PROLOGUE

The Mountain

THE ELK STOOD BROADSIDE about two hundred yards out when I pulled the rifle onto my shoulder.

Early November in Eastern Oregon. Cold enough that every breath felt sharp in my chest. My dad and I had been moving through dark timber since before light, orange hats and camouflage, stopping every few minutes to scan the trees.

I was young, competitive, and obsessed with hunting. The kind of kid who felt most alive outside.

When I looked through the scope, everything went quiet.

Crosshairs behind the front shoulder. Steady breath. Slow squeeze.

The shot cracked across the mountain.

The elk dropped.

And a few seconds later, so did I.

The adrenaline hit first. Then my body shut off completely.

The rifle slipped out of my hands and crashed against the rocks. My legs folded under me. My head hit the ground. I could hear my dad yelling my name somewhere above me, and I could not answer him.

I was awake.

I just couldn’t move.

That was the terrifying part.

I could hear the panic in his voice as he knelt beside me, trying to figure out what had happened. We were deep enough into the mountains that if something was seriously wrong, getting help would not be simple. He thought he might have to call Life Flight.

I kept trying to speak. Trying to lift an arm. Trying to sit up.

Nothing answered.

For a few minutes, I was trapped inside my own body.

Then, as fast as it started, it started to come back. A finger twitched. Then my shoulders. Then my legs.

I stood up, brushed myself off, and told my dad I was fine.

A few minutes later, while we were taking pictures with the elk, it happened again. Another collapse. Another complete loss of control. Awake the whole time. Unable to move.

We had no idea what was happening to me. We only knew something was wrong.

It would be a while before that morning had a name.

I did not know it on that ridge, but it changed the direction of my life.

Not all at once. That was the hard part. It changed slowly, over years, while I kept insisting it hadn’t.

I was an athlete, and I believed what athletes believe. Push harder. Stay tougher. Pain is temporary. Weakness is mental. So I treated this the same way. I figured if I stayed disciplined enough, my body would fall back in

line.

It didn’t.

Until that morning, I had assumed the thing most people assume without ever saying it out loud. That my body would keep working. That my plans would hold. That tomorrow would mostly look like today.

The mountain took that away from me earlier than most people lose it.

At the time, it felt like the worst thing that had ever happened to me.

It would take me years to understand it was the most important.

CHAPTER 1

Everything Can Disappear

THE ELK ON THE mountain was not the first time my body gave out on me.

The first time I remember it really happening, I was a freshman in high school. I was walking through the hallway between classes like every other kid. Backpack on, books in my hands. Nothing unusual.

Then, without warning, my body just gave out. I collapsed right there in the middle of the hallway. My books and papers scattered across the floor while hundreds of students stepped around me, and I lay there trying to understand what had just happened.

I was not hurt. I was not sick. My legs had simply stopped working. More than anything, I was embarrassed.

Nobody around me knew what was happening. The truth was, neither did I. At the time it was just one more strange thing my body kept doing that I

could not explain.

So after the mountain, I did what I had always done with anything hard. I tried to outwork it.

That was the only tool I trusted. Sports had taught me that effort solved almost everything. If you were tired, you pushed. If you were behind, you worked harder. If something hurt, you played through it.

So when my body started shutting down, I treated narcolepsy like an opponent. Stay disciplined enough, I figured, and eventually life would go back to normal.

Instead, life kept moving further from the version I had pictured for myself.

For a long time, none of it had a name.

That changed because of a conversation. After the elk hunt, I told one of my friends what had happened. His mom happened to be an eye doctor. As I described it to her, the collapsing, the exhaustion that never lifted, the strange moments when my muscles would simply quit, she looked at me and said something I have never forgotten.

“I think you might have narcolepsy with cataplexy.”

I had never even heard the words before.

That night we looked it up. Every symptom. Every story. Every description. It felt like someone had been quietly writing about my life. For the first time, I was not reading random medical information. I was reading me.

Most people hear narcolepsy and picture someone nodding off at a desk. They do not picture a teenager hitting the floor of a hallway because his body shut off. They do not picture a kid who would become afraid of his own

laughter. But that conversation started the process that finally led to specialists, and to a sleep study that would give my family an answer.

The night of the sleep study, they put me in a room that looked more like a science experiment than a bedroom. They taped wires all over my head and body to track my brain, my breathing, my heart, my sleep.

The technician finished hooking everything up and said, “Stay awake for just a minute. I’ll be right back.”

He walked out. By the time he came back, I was already asleep. Not just asleep. I had already dropped into REM. It had taken about ten seconds.

The next day was a test where every two hours they had me lie down for a nap. Most people struggle to fall asleep on command. I struggled to stay awake between the naps. The doctor explained the rule beforehand. If I entered REM in at least three of the five naps, that was diagnostic for narcolepsy.

I entered REM in all five. The doctor told us he had never seen a case quite like mine.

For years I had wondered if all of this was somehow in my head. That day proved it was not. The diagnosis did not fix anything. But it finally gave a name to the thing that had been stealing pieces of my life since I was a kid.

I felt two things at once. Relief, because I was not crazy, and there was finally a reason. And uncertainty, because I had no idea what that reason was going to mean for the rest of my life.

A diagnosis does not come with a cure. That was the next thing I had to learn.

Over the next few years, I tried different medications. Some helped for a

while. Some did not. What I slowly came to understand was that treatment manages narcolepsy. It does not fix it. There was no pill that handed me my old body back. There was only finding what made the days a little more livable, and accepting I would be managing this for the rest of my life.

So it became a routine. Medication every day, on a schedule, whether I felt like it or not. I learned to carry it with me everywhere, because being caught without it was not an option.

Even traveling turned into its own small ordeal. Some of my medication was a liquid, which meant nearly every time I went through an airport, I could count on security pulling my backpack aside. I got used to the wait, the questions, the explaining. One more thing most people never have to think about.

And underneath all of it was the sleep, or the lack of it. Missing it did more than make me tired. It reached into everything. My focus. My mood. My patience. How present I could be in my own life. People hear narcolepsy and think it means being sleepy. It is so much bigger than that.

Narcolepsy was never one dramatic moment. The collapse on the mountain was dramatic. The diagnosis was a milestone. But the real weight of it was quieter than that. It was every single day. The medication. The planning. The constant managing of a body that would not just cooperate.

Somewhere in there, the goal quietly changed. I stopped measuring things by whether the narcolepsy would ever go away. I started measuring them by one question instead. Whether I was going to let it decide my life.

This is the opening of Income Is Temporary by Brady White. Continue reading on Amazon.