
Thriller

Drama

DROWN

Fighting for air, hear these lungs crying

Kassan Jahmal Kassim

Alex Pat, a man with a deep and haunting tragic memory from his childhood spent by the lake, now finds that the spectre of his past has seemingly materialized into an unnerving and unsettling presence that relentlessly shadows his every move, as if he is being perpetually stalked by an otherworldly entity that refuses to let go.

Lungs

As my car sinks deeper into the murky depths of the lake, I feel the weight of panic and desperation pressing down on me, crushing my lungs and leaving me gasping for air. The eerie familiarity of this suffocating situation strikes a chord within me, stirring up memories of a similar feeling long ago.

With each passing second, my pleas for help escape my lips but are swallowed by the surrounding waters, reduced to mere bubbles surfacing in a silent symphony. Frantically, I twist my head in all directions, searching for any glimmer of hope or a sign of an exit from this watery trap. The confined space of the submerged vehicle taunts me, threatening to steal what little air I have left.

Floating in front of me, a haunting display of my personal belongings serves as a painful reminder of the life I may lose if I can't find a way out. Determined, I begin a relentless assault on the driver's window with my fist, hoping that each strike will break the tempered glass barrier that stands between me and survival. The sound of my knuckles cracking against the unyielding surface echoes through the drowning car, serving as a painful reminder of my desperate situation.

As the weight of impending doom presses down on me, desperation overwhelms me to the point where I resort to

scratching at the glass, hoping to find a weak point that will give way. My efforts, however, are met with futility as the window remains steadfast, denying me the escape I so desperately seek.

The once crystal-clear waters that suspended me in a world of calm have now transformed into a suffocating abyss, where emptiness reigns and the ability to distinguish anything around me fades into a hazy blur. The crushing pressure on my chest intensifies, amplifying the terrifying reality that I am drowning within the confines of a sinking car, descending deeper into the frigid depths of the lake.

In the midst of this desperate struggle, my pleas for help become more fervent as I come face to face with the realization that I do not want to meet my demise in such a tragic, isolated manner. The urgency in my voice is intertwined with a plea for someone, anyone, to lend a hand and pull me from the clutches of this watery grave.

Each passing moment inches me closer to the threshold of surrender, but a flicker of hope keeps me fighting against the odds. Every fibre of my being yearns for a hero to emerge, to rescue me from the drowning car that threatens to consume me. So, I cry out, hoping that my voice will reach an empathetic ear willing to dive into the murky depths and pull me back into the realm of safety and life.

Stalker

A few days before, I found myself going about my usual routine, sipping on my favourite cup of coffee from a familiar shop. The warm bitterness of the drink never failed to jumpstart my day, but on this particular morning, my attention was drawn away from its usual effect. As I stared into the depths of my cup, lost in my own thoughts, nostalgia for my childhood consumed me. Amidst the old tunes playing in the background, reminiscent of the melodies favoured by our grandparents, I couldn't help but feel a strange presence watching me, casting a dark shadow over my otherwise mundane day.

With each sip I took, an unsettling feeling overcame me, causing my throat to tighten and making it difficult to swallow. The most peculiar aspect of it all was that whenever I turned to investigate the source of the shadow, it would vanish, leaving me unable to trace its path. This realization only added to my mounting unease, leading me to conclude that this was far from a normal day, and my instincts urged me to leave the coffee shop before finishing my drink.

As I stepped out into the cold atmosphere, a chill coursed through my spine, intensifying the sense of foreboding that had already settled within me. Seeking solace in the familiarity of my old Corolla, I hastily made my way to my car, hoping that

the confines of its familiar interior would offer me some semblance of safety. Little did I know that my journey was far from over.

As the traffic lights changed, I noticed a black car lingering behind me through the rear-view mirror. The sheer coincidence of it standing out in a sea of vehicles made me question if it was mere happenstance or something more sinister. To put my suspicions to the test, I decided to manoeuvre through the crowded streets, weaving in and out of lanes and cutting through intersections, all the while keeping a close eye on the black car's movements.

After several heart-pounding moments, I finally managed to lose the car, its presence fading into the distance. The relief washed over me like a wave, tinged with confusion and curiosity. What was happening? What could have led to such a pursuit? Thoughts of having a stalker plagued my mind, and I silently prayed that this would not turn out to be the case. The uncertainty loomed like a dark cloud, casting a shadow not only over my day but also over my sense of security.

Dream

At home, in the cosy confines of my small place for one, I sank into the plush cushions of my couch, ready to piece together the events of today. As I settled in, a nagging doubt crept into my mind, prompting me to ponder, "Did that really happen?" Cupping my hands around a bowl of leftovers, I aimed to reheat them in the microwave for dinner, only to find myself mesmerized by the pulsating lights emanating from the control panel. Amidst this mundane chore, my train of thought was abruptly interrupted by the sound of a child's laughter echoing in my head, so familiar, for it once belonged to me in my younger years.

Startled, I resisted the urge to succumb to these resurfacing memories, hastily tucking them away in the depths of my mind. The past, laden with its own set of joys and sorrows, was too painful a realm to let infiltrate my present existence. Still, the whispers of my subconscious refused to be silenced, occasionally manifesting as vivid dreams, or rather, forceful flashbacks from a bygone era. Tonight, however, as I prepared to surrender to sleep's embrace, I fervently prayed that these haunting dreams would grant me respite, granting me release from their incessant grip on reality.

As I savoured each mouthful of my slow-cooked meal, the flickering television screen became an inconsequential

backdrop to my thoughts. My finger danced across the remote, ceaselessly channel surfing in search of a program that could momentarily detract from the weight of my existence. Yet, despite the array of channels at my disposal, none succeeded in capturing my attention. Instead, the allure of slumber grew stronger with each passing moment, teasing my weary mind as I reclined on the couch, my eyelids fluttering in anticipation of surrender. Just as I teetered on the edge of sleep, a particular phrase from the show playing on TV began to reverberate through my drowsy consciousness, an incantation that, like a lullaby, gently ushered me into the realm of dreams.

"Get ready, get ready, get ready....."

Mother

"Get ready, get ready," my mother screams across the rooms, her voice echoing against the walls of our chaotic house. In my messy room, the battle against the clutter intensifies as I scramble to find my towel amidst the sea of scattered clothes and books.

Amidst the frenzy, I can hear my father's footsteps as he rushes out to the car, his determined strides echoing in my ears. The sound of the car engine roaring to life fills the air, a signal that the start of our long trip is imminent.

"Do you have all the things you need for the lake, dear?" my mother asks, her voice carrying a mix of excitement and organization. She has a knack for ensuring that everything is meticulously planned and ready for our adventures. Her attention to detail never fails to amaze me.

As a child, the excitement of escaping the confines of our predictable routine – school, home, and church – would often make me forget about the essentials. Who wouldn't be excited to go to the lake for the very first time? It's a chance to break free from the monotony and embrace new experiences.

With the rush of anticipation coursing through my veins, I would often neglect to eat breakfast, fearing it would slow us down on our long journey. But my mother's keen eyes, sharp as ever, would catch me in the act. She would insist that I fuel my body for the day ahead, reminding me of the importance of nourishment.

As a good boy, moulded by my mother's guidance and affection, I obediently ate my cereal. The anticipation bubbling inside me caused my feet to swing back and forth under the table, unable to contain my excitement.

Once I deemed my plate sufficiently clean, I sprinted to the car, eager to secure my spot in the front seat. The hint of a smile tugged at my mother's lips as she followed suit, settling into the backseat beside my father. With a gentle shift into first gear, my father set the car in motion, and we embarked on our adventure to the unknown.

Yet, as vivid as this memory is, there are certain gaps that leave room for uncertainty. It's as if there are missing puzzle pieces, creating plot holes within the narrative. Suddenly, everything fades to black, and I am overwhelmed by the sensation of water engulfing me, like a suffocating embrace tightening its grip around my throat.

?

I woke up a little bit earlier than usual today, as my restless night of sleep left me tossing and turning. Determined to make the most of the day, I decided to start my morning routine ahead of schedule. With each step - waking up, taking a refreshing bath, changing into my work attire, and enjoying a slice of warm toast - I found myself ready for the challenges that lay ahead at my job.

As a dedicated handyman, I never shy away from any task that needs my attention. Some weeks, I find myself working tirelessly all seven days, taking pride in my ability to solve problems and help others. Other weeks, though less demanding, still keep me occupied with projects and repairs. In fact, I am the proud owner of a small shop that I established through hard work and dedication.

Today, however, the atmosphere felt unusually quiet, with very few customers venturing into my shop. It was during this lull that I began to sense a mysterious presence lurking in the shadows. Initially, I dismissed it as mere imagination, assuming that I was alone in the shop. Nonetheless, as time passed, I couldn't shake off the feeling of being watched intently by an unknown eye. A chill ran down my spine, and my throat tightened as if deprived of moisture, causing me to struggle for breath. The room seemed to constrict around me,

the walls closing in, making it increasingly difficult to breathe freely.

Overwhelmed by this unsettling sensation, I hastily rushed out of the shop, desperate for a breath of fresh air. Gasping and coughing loudly, I fought to replenish my lungs with the life-giving oxygen they craved. With my eyes wide open, searching for solace, I instinctively looked up toward the infinite expanse of the heavens, praying for relief.

Fortunately, my prayers were answered as I managed to take a deep breath, feeling the life force surge through my body once again. Gazing downward, taking solace in the stability of the ground beneath me, I placed my hands on my knees and focused on the gentle rhythm of my inhalations and exhalations, slowly re-establishing a sense of equilibrium.

"What could possibly be happening?" I pondered to myself, a mix of confusion and apprehension clouding my thoughts. Returning to the familiar confines of my shop, everything seemed to have returned to normal, as if the unsettling episode had never taken place. Wiping the sweat from my forehead, I took a seat to steady my nerves and regain my composure.

Still plagued by unanswered questions, I found myself once again contemplating the bewildering turn of events. "What on

earth is going on?" I asked aloud, hoping the silent walls of my shop would provide me with some insight.

As the seconds passed, the silence enveloped me, leaving me with only my thoughts and the unanswered question hanging in the air. With a mix of trepidation and determination, I took a deep breath, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead, searching for the truth amidst the enigmatic shadows that seemed to be haunting my otherwise ordinary day.

Pills

A few days had passed, and I mustered up the courage to finally make an appointment with the doctor. Desperation consumed me as I realized how crucial his help was to alleviate my troubles.

Stepping into the doctor's office, we underwent the routine check-ups, which seemed to reveal no abnormalities. However, it was not until I shared the details of my specific problem that the doctor's expression shifted, and an eyebrow raised in slight surprise. I couldn't help but feel his gaze fixated on me, possibly considering me to be an unusual case.

An uncomfortable silence filled the room as the doctor scribbled down his notes, seemingly unsure if he possessed the expertise needed to assist me. Despite this uncertainty, he felt a responsibility to at least attempt to offer some guidance and support.

In his attempt to address my sleep disturbances, the doctor prescribed sleeping pills in the hopes of improving my rest. He then suggested seeking counselling to address the choking episodes, surmising that anxiety might be the underlying cause. However, he also nonchalantly mentioned that if counselling proved ineffective, I should consider seeking solace in religious faith.

Leaving the doctor's office with a mixture of relief and lingering unease, I made my way slowly towards my car. Yet, as I walked, an eerie sensation gripped me. The sound of footsteps reverberated behind me, but to my bewilderment, no visible source accompanied them. The unnerving noise grew louder and closer, fuelling an instinctual fear within me. I felt compelled to run for my life, disregarding anything except reaching the safety of my car.

The sensation of choking tightened its grip on me, intensifying my panic as I fumbled to unlock the car door. In a desperate stroke of luck, the window obediently rolled down, granting me swift access to the vehicle's interior. Without hesitation, I threw myself into the driver's seat, ready to start the engine and speed away from this eerie presence. To my astonishment, as soon as I secured myself within the car's confines, the overwhelming feeling dissipated, leaving behind an eerie silence as if nothing had transpired.

Allowing myself a moment to catch my breath and calm my racing heart, I started the car's engine and embarked on my journey back to work. Upon arrival, I discreetly hung a sign on the door bearing the simple message: "Back in 30 minutes." Sneaking into the backroom, my eyes landed on a well-placed sofa, a sanctuary I had purposely installed for brief moments of respite. Eagerly, I settled onto the comfortable surface, determined to find solace in a few moments of rest. As I lay

there, I swallowed the prescribed pills, hoping they would bring about the relaxation and tranquillity that had eluded me for so long.

The minutes ticked by slowly, offering a temporary reprieve from the chaos of life. In those fleeting moments, I sought refuge in the quiet as I tried to ease the troubled thoughts that plagued my mind. With each passing second, I gradually found myself drifting into a state of calmness, relishing the stillness that enveloped the room.

Eventually, the 30 minutes elapsed, and I reluctantly rose from the sofa, feeling reluctantly recharged. Pushing aside the drowsiness that threatened to linger, I returned to my responsibilities with renewed determination, hoping that this brief respite had provided me with the resiliency to face whatever challenges lie ahead.

Father

Counting the passing trees one by one in the moving car, my father drives quite slow, allowing me to savour each moment and immerse myself in the enchanting scenery unfolding before my eyes. And with this deliberate pace, he not only fuels the excitement within me but also creates an atmosphere of calmness and serenity that makes the journey all the more enjoyable.

I find myself enthralled, unable to tear my gaze away from the open window. My chin rests on the door as I bask in the beauty of the outside world, which appears so spectacular and different from my everyday surroundings. The vibrant colours, the gently swaying branches, and the soothing breeze evoke a sense of awe and wonder in me.

My father, always concerned for my safety, warns me not to stick out my head too far and reminds me to sit still in my seat. However, he knows all too well that keeping an excited child rooted in one spot is a Herculean task. Despite his admonishments, I can't help but fidget in my seat, uneasy as if ants were crawling beneath my skin.

Time seems to stretch perpetually during this car ride, and my restlessness persists. But suddenly, something at the back of the car catches my attention. My dearest mother appears to be

engaged in a conversation with someone in the rear seat, though I can only see an empty space. With a loving smile, she speaks with a gentle concern, as though she is conversing with a ghostly presence in that vacant spot.

Soon after, we make a pit stop at a convenient store for a quick bathroom break. As we all disembark from the car, I hear what seems to be extra footsteps, accompanying our own. Curiously, I glance down and discover that our shadows, cast by the warm glow of the sun, now feature an additional pair of feet. The inexplicable sight fills me with a sense of intrigue and a touch of unease.

Before I can voice my perplexity, my mother gazes at me, her eyes fixed not solely on me but on another person, as if addressing someone mysterious and intangible. In her tender yet enigmatic voice, she says, "Let's make use of the restroom quickly, dear. Your father values efficiency."

As we enter the restroom, I proceed to use the toilet and diligently wash my hands. Inside, I encounter a man who utters the strangest of statements. "Oh, what a striking resemblance they share, one could easily mistake them for each other," he says cryptically. Yet, as much as I strain my eyes, I fail to discern who exactly he is referring to.

Returning to the car, we resume our journey towards our destination. However, a lingering sense of apprehension begins to tighten its grip around my throat. Suddenly, the car begins to fill with water from all sides, and I feel myself being engulfed by shallow and suffocating waters. Panic sets in, and I find myself struggling to breathe, yearning for help that seems hopelessly out of reach. Then, in an instant, darkness descends upon me as consciousness slips away.

As I awaken abruptly, drenched in sweat, I find myself gripping the mattress tightly, desperately gasping for air. The remnants of the nightmare cling to me, leaving me feeling drained and exhausted. Sleep evades me for the remainder of the night, and I am left contemplating the origin and meaning of these relentless and haunting dreams. Seeking solace and understanding, I turn to the Lord, silently pleading for answers and guidance.

Lake

Reflecting back on my childhood, it often feels like a distant dream, one that I have just awakened from. The memories are hazy, and I struggle to recall many details. Strangely enough, it seems that I only remember the good moments, while the bad ones have faded into the background, as if they never even existed. However, my mind is slowly piecing together fragments of the past, and in doing so, it awakens long-forgotten pain that I have been shielding myself from.

As I share these thoughts, I can't help but acknowledge that you, as my therapist, hold the expertise to guide me through this journey of self-discovery. Of course, I've come to realize that therapists often have a penchant for stating the hard truths and mirroring your own words back to you - a practice that can sometimes feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, I recognized the need for answers and sought therapy as a means to find them. The weight of my experiences has become too much for me to bear alone.

However, the first therapy session confirmed my fears. It felt like a futile exercise, with little progress made. Disappointed, I left the therapist's office and found myself standing at an intersection, lost in my thoughts. It was then that a simple sight triggered yet another vivid flashback from my childhood.

I remembered a family trip, a journey that seemed endless and left me exhausted as a child. But eventually, we arrived at a beautiful lake. I can still feel the surge of excitement as I saw the ice cream van approaching. The anticipation of jumping into the tranquil waters overwhelmed me. Yet, my mother, ever the responsible one, urged me to help unload our belongings from the car before indulging in any fun. Obediently, I followed her instructions, pleasantly surprised by how quickly the task was accomplished. It was as if an extra pair of hands had magically appeared.

While others prepared the barbecue and set up the table, I sat on the deck overlooking the lake, my feet dangling above the water. In this particular memory, I seem to be engaged in a conversation with someone, perhaps an imaginary friend that existed solely within the bounds of my childhood imagination. My mother, who had always been overly protective, appeared strangely relaxed on this day. It was a rare deviation from her usual cautious self.

As the enticing aroma of the grilled meat filled the air, my mother called out for me, signalling that lunch was ready. Excitedly, I prepared to run back to her, but my first step was halted by a loud crack beneath me. In that instant, I found myself suspended in mid-air before being thrust into the depths of the lake. Panic consumed me as I struggled to stay afloat, desperately fighting against the currents. Despite my limited swimming skills, I mustered every ounce of strength to

reach the surface, only to feel something entangle my feet and pull me back down, deeper into the watery abyss. The water invaded my lungs, suffocating me, and I could barely manage to gasp for air. I cried out for help, each desperate plea accompanied by a stream of bubbles.

And then, in a moment of sheer terror, I heard a resounding splash beside me. My father had leaped into the water, his sole focus fixed on pulling me to safety. Clutching me tightly in his arms, he lifted me back to the surface, gasping for air. Leaving me in my mother's arms, he immediately dove back into the water, compelled by some unknown force.

Why did he return to the water after saving me? The answer remains shrouded in mystery. Emerging once more, his face etched with despair and shock, he stretched out his empty arms, as if still holding something, though I saw nothing. Tears streamed down my mother's face, and the details of that memory fade into darkness.

The blaring horn of a frustrated driver behind me snapped me back to the present. The intersection was empty, and I continued my journey home, deep in thought, grappling with the revelations uncovered during therapy. The pieces of the puzzle in my mind were slowly connecting, but the final picture that they formed remained elusive, leaving me yearning for answers.

Photo

I arrived home, completely drained from the long and exhausting day. The weight of the world seemed to be resting on my shoulders, and I couldn't wait to just unwind and relax. As I walked into my bathroom, ready to wash away the stress, something caught my eye on the sink. It was the bottle of sleeping pills that I had bought earlier.

Letting out a heavy sigh, I picked up the container and stared at it for a moment. These pills were supposed to help me get a good night's rest, but they had failed me time and time again. They were useless, just like the countless sleepless nights I had endured. Without a second thought, I poured the pills down the drain and washed them away with water.

Feeling a mix of frustration and exhaustion, I turned to face the mirror. The reflection staring back at me was a sight of pure weariness. Dark circles under my eyes, a pale complexion, and a face that clearly showed the lack of sleep I had been experiencing. It was disheartening to see myself in such a state.

Suddenly, a surge of anger rushed through me. My throat tightened, and I could feel my breath becoming heavy. In that moment, I couldn't contain it any longer. I let out a loud yell, "ENOUGH!" and stormed out of the bathroom, my feet firmly planted on the ground, ready to release my pent-up frustration.

A heavy silence filled the room as I stood there, seething with rage. And then, without warning, my anger erupted like a volcano. I began throwing anything within my reach, unleashing my fury upon my own home. Picture frames, remotes, displays, and anything else that crossed my path became victims of my wrath.

Tables and chairs were flipped over, and I screamed in pain and frustration, repeatedly asking, "WHY? WHY? WHY?" The kitchen became my next target as I vented my anger on pots and plates, tearing through my belongings without a care.

Finally, as my temper tantrum subsided, I surveyed the aftermath of my rage. The mess I had created was overwhelming. I let out another sigh, realizing that I was the one who would have to clean up this chaos. With a sense of responsibility, I grabbed a dustpan and broom, starting from the kitchen and working my way through the house.

As I reached the lounge, I couldn't help but notice the broken picture frames and the pictures scattered on the floor. Among them, one particular photo caught my attention

The edge of the picture where I stood appeared to be slightly crooked. It seemed as though a portion had been cut off, and upon closer inspection, I noticed a third piece of clothing in the picture.

Curiosity piqued, I pondered, "What could be the story behind this peculiar picture?"

Without a doubt, the best person to shed light on this recent discovery would be none other than my dear mother. After all, she was the one who had given me this picture on the day I moved out.

The following day, I embarked on a journey to my mother's place, which was located a few kilometres outside of town. Ever since her separation from my father years ago, she had been living on her own.

As I approached her door, I knocked and was greeted with a warm smile. "Come in, come in," she welcomed me, her voice filled with warmth.

"I'll put the kettle on for a cup of tea," she continued, bustling about in the kitchen.

We engaged in conversation, the typical exchange between a parent and child. She inquired about my well-being and questioned why I didn't visit more often. Eventually, as she paused to take a sip of her tea, I prepared to ask her about the peculiar picture.

However, before the words could escape my lips, a voice within me held me back. "Don't ask her, for you know she'll dismiss it. Look in the box for the truth," the voice whispered.

Intrigued by the mysterious voice, I altered my question and instead asked my mother about the whereabouts of my old comic books. "I plan to give them to children who visit my store with their parents," I explained to her.

"They should be in the backroom, among the old clutter," she replied.

With her permission, I ventured into the backroom, instructing her to stay put as I assured her it wouldn't take long.

What was the purpose of all this?

The box the voice had referred to was my mother's secret box, hidden away from my father. I had known of its existence, as I had often observed her discreetly placing items inside when she believed I wasn't watching. And true to her nature, she had stowed it away amidst the old junk.

As I made my way through the backroom, I diligently searched for the box. Concealed beneath layers of dusty blankets, I finally discovered it. It was evident that my mother had never laid a hand on it since my father's departure

Prompt 1: Rewrite the text in a different storytelling style.

As I carefully removed the layer of dust from the lid, I couldn't help but feel a sense of anticipation. What secrets would this old box hold? With a gentle push, the lid creaked open, revealing a treasure trove of forgotten memories.

Amongst the assortment of items, my eyes were immediately drawn to a stack of love letters. They were not addressed to my father, which piqued my curiosity even further. As I sifted through the contents, I discovered an old doll, a delicate necklace, and a silver bracelet. Each item seemed to whisper stories of their own.

However, it was the object nestled at the bottom of the box that held the key to my quest. With trembling hands, I retrieved the missing piece of the picture from my pocket. It was time to reunite the fragments and uncover the truth. As the two pieces seamlessly fit together, my heart skipped a beat.

In that moment, the complete picture before me was nothing short of astonishing. My eyes widened in disbelief as I realized the unimaginable. "Dear Lord," I gasped, "I had a brother! And not just any brother, but my very own twin brother!" The revelation left me speechless, my mind racing with questions and emotions.

Twin

As we gathered our things to get ready for the trip, I could hear my mother's voice ringing in my ears, repeating the familiar phrase, "Get ready, get ready." Her words were clear and distinct, even from outside the car where I stood. Meanwhile, my father started the car, allowing its cold engine to warm up before our long drive. It was a routine we had become accustomed to, as I often helped with the regular check-ups on the car, ensuring its smooth operation.

What struck me as interesting, despite being the youngest twin, was that I felt a stronger connection to my father than my mother. It was a peculiar dynamic within our family, where expressions of love were displayed in different ways. While I knew my mother loved me, her way of showing it was often unconventional and hard to interpret.

In the midst of the car preparations, my father posed a question to me as he checked the oil levels. "You haven't told your mother about what you saw me doing that weekend she was away, have you?" he asked, a hint of worry betraying his calm demeanour. I shook my head in response, assuring him that it was our little secret, just as he had instructed.

"Good boy," he praised, emphasizing the importance of keeping our secret from my twin brother as well. It seemed that

this secret was not to be shared with anyone, adding an air of secrecy to our already complex familial relationships.

Once the car check-ups were complete, my brother sprinted towards the car, shrieking, "SHOTGUN, SHOTGUN!" He quickly claimed the front seat while I took my designated place in the back, alongside my mother. As my father started the engine and drove us away, I couldn't help but feel a sense of apprehension and boredom settling in. The entire trip ahead seemed uninteresting and tiresome, leaving me with little enthusiasm.

Somewhere along the journey, my mother began speaking to me in a strange and unfamiliar manner, expressing sentiments she had never uttered before. "I love you so much, sweetie," she conveyed, her tone laden with a sense of urgency. "I want you to know that you can always tell me anything, even if it's a secret. We can keep it between ourselves." The unexpected conversation caught me off guard, and though I smiled in response, I quietly pushed the discussion aside, unable to fully grasp its implications.

Eventually, we found ourselves in need of a restroom break and stopped at a convenient store. My brother eagerly held my mother's hand as they walked away, leaving me alone, feeling like a mere shadow within our family unit. With a sense of detachment, I followed behind them as we entered the store.

Amidst the commotion of our pit stop, my father's phone began to ring, prompting him to step aside and take the call. As my mother's face contorted with discomfort, she knelt down to address us. "Let's make this quick," she urged, her voice strained. "Your father is always conscious of time." Her words struck a nerve, hinting at a deeper tension between my parents that I had yet to fully understand.

Hastening our pace, my brother and I made our way towards the restroom, only to encounter a stranger who offered an unwelcome comment. "Oh, such a striking resemblance between the two of you," he remarked, his tone dripping with condescension. I despised such comparisons, as they often emphasized the fact that I was the youngest twin, perpetually overshadowed by my brother.

Returning to the car, we resumed our monotonous journey once again. Finally, we arrived at our destination – the tranquil lake. Mother immediately put us to work, instructing us to unpack the belongings from the car. While my brother exuded excitement and anticipation, I struggled to muster any enthusiasm for this supposed adventure.

As my father set up the grill to cook the meat and my mother arranged the table, my brother and I settled by the lakeside deck, our feet dangling playfully above the water. Seizing a

moment of vulnerability, I turned to my twin and voiced a question that had been haunting me. "Do you ever feel like you've witnessed something you shouldn't have? Something that has caused resentment from both sides?" His face wrinkled with confusion, unsure of how to respond. Before he could gather his thoughts, the call for lunch echoed through the air, redirecting our attention.

Taking our first steps towards the beckoning call, my heart froze as a loud crack resonated in the air. Suddenly, we found ourselves submerged in the chilling embrace of the water. Panic washed over me as I realized I couldn't swim, not even a little. Desperately clutching onto my brother's leg, I fought against the forces dragging me down into the depths. With each frantic kick, my brother inadvertently pushed me further underwater, his terror rendering him oblivious to my plea for help. Gasping for air, I felt my grip weaken until I could no longer hold on. Slowly, I sank deeper into the water, my brother's desperate struggle for survival a tragic scene unfolding before my eyes.

In the depths of my despair, I silently whispered, "Don't forget about me." Closing my eyes, I succumbed to the darkness that enveloped me, taking one final gulp of life before all faded to black. In my last moments, I caught a glimpse of my father rushing into the water, his belated attempt at rescue confirming the inevitable truth – his efforts were too little, too late.

Camera

Finding my way into the house, I sat down with her, my mind reeling from this shocking revelation. Thoughts raced through my head as I pondered the best approach to confront my mother and uncover the truth about my twin brother. I knew that a direct question would likely yield a negative response, so I needed to come up with a more strategic plan.

As I sat with my mother, pretending everything was normal, I couldn't help but feel the weight of the secret I now carried. It was as if a hidden world had been revealed to me, and I was determined to uncover its mysteries.

Suddenly, an idea struck me. "Hey mom," I began, "remember that family picture you gave me when I moved out? Well, I have a friend who wants to take a picture with her family too. Do you remember the name of the place where we took ours?"

My mother paused for a moment, racking her brain for the information she knew I sought. "Hmm, let me think," she said. "I believe it was called 'Sunshine Studios,' but I'm not exactly sure."

I pressed further, hoping to elicit more details. "And do you remember the name of the photographer who took our picture?"

I would feel more comfortable if we could find someone familiar."

My mother hesitated, biting her bottom lip. It was a tell-tale sign that she was withholding something. "I'm sorry, sweetheart," she said, her tone slightly unsteady. "I don't really remember the photographer's name. My memory has been a bit foggy lately."

I knew she was lying. After all these years, I had learned to detect the subtle signs. Disappointed but not deterred, I thanked her for the information and left the house to continue my search.

With the name of the photo studio in mind, I set out to find it. As I walked through the unfamiliar streets, my mind buzzed with questions. How would I recognize the photographer? Did they even still work there after all these years?

Lost in my thoughts, I was snapped back to reality when I heard someone calling my name. "Alex, is that you?" a voice exclaimed.

I turned to see a sweet old lady with kind eyes and a friendly smile. "I'm sorry," I replied. "Have we met before?"

The lady chuckled softly. "You must not remember me, but of course, you were only a child back then. My name is Mary. I took your family picture some years ago."

I couldn't believe my luck. It seemed that fate had led me to the very person I was searching for. Excitement filled my voice as I asked Mary about the picture and what she could remember.

Mary's eyes sparkled with nostalgia as she recalled that day. "It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon," she began. "Your family was my last customer. I remember how sweet you and your brother were."

Wait, did she just say "brother"? I interrupted her. "You mentioned a brother. Who are you referring to?"

The smile on Mary's face faded slightly, and a flicker of fear passed through her eyes. "Oh, my dear," she said, trying to brush it off. "That must have been a slip of the tongue. Sometimes my memory plays tricks on me."

But I could see through her façade. Just like my mother, she was hiding something. There was a connection between them, and I was determined to uncover it.

We continued to chat, but it became clear that Mary was reluctant to reveal any more information. I sensed the fear in her voice whenever my mother was mentioned. It was as if she was afraid of someone or something.

Leaving the studio, I knew that my mother held the key to this mystery, but I couldn't directly confront her. It was time to turn to someone I knew could shed light on the situation - my auntie, my mother's younger sister.

Throughout my childhood, I had witnessed the tension between my mother and auntie, but I never truly understood the root of their animosity. Now, it seemed like their strained relationship might hold the answers I desperately sought.

Walking away from the studio, I couldn't help but notice the camera Mary was holding in her hands. There was a certain air of concern on her face, as if that camera held the secrets I needed to uncover. Determined to solve the puzzle of my forgotten twin brother, I embarked on a journey that would test my courage and unravel the hidden truths that lay buried in the past.

The Union

My dearest Auntie was truly the only woman I ever loved, simply because she showered me with the love and attention that my own mother seemed incapable of showing. It was as if we both shared a common bond, being the youngest in our respective families, constantly living in the shadows of our older siblings who received all the praise and favour from our parents. Deep down in my heart, I couldn't help but acknowledge that this was the reason my mother harboured disdain towards me. It became increasingly evident to me that I showed her sister more love and affection than I could ever muster for her.

However, my mother's animosity toward me went beyond mere jealousy. Whenever my perfect older brother would partake in school events or play sports, I was always forced to stay home and protect the house. While everyone else revelled in my brother's achievements, I couldn't help but feel the weight of my own isolation. During these moments, I would seize the opportunity to sneak out of the house and pay a visit to my beloved Auntie. Our conversations would last for hours, filled with laughter and stories about my mother's younger days.

My Auntie, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, would recount tales of my mother's arrogance and self-importance. "I

remember her thinking she was all that, a real spoiled brat," my Auntie would chuckle, "The day I was born, she saw me as a threat to her position. So, in retaliation, whenever I felt threatened by her during the day, I would secretly stuff her pillow with dead frogs at night." Listening to these stories, I began to realize that my mother hid her true nature behind a facade of superiority.

As my visits to my Auntie's became more frequent, time seemed to slip away unnoticed. Often, I would lose track of time and find myself needing to sneak back into my own house because I had spent too long with her. It wasn't long before my mother discovered my secret escapades. She seemed to possess eyes and ears all around town, and I became the subject of her scrutiny. One day, she confronted me with utter frustration, warning me to stay away from my Auntie. "She's plotting against me, and I won't have my own child associating with someone like that," she shouted with a mix of anger and fear.

Despite my mother's vehement warnings, I continued to sneak out to see my Auntie. I became more determined, even as my mother found ways to lock me inside the house, desperate to keep me away from my beloved aunt. However, on my last visit before being confined to the house, my Auntie revealed a secret that left me completely intrigued. "Do you know why your mother acts this way?" she asked, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "As children, she believed that being the firstborn made her perfect. She did everything in her power to maintain

that perception. Joining every club and excelling at every sport, she always strived to be on top."

My Auntie went on, revealing the one thing that ignited my mother's hatred towards her - art. Despite all my mother's achievements, there was one area where Auntie always surpassed her, and that was in the realm of artistic talent. Pulling out several paintings from a hidden cupboard, she unveiled a collection of stunning, awe-inspiring artwork. I couldn't help but feel a pang of envy at her immense talent. "Our parents admired me for this, showering me with praise," my Auntie continued, "but my sister's eyes burned with jealousy. She despised me for the one thing she couldn't outshine. Your mother has a twisted side, my dear nephew, and it would seem she fears history repeating itself within her own family."

That was the last time my Auntie and I exchanged words, or so I thought. A couple of weeks later, as I walked home early from school, I noticed my father's car parked outside our house. To my surprise, Auntie's car was parked right next to it. Confusion filled my mind as I recalled my mother's words forbidding Auntie from entering our home. Proceeding cautiously, I opened the front door to the sounds emanating from my parents' room. My curiosity got the better of me, and I crept up the stairs, careful not to make any noise. Peeking through the slightly ajar door, my eyes widened at the shock of what I witnessed. There, in a vile twist of betrayal, Auntie and my

father were entangled, their clothes strewn across the floor. The sound of my school bag accidentally hitting the ground caught their attention just as they were reaching their climax. Both of them saw me peeking through the door, and the shock on their faces was palpable.

"What are you doing here?" they both yelled simultaneously, their voices filled with panic. Startled, I turned and sprinted back to my room, shutting the door behind me. From within, I could hear the rustling of clothes and frantic whispers as they hastily dressed. Peering out of my window, I saw Auntie jump into her car and speed away. A few minutes later, my father entered my room and sat on my bed, his face filled with guilt and remorse.

"Son, I know what you witnessed doesn't make sense, but I implore you, in all that is dear to you, don't tell your mother about what happened today. Let it remain our little secret," he pleaded, his voice filled with desperation.

In stunned silence, I nodded my agreement, unable to find words to articulate the deep pain and confusion that overwhelmed me. My father left my room, hopped back into his car, and drove off to work, leaving me alone with the heavy burden of what I had just witnessed.

His name was Nelson

After gathering my thoughts, I made my way to my Auntie's house. I knocked impatiently on the door, desperate to talk to her about something that had been weighing heavily on my mind. Finally, she opened the door and fixed her gaze on me, from top to bottom, as if trying to read my soul.

"Mmmm, you're all grown up now. Guess you're not here to visit. Come in," she said, gesturing for me to enter. As I followed her inside, we settled in the dining room. The air was thick with tension, and a sense of unease hung in the room like a heavy cloud.

Feeling her piercing stare, I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. It was clear that my Auntie had something important to tell me, something that had been kept hidden for far too long. Finally, she broke the silence, cutting straight to the chase.

"Alright, I'm going to cut to the chase, child. You want to know about your twin brother, the one you never knew," she said, her tone blunt and matter-of-fact. Before I could even gather my thoughts to respond, she continued, pouring herself a glass of whiskey.

"His name was Nelson, by the way. We have a lot to talk about. Let me pour some whiskey," she said, seemingly not bothered by my lack of interest in alcohol. The tension in the room intensified, and I couldn't help but feel a sense of disappointment in her reactions.

"I don't drink," I calmly replied, trying to assert my personal boundaries.

"Well, it's not for you. It's for me. I have a lot to get off my chest," she responded, pouring herself another glass. Her dismissive demeanour only sharpened my curiosity.

"The perfect child, headache, you make me laugh, but I don't find you funny. Listen closely, child. I don't want to repeat myself," she said, her voice tinged with bitterness. I leaned back in my chair, bracing myself for what she was about to reveal.

Taking a deep breath, she started to recount her story, the story of my twin brother. "So, firstly, yes, you did have a twin brother. He was the younger one among you both, and despite your similar appearances, your mother saw both of you differently. She treated you like the perfect child, while she viewed your brother as nothing more than a waste of space. You always received preferential treatment, as if you were the golden egg," she explained, taking another sip of her whiskey.

"But let me tell you something. Your mother never believed your brother had the potential to surpass you, until he proved her wrong. You may have been the sporty one, skilled with your hands, but your brother had a different kind of brilliance. His mind was exceptional, with a photographic memory. He once learned how to play the piano from a book in under a week," she said, her voice filled with a mix of pride and regret for what could have been.

She took one last gulp of her whiskey, her voice growing more solemn. "But when your mother discovered this, she was devastated. She saw your younger brother as a threat to you, just as she saw me as a threat to her," she explained, her tone heavy with the weight of the past.

My mind was racing, trying to process this newfound knowledge. So many questions flooded my thoughts, threatening to overwhelm me. "But why don't I remember him?" I asked, desperately seeking answers.

My Auntie locked eyes with me, her gaze unwavering. "Your dear mother did everything she could to hide this secret from you and the world. She kept Nelson hidden away in the house, away from your sight. You and your brother were never close, rarely seen together. So when he died, it was easy for your mother to erase him from your memory, convincing you that

he was nothing more than an imaginary friend," she revealed, her words hitting me like a tidal wave of emotion.

I was taken aback by the magnitude of it all. I felt a lump forming in my throat, suffocating me with regret. The weight of guilt pressed down on me, as I blamed myself for unknowingly playing a part in my own brother's demise, while forgetting his very existence.

But before I could collect myself and regain some semblance of composure, my Auntie approached me from behind. "Here, you look like you need this," she said, handing me a glass of whiskey. I hesitated for a moment, unsure of whether to give in to the bitter drink. Yet, I knew that there was more my Auntie had to share, so I took a gulp, allowing the whiskey to burn my throat, releasing some of the overwhelming emotions that flooded my mind.

As I stared into my Auntie's eyes, I sensed that she hadn't finished telling me everything she knew. I mustered up the courage to ask, "How do you even know all of this? You were never allowed near my family."

She sighed, a mix of pain and longing evident on her face. "Your father, he visited me often, especially on the days he couldn't bear to be around that woman. And every time we met, an old spark ignited between us, a remnant of the love we

once shared," she confessed, her voice filled with a bittersweet nostalgia.

"An old spark? What do you mean?" I asked, confused by her implications.

She sighed once more, a hint of sadness lacing her voice. "Your father and I were lovers in our younger days, until your mother stole him away from me out of jealousy. And when we slept together, it wasn't just out of lust; it was fuelled by an old love that still lingered between us. But I suppose your brother didn't understand that when he caught us in the act," she admitted, a mix of guilt and remorse colouring her words.

Understanding dawned upon me, and I quickly interjected, connecting the dots. "But, as I guess, mom found out about your affair," I said, realizing that my mother's jealousy and the photographic memory of my brother would have been a lethal combination.

My Auntie nodded solemnly. "Your mother always had eyes and ears everywhere, even in our small town. It was probably the neighbours who informed her. Her jealousy was insatiable," she replied with a heavy sigh.

I took a moment to absorb everything I had learned, piecing together the puzzle that was my family's history. My mother may not have had concrete proof of my father's betrayal, but if my brother witnessed their indiscretions with his extraordinary memory, it would have been all the confirmation she needed. A mixture of anger and sadness welled up inside me, fuelled by the realization that my mother had gone to such lengths to hide the truth from me.

With a determined gaze, I asked my Auntie if there was anything else she wanted to reveal. Her eyes glistened with unshed tears as she pleaded with me. "Your brother only wanted to be loved, to break free from your shadow. Will you do him justice and expose his existence to the world? Expose your mother's secrets, her true nature? Free this town from the burden of keeping her deceit hidden?" she implored me, her voice trembling with desperation.

Meeting her gaze, I made a silent promise to my Auntie and to Nelson. "I will do exactly that, but I need my father's help," I declared, knowing that I couldn't face this daunting task alone. She provided me with the information of where I could find my father, explaining that he often visited her.

Leaving her house with a newfound sense of purpose, I embarked on a mission to uncover the truth and seek justice for Nelson. Determined to expose my mother's secrets and set the

town free from the shackles of her deceit, I walked boldly, fuelled by memories of a brother I had long forgotten.

With each step forward, my resolve grew stronger. This wasn't just about my own redemption; it was about honouring the memory of a brother lost and forgotten, giving him the recognition and love he had always desired. Together with my father, if he agreed to join me in this pursuit, we would unearth the buried truths and ensure that Nelson's existence would no longer be denied.

Happier times

Feeling tired and frustrated from the seemingly endless drive to my father's place, I couldn't help but think that it was taking longer than expected. With every mile that passed, the anticipation grew, making the journey feel like it was dragging on for an eternity. As I neared a particular robot on the road, seemingly getting closer to my destination, my progress was abruptly halted by a car that cut me off with no warning.

Reacting quickly, I slammed the brakes with all my might, bringing my car to an abrupt stop in the middle of the road. The sudden jolt caused a chain reaction behind me as other vehicles screeched to a halt, creating a cacophony of frustrated honking. In a state of panic, I furiously honked at the car that had cut me off, immediately noticing that it was a sleek black vehicle - eerily similar to the one that had menaced me a few days prior. It was as if fate was playing a cruel trick on me, bringing back memories that I thought I had left behind.

Straining my eyes, I tried to make out the blurry license plate of the car, desperately attempting to discern the first few numbers. Unfortunately, my vision failed me, rendering the license plate unreadable. The car's windows were tinted darkly, obstructing my view of the driver, and giving the vehicle an air of secrecy. Within a matter of seconds, the car accelerated and

sped away, disappearing into the distance, leaving me with an unsettling feeling in the pit of my stomach.

"Strange," I muttered to myself, perplexed by the bizarre encounter. Shaking off the unease, I gathered myself and resumed my journey towards my father's place. The hours seemed to stretch on endlessly, as if time itself had slowed down, prolonging the anticipation of our impending meeting. Finally, as the day drew to a close, I arrived at his modest home, nestled far away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Approaching his front door with a sense of determination, I knocked loudly, as if announcing my presence with authority. My father opened the door, his expression a perplexing mix of surprise and confusion. Before he could utter a word of greeting, I pushed past him, with a firm resolve to have a serious conversation.

"We need to talk, father," I declared, my voice filled with conviction. The shock on his face was evident as he scrambled to process what was happening. In a momentary lapse of composure, he retorted, "Who the hell do you think you are, coming into my home like you own the place?"

Knowing that he had a tendency to launch into one of his lengthy lectures, I abruptly cut him off with a single name. "Nelson," I said, casting an unyielding gaze upon him. In all my

years, I had never seen my father lost for words. He was always quick to offer an opinion or engage in a heated discussion. However, this time, he fell silent, his head bowed in resignation.

With a heavy sigh, he finally spoke, admitting, "I guess you know the truth about your brother." His words hung in the air, heavy with the weight of a buried secret. I locked eyes with him, bracing myself for the impending interrogation. But before I could even form a question, my father's voice cracked and he began to sob, unleashing a flood of raw emotion. It was as if the floodgates had been opened, and the pain he had been concealing erupted like a torrent.

Giving him the space and time he needed to collect himself, I handed him a tissue, silently acknowledging the depth of his grief. As he wiped away his tears, he repeated the phrase, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," as if hoping that his remorse could somehow mend the shattered pieces of our fractured family.

Curiosity getting the better of me, I couldn't help but ask him why he was apologizing. With a shaky breath, he gathered his thoughts and began to share a long-awaited piece of the puzzle. "I let you all down - you, your mother, and your brother. And I know that right now you may see your mother as an angel or a she-devil, but there was a time when happiness existed."

He delved into a memory, recounting a day when he had returned home unexpectedly. The sound of laughter had drifted through the house, compelling him to investigate. Climbing the stairs, he stumbled upon a heart-wrenching scene - your mother and Nelson sharing a genuine moment of joy, engrossed in a game of cards on the floor. It was a sight that mirrored the special bond he had witnessed between you and your mother countless times.

Rather than confronting them, my father chose to retreat quietly, slipping back downstairs as though he had just arrived home. In the weeks that followed, he became consumed with unravelling the truth behind what he had witnessed. And the truth was nothing short of startling - Nelson had become your mother's favourite, a revelation that both confused and pained him deeply.

"You were her beacon of love, always," my father began, trying to make sense of the complicated dynamic. "But Nelson, despite being the youngest, captured your mother's heart in a way that she never expected. As she spent more and more time with him, her love grew exponentially. Yet, she struggled to reconcile her feelings, creating a facade when others were present, but showering Nelson with her devotion behind closed doors."

In disbelief, I interrupted him, demanding an explanation for such a tangled web of emotions. Fuelled by the need to understand, I questioned him, "How is that possible? How could she have betrayed us like that?"

He sighed deeply, his eyes filled with sorrow as he continued, "I know, it seems unfathomable. But let me paint the whole picture for you and shed some light on the circumstances." My father delved further into the story, recounting how Nelson's elevated position in your mother's heart was a result of circumstances - your busy schedule with school and sports, his own long hours at work, and your mother's role as the primary caregiver at home.

"Investigating further, I discovered that Nelson had a depth of character that had taken your mother by surprise. The more time she spent with him, the more she fell under his spell. However, the situation became too complex for her to handle alone, so she resorted to putting on a different face when others were present."

Stunning as this revelation was, it only added to the whirlwind of emotions swirling within me. I struggled to process the implications of my mother's questionable actions, desperately seeking answers to the questions that peppered my mind. As if sensing my inner turmoil, my father leaned forward, ready to disclose yet another layer to this already convoluted tale.

"I intentionally kept this revelation from your aunt. She claims to know so much, but in reality, she only possesses a fraction of the truth," my father admitted, his voice tinged with regret. He continued, revealing the bitter history between him and your aunt - a past love affair that fell apart when he fell in love with your mother instead. The news of their blossoming romance devastated your aunt, leaving her bitter and resentful, convinced that your mother had stolen him away.

Knowing the extent of your aunt's animosity, my father made the difficult decision to forbid her from visiting their home, fearing that her presence would only exacerbate the already strained relationship. However, fate intervened, and she made an unannounced visit, catching them both off guard. In a moment of weakness, fuelled by his own resentment towards your mother, my father succumbed to your aunt's advances, using the opportunity to hurt your mother - an act that he would come to deeply regret.

From that pivotal moment, everything shifted. The fractures within their relationship deepened, and your mother's pain and anger intensified. Blaming my father for not saving Nelson, she believed that his secret desire was for their youngest son to perish, taking his shameful secret to the grave. In her eyes, my father had betrayed them both, shattering their family in irreversible ways. And so, your mother, overwhelmed by grief,

sought solace in erasing every trace of Nelson's existence, imploring the town to forget him as well.

My father's voice trembled with self-disgust as he confessed, "It was my biggest mistake, seeking comfort in your aunt's arms after your mother and I split. I only added fuel to the fire of bitterness that already consumed her. I retreated from the world, choosing to hide in my shame, far away from prying eyes."

With those final words, I felt an overwhelming mix of anger, sadness, and confusion. The weight of the revelations bore down on me, threatening to suffocate my resolve. Without looking back, I walked away from my father, determined to confront my mother and unravel the remaining threads of this intricate tapestry of secrets and betrayal. As I closed his front door behind me, I silently promised myself that I was done with him and his tangled web of deceit.

Drown

As I drove like a man possessed, careening through the congested streets in a frantic attempt to reach my mother, I found myself overwhelmed by a whirlwind of emotions that were difficult to pinpoint and even harder to control. It was as if I was being pulled in multiple directions, each emotion vying for dominance within me.

Anger coursed through my veins, fuelling my impulsive actions and causing me to lash out at the world around me. Simultaneously, a heavy cloak of sadness enveloped me, weighing down my spirit and clouding my judgement. The weight of depression settled upon my shoulders, suffocating any remnants of rationality that might have remained. And beneath it all, a sense of betrayal lingered, eroding my trust and exacerbating the turmoil within.

As I came to a stop at a traffic light, my impatience grew to unbearable levels. Gripping the steering wheel with white-knuckled intensity, I ground my teeth together, the tension in my jaw a reflection of the boiling anger that threatened to consume me. "Change already!" I shouted at the unyielding red light, my voice dripping with frustration and desperation. The other drivers nearby could sense the intensity of my emotions, a palpable aura of anger emanating from my very being.

Finally, the traffic light transitioned to green, and without a moment's hesitation, I unleashed the pent-up fury within me. My foot slammed down on the accelerator, propelling the car forward with a violent surge of power. The sound of the engine's tortured screams echoed in my ears, but I paid no heed to the pain I was inflicting upon my vehicle. My sole focus was on reaching my mother's side, no matter the cost.

As I sped like a fiend down the sprawling highway, the world around me morphed into a blur of indistinct shapes and colours. Everything became secondary to the singular goal of getting to my mother as quickly as humanly possible.

Approaching a bridge that spanned a serene lake, I instinctively eased my foot off the gas pedal, allowing the car to gradually decelerate. And then, in my rear-view mirror, I beheld a sight that sent a chill down my spine – the same black car that had been tailing me since the beginning of this hazardous pursuit. Panic flickered within me as I discerned its sinister intentions from a distance. It seemed as though the driver had no intention of halting their relentless pursuit and instead planned to cut me off completely.

With a racing heart, I veered my car closer to the vulnerable edge of the bridge, as if seeking refuge in the frail barrier separating me from the abyss below. Much to my dismay, the black car mimicked my actions, aggressively closing the

distance and intentionally pushing me perilously close to the jagged precipice.

The sight of the dark waters churning below sent a wave of suffocating dread coursing through me. In a desperate attempt to avert the impending disaster, I jammed my foot onto the brake pedal with all the strength I could muster. But fate intervened cruelly, shattering my hopes as I felt a sickening snap reverberate through the car – my brake lines had failed, leaving me completely at the mercy of gravity and destiny.

Time seemed to slow to a crawl as I helplessly watched my car hurtle towards the water's surface. I could almost count the number of heartbeats that transpired before the inevitable impact. Then, with a bone-jarring thud, the front of the car collided with the unforgiving face of the lake, jarring my head against the unyielding steering wheel and thrusting me momentarily into darkness.

Moments later, I regained consciousness, my vision blurred and disoriented. Panic flooded my senses as I realized that water was steadily seeping into the car, the level rising with each passing second. The sinking sensation in my chest mirrored the sinking of the vehicle, both of us descending into a watery abyss from which escape seemed futile.

And so, as the car and I succumbed to the suffocating weight of the water, our fates intertwined in this desolate aquatic grave.

Inner demons

The car sinks deeper and deeper into the lake's bottom. Pressing my hands against the back windscreen, hoping to force it out, but no success. I swim through the car full of water to the driver's seat, punching the glass till it breaks, yet still no success. The pressure of the water starts to fill up my lungs, collapsing on them. Fighting for my life, I continue to punch the glass till my knuckles bruise and bleed, feeling my life slowly fade away at every punch I make.

Finally, with a loud impact, the car reaches the lake's bottom, and my death feels so close that I can almost feel its touch. Seeing that all my efforts are leading up to nothing, I eventually give up, letting myself go and float aimlessly in the car. I close my eyes, waiting for my death to arrive, and the darkness I see feels strangely comforting. As my whole life begins to flash in front of my eyes, memories of my brother start to resurface. It's just too bad that they are only happening now when I'm faced with the impending inevitability of death. But as I stop drifting off into my memories and edge closer to my demise, a single picture of my brother's face stays frozen in the flashes.

He stares me down, opens his mouth, and in a great voice says, "NOT YET."

Suddenly, my eyes shoot open again, filled with a newfound determination to live. I start swimming back to the window, kicking the door with all my might in the hopes that the weak window will finally drop down. Each kick becomes harder than the last, and I am in awe of the strength I have found within myself to keep fighting for my life. I keep kicking at the door, relentless. And finally, the window drops down, not much, but enough for me to stick my hands through and force the rest of it down. I swim through the open window, looking up at the far surface of the water, desperately swimming upwards to reach the life-giving air I so desperately need. With what little strength I have left, I continue to swim, pushing myself further and further until...

Finally, I gasp. I've made it to the surface, and the air has never tasted so sweet. I swim towards the shore, pulling myself onto the bare ground and collapsing on my back. Taking a few more breaths of life, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for being alive. But amidst this moment of relief, I sense a shadowy presence nearby. Lifting my head up, I see a mysterious figure in the distance, a man dressed in all black, his face concealed by his hoodie. A sense of familiarity washes over me as I come face to face with this enigmatic figure. "It's you," I say aloud, my voice filled with both recognition and fear. "You're the thing that has been tormenting me for the past couple of days.

You must be some kind of demon, a manifestation of my deepest fears." My words hang in the air, but the figure

remains silent, its gaze fixed upon me. I clench my fist, assuming a stance of readiness and determination, preparing to confront this entity head-on. With a resounding cry, I declare, "Enough of this!" and charge towards the figure with all the strength and courage I can muster.

In response, the figure also rushes towards me, and as we draw closer to each other, everything around us dissolves into a blinding light, leaving us both suspended in an unknown realm of uncertainty.

Wake up

As I lay in the hospital bed, the room seemed unfamiliar and foreign. The light dimmed, casting a sombre atmosphere over the space. Confusion clouded my mind as I tried to make sense of my surroundings. A nurse entered the room, followed closely by my mother. Their presence brought a glimmer of comfort amidst the uncertainty.

The nurse greeted me with a warm smile, exclaiming, "Ooooo, you're finally awake!" Her words only added to my bewilderment. I couldn't comprehend what she meant by "awake."

Perplexed, I furrowed my brow and asked, "Awake? What do you mean?"

With a gentle tone, the nurse explained, "You've been asleep for quite some time after your accident." Her words hung in the air, leaving me even more bewildered.

I glanced at both the nurse and my mother, desperately seeking answers. The nurse, sensing my confusion, kindly offered to leave us alone so my mother could provide the much-needed explanation.

As the nurse exited the room, my mother settled herself on the edge of my bed, ready to unravel the mystery that had enveloped me. She began, "You were involved in an accident, dear. You crashed into a lake. But don't worry, it wasn't your fault. A drunk driver in a black car cut you off, causing your brake lines to snap."

Relief washed over me as I realized it wasn't my own negligence that led to the accident. My mother continued, recounting the events that unfolded after the crash. "Fortunately, there were witnesses who saw the whole thing. They managed to rescue you when you lost consciousness after hitting your head on the steering wheel."

Gratitude swelled within me, knowing that I had been saved and that justice was served with the arrest of the reckless driver. My mother's words made sense, yet there was an underlying feeling of disbelief. It was a lot to process, and she could see the weight of it all on my shoulders. Sensing my need for solitude, she left me alone in the room to piece together the fragments of my memory.

Left to my own thoughts, I couldn't help but question the reality of it all. Was it merely a dream, conjured up by my subconscious? Or could it be a message from my late brother, guiding me through my dreams to uncover the truth?

Countless questions swirled in my mind, but answers eluded me.

I started to rub my head, still trying to understand what's going on. The confusion I felt was overwhelming, as if someone had turned my world upside down. But there was something I desperately needed to confirm, a nagging uncertainty that had taken hold of my thoughts and refused to let go.

Determined to find answers, I called my mother into the room. She entered with a concerned expression, her eyes reflecting a mixture of curiosity and worry. Sensing the weight of my turmoil, she asked how she could help. I hesitated, unsure of how to articulate the burning question that consumed me.

Finally, I mustered the courage to ask. "Mom, did I have a twin brother?" The words hung in the air, the silence thick with anticipation. My mother's face softened, her eyes glistening with warmth and fondness. She let out a gentle laugh, a sound that carried a mix of nostalgia and affection.

With a tender smile, she responded, "If only that were true, but the Lord blessed me with one precious child to love. And love him I do, more than words could ever express." Her words were like a balm to my troubled soul, easing the ache that had settled deep within me.

Returning her smile, I spoke softly, my voice filled with comfort and gratitude, "Okay mom, and I love you too." There was a brief moment of tranquillity between us, a serene connection that brought solace amidst chaos.

As my mother prepared to leave the room, her footsteps growing faint, my attention turned to the family photo sitting besides me. Holding it close to my heart, I noticed how my hands trembled with anticipation. With trembling fingers, I carefully removed the picture from its frame, tracing the edges with a sense of urgency and hope.

Patiently, I scanned the photo from top to bottom, my eyes meticulously analysing every detail. As minutes turned into an eternity, my heart raced, each beat echoing the uncertainty that lingered within me. And then, just when I was beginning to lose hope, I found it – the confirmation I had been desperately seeking.

A piercing realization struck me, and I felt a surge of both excitement and trepidation. With a mix of determination and apprehension, I whispered silently to myself, "A piece of this picture has been cut off."

The end?

Copyright 2023 – All rights reserved.

The content contained within this book may not be reproduced, duplicated, or transmitted without direct written permission from the author.

Legal Notice:

This book is copyright protected. It is only for personal use. You cannot amend, distribute, sell, use, quote or paraphrase any part, or the content within this book, without the consent of the author.