

## Chapter One:

The quietness of the evening wrapped itself around the world as the sun slowly dipped beyond the horizon. A soft orange glow lingered in the sky, stretching its last light across the dusty road. Along that road walked a boy — alone, unhurried, and lost in thought.

He was not running.

He was not rushing.

Yet something within him urged him forward.

Each step he took felt heavy, as though the distance ahead was longer than it appeared. It was not late, not yet, but the evening carried the stillness of a day coming to an end. Perhaps he had an errand to complete. Or perhaps he was chasing something he did not fully understand.

He passed by a few vehicles rolling lazily toward their destinations. The passengers inside looked tired, their faces worn from the day's struggles, each of them eager to reach home. The boy watched them quietly, wondering if any of them felt the same restlessness he did.

"I never thought things would turn out this way," he thought.

"I never imagined I would be walking toward someone I barely know."

Yet he continued.

He was walking toward a man whose name he knew well — a name his father had spoken many times. A name that carried weight, even though the face attached to it remained a mystery. He had never seen the man, only heard stories, half-finished sentences, and sudden silences whenever the name arose.

"If I find him, the boy thought, maybe he will understand me. Maybe he will tell me what my father never could."

But his thoughts were tangled. His mind drifted, divided between fear and curiosity, hope and doubt. And as often happens when one walks with a troubled mind, he failed to notice what lay ahead.

Suddenly — crash.

A basket fell.

Fruits scattered across the ground, rolling in different directions. The boy froze, shocked.

"I'm so sorry, madam!" he exclaimed, quickly bending down. "It was an accident. I didn't mean to."

The old woman whose basket he had knocked over studied him carefully. Her face was calm, lined with age and wisdom.

“It’s alright, my son,” she said gently. “But you walk like someone whose mind is not where his feet are.”

He paused, embarrassed.

“Is something troubling you?” she asked kindly.

“No... no, madam,” he replied quickly, though his voice betrayed him.

She gave a small nod. “Then be careful. A divided mind often leads a person into danger.”

Her words struck him more deeply than he expected.

“Yes, madam,” he said softly as he gathered her fruits and placed them back into the basket.

“Thank you.”

He continued his journey.

Time passed quietly. The sky darkened completely, and the road grew emptier with every step. Streetlights became fewer. Houses thinned out. The sounds of people faded into silence.

Now he was truly alone. Fear slowly crept into his heart. His imagination began to betray him, shaping shadows into frightening figures. Every sound made him turn. Every movement made his chest tighten.

On one side of the road stood an abandoned workshop — old, silent, and half-swallowed by darkness. Its walls were cracked, its windows broken, and weeds had claimed the ground around it.

The boy hesitated... then moved closer. No one was there. The night air had grown cold, and exhaustion finally claimed his body. Near the workshop, he found discarded polythene bags, torn and dusty. He gathered them and wrapped them around himself for warmth, curling slightly on the ground.

His legs ached. His eyes burned.

Sleep came slowly, but when it did, it came heavily.

The world was still asleep when the morning arrived.

The sky had only just begun to pale, and the cold air clung stubbornly to the earth. Most people remained wrapped in their blankets, lost in dreams, unaware of the quiet movements unfolding beyond their doors.

It was at this hour that two figures appeared near the abandoned workshop.

One was an old man, bent slightly by age but firm in his steps. The other was much younger — a boy nearing manhood — strong, alert, and cautious. They walked slowly, their voices low, as though afraid to disturb the silence.

“Well,” the old man muttered, scanning the place, “it seems today we shall have much to carry.”

“Yes,” the younger one replied, adjusting the sack on his shoulder. “More than usual.”

They stepped closer, unaware that someone else lay hidden only a few steps away.

Just then, the boy who had slept there stirred.

His body ached from the cold ground. Slowly, he stretched, shifting beneath the plastic that covered him. The faint sound of movement caught the attention of the young companion at once.

He froze. Then whispered urgently, "Master... I think this is a trap."  
Before the old man could respond, something unexpected happened.

From the shadows emerged a large, fat cat — its eyes glowing faintly in the dim light. It moved cautiously toward the boy, sniffing curiously. He woke fully at once.

His heart leapt into his throat.

Still half-asleep and confused, he saw shapes moving, heard whispers, and mistook fear for danger. Acting on instinct, he grabbed a stick lying nearby and sprang to his feet.

"Ahhh!" he shouted, swinging wildly.

The cry tore through the quiet morning.

The two men panicked.

To them, it seemed as though their worst fear had come true — that someone had been lying in wait, ready to capture them. Without a second thought, they turned and fled, abandoning everything they had come for. Their tools clattered to the ground as they ran, fear driving them faster than reason ever could.

The boy stood frozen, breathing heavily, his heart pounding.

Only then did he notice the cat. It stared at him for a moment before darting away into the darkness. Realization washed over him slowly.

It had all been a misunderstanding.

Exhaustion settled back into his limbs. He lowered the stick, his hands trembling slightly. The silence returned, deeper than before.

He sighed, shaking his head at himself.

Wrapping the plastic around his body once more, he lay back down against the cold ground. His eyes closed, heavy with fatigue, his mind still racing with thoughts of the journey ahead.

Sleep claimed him again — not peacefully, but with the uneasy knowledge that this day would not pass quietly.

Something awaited him.

And soon, he would no longer be able to run from it.