

The House of Whispers

The rain had been falling for three days without stopping. It relentlessly pounded against the cracked windows of the old house where Loris lived with his mother. The house stood alone at the edge of the forest, separated from the village by a narrow road that disappeared under a thick fog every evening. The villagers avoided the place. Some claimed that strange lights appeared behind the attic windows at night. Others whispered that the forest itself was cursed. But Loris never listened to them. He had learned long ago that silence protected him better than words. At school, he moved through the corridors like a ghost. No one really noticed him. The teachers described him as polite but distant. The students found him strange because he rarely spoke. Only his mother understood why. Three years earlier, his father had disappeared without a trace. One evening, he had gone into the forest with a lantern and never returned. The villagers had searched for days. They had found nothing but his lantern, hanging from a dead tree near the river. After that, Loris changed. He became quiet, wary, almost afraid of getting attached to others. Yet beneath that silence remained a kindness he could never quite bury. That Friday night, the storm worsened. The electricity flickered as Loris read an old history book in his room. Beneath him, the floorboards creaked softly. The house always made noise, especially during thunderstorms, but that night seemed different. Alive. A sudden bang echoed downstairs. Loris froze. His mother looked up from the kitchen table.

- *Did you hear that?*

He nodded slowly. Another knock sounded, louder this time. His mother stood up and walked to the door. Loris followed her silently. The hallway seemed darker than usual, and the shadows stretched unnaturally across the walls. When she opened the door, no one was outside. Only rain and darkness.

- *That's impossible...*

She murmured. She quickly closed the door, but Loris noticed something on the doorstep. A lantern. Old. Rusty. His father's lantern. His mother stared at it, her hands pale and trembling. For several seconds, neither of them spoke. Then she murmured, almost to herself, that she should have stayed in the forest. Loris felt a chill settle in his chest. How could she be here? Who had brought her back? That

night, sleep refused to come. The wind clawed at the walls like long fingernails, and branches rapped against the roof above his room. Around midnight, Loris heard footsteps in the hallway, behind his door. Slow footsteps. He sat bolt upright in bed. His mother was asleep downstairs. He knew the sound of her footsteps. These were heavier. The footsteps stopped just outside his door. Silence followed. Then a faint whisper rose.

- *Loris...*

His heart pounded. No... that voice couldn't be real. He lay still under his blanket as the handle turned slowly. The door opened by itself. Darkness filled the hallway beyond, thick and endless. Loris tried to breathe silently. Maybe it was just the wind. Maybe the storm had blown the door open. But deep down, he knew someone was standing there. Watching him. A figure emerged from the shadows. Tall. Slender. Motionless. Loris wanted to scream, but his voice remained trapped in his throat. The figure moved forward into the pale moonlight. His father. Or something bearing his face. Water dripped from his clothes onto the floor. His eyes seemed empty, almost black.

- *Come with me*

He whispered. Loris trembled violently. It was impossible. His father was dead. Everyone knew it. And yet, a part of him desperately wanted to believe otherwise. The figure turned toward the hallway.

- *Follow me.*

Without understanding why, Loris stood up and walked behind it. The oppressive silence of the house seemed to close in around him. Even the storm outside had become calmer, as if the world itself were listening. Step by step, the figure led him downstairs and then to the back door. The forest waited beyond the glass. The dark trees twisted in the storm like enormous claws. Loris hesitated. Something felt terribly wrong. Once, his father had carried him through these woods when he was little. He laughed warmly and promised that nothing in the forest could harm him as long as they stayed together. But this thing... this creature... gave off no warmth. He stopped near the trees.

- *Loris...*

He said again. Her voice sounded broken now, strange, as if drowned. He suddenly understood. The figure didn't want him to follow her. He wanted him to disappear. Fear completely overwhelmed him. He recoiled abruptly.

- *No!*

At once, the creature's expression twisted horribly. His mouth stretched too wide, and her hollow eyes darkened even further. The lantern she was holding suddenly burst into flames. Then the forest awoke. Whispers rose among the trees. Hundreds of voices spoke together. The branches shook violently despite the absence of wind. Loris could hear his own thoughts screaming in his head. Run. Run now. He turned and sprinted toward the house. Behind him, footsteps echoed in the mud. The creature was chasing him. Loris slammed the back door and locked it with trembling hands. His mother rushed into the hallway.

- *What's going on?*

- *There's someone outside!*

The whispers grew louder. His mother's face went colorless. She looked out the windows with terrified recognition.

- *He's back...*

She whispered. Loris stared at her.

- *What do you mean?*

Tears welled in his mother's eyes. For years, she had hidden the truth because she feared what it would do to her son. Finally, she confessed. His father hadn't simply vanished. Before entering the forest years earlier, he had become obsessed with strange voices he said he heard at night. He believed that something lived deep within the woods, something ancient that promised immortality. One evening, he had set out to find it.

- *He said the forest was calling him*

She explained weakly.

- *And when he never returned... I prayed it would all be over.*

A violent jolt shook the house. The windows rattled. Another bang followed. Loris's breathing quickened. The thing outside no longer pretended to be human. The front door creaked slowly as it opened. An icy chill filled the hallway. The creature entered. His body now appeared distorted, half shadow, half human, dripping with black water. The lantern burned with an unnatural light beside him. Loris could no longer move. Terror pinned him to the ground.

- *She's going to take me too.*

The creature stared straight into his eyes. Then, unexpectedly, she stopped. For a brief moment, something human returned to her face. Pain. Regret. A father's sadness.

Go...

He murmured painfully. The shadows around his body trembled violently, as if fighting against him. Loris then understood the truth. Something in the forest had taken his father years before, but a part of him still existed inside the monster. And continued to fight. The creature suddenly let out a terrible cry, filled with rage and suffering, before throwing the lantern to the ground. Flames immediately spread through the corridor. His mother grabbed Loris's arm.

- *Run!*

Together, they escaped through the back door as the fire devoured the old house behind them. From the edge of the forest, Loris turned one last time. Through the flames stood the dark silhouette of his father. Watching him. Then the roof collapsed and the silhouette vanished forever. By morning, only ashes remained. The villagers later claimed that the storm had caused the fire, but Loris knew the truth, a truth that would remain buried in the forest. And sometimes, late at night, when the wind rustled through the trees, he could still hear whispers coming softly from the darkness. They were waiting.