

“Three promises”

written by

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Chapter 1

Harrison was a good person. Always helpful, caring, and friendly. He loved putting smiles on people’s faces as much as making them laugh. Golden boy, they used to say. At school, every child had envied him. When he grew up, nothing changed. After having been employed as a teacher, he started to get along with a few people, not only with other employers but also his pupil’s parents. Promotion by promotion, achievement by achievement, and soon his self-proclaimed friends eased away from him. He was left alone in a big city, living in his hired apartment with his beloved wife. Having almost no colleagues had its flaws, but it made Harrison centre his whole life on his true profession. Surely, everyone knew him as a 26 years old Brit, who teaches English, but not many people knew what the young man was doing in his free time. Those who had the information, however, reluctantly accepted his hobby. That's why Harrison has found himself in the middle of an argument with his wife. “Look, I know you feel like it's a bad idea, but I have to go. I can't just stand them up!” Harrison could feel the anger coursing through his veins. He didn't like to contend with the only person who somehow still stood by his side. “Please, you know how much it means to them. They don't have anyone else to help. I will be careful, as always,” trying to persuade his wife, he couldn't stop wondering why she seemed unusually resistant to let him go. The man could feel the sadness and hesitation in his love's voice, and it almost made him stay home. Almost.

Zippering up his suitcase, he looked around the room. It was messy. Dirty clothes laying on the floor, used dishes on the cupboards, and dusty photo frames standing on the beechen desk. Anyone who would come into the area would think the owner isn't a neat person. But the truth was, latterly Harrison's been too bustled preparing his newly accepted case to take care of his apartment. Coming closer to pick up a photo of himself and his wife, he quickly glanced at the clock. It showed ten past nine in the evening. He cursed under his nose. No matter what was happening, he was always late; another vice to add to the new year's resolutions list. Staring at the photo in his hands, he said a prayer and briefly planted a kiss on his wife's lips. It was Harrison's every time ritual when he was leaving the house. Coughing a bit because of the dust, he put the photo back in its regular place. After turning off the lights, he stepped into the living room. He signed, noticing that his wife wasn't sitting beside the piano as she typically would.

He picked up the hint that she was still upset with him, but he couldn't spare another minute to look for her and make things right. His cab was probably already waiting for him, and he needed to rush to the railing station. He just hoped she would call him soon.

Harrison never liked trains. In his head, they were shabby and cramped. Concededly, heading off the country ran smoothly and according to the plan, but now he started to regret choosing this specific transport facility. Children who were running around the compartment have been giving him the headache for some time now. The disarray made him unable to focus on his reading. Shaking his head, he flipped the page, trying to readjust in the seat. Once more, his peace was disturbed by the uneasy feeling. Harrison could sense someone ogling. Keeping a sharp lookout, he couldn't help goosebumps rising on his skin and breathing becoming shallow. Drops of sweat forming on his forehead made the adrenaline kick in. The teacher hadn't felt this way in years. Harrison has come through enough uneventful situations in life, which made him resilient to every form of fear. It wasn't easy to scare him, yet here he was, trembling like a leaf. It was the first sign of his sixth sense going off. When he finally made eye contact with a young boy, it was as if the time stopped. The boy was giving him a blank look, but something in his hazel irises bothered him. The half-smile on his face was flier, presumably aiming to provoke the young man. Suddenly, Harrison felt the temperature in the room drop significantly. The lights on the ceiling started to flicker, making him gasp slightly. Out of nowhere, he became highly aware of the unwanted presence around him. He wondered when all of the other people disappeared. He refocused on the young boy who was standing in the middle of the room now. His eyes became darker with rage, and he wasn't smiling anymore. Harrison gripped the book, which he was holding, harder. He started to recite a prayer in his head; the one he hadn't thought of in a while. *Sancte Michael Archangele, defende nos in proelio, contra nequitiam et insidias diaboli esto praesidium. Imperet illi Deus...* It seemed to infuriate the boy, whose veins defined on his fair complexion, the blood turning a darker shade. He was furious, and Harrison couldn't resist the thought that he wanted to hurt him. As the boy took a step forward, the worried voice got Harrison out of the trance.

"Umm... Excuse me?" he snapped his head to look at the person who interrupted him. "Sorry, sir. You look quite troubled," making sure that the surroundings came back to normal, he cleared his throat and tried to smile at the stranger.

"Uh... Everything's fine. Thank you," exhaling slowly, he wiped the sweat off his face with the back of his hand and moved to face the other person.

"You're unusually pale. Have you seen a ghost?" the woman chuckled, trying to brighten up the mood, but he couldn't return the laugh.

"Something like that," he looked around, struggling to spot the boy. It was as if he disappeared, and it weighed on Harrison. Was it possible that his imagination played tricks on him? He didn't know. Whatever it was, Harrison knew he wouldn't get a wink of sleep that night. Trying to get his mind off the horrific incident, he took up the conversation with the woman.

"You're not from here."

"Neither are you," she gave him a reassuring smile.

"I'm from London," he admitted.

"Young man in the big city. What has brought you to France?"

"My job. I have unfinished business to take care of."

"Sounds mysterious," the woman whispered, making Harrison smile a little. "Are you a priest?"

"Why do you think so?" Harrison huffed, slightly offended.

"You were reading The Bible. Also, you were muttering something in Latin, I think," she looked puzzled, trying to translate the words into English. "It was something about Michael the Archangel, right?"

"You can speak Latin?" Harrison was impressed. He hasn't met a regular person who was fluent in the language in a while.

"Oh... Not really. My son can speak it well. I know some words, though. He's 12, has been learning for a while now. He took an interest when his father died. I never could quite understand why."

"That's interesting. Answering your question, I'm not a priest. I enjoy teaching children English, though."

"I bet they love you."

"That's what I'm telling myself," the woman laughed, throwing her head back. Just now, Harrison took a good look at her. He inferred that she was probably in her mid-thirties, but good looks took years off her. She had long, straight, dark brown hair that fitted her pretty, round-shaped face. The young man couldn't help himself but keep staring at the beautiful human in front of him. Everything from her small, straight nose to her skinny physique attracted him to her. When she looked at him with her honey-like eyes, he smiled softly. It was when he felt the odd weight of the wedding ring on his finger that he turned away, blushing. He immediately

reprimanded himself for his inappropriate thoughts. When he opened his mouth to say something, she got up from her seat, taking her suitcase, and rushed to the exit.

"It was lovely to meet you, but I've got to go. I hope we meet again, someday," she sent him a small wave and reached for some child's hand. Looking at who was seemingly her son, he caught the young boy's eye. He stopped dead in his tracks when he understood who the child was. This time, however, the eyes which were expressing fear were the boy's ones. He looked anxious, small even. He didn't seem to remember anything that happened barely a few minutes ago. His defensive posture was almost unnatural. When the door closed behind the mother and the child, Harrison put pieces together. When the realisation hit him, he felt pity and sadness wash over. The boy is most likely going through living hell at the moment, he thought. Sighing deeply, he looked out the window. He spent the rest of the journey gaping into the middle distance, brooding about all of the things that have happened that day and praying for the boy's soul.

When Harrison reached the hotel room, the sun had already started to rise, illuminating the clear sky with light tones of red and yellow. As expected, he didn't sleep a wink. At first, he thought that the exhaustion would flee with time, but the hours passed, and nothing changed. He needed to fight the uncontrollable urge to doze off during the board meeting, but it wasn't his leading concern. His wife hasn't contacted him yet, and it began irritating him. Truth be told, Harrison was never the type to reach out first. Mainly, because his pride was preventing him from that, and sometimes he might have been embarrassed. Taking a glance at his phone for the tenth time during the meeting, he felt someone nudging him.

"We did a good job today, didn't we?" John, a guy who has worked with him on a few cases, whispered. He was a nice man, only a year older than Harrison. They first met at the prayer services and bonded like brothers immediately. John was the first person to encourage him to become a priest so they could work together, but it wasn't Harrison's piece of cake. He felt better helping people more directly. "The man started to live a better life today, finally. I'm glad it's over. I was getting tired of his constant moaning. It started to hurt my ears," he grimaced, massaging his temples.

"You're such a drama queen, John. The demon wasn't aggressive. It could be worse, believe me." Harrison knew it was John's first time exorcising someone, but he's been through it too many times for it to have an impact on him. He acknowledged that he came out as disinterested, but all he wanted at that moment was to make sure the love of his life was alright.

"Someone's not in the mood today."

"Boys! Show some more respect!" the bishop scolded them for disrupting his speech. He came back to soliloquising after hearing the choir of apologies.

"I'm just frustrated. She hasn't called yet," Harrison turned to John with a puzzled expression. "What if she's gone?" he asked with hesitation in his voice.

"She will call soon. She always does." John knew how much the harmony in his friend's relationship meant to him. Peering at him, John couldn't help to notice the bags under his eyes and vogue expression. "But... have you maybe thought of leaving? This situation isn't healthy," when Harrison didn't reply, John knew he crossed the line. "Look, I'm just trying to help. I think you should take some time off," Harrison didn't get a chance to respond because the bishop has ended the meeting. Instead, he patted his friend's back. After everyone said their goodbyes and congratulated each other on closing the case, the men made their way to John's office for their little celebration. Their plans, however, hadn't come through.

"Excuse me, boys," the same bishop interrupted their conversation about Arsenal's last match. "I hope I'm not disturbing you," the men gave each other side looks.

"Um... No, of course not," John was the first to speak up. "Is there any way we can help?"

"Yes. I've hoped to talk to you about another case I want either of you to act on. Let's get to my office. They are waiting," without further ado, he started walking, not waiting for the men to follow him. "Your task won't be too engaging. All you have to do is to interview the victim and make a report."

"What are we dealing with?"

"Possible demonic possession. It appears that 12 years old boy has been experiencing some upsetting situations after calling up his dead father, using the Ouija board." As soon as the words left the priest's mouth, Harrison stopped dead. He immediately remembered the conversation with the mysterious woman on the train. Was it possible that they were talking about the same person? He got his answer when he noticed her sitting on a chair beside the bishop's office. She also seemed taken aback, almost not believing her eyes. She recomposed herself as they approached her and extended her hand. By the time she and the priest discussed threats capes and the issue's solvability, Harrison and John had already started making themselves comfortable in the room. Waiting for the boy to come in, Harrison began to feel anxious again. He didn't know what to expect and how the boy would react to the presence of sacred relics. John, seeing the state his friend was in, made small talk to de-stress.

He didn't want to admit it, but the fraught atmosphere filling the place rubbed off on him too. When the young boy walked through the door, there was stony silence. He looked fragile, utterly miserable, and scared to death. Harrison told it by how hard he was clenching his fists on the soft material of his shirt.

"You can come in. We won't hurt you," John took the initiative, welcoming the boy inside. "Would you like some water?"

"No, thank you," the way the boy's voice trembled made both men break a little. "We need to ask you some questions. Would you like to sit?" the boy looked around and then shook his head.

"He doesn't like it when I'm near that." he pointed at the cross hanging on the wall behind the desk. "It makes him very angry."

"What's your name?" asked Harrison, catching eye contact with the boy for the first time that day.

"Dan."

"That's a nice name, Dan. I'm John, and this is Harrison. We are here to help you and take care of you, alright?" Dan just nodded, not convinced. "Let's start with a simple task. Tell us something about yourself." listening to their conversation about Dan's interests and hobbies, two thoughts crossed Harrison's mind. First, John was good at soothing children. Second, he was jealous of how easy he made it look. Harrison loved children. He dreamed of having his own one day. There was a time, he and his wife had been trying, but she quickly shut him down. He accepted it but still couldn't help the sorrow. He wondered if he would be a good parent and if he would live to see that day. Dan's small chuckle brought him back to earth. He was smiling and stood a bit closer to the desk now. "Now, I'm afraid we need to talk about something more serious," everyone could feel the shift in the air. "Let's address the elephant in the room. For how long have you been dealing with the attacks?"

"I don't know. I can't remember."

"Have you noticed something weird around you? Any changes with your body?"

"Sometimes I wake up with bruises. Mum dresses them, but it doesn't help. There are times when I can't control my body. My hands and legs twist, and it hurts. I don't remember, but mum says that sometimes I speak weird languages, using what isn't my voice." he stopped for a while. "I know that I'm not a regular child, but I'm not crazy."

"No one said you're crazy, Dan." John tried encouraging him. "We are here to help you and make you feel better," the boy hummed and looked at Harrison, who has been quiet for the majority of the conversation.

"Can I talk to Mr Harrison? Privately" he asked shyly, smiling sweetly at John. Both men were surprised, but neither of them said anything. When the older man left the room, Dan turned to face Harrison. A sad frown had formed on his face. "We've met before on the train."

"Yes, we did." Harrison stood up from the chair. Slowly walking around the desk's corner, he picked up the Bible. "You saw me reading it," he held it up for Dan to see, expecting to get a reaction out of him. As predicted, he stepped back to the door, his attitude changing completely. Catching Dan's hostile expression, Harrison put the book down and sighed softly. "This evil spirit inside of you... it wants to destroy you. It won't stop until you give up. If you are ready to take up the fight, I won't lie to you. Overcoming your issues won't be easy, and it can take years."

"It tells me to give up sometimes. It says that I'm too weak to fight, and I can't help but feel like it's right," the man hadn't seen the boy so vulnerable since he walked in. Salty tears welling up in the hazel eyes showed Harrison that he wasn't the only one who was afraid. Invisible string distancing him from the danger started to loosen up when he realised that in reality, Dan felt as lonely and pain-wrecked as he was. He tried to put his thoughts aside, wanting to comfort the boy first. Covering the distance between them, he took the sobbing child in his arms. They stayed like this for a few more minutes until both of them pulled themselves together. He let go, smiling at the boy consolingly.

"Everything will be alright. You are not weak, Dan. You will get through this."

"I don't want to die," Dan's red and puffy eyes conveyed more emotions he had ever seen being expressed by one person. He saw fear, self-doubt, exhaustion, hatred. He was pleading for help. It reminded Harrison of the flappers. Forced out of the nest at a young age, made to face the threats on their own. Condemned to death, never getting a chance to experience the beauty of the world.

"I won't let you die," he made a promise, which he was determined to keep. He couldn't recall what it was; God's will, a simple pity, or the need for redemption, but he felt it deep inside. He couldn't just leave. Very few people could actually live with that on their conscience, but Harrison wasn't one of them.

Chapter 2

If someone told Harrison a few years back that he would be living in a farmer household, mucking out the stalls on a daily basis, he would laugh at them. Yet, there he was, spreading manure at 8 am on Saturday. He never thought that living on a farm was that hard. After he agreed to make a concerted effort to overcome Dan's trouble, John advised him to move in with the family. The little boy's mother was more than happy to welcome him home. In her mind, she would finally have someone to help with agriculture, and Dan would eventually have a friend. Harrison later found out that her name was Este. It took a lot of begging, bribing and proving a point until Harrison's wife let him leave for the duration of retrieving, but she eventually gave up and made him promise every-day phone calls. Soon enough, he set foot in Harmonsburg, a census-designated place located in Pennsylvania. There weren't many people living there, especially within the farm, since it was hidden deep in the forests. Pervasive silence, the calming rustle of the trees, so diverse from annoying street noise and breakneck pace of life Harrison loved deeply, yet, they brought peace and an odd feeling of complacency.

Adapting to the new reality wasn't easy, but for some weird reason, he had an impression that he was, finally, brought on the right path with his life. His days were more enjoyable, nights more restful. For the first time in a long time, he started to laugh more than cry. Yes, Harrison was a crybaby, but he didn't like to admit it. In his eyes, he needed to be the perfect man, an alpha, having a sense of control in every section of his life. He loved it when people complimented his imitable confidence. That's why he used to put on a show. In the comfort of his new home, he found himself distancing from what he thought was his real face. Lately, Harrison started to enjoy his "newer" side. Spending each day playing games with Dan or simply being around him woke up his old memories. He liked playing hide and seek in particular because it reminded him of his childhood days. Ironically, being stuck in the middle of nowhere with a child exhibiting demonic activity has steadied his choleric nature.

His favourite time of the day was the evening. Every day he would sit with Dan on the bench in the back yard and admire the sunset. As March has come, the wildlife gradually emerged from winter sleep. Chilly hiemal days were slowly fading away as the sun rose higher each day above the horizon, beginning to free ponds and lakes from their bounds of ice. The first sign of upcoming spring was fowl migrating back to Pennsylvania. Harrison knew very little about birds, but Dan, being brought up on a farm, got acquainted with it pretty well.

"You see that one?" he pointed to the pond at the black-feathered bird. "That's a watercock."

"She must be hungry."

Dan looked at Harrison full of contempt.

"That's he, first of all. The second of all, I have told you the difference already."

Harrison wished he had enough skills to memorise all of the strains and species as much as he wished for Dan to stop talking back.

"And I have told you not to cheek."

Harrison wasn't upset with the boy's behaviour, he just liked messing around with him.

"Yeah, sorry, dad," Dan rolled his eyes but then smiled softly at the older man. He didn't refer to Harrison as his father, but he knew it made him melt inside. He might have used it to his advantage a few times. The guys got closer as the time flew. They both became more comfortable around each other and self-aware of their boundaries.

The topic of Dan's father's death wasn't spoken about often because neither of them liked talking about it. All Harrison knew was that the parent died in a car accident a few years back. "I miss him," when Dan noticed that his friend didn't intend to respond, he continued with his thoughts. "I wish he was here. Otherwise, I wouldn't have to use that stupid board to contact him," the boy huffed and shook his head in a gesture of stupidity. He regretted his past decisions. "You couldn't have known, and you definitely shouldn't blame yourself. Besides, you are doing better," it was true. The lessons Harrison started to teach Dan about God, and daily praying sessions progressed with the boy's condition. He was more lively and happy.

Along with his mental health, his physical condition also got better. He was stronger now, growing up faster than before. "I know you miss him, but the dead never go away. They stay here..." he pointed to the boy's chest. "...in your heart. Your dad may not be here bodily, but he's up there looking out for you. Like a guardian angel," Dan glanced up to the clear sky. He seemed to think about something deeply before he spoke up.

"Do you have your guardian angel?"

"I do. She will be calling soon," Dan turned to face Harrison with a puzzled expression. He couldn't quite understand what the man meant by that until the way too familiar ringtone sounded in the air. He watched the man checking out his phone and smiling widely. "I'll be right back. I need to take it," he got up and went to talk with his wife about his day, as promised. Dan stayed in his spot, trying to figure out what he had just witnessed. Minutes passed when Harrison finally came back to sit beside the boy.

"Your wife's dead," was the first that came out of Dan's mouth.

"She's not dead. She's just not here," the words petrified young boy. This whole time Harrison was making the conversation with his wife, it was his pure imagination. He didn't know he voiced his thoughts until he heard a response. "I'm not stuck in the head, Dan. I can hear her. Don't look at me like I'm crazy," Dan quickly turned away to break eye contact. Noticing that he was a bit troubled and confused, Harrison sighed and started his story. "She was... sick just like you. She was always fragile, weak. I wasn't surprised that she became the target. The demon was too strong, and I couldn't help her. I killed her, Dan."

The boy was speechless, he couldn't believe his ears. Suddenly, he realised that Harrison wasn't helping him because he wanted to, only because he felt obliged to do it. He wanted to comfort him; he just didn't know what would possibly make him feel better. While Dan was trying to come to terms with his mind, Harrison couldn't understand what came over him. Suddenly, he broke down, not knowing what else to do. His sweet secret was now out in the world, and he didn't know if he should be relieved or worried.

"Please, Dan, don't leave me. You're all I have left."

"I'm not leaving. You still need to save me, remember?" Dan tried to loosen up the atmosphere, but when he saw Harrison's pointed look, he apologised quickly. "Um... Sorry, a lame joke. Look, I know I'm just a kid, but you're not alone, okay? We can be fucked up together," Harrison sniffed but chuckled anyway. "I need you to do something for me," he started again. "You need to let her go. It will make you crazy in the end, and you deserve better."

"I can't do that."

"Why not?"

Frankly speaking, Harrison was scared. He was terrified of the world without the love of his life in it. He was afraid he would never find another person, that no one would accept him in the same way she did. He was scared to go off the deep end. She was everything he knew, everything he needed to know. He was scared that if he went outside his comfortable bubble, he would break into a million pieces. He was scared that he would become heartless. That the pain would slowly kill him. Or he would kill himself. Then, he thought that he might have some serious mental issues. Then, he realised that except for his age, he's still just a child, who needs to be shown his way through life. Like a string puppet entertained by people. He concluded that the people were the source of his problems. Wherever they wanted him, he went there. Whatever they needed him to do, he did it. Was what to eat for breakfast his only self-made decision in life? He didn't know. He didn't know anything, anymore. Having enough of his depressing thoughts, he stood up and started walking towards the house.

"Hey, wait up!" Dan started following him, catching up after a few seconds. "You need to promise me that you will move on," when he didn't respond, Dan barred the entrance to the house. "I won't move until you promise me," he knew he was childish, but he didn't care. He needed Harrison to be at his best. Mainly, to make sure that he, himself, would be well soon. Selfish, but as long as it has mutual benefits, it doesn't matter, right?

"Alright, I promise. Can we go in now, please?" Dan happily strolled down, walking by Este. She instantly recognised a frown on the man's handsome face. She tried to ask him about it, but he dismissed her and went straight to his room. The sleep came quickly that day, and after just a few minutes, Harrison was sleeping like a baby.

Dan, however, wasn't this lucky. He's been rolling over in the bed for the majority of the night. Soon, he gave up and started to work out a plan on how to make his friend move on from his past. After coming out with, what he thought was a brilliant idea, he wrote his strategy on a piece of paper. He decided to implement it the very next day. Finally, being satisfied with his work, he was able to fall asleep peacefully.

In Daniel's scenario, Harrison and Este were supposed to fall in love with each other. They both needed someone to fix their broken worlds, to make them see colours again. The boy purposely initiated moments in which they would have to interact, getting to know each other better. In the first few weeks, everything was going well. Both adults were getting closer, enjoying their lives. Because of the affair, he even forgot about his own issues, being happy that all three of them would finally make a family. March passed, and everything was perfect.

As the days were warmer now, Dan, Este, and Harrison were spending more time outside. They would play games, going on bike rides and walks in the forests. The boy even noticed that Harrison was spending less time on his phone, talking to his wife. He still did that daily, but conversations were shorter and less detailed. Dan knew that Harrison was trying his best to move on. Even though both guys never came back to that talk, Dan was proud of him. The man was proud too, not of himself, but of the boy for making enormous progress. His attacks weren't as frequent as at the beginning, and he was doing an amazing job of resisting the evil spirit's temptations.

However, as May rolled in, Dan saw that maybe things between his mum and Harrison weren't going as smoothly as he thought they would. He noticed the looks they were giving each other when the other one wasn't looking. He noticed how uncommunicative they've become during dinners. He noticed the indifference. The boy couldn't believe that he missed the point when it all went wrong. Maybe if he wasn't so caught up in the moment, he would be able to fix

it. He was mad at himself, but even madder at both the adults. He tried delving, but no one let him into the matter. That was until he heard them arguing in the middle of the night.

"Can't you see that it isn't working out?!" Harrison's resonant voice sounded in the air.

"We were doing fine! Why can't you just let me in? I could make you happy," Dan felt anger boiling inside him after hearing his mother's sobs reverberating in the walls of the living room.

"Don't you see that you never could make me happy?! You never could, and you never will!" After that, there was silence. Dan couldn't see what was going on inside the room, but he sensed that adults were trying to collect themselves. "I wish I could give you what you want, but I can't. We can't be family. I finish my job here and go home."

"So we are just the job for you? You don't feel anything after all the days we've spent here together?" Este's voice wasn't broken anymore. This time it showed disgust and disbelief.

"You were always just a job for me. I'm sorry if it hurts, but it's the truth. I should have never gotten friendly with any of you. What happened a few weeks ago was just lust. It meant nothing to me. I want to help Dan, but you need to step aside and control your emotions." Daniel didn't know what made him furious more: Harrison's words or the way he was talking down to his mother. Tossed by emotions, he stepped from the darkness into the room. The surprise on Harrison's face was quickly replaced by fear when demonic red eyes immediately captured his attention.

"Este, get the Bible and the holy water," he ordered and then turned to the boy. "Dan, you need to focus on my voice. Don't let him get to your head."

"You lied to me. You lied to everyone!" Harrison could hear the rage in his voice dripping with hatred.

"Dan, try to calm down. I didn't mean what I said." Harrison tried to keep his cool, but the boy was unpredictable, and he was worried that something awful would escalate from the situation.

"I don't believe you!" After that, everything in the room started to shake, and some books fell out from the shelves. Dan was losing control. By the time Este came back with items, the room had turned into a complete mess. Harrison took the book from the woman's hands and started to recite a deliverance prayer. That seemed to infuriate the spirit, which started throwing items in his way, with force not possible for a child to have. Successfully avoiding them with a dodge, he turned to the demon directly.

"In the Name and by the power of Our Lord Jesus Christ, may you be snatched away and driven from the Church of God and from the souls made to the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the Precious Blood of the Divine Lamb. The most cunning serpent, you shall no more dare to deceive the human race, persecute the Church, torment God's elect and sift them as wheat."

The lights in the whole room went off. It would seem that peace descended. The silence didn't take long. Soon, a loud sneer sounded in the room.

"You cluck, you cannot fight me. The boy will die!" A deep, throaty voice spoke up.

"In the Name and the power of Lord, show yourself!" Harrison demanded but what he got in exchange was a choir of laughs. When he splashed holy water, suddenly it got quiet again. The only sound heard was the shallow breathing of two adults. They stayed without a move until unexpectedly, the light came back.

In the middle of the room, sat Dan, embracing his knees, with his arms. The man slowly and hesitantly stepped to check upon him. When he was about to touch him, the child lifted his head. Harrison's eyes met with a disgusting view. Boy's face was in the worst state of decay: his eyes falling out of the skull, fibres being the only thing that kept the falling skin connected with bones. The demon laughed in the man's face and spit at him with blood. He hardly could remember what happened next. He just felt a strong grip on his neck, his vision turning blurry. When he snapped out of the haze, he saw Este standing next to her screaming son with a cross. He tried to call her, but his throat was too sore, and he had difficulty breathing properly. He crawled to the woman with the last bits of strength he had. He finally noticed the cross necklace hanging around the boy's neck, keeping the demon in a trap. Animalistic shouting along with a gruesomely contorted body made a frightening view that he knew would keep him up at night many times. He didn't know what more to do, so he just watched the boy's grapple and prayed for it all to stop. Not long after, he started to get dizzy, and before he knew it, he blacked out.

Harrison woke up a few hours later, with a tremendous headache and bruised throat. Este told him later that day that the demon attacked him, almost choking him to death. She also informed him that Dan was doing better, but he was weak and refused to eat and drink. Harrison, feeling fine, went to see the boy himself later that day. They had a long conversation about what happened earlier. The boy was still furious, dismissing the man's apology, but he confessed that he told the evil spirit to kill him. He felt guilty for his murder attempt. Harrison didn't want to admit it in front of Dan, but he was petrified by what the demon was capable of. He had never faced such a strong spectre in his five years old career.

In the next few days, he has been wondering what he could do to cast it out, but nothing he knew gave him the assurance he needed. Fearing a complete failure, he asked John for help. Twenty-eight hours later, they were sitting in front of the fireplace, debating about the possible ways out of the situation. Deep inside, Harrison knew what they needed to do. The truth was he just didn't want to. For the first time, he hated his profession. He didn't know if he was ready. What's more, they haven't received permission from Vatican City to exorcise Dan yet. He needed to come to a decision; the right one. He remembered the promise he made. Now he just needed to keep it.

The exorcism began better than Harrison thought it would. Harrison and John set up a proper place in a barn. Este was waiting outside. None of the men wanted her to be part of the ritual. After sprinkling holy water on the boy's head, he became more active but stayed still. Harrison recited the first prayers without any issues. The problem appeared when the man put his hands on the boy, begging the Holy Spirit for casting out the demon. Dan's growls were getting louder and louder with every spoken word, and Harrison noticed demonic symbols showing up on the boy's skin. Soon, the voice sounded off in the warm air. The demon spoke up, being sorry about the pain he gave the boy. It started to whimper quietly, but Harrison knew it was just playing games.

"Don't be misled by its sorrow. It wants to distract us." John nodded and moved on to declaim the Creed. As if he was seared, Dan fell from the chair, squirming like a snake. Harrison held the cross in front of the boy to force the evil spirit to focus on him. He summoned it to show itself in the name of the Lord, but all he got was just a ripple of laughs. Then suddenly, the boy spread his arms to the sides and hanged in the air. Bloody wounds appeared on his hands and legs. The same Jesus Christ had after being nailed during his crucifixion.

"You have no power here, mortal!" The spirit laughed, and thousands of other voices cheered with him. Satanic chanting could be heard in the room, just like the Devil himself celebrated his win. Harrison, however, didn't concede. He moved to the last part of the exorcism: casting out the Devil and the evil spirits. Shouting out the prayers, he tried to pressure the demon to leave Dan's soul in peace, but it seemed to grow in power even more. It marked the poor boy's body, ripping his skin to blood. At that point, Dan didn't look like a human anymore. His flesh resembled an animal, hunted and left to rot, with ribs poking out of the shirt. Harrison realised he failed when the numb body hit the cold floor. John was the first one to rush to the boy. Harrison couldn't move. The boy was dead, and he couldn't prevent it. He felt like a complete loser knowing that he broke up the promise he made. He wished to give away his own life in

exchange for Dan's, but there was nothing he could do to turn back the time. He only snapped out of his thoughts when he heard Este's heavy sobbing. She was now by her son's side, gently caressing his face. Harrison couldn't take it, so he left and made his way to the closest tree. He started to punch it with all the strength until his knuckles turned bloody red. If John hadn't drawn him aside, Harrison wouldn't have stopped. At least, not until he would write that he received enough of the punishment. The next few minutes men spent weeping in each other's arms.

When they pulled away, John took a good look at the peer. He never saw him looking so miserable. John knew he was in a lot of pain, and he was scared that there wasn't a turn back from the darkness Harrison found himself in, this time. The next few days were horrible. No one in the house could deal with the boy's death. Harrison neither hadn't eaten nor spoken to anybody in a week. Nobody blamed him for what had happened, but in his mind, he was a parasite, preying upon other people. Este, despite her own mourning, pitied Harrison more.

When she told him about the funeral, he didn't come. Harrison was losing himself in his thoughts. Not daring to stay at the farm any longer, he booked a plane ticket to London. Even so, others tried to convince him that he needed someone close to him to normalise his mental condition, he declined. Not long after that, he was getting out of the taxi in front of his apartment. He was excited but also partly scared to step in. He didn't know what he would find inside. Pushing bad thoughts, he unlocked the door and stepped in.

Looking around, he inferred that almost everything was untouched. The only thing that wasn't in its usual place was the photo of his wife and himself. Harrison found it standing on the dusty surface of the piano. Picking it up, he examined it. It looked as if someone placed it there not much time ago, considering its polished frame. He sighed, standing up and moving to the bedroom. After he unpacked his suitcase, he sat on the bed. Home, sweet home, he thought. He closed his eyes and laid down. Steading his breathing, he started to doze off. With the last bits of awareness, he heard the door to the room closing slowly, cracking under the force. He could feel someone's hot breath hitting his face. When the bed dipped next to him, he smiled.

Opening his eyes, he turned to his side, facing his wife. He could see her clearly in the twilight. Her hands on his skin were cold, but he didn't mind. The first time in a long time, he felt at ease. Part of him felt bad for breaking another promise he made for Dan, but his hesitance soon disappeared when soft lips musked the skin of his forehead. He remembered yet another promise he made, this time to his wife. She wanted him to find someone, to lead a happy life; not to dwell in the past. For the past few years, he has been looking for someone or something to make him see the world in brighter colours. He was balancing between finding happiness and

accepting his fate. But how could Harrison move on when the only thing that kept him standing, kept him breathing was the memory. He never wanted to forget the only soul that could dull his pain. Now, she was closer than ever, laying beside him just like in the old times. He never wanted to be alone again, trailing the world without any sense of purpose. Deep inside, he wanted to break out, break all the chains that kept him in the dark. But how could he do that when she was looking at him like that, tempting him. Maybe he could let go for some time. Just a moment, savouring the sweet taste of her lips on his for a few more minutes.