

CHAPTER 2: Awakening

There are moments in everyone's life that will define who they are and stay with them for as long as they live. These moments give new meaning to one's existence and define the path that lays before them. Galloway's defining moment came to him in an instant back in high school when he was aged 16 years old.

"There's one, get it!" cried Galloway. His best friend Rowan dove the shovel into the sand to try to catch the tiny sand crabs, but they scuttled away and returned to their tunnels below the surface. The moon overhead shone a brilliant pale silver as the two teens shimmied down the cove. "Man, why do you suck so bad at this, they're just crabs."

"Says you, probably got some crabs now, you slut." said Rowan, grabbing his own crotch with a chuckle. Handing Galloway the shovel, "You might just be a pro at this senior."

Galloway and Rowan had been best friends for as long as he could remember. On the playgrounds of elementary school, Galloway saved Rowan from a bully who was already a few minutes into the beating. Galloway was able to flip the bully over onto the ground and get him into a choke hold, which lasted until the bully looked like a blueberry ripe to be picked. Needless to say, the bully never made a move on Rowan again. Later that school year, Galloway was cornered by a group of bullies when Rowan stepped into help, and they had been partners in

crime ever since. Those days have since calmed down and they had taken more relaxing hobbies such as crab hunting on foggy nights at the cove.

The cove was on the east side of the little known town of Everett's Cove, which, just like any other coastal new england town, was full of traditions and secrets. Pine trees circled and enclosed the town, keeping it tucked so far from the interstate that one would have to be lost to find their way there. The bay's unusual length allowed the whole town to be strung along it's horseshoe shape. At night the area became so foggy, that one couldn't see the rocks jutting from the tips of the bay. Rather than encouraging trade, the townspeople of the past had opted for the quiet life of the surrounding forests and sea and, so, Everett's Cove had no lighthouse.

As the two friends gathered their tools, and what few crabs they had caught, they began to make their way back up the beach. They could hear the sound of steps in the grainy sand somewhere behind them. Galloway turned and looked, but not a soul was peaking through the dense fog.

"You heard that right?" he whispered.

Are we being followed?

"Yeah, but I don't see anything. Hello!? Anybody there?!" Rowan belted out at the sands, the waves crashing behind his back adding their roar.

The pitter-patter of steps quickened and a blur broke through the fog, causing both young teens to dive in opposite directions. Galloway crashed into the shoreline, spilling their nights hard work back to the wild. Rowan fell into the sand with a thud and before he could catch his breath, he was being yanked up from the ground, a strong grip around his throat. Opening his

eyes, he saw the face of Joshua Hockstetter, a tall but bulky young man a grade above them. His eyes looked over Rowan's face then threw him down, hard.

Galloway stood up, soaked in saltwater and covered in sand, and yelled, "What the fuck do you want?!" He began to march up to Joshua, but Joshua kicked him in the balls and stood over him. Galloway let out a silent scream as the pain shock waved throughout his entire being as the dull ache set in.

"Why the fuck did you do it Cross? You knew I liked her, and you still went after her." Joshua said, looking down, long greasy black hair around his face, sneering with bloodshot eyes and a peculiar white stain just below his small pug like nose. The her in question was Samantha Billings, Galloway's current conquest and source of youthful exploration. "You knew I had a thing for her, but ya still stuck your filthy fucking dick into someone else's girl! I hope you rot." He pressed his foot into Galloway's neck and pulled a knife out of his belt..

Just then, another blur broke through the fog. This time, it was Rowan. His Tackle Caught Joshua's midriff and the knife fell to the sand. Rowan began to throw fist after fist, but Joshua was almost double his size and threw him off like a sandbag then he stood up, ready to fight.

"She was never your girl, dipshit, you were too afraid to talk to her. She can't be yours if you never make a move. You can just wait your turn."

She wasn't even that pretty anyways, why is he so hung up over her?

Galloway, wiped the water from his face and slicked back his hair. "I didn't think you'd be the one to fight dirty. You wanna go, let's go then!" he rushed him, gaining momentum as he ran. This time, he sidestepped Josh's kick and slammed him with his fist with a direct hit to the

jaw, sending Joshua back a few steps. Joshua wiped his mouth then put his fists up in a boxing stance and started his barrage. Galloway was able to block a few, but then a split second decision on his part left his vision blackened and ears ringing for a few seconds. That was enough time for him to be shoved back into the sand and for Joshua to recover the knife.

“This time, you won’t get back up Cross.” Joshua raised the knife up once again and when he brought it down, it sunk into a different target.

A few seconds before, Rowan was getting back on his feet when he saw Galloway get decked and shoved back down.

Oh fuck! Galloway!

He ran as fast as he could, diving in between both when Joshua brought down the knife right into his back between his rib cage. The sheer shock and sharp pain was enough to make him cry out in surprise one second and faint the next, body going limp on the shoreline.

“Oh fuck, shit shit shit shit shit.” cried Joshua, the weight of his actions reaching him. He ran to Rowan. “Why did you jump in the fucking way!” he screamed, bent down, trying to get any response from the out cold Rowan.

All Galloway could hear was a steady, constant ring. The sound was so deafening that not even the waves reached his ears. He stood up and looked on in abject horror. The sight was enough to make his legs shake and his lips quiver, trying but failing to form a single word. He slowly walked through the sand and waves to Rowan and Joshua. The ringing continued, his vision narrowed. All he could see were those two and the grey backdrop of the fog.

Why is this happening? Weren’t we just laughing?

These thoughts swirled in his head, but he was unable to make a sound; He reached the two and something inside him snapped.

Make him pay. Make him pay. Make him pay.

His hands closed around Joshua's throat, squeezing as hard as he could. Joshua looked up with bug eyes, unable to grasp the situation he had gotten himself into. The world made no sound other than a deep croak coming from Joshua's mouth. The three were intertwined and as Joshua's face began to turn a shade of blue, the world began to change. Like a Salvador Dali painting, the world seemed to melt, all colors overlapping and all sound stopped, even the deep croak. Suddenly, with the sound of a pop, they were gone, and the water filled the depressions in the sand where they had been standing.

Where are we? What is this place? Is all that blood?

Galloway released Joshua from his grip and slowly lifted his head. The fog had vanished. Rowan was bleeding, the knife still stuck in his ribs and the ocean itself seemed to have been dyed the same dark crimson, with red seafoam to match. The crashing waves were more violent than before and ocean spray reached Galloway's face, flecking him with red. He fell backwards as Joshua laid there gasping for air and clawing at his own throat as if Galloway were still gripping him. Joshua finally regained his composure after a minute of looking like a fish that had washed ashore, and slowly stood up, eyes widening at the scene before them

"Black sand.....the fucking sky is yellow..." Joshua fell to his knees.

At least that confirmed what Galloway was seeing. The sky was a dark yellow with bright orange clouds in the sky. The clouds seemed to dance and twirl, as if mocking the two teens with this new reality. The sand beneath their feet was black and gravelly, with hints of white salted throughout the beach. The crimson waves lulled to and from the shore, seeming to calm down. The cove rocks were pure white, almost as if the color had drained from them and bled into the sand. The fog had disappeared, leaving nothing to block the vibrancy of the alien scene.

As the boys stood there the crashing of the crimson waves lessened.

“This isn’t possible. How in the fuck is this possible!” cried Joshua, unable to cope with the unknown laid before them. He started to sob. The rage that had filled him moments before had vanished.

Galloway then remembered Rowan, body slumped on the shore. He ran to him, dove to his knees and held two fingers to Rowan’s throat. He could feel a pulse, albeit a weak one. Galloway carefully picked Rowan up and held him in his arms, making sure not to touch the blade sticking out of his back. He started to walk away from the surf when Joshua cried out.

“Where are you going?! You can’t just leave me here, we don’t even know where we are!” Picking up the pace of his words he trotted along behind Galloway. However, before he got close to them, Galloway turned around quickly and shot his leg out with all his might and nailed Joshua in his nether regions. The surprise mixed with the burst of pain sent Joshua back into the sand. Through wincing, he could see the pain in Galloway’s eyes.

“That is for what you fucking did to Rowan. All of this for a fucking girl, you insane, fucking coked out piece of shit! You never even really knew her, and if you did, she wouldn’t even look at you twice. Stay the fuck away from me. I’m going to go and try to find help,

something is horribly wrong and it's all thanks to you." He drew a deep breath and turned back around and started to walk away. This was when Galloway realized something terrifying.

There's no town. Everret's Cove...where did it go?!?

His mind turned to panic and his brow began to sweat. Laid out before the marooned travelers was a seemingly infinite sea of black sand. Dunes had replaced the town hall, highschool, neighborhoods, police department. Everything that had been there, was now gone.

"Ughhhh." groaned Rowan. His eyes opened a little but he showed no signs of awareness of their surroundings.

I can't let him die here, he never gave up on me when the stakes were high!

Galloway looked around him, black sandy dunes and white juttied rocks near the crimson shore. This world didn't make sense to him, it challenged all he thought was possible.

I don't know what to do. Where do we go from here?

Joshua was still laid out behind Galloway, who had stopped in his tracks, trying not to succumb to the existential terror before him. As Joshua laid there, looking up from the ground he too began to feel dread weigh down on him.

"There's no stars." The observation was quick and emotionless. Galloway looked up, and all he saw were the same wispy orange clouds, however this time the sliver of a dark grey moon poked through in his gaze. About five minutes had gone by with them like that, looking up and questioning the existence of a place such as this, when they heard the noise.

The ground began to shake and rumble, throwing Galloway off balance and stirring Joshua to his feet. The two frantically looked around but saw nothing. The Sand between them suddenly began to part, as a giant crustaceous limb emerged, snapping feverously.

CLACK! CLACK! CLACK! CLACK! The sound reverberated inside their skulls, leaving a ringing sound with each snap of the claws. Joshua was frozen in terror when the full monster emerged. The creature was close to a crab, but completely white, like the rocks near the shore line, and stood a good twelve feet tall. It's pincers were opening and closing constantly, the horrible sound continuing. Black beady eyes looked down upon the two with cold indifference, as a human would see an ant. Galloway had seen enough, and with Rowan in his arms, began to run down the shore line. The rumbling continued as more white shelled beasts ascended from the sands in which they slept. Looking back, Galloway could see more than 20 of the monsters moving about where he just left, appearing as if they were looking for something.

"No...p-please." Joshua whispered. His legs had turned to jelly and he could no longer move, no matter how much he wanted to.

RUN! OH MY GOD, WHAT THE FU-

His thoughts were cut short when the giant crab in front of him snapped right below his knee, severing his leg from his body and sending him to the ground. Before he could inhale to scream the claws were at him. Galloway looked back and saw a sight he would never forget. Joshua had disappeared into a gurgling mound of bloody body parts as the creatures severed every limb from his body and, piece by piece, picked them up with their pincers and brought the limbs to their mouth parts. The audible crunch and sounds of Joshua's final moments were enough to turn Galloway's blood cold and made him lose momentum. For a moment, the whole world seemed big and unfathomable.

This is it. This is how we die. I'll never go back home and lay in my bed or see mom and dad again.

The tears came, and wouldn't stop flowing. Still clutching Rowan in his arms he screamed, "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!" He didn't know what to do. The sounds of crunching stopped behind him. Galloway turned and immediately got back up with a surge of adrenaline and ran full sprint. The shelled abominations were quickly sidestepping towards him, gaining speed. Galloway screamed in terror as he fled. The tears were blurring his vision of this strange world, but he knew he had to keep running. Blood soaked visions danced through his mind of what would happen if those things were able to catch him.

CLACK CLACK CLACK CLACK! The sound rang like someone hitting a metal pole on concrete repeatedly.

He dared not look behind him but he knew that those horrid sounds were closer than before. Fear turned to panic, and panic turned to desperation. The sand beneath his feet didn't offer suitable grip and the traction he knew he would need to successfully escape these monsters. There were no structures in his vision to offer shelter and nothing around to be used as a weapon. No weapon in sight, except for the knife sticking out of Rowan's back. While sprinting, he looked down at Rowan's face, now pale and drained of all color.

I failed....he's dead.

The tears at this point wouldn't come out, but the grief for his friend struck his heart deeper than anything he had experienced in his life up to that point. All the memories between them seemed to be for nothing now.

This is all my fault, if only I could have protected him, then none of this would've happened. Galloway's adrenaline wouldn't let him stop. He he couldn't outpace those creatures, now no more than ten feet behind him.

CLACK CLACK CLACK CLACK! The claws were closing in on him, taunting him with his impending demise

“I’m sorry.” Galloway whispered through a saddened croak. He ripped the knife from Rowan’s back and let him go. Rowan’s body fell to the sand with a thud and seconds later the horrible sounds of bones snapping and meat being pulled and cut followed Galloway across the sand. The smell of blood filled the air.

Galloway never looked back, but kept running on, screaming the entire time. His mind couldn’t handle what he had just done. His best friend was no longer alive and he felt it to be his fault. As he ran, frantically screaming at the top of his lungs, the world began to melt and all sound drifted away, except for that of the great white crab claws snapping. His vision blurred and in that moment, Galloway disappeared. The sand from his sprint drifting in the wind along the red shoreline as the crabs behind finished their feast.

When his vision returned, he was surrounded by fog and the familiar dark skies and white sand of Everett’s Cove’s beach. Galloway quickly looked behind him, scanning all directions. The humongous crustaceans were gone. The fog concealed anything beyond 15 feet or so. He slumped down onto his knees and began to sob but the tears wouldn’t come out.

The town of Everett’s Cove was flooded with rumors of what happened that night. Galloway threw the knife as far as he could into the ocean, and never mentioned what happened to anyone. He buried the guilt deep inside him. Eventually, the knife was found by children playing on the beach that same week. Galloway was taken in for questioning but claimed

ignorance and said that when they were done at the beach, they both went their separate ways.

The knife was discovered to belong to Joshua Hockstetter. It was concluded that Joshua had murdered Rowan and then ran away. Only Galloway knew the horrors that took place that night and he never told a single person about what had happened.