

position where they couldn't get a shot. The yells for his demise got louder and louder and at the current pace they would overtake him.

Unable to get a clear shot, the three men let the dogs loose in an attempt to slow Edgar. Unrestricted by the humans the dogs ran ahead of the five men in the tracking party and began to close distance on Edgar. He turned back as the barks got louder and louder by the second to see three dark objects closing in on his position. He stopped running and stood with his knife ready for combat with the animals. The first dog reached Edgar and it jumped for his neck. Edgar stepped back clutching his lucky dagger and lunged forward with his metal knife stabbing it in the chest. The blow inflicted on the dog entered the rib cage of the dog and into the lung. Blood shot from its mouth as the pain of injury ran along its nerves. Edgar tried to pull the dagger from the animal as he fell backwards from the momentum of the dog's impact but he couldn't. The dog let out a whimper while its lung filled with blood from the injury.

Before he could pull the knife out of the first dog's flesh the other two dogs started to attack. Bites to his forearms opened brutal wounds as blood squirted on the ground, dogs, man, and forest floor alike. He punched one dog in the head but it seemed to have little effect on its ferocity. Frantically reaching around, he found a heavy rock. Edgar smashed the nearest dog on the head with the rock. While it was momentarily dazed he got back to his feet dazed and bleeding. The sudden impact from the rock spun him in a complete circle before he fell back to the ground. Blood poured from the wound to his right shoulder. Edgar screamed in pain as the burning sensations pulsed through his body. The rock went straight through his shoulder and out the other side. The men had

reached Edgar Roman.

The men reached Edgar's body as his blood loss from the wounds on his arms and shoulder made him fade in and out of consciousness. One of the younger men looked at the dog that had been shot. His eyes filled with tears as his best friend lay dying on the underbrush. The pure tears cleaned two lines down the dirty face. Sorrow quickly turned to anger as he grabbed his rifle and pointed it at Edgar squirming on the ground. A Federal Marshal walked over and pushed down the muzzle of gun with his hand. They had plans for Edgar and it didn't include him dying so quickly. The son grabbed his bleeding dog and hugged it as it bled over him and walked away from the men in disgust. The other son grabbed Edgar from the ground assisted by a Federal Marshal and brought him back to the town three miles away.

Ten hours later Edgar awoke to a series of violent coughs induced by the infection that now spread throughout his body. He opened his eyes and looked around but his sight was unfocused. Cold dirt rubbed against his fevered warm skin. A large wooden post dug into his back as his arms were tied and chained around the pole behind him. He had committed two atrocities in that village three days prior and thus the townsfolk stood looking at him with tremendous contempt. Life was hard enough on the edge of Missouri without having an outsider coming in and kill residents. They stood silent until Edgar showed signs of movement and then they called for the Federal Marshals.

The head Marshal walked towards Edgar with eyes trained on his movements and a cold stare. The professionally dressed man leaned forward and took off his hat. He stroked his full black beard as he peered into the eyes of Edgar. A hard punch to the face exploded his lower lip and forced blood to rush

down from to his dirty chest. “I will never forgive you for taking my daughter from me Edgar. Look into my face. Do you see her in my face? Do you see her? You will die here, boy,” yelled the man mere inches from Edgar’s face as he reached forward to grab his throat. Gripping the throat of the man who killed his daughter could not bring her back but for a second brought him joy as Edgar squirmed under his grip.

“What are you going to do, Marshal? Mr. Law, I want my damn trial. I can’t wait until you try to prove that I committed those crimes. You don’t have any evidence on me, do you?” said Edgar even though he knew full well that he killed that man’s daughter. In fact, he killed two hundred and twelve other daughters, wives, or mothers. That murder, on the other hand, was the murder that brought the attention of the federal government. Previously he would terrorize an area and then leave. Killing the daughter of a man in the Federal Marshall Service brought an extra level of attention. It was this attention that led Edgar to be tied to a wooden pole in the Missouri soil. Annoyed by the grandstanding of the Marshal, Edgar still felt he was above the law and he would escape once nursed to health.

“There will be no trial Edgar. We have played that game in the past already and you were able to escape twice. You are guilty. You have been sentenced to death twice. You will die here today, here, on this very dirt. I will not give you another chance to escape. I will not give you another chance to take what is not yours. You will die, and I will watch you die,” said the man as he walked out of the small pen that surrounded Edgar. He sat down on a wooden stump outside the wooden pen that enclosed the area and placed his hat back on his head. The other men that helped to hunt the man the previous night also surrounded the pen with rifles slung. Edgar smirked to

provoke them to shoot him. He was tired of waiting for them to kill him. He wanted them to kill him as soon as possible or shut up.

The taunts from his captors led Edgar to provoke the men. Edgar now had a good idea that he would not live past the day. The eyes of the men were not of forgiveness or compassion but of death and anger. Long empty eyes peered violently toward the captor. Edgar began to describe to the Marshal what his daughter sounded like when she was strangled to death. The Marshal's face squinted to expose the wrinkles around his eyes and mouth. The stare that Edgar received from the official would turn a normal man to stone. Detailed brutality and torture of his daughter floated through the early morning air. The Marshal shook his head up and down while patiently waiting to serve justice.

Edgar was finished entertaining himself for the moment and scanned his injured shoulder. His wound was cleaned when he was unconscious but infection still took hold on his body. If they didn't kill him the infection surely would end his life. He figured that the man wanted to wait until he bled out or died from infection. He continued to look around the pen trying to find some avenue of escape but the wooden pen had barbed wire interlaced with the wood. Two feral dogs lay in a box connected to the pen sleeping. These wild dogs are often left behind when the humans they were with died trying to reach the territories. They are caught by explorers and domesticated but some do not take. They are usually killed once they are identified but on this occasion they had one more task to perform before they found their fate.

Edgar watched the dogs slowly awaken from the sleep they enjoyed and look at the injured man chained to the pole. With all of his focus on the dogs he failed to see the children of the

town gathering rocks. The first rock struck him above the right eye, startling him. The men had encouraged the children that surrounded the pen to throw rocks at Edgar. The smaller rocks were soon followed by larger rocks thrown by some of the elder teenagers. The steady stream of impacts from the rocks caused more and more pain to the battered body. Tears fell from his eyes as the crowd yelled cryptic epithets at the man.

Compassion was in short supply. Edgar Roman was considered a demon by the people of the small village and in many other communities across the country. The wild dogs seemed to awake from the smell of blood. They took to their feet and walked to the edge of the small cage they were in. The young man that lost his dog the previous night walked over to the small cage and opened the door. A smile from ear to ear erupted on his face and on the faces of the men that lined the pen. Hunger filled their eyes as the mangy dark grey coats of fur moved closer to the man. Subtle growls signified that they were ready to eat and one thing was on the menu.

At first there was a lick of an open wound on his arm. This signaled to the women in the town to take to children away from the pen and inside the various homes. The licks then turned to tugs on the flesh. Terror filled the eyes of the man as he struggled violently to get free. The wild dogs felt the energy being exerted by Edgar and started to bark. Laughter lined the pen as Edgar's face, now highlighted by fear, realized the fate that was upon him. Celebratory ovations for the wild dog's new found aggression relayed the resentment. Defiance was replaced by the very fear that he projected onto his victims when he attacked, tortured, and killed them.

Another nibble on the shoulder wound by one dog was soon followed by a tug on his hand by the other dog. Knife-

like teeth ripped into flesh and bone alike as they attempted to rip apart his body. He never imagined he would die like this. Edgar knew that this would be the end for him. His reign of terror was going to be coming to an end very soon. Pleas for help soon fell on deaf ears as the men turned and walked from the pen. Over the next few hours the dogs bit, tore, and mangled Edgar's flesh from his bones. His trail of destruction on Earth was over.

The pain from the bites started to fade as his life ended. In his last moments of consciousness, Edgar wished for a better end to his life. Hanging, firing squad, or even stabbing would have been preferred more than his fate. The day turned black and his life was over. His soul slowly left his body retaining a spiritual shape of a human. It began to float upwards to the heavens he had heard so much about in his travels. The feeling was more euphoric than the greatest intoxication. It was if he had a physical body yet he was lighter than air looking down onto his dead body. It was still being torn by the wild dogs as he continued to fly higher and higher into the sky.

No longer facing the ground, his focus was trained to the heavens as he continued high into the sky. A soft light engulfed him with powerful warmth. Jolts of childhood memories filled his consciousness. He enjoyed this time of his life dearly. The joyful nostalgia was soon jolted by the memories of his crimes against humans. The faces of those he had slain suddenly engulfed his soul as it floated towards the origin of the pale blue light. Dark shadowy figures slid in front of the light and yelled "no" in a rabid chorus. These were the souls of those he killed over his violent rampage across humanity. They offered the opinion of those who suffered under his brutal criminal acts.

The shouting echoed in the space, escalating in intensity until the chorus was deafening in the vast expanse of his levitation. The soft blue light that engulfed him soon faded to black very quickly as the figures disappeared. A strong tug pulled on his soul from the other direction. It suddenly felt to Edgar's soul as if he was sinking or moving away from the light that he had travelled towards. His soul jerked faster and faster in the other direction and Edgar had the feeling that he was almost in a free fall. The smell of burning flesh and charcoal was becoming overpowering. A small red dot under him grew larger. Edgar's soul was descending towards the depths of Hell. Unimaginable terror filled his spirit as the jarring tugs from Hell brought him closer to his approaching fate.

"Do you want to go to Hell Edgar? Heaven has judged you and deemed you unworthy of admittance. Hell awaits you, but I can give you another option," said an old raspy voice from the darkness. Edgar turned to look into the darkness but he couldn't see anything except the approaching fires of hell below as his soul fell. Edgar was barely educated and couldn't read or write but he understood the concept of Heaven and Hell. With that understanding he could not fathom who or what would try to stop him from going to Hell after the clear rejection from Heaven. Heat from the fires started to influence the spiritual body as slight pain was triggered by the mounting heat. He no longer had time to ponder and spoke.

"No I do not want to go to Hell. If you can stop me from going to Hell then do so. I don't want to go to Hell," yelled Edgar into the darkness.

"Edgar, your life has been marked with the stains of evil and malice. Your soul requires obedience to my will. Submit to my lordship and be freed from the brimstone and fiery chains of Hell. Servitude to me will not be easy and I will

demand absolution from your soul. Follow my commands and survive. If you survive my test of redemption you will be given the choice to either serve me forever or return to a natural life. You may return to your natural life, and you can once again try your luck with Heaven upon your death. In order for this to happen you must pledge your soul to me,” said the old raspy voice in the darkness.

“I pledge you my soul! I will take your test of redemption. Anything but Hell,” said Edgar as the fires approached his spirit. After accepting the proposal from the darkness his body stopped its fall. The tugs from Hell grew stronger and stronger but his soul wouldn’t move. A sudden rush overcame his soul and the once burning sensation was replaced by something much colder. The smell and coarseness of dirt overtook his senses as the returned one by one. He was no longer in the dark void but he was even unsure of his current location. All of the normal feelings and sensations returned to his body. The pressure of dirt was so intense that he soon realized that he had awoken in a grave.

His first course of action was to move his fingers and toes. Delighted from the results it was nice to have fingers and toes once again after they were so brutally divorced from his body. Step two was to get out of the literal hole that he found himself in. Consistent pressure on his body from every direction made it hard for him to decipher which way was up and the oxygen was disappearing quickly. He tried to listen for signs of his orientation but without time to spare he clawed in the direction that he was facing because most people were placed on their backs when they were placed in a grave, that is what he did. Ten minutes of clawing, pulling, and struggling allowed his right hand to penetrate the surface. The cool breeze on that hand signified that he was close to being free.

A strong hand grabbed his recently freed hand. Thirty seconds of rigorous pulling got Edgar from the darkness of the shallow grave. Freed from the dirt he positioned himself quickly to all fours and spit out the dirt that was lodged into his throat and nostrils. Without the pressure from the ground on his body he began to realize that something was different. He looked down at hands that were not his. Small skinny scar free fingers were not like the hands of the former blacksmith. He leaned back from the animal like position to a kneeling position to as he looked at his palms. That wasn't the only difference that he now saw clearly. Short black hair blocked his vision and as he pushed that away to reveal breasts in a white blouse. It was evident that he was no longer in his old body.

He jumped to his feet and looked at his new body and fell backwards to the ground. The new five foot one girlish frame was different than the six foot one inch body that he had when he was killed. Edgar returned to his feet confused and disoriented. The dirty white blouse was completed with a long brown torn dress. Blood stains littered the both the blouse and the dress but Edgar did not feel any injuries to his new body. Panic continued to elevate with every breath as his new reality began to take hold. Edgar was now a teenage girl.

“You don't remember do you Edgar? That is the body of the first girl that you killed a little more than ten years ago. The Grim Lord decided that it was the best body for you to be placed into to keep you. Get on and I will take you to my home so I can explain all of this to you. I know you have a lot of questions about what is happening here,” said the man as he sat on his brown and white horse. A long thin white cotton shirt and a black rugged beard covered his tanned skin. He reached out his arm from the horse. Edgar walked over to the

man with his new fragile body, grabbed the mysterious man's hand, and pushed up on the stirrup with the left foot. With a swift tug he pulled the small frame onto the back of the horse and they began to ride away from the area.

It took four hours of travel for the duo to reach a log cabin deep in the woods. They dismounted the horse and walked to the porch tired from the ride. Jack's house was a testament to precision and style. Edgar's eyes squinted in the midday sunlight as he walked toward the home. The man sat on a wooden step on his porch and Edgar sat next down next to him. Edgar spoke, "Okay so what's going on here and why am I in this girl's body?"

"You are now on your path to redemption Edgar. My name is Jack Smith and just like you I serve the Grim Lord. Unlike you I am a grim reaper. You are what are known as a grim redeemer. Your soul needs to redeem itself to the Grim Lord. You have made many mistakes during your lifetime and for this you must show your loyalty. If you complete your task without getting yourself killed, going insane, or losing your way, then you can decide to become a grim reaper like me and continue to serve the Grim Lord. If you don't want to do this you can become mortal again and try your luck with Heaven. I do not suggest the second. Heaven has never accepted any of the redeemers so far and from what I understand it didn't go so well for you the first time.

The Grim Lord placed you in this body for your protection. It would be too dangerous for you and everyone else if you returned in your body. You are immortal now and your body will not age. You are not invincible though so you best stay away from getting shot and such if you want to keep alive. We want you to blend in. If someone were to see you in your previous body they would surely try to kill you again. There

are other reasons why we are keeping you from your other form but you wouldn't understand them so they will be explained to you later.

Since you walked the earth preying on women and girls you will now walk the Earth as one. You are tasked to kill 2000 murderers, rapists, and other violators of women. So you will lure in those who would harm you and then you will kill these people for the wickedness that harbors them. When you are finished with this task you can decide what you want to do with yourself after that," said the man as he picked up a stick from this side and started to whittle.

"How am I supposed to kill a grown man in this body? Do you see me? And what is a grim reaper and who is this Grim Lord? I don't understand anything that you have told me. How can I understand all of this? I am a simple man. Or was a simple man," said Edgar in response.

"You will understand what the reaper conclave is in due time and for that matter, who the Grim Lord is as well. You are not a simple man. You are a murderer. The most important thing for you to understand at this time is that you are no longer human. Though you feel and look human you are not. You will still need to eat and sleep to repair your body and to provide yourself with energy but you are much more now. The Grim Lord has blessed you with some of the powers of the grim reapers. When you are in danger you will be able to transform into your old body. Your old body will be much faster and stronger than it was during your life. Your skin will harden to offer some protection and you will be able to kill those who mean you harm. This is his test for you.

His tests are designed to challenge you to overcome your fears. Morality is not of concern to us. We do not represent Heaven so we do not care if their definition of good comes to

this world. We don't represent the forces of Hell so we don't care if their definition of ill will comes to this world. We just want this world to make its own decision. Both sides corrupt the people with their message and force them to battle one another. This conflict is as old as humanity itself and we sit in the middle. We want to bring back the human order to this world and rid it of these outside forces. Because of this we need to ensure that you are able to kill the vilest on the planet without remorse or compassion. Complete the test and you will have your choice at the end. You can go back to being the sheep or become a wolf," said the man as his knife cut more of the wood.

Edgar shook his head in agreement. He became a sponge to the information that was being told to him from his elder. The man talked to Edgar for five long hours about using his power, the dangers of the world, and his path to redemption. He told him how to find other reapers, survive the world as an immortal, and stay away from the dangers of other immortal races. He soon realized that he knew very little about the world and the things around him. The reason why this grizzled reaper told Edgar all of these things that day was because the next day Edgar would have to leave the area and travel south to meet his new controller. The road would be long and dangerous for Edgar but so is the path of redemption.

CHAPTER 3

HELPLESS

“No, please mister, do not do this to me. You can just let me go...I, I, I, won’t tell anyone. Please don’t do this to me,” said the girl as she pressed herself against the beige wall. She clung to her ripped sky blue t-shirt while her bare shoulder pressed into the drywall cracking it from the force. Short black hair hung to her ears as stray strands drifted in front of her face trying to block her vision but it could not hide her horror.

Across the room from her stood a young man eagerly wanting what he captured her for. She pleaded with him for his compassion and the common humanity they shared. His crossed arms, slightly tilted stance, curled upper lip, and grin signified compassion had escaped him years prior. Hungry eyes scanned every inch of the girl’s body. Only moments ago she had been walking down the side of the road looking for a ride into town. His inner demons convinced him to capture her and bring her back to his home.

Sadistic urges pulsed like a beacon through his body. He needed her for fulfillment like food or drink. In order for him

to realize his urges he must take from others in a cowardly way. Once she told him that she was lost, her family did not know her location, and she had a dead cell phone, he knew he had an opportunity to feed the beast that had grown inside of him. Thus is the nature of such a beast. It must feed.

The five foot nine inch black haired man walked closer the girl that he threatened with her very survival. A dirty white t-shirt and blue jeans looked like it was bought straight from the hillbilly handbook. Brown eyes sparkled as he walked confident. The flicker was not of joy and love, but of malevolence and darkness. It was as if the fires of Hell were reflected from his retina to the outside world. He demanded cooperation with his requests but yet wished she wouldn't. A chuckling mumble filled the room while his hands fidgeted. The brute didn't like cooperation. The animal liked the struggle. Oh how the beasts inside of him like it so.

The five foot one inch girl curled her body deeper into the corner of the living room. Squeezing on her shirt and trying to stay tucked in a ball as if that would be the entire defense that she needed. Her bare foot slid along the carpet only to kick an empty beer can. She quickly slid her leg back into the tucked position as she stared at the man who threatened to take her purity. The night had not been kind to her but now it seemed that it would be utterly unforgiving.

"What are you going to do to me? Are you going to kill me? Please just let me go mister. I won't tell anyone," said the girl as she pleaded for her release again. She knew he would not let her go. She knew what he was going to do to her. The man only laughed and snickered at the notion of release. Power and its addictive effects intoxicated him. This intoxication was the only thing that he longed for as he went to work as the janitor at the local high school. He longed for

moments like this. Considered small by other men, but to a teenage girl, he had power.

He ordered her to stand up with his newfound supremacy. She looked at him with her green eyes through the fallen strands of black hair that covered some of her face. Slowly she pushed her body against the wall and slid up it until she reached her feet. Her cheekbone ached from where he struck her and burned at the thought of him hitting her again. It was time and she couldn't do anything to make the man change his mind from his current course of action. It was his nature to commit acts such as this.

His normal lowly day as a janitor was filled with only disrespect and humiliation. Multiple times per hour he would be harassed by the local kids but in his house and on this night he had the power. This was his domain and he was the king. Eagerly he walked closer to her as she shivered in fear. Adam Jenkins would own this; he would finally control an aspect of his life even if this was control in the most evil form. Adam was not a stranger to this type of violence. In fact, this would be his sixth offense in the last three years. Every time he committed a vile act of this magnitude and was not captured by the police he grew even bolder and more confident in his actions.

Adam reached with his right arm as he got close and grabbed the already ripped shirt of the girl. He tugged and she pulled back. Long dirty fingers extended towards the girl touching her bare shoulder. Grimy fingertips and hands combined with her sweat made a filthy mud on her shoulder. Not satisfied with merely this action he opened his mouth and licked the shoulder and then smiled. She didn't appear to resist the man. For the last time she pleaded for him to stop and for the last time he told her that he was in charge. This time

Adam Jenkins made an error. This error in judgment could not have been foreseen by an ordinary man for this variable he did not consider was one he could not have imagined.

“Well then it is time for you to die then motherfucker. You have committed sin for the last time,” said the girl as her voice changed unexpectedly. It grew deeper with every word spoken in declaration. The sweet sounds of a fifteen year old girl were replaced by an older, deeper voice. This startled Adam but he just giggled because the girls he violated in the past tried escape in various ways but Adam never heard them change their voice before to frighten him.

To his dismay this was not the only change occurring. The perfect light tan skin that once covered her body darkened to a charcoal black color. Soft skin was replaced by a coarse, rock-like membrane. Adam took a step back from the wall stumbling slightly on empty beer cans with his black combat boots until he collided with the TV stand. Faltering backward, he found the path he needed to continue his retreat. Laughter filled the room as it mercilessly echoed off the walls. Her eyes, once full of youth and life, were now completely bloodshot and growing in size with the rest of her body.

The slender shoulders grew broad with defined trapezoids. Biceps and triceps also developed into much larger structures than before. Her entire body was converting from that of the girl to a grown man. This conversation took place extremely rapidly. Within two steps of movement the once fifteen year old girl was a six foot one inch middle aged man of modest build.

Black coarse skin covered his body. Torn clothing littered the floor from his transformation. Adam tried to yell for help but his mouth was not obeying the orders. Fear withheld the information that was sent forth by his brain making him in

effect paralyzed. Was this God's punishment he thought? The brief life of Adam Jenkins flashed before his mind. All the wrongdoing, all the violence, and all the evil things that he had been associated with now occupied all of his mental real estate as he hoped the man or being in the living room wasn't sent by Heaven's bank to repossess his soul. Edgar was not sent by Heaven and he was not sent by Hell. He was sent from Purgatory to do the will of the Grim Lord. The Grim Lord that he pledged to obey.

All Adam could utter was, "What are you?"

"I gave you the chance to reconsider your evil ways, Adam. I gave you a chance to change your life but you did neither. You have given into an impulse. I could feel you getting stronger as you flexed your power. I could feel you wanting and yearning to do evil. You owe a debt and it will be collected by me. The Grim Lord demands it and I am his reaper," said Edgar as his heart pounded against his newly formed, muscular ribcage.

Adam turned to run into the hallway of his two bedroom house. Three handguns, two shotguns, and two rifles were in his bedroom. The arsenal would be his only defense against the reaper that he brought into his home. Great speed and power was an asset of the reaper as it jumped from the corner of the room onto Adam's back covering twelve feet in the broad jump. Adam jerked backwards as he felt like a gorilla grabbed him. The right knee of the reaper was firmly planted into the spine of Adam and placed with tremendous pressure.

Two powerful hands grabbed the left arm of Adam while the reaper pulled violently with its knee still firmly planted in Adam's back. With one tug Adam's shoulder was removed from the socket effortlessly by the reaper. Yells and pleas of assistance bellowed from the lungs of Adam as the pain rattled

his nervous system. How could he expect his pleas for forgiveness to be received when just minutes ago he ignored the same pleas for help, forgiveness, and compassion? His call for help and his pleas for forgiveness only spurred the reaper to continue his attack ironically the same way the little girl form of the reaper inspired Adam to continue his evil pursuit.

The last ligaments and blood vessels separated from his body as the left shoulder was violently ripped completely from his body. Adam, running on adrenaline, shook free using leverage trained on the wrestling mats of the local high school years prior. He reached the far room down the long hallway and quickly went for his weapons, his babies, and his loves. The revolver by the bed was always loaded to be fired in anger against any robber. The reaper followed quickly down the hallway like a starving mad dog. Its arrival at the doorway was greeted by one armed Adam holding a .357 magnum. The sight of this enemy still seemed unreal to Adam even as his torso spurted blood to the ground from the location of his former arm. He stood with a tight grip on his gun while looking at the black skin of the reaper that radiated an equally black mist that cloaked its features.

The echo from the 357 magnum firing shook the room. The bullets ripped the air and hit the body of the reaper. Levitated by the force of the bullets, the reaper hit the drywall of the hallway. Adam sidestepped the bed as moved from the nightstand closer to the reaper and fired the remaining three bullets. It was apparent to Adam that the bullets had inflicted some damage because purple blood splattered on the hallway wall and then dripped from the reaper's chest. Blurred by the loss of blood, Adam struggled to focus.

Enthusiastic and confident, he believed that he had killed Edgar. For a brief second it looked as if he would not be the

only one to die that night. The excitement and adrenaline in his system made his body pump blood faster and faster. Unfortunately for Adam, his arm was no longer attached to his body, and the blood flowed on the light grey carpet of his bedroom at the door way. His focus shifted on trying to place a call to 911 and surviving the night but the process of locating his cell phone was difficult. A sudden shift from Adam's enemy began to indicate that his current struggle was far from over.

The reaper opened his glowing red eyes and laughed. The laughs signaled the death of Adam's resistance. The wounds on the chest area of the reaper began to close in real time in front of Adam. The rock hard skin quickly turned into black putty and reshaped into the original form only to quickly harden back into form. This struggle was over. Shock was setting in and it was getting harder for Adam to stand. He took three steps back and sat on the edge of the bed. With all of his energy he tried to focus on the reaper as it walked closer to him.

“Are you a demon?”

“No, you are the demon. You have only evil inside of you. I know how you will be received by Heaven. Better yet, how you will not be received by Heaven. Your soul is lost forever and it will never be found,” said the reaper as he walked within arm's length of Adam. His head snapped back from the cinder block force meeting his head. Ejected brain matter fell to the bed from the massive blow to the skull. Adam Jenkins was dead. His soul would now have to answer to Heaven for the crimes it committed on Earth.

The reaper stood over the fallen body of Adam next to the bed. He panted heavily while facing the corpse of his 1,999th kill since becoming a reaper. The reaper's skin faded from the

black misty rock substance to his old scarred to human skin. The features once cloaked by the black skin and mist were now prominent on the face of the reaper. Blood from Adam covered his face, chest, and hands. Though the powers of the reaper faded quickly, his original body brought him his only form of sanity. The man that was once known as Edgar Roman was still real. He was no longer in the form of a fifteen year old girl. No longer was he in reaper form fighting the scum of the Earth. Once again he was Edgar Roman.

Edgar turned from his victory and ran into the bathroom across the hallway. The reflection from the mirror was welcomed and the highlight of his action. Bright bathroom lights shone on his face as he panned his head from left to right to see every detail. Edgar longed to see his own face for it had been four months since he had this honor, this privilege. Jolted by the sight of his own face, a tear ran down his cheek. Freedom from the horror of his current condition was overpowering him to cry. The contrast between his grizzled face and that of a fifteen year girl was shocking. It surprised him every time that he transformed.

If he did not terrorize the Midwestern states in a twelve year period during the mid 1800s he wouldn't have been in this position. The gates of Heaven would have welcomed him centuries ago with open arms. Heaven wouldn't have sent him to the fiery gates of Hell never to be welcomed into its endless beauty. Edgar wouldn't have made a deal with the Grim Lord to avoid the fiery gates and the brimstone of Hell. Unfortunately for him, his victims, and their families, he did commit those crimes. The only solace Edgar took now was in his vigilante-like justice. Another vile human being was removed from the world.

One more murder was all he needed now to gain his

freedom. Just one more murder and he gets his body and soul back from the mortgage that he signed with the Grim Lord. The mere thought fills his heart with happiness. 2011 was a good year to end his commitment to the Grim Lord he thought. Thoughts raced through his mind about the moment that he will not be forced back into the body of a fifteen year old girl. These hopes and prayers consumed him daily and now it seemed that it would not be too much longer until he was free. This pursuit of freedom filled his every thought.

The cool water flowed over his hands and removed the red blood that had not yet dried. Orange liquid soap and the application of friction removed the rest of the blood from his hands and created a pinkish color in the white porcelain sink. This was a normal sight for Edgar. Hands, arms, and face is the order that he washed body after a killing the worst that humanity had to offer. With a subtle grin he was happy to see green, minty mouthwash next to the soap. He squished the cool, refreshing mouthwash around before spitting it into the sink.

As he spit the liquid into the sink Edgar saw purple blood on his chest in the mirror. The powerful bullets of the .357 Magnum had enough power to draw blood from the reaper. Most hand guns could not penetrate the skin of the reaper. The wounds had healed but the stain was fresh. This was extremely dangerous for someone like Edgar. Werewolves and vampires had a sense of smell that would rival that of sharks in water. Two frantic wipes more of soap on the purple stain on his chest forced the blood into the drain. He quickly stepped into the hallway of the home and looked at the blood on the wall and the carpet searching for any purple stains. Fear penetrated his mind as he ran back into the living room and grabbed his smartphone from the ripped jeans pocket. Edgar

needed help and he knew that his time was short.

He scrolled down his contact list to Jamal Jackson and dialed. He paced back and forth in the room thinking that it wasn't his fault that he got injured and bled. The first call was unsuccessful but he dialed again and again. On the fourth attempt, Jamal answered the phone. Edgar spoke, "I got my 1999th kill but I got wounded in the process. I'm bleeding. I'm in danger and I only have about five minutes or so before I turn back. Help me please," said the man frantic over the prospect of being killed by another immortal one kill away from freedom. The deep voice on the other end of the phone merely said "five minutes".

Jamal Jackson was a grim reaper that resided in Miami Beach, Florida. He became Edgar's controller five years prior. Since that time they had an extremely strained relationship. Jamal didn't want to bother with such tasks after he rose to prominence during the brutal Immortal War of the 90's. Edgar was known in the ranks of the reapers to be very sloppy. Two of his former controllers had been killed before by immortals and it was clear he played a role in their deaths due to his carelessness.

Jamal was turned into a reaper after he killed two vampires during the height of the war. He later killed six more vampires, three werewolves, and an arch. The war, on the other hand, reduced the ranks of the reapers so much that soldiers and enforcers like Jamal now had to take on these new liabilities. All redeemers in the ranks of the grim reapers had a location spell placed over them. This spell allowed the controllers to quickly find them. It had an effective range of roughly two hundred and twenty miles. He used this to track his redeemer and speed to the location.

With Jamal on the way Edgar focused on reducing the

current threat of attack in the house. The man moved swiftly down the hallway to the bathroom once again. The shower was quickly turned to hot and he jumped in. He cleaned the remaining blood from his backside. Shampoo, conditioner, and soap were squirted down his spine to ensure that the smell from his reaper blood was completely rinsed. He stepped out the shower and scanned the bathroom to ensure that none of his blood was on the floor. Once that area was clear he had to make sure the rest of the apartment was clean.

Internal warmth resonated inside from his organs outward to his skin. This was the precursor for his transformation back into a fifteen year old girl's body. Pain followed the warmth forcing him to the white tile of the bathroom floor. Drool and spit dribbled out the side of his mouth as the molecules of his body were squished into a smaller female frame. The six foot one inch body was forced into a five foot one inch body with great speed. The small body he was forced to reside within was now in grave danger from attack. Unable to transform back into a reaper for some time he would be defenseless against an immortal attack. He was powerless to control his situation.

Grabbing the shampoo and soap off the tiled floor, he ran down the hallway allowing the liquids to drain onto the carpet. He would not be able to mask his smell but if he made everything smell like him then he might last long enough for Jamal to arrive. The next stop was to his backpack once more. Edgar unzipped the main section of the backpack to get new clothing. The transformation shredded his previous clothing and while in human form he was subjected to all the physical effects of his environment. Gray sweat pants and a pink t-shirt were quickly placed over his slender framed body that he now occupied. He then gathered his sandals from the doorway.

Edgar ran towards the bedroom to gather the weapons of the freshly killed Adam Jenkins. The .357 proved powerful and he wanted to have some defense in case he got attacked. When he turned the corner to enter the bedroom he saw a shadowy figure moving toward the window of the bedroom. The hallway light was on and Edgar was unaware if the figure saw him. His chest instantly started to beat rapidly as he leaned against the drywall. Quickly and quietly he made his way into the living room and gathered his backpack. Edgar hit the floor and crawled around the TV to hide his small frame. His cell phone ringer was quickly placed on silent without vibration. Danger was upon him and his only hope would be his controller.

Seconds later he heard a small crash in the master bedroom of the home. Bass from heavy breathing rumbled down the hallway into the living room. Only werewolves made sounds that loud but utter terror wouldn't allow him to peak around the corner of the TV console for proof of his assumption. Plans of escape were debated in his head but a good solution did not present itself. Heavy breathing and loud footsteps indicated the beast was now in the house moving closer to him. It stopped in the hallway and sniffed the blood on the wall. A deep laugh bellowed from the monster in the house. "I can hear your heart beating reaper. I can smell your foul blood too. It is only a matter of time before I find you and kill you," said the deep voice. It licked the blood from the hallway wall as an appetizer but it wanted the main meal of reaper.

Edgar's phone face flashed but he dare not answer even though it was Jamal. He hit "decline" on the screen with his thumb and then quickly maneuvered to send a text. The message read, "Living room, werewolf, help please!" Edgar gathered the courage to peak around the corner of the console

to the hallway. The brown fur of the seven foot two inch werewolf was magnificent. The angular wolf face was highlighted by the long mane. It stood erect as it lumbered the massive mass it carried down the hallway. Long arms flopped by its side as it tried to decipher the smells of the house. Black marble-like eyes peered around the room analyzing the battle that occurred previously in the area.

The massive blood stains in the middle of the room intrigued the werewolf. It bent over and sniffed the arm. It placed its arms on the ground to support the massive weight as it licked the blood from the carpet. It mumbled “fresh” and then stood from the ground. It was gathering the various smells of the house and comparing them. Soon the smell of the reaper would be clear. The small female body smelled like a normal human and thus it made it harder for the werewolf who was searching for the smell of a reaper. This deception would only last so long.

To gain a better vantage point, the beast rose to its full height to scan the room. Angered by the inability to find the reaper it walked deeper into the living room. The wooden boards under the carpet creaked from the weight and the force of the immortal. A small lightly tanned foot entered its line of sight. The creature laughed for it had found the reaper that it searched for. Two rows of razor sharp teeth were exposed when it opened its mouth for the attack. Saliva ran from its mouth to the brown fur under its jaw. Its shoulders flexed back and skywards. The right arm swooped from the retracted position hitting the forty two inch TV across the room. Edgar turned the small head to look at the massive brute. Exposed to attack, Edgar felt that he might have met his match.

“Sak Pase, Sak Pase motherfucker,” yelled a voice from outside the house. The werewolf turned its head to face the

window from the living room to the front of the house. It took a step back and raised its arms for impact. Shards of glass flew across the room as the window was breached. Jamal had arrived at the location with complete prejudice against the werewolf. Time appeared to slow as the massive reaper broke the window and hit the equally massive werewolf with a right hook to the face. Brown strands of hair flew into the air from the impact. His momentum carried the reaper into the body of the werewolf and knocked it onto the old couch.

Jamal athletically jumped backwards to avoid the counter attack from the werewolf's right arm as it swung violently. It growled at the seven foot ten inch reaper as these giants now engaged in life-or-death combat. One of them will die that night and they both knew it. The traditional grey hood of the reaper covered long dreadlocks and ended at the top of his shoulders. The extremely muscular back of Jamal faced Edgar as he rushed into the corner to avoid the fallout from the conflict. Dark grey gauntlets wrapped around his hands, wrist, and forearms covered by a dark black metal. Hard, Chobham-like armored skin covered his body with extra thickness around his chest and vital areas.

Jamal punched with his right hand violently toward the werewolf as it slid to the left to dodge the massive punch. It raked Jamal's chest with a swift blow. Pieces of Jamal's armor popped out from the rest of his body when the dark grey claws of the werewolf connected on the attack. The concussion from the headbutt that ensued knocked the werewolf over the couch into the wall. Obliterated drywall fell to the couch as Jamal grabbed the leg of the beast and pulled it with extreme force from the green microfiber fabric. It hurled through the air until Jamal dropped a megaton elbow to the werewolf's torso. The sound of ribs breaking from the blow indicated the

perfect attack, and the werewolf howled.

It hit the ground only to spin quickly and kicked into the air. Jolted back by the impact to his chin, Jamal's body flew into the ceiling. Using the centrifugal forces created by the previous spin the werewolf elevated further and kicked with the other foot into the midsection of the reaper as the roof crumbled around them. Though the corner of the room was collapsing it didn't halt the violence. While the installation, drywall, and remnants of 2 x 8's shot around the room from the impact of the battle, Jamal launched another attack. The damage to the structure didn't hurt Jamal at all. The werewolf, on the other hand, was starting to show signs of injury.

The two gauntlets were suddenly infused with a massive burst of energy by the reaper. The once black and grey gloves glowed a fiery red. A loud yell was followed by a violent combination of punches. Burned wolf hair from the heat of the gloves brought a foul smell to the room as the battle raged. The werewolf took the fury from the attack from the reaper and responded in kind with a counter attack. Slicing more pieces of armor from Jamal's chest the werewolf laughed at the previous attacks launched at it. He was angered by the attack because Jamal had to hold back his true power in order to not risk killing Edgar.

The current style of fighting would only lead to a stalemate but Jamal had an idea on how to end the current fight that he found himself in. Jamal then moved toward his enemy once again making sure to leave a point of weakness open. The werewolf saw this weakness and attacked. It pierced the skin of reaper and drove its hand into his stomach. This was the very action the Jamal wanted though the pain of the attack reverberated around his body. The reaper grabbed the arm of the werewolves and pulled it closer. The two

massive brutes then disappeared.

Jamal had used the dark-stepped outside the building. It allowed weaker reapers to transport themselves into dark areas. The more powerful the reaper the farther that said reaper could travel and the less reliant they were on darkness. In fact, it was how Jamal was able to travel the fifty miles to Edgar within the short period of time. Soldiers like this reaper train very hard to perfect this ability and he wasn't an exception. He needed the werewolf to be in close contact in order to travel with it as well and the baited attack gave him the ability to complete the move.

He had transported the two immortals three hundred feet into the sky. The two massive warriors plummeted to the ground at a high rate of speed. The werewolf lacked the armor of the reaper and it would now cost the werewolf dearly. It took only a couple of seconds before the two hit the roof of the small house. They hit the ground with a massive thud and explosion of dust and pieces of the roof. The impact obliterated half the load bearing beams in the house and it began to collapse around Edgar still lodged in the corner. The middle roof of the house was now inside the house as the rest of the home barely had the structural integrity to stand for much longer.

Jamal was lying on his side as his power faded. The wound and the fall had weakened him. He turned his head to look at the werewolf. It was no longer in its werewolf form and was all but dead. Jamal stood to his feet and stood over a naked caucasian, black haired woman. The massive hands of the reaper grabbed her neck and picked her up into the sky. Unlike her previous form, the woman was a mere five foot three inches tall and her current weight was only one hundred and thirty pounds. She struggled to her free herself but she

was drained of energy and now was at the mercy of the reaper. Jamal was concerned because until this point the werewolves in America were only Latino. This development led Jamal to think they might have greater numbers in Florida than previously imagined.

Edgar pushed the debris from his body and stood to his feet. Small and large particles alike fell from his cheeks and shoulders as he walked closer to Jamal. Purple blood now dripped from Jamal's side onto his black cargo shorts. More werewolves would be on the way shortly. Edgar, fearful of the anger of his superior walked closer to him nervously as he told the redeemer to hurry. Once in reach he grabbed Edgar's small body by the neck the same as the fallen werewolf. In an instant the group was transported from the battered home that now had begun to burn from the conflict.

CHAPTER 4 DARK PAST

Jamal Jackson was born in 1975, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Since birth he was sentenced to a brutal life. His mother and father braved the seas from Haiti to America on a makeshift boat with Jamal and his brother when he was three years old. They both died of AIDS before Jamal was eleven years old, and without any other family Jamal was forced onto the streets as the coke and crack epidemic of the eighties started to heat up. The slums of Carol City didn't provide the structure that he needed to become a productive member of society. At the age of twelve he did work for the local drug dealers so he could feed his little sister.

He grew into a six foot seven inch body and had all the tools athletically to perform on the football field as well. Jamal thought that would be his escape from the hell in which he was raised in, but past drug convictions negated college coaches from recruiting him. If not for his drug transgressions, he probably would have drafted by the NFL and not by the Grim Lord. From the time that he was brought into the world, he

has only known fear, pain, and anger. At twenty years of age Jamal killed two vampires without the aid of immortal weaponry or tactics. In that attack, the only thing he cared about, his sister was killed in the attack. When the reapers then offered him the chance to seek revenge, he took the offer.

The transportation of the immortals to the location only took a couple of minutes but they had travelled more than twenty miles from the previous location. The basement was located in the house used by him and the other grim reaper soldiers. The roughly one thousand square foot area had three rooms in addition to the main room. Jamal dropped Edgar to the ground of the main room's black tile floor as he continued to walk into one of the back rooms. He placed restraints around her neck and pinned her arms behind her back. The door to the holding pen was closed to hold his new prisoner. They would question her when she woke. After that she would be killed and the immortal ore in here body would be extracted and used to craft more weapons. The reaper felt extremely weak from combat and walked back into the main room.

The transformation into his human form only took mere seconds. The large purple blood stains on the side of his body still bled after the conflict. A small closet next to the entrance housed large black towels that he quickly used to clean the blood. His eyes soon rose to look at Edgar from his wound after the third towel was filled with the blood. "Can you tell me why I am bleeding from my ribcage after fighting a werewolf? This better be good Edgar," said Jamal as he walked to the wooden kitchen like cabinets along the adjacent wall.

"I was out walking when I met the guy. He asked me for a ride and I thought I might have a chance to get the 1999th

redemption murder. I could sense the evil in him. So I waited for him to attack me and he did. I transformed and killed him. Before I could finish the job, he got the jump on me and shot me with a revolver. I bled all over the place. I tried to clean it up, but the werewolf came so fast I couldn't do it in time. It could have happened to anyone really it is not my fault," said Edgar as he stood on the cold tile.

"It could have happened to anyone, really? But, it doesn't happen to just anyone. It happens to you all of the time. What is this the third time that I have had to come to your aid? The other two times you got lucky. If that attack didn't work I would have used all of my power. You would have been killed. What if I didn't pick up the phone? I have a job and it isn't just to babysit you. Is that how you got the two other controllers murdered? Is that why I have to babysit you? You are not worth it Edgar. You have one more task before you become a reaper and I will make sure you are tested. I won't leave it up to you. Don't go out trying to complete your mission. In fact come here," said Jamal as he yelled across the room at him while applying a battlefield wrap around his midsection.

Edgar walked over slowly to him until he almost reached him and said, "C'mon man. Don't beat me down again. I am only one kill short and then you can be rid of me. Yeah I fucked up. I know that. I understand that. I am not like you guys yet and you know that. But you don't have to beat me down every time I fuck up," said Edgar as his eyes welled up with tears. A simple speech meant nothing to the reaper that just cleaned a six inch gash along his midsection because of Edgar's sloppiness.

"Oh, you don't want me to beat you down this time. You have been a redeemer for a long time and you still make

mistakes. Mistakes like the one you just made will get you killed and even worse, it will get me killed. That is unacceptable in the grim reaper conclave. Yet, I am here bleeding and you are unharmed. You have no money, no title, and nothing worth bartering for this injury that was inflicted on me. This will take days to heal. Any retaliation by werewolves will leave my other reapers vulnerable. Yet you want your apology to be my compensation for helping a redeemer. You are scum to me and I will treat you that way until you get yourself killed,” said his controller.

Edgar knew what it meant for him. The small female body that he was trapped in lowered its head and walked closer. The first blow to the head knocked him to the ground. The further punches added to pain that flowed like a stream through his body. It pulsed around impact zones as blood flowed from his mouth and face. Unlike earlier in the day his blood was the normal human red blood. In human form he was no more or less human than the average person. The only benefit he enjoyed was the accelerated healing ability but the pain and other emotions affected him just like anyone else. The impacts shook his frame and broke multiple bones in his face, chest, and arm. This was how the reapers solved problems with those who got out of line.

The stigma that redeemers incurred in the ranks of reapers was similar to that of a child molester in prison. Even though they are all violent, the molester holds a special place in the distorted hierarchy. All reapers had an anger, resentment, or rage that bordered on psychotic. Except for the redeemers, the majority of the reapers were denied entrance into Heaven or Hell, and then banished to Purgatory. Most, like Jamal, lived life in absolute poverty and pain and never died before becoming a reaper. They reject Heaven for the life they felt