A Wall of Water

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The sun was already low and red, sinking into the calm flat lake that stretched before the two men. Its light outlined the cliff sides and hills that bordered the water and formed a jagged horizon against the glowing sky. Jeremy and his uncle George sat side-by-side in their seats at the back of their speedboat facing the sun. They were both large, muscular men with short cut hair and big, meaty hands. Despite their age difference, they actually looked very much alike, except one feature: George’s eyes. They were a light grey, and had a tone of quiet and aged wisdom.

Suddenly, Jeremy noticed that the horizon became flat, and started to rise in the air. In the distance, there emerged a huge wave out of the lake that stretched across the horizon. Jeremy looked over at his uncle for guidance, but the older man didn’t move, his soft eyes gazing straight ahead, over the surface of the placid lake, at the giant wall of water moving towards them. Jeremy reached over and grabbed his uncle’s hand, which grabbed back with its familiar strong, sturdy grip. He tried to call out and ask what he should do, but he suddenly couldn’t speak. Feeling helpless and afraid, Jeremy shut his eyes.

“No, Jeremy,” he heard his uncle say, as if the voice was speaking from inside his head, “don’t close your eyes. Never take your eye off the ball. The storm is coming, my boy, and it’s looking right at you. Stare it in the eye ‘till it hits. Only then can you know what you’re fighting against. Look.”

Jeremy’s eyes opened at the sound of an electronic chime, followed by the muffled voice of the captain of the plane speaking through some unseen intercom speaker. The captain informed the passengers that they would be landing at DFW Airport in about 20 minutes, that it was now 6:37 PM, and that the passengers’ luggage could be claimed at gate C-4.
“I thought people weren’t supposed to talk about bombs on airplanes,” Jeremy thought. Jeremy pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes, trying to squeeze out the image of the giant wall of water coming towards him in his recurring dream. It haunted his sleep more often recently; it had already interrupted his sleep three times this week.

The ‘Fasten Seat Belt’ sign came on. Jeremy pushed the button to bring his cushioned first-class seat to its upright position, and slid up the cover of the window to his right to let in the light from the sun setting low in the sky. His freshly awakened eyes squinted through the overwhelming glare and down at the massive metropolis in which he grew up.

The landing was gentle, and Jeremy had grabbed his bags and was heading out of the automatic sliding glass doors of the airport by 7:15. He walked out into the 75 degree Texas air, and immediately into the embrace of his Aunt Caroline, who was standing next to her car parked along the curb waiting for him. He threw his single suitcase into the trunk of the Range Rover, and they set off on their two-and-a-half hour drive to his aunt and uncle’s lake house in Possum Kingdom. Jeremy had told Caroline that she didn’t have to drive all the way over to Dallas to pick him up; though he could not fly in directly from Logan International to Possum Kingdom Airport, he could just grab a short flight from DFW after he landed. But his aunt insisted. She said that he flew around the country enough as it is with his team, and that a nice long car ride would do him some good. She always thought a little something or other would “do him some good.” Going on vacation to Europe; eating organic food; getting married. But she was probably right on this occasion; Jeremy’s career in the NFL had him flying almost every weekend.

Jeremy wasn’t one of the widely recognizable faces of American football, like many quarterbacks and some overly-cocky wide receivers were, but he was having a successful career. If anyone who knew much about the sport heard his full name associated with his 6’3”, 245-
pound body, they would readily identify him as the tight end of the New England Patriots for the past five years. Jeremy was convinced that he would have been even further along in his career if he had focused more on football and training during his high school and college years, but his Uncle George never tolerated less-than-perfect grades: “There’s gonna be a day,” he said, putting his large hand on Jeremy’s shoulder, “when your body’s not going to be able to walk you through life anymore, and your mind is going to have to kick in and carry you the rest of the way. When that day comes, Jeremy, you damn well better hope your brain’s up to the task. Now do your homework.”

Jeremy frowned at the irony that conversation now presented.

“You’re bein awfully quiet, sweetheart.” Jeremy suddenly realized that his aunt had been speaking to him for the last fifteen minutes of the car ride. “What’s the matter, hun?”

“Hm? Oh…I’m sorry Aunt Caroline. I’m just…distracted.”

“That’s alright, dear, I was just blabbering. How is Stephanie? I’m so sad she couldn’t make it down this time to come meet George.”

“She’s doing well, thanks. She’s a little stressed. She’s really sad that she couldn’t come as well, but she was forced by her editor to go to France to report on the French Open.”

“Oh, France! She goes to so many wonderful places with her job. You should go with her one time! I think it would do you some good.”

There she goes again. “Ya, we’ll see next time she goes if my schedule works with it.”

They were quiet for some time. Jeremy looked out his window at the passing landscape between Dallas and Fort Worth. The sun was very low, peeking through the trees that lined the road, but hadn’t set yet. The days were late this time of year, but it was the best time in terms of weather in the Dallas area.
“So are you going to ask her to marry you?” He knew that was going to be his aunt’s next question; it always was.

“I’m still not sure, Auntie. There’s a lot to worry about on both our sides right now. We’re hardly ever in the same city.”

“Her dumb editor should just make her the official journalist for the Patriots, already! I mean she goes to as many of your games as possible already without him trying to drag her off to tennis matches in France or whatnot. Then she could be with you the entire time you’re on the road. It’s so simple; I don’t see why he doesn’t just do it already…”

“I don’t think it works that way, Caroline,” he sighed. “He gets other people to report on us now that I’m in a relationship with her, probably to avoid biases. I prefer it that way anyway. I don’t want the boys to think that I’m getting good publicity because I’m with the reporter.”

“I know, I know, you’ve told me…Still, I just think it would do you some good to get married. You’re 27, after all. Your uncle and I got married when I was 24 and he was 27, you know that?”

“Yes ma’am, I know.”

He knew the story by heart. George and Caroline met at a hospital in Dallas. She was a nurse in the OR and George was interning as an assistant brain surgeon. He revolutionized the practice, incorporating new computer technology to monitor neurological activity and pinpoint the abnormalities in the brain. George was a massive man as well. He, like Jeremy, was a star football player in high school and college, but he was a quarterback. However, after studying neuroscience at his university, George realized the massive and irreparable impact the continuation of his football career as a quarterback would have on his body and brain, and he
decided not to go professional. Instead, he continued on to med school and had become a head surgeon by the age of 37.

Around that time, George’s younger brother by ten years, Sam, and his wife Sara birthed their only child: Jeremy. A few years later, Sam died in a car accident, and Sarah was left to work however she could to support her child. George offered to support her, but she did not want to depend on his aid. So instead, Jeremy just spent a lot of time at his aunt and uncle’s house while his mother worked late shifts. George basically took on the role of Jeremy’s father, Caroline became his second mother, and his two cousins, Steven and Mary, although they were nine and seven years older than he, did their part as his brother and sister. George convinced Sara to let him pay for Jeremy’s private school education like he did with his own kids, and often took his nephew out to the lake house with the rest of his family. He also coached Jeremy’s football teams outside of school up until high school, and even after that still went to all his football games he could and worked on his skills privately. Before Jeremy’s junior year in high school, his mother got ovarian cancer, and passed away. Jeremy moved in with his aunt and uncle for the last two years of high school, and they paid his way through college.

Jeremy owed them everything. All of his success was built upon his uncle’s strength in mind, body, and character. George was a symbol of stability, someone Jeremy could always rely on to have the right answer or do the right thing. Jeremy couldn’t believe that he would soon be gone.

“How…uh, how is everyone holding up?” Jeremy asked hesitantly.

His aunt paused for a heartbeat, but quickly recovered, “Oh, you know, it’s been coming a long time. I mean, you can’t expect his body to just keep going for very long after a stroke of
that magnitude. Over the last three years his body has just been gradually shutting down, you know?"

Jeremy noticed she didn’t really answer the question, but he wasn’t going to press it or ask again. Jeremy’s first two years of college level football were not as successful as he had expected. But George kept Jeremy fighting, making him see that college ball was a completely different level of play then he had ever experienced. Jeremy trained the entire off season twice as hard as he had ever trained before. He came home to Dallas for Christmas vacation, and the family went to the lake house as usual. During the vacation, George, who was almost 60 by that time, supervised his training and ran with him through the freezing air and ice that surrounded Possum Kingdom Lake. It paid off. Jeremy became a name in college football by the end of his junior year, and attracted the attention of the professional draft by the time he graduated cum laude from Notre Dame at the age of 22.

Jeremy was drafted by the Patriots. His first year there, he was third string and didn’t play in a game. George kept his spirits up once again, telling him he just had to get adjusted to the level of play. The next season, Jeremy got his first play time. A few games later, he scored his first touchdown. The evenings after his games, Jeremy would usually get a call from Uncle George, telling him how proud he was of his boy, letting him know what he needed to improve on, be more aware of, make stronger in his game. It wasn’t anything that Jeremy’s coaches didn’t make sure he heard every day of the week, but he let his uncle talk anyway; George had earned that much from him. The night Jeremy scored his first touchdown, he eagerly awaited his uncle’s call. He waited longer. George had never been late calling him after a game. Right when Jeremy was about to call his uncle, his phone rang from his aunt and uncle’s house phone.

“Uncle George?” he said excitedly into the phone.
“No dear, it’s Auntie Caroline.” There was none of the usual perk and cheer in her voice.

“Oh hi, Aunt Caroline…” He heard a sniffle come through the receiver. “What’s wrong?”

After a strenuous pause, Jeremy’s aunt choked out the words: “…Your uncle has had a stroke, honey…”

George did not die of the blood clot in his brain, but his functions were completely destroyed. His entire body was paralyzed except for part of his mouth and slight movement in his right hand, dominantly his thumb and ring finger. He could not speak, write, move, even go the bathroom by himself. Jeremy’s inspiration, the strongest man he’d ever known, was reduced to a child.

“George is going to be so excited to see you!” Aunt Caroline looked over with a bright smile at Jeremy, who was staring blankly out the passenger side window. There was a long pause.

“I’m sorry I didn’t visit him earlier,” Jeremy said to his aunt without turning away from his window. They were now past Fort Worth, and the sun had gone down, just leaving a faint glow on the horizon.

“Oh honey, he understands! You’ve been so busy!” That was only part of it, and they both knew it. After the Christmas before the stroke, Jeremy did not come back to the lake house. He had seen his aunt once or twice a season when the Patriots would come down to play the Dallas Cowboys, but Jeremy had never gone out to see his bed-ridden uncle, who they had moved permanently to the lake house. Jeremy always used the excuse that he had to go back with the team as a team and security policy, but that would not prevent him from coming down to visit otherwise. As a matter of fact, his girlfriend had been pressuring him to let her come meet his aunt and uncle. But Jeremy couldn’t do it. He couldn’t see his uncle in that state. He avoided
it, ignored it, thought of his uncle going for runs and giving lectures on neuroscience and throwing the football with him. But Jeremy could not avoid it forever. George did not have much longer to live. Jeremy’s aunt, who had been George’s private nurse throughout the process, said that the doctor said it was only a matter of time before his uncle’s body would just get worn out and shut down. Aunt Caroline begged Jeremy to make some time to come down and let his uncle see him before the end.

Jeremy snapped back to reality with the familiar sound of pebbles grinding together below the tires. They were coasting along the driveway that led up to the lake house. Jeremy looked at the clock; it was almost 10. Aunt Caroline let out an exhausted sigh as she put the Range Rover in park and took the key out of the ignition. The death of the engine filled the country air with silence, giving way to the sound of a hundred crickets chirping on the ground, and a thousand stars glistening in the sky. Jeremy had forgotten what a starry sky sounded like.

“Welcome home, sweetheart,” Aunt Caroline said with a warm, tired smile. She leaned across the console and they hugged. When they separated, they sat looking at each other for a while. Although her vision and mobility had remained nearly perfect as she reached her sixties, the ethereal glow of the night sky seemed to accent the aging in her face. Jeremy noticed dark bags under her eyes and a series of wrinkles that he had never noticed. It must be from the stress of having to take care of Uncle George. Jeremy felt sorry that he had not been here to help her.

“I’m exhausted,” she said. “Let’s get us to bed.” They got out of the car and Jeremy grabbed his luggage out of the back. Caroline unlocked the front door and opened it slowly and quietly. As Jeremy entered, the familiar smell of warm mahogany and cold stone wrapped around him. It felt good to be back.
“Come on this way to your room,” Aunt Caroline whispered. They walked to the right across the large open living room. “Mary’s in the rooms downstairs, Stephen and his family are living in the guesthouse out back, and me and George’s room is up these stairs and to the right as usual.”

Jeremy looked up the stairs as if they were Mount Everest, leading up to the dark and quiet place where he would have to face reality. Of course he knew where his aunt and uncle’s bedroom were, and he felt slightly embarrassed that Aunt Caroline was speaking to him as if he was a guest that had never been to the lake house.

“You’ll go up there to see him tomorrow. Let’s get you to your room,” she whispered as she led him willing past the stairs and into another hallway to the right of the base of the stairway. At the end of the hallway on the left was his old room, directly below where his aunt and uncle slept.

“Goodnight, honey!” He bent down to let his aunt kiss him on the forehead. “I’ll see you in the morning.” She left the room and he heard her turn to the right at the end of the hallway and up the sturdy wooden stairs to her room right above him. Jeremy did not bother to get undressed; he lay down in his bed and stared at the ceiling. Jeremy always used to take comfort in the fact that his uncle was sleeping; now, as he gazed at the place above which the broken man lay, it just made him feel uncomfortable to stare at inevitability.

Jeremy woke up staring at the same spot. He smelled breakfast. He got up and changed, clothed, and walked out of the hallway towards the kitchen. As he passed the staircase on his right, he looked up it out of the corner of his eye. It was much brighter and cheerful looking than it had seemed last night, merely a mask of the sadness that resided up there. He continued into the kitchen where he found his aunt and Mary cooking pancakes.
“Smells good,” he said with an expecting smile. Mary turned quickly, screamed a little, and ran towards him, jumping into his arms. She was a tiny dancer, and felt weightless as he swung her around.

“Hey, hey, hey!” she yelled as her legs flopped around. “I’m your big cousin! You can’t throw me around like a child!”

“You are a child!”

“Hahahaha, put me down you jerk!” He set her lightly on the floor, and they hugged again before separating, and she punched him in the stomach. “Where the fuck have you been, Mr. ‘iplayfuhbawl!’??”

“HEY! Language!” Aunt Caroline interrupted, saving Jeremy from having to answer. “I have to cook a thousand more of these things for Stephen and his little rascals. They’re still in the back house sleeping, thank goodness... Hey Jeremy, take the food up to your uncle and put it in his feeder, please.” Jeremy’s death sentence came in the form of what looked like baby food in a cup, and what he assumed were sacks of vitamins. She said it so casually, like it was part of every normal person’s daily routine. “Just pour them all into the machine to the left of his bed, close the lid, and push the button. You should see it passing through the feeding tube.”

Jeremy swallowed hard as he took the cup from his aunt and turned out of the kitchen. He moved to the base of the staircase and stared up it for a while, not moving. He heard a “pssst” from the direction of the kitchen. Mary had poked her head into the living room, and gave him a nod of encouragement, and a wave that meant “go on, get.” Jeremy nodded at her, looked back up the staircase, and slowly rose, step-by-step, towards the second floor. When he got to the top, he slowly turned to the right with his eyes closed, picturing in his mind the strong, hardy idol that
raised him lying in a bed with a big smile and two big strong hands out to scoop Jeremy up in a crushing embrace.

He opened his eyes to a deathbed. The man who was lying in his uncle’s bed was a skeleton. His body was a set of twigs covered in loose-fitted skin that looked more like wrinkled clothes than a part of him, and was plugged full of wires and monitors and tubes. An oxygen mask covered half of the man’s hairless, emaciated face. The only thing that separated him from being a corpse in Jeremy’s eyes was the beeping spikes of the heart monitor and the slight rise and fall of the sheets covering him. Jeremy turned away and out of the room. Jeremy’s head was spinning as he gasped for breath, unable to believe or comprehend the ghastly vision engraved into his eyes. He stood there with his back to the room, staring at the picture in his mind.

He jumped as he suddenly felt a hand on his back. Aunt Caroline was looking at him with knowing eyes. “Go ahead,” she said, putting her arm up on his towering shoulder and turning him around and back into the room. Jeremy walked forward quietly towards the left side of the bed, staring at the masked skull situated on top of the grotesquely thin body. He still couldn’t believe that it was his uncle. Suddenly, the corpse’s eyes opened, and the familiar grey eyes swiveled around and rested on the Jeremy’s face. They were his eyes.

The eyes lit up with recognition as the part of Uncle George’s mouth that was still working stretched the wrinkled skin around his lips into a big, toothless half-smile under the see-through plastic oxygen mask. “Hey, Uncle George,” Jeremy choked out, returning the old man’s smile. He put the food on the bedside table and put his hand on his uncle’s pointed, bony shoulder. It was once so round, so broad. Jeremy took his hand off; it was like touching fire. Jeremy looked up and noticed that they had moved another small bed into the room next to George’s so Aunt Caroline could sleep near her husband.
George’s slightly movable fingers on his right hand were wiggling around and twitching. “He moves his fingers when he’s excited.” Aunt Caroline was standing right behind Jeremy, pouring the liquid food into the feeding machine. She closed it and pushed the button, which set the machine off and started pumping the food through the feeding tube into his uncle’s stomach. “Now you rest and eat your breakfast young man,” she said, leaning down and kissing her husband’s forehead, “Jeremy will come see you when you’re done eating.”

Jeremy stood stupidly for a bit, staring at the wiggling fingers. He remembered when he used to put his hand in his uncle’s. They would entwine fingers and squeeze them together, battling to see who could squeeze the hardest, trying not to be the first one to cry “mercy.” Jeremy never won. If he tried it now, he would crush the frail man’s bones… Aunt Caroline put her hand on Jeremy’s arm. He leaned down and kissed his uncle’s forehead, and then was led by his aunt out of the room.

“He’s not feeling very well today,” Aunt Caroline whispered to him. “The doctor will be coming around 4. We should let George rest until then.”

When they got down stairs, everyone was in the kitchen grabbing pancakes. Stephen stopped cutting up his youngest son’s pancakes to get up and give Jeremy a hug and a pat on the shoulder.

“Can I talk to you later?” Jeremy mumbled to him.

“Uh, ya…ya, of course?” Stephen said inquisitively.

After breakfast, Jeremy walked outside with Stephen to watch the kids play.

“Hey,” Jeremy said next to Stephen, “is that old speedboat down at the dock still working? The one your dad used to take us out on all the time?”
“Ya, it should work great. I’ve been running and maintaining it whenever I visit since dad got sick. I haven’t gotten around to working on it this time, but it should be alright.” He looked away from the kids and over at Jeremy with a raised eyebrow. “Is that it? What’s up?”

“No, ya, that’s it,” Jeremy responded shortly. “I was thinking about maybe going out on it, is all…”

“Ya, it’s great weather for it tonight; should be nice, cool and calm.”

“Alright thanks, mate.” Jeremy slapped his cousin’s back. “Cute kids, by the way… Damn, they grew up fast…”

Later that afternoon, Jeremy stood outside Uncle George’s room while he was sleeping, just watching the aged man’s heartbeat and chest rise and fall to the sound of hissing oxygen. Around 4, the doctor came to the house. He monitored George for a while and gave him a couple of shots. As the doctor was leaving the bedroom, Jeremy pulled him aside at the top of the stairs.

“What is wrong with him, Doctor?”

“As far as I can tell, his mind is pretty much the same as it always was, some minor amnesia and he’s a little more child-like in his reactions. We can tell he recognizes someone because his eyes light up and he’ll start wiggling his fingers around. He doesn’t seem to be able to remember how to spell when we gave him a machine he could type with. But nobody would know better about his condition than he would. That’s just another slap of sadness, right there. He knows everything that’s wrong with him and why, and knowing him from the work I used to do with him, the hardest part for him about all this is that he can’t take notes and experiment on his own condition,” the doctor said this last part with a somber chuckle. “But as for his body,” he was no longer smiling, “it’s just going through its cycle. Nothing can make it better or worse at
this point. He doesn’t have much left in him. But he’s a real fighter to have made it this far at his age. He must have a good reason to fight for…”

“What do you mean he can’t get any worse? What if these machines stop working?”

“Well, the machines are all just monitors to detect how he is doing and warn us if his vitals start to drop. Him being taken off those is not a big deal as long as he is being watched closely. The feeding tube is only necessary when it is time for him to eat and is also detachable. The only important thing to have around at all times I suppose is the oxygen tank because his lungs are so weak.”

“Alright thanks, doctor…”

The doctor left and Aunt Caroline stayed with George by his bed for a while. Finally, she came out of the room and asked who wanted to go shopping for groceries for the week. Mary and Stephen said they would go with her, and Stephen’s wife Shannon said that she would stay with the kids at home. Jeremy decided to stay, wanting to stay with Uncle George just in case his condition got worse. So at about 6:30, the shoppers left in the Range Rover, and Shannon and the kids went to the back house to play videogames. Now was Jeremy’s chance.

He went upstairs into his uncle’s room. It sickened him to see such a man bedridden. If his mind was still the same, Jeremy knew that George wouldn’t want it to end this way. So Jeremy detached the feeding tube and monitoring wires, scooped up his uncle and his oxygen tank in his arms, and carried the old man out the door of the room, down the wooden stairs to the first floor, and out the back door to the back yard. He moved past the back house and saw Stephen’s kids looking out the windows at him as he walked by. Jeremy moved to the edge of the cliff and started down the stairs built into the cliff side, down to the dock. His uncle felt even lighter than Mary as he hung lifelessly in Jeremy’s strong cradling arms.
When they got to the bottom, Jeremy placed his uncle down on a table, lifted his back and slid a lifejacket under him. He felt like he was changing one of his nephews. As he strapped the lifejacket onto the old man’s frail chest and shoulders, Jeremy could feel his uncle’s heartbeat race and hear his lungs pumping for oxygen in the plastic mask. Jeremy picked George up again, approached the speedboat and climbed aboard. He gently set his uncle down on one of the two side-by-side seats at the rear of the boat that faced away from the nose, and out towards the open lake. Jeremy covered his boney legs with a blanket and a waterproof tarp, and fastened him securely to the chair with the seatbelt.

Jeremy put on his own lifejacket and moved to the front of the boat. He took the rich wooden wheel in his hand and turned the key in the ignition. It started beautifully. “Thanks, Stephen.” Jeremy slowly pulled the engine in reverse and eased the boat out of the dock, turned the bow out towards the calm, open water, and smoothly set the boat moving forward to glide out to the middle of the lake.

At the slow pace, it took them about 30 minutes to get to the middle. The sun was already low and red, sinking into the calm flat lake that outstretched before them. Its light outlined the cliff sides and hills that bordered the water and formed a jagged horizon against the glowing sky. Jeremy cut the engine, left the cockpit and moved to the back of the boat to sit in the seat next to his uncle. Jeremy had been so caught up in his escape that he had not checked to see if George was alright. But one look at the old man showed that he was more than alright. His body was shaking with a wheezy laughter through his toothless smile underneath his oxygen mask, and his eyes were swiveling in their sockets, trying to see everything although he could not move his head. Jeremy reached over and took off the oxygen mask so he could get some fresh air, then gently turned his uncle’s head to the left towards the south shore, then westward towards the
setting sun, and finally to the north towards Jeremy, so that they could look eye to eye. Jeremy rested his uncle’s head back against the chair so that George could look at both him and the sun whenever he wanted to.

They sat there a long time. George was smiling the entire time, wiggling the stiff fingers on his right hand, his weak lungs heavily breathing in and out the thin, still air. He was happy.

After a little while, George seemed to be having trouble breathing, so Jeremy put the oxygen mask back over his mouth.

“…You can’t leave,” Jeremy said after a while. He took his eyes off the sun and looked down at his bare feet. “I need you here, pap. I don’t know what to do. There’s never been a time when you were not there for me…”

Jeremy looked up towards his uncle with teary eyes. George was no longer smiling under the see-through plastic mask, his knowing grey eyes peering sideways into Jeremy’s.

“I can’t even decide whether or not to marry the girl I love because I wouldn’t know if you would approve of it or not… I needed you to show me the way. I needed you to be strong…”

George looked at Jeremy for a while, then looked down at his wiggling fingers. He looked between his finger and Jeremy a few times until Jeremy realized he wanted him to hold his hand. Jeremy reached out and gently put his hand on top of his uncle’s and entwined their fingers like they used to when he was a kid. Jeremy put his head down as tears swelled in his eyes in mourning of better days.

Jeremy felt a squeeze on his fingers. He was suddenly afraid that he was inadvertently crushing Uncle George’s fingers, and he quickly relaxed his grip. This only made the squeezing sensation worse, and the pressure began to dig into his fingers. George was squeezing Jeremy’s hand; he was squeezing it hard. Jeremy looked at his hand, and then up at his uncle, whose
mouth was once again curled into a knowing smile. Jeremy broke down and threw his head into his uncle’s lap, sobbing into the old man’s frail body, still holding onto his hand, still being squeezed.

“The storm is coming.” His uncle’s voice in his dream echoed through his head. “Stare it in the eye.”