

# CHAPTER 1

Harrelton, Ohio  
September 22,  
**2011**

Something was wrong. Sixty-four-year-old Theresa Washington could sense it the way her grandpa could feel the sudden ache of arthritis in his bones when the weather was about to change. She tried to deny it, of course, would likely continue to deny it all the way up until she found out what the bad was.

Lightning shattered the darkness, shards of a broken mirror raining out of the sky. She tensed for the bowling-alley rumble of thunder that would follow as the street ahead appeared and disappeared in rhythm with the wipers' sweep across the windshield.

"Fool!" she muttered aloud. "Out in a storm like this. You deserve to run off the road into a ditch." Course you seldom got what it was you deserved in this life, and most times that was a good thing.

She turned down Elmcrest Circle, where the streetlights glowed through the wall of rain, but all the houses was dark. The storm must have knocked out the 'lectricity. She could see lights in the windows of most houses, though, flickerin' candles or the bright, almost-yellow glow of a lantern.

Miss Minnie got decorative candlesticks in every room in that whole house. Even the bathroom. They's fine!

That was the thing, though, wasn't it? Theresa didn't *really* believe Minnie and Gerald Cohen was fine at all. Oh, today was Thursday, and she hadn't missed goin' to see the elderly Jewish couple every Thursday evenin' in years. But that's not why she was out in this monsoon. She was here 'cause of the ache of evil in her bones.

The house at 1107 wasn't quite as dignified as the other old homes on the tree-lined street, courtesy of the bronze lions that sat like they was standin' guard on either side of the driveway. The whole yard would have been littered with concrete ducks, garden gnomes and bird baths, too, if Mr. Gerald hadn't drawn a line in the sand at the lions. Oh, how Miss Minnie did love to shop at garage sales and flea markets back when she could still get around by herself! And she hadn't never been able to pass up a bargain. Mr. Gerald said she'd a'brought home a dead horse if she coulda got it for half price.

Theresa's headlights washed the lions in a harsh light when she turned off the street. The house was totally dark. Not a single light in any of the rooms that faced the street. Aw, but that didn't mean nothin'. They had them heavy drapes pulled was all. There was plush drapes in every room. Miss Minnie called the ones in the parlor Scarlet O'Hara drapes 'cause they was made out of green velvet and had tassels on the tiebacks.

Theresa opened the car door and held the mini umbrella she kept stuck up under the front seat out into the cold rain, openin' it to cover her as she got out. Didn't do hardly no good at all, though, soon's she stepped away from the car. Wasn't nothin' mini gonna cover up her maxi. But it did keep her head dry as she went splashin' up the sidewalk through ankle-deep puddles.

The wet rubber soles on her new shoes squeaked on the Moroccan tiles on the porch. The shoes wasn't broke in yet, hurt her feet, but they went with the white Good Samaritan Hospital's Ladies Auxiliary uniform she wore, and the old ones was worn out. She could have stopped by her house for some shoes that didn't pain her—and to get a raincoat!—but that's when the knowing of it come on her, and she drove straight to the Cohens' house.

There was no sound from inside when she knocked on the door. It was a big house, though. If neither one of them had they hearing aids in, they'd miss her knockin' altogether. But they'd be listenin' for it. They was expectin' her. And what about Biscuit? The old couple had took in a mongrel pup a couple of years ago, and now the dog never left Mr. Gerald's side. He always set up a ruckus, barkin' and carrin' on when Theresa come to visit, so excited he'd near wet himself.

Where was the dog?

She started to go around to the side door but didn't want to step back out into the cold downpour. She tried the knob instead. The door wasn't locked. Theresa grunted in annoyance as she pushed it open. It was time for the lecture again, 'bout how they'd oughta lock—

The darkness wasn't from the drapes. Wasn't a single candle lit anywhere. The entry hall was a black cavern, and the house beyond was still and quiet. Theresa's heart kicked into a gallop. She closed her umbrella and stepped inside, and even though she knew it wouldn't do no good, she still reached out to the switch beside the door. There was a crystal chandelier high above her head, all decorated with cobwebs, that had become a word-picture for Theresa of the decay of the huge house the old couple didn't have the means or the energy to care for anymore.

She flipped the switch up and down a time or two, but no light danced in the dusty crystals. Though some part of her didn't want to disturb the silence all around her, Theresa called out, "Miss Minnie. Mr. Gerald. Where you at?"

Wasn't no response, so she stood where she was and listened hard as she could.

Almost drowned out by the pounding of her heart was a small sound, a dog barkin', only muffled, like Biscuit was down in a well. But no demon wails. She sniffed the air. It was musty as always, smelled like *old*—crumblin' plaster, ancient dust, decayin' wallpaper. But no demon stink.

Theresa had *the knowing*. She couldn't see demons like Bishop and Andi and Becca could, but she could hear and smell 'em. And sometimes, not always, she could sense they was around even when there wasn't no reason a'tall to b'lieve that was the case. And right now, the alarm bell on *that* sense was going *ding, ding, ding!*

Leaving the front door open behind her, she took a couple of steps down the hallway, where rooms with wide French doors or big oak ones opened on the left and right. She couldn't wander 'round in the dark, though, so she set her purse and umbrella on the floor and took out her iPhone, wishin' she'd let Andi put that flashlight app on it the child had wanted to download. Still, when you tapped the digital clock, the screen turned to solid light, and that chased some of the shadows into the corners. She moved toward the sound of Biscuit barkin' in the back of the house.

Apprehension grew in her chest with every step. The dark, the quiet, and now a smell she couldn't identify replaced the old-house stink. It smelled...coppery, like wet pennies. She come to the door of the parlor, strange and foreboding in the shadowy, luminous glow from the cell phone screen. It looked like somethin' out of a black-and-white Frankenstein movie. She put her hand on the doorknob, tellin' herself she'd find Mr. Gerald and Miss Minnie cuddled together on the couch in there, candlelight makin' the room all cozy, as Mr. Gerald read some classic work of literature to Miss Minnie, who couldn't see well enough to read no more.

That's not what she found. Wasn't no flickerin' candles. Wasn't no light of any kind, only a vast expanse of black.

It was a big room with a sixteen-foot ceiling, and the dark ate up the pale glow from her phone. The copper smell was strong here. She could almost tell...it was familiar, she'd smelled it before but couldn't place where. She stood in the open doorway for a moment and swept the phone glow in arcs out into the room but it couldn't penetrate the thick, tar-blackness enough to—was that somethin' there, somethin' on the sofa on the far side of the room? Someone asleep, maybe?

She moved through the doorway to investigate and started across the room, but had taken only a few steps when her right foot hit somethin' slick, and she slipped. She tried to regain her balance, but her left foot connected with somethin' on the floor and she tripped over it, stumbled and went down hard on one knee. She reached out to keep herself from face-plantin' on the hardwood floor and ended up on her side, the breath temporarily knocked out of her. Her cell phone flew out of her hand and clattered on the hardwood floor face-side—*light*-side—down, slidin' across the floor and comin' to rest about fifteen feet away.

Sucking in a gasp of air, then another, Theresa rolled over and got up on her hands and knees, her arthritis screamin' in protest. When she started to crawl toward her phone, her hand brushed somethin'—the thing she'd tripped over—and she reached out in the dark, feelin' around but couldn't lay hands on it. What she did find was that the floor was wet. Sticky wet. That's why she'd slipped. And it smelled like...

Copper. *Pennies*. Suddenly, she knew what smelled like pennies.

She scrambled the last few feet to her phone and snatched it off the floor. The glass was cracked, but the light still shone, blindin' her for a moment. In its glow, she seen what was on her hands—seen the *blood* on her hands—for only an instant, then the light on her cell phone blinked and went out and the darkness rushed in all around her.

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Caverna County, Kentucky  
June 5,  
**1985**

Bishop Washington's head snapped up. Unease awoke in his belly, and he looked warily around, glanced over one shoulder and then the other. Something was out there in them trees. Nearby. He could sense it. He'd be able to see it, too, if it come to that. Bishop had *the knowing*.

A dark cloud of foreboding settled around him, and his mouth suddenly felt like it was full of cotton balls. The evil he was sensing—it was *bad*—and the kids was in them woods with it, all three of them!

He had dropped Jack Carpenter, Daniel Burke, and Becca Hawkins off on a logging road right after first light, watched the dew that was still on the leaves fall on them like rain when they set out through the trees. Then he'd driven several miles farther north. He'd promised to return to the logging road right after lunch to pick 'em up.

Freezing where he crouched on one knee, Bishop listened with a sense that didn't have nothing to do with hearing. Whatever was out there, it wasn't where them kids was. Couldn't be. It was around here real close by, or he couldn't have sensed it.

The skin on his arms pebbled with gooseflesh.

Bishop stood, a giant of a man, six feet seven inches and working up to three hundred pounds, with shoulders so broad that Theresa'd had to work a seamstress's magic to get

his shirts to fit over 'em and around his barrel chest. His skin was as black as the feather of a raven and his face broad, with strong features softened by wide-set, chocolate-drop eyes that even at forty were already sunk in a web of deep smile wrinkles.

Using his thumb to wipe the dirt off the blade of his pocket knife, he flipped it closed, stuffed it in the pocket of his overalls and put the ginseng plant he'd just hollowed gently out of the ground into the cloth knapsack Theresa'd made out of one of his threadbare T-shirts. Ginseng was a wily rascal, hid from you in the shadows. He'd tracked down this patch of it, watching where water trickled out of the rocks, searching out wet ground in the shade of trees or finding it snuggled up beside rock outcrops on the hillside. There was more here to harvest—though you had to be careful, always had to leave some so it could grow back. But he didn't care about the ginseng now as he set out through the trees back to the road, didn't care about nothin' but findin' them kids and gettin' 'em out of these woods!

Jack and Daniel. Just saplings, budding branches of the men they'd grow up to be—tall and strong and good. Like his Isaac.

The pain of that thought planted daggers in his chest that hurt so bad it was hard to draw in a breath. He couldn't imagine how his sweet Theresa was standing up under it, the not knowing. The boy had been gone more than five months—one hundred fifteen days to be exact—and he didn't need no calendar to tell him that. On every one of them mornings, waking dropped another boulder of time on his chest, and he sometimes felt like he was bein' crushed under the weight of it. *Where was he?*

Just twenty years old, Isaac had vanished like smoke from a dying campfire on Valentine's Day and nobody—*nobody*—had seen or heard from him since. Bishop was beginnin' to learn how to wall off the pain of the boy's absence, but Theresa couldn't. She radiated hurt like the side of a stove radiated heat into a room.

When Bishop got to his rusted red pickup, he reached in through the open driver's side window and tossed the cloth bag into the passenger seat beside the baseball cap Becca'd forgot. It was a spare all-stars hat she wore sometimes to keep the hair that hung almost to her waist out of her eyes. She was a beautiful child, fragile, hair the color of corn silk and big sea-green eyes. She'd be a heartthrob one day—shoot, she already had Jack and Daniel following her around like puppy dogs.

It was Becca that Bishop was worried about. Like Bishop, Becca *knew*. If she was to happen across whatever was out there in them woods, she'd be able to *see* it. *And it would know she'd seen*. The sense of evil had been growing on him as he'd rushed through the woods, and now he feared he'd been wrong about it at first. What if it wasn't nearby, wasn't *close*? What if it was so powerful that he could feel it even when it was a long way off? He shivered. He needed to get to that logging road quick and then lay on the horn, keep honkin' til them kids come runnin'.

He fished the keys out of the pocket opposite the one where he'd stuffed his knife. The truck's old suspension groaned when he got in behind the wheel. He put the key in the ignition and turned it. Nothing happened. He tried again. Not even the grind of the starter—just silence. His old truck had finally given up the ghost or the battery was dead. Either way, he wouldn't be showin' up at that logging road to pick up the kids after lunch.

Right now, they was out there alone with whatever evil creature haunted these woods. And wasn't a thing Bishop could do to help 'em.