

Undead

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Chapter 1

“The boy’s soul is our only chance at stopping the apocalypse. Take him now.”

* * *

A heart monitor whined steadily. I’m floating above a hospital emergency room looking down at my human form lying still on a gurney. Its unblinking eyes are glazed and half-lidded; its face pale. A slender, luminous cord stretches out the back of my human head and connects into the back of my spirit head.

“Code blue!” a nurse stated.

“Thirty cc’s Heparin!” a doctor ordered.

I watched as the doctor sunk a needle into my body’s chest. The luminous cord constricted and yanked me down into myself. My nervous system jump-started and kicked on my circulation. The heart monitor beeped. I drew a breath. Odors of antiseptic and bleach swirled into my nostrils.

“Got a pulse!” the nurse stated.

Penlight shone into my right eye and then my left.

A tall man dressed in surgical attire rushed into the room and hastily looked me over. He had cotton-colored hair and a snowy white moustache that merged with a long, flowing beard.

“Prognosis?” the cotton-haired man asked, and his forehead bunched with concern.

A stethoscope pressed against my chest.

“He’s stable,” the doctor replied. “I’m moving him to the ICU to do a full spectrum and find out what’s going on.”

She and the nurse turned to look at the heart monitor. The cotton-haired man quickly withdrew a golf ball-size crystal from his right front pocket and held it above my chest. Blue light flashed from within its multi-faceted surface causing my muscles to stiffen. The cotton-haired man quickly re-pocketed the crystal.

Despite the gleaming, sterile room, snake-like bands of black shadow burst from the walls and dropped to the floor. The doctor and nurse didn’t notice.

Unable to move, I laid in horror as the shadows whipped over the contours of my body into my ears, nose, and down my throat. My belly constricted. My vision blurred. My breathing stopped.

The heart monitor whined steadily.

“We’ve lost the pulse!” the nurse stated.

My spirit lifted from my body; an exact copy of my physical self formed of glowing plasma. The cord connecting us flared white and dissipated into sparkle. A panoramic view of everything I’d ever done appeared in incredibly quick progression: standing in my crib,

learning to walk, to ride my bike, my first day at Whitmore Elementary School. Scenes of my life played like a movie in fast-forward: fishing with dad at the pier, my freshman prom with Sarah, getting my driver's license last September.

My mind spiraled through the events of my past up until today when I collapsed on the lawn, heard Ma scream from the kitchen window, and saw Sarah rush out the back door toward my fallen form.

The image dissolved into the emergency room and below me the frantic activity of the doctor performing CPR.

"Still coded!" the nurse informed. "Going on four minutes!"

"Operating cart!" the doctor ordered, and she reached for a scalpel. "Get me a rib spreader!"

"Disregard that request!" the cotton-haired man countered.

"I've still got time!" the doctor stated. "I can save him!"

The cotton-haired man shook his head slowly. "It's over."

The doctor's face was almost as white as mine on the gurney. She stood for a long moment holding the scalpel close to my body's chest and then placed the instrument back onto the surgical tray.

The cotton-haired man squinted at the wall clock. "Time of death, 1:17 P.M. I'll notify those in the waiting room that the patient has expired. The mother, and, I believe, the girlfriend, are in there."

"This doesn't make sense," the doctor said, and she peeled off a latex glove. "The patient was in perfect—"

Sound disappeared and an overwhelming feeling of calm enveloped me. My vision tunneled and I propelled upward through deep, impenetrable darkness.

I stopped, and suddenly my world was bright and filled with pain, as if my skin had caught fire. My vision adjusted to the surroundings. I was on the front porch of my house. Shafts of sunlight beat down mercilessly from the clear blue sky. I reached out for the doorknob, but my momentum carried me forward through the wood and into the foyer. Sunlight beamed from the windows like lasers.

I ran across the hallway, through the closed basement door, and down the steps into the dark, cool cellar. Filamentous illumination drifted off my spirit body like rising steam. My spirit flesh itched. I scratched and my fingertips ran along what felt like real skin. I patted my chest and thighs, they felt solid. I knew I was dead, but all my mortal emotions, experiences, and memories were intact. I knew where I was. I knew who I was. It was as if I were an identical blueprint of my former self.

I went back up the steps and pushed my head through the closed door. The sun had set and the house was dark, except for the kitchen. The wall clock showed 8:45 P.M. Hours had passed in what I perceived as seconds.

I stepped all the way through the door, looked for my reflection in the windows, and saw none.

I headed into the kitchen. The glow cast by the overhead fluorescents heated my spirit flesh, but the discomfort was bearable. Ma sat at the table in her ratty blue robe. Her

face looked chalky and devastated. Tears streamed from the corners of her eyes and coursed down her cheeks. Her fingers gripped her coffee mug.

“My husband and my son,” she muttered, and her lips contorted with grief. “Both gone on the same day. Why Lord? Why have you taken my loved ones from me?”

I stood for a moment in absolute shock. It had been two years since a sudden and mysterious stroke had left my father in a vegetative coma at Pine Brook Nursing Home. Ma and I did our best to keep him comfortable, though the doctors said there was no brain activity so he wouldn't know the difference. I even got a before-school job at Pine Brook cooking breakfast three mornings a week so I could spend time with him, sometimes talking to him for an hour or more after my shift, hoping by some miracle that he'd respond. He never did.

Ma raised the mug, sipped, and then set it, hands trembling, back onto the table. I reached to hug her, but my arms passed through.

“I'll be right back,” I whispered into her ear.

I turned and walked through the drywall, through the insulation and vinyl siding, and into the night. Moths fluttered dizzily and bumped the back porch light. Crickets chirped. A car droned down the street.

The world was as it should be.

When I stepped back through the wall, 10:45 P.M. beamed from the stove's clock and Ma's sobs emanated from upstairs.

“Say goodbye,” a voice behind me growled. “Your time on the Earthlevel is over.”