

PROLOGUE

The insanity of man can be simply described as striving to control what cannot be controlled. Something that the stars could never quite understand. Below them, the moon brightened the snow-covered surfaces that covered the Earth. The only stretch that wasn't covered was a single road traveled by a few vehicles throughout this late hour. The clouds that emptied out all their snow thinned out and eventually blew away. Out here, the countless stars could be seen far away from the city lights. Away from all the noise and distractions, the stars were free to come out from hiding from such a strange world to shine brighter. Until a pair of headlights showed themselves.

The driver, a man in his mid-thirties, turned to his passenger.

“Did I mention that Mr. Holmes is a vet?”

“Oh? What kind? Horse doctor?”

A smile crept onto both of their faces.

“No, Mrs. Knots. A veteran.” Focusing back on the road, he continued. “A horse doctor probably gets paid more.”

“You know, before I met you, I was only a Miss. Now, my title sounds plural, implying that I miss all the time, *Mr. Knots*,” Mrs. Knots said.

“You had such a grand title, Ms. Ratanasta,” Mr. Knots did his best to hide his smile.

“Hey, we Ratanastas are a fine people and proud, too. Although, I wonder who originally came up with such a name. I’m sure we could have done well with just Jordon or perhaps Smith.”

“Whoosh!” a child in the back seat proclaimed as he swiped his army figurine up in the air.

Mrs. Knots turned, “Is Colonel Henry flying?”

“Yeah, Mom.”

“Well, I never. How is it he can fly, but we cannot? Truly, envy is my sin,” Mrs. Knots said in a serious tone.

“He can because he believes he can,” the boy replied.

Mrs. and Mr. Knots shared a smile.

“Remarkable. Doubt is indeed our enemy,” Mrs. Knots said.

Another pair of headlights came around the bend up ahead.

“Our son is a true genius, a genuine deep thinker. You know, the other day he couldn’t comprehend the perception of time. Something we adults don’t fully comprehend, yet he understands that he doesn’t understand.” Mrs. Knots said as she turned one last time to admire her son’s face, lost in his imagination.

“*There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception,*” Mr. Knots quoted.

“Is that Lewis?” Mrs. Knots asked.

“No, Huxley.”

“Ah. Indeed, it is.” Mrs. Knots reached out to grab her husband’s hand. “Our little philosopher.”

“I give one hundred percent credit to your side of the family. All praise to the Ratanastas,” Mr. Knots bowed slightly in reverence. “Us Knots’ aren’t too well known for our intellect.”

“Be careful, darling. I’m now considered a Knots, too, you know.”

“True. With your help, our people just might survive.”

“Are you saying that marrying me wasn’t an intelligent move?”

“I’m not so sure that intelligence had anything to do with it. What I *am* saying is once in a while, we Knots’ stumble onto something priceless. That, my dear, is what I call *dumb* luck.” Mr. Knots turned to lock eyes with his beloved.

“You adorable fool,” Mrs. Knots said as her face brightened by a direct light. Her loving eyes widened in fear.

Turning back, Mr. Knots found the car up ahead had weaved into his lane. He slammed on the brakes that didn’t slow the vehicle down nearly enough to avoid contact. He steered slightly to avoid flying off the road but had only a split second to choose one of two ways to direct his precious cargo: off the road or toward the oncoming collision. In that split second, the other car corrected itself, giving Mr. Knots enough room to reclaim his lane. When he turned the wheel back, he overcorrected, causing the tires to slide on the slick, icy surface. The car spun until the back right wheel caught up with the front, causing it to flip.

With enough speed, they rolled several times and flew off the road toward the bottom of a steep ravine. The witnessing stars never took pleasure in seeing such things. Just as they never understood the complications of man.

The Abstract Adventures

of

Jacob Knots

By Nicholas C. Hutton

BOOK I

Departure

Chapter one

FORGOTTEN FOE

A white marble floor with black and ash cracks illuminated a soft white light that stretched as far as the eye could see. A much brighter white light covered the sky. That light then shattered into thousands of pieces that flew away. Shrinking in size into the black, empty night sky, the white pieces were soon shown as tiny stars actively twinkling. The lit marble ground began to change, growing an endless field of vibrant purple and reddish grass. The ground kept its glow as it changed color, replacing the bright tone with a darker one. The grass appeared to come alive, dancing in tune with the stars, so animated yet so still.

In the center of the field was a boy, Jacob Knots. He had dirty blond hair with a hint of strawberry waving as it covered the top part of his head, his dark green eyes hidden beneath. A few freckles and dirt

smudges stood out in contrast to his pale skin. He wore a tattered brown hooded robe that was a few sizes too big.

Slow at first, a beating sound of feet came from every direction toward him. Like a thousand hooves stomping the ground with every moment, warning anyone frightened to flee. From the sounds of it, Jacob was quickly becoming surrounded. Soon, silhouettes of creatures began to take form from all around, giving Jacob nowhere to run. Each beast had yellow eyes resembling all things terrifying and sharp teeth to match. Open slobbering mouths gapped, flinging drool in anticipation of the feast. They shrieked in sequence to their laughter, doing all they could to terrify the boy.

Jacob bowed his head and closed his eyes, hearing their growls, smacking lips, and excited high-pitched squeals. He remained still until he could feel their bodies closing in around him. He then slightly cocked his head upward toward the insidious crowd and displayed a very sneaky smile.

He flew up so fast that the ground reacted by leaving a perfect circle of eroded clumps of dirt where he once stood. He showed the mob his impressive flying skills of flipping, turning, rising, and diving. He did this to let them know he could evade all of them with ease. However, he was nowhere close to retiring from toying with them. Landing to meet the enemies at their level, he grabbed a nearby opponent by the arm. Using a strength that surprised the creatures, Jacob heaved the beast up in the air and arched it over Jacob's smaller body. The creature was flung into the air, landing on a small group of ugly fiends knocking some of them down.

Behind him, a giant slowly rose, seemingly out of nothing. Towering over its small foe, covered in scars and muscles, tattered black cloth, and dried blood, the large monster lowered his head to eye his prey. Suddenly, Jacob's elbow flew into the beast's ribs. The giant's eyes swelled up, but his tears froze in place. His breath was caught in his chest, and after a few agonizing moments, it was released with a groan that sounded like

an uncomfortable cough. Tears dripped down his elongated face before his colossal body fell, shaking the ground around him.

Jacob mockingly growled back, baring his teeth at the crowd as they got out of his way. He then, once again, took flight and swooped down so close to the ground the grass tickled his face. Jacob laughed as he tripped all those in his path. Toppled beasts were the only evidence of Jacob until he rose above the sea of creatures and remained still, suspended in the sky. Sounds of laughter and growls turned to concerned shrieks and cries. Looking for a challenge and finding none, Jacob realized his biggest fear was approaching. He was starting to get bored.

He floated down to ground level and spoke. "You ugly brutes aren't any fun. Come at me all at once?"

The creatures looked at each other, hoping one would be brave enough to lead them. After an uncomfortable silence of no one stepping up to the boy's challenge, an unusual dark cloud formed overhead. Blocking out the stars and even the glowing grass from underneath them, this strange darkness gave Jacob a feeling he'd never felt before.

A voice spoke, like crackling thunder vibrating the entire arena. "Very well. *I* will grant your wish."

Jacob looked towards this new darkness, trying to find the source of who spoke. After his eyes failed to locate this new threat, a series of lightning flashes revealed a dark figure covered in black robes. His face was hidden in thick, black hair that dangled out of his hood. Bright red glowing eyes with black-slitted pupils, like that of a snake, stared back.

The dark figure raised his hairy, clawed hand, and as he did so, the ground shook, forcing all the beast's knees to buckle. The first creature, confused, took notice that his arm involuntarily hooked the closest comrade by the arm. One by one, the entire crowd began to link arms and legs, whichever limb was closest to another's, until they formed a wall of binding flesh. The wall rose slowly at first but grew at an alarming rate. So fast, in fact, that Jacob didn't realize that soon he would have nowhere to go.

“This is more like it. I will allow your wizardry, you repulsive goat,” Jacob said with amusement.

Soon, the wall multiplied, as they were quickly closing in on him. Jacob could barely see as the barricade of brutes was starting to block out any known light. He used his strength to attempt to push through them, but he realized after he got through a dozen bodies, he found another dozen in his way. He kept pushing in one direction, and those he left behind were sinking underneath and appearing before him like the current of a wave.

The thunderous voice crackled again. “This is what you wanted, is it not?”

Jacob wasn't making any progress and wasn't even sure where he was going at this point. His sense of direction was lost in the clutter of countless bodies. He was beginning to feel fatigued. Tired, he slowed his pace, which allowed his enemies to tighten their grip on one another, strengthening their bond. The faces all had smirks as they cackled, drawing closer. The snapping jaws sounded like hundreds of popping bones. Each of them was eager to taste their victory, literally.

Jacob felt the first bite on his ankle and instinctively kicked back, breaking the bridge of the annoying nuisance's nose. The next fang dug into his left bicep, tearing his already torn robe. Another nipped him in the behind and on his right side. Running out of limbs to defend with, Jacob was soon unable to do anything about the teeth that were about to dig into each available piece of meat. It would seem Jacob finally had met his match.

“Jacob, wake up,” said a clear, nurturing voice.

Frightened by what was to come, Jacob frantically tried to shake the monsters loose. A hideous face materialized in front of him. Red eyes opened while razor-sharp teeth glinted from their glow. The face smiled. Jacob only smiled back.

“This isn't over. We *will* finish this next time!” Jacob said as he felt a hand shaking his shoulder. “What's your name?”

The figure's smile shifted into a scowl. "My name is Lurid, producer of all nightmares, and I will be here the next time you rest to finish this. You *will* know fear."

Jacob sat up so fast he almost head-butted a small girl in his cot. Trying to catch his breath, he stared around, not knowing where he was. With his memory fogged, he wiped his eyes, trying to transition from such a rush.

"Are you okay? You were shaking so much that you woke me. These nightmares are getting worse each night." In the dark, Jacob could only hear the girl, and after a moment, he remembered her name.

"Lizzy... I'm sorry I woke you," he said as he laid back down on his side, his head away from her.

Staring at other cots, their metal frames lit from the night's light, he knew exactly where he was, and so he sighed.

"What was your dream about?" Lizzy asked.

"I don't remember," he replied, "I never remember."

"It's probably for the best," Lizzy said as she patted his shoulder reassuringly. She laid back down, her head by his feet. She added, "well, just know that I'm here if you need me."

"Thanks, Lizzy," Bunching up his pillow, he recentered his head. "I always wondered what they're about myself. All I know is I feel trapped when I wake up here. I mean more than I do when I go to bed. Maybe in my dreams, I'm free."

Jacob felt free at just the thought. Although he never remembered his dreams, he still felt the excitement. This caused him to dread every new day, knowing it would never compare to the rush he felt when he woke up. The forgotten dreams were a reminder of his forgotten life.

Unlike the other orphans, Jacob didn't remember his life before he arrived *at The Short Leg Orphanage* five years prior, about half his life. On February 12th, 1951, a car accident that had killed both of his parents and nearly killed him caused a head injury, resulting in memory loss.

The slight angle of their faces from the back car seat was the only memory he had of them. He wondered if his life before the accident was as exciting as his dreams. Jacob could only daydream about what kind of life he lived before the accident, as he did most of his waking hours.

Those thoughts kept him silent a lot of the time, giving the other children the impression that he intentionally shut himself off from them and the outside world. They figured he was shy, soft, and reserved, not knowing the boy he was in his dreams.

The orphans also never knew how much they meant to him. Since his parents were absent from his earliest memories, his fellow orphans were all he had. Since he couldn't recall the love from his parents, the same love that the others shared about their past lives. He secretly looked forward to hearing about such sweet feelings that were shrouded in mystery. It gave him hope of what life was like outside the orphanage. But mainly, hearing them share such sweet memories allowed him to catch a glimpse of each child's heart in contrast to a world that didn't seem to want them.

"Do you know what time it is?" Jacob asked.

"I'm not sure. I'm not seeing the stars as much, so maybe the sun will be up soon," Lizzy replied.

"Yeah, it's almost morning. Can't you hear the birds?" A voice to the cot next to them asked.

After a few quiet seconds, they could all hear cheerful whistling, quietly breaking the silence.

"Oh yeah, I hear them," Lizzy replied.

"Keep it down, will ya?" Another voice whispered loudly from a couple cots down. "You're going to wake the others, and then Jasper will come, and we'll all get into trouble."

"Calm down, Albert. It's almost time to get up anyways," said the other voice.

At this time, most of the children were shifting in their beds. Some were yawning, others rubbing their eyes or stirring about, disturbing their cot partner. A dark blue glow lit the inside of the room, changing to orange and then white, lighting up the entire orphanage inside and out. The birds retired their excited chirps when the sun fully showed itself.

The door to the room flew open with a kick, and an elderly yet spry man directly followed with an angrily driven stride. Whoever was still sleeping was now suddenly awakened by an unwelcome siren of a voice.

“Get up, get dressed, and make your beds,” Jasper repeated his stern order over and over, shaking any child near him not moving to his desired pace. “Food is prepared downstairs and is getting cold.”

The children lazily wrestled their clothes until they slipped each limb inside, and their bodies were properly covered. Each pair of children assisted the other in covering their beds, pulling the corners tightly, and erasing any wrinkles that once were. In a disorganized, sluggish formation, they all poured out of the bedroom, down the stairs, and propped up on their own chair that surrounded a long supper table.

An odor filled the room, which twitched some of the children’s noses in disgust. Bellies rumbled in response, not out of desire but from starvation. If they decided not to eat, they wouldn’t have another chance until dusk. Wooden bowls were placed in front of each one and were filled by a ladle that transferred a tan, chunky soup of some kind. The children tried their best not to smell it as they also tried to swallow the best they could. The real challenge was to keep it down.

After the unpleasant invitation to the new day, the children soon got out of their chairs to start their chores. Each was assigned a task. Brushes, sponges, and rags were handed out as they all separated accordingly. Sounds of scrubbing started to fill the orphanage’s halls in a unique harmony.

After the sun shifted in the sky, the shadows hid from it in and outside of the orphanage from one side to the other. At last, the children had time to go out to the courtyard and play. All of the children ran out and filled their lungs with fresh air to reward themselves. They

assembled to start playing whatever their big imagination sparked. Collectively joining in, they escaped the cruel reality they all shared. In no time, they all entered a world of make-believe, forgetting where they were and leaving their troubles behind.

