Preface

"I miss her."

Those three words were the bane of my existence. There was nothing I could accomplish without worrying about those words. They were my death sentence. My future wouldn't be the same as long as those words existed.

It was late spring flowers were in bloom. Life was slowly turning to normal. Well, I thought it was turning to normal. Who would have thought all the painful memories would come flooding back to me? I sure as hell didn't expect any of it to happen. Yet it did.

Earlier that year, she up and left me alone. I didn't even want to go down this road. The painful memories are still too fresh in my mind. I'm just trying to keep the peace. There's no reason for any of it to be messing with my mind like it is. But well… it is. What else am I supposed to do about it?

The thoughts will not leave my mind no matter how difficult I try to make them leave. I want them gone. I want to be able to sleep.

Well tonight sleep will elude me as I tell this ridiculous story that keeps spinning around in my brain. If you don't enjoy it? Well that's your own fault. Don't come running to me because you decided to read something that was stuck in the mind of a penguin.

What on earth are you even talking with a penguin to begin with? You don't want to be messing with penguins. Diseased creatures of the night without any sort of anything. No back story. Nothing. It's all about control. Controlling the mind to controlling the thoughts and actions of one’s self.

Wow it's late. I really should be getting to bed, but there is no time like the present because this story is so damn pressing it must be told. My brain won't let me sleep! Do you not understand the difficulties that I am dealing with? My entire brain won't let met sleep. Forget about the whole, oh only 10% of your brain actually does the thinking. I suppressed all of those damn thoughts so far back into my mind… and they decided to pop up now. Now of all days. Why are they coming to the surface now? It doesn't make any sense. I'm not sure I want it to make any sense.

The AC is on, I can feel the cool breeze flowing past me at this very moment. It feels nice. Almost a perfect entry point to the story that shouldn't be written. I will probably delete this after I'm done with it. It might never see the light of day. We will have to wait and see what happens though won't we? Yeah that's exactly what I was thinking.

Don't expect this to be of some great design or anything. I highly doubt any of it will make perfect sense by the time I am done telling you this tale of imagination… this reason for my non sleep.

And so it begins.

Sleep is for wimps. Let's just throw that out there while we're thinking about it okay? Sleep is for cowards and those who don't enjoy thinking. It is that part of the brain that thinks; hey I don't want to do anything so I will let you sleep. When the brain is awake, there isn't anyone getting any sleep. Including yours truly.

Why bother with something you can't even begin to deal with? The dog is sleeping just fine. Snoring away. So is the wife. My how cute and cuddly the wife and dog look together.

Me? I'm up and writing this damn book. Which I haven't even began the story yet! Why do you allow me to ramble on as though nothing is going on? Why?

I bet you don't even have an answer do you? No, I didn't think so.

Here we go.

Chapter One

The Little Girl

It was only the beginning. What exactly was the beginning? Joe wondered that for a good portion of his life. He had been cursed with anxiety as a child and it grew with him. There wasn't anything his mind couldn't or wouldn't think up just to fuck with Joe's thinking.

To say it was a cursed way of living? Well that was beyond anything Joe could even comprehend. The doctors had prescribed medicine to him, like that would do any help. Those silly doctors and their medical miracles.

Personally, Joe wished they had prescribed something along the lines of weed. Medical Marijuana was the "official" name of the plant. But well let's face it, it's weed, what else are you gonna call it. Joe just wanted to feel normal. But what exactly was normal?

Since the sixth grade, Joe had issues being around people in public. He would puke in the mornings before school and would be relieved when everything was all over. It was especially worse when he had a test to take.

Now, Joe didn't know he had anxiety. That didn't come till many years later when he was in his early twenties. So when I tell you that his early life was really difficult? Yes I do mean it. It was extremely difficult.

Being the outsider of the group, Joe didn't understand the meaning of everyone gets a chance to speak. He went along with what everyone else was doing. If it seemed good to them, it seemed good to him. There wasn't anything he wasn't willing to try, given the opportunity to being forced into it of course.

The panic attacks weren't too difficult to deal with. A few moments of slow breathing, followed by a Xanax, and Joe was just fine. He would then sleep for a good portion of the day and into the next day where things would mellow out and clam down. He enjoyed the calming down part. Xanax messed with Joe's dreams. Nothing too crazy, but he felt being a penguin on a few occasions merited a warning or two.

Joe pretended to be a penguin in real life for a bit. He was on social networks where that was the norm it would seem. The social networks were a place where Joe could get away from everything. He could escape real life there and just be… whatever it was he wanted to be.

Writing came normal to Joe. He would write about whatever came to mind. Sometimes it was just a place to quietly contemplate how terrible his life was., and then he would change it. Changing life came easy when it was written down on a piece of paper.

That's what Joe enjoyed most about writing. He could change anything he wanted to as long as it was his to control. When someone else walked in and messed with Joe's formula, well that was no longer his work and he couldn't take credit for it. That was the breaking point. It was the final straw beyond anything else that was to be determined.

On Joe's thirty-fifth birthday, he decided it was time to actually do something with his life. Living on his parents couch wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

Walking outside, he faced the bright summer day. It was the end of July. One of the hotter months was coming to a close. Joe enjoyed that fact. He could handle the winter a bit better than the summer. So when summer was at an end, it was time to celebrate.

Joe went downtown to a local bookstore and applied for a job. He was surprised a week later when they interviewed him a second time, and he got the job. It wasn't anything special mind you, but it was a job. Something to pay the bills and keep him out of trouble while he did what he enjoyed best. Reading and writing was Joe's craft.

His parents were rather proud of Joe. It wasn't everyday their son decided to go out into the world and make something of him. They figured they would help him out and kick him to the curb, which they did. Joe was grateful for this, it meant he had to find a place to stay quickly.

There was a small room above the bookshop the owner rented out. At the moment it was vacant. Joe applied for room and board and was granted it. He agreed to have part of his paycheck taken out for utilities and rent.

Yes, Joe was on his way.

During the nights, when Joe wasn't working, he would write in his small book. It was a makeshift journal. It wasn't anything too prestigious or fancy. It was really rather simple. A book with lined paper held together by superglue and duct tape. Joe always kept a pencil on hand in case some new idea came to his mind. He was grateful for all that had been granted him.

A day after moving into the apartment, Joe noticed some strange occurrences happening in the place. He could hear the voice of a small child crying out for her mother.

"Mama" she would call out. "Mama?"

At first it frightened Joe. Why would someone be calling out for their mother? Why would someone who Joe couldn't see be calling out for their mother?

Nervously, he crept downstairs into the store. Joe looked around with a flashlight in his hand. He could see no one. Perhaps he was dreaming it? Yes, that must be it.

Joe quickly walked back upstairs and laid down. It was time to get some shuteye before the morning shift. He would have a talk with the manager in the morning. Perhaps that would clear things up.

Morning came quickly. Joe's manager was out of town on vacation. He left Joe with simple instructions. Don't burn the place down while I'm gone. Joe figured he could handle that.

The used bookstore was a wonderful place to work in. There were first editions collecting dust long forgotten and abandoned. Joe sometimes felt like a first edition just thrown to the curb never to be read again. He was always amused by what people decided to bring in.

Joe decided to collect the first editions for himself. He would pay t he store back in his weekly check. Before long, Joe had his own small collection of books upstairs. They stopped collecting dust and were now being read. What an amazing turnabout for them. Who knew how long those books would be there!

At business close the first day, Joe locked up and headed upstairs for some shuteye. It was then he heard the voice.

"Mama!"

The little girl screamed out this time. Her voice was cracked as if someone were chasing her. Something awful for sure.

"Mama! Please help!"

The voice said again.

Joe turned quickly around on the steps and started back down into the bookstore.

A young child around the age of four met him. She was wearing a cotton white dress and was covered in blood.

Joe stopped dead in his tracks. They eyed each other, Joe and the little girl. She screamed at once. Joe rushed to her side and tried to calm her down.

"No… shhhh" Joe said. "I'm friendly. I'm not going to hurt you."

Joe looked quickly around to see if anyone had come in his direction. No one was looking in the store. Perhaps they couldn't hear the ghost child screaming for help.

Relieved, Joe calmed the girl down. "What's your name?"

The girl looked at Joe, disbelief filled her eyes. Was he actually talking to her? No, it couldn't be. No one had ever talked to her in all of her years at the bookstore, no one had ever reached out to her.

Struggling, the little girl found her composure and her voice. "Suzie." She said carefully.

Joe relaxed and sat back. "Nice to meet you Suzie, my name is Joe." He smiled at the girl.

Suzie sighed and then allowed a laugh. "You're different than the rest." She said.

"Oh?" Joe asked. "Why?"

Suzie shrugged her shoulders. The red blood disappeared from her. Her skin was clean and pale. "I don't know, you just are."

Joe laughed. "Okay, sounds good to me. Why were you screaming?" He shuffled his feet back and forth on the floor.

Suzie shrugged. "I don't know. Living here for so long with so many people to talk to, and none of them care. So I figured why not scream? Scream until someone listened to me."

Joe nodded. He could understand the sentiment. When there was something to get your attention, why not give it a shot.

"You're dead." Joe said as plain as day. "A dead little girl living in a bookstore."

Suzie nodded.

"Yes, but this wasn't always a bookstore."

Joe leaned forward. "Oh?"

Suzie nodded again. She wiggled her finger.

Joe came closer to Suzie where her mouth was close to his ear.

"People died here."

Chapter Two

The Mortuary

Suzie walked around the main parlor of her family's mortuary. She enjoyed helping her father with the bookwork he had for the day. It was a simple life, being the daughter of a mortician. It was just the two of them, Suzie and her dad. Quite a life they led.

People would come in and drop off a body to be cleaned up. Well to Suzie they were just people. To her father they were something else. A coroner here, a doctor there, they were all important people that had to do with the dead.

It wasn't much, but it managed to pay for a living.

Suzie and her father lived upstairs of the mortuary where a small two-room apartment was. It was rather small, but it took care of the two quite well. Suzie enjoyed living there. She never had a dull moment.