



eye of the

# UNKNOWN

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# Book 1: Alex

A cool, autumn breeze blew gently across the woods, pulling leaves from their trees and scattering them onto the soft grass below. The moonlight shone down upon the land in an enchanting haze. It would have been a lovely sight, had it not been for the horrific situation I found myself in. Along with two other freshmen, Nathan and Garret, I've been tasked to investigate an abandoned house located at the very top of a hill just outside of town. The further we advanced toward the creepy place, the more I wondered why I was doing this; was it really worth it to be a part of this fraternity? Did I really want to be involved with an organization that was set on humiliating underclassmen?

Pushing my concerns aside, I continued the commute to the house alongside my fellow freshmen.

"I can't believe they put us up to this," Garret said as he shook his head. "It's like they think we're children or something. What college student actually believes in a haunted house?" While I wanted to agree with him, my undeniable fear betrayed me. Even if this house wasn't *haunted*, per say, it could have contained numerous dangers. What if we're trespassing on someone's property, or if some escaped convict has made this his hideout? What if it really *is* haunted by a vengeful spirit who would curse anyone who stepped into its home? The possibilities were endless.

My thoughts were broken when Garret spoke up again.

"Hey, did you guys ever hear about that farmer who lives around here? The one whose horse was brutally decapitated and scratched up beyond belief? They say a *monster* lives out here, one that shows no mercy to its victims."

Despite the nervous feeling that arose in my stomach, I knew Garret was only saying this to get a rise out of me. Thankfully, Nathan intervened: "That's just a campfire story, man. Even

if it really did happen, it was probably a coyote or something. This place *is* surrounded by woods, after all.”

As we ascended the hill, the house came into view. The roof was partially caved in on the right side, and the wood was nearly rotted away. Though it looked like it had been struck by lightning seventeen times, it was still standing. A shiver ran down my spine, and the once-comforting autumn breeze chilled me to the bone.

“Well, here it is,” Nathan said skeptically, as if with doubt. “Who wants to go in first?”

I avoided his gaze as if it were the eyes of Medusa herself, because it *certainly* wasn’t going to be me. Yet, out of some cruel twist of fate, the others looked at me expectantly, and I was the first one to enter the house after all.

I stood in front of my partners, peering into the front window, which was almost entirely busted. Inside the house, there were shards of glass and, if my eyes weren’t deceiving me, *scratch marks*. I hesitated, of course, until I heard someone clear his throat. It was then that I remembered the fraternity’s vice president, Jarrod, was present on a Facetime call on Garret’s phone. “Get on with it.” Jarrod’s irritation was audible despite the cuts in sound from the phone’s unstable signal. I took a deep breath and, without a second thought, pushed on the door, which made an ominous *creeeeeak* as it swung open. The three of us had entered the house at last, and it was every bit as disturbing as I had feared. In the center of a room, an old sofa stood, barely intact. Next to it stood a chair, which matched the pattern of the sofa. Both of these items were covered from top to bottom with impossibly deep scratch marks, creating holes where the cotton innards emerged and fell to the floor grotesquely. I looked down at the wooden floor, which creaked with every step. The scratch marks were still evident, and as I looked around the moonlit room, there were similar marks upon the floor and walls.

“Why are there marks all over the place?” Nathan asked. So he’d noticed them too. Jarrod was clearly busy, as the cacophony of chatter and what sounded like party music took over the Facetime audio.

“Yo, Jarrod, listen up!” Garret shouted assertively. “Why are there scratch marks all over this house, dude?”

Having finally heard us, Jarrod replied, “Oh, there used to be this really ugly barn owl in that house. It’s probably gone now, and it’s harmless anyway.”

This explanation was almost reassuring, save for the fact that these marks did not look like they belonged to a “small animal.” They looked larger and sharper, almost like a coyote’s. As we advanced into the house, more marks came into view, eventually joined by feathers scattered throughout the first floor. When we arrived at the foreboding stairwell, I grew nervous. The top was pitch black, making it impossible to see anything. “We’re not going up there, right?” I asked, pointing toward the stairs.

Garret scoffed as he shot an annoyed glance in my direction. “You’re not scared, are you? I have no problem leaving you down here if that’s the case.” His voice was laced with patronization, as if he considered me beneath him despite being in the same grade. Sensing the growing tension, Nathan stepped in between us and changed the subject. “Jarrod said we have to take pictures in this place, remember? One of those locations happens to be at the top of the staircase...” His voice grew softer as he spoke. Something told me that he was just as nervous as I was, though much better at concealing it.

“Doesn’t it strike you guys as, I don’t know, weird that we’re being forced to do this? Especially in the middle of the night? Isn’t this what some people define as *hazing*?” I asked, momentarily forgetting that Jarrod was still present via Facetime. Luckily, he couldn’t hear my

accusation over the hoots and hollers of whatever party he was enjoying. As socially awkward as I am, I would have preferred being at that party than being forced to ascend these stairs leading to who-knows-where.

“I think you’re just making excuses, dude,” Garret argued. “*Hazing* is like peer-pressure and all that. Nobody’s *pressuring* us into this: we chose this in order to join the fraternity!” I held my breath. I wanted to respond with, *You just admitted that we’re being hazed*, but I knew it would only anger the guy. He was six feet tall and extremely muscular, which deterred me from pushing his buttons any further.

Nathan kept his mouth shut as well, until eventually he turned to us with a determined expression. “I’ll go up and take the picture. You guys can stay down here and photograph the rest of the place. I’ll only be a second.”

Garret and I exchanged glances. At this moment I could tell that none of us wanted to go up those stairs, not even strong-guy Garret. We didn’t say a word, just nodded at Nathan as he disappeared up the staircase.

Garret and I began to roam the rest of the house. I used my phone as a flashlight and camera since Garret’s phone was still occupied with Jarrod’s call.

“Yo, come over here and look at this creepy painting. I think this is one of the things Jarrod wanted us to find.” I was preoccupied with yet another scratch mark I had found. This mark was deeper than the rest, however: it sliced into the floorboards and created two holes which seemed to bore directly into the house’s foundation. “Hey, you, are you deaf *and* blind? I asked you to come over here!”

Before I knew it, my glasses had been snatched from my face, rendering me relatively sightless in the dark room.

“Give those back! What is wrong with you?” I protested as I reached toward Garret’s blurry figure. “If you can’t follow simple directions, how do you expect to survive through college?” Garret jeered, holding the glasses higher out of reach.

We were so caught up in arguing that we hardly noticed the subtle *thud* from upstairs.

“Did you hear that?” Garret asked.

His sudden concern made me nervous, but I quickly snapped myself out of it. “Don’t try to mess with me right now. I want my glasses back.” Garrett would be the type to make jokes like that. He’d been trying to spook me since the moment we entered the house.

“No, I’m serious. We should go check on Nathan. Or maybe *I* should, since *you’re* so scared of the dark.” He walked away, still clutching my glasses in his hand. At this point, I’d had enough. This had to be some kind of plot between the two of them to freak me out. “I’m not falling for this, Garret! Just give them back!” I started to follow him toward the stairs, but it was useless. He had already vanished into the darkness. I stayed in place, impatiently waiting for Garrett and Nathan to pull their nasty prank.

The longer I waited, the more nervous I became. Something was telling me that they weren’t just messing with me after all. I began to rub my hands together nervously, noticing the hot sweat emerging from in between my palms.

Moments later, I heard the dreaded sound of a scream from a voice suspiciously like Garrett’s. I tried to hold myself together. *It’s just a joke. Just a joke.* I waited for the laughter that would most certainly follow, the comments about how scared I was and how easy it was to prank me. Yet nothing happened. The house remained as silent as ever.

Finally, I decided I'd had enough of standing around helplessly while my classmates were who-knows-where. With my impaired vision, I headed toward the foreboding staircase and began to climb. Each step creaked louder than the last.

When I reached the top, I noticed my glasses conveniently lying on the floor. Without hesitation, I put them on, but noticed that the left lens was blurry and cracked. "Of course he'd break them within five minutes," I muttered, using my sleeve to rub dust off the lenses. "I'd expect nothing less."

The satisfaction I felt from regaining my vision didn't last long. As I turned to my left, I was filled with horror: there was Garret's lifeless body, lying face up, blood drenching his once-white shirt. His phone was cracked and broken on the floor next to the bloody scene. My eyes widened, and I covered my mouth against both nausea and disbelief. My brain couldn't process what I was seeing, but the horrid smell was enough to convince me to run.

Without thinking, I backed up and nearly fell down the stairs, yet something prevented my fall. When I turned around, I met the eyes of an unnaturally large, owl-like creature. It was the size of an average human, with a beak and claws that looked deadly sharp. The creature was covered from head to toe in blood. It narrowed its dark eyes and lunged toward me. With the agility I didn't know I had, I ducked low to the ground so that it flew right over me. I knew this wouldn't hold it for long, though, so I booked it down the stairs, nearly tripping as I did. I tried not to scream as I ran through the old house and out the door. I didn't want to agitate the creature any more than I already had. Most of all, I didn't want to end up like Garret and presumably Nathan, as well.



As I ran toward the surrounding forest, I heard the creature burst out of the house, ripping the door from its hinges. It landed on the ground with a menacing *thud*. Sweat poured down my neck as I realized that I was being chased.

A shrill screech erupted behind me. It sounded animalistic, and yet not quite natural, as if an alien were impersonating a bird. I dared not look back, because I knew the creature was gaining on me. I panted as I ran through the woods, dodging everything in my path without slowing down.

Again, the scream echoed throughout the woods, but this time it came from above. Without stopping, I looked up at the horrific sight of the owl-creature soaring through the sky. Its great wings created a subtle shadow which was noticeable even in the dark of the night. When I finally found the strength to pull my eyes away, I came face-to-face with a maple tree. The momentum was too strong, and my face hit the trunk full-force. Served me right for having the stupidity to look, I guess.

I was too disoriented to get up immediately when I hit the ground. The monster was still soaring above the treetops, preparing to dive in and tear me to pieces as it had done to my peers. I returned to my feet as quickly as I could, but when I took my first step forward, I heard a distinct *crunch* beneath my shoe. I cursed quietly, realizing that I'd broken my glasses entirely. Although I was at a severe disadvantage, there was no other option, so I continued to run. I dodged the trees and brush to the best of my ability. I was staring into the eyes of death itself, but I had to *try* to escape.

The farther I ran, the further my sanity slipped away. I no longer knew where I was going or what I was doing, just that I needed to survive. I had to outrun this monster. If I stopped for

even a moment, the thing would swoop down, scoop me up and tear me limb from limb. I tried to block out the never-ending shrieks, but in the darkness, they were sending me into madness. Finally, a river stopped me in my tracks. It was too deep to trudge through, and with my limited vision, I doubted I could navigate around it. Fear struck me as I heard the creature soar downward through the trees. I whirled around to see its crazed, dark eyes peering into my soul. Without a second thought, I leapt into the river. In my mind I knew I was doomed, but some small part of me hoped that just maybe this would buy me some time.

To my horror, the creature jumped in after me. It shrieked and splashed around with its gigantic wings, beating against the water as if to threaten me all the more. My sopping clothes weighed me down. I was only thankful that the river wasn't as deep as I'd assumed.

I was about to accept my fate, until I felt an object move under my foot at the river floor. It was a rock, just light enough to pick up but heavy enough to knock someone out. I dove in, grabbed hold of the rock, and, with the last bit of strength I could muster, emerged from the water. I faced the owl-creature, as its bloodthirsty gaze settled upon me in preparation to attack. It lunged with all its might, but the water slowed it down just enough. I brought the rock up above my head and slammed it down upon the monster's beak.

*Thump.*

Blood poured out of its face as it cried out in pain and flapped its wings helplessly. There was a noticeable dent in its beak. I slammed the rock into its head once more.

*Thump.*

I met the creature's eyes as it fell lifelessly into the water, noticing how its once bloodthirsty gaze turned to an expression of peace and emptiness. Its body was too heavy to be carried by the current, so it just lay there, a bloody mess just like Garret.

I heaved uncontrollably as I pulled myself out of the river. My body shivered in the coolness of the night, yet I felt a fire burning in my veins. It almost seemed that the adrenaline would never leave.

So the ugly little barn owl that Jarrod spoke of wasn't *just* a barn owl. And perhaps the rumors of what had happened to that farmer's horse really were true. All I knew for sure was that no one else would come here ever again, and my peers were gone for good.

# Book 2: George

Eyes opened, I awoke in a blur from the sound of sudden motions outside this place I call home. The hunger had settled in since my last meal—I could not conceive how long ago it was. Even so, the meal did not give me much sustenance: it just left me with an unsettling desire for more. It has always been this way. Never receiving enough as I grew into what I am now.

Since birth, I've never looked like the rest of my nestlings. I had an immediate height difference as I began to grow. I wailed and screeched for more food, as my mother could only portion out our feeding with the most she scavenged for. This took a huge toll on the other nestlings' health, so my mother made a decision that would fit in her limits of what she could do for the entire nest: she ignored me to feed the rest. I was starving for days on end before I realized that I needed to find my own food. So I jumped.

From then onward, I took care of my needs, and my needs alone. Since I had ejected myself from the nest, I needed to learn how to survive. When I made the jump, I scarred my wings where it hurt to lift them. My inability to fly, at the time, made hunting and traveling hard. Before my wing healed, my first few hunts consisted of any scraps that other creatures left over. Even then, I still had to learn how to fly without guidance. I noticed that in the day, prey was limited. At night, my hearing made the prey easier to spot. I was able to catch multiple rat families, rabbits, and squirrels. I had to fight for my prey and even *became* prey as I rested in the day, staying away from bobcats and snakes.

The predators that troubled me the most were the strange giant two-legged creatures. A couple of days after I had begun to manage on my own, I returned to the nest: where better could I go? It seemed my mother and nestlings had left. I had the den completely to myself.

I was eating a dead rat in the den when I first encountered the creatures. They came rushing in, being loud and reckless. I stood paralyzed with fear as I watched them be destructive

and careless. They started to throw reflective objects at the wall. Large basins pushed over, spilling liquids everywhere, and throwing my old nest to the ground. Smashing it into pieces. I couldn't pull my eyes away.

Realizing that I could be in danger, I scurried across the room for cover. One of them saw me. Its paw grabbed me in the middle of the run and squeezed me at my sides. I screeched, hoping that it would stop causing me pain. It tossed me harshly to the others. One of them bent my wings out of place and ripped feathers out of my skin. This went on for minutes, one after the other playing around with me like I was a stick. After a while, one eventually dropped me on the ground. I thought it would be over then. It wasn't. I laid there playing dead, hoping that they would leave. They didn't. The tallest and most physically foreboding one took its foot and kicked me straight across the den. *Thump*. The sound rocked in my head and everything vibrated. I could not move. The vibrating was so intense that it calmed my mind. My body was still in pain, but as I started to drift, I knew that this creature was the most vile predator around.

As I grew, my physical form continued to mutate, and I noticed that I did not look like the others. I was stronger, bigger, and faster. My talons grew as long as fallen branches in a storm. My legs elongated so that when I stood up I reached the height of a growing cornfield. My wings stretched as wide as the distance between two neighboring trees. My body was scared in various places from the speed of my growth and all the dangers I had barely survived. Lastly, my beak, the most favorable part as I crushed and swallowed my prey effortlessly with its strength. My new form had exceeded its use for mere survival in this bleak world. One of the first prey that I successfully caught after my new growth was an injured horse. The horse fell and had been stuck in a large ditch. It was quite fascinating because I did not know what I could do, yet I took the chance. My talons ripped into the horse's side with ease. My beak sunk easily into its

stomach as it cried out for help. As I was swallowing the leftover organs of the horse, the strange, tall creatures that stand only on two legs started to search around the ditch, so I left the horse unfinished.

Tonight, the sounds grew louder as my eyes began to adjust—familiar sounds of recklessness and carelessness. I shuffled in my nest, throwing around old bones. I wanted to cause a commotion to see if it was only a simple prey roaming around. With startling speed, I crawled out of my nest, straight to the entrance. I crept down the woodwork, slightly panning my neck around to notice that it was the two-legged creatures. I swiftly went back into my den in shock that its kind had returned. Yet, I remembered that it was different this time. I was not the weak and starved bird that I was before. I had grown into my own breed and learned skills that kept me alive and safe. Skills that kept me well-fed. Over the years, I learned not only how to protect myself from the predators that harmed me, but other skills that taught me to *be* the predator. Tonight these two-legged creatures entered my home again, but it would not be like the last time.

I flew up to the ceiling joist and perched on the wood to stay hidden. As the prey walked into the large den, it looked around at the old objects left by the last resident, flashing a bright light with its paws. These objects had been there since I was born, yet were destroyed years ago by their kind. Some of the objects were odd and reflective, yet jagged and sharp. One was a square-shaped block of wood next to a bit of lumber topped with a cushy pelt, but half of it was dismembered and ripped. The prey flashed light on to flat images that resembled my mother, but with strange markings on the neck, wings, and talons, but some of the parts were scrapped over the years of sharpening my claws. It panned across the room more seeing the scratches all across the wall and old blood from past creatures that I dragged into the nest store for harsh days.

Creeping toward my corner of the room, it panned the bright light over my nest. Not realizing what it had just crushed in the nest, and it peered down to see an old skull nearly cracked into pieces. It continued to flash the light around the den, slowly veering towards me. When the light reached me, I tried to protect myself from it. I crawled down from the joist with a wing covering my head, but the prey kept shining the light on me. It began to shiver vigorously as it tried to back away slowly, tripping on more bones. I opened my wings to display my mangled, crooked body, and its eyes dilated with fear. I craned my neck forward to give my meal a better look. Before it could even attempt to make a sound, I pierced my beak straight into its chest. Removing my beak from the prey, its paws shook, feeling the large absence in its chest.

As the prey looked into my eyes, seeing that the last thing it saw was me grasping my foot around its neck. Snap. I twisted his head with one go. I tore into its organs and tossed them into the air, gobbling them up in one go. I removed all the weird, disconnected fur around its body for a better taste. This prey was different from most because of how tense its body was in death, but with my talons I sliced its legs and its head so I could swallow it more easily. Coming from the lower half of my home, I could hear more of the prey's kind. I crawled out of my den and went silently down the woodwork. I wanted a closer look, because most prey would never present themselves as loud as the creatures were.

The first prey that I saw was loud and obnoxious. The other was quiet and timid. The loud one seemed that its mother portioned its food very well and it looked like it hunted frequently. The quiet one looked like a runt and was slimmer than the other. It would be harder to catch the quiet one. I could sense its fear. This one also indicated a stronger awareness of its



surroundings, but the loud one would be an easy pick. Maybe, for once, I would have a nice meal. I crawled back up the woodwork and flew over the entrance to my den. Waiting.

It only took a couple of minutes for one of them to come up. Noticing that loud prey walked into my den in search of its brethren. As soon as the prey stepped deeper, I came down the entrance with my talons pointing straight into its back. I stabbed one of the talons into the center of his back and removed it rapidly. The prey stood there for a second ready to clasp, yet I caught him by the sides with my talon. I squeezed into its sides crushing the organs tightly, causing it the same memorable pain. Causing the prey to wail with an excruciating volume, I crushed so deep into its chest that no more sound could be produced. This prey looked exactly like the creature that had once hurt me so badly, but it did not seem as vile and menacing this time. And yet I felt just as afraid as I had so long ago.

I heard the same creaks and cracks in its ribs and watched it suffer in silence. But I couldn't care less; this meal would suffice. Like any other creature, I just needed to survive. I drew the ultimate breath from my prey as I sliced its upper body in half and removed each leg from its joint. The prey had tough meat, which looked like it had been worked harder than the others. After I pulled off its fur, I slid my talons down the chest, cutting it in half to make my meal easier to swallow later. The head was easily accessible, as usual, and I took delight in picking out the eyes.

As I finished cutting it up, I realized the third prey was too quiet. As if it knew that it was in my home. Returning to the edge of the woodwork, I saw it standing at the bottom like a sitting duck. So I hid myself by the ceiling once again. As the prey creeped up the woodwork to find its kind. It stopped for a moment, picking up this weird reflective object with legs on both sides and putting it between its tiny nose. While it did that I crawled back around the joist to the den

entrance and landed softly on the floor. The prey looked over and I saw the fear in its body peak, as it saw its kind cut up in pieces on the floor. I stretched my body more preparing for it to feel my presence. The prey slowly backs away, but trips onto my stomach. As I stared down upon it, I saw the fear spike in his eyes. I made myself as intimidating as I could to let the prey know this would be the last thing it saw. But, somehow, this was a mistake. As soon as I went into strike while lunging beak towards it, it ran like a rabbit right under me.

As I got my bearings, I rushed down the woodwork to notice that the prey had run through the wooden entrance. I could not let this prey get away from me, so I barreled straight into the wooden entrance, causing the whole thing to fall down. In frustration, I screeched from the top of my lungs: it was getting away from me. I soared into the air and scanned my eyes over the forest, and there it was, scurrying for its life. I increased my speed and flew right over the prey as it ran into a tree and disoriented itself. This was my moment. I glided deeper through the trees, weaving through branches as the prey ran more chaotically. I increased my speed and aimed myself straight for his back, but before I knew it, the prey had jumped straight into the river.

I paused for a second to take a deep breath before diving in head first. I stabbed the water with my beak, trying to find my prey. All I could see under the water were shadowy blobs. In a moment of excitement, I thought I found it, but my beak thumped against something hard, knocking me off my feet. It was only a rock. My feet scraped the stones on the river's floor as I tried to keep myself afloat. It was a success. I steadied myself to find my prey right in front of me. I stared into it once more, reminding it that these eyes would be the last thing it saw. Then I threw my head back and lunged.

*Thump.*

My eyes blurred. I began to screech as the pain vibrated through my entire body. Blurrily, I saw the heavy weapon it held in its paw, and before I could think, it struck again.

*Thump.*

I went limp. As if from a distance, I watched myself drop into the water, unable to move. Finally, the vibrating stopped, and everything started to ease. The water felt calming in my ears. It was so peaceful. The unfinished prey no longer mattered: all that was left now was to sleep. I sunk deeper into the water. As my vision blurred and my eyes drooped, the eyes of my prey were the last things I saw. And all was silent. Just me and the gentle water. Eyes shut.



In the dark of the night, three frat boys are sent to investigate an abandoned house. Rumors have circulated in the area about a demented creature, impatiently awaiting its next victim. Perhaps this is only a ghost story to frighten the naive. Or perhaps these tales are true, and the group is about to wander into their own untimely demise...