

CHAPTER 5 - - MASTER RODDICK

It took a long time for Elijah to tear himself away from the photograph of his father and uncle. Was it possible that they walked the same halls as Elijah did now? It certainly seemed like it. The more Elijah thought about it, the more it made sense. William and Stanley Hawk were also orphans, so they were probably raised somewhere like here. Was it by coincidence that Elijah ended up here, or by design? Could it have been the intention of Elijah's parents to send him here if something happened to Uncle Stan?

Elijah was so hungry for answers that he almost overlooked a glaring question. Why all the secrecy? If all that was true, why didn't Detective Scott simply say it was the will of Elijah's parents for him to go? Things still didn't add up. Maybe there was something, or someone, here that could give him some answers. He immediately thought of Master Roddick. Could he have known his parents? He looked to be their age, maybe a little younger.

Elijah had to force himself to slow down. It was tempting to ask every adult if they knew his dad, but his instincts told him that he should be careful. There may have been some truth to Detective Scott's warning that he needed protection. After all, there was a killer out there.

Elijah looked at the clock. He had a few minutes before Roddick said he would be finished with class, so he ran to the library. Maybe there was some kind of yearbook he could look through. When he asked, the librarian unloaded a massive book on Elijah that contained the names and pictures of all the students from the last few decades. He flipped through all the "H"

names. There were no Hawks listed anywhere. He began going through the yearbook, page by page, looking at the pictures and reading the names written underneath.

He found them! Right next to each other, he saw the unmistakable faces of his father and uncle, William and Stanley. However, the caption said their name was Benson, not Hawk. This really puzzled Elijah. Why did they change their name? He wished for Uncle Stan at that moment. Even if he was a criminal, Elijah had so many questions he needed to ask him. His uncle seemed to be the only person who could help.

Elijah returned the book to the librarian and raced back to Roddick's classroom hoping he wasn't too late. Roddick would have been finished with his class for ten minutes already. He turned the corner as Roddick was closing up the classroom.

"Hey, Elijah!"

"Sorry I'm late, sir," Elijah said panting.

"Oh, you're not late," said Roddick. "I finished just now. I'm afraid if you get me talking about Charles Dickens, I lose track of time. I hope my students found it as fascinating as I did. My guess is no." Roddick chuckled at his own joke. "So, where do you want to talk?"

"I'm not quite sure I know of any places around here yet," said Elijah.

"Well then, do you want a tour? I'm a great tour guide," Roddick said.

"That sounds fine," Elijah stated. "As long as we don't see Chancellor Hawthorne."

"I don't want to run into him either," kidded Roddick. "Let's just agree if we see him, we'll go in a different direction."

Elijah smiled.

Master Roddick walked him through the two long halls on the first floor and showed Elijah the different classrooms. The first floor contained the majority of the classrooms, the

library, and the cafeteria. Roddick explained things to Elijah like how to check out books and when to turn them in. He also advised him when the best time was to eat meals, which food was good and which foods to steer clear of.

“Try to stay away from the fish. We have good fishing in these parts, but for some reason, it tastes like rotten pork here. Go ahead and try it if you don’t believe me, but it’ll be the last time you do.”

Master Roddick took Elijah through the halls of the second floor. Most of the rooms were science laboratories. There were a few other classrooms scattered about.

“These classrooms are for the upper division students. If you’ve aced all your exams, and you’re still not old enough to move on to a university, you are allowed to work on a final project,” explained Roddick. “These classrooms are for those students.”

“What’s a final project?” asked Elijah.

“It’s where you get a year to basically do whatever interests you,” Roddick said. “You design your own work schedule and curriculum.”

“Wow. That sounds like fun,” said Elijah.

“It can be,” said Roddick. “But it’s also a lot of work, and not many students get to that point. But if they do, they’re advised by one of us, and we keep them on track.”

“Do you have a student you’re advising?” asked Elijah.

Roddick snickered. “No. Not officially anyway.”

“What do you mean?” asked Elijah.

Roddick paused a moment. “I’m afraid I have a little too much on my plate right now.”

Elijah wondered if he would be able to work with Roddick if he ever got to do a final project.

He felt comfortable with him and wished all his teachers could be as friendly—especially his science teacher, Master Corgan.

Finally, Master Roddick took Elijah to the third floor, which held most of the offices of the teachers. He explained to Elijah that the students could make an appointment with the teachers if they needed to see them.

“Many teachers will not see you or even let you on the floor without an appointment,” Roddick explained. “However, if you ever want to see me, you can just come up here. No appointment needed, unless I’m with another student.”

Elijah smiled. “Thanks.” They walked down the hall and into the next to last office.

“Have a seat,” said Roddick. Elijah guessed, from his office decorations, that Roddick loved water. Pictures of the ocean hung on the walls. Smaller pictures of rivers and lakes were propped on his desk. Roddick even had glass containers filled with water from all different parts of the world. They were labeled “DEAD SEA”, “ATLANTIC OCEAN”, “NILE RIVER”, and it went on and on. Roddick noticed the fascination.

“I used to travel,” he explained. “Lots of people collect dirt from different places. I collect water.”

“How do you keep it from growing stuff?” asked Elijah.

“Great question!” Roddick said, sounding impressed. “Let’s just say I take good care of it. So, what’s your story? Why are you here at Saint Phillip’s?”

Elijah had just been asked this question the other day in Hawthorne’s office, but this felt different. Less intimidating.

“My parents were murdered,” Elijah said directly.

“That’s awful,” said Master Roddick, his face looking genuinely pained to hear that. “I know this sounds like a stupid question, but how are you handling that?”

“One day at a time really,” Elijah answered. “I lived at my uncle’s house for a little while, and I felt like I was able to have a little time to deal with my family’s deaths there—”

“—but moving around isn’t helping much, is it?” Roddick interjected. Elijah nodded. Both Roddick and Elijah sat for a few seconds in silence. It was almost as if they didn’t need to talk anymore—they could feel each other’s thoughts. After the short silence, Master Roddick spoke again.

“Elijah, I don’t want to confuse you or put you through more change if I don’t have to, but I wonder if I could see you regularly. Like a mentor. You seem like someone who has his head on straight, which you’ll find is rare around here, even if it’s not obvious. I want to help you, but I understand if you have enough on your mind.”

“I guess,” said Elijah. “What would I have to do?”

“Talk. Open up. Be honest. Does that sound too hard?” Elijah shook his head. “Okay, I’ll set up standing appointments for you to come and see me. How about twice a week? Does that work for you?”

“I think so,” said Elijah.

“Good. Why don’t we make our next meeting three days from today? That will be Saturday. Are you willing to come in on your weekend?” Roddick asked, smiling.

“Sure,” said Elijah. He was actually quite excited to have something planned for the weekend.

“It’s settled then. Well, I’d better let you get going. I’m sure Hawthorne’s got a huge list of chores for you to do,” said Roddick.

“Thanks,” said Elijah. “See you tomorrow.”

Elijah ran down the stairs and arrived on the first floor. It was mainly deserted as classes were done. He raced through the back exit and ran through the gardens, past the fountain, into his hall, and up the stairs. Rounding the corner his stomach gave a lunge as he saw Chancellor Hawthorne and another sinister-looking man waiting for him. Hawthorne grinned at Elijah.

“Come with us,” he said very calmly. He walked Elijah into the bathroom and pointed to the floor. “Look at the floor.” Elijah was not sure what he was supposed to see. There wasn’t a piece of trash lying around. He looked back up at Hawthorne. Seeing that Elijah didn’t understand, Hawthorne bent down and ran his finger along the floor, then stood back up.

“You didn’t clean the bathrooms today,” Hawthorne said, holding up his finger with the smallest amount of dirt on it.

“I didn’t have time to—”

Before Elijah could finish his sentence, Hawthorne stretched back his hand and unloaded it on Elijah’s face with enough force to knock him down. Hawthorne stood over Elijah, who was now holding his face where he had just been struck. He spoke in a low voice—very slow and soft.

“Never... argue... with me.” It took everything in Elijah not to let his anger get the best of him. The weather outside must have sensed his anger because thunder roared in the distance. Elijah was able to control himself, and he bowed his head.

“Yes, sir,” he said with clenched teeth.

“Now,” said Hawthorne as calmly as ever, “you shall do your chores right after your punishment.” Elijah looked around worriedly. Hawthorne stepped aside and the other adult, a

pale-faced man with long, dark hair, stood right in front of Elijah, holding a long, flat stick. On one side of the flat stick, Elijah saw thorns about a half an inch long sticking out.

“Hold out your hands,” commanded the man in a whisper-like voice that sounded almost like a child trying to hide his excitement. Elijah did so. Hawthorne stood behind Elijah, apparently making sure he did not try to make a run for it.

Elijah let out a small whimper as the stick slammed down on his hands, and the thorns dug into his tissue. The pain surprised him. The pale-faced man raised the stick, and again he slammed it down. Elijah bit his lip, but this time, he didn't make a sound. He didn't look at his hands, but he saw the thorns with his blood on them as the pale-faced man raised up the stick a third time and slammed it down again—this time leaving it in the back of his hands—wiggling it around. The pain was almost unbearable, but Elijah wouldn't let out a sound. He just stood there looking defiantly at the man, who seemed to get a small amount of satisfaction out of Elijah's pain. Elijah thought he could detect a smile on his lips.

“Now, get to work,” Hawthorne said as he and the pale-faced man walked out. Elijah spent most of the evening scrubbing the bathrooms until the floors shined and his wounded hands throbbed. When he was done, he opened up his room door and saw Samuel doing homework at his desk. Elijah held his hands behind his back and tried to act casual. Samuel looked up when he walked in.

“Hey,” said Samuel looking up from his work. When Elijah didn't respond, Samuel looked back down and said, “You don't need to hide your hands. I got the Thorn Stick my first week too. It seems my shirt wasn't tucked in quite right, and I ran right into Hawthorne. See?” Samuel held out his hands and Elijah saw a few red scabs and wounds beginning to heal from the piercing thorns.

“You could have warned me,” Elijah said, irritated.

“I don’t really like to talk about it. It makes me hate my parents even more than I do,” said Samuel coldly.

“I’m sorry,” apologized Elijah. “It’s not your fault. I guess you’re the only family I’ve got now, so I shouldn’t make you mad at me.” Samuel turned around again and looked at Elijah directly in the eyes.

“What was your family like?” The question took Elijah by surprise.

“I dunno. They were cool. They loved each other. They loved me.”

“How do you know?” asked Samuel. “Did they never get you into trouble?” Elijah laughed. “I got in plenty of trouble.”

“Did they ever hit you?”

“Not like here,” admitted Elijah. “I got swatted a few times when I was younger I’m sure, and I was grounded loads of times. But they always explained my consequences to me,” Elijah said angrily as he remembered his recent punishment for not cleaning the bathroom soon enough.

“Did they ever do anything with you?” Elijah could sense that Samuel’s questions were more than just curiosity.

“What do you mean, like play with us or go out?”

“Yeah.”

“My parents pretty much made time to play with us whenever they could. My dad threw the ball around with me. My mom would let us lick the cookie batter when she made cookies.” Elijah couldn’t help but smile as he recalled his parents. “She even started a food fight in the kitchen one time that ended very badly. There was batter everywhere.” Both boys laughed.

“We also went on vacations every summer and sometimes during short holidays. Didn’t you ever do anything like that with your family?”

“No,” said Samuel, “I was lucky to ever *see* my parents. If they said anything to me, it was ‘goodnight’, or ‘go to bed’.” Elijah had a hard time picturing a life like Samuel’s. A life where he knew no love. No acceptance. He never realized how lucky he was to have a family like his. He wished he could tell them how much he missed them right then.

“I guess—” Elijah continued, feeling suddenly detached from his surroundings. He lowered his head and looked at the floor. He may have been speaking to Samuel, but he was talking to himself. “—I guess I know they loved me because I always knew I was important to them. It’s never something I thought about. I just felt it—like a bond or a connection to them. I knew that they would do anything to take care of me.” He looked back at Samuel. “Did you know my dad saved my life?”

“Really?” Samuel asked with huge eyes. “How?”

The two boys talked about their past for the rest of the night, even after lights were supposed to be out. In the midst of their conversation, Elijah experienced a warm sensation that slowly spread throughout his body from deep within. His sense was not danger or fear this time. It was an enlightenment—an understanding—a calling. As he spoke to Samuel about his family, Elijah somehow knew there were things he was supposed to do. He knew that he was supposed to uncover the truth about his family’s deaths, and to do that, he needed to uncover his past. This would not be as simple as reading a yearbook or talking to a relative. That was certain! He would have to dig deep. His journey would take him far beyond anything he knew. It would be difficult and even dangerous. It would take time and it could end up taking his life, but it was his duty. He owed it to his family. He owed it to himself.

The remainder of term crept by slowly. He had not been punished with the Thorn Stick since that day in the bathroom. Elijah started waking up early in the morning with Samuel to get his chores done on time. When Samuel went off to work in the kitchen, Elijah would clean the bathrooms. He would return to inspect them again as soon as his classes were finished. He made sure they hadn't gotten worse, and if they had, he would immediately clean them up. It didn't seem to impress Hawthorne when inspections came three times a week, but at least Elijah didn't have to suffer through another beating.

All of the classes continued along just fine, except for science. Elijah thought the class should be called "Sit and Read your Science Book." It was rare for Master Corgan to even address a student. He mostly just paced around the classroom making sure students were reading. One day, however, class was very different.

Master Corgan was in the middle of his fourteenth lap around the classroom when he noticed a young man who was staring off into space. As soon as he saw Corgan's eyes fixate on the boy, Elijah tried to make it look like he was reading so he could eavesdrop without being detected. Corgan walked over to the boy's desk and talked in his low, mystical voice.

"If you have something better to do in my class, by all means enlighten me." The student ignored Corgan and gave a very disrespectful huff to show his annoyance with the teacher. Elijah thought for sure the boy was done for, but to Elijah's surprise, Master Corgan smiled just slightly.

"Come with me," Corgan said softly. The student slammed his science book down, picked up his stuff and walked outside with Master Corgan. He never returned to class. In fact, Elijah found out that the student didn't come back to Saint Phillip's Academy. When he asked

other students about the incident, Elijah learned that there had been outbursts in Corgan's class before, and each student met the same fate—being ushered out and never seen again. To make matters more curious, with each dismissal, Master Corgan would miss the next day's class. Elijah had witnessed outbursts in other classes. The students were usually sent to Chancellor Hawthorne and returned holding their hands, so it was very peculiar to see Master Corgan react the way he did.

The highlight of Elijah's week was always his meeting with Master Roddick. Roddick would always check in on Elijah to see how everything was going. Elijah would start by telling him how his day was and what he learned in his classes. After a few sessions, however, Elijah and Roddick developed quite a close relationship. Roddick would help him with his homework, but he would also listen to Elijah when he wanted to talk about his parents. Elijah never mentioned the names of his parents or his uncle, but he knew when the time was right, he would talk to Roddick about them more specifically. Some things were just too personal to share at the moment. Many sessions were very casual, and they just talked about nonsense. He shared conversations about school back home, and he even told Roddick about the research he had done at the library when he lived with his uncle. Some conversations, however, were very serious. Roddick seemed like he genuinely cared about each session, regardless of the topic.

One blustery day just before Christmas, a horrific shock came to Elijah. He walked into his literature class and took his usual seat. He always sat in the front so he could hear Master Roddick clearly. Elijah wanted to do well in Roddick's class, even if he didn't really care about 19th century poetry. Instead of a cheerful Roddick coming into class, a man by the name of Pennington walked in. Master Pennington seemed very friendly, but his first words to the class made Elijah melt in his seat.

“I’m sorry to inform you, class, that Master Roddick will not be teaching for the remainder of term. I will take his place until he returns.” Elijah thought he should be used to feeling abandoned at this point, but it still hurt. After class, Master Pennington caught Elijah on his way out.

“Mister Hawk?”

“Yes, sir?” Elijah answered, still feeling upset.

“Can you stay a minute?” Elijah stayed and Pennington waited until the other students left. He obviously wanted them to be alone before he addressed Elijah. When the last student was gone, Pennington walked close to Elijah. He talked very softly.

“Master Roddick wanted me to relay a message to you.” Elijah perked up. “He told me to tell you that he is sorry for the abrupt ending to your meetings this term, and he hopes you’ll understand.”

“Why is he gone?”

“I’m not sure I can answer that, Elijah. But he did ask me to give you this.” Pennington handed Elijah a folded piece of paper. “I look forward to seeing you in class.” Pennington walked out the door and left Elijah alone. Elijah immediately opened the paper and read.

“I’M SORRY TO LEAVE ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE. I KNOW IT’S NOT WISE TO ABANDON SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN ABANDONED TWICE ALREADY, BUT I WILL TRY TO EXPLAIN WHEN I SEE YOU NEXT. I KNOW ASKING A FAVOR OF YOU NOW MAY BE A BIT MUCH, BUT IF YOU’RE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS, TRY RETRACING YOUR RESEARCH.”

Elijah was sure this was some kind of code for him. “Try retracing your research.” The only place he could think of doing research was in the library.

After his classes were finished, Elijah walked into the library and asked the librarian again for the book of students. He flipped through the pages once more but nothing stood out to

him. Elijah sat down at a table and thought. What research had he done? What was Master Roddick talking about? He looked through all of his class research, but he still found nothing.

At last, he thought of something. Elijah remembered talking with Master Roddick during one of their meetings about research he had done in the library near Uncle Stan's. He asked for a book by J.J. McClintock. They had it! He hurried to the shelf and picked up *Historical Myths and Analysis*—the book he looked through in the downtown library by Uncle Stan's house.

Elijah opened the book to page 234. He knew this was the right book because when he turned to the page, a note was sitting inside labeled "ELIJAH". He opened it and read.

"ELIJAH – I HOPE THIS FINDS YOU SOON.

*IF YOU TRUST ME, MEET ME BY THE FOUNTAIN AT MIDNIGHT ON THE
LAST DAY OF TERM. I HAVE INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH YOU. IF YOU
LET ME, I CAN TEACH YOU MUCH MORE THAN YOU CAN EVEN IMAGINE.*

-R

P.S. THE MAGI ARE REAL."