

The Hungering Dark

Awakening

SAMPLE CHAPTER

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“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.’ So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.”

-- Exodus 10:21-23 (NIV)

“You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.”

-- Psalm 18:28-29 (NIV)

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

-- Romans 8:28 (NIV)

“The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt.”

— Frederick Buechner, The Hungering Dark

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Sheriff William “Bill” Battell walked up to Tad from his patrol car and shook Tad’s hand. They were best friends, having grown up in Timbuk and graduated high school together. Both had served in the military.

Bill now headed a somewhat unique Sheriff’s office. He and his deputies and staff provided law enforcement for the entire county, meaning the various burgs and towns did not need their own police departments. Many of Bill’s people were also former military and all were highly skilled, dedicated, and loyal to a fault. He even had some who volunteered their services when needed, allowing Bill to ramp up personnel quickly for complex challenges.

“Hey, Tad, what’s up?”

“I’m not sure, Bill. I’ve been here since about noon and there’s not been a sound from the house or any sign of Jim and Angela, or any sound from Jasper. All the doors

and windows are locked, but their cars are in the garage. And Jim said they'd be here today; I've been out back putting up his new shed. I started to use their spare key but for some reason felt I should wait for you."

"Wow, that *is* weird if Jasper's not barking. Are you sure they haven't just gone for a walk?" asked Bill as he scanned the outside of the house and the yard, looking for whatever clues that might be there.

"Nah. I've been working out back for at least three or four hours. If they'd gone for a walk, they would have been back by now. Besides, Angela would have made Jim leave a note knowing I was expecting them to be here. And at least the back door would be unlocked so I could get in and get a drink or use the bathroom. Even so, if they are out walking, they won't mind our nosing around. I think we need to take a look inside, Bill. I'm hoping they *are* out, but I've been getting a real sinking feeling while I've been waiting for you."

Bill's faced was etched with grave concern as he scanned the house, fearing whatever it was they would discover inside. "You're right, Tad. This isn't like them at all. Let's go take a look."

Tad handed Bill the key and they went up to the front door. Just as a matter of protocol, Bill knocked and called out a few times, tried the door, then unlocked it with the key.

Oddly, the air in the house was musty like it'd been closed up for years. Even some of the furnishings and knickknacks looked unusually aged, yet dustless. They slowly moved through the downstairs rooms. Nothing was out of order. Angela was a fastidious housekeeper. There wasn't even a single dirty cup or spoon in the sink. However, there was an apple on the counter looking dried out and wrinkly. Tad reached out to touch it – it was nothing more than a dried skin filled with dust that crumbled in his hand.

“What the....?”

Tad and Bill looked at each other quizzically. They had no words to express what they were feeling at the moment. They kept moving through the house and then up the stairs. It was a little dark since the sun was already sinking below the hills behind the house throwing much of the inside into shadow.

Bill flipped the hall light on. Nothing. He went to another nearby light switch and got the same result.

“Guess their power is out for some reason,” said Bill.

“How have you been running your equipment?”

“Everything’s hand or battery powered,” replied Tad.

“Saves having to run cords all over the place.”

The stairs were away from the windows and the steps were mottled with shadows. Bill pulled out his flashlight as a precaution as well as to help him focus on details and potential clues as they headed up. A few dust specks danced in the beam of light.

The steps creaked with the dryness of extended aging. They moved through the spare bedrooms and Angela’s sewing room and all were just like downstairs. Nothing was out of place, but stuff looked oddly old. They paused outside the one closed bedroom door, then Bill opened it slowly, putting his other hand on the butt of his gun. That’s how he was trained.

What they saw when he opened the door took their breath away.

Jim and Angela were lying side by side in bed, but they were nothing more than dried out corpses, like rotted mummies with no wrappings. Jasper was between them at the foot of the bed in the same condition.

Just as with the apple in the kitchen, all three appeared to have had the life sucked out of them.

“Holy ... !” exclaimed Bill.

“No,” interrupted Tad. “I don’t think there’s anything holy about this!”

Bill radioed in for an ambulance, an investigative unit, and the coroner.

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