

EVIL'S ENEMY

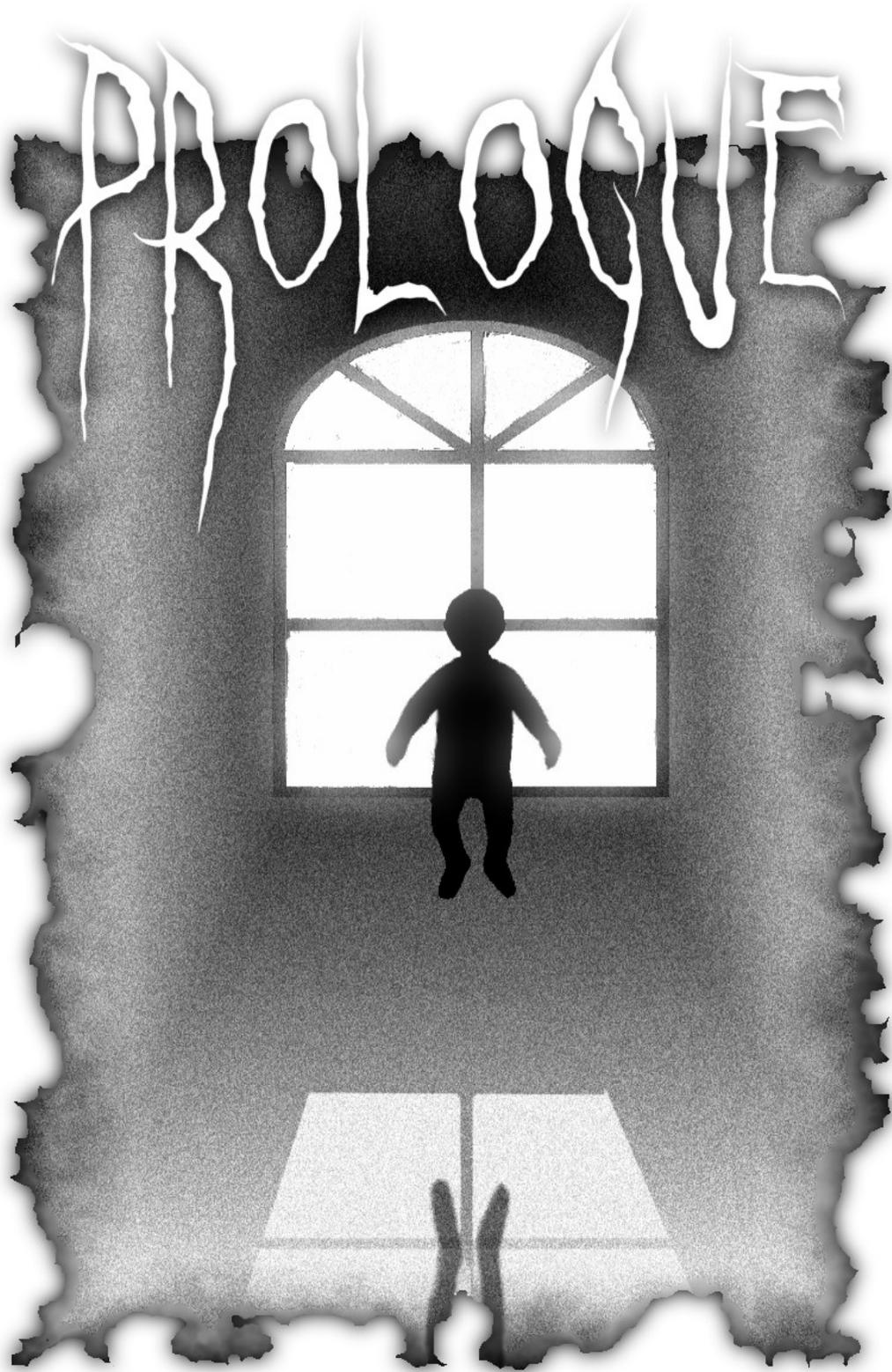
THE COVEN

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The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it. ~ Albert Einstein

I am evil's enemy. ~ Robert Coleman



Prologue

Robby woke in the darkness with a stab of fear. Something had disturbed his sleep but he didn't know whether it was a dream or real. Once again Robby felt the call rather than heard it. He calmed rapidly now that he recognized who had been summoning him. Although he wasn't really sure who or what she was, he knew that she was his friend and would never hurt him. He sat up so that he could look around but found that he could see little in the darkened room, with only the small night light atop the chest of drawers, but he could see well enough to recognize his own bedroom. He could just barely make out the table between his crib and Jack's bed with the half remaining box of caramel popcorn and his favorite bear perched on top. Daddy had given it to him a few weeks ago after he had had a bad dream. He had told Robby that the bear would protect him from bad dreams. He knew that his daddy was just trying to ease his night frights, because Robby understood the difference between a dream and real life. His parents just couldn't seem to believe that he could grasp such ideas because he was so young, so he carried the bear around to make them think it made him feel better. Besides, it was fun to pretend that it was a real bear to play with. Most of the time it was his only real companion other than his parents, and it had become a special friend because it never got angry with him or felt afraid or jealous or any other bad emotions. He could always count on him to play without any reservations or bad feelings of any kind. His bear was a safe playmate.

Crawling to the bottom of his crib, he looked over at his brothers' bed to be sure that Jack was still asleep. Robby could see slight movement under the covers and he was afraid that Jack had also heard the call. He reached out with his mind to listen briefly to the dream that Jack was having. He was talking to the 'Sky King'. He was dreaming that he was the real pilot in that show, flying all over the west to save the old timer's daughter from outlaws trying to rustle their cattle. He paused for a moment to enjoy his brother's version of the show and he had to laugh silently when Jack tried to kiss the girl. Jack often dreamed of being in his favorite television shows. Even though Robby was only just two years old, he could recognize the images he saw in Jack's mind as coming from that show.

Again, the call came to him breaking his link with his brother, this time it was more urgent as time was growing short. He reached out to touch her mind and she responded that she had something very important to tell him, but she was unable to stay for very long. Robby responded by climbing over the rail of his crib and down the outside. The floor was cold on his feet, but he ignored that, as he was intent on the task of being quiet. Creeping slowly, he stepped over the loose board by the doorframe that creaked loudly when stepped upon, and then he went out into the upstairs hallway. Here, there was only a very tiny night light in a plug halfway down the hall that ran the length of the house on this floor. Although shrouded in shadows, he could see that the door to his parents' bedroom was half closed. He proceeded slowly to be quiet as he passed by. He did not want to wake anyone.

Next, he came to a stairwell with a gate blocking it. This he avoided as his mother always told him to do. A touch of fear came to him as it always did when he tried to visualize what it was below that his mother feared so much. He was sure that some terrible monster was down there waiting to eat him or do some other terrible thing to him.

He knew something awful must be down there to make his mother so afraid. She always had such terror inside her when she carried him down those stairs, ever so slowly so she didn't wake the sleeping demon on the second floor. She always took forever to go down because she went so carefully with each and every step. All the way down she worried frantically about losing him. By the time they got to the first floor landing Robby was always ready to cry. He could feel the hatred of the inhabitant of that floor sometimes and when he felt it he was frightened too. Robby could feel the hatred inside his mother for that inhabitant and it made him sad. It was always there, buried deep inside.

He feared that some day she might feel that way about him too. He knew that his mother loved him and Jack equally, but the thought of losing that love scared him more than the monster on the second floor. He feared that she would send him away if she stopped loving him. Then what would he do?

Robby continued down the hallway to the opposite end of the house and stopped in front of the closed bathroom door. She came to him there and began to talk to him in ideas and images, in ways never spoken. There were a great many things that he needed to learn, and so she taught him of things he could not as yet understand and would not remember consciously until it was time for him to know. He knew that they were important things and that one-day they would save his life. She also taught him of his destiny, and of what he would need to do and become. These things, he was told, he could never share with another soul, not even his mother...

Mrs. Coleman awoke with a start from a dream she always hated. As before, she dreamed of one of her sons falling to their deaths down the stairs and she awoke just in time to stifle a scream before it could emerge from her throat. She clamped a hand over her own mouth to be sure no sound would escape and wake her sleeping husband Jack. She needn't have worried though. He was 'sawing logs' so loud that he wouldn't have heard a cannon go off next to him.

Then the memory of the dream came to her and of the daughter who had died plummeting down those deadly steps. She hated herself for not being more careful. She hated herself for not watching Jessica closer. Leaving the gate open was inexcusable. She would never forgive herself.

Then, her hatred turned toward her mother-in-law who had always called from the second floor, asking for Jessica to come down to help her. Alana should never have allowed Mrs. Coleman to lavish so much attention on Jessica, but she had relented because it was easier to let the old woman spoil her only granddaughter than fight with her about it. Whenever Alana had resisted, Mrs. Coleman would complain to her son and then it would cause a fight between him and Alana. So, she had been lenient and allowed grandmother and granddaughter to become overly close. They had spent every day together. They played games and did puzzles together. They baked cookies and watched television together. They had become inseparable as their companionship had become a daily routine. Jessica had been six at the time that the accident had occurred. She had gotten up early one morning and asked to go down to grandmas. Alana was pregnant with Robby at the time and this particular morning she was sick. She tried to tell Jessica that she had to wait for a while, but her daughter had been in too much of a hurry to wait on her mother's stomach problems.

"Mommy doesn't feel very good right now," she had said, while looking up from her morning sickness ritual in the bathroom. "I'll take you down in just a minute baby,"

she added, turning back to the toilet. Her daughter, however, had been in such a hurry to go down stairs to see her grandma that while Alana was in the bathroom vomiting; Jessica went to the gate to go down on her own. That was the last time Alana had ever gotten to speak with her daughter again.

Alana was disturbed in her retching by the sound of a scream that would forever haunt her. It was a scream of complete mortal terror. She ran from the bathroom to the hall to see the open gate and knew in her heart what had occurred. Her spine turned to ice and her legs became as rubber as she glanced over the rail to see a sight that nearly stole her sanity. Jessica lay at the bottom of the second floor landing with her head at an impossible angle. Mrs. Coleman was standing over her dead granddaughter, her face a mask of shock and anguish. The scream had undoubtedly been hers. Alana would never forget the tear-stained look on her face as she looked up to see the child's mother looking down upon them. Then, she remembered vividly how her mother-in-law's look of tragic loss turned instantly to one of hatred and accusation. Surely it had been Alana's fault for not being a better mother. It was Alana's fault because she didn't watch over her child adequately enough to protect her. She hated Alana for letting her granddaughter die. It should have been her instead. All this and more was said with one look. She knew that her mother-in-law would never forgive her. Nor would she ever forgive herself.

Pain erupted from Alana's abdomen and a scream escaped her throat. Being only seven months along in her pregnancy, she would soon lose another child as labor set in prematurely. Darkness enshrouded her as she lost consciousness.

When she awoke in the hospital she was completely disoriented, not knowing at first what had happened? She could not fathom what all the tubes and wires were attached to her for. Then, in a rush, it all came back to her. She remembered what had happened, and her world turned to pain and grief. She knew that she had lost two children in one day. She cried in silent lonely convulsions. It was too much to bear and her heart slipped into black despair. She wanted it to have been her to die. She prayed to God to make it be so, but he would not heed her call. It should have been her, she thought, not my babies. She cried and mourned for her lost children, until at last a warm hand on hers brought her to awareness and she found a nurse standing at her bedside. She also was crying, but in compassion. Despite the cold sterile uniform, she had a warm heart. Then, when they both stopped crying, the nurse smiled kindly.

"Where's my baby?" Alana inquired.

"I'll get the doctor," replied the nurse, who quickly disappeared. A few seconds later, a portly man in middle years came in and looked at her over glasses that rested halfway down his nose. He smiled compassionately, but his gaze was stern.

"Mrs. Coleman, we need to talk," he said as he sat down and took her hand in his. "We had to do a cesarean section because your baby was not tolerating labor. His heart rate was slowing with each contraction and we feared he could not survive otherwise."

"He's alive?" she inquired. "Where is he?"

"Yes, he's alive for now, and he's just down the hall. He's actually doing all right for the moment, but I'm sure you realize that his chances of survival are very grim. He is only seven months developed and he weighs only a little over a pound." He paused to grip her hand more firmly as if to keep her from falling even deeper into despair. "I'm sorry Mrs. Coleman... we are doing all that we can, but he may not live out the day."

The knife struck deeper into the pit of her stomach as she looked into the doctor's eyes pleadingly.

"He will die then," she more stated than asked.

"Probably," he replied with a tone of regret. "In fact, we nearly lost you both during the delivery. It was a miracle that you both survived. However, you must understand that he is not developed enough and will probably not live very long."

"Can I see him?" she asked with a subdued tone.

"I'm afraid it would be too difficult for just now," he replied. "He is in our neonatal intensive care unit and is being worked on by some very good pediatricians. Our hospital boasts some of the best neonatal specialists in the country."

His visage had begun to blur as tears flooded down her face. The realization began to hit home of just how dire things really were. She buried her face in her pillow and lost control in grief for a while. A little while later she realized that doctor Mason was speaking again.

"You go ahead and let it out for now, but remember, you still have a son at home who needs you and perhaps another if God deems to save him. They will both need their mother's love and guidance." Those words had given her a lifeline to hold onto. They still did.

Robby had made it through the first day, and then the first week, then a month, then, at long last he came home. He was six months old by then, but he was healthy. She remembered the first time she got to hold him. He was one month old and he was so tiny she could hold him in one hand. Now he was two and she still had trouble believing he still lived. He must have inherited his father's stubbornness. Thank God for that!

Alana roused herself from her bed and headed towards the bathroom to empty her full bladder. She went as quietly as possible so as not to wake Jack, her husband. She'd check on the boys after satisfying nature's call. She stumbled into the hall and padded toward the bathroom. Halfway down something caught her eye. At first she was unsure of what she was seeing in the dark. Then, a sudden twinge of fear stabbed at her when she realized that there was someone standing in the hall in front of the bathroom door. The shape of the person's silhouette that she could just barely make out in the poor light was unfamiliar. Her fear escalated significantly. It could be a burglar, come to rob them, although there wasn't anything of any real value in their house, but the thought frightened her anyway. There is nothing more frightening than the unknown.

She reached out with a shaking hand to the wall and flipped on the light switch. The overhead light blinded her at first, but as her eyes adjusted, she was surprised to find out that the shape she had seen was Robby. He was standing there with his arms extended upward. But, there was something peculiar about how he was standing there. It was hard to put a finger on at first, but she tried to fight the sleep in her mind to make sense of what she was seeing. Then suddenly, she realized that his head was as high as her own. She rubbed the last of the sleep from her eyes and refocused. Although she saw clearer now, her mind refused to accept what her eyes were telling her, so she rubbed them again. Then, what she was seeing finally sank into her conscious mind. Robby was suspended in the air with his feet about three feet above the floor. There was nothing beneath him to give him such height. He resembled one of those magician's assistants waiting for the rings to be passed over his body to prove there were no strings. But there

were no strings and no magician. Her bladder released as reality left her, and she fainted dead away.

