

# Ghosts of the Past

## Part 1

The following events begin 10 years prior to "The Box Journey Home"

*"For I have seen things in the shadows and soon they will come for you too"*

Bryson looked over the hand written note one last time then folded it up. He slipped the note into his pocket and stepped into the room. The house was a mess. Tables and chairs were toppled and a two-year supply of Entertainment Weekly magazine had been spilled across the floor. He was careful not to touch anything as he stepped over a broken lamp.

"Took you long enough," came a familiar voice from a hallway just beyond the living room.

Bryson swung up his small Maglite and temporarily blinded the middle-aged man standing in the hallway. "Hey, Thomas."

"Do you mind?" Detective Thomas Lees said as he shielded his eyes from the bright light. As the light slipped from his face, the detective slicked his black hair back and composed himself. "You haven't touched anything have you?"

"This isn't my first crime scene," Bryson replied coldly. The sad truth is that he had visited far too many crime scenes in his life although this one hit a little too close to home. "Where' the body?"

Thomas turned and pointed to a doorway at the end of the hall. "In the bathtub."

"Are you sure it's David," Bryson asked as he peered towards the open door at the end of the hall.

"Were you expecting someone else?" Thomas asked readjusting his black latex gloves.

Bryson shook his head no and took a deep breath. "It's just not something I expected from David."

Bryson looked over to the fireplace mantle and inspected the long row of picture frames. Each one depicting a moment in the life of what appeared to be a happy family. One of the pictures, the most recent was taken by the pond in his front yard just a few months ago at his Fourth of July party. The man in the picture he had known for over twenty years and yet he wondered, based on the condition of the David's house, if he had really known the man at all. He didn't want to believe that the same man who held his wife and young son in the picture would take his own life.

"Melissa and Ryan?" Bryson asked.

"Not here," Thomas replied. "Melissa went to visit her mother in Chicago and took Ryan with her a couple months ago. By the looks of things I think the visit turned permanent."

"I didn't know"

"I wouldn't have known either if Melissa hadn't called me," Thomas replied. "She had been trying to get a hold of David for the last couple days. She was worried so she asked me to check in on him."

"I can't believe that things got this bad," Bryson said as he stepped into the kitchen. The dishes hadn't been done in a few days and had piled up in the sink. Liquor bottles were tossed half-hazardly into a blue recycle bin by the door.

"Yeah, David's drinking had gotten worse and now I know why," Thomas replied. "Last week I had to pick him up from O'Malley's on fifth. He had started a fight with a couple of college kids."

"You should have told me," Bryson said with the same cold stare that he gave Alex every time he wanted to let his son know he did wrong. The look wasn't as effective on the Detective.

"Wasn't important," Thomas replied with a shrug. "David may have been drunk but he knew when to hold his tongue. The boys weren't hurt and didn't even press charges."

"Can I see the body?" Bryson asked. He didn't wait for permission and instead moved carefully towards the hallway.

"Sure," Thomas replied. He then handed Bryson a pair of black latex gloves. "Put these on though."

Bryson slipped on the latex gloves. The cold rubber felt terrible and sent a shiver up his back. He immediately felt the sweat building up on his hands. "I hate these things."

"I think you may hate spending time in prison more." The Detective said with a laugh.

Bryson looked into the rooms as he passed. The closest room was Ryan's. As Thomas said, the room had been cleaned out with the exception of the empty dressers and bed. Still the room was disheveled with one of the dressers laying on the floor and old posters ripped from the walls.

The door across the hall from Ryan's room was shut. Bryson turned the handle and noticed it was locked. He looked down at the door knob and noticed a keyhole. He thought it was odd and made a mental note to come back to it later.

After the two rooms the hallway opened to a "T" with the bathroom center to the hallway. To the bathroom's left was a guest room. Bryson could see it too had been tossed as bedsheets snaked their way to the door. The room to his right was the master bedroom and it looked like a bomb had gone off. Even the TV wasn't spared and lay broken on the floor.

With trepidation, Bryson slowly opened the bathroom door. He was no stranger to death and had seen his share of bodies in the course of his long life. Still, it wasn't something that he was comfortable with. He never got used to seeing the people he loved and laughed with cold and lifeless like cemetery stones.

The bathroom was small, too small for a man of David's size. Bryson wondered how David would even be able to make his way past the sink to the toilet and the tub. David was well over three-hundred pounds and built like a brick corn silo, round and thick. Still there he was naked in the tub.

Water had rolled over the edge and Bryson was careful not to step in the red mixture of cold water and blood. The man's skin was as white as a Colorado frost and probably just as cold. Long jagged cuts ran up David's arms and his fingertips were caked in blood. David's face was obscured by the shower curtain so Bryson took another careful step to try and see around it.

He gingerly put his foot down on the wet rug and with his left hand moved the shower curtain back. The hairs on his neck stood up as he looked down at the frozen face of his old friend. Flecks of water hung in the man's beard as if the

room had been filled with steam and all that was left was the condensation. His lips were blue and pulled back as if in a scream. His lifeless eyes stared up into the ceiling frozen in a perpetual state of fear.

Bryson followed the sight line up to the ceiling and reeled backwards. His right boot heel slipped on the water and he tumbled out of the room. He smashed into the corner of the hallway and fell to the wet carpet.

“Crime scene, remember!” Thomas shouted from the end of the hall. He must have seen the look on Bryson’s face though because he quickly made his way towards his fallen friend, crime scene be damned. “What the hell happened?”

Bryson crawled his way into a sitting position and pointed to the bathroom ceiling. When the words came they were broken. “Did you...did you check the ceiling?”

“No,” Thomas replied as he stepped into the bathroom. Bryson could hear his shoes sloshing in the water then. “Oh my God!”

Bryson pulled out the folded piece of paper. “What does it say?”

Thomas cleared his throat and slowly spoke “Soon they will come for you too.”

Thomas stepped out of the bathroom and braced himself on the door frame. “I wondered why his fingertips were so bloody but I can’t believe he would write that.”

“Here,” Bryson said handing Thomas the note. “I found this on my windshield tonight after you called.”

Thomas took the note and read the one sentence. He then read it again a couple more times. “I’ll need to get some crime scene guys out here but based on the rate of decomposition, David died early this morning. There is absolutely no way he could have left this note on your windshield.”

“My thoughts too,” Bryson said as he slid back up the wall. “Which means that this may no longer be a suicide.”

“Damn it!” Thomas yelled. “Sorry, I’m glad it’s not suicide but this is going to make things very messy. Not a lot of questions get asked about suicide. Murder however, we could really have a crap storm on our hands.”

Bryson looked at the bathroom one last time then walked back towards the kitchen. “We can’t let this expose us. Lately we’ve had too many close calls.”

“Whoa!” Thomas cried out throwing up his hands. “You better not be thinking what I think you’re thinking.”

“Clean up the ceiling and any mess we made. Do your best to make it look like a suicide.” Bryson said searching the kitchen counter.

“No. Now way, Thomas said shaking his head. “We can’t cover this up Bryson. If there is a killer out there we need to find him or her.”

“And we will,” Bryson replied. He moved aside a coffee mug that said “World’s Greatest Dad” and had a thought. “Are Melissa and Ryan going to be a problem? How much do they know?”

“David had stuck to his story with both of them,” Thomas said as he rubbed his temples. He stopped and narrowed his eyes at Bryson. “Why? You thinking about having one of your “Friends” erase their memories?”

“We’ve had to before,” Bryson replied.

“Cunningham was different and you said a one-time thing,” Thomas yelled. “We can’t go around having people’s memories obliterated casually.”

“If you’re sure then we won’t have to,” Bryson replied calmly. He swept his hand under a pile of papers and felt cold metal.

“You going to tell me what you are looking for?” Thomas said walking into the kitchen.

“The door opposite Ryan’s is locked,” Bryson said as he pulled out a set of keys. “Ah-Ha!”

“Um, those are the keys to his truck and house,” Thomas called back. He then pulled a key out his pocket. “This is the key to the door. I found it when I initially searched the house before you got here. Now put those back where you found them, Sherlock.”

Thomas walked back to the locked door. “You must think I’m a terrible detective, huh?”

“Well you did miss the writing on the ceiling,” Bryson said with a half-grin.

“Shut-up and cover me,” the Detective said pointing to the other side of door jam.

Bryson stepped to the door and slid his knife out from the sleeve behind his back. He gave a nod as Thomas unholstered his 9mm and raised it eye level. He turned the key and lock clicked. From inside, Bryson could hear a thump as if something had fallen.

“My goosebumps just got goosebumps,” Thomas said as he turned the knob.

Detective Lees threw the door open and slipped to the wall for cover. He cocked his head to get a view of the room.

Bryson did the same but it didn’t matter as the room was as black as pitch. If there was a window it was covered up to prevent anyone from looking in. He leaned back into the hallway. “Why would David lock up this room? What should we expect?”

“Most of us have a locked room that we keep mementos and stuff in. Things we don’t want people to find,” Thomas replied. He looked at the door and squinted. “The door though looks recently painted which means the lock is new.”

“So in other words, Detective, you have no idea,” Bryson replied with an eye roll. “As you have the gun and the badge, I’ll let you go first.”

“Alright,” Thomas replied. He whipped his head into the room and brought his gun around. He stepped into the room and started smacking the wall, desperately looking for a light switch.

As Bryson stepped into the room whatever was blocking the window moved allowing the moonlight in. In response, Thomas raised his gun and Bryson immediately tensed up.

“You saw that too, right?” Thomas asked as he traced the shadows movement with the sight on his gun.

“Yes,” Bryson replied. He felt ice forming in the pit of his stomach. It was as if he was walking across his own grave. He shivered for a second then ran his hand up the wall. His fingertips nudged the light switch and an overhead light popped on.

They were standing in what appeared to be Melissa’s old office based on the mauve color scheme and white framed pictures of the family. Amway flyers sat on a nearby table along with a large three-ring binder.

“Ooookay,” Thomas whispered as he carefully crossed the room to Melissa’s desk. “So where did whatever it was go?”

Bryson looked under the table and found nothing but some old gum wrappers. He searched the room but there weren’t any closets or hiding areas. The room itself was pretty pristine with the desk being the only piece of furniture that seemed to be used recently. “It’s not here anymore.”

“So what was it? A ghost?” Thomas asked as he slid into the desk chair.

“We built the house on new land,” Bryson said.

“Doesn’t necessarily rule one out,” Thomas said as he moved some papers around. “Could have been an old burial site. You know, “They moved headstones but never moved the bodies.”

“Ha-ha,” Bryson laughed sarcastically. He searched a few drawers of the nearest filing cabinet but only found old order forms and some customer files. “So it’s not a stash room. Why would David put a lock on the door.”

“I think I know why,” Thomas said as he typed on the computer. “I was able to login as David and I found a file directory you should see.”

“You hacked into his computer?” Bryson said as he crossed the room. As he passed the bookshelf he kicked a book that had fallen on the ground. He picked it up and placed it on the desk.

“It’s not really hacking when the password is “Password” Thomas replied.

Thomas moved the cursor around and opened several folders until he found the won that he wanted. “Jackpot!”

Bryson leaned in and recognized the names on the subfolders that had appeared on the screen. There were twenty-three names including his own. “The Prodigals!”

“Yes, it’s all of our names,” Thomas clicked on the “Thomas Lees” folder a new screen appeared. This one was full of information that no one should know. It was his real name, former occupations, known associates and even a section listing strengths as well as weakness. “David put together information on all of us. Why would he do something like this? Was he a spy?”

“David wasn’t a spy,” Bryson said as he read Thomas’s information. “He wasn’t even a big thinker more of a doer. He took on construction here and was damn good at it. He was also extremely loyal.”

“None of this adds up,” Thomas said as he leaned back in the chair. “We got a dead friend who was murdered, a warning message, a locked room and a file with all of our info.”

Something caught Bryson’s attention and he leaned over Thomas. He grabbed a yellow tablet of paper.

Thomas pulled the note out of his pocket and placed it down on the desk next to the tablet. “It’s the same paper but look...”

Thomas pulled a sheet of paper from under the keyboard. He placed it on the other side of the note. “This is written by David. Looks like directions to a therapist’s office.”

Thomas pointed to the “S” on both notes and Bryson could see the difference. “Bryson, your note was written by someone else. Someone who had been sitting at this desk. I’m guessing it’s the same person that murdered David. Yet there’s no blood no other evidence of anyone being in this room.”

“Can you dust for fingerprints?” Bryson asked.

“Yeah,” Thomas replied again rubbing his temples. “Between covering up, copying then wiping the desktop and dusting for prints, this is going to be a long night.”

“I’ll call Sara and let her know that I won’t be coming home tonight,” Bryson said reaching for his cell phone. “I’ll also call Mona and have her bring Wes. They could be of some help.”

“Oh, great a night of bickering with the OCD kids,” Thomas said with an eye roll.

Bryson laughed and started to dial home but the phone slipped from his hand and fell to the desk. He reached down to grab it but stopped. His eyes were locked on the cover of the book.

“What?” Thomas said his interest piqued.

“The thump sound we heard when you opened the door, I think this was it,” Bryson said flipping the book over to its spine. He turned it to Thomas so that he could read it.

### ***“Something Wicked This Way Comes” from Ray Bradbury***

“I got a bad feeling that David’s death is only the beginning,” Bryson said as he dropped the book back on the desk. From the corner of his eye he saw a shadow move down the hallway from the bathroom. As it passed the doorway, Bryson watched as the office door slowly closed.