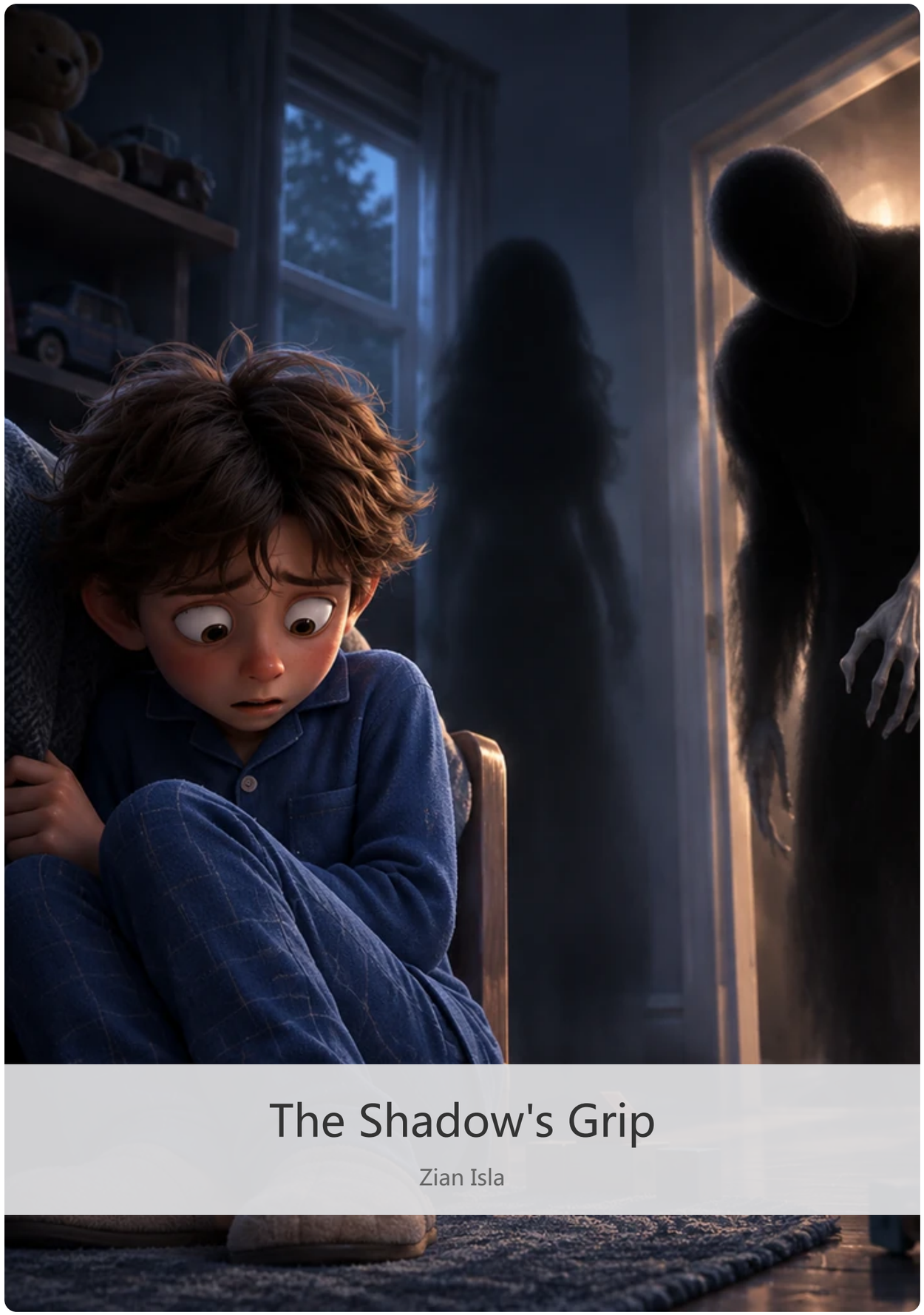


The Shadow's Grip

Zian Isla



Alex sat on the edge of his bed, the moonlight casting long, distorted shadows across the wooden floor. The house was unnaturally quiet, save for the distant hum of the wind against the windowpane.



A soft tap came from the other side of his bedroom door, breaking the heavy silence. Mia’s voice drifted through the wood, sounding strangely hollow and distant as she called out his name.



Alex looked toward the door, his heart fluttering with a sudden, inexplicable sense of dread. He answered her with a hesitant response, his voice barely more than a whisper in the cold air.



Mia didn't open the door, her silhouette remaining a dark blur through the frosted glass panel. She told him she needed him to answer just one question, her tone becoming increasingly urgent and sharp.



Alex gripped the edge of his blanket, wondering why his sister was acting so strangely in the middle of the night. He asked her what she wanted to know, his eyes darting toward the dark corners of the room.



Mia’s voice dropped to a terrifyingly calm level as she asked the question that made his blood run cold. She asked him who was holding his hand if she was still standing outside in the hallway.



Alex froze, the air in the room suddenly feeling thick and suffocating. He slowly turned his gaze down toward his own hand, which was resting on the mattress beside him in the dim light.



A pale, elongated hand with spindly fingers was tightly interlaced with his own, its grip firm and icy. Alex became completely silent, his breath hitching in his throat as the terrifying reality of the situation set in.



A dark, formless figure rose from the shadows behind his headboard, leaning close to his ear. An unknown, raspy voice whispered that he was a good boy for finally listening to the silence.



The bedroom door finally creaked open to reveal an empty hallway, but Alex was no longer alone in the dark. The shadows seemed to swallow the light entirely, leaving behind only the chilling echo of a secret kept too long.