

LIST OF WORDS ON COVER

Narts	Ördög
Fomoire	Stregoica
Argonian	Daityas
Babylonians	Vritra
Hitties	Wyvern
Assyrians	Magog
Sárkány	Nephilim
दैत्य	Das Herrenvolk
Oni	Apep
Ahriman	Trolls
Bobbi-Bobbi	Ddraig Goch
Sigbin	Hanseatic League
Phillistines	χθόνιος
Hivites	βασιλίσκος
Canaanites	גוג ומגוג
Jebusites	جوج أمو جوج أي
Amoites	Scultone
Amartya	Gog
Nāga	The Immortals
Nidhogg	Wampyr
Zipacna	Nosferatu
Chthonic	Pokol
Aswang	Basilisk
Theriantrope	Pratorean Guard
Mörder des Lebens	

Ari Dynasty

Ari Dynasty

Trilogy by J. J. Mikhale

Ari Dynasty by J. J. Mikhale is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



INTRODUCTION

This book has been an on-going process of my life, and all the experiences I have had growing up only contributed more to the characters and the details of this story. My parents had been reading to me since I was little, and I had learned to read by the time I reached Kindergarten. Throughout elementary school I studied phenomenons (Yeti, Bermuda Triangle, black holes, time travel, alien abductions, ghosts, demons, angels, et cetra.) Many of these I hoped religion would address, and searched through the Bible hoping to find some clues. In addition to my interest with the supernatural—meaning things science had difficulty explaining—I surrounded myself with movies and music. I remember having nightmares after watching some suspenseful and scary movies; suddenly I was hooked on the anxiety I felt in my stomach caused by fear of the unknown. Even to this day I search for movies which send chills down my spine, the rush of a free-fall to my stomach, and the spike of adrenaline throughout my body. The first such movie I remember invoking these nightmares was Ernest Scared Stupid with Jim Varney. The trolls had given me nightmares, but in the movie, Ernest had found a way to defeat the beasts—milk. I often thought on this principle: a hero in danger is not as engaging if there is no hope of them winning. I had a predominantly sheltered childhood in the years following. The second movie, my sister introduced to me just before my sixth grade year began, was Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. I recall the scene with Jimmy Stewart in the wheelchair is confronted by the tenant who killed his wife. The shadows across the face of the man made it difficult to

Ari Dynasty

distinguish the person. But learning what made stories scary was not the only lesson I found in the movies. It was plot twists you never predicted. It was around the same time that I started writing that *Sixth Sense* had become popular for the unexpected ending. All of this prepared me for starting to write my book.

Back in the fall of 2001, my two friends and I became bored with our sixth grade teacher's lectures—being the artistic and creative bunch that we were—we began to draw comic strips. Though my mother was an art teacher, and I had been drawing since out of her womb, I found comic strips to be a challenge. To draw a stationary person per frame, yet to have them appear in motion was a difficult concept to capture. Since I lacked the artistic skill at the time to draw in frames, I thought I would instead write down a story and share it with my two friends. Originally the book was about these giants with the tail of a lizard, the legs of a bull, the body of a man, and the face of a troll. I had titled it *Legend of the Shadow*, and at some point was going to have the “Shadow” pull the hood back and show its face. As the book progressed I found the hood to be more effective and dispensed with the idea of different parts of animals. Only the lizard tail was left. Throughout the sixth grade year I continued to write on the story with an idea of where it would eventually lead. After every chapter I wrote I would pass it to my friend Chris and have him read it to tell me what he thought. He was very encouraging and often prodded me to write more. By the end of the school year I had written up to twelve chapters (what is now up to chapter twenty). When the sixth grade was over, I felt no reason to continue and left the ending a cliffhanger. The summer between sixth and seventh grade the church youth group began to study the book of revelation, and though at the time

this did not mean much to me, it influenced many of my decisions to come. During the seventh grade I had a dream about Shadows chasing me on a beach. And it was then I decided to write another story which would exist as parallel to Revelation, and be about the great-grandson of Kevin. After waking up, I promptly wrote down a couple of chapters, and stored them away for the day when I would write the third in the trilogy. At this time I had not even played with the idea of a second book nor what it would be about, but I knew that this would be a trilogy. Beginning the ninth grade I had finished *Legend of the Shadow*, but the sudden death of my sister warranted another edit, lengthening the book and adding personal flair to the characters. Synonymous with my editing, I began conversing with others about ideas for a second book. The work on the second part *Lead & Absinthe* began during the summer of 2006 as I talked with a close friend about how I wanted these books to be a trilogy. The theme for the second began to revolve around solving the questions of the first book and raising more that would lead into the third. My first full edit was completed by freshman year of college in 2007, but after purchasing a larger computer tower and shorting out my hard-drive while trying to transfer it to the new shell, I lost all the work I had done, and had to edit it all from a version I had luckily saved on a compact disk in 2005. While attending ethics classes, world history classes, and many religious courses, the book took on a new character. My research began to turn up eerie results. Myths from various parts of the world coincided with each other, apocryphal texts linked religions together, demigods, giants, and the Nephilim began revealing their nature to me. Eventually with the help of years of research that I have done over various religions, mythologies, and ancient cultures, I was able

Ari Dynasty

to turn the novel into what it is today. By April 14th, 2009 the first book, now called *Animus Aufero* had been completed.

What started out as fun story telling between friends has turned into a novel very quickly. Once a story about a boy frustrated with his family, the novel evolved into a commentary on the world's relationship with an invisible God. I wanted to make the main themes in these books revolve around the daily choices, no matter how subtle. I need to be extremely clear on one point. To be completely honest I had tried to abandon writing this story and felt often compelled by myself and possibly God to continually return to writing these story. However, I am not saying that this story is God inspired, or that this should be considered as a work of religious nature. I myself am a firm believer in God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Satan, angels, and demons. Throughout the course of writing I had personal struggles of my own as I came to grips with a reality I could not understand. But this story was writing during the maturing part of my life and helped me personally deal with struggles of the world. Many times during the course of writing and editing this piece, I would neglect working on it for any numerous amount of time off and on. I would instead become consumed with passionate relationships which would all end very horribly with me, and as a way to climb back into myself once again, I would return to writing this story. Though the work itself may have been a comfort, at the time I became convinced that God did not want my focus on personal pleasure. I believe that God has a reason for me to become consumed with this piece. The year 2007 greeted me with the beginning of what would turn into three years of relationships which transformed me into a person I hope never to see

again. It was through that time that I lost trust in God and was constantly telling Him how much I hated Him. I chose to destroy myself, and to concentrate solely on making God angry. Yet, even through this time I continued to write and ask God “Why the Hell are you having me write this? I do not write well. I would rather draw!” I eventually came to a point of spiritual sickness that caused me to reflect on what I had done. Hindsight made me realize my anger toward God had lead me through the darkest places of my life. I decided to see if my life could improve by trying to do what God wanted me to do.

If you are a Christian reading this book you may be challenged and disagree heavily with what is written. I pray you will see this as a work of fiction to distinguish between faithful serving and sin in our lives. If you are a non-Christian, you may be surprised to find I write of common struggles and certainly of ones that I have actually experienced. There are many things I myself have done, and I am not proud of them, nor would I take credit for the good that often results from the opposite decision. Some people may come to hate me, others admire me, but the one thing I would like most is that people read this and recognize it as a story of daily conflict that humans experience. I never decided to write this because it was easy, but because I was constantly reminded that our humanity needs to be retold in a way we can all pin-point the exact moment we made a bad decision, and hopefully correct it. Again I feel the necessity to stress: though this work talks of both God and Satan, there is foul language, sexuality, debauchery, and a multitude of other “festivities”. These are included in order to show the life of one we should call a hero, and the life of those we perceive to be heroes. All debauchery is shown to contrast fidelity.

Ari Dynasty

Finally, my prayers go to all of you. Some will read this purely as fiction, others may research what I have written and discover the same reality that I have come to know. Whichever course this book directs you, may you enjoy it.

J.J. Mikhale

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE: ANIMUS AUFERO

BEFORE THE TIME OF THE KING.....	1
WEDNESDAY.....	3
6:17PM.....	13
BEFORE SUNRISE.....	23
THURSDAY.....	29
BETWEEN DAYS.....	37
FRIDAY.....	43
27 MINUTES PASS.....	49
SATURDAY.....	55
CONNECTING FLIGHTS.....	61
BIRTHDAY.....	67
DUSK.....	75
NIGHT.....	81
DAWN.....	87
ENLIGHTENMENT.....	91
MANSLAUGHTER.....	99
BACK DOOR.....	107
AUTHORITY.....	111
PROMISCUITY.....	115
MISGUIDED.....	123
DISLODGED.....	129
ACQUAINTANCES.....	135
CATATONIA.....	141
PATRICIDE.....	147
CONSPIRACY.....	153
CHIMERA.....	161
CONFIDENCE.....	165
RESIDENCE.....	171

Ari Dynasty

SETTLING.....	179
AFFECTION.....	185
DISCOVERY.....	197
RECONCILED.....	203
ASSEMBLY.....	207
DISAPPOINTMENT.....	211

PART TWO: LEAD & ABSINTHE

APÉRITIF.....	217
PLASTICITY.....	225
RIFTS.....	
COINCIDENCE.....	
CONFRONTATION.....	
REDEMPTION.....	
SALVATION.....	
BEWILDERED.....	
IDLE.....	
MAGNANIMOUS.....	
TEMPORAL.....	
CLAIRVOYANCE.....	
ACEDIA.....	
CONTRACTED.....	
15.....	
16.....	
17.....	
18.....	
19.....	
20.....	
21.....	
22.....	
23.....	
24.....	
25.....	

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

TRANSHUMANISM. 333

PART THREE: SPLENDIFEROUS EMPYREAN

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

Ari Dynasty

- 2 4
- 2 5
- 2 6
- 2 7
- 2 8
- 2 9
- 3 0
- 3 1
- 3 2
- 3 3
- 3 4

J.J. Mikhale

— Part One —

Animus Aufero

Ari Dynasty

TO CHRIS AND EDUARDO WHO BROUGHT ME
TO FATE, AND FOR GOD WHO CHANGED MY
LIFE IN MAKING THIS BOOK.

BEFORE THE TIME OF THE KING

You asked me how this all came to be, if this were the true nature of the world, yet silent I remained. Still I remain, but with my end come to pass I will share a whisper from the dark: a story never told. One which can open your eyes to this world. But I urge caution. The glimpse into the life beyond has caused many before to question the hope of salvation. Not for fear of the end, for that is already determined, but fear of what was. Do not worry about the end, for we are only in the adolescence of time, just as you are now.

Your growth continues. See, your nature is the same as mine in youth. Though I cannot be with you as a guide I leave you this tale as an oracle. Nations will surround the land and tempt you. Judgement will come to those stray. So be steadfast and listen to these words my son. For if you do not correct your path, you may end up like these.

—Pethuel

“HEAR THIS, YOU ELDERS,
AND GIVE EAR, ALL YOU
 INHABITANTS OF THE LAND!
HAS ANYTHING LIKE THIS
HAPPENED IN YOUR DAYS,
OR EVEN IN THE DAYS OF YOUR
 FATHERS?
TELL YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT IT,
LET YOUR CHILDREN TELL THEIR
 CHILDREN,
AND THEIR CHILDREN ANOTHER
GENERATION.”

THE BOOK OF JOEL
NKJV

WEDNESDAY

1

February the second, Groundhog Day, a mass of ravens descend upon the cockle weed. This day begins more than the indeterminable length of winter. So much is put into the fate of a single mammal. The rodent must hate the weight of so many people eyeing its every move. Everything is yoked to a creature seeing its shadow. People gather waiting just to see it come outside, in hope of a warm future. Others come to see it run back into the recesses of its home, frightened by its own shadow, knowing in reality the future will always remain gloom. These figures—often judged by men as depressed pessimistic hopeless causes—are realists, not blinded by the false reality established long ago.

One week from now marks my sixteenth year on earth. Soon the government will look upon me with fresher eyes, and place the lives of millions into the hands I will clench to a foam and plastic wheel. Far be it from me to judge why a sixteen-year-old could be trusted on the road with hundreds of people screeching past in their multi-colored tons of steel. Each person practices for months eagerly awaiting to be the next one to have a collision which will ultimately cost them more than what they are unwilling to pay. Coming from a smaller town than most, walking has always been my preferred method to get around. Why create unnecessary risk? Necessities to enjoy a weekend have always been just a few minute's jog away. I have seen the melting

glass and black smoke caused by reckless behavior. Regardless of the care taken to observe the laws and regulations, the unexpected does and will continue to happen every day. I have seen enough tourists distracted by a map run a red light and take the life of an innocent. Sometimes, no matter how safe you try to be, you can't prevent another person's recklessness.

Death never comes when we want it; even if an individual has laid plans and mentally prepared oneself for either bliss or pain. Those surrounding the hospital bed realize only too late that any object around them can be turned into a door to the after life. To this truth I have also been a witness. I ask myself "why me?" and in this moment of weakness reveal human nature to be inward selfish reflection. Though I was not the one to die, it often feels like it was so. A piece of myself is now gone. Slowly memories fade through the ever forward progressing sands of time. Now and forever an uncompleted puzzled heart writhes with feelings of abandonment; abandoned by both human entity and spiritual deity.

Selfish thought continues to swell within me though I do not wish to truly expose it, for the shame will be my own. I must force these thoughts back. Quick! Lay mortar and brick, build a frame, establish buttresses, support the fortress with cross beams on every side. But alas, every tower has pests. Cracks are made by long torrential weather and persistent insects. Cracks form holes; gaps; crevices; pits; caverns; chasms; hell. Through the holes back-drafts carry out the thoughts chained inside.

Everything is tainted! From this moment onward my life is destroyed. The very day of my birth is no longer a celebratory act of

*worshipping me. Forever I am ruined; never to be the same because everyone will forever remember these moments as a time of mourning. Today marks the beginning to my pursuit of happiness. Before I thought of others and tried to please God as best I could, but they have all abandoned me and taken away the very day which identifies my continued existence; as still a human being; **being** alive! Today I take my life into my own hands for the future I have always wanted. This is the perfect week for such a beginning since the saints have allowed for its entirety to be freedom from school or study.*

Old crows continue to congregate. Their black feathers and silk coverings conceal their true intent. Each figure moves through the oak doors seeking to corrupt my mind. They process down the allotted path, only stopping to admire a bald corpse with sunken eyes. I even notice one smile as she gazes upon death. Soon they take their seats next to all the others facing east. Few friends are here, though many would claim acquaintance. The dim lights reflect the emotion of those in the room as the man at the podium blathers on. The only part that catches my ear is when he reads, “survived by son Kevin Creston.”

She had lung cancer, although she never smoked. In a way it makes the pain worse; the irony; she was an oncologist. All the people she saw go through the hospital who never made it must have made it even more difficult to believe that she could make it through the sickness. No matter how many times the doctors were able to force it into remission it continued to return. Like moldy bread, the infection could be removed and in a few days return.

My father had never worked a single day in his life. Well, except as a paperboy at age fifteen. But ever since, nothing. The GI Bill had paid his way through college and he met mom shortly after. But now our source of emotional and financial support had been taken away from both of us. Even with life insurance we are unsure how the funeral debts will be paid. Most of our money had been eaten up by hospital bills and hour long commutes to Rapid City. Health insurance hardly covered the costs and decades of saving depleted quickly. During her sickest days I searched for jobs to help out our family. My heart compelled me to at least look for a job, but my mind knew I was incapable of pretending life would go on. The challenge was to leave the outside world at the door of the establishment. Deep down we all know personal life effects our productivity at work. Though we live in a small enough town where everyone knew our condition, they acted as if the whole situation were taboo. For some, a job offers escape and reprieve; for me it only offered anxiety. The only escape I could find was in fiction. Movies and video games soothed provided the needed outlet to express myself. Maintaining normality was key. Boys normally yell at video games, or cry during sad films. Outside these I could not express how I felt.

She kept promising me that she would get better and—like a fool—I believed her.

Things only got worse. Mortgage payments began to pile up on the kitchen counter tops. Car payments, insurance, gas and electric, municipal utilities. Cable and internet had been cut months back. Above the stacks of unfolded tri-creased bills, the cupboards began to dwindle in food supply. Luxury items had to be sold to help pay for necessary expenses. Already it was evident:

our lives would never be the same. For months now we ate hobo dinners around a fire pit in the backyard. The nights we splurged consisted of red beans, corn bread, onions, and milk. Father would put them together in a large glass to drink the mixture. Those days we sat around the coffee table in the living room drinking the ‘gheny shakes’ with the windows open to let in light and save on air conditioning (although with it now winter we closed them and wore overcoats with blankets draped over our shoulders). Most of the appliances had been pawned or sold to help pay for the house. We gave most of our clothes to Goodwill. One pair of jeans and a weeks worth of T-shirts was all that was left. The washer and dryer had been sold so we hand washed them in the tub and hung them from the shower rack. My father even sold Mamaw’s pearl necklace which had been reserved for my future wife.

I am often reminded before the incident, on several occasions, my father reassuring me with a smirk saying, “Don’t worry Kevin, your mother provides enough for this family to survive...I don’t need to work because we already have enough of what we could want. If I ever had to work, however, I wouldn’t sell anything.”

My father was an artist; he has since lost any inspiration for further works. The smirk and forced words said through doubtful eyes had been my father’s way of trying to comfort me. When I was little, I would sneak into his studio late at nights to watch him create masterpieces with various media. As long as I can remember he strived to get his master’s degree. Not many people wanted to hire or exhibit his works other than local sideshows. After mom’s passing, I would hear muffled cries from behind the studio door. I believe he was pulverized by the notion of selling memories.

* Refers to Allegheny, now the Appalachian Mountains.

He tried so hard, but no one could offer a job to an inexperienced artist. Businesses always looked for a degree in something “more important” or “impressive”. Nowadays, people needed to know how to create digital works. Anyone who still played on canvas belonged in the museum, not business. To even begin teaching art, he would have had to pay for classes to become a substitute teacher, and then work long enough to become certified.

As a last resort, he ended up trying to sell paintings at a street corner downtown, many people were interested in his work, but when they saw the price tag they suddenly became disinterested and disgusted. He did get a little carried away. Most of his paintings were offered at a grand or more. Publicity is one thing to have, but to obtain the pedestal you have to gain the interest of the public and not have them laugh at you. His works were decent, people found enough interest to stop and converse with each other on which ones they liked the most. Yet, he was not famous, and people would not pay so much for a name that no one would recognize.

His business soon was down the drain and we had nothing to lean our backs upon. With money running short, my mother became enveloped in pain and sickness until she was too weak to speak. She saw how much we were barely hanging on at home, even though no one mentioned it. There must have been a point when she couldn't bear the pain any more, or she didn't want to watch us to suffer; that was when she pulled her own cord.

So I guess this brings me back to where I am now...a funeral I can't wait to leave. I look at my watch, fifteen until four. Only about an hour left and once again I can escape. I hate funerals.

We stand with our backs against the west wall. The old crows ooze through a line to speak words black as pitch. Sticky words percolate from their lips and fill my ears with deceit. Each of them carries the same muck ready to cake upon my ear: “I understand how you feel; I had a loved one die to cancer. We all loved her. We will all miss her too,” then they reach in their pocket, and grabbing my hand place a note.

“If you ever need anything, do not hesitate to call.”

The lies burn my skull. No one was there for me at two in the morning when she pulled the plug. No one actually expects you to call and talk. After a week they all forget and think it has passed. This kind of change is one which impacts you forever. Who would be willing to answer a cry in the darkest of nights several months after the incident has died off in the rest of their minds. No! They don't care for me. They just say it to comfort you and to ease their mind. If they offer, they no longer feel responsible for you. They know you won't call. I wish for once someone would just be honest, “Sorry for your loss. I can't even begin to imagine what you must be feeling.”

In my flesh I feel the unnatural tingle which sends shivers to your spine. Death seems so unreal. It isn't the crows wiping crocodile tears. It isn't gazing upon a body which once had breath and now is fleshed in rubberized and molded putty disguised by make-up. It isn't hearing others claim they understand *exactly* what you are experiencing, though every case is unique and individual because of the person, time, and overall experiences you have been through. It is the feeling of being tricked. Death acts as a facade. There is some truth locked away which would reveal to all of us how unnecessary it is to die. Dying should never occur. We all know what it feels

like to watch people who were once so strong suddenly not have air in their nostrils. Air is such a flimsy concept, and yet is all around us. Although, I am only a teenager who doesn't know any better; everyone has to die sometime.

"SINCE WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE, IT'S
OBVIOUS THAT WHEN AND HOW DON'T
MATTER."

THE STRANGER
BY ALBERT CAMUS

6 : 17 PM

2

Home was always my place to get away. Both my father and I went to our individual rooms still shaken up from today's events. Raised in a small house with vast amounts of clutter made me agoraphobic. There was some instinct deep within me. I was always watching exits with my right shoulder against a wall so my dominant hand could fend off danger. In restaurants I found the best vantage point facing doors. If I couldn't sit in line-of-sight of the entrance I looked for windows or mirrors reflecting the view. There's a need to defend myself from the unknown. Like the saying, "Corner a dog in a dead-end street and it will turn and bite." For me there was no better place I enjoyed spending time than inside the miniscule guest bathroom clearing my mind. There is an unspoken sanctity to not be disturbed. About once a week I would read fully clothed in an empty tub. When I was in my bedroom I maintained a closed environment. The doors remained closed and blackout curtains over the windows. Many arguments were started over my father opening the door to ask a question and leaving it open upon exiting. I learned to appreciate tight dark spaces. Any glimpse at a borderless world left me uneasy. Where do you run when you are exposed from every side? Had someone sat me in front of Freud she[†] would have deduced I enjoyed compact areas as a childish reminiscence of my mother's womb. Or perhaps I had not been held enough as a teen and

† Anna Freud and attachment theory

longed for the days I was swaddled and rocked to sleep. And though a hundred plus strangers had wrapped their arms around me, I did indeed wish to be held by my mother once again. Today, home felt more like a prison than an escape. The only exit from this cell was on the other side of a vacuum tube. A quick shock to the finger from the press of a button, the buzz of static before a black screen, and a publisher's logo. The game began. Soon my mind slipped away from time; the date; events; and her. She was usually at work during the time that I was at home, but she would always make up the lost time.

I was already inside my own world when the phone rang, and jumped out of my seat. It was the land line. Not many people had them still, but since neither of us worked or left the house often there was no need for a cellular. Father still believed a hard line was better than pinging off thousands of satellites. A moment passed before I was out of the daze and capable of running downstairs to answer the phone before the person hung up.

"Hello?" I was asking who wanted to bother me now.

"Yeah, hey it's me, Robert. Is Pat there?"

Robert has been my best friend ever since we lived next to each other; in other words, forever. He's a quirky guy, but coming from a small town it was difficult not to become friends with your neighbors. There was a time we played kickball in summer heat, but now the outside world was unsafe. That, and games were more fun. Don't get me wrong, he's fine to spend time with, but there's always a critical point at which I feel like running to a place where he cannot follow. I guess by best friends I mean more that he irritated me endlessly, but I put up with him because he put up with me. Nobody else in

town even so much as looks at me without criticizing every feature and sinew of my being. The trouble with being friends in a small neighborhood is you all share the same favorite hiding places.

“Hold on a second, I think he might be asleep. I’ll get him for you.”

“Father, Robert is on the phone asking for you!” I yelled covering the receiver, looking towards his bedroom not knowing that he was standing right behind me.

“Yes?” He whispered right in my ear.

I shivered at the air that passed my ear. “Uh...it’s for you.”

I handed him the phone and ran into his office to hear what they were talking about. He grunted on the other end to let me know I needed to hang up. All I heard after that was Robert speaking these words “You won’t believe the job I’ve found for you, Mr. Creston.”

I was not reminded of the phone call until supper. My father had been busy since Robert’s conversation making other calls, and I had remained a barren cavernous skull. We sat outside in Vikings folding chairs and heavy Broncos parkas we had recovered from a thrift store. There were still patches of packed snow on the ground from the last snow storm, but the last few weeks had been warm for winter. Most of the snow had melted during the day only to freeze again overnight. A brisk wind disturbed the flames while we sat waiting for our dinner wrapped in foil to finish cooking. It was a clear night with a first quarter moon to the southwest. An arm of stars stretched across the sky. My face was numb from the wind and it felt like my skin would crack like ice. The warm breath from my

mouth formed droplets on the tip of my nose causing an insistent sniffing. Although the two of us normally remained silent while eating around the fire pit, I could sense his stare as if he was working up the nerve to ruin what remained a sad existence of life. I tried ignoring it, but it seemed he would wait for me to take a bite before opening his mouth.

“What?” I threw the hot foil down in my lap.

“Huh?”

“Seriously? You know something and you are just staring at me.”

“No?”

“Are you asking me or telling me?”

“It is nothing.”

“You are sure you don’t want to tell me something?”

“Yeah.”

I picked up the fork with a piece of carrot on it.

“Well...”

I lowered the fork.

“No, keep eating, it is nothing important.”

Hesitantly I put the utensil up to my lips. I stared at him; he waited; I took a bite.

“I got a job in Europe.”

I choked; forcing a swallow and covering my lips I exclaimed, “How can you think that is ‘nothing important’?”

“What?” he shrugged.

“You’re joking, right?” I stated, both half doubting myself, and half doubting my father. “We don’t even have money to fly to Europe much less stay there! What do you mean you got a job? Did they already interview you? What if they turn you down?”

“They already accepted me. I called them, and they performed a phone interview. They asked me when was the earliest I could get there. So I told them we could leave this Saturday; the museum is providing all the services we need to get there.”

“Wait, what’s this about a museum?”

“It is the Muzeului Național de Artă al României. The museum is located inside the Parliament building.” He proclaimed it with a pompous air.

“In London?”

“How is it that you get this far through school with out knowing that more than one country has a Parliament Building?”

“What do you expect dad, it’s public school they can’t teach you everything.”

“It’s in București.”

Pause.

“The capital of Romania.”

“I thought Romania was like a province of Poland.”

“Well, its not. It is and has been its own country since even before I was born.”

“What exactly are you doing there?”

“I’m going to be a security guard during the night shift.”

“What about visas and passports? Doesn’t it take months to move into a new country and settle down? How are you going to work for them so easily?”

“Well, my passport is still good from about eight years ago when your mom and I thought of going to Saskatchewan for our anniversary. I held on to your passport from the school choir trip you took to the Vatican your eighth grade year. I already told you the museum is part of the Parliament building. I spoke with the US embassy’s connection to the Romanian Parliament. Since I would be working for the government, they could speed up the process for us both. Are you sure that you are okay with us moving?”

“Hell yeah! I always wanted to live internationally!”

I hated the idea of a different country; especially within Europe. If Romania was anything like Rome and visiting the Vatican I wouldn’t enjoy a single moment. Everything was so different over there. South Dakota may be boring, but I at least fit in here. Most kids my age would gladly go to Europe and travel, but to move and leave their friends was something different. I had always been a loner, the only friend I had was Robert. It bothered me how Robert even found the job. But what hurt more was I would spend my sixteenth birthday away from my one friend in a different country I knew nothing about; all because of the same person I had called my *best* friend. I could possibly find more in moving, but I still don’t like the idea of different cultures and standing out. I’ve always hated going on family trips and looking like a tourist—or simply looking like you don’t belong there. I tried to make it a game to blend in: to pack clothes with no words on them, dull colors, and a haircut similar to the culture.

I thought I should change the subject, “How much are you going to earn?”

“They are giving me the equivalent of forty-five to fifty grand to start off. I am getting about five thousand for expenses just to move there.”

“Wait, is this in Euros?”

“Yes, but right now the exchange rate is close to the dollar. With the money we get there we will be able to pay off some of the bills that we accumulated over here. This is going to be a fresh start for us. The museum said they would pay for everything, food, shelter, new clothes, anything we need, out of hospitality for our recent loss until things settle down for us. It’s almost too good to be true.”

Yeah it is too good to be true. I doubt anyone speaks English over there. If only she had lived. If only I had taken the job working with Robert at the restaurant. If only I had not been selfish.

We sat in silence through the rest of dinner. There wasn’t much left to say. It was understood that this would happen even if I rejected the idea. Where else could we get money? It seemed like this was the only sure thing. It was just almost too good to be true. I rinsed the burned foil before folding it, placing it in the kitchen drawer, and heading upstairs. I was tired of playing games now and I had no idea of what I should be doing. I felt so confused. I sat and thought for a minute. Maybe I should start packing if we were to be leaving three days from now. I pulled out the largest suitcase I had. Setting it on the floor, I opened it up and started tossing some clothes on the inside. I figured

I could pack the clothes I wouldn't need to wear any more first. After throwing a couple of T-shirts into the suitcase, I passed out on my bed.

“THERE ARE... THINGS WHICH A MAN IS
AFRAID TO TELL EVEN TO HIMSELF, AND
EVERY DECENT MAN HAS A NUMBER OF SUCH
THINGS STORED AWAY IN HIS MIND.”

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND
BY FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

BEFORE SUNRISE

3

A blanket of darkness resided outside the window. Silence accompanied the void. The trees did not move, and even the birds were asleep. Yawning, I tasted morning breath; swallowing, I felt cotton mouth; blinking, I felt dizzy. I was dehydrated and disoriented. As I breathed in I felt the sting of chilling air in my nose with a hint of staleness— that old-person-smell intermingling with PVC medical equipment—and something else. It reminded me of the midsummer dust storms coating the sky sandy gold. But the taste, the grit, was more...metallic? Metallic air: tiny particles of iron oxide. An image of my father's machete cutting tomatoes came to mind. The wooden handle covered in grease and sandalwood soap; a freshly sharpened blade resting against the whetstone, with small particles shaved off. The polished scratches on the newly sharpened edge like rough diamond knurling.

I waited to gain enough consciousness to walk to the light switch. I waited for my eyes to focus. Even with my pupils dilated, the present darkness allowed me only to see about a hands-breadth of clarity. Falling asleep so early must have messed with my head and cause me to wake in the middle of the night. I sat up placing a pillow behind my back to keep from feeling the cold drywall through my shirt. The blackness was unnerving. Death was in the air. Up and down a chill ran along my spine. My guardian angel had left me exposed to the demons

of the night. A thought passed through my head of an interrogation room—the cold concrete and metal type. I was being held captive against my will. Soon music would blast from holes in the walls, and the subwoofer would vibrate my innards until my organs scrambled; but the music never played.

Gently, I moved to the edge of the bed and I let my feet hang over the side. The clock rested on the night stand flashing the red digital numbers 88:88. The power must have gone out. I listened for a bit. No thunder. It wouldn't have been the electric bill. There was still some power since the clock was on. Must be a surge, old wires. I pulled aside the curtain hesitantly to glance outside. It was still a clear night and the moon was not visible. Oh-dark-hundred. Why this early? I suppose the body doesn't always have an explanation for the head. A growl protruded beneath the skin of my stomach. I suppose hunger was the reason my body woke my head.

Eventually I got out of bed. Within the memories of my mind I tried to navigate slowly through the maze I knew was before me. Although, it seems that no matter how many times you have been through your room in the middle of the night, you always forget the suitcase you placed on the floor the night before. After recovering complete control from stubbing several toes on the suitcase, I slowly limped across the carpet. It was only now, after I walked on a contorted foot, that I noticed the feel of the synthetic fibers below my feet. The floor was sticky and wet. The carpet felt like stepping on slimy kelp wash upon a beach along the Pacific Ocean. Again cold shivers ran up and down my spine till all the hairs on my neck rose.

Upon reaching the light I closed my eyes. I rested my head in my arm which then rested on the wall. The wall seemed just as viscous as the floor, but at the moment I ignored it. I knew the light would scar my retina as my highly dilated eyes would soak in light too quickly. They would need time to adjust properly. I flipped the light switch; slowly I let light peer through the folds in my sleeve. Once my eyes no longer felt the sting of muscle contractions I lifted my head.

My sleeve was soaked in color. The light blue shirt I had worn the day before was now more of a deep maroon color. I pulled my arm off the wall and noticed that there were red spots on the blue wall where my arm had been. I checked my arm for any red marks or paint. My elbow was soaked in red. I took off my shirt to check my whole body. There was no cut that I could see and no red beside where my arm had rested against the wall; it couldn't be my blood. My eyes widened. Somehow I had known that it had been blood. Maybe it was coming from my head and I was unable to see it. I need to check the dresser mirror next to the bed.

I turned around to go check my face in the mirror and stopped dead in my tracks. The floor was covered in about three inches of blood and it was slowly getting higher. Looking around, the contour of my room was outlined with splattered blood. Each wall had its share of splotches varying in size. The ceiling, normally white with the popcorn texture, was brownish-red. Near the center of the room the ceiling bowed closer to the floor; there blood dripped down one-by-one into the pond that had become my floor. The sponge of my brain took a while to realize that my walls were no longer the happy sky blue they should have been. It was when the sponge

had soaked in all the blood it had seen, my jaw dropped and the vocal chords within my throat sang out a scream all on their own.

