

The Breaking Dawn

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FIRST EDITION

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To my father and mother, R.C. Veirs, Jr. and Joy Veirs, with great appreciation. Because of the way they raised the children in our family, this book was not only possible, but eventual. Their inspiration throughout my youth taught me that with God all things are possible.

Dad, I hope you can look down from heaven and are proud of this work—you surely are the leader of our band.

Mom, thanks for the prodding, questioning, love, and encouragement—I particularly enjoy our arguments.

Also to my wife, Bev. Thanks for being you. I couldn't have done it without you, babe. Until the day after tomorrow.

*Ask, and it shall be given
to you; seek, and you shall
find; knock, and it shall be
opened to you.*

*For everyone who asks
receives, and he who seeks
finds, and to him who knocks
it shall be opened.*

—Matthew 7:7–8 ASV

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And last, but never least—God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—thanks for being my best friend. You have taught me so much about love and given me so many blessings, that the highest honor this planet could give me would be for anyone to say, “There's a man of God.” I dream of the time when You will say to me, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

ONE

The van was a little warm as Patrick traveled Interstate 57 to Alkridge. The dotted lines on the highway had started becoming solid and the trees along the deserted roadway were a blur. The moonless night engulfed all but the road directly ahead of the little import, where twin headlights cast illumination. The blackness gave way momentarily to the van's excursion, possessively closing again as the van sped its way as water does about a swimmer, leaving no sign of its passage.

His eyelids heavy, succumbing to the calls of the night, Patrick shifted in his seat to ward off the weariness, glancing quickly over his family. The kids were asleep, two little girls and a sixteen-year-old boy. His wife, Tamara, on the seat beside him, had fallen asleep, briefly napping as she could in the most uncomfortable looking positions to Patrick. Her long black hair fell softly across her shoulders, nearly to the seat, with part draped over a raised knee. Nearly Patrick's own 5'9" height, Tami contorted herself without trouble to fit the small space. Against his objections, Tami had pulled her seat all the way forward to allow more room for the kids.

The back of the van was loaded with Christmas presents they were taking to Alkridge, where once a year his family and friends got together to enjoy the holiday and each other's fellowship. He smiled, anticipating the good times down the road a few hours. Patrick lit his pipe, cracked his window, turned down the heat, and began to sing along with the tape playing on the stereo of the van as their trek continued. His slightly balding head bobbed to the beat.

Unknown and unseen, there were several dark forms inside the van. Some clung to Patrick, some to Tami, and some to their oldest boy, David, while others were strewn about the van in a haphazard fashion. If the travelers could have seen them, they would have been appalled at their appearance. Their black, gnarled fingers held tightly to Patrick, long curved claws sinking deeply into his body. Smaller versions flitted around on bat-like wings shouting curses and obscenities. Amidst this, the undiscerned parasites whispered passionate gossip in his ears. This scene was mirrored about Tami, while David had the greatest concentration of all.

The large forms eyed the young children hungrily, but kept their distance because of two guardians, riding on the roof of the van. These two, looking very much like large men, wore tennis shoes and long-sleeved shirts though the outside temperature was just above freezing. The larger of the two men sitting atop the import turned to the other with a grin that threatened to engulf his face.

The infectiousness of the other man's smile caused Shil to grin as he spoke, "You've been waiting a long time for this, haven't you, Tashk?"

"Nearly thirty-five years," Tashk agreed.

Strapped to his back, Tashk carried a sword held in its scabbard, while the smaller Shil carried a rapier, more graceful, and better suited to his thinner frame.

"It's your turn, Shil," Tashk said.

The smaller man shrugged his shoulders, then turned around from his seated position and poked his head through the roof of the van. He observed the dark forms clutching Patrick and the others to make sure they had held their places and were not trying to get to the children, for one of their responsibilities was to protect these young ones. The time would come later, when the protection was lifted, but now, they were still under that age. Shil noticed that one of the ugly creatures had scooted

closer to the four-year-old, Sara. With a stern look and a wag of his finger, Shil coerced the thing to get back into its area.

With red eyes whirling, the thing spat at Shil, “But she was calling me over! I have a right, you know!”

Shil spoke very matter-of-factly. “Not yet, you don’t. It will be a few years yet before you are granted that authority. The only thing you are permitted to do right now is affect their dreams occasionally—and only if they call you.” Shil met the creature’s angry glare with a stern one of his own that he held while pulling himself back into a seated position beside Tashk, who looked at his with raised eyebrows. “It was Fear, who else?” Shil answered his unspoken question.

Tashk shook his head slowly with a wry grin and muttered, “That little guy is always trying something.” Shil nodded his head in agreement.

(1)

Ted Grainger was busily loading his car on the cold winter evening, yelling at his kids and wife to hurry up, but it seemed that no one was responding. He finished putting the packages in the trunk of his LTD and turned to go back into the house. The cold north wind chilled him to the bone as a frigid gust billowed through his body. Half-freezing, Ted grabbed at his unzipped coat, catching the sides and pulling them about his torso while turning away from the direction of his discomfort. With shaking hands and stiff fingers, Ted repeatedly tried to zip his jacket without success. Making loose fists, he brought them to his chapped lips as he hunched over, blowing warmth over them. Closing his wind-teared eyes, he blew again. Controlling his shivering somewhat, he slid his hands down and tried twice more before achieving his goal. Quickly jamming his fists into his pockets, he shuddered a sigh of relief.

Ted worked up his nerve to face the brisk wind, shut his eyes tightly once and turned around, catching the brunt of a fresh gust right in the face. Muttering to himself about penguins overrunning the neighborhood soon, he lowered his head and forged through a current of air trying to turn him into an icicle. About halfway to the house, that same wind launched a missile. An empty plastic trash bag zeroed in on Ted. In his head-down position, he only caught a glimpse out of the corner of his right eye. Ted started, throwing up his arms to shield himself and ducking down, trying to spread his legs into a wider stance. The grass, unfortunately, had a thin covering of frost and Ted's left foot slipped out from under him, sending him unceremoniously to the ground. From his semi-prone position, Ted watched as the garbage bag lifted over him in the wind to a height well over ten feet, and slowly sank back down to the cold ground. Then it continued skittering along to finally come to a halt, ensnared in a hedge further down the street. Ted reviewed the path of the bag with a puzzled look on his face. *It should have hit me*, he thought, temporarily forgetting the bleakness of his surroundings. It was almost as if the bag had been lifted by *something*.

The unseen man walking beside Ted moved quickly around him when he saw the bag heading straight for his charge. Positioning himself between Ted and the oncoming danger, the man swept his arm upward, sending the bag flying in an upward arc clearing Ted's head by several feet. The big man viewed Ted sprawled on the ground and saw that only his pride was hurt, then turned to look in the direction from which the bag had come. He saw a dark form displaying what might have been a smile on its face, its bared fangs gleaming despite the wan light. The creature emitted a sound which might have been a chuckle from the leathery looking skull of a face, its deep red eyes glowing with amusement at the big man from their sunken sockets.

“Have a care, Mischief!” the large man bellowed, as he shook a huge finger at the retreating, mocking form. “This man is under the care of B’nil!” B’nil turned back to see Ted regaining his feet and watched him carefully as they made their way back into the house.

Ted entered his house, brushing himself off, unzipping but not removing his coat, and walked into the kitchen. His wife, Penny, offered a steaming cup of coffee that Ted took gratefully. She looked at Ted’s lean frame, noticing the reddened face and hands. Fogged glasses pulled down on his nose like a nutty professor, his appearance caused Penny to smile. Ted’s chapped lips cracked as he returned her smile, causing him to bring the back of his right hand up and press a newly opened wound. As he lowered his hand back to the warmth of the coffee cup, a trace of blood was left.

“A little cool outside, babe?” she teased, her brown eyes sparkling as she observed the red stain on his hand.

“Oooohhh!!! You can say that again,” replied Ted as he warmed his hands on the heat of the coffee cup. “And the wind’s coming up, which means everything is flying around, trying to attack you,” he added, remembering the curious flight of the plastic bag that had planted him on his behind. After he had taken a few sips of coffee, his cheeks lost some of their redness. He smiled gratefully at Penny. “I think everything is about loaded; have you got any more in here?”

Leaning in a relaxed position, using the counter to support her back, she shook her head. “No, you’ve taken everything out.” Penny left the room touching her husband’s arm as she passed and smiled at the picture he presented: steam rising around a contented face, glasses perched on the end of his nose, and his eyes closed, to call their kids to come on because they were ready to leave. Hearing their usual objections and reassurances that they would be right there, Ted smiled.

(2)

There was nothing unusual about the house, certainly nothing that could lead anyone to forecast the incredible events that would occur. From the outside, it looked like most of the other houses on that street in the little town of Alkridge. It was old, but the new owners had been slowly fixing it up as they had the money and time.

It was a two-story house with a full basement, made of cinder block and wood with high, arched ceilings. The backyard was a project under construction. Adjoining the house was a small fenced-in area containing a wading pool that had been converted into a fish pond. Surrounding the pond was a deck of large, cut flagstone tiles extending to the house and toward the back fence. Between the house and the pond stood an old oak tree which gave a nice shade area over the fenced-in yard. To the right of the house was a detached single-car garage on the outside of the fence. Further back, standing like soldiers on watch around the perimeter were fence posts unencumbered by slatting or fence boards, their lonely stations a promise of what was to come—in more than one way.

In front of the house was a fair-sized yard with a walkway on the right leading to the steps of the front porch. On the porch itself hung an old wooden swing lending character to the house. The house numbers were unfortunately painted only one shade lighter than the house itself, making them hard to read in daylight, and impossible at night. The house was marked by a huge elm tree that cast shade over the entire front yard. Hanging just to the left of the numbers on the house itself, was a nicely carved nameplate with raised white letters that read BREWSTER standing out clearly from the dark beige of the house. It was a magnificent old structure, constructed in a time when there was care in craftsmanship, allowing the 75-year-old building to remain intact.