

*Life is a lost and a wondrous rage,  
I don't want to be afraid to be alone . . .*

# Chapter 1

It was stark, relentless.

John Hammond once again tried to shake the memory hammering inside his head. But, yes, there it was—strange men, without expression, ever so slowly lowering his little sister into the ground. Sweet, beautiful Sarah.

What had struck him as odd was that she didn't even move. Nothing, absolutely nothing. It was miserable hot that day, bugs storming the yard as if this were some sort of picnic. And there was that fly again; that one particular fly darting from preacher to casket, then buzzing away, oblivious to its passage.

Mother was lost in black, father pale as a winter wind. As flowers fell and dirt followed, John leaned close to his brother. "I'm living to a hundred," he whispered bravely to David. "I'm never gonna die, never."

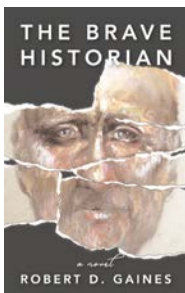
David said nothing, perhaps not even hearing. He too was lost.

That was the summer of 1910, nearly 90 years back. Peculiar, but beyond the stillness, John's most vivid memory was that one ugly fly, nasty brown with a streak of shimmering green, the kind you just want to squash. Yet, still to this day, its every detail remained permanently chiseled into his mind—a stupid fly.

And Sarah, at times John could barely remember what that little girl looked like, the sound of her voice, the feel of her fingers, the smell of her youth. She was just a vague and fleeting glance, like a startled dream seeking shelter from its awakened creator.

Such rotten luck, poor Sarah. She had only been three years old; now her big brother was nearing 100. Strange how she had fallen so quickly, and he had survived so long. At the burial, father had vowed they would all meet again. John never bought it.

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