

Chapter One: New Dawn

"NORMAL IS AN ILLUSION. WHAT IS NORMAL TO THE SPIDER IS CHAOS TO THE FLY."

One minute the teacher was speaking about math. And then the next minute she had been attacked by a student.

Rose was there, though drifting somewhere inside her mind--away from all the arguing, the crackling of gunfire, and the slamming of the classroom door.

Through the low ringing in the back of her head and the sharp intakes of air, she recalled what others around were saying: Dead. Gunshots. Bit.

Rose hadn't known how long she'd been slipping in and out of reality. All she knew was, no one was permitted to leave. That's what the military police had said after they drug Nick out, leaving a long trail of black bile behind. It had been hours since then. Hours and no word of what happened to Nick.

Of course Rose knew there were rivals and fights amongst students and teachers of Rogan high. But this, this left her eyes glued straight ahead, leaving her staring at their twelfth-grade teacher Mrs. Caine with an agape mouth. There she sat, right in front of the whiteboard with her wrinkled hand affixed to the arch of her neck where gray curls matted against crusted blood.

Her blue glistened over eyes made Rose's skin crawl. She knew she wasn't alone, and yet she felt as if she were as they stared one another down.

"Are you kidding me," Rose heard Jonathan's voice pierce through all the others, snagging her back from wherever her mind had taken her.

"It's Five o' clock and we're still sitting here waiting for what exactly?!"

Five o' clock? How long had she spaced out?

Rose rubbed at her temples while turning in her seat to study Johnathan and a few others who craned their necks this way and that. No

"Sit down," Mrs. Caine snapped her fingers back towards a desk in the far corner of the room. "I've had enough of your lack in listening skills!"

Rose diverted her attention elsewhere, noticing a few others who stared out the large windows towards something she couldn't see. Whatever it was, it had to be far better than listening to Jonathan's temper tantrum. "Can't you lower your ego for once and listen?" Rose asked, brushing dark curls from her face.

Johnathan smirked. "Mind your own, girl kisser!"

Her jaw dropped.

The spark of spite in the depths of his hazel eyes made her fidget and curl her fingers against the palms of her hands. Rose's mouth twitched. Was that the only worn out name he could call her? So what if she kissed a girl two years ago on the account of a prank. People needed to learn to take things less serious and get over it.

In the time he took to peer around the room, she sent a glare towards the back of his head that could've burned a hole right through that thick skull of his. "As I was saying," Johnathan turned his back towards her and the rest of the class. "There's no fucking way any nerdy twelfth grader could've lifted you off the ground with one fucking hand. No offense. But you aren't exactly skinny!"

"Rabies," Rose interrupted, still holding back the anger that threatened to arise. "Maybe that could've been the cause?"

"That's a rare case in cities," Jane said from behind. "And you all know as well as I that Nick is too athletically challenged to go hunting. He never said anything about getting bit either."

Something about Jane's voice made Rose peer over her shoulder, and there she was, slumped over with her dark hair curtaining her face from view. Rose already knew she'd been crying for the past few hours. Who wouldn't after seeing their beloved get shot in the shoulder and drug out like some wild animal? That thought alone left her at a loss of words.

"Yeah. Jane's right." The corner of Jonathan's mouth twitched as he stared at their teacher.

Mrs. Caine shook her head. "I'm a math teacher. I'm not experienced with medical conditions Jonathan."

"Find out! Cause if you come at me like Chase came towards you, I can't promise I'll be the one catching a bullet." There was no trace of a joke in his tone whatsoever. Matter of fact, Rose couldn't recall a time that he'd been so solemn.

Things weren't right, and there was a voice in the back of Rose's head that sent a cold wave up her back and said nothing was going to get better as she noted how pallid Mrs. Caine's skin was.

She'd seen this before; many times at her mother's hospital when a patient suffered from blood loss. She bit down on her bottom lip and looked towards Jane with a shake of her head. Did he truly think acting thick-skinned would fix anything?

When Rose looked back at Mrs. Caine, she was slouched over with her face pressed against the wood of her desk, gasping for air. "Johnathan, Jesus Christ! Did you really have to yell at her while it's obvious there's something wrong?" She didn't give him a chance to explain before she bumped passed him and eased up beside their teacher.

Johnathan licked his lips, pacing. "Oh. Okay. Everything is always my fault. All because I want to get my ass home and in bed. Sure." He mumbled.

"Just shut up will you." Rose hissed out, tucking some stray strands of hair behind her ear. She rocked on the balls of her feet and tip-toed around the desk,

occasionally glimpsing up at the others. Was it just her, or did the teacher stop moving?

"Did, did she pass out?" Jane whispered, slack-jawed.

"I don't want to touch her." Rose said, moving back.

"Fucking check her pulse and stop being such a wimp about it!"

Rose jumped, finding Jonathan's rounded eyes staring at her. He was right. She had to do it. She was the only one with that kind of knowledge, which she now regretted. Suppressing the voice in the back of her head and burying all her worries along with it, she moved a shaking hand beneath Mrs. Caine's neck, noting how cold she was. There was warmth--but faint. "She's a little cold." She said.

"Well?!" Johnathan rolled his eyes as if telling her to go on.

"There's a pulse!"

There were a few sighs of relief filling throughout the room. But the moment she took a step back towards the whiteboard, the teacher jerked upwards and collided against the backrest, rocking helplessly. She swayed and whipped her head all around until a hair-raising wail tore free from her throat. Rose swallowed hard, unable to tear her eyes away. The uprising fear stuck to her face didn't stop Mrs. Caine from clawing at the desk and biting into the flesh of her bottom lip.

Rose shifted her gaze between the whites of Mrs. Caine's eyes rolling in the back of her head, to her classmates charging towards the other side of the room, leaving her alone in that small space to watch their teacher die. Mrs. Caine kept repeating I feel them inside me over and over again as she convulsed while bloody bile spilled out the corners of her mouth, splattering all over the mahogany desk, carpet, and on the fabric of Rose's black leggings. There was so much blood--too much. And she hadn't known where all of it came from. The chair screeched with each rock, tilting on its legs until Mrs. Caine plowed against the desk stiffly.

Rose didn't move at first. Her hands were the only thing her sights could find at this time and moment, because they trembled more than they had in her entire life, more than when her parents fought in the middle of the night. And more than those creepy dreams with the blood chilling whistles.

Everything grew silent, and it'd taken every ounce of courage within her body to peer out towards her classmates. Johnathan was the first she focused on. And for the first time she didn't look away. This was different than all the other times when he glared and poked at her. Now, a twisted face stared back-not a taunting one, but a fearful one.

Next, she found Jane. Her hand was rested against her chest, eyes wide and void. The rest of the class had huddled up in groups against the corners and underneath desks. Cassie, who Rose had almost forgotten, was there too.

"I didn't do that!" Johnathan blurted out, shooting a wide-eyed look around the room. "She was already sick when Chase attacked her."

"I know! I know! A heart attack or seizure doesn't do this!" Rose said while she leaped over the puddle of blood, nearly tripping over the wooden leg of the desk. Her hands found the tabletop and she steadied herself with a rough pulse in the veins of her neck. She made sure she was careful as she crept up towards the front of Mrs. Caines desk, one leg after another. It was ironic. No one had asked her to check for a pulse this time, but she had. She placed her fingers just beneath Mrs. Caines jawline. There was nothing but cold skin rough to the touch.

"She's dead." Rose whimpered out, jolting back hard against the whiteboard. But a raking noise drew her eyes towards the dead body.

The teacher's hand flinched, then cleaved brown stained nails across the desk. Splinters tore away against the pink flesh beneath, peeling back until her nail hung from the nailbed by a string. Although her eyes wouldn't tear away from the sight, bile still rose at the back of her throat. "She's acting like him." She said slurred. Her legs were far from weak. But now they were weighed down and difficult to move.

"He didn't act like that!" Jane corrected through what sounded like clenched teeth.

Maybe Rose shouldn't have worded it that way. Jane was right. Nick only attacked Mrs. Caine. He didn't vomit a river of blood or melt down into a seizure. This was far from messed up.

Rose felt a hand against her shoulder, and she found Cassie giving her a half warmed smile. She found it nice, but it hadn't stopped the bumps that rose up on her arms. "We can't just stand around." Cassie said with a nod, her blonde hair falling against her slender shoulders.

"Fuck." Cory smacked his head, then began pulling desks from one side of the room towards the other.

Rose, Cassie, and Jane only watched.

"What?! Can I get a damn hand or what?!"

"Maybe if you acted like a gentleman and asked for once." Rose mumbled, gesturing for the other girls to assist. She couldn't stand him. All those damn years and one bad day he acted as if nothing ever happened. He was a-a loud boom reverberated from outside and shattered the windows. The floor moved beneath her feet, and if she hadn't thrown her leg out, she would've slammed right into a desk. Another one came, and then the lights flickered until a blanket of darkness fell, veiling their eyes.

"What was that?" Rose heard Johnathan say nearby.

"Someone, phone, lighter, anyone?" Cassie said over whimpers.

A faint light flickered in the corner of Rose's eye. It wasn't from a phone, but from a crack beneath the classroom door. "Shh." She said as her foot slid across the carpet, easing her forward. Finally, she stood by the door, pressing her face against the narrow window pane. Maybe someone had come to inform them that everything was alright.

Through the gloom, something blurred past. A face flashed before her; sharp, angular, and mutilated. Through the red strobe lights in the halls, she swore she

saw other people moving within the distance. Fast, appearing in swirls of colors that ranged between a vibrant red and a ghostly gray. Her heart drummed in her ears.

"What do you see Rose!" Johnathan hissed right into her ear and she rammed an elbow into his side.

"Hold up," Rose said. Someone was there, right in front of the door. But through the thick smoggy obscurity, it was hard to tell who.

"Hello?" Rose spoke again, sending yet another elbow into Jonathan's side when he clamped a hand on her shoulder.

No reply.

Rose whipped around towards the others staring at her. "Someone's here. It might be the paramedics. They did say they were going to send one, right?!"

"N-No. They just left. Besides, if that's the EMT's, where's the sirens Rose?" Cassie asked in a low chirp.

"Well. What are you waiting for? Open the damn door!" Johnathan grumbled.

Who was right or wrong? Rose thought. There weren't any sirens, and if someone came for them, why'd they remain silent? Rose gulped, reaching her decision. She placed a shaking hand on the doorknob and yanked until there was a small crack enough to peep through. When she peered through the gap, something slid through the crack she couldn't completely see. Maybe a note? It was white, contrasting a bit against the dark.

"Hand me a phone. I left mine on the desk." Rose whispered.

"Here." Johnathan slid his cell phone in her hand.

Sliding her finger over the lockscreen, the faint glow lit up a good portion of the area. She could see Cassie pressed against Jane's side. And just beside them, Johnathan was biting on his bottom lip with his brows lowered. Rose shifted back towards the door. Right in her line of sight was a fresh, partially gnawed off finger wiggling around, curling, seeking for something. And at the blunt cut off tip were fine tendrils lashing around like miniature vines.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Gunshots?

She leaped back, slamming into the others while the hall echoed with fleeing footsteps and screams. But what she heard most was the raspy moan coming from the other side of the door, and a wheezed voice that said: "Let. Me. In."

Something pushed it open wider, and Rose hastily pressed a shoulder against the wood. But it fought back stronger.

Screams filled the hall as another raspy moan came from the other side of the door, pushing it open even wider than before. Her feet slid as the seconds passed. "Help! Help god damn it!" She could feel her skin bruising, her toes burning on the inside of her shoes as she fought against the force.

Jonathan's hands came near her face, then pressed against the door. Then another pair. Finally, all three of them slammed it to a shut. The frame quivered as something banged against it. The wood groaned, but whatever it was, was no match for the three of them. After a minute, footfall became distant, then nothing-silence and their own heavy breathing.

Chapter Two: Beyond Darkness

"WHEN THERE'S NO MORE ROOM IN HELL, THE DEAD WILL WALK THE EARTH."

"Fuck!" Jonathan's voice was gruff as he gestured towards Mrs. Caine's desk. "I-I don't see her. And dead people don't get up and walk without anyone noticing!"

Of course people can't get up and walk when their dead, Rose thought while following the end of his finger. Squinting through his cellphone light aimed towards the desk, she'd seen what he saw. There wasn't a trace of their teacher in sight. Almost as if she'd come to life and walked off. But if she had, where the hell was she? The only thing left was a slimy trail of bodily fluid smeared across the wooden desk.

"There's no way she can just up and vanish!" Rose shook her head in disbelief.

"Well, she did." Jonathan turned towards the rest of the class, "Did you see anything?"

Everyone shook their heads. They were still huddled against corners and under desks with fear struck expressions, a sea of horrid whimpers. "Of course not," He spoke as if he were annoyed. "All you're good for is hiding!"

A loud crash echoed from outside, and then the sound of sirens blared throughout the city. Everyone moved across the room and pressed against the large glass windows with their hot breath fogging the view of the city. Roggan was the biggest high school in the city of Ashford. It consisted of first grade all the way up to twelfth, nearly towering over other buildings.

Impossible! Rose pressed her face more against the window. Just past the pavement bellow was a wildfire flaring within the night and creeping around several vehicles that were smashed into one.

Smoke billowed outwards, fogging the streets while the fire hungrily devoured the grass and nearest buildings. That's when panic swelled in her. She was sure that the fire would continue to consume everything in its path if the fire department wasn't called. But without any signal, She was well aware of how screwed they truly were.

Something dark and writhing flashed across the ceiling in the reflection of the window. Whatever it was, it wasn't a classmate. Don't turn around, she told herself. But out of the corner of her eye, a short girl with blonde hair was snatched up out of sight. The only thing that proved she'd ever been there was the steam left on the window from her breath, and a pink sandle that fell right beside Rose's foot.

Her heart thumped as she peeked towards everyone else. They hadn't noticed it. They were too busy gazing at the commotion bellow.

In that moment, something sinister stirred and coiled inside of her. She felt the last bit of heat leave her body. This time, to her left, she saw it more clearly. A long, pinkish tongue snaked around a boy's waist, jerking him up into the air before a squeal could even leave his mouth.

Rose spun around and looked up, reflexively catching something that was thrown towards her. Her fingers slipped and slid across its warmth and wetness, but when

she looked down hesitantly, there was a dislocated head within her grasp. She swallowed as her eyes caught sight of abrasions and puncture wounds along the jagged flesh of the neck. What animal left these marks? What sick game was being played here?!

Deep down inside, she knew the truth. The head she held within her grasp belonged to Brice, a boy who'd bullied her for years. Tears welled as low strangled cries escaped her trembling lips. His eyes, his eyes were dilated and void. She couldn't say a word. All the sirens drowned out the thudding of her heart and the shallow breathing in her ears.

When she realized that something else was in the room with them, she screamed so loud she could barely hear everyone moving from the windows to surround her.

"What happened?!" Jonathan asked while shaking her.

"I-I don't know. He flew. She flew... And, " Rose lifted Brice's head. "And. And he's dead."

"What?! What the fuck do you mean he flew?!" He gave her a low-browed look. The minute he glimpsed down, he gagged and vomit spilled over his bottom lip.

"Is he dead? Is that a dead body?!" Jane screeched out and tugged at a handful of her curled black hair.

"Oh God." Rose mumbled. "We're all going to die... Aren't we?"

"Stop it!" She heard Jonathan yell, yet she kept repeating herself until a pair of arms curled around her waist and yanked her up against a firm chest. For a minute, she fought and struggled against the force. She knew it was Jonathan; the jerk that also bullied her all those years. She never thought he'd be the one to calm her down in the time of need.

Defeated, She just stayed there darkening his grey shirt with her tears.

"The hell is that!?" Jane moved back against a desk.

Rose saw at least five students run past Johnathan. One by one, they jumped out the windows to their death. The alarms drowned their sickening crunches, yet she could still hear their ghostly echos in her head as she pushed away from Jonathan to see what he and everyone else saw.

There amongst them was a creature, it's skin sleek and glistening against the moonlight that seeped through the shattered windows.

It had to be Mrs. Caine. Her grey curls sprung from the top of her head in fine wisps. And she definitely wore the same flowered shirt that hung loosely off of her like a dress for someone twice her size.

This isn't real. I'm dreaming.

This was no longer her teacher, but a monster. A monster in the movies she watched. Things that didn't happen, weren't supposed to happen. how could it?

Rose grabbed Jonathan's hand and slowly scooted back while their dead teacher eased across the ceiling using her long bony fingers to grasp onto the light fixtures. For a split second she was there, then the next she sprang down on all fours. Crouched. Wheezing. Foam bubbled at the corners of her cracked mouth in vivid reds and blacks.

Rose swallowed hard as the feeling of needles pricking her skin arose. She never thought she'd stand out amongst her classmates, but here she was trembling with them as their teacher stared back with pitch black eyes.

Mrs. Caine's pallid hand moved across the floor and lifted Brice's head from where Rose had thrown it. She cocked her head with a snap, nostrils flared. A throaty howl left her before she sunk her teeth into the tender flesh.

"Options Cassie, Options!" Jonathan's eyes hadn't torn away from the sight, though he backed up even more.

Cassie stuttered, nudging her glasses up against the bridge of her nose. "The roof. Climb to the roof. The drop from up there towards the School's pool isn't too far away."

"Can't we die?" Rose said.

"Not from that height. Trust me, I've done it." Cassie offered another smile despite being just as scared as the rest of them.

"You're one crazy bitch. But this better work." Jonathan shouted out. "Lead the way."

Cassie nodded, then eased herself out the window and up the fire escape that descended from the roof. Rose wanted to tell them both to be careful, but Jonathan had ascended and called from above for her to hurry up.

When Rose began following behind the others, her head was snagged back by her hair, and Mrs. Caines bloodied face came into view. Rose went to scream, but her teachers mouth tore ten inches wide, and a thick worm looking thing squirmed out and towards Rose's ear. Was it trying to get inside of her?

She didn't give it time to get close. Rose pulled away so hard a patch of hair gave way, and within minutes, she focused on climbing, one foot after another until she was holding onto the edge of the roof.

Jonathan took one of her arms, and Cassie grabbed the other, pulling her as she dangled. Bellow her, the city was worse than before. More vehicles were piled up, and people were running away from things that bounced against the ground like cheetahs. With one last tug, Rose was heaved up onto the roof's rough pavement, scraping her knee in the process.

"This way." Cassie squeaked out as she released Rose's arm.

"Wait." Rose inhaled. "I can't swi--."

"Swim or die Lesbo." Jonathan barked out.

Jane rolled her eyes. "Jonathan. Stop. It isn't funny anymore. You're just jealous because she kissed me and not your prick ass!"

The way his mouth fell open was priceless. Another wish on Rose's list had been fulfilled and checked off. It hadn't lasted long before she heard a splash.

Running towards the edge, she looked down through the darkness where she could see Cassie swimming towards the surface.

"I made it!" She waved her arms and Rose smiled.

"Thank goodness! Jane. You go next." Rose urged her forward.

The look Jane gave her spoke that she was terrified. It sparkled in the depths of her blue eyes. But with a reassuring nod, she moved back, then jumped over the edge and into the pool with another splash. Not even a second later, Jane swam towards the top, floating around with Cassie by her side.

Roaring caused Rose to turn around and slithers of glass exploded upwards, cutting into the flesh of her cheek and arms. By the time she cracked open her eyes, she saw Jonathan charging towards her with a contorted figure trailing. It leaped from left to right, bloodthirsty eyes boring at her as if she were a piece of meat on display.

"No-no-no-no! I can't swi-" Before Rose could finish her sentence, Jonathan knocked the air from her lungs as his body slammed hard into hers, knocking them over the edge.

Everything flashed before her eyes; Her mother, those jagged teeth, and her father. Through it all, she felt Jonathan's fingers tighten around her arm. Wind pushed up her nose just before she plummeted beneath the chilling waters embrace.

Her head struck something hard. She breathed, yet no air filled her hungry lungs. As she kicked and rotated, someone held her there, blocking her from an attempt to

swim towards the surface. When she opened her eyes, she caught sight of her blood twisting into the waters currents and Johnathan staring.

She tugged against him and his grip tightened while he shook his head.

Is he trying to kill me? Rose thought, kicking and punching, doing anything and everything to escape. Instead, he pulled her towards him and crashed his lips against hers.

Air. He'd taken air to fill her mouth for a split second. After a minute, he kicked and they broke the surface at the same time as Jane and Cassie.

"What the hell was that!?" Rose hissed out, brushing her dark curly hair from her eyes.

"Hush. I could've let you drown or get eaten!" He rolled his eyes.

"What is he talking about?" Rose asked Jane.

"That thing was going to come down until it didn't see us beneath the water." Cassie said while moving up beside Jane.

Great, She coughed and tilted her head back. The moon glistened over the rooftop where everything seemed solid from where Rose stood. Things began to get blurry.

"You're bleeding!" Jonathan extended his hand to press his fingers against Rose's head and she winced.

Suddenly, her eyes felt heavy, and her knees unbuckled before she was swept away in utter obscurity.

Jack Apollo gazed skyward, watching the clouds ooze and billow across the awakening moon that cast the forest into the deepest of shadows. It didn't take a rocket scientist to know there was a storm brewing-that it'd be much easier to hunt whenever the ground was wet beneath his feet. It made less noise for him.

He inhaled some of the chilling air. Quite often, he thought.

Being out in nature often drowned out those screams in his mind-those voices-the guilt that wore him down over the years.

That thought made him tighten his grip on the groove of his bow, knuckles turning white as he kept weaving between thick branches that hung and jabbed at his clothing.

Through squinted eyes, he observed a vague light that lit up the leaves by a nearby tree. Those damn school kids. If there was one thing he couldn't stand, was kids. They were whiny little brats-weak-dependent.

The high schools building was slightly visible through the trees. It was tranquil around here, except for when high school children lurked around egging his cabin.

He shook his head.

A scream echoed over the howling winds and he whipped around with one hand clicking on his flashlight attached to his bow, and the other retrieving a ready to go arrow.

This was ridiculous. No one ever came into these woods during these times of nights. Not even those damn kids, he thought.

Something brushed against his leg, warm, and fuzzy. He spun around, throwing his arm up and aiming his bow downward. There in plain sight was his white pug Soozie wagging her tail happily.

"God damn it Soozie." His voice lowered as he drew his weapon back. Soozie barked with her teeth bared, snout low to the ground with her ears folded back.

"Calm down girl. What is it?" He crouched, aiming the flashlight where she was barking. He caught the last movements of something big. A branch swayed.

There was a dark figure there, partially hidden by the bark of a tree. Maybe a kid got lost?

"You're trespassing! I'm going to have to countdown, and you're going to leave. Ya hear?!"

The figure stayed put, lowly snorting.

God damn it. Always when I'm trying to find something good to eat.

Jack rounded the tree. "Come on ya little shit. Go hom-"

This wasn't a child. It was a deer- no ordinary one. Its fur coat was matted with blood. Gashes and flesh had been torn away near the ribs. He moved slowly back. Okay, okay, just run, go! His mind yelled at him. Low growls came from the deer. It was ready to charge, but he knew he couldn't act rationally.

Foam pooled from the flaps of its mouth. Jack's stomach dropped upon noticing half of its jaw was missing, leaving the animal with an eerie grin that curled upward. He reached for his bow, but right when he had, he'd been knocked down onto the cold soiled ground.

A yelp left his mouth as he shot his hands forward against the base of the deer's neck as it snapped, and snapped, jerking its head this way and that. The animal wanted to eat him. He could see the hunger in its dark bloodshot eyes. Jack punched the deer repeatedly while trying to push it away with his other arm. Little good did that do. He had lost his weapon during the fall.

Tilting his head back, he felt a spark of hope course through his body when he saw that it hadn't landed too far away.

I can't let my guard down!

The deer tore its mouth wide open, from ear to ear, then black tar came squirting towards his face.

Jack reacted quick and threw his arm up to take the blow. When it landed on the sleeve of his shirt, it sizzled, gnawing through the fabric as if it were acidic.

"What. The. Fuck!" He grunted out.

Desperately, his hand slid across the grass until his fingers met a sharp stick. Not wasting any time, he jammed it right into the deer's left eye. It groaned, still coming forward, still snapping until Jack reached one of his arrows. With all his strength, he jabbed it through its other eye till it tore out the other end, oozing all over his fingers in sticky warm chunks. The deer fell lifeless against his chest with a thud.

"Thank goodness." He breathed out heavy, nearly gasping in relief. "Soozie. Soozie!"

Soozie came bounding around the corner, the small ball of her white tail wagging fiercely.

"Good to see you're okay." He chuckled, pushing the animal from his chest. That'll leave a bruise, he thought. Once Jack moved to his feet, he looked back towards the light source where the school's lights flickered, then went out.

That wasn't normal. But it was none of his business.

Just turn around Jack. Just turn around. This has nothing to do with you. But it had. These signs were from the man he'd allowed to kill all those children before.

He began to head back but stopped in mid-walk. Damn it. He found himself turning around, running towards the place he swore he wouldn't be caught dead at.

"Here we go again Soozie."

Chapter Three: Blood, Guts, And Gore.

"ALL MONSTERS WERE ONCE HUMAN."

"Please, please tell me she's breathing Jonathan!"

"Hush Jane. Just shut the hell up. I can't hear anything over that loud mouth of yours."

Rose felt something warm against her chest when she awoke, then the feeling of someone's fingers raking through her hair, pulling her from the thick suppressing darkness.

"She's still breathing Jane. Now calm down."

Still breathing? Rose cracked her eyes open and noticed that Jonathan was crouched over her with his head pressed against her chest. They were still outside the school, which meant everything wasn't a dream.

As she laid there in silence, she wished that everything would got back to the way it was. But, lord only knew her prayers wouldn't be fulfilled.

Jane stood nearby by with her hands clutched against her face, and Cassie was trying to get a signal by waving her phone wildly in the air. Rose almost laughed

when she heard the soft cursing that Cassie spewed out her mouth. That girl never cursed, like ever.

Rose exhaled. "I'm okay guys."

Jane's hands fell from her face. Her blue eyes were wide, and a smile began to tug across her lips. She was kneeled down beside Rose within a matter of seconds. "Oh. My. God! Don't ever do that again!" She croaked out.

Even though there was a sharp pain in the back of her head, Rose used all her strength to sit up. "Ow," She squinted. "My head hurts, I need some aspirin."

"Ha. I'm sure we can just go home and get some aspirin, Rose." Jonathan rolled his eyes.

Rose's grumbled. "Everything's not okay, is it?" She knew the answer. They all did. But she couldn't help but desperately grasp onto hope.

"Yea. Everything's peachy fine." Cassie blurted out, "My phone signal isn't working. I don't think any of them are. I can't even call my sister."

Sister! Panic surged through Rose. Illiana! She jumped up to her feet and started running towards the gate bordering the pool.

"Wait. Rose! The fuck are you going!"

Her breathing was so fast that she could barely pull the gate open; her grasp was weak and her head spun. Rose kept yanking, pulling until she decided to turn around. "My sisters still in there. And here I am worrying about saving my own ass!"

Jane stepped forward. "If you go in there, what if you end up like-"

"I won't." Rose interrupted. She refused to give Jane a chance to jinks her, not now. I'd be fine. I just know it. "But I need a weapon." She peered around, searching for anything and everything she could make use of.

Jonathan leaned against the gate with folded arms. "You aren't going. We're sticking together. Right here," Jonathan pointed downward. "This is suicide!"

Rose's mouth nearly fell open. "Are you kidding me?" She laughed out, more confused than she'd ever been before.

He shook his head. "I'm afraid not, just Listen. Let's wait until someone comes for us. It's not safe, so-"His words were cut off when she hauled off and punched him right across the nose with a sickening crunch. Rose wanted to do this for years, but she never mustered up the courage. Even now she didn't feel regret as blood pooled down from his nose.

"Don't you play boss here," Rose pointed a finger towards the school. "My fucking sisters in there. Unlike you, that's all I have. You don't understand that because you're a spoiled brat that's used to getting everything, absolutely everything you want!" her body was shaking, and her words came stuttered.

She stepped forward. "You're scared. But I'm not." Rose gave him a threatening glare, daring him to say another word. When he hadn't, she walked past him, bumping his shoulder as she went. "I'll be back Jane, i promise. Look after Cassie for me. Without her, we're screwed."

Jane nodded, looking between Rose and Cassie. "Okay. I'll hold you to it."

"I'm leaving. Lock the fence." She swallowed. Deep down inside, Rose wanted to tell them to kill her if she came back like Mrs. Caine. But she could mustered up the courage.

Rose moved forward, but someone grabbed her hand. Turning, she was met with Jonathan. "Wait. I'm coming with you."

She snatched her hand away. "I'm good. Stay here and watch over Jane. Please? That's all I need."

He stood there for a moment. After a minute, he moved back. "Fine."

Giving him one last uneasy look, she squeezed past the fence and focused on the task ahead of her--to save her sister.

Rose edged her way around the corner of the school's back door with a sickening feeling in her stomach. She tugged on the handle, but it was locked. The courtyard door was never locked. It connected from building A to building B.

Dropping her hand from the lever, she turned, catching the last movement of jagged lightening tearing a luminous line through the midnight sky. The air was warm and relatively moist to say it'd be a slight rain coming, but she couldn't shake the impending doom that suffocated her.

For a second, she walked a few steps, then turned right back around towards the door.

What am I doing? Rules no longer apply right now. And if it was as drastic as she thought, she'd easily explain to the police that her sister was in there. They'd surely understand.

She came to her decision by tearing the sleeve of her shirt and wrapping it around her hand until every inch of skin was unexposed. With a quick jab, fragments of glass went flying, blanketing around her feet and against the concrete.

She waited-nothing, no teachers nagging, no students screaming, just the melody of rain hitting dirt, leaves, and pavement.

The school was once gorgeous, blue lockers, black and white marble floors. But now dribbles and smears of blood stained every inch of the building. Lockers were

dented in, notebooks were everywhere, and book bags were scattered around as if a tornado had struck.

She wanted to scream and call her sister's name, ask if there was anybody else alive-but fear kept her silent. Who knew what could be inside and why everything was a wreck?

It had been a tough minute, standing there in the gathering darkness with the scent of death clouding her senses. She peered further back. At the end of the hall, there were two bodies sprawled out, not even a few millimeters away from one another.

Could there be any chance those people were alive, or were they unconscious?

She thought she heard a squeak and tried to hide further in the shadows as she inched towards the lifeless students. Above, the light fixtures flickered, sizzling with sparks flying every which way. Rose could only imagine another fire blazing, but at least she was near an exit if anything like that would occur.

Something caught her eye by the foot of one of the bodies. The closer she'd gotten, the sooner she realized it was a handgun and a few missed shells. She knelt down, running her fingers along the barrel. Still warm, so whatever happened, happened right before she'd gotten there.

Rose stood, lowering herself in front of the first body. Reflexively, she placed two fingers beneath the woman's neck, noting the coldness. Then she checked the other, and it hadn't differed much from the first.

Her heart sank as she distanced herself, rubbing her hands up and down her pants leg as if she could relieve the sensation of death from her fingertips. Tearing her eyes away from the corpses, she looked back towards the gun, considering pocketing it. That gun didn't belong to the bodies she checked. They'd been dead long before the weapon was even fired. Whoever used it, didn't use it on those two. They probably bailed soon after firing at something else-probably one of those things.

As quietly as she could, she stood, gun in hand. The next stop was her sister's classroom. If she could remember correctly, that was the next floor. All she needed to do was take the stairs, get her sister, and get the hell out of this fucked up place.

An image of Jonathan's laughing filled her mind, and she sucked in some air. It isn't time to think of him. It's time to be brave and prove to yourself that you can do this.

She nodded, lifting the gun and starting for the stairs. Rose carefully stepped around book bags and mauled bodies while surveying the area. She heard a soft movement, at the base of the stairs. She turned, and there stood a crouched lion, yes, a lion.

She practically cursed beneath her breath from allowing her mother to talk her into attending a school near a Zoo.

This wasn't a regular lion either, she thought with terror weighing her down. It was mutated and had three heads, blood matted fur, claw wounds and chunks of flesh and skin missing.

Rose froze, her fingers slipping across the metal of the gun. Stupid. She didn't even know how to use the god damn thing and yet she picked it up.

A growl brought her eyes straight forward once more, staring clearly at a full row of rotten canines and blood oozing out the side of the Lion's torn jaw. Her hands moved outwards, gesturing for it to calm down, but a sickening noise came from it, flanks flinging as it shook the rain from its coat.

Fuck.

Without hesitation, Rose turned around and practically flew up the flight of stairs, skipping step after step, loud clicks trailing behind, more growling, shallow breathing. The thing was right behind her and she wasn't stupid enough to check either.

It didn't take too long for her eyes to find the safeguard. She clicked it off just like in the movies.

It's just like in the movies. Aim and pull the trigger!

Staring over her shoulder, she flung her arm out, aimed, and pulled the trigger. The gun moved back against her palm and the bullet hit the Lion right in its neck. It squeaked, paws skidding against the floor until it came to a halt.

Rose breathed out, though it was soon caught in her chest when the Lion's black eyes landed right back on her, its massive tongue rolling from the middle head's mouth. The other two snarled, pulling their flews above their teeth while snapping.

"Sister!" Rose heard Illiana's voice, and when she looked up, there was a man standing beside her with a bow in his hand. In front of him was a little pug barking away.

"I've got this," The stranger said, nudging her little sister along beside her. "Is your father Malcolm McCain?" He asked while knocking an arrow.

"Ye-yes, but why?"

"He caused all of this," His knuckles turned white around the groove of his bow. "Give me the gun, this arrow might not do. I've only got one and I ain't wasting it on no stupid kids." He grunted.

The lion lowered and moved back before charging forward once more. Rose wanted to tell this stranger to buzz off, but she needed him. And on top of that, he saved her little sister. Faced with that, she slid the weapon into his hand and snatched her sister up and out of the way.

That's when Cassie appeared behind it with a shriek. No, Rose's lips clamped shut. She'd told them to stay put, and here Cassie was trembling in the middle of the hall. Just as Johnathan and Jane came up beside Rose from the same end of the hall, the lion skidded to a turn across the floor and pounced Cassie to the ground.

"No!" Jane screamed, but Johnathan clamped a quivering hand over her mouth, silencing the terror filled cries.

"Help her god damn it, don't just stand there!" Rose pushed at the strangers back with a closed fist.

"Kid, if I aim from this spot, it will do little to no good." The man kept his gaze locked straight ahead. "It probably won't faze that damn thing."

Rose went to move, but the stranger had clamped a hand on her wrist. "She's gone." He said.

"You don't know nothing." Johnathan released a throaty growl towards the man.

The lion slashed its paw right across Cassie's chest, severing through clothing, flesh, and diving deep towards the bone. Rose thought she'd puke, but she hadn't. She couldn't turn away as the tears burned her eyes, as the beast ravished through Cassie's stomach. Pools of blood erupted out her mouth and stained the once gorgeous floor while her intestines were tangled around the creature's teeth like a fork full of spaghetti.

Jane pushed Jonathan's hand away from her mouth and mustered up the courage to size Rose up. "I heard what that man said. All this is your fault--Cassie died because of you!"

Rose swallowed down a whimper, forced to watch her best friend grieve, the woman she loved blame her for something that was out of her control, out of her hands. "No-no. You know that isn't--"

"Don't get me started on Nick," Jane took another step forward, cornering Rose to the point she pushed her sister towards Johnathan in hopes he'd keep her safe. "You couldn't keep your hands off of him huh? We shared everything, but you didn't like the fact I had him to myself and now he's dead because of your father. No. Because of you. So, tell me stranger. What exactly did her father do?"

Rose bit down on her lip, staring towards the stranger as her tears seeped through the cracks of her lips and soaked her tongue in despair. "Go ahead, tell them." She coughed out.

"He'd always been a bad man. I know," He pointed to a scar that marred along his neck. "He brought those monsters here. Their like parasites. Then they evolve, bigger, stronger, like Giants. We don't have time, that creature will be done eating your friend soon. So--"

While the man was talking, Jane grabbed the gun from his and aimed it towards Illiana. "Ma-maybe I'll take something from her then. Huh! Huh! Rules don't matter right?"

"No. Please..." Rose pleaded, her cries a cross between a drowning cat and a dogs howl.

"Or," Jane looked at Johnathan as she moved the mouth of the gun back towards Rose. "Perhaps I should kill you. Wouldn't that make it all go away?" She howled in laughter.

"Jane, Stop. This!" Johnathan growled out, placing his hand over Illiana's eyes.

Jane tossed her head back as she went into a fit of laughter that shook her shoulders. "No! You shut the fuck up. You wanted her too, like everyone else. Everybody secretly," Bang! She sent a bullet right into Rose's side. "Wants her!"

Rose howled out as light splintered her vision. Yes, everyone had liked her, bullied her, but Jane was the only one who truly cared and held her heart. At first, everything was clear. Then she began seeing doubles, when the world washed out in pale colors. Heat radiated through her body, and the arms of another wrapped around her right before she could completely collapse.

"Fucking kids!" The strangers voice penetrated her ears. "Stay in there. Stay in there. You! Give me the fucking gun. I said give it to me or I swear to God I'll snap your neck," the sound of clinking metal greeted her ears. "Now kick it to me." She heard him say.

"Oh God. Oh God. What did you do! " Johnathan cried out.

"Lets go, move! I might be able to help her, but she's fading quick." The man hissed as she felt herself being lifted. Her broken body crumbled against him, her breathing heavy, her body cold.

"Ple-" Rose hacked up something warm and metallic tasting, but she forced it down with a whimper. "Please take care of her."

"You'll do it god damn it! You'll live to do it." He said, tightening his grip.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." Jane's voice rung out through Rose's ears. Their voices became further and further away, ghostly whispers on a winds drift.

Atlas, Rose sucked in air one last time before images of Cassie's scattered limbs flashed before her, and those lifeless doll green eyes. This. Was. Hell, and my father caused it all.