

UNTAMED
A novel by Steven Jeral Harris



All of the characters in this book should not be used without the author's consent. Thank you all for your support and I hope everyone enjoys the book.

This book is mildly interactive, so I do recommend listening to a few songs during certain chapters; however, you can go the conventional route and read it without the music. Be warned, the experience is FAR different with the music playing. The music brings the book to life. Songs are better played at half volume. Here's a list of the songs:

1. Finding Life by Greg Dombrowski

<https://youtu.be/0cmPEm5ki78>

2. "Being Alive" by Audiomachine

<https://youtu.be/CdXskVvLtzI>

3. "Your God is dead" by Really Slow Motion

<https://youtu.be/FT8nG9hv168>

4. "Emotional Tech Noir" by The Machine

<https://youtu.be/UtsCIsyfK4w>

5. "Hard" by Rihanna

<https://youtu.be/5CT20jTkS3o>

6. "Blink"

<https://youtu.be/mQFd6QiKJYk>

7. “Dominion” by R. Armando

<https://youtu.be/kwDzac4vmXI>

I’m also introducing two new interactive additions to my book called *Author’s read along* and *Cinema mode*. If you see blue notes here and there while reading, that’s me following you throughout the book. Periodically, the words *Cinema mode* will appear before a paragraph. This is hinting that the paragraph is meant to be imagined like a slow-motion scene. The book also transitions through different genres. I will make a note of the transition as you read.

Also, this book is told through the main character, Iva Hill, but the story will jump from a first person’s perspective and back to the narrator. I will inform you when the jump happens. I am extremely grateful to present to you my first book. Enjoy.

HORROR

INTRODUCTION: THE PARK

For this chapter, you will require the song “Being Alive”. Only play this song when you are told to during the middle of this chapter.



No words can describe the sadness I feel. An innocent person, dearly admired by many in town, was found brutally murdered on campus about a week ago. Word of his strange and shocking death had spread quickly around this small, and often morbid, town. His untimely death created a stir of rumors to plague the campus like a wildfire that's far from being extinguished. The worst part about it is nobody can give a real explanation for why he was killed.

His cold and pale body was found hanging above the main entrance doors of the science building. Pandemonium ravaged the town of Glenworth on that early morning of October 9th. Nearly a week has passed since then and a wall of denial is still towering over me. The chilling sounds of screaming onlookers mixed with sirens are still fresh in my head; as if I'm reliving the whole ordeal. The schoolboard assumed a week was enough time to reopen the college. How inconsiderate of them to expect that anyone could recover from this so fast.

I'm hit twice as hard by his death because I was amongst those who discovered his body. For the first time in my twenty-two years of living, I'm starting to feel the harsh reality of death and the

emotions that come along with it. I've never lost a friend before; in fact, I never had a real friend to begin with. That's because I lived the majority of my life secluded from the outside world; *I will talk more about that later.*

The people of this small town of Glenworth now fear for their lives. Crime is not a huge thing around here; however, due to the recent events, everyone is spending most of their time indoors; afraid that the killer may strike again at any moment. I don't blame them for doing so.

This is the seventh unsolved murder this year that occurred in the surrounding area. The first six happened four months ago when some Glenworth students were found dead in a forest while camping. Their cause of death was "...An unusual animal attack"; at least that's what the reports say about them. Many are beginning to speculate a serial killer is to blame for these deaths, and I'm starting to believe them. Even my uncle has warned the townspeople of that possibility.

He's been on Glenworth's police force for almost fifteen years and has no plans on retiring anytime soon. His experience and dedication to his career has made him a highly-respected Detective. Unfortunately, experience alone wasn't enough to prepare him for this case and the enormous pressure that came attached to it.

"When being in law enforcement, you should never rely on experience," he told me before in the past. "You may run into some things you've never experienced before. That's why you rely on instinct."

To my knowledge, there hasn't been a case he couldn't solve, or a criminal he couldn't outsmart. He often brags about being offered a job at the "Bureau", but I guess he decided that small-town life was a better fit for him. This case is different and it may be the one that tarnishes his perfect record. He managed to exhaust all of his leads within a matter of days, which is usually not a good indication in any investigation; so I've heard. Everyone is expecting him to bring justice to this town, myself included.

I would never expect that anyone I know would be murdered. That thought has never crossed my mind. For once, everything in my life appeared to be going great for me: I was going to college, I was in perfect health, and I even began creating friendships; something I would never think was possible a year ago. I was finally living a normal life for a change, so it seemed. Now it feels like I've been thrown into a horror movie.

Knowing this wicked person is still out there, enjoying their life while my friend is dead and people are grieving, really upsets me to my core. Only a sadistic person can commit a crime so cruel. Whoever he or she is that did this, they're probably somewhere laying-low while watching the news just like a serial-killer from a movie or a book; laughing at the fact that they got away with it. What scares me is the fact that they could be planning another murder at this very moment, or worse, a string of murders.

“Serial Killers don't stop until they're dead or caught,” my uncle quoted in the past. “They're mindset is very similar to heroin addicts.”

The staff and students came together and created a beautiful memorial for him at the nearby park, which is located around the corner from the campus. A wooden podium is decorated with an array of flowers, cards, and photographs. A picture of his smiling face helps reduce the weight of sorrow in my soul, although I know I will never see his real smile again.

Besides wanting to know the identity of his killer, the main question on my mind is why do I feel so damn guilty for what happened to him? I can't help but feel responsible for everything, especially when I started seeing a sudden change in his behavior.

BUT THEN...

A faint sound of crunching leaves gently caress my ear, shifting my focus away from his picture.

I abruptly hit the brakes on my racing thoughts as my ears become alert. I'm sure I heard a faint noise; a noise I probably wasn't meant to hear. I look to my left towards the wooded area that

separates the college from the park, where I heard the soft sound coming from. I always had a vivid imagination, so this wouldn't be the first time my mind exaggerated a noise that could easily be caused by the wind or an animal going about its day.

Suddenly, the sound of fluttering feet snaps me away from my grieving and pushes into another emotion; fear. The autumn wind blows gently across the field and sways the orange leaves. The hand-like branches are reaching toward the grey sky like tormented souls crying out for deliverance.

I stand still while looking into the crowd of dark trees that fades into a wall of fog, hoping to see an animal scurrying among the leaves. I wait for a few seconds and hope that some rodent would satisfy my sanity. It doesn't happen the way I hoped. I guess it's just my mind playing tricks on me, so I assume. I then hear a similar sound, but this time it's louder than the first. Now I'm certain that something is moving behind that murky wall of mist.

I never was a huge fan of horror novels, but I have read some Stephen King in my day, and this is truly starting to feel like the beginning of a horror novel.

Here I go again, thinking too hard about something that could easily be an animal moving along the forest floor.

My ADHD plays a huge part in all of this. Sometimes I zone out so hard that my mind wanders off into memories from my childhood or a task I suppose to complete the day prior. More often than not, I also think way too hard about a situation and blow it out of proportion.

I remain completely still and alert with a hint of intimidation spreading throughout my small one-hundred and twenty-pound frame. Another gust of wind comes through the park with much more force. I can't decipher if the chills I'm feeling are from the wind or the eerie pitter-patter of feet coming from the woods. A wool coat and a long-sleeved shirt are not enough to suppress goose-bumps from swelling on my arms. Even the thin hairs on my neck, which are exposed to the wind, are now standing at attention. I lift

the collar of my coat and wrap my arms around myself to combat against the spooky feeling that's trying to consume my body.

My arms automatically fold tightly against my body. I stand motionless and attentive; hoping it's just paranoia trying to get the best of me. An abrupt sound of screeching crows rips through the wind and rattles my heart. I watch as the murder of crows scatter across the gray sky and disappear from my sight.

I take a glance at my surroundings—realizing I'm all alone—and all of a sudden I start to feel vulnerable. I then begin to slowly walk away. Each step I take feels like they're being mimicked by someone else's behind me. I can't shake off the consistent feeling of being followed or watched. I know it's most likely my mind playing tricks on me, so I try to rationalize with my own thoughts.

"It's all in my mind," I think to myself.

To be on the safe side, I quicken my pace. I can't stop feeling the presence of another person behind me. I glance around the park and hope to God I'm wrong. Again, it's just paranoia getting the best of me and I'm feeding into it. There's not another soul in sight, and I know this, so why am I so freaking anxious? However, as soon as I begin to believe that my mind is playing tricks on me, something unexpected happens that makes my heart sink into my stomach...

"HELP," a voice calls out to me somewhere within the wooded area.

I stop walking instantly when I hear someone shout my name from the woods. The uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach, which I tried to disregard, lashes back at me with a vengeance. The voice sounds like the voice of a woman being abducted.

I stop walking when I hear the voice because fear has caused me to become paralyzed. The fear I feel in my chest becomes darker and more prevalent. I take a moment for my breathing to become stable before snapping out of my frightened trance and begin walking again. This time my legs are moving twice as fast, almost like I'm power-walking. I look over my shoulder to make

sure no one is following me.

“IVA!” the woman shouts from the woods.

Suddenly, a disturbing realization hits me like a ton of bricks. I stop walking again when I recognize the voice which is calling out to me. A dose of terror turns my body ice-cold, and my heart begins pounding inside my chest like a beating drum, yet I can't help but reply. My uncle and my mom are probably the only people I would totally risk my life to save, and I'm certain that voice belongs to only one person, Julia Lancaster; my mother.

“Mom?” I speak back into the woods.

How...how could this be? My mother should be at work right now. It just doesn't feel right in my gut; still, I know that voice all too well to ignore it.

“Help me!” my mother calls out in anguish.

It's definitely her. Her voice is embedded into my DNA. She's both my best friend and my mother. I know her voice better than I know my own.

“Iva...” she whimpers in pain somewhere within the obscure wilderness.

I'm terrified right now—deeply terrified—but my love for her engulfs my fear. I have a stare-down with the misty trees as confusion and fear starts to rip apart my mind like never before. I walk towards the woods with wrecked nerves.

“Mom, where are you?” I shout next to a tree.

I look in between the ensemble of trees. I don't see her anywhere. I can only see leaves blowing in a shaded wilderness that leads to no specific trail. I take a second to look around at the gloomy forest in hopes to find my beloved mother. I can't find her anywhere. Instead, I'm surrounded by distorted dark figures that were once called maple trees. Small branches and roots are sticking out of the ground like demons reaching from the pits of hell to grab me.



“Help me,” she cries out again.

I can’t take it any longer. Her desperate cry for help causes me to break through my fear. I make my way deeper into the woods, unsure if I would make it back out again. I feel around the pockets of my coat with jittery hands, hoping to find my phone. Never in my life have I had the need to call the police, until now. I find my phone inside of my left coat pocket, and with a quivering thumb, I dial those three infamous numbers I’ve never dialed before until now. I put the cold phone against my ear and wait for the call to go through. The longest three seconds of my life passes before I can hear ringing.

“9-1-1 what is your...”

“Hello? Hello?” I reply in a panicked voice.

“Yes, what is your emergency?” the dispatcher replies in a calm voice.

“Yes, um, my mom is in trouble....I think,” I reply with a shaky voice.

“Is she hurt?”

“I don’t know. I can only hear her screaming.”

“Ma’am, please calm down. Tell me your location.”

Once again, my mother shouts my name, giving my heart a hard jolt.

“Hold on one second,” I tell the dispatcher and then focus my attention on her voice. “Where are you?!” I shout into the misty woods.

I halt and wait for her to reply, but she doesn’t.

“Are you still there?” the dispatcher voice echoes from the phone.

“Yes, I’m still here,” I reply.

“Can you tell me your location?”

“I’m in the woods next to Glenworth University. I’m a student. And um...”

“What is your name ma’am?” the dispatcher cuts me off.

My...my...name is Iva Hill,” I stutter.

“Help,” my mother cries out.

“Hold on one second...” I reply to the dispatcher.

Once again, I divert my attention away from the dispatcher to answer my mother.

“I’m trying to find you, but I don’t know where you are!” I reply with frustration. “Just keep talking.”

I look around, but the humidity is rising from the forest floor; making it difficult for me to see. I squint as hard as I can and try to see beyond the fog. She could be anywhere. My only hope is using my hearing to track her down.

“Where are you?” I speak at a high volume; my voice is echoing through the seemingly endless forest.

I continue to walk deeper into the heart of the foggy and dim wilderness with no sense of direction.

“Help me please,” she replies from a close proximity.

I’m getting closer because I can hear her grunting and murmuring. I follow the sounds. I maneuver under low branches and nearly trip over roots that are protruding from the muddy soil. I

walk around a tree and suddenly I see something that makes me flinch. I drop my phone in order to catch my heart from leaping through my ribcage. I see something resting against a tree; a person. This person has his or her back turned. The tree they're resting against is tall with a large base with tentacles for branches. It looks like something ripped straight from Tim Burton's imagination.



The person is wearing a long brown cloak, which is concealing its entire body. I'm almost certain this is where the voice was coming from.

"Mom...?" I stop speaking when my mind begins to form unnerving questions.

Why is my mom over six feet tall? When did she develop that abnormal hunch in her back? Why are her arms so long? Then the most important question of them all comes to mind; what is this imposter and why does it sound like my mom?

I stop dead in my tracks about fifteen-feet away from the person. I'm now close enough to see it clearly through the fog. As my vision of this thing becomes clearer, so does the entire scenario that's unfolding in front of me. I have a strange feeling that I've been lured into a trap.

"Iva, just a little closer honey," this thing, which clearly isn't my mother, replies with my mother's voice.

An ugly feeling grows inside of me. My neck gets hit with a

cool sensation that makes its way down my spine and lingers there. It feels like someone is rubbing a piece of ice up and down the middle of my back. This is a sensation you can't get from cold weather; instead, you get this feeling when you realize something very unnerving.

I remember watching an old horror movie called "The Thing" by John Carpenter. It was an older horror film that my mom forced me to watch so she could laugh at me cowering behind a pillow. Although I was well into my teens, that movie scared the heck out of me; it still does.

One scene in particular sent major chills down my spine that caused me to stay up for two days straight. It was the scene where one of the character's head ripped open and started to chomp on another man's head like it was a piece of steak. My mother had the thermostat on seventy-five degrees that day. However, my body temperature dropped several times while watching that movie. I have the same feeling now, but it's ten times more severe. There's something about this whole situation that's not adding up correctly.

The wind comes howling through the forest, which only forces me deeper into this nightmare I walked into. The strong gust of air disturbs everything in sight including the cloak. The bottom of the cloak is lifted slightly. I feast my eyes upon a pair of large feet with curled nails.

I gasp deeply and try to conceal my fear by covering my mouth when I see how hideous its feet are. I can barely cover my mouth because my hand is quivering out of control. I've never felt so terrified in my entire life. The fear is so powerful it makes my legs weaken, and I begin to feel lightheaded as if I'm about to pass out. I stumble back a little and nearly collapse, but I manage to grab one of the long branches to balance myself.

"I can't believe how gullible you are," this thing speaks to me in a low monotone voice; its real voice.

Another dose of fear hits my bloodstream, causing me to become paralyzed temporarily. In other words, I'm literally scared-

stiff right now. What the hell is this thing? I'm sure it's not human. My mind is so frightened and confused that I can barely think.

"What have you done with her? I reply with fear attached to every syllable."

"It should be clear by now, Iva. It's not her that I'm after."

"What....do you want?"

A slight pause lingers between us.

"I want be your worst nightmare," he replies in a menacing tone.

He speaks in a whispering yet eerie tone; somewhat similar to my elderly neighbor in Virginia who had terrible smokers-cough as long as I can remember. Every syllable seems to end with a wheezing sound. One would only assume it's a male; whatever it is.

My immediate instinct is to create more distance between us, so I do just that while trying to remain perfectly quiet. I don't know why but this tall thing isn't moving at all. He's just....standing.

Suddenly, he takes a step back without turning; mimicking my movement. I stop walking as well, not knowing what I should do next. I have three options as of now: I could scream, I could run, or I could try to buy time by talking to him. I take another slow step backward. He then takes another swift step towards me with his back facing me.

"STOP WHERE YOU ARE!" I shout.

"It's rude to leave without saying bye," he replies without turning.

He stops walking backward and shifts his head to me slightly. I still can't see his face because his head is covered in a draping hood.

I assume this person or thing does not want me to see his



face, and I'm almost sure he doesn't care about being identified by police. I think he doesn't want to show his face because whatever lies underneath that hood has to be something terrifying beyond my wildest nightmare. Judging by his ugly hands and feet, I could only imagine what dreaded features await me when he turns around.

"You have a beautiful spirit," he starts to speak in a low, weak voice. "You're terrified right now, yet you came out here still. You won't believe how many people would completely ignore the cries of their loved ones to save themselves."

As he speaks, my muscles tense up and my breathing increases. Tears swell in my eyes as fear takes over me like never before. My body can't seem to handle this level of fear. The tips of my fingers are turning numb, and my heart feels like its shrinking inside my chest.

Again, he takes a step back at a sideways angle, unwilling to reveal his face.

"Don't come any closer," I warn him.

“It’s nothing wrong with being afraid. Hell, I even scare myself sometimes.”

My mind has run out of options. I refuse to fight this thing, so I might as well run like hell. I push myself off a tree and start running for my life. My shoes are sinking into the soft ground and gathering mud on my heels as I dash away. I stop running and gasp for air when I see the creature standing in front of me with his back turned. Its speed is incredible. My moment of hesitation is over and I dart to my left and try to find a way out of the fog.

I then catch the sound of feet moving rapidly somewhere behind me, followed by a quick passing wind. Once again, I stop running when I’m greeted by the creature’s back. He’s so fast that I didn’t even see him move. I guess running is out of the question.

I stop and try to catch my breath. Thoughts of my uncle fill my mind. He has experience with sociopaths and murderers. I try my best to remember the advice he’d given me about how to deal with maniacs like this. One thing I do remember him mentioning is to let them talk and buy as much time as possible. I would scream but he warned me about the dire disadvantages screaming could bring.

“*Screamers die quicker,*” I remember him telling me.

“Tisk tisk,” he mutters. “Why are you leaving so soon? I thought we were friends Iva?” he says the last sentence with a child’s voice.

The child’s voice is unfamiliar; however, the fact that this thing can mimic a child’s voice is bringing dark fear all over my body. I have reached a level of fear that no one should ever reach.

“How, um, do you know my name?” I ask while gently stepping backward and trying to buy myself some time.

I’m also looking around for something to defend myself with as I speak to him.

“I know all about you. I’ve been searching my entire life for you,” he says in his regular voice. “I’ve killed so many people in my life; searching for the perfect victim; someone with an innocent

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