

THE ORIGIN OF LIGHT

Chapter 1.

Benjamin Milton remembered he was God when he heard the child crying. It was as if he had suddenly come out of a stupor into clarity. He looked calmly at the chaos around him. People were running everywhere trying to get as far away from the inferno as they could. The heat was intense even from where Ben stood across the street. Neighbors and on-lookers watched fearfully as the residents of the four-story apartment building fled to the safety of the street. People from the adjacent buildings wisely evacuated themselves for fear that the fire would spread.

"Where the hell are the fire trucks!" someone shouted, more angry than fearful.

The wail could be heard in the distance but it still seemed a hundred miles away.

Ben was strangely unaffected by the commotion. He was focused on the flames and a sound that lay beneath its growling, like a kitten's mew. A plaintive heartbreaking wail. A panic stricken woman was trying to fight her way back into the building. It took four people to hold her back and still she nearly knocked Ben over as she tumbled to the ground sobbing.

"Oh God! Please God! My Baby! Willy! Jesus, he's gonna burn!"

Ben looked down and saw her pleading.

"please," she whispered, her strength nearly gone.

Ben turned and immediately began walking toward the building. Several people had dragged out their garden hoses and were vainly trying to fight the fire. Ben walked right through the path of their streams. A man-made rainstorm instantly drenched him. A bystander with a video camera captured the image of a dark shining spirit within the mist advancing against a sulfurous holocaust. In a moment he would be consumed like a soul into its damnation.

The fire trucks were only four blocks away now, but it would be too late for the child. The crowd looked to the third floor in horror as the child's cries died down to a whimper. The distraught mother keened wordlessly to heaven.

"What in God's name is he doing?!" A voice cried out.

"He's going in after the kid," a young woman shouted pointing at Ben.

"Hey mister, it's suicide! Come back!" The people were calling to him.

But he did not hear them. The terror in the crowd grew more palpable as Ben disappeared into the building.

Ben felt as if he no longer needed to breathe. The flames licked at him but his wet clothes did not catch. He took the fiery steps two at a time but by the time he reached the second floor landing his face was blistering. Ben ignored the heat on his face and the burning that had now

begun in his throat. He reminded himself that this was merely a response of the mortal flesh he was wearing and since he would not die today he would accept it.

He continued on to the third floor. He could hear the child whimpering now and he strode purposefully down the hall to the open apartment. He did not need to search. It was as if he knew where the boy's room was. Two year-old Willy was under the bed choking and nearly unconscious. Ben grabbed hold of the boy's pajamas slid him out and turned him face up in one motion. The boy looked up at him weakly, squeaked out the word, "angel," and then passed out. Ben gathered him up and tucked him beneath his sopping coat.

Outside the firemen were unloading their hoses to begin dousing the flames. The chief shouted out orders to his men and surveyed the position of the crowd. These people were too close. He told one of his men to call for police back up and then started ordering people back himself. He noticed a woman crying violently in the arms of a fellow bystander.

"Is there anyone left inside," the chief yelled out.

"My son," Willy's mom threw herself bodily toward him.

"How old?"

"He's only two, Oh God, please get him out!"

"A guy went in after him," a bystander spoke up.

The chief grimaced. The only thing worse than a victim trapped in a burning building was two victims trapped in a burning building.

"Now listen up!" he yelled out to his men, "we got at least two people in there and one of them's a kid! Let's go get 'em!"

The fire fighters moved in with their hoses but each man knew looking at that building that it was hopeless. If they were lucky dental records might identify the bodies. Ubiquitous flames leapt from every possible exit. No one was coming out of there alive. The chief shook his head and scanned the building for any sign of life.

CRACK! A loud snap of wood followed by the groan of metal . The crowd gasped and the firemen looked up. The infrastructure could be heard crumbling inside. The building was going to fall.

"Pull back! Pull back," the chief yelled to his men. "Everybody back!"

The crowd looked as if it would stampede at any moment. A brief silence was followed by several sharp pops as the roof began to cave in. The chief looked to the roof and that was when he saw it.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God!"

He could not believe it. The crowd saw it too. A silhouette moving against the smoky moonlight. It looked like a large man walking swiftly and picking up speed. He was heading across the roof toward the neighboring building. And he was on fire. A tail of yellow flames snapped at his back, yet hunched over and clutching his coat tightly around him as he did, one might think he was cold.

The building next door was only a six-foot drop but he would have to clear a four-foot alley. By the time he reached the edge he was in a full run. The burning building groaned loudly as he stepped off and then it slipped away behind him. There was absolute silence as he sailed through the air. The moment he landed on the other ledge he disappeared into a cloud of smoke and dust from the collapsed building. The rumbling shock wave that shook the crowd slowly faded.

Silence. No one had fled in spite of the gray whirlwind that choked them and stung their eyes. As the cloud settled and cleared one hundred pairs of eyes strained to see the adjacent building. The young man with the video camera climbed up on the side of the fire truck to get a better shot.

"Did you see that?!"

"Where did he go?!"

"Did he fall?!"

The questions came randomly, fearfully, daring to hope for the impossible. Some scanned the burning rubble with silent prayers and frightened gazes.

Ben stood slowly, carefully, still clutching his precious cargo. His coat was smoking and he was covered in soot. The crowd roared with delight. Several firemen raced into the building to assist him. Ben walked to the edge of the building and looked down.

The front of his coat wiggled and Willy poked his head out and took a breath of clean air. A second cheer went up louder than the first. A screaming, sobbing, laughing cheer that bespoke a universal prayer answered. Willy's mom fell to her knees and raised her hands to God in thanksgiving for her son's deliverance.

Within a few minutes they were down on the ground and Willy was in his mother's arms. Blackened and blistered as he was Ben looked like a creature of hell and yet to the crowd and to Willy and his mother there was never a more divine face. The young mother kissed Ben's hands and wept with ineffable joy and gratitude. Ben reached out and touched her face in blessing and smiled. Then He looked up at the sky, His sky, and fainted.