

[Author's Note: This is a rough draft of a manuscript I'm writing. I intend for it to be a short novel about a single mother. It's based loosely on my own family, but for all intents and purposes is completely fictional. I look forward to feedback, so please say anything, good or bad! As I see no greater compliment, then someone reading and taking the time to comment. Also, for the sake of having a title, I shall call this novel, "House of the Rising Sun."]

PREFACE

3:15 AM. I wake up every morning at 3:15 AM. Not by choice.

If I could afford a new alarm clock, I'd buy one this minute. I'd march down to Wal-Mart and pay the \$15.00. Then when I got home, I'd rip the glossy, black Dolby straight out the wall. I wouldn't stop to watch the icy blue, digital numbers fade into obscurity or think twice about dropping it into the waste-bin next to my bed. For sixteen years, this clock has gone off at 3:15 AM without my permission. Sixteen years since I lost Aston.

3:16 AM. I can fall asleep.

CHAPTER 1

Mornings in my house are, for lack of a better word, lively. After hitting the snooze button on the alarm clock, I rub the sleep from my eyes. I drift from my bed and knock on Ida's bedroom door first. Ida is ten years old going on eighteen. She juts out of her room immediately to get in the shower first. Always first. Jed is next. The oldest boy in the house, thirteen, needs his breakfast. I knock once on his door and enter his room. Locked. I jiggle the tarnished metal knob and bang on the door. I can hear him stir in his sheets and, begrudgingly, unlock his door. After sauntering into the kitchen, I follow closely behind to start my coffee.

The morning light has filtered itself through the wide bay windows of the living room and spilled over into cozy kitchen. Jed calls it a "cozy kitchen," because it seems more of a laundry room than a kitchen. In fact, the laundry room is only a quarter of the size smaller. I grab the end of the black coffee pot and dump out yesterday's coffee into the silver basin kitchen sink. The black liquid jumps from cup to cup in the sink. Dishes. I'll have to do that tonight after work. I haphazardly wash the pot and fill it back up with water. Coffee making has always seemed so much more of a chore than it's really worth. It hasn't worked for me since I turned twenty-seven, nine years ago. After the store-brand coffee beans are set in-place, I walk back to my room.

I walk back into my dingy room. Clothes are piled in every available corner and laundry baskets are stacked in front of my four-poster bed. No matter how many times I do laundry, it seems they can't keep up with at least pattering their

things up. Stacks are tilted this way and that, no doubt from both Ida and Jed digging for clothes to wear too lazy to have hung them up in the first place. The deep burgundy curtains I inherited from my mother after she passed do a commendable job of keeping the sunlight out. No light is harsher than sunlight.

I grab a towel used from yesterday and head into my bathroom, my sanctuary. I turn the spout in my Jacuzzi-sized tub. Of course, this is all in vain, because the spouts are broken and only need to be turned by the knobs hidden within the tub's plumbing. I sit still in the wooden stool placed in front of one of the his and her sinks. Two sinks for one person. The ceiling length mirror reflects to crimson wallpaper to no justice. But, reflects me with absolute truth.

The bags slump under my hazel eyes from 3:15 morning wake-up calls. The wrinkles have set from all angles of my face. The freckles of adolescence still beam stubbornly across my chin. My frizzy, curly hair droops at my shoulders. The color, some kind of brown currently, has deviated so far from its original, I can't remember what it was. But, all this is in no contest with the turkey "gobbler" and pudgy cheeks I've gained from eating after my mother died. A pound for every month she's been gone.