



## “Clear Whisper” by: Elliot O’Connor

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She heard a whisper down the stairs. Warm in her bed, from a deep slumber she instantly awoke, curious to know what she heard. It was not the steps of a late servant, or the taps of the light cat. No, it was something else. Not the clang of a door, or the slip of the foot, or drop of a book. No, that was not it. It was something else.

It had sounded of a call, whispered in command. But what of she misunderstood. This whisper trilled in her ears, even as she tried to shut her eyes again, attempting to fall deep in sleep once more, but the quiet voice would not leave her alone, a simple clear voice bringing a message.

Out of bed she got, and more voices appeared, encouraging her movements. Putting on her shawl, and lighting a single candle, she opened the door of her room and the voices rang. Down the hall she looked, wondering why no one else scurried from their rooms, to follow the voices. And then the clear whisper called again and her doubts ceased. She hurried down the hall.

In the glow, reflected from the candle, the whisper sang to her, inspired her forward. Portraits glimmered, vases glared, furniture grew on the walls, but she took no notice. All she saw was the sound which tugged at her legs. Not once did her eyes take a look back. Not once did they blink in the darkness. No, they focused in the distance, trying desperately to see the whisper’s voice.

She arrived at the stairs that twisted downward where the whisper echoed. It sounded so near, so sharp. But where was it? Down she journeyed, the other voices followed; the whisper pulled while the voices pushed. She would not be returning. Never would she be going back to that which was known.

Further she went, and colder it got. Although her arms were thankful for the shawl, her bare feet were not so grateful, for within each touch her feet iced against the stoned stairs. The stairs would never end in the turn it seemed – until at last they did.

Here the whisper was different...it was still clear, but its sound was lighter, the air of mystery still surrounding her head. Standing proud before her was a door, an unfamiliar door. She had a moment’s thought of turning back; the unknown never suit her well. She wished to fall back into her warm bed, but such thoughts were interrupted by a roar of scold, angered voices that shouted,

*No! You must not go back!*

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All sense of adventure vanished. Who would say such forceful words? Her worries increased and she turned to leave, but a wind slapped her face, and the candle's flame failed.

*Go forward!*

Unwilling, her hand pushed the door open.

Down she fell, falling through the black. Her shawl left her, her dress flapped. She tried to scream, but no sound came. It was silent as she fell through darkened frost. The whisper had left. The voices had left. Down she fell at speed unwanted.

And then she stopped.

Her body landed on black. To her left was black. To her right was black. Up above was black. The candle had been left behind. Her shawl eventually made its way to her lap, but it gave no comfort. Where was the whisper now?

She stood up, surprised that it was possible. After turning full circle, she walked forward, as had been instructed. She felt a cry forming in her chest. She hated to cry. What point was there to it? No point. But she couldn't help it. The tears fell and the black shined bright, like the full moon she'd never see again. Alarmed, she ran, and the tears continued to fall. The light continued to bring terror, until the whisper appeared again. But it was not a whisper. It was a call. A plea for assistance, but it grew faint. Panicking, she quickened her bare feet, trying to find the sound.

It was behind another door, black, but for the knob that held it closed. The voices returned.

*Go forward! You're close!*

Without any resistance this time, she opened the door. What she saw beyond scorched her vision. Fire burned. It burned wildly but it did not scar, it would not damage her. And so she ran. She ran through the flames, searching for her whisper. For her call. The voices encouraged again. They followed behind, hurrying her along—they told her to turn this way, and that way, never to stop—ever. The orange and red and yellow hurt her eyes, they tried to darken them. But she ran, pushing the flames aside.

In the bright she saw a figure. But not for long, for the flames still had will to hide their secret. She knew it was her whisper. She knew she must free the figure, which was trapped in the terrain of fire. She ran

forward, the voices hesitating, unable to follow. They were not allowed. She ran, and she tripped.

Looking behind to see what had stopped her feet, she found a body that lay motionless. The flames fell, and she and the body rested in a cloud of gray silence. She looked carefully at the still figure, wondering what eyes were beneath the lids, and after some time the form became clear. The body was that of a forgotten memory – a memory erased by unbearable pain. The body belonged to her lost love, one that had been stolen away from her. And now she had found him. She knew who whispered, and what voices spoke. But if she found her lost love, then one other also must be near as she sat, in the gray of silence.

And sure enough there he was. He stood before her, with eyes of greed, eyes of unfortunate purpose.

*At last, sister. You've come to join us,* he says to her. She shakes her head.

*I've come to take him back...I remember what you did.*

*And what was it that you remember?* he asks.

*You took him from me. But we will go back now.*

*Why go back? He is dead.* She hears a whisper in the distance.

Clearly.

*He is not dead,* she says, smiling at her brother.

Closing her eyes she spun upward until she lay within the covers of her warm bed. A quiet sound sang through her ears, and she knew her love was not gone. He was not forgotten.

Out of her bed she rose – and after putting on her shawl, after lighting a candle, and after slipping on her slippers – out she went down the hall to the stairs, to where she heard the clear whisper calling.