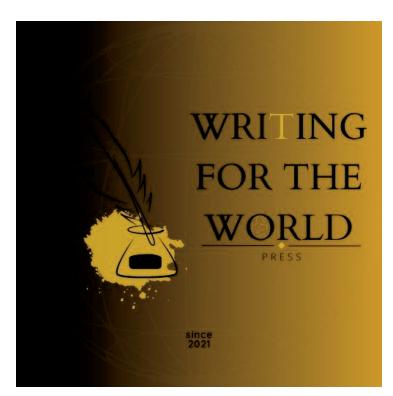


The Gyfed Series
Book 1



# THE UNTAMED FORCE

J. A. Springs



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# PART ONE

# Kafziel (Speedy one of God) "Precious"

Kafziel (Speedy one of God) "Precious" — Before the Fall

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### 1

The two shadows pinned the girl in place, their dark forms remaining ominously silent. Patiently they stood, a prelude to the encroaching presence of an even darker mass, silently advancing toward her. Its intentions were unmistakable – it hungered for her body, devoid of concern for her consent or her feelings. The impending act was driven by a perverse desire, a lustful need for the ecstasy that would follow. The girl's potential screams were inconsequential to this entity.

Across the room, Aaron was hardly standing. He leaned against the silhouette of a woman, its curvaceous figure pressed against him. But there was no room for such awareness; terror had overwhelmed him. Despite his desperation, he was powerless in the face of the unfolding horror. His dominant emotion was crystal clear – fear.

A piercing shriek sliced through the silence, marking the moment a hand recoiled, its release yielding monstrous consequences. The darker mass's rage had ignited, leading to a merciless backhand that sent the girl sprawling across the room. Aaron's gaze couldn't pierce the violence, the depths of cruelty that were beyond comprehension. This being, this dark mass, transcended humanity.

Into the unflinching gaze of the redheaded girl, Aaron looked, seeing an imagined plea for salvation in her eyes. Yet, lifelessness

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replaced the plea. A nauseating thud disrupted the void, followed by a swift crack as bones gave way. The girl's body met the wall before collapsing onto the floor, a trickle of blood tainting her lips.

Aaron's heart raced; he knew her fate was sealed. The accusatory stare from those lifeless eyes pierced him. Then, the room filled with a chilling scream, released by the malevolent entity that shared his space.

Blood surged forth, a macabre torrent. It cascaded from the ceiling, painted the walls, and coated the floor in a grotesque tapestry. Shadows retreated, leaving Aaron alone with the girl. Her vacant eyes bore into him, an unsettling emptiness. And then, she smiled. His scream intertwined with the horrific scene, a symphony of terror.

2

The darkness enveloped Aaron's room as he awoke, drenched in sweat and shivering uncontrollably. Tremors threatened to cast him from his bed, his chest heaving with each heavy breath. His heart pounded, a captive against the cage of his ribs, as if battling to escape. He teetered on the edge of unleashing a scream that would rouse the entire household. The recurring nightmare had returned, haunting him since his tenth birthday and vanishing temporarily after his seventeenth, only to reemerge with even more graphic and haunting details than before.

Seeking solace, Aaron tried to calm his shattered nerves with deep breaths. Gradually, his heartbeat ebbed back toward normalcy. Rising from the bed, he surveyed the room with vacant eyes, his internal turmoil mirroring his blank expression. Certainty about his surroundings was all he sought.

The darkness, much like when he'd fallen asleep, greeted him. However, the shadows now held an unsettling discomfort. The nightmare cast an ominous pall over the room. Reluctant to confront it, he deferred switching on the light, allowing his thoughts to find order again. The room's dimness still offered a discernible outline of his belongings.

Turning his head slowly, orientation returned. On his bed, against the wall opposite, stood the dresser. Adjacent to it loomed the closet door. A small desk and computer occupied the bedside. The darkness wasn't impenetrable; it revealed the familiar layout that reassured him of his solitude.

Aaron's attempt to dispel the nightmare's lingering remnants was futile, though he shook his head as if to banish them. The gesture proved ineffective, his heartbeat now pacing itself to a familiar rhythm. He confirmed his reality, alive in his room, yet his attempt to swing his legs over the edge of the bed met resistance. The tangled sheets around his feet explained his previous sense of restraint. However, he recognized the lie – the nightmare's resurgence over the past month had grown more vivid, denying him even this small relief.

Standing, he stretched taut muscles, acknowledging that sleep was elusive. "These muscles are going to hate me later," he mumbled to himself. His bed beckoned, yet he knew it was a futile invitation. "As if I could go back to sleep after that nightmare," he muttered, frustration tinged with exhaustion in his voice. Glancing at the alarm clock, 5:45 AM blinked back at him. A considerable stretch of wakefulness lay ahead before school. Limited options remained.

Donning his running shoes, t-shirt, and shorts, Aaron resolved to follow his habitual coping strategy for unanswerable dilemmas – he would run.

Years ago, he had charted a course, designed in the throes of the nightmare's grip when escape seemed impossible. He shared with a select few that running was an escape from sleeplessness, a partial truth. The full truth was that running, the relentless rhythm of feet pounding against pavement, diverted his thoughts from the nightmare's clutches. The challenge of moving forward, one foot before the other, regardless of chest pain or leg cramps, granted him respite

from the night's terrors.

His route, not without its challenges, led him through his neighborhood, into the nearby park, and almost to the city's edge before doubling back, a grueling eight-mile journey to pacify his mind. He'd complete it in roughly ninety minutes, each mile a testament to his determination.

Before departing, Aaron checked on his little brother, Michael, sometimes an eager participant in his runs. This morning, Michael's bed wasn't vacant, the younger boy still asleep. "He must be exhausted from soccer practice yesterday," Aaron mused aloud. Aaron treasured this solitary time, as he struggled to match his own pace when running with his determined sibling.

Slipping outside, Aaron silently embarked on his run, the darkness beginning to wane as dawn approached. His thoughts centered on the effort ahead. "One step at a time," he reminded himself, seeking a welcomed escape from the nightmare's grip. He maintained a deliberate pace that gained momentum as his muscles loosened.

"Morning, Aaron," he whispered to himself, imagining a friendly jogger's greeting.

"Morning!" he replied with determination, his focus returning to the path ahead. By the time he concluded the seventh mile, the sun crowned the distant hills, heralding a new day. As he neared his house, the sun was a blazing presence on the horizon. Fatigue and sweat testified to his effort as he ascended the porch steps. The victory lay in the nightmare's retreat, replaced only by the ache in his lungs and the burn in his legs.



"You can't keep running from your problems, son. You need

to face them square ahead," said a gravely voice that Aaron immediately placed as his father's.

Aaron looked up from the bottom of the stairs where he sagged, trying to cool his aching muscles and burning chest. He had not seen his father standing on the porch when he ran up. If his heart wasn't already racing a mile a minute, it would have been pounding now because of the fright his father's sudden appearance gave him.

His father John stood at the top of the stairs leaning on the rail and puffing gently on his pipe. He must have been inside the house and seen Aaron as he rounded the corner up the street and came out when Aaron was at the stairs. There was coolness in John's eyes that not many people cared to espy. Aaron was one of those people that didn't like to linger too long in that gaze.

John merely shrugged his shoulders and turned to reenter the house. "You been having those dreams again haven't you? No need to answer, I can see it all over you, you always ran in the morning when the dreams came." John paused; he stood with his back partially turned to Aaron and he looked as if he wanted to say something more. He kept it to himself. He trapped the thought before it ever left his mouth remaining instead as a polite silence rather than a spoken truth.

"Get up stairs and get yourself cleaned up. Your momma's in the kitchen making breakfast." John walked into the house then, still puffing lazily on his pipe. Aaron did as he was told.

Aaron was downstairs sitting at the breakfast table in no time. He wanted to eat and get out of the house as quickly as he could. 'No need to linger somewhere you're not needed,' was something his father always said. He didn't want to linger anywhere near his father today and besides, he had school. He sat down at a plate that was already prepared for him and watched his mother approach the table from the

stove.

"Good morning, baby. Would you like some more grits?" his mother, Emma, asked politely. She was smiling, as she always was, as she looked down at her first-born child. The warmth of her love enveloped him and held him close, refusing to let go. That quality in her made her the most beautiful woman in the town of Ionia and made John the luckiest man in town to have her. John had met her when he went down south to Georgia to work one summer. They fell in love, got married and he brought her back to his hometown. She still had a thick southern accent after so many years.

"I'm okay momma," Aaron said, "I'll just finish what I've got on my plate now; I need to hurry because I don't want to be late for school."

Emma smiled again and bent down to kiss her son on the forehead. She hustled around the table and put more food onto John's plate before she settled down to her own breakfast. She hadn't bothered to ask Michael if he wanted more because she knew already that he would refuse. He never ate much anyway and it was very rare if he ever cleaned his plate.

Emma looked across the table at Aaron, "Are you having those nightmares again, Aaron?" There was concern in the question, a concern that was decidedly lacking from his father.

Aaron didn't want to answer. He didn't want to lie to his mother either. He didn't want her worrying herself to death about something she couldn't fix. That was one of his mother's best abilities. She loved to worry about everyone. Aaron looked across at his father who sat reading the paper. 'Nice of you to ask too, dad, it's not like you care about me or anything like that,' thought Aaron.

"Boy," John said, calling to Aaron who nearly jumped out

of his chair. He thought his father had heard what he had been thinking. "That Baker girl came by here looking to see you. She's standing out back waiting on you."

The words his father said had barely begun to register when he found himself up and out of his chair, heading for the back door of the house. As he rounded the breakfast table, he stopped long enough to kiss his mother gently on the cheek. "I'm alright momma, I'll be fine."

He passed by his father. He was just about to reach out and kiss him on the cheek but thought better of it. It wouldn't do to kiss him, Aaron wasn't sure that his father would appreciate the gesture of love. They had never shared that intimacy much before. He should just leave and get Sara from the back porch.

Michael wasn't far behind him. He gathered up his own school bag and followed where his brother led, straight out the back door, headed towards the cut between their house and the next and on towards the street and school.

Sara stood on the back porch, looking as beautiful as she always did. Her midnight black hair was tied up in a ponytail, a few loose strands found their way down her back. She smiled sweetly at Aaron as he came out the door. She began to speak and found herself suddenly being pulled off of the back porch unable to utter even a small protest at the abruptness of it.

"Why didn't you come in for breakfast, Sara," Aaron asked as they headed past the side of his house and hers.

Sara shrugged her shoulders. She didn't mind waiting outside for Aaron no matter how long he took. Aaron had her hand in his; he glanced down at their entwined hands and tightened his grip slightly. Sara smiled at the gesture and returned the squeeze.

Aaron slowed up his pace and took the time to marvel at her beauty, at the gracefulness of her smile, at the softness of her love as they walked down the street.

"I didn't need to eat breakfast. I already ate at home. I didn't want to bother your parents this early in the morning with having to provide me breakfast, even though they would have."

Aaron was slightly surprised. Sara knew how his parents felt about her. His parents loved her. Aaron even thought that his parents loved her more than they loved him but that wasn't true. It was true that they treated her as one of their own because they knew it would take an act of God to separate the two of them.



Michael gestured towards the opposite street, a direction Aaron chose to disregard. He pressed ahead, his steps unyielding and unfaltering, determined and uninterrupted. Michael hastened his pace, eventually moving in front of Aaron, who came to an abrupt halt. A pointed finger indicated the street they had just passed, a silent communication in their sibling language.

Aaron's voice remained absent, as it often did. Michael rarely spoke, a trait that both baffled and frustrated his teachers. However, Aaron's family had grown accustomed to Michael's silence, an inherent part of who he was. Though a curious peculiarity, Michael's reticence held no mystery for those who knew him well. Speaking was reserved for only the most necessary occasions, and this didn't fall into that category.

Aware of Aaron's plan to diverge from their usual route, Michael's persistence anchored him, grounding him in the moment. Blocking the path, he stood firm, steadfast, as if planting his roots into the ground.

"Go on to school, Michael." Even as Aaron urged, his younger brother remained resolute, unyielding in his stance. So, Aaron lifted Michael's shoulders, nudging him in the schoolward direction, a mixture of gentle guidance and a swift boot to his backside.

Amidst his reluctant movement, Michael's anger manifested, subdued but palpable. He remained devoted to his brother but couldn't help feeling a pang of jealousy when Aaron's attention was divided, particularly by Sara.

Sara, the girl who waited on the porch, was a vision of beauty to Aaron. Her raven hair was tied in a ponytail, a few strands cascading down her back. Their entwined hands and shared smiles spoke volumes as they walked, her presence a welcome diversion from the day ahead.

The wind tousled Aaron's unruly brown hair, mirroring Sara's unbound hair's hypothetical movement. Engulfed by the morning traffic, their presence garnered little attention, as they walked away from school, temporarily immune to time's constraints.

"Aaron," Sara began tenderly, "I saw you running this morning. Are those nightmares back?"

Aaron's steps slowed, then halted, his gaze locking with Sara's piercing blue eyes. Within their quiet companionship, he could unburden himself without fear of judgment. "Yeah, I had one over the weekend while you were away. I meant to tell you, but somehow I knew you'd find out anyway."

A lifelong bond united Aaron and Sara, neighbors and companions from birth. Through shared experiences and time's passage, they had nurtured a love and trust that nothing could breach. Their parents had nurtured it, acknowledging that the two would inevitably fall in love and marry.

Aaron picked up his pace, leading Sara to their secret rendezvous, an abandoned gas station turned makeshift clubhouse. It was a place where local teens congregated, a space that, while sanctioned by parents, granted them autonomy.

Cautiously entering through a concealed entrance, Aaron and Sara sidestepped prying eyes. Inside, the dim space featured scattered chairs, a weathered couch, and discarded newspapers. Despite the disorder, the place was fairly clean, thanks to parents who kept the lights on and supervised their activities.

Sitting on a bench, Sara's hands found their place in her lap, her gaze locked on Aaron. The need to discuss the dream pulled at him, overshadowing their time apart. "It's not like the others. I can remember more details now," he confessed, the frustration evident.

He recounted the dream's unsettling scenes to Sara, his voice gradually fading to a whisper. Emotions stirred within him as he spoke, and Sara's touch offered a solace that words couldn't capture. This wasn't a simple tale of nightmares; it was a journey into Aaron's psyche, a realm where nightmares lurked and fears took form.

Sara reached for his cheek, her touch a soothing balm for his turmoil. "Do you remember anything else? About the park or the girl?"

Aaron's abrupt tension revealed the weight of his concerns. His grip tightened around Sara, drawing her closer, their union a silent affirmation of their bond.

"Let's not dwell on this," he declared, as if determined to reclaim the fleeting moments with Sara. Emotions propelled them towards each other, their lips meeting in a kiss charged with longing. The touch of their tongues conveyed the depth of their connection, igniting a blaze that resonated deep within them.

The passionate encounter was a testament to their love, a temporary reprieve from their respective anxieties. Aaron

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tended to Sara's needs, his focus solely on her pleasure. As their moment of shared intimacy concluded, Aaron's own desires simmered beneath the surface, a fire that would wait for the right time to be quenched.

Sara positioned herself between Aaron's legs, arms wrapped around his neck, seeking solace in his embrace. The intensity of their passion left her trembling, her strength waning. Aaron's touch was a lifeline, supporting her as they stood intertwined.

With a tender smile, Aaron whispered, "I missed you, Sara."

Sara's response was a slow nod, a silent acknowledgment of their bond, an assurance that words couldn't convey.

3

It wasn't too long till the prom came around. It was something that they had been waiting on since their senior year began. Now it was only a day away. Five months had passed since the day at the club and presently found Aaron sitting at the foot of Sara's bed watching her stride slowly back and forth across the floor.

Sara's naked feet were padded against the cold wooden floor by the luscious cream-colored carpet that swept out from under her bed. It was an area rug and didn't necessarily cover the entire floor by the necessity of its design. It was only meant to keep warm little piggies from becoming cold little piggies when you got out of bed.

Aaron watched her without saying much. He kind of liked it when she passed in front of the lamp on her dresser. It made the nightgown that she was wearing translucent. Nothing more needed to be said about that, considering the fact that he was a normal teenage boy, his inability to sleep through the night not withstanding. He wasn't about to tell Sara to stop, just yet.

Sara called earlier and asked Aaron to come over to her house that evening. She had called after they got home from school. He kept the appointment, showing up less than a minute after they got off the phone. He wouldn't have missed it for the whole world, where else but by the side of the girl that he loved would he ever want to be and besides, he had an idea of what she wanted to talk about. He thought it was either the prom or the acceptance letter for college her mother had told him about as he came into the house.

Sara was worried about something and that was way too obvious for Aaron to miss. She continued to pace in front of him, occasionally putting her fingers into her mouth to chew on her fingernails. It was a bad habit and he wondered where she had picked it up.

"Sara, would ya slow down and tell me what's bothering you?" Aaron was exasperated by her constant motion. He had been there ten minutes already and she hadn't stopped moving since he came into the room.

She thought about it and was very tempted to keep pacing but knew that the problem wouldn't get solved that way. She looked over Aaron's shoulder to the other side of the bed. On the nightstand sat a letter that she had received while she was at school. She had only read it a moment before she called Aaron to come over. The content of that letter was the source of her trepidation. If she didn't tell Aaron what was written on that single page she felt her head was going to burst. She took a deep breath. Her shoulders rose and fell with the exertion. This wasn't going to get easier no matter how long she stalled.

"I got a letter from the college today," she began.

She took a second to look into Aaron's eyes to gauge his reaction before she kept going. His face remained neutral. She wanted to know what he was thinking. It would have been a lot easier for her to try and read a brick wall for a reaction for the look she got from Aaron. His face was a mask of patience and readable as a plain white wall. She knew she had to troop onward in order to get a response. He needed more

information.

"I got accepted. I'll be able to start the fall semester as soon as summer is over."

That was only part of what she wanted to tell him. She still hadn't told him the news that was causing her so much grief; the part that put her in a school that was miles away from where Aaron was offered a full athletic scholarship. She opened her mouth, intent on telling him where she had been accepted, and found Aaron standing in front of her with his finger placed gently on her lips.

"I know, Love, I know. Just sit down and relax," Aaron said.

He slipped her gently around him and sat her down on the bed. He sat down beside her and curled his leg up underneath his other thigh so that he could look at her while he spoke. Aaron was amazed at how well he knew, just from her mannerisms, that she was willing to turn down the college she had gotten accepted to just to be with him halfway across the state. It was remarkable how much they knew one another.

"You don't have to turn down your acceptance to Dale College," said Aaron. As he spoke, a sparkle lit up in Sara's eyes. She knew without even hearing more than what Aaron had already said that they were going to be together in college.

"I turned down the athletic scholarship at State and decided to take up Dale on their offer instead," Aaron said.

Sara was surprised that he had turned down the scholarship at State and decided to go with her. She was also very happy but just as the realization sunk in she understood how much Aaron was giving up just to be with her. She wouldn't have been able to go to State because her parents couldn't afford the tuition. As things stood now, she was going on a partial academic scholarship and had a few grants

to help her shoulder the burden of the hefty tuition. With a little financial prudence and a fair paying after school job, she should be okay.

Aaron didn't have that. State was giving him a full ride and he needed it. He couldn't pay for college any other way. The athletic department at State was one of the best in the country with the potential to offer him more rewards as a professional athlete than being a student athlete at Dale College would.

Aaron surmised what she was thinking from the several seconds that she was silent.

"It wouldn't do to have you going all the way to Dale without me. Besides, Dale has a pretty good athletic department. I'm not trying to go into professional sports or anything. I just wanted the scholarship so I could get some smarts out of it," Aaron intentionally used bad grammar to emphasize his point. "Dale offered me the same full ride as State did yesterday. I called them not more than an hour ago accepting that offer."

There came a squeal of joy from Sara's direction and Aaron had to clap his hands over his ears because of it. Sara was fighting back her tears of joy. She didn't have to worry about Aaron going to school on the other side of the state and she also didn't have to worry about him not being able to pay for college.

She was about to wrap her arms around him and pull him onto the bed where she could accidentally touch him here or there while they wrestled and tumbled around. She wasn't going to get the chance. She heard her mother calling from down the hall.

"Aaron, you still up here son?" Norma asked. "You know how late it is, the prom is tomorrow and you two can see each other then." Her voice was getting louder as she neared the bedroom door. She was giving them plenty enough warning in case the two of them were doing something they shouldn't be doing.

Sara's mother rapped her knuckles twice gently on the door before she entered her daughter's bedroom. She saw them sitting on the bed and smiled. "You get yourself home before you worry your mom, Aaron. Sara's gonna be here when you get up in the morning, she ain't gonna disappear."

Aaron stood up and quickly kissed Sara on the cheek. He passed by Mrs. Baker and also kissed her on the cheek. She clutched him to her chest and gave him a hug before shooing him out of the room. As Aaron walked down the hall towards the stairs, he could hear the two laughing and giggling. Obviously Sara had told her mom the news about school.



Aaron exited the Baker house through the back door. The backyard of his house and Sara's house was linked together and only separated by a small hedge that he easily jumped over instead of going around like a normal person. He wasn't about to let anything slow him down tonight. Not on this night, right before the prom and right after he told his girl about their being able to go to college together.

Aaron paused just a few feet short of the back porch. He thought he heard something coming from there and was unsure what it was. It was very dark in the yard; the light from the street was unable to distill the darkness in the back of the houses. He squinted his eyes and waited for them to adjust to the darkness. He focused on the direction the sound came from.

Aaron heard the sound again before his eyes could fully adjust to the dark and let him know what was there. He recognized what had drawn his attention and realized what had made the noise in the first place. It was his father sitting

in his rocking chair on the back porch. His mother had set him out to get some of the night air before she would eventually put him to bed for the night.

Three months ago, John had been in a hit and run. He was the unfortunate victim. He was lucky to have survived it, but Aaron didn't consider that to be any sort of luck. His father had gone into a coma for three days and when he woke up, he wasn't the same man as before. He was worse. He never gave Aaron a chance to do anything without immediately condemning him for his failure or eventual failure, it didn't matter if Aaron could accomplish the task or not.

He didn't want to see his father just now. He really didn't want to see him at all; he would rather go around the house to the front door just to avoid his father. He was just about to do that when his father called out to him.

"Who is that? That you, Aaron? What cha doing sneaking around out here, don't you know I could have killed you with this shotgun?"

Aaron wasn't worried about getting shot with the shotgun. The shotgun didn't exist but his dad couldn't understand that. He had been rendered slightly delusional from the coma. The doctor's said it would only get worse. There was no need for any false hope. All the tests the doctors conducted showed the brain damage. It was irreversible and would eventually leave John in a catatonic state. He would be no better than a vegetable.

Aaron stood where he was. He figured that if he just ignored his father then he would be able to slip out of sight once the delirium set in again. The delirium came and went and the easiest way to know was if he used your name or not.

"I see you there, boy. You can't ignore me all night," John barked roughly. "Get over here in the light so I can see you better."

Aaron slipped to the side. There was a little light coming

from the glass pane in the back door of his house. That light was measly and wouldn't show much but from Aaron's angle it already showed way more than he wanted to deal with. The accident and subsequent surgeries had mutilated his father's once handsome face. There was a patch of hair missing on his head from where the car's tire had run him over. That side was also slightly deformed and was the starting point of the scar that ran down the length of John's face, across his jaw and ending just below his chin. Aaron saw enough, even in this bad lighting.

"What do you want," asked Aaron with a sarcastic drawl. He wanted this chance encounter to end as quickly as it possibly could. No good would come of it; that much Aaron had already figured out. He could smell the alcohol pouring from his father's pores from where he stood, not more than ten feet away now.

John's hand twitched; it was yet another symptom of the damage to his brain and central nervous system. "Come closer so I can see you, boy."

Aaron wasn't about to move. He didn't want to get close enough to his father to see more of the damage that had been done. He didn't want to have to see the reality of it and face it so blatantly. He did move, despite his inhibitions, after a moment's hesitation. He respected his father, even in his current condition and nothing would change that. He regretted his earlier outburst of sarcasm.

He loved his father and wished that this had never happened to him. He just wished that his father had told him he loved him as well. That would have meant more to Aaron than anything else in the world. His father had only shown that love, somewhat reluctantly, but never mentioned it verbally.

Aaron stepped forward slowly, aware of the diminishing distance between them and realizing that the only thing separating them was the rail on the porch. His father's mobility was lessened dramatically and he could be out of arms reach within seconds but that still didn't stop Aaron from creeping forward and trying to keep the distance between them.

The accident made his father unpredictable. There were a few times when his mother would mediate in a situation between Aaron and his father. A situation that had the potential to quickly degenerate and spiral dangerously towards violence.

As for John, he knew his son was wary of him. There wasn't much he could do about it now, not after so many years. He had always kept Aaron at a distance, not wanting to get too close to him, not wanting to love him too much because he never knew when he was going to lose him. Now things were at a head, he wasn't the man that he used to be. He couldn't hold his oldest son in his arms anymore and tell him that he cared, that he loved him. He didn't have the ability to communicate on that level anymore. John's temper flared slightly. He kept a tight leash on it. It wouldn't escape him this time, not when he was so close to telling his son the truth.

"I don't know why I didn't tell you this sooner," John whispered quietly. Aaron had to take another reluctant step forward just to hear what he was saying.

"You don't deserve any of this. We should've warned you a long time ago about the girl. We should've told you about this damn town...everything that happens in it happens for a reason, son." John stopped talking. He would have kept going but he had to turn and see who was coming out of the back door of the house. Aaron could see his father's left eye when he turned around. It was glassy and still and it bothered him to look at it. John leaned over till the right side of his face was made clearer to see by the light. It was

pockmarked with scar tissue from the reconstructive surgery.

John knew he wasn't going to be able to finish telling his son everything he wanted to say. He chose his words carefully, knowing that he didn't have much time and he had to tell him something. He inclined toward Aaron whispered conspiratorially, "Don't you forget about those dreams, they're a warning to you. You keep your eyes open boy and don't let them..." John got interrupted before he finished, just as he knew he would.

"You hush now, John," Emma cooed, "you scaring the poor boy half to death with your crazy talk." Emma stood in the doorway and smiled sweetly at Aaron as she spoke to John. She smiled at him like a child needing reassurance and receiving it in a slight gesture. She had heard some of the things that her husband had mentioned to Aaron and she came out to stop him from telling too much. She didn't want her son to know about the sad history and curse of the town. She'd save him from it as long as she could. She walked over to John and pulled the blanket around his shoulders. "It's time you got to bed, John." She helped him out of the chair and to his feet.

"You gotta tell him, Emma. He got a right to know the truth. Them dreams is a warning," John spoke harshly and with a little difficulty. His speech was slurred from the consumption of the alcohol and the damage to his jaw. Spittle dripped from his mouth with every word that he spoke, making him look child like and weak. He tried in vain to fight off her hands but his strength wasn't up to it, not tonight. She led him through the door and up the back stairs to their bedroom where she settled him into bed for the night.

Aaron was more than a little confused. His father had been rambling and he had never known him to ramble on like that before. Some of the things that his father had said, even though Aaron didn't understand any of it, were unnerving to say the least. Aaron walked into the kitchen and sat at the table. He hadn't been there long when his mother came back in from having put John to bed. His first thought was to ask his mother what his father had been talking about. He wouldn't get the answer that he wanted. His mother would start in with her concern and then they would be on a totally different subject altogether with him forgetting what he wanted to ask.

"Did you eat yet, Aaron?" she asked in her matronly voice. "There're left-overs in the fridge. You go on ahead and make yourself a plate. You gotta eat so you can stay strong." Emma sat down next to Aaron and placed her hands on his. The look in her eyes was warm and caring and it made Aaron blush despite himself.

"I'm fine, momma," Aaron said softly, smilingly. He was back in good spirits, having dismissed his father's ranting as effects of the alcohol. He was thinking again about Sara. He kissed his mother on the cheek as he stood up and made his way out of the kitchen. He went to his own room so that he could get some sleep.



Emma sat in the kitchen a moment longer, happy in the fact that she had such a wonderful family even with all of the tragedy that had occurred recently. That calm didn't last long. Some dark feeling settled across the room like a heavy cloak. Emma felt it settle on her uncomfortably. The joints in her bones began to cramp up in pain as they always did when they were cold. The heat in the kitchen began to fade, only to be replaced with a chill that Emma couldn't explain until she noticed the shadows.

Emma could see the shadows in the kitchen coming to life;

they moved restlessly like a troubled sea. At first she thought that it was an over active imagination playing tricks on her. She wanted desperately to hold on to that belief but knew, deep in her soul, that it wasn't true. She shivered subconsciously — it wasn't from the temperature in the room. She knew what had come to visit her.

She had never been in its presence, only told about it. Once in this entity's presence was enough for the imprint to last a lifetime. She never wanted to have this experience again and would have gladly died knowing that it had never occurred. Nothing in the world was more terrifying to her than the thing that had just come to visit her.

"John didn't mean what he said out there. He was drunk, that's all. He didn't know what he was doing," Emma was calling out to the shadows in the room.

There wasn't a living soul present to hear what she said. Another chill passed through Emma, a coldness that sent a shiver racing through her — deep in her — cold enough to freeze on the hottest summer day. It traveled down her spine and ended up as a tingling sensation in her limbs. She wasn't cold; it was a reaction to the thing that was in the room with her. The penumbral that lived unnaturally in the shadows. It was on the far end of the kitchen and the feeling she got was that it was becoming more powerful as the seconds ticked by.

A slight breeze played through the room, rattling the glass in the cupboard doors and causing the kitchen door to begin swinging closed. It was a breeze that had no business being inside of a house. It was eerie to say the least. Emma nearly jumped out of her chair when she heard the back door slam shut.

Emma gathered up what strength she could to challenge the presence coalescing around her. "You leave the Baker girl alone, you hear me. The Baker's have given you what you wanted and you got no reason to take her away just cause she's sweet on my Aaron."

She had been looking around wildly, from one corner to the next, looking for the thing that had come to visit. Emma turned towards the darkest part of the room. It was here that she would see the thing that was to appear before her. There had been no noise. No breath or softly treading slipper had betrayed the entity that stood in the darkness. Her abrupt appearance alone commanded Emma's attention. Emma stared in dread fascination at the entity before her. It took the outward appearance of a little girl.

The little girl looked to be no more than ten or eleven years old. Her blond hair was partially tied up so that what was enclosed cascaded from within the blue silk ribbon that bound it. The hair that remains free of the bonds flowed gently across her shoulders. Her tiny hands were clutched before her belly. Her downward gaze denied a view of the fair blue eyes that shone from the cherubic face. She wore a simple, white dress with an empire bodice. Across her midriff was a baby blue, silk sash. It was tied in a bow in the middle of her back.

She spoke, and when she spoke the doors on the cabinets shuddered. The glass panes therein threatened to shatter. She spoke without lifting her head up to look at Emma. Her lips never parted; her mouth never actually produced the words that were said.

"You can't tell me what to do."

Emma knew it was the little girl who was speaking. She didn't know *how* she knew but she did. She felt her own courage becoming small and inferior to the power of the thing in the room with her. It evaporated like steam from a hot pot of water — as quickly as it had emerged. When Emma spoke, she found that her voice was tiny and insignificant. She didn't know if her voice could carry the words she wished to say.

"I only meant to say that you already have what you want from the Baker's. Norma and Leon done gave you their firstborn. I didn't mean to imply nothing by it that you couldn't do as you please but why you need to take away Sara?" Emma's voice was pitifully frail and without conviction. Her pleas fell on dead ears.

A long moment passed and she received no answer. She wouldn't. After so long with no answer, she felt a new dread entering her.

"Did you come for my Aaron?"

Emma thought the sound of her own voice was pathetic as she tried to query the thing standing before her.

"You forget who I am. I don't answer to you." The voice that spoke back to Emma was that of a child. The voice was innocent and sweet sounding but not at all kind. This wasn't a child clad in a white Sunday dress with its blue sash tied neatly around the waist standing before Emma; the edges of her huge bow showing from behind her elbows. "What is my name?" There was sweet malice in her voice.

Emma didn't answer.

The little girl looked up. Her stunning, ice blue eyes created a disparity when viewed against her alabaster skin. Those eyes caught Emma within their piercing gaze. Emma felt trapped within those eyes. She felt as if her whole world was exposed to those eyes. She felt as if those eyes could see everything that she had ever done. That they would reveal her unimaginable fear.

"What's my name?" repeated the little girl.

"Pre...Pre...Precious," Emma stammered.

"I am Precious. I am the Forgotten Child of Ionia. I am the Dark Daughter of Ionia."

Emma was quite aware of what the apparition was. She was also aware that she didn't want to be this close to her. She made as if to move and found herself face to face with

Precious. Precious had closed the six-foot distance between them in the blink of an eye. Emma never saw her move.

"Sit down, bitch," Precious hissed vehemently. Her face was screwed up in anger — her brows furrowed, her smile malicious, and her bright blues eyes colder than arctic ice.

Emma sat down like a stone. The chair she fell on nearly skidded from under her, almost causing her to be dumped to the floor.

"Listen to me," Precious said, venom dripping from her every word, "You will shut that old fat bastard of a husband of yours up. I don't want to hear him say another fucking word to Aaron. Do I make myself clear?" Precious waited for a response that was slow in coming.

Emma nodded. Her head bobbed up and down like a wooden marionette.

"Aaron is mine. I *need* him and I'll take him when I'm ready," Precious smiled.

She reached out her hand and stroked Emma's cheek, wiping away a tear that had somehow fallen. Precious looked forlornly at the tear as she took her hand away from Emma's face. Her face relaxed from the hideous look it held before as she looked at the tear as if she had lost something in it. She tore her eyes away from her fingers and wiped them on her dress. Precious' touch on Emma's face had been so soft and gentle, a complete contrast to the thing that she appeared to be at times.

Precious turned and walked away towards the shadows. "Save your tears. The first born, before all others, are mine; that was the promise that I spat through the flames as I burned and I won't change that now."

Emma watched the little girl disappear into the shadows as if her small form were one of them. When she knew that she was finally and truly alone, she flung her hands to the table and dropped her head to her forearms. She began to sob

#### The Untamed Force

uncontrollably. It took about an hour for her to gather herself together enough to go upstairs and play at being asleep. She never saw her youngest child, Michael, slip up the steps before her and retreat to his room. This was the first time that she had ever met Precious and she hoped that it would be the last time ever in her life that she would have to be in her presence again.

## explicitus est liber



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