



# The Door

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THE DOOR STOOD ALONE AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF THE tundra. It was white, almost lost in the endless field of snow. The only thing that stood out was the black doorknob. Joamie blinked hard. He turned off his snowmobile, threw his shotgun over his shoulder, and approached cautiously. Up close it looked like any regular door, except that it was standing alone in the middle of the Arctic. He gently touched the sides, sliding his hand underneath to feel the space between the door and the ground—it wasn't attached. He shivered and took a step back.

"What in God's name?" he said.

Joamie had left his house that morning at roughly six a.m. It was springtime. The sun had just begun to peek over the horizon, giving him a precious few hours of light. He was hunting polar bear, although he would bag a wolf if he saw one: the Northwest Territories Hunters and Trappers Association offered \$150 for the pelts, and he could use the money. But after nearly two hours, Joamie had managed to kill only one Arctic hare. *Not much*, he

thought. *But better than going back empty-handed.* The daylight had already begun to fade. He had skinned the animal with his knife and put the red flesh in a plastic bag. After securing his catch to the back of his snowmobile, he'd driven off toward the village.

And then he'd seen it.

As Joamie stared at the door, he noticed the world around him had grown eerily quiet. Usually the wind was stinging his face, but it had stopped blowing. Everything around him was silent, unmoving. Without knowing how it happened, Joamie found his hand on the doorknob. A bad taste formed in his mouth, and his stomach was in knots. He fought hard against the urge to open the door. He had a feeling deep in his gut that this was something unnatural. Something evil. He used all his willpower to remove his hand and ran back to his snowmobile. He took off for home without looking back.

He arrived home, breathless and shaken, just as the darkness took over and hurried into the house with his catch. His grandmother, Ethel, was sitting at the table sewing beads onto a moosehide jacket. Joamie stood in the kitchen, snow falling off him in heaps that melted into puddles on the floor.

"Take off your snowsuit in the entrance," Ethel said.

Joamie went into the kitchen, threw the hare into the sink, and went back to hang up his clothes to dry. When he came back, his grandmother was filling a pot with water. She could tell from the look on her grandson's face that he was upset.

"I found something," Joamie said.

Ethel waited for him to continue speaking, but he just stared at her, his eyes wide.

"What?" she said finally.

"I couldn't bring it back with me. It's not something . . . I have ever seen before. I mean I've seen one before, but not like this."

"You're talking crazy. What did you see?" Ethel asked.

"There was a . . . a door. It was just there all of a sudden. It looked like it was floating."

Ethel looked at Joamie askance. What he said sounded insane. He expected her to laugh or cry because her grandson had lost his mind. He noticed her body stiffen. She stood for a moment, unmoving, as though she were transfixed.

"Did you touch it?" she asked.

Joamie nodded. "Just lightly."

"Did you open it?"

"No. But I . . . I wanted to."

Joamie stared intensely at his grandmother. Her face was contorted in fear. He had never seen her look like that before. She spoke slowly, in a hushed voice.

"Joamie, you must not open that door. You understand? If you see it again, you do not open it."

"Where did it come from? Why did I see it?"

"I don't know."

"What happens if I open it?"

"Listen to me, Joamie. You leave it alone if you ever see it again. That's all we're going to say about it."

Ethel shook her head and turned away. She took out a bag of flour and began busying herself. "Do you want some bannock with dinner?"

"Gran? I . . ."

"Joamie, stop!"

Joamie sat down at the kitchen table, swallowing his questions

along with his fear. "Yes, you should make some bannock. Maybe take out the jam too," he said.

Ethel smiled and began to hum. "We need to go to church this Sunday. We haven't been in a while. I saw Father Gagnon at NorthernMart. He told me we have been missed."

Joamie nodded his head in agreement. His grandmother had been a practising Catholic since missionaries had arrived in the village when she was a child.

"I guess we should go this weekend," he said. "You're one of the most respected elders in the community. You have to set an example."

Joamie couldn't help but think her sudden urge to go to church had something to do with the mysterious door. The sickly feeling swirled in his stomach and crawled up into his throat. He swallowed some water and tried to stifle it, forcing it back down. He ate his dinner in silence and went to bed early.

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Joamie did his best to forget about the door. Allowed it to fall into the deep recesses of his mind where he had shoved other bad memories, like the time he was beaten almost unconscious by Jackson Bishop, the local bully. Or the image of his mother lying in a casket, her face calm as though she were sleeping. Joamie did his best to keep all his darkest memories buried. Ever since his encounter with the door, he hadn't been able to keep them out of his mind. They kept bubbling up to the surface, jolting him awake, heart pounding.

The weather changed, and with warmer temperatures came the midnight sun and the best season for hunting. Nearly half the village would spend time harvesting muskox, bison, and caribou.

Early one morning, Joamie's neighbour Darrell arrived at the door carrying a shotgun. Darrell was a little older than Joamie, in his mid-thirties, but looked closer to fifty. His skin was weathered and cracked, and he had deep bags under his eyes. "Joamie, we're heading west to hunt for caribou tomorrow. Why don't you join us? We got a small group together. Going for maybe two or three days. We could use you."

Normally, Joamie would jump at the offer, but the swirling nausea in his stomach gave him pause. He looked at his grandmother for approval. She was standing behind him with her arms crossed over her chest.

"You're not going to get better weather than this," she said, motioning to the sky. "We need to eat."

Darrell smiled and gave Joamie a friendly slap on the shoulder. "Get your survival gear together. I'll swing by tomorrow. Early."

Joamie went to sleep feeling anxious. He tossed and turned, dreaming about the door. In his dream, he was standing in front of it, trying to stop himself from opening it. It was like his hand had a mind of its own. He couldn't stop himself from turning the knob. The door opened to blackness, a deep, dark abyss that Joamie felt himself being sucked into. It felt sinister. He was propelled awake, sweating and out of breath.

The next morning, Joamie drove his ATV behind the others, carefully scanning the ground for tracks. He hoped for a caribou or muskox; either would have enough meat to last a while. After a morning of travel, the group was hours from the village. Joamie's eyes scanned the flat landscape continuously, looking for anything that appeared unusual.

It was nearing two a.m. when they finally stopped to set up

camp. Normally, Joamie had no difficulty sleeping in the sunlight, but this time, for some reason, he felt an uneasiness he couldn't shake. While the others slept soundly in tents, Joamie walked away from camp, looking for a spot to relieve himself. He noticed something in the distance. At first, he thought it was a burned-down cabin, but as he got closer his blood ran cold.

It was a door. The door. It looked the same as it had in the winter: standing alone, unfixd to the landscape. He considered waking the other men, but something compelled him toward it. He didn't want to do it, but it was as though he was not in control of his own body. He found himself approaching, despite the feeling that something was very wrong. There was something sinister about the door. The urge to open it was stronger this time. He put his hand on the knob. He remembered his grandmother's warning. He pictured her face as he tried to keep his hand off the knob. It was as though an invisible force had taken over Joamie. A deep breath, and he opened the door. He couldn't help it.

He closed his eyes, half expecting something awful to jump out and eat him. Slowly opening his eyes, he stared through the empty door frame to see the same landscape on the other side. Nothing horrible, no monsters, no demons. He walked back to camp, and, looking over his shoulder, saw that the door had quietly vanished.

Joamie felt unsettled. He told himself he should feel relieved, but something nagged at him. Deep down he knew that couldn't be it. He felt as though the door wasn't finished with him. The anticipation of what lay ahead was nerve-racking. He did his best to shove his concern aside and act like everything was fine.

Three days later, the group arrived back in the village on schedule. The hunting party had killed two large bison, enough meat to

last a few weeks. Joamie found his grandmother in the kitchen when he arrived home. She was sitting with her Bible in front of her. Reading glasses hung from a string around her neck. She visibly shivered when he walked in.

"We were successful," he said, smiling as he placed cuts of meat inside the freezer. Ethel sat stone-faced.

"Aren't you happy? You can make stew tonight," he said.

"Go into the backyard," she said.

He opened the back door. A raven was lying right at his feet, almost as though it were waiting for him, horribly injured. Its neck was broken, and blood pooled around its body. Joamie bent down to get a closer look. He then noticed the yard was littered with at least a dozen dead birds, all bloody and broken. Joamie recoiled in horror. He stepped quickly back inside the house.

"You opened the door," Ethel said, her tone filled with disappointment and fear. Her words pained her grandson. Joamie, wide-eyed, was speechless. He lowered his head. He searched for something to say.

"I . . . I'm sorry," he muttered.

"I'm afraid it's too late for sorry."

A blood-curdling howl came from outside. It was almost animalistic; it was so deep and unnatural. Darrell was outside, blood flowing from his eyes. His piercing screams brought out half the village. Most people just stood around watching, shocked at the sight. A few ran to Darrell's side in an attempt to help. He writhed and flailed so violently that no one was able to hold onto him. Blood spurted from his face, spraying those closest to him. Joamie stood watching from the window. He wanted to help his friend but found himself frozen in fear.



"There is nothing we can do," Ethel said. She put down the Bible and motioned for Joamie to join her at the table.

"When I was a girl, my mother told me about something that happened when she was a child. Her uncle claimed a door had appeared before him. He had been using sled dogs to cross from his hunting grounds back to his camp. There was a blizzard. His dogs became agitated. He saw a door, standing on its own. He felt the evil that lay behind it, but he couldn't help himself. He had to open it. Nobody believed him, of course. They laughed at him, said he must be sick in the head to come up with such a crazy story."

Ethel paused. She began to cry but stifled her tears with a tissue. "Then people began to die. First, they suffered in an unspeakable manner."

Joamie thought of Darrell, lying right outside on the gravel road, writhing and contorting in pain.

"The sickness spread, and everyone in the camp was dead in a few days," Ethel said. "Aside from my mother and her older brother, who fled early on. For some strange reason, their lives were spared."

The pair sat in silence for a moment. Screams could be heard outside.

"We can leave," he said to his grandmother.

"And go where?"

"We can take the ATV to Coral Inlet. The weather is good, endless daylight. We can make it."

Ethel didn't respond.

"We can make it, Grandma. Grandma!"

Ethel sat quietly, picking her Bible back up and continuing to read. She was so calm that it made Joamie feel panicky. He got up abruptly from the table and began to pack. He shoved some

clothes, food, and a few other necessities in a duffle bag. He went back to the kitchen to tell Ethel it was time to leave, but just as he reached the doorway, he felt something wet on his face. Joamie touched his eyes, which had begun to sting. He looked at his hand to see blood.

Ethel looked up at him as tears of blood fell onto the pages of her Bible.

“God help us,” she said.