

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

By : Matthew Bissonette

Mechanic Luther Redstone returns to his boyhood town of Sanctuary Hill Canada. He is a social pariah and returns to find things haven't change. But soon he will face a horror more terrible then anything he can imagine.



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By Matthew C. Bissonette

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Prologue: The Mystery of Sanctuary Hill

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During the late autumn of 1983, the press and media started circulating stories about the remote hamlet of Sanctuary Hill , stories which vaguely told about some unknown catastrophe which had befallen the inhabitants of that isolated community in the wilds of northern Ontario. The state authorities put Sanctuary Hill under quarantine and they did not elaborate about the fate of the five hundred people who lived in that community, though rumors ranging from some lethal virus to a mass cult suicide where the prevailing theories among the public. People began to demand answers but the government officials simply ignored the public's cries. The media finally was able to get some information and it was rather alarming; there where only a handful of survivors from the unnamed disaster which had claimed the entire town, and these few where quickly silenced by the authorities and spirited away to undisclosed destinations.

The residents in the surrounding rural communities began to give press interviews, and some of them spoke of some kind of curse which had been over Sanctuary Hill, though most in this secular society instantly dismissed such notions as lunacy. Few people could have imagined what had really happened, and the truth

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was far worse than even the most fevered imagination could have ever envisioned. Sanctuary Hill, that town lost from civilization in a great expanse of deep dark forests, so remote from every thing that it was easy for them to hide the truth.

Since I am one of the survivors of the horror that emerged and laid waste to that place, I alone can tell the story of what really happened though I'm sure what I have to say will be dismissed as the ravings of a lunatic. But knowing the facts in this particular matter is a hell from which I can never escape, for how does one cope with having witnessed terrors which should not exist in any sane world. I don't know how I can go on, how to live with what I saw with my own eyes; how to live with seeing a nightmare in the flesh. For I know of the dark, horrible things which conceal themselves in the dark places where man's knowledge does not shed light; and now I am afraid of the night and I never turn my apartment lights off; fearing what may hide in the dark. I live in a state of fear, for I honestly feel death comes for me on silent wings.

My name is Luther Redstone. A rather unexceptional person who is, or was, a auto mechanic by trade. I had grown up in Sanctuary Hill and was a social pariah because of some family history. I had left when I was a young man with intentions of making something of myself in a big city. I thought I had left Sanctuary Hill behind forever and all the personal suffering I had experienced there. But circumstances would bring me back, I wish I had never returned.

Because I bear some responsibility in what happened.

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Chapter One: A Night in the City

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Night had just fallen over the city of Ottawa as a sweltering heat of summer began to subside, I remember the heat because the place where my Alcoholics Anonymous meeting was being held was in a room with only single oscillating fan providing relief from the heat. It was actually my twelve month sober, quite an accomplishment for myself since I had a severe drinking problem only a year before. The room was full of people who were tackling the same demon as myself, the booze. After I had sat and listened to a man named Stan talk about how alcohol had lost him his job, his home, and his wife in that order. I guess you need to hit rock bottom before you know you need help. Rock bottom for me was getting into an almost fatal car crash, judge told me I could either get sober or go to jail. I chose the former.

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The guy who resided over this group was a rather affable Norman Dowd, a grandfatherly looking guy who had been an extremely violent alcoholic and had not touched a drop in over two decades. He turned to me.

"So Luther, care to tell the group about your accomplishment."

I stood up then did my recovering alcoholic speech which I had done countless times in the past year.

"My name is Luther, I've been sober for the past year. I realized the destructive impact it was having on my life and changed for the better."

Someone in the group, this heavy-set guy who always was dressed in the same cheap t-shirt and whose name always escaped me, asked, "what drove you to drink?"

I looked at the guy momentarily, then replied, "I was trying to escape the past. My life has been difficult and the alcohol was comforting but I abused it. I don't need it."

Even as I spoke, I wanted a drink more than anything else.

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The group let out around ten and I left. The building where the meeting was held was in the run down area of the city, the area where the homeless congregated and crime was common. A soft, cold wind blew from the north, and it provided a momentary relief from the oppressiveness of the summer heat. The streets seemed oddly empty that night, I remember feeling as if I was somehow alone.

I arrived at the bus stop. A simple green bench was placed beneath a flickering street lamp. I sat down on the bench and waited.

I was startled when a somewhat low, menacing voice spoke out.

"Going home?"

I turned to see a person who seemed to be a vagabond, dressed in rags and a hooded sweater so I could not see his face, sitting on the bench. I hadn't heard or seen him approach, he was just there all of a sudden.

"Going home," he asked again.

I said, "sorry, I don't have any change, I'm a little bit tapped out to at the moment."

Then he turned to me. He had extremely pale skin, a strangely angular facial features hidden beneath a grimy beard. His eyes were dark, and struck my like there wasn't anything looking at me from behind those eyes.

Then he spoke again, and when his mouth opened I almost had a fit of revulsion, these things that looked like maggots or worms fell from his mouth and then wriggled about upon the ground. Yet even though his mouth was infested with those things he still was able to speak clearly.

"Going home."

His jaw didn't move when he talked.

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I stood up and started to back away when the every street lamp on the block went dark for a few moments and when they came on he wasn't there.

Just then my bus came to a rumbling stop and the curb and the door opened. I looked around, unsure if what I had just seen was real or only in my mind. I then boarded the bus and felt a sense of calm as it rolled away from the bench.

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I arrived at my apartment just after eleven. It was a small, and it was well kept. As I took my coat off I noticed that the light on the answering machine was blinking. I walked towards the machine and hit the message repeat button.

The machine spoke, "You have one new message."

I then started to walk about the apartment and open the windows to let the cool air in as the message repeated. A really flat, emotionless voice spoke.

"Mr. Redstone, I am the executor of your late uncle's estate, his name is Peter Redstone. I have called to inform you that he has named you the soul beneficiary of his estate, you receive both his home and his business, a garage; as well as roughly forty thousand dollars."

I stopped what I was doing, a mechanic by trade, I was interested in my uncle's garage. It was actually him who taught me auto-motive mechanics, I had spent much of my angst filled youth tuning up cars in that garage. I was some what upset at his passing, though I had not had any contact with him since I had left my boyhood home fifteen years before.

The executor left me his number so I could contact him.

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About an hour later I was laying in bed as I watched the ceiling fan rotate, it was a little rusty and would make this metallic whining sound. I was evaluating my life.

I admit some of my previous history had made me avoid the town where I had spent my troubled youth, I left intending never to return.

As I thought about things the neighbors in the next apartment, a young couple who had the most venomous arguments, where having their latest row. The siren of a passing police car screeched out in the night.

Though life in the city had not turned out as I had planned, I worked several jobs in garages that never went anywhere. A few women, not many, but relationships seemed to be more headache inducing then meaningful or fulfilling. Though most of the time in the city was fogged by the years of drinking. I had to admit the prospect of returning to Sanctuary Hill left me uneasy, but I was interested in owning my own business.

So that night I decided to return to the town of my youth, a drifted of to sleep.

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The dream began.

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I'm standing in a black void, I can feel these little slimy things under my feet that wriggle about but I can't see them. I look around, yet all I can see is darkness. Then I can taste dirt in my mouth, and I feel an extremely severe sense of claustrophobia, like I'm entombed. I want to scream but I can't.

I woke up the next morning screaming.

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Chapter Two: The Homecoming

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Sanctuary Hill, a small community, was a remote outpost of modern civilization in one of the most remote regions in Northern Ontario. It was lost amongst vast forests which seemed to go on forever. The town itself had been built on a tall hill and from which you could see almost forever. It was called Sanctuary Hill because fur traders hunted these lands in the early years of European colonization, a small outpost built atop that hill which they could see from a great distance away and would be called sanctuary from the harsh wilderness.

I drove through town in my old beat up green truck, all my belongings strapped to the flatbed; the truck I had been driving since I was a kid. The town appeared just as it had when I left nearly a decade before. A great part of the forest around the hill had been logged away long before and a few dozen homes had been built around the base of the hill. Atop the hill was main street along which most of the town's business was located, a gas station, a liquor store, a pizza place, a few other businesses. Although the buildings in town predated the century so there was a somewhat of a decayed, dilapidated appearance to the town.

It was an early Sunday morning, so the streets were entirely empty, I imagined the town's people were all congregated at the ancient church built near town square at the top of the hill.

I passed by town square and came to the town's cemetery, a large grassy field surrounded by a iron fence. Inside a gargantuan willow tree towered over the tombstones, its branches waving limply in a breeze. Amongst the tombstones were statues, angels and gargoyles who silently watched over the graves.

I parked my truck in front of the gate and got out. I turned towards the Church which was across the street from me. It was a large cathedral, and its steeple loomed above me. The large doors were open, and I could hear the sermon of the preacher inside, the same hell and brimstone stuff that terrified me as a kid.

I then entered the cemetery and walked along the rows of tombstones. All the older graves had been placed in the center, the newer ones along the edges of the cemetery. It was easy for me to find where my parents had been buried. I knelt down before them, it had been the first time I had paid my respects since they passed away. My father had died a year ago, my mother the year before that. Although I saw them occasionally, I had not been in town since I left fifteen years before. My father visited the city occasionally, I would visit my mother over in the asylum in Falls County miles from town.

I looked down at the graves, I realized that they might have found the peace that might have been denied to them for so long.

On the face of my mother's tombstone there was old faded paint spelling out, "Murdering Bitch." I guess people hadn't forgotten, being accused of two murders in such an isolated community is something that people never forget. I had long ago decided to never dwell on what had happened. It was one of the reasons I left town.

I did my moment of silence and returned to my truck. As I walked out of the gates I realized that the church parishioners were now letting out and talking on the church steps. I realized a few were looking at me. I understood why, this place was isolated from the rest of the world by the sea of trees, and outsiders were uncommon and in some ways unwelcome. But some of the older ones were looking at my truck, same truck I drove when I was young.

I didn't look at them as I got into my truck and drove away.

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I had met the stiff lawyer who was the executor of my uncle's estate a few days before in Kirkland City, a small city about a fifty miles away from Sanctuary Hill. I signed all the papers and now my uncle's garage and home were mine. After I had left the cemetery I found my new home. It was a modest one-story home in a state of disrepair, though I knew that fixing the place up would be a constructive way to pass my some time. I spent the rest of the morning moving my stuff in. I didn't bother unpacking my stuff, I was more interested in the garage at the top of the hill.

When I drove up to the garage, it looked just like it did that summer my uncle taught me how to be a mechanic. Before I could not tell you the difference between a spark plug and an alternator, afterward I was an efficient mechanic to say the least. My father had sent me to work for him during the age where I had a lot of teenage turmoil which was making me act out.

It was a large green building with tin siding, you could easily fit two cars inside. My uncle had always managed to make enough to live off with that place, I imagined it would be no different for me. The garage doors were locked, I was about to go in when I happened to see the Ma's general store next door and I decided to give to visit.

Ma was a kind, elderly woman whose age was not known but who most agreed was around at the turn of the century. I had liked her as a child, and was glad to see her still tending shop.

I walked inside. Inside where several rows of shelves stocked with goods; several cats were sleeping lazily among the produce and merchandise. Behind a large wooden counter stood Ma. Though she appeared quite aged, she still had that perpetual smile that I had found so compassionate as a child.

I stepped up to the counter and said, "Hi Ma. Good to see you again."

She squinted at me for a second. "I know who you are," she said, "if it isn't little Luther, Luther Redstone. I haven't seen you in years. What brings you back to Sanctuary Hill?"

I replied, "I'm taking over my uncle's garage. Thought I would escape the rat race of the city. Things are peaceful around here."

I had been away for so long that I really didn't know what had been going on during my absence, though Ma was an endless fountain of knowledge when it came to local history and gossip.

I asked, "so, what has been going on around here lately?"

"Well, nothing much happens here," Ma admitted, "but last winter there was another disappearance. Sonny Maxwell and Gene White, you remember them don't you, they went hunting last winter and they never returned. They still haven't found any trace of them. It shook everybody up."

There were only two types of news in Sanctuary Hill, no news and bad news. I remember that the town had more than its share of tragedy, I knew that better than most since my own childhood had been ruined by one of those tragedies.

The shop door opened and a tall, well built Native American fellow with long, black hair and dressed in denim, walked in. I knew him, or more like knew of him, I had been told that his name was Jason Raven and he was considered somewhat of an odd duck by most of the town's people. I knew he made his living from taxidermy, aside from that the man was a complete mystery to me. He was known to be a very solitary guy.

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Jason stepped up to the counter and asked, "you wouldn't have any lamp oil would you?"

She answered, "yes, I can help you out."

Jason turned his head and looked at me.

I extended my hand towards Jason and said, "Luther."

Jason didn't shake my hand and continued to look at me. "You are Tiffany Redstone's son aren't you?"

I nodded. "Yeah, I am."

"How is she these days?"

I muttered, "She passed away several years ago."

My mother's confinement in a psychiatric hospital was a very sensitive subject for me, I had visited her many times before she died and seeing her under the influence of medications was hard because she seemed only partly alive. I knew about the events which had led to her confinement as did the whole town, though I rarely spoke of them. I guess it was to painful to address.

Jason offered his condolences. "I am sorry to hear that. But has been tough for you, being her son."

I defensively said, "I don't want to talk about it friend."

Ma put two containers of lamp oil on the counter. "Here is your oil Jason."

Jason took out his wallet and pulled out several bills and handed them to Ma. He said, "keep the change." He took his lamp oil and headed for the door.

I said, "I'll see you around Jason."

He briefly looked back at me then said flatly, "Maybe."

Jason left and I was alone with Ma again. I asked her, "do you know Jason well?"

She shook her head. "He comes to the store every now and then, though he never says much and he does seem to keep to himself mostly. He has lived here for many decades yet he doesn't seem to want to make any friends."

"Well, I guess I'll be off, though I'm going to be a regular customer."

I got a thousand dollar bill from my wallet and placed it on the counter. Ma looked at me and asked, "what is this for?"

"For the tab. When I left I remember I had a large tab, so I'm paying you back."

"I'm happy your are back Luther."

"Yeah," I said, "glad to be back."

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Later that day I was busy organizing all tools my uncle used and cleaning up the garage. During my cleaning I was alarmed to find a box with several sticks of dynamite in it tied into a bundle. My uncle occasionally used them to destroy beaver dams. I hid the box in the corner beneath a bunch of empty boxes. A large, rusty engine was suspended by chains from the ceiling.

I was so focused on my work I failed to notice someone walking up behind me.

"Luther, I could smell you from across town."

I was startled and I dropped the socket in my hand and I turned to face the stranger who was standing behind me. He was overjoyed to see my childhood friend Paul Jackson standing there.

He had spent his life doing hard labor, and his physical appearance revealed this because he was large guy who looked tough. He had prematurely gray hair, though he was in his mid thirties, he looked much older.

I asked, "how did you know I was in town?"

"I saw the Green Snot."

I laughed. He always called my truck the Green Snot.

I said, "it is good to see you again, how the hell have you been doing lately?"

Paul slapped me on the arm. "Luther," he said, "I can't believe you actually came back to this one horse town. Why in the name of God would you come back?"

I turned back to my tools and spoke as I continued organizing them. "The city is all it is cracked up to be, man. At least here I don't have to be in such a relentless rush all the time, things are more relaxed here."

"Jesus, this town has to be the most boring place on the entire planet, nothing ever happens here."

I asked, "what keeps you here then?"

"You know why," he replied, "my father left me his farm and I'm not going to sell it."

"I see Paul, you got responsibilities here."

I and Paul had been friends for as long as I could remember, and we had always two directly opposite individuals. Paul was muscular guy who spent most of his time doing heavy physical labor and he was the most outgoing person you could meet, he could shoot the shit well with friends and stranger alike. I, I spent my youth reading books and avoiding hard work, and I had grown into a tall, slim guy with short brown hair. But, as young guys, we had been in a couple of fights together, and there was no one else I would want to cover my back in a fight. We weren't brothers in blood, but we where close after going through so many trials of life together.

Paul said, "yeah, I got responsibilities, though I know you have spent your life trying to avoid any kind of responsibility."

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"Listen," I told him, "I am responsible for myself alone, and that is all the responsibility I need."

Paul shrugged. "So, have you seen Lizbeth yet?"

As soon as I heard the name I could feel my heartbeat slow down, I hadn't really thought about her in ages.

I muttered, "no, I haven't. Does she still live here?"

"Yeah."

"How is she?"

"She is doing really good for herself, her husband is on the town council."

I turned to Paul and asked, "who did she marry?"

"Carl Smith," he answered.

I said, "shit, not that asshole."

Lizbeth Bechet was the only major love I had in my youth, an attractive french Canadian girl. Though when she refused to leave Sanctuary Hill with me, we said our tearful goodbyes. I remembered her as she was in her youth, with curly brunette hair; blue eyes, an attractive figure. I had been married twice, though I had never loved another woman as I had loved her. I guess every love you ever have will always be compared to your first. I didn't know what she saw in me then, I really didn't.

Carl Smith was a guy in school who had beaten me to a pulp a few times, he took a special interests in making my life difficult.

I, dumbfounded, asked, "why would she marry him?"

"Carl doing pretty well for himself," Paul said, "he is on the town council, as well as being related to the only rich family around here. Lizbeth did OK for herself as husbands go I guess if you look at it from a strictly superficial standpoint."

I, somewhat upset, slammed the tool in my hand down hard on my work bench. I said, "she deserves better than Carl Smith."

Paul nodded. "Yeah, he was always spreading shit about your family. Man, I had to stop him from beating the shit out of you more than once. You know, people around here still are very opinionated but that whole deal. I'm sure people are already talking about you being back."

I put my hands down on the bench and sighed heavily. "I don't care about what anyone has to say, it has nothing to do with me. Shit, shouldn't people have gotten over this by now. It was over twenty fucking years ago."

"OK," Paul said, "but are you going to talk with Lizbeth, because she is now the receptionist at the town hall. It just a short walk from here."

I bluntly said, "me and her ended a long time ago, besides, she is married now. I'm really not going to get involved in anything with her."

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Paul smiled. "Yeah, I know you, you want to see her. Stop being a pussy and be a man."

I shook my head. "I couldn't care less, besides, I got two ex-wives who are draining the life out of me through alimony payments. I really don't need to get into it with another skirt. I don't want her to know I'm back."

"OK, Luther, I got it."

"Paul," I said, "have you gone and married someone or are you still a swinging single?"

"Actually got hitched not soon after you left."

"Who?"

"Marry Keller."

I laughed. "You used to call her the wicked bitch of the west, you've gone and married her. God, she used to despise me."

"She isn't that bad, though when I tell her you are back in town, well, she won't happy."

"Yeah, she thought I was a bad influence or something."

It was good to talk to Paul again, he was always the consummate optimist who could see the good side of any situation. I myself was a pessimist about almost everything. I have had a few friends during the course of my life, though Paul was the only one I ever respected, I always knew him to be a decent person. His commitment to family was absolute, and in most situations, he would stand by a friend.

Paul started to talk. "I can't believe you became a mechanic. As a kid, you didn't know a God damn thing about cars."

I looked at Paul. "Yeah, well, I had a good teacher."

Paul looked around and saw the 350 big block engine suspended from the ceiling. It was in the drastic need of an overhaul, and until business started coming in, I guessed fixing it would be good for a diversion for awhile.

Paul said, "do you think you can fix it?"

I replied, "there isn't any engine I couldn't fix, it just needs some time and a little care. You up for helping?"

"Sorry," Paul said, "I've got a ton of work to do at the farm, harvest you know. I'm a busy guy, not a moment to waste."

"OK. Oh, if you see Lizbeth, don't tell her I've come back."

Paul asked, "want to get piss drunk tonight at the bar, just like old times?"

I had fought hard to rid myself of alcohol abuse, so I answered, "I don't touch the sauce any more. Maybe we can hang out some other time."

"Well," Paul said, "I'll see you later."

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"OK, it is good to see you again man."

Paul returned to his car parked outside my garage, got in and drove away. Though me and Paul meant to keep in contact, it had been many years since I talked to him last. I looked forward to pissing some time away with Paul, I had always enjoyed his company.

I returned to organizing my tools and equipment as the day slowly passed by.

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I was closing up the garage for the day as the sun slowly sunk beneath the horizon and the dark embrace of night came. I stood in front of my garage as I locked the doors. I hadn't gotten much accomplished, though I was happy with the condition of the place. I guess my uncle was fastidious when it came to how he kept his garage. I was happy that this was my own business, though I wondered if business would be good enough to pay the bills. But I had decided to take a gamble. Though personal history seemed to show that every gamble I had ever taking in life had never paid off.

I turned away from the garage and I saw her standing there and I heart began to beat faster.

I knew it was Lizbeth, and a cavalcade of emotions I hadn't felt for a long time overtook me. She still had her dark raven hair, her figure was slim and she moved in a vary feminine way. But her eyes where just as I remembered, piercing and deep. She still spoke with a french accent.

I stammered, "Liz."

She took a step towards me. "Hi Luther," she said, "I heard that you took over your uncles garage."

"Yeah, but how did you know I was in town?"

Lizbeth shrugged. "Paul came to town hall this afternoon and told me you where back in town."

I said, "I implicitly told him not to tell you."

Lizbeth asked, "why didn't you want me to know you where in town?"

I looked away from her and replied, "we exchanged some pretty harsh words when we parted ways, I don't know, maybe I thought you didn't want to see me and maybe we should just let sleeping dogs lie. Honestly, I thought you and me where over.

"Why did you think I wouldn't want to see you, that I wasn't happy to hear you're back. I would like to think we are still friends."

I said, "friends, of course. Anyways, I heard you went and married Carl Smith."

She sighed. "Yes, we where married a year after you left."

"I see," I said, "I hope he is making you happy, you deserve to be happy Liz. I guess that was something I could never do for your."

"You still being to hard on yourself."

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"Yeah, I guess some things never change. What kind of husband is Carl."

She responded with, "he is a good husband and a good father, he has done a lot for me."

"You have a kid?"

"Yes, his name is Ben."

There was something I had wanted to know since we had split up, and I finally asked her something that had bothered me for a long time.

"Lizbeth, when you refused to move away with, was it because you didn't want to be with me, where you glad I left because I'm sure everyone else was?"

She thought about something for a moment then said, "I know you wanted to escape this place since childhood, but Luther, I didn't want to leave. My friends and family are here, my entire life is here, and you asked to leave it all. You broke my heart when you left, do you think you are the only one who suffered. And you never wrote me, you didn't even call."

"Because, I was scared what you might say."

"You just dropped completely out of my life and never once tried to reach me, you hurt me. But it doesn't mean I was not happy when I heard you were back."

"Yeah," I said, "well, it is better that you didn't go with me. All I found in the city was disappointment. I never could give you the things you deserved, I guess Carl can."

Lizbeth said, "I missed you."

"Yeah, I missed you to. All these years I've been away."

She asked, "something seems to be troubling you, what is it?"

I looked away from her eyes. "It is killing me to stand here and talk to you, I was an idiot for leaving, and I don't want to think that if I had stayed that we would still have been together. I've found love and lost love in the city, but I will always regret leaving you. I must be the world's biggest idiot, honestly, you were the only damn thing in life that ever made it worth living. When I lost you, it felt like I lost my reason for living."

Lizbeth said, "I understand why you left, I mean, people around really don't like the Redstone family ever since your mother was taken away. It was horrible the things they called you as a kid."

I frowned. "I didn't meet many people in the city who liked me either. Besides, I don't care about anything people might have to say about my family, what the fuck do they know. Whatever my mom did way back when has nothing to do with me."

Lizbeth asked, "Luther, why did you really come back?"

"Because," I replied, "I lived in the city for over ten years, and the stress of urban life was really getting more than I could take. I remembered this place, I came back to where life seemed simpler. I know my family name is held in poor regard here, that was why I really left. I can't escape it, I'm a Redstone and this town is my home. If people want to look down on me for what my mother did, then so what."

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"I think you weren't trying to run away from this town, you were trying to run away from your family or their reputation."

I said, "I never asked you, but why did you get mixed up with me, I mean, I don't suppose people were much kinder to you than they were to me when we were together. Honestly, people here like your family, they despise mine. You are better than me, you always were."

Lizbeth smiled. "Because, you could always make me laugh and you treated me like the most important thing in the world. You broke my heart when you left me."

"Sorry, I'm a world class idiot for leaving you."

Lizbeth asked, "are you going anywhere?"

"Yeah, I own the white house at the bottom of the hill. A short walk from here."

My truck was parked nearby, but I was hoping she would walk with me.

"Can I come with you," she asked.

"Sure, I would like that."

So we started to walk side by side, down the road which led to my new residence. We walked in silence for a moment, and I savored every moment of her company. I didn't know why, but I felt as if my love for her had been dormant but seeing her brought back very old feelings. But then she was another man's wife, and I knew her well enough to know that she wouldn't be unfaithful, she had actually been born with some class.

I asked, "So, what kind of husband is old Carl?"

"Let me see," she said, "he is at work a lot, and we don't spend much time together lately, it seems that work is taking up all his spare time. But he is very successful and we are doing well."

I laughed slightly. "I don't know, what kind of man would rather be at work rather than be with you."

Lizbeth sighed again. "He tries hard. I loved you Luther, but you did everything in such a half-assed manner."

I was surprised. "Are you saying I do everything half-assed, because I assure you, lately I've been able to utilize three quarters of my ass at least."

She laughed. "I'm serious, you have ability yet you never seem to look for opportunities, you just let life roll by and never strive for better."

I shook my head. "You and I see life through different eyes. I wish I could see things like you and be hopeful and optimistic, but Liz, through my eyes, this world doesn't seem to like me very much."

"It doesn't hate you, you could succeed if you put your mind to it."

"Wait," I said back, "you chose to stay here, and you're damn smarter than I am, you could have made it out there, you could have found something better for yourself. Me, I'm not a bad guy, but I'm a simple guy. You, you are something special."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

"I'm happy here Luther, unlike you, I don't have a chip on my shoulder about this town."

I said, "after they took my mother away, after they accused her of those horrible things, everyone in this town thought that I was just as guilty as her. They see me as her fucked up seed, just how are you suppose to feel when everyone tells you as a kid that you are inherently evil. If it wasn't for you, I'd either be dead or in prison by now. This town just really seemed to have it in for me."

"Yet you came back."

"Yeah," I said, "I'm really past the point by now of giving a shit about what people in this town might think of me. Besides, I'm just here to run a little business and find a sense of inner peace, something you would be hard pressed to find in the city."

She looked at me and she asked, "when you visited your mother, did she ever tell you what had happened?"

I told her, "last couple of times I saw her in the asylum, she was so whacked out on pills that she was nothing but a shell of her former self. I asked, or tried to ask her what happened, and she started to rant a rave about demons, monsters, she didn't make any sense."

She said, "When we where together, there was nothing anyone could have said to make me stop loving you. I know you feel like you have this dark cloud hanging over you, but things aren't as bad as they seem."

We reached the small, single story home then both walked up onto my porch then faced each other. We smiled, though I hated that she belonged to another man, because at that exact moment, I knew she was the best thing to happen to me in my entire life.

I asked, "would you like to come in?"

She replied, "no, Carl is expecting me for dinner. I guess I'll see you around."

"See you later then."

We parted company and I watched her walk away, she stopped and looked back at me, then continued on. After I went inside my rather modest domicile.

I decided to get some sleep. Since did not come easily, I lay in my bed and looked at the ceiling. My thoughts then turned to the incident which had tainted my family name in this community, and I remembered. I remember when it first began to destroy the ones I cared for.

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Chapter 2: Haunted Past and A Murder

Chapter Three: The Haunted Past

Before the events which would cast a shadow over the entire Redstone family, my childhood could be best described as bland and prosaic. I can't remember being happy or unhappy, but I remember my family before our lives would take a turn for the worst.

I was the only son of Hal Redstone and Tiffany Gates, both whose family lines could be traced back to when Sanctuary Hill was founded. Hal worked doggedly at a factory many miles away from the town in which we lived. Though he worked hard he was what most would see as a poor man yet a good, honest man. I never remember having an abundance of money as a kid, but our family was a happy one. My mother Tiffany, well, she was a simple country girl who always was there for me when ever I needed her. I could you always remember her ever watchful eye looking out for me.

We lived in a dilapidated farm house not to far away from Sanctuary Hill. At first it was just me and my parents; that was the only time in life I could remember when I didn't feel cursed. But when I had reached the age of eight, then my families curse did come.

My mother had a large family and her family bond was very tight so that when they asked her take care for my great aunt Edna, my mother couldn't say no. My father, who unlike me, was aware of Edna's problems, tried to convince my mother to say no. But my mother was as stubborn as a mule when it came to family, and my father finally gave up. So aunt Edna came to stay with us.

Edna was elderly as well as almost being a complete invalid, she had the intellect of a toddler. Since Edna's birth she had been particularly malicious, she had been known to set fires in her childhood. Though as she aged in years, she became afflicted with some withering disease that attacked both her body and her mind. By the time she came to live with us, she could barely do anything.

She scared me from the beginning, there was something not right about her. She would always wear the same tattered yellow dress, and she had odd angular teeth that seemed strange to me, and what really scared me was the fact I was sure she wouldn't blink for long periods of time. She could speak, but only mad ramblings which I could not understand. I honestly hated her, I hated her because she made me afraid.

We set up a bedroom in our attic and would routinely bring up food for her as well as empty her bedpan, though I hated doing this when it was my turn. I remember feeling deeply afraid every time I went up the ladder into the attic. I remember this one time.

I had climb up the ladder and entered the attic with a meal for Edna. She was sitting in her rocking chair, peering aimlessly out the small circular window in front of her. She didn't take any notice of me so I slowly approached her with her dinner tray in hand.

Then her head whipped suddenly around and she was looking directly at me with the eyes of the dead, there was no life behind those eyes. I was so startled that I dropped the tray.

She cooed then said softly, "would you like to play?"

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

She seemed more composed than I had ever seen her before, and I was caught little of guard by her words.

I muttered, "I'll get you another tray."

Edna ceased rocking in her chair and then asked, "would you like to know a secret?"

I just looked at her and was unable to speak, I was a second away from pissing my pants.

Edna began to giggle like a child then told me, "you don't know what is coming. Soon you will be fed to the flesh worms who infest you, he comes from the stars."

I thought it was all the babbling of an insane woman, but I could not forget what she said.

Edna turned back to the window and peered outside then said, "when it escapes, all in this town will suffer, so you best leave and never come back."

I had had enough so I left the attic, I didn't return for a long while.

As the years went on, Edna's condition grew increasingly worse and was pushing my family to the limits. I mother still took care of her, but Edna was having screaming fits, and she would spit and curse at us when we brought her food. I think my father knew we were almost at the breaking point, but out of love for my mother he chose to remain silent.

But Edna and our family reached the breaking point during the summer of 1968, and sweltering summer which only inflamed the tension between my family and Edna. My life before this summer was entirely different from how my life was after it happened.

Like I said, my family was destitute and my parents would do odd jobs around the community to make money. So it came to be that my mother, on one hellishly hot day, was paid to baby-sit the Moss twins.

The Moss twins, two six year-olds one whose names were Tyler and Victor, came to our home for a couple of days. I was older and too wrapped up in myself to take much notice of them, all I can remember was them playing in our front yard. My mother kept a watchful eye on them from our porch, and all seemed well enough.

Though when my mother's attention was distracted by a wringing phone for several minutes; she came back to find the twins missing. At first we thought they might have wandered off, but we looked and could find no trace of them. All that was found was one of the shoes of the toddlers covered with blood.

My mother seemed to be stricken with guilt, and she did everything she could to find them but to no avail. My father gathered some of the local men to start a search, but as day turned slowly into night, no one could find them. Everyone from town who came to help find the twins, they didn't bother to hide their ambivalence, people were already blaming my mother.

That night, everyone was spread around the area looking for the missing boys, though my mother had remained home by herself. The search failed to turn up anything we searched well into the morning hours.

I was almost home, exhausted, when I heard the thunderous sound of a gunshot and I realized it had come from my family's home. I ran home as fast as I could, I imagined that I would find my mom dead and I can't ever remember feeling so scared.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I ran into the house and searched it for my mother. When I reached the ladder to the attic, I heard the sobbing. I climbed up the ladder and entered the attic.

My mother was sitting on the floor, one of my father's rifles was in her hands and there was an empty shell casing on the floor. Behind was my great aunt Edna, lying lifelessly on the floor in a growing pool of crimson blood.

I asked, "mom, what did you do?"

She couldn't seem to be able to look at me. She sobbed then said, "I had to kill her, for God's love, I had to kill her."

Others must have heard the gunshot because I could hear a gamut of footfalls from downstairs. I approached my mother and place my hand on her shoulder.

"Why," I asked, "why did you kill her?"

My mother cried harder then replied, "it was all my fault, it is because of me that those boys are dead. I killed them."

A local man, I didn't know who he was, had just entered the attic and he had heard what my mother had said. He yelled down to others waiting downstairs, "the Redstone woman just admitted she killed those poor kids."

I turned to this guy, vehemently angry, and yelled, "she didn't, she couldn't."

My mother stood up and faced me and her accuser, she whispered, "I did kill them, I knew, but I did nothing."

The guy on the ladder said firmly, "call the authorities, we have us a murderer."

That had to be the worst day of my entire life, I lost my mother that day and also learned that the name Redstone would be remembered for this horrible tragedy. I sometimes feel that the person I was before this happened was different from who I am now.

When the police finally arrived to detain my mother for triple homicide they made a futile attempt to talk my mother down from the attic, she simply kept repeating the words, "I am responsible, I killed them."

I was still in the attic with my mother, the police had tried to get me to leave her, but I didn't respond. I just stared at my mother, knowing that she was going away and there was nothing I could do to stop it. I looked at her, I didn't know what to do or to say, words for such an event are never easy to come by I suppose.

Finally, two guys in white coats arrived, they were able to detain my mother without any violence and they took her away to the asylum in which she would spend the rest of her life. My father was a strong man, but when the truck which they put my mother in started down the road taking her away from us, it was the only time I had seen the man cry.

This incident was followed by a flurry of interest from the media, many news crews came to Sanctuary Hill and endlessly repeated all the details of the crime. My father was confronted by a reporter and a cameraman who pressed him for details, he instead punched out the guy with the camera and he spent a few days in prison for assault. The media interest waned, though the ambivalence most locals had for my family remained.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

My mother was found not-guilty by reason of mental insanity, though during her trial and the subsequent investigation into the matter they had never been able to reveal what had become of the twins. It just became a source of endless speculation and gossip.

I would spend the next seven years as a virtual pariah, I guess people thought the apple didn't fall far from the tree so I was just as suspect as my mother. Local lore turned my mother into inhuman monster, but I could only remember her as the person who was always there when I needed her. I got into a lot of fist fights, and I lost most of them, but I dreamed of escape. When I finally did leave Sanctuary Hill, hoping to leave both good and bad memories behind, I never imagined I would return.

But I did return, though fate which can be a truly cruel mistress at times, had brought me back. I thought the worst of my life was behind, I couldn't know of what the future was to hold for me.

Chapter Four: A Murder and Chance for Redemption

I lay in bed the next morning. I was partially awake and had decided to sleep in. I just lay in the small bed in my new bedroom, unpacked boxes were strewn about room.

Then I heard the shrieking sound of a siren in the distance, and it sounded like it was coming from the center of town at the top of the hill. I rolled out of my bed and began to put on some clothes then groggily wandered outside to see what all the commotion was about. I looked towards the peak of the hill and I saw flashing lights several emergency vehicles. A crowd of locals had gathered around the area of the general store.

I began to slowly walk up the hill at first, then I found myself jogging towards the scene and I remembered feeling a very alarming sense of foreboding. I instinctively knew that something bad had happened.

I arrived at a police barricade around the front of the store and pushed my way through a crowd so I was able to see what was happening. A uniformed police officer, a young guy, came out of the store with his hand pressed against his mouth and he was shaking. Then he vomited all over the pavement in front of the store.

I turned to the man beside me, a slightly obese fellow in a suit with a thinning hairline and deep lines crisscrossing his face, and I asked him, "what is going on?"

Looking sort of angry, he said, "some bastard killed Ma last night."

I had known Ma as long as I could remember and the news of her death shocked and saddened me. Though I didn't express my feeling of grief for her on the surface, inside it weighed very heavily on my mind.

I asked, "what are you talking about?"

"This morning," the stranger replied, "the little Truman boy found Ma dead and is in shock. We've been trying to get some answers from the police, but they haven't said anything."

The man looked at me for a second, there was a hint of suspicion in his expression and he asked me, "I don't know you, what is your name?"

"Luther," I told him, "Luther Redstone. I just moved here a couple of days ago."

"I see," he said, "the only remaining Redstone has come back to town. Funny you should just arrive and then this happens."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I faced the guy and scowled at him. I asked firmly, "do you got something you want to say to me, then just say it."

He said, "your mother was evil, and I don't imagine you are any different then her."

I was angry and spoke loudly. "And what the fuck to you know about any of it," I asked, "did you even know my mother?"

The man replied, "I know of her, and you have some nerve coming back here, you are most decidedly not welcome."

I asked, "and do you speak for everybody in this town?"

The man smiled and replied, "actually, I'm Mayor Thatcher, so I do speak for the people of this town."

I didn't notice as the detective in plain clothes emerged from the store and approached me and Thatcher. He was well within his forties, he had completely gray hair, and he walked with a slight limp and used a cane.

The detective asked, "and what seems to be the problem gentlemen?"

The Mayor looked at the detective then said, "I and this fellow where just having a conversation. Nothing for you to concern yourself with detective Moss."

I asked the detective, "what happened in there?"

Detective Moss shrugged his shoulders. "Can't help you. We don't want to have the details of this crime become public knowledge. But I'll say this, I've been a cop a long time and have seen some horrible things in my time, but what I saw in there actually scared me."

Mayor Thatcher said, "but it was murder, someone murdered that kindly old lady."

Detective Moss suddenly frowned. "This wasn't murder, I don't think there is a name for what happened in there. Who ever did this must be a maniac in the worst way."

Thatcher asked, "do you think someone in this town did this?"

Moss frowned. "I don't know. Are there any individuals in this community, that you know of, who would be capable of committing murder."

Mayor Thatcher shook his head. "I don't know anybody in this town who would be capable of that. It must have been an outsider."

Moss looked at me. "who are you," he asked.

"Redstone, my first name is Luther. I just moved back into town yesterday."

Moss seemed to think about something for a moment then said, "Tiffany Redstone's son. I had heard that you left town."

I said, "I've come back."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

Moss looked at the Mayor then said, "could you excuse us for a moment, I want to have a little talk with Mr. Redstone here."

The Mayor reluctantly left, leaving me and the detective to talk. I got the sense that he was sizing me up.

Detective Moss looked at me, then asked, "why did you come back?"

"My inherited my uncle's garage," I said, "I going to try and run it as a business."

"Can you tell me what you where doing between the morning hours between three and five o'clock?"

I said, "I was at home, asleep. Why, am I a suspect or something?"

Moss said flatly, "everyone here and in the surrounding counties know about the whole sordid affair with your mother, and I'm sure they, though unjustly, somehow see you as guilty for the crimes of your mother."

I pleaded, "I didn't do it, I actually liked Ma. She always treated me well."

Moss nodded and said, "I pretty sure you didn't. When I arrived on the scene and was informed that the Redstone kid had returned, I admit I pulled your file to see if you had any prior arrests. You had just one for driving while intoxicated. What I saw in that store, no one wakes up one day and just out of the blue commits a crime like that, no, who ever did this most likely would have a history of violent offenses. But you because of your history, I'm sure more then a few around here already see you as guilty."

I told him, "I put up with people's petty suspicions about me for a long time and I tried to put it all behind me when I left. Listen, I'll help you any way I can."

"OK," Moss said, "but I hope you know that you are not held in vary high regard here, and with what has just happened, people will make a connection with this crime and your sudden arrival."

I said, "I really want to help, any way I can."

"This is a police matter. There is no need to get involved."

I said, "I've got some work to do at my garage, but, I hope you find the bastard who did this."

As I turned to walk away, Moss explained, "I was a rookie when that whole incident with your mother happened, and though I'm the only person in the department who believes this, you're mother didn't do it."

I turned back to him and asked, "why do you think that? She confessed."

Moss replied, "You're mother was guilty of shooting her invalid aunt, that I am sure of. But no trace of the other two victims was ever found, we don't know for sure what happened to them. I don't know she did it for an absolute fact, and when I accuse someone of a crime that serious, then I'd rather be a hundred percent positive of her guilt."

All the years since it happened I had never once questioned my mother's guilt, I just accepted that she had done this terrible thing because everyone else accepted it. But I still loved my mother despite anything she might have done, and something in me wanted to believe she was innocent.

I began to walk away and said, "thank you detective."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

As I walked towards my garage, I felt a small, weak hand grab me by the arm and I swung around to face the person. Then I saw her for the first time, and quite a sight for eyes as jaded as my own. She caught me off guard.

She was a thin young woman who could barely be in her early twenties, with extremely pale skin yet her eyes were very vibrant and full of emotion, and she had long brunette hair which was silky yet there was a streak of white in her hair. She was wearing entirely black clothes, a jacket as well as a long skirt which went down to her knees, and had on black boots.

I'll be honest, she was attractive in a non-conventional way and something seemed instantly odd to me, for she evidently was something of a stark contrast to the mundane aura of that town. I liked her right away, I knew she was another local misfit like myself. I knew the person I was looking at also raised the ire of that town, I identified with her there.

I calmly said, "going to a funeral or something. Can I help you?"

She let me go and stepped back and seemed to give me a thorough look over, then she smiled and replied, "I finally met the infamous Luther Redstone."

I nodded. "Yeah, what's it to you?"

"Nothing," she said, "I just wanted to meet you."

"And why do you know about me anyways?"

"People occasionally still talk about your mother. A few times I heard about her son. Some people don't seem to like you much."

"Nice to see that everyone here is living in the past, it is ancient history."

"I understand how it feels, everyone here hates me too."

She piqued my curiosity. I said, "and why do they hate you? What did you do?"

She frowned woefully. "I'm different, they hate me because I'm not like anybody else here. I don't fit in."

"Since you know my name, maybe you can tell me yours just so we know who we are talking too?"

She replied, "I'm Ashley, Ashley Winters."

I told her, "Ashley, I have to be going. Have a nice day?"

As I walked away from her, she said, "I know you hate this place."

I stopped and turned to face her and asked, "what did you say?"

She got real close to me, her body only inches from my own, and I could feel her hot breath on my face. We stood like that for a moment then she whispered, "you hate this place, for it has hated you for so long. I hate it as much as you, so you and I are the same."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

"Yeah," I said, "you are a social pariah like me, but I could give a rat's ass less about any beef I used to have with the people here. I just want to be another hapless cog in the gears of this town."

She whispered into my ear, "do you know why you came back so abruptly, or do you only think you know? Did you come here of your own free choice or was it something else that brought you back."

I muttered, "I inherited my uncle's garage. That is the only reason I'm here. The garage could be in the northern arctic and I'd still go there."

She saw my hesitation and whispered, "it calls to you, the same as it calls to me. It brought you back so you can see what you have always hungered for."

I began to believe this girl was crazy, what she said sounded like lunacy to me. But I remained near to her and listened.

She asked, "do you feel it, late at night when you lay awake in bed, can't you hear it beckon you and doesn't it get closer with each passing day."

"You are insane, aren't you."

She pressed her index finger against my chest and began to move it around my chest in circular patterns. I felt a rush of warmth suddenly.

She stated, "something which you can't imagine is about to happen, and you will be major part of it. That is what he told me."

I pushed her away and barked, "lady, you are creeping me out, I have to go."

She turned away from me began to walk away. I watched her leave, and though I found her somewhat alarming in the things she said, my youth had made in me a deep sympathetic feeling for anyone who seemed like an outcast, so I felt something for her then.

I walked away, with my day getting off to a bad start I hoped that things would get better though I did not know just how bad the next few days would get.

Though I spent the next several hours tinkering with the 350 big block engine, my mind was otherwise occupied with the thing which had effected my life for so long, my mother's supposed crime and how it had forever blackened the Redstone name in this community. Now that I considered that she was innocent of what happened to those missing kids, for the first time that I could remember, I didn't feel as if I should have guilt for what had happened.

I soon realized that though up till that moment my reasons for returning to Sanctuary Hill were simply financial, I came then to believe that I was brought back by fate to prove my mother's innocence and redeem the Redstone name. Sure, such notions as fate may seem absurd to more skeptical minds, but I believed that now there was a real reason for me coming back. I knew I was going to vindicate my mother.

I would find the truth, though the price for finding it would be much higher than I ever could have imagined.

I believed that there must be someone responsible for both Ma's tragic death and the disappearance of the twins. If there was some unknown individual who initiated the chain of events which destroyed those who I had loved and nearly destroyed me, then I would find him.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I wanted answers, but the answers I was to discover were like nothing a sane, rational mind could fathom.

Located several miles outside of town was the rather modest farm which Paul had inherited from his parents. It was a large patch of land near the edge of a river; a farm home in the center large clearing in the forest surrounded by fields. There were a couple of fields of corn, some pasture land for a few cows, a rather large red barn. It looked just like it had the last time I saw it over a decade before, it hadn't change at all.

As my truck drove up the gravel road which led to the house, I noticed that Paul was in a field working on a tractor. I parked my truck in front of the house and got out. I walked over to Paul.

I stood behind him and said, "hey Paul."

Paul didn't look up from the engine of the tractor.

"Luther, I'm busy at the moment. Trying to get this old piece rust to work."

I asked, "you heard about what happened to Ma?"

He nodded. "Yeah, the local radio news has been talking about it all day. It's a damn shame to be sure. One of the better people around here."

I said, "I spoke with a detective Moss."

Paul interrupted suddenly. "Moss, I've heard from more than a few people that he is a decent cop, you know, a real square dealing type of guy."

"Moss said that he thinks my mother was innocent."

These words seemed to somewhat shock Paul, and he said in a very serious tone, "Luther, you really have to put all that behind you."

I lowered my head and looked at the ground. "I believe she is innocent and I'm going to prove it."

"Luther," Paul said, "your mom was a good woman but she snapped OK, she confessed."

I looked up at him and said, "just listen to me for a second. What if what happened back then is related to Ma's murder, you well know that this town has always had an unusually large amount of disappearances. What if someone in this town is responsible for all of it?"

Paul stopped working on the tractor, turned around then asked, "what the hell are you thinking of doing Luther? I know you, you get these ideas and they never lead to any good."

I told him, "I'm going to find out who really did it."

"Damn it," Paul told me, "so you are going to start snooping around. Man, listen to me, this is a matter for the police."

I didn't care, so I asked, "listen, aren't we good friends?"

"Yeah, so what."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

"Paul," I said, "I am going to need your help."

He shook his head. "No way, no fucking way I am going to get involved in this mess. This is your business, not mine."

"Damn it Paul, I have never asked you for anything before."

Paul laughed. "Bull shit you've never needed me to bust you out of a jam, like right now."

I asked, "what do you know about the local history around here?"

Paul shrugged and shook his head. "My father told me a bunch of stuff, but nothing that has anything to do with this. You want some local history, then you have to go ask the old timers."

"Old timers?"

"You know," he said, "that group of old guys who hang out at Red's Bar every night. They have spent the past eighty years gathering gossip at that bar."

"I'm going to speak with them."

Paul smirked. "Good luck, those old bastards won't talk to anyone, not anyone. Well, not for free anyways. How much extra cash do you got?"

I replied, "I got a lot of money at the moment."

Paul looked concerned. "Going to Red's is dangerous for you buddy, I didn't want to tell you but some people think it was you who killed Ma. Mayor Thatcher is already spreading shit around about you, and you know how much people around here like your family."

I said, "I have to know who is responsible."

"Go to Red's," Paul told me, "and you will surely get your ass handed to you."

I said, "I'm going."

He frowned. "I guess I better go with you, watch your back."

I said to him, "thanks."

"Frankly," Paul admitted, "you are one giant, fucking pain in the ass."

Chapter 3: Bar Brawl and The Nightmare

Chapter Five: Bar Brawl

As the day slowly faded away and dusk fell over the land, I and Paul found ourselves standing in front of Red's Bar, a small establishment in the center of Sanctuary Hill. It had been a hotel once, and it was rather run down, now the ancient building served as a watering hole and gathering spot for the local alcoholics as well as the old timers who nightly gathered at Red's.

Paul looked at me and asked, "are you sure you want to go in there?"

"I'm sure."

"OK," he said, "just don't expect a warm welcome from the guys inside."

We stood silently for a moment then we entered, I was eager to learn a little more about town history, though I knew it there was only a slim chance that I would be able to learn anything useful. But logic was not dictating my actions, no, I was not sure what was driving me. Maybe it was the hope that I could somehow vindicate my mother as well as myself.

The bar was thick with cigarette smoke and the noise of idle conversation between the many patrons of Red's. Some men were sitting at the bar as they slowly drank their beers, at the back part of the bar sat four old men, the old timers, the people who knew everything about Sanctuary Hill. Red himself, an elderly man of generous girth and large muscular arms, stood behind the bar wiping down a glass. No one seemed to take any notice of Paul and I.

Paul whispered to me, "let me buy you a drink."

"Sorry, I gave up drinking a year ago," I said.

Paul shook his head. "just nurse a beer slowly man, we don't want to stick out like a sore thumb."

I and Paul sat down on two stools beside the bar and Red approached us then asked, "and what will you two have tonight gentlemen?"

Paul replied, "two beers, for me and my friend here."

Red looked at me then asked Paul, "and who is your friend?"

I extended my hand to Red. "Name is Luther."

Red frowned at me, then he asked, "you wouldn't be Luther Redstone."

I told him, "Yeah, so what?"

Red turned to Paul and said to him, "your friend has a lot of nerve coming here, hell, he has a lot of nerve coming back to this town."

Paul shrugged. "Jesus Red, I thought you weren't an asshole. Luther is an OK guy, I assure you."

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Red retrieved two mugs and filled them with beer from the tap then placed them in front of us. Paul started to drink while I looked nervously at my beer. Ending my drinking problem had been a hard battle to win, and the temptation to resume drinking again had always been there. I did as Paul suggested, I slowly downed my beer.

Red looked at me, his eyes were full of suspicion. He commented, "funny that someone should kill old Ma the exact same week you returned."

I told him firmly, "Ma was a friend of mine; she was one of the few people around here that didn't treat my family like we were guilty of something. I want to find her killer just as much as anyone else does."

Red asked, "are you going to make trouble?"

"No," I told him.

"OK," Red said, "if you aren't going to make any trouble for me, then I got no problem with you."

Paul turned to Red and asked, "do you think the old timers would mind talking to Luther and myself?"

Red shook his head. "They don't talk to anyone, at least, not for free. If you give them some money, I suppose it might loosen their lips."

Paul and I got up and walked over to the gloomy end of the room where the four old men sat in a booth, drinking heavily and talking. Then they noticed Paul and I approach, and the four of them turned to us.

The eldest of the men, a guy who could have easily been in his nineties, was the first to speak. He asked, "what in the hell do the two of you want?"

Paul said, "hello Edward, how is it going?"

The eldest man, Edward, looked at me for a moment then turned away. He told me, "I will not speak with the bastard son of Tiffany Redstone. We all know what your mother did, and you are her blood."

Paul looked at me then said, "Luther, got any money on you?"

I reached into my coat pocket and pulled out my wallet. I produced hundred dollars and asked, "will this be enough to get you to talk to us?"

The three other elderly men didn't seem to be especially interested, but Edward looked greedily at the money and said, "OK, I might talk with you. For a little while at least. Let us sit at another booth."

Me and Paul sat down at the next booth and Edward, who moved with much strained effort, joined us. He seemed to walk with a severe limp, and I could tell by his expression that the act of moving caused him much pain.

I asked him, "are you OK?"

Edward snapped, "I will talk to you, but I don't want your God damn sympathy."

"OK, I got it," I replied.

Edward said, "so, what do you want to know?"

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"Some town history actually," I responded.

Edward nodded. "You came to the right person then, though Sanctuary Hill's history is a very long subject, is there anything in particular you would like to know."

I asked, "people seem to think there is a unusual number of disappearances in these parts. What do you know about that?"

Edward seemed to mull over the question for a second then said, "yes, that is true. In the past fifteen years, we have had over two dozen people simply vanish without a trace. Though several decades ago, disappearances were practically unheard of. Sure, we have had some tragic events in these town. You see, this town has always been unlucky, going all the way back to when the town was founded. It seems that there has always been a unusually high amount of tragedies around here."

Paul added, "yeah, the fabled curse."

Edward frowned. "The curse is real, it seems that some black cloud hangs over this town. You see, the story of how this town was founded is also somewhat tragic in itself."

"I would like to hear it," I said.

Edward began his tale.

"Two hundred and something years ago, Scottish settlers came to this area and established several towns in this area. Sanctuary Hill was the first town to be founded in these parts, and at that time, this area was still wild and untamed. The town's founder, Garry McCloud, built his town on the top of a tall hill from which you could see the surrounding land for miles away. From the very start though, this town was unlucky. After the city hall was built, Garry McCloud was stricken with a terrible madness, and those who had founded this town with him surmised that he was possessed by a demon. In his madness, McCloud ranted and raved about some evil that haunted within these lands and he claimed that a day would come when all who lived in this town would be claimed by this unnamed evil of which he spoke. Sadly, McCloud was hanged by the towns people, he hung from the large oak tree in the cemetery. But before he was hanged, McCloud still tried to warn his former friends, now his murderers, that they, their children and their children's children were in great danger."

I said, "I've never heard of any of this."

"No," Edward told me, "many around here don't know about it, most people around here are completely ignorant of the dark history of this town. They don't know because they prefer not to know."

Paul asked, "but the high rate of disappearances, that only started happening relatively recently."

Edward nodded. "yes, actually, it started a year after that whole incident with your mother transpired. I would say she was responsible, but people vanished after she was put away."

I asked, "do you have any idea why so many people simply disappear in these parts?"

"No, but I know this sounds foolish, but I believe it has to do with the curse. Something evil is at work in this town, though what I'm completely ignorant of what it is exactly."

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Paul turned to me, "Luther, I don't see how this is going to help you clear your mother's name. Sounds like a complete load of shit."

Edward seemed taken aback by this. "What, do you actually believe Tiffany Redstone is innocent of the death of those two poor boys?"

I nodded. "I know she didn't do it, I've always known though I've just realized it lately."

Edward seemed skeptical. "So, you are here to see if I can help prove your mother's innocence. Well, sorry, but she was guilty, she confessed."

I said adamantly, "you said that people began to vanish right around the same time it happened, is it hard to believe that all the disappearances are not connected. That there is someone responsible for all of it, for what happened to those boys, for what happened to Ma. That there might be a killer lurking in this community."

Edward shook his head in denial. "No, I can't believe anyone here could be responsible for such things. And what about you, the Redstone son returns right around the same time as Ma is murdered. Maybe it is you."

Paul said, "fuck you Edward, I've known this guy since we were kids, and all the bad shit people say about him is wrong."

Edward turned to Paul. "I've always known you to be a OK guy Paul, but I can't for the life of me figure out why you became friends with a Redstone."

I asked, "listen, my mother is innocent, is there anything you can tell me, any idea about who in this community could have it in them to do something like murder?"

Edward shook his head again. "No, I don't know of anyone who has it in them to do such things, honestly, you are the only I can see doing it."

Paul pounded his fist down on the table. "Edward, I'm vouching for this guy, it has to be someone else."

Edward started to get up and he said, "OK, your time is up, I don't think I want to speak with the two of you anymore."

Now I was alone with Paul in the booth. He turned to me and stated, "Well, that was a waste of both time and money. Luther, I think you might want to let this one go."

I said, "Paul, I have to find the answer to this, I have to know if my mother was truly guilty. All these years I carried this weight on my shoulder, like I had done something wrong, my mother's memory makes me feel guilty. I would like to remember her as the good woman who raised me, not as some monster who did something so horrible."

Paul told me, "so, you want to play detective and start snooping around. Man, maybe you should go back to the city, this town might be the last place in the world where you should live."

I asked, "why do you stay in this one horse town Paul? What keeps you here?"

Paul pondered my question then replied, "I guess because of the farm, my roots are here as well as everything I've ever known. For better or for worse, this place is my home."

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"Exactly," I said, "my roots are here to, this place is my home and I realized that recently. I tried to escape this place, but I can't, and if I'm ever to be at peace with myself, I have to find out the answer to why my mother was taken away from me, why I felt like I had done something wrong for so long."

Paul shrugged. "Luther, what happens if the answer your looking for is not the one you want."

Then I noticed a group of men enter the bar. Standing at the front the group was a tall, well built guy with copper hair and a very prominent jaw. It took me a moment to realize that it was Carl Smith, the Carl Smith who had made my life such hell in my youth, who had spread much hatred towards my family. With him where the same two guys he used to hang around with in school; a short guy with sleek brunette hair and wearing the a leather jacket and whose name was Fred; the other guy was a tall, very muscular guy with a shaven head whose name was Gerald. This was the same gang who beat me to a pulp more then once.

Paul muttered, "Oh shit."

Carl approached Red who was still behind the bar, and Red pointed towards us then Carl and his lackeys approached. Carl still had the same smug expression I had remembered from so long ago.

Paul raised his mug of beer towards them and asked, "would you like to have a drink with us?"

Carl scowled at me then said, "well, well, well. It seems little Luther Redstone has come back, and someone dies. Seems I was right about you."

"Carl," I said, "it has been over ten years and you still got being a colossal prick down to a fine art."

I hated the fact that Lizbeth, who I still loved after all those years, was married to the guy who had made my life so hard. He didn't deserve such a good woman, and I found myself hating him, not for what he had said or done to me in the past, but for the fact that he had the love of the best woman I had ever known.

Paul looked at me. "Easy Luther, we don't want any trouble."

Carl said, "You've got trouble, more trouble then you want."

I asked, "what do you want Carl?"

Carl grabbed my beer which was on the table then poured it on me, drenching my clothes. Carl asked, "are you going to leave town or am I going to have to make you?"

Then it all happened in quick succession. Paul threw the beer in his mug at Carl, and then he was as drenched as I. Carl, obviously infuriated by this, grabbed Paul by his collar and pulled him up onto his feet. Paul, who had always been a scrapper and the type of guy you want on your side in a fight, drove his knee into Carl's stomach and managed to knock the wind out of him. Carl fell to his knees as he gasped desperately for breath.

Fred shouted, "come on you fuck."

Gerald tried to grab Paul, but I jumped out of my seat and charged into Gerald and knocked him to the ground. This was a bad idea since Gerald was far more stronger then I. We both fell to the ground, and I was on top of him. I started to rain down blows on Gerald, though he was able to use his leg to knock me off from on top of him.

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Fred, who I remembered as being a coward, stepped away and left the four of us to fight. Paul stood over Carl, Paul being an honorable guy, he waited for Carl to catch his breath before they resumed fighting. Carl rose to his feet, the rage evident in his eyes, and looked right at Paul.

Carl sneered, "Jackson, you should know better then to stand up for this piece of shit."

Paul replied, "I'm looking at the only piece of shit in this room."

Gerald and I stood before each other, I had no chance to beat him in a straight on fight, but I head butted him in the face and a small trickle of blood began to pour from his nose.

Gerald yelled, "you bastard!"

Paul and Carl started to trade blows, and it was obvious that Paul would be the victor in this fight, I had always known him to be a tough customer, and like many times in my youth, I was grateful that I could call him friend.

Then Red shouted, "stop it right now or I'm going to phone the cops!"

The fight ended abruptly and Carl and his cronies began to back away from us and towards the Bar's exit.

Carl said to me, "this isn't over Redstone, I won't stop until you leave town."

I told him, "I'm not going anywhere."

Carl and his two friends left the bar.

Red turned to Paul and I and said, "you two, get out and don't come back."

So Paul and I left.

It was night when my truck pulled into the driveway of Paul's farm. It was a clear night, the stars blazed in the night sky and a fat harvest moon hung above us. A strong wind was blowing in from the north.

Paul and I sat in the cab of my truck for awhile, silent and still hurting from the fight. Then the silence was broken when Paul said, "God, doesn't it feel just like old times. It is like we are teenagers again, we used to get into a lot of fights back then to. Luther, I'm glad your back. Feel young again."

I asked him, "Jesus Paul, why have you been my friend through of all of this?"

Paul replied, "because, we where friends before all that stuff with your family, and I don't turn my back on friends. Besides, nothing gets the heart going like a good fight."

I smiled. "I'm glad to see that you still can throw down better then any other guy I've ever known."

Paul asked, "so, how do you honestly feel about Lizbeth and Carl being man and wife?"

"She is to good for him, hell, she is to good for anyone in this entire town. She deserves better then this."

"I remember," Paul said, "when you left, Lizbeth was really broken up."

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I looked down. "Anyways, Paul, I'm damn glad that I can call you friend."

"Yeah, well, I better be off. Sorry we didn't learn anything useful tonight. Let me ask you, are you still going to look into this subject?"

I nodded. "Yeah, I think I'll poke around town and see if I can find anything out."

Paul opened the passenger door then got out. He said, "just be careful, some people around here have already picked you as the guy who killed Ma. I'll be off then, have a good one Luther."

"You too, take it easy."

Paul closed the door and started down his long driveway and I drove off.

I realized something was amiss from the moment my truck pulled into the driveway of the house I had moved into. My front door swinging in the wind, and the glass window in the door had been smashed. Even from inside my truck, I could smell something which smelt like decomposing meat. I grabbed the tire iron from behind my seat and stepped out of the truck. My first assumption was that some locals had trashed my front door, though I had never encountered such a situation before all the years I lived in Sanctuary Hill before.

I approached the steps and went up onto my porch and that is when I saw it. There was a trail of some substance, a purplish slime, leading up the porch steps and into the house. There were several deceased worms lying in the muck. The substance reeked of decay and it made my stomach feel violently sick, I held my hand to my mouth and was trying my hardest not to vomit. My mind couldn't grasp what was happening.

I raised the tire iron and shouted, "if there is anyone in there, better show yourself now!"

I slowly entered my house and found that someone had trashed it severely. My furniture was all overturned, the pictures on the walls had been ripped down and the glass in them smashed, and much of the floor was covered with the horrible purple substance.

I followed the trail of slime into my kitchen and found it in shambles. All my drawers had been pulled out, my utensils and pots and pans were scattered all over the place. The windows had been smashed, and there was broken glass all over the place.

I muttered, "what the fuck."

Then I saw it. Someone, though who could be sick enough to do this was beyond me, had written on my kitchen's white wall a single sentence and reading it sent a spontaneous chill down my spine.

"Welcome home Luther. Ready to have some fun?"

I dropped the tire iron on the ground and fell to my knees.

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Chapter Six: The Nightmare

It was just after nine in the evening.

The police showed up around twenty minutes after I had phone 911, and now they were busy collecting evidence and taking photographs of my home. They had asked me some questions but I had little to tell them so they left me alone outside and I leaned against my truck in the driveway, alone with the thoughts of who could have possibly done this. I didn't have any idea who hated me enough to do this. I watched as the police used cotton swabs to collect samples of the strange, vile substance that covered my porch and the floor in my house.

Then an unmarked police car parked in front of my home and detective Moss stepped out of it and approached me. I was relieved to see him, though I didn't know the man very well, he seemed to be a honest, decent cop.

Moss pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his raincoat and held them before and asked, "would you like a smoke Mr. Redstone?"

"No thanks," I replied.

Moss put the cigarettes away and gave me a very serious look. He said, "I was informed about the situation here. It seems like someone has vandalized your home."

"Yeah," I said, "not only did they vandalize my house, they spread something that smells like rancid meat."

Moss nodded. "If I tell you something, do you give me your word that you'll keep it under your hat until we find who did this?"

"Sure."

"OK," he said, "we found a similar substance inside Ma's store. So I say it is a safe wager to say that whoever murdered old Ma is also responsible for wrecking your house. I think that there is an extremely sick individual living in this very community, someone who might have an ax to grind with you in particular Mr. Redstone. Someone in this town might want to hurt you."

I was dumbfounded and asked, "are you sure?"

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Moss nodded. "It seems likely, so it might be safe to assume that you are in danger. Is there anyone you can think of who would be capable of doing this?"

I shook my head. "No, I have no idea who could do something like this. Truth is, people in this town might not like me, but I can't see any of them doing something like this."

Moss grimaced. "Truth is, I've been on the job in these parts for awhile, and this town seems to have a disproportionate number of disappearances which I'm sure you are aware of, most everyone in these parts is aware of this fact. Someone, I bet money on this, is responsible for all of it. I would also say they have some connection to you, I believe your moving back is what triggered this individual."

I asked, "do you think it might be the same person who was responsible for what happened to my mother?"

"Yes," he replied, "I would say that is very likely, and I would say you might now who ever is doing this."

"And what is that crap you found in my home," I asked detective Moss.

Moss lifted his fedora on his head then started to scratch his scalp. He said, "we have been trying to identify what this substance is, but aside from knowing it is some kind of organic matter, we have no idea what the hell it is."

"Damn," I said, "so you are saying that who ever murdered Ma, he might also want to kill me as well."

"Yes, I would say that is a safe assumption Mr. Redstone, so you might want to consider leaving town until we apprehend whoever did this."

I said, "no, I'm not going to go run and hide."

Moss folded his arms across his chest. "OK, well, you might want to think about your personal safety. I don't advocate a private citizen to get a pistol, but you might want to."

"No," I said, "I hate guns."

Moss shrugged. "OK, then I'm going to give you some pepper spray, keep it with you at all times."

"Thanks."

"I'm going to give you my personal number, if anything happens I want you to phone me immediately. Do you have somewhere to stay for now?"

"Yeah, I got a friend who might let me crash at his place."

Moss turned away from then said, "OK, if anything happens or you get any idea who did this, then give me a call."

"I Paul."

Moss then joined the other officers in my house and I got in my truck and drove to Paul's.

It was a little after eleven.

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Paul and myself were sitting in his kitchen, talking and having a beer. I didn't want to drink yet I needed something to calm my jangled nerves.

Paul asked, "sure you don't want to leave town?"

"I'm sure."

Paul downed his beer then said, "still stubborn as a fucking mule I see."

I slowly drank my beer then said, "sorry, I've been here only a few days and I've already imposing on your hospitality. I know you don't need this."

"Luther, someone in this town might want to kill you, Jesus, you don't even look afraid. If I were you, I would be pissing my pants but you seem perfectly fine with this."

I said, "yeah, well, I guess I'm too stupid to be afraid."

Paul told me, "if you leave town, I might as well go with you."

I asked, "what are you talking about Paul?"

Paul looked solemnly at his beer. "The town council, they are trying to force me to sell my farm, and it seems that soon they will get what they want."

I remembered the town council. It had been composed of several members, mostly prominent figures in the local Church, and they involved themselves with almost everything that happened in the town.

"Why the hell would you sell the farm?"

Paul seemed depressed suddenly. "I owe a lot in back taxes and the town council is trying to strong arm me into selling."

"Shit, sorry to hear that."

"Yeah," Paul said, "I don't have the money to pay the taxes, this farm has never been a very lucrative enterprise. I suppose I'll have to sell it by next summer. I'm glad my parents aren't still around to see me lose it."

I finished my beer then muttered, "fucking town council."

"Maybe it is a blessing in disguise, this town is fucked, I'll move to the next county."

I offered, "Paul, you've always been a top rate friend, maybe I can help you out financially once I get my garage up and running, you know, get some business."

"Yeah, do you have an extra hundred thousand dollars in your back pocket, because that is the kind of money I need to get my farm back into the clear."

"Well," I said, "I have around forty thousand right now, will that help?"

"Keep your money. But I appreciate the offer."

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Marry, Paul's childhood love who was now his wife, entered the kitchen. She was of average height, had blond hair, and a very pale complexion. She was wearing a bathrobe. She didn't hide her obvious disdain for my presence.

She asked, "Paul, when your done talking it up with your friend can you come to bed tonight."

"Hi Marry," I said.

She looked at me then asked, "are you the one I have to thank for the bruises on my husband tonight?"

Paul shook his head. "He wasn't responsible, the fight came to us; we didn't go looking for it."

Marry frowned. "Paul, you are a father now, you are to old to get into fights."

Paul smiled at her. "Honey, I'm not an old man yet."

Marry asked him, "listen, can you go tuck your son in for the night."

Paul got up and said, "sure."

He got up and left the room leaving me alone with Marry, I could tell from her expression that she still disapproved of my friendship with her husband.

Marry flatly told me, "Luther, could you not share whatever troubles you have with my husband, he has enough of his own right now."

I nodded. "Yeah, sure."

Marry sat down at the table and looked at me. She said, "you must now that you are trouble Luther, you coming back to town is going to open a whole can of worms. You haven't even been here a week and look at what has happened."

"I'm not responsible for this," I told her.

Marry seemed upset with me. She said, "maybe if you leave town everything will return to normal."

"I've already invested all my savings into the garage, and I have to stay for better or for worse. Besides, who ever is responsible for what happened to Ma, who ever trashed my house, they will still be here even if I leave."

Marry said, "OK, but if you are going down, don't drag Paul down with you."

"I won't."

She got up and went to the door which led into the den. She looked back at me and said, "you are welcome in our home for ever how long you have to stay here, just don't abuse our hospitality."

"OK, thanks," I said.

She left, leaving me alone in the kitchen and I silently finished my beer. I guess I should have been scared, maybe I should have left town then, but the conviction that who ever was responsible for what happened to

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Ma was also responsible for what happened to my mother compelled me to remain. And if these seemingly disconnected events were linked by the actions of a single individual, then I would find him and make him pay. Pay for robbing me of my mother, pay for all the years I lived with the accursed name of Redstone.

I wanted an answer to a question which had plagued me for so long, why did fate have to be so unkind to me?

If I had known the answer then, I might have left town and never looked back.

I went into the guest room that Marry had prepared for me and fell into a deep sleep on a small cot. I was asleep a few moments after my head touched the pillow.

A horrible, vivid nightmare came to me as I slept that night. It is always hard to describe a dream since they come in a succession of vague images, but I will try to convey what I witnessed during this terrible nightmare.

It started as I was looking down into a massive, deep pit which went down for several hundred feet. At the bottom of this pit where large stone figures, though I could not see them clearly, I could tell they were made in the likeness of things to hideous to imagine. Then I noticed that dead bodies were being thrown down the pit and soon the entire bottom of this gigantic pit was littered with human bodies. Then dirt and rocks began to fall down until the entire hole was filled.

Then I could see the image of a field of stars twinkling in the void of outer space, yet I could hear something. Terrifying, inhuman hisses and growling came from the darkness before me and they seemed to get closer with every passing moment. Then the stars slowly began to seemingly burn out until there was only darkness before me.

Then I was standing at the end of the driveway of the dilapidated farm house in which I had grown in and where I had lived with my once happy family. But the house was not as I remembered, it was now in ruin from lack of maintenance. There were many holes in the roof and walls.

I slowly approached the house when I could suddenly feel that someone was watching me from one of the windows of the house. Then a sound came from the house, a sound which I could only liken to nails on a chalkboard.

Then a distorted, odd voice spoke, "come on in and have some fun. Come down and see what is to come."

The voice was coming from the open cellar doors to the side of my onetime home. A gravel incline led down to the green cellar doors which were now agape. Beyond the door was blackness, and even though I was terrified, I still walked towards the darkened cellar. Suddenly a shaft of moonlight revealed it to me.

I entered the cellar. It consisted of a single, large room which was occupied by the machinery tools my father had kept down there. In the corner was a darkened space in which a shadowy, deformed human shape lurked in the shadows, its eyes though glowed red and pierced the darkness.

The voice spoke again. "Glad you have decided to come back, so you will get to see the dark ones emerge from their earthly prison and show their wrath upon the mortal world."

Then I was looking down upon Sanctuary Hill from high up in the air. I could see most of the buildings in town ablaze and the towns people running around in a panic. Things, though exactly what I was not sure, things were chasing the terrified towns people. There was a crescendo of screams coming from everywhere.

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Then I was looking at a primitive looking spear driven into the ground, standing vertically. A severed human head was impaled by the spear. It took me a second to realize I was looking at my own face.

Then the dream ended thankfully.

I awoke in my cot, drenched in sweat and felt a cold chill all over my body. I was unable to sleep again after that, so I sat in bed and tried to forget the dream.

Chapter 4: Old Love Dies Hard and The Town Hall

Chapter Seven: Old Love Dies Hard

I didn't dwell much on my nightmare when morning finally came, and I was eager to forget it. So I left Paul's place early in the day and went back to my garage to tie up a few loose ends around the shop.

Around noon I was working on that big block engine to pass the time since I had yet to have a single customer. I expected some soon, since my uncle had always made enough money to survive from this garage, and I expected it would be no different for myself. Sure, maybe the name Redstone carried a certain stigma in this town, but it still was the only garage for many miles. So I expected business soon.

Then a white station wagon parked in front of my shop. I grabbed a rag and wiped the grease from my hands as I went out to greet who ever it was. When Lizbeth stepped out of the car my heart jumped, and I couldn't help smiling.

She faced me and asked, "I need a mechanic, and you wouldn't know one would you Luther?"

She was wearing a tight sweater and a red skirt, and she seemed more beautiful then I remembered.

I replied, "I might know one. Though I'll be honest, he isn't the best."

She said, "the engine has been making this knocking noise when ever I start it. Maybe you could take a look at it for me?"

I nodded. "Yeah, I would be glad to."

She asked me, "how much will it cost?"

I shrugged. "You get the ex-girlfriend discount, which means I'll take a look at it for free."

"No, Luther, I want to pay you."

"Lizbeth," I said, "allow me to look at it for free. Give me that much."

"OK, thanks."

"Yeah, can you drive it into the shop."

She started the engine and slowly drove the car into my garage. She popped the hood and I started to examine the engine, she walked up beside me.

Lizbeth said, "Luther, I know you got into a fight with Carl last night."

"You know about that?"

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She nodded. "Yeah, news travels fast in this town. Everyone is also talking about what happened to your house last night. Carl forbid me from speaking to you, though he doesn't have to know."

"Paul is letting me stay at his place until the cops are finished going over my house. I will say though, I got a real mess to clean up there."

Lizbeth seemed worried. "Luther, you always seem to be a magnate for trouble."

"Yeah," I said, "anyways, Carl seems to want me out of town real bad. I guess some things never change, no matter how much you want them to."

Lizbeth looked at me. "Carl is a very possessive guy sometimes, aside from you, he is the only man I've ever been with so I think he sees you as a threat."

I said, "someone should explain to Carl that you aren't the type to fool around, you got the undeniable stink of class all about you Lizbeth. I'm sorry to say this, but you deserve someone better than Carl."

"Like you?"

"No," I said, "you deserve a hell of a lot better than me as well. Lizbeth, don't sell yourself short, I met a lot of girls in the city but not one of them could even hold a candle to you."

She blushed. "Luther, do you still love me?"

The ratchet I was using slipped out of my hand and fell to the ground. I picked it up, and was unable to look her in the eyes, I couldn't face her or the truth.

I said, "do you want me to be honest, or do you want me to lie to you?"

"I want only the truth from you."

I leaned over the engine as I explained my feelings to her as she listened.

"Yeah, I still love you and I hate the fact that I have to see you with another guy who, sorry I'm saying this, but who is a complete asshole. You should be treated like you deserve, wined and dined, given flowers, the whole world given to you on a silver platter. You're too good for Carl, too good for me, and too good for this town. I fell for you because of your beauty, but that is nothing compared to how beautiful you are on the inside. Shit, in my youth you were the only good thing in my wretched life, you actually made life worth living. If I ever am anything in life, it was because you showed me that no matter how fucked up your life is, the love of one good woman can make existence bearable."

She smiled. "Luther, you are the only man who could be very eloquent and very crude at the same time."

"I'm not sure about eloquent, but I've always loved you, I didn't realize that until I saw you two days ago. I know it might be wrong to feel these things for the wife of another man, but such feelings can't be helped."

Lizbeth said, "promise me that you'll be careful, someone out there might want to hurt you."

I grinned. "You know me, I'm cautious most of the time."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

She held my hand, it felt so warm against my skin. She said, "I still love you. I might have married Carl, but you are the one I wish I had married. But we have to accept we can't be anything other than friends."

I asked, "really?"

"Yes," she said, "all the years you were away, I still thought about you every day."

"Let me ask you something, why the hell did you start going out with me in the first place, me being a Redstone and all?"

She said, "are you sure you want to hear this?"

"Yeah," I said, "I would like to know."

She told me, "when I was young, I had this cat. It was a sickly little thing, though it needed me to take care of him, and that cat was my favorite always. When we were young, you reminded me of that cat Luther, a troubled guy who needed someone to take care of him and look out for him. You always made me feel like the most important thing in the world, you made a girl feel needed."

"I see, so what you are saying is that you felt sorry for me, like you did for that sickly cat."

"Basically yes."

I asked, "does Carl know you have been coming around the garage?"

"No, he is a very jealous man, I wouldn't want him to know because it would upset him."

I looked at her, and I said, "maybe you shouldn't come around to see me, maybe it is a bad idea."

"But why?"

I explained, "a few days ago I thought you and me, what we had together, that it was all in the past and that it didn't really matter that much to me. Do you know what it is like to have you standing here, and I have to know that you belong to another man, and that fact is killing me because all the shit I used to feel about you has come back. I don't know about how you feel about the way it used to be between us, but for me, the only reason I wanted to live when I was young was because of you. No matter how much shit the people around here said about me, about me having to live with my mother being in an asylum, the only reason I had for living was you. I just want to go back to that day when I left town and change it so that I had stayed here with you. I was a fucking idiot for leaving you, but I can't change what happened between us and I can't bare to look at you now and know that the best thing that ever happened to me in my entire painful life is gone forever."

Then she swiftly approached me until our faces were only inches apart and she kissed me. It lasted for several seconds then she pulled away and looked at me.

She blurted out, "sorry Luther, I have to go."

I simply stared at her, completely dumbfounded and my heart was racing. I was at a loss for words and all I could do was stand there with my mouth agape.

She walked out of the garage and started walking towards town hall. I watched her leave, and I wanted her to stay with me more than anything but I remained still.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I was alone in my garage for awhile, just standing there, when I decided to begin work on her car's engine. As I worked, I began to fully recollect the great love which, in my youth, was the one thing I could depend on to make me want to keep going.

I remembered how I met, fell in love, and lost Lizbeth.

Fall my soft-more year in high school. I attended school in the next county, and my first year due to my personal history had been rough. Regularly having the tar beaten out of me, mostly by Carl Smith and the other male students. Paul would back me up, but sometimes when they caught me alone they would beat me severely. So the first day of October my second year I found myself alone behind the sports bleachers in the football field; a pack of students gathered around me a Carl. Paul was not there since he missed school frequently, so I was defenseless. Carl, dressed in his school jacket and with his slicked back hair stood before me.

He threatened, "Redstone, I hope your ready to get your assed kicked."

I said, "Carl, aren't you getting tired of beating me up."

The everyone in crowd laughed, accept for a young woman in my grade. I had seen her around the school but never had learned her name. She just looked at me in a sympathetic way. She was dressed in a sweater and a long skirt, she had dark hair and a light complexion. She was the only one who looked like she was not enjoying watching me suffer.

Carl asked, "why don't you and your insane family get the hell out of the county. When are you going to learn that as long as you are here I'm going to hurt you?"

I replied, "Carl, you punch like a fagot."

The crowd laughed again then Carl punched me in the face and I fell to the ground as blood streamed from my nose. He looked down at me and smiled, that same damn smug smile he had every time he beat me up. The group of students around us where all laughing and pointing at me.

A male student yelled, "Carl, hit him again."

Carl sneered. "Luther, you and your family are monsters just like your mother. You know, the bitch locked in the nut house. I can see your future, sharing a room right next to her. Until then, I will hurt you again and again. I won't stop until you realize that you deserve this."

I muttered, "Carl, can you just hit me. I find it preferable to having to listen to your moronic lectures."

He said, "have it your way you little fuck."

Then he started kicking me as the students cheered and applauded. I tried to cover my face but he just kept kicking me then finished with another punch to my face as I lay upon the ground. Then he stopped and started chuckling.

"I love watching you bleed," he said then faced the crowd of students, "come on, let the little pansy crawl away."

Then the students dispersed and I was alone, accept for the young girl still looking at me sympathetically. She just stood there and said nothing. I turned to her as I got to my feet with strained effort. I wiped the blood

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

away from my chin with my hand and asked, "what do you want?"

She didn't say anything as I began to limp away. I faltered and almost fell over when she came up behind me and took my arm, propping me up. She put my hand over her shoulder and helped my walk towards the school across the field.

I, not used to such kindness from a stranger, asked, "why are you helping me?"

She didn't answer me, but simply said, "come on, lets get you cleaned up."

She led to the boys bathroom which was unoccupied and leaned me against the sinks. She then whetted a piece of paper towel and began to softly wipe the blood from my face.

She asked, "why don't you tell the teachers?"

"Because," I replied, "they won't do anything. Carl Smith is the school golden boy, everyone hates me; even the teachers."

"Nobody deserves what they do to you," she said.

"What's your name," I asked, "I've seen you around but I still don't know who you are."

"Lizbeth. Lizbeth Bechet."

"I'm Lu-" I tried to say before she interrupted.

"Luther Redstone. Everyone knows who you are."

I asked, "why are you being so nice to me?"

She smiled and replied, "because, I think your cute and I think you could use another friend."

I was a little shocked by her comment. I warned her, "if anyone see's you being kind to me, they might make you regret it."

She explained, "I have the luxury of not caring what people think."

"Thanks Lizbeth. I can't remember the last time anyone was kind to me. Listen, I have to get to class. My father will flip out with I get another absentee slip."

I began to limp away when she asked, "would you like to go to the dance next week?"

In disbelief, I turned back to her and asked, "why?"

"Luther, just say yes."

I then tried to smile and said, "sure I would like that. I have to go."

We parted, but afterward for the first time in years I was genuinely happy.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

We dated for the rest of our time in high school and were deeply in love. Carl and the other students still made my life hell, but I didn't care. Spending time with Lizbeth made my life durable, I cherished every moment I spent with her. People would mock Lizbeth sometimes for being with me, but she seemed to neither notice or be effected. Because of her my grades improved and I even made the honor roll at graduation. We talked about leaving for college together, and I couldn't wait to be far away from Sanctuary Hill. I was going to ask her to marry me after we left. But little did I know that circumstances were going to split us apart.

It was a warm summer's day as I packed all my meager belongings into my truck as my father watched silently from the kitchen window. I had reached the point where either I was going to lose it or I was going to get out of the hell I had known for so long. I had been a good pupil in school and had gotten a scholarship to a college in Ottawa. I wanted to never return.

I was going to stop at Lizbeth's after and pick her up. I really believed she was going to leave with me, though I severely miscalculated the situation.

I stopped packing my car when I noticed her walking up the driveway, yet she was seeming to avoid looking at me directly and I could tell that she was upset about something.

I approached her. "Lizbeth, get your things packed. We'll be far away by nightfall."

She sobbed. "Luther, I can't go with you."

I faltered, my heart sank. "Wait, what are you saying?"

She looked at me with tearful eyes. "I know you have to leave, you don't have a choice. I have to stay Luther, I don't have a choice."

I shook my head. "Liz, don't do this, please."

She turned away from me. "My mother can't care for herself, so I must take care of her, I can't leave her. I knew this day was coming, when you would have to go. I'm sorry, I can't go with you."

I began to weep and fell to my knees in front of her and looked down at the dirt. I begged, "please, I don't want to say goodbye."

She put her hands on either side of my face and looked into my eyes. She whispered, "I'll always love you."

Then she walked away and, from my knees, I watched her walk out of my life. Hard when the only thing that keeps you going suddenly isn't there, like missing some vital piece, a piece which you can never recover.

Second worst day of my life.

I busied myself for the rest of the day by tuning up the engine of Lizbeth's car, though she was always in my mind. She was in my life again, and that fact brought with it mixed emotions, I wanted to be with her but she was another man's wife, a man whom I hated, though I knew she would be loyal to him. But I kept thinking about how she had kissed me, and my heart yearned to hold her in my arms again.

I tuned up her car and finished just before three o'clock. I closed up the garage for the day. I knew I couldn't wait, I had to see her again.

Chapter Eight: The Town Hall

Chapter 4: Old Love Dies Hard and The Town Hall

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I remembered how Paul had told me Lizbeth worked as a receptionist at the town hall. I figured I could see her just before she left work; I just wanted to tell her that I was glad to see her and say that I knew that we could only be platonic friends. It was a lie, I wanted to be with her. But I had to say something to Lizbeth.

I walked towards the town hall, it was next to the the church. A small stone building beside a parking lot full of expensive cars. Employee's where leaving at the moment; getting into there vehicles and driving home for the night. I walked along row of tall oak tree's beside the street nearby which waved lazily in a gentle breeze. I then saw Lizbeth standing on the sidewalk in front of town hall. I was about to wave when a convertible sports car, easily worth three hundred thousand dollars, parked beside Lizbeth. Carl was in the driver seat and they began to talk.

I then hid behind the tree beside me, I didn't want Carl to see me. I was going to leave when the two of them began to talk. I listened to their conversation.

Carl asked, "where is your car honey?"

Lizbeth replied, "it needed a mechanic."

I could hear Carl sigh loudly. He said, "I wouldn't have happened to bring it to your old boyfriend. I told you, I don't want you seeing that guy."

She sounded defensive when she responded. "Carl, he is an old friend and I thought he could use the business."

He laughed. "He won't get any business. People already want to ride him out of town on a rail."

"He is an OK guy."

"He's trouble," Carl said, "and we have a reputation to think about. How would it look if the wife of the most powerful man in town was seen with the local outcast?"

"Are you giving me an order Carl?"

He told her, "no, just some advice. I don't mind that you took pity on him when you where young; just put him in the past where he belongs. I sure he'll leave town of his own accord soon enough. Now get into the car and let's go home."

I heard the car speed away and I emerged from behind the tree and watched them drive away. I knew I couldn't see her, she had a good life and I didn't want to ruin it. I decided that she was probably better off without me.

I was about to walk away when Mayor Thatcher stormed out of the town hall. He was talking loudly to a young guy in a suit as they had a conversation in the parking lot. I again hid behind the tree and wanted to listen; I was curious about what Thatcher was doing about the current situation in Sanctuary Hill. If anyone knew about what was going on, he would.

Thatcher was yelling. "I told you to keep and lid on this! Last thing I want is the damn press snooping around again!"

The man's who name I didn't know explained, "Due to the sensationalistic expects of the crime, we are going to be of interest to the national media."

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"Tom, when I gave you the job you told me you could help keep our town's little dilemma from turning us into a freak show for the media. You were some little runt when the Redstone woman's triple homicide brought news people from everywhere. People live here because they like how remote Sanctuary Hill is, and the last thing anybody wants is outsiders coming here. Now if you can't keep our town the way we like it, then you are off the town council."

"I'll do my best," Tom replied.

Thatcher sounded like he was calming down. "Good. This town was founded over two hundred years ago, and the families who were there are still here. It is our job to keep it that way. Since I've took this job, more of our people have vanished than I can remember. And even the people who live here don't talk about it. And I'll keep it that way."

Tom asked, "shouldn't you want to find why so many people are gone missing?"

"No, I don't particularly care. The police might figure it out someday, till then, I'll keep things quiet. I can't believe I would ever be thankful the Redstone punk came back."

"Why are you glad? You have been whipping up a frenzy over his return," Tom asked.

Thatcher explained. "Because, people around here might start demanding answers because of poor old Ma. But now all they care about is seeing Redstone leave. Instead of the town council looking incompetent because we have not solved the disappearances, we get to keep people distracted as they get a lynch mob ready. Until people settle down, we'll keep them happy with sharpening their pitch forks and readying their torches."

"Redstone is probably innocent. He was gone for most of the years when the majority of our citizens vanished."

I liked Tom. First local I heard defend me.

Thatcher got louder. "Never forget how useful the proper scapegoat is. From the beginning, as everyone of authority in this town knows, we have had bad luck. This town is a magnet for misfortune, but we are going to stay here and weather the storm no matter how bad it gets. People might leave and we would be governing a ghost town if it got out about how unlucky this place is. The town council will keep our secret even from the people who live here. Redstone is all they care about now."

"I see Mayor."

Thatcher settled down. "Now, how has our attempts to buy the surrounding farms going Tom?"

"Everyone has accepted the town council's generous offer, everyone except the Jackson farm."

I could hear Thatcher laugh.

"The Jackson farm," Thatcher said, "is fit to be a dirt farm. Now, I want us to own all the surrounding land so we can own everything lock stock and barrel. We'll own every inch of Sanctuary Hill, and the sheep who live here will have to pay us to stay."

I had heard enough. I slammed my fist into the trunk of the tree I was hiding behind and hurt my hand. I then stormed away in anger.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I spent the next few hours in garage. I didn't feel like staying at Paul's yet, so I just paced about and fumed. I really wanted to give a piece of my mind to Thatcher. I then went to the cab of my truck outside; it was night and the stars blazed in a cloudless night sky over the town. I searched my truck and that was when I found the bottle of vodka.

I muttered to myself, "fuck it."

Chapter 5: Nightmarish Encounter and Ashly

Chapter Eight: A Nightmarish Encounter

Midnight.

I decided to go out the bridge, just some large tunnels under the road partially submerged by the water of a passing stream. It was four miles out of town, totally surrounded by a dense woods in every direction. At night there just seemed to be something surreal about this place. During my troubled youth, I had always come here to blow off some steam.

I was sitting on the hood of my truck, drinking from a bottle of vodka, the last bottle I ever bought and saved for such a time as this, when things were getting tough to handle and I just felt like deadening my senses and getting drunk. At that moment, I was dealing with several weighty issues.

One, with my place getting trashed, possibly the same perpetrator as who murdered Ma; who I surmised most people were assuming it was me; and that not for a second did I consider to leave town. The reasons for not leaving were vague to me then. But coming back was proving to be a rather bad series of events, but there was not any regret in me about my choice.

Before then, I always thought I would be burdened by my problems for life; but now I felt I was ramming those problems head on. If it was true that one person was responsible for what my mother was accused of, for killing Ma; then that one guy was responsible for all my problems. He was the one who took my mother away, who ruined my family name in that town; basically the one who fucked up my life. If he was real, I had already set my mind on finding him myself. Vindication, yes, I would finally have vindication.

But I didn't have to wait to find him, that particular night, he or it found me sitting on the bridge. I had just finished the bottle and I threw it out into the woods.

A voice spoke out in the night, it was alarming and distorted to a point where the gender of the speaker was undetectable; it sent a cold chill down my spine.

"Come back have you?"

I jumped down from the hood of my truck and started to look around for the interloper, the voice had come from the tunnels below the bridge. And now I could smell that exact rancid smell which I had encountered in my home.

"Little Luther has come back, now we can have some fun," it cooed.

I yelled, "show for yourself!"

Then it spoke again, I was frozen in fear and mutely listened as words slithered from its unseen lips.

"Remember," it maliciously said, "when they took your mamma away, to the nuthouse. Remember all the horrible things they said about you and your family. Oh Luther, you always have been a source of endless fun. That is why I didn't kill you."

Then I accused, "you killed Ma! You did all of it."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I went into my truck and grabbed my tire iron out and started to pace about the bridge; I was pissed and it felt like a tide of repressed anger suddenly came to me all at once. I just wanted to smash it in the head; I believed I had found the unseen individual who was responsible for my problematic life and now it was my turn.

I vehemently screamed, "show yourself mother fucker!"

It laughed which echoed through the night, and it said, "if want to hurt me, then come down here."

I got out my pocket flashlight and held in one hand, tire iron in the other; I climbed down the side bridge and stood at the mouth of a large tunnel and looked into the darkness before me.

I said, "got you fucker."

I pointed the flashlight down the tunnel; deep inside I could see a roughly human silhouette, hunched down and I could see a tattered, yellow cloth covering it. Then it's eyes, blazing like two burning ambers, looked at me.

Maybe I should have felt afraid, but anger was all I felt then and I was determined to hurt it for hurting me. Not for one second did I doubt that this was he who was responsible for all of it.

It asked, "sure you want to see me any better then you do right now. Your feeble mind might not be able to handle it."

"Enough fucking talk," I told it.

I started to walk down the tunnel then my flashlight revealed the thing to me and I stopped dead in my tracks. I would have screamed if I hadn't been paralyzed by fear.

It was roughly the shape of a human, but I knew what I was looking at was not human. It had wet, slimy skin that was greenish and glistened in the light. It's face consisted of a roughly human face, yet it had an enlarged bottom jaw, agape and revealing two rows of jagged, ebony teeth. A long, serpentine tongue flicked about its mouth. It was bald except for sparse white hairs. It had long arms, longer then it's legs, and they ended with a large hand with three fingers, each ended with an obsidian talon. Then I could see things that looked like worms, crawling, swarming all over this horrible thing. And it was wearing a tattered yellow dress.

I knew who's dress it was, it was the same one my great aunt Edna wore.

I began to slowly back away from it, the tire iron raised so I could defend myself if it chose to attack.

It asked, "aren't you going to give your aunty a kiss?"

I turned to run.

Then it said, "Luther, I could have killed you many times, but I wanted you to be here for the surprise. Something wonderful and terrible comes, I want you to see it."

For a reason I didn't know, I turned back to face it. Maybe any sane man would have run for his life, yet something compelled me to face this monstrosity.

I asked, "You're Edna, but you where killed. I saw you buried."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

It triumphantly laughed and it told me, "yes, your mother, after she realized what I was, succeeded in killing only my mortal shell which concealed my true self. She actually set me free of that accursed body."

"What the fucking hell are you?"

"I'm" it said, "I'm the servant of my dark master and I am the one who must prepare for his arrival, him and his legion of minions. And we will have our revenge for being imprisoned."

I asked, "are you going to kill me."

"No, I will give you what you've always secretly wanted, I will let you live to see all in this town suffer, just how you have suffered because of them. You will die then, but first you will get to see them destroyed."

I defensively said, "no, I'm not like that."

"Lie to me, don't lie to yourself. Hatred hasn't crept into your heart. Or do you still deny that you don't hate them? Do you deny that you would like revenge."

I tightened my grip on the tire iron. "You're right, I do want some revenge; you are responsible for all of it. So who should I hate."

It started to joyfully clap its hands together and it said, "Luther, you surprise me endlessly. Most mortals surely go insane when they behold me, yet you want to fight even when you see me as I am."

I wasn't afraid, I was just angry.

I spat at it then said, "OK, let's just fucking settle it now."

I ran down the tunnel towards it, tire iron ready to strike; though it didn't seem to react to my advance. When I was close enough, I swung my blunt weapon into its head, then started to hit it repeatedly. Then it pulled back its arm and then punched me hard enough to send me flying back several feet. I landed on my back in shallow water and then it quickly came close enough to stand over me. It used a leg to pin me down. It lightly pressed a talon into my stomach.

It asked, "are you so ready to die?"

I muttered, "just fucking do it."

It laughed. "It would be so easy, so delicate you are. I could also easily kill precious Lizbeth as well."

My blood suddenly felt like ice water, and I was immensely afraid, not for myself but for Lizbeth. I really didn't care about what happened to me, I did care about what happened to her.

I demanded, "leave her alone!"

It cooed again. "You can't save her, you can't save anyone, not even yourself. Accept the true nature of life, that you will have to watch everything you love wither and die."

I begged, "just leave her alone."

It said, "stay, leave, you can't escape what is to come."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

It started to back up away, then I quickly got up onto my feet and turned to face this thing only to find that it had vanished into the darkness leaving me alone.

Its voice called out in the darkness, "time to play."

Then it was gone. I quickly climbed up the side of the bridge, got into my truck, and drove to Paul's. The pedal was to the floor the whole time.

I lay awake in bed all that night, questioning my own sanity, unable to get the image of that thing out of my mind. Nightmares end when the sun rises, but if this thing was real, then it was a nightmare which would not stop at dawn.

I once read the oldest and most ingrained type of fear is the fear of the unnatural. I guess everyone develops their own view on what exactly can and cannot be in our perception of reality, but when something happens which infringes on your sense of what is, then your view of reality is threatened.

I considered two possibilities. Either I had hallucinated and was insane, or I had really seen that terrible thing with my own eyes. Might sound odd, but I was really hoping that I was insane. The alternative was far too horrible to consider.

Chapter Nine: Ashley

I slept in, and it was just before noon when I finally got out of bed. I had a harsh hangover, and at first everything seemed right. Then I remembered what I had seen, or thought I saw, and suddenly a cold chill ran down to the base of my spine. I sneaked out of Paul's house, being careful to avoid anyone since I really didn't feel like talking to someone. I yearned just to get to my garage and lose myself in some work, alone with my thoughts.

So I arrived at my meager garage early in the noon, and decided to do a complete tune-up of Lizbeth's car. So I went over the engine alone for a few hours. I decided that maybe it was better to let go of what I had seen in my drunken stupor, just forget it. I wanted to believe it was just the result of a bad trip.

I was brooding deeply and failed to notice the side door open and someone enter.

"Hello Luther," a female voice said.

I was so surprised that I jumped and banged my head on the hood of the car. I bellowed, "damn it!"

I turned to see that Ashley girl, dressed all in black, standing in my garage, looking at me with a joyous expression on her face.

I asked, "what in the hell do you want miss?"

She smiled and said, "I know you saw it last night."

"What?" I stammered.

She approached. "You saw it last night."

"I don't know what the hell you are talking about," I said deciding to play it dumb. I turned away from her and hunkered over the engine.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

"Luther," she said, "most go insane when they behold someone who has been touched. You saw the thing who at once was family to you."

I turned to her, and I asked, "how in the hell do you know about it."

She looked at me and replied, "I am a practitioner of the dark arts."

I laughed. "Don't tell me, you worship Satan."

She shook her head. "I worship a god a darkness. But he does not rule some imaginary after-life, no, he will reign over these very lands. And his servants will be rewarded, such as you and me."

What she said unnerved me a little and I forcefully asked, "Have anything to say that isn't insane?"

Though what she said to me might have seemed like madness only a day ago, the prior night's events had left me open to consider unfathomable possibilities. Perhaps that is the definition of insanity, when your view of reality is intruded upon by things which should not be in any reasonable world. But if what I saw in the tunnel the night before was real, then my view of reality had been painfully naive.

She leaned toward me and asked, "would you like to know more?"

Though the answers of this enigma my life had become entangled in might not be anything a man should now, I was now in the middle of this somehow, and if she could enlighten me, I had to listen.

She said, "you saw the thing that had once been kin to you, though any scrap of its mortal existence is gone."

I looked at her in the eyes. "That thing, it is responsible for all the deaths around here, including the crime my mother was put away for?"

She nodded. "It is simply doing what its master commands in to do, the prepare the way for his coming."

"What in the hell are you talking about?"

She smiled. "It works through its chosen servants to prepare the way for its arrival."

I asked, "how do you now these things?"

"You see," she explained, "once in my youth I witnessed the creature you saw last night. Ever since then I have had a psychic link to the creature. That is how I know."

"This thing that is coming, what is it?"

"A being of absolute darkness, the withered one, the reaper of souls."

I said, "a demon or something?"

"No, not a demon, no, he is a god. He is our god Luther."

"What do you mean, my god?"

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

She smiled coyly and she said, "it is he who brought you home Luther, your hate of this pathetic village has bound you to him."

I turned away from her and went to my tool bench and started to arrange them. I muttered, "I could give a shit less about this town, I'm just here to run a business. This doesn't make any sense."

Then I felt her body press against my back and she placed her hands lightly on my shoulders, I could feel her heated breath against the back of my neck.

She whispered into my ear, "Luther, you and I a kindred souls, we both are despised by most here. You are like me, alone and hated. Don't you wish to see all those who vilified you suffer as you have suffered?"

I turned to face her, our faces where only inches apart and I admit that I found something about her deeply alluring, yet if what she said was true, then she was somehow in league with whatever forces had destroyed my mother, my father, and to some extent, myself as well. If this madness which had invaded my life was real, and this strange girl Ashley was part of it, then I should have been weary of her. But, though not knowing why, I did feel some connection to her and I'll admit I was attracted to her though for what reasons still baffle me.

I gently pushed her away and explained, "yeah, most people here hate me, my family, but I'm really past the point of caring enough to hate them back."

She seductively cooed and she asked, "why, why did you really come back?"

I replied, "just wanted to run a business."

"You where gone so long, why did you chose to come back at this particular time, why did you wait so long to return?"

Till that moment, my reasons for coming back changed often and where truthfully vague even to myself. Why did I come back? To escape the city like I first believed? To run my uncle's garage and maintain my own business? Or because of ancient feelings for Lizbeth? Maybe to finally absolve the curse which had hanged over me and those I had loved in the last day of their tortured lives? Why did I come back?

I asked, "listen, if this insanity is in any way related to reality, what is this thing you say is coming?"

Ashley said, "I will tell you if you go with me now."

"Go where?"

"Somewhere."

She started to walk away and I watched her move farther away. I felt compelled to follow, maybe because she had the answers, but maybe because I was attracted to her.

We walked through the town square, side by side, and not a single word passed between us. Everyone we passed would stop a look at the two of us, their eyes thick with suspicion and animosity. That damn look I had endured from every day in my youth when I would see others, they where giving her that same look as well and I felt some compassion for her. I guess it is easier to be sympathetic to those of a similar lot in life.

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This old guy was walking down the sidewalk, I knew him from way back, and he was a farmer who owned land right next to my boyhood home. His name was Ronald Donovan, when I walked to school sometimes, he would yell out how my mother was a murdering bitch and how I was no different. I used to hate the bastard passionately, now I just felt slight animosity.

Ronald, wearing mud stained overalls and with patches of streaking white hair on his mostly bald head, stopped and looked at the two of us, Ashley and I.

He grunted, "I heard the Redstone bastard child had returned, and look, he is with the slut witch. Why don't you two get the hell out of town!"

I looked at Ronald right in the eyes and bluntly stated, "Fuck off asshole."

Ashley then made an odd gesture with her hand and pressed it against Ronald's chest, over his heart, and she muttered something that I could not hear. She then retracted her hand and smiled.

She advised, "your heart is old, you never know which heartbeat will be your last."

Ronald snorted, "get away from me."

I said, "come on Ashley, he isn't worth this shit."

So we walked on and Ronald said as we parted, "God will punish you, like he punishes all sinners."

I yelled back at him, "Drop dead you old bastard."

Ashley led me out of town and we walked down a dirt road, on either side of road where the poor homes of town, trailers, dilapidated hovels, surrounded by deep, dark woods which had always seemed strangely ominous to myself. Finally we arrived at a two story farm house which was in pretty bad shape.

Ashley said, "this is where I live, unfortunately."

"I've seen worse."

"Come inside."

I asked, "you live alone?"

She shook her head. "No, I live with my alcoholic mother. Please come inside."

"Wait," I said, "I don't feel comfortable with this."

She took my arm and pulled me towards the front door, I didn't resist much though. So we entered.

Inside it was a mess of titanic proportions, garbage everywhere, and there was the sound of someone snoring in the next room. I looked in and saw an obese woman passed out on the couch with a vodka bottle in her hand, strangely, the same brand I used to drink incidentally.

I asked Ashley, "would your mother approve of you bringing a guy in his thirties home?"

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Ashley told me, "my mother doesn't give a shit about me and I don't give a shit about her. Please come upstairs."

So we went upstairs and she led me into her large bedroom which was much cleaner than the rest of the house, though its decor really indicated just how much of an odd duck Ashley was. It was dark, purple sheets covered the windows and blocked the sun. The room was adorned with candles, yet not ordinary candles, these candles were carved into figures which were both bizarre and alarming, and it reminded me much of that hellish thing I thought I saw the night before. In the center of the room was a large bed with black sheets.

I muttered to her, "Nice room."

She sat on the bed looked up at me. "Sit down with me."

I folded my arms across my chest and said, "I think I'll stand. Listen, I'm really on my last nerve here, so can we get to the point."

Ashley asked, "do you want some answers?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Fine, what would you like to know first?"

"Easy, what the fuck is going on in this god damn town?"

Ashley looked at me and said, "deep beneath this town, there is a power, a power of utter darkness, imprisoned and seeking escape."

"What power?"

Ashley told me, "I don't know exactly what it is, but I am empathic to it, I can feel what it feels. Rage, endless rage, for all who dwell in this town. And it wants to escape."

"Fine, evil buried beneath this town, what the hell does this have to do with Edna and what happened to my mother."

Ashley explained, "though this darkness is imprisoned somehow, it can occasionally taint those born here during a particular configuration of the planets. Like Edna, from birth, she was tainted. Though she began life as a mortal, when your mother destroyed her mortal form, she only unleashed her and now she stalks these lands, doing the will of her dark master."

I asked her, "can it be killed?"

Her eyes opened wide open and she seemed upset by this. "Why kill it?"

"Why," I said, "because that thing, if it is real, it took my mother away from me, it took everything away from me. I should hate the people in this town, they only looked down on and despised my family. Edna, or what ever the hell it is now, she is the one I should hate."

"Luther, it cannot be killed for it was never truly alive, and she would most certainly kill you."

"Ashley," I asked her, "do you care about anyone?"

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She frowned. "I used to love my father, before he left us in the middle of the night."

I told her, "listen, I don't know what is going on, how much of what you told me is bullshit, or what it has to do with me now. All I know is I had to watch my mother wither away in that insane asylum, I had to watch her slowly die and knowing there wasn't a damn thing I could do for her. I can't bring her back, but, if I can destroy that thing which took everyone I loved away from me, then that is the only thing I will ever be able to do for my family. I'll kill it, or her, just as it killed my parents."

Ashley dipped her hand into an urn which was full of a white powder and took out a handful and she stood up. She asked, "can I talk you out of this. Luther, we don't really know each other, but in some ways I know you better than anyone, if you oppose this power Luther, it will only cost you your life. To oppose it is your doom, but, to side with it will bring you things you can't possibly imagine."

She held the hand full of powder in front of my face and I asked her, "what is that?"

"Here is your answers Luther," she said then she blew the powder and it covered my face, going in both my mouth and my nose.

The damn stuff burned horribly and I tried to wipe it away from my eyes. I dropped to my knees and looked up at her.

I asked, "why?"

She ran her hand along my cheek. "Sleep now Luther."

I passed out.

The events which followed are hard to recall because I'm not sure of how much of what happened was a dream, and how much was reality. I was in a state where I seemed to change from the world of sleep to the world of wakefulness.

First I recall a black void, a nothingness which was full of a thunderous sound in the distance approaching me swiftly. Then the sound became more succinct, it sounded like the squealing of some kind of ungodly animal. Then a sexless, inhuman voice echoed out in the darkness.

The voice said, "to oppose us is death, for you and all you love."

Then I was in the waking world suddenly. I was lying on the bed facing up, my shirt unbuttoned and I was completely paralyzed. Ashley was straddling my thighs, she was now wearing nothing but black undergarments and she was kissing my chest.

She then whispered into my ear, "don't fight it, it is useless to try."

Back into the state of sleep. I'm standing in a muddy field outside Sanctuary Hill, its night and it is raining heavily. A flash of lightning reveals the surreal landscape around me.

The ominous voice said, "You can't stop us, nothing can."

Then I feel something grab my foot and I feel something sharp penetrate my shoe and tear into the flesh of my foot. I looked down when I saw skeletal hands, the fingers tipped with long obsidian talons, rising from the ground and grabbed my legs, tearing into me. Then they begin to pull me down into the damp mud. I

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screamed, yet all I could hear was this strange noise, sort of like the chattering of countless teeth emanating from below me. Then I completely sink beneath then surface and I can taste the dirt in my mouth.

That chilling voice spoke. "Join us."

Then the sensation of dirt filling my mouth is replaced with feeling something warm and moist. Again the waking world, Ashley was kissing me then she pulled back.

I tried to speak, what ever it was she used to knock me out seemed to keep me in a state of paralysis so I was unable to move. Though this should have been, I don't know, I guess pleasurable; it was actually terrifying.

She looked into my eyes and said, "be with me."

Then I'm again in the nightmare realm. It is the past and I'm sitting in the room where I would meet my tormented mother, we are separated by Plexiglas and we stare mutely at each other. She looks worn down, I stutter to say something but the words just won't come. I want to tell her I'm sorry.

The damned voice said, "she tried to stop us, see the fate of all who try."

I watch in mute horror as she suddenly begins to wither away in front of me until there is nothing left but a leering skeleton looking at me from the other side of the window.

The voice again. "Try, and you will die."

Then again I'm thrust into the waking world, Ashley is resting her head on my chest. I begin to feel the paralysis begin to fade away though I was still incapacitated, I could move my fingers slightly and I was able to mutter a single word.

"No."

Then again I'm plunged into the nightmare, and the worst was yet to come. I'm standing at the edge of the deep, dark forest which surrounded the town and it is night again. Standing at the tree line is Lizbeth, she is looking at me and smiling. I feel the need to warn her but the damn words would not come out of my mouth.

The voice jeered, "see the price of resistance."

I watch silently as that thing, the thing that had once been Edna, burst out from the trees and grabbed Lizbeth and pulled her away into the darkness between the trees.

Then I'm returned to the black void the nightmare had begun with. The howling and hissing of unseen monstrosities ring in my ears.

The voice, now fading, said, "Luther, choose, serve me and us and you will live. To fight us means only your death."

I yelled, "leave her alone!"

It laughed maniacally. "Your choice."

It ended finally.

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I woke up on the floor of my garage, my face lying in a pool of my own drool. It was night now and I didn't have a clue on how I came to be there though I was relieved to see familiar surroundings. I got up onto my feet and felt something like a hangover. I carefully looked around then grabbed my crowbar of the wall. I wasn't sure if this horrible chain of events was real, or if I had finally cracked.

I wasn't going to take any chances.

Chapter 6: A Moment of Doubt and Home

Chapter Ten: A Moment of Doubt

I jumped into my truck and sped all the way to Paul's farm. I parked in front of his house and started to repeatedly honk the horn. I did this for a minute before Paul finally emerged, dressed in his night clothes, and looked at me in a way that suggested he was a little pissed.

Paul yelled, "what the fuck man, I was asleep."

I shouted, "get over here!"

He reluctantly approached the truck and stood outside my open window. "OK Luther, what in the hell is going on?"

I asked, "where does Lizbeth live?"

Paul shook his head. "Jesus, have you been drinking because you looked messed up. And no, I'm not going to let you go to her house in the dead of night and make a total jackass of yourself."

I looked right at Paul and told him, "listen, get your wife and get the hell out of town. You are in danger."

Paul shook his head. "Luther, in the history of our friendship I have put up with a lot. Are you going to flip out or something."

"Paul, listen you and everyone is in danger. Please, friend, get the hell out of dodge because something bad is coming."

"What are you talking about?"

"The thing that killed Ma, I saw it and more. God, you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Thing?"

"It wasn't human, it was, a, a, a monster."

Paul said, "Luther, maybe I should drive you to the hospital in the next county."

"One favor, tell me where Lizbeth lives, please Paul."

"Fuck," Paul shouted, "I've been doing you a lot of favors lately, man, don't test the breaking limit of our friendship, cause I'm really getting annoyed here."

"Paul, please, I need to see her."

"Fine! But I'm going with you, just to make sure you don't do anything stupid. And after this, I really don't want to see you for awhile."

"OK, get in the truck."

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Paul climbed in and I floored it and raced back towards town. He was looking at me, he seemed to be concerned and somewhat suspicious. He had been a trust worthy friend, though I imagined now he might have had doubts if it was wise to call me friend. After he gave me directions to Lizbeth's home, he asked in a deadly serious tone, "Luther, what is happening to you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why are you acting like a fucking lunatic buddy."

"I'd elaborate about what is going on, but Paul, you really don't want to know. Trust me, get you and your family the hell away from here."

Paul sighed. "Leave every thing behind, listen, I need to know the fucking reason for why I have to leave."

I turned to him. "Paul, this town is fucked, that is all I can say."

"Listen, if you go to Lizbeth's, Carl is going to pound you into the ground and Luther, this time I don't have your back because I don't know what is your god damn problem."

"Yeah, but I have your back, you may not believe that, but it is true."

I arrived at her home, a large country estate on the outskirts of town which had once been the home of the only rich family to ever call these parts home. God, I didn't like the fact that Carl had given her more then I've ever could have, he treated like she deserved and I guess the better man won.

Paul asked, "sure you want to do this? Cause let me tell you, it looks bad, really bad."

Then the front door to the large home opened and Carl stepped out into the night, he looked very angry and I could tell this wasn't going to be pleasant.

I and Paul emerged from the truck and walked up to the house.

Carl said, "Paul, your wife phoned and warned me you two where coming by."

Paul explained, "hey, I didn't want to come here."

Carl folded his large arms across his chest and asked me coldly, "and what the fuck do you want psycho?"

I told him, "Carl, I can't explain, but you have to get your family out of this town. Something is coming, something bad."

Carl sneered. "Yeah, accept this thing is already here, Luther, you are just as fucked in the head as your murdering bitch mother. Leave now or I'll beat you to an inch of your life."

I stepped up to Carl. "Jesus, you are in danger."

"I'm counting to three," Carl said, "after that I'll seriously fuck your shit up, I promise. One."

Paul put his hand on my shoulder. "Luther, we better leave."

"Two."

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I yelled, "Carl, you don't know what is going on!"

"Three mother fucker."

Next thing I knew Carl had forced me to the ground and he was now on top of me, powerful blows reigning down on me. I had taken more than a few beatings in my life, but never like this. Paul didn't do anything, he just watched.

"Carl!" Lizbeth's voice yelled out.

She rushed out from the house and she tried to pull him off me. She pleaded, "leave him alone."

He whipped around to face her and shouted, "why do you stand up for this piece of shit every fucking time, you married me, not this pathetic asshole."

Lizbeth was crying now. "Carl, he is sick, he needs help."

Though my jaw, inches from being broken, made it painful to talk, I managed to plead, "Liz, get out of this place. Please."

Then alternating red and blue lights shined upon the scene as a police car pulled into the drive way. Carl stood up then looked down on me then spit.

A lone police officer approached the scene and he asked, "we got a call, what seems to be the problem."

Carl told the cop, "this guy on the ground is trespassing on my property, please arrest him."

The cop looked down on me. "OK, I have to take you in. Please don't resist."

Lizbeth said, "look at him, does he look like he is in any condition to resist."

The cop helped me up from the ground then slapped some handcuffs on me and escorted me to the car. Then Paul stepped up and said, "Officer, I admit my friend made a bad choice coming here tonight, but does that justify beating him to a pulp when my friend here didn't do anything to warrant that."

The cop stopped suddenly then said, "I have a member of the town council here, his stock is worth a little more than this guys who everyone knows is trouble. Your friend is just lucky that he hasn't been arrested for murder."

Lizbeth explained, "he needs to go to a hospital, not to the county jail."

Carl looked sternly at his wife. "Get inside please."

I said to her, "Liz, listen to him, go inside."

She mutely went back into the house. I didn't want her to see me get hauled of by the cops. God, maybe I was just as crazy as my mother supposedly was. Maybe the Redstone curse wasn't the disdain I often endured here, maybe it was really a genetic predisposition towards insanity. Maybe I was the monster, god, maybe I had killed Ma and I was creating a delusion to place the blame on something other than myself. Maybe I had come back for one reason, to satisfy a need to avenge myself which was concealed even from me. At that moment, I just wanted the cop to pull out his revolver and shoot me dead. Maybe that would end this whole mess.

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The cop put me in the car then went off to talk with Carl, the officer had left the door open for some reason but I didn't feel the urge to run even if I could, I just wanted to be put away. Lizbeth and Paul, the few who had made the mistake to call me friend, needed to be protected, protected from me.

Paul looked at me. "Listen, I'll go see you tomorrow. Get some rest, I'll find a lawyer."

"Paul," I said, "just leave me alone, go back to your wife, I'm tired of you having to having to deal with the problem it is to call me a friend."

"Luther, goodbye." Paul got into my truck and drove off. I felt that this was the last time we would part as friends, and I felt a deep feeling of sorrow. God, I really must have looked like a maniac.

Then a tall figure emerged stealth fully out of the night and stood before me. It was Jason Raven, that native fellow who was like a local enigma.

He said solemnly, "don't doubt what you have seen Mr. Redstone, and don't give up."

I asked, "what are you talking about?"

"You," he said, "you acted tonight out of concern for those who you care for; you may think you are crazy, but you are just as sane as I."

"Please, leave me alone."

He turned and began to walk away but said as he left, "Mr. Redstone, don't doubt what you have seen. For far worst I fear may come to pass and you may be able to help me prevent it."

Then the cop turned towards the car and shouted, "get away from the car?"

Jason left with out saying anything else. Just disappeared as suddenly as he appeared. For a brief moment, I felt that maybe it was all true, but as the police drove me away, I again became convinced that if there was a central villain here, that is was I.

After some brief questioning by another officer at the county jail, they threw me into a cell and left me there alone. I just kept thinking about how the only woman I had ever truly loved had seen me, a raving lunatic hauled away by the cops. I had always felt alone in life, but I never felt as alone then I did then. I felt hatred for myself, and I didn't see any point in going on.

Then Detective Moss showed up, he looked down at me as I sat slumped down on the small cot in the jail cell. He passed a towel through the bars and said, "wipe the blood of your face."

I muttered, "high Detective, what are you doing here?"

"I heard you caused some commotion tonight, may I ask why?"

I lowered my head and replied, "because, I'm sick and everybody was right about me. I think I killed Ma."

Moss stated, "you may be sick for all I know, but I know you didn't kill Ma for a fact."

"And how do you know that?"

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"I neglected to tell you since it was need to know information, but we are pretty sure we got a footprint left by the killer. When she was attacked, a bag of flower was spilled on the floor and we got a good print."

"What?"

"Yeah, listen, this print was of a bare foot which was severely deformed beyond anything the medical examiner had ever seen. He couldn't even be sure it was human. Would you know anything about who may be responsible?"

"You really don't want to hear it."

"Listen, I got a killer in this county who I believe is responsible for a lot of tragedy around these parts, and I know that it has some connection to you."

"Why do you think that?"

Moss explained to me, "do you know that there have been over two dozen disappearances in and around Sanctuary Hill, and it started almost an exact year after that incident with your mother. Honestly, I've been trying to solve this case for my entire career. May I ask you if you remember the name of those twins who vanished?"

Then it clicked in my mind. "The Moss twins."

The detective nodded. "Yes, they were my younger brothers. I wanted to nail the perpetrator who was responsible. And I think you can help me finally do that."

"Shouldn't you hate me, my family was partly responsible for your loss."

Moss said, "I used to, but I realized that there was something creeping about this community which was responsible for what happened to my brothers, as well as much more grief around here. And Luther, you are going to help me close this case once and for all, I know that."

"Why do you think that?"

"This killer, it never leaved a single victim to be found, yet when you returned, suddenly it left its first victim to be found. Why when you returned, because you are connected to this situation. It seems to be somehow focused on you."

"Detective, why are you sure all the disappearances and Ma's murder are connected?"

"Because, statistically, this town has the highest total of missing individuals in all of this province, maybe the country. Something really bad is loose in my county, and I'll stop it. With your help."

"How can I help you detective?"

"It all started during that summer with your family, that event triggered something which is still lose out there somewhere, and I think you might know."

I asked, "You know about Edna, the invalid my mother shot?"

"Yeah."

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I knew how it sounded, but I wanted to help Moss because he seemed like a good cop, so I told him, "I think Edna is responsible for all of it."

"How can a dead woman be responsible?"

So I explained it all to him, seeing that thing which I thought was Edna, though I omitted Ashley's involvement since I didn't want to get her in trouble for some reason. And I told him about how something much worse might be coming. Moss just listened.

I said, "I know how it sounds, I'm probably insane."

Moss seemed thoughtful. "Yeah, undead monsters seems a little unlikely, yet there is something I should tell you. An exact year to the day after Edna's death, someone dug up her grave and stole the body."

"What? I never heard of this?"

"Yeah, the town council puts a lid on events around here that they feel might disturb the public peace. Thing is, I saw that grave myself. It wasn't someone digging down into the ground, it was something digging its way up from under the ground."

I stood up. "Why didn't you realize that something really odd was happening?"

Moss shook his head. "I prefer to rely upon my logical nature, and I really didn't want to believe what I privately suspected, that something had dug itself out of the grave."

"Do you believe me?"

"Luther, I don't want to, but I will accept what ever the truth is, and I don't pretend I know exactly what is possible and impossible in this reality. But that foot print, how I saw the grave, and the fact you confirmed a theory I didn't want to believe for so long. Honestly, I would prefer if it was all your fault."

"Yeah, me too, that would be easier to live with."

"Edna," Moss cryptically said, "if she is the thing at the center of this mystery, if she somehow survived her own death, then she is the one we have to stop. Will you help me?"

"I'm kind of in jail right now."

Moss shrugged. "I know a sympathetic shrink who is also a close friend, I get him to write tonight's episode of as a panic attack caused by stress. I'll get you out by tomorrow."

"What do you want to do?"

"If it is real, then I'm going to kill it if I can."

I asked, "yeah, but how do we kill it."

Moss began to walk away but said before he left, "there must be a way, and we will find it."

"Wait."

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"What is it?"

"Edna might only be a symptom of some disease that infests that town, something worse might be coming."

Moss said, "then we better figure out how to stop it."

Then I was alone and once again was living in a world where such terrifying realities hid beneath the facade of normalcy of our existence. My moment of doubt had passed, and once again my reality was one that could have been nightmare.

If we could stop it, Edna, and the sickness that had spawned her; then I would succeed or die trying. The town in which I had been vilified for many years now was relying on me and the detective for salvation. Funny how fate can be so ironic in the end.

I slept, scared of what was to come.

Chapter Eleven: Home

The next day detective Moss went through the motions and procedures to get me released with nothing more than a slap on the wrist for my actions the night before. It was dusk when I and Moss exited the police station and got into his car. Then we began the journey towards the cursed town of Sanctuary Hill.

I asked him, "so, what is the plan here?"

Moss replied, "we are going to start at your families house, see if we can't find anything there."

I felt a momentary twinge in my stomach, I knew returning would dredge up a life time's worth of repressed emotions. I had hoped never to see that house again, I had tried hard to forget it. Now I was going back to where it all began.

Moss said, "I sneaked some hardware out of the armory, what kind of fire arm are you comfortable with?"

I shook my head. "I hate guns, ever since what happened to my mother and all. Swore I would never touch one."

Moss shrugged. "I got a baseball bat."

"Look," I said, "I not sure we can even kill this fucking thing, you haven't seen it, and trust me, you don't want to."

"Listen to me sir, we both have lost the people we love to this damn thing. You want vengeance as much as I."

Even though I knew he was right; I protested, "it will most likely kill us."

Moss asked, "you know we must stop it, will you help Luther Redstone?"

I nodded. "I don't care if it kills me, I just want this fucking thing resolved finally."

As we drove during the later hours of dusk we approached Sanctuary Hill as night slowly fell over the land.

"Sorry, I don't share your pessimism, but it is my job to take chances, to protect and serve."

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"I'm just a lowly mechanic, and no offense, people around here have always been kind of shitty to my family for awhile, why take a chance for them when I know god damn as well they wouldn't spare a squirt of piss for my ass if I was on fire."

"A rather crude way to say it, but I understand your sentiment."

"Actually, why don't you get fucking S.W.A.T. in on this, they would stand a better chance."

"Yes, I doubt I could go through proper channels to get S.W.A.T. assistance when I tell them our perpetrator is undead. But don't worry, we have some firepower."

"You're going to need it, this thing is a fucking demon from the fucking pits of hell, and there might be something worse coming."

"I don't know, we stand a good chance I would say."

"What are you basing that on exactly?"

"Blind optimism. But someone must face it, and I suppose it is our responsibility now."

We drove in silence until we reached Sanctuary Hill just as a fat harvest's moon had risen into the sky, looming ominously over the town as it cast a surreal moonlight over the land. I wondered just what evils might be hiding in the dark of that night, I hoped Edna was solely responsible, I hope she was not just a symptom of a greater unnatural disease which infested this place.

We reached the end of the long dirt driveway which led to the dilapidated farmhouse to where I had once lived, I hadn't been there ever since I left that house long ago; I had never wanted to see it again. Looking at the darkened, decrepit structure I could imagine Edna looming within. I supposed that Edna was not the only demon in that house for me, for that house carried a load of personal demons for myself and seeing that house brought it all back for me.

It was not bravery which compelled me to face this thing, it was pure anger and hatred. I loathed this thing because all my problems in life could be directly put upon this thing's doorstep. I also had my family avenge, my father and mother as well as my self.

We where parked at the end of the driveway, we got out of car and Moss walked around to the back of the trunk and opened it. Inside where some guns.

Moss turned to me and asked, "sure you don't want a weapon?"

I shook my head. "No, I hate guns."

Then I saw the aluminum bat in the trunk and picked it up and said, "this will be fine."

Then headlight's appeared out of the night, and Paul drove up, in my truck. He was quick to see the guns. He stopped the truck and he jumped out.

He said, "Luther, I saw you pass by in town, thought I would bring you your truck. What the fuck is up with the guns Officer?"

Moss asked, "how much does your friend here know?"

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I explained, "Paul, crazy as it sounds, my aunt Edna is still alive and is responsible for a lot of death's around here, and we are going to kill it."

Paul looked at Moss and asked, "Please say Luther is fucking insane, Moss, you don't believe any of this?"

"You see," Moss said, "I haven't seen it myself personally, I just have Mr. Redstone's word here, but he seems to confirm some long time suspicions I had. I think you should listen to him."

I told Paul, "go home, get or wife and get out of town, trust me."

Paul seemed to think for a second then shook his head. He said, "Luther, I guess I will go with you."

"Don't, don't risk your fucking life for this."

"There is nothing in that fucking house, I'm so sure I'll go with you and show you two you are wrong."

Moss asked, "so here is how we proceed gentlemen, wait here while I go recon the house."

Paul said, "recon the house, we are just going to go search that house so I can show you two assholes you are both wrong."

I nodded. "We will stick together."

Moss asked Paul, "want a gun?"

Paul shook his head and replied, "let's just go get this done with. I've had just about enough of you two assholes."

Moss pulled out a large, gray shotgun out of the trunk and pumped the barrel. He picked up a box of shells and started loading his coat pockets.

Moss said, "off we go, into the fray."

So we walked slowly down the driveway and the terror I felt grew more intense with each step I took towards my boyhood home. Moss seemed expressionless, his eyes completely locked with the house; while Paul seemed more annoyed then anything else.

So then we arrived at the house and we all stopped to look then we heard it, the sound of an old woman cackling maniacally from inside the house, we all heard it.

Paul jumped back and gasped, "what the fuck was that?"

I raised my bat, me and Moss walked up the porch and approached the gaping double door's that led to the kitchen. It was not dark inside for moonlight was illuminating everything. So we both entered as I noticed Paul run down the driveway.

I screamed, "come get me you fucking bitch!"

Moss said, "you just gave or location."

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Then Edna's distorted voice spoke out from somewhere deeper inside the house, and it chilled my blood the moment I heard it.

"Luther, nice of you to bring me a snack. I'll enjoy sucking the marrow out of his bones."

I yelled, "show yourself."

She sneered, "your friend had more sense than you to run away."

Moss whispered, "it's coming from upstairs."

"Yeah, it is in the attic, in its room we made for it up there."

I felt like a child again, bringing up Edna her tray of food, and I remembered the terror I felt then.

So I led Moss into the den when we saw the grisly thing we were about behold. In the center of the room was a crudely constructed thing which resembled some ungodly shrine, but it was made entirely from human bones and skulls. And complete skeletons were lying on the floor around it.

I stammered, "what the hell is this thing."

"Let us go on, put it out of your head and just focus on what we have to do."

So we went up the stairs into the second floor where we came to the attic entrance, the ladder was already extended I looked up into the blackness above.

Moss pulled out a flashlight and went up into the attic first, I followed; I expected I only had seconds to live. Then we were standing in that attic where it all began for me.

The deceptively large room was unlike any other room in the house, it was still in good condition; everything all neat and tidy as it had been before. Her rocking chair was empty. The mirror on the wall though, it had been smashed, while everything else in the room seemed organized and tidy.

Moss asked, "why do you suppose it would maintain this one room so well."

Then I realized. "Because, it comes here to feel human again, just to be a good little girl who cleans her room, it smashed the mirror cause it made her see what she had become."

"Sounds like a reasonable explanation."

I said, "it is not here."

Then I heard something scuttle across the roof above us and that is when I saw her window open.

Moss said, "it is on the roof."

Then Edna, out of sight, chillingly asked, "do you boys really want me to come down and play, you won't like that very much I'm afraid."

Then Moss aimed his weapon at the area of the roof where the sound had last come from and he pulled the trigger, making a defining sound as well as filling the room full of choking smoke. It screamed out in the

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night.

Moss excitedly proclaimed, "she can be hurt!"

Then Edna's voice, obviously enraged, yelled, "you will regret doing that. Here I come."

Then one of Edna's hands punched right through ceiling, like the wood was wet tissue, and the arm seemed to expand and undulated like a tentacle, and a large hand grabbed the detective's head and it pulled him off his feet.

I yelled, "Moss!"

Moss quickly prepared to fire in defense when the thing then snapped his neck with a sharp cracking sound. It let go and Moss fell lifelessly to the floor.

Edna bellowed, "run, because you know what, you get to be it."

I wanted to help Moss but I knew the man was dead, and I now didn't want to join him, so I ran as quickly as I could out of the house. About halfway down the stairs I heard Edna scramble through the house after me and it sounded fast.

It yelled, "now you die boy!"

I ran out from the house and could see Paul standing at the edge of the driveway and I raced towards him.

I screamed, "start the truck!"

Then I heard Edna's approaching footsteps growing closer. Paul saw her I guessed because he suddenly seemed terrified and he grabbed a large pistol from Moss's trunk and tried to fire it unsuccessfully. He began to fumble with the gun.

I hollered, "safety!"

Then gun shots filled the night air and I could hear bullets whiz by my face then I heard Edna stop and I was able to reach the parked vehicles and looked back. Paul fired until there were no more bullets.

I said, "let's get the fuck out of here."

"It's real," Paul muttered, "it is fucking real."

Edna stood in the driveway, she seemed to be looking at us then she started laughing, it's jagged teeth shining in the moonlight.

She said, "I'll let you go, but Luther, I will come for you. I imagine your parents are lonely in the cold dirt, so I will send you to them."

Paul, angered, said, "shut up, shut up, you fucking freak!"

"Let's go," I said.

"Where is the cop?"

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"Dead, us to if we don't leave."

Me and Paul got into the truck and drove away from that accursed house.

Moss was dead, I couldn't help but think I could have done something but he was gone now. I was sorry to see the only ally I had parish so suddenly, now I felt alone.

Paul and me said nothing as we drove to his home, and we didn't talk as he gathered his family and packed some belongings into his car. His wife waited in the passenger seat, and she looked pissed, but she didn't seem to be asking questions.

Paul was about to get in when I said, "you are doing the right thing."

"Yeah Luther, I just can't deal with what is going on, so I'm out of here. I would suggest you come with me, but you being so infinitely predictable, I know you can't leave without Lizbeth."

"Yeah, something like that."

"I can't help you with this, but good luck, I mean it."

We shook hands for a moment, I got the sense I would never see him again.

I said, "later Paul, thanks for always being a friend."

"Call me when this is over."

"Sure."

He got in the car and drove away. I spent the night at his home, I kept thinking of Moss, I couldn't help but feel guilty.

I slept, wondering what would happen next.

Chapter 7: The Day After and the Dark Tribe

Chapter Twelve: The Next Day

The next day there was some commotion in Sanctuary Hill, the cops had found Detective Moss's abandoned squad car at my boyhood home but there was no sign of his body or any of the grisly horrors I had seen the night before. They just listed him as missing, though they did question me for I was last to be seen with Moss. I lied and said he dropped me off at Paul's the night before but that was the last I had seen of him. I could sense they wanted to take me in, but I guessed technically, they had nothing but their suspicions about me. So they left.

I left in the afternoon and drove to my garage, maybe I should have run then like Paul had done the night before and left this fucked up town behind me, but I didn't feel the inclination to run. I just wanted to work in my shop and wait for what ever was going to happen, and besides, I couldn't leave Lizbeth. I couldn't save those I had loved most from this horror, but I would save her. That is what I thought about as I worked on the big block engine.

Then later I heard the gentle sobs of a woman and looked up to see Lizbeth walking up to me and crying, she had a black eye. I looked at her, concerned, also angry because I could guess who gave her the shiner.

I asked, "Carl do that?"

She nodded. "We had a fight last night because of what happened when you came to our house, I tried to defend you, and Carl suddenly hit me, he has never hit me once in my life."

I squeezed the wrench in my hand, I then said, "it is my fault, sorry if I caused you this distress. I'll leave you alone from now on."

She pleaded, "Luther, I believed what you said, I want to leave town with you right now, before Carl gets home from work."

My jaw was agape. "What do you mean?"

She asked, "would you leave with me today."

I looked down at the floor. "Is this because of what I told you, or because that pig fucker Carl hit you. Sorry, but I'm going to go hit that bastard in the head."

She explained, "Luther, I believe you because you've never lied to me, so I'll believe you now. Everyone said you were mad like your mother, but I know you better than any of them, you are not crazy. We,"

I interrupted, "Liz, you haven't known me for a long time, but I love you as much as the day I left, I tried to deny it, but I can't, that is why I can't leave town with you."

She protested, "Luther, come with me. Why stay?"

I told her, "Liz, something very bad is loose in this town, I won't go into it, but I have to find a way to stop it. God, every fiber of my being is urging me to go with you, but I can't even though I want it more than anything I've ever wanted in my life. If I don't stop it, more people are going to get hurt."

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Then she adamantly said, "then I'll stay and help you do what ever it is you have to do."

I shook my head, not wanting her to stay in harm's way, and told her, "please, I don't want to see you get hurt, not you. Just get your kid and get out."

"No," she said, "I'll have my mother drive my child into Ottawa to stay with my sister, I'll stay and help you."

"Did you know detective Moss?"

She nodded. "Yeah, he is a good man. Known to be a little eccentric."

"Yeah," I replied, "I saw him killed last night, and it almost got me as well."

"Luther, you are scaring me."

"I'm scared, I'm scared OK. What me and Paul saw last night is so messed up to exist, and I don't want you to see it."

"Luther, I don't need you to protect me, and I don't want you to tell me what to do here. I'm staying, like it or not."

I knew her well enough to know she was one of the people who could be more strong headed than myself when she made her mind up, so I knew it was futile to change her mind on the matter.

I asked, "OK, but Liz, be god damn careful, I couldn't live with myself if I got you hurt."

She asked, "what about after?"

"What do you mean?"

She composed herself a little. "What about us?"

"Liz, us ended over a decade ago. I want to be with you, I just now I'm not the kind of guy you deserve, you deserve better than me or Carl, if we got back together I know I would only lose you again."

"Did it ever end Luther? A few weeks ago, I was just living my life as I had ever since you left, then suddenly you are back, and despite all that is happening, I'm happy your back."

"You are married to another man, who is a complete shit bag, but you are going to leave everything for me because of old feelings."

"Do you still love me Luther?"

"I never stopped, I just forgot till I came back, but isn't love when you love someone more than you love yourself, so I know I can't be the kind of guy I wish I could have been for you, and I have to let you go after this is all done."

"Luther, ask me if I still love you."

I looked at her, I could feel my eyes water, and I asked, "do you still love me Liz?"

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"Yes," she said, "and I want to be with you."

I said, "OK, then we will leave tomorrow together, and we'll leave this town behind."

She smiled and seemed pleased. "OK, I'll leave now and start packing my things, you do the same. I'll pick you up at Paul's tomorrow morning."

"OK. You better go, someone around here sees you here with me, they might tell Carl and he might hit you again."

"I love you."

"I love you Liz, now get out of here."

She left. I couldn't believe what had transpired there, Lizbeth was going away with me and I was happy for that for I wanted nothing more, though I doubted she would stay with me long. But I was going to be thankful for what time providence gave me with her.

So I continued working in my garage.

An hour so later, I still feeling a burning sensation in my mouth and nostrils, just like when Ashley had blown that powder in my face, and suddenly all my muscles constricted violently. I fell to the ground, paralyzed, and then I watched a woman walking towards me; it was my departed mother. She looked exactly like I had seen her the last time I saw her in the asylum.

I muttered, "it can't be."

"Luther," she said, "please come home."

Then she was gone.

Then I was pulled into the nightmarish dream scape, and I was gazing out into a vast field of stars when a booming, inhuman voice thundered all around me.

"Join us, it is death to resist."

I yelled, "no!"

It said, "soon I come to your world and I bring desolation with me. Fight me and die, serve me and live. There is nowhere you can hide, no one you can save, only yourself and your obedience will save you."

"No! I won't!"

It mockingly asked, "and you haven't been serving my will already Luther, thank you for bringing us that man last night, his intrusiveness might have been a problem. I'm sure by now Edna has digested him, and we have you to thank."

I tried to deny what it was saying, I screamed, "No, it is not me!"

"Yes it is, it has always been you, only you Luther."

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Then I was ripped out of the dream scape and I was again on the floor of the garage, still paralyzed, but now there was a man who was kneeling over me. He pulled out a pouch and emptied its contents on my face, a powder that felt cool, then suddenly the burning in my mouth faded and I was able to move again.

The man asked, "are you OK?"

It took me a moment to realize it was Jason Raven, and I said, "yeah."

"Don't worry," Jason stated, "you where put under the influence of a hallucinogenic, I just cured it. You should stop having the visions for awhile."

I asked, "I've been hallucinating?"

"Yes and no," he told me, "some things you have seen are real, some others weren't, but the grave threat which you have learned of is indeed real. Be sure of that."

"What do you know?"

"Enough. I will leave you, but tonight, come to my home and I will give you the explanation you seek."

He gave me directions then he vanished as mysteriously as he appeared. I was alone for the rest of the day, I just leaned against my work bench and thought about what was happening.

I was glad that I was going to be leaving tomorrow, but still, an answer intrigued me, and I guessed Jason just might be the man to give it.

I couldn't have guessed how high the price of such answers where going to be, and I couldn't guess of what was to come, no one of seemingly rational mind could imagine such horrors but now I was going to attempt to flee with the woman I loved, the only woman I had ever loved. But fate can indeed be a cruel mistress, and I did not know that my invitation to this deranged party could not be refused.

Chapter Thirteen: The Dark Tribe

Jason Raven, the native American who with his cryptic words about what evil hung over that town offered answers finally, so I followed his directions which led me to a large log cabin not far outside Sanctuary Hill. I parked my truck, got out, then walked up to the house and nervously knocked on the door. Night was beginning to fall.

The door swung open and there was tall Jason, looking at me with piercing eyes and a grimly serious expression on his face. He said, "so you came?"

I nodded. "I want to know what is going on finally. You said you would know that."

"Please come inside."

He led me into his home, which was furnish with native art and was devoid of modern contraptions, and we came to stand before a roaring fireplace. He sat in a wicker chair then said, "please have a seat."

I sat in another chair and asked, "so, what is going on Jason?"

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Jason explained, "long ago, a great evil was imprisoned deep beneath this very ground we stand on, and it's malignancy still infests these lands. And soon I fear, it may escape its prison made for it so long ago."

I asked, "I'm through fucking around, what is going on?"

Jason leaned back in his chair and seemed submerged in thought then he said, "you have to go back thousands of years, long before Europeans came to these lands, back to when a small tribe of natives inhabited this very land, whose name was long ago forgotten. Once they were decent and honest, but then the cursed one came."

"A new medicine man came to the tribe, and he spoke of a god, a dark god who if they worshiped, it would give them unnatural powers and eternal life. At first the tribe resisted the insidious temptations of the medicine man, but eventually they relented and set about to win the favor of this vile god."

I asked, "what dark god?"

"The medicine man called him the Devourer, and he said to win the favor of this thing, they would have to carve gigantic stone idol to receive the power they craved. So, it took decades, but they built this hideous idol. But still more was required to gain the favor of this evil god."

"What?"

"Blood," Jason grimly said, "the shedding of innocent blood, which they did gleefully, for now their corruption was almost complete in mind. The medicine man was the first to be tainted by the unnatural power granted to him by his vile god, for he lived unnatural long, centuries it is said, and his form grew more and more grotesque with each passing year. Then this tribe began to prey upon the peaceful tribes in surrounding areas, captured them, sacrificed them, and began to consume their flesh. Constructed altars and shrines from human bones, all meant to harness the power of the Devourer."

"Jesus, like Edna. She has made something like it, I saw it right before detective Moss was killed."

Jason looked into the burning fire, orange light bathed his face, and he said, "yes, she is just one terrible manifestation of a greater evil, and worse may yet be to come."

"Go on Jason."

"Well soon the other great tribes of this land and beyond grew to fear the medicine man might succeed at bringing the Devourer into our realm of existence, so they put their feuds aside and agreed to work together to fight this great evil. They amassed a great army, yet one stood before them, the greatest hunter and warrior they had said he would go alone to face the evil. If he did not return, then the newly assembled army would seek vengeance."

"So the warrior journeyed alone to the camp of the dark tribe, and what he beheld terrified him. Now the tribe had been so corrupted by the evil they worshiped, they were twisted in both body and mind; more demons than the men they had once been. And the foul medicine man still led them, and the warrior watched as they sacrificed men and women to their god. The warrior escaped unobserved and returned to tell the tale of what he had seen with his own eyes. He told the shamans of what he saw, and they devised a plan."

"The shamans knew that the enemy they faced had been so consumed by the evil that they could never truly die, so they set about to imprison them in the very earth beneath them. Let's see, what you would call it magic, it was still known to my people in those days and they knew it was the weapon adequate to fight the enemy they faced. Knowledge of the arcane arts is lost forever, but once it was great."

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"So the armies of the allied tribes banded together and fell upon their deformed enemies, and though many died on both sides, the enemy was slaughtered or at least momentarily stopped. The shamans hurried to use their most powerful magic to create a gigantic burial pit hundreds of feet deep. Then every trace of the dark tribe was cast down into the pit, the bodies, the stone idol, the altars and the bones, and the pit was filled with earth. The shamans created a magical seal over the burial pit which would contain the evil. There it was to remain for the rest of time."

"But the evil contained beneath this very ground is still able to influence certain individuals on the surface, and in the most extreme circumstances, it can even create unnatural children, children who are born during certain planetary alignments, such was the case with Edna."

"OK, can she be stopped Jason?"

"Yes, but there is some risk in doing so, and I fear she may not be the greater threat, for I fear the evil the dwells beneath us might soon find away to escape. If they do, then they might be able to finally succeed in bringing the Devourer to our world."

I asked, "Jason, you know why I'm involved, but why are you getting into this?"

Jason replied, "you see thousands of years ago, the bloodline of the great warrior was chosen to watch over these lands and prepare for when the evil might escape. My bloodline, for you see, it is my destiny to fight this threat."

"If that is so, why have you let Edna get away with it for so long?"

"Because, as I said there is some risk involved, the rite which must be enacted to free the dark tribe involves the shedding of blood, after so many lives taken, it must be ended with a final act, the shedding of unnatural blood, like the blood of Edna. If she is killed, there is a possibility that it might release the evil which we face."

"Jason, yesterday I went to face Edna with another guy, and got him killed. Listen, I'm just going to get as far as I fucking can from this place tomorrow."

"No you are not."

"Why not?"

"Because," he said, "in your vision today, did you hear the Devourer speak to you?"

"How did you know that?"

"Because, I know it told you to serve it, see Luther, you are going to be given a choice, and it is one you can't refuse, so you must decide. Will you stand against the Devourer and his dark minions, or join him?"

"Why can't I just leave tomorrow?"

"Because, if the Devourer breaks through to our world, then there is nowhere to hide for he will destroy the world of men and force everyone into submission. You must make a stand here Luther, either for good or for evil, but you must choose finally."

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"Jason, I'm not a brave man, never have been, and I can't face Edna, the Devourer, what ever the hell it is, I can't. And you seem like a nice guy, you should run to."

Jason seemed upset with this. "My family has waited for this for several millenniums, it has fallen to me to stop it, I will not shame myself as well as my family."

"How can you fight this thing, Detective Moss tried and he was killed in a instant."

Jason stood up and said, "it can be defeated with the right weapons, here, let me show you."

Jason went to the wall behind him, on it several Native American artifacts where placed on the wall, as well as a large tomahawk. He pulled the tomahawk off the wall and turned towards me. He raised it and with blinding speed his threw it near me and it buried it's blade into the wall beside me. I fell of my chair and looked up at him.

"What the fuck are you doing," I demanded.

He said, "watch."

Then he made a hand motion then shockingly the tomahawk pulled itself from the wall and flew through the air and now was in his hand again.

I mumbled, "Jesus, what the hell is that?"

"My bloodline has preserved some weapons of ages past, they alone can hurt and end the enemy we face. But I fear this might not be enough, weapons as powerful as these help, but it is the courage of men to wield them and stand before evil."

"That is courage I don't have, I thought I did, but I don't. I'm leaving tomorrow, and I won't be coming back."

"Do any who you love dwell in this town?"

"No," I said as I thought of Lizbeth, "the only person here I care for is coming with me tomorrow."

Jason told me, "like I said, if the Devourer comes to our world, this town is only the beginning, you can't hide from it. Either we stop it right now, or we sign the death warrant of our entire world."

"You don't need me, I'm no warrior. I'm a mechanic, worst evil I ever face is a clogged gasket or crack in a engine block; I can't help you."

Jason looked away. "OK, I won't prevent you from leaving, but I tell you, you can't escape fate."

"Thank you for your hospitality and helping me out today, and for telling me about it all, but I'm leaving. But I wish you luck, and do me a favor, send Edna back to her fucked up maker. Good bye."

Jason frowned. "You know the way out. Good bye Mr. Redstone."

I left a jumped into my truck and drove back to the garage. I didn't know how much worse it was about to get.

Chapter 8: The Vile Deed and The Confrontation

Chapter Fourteen: The Vile Deed

I found Ashley waiting for me in the darkened garage, smoking a cigarette and she had turned on the lights so I could see her as I pulled up in my truck. She looked upset.

I got out of my truck and barked, "get the hell out of here!"

She didn't seem impressed and she asked, "do you ever want to see dear Lizbeth alive again?"

I shuddered. I asked, "what are you talking about?"

Ashley said, "Edna has her, and she will kill her if you resist us anymore Luther."

"If you hurt her, I swear I will, I will,"

"Please," she said, "Luther, she will not be hurt, you will not be hurt, if you only join us."

I pleaded, "Ashley, please, this thing is killing people, it isn't a game, please say your better then this. Please, tell me where Edna is right now, help me save Lizbeth."

She flicked away her cigarette then said, "I will tell you nothing except that you must do exactly what I say and if you don't, she dies, I don't want that."

"The Devourer."

"So, you have talked to Jason Raven, good, for he is the subject of our first order. Succeed and you and dear Lizbeth can leave."

Then an angered male voice screamed out, "I'm going to kill you mother fucker!"

I turned to see Carl, enraged, standing at the door of my garage and looking at me like he wanted to kill me. His face was red and his teeth were clenched.

"Wait, Carl," I said.

Carl ran at me, grabbed me by the collar of my overalls, and pushed me into the wall and yelled, "where is she, tell me or I'll kill you!"

I struggled to say, "Carl, it wasn't me, we have to find her."

Ashley said, "Carl, best you leave, or you'll get hurt."

I told him, "go, get the cops, you don't know what is going on."

Carl whipped around to face Ashley and accused, "You are the witch, should have known you are fucking involved, you both are going to prison to rot."

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Ashley reached into her coat and pulled out a handful of the mysterious powder, and she asked, "would you like to know the truth Carl, I can show you if you want."

Carl spat, "fuck off witch."

Then she blew the powder into his face, he began to try and brush it away, but he fell to the ground and started to scream. His eyes rolled back in his head and he started to babble incoherently. Then he passed out.

Ashley said, "we best be off, I imagine the cops will be around soon. Into the truck, now."

I looked down at Carl and asked, "is he going to be OK."

She replied, "he will be fine, if his mind can take what he sees, now let us go."

She followed me as I got into my truck and we drove away.

I drove to an old forest path, deserted and a good place to hide, miles outside town. We sat in the cab of the truck, in the darkened forest. I would have rather remained in the lights of town, but I knew I was or was going to be a wanted man. And for me to save Lizbeth, I would need my freedom for now.

I turned to Ashley and bluntly asked, "what do you want me to do?"

"Easy," she said, "we are going to kill the only one who can threaten us, Jason Raven. Do this, and you have proven your worth to us."

"No, I won't do that."

Ashley coldly explained, "do you know what Edna does to her victims, do you want precious Lizbeth to end up as Edna's excrement. You can save her, it is your choice in the end, either Jason Raven dies or Lizbeth does."

Neither choice seemed like one I would have ever wanted to make, to choose a life over another, but my loyalty, god help me, was to Lizbeth and I knew I didn't have a choice.

I asked, "what do you want me to do?"

"We will go to Raven's home, come in the guise of friends, and then we will kill him. Then there will be no one stop what is coming."

"OK, let's go."

As my truck pulled into Jason's driveway, I tried not to think too much about what I was about to do, just get it over with so I could save Lizbeth's life. Love can make you do funny things I had learned over the years, I never could have guessed it would force me to commit murder.

I asked, "how are we going to do this."

Ashley laid out her plan. "I will follow you in, and I will let you do it, and will help if necessary. Don't underestimate him, he is a powerful so you must quickly do away from him."

I said, "OK, let's get this over with."

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We got out and she followed me up to the house and I knocked on the door, not knowing honestly what I intended to do.

Ashley whispered, "be quick."

The door opened and there was Jason, eyeing the two of us over then he said, "you are back, and who is the young lady."

I concocted a lie. "She knows about what is going on, she wants to help us stop it."

Jason asked, "changed your mind?"

"Yeah," I said, "you are right, we can't escape this, better to face it now."

Jason stepped back. "Please come inside."

So once again Jason led me to his den as Ashley followed, I couldn't help but look at that damn tomahawk on the wall. I put my hands on it then pulled it off the wall and faced Jason.

I sputtered, "sorry."

I raised the tomahawk to strike when Jason smashed his fist into my chest, it felt like being hit by an iron beam, and I was thrown through the air and hit the wall, bounced off, and fell on the floor.

Ashley, standing about ten feet from Jason, pulled out a dagger and started to approach him.

Jason asked, "you really want to do this young one?"

Ashley responded, "I'll serve my master to the end."

"Fine, I do not wish to do this, but you force my hand."

Jason motioned his hand and the tomahawk was ripped from my hands and propelled itself into his waiting grip. He raised it then threw it with a mighty throw and I watched as it buried itself in Ashley's chest, the force knocking her now limp body of her feet. Then she was on the floor, dead, and despite everything, I was saddened by her death, I had liked her in the beginning.

I shook my head. "Ashley."

The tomahawk pulled itself free and returned to Jason's hand, now he stood above me, and he was raising the tomahawk again, so I closed my eyes and prepared to die.

I pleaded, "there is a woman, that thing has her, save her, please."

He lowered the tomahawk and asked, "what are you talking about?"

"There is a woman, she was abducted by Edna, it was going to kill her if I didn't try to stop you tonight. Kill me, but the woman is innocent in this, she needs your help."

"So, you would have murdered me to save her. I understand, you must love her."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

"Will you save her?"

"Understand, if I face Edna, my destroying her might only be the final sacrificed needed to release the slumbering evil beneath this land."

"Please, you must."

Jason nodded. "OK, but I will require your help."

"Anything."

Jason dropped the tomahawk in front of me and he said, "take it."

"What?"

"I give it to you, it is yours."

I picked it up and got up to my feet, then asked, "wait, aren't you going to need it?"

"No," Jason said, "a good weapon, but I favor another."

"How do I use it?"

"Simple, throw it, it will come back when you want it to. Just make sure you aim well."

He turned to the wall and pulled what looked to be some kind of long smoking pipe off the wall, and he looked at it.

"What is that," I asked.

He replied, "a very powerful weapon. So where is Edna?"

"Shit, I don't know."

Jason said, "I have a good guess where she is."

"Where?"

"In the woods behind the house your family once lived in, do you know of the trail there."

I did. Behind the house was a trail which led through the dark forest, it went on for miles, and to be honest, that trail had always scared me as a kid. Something alarming about being alone in that wooded place.

I said, "we go now then."

"Perhaps we should wait for the light of day."

"Lizbeth might not have that long, we go now."

As we left, I knelt down beside Ashley and brushed her hair away from her face then closed her eyes.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I said, "sorry."

Jason asked, "you had feelings for her?"

"She was just mixed up, it wasn't her fault."

"Let us go."

Chapter Fifteen: The Confrontation

We took my truck, and we arrived at my childhood home to find it thankfully free of police officers.

Sitting in the driver's seat, I looked down at the tomahawk in my lap, and asked, "this thing is easy to use, right."

Jason said, "listen, we will save the girl but do not kill Edna, we must know if she was committed enough sacrifices to break the seal, if we shed her blood and she was needed to be the last one, then we have done her work for her. She might want us to kill her, so we will save the girl and flee."

I shook my head. "Jason, is there any way to stop her?"

Jason frowned. "She can be killed, and I had the chance. Once, I faced her, but a momentary feeling of pity for the pathetic creature stayed my hand and she lived, able to escape because of my momentary reluctance to strike."

I didn't understand. "How can you pity it, after what it has done?"

"Because, she did not choose to be born a herald of the Devourer, and even the evil she commits, she still thinks she is a child, she has the mind of a child."

"Don't pity her, pity all those she has hurt. She is a fucking monster, not human like us."

"Yes, I guess you are right, though I fear she may still prowl these lands for extreme danger comes with taking her unnatural life."

We got out of my truck and commenced our journey down the driveway, across my families lawn, and towards the mouth of the trail which led into the bowels of the darkened woods. I could imagine Edna somewhere in that darkness, waiting for us, I just hoped that Lizbeth was still alive.

I turned to Jason and asked, "got a flashlight?"

"No, something better."

Jason raised the long smoking pipe, then he inhaled from the pipe even though it wasn't lit. The smoke which came out from the end was not like ordinary smoke, no it was green and seemed to be giving off light. Jason exhaled and the luminous smoke rose above us and gave light which revealed the landscape around us.

"Holy shit," I said dumbfounded.

Jason started walking down the path and I followed close behind him, as we went on the clouds of green light followed above us, lighting the way for us and basking everything in the woods with greenish light.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I asked, "do we have a plan of attack?"

Jason replied, "I have a pretty good idea where the beast has hidden the woman, there is a old loggers cabin a mile or so down this path. I have tracked the movements of Edna, and she mostly seems to only leave the majority of her tracks around this area."

"Yeah," I said, "if we can't kill it, then what good are these weapons?"

"Natural or unnatural life as the same instinct, the instinct of survival. Use them to keep her at a distance, but do not kill her."

So we walked down the path, surrounded by the dense forest, I kept looking around nervously expecting Edna to jump out from behind every tree, my grip on the tomahawk was tight and I prepared to use as soon as Edna showed her ugly face.

Then I heard a noise, kind of like the fluttering of birds, to my left and I faced that direction sure that the thing had found us. All I saw was the shadows which the green light created, further there was only the blackness and emptiness of the night and the forest.

Jason asked, "are you sure you are ready for this Redstone?"

"No," I said as I thought of Lizbeth, "but I don't have any other choice."

"You must lover her much if you are prepared to face the thing which terrifies you, your love for her has conquered your fear."

I shrugged and said, "love for me has never been an easy thing to find, and the truth, I don't think I have ever loved another other like her."

Then the nerve shattering cackling of Edna came from the forest ahead, and then it cooed, "Luther, the woman was a rather tasty morsel. I used her finger bones to pick my teeth clean."

My heart sank and it felt far worse then anything I could describe and I yelled, "No you bitch!"

"Where is she," Jason demanded.

It made a jabbering sound then said, "so, the great warrior has come to put and end to me, finally, I tire of this stalemate between us and I am overjoyed we can now end it."

Jason taunted, "have you always been such a fowl creature, or was there a time when you still had a shred of humanity within your tainted essence."

"Shut your mouth," it said.

Jason leaned towards me and whispered, "you talk with it to keep it occupied, while I circle around and hit it from behind. If it comes at you, then you know what to do. Just don't kill her."

I looked at the tomahawk then admitted, "I don't think I can do this."

"Just be ready."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

Then Jason disappeared into the shadows of the forest and I was alone, the halo of luminous smoke revealed some of the surroundings but several meters away it was still pitch black. In the blackness before me was the thing, and I prepared for it to burst out of the night and claim my life like it had claimed so many others before me.

The demon's voice spoke out in the night, "remember bringing me my food, so afraid of your feeble old aunt. Now you are the feeble one and you are about to be my meal."

I asked, "do you like it?"

"What," it bellowed.

"Do you like being a monster, do you like being something that should be feared? Any fucking idea just how god damn repulsive you are?"

It snapped back, "you will regret your words!"

"Yeah," I said, "I hated you before now, but now, now I just feel sorry for you, I guess dying is better than living like you."

It then laughed maniacally, chilling my bones, then roared, "now you die little Luther, come to aunty!"

Then I heard movement in the forest ahead of me, then Edna rushed out from the darkness and charged towards me, her monstrous dagger filled mouth leered at me. Its long tongue was hissing like the tongue of a snake, and its fiery eyes seemed full of rage.

It repeatedly said, "die, die, die, die!"

I raised the tomahawk and threw it as best I could to only see it bury itself into the trunk of a tree.

Edna stopped. "Nice throw."

I held out my hand and expected it to come back to me yet it remained still and I was now weaponless and defenseless. I looked at the tomahawk and still it did nothing. Then in my mind's eye, I pictured it returning to my hand, then it swiftly pulled itself from the tree and flew back into my waiting hand.

Edna said, "nice trick."

"Just give me the woman, and we'll leave."

"I told you Luther, I devoured her. Of course you are about to join her in my stomach."

In anger I pictured the tomahawk flying towards Edna and hitting her in the chest when the weapon pulled itself from my grip and did exactly what I had envisioned. It hit Edna and she fell back as she let out an anguished scream.

I triumphantly yelled, "got you!"

Then Edna sat up then pulled the tomahawk from her chest, a black oil like substance began to pour out from Edna's wound and her tattered dress was covered with the strange substance. She got up to her feet, but she looked unsteady and seemed to be injured badly, or at least I hoped.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I didn't wait, picturing it in my mind, I watched as the tomahawk pulled itself free from Edna's claws and it returned to my hand and then I looked into Edna's eyes.

I said, "this is for my mother, my father, and for me you bitch. You should have killed me when you had the chance."

Then the tomahawk went from my hand and struck Edna directly in the head, and it fell over onto its back again and it was completely motionless, it had stopped breathing.

I thought the day was won and it was over, but, it had only truly begun at exact moment. You see, in my haste and anger to kill Edna, I had done exactly what she wanted.

It started when all the ambient sound of wildlife in the forest suddenly faded away, and then every thing became dead silent, I mean there was absolutely no sound of any kind. I spoke yet there was no sound, it was like the entire world had been silenced.

Then I looked up through the tree cover and saw the stars beyond, and watched as they all slowly became crimson red and began to pulsate.

Then the ground began to shake, all the earthquakes I experienced in this province had been only slightly noticeable; this one was of such violence and magnitude that I was knocked off my feet. The tree's heaved about and several snapped like twigs.

My eyes fell upon Edna and as I watched great cracks in the ground began to form under her body and grew to such a degree that her body fell into the tear in the earth and fell out of sight. A single, large crack grew and it seemed to be heading in the direction of Sanctuary Hill.

Jason Raven emerged from the night, struggling to move while the ground shook and then reached me and looked down. He yelled, "what did you do!?"

"What's going on?"

"Its happened, it has escaped. Edna's death released it, and now hell has come to this town. I told you not to kill her."

"I, I just reacted."

"You have no idea what you have done this night."

Then inhuman screams ascended through the cracks in the ground.

Then the first monstrosity crawled from the rips in the Earth, and what it was scared me deeply. It was a skeleton, yet was about nine feet tall, its skull face had two fiery ambers for eyes. Its skeletal frame was packed with rotting flesh which was riddled with these small worms. It had jagged teeth where revealed when its jaw opened. It was wearing some native tunic and it was holding a spear, which it raised over its head and let out a scream.

I rolled over to the rift beside me and looked over the edge. I saw three of those skeletal things climbing up towards me and I could hear countless more doing something in the blackness of the earth.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

Then the ground stopped shaking and I quickly got back up onto my feet and turned to Jason and asked, "what do we do now?"

Jason explained, "the woman is tied up near a well down the path. Get her and meet me at the town square."

"What are we going to do?"

"We," he grimly said, "we are going to save as many as we can, and stop them from summoning the Devourer."

I nodded. "Good luck Jason."

"We will need more than luck this evening, for much is demanded of us this night."

We ran off in separate directions.

I found Lizbeth tied to a tree in a clearing in the forest, under our feet the ground continued to quake sporadically. I started to untie her. She looked up at me.

She softly said, "I knew you would come for me."

I asked, "are you all right? Are you hurt?"

She replied, "no, where is that thing?"

"Don't worry," I told her, "I killed it."

Then the ground shook violently for a few brief moments, it was powerful enough to knock me off my feet again. I got back up and finished freeing her from the tree.

She asked, "what is going on?"

"Listen, something a lot worse than that thing is coming, you have to get out of here."

"What about you?"

I, already feeling guilt for releasing this impending evil, replied, "I have to try and stop it."

"Alone?"

"No, I have some help."

She turned her back to me. "I am staying with you."

I pleaded, "I am not going to let you get yourself killed."

"I'm going to stay, it is not your choice Luther."

I turned towards town, I could see it sitting atop the hill. There weren't any lights so it seemed the power was out.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I told her, "something very bad is here, and it is my fault."

She said, "we face it together."

"Damn it, I hate it when you are stubborn. You and I will probably get ourselves killed."

We turned to the town and she said, "OK, let's go."

As we ran through the darkened forest, we could hear the ghoulish noises those things made all around us. They gibbered at us and were speaking some lost native tongue to each other. I could not tell you what they were saying, all I can tell you is that it chilled my blood like ice water running through my veins.

We finally emerged from the wood and found ourselves racing down my families old driveway towards the parked vehicle. We both got inside and she turned to me, she asked, "so, what do we do?"

"Go to town. We have to warn everybody."

We arrived near the town square and we found it packed with the towns residents who had all flashlights for illumination since all the lights in town were off. Mayor Thatcher was standing on a bench which served as his makeshift podium as he tried to calm the town residents down. There was no sign of Jason Raven.

I parked the truck, then Lizbeth and I got out and approached the crowd.

Thatcher, trying his best to sound dignified, explained, "we are just having a mild earthquake. There is absolutely nothing to be afraid of."

I stepped up and said, "actually, there is something to be afraid of. Listen, something is coming here tonight and you all have to get in your cars and get the hell as far from this place as you can."

Thatcher scowled at me. "Seems the last living Redstone is causing trouble."

I barked at the Mayor, "listen, do your job and get these people to run for their lives!"

A car raced into the town square and an elderly man in work overalls got out, he was shaking and his facial expression could only be described as sheer terror.

Thatcher shouted to the scared guy, "Benny, I thought you were on your way to the next county to get help."

Benny caught his breath and explained, "the roads out of town, they have cracked apart, giant rips in the ground. And, and, things, coming up through the cracks. They have gathered along the forest line all around town."

The Mayor snorted. "Crazy old fart."

Lizbeth stepped up to the Mayor and said, "he is telling the truth, tell everybody."

He scowled at her and told her, "listen, I would expect better of this than you."

I faced the crowd and stated loudly, "listen, we can't escape, so we are going to have to fight. Ones who can fight, arm yourselves with anything you got and the ones who can't fight will hide in the houses."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

Everyone in the crowd looked doubtfully at me when it started and erased any doubt they might have had, for the sound of countless inhuman voices chanting in some profane song could be heard. The crowd seemed terrified.

Thatcher, growing more afraid with each passing second, muttered, "no, this is some one's sick idea of a joke."

Jason Raven emerged from the crowd and said, "no joke, we are all in the greatest of dangers. But if we don't stop it here, then all is lost."

The singing got louder.

Jason faced the crowd. He told them, "right now they are singing about how they will kill you, eat your flesh, and wear your skins as a trophy. When the singing stops, then they will come for us."

Thatcher yelled, "this is crazy."

"Crazy," I said, "and real. Trust me, soon you are going to pray that you are mad, cause this world has secrets that are fucking insane. Listen to me everybody, if you want to survive this, then we must fight."

Thatcher waved his arms about and urged, "don't listen, everything will be all right."

Then the very ground responded to the mayor's denial as the earth shimmered with such force that it knocked everyone off their feet. Then in the center of town square, cracks appeared in the pavement and then a gigantic stone arose from the ground and continued to rise until it towered over us. It was a gigantic carved rock, carved into the likeness some inhuman evil, it looked like some freakish insect like creature with only one eye, it had many arms and each finger ended in a long talon. The little insects and worms which had infested Edna's flesh covered the statue from head to toe.

I turned to Jason and asked, "is that the Devourer?"

Jason, with a very grave expression, replied, "yes, this is a monument to him which gathers power from the sacrifice of human lives. Once it collects enough energy from the souls given to it, then a gateway will open allowing the Devourer to come to our world."

I got up and faced the crowd and yelled, "those who can fight, get any weapon you can get your hands on, those who can't fight, hide."

Thatcher was mumbling incoherently to himself, he muttered, "no, this can't be real."

Jason told the crowd, "if we survive till morning, until the configuration of stars changes, then they will have to return to the ground from whence they came."

The ghastly singing of inhuman voices began to fade slowly.

Jason ordered, "we are out of time."

Then an insidious voice roared above the sound of those things singing and it started to scream in the arcane dialect which this things spoke.

I asked, "what is it saying Jason?"

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

Jason grimly replied, "that is the voice of the tainted medicine man who brought this curse upon us all. He is saying that we will be killed mercifully, but if we resist, then we will endure a suffering for eternity."

"What do we do," I asked.

"Listen," Jason said, "we will hide everybody in the church; you will wait there and protect them as best you can."

"And you?"

Jason replied, "the medicine man will come to this stone idol to begin the incantations which will bring forth the Devourer. I will wait here alone, and face him."

"Alone?"

"My bloodline has waited over a millennium for this night, I and my ancestors will win this night. I will not shame all those who have come before me and fail, that is not an option. When destiny finally reveals what purpose it has for you, you must accept, for refusal of one's destiny is the life not worth living."

I asked, "and what do you think fate has planned for us tonight?"

"We are all that stands between the world of man and this accursed blight, for if we lose this night, then all is lost for all men and women to walk this earth."

I said, "well, we better get moving."

I and the towns people devised our strategy on how to hold of on the incoming siege.

At that moment, still unaware on just how large the responsibility placed upon my shoulders was, I expected that the fight was already lost. Though I knew that with some fights, even if you know you are going to lose, you have to wage it anyways. A so it became that someone who this town had always seemed to dislike, someone who secretly resented how people saw him there, well, fate a chosen him to defend this town and those who lived within it.

And example of the sick sense of humor irony has.

Chapter 9: Hell Comes To Sanctuary Hill

Chapter Sixteen

Hell Comes To Sanctuary Hill

Within a half of an hour, we had been able to get the children, the elderly, and some of the women seeking safety with the stone walls of the church. They huddled between the pews and some of them began to pray, and all were scared. Women clutched onto the children, old married couples held each other, and upon seeing this I realized that there are things worth fighting for, the fight for love.

The majority of the towns people took shelter within their homes.

I and many of the men of the community were gathered on the cement walkway which led to the church. They were armed with baseball bats, axes, and a few people had rifles and shotguns. I was holding the tomahawk, and I tried to prepare for what was to come.

The singing was almost completely gone, and it did not take much to convince people of the present danger, for the horrible singing had convinced even the most doubtful.

I felt a hand fall down upon my shoulder, and I turned to see Lizbeth looking at me. I realized that through the act of saving the only person I loved, I might have damned all those who lived within this community as well as for all mankind. Though if I had to make the choice again, my decision wouldn't have been any different.

I asked her, "why are you not in the church?"

Then I saw the snub-nosed pistol in her hand.

She said, "you said you needed everyone who can fight, I can fight."

"There you are," a voice interrupted.

Carl suddenly approached us, he was holding rifle, and he seemed scared. There were deep black circles around his eyes, and he seemed on edge.

Carl muttered, "it is true, every single word of it."

Lizbeth gasped. "Carl, are you hurt."

He told her, "I saw it, saw what it is that is coming here tonight. We have to stop it. I'm here to help."

Then the singing stopped and then the night became dead silent. Everyone started to look around, for all felt that the uneasy still of the night hid horrible things. A chilling wind suddenly blew across the land, the stench of decay and death was everywhere.

Someone asked, "are they coming?"

I said, "they will be here soon."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

Across the road from the church was a large two-story house with a red shingled roof. Atop the roof stood one of those things, a towering thing made from bones and rotting flesh, every inch of it crawling with those weird little worms that manifested itself in Edna, with everything in this mess. It was holding a long spear, a human skull was tied to the back, and it waved the dread spear at us all and began to speak, what it had to say I do not know.

Then a shot rang out in the night, Carl had fired his rifle and hit it directly in the chest. It knocked the thing back and it stumbled off the roof out of sight.

I said, "good shot Carl."

A older guy ran towards us, he seemed frightened and muttered, "six of those things are coming up the road towards us."

I said, "well, we better go intercept them. Who is coming with me?"

Carl said, "I'll go."

No one else stepped forward.

"It seems," I said, "that it is just me and you."

"I'm going with you," Lizbeth explained.

"No," Carl said, "you stay here. Let the boys go take care of this one."

I nodded. "You are needed here. We can handle this."

Lizbeth reluctantly replied, "OK, but please be careful, you two."

I and Carl began to jog quickly towards the four approaching creatures, and we stopped at the edge of the hill looking down.

I asked, "how do you want to do this?"

"She still is my wife," he told me.

"What?"

Carl said, "if you are entertaining any thoughts of running off with her, just know that won't be happening. She is my wife! I have been faithful to her for more then ten years, I'm not going to let you blow through town and steal her away from me.""

"Listen, if you want to get into this, do it some sometime when our lives are not hanging in balance. Listen, stay here and cover me."

"Where are you going?"

"Easy, I'm going to walk right up to them."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

Carl took cover behind a parked car and I casually walked towards them until we were only ten feet apart. The skeletal abominations stopped and looked down at me. When they saw the tomahawk in my hand they grew visibly alarmed.

I threw the tomahawk and it hit the thing, which then let out this hellish scream, and then it stayed motionless and I was confident that I had killed it. A quick mental image of the tomahawk returning to me was enough to return my weapon to my hand.

A shot rung out in the night from behind me, then my whole arm became inflamed with pain and I dropped to my knees as I realized blood was flowing freely from a wound in my arm, a gunshot. I turned to look at Carl, he standing there with the smoking gun still in his hands and his eyes ablaze with hate.

I muttered, "why?"

Carl replied, "if you take what is mine, I'll kill you."

Though I hated Carl more than any man I had ever known, I didn't hate him for trying to kill me for Lizbeth because I knew I would be no different.

Those abominations simply watched all this with amusement then they began to close in on me. My arm was hurt bad, but still functional and I got up to face them as I fought back the pain.

I raised the tomahawk when suddenly one of those things pulled back the string of a bow and before I could react an arrow had pierced my left shoulder. I let out a dull yell and tried to pull the arrow out, which only caused me severe pain.

The remaining three encircled me and started to circle around me as they gibbered in some dead tongue. I couldn't believe these things had ever been real men with hearts and minds, now locked into eternal undead bondage to the Devourer. Yet these things I knew were just the symptom of a greater disease, from my experience with Edna illuminating me to the vile, unholy plague which had supposedly festered here for so long.

Then the one nearest to me raised its hand and barked something and suddenly the remaining two skeletal horrors started walking back down the hill. The one which had just spoke, it looked me right in the eyes.

Then, with an inhuman voice, it said, "brave for a mortal."

I looked right into the hollow eye sockets which were writhing with those little worms, and I asked, "what do you want?"

Then Carl started walking away from us, I guess he would leave me to be finished by those things.

The thing said, "Why don't you use the weapon the medicine man gave you and put that man out of his misery. Come on, he is the only thing standing in your way to get what you want, come on. Our god offers you everything, even the woman, he will let you live this night and escape."

I'll be honest, I considered the creature's offer for a second or two. Then I used my good arm to bury the tomahawk in that thing's face. I retrieved my weapon from the dead foe.

Then I took a moment to catch my breath then with a great pained effort I pulled the arrow free from my arm and I yet out a yell into the night which echoed throughout the night.

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

I frowned, I was injured and I feared I might not be able to do what I had to do that night, but thankfully a wave of endorphins and adrenalin came over me and I turned back to the summit of the hill and started walking back. I looked towards the foot of the great hill on which this town had been built and I saw our doom. Dozens, hundreds of those things emerged from the darkness and step into the light the town cast on the surrounding area. Their pace was purposely slow, and in my heart I knew, this had been my whole fault. For it was I who slew Edna and here immortal blood broke the magical seal which kept this unholy sickness confined, and I released this festering evil to save the life of the only woman I had ever loved. I would have to see this till the end.

I ran into the town square and was shocked to find Jason sitting peacefully by the foot of the statue which had been pushed up from the bowels of the earth. That arcane pipe he used was now laid out on the ground before him.

I asked, "Jason, we have an emergency here, maybe you should do something."

Jason replied, "so, you have come to face evil with me."

I told him urgently, "hundreds of those things are coming. What are we going to do."

Jason picked up his pipe and he said, "don't worry, I'll call for some reinforcements."

He lit the pipe and he took a deep inhale and he exhaled the luminous smoke. A great plume of this mist raised above us when the smoke broke into five different balls of glowing vapor.

Jason looked up at the smoke and said, "please hear me ancestors, I beg of you to rise forth and help me save these people. We need warriors."

Then the smoke began to change, the five plumes of smoke began to shake, grow and shrink; I watched as the smoke formed into human forms. Above Jason the smoke transformed into five native warriors, five native hunters who seemed to be made of luminous smoke.

I stuttered, "this just keeps getting better."

Jason explained, "I have used the power of this pipe to summon the spirits and make bodies for them from the smoke."

The spirit who was wearing a large head-piece covered with feathers. In a deep voice, it, he ask, "why have you awakened us, leave the dead in peace."

Jason got onto his knees. "sorry for the intrusion, but we have need of great warriors, Chief Sneaking Bear, for the very world itself might hang in the balance. We require your strength and bravery. "

Then throngs of those things began to approach the town square. While some marched towards us, most of them started to raid the homes people were hiding in, the horrible sound those poor people made before being killed at the hands of those things. They reached the edge of the town square.

I raised the tomahawk and said, "two of us, hundreds of them."

Jason said to the spirit chief, "without you, there is no hope."

The Horror of Sanctuary Hill

Then all the warrior spirits landed on the ground and stood in a circle around me and Jason. They all seemed to have a lethargic look to them, and I could not see what help they would be.

"Please," Jason told the chief, "for Chief Sneaking Bear is still remembered for his bravery."

The masses of those skeletal things which had ascended up through the cracks in the ground, now they surrounding the town square and jabbering things in there dead tongue.

The spirit, Chief Sneaking Bear, looked at the horror which surrounded us then confidently said, "so many of them, so few of us, doesn't seem fair, but I will give them a fighting chance."

Chief Sneaking Bear turned to face the four other spirits and asked, "So what do you have to say brothers, should we intervene in this situation?"

They all nodded at the same time and the five spirits, beings made of luminous smoke, let out a scream filled with rage. The windows of nearby homes shattered from the sound. The skeletal minions began to back away from us. Then the five spirits attacked the enemy, yet they didn't walk or run, they moved like large billowing clouds of smoke which looked like a formless blob, then when they where on top of one of those things they would resume the shape of a man just long enough to strike with weapons which had appeared in their hands, weapons which where ablaze with fire. The throngs of the Devourer servants began to fight back, yet when they struck a blow, their weapons passed through the spirit like smoke. Yet when one of the spirits hit, they hit hard. It only a minute the spirits had managed to kill dozens of those things.

I smiled and yelled, "yeah, go get them boys."

Jason frowned. "I have some bad news."

Then the spirit warriors began to fade slowly away until there was nothing.

I muttered, "what's happened Jason?"

Jason explained, "the magic which has resurrected these spirits doesn't last long, they have returned to the realm of spirits."

I looked around us. Several dozen of those things where left, yet they seemed reluctant to approach us, maybe they feared Jason's magic. But I knew fear wouldn't hold them back long, and even though a great number of those had been slain, there was enough left put us all out of commission.

I leaned over to Jason and asked, "what do we do now?"

Jason, his facial expression that of stone, he replied, "the dark tribe's medicine man, he alone can open a gateway to summon the Devourer to this world, if we can kill him, then they loose."

"Sounds to easy."

Jason said, "the medicine man has been receiving power from the Devourer for ages, so he will be far more terrible then anything we have faced yet."

Then all the skeletal minions stopped moving and they all became perfectly still, then started to repeatedly chant a word which sounded something like "Tonga" or close.

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Then a deep, deafeningly loud roar sounded out in the night. I put my hands to my ears, it felt like my ear drum where about to burst.

Then there was some movement at the back of the crowd of those things, they all seemed to gather around something large, and it was getting closer.

I nervously asked, "is this it? Is this the medicine man?"

Jason nodded. "Yes."

Then the crowd of rotting skeletons parted and revealed something massive, it just looked like a pile of flesh, but sticking out from it where many arms and it was covered with those worms, this things body was covered with a crawling carpet of those damn worms. Then its head emerged, it had no eyes, no nose, no face, its head had numerous mouths though; each filled with jagged teeth.

Jason faced the quivering mountain of flesh and limbs, and he yelled, "now you will pay for those you have corrupted, you will never bring about the coming of your sick god."

Then its numerous mouths began to talk like symphony of voices all saying the same thing. It said, "Raven, you have failed, we are free, and I'm about to bring destruction to your world."

Then the evil medicine man started moving towards the statue of the Devourer in the center of the town square, it crawled forward using it many arms.

I asked, "why is it speaking English?"

Jason shook his head. "I don't know."

The dark tribe's medicine man replied, "I have waited over two thousand years in the dirt beneath this place, and I have listened and watched the people and learned their tongue."

I remembered the tomahawk in my hand and I threw it at the dark tribe's medicine man, but before it could strike it elegantly grabbed the tomahawk and held it up in the air.

"Nice weapon," it said then it snapped the tomahawk in two with only one arm.

I said, "shit, I'm out of ideas Jason. Use the fucking pipe now."

Jason, eyes locked on the approaching mass of flesh covered with arms and mouths, whispered, "I have used all the pipes power, it will be ready for another lunar cycle."

"What do we do?"

Jason firmly said, "we stand or ground."

The skeletal horde seemed to only be interested in watching, they where content to let their twisted medicine man approach town square alone.

"How do we kill it," I asked.

Jason seemed worried. "We will prevail."

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Then a truck appeared out of the night, raced towards us, went right through time square and was going at least fifty. I caught a glimpse of the driver, it was Lizbeth. And she drove my truck right into the mountain of flesh that was the medicine, the truck hit it with a sickening dull thud.

I yelled, "Liz! Liz!"

All the skeletal minions began to chant again as I rushed towards the truck. I opened the drivers door and found Lizbeth slumped over in the driver's seat. She was conscious, and seemed unharmed. I undid her seat belt and helped her out of the truck and up onto her feet.

I asked, "what the hell where you doing?"

She replied, "I knew you where in danger, I had to know that you where all right."

I walked over to Jason with Lizbeth then I heard the sound of twisting metal behind me and I turned in time to see that thing actually push the truck off itself and flip the truck onto its back. The hulking fleshy thing began to approach us again.

It spoke.

"You can not stop me, this is inevitable. You all will die tonight. And you are just the first of many. Seize them!"

Then the rotting skeletons rushed the three of us quickly, and soon we where subdued. They held us down to the cement floor as we watched that ungodly heap of flesh reached the stone alter in the middle of town square.

Jason tried to get up to his feet but he was forced back down, one of those skeletal things held and knife into his back. Jason stopped struggling.

The flesh heap said, "all for not, all for not. You and your bloodline have waited an eternity for this night, and it ends like this. I won't kill you, no, I will let you watch as I bring the Devourer to this pathetic world."

Jason looked defeated. He said, "we have lost."

I looked at the hideous statue and the monstrosity chanting before it. I couldn't comprehend the words yet they chilled me all the same, then I looked up into the sky.

"Oh my god," I said to myself.

The moon had become blood red as well as the stars, and suddenly the ground shook and a voice spoke out, a voice that came from everywhere and which made the ground shutter when it spoke. The voice echoed through the forests and the valleys around town.

"I will be amongst you soon."

Then I looked at the statue again. I turned to Jason and asked, "what if we destroy the statue."

Jason seemed surprised. "Yes, the statue serves as a anchor so the Devourer can influence this world, but if we destroy statue, that might severe the source of these things power."

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Some problems. One the ceremony had commenced and I imagined that I did not have the luxury of time so I would have to discover the means to demolish this stone statue quickly. I had the tools I needed in my garage.

I asked Jason, "can you create a commotion so I can get away, by me some time to run to my garage."

Jason nodded. He jumped up onto his feet, ripped himself free of the skeletal things grip, and ran off, leaving me and Lizbeth by ourselves.

The heaping bulk of flesh yelled, "After him, he alone can stop us. These two pose no threat."

All of the skeletal tribesman chased after Jason, leaving me free to run to my garage only a block away. Lizbeth got up with me and we ran.

The obese mass of flesh continued to chant and seemed to be ignorant to our escape, it was focused on the arcane ceremony and left me and Lizbeth to ourselves.

After running a block, I and Lizbeth reached my garage and we quickly ran inside. I went over to a pile of boxes and started to dig frantically for what I was looking for.

Lizbeth asked, "what are you doing?"

I explained to her, "dynamite, I looking for dynamite."

"Dynamite?"

"My uncle used to use it to blow up beaver damns, he always had some. I have to find it."

Lizbeth knelt beside me and she helped me search the boxes until I moved some papers and under them found a lot of dynamite tied together, there must have been ten sticks.

"OK," I said, "let's blast this asshole into next Thursday. Come on."

She said, "I love you Luther."

"There will be plenty of time for sloppy sentimentality after this is done. Let's go."

Then we ran towards the town square. The flesh beast was still there performing its sick ceremony, and many mouths chanted. Then it stopped and it faced us.

The medicine man, or what used to be a man once, said, "so you think you can stop us do you?"

I readied the dynamite and lit one of the fuses and I got prepared to throw it at the statue.

I yelled, "fuck you all!"

Then the monstrous medicine man raised one of his many hands, the palm was flat. Then the worms started to crawl towards its open hand. A mass of worms formed into a sphere which hovered only inches above its hand.

I stood there, lit dynamite in hand, and watched in awe. Yet I was about to witness something more horrid than any thing I had seen yet, and wasn't prepared for what was to happen.

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The dark medicine man said, "I offer you immortality, I offer to bring you to a place where death has no power over you. Join us won't you Lizbeth?"

I yelled, "no!"

Then the orb of writhing worms flew out of its palm and hit her in the chest. I watched in horror as Lizbeth fell to the ground as those worms began to crawl all over her.

I put out the fuse on the dynamite out and knelt down beside Lizbeth and tried to help her to get those damn worms off. I watched as Lizbeth became very pale and her pupils shrank. The worms where everywhere.

Lizbeth yelled, "get them off me Luther!"

"I'm trying, I'm trying!"

The disgusting thing said, "she is infested, soon she will be one of us."

Full of rage, I faced it and screamed, "you better get those things of her!"

The flesh beast replied, "once you are infested, then you are locked in eternal bondage to the service of the Devourer."

Lizbeth was scared and she tried to beat the worms off, but they held fast and where crawling all over her. I did my best to aid her, yet I could do nothing.

"No! No! No!" I yelled.

Then she stopped struggling and she lay motionless, she appeared to be dead, I checked for a pulse but couldn't find one. Then I realized she was dead, and the feeling of loss was enough to crush my soul. The experiences of my life and caused me to cry on several occasions, but I didn't know just how much grief hurt until that moment.

I turned to the thing, my eyes full of rage, yet I calmly asked, "can you bring here back?"

"No," it replied, "only the Devourer has the power to remove the curse. So you are faced with a choice, either stop me and destroy this statue of our god, but do so knowing that only the power of our god can return the one you love to you."

Then Jason emerged out of the night, looking a little roughed up. He saw the dynamite in my hand as well as Lizbeth's body on the ground of the town square.

Jason pleaded, "destroy the statue!"

The fleshy hulk said, "yes, destroy the one thing which will give you back your pathetic love."

I looked at Jason and muttered, "Jason, can you bring her back?"

"No, I don't have that power."

I just wanted her back, and at that exact moment, I didn't care what unholy deal I would have to make with this god and surely damn all to destruction, sometimes the human heart is a little stronger then you logical

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facilities.

I looked at the dark tribes medicine man and asked, "can your god bring her back."

The thing replied, "yes, we will give you and the girl safe passage out of this place, that is if you let us complete the ceremony."

Jason demanded, "Luther, give me the dynamite. We must end this."

Then the night got worse, if you can imagine that.

Lizbeth began to shake violently, at first I was happy because I thought she was alive, then I realized she was one of them. Her eyes were obsidian orbs which glistened in the moon light, and her skin was white, the color of chalk. And she moved in a way that made me realize that I wasn't looking at a living breathing person, I was looking at a dead person brought back in some undead form, reanimated by some insidious power.

She looked at me, then pleaded, "Luther, destroy the statue. Don't let this thing win just to save me."

I looked at her as I re-lit the fuse on dynamite and as the fuse slowly burned its way towards the bundled sticks of dynamite.

I told her that last time, "I love you Liz, and if there is a world after this passes away, then we see each other again there."

The fuse was nearly finished when I threw the stick of dynamite and the feet of the statue. Then I embraced Lizbeth, doing so caused the worms to crawl onto me. But I wouldn't let her go. I knew I might be infested as she was with the worms, but I couldn't let go. I didn't care if I was going to die for losing her felt like dying already.

Then the dynamite blew with a great, thunderous sound and I, Lizbeth, and Jason were thrown right off our feet and knocked many meters back.

I passed out.

I woke up to find Jason trying to revive me, and behind him was the statue, now left in rubble. I rolled over on my side and I could see the body of Lizbeth lying near me, no worms on her, but I knew she was dead. If there is such a thing as the human heart, well mine shattered into a million pieces and I understood she was really gone. One of the redeeming aspects of a sometimes troublesome life is love, yet that capacity isn't always a good thing, especially when something you truly love is suddenly gone and all you have left is a sense of loss, like a piece of your soul is suddenly gone and all you can feel is the emptiness.

It was early morning now, the sun was just beginning to rise above the Eastern horizon. I was never so glad to see daylight in my entire life.

I asked Jason, "is it over?"

Jason nodded. "As soon as the statue was destroyed, every one of those things fell down in their tracks and died. Those worms, they all seem to be dissolving, like as if their life force was dependent on the statue. The day is won."

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I looked at Lizbeth's body and blurted out, "forgive me if I'm not more happy, I just lost someone really important to me."

I got up and sat beside her body then embraced her and the tears began to flow from my eyes and I shook my head. Perhaps the side of good and claimed victory that day, but the curse of Sanctuary Hill had now lay claim finally to everyone and had ever really loved. I lost, I lost her and I knew I had lost.

Jason said, "listen, you lost her, but you have freed this town of the curse which has been responsible for so much agony. You did some good here."

"Yeah, and it cost me everything. I have nothing, no reason for being alive. Where ever she is now, I want to be there with her. There is nothing left in this god damn world for me, now that she is gone."

He told me, "after we pass from this world and go into the world of spirits, you shall see her again. Take some comfort in that, that no goodbye is ever really forever."

I limply replied, "spare me your metaphysical crap, seems like a cold comfort right now."

Then a voice screamed out, "Lizbeth!"

Carl came running into the town square and fell to his knee's and wrapped his arms around Lizbeth. He started to cry and continually muttered, "no, Lizbeth, no, no."

I got up onto my feet and walked over to Carl and stood above him and looked down. My hands became clenched into fists and I said, "Carl."

He looked at me, his eyes still streaming with tears. He looked like he expected to be hit or something, and honestly, I wanted to. Not so much because he tried to kill me, but because I felted endless anger for losing Lizbeth.

He weakly asked, "what do you want."

I flatly said, "you got a kid with her, take god damn good care of that kid. That is what she would want."

Then I walked away from him and left him there to grieve for the woman whom I grieved for to, I guess in the end, we both lost her.

Jason said, "I'll give you some advice. Get the hell out of town before the authorities get here. Slip out now, go back to the city. Man's world has a habit of confining and ostracizing those who encounter things from beyond the limits of their understanding. "

"What about you Jason?"

"Now that the curse has been lifted, there is no reason for me to be here. I think I will go see the world, like I always wanted."

I asked, "Jason, will we ever meet again."

He nodded. "I'm sure of it."

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We shook hands and we both walked away in separate directions. As I left the town square where now the body of someone I loved now lay, I felt I was leaving a part of myself with her, the part of me which could feel love or happiness.

I was able to find a dirt road which hadn't been compromised by the earthquakes and I drove the little car I "borrowed" as far away as I could. I was glad to see that hill the town was built on gradually shrink in my rear view mirror until it was gone completely.

The good fight was won, but what had I won I wondered. That damn curse had stolen the people I cared for most, and in the end all I could do was avenge myself by ending the curse. But the people I had loved were still gone. I had lost everything.

So I left Sanctuary Hill, though I was to never forget what I had seen. The horrors and wonders I saw had been burned into my mind forever.

So that is the true story of what happened at Sanctuary Hill, sounds crazy for sure, but sometimes this reality in which we exist can be just as horrible as any nightmare. You can wake from a nightmare, but when life becomes like a nightmare you don't have the luxury of waking up. Honestly, it is hard to live in the normal everyday world when you know just how sick and twisted the secrets reality has are.

Most nightmares end at dawn, some never end.

Epilogue

It has now been several years since that night where I witnessed horrors beyond imagining, I have to say that ever since that night fear has been a constant companion of mine. I fear what any shadow might hide, fear the horrors which the night might conceal, I fear the dark and lethal things that dwell within the shadow of man's ignorance.

As for Sanctuary Hill itself, most perished that night, though all those who took shelter in the church lived. The town has now been condemned though from what I hear, and it is deserted except for the ghosts who used to live there. So now Sanctuary Hill is going to be remembered as one of those freak accidents, and I'm sure no one involved wants to dig too deep into the matter.

The authorities detained all the survivors, and held them for several weeks. I don't know what they might have said, but I can guess their eye witness accounts will be ignored and this whole ordeal will just be explained away with logic. I'm sure the authorities will find a reasonable answer to what happened, I'm sure the truth will never be known. The truth is just far too insane to consider, so I guess the only ones who will know the truth are the ones who were there.

As for me, my life has been in slow decline ever since that night. I can't find employment, so I have to subsist on welfare, and what I do can't be called living. I never go out, my entire existence is nothing but being in this rat hole apartment and waiting for something horrible to come shambling out of the night and get me. I still grieve for Lizbeth, I'll never stop because I miss her.

So I go on, awaiting whatever fate has planned for me.

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