

Whispers Out of the Darkness

I remember that day better than anything else in my whole life.

The trees in the forest were huge, towering high above our heads, and even at the edge they were so dense that I couldn't see more than three feet ahead in most places. The place looked dark and sinister. So of course, like any boy would, I suggested that we go inside and explore.

"Sure," Ross agreed, and that was how it all began.

Birdsongs filled the air as we entered the woods, and it seemed safe for now. I always loved hiking through the woods. Having no distinct path to follow, we had a tendency to veer off to the left.

Spiders seemed to like the western edge of the forest, and many of them had chosen to make their homes between the trees. More than once I stumbled through an almost invisible web, the sticky silk clinging to my hair and face, and even getting in my mouth. It tasted disgusting, like dirty hair drowned in hairspray. Every time it happened I flailed my arms around like a madman trying to get the nasty stuff off. Ross laughed at me, but he never seemed to get caught; he had a better eye for avoiding the webs than I did.

We went on for maybe an hour before we came to a wall of trees and bushes blocking our path. Ross wanted to hack our way through, but for once I had no desire to cross the line. The wall was so thick it seemed almost artificial, like something meant to keep us out. It was eerie, and I didn't like it. But in the end my desire not to look foolish overpowered my common sense and I agreed. The rough, thorny branches refused to give way until Ross drew his Bowie knife and slashed them apart. The knife was as big as a dagger, and I was glad Ross had it with him now.

After shoving our way through the thicket we saw a cottage, old and beautiful. It was made of polished logs, and had a painted white roof. It was quite a sight, and we moved closer for a better look. A fence, hardly two feet high, was not enough to bar our entrance. With a chuckle we hopped on over.

Ross, suddenly becoming clumsy, didn't quite make it. His foot caught the top of the fence and part of it collapsed with a thud.

"Oops," he said sheepishly.

I shook my head and continued onto the porch. As soon as I set foot on the stairs they broke under my weight with a loud crack. The wood didn't appear to be rotten, so I bent down and sniffed. My nose screamed for mercy; it was dry-rotted, and very moldy. I sneezed and quickly stood up, making sure to test my weight carefully on the other steps till I reached the porch. Ross did likewise, and we soon reached the door.

It creaked open, obviously never oiled. The sound seemed deafening in the quiet woods, but we went on anyway. The smell of burning wood was the

first thing we noticed when we got inside, but there were no other signs of life. I went to the fireplace and put my hands over the flames to warm them.

There was no furniture at all in the room, and the place looked abandoned. Someone had to have been here recently to light the fire, but who could it have been? I looked at Ross, and saw the uneasiness on his face. I fully shared the feeling but refused to allow it to take hold, or at least to show it. I'd be a man and hold out. . . at least until Ross fell apart.

Soft footfalls came from behind us and we whirled around.

A man, dressed in black robes with a white sash and sandals, had just come out of the hall and was slowly moving our way. I held my breath and willed my head to turn toward Ross but I couldn't do it. Somehow my eyes could not turn from the man.

He walked ever closer, his head always pointed down. A dark hood was drawn down low over his head, hiding his face. We wanted to run for the door, but somehow we couldn't.

The man did not look up until he was hunched over the fire. Then his head turned ever so slowly our way and gazed right into my face. His eyes were blue and beautiful, though I was overwhelmed with unreasonable fear at the sight of them.

He lifted his hands to his hood and let it fall gently back. His hair was flaxen blond, cut neatly short, and his features were sharp and well-defined. He didn't say a word, only stared silently at us without even a hint of surprise or confusion. I found my voice after a time.

"Who...who are you?" I asked in fear.

His eyes sparkled and a sly smile came to his lips. "Who am I? I am afraid that I cannot tell you this thing," he said. He turned back toward the fire and prodded it, sending sparks up the chimney.

"What I *am* at liberty to reveal and what I *shall* tell you is this. I am called Abaddon," he paused, turning around slowly. His eyebrows rose and his eyes grew wider, "or, The Destroyer."

My blood ran cold and my breath nearly stopped, though I still knew no reason yet to be so afraid. *The Destroyer?*

At our hesitation Abaddon spoke again, "I must go now."

Ross coughed and hesitantly said, "Yeah...us too...we a...we gotta go."

Just as we turned to leave Abaddon cried out,

"Be still! The night is near, so come hither. . . I must go," he said.

To my horror, Ross obeyed and turned to follow him. My hand was already closed on the doorknob. Dare I open it? Could I run to safety while my best friend remained in the hands of the Destroyer? I let my hand drop to my side. No...I wouldn't leave him.

I hurried after them, unsure of why I was in such a rush to enter death's clutches.

Now far ahead of me, Abaddon and Ross seemed small in comparison to the long corridor. The hallway stretched so far into the distance that I couldn't

see the end of it. The walls were bare of any design or decoration. They were nothing but plain rough wood.

But just inside the hall to my right there *was* something to break the monotonous nothingness of the walls. It was only a clock, made of the same wood as the house itself and built into the wall, but I glanced at it nevertheless. The time showed just after four in the morning. I gasped in shock. Four AM! It was still light when we had entered the forest.

Not far past the clock there was a window and the skies proved the clock's accuracy. It was dark as pitch.

Time had passed swiftly.

I finally caught up to Ross, though Abaddon himself loomed still farther ahead, his dark robes blending into the dusky walls of the cabin.

"Where do you think we're going?" Ross whispered into my ear.

I looked at him, worry lining both our faces.

"I don't know," I whispered back, but the Destroyer heard me.

"Soon, very soon," came his voice down the hall. "Where we are going shall come to light very soon indeed."

In spite of my fear I had to chuckle. What did 'soon' mean? If we'd already been in the cabin for hours, who could say that 'soon' to him wouldn't really be three days?

Abaddon stopped, and before I realized it I almost ran into him. His head did not turn, however. Instead, his gaze remained focused on a door in front of him, a door that led out into what I assumed would be the forest.

Ross elbowed me quietly. "Is this it?"

"This is where I was going," answered Abaddon softly.

The man suddenly whirled around and grabbed both of our wrists with a crushing grasp. His smile became broader than ever.

"You are to come with me, to where I am going."

He jerked us, none too gently, and kicked open the wooden door with his foot. The softly blowing wind gave me reason to believe that we were outside, for all was black.

Abaddon hurled Ross and me to the ground, and I screamed although I couldn't hear myself. I felt Ross's body heave next to me as he too screamed silently for help, but no answer came. I could hear nothing at all.

Abaddon, in his black robes, disappeared into the night though we could still hear his voice, the only sound in the blackness.

"The darkness has come, and you shall both be destroyed," he said.

Flames sprang up all around me, black flames that gave no light. But I felt their heat and clung tightly to Ross in terror.

"Listen to the voice, and you may yet be saved. Ignore it and you shall be lost," the voice of Abaddon declared out of the darkness.

And then we were alone.

Only then was I able to hear sounds again, and the eerie silence ended. The fire crackled and popped all around us, but it didn't seem to be spreading. Not yet.

"What are we going to do?" Ross asked me.

"Listen for the voice," I said, with a tone that was full of a confidence that I did not feel.

"What does that even mean? How are we supposed to listen to a voice if we don't know what it sounds like?" Ross huffed.

I had no answer for that. I cried out to God, desperately searching for a solution. I looked in the direction I thought was up and saw nothing but darkness, heard nothing but the fire and our breathing.

God, I prayed, we're lost. I don't know what's happening to me. Show me You're here, and help us I pray.

The flames crackled again and I heard a sound like soft wind whistling through the trees. Ross rolled off of me and struggled to sit up.

I heard the soft sound again.

"Do you hear that?" I asked.

Ross's heavy breathing evened out and he took a deep breath.

"Hear what?"

The fire went on crackling and I thought I could make out one word from the wind-like sound. I thought I had heard the word "stars". But that didn't make any sense; I'd already looked and there weren't any stars.

"I think I hear the voice. Focus on the fire," I told him.

Ross took one last breath and I think he might have held it. I did the same and focused intensely on the crackling fire. This time the words were clear.

"You are not alone; look to the stars. When darkness comes I will always light the night. Look to the stars, for you are not alone."

I heard Ross exhale and I thought I *saw* him looking up. Could it be? My head shot up, and sure enough, a small speck of light twinkled in the sky.

My breathing sped up in awe; was that voice a direct answer to prayer? Had God spoken to us? And how had Abaddon known it would happen?

"Hey," Ross slapped my shoulder, "Check it out. Look at the star!"

The fire felt hotter and closer now, but I lifted my eyes anyway. The star seemed bigger when I looked this time.

Rapidly it grew larger and larger. It grew to the size of a golf ball, then a baseball. Ross gripped my forearm.

I, though, felt no more fear. In just moments the star exploded in light, dazzling me with its brilliance.

It was the brightest and most glorious sight I have ever beheld, and when it had subsided I could see the sunrise peeking up from the horizon.

The fire had disappeared, and the grass around us was un-singed, as if it had never been aflame.

The door to the cottage opened, and Ross and I scrambled to our feet. Abaddon peacefully walked out, but we were on our guard now. He halted just three feet away, and held out his hands.

“You have been revealed to in a way many can only dream of. You have heard whispers out of the dark, and seen the light of day for its true magnificence.” He gazed straight at me, light seeming to pour from his bright blue irises.

“Your prayers have been answered, and you have been delivered from fear and death,” he said. He took our hands, and strangely enough we didn’t stop him now.

“Stand tall now and proclaim what you have seen. Speak in whispered roars. Be cunning as serpents and gentle as doves.”

He smiled, arousing a smile in each of us. I no longer distrusted this man, for surely he was a servant of God who had destroyed my fear.

“You have been delivered.”