

Doctor Robin Watkins, distraught by the horrific circumstances of her fiancé's death, seeks a seedy reporter for answers. As Robin digs deeper for answers, she is pulled into the fight of her life, for she, along with the reporter, faces seemingly invincible deadly creatures.

**They Were Here Before**

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# THEY WERE HERE BEFORE

CLIFTON VASSELL



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## Chapter One

APRIL 10, 2001

At twelve in the morning, an ambulance raced down the rain swept Philadelphia Street, red lights flashing, rain pounding its windshield. Inside, two men stared out the frosty windows without speaking as the siren wailed overhead.

John, the middle-aged driver, turned to his partner and said tersely, “You should be doing something.”

A scrawny man in his early twenties with red spiked hair and only a couple months on the job, Dick sat uneasily in the passenger seat. He glanced into the back of the ambulance. “I gave him oxygen.”

“You should be back there.” John stroked the dark stubble, peppered now with gray, on his chin.

“You saw the guy. Hell — let the hospital handle it.”

“At least call the hospital and let them know what we’ve got.”

“Yeah, you're right.” Dick reached for the radio and began, “This is Unit 384. We are transporting, ah ...” He glanced back before continuing, “... an unconscious male. He’s not responding to treatment ... should be at Mercy General shortly.”

John raised one bushy eyebrow and gave Dick a quick glance, saying, “I really don’t blame you.”

The two men focused on the rain soaked street. The ambulance jerked when John swerved to avoid a pothole. “Careful, it’s slippery,” cautioned Dick.

“I know, damn it.”

As the ambulance sped to the hospital, slicing through the downpour, the red light flickered in the chilly night air. The streets were nearly deserted and the stoplights were on cue.

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John steered the ambulance straight up the ramp and parked inside the ambulance bay at Mercy General Hospital. The figure lying on the stretcher remained unconscious. John and Dick exited the ambulance, ran to the back and hurriedly unloaded the man and wheeled him to the entrance of the ER. The door slid open and they headed for the trauma center. The trauma rooms were nothing more than cubicles in the ER created by curtains hung from overhead tracks. They were usually packed with people being treated for life threatening illnesses and injuries by heroic and overworked staff doctors, residents and nurses — all fighting desperately to save their lives.

Dr. Robin Watkins hurried to meet them, her ankle-length dress sailing out behind her. Dr. Watkins, a physician with Mercy General for two years now, was an African-American woman with skin the color of toffee caramel and hair relaxed down to her neck.

She met the paramedics along the way to a trauma room. Her eyes instantly focused on the man in the stretcher with frightening disbelief.

His skin was gray and he had a cluster of dead hair hanging off his head. The man's eyes sunk deep in his gaunt face, and his lips were cracked and gritty. His nose was small and the nostrils flared out. A faint odor of decaying flesh emitted from him.

"My god! Is he wearing some kind of mask?" Scowling, she backed away from the stretcher, and then added almost angrily, "Is this for real?"

"That face is real," muttered Dick.

"What happened to him?"

"Don't know. We found him on the sidewalk on Twelfth Street between Washington and Ellsworth. Somebody called 911."

She gazed at the man's long lanky arm, which stretched passed his knees.

"Excuse me, Doctor," said John, startling the usually cool-headed Robin, who was still staring with her eyes wide. "We were just heading for the trauma room."

"I'm sorry," she said, keeping pace with them now. "I've never seen anything like this."

"Me neither," said John.

They burst through the swinging doors to the trauma center.

Robin led them into an empty cubicle. They parked the stretcher in the center of narrow space, under the glaring fluorescent light.

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She took a penlight from her pocket and moved closer, then seemed to think better of it. “What is his name?”

“I don’t know,” said John.

“Anything in his pockets?”

“No wallet ... nothing. This is weird stuff, Doctor.”

“I’d say,” she said as she back-stepped into the hallway. “Put him on the bed. I’ll be back in a minute.”

John and Dick slid the patient off the gurney, onto the ER bed. “He’s all yours,” Dick muttered under his breath as they dashed out.

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Robin returned to the unit with two nurses. The nurses jerked back when they saw the man. They stood frozen with eyes fixed on him. They frowned when his pungent odor hit their noses.

Robin remained calm, but she could feel the hairs on the back of her neck standing up. She leaned forward, placed two fingers on his wrist for a few moments, and then placed her stethoscope on his chest. “That’s strange,” she murmured, moving the scope methodically at first, and then more randomly across the broad expanse of the man’s chest for several minutes before she sighed and gave up.

“What’s that?” Susan asked.

“I can’t hear a heartbeat, but his wrist has a strong pulse.” She ran the stethoscope up and down his chest a final time and shook her head. “I can’t tell if he’s alive or dead. Hook him up to the monitor and put in an IV line.”

Neither of the nurses moved. “Tracy! Put the IV in him!” Robin snapped.

While Tracy grabbed an IV kit from the cabinet, Robin took hold of man’s arm and quickly released it. The skin was thick and leathery. “Right here where his shirt is ripped — that’s where you can put in the IV. Then cut his clothing off. I’m going to have the unit clerk page Dr. Banner.”

Susan cut the front of the man’s shirt open and slapped three cardiac leads onto his chest. As Robin turned to leave, the man’s body began to shake. His face contorted into a terrible grimace, his arms and legs vibrated against the padded cot, banging against the metal side rails.

“Doctor!” Tracy shouted.

Robin whirled around. “My god.” She raced to the swinging doors, shoved them open and yelled to the unit clerk, “Page the orderlies, STAT!”

The man’s face had turned blue and his body flailed around.

Robin and the nurses watched helplessly, unable to move.

Four orderlies rushed into the trauma room, hesitated a moment, and then snapped into motion as though they had been reset on autopilot. They managed to strap his arms and legs to the bed with leather restraints.

“Give him Ativan, IV push,” barked Robin.

Tracy jumped into action but Susan stood leaning against the counter, still horrified by the man’s grotesque image.

“How much?” Tracy asked.

“Nine milligrams. Then reassess.”

Tracy rummaged in the crash cart, found a vial of Ativan and drew the drug into a syringe. Her hands shook so badly she had to brace her elbow on the countertop. Robin watched the orderlies wrestle the writhing body in order to hold it still while Tracy shot it up with the drug. “I gave nine milligrams; and he’s still shaking.”

“Give another seven milligrams,” said Robin, moving to the head of the bed where she could keep an eye on his breathing. Gradually, the shaking slowed and then stopped, but his face remained blue.

Tracy gave a deep sigh. “What was that?”

Robin looked puzzled. “It seemed to be grand mal seizure, but I’m not sure.”

The orderlies left and Robin looked at Susan, who was still trembling. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Susan’s lower lip quivered.

Tracy looked at the man. “Damn, that face would have me running in daylight.”

“I see what you mean.” Robin surveyed his body, noting that his leg hung over the end of the bed by at least a foot. “How tall do you think he is?”

“I’d say over seven feet tall,” Tracy responded.

“His clothes are so small on him,” Robin said. “It’s almost like he’s been stretched.”

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“Where did they find him?” Susan said in a low, shaky voice.

“The paramedics told me they picked him up around Twelfth and Washington Street.”

“I bet Barnum and Bailey circus would be happy to see him,” Tracy said.

Susan showed a tight smile.

“I’ve never seen anything like this before,” Robin said.

“Well, let’s see what we’ve got on the monitor.” Robin hooked the cardiac monitor to the leads on his chest and waited for the green lines to appear.

She peered at the screen. “Everything’s weird. His heart rate’s only 40 beats per minute. Let’s check his blood pressure.” She looked at Susan, who grimaced.

Susan approached the bed, standing back as far as possible, and wrapped the blood pressure cuff around the man’s upper arm. The cuff was too small. She moved it below his elbow and pumped it up, then listened to the radial artery with her stethoscope. “This sounds crazy, but I’m hearing 200 over 110.”

Robin shook her head. “I’ll be back in a second. I’m going to have the unit clerk page Dr. Banner.”

Robin left the room and headed for the unit clerk desk.

Susan continued examining the equipment.

A faint clicking sound began to emit from the man.

“Did you hear that?” asked Tracy, eyeing the man.

“What?” responded Susan, still examining the equipment.

“That sound coming from him,” Tracy said, pointing to the unconscious body.

Susan turned from the instruments and gazed at the man.

A bright pulsating light hissed from his midsection.

Tracy winced. “Did you see that?”

“I saw it,” Susan said. “What do you make of it?”

“I don’t know.”

Tracy looked down at the body lying in front of her and carefully glided her fingers along the arm. A flicker of bright light raced down his arm. At the instant it made contact with Tracy’s fingers, her body jerked, her muscles contracted, she seesawed and collapsed to the floor.

“My god!” shouted Susan.



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Susan whipped her hand up to cover her wide-open mouth. “My god!” she quivered.

Robin strode into the trauma room. “He’s on his ...”

Her eyes shot down to Tracy lying on the floor. “What happened?” she asked as she raced over to her.

“I don’t know,” Susan said. “She was examining the man’s arm and then she fell to the ground.”

Robin checked for a pulse and breathing. “Oh shoot no pulse. No respiration.”

Robin began forcing air into the nurse’s lungs to bring oxygen to her bloodstream but was unable to revive her. “C’mon, Tracy,” she pleaded. “Please don’t die.”

Robin shouted, “Get me the defibrillator!”

Susan grabbed the defibrillator next to the monitoring equipment and handed it to Robin. She attached two electrodes to the nurse’s chest. She ordered Susan to stand back before she pressed the shock button.

One ... Two ... Several long seconds later, she felt a faint pulse. All of a sudden, Tracy took a deep breath and started to breathe on her own.

Susan saw little droplets of tears coming from Robin’s eyes. “You did great,” she whispered softly.

“... I thought ... I had lost her.”

“But you didn’t.”

“Yeah ... I didn’t. That’s a real good feeling.”

Robin checked her pulse one more time, relieved that it was already much stronger, and saw that Tracy was fine, but still unconscious.

Robin turned to Susan. “It looks like she received an electric shock. What did Tracy touch?”

“I don’t have the foggiest idea,” Susan said as she leaned over the man to take a closer look. “All I know is that she was looking somewhere around here on his arm to find where these flashes of light were coming from ...”

Suddenly, the man sat up, easily breaking the leather straps. Susan jerked back shaking, bellowing a gut-wrenching scream. He swung his arm at her, knocking her through the curtains and into the monitoring equipment in the adjacent trauma room.

“Susan!” Robin screamed, racing to her. She bent down and felt her wrist. She had a pulse. “Dear god, good,” she sighed. Over her shoulder,

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Robin glimpsed the hideous mammoth of a man struggling to get to his feet. She shot up immediately, grabbed Susan by the arm and dragged her, inching away. In moments, the man was upon them; he reached out his huge cracked hand, grabbed Robin's shoulder and tossed her away from Susan. Robin landed hard on the floor.

She was dazed. With her hand on her forehead, she shook her head trying to gain control of her senses. Suddenly, she felt a strong, powerful grip grab her by the arms and lift her off the floor.

By the time she cleared her head, she was face to face with the hideous man. He held her off the floor with her feet dangling in the air. Robin was terrified. Her eyes popped open and the muscles around her mouth tightened into a gaping jaw. She looked at her arm where the man held her in a tight grip; it felt like a bee sting there, but only momentarily.

She gathered some courage and cried, "Let me go!"

There was no response. She called out again. Her voice grew shaky. The monstrous man did not answer but he pulled her closer to him. He opened his mouth exposing the dead flesh from which his teeth were attached. She felt the dry, hot breath of this man on her face. Her heart sank from fright. She tried to lunge away but her arm hurt from his vice-like grip.

The mouth began to move in a grinding motion and with a throaty voice the man spoke, "It already began ... call Tony ..."

The hideous man grunted out a telephone number then said, "Kaylee."

Suddenly, she felt the grip of steel soften. It slowly released her arm. The man fell to the floor, shook, then stopped moving completely.

From all over the ER, staff physicians, residents and nurses came running. The security guard plowed through the crowd. He found Tracy and Susan unconscious on the floor, Robin sitting up on the floor shaking from terror, and the monstrous man lying motionless beside her. "What happened?" he asked.

Robin, still in shock, asked, "... Is he dead?"

The guard looked over at the man. "Looks like he's dead as a doornail."

The guard gently held Robin's arms as he slowly lifted her.

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When Robin was back on her feet she glanced down at the man and shrieked, "... he tried to kill me!"

"Don't worry, Doctor," said the guard. "He'll never bother you again."

The security guard noticed that her white coat was stained with blood on both sides of her shoulder.

"Doctor, you are bleeding."

Robin looked at her arm, "It's alright."

She returned her focus to the man, glaring at the unmoving form.

Dr. Banner, head of the ER, appeared at last. He glared at Susan and Tracy lying unconscious on the floor, and then at Robin in her bloodstained coat. He spied the hideous man on the floor. He ignored his staff and went straight to the unusual figure, looking him keenly up and down. "My God!" he exclaimed, as he stared some more.

He then turned and looked over his shoulder at Robin. "Are you alright?"

"I think so."

He turned to the security guard. "What happened here?"

"From what I gather, that man," pointing to the man on the floor, "attacked Dr. Watkins."

Dr. Banner sighed. "Get Tracy and Susan on a gurney and wheel them to trauma room 3." He said to two residents, "And Lisa," he said to the nurse, "Take Robin to Dr. Pitt and have him take a look at her arm."

He focused on Robin. "... and you take a week off. You've been through a lot tonight."

"Ok, back to work," Dr. Banner commanded everyone else who had gathered and were gawking at the scene.

Carla Thompson, a woman in her early thirties with a dark complexion and fine features, skirted her way passed the crowd to Robin. "My gods, Robin, are you alright?"

"I'm fine."

"Sorry I didn't come earlier, but it was a madhouse at the admittance desk."

"Where're you taking her?" Carla asked Lisa.

"To Dr. Pitt."

"I'll take her," she insisted.

"Ok."

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Carla cradled Robin gently around her shoulders and led her down the hospital hallway. Robin turned around slightly to take another glimpse at the unsightly man stretched out on the floor, who had in an instant caused so much pain and terror.

Doctor Robin Watkins, distraught by the horrific circumstances of her fiancé's death, seeks a seedy reporter for answers. As Robin digs deeper for answers, she is pulled into the fight of her life, for she, along with the reporter, faces seemingly invincible deadly creatures.

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