

CHAPTER 3 - - THE MYSTERY OF THE PHOTO ALBUM

“Can you spell that name for me, sweetie?” the librarian asked, looking puzzled.

“M-a-l-i-p-h-i-s-t” Elijah said, reading from a scrap of paper he had scribbled on.

The librarian, a short woman with long gray hair, typed the name into her computer as Elijah waited patiently.

For the first time in three weeks, Elijah had a moment to clear his head. Uncle Stan had been gone for long hours the past few days, and his absence gave Elijah a lot of time alone. He welcomed the solitude, but he needed something other than the horrific memory of his parents’ murder to occupy his mind. At first, Elijah thought about reading the old book he found with his parents’ stuff. He remembered placing it on the floor, but Uncle Stan had obviously moved it because it wasn’t anywhere to be found. Until he could ask his uncle where the book was, Elijah decided to investigate some of the words he remembered from the book.

“Sorry, hon. I’m not seeing anything on Maliphist here,” said the librarian.

“What about Tiberus?” asked Elijah, determined to get some answers. The librarian went to work.

“Here’s something,” she said. Elijah perked up. “We don’t have it here, but the other library across town has a book with an entry on Tiberus. It’s called *Historical Myths and Analysis* by J. J. McClintock. Would you like me to call and have it reserved for you?”

“Yes!” Elijah said enthusiastically. “Thank you so much!” Elijah had no idea why he was so excited because he didn’t have a clue what he was searching for. But lately, instead of getting answers, he felt like he was getting more and more questions. Maybe this small success, a simple entry in a book, could help him start to make sense of things.

“It’s reserved,” the librarian said, hanging up the phone.

“Thank you again,” Elijah called as he walked out the door.

By foot he wouldn’t be able to make it across town today. If he got up early in the morning, however, he was sure he could make it there and back before it got too late. It would be a long day of walking, but he didn’t mind. The journey would provide time alone to think, and he always found it peaceful to walk and think by himself.

When Elijah returned from the library, Uncle Stan was still not home. Elijah decided to kill time by exploring the only area of his uncle’s house he hadn’t yet explored: the basement. He wasn’t afraid of it, but he never considered the basement a very inviting place. There was a presence down there that always made his spine shudder. Elijah walked to the top of the stairs and stood, looking into the darkness below, trying to gather his courage to take a step. His curiosity ultimately trumped his fear, and he began to slowly descend. As the old, rickety stairs groaned and creaked with each step, Elijah wasn’t sure he wanted to spend any more time down here than necessary.

The moment he reached the bottom, he got the creeps. It was pitch black. In the middle of the ceiling hung a single light bulb with a string attached. He pulled the string and watched the light flicker a few times before turning on. Elijah shivered. He thought it would be better to find something interesting and bring it upstairs as quickly as he could. Willing himself to stay, he started scanning the area. It was a mess! Uncle Stan had lots of old car parts and tools lying

around. He also had an old, dirty engine and engine parts piled in the corner. It was obviously a project left undone. On the floor, and in boxes, were hundreds of old newspapers in no particular order.

He looked further before he finally found something interesting. In the corner stood a rusty bookshelf containing old books and photo albums. Elijah carefully walked over to it and started reading the spines. From what he could tell, the books were old adventure and mystery novels that were twenty or thirty years old. Elijah wondered if they belonged to Uncle Stan when he was a kid.

He continued to survey the bookcase and came across something that caught his eye. It was a photo album that hadn't been touched in ages. The cover, made of black leather, was tattered and abused-looking. Elijah's first thought was that it may have held pictures from his father's childhood. He had actually never seen pictures of his parents as children because his father and Uncle Stan were orphaned at a young age, and his mother had always said she lost contact with her parents. Since he never knew any grandparents, old family pictures were unheard of. Elijah grabbed the album and flew up the stairs. As soon as he reached the top, the telephone rang. It was Uncle Stan.

“Hey Sport! You stayin' outta trouble?”

“Yeah. I just got back from the library.”

“Good man!” Uncle Stan sounded like he was tired even though he tried to be cheerful.

“But don't go wandering around. I promised your parents I'd take care of you, so don't go doing things I wouldn't do.”

“What does that leave?” joked Elijah.

Uncle Stan chuckled.

“Not much. Hey—I just wanted to call and let you know I won’t be home tonight.”

“Really? Why not?” Elijah tried to hide his disappointment.

“Just need to. No worries okay?”

“Sure,” Elijah said, unconvinced.

“Okay. You’ll need to take care of dinner yourself. When you get off the phone, head into my room. Open the second drawer and dig. It’s my underwear drawer, so try not to freak out on me.”

“Why exactly are you having me feel around through your underwear?”

“You’ll find something.”

“I’m sure of that.”

“Don’t get smart now,” said Uncle Stan. Elijah laughed at their playful banter. “In the drawer you’ll find a big hairbrush—looks like a ladies’ brush, but the back comes off. Open the back and you’ll find a bunch of money. Use it to order a pizza or something.”

“Oh.” Elijah laughed. All this trouble for food.

“Alrighty. Now you stay put until I come home, okay?”

Elijah wasn’t sure what to say to that. He still wanted to go to the library in the morning, but he didn’t want Uncle Stan to worry about him.

“Take care,” Elijah said. “See ya when you get back.”

Elijah hung up the phone and followed Uncle Stan’s instructions. Sure enough, a very large hairbrush was hidden in his uncle’s underwear drawer. He pulled on the back of the brush and out popped a roll of money. There had to be close to three or four hundred dollars there. He pulled out enough to pay for his pizza, stuffed the rest back into the brush, and returned it to the drawer.

After he called for pizza, Elijah sprawled out on the floor to continue his investigation of the photo album from the basement. The first two pages each had an old black and white picture of a baby. He immediately wondered who the babies were. The picture looked too old to be either of his parents. Looking at the old photographs, Elijah realized he had never questioned his roots. His parents were always open to talk with him about anything, but he had never taken the time to ask about his past. He had so many questions now. Where did his family come from? What were his grandparents like? He knew his dad and uncle were orphaned at a young age, but Elijah never bothered to ask what that was like. It seemed selfish that he never thought to ask, especially since he too was now an orphan. He decided it was time to make up for missed opportunities. As soon as Uncle Stan came home, Elijah planned to ask him all about his roots.

Elijah turned the pages, trying to make sense of the photo album. Page after page was littered with black and white photographs, preserving memories of two people. None of the photos had labels, but as the pages turned, a simple story began to develop. The two babies from the first page grew up in front of Elijah's eyes until, eventually, they were married. The album was a story of their journey through life together. They were a handsome couple. The grown boy looked very strong and confident. The grown girl, also confident, was very pretty and reminded Elijah of Kyria with her dark hair and pleasant smile. He couldn't help but think he had seen these people before. But who were they?

Elijah was about to look through the album again when something suddenly caught his eye. He could barely see it, but in the hand of the young lady, was an item Elijah recognized. He jumped up and frantically searched the house for a magnifying glass to get a closer look at the picture. Elijah searched in Uncle Stan's bedroom, in the study, and then the kitchen. No luck. He almost gave up when he decided to check the front room. There, in the drawer of the

coffee table, Elijah found a big, round magnifying glass. He ran back to the album and used the magnifying glass to look at the picture. He was now positive he saw what he thought. The young lady in the picture was holding the glass square of dirt that Elijah had inherited.

Elijah wanted Uncle Stan to call back. He was dying to know what that glass square was and who the people in the pictures were. Could they be his grandparents? Were they at least related to him? Elijah scampered up to find another book in the basement just as the doorbell rang. When he opened the door, he expected to see someone delivering his pizza, but instead he jolted back in surprise. Elijah felt his body warm up again as he looked up at an ominous Detective Scott.

“May I come in?” the detective asked in a low, menacing voice. Elijah turned around and looked behind him, knowing full well that he was alone. He wanted to say no, but before he knew it, he stepped aside to let the detective in.

“I’m headed out to meet with some friends soon,” Elijah lied in desperation.

“I won’t be long,” said Detective Scott, concentrating on something in the house.

“Where’s your uncle?”

“He just went to get us some dinner,” Elijah lied again. As soon the words came out, he dreaded it. If the pizza delivery person showed up now, Detective Scott would know Elijah was lying. “What do you need?” Elijah tried to calm himself down as he felt an increasing sense of danger.

Detective Scott had been looking around the house ever since he came in and never really took an interest in Elijah’s presence. He finally turned to Elijah and smiled. “You don’t mind if I look around do you?” the detective said, ignoring Elijah’s question. Elijah began to panic.

What was a homicide detective doing so far from his area, and why was he investigating something other than a murder scene?

“I really do have to get going,” Elijah responded, trying to sound impatient. He hoped the detective would get the message.

“It’ll just take a minute,” said Detective Scott, who was already walking away toward Elijah’s bedroom. Elijah followed him, becoming more and more uncomfortable. Something was not right about this. As Detective Scott looked through his bedroom, Elijah stepped inside.

“I’m going to make a phone call,” he stated. “I’m sure someone will be wondering where I am.” Detective Scott stood up slowly and put his hands in his pockets. They stood studying each other for a long time. Elijah may have been frightened of the detective, but he stood his ground. He was determined not to show fear. Finally, Detective Scott relaxed and began to walk out of the room.

“No need, I’m just doing my job. I’ll let myself out.” As he was walking down the hall, he said, “It’s a bit drafty in here. Your uncle would be wise to turn on the heater so you don’t catch cold. That wouldn’t look good for the courts.” Elijah glared at him as he walked out the door. He didn’t shut it until he saw Detective Scott’s car turn the corner. Uncle Stan could not get back fast enough.

Elijah had trouble focusing for the rest of the night. He had forgotten all about the pictures and the cube of dirt that had been so fascinating just a little while ago. He was now obsessed with wondering why Detective Scott was in the house. What was in his room that the detective needed to see? Was he here to check on living conditions? Homicide detectives didn’t care about child custody, did they? Elijah was so confused and mixed up that he found himself pacing the living room floor for hours, deep in thought.

Elijah desperately tried to dismiss the visit so he could get some sleep, but he kept imagining the detective going through his bedroom. He didn't look long, so he was either scared away quickly or he saw what he needed to see. Elijah looked around. There didn't seem to be anything *to* see. He had only been living in Uncle Stan's house for a short while, so he hadn't had time to fix the room as he liked. The walls were bare, the furniture was minimal, and it was mostly clean except a few clothes scattered about on the floor. All of a sudden, Elijah's stomach dropped as he remembered the treasures he kept to remember his family. He was currently carrying the pocket watch, but the others were in a box under his bed. Did the detective take them? He dove under the bed and pulled out the box. He lifted the lid and sighed. They were still there—two diaries and a locket. He felt a great wave of relief hit him as he sat frozen by his bed for a long time. It was well after one o'clock when Elijah finally felt comfortable enough to go to bed. He left on the lights, crawled under the covers, and went to sleep surprisingly fast—after he had turned on the heater, of course.

Elijah woke up early the next morning. The daylight helped settle his nerves from the visit the night before. He found that it was easier to forget about Detective Scott with something promising on the horizon. He thought about what he might find at the library and became excited. Maybe he would find a connection to his past. This prospect made Elijah shake with anticipation. He almost tripped running down the front steps.

Autumn had definitely arrived, bringing with it a cold, crisp wind. Living most of his life in a warmer climate, Elijah loved the opportunity to bundle up. The trees lined the streets and the leaves were turning yellow and red. Most of the leaves were still on the trees, but many were on the ground, wet from the moisture of the morning. During his journey, he noticed other children on their way to school. Elijah wondered when Uncle Stan would discuss the subject of

education. He knew it wouldn't be long before he would have to face a new school, but since his uncle hadn't yet brought it up, Elijah left that subject alone.

After a couple of hours, he arrived at the library. It was a huge building with tall pillars in front of the entrance. Elijah always had mixed feelings about libraries. He loved to read, and the thought of thousands of unread books was fascinating, but many times he felt lost and overwhelmed by the possibilities. It was good that he had a book in mind this time. He walked up to the front and was greeted by the librarian—a young man.

“Hi. My name is Elijah and I believe you are holding a book for me.”

“Okay, do you remember the title?” The young man turned around and began shuffling through the reserved books even before Elijah had time to answer.

“Um, something about myths and history,” Elijah said. He knew he sounded stupid, but he had forgotten to write down the title at the other library.

“Hm,” the librarian said, continuing to file through the books. “Ah, is it *Historical Myths and Analysis*?” He picked up a book with “Elijah” written on a piece of paper rubber banded to it. Elijah took the book and flipped to the back to find the index of names. It took him just a second to find “Tiberus”.

“Yes. This is it. Thank you.” Elijah walked to a table in the middle of the library and sat down.

The entry on Tiberus was very short. It started at the middle of page 234 and ended at the top of 235. He began to read:

TIBIRUS

“(MYTH) - Tiberus was widely considered the leader of the separation movement that began in 1135 A.D. The Magi, a mystical group of people, about which very little is known, separated themselves from the common public in order to avoid being killed. Many believed these people who called themselves Magi to be possessed by evil spirits, and there was a call for action to

cleanse the Magi from their towns and villages. Tiberus, sensing the Magi could not withstand an attack from the entire town, began to call for separation and the Magi went into hiding.

(ANALYSIS) – Most scholars agree that the Magi are just legend, but that there may have been a real person named Tiberus, who lived in the 12th century. There are few, if any, records of his existence, but he is mentioned a few places in medieval archives, which may lead to the conclusion he existed. Whether he led an exodus out of his village is unknown. While the Magi may be legend, more than one source has mentioned them and their connection with evil spirits. There has been no mention of Magi since the 13th century.”

Elijah felt like he learned more about the Magi than Tiberus, but he was still short of information that made any sense. Who were the Magi? Why did people think they were possessed with evil spirits? If Tiberus was trying to help save them, he was obviously unsuccessful since Elijah had never heard of a group called the Magi.

He wanted to learn more. He asked the librarian to look up other books on the Magi, but there were none he found that had anything close to the myth from the first book. The other books relating to the Magi only had to do with the Christmas story. He reached a dead end. Elijah desperately wanted to get his hands on the book at his uncle's house. That was certain to have more information.

After perusing some interesting-looking books—based mostly on the covers—he finally decided to head back to his uncle's house. Even though he had not found what he wanted, Elijah was satisfied with his day. He had fun researching at the library and spending a day walking and reading and thinking. Besides, he could locate the book as soon as he asked his uncle about it. As soon as Elijah thought of Uncle Stan, he felt guilty. He flat-out ignored his uncle's request to stay put until he got home. Hopefully, if he could explain that he was careful, Uncle Stan wouldn't be mad.

Elijah got back close to sunset and opened the front door. The phone was ringing as he walked in.

“Hello?”

“Where the heck have you been?!?” Uncle Stan asked almost shouting.

“I went to the library across town. They had this book—”

“Nevermind that,” said Uncle Stan. “So you’re okay? I’ve been calling all day.” Elijah felt horrible. It hadn’t occurred to him that Uncle Stan would be worried about *him*.

“Yes, I’m okay,” Elijah said.

“Good.” Uncle Stan seemed to immediately calm down and turned into his usual casual self. “Boy, you sure are a bookworm. Whatcha read?”

“Oh, I just researched some stuff.” Elijah wasn’t ready to admit what he was actually doing.

“That’s good. Well, I hate to tell you, but I’m going to be gone again tonight. I just wanted to check up on you and see if anything exciting happened while I was gone—besides you going missing for a whole day.” Elijah was relieved to hear Uncle Stan start to joke again.

“Nothing exciting. Oh, Detective Scott came up here and looked around.” There was a long, uncomfortable pause. “Hello?”

“I’m here,” said Uncle Stan in a tone that made Elijah worried. There was another pause, and this time Elijah let Uncle Stan speak first. “What did he want?”

“He wouldn’t tell me. He just looked around. He went into my room and—” Elijah wasn’t able to finish his sentence.

“Elijah,” Uncle Stan interrupted, “I want you to leave the house. Meet me at Liberty Park. It’s about a mile north of the house. You need to leave now. Can you do that?”

“Yes,” said Elijah, feeling the sense of panic returning. “Can you tell me why?”

“I don’t have time over the phone,” said Uncle Stan impatiently. “I really wish I could, but you’re going to have to wait until I can meet you.”

“Am I in danger here?” Elijah decided to ask directly so he didn’t spend the rest of the night worried if he didn’t have to be.

“I honestly don’t know,” Uncle Stan answered. “But to be safe, I want you to grab some warm clothes, something to snack on, and go wait for me at the park. It might take me a while, but I should be there before sunrise.”

Before sunrise? How far away was he?

“Okay,” Elijah agreed.

“You’ll be fine Eli. If you think you’ll need cash, you know where to find it. Just don’t bring the brush. That might make you look too pretty.” Elijah was thankful for Uncle Stan at that moment. He felt calm and safer knowing Uncle Stan was going to be there as soon as he could.

Elijah hung up the phone and flew to the bedroom. He grabbed his jacket and for some reason, he felt the need to take the diaries, locket, and pocket watch. He removed them from the shoebox and, luckily, they fit inside his jacket pockets. He ran down the street as fast as he could, not certain he even locked the door.

After about a quarter mile of running, Elijah slowed down so he didn’t attract attention. He got the impression that getting out of the house was more important to Uncle Stan than meeting at the park quickly. As Elijah walked he couldn’t help but feel as though he had already lived through this before, just in a different house.

Elijah arrived sooner than he expected and walked over to a nearby bench to sit down. It was deathly quiet. Usually, Elijah liked silence, but this was eerie. He began to look around.

He noticed there was a street lamp overhead lighting up the bench. “Genius,” he thought to himself sarcastically as he jumped off. Anybody passing by would see him sitting there, and he was trying to be unseen. Elijah moved deeper into the park, crouched next to a tree in the shadows, and covered up with his blanket. It was getting cold. He looked around for anything suspicious or dangerous, but the park was deserted.

A low wind blew noisily and made him shiver. Elijah was keenly aware of every sound. There was a rustle in the bushes that turned out to be a small animal. A leaf blowing on the pavement made him jump until he realized what it was. Thankfully, Elijah soon began to grow accustomed to the sounds around him, and he relaxed a little. His eyes grew tired and heavy, and before long he began to lean against the tree for rest.

When Elijah awoke, the sun was shining through the trees. It had been morning for awhile. He pulled out his pocket watch. It read 8:19. He scanned the park looking for Uncle Stan, but he was nowhere to be seen. He decided to give his uncle another hour. Elijah began to get hungry and realized he hadn’t gotten the snack his uncle told him to get—or the money. He didn’t think he would need the money, but a snack would have been perfect now.

As the hour ticked by, Elijah worried that he had not heard Uncle Stan right. He got up and walked to a nearby park sign to check. Sure enough, it read “Liberty Park”. Elijah wondered if there was another Liberty Park around, or if he was in a smaller part of a bigger park. He spent the better part of the hour looking around the area. Finally, he decided that Uncle Stan wasn’t going to show. Elijah gathered his belongings and walked back to the house. Maybe Uncle Stan came by, didn’t see him, and went back home, Elijah thought to himself. He really didn’t believe that, but there weren’t a lot of options left that he liked.

Elijah turned the corner onto his street. As he came closer to the house, his heart began to race. He saw two police cars in the driveway.

“This can’t be happening,” Elijah spoke out loud, suddenly concerned for his uncle. He walked up the driveway and watched as Detective Scott emerged from one of the cars and stood to face Elijah.