

PART 2: GOING BACK

In the late of the hour and dark of the cabin, she rose from bed, making her way to the door. The weeping she heard from the outside pulled at her heartstrings, as it resembled that of a lost child.

The woman pushed aside the latch covering a small hole in the door and looked out. Indeed, there was a little child seated on the ground, his back to her.

She moved quickly to open the door, wondering what sort of person would leave such a small one to wander all alone.

As the oak barrier between the security of her cabin and uncertain danger of the dark frontier opened, she glanced about, wondering if perhaps she would catch sight of a mother or father, but no other living soul was found.

The skin on her arms rose as she laid eyes upon the child once more. Her heart palpitated for a reason she was unable to explain and pangs of dread permeated the air around her. Ignoring it, she made a slow move to kneel, her focus on the little lone one.

"Art thou lost?" Her voice reached to ne'er above a whisper.

The child continued his sobbing, his back remaining to her.

She reached out to the lad. "Where art thou mother and father?"

The child still did not answer.

In the back of her mind was a warning to shut the door and latch it, but her maternal instincts just could not allow her to leave the young one out in the cold dark of night.

Such a thing would be inhuman.

Her hand touched the boy's shoulder and he suddenly ceased his cries. A sigh of relief left her, and the child turned around.

*When their eyes met, the scream that left her throat would be the last sound she would ever utter..." ~ L. H. Livingston, *The Child with the Black Eyes**

CHAPTER 3

Dayton, Ohio

Wednesday June 20, 1933

Eve of the summer solstice

The six 'o' clock sun shone down on the dirt path that Cletus walked as he was headed home after finishing a day of work at a family friend's farm. It was one of three jobs he held down during the summer months. His earnings were used to help with the family's household expenses, and he was saving the rest for an apartment or room to rent. At eighteen, he lived with his parents, Ronald and Eunice Blake, as he worked toward being able to live on his own.

Following the 1929 stock market crash, lucrative farming in the Midwest had greatly diminished, though many communities were managing to pull together and stay afloat, therefore making work still available. In these parts of the country, residents often traded goods for labor but often found themselves in a bind when trying to accommodate everyone coming into town in search of work.

Recent months brought reports of soup and bread lines in the cities and such images were increasing, dominating the media. Some of the more destitute were hopping onto the passing locomotives, maintaining discretion inside of a freight car until reaching the next rural or suburban area. Those who were not fortunate enough to acquire some form of work would have no choice but to climb aboard yet another train and head to the next town with their future still uncertain. For many, this was a neverending cycle.

Cletus glanced up toward the early evening sun. From somewhere in the distance, the sound of a locomotive temporarily drowned the calls of the evening birds of prey. The young man sighed, thinking of the hapless soul leaving this area and headed to another in search of work. He preferred an image of Charlie Chaplain as the happy, good-natured, bungling tramp emerging from a locomotive car to the grim-faced individual with fading hope that was more likely to be on that train.

As the engine faded out, a murder of crows flew closely overhead. He flinched and ducked slightly, remaining still as the birds disappeared to the infinite horizon. The scene reminded him of a segment from Lawrence Livingston's *The Child with the Black Eyes*, a story that took place on the early colonial frontier, long before America established itself as an entity separate from Britain. The plot was a simple one, yet its words were enough to leave the reader beyond disturbed after the final sentence was read. The tale told of a small child traveling the land, knocking on the doors of homes spread across the frontier. If a resident happened to answer, the child would ask to be let in.

No one knew for certain what exactly took place if the seemingly innocent child was allowed inside, but the good-hearted, though unfortunate, individual would often either turn up missing, never to be seen again, or fall mysteriously (and incurably) ill. It was Livingston's most well-known work and arguably among the most terrifying tales of his time.

Much of Lawrence Livingston's writings indicated him as one who often felt like a fish out of water. This was particularly evident after an incident had as a boy when he dreamed of his father being killed by a recently deceased Nathaniel Fleming.

Following the events of two Novembers ago, he and a few others that knew what happened had been delving further into the history of the Livingston and Fleming families. The lineages of Cedric and Margaret Fleming remained sketchy, the origins of their two adopted children, Nathaniel and Maxine, were shrouded in mystery. Those who possessed abilities to see passed what floated on the surface seemed to arrive at one dead end after another in their search, as though they were being blocked from finding the answers being sought. On the other hand, when it came to the Livingstons, much of that family history was open and available to the public, starting with Robert the Elder.

Born in the year 1654 in a village called Ancrum (near Jedburgh in the County of Roxburgh, Scotland), Robert Livingston the Elder was one of seven children had by Reverend John Livingston and his wife. John was a minister to the Church of Scotland and a descendant of the fourth Lord Livingston (ancestor to the Earls of Linlithgow and Callendar). When Robert was not even a boy of ten, the Livingstons were sent into exile due to John's refusal to convert the Presbyterian Church of Scotland to the Episcopalian Church of England. The family settled in Rotterdam of the Netherlands and it was there that Robert learned the Dutch language, becoming fluent which would aide him in future business prospects.

At nineteen, Livingston the Elder returned to Scotland for a time but soon sailed to Boston where his father happened to be well-known. He went on to marry the widow of one of his Dutch business partners and settled permanently in the colony of New Netherland (which later became modern day New York). As a successful businessman and politician, Livingston the Elder brought more prestige to the family name, and the surname became synonymous with those that held prominent positions in society, including those assisting with the draft of the American Constitution.

Like Livingston the Elder, his great grandson, James Henry Robert, would court and marry a Dutch woman. James was also pragmatic to a fault; despite attending the Presbyterian church on Sundays with his family, he never thought to entertain anything outside of his natural world. But his beliefs (*and non-beliefs*) were challenged on the evening of 1844's summer solstice just prior to the Fleming Orphanage opening to the public.

According to what little he wrote of that early evening in his journals, an apparition of a young woman taking her life by hanging appeared to him. He recorded having recognized her, even going so far to say that she had 'his Samantha's nose.'

Shortly after the orphanage opened, Lawrence had his dream (*or omen of warning?*) in which his father answered to a persistent knocking at the door, only to be killed by a demonic entity that resembled Cedric and Margaret's son. The dream shaped the man that Lawrence would become, along with his outlook on what most humans perceived as reality. Throughout his adulthood, he spent much time among Indian tribes of New York and Pennsylvania, coming to know their languages, sign, lore, and customs. He also married a young woman who was half Delaware.

In his AmerIndian studies, Lawrence learned of the early supernatural sightings that dated far beyond the earliest of European settlers and Viking traders. Other lore told of creatures many claimed as pre-dating the first humans. It had also been implied that other incidents like the mysterious death of Jonathan's father Charles and Kimimela's oppression by the dark influenced James's youngest son.

Cletus shuddered against the warm weather and an image of his cousin Dorothy entered his mind.

Knowing that she was no longer in this world left him with an empty void. On occasion, the cousins were able to communicate in dreams, which they had done throughout their early childhood. *Right up until her night terror almost twelve years ago...*

Despite growing up far apart, their bond and connection remained strong. On many occasions, both had the ability to sense when the other was in trouble.

As the events of two Novembers ago unraveled, Cletus was plagued with rather bizarre dreams involving Dorothy and a massive castle in Wallachia. While he didn't have the same formal schooling as his cousin and her friends, he had still been taught generous amounts of reading, writing, geometry, history, arithmetic, and other subjects by his parents. He attended the small, one room schoolhouse from age four up until thirteen. From there, he continued studying independently. One subject that especially fascinated him was history. He knew that the Roumanian Castle Alexandru was inhabited by members of the Serban bloodline from the Houses of Basarab and Draculesti, lineages directly traced to Vlad the Impaler.

Just before Dorothy was forced to take leave from their natural world, Cletus felt a strong urge to confess his dreams of a young Gypsy girl to his cousin. At the end of their conversation, she implored that he phone her the following day. When he had gone to sleep later that night, he was falling into a series of disturbing dreams in which he saw his cousin and her friends making their way through a dark labyrinth that lead them into the realm of an ancient evil. After waking the following morning, he had an overpowering sense that life for him and his family would never be the same.

How right he was.

Over the last year and a half, Cletus replayed that final telephone conversation with Dorothy in his mind. He also remembered his father receiving a phone call from Tahatan after he, Matthew, Liz, and Father Louis returned from being missing for several days from Plains and their natural world. Liz was found in the Fleming Orphanage basement by Tahatan, Father Louis, and a devastated Matthew shortly after the men escaped the nether realm they had been thrown into. She had been brutalized, bearing injuries that were physical, mental, and emotional. Dorothy's mother and Matthew's wife was admitted to the hospital for her endured trauma.

Cletus knew that his uncle Matthew still struggled to cope with all that was taking place while caring for his wife. Fortunately, both seemed to be in a better place than they were a year ago. In Matthew's last letter to Ronald, he told of how Liz was starting to form sentences again and was determined to learn to walk, cook, and all she had done prior to being abducted and tortured.

The chills rose higher on the young man's arms as he recalled the first time he and his family visited Liz at the Blake property after the incident. While it was nice to see Matthew and Liz have wonderful support, witnessing her in such a state was devastating for all.

On the first night of that week's visit, Cletus noticed his father, Uncle Matt, Uncle Joe, and Grandpa Gerard conversing with one another in rather hushed tones. The young man was unable to hear what was being said, though a cold darkness reverberated from their voices.

After breakfast the following morning, Cletus visited the Blake family burial site in the back field. He walked among the small cluster of headstones, stopping to view each one, starting with Charles and Emma. He then moved to the stones placed over the graves of Jonathan and Kimimela. In the many times that he had been back here, he found himself most drawn to the markers of his great-aunt Willow and great-uncle Charlie. Two headstones without bodies to rest beneath them.

Staring at the two markers, he became lost in the mystery surrounding Charlie and Willow. So much, that he barely heard his grandfather walk up behind him...

...Cletus was wrenched by the sound of someone clearing his throat. The young man turned around, his gaze meeting his grandfather's.

Gerard Blake inherited much of his physical traits from Kimimela's side of the family, though his grayish-blue eyes were of his Irish father and grandfather.

"Hello, Grandpa..."

Gerard greeted his grandson with a nod and rather tired smile before coming to stand beside him.

Cletus turned back to the headstones of Charlie and Willow, before shifting his eyes toward Aunt Amy's:

Amy Violet Blake

Gone but never forgotten

1888-1905

Cletus glanced over at his grandfather, seeing the forlorn expression in the older man's eyes. In the eighty-three years that he had been alive, Gerard experienced several painful losses. His daughter Amy being lost to unexplainable circumstances was among them. Anytime she was brought up in conversation (which was rare...as if the family was trying to avoid dwelling on at least one tragedy), a pronounced melancholy pierced the air.

"I have tried locating them all," Gerard said, his voice slightly choked as he faced Charlie's headstone.

"As a young boy, your older brothers are so important to you. Second to your father, of course."

Cletus nodded, understanding what his grandfather meant. As the youngest child of Ronald and Eunice, his older brothers Chayton and Raymond meant the world to him throughout his own childhood.

Gerard continued. "For Chaska...Charlie and I were the little brothers he needed to protect and look out for. For me, those two and my father all represented everything I wanted to be as a man." He paused, appearing to recall a special memory. "Charlie was by far the most adventurous of us. I think he got an increased dosage of those particular genes that were prevalent in Mom and Dad when they were young. He was always getting into something and when the war between the North and South was around us, we all participated to a degree, but Charlie was quick to be a hero and enlist. And because many of the militia units in Illinois were becoming pretty desperate at one point, they were taking any able-bodied person willing to fight."

Cletus took in his grandfather's words before asking, "You haven't been able to reach him at all?"

Gerard sighed. "I've had brief visions here and there. Some involve him among other soldiers at an encampment, others are of him charging across a battlefield. But one consistent vision that I have is one...where he is leading a group through a tunnel. That group could very well be soldiers on their way to ambush a Southern army, but I'm getting more of a leaning toward escape...as if he were helping people escape from danger. Maybe prisoners of war or runaway slaves or both..." The old man paused.

"I have a feeling that...he died while doing this...or sometime shortly after..."

Gerard's voice trailed off and both stood silent. Cletus was almost afraid to question any further.

Finally, the young man spoke. "I know Uncle Matt saw Willow in some dark void when he, Tahatan, and Father Louis were trying to help Dorothy. It sounds like Aunt Willow is somehow still alive...and as she was on the day she disappeared."

Gerard nodded. "My sister has been lost and unreachable. Your Uncle Matt was the only one to have seen her in seventy years. We've all tried to place where he was taken that night, but of course to no success."

Cletus frowned as another thought crossed his mind. "What would happen if she were to be brought back? I mean, would she instantly age to how old she would be today or grow normally from where she is?"

Gerard shook his head and shrugged. "I don't know."

"Maybe we can find out...I'm sure there's a way..." Cletus's voice trailed off when he saw Gerard's ruddy complexion paled.

The young man froze before following his grandfather's gaze back to Amy's gravestone.

Cletus started to further question, but something in the air told him to listen. He focused on the grave, hoping to perhaps acquire some kind of a lead on Amy.

Almost instantly, a black void formed before him, followed by a vision of blood seeping into the soil. The images were violently snatched away, nearly sending the young man staggering backward.

As Cletus caught his breath, his grandfather was staring at him.

"You saw it too..." the old man said...

... In the last year, the great puzzle of the Blake family's history had grown even more intricate and mysterious. In spite of everything, they all tried remaining optimistic. There was even talk of Matthew and Liz getting a place of their own and starting over once she was well enough. Uncle Matt and Aunt Liz were also looking forward to being grandparents, even if they couldn't see or be near the child until a few weeks after the birth.

His cousin's pregnancy was made known to him, as was her having to be sent to another realm. For Dorothy's safety, and the safety of those with her, whereabouts could not be disclosed. As for Carl, he managed to talk the Elders into allowing him to go with her.

Since Carl's own settling in that new realm, he acquired many allies on Council, including his longtime childhood friend, Jimmy Kratz, who was being trained and prepared to take a high-ranking position.

If Cletus closed his eyes and concentrated hard enough, he could see Dorothy in her new, temporary place of residence. It resembled a Medieval castle, yet seemed better equipped than some of the most medically advanced hospitals he knew of. His cousin was also starting to show being with child.

He thought back to all that happened with Dorothy and the Fleming property. *What almost did happen to her. Maybe Aunt Amy wasn't as fortunate...* He ignored the morbid thought, pushing it back to the farthest region of his mind while trying to find relief in knowing that his cousin was safe.

Maintaining regular contact with Tahatan also helped, and Cletus had taken to communicating with Reginald and Gail Carr-Johnson, two of Dorothy's close friends from Plains.

Reginald and Gail had been married for just over a year and were living in Pennsylvania close to where Tahatan lived. The couple tried visiting with the medicine man once a week. During those visits, more detail was discovered, found out, which was also being shared with Cletus.

After the earth-shattering events of that late autumn in 1931, Cletus found himself in need of support, particularly from those that knew and understood what was taking place. While his father Ronald did understand to an extent, Cletus needed conversation with those that had been present for all the bizarre and horrific events in Plains. Upon the young man's request, Uncle Matthew gave his nephew the addresses to the Johnson and Carr residences.

Initially, Cletus was hesitant about reaching out. While he had briefly met Reginald and Gail during some visits to Plains, he didn't know either very well. He decided that the best course of action would be in contacting Reginald first (the last thing he wanted was for the other young man to believe that he was stepping in on Gail). Cletus overcame his nerves and wrote to the other young man. He awaited a response, hoping that Reginald wouldn't think it odd receiving a letter from him. To his relief, the other young man wrote back and didn't seem to think the correspondence odd at all. In his first letter, Reginald also assured Cletus that regular communication was not a problem, even stating that he trusted Dorothy's cousin with contacting Gail.

Throughout that following year, the three maintained their correspondence and Cletus even made a trip to Pennsylvania, visiting the Johnsons at their small apartment.

While he was out there, he saw the wonderful marriage shared by the newlyweds, including Reginald's pride in watching Gail train for her aviators license. Her dark eyes were glowing as she climbed down from the aircraft and ran over to Reginald, who greeted his wife by scooping her up and kissing her. During that first visit, Cletus also brought word of Jimmy being recovered from Hell and Linda giving birth to their now one-year-old daughter, Meredith.

Jimmy and Linda eventually managed to repair their relationship and were living together in a chateau as he received schooling and training within the Sanctuary for the position he was to take on at Council. While it wasn't completely understood by Reginald, Gail, or Cletus what exactly this Sanctuary and Council were, Jimmy's current situation was a surprise to the two that had grown up with him. In high school, Jimmy was a rather popular football player who didn't care to read much other than pulp thrillers and materials he was forced to for classes. Upon graduation, his plans were to marry Linda and inherit his father's mechanics garage. Of course, those plans were thwarted and Cletus could hardly imagine the anguish and confusion being felt by the Kratz and Parker families.

As he continued his walk home, Cletus anticipated that Thursday evening when he would be taking his second trip out to Pennsylvania. Once again, he would be staying with Reginald and Gail at their apartment. There were also plans for the three to pay Tahatan a visit. With it being the summer solstice and almost ninety years since that fateful night in 1844, there was a restless stir in the air, a stir that they all could feel.

During that visit, he hoped to also work up the nerve to ask his father's second cousin about the young Gypsy girl he had been dreaming of since he was a boy of ten. The girl whose name he still did not know despite his best efforts. By now, he guessed her to have about sixteen years in age and found her quite pleasing to behold. Her black hair complimented her light cocoa skin and golden eyes, and her pert figure was starting to make his groin tighten anytime he thought of it.

As his great grandfather Jonathan Blake had felt about his own beloved Sioux wife, Cletus believed that he was meant to be with this girl. He was certain that when the time was right, they would meet.

In addition to visions of the girl he wanted, there were times when an old woman also appeared to him. He figured this woman out to be the girl's grandmother and sensed a sort of connection between the old woman and Dorothy's husband. From what he understood and found out, his dream girl's grandmother and a great grandfather of Carl's had met once...

...An image of a mid-nineteenth century ship sailing over an ocean appeared before him. On the deck was a little girl, no older than ten years of age who appeared to be from a family of poor Romanichal immigrants. A family related to Jimmy. She was at the bow of the ship, looking out to the ocean while being held up by a young man with dark red hair and eyes as green as the Emerald Isle itself. The young man quirked up the side of his mouth, a gesture that reminded Cletus a little of Carl...

The image disintegrated, causing the young Ohio man to let out a jagged sigh. They all were connected to one another, as if their paths had long been predestined to be intertwined.

While such a thought offered some solace, Cletus still felt alone in not being able to tell any of his friends and peers why he never went further than two dates with the girls he took out. As of now, many young men Cletus had grown up with were going with girls, planning to marry and settle down. Even his older brothers lived nearby with their wives and each with a child of their own.

Cletus very much wanted a married life but could never see himself in a long-term relationship with any girl from his area. He had gathered enough courage to take a few out, but lack of connection and any emotional investment brought all promise of a relationship to a standstill. Mostly because of the Gypsy girl he saw every night.

He feared being thought of as crazy, along with endless jokes at his expense about having an imaginary 'dream girl.' *Someone might even lock me up...*

Although Ronald and Eunice (*particularly Ronald*) were open to things not of this world, Cletus felt that keeping his dreams of the Gypsy girl to himself for the time being was the best move. *At least until I go to Pennsylvania in a couple days...*

With that passing thought, an image of those abandoned Victorian buildings high on a hill appeared to him. Immediately, he recognized the old Fleming Orphanage. *We need to go back...*

Cletus flinched, having no idea what made him have such a thought. He tried showing the idea away, but deep within his core, he could feel a force pulling him there.

Over the years, he learned to not doubt such intuition. Once arriving at said destination, reasons for being led there would reveal themselves. *Father Louis would be there to help...*

In an instant, an image of the priest seated inside his chamber at Gregory the Great Catholic Church appeared. The older man was not alone either as he was speaking with another middle-aged man, one who very much resembled Dorothy's husband. A third man with a brown complexion and hair nearly the color of coal stood with his back against a wall. Luis Kratz...Jim's dad...

Cletus's steps ceased as he tried focusing on the intense conversation the three were having. He also recalled certain things about Father Louis that Reginald had mentioned in one of his letters. Just before proposing marriage to Gail two Valentines Days ago, Reginald was given reason to believe that the priest belonged to a genus or race similar with that of Dorothy and Jimmy. But there were never any other incidents after that one.

Cletus tried maintaining focus on the three men in the priest's chamber, but the image was interrupted by a certain dark, stone castle overlooking a vast field close to thick woodland.

Castle Alexandru...

Blood started seeping out from the ground before the vision disintegrated to the air. After the images faded, Cletus jolted backward, finding himself standing outside the gate of his family's home.

When did I...?

He glanced about his surroundings, the sound of his heart pounding in his ears as he tried in vain to remember having walked home, but all he could see was the menacing stone castle with blood red roofing.

Attempting to calm himself, Cletus opted to shrug off this one incident. His trembling ceased as he was comforted by the aroma of his mother's cooking flowing out through the open windows.

He latched open the small gate that was in front of his home, content with pretending that he had simply ended another work day and nothing more. For the time being, he would not dwell on what might need to be done during his pending visit to Pennsylvania.

Today was an ordinary day.

INTERLUDE A CHILD'S NIGHTMARE

October 25, 1831

The boy stirred, still half asleep as faint whispers drifted close to where he lay. One of voice stood out among the rest, calling to him, drawing nearer until it was as loud as a clap of thunder.

He awoke with a start, sitting up and staring into the inky black as the voices ceased. Taking in deep breaths, he felt the chill in the still quiet.

When his eyes adjusted, he averted his gaze toward the floor. He knew what was downstairs and who was laid out in the parlor.

Slowly, the boy climbed out of bed, his bare feet touching the cold wood floor.

Shivering, he considered lighting a candle. At least it would add a little cheer. But he recalled his parents saying something about the current shortage on rather expensive wax. Thus, he braved the darkness.

Drawing in a breath, he moved through the second floor of the house, feeling an outside force pulling him toward the stairs. He descended, continuing his steps until reaching the parlor. He approached the chaise on which his older brother was laid out.

The boy's vaporized breath was visible as he leaned over the young man's corpse. As the child stared down at the dead twenty-one-year-old, the whispering started again. He turned around to see a shadow rise from the floor in a far corner of the room. The boy trembled as the dark mass increased in size. A rustling from behind broke his stare. Slowly, he turned to see his brother, rising to sit with eyes wide open.

The boy was paralyzed with fright as the young man's head slowly turned to face him. The corpse pointed to the corner in the room from where the shadow was rising. Then the boy's brother's jaw dropped, letting out a horrifying, choked scream...

...The little boy sat bolt upright up in bed, frantically looking about the cold dark room. Letting out a shaking breath, he willed himself to remain calm. His thoughts immediately went to his brother, who was now at seminary. Bewilderment filled him as he wondered of the reasons for having such a terrifying dream. As far as he knew, his brother was not at all ill and was doing well in training for the priesthood. He was about to graduate, among the best in his class.

The young one laid back down, but found it impossible to shake the remaining dread. For as long as the two were able to recall, he and his brother both experienced prophetic dreams. He hoped that this dream was merely symbolic of something other than the horror that it showed. Perhaps by joining the priesthood, his brother's former self would symbolically "die" before being reborn once he was ordained. As the child tried to focus on keeping this in mind, a noise from behind made him freeze. His breath grew rapid as he tried moving, only to find his limbs stiff. Something was creeping up on him in the dark. The boy shut his eyes, praying for whatever it was to disappear. In the blackness of his tightly closed eyes, a landscape appeared before him, one engulfed in purple light. He also had a feeling of being pursued.

Finally, the scene disappeared and his eyes opened. His body trembled as he looked around to see who (*or what*) was in the room with him.

There was no one else.