

# The Mad Man's Woods

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The first chapter going up is setting a story frame. The frame is a Man who was outcast as a youth for being overly violent and dangerous. Now he lives in the woods, like an animal, and no one knows anything about him. He stalks and prays those who do him wrong, and adds each one of them to his portfolio...of death.

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## The Mad Man's Woods : Chapter 1

"When I was a young man, I was homeless. There was a problem at home where my parents didn't agree with my way of life. See, I was... Well, I don't really know how to put it. Ahh, fuck it, I was an absolute bastard. If someone had something to say to me, they would be allowed a certain amount of time, before I left their lips feeling like balloons were invading their mouths. I didn't care much for reason, or 'fair'. I had my own system of deciding who got a fair case. That system was as follows. You have annoyed me; you now have 2 minutes approximately to make me feel like I shouldn't inflict some damage to you. Of course, I didn't take this approach with my family; that isn't why they abandoned me. They left me behind because they couldn't watch me disappearing anymore. They couldn't stand by and watch me become a thug. I don't blame them at all. I thank them, as I didn't want Josh growing up trying to be me."

¶½

This was just part of the letter found in the desk of a man named Alan. It was in a folder, covered with dust and what seemed to be coffee stains. The man searching through these documents was Mike Hoskins. He was searching for a missing girl called Elizabeth Jonah; Liza for short. Liza was last seen arguing with Alan. No one could identify the man, and no one even knew a surname. All that could be said, was he didn't seem to like being shouted at, and definitely didn't like the slap to the cheek he got. Liza was seen leaving the shop, was caught on CCTV walking up the street toward the taxi rank, but then never seen again.

¶½ It had been a matter of two and a half weeks since she had been seen in that shop and her family were worried sick. Mike was trying his best to find her and return her to her parents. Liza was only 17 years old and was looking into universities. She was attending a local college doing script writing and had a couple of voluntary jobs too. Her parents were still holding out that a letter of ransom would arrive. Mike was working the clock trying to crack this case, and it had lead him to this cabin. Using witness statements, and bits of CCTV he discovered that this man, Alan, lived somewhere in the woods.

¶½¶½ Once in the woods, he had the task of finding exactly where this man was. Mike knew that it could take weeks to search this area properly. It may be that Alan doesn't live here and that he just uses the woods to hide. It may have been that he just walks through this area to get home. They had to search it though, just to look for clues; clues on where this man might be, or even clues to where Liza could be. It just so happened that they came across a small structure. It was a moss covered wall that appeared first and Mike's heart sank straight away. It wasn't a feeling he had experienced before. It struck his mind that this could be the resting place of a kidnapper, or worse, a murderer. He approached slowly, making sure he was quiet as he brushed through the golden leaves. He put his ear against the wall, but no sound made its way to his attention.

¶½¶½ Walking round the wall that he was against, he saw a great wooden door, two windows and a small set of steps. He snuck round to these steps, and tried looking into the windows. Upon seeing no lights or movement, he made the decision to kick down the door. It was empty, in regards to people, but full of things, possessions. This is where the desk came into it. This took his attention before anything else. He'd picked up the folder, and started to look through it. It was just filled with extracts from previously written memoirs. The only things in the drawer of the desk other than this file were a few bits of blank paper and a set of pens.

¶½¶½ It was at this point, that Mike turned round and spotted a huge wardrobe. This only took his attention due to the light that seemed to be coming from the cracks. He slowly approached the doors with his hands and started to pull them open. It was a look of absolute horror that took over his face. He didn't know what to do with what he had seen. The walls of the wardrobe were plastered with pictures of young girls. Nothing offensive, just ordinary photos from day to day life, but what were they doing here. It was then he noticed a picture of Liza from just outside the shop where she was last spotted. He had narrowed his search for a culprit

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to one man, now he needed to find that man.

## Chapter 2

Mike was frantically pacing up and down this wretched cabin. All he could smell was damp, and all he could picture was that wardrobe's contents. An overwhelming sense of illness seemed to be gripping his insides. He had never had to investigate anything like this before; a missing girl in the prime of her life. That sickened him enough, but now there were obviously others. Perhaps they were future targets, or even worse, past achievements. Everything was rushing around his head, so fast that he couldn't concentrate, he started to feel dizzy. "How could this be happening?" He asked himself this question a few times before realising he wasn't going to stumble upon the answer; he needed to search for it.

He ran outside of the cabin, thankful for the fresh air, and took a moment to compose himself. Removing his phone from his pocket, he thought about who to call first. "Jack, that's who I need right now, Jack!" If anyone could have heard him, they would have assumed he wasn't well. He was frantic in his speech, and his actions were to be described as scatty. The phone rang three times before Jack answered. "Hello, Jack Hoskins speaking." Mike hesitated to answer for a moment. The gruff voice came back, "Hello? Who is this?" Mike had no choice; he had to involve his brother. "Jacky, I need your help. I know you probably don't want to give me the time of day after what happened, but it's important." Jack paused. "It's about that girl you're searching for isn't it?" "How'd you know?" Mike seemed almost suspicious. "Well, I've been doing some digging on this case. I know it's not my case, but I can't just sit back while parents lose their little girl. Not afterâ!" Jack was interrupted, "Yeah, and have you found anything?" Annoyed at this diversion, Jack responded, "No, but I know you have. You went to look in the woods today didn't you? You have found something, and you don't know how to react to it!" Mike was astounded; he started to suspect his own brother of being involved with the criminal for one moment. "Jack, why do you know all of this?" "We work for a secret organisation, no one can talk to anyone outside, but they damn sure talk to everyone inside. Most people are saying you've finally lost it, but I know you're onto something." Mike was reassured. "I'll tell you what; meet me at the coffee shop. I'll explain everything." The phone line went dead and Jack was left waiting for answers.

It was now early hours of the morning, Jack was sat at a table looking into a coffee mug and picking at a blueberry muffin, that if he was honest, tasted like it was about to grow legs and jump off the table. The door swung open, and Mike appeared. He first went to grab himself a coffee, mainly to stay awake. It was then he turned to Jack and said "mind if I sit?" "Of course not, we need to move on eventually." Mike wouldn't be drawn on talking about the past. "Right, I followed up on the man she was seen arguing with. I was told he lives in the woods, so I checked it out. Found a cabin. Disgusting cabin. Iâ!" Mike wasn't able to bring the words out, speaking in short snappy sentences, and forgetting his words. "It's okay Mike, you can talk to me about this" This did Mike a world of good, and he felt air entering his lungs for the first time in a few minutes. "I found a file." The file was dropped onto the table. "It has memoirs of a man, who was made homeless as a child for being aggressive and overly violent. I also found a wardrobe." Jack laughed, "A wardrobe huh? We need to arrest that man now!" this was followed by a slight chuckle, which was extinguished by Mike's reaction, "No you fool, the wardrobe had these" The photos then found their way to the table. Jack looked at them and shouted in shock, "There all the missing people from the last few months!" "I know Jack, and that one is Liza." He poked his finger toward Liza's picture, but he couldn't bring his eyes upon it.

Jack's reaction was somewhere between shock and awe. Mike was frantically looking around him as though he was expecting a hit-man to suddenly jump up and blast a thousand bullets into his chest. "Well, you gotta' catch this guy Mikeâ before he hurts anyone else." "I know, but that's easier said than doneâ where is he?" Jack had never seen his brother look more puzzled. Mike was an intelligent guy, and had been throughout his life. Jack was always the joker who hid his real potential while Mike flourished. "Mike, I know I'm not always the best person, but let me help you with this. You look so stressed andâ!" There was a pause that seemed so eerieâ!" "Mike! That man there! Heâ!" Jack couldn't speak, for the first time in his life. Mike turned to see a man who looked like death. This man was in clothes blackened by dirt with his hair wild and greasy, no signs

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of washing, with scars on his face that looked like wounds from fighting. Mike stared for a while. In this whole time that Mike was analysing him, he didn't even realise the man was staring at him. Jack got up from his seat and started to walk toward the door. The man quickly fled the scene. "That was him" Jack said with a sense of sadness, hinted with resolution.

It was then that Mike said "you don't know thatâ we have never had any sighting of him". Jack turned toward his brother looking paler than paper. "What's wrong? Jack?" the sentence trailed off as Jack kept thinking. Eventually, Jack exclaimed "He took my baby girl Mike! That was him" It was at this point that Mike's internal organs all seemed to drop at the same time. "You meanâ That's the man who kidnapped Hayley?" Jack could only bring himself to nod, his lips were quivering and tears were being produced by the second. Mike hadn't spoken to his brother properly since his niece went missing. It ruined Jack's life; he lost his job, his wife and in the end his brother. Jack blamed Mike for what happened. They were working on a case together, and there was a killer on the loose, Jack got too involved and when he thought he'd gotten the best of the masked killer, his daughter was missing. Jack had one face off with the guy who was responsible for the killings, and that was the man he had just seen again. "I should have just killed him when I had the chance, then I wouldn't have all this regret and anger built up inside" Mike knew nothing else to do, than hug his brother.

Jack had calmed down, but was set on helping Mike. "I'm willing to bet my life that it's the same man" "We don't knowâ !" Before Mike could finish the sentence Jack shouted "YES WE FUCKING DO KNOW THAT! It's the same crimes Mike" The second sentence went straight from anger to reasoning, as though he regretted shouting, and wanted to convince Mike that he was right. Mike thought for a couple of seconds. "The photos!" Jack looked very confused, and asked "what about them." Mike gave no response, but just kept rummaging through the pictures he had collected earlier. It was at a point where Jack had given up trying to talk to Mike that he was suddenly disturbed by an almighty yelling. "OH MY FUCKING GOD!" Mike seemed in a state of shock, like someone had just come up to him with a cattle rod. "What is it Mike? What have you found?" "The proof you're right, and some good news ", replied Mike.

Mike had a photo in his hand, and was waving it frantically. "It's been two years since Hayley went missing" Jack looked upset "don't remind me Mike". Mike looked like he had discovered something amazing, like he was a genius. "Hayley was about 14 when she went missing right? Mike was trying to prompt an answer. "Yeahâ Well she was nearly 15 actually." Jack looked as though he was in a state of reminiscence. "Well, look at this photo." Mike shook the photo in Jack's face. Jack was astonished. Words couldn't describe how he was feeling at that time. "It's her Mikeâ It's really her. That's what she would look like now." It hit Jack that she might still be alive and there might be a chance of saving his little girl. Jack and Mike both threw on their coats and disappeared out of the door.

## Chapter 3

Mike was struggling to keep up with Jack, which he found unbelievable since he was the one who was always in the gym keeping fit. Jack was running off a mixture of adrenaline and love. There was nothing more he wanted than to have his daughter back. Every man they passed was given the once over for the signs of the man they'd just spotted at the coffee shop. Mike stopped suddenly. He saw something move in the trees along the road they were searching. "Jack!" he shouted after his brother, but his brother was too affixed on the task in his mind. "Jack, I think he's this way." Just as this was said, the movement from the trees was much larger and a lot more notable.

It was definitely a man, a man who was clearly hiding from them. "JACK! THIS WAY, IT'S THIS WAY" The deafening screaming was enough to grab his brother's attention, and Jack quickly bolted toward Mike. There was a pause while both men caught their breath. "Where, I don't see him?" "Right there Jack, he was right there and then he ran further in. I know I saw him" Jack looked perplexed, and started to question his brother's judgement in his mind; however, didn't question him out loud. "Okay, then I guess we go into the woods after the bastard!" There was conviction in his voice, and Mike could tell Jack meant business here.

After the two men entered the woods, Jack got his phone out using it as their only source of light. "This is the way I came!" Mike sounded horrified. "What are you talking about?" Jack seemed slightly worried for his brother. "When I was looking for Hayley, I came this way." Mike seemed to drop to a lower level of sadness before carrying on. "I gave up when I couldn't find a clue. If only Iâ" he was interrupted by Jack, "Don't do this to yourself Mike. I know I blamed you, but I was wrong". For the first time in two years, there was a connection between two brothers who were once so close. There was a resolution to the problem, and it was forgiven. Mike looked at his brother with respect, and then carried on with his search.

"Do you ever think God does certain things just to get his own way?" Mike looked at Jack and responded "Yeah, and I reckon he tries to piss me off too but, we've just got to ignore it." Just as this sentence finished there was a gun shot in close proximity. "Get down!" Mike grunted this to Jack before withdrawing his gun from the holster. He started to creep toward a tree and hid behind it. Peeking round to see if anyone was there, he noticed something. Something he had hoped would go away if he rubbed his eyes. It didn't, and just a few more meters in front of where he was standing was a cabin. This cabin was bigger than the last one he had found, and also seemed to have different rooms. This one of like the house and the other seemed as though it was a work office. Muttering under his breath he said, "Surely not, this cannot be another one," he was unsure of how to tackle this cabin. The last time he found a strange out of place cabin in the woods, he found a lot more than he bargained for.

Jack came running over, wondering what Mike was doing. He could see the look on his face, and it was as though he had seen a ghost. Jack turned toward where Mike was staring and that look smacked him in the face too. "This is the cabin where you found the pictures?" he questioned his brother. Mike could barely speak but managed to mutter out, "no, this one's bigger." Jack looked slightly shocked for a few seconds then exclaimed, "THIS is where all the girls are being kept." Mike turned toward Jack and looked at his hopeful expression, knowing that it was unlikely that any one of those girls was still alive in there. Mike couldn't bring himself to say anything.

Mike started to creep toward the cabin wall. From what he could tell he was at the left hand side of the cabin, and it was just one corner away from the dreaded door. He walked slowly toward that corner, making sure he wasn't making too much noise as he went. Jack started to do the same trying to keep as close as possible to Mike. Mike kept thinking he might as well be giving Jack a piggy back. Mike peaked around the corner hoping to not see anything untoward, he didn't get his wish.

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There was a car, well a van. It was covered in what looked like a batter consisting of mud, rain and blood. Mike plucked up the courage to pace round the corner, but just as he did this, the van's engine switched on, and the headlights blinded him. He tried to look past them at the person controlling the van, but couldn't see anything past the headlights. The van's wheels screeched away from the cabin and disappeared into the night. Jack and Mike assumed that this was the coast cleared, so presumed with their task of going inside.

Cautiously, Mike pushed open the door. Jack was surprised that it wasn't locked. It was dark inside the cabin, and they couldn't really see anything. Mike kept tripping over things and Jack was struggling to walk in a straight line. There was one door that under the crack at the bottom, a little bit of light was escaping. This drew Mike's attention straight away. He went toward the door, with Jack still right behind him, and placed his trembling hand on the handle. Slowly pulling the handle down, he hoped that there was no nasty surprises for him.

The door was opening further and further, and the light was exposing the state of the rest of the cabin. It looked just as disgusting as it smelt, and matched up with the van nicely. By the time this observation was taken the door was fully open, and all that could be seen was space, a big empty room that lead to another room. Mike looked into the room and proceeded. He paused and made Jack pause to listen to a noise, "what was that? I heard something." Jack looked a bit confused. Mike could hear what sounded like someone trying to shout, but someone who was gagged. His eyes widened in horror as he looked toward the next door. His heart raced as though it was going to pop right then. He strutted toward the door and opened it, it was at this point that an axe swung from inside the room and straight into Mike's chest. Jack watched in horror as he saw this happen. The axe was then moving out of the doorway, as was the man wielding it. Jack ran out of the cabin and through the woods, with tears streaming down his face. He just watched his brother die, and was now sure that the killer wasn't alone as someone drove that van away.

## Chapter 4

Jack was extremely unsettled by what he had seen. He had witnessed his own brother have an axe thrust into his chest, and then drop to the floor. He had always been best friends with his brother since they were kids. This made him regret blaming Mike for Hayley's disappearance even more than he already did. Mike had gone looking for Hayley, but couldn't find her, despite looking for weeks. He went days without sleep whilst searching for his niece, and when the commissioner told him to stop looking, and his job was threatened, he had to do it. Jack didn't forgive Mike for this and said that Hayley was more important than his job. This is why Jack lost his job and his obsession with it eventually lost him his wife too. For two years Jack was all alone without anything or anyone, until he got that call from Mike earlier on in the night. That call led to him losing his brother for good.

Despite all of this, Jack still wanted to crack this case, not to help Mike anymore, but in Mike's memory and for Hayley. He was sat in a cold excluded area of the woods still wondering what his next move should be. Should he go back? Should he go get help? Maybe he should ring dad and let him know what's happened also. He searched for his phone in his pocket, but couldn't find it. He started frantically tapping his pockets, but still couldn't find it. It was then that he realised that he dropped it in that cabin, and that the killer would find it, and know exactly who he was. The killer would be able to find out anything he wanted about him, because all of Jack's details were on the phone. He was filling out a job application on his phone just before Mike had rang him. "Shit, what am I going to do?" He turned as though Mike would answer, and then turned back with a sad realisation. He decided there was nothing else to do, he needed to go back.

Pacing through the woods, tripping, falling and unable to run in a straight line, Jack was hoping he would just stumble upon that cabin once more. It started to run through his mind that he was just running relentlessly to his own death, thoughts he couldn't afford to have, so instead focused on questioning how his lungs were still allowing him to run. Adrenaline was completely taking over his body and he felt as though he could run forever, it was during this thought that he started to feel anger, pure anger; for the first time in two years, it wasn't about Hayley, but about Mike instead.

He finally reached an area that he recognised, and knew straight away that he wasn't far away from the cabin. He took a few moments to rediscover his energy and most importantly after all that running, his breath. It was then he started to walk slowly, trying to be as silent as possible. "What am I even going to do when I get there?" Jack began to question his own abilities and motives. He found the tree that he and his brother had hidden behind before.

Slipping his head around the tree, he checked for any signs of danger. When he saw nothing, he paced toward the cabin wall. It had been a while since he did this sort of thing; two years had passed since he was dismissed from the force, but he was a natural, just like his brother. He took a moment to remember his brother's bravery, gulped, and then rounded the corner of the cabin. He quickly retraced his steps back round to safety when he saw the van. "Shit, what do I do?" He was panicked enough about facing one killer, but a team of them was out of the question.

Jack took a deep breath and thought of his brother, thought of the bravery he had always displayed. For one moment a memory of them as children flashed through his mind. It was a memory of Jack falling down a small well, and Mike climbing down and pushing Jack out because he was crying. Jack had a tear of admiration crawl down his face; the bravery Mike had shown even when they were kids, just for Jack. Jack shook himself off, and his face changed immediately. The look of determination crippled his sadness, took over his face and soul, and gave him the bravery that he needed to continue with this mission of his. He wanted to at least get Mike's body back from this cabin, and he wanted to find Hayley.

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So once more he made a move to the corner of the cabin, keeping so close to the wall that he was scraping off the moss with his coat. Jack peeked round the corner again, with a shred of hope that the van was pulling awayâ his hope was misplaced. He cast his eyes upon the van and fixated on it, looking toward the passenger side window, hoping that he would see someone in there. He ran to the van and crouched down, his breath was deep and hard, his lungs flooding with ironâ or so it seemed.

He thought his body was giving up on him, telling him that he shouldn't be doing this. Jack began to believe this and started to look back toward the wooded area behind him in thought that he needed to escape from this hell. He felt his head twinge and shake, as though his mind was trying to better his body. It wasn't enough that he had to fight a killer, but he had to fight an internal war too! It was at this point, an interval perhaps, that he heard a gun-shot. He turned toward the cabin wide eyed, to see the door swing open and fall off its hinges. No man stood there, but there was a man sitting down, to Jack's surprise. He couldn't make out who it was, but knew it wasn't the man he had seen at the coffee shop. This man was much smaller, and didn't seem as hostile. It was exactly this thought that was followed by the man suddenly standing and running toward Jack. He was uncontrollable and was screaming out "YOU BASTARDS". The last thing Jack saw was a blunt object flying toward his face and then his face was level with the bottom of the tires on the vanâ then darkness.

## Chapter 5

"Jacky? Jack? JACK!? Wake up". Jack had this voice in his head as he lay there unconscious, it was as though Mike was trying to wake him up when they were younger, but it was an adult Mike's voice. Even in unconsciousness, Jack was easily confused, and this was far beyond his limit. He started to wiggle his fingers; a great start to recovering full control of his body. In his mind he had a picture of Mike as an angel, "that's who was trying to wake me up, he's come to protect me". A smile crept across his face, and was the first time in two years that one had done so.

After his fingers, it was his arms, as he placed his hands down on the floor to push himself up. Next, his knees reached a vital point, both supporting his frame for a timely escape from the clutches of the leaves; at last, he was standing. Jack was groggy, and could only see a splice of blur and blood, a lovely concoction to wake up to. He began to scrabble at his eyes hoping that he could clear them enough to see. The blood wiped away but the blur remained and at this point that was a win in Jack's books.

Blurry eyed, beaten and looking like death he decided it was time to leave the woods. Although it was a noble task to recover his brother's body, he knew he would end up dead also, and what good did that do the world. It was at this point that he heard the leaves behind him crunching and panic took over his organs again. In his head he thought of running straight, but knew he wouldn't outrun a fully fit man in his condition. Hesitantly, he asked "Who are you?" There was no reply. "I said WHO are you?" This time, a large breath was exhaled, and the man began to talk, "Well, if you didn't recognise my voice when waking you up, who do you think I am?" Jack's face had never looked so happy and relieved, "You mean?" "It's me Jacky" Jack swung his entire frame around to see his brother standing, alive. "I'm so happy you are here!" Immediately his face turned from happy to worried, "I'm sorry Mike, I'm sorry I left. If I knew" Mike interrupted him, "Don't be silly. No one would have known I survived. I don't know how I did. My vest must have been stronger than I thought." His bullet proof vest had absorbed the damage of the axe, meaning that he only had a minor wound on his chest.

"I heard a gunshot in there and then someone attacked me!" Jack looked around for his attacker as he said this. "Yeah, about that." Mike smiled cautiously, "I had to shoot the lock off the door to get out, and well, it was dark and you were standing next to this van." Both men laughed just before they embraced each other. "You didn't think you would get rid of me that easily, did you?" Jack looked his brother in the eye and replied, "I was scared I had Mike." Jack started to walk away and Mike grabbed his arm and said, "I'm not finished here!" "What do you mean? You can't go back in there!" Jack was desperate to leave the woods by this point and wanted his brother to get to safety as soon as possible.

"I know how crazy it is Jack, but I've got to find Liza; I promised her parents." Mike's face looked quite sad as though he was about to cry. It was as this feeling gripped him that he turned back toward the cabin and said "We need to search it properly. Don't worry there isn't anyone in there this time." This calmed Jack down completely, and gave him even more admiration for his brother.

The two men walked into the cabin as they had once done already, they looked toward that door once more. Mike, for obvious reasons, looked a bit sketchy when walking toward the door he had been attacked from before. He cautiously reached out his hand toward the handle and was visibly shaking to open the door. Jack placed a calming hand upon his brother's shoulder to reassure him that everything would be fine. This seemed to spur Mike on; just the effect Jack had on him as kids. Jack's taunting or encouragement could make Mike do anything in the world. Mike had once climbed up the drain pipe to the top of his house and jumped off just because Jack said he couldn't do it.

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With his brother behind him, Mike swung the door open to find an empty room; except from an old chest in the centre of the room. "Why would he be guarding this?" Jack asked. Mike couldn't answer as it all seemed a bit perplexing. He moved inch by inch closer to the antique chest until he finally reached a spot where he could pull the lid open. Mike placed his shaking; dirt covered hands on the lid and after a few seconds to compose himself, lifted it off of the chest.

The chest was packed full of photos like the ones he had found before, but this time they were of all different kinds of people. There were young girls, old women, boys and men all in everyday situationsâ not one of them posed for. "Jack, I think we could have a serious issue on our hands here" Jack gulped and replied with, "I think there is a bigger issue at that window Mike." Mike looked up to the window to see a face staring back at him and in the blink of an eye the face was gone. The two men worked together to barricade themselves into the room they were currently trapped in. They found some wood and wedged the door closed, while the chest acted as a nice weight against the door.

Footsteps were heard pacing toward the door and then the handle was pulled down. It seemed like an eternity for this man to get to the door of this room, but Mike was still startled when the handle moved. Jack just kept still in the corner hoping that the poor barricade was enough to send this man away. The door was tried once more, and then the footsteps seemed to be moving away from the door. Indeed they were, but only to take a run up. \*THUD\* The man's shoulder collided with the door. Mike picked up another rogue piece of wood in case of needing a weapon. \*THUD\* the man was there once more, and this time the wooden beam had fallen, and the man was pushing the door back including the chest's weight. The door burst open and the light from three torches pierced the eyes of Mike and Jack as they stand waiting in the dark secluded room. A voice started to bellow out "Identify yourself right now!" Mike thought he recognised this voice and replied, "Detective Michael Hoskins, and this is my brother Jack Hoskins." The man at the door seemed relieved. "I fucking hoped it was you two. What the fuck did you think you were doing coming into these woods without backup." Mike was right, it was his boss, and it was the only time in eighteen years that he was relieved to see him.

"Sir, I'm sorry, I had a lead that was too good to waste time, and I made a mistake." Mike's head dropped as he said this, but everyone else in the room raised their head in shock. "Was that the great Mike Hoskins admitting to a mistake?" "Yes sir" Mike felt humbled for once and knew there was no point arguing; he had done something stupid, and he was lucky he was still alive. On top of all this, he had put his brother at risk too. Jack stood up and walked toward the door, "Sir, Mike needed me to help him through this, that's the only reason I'm here." "You are two years past having to explain yourself to me Jacky" "I know, but I just thoughtâ" this was interrupted by Mike, "GIVE him his job backâ I'd be dead without him." This of course wasn't true at all, but Mike wanted to work alongside his brother again; he missed it.

"Alright boys, Jack can have his old job back. I'm guessing you two will want to pick up where you left off and become partners again?" Mike nodded and smiled with a thankful expression. "Dya' know Jacky, Mike refused to have a new partner when you left, he said no one could fill your shoes." With this the man walked away and got into a car, ushering Mike and Jack into another car behind.

## Chapter 6

The two cars arrived at the station, and all of the men got out of the cars. Jack kept staring at Mike as though he was in some sort of trance. All that was going through his mind was how lucky his brother was to be there. Then Chief Kanya piped up, "Right guys, this way please!" There was an assertive tone that he didn't have in his voice before; his voice was calming when they were in the woods. Mike was looking at Kanya as though he was going to punch him in the face.

Jack kept thinking about the man he saw at the coffee shop, and how that was the man who had taken his little girl. Kanya spoke out once more, "Mike, you need to tell us everything you have learned so far, as you have been holding out on us for weeks." Mike didn't seem to appreciate this order and stayed silent. Kanya opened the door to an interview room, walked in and smashed the tape recorder against the wall. He then walked back to the corridor, pushed Mike into the room and locked the door after entering. Jack was angered by this shouting, "What the fuck are you doing Kacey?" He continued to shout, "You better get your skinny ass back out here now!" Jack was punching the door and kicking but it was no good.

The door opened just a crack, and Kanya had a huge grin on his face. Jack burst the door open with a swift boot, only to see a banner up that said welcome back. "Sorry Jacky, we just wanted you to know how much we wanted you back with us." Jack looked astonished, and at the same time had a red glow of embarrassment to his cheeks. Mike was the one to open the rounds of laughter, struggling to blurt out, "You thought Kacey was going to rough me up? Ahahahahaha" Jack was looking like a spoilt child at this point, "Okay guys, I get it! I made a fool out of myself; let's just move on."

After the laughs were gone, the mood changed fairly quickly, back to the serious topic of kidnappings and possible murders. Mike was the one who said, "We need to get back out there and search those woods. I have found two cabins, both disgusting, and filled with photos, of what can be assumed victims or targets." Kanya looked toward him in contemplation, and agreed with a firm nod. Jack had a look of terror on his face but removed it forcefully when Kanya cast his eyes on him, "You alright Jacky? It's been such a long time!" Jack interrupted, "Yeah, I'm just ready to find this son of a bitch Kacey!" This was the most assertive Jack had been all night, and it sent a look of pride down to his face as his mouth remembered what it was like to smile again.

Mike, followed by Jack, left the station and jumped into a car. Jack got into the passenger side and adjusted his seat, "Just the way it used to be" he reminisced. Mike looked across to his brother; his partner and smiled into the mirror. This was what Mike had wanted for the last two years, the Hoskins reunited to fight against crime. Their dad had always treated them as some sort of super hero team when they were in the academy, and this was an idea that both men liked secretly.

"So, we going back to those woods?" asked Jack. Mike looked vacant for the first time in a long time. "What's wrong Mike? You Okay?" Mike still gave no answer, but looked toward his brother. His face had become pale and had his eyes seemed to be glazed over. Jack ran straight back inside to grab the police doctor, "QUICK, Mike! THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH MIKE!!" The doctor ran to the car and pulled Mike to the ground, laying him out as though he was a sheet.

Mike could hear the faint sound of Jack shouting and could feel his body hit the cold wet ground. He felt his shirt being ripped open and then saw a light being flashed into his eyes. At first, he thought he was going to the light in the sky, but then he could make out the sound of the flashlight clicking on and off. He could hear Jack trying to comfort him, as though he was trying to talk him out of dying. He managed to mutter out what he thought was "I'll be fine" but was in fact "ahhebffffn"

## The Mad Man's Woods

Jack was obviously worried about his brother, and started to shout at the doctor, "Why can't he talk?" "Jacky, calm down, you aren't helping anyone right now. He is delirious and it seems he has an infection of some sort." "That damn axe; I should have taken him to the hospital!" Jack was angered by his stupidity to not tend to his brother's wound. "It just needs to be covered with an anti-septic cloth and bandaged up. A couple of hours rest and then he should be fine."

Mike awoke and he was in a white room, with no other colour to it at all. He could see a window and it was bright outside. "What time is it?" A voice came back to him, "quarter past 1." This voice sounded familiar, but wasn't one he had heard in a while. "Dad, is that you?" "Yes sonâ it' me. How you feelin'?" Mike didn't know how to respond at first, but started to speak in pride, "Dad, you need to go! I don't want you seeing me like this." A tear rolled down his cheek and onto the pillow. "See you like this? I've seen you in a lot worse states Mike!" Mike could sense the angry tone in his dad's voice. "You better be getting well now Mike. Jack told me what happened and it sounds like you have an angel looking after you son." Mike kept his eyes closed knowing what was coming next; "Like I've always told you, your Mum will always be looking out for you!" This was a sentiment never relayed to Jack but always rubbed into Mike's face.

Jack entered the dingy room and saw his dad holding Mike's hand in his. "That was a brave thing you did Jacky; going back for his body." The first time his dad had shown any pride in Jack and it wasn't long lasting, "But why did he get left there Jack?" Mike stepped in with a passionate cry, "It wasn't Jack's fault. I was hit with an axe, and Jack was in danger; I wouldn't have wanted him to risk his life for mineâ we both could have been killed." Jack's expression loosened, and he smiled toward Mike. Their dad had always treated them like opposites even though they got on like best friends.

"So Jacky, are you going back to your hideout after this?" His dad had such a nasty look on his face, and sneered right toward him. "Dad, leave him alone!" the defence came from Mike. "You never could fight your own battles Jack. That was always your problem." It was this line that snapped something in Jack's mind, "NO! You were always my problem Steve." All men in the room looked shocked, even Jack who had decided this was the right time to speak out. "You have put me down my whole life. No matter what I did, I could never be as great as Mike. MUM NEVER LOOKED DOWN ON ME!" Jack began to get really angry and this had forced a nurse to come into the room, "Is everything okay in here?" she asked with an inquisitive, yet knowing tone. "Yes, everything is fine." Steve snapped. "Are you sure? It's just we heard shouting and what seemed to be arguing. "He's a moron, that's what's wrong. I'm sorry for the shouting, it won't happen again." Jack said this in such an apologetic tone whilst keeping his eyes fixed firmly on his dad.

The nurse left the room, sighing away to herself while Mike lay shocked about what he had seen moments ago. "You are no son of mine" their dad snarled. Even though Jack was angry, this hurt him. He went to speak, but couldn't bring out the words, and eventually left the room with tears caressing his cheeks. Mike was looking straight at his dad waiting for the correct reaction; it didn't come. "Dad, you better be going after him now!" Mike had never spoken to his father like this. He was raised to obey him, not question him. "Don't you start as well Mike!" the tone of his voice dropped from angry to desperate. Mike felt a drop of sympathy for his father, but knew he couldn't side with him on this one. "Dad, what you just said to him, after everything he's been through; he needs us now more than ever." Mike hoped this speech would revive his father's loving side, but instead it just convinced him to walk out of the room.

Steve went to the car park to find his car muttering to himself about respect and loyalty. He was so much in his own world, that he didn't know the car steaming toward him. He looked up, saw the bright flash from the headlights and froze. It seemed in his head to be taking forever to reach him, as though time was slowed down, and his fate was fixed. He couldn't bring himself to move, and all that was in his head was what he had just said to Jack. It replayed over and over "You're no son of mine" "You're no son of mine" until he clenched his eyes shut and waited for impact. Then BANG! He felt the impact, but not of a car, of a shoulder in his ribs; of hands grasping around him. Then his head tapped the ground and his back slammed hard against the grainy

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concrete of the car park. As the blur cleared from his eyes, he saw a familiar figure, "Jacky? After what I said to youâ I'm sorry" Jack was crouching above his dad panting and out of breath. "You ARE my dad, and I'm not about to lose any more of my family!" He smiled and his dad sat up to embrace him. For the first time in years Jack had received love from his father.

## Chapter 7

Mike had been in the hospital for three days with an infection to his blood. There was numerous times where he had been put back into the bed after trying to discharge himself. He was anxious that every day lost was another person killed or kidnapped. Jack came running into the room, "Mike! I've found something!" Mike sat up and looked intrigued by Jack's excitement, "It better be good Jacky!" Jack unravelled a piece of paper that looked old; it was a map of the woods. "This was designed thirty years ago by a man who wanted to buy and build in the woods Mike!" Mike's face dropped and he said, "And that helps us how?" Jack seemed dejected at first but then went on, "It shows that 30 years ago, there wasn't a single structure in those woods; only animals and trees."

Mike was shocked by the information his brother had found but at the same time was impressed that he had found it. "How did you get your hands on this Jacky?" he questioned. "I was in the library trying to research this whole thing. I was looking for a name of the owner of those cabins." Jack stopped for a breath then carried on, "Then there was a weird guy in the library that asked me what I was looking for. I told him and he brought me to a filing cabinet. It was part of the public records office, and it had this map in it." Mike looked happier than a child at Christmas and began to get out of the bed saying, "We need to go back down there and see if we can find anything else like a name." Jack looked at Mike and said, "Well, I already have that Mike; it's written on the map too!" Mike snatched the map out of Jack's hand and searched. After a few moments, his fear was confirmed and he read out the name, "Alan Rogers."

Mike recalled the letter he had found in the desk in that first cabin and remembered that the name on it was Alan. "Jack, we need to find out more about this Alan Rogers; he's the killer!" Jack looked astounded and asked about the first cabin, "So, is that letter still there Mike?" Mike rolled his eyes at this and retorted, "No Jack, I kept the letter, but the rest of that journal is still there. I bet that had even more information in it." Mike was regretting not picking that journal up when he had the chance, and was very swiftly regarding that as his worst decision during this investigation. Jack plucked up some courage and blurted out, "We need to go back then don't we" which was met by a nod from Mike.

Mike was getting himself dressed as he prepared to discharge himself successfully. "Dad will want to see you before we go" Jack claimed. "After what he said to you Jacky, I'm not too sure I want to see him." Mike was still angry about what had happened. "Mike, he had two broken ribs and concussion. He nearly died." Mike was swayed more by guilt than anything else. "Okay, we'll go see him before we head off."

They arrived in the room where their dad was laying. "Dad, are you okay?" Mike asked. There was no response. Mike placed his hand on his father's arm and looked at the man who had raised them single handed. He was fast asleep, and wasn't waking any time soon. "We'll come back later Jacky; he needs his rest for now." Jack looked happy for this to go ahead and proceeded to walk out of the door. They were stopped in their tracks by a trolley being run down the corridor. It was a young boy no older than 14. Mike started to follow the trolley and waiting until it came to a stop in a nearby room. "What's happened?" he desperately asked. The answer came from the same nurse who had intervened before, "He was found on the roadside this morning, with this attached to him by staples." The nurse looked absolutely disgusted when she said this, as though it was her fault just because she was repeating what had happened. She handed them a piece of paper that had more blood than ink on. It said, 'Come and get me! You know you want to!' It then had the initials M.H on it followed by J.H. This could be no coincidence; this was a message to them.

Mike asked the two paramedics if there was anyone else there, but the answer was a no. "I don't understand Jack, why is he now trying to get our attention?" For the first time Jack saw Mike genuinely confused. "Mike, don't worry about that, it's just going to be that we escaped and are onto him now." To a certain extent, Mike knew he was right, but at the same time, couldn't help but wonder how the killer knew their names.

## The Mad Man's Woods

They left the hospital and went to the car as Jack joked, "you aren't going to go all pale when we get in again are ya" this was a joke that was firmly ignored, but not through purpose, just distraction. They drove for a while and Jack was looking at the map, "Mike, I have just noticed something on this map." He held it up to the light. "There is a message on it that can only be seen when exposed to the light." Mike hurried him along with the contents of the message. "It says, 'those who shall seek the woodland man shall meet their grave as fast as they can'" Mike looked astounded by the thought that these crimes could be 30 years old.

"So, are we going back to the woods Mike?" Jack seemed as though he was a bit scared of going back. "Yes Jack, we are going back because that's where he is. That's how we are going to avenge all of those kids; it's the only way out now." Mike was saying this knowing that they would have to venture deeper into the woods than they had before. The woods were acres upon acres of trees and lakes. He knew that if there was anything to hide in these woods, then it woods certainly be a lot deeper than they had previously been.

They arrived toward the main entrance to the woods, and could see the footpath that they had used before. "Jack, I just want you to know that I have your back and well..." Mike was stuttering so Jack interrupted, "I love you too man. Now enough of that talk, we're going in there to find those kids and Hayley." Jack had a rare look of determination and anger on his face. He stepped out of the car and slammed the door shut behind him. Jack paced toward the boot of the car and picked a gun up to slide into the back of his trousers. Mike was already armed with his holster. Each man picked up a torch and proceeded toward the dusty path.

Mike was walking quickly, with intent to end this whole thing as quick as he could. "Jack, we need to find that first cabin before we do anything else; I want that journal!" Jack was in no position to argue and just nodded along. They turned through a little bypass, jumping over a small patch of water. "It's not far from here now. I found it just behind those trees." Mike ran toward the trees as he was pointing with Jack trying to keep up. There it was, the cabin that started the investigation.

Mike walked to the front of the cabin, this time with no caution whatsoever. Opening the door he thought about the fact that there was a man who could have potentially been a murderer for over 30 years. He switched on a light to cover the room with a brighter tone. He ran to the desk and opened the drawer. The journal was sat right there. For one moment, he couldn't pick it up, as though he was in a trance. Jack shook him from this and handed him the journal. Mike flicked through hoping that he wouldn't find anything that he would regret missing from the first time.

Nothing seemed to appear, except for one piece of paper that was folded up; it was newer than any other in there. In fact, it didn't seem like it was there for very long at all. Jack grabbed it from the journal and started to open it. His hands were shaking quite visibly. "It's a note!" Jack was in shock as this note had the initials on it again. Mike read it aloud, 'You two just don't know your limits do you? I axe one of you in the chest and you still get up and carry on. What do I have to do to get you off my case? I WILL KILL YOU! IT WILL BE SLOW! YOU WILL REGRET FOLLOWING ME! Oh, and ask your father how he's doing after his near death experience!' Jack looked at Mike and couldn't speak. Mike managed a few words, "He knows what we're doing; he knew we were coming here first." Both men seemed scared by this and started to look around the cabin at all the windows.

They could hear a tapping on the walls, and a laughing from the outside, but it was the laughter of a few people, not just one. Mike drew his gun from the holster and started randomly pointing it towards walls. Jack shouted, "WHO ARE YOU?" there was no answer and suddenly no tapping or laughing. They were on their own again; or was there anyone even there in the first place? Mike began to question himself, and started to think he might be going mad then he realised Jack had heard it too. "Jack, we need to remain calm and carry on this investigation!" Mike sounded terrified, as though he knew death was closing in and this only made Jack feel worse.

## The Mad Man's Woods

Mike walked toward the door hoping that there would be no axe swung at him when he opened it to leave. Jack walked swiftly behind him until he could hear something; a ticking. He turned and walked toward the wardrobe that had contained the first lot of photos. He cautiously placed his ear upon the door and one hand on the door handle. He pulled the door open and shouted to Mike, "GET OUT NOW! RUN!" There was a bomb inside the wardrobe and it only had ten seconds left on the timer. Mike had escaped to the outside and was screaming for Jack to get out too, Jack had started his run toward the safety zone but had only managed to get to the porch steps of the cabin. He jumped over the wooden railing and into the small bit of lake surrounding the cabin. Mike was blown back by the blast. The cabin lay in pieces and both men lucky to be alive.

## Chapter 8

The wreckage had created a smoke, and there was rotten wood burning an aroma into the air that had the foulest stench. Mike was face down in the dirt a few meters away from the wreckage and he had been burnt by the blast, but only a simmer on his skin; almost as though he was flash fried. He began to push himself up using what strength he had left in his arms and looked toward the trees they had come from. He twisted his head round to see the piles of wood on the floor, with the little spurts of fire and smoke.

It took several moments before he could bring his mind round to the right state and started to think about his brother. The last he had seen was him in the doorway as the blast blew him back. It was this thought that gave him another burst of power and he almost leapt to his feet, although he didn't know what his next action was going to be. He scanned the area very quickly in search of Jack, contemplating a move for the wreckage to search through for his brother.

He heard a splash, and more movement in the water. He looked down into the small pond to see Jack scabbling around trying to find land in the mixture of darkness and smoke. Mike couldn't help but laugh, though it was a laugh spoiled by the sigh of relief. "Jack, grab my hand" Mike said while giggling.

"You think this is funny? I nearly got blown up!" Both men laughed as Mike hoisted Jack back to dry land. Mike was looking at Jack remembering his obligation to always take care of his younger brother. He had always been made responsible for his safety, not by force, but for the sake of family love.

"So what's next?" asked Jack.

Mike took a moment to think about it. "Well do we risk going to the other cabin again, when it is probably going to be set up to kill us again?"

Both men were thinking of the possible fact of this killer knowing their every move before they even decided it. It was like he was toying with them; as though he was the puppet master and they were his creations. Mike looked at Jack and pictured him dressed as Pinocchio with a long thin nose. He chuckled to himself and wouldn't share the joke with Jack, who seemed quite annoyed by this.

The men started to hike through the woods some more, knowing that even though they hadn't made a firm decision, they were going back to cabin number two. Jack had been terrified there and Mike had been axed there; it was suffice to say that neither man could see this as a future holiday home. Jack began to shake again and was thinking of running away through sheer terror. Mike was rubbing his hand gently on his fairly fresh wound. This wasn't a place where either of them could muster up a smile let alone a laugh.

"Right, let's go round to the front, barge in and hope we can catch them off guard!" Jack expressed as he planned the tactics to survival approaching the back of the cabin.

Mike was more apprehensive than he was letting on, thinking that the last time he did that, he got an axe to the chest. He said nothing to Jack and carried on leading the way. They crept round to the corner once more; there was no van. They made a break for the door.

Jack yelped out behind Mike as he fell through the decking, his arms the only thing keeping him from falling underneath completely. Mike was trying to hush the noise as he reached his hand out to Jack once more.

"Help me the wood is stabbing into my sides. It's really hurting Mike! Please!" Jack was begging for some relief from the pain of this damp wood ripping the skin from his rib cage.

## The Mad Man's Woods

"Jack, stop struggling now!" Mike bellowed out and for one moment Jack saw a lot of their dad in him. With one momentous heave, Mike pulled Jack back to a standing state; leaving half of the skin from his ribs and chest clinging to the wood.

Jack was in a lot of pain, and had tears in his eyes that seemed as though they were barging out of his eyes rather than falling. The stinging coming from the ripped skin was worse than anything else he had experienced. Mike didn't know what to do as he had nothing to patch him up and no sanitary equipment. Jack's eyes closed and Mike could tell he wanted to scream out in pain. Jack was fighting the urge and was trying to stop the pain at the same time. That look of determination came back to his face and he walked toward the door. Mike went to speak and Jack spoke first, "When we find this guy, we kill him! I don't care what the law says, he dies!"

There was a few moments silence before Mike could bring himself to go inside. "Did you mean that Jack?" There was a sense of fear in his trembling voice.

"Yep" Jack said angrily. Again there was a silence as both men searched the cabin once more. It was strange because there didn't seem to be a fear of the cabin anymore, or what this psycho might do. They had come past all of that into a much darker scene; of course that's the scene in their minds, where Jack kills a man.

They walked toward the same room where they found the chest and Jack placed his hand on Mike's shoulder, whispering as he did so, "Over there!" Jack was pointing toward a little trap door in the corner opposite the door. Mike crouched down and pulled it open looking into the dark abyss that seemed to appear. Jack shone a torch down into it for Mike to climb down and have a look. It was a longer drop to the bottom than he thought and it impacted on his ankles and knees almost buckling his legs completely.

"Oh my god" Mike just about brought himself to be able to say this. The sight that invaded his vision as it was being uncovered by his torch light was something he really didn't expect; perhaps a basement or a ditch or something, but not what he could see in front of him. Jack jumped down after and was just as shocked at the sight that stretched in front of him. The whole time they had been focusing on the woods themselves, when the real threat was underground.

"A tunnel" Jack expressed in disbelief.

"No Jack; a network of tunnels!" Mike's response seemed as though he had known about them but blanked them out. Jack looked toward his brother and asked, "Did you know about this?" His voice came through quite assertive. Mike wouldn't answer at first and had to be practically bullied into releasing his answer.

"Okay Jack, Just shut the fuck up!" He seemed angry but not with Jack; himself. "I heard from a weird guy sitting on the street corner that they were underground, and that's why he was forced above ground. I just thought it was nonsense." He faded into disappointment in himself.

Jack placed a hand on Mike's shoulder, trying to confirm that he shouldn't beat himself up about it. All Jack could think about was the pain from his ripped skin and how he was more than likely going to get infected. He didn't care as long as he lasted long enough to see Mike to safety and see this mad man put down.

They embarked on this journey through the tunnels, hoping that this was going to be the way to their target. There was a stench that was unlike any other known before. It was as though this was Death's corridor, a corridor where people were dragged kicking and screaming, biting and clawing; doing anything they could to escape a vice grip. Jack was ignoring patches of blood where people had obviously been subjected to cruel punishments to stop their squirming; it was something he couldn't deal with properly, so he just closed his eyes placing his hand on Mike's shoulder once more so that he could lead him through safely.

## The Mad Man's Woods

They were only a few minutes in, probably less than 100 metres in total when they could hear something. Mike stopped dead causing Jack to walk straight into his back so abruptly that Jack could almost feel the chill going up Mike's spine as he listened out. Mike placed his ear to the air slanting his head sideways to enhance hearing. There was a moment of silence where Jack assumed Mike might be going crazy, but then it happened. Both men could hear a scream, and then a large bang, followed by another scream. It was the scream of a young boy and they came with intervals of around five seconds. Both men couldn't move at first; completely frozen to the spot, wondering what they could do even if they could move. There was one more noise, one that they couldn't really make out at first, then they realised, someone was being dragged into the tunnels behind them. They had nowhere to hide from the madness approaching.

## Chapter 9

They were swiftly running out of time. The noise was getting louder and louder. The dragging was shifting toward them and they had nowhere to hide. Jack began to run toward the first noise in hope that he would find some crack or crevice to hide in. Mike was standing, waiting. Mike seemed to be waiting for his prey, stalking almost. In the darkness he had no sight, and he looked to be trying to maximise his hearing.

The dragging was getting closer and closer. Mike's heart was racing and his mind was boggling itself at a very quick rate. He didn't even know what he was going to do when the perpetrator reached his position; he just knew it wasn't far from happening. The man came into a few metres distance and Mike could hear his deep breathing. His gruff voice panting as he dragged whoever this person was.

Mike felt sorry for this poor guy or girl who was being dragged, but at the same time relieved that he was probably going to save their life right now. The moment was approaching; Mike and his adversary were just a few milliseconds from clashing. Although it was so prominent, it felt like an eternity in Mike's head. It was as though God was trying to give Mike some extra preparation time, and he still didn't know what to do.

Mike crouched down low, to try and gain the extra element of surprise on his opponent. The moment came and Jack could see it from where he was stood. He looked away in an attempt to avoid seeing his brother lose. Mike jumped up and swung his torch into this man's face. The man falls to the floor on top of the body he was dragging so ruthlessly into the tunnels. Mike checked the person's pulse to feel they were alive. It was too dark to make anything out about them, but that wasn't important at this time. He'd spent too much time checking the body and not enough thinking about his next move. He was tripped to the blood stained floor and felt his face pummel a rock on the floor.

Jack, who had found that crevice he so desperately searched for, watched as his brother was knocked unconscious by that fall, and then watched as this man grabbed one foot of each body that lay before him. He struggled, but he was managing to drag both toward his destination. Jack was aware that he had to save his brother, and that this was going to risk his own life. He readied himself to jump out and launch a defensive manoeuvre, before realising that he needed to be on the attack. He lunged from his space reaching his hand out to cause some damage and he did just that. His hand seemed to match up with the man's head perfectly as he shoved it into the wall. It hit the wall so hard that Jack heard his skull crack against it. He fell to the floor, and this time, he wasn't getting up.

Jack's main focus was checking if Mike was alive; he was. He tried to arouse Mike's senses hoping he would wake up and be okay. At first, it wasn't working but then Mike's eyes shot open and he pulled himself back to his feet seeming quite weary of his surroundings. He then looked down and saw the man laying still. He looked toward Jack with his lips quivering, "You didn't kill him did you?" Jack looked back and gulped; he could only bring himself to shrug.

Mike's attention then turned to the other hostage. He pulled the person onto their back to shine a light in their face. It was a heavy body, so wasn't a young boy and the tone seemed as though it wouldn't be a woman. He grabbed out for a torch, snatching one from Jack's hand. He shone it in the person's face and dropped the torch in shock. Jack didn't see and was asking, "What's up?" Mike took the torch once more and shone it in the face again. This time he looked away, allowing Jack to take the image in. It was something neither man expected. Jack dropped to his knees crying, whispering "Dad! Wake up. Please." There was a moment of silence as Mike checked for a pulse once more. There wasn't one. Steve was dead, and there was no mistaking it. Mike checked again and again for a sign that he was still able to save him. It was too late.

## The Mad Man's Woods

It was a brief but silent trip back to the start of the tunnel, but Mike was determined to get his dad out of that tunnel. He reached the hatch and climbed up pulling his dad up after him. His face was now covered with light and Mike could see the damage done to him. His face had a blanket of cuts and he was black and blue. He had been beaten seriously and was a fragment of the man Mike recognised. He wept onto his father's chest while Jack couldn't bring himself to talk. He punched out at the wall putting his fist right through the wooden panel. He now had matching wounds on his knuckles to his ribs.

With hands and ribs excreting blood, Jack jumped back into the tunnel to start his journey for vengeance. Mike stared one more time at his father's face then leapt into the tunnel after his brother.

"It's just me and you now" Mike said with a tone of depression. Jack said nothing while making a bee-line for the man he had already taken out. He kicked out at the corpse as he stepped over it while Mike was watching his brother change by the second. Jack had gone from a man who was scared and worried to a man on a mission. He seemed as though he couldn't be stopped, and Mike couldn't help but let him do what he wanted at this point.

Jack looked to be unstoppable, as though something was possessing him, making him into a braver man. Mike was struggling to keep up even though Jack was only walking. They both knew what they had to do, but Mike was reluctant to do this. He had never killed a man, or even come close. This was the worst case he'd ever worked. He had done small robbery cases, a couple of accidental murders, but never anything like this. This was surreal to him; he wished he was dreaming.

They'd been walking for about ten minutes, and they hadn't seen a sign of any exit yet. Jack seemed to angrier as he became more concerned about the lack of air. Mike tried to talk,

"We need to get over Dad momentarily and do the job we came to do." He spoke hesitantly, and the reason why became clear when Jack responded, "Fuck you Mike; Fuck you!" He wasn't in any kind of mood for any good will gesture right now. He was angry, and was on a path to kill. Mike didn't like what he was seeing and he certainly wasn't sure he could just stand there and watch his brother turn into the very thing they despised; a murderer.

Mike had only just thought of it, the original screaming had stopped. It hadn't embarked on his mind after everything else that had happened since they had first heard the boy's screams. It hit him that they were probably going to find their destination and see many dead bodies. This wasn't the case that Mike had taken up. He was looking for one missing girl; Liza.

Jack looked ahead of him and could see a fragment of light bearing down on the ground; he had found another trap door. The only problem being, how do you go through a trap door without being seen by any in there? Mike could feel his heart racing, and was wondering how he had managed to escape a heart attack during this case. Mike removed his gun from the holder, wondering why he didn't just use it earlier on the man walking toward him. He aimed it toward the hatch and motioned for Jack to open it. Jack placed his hand on the hatch, seemingly losing all of the confidence he had gained. His hand went back to shaking instead of a firm hold. He pushed the hatch open and both men awaited what they will see.

## Chapter 10

The hatch was opened and nothing seemed to come at them. Jack put his hands out to boost Mike up so there was no struggle in the climb. Mike seemingly leapt into the cabin above rolling into cover like a scene in a James Bond film. He peered around the cabin and was shocked with what his eyes saw. It was nothing like the other cabins; well for one it didn't seem to be a cabin. He looked round once more scanning the surroundings.

"Jack, you better come up here and see this" he informed as he hoisted Jack into the room.

"What the fuck is this place?" Jack was confused and somehow disgusted. It was a normal room, all decorated with yellow wallpaper and luxury red carpet.

They looked onto the mantelpiece to see if there were any clues; there was nothing there. There was only one exit from this room, and it was a dark wooden door. It had a golden handle that had tints of red; red from the blood brought through here. It was such a normal room; how could it be linked into all of this. Jack approached the door and placed his sleeve covered hand on the handle to twist it. Pulling it open crack by crack to see if any danger was imminent. There was none in sight. Both men left the room they were in and ventured to a corridor.

They were in a long dark corridor which was starting to look and smell like the cabins had done. They knew they were in the right place, but couldn't understand what this was. It was of course the house of whoever was behind all of this. Mike was creeping through the house as though he was an intruder in someone innocent's house. He almost felt guilty asking Jack, "Are we in the right place?"

Jack of course responded with a nod, and kept walking.

They reached a red door with a white door handle. It was the most unusual door they had ever seen. It had engravings on it that seemed to be in Latin. Both men thought nothing of it. They went through the door and it led them to a hall; a great hall. There was a portrait of a family; a mother and father with two young boys. One of the boys didn't look particularly pleased to be in the portrait. He didn't look like he fitted with the family he was with. On closer inspection, there was a name scrawled under both boys. One was Josh and the other Alan.

Mike's face screwed up almost as though he was growing a lime tree in the pockets of his tongue. "This is the house Jack! This is the house where that psycho grew up" Mike whispered in disgust with a hint of fear. He looked round at the rest of the hall and wondered how there could have been killings here. He then remembered the letter saying that Alan had been made homeless by his family. It didn't seem important at first, but it was hitting Mike's mind hard; Alan's family were probably his first victims.

There was another door covered in Latin symbols. Mike was starting to worry about these symbols, they didn't seem normal to him, and no matter what he thought he couldn't stop thinking about them. The door led to the main entrance which was located opposite a large staircase. Mike and Jack walked toward the stairs weary of the upstairs more than they had been the downstairs.

Each step creaked and cracked beneath their feet, it filled both men with a sense of horror movie feelings. They were expecting someone to jump out or a phone to ring, but neither of those things happened. Something worse happened as there was a bang unlike no other. It was as though the whole house shook and was about to come down.

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Mike ran up the rest of the stairs and ran to a nearby room. The room was empty, or so it seemed to Mike. Jack ran in after him and froze right away; he couldn't believe what he was seeing. Right in front of him and behind Mike's back, was a white figure. The figure was unlike any Jack had seen before. He rubbed his eyes in the roughest manner possible then looked back at the space he'd just been staring at. When his eyes returned to the spot the figure was gone and he was in a clear state of confusion. Mike looked at Jack and mocked, "You look like you just seen a ghost." This was finished with a little laugh which discredited the joke. Jack attempted to speak, but could just about bring out, "I did!" Mike looked at him once more and noticed just how pale he had gone and how his lip was quivering.

"Jacky are you being serious here?" Mike probed his brother's mind. Jack just nodded in response while Mike was sighing away to himself.

"There's no such thing as ghosts Jack. We used to tell you this every time you screamed you'd seen one." Mike was trying to comfort him about what he had seen.

Jack had always claimed to see ghosts, right from a young age. This is what had tarnished his relationship with his dad in the first place. Jack had claimed that he saw some sort of ghost on the night his mother had died; his dad never forgave him for making up stories. Jack had always maintained his version of events was the truth, and he blamed the paranormal when Hayley went missing. This is why he pushed everyone away, because he wouldn't accept that there was another explanation.

"I swear to you Mike I saw one right behind you." Jack quivered.

"Shut up Jack! I've had enough of this now! Why can't you just forget what we saw that night!" As soon as this came out of Mike's mouth he seemed to regret it and for good reason. Everything came back to Jack as he stood listening to Mike's outburst.

"You saw it too?" Jack seemed hurt as he was asking this.

"Yes Jack, I saw it too! I never said anything because it was tearing Dad apart."

Jack was furious at this point asking, "You let me lose everything, and everyone. You told me I was crazy Michael." It had been a very long time since Jack had called him Michael. In fact it was just before they had fallen out two years ago.

Jack had spent a few moments trying to calm down and stop the tears that were breaking out of his eyes. He brushed himself off and started to leave the room. Mike placed a hand on his shoulder to try to apologise but it was no good this soon after learning the truth; Jack shrugged it off and carried on leaving the room. Mike followed on in silence hoping that this whole thing would come to an end soon.

There was just three more doors on the wing they were situated on. Mike went for the nearest one, while Jack went to the furthest. Mike watched as his brother walked to the last room, wondering if they could fix what was broken between them. Mike went into the room to search it, and was startled by hearing the other door slam shut. He assumed it was Jack slamming it in a mood; how wrong he was.

Jack had walked into the furthest room cautiously after what he had seen. People could call him crazy, but he knew what he could see. The door slammed shut behind him and he turned expecting to see someone there. There was no one, and he started to panic slightly. He was thinking about the man in the tunnel, perhaps that was the only person involved and he had killed him. He still knew he had to keep searching, to find any other clues or people. He noticed there was a door on the opposite side of the room that he couldn't remember seeing as he walked in. He approached it, taking small step by small step toward it. He opened the door scared

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of what he might find. The room was dark, but there was a pull-chord for a light. He yanked at it until the light came on and he was shocked at what it uncovered. He let out a scream of terror.

Mike ran to the door he had watched his brother walk through and burst straight through it. There was no one in there, and he was confused at this sight. He quietly said to himself, "He must have gone to another room." The door that appeared to Jack, appeared no more. Mike left the room wondering where he would find his brother, and what had happened to make him scream.

Mike walked down the corridor approaching the opposite wing. As he was passing the staircase, he noticed a figure at the bottom staring at the front door; it looked like a young girl. He cautiously called out, "Hello? I'm a detective. I'm here to help." He skipped down the stairs lightly and placed his hand on the young girl's shoulder saying, "Hello? You don't need to worry." He was trying to reassure her that she was now safe. She turned toward him crying tears made of blood and water. Mike jumped back at the sight. He looked past the streams of watery blood, and noticed that the girl he was staring at was familiar to him. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped away the tears from her face. "Oh my god!" he exclaimed. "Liza? Is that you?" The girl could only nod in response. Mike had found the girl he was searching for. An enormous feeling of joy and emotion took hold of his insides.

Mike knew his mission was far from over, but at least the Jonah family would get their daughter back. He called Kanya, and told him the position. Kanya knew it straight away, and made a point of collecting the girl himself. She was terrified but not in a normal way. She didn't seem scared for her life, but scared of something that she had seen. Kanya got her into the car and asked Mike to be careful, "Mike, you need to get yourself out of there you know. The rest of those kids are long gone. Find Jack and get yourselves out of here!"

Mike closed the door to the house and turned back toward the stairs. He stopped dead as he saw another girl standing on the stairs. He approached carefully, as this one didn't seem the same as Liza. He got closer and closer getting a bit more worried with every step. His lips opened wide in disbelief as he called out, "Hayley?" He seemed so uncertain with himself, but was sure of what he was seeing. Had she really been alive for this whole time; it had been two years since her disappearance. He asked once more, "Hayley is that you?" The girl turned her head toward him, and there was no mistaking her. She was older but still looked the same, although she was rough, her hair greasy black and skin discoloured by lack of day light.

"It's okay Hayley, I'm here for you. Your Dad is here somewhere. He came for you." Mike was trying to reassure her, but nothing seemed to be working. She responded with a twisted smile, "I know Daddy is here somewhere but you don't know where." This sentence finished with a spurt of laughter as she ran up the stairs.

Mike didn't know what to do at this point. He was scared at what had just happened, but had to fight for his brother. He knew what he'd seen that night of his mother's death but he had always blocked it out. He walked up the stair case and saw the door at the end slam shut once more. He crossed his arms over his chest in a symbol of faith, walking toward the door. He didn't know what he was going to find behind that door this time. His own niece seemed to be crazy and he hadn't seen Jack in over an hour. His bravery was slipping away with every step he took toward that room. The house started to shake and there was an almighty bang. Mike fell to the floor and saw the door swing open. He let out a scream and what could be seen. Could this be his end?

## Chapter 11

On the floor, no defense and giving up hope, Mike watched as his death was approaching. The man they had seen at the diner was walking toward him with the same axe that had already caused Mike so much damage. He rolled over and pushed himself to his feet. He was attempting a getaway, but before he knew it he was back on the floor, this time face down. The axe swung down just by his face and delved into the flooring giving him warning to move. He watched closely as the axe was torn from the floor and spun his body over to set his eyes on a sight more shocking than any other; the man wielding the axe this time was Jack!

Mike looked into his brother's eyes and could see they weren't the same as though something had taken them over. They were cloudy and white, no sign of pupils and no sign of feeling inside anymore. He looked at his brother once more and could see blood trickling down from the back of his head onto his shoulders, the wounds on his ribs and his knuckles had gone a dark yellow and his face was vacant.

Mike stood once more and was this time face to face with Jack, pleading,

"Jacky I know you're in there somewhere. Please fight this."

As this sentence came to an end the axe was lifted up, and swung toward Mike once more as he rolled out of the destruction path. Mike's eyes were welling up with tears at the thought of him losing everyone he held dear. His father's death in the tunnel, his niece lost a long time ago and now his brother had turned into some sort of psycho demon. Mike carried on pleading with his would be executioner,

"PLEASE JACK! You can fight this." His voice was becoming more and more desperate as he backed away from his impending doom.

A man walked from the room behind and started to laugh. This time it was the man from the diner window and he began to speak in a taunting voice,

"Do you like what I have done with your dearest brother Michael?"

Mike was shocked at this man's front.

"How are you doing this and how do you know my name?"

The man laughed once more before responding,

"Michael" there was a pause of thought "or should I call you Josh?" This was followed by a sickening laughter. "My name is Alan, and I am your older brother you see." A smile seemed to force its way onto his face.

Mike tried to deny it straight away, but it was no use, he couldn't move his lips.

"You were my baby brother many moons ago young Michael. Until our parents cast me into the cold so that you didn't end up like me. I trust you enjoyed my letters and photos. Just to put your little mind at ease, no children were harmed in the making of this reunion." His speech ended with a foolish laughter that seemed uncontrollable.

He carried on, "OUR parents didn't want you to end up like me, so they got rid of me. It wasn't long until you started to scare them, with my help of course. They didn't know I was controlling you, I wanted them to suffer

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for what they did to me." This time the speech ended with a sad sigh and Mike seemed able to move his lips again asking,

"Are you fucking crazy?" His voice seemed uncertain as though he believed the story.

Alan carried on, "I was born with a power to make people do things. I don't know why, but I was. I chose to use it to inflict pain and to my amusement of course. You were easy to control and so I poisoned the relationship between you and them. You were given away and ended up with that useless sap in that tunnel." He paused just to breath, "For so long I wanted to be with you again, brothers on a mission. YOU had your own plan and had a brother to go with that."

Mike ran down the stairs and through the front door. At this point he had given up hope that he could save Jack and Hayley and was more concerned that he must live on.

He reached the pathway out of these deranged woods and began to sprint with everything he had. He couldn't help but look behind to see if he was being followed; the paranoia was setting in. Tears were uncontrollably running down his face as he thought of what he had lost on this night. It was then that he fell to the floor. It seemed to take forever for his face to collide with the floor as he was thinking about what was putting him there. He noticed blood exploding from his shoulder, and how it seemed to be following him to the ground. He had been shot and Jack was the man holding the gun.

For one moment as Mike laid bleeding and writhing in pain, he looked up to see Jack approaching. His eyes were going back to the sky blue they had been before, and his face went from vacant to confused. Jack looked down at his brother and started to cry whispering, "I'm sorry, I love you" before he dropped down to his knees, allowing Mike to see the axe sticking out of his back. Mike sat up to embrace his brother for the last time, whispering back, "I love you too Jacky. I always will." Jack's face hit the dirt and there was no movement after this.

For some reason, this sparked Mike to go back. He knew he had lost his brother no matter what before, but he hadn't had to watch him die. He was angry and this was going to fuel his assault. He reached the house and saw Alan standing at the front door. He began to charge at him shouting,

"I will kill you for what you've done to my family." Alan stopped him in his tracks, mocking him,

"Just how are you planning to do this JOSH?"

"MY NAME IS NOT JOSH!"

Mike burst through whatever power was holding him and continued his charge on the enemy. Alan at this point began to charge back. Both men were on a collision course, and the only result was Death was going to strike again.

Mike's fist was out-reached in an attempt to get the first hit - it worked. Alan fell back wiping the blood from under his nose. He flew at Mike in an attempt to take him by surprise that was unsuccessful. Mike began to furiously strike his real brother, punching, kicking, butting and screaming all in one timely combo. Alan fell to the floor clutching his face and ribs; there was a poignant look to him. Mike began to feel a shred of sympathy for a man never cared for, a man never liked and a man who knew nothing but pain. The sympathy disappeared and the anger returned but it was too late. Mike had heard a gunshot and he seemed unable to breathe. He looked down at Alan as he scurried away and then gave himself a swift look. He had blood pouring out from his chest and his energy was quickly diminishing. He looked up to see the sun rising, it had never seemed more beautiful to him. Then, just as quickly, the sun disappeared and his life was no more.

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Everything he had done that night was to save one little girl by the name of Elizabeth Jonah; he had done this. It had cost Mike more than he ever thought it would. He lost his father, his brother and his life at the hands of a mad man. Alan had made innocent people like the man in the tunnel his puppet and it was all to get the attention of his long lost brother. After all was done, and the madness was over, one thing was sure. No one will go to the Mad Man's Woods no more!

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