

REBORN

Where Infinity Begins

By

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Chapter One – The Cycle, Realm of Noor

‘Why do we forget everything?’ As William asked this question, he believed he saw a smile where the glowing person’s mouth should be. His query was met with silence, and he did not know whether he would get an answer.

‘That is an excellent question, William, but I do not have an answer for you. Few have ever found out about this secret. Even in my own kind, only the wisest know exactly why this happens to every sapient being.’

‘But you’re a god, aren’t you? And you’re also the one who is bringing us back to life, right?’

The figure laughed at William’s words while it stood up from the chair and walked towards him. ‘I am not a god. In fact, there are no gods the way you Humans believe. I have just chosen your species and connected myself to you to observe and learn from you. To guide you when the time has come for you, as my father has told me to do and as all my siblings do while they are scattered around the universe.’

‘So, are there more intelligent species out there?’ William asked. ‘And what’s up with your siblings’ connected races?’

The being stood right before William, and he felt a pleasant warmth radiating from it and a rising happiness within himself.

‘I do not really know, but some of them may be ahead of your kind and some may just be starting to develop real consciousness,’ it said. ‘I have not spoken to any of my siblings in a long time and probably will not until my own cycle has to begin anew.’

fell silent for a moment. He could not grasp what he was told to its full extent. Everything felt so familiar, and yet, out of this world. He had so many questions on the tip of his tongue, but he did not want to offend the being with too many. ‘How many of your kind exist? From what you’ve told me, you all must be very old, so there must be countless numbers of you.’

‘Only my forebear can answer that question for you. Maybe you will meet them one day.’ The being gave another slight smile. ‘I am sure they would like you, as you are a curious little guy.’ While finishing its sentence, the figure laid a hand on William’s shoulder.

Warmth flooded through him, making him feel calm and comfortable. ‘I’d be honoured. What’s all that “bringing us back to life” thing about now?’

‘To put it simply, I am not the one responsible for that, nor is my forebear. As I have told you before, even we are bound to this circle of rebirth, but in different ways. Nobody knows whether this is natural or if someone was able to give the gift of eternal life to living beings. We just assume that the will of the universe keeps us all alive and judges our destinies.’

William, seemingly unsatisfied with the answer, sighed. ‘How long do you live before you have to be reborn?’

‘When the last member of my chosen species closes its eyes for their final rest, it is time for me to die, too. Then I will engage with the shadows and search for a new race to connect with. The biggest difference is that I do not lose my knowledge as you do.’

William looked down at his legs. They were shaking, even though no weight was upon them. He tried to sit up a little straighter. ‘That’s all hard to believe, but it feels like the truth. There are so many more things I’d like to ask, but I don’t know where to begin.’

‘I know it is hard to understand. Someday, it will all be clear to you. For now, it is time to leave, William. Your new body is waiting for you, and we would not want to let your current parents wait too long for a sign of life from you.’

Again, William sighed. ‘Alright, I’m ready to go, I think.’

‘Do not be sad. An interesting new life awaits you. You can ask me further questions the next time we meet.’

William nodded, his face saddened, before standing and tightening his chest, ready for whatever came next.

‘Have a good life, William. As always, I look forward to meeting you again, my old friend.’

‘Goodbye. I will try to remember you when I see you again to save us some time.’

The entire room, including all furniture and the figure itself, dissolved before William’s eyes. Every light source was gone, and he was left to try to navigate through the darkness by touch. It did not take him long to realise that nothing was left. He

did not know if he was falling, levitating, or simply stuck in emptiness.

After some time, it seemed that dim lights reflected by something not too far away appeared. The longer he watched them, which begun to dance with the slight breeze of wind he could feel, the closer they came.

After what felt to him like an entire day in his lonely state of thoughts, the lights were finally close enough to see what they were. As he had thought, they came from candles. They were short, beige, and seemed as though they would never burn out. The flames danced slowly back and forth as if to a melody he could not hear.

A shiver ran down his spine when he realised what dimmed the candlelight. Around the waxy sources of luminosity, there were Human bodies tied together. They were empty and drained of blood. Surprisingly, they were not rotting away. Scary yet fascinating to look at.

He studied the dead faces as he slowly glided further down in what seemed to be a tower full of corpses. Fresher bodies started to appear soon, some of them dripping with blood. The longer his journey took and the further down he got, the more blood flowed out of the bodies.

He started to hear and see the streams of blood as they gushed into a single body of liquid. The fluids splashed about as he fell into the lake of what seemed like a concoction of water and blood. He saw even more bodies floating no further than two metres away.

Both above and beneath him, there was only darkness, and he could see neither the top of the tower nor its bottom. His fear

grew, so he tried to calm himself and closed his eyes. William panicked as something suddenly grabbed his leg and pulled him deeper into the dark liquid. The more he fought against it, the stronger its grip tightened.

Struggling, he reached out to hold onto the dead bodies, which seemed to multiply every second as the tower grew in height. New candles lit up in the bodies materialising next to him. He saw shadows in the soft, red, shimmering liquid. They encircled him and held onto his legs, slowly but steadily dragging him underneath the surface. The fear of drowning made him throw his arms and legs around hysterically until the shadows got complete hold of them.

He suddenly realised he could not drown as he was already dead, so he let go. After he stopped resisting, everything seemed to happen much faster. The shadows started to rip his body apart, removing his skin layer by layer. He felt neither pain nor anything else. Only a slight sense of discomfort.

‘What’s happening here would scare me to death if I were still alive,’ he said aloud. ‘I wonder if those shadows can speak at all.’

As if reading his thoughts, they started to hiss, one after another.

‘You are soon to be ready.’

‘Undone shall be your sins, cleansed shall be your mind.’

‘Only uncovered can you move on.’

They began to sing, and he could barely try to understand their song, as their voices seemed more like they were trying to sing against several walls.

The remains of his body began to heat, and a faint light glowed on his skin. As the heat emitting from what was left of his physical form further increased, it felt as if he was burning without bringing him pain or discomfort. His skin got thinner, and the light grew brighter until nothing was left of him except grey light.

Instead of skin, flesh, and blood, he seemed to exist only of grey, nearly milky light. William was astonished by what was happening and just stared at his luminous body.

‘This must be my soul. It’s beautiful. Somehow, it looks like a thick, contained cloud of white smoke filled with the light of the stars. It keeps the shape of my body, which makes it even weirder.’

While watching his soul, he did not notice that most shadows had let go of him. He was not dragged down any longer but caught in a swirl. But as he realised this, he was torn from his thoughts and panicked once more.

All he could think about was that he did not want to forget anything he had learned today, and how to escape this fate. The only solution that came to his mind was grabbing some of the shadows. William hoped that he could hold onto them so he could somehow escape the vortex. To his surprise, it worked to a certain degree, and it seemed to save him as they pulled him up out of the swirl and to the surface.

His success lasted only a few seconds. He got sucked down once more by the whirl, which became stronger. His fingers still wrapped around the shadows with a powerful grip, William reached the end, leaving him in a space with no liquid left.

While gliding down again, he looked up and saw his reflection in the liquid as if floating beneath it. A flash of light, brighter than any source of light he had ever seen, filled up the entire space for a split second. When the light dimmed to the level of average daylight, William made out little orbs glowing in different colours, some he had never seen before, their tints scattered across the space.

Once more, he got distracted as he felt a piercing pain in his arms. The shadows he clung to had shaped objects that looked like swords from their arms. They began to stab into his upper limbs. Luckily, they were only as big as cats, so they could not reach his face or other dangerous body parts as he held them away from his soul.

William's fight with the shadows began anew, and some of them managed to escape as his grip loosened. He did not even know why he still held onto them. He was no longer in the swirl, but something told him he would need them, anyway.

A beam of light hit him like a piercing arrow, and a glance down made him realise this was not the only beam about to hit him. All the orbs started glowing more intensely as if they were powering up. The struggle between holding the shadows back and trying to find out what was happening below and around him hindered him from reacting in time.

William felt no pain as several beams hit and pierced his soul without leaving any kind of mark behind as he expected they would. Only after more beams hit him did he begin to realise what effect they had. He slowly lost his memory. William needed an idea fast, a way to escape or at least dodge the beams.

Losing more memories with every beam that hit him, William slowly gave up. His grip loosened once more due to getting tired and weak, and more shadows fled. Fighting against the odds, William gathered all the energy he had left and pulled the remaining shadows closer to his body, using them as a shield against the beams. As he struggled to keep them close, he remembered what the figure had told him earlier.

‘Some of you have strengthened their souls enough to overcome the circle. They do not forget anymore, and they keep their memories just as I do. While this may seem impossible for now, it is only really the beginning of your journey. The potential in you Humans seems to be to an astonishing extent, and I am most curious to see what you will accomplish. I hope your race will use your connection to the universe wisely and for good purposes.’

As he began to feel drowsy, he pressed the shadows against his chest, which were hit by the beams and instantly disintegrated where the light hit them. William was brought back to consciousness as the shadows produced a shrieking sound of fingernails scratching a blackboard.

Not much was left of the shadows. Most of the rays hit him directly as they did before. Struggling to keep the last shreds of shadows to himself, he realised he had forgotten how to move, so he could not do anything else except think about the exact same words over and over again.

‘I’ll break the circle. I won’t forget. My name is William Salter, and I’ll remember!’

Slowly, he rolled up and fell asleep while his body drifted further down. In his last moments of dozing, he could no longer

perceive any more light, sound, or anything else. His soul took on a silvery hue for a few seconds before another flash, even brighter than the one before, illuminated the space, and his soul disappeared.

*In the end,
no one can tell.
Are we in heaven,
or stuck in hell?*

*Cleansed of fault.
Released from veins.
The soul splits up,
And blood it rains.*

*The body stays.
The soul sinks down.
Convoyed by shadows,
The mind it drowns.*

*Memories erased,
by colourful light.
All forgotten,
but it feels right.*

*Born again, new.
New body shaped.
Without a clue,
you cannot escape.*

“Song of the Shadows”

Chapter Two - The Life Before

On the 17th of February 2006, at 10:32 a.m. in New York's Presbyterian Lower Manhattan Hospital, a child was born to Christine, a small, red-haired woman and her husband, Liam. Liam was at least two heads taller than his wife and had shaggy, brown hair.

Naked, wet and crying, just like every other baby, the boy made his parents proud from the first moment on. They were glad their child had made it into the world safe and healthy, and they felt overjoyed by being together for this unique moment.

Over the next few days, Liam visited his wife several times a day to look after her and their son, and so it happened that the two of them should become witnesses of something they had never heard of before.

'Am I really that exhausted, or did he just speak?' Christine asked.

Liam laughed mockingly as he held onto the cup of coffee in his hands. 'You'd better get back to bed or take some pills,' he said more seriously. 'Hearing a baby speak already? It's not looking good for you.'

She threw a pillow after him, which he nearly dodged, spilling some coffee as a consequence.

'Shut up!'

‘You’d better take care of the boy and not drop him.’

Another angry glance hit Liam.

‘Don’t worry, I won’t, but maybe I’ll drop you on the next chance I get to,’ Christine said fiercely. ‘Now help me understand what he’s saying.’

‘Alright, I’ll try to translate it for you.’

The child continued to make some noises, but nothing came out of its mouth that could be described as spoken words.

‘That’s easy,’ Liam said with finality. ‘He’s hungry. There you go.’

‘That’s not what he’s trying to tell us. Do listen more closely.’

‘We’ll give it one more try.’ Liam leaned closer.

About two hours passed, during which the baby made no more sounds but was utterly silent. While Christine tried to encourage him to speak, Liam fell asleep in a chair beside her bed, waiting for something to happen.

A cry of joy finally managed to knock him off his chair, marking the end of the mug he held, still half-full of coffee. While trying to get up as he wiped spilt coffee off his shirt, he grinned.

‘Whoa, did you drop him?’ he asked cheekily. ‘Or has he foretold next week’s weather?’

Christine completely ignored him and cheered over her son’s first word. ‘He spoke. I knew my boy would be able to do it! Didn’t you hear?’

‘Sorry, I was just thinking about which college we could send him to,’ Liam teased.

A deadly glare fell onto him as he tried to hide behind the chair, expecting something would be thrown his way, but nothing

happened. Confused, he stood up again and looked at his wife, who was happily looking down at their child, smiling in silence.

‘You seem more relieved than surprised about the fact that he’s speaking. What do you mean by “you knew it”, anyway?’

‘I am relieved, but forget about that. That’s just something I said out of joy.’

‘If you say so. What did the little Jameson say to you?’

‘Hold on. I told you that we’re not going to call him that.’

‘Call him what?’

‘Jameson! His name is Austin.’

Liam crossed his arms and made an offended face. ‘Come on, “Jameson” sounds way better than “Austin”.’

‘It doesn’t matter, anyway since he himself had a better idea.’

Confused, Liam narrowed his eyes. ‘He had what?’

She beamed, looking down at the quiet baby in her arms.

‘Tell your daddy what you want to be called.’

‘You are joking, right?’

The baby made sounds like “William” and giggled.

‘What the actual...?’

‘I told you he could do it.’

Liam stared at Christine as if he had seen a ghost. He sat down again. ‘So, William, it is?’

‘I guess so. No, wait,’ Christine said, trying to bring her husband back to reality. ‘He’s only a few days old. We can’t let him get what he wants from the very beginning. I propose giving him all three names so everyone’s happy.’

‘Deal!’

As if their son understood what they'd said, the baby giggled, kicking with its arms and legs.

'Aww, did you see that, Liam?'

'He really is cute. Little William Jameson Austin. I can't wait to see him grow up.'

'William Austin Jameson.'

'As you wish.'

'He'll be a good child. I can feel it.'

The three snuggled up together, and the parents' loving eyes watched their child, who tried to grab things around him.

William's childhood was relatively normal most of the time. He went to school, played, and had fun like all the other children. The only difference was that he was rather swift at learning, and after a short period, he had acquired all the knowledge he needed for school. Therefore, there was more time for him to play, and he enjoyed doing exactly that for as long as he was able.

This gift stayed with him until the end of high school, after which he remained a fast learner but began having to get down to his books more often. For him, it was completely normal to understand everything in a short period. Because of that, it was sometimes hard for him to make friends, since he could not understand the struggles his peers faced. Once, one of his teachers even asked his parents whether they were giving him home education as well to help advance him. When they denied it, the instructor would not believe them.

Throughout elementary, middle, and high school, William had no trouble with his grades, and his parents supported him whenever he wanted to learn something extra. After that, he began

his Bachelor of Arts at Stanford University, and only then did he have to study more actively. But he still had enough time to learn about history far beyond the level of his regular studies. At college, William also met his lifetime best friend, Mark, from whom he imagined he'd never be separated again.

Mark was a simple guy who worked at a restaurant near William's university and the flat where William lived. He was 1.83 metres tall and had a well-trained body, just like William, who went to the same gym. Even though he was a fit person, he had a slightly chubby face, which made him look very kind. His hair was short and raven black, just like his beard, which, to show off his discipline, he trimmed every single day. He always made everyone laugh with his jokes and offered William mental support whenever he needed it.

William, with a height of 1.80 metres, was the shorter of the two. But in terms of bodily fitness, he was just as vigorous as his friend. Most of the time, his curly hair reached his shoulders and was chestnut-brown in colour. His facial features accentuated his jawline, making him look like a nobleman. Always calm and relaxed no matter the circumstances, he was practically the counterpart to the bright and energetic Mark, who was often held back by William when he got fired up. Both of them had bright blue eyes that were nearly identical, which was why they were often believed to be brothers.

They spent nearly every second they could get together, and a strong bond grew between them over the years. So strong that after William finished his bachelor's degree, Mark moved to New York so they would not be separated and could stay close friends.

In William's last semester, he got homesick, which made him look forward to the end of his student life, and Mark tried his best to keep him going. The only problem was that when William was back in New York, the homesickness did not go away, so he tried to find out what he was missing. Mark tried to support him as best he could, but he also could not find a solution to William's problem. Weeks went by, during which William did research on his own and tried to get to the bottom of his feelings. In the end, he decided to visit a doctor and get help, as he thought it might be a psychological problem.

William saw Dr McDaren, an old friend of his mother's, whom he had known from an early age. A middle-aged man whose sharp suit made him appear professional and sophisticated, the psychologist greeted him with a friendly smile. The few wrinkles he had and black-grey hair fitted perfectly with his whole appearance. The two of them had a little chat, straying at times until they finally managed to end their conversation.

The doctor gave William a tip to travel the world. An hour-long speech about why it was a good idea to do so and why it would help William later on in his life, McDaren concluded. 'I really recommend you do this. You could only profit from it. You will learn a lot, find many new friends, and who knows? By your standards, you may even learn a new language or two. Also, you might find a place where you feel at home and even want to stay there.'

'But what if it doesn't help? Wouldn't it be just a waste of time and money?'

Dr McDaren chuckled and shrugged his shoulders. You said you like history, William. There are so many historical places