

Chapter 1 - "Prologue"

Drifting through the aether, the space between nothing and everything, there was an alien existence to this... celestial plane. Something, someone. A human figure floating through the endless currents of time. Kai, a young man molded of misfortune and misery, somehow found himself here. The confluence of his tragic life and a being beyond the comprehension of mere mortals having pulled the strings of fate were the culprits of this oddity in the void of the aether.

Throughout life, Kai had been met with tragedy after tragedy. At the ripe age of five, he and his mother were left by his father to fend for themselves in an unforgiving world that cared as much about them as his father did.

They had already been dirt poor to start with, and now a single mother with a young child, Kai's mother fell into a deep depression. Being utterly unable to support neither herself nor her child. But Kai with his mind of an innocent child, unaware of their dire situation, could only wonder curiously when his father would come back home.

A year passed, and out of the blue, mommy seemed to have regained her happiness once again, which incidentally also made Kai very happy. And this was because - the happier mother was, the fewer beatings there would be.

Mommy even started bringing home new friends. Kai thought some funny and others rude. But each time her new friends came by for a day or two, the both of them would always eat well for the next few days until another friend would come to visit which made it more than worth it in his opinion. So he honestly didn't care if some of them had a bit more snark than he would've liked.

However, things did not last. It didn't take long before mommy started beating him black and blue again. Just like when father left.

She was seemingly less happy for each day that went by. The woman that Kai thought as the 'most beautiful girl in the world', not that he had seen or could remember any other women than his own mother, was becoming less and less pretty by the day. Like a withering flower.

One fateful day, while administering his mother's 'happy juice', as Kai liked to call it, something went wrong. *Very* wrong.

Mommy's body started suddenly to convulse and tremble with violent intensity, white foamy drool trickling down her cheek and onto the couch. Eyes going wide, Kai hastily let go of the syringe, afraid that he had accidentally gone too deep and it might've hurt her.

Closing his eyes and shielding his face in fear, he was rather surprised when he wasn't met with an angry punch or slap, but was instead doused in a deluge of something *warm* and *chunky*. It ran down his arm and chest, staining his already very dirty unwashed t-shirt.

Frothing at the mouth and shaking violently, puke dripping off the edge of the couch, Kai was very confused as to why mommy was doing such a silly dance. Although it wasn't really unusual that she would occasionally puke when taking her happy juice, she for some reason wasn't responding to him at all.

Giving up on making contact with her, Kai simply started cleaning up the puke as he typically did.

It was only after some time that her shaking stopped, but to Kai's dismay, she still didn't respond to any of his questions. Even though her eyes were open, staring out into the air almost as if she was sleeping.

Kai was very confused as to how you could sleep with your eyes open and wondered if mommy could maybe teach him that when he grew older, but alas, he could only wait until she would wake up before asking such a question.

Minutes turned into hours, and hours turned to days.

Still, no response, and Kai was getting hungry. He had never been allowed to walk outside without his mother, and even so, it was extremely rare for him to ever be taken outside with her. He honestly couldn't even remember the last time she did so, but that might also have been attributed to the fact that he was still very much a child.

So when Kai ventured outside to find another adult who could maybe wake up his mother - or at least feed him, he unsurprisingly, was very frightened...

It was only after some very unfriendly men telling him to scram, that a very beautiful woman, even more beautiful than his mother, went home with him to check up on the withering flower sleeping on the couch.

But Kai was very confused when the beautiful woman, instead of waking up his mommy, just screamed.

At that moment, she seemed to be almost as scared as Kai himself did when his mother was in a bad mood or had been drinking her angry juice again. Which usually meant bruises and potential scars the next day.

The beautiful woman called someone, and before Kai knew it, his house was swarming with people wearing all kinds of weird outfits that he thought looked kinda funny. After being taken away, cleaned, and fed by these strange people, Kai was finally informed that his mommy was - **dead**.

Having endured the endless abuse of his father during the short time when he was around and his mother who took up that mantle as soon as he left, Kai was left decentralized from what a child like him should feel. *"But then, what did he feel?"* Was something that neither the strange people nor he couldn't answer.

Kai loved his mommy, and he truthfully just thought that when she got angry and gave him a couple of extra scars, it was something normal. *Didn't all mothers do that?*

So it wasn't a surprise that Kai couldn't help but be confused by the way everybody was looking at him, the pity in their eyes almost palpable as they gazed upon his utterly marred body.

By the time Kai had turned twelve, he had been moved through the hands of numerous people. Each one seemingly worse than the last. Kai was actually a bright kid that loved to learn, however, he only rarely got to go to school. That was a privilege, and it really just depended on how shitty his foster parents were at the time.

This isolation caused his view of the world to change irremediably.

As time once again went on, the faces of his 'guardians' started to blend together, only the scars running across his body able to remind him of each one and the atrocities they commit against him. By now, he was talking a lot less; turning conceded and sorrowful.

He didn't know exactly why, but an all-encompassing sadness had taken root within his heart. While his history most certainly had its crooked hand in it, he knew it that wasn't the cause alone. It was *something* else that plagued his mind. But exactly what, he failed to grasp...

It was after a particularly nasty pair of people adopting him, Kai finally managed to escape the system and its wretched clutches. For some reason, it seemed that they had either forgotten all about him or just given up, those blasted government people not even looking for him to bring him back to another shitty pair of 'parents'.

Twelve years old, on the streets, and utterly alone, Kai had to find his own way in the world.

He struggled. However, like some twisted joke, the scars and years of abuse he had endured inadvertently had matured Kai way beyond anything a child like him should have, which ended up being the only reason why he could survive in the streets and continue the cycle of tragedy.

Surrounding himself with shady company, stealing and thieving, using any nefarious means to survive, Kai barely made by.

Unbeknownst to him, the years flickered by.

The sorrow and dejection of life that had taken root in his heart, now growing to consume his mind. He was surviving, but for what? It was becoming more and more obvious that he was missing... *something*. He did not wish for his childish innocence to return or his lifetime of abuse to be absolved, he only sought to find the missing link; the reasoning for his own existence and mindless survival.

On one fateful day, however, he managed to uncover a faint hint to what was eluding his search. Being beaten and battered by some unknown henchmen, the same age as himself, Kai for some inexplicable reason, found himself fighting back - For the first time in his life.

The fight was messy, downright pathetic, but - he won.

It was victory or defeat. And he wanted *more*.

This was the small revelation he obtained, and it fundamentally changed who he was as a person. No longer conceded and frail, he personally sought out conflict and fights. He lost more times than not, accumulating even more scars. However, those few times when he won, he felt truly **alive**. There was finally a meaning, a purpose, to his existence.

The pursuit of **power**.

Strength and prestige, every goon he defeated allowed him to grow and improve. He became a known figure on the streets, even feared by most. This feeling was the missing link, the reason to survive, the reason to live...

But as with the greatest tenet of time, which everything in existence is beholden most to; nothing ever lasts. For every fight, he came closer to the realization of a fundamental flaw of this world and himself; The Shackles of Mediocrity.

Trapped within a human body, in an insignificant world, forever bound to the limits of his own flesh, he could see his own limits before he even reached halfway.

Sure he could beat a few goons at a time, maybe a few more if he reached the peak of his body's potential. But to what end? What 'amazing' feat would that be? What good was he against some no-name with a gun? He would still just end up becoming another forgotten grain in the sands of time upon his death, just another corpse on the sidewalk. Not leaving any significance in a wholly insignificant world.

Once again... existence lost meaning.

Drifting listlessly, Kai went from fight to fight, mindless and without purpose. On one fateful day though, a fight went bad. Very bad. A knife in his gut, Kai realized that this could very well be his end; but maybe death would finally give him escape from the torment.

With warm blood pooling beneath him, contrasting to the cold bite of the concrete, Kai's life flickered before his eyes. A world that had given him nothing but suffering and misery, only to taunt him with a purpose wholly elusive to his mundane existence, and then finally kill him off once an even greater anguish had taken hold of his sense of self.

Truly a cruel and despairing world.

When Kai opened his eyes, he wasn't sure what he had been expecting. But the two sky-blue eyes that peered curiously over a bedframe definitely wasn't it.

Kai was an atheist, so upon his untimely meeting with a cold blade in his gut, he had only awaited eternal darkness. But after having glanced around at the small and dusty room and his bandaged abdomen, he realized he hadn't ascended to some religious afterlife. He simply wasn't dead yet. Somebody had saved him.

The one who had saved Kai was a man by the name of Callum. He was a man in his forties, a local library and store owner. His half-grayed scruffy beard did nothing to compliment his balding head, and his weathered face told of someone whose been struggling for a good part of his life. Something Kai was all too familiar with.

Callum's daughter, Ellie, the girl with golden-blonde hair and azure eyes, was almost unrecognizable to Callum's appearance. Only a few features shared between the two proved their blood-relation. Ellie was only 10-years-old, and her curious innocence baffled Kai, something that he had long been purloined of.

Callum, out of the kindness of his heart, and no small amount of encouragement from a pleading Ellie, had decided to pull Kai off the streets and tend to his wounds. Kai had met countless liars, manipulators, and people with fake facades, but he didn't doubt him for a second when Callum said that Ellie was his world.

However, Callum wasn't perfect. In his early youth, he had mingled with a lot of bad company and made many, many bad choices. At least, that was until he met Olivia, a picture-perfect older version of Ellie. Pulled from his self-destructive life, Callum suddenly had his hands filled with a pregnant wife.

But that didn't mean that he had completely escaped from his old life. Still left with a crippling debt to a dangerous crime lord, Callum was continuously harassed by goons and illegal debt collectors. With Ellie, a new-born baby, Callum and Olivia struggled to live their new lives as a family. But again, things never last.

To set an example, the crime lord had Olivia murdered, leaving Callum a single father and with an even greater debt than he had before. Unable to turn to corrupt government officials and police, including the seriousness of his own criminal background, Callum could only wallow in his own misery.

Kai had long forsaken his love for his fellow humans, however, Callum and Ellie had shown him kindness and he could sympathize with their situation. Helping Callum with the shop and housework, Kai suddenly found himself in a stable life - An utterly alien experience to him.

Ellie had essentially become his little sister as she took to him instantly, and both he and Callum doted endlessly on the little ball of curiousness. Getting a job for some off-the-books construction work, Kai worked together with Callum in the pursuit of a shared dream; to send Ellie off for a better life.

Now 20-years-old, Kai was finally told that they had enough money and resources, to not only get Ellie out of the slums, but also get her a brand new life, scholarship, and willing guardians. Unable to promise Ellie's safety, Callum could only let his little girl go and live out her life.

At first, when Ellie had been sent off for her new life, Kai had thought this was something to celebrate. But, when Callum all of a sudden began trying to shoo away Kai for his own supposed 'safety', he realized something was very wrong. Apparently, how bad things were when Callum had left his old life was in reality a lot worse than he had originally let on.

With the crime lord having reached the end of his patience, he would come for either Callum's money - or life. Having spent every single cent of his money and collected another debt from another illegal channel to finally send Ellie off, Callum had burned all his bridges.

His attempt to shoo him away to preserve Kai's life wasn't working. With Ellie gone, Kai too had lost the small but short purpose he had found to keep himself alive, so he simply decided to stay and face the same fate as Callum. Carrying on with their lives, Kai one day found himself returning from work only to find the door of Callum's store having been busted down.

Heart sinking into an abyss, he rushed inside only to see eight bulky goons, all with guns holstered at their hips. They surrounded an almost unrecognizable figure laying on the ground, glassy eyes, blood leaking from cuts and bruises.

It was Callum.

The was the last straw, the last tether to this world that kept Kai trying to survive, broken. Charging at them, he knocked two out from a knuckle to the temple and fist to the jaw, but then suddenly found himself grappling with a goon desperate to draw his gun. In their furious struggle, they accidentally knocked off the glass on a counter.

But instead of the expected sound of glass breaking and the scattering of glass shards across the floor, something very *odd* happened.

Upon the glass touching the wooden flooring of the shop, the entire ground rippled like a stone being dropped into a pond. The absolutely shocking occurrence caused everybody to immediately stop in their tracks, even Kai and the man he was desperately grappling with stopped. They all just stared at the oddity of solid wooden rippling like waves.

As the ripples got consecutively larger as they spread out, the wood warped and started to acquire grizzly cracks. Through those cracks, blue rays of luminescent light shone through, capturing everybody's gazes. It was mesmerizing.

Kai and the unknown henchmen only snapped out of their daze when the floor suddenly turned into a reality-warping vortex that slowly swallowed everybody into its gaping maw. The last thing Kai saw before azure light claimed his world, was the dead body of Callum, whose glazed over eyes stared listlessly out into the air as he slid down into the vortex with him.