

BOOK II

THE PAGE
TURNERS

ECONOMY OF FEAR

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PROLOGUE

THE SECOND BOOK

The writer gazed into the night sky—it seemed that every single star in the entire galaxy had gathered in the heavens up above his home.

A laptop sat open in the darkness on the desk behind him. Next to the computer stood a glass of wine and a stack of notes, ordered in a tidy pile. Character lists, tone poems, a plot skeleton, everything was ready to go—yet he was not writing. Instead, he stared out the window at the majesty of a million distant and unknowable stars, spilled across the endless tapestry of the living universe.

He was procrastinating—had been for years.

The first book had taken half a decade of craftsmanship, and thirty years of living, to produce. An entire lifetime of joy, pain, and imagination had been poured out onto the page. It was all there, every last part of him. Nothing had been held back. The paper was his skin, the ink his blood.

And now they wanted him to do it all over again.

Put the genie back in the bottle. Rub, rinse, and repeat.

As if it were that easy.

The first book had been a success—if, by “success”, one meant a modest seller in a genre with a small and passionate fan base—but it had not been the mainstream breakout hit his publisher had so dearly wanted. All the same, they had been pushing for a sequel for a long time now.

He’d written the first book while balancing a career and a young family. He’d scrawled down scenes over lunch breaks at work, and written chapters during midnight feedings, pausing briefly in the drafting for diaper changes and bottle warm-ups. There had been little free time in those days, and even less sleep, but somehow the book had been written and—hallelujah!—published.

Now the job was gone, the wife and kids gone, everything gone...

He had nothing but time, and yet the second book

remained unwritten.

He turned from the window, switched on the desk lamp, and lifted the glass of wine. He held it to the light and examined its flushed tint. Who was he kidding? He left the room, poured the wine down the bathroom sink, and then went downstairs to get a *real* drink. The computer would have to wait. Novels aren't written on best intentions and dry merlot—not this one, anyway. This particular witch's brew called for heartache and hard liquor. Luckily, those two so often came hand in hand.

Despite a purposeful descent, he soon found himself wandering through the emptiness downstairs. The rooms felt hollow and cavernous. Depressions lingered faintly in the carpet where the items his wife had taken with her had once sat: a television and its stand, a loveseat, a glass coffee table.

She'd been gone for two years—had it been two years already... yes, two *long* years—but still he kept the whiskey hidden at the back of the cupboard, behind the olive oil and the apple-cider vinegar. He pulled out the bottle and poured himself a heavy glass.

Sipping, he left the kitchen and entered the living-room.

Sipping? No, he *drank* the damn stuff, the way whiskey was meant to go down. And what did it matter, anyway, how he drank his drink? The family was gone; no one was watching.

Only someone *was* watching.

In the writer's living-room, a man stood quietly in the shadows, waiting for him.

The writer saw him and nearly dropped his drink. Even in the darkness, he knew the man instantly, the way a father knows his son. It took a moment for him to steady the tremor in his hand. "What are you doing here?"

The man stepped from the shadows. "You tell me."

The writer said nothing.

"Drink your drink," said the man.

The writer emptied the glass and said, "You're here... because I'm beginning to write the second book."

The man in the shadows moved towards him. "Are you, now?"

Upstairs, the laptop's screen was still blank.

"Nothing is written yet, but I intend to begin shortly."

"Do you think it wise?"

"The publisher wants a sequel."

"There was never meant to be a sequel. You know

that.”

“Yes, I know that.”

The man moved closer, crossing the living-room with even steps. “The story is magnificent. It is beyond perfection. A sequel would ruin everything. It would be profane, blasphemous, a desecration of the holy.”

“The fans... they want more,” stammered the writer.

The space between them shrank to nothing.

“You are getting greedy. You created something magical. To go back to that well would only pollute its waters.”

“What am I to do?” asked the writer, becoming afraid.

“You still have something within you to give,” said the man, “but it is not a novel.”

“What is it? What is it I still have to give?”

The knife went in quick.

The glass fell to the floor.

“Blood.” The word dripped from the man’s lips.

He pulled the knife out of the writer’s gut, and then plunged it back in, up to the hilt. The blood flowed warm and thick.

A short time later, the writer was dead, and the man was pleased. He went upstairs, switched off the computer, and made a neat fire of the tidy stack of notes.

There would be no sequel to *Paradise Fields*.

Enjoy this sneak preview? Pre-order *The Page Turners: Economy of Fear* now:

<http://www.kevintjohns.com/thepageturners2>