



REMNANT

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MIKE SENCZYSZAK



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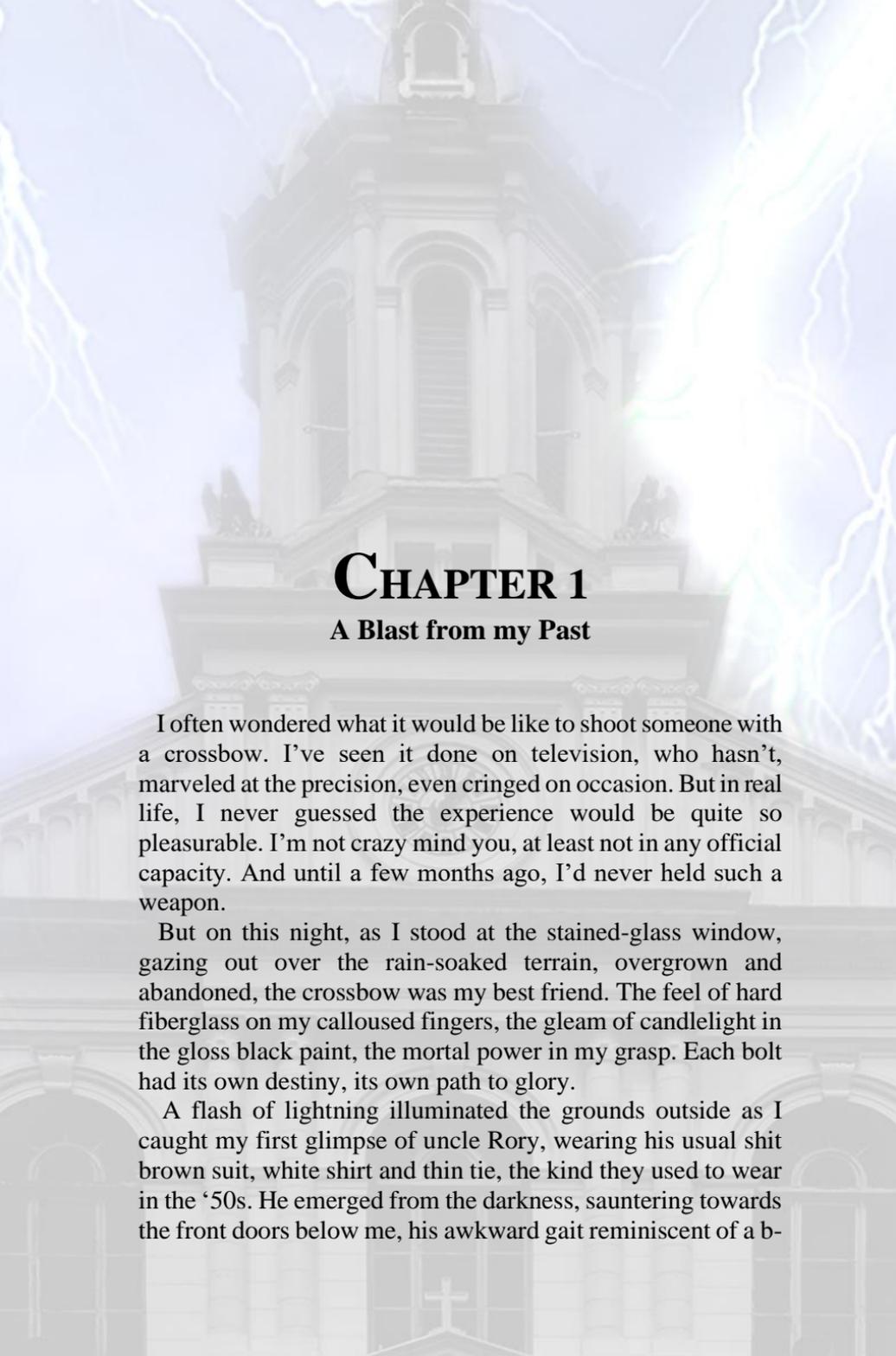
ISBN: 978-1-7751373-4-4

ISBN: 978-1-7751373-5-1 (E-book)

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For my family,



CHAPTER 1

A Blast from my Past

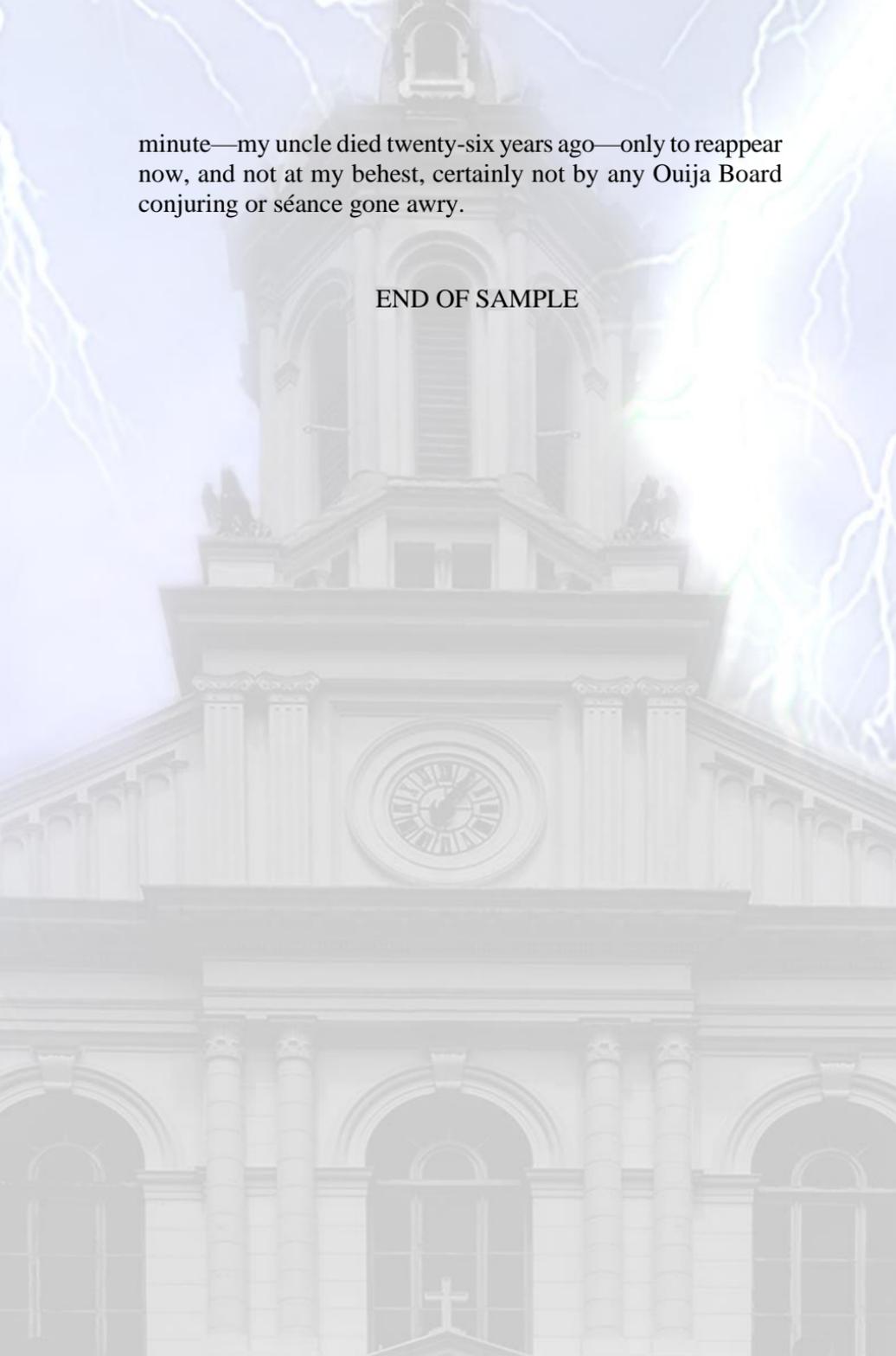
I often wondered what it would be like to shoot someone with a crossbow. I've seen it done on television, who hasn't, marveled at the precision, even cringed on occasion. But in real life, I never guessed the experience would be quite so pleasurable. I'm not crazy mind you, at least not in any official capacity. And until a few months ago, I'd never held such a weapon.

But on this night, as I stood at the stained-glass window, gazing out over the rain-soaked terrain, overgrown and abandoned, the crossbow was my best friend. The feel of hard fiberglass on my calloused fingers, the gleam of candlelight in the gloss black paint, the mortal power in my grasp. Each bolt had its own destiny, its own path to glory.

A flash of lightning illuminated the grounds outside as I caught my first glimpse of uncle Rory, wearing his usual shit brown suit, white shirt and thin tie, the kind they used to wear in the '50s. He emerged from the darkness, sauntering towards the front doors below me, his awkward gait reminiscent of a b-

grade zombie. Not that uncle Rory was a zombie. He was not. But he also wasn't alive. Or at least human. This conundrum was something I'd yet to unravel; the evolving mystery of human existence, one without an answer, and few left to solve the riddle. At least by my calculations. Those who survived, made it this far, kept themselves segregated, hidden away from all others in the dark corners of a now vast and barren landscape. Living alone, living lonely, was not a difficult problem for yours truly in the new world order. In fact, I relished it. People rubbed me the wrong way, more often than not. Like a recluse or hermit, I preferred the company of animals in my old life, as long as I had a computer and a gaming console at the ready—my windows to the outside world. Children, the younger ones especially, perplexed me. Hand me an infant, and I'd disappear faster than a looter with an Xbox. I'd rather you passed me a dead skunk, I'd be more inclined to take it. Kids amplified my undiagnosed social anxieties, as did certain adults. And speaking of adults, here he was, in all his glory, someone from my distant past, back again.

Another flash of lightning revealed the top of uncle Rory's balding head, bobbing ever so slightly in front of the barricaded doors. In the darkness, I could just make out his silhouette as I juxtaposed my position to get a better bead on him. I was holed up on the church balcony, overlooking the exterior of the parking lot and courtyard. The structure, a Presbyterian monolith, stood three stories high, no expense spared in its construction, providing me with a decent 180-degree view of the surrounding land. It also housed my necessities at the moment; weapons, food, survival supplies. Being holed up in a church isn't the most practical location when the world goes to shit, but it has its advantages. The view gave me a good vantage point of uncle Rory's position, and a part of me wondered what it is he might be thinking about. I mean, if he could think, that is. Because he wasn't actually my uncle. Sure, he looked identical, same clothes right down to the penny loafers and cigarette burn on his lapel, but it wasn't him. How did I know? Because uncle Rory died in 1995. Let that sink in a



minute—my uncle died twenty-six years ago—only to reappear now, and not at my behest, certainly not by any Ouija Board conjuring or séance gone awry.

END OF SAMPLE