

Jimmy
Threepwood
And The Veil of
Darkness

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To my wife Kristy; my raison d'être.
Thank you for the support and for believing in me.

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Prologue

Screams echoed off the cavern walls as a dark, cloaked creature glided over the damp floor; slowly, silently. What sounded like a thousand souls perishing by fire, rattled over the rocky surface as the creature - otherwise known as the Gatekeeper - stopped in the centre of a large, open space, where stood a giant mirror. Gazing into the reflection, he admired his handiwork; the souls he'd dragged, screaming from the mortal world into an eternity of suffering and pain, swirled and swirled behind the glass. Returning his attention to the grand mirror, he touched the bony remains of his finger to the glassy surface, liquefying it and opening a view into the world of man. The Gatekeeper surveyed the poorly populated Close of Mountbatten with hungry eyes and an evil laugh.

'Soon, Jimmy Threepwood, it will be your eleventh birthday. So starts the series of events which will bring an end to this mortal world, giving me an unlimited supply of souls to do my bidding!' The hellish creature gave a long, vile, thunderous laugh, which resonated throughout the unearthly prison.

Chapter 1

How boring thought Jimmy Damien Threepwood as his breath fogged up the window that he gazed longingly out of. Jimmy was a small lad of ten years, although quite rotund for his size. He had a mop of ginger hair and a beaming smile, which had got him out of trouble on a number of occasions.

Looking around his small and lifeless bedroom he saw his wardrobe and chest of drawers sitting in the shadowy corner, housing only school uniform, a few of his clothes, cobwebs and spiders. For a boy of his age there was one thing clearly missing.....toys. Jimmy's mother didn't believe in toys or allow him any type of games not even a computer. Instead, every Sunday, he was given a list of chores which often included washing the family car, cleaning his room and generally doing the housework his mother refused to do. Did this really matter to him? Not really, he didn't know any better.

Jimmy continued to stare out of the window, longing to go outside and play football with his friends who lived on the council estate. Staring off to the right, in the direction of the estate, he was mesmerised by the nasty looking thick black clouds, which hung suspiciously in the air. Regular crackles of lightning snapped through the sky and each time they did so an uneasy feeling began growing in his stomach, especially as these black clouds were always in the same place every day, hanging high above the council estate projecting a sinister shadow on the ground below.

Feeling restless, he grabbed his sky-blue and white jumper from his bedside cabinet, pulled on his trainers and ran downstairs to see if his mother would let him go outside. Walking in to the living room Jimmy was met with the usual foul smell of feet mixed with greasy food. There, slumped in an armchair, was his oversized slimy mother. She had a large sized fried chicken bucket resting on her stomach and a coke of the same size on the arm of her chair. Stains of the sticky liquid tainted the front of her grey vest top.

Engrossed in a daytime chat show, she didn't even notice him standing there.

'Mum, can I go out to play football?'

...Silence.

'Mum, can I...'

Marjorie Threepwood turned her head, slowly peeling it away from the back of the armchair and scrunched her face into a disapproving look.

'I don't know. I don't care what you do! Go and see your father, can't you see I'm busy!' She said through gritted teeth, shooing him away and turning back to face the TV.

Solemnly lowering his gaze to the floor, suppressing sadness and tears, he shuffled slowly out to the garden to find his father.

As he reached the kitchen, the back door swung open and in walked a short, skinny man wearing round glasses clearly too big for his face and held in place by his long pointy nose.

Bill Threepwood ran his hand through his slicked back greying black hair.

'Arrhhh Jimmy, I was coming to find you. Why aren't you out playing football in the Close?'

'Dad, it's boring in the Close. It's too small. I want to go over the road on the grass to play football.'

'Why don't you play in your room? Didn't I get you that toy you wanted the other day? Where's that gone....?'

'...Jimmy, is that you? What's taking you so long? I'm starving!' A voice demanded from the living room.

The vision was so real he could almost touch it as he remembered walking into the living room and handing his mother the chicken burger she had made him go out and collect two days earlier.

'Puurrgh, what's this? It's freezing cold. You dawdled back again didn't you, DIDN'T YOU!? Right that's it! Where's that stupid toy you wanted!?' His mother screamed, grabbing it from the mantelpiece. 'I'm keeping this for one week; next time you won't dawdle will you. Out! Go to your room.'

Jimmy remembered his lower lip quivering in response. 'But, it wasn't my fault, it's what they gave me...'

'I've heard enough. Go quickly, my programmes starting.' His mother said as she grabbed the TV remote and turned away, slumping back into her chair.

Jimmy sat in his room on his own for hours. He had found a few old, plastic soldiers, most of which were snapped or broken as though they had been trodden on. He tried his best to use his imagination, to make up a game, but he could only think about his friends in school always talking about their new games and toys. Jimmy had to either pretend or keep his head down so he didn't get asked...

'Mum took it away because I, urm, I was naughty.' he mumbled dejectedly.

'Never mind Jimmy. Look, go and play in your room or just outside, and I'll speak to your mother.'

Shaking his head, Jimmy knew this wasn't going to end well. This happened every week, and every week he was forgotten about. He went back to his solemn, empty little grey room, lay down on his bed and wished with all of his might that things would change.

His head felt light as a feather and he could feel himself slowly, gently drifting off into a daydream. Suddenly he was jolted awake, nearly falling out of his bed by the demonic reverberation of a thousand whips crackling through the sky. His heart was pounding and he was struggling to catch his breath as he forced his eyes open. He felt disorientated; he was no longer in his bedroom. Frantically looking down, he saw he was standing on hard, bone dry ground with cracks streaming off in all directions. The pungent smell of singed clothing and ozone oozed through his nostrils, making his senses tingle. Cracks of thunder made him jump and snap his neck upwards to see blood red and purple clouds gazing down at this young intruder. Burnt, ashen black trees caught his eye. He stared in disbelief. Petrified he looked around, searching for any means of escape... and then he saw them.

In the near distance were vast numbers of lifeless bodies strewn across the scorched earth. Rushing to the closest person to see if he could help, Jimmy grabbed the shoulders and pulled the body over, gasping at what he saw. There was no face; no physical injury that he could see, just a vast void of emptiness where a face should have been. The body was wearing a black cloak with soft purple lining that had some form of animal emblem stitched into the breast pocket. The cloak was severely burnt. Brushing the soot away Jimmy was able to make out the head of an embroidered golden owl. Something made him reach into the open pocket of the cloak; trembling and closing his eyes, his nervous fingertips touched a silky soft texture. He was just about to examine his find when, from behind him, came a roaring sound that seemed to shake the very ground and surrounding mountains.

Instinctively, Jimmy ducked, looking over his right shoulder to see what was happening. There in the distance two monstrous figures clashed blades again, sending a vibration through the air that made him stagger as it flicked passed his tuft of hair. The figures were too far away to make out any real detail, but one was humungous with fiery red skin, a black cape thrashing in the wind and his hand raising a giant axe above his head. Jimmy couldn't turn to look at the other male; this humungous red warrior transfixed him. The ground quivered again as the hulky beast struck the final blow sending the second warrior hurtling through the air and crashing into a mighty oak.

Roaring in victory, the beast turned to see Jimmy kneeling next to one of his victims. In a flash it bounded towards him at immense speed, his strides eating up the distance. Fear flooded Jimmy's body, and he didn't know whether to run or fight.

He turned to run but found his legs wouldn't move. In sheer panic he tried again, but nothing. The warrior was getting closer and closer.

'Arrgh!'

Jimmy closed his eyes and woke up in his own bed in a pool of sweat. He took a long deep breath. His dream had felt so real. The burnt smell was still on his pyjama top, the black soot on his fingers... but he was safe.

He wiped the sweat away. Lying there for a short while trying to recover, he heard his mother and father talking downstairs. Glancing at the clock, he saw it was late. He must have been sleeping for hours. Pulling on his slippers, he crept silently down the stairs and slid into the kitchen.

Jimmy hid under the breakfast bar and listened in.

'Marge, we can't keep it a secret much longer,' he heard his father say.

'They said things would start to happen near his eleventh birthday.'

'No! He will never know. He will remain here with us locked in that room if necessary,' his mother argued.

Edging closer to get into a better position, Jimmy caught his arm on the radiator. He let out a small gasp.

'What was that?' his mother whispered.

Swiftly, Jimmy darted out of the space and rushed upstairs to his room, diving under the covers, pretending to be asleep.

He closed his eyes tightly as he heard the squeaking of the fifth, tenth and top steps as someone climbed the stairs. The bedroom door slowly creaked open, just enough, he imagined, to allow a beam of the landing light to illuminate his bed.

He knew it was his father who poked his head around the door; he could picture him catching his glasses on the doorframe as he did.

Jimmy could sense panic in his father as he peered in on him, as though he was worried he may have overheard something.

The door closed gently and soft slippers patted down the stairs, into the kitchen. Jimmy's mind was spinning; what were his parents talking about? What would happen? He thought about it a little longer before finally drifting back off to sleep.

Chapter 2

Weeks passed and Jimmy had completely forgotten about the dream and what his parents had been talking about. That was all about to change.

One day, as he was walking the usual two-mile trek to school, he saw a peculiar black crow standing in his path, almost as if it were waiting for him. This was clearly unusual, even to Jimmy's ten-year-old brain, and he side-stepped to try and avoid the confident bird. To Jimmy's surprise the crow mirrored his actions and simply hopped in front of him again. Once more Jimmy tried to walk around the crow but again it jumped in his path, giving a challenging squawk.

Feeling a little brave and pressed for time, Jimmy bent down and tried to gently nudge the bird aside with the palm of his hand. This was the wrong move. The inquisitive crow instantly became animated, squawking aggressively. The bird leapt forward, nipping Jimmy's hand. As Jimmy instinctively pulled away, the bird flew onto Jimmy's head and pecked him twice with its sharp beak. Jimmy was flailing his arms around desperately, trying to escape this unprovoked attack, until eventually the crow calmed down, jumped off of Jimmy and landed elegantly on a wooden fence. Seizing his chance, Jimmy started to run towards the school but was amazed when he saw, out of the corner of his eye, that the mysterious black crow was keeping up with him, gliding along the fence.

Slowing down to a brisk walk he glanced over his shoulder to see the crow's location. As he dreaded, it was staring at him through yellow beady eyes and was squawking in victory. Jimmy was sure the bird was laughing at him.

Jimmy's attention was drawn for only a few moments; then another squawk came from a tree to his right, then another to his left, then another, and another. Entrenched in the high-pitched noise, he looked up into the trees and found a hundred more black crows almost chanting for the original, slightly fatter bird to attack again.

Confused by the surreal situation, Jimmy took a firm grip of his school bag and ran as fast as he could through the valley of chanting birds. Reaching the entrance to the school, Jimmy grabbed the giant steel gate and slammed it behind him. Looking back through the bars of the school gate he could see the determined fat little crow positioned on the path. Jimmy felt a chill of worry rush through his body, thinking whether this nemesis was going to wait for him all day. Just then the school bell reverberated and he ran through the main doors.

School was the same as any other day, with Jimmy having Art and Maths first thing.

Periodically during the lessons, Jimmy would look out of the window, firstly checking for the crow but also with the now familiar desperate feeling that there must be more to this world. Daydreaming, he hadn't noticed that he was looking towards his house. He snapped out of his trance when he saw the angry looking black cloud was hovering overhead again. Bending his neck to look at the sky above the school, he was surprised to see it was a perfect day.

'Potts, Potts, look at that dark cloud over there. That's odd, isn't it?' he frowned, shoving his elbow into the boy next to him.

Will Potts, a tall lad with brown hair parted to the side and a large protruding nose, looked from Jimmy to the area in question, and then back to Jimmy again.

'Jimmy, are you mad? I don't see a cloud in the sky! Shhh you'll get me into trouble.'

Puzzled Jimmy turned back to the area and to his surprise Potts was right; there was no cloud. It was a beautiful summer's day. What was going on? He thought. Then Jimmy saw it; he caught a glimpse of that crow again. The maniacal crow sitting on a tree with five others gazing directly at him, again giving him the feeling it was laughing and mocking him. Turning his head Jimmy looked away. Although he tried to ignore it, he was scared.

As the end of lesson bell rang, lunchtime was the next concern, not only for Jimmy but for the rest of the school children. Lunchtime was the one hour every day where Spike Williams would be unsupervised with the other children.

Spike was a full year older than Jimmy but had been kept back a year due to his behaviour. He was a good three inches taller than Jimmy and a great deal stronger. Spike took great pleasure in pushing the younger kids about, throwing them down the small bank into the mud and taking their dinner money as a protection racket. Let's just say Spike was a mean and horrible little boy. Luckily, during this one lunchtime, Spike left Jimmy and his pal Will Potts alone and found another victim.

After lunch Jimmy followed Will and his fellow classmates into their chemistry lesson. This class always entertained Jimmy as he thought the teacher was quite mad.

The teacher, Freddy Tuft, was a small man with a slight hunch. He was very excitable and often paced up and down the classroom mumbling to himself; the other unusual thing was that he would often talk to students but remain completely focused on the ceiling. Mr Tuft's choice of clothing also amused the students; even on the hottest of summer days he would wear a knee length brown raincoat, rich brown shoes and carry a leather brief case, which was empty apart from his sandwiches.

As the lesson progressed Mr Tuft started to discuss the periodic table and was going to demonstrate to the class how to make various liquids 'pop' from inside a test tube. Mr Tuft showed the class how it was done and then asked all the students to carefully turn on their Bunsen burners. Jimmy was very careful as he turned on the gas and ignited the bright yellow flame.

Jimmy was ready to start when he caught a glimpse out of the corner of his eye and saw twenty crows sitting in the tree directly outside the second floor classroom window. As Jimmy continued to stare at the birds he stretched his arm out in front of him to grab his science book, when a small fat wasp flew straight passed his face. Instinctively, Jimmy swung out with his left arm, missed the wasp and hit the Bunsen burner onto the table. Instantly his school jumper set alight and the flame burnt straight into his left wrist.

'Sir, Sir, quick Jimmy's on fire!' Will hollered frantically as the thirty students snapped their heads back to see what was going on.

In a flash Mr Tuft grabbed a towel and threw it on Jimmy's sleeve to dampen the fire, whilst at the same time turning off the Bunsen burner. A raw sensation of fire throbbed on Jimmy's skin and the soreness was starting to burn. Mr Tuft immediately took Jimmy to the sink and ran cold water on his wrist for five minutes before wrapping it in a clean bandage. Jimmy was told to report to the nurse for a check-up.

As Jimmy sat waiting for the nurse he still had the raw sensation of burning under the bandage. The nurse saw him quickly and she was already pulling and tugging at Mr Tuft's bandage. Having never been to the nurse before he noticed that she was extremely tall, taller than any of the other teachers in the school and she kept grunting and sniffing. This was very odd but Jimmy thought it would be impolite to say anything. Peeling back the bandage from the skin the nurse was first to comment and noticed that the fire had left a deep mark on his forearm.

'Huumm it looks like a 9?' the nurse mused.

Which it did, but of course from Jimmy's angle it looked more like a 6. The nurse applied a foul smelling greasy ointment, told Jimmy to keep changing the bandages and sent him home with a letter for his family.

Jimmy ran home and quickly told his mother the story. She was still sat in the same position as the day before, with the same stain ridden vest and piece of fried chicken resting on her stomach.

'That's interesting boy...' she said, not once moving her eyes from the daily dose of chat shows and antique programs.

'Go and see what your father thinks, go on, scoot.'

Walking into the kitchen, his wrist started to throb and after the day he'd just had he decided to go straight to bed. After a few hours of the intense soreness throughout his arm, Jimmy decided to look out of the window to see if the menacing crows were still sat outside. To his pleasant surprise, they weren't.

Looking around the estate Jimmy saw Derek from three doors up sweeping his path with a long wooden brush. Whilst he was looking towards the council estate, there was a bump on the window that startled Jimmy.

When he looked closely at the windowsill he saw there was a small fat wasp. Could it be the same one from earlier? Thought Jimmy, 'Nah' Then... 'Bump' 'Bump' 'Bump' 'Bump' 'Bump'. Five more wasps hit the window, landed on the windowsill, and sat focused on Jimmy's every movement. They sat there for a few minutes before just flying away. That can't be normal? What a strange day.

Later that night Jimmy explained what had happened in school to his father whilst he changed the dressing on his wrist. The family ate their tea as normal before Jimmy went back to bed.

The following morning Jimmy sluggishly rose from bed at 7am and looked at the grey calendar on the wall. September 12th; three more days until his birthday, he mused. An air of excitement passed through Jimmy as he began hoping he would finally get a good present, such as a game console or a laptop. Remembering he had never received a present during the last ten years, he wondered why his parents would care now. Letting out a deep sigh he got ready for school.

Walking to school by himself once again, Jimmy anticipated seeing the black crow, but there was nothing. He breathed a sigh of relief and continued on.

Approaching the school Jimmy suddenly heard a buzzing and vibrating sound on the gentle morning breeze. He cast a sharp glance over his shoulder, but there was nothing. Shaking his head and shrugging his shoulders he carried on. Jimmy was mulling over the strange events of yesterday when from nowhere a swarm of angry wasps flew straight at him. The haze of wasps dived around his head making an aggressive 'buzzing' noise.

'Oww!Arrgh!'

One of the raging insects had stung Jimmy on the right side of his neck.

Arrgh! What is going on? he thought.

Grabbing his neck whilst keeping his head low and trying to swat the swarm with his school bag he ran straight into the school. As he ended the day yesterday at the nurse's office, he began today in the same fashion. Reaching the nurses office, Jimmy nearly skidded into the surgery. Rubbing his hand against his neck, Jimmy sat on a chair; what is going on this week?! He thought.

After his first two lessons had finished, Jimmy started to realise it was lunchtime and time to once again avoid Spike. Little did Jimmy know that his week was going to go from bad to worse...and then to strange.