

My family has always been unique, always been different. It's a curse, or gift, depending on how you look at it. Passed down from the first-born girl in the family. The curse has always presented itself differently in all of us, either corrupting the mind or enlightening it. My younger sister Sadie always looked up to me, shadowing my every movement when we were children, always gushing about how lucky I was, to have something as special as I did. I disagree with her, I don't believe I was lucky at all, and if possible, I would've traded places with Sadie in a heartbeat.

My name is Edris Wilham, and I can see the other worlds. I've done something terrible.

### **\*THEN\***

When I was four, I had a friend. We'd play for hours at a time in the corner of my room. Mum and Dad hated the interactions between my friend and I. Mum had experienced the devastating effects this gift could cause, and she wished for me to try and suppress my gift as much as possible because then, maybe we would be rid of it. I wish I had listened. One day Mum decided she needed to take things into her own hands. I remember how distraught I was when I came home from school to find the corner empty except for a shiny St. Christopher Medal and a wooden cross. I didn't see my friend as often as I did before, not in my room, but I always felt him there. Always noticed his presence and for that matter his absence as well. I was confused by my feelings. Frightened when he left, what if he didn't come back? Yet sometimes I wished he stayed away. He got really angry once, so angry. He twisted my reality, made me believe my room had blown up. I still remember the weight of the broken bricks as I carried them to Mum's room in the middle of the night. I stopped seeing my friend then, stopped letting him in. I always thought I was in control; I was so very wrong. I was never in control, he just wanted me to believe it so.

This became clear to me on a cold winter night. A storm had come through our town and the power was out. No heating, no lighting. The lightning split the sky and the trees seemed to swoon in admiration of the wind. The thunder bellowed through the crisp night air. I hid under my covers, waiting for the storm to pass, but it seemed relentless and never ending. The gusts of strong wind swept throughout the house, shaking the wards my mother had put in place from their hooks. And there he was once again. My friend had returned. The lightning illuminated his face, revealing the most menacing grin I had ever seen. I knew then that he had changed, that nothing good could come from this. For the first time I was truly frightened of my friend. I yelled for my mum, hoping she could hear me over the screaming wind, but as the words left my mouth he seemed to melt back into the shadows.

As I got older my episodes became less frequent and while not as frightening, they were just as confusing. For my sixteenth birthday I was gifted a tabby kitten. I loved that cat. The cat did not love me. Alone in a room, the cat would bolt from me, hackles raised and hissing. Never in the presence of others, but always just myself. In hindsight I think the cat always knew.

As with everything you can grow out of anything, and eventually I was left in silence, peace. My gift seemingly gone. How wrong I was.

After I married and was on the birth of my first child, a girl, I sensed a presence I had not felt since my childhood. My stomach twisted like a desperate fish, caught in a net and my heart hammered in my chest. I knew he was back. He did not seem interested in me, but I could see him in the shadows and the corner of the rooms I entered. Always watching. Not over me, but hovering near Madlynne. I felt helpless. I knew no-one could help me, I could only hope that I was enough standing between him and my daughter. Madlynne was a strange

and reserved child. A shy and quiet child often found whispering to herself, she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. By the age of four, her auburn hair had already reached the lower back and her eyes were like the ocean. Her laugh made me want to laugh and hug her. She was an angel sent from heaven. I loved her dearly, but if she loved me, she hid it well. She would not look me in the eye and shied from my touch. As she grew a strangeness settled on our home. Doors began to lock of their own accord as Madlynne left a room, milk turned sour in the bottle and clocks began to wind backwards. From time to time unexplained bruises bloomed across her soft skin. I suspected my husband who had failed to notice the strange events taking place in our home. I would often find Madlynne and her father huddled together, my husband whispering frantically to Madlynne, as if secrets were being passed between them. Did he not love us anymore? With no proof I asked him to leave in the hope I could protect her. I will never forget my daughter's cries as she watched what I believed to be a cold and unloving man drive away from our house. I remember the tears in his eyes as I told him he had to leave. I remember how he held my daughter close to his chest and murmured words of love to her, while her tears soaked his shirt. I told myself that he was just acting, that he didn't love me or her and what I was doing was right. I was slowly being driven mad trying to keep it all together. Sleeping little as I listened to the creaking of stairs treads that no-one was walking on, the banging of doors and windows that were already closed. I should never have asked him to leave. If he had stayed, maybe he could have protected Madlynne from what was to come.

I recall the day, my sweet girl disappeared as if it was yesterday. I relive the memories over and over again, searching for a detail or clue left behind. But I fail each and every time. I awoke alone and cold. The house seemed to have a chill that could not be lifted by the fire or gas heaters. Frost was coating the edges of all window panes on the inside. All clocks had stopped, and the phones were dead. As I headed downstairs, I experienced a calm that had evaded me since Madlynne's birth. No-one was hiding in the shadows or lurking in the corners. No-one was in the with me in the house at all. Madlynne was gone.

The next few days were a blur of sirens and lights, interview after interview, I answered questions until my tongue felt swollen. *Why were they interrogating me? Why were they not out looking for my Madlynne?* I told them many times about the man that lurks in the shadows. About his strange interest in my girl. I told them to look for her in the shadows, in the places no-one looked. I told them about the strange events that occurred after Madlynne's birth. Not one detective, office or reporter believed me. Looking back at it now, I wouldn't have believed me either.

### **\*NOW\***

The room I am in now is all sharp edges and cold surfaces. I rub my eyes, now bloodshot and with dark circles under them from hours of interrogation and lack of sleep. The detective across from me is showing me photo after photo of the evidence they found, all telling the same story. My DNA, my fingerprints, my exact words repeated back to me. It seems to me they are giving me an excuse, perhaps I had a psychotic break. How else could I have missed the blood painted across the walls or the tiny smeared footprints across the landing. "There is no other explanation Ms. Wilham, the doors were all locked, your DNA and fingerprints are on everything, you made no attempt to exit the house, you made no attempt to call for help" the officers cold and hard eyes bear into me, "Tell us where you hid the body, the father at least deserves to say goodbye" His words send rage spiralling through me. I clench my fists and feel tears prick at my eyes. "She is not just a body!" I screamed at him "She is my child, my pride and joy, the thing I loved most in the world! What motive would I have to ever kill my own daughter!" As soon as the last word left my mouth, I hear a small bubble of laughter from behind me. I whip my head around. There, as if mocking me, hand in

hand with my old friend stood my daughter. Pure fear ran down my spine as I realised, they were wearing the same matching smiles.