



**THE
FEAR
THAT
MADE US**

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Prologue — The Fear That Made Us

Rowan Hale never remembers the fall the same way twice.

Memory shifts under her like loose gravel, sliding, rearranging, refusing to settle. Some nights she hears Jonah's voice first—sharp, furious, cracking in the cold air as they argued on the railway bridge. Other nights she remembers only the silence that followed, a silence so sudden and absolute it felt like the world had been cut open and emptied.

But tonight, the memory comes with teeth.

The bridge rises out of the mist like a ribcage, metal slick with dew, the valley below a black, waiting mouth. Jonah stands a few steps ahead of her, shoulders hunched, hands shoved deep into the pockets of his school coat. He's fifteen again. She's seventeen. The air between them is tight, stretched thin by words they haven't said yet.

Rowan feels the old heat rising in her chest—the frustration, the fear, the helplessness she never learned to name. She sees herself reaching for him. Not to hurt him. Never that. Just to pull him back, to make him listen, to stop him walking away.

But in the dream, Jonah turns.

And the look on his face is wrong.

Not the teenage anger she remembers.

Not the hurt.

Not the stubbornness. Fear.

A deep, instinctive fear that doesn't belong to that night. A fear that belongs to now. A fear that says he knows what she is capable of.

"Don't," he whispers.

Rowan freezes. Her hand hangs in the air between them, fingers trembling. She wants to tell him she would never hurt him. She wants to tell him she's sorry. She wants to tell him she's not the person he thinks she is.

But the words stick in her throat like stones.

The mist thickens. The metal beneath their feet hums, vibrating with a low, sickening resonance. The valley seems to lean closer, listening, hungry.

Jonah takes a step back.

Rowan's breath catches.

She reaches for him—

too fast, too desperate—

and he flinches again, as if her touch burns.

Then he falls.

Not a slip.

Not a stumble.

Not the chaotic, scrambling drop she remembers from waking life.

He falls as if the world has decided it no longer wants him.

Rowan lunges forward, fingers clawing at the air, but she catches nothing. The bridge shudders beneath her. The valley swallows the sound of impact, leaving only the echo of her own ragged breathing.

Then the dream shifts.

Rowan is alone on the bridge.

Her breath fogs the air.

Her hand is still outstretched.

And on her knuckles—fresh, impossible—blossoms a bruise she has never had.

A voice behind her whispers, You did this.

Rowan turns, heart hammering, but there is no one there.

Only the valley.

Only the mist.

Only the echo of a fear she has carried for twenty years.

The metal beneath her feet groans.

The mist curls around her ankles like fingers.

The bruise on her hand throbs, darkening, deepening, as if remembering something her mind refuses to hold.

She wakes with a gasp, the taste of iron in her mouth, her hand aching.

The bruise is still there.

And somewhere in the valley, something stirs—

something that has been waiting for her fear to ripen,

something that knows the truth she refuses to face,

something that will make the world remember what she has tried so hard to forget.