

## Chapter I

The night before Cosmo and I left for Mexico I could not sleep. I had no idea we were going anywhere at the time, no clue what the next day would bring besides meeting Cosmo at the beach before work to go surfing, but I was restless and the air felt astir. It reached out with icy hands, the bed morphed into an army of slithering insects, and tired eyes fixated on the stillness of our bedroom walls. Karana rested like a newborn baby after a good cry. I walked to the kitchen and drank a glass of water. The rain simmered into a gentle tap dance upon the fiberglass awning covering our back porch. Sleep would not come, I realized. It was many things. It was J.P.'s death, it was Karana's silence, it was my place in the world. Maybe I did not know it consciously then, but somewhere locked beneath the entrails of submission and regret I sensed the presence of a powerful force from which I could not hide. I decided to go out into the night. My truck started up and headed past dark store fronts, through green stop lights, and halted when the asphalt ceased to go any further west.

Low tide sank into the jaws of the sea. A cruel, midnight sky devoured blackened saltwater and spat out acres of desolated sand. A purged, barren wasteland littered with beaten appendages of lifeless seaweed, despondent piles of damp tree limbs, trails of garbage, plastic, and wilted cardboard usurped the usual, friendly hospitality offered at the toes of the sea. Wiggling digits, playfully free, transformed, discovered evil alter egos and stalked the land of soil and concrete. Swirling winds somersaulted amidst baritone roars of angered thunder. The storm began small, it itched, twisted, clawed at the guts of the atmosphere. Surge propelled surge, clouds swelled and the storm built into a frenzied torrent which expelled Hershey Kiss size teardrops upon a thirsty planet.

The altered shoreline yearned for its liquid life force to return, to cease the damaging ebb sucking all familiarity, all possibility, all dreamed and invented into a cataclysmic oblivion. The absence hit me square in the mouth. Sweatshirt hood pulled down over a gray and black beanie shielded the cold, the emptiness, the lack of stars. Restless thoughts, which called me to walk at the edge of the ocean well into the early hours of the morning, guided my steps. The rain slept for a moment as the storm gathered strength for another deluge. Soon all would change. Nature snarled alive and

robust, churned an innate prowess poised to unleash a liberated downpour of spirit and power, exposed, direct, in a free flow of expression.

I envied the storm. How fortunate to know its true essence, the very core of its existence, and then release that entity without hesitation, without doubt. To know it would expel an unreserved gush of emotion on full display, frothing, breathing, howling, and inspiring awe at its every twitch propelled a bitter spark of jealousy in the pit of my stomach. I was mute, slightly dragging the tip of my left shoe on the concrete of the shore walk for reasons I could not fathom. I never walked like that before, funny; while the grit of sand scraped between rubber and the wet cement created an ominous screech in the kinetic air.

As I watched the tide creep back I did not realize how much like the storm I was at that moment. Maybe because I did not think I was capable of such a release. That the upwelling reeking havoc on my organs would not split open a distended belly and release its contents to the world. Let it rain guts, heart, soul, and bone. A prayer existed, a hope, far too many wishes, but I grew overly comfortable to remain confined inside a puffy cloud always smiling, always penitent, but afraid to commence into a true downpour of emotion. I thought I could keep going. Keep trudging along, keep moving, but like a gathering storm it was only a matter of time before I let go. Nothing extraordinary happened. No wild premonitions or visits from angelic prophets. I only gazed at the darkness of the sea, but somewhere in my trance I imbibed an arcane taste from the sweet ooze of triumph. I felt like I could make the world right again, sane again, competent again, not that the world ever possessed any of those elements in the first place, but it seemed possible. A fools dream, but a good dream, a worthy dream.

The water crept up and swallowed the trash, the kelp, and the dismembered limbs. I navigated from concrete to sand and found a six and a half foot branch of traveled driftwood. I held its knobby composition in two hands like King Arthur wielding Excalibur and waved it towards what little showed of Orion's Belt. A buckle loosened, the stars relaxed. The universe slithered into my grasp. So many nights without sleep, so many dreams left in a mess of cosmic dust, but standing on the ravaged beach a modest pour of strength reached an apprehensive soul and filled it with enough courage to set off on an emancipated voyage.

I am not sure why I remembered that walk with such vivid detail. Maybe I gave it more credit after the fact as I searched for what inspiration prompted me to leave in the first place. I did not know it. I could not fathom it, yet the sea grinned as it pushed foam further up the beach. My system shifted sub-consciously and set the tumblers in motion as a light sprinkle began to fall. Mother Ocean felt it; she twisted the belts of time while I tightened the strings of my sweatshirt hood so it sucked against my cheeks. I staggered to my truck with an odd hope that by the next day the whole world would change. A wave crashed, thunder rumbled somewhere over Palomar Mountain and I made my way to the warmth of Karana resting easy underneath our blankets and fell into a peaceful sleep unaware that the next morning would unleash the storm that had been brewing in my belly for far too long.