

**The hopeless treatment**

by

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## Day

### 3

Eli lay on the table listening to the dripping water he assumed came from the ceiling. He wondered if the rotten egg smell that perfumed the room came from the mud bath, but the mud wasn't even in the main building of the treatment center. The mud bath was housed in the barn thirty yards away. The treatment center contained one therapy room located in the main building. A single round light which barely lit the room hung over each exercise table. The radio always on in the therapy room hummed absently since no programs were being broadcast. Why did no one bother to change the station or turn it off? At home, Eli used the radio as a companion since he spent most of his time alone in his room. The radio sat by his bed to keep him company. It bothered him when the station switched off. He very slowly taught himself how to change the station. He figured out that his arm reached the radio. Then he forced the knob between the thumb and forefinger. The most difficult part of the process was the turning of the knob itself. He could only turn it a little at a time. As he

worked on tuning the radio, he became faster. By the time he left home, he changed stations easily.

Now, amid the static in the therapy room, Eli lay on one of four identical rectangular metal tables which sat in each scarcely lit corner of the room. Each table contained leather straps that restrained patients' limbs during therapy. The straps holding Eli's legs to the table seemed to tighten a little more every second, but in the two days that Eli had been here, he learned not to complain. If he said anything about the straps, he was reprimanded.

The last time he'd mentioned it, Dr. Franklin said, "Young man, do not complain about a treatment which is meant to help you."

Eli wanted to say something about how the strap hurt his leg, but he realized this was Dr. Franklin's way of telling him to shut-up and take the treatment. Eli wondered if this was the way treatment was done at Warm Springs. It was Reverend Worthy who told Eli of Warm Springs. Eli also heard about Warm Springs on the radio, but he didn't understand that it was a place for crippled people like himself until he met his new friend, Reverend Worthy, on the train to Dr. Franklin's treatment center. Reverend Worthy told Eli that he had come here to the treatment center in Iowa instead of Warm Springs, Georgia for two reasons. Reverend Worthy's church couldn't afford the ticket to Warm Springs and his wife feared he wouldn't make it there. She heard that another patient almost didn't survive the trip to Georgia.

"If Warm Springs cured the president, Eli, then maybe The Franklin Farm Treatment Center can cure us."

This was the first time Eli realized that the treatment center would cure him. He thought he was just being sent away from home since he came of age at eighteen.

“So you mean, I can be cured and go home and actually talk to my family.”

For the first time, Eli was excited about where the train was going. Before meeting Reverend Worthy, he worried about what his life was going to be like. But now he was convinced that after he was cured, he could do all the things he heard about people doing on the radio. He could actually hold a conversation without people ignoring him. He could go on adventures, and he could get married and have a family of his own.

As Eli lay back on the table in the dark room and thought of his optimism on the train with Reverend Worthy, he wondered whether this optimism was misplaced. He questioned if the treatment center was like Warm Springs or if it was dangerous like the man said in the dining room last night.

“If you don’t escape from here, you could disappear,” the man said. “I will be gone in the morning. I can assure you of that.”

The staff started for Eli’s table.

“What’s going on over here?” said the man with the beard who Eli recognized as one of the nurses that helped him in the outhouse.

“I’m just warning these two about the prison you people run here,” the man said.

“You know you’re not supposed to talk at mealtimes,” said the nurse with the beard.

“I don’t care,” the man said.

“You’re just tired,” the nurse said. “Let’s get you back to your room.”

“You and I both know you’re not taking me to my room,” the man said.

The nurse with the beard didn’t make another comment. He just pushed the man out of the dining room. Eli watched the nurse wheel the man out the door.

Now, in the therapy room, Reverend Worthy lay in a dimly lit corner on a table identical to the one that Eli occupied. It was a large rectangular metal table with leather straps to hold down a patient's limbs. Dr. Franklin removed Reverend Worthy's right leg from one of the leather straps and moved it side to side. The large shadow of Reverend Worthy's head on the wall in the dark room moved up and down in order to not scream with the movement of his useless limb. Dr. Franklin repeatedly pushed Reverend Worthy's leg out to the side of the table and back onto the table. Reverend Worthy's leg reminded Eli of the time men came and chopped dead tree branches outside of his window at home. The dead tree branches gave way with just a few cuts. What if this is what happened to Reverend Worthy's leg?

Eli couldn't get a good look at Reverend Worthy's face. The room was completely dark except for the round electric lights that hung over each metal table. Eli got the feeling that Dr. Franklin didn't want the patients to see each other having treatments. Eli didn't know if this had something to do with the fact that Dr. Franklin didn't want patients to know what treatment was coming, or he didn't want the patients to be able to encourage each other because it would just waste time.

Eli heard Dr. Franklin say, "Push against my hand, Reverend."

"I'll try," Reverend Worthy said.

The Reverend shifted his head up and down. Shadows were just as good as mirrors. It gave a person a larger view of himself or in this case someone else.

"Don't try, Reverend, do," Dr. Franklin said.

Reverend Worthy made the same mistake that Eli had made. He tried to talk to Dr. Franklin about how he felt. Dr. Franklin didn't want to hear a patient complain or ask about his orders. He just expected them to be followed.

"You're going to have to get better at that exercise, Reverend, or you will continue to walk with that limp," Dr. Franklin said.

Dr. Franklin walked toward Eli's table. It wasn't until he was almost up to where Eli could make out his body entirely that his shadow began to take shape on the wall. Eli saw Dr. Franklin's large round stomach and bald head. His oddly triangle-shaped nose added to his unusual profile. He looked like the snowman outside of his window at home last winter.

"Let's see if we can get those hands to open up any better today, Eli," Dr. Franklin said.

Dr. Franklin placed a soft bundle of rags in between his fisted fingers. He slowly stretched each finger straight until Eli's hand opened with the palm up. The muscle spasms in Eli's hand felt like the static sounded on the radio. The muscles felt like little individual pieces jumping uncontrollably all over his hand. His fingers instantly wanted to clamp shut. The bundle of rags taught Eli not to close his hand. If he felt his hand gripping the rags then he failed the exercise. Eli never understood what happened at the end of the exercise. He felt his hand grip the wad of rags and turn over. His hand suddenly opened palm down and the rags dropped out onto the floor.

Don't drop the rags, Eli told himself. He wouldn't get any better if he kept dropping the rags onto the floor.

"You just don't want to cooperate today. Do you, Eli?" Dr. Franklin said.

Did President Roosevelt's positive attitude help him recover from polio? Did the President have days when his legs and arms wouldn't do what he wanted them to do? Dr. Franklin said it would just take time and a good attitude to get better.

"Yes, sir," Eli said. He didn't like answering Dr. Franklin's questions in therapy. Dr. Franklin would ask him questions like, "Is that too tight?" Eli's response would be, "No, Dr. Franklin," or "No, sir." Eli also knew that if a patient did complain about a strap being too tight Dr. Franklin would say, "It needs to be that tight to serve its purpose."

"I'm glad to see you and I are thinking the same way, Eli," Dr. Franklin said. "It's going to take that type of attitude to get better."

Eli wanted to go home healed. This time if he could walk, he wouldn't be kept in his room. Instead of listening to his family through the doorway, he could actually be a part of their conversations. Listening to the radio by himself in his room made for a lonely existence. After all, his parents kept him in his room because he was a cripple. The only human contact he received at home on a regular basis were the visits from the attendants. When the attendants came into his room, they wouldn't talk to him directly. Their questions weren't directed at him. They directed them to the bed.

"Why are you so heavy?"

"Why am I doing this?"

Eli always wanted to say something to these people, but he never did. He always had the feeling that they wouldn't talk to him anyway. If he went home and he wasn't a cripple, he could be part of his family instead of a person who hid away in an upstairs bedroom. A secret from the rest of the world.

Eli held the bundle of rags this time in his left hand. This was Eli's weaker hand according to Dr. Franklin. Yesterday he couldn't even keep his hand open at all. Today when the rags were placed in it, they seemed to sit there for a second. Then the rags fell to the floor, and his fingers snapped shut.

"It will get easier, Eli, as you do the exercises," Dr. Franklin said, "just keep working hard."

Eli wasn't sure how gripping rags was going to help him get better, but Dr. Franklin was the doctor. He was the patient, and he didn't want to question what Dr. Franklin told him to do.

He also feared Dr. Franklin a little. Something just didn't feel right about him, Eli told himself. What was it? Maybe it was the new surroundings. He wasn't sure.

Dr. Franklin then went over to another table on the other side of Eli. Ariella occupied the table. Eli picked up Ariella's name in therapy by listening to Dr. Franklin address her in the same way he addressed Eli when he did his therapy. In this way, even though Eli and Ariella weren't allowed to talk, Eli felt like he knew her. Ariella's leg was crippled in a different way than Eli and Reverend Worthy's. Her legs were twisted so that her right leg faced her left one. It was as though Ariella's knees were two faces that faced each other.

In Eli's opinion, he would rather be crippled in the same way as Ariella. At least she could walk, Eli told himself, even though Dr. Franklin called it a hop.

Ariella tried in vain to straighten out her twisted leg. When Ariella moved her leg, it looked like a loose floorboard that needed to be nailed down. Was it possible for Dr. Franklin to straighten her leg the same way he straightened his and Reverend Worthy's? But



if this were possible, Dr. Franklin would have been doing it instead of the twisting motion that he now applied to Ariella's leg.

"Finished," Dr. Franklin announced, as if to no one, when he completed Ariella's treatment.

Eli wondered for the second day if the nurses who appeared had been in the room the whole time or if they just knew when Dr. Franklin finished by listening outside the door. He didn't really understand how people and objects seemed to just come out of the shadows in this place to complete their task and then disappear again.

Eli, Ariella, and Reverend Worthy were all escorted by the nurses that helped them off the table, out of the treatment room, and down the long hallway which housed the dining room. Ariella stood right next to Eli, her head just above the top of Eli's wheelchair. Her blond hair bobbed as she hopped alongside him. Eli sat leaning toward Ariella in his wheelchair. He wanted to tell her that her hair looked nice, but he didn't know if 'no talking at mealtime' included the walk to the dining room. Reverend Worthy stood taller than Eli and Ariella. He dragged his useless left leg as he walked with them. Eli's own useless legs hung down, so his feet didn't quite reach the footrest of the wheelchair.

Reverend Worthy's red hair and beard looked extraordinarily bright in the hallway. It reminded Eli of the color of carrots which he ate at home all the time. Eli's brown hair, the little he had of it, wasn't as interesting as Reverend Worthy's or Ariella's. When Eli lived at home, the attendant cut his hair as short as possible so it could be maintained easily.

When the three patients reached the dining room, Eli and Reverend Worthy were seated at a table with two other men in wheelchairs. The dining room contained five other rectangular tables just like this one with four patients seated at each table.

Should Reverend Worthy be sitting at this table? The other men were all in wheelchairs. It seemed like this broke one of the treatment center's odd rules that Eli didn't understand.

Eli looked across the dining room and saw something very strange. Ariella sat next to Dr. Franklin at the long staff table located at the back of the room. He didn't think that Dr. Franklin liked talking to the patients. If he doesn't like talking to patients, why did he have one sitting next to him at lunch? He wanted to figure this mystery out for himself. It gave him something to focus on other than the treatments.

At home he didn't talk to anyone in his room unless they talked to him first. His attendants at home didn't like it when he talked. It made them uncomfortable. They told his parents as much. His mother and father usually came to talk to him at night. It was one of these nightly visits when his father informed him that he had now come of age and they expected him to leave home just like his other siblings. Eli didn't have much contact with his siblings. The only time he saw his brother was when he came up to retrieve something out of his room during the day. At night his brother used to come to bed late after Eli was asleep. Eli wondered if this was to avoid him.

It was the voice of Reverend Worthy that brought Eli out of his thoughts.

"I still say this stuff looks like the time my wife made vegetable soup and let it simmer for too long," Reverend Worthy said.

Eli couldn't believe Reverend Worthy spoke. Dr. Franklin warned them about the 'no talking at mealtime' rule on their first night here.

"Don't you remember the rule?" Eli whispered.

This time a little more quietly Reverend Worthy said, “The only rule I don’t understand is when we can talk. We can’t talk in treatment, and we can’t talk during meals. What does that really leave us?”

Eli didn’t understand the rule either, but he figured it didn’t really matter. Eli couldn’t talk for very long anyway, or he would get tired. He discovered this on the train ride here with Reverend Worthy. He asked Reverend Worthy so many questions about Warm Springs because he thought they were going to a place like it. This place wasn’t like what Reverend Worthy described. At Warm Springs patients did exercises in pools filled with water. At Warm Springs the patients lived in cottages. At the treatment center the patients lived in one large brick building that consisted of four hallways. One hall contained the treatment room. Off of this in an L shape was the patients’ rooms. Eli didn’t know what was down the hallway that was beyond the patients’ rooms.

Eli turned his attention to his mush. The spoon laid next to the bowl. His fisted hands throbbed from therapy. He tried to pick up the spoon. He noticed the man sitting across from him. All he could see was the top of the man’s gray head of hair. The man licked the contents of the bowl with his tongue. Eli had done this for the past two days. He didn’t want to do it again, but again he was unsuccessful with the spoon. Like the man in front of him, Eli tipped his head forward and began licking the contents out of the bowl. He could’ve tried to pick up the bowl with his fisted hands, but he had already dropped one bowl of food trying this. He was too hungry to waste another bowl. Eli discovered his jaw didn’t just get tired from talking, it also tired quickly from lapping up food with his tongue.

Reverend Worthy was right. Eli wasn't fond of this brown gray mush. He didn't know what it was, but it didn't have much flavor. He finished the contents of his bowl, and without a word Reverend Worthy wiped Eli's mouth with Eli's shirt.

Reverend Worthy leaned over and whispered in Eli's ear, "I wish you'd let me help you eat the food, if you can call it food."

Eli shook his head from side to side. He wasn't going to say anything. He didn't like eating the food this way, but it was the only way he could accomplish it on his own. He worried that if Reverend Worthy helped him they would get in trouble for breaking the rules.

Dr. Franklin stood up from the staff table at the end of the dining room. The staff members on all the corners of the dining room wheeled the wheelchair patients out of the dining room. Eli felt himself begin to move. He headed to the mud bath in the barn. Ariella would be directly outside the barn gardening. She always worked in the garden during his mud bath.

The nurse with the dog tags pushed Eli down a steep hill to get to the barn. For the past two days, each time Eli went down this hill, he feared falling out of the unstable wooden wheelchair. When the wheelchair hit a hole, Eli lunged forward and tried to hold himself in the chair. He held his body as stiff as he could, thinking that if he held his body still it wouldn't slide out of the wheelchair. When Eli arrived at the barn after the adventure of the hill, he would have to start another adventure when he entered the mud bath. The same rule applied in the mud bath as on the hill. When the warm mud relaxed his tight muscles, it became difficult to keep his balance. He again had to hold himself stiffly straight at all times. If his mind wandered at all, he would fall and lose himself in the mud. This happened because his left side was not as strong as his right side.

After the two male nurses stripped off all his clothes except his underwear, each nurse took him by an arm and swung him high over the trough and stuck him down quickly into the mud. Eli was now prepared for this. On the first day, they had lifted him so quickly that he fell over in the mud instantly. He lay in the mud face first waiting for someone to take him out of it. This gave Eli a good first encounter with the stinking muck. The mud, housed in a trough which looked like a large window box, smelled like rotten eggs, soil, manure, and other smells that Eli couldn't identify.

The mud bath sat next to an open window. Theoretically, this was so patients could holler for help if they needed it. Another benefit of this open window was that a patient could hear the sounds of the garden. They were natural sounds of birds and insects. Other times they were people's conversations.

The one aspect Eli enjoyed about the mud bath was that he could hear Ariella having a conversation with Face, a staff member at the treatment center. From everything Eli could figure out, Face was called Face because it looked as though part of his face had been repaired. He couldn't exactly figure out how. All he knew was that part of it didn't quite look like a human face. It looked as though it was constructed of metal because some of the paint chipped off the chin section. The mask covered his chin, most of his mouth, and extended to the outside corner of his left eye. The bottom portion of his face that was covered didn't move when he spoke.

Eli heard Ariella say something to Face outside the window. "I don't understand why you don't want me to call you by your real name."

"Because it no longer has any meaning for me. People don't see the person anymore. They just see the disfigurement."

He couldn't keep his balance in the mud bath if he didn't concentrate. He'd either fall to one side or the other, or in the worse case he'd sink in the trough and not be able to breathe. Each time his head went down in the mud, he worried that someone wouldn't be there to pull him out. If a nurse or Dr. Franklin was the one to pull him out, they would scold him like a child and say, "I told you to keep your balance. That's what this exercise is supposed to be teaching you."

Eli hated having to worry about keeping his balance. Sometimes, he wished he could just lean over like his body naturally wanted to do, but he knew that he would never get out of here with an attitude like that.

"Who cares what other people think," Ariella said.

"You know the way people look at us," Face said.

"I know it's hard to have people stare at you," Ariella said, "but you shouldn't let them bother you."

"I can't help it," Face said with a cough.

"So you won't let me call you by your real name?" Ariella said.

Eli began to tip over. His head hit the warm mud. Eli tried to push up, but there wasn't a solid object to push on with either his hands or his feet. Eli sank deeper the more he tried to push up. The control Eli usually had over his upper body had been taken by the mud. It made Eli's muscles feel better, but it also drained them of their strength. Who would find him in the mud? Would it be Dr. Franklin or one of the nurses? Would anyone find him?

Eli saw a hand. It looked like it had been burned or scraped. He wasn't sure. The hand pulled him out of the mud and into a sitting position. Ariella's head stuck in through the open window.

“Is he alright, Face?” Ariella asked.

“I’m alright,” Eli said, coughing.

“You sure?” Face said from behind the trough.

“Oh, yes,” Eli said. “Thanks, Face.”

“They’ll be coming for him soon, Ariella,” Face said.

“Okay,” Ariella said. “I’ll see you later, Eli.”

Face walked out of the barn, and Ariella walked away from the window and both went back to gardening. It wasn’t long after this that Eli was lifted out of the mud by the two male nurses who then took him into a shower that was right next to the trough of mud and quickly washed it off of him. They never got all of the mud washed off. The mud still left on his body became itchy and uncomfortable.

After his mud bath, the two male nurses took him to the outhouse. Eli wasn’t used to the outhouse. At home, he used a bedpan and a urinal. Eli didn’t possess the muscle strength to hold himself on the hole very well. He only had one bowel movement in the time he had been here. His stomach ached from the need to relieve himself. He was afraid of falling off of the hole onto the dirt floor.

His first night in the outhouse, the nurses forgot him. He must have been in the outhouse for a couple of hours. He eventually couldn’t hold his balance, and he fell headfirst into the flimsy outhouse door.

“Are you trying to be funny?” the bearded nurse asked when he finally returned.

Eli wasn’t sure how to respond to this question. He didn’t usually talk to the people that helped him. If he talked to these nurses, it made them uncomfortable.

Eli hoped he wouldn't fall off of the hole this time. The nurses pushed Eli to the outhouse, and each nurse took an arm and guided Eli through the small door. Eli wondered how their three bodies together managed to fit into the outhouse. One of the male nurses, with dog tags that hung around his neck, positioned himself behind Eli after they were through the door. The other bearded nurse then went in front of Eli and pulled down his pants. Then both nurses each took an arm and placed Eli on the hole.

"Do we need to stay with this one?" the bearded nurse asked.

"It says in the pamphlet that we don't stay with the patients in the outhouse," the nurse with the dog tags said.

Eli had never heard of the pamphlet.

"He just seems to need more help," the nurse with the beard said.

"Not our problem," the other nurse said.

The two male nurses left the darkened outhouse. He wished one of them would have stayed with him. It might have made it easier to relieve himself. At home, an attendant always sat with him while he was on the bedpan and steadied him with their arm, so he didn't have to worry about falling. Here, no one caught him if he fell. Eli couldn't hold it anymore. He decided to take the risk and try to relieve himself. He started to slide slowly forward on the hole. He just hoped whatever was going to come out of him would do so while he was positioned over the hole. Eli felt something leave his body. His stomach slowly started to feel better. He was on the very edge of the hole now. He thought he was finished, but he wasn't sure how long he could stay in this position. He thought the nurses would come back and find him on the floor again.



After Eli soaked in the mud, it was difficult to keep his balance on the hole. The mud made his muscles weak, and he was tired from holding himself up in the trough.

When Eli thought he couldn't hold on any longer, the door to the outhouse swung open.

"He stayed on the hole this time," the nurse with the dog tags said.

"I need to be wiped off," Eli said.

"Good for you, little man," the same nurse said.

Everyone always talked to Eli like a child. He was almost the same age as the two male nurses, and yet, they treated him this way. It confused Eli how people feared him at one moment and then treated him like a child the next. He didn't think the two visions people had of him went together.

The bearded nurse stood in front of him again while the other cleaned him off with what felt like a page of the Sears and Roebuck Catalog. This was similar to how he was cleaned at home, but there he lay on a towel in bed while being cleaned off with a catalog page. The nurses carried Eli out of the outhouse the same way he had been carried in. The nurses held him by each arm, lifted him into his wheelchair, and wheeled him back into the main building of the treatment center and into the dining room for evening dinner.

He again was parked by Reverend Worthy. An identical bowl of mush was placed in front of him. Eli tried to pick up the spoon. This time he was able to get one finger around the spoon, but the object was still too heavy to lift. He went back to the animal way of eating his dinner.

The man sitting across from Eli stared at him after he had lapped up the last of his food. With that look, the man seemed to be trying to tell or ask Eli something. Eli resisted

the urge to ask the man what he wanted. Eli eventually had to look away from the man, so he looked at Reverend Worthy who was sitting on his right. Eli tried to scrape the mush off of his chin with his fisted hand. He wanted to see how much this could accomplish.

Reverend Worthy whispered to Eli, “Your shirt will make much faster work of that mess.”

Eli heard a squeak. He looked across the table at the other man. The man was seated in a wooden wheelchair exactly like Eli. At first, Eli didn’t know what made the noise, but then the man started pushing up on his legs in a sort of jumping motion. The same squeak came from the man’s chair. The man continued this motion three or four more times. Still continuing this motion, the man spoke.

“He wouldn’t have to use his shirt,” the man said, “if they wouldn’t make us eat like dogs.”

On instinct, Eli said, “Shh.”

“No, I will not be quiet,” the man said.

Eli wanted to say “Shh” again, but for some reason he didn’t. He just sat there looking at the man.

“I’ve seen too much happen here to be quiet,” the man said. “They don’t feed us good food. I didn’t care because I’m old, but now that I see this young man, I can’t put up with this anymore.”

Eli didn’t think this man looked that old. He was a bald man like Dr. Franklin. He had wrinkles and gray eyebrows. He was fascinated by the man’s red and white checked flannel shirt. Eli only wore one type of shirt. It was a brown long sleeved worn-out cotton shirt. Eli loved to look at other people’s clothing. At home, he noticed all of the new shirts

his father and brother wore. He always wondered why he couldn't have new clothes like them.

"Don't worry about Eli," Reverend Worthy whispered to the man. "I'm looking out for him."

"Look out for yourself," the man said no longer jumping up and down in his chair. "You're different from me or him. You can walk. You should escape from here. They don't care about us."

The nurse with the beard slowly made his way to the table and wheeled the man causing the disturbance out of the dining room.

Reverend Worthy turned to Eli and said, "Do you believe that, Eli?"

Eli nodded his head.

Reverend Worthy whispered, "What? You do believe that? Why, because he broke the rules?"

Eli didn't move. He wasn't going to get in trouble for talking. If Reverend Worthy wanted to that was his business, but Eli knew why the man was taken away. The man had broken the 'no talking at meals' rule.

When the nurse finally came to push him back to his room, Eli's head was almost on his chest falling asleep. When they arrived in his room, the nurse gave him a pill and ordered him to swallow it down.

"It will help you sleep," the nurse with the dog tags said as he left the room.

Eli kept hearing the man's voice from dinner. He just kept hearing, "People are disappearing. People are disappearing"

Then Eli heard a familiar voice behind him.

“Eli, are you awake?”

Eli recognized the shadow of Reverend Worthy’s beard and curly hair.

“Yes,” Eli said, “I’m awake. I’m not in bed”

“Bedtime isn’t for another two hours, Eli. After dinner is quiet time in our rooms until bedtime. I read it in the pamphlet we received when we arrived,” Reverend Worthy said.

Too tired, Eli didn’t ask Reverend Worthy to explain the pamphlet.

“I wanted to tell you I’m not so sure that our friend at dinner was just a crazy man,” Reverend Worthy said.

“He had to be a crazy man,” Eli said. “He was talking crazy about people disappearing from here. I thought this place was supposed to be like Warm Springs.”

“Now that we’ve been here for a few days I’m convinced that this place is nothing like Warm Springs, Eli,” Reverend Worthy said. “Warm Springs was not only a treatment center for polio patients but a social gathering place for crippled people. This isn’t a gathering place. Our friend at dinner was right. It seems more like a prison.”

Eli didn’t see why Reverend Worthy was so worried. Dr. Franklin said if you didn’t have the right attitude the treatment wouldn’t work. Maybe Reverend Worthy and the man at dinner just didn’t have the right attitude.

“I don’t know,” Eli whispered.

“Well, there’s one way to find out if our friend is telling the truth or not,” Reverend Worthy said. “If he isn’t, he will be at breakfast first thing in the morning. If not, we will have to take his story into consideration.”

Eli's head was starting to tip down to his chest again. He hardly could keep his eyes open.

"Do you want me to help you into bed?" Reverend Worthy asked.

"Can you do that?" asked Eli.

"Yes, I think so," Reverend Worthy said.

"Okay," Eli said.

"Okay," Reverend Worthy said. "Push up on your feet the best you can and we will pivot our way onto the bed."

Reverend Worthy pushed Eli's wheelchair even closer to the bed. Reverend Worthy came around in front of Eli's chair and slowly lifted Eli up. The two men did an awkward dance toward the bed. Reverend Worthy placed Eli down as gently as he could. He took Eli's legs from the side of the bed and maneuvered them onto the bed so that Eli lay on his back. Then he placed the pillow under Eli's head, covered him with the big canvas blanket, and walked to the door.

"Well, then goodnight, Eli," Reverend Worthy said. "We will see what happens with our friend in the morning."

"I think you worry too much," Eli said.

"I hope you're right," Reverend Worthy said.

Eli didn't hear Reverend Worthy leave the room. He looked in the direction of the door and didn't see his friend's shadow anymore. Eli hoped that Reverend Worthy was just overreacting to the man in the dining room. But at the same time, Eli hoped the man would be back tomorrow morning. If he wasn't, what would Reverend Worthy do? Who would be the next to disappear?

## Day

### 4

At breakfast, Eli didn't see Reverend Worthy or the man from the night before. The other patient sat in his spot at the end of the table, but so far his friend and the man were nowhere to be found. Reverend Worthy talked last night, too. Maybe one of the nurses reported that he talked. Eli now hoped that the man and Reverend Worthy would both turn up before breakfast was over.

While Eli was waiting for Reverend Worth and the other man to arrive, he noticed a man at the table across from him in leg braces struggling to get into his chair on his own. The hinge on one brace locked in the standing position. The hinge needed to unlock for the knee to bend so the man could sit down. Eli wanted to scream at one of the nurses standing at the back of the dining hall leaning on the wall doing nothing.

The man finally called for help, "Could someone please help me?"

Would the man get help or just be ignored? He would probably be told to shut-up or something to that effect before long.

Sure enough, Eli heard the nurse with the cross-shaped pins on her dress say, “Just force the brace to come up. You’ll eventually be able to sit down on your own. In the real world there won’t always be a person there to help you.”

The man said nothing to this response for help. He just stood there trying to get the hinge on his brace to unlock. The other patients seemed to know better than to help. This was Eli’s instinct as well. Even though the patients couldn’t help him, their eyes remained transfixed on the man with the stuck brace. It was almost as though, if they couldn’t do anything physically, they were going to cheer him on with their eyes.

The man now stuck his finger in between the hinges to manually make the brace work. All of the patients heard the click from the brace. The man only had a fraction of a second to remove his finger from the heavy metal brace before it snapped down. He must have done this before. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have the timing down as well as he did. He seemed to move at the same speed as the hinge snapping down. Instead of getting his finger stuck in the brace, he was in the chair almost at the same moment the brace’s hinges disengaged. From the other patients’ facial expressions, it looked to Eli as though the patients were now clapping with their eyes in the same way a few moments earlier they had been helping with their eyes.

Reverend Worthy finally arrived at the table and sat down next to Eli, but what happened to the man from their table? Was he still on the treatment center grounds, or did he disappear? Eli, still thinking about the man with the brace, only slightly nodded to his friend. Reverend Worthy returned the gesture. The staff began distributing the morning mush. Eli

didn't even try the spoon. He lapped up the mush with his tongue. Reverend Worthy suddenly stuck a spoon into Eli's mush and held it in front of Eli's mouth. He knew what would happen if Reverend Worthy helped him. In a panic, Eli shouted, "No."

If the dining room was quiet when the man's brace was stuck, it was even quieter now. Everyone knew the rule. Patients were not allowed to speak at meal or treatment times. Eli feared this rule since he arrived. He vowed never to break it. In a moment of weakness and fear, he had broken the rule. Now he was worried about getting into trouble especially after the warning from the man at his table the night before.

Before Eli knew what happened, he was taken away from the table by the nurse with the dog tags. He wheeled Eli out of the dining room and into a dark room next to it. The only light in the room came from the door that Eli was pushed through. The nurse with the dog tags came around in front of his wheelchair and sat a bucket on the floor.

"For relieving yourself," he said.

Eli wanted to ask how he was supposed to do that on his own, considering it usually took two male nurses to get him over the hole in the outhouse, but he was in enough trouble already and didn't dare ask the question.

"Dr. Franklin will deal with you after breakfast," the nurse said as he swung the door shut.

Eli sat in the dark room and waited for Dr. Franklin. He couldn't hear any outside sound except an odd buzzing noise. He wondered if it was a strange machine in the room or maybe this is what a person heard when they couldn't hear any outside sounds. He strained to hear the dining room. He thought if he listened close, he might be able to hear spoons clinking.



Even though Eli had always been isolated, sound was his window to the outside world. He could get a sense of the world he was not allowed to be in by trying to pick up conversations, radio shows, and noises below him in the house. Eli could even get a sense of the weather. He heard when rain hit his window. He heard the howl of the wind. This was the first time Eli hadn't heard anything. That's why the buzzing sound seemed so loud in his ears. He needed to hear something.

After a few minutes, a shaft of light filled the room. He expected Dr. Franklin to come in, but he didn't. He just stood at the back of him in the lit doorway.

"Eli, why did you speak at breakfast?" Dr. Franklin said. "You know it is not allowed. The rule is stated clearly in the pamphlet."

Eli couldn't answer that question, and he wasn't going to answer Dr. Franklin. It would probably break another rule, and he didn't know what would happen if he broke two rules in the same day. He wished everyone would stop talking about the pamphlet. He didn't understand.

"Since this is your first punishment," Dr. Franklin said, "I am making it a light one. I've already explained to you that you do not speak at meals. I do this to keep order. I also do this so that people with unfortunate physical deformities do not feel obligated to discuss their condition with anyone else. I don't know if you thought you could speak because of the gentleman yesterday, but he is being dealt with."

Eli wanted to ask Dr. Franklin what happened to the gentleman from yesterday, but he was in enough trouble already. He didn't want to make Dr. Franklin any angrier than he already was.

The strip of light Eli saw in front of his chair began to grow smaller and smaller. Then Eli was in total darkness. He never thought he was afraid of the dark until he sat in silence with no light and no sound. The fear of not knowing what was around him frightened Eli. A tall unrecognizable shape sat a few feet in front of him. Eli tried to move his chair to examine the object, but his fisted hands couldn't move the chair very far. The wood and metal made the chair awkward and heavy. The man at dinner talked about running away. This wouldn't be possible for Eli. He'd make it a few feet down the dirt road and someone would discover that he was gone. The staff would find him instantly.

Whatever that thing was a few feet away from Eli really started to bother him. He wanted to go touch it. He wanted to investigate, but he couldn't make it across the room on his own. Since he moved a little, would someone come in and yell at him for moving or was this like bedtime, when nurses and doctors didn't usually have contact with the patients? He didn't know. Reverend Worthy could have investigated the object, but Eli was stuck in his heavy wooden wheelchair.

Eli sometimes thought he heard screams at night in the treatment center. He supposed it could have been the wind. At least that's what some of those characters on the radio said whenever they heard a scream in a scary story. Another character would always say, "Oh, it's just the wind," but Eli was more like the character that thought it was a scream all along. When it turned out to be a scream, Eli wanted to call the character who thought it was the wind an idiot.

Eli looked around the darkened room that Dr. Franklin left him in for punishment. The other shadow in the room with Eli was the bucket sitting directly in front of him. Eli reasoned that it must be just before lunch because he always made a trip to the outhouse

before lunch. He was starting to really have to go, but he knew he couldn't use the bucket himself. If this was a punishment, Eli assumed that no one was going to help him use the bucket. Eli didn't want to wet himself. He thought this might prolong his punishment.

The only choice he had right now was to focus on the dark shape in the corner of the room. He hoped that the mysterious shape might be *The Shadow* here to save him from this unjust punishment. He knew that *The Shadow* was just a kid's story on the radio, but it got his mind off of his bladder.

Why had he spoken at breakfast? He was always careful never to do anything to upset Dr. Franklin. Was the man at his table right? Did people disappear when they broke Dr. Franklin's rules? He was afraid he would be one of those people that disappeared. They were here one day and gone the next. Did other patients hear about their friends disappearing? How would it be possible for someone to disappear right out from under the watch of the staff of the treatment center? Eli reasoned that maybe it was like one of those radio murder mystery shows where a murder occurred in someone's house, but they knew nothing about it. In those cases it usually turned out that someone in the house committed the murder, or they were connected to it in some way.

If Dr. Franklin possessed the capability to make other patients disappear, what did that mean for Eli? Were first time offenders, people who Dr. Franklin didn't like, or were they people that broke the rules? Eli again saw the shadow of the bucket on the floor.

"Don't think about it," Eli said aloud.

"Don't do it."

"Look at the shadow."

It wasn't working. Eli couldn't hold it anymore. As he wet himself, a warmth overtook him. As soon as he was done, the warmth turned to a chill, and he became progressively colder as he sat there in the dark staring at the shadow.

Maybe it wasn't The Shadow. Maybe it was Superman. After all Superman would never put up with injustices like this. He would sweep in through the window and save Eli. Eli didn't even think there was a window in this place. Superman would just have to break in through the wall. Those nurses and even Dr. Franklin couldn't stop Superman. No one could stop Superman.

"Oh, stop it," Eli said out loud to himself again. "Superman isn't coming to save you. That's kids' stuff."

Eli wanted to stop talking to himself. He finally realized that even if he didn't talk to anyone at least he could observe others. He wouldn't be stuck in the dark by himself. He'd even be grateful if Dr. Franklin came back at that moment and yelled at him some more. At least he wouldn't be alone.

Eli didn't hear the door open. He only saw the little fingers of light appear in front of his chair. He heard footsteps behind him.

"Why does he always have to make it so dark in here?"

Eli instantly recognized Ariella's voice. Then he was blinded. An overhead light snapped on and all of a sudden the darkened room filled with light. Eli heard two other male voices. It was Reverend Worthy and Face.

"Maybe you shouldn't turn the light on, Ariella. We don't want to draw attention to ourselves," Face said through his cough.

"Well, how are we going to help him if we don't have light?" Ariella said.

“It’s a full moon tonight,” Face said.

“How does that help us?” Ariella asked.

“Open the curtain. The moon will give me enough light to see him if he needs changed,” Face said.

Eli couldn’t figure out why he spoke now. Maybe because the conversation concerned him.

“I do. I’m sorry,” Eli said.

“You’re fine,” Reverend Worthy said. “We would all have that same problem if we were unable to relieve ourselves all day.”

“Then that means there’s nothing in the bucket?” Ariella asked.

“How is a boy in a wheelchair who has weak muscles going to be able to fill a bucket, Ariella?” Face asked.

“I don’t know,” Ariella said, “but it’s bad luck if the first thing you see when you enter a room is an empty bucket.”

“You and your superstitions,” Face said.

Ariella shut the door and turned off the light. Reverend Worthy and Face came around to the front of Eli’s chair while Ariella opened the curtains.

Face coughed and said, “Can you push up on your feet, Eli?”

“Yes,” Eli said.

Ariella kept her back to them as Face changed Eli’s pants.

Face slid a dry pair of pants up on Eli.

“There you go, Eli,” Face said. “They’re a little big but they’re the only ones I could find that wouldn’t be missed by anyone.”

“They’re fine. Thank you,” Eli said.

Eli noticed the chair that was sitting next to Ariella.

“I didn’t know that was a chair when the lights were off.”

“Darkness can be deceiving,” Ariella said.

“Why are you here?” Eli asked.

“This is my job,” Ariella said. “I check on patients when they get punished.”

“Who gave you this job?” Eli asked.

Ariella stepped in front of Eli’s chair.

“I really gave it to myself,” Ariella said.

Eli turned to Reverend Worthy who was standing next to the door.

“Do you understand any of this?” Eli asked.

“Yes, I do,” Reverend Worthy said. “Ariella is Dr. Franklin’s daughter.”

Eli was at a loss for words.

“Yes,” Ariella said. “I try to make sure that the patients aren’t neglected during punishment. I have seen friends die from my father’s punishments. I try to save as many of them as I can.”

“Our friend at the table last night, Eli, disappeared,” Reverend Worthy said.

“I couldn’t find him,” Ariella said. “I don’t know where my father put him.

Sometimes I think he knows I look for the people he punishes. If he really doesn’t want me to find them, I think he has a spot that I don’t know about.”

Eli noticed Reverend Worthy looked almost as shocked as he felt.

“What are you thinking, Reverend?” Eli said.

“I was just wondering about Ariella’s mother and what she thinks of Dr. Franklin’s treatment center,” Reverend Worthy said. “Does she sympathize with her husband or Ariella?”

“She’s dead,” Ariella said.

“I’m sorry,” Eli said. “What happened?”

“My father killed her.”

As he heard the frightening news, Eli felt like he was getting one of those cramps in his foot that started in his big toe and went all the way up his right hip. After the cramp started, his foot jumped and he couldn’t stop it. It continued until his muscles relaxed. Could Dr. Franklin kill his own wife?

“Do you know this for sure?” Reverend Worthy said.

“No, but she died mysteriously like the other patients,” Ariella said. “My mother protected me because she knew how my father felt about me.”

“Does your father know you know this?” Eli asked.

“Of course not,” Ariella said, “If he did, he would have killed me, too. He’s always thought of me as a freak, and he wanted to leave me in an orphanage since I was born. My mother wouldn’t allow it. She contracted polio when I was six and my father killed her because he couldn’t stand having another crippled family member.”

“If that’s true, why didn’t he kill you, too?” Reverend Worthy asked.

“I think he felt guilty after he killed my mother.”

Ariella went on, “The world thinks that he tries to help people here, but he kills the ones that he can’t help because he thinks he is putting them out of their misery. I watch him. I follow him at night when he thinks I’m asleep. That’s when he performs his surgeries on

the patients. It's easy for me to follow him because my bedroom is next to my father's office and the operating room."

If Ariella's story was true, the treatment center was a dangerous place to be. He wanted out, but he went back to the thought of trying to wheel his chair down the road without getting caught. He was stuck. Ariella was stuck. Reverend Worthy was stuck. All the patients were trapped. There was no way out. This situation really was much worse than one of those murder mystery stories Eli listened to on the radio. Instead of being the detectives to solve it, Eli and Ariella were the murder victims.

Eli noticed Ariella at the window again. For some reason the next horrifying thing he noticed was his reflection in the window. His almost shaven head with little nubs of hair still peeking through the top of it stared back at him. He could see every bone in his face. For some reason, Ariella didn't look so freakish to him. She still had her relatively long blond hair. Her eyes still seemed to be bright as opposed to his dark black circles which looked more like permanent big rings stuck into his head instead of eyes with bags underneath of them. Yes, Ariella had two twisted legs but to him she looked perfect compared to himself.

When Eli snapped out of his trance, Ariella sat next to him in the chair that formally was a shadow.

"What are you thinking?" Ariella said.

"I noticed my reflection in the window," Eli said.

Eli forgot that Face was in the room until he said, "I know all about seeing your reflection. I try to avoid seeing mine."

"You two are crazy," Ariella said. "Neither of you look that bad."

"Don't you think we need to go, Ariella?" Reverend Worthy said.



“You’re probably right,” Ariella said. “I just don’t want Eli to be alone in here.”

Eli didn’t want to be alone in here again either, but if all of the information Ariella and Reverend Worthy gave him was true, he didn’t want them to get caught by Dr. Franklin or the staff.

“I’ll be alright, Ariella,” Eli said. “I just hope I don’t have to be in here for too much longer.”

“I’ll see if I can get Father to let you out of here tomorrow,” Ariella said.

“If not, Eli, one of us will be back to see you tomorrow,” Reverend Worthy said.

The party began to make their way to the door.

“We better close the curtain,” Face said.

“Do we have to?” Ariella said.

“Yes,” Face said coughing, “Otherwise, they will know we were here.”

Ariella, still standing by the window, closed the curtain as Face ordered and the room went completely dark again. Eli heard Ariella move away from the window to join Reverend Worthy and Face at the door. Eli saw the familiar shaft of light when the door opened. He heard all three sets of footsteps move away. As the last footsteps faded away, the shaft of light grew smaller and smaller until Eli was in complete darkness again.

Eli didn’t know how to make sense of all the information. The man from dinner disappeared. Ariella was Dr. Franklin’s daughter. Ariella thought that Dr. Franklin killed her mother. When Eli met Reverend Worthy on the train they both had such high hopes for this place. They both thought the treatment center would help them in their daily life. It would make it possible for them to do more for themselves. Now on the fourth day of this journey, instead of helping them, this place could kill them.

## Day

### 5

Dr. Franklin released him from confinement that morning. The same familiar shaft of light came underneath the door. Two shadows appeared behind Eli's chair. One of them had to be Dr. Franklin, but who was the other? Eli didn't think Dr. Franklin would bring Ariella with him when he was getting him out of his punishment.

"Did you learn your lesson, Eli?" Dr. Franklin asked. "It's important that you follow the rules here, Eli. Part of learning how to be normal within society is learning to follow the rules. You seem like a good boy. I'm hoping it was just the excitement of other rule breakers that made you act out."

That wasn't it. Eli knew the rules so well he didn't want Reverend Worthy to get into trouble. They weren't supposed to talk. Eli understood this. He spoke to protect his friend. Why else would he have spoken?

Eli assumed that Dr. Franklin must have been waiting for an apology or a sign that he had learned his lesson. Eli hoped what he said gave the doctor enough reason to trust him.

“Yes, sir, it was the excitement in the dining room. I knew the rules. I just didn’t think before I spoke,” Eli said.

“It sounds like he’s learned his lesson. Face please push him to breakfast,” Dr. Franklin said.

Face coughed as he came around behind Eli’s chair and pushed him out of the room. Eli wanted to speak to Face, but he didn’t want to break another rule and end up right back in confinement again. No one spoke on the way to the dining room.

Eli looked for Reverend Worthy and Ariella even before he was all the way in the dining room. Reverend Worthy was already seated at their table. Eli didn’t see Ariella anywhere.

Face positioned Eli next to Reverend Worthy. Eli felt Face’s hand touch his shoulder slightly, and then Face walked around the table and out of the dining room. After Face had gone, Reverend Worthy patted Eli’s shoulder in the same way Face had just done. Neither one of them said anything. Eli wanted to ask Reverend Worthy if he saw Ariella today.

Eli lapped the mush out of his metal pan looking for Ariella in between licks. She must have come in the dining room in the instant he looked down at his bowl because the next time he looked over to Dr. Franklin’s table, Ariella sat next to her father. Eli tried to lock eyes with her. He stared at her for what seemed to be a long time. Then Eli saw Reverend Worthy put up an arm and wave to Ariella. He worried his friend would get in trouble for breaking a rule. Reverend Worthy’s wave seemed to get Ariella’s attention. Her

eye's looked first at Reverend Worthy and then at Eli. They looked at each until the nurses pushed the patients out of the dining room.

Ariella's eyes seemed to be saying, "See I told you I'd get you out."

Eli's eye's responded, "Thank you."

Eli lay on the table and listened to the dripping water during his usual morning treatment. His only therapy companions, Ariella and Reverend Worthy, lay on their usual tables. Once the patients were on the tables, they were left alone for their forty-five minute stretching exercise. The straps did the work in the first part of therapy. Each table held nine brown leather straps, two for each arm and leg and one for the chest. The leather straps holding the patients' limbs stretched their limbs into a straight position. The strap on their chest held the patient on the table. Eli lay in the silence waiting for one of his two friends to speak. He hadn't spoken during one of these silent times before. After being in confinement, he couldn't handle the silence. He wanted conversation. Not daring to speak himself, he just waited for Reverend Worthy or Ariella to speak. Ariella spoke quietly at first.

"Face is taking me to the graveyard today," Ariella said.

Eli waited for Ariella to explain, but she didn't say more.

It was Reverend Worthy who said, "Is that where your mother's buried?"

"Yes," Ariella said.

Eli didn't understand why Reverend Worthy didn't ask where this graveyard was. That's what he wanted to ask. Eli, still afraid to speak, didn't say anything.

"How often do you go there?" Reverend Worthy asked.

"Once a week," Ariella said.

Eli couldn't take it anymore.

"Where is this graveyard?" Eli asked.

"It's behind the barn," Ariella said.

"It's here, on the grounds of the treatment center?" Reverend Worthy said. "Who else is buried in this graveyard?"

"Other patients that die in surgery or from any other sickness while they are here," Ariella said.

So, it was true. What Ariella told them. The graveyard proved it. Dr. Franklin killed other patients in surgery. He remembered some of the best murder mysteries on the radio were murders committed to look like accidents. Maybe that's what Dr. Franklin did. He murdered patients and made it look like a surgical accident.

"He doesn't send the patients home when they die?" Reverend Worthy asked.

"No," Ariella told them.

"I overheard the nurses talking about unfortunate deaths, but I didn't think it was anything like this," Reverend Worthy said. "I assumed they died of an illness not from one of Dr. Franklin's surgeries."

Didn't Reverend Worthy remember the man taken away from their table at dinner? Eli hadn't seen him again. Where was he? He could've been murdered, or he could've gone home. Eli hadn't ever seen anyone go home from the treatment center in the few days he'd been here. He suspected that the man at dinner was murdered, but there was no way to know for sure.

Reverend Worthy then spoke to Eli, “You have to listen around here, Eli. It’s the best way to get information. We can’t be sneaking around. We only have the nurses’ conversations to pick up information.”

Insulted by this comment, Eli didn’t know what to say. Before Eli came to the treatment center, listening was the only way he learned anything. Reverend Worthy was a member of the world. He lived among people. This was the first time in his life that he couldn’t just ask people for information. Eli lived this way for years. He resented Reverend Worthy telling him how to pick up information in the only way he knew how.

“Okay,” Eli said.

“Is there anyway I could see this graveyard, Ariella?” Reverend Worthy asked.

“Sure,” Ariella said. “You and Eli could come with me and Face today. Face is picking me up early before lunch.”

“I don’t know if Eli should go with us, Ariella,” Reverend Worthy said.

“Why not?” Ariella asked.

“Well, I just think we could go faster without him,” Reverend Worthy said.

Eli knew that Reverend Worthy was right. Even though Eli wanted to go, he knew there would be a better chance of them getting caught if he went along.

“Well, I can’t walk very fast,” Ariella said, “and if I can go, Eli can go, too.”

“That’s okay, Ariella,” Eli said.

“No, it’s not. If Reverend Worthy wants to go, I want you to go, too,” Ariella said.

“We’ll ask Face when he comes,” Reverend Worthy said.

“I’m sure Face will agree with me,” Ariella said.

Suddenly, Dr. Franklin entered and first untied Eli's leather straps and began another exercise regiment. First Eli's arms were raised above his head. Eli hated this exercise because he could already raise his own arms but for some reason when Dr. Franklin did it he would always raise his arm until it hurt. If he complained about this, he would just stretch it more and say, "Well that just means it's getting a good stretch."

Eli didn't understand what pain had to do with stretching. He understood that exercising the muscles was important, but he didn't see why it had to be painful. After all four limbs were stretched, the ball of rags was placed in Eli's hand. No matter how hard Eli tried this exercise, he always failed. These were almost the same exercises he used on Reverend Worthy. Ariella, lastly, received her treatment which consisted of Dr. Franklin twisting her legs.

After Dr. Franklin finished he said, "There, Ariella, I'll send Face to take you to see your mother."

After Dr. Franklin left the room, Reverend Worthy said, "I don't think we should take Eli with us."

"If he doesn't go, then you don't go," Ariella said.

"We'll ask Face," Reverend Worthy said.

Eli didn't even realize that Face was in the room until he spoke.

"Well, let's go Ariella. We don't have that long until lunch," Face said. "I don't want you to be late."

"There's something I have to ask you Face," Ariella said.

"What?" Face said.

"I want to bring Eli and Reverend Worthy with me to the graveyard," Ariella said.

“I don’t know, Ariella,” Face said.

“Oh, please,” Ariella said.

Then Reverend Worthy spoke for the first time, “Well, I’ve already explained to Ariella that it might not be a good idea to take Eli, but I think I can be responsible for myself.”

“What makes you any different from Eli?” Face asked.

“Well, I just thought we might not get caught as easily because I can walk and he can’t,” Reverend Worthy said.

“Eli won’t have any effect on whether we get caught or not,” Face said. “Why do you want to see the graveyard anyway, Reverend?”

“I just need to see it for myself,” Reverend Worthy said, “to prove what Ariella has been telling me.”

Eli didn’t need any proof. If Ariella told him that Dr. Franklin murdered patients, then he believed her. She was Dr. Franklin’s daughter. She knew him better than anyone.

“Ariella knows what she’s talking about, Reverend,” Face said.

“If it’s true, then why don’t you leave?” Reverend Worthy said.

“Because I have nowhere to go,” Face coughed before he went on. “The Great War scarred me physically. My face and lungs were burnt. It might as well be a mark of shame. Society wants nothing to do with me.”

“He thinks nobody wants him,” Ariella said, “but here, even though he’s part of the staff, he feels like he fits in with the patients.”

“If I’m taking you to the graveyard, Reverend, I’m taking Eli, too,” Face said.



The wheelchair squeaked as it proceeded out the door and down the long hallway. Just before they got to the door, the nurse with the beard stepped in front of Face.

“Where are you taking these patients?” the nurse asked.

“I’m taking Ariella to the graveyard,” Face said.

“I know that,” the nurse said “Where are you taking the other two?”

“Dr. Franklin asked me to take them to the mud bath,” Face said.

“Isn’t it a little late to take patients to the mud bath, right before lunch?” the nurse asked.

“I’m just doing what I was told,” Face said.

“Sorry to hold you up,” the bearded nurse said.

“That’s alright,” Face said.

The group continued down the hallway and out the door to the barn. They took the usual route that patients took to get to the mud bath. After they passed the barn, Eli noticed the odd shaped objects that seemed to be sticking up out of the ground. When they reached the odd shapes, Face stopped and coughed. At the top of the hill there was a large rock with writing on it.

“What’s that?” Eli asked.

“It tells you who’s buried here,” Ariella said.

Eli noticed the objects were cross shaped symbols marking what he assumed were graves of patients. Face pushed Eli toward the large rock.

“See,” Ariella said, “all the names and see underneath them. It says how they supposedly died.”

Eli couldn't read so he had to take Ariella's word for what was written on the large stone.

"I see pneumonia, tuberculosis, and influenza," Reverend Worthy said.

"That's not really how they died," Ariella said. "That's just what they tell the families. Most of these people died in surgery. Father doesn't like to answer questions. He says it's a waste of time, and I guess he's afraid someone would blame him for the deaths of these people. Every time I come here, I think about how the people buried here used to be alive. It's kind of odd to think of people that used to be alive being stuck in the ground."

"Only your body gets stuck in the ground," Reverend Worthy said, "Your soul goes to heaven."

"Father says crippled people will all end up in hell because they are not made in God's perfect image," Ariella said.

"I don't believe that," Reverend Worthy said.

This made Eli ask Reverend Worthy, "Does your body go to heaven, too?"

"No," Reverend Worthy said, "but your soul is the part that makes you who you are. Your body is left here and your soul goes to heaven."

This made Eli wonder about Dr. Franklin's obsession with the body. If the body wasn't important when you died, why spend all that time trying to make it perfect in a person's lifetime?

Eli looked at the grave markers. He wondered what it was like to be in one of those graves. If a crippled person didn't go to heaven, did they just sit in their grave forever?

"So you think crippled people go to heaven?" Eli asked.

“Yes,” Reverend Worthy said, “I don’t think crippled people can help their condition. Only people who sin don’t go to heaven, and as far as I’m concerned, being crippled isn’t a sin. In fact, I know it’s not. I had a vision of God in a wheelchair just like the one you are sitting in. His hands were fisted just like yours, Eli. He didn’t have any legs that I could see. This was just after I contracted polio, and I wondered myself if I would be welcomed by him. I took that vision as a sign that I would be.”

“Did God speak to you in the vision?” Ariella asked.

“No, I think the fact that God let me see him was enough,” Reverend Worthy said.

“How do you know that just wasn’t meant for you personally?” Face asked.

“Because I think God serves all people,” Reverend Worthy said.

“I’m not so sure,” Face said.

“Face, you fought in the Great War for your country. I don’t think God is going to forsake you for getting wounded in that valiant duty,” Reverend Worthy said.

Eli didn’t think it looked like Face believed what Reverend Worthy was saying, but it made sense to Eli. Why would a man injured in a war not be allowed to go to heaven? This made no sense since Eli knew that people died in wars, and they, obviously, went to heaven. Face had nothing to worry about.

“What are you four doing up here?” a gruff voice behind them said.

Eli jumped at the same time everyone else did. It was the nurse with the two gold cross-shaped pins on her dress. She must be out on a lunch break or something, why else would she be up here.

“You two know better than to have them here,” she said to Face and Ariella as she pointed her right index finger at Eli and her left at Reverend Worthy.

“And you,” she said to Reverend Worthy, “you can walk. The other boy can’t, but you can. So, I’m thinking that you came here on your own accord. But it’s up to Dr. Franklin to decide who can come here, not me. I suggest you find your way back inside and know that he will hear about this.”

She quickly stomped away.

“We better do as she says,” Face said coughing.

Eli knew that Face was right. Even though he didn’t get singled out by the nurse like the others, he knew there was a possibility that he could be punished as well. He didn’t want to get put in confinement again. He would do anything to avoid that punishment.

“I think Face is right,” Reverend Worthy said. “We better head back inside.”

“Alright,” Ariella said.

The four made it back in time for dinner. Eli seated at his usual table kept his ears open for news. He heard the nurse with the pointed hat talking with the bearded nurse about a date they were going on. They giggled about this a little, but just before they separated, he said, “Did you hear about Face getting punished in the graveyard?”

“Face, but he’s not a patient. What did he do?”

“I don’t know, but Dr. Franklin is pretty steamed. He might end up like some of those poor patients.”

“Oh, no,” the nurse with the pointed hat said.

Eli wondered about Face’s punishment as he finished his mush. What punishment did Face receive in the graveyard? Confinement was the only punishment he knew. He continued to think about the punishment as he was wheeled to the mud bath for afternoon therapy.

In the mud bath, Eli worried what would happen if he fell over and Face wasn't there to save him. Would he end up being one of the people in Dr. Franklin's graveyard? Or would they call his parents and bury him in the family crypt? Eli didn't think about this possibility too long because it disturbed him. This was one time Eli wished he could walk because he would go up to the graveyard, find Face, and take him out of whatever punishment Dr. Franklin put him in. Eli felt responsible for Face's punishment even though it was Ariella who wanted him to go to the graveyard. If Dr. Franklin was willing to punish Face, how long would it be before he was punished? Were any of them safe or was it just a matter of time before they were all doomed?

When Eli went to dinner that evening, he listened again. He heard the rain hitting the metal roof of the building, it sounded like little rocks hitting an object. Face wasn't in the dining room. He hoped that he wasn't out in the rain. At least, there wasn't any lightning.

Eli listened for a noise in the dining room but he heard nothing. No one spoke. Even though patients weren't allowed to talk, the staff always talked among themselves. Eli wondered if everyone thought about Face.

Eli didn't notice when he finished his dinner. He usually relished that last bite, not because he loved it, but because he had made it through another meal without gagging.

As the nurse with the dog tags maneuvered Eli's chair back to his room after dinner, Eli sat in silence. He was so troubled about Face at this moment that nothing else seemed to matter to him. Rain hit the small window beside the bed. Eli looked from the small window to the bed itself, which was just a metal frame with a thin mattress and blanket covering it. Sleeping pills sat on the little table next to the bed. The nurse must have forgotten to make sure Eli took them. Tonight he considered taking the sleeping pills just so he wouldn't have

to think about Face anymore. Then he decided not to take them. If he slept, he would just dream about Face.

Eli wondered if Reverend Worthy's vision of a crippled God figure was like a dream or if, when a person of God had a vision, it was something different than a dream. Then something else occurred to Eli. What if he could see this God and maybe tell him about Face? Maybe God could help him. Eli closed his eyes as tight as he could.

"God from Reverend Worthy's vision, if you can hear me, please help Face," Eli said.

He sat there for a long time waiting for the vision to appear to him. At one point, Eli actually thought he heard the crippled God speak.

"Hey, Eli, you asleep?"

Then Eli realized it wasn't God at all. It was Reverend Worthy.

"No, I'm not asleep," Eli said opening his eyes. "I was trying to see your crippled God to ask him if he could help Face."

"God works in funny ways," Reverend Worthy said, "but I don't even know if he can help Face right now."

"What are we going to do?" Eli asked.

"I'm not sure," Reverend Worthy said. "Ariella said she'd meet me here."

A shadow moved closer to his room. He remembered the shadow from confinement and that one had scared him. He didn't particularly like this one either, but when it spoke, he no longer feared it.

"Hey, Eli, Reverend Worthy, you in there?"

"Yes, we're in here, Ariella," Reverend Worthy said. "But keep your voice down."

"Oh we're fine," Ariella said louder than before, "No one's around at this time."

“So you say,” Reverend Worthy said, “but I don’t want to take that chance. Do you know what happened to Face?”

“No,” Ariella said, “I just know he’s in the graveyard and we have to get him out.”

“And how are we going to do that?” Reverend Worthy asked.

“Oh, I’ll think of something,” Ariella said.

“I don’t think there is anything we can do for him, Ariella,” Reverend said.

“Well, we have to go check on him, don’t we?” Ariella said.

“I agree, we have to go check on him,” Eli said, “but how are we going to get out of here without getting caught?”

“I told you,” Ariella said, “nobody’s around until bed check. We won’t get caught.”

“Just like we wouldn’t get in trouble earlier, right,” Reverend Worthy said.

“Okay, Reverend Worthy, that’s my fault. That’s why we have to go check on him,” Ariella said. “So, if you won’t go with me, I’ll go myself.”

That’s when Eli knew they had to go with her, or she would be in the same trouble as Face.

“We have to go with her,” Eli said. “She can’t do it alone.”

“I’m just not sure what we can do about it when we get there, Eli,” Reverend Worthy said.

“But we have to try,” Ariella said.

Ariella went behind Eli’s chair and took the brakes off. She gave him a little push. He went a few feet. She hopped up to the chair and pushed it again.

“This is going to be a very bumpy ride, isn’t it?” Eli said.

“Sorry,” Ariella said, “I can’t get my legs to move and push a wheelchair at the same time. I’ve been trying to master it for years and I can’t do it.”

“That’s okay,” Eli said.

Eli really meant this. He had things he couldn’t do either and they were frustrating for him. He couldn’t even open his hands. He had tried to do this for as long as he could remember. He understood Ariella’s frustration with the wheelchair. Reverend Worthy must have sensed Ariella’s frustration as well.

“Well, if we’re going to do this, let me push Eli,” Reverend Worthy said. “If you push him, we’ll get caught for sure.”

As the three went down the darkened hallways, they heard screaming and moaning. Eli heard this in his room every night but now with Face’s punishment the screams and moans seemed more real.

As the three made their way down the corridors, Eli looked around every corner thinking surely someone would jump out and tell them to stop and go back to their rooms, but it appeared as though Ariella was right. There wasn’t a soul around.

Reverend Worthy seemed to have a lot more difficulty than Face pushing Eli’s chair.

“You don’t have to push me up here,” Eli said. “I can wait here and you two can go check on Face.”

“Nonsense,” Ariella said, “We’re all in this together.”

Did Reverend Worthy ever consider leaving him at any point? The further they went the slower their progress became. Ariella tried to help, but she couldn’t keep her balance and she kept falling down. Every time she fell, she would crumple into a little ball and roll for a few feet until she could catch herself with her small hands.



When they finally got to the point where they could see the grave markers, they knew they only had to go a few more feet.

“Do you know where he is, Ariella?” Reverend Worthy asked.

“He’s behind the last grave marker. I heard the nurses discussing it when they were bringing patients back to their rooms after dinner,” Ariella said.

This was further than they had come before. Because of the rain, the ground was muddy, which Eli didn’t realize until he could see it surrounding the grave markers. It wasn’t until they were a few feet from Face that they saw the hole. Then they noticed Face’s head at the top of the hole. Whoever buried him put so much dirt around his body that he couldn’t move.

“Face,” Ariella said, “are you alright? We came to get you out.”

“Now that the rain is over, I’m fine,” Face said with a cough.

Reverend Worthy left Eli’s chair and went over to inspect the hole.

“I can’t move,” Face said. “I don’t think you can get me out of here.”

“I’m afraid you’re right,” Reverend Worthy said.

“We can’t just leave him,” Ariella said.

“Even if we had a shovel, I wouldn’t take him out of here. We would all be punished,” Reverend Worthy said.

“I’m going to get the shovel,” Ariella said.

“No, you’re not,” Face said coughing hard. “You’re going to go back inside and leave me here. I’ll be fine.”

“You’re sick,” Ariella said. “Your cough is getting worse.”

“I may be sick, but I’m not dead,” Face said, “and I have a feeling I would be if you dug me out of here. I’ve never seen your father like this. This was crazy, even for him. I don’t want to see what happens if you dig me out of here.”

Ariella appeared to consider this for a moment.

“Okay, but he’s getting you out of that hole first thing in the morning, and I don’t care if I get in trouble for it,” Ariella said.

Would Face even be alive in the morning? And why of all days did God have to pick today to make it rain in this particular Iowa town? Eli thought as the three made their way back to the building.

## Day

### 6

Eli sat in the dining room transfixed by the man positioned in front of him. This was the same man that a few days earlier couldn't sit down at dinner because the hinge on his brace locked up. Now this same man balanced in front of Eli without his right leg. The man stood in front of him, on his one remaining leg, for what seemed to be several seconds. What happened to the man's leg? Eli thought. Did Dr. Franklin remove it?

The man hopped on his remaining left leg, almost falling each time he placed his crutches out in front of him. His gait reminded Eli of the start-stop motion Ariella used to push his wheelchair. Ariella pushed Eli's chair out to arms length and then hopped up to the back of the chair and pushed it again.

Eli waited patiently for both Reverend Worthy and Ariella to arrive.

"Good morning," an almost inaudible voice said.

Eli recognized it immediately as the voice of Reverend Worthy.

“Good morning,” Eli mouthed without making a sound.

“Did you notice our friend over there?” Reverend Worthy whispered. Eli nodded, still not saying anything. Didn’t Reverend Worthy remember he was punished for talking in this very room? Reverend Worthy didn’t seem to notice Eli’s silence. He just continued talking.

“Apparently, Dr. Franklin removed his leg,” Reverend Worthy said. “I thought it was his brace that was defective not his leg.”

Eli nodded. The Reverend made a good point. If Dr. Franklin’s treatments didn’t work, then he blamed the crippled person’s body.

“Your not very talkative today, are you, Eli?” Reverend Worthy said.

“Reverend you have to be quiet. Remember what happened to me in here?” Eli whispered.

“Don’t worry about me. Worry about yourself,” Reverend Worthy said.

The patients seemed to be watched closely at mealtime. After all, how else had Eli been taken out of the dining room so fast, and how had the other man been removed so quickly? He didn’t understand the system. He just knew it existed. As Eli thought about the staff appearing at random moments, the nurse with the dog tags stood next to Reverend Worthy.

“You sure have a lot to talk about this morning. Don’t you, Reverend?” the nurse with the dog tags said.

“So what if I do?” Reverend Worthy said.

“You know talking isn’t allowed at meal time, Reverend,” the nurse said.

“I’m starting to wonder what is and isn’t allowed here,” Reverend Worthy said.

“Well, you’ll have to take that up with Dr. Franklin,” the nurse said. “Now come with me.”

Reverend Worthy didn’t say anything. He just got up from the table and followed the nurse out of the dining room.

One minute Reverend Worthy was here talking to him and the next minute Eli was lost in his thoughts thinking about his friend’s punishment. Eli began to eat the tasteless mush. After he finished, he spotted Ariella seated at the staff table and the two made eye contact with each other.

Morning treatment began with one less patient in the group. Ariella lay on the table across from Eli, but Reverend Worthy was not on the table opposite her. What punishment would Reverend Worthy receive?

“We can talk now, at least until they come and do our exercises,” Ariella said.

He knew she was Dr. Franklin’s daughter, but he still wondered where she got her confidence from.

“Face got out of the graveyard this morning, but he’s still sick,” Ariella said.

“How sick is he?” Eli asked.

“His cough is worse,” Ariella said. “Father doesn’t know if he’s going to make it.”

Eli asked, “Do you know what happened to Reverend Worthy?”

“Yes,” Ariella said. “Father put him in confinement because he said it taught you a lesson, so maybe it could teach your friend one.”

Reverend Worthy’s exchange with the nurse at the table showed Eli another side to Reverend Worthy. He wasn’t going to let Dr. Franklin push him around the way he

intimidated the other patients. Maybe since the Reverend was a man of God, he was secure enough in his beliefs to suffer through any punishment Dr. Franklin gave him.

Eli also knew the toll confinement could take on a person. It didn't seem like that scary of a place at first until Eli became aware of the sounds and shapes in the dark. He couldn't imagine what it was like for a man like Reverend Worthy who was actually a part of the world instead of an observer and a burden like Eli. Eli realized after Reverend Worthy was punished that the two of them were in the same situation. They were two crippled people in this treatment center who could be punished for talking in the dining room. For that matter, all of the people in this place were in the same situation. They all relied on someone else to do manual tasks. For people like Eli, this meant day to day needs. For people like the Reverend, it meant things like meal preparation and washing of clothes. Either way, all of these patients relied on other people to help them.

"Hey, Ariella, do you think you could sneak me in to see Reverend Worthy tonight in confinement?"

"Yeah, I think I can do that," Ariella said after what seemed like a long time.

"There's not very many people around at night. I wanted to show you something else, anyway."

"What is it?" Eli asked.

"You'll see," Ariella said.

"What is it?" Eli asked again.

"I want to show you surgery," Ariella said. "I want you to see what Father does to people here. I'll take you tonight."

As promised, Ariella came for him that night. Ariella's start/stop motion made Eli feel sick as she wheeled him forward down the hallway. As they entered the next hallway, all the lights were turned off. The only light came from the open doorways. Ariella and Eli proceeded down the dark hallway.

In one of the rooms, Eli saw a cement floor with a gray metal table in the middle of the room. A round white metal light hung over the top of the table. He assumed this was the operating room.

As the two drew closer, Ariella leaned down and whispered in Eli's ear, "Don't worry. They can't see us in the dark when they're in the bright light. The only way we'll get caught is if you make a sound."

The person on the table was the woman who had earlier fallen at dinner. Eli recalled, as the patients filed in for dinner, a woman on crutches wearing a polka dotted, yellow night gown fell and twisted her leg. When the woman fell Dr. Franklin said, "Well, that foot needs to go anyway. It isn't doing the poor woman any good."

Now, the woman on the table still wore her polka dotted yellow nightgown. She lay asleep on the table strapped like Eli in therapy. Eli gazed at the other end of the table. He assumed the man in the mask was Dr. Franklin. Dr. Franklin took one of the woman's legs out of the strap and pulled the leg toward him.

He heard the masked man say, "Hand me my saw, Nurse."

The nurse with the pointed hat stepped next to Dr. Franklin and handed him the large knife-like tool. The tool resembled the knife that the attendant used to cut Eli's meat when he lived at home, but the blade was wider and the handle was curved.

Dr. Franklin brought the blade down onto the woman's ankle. Eli's stomach began to turn. Dr. Franklin's arm started to move and Eli heard a muffled dragging sound that quickly changed to a crack. The woman's foot was now separated from her body. Eli's stomach turned violently. Dr. Franklin took the woman's foot and dropped it into a washtub or something that at least looked like a washtub. Eli saw the blood that accompanied the foot in the tub. This was the first time he saw this much blood. He found bloody murder scenes on the radio interesting. His opinion changed, however, after seeing this first hand. Eli now watched as they put bandages where the woman's foot used to be.

Eli's chair started to move. He wanted to scream. He worried that he was being pushed into surgery. Ariella shoved his chair back in the direction of his room. All Eli thought about was Ariella's warning not to make a sound. Maybe Ariella didn't want to take anymore risks with him, so she decided to take him back to his room. Then Eli realized she pushed him past his room. When they were approximately three or four doors past his room, Ariella turned into a doorway, and Eli sat in a room identical to his own.

It wasn't until Eli's eyes adjusted to the darkness that he noticed who lay in the room. Lying on a bed, again identical to the one in his room, was Face. The only reason Eli identified it as Face was because of the cough that issued from the bed. Eli always thought it was strange that a cough or a sneeze sounded like an amplified version of a person's voice so it could be used to identify them.

"How is he?" Eli asked even though he already knew the answer.

Even though he hadn't known the people here very long, he still considered them friends, and he couldn't handle seeing a friend die.

"Do you need to talk about what you just saw?" Ariella asked.



“I honestly don’t know what to say,” Eli said.

Eli just sat there watching Ariella feel Face’s neck.

“What are you doing?” Eli asked.

“Checking his pulse,” Ariella said. “It’s very faint. His weak lungs couldn’t handle the rain and the cold. I don’t think he is going to make it much longer.”

Eli said the first thing that popped into his head.

“Have you seen a lot of people die?”

“Yes,” Ariella said.

Eli wished he hadn’t asked the question. Of course, Ariella saw a lot of people die. She lived in a treatment center where apparently surgery and death were an everyday occurrence. “Is there anything we can do for him?” Eli asked.

“No,” Ariella said.

Her response seemed so detached, but in a place like this a person probably became accustomed to people dying. Eli sat in his wheelchair fidgeting. The wicker back of the chair squeaked with his movement.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Ariella said. “You can ask or say whatever you need to. I know it’s hard to make sense of what’s going on around here. I just thought you needed to see it for yourself. Someone else needs to know what is going on. I try to help the patients as much as I can.”

Eli didn’t respond. How did Ariella live like this? It seemed odd to him but his instinct was to do the impossible and run. He was stuck in this chair and there was no where for him to go. This place was supposed to help him. When Eli first came here, he expected

this place to make him normal, but he now knew that Dr. Franklin wouldn't make him normal. If anything, he added to a person's deformities.

Ariella felt Face's pulse again. Eli was shocked by what happened next. First Ariella's body began shaking and it was almost as if she were going to lose her balance. Ariella let out an almost inaudible scream. Then Eli heard the unmistakable sound of sniffing which Eli knew meant that Ariella was crying. "He's gone. Isn't he?" Eli said.

Ariella nodded.

"Ariella," Eli said.

She didn't move. He couldn't believe that a few minutes ago she was trying to comfort him. Now all he wanted to do was comfort her, but he didn't really know how. He wanted so badly to be one of those strong male figures from the *Lux Radio Theatre*. He wanted to help her. He wanted to comfort her. He wanted to be the one to make her feel better, but he just didn't know how to do it. This was what it was like being a crippled person. He spent most of his life inside himself.

"Ariella, it's time to leave," Eli said.

It was time for them to go before someone came and saw them in Face's room. Ariella covered Face with the blanket and walked over to Eli's chair. Neither one of them spoke as Ariella moved his wheelchair. It took them the same amount of time to leave Face's room as it had to leave Eli's room because of the slow pace at which Ariella pushed Eli.

Eli and Ariella made their way past the patients' rooms. After they passed all the rooms, they turned down another hallway. In the daylight Eli thought nothing of the corridor, but at night, the emptiness frightened him. He heard buzzing noises similar to the sounds when he was alone in confinement. He looked up at the lights and reasoned that the buzzing

in his ears came from the lights that lit the hall. During the day, Eli never heard this sound. The activity in the corridor covered the noise.

When Ariella and Eli reached the dining room, instead of going in they turned to the left where Eli was brought on the day of his confinement. Ariella tried the doorknob.

“Locked,” she said.

What were they were going to do? Did Dr. Franklin know about Ariella sneaking in here to see him? If so, did he lock the door to keep her from going in? More than likely, however, Dr. Franklin had locked the door because, unlike Eli, Reverend Worthy could just open the door whenever he wanted to.

“Don’t worry,” Ariella said, “I’ve got a key.”

“Where did you get it?” Eli asked.

“Face made it for me,” Ariella said.

She pulled on a string around her neck, retrieved the key off the end of the string, and put it in the keyhole. After turning the key, Ariella let the key fall back down into its usual position.

“It’s a master key,” she said. “I can open any door in the building with it.”

Ariella turned the doorknob. Eli pictured the shaft of light coming under the doorway that Reverend Worthy now saw. He knew he was now blinded by the light that reached his eyes. Did Reverend Worthy have the curtains open? As soon as Ariella managed to push him into the room, he realized that Reverend Worthy was in total darkness as he had been a couple of days before.

“Oh, I hate it when Father covers the windows with paper,” Ariella said.

“Its okay, Ariella, you don’t have to stay long,” Reverend Worthy said. “I just wanted to tell you and Eli that I’m going to try to get out of here, and I wondered if you two wanted to come with me.”

Eli was at first shocked by the Reverend’s question. He wasn’t sure if it was possible to escape from here, but the idea made sense to him. If there was a way Reverend Worthy knew to get out of this place, Eli determined in that moment that he was going to go with him.

“I’ll go with you, Reverend,” Eli said, “If you’ll have me.”

“I wouldn’t have offered if I weren’t willing to take you, Eli,” Reverend Worthy said.

“I don’t know if my family would want me back. They said I was of age now, so I had to come to a place like this,” Eli said.

“I would hope to God if your family knew what this place was like they’d take you back,” Reverend Worthy said, “but you’re of age so you can decide whether you want to contact your family or not. I will be glad to have you come live with me no matter what happens.”

“Thank you, Reverend,” Eli said. “What about you, Ariella? Are you coming with us?”

“I have to stay here, Eli,” Ariella said. “My father’s here, and I don’t know what I’d do if I went with you. I also feel like I have to watch out for the patients here. Especially, now that Face is gone.”

“What do you mean, Face is gone?” Reverend Worthy asked.

“Face died tonight,” Eli said making his chair squeak again with his fidgeting.

Reverend Worthy said nothing.

Now Eli wondered about Reverend Worthy's vision. Was Face in heaven or was he somewhere else? The whole concept didn't really make sense to Eli, but wherever Face was, he hoped that he was okay.

As if Ariella and Eli were having the same thought, Ariella asked, "Do you believe that your vision applied to all crippled people?"

"Yes, Ariella," Reverend Worthy said. "I believe that Face is in a good place. Not in a place of damnation for his physical limitations."

Eli hoped these words comforted Ariella more than they did him. There was so much that Eli wanted to learn.

"So, when do we leave, Reverend?" Eli asked.

"As soon as I can convince Dr. Franklin that I've learned my lesson," Reverend Worthy said.

"I'll help you escape, Reverend," Ariella said.

"No, Ariella, if you're going to stay here, I don't want you to get in trouble after I'm gone," Reverend Worthy said.

"If you're going to escape you're going to need my help finding supplies," Ariella said, "and you're forgetting one thing. What if my father doesn't let you out of confinement? He's strict about patients breaking rules."

"I guess you'll have to get him out then. Right, Ariella?" Eli said.

"Yes," Ariella said.

"All right," Reverend Worthy said, "I don't exactly know how I'm going to get out of here, so I guess you'll have to help me."

Now, all they had to do was wait for Dr. Franklin to let Reverend Worthy out of confinement.

## Day

### 7

The next morning when Eli awoke, he wondered when and if Reverend Worthy would be released from confinement. He considered whether the Reverend's plan for escape was possible. The nurse with the dog tags came to push Eli to breakfast. He felt queasy as the nurse guided his wheelchair toward the dining room.

Two elderly men sat across the table from Eli. One of the men absently tapped a cane on the floor. The staff that stood at each end of the dining room or along the wall would eventually stop him. The other man with large brown spots on his face leaned his head on the back of the wheelchair and stared at the ceiling. Who were these new arrivals at his table? Were they taking the place of Reverend Worthy?

Eli's mush sat in front of him.

"What's in this stuff?" said the old man who tapped his cane.

Eli quickly pounded his balled up fist of a hand as hard as he could on the table. When the old man looked at him, Eli placed his fist to his lips and made the universal quiet gesture. He hoped that was enough. He hoped the man understood. Eli didn't want to see another person get put into confinement or worse for breaking the no talking at meals rule. The old man seemed to get the message. When everyone in the dining room looked in their direction, Eli wasn't sure if they were doing this because he had pounded his fist onto the table or because everyone else heard the old man speaking. The atmosphere in the dining room quieted and the staff looked for the person who incited the change. When the staff found nothing, they returned to their duties. Eli thought for sure someone heard him pound his fist on the table but no one came to reprimand him. He figured he got his message across to not only the old man but the dining room as a whole.

Eli continued to eat his mush.

"Don't say anything," Ariella whispered as she positioned herself behind his chair.

Eli didn't know what was going to happen, but before she could do anything, Eli saw Dr. Franklin's balding head come into his line of vision.

"What do you think you are doing, young lady?" Dr. Franklin asked. "Go back to your table, Ariella. You know you belong at your assigned table at mealtime. That's the way it works here."

Ariella hopped around to the other side of Eli's wheelchair and made her way to her own table. Eli wondered what type of scheme Ariella figured out before her father caught her. Did she plan to take him to see Reverend Worthy during the day? Reverend Worthy wouldn't try to escape in daylight. It was too risky.



After breakfast, Eli was surprised when Ariella made it to treatment before him. The nurse with the dog tags lifted Eli out of his wheelchair and placed him on the metal table across from Ariella. Both Eli's arms and legs were strapped to the table. A large strap across his chest held his body in place. Then the nurse tipped the table to a ninety degree angle using a hand crank located at the foot of the table. The table at this angle simulated the standing position in order for the legs to strengthen.

As soon as the nurse with the dog tags left, Eli said, "What were you planning this morning, Ariella?"

"I wanted to take you to see the Reverend this morning," Ariella said.

"That's what I thought," Eli said, "but what made you think we could get away with it in broad daylight?"

"I don't know," Ariella said. "I must have gotten too excited about Reverend Worthy's escape plan."

"How come you didn't get put in confinement like me and Reverend Worthy?" Eli asked.

"I don't know," Ariella said. "My father doesn't usually punish me like that."

Eli didn't understand the relationship between Dr. Franklin and Ariella. After all, before he came here he had been kept in his room for years. Out of sight. Not ever to be seen by others. Maybe this was Dr. Franklin's reason for starting this place. The treatment center was like Ariella's room. She wasn't ever supposed to leave it. Eli never saw Ariella interact with any other patients only him and Reverend Worthy. Maybe the other patients resented Ariella not being punished like the rest of them. Were Eli and Reverend Worthy the first patients that Ariella talked to? The other patients might have not wanted to have

anything to do with her. They may have considered her special. Patients might've thought of Ariella as a spy for her father. Maybe this was why Reverend Worthy originally didn't want Ariella helping them.

Before Eli could ask Ariella another question, the door opened and Dr. Franklin entered. Dr. Franklin approached Eli's table and unbuckled the straps that held his arms. Dr. Franklin began stretching Eli's arm as though it were some sort of mechanical lever. He stretched Eli's arm over his head and then brought Eli's arm down to his side. Dr. Franklin repeated this process several times and then did the same stretching exercise with the other arm. Eli's muscles felt like a rope that eventually gave way if it was stretched too much. His shoulder joint began cracking like an old tree branch moving in the wind. His bones felt like they were older than his eighteen years spent in this lonely repetitive existence. Eli thought about engaging Dr. Franklin in some sort of conversation about his arm, but he knew Dr. Franklin didn't like to answer questions.

"How's that feel, Eli?" Dr. Franklin asked.

"Fine, Dr. Franklin," Eli said.

"Good, because it's not going to get any better if we don't stretch it out," Dr. Franklin said.

Eli's arm hurt. He didn't understand. If something hurt, how was that making it better? It was making progress, but why did he have to stretch his arm to the point where it hurt? Eli was sure his legs and arms would always hurt, but he didn't understand why exercises caused more pain. If there was a way that this treatment could be given without the pain, Eli would take it. This made Eli think of Reverend Worthy again and his possible escape plan. Eli didn't think Dr. Franklin's treatments were helping him. Eli's muscles may

have been looser than when he arrived, but he felt about the same. Even though the mud bath gave Eli some temporary relief, he didn't think that it honestly helped that much.

Eli heard Ariella screaming. This just made it clearer to Eli. Why should a person who is already in pain have to be put in more pain?

"Stop screaming. Screaming just makes the pain worse," Dr. Franklin said. "You never hear Eli scream. Eli's a good patient."

Eli didn't know if he should speak at this moment, but he decided to take the chance.

"It's okay, Ariella. If you don't make yourself stiff, the pain won't be as bad," Eli said.

It seemed to Eli that Dr. Franklin twisted his daughters leg even harder when Eli gave, what he hoped were, comforting words.

"That's right, listen to Eli," Dr. Franklin said.

Eli felt that Ariella knew these words were a lie and that was why she continued to scream. Eli spent so many years in silence he didn't know how to verbalize what he felt, but if he grew up in this place like Ariella, he had a feeling that he would scream just as she was now.

After Eli and Ariella's stretching exercises, Dr. Franklin decided to put them in the mud bath for the last hour of morning treatment.

"I just can't stand your screaming today, Ariella," Dr. Franklin said. "So, I'm going to put you in the mud bath to try to loosen you up."

Why did Dr. Franklin decide to change the treatment schedule? If Dr. Franklin wanted to put Ariella in the mud bath, why didn't he wait until the afternoon when he and Reverend Worthy received their usual mud treatments?

Eli and Ariella both in wheelchairs were pushed out of the treatment room. Why was Ariella being pushed in a wheelchair? Was Dr. Franklin being compassionate to his daughter after cranking on her leg so hard?

When they left the therapy room, they took the usual left turn toward the dining room but this time they were pushed past it. As they passed the door in which Reverend Worthy was held in confinement, Eli wished for some way to signal him. He knew how much the darkness affected him after being in there for a long period of time.

When Eli and Ariella reached the barn, there was a wall between two of the trough shaped mud baths. This surprised Eli. It had never been there before. Eli hated getting his clothes taken off at anytime in the treatment center. The nurse with the dog tags was not gentle. He shoved Eli forward as quickly as possible. Then it seemed as though in the same instant the shirt was taken over his head.

Then the nurse with the dog tags shouted, "Push up, on your legs."

Before Eli could get a full push in, the nurse pulled off his pants. One day Eli barely caught himself on the arm of his wheelchair before he fell out. Of course this was his fault.

"If you would stay up that wouldn't happen," the nurse with the dog tags yelled at Eli.

After being placed in the mud bath by the two male nurses, Eli noticed that the wall that separated him from Ariella was just an old barn door propped up against two sawhorses. This must've been so that the wall could be removed depending on the patient that occupied the mud bath.

"This stuff smells worse when you're sitting in it," Ariella said.

"And it's even worse when your face falls in it," Eli said.

After a pause, Ariella said, "You're lucky."

“How?” Eli said.

“Well, when you escape tonight with Reverend Worthy, you won’t have to sit in this stinking mud anymore,” Ariella said.

“I don’t know,” Eli said, “I just don’t know if it’s going to work.”

“Why not?” Ariella said. “You know there is no one around at night.”

Eli worried about being caught. How were two crippled men going to escape and catch a train for Reverend Worthy’s home? Eli couldn’t go home. He decided to take Reverend Worthy up on his offer to live with him. He didn’t know how two crippled men could survive but that risk was better than staying here. The difference between Eli and Reverend Worthy was that before Reverend Worthy contracted polio he was living a normal life with a wife and family. Eli never knew what that was like. Unlike Reverend Worthy, Eli wouldn’t be welcomed back home with open arms. It was made clear to Eli when he left home that it was time for him to go. He wasn’t even sure if he would be welcomed in Reverend Worthy’s home. If Reverend Worthy contacted his parents, would he be sent right back here? Eli didn’t know if he belonged anywhere else.

Ariella would have a better chance of escaping with Reverend Worthy. Even though she had difficulty walking, she could still watch out for herself. Eli on the other hand had to rely on someone to push him where he wanted to go. When it came to an escape, this gave Eli a disadvantage. He’d slow someone down that might have a chance at an escape.

The two male nurses removed Eli from the mud bath. Eli and Ariella expected to be pushed immediately to the dining room after being washed off, but instead, they were pushed past the dining room and back into the same treatment room they left to go to the mud baths.

The two lay on the tables in silence waiting for someone to come and begin therapy. Eli expected someone to come, but after awhile he gave up and fell asleep.

Eli heard a scream and immediately awoke. “If you don’t stop screaming,” the nurse with the gold cross-shaped pins yelled at Ariella, “I will have you punished.”

“Go ahead,” Ariella said, “and try. I will say you twisted my leg too hard.”

Would this threat really work? It might work with some of the staff, but Dr. Franklin might believe the staff more than Ariella. The nurse’s response showed Eli that the threat did indeed work.

“I’m sorry, Miss Franklin,” the nurse with the gold cross-shaped pins said.

At dinner, Eli didn’t pay attention to anyone. How would he and Reverend Worthy escape? Would Ariella get in trouble when it was discovered? What if his parents were contacted and told of the escape? Maybe Dr. Franklin would just write to them and tell them that Eli had died of pneumonia or some other fictitious ailment. Eli wished he could take all of the patients with him. He hoped he could change Ariella’s mind about coming with them, but he didn’t think she would leave her father or the other patients. Was it possible for him to escape or would he still be here with Ariella tomorrow morning?

Eli’s mind wandered back to Reverend Worthy. He hadn’t seen him all day. Was Reverend Worthy still in confinement? What if Dr. Franklin came up with another punishment for Reverend Worthy, or worse yet, what if Dr. Franklin scheduled him for some mysterious surgery? Eli saw surgery first hand, and he never wanted to be on that operating table. In fact, Eli hoped that someday other patients would escape Dr. Franklin’s treatment center. Eli licked up the last of the mush.

When Eli arrived in his room, the nurse with the dog tags said, "I'm going to give you a sleeping pill. You had a rough day in the mud bath."

Why did the nurse seem so concerned? The nurses didn't talk to the patients. Eli didn't want the sleeping pill, but he wanted the nurse to leave. He obediently opened his mouth for the pill, and immediately placed it under his tongue. The nurse gave him a drink of water and Eli pretended to swallow the pill.

Eli wiggled the object around in his mouth as the nurse finally left his room. Now alone, he wanted to spit the pill out. He let it fall out and onto his lap. Carefully, he extended his fist and knocked the pill onto the floor.

Occupied with his thought, Eli was startled when Ariella's voice came out of the darkness and said, "Are you ready, Eli?"

"Yeah, I'm ready," Eli said.

"Now, when we get to the room, Eli, we won't have much time," Ariella said. "So, I will probably just open the door and let you and Reverend Worthy make your way to the front door and leave."

"Okay," Eli said.

He thought she waited for something else, but he didn't know what.

"I guess what I mean," Ariella said, "is I will say good-bye to you now because I don't know if we will have time later."

He wasn't quite sure what to say to her. He considered Ariella a friend, and he liked her. He didn't know how to tell her this, and he wasn't going to try.

All he said was, "Goodbye."

“I think you’re the first friend my own age I ever had,” Ariella said.

“Don’t you think we better go,” Eli said.

“Yeah,” Ariella said, “you’re probably right.”

She pushed his wheelchair out of his room. As they made their way down the hall, he looked in the rooms of other patients. He was sorry he had to leave them behind but he guessed it was like one of those sinking ship adventure stories. If a person could find a way to get off of the ship, he just had to save himself.

Eli could hear the same buzzing sounds he heard the night before. He knew the sound came from the lights on the ceiling. This sound still frightened him. Suddenly, Ariella turned into the same room that used to be Face’s. She pushed him next to the empty bed frame that stood in the room. She then walked around the room. They should’ve kept going. Reverend Worthy and Eli needed to be gone before bed check. Ariella stopped at the table that sat next to the bed and picked up an object that Eli couldn’t identify in the dark. She looked at the object for a few seconds.

“I can’t believe they didn’t bury him with his mask,” Ariella said.

Eli didn’t think before he said, “Well, they wouldn’t bury me with my wheelchair.”

“This mask is more than a piece of equipment. It’s part of Face,” Ariella said. “The mask was made to resemble his face before he was injured.”

“You can still come with us, Ariella,” Eli said.

“I don’t know. I feel like I should stay with my father and the other patients need my help. I don’t know what I’d do if I came with you, anyway” Ariella said. “We need to get going. You and Reverend Worthy need to be gone by bed check.”

“I know,” Eli said.



Ariella still held Face's mask in her hand. She placed the mask on Eli's lap so she could use her hands to push the wheelchair. Ariella and Eli left Face's now empty room. Ariella began the start/stop pushing motion down the hallway. As they made their way down the corridor, Eli saw a shadow that for a minute he thought was a treatment center staff member, but he realized fairly quickly that it was a door.

Ariella and Eli finally reached the end of the hallway and the closet next to the dining room. Eli thought at first he was going to hit the door when Ariella gave him one last push, but he stopped before he hit the closed door.

"That was close," Eli said.

"Shh," Ariella said.

Eli spoke again. He looked around quickly to see if anyone heard him. He didn't see anyone or hear anything. Ariella hopped around Eli's chair to the door. She fished her key from around her neck and opened the door.

"Oh, no," Ariella said.

"What?" Eli said.

When Ariella pushed him into the room, he saw it. The paper was off of the window and light streamed into the room. The confinement chair sat next to the broken window missing one leg. The leg sat on the floor next to the chair.

"He's gone," Ariella said as she joined Eli in the room.

Eli couldn't say anything. It surprised Eli that Reverend Worthy left without him.

"I can't believe it," Ariella said. "I thought he was going to take you with him?"

"I know," Eli said. "Maybe, he thought he wasn't going to get out of confinement."

"No, he was thinking about himself," Ariella said.

“No, I don’t want to believe that,” Eli said.

“We have to go, Ariella,” said Eli. “We can’t be found here.”

Ariella stood silently looking at the window.

“No, I mean it, Ariella. We have to get out of here,” Eli said.

“You’re right. We have to leave,” said Ariella as she turned toward Eli.

Ariella went to the back of Eli’s chair, grabbed the handles, and pushed him out of the room. When they were through the door, Ariella pulled the key from around her neck and locked the door.

They needed to hurry.

Ariella turned back to Eli’s wheelchair and gave it a hard shove. Eli didn’t expect the next shove to come as soon as it did. Ariella pushed his chair quicker than before. There wasn’t as much time between her pushes. She pushed and hopped faster than usual. They moved straight down the hallway. They never turned toward Eli’s room. They passed the dining room, and they moved toward the front door.

“Where are we going, Ariella?” Eli asked.

“We’re going to try to find Reverend Worthy. I’m coming with you. You can’t do this alone,” Ariella said as she pushed him closer to the front door. “He couldn’t have gotten far. We can still catch up to him.”

Could they catch up with Reverend Worthy? Was it possible for them to make it down the hill and to the dirt road by themselves? They didn’t have a choice. If they were going to get off of this sinking ship, they had to try.