

The dingy water kept Joshua Tanner from seeing the face belonging to the rough hands that held a grip around his throat. Another set of evil hands held his body in place. That face, too, was nameless. Joshua struggled with all his might, but his fight was futile. The strength of his ten-year-old body was no match for the powers that held him under the murky waters of the pond. His muscles wanted to give up, but his mind said no.

“Somebody, save me!” his mind cried out. When he could no longer hold his breath, the water began to seep into his nostrils. With one final breath of strength, Joshua swung his right arm as high as he could. His hand hit the face of the monster holding him by the throat. The hands let go, and Joshua sprang up out of the water.

Joshua found himself sitting straight up with his legs level. He focused his eyes, and his enemies were gone. He was no longer in the dark waters of the pond. He was home in bed, yet he was still soaked to the skin. He looked around, feeling shaky. The room was still dark, but he could see the first pink light of the morning pressing against the mini-blinds.

He had had that awful dream again, thanks to his little brother Caleb. Since Caleb had come down from Chicago and had been sleeping in Joshua’s bed, Joshua had had that recurring nightmare. Joshua took the pillow that Caleb had obviously thrown over his head and tossed it angrily against the wall. Caleb threw his arm on Joshua’s side of the bed, and Joshua knew instantly why he had dreamed of someone choking him.

Joshua threw the wet sheets off his legs and bundled them over Caleb. “Drown in your own wet sheets, you little stinkin' bed-wetter,” he muttered.

He got up and grabbed a set of clothes from the dresser drawer. As he took the three steps from his bedroom to the bathroom, he could hear that his grandmother was snoring contentedly as usual. “Must be nice to have a dry bed!” he yelled toward her room as he entered the bathroom.

“I’m sick of that little baby wettin' my bed,” Joshua mumbled as he peeled off his wet clothes. He took Caleb’s Spider Man towel from the rack and dried himself with it. He then took the towel and wrapped it around the bundle of wet clothes, squeezing as much of the wetness out of the clothes and into the towel as possible. He hung the towel back in its place. “You should smell real fresh after your bath, little brother,” he said scornfully. “That’ll teach you for wettin’ my bed.”

After Joshua changed, he decided to finish out his morning on the sofa. It was only a week into summer vacation, and Joshua was looking forward to sleeping late, watching a few cartoons, then heading out with his best friend Marvin. But all that had changed in the last month.

Joshua and his grandmother Sadie Belle had not heard from Joshua’s mother since the night she dumped Joshua into Sadie Belle’s lap and caught a Greyhound to Chicago. So when she phoned and said she would be coming to Mississippi, Joshua had mixed feelings of happiness and hatred. Secretly, he still wanted to go to Chicago and live with his mother, in spite of how much he loved his grandmother. But, his darker secret was that he still resented her for having abandoned him for so long in the first place.

His anxiety was unwarranted, however. He never got the opportunity to see his mother. She came while he was in school, dumped his seven-year-old brother Caleb and everything he ever owned at Sadie Belle's door, then caught the Greyhound back to Chicago.

Joshua had been too excited to concentrate at school the whole day, only to come home and find a newly acquired brother, rather than his mother, waiting for him.

Joshua's mind wouldn't allow him to sleep, so he lay on the sofa and looked around the living room, resenting its transformation. Before last month, his picture had dominated the walls and the tables. Now Caleb's pictures were everywhere.

"How can you just love him like that, Grandma" Joshua mumbled. "How can you just put his pictures all over the place like he's been here all the time," he muttered as he buried his face into a cushion.

He thought about all that had happened to him over the last few years, since the time he had almost been killed at the pond. Everybody had called him a hero when he remembered who had murdered Sandy Cassin. His picture had been in the paper, and he had been on the news. He had been famous, for a while.

And, of course, everybody felt sorry for him because they thought Marsha Hopkins had tried to kidnap him. He became popular at school, and he could get away with almost anything with the teachers. Everybody seemed to feel sorry for him and pamper him except his mother. Joshua was sure she had somehow heard about him through the news and would come running down to get him. But she never did. She just traumatized him more by bringing that spoiled little bed-wetter into his life.