

# The Hollow Ones

by Gabriel Solstice

Daniel Ashwood wiped the dirt from his hands, his fingers trembling. The chamber wasn't supposed to be here—at least not according to the records. Yet the stone door stood before him, sealed for centuries, its surface carved with symbols he couldn't decipher.

Behind him, the forest pressed close, the wind carrying whispers through the trees.

"You shouldn't be here."

Daniel turned to see an old man standing at the edge of the clearing. His clothes hung loose, faded and torn.

"I have a permit," Daniel said, but the words felt hollow.

The man shook his head. "It's not the land that needs permission. It's them."

Daniel frowned. "Who?"

But the man was already retreating, swallowed by the trees.

The wind picked up, and Daniel turned back to the door. He traced the grooves in the stone, pausing as his fingers caught on something—dried blood, flaking beneath the carvings.

He stepped back. The air felt heavier now, as though the earth itself held its breath.

The ground shifted.

Daniel froze as the door began to crack open, dust spilling from its edges. He reached for his flashlight, but the beam barely pierced the darkness inside.

Then he heard it.

Scraping.

Like nails against stone.

He stepped closer, his heart pounding. Shapes shifted in the shadows, too large to be human.

A hand shot out of the darkness—thin, gray, and clawed. Daniel stumbled back as the figure emerged, its hollow eyes fixed on him.

More followed.

Daniel turned and ran, the sound of footsteps echoing behind him.

But the forest offered no safety.

The whispers grew louder, surrounding him.

And Daniel knew—he had woken something that should have remained buried.