



MIMIC

American Horror

ANGEL BERRY

MIMIC: American Horror

By Angel Berry

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“Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot...” – Luke 22:3

Topeka, Kansas 1971

DAY 1

“He’s home, mom! He’s home!”

As Cole shot out of the house to meet his father, Lilly stayed behind and watched through the window as her husband exited the military vehicle and limped up the walk while leaning heavily on crutches and she sighed with relief. Mike’s three tours in Vietnam had left her nerves raw, but now that he was finally home, she would spend no more restless nights robbed of sleep because she could only stare up at the ceiling clutching wet tissues while praying for her husband’s safe return. The fact that he had been injured caused her no stress. She would have willingly sacrificed both of his legs to have him alive and home for good.

She quickly re-checked her reflection in the mirror as the noise of Cole’s endless chatter met her ears. She was self-conscious about her hair. Instead of the long, strawberry-blonde curls that Mike would remember, her hair was now worn in a boy cut that Cole had assured her didn’t take away from the prettiness of her face. She had lost a little weight, but the indigo dress she wore complimented the blue of her eyes and she hoped that Mike wouldn’t be able to take his eyes off of her.

She turned as Cole stumbled up the stairs and into the house with Mike’s bag, jabbering non-stop, and tears sprang to her eyes as Mike hobbled in, apparently in pain but determined not to show it. In spite of his obvious discomfort, she threw herself at him, wrapping her arms around his waist and burying her head against his chest.

“There she is,” he whispered into her hair.

They stood that way in the middle of the room holding one another for some time without speaking.

DAY 2

“So your dad’s home, right?” Theo asked, pedaling backwards as their bikes rolled down Cone Rd.

“Yep.”

He had wanted to stay home from school to be with his parents but his mother had insisted he go, whispering that his father was still very tired and needed his rest. His dad had repeated the same thing to him the night before. *The first year of high school is important. I’ll see you when you get home, bud.*

“Well, you glad or what?”

“Of course I’m glad. I’m just worried about him is all. He’s different.”

“He was in a war, dingus,” Theo snorted and shook his head but his tone became somber.

“Did he really lose his leg? Did you see it?”

Cole nodded but didn't speak. He hadn't actually seen "the leg", as his mother called it, but he knew it was gone. His dad now wore one pants leg folded and pinned out of the way.

"You wanna talk about it?"

"Nah," Cole replied, shaking his head.

He planned to do like his mom said and give his dad some time to "re-adjust". If what was needed was rest, then he would give him rest.

"You gotta get home?"

Theo shook his head. "Nope. My mom isn't home til late."

"You wanna come by for dinner?"

Theo shook his head. "I would but I told Bryan I'd meet him down in Hunters Woods."

"Why didn't you ask me?"

"We're just gonna mess around. Besides, you don't even like Bryan."

"Because he's an idiot."

Theo's eyebrows rose with surprise. "You don't gotta get home to your dad?"

"I'm good as long as I make it home by six. I've got a few hours yet."

Cole stood off to the side and used a twig to harass a caterpillar as it slowly pushed its furry body up the trunk of a tree.

Bryan pointed and his voice trembled as he spoke. "So I was walking right down there when I saw it."

"Saw what?" Cole asked, wondering what had Bryan so spooked.

He seemed confused and his usually arrogant demeanor had been replaced by quiet uncertainty. "I don't know. It was hiding behind that tree watching me. At first I thought it was an eagle – you know, the bald ones, but it didn't have any feathers. I think it was following me. When it heard you calling, it took off toward the caves..." his voice trailed off and he timidly looked back and forth between them. "You believe me, don't you?"

Cole smirked at him but Theo squinted his eyes and peered down the hill.

"What'd you say it looked like?" he asked over his shoulder.

Bryan knelt beside him and they both stared out into the trees.

"It was small but not really – about the size of a kid. It wasn't naked but more like...bald and shiny. Its eyes were huge. It moved fast too."

"Hmm. Maybe it's injured," Theo mused, rubbing a thoughtful hand over his chin and Cole stared at him, shaking his head. *A few whiskers show up and the guy thinks he's got a beard.*

"Not with how fast it moved," Bryan huffed and stood, stuffing his hands into his pockets and nervously squaring his shoulders.

“Let’s go down and see if we can find it.”

Theo started down the hill but Cole stood watching Bryan who seemed paralyzed, his feet glued to the earth beneath him.

“You coming?”

At first, Bryan didn’t respond and continued to stare down the hill. “Come on, guys. This is stupid,” he complained, but the trembling of his voice confirmed that he was afraid and Cole felt a slight stab of uneasiness.

Theo kept moving as if he hadn’t heard him, so Cole followed, and after several seconds he heard Bryan’s reluctant footsteps fall in behind them.

As they cleared the hill and moved along the trail and deeper into the woods, a whippoorwill began to shriek and Cole paused mid-step wondering why the bird’s calling made him feel so ill at ease. Theo kept moving ahead of them, his eyes searching the brush as Bryan pointed out the cave but Cole paid them no mind. His eyes were intent on the trees around them. He didn’t quite know what was wrong – just an odd feeling in his gut that he couldn’t shake coupled with the sensation of the blood in his veins turning ice cold. *Feels like something’s watching us* .

The trees surrounding them were huge – the same trees that he’d played around when his father would take him camping as a boy. Green moss almost entirely covered the strong trunks of many of the trees and he could smell it in the damp air. Again, he thought of how eerily quiet the forest was save for the urgent whispering of the two boys ahead of him, and he tried to shake off his unease.

“I’m not going in there,” Bryan said, shaking his head.

“Come on. Don’t be a wuss,” Theo chided, walking over to the mouth of the cave to look inside.

“We can’t even see inside. It’s dark.”

“Let’s just go so far then we’ll turn back.”

Bryan, who was usually always game for mischief, shuffled his feet and stuttered as he tried to come up with an excuse without losing face and Theo rolled his eyes and turned to Cole with a questioning, raised brow.

But they didn’t have to step into the caves. The sound of Bryan’s sharp inhalation of breath was drowned out by the shrill shriek of a whippoorwill and Cole stumbled back a step and tripped over a rock, colliding to the ground with a grunt, barely noticing because his eyes were fixed on a spot within the trees.

“What the hell is that?” Theo exclaimed, taking a surprised step forward.

Cole didn’t know what it was, but he had never seen anything like it. The whippoorwill screamed alone, hollering as if its feathers were being boiled from its body and whatever it was watched them intently with dense, black eyes.

“I told you,” Bryan said in a terrified whisper.

“Hey,” Theo called out into the woods.

Its head moved slightly and Cole gasped as it bit down on the bark of the tree in front of it, eyes void as it watched them.

“That is not a bird.”

“It’s a man,” Bryan said and took a step backwards. “There’s something wrong with him. We should go.”

Theo bent and picked a rock up from the ground, aiming before he threw it, and as it sailed through the air the hunched form moved like a streak of lightning, tearing through the trees to its right until it appeared again, a little closer, and Cole’s mouth fell open, startled into speechlessness.

Bryan and Theo ran and Cole followed, at times turning to look over his shoulder to see the disfigured man running along the trees, hunting them with desperate eyes and seeming to get closer with every step that they took. As they made it up the hill it overtook them and they scattered, Bryan breaking away as it backed Theo and Cole into the trees.

“Calm down, man.” Theo held out shaky hands, pleading for the man to back away. “Calm down.”

He drooled – long slivers of shining saliva trailing to the ground from beneath jagged brown teeth. The skin of his hairless body seemed to be shedding and folds of it hung around his face and abdomen – even his legs, which were covered in feces and bent backwards at the knee, deformed where scaly patches of skin fell from them. His eyes were black pools surrounded by reddish-yellow rings and though he growled and snapped angry teeth at them, he was sobbing.

“Lo siento. Lo siento,” he pleaded, then gut wrenching sobs followed by more growling and barking. *“Desole.”*

“Man, he stinks. He’s probably got rabies,” Theo whispered.

The whippoorwill ceased screaming as the man sobbed, begging with his hands clasped in front of him. “Nooooo,” he hollered, again breaking the still of the forest and he fell over viciously scratching at his face until it bled.

Cole felt sorry for him and watched horrified as the tormented man squirmed on the ground.

“Hey, man,” Cole started, inching toward him and speaking in a shaky tone.

“Don’t touch it,” Theo whispered harshly.

But when Cole knelt and his hands fell upon him, the vicious snarling began anew and eyes with the blackest depth fixed on his own. *“Pardon.”*

Mike limped out of the house and onto the porch again and scanned the semi-dark street for Cole.

“He should’ve been home by now,” he said when he heard the screen door close behind him and Lilly stepped out onto the porch.

She exhaled an irritated breath, wanting to strangle Cole. Mike had been running back and forth outside for at least an hour now and she was worried that he was paranoid – and urgently so. Though she was surprised that Cole was late, she wasn't worried about him. She knew that he would pop up eventually as he usually did, but Mike was overly stressed and she wanted him to relax.

“He'll be here, Mike. Come back inside.”

Mike shook his head as he hobbled back into the house holding on to the wall because he refused to use his crutches. When he made it to the living room, he clumsily collapsed onto the couch and Lilly rushed to right him and he frowned at her.

“I can do this, Lilly.”

“Mike,” Lilly started, bending at the waist until they were eye level, “you're my husband, and if I want to help you then that's how it's gonna go, so cut it out.”

She stared down the brown-haired giant that was her husband until the grimace left his face and he smiled, his green eyes crinkling at the corners, and Lilly placed an affectionate kiss on the tip of his nose then helped him until he was lying comfortably on the couch.

She heard the bikes before she saw her son and she smiled knowingly down at Mike while fluffing his pillow. “See? I told you, love.”

And she stood as Cole entered the house, turning with a stern frown that was instantly replaced by worry as her son stumbled in leaning heavily on Theo.

“What happened?”

Theo lowered Cole onto an armchair then turned to Lilly.

“Hi, Mrs. Erickson,” he turned to Mike, “Mr. Erickson.”

“What happened, Theo?” Lilly asked and checked Cole over.

“We got attacked in the woods.”

Mike pulled himself to a sitting position. “Attacked by what?”

Theo shrugged. “A man – I think. I don't know. Cole tried to help him and he bit him. He's been throwing up the whole way home.”

“Cole, sweetie, are you okay?”

The first thing she noticed was the bite mark on his chin where the puncture marks were deep and blood still oozed from them, but what really worried her was that he seemed feverish and his eyes glazed over as his head lolled.

“I thought that maybe the guy had rabies.”

Cole vomited then, a spew of yellowish-green liquid that hit the carpeted floor and splattered onto Lilly and she grabbed her face, repelled by the stink of it then screamed when she noticed the fat, black worms squirming within.

They were quiet on the drive home from the hospital. He watched Lilly from the corner of his eye as she continually checked the rear view mirror to look at Cole who lay slumped in the backseat staring absently out the window. He hadn't spoken at all since they left the house, and even as the doctor had looked him over, Mike had watched his son lie flat on his back and stare at the ceiling with vacant eyes, whispering to himself.

"Are you okay, Cole?" Lilly asked, her voice heavily tinged with worry.

Mike turned in his seat to look at him. The foul smell of vomit filled the car and a sheen of sweat covered his face. His lips were dry and pressed into a thin white line above the adhesive tape covering his chin.

"Did you hear your mother, Cole?"

"We shouldn't have been there," he whispered.

DAY 3

"I say we go wake him up."

"Keep your voice down, Mike."

"All I'm saying is that it's almost noon already. He should've been up hours ago."

"I looked in on him earlier. He's okay..."

"What is it?"

Lilly bit at her thumbnail and stared into her coffee cup. "It stinks – his room, I mean. It's terrible."

Mike waved a dismissive hand. "He's sick, Lilly. You heard what the doctors said. He has some type of bacterial infection."

Lilly sat forward and stared at Mike. "This morning when I checked on him, his room was steaming hot and he hadn't even broken a sweat. I left the door open to let some air in, but he must've gotten up and closed it."

"I'll go up."

As Mike hobbled out of the kitchen, Lilly sat at the table and chewed her fingernails and listened to him grunt as he took the stairs. *Something wasn't right.*

Mike listened before lightly rapping at the door.

"Hey, bud. You up?"

Buzzing.

Hearing no response, he turned the knob and pushed the door open, wincing when heat surrounded him, pulling him into the room as he gasped for breath, suffocating in a wave of reeking, hot air and he grasped the wall to steady himself as dizziness shocked him and he clenched his eyes shut until the spell wore off.

When his nausea faded, he hopped into the room and over to Cole's bed and lowered himself to sit beside him. The blanket was pulled over his head and Mike placed a hand atop him, gently shaking him.

"Cole," he whispered softly.

He shook him a little harder, frowning as he grabbed the top of the blanket and pulled it away then coughed as a rotten stench met his nose, choking him. Mike held an arm across his face and looked Cole over with worried eyes. He was sleeping deeply but yellowish-green phlegm had dried on his face and escaped his parted lips, covering the pillow beneath him.

Mike shook him again, shouting his name then paused, frowning in confusion when his eyes rested on the thick sheet of flies that covered Cole's bedroom window, and he pulled Cole into his arms, screaming for Lilly when Cole's eyes fell open, darkened and covered with a milky white film.

"All I'm saying, Doctor, is that this seems like more than a common infection."

Mike stepped forward and laid a hand on Lilly's shoulder as her voice rose. The doctor, a portly, balding man in a starched white uniform, clenched a stethoscope tightly in one hand and glared at Lilly.

"There's no need to be rude, ma'am."

"My wife is under a lot of stress, Doc. What she's saying is that Cole should be in the hospital. He's very sick."

"Your son has an infection. I mean, it hasn't even been 24-hours since he was diagnosed, sir. You have to give the medication an opportunity to work its way into his system."

The doctor spoke to them as if they were children and Lilly wanted to throttle him. "That's the best you can do?"

"I'm sorry," he exhaled an exasperated breath. "Take him home and put him to bed. He'll be up and moving around in no time. Excuse me."

Mike's eyes flew open with a start and as his eyes adjusted to the darkened room he exhaled an agitated breath and flung the covers from his body, scowling at the putrid heat of the house. He paused as a runny wetness slid from his forehead and down the side of his face and his nose curled in disgust as he wiped away the stink with the back of one hand.

Another fat drop hit his cheek with a solid plop and he turned in the bed and gagged, flicking on the bedside lamp and for a moment his heart stopped, but Lilly screamed and it pounded in his chest again. Together they stared up at Cole who stood over his father, naked and covered in feces, barking and spitting rotten mucus at them, wailing...

"Release me!"

DAY 4

"I don't believe this. I can't – how..."

Lilly leapt from the couch and ran to the kitchen where she pulled a glass and a bottle of whiskey from the cupboard.

Mike didn't stop her as she gulped down half the glass, sobbing between swallows. "I don't know how much longer I can take this, Mike."

Exhausted, Mike leaned forward and rested his forehead on the table, glad that he could no longer hear Cole screaming. He had fled the stifling hot bedroom where the stench was overpowering and the paint melted from the walls – where his son ranted vile obscenities at his mother.

They had bound him. *Bound and gagged him.*

DAY 5

It was cold and the sky was cloudless and gray above the tidy, middle class neighborhood. No one was aware of what was happening inside of the small, neatly kept brick house that sat on the corner, and the neighbors were comfortable in their homes, safe and undisturbed from the Erickson's madness. Though the wind was frigidly cold for spring, it was a welcome relief from the pulsating heat of the house and Lilly welcomed the icy air.

You could leave – just for an hour.

To Lilly, everything seemed to be moving in slow motion and as she sat on the porch wringing her hands, she had to take a deep breath and remember that she couldn't leave Mike alone with...it.

As she entered the house, Lilly was again overwhelmed by the foul odor of Cole's seeping flesh. Her head swiveled to the right and she gritted her teeth. It was on the wall again, a shifting shadow clinging and beating at the beige plaster and she ignored it, instead standing still as she listened to the voice that echoed throughout the house from Cole's room, and she hatefully stared up at the second floor before hesitantly approaching the stairs. As she took the steps one at a time, Lilly breathed into her sleeve, her eyes closed with dread as a strange but now familiar voice filled the hall.

"Where's that bitch of a mother?"

She stepped into the room and stopped to stare at...it. She was no longer surprised at Cole, and neither was Mike apparently because he sat quietly in the corner with a small wooden bat and watched her expectantly.

Cole squatted on the bed and leaned against the wall on his haunches. His skin was slick from yellowish drops of pus that ran from his pores in rivulets, saturating the sheet beneath him. His eyes were still covered by a slimy film and the skin surrounding them had darkened as had his gums which were nearly black. Lilly noticed that he had succeeded in peeling his fingernails off and the blood from his hands now smeared the wall behind him, the sheets, and his naked body.

To Lilly, at first glance he looked tired and ill, but the insanity of him was unmistakable and ever present and she stared longingly at the rope that lay discarded on the floor – rope they

had used to bind him.

“Cole,” she called out, desperate to hear her son’s voice.

But he stared at her with cold eyes while a stream of urine squirted from him in a stream, soaking the mattress beneath him and a solid wave of nausea washed over Lilly as the odor in the room intensified.

“You cannot help him,” came that broken, mocking voice.

“What do you want?” Lilly whispered.

A guttural meowing issued from it. *“I come for the hearts of the mothers.”*

“Tell me your name.”

“What does it matter, what is my name?” it snapped.

“Please. Give me back my son,” Lilly pleaded.

“Please,” it mimicked her and the eyes rolled back then, the milkiness of them thick and white and it laughed.

Their eyes met and it smiled, front teeth now missing from it beating Cole’s head into the wall.

“Your son is dead...” it hissed.

“You lie!” Lilly whispered harshly, her face turned up in a snarl of hatred.

“Sometimes,” it replied, hands raised nonchalantly in the air.

It cautiously eyed Mike as it slid towards the window and Mike clenched the bat and prepared himself for an attack. With trepidation, Lilly watched the exchange then gagged with disgust as Cole lifted the curtain from the window and began eating dead flies from the sill.

DAY 6

In spite of the outside cold, the sun rose and showed brightly that morning. Lilly had stayed awake all night, and even now into the early evening unable to sleep, and had instead sat cross-legged on the floor near Cole’s bedroom with Mike’s stick, afraid to go inside the room. The house was sweltering hot in spite of the fact that she had opened all the windows and the buzzing had become louder as flies escaped the room and crawled along the floor and bedroom door in the dozens, and she swatted at them as they flew around her head, sometimes landing on her face or in her hair.

“Mom...”

Lilly had cried throughout the night as she listened to the voices coming from the other side of the door. Never once did she hear Cole – only the evil bickering and then the screaming when her son’s body was repeatedly slammed into the ceiling.

She had seen the shadows playing along her walls and the figure of a broken, bloody man standing in front of the fireplace in her living room hoarsely humming a melancholy tune. Being

outside was no longer an option for temporary escape. Something watched her from the trees and disturbed her attempts to hide – even if just for a few moments. Mike was outside now, transfixed by the menacing shadow of the figure that now watched their house from the trees the same as it had the night before.

“Lilly...”

She allowed her head to fall back and she closed tired eyes, sagging against the wall as she fell into an exhausted sleep.

Lilly awoke with a start – not because of the ranting wailing, which had surprisingly ceased – but because of the loud slamming of the front door and Mike’s harsh breathing as he tumbled to the floor. It was dark as Lilly felt her way to the stairs with anxious fingers, stumbling and then falling headlong to the floor below and she gasped for air in the humid house because she couldn’t breathe.

“Don’t open the door, you bitch of a mother!”

She ignored Mike where he sat against the wall panting, covered in sweat, staring at the door with an incredulous look on his face. Lilly stood, cradling an injured elbow and limped to the window, moving the curtain aside to peek out. The figure stood in front of the house now, swaying as if the howling wind would carry it away at any moment and it seemed to be staring directly at her, cloaked and hooded, and she inhaled a fearful breath.

“You don’t want to go to hell, do you, Lillian?”

Whatever had Cole was afraid – she could hear its fear as multiple voices spoke to her as one. She nervously pressed her face to the glass and watched the figure as it paced the lawn.

“Don’t let it in! Don’t let it in!”

Lilly turned to look over her shoulder, squinting in the darkness as floorboards creaked above her head and then the whining of Cole’s bedroom door being thrown open before the awful crashing of exploding glass reverberated through the house and Lilly screamed, ducking as she fell to the floor, whimpering as she scooted toward the safety of the wall.

“Noooo, no, no...”

A guttural pleading then and Lilly’s first instinct was to flee the house, but she stilled herself – attempted to calm her breathing as her heart pounded wildly in her chest.

“How old be your soul, Ki?”

And Lilly’s heart caught in her throat as the house shook and plates and glasses crashed to the kitchen floor. A loud rattling filled the house mingled with screaming and she leapt to her feet and ran to the window, shocked to find that the figure had disappeared. Mike and Lilly stared wide-eyed at one another, Lilly horrified and Mike hard-faced, and they listened to the sounds above them – the terrible swallowing as if something were being devoured. A terrible weeping started then – the sound of many children crying in unison.

The stairs creaked as someone came to stand on the landing – a shadow, moving like a dark midst down the stairs, fast, colliding with the door yanking at the knob like a fiend and Mike

grabbed Lilly and pulled her behind him.

“Release me!”

And though the door strained on its hinges, it would not budge and the shadow threw its weight against it, wailing aloud as it moved towards the window, forcing Mike to press into Lilly where she cowered behind him against the wall. Another feral, crouched shadow leapt upon the dark figure, hissing as it attached itself to the other’s back, and Lilly screamed then clapped a hand over her mouth when it turned to her, red glowing slits burning within a black skull. Together they tore at the walls as an unnatural rattle filled the house.

Mike pressed himself into Lilly protectively, pulling her to the floor as the steaming, burning outline of a man appeared on the wall before them illuminating the room and the stench of something long dead filled the air.

“There’s more! There’s more!”

And gleeful laughter then as dead children slid down the stairs two at a time, some cradled by sobbing women in black veils that rocked soulless, tiny bodies.

When the source of rattling appeared, it carried Cole in its arms as if he weighed as much as a baby and the entities parted as it descended, their voices suddenly silent. Mike tensed, his eyes resting on Cole, and when the cloaked figure stood before them Lilly was so afraid that she thought she would faint.

It viciously snapped its teeth at Mike but her husband did not flinch, even when it held Cole out to them and the rattling grew louder. Mike’s arms slowly lifted as he watched it with steady eyes filled with distrust and it grinned at him with teeth so numerous that they seemed to be growing from its ears, but when Mike took Cole from its arms the rattling quieted to a low rumble.

As it backed away, the Mimic bowed then turned, leaping upon the shadows that cowered on the wall, one heaped atop the other, and they screamed obscenities as they left the house – some fighting as they were drug away kicking and screaming, and Lilly stood open-mouthed as the women and children left the house single file

It was quiet then save for their heavy, panicked breathing and all at once the air seemed cooler – smelled fresher – and Lilly started to cry when Cole rose to his knees and Mike knelt beside him, pulling him into his arms.

“It’s alright, bud. It’s alright.”

DAY 7

Mike sat on the floor of Cole’s bedroom and watched his son sleep. Though he seemed normal, he and Lilly were still wary. Cole didn’t remember anything but darkness and wailing and pain, but they had him back now and for that they were thankful. He was tired, but whenever they roused him, he would awaken at once, smiling up at them with a light in his eyes that was sometimes shadowed by worry and fear.

Lilly wouldn't sleep and he could hear her moving around in the kitchen, humming softly to herself then at times crying. He did not go down to comfort her because he did not want to take his eyes off Cole.

It had given its word that Cole would be safe – that it wouldn't leave any behind if he granted it access. Mike shook his head to clear his brain.

They lie.

He had been unable to ignore the figure that watched his house from the trees so he had left the porch, leaning heavily on crutches, and approached it, calling out to it as it moved away, forcing Mike to follow it into the dark and the air around him suddenly became icy cold.

Mike had not believed his eyes when it again appeared – an angry, black bear with eyes like large fiery holes bounding toward him, throwing its weight into him and his head hit the ground with a solid thud. He fought the blackness that threatened to overtake him as it had held on to him, lifting his 230 pound body into the air as if he were nothing.

“Let us speak together, you and I.”

“What are you?” Mike had grunted as he struggled to free himself.

A harsh rattling began and the familiar rank odor of demonic breath moistened Mike's face. When the animal answered him, he stared at it with wide eyes because it now spoke to him in a woman's voice.

“...hell spit it out – did not want the Mimic because it fought to keep the souls that it collected for itself...they could not control the Mimic so they stole from it, stole souls that it had gathered for centuries – souls of the wise and mighty, spirits of those most twisted and evil, and the Mimic was enraged.

In its urgent need to replace what it had lost, it fooled its brethren, stealing their evil souls and trapping them within itself for all time...”

It dropped him then and Mike hit the ground with a painful thud then tried to scramble to his feet again only to have his leg give out from beneath him.

“The souls of one hundred possess your son...” it said, tone again harsh, a click-clacking – a rattling issuing from it. Its eyes burned into him, a glowing orange and blue flame in the night.

“Will you help me?” Mike uttered, feeling strangled at the acrid odor that filled the air around them.

“No. I will help me...”

The animal's head tilted and it yawned, exposing the sharp, yellow fangs of its mouth.

Mike pulled himself to a sitting position. “I don't think you can defeat it.”

“Do not try to tempt me, human. Either I will do a thing or I will not.”

Mike laughed then, suddenly tickled at the fact that he was talking to a bear and the Mimic stared at him for long moments without speaking until Mike regained control of himself, wiping

his mouth with the back of one hand.

“What amuses you, Michael?”

“You’re a devil.”

“But you have a hundred devils living in your only child. Does that amuse you?” it asked in a curious tone.

Mike sobered then, his mind going back to Cole. “Just a short time ago, I fought many demons.”

“No, Michael,” it hissed, its tone now hateful, *“those were men.”*

Mike did not flinch as it slowly circled him, but his heart pounded with fear.

“You are a man of war and you’ve murdered many men?”

“Many.”

“Many men, many men,” the Mimic sung through hoarse rattling. *“Tell me, how much do you love your son?”*

“Very much.”

“Very much,” it mimicked. *“But you have killed many sons. Why do you deserve your own?”*

“He is innocent.”

“He is not!” it screamed, now seething, barking at Mike as it struck him with a huge, calloused paw.

Mike felt the flesh of his forehead ripping open and the warm gush of wetness pouring down his face as his vision suddenly clouded with blood and it grabbed him, its teeth affixed to his belly, and when the chewing began Mike beat upon the huge, hairy head with his fists, afraid that he would be disemboweled though it did not notice, and as a tongue seared his flesh in liquid, white heat Mike screamed...

“As you say, either you will do a thing or you won’t.”

It dropped him, panting as foaming saliva and blood dripped from its teeth. *“I am not here to save your son. I will tear through him to claim what I have come for.”*

“And you won’t leave any behind?”

“Not even one...”

“It is not a difficult thing to crawl beneath a grown man’s skin.” – the Mimic