

—I AM VISION, I AM DEATH

by Erik Williams

On the East side of Dallas, Elijah pulled into a Motel 6 and bought a single for the night. He paid in cash. He'd wanted to make Shreveport before stopping, but the caffeine and speed had lost their effectiveness. He needed to crash for a few hours.

The room was small but adequate. Elijah brought in his backpack and locked the door. He slid the curtains closed and flicked the A/C on full. After a quick shower, he crawled into bed and set the alarm for five in the morning.

He checked the date on his watch. Two days, he thought. Two days since he'd gotten the call that Mom was on death's door. She'd only last a few days, according to the doctor. A week, tops. Elijah frowned. It would be another whole day of driving to get to Jacksonville.

Elijah looked around the room at the sparse walls and small TV and plain art in faded frames. "I am Loneliness."

Then he took a few pulls off his flask and went to sleep.

* * *

Again, he dreamed he was the stranger, trapped inside his skin and seeing through his eyes.

The dreams were always different. The settings and atmosphere changed each time. The stranger, though, always remained constant. The same cadence in his speech. The same controlled anger pulsing through his veins. He had never seen the man's face, since he was always looking out through it, nor had he heard his name, but Elijah knew *him* and knew what he was capable of.

This time he was lying naked on a motel bed, watching the local news, KROU-Channel 9, Baton Rouge, he recognized, but he was humming some song Elijah had never heard. The previous time he was in Houston, smoking a cigarette and drinking vodka out of a plastic motel room cup. He knew it was Houston because of the 214 area code stamped on the phone set. Other places, he could only guess at.

Always somewhere different, a nomad like Elijah, though the similarities ended there.

After a few minutes, he stood and stubbed out the cigarette. He kept humming as he walked into the bathroom. Inside, a woman lay in an empty tub. She was gagged and bound, her eyes wide, her skin pale except for bruises on her breasts and thighs.

The stranger knelt next to the tub, then stroked her cheek with the back of his

left hand. She didn't blink.

"I am Death," Elijah heard himself say through the stranger's voice.

* * *

Elijah opened his eyes and breathed deep. Sitting up, he glanced at the clock. He'd only slept forty-five minutes.

Another woman. In every dream the guy killed women. Not always the same way, but always women.

Elijah sipped from the flask and rubbed his face. The dreams varied in length from time to time, just as his visions did. He thought about how long he'd been having the dreams and wondered if it counted as living two lives. It sure felt as if it should.

A few more sips and Elijah lay back down.

* * *

The alarm woke Elijah at five. His head ached and his eyeballs burned. He wanted to sleep for another day but forced himself out of bed. After he dressed, he grabbed his bag, headed to the main lobby and checked out.

As he walked to the car, he heard a woman whimper. He turned and looked around the parking lot. It was dead quiet with the exception of the buzz of streetlights. For a minute, he thought he had imagined the sobs, when he heard another.

Elijah slinked toward the side of the motel's main lobby. The whimpers grew louder and more frequent. Then he saw the movement of shadows on the asphalt. Elijah pressed his back against the wall and peeked around the corner.

A large man, well over six feet, had a young girl pinned against the wall, and both had their pants around their ankles. The man rammed her from behind holding the side of her face against the brick wall. Her hands were duct-taped together behind her back and a strip covered her mouth. Blood trickled from her nose and tears soaked her cheeks.

Elijah looked away. He peeked again and they were gone.

I am Vision, he thought.

His eyes scanned the parking lot, looking for the large man. Then he found him, leaning against the front bumper of a semi-truck, picking his teeth with his nails.

Elijah pushed off the wall and walked toward the trucker. As he did, the bell rang above the motel's entrance. He glanced over his shoulder and saw the girl walking out wearing a maid's uniform.

He turned back to the trucker. The man had stopped picking his teeth and was moving toward the girl.

Elijah walked faster and pulled a knife from his back pocket. He flipped out the four-inch blade and held it at his side. His pulse remained steady as he maneuvered around several cars and flanked the trucker from the right.

Crouching between two cars, Elijah lunged forward as soon as the trucker walked by, slicing the knife across the right Achilles tendon. The guy crumpled to the ground and started to scream but Elijah pounced on his chest and covered his mouth with his left hand.

Wide eyes stared at Elijah, saying more than words. Elijah swiftly slit the man's