

Chapter One

It is exactly 3:04 am, aboard an airplane soaring over the only world you've ever known. As your town slowly diminishes into a mere speck of light, the rumbling engine carries you away into the unknown. The night sky is vibrant with the stars and the moon is a beautiful crescent. The inside is pitch black and pin-drop silent. As the darkness and silence envelop you, fatigue tugs at your weary eyes, luring you into a peaceful sleep.

Aiden's mind drifts back to his childhood home—a small but sturdy piece of architecture that sheltered his family of four: his loving mama, protective papa, and his wise older sister. As he reminisces, a particular corner of the house floods his thoughts—a broken plank in the wooden floor. It lay tilted upward in his cozy room, serving as his secret storage. Aiden, always resourceful even as a child, hid away his cherished possessions: a smooth rock collected from a distant beach or his worn-out favorite tennis ball. The image of his mama flashes vividly in his mind, her gentle voice calling him to dinner. And his papa, everyone knew exactly where to find him, comfortably seated in his beloved rocking chair in the living room, absorbed in the latest news. 'Look what has happened!' he would often declare, reacting strongly to some significant headline. Aiden finds himself puzzled by the sudden flood of memories about his home—of all places—memories he believed he had locked away, vowing never to revisit them again.

As the airplane soars through the vast expanse of the night sky, Aiden's thoughts wander, like fleeting shadows dancing on the plane's dimly lit walls. His feet begin to feel cramped in the limited legroom, a reminder of the hours spent in this confined space. The snoring coming from his neighboring seat gets on his nerves, a constant annoyance that disrupts the otherwise silent cabin. Hunger gnaws at his stomach, reminding him of the missed meal and the anticipation of a satisfying feast at his destination. Amidst the discomfort and restlessness, he contemplates the journey that lies ahead—the uncertainties and possibilities awaiting him, the mix of leaving behind everything he knows and the exhilaration of venturing into the unknown. It's as if the very air he breathes holds a whisper of new beginnings, a promise of uncharted paths and untold stories yet to unfold.

Chapter Two

Aiden woke up to the blaring alarm, rousing him from his slumber. He followed his morning routine with sleepy eyes and an empty stomach. After quickly finishing his breakfast, he stepped out of his home and set off for school, knowing it was just another Monday. However, the state of the streets caught his attention, bearing the visible aftermath of recent pillaging in the town. It was disheartening to see the neglect of the authorities, with the absence of police officers adding to the sense of unease.

Ruben, once a bustling and lively town, now bore the scars of a devastating flood. The impact of the catastrophe had left its mark on the community, with food shortages and frequent power outages becoming an unfortunate norm. The struggles had taken their toll, leaving behind a sense of bitterness among the remaining residents. Ruben had transformed into a place akin to a sunken ship, a desolate landscape where hope seemed distant and rescue unlikely.

He walked with a heavy heart, each step a reminder of the torment that awaited him at school—a place he had grown to despise. It wasn't the pursuit of knowledge that bothered him, nor the absence of friends. Aiden, with his slight stature and gentle demeanor, was an easy target for bullies. Towering figures loomed over him, casting long shadows of intimidation. They taunted, pilfered his belongings, and inflicted both physical and emotional pain. But amid the hardships, a glimmer of solace emerged: the chess club. Within its walls, he found respite, a place to concentrate, where his true abilities could shine. Chess, a battle of intellect rather than brawn, ignited his passion. The competitive games fueled his spirit, briefly shielding him from the harsh realities of the classroom. With every strategic move, he affirmed his intelligence, defying the judgments imposed by his size. After enduring the rest of classes, he longed for the release of returning home.

The deserted streets were not as empty as they looked this time, an evil and melancholic atmosphere could be felt. With caution and fear in his every step, he forged ahead, even though intuition told him something was off. The quiet looked deceiving, and it just felt like terrible things were to follow. Nevertheless, he carries on until he witnesses the horrors he sees when he reaches home.

On his beautiful and cozy house, a dark flag was flown. Several guns and skulls made it even more horrifying. Loud noises which included laughing and

shouting could easily be heard from the outside. It did not take long for Aiden to realize the culprit of such an event at his house.

The Dark Skulls were a rebel group formed after the great flood. They had assigned themselves the roles and responsibilities of the authorities but used a harsher and more dictatorial approach to rule the town. While they usually expanded in the shadows, Aiden had heard that they also terrorized random homes for ransom and other dark motives. With this information, he was able to evaluate his condition and was deciding his next step.

Aiden's mind raced, strategizing his next move in this perilous game. Like a chessboard, he surveyed the situation, considering every possible outcome and countermove. With a resolute determination, he ventured into the heart of danger, his heart pounding with a mix of adrenaline and fear.

As he stepped into his ransacked home, a wave of devastation washed over him. Furniture overturned, belongings scattered haphazardly, and the eerie silence amplified the absence of his family. Panic gripped his chest, but he forced himself to stay calm, knowing that a clear mind was crucial for his next steps.

He scanned the rooms, searching for any clues that might unravel the mystery of his family's disappearance. The air hung heavy with an unsettling stillness, broken only by the occasional creaking of the floorboards beneath his cautious steps. Every shadow seemed to hold a hidden threat, heightening his senses.

In his parents' room, he noticed a torn photograph, fragments of a once-happy memory. The sight tugged at his heartstrings, fueling his determination to find his loved ones. He retraced his steps, his mind replaying the moments before he left, hoping for any overlooked detail that might provide a clue.

His sister's room revealed a chilling discovery—a hastily scrawled note, words smudged with hurried penmanship. It read: "Taken. Pay the price if you want them back." Aiden's heart sank, and anger ignited within him. He knew he had to act swiftly, for time was now his enemy.

With a steely resolve, Aiden made his way to the Dark Skulls' hideout, a dilapidated building at the edge of town. Shadows danced menacingly across its decaying facade, but he pushed aside his trepidation. This was his family, and he would stop at nothing to save them.

As he crept through the dimly lit corridors, he heard muffled voices and the occasional echo of footsteps. Aided by the element of surprise, he maneuvered through the labyrinthine halls, drawing closer to the heart of the enemy's lair. His mind remained focused, his movements calculated, just like the strategic maneuvers on a chessboard.

Finally, he reached a locked door, beyond which he sensed the presence of his family. With a swift kick, he burst into the room, only to be met with an empty space. The feeling of loss crashed over him, threatening to drown his spirit. But he refused to give up.

Desperation mingled with determination as he delved deeper into the hideout, searching for any trace of his family's whereabouts. The walls seemed to close in on him, and each passing moment weighed heavily on his shoulders. The game of chess he once relished now mirrored his reality—a battle of wits and resilience against an unseen adversary.

To be Continued....