

CHAPTER 2 - -TWO ABANDONED DIARIES

A slow drizzle lightly fell over a small blue house owned by Elijah's Uncle Stan. Inside, Elijah patiently sifted through a large pile of framed photographs that belonged to his parents. He couldn't quite muster a smile as he gazed down at a picture of his mother and father, much younger then, embracing each other. Uncle Stan had given him a huge box of things that he said contained precious items belonging to the Hawk family. After taking most of the morning preparing himself to face the contents of the box, Elijah sorted through most of it quickly. When the pictures appeared, however, he couldn't resist taking time to look through them, even if it meant reliving the love he lost six nights ago.

"How are you doing?" Uncle Stan asked, poking his head through the doorway, interrupting Elijah's thoughts. He looked at Elijah across the piles of pictures, cards, love notes, and other possessions that had been the most valuable to the Hawk parents.

"Fine," Elijah answered flatly. "Just looking at some pictures."

"I meant how are *you* doing? You know, with everything?"

"Oh. I'm okay." Elijah knew Uncle Stan could see right through his lie, but he didn't feel like talking about things right now. Uncle Stan seemed to get his silent message.

"Ok. I'll be in the kitchen," he said, resignedly. "Just let me know when you're ready for lunch."

Elijah felt bad for his uncle. He just wanted to talk and have Elijah open up to him. Ever since he was sent to live here, Elijah noticed him hovering around, debating whether or not to say something comforting. On one occasion, Uncle Stan slowly walked up to him and made a move to give Elijah a hug, but at the last minute, he paused, frantically looked around, and then flipped on a light switch that was directly behind Elijah, even though the house was plenty bright. Good ol' Uncle Stan. It was comforting to know he was willing to listen, but it hadn't even been a week since that horrible night. Elijah still needed time to make sense of things. After all, his life had just been turned completely upside down.

Six days ago, Elijah was a happy thirteen-year-old boy living with a family that adored each other. His parents, William and Julia Hawk, cared for their children more than anything in the world, and Elijah never doubted that fact. He spent his life knowing that if he or Kyria were ever in trouble, his parents would give their lives for them to be safe and happy. And that's just what they did.

He still didn't know exactly what happened that night. After the police finally talked to him, Elijah learned that he had lost everything that mattered. His father, who was there when he needed him most, died protecting his son. His mother, who was found halfway up the staircase, was also killed on her way to protect her daughter.

What tormented Elijah even more than the deaths of his parents was the horrific kidnapping and murder of his sister. Her body was never recovered from the house that night, but two days later, in the early hours of the morning, Elijah's uncle received a call saying that they had found Kyria's bloodstained clothes on the shore of a beach, twenty miles away from their house. Elijah remembered hearing the police explain everything to him, but even now, he found it hard to accept that his entire family was dead. He felt guilty for not talking with his

parents that night while he sulked about something as trivial as being too skinny. His family's last night together was wasted while he thought about himself. So selfish!

Elijah continued to sort through his parents' possessions. How his uncle was able to get these things from the house without the police knowing baffled Elijah since everything in the house needed to stay as it was until the investigation was over. He decided not to ask. There were, after all, more important matters to attend to. He needed to separate the things he wanted to keep with him from what he wanted to put into storage. Elijah agonized over each item, reliving the memory that went with them. He came across scenes from his family's many vacations. The Grand Canyon. The Hawaiian Islands. Numerous camping trips where he and Kyria fished and swam in freezing lakes. He flipped through the pictures one after another, letting the memories flood his emotions.

Finally, he saw a picture of all four of them on top of a mountain. His family had, on more than one occasion, climbed a mountain, and they always took a picture of their accomplishment. His dad stood tall and confident with Elijah's mom's head on his shoulder. Any stranger could see the love they had for each other just by looking at this one picture. Elijah and Kyria were in the front leaning on a large boulder. All four were smiling triumphantly. He gently ran his fingers over the faces of each family member as if the flat, glossy material somehow resurrected them. The tears came quickly. It felt good to cry, but he tried to hold back. He got up, deciding to regain his composure and eat some lunch. Food made things better.

He walked to the door, intending to go through it, but instead he closed it. Elijah picked up the photo again and locked himself inside the room's small closet. He knew he shouldn't do it, but he wanted to feel the sadness overwhelm him again. Elijah slowly looked back at the picture, and he let himself become overtaken with emotion once more, allowing his

uncontrollable sobs escape from his body without restraint. This time, he didn't try to control it. It was awful and wonderful at the same time.

An hour and a half later, Elijah emerged from the room looking completely composed. He walked into the kitchen, but he didn't see his uncle. After searching the house, Elijah finally found him in the garage working on his truck.

“Hey there Eli. You ready for some lunch?”

“If that's not too much trouble.”

“Nope. Just give me a sec to finish up and I'll be right in.”

Elijah went back inside and let the door close behind him. Down the hall he noticed a mirror and decided to make sure he showed no evidence of crying. All clear. Uncle Stan soon walked in wiping his dirty hands on a rag.

“What'll it be today?” Uncle Stan said, rummaging through the refrigerator as though he had never looked into it before. He moved items here, then there, muttering and grunting to himself. The man could rebuild a car engine, but apparently the refrigerator was a complete mystery. “How about sandwiches?”

“Sounds good.” Elijah had to laugh inside. Every day they had sandwiches for lunch. He wondered why Uncle Stan wasted his time looking through the fridge. It was always sandwiches for lunch and some kind of takeout for dinner—usually pizza. But Elijah didn't mind. It was kind of fun to eat junk for a while. Uncle Stan obviously wasn't used to entertaining much.

Uncle Stan always looked like he needed a shave. He may have appeared gruff, but he was friendly. Elijah loved visiting his uncle. Not having a family of his own gave Uncle Stan time to spend with Elijah and Kyria. He was unpredictable and a bit of a flake, but he made sure

they felt included by taking time to talk with them, even when other adults were around. Uncle Stan was different, and Elijah was thankful he was sent to live with him.

“Here you go. Bon appétit.” Uncle Stan handed Elijah a ham and turkey sandwich on a plate with some potato chips. He even tried to put the chips in a nice arrangement on the plate, maybe to make it seem like a fancy lunch.

“Thank you,” said Elijah.

“Don’t mention it,” said Uncle Stan. “Just wanted you to know that the police called today and want you to do a walk-through with them tomorrow. Sounds like they have more questions.”

“Okay.” Elijah didn’t know what more to say to that. The last place he wanted to go was back to the house. He hadn’t been back since that night.

“How much more of your folks’ stuff do you still need to go through?” asked Uncle Stan.

“Not much,” Elijah answered. “I think I’ll put most everything in storage.”

“Alrighty. I’ll start loading the truck pronto. I have some items to put in there if you don’t mind. Just some old furniture and books and such.” Even though Uncle Stan was trying to be upbeat, Elijah noticed that his eyes weren’t committed to his smile. There was grief beneath his blithe exterior. It made sense to Elijah. After all, Uncle Stan had just lost his brother. One night, Elijah got up to use the restroom and found his uncle sitting at the table working on a model airplane. The next morning, before Uncle Stan woke up, Elijah walked over to the unfinished airplane and read a handmade card next to it. Even though it was written years ago, Elijah recognized the handwriting as his father’s. It read:

“Happy Birthday Stanley. Once I get home, we can work on this together. I figure an airplane is fitting. Love, Billy.”

Elijah wasn't sure he understood the card, but he understood what it meant to his uncle. It meant that he lost someone special too. Elijah considered asking about it, but he decided the card was between Uncle Stan and his dad.

After lunch, Elijah headed back to work sorting his parents' belongings. While most of the items were going into storage, he wanted to keep something to remember each of his family members. To remember his mother, he kept a locket that had a picture of her and Elijah's father inside. Elijah gave the locket to his mother for her birthday years ago. At the time it was all he could afford. It was very plain, and it started to rust and turn green on the back, but his mother kept it and wore it often, even though it turned her neck green. He thought the locket would remind him of her love and thoughtfulness.

To remember his father, Elijah kept a gold pocket watch. His father never left the house without having it in his possession. All his life, Elijah remembered listening to stories about the watch.

"This watch," his father would say, "was created with the finest gold and the best craftsmanship you'll ever see! It was specially made for me, and I want it to be worn and carried by the first-born son in our family. You must promise to protect this watch once you inherit it. It has a power inside it that may never be understood, but you must search for the answers."

Elijah was never sure how much of his father's stories he believed, but he knew how important the watch was. He delicately touched the gold letters on the inside that had his father's initials, feeling the history that now came with it. He held it up to his ear and listened to the soft ticking noise.

The box Uncle Stan gave to Elijah contained nothing that belonged to Kyria, so Elijah picked up a picture of his sister and himself at the beach. It would have to do for now. He found

an old shoebox and placed the three items inside. Then he pushed it away from the other clutter to keep it separate. These would now be his most prized possessions.

Elijah surveyed his piles. There were still two things left that he needed to sort. One in particular had him puzzled and fascinated at the same time. It was a glass cube filled with dirt. The casing was about the size of a golf ball, and there were no markings on it anywhere, which was odd because his mother was very meticulous when it came to labels. The cube itself was interesting because there didn't seem to be an opening. Until he knew what it was, he couldn't bring himself to throw it away.

The other item left to sort was an old book he had never seen before. It was giant and written by hand. He didn't have time to read it all now, but he wanted to get the basic idea so he could decide whether or not to keep it. Elijah randomly opened the book and read.

“One hundred and forty years past the reign of Maliphist and there still is no sign of his sphere. Where there was once certainty in the world of the Magi, there is now fear and mistrust.”

Elijah had no idea what in the world that meant, so he turned the pages and read a few more lines.

“It is my understanding that Tibirus and his people are withdrawing from the city. It is much too dangerous to be among the people when the Magi do not even trust each other. Even here, talk of persecution is stirring and we may be wise to begin fleeing.”

After a few more lines, Elijah decided that he was not going to understand the book. Still, he was curious to read more, even if it didn't make sense. He gently placed the book on the floor, deciding that when he had time, he would pick it up again.

When he was finally finished, he felt much better. Elijah stood up looking at all the possessions neatly organized on the floor. It was done. He didn't know why, but he suddenly

felt very empty. He paused for a moment and thought of his parents again as he prepared to part with their things.

After all the belongings were secured inside the storage garage, Uncle Stan ordered two large pizzas and they took them back to the house to eat. They spent the evening watching action-packed movies, each on his own chair with a pizza box on his lap. They “oohed” and “aahed” and laughed until they were too tired to keep their eyes open anymore.

Very early the next morning, Uncle Stan walked into Elijah’s room.

“You ready to go? You need to talk with the police today, remember?”

“Right now?” Elijah asked sleepily.

“Yup. We need to get a move on. It takes a few hours to get there from here. Go hop in the shower and I’ll get breakfast ready.”

Elijah took a long shower, trying to delay the trip. He knew that he had to face the house at some point, but he wasn’t sure he was ready. When he was done, he walked over to the shoebox that held his family’s valuable possessions—now his—and picked up the watch. His father had always carried it, so he figured today he should start carrying it too.

The drive to the house was long. Elijah grew up in a nice, quiet suburb in southern California. Uncle Stan’s house, tucked away in a small community, was about five hours north. Elijah decided that he would try to sleep so he didn’t have to think about what awaited him. He would have to relive the memory. He looked over at his uncle, who had been checking the rear view mirror since they left. Elijah fell asleep wondering what his uncle was looking for.

The police were already in the driveway when they pulled up. Elijah looked apprehensively at the place where he last saw his family alive. Uncle Stan got out of the car and

was greeted by a police officer and a detective. The detective looked just like Elijah pictured a detective would look. He had on a white button-up shirt with a necktie and brown slacks. In one hand he held an envelope and a note pad. The detective walked around to Elijah's door and bent down.

"Hey there, you must be Elijah. My name is Detective Scott. Do you mind taking a walk with me?" Elijah gathered his courage, got out of the car, and followed the detective into the house. "Follow me," he said firmly. "Do you know why you're here?"

"Not really," Elijah admitted.

"I know you've given your story to the police already, but I want to hear it from you and have you walk me through everything that happened." Detective Scott glanced quickly at Uncle Stan. Something was odd about the way he looked at him. "As it happened here in the house," the detective explained, now in a whisper as he looked back at Elijah. "From your testimony, you heard something down here?"

Elijah didn't want to admit that he actually hadn't heard anything at all, and that he just *felt* that something was wrong, so he went along with the detective's assumption.

"Yeah," Elijah said. "I was upstairs in my room."

"Why don't we go up there." said Detective Scott. "Truman, talk to the uncle down here." Elijah and the detective started up the stairs and left Uncle Stan and the other police officer on the bottom floor. Halfway up, Elijah froze and his throat knotted up as he thought about his mother who died at the spot where he now stood. When the detective looked impatiently at his hesitation, Elijah's trance broke and he hurried up to his room.

"Walk me through it," Detective Scott instructed.

"I was in here and I heard a noise so I got up and hid in the corner," Elijah started.

“How long?”

“I’m not sure. Not very long.”

“Then what did you do?”

“I went down the stairs.” As he recalled his story, Elijah felt like he was making his escape sound so mundane, as if he just went down to grab a snack or take out the trash. He didn’t know how to say that the trip down the stairs was one of the most terrifying moments of his life.

“What made you decide to go down the stairs?” asked the detective.

“I’m not sure. It just felt right,” said Elijah.

“Did you see anything?”

“No.”

“Did you hear a noise somewhere else that you were running away from?”

“No. I don’t know how to explain it. I just knew I needed to do it.” He knew that the detective was just doing his job, but Elijah was starting to become irritated at the tone of the questions. Like he was in trouble.

“Okay,” said Detective Scott, “then what happened?”

“I went into the kitchen.” Elijah pointed and they went back down the stairs and followed the path that he had used to escape a week ago. “I tried to use the phone to call for help, but the power went off.”

“No other reports of a power outage in this area were filed,” Detective Scott said. “Are you sure you tried the phone?” Elijah glared at him. What kind of question was that? He wanted to scream at the detective, but he composed himself before he answered.

“Yes. I’m positive.”

“Okay,” said Detective Scott. “What happened next?”

“I saw him.”

“Who?”

“The man who murdered my parents and sister!” Elijah’s voice started to rise.

“What did he look like?”

“I could only see his eyes and his . . . outline.”

“And you said he had yellow eyes.” Elijah wasn’t sure if this was a question or a statement.

“Yes. He did.”

“Are you sure they were yellow, or could it have been a reflection?”

“I don’t know. Maybe.”

For the next twenty minutes Elijah walked the detective through the house answering every detail he could remember. When they reached the side yard where Elijah ran into his father that night, the intensity of Detective Scott suddenly changed. He moved extremely close to Elijah and asked him to be very specific. Elijah could feel the detective’s focus. He knew this was why he had been called back to the house.

“How did you see your father?” Detective Scott asked.

“I just ran into him,” Elijah answered.

“How did he get here?”

“I don’t know. He just appeared. I was looking behind me.”

“What did he say? Be specific.”

“He said...” Elijah thought carefully. “He said that he loved me and that there was a plan.”

“What plan? What did he mean by that?”

Elijah wished he knew because it seemed to him that the plan didn't work.

“I really don't know what he meant,” answered Elijah.

Detective Scott didn't look satisfied with that answer, but he let it go.

“Was there anything else? Did your father say anything else to you?”

“I don't think so.” Elijah was suddenly having trouble remembering the details that had haunted him for nights. Detective Scott looked around the yard while deep in thought. Elijah shifted uncomfortably and stepped into a wet puddle next to the house.

“Elijah,” Detective Scott said slowly, “there was a lot of debris scattered around the yard.” He pulled out the envelope he had been holding and handed Elijah a photograph of the scene. “We cleaned it up already, but does any of this look familiar?” Wiping his shoe off on the grass, Elijah peered over at the picture. There were tree branches strung about, metal scraps from who knows where, and other elements he couldn't make out all over the yard.

“No,” said Elijah. “When I left it looked completely normal.”

Detective Scott wrote that down and took a deep breath.

“This is where the case gets a little—different,” said the detective. “Look at the house.” Elijah turned around, and at first everything seemed normal. But as he looked more closely, he saw dozens and dozens of holes with what looked like small burn marks around them. “I was hoping you would share with me what you know about that.”

Detective Scott looked very intensely into Elijah's deep-blue eyes, as though searching for something Elijah knew.

“I've never seen that either. What is that?”

Detective Scott sighed, but looked surprisingly relieved. “It goes right through to the inside.”

“It’s that powerful?” Elijah asked.

“Yes. We found these marks on your parents too. We think it’s what killed them.”

Elijah looked at the house in horror. What on earth happened? Detective Scott walked closer to Elijah and suddenly he started to feel his body pulse with heat. He wished Uncle Stan would come out.

“So you see now why we needed to talk?” Detective Scott was talking in a very soft, low voice. “The police have never seen anything like this. Can you imagine the commotion this would create if it were to get out? I think it’s best that until we figure this out, you keep it private.”

Just then, as Detective Scott began to lead him back into the house, Elijah caught a glimpse of something peeking over the edge of a bush just outside Kyria’s window. He was about to point it out, but something told him not to.

“Sir?” Elijah said. “May I have a moment alone please?” Detective Scott looked uneasy at Elijah’s request, but he gave his permission.

“Just make sure you don’t touch anything,” he directed. Elijah agreed, and the detective walked away.

When he was confident he couldn’t be seen, Elijah walked over to the tall bush and looked more closely at the object peeking over the top. It looked like a small book. Elijah swiftly shook the bush, and surprisingly, two objects came falling down. As soon as they hit the dirt, Elijah knew exactly what they were. They were Kyria’s diaries. Both books were small and brown, but one had a gold lock on it. Elijah distinctly remembered when Kyria started writing in

the locked diary just six months ago. She was never a private person, but she was so secretive about her locked diary. So what were they doing out here? He knew that she always kept them safe inside her dresser drawer in her room. From where he stood, it looked like Kyria threw them out of her window. But why?

Not wanting to get caught with any evidence, Elijah crammed them in the back of his pants, under his belt. He hoped Detective Scott wouldn't notice the books, so he pulled his shirt over his belt the best he could.

"How are you doing?" the detective asked when Elijah walked inside the house.

"I'm good. Thank you," Elijah responded politely.

They met up with Uncle Stan and the other police officer. Everybody shook hands and left in a hurry. And that seemed to be that. Climbing back into the car, Elijah felt relieved that he and Uncle Stan were alone again. However, he was completely confused and needed answers. He wondered if it was okay to tell Uncle Stan about the burn marks on the house or the diaries tucked under his belt. Before he could say anything, Uncle Stan chimed in.

"Man, that guy seemed intense. You okay?"

"Yeah."

"Hey," said Uncle Stan in a serious tone. "That other policeman just said that they don't have any leads, but they think the murders were a random act of violence." He briefly put his hand on Elijah's shoulder. "I'm sorry. I thought you should know."

Elijah looked out the window and shook his head. Nothing about that night seemed random. The figure was definitely looking for something, or trying to make it *look* like he was looking for something. Then a thought came to Elijah that haunted him for the entire ride home. Did the figure find what he was looking for? And if not, would he come looking for Elijah?