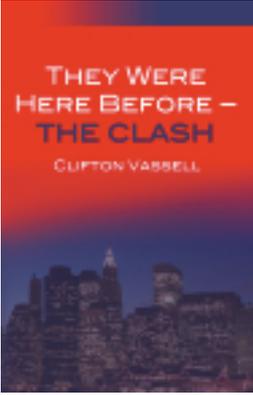


THEY WERE HERE BEFORE — THE CLASH

CLIFTON VASSELL





As Robin Watkins gets pulled back into battling the seemingly invincible creatures, she must now face a deadly insidious life form bent on coming back into the world; and all the while trying to evade the tyrannical head of a biotech company hunting her.

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by

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Dedication

To my wife Lusimara, daughter Nara, son Clifton Jr.

A special dedication to my mother, Ruby Vassell and memory of my father, Kenneth F. Vassell with love, admiration, and gratitude.

Clifton Vassell

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Clifton Vassell

Chapter One

MAY 21, 2001

On a moonless night around two in the morning, near a large oak tree in Cobb's Creek Park, dozens of large sinewy figures, concealed by the park's dark world, stood six rows deep. The brisk night air rustled their ragged clothes.

Each row faced a heavy round metallic container four feet high. None made a sound, but they all understood their common purpose. Each figure clenched a canister the size of a football in their elongated hands. One by one, they marched up to the large containers and emptied the liquid from their canisters into them then they stepped exactly twenty feet away still facing the containers.

As soon as the last one finished, they all marched up to the metal containers, forming a circle around them, and stretched their arms straight at the containers. A hissing sound began to emit from the sinewy figures. Bright electric arcs flashed out from them to the containers and the light glowed a greenish hue.

The flickering light revealed ghastly, gaunt-faced brutes in tattered, soiled clothes whose humanity had faded into frightening monstrosities.

After two hours, everything stopped. Six of them approached the containers and flipped the lids down, latching them shut. They picked the heavy containers up by their metal handles, walked over to the large truck, and heaved themselves and the containers into the back of the truck, a dozen more filed in one by one until the back of truck was packed tightly.

They stood motionless and silent, their eyes squeezed shut. The truck pushed off, laboring up the steeply sloped street. The others dispersed in all directions.

A group of them drifted down the dirt trail to the wooded park entrance. Across the heavily trafficked street was Club Wanda's, a popular dance club among college students.

Under the cover of darkness, they watched as the young people trickled out of the club.

Suddenly, they swung their heads to the left. Peering through the grove of shrubs and thin trees, they targeted a couple walking down the block.

The couple stopped in front of a boarded up, abandoned house. The entire block was mostly abandoned houses. Twenty yards down from them was the park entrance.

"Hold still, please," the young man said, smiling with the video camera in his hand.

"We took enough videos at the party," said the slim young lady with mock weariness.

The happy couple had decided to take a shortcut home from a night of partying at Club Wanda's. Both in their junior year of college, they were celebrating the end of a week of exams before going home for break.

"One more video, please."

"Ok, but hurry. It's creepy out here," she said, glancing at the wooded area.

The two had the breezy air of youth. The girl brushed a strand of light brown hair from her face and posed coyly. She was wearing a tight blue suede mini-skirt and, with her hand on a tree, she sauntered up close to the camera lens and whispered something for her boyfriend to catch. He grinned and finally put the camera down, circling his arm around her waist.

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"Ok, you win," he shrugged. The girl gave him a playful smack on the rear and they kissed. The hellish creatures moved easily among the trees and shrubs, advancing closer, ready to pounce.

Chapter Two

At eight in the morning, Robin's eyes opened slowly. She blinked a couple times to clear her vision. She was lying on the bed with a thin white sheet pulled up neatly to her mid-section.

As she regained her senses, Robin noticed that the room was warm and cozy, not like the other room which was always cold and sterile, like an operating room, with its intimidating equipment.

She shifted her gaze toward the end of the bed where a man with a neatly-cut salt and pepper haircut stood reading a chart.

Robin tried to sit up but her body felt weak and her arms, stretched out limply by her side, refused to obey. She let out a slight moan.

"Roger," she said, her voice low and dry.

Dr. Roger Benin turned and moved to her bedside. He looked down at her with concern. "How do you feel?"

Robin tried to reply but at first her voice caught. When she finally got the words out, her tone was raspy and weak. "Like a big hangover."

"I'm sure you'll feel that way for a while. They put some nasty things in you." Dr. Benin shook his head. "But you're having an amazing recovery."

Robin raised her head off the pillow and glanced around. Her eyes stopped at the sweet smelling flowers sitting next to her on the night table. "Where am I?"

"You're certainly not in containment anymore," Dr. Benin said smiling. "You're in a room at the Lancaster military base."

Robin exhaled softly then sunk back into the pillow.

The doctor pulled out a pen flashlight from his pocket and examined her eyes. "You're recovering nicely."

She turned her face to him. “How long have I been here?”
“About two days,” he said. “You were in and out of consciousness.”

Robin exhaled. “Am I going back to that horrible place?”
“No Robin,” he said, “never again.”

Dr. Benin smiled warmly. “In fact, you’re the key to stopping those horrible creatures.”

Robin’s eyes widened in disbelief, she glanced down thoughtfully and whispered, “How am I the key?”

She turned her gaze back to him. “I don’t understand.”

Dr. Benin grabbed a chair and sat, leaning forward.

“You remember the bizarre man that attacked you that night in the hospital?”

Robin nodded.

“He was in fact Dr. Kaylee.”

Robin stared out, stunned. She remembered the horrifying moment and the vice-like grip the crazed man had on her and the pain she felt in her arm. “That man was Dr. Kaylee?”

“Yes, however, somewhat mutated.”

She exhaled. “He grabbed me in the ER that night and held me off the floor.”

“That’s when he put a virus as well as the organism in you.”

Robin grew anxious. She glanced down at her chest. Her heart was pounding. “What will happen to me? Will I eventually become one of those things?”

“No, Robin.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. The virus in your blood prevented the mutation and it killed the creatures.”

“My blood,” Robin looked out, mulling it over. She returned her focus on Dr. Benin. “My blood can put an end to all this?”

“Yes, Robin. Your blood is the key.”

She looked at him perplexed. “How do you know all this?”

“You can thank Tony for that.”

“Where is he?”

“He was here yesterday. He left those flowers for you.”

Robin glanced at the flowers. “How is he?”

“He’s fine.”

“What is he doing now?”

“What he always does.”

Robin grinned slightly.

Suddenly, the door swung open. In strolled General Pathy. Robin frowned when she saw him.

The general walked to Robin’s bed and looked down on her. “Hello, Robin,” he said. “I see you’re fully recovered.” Robin rose up slowly, leaned against the headboard and shot a nasty look at him. “I’m fine, no thanks to you.”

The general cleared his throat. “Now that you are cleared and feeling better, I want you to resume your duties with the military.”

By now, Robin was fuming. She yelled, “You’ve got my blood! What do you need me for?”

“Young lady, you still have a duty to me.”

Robin winced. “You cold bastard! You caused me a lot of pain and now you’re asking me to act like nothing happened.”

“I’m sorry for what happened to you,” General Pathy said. “I was just following protocol.”

“Protocol my ass!”

General Pathy’s eyes narrowed and he glared nastily at her. “I am a four star general and you will give me the dignity and respect that is due to me.”

Robin sneered back at him. “You and your four stars can go to hell!”

Dr. Benin’s eyes widened. He didn’t expect that from her.

General Pathy shook his head and moved to the door. He turned, looked at her with cold eyes, and said, “Don’t forget, those things are still out there.”

Robin glared at him until he stepped out and slammed the door behind him.

Steaming, she swung her angry face toward Dr. Benin. “I’m leaving!”

Robin slid her weak body down to the edge of the bed. Her feet hung down to the floor.

Dr. Benin, startled by her actions, yelled, “No Robin!”

She ignored him and took a deep breath. Summoning all her strength, she pushed off the bed. Immediately, her legs buckled.

Dr. Benin jumped up from the chair and grabbed her before she hit the floor. He helped her return to the bed. “You need to stay in bed.”

He sat back down in the chair, reached for her hand and held it firmly. It felt flaccid.

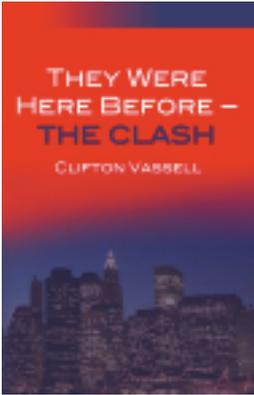
Robin was on her back, staring up at the ceiling. She turned her head and looked at him. She gave a feeble attempt to squeeze his hand. “Can I leave here?” Her voice was weak and faded at the end.

He gazed at her weakened body. “Yes, you can,” he said, “but not now. Your body needs more time to recover.”

Slowly, Robin’s eyes closed.

Dr. Benin rolled back her eyelids and examined her pupils. She’s only sleeping, he thought.

“Rest Robin,” Dr. Benin whispered. “In a couple of days, you’ll be just fine.”



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