

M A R I E T A Y S E

THE
FIRST
CASE



COLT INVESTIGATIONS #1

The First Case

Colt Investigations

Marie Tayse

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St. Michael the Archangel,

defend us in battle.

Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil.

May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,

and do thou,

O Prince of the heavenly hosts,

by the power of God,

thrust into hell Satan,

and all the evil spirits,

who prowl about the world

seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

(Prayer of St. Michael)

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Chapter 1

Will and Donna Colt met in high school and married a year after graduation. Both had been born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska and decided it would be a good place to raise their own family.

Donna, the younger of two girls, had always dreamed of having a large household. Will, having shared a bedroom with an older brother and two younger ones most of his life, also wanted a big family but wanted to make sure they had plenty of room for all of them. He had always felt as though he and his brothers were smothering one another in the close corners of the small two bedroom wood frame house he grew up in. He wanted his own children to enjoy one another's company, yet have the space to do their own things. It was this desire that led them to a large, three-story simple white Neoclassical Revival style house on Brown Street.

Donna was amazed. It would have plenty of room for a big family with extra space to spare. She could already imagine sitting on the porch swing with a baby in her arms, as the birds sang and fluttered around the tall Serviceberry tree that stood near the porch. The house sat on a nice lot and shared part of its lawn with the one next door. From the outside view, they were very interested in purchasing. Will took down the telephone number from the sign out front, and they decided to go to a nearby diner and give the owner a call. As luck would have it, the man was able to meet with them that very afternoon.

Donna wasn't sure what she was expecting but the man getting out of the hunter green Ford pickup truck wasn't it. He was at least seventy years old with a slick, bald head that reflected the bright sunlight off of the top of it. Wearing a black suit and tie, he looked as though he had just run out in the middle of a wedding. The man parked his truck in the street and slowly began his walk to the front porch, stopping every few seconds to gaze up at the house before continuing on his way.

Finally in front of the concrete porch the man extended his hand and introduced himself, "Nice to meet you folks. I am Ronald Crowe. I bought this house a while back, hoping to live out the rest of my days here but it was not to be." He said, glancing toward the windows near the door. "Anyway, my boys did a lot of work on the place."

"Would you mind if we took a look around inside?" Will asked.

"No not at all. Here's the key. I'll just wait out here on the porch. If you need anything just shout." Ronald told them, holding the key out for Will to take. The couple found it odd that the owner wasn't going to accompany them inside, but gave it little thought.

The front door opened into a nice sized living room with wood paneling on the walls and light brown shag carpet on the floor. A beautiful fireplace with a richly carved mantle was along the wall directly opposite the large window by the door. An old oak staircase in the back of the room led upstairs. A door to the left led into a large kitchen with lots of cabinet space. It already had the refrigerator and stove in place, and would have space for a small table and chairs. The floor was covered with yellow and white linoleum. The counter tops matched the

floor, only with slightly less white used in the pattern. The walls in the kitchen also had wooden paneling.

At the far end of the kitchen another door led into the dining room. The walls and floor matched that of the kitchen, except that there were no windows. There were three closed doors at the far end of the dining room. Will opened the one on the right to reveal a short walkway leading to the steps going to the basement. The door in the middle led into the first floor bathroom, which housed a white porcelain claw-foot tub, free-standing sink, and toilet. The floor was covered in light brown, diamond-patterned linoleum. Donna opened the third door and saw that it led out to a small, concrete patio on the side of the house.

Retracing their steps, the couple went back to the living room and up the staircase to the second floor. The master bedroom was the first door on the right past the landing. With a double window facing the house next door and another smaller one overlooking the back yard, the room was very nicely lit. Donna could already envision where she would hang her various wall décor.

The rest of the second floor consisted of three additional bedrooms, each with wooden paneling and the same carpeting as the living room. The bathroom had a tub and shower stall connected to the wall. The sink sat atop a wooden cabinet, and the toilet was in a small space behind the door. The flooring matched that of the first floor bathroom. A closet in the hallway between the bathroom and master bedroom had six wooden shelves capable of holding additional bedding and linens. Will could see the excitement on his wife's face, as she looked into each of the rooms and closets.

"I can just imagine us raising children and grandchildren and growing old together in this house!" Donna exclaimed, taking her husband by the hand and leading the way down to explore the basement.

With its plain concrete floor and gray brick walls, the basement wasn't what they were expecting. It was divided into two separate rooms and a small bathroom in the back, but it still lacked a lot of work to be able to use it. Will would have to at least panel the walls and lay down carpeting. But he was up to the challenge and smiled as he asked Donna if they should take it.

"Absolutely!" She declared, leaping into his arms with excitement. And so it was, the Colts bought the house at 426 Brown Street and set about moving in the very next day.

Chapter 2

William Oliver Colt Jr. was born November 14, 1961 to nineteen year old William Oliver Sr. and Donna Jean Colt. With his tiny patch of light brown hair and matching brown eyes, he looked just like his mother. His parents called him Billy. From the time he could crawl his parents knew he was going to be a strong-willed person. His mother, trying to keep him from breaking her figurines, frequently told him not to touch them but he paid her little mind. From a rambunctious toddler to a chubby ten year old, Billy enjoyed having his parents all to himself. That would soon change though because in June of 1971 Will and Donna welcomed a second son, Donald Dewayne Colt, into the family.

Donnie, as he would be known, seemed to be the daredevil of the two brothers. Even as a tiny infant in his crib, he never jumped or jolted at loud noises as other babies did. Billy, oblivious to his baby brother, would repeatedly bang a wooden spoon against a cast iron skillet in an attempt to frighten the sleeping baby. But Donnie didn't seem to notice. Out of concern, his parents even took him to the doctor to have his hearing checked but everything was fine.

Once he could walk, Donnie began to actively seek adventure. From descending the stairs to explore the basement, that even his mother found to be a bit creepy, to following his older brother and some neighborhood kids into an old abandoned house down the street, Donnie loved doing adventurous things that most children his age would have been terrified of.

When Donnie was two, Cyrus Nathaniel was born. He was the first of Will and Donna's boys to have bright blue eyes. Unlike Donnie, Cyrus was cautious of his surroundings. Even as a baby, he seemed to feel and exhibit the emotions of those around him as if they were his own. If Billy was angry about something that happened at school, Cyrus suddenly became angry as well, simply by being in the same room with him. When Donnie lost his favorite truck and sat on the porch crying about it, Cyrus too began to cry. By the time he was three years old, his parents knew they had a very unique little boy.

That same year his parents welcomed home their fourth son, Spencer Matthew, on August 23, 1977. Spencer was born with a head full of dark brown hair and brown eyes. As the baby of the family, his parents and older brothers doted on him. Billy, who was sixteen years old, was much closer to his youngest sibling than he had been to the other two. With Donnie being daring and Cyrus being wary, Spencer fit right between them. Billy was often very critical of the older two, while boasting about his baby brother's milestones.

Spencer was a compassionate child and made friends with the neighborhood kids easily, even those older than him. He loved his older brothers and always tried to play with them whenever possible. He seemed like the typical high-spirited little boy, until one night shortly after his third birthday.

Billy was home alone with his younger brothers, while their parents were out doing some Christmas shopping. Six year old Cyrus and nine year old Donnie were upstairs in their parent's bedroom eating popcorn and watching a movie. Nineteen year old Billy was downstairs in the living room sitting on one end of the couch watching television, while

Spencer was asleep on the opposite end. All of a sudden, the little boy sat up and began shouting that their parents had been in an accident. His older brother thought he was only having a nightmare and tried, without success, to calm him down. Shortly thereafter, Donna called from the hospital to say they had been involved in a minor accident but that they were fine. Later that night, Billy told their parents about Spencer's vision.

As the little boy grew, it became apparent that he was capable of knowing other things before they happened. He was the one who told his mother she was going to have another child. Then a few months later, he mentioned the baby would be a boy. Sure enough, when Spencer was seven years old Donna gave birth to her fifth and final son, Alexander Eric. They decided to call him Alex.

Billy was now twenty-three years old. He was five foot six and had short light brown hair that he always kept covered with an old blue trucker's cap. He had a full beard, which his mother hated and begged him regularly to shave it off. He had graduated high school and gotten a job at a factory in downtown Lincoln. He had a steady girlfriend and was even considering marriage, although he was reluctant to take such a tremendous step so young.

The house on Brown Street had turned out to be an excellent home so far for Will, Donna, and their five boys. Billy and Will remodeled the basement; turning it into two extra bedrooms and a small bathroom. It was almost like having an apartment downstairs, and for a short while the oldest Colt son called it his.

In other parts of the house, however, the family had begun to have strange sensations. While alone in the kitchen after everyone else had gone upstairs, Donna would often feel eyes upon her. She would turn, expecting to see one of the boys in the doorway but there was no one to be seen. Billy would regularly hear footsteps walking around above his head on the first floor when everyone was asleep on the second floor. Will would sometimes awaken at three in the morning to what he thought was someone knocking on the front door. He would get out of bed, put on his robe, and go downstairs to immediately have the knocking end as soon as he was in front of the door. He assumed it was some of the neighborhood kids playing jokes and returned to bed, only for the knocking to resume as soon as his head hit the pillow.

A remote controlled toy car of Spencer's would frequently turn on in the middle of the night and move about the bedroom he shared with baby Alex. Donna would hear the car's horn blowing and go turn it off, thinking it had been left on by mistake. Sometimes it would stay off, but other times it would turn on again once she was out of the room. After a few nights of the car continuing to move and make noises even after being turned off, she removed the batteries. The following night the car again turned itself on. The next morning, Donna took the car and put it in the trash can on the curb, sure that the toy was somehow malfunctioning and getting rid of it was the best option.

Some nights, even in the winter months, Cyrus would wake up in his bedroom at the end of

the hallway with sweat dripping from his dark brown hair. His pillow and sheet would be drenched with sweat as well. The entire room would feel muggy, as though it was the middle of a hot July day. With no heater in his room and the only source of heat on the second floor being from a wall unit in the middle of the hall, it was very strange to awaken in sweat.

Donnie, whose room was the last one on the left on the second floor, could every so often hear the sound of a woman's laughter while lying in bed late at night. At first he dismissed it as being his mother, but then he heard it one night while Donna was staying the night with her sister. Not frightened but curious, he crept down the hall and peeked into the rooms of his brothers and father before starting down the stairs. They were all asleep. He couldn't hear any sounds from downstairs so he assumed Billy was asleep as well. Standing in the middle of the dark living room in his pajamas with only the streetlight casting a pale glow on the room, Donnie thought he saw somebody standing near the TV. Thinking someone had broken into the house he reached over to the light switch by the front door and turned on the overhead light. A warm bright yellow glow flooded the room as he turned in all directions looking for someone. There was no one there. He checked both the front and side doors, turned off the light in the living room, and went back upstairs to bed. By morning, he had all but forgotten about what he'd thought he saw.

Baby Alex would on occasion look as if he was watching something near the ceiling. His mother thought perhaps a moth or fly or some other flying pest had come in when the door was open. But gradually he would also begin to cry when he caught sight of whatever was captivating him.

Will and Donna didn't have any explanations for what Alex or any of the rest of the family was experiencing, but the thought of it being something to do with the house never entered their minds. The Colts were a very religious family. Being of Catholic faith, they regularly attended Mass and openly prayed at home. Billy and Donnie had been reciting scripture since they learned how to read. When strange and unexplainable things would occur inside their home, the family would simply turn to their faith, wholeheartedly believing they were protected from anything that could harm them.

Over the next four years, Cyrus continued to experience the emotions of those around him as if they were his own. It made school difficult and making and keeping friends even more difficult. He wasn't outgoing like his brothers and spent most of his time reading. His choice of reading material also set him apart from others his age. Being different made him want to find out as much as he possibly could about his and Spencer's abilities. Checking out books about psychics, powers of the mind, and the occult from the local library turned heads in his direction and not in a good way. His classmates thought he was a freak. His teachers avoided him like the plague. And there was nowhere to escape, because a simple trip to the grocery store was enough for Cyrus to feel like the most ostracized kid in existence.

Even though he was still a child, he knew that his abilities were given to him in order for him to

use them to help others. He wasn't sure how but it was his biggest desire. A desire among others that he would wait years to tell to anyone. At thirteen years old, his classmates were attracted to girls and sat around talking about what the weekend would bring. To Cyrus, girls had never really appealed to him and his weekends were usually spent in his bedroom alone.

Spencer also enjoyed reading, but the subject matter was more realistic to most people. His favorite books were of a nonfiction historical genre. At nine years old, he was as outgoing as ever and seemed to never meet a stranger. He would carry on the same conversation with a man on the street as what he would with a kid sitting next to him on the school bus. He was a happy, go lucky child and was always up for a good laugh. He would play innocent pranks on his older brothers just so he and his friends could sit back and watch.

Once he and a friend stuffed a dead fish into the bottom of Donnie's sock drawer and forgot about it. A week later a rotting smell began to overtake the second floor. When Donnie discovered the fish, he was convinced Cyrus was responsible. Spencer denied having any knowledge of it for months afterwards.

Spencer had continued to have premonitions. Sometimes it felt more like a curse than a gift. Having the ability to know something was going to happen but being completely powerless to stop it took a toll on him, especially at night when he often suffered from insomnia. No one ever knew it though. He didn't want anyone to think any less of him; so every morning he would put on a smile and go to school even after sometimes not sleeping more than an hour or so.

Donnie, at sixteen, was taking auto mechanics classes in high school in hopes of opening his own shop one day. He played basketball, had a girlfriend, and by all outward appearances was a typical teenager. On the inside, however, he felt like he was destined for more. He was slightly jealous of his younger brothers Cyrus and Spencer, because of the amazing gifts they possessed.

At five feet nine inches, he was the tallest person in the house. His mother would regularly ask him to change out a lightbulb, reach something high on a shelf, or hang a picture on the wall. One day Donna asked him to rehang a wooden cross with praying hands on the wall in the living room by the kitchen door. Will had hung it up in the same location shortly after they had moved in. Up until the previous week the cross had remained in the same spot. Then suddenly one day while they were all gathered around reading scriptures and praying, as they done on a weekly basis, the cross fell onto the floor. No one was near it and there were no windows open that could have caused a breeze that made it fall. Donnie shrugged it off, put the cross back in its place, and returned to his spot on the couch. None of them thought anything else about it.

A few weeks later, the family returned home from church to find the cross on the floor. Donnie hung it back on the wall and went about his business. An hour later, he walked back into the living room to once again find the cross on the floor. Getting frustrated, he went into the kitchen and got a nail and hammer. After hammering an additional nail into the wall, he placed the cross back on the wall. Certain he had fixed the problem, Donnie returned the hammer to the china cabinet drawer in the kitchen and left to visit his girlfriend. Thirty minutes later when Will came home from work, the cross was once more on the floor. Thinking perhaps the

washing machine downstairs somehow was making the wall vibrate, causing the cross to continue to fall, Billy took the liberty of hanging the cross on the wall behind the couch. For the moment at least that seemed to fix the problem.

Three year old Alex, being the baby of the family, was spoiled rotten. To their parents, the boy could do no wrong. The older boys often got the blame for what he had done. He was hyper all the time, babbled on and on about nothing, and showed bravery like Donnie. While he got on his brother's nerves, it was obvious they loved him. So when he started waking up in the middle of the night saying black eyes was scaring him, his older brothers tried to figure out what was going on. While their parents dismissed it as childhood nightmares, Donnie was convinced there was more to it than that.

Spencer soon began to have terrifying visions of a black-eyed man killing the entire family. Cyrus started to act strangely as well, having seemingly random angry outbursts for no reason at all. Normally a very quiet reserved teenager, he would turn irate at the drop of a hat. Once after only a minor disagreement with Donnie over something at school, Cyrus struck a mirror in the dining room shattering it with his fist.

Besides the changes in the children, the house also suddenly began to smell of rotten eggs. No reasonable explanation as to where the odor was coming from or what was causing it could be determined. Donna cleaned out and scrubbed down every possible surface in attempt to get rid of the scent, to no avail. Spraying air fresheners throughout the house for several days, she was finally able to eliminate the overwhelming stench. But as soon as the rotten egg smell was gone, sounds of scratching in the walls commenced. Will called in an exterminator to check for mice, but no sign of any pests could be found.

As Will worked long hours as a manager at the largest bank downtown, the events at home began to take their toll on Donna. She never knew what might set Cyrus off in a fit of rage. Spencer would unexpectedly go to into a trance when he would have one of his visions; and the nightmares little Alex was enduring were becoming more and more intense. She began to pray over her children after they had gone to sleep at night. Still believing all the occurrences were normal, she felt a bit strange in reciting prayers of protection over the youngsters but she felt commanded by an unseen force to do so. Trusting God to be the voice inside her head, she did so every night for more than a month.

Twenty-seven year old Billy, living in his own apartment across town, decided after many conversations on the telephone with his mother that he would move back home to help out with his siblings. He also thought it best to end his relationship with his girlfriend; stating that he needed to focus on helping his family.

Chapter 3

Will had always been a loving, devoted father to his five sons. When one of them had a sporting event he would either go in to work early or stay late to ensure he would be there to cheer them on. Every evening when he came home from work he would speak to each of them about their day. He even took the time to call Billy after he had moved out, just to enquire how his day had gone.

He hardly ever raised his voice in anger neither at home or out on the street. He was well liked at the bank where he had been employed since the age of twenty-one. He had friends within the community from every walk of life, and was known for being one to give the clothes off his back in order to help another. He was a genuine virtuous soul. That all changed however one morning in April of 1988.

Will came downstairs for breakfast, as was his usual routine. Already dressed in a suit and tie, he looked no different than he did any other morning. Spencer, Donnie, and their mother were already in the dining room. Will, normally bright-eyed and cheerful in the mornings, stomped into the room and angrily demanded Spencer to get out of his way. Donnie and his mother, who were just about to sit down at the table to eat, looked at Will in surprise.

“What?” He barked, looking from one to the other.

“Are you feeling alright, hon?” Donna asked.

“I’d feel better if these boys would learn to have some damn respect!” He snapped, taking a drink of the orange juice from the glass in front of him.

Spencer, confused by his father’s angry outburst, started walking toward the kitchen. “Oh no, you don’t! Boy, you sit your ass down and eat this breakfast your mother made!” Will shouted at him.

The boy jumped, startled by the harsh tone. Spencer turned to face the man at the head of the table and froze. His dad normally had bright, blue, welcoming eyes but at that moment his eyes were as pitch black as night. His breath caught in his throat and he squeezed his eyes shut, praying when he opened them his father would be back to normal. A minute passed and then two, Spencer fearfully opened his eyes and was horrified to see the black-eyed man from his visions sitting where his dad was supposed to be. He opened his mouth to scream but no sound came out. Looking at his mother and brother, he saw that he was the only one who could see the intruder. Closing his eyes tightly once more, he backed up against the wall. Seconds later when he looked again, his father was back at the head of the table with his blue eyes showing a look of unease as he watched Spencer try to calm his racing heartbeat.

“Spencer, are you alright?” Donna asked, rushing to his side.

Billy and Alex, who were just entering the room, saw the expression on their brother’s face and stopped cold. “What is it?” The older boy asked, alarmed.

Spencer looked down at little Alex’s frightened face. “Nothing. It was nothing,” he said at last.

Billy wasn't convinced. He knew his brother well enough to recognize when he was hiding something but he didn't press the issue.

Cyrus, who walked into the room shortly after the other two, immediately realized there was something not quite right within the room. He hadn't seen the look on Spencer's face or heard his dad's comments. He felt no abnormal emotions though, which was unusual considering the way everyone in the room seemed to be on edge. He'd always been able to pick up on any sort of intense feeling before, but at that moment he felt undeniably emotionless.

Will noticed him standing in the doorway and bellowed, "Boy, get in here and eat your breakfast! I don't know what's gotten into you all today!" Rising from the table, he scanned the room as if attempting to drive nails through them with the piercing look on his face. "I'm going to work," he announced moments before slamming the side door.

Donna was confused. Her husband had never left for work without kissing her goodbye in all the nearly thirty years they'd been married. She glanced up from her plate and realized that all five boys were eyeing her. "It's okay. I guess he's just tired this morning. Eat your breakfast and get ready for school and work." She told them, cleaning off the spot at the table where she and Will had been sitting.

The boys did as their mother requested and soon Donnie, Spencer, and Cyrus were on the bus headed for school. Billy left moments later going to work.

On the way to school, Spencer sat by himself. His friends tried to talk to him but he ignored them. His mind was still back at home. The black-eyed thing consumed his thoughts. He was concerned that although it appeared in the form of a man, Spencer was nearly certain that it wasn't a man at all. Whether in his visions or in the room a nearly overwhelming sense of evil radiated from the being. Yet he seemed to be the only one able to see or sense it.

Cyrus sat a few seats behind his younger brother. Now he felt the sadness of the girl in front of him while she talked to another girl about her boyfriend breaking up with her. He sensed the excitement of the little boy in the front seat who had just discovered he had cookies in his lunchbox. He experienced the anger of the nerd across the aisle who was being hit with paper wads from behind. And he felt Spencer's fear and apprehension about something back at the house. Thinking about his own bewilderment about not being able to feel anything at home to picking up on every emotion on the bus, Cyrus stared out the window.

Billy, with nearly a half hour's drive to work, tried to concentrate on the road ahead of him. Traffic going into downtown was always a nightmare in the mornings. Letting his thoughts drift back to the incident at breakfast, he again wondered what had frightened Spencer so. He was certain that the old man having a bad day and being a bit out of sorts wouldn't have been reason enough for the boy to have a sheer look of terror on his face. Continuing to ponder over it, he spoke out loud to himself as frustration set in, "I just don't know what to make of it!" He said loudly, hitting his hand against the steering wheel.

That evening when Will came home from work he was ostensibly back to his old self. He entered the front door with a smile on his face and kissed Donna on the cheek, as though the day had been any other. He picked Alex up and hugged him. He asked Billy how his day was

and then went upstairs to talk to the rest of his boys.

Cyrus was sitting at his desk doing his homework. He felt his father's happiness before he ever came into the room.

"I saw where your picture was in the paper this week about that speech you worked so hard on. I'm real proud of you, son." The man told him, beaming.

"Thanks," Cyrus responded, not looking up from his work.

Exiting the room, Will closed the door behind him and walked back down the hallway to the room his two youngest sons shared. Spencer was lying on his bed staring up at the ceiling. He had been reading but he'd put the book down when he heard his dad come in from work. He had heard him walking past to go to Cyrus' room moments before. Now his own bedroom door creaked open.

"Usually you meet me at the door, son. Are you sick or something?" Will asked, obviously alarmed.

Spencer looked at him closely. No black eyes. No evil being. Just his dad. "I'm fine. Just had a long day," he answered at last.

"Do you want to talk about it?" His father questioned, taking a seat on the end of Alex's bed.

Spencer was shocked by the transformation from breakfast. He wanted to know what had caused him to be so irritable that morning, and more than that he wanted to know why he had seen what he had. But he kept it all to himself. "No, I'm just tired. I didn't sleep much last night," he lied.

"Well, your mom is in the kitchen making her mouth-watering pot roast. After dinner, you should try to get to bed early." Will said while getting to his feet.

"Yeah," Spencer agreed softly, half expecting to see the man with the black eyes appear in his father's place.

Donnie didn't see his father until they had all sat down at the table to eat. He had just come home from basketball practice a few minutes earlier. He took his seat between Cyrus and Alex and waited for his mother to say grace. Glancing at his father before bowing his head, he noticed the man seemed very different from how he had that morning.

"So, Donnie, how is it going with what's her name?" Will asked as everyone picked up their forks and began to eat.

"Bridgett? It's going pretty good," he answered.

"Good. Glad to hear it! You know, honey, we've got ourselves some fine boys!" The man announced glancing around the table.

"Yes, we sure do." Donna agreed, passing a bowl of corn on the cob to Billy.

The brothers went to bed that night praying that the following morning wouldn't be a repeat of the previous one. Wanting nothing more than to forget about the being with black eyes,

Spencer said an extra prayer with hopes of not having any more visions of it. Luckily Alex didn't have any nightmares that night either. The family slept peacefully without any disturbances.

The next morning, Will woke up early to make pancakes for everyone while letting Donna sleep in. The boys were surprised to see their father in the kitchen making breakfast, but were glad that he didn't give the impression of repeating the prior events.

After he and his family had eaten, Will rose from the table and went into the kitchen to collect his briefcase for work. A moment later, he returned to the dining room to give Donna a kiss. "Have a good day, boys." He told them before leaving for work.

Chapter 4

For four months the Colt family returned to the peace and harmony they'd felt for years. Other than the occasional scratching and knocking sounds, nothing out of the ordinary occurred. Spencer didn't have any visions of the black-eyed man. Cyrus' abilities were back to normal. He still felt the emotions of others, but during that time the numb feeling didn't return. Alex wasn't plagued with nightmares. Will was the same loving, devoted father he'd always been. Billy, who was still living at home after having moved back when Donna was having trouble with his brothers, was contemplating moving out again.

It was now August 1988. Alex was in preschool. Donnie had ended his relationship with Bridgett and the girl that followed her, and was now dating the sheriff's daughter. Cyrus had come to a conclusion about himself but decided to keep it silent for the time being, for fear that his family turn against him. He and Donnie were a year older, and Spencer would be celebrating his eleventh birthday the last full week of the month.

It was only two weeks away and Donna had already begun to plan his party. She wanted to have a big celebration at the house with cake and ice cream and invite his friends from school, as well as some of the neighborhood kids. Will had already bought him a new bike, which he hid in the garage.

The day had started out as any other day during the last four months. The family had breakfast together, and then Billy and Will left for work. Donnie's girlfriend and her father stopped by to pick him for school. Cyrus, Spencer, and Alex rode the school bus. Donna busied herself with the household chores, not paying any attention to the clock until she heard the front door open. Glancing at the clock on the wall in the kitchen, she saw that it was only noon. Alarmed, she walked into the living room to see who was home. The door was slightly ajar but there was no one in the room. She hurried to the window and looked outside. Neither Billy's nor Will's truck was in the drive and there were no cars parked on the street in front of the house.

She shut the door and turned the latch to lock it, feeling certain she had locked it after the boys had gotten on the bus. With the door being locked there was no way someone could have opened it without a key. Fearful that an intruder was in the house, she rushed back to the kitchen to get something to protect herself with. One step through the doorway, Donna froze in panic. Every cabinet door and drawer in the room was wide open.

Now absolutely sure she wasn't alone in the house, she reached into the open drawer by the sink and took out a butcher knife. Taking a deep breath, she turned and started walking toward

the dining room. All of a sudden the knife was snatched from her grasp and tossed across the room by invisible hands. Turning in all directions, thinking there had to be another flesh and blood person in the room she suddenly felt a man's hands on her upper back. Before she had time to react, the hands shoved her face down onto the linoleum floor between the refrigerator and the dining room doorway. Donna began screaming as loud as she could while the pressure on her back continued to hold her down. It felt like more than hands at that point. It almost felt as though there was someone sitting on her. Feeling blood running from her nose, she began to pray. A moment later the pressure on her back eased and she got to her feet. Frantically racing back into the living room she unlocked the front door and ran screaming to the house next door.

Mable Rollins was a seventy-nine year old widow. Petite and thin with silver-flaked gray curly hair and a body that had seen its better days, she felt as old as the hills. But all her aches and pains didn't keep her from getting out of the house on a regular basis. Outgoing and caring, she was well-known and popular in the neighborhood.

She shared the large two-story red brick home with her youngest son, twenty-eight year old Hunter. The Rollins family had lived in the same house since the early 1940s.

Hunter Rollins and Billy Colt had been childhood friends. Donna and Will were friends of Mable and her late husband, Roger. The two families had regularly visited at one another's houses throughout the years and they often celebrated holidays together as well. The Colts considered their neighbors family. Donna even thought of Mable as her second mother. Roger had been like another father to Will, taking him under his wing when the young couple had first moved in next door. When Roger passed away in 1979, the Colt family felt they had lost one of their own. The two families had been there for one another in many ways through the years; and now Donna just hoped they wouldn't think she'd gone mad when she appeared screaming on their doorstep.

Mable was sitting in her rocking chair in the living room knitting a pair of baby booties for her great-grandson when Donna began pounding frantically on the door. "Good heavens, dear! What on earth is the matter?" The elderly lady asked, swinging the door open wide.

Donna, who was normally soft spoken and calm natured, had a look of total terror on her face.

Mable noticed a large purple bruise beginning to form on her chin and blood was trickling from her nose. The older woman rushed her friend into the room and over to the couch. Not knowing if Donna had been attacked or what had happened, Mable quickly locked the door before joining her on the couch. "What on earth happened? Who did this to you?" She asked, wiping the blood from her nose with a tissue.

Donna trembled as big tears rolled down her cheeks. For a moment she stumbled over her words, not sure what to say. She had felt a presence in the house, but visibly there had been no one there. She knew someone had pushed her. She had felt all five fingers on both hands pressed against her back, and then someone put their full body weight on her as she lay helplessly on the floor. Scared she was going to be sexually assaulted, she had tried to fight off her attacker unsuccessfully. Only after beginning to recite the Lord's Prayer, had the heaviness on her diminished. *There has to be an actual person in the house*, she thought to herself, trying to come to terms with what she had experienced. *The other possibility of what could have been responsible was crazy though, right? Or was it?*

"There's . . . There's someone in my house!" Donna blurted out at last. Despite having a bad hip, Mable dashed into the kitchen and called her son at work.

At only twenty-eight years old, Travis Hunter Rollins was very ambitious. Shortly after graduating high school he had started his own plumbing business, Gunk & Junk. The business had taken him all over Nebraska, as well as into parts of Kansas. Up until early 1987, his office had been in the garage next to the family home. A few weeks into the new year, however, he had purchased a small building a short distance away and turned it into Gunk & Junk's office.

At five feet six inches, Hunter was considered short by his siblings, who were all at least five foot eight. Friendly, kind, and gregarious, he had a large circle of friends. He was of Protestant faith and attended church regularly. Not really caring if he had a lady attached to his arm or not, Hunter wasn't a big flirt. Because of that, his sisters reasoned, was why he had yet to marry or have children.

Hunter considered himself somewhat attractive, although stocky and not as muscular as he would have liked, he still felt he had a lot to offer the right woman. He contributed his lack of dates to the opposite sex's inability to see past his physical features. While nearly bald on top

of his head with only a bit of dark brown hair remaining on the sides and a full beard, he looked much older than he actually was. Strangers were usually shocked to learn his true age.

Although he was lacking in the relationship department, Hunter was a very devoted son. He loved his mother and regularly took her out to eat, shopping, and to church. Regardless of being an adult, he was still a momma's boy, abandoning anything at the drop of a hat for her.

"Hello," Hunter said into the telephone after answering on the first ring. He was sitting at his desk in the office looking over some order forms for additional equipment he was considering ordering.

"Hunter, are you at the office?"

"Mom, what's wrong?" He asked hearing the anxiety in her voice.

"Donna is here and says someone is in her house! Her face is a mess! Someone has really done a number on her!" Mable answered quickly.

"Mom, stay in the house with the doors and windows locked and don't open the door for anybody! I'm on my way," he told her, dropping the forms on the floor as he hurried from the building, barely stopping to lock up.

Normally the drive home would have taken about fifteen minutes, this time though he pulled up to the curb between the two houses in just under ten minutes. Hunter leaped from the cab of his red and white extended cab Dodge Ram pickup, leaving the door open, and ran to the garage. Grabbing a hammer from atop a large metal tool chest, he then ran across the Colt's lawn and up to the front door. It was ajar as though someone had left in a hurry, which he reasoned could have been Donna or her attacker. Holding the hammer up ready to strike at any moment, he stepped inside and looking around the living room.

He knew the layout of the house. With the oldest Colt boys being closer to his own age he had spent more time playing with them than he had with his own siblings. The house had been like

a second home throughout his childhood.

Nothing was amiss anywhere in the house except for a few droplets of blood on the kitchen floor. Hunter looked the entire house over. He couldn't find any sign of a break in and nothing appeared to have been taken. Other than the blood dribble there was no sign that a struggle had taken place.

Exiting the house through the front he pulled the door up behind him, locking the bottom knob. Going back to his truck, he laid the hammer in the passenger seat and shut the door. Walking over to his own house, he saw his mother standing by the front window looking out at him.

"Did you see anyone?" She asked as soon as he was within earshot of the porch.

"There's nobody in the house and nothing looks to have taken. Are you sure she didn't just fall?"

"I don't think so," Mable said, moving aside so he could come in.

Hunter took one look at Donna's face and knew something had happened besides just her taking a tumble onto the kitchen floor. She actually had been assaulted by someone or she had fallen so rapidly that she'd had no time to try and catch herself. Taking a seat in the rocking chair across from where the traumatized woman sat, Hunter questioned her himself, "What happened? Did you fall?"

"Something pushed me!" She cried out, still trying to come to terms with it herself.

"I told you she said someone was in her house!" Mable blurted.

Hunter, unlike his mother, heard Donna clearly. "Something?" He asked to clarify.

When she hesitated, he changed the question. "What did you see?"

"I didn't see anything but there was something there. I'm not losing my mind. I know it's impossible. But there was someone in the kitchen with me." She answered, still in tears.

Hunter looked up at his mother and then back at Mrs. Colt. "I don't think your losing your

mind," he said at last.

"Can you give Billy a call, please?" Donna asked after a moment.

"Sure," he said, rising to go to the kitchen to make the call.

He dialed the number into one of the rotary telephones his mother insisted on keeping 'for emergencies'. Leaving a message saying that Billy was needed at home as soon as possible, he hung up the phone and returned to the living room.

Mable was sitting on the couch next to Donna, who had calmed down a bit but was still crying softly. Taking a seat back in the rocking chair across from them, Hunter propped his elbow up on the arm rest and scratched his beard. He didn't want to jump to conclusions, but he thought perhaps a ghost had pushed her or frightened her enough to cause her to trip and fall. After spending so much time at the Colt house through the years, it was impossible to not have been there for at least a couple of the strange occurrences.

Once when he was about twelve, he and Billy were playing in the basement when they heard footsteps running down the stairs. Donnie was only five months old, so they knew it wasn't him. Thinking it could have been another of their friends from the neighborhood, they hurried out to meet them but there was nobody there. Another time when he was a teenager, he was having dinner at the Colt house when the entire family heard a man's laughter. Will had gotten up from the table and went outside to see if he could find out where the sound was coming from, but it was only audible inside the house. When Billy pressed his dad for answers, the elder Colt insisted it was only something in the house that 'sounded like' laughter. While his friend accepted that answer, Hunter didn't. And he had been fairly certain since then that the house had a ghost, although he never voiced his thoughts on the subject to Billy.

He found it strange that the family had no problem accepting Cyrus and Spencer's abilities, but insisted there were no such things as ghosts. Hunter supposed that the Colt's beliefs kept them from seeing the proverbial writing on the wall, but their viewpoints didn't change his way of thinking. It was one thing to not believe in the supernatural when reading about it in a book or watching it on TV, but it was quite another to flatly deny its existence when it was happening right under your nose. Back then he'd simply let it go but after Donna claimed to have been attacked by something she couldn't see, Hunter was very eager to see how they were going to attempt to dismiss it as having a 'completely logical explanation'.

A little over half an hour after Hunter had left the message, Billy arrived home. He pulled his pickup truck in the drive, got out, and started walking toward the front door until he saw Hunter trying to get his attention from across the lawn. Turning toward his friend he shouted, "What's

going on?"

Hunter gave him a brief rundown of Donna's account and then his own findings when he'd went to investigate before leading him into the living room. As soon as Billy saw his mother's face, his face turned bright red. "Who did this to you?" He demanded, standing over her.

"Billy, I just want to go home. Can we just go home?" She asked tearfully.

"I want to know who did this to you!" He said, letting his voice rise louder than he meant to.

"I don't want to talk about it. Let's just go home," Donna told him, getting to her feet.

"We're not going anywhere until you tell me who the hell did this to you? Was it Dad?" He asked, thinking back to the morning four months prior.

"Your father left for work at the same time you did," she answered, regretting having asked Hunter to call him.

"Well, who did it then?" Billy shouted, getting frustrated.

"I don't know! There was no one there!" She said at last, bursting into tears again.

"What do you mean there was nobody there?" Billy asked as a look of confusion spread across his face.

Mable and her son, feeling awkward, stood nearby. Hunter was fighting the urge to voice his opinion about what was responsible. With Billy already looking as though he was about to blow a gasket, he decided it would be best if he kept his mouth shut.

"It doesn't matter. I'm fine. Let's go home." Donna said, and without waiting for a response she went out the door heading back to her own house.

Billy cleaned the blood off the kitchen floor while Donna went upstairs to clean herself up. She'd already decided to tell Will and the boys that she had accidentally walked into a door. She didn't want to lie to them, but she couldn't tell them what she thought had happened because she was still questioning it herself.

When her youngest three sons arrived home from school, Donna was busy in the kitchen preparing dinner. Billy was downstairs in his room, where he had been since moments after returning home. Spencer and Alex came through the door and immediately raced up the stairs to play Nintendo. Cyrus walked into the kitchen to tell his mother he needed to go to the library for a book he was required to read. He took one look at her face and stopped in mid-sentence.

“Mom, are you alright? What happened?” He asked, joining her at the counter where she was slicing an onion.

“I’m fine. What were you telling me you needed?” She asked, not looking up.

He was instantly gripped by the fear and confusion of his mother’s emotions. Taking ahold of her hand, he felt someone applying pressure to his back and then a sharp pain shot through his face. Releasing her hand, he stared at her. He’d been able to feel the emotions of others since birth, but it was the first time he had ever been able to see an event simply by touching someone.

“What is it, Cyrus?” Donna asked, interrupting his thoughts.

“What happened today?” He asked again, hoping she would be honest and tell him what he already knew.

“I wasn’t paying attention to what I was doing and walked into a door. It’s not a big deal. Oh, and I’ll take you to the library tomorrow after school.”

Cyrus shook his head in dismay. Why would she lie? He wondered on his way to his room. He didn’t have the answer to that any more than he was able to explain how he had been able to actually see what happened after it occurred. *Just another mystifying ability*, he supposed.

Chapter 5

It had been nine months since Alex had suffered from any nightmares. The same amount of time had elapsed since Spencer had experienced any visions of the black-eyed man. The scratching sounds, the cross that appeared to leap off the wall on its own accord, the footsteps, and other various occurrences in the house disappeared for three months. Donna eventually dismissed the incident in the kitchen as a hallucination.

The family celebrated Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Billy, having had a birthday in November, was now twenty-seven years old. Alex had turned four on December 12th. Donnie was scheduled to graduate high school in May, while Cyrus would celebrate his birthday in the same month. Spencer, at eleven years old, had just gotten his first kiss from a little girl who lived down the street. Billy had moved out around the first of December after getting his own apartment downtown.

It was January 1989. School was out due to the nearly two foot of snow that had fallen the night before. Donna had waited until late in the day to go to the grocery store, so the roads could be scraped and salted. Will had managed to make it into work with little difficulty, so she and the two younger boys loaded up in the blue and tan 1971 family Station Wagon and left going to the store. Donnie had walked to his girlfriend's house at an earlier time in the day, so Cyrus was home alone.

Upstairs in his room reading, he heard the front door shut behind his mom and brothers. He wasn't expecting them back for at least an hour. Settling in to enjoy the peace and quiet for a bit, he leaned back against the headboard of his bed and turned the page in the book in his lap.

There was wood burning in the fireplace in the living room and the wall heater was on both in the second floor hallway and in the dining room downstairs. Even with the heater on upstairs it still stayed cool in the bedrooms during the day and plain old cold at night. The family had to sleep under multiple blankets to stay warm during the winter months. With the house normally being quite cool during the day, it took Cyrus only a moment to notice the major sudden change in the temperature of his room. Whereas moments before he'd had goosebumps on his arms from the chill, sweat was now beginning to form on his forehead.

He immediately knew something was wrong. At first he thought there was a fire. Rushing out into the hall and then downstairs, he checked all the rooms. There was no fire, nor any other source of heat to have caused the rise in temperature in the house. Slipping on a pair of old

sneakers by the side door, he walked around to the back of the house to make sure there wasn't a blaze out there. Circling the house, he returned to the side door and went back inside. As soon as he got the door shut behind him he felt the numb feeling he had felt the morning of the drastic change in his dad. He also felt a very strong presence in the room. There was no one visibly present, but Cyrus knew there was someone or something there watching him.

"What do you want?" He asked loudly, standing in the middle of the dining room.

As if in response, he heard the front door open and slam shut on its own. Without bothering to take off his snow-covered sneakers, he ran into the living room. A moment later, the television came on by itself and began to rapidly switch between the channels. He could feel the same presence from the dining room now in the living room. He wasn't able to see it but the negativity emanating from the being was overpowering. The windows opened and shut by themselves several times, as the front door continued to open and close on its own.

"Leave us alone!" Cyrus shouted into nothingness, as the cross once more dropped from the wall. All at once a low menacing growl echoed through the room, followed by an intense guttural male voice, saying 'GET OUT!' Before he had time to react the Station Wagon turned into the drive.

Spencer and Alex began to play in the snow on the front lawn as Donna collected the bags of groceries from the back of the vehicle. Cyrus met her at the door. "Mom, you can't go in there right now," he said quickly.

It was at that moment that Spencer looked up at the window by the front door and saw the black-eyed man staring back at him. He opened his mouth to scream but no sound came out. Running up to the porch as fast as he could in the snow, he grabbed his mother by the arm. "Mom, we've got to go!" He blurted out, trying to catch his breath while pulling her back toward the car.

"He's right, Mom. It doesn't want us here." Alex, who had made his way to the porch, added.

Donna was taken aback. "Who doesn't want us here? This is our home."

"It's black eyes. He doesn't want us here, Mom." Spencer answered, looking straight through the doorway behind his older brother.

Cyrus saw him and turned around. Although he could still feel the presence, he didn't see anything. Donna peeked into the room as well. She suddenly felt a chill run up her spine, but considering they were standing on the porch in the middle of winter she thought nothing of it. "Boys, it's probably just your imaginations." She said after a moment. Brushing past Cyrus, she walked into the living room. All three boys walked in behind her. The excessive heat in the house was gone. The TV was now off. The windows were closed. The growling was gone. The whole house was dead silent. The only sight of anything occurring at all was the cross still lying on the floor next to the mantle. Cyrus' numb feeling was also gone.

"See? I told you." Donna said after a moment of scanning the room.

Cyrus and Spencer exchanged glances. Both boys now knew without a shadow of a doubt that whatever was in the house was extremely negative. But at fourteen and eleven years old, neither had any clue of what to do about it.

In the books that Cyrus had read in the past, he vividly remembered reading where they said ghosts can't hurt you. Not sure if their problem was a ghost or something more sinister, he began taking notes from the books and comparing them with the events in the house.

Spencer and Cyrus went to bed that night praying that the entity would leave on its own permanently and not come back. Those prayers, however, went unanswered.

Chapter 6

Four days went by without incident. Then on the morning of the fifth day the ringing of the telephone beside the bed in the master bedroom, awoke Will and Donna. He picked it up on the second ring. Donna glanced at the clock on the bedside table. It was three-thirty in the morning.

“Hello?” He said, still groggy from sleep.

“Is this Mr. Will Colt?” A female’s voice asked from the other end.

“Yes, it is.” He answered, yawning.

“Sir, I’m calling from Lincoln Regional Hospital. Skip Colt has your information down in his records as an emergency contact, and he was brought in unresponsive a little while ago. We need you to come down here in case . . . In case any decisions need to be made.”

Will sat straight up and looked at his wife wide-eyed. “What happened?” He asked into the phone.

“Police are investigating, but they believe it was self-inflicted.” The female voice answered.

“What was self-inflicted? Are you saying my brother tried to kill himself?”

At that, Donna sat up and put her hand to her mouth to stifle any sound. *Surely none of Will’s brothers would have done such a thing*, she thought. She reached out to touch her husband’s arm to console him, but stopped when she saw a large ball of bright white light shoot out from the closet and into the hall and then disappeared. It was dark in the bedroom and no lights from the street would have been able to reach up at that angle. Will glanced toward the hallway and then over at Donna, as though he had also seen it but he didn’t say anything. A minute later, he hung up the phone and got to his feet to get ready to go to the hospital.

Donna stood as well, turning on the lamp beside the bed. She wanted to mention the ball of light but she didn’t. “What happened?” She asked instead.

“Skip’s at Lincoln Regional in bad shape. He was brought in unresponsive. I’ve got to go. Can you give Dean and Carter a call and tell them to meet me there?” Will asked, slipping on jeans, a t-shirt, and a pair of boots before kissing her on the forehead.

“Yes, I’ll call. Be careful, honey.” She told him, turning toward the telephone to dial Will’s other brothers.

With Dean being three years older than Will and Carter being ten years younger, Skip was the baby. He had been only five when Donna and Will began dating. She, having never had brothers, thought of Skip as her own sibling. He was only six years older than Billy, and the two had been playmates as small children.

Skip, at thirty-four years old, was married and worked as an electrician. The couple had a six-month old daughter together. He and his wife had recently bought a house in Beatrice, Nebraska. When they had visited the Colt house on Christmas, they had been discussing having another baby. There had been absolutely nothing to indicate that Skip was suicidal, or even slightly depressed for that matter.

Will was beside himself during the drive to the hospital. *Surely there’s been a mistake*, he thought. “Skip would never do something like this,” he spoke aloud.

Parking in front of the ER entrance, he shut off the truck and hurried inside. At the nurse’s desk, he blurted out who he was and why he was there. A moment later, a doctor with graying hair and glasses ushered him to an empty waiting room. Motioning for Will to take a seat, the man sat across from him.

“I am Doctor Bernard Hancock and I regret that we are meeting under such circumstances.” The man said, extending his hand.

“Will Colt. Skip is my little brother. What happened? Is he alright?”

“Mr. Colt, your brother was brought in earlier tonight with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the

head. We rushed him into surgery and were able to remove the bullet, but the swelling was extreme and with the huge amount of blood loss there was little else we could do. We really did everything we could, Mr. Colt, to save your brother. I'm sorry . . ."

"But the lady on the phone . . . I thought he was still . . . How do you know it was self-inflicted?" Will babbled as he stood and wiped the tears that were beginning to fall.

"The police are still investigating, but there were at least two witnesses so I'm told."

"Where did it happen at?" Will asked, pacing and shaking his head in disbelief.

"You'll have to ask the deputy out front that. All I know is what we did to try and save him. There is a phone there on the wall, if you need to call anyone else." Dr. Hancock said before leaving him alone with his thoughts.

The next few hours went by in a blur for Will. His surviving brothers arrived at the hospital and were met with the same tragic news he had received. The deputy who had accompanied the ambulance to the ER was able to shed a little light on what had occurred but not about what led up to it, having only being alerted by a telephone call to the sheriff's office from Skip's wife, Patricia, saying her husband was acting strangely.

According to the deputy, he had arrived at the home of Patricia Colt's mother on Barons Road to find Skip standing in Mrs. Tuck's living room shouting obscenities at his mother-in-law, wife, and daughter. By the officer's account, he instructed Skip to step outside so he could speak to him. A moment later, he pulled a small caliber handgun out of the front of his pants and put it in his mouth, pulling the trigger before anyone could intervene.

The deputy asked Will and his brothers if Skip had seemed depressed or upset about anything the last time they had seen one another. The three agreed that he'd had no reason as far as they were concerned to have done such a thing. Skip was always laid back and easy-going. As far as Will was aware, his baby brother had never even raised his voice to his wife, let alone his mother-in-law. It made no sense.

The day dragged on and seemed to last forever as Skip's body was sent for an autopsy to

verify for certain what the witnesses had seen. Will returned home to break the news to Donna and the boys, while Patricia and her daughter went back to the house alone that they had called home for nearly a year.

Later that night over the telephone Will asked Patricia if there had been any signs that Skip was suicidal. He still couldn't believe that his brother would have been capable of such a thing. He'd always been so loving and caring; there was no way he would have willingly done something to traumatize his family, especially his baby daughter.

"Skip hadn't been depressed at all. We just found out two days ago that we are going to have another baby. He was excited. We stayed up late last night talking about what we wanted to name him or her." His sister-in-law told him.

"Did anything happen today that could have set him off?" Will asked trying to get some kind of idea what could have happened.

"No . . . We went to visit Mom after he got home from work. One minute he was laughing and joking about a man he works with and the next minute he was cursing at us. It was like he was a completely different person. The look in his eyes was even different. I'm not sure how to describe it. It was almost as though his eyes were filled with rage, only instead of the phrase 'red with rage', his eyes looked black. He cursed at us for several minutes and then went and got a gun my mom keeps for protection in her room. I was sure he was going to kill us all. I'm telling you, Will, he was not himself then! When he came back into the room with the gun, he told us to get out of the house. I was afraid to move. Afraid of what he would do but I did pick up the telephone and call the police. It was while I was on the phone that Skip fell to the floor like he was having a seizure or something. He was coughing up blood and screaming for us to get away from him because he didn't want to hurt us. I was trying to help him, but he kept yelling for me to back. When the cop got there, Skip got back to his feet and pulled the gun from the front of his jeans. He turned it toward us for a second and then again seemed to be fighting with his own hand. A minute later, he put the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger."

Will wondered if she realized how unrealistic she sounded. He thought she was talking foolish from being distraught and in shock. He told her if she needed them she knew how to reach them and hung up. *Fighting with his own hand?* He could hardly believe she had said such a thing.

A few days later, the coroner released the body and Will joined Patricia, Dean, and Carter to make funeral arrangements. The official cause of death was suicide, even though it was inconceivable to his brothers.

Spencer, who had overheard his parents talking about what his Aunt Patricia had told his dad about his Uncle Skip, had his own theory of what had happened. "Cyrus, I think the black-eyed man made Uncle Skip kill himself." He whispered to his brother at the funeral.

Cyrus sat beside him in silence, looking straight ahead at the closed casket. Donnie, who was sitting on the opposite side of Cyrus, seemed to be thinking out loud when he murmured, "I wonder why they couldn't open the coffin. The hole should have been in the back of his head not the front."

"They couldn't get his eyes to stay closed even after sewing them shut." Cyrus blurted out, without shifting his gaze.

"How the hell do you know that?" Donnie asked quickly.

"I'm not sure," Cyrus answered honestly.

At that moment, Patricia's mother walked by conversing with an elderly lady they didn't recognize. "You know I wondered why she chose to have a closed coffin as well, but she said the undertaker told her it would be impossible for them to open it because of Skip's eyes."

Spencer and Donnie both glared at Cyrus as if he had two heads. "He was right!" The youngest of the three announced as quietly as possible.

Cyrus had no idea how he knew about his Uncle's eyes, but he'd known it from the moment they entered the church. And there was something else that caught his attention as well. Normally sitting in church he felt safe, like no outside negativity could cross the threshold, but at his uncle's funeral Cyrus experienced a feeling of being threatened. He was sure there wasn't anyone near that was cause for concern, but it was almost as though his uncle was trying to speak to him somehow. To warn him of some impending danger. Cyrus couldn't hear actual words but he could sense what he was supposed to be aware of. Leaving the funeral, he was sure that his Uncle Skip had warned him of something bad to come but he hadn't been able to determine what it was.

Chapter 7

The day after Skip's funeral Patricia asked Will to come by after work and pick up a few boxes of things that his brother had kept from their father's old house. Will was going to have to work late, so he called Billy and asked him to go get them.

Billy went and collected the boxes after work and took them to his parent's house. Donnie helped him take them down to the basement until they could be sorted through. Shortly thereafter, Billy left going home leaving Spencer and Donnie at the house by themselves. Donna and Alex were running errands, while Cyrus was at the library.

Spencer was sitting on the couch watching TV. Donnie, who had been on the telephone with his girlfriend since Billy had gone, decided to go downstairs to the basement and look through the boxes. He made sure to leave the door at the top of the stairs open in case his brother needed him for anything. He flipped the light switch on just inside the door and walked down the lit staircase to the blackness of the basement before turning on another switch that illuminated the first room.

Kneeling in front of the first cardboard box, Donnie pulled back the tape that had been used to seal it and looked inside. It held several records from the 50s and 60s. He smiled as he held up a Jerry Lee Lewis album. He could remember his grandfather listening to *Great Balls of Fire* from the record. Laying it aside he lifted records of Buddy Holly and Elvis out of the box. He was just about to reach in once more when the door at the top of the stairs slammed shut. Thinking that Spencer may have shut it for some reason, he ignored it and continued sifting through the records. The Monkees and The Supremes were the last two. His grandmother had often sung *You Can't Hurry Love* and *Daydream Believer* when he was little. Seeing all the records brought back several fond memories.

Returning the records to the box, he felt a change in the temperature of the room. It was getting colder quickly. Taking a look around, he realized it was so cold he could see his breath. At that moment the light above his head went out, plunging him into complete darkness.

A bit perturbed but not afraid, Donnie felt his way back to the stairs and climbed them up to the door. He turned the knob while pushing the door but it wouldn't budge. It didn't have a lock on it, so he knew that wasn't the problem. Just as he was about to call out for Spencer to come open the door, he heard the sound of glass shattering somewhere on the first floor. Immediately his little brother began screaming for him. Ramming his shoulder against the door, Donnie fought without success to get out of the basement. Spencer continued to scream

for a few minutes as Donnie tried everything, including prying open the door with a crowbar to get to him. Then silence enveloped the house.

“Spencer! Are you okay?” Donnie shouted from behind the closed door. Hearing nothing, he turned the knob once more and the door swung open with ease. He raced into the living room to find his little brother hiding beneath the coffee table.

“Donnie! He was here!” Spencer cried, still hunkered down on all-fours.

“Who was here?” Donnie asked, quickly scanning the room for anyone. He noticed the vase that normally sat atop the mantle was in pieces on the floor by the TV, as though someone had tossed it. But there was no one in the room besides the two of them.

“The black-eyed man! He was coming for me!” Spencer wept, crawling into his brother’s embrace.

“Was it a vision?”

“No. He was in the room with me. He came out of the kitchen with a gun in his hand.” Spencer said, continuing to look around the room for the mysterious being.

Donnie’s temper began to boil. Holding his crying brother, he too skimmed the room. There was nothing to be seen.

The brothers didn’t mention the occurrences to the rest of the family; both agreeing not to worry their parents any more than they already were because of Uncle Skip’s early departure.

The rest of the day and evening went by uneventful until shortly after eleven o’clock that night when Alex woke up screaming. Donna leaped out of bed and rushed into him and Spencer’s room only to see her youngest son standing at the foot of his bed in total darkness pointing to a spot on the wall above his brother’s sleeping figure and screaming. Spencer was completely unaware of the commotion.

Will, who had felt his wife get out of bed, turned on the hall light and joined her in the boy’s room. A moment later, Donnie also came through the door shirtless with a look of concern on his face.

“What in the world is he screeching about?” Will asked.

“He’s having a nightmare,” Donna answered trying to calm her little boy.

Donnie directed his attention to the wall where Alex was pointing. Very vaguely he could make out a face staring at them. “No, he’s not. He sees something!”

“There’s nothing there.” Will said in an ill tone of voice.

Donnie looked back at the wall to see the face smiling. He felt his skin crawl as he looked back at his little brother. The little boy had stopped screaming but he was still staring straight ahead with a look of sheer terror on his face.

“Black eyes.” Alex said simply, before allowing his mother to put him back in his bed.

“Go on back to bed, Donnie. He’s alright now.” Donna whispered, lying down in the bed beside her youngest son.

Donnie glanced at the wall once more before exiting the room. The face was gone.

The next morning at the breakfast table Will was once again snapping at everyone. The boys were already at the table when he walked into the room, yet he still felt the need to demand that everyone ‘eat their damn breakfast’. Donna contributed it to his sleep being disturbed during the night because of Alex’s nightmare and thought little of it, at first.

“Good morning, hon. I made grilled cheeses.” She said in her usual cheerful tone.

“Nothing good about it!” Will barked angrily and then added, “I want all of you to come straight home after school today. We are going to have a fucking family meeting about the way you boys have been acting lately.”

Cyrus immediately felt his own emotions, as well as those of his family disappear. The numb feeling had returned. He put his fork down next to his plate and directed his attention to the head of the table. Even though he couldn’t feel anything within the room, he knew there was something wrong. Yet he was completely unaffected mentally by it.

Donnie, who cursed like a sailor, had never heard such from his dad. He stared at the man he'd once boasted to friends about being a saint. Glancing at the blank expression on Cyrus' face, he put down his fork and leaned back in his chair still watching his father.

Spencer looked up from his grilled cheese sandwich and froze, feeling his breath catch in his throat. The man at the head of the table looked like his dad except where his blue eyes should have been there were pitch black empty eye sockets. Spencer looked around the room at his mom and brothers. None of them seemed to be able to see what he could, except for maybe Cyrus, who was staring at the man blankly.

Trying to hurry up and finish his breakfast, Alex reached for his napkin and accidentally knocked over his glass of milk. The milk ran across the table and began to drip onto the floor. Before anyone had time to react Will jumped up, knocking over his own chair and grabbed the little boy by the arm. Jerking him from the chair, he held him inches from his face and began screaming, "What the hell is wrong with you? Look what a mess you've made! Now you get down on that floor and lick that shit up!"

Donna burst into tears as Donnie got to his feet. "Let him go!" He shouted, moving around the table toward the man.

"And if I don't?" Will asked as a sly smile crossed his lips.

Spencer looked at Cyrus. His face was devoid of any reaction. The one who normally took on all sensations around him was calmly eating his breakfast, as though it was the most ordinary morning ever. Spencer knew then that he wasn't the only one being affected by the presence in the house.

The scene in front of them was rapidly escalating. Donnie and Will were in each other's faces shouting back and forth. "What the hell is wrong with you lately?" Donnie asked, pushing his father.

"Boy, you don't know who you're screwing with!" Will spat at his son and shoving him against the wall. Pulling back his fist he struck Donnie repeatedly in the face, as the boy tried to fight back.

The man who probably wouldn't have weighed one hundred fifty pounds soaking wet and had never hit another person in his life, had the upper hand against his athletic and strong son. It seemed like the man was being driven by another force.

Thinking his dad was going to kill his brother if he didn't do something, Spencer shouted, "Stop!"

Donna clutched Alex to her chest on the floor amid the spilled milk. Cyrus continued to stare straight ahead as if in a trance. Will carried on with pummeling Donnie. Thinking fast, Spencer picked up the overturned milk glass and slammed it against the floor shattering it.

Instantly the feeling of the room changed. Cyrus blinked and looked around the room as tears began to flow down his cheeks. His face turned ashen and then red as he began to experience Donnie's emotions.

Will took a step back in confusion. Looking down at the blood on his knuckles and then back up at his son's battered face Will leaned on the table to steady himself as the realization of what he'd done set in.

Donnie wiped at the blood pouring from his nose with his t-shirt collar. His eyes were swelling and his lip was busted open while blood dripped from the corners of his mouth. Overwhelmed with anger at the man who had attacked him, he pleaded to know why. Even drawing his fist up and threatening to hit him back at one point, Donnie relentlessly demanded answers from his confused father. His mother, ready to put it all behind them, told him to hush. A minute later, he stormed from the room saying he was leaving.

Bending down and lifting his baby brother out of his mother's arms, Spencer took one last look at his dad and took Alex upstairs for both of them to get ready for school. Cyrus got up from the table, reached out a hand to help his mother to her feet, and went outside to wait for the school bus.

Donnie left on foot shortly after the bus picked up the younger boys. His mother begged him to stay but he refused. His father left for work shortly thereafter.

On the way home from school that afternoon, Spencer had another vision. In it his dad's body, only with black eyes, was walking from room to room in their house shooting into each room before moving on to the next. But instead of taking it as forewarning, he contributed it to the

morning's events and didn't mention it to his brothers.

When Will returned home from work that evening, his three youngest sons went outside on the front porch and stayed there. There was still snow on the ground and the temperature was below freezing, yet they refused to go inside. Their dad could have killed Donnie that morning and they were afraid he would lash out at one of them next.

The boys felt betrayed by their brother, even though they didn't blame him for leaving. The fact that he left them to suffer alone instead of taking them with him or notifying someone about what was going on, was what upset them the most. Spencer had looked up to his big brother for years. He never thought he'd abandon them like he did.

Huddled together for warmth, Cyrus promised to protect his little brothers. He didn't know what had happened to him that morning. If he'd been himself he would have intervened on Donnie's behalf. He wasn't a fighter, but he'd been picked on enough at school to be able to defend himself. It had been as though something had put him in a daze, aware of his surroundings but unable to interact at all.

Several times during the evening, Donna came to the door and pleaded with her sons to come inside but they stayed put. They could hear their father shouting and breaking things from the porch. Fearful, Alex clung to his brothers for protection as violent sounds echoed throughout the house.

Once the noise inside got quiet and the lights went out after midnight, the boys carefully crept around to the shed behind the house. Inside they found a box of old blankets that they used to shield themselves from the cold. Shortly thereafter they fell asleep, still clustered together.

The next morning, they got up and went out to wait for the bus without having eaten, bathed, or changed clothes. Their backpacks were inside the house so they left without them.

For three days the pattern continued. Cyrus, Spencer, and Alex woke up and got on the bus for school still wearing the same clothes. Without having eaten since lunch at school the previous day, except for the plain saltine crackers Cyrus bought after leaving school early and

going by the store the second day. Not having had any money, he'd had to convince the cashier that he would return with the money at the end of the week. He had no idea how he would get it.

No one at the boy's schools batted an eye when little Alex arrived wearing the same clothes as the previous days. With a dirty face and hands from sleeping on the garage floor, four year old Alex was just happy to be away from home. Spencer pretended nothing was wrong and tried to be his usual bubbly, jovial self.

For fourteen year old Cyrus the regular school days were bad enough, with being ridiculed and bullied by his more popular classmates; but going to school wearing dirty clothes and reeking from body odor was a sure-fire way of getting tormented.

Chapter 8

One evening, Hunter Rollins arrived home from work and saw the three youngest Colt boys huddled together on the front porch of their home. It was the third day in a row he had saw them out there. Deciding it was time to find out what was going on, he crossed his own lawn and into that of the neighbor's.

Cyrus met him at the edge of the porch with a look of concern on his face. "What are you doing?" He asked.

"Why have the three of you been out here for the past three nights? It's below freezing." Hunter said, peeking around him at the two younger boys.

Cyrus glanced down at his feet, delaying giving him an answer. "Dad's not dad, not inside anyway." He said at last.

"What do you mean?" Hunter asked, but then he heard shouting and screams from inside the house. Brushing past Cyrus, he pounded on the front door.

Since his own father had passed away, Will had been like a father to him. But the man who opened the door was not the same man he'd known since childhood.

The first thing Hunter noticed was the smell of alcohol on Will's breath. Having been very religious for as long as he'd known him, it was unimaginable to witness Will being drunk. The man was wild-eyed and angry. "What the hell do you want?" He demanded, thumping the ashes from a cigarette onto the carpet.

Hunter was shocked to say the least. When he didn't answer quickly enough, Will grabbed him by the arm and yanked him into the living room. Immediately he noticed the difference in the room. He and his mother had celebrated Christmas with the Colts, and the room then looked completely different than it did now. The oil painting of an angel guiding two small children across a bridge that normally suspended above the mantle was now in pieces scattered about the floor. A cross with praying hands that had hung in the living room for as long as he could remember now dangled upside down by the staircase. The television was overturned with the screen broken out and empty beer bottles littered the entire room.

Flabbergasted by the mess, Hunter was looking around the room when movement by the kitchen door caught his attention. Mrs. Colt had just entered the room. Her face was swollen and blood ran from the right side of her mouth. Both of her eyes were blackened and the sweater she wore had been ripped from the neck down to the left sleeve, exposing part of her bra and more bruises on her chest and arm. "What the hell have you done, Mr. Colt?" Hunter burst out, disgusted by the sight in front of him.

A flash of pure hatred shown on Will's face as his mouth curved into a menacing sneer. "The bitch needs to learn to do as she's told!" The man spat, taking a step closer to him.

Hunter didn't hesitate hurriedly walking over to Donna. It seemed to hurt her to walk. He didn't want to think what else her husband had done to her. "Come on, I'm getting you out of here." He said, attempting to take her by the hand.

"Just go, Hunter. You'll only make it worse. I'm okay. Just take care of my boys, please?" Donna begged him, shaking all over.

"Get the hell out of here, you little bastard! And if you call the law, her blood will be on your hands! You got that?" Will yelled inches from Hunter's face.

Taking one last glance toward Donna, Hunter backed out the front door and collected the boys from the porch. Together they walked across the lawn and up to the door of the Rollins' house.

Hunter's mother, Mable, didn't ask any questions. She took one look at the Colt boys and went into the kitchen to fix them something to eat. Spencer and Alex followed her, while Cyrus stood just inside the door gazing off into space.

"You're safe here," Hunter told him, patting him on the shoulder and taking a seat in the rocking chair nearby.

"There is no such thing as safety." Cyrus murmured, turning toward him but not meeting his eyes.

Wondering what he meant, Hunter was about to ask when Alex walked back into the room. "I'm really stinky!" He blurted out suddenly.

Hunter grinned. "Well, let's go get you all cleaned up then." He said as cheerfully as possible

given the circumstances. He lifted the little boy into his arms and carried him upstairs. He'd thought of the boys like little brothers of his own since they'd been born. He had no reservations at all about taking care of them as long as they needed him.

After all three brothers had gotten baths and their stomachs were full, Mable led Spencer and Alex upstairs to the guest room, right next to her own. She tucked them in side-by-side in the full bed, taking time to kiss each of them on their forehead. She turned down the daybed for their brother in the same room before exiting. "Sleep well, loves."

Cyrus was still downstairs in the living room. Wearing a pair of Hunter's old ragged jeans and a Beatles t-shirt three times too big for him, he sat on the couch appearing to look at his hands in his lap. He couldn't sleep if he'd wanted to. He was uneasy, furious, and melancholy all rolled into one. And the strangest part was that they were all his own feelings. Along with his emotions running wild, Cyrus also felt a nearly overwhelming sense of impending doom.

Hunter had sat with Cyrus for a while, but then he'd gone upstairs to take a shower. He knew the boy was aware of something that he wasn't telling. It was written all over his face as he sat on the couch wringing his hands and staring off into space. After his shower, he returned to the living room. With him he carried a stack of books on the supernatural.

Having experienced unexplainable things in the Colt house himself, Hunter was certain there was a ghost residing inside. But his current concern was whether or not the specter was responsible for the drastic changes in Will.

As he flipped through the pages of the first book, reading a bit here and there, he continued to glance over at Cyrus. Finally with curiosity getting the better of him, Hunter asked him point blank what he was thinking.

"Trust me, you wouldn't understand." Cyrus answered instantly.

"Try me," Hunter countered.

"He's not Dad anymore." The boy said simply and then stood to pace around the room as he continued, "I don't know for sure when it happened but I've known for three days now that Dad was gone. Dad loved us. Dad never hit mom. Dad would've never beat up Donnie like he did. And whatever the thing is that is pretending to be him put me under some kind of spell three days ago so I couldn't feel anything."

“Wait, he beat up Donnie?” Hunter asked, placing the book in his lap onto the coffee table.

Cyrus, still pacing, nodded. “I should have done something! I just sat there. It could have killed him. It could have killed us all.” Tears of anguish ran down his face, as he began to come to terms with the past few days.

“You’ve protected your little brothers for the past three days, Cyrus. Even if you had of intervened between your dad and Donnie, who’s to say Will wouldn’t have hurt you or worse?”

“If he had killed me then the cops would have taken him to jail. My death would have saved my brothers and Mom.” Cyrus sat back down on the couch and wiped his eyes with the t-shirt he was wearing.

“You are destined for great things, Cyrus. You have a gift and you’re going to use to do good and help people. Your brothers are blessed to have you, regardless of what happened three days ago. I know without a shadow of a doubt had you been able you would have taken care of your family that day. And furthermore, I believe you that it’s not your dad. There’s been something eerie going on in that house for years. I’ve known since we were all kids that the house was haunted. I tried to get Billy to believe me about it, but you know him. Bottom line is, there is something in that house and it’s not Casper the friendly ghost.”

Eventually Cyrus dosed off on the couch. Hunter stayed up reading until nearly three in the morning. Realizing what time it was, he stood and turned off the lamp. Checking to make sure the front door was locked securely he glanced through the window over to the house next door. Every light in the place was on and he could see someone’s shadow walking by the windows in the living room. Saying a silent prayer for Mrs. Colt, Hunter went outside trudging through the snow to give Billy a call from the garage. He didn’t want to take a chance on the boys hearing.

Billy hadn't been back home since Christmas but he did hear about the fight between Will and Donnie through a telephone call from the latter. Knowing his brother how he did he thought he probably did something to provoke the old man; even though he had never known his dad to lash out on anyone before.

During the call Donnie had insisted there was something seriously wrong at the house. He even went as far as to urge Billy to go get the younger boys. He didn't go by the house, or even call, because he assumed his brother was just trying to get him to pick sides. But when the telephone rang shortly after three in the morning, he grabbed it on the first ring afraid that he'd been wrong to dismiss the whole thing.

"Yeah," he said quickly.

"Billy, it's Hunter. There's a big problem over at your parent's house."

Presuming he was going to repeat what Donnie had already told him, he replied, "Yeah I heard."

"Cyrus and the younger boys are staying here tonight. They're scared, Billy. Your dad, man, he's majorly changed. Like to the point of being a completely different person." Hunter told him, looking for a particular page in the book on the desk in front of him.

"Uh huh and what do you think the problem is?" Billy asked, only half listening.

"Well, I've been doing some reading and I think there's a demonic spirit in the house."

"Ah hell, Hunter! Do you know how damn crazy that sounds?" Billy hissed, getting annoyed.

"Most people wouldn't believe that Spencer has visions or that Cyrus can do that thing that he does, but you know they can. Go to that house, Billy. I'm telling you something's seriously wrong!" Hunter said, trying to persuade him to at least check it out for himself.

"Well, just let the boys stay there as long as they want to. I'll stop by over there after work today and check things out." Billy told him, and immediately hung up without waiting for a response. Rolling over, he fell back to sleep.

Chapter 9

Friday, January 27th, 1989, began with Hunter leaving for work at seven in the morning. Spencer and Alex were still asleep when he peeked in on them on his way down the hall. He spoke to Cyrus briefly in the living room, telling him that they didn't have to go to school that day. Around nine, Mable made breakfast for the boys. All three ate like they were starved. Alex talked nonstop about everything from how soft the guest bed had been to his teacher at school. Mable enjoyed the chatter. It had been quite a while since she'd heard the enthusiastic conversation of a four year old boy.

After they'd all finished eating Spencer and Cyrus volunteered to clean up. Mable and Alex went upstairs to make the bed the boys had slept in. Shortly thereafter, the telephone rang.

She answered it in her bedroom. "Yes?"

"Ms. Mable, how are you this morning?" Will Colt, asked in his typical jolly voice.

She was surprised by how friendly he sounded. Just like the young man she'd grown to love as her own son. "I'm doing well, and yourself?"

"Oh no complainants here. Wouldn't do us any good to complain anyway, now would it Ms. Mable?"

"No, that's right. It wouldn't." She said with a slight grin.

"Say, would you put one of my dear boys on the telephone please?"

"Yes, of course." Mable glanced at Alex, but decided instead to get Cyrus to pick up on the line downstairs. "Cyrus dear, will you pick up on the phone down there please?" She called.

"Hello?" Cyrus said a moment later from the kitchen.

Mable remained on the line to listen to the conversation. She was concerned about the boys, although Will didn't seem a danger to them currently.

"Cyrus, it's Dad. I want to apologize for everything I've done. I know I've hurt you and your brothers and I'm very sorry. My actions the past three days have been unacceptable. I want to make it up to you all. Will you bring the little boys and come home please?" Will said with a hint of sadness in his voice.

Cyrus was conflicted. He loved his dad but he was afraid of him at the same time. He listened to the man rattle on about all the wrongs he'd done in the past for a minute or two before agreeing to return home.

After hanging up the phone, Cyrus told Mable that their dad was feeling better and that the three of them were going home. She hugged them all and assured them they were welcome to come back anytime. Waving at them from the porch, she had no idea of the horrors that awaited them at home.

The unsuspecting boys crossed the Rollins' snow-covered lawn and lumbered up to their own front porch. Fearful of what lay ahead, Spencer and Alex trailed behind their brother. They had every reason to be scared because unbeknown to them shortly after five that morning, their father had murdered their mother in the bed they had shared for thirty-one years as she slept. They also didn't know that before he had called begging them to come home, he had phoned both Billy and Donnie and requested they come home as soon as possible because he needed to talk to them about something important. His oldest son had agreed to stop by after work, but Donnie had immediately hung up as soon as he heard his father's voice.

After making his calls, Will had reloaded the shotgun he had used to shoot his wife and had a seat on the couch in the living room to wait for the rest of his family to arrive.

Hearing his three youngest children on the porch, he quickly hid the gun under a blanket on the opposite end of the couch. Then Will opened the door and hugged his boys. "I'm sorry for scaring you all. I just want my family back like it used to be." He murmured as tears flowed from his eyes.

Cyrus hugged his dad but inside he felt a growing sensation of tremendous rage. He could feel his own nervous feelings and the happiness of his little brothers, but the anger was coming from somewhere else. He was confused, as he could see no reason for such an overpowering reaction.

All at once they noticed their mother wasn't in the vicinity. "Where's mom?" Alex asked.

Will smiled broadly and held it for a moment before answering that she was in bed taking a nap. Both Spencer and Cyrus instantly perceived a sense of trouble. Something wasn't right. Their mother hadn't laid eyes on them in three days; surely she would have made it a point to see them when they came back home. Something was wrong.

Noticing the apprehension in Cyrus' eyes, Will asked his sons to go upstairs to their rooms for a bit while he made them some lunch. The boys did as he requested.

Spencer, having missed his room, began to play Nintendo. Alex started to play too but said he had to use the bathroom and would be right back. Scampering across the hall, he saw Cyrus looking out his bedroom door into the hallway. Giving him little thought he went into the bathroom and shut the door.

One minute passed. Then two. Will went to the living room and retrieved the shotgun. Climbing the stairs, a smirk formed on his face. In front of the closed door to the master bedroom, he let out mechanical laugh that would have been near impossible for a person to recreate. Neither Spencer nor Alex heard it. Cyrus didn't hear it either, but with his hand pressed against the wall of his bedroom he was instantly plunged into a past memory of the house.

All around him wallpaper peeled from the walls like the sunburned skin of one's body. The carpeting on the floor beneath his sneakers disappeared, leaving a dirty wood surface. The room turned frigidly cold, and he was cloaked in darkness. Taking a deep breath, he took a step into the hallway. It looked the same as his bedroom but in it there was a stench of rotting flesh. Covering his nose with his hand, he retreated back into his room and closed the door. A

second later he was back in the present.

Unsure of why he'd had the visualization Cyrus sat down on the foot of his bed for a moment to collect his thoughts. Suddenly he felt the numb feeling he had felt before returning. Standing, he could hear something repeating a chant over and over attempting to put him back into a trance.

Holding his ears tightly, he screamed in a desperate effort to make it stop. Opening his bedroom door once more, he was about to try to flee the voice but what he saw coming down the hallway made his blood run cold.

Will had a shotgun in his hands and a sinister smile on his face as he got closer to Spencer and Alex's room. His eyes were black as coal.

Cyrus stumbled backwards and fell onto the floor. Frantically trying to do something to save his little brothers, he jerked the plug of his bedside lamp out of the wall and charged out into the hall. The chanting stopped. He didn't see his father or his brothers. As he got closer to their room, he could hear them playing Nintendo. Considering his eyes may have been playing tricks on him, Cyrus took one last look both up and down the hall and then returned to his room.

As soon as he closed the door behind him, the chanting resumed. The feeling of being in the presence of pure evil enveloped him. Thinking quickly he rushed to the window. Climbing out onto the ledge and then onto the snow-covered roof of the side porch, Cyrus saw the knob on his bedroom door turning. Scrambling from the window and then across the porch roof, he didn't hesitate before he jumped down to the ground and hurried back around to the front.

Cyrus hadn't heard the shotgun actually go off, but he was wrong in thinking that it hadn't. Even though he was in the house and on the same floor, he never heard the three blasts Will had fired at the younger boys.

When Cyrus had been in the hallway moments before, Will was in the bathroom with little Alex. The little boy was playing in the bathtub when the terrifying sight of his own father pointing a gun at him and firing became his reality. He screamed but it was too late. He'd taken a bullet to the chest and one to the shoulder. Horrified, he pulled the plug letting the water leak from the tub and laid flat down hoping the side of the tub would shield any other shots.

Spencer, across the hall less than ten feet away, didn't hear the shotgun blasts or his baby brother screaming. He also didn't have the unfortunate experience of actually seeing his dad pull the trigger. He was facing the small TV between the two twin beds. One minute he was playing Nintendo and the next he was struck by an intense pain that jolted him from the chair. On the floor, bleeding from a gunshot wound to the upper arm, Spencer managed to crawl beneath Alex's bed to prevent being hit again. From beneath the bed he saw the pitch black eyes on his father's face as the man turned and continued down the hall to Cyrus' room.

The front door was locked. With strength he never knew he possessed, Cyrus drew back his fist and busted one of the front windows. Clearing the glass shards with his already bleeding hand, he climbed into the living room. Darting to the kitchen, he took a butcher knife from the drawer by the sink. Turning around he saw his father enter the room.

With only a split second to react, Cyrus raised the knife and stabbed the man in the chest. Will dropped to his knees accidentally firing the shotgun, sending a bullet through the ceiling. His black eyes turned red and a big smile appeared on his face. He opened his mouth and a deep guttural growl echoed throughout the room. Knowing instantly that his dad was already gone, leaving the merciless monster in his place, Cyrus pulled the knife from its chest and thrust it between the eyes of what he truly believed to be the devil incarnate.

He sat on the kitchen floor staring at his dad's body as the tears began to fall. About to wipe his eyes, he saw that both his hands were bleeding and his entire upper body had his father's blood splatter on it. Removing the t-shirt he was wearing and taking a dish towel off the counter, Cyrus tried to cover the wounds on his hands. Hearing a sound upstairs, he froze.

Dropping the towel, he dashed up the stairs to the second floor. There he heard Alex crying from the bathroom. He was aghast to see his baby brother lying in a pool of blood in the bathtub. Taking care not to hurt him, Cyrus lifted the little boy from the tub and laid him on the bathroom floor. Grabbing towels from the wooden shelf behind the toilet, he desperately tried to stop the bleeding. "Alex, you're going to be ok." He told him as calmly as possible. "Spencer! Mom!" Cyrus shouted, hoping they were alright.

"Cyrus! I've been shot!" Spencer called back.

Hearing quick heavy footfalls on the stairs, Cyrus scanned the room for something to protect them with. A moment later, a familiar friendly voice rang out.

"Cyrus! Spencer! Alex! Mom!" Donnie yelled. He had changed his mind about dropping by and arrived to see the broken window in the living room and Will dead in the kitchen. He was beside himself with dread that someone else in his family had been hurt or worse.

"Donnie, go help Spencer!" Cyrus called out.

Hurrying down the hallway opening door after door, Donnie found their mother first. Had it not been for the large bloody gaping hole above her nose, she would have looked asleep. But it was apparent she was beyond help. Feeling his breakfast beginning to make a reappearance he covered his mouth and left the room, making sure to shut the door to spare his brothers from seeing what would be forever etched in his own mind.

On down the hall Donnie glanced into the bathroom and saw Cyrus hunched over Alex on the floor. One glance at the scarlet stains on the linoleum told him his baby brother was in bad shape. "Keep pressure on it!" He hollered before zipping across the hall to find Spencer.

Spencer was still under the bed. He was holding his arm and crying when Donnie knelt down to help him get out. "Are Cyrus and Alex ok?" He asked immediately, disregarding the fact that his arm was pouring blood of its own.

"They're alive for now," his older brother answered as he pulled him from beneath the bed. Reaching up onto the bed, Donnie emptied a pillow case of its contents and swiftly wrapped it around Spencer's arm to stop the blood flow.

Lifting his brother into his arms, Donnie returned to the bathroom. "We've got to get them to the hospital! The Station Wagon's outside, let's get them some help." He told Cyrus, while helping him lift Alex's little body with his free hand.

On the way to the hospital Donnie was panicked. "What the hell happened, Cyrus? Did you do this?" He shouted as thoughts raced through his head.

"What? Hell no I didn't do it! He came after us!" Cyrus screamed back, appalled that his brother thought he would shoot his little brothers.

"Donnie, he's telling the truth!" Spencer exclaimed from the passenger seat.

In the waiting room at Lincoln Regional Donnie called Billy. The call had to be transferred from the office out onto the floor for him to answer it. "Hello?" Billy answered.

"We're over here at the hospital. You need to get over here as soon as you can," Donnie told him, worry evident in his voice.

"What? Why?"

"Just do it, Billy. And don't go by the house." Donnie told him before hanging up.

As a million things ran through his mind, Billy informed his boss that he had to go and bolted to his truck. Less than ten minutes later, he turned into the parking lot of Lincoln Regional. Only then did he realize Donnie hadn't told him what hospital they were at. Taking a chance on being at the right one, he hurried inside and straight to the front desk. "Donnie Colt . . . He called me . . . He's my brother . . . Is he alright?" He spluttered to the first lady that glanced in his direction.

The lady put down the stack of patient records she was holding and directed her attention toward him. "Sir, there are some policemen right through here that would like to speak to you." She said, leading him into a room off to the right with only a table and three chairs in the middle of it. Two of the chairs were occupied by uniformed police officers, while another plain-clothed officer stood to the side talking to the first two. He recognized one of the seated officers as being Tim McNabb, whom he had gone to high school with.

"Billy Colt?" The one standing walked toward him and asked.

"What's going on here?" Billy asked, immediately wary.

"Mr. Colt, we need to ask you a few questions. If you don't mind having a seat," the other uniformed officer stated.

"I'll stand," he said, all the more suspicious.

“Billy, you’re not in any trouble. We’ve already checked your whereabouts. We just need to ask you a few questions.” Tim told him.

“Trouble for what? What the hell is going on here?” He snapped, getting frustrated.

The three officers glanced at one another. A moment later, the one standing said, “We were told you had spoken with your brother Donnie. Did he not tell you?”

“Tell me what?” Billy asked more sternly, as beads of perspiration formed on his forehead in frustration. He waited only a few seconds for them to answer before he angrily asked, “Are you charging me with something?”

“No, sir, we have already verified you were at work when . . .” The standing officer began before Billy cut him off.

“Then I’m going to talk to my brothers,” he barked as he left the room.

In the crowded ER waiting room he found Donnie and Cyrus. They were sitting side-by-side against the wall by the snack machines. Cyrus was wearing blue scrub pants and a hospital gown with bandages covering both hands. Donnie had spots of dried blood on his originally white t-shirt and looked like he had been on the losing end of a boxing match. Both of them were looking at their hands as they wrung them in nervousness. They didn’t notice him approaching until he was directly in front of them. “What the hell happened?” He demanded.

His younger brothers stood and walked over to a less full area of the room as Billy followed. “Spencer and Alex was shot,” Donnie answered.

“Shot!” Billy said louder than he meant to and caught the attention of a woman holding a screaming baby. “Who did it?” He asked a little quieter.

“Dad,” Donnie answered after a short pause.

“It wasn’t Dad. It was his body but it wasn’t him. We never should have went back home,” Cyrus told him, not making eye contact.

“But you did and look what happened,” Donnie blurted.

“Where the hell was you, huh? At least I didn’t leave them to fend for their damn selves!” Cyrus snapped angrily before walking out of the room.

“Are they okay?” Billy asked, once again noticing the amount of blood stains on his brother’s clothing.

“Spencer is. He was hit in the arm. They got him bandaged up and in a room, keeping him for observation. Alex is bad though. He’s still in surgery.” Donnie answered, wiping a tear away.

Billy felt the tears welling up in his eyes and he fought to gain his composure. I should’ve been there, he thought to himself. “Where’s Mom?” He asked.

Donnie caught his older brother’s eye and shook his head, letting him know silently that their mother was dead. Billy clenched his teeth and bowed his head.

Spencer was sitting in the hospital bed propped up on two pillows eating a small cup of chocolate ice cream when there was a knock at the door. Before waiting for a response, a young police officer with auburn hair and brown eyes walked into the room. "Spencer Colt?" The man asked with a smile.

"Yes," Spencer answered, getting nervous.

"Hi Spencer, I'm Sergeant Tim McNabb of the Lincoln Police Department. Mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Okay."

The officer took a seat in a chair near the bed and pulled a small note pad and pen from his pocket. "According to your neighbor, a Mrs. Rollins, you and your brothers have been sleeping outside for the past few nights because of some issues with your dad. Is that correct?"

"Um . . . We stayed at her house last night but before that we did. My brother Cyrus, he broke the lock on the shed after the first night though so we could sleep in there."

"And what was the reason you three weren't inside the house?" Sergeant McNabb asked him, taking notes.

"We was afraid after what he did to Donnie," the boy answered.

"Your older brother Donnie? Your father did that to his face?" The officer asked, remembering how bad the boy who had reported the shooting had looked when he'd first seen him.

"Yes sir, at breakfast four days ago."

Shaking his head in disgust, Sergeant McNabb tried to refrain from voicing his opinion on child abusers. "Did you see who shot you?" He asked, trying to get to the main reason he was there.

"Yes, sir . . . My dad did it."

"You're sure?"

"Yes sir. He would have killed us all if it hadn't been for Cyrus."

"Well, I guess that's all the questions I have for now. You need to get some rest. I'll send one of your brothers to be in here with you." The officer said, getting to his feet.

"That's okay. The only one I was afraid of is gone now." Spencer told him.

"Okay then."

"Um . . . Sir, is my brother going to be arrested?" The boy asked as an afterthought.

"Not if the evidence proves it was self-defense."

Sergeant McNabb had questioned Spencer while Detective Anthony Davis and Deputy Matthew Reid had separated Donnie and Cyrus and interrogated them. The brother's stories matched.

The doctor who performed the three hour surgery on little Alex had finally appeared in the waiting room and told the Colt boys and the police that he was expected to pull through. "Thank God!" Billy said standing from the kneeled praying position he had been moments before.

The crime scene investigators at the house had found no evidence to contradict the boy's statements. Mrs. Colt had been deceased several hours prior to the boys returning home, and gunshot residue was found on Mr. Colt's hands and clothing; while none was found on any of the boys. The bodies were transported to the coroner for autopsy and the Colt brothers began the disheartening task of making their parents' funeral arrangements.

Chapter 10

A week passed with Alex still in the hospital. While he was awake and had tried to talk, he still had to have a breathing tube in. One of the brothers stayed with him around the clock. Returning to the house was not an option in their opinions, so it was decided they would all live in Billy's apartment until they could find something larger. The oldest brother still had to go to work to keep from losing his job, so Donnie took charge of getting the house ready to be put up for sale.

The cleaning company Hunter and his family had hired had already removed anything with blood or bodily fluids on it and cleansed the house thoroughly. So there were no obvious signs of the tragedy when Donnie and Cyrus returned to the house to box up their possessions to donate to charity. Fearing the entity that had terrorized them was still capable of doing so, they decided nothing would be taken with them from the house except for two family photo albums.

For six hours, they boxed up everything from cooking utensils to toys, clothing, and the remaining food in the house, and anything else that would fit in a box. They loaded it all up in Hunter's pickup truck and made four trips to the local charity downtown. Handing Hunter the keys to let the men from the charity come and get the furniture, Cyrus and Donnie took one last look up at their childhood home. A light was on upstairs in the master bedroom, even though every light inside had been off when they'd left less than a minute before. Looking at one another, they got in the truck and drove off.

While the investigation into the shootings of Spencer and Alex and the deaths of Will and Donna was closed, there were still aspects of the case that continued to trouble even the most seasoned officers. At the top of the list was how Will had managed to fire the shotgun twice less than ten feet from Spencer, yet he insisted he hadn't heard a thing until he had been shot himself.

Sergeant McNabb was deeply concerned about the condition the house itself had been found in. Upside down crosses hanging on the walls, trash and rotten food scattered about the floor, and the overwhelming odor of feces were what met him and his coworkers that unforgettable day. Coupled with Mr. Colt's body sprawled on the kitchen floor with a butcher knife lodged in the bridge of his nose and Mrs. Colt in the bed upstairs missing over half her face, the scene was forever etched in his memory.

Though the house stood empty, lights throughout would turn on and off at various times during

both the day and night. Occasionally someone walking by on the sidewalk out front would hear what sounded like a child's laughter coming from inside, and banging noises could be heard at all hours. Twice during the weeks after the house was cleaned, Hunter had gone over to make sure no living person was snooping around after seeing shadows pass by the windows. There was never anyone to be seen and nothing had been disturbed.

One Saturday afternoon, about three weeks after the tragedy, a mysterious elderly woman knocked on the Rollins' door. Mable and her son were just sitting down to a cup of tea after doing some household chores. Hunter rose and went to the door. Standing there on the front porch was a short older Native American woman wrapped in a lavender shawl. She smiled slightly as he opened the door to see what she needed.

"I've come to bring you this," she said, placing a small bundle of dried white sage in his hand.

"What's this for?" He asked, taken aback. He'd never laid eyes on the lady before.

"I live down on the end of this street," she told him, motioning in the direction with her right hand while still facing him. "I have to drive this way daily."

Hunter looked at her, awaiting an answer to his question, but she simply leaned in closer. "Burn it inside of your neighbor's old house," she whispered inches from his face, "to get rid of the evil." And with that she turned and was gone.

He shut the door and took the sage upstairs. Placing it in the drawer of his nightstand, he thought about what the woman had said. He wondered if getting rid of the entity was actually as simple as burning an herb inside. But deep down he knew it wasn't going to be that easy.

During the last week of February, Billy signed the lease on a three bedroom brick house in the small rural community of Fairbury. It was a little over fifty miles from Lincoln and would be the fresh start the brothers needed.

Alex had been released from the hospital the weekend before and was looking forward to moving into a larger space than the one bedroom apartment they were currently living in. He was also excited to be starting a new school.

Spencer and Cyrus were planning to walk to their new schools every day. The new house was only four blocks away from both of their schools. Donnie, with only one year remaining until graduation, decided to stay with friends in Lincoln until he finished school. Trying to become independent, he had already gotten a job as an additional mechanic at a small repair shop downtown.

Billy had been fortunate in finding a job at a manufacturing plant less than two blocks from their new home. The pay was better than at his previous job and the hours would allow him to be home at night.

Aside from the occasional nightmares endured by both Spencer and Alex and the vivid

flashbacks suffered by Cyrus, the Colt boys were on their way to overcoming that which had stood to break them.

Chapter 11

On March 14, 1989, the house on Brown Street was purchased by a couple and their six children. They were new to the area and knew absolutely nothing about the strange events in the house or the deaths that had occurred there less than two months prior.

Forty year old Jackson Greene and his wife Ruth Ann loved the house from the first time they laid eyes on it. They could easily envision their children playing in the large backyard, and they hoped to turn the largest room in the basement into a playroom as well. The family of eight had previously rented a small, two bedroom apartment and were looking forward to having all the extra space.

The oldest of the Greene children, fourteen year old Angela, was going to get the bedroom in the basement. To her, it felt like having her own apartment. With a bathroom down there too, the only time she would have to come upstairs would be to eat.

Ten year old Jackson Jr., JJ as his family called him, would take the bedroom on the right at the end of the hall. In their old apartment, he and his siblings had all shared one bedroom. He was very much looking forward to having his own space.

Eight year old twins, Kenneth and Kevin, would share the room directly across the hall from the second floor bathroom. Their dad had promised to buy them bunkbeds once they got settled in. Until then, the twins would sleep on the floor in their sleeping bags.

Three year old Samantha and six month old Kathleen would share the bedroom on the left at the end of the hall. It would be new to them because they had slept in the room with their parents all their lives.

The master bedroom was larger than Jackson and Ruth Ann were expecting, but they were delighted to have the privacy.

The Greene family moved into their new home on Saturday, April 15, 1989, despite the fact that Ruth Ann had had horrific nightmares of blood and gore for the past week leading up to the move. She contributed the dreams to stress and dismissed them.

Their new next door neighbors, Mable and Hunter Rollins, stopped by a few days later to introduce themselves. He still firmly believed a dark presence had been behind the events leading up to the day of the shooting, and he was fearful for the new family. He was at odds with himself over the desire to subtly warn them to be careful and his brain telling him to keep quiet. He tried to decide whether or not to mention it as he helped his mother up onto the porch.

Knocking on the door, he thought back to the last time he was standing there in the same spot awaiting someone to open it. It had been colder then with a heavy snow covering the ground.

This afternoon the sun was out and a nice spring breeze cooled the air, as birds sang in the big tree behind them.

A few seconds passed before a young boy with red hair and glasses cracked open the door and peeked out at them. "Hello there," Mable said smiling. "Is your mother or father home?"

"Yes, ma'am," the little boy answered as another older boy joined him at the door. The older boy observed them for a moment and then called for his mom.

A minute later an attractive woman with shoulder length voluminous crimson hair and brown eyes opened the door wide and invited them in. The woman was wearing shorts and a bright orange top with sneakers. Hunter immediately noticed how striking she was. Catching himself holding her gaze a moment too long, he slid his hands into the pockets of his jeans and looked away. Besides the fact that she was obviously married, his reasons for wanting to become on friendly terms with her and her family had nothing to do with the burning sensation he felt in his lower extremities at the mere sight of her.

The living room looked much different than it had previously. Instead of an inverted cross and broken angel print, the walls were adorned with smiling family photographs. A vase holding a large bouquet of fresh flowers sat atop the mantle, and green plastic toy soldiers were in a pile in the middle of the room. But while the room appeared changed, the heaviness of the air was very much the same.

Mable noticed it first and crossed her arms around herself. Nervously, she eyeballed the ceiling and room, expecting something sinister to appear at any moment. The woman in front of them didn't seem to notice.

"Hello, I'm Ruth Ann and these are two of my sons, JJ and Kenneth." She told them, motioning toward the two boys who had first opened the door.

"It's very nice to meet you, ma'am. I'm Hunter Rollins and this is my mother, Mable. We live in the white house right over there." Hunter said, pointing to his right.

"Oh, please don't use ma'am! I'm probably not much older than you." Ruth Ann replied, allowing her own eyes to wonder across him.

Her gaze wasn't lost on him. He grinned at her and tried to turn his attention to the boys. "You guys like playing cowboys and Indians?" The older boy shrugged his shoulders as though he was entirely too old for such a stupid game. "I used to play it with the boys who lived here before you guys. That big yard back there is perfect for it."

"Were you friends of the previous owners?" Ruth Ann asked.

"Yes, they were like family." Mable answered sadly.

"But we still keep in touch." Hunter added quickly, not wanting to get into details of the past in front of the children.

Suddenly they all heard the side door slam. Moments later a man and another young boy joined them. "Honey, these are our new neighbors Hunter and his mother Mable." Ruth Ann introduced happily. "This is my husband Jackson and our son Kevin."

Jackson, with graying hair and bright blue eyes, stood at least six feet tall. Wiping his hands off on his jeans, he glanced down at his shirtless chest and excused himself to go put on a shirt. Hunter made a mental note of the fact that he was definitely older than his wife, although he wasn't sure why he was so worried about it.

Several minutes passed before Jackson returned wearing a blue and white polo shirt and clean jeans. Bending over to reach Mable's hand, he shook it and said, "Nice to meet you both."

"Likewise," Hunter responded as he began to feel the oppressiveness of the air as well. It felt so thick you could cut it with a knife. He was amazed that the family didn't appear to notice, or maybe they did and just dismissed it. Either way, he knew the presence in the house was still there, biding its time to make its first move.

Mable, feeling even more anxious than before but not sure why, turned to her son and said, "Well, we should be getting back. It certainly was nice meeting you all." Hunter nodded and followed his mother back out onto the porch.

"Come back anytime!" Ruth Ann shouted after them.

As though the neighbors could hear their whispered conversations from across the lawn, Mable waited until the door of their own home was securely locked behind them before she twirled to face Hunter, obviously distraught. "Whatever was in that house before is still there! We've got to do something or least warn them!"

"I know, mom. I felt it too." He said, deep in thought.

"That family has no idea what they've gotten themselves into," Mable continued, wiping her eyes with a tissue.

"I'll give Billy a call tonight."

Spencer had decided to ride the bus home that afternoon because he didn't feel like walking. At home he was still having nightmares of being shot, but when he drifted off on the bus he hoped the terrible images wouldn't come. But as soon as he was in a complete dream state, he opened his eyes to find himself back in the old house on Brown Street. He noticed that the furniture and décor wasn't what his family had owned. He walked around from the basement to Cyrus' old room. The house was dark; looking out one of the windows, he saw that it was nighttime. Suddenly he felt eyes upon him. Standing in the second floor hallway between his and Alex's old room and the bathroom, he turned toward the staircase. There aglow in a bright red light was a teenage girl with flowing blonde hair, green eyes, and a foreboding smile on her face. Wearing only a short pale green nightgown and socks, she didn't look scary at all except for the expression on her face. It was what was in her hand though that made his blood run cold. An ax, like he'd helped his dad chop wood with in the past, dripped a scarlet liquid across the floor as she moved toward him.

Turning to run, he heard a baby crying in Cyrus' old room. Rushing toward the sound, his nostrils filled with a putrid odor of rotting flesh. Holding his nose with one hand and feeling for the door in the pitch black hallway with the other, he felt a severe pain in his back. He fell to the floor and shifted his body just in time to look up and see the ax coming down on him again. As a scream escaped his lips, he awoke. The boy in the seat next to him burst out laughing. "What happened? You drop your teddy bear?"

Spencer sat up straighter and turned his attention out the window. If you only knew, he thought to himself.

Billy was just finishing the dishes when the telephone rang. "Yeah," he answered it on the second ring.

"Hey, it's Hunter. Listen there is something I need your help with."

"What's that?" Billy asked, taking a seat at the kitchen table.

"There's a new family living in your old house. Mom and I went over there to introduce ourselves tonight, and the presence is still incredibly strong. They are completely unaware. We've got to warn them or do something."

Billy scratched his beard. He'd been worried that it wasn't gone. That was why they had donated all their possessions to charity instead of taking any of it with them or leaving it for future owners. "What do you want to do?" He asked.

"I want to stop the entity that's in that house from hurting anybody else." Hunter told him with determination.

Billy glanced at Spencer, who was doing his homework at the table across from him. "I'll do some reading and you need to too. We can't go in there and take on this thing blind. In the meantime, keep in touch. Let me know if anything new develops."

"Will do. How are the boys?"

"They're doing alright considering." Billy answered, rising from the table.

"Well, I'll get off here. I'll be in touch."

"Yep," Billy said, hanging up the phone.

The next morning Billy went into work two hours early so he could take off early and drive back to Lincoln to the library. Not only did he want some history on the house prior to their parents buying it, but he also needed to determine exactly what inhabited the house.

Cyrus made sure his little brothers ate breakfast and got dressed. He and Spencer waited for the bus to pick up Alex, and then the two of them set off walking to school.

“Do you like it here?” Spencer asked him suddenly.

“I like the house. Why do you ask?” He asked, reading the tone of his brother’s voice.

“I had friends in Lincoln. Most of the kids are jerks here.”

“What do you mean they’re jerks? Is somebody picking on you?” Cyrus asked. He was bullied regularly, but he had no intentions of letting it happen to his brothers.

“No. It’s just we’re outsiders here and everybody wants to put that in your face. You know?” Spencer answered, continuing to walk ahead of him.

Cyrus understood alright. He felt like an outsider no matter where he was, except around his brothers. “It’ll get better after we’ve been here a while.” He said at last.

The answer seemed to satisfy the boy, and he picked up the pace a bit leaving his older brother behind.

From the first book Billy opened he realized they had been experiencing supernatural activity long before the more profound occurrences began. He could vividly remember seeing fleeting shadows out the corner of his eye before Donnie was even born. He had brushed it off because at the time he hadn’t felt threatened by it. He thought maybe his mind was playing tricks on him.

Their parents had been very religious. There was never any talk of ghosts, let alone demons. He’d been brought up believing that God would protect him and his family from any and all negativity, but this belief had led them to think that no evil could enter a home where God was present. Through his reading, Billy now believed that somehow the evil in the house had found a crack in their religious foundation, blindsiding them and forcing God and all that was good out. And what concerned him the most was that the force inside that house hadn’t been satisfied by the two lives it had already taken. And that left the new family all the more vulnerable.

After only a small amount of reading Billy, like Hunter, was convinced that a demonic entity had possessed his father. Determined to help the current family, he continued to search for information on how to rid a location of a demon.

Chapter 12

Nearly seven o'clock one night a couple of weeks after Hunter's conversation on the telephone with Billy, Mable was upstairs in her bedroom preparing for bed. She was just standing up from her dressing table, when she saw something in the window of the Greene house. At nearly eighty-one years old, her eye sight wasn't what it used to be even with the prescription glasses she always wore. She turned her attention to the master bedroom window of the house next door and took a few steps closer to her own windowpane. She still wasn't sure what she was seeing, but it looking like a large black mass that gradually began to morph into a solid figure. Bright red eyes formed on the face. A moment later, she shrieked and lost her footing. Falling back onto the hardwood floor, she felt a presence in the room. She became aware of hands upon her, yet there was no other person to be seen. Feeling a weight atop her lower body, she screamed in horror as her nightgown slowly began to push upward toward her stomach. The realization that she was about to be sexually assaulted by an unseen phantasm, gave her a sudden burst of strength. Reaching up to the nightstand she tugged on the cord of the lamp until it crashed to the floor beside her, alerting her son downstairs that something was wrong.

Hunter, who had been in the kitchen making his lunch for work, dropped the bread and dashed up the stairs. "Mom, what happened?" He asked upon seeing her on the floor with a look of pure panic on her face. He thought at first that she'd fallen while trying to get into bed, but then he sensed something powerful in the room. Scanning the ceiling and all four corners, he searched for it. There was nothing to be seen.

"The devil's in that house!" Mable wailed, tugging her nightgown back over her legs.

Kneeling beside his mother on the floor, he looked her over trying to determine if she was alright. "Mom, are you hurt?"

"The devil's in that house!" She repeated, nearly frantic.

"Mom, I need you to calm down!" He told her firmly.

Mable, who had been tightly holding his hand, let go and began to hyperventilate and then went into violent convulsions. Hunter grabbed the telephone and called for an ambulance. Seconds later, his mother lost consciousness.

The rescue personnel loading up his mother and leaving in route with her to the hospital, the nurse taking her insurance information from him, and even phoning his siblings went by in a complete blur for Hunter. He was gripped with anger. Not only was the entity wreaking havoc on the residents who lived in the home, but now it was attacking innocent bystanders.

Hunter's brother, Jeff, and his sisters, Margie and Sherry, arrived at the hospital to find their brother pacing back and forth in the waiting room. Wearing dark blue pajama pants and a gray t-shirt, he looked as though he had just crawled out of bed. He certainly seemed out of place among his siblings, who were all dressed fit to kill. Thirty-nine year old Sherry wore a long red evening gown with heels and her raven hair pulled up in a tight bun. She had most definitely been interrupted on a date. Forty-six year old Margie was decked out in her Sunday meeting

dress beneath a long white unbuttoned sweater and sandals with her sandy blonde hair tied into a ponytail. Fifty-two year old Jeff, a Protestant Minister, appeared to have either been at church or out dining at a five-star restaurant in his black suit and tie with his salt and pepper hair neatly combed over the bald spot on top of his head.

“Any word yet?” Sherry asked, her heels loudly clicking on the waxed floor as she entered the room.

Hunter glanced up and shook his head no, continuing to pace.

“What happened?” Jeff questioned, slightly loosening his belt so he could sit down.

“Mom was upstairs getting ready for bed when she fell, and I guess she hit her head or something. She had a seizure too.” Hunter told them, purposely leaving out mention of anything otherworldly.

“Mom’s never had any seizures that I know of.” Margie said, thinking out loud.

It was at that moment that the doctor opened the door and popped his head in. A young man, who didn’t look old enough to be out of college, took a seat in the chair across from Jeff. “Mrs. Mable is resting. We’ve ran some tests and we are waiting for the results to come back on those, but so far we can’t find anything to have caused her to have had a convulsion or lose consciousness. Perhaps it was brought on by stress, but only time will tell with that.” The man rose from his chair and with a slight smile, exited the room once more.

“Not a very friendly guy is he?” Sherry sarcastically asked.

Hunter simply continued to pace the room.

Jackson and Ruth Ann Greene had been in the living room watching TV when they’d heard the sirens next door. The couple was relaxing a bit before heading upstairs to bed. The children were all in their rooms asleep or settling down to sleep.

When the ambulance pulled up in front of the Rollins’ house, Jackson slipped back on his work boots and stepped out onto the front porch. He couldn’t really see anything for the blinding flashing lights, so after a moment he returned back into the house. Ruth Ann, eyes wide with concern, met him just inside the door. “What happened? Is it that sweet Ms. Mable?”

“I don’t know, but I’m sure she’s fine. Probably just precautionary,” Jackson answered, trying to ease her mind.

Just as the couple was sitting back down in front of the television, a loud boom came from upstairs. Thinking one of the children had fallen out of bed Ruth Ann got up and hurried up the stairs.

Going into each of the children’s bedrooms, she checked on them all except her daughter

Angela, whose room was in the basement. No one had fallen out of bed and they were all sleeping soundly. Walking softly back toward the stairwell, she noticed the master bedroom door was closed. She was certain she had left it open, but thought perhaps her husband had gone up after her and closed it behind him. Opening the door again, she saw that both lamps on opposite sides of the bed were on. She was sure Jackson wouldn't have left them on with no one in the room. He'd already mentioned how much more the electricity bill was going to be than what they were used to, on account of how much larger the house was than their apartment.

Ruth Ann stood by the bed a moment thinking maybe one of the children had turned them on and forgotten to turn them off. Walking to the window to close the curtains, she looked out and saw that she could see directly into a bedroom of the Rollins' house. She made a mental note to remind her husband to be sure to pull the curtains before changing in their bedroom. She then turned off the lamps and went back downstairs.

Thirty minutes later the show Ruth Ann and her husband had been watching went off. The couple turned off the lights in the living room, checked to make sure the front and back doors were locked, and went upstairs to bed. Once again their bedroom door was closed, both lamps were on, and the curtains were open. Ruth Ann stood dumbfounded in the hallway. Thinking she was losing her mind, she dressed for bed and laid down beside her husband. Eventually dismissing it as one of the children playing a trick on her, she was able to fall asleep shortly before ten.

A short time later, twins, Kenneth and Kevin, awoke to the sounds of scratching coming from inside the walls. "Hey, Kevin, do you hear that?" Kenneth whispered from the top bunk.

"Yeah, what is it?" Kevin whispered back, peeking out from beneath his blanket.

"I don't know. Maybe mice?" Kenneth answered as he climbed down the ladder. The little boy tiptoed over to the wall by the closet where the noises seemed to be the loudest and hit the wall hard with his small fist. The scratching immediately stopped.

"Guess it was mice," Kevin said as his twin got settled back in bed.

"Guess so," agreed Kenneth, drifting back off to sleep.

The next morning when Jackson got up to get ready for work he instantly noticed how frigidly cold the master bedroom was. At first he thought the temperature had dropped during the night making a noticeable drop inside the house, but when he stepped out into the hallway the house was as it should be. Shrugging his shoulders, he started into the bathroom when he heard his daughter Samantha talking in her bedroom at the end of the hall.

He walked down to the bedroom door and saw her sitting on the floor with her favorite stuffed bear in her lap. She was facing the closet and talking to thin air. Observing her a moment, he made sure not to make a sound; so he was surprised when she turned and looked at him. "Hi

Daddy,” she said with a smile.

Jackson entered the room and knelt down by his little girl. “Hey, sweetie, who are you talking to?”

“It’s just my friend Zachary, but you scared him away.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Well, I’ll go get ready for work. You and Zachary be good and try not to wake the baby.” He kissed his daughter on the forehead and walked out of the room. He didn’t see any harm in her having an imaginary playmate. The other kids were older, so she didn’t really have anyone to play with. *Lots of kids have imaginary friends*, he thought to himself as he showered for work.

Chapter 13

On Thursday, two days after she'd been taken by ambulance to the hospital, Mable returned home. She had yet to tell her youngest son what she'd saw, because of the company of her other children. Once back at home, she got settled on the couch and began to describe what had happened. "Something didn't feel right in my bedroom. I'm not sure of another way to describe it. The feel of the room was different, not to the extent of how it felt in the Greene house, but close. I felt like someone was watching me as I changed into my nightgown, but there was no one in the room with me. I thought maybe there was someone next door looking this way so I glanced out the window. And when I did I saw this black figure with red eyes. I tried to back away from the window but I lost my balance and fell. That's when I felt this weight beneath my stomach. It pulled my nightgown up to my waist before I was able to jerk the lamp off the table to get your attention. As soon as I heard you on the stairs the room returned to normal, but I felt something hovering over me and I guess I passed out. I don't remember anything after that until I woke up in the hospital."

Hunter listened intently as his mother relayed to him what had happened. Once she finished speaking, he moved next to her on the couch and made a promise. "Mom, Billy and I are going to stop this. We're going to get rid of this thing, I promise."

That night once Mable was asleep, Hunter once again rang the Colt house. "Hello?" A voice said on the first ring.

Hunter recognized the voice as belonging to Donnie. "Hey, I thought you were staying in Lincoln?"

"I am but I decided to spend the weekend with my brothers. I drove down this morning," Donnie told him.

"Oh. Listen, is Billy around?"

"No, he had to work late. Is this about the old house? He and I have been talking about it."

Hunter didn't want to involve Donnie, but if Billy had already been conversing with him about it all then he didn't see any reason why he should keep him in the dark. "Has he told you his opinion about it all?"

"I've read the books he's been reading. We've prayed for the family who lives there now. We both believe the spirit is still there."

"Oh, yeah, it's definitely still there. Only now it's not just terrorizing the family in the house, but even innocent little old ladies." Hunter said the anger evident in his voice.

"What do you mean? What happened?"

"Mom was attacked two nights ago in her bedroom by a black figure with red eyes."

"Damn! Is she alright?" Donnie blurted.

“She had a seizure, lost consciousness, and spent two nights in the hospital but since she’s came home she seems to be alright. She doesn’t remember all of it, but she kept repeating that the devil was in that house.” Hunter told him, glancing across the lawn at the normal-looking early 19th century house. From the street no one could see the horrors that unfolded inside. People walking or driving by were completely unaware that pure evil lurked just beyond the concrete porch and brown wooden door. He wondered if the Greene family had experienced any activity yet.

As if reading his mind, Donnie asked, “Has anything happened to the ones there now?”

“Not that I’m aware of, but I’ve only spoken to them once.”

“They’re not going to let strangers into their home until stuff starts happening to them.” Donnie stated what had been on the minds of all three of them.

“I know. I just hope by then it’s not too late.” Hunter said as he noticed the porch light come on next door and Ruth Ann walk out. Slipping back on his sneakers, he added, “Something may be going on now. Let me give you a call back.” He hung up the phone and looked out the window again. Under different circumstances he would have taken the opportunity to flirt with her a bit, even though he’d never been one to do so very much. With her wavy red hair and long white nightgown blowing in the cool night air, she could nearly pass for a ghost herself, he thought as he walked out the front door.

It was after nine o’clock. Normally the house was dark by eight-thirty. He was sure something was amiss, but he didn’t want her to think he was some weirdo who had nothing better to do than watch the neighbors at all hours. Thinking quickly, he went out to his truck, which was parked at the end of the drive and began to pretend to look for something. Seconds later, he heard a voice say, “Mr. Rollins, is that you?”

He turned toward her house and answered, “Yes, ma’am. Sorry if I scared you.”

“If you have a minute can you come over here? We have a . . . problem and I . . . Well, I guess I just need to know I’m not crazy.” She laughed awkwardly before taking a deep breath and sitting down on the edge of the porch.

Hunter walked up the lawn and stopped about three feet in front of her. “What kind of problem?”

“Well . . . I’m beginning to think I’m losing my mind. But before I say anything, I wanted to ask . . . Did the previous owners ever mention anything . . . strange?”

He looked up at the house before he spoke. He didn’t want to lie but he didn’t want to frighten her either, especially until he found out what had occurred. “There were a few things they told me about,” he said at last.

“Did you think they were losing their minds?” She asked, gazing up at him.

“No, of course not.” He answered, sitting down beside her, even though his brain advised against it.

“This may sound absurd, but I’ve been getting these feelings like I’m being watched. Also, for

the past three nights I've found our bedroom door closed, the lamps on, and the curtains open after I know for a fact I didn't leave them that way." She folded her arms across her chest and rubbed them to rid herself of a chill.

"Is it possible your husband or one of the kids did it?"

"The first night I thought one of the children had done it, but when I asked them the next morning none of them knew what I was talking about. And then it happened again the following night and then again tonight as well. Also, the twins said they heard mice scratching inside the walls in their bedroom the first night that those things happened in our room. My husband had an exterminator come out, but he found no sign of mice or any other pest." She told him, as a single tear ran down her cheek.

Resisting the urge to wipe it away, Hunter looked away as he spoke. "The Colts didn't mention those things happening. I know Mrs. Colt once left the kitchen and returned to find every cabinet door wide open. I heard that one of their boys got locked in the basement, even though the door leading to the basement doesn't have a lock on it." He didn't go into the more extreme activity. He knew there was a negative presence in the house, but at the moment what she was describing could have just as easily been the kids, or even her husband playing tricks. At the moment he had no intentions of telling her about the house's tragic past or the demonic entity that had caused it. He desperately wanted to save Ruth Ann and her family from the fate suffered by the Colts, but the activity had to pick up before they would ever allow himself or anyone else to come in and attempt to force the demon out. Taking a deep breath, he stood. "Well, I better be getting back."

"Yes, of course. Thank you for listening." She said, getting to her feet as well.

For a brief second he nearly leaned in and brushed his lips across hers. Feeling a sensation of burning desire, he quickly made his exit. "Sure thing," he called over his shoulder as he hurried back toward his own house.

Before going to sleep that night, Hunter decided it was time he looked into the history of the property. He planned to do it after work the following day. Turning over to face the wall, he drifted off to sleep.

Unbeknown to Hunter, Billy had already researched the history. From childhood he had believed his parents had purchased the house at 426 Brown Street shortly after it had been built. But when thumbing through land deeds and property records, he discovered the house had actually been in quite a dilapidated state only a few months before his parents bought it. The reason he'd thought it was new was because it looked as though it was. The house had been completely renovated six months prior. Before the restoration, the house had sat abandoned since the mid-1950s, when a couple by the last name of Crowe moved out after buying the house only one year earlier. It fell into disrepair until the oldest Crowe son set about remodeling and renovating it to be sold. He found an old photograph of what the house had looked like before the transformation.



Through their research, Donnie and Billy determined the house had originally been built by a man named Harold Elmore in 1915. There was no record of it being sold until April of 1932, but letters they found suggested the house may have stood empty for several months before that.

There were no known deaths on the property until October 1933 when a young boy fell from a horse and broke his neck behind where the shed currently sat. Eight months later, the boy's father hung himself in the basement. Six months after that, an angry neighbor of

the new homeowner shot and killed the man on the front porch.

By the time the Crowe family bought the house, five other deaths had occurred inside its walls. It seemed that at least one member of every family who lived in the house since late 1933 had met their demise at the house. Although none of the deaths could be directly blamed on the house itself, so much loss of life in one place could definitely attract negative energy; that is, if it wasn't already there.

Billy was baffled as to why the entity had waited more than fifteen years to attack his own family, when the facts showed other residents had been plagued from the first month. Donnie's theory was that their family had maintained such strong faith that it had taken that long for the demon to break through the barrier.

A few days after Ruth Ann and Hunter's conversation, she began to notice her three year old daughter Samantha talking to someone she couldn't see. At first she dismissed it as her daughter having an active imagination, but as it continued over more than a week Ruth Ann became curious. She started asking the little girl some questions about her imaginary friend. "Sweetheart, what's your friend's name?" She asked as she and her two youngest children were having a snack out on the porch that sunny May afternoon.

"His name is Zachary." The little girl with light brown pigtails answered.

"Is Zachary three as well?"

"No, Momma." Samantha said, picking up an apple slice and taking a bite.

"How old is he then?" Ruth Ann asked, handing a cracker to seven-month old Kathleen.

"He's six," Samantha answered as she also held up six fingers.

"Is Zachary fun to play with?"

"Sometimes," the girl muttered looking down at her lap.

“Why only sometimes?” Her mother questioned.

“Cause he’ll only play with me in my room.”

“Why is that?” Ruth Ann asked, becoming slightly alarmed.

“Because he don’t like you or Daddy.”

“Why doesn’t he like us?” Her mother inquired.

“He says mommies and daddies are mean, like his was.”

Ruth Ann took a deep breath and looked at her young daughter. Finally she asked the question that had been burning in the back of her mind. “Is Zachary a make-believe friend?”

“No Momma. He’s real,” her little girl insisted.

“How do you know?”

“Because he showed me the hole in his head where his daddy shot him,” Samantha answered innocently.

All the color drained from Ruth Ann’s face. She dropped the juice cup she’d been about to hand to baby Kathleen. Luckily, it was plastic. She felt the breath catch in her throat as a sudden realization came over her. The scratching noises, the activity in the master bedroom, even the events experienced by the previous owners that Hunter had told her about could all be the work of one innocent little six year old ghost.

She suddenly felt an overwhelming sadness for a life cut short; a little boy who never had the chance to grow up. Big tears welled up in Ruth Ann’s eyes and she wiped them away before her daughters noticed. “Well, honey, you tell little Zachary that he doesn’t have to worry about anyone being mean to him ever again.”

Since having the horrifying nightmare on the bus, Spencer had been plagued by other frightening events. He knew two of his older brothers and Hunter were planning to help out the new family to prevent another tragedy from taking place. He’d tried on numerous occasions to tell both Billy and Donnie about the nightmare but every time he would be about to, something would happen.

The first time had been roughly four hours after he had gotten home from school that day. Sitting next to Billy, who was seated at the kitchen table reading, Spencer opened his mouth to speak when the telephone on the table behind him instantly began to ring. He thought it odd, but nonetheless, he picked it up and said hello.

He was met by a deafening silence for several seconds and then a loud menacing voice said, “NO!” Following the ominous warning, the line went dead.

Spencer's stomach churned as he realized that the monster in their old house in Lincoln had now found them in Fairbury. Placing the phone back on the hook, he walked over to the open window nearby. Taking in gulps of fresh air, he was able to slow his racing heartbeat and calm his upset belly. There was no question in his mind about what the voice on the end of the line had belonged to.

At only eleven years old, most boys his age were out riding bikes or getting into mischief. Spencer, however, wasn't like those other youngsters. He and his family had been witness to the devil incarnate and he, like Billy and Donnie, wanted answers.

"Who was that?" Billy asked, interrupting his thoughts.

"Wrong number," he said quickly, never turning to face him.

"Are you okay, Spencer?" His older brother asked, getting up from the table.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'm going to bed now. Goodnight," he told him, not looking back.

"Oh . . . Okay then. Goodnight." Billy said returning to his seat.

Another time Spencer had been about to tell his brothers of the nightmare, a framed photograph taken of the family shortly after Alex was born fell from a table, cracking the glass and breaking the frame. Thinking it could have been mere coincidence, Spencer picked it up to examine it. He quickly noticed that the crack in the glass only covered Alex's face. Taking it as the sign it was, Spencer again kept quiet.

A few weeks later as he and Billy were out doing some grocery shopping, Spencer attempted it once more. "Hey, Billy, I need to . . ."

All at once he felt something hit him in the back. He turned around swiftly to see one lone potato on the ground behind him. He glanced around to make sure no one of flesh and blood had thrown the vegetable at him. There was no one else in view, except for an elderly chap pushing a cart two aisles over. Knowing that the man, who appeared to have to steady himself with the shopping cart, would have had no reason to randomly hurl a potato at a complete stranger Spencer knew it was another warning.

"You need to what?" Billy asked, pausing to look at him.

"I . . . Uh . . . Need to use the bathroom," he stammered.

His older brother looked at him curiously. "Well, it's in the back."

After seeing that the evil entity from the old house could find him no matter where he was, Spencer gave up on trying to talk about the nightmare.

Back on Brown Street in Lincoln Ruth Ann began to speak out loud to Zachary, as though he was any other member of the family. A picture would fall from the wall, a candle flame would

extinguish itself, or the water in the kitchen sink would turn on with no one in the room. She would casually return the picture to the wall, relight the candle, and turn off the running water before asking Zachary to go play somewhere else.

Throughout the remainder of May, the activity in the house continued to be seemingly innocent child's play. No one was frightened by it because the entire family assumed it to be six year old Zachary's spirit. On the first day of June, however, the playful antics of a small child turned into something much more disturbing.

The Greene's four oldest children were home by themselves that afternoon. Ruth Ann had taken the younger two to a doctor's appointment and Jackson was still at work. It was a bright hot sunny day. JJ and the twins were out in the backyard playing. Their older sister, Angela, was in the kitchen making her and her brothers some lunch. She had bread, sandwich meat, cheese, and mayo spread out in front of her on the counter across from the stove. All of a sudden she heard the sound of something being dropped behind her. Just as her mother always did, she told Zachary, without turning around, to go play elsewhere. Silence returned and she went back to making the sandwiches. A moment later the drawer next to her, which held the silverware, opened by unseen hands. Angela reached over and shut it. Immediately it opened again. Letting out a sigh of frustration, she began to turn around while saying, "Zachary, I thought I told you to . . ." She stopped in mid-sentence though as she saw what was standing less than three feet behind her.

It was at least six feet tall and black as night. With no face or clothing visible, it was simply the silhouette of a large man. But seeing it where nothing should have been was enough to make fourteen year old Angela run screaming from the house. She was terrified and could say with absolute certainty that what she'd seen was not the spirit of a six year old boy.

When her mother returned home, Angela pulled her aside and told her about what she'd encountered. Ruth Ann was still convinced that it had only been Zachary playing a joke on her.

Chapter 14

Since the night the entity from next door had attacked her, Mable hadn't seen it again. She did, however, begin hearing strange sounds coming from various places in her own home.

The first time she heard the peculiar noises she was sitting at the small square table, at the end of the counter in the kitchen, drinking a cup of tea. She had just sat down to read the local newspaper and enjoy her tea when all of a sudden she began to hear what she thought was a bird chirping. It was a warm sunny June day, so hearing a tweeting bird in and of itself was no cause for concern. But what was troubling was that the sound seemed to be coming from inside the room with her. Not having been outside at all, she had no idea how it would have gotten in.

Mable turned and looked around expecting to see a little bird sitting nearby. But she saw nothing. She put down the newspaper and stood. The sound still filled the room as though a happy feathered friend had come to join her for tea. Slowly walking around the kitchen, she looked for it. Finding nothing, she next went into the dining room to take a look. She assumed the volume would either increase as she got closer or decrease when she got farther away. But neither were the case. The singing seemed to follow her no matter which room she went into, as though the little fowl was sitting on her shoulder serenading her.

Returning to her tea, Mable tried to ignore the phantom sounds and went back to reading the paper. Several minutes later, the chirping ceased. The singing bird stopped as mysteriously as it had started, leaving Mable clueless as to where it had come from.

For two days no new sounds began nor did the chirping bird return. Then on Sunday morning as Hunter and his mother were upstairs getting ready for church, they each heard a loud insistent knocking on the front door.

Hunter, standing in front of the bathroom mirror trimming unruly hairs from his beard, hurried downstairs with the tiny scissors still in his hand. Because of the urgent sound of the pounding, he thought it must be one of the neighbor's from next door.

As he was unlocking the door the knocking continued, but it immediately stopped the moment he swung it open. There was no one there. He walked out on the porch, even though he was barefooted and shirtless, and scanned his eyes over the lawn. Nobody was to be seen. Assuming some neighborhood kids were playing a joke, he took one more quick glance and then closed the door. He didn't even get a chance to turn over the lock on the inside until the frantic rapping resumed. Instantly he swung the door open wide, sure he would catch some lanky teenager staring back at him, but again there was no one there. It would have been impossible for anyone to have bolted from the porch in the two seconds it took him to reopen the door. Realizing what was probably to blame, he shut the door once more. The persistent hammering on the door began again. Hunter, standing directly in front of the closed door, loudly announced, "Knock all the hell you want to. You're not getting invited in." And with that he went back up the stairs to finish getting ready for church.

A few days later Mable and her daughter Margie, who was spending the day with her mother, were in the living room looking through a box of family photographs. They were alone in the house.

The younger woman was sitting on the left side of the couch, while her mother sat on the right. The two were talking and laughing as they reminisced of days gone by. All at once they both heard footsteps upstairs. It sounded like someone wearing heavy boots was taking a stroll from room to room above their heads.

Margie froze. As the color drained from her face, she turned to Mable wide-eyed. The older woman was a bit concerned, but given the recent occurrences she was quite sure she knew what was responsible. Her daughter, on the other hand, was petrified. She gently laid the photographs she was holding down on the coffee table and grabbed the rotary telephone receiver from the table on her end of the couch. Turning the finger wheel clockwise to the necessary numbers on the phone's faceplate, she quickly rang the police.

"No, there's no need!" Mable tried to stop her but she was already talking to the dispatcher.

"This is Margie Craigford. I'm at my mother's home at 430 Brown Street. There is an intruder upstairs and we need someone out here right away!" She whispered into the phone as the footsteps continued overhead.

"Ok, ma'am, an officer is in route. Are you still inside the house?" The female dispatcher asked in a concerned tone.

"Yes, my mother and I are downstairs in the living room."

"Okay, ma'am, are there any weapons in the house?"

Thinking quickly, Margie blurted out, "My brother probably has a rifle in his bedroom upstairs."

"Okay, ma'am, you and your mother need to get out of the house. Go outside and wait for the officer to arrive. He looks to be about five minutes out."

Margie didn't need any further direction. She hurriedly placed the receiver back on the cradle and grabbed Mable by the arm. "Come on, Mother. The lady said we need to go outside and wait for the officer."

Mable stood up and followed her daughter out onto the front porch. Once there she spoke in a calm voice when she said, "There really was no need to notify the police."

"Mother, someone has broken into your home!" Her daughter exclaimed in disbelief.

"Nobody of flesh and blood is in the house, Margie."

The younger woman looked at her as though she had gone completely off her rocker. "Are you saying there's a ghost responsible?"

"It's not a ghost but a presence, yes. I know you don't believe it because neither did I until I saw it with my own two eyes. In this world there is pure evil, and I'm not talking about in people either. In the house where the Colts used to reside, a demonic force is at play."

“Mother, do you realize how ridiculous all that sounds?” Margie said at last, beginning to think the woman she had always looked up to had gone mad.

“Read the Bible, dear. There are many verses that talk about demons on earth. Believe me, you become a lot more open to the different possibilities once you experience something for yourself.” Mable told her daughter, while taking a seat on the dark green and white metal glider near the porch railing.

Sergeant Tim McNabb, who had assisted in the questioning of the Colt brothers four months before, arrived at the Rollins’ house to find Mrs. Rollins and her daughter on the front porch. The younger woman appeared terribly distraught, while the older one was as calm as if they had simply invited him over for a cup of coffee.

Acknowledging the two ladies, he whispered, “Stay here.” Entering the house through the front door with his gun drawn, he checked each of the rooms on the first floor before ascending the stairs to the second. He found no prowler, nothing amiss, nor any signs of forced entry. As he stood in what he believed to be the elderly woman’s bedroom, something in the window of the house next door caught his eye.

The sight of the house, separated only by a few shrub bushes from the one he stood in, brought back haunting memories of that traumatic day in late January. The case still weighed heavily on his mind. How a respected caring father could just suddenly one day snap and attempt to slaughter his family was still very troubling. Often times at night, at the end of his shift, Tim would contemplate if perhaps there had been something else at work in the Colt household. As a highly distinguished officer of the law, he couldn’t very well suggest that they should consider the possibility of something ethereal being responsible, but that was along the lines of his thoughts in the months after that terrible day.

As Sergeant McNabb stood there in Mrs. Rollins’ bedroom, a large shape began to form directly in front of the window of the house across the lawn. At first it was more of a dark gray wispy blob but as he stood watching it, it morphed into a black mass that covered the entire window. Tim felt he was in the midst of something tremendously evil. His eyes darted to the corners of the room he was in sure there was something with him. Seeing he was indeed alone, he turned his attention back to the window. To his horror the mass was now a full-body silhouette with crimson flaming eye sockets. It had no other facial features but he got the distinct impression that the figure was smiling.

Backing away from the window until he was against the foot of the bed, Sergeant McNabb turned and darted out into the short hallway and back down the stairs. Hurrying out to the women on the porch, he stopped only long enough to tell them there was no one in house and no sign of anyone else having been there. Then he quickly rushed back to his patrol unit and continued on down the street, even though it would have been closer to go in the opposite direction. He simply could not drive by the house harboring the malevolent specter.

Timothy McNabb had been a police officer for six years. Prior to that, he had been a member of the Lincoln Volunteer Fire Department. He was a member of Second Baptist Church on 84th Street in Lincoln, and he coached his nephew’s Little League team. He considered himself to be a rational man, and had never been one to believe in ghosts and such. But after

what he'd just witnessed he was beginning to question those beliefs. He had no reasonable explanation for it.

At the Rollins' house Margie was visibly shaken. They had heard heavy steps upstairs; they weren't just imagining things. There had been someone walking around in the bedrooms upstairs, she was certain of it. Yet the officer found no evidence of anyone having been there. As she followed her mother back inside, she replayed what Mable had said. *Was it possible that something*, she wasn't sure she could believe it was demonic, *but perhaps a spirit had made the sounds?* She continued to contemplate it all on her drive home later that evening.

Chapter 15

Jackson Greene had yet to have any experiences with Zachary's apparition or anything else in the house. Even though his wife and children firmly believed that the spirit of a murdered child dwelled among them, he dismissed it all as them having wild imaginations.

There were no such things as ghosts in his opinion. He'd been born and raised most of his life in a small rural community in East Tennessee. Both of his parents were highly religious members of a small one-room Missionary Baptist church less than two miles from the family home. Jackson, an only child, had been expected to be at church every time the doors were open. It was through the sermons at that little church that he'd learned ghosts, hauntings, and the like were just made-up stories to be told around a campfire. He'd never saw a ghost, so therefore he'd never had any reason to question those teachings.

One Friday night after Ruth Ann and the children were already in bed, Jackson turned off the television and since he didn't have to get up early for work the next morning, he decided to read a bit. Sitting in his wood frame easy chair with his sock feet propped up on the matching foot stool. His mother's 1950s three-bulb floor lamp stood between the chair and the wall. The lamp was plugged into a popular new device called The Clapper, which would allow one to turn on or off the lamp by simply clapping one's hands twice. When they had first purchased The Clapper they had been quite pleased with it, but more recently they had seen that a lot of normal household sounds could make it operate as well. Sounds like the television volume being a bit loud, the telephone ringing, or even someone talking loudly would cause the lamp to turn both off and on unpredictably. But on this particular night the living room was silent, except for the sounds of Jackson turning the pages in the book he was reading. So when the lamp suddenly began to rapidly turn off and on, he was puzzled.

He inserted a folded slip of paper into the book to hold his place and laid it down on the arm of the chair. Getting to his feet he pulled the chair out from the wall and unplugged the lamp cord from The Clapper, which removed the lamp's source of electricity. Yet the lamp continued to turn on and off. Highly disturbed, Jackson backed away from the lamp and flipped the switch by the door, turning on the overhead light. At that moment a piercing growl began to reverberate throughout the house. It sounded like an angry, menacing dog had somehow found its way inside. The only problem was that it seemed to come from everywhere inside the house at once.

Jackson's breath caught in his throat. He knew there was no animal in the house or anything else that could create such a noise. Concerned for his family, he darted to the basement to check on his daughter, Angela. Not bothering to turn on any lights until he threw open her door, he had to feel the wall to get to her room without running over anything. Peeking into the dimly lit room he saw that Angela was sleeping soundly, even though the growling sound was just as loud in the basement as it had been in the living room.

Returning to the first floor, he glanced at the floor lamp to see it still flickering off and on. Running up the stairs to the second floor, he stopped to look in on his wife and his other five

children. They were all sound asleep, despite that the intense growling that was now causing the pictures hanging on the walls in the hallway to vibrate.

As the noise continued loud as ever, Jackson went back downstairs and stepped out on the front porch. As soon as he closed the door behind him, he could no longer hear the snarling. Wearing only red pin-striped pajama pants and a black t-shirt with socks, he walked out onto the lawn and attempted to calm his racing heartbeat. The cloudless, star-filled sky above him helped to settle his nerves. The darkness of night was so peaceful with no more than a light breeze drifting from the west. Standing in the dew-covered grass, it seemed the ominous feeling he'd had inside had simply been a nightmare. *Perhaps it had been a dream*, he thought to himself. He'd been drowsy, but he'd been trying to finish the chapter he was on before he went up to bed. Maybe in reality he had drifted off and then had a bad dream with the awful growling in it. But if that had been the case, he would have had to been sleepwalking when he stepped out on the porch. He remembered unlocking the door and walking out onto the cold concrete as plain as day. And he'd never been known to be a sleepwalker before. Shuddering from a chill that had nothing to do with the night air, he glanced over next door to see a light on in the living room. Contemplating for only a moment, Jackson sauntered across the lawn and up to the front door of the Rollins' house.

Less than a minute passed before Hunter swung open the wood door. The younger man looked surprised, although considering it was nearly eleven it was understandable. Like himself, Hunter was in his pajamas and socks.

Hunter immediately knew something had happened. The man in front of him was pale and obviously distressed. Besides his appearance, the fact that the two hadn't spoken at all since they'd first been introduced when the Greene's moved in and now the man stood in front of him in wet socks and pajamas, were also good indications that some type of phenomenon had occurred.

"I saw your light was on. I hope I'm not disturbing you," Jackson said awkwardly.

"No not at all. I was just doing a little bit of reading. Come on it." Hunter responded, holding open the screen door for him to enter. He led him through the foyer and into the living room.

It was obvious to Jackson that Mrs. Rollins had done the decorating, as it didn't at all resemble a bachelor pad. The couch and both chairs were the type you would find in an antique store. A wooden rocking chair with a lavender hand-sewn cushion in the seat sat near one end of the couch. The walls were adorned with family photographs, religious paintings, and a large wooden cross over the mantle. Several potted plants sat near the side window and a family Bible rested in the center of a rectangular table on the wall opposite a small TV. Nothing made him the least bit uncomfortable until he glanced down at the end of the couch nearest the entrance. Three books were scattered there. The titles were *Demons and Demonic Forces*, *Murder in Amityville*, and *The Exorcist*. Alarmed, Jackson felt glued to the spot.

Hunter followed his gaze and picked up one of the books. "I'm just curious," he said referring to the unusual titles. "So what brings you out and about in the middle of the night?"

Thinking about the menacing growl that had sent him fleeing his own house, Jackson sat

down in the rocking chair and contemplated how he should approach the subject. "My wife and kids think there's a ghost in our house," he said after a moment.

"And you don't?" Hunter asked, treading lightly as he took a seat on the couch.

"Honestly, I didn't but now I don't know." Jackson told him, looking bewildered.

"What happened to make you question your beliefs?"

"They think we have the spirit of a six year old boy named Zachary living . . . I mean residing in our house." Jackson told him, not yet ready to admit that he'd come into contact with anything.

"What makes them think that?" Hunter asked as calmly as he would have had they been discussing the weather.

"At first we thought he was my three year old little girl's imaginary playmate, and then from there my wife began to communicate with him. Now all my children talk to him and about him as though he is any other person. None of them are afraid of him."

Hunter was alarmed and it was written all over his face. "I've looked into the history of the house and land where you and your family live. And while there have been multiple deaths there since the house was built, there is no record of a child named Zachary."

"So they are imagining it all?" Jackson asked feeling slightly relieved.

Hunter took a deep breath and answered, "It could be another spirit pretending to be a child." He watched the other man's face for a reaction.

"So you think there is something in my house?"

Instead of answering the question, Hunter asked one of his own. "What happened to you tonight? You didn't just feel like having a heart-to-heart at eleven o'clock at night."

Rubbing the palms of both his hands down his pant legs to the knees and then beginning to bite on the fingernails of his left hand, Jackson was obviously uneasy. "I heard growling," he said barely above a whisper.

"What?" Hunter asked, leaning in a bit so he could hear.

"I heard growling," he repeated louder.

"Where?"

Feeling foolish, Jackson rubbed the back of his neck and looked away. "Inside the walls," he answered reluctantly.

It was at that very moment that the door leading from the living room into the kitchen slammed shut on its own accord. "What the hell was that?" Jackson asked as the color drained from his face.

Hunter got up and walked over to the door. He was pretty sure he knew what had caused it, but he didn't want to jump to conclusions. Glancing into the kitchen, he made note that no windows were open in there or the living room. There wasn't any air circulating in either room

that could have triggered the door to have shut on its own. Hunter returned to the couch and said, "That was a sign."

"A sign of what?" Jackson blurted terrified.

"What it's capable of."

Jackson stood and paced the room for several minutes. "So if it's not a little boy then what is it?" He asked suddenly.

"I have a theory but I'm not an expert on such things by any means."

"What's your theory?" Jackson murmured, not sure if he truly wanted to know or not.

"I think it's a negative entity."

Jackson stopped pacing and stared off into space, as if in deep thought. "I've got to get back home before something else happens there. Can you stop by tomorrow afternoon? I'd like to discuss this further." Jackson told him, turning to go.

"Sure thing," Hunter said following him back to the door.

Jackson walked back home and went in, making sure to lock the door behind him. At this point he wasn't sure locking the door would do any good in keeping trouble out. How can you escape something that shares your home with you, he wondered as he noticed the lamp cord had been plugged back into The Clapper. The lamp was off and the rest of the downstairs was dark as he climbed the stairs to go up to bed.

Three steps from the second floor landing he heard screaming. Leaping up the remaining stairs and racing down the hall, he realized it was coming from JJ's room. He darted into the room and saw his son's bed violently shaking. "JJ!" He shouted.

"Dad! What's happening?" The boy screamed, absolute terror in his voice.

Jackson jerked his son from the pulsating bed and ran from the room. In the hallway he heard the twins crying in their room. One move inside the door was all it took for him to see why. A towering pitch black figure was emerging from the corner of the room. One of its arms was raised toward the ceiling and long slender fingers inched toward the terrified boys. The air in the room was so thick it was hard to breathe, as though a fire was burning elsewhere and the smoke was obscured.

"Dad! What is that thing?" JJ cried from the doorway behind him, as he frantically grabbed his youngest sons.

As soon as Jackson and the boys were back into the hallway they saw Ruth Ann coming out of the master bedroom. She'd heard none of the commotion but had awoken to use the bathroom. "What in the world is the matter with you all?" She asked, seeking the looks on their faces.

"Get the girls! We're leaving!" Jackson shouted, out of breath.

"What? Why?" Ruth Ann demanded, confused.

“Because there is something very wrong in this house!”

Ruth Ann smiled and let out a sigh. “It’s only Zachary.”

“What I just saw in the twin’s room was not the ghost of a child!” He blurted, angrily.

“He just likes to make jokes sometimes. He doesn’t mean any harm!”

Ushering the boys into the master bedroom and out of earshot, Jackson turned to his wife. “Zachary doesn’t exist. I mean . . . The spirit you believe to be a child doesn’t exist. There is no record of a six year old boy named Zachary dying here.”

“How do you know that?” She asked in disbelief.

“Hunter Rollins, our neighbor. He’s researched the history of the house.”

She was quiet for a moment while she processed what he’d said. With tears in her eyes she responded, “Just because there’s no record of him, doesn’t mean he’s not real. You don’t understand, Jackson. A mother knows. I can sense his loneliness and I’m not leaving him here alone!”

“Ruth Ann, it’s not safe for our children to be here! You didn’t see what we saw.”

“Zachary is nothing to be afraid of. If you and the boys are too afraid to share our home with an innocent little spirit then by all means go, but the girls and I will be staying.”

Jackson could not believe what he was hearing. The mother of his children and the only woman he’d ever truly loved was willing to sacrifice the wellbeing of their own kids only so a phony spirit didn’t have to be alone. The whole situation was ludicrous, and the worse part was had he not saw the sinister figure with his own eyes he wouldn’t have believed it either.

The fact of the matter was they didn’t have anywhere else to go. Their decision to move to Nebraska had basically been a leap of faith. They had no family or friends within hundreds of miles. There were the Rollins’ next door but they could hardly call them friends, having only spoken to either of them a couple of times. Regardless of Jackson’s rising concerns for the safety of his family, they couldn’t live on the street; nor could they escape back home to Tennessee in the middle of the night, with only the clothes on their backs.

Finally, at nearly three o’clock in the morning, Jackson was able to get JJ and the twins settled down to sleep on a pallet on the living room floor. He promised to doze on the couch, but he doubted if sleep would come for him.

As he laid his head back on his arm against the wooden arm of the couch, he thought about the figure in the twin’s room. Besides the way the room itself had felt, there was a distinct malicious sensation emanating from the entity. He was certain that what he’d seen had meant to cause harm and was undeniably not the spirit of a little boy. But he was at a loss as to how to get his wife to understand that they were all in peril.

Even though it had been only minutes till midnight when his neighbor had left, Hunter still decided to give Billy a call. Spencer answered on the third ring. "Hello?"

"Spencer it's Hunter. I need to talk to Billy. Is he still awake?"

"Is there trouble at the old house?" Spencer asked, thinking about the nightmare he'd had.

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"Angela is going to kill her family if somebody . . ." The little boy shouted quickly into the phone seconds before the line went dead. A moment later, an invisible hand slapped him with so much force that Cyrus heard it from the next room. The boy rubbed his cheek and stared up at his brother from the floor where he'd fallen from the impact.

"What the hell was that?" The older boy shouted, scanning the room for the perpetrator.

"It's the he monster from the old house! It's been trying to keep me from telling anyone about a nightmare I had, but I was finally able to tell Hunter." Spencer told him, rubbing the large red handprint on his face.

"Nightmare? You mean premonition?" Cyrus asked, helping him to his feet.

"Yeah, it's bad Cy. Somebody's got to do something."

"Billy, Donnie, and Hunter are going to try to help the people living there, but they can't just show up saying they need to exorcise a demon." Cyrus said, taking a seat at the table.

"I don't know how I know this, but the new family knows something's not right with the house." Spencer stated, pulling out the chair across from him and sitting down.

"Has anybody been hurt yet?" Cyrus asked, wishing for the first time that he was able to have visions like his little brother.

Spencer closed his eyes for a moment. Opening them he answered, "Not yet."

At that moment the telephone began to ring again. This time Cyrus answered. "Hello?"

"What happened to the line? Spencer was talking and it just went dead." Hunter said his voice filled with concern.

"Yeah it was the demon, but it was a tad more dramatic on this end. Spencer took a slap to the face, leaving its whole handprint."

Hunter rubbed his eyes as he listened to Cyrus. As bad as he hated to, he needed to talk to his brother Jeff. They all needed some guidance on how to protect themselves from the entity's wrath. "I've been invited over there later today. I think it's as good a time as any for Donnie and Billy to meet them too. If Spencer's premonition is right, we are in a race against time to stop this thing. I'm going to call my brother in the morning to see if he can give us any spiritual guidance. Can you tell Billy and Donnie to try and make it up this way, say about one?"

“Yeah, I’ll tell them.” Cyrus answered, glancing at his little brother’s face.

“Okay. Cyrus, take care of the little boys if anything was to happen.” Hunter told him as an afterthought before returning the receiver to its cradle. Instantly something in the living room crashed to the floor. He knew the demon was responsible. Ignoring it, he climbed the stairs. Hoping for at least an hour’s sleep, he crawled into bed and closed his eyes.

Chapter 16

Breakfast at the Greene house on that Saturday morning was very different than most morning. JJ and the twins were still so shook up over the events during the night that they refused to go upstairs even to get dressed. Jackson went up and collected the three of them fresh clothes. Angela, remembering her encounter with the figure in the kitchen, felt sorry for her brothers.

Everyone had just began to eat their eggs, bacon, and toast when little Samantha spoke up and said, "Daddy, you made Zachary mad last night when you tried to get Mommy to leave."

Shocked, Jackson dropped his fork in his plate with a loud clatter that filled the room. JJ jumped at the sound. "Mom, Dad is right! There is something bad in this house!"

Ruth Ann stood. "Now look what you've done, Jackson! Now the children are afraid of poor little Zachary."

Jackson got to his feet as well. "They are afraid because of what they saw and felt! Open your eyes, Ruth Ann! Would an innocent little boy scare the daylights out of other children, even as a joke? I'm telling you there is something evil in this house and it very well may be what you believe to be Zachary, but he is not the spirit of an innocent child!" He shouted, putting his still full plate on the counter and going out onto the side porch. He hoped the guy next door had some answers when he came over later.

Hunter had finally drifted off to sleep sometime after daylight. An hour and a half later he awoke to the sound of his mother's footsteps in the hallway. She was getting ready for his sister, Sherry, to come pick her up for a shopping trip.

He sat up on the side of the bed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. Getting up, he walked to the dresser and collected a clean pair of jeans, a dark gray t-shirt, underwear, and socks. Not wanting to disturb his mother in the second floor bathroom, he went downstairs to take a shower. Afterwards he went into the living room and cleaned up the broken glass from the vase that the entity had tossed earlier that morning.

After dumping the remainder of the glass shards in the kitchen trash can, he picked up the telephone and called his brother.

"Yes?" Jeff said, picking up the receiver on the second ring.

"Jeff, it's Hunter. This is going to sound ridiculous but I need some advice on dealing with an evil presence." He was sure his brother would think he'd fallen off the deep end.

"Is this involving what happened to Mom?" Jeff asked after a long silence.

"Partly, yes."

“She spoke with me about it last Sunday. Hunter, you have to understand what you’re proposing is all out spiritual warfare. This isn’t a game. Demons can and sometimes have caused serious injuries to the individual trying to force them out.”

“We know the risks, Jeff. But we’ve also seen what this thing can do. The Greene’s have six children. Six completely innocent kids! This thing has already taken lives; we can’t stand by and let it take anymore!’ Hunter stated.

Jeff agreed with his little brother that the being needed to be banished from the house, but he prayed Hunter understood the risks involved. Drawing a deep breath, he said, “Well, what I’m about to tell you ought to be tried first. If it doesn’t work, then you will have to take more extreme actions. And at that stage I can give you some blessed, religious objects to assist. You will need to begin with a prayer of protection before ever entering the house. Once inside you should join the family together and say a prayer over them. You must place genuine and devoted conviction into the words. Next, you’ll need white sage. It must be burned and spread with a feather into every corner, cabinet, closet, and crevice inside the house and then go outside and do the same thing around the edges of the property. While doing that you need to forcefully command that the entity leave and not come back.”

Hunter had a pad of paper and a pen and was taking notes as his brother spoke. “It’s called Smudging, right?” He asked, remembering the reading he’d done.

“Yes, it’s an old Native American ritual to rid yourself and your home of negative energy.” Jeff said, hoping and praying the smudging worked without having to bring out the big guns, sort of speak.

“How will we know if it worked?”

“Trust me you’ll know. The atmosphere changes; the air gets lighter. However, demonic entities have been known to give you a false sense of security, so use caution.”

“Will do. Thanks brother,” Hunter said after he finished writing everything down.

“You’re welcome. I’ll be praying for you all.” Jeff told him as he hung up the phone. Leaning back in his office chair, he thought about the battle that was inevitably about to ensue. All of a sudden the lights overhead began to rapidly dim and then brighten. It continued for several seconds before all three bulbs blew out simultaneously. “A battle indeed,” he spoke out loud to the empty room, well aware of what had caused the lights to malfunction.

Chapter 17

Donnie and Billy arrived at Hunter's house shortly before noon. The younger of the two brothers had a box of newspaper clippings from the research they had done tucked under one arm. Both Billy and Donnie had anxious looks on their faces.

"I can do this alone," Hunter told them after one glance in their direction.

"Hell no! We've got a job to do here. Just give us a minute to get our feelers out of the way." Billy responded, while standing in the Rollins' dining room looking out the window at his childhood home.

An hour later, the brothers and Hunter stood on the Greene's front porch and awaited someone to answer Donnie's knocking. Jackson swung the door open wide after a minute or two. Dressed only in a pair of green plaid shorts with a baby girl on his hip and a look of concern on his face, he was a sight to behold.

Seeing his neighbor accompanied by two strangers on his porch, he invited them in and then quickly excused himself to go put on something a little more appropriate. Shortly thereafter he was back downstairs and sitting across from Donnie at the kitchen table. Hunter sat beside Jackson, while Billy was beside his brother.

"Jackson, this is Billy and Donnie Colt. Their parents were the previous owners of this house." Hunter said, making introductions.

"Good to meet you." Jackson returned, unsure of why they were present but needed to get the previous night's events off his chest, he continued, "I don't know if you boys ever experienced anything in this place or not. And I don't want to come across as some lunatic, but there is something evil here."

Billy and Donnie exchanged glances.

"What makes you say that?" Hunter asked.

The older man shifted in his chair and looked through the doorway into the living room. The twins and baby Kathleen were playing on the floor in front of the TV. Jackson didn't know what he would do if something were to happen to one of his children. "The growling I told you about last night wasn't the only thing that happened." He began and then proceeded to describe the rest of the night's activity.

When Jackson finishing speaking Billy cleared his throat, "It sounds like the entity is gaining momentum."

"Can this thing actually hurt someone?" Jackson asked to no one in particular.

Donnie sighed softly and took out the first article in the box he'd brought. The headline read "Shooting Leaves Woman Dead, Two Children Injured. Suspect Found Deceased."

Jackson took the newspaper clipping and scanned the first paragraph. "Donna Colt. Was she

your mother?" He asked the brothers.

Billy nodded and then added, "What the papers told was only the tip of the iceberg though. Our dad was possessed by the entity that is still in this house. We want to stop it before anyone else gets hurt, but it's not going to be easy."

Jackson sat in silence as he read the rest of the article. As tears welled up in his eyes, he asked, "Can you fellas keep this from happening to my family?"

"We believe we can, but it's going to be one of the biggest fights we've probably ever been in." Hunter answered.

Suddenly the door leading into the living room slammed shut on its own accord. Baby Kathleen began to cry from the other side of the door. "Daddy!" Kenneth screamed.

Jackson jumped to his feet and desperately tried to get the door to open. There was no lock on either side, yet the knob wouldn't turn and the door was frozen in place. Donnie and Hunter joined him, each ramming their shoulder into the wood trying to force the door open. To no avail. The kitchen all at once became noticeably stifling. All four could feel unseen eyes upon them.

Billy, knowing the demon was close, took his mother's rosary beads, that he'd found under the seat of his truck, out of his pocket and held them in the air. "I command you to leave this family alone! You are not welcome here! Leave this family alone in the name of Jesus Christ!" He boomed over and over until the knob turned and the door popped open.

Jackson ran to his children in the other room. They were frightened but unharmed. As he held his three youngest children against his chest, he wept. He would never have moved his family into the house if he'd had any idea of the horrific secrets hidden inside.

Billy hadn't known if it would work or not, but he'd felt he had to try. Thankful no one had been hurt he slid the rosary back in his pocket and returned to his seat at the table. All of a sudden he felt eyes on him. Turning toward the door leading into the dining room, he saw who he assumed to be Mrs. Greene. "Ma'am," he said getting to his feet.

She walked past him and took a tea cup out of the cabinet. Lifting the kettle, she filled the cup and then took a seat across from him with her head bowed. "Well, well, well . . ." she began, "if it's not one of the Colt boys."

"Yes ma'am. The name's Billy Colt." He said extending his hand.

"I know who the hell you are!" She snapped.

Billy was taken aback but he went on to say, "We're here to help you and your family."

"I don't need your damn help! I want you, Donnie, and Hunter out of my damn house! I should have taken you instead of your weak ass old man!" She hissed before tilting her head to look up at him.

The sweet, kind-hearted face of the woman he'd first seen in the doorway was gone. In its place was a blood-spattered grotesque face with hollow black eye sockets. Billy realized at

once that he was face to face with the monster that had terrorized his family.

Refusing to let his fear take over, he quickly stood and began to recite the Lord's Prayer. Donnie, Jackson, and the real Ruth Ann entered the room yet Billy continued to make direct contact with the repugnant beast.

"Oh my God!" The real Ruth Ann blurted out in horror when she saw what appeared to be her own body housing the demon. "You were right Jackson, that's not Zachary!"

"Zachary! Ha! It's been me all along!" The entity screeched as it twisted and scratched its way out of the chair.

"Leave my family alone!" Jackson screamed catching his wife seconds before she collapsed.

"You'll pay! You'll all pay!" The demon spat before disappearing into thin air.

"How did it . . . It looked just like . . . Oh, Jackson, I'm so sorry I didn't believe you or the children!" Ruth Ann cried.

"It's okay. Now we've just got to keep the kids safe." Jackson responded looking at the Colt brothers.

It was at that moment that a blood-curling scream echoed from the basement. "Angela!" Ruth Ann shrieked.

"Stay here!" Donnie instructed the couple as he and Hunter took off down the stairs.

The lights in the basement flickered on and off, and the air was so hot it almost burnt their skin. The odor of feces hit them both in the face as soon they opened the first door at the bottom of the stairwell. A second later the lights went out completely, plunging them into total darkness.

Donnie took the lead and felt along the walls for the next door. Finding it, he turned the knob expecting it not to budge but to his surprise, it swung open banging the wall behind it. "Angela!" He shouted.

"I'm in here!" A teenage girl's voice rang out from the bathroom in the back.

Hunter stood watch as best he could in the dark, as Donnie tried to get to the girl. A dresser was overturned and partially blocking access to the bathroom. Trying to shove the large wooden piece of furniture out of the way, he sensed a presence directly behind him. Giving up on moving the dresser, he climbed over it and yelled, "Angela, I need you to get back away from the door!" Lifting his leg while standing on the upended bureau, he kicked the door with every ounce of strength he had. Immediately it ripped from the hinges.

"It's in here! I can feel it!" Angela cried, tears streaming down her face.

"I know." Donnie said, trying to keep his own emotions in check.

A moment later, they were trailing Hunter back up the steps to the dining room. Donnie carried the terrified teenager in his arms.

“What happened? Angela, are you alright?” Jackson asked, rushing to her.

“I saw the figure again but this time its face was cut up and bloody. Oh Daddy, it was awful!” The girl wept into her father’s chest.

“I know, honey. I saw it too.” Jackson tried to comfort his daughter, but he was at a loss.

Hunter glanced around the room and then announced, “Jackson, you need to get your family out of this house now. We can do a ritual but I have to go get the supplies for it first.”

“But where will we go? We don’t have anywhere else to go or we would have left already.” Jackson answered.

Billy never batted an eye as he said, “You all can stay at our house in Fairbury until this is over. Pack a few things and you can follow Donnie back there. We have three more brothers at home who don’t need to be left alone too long anyway.”

Ruth Ann, frightened and confused, didn’t question his offer. In reality the Colts were total strangers, but they were there to help. The Greene’s had no choice but to trust them. “I’ll go get some things together.” She said, headed for the stairs leading to the second floor.

“You all have no idea how much this means to us, but I have to tell you I don’t think I’ll ever be able to repay you.” Jackson blurted as his wife left the room.

“Knowing you, the wife, and the children are safe is payment enough.” Billy told him.

Half an hour later Donnie left driving Billy’s pickup truck, followed by the Greene family in their van. The older Colt brother and Hunter remained in the house. They were fearful of the entity following the family, and wanted to stay behind to occupy its attention.

Minutes after they left, Hunter called his brother and requested that they meet to get the sage for the ritual Jeff had described over the phone.

Chapter 18

Against Hunter's better judgement, Billy decided to wait inside the house on Brown Street for him to return with the sage.

His friend had only been gone a few minutes when the smell of sulfur filled the entire downstairs. Billy covered his mouth with his hand and stepped out onto the front porch to get some fresh air. He hadn't realized how much time had passed since they had first arrived at the house. It was dusky dark and the moon was visible on the horizon. A single star shone brightly in the direction of Fairbury, as if trying to guide him to a safer place. "No, I've a got a battle to win here first." He said out loud before going back inside.

Immediately heavy footsteps sounded out overhead and a guttural growl echoed throughout the house. He turned on a lamp sitting on a table near the TV and sat down on the end of the couch closest to it. He'd been mentally preparing to take on the bastard since that day in January. Now his chance had arrived and he felt ready. No matter what antics the entity used, Billy vowed not to stop praying and fighting until he won the war.

As the footsteps and growling were met with doors opening and closing simultaneously all over the house, Billy knew the entity considered him a threat. The air in the living room became heavy and the room temperature threatened to burn his arms and face. The windows too began to open and close by themselves as a deafening sinister voice boomed, "GET OUT!"

Billy, who had changed a lot since the deaths of his parents, took it all as a challenge. He stood, taking his mother's rosary beads out of his pocket and began the spiritual battle by demanding, "What is your name demon? I command you to tell me your name?"

"Zaakill!" A deep male menacing voice rang out from somewhere upstairs.

"Your name is Zaakill? Zaakill, I demand you to leave this house! You are not welcome here! St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the devil."

The noisier the commotion from the entity got, the louder Billy prayed. He continued with other prayers of deliverance, the Lord's Prayer, and back to the Prayer of St. Michael. He'd never been one to be able to sense things as his brothers were able to, but he felt the demon getting weaker. From the farthest wall in the basement to the last bedroom on the second floor and every space in between, Billy continued to command the entity to leave. He intensely prayed for nearly two hours. Halfway through the fight, he felt God's presence battling alongside him.

Retracing his previous steps, Billy ended up in the living room. He leaned against the mantle as he removed his worn out trucker's cap. Wiping the sweat from his brow, he endlessly spoke the words of many prayer verses. Even though he was rapidly weakening in the war of good versus evil, he refused to give up. He owed it to his parents, to his brothers, to the Greene family, and to every other poor soul who had been affected by the wrath of the demon he now

fought against. He was an ordinary man. He wasn't a priest or a minister. He was simply a believer that with God's love and guidance he could drive out the evil entity.

As he returned to the Prayer of St. Michael, Billy's legs collapsed from beneath him. From the floor, he persevered in prayer and commands for the spirit to go back from where it came. Gradually the growling and other signs of the demon's presence began to fade away.

The heaviness in the air lifted. The temperature of the room returned to normal. For the first time ever inside the house on Brown Street, he could hear the chirps of the crickets outside serenading the night. "It's gone," he said out loud to himself as his face hit the carpeted floor.

Before he closed his eyes, Billy was sure he glimpsed the wispy figures of his parents ascend the staircase hand in hand.

It was well after midnight by the time Hunter made it back to the house, due to a car accident and backed-up traffic coming in from across town. He'd tried calling to check on Billy several times, both from his brother's house and a gas station along the way back. But the calls had gone unanswered. He'd hoped his friend had been outside or had maybe gone for a walk. But once he pulled up in front of the house and saw the front door open, he knew something was wrong.

Hunter raced into the living room to find Billy face down on the floor in front of the mantle. He knelt beside him and shouted his name. No response. Turning him over, he checked for a pulse. He had one but it was very faint. "Billy, come on buddy! Wake up!" He continued to shout. Getting no response, he grabbed the receiver of a nearby push-button phone and called for an ambulance.

He monitored Billy's breathing while waiting for the ambulance to arrive. As he sat on the floor next to him, he could feel the difference in the house. Whereas it used to be hard to breath within the heaviness, now he was able to take huge gulps of air with no problem. The feelings of being watched were gone. Even though it was night and only one lamp illuminated the room, the house was brighter. More welcoming. There was a newfound silence, peaceful even.

Hunter followed the ambulance to the hospital. The nurses checked Billy's vitals and drew blood from his arm. The doctor came in a few minutes later, and announced, "Mr. Colt is extremely dehydrated. But other than that he seems to be fine. The nurse will start him on a bag of fluids through IV and he should be fine by morning."

Within the hour Billy awoke, surprised to find himself in a hospital bed. "What the hell is all this?" He shouted angrily.

"Hey! Hey! It's okay. You collapsed back at the house. Doc said you're just dehydrated. He said you should be good as new by morning." Hunter told him, trying to make sure that his friend didn't jerk the IV out.

“I did it man,” Billy murmured as a slight grin formed on his lips.

“I know you did.”

“That demon . . . Won’t hurt anybody else in that house,” Billy replied between coughs.

“I just wish you hadn’t had to go it alone.”

“I wasn’t alone. God was in that house, Hunter. We were fighting together, side by side.” Billy said.

Hunter simply nodded.

“I’m not joking, Hunter. The good Lord was in the house with me! I could feel him!”

“I believe you buddy,” Hunter replied at last.

Donnie and his younger brothers arrived at the hospital a few minutes after three in the morning. Alex and Spencer rushed into Billy’s room. Cyrus and Donnie had already spoken to Hunter on the telephone and knew that their brother was going to be just fine. The two of them trailed behind having flashbacks from the last time they were all together at Lincoln Regional Hospital.

The youngest boys jumped up on the bed Billy was lying in and hugged him. “I was afraid we lost you too,” Spencer said as a tear ran down his cheek.

“Not a chance. But I have decided what I want to do with the rest of my life.”

Hunter, Billy’s brothers, and even the nosey nurse, who pretended to be checking his blood pressure but the cuff never inflated, listened intently for him to explain.

“I want to save other folks like the Greene’s who are dealing with this kind of thing. I drove that demon out. Me. With God’s love and guidance, I did it. And I can help other people too. I know I can.”

“You could have gotten yourself killed taking on that thing alone!” Cyrus blurted.

“But I didn’t. Think about it . . . If somebody had been available to help us when we needed it, Mom and Dad might have still been alive. This is my calling. I know it’s dangerous. I know the risks. It could have killed me tonight, I know. But I feel like God has called me to help others battle demonic forces in their homes. Innocent people shouldn’t have to suffer.”

“And what are we supposed to do while you’re out fighting the demons of the world?” Spencer asked.

“We can all do this. We’ve been there. We’ve been in the victim’s shoes. You and Cyrus have gifts that were given to the two of you for a reason. Those abilities can be a big help out in the field. We can start our own non-profit business. We’ll call it . . . Colt Investigations.” Billy told

them all.

“Sounds like a plan!” Spencer said, excitedly.

“I think we might be able to pull it off,” Donnie stated.

“Can I help too?” Alex piped up.

“Sure, we can’t leave you out little bubba.” Spencer answered.

“I agree with Billy. There’s a reason we were born with these weird capabilities. It’s only right to use them to help other people dealing with what we went through. But we can’t just focus on the demonic cases. We need to try and help people who are experiencing anything that could fall into the supernatural category.” Cyrus added.

“Now you know I can’t let you all do this alone,” Hunter said suddenly.

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Billy laughed.

Jackson, Ruth Ann, and their children returned to their home the next day. The presence that had cast a fog over the house for so long was gone. For the first time since moving in, it felt warm and inviting.

They were thankful to have their lives back, but they remained fearful that the entity would return one day. Instead of continuing to worry about it, the Greene’s moved out of the house into a much smaller home in Omaha within the six weeks following the exorcism.

The house was put on the market and stood empty for nearly a year before a wealthy businessman purchased it with the intent of turning it into apartments. The next spring, tenants moved into the newly remodeled apartments on Brown Street.

The house finally held the happy moments of life that Mr. Harold Elmore had envisioned when he’d built it so many years before.

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Daniel has never been anything but a burden to all who knew him. He's got big dreams, but no one will look far enough past his autism diagnosis to see them. Candace grew up in a home where she never felt like she was good enough. As soon as she could, she moved out to California to make a new life for herself. One day the two cross paths, and from that moment on neither of their lives are ever the same. Together they set out on a daring adventure across the country where they find unconditional love in the most unlikely of places.

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