

The Candlestick Boy  
By Harloe Rifner

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This story is in dedication to my wonderful friends Justin Rifner, Jamie Roelle, Anthony Roelle, Kee Roelle, Alex Hill, Jordan Algeni, Jessica Algeni, Maddie Wilson, Justin St. Esprit. Without you, I would have never found inspiration to bring this to life.

Thank you for all of your constant support.

## Chapter One

It seems like nothing ever changes in this town, same old hustle and bustle of the townsfolk and their daily routine. Welcome to the Town of Brimsmouth, a small rural town outside the state of Pennsylvania, it's a town that is easily forgotten since it's not very big and you hardly ever find it on a map. Completely surrounded by dense forests and only one road that leads out of town that runs from north to south. If you drive a few miles, you'll eventually hit the highway. The roads in town are uneven and bumpy going from asphalt to dirt in some areas. We have a small-town square with a city hall, a market, and a gas station. You can find the Brimsmouth Police Station two miles outside of town. Go down the street away from the square you can find a lot of mom and pop shops and further down from there, you start getting into the residential part of town. The houses are old and falling apart, the people that live there aren't any better. They're old and crotchety, they don't like change of any kind. In all honesty, my life isn't that much better either.

My name is Connor Hammond, I'm 23 and I'm just your average police officer. I started this job about 3 months ago and it never seems to get any easier, a lot of petty crimes and calls for noise complaints. They never seem to want to give more interesting assignments, but I'm ok with that. I never really wanted to be a cop anyway, it's what my father wanted. I began my Friday as any other day, got dressed, ate breakfast with my parents who I still happen to live with, then left for work. My drive to work is usually an uneventful one except for today. I get a call from the chief.

"Good morning sir," I answered as I picked up my cell phone.

"Morning Hammond, listen I need you to hurry up to the station. I have an assignment for you that needs immediate attention. We don't have many officers on hand as most of them were sent to deal with a large and nasty accident on the highway involving a pickup truck and a semi," he said.

"That sounds awful sir, I'm currently on my way to the station. I'm about three minutes away," I said.

"Good see you soon," he said, then immediately hung up. The chief wasn't one for long conversations. I heard around the station that he's like that with his own family, and do not take it personally. I arrive at the station, park my car and take a moment before I get out.

“Alright Connor, survive today then you go home and the weekend is yours,” I mumbled. I took a deep breath then opened my door and climbed out. I walked through the station doors and made my way to the chief's office. I knock on the door and wait for him to call me in. I hear a gruff reply then I open the door. The chief was sitting at his desk with paper scattered all over it, he was reading over some documents when he looked up to acknowledge my presence. This is Chief Joseph Hawkins, he is this rough and tough 62-year-old, with salt and pepper colored hair and mustache, cold brown eyes that you can tell has seen some serious shit, and always seems to be in a bad mood.

“Alright Hammond, we just received a few calls about some missing children. We have three currently missing and all three were last seen together wandering into the wood on the Northside of town. Two boys, one girl, since you are currently the only available office at the moment I am sending you out to investigate” he said.

“Understood sir, I'll get to it,” I said, I collected files from the chief and made my way back to my vehicle. I make my way to the last known location of the kids, I can tell that this is going to be another long day. Days like this remind me why I never wanted to be a cop in the first place. My father always told me that being a cop was a passed down tradition of the Hammond family, my grandfather, his father, and his father's father. My dad however at a young age was in and out of the hospital until he was 18 years old due to a heart condition. Because of it the police academy wouldn't accept him and that crushed my dad. When I was born, my mom told me that at that moment she could see the fire in his eyes, the tradition wasn't going to die with my father. That's when he decided that he was going to groom and prepare me for when I was old enough to enter the Brimsmouth Police Academy. Growing up I always want the approval of my father, but I never had the guts to tell him that I didn't want to be a cop. Though it didn't matter, he still found out anyway. One night I was supposed to be studying the BMPD training book my father bought me, but instead I was writing. Nothing police related or school related, it was all fiction adventure stories.

My father came in to check on me, and saw that the book was left unopened on my nightstand. He rushed over to me and snatched my notebook from me and was skimming through the pages. I'll never forget the look on his face that night, he was furious. I remember him drilling into me about how I shouldn't be wasting my time with this garbage and that I should be studying for the academy, that's when I slipped up. I stood my ground and told him that I didn't want to go into the police academy and that I wanted to pursue a writing career. He went silent and glared at me for a few moments, he then began gathering all my notebooks and any book that I had that wasn't academy training materials and stormed out of the room. I followed after him with tears streaming down my face and begging him not take them away. He ordered my mother to keep me

inside as he walked out to throw them in the trash outside. He then set them all on fire and all I could do in that moment was watching in silent as the tears continued to fall. He came back inside and looked me straight in the eyes and said, "No son of mine is gonna be a damn writer and that's final." And that was that, I never looked back at what could've been.

I just keep on doing what my father wanted me to do. I arrived at the location the children were last seen, normal there would be one other with me, but not this time. Kind of unfortunate to have a huge accident happen at the same time. It must have been pretty bad if it needed almost all the officers on duty this morning. Stopping my car on the side of the road, I get out and begin surveying the area looking for anything that seems out of place. Nothing right of the road so I wander further into the woods and onto a clearing, nothing off here. I spent hours looking for anything that could be a clue, maybe a shoe or a piece of jewelry. The photos I had of the kids were of what the kids were last seen wearing. I kept going further and further into the thick woods and still nothing. I honestly wanted to give up and call it a day, until I stumbled upon something that seemed out of place.

I stumbled upon an old and decrepit church, it looks as if it's been abandoned for decades. The wooden slat walls splinter and sun bleached, the stone steps and foundation cracked and crumbling. From what I could see the roof looks like it has a few holes in it and the bell tower and the bell inside it looks like it's rusted still and corroded. Behind the main church building was a larger attached building, possible classrooms and dormitories. Windows were all boarded up in the main building a few from the other building weren't. Curiosity gnawing at the back of my mind I tried to peek into the building, the windows were small and narrow and not much sunlight was seeping in. It made it kind of hard to make out anything. I walked around the rest of the building and came across a set of old and weathered cellar doors. The handles were covered in rust and were chained and boarded shut. I didn't have the right tools on me to pry it open, something to come back to at a later time. I made my way back to the front of the church and made my way up to the doors. The doors were the only thing un-boarded at this place; if some psycho wanted to kidnap and hide the children, this would be the place to hide them. I reached to the handle and gently pushed the door open.

The door opened with an ear-piercing creak, I entered the building carefully watching out for any broken floor boards. I found myself in a church sanctuary, the room had two rows of pews all worn and covered with dust and debris from the crumbling ceiling. Bibles scattered all over the floor, pages ripped and covered with mold. This church has seen better days, I carefully walked down the aisle and up to the pastor's podium. The podium was the only thing in here that seemed to be untouched by time, it felt like it was

brand new. On the podium was a large black leather book with a red ribbon bookmark. Something about this book didn't seem right; it felt almost demonic. I opened the book and to my surprise it wasn't a bible, the contents of the book were written in what I thought was Latin and upside pentagrams and ritual diagrams filled most of the yellowed pages. I continued flipping through the pages when I felt an icy cold breath on the back of my neck.

"I wouldn't touch that book if I were you," said a soft voice. I quickly turned toward the direction of the voice and found a young boy dressed in white robes. He looked to be at least 10 years old, I didn't recognize him as being one of the missing kids. There was something really off about this boy, his expression was somber and his eyes vacant. Then I noticed that I was able to see through his body, this boy was a ghost. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, an actual ghost appeared right before me. I began to panic and I began walking backwards, as I was backing up my foot slipped off the each on a small stage that the podium stood on.

"LOOK OUT!" he yelled. I fell flat on my back and hit my head hard on the wooden floor, clutching my head from the pain. I shut my eyes tight. When I opened them again he was extremely close to face.

"Wow! It's been such a long time since I last saw a living being in here!" he said with a huge smile on his face.

"Wh..Who are you?" I asked. Scrambling to get back on my feet.

"Me? My name is Alex, Alex Thornton. What's your name mister?" he asked

"I'm C..Connor Hammond, um...are you a real ghost?" I stuttered.

"Well, I think so. I don't have a body anymore, I can walk through walls, and no one can seem to see me until now," he said cheerfully.

"Why are you here?" I said.

"I live here," he said cheerfully.

"Is something keeping you here in this church? I thought ghosts only haunt places because they have unfinished business. You're just a kid." I asked.

“Oh, well that’s kind of a long story if you want to listen,” he said. It looked like Alex was about to cry when he said that. I looked back at the empty front pews, then to my watch and took a seat.

“I’ve got some time to spare, I would like to hear your story,” I said, giving the boy a small smile.

“Alright, a long time ago I called this place my home along with nine other boys. This church was run by Pastor Rocklin, all of us had no family and nowhere to go. Pastor Rocklin took us in and home schooled us all. He gave everything we needed and in return we all had a job to do in the church, my job was to make new candles for the sermons. One night, Pastor Rocklin called us all into this sanctuary. He placed that black book on the podium and told us to come forward to take part in a special communion. We all picked up our glasses of wine without questions and Pastor Rocklin read the usually communion scripture. Once he finished, we all took a sip from our glasses. I remember at the moment feeling very ill and my vision was becoming very blurry. The others around me dropped to the ground one by one, and the last thing I remember was Pastor Rocklin saying “It’s all for the sake of salvation, for our lord.” And that’s all I remember,” He said.

At that moment, I really had no idea what to say to him. It was awful what happened to Alex and the other kids that lived here. I pulled from my thoughts when I heard the crackling of my walkie talkie. It was another officer’s voice coming from it, “any officers out in the field not currently dealing with the traffic accident, return to the station.”

“Looks like I got to go,” I said.

“Wait! Will you come back? I’ve been here for so long by myself, I don’t want to be alone again,” he pleaded.

I really didn’t want to come back here, but I couldn’t shake the feeling that something was about to happen. It couldn’t be a coincidence that the missing kids disappeared in this area.

“Alright, I’ll come back tonight after I’m off at the station,” I said.

“You promise?” he asked

“I promise,” I said.



With that I left the church and made my way back to my car and drove off.

## Chapter Two

When I came back to the station, all the offices on this shift gathered around the chief as he began going over what he needed the remaining officers for.

“Alright gentlemen, it’s getting to be that time of year. All the mass house pranks from the teens in this community. The mayor has asked that this year we double the officers out on patrol to catch those delinquents before they act. There’s no opting out on this either, officers will have designated night and shift changes during patrols will be implemented.” he said. It was very apparent that no one was too thrilled with this idea. In Brimsmouth, fall and more specially October was a very stressful time of the year for our small station. Every year homes are wreaked havoc during the night by some high-schoolers. Each prank is more elaborate than the last, none of us have ever caught a single one of them and since we don’t know which ones are responsible we can’t serve any punishment for them and it’s not right to punish all of them if they aren’t involved. The chief may be harsh, but he’s not that harsh.

I returned to my desk empty handed from my search this morning, most of the officers that were out dealing with traffic accident had returned and were carrying on as if it never happened. I want to know just how bad it was, but that can wait till later. I needed to report to the chief. I was about to walk into the chief’s office when I noticed he was currently in the middle of a phone call. I’m not one to eavesdrop on other people’s conversations and this was probably a call about the accident from this morning. I did manage to catch a few things from the conversation as I was about to walk away, the chief had mentioned something about the old church in the woods on the outskirts of town. I wish I could hear what was being said on the other end of the call. What I made from the conversations was preparations for something that was going on two days from now, and that something was found. Something wasn’t right about that phone call. I went back to my desk, as I was about to take a seat the chief called me into his office. Shit, I hope he didn’t notice me early and that is just a coincidence being called in. I walked up to his office and knocked on the open-door frame. The chief looked up from his work to acknowledge my presence and I proceeded to enter the room.

“Were you able to find anything Hammond?” He grumbled.

“No sir, nothing out of the ordinary,” I said. I could tell that the chief was obviously very unhappy with that answer. I wanted to ask him if he knew anything about crimes that took place at the old church, but from what I heard on that phone call it was probably best to not bring up what I actually found out there.

"I am keeping you on these cases, I want you to go and find out anything you can from the possible witnesses and the children's parents," He said.

"Yes sir," I replied.

"Good, you're free to go. I want to see progress on these cases before your shift ends," he called as I walked out the door. I gave him a thumbs up and disappeared around the corner. I knew I wasn't going to find out anything else today, so I decided to look for some old cases to see if anything pops up that sounds similar to Alex's story. Poor kid, didn't have a family and was being cared for by a psychopath just to be used in some freaky witch shit. I still couldn't shake what I heard in the chief's office. Something's going on and I bet my life's savings that the chief is involved in whatever it is. I had to spend a good half hour looking through the station's old case files, it amazed me how far back they went from the 1920's all the way to present day in 2005. I shouldn't have been surprised that the station didn't have anything dating back to the 1880's the original police station was burned to the ground in 1943. So, anything dating back that far was more than likely lost to the fire. I was pulled out of my thoughts by a loud knock on the door, I quickly turned around to find one of my colleagues Amy Harper.

Amy was a petite girl with long curly black hair always pulled into a tight ponytail and the kindest green eyes I had ever seen. I had known Amy since we were in middle school, when we graduated high school she immediately enrolled in the police academy with the dream to be a hero just like her mom was.

"Connor what are you doing? You're supposed to be getting evidence on those missing kids. If the chief finds out you're slacking he's going to rip you a new one," she scolded.

"Well he won't find out if no one tells him," I said sarcastically. She rolled her eyes at me with a smirk. She folded her arms and leaned up against the door frame.

"Are you saying that I shouldn't tell him so that he can tear into you," she said playfully.

"Come on Amy please! I'm almost done in here," I begged. She looked around the room at all the accordion style storage boxes stacked around. She gave me a quizzical look and knelt down beside me.

"What are you looking for in these old cases files?" she asked. I can't tell Amy about Alex either mainly because I doubt she would even believe me, but I can't risk the chief finding out that I found the old church during my search. I had to think of a good reason and fast.

"I'm looking to see if there were any missing children's cases that might have any similarities to how these kids disappeared. It's possible that it could be someone from another case or someone trying to copy another kidnapper," I said. I hope that was a good enough reason to be searching through these.

"uh...huh... Ok well I guess since you're still doing your work and not goofing off I guess I can let it slide," she smirked.

"Thanks Amy, I owe you one," I said.

"Damn right you do," she said, playful slapping my arm. I pretended to be in agonizing pain and she laughed as she stood up.

"How about I treat you to some beers at Finnegan's tomorrow night after I get off of work?" I offered. She looked back at me and pressed a finger to her chin.

"Hmm, alright sounds like a plan. Good luck with your search," she said as she waved goodbye and walked back down the hall. I never did get the chance to tell that I liked her back in high school and it's probably too late by now, she has always been a fun and outgoing person who really cares about her friends and loved ones and always put them first above all else. I can't imagine that she doesn't have a boyfriend by now. I guess I should be happy that we're still best friends even after all the time apart. I decided that I'm not going to find anything that could be related to Alex's story. I started to put away the boxes I took out when one of the older looking boxes bottom gave out, spilling a single folder onto the floor. The folder was very old and weathered. I carefully set the box on the floor and picked up the folder. On the top of the folder written in small and neat cursive was "COLD CASE, OCTOBER 13<sup>TH</sup>, 1886."

I opened the folder and found pictures of the old church back in its day of former glory and headshots of nine men. Each picture had become weathered and stained over time, the first thing I noticed all the men in the pictures were already dead. The cause of their deaths clearly visible in the shot of their throats had been sliced open. This was it, this was the report of the murder that took place in the old Brimsmouth Church. I looked through the pages and across a page that had pictures of the crime scene and the head shots of twelve deceased young boys. My eyes immediately zoned on one of the head shots, Alex's. Outside the door I could hear the voice of the chief and it was getting louder and louder. I quickly grabbed a few random case file folders and tucked Alex's case folder in between them. I packed the box back up and place it back in it spot on

the shelf and walked out of the room. Thankfully the chief hadn't turned the corner as I left the room, that would have been a tough one to get out of.

I returned to my desk, collecting my phone, laptop, and the old folder and shoved it into my backpack. I placed the random folders I grabbed to hide the church case folder into the lower drawer in my work desk and made my way to the front entrance of the station. I got back to my car and made my way back into town. That is one of the benefits of working at the police station. The station was built outside of Brimsmouth, so going out for a coffee run for the staff and other officers always took a bit of time out of a shift. It also makes for a good opportunity to delve deeper into this file without the worry of the chief finding out. Before that though, a coffee break is very much needed. Arriving at Brimsmouth's only coffee shop, I order my coffee, grab a bite to eat, and head back to my car. I took out my notepad from my backpack and looked up the addresses of the missing kids that I wrote down early this morning.

"Esther Cunningham age 7, lives at 7906 Blackwater ave. Parents Anna and Patrick Cunningham. Jacob Mackins age 7, lives at 8463 Little River st. Parents Silvia and John Mackins. Andrew Raleigh age 9, lives 6624 Lexington st. Parents Ellen and Will Raleigh. Alright next stop the Cunningham's," I mutter to myself. I made my way to all three of the missing children's homes and met with their parents. Every single one of them looked so tired and longing for good news on the whereabouts of their kids. I went through the list of questions with them, "How long has it been since they were last seen?" "Did you happen to notice any suspicious persons in the area?" "Were the kids acting out of the ordinary?" What was in common with all three kids was each one of them began talking nonsense about a man made of mist hiding in the shadows. After that comment the kids seemed to have snapped back to reality and were fine. They let go outside to play and called them in when dinner was done. They never showed up and that was the last time they saw them.

A man made of mist? I wonder if Alex knows what that is or if it means something. My shift was almost over, so I made my way back to the station to clock myself out. I got back to my desk and finished my report for the day as well as file the responses from the missing kids' parents. Six PM, quitting time. I repack my laptop back into my backpack, grab my keys and made my way back to my car. I still had some time before I was to meet Alex again, so I decided to go home, get changed, and look at the file some more.

## Chapter Three

I arrived at my parents house at about 7 o'clock, my father was sitting in his recliner watching a football game and my mother was finishing up dinner. I walked through the front door and kicked my shoes off before I made my way to my room.

"I take it, it was a long day at work son?" he asked, barely taking his eyes off the tv.

"Yeah, kind of. I don't really have time to chat. I have some missing children cases to look over. I'm going out later so I wanted to look these over before I forget," I said as I hurried down the hall.

"Ok hot shot, I get it," he said waving me off. I closed and locked my bedroom door, unzipped my bag and reached for the old Brimsmouth Church case file. Taking it out of my bag I dropped the bag onto my bed and placed the file on my desk. I took a seat and began looking over each page in that file. What I learned from this made me wonder what other crazy cult shit has happened in this town.

The church was built on September 15th, 1880, The pastor at the time was Ingram Hitchcock. Hitchcock was the head of the church for 5 years before he passed away in his sleep. Three months later a new pastor takes over, Alfred Rocklin. During Rocklin's time as the pastor of the church he took in nine orphan boys. Weeks after he took them in he closed the church's doors to the town of Brimsmouth. As I continued reading through the file, this one page caught my attention.

### ***"Pastor Caught in Cult Scandal"***

As I continued reading I found a list of names of those that took part in the killings. Thirteen men were involved; four escaped, eight were found dead, Rocklin was confronted by authorities, but took his own life before they could get close to apprehend

him. This is insane how could something this horrible have been covered up like this. I should bring these with me when I go back to church.

I hear a faint knock on my door followed by my mother's voice.

"Connor, dinner is ready," she said softly. I went to the door and opened it to see her sweet and smiling face.

"Your father mentioned that you were going back out soon. Will you have time to have dinner with us before you leave?" she asked.

"Yea I have time for dinner," I said with a smile. The difference between my mom and dad was like night and day. Jancie Greenwood and Albert Hammond, when they met things were great and full of love. Even when they got married and when I was born everything was great. Though things began to spiral when my parents found out that my mother could no longer have children. It was a miracle that I was even born. My father desperately wanted another child, a son preferred but he would love a daughter if that's what he got. My mother started to feel useless and my father didn't help with that. He began to drink, my father due to his health had a hard time keeping a job. So that responsibility went to my mother, she has been working in the mayor's office for as long as I can remember. She would come home and find many beer cans and bottles all over the floor around the couch and my father would be passed out on the couch from said beers. He also became more and more irritable and aggressive. Every little thing that my mother did that he didn't like or agree with would end in a screaming match between the two and to end that my father when he had enough he would hit her and that was the end of the argument. I'm pretty sure I made things worse when my father found out that I had no interest in joining the Police Force when I was younger.

I wanted to be a writer, I had some many story ideas that I would have loved to have seen become a book someday. I still have them, in my mind. I know better than to follow that dream now. My father would disown me and throw me out, leaving my mother all

alone with him. I couldn't do that to her. Despite all that she never took her frustrations and anger out on me. I followed her out to the kitchen where my father was waiting at the kitchen table with a half drunk beer bottle in his hand. He ignores that fact that I am now in the room, which I could honestly not give a damn. We all sat and ate in silence, then my mother spoke up.

"So, sweetheart, how was your day at work? I heard there was a pretty bad accident near the highway," she asked, obviously uncomfortable by the silence. Usually that means that something happened between her and my father which resulted in her getting hit again. I was used to seeing some bruises on her face, was I ok with that of course not. Until I noticed that her arm was in a sling, how did I not notice that before. That was it, I can't just sit by and let him continue this.

"It was fine, what happened to your arm mom?" I asked blatantly glaring at my father who continued to carry on as if nothing had happened. She shifted nervously before she spoke.

"Oh this? It's nothing really, it's just a small fracture. I fell at work," she stuttered. It hurt to watch her lie to me, but I knew why she had to. I stood up from the table and slammed my hands on the table. That got my father's attention.

"You did that, didn't you," I said as I continued to glare at him. I've had enough of this; 17 years is enough. My father put his utensils down and looked me in the eye.

"You watch your mouth boy," he said, returning the glare.

"You don't scare me, I know that you did this. I'm not stupid, and I'm not going to let this continue," I said seething. My father stood up, his fist tightened and he was grinding his teeth.



“You think you're so tough because your cop, huh boy? What are you going to do, arrest me?” he pushed with a nasty smirk.

“I never wanted this, you did because you couldn't live your dream of being a cop like grandpa,” I snapped. My father furrowed his brow and gritted his teeth, that's when I realized what I had just said. To hell with that, I couldn't really give a damn.

“And what you think being a fucking writer was gonna make you any money? You would be penniless, chasing a stupid dream. I mean, for fuck sake you get paid well enough and yet you still choose to live here,” He snapped back.

“At least I have a job, unlike you. You could get an easy job like store greeter or some shit, but you choose to sit on your ass and drink yourself into a coma. Yea you have a heart condition, that shouldn't stop you from trying to help out around here,” I was reaching the breaking point, and I knew my father was too. I could also see that he was several beers in and was starting to become hostile. He reached for his half drunk bottle of beer and smashed it on the table causing the bottom to shatter.

“I should have thrown your ass out onto the street years ago,” he growled. He lunged at me with the broken bottle. I dodged out of the way while grabbing a hold of his wrist, I maneuvered behind him and swept his leg. He went down fast, I rolled him onto his stomach and pinned his arms behind him.

“Mom, I have cuffs in my bag, grab them,” I demanded. She nodded all a while shaking at the scene that was taking place in her dining room. She found the cuffs and handed them to me, I cuffed my dad and reached into my back pocket for my phone. I dialed the station and called for an officer to come pick my dad up and take him away. Let him cool off at the station instead of letting him take his anger out on mom and I. The office arrived and his partner arrived, luckily it was a pair that I was fond of, Office Ryan O'reilly and Office Ashton Hunter. Hunter was fairly new so he got paired with O'reilly for the night shift. They both came to the door and Hunter escorted my dad out of the house and into the back of the car. O'reilly grabbed my shoulder and gently shook me.

“That’s pretty rough sending your own dad to jail,” he said.

“Yeah, well he had it coming to him. I should have done this years ago. Thanks for coming out here,” I said.

“ No problem man, it must have been pretty bad if you had to take down your old man and cuff him like that,” he said.

“Yeah, I can write the report for you,” I offered.

“Sounds good, we’ll take him in, but I can’t imagine he will be there for long since he buddies with the chief,” he said, folding his arms.

“I’ll explain to the chief tomorrow. I would like it if he stayed there for a while,” I said.

“Alright, well take it easy Connor you look like shit,” he said as he turned to leave.

“Good night to you too Ryan, tell Ashton I said bye,” I waved. He shot me a thumbs up and got into the car. I shut the door and walked over to my mother. She was kneeled down picking up the larger shards for glass. The rest would have to be vacuumed up, knelt down beside her and helped her.

“Connor why did you do that?” she asked me, still shaking.

“He hit you and this time he broke your arm. I can tell when you're lying, this has been going on long enough for me to figure that out,” I said I extended my other hand for her to place the glass she had in her injured hand. She handed them to me as I stood up to dump them in the trash. I looked over at the clock, I still had some time left before I had to meet back up with Alex. I went over to the hall closet and pulled out the vacuum cleaner. My mother was still kneeling on the floor, just staring off into space. I walked

back over to her and offered my hand to help her up. She looked at me and took my hand, I walked her into the living room and helped her get comfortable.

“Just relax mom, I can take care of the rest.” I said with a smile as I gave her hand a gentle squeeze. She tightened her grip on my hand, she started trembling and I could see the tears spilling from her eyes. I sat down next to her and hugged her. She returned the hug.

“I’m sorry Connor,” she said softly. I placed my cheek on top of her head and hugged her tighter.

“You have nothing to apologize for mom, none of this is your fault.” I choked, I could feel the tears trailing down my cheeks. I moved my arms to place my hands on her shoulder, I moved her so she was looking at me.

“Mom you should leave dad, you don’t deserve this kind of treatment. My whole life I watched you not only take care of me and dad, but worked so hard to make sure food was in the house and bills were paid. He has done nothing to help you and you have done everything to keep him happy. You deserve to be happy too,” I pleaded. She looked at me and shook her head as more tears fell.

“Where would I go? Where would you go?” she said. I lightened my grip on her shoulders.

“You want to know why I chose to continue living here? I was saving every single paycheck, so that I could move us both out of this house. I know he has been doing this too since my junior year in highschool. That’s why I tried so hard looking for a job back then. I have been saving since that first job in highschool. I have enough to get a small fixer upper house.” I said

“Connor...I...I don’t know what to say, What about this house? We can’t just up and leave,” she said. I couldn’t tell that I already put a down payment on a house. I put it

down because I felt it was time to move on, but I can't just leave her here, not with him. I looked at her and sighed.

"I won't force you, but would you at least think about it?" I asked. She nodded.

"Thank you," I smiled. I looked back over at the clock, shit I need to get going. I got up from the couch and grabbed my bag. I walked over to the door and stopped.

"I gotta get going, I'll be back late so you don't need to wait up for me. I mean it mom, think about it," I said.

"I'll think about it, and Connor please be careful," she smiled sadly.

"I will," I said as I walked out the door.

## Chapter Four

I arrived at the edge of the wood where I found myself this morning. I parked my car, grabbed my and the flashlight I always kept in my car. As I made my way back to the old Brimsmouth Church, I felt a chill run up my spine. Something was off and I felt like I was being watched. I made it back to the church and opened the large old door. I shined my light around trying to spot Alex. I decided to call out to him.

“Alex...Alex are you here?” I called. Suddenly a soft blue light shone near the podium and Alex faded into view. He looked as if he had been sleeping. I walked over to him and as he zoned in me his eye went wide and a big smile spread across his face. He met me halfway as he zipped over to me.

“Connor! You really came back!” he exclaimed. He gave me a hug and I did my best to return it seeing as I can’t actually touch him. He looked at me with his big blue eyes and continued to smile. I smiled back.

“I told you would come back,” I said. I looked at Alex and thought of the case file I found. I wonder if It would be a good idea to show it to him. Then I remember something from earlier that I wanted to ask him.

“Hey Alex, I was wondering. Do you know anything about a man made of mist? I was out in the field asking the parents of three recently missing kids about anything strange leading up to their disappearance. Each one said that their kids were talking about a man made of mist before they disappeared,” I asked. Alex furrowed his brow and thought hard. He looked back at me with a stumped expression.

“I’m sorry Connor, but I don’t recall anything about a man made of mist.” He said. Damn, I was really hoping he knew something. Suddenly the winds outside began to pick up and the whole church began to creak and moan against the wind. That feeling was back, something was about to happen. I can feel it.

“I have another question, The three kids were last seen entering this part of the woods. Do you know if they came here?” I asked.

Alex again thought hard, trying to remember anything. Suddenly Alex’s expression changed as if a switch flipped.

“I do remember hearing children around here. I don’t remember seeing them, but I remember hearing laughter. It sounded like two boys and one girl,” he said.

“Yes that’s them! Do you remember where the laughter was coming from or which way they were heading?” I said excitedly.

“They sounded close to the church when I first heard them, then the laughter started getting quieter. I think they were heading towards the dormitories,” he said as he looked out the window towards the other building. Alex’s face went blank and his eyes looked empty.

Suddenly, moaning and faint screams filled the almost empty church, they were so loud that it was difficult to pinpoint its location. Alex snapped back to reality, he looked in the direction of the podium stage. He turned to me with a worried look on his face.

“That sounds like it was coming from the basement,” he said.

“This place has a basement? Where?” I asked. He nodded and headed towards one of the windows. He pointed to the large separated building.

“The building out there are the dormitories that me and my friends lived in. Behind the building are cellar doors,” he said.

He called for me to follow him and I did. Just before we left the church, I went back and grabbed the black book that was on the podium. I don’t know why, but I had a feeling we were going to need this. I shoved the book in my backpack and jogged back to the doors. The walk to the other building felt endless. We eventually made it to the door, it had a small plaque that read “Dormitory.” I looked around to see if there was a quicker

way of getting to the cellar doors that were in the back of the building. Surrounding the building were tall wooden fencing. It was old, but sturdy and it was not climbing over that anytime soon. Looks like we had to go inside. I reached for the handle to open it. Alex looked like he was about to cry. This building was the rooms he shared with eight other kids who all met the same fate after they finally found a place to call home.

“Hey, are you going to be ok?” I asked.

“Yes, thank you. Even though it has been years since then I still feel sad whenever I come back here,” He said.

“If you want we can turn back,” I said. He looked at me with determination in his eyes.

“No, we need to go. If what you said before about those kids is true, they might be here and could be in danger,” he said. I nodded to him and opened the door. It slowly opened with a loud creak, and beyond the door was another hallway that was lined with doors. As we made our way down I noticed that all the doors had a name on them, I imagined those were the names of Alex’s friends. Each door had a different child’s name on it and the last door read Alex. This was his room when he was still alive, I wanted to open the door, but refrained from doing so as to not upset Alex.

“Would you like to see my old room?” he asked. I answered him sheepishly.

“If you’re ok with that, I’m just a little curious,” I said.

He nodded and told me that it was ok for me to see. I reached to the rusted handle and opened the door. Inside the small room was an old bed that had been eaten up by moths and molding due to any rain that found its way in from the leaking ceiling. The floorboards creaked with each step I took into the room. A few old toys littered the floor along with clumps of leaves and dirt, the sight before him was depressing and watching Alex wander about the room reminiscing about the good memories of his friends and about what it could have been like if he was still alive made it much more depressing.

“Ever since that night I died, I haven’t ever come back here to this part of the church. It reminds me that I’m all alone here,” he said. This poor kid had no parents or real family, and when he was brought he felt like he finally had something close to a real family only for it to end so maliciously. I knelt down and picked up an old book that was lying upside down. It was an old children's book about the tales of Mother Goose.

“Hey Alex, How did you and the others end up here?” I asked. I had no idea if he was going to answer me. I wouldn’t be upset if he said he didn’t want to share. He then turned to me and floated over to where I knelt down.

“Me and others lived on the streets for a long time. Me and another boy named Henry were the oldest of them, so it was kind of our responsibility to find food for all of us. We stole from what we could which was never much, we always got caught before we could grab enough. We always escaped and made it back with the food. Both of us made sure that the youngests and the sick were fed before us. One day we overheard a conversation about a carriage loaded with food that was heading for this church, so Henry and I came here to steal from the carriage. We thought that a church that only had a pastor that only worked there would be easy to take from. We were wrong, Pastor Rocklin found us inside the carriage. We were trapped in the carriage with him blocking the only way off. We begged him not to send us to be punished, he started laughing and said, “Do not worry boys, I will not send you away.” He was the first person to show us any kindness. He brought us inside the church and gave us blankets to wrap up in since it was as cold as it is tonight. He then asked us about our parents, that's when we told him about how we were on the streets and about the others. He told us to bring them here and that we could all live here. So we did,”

“He gave us all tasks to do around the church like cleaning the church, helping with cooking meals, and collecting communion during services. We were here for a little more than a month and I noticed that the Pastor was favoring me and Henry over the others. He treated us differently. He would give us simple tasks, while the others had rather hard tasks to complete. For a few days me and Henry were given the tasks to make candles for service., The others made fun of us for it, saying it was a ladies job to make candles and they gave us the nickname candlestick boys. We didn’t care, we were just happy to see them all smile and laugh. Happy that they were all healthy again.” While Alex told his story he had a smile the whole time. I wonder what changed.

“One night, when the others had gone to bed me and Henry were still up working on finishing making the candles for that coming Sunday service. I remember it began to rain and lightning flashed brightly in the small candle room. Suddenly the door flew open and Pastor Rocklin was standing there in the doorway. Something felt really wrong, as he entered the room he locked the door behind him and he swayed with every step he took. We asked him what was wrong and he stayed silent. He was scaring us, we then begged him to tell us and what we could do to help. He stopped and said here is what we could do to help. He ordered for us to remove all of our clothing, we did what we were told. It was so cold in that room, he grabbed some rope and tried both mine and Henry’s hands behind our backs. He smiled and called us “such good little candle boys”



and then he...he...started touching us in all weird places.” Alex started to tremble and I could see tearings running down his cheeks.

“I can still hear Henry crying out in pain, crying and begging for him to stop. I could do nothing, I was paralyzed by fear. All I could do was watch as he continued to touch Henry, eventually Henry passed out from the pain, Once Pastor Rocklin was finished with Henry he moved on to me. I begged for him to stop and to not come any closer, he gently grabbed my chin and looked me in the eyes. He said to me,

“My dearest Alex, you have always been my favorite.”

“He then pinned me to the floor and all I could feel was pain, I have never wanted death so much than I did that night. As he had his way with me I could feel my very being just fade away and become completely numb. After while my screams could no longer be heard in the room, the only sounds that filled the room was Pastor Rocklins ragged breathing. Once he was done with me he left both Henry and I on the floor stilled tied and completely bare. I don’t remember much after that except I can remember that last thing he said before he left the room.

“You boys are truly magnificent, let’s spend another night together soon.” As he said we did spend other nights like that after that night. He ordered us to keep quiet about it, and if we spoke one word about it he would throw us all back onto the streets. We couldn’t let the others suffer that way. They were so happy, so we kept our mouths shut for their sakes.” Alex’s eyes were filled with tears and I could see pure terror in them as well. He suffered for so long, him and his friend just to make sure the other boys that were here could have a chance at a better life. No kid should ever have to go through what Alex and his friend went through. I got up from my spot on the floor.

“Come on, let’s go to the basement,” I said. Alex agreed and we left the little room behind. At the end of the hall was a door that led to the backyard of the dormitory. The back of the building felt more depressing than the front. The fenced in backyard was very small and very empty. Just to the right of the door were the cellar doors and on the wall above it was another small plaque. The sign read Basement, just by standing in front of it I could feel something ominous behind it. The pressure was so overwhelming that it caused me to start trembling. I reached for the handle and slowly pulled open the doors in hopes of not alerting anyone or thing that might have been down there. Just beyond the door was a decrepit staircase, I had a bad feeling about what was waiting for us down there. We looked at each other and knew that there was no turning back now. I slowly descended the staircase, watching my footing carefully as to not break the old stairs. The light from my phone’s flashlight seemed to just disappear into the pitch

black of the basement stairs. We reached the bottom of the stairs and the room suddenly opened up a bit more. The dark room was musty and humid, my foot kicked something over and I shined my light to see what it was. It was a candle and it looks like there were many scattered about the room.

I turned it right side up and reached into my pocket and pulled out a small match book, I guess it was a good idea to bring these after all. I lit a few candles and the room immediately revealed all its horrors to us. Strange sigils and pentagrams were carved into the wooden walls, papers, with strange diagrams and matching sigils scattered the floor and in the center of the room was a large pentagram drawn in what looked to be dried blood. I looked around the room once more and noticed that the walls were also covered in dried blood, but what was written was unclear. The language was unfamiliar, maybe latin? My head began to fill with the sound of many voices all trying to speak at once, a jumble of many different things. It made my head pound and my ears hurt, I clutched my head in hopes to calm the pounding when suddenly the voices went silent. I turned to look to see where Alex ended up in the room. He was standing in the middle of the pentagram that was on the floor. His face was blank and eyes wide, out of nowhere he says,

“I remember now, this is where the madness and betrayal began. Pastor Rocklin called us all down to the basement in the middle of the night. We made our way down to the basement and when we got here there were twelve unfamiliar men and Pastor Rocklin all waiting for us. We all questioned what was going on, but he told us not to worry and asked us to have a seat on the floor around this weird looking circle. The men passed out cups to us with a strange smelling liquid, Pastor Rocklin said everything was fine and asked us to drink the liquid. We did as we were told and soon after that when everything went fuzzy and we all dropped to the floor clutching our stomachs in pain, then everything went black. When I woke up I was hovering over my own body and that’s when I realized that I was dead and that the others were dead as well and hovering their bodies.”

“The men then started to collect our bodies and brought them up into the sanctuary, the large floor rug was pulled back and underneath was another large pentagram etched into the floorboards. It was carved very deep and all the lines wide, almost to contain something in it. They began arranging our bodies at each point of the pentagram star and in between each point was a line attached to the center of the star. We watched from the veil that separated the dead from the living, all holding one another in tears. They placed candles on either side of our bodies and lit them. Once everything was set, their ritual began. They all started to chant in a strange language waving their hands in a weird way almost like a strange tribal dance that we learned in history books about

native tribe people. Soon a silence and the men pulled out a small knife and chains from their belts. One by one they all chained themselves to our bodies and the slit our throats. We watched in fear as our blood filled the carving on the floor without overflowing and how instantaneously it filled completely.”

“We cried out even though we knew no one would be able to hear us. We could no longer feel physical pain, but we were hurting. Pastor Rocklin began to chant and as he did one he gestured one by one to each man before him. When he did one by one they all slit their throats and fell to the floor. As that happened my friends also began to disappear one by one till I was the only one left. Pastor Rocklin then pulled out a knife and chains of his own, but before he could the town police appeared and caught him in the middle of this blood bath. The look on his face was pure fear and determination. He wasn’t about to let himself get thrown in a cell to rot for the rest of his life, and he certainly couldn’t let what this sacrifice was for be known. He looked at the men in uniform and said,”

“sera venit estis.”

“He slit his throat and died taking his secrets with him.”

Alex began to tremble and flickering as if his light was about to burn out. I rushed over to him and tried to snap him out of his train of thought. When I looked at his face there were tears spilling from his eyes uncontrollably. I wished that at that moment I was able to hold him, but he didn’t have a physical form.

“Alex...Hey Alex,” I said, but he didn’t respond. “Alex...ALEX!” I shouted, that seemed to catch his attention as he opened his eyes and looked at me. He scrunched his face and flew into me wanting to be held. He buried his face in the crook of my neck and continued to cry. It was a strange feeling. He was cold and I couldn’t feel the tears that were falling onto my skin. I put my arms around him as best as one could to hold a ghost.

“Connor, I’m so scared.” he cried.

“Hey, it’s ok Alex. I know you must be terrified having all those memories flooding back to you like that, but it’s over. Rocklin can’t hurt you anymore, he’s gone.” I said. I managed to get him to calm down when suddenly a voice filled the room. The voice was unfamiliar to me, but the look on Alex’s face I could tell that the voice was all too familiar to Alex. Suddenly the candles flickered into life and the light from the candles suddenly went from a soft yellow-orange to an eerie and ghostly green. The wall in front of them

that had a large pentagram drawn in blood on it began to ripple and twist. A black figure emerged from the wall. I couldn't make out a single detail on it, it walked closer to us and black that surrounded the figure disappeared to reveal its true appearance. It was Pastor Rocklin. He looked different from what Alex remembered, his form was all twisted and deformed. His face was thin and almost looked like a skeleton, his body bent out in all sorts of ways. The look in his was not the look of someone that was once human and his smile was something straight from a nightmare. The wall behind Rocklin began to ripple and twist once more, and eight more figures appeared. It was the other eight cultists and chained to them where the souls of the eight children the night that Alex had died. Rocklin raised a deformed and spindly hand towards Alex and smiled.

"Alex my dear boy, I'm glad to see that you are still here after all this time," he said. Alex was frozen and silent by pure fear of this man. I got up from the ground and stood between Alex and Rocklin.

"What kind of Pastor kills innocent children? What were you hoping to gain from it?" I said. He gave me a smirk and began to pace around the room, I followed his movements and kept the distance between us and him.

"Well, my boy it's quite simple and has a bit of a story to it. God whom I put so much faith in took the love of my life from me. She was raped and killed on a quiet night like this, I was away from home doing some work here at the church. A vile beast of a man broke into our home, had his way with her, mutilated her nether regions and slit her throat to keep her quiet. I lost everything that night, and days after her murderer was never caught and prosecuted. I turned to drinking my grief away and mourned her months. One night I heard a voice call out to me,"

"I can bring back the love you lost,"

"I told him I would help him, in turn bringing my love back to me, but the ceremony was incomplete until now. I have found four new members to aid my cause and they have found me three children and are close to finding a fourth. Just look for yourself, I now have eleven souls and the twelfth will be found soon," he said pointing to the fall west wall. The wall was mostly covered in shadow, but I was able to make out three small figures along with three larger figures. It was the kids, they were each chained to a cloaked figure and were all bleeding from their necks. They were dead, and I was too late to save them. Rocklin began to cackle, he turned to me.

"However, I'm afraid my boy you know too much for me to allow you leave." The room began to shake and out of the corners of the small room black tendrils began manifesting from the shadows. Alex finally made a move.

“RUN CONNOR!” he shouted. The tendrils lashed out towards me, I managed to dodge them and made a break for the stairs. In my haste I dropped my flashlight, but there was no going back for it. We raced back up the stairs breaking the boards on our way up, just as we reached the top the door slammed shut and locked us in. Alex was able to phase through it but he wasn't going to leave me there. I shove the door with all my might but it wouldn't budge, the tendrils were closing in and after the third time of bashing my shoulder into the door it finally broke open. We pounded down the hallway back to the sanctuary with Rocklin not too far behind us. We reached the sanctuary, Alex pushed me toward the door.

“Connor, you need to get out here. He'll kill you,” he said. Before I could say anything to him, the room shook again and Rocklin's laughter rang throughout the building. He was even closer to us than before.

“Alex you need to get out of here,” I said

“I can't, I'm bound to this church,” he said. Shadows began creeping into the room.

“Then we need to hide,” I said. Rocklin finally reached the room, but I managed to find a place to hide while Alex faded from sight. He slowly walked about the room, scanning for any signs of movement.

“I know you're still here boys, you can't hide from me forever,” he chuckled. My heart was racing and I was sweating buckets. I never thought in my life I would ever have been involved with ghosts and demons, and now I'm being hunted by one. I tried to poke my head out from my hiding spot of an overturned pew just enough to see where he was from my location, he wasn't too far. His footsteps getting louder and louder the closer he got, and the shadows closing in on me. Without warning the pew was thrown violently into the air landing on the other end of the room. I tried to scramble to my feet, but kept tripping over them instead. Rocklin kept his creeping pace and the tendrils inched closer and closer the more I tried to crawl away. I was backed into a corner, with nowhere else to go Rocklin smiled showing sharp point teeth like a wild beast.

“This is the end for you Connor,” he said as the tendrils lashed out towards me once more. I instinctively put my arms in front of my face to shield myself from being impaled, but the attack never reached me. I moved my arms out of the way and saw that Alex gave himself up to save me.

“Connor...Go...save yourself,” he said, straining to speak as the tendrils impaled his corporeal form. Rocklin who was quite pleased with this turn of events, smirked and both him and Alex faded into nothing.

“No...ALEX!” No, it can’t end like this, I have to save him. I have to save them all. I sprinted as fast as I could to my car, there had to be something I could do. I needed a plan, but where to start? I could try the Brimsmouth Library, that’s always a good start.

## Chapter Five

You know, one would think that this is completely crazy. Risking your safety for someone you just met, especially if this person is a ghost of a young boy that was murdered in the late 1880s. That's just the kind of person I am, I want to help in any way that I can. Many people don't know that about me, I usually keep to myself when I can. I may have not wanted to be a cop, but if you need help you can count on me to help you out. I arrived at the library and was able to catch the librarian just as she was leaving the building. Mrs. Darcey is a long time friend of my mom, she is the model of a perfect librarian. She is always so neat and organized, and she is always very sweet. I ran up to her and asked her if she could lend me the keys to the library. She looked at me like I was crazy, she knew that I wasn't in school anymore so why would I be begging to let into the library after hours. I wish I could tell her why, but I knew she would never believe me.

So instead I told her that I needed to take a look at the town's old newspapers to help a case that I am currently working on. Since the town's founding the library always had one copy of the paper that came out every week. As tradition Brimsmouth Library still saves a copy of the weekly paper. She thought for a moment, from time to time us cops will come to the library to gather information if it can help with their cases. She knew that I was a cop so she knew that I wasn't here to do any harm to this place. She passed me the keys to the building.

"I trust that you will keep my library in shape Connor. I have a spare key, so you can bring those to me tomorrow ok?" she said with a smile. I thanked her and walked her to her car, waving goodbye as she drove off down the street. I raced to the doors and quickly unlocked the door. I reached in my bag for my flashlight and remembered that I dropped it in the basement when the ghost of Rocklin attacked us. I pulled my phone out of my pocket and used it as a light, which wasn't the least bit helpful. I walked over to a large catalogue book that was sitting on top of the front desk. The book contained lists of where the books and non book items were located. I ran my finger down the pages looking for the locations of anything that could be related to the occult. After a moment I found a few places, they were on the second floor. I closed the large book and made my way to the stairs.

I wandered through the many towering bookshelves trying to read the titles of the books. Suddenly, I was alerted to bang followed by a very loud, but whispered "shit!" I ran over to where the noise came from and was very surprised to find out who was

behind it. It was Amy, she had hit one of the shelves with her shoulder as she was unable to see it due to how dark it was in here.

“Amy? What are you doing here? How did you get in?” I asked. She looked up at me while she continued to massage her shoulder.

“The same way as you, the front door. You left it unlocked, but I locked it for you. What are you doing here?” she asked. Crap, I don’t think she would believe me if I told her the same lie that I told Mrs. Darcey.

“Um...Just wanted to get reading done,” I said as I nervously rubbed the back of my neck.

“Right...This late at night?” she said as she folded her arms across her chest. Yeah, I knew she wouldn’t buy that.

“Connor, I saw you speeding down the street to get here while I was out on my nightly walk. You never speed, even if you're going to be super late to something. You have been acting off all day, is everything ok?” she asked. Amy has been my friend for a long time. She helped me out during highschool, especially in our junior year, when I was at my lowest. I was always able to tell her anything and the same for her.

“Connor, you're one of my best friends, you know you can tell anything,” she said, placing her hand on my shoulder. I knew that, but what were the chances of her actually believing me.

“You wouldn’t believe me, you’d think I was crazy,” I said, looking away from her.

“Try me, we went through a lot of shit together growing up. If I didn’t think you were crazy then, I wouldn’t think you were crazy now,” she said with a gentle smile. I still wasn’t too sure about telling her, but maybe it would be ok.

“Well take a seat, it's kind of a long story,” I said as I sat down on the floor. Amy followed suit. I told her everything, about the church, about Alex, and about everything that happened within the last hour. I even pulled the black book out of my bag and showed it to her. She didn’t say anything, she just continued to stare at me. Then she finally broke the silence.

“You were right, that does sound crazy,” she said. I knew it.



“It sounds crazy, but I believe you,” she said. She gently touched the cover of black book that was now placed on the floor between us. I let out a long sigh of relief, at least she didn’t think I was crazy.

“That bastard is looking for one more kid, if he is able to get one more his ritual will complete. It was a ritual for a sacrificial offering to some powerful demon that promised him that he would bring his dead wife back if he followed his orders. There has to be more to this ritual that Rocklin has no knowledge of. I’ve had this feeling all night that something big was going to happen. More than anything, I want to prevent this last kid from getting killed like the others.” I said. She looked at me and nodded in agreement.

“So, what were you hoping to find here?” she asked.

“Anything related to the occult really, I have no idea of what I could even do to help Alex,” I said.

“Maybe there is some kind of reverse ritual. You said Rocklin was kind of a demon thing now. Maybe there is some way we can banish him and whatever demon he is taking orders from?” she said reaching for the black book.

“Have you actually looked inside this thing?” she asked.

“I only took a glance at it. Alex stopped me before I could look more,” I said. Amy opened the book up and began flipping through the pages.

“There has to be something in this book that can help us,” she said. I quickly looked at her in surprise.

“Us?” I said. She looked over at me with a smirk.

“Yes, us. I want to help you Connor, plus who would pass up an opportunity to fight ghosts and demons!” she said, completely beaming with excitement. This actually made me feel a whole lot better having someone else with me since Alex is no longer here.

“Thanks Amy, I really owe you one now.” I said.

“That’s what best friends do, we help each other out when things get tough,” she said. Suddenly a loud crash rang through the empty library, it sounded like something or someone shattered the glass doors. I grabbed the book while Amy grabbed my arm and pulled me up off the floor.

“We need to hide!” she whispered. We carefully maneuvered through the rows and rows of bookshelves. There was another set of stairs that led to the back half of the first floor, we almost made it, when we heard hurried footsteps coming from that staircase. We quickly ducked behind the shelves, the footsteps were getting louder and louder. My eyes were finally adjusted to the darkness and I was able to make out a robed figure. Amy tapped my shoulder and motioned me to follow her. The figure continued to walk along the second floor railing as we quietly made our way to the stair behind the shelves. I reached out and grabbed Amy’s shoulder, she looked at me with confusion. I motioned for her to listen. The footsteps went quiet, something felt off.

I didn’t have much time to get a look around us as gunshots were being fired in our direction. Amy and I clutched our heads and made a break for the stairs. The shots continued and I felt one graze my backpack. We made it to the first floor and the front door as broken glass crunched and cracked under our feet. Shit Mrs. Darcey’s going to kill me. I fumbled with grabbing my car keys out of my pocket and quickly unlocked it. The shots continued out in the streets as the robed figure followed us out of the building. When we both got in I shoved the key into the ignition and speed off down the road with the figure fading into the distance in my rear view mirrors as we made my way out of town.

“Amy are you ok?” I asked, still trying to catch my breath.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Who the hell was that?” she said, still regaining her breath as she turned to look out the back window.

“I don’t know, but I have a feeling that that was the new member that Rocklin had mentioned,” I said.

“If that’s the case then he hasn’t found a kid yet,” she said.

“Or he has and he or she is being held at the church or at a secondary location,” I said. I passed the book to Amy so she could continue looking for a way to stop Rocklin. I didn’t really have a place in mind, but I continued to drive until it felt safe to stop. We ended up pulling off onto a stretch of dirt just outside of town.

“Have you found anything?” I asked. She continued skimming the pages and shook her head.

“Maybe? I don’t know, everything is in another language. There are some diagrams and little notes written in english that aren’t very helpful,” she said, flipping through the pages.

“There are notes in there?” I asked looking over her shoulder.

“Yeah, that Rocklin guy probably wrote them,” she said. I took the book from her and she showed me where the notes started. They were all something about blood magic, I flipped through the pages some more. The note stopped about the middle of the book. The next page flipped caught my attention, The was filled with pictures of demons and magic circles. I looked a little closer and noticed that it was a diagram and at the top of the page I saw something small written there. It read “daemonium in exilium” daemonium kind of looked like a fancier spelling for demon and exilium looked like it could be the word exile. This was it, the ritual that can banish Rocklin and his demon boss away.

“I think this is it,” I said.

“You think so?” she asked, studying the diagrams.

“Yeah, this has to be. It looks like we are going to need a few things,” I said. I started the car up again and drove back in the direction of Brimsmouth.

“If we go back into town that guy could show up again,” she said.

“We don’t really have a choice,” I said. We made our first stop at Brimsmouth’s only 24 hour store. BakersGood is a family owned store and has been around since I was little. It was always weird coming here late at night, nobody except the employees were here. I put the book back in my backpack and we made our way inside. In the diagrams it looked like we needed white candles, at least five, salt, a knife, a wooden cross, a metal chalice, bottle of red wine, and an unknown red substance that I can only imagine is blood. Who’s blood? I have no idea. As we gathered all of the supplies, Amy came over with a small book.

“What’s the book for?” I asked.

“It’s a latin dictionary. Most cult related things I know of all involve latin, so I figured that that’s probably the language written in this book.” she shrugged. I took the book and placed it into the basket. I turned to Amy.

“Hey I had a thought, well more like a feeling.” I said. She raised an eyebrow and folded her arms.

“What’s up?” she said.

“Let’s tear the two pages with the diagrams out of the book,” I said.

“Alright,” she said. She took the book and held it open at the pages with the diagrams so I could tear them out. Once they were out I folded them up and stuck them in my back pocket. We brought our items to the only open register that was being manned by a moody looking teen wearing a beanie, had dyed hair and way too many face piercings. As he took the stuff out of the basket, he looked at us with an eyebrow raised.

“You two planning on summoning Satan or something?” he said in a very monotone voice. We nervously looked at him and choked out a laugh. He stared at us a moment longer and continued to ring up our stuff. He told us our total, we paid and left in a hurry. As we walked back to the car, the robed figure from the library appeared from the other side of the car. Instinctively I put myself between him and Amy in an attempt to shield her from his attacks.

“Who are you?” I called out.

“You’re in way over your head Hammond, hand over the book and I might just spare you both,” he said. His voice sounded familiar, his voice was deep and gruff sounding. He almost sounded like the Chief. That’s when it hit me.

“Now I know why you sound so familiar, it’s you isn’t it Chief,” I said slowly backing away. Amy followed suit. The man chuckled then removed his hood to reveal his face.

“You’re pretty smart, Hammond. Though I was surprised when I noticed you eavesdropping on me this afternoon and when you went through the station’s documents. I’m honestly surprised you found that old case file,” he said with a grin that was very foreign for the Chief.

“Why are you doing this Chief Hawkins?” she said.

“Harper, you wouldn’t understand in fact neither of you would.” he said. He pulled his gun from its holster and pointed straight at me. Shit my mind was racing along with my heart, I had to think fast or we were both dead. Hawkins took another step forward and cocked his gun.

"I'm only going to ask you one more time Hammond, hand over the book." he said. I had to think of something, then I had a thought about the book. I reached into my backpack and pulled out the book.

"Ok Hawkins, I'll give it back only if you answer three questions." I said raising a hand and the book out in front of me. Hawkins chuckled and lowered his gun.

"I'm all ears Hammond," he smirked. I wasn't expecting that kind of response.

"First question, What did Rocklin offer you?" I asked. The grin on his face began to fade.

"I was married once; we had two kids, both girls. One night I came home drunk off my ass after having left the house in a fit of rage from an argument I had with my wife. My wife woke up when she heard me making a racket in the kitchen. We had another spat and she left me that same night, leaving me with our two little girls. I don't know how I managed to sleep but I felt like shit, from the intense hangover and from how I let last night happen. Sure we fought quite a bit, but I loved her more than anything. I let her walk away from me when I should have apologized and admitted that I was in the wrong. Not just from that fight, but for everyone we ever had. It was about six in the morning, the girls were still asleep when I got a phone call from the hospital. My wife was killed in a hit run, and the last thing I ever did with her was fight. I had to explain to my little girls why their mom wasn't coming back home ever and how it was my fault she left. We had her funeral and in the following months I fell into a state of alcohol addiction that caused my wife's sister to come and take my girls from me."

"I knew in my heart that it was for the best, I had hit rock bottom. Nothing was going to bring my wife or my girls back. One day I hit an all time low, I drove out of town and left my car on the side of the highway. I wandered far into the woods with nothing but a gun in my pocket. As I wandered I found the old Brimsmouth Church, it was in a sorry state just like I was. I opened the doors and walked to the fold of that old sanctuary and got down on my knees in front of the old decaying cross on the wall. I thought to myself that this was the perfect place to end it all. No one would be able to find me, if they even wanted to. I was the police chief back then and no one really cared if I was around or not. So I felt it was better this way, I took the gun from my pocket and aimed it at my head. I cocked and hesitated for a moment, and in that moment I heard his voice."

"He said that it would be a waste to end a life such as mine. He introduced himself as Pastor Rocklin. Then he told me to speak my mind, and so I did. I told him everything, he smiled at me and he said he knew how I was feeling and that he himself had felt that same way when he was alive. He told me he knew of a way to bring my wife since he

was wanting the same thing. All I had to do was bring him four kids and he would bring her back. I would have my wife back, I would be able to apologize and I could get my kids back. My family would be with me again. However that was over twenty something years ago, he had me wait until the time was right and that time is finally here.” he said with a smile growing on his face.

He lost his wife just like Rocklin did, that's how he got him to join him. Rocklin needed four more kids and the ritual required each kid's soul to be bound with a member of his cult. That meant three other people were involved as well.

“Alright, second question. Who were the other three members?” I asked.

“Hmm I guess you read up on how this little ritual works. Well, you get Richard Kramer, Pete Sumtner, and Jessica Cross. They all had a similar story that was going to end in suicide in that old church.” he said chuckling as he looked up towards the night sky. Hawkins then looked back at me.

“Last question Hammond,” he said.

“Last question, where is the kid that you kidnapped?” I said.

“She's just fine. She's in a safe place,” he said smiling. He began walking towards us, and Amy and I moved away from him.

“Alright Hammond, that was your last question. Now hand it over,” he demanded raising his gun to us one more time. I nodded my head and slowly moved toward him. I held out the book and he snatched from my hands. While his attention was fixed on the book, I reached out and held the hand that held the gun. I gripped his wrist tight and pulled him into a solid punch to the face. He dropped the book and stumbled back. I had managed to pull the gun out of his hand, but dropped it in the process. As he reached to touch his swelling cheek, he flashed me a wicked smile.

“You shouldn't have done that,” he said. He then charged at me, I turned to run and see where Amy ended up. In that moment he caught up to me and tackled me to the ground. He tried to pin me down, but I continued to struggle. I managed to get him off me and stand back up. The sound of a car engine filled the area and as Hawkins stood back up, a car from behind plowed right into him. It took a second for me to process the fact that it was my car that just ran over Hawkins and that Amy was behind the wheel. I reached for my back pocket and realized that during the initial confrontation she managed to quietly steal my keys. She got from the car and ran over to me. She grabbed me and brought me into a tight hug. That caught me off guard.

“CONNOR, OH MY GOD ARE YOU OK?” she said in a panicked tone. The adrenaline was still kicking in, she was shaking and she sounded like she was going to cry. For what? I have no idea, maybe because our boss had just tried to kill the both of us or the fact that she just ran over our boss. Either way this was over, but we still had a long night ahead of us.

## Chapter Six

We drove down the highway and after a few miles out I pulled over and parked. Really wishing I had my flashlight now, the woods were almost pitch black. Our cell phones weren't a good source of light but it was all we had. Suddenly I heard a thud behind me and a long string of cursing. Amy was on the ground trying to find where she dropped her phone when she tripped. She eventually found it and I extended my hand to her, she took and never let go as we ventured further into the pitch black woods. We finally arrived at the old church, Amy was in awe just like I was when I found it this morning. As we got close the faint sound of a little girl crying could be here from inside that church. A red light began to fill the church, and the earth began to tremble under our feet. It was starting, we raced to the door. We pulled on the handles as hard as we could, but it wouldn't budge. It was sealed shut. A wicked laughter began to ring throughout the church and into the church yard. How could the ritual be happening Rocklin was already dead and unable to perform it and Hawkins is dead as well. There was a fifth party involved, but who?

I drove my entire body weight into the doors, after a few tries I managed to unseal the doors. The screams of the little girl grew louder as she tried her hardest to break free from her captures.

"LET HER GO!" I shouted. I ran towards the new robed figure, but was stopped by one of Rocklin's black tendrils. He hit me hard and set me flying towards the door. Amy clutching the book ran over to me. Suddenly many black tendrils came flying towards her, they struck her arm and she dropped the book. The tendrils then wrapped themselves around the book and slowly made their way back to Rocklin. I struggled to get back up after that blow, but I needed to get to Amy to make sure she was ok.

"HAHAHA, Thank you my boy for returning my book to me. It would have been quite difficult to perform this ritual without it," he said. He then opened the book and flipped through the pages until he reached the desired page.

"You may have killed my most loyal follower, but at least I had another to spare." he said gesturing to the robed figure in front of him. The man did not move, he waited holding the knife in his hand waiting for orders to continue.

"I know you feed this guy bullshit about helping him, you and I both know that you're not going to. So let them both go," I said, as I finally reached the Rocklin smile as he continued to read through the book.



“What will you do if I refuse to do as you asked Connor? Hehehe, will kill me? That would be quite a waste of energy considering I’m already dead,” he said mockingly. He motioned for his follower to continue on. The robed man grabbed ahold of the girl who once again began to scream. He turned her to have her back to him and she was now facing me and Amy. The little girl looked at both us and silently begged for us to save her. I managed to get back on my feet. The man slowly raised his knife to her neck and I tried to run over to her as fast as I could. I just wasn’t quick enough, the man sliced through her neck and she fell over lifeless onto the floor. The sound on iron chains caught my attention, the man was already chained to her and all he had left was to take his own life to complete this ritual. The man then raised the knife to his own neck.

“Wait! You don’t have to do this!” I said. The man remained silent, but stopped his movement. I needed to try and talk him out of this.

“Think about it, Rocklin promised to help you get something back that you lost. It doesn’t make sense that in order to get that back that you need to take your own life.” I said. The man continued to remain silent. Was he under some sort of spell? Hawkins was free to speak as he wanted, so why can’t he? The man raised and pressed the knife to his throat. Just before he committed to his next move he finally spoke.

“You wouldn’t understand,” he said in a very monotone voice. It was almost like he was in a trance. Then it dawned on me, his voice sounded familiar. Very familiar. In that instant the deed was done, the man sliced through his own throat and collapsed onto the floor. I raced over to him and knelt beside his body. I carefully removed the hood, now I knew why his voice sounded so familiar. He was my father. I didn’t know whether I should have been angry, sad, or happy that he was dead. Suddenly the ground began to shake and Rocklin began to cackle loudly.

“It’s finally complete, after all these years of waiting,” He proclaimed. The floor boards began to splinter and crack beneath me. I backed up as quickly as I could, the floor was about to open underneath my father’s and girl’s bodies. I needed to grab them before they fell in, but I would only be able to grab one of them. Then I heard Amy run up behind me, she grabbed the little girl’s arm and I grabbed my father’s. We pulled the both away from the hole that was forming. Red light was emitting from the large hole and the smell of ash and brimstone filled the room. Outside, I could hear the wind picking up and the trees cracking against the wind strength. A loud, booming laughter rang out and the ground began to shake. Black tendrils came seeping out of the hole as a large creature emerged. The creature had a muscular build and was covered in black fur. It had large black horns that curled like a ram’s horns and long clawed hands. Its face was that of a dog with a very long snout and sharp fangs were protruding out of its

mouth. The creature had four sets of eyes, each set glowing a different color. The bottom set of eyes which were the largest were green, the second set were blue, The third were purple and the fourth which were the smallest were gold.

Rocklin bowed to the disgusting beast, but the beast's attention was focused on me. It opened its mouth and spoke.

"I am Eztrixs, Thief of light and Bringer of Insanity. For centuries I have waited for the day that I may walk this plane and conquer it. That day is now," He said. Ok I was ready for dealing with a crazy ghost of a priest, but I was not ready for dealing with a huge dog looking demon with eight eyes and ram horns. The beast placed his hands on the ground on either side of me and lowered himself to face me.

"I sense, strong and mixed emotions coming from you boy. Tell me are you feeling sorrow from the loss of your father or this little child. Or are you feeling hopelessness and despair for you and all the other mortals on this plane will become my slaves," he said. I was completely frozen in place, I couldn't speak. I felt a few tears fall down my cheeks. I was able to shift my eyes to see how Amy was fairing, she was the same as I was. Tears fell from her eyes and she was frozen in fear. Eztrixs rose and roared out with laughter, with his eyes off us we felt ourselves regain the ability to move and speak. Amy dropped the girl's arm and pulled at my arm.

"We need to go, now!" she cried. Rocklin called out Eztrixs, praising him. Eztrix turned to him.

"Ah, yes. My most devout follower, I shall give you your reward as promised." he said as a wicked smile spread across his face. Eztrix reached out and grabbed Rocklin. He dropped the book as he was lifted into the air. Eztrix's grip on Rocklin began to tighten and Rocklin's demonic spiritual form began to flicker and crack.

"Great Eztrix! Why! I have done what you asked of me!" he cried out.

"Foolish priest, did you really think that a demon such as I could be trusted?" he roared. His grip tightened even more. Rocklin cried out in pain.

"It's time I take back the power I lent you," he said. Rocklin form began to wither away, he looked back at the old cross on the wall with a sad smile.

"My love this looks to be the end for me. I'm sorry, but it looks like we will never be together again. Goodbye, my dear Eveyln." he said in a whisper. Rocklin form began to glow bright red as he was absorbed into Eztrix's body. Eztrix chuckled and faced us

once more. He roared loudly causing the building to shake and crumble, Amy pulled at my arm. I looked down at my father and released his arm. We made a break for the door then I stopped remembering the book. There was no going back for it as the wooden beams from the ceiling fell and began burying the book and the bodies. We escaped just as the building collapsed and Eztrix emerged from the rubble. He sprouted a large pair of black wings and took off into the air. He was heading straight for Brimsmouth.

“We need to get back to town,” she said heading in the direction of the car. I remained in that spot. She stopped and looked back when she noticed that I wasn’t following her. Amy walked back over to me and placed her hand on my shoulder.

“Connor?” she said.

“I...I couldn’t save them...I failed,” I said, dropping to my knees. Then Alex began to fill my head.

“I let you down too, I’m so sorry Alex.” I whispered. Amy knelt down next to me.

“We can still save him Connor,” she said. I reached into my back pocket and pulled the torn pages out. I opened the folded pages.

“Your right, I owe it Alex and all the kids that died to bring that monster here to try and stop him,” I said. Amy stood back up and extended her hand.

“Well what are you waiting for,” she said. I took her hand, and we took off back towards my car.

## Chapter Seven

As we got closer to town the night sky was filled with an eerie green glow that got brighter the closer we got. Screams from the Brimsmouth residents rang throughout the streets. Eztrix was flying high above the town as he summoned shadow demons of all sizes to lay waste to Brimsmouth. Stopped just before the welcome sign quickly turned the headlights off.

“Ok, we need to get into town unseen, Eztrix is probably waiting for us to show up and confront him. I bet for the ritual to work we need to be as close to him as we can get,” I said.

“There are all sorts of demons running around, how are we supposed to sneak in?” she asked.

“Our best shot of getting this to work is performing this in the park, since it’s in the center of town. If we stick mostly to the edge of town, we can probably go around him since Brimsmouth is kind of shaped like a square.” I said. She nodded and we quietly got out of the car. Before we took off, I checked my bag one last time to make sure we had everything we needed for the ritual. Amy on the way to the church had already looked up how to read this spell using that dictionary we got early. I really hope we get it right. We made our way to the park using the buildings as cover, at least we didn’t have to worry much about our footsteps since there were so many people screaming. The shadow demons were everywhere capturing any human they came across. They were throwing them all into these weird floating cages made of rock and metal. The children however were being lined up and shackled together. They were being led to the park at the center of town.

“What do you think they are going to do with them?” she said.

“I don’t know, but whatever it is. It can’t be good,” I said. After a while we finally made it to the park at the same time the line of kids were showing. Eztrix had floated back down and was smiling at the kids. He chuckled as he began licking his lips, he was planning on eating them. I took my backpack off and set it down on the ground, I dumped out the contents of my bag and began setting up the ritual. In the diagram it looked like the caster had to create a circle using the salt and stand inside of it. Around the circle were the lit candles. The wooden cross was staked into the ground in front of me, and I filled the metal chalice with the wine I placed the chalice on the ground and reached for the knife. In the last diagram it showed the caster cutting into his palm and allowing a good amount of their blood to fall into the chalice. I put the knife to my palm and began to

slowly push the blade into my skin. As soon as the blood began to pool out, Eztrix turned to us and roared. He was definitely on to us now.

“You fools think you can stop me! You will be dead before you can even utter the first word to that silly incantation,” He roared. He then called upon his minions and set their attacks on us.

“CONNOR, START READING!” She shouted as stood up beside me. As I began to read the spell one shadow demon lashed out, then disappeared in a puff of smoke. Amy had the container of salt and was throwing them at the demons. I looked at her with confusion.

“I've seen a lot of supernatural themed movies, they use salt for just about everything!” she said as she continued to throw more salt. I looked back at the page with the spell and began to read again.

“Ad quos eieci te daemonium fornacis ignis planis ad inferos.”

“Ut aditus aperiam remittimus hoc planum redire rursus invocavi!”

Suddenly the blood and wine mixture began to glow inside the metal chalice as white tendrils shot out from it and ensnared Eztrix. He thrashed and struggled as the tendrils began to pull him in. The shadow demons began to disappear one by one, the shackles on the kids and the cages that held the other town resident began to disappear as well.

“How is this possible!” he roared.

“Because you fucked with the wrong town!” I shouted. Eztrix roared as he got pulled closer to the chalice. Light grew brighter and Eztrix cried out once more as he was pulled into the light of the liquid and disappeared leaving the chalice completely empty. The town of Brimsmouth cried out in joy for being set free. Where Eztrix once stood twelve little blue lights appeared and formed the twelve children that had been sacrificed to Eztrix. All the kids that were brought to the park recognized their three friends that went missing earlier this month and were surprised to see the fourth one with them who was taken tonight. The other eight were the boys that Rocklin took into his church, I looked around and noticed that one was missing. I didn't see Alex with the rest of them, but then I felt a familiar cold breath on my neck. I turned around and there he was, he was smiling so brightly it was almost blinding.

“You did it Connor! You set us all free,” he said.

“Well it wasn’t just me, I had help.” I said, gesturing to Amy. She stepped forward and introduced herself.

“It’s nice to finally meet you Alex,” she said. Alex smiled back at her.

“Thank you Amy, for helping Connor. When I left I was so worried that he wouldn’t be able to handle all of this on his own.” he said.

“So what happens now?” I said. Alex looked over at the other children and smiled sadly.

“Now we are all free, The others for decades were trapped inside of Eztrix suffering and I am no longer tied to the church. We can finally rest,” he said as he looked up at the sky that was filled with the horrors of hell and now shows the stars and moon.

“Thank you Connor, for everything.” he said. Then all twelve of the kids began to glow, they all said their goodbyes and faded into the night sky as their joyful laughter rang throughout the park.

After that night, life went on. My mom and I sold the old house since my father had passed. She declined to move into a new home with me, so I helped her get a small place for herself. I could never tell her how he really passed, so I told her that the next day after he was sent to the jail we found that he committed suicide. Which honestly wasn’t too far from the truth. I left the station and attended a community college to get an associates degree in writing. Amy and I started dating during that time and she moved in with me to help while I went to school. I got the degree and went on to write my first book. It was about Alex’s story and the events that took place in Brimsmouth, it had been 3 years since that night and this book was a huge success. I still think about Alex from time to time, even though we spent a brief time together. It was a time that I don’t think I could ever forget.