

# SPOOKY SOUTHINGTON

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Organized by the  
Southington Public  
Library

EDITED BY JASMINE GEBERS AND NICOLE KENT

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### A Quick Note from Your Editors

Let us start by saying that it was our absolute honor to edit the first edition of Spooky Southington and we hope to do it many years to come. We were blown away by the number and quality of the stories that we received during the month of October. Some stories were funny, some stories had a touch of science fiction, and some were downright scary! But above all, these stories show what a wonderful sense of community Southington has and what a varied and extraordinary bunch they are.

Given that this is the first volume of Spooky Southington, we organized the anthology in a few non-traditional ways. First, we have begun the anthology with the child entries, followed by the teen and adult entries respectively. Second, rather than put the stories in alphabetical order by title, we decided to do it by the author's last name since many were untitled or submitted as a "free write" or simply "Spooky Story". Lastly, we did not put our winners in any obvious place in the anthology. The winners in each category have their titles in red font versus black font. There were so many amazing entries that we want the anthology to be appreciated as a whole product.

We hope that everyone who submitted and consequently reads this anthology enjoyed this journey as much as we did. We can't wait for next year and the publication of Spooky Southington volume 2.

Without further ado, please enjoy **Spooky Southington Vol. 1**.

Jasmine Cedeno/Children's Librarian

Nicole Kent/Teen Librarian

Southington Public Library, October 2023



**CHILD ENTRIES**

## A Trail of Crimson Secrets by Olivia Albanese

### Chapter 1

As I trudged through the cold, dark rain on Thursday night, I can't help but think about what my dad was doing right now. He had kicked me out of the station because of some "adult stuff", but I knew what that meant. In fact, I knew everything about what he was doing. Last night, a murder had taken place. He, Chief Thornwall of Police, was required to question the only witness- a Nardelli's worker named Peter Scatterval. To be honest, I really wanted to be there, but of course he kicked me out. So here I am, in the freezing cold downpour, walking home.

I'd had a bad day even before he kicked me out. California Warren, the Queen Bee of Southington High, had decided to pick on her favorite target for today. As you're probably guessing, that's me.

I've always been different. There's only one person who really gets me? My friend Suki Dovannta. Suki is the only girl in a family of five boys, so she's kind of always doing stuff she shouldn't be. But, really, she's an *amazing* graffiti artist.

Speaking of Suki, there she was. Spray painting on a brick wall, not even caring about the rain. Her ginger hair looked flaming red in the street-lighted shower.

"Be a shame if my dad caught you doing that," I say. Suki whips around, unaware of my presence.

"Can you please *not* do that, Kardama? It scares me every time!"

"Sorry. Did you hear about last night?"

"Yeah. I heard. So, what?"

"I want to investigate. Could use your help."

"What's in it for me?" Suki always likes to get her end of the deal. Typical. I dig through my pockets.

"Two Jolly Ranchers."

"I need more than that." she says. *Of course. Not enough, as always...*

"I won't tell my dad that you're out here doing this." *Ha. My turn to play the card.*

"You wouldn't dare." I give her the look that says I would dare. "Okay, okay, you win."

Now that I have Suki on my side, I know just where to start.

Queen Street Plaza.

Nardelli's.

The exact place where the murder was witnessed.

### Chapter 2

The investigation didn't go so well. There was hardly any evidence. The wind whipped and howled, and I could hear police sirens down the street, frantically searching for any witnesses. *Clearly, I think, these people don't have a clue what to do in an investigation. Probably my dad's doing...*

Then I barely see it. A backpack with the same color as the dumpster, and, also... the wall? As I pick it up, it adapts to my hoodie while also matching the wall and dumpster in front of me. *The perfect cover.* But how could such technology even be possible?

I tell Suki that we'd better head to the library. Only such information could be found in books. Right? At this point I didn't really know what to do. If such futuristic technology really does exist, the murderer could cover up any crime scene that they wanted to. Meaning they could be committing a crime right at this moment. We had to stop them before they could run wild committing crimes.

### Chapter 3

When we arrive at the library, I smell the scent of rot in the air. *Something has happened here...but what?* I then notice the librarian, Ms. Wallater, run up to me.

“Oh Kardama! Suki! Come with me, someone has just been killed!” she shrieks, not caring about the quiet library thing. Then again, desperate times call for desperate measures. We both swiftly follow her, and then see the body on the floor, gore stained on her shirt from a stab wound. A friend. Sage Matthews.

“SAGE!” Suki screams. They’d known each other for years. “Oh, no, no. Please, no.” I will admit it. The sight of Sage’s dead body was sad to see.

At that point, my phone dings with a text. I realized it was almost six, and the library was technically closed.

“We’d better go-” I say, but then Ms. Wallater interrupts me.

“It’s alright. You came here for a reason, didn’t you? Go. Use the books to find the thing you seek.”

### Chapter 4

I wander around the adult section of the library, trying to find the book that will unlock the key to the trail of crimson secrets that stain this case. Then, something thuds to the ground, and for a second, I swear I see Sage. Not as a human, but as a pale, silvery form. A ghost.

It isn’t the first time I’ve seen the dead. And I’m not sure it will be the last. But, standing right there in front of me, is Sage Matthews. The book that she dropped for me is *Unlocking the Future*.

“Thank you,” I say. “Rest in peace.”

I rapidly skim the Table of Contents, until I see it. *Technology of the Future*. A diagram showing the exact backpack I found rests on the page.

*To open the backpack’s inner lock, a code is needed. To unlock it, simply say the code aloud.*

Then a sticky note floats to the floor. 22597, it says. Then I shut the book, and noticed the author. Linda Wallater. Who better to know about future technology than someone who owns a piece of it? Then that means...

“SUKI!” I scream at the top of my lungs. “SUKI! I FOUND OUT WHO DID IT!”

“Did you now?” an eerie voice pummels out of the shadows behind me. Then, something goes over my head, and the world is encased in black.

### Chapter 5

“I always knew you were smart,” my captor says viciously after removing the bag from my head. “But I really wish you hadn’t found out my plan.”

“Hello, Linda Wallater.” I say. It’s easy to figure out who it is. She sounds exactly the same- cheery, happy, welcoming. My new least-favorite librarian.

“Hello, Kardama Ophelia Thornwall. Now, the most appropriate option right now would be to kill you. And, man, I would love to, but I think I’ll keep you as hostage to bargain. I want your father. And if he doesn’t come, it’ll be you instead I guess. Oh well.” She taps a number into her phone, turns on a voice changer app, then speaks.

“Hello, Chief Thornwall. I propose a trade. You for your daughter.”

“DAD! NO! DON’T!” I riot.

“Kardama?!” I heard him say.

“Don’t come. Please. It’s a trap.” she hangs up, which either means he’s coming, or he’s not.

I realize I still have my pocket knife. I use it to cut the ropes tying me to a wooden chair, then while Wallater is busy on her phone, I stab her.

Just as she did to Sage.

Technically, if she captured me, tied me to a chair, and was going to murder me if my father didn’t show up, would it be considered self-defense? I’ll leave that up to my father to decide. But right now, I’m glad I’m alive.

## **Chapter 6**

My dad bursts into the room I’m trapped in, and for once, that’s a good thing. He hugs me, then says, “You are in *so* much trouble.” Then he smiles. He doesn’t mean it.

When we get home, I realize that I left the invisible backpack at the library. Then, the doorbell rings.

As I open it, I see Suki standing on the front porch, holding something suspended in the air.

“Looking for this?” she asks. I hugged her. For the first time. I hugged her.

“I’m sorry about Sage. I’m sorry you had to see her like that, I’m sorry she even got killed!”

“It’s fine. It wasn’t your fault.” At that point, her phone rings.

“Oops, that’d be my mom. I have to go. See you at school?”

I nod then wave bye as she sprints to her car in the rain. I then shut the door, and head to my room.

“22597” I whisper, and the backpack becomes visible. As I unzip it, I notice all sorts of different future tech Linda Wallater was hiding. But that’d be an adventure for another day. For now, I needed to get to sleep.

## The Jinxed Night by Avery Alia



### Chapter 1

“Hey guys!” I said.

“Hi Ella!” Sophia said.

“Hey Ella!” Alex said.

“Hey bestie!” Ava said, “I’m sorry I have to ask again, Ella, but what day is it again?”

“Oh my gosh Ava, it’s Friday the 13th! The iconic horror day!” I replied, “Oh my goodness! How could I forget!” We all broke out into laughter.

While I was opening my locker and putting my stuff away as usual, all of a sudden, I heard this soft, but cold, whisper.

*“Ella . . . . Ella.”*

The hair on the back of my neck stood up. “What in the . . .” I whispered, “Hey uh. . . guys? I’m gonna go to the bathroom. Be right back.”

“Uhhh ok?” Alex said, sounding very confused.

When I arrived in the bathroom, I saw a note on the wall, a note written with blood. It read, “Ella, today, Friday the 13th, when the clock strikes 11:00 pm, you and your friends must come to the Southington Public Library. It’s . . . urgent. (Erase the message once done reading) - anonymous

“Uhh. . . What the heck?! I need to get to the group!” I exclaimed in a stern tone. I swiftly erased the message, and sprinted out of the bathroom. The whole time I was thinking, *this is not okay, this is not okay!* “Guys! Guys! You’re never gonna believe me. Honestly, no one in their right mind could EVER possibly believe me. But what I’m about to tell you is absolutely true,” I explained.

“OKAY! We get it, just get to the point!” Alex exclaimed.

“Okay, so, when I was at my locker, I heard this creepy voice. So, I went to the bathroom and there was this note on the mirror, written in blood by the way, saying for you guys and I to go to the Southington Library once the clock strikes 11:00 pm,” I explained.

“Wait, wait, wait. The Southington Library?! But you know that that place is haunted right? There’s no way I’m going,” Sophia said.

“Well you can’t just make her go on her own. Who knows what might happen! I’m going,” Ava said.

“Yeah, Ava’s right, I’ll go with you!” Alex said. He gives me his goofy sweet smile and I give one back.



“You know what I’ll go too!” Sophia said. “Thanks, Soph! I’ll see you guys tonight!” I say. I gave a wave and walked off.

**\*DING DONG\*\*DING DONG\***

I woke up immediately. *What in the! Shoot, I gotta go!* I thought. I leaped out of my cozy bed, threw on some shoes and ran out the door. I didn’t really want to do this, but who knew what would happen, because you know, that blood on the wall.

<1 minute later>

“Hey guys I’m here!” I said out of breath.

“Hey Ella, are you ready to go in?” Alex asked.

Before I could answer, I saw this other kid who was kinda cute, not gonna lie but I had no idea who he was. “Uhh ... yeah! But who is he?” I asked.

“I’m Landon,” He said. Clearly, he was a little shy, but I knew he had a big personality, I just had to reveal it.

“Well,” Sophia said, “let’s go in.”

Right then and there, we walked in. And boy it was creepy inside. There were creepy cobwebs and this weird rotten flesh smell, not the smell of fresh books like usual.

“Okay, this isn’t just weird, it’s beyond weird,” Landon said.

All I could do was stare. His eyes were a deep blue, like a calming ocean. Even in this creepy place he made me feel calm. *Ugh, snap out of it!* I thought to myself. But I couldn’t just look away. All of a sudden, he looked at me. When he did, he seemed surprised, but a smirk grew on his face.

I looked away, I can’t be falling for someone in the place. We gotta find out why we’re here.

We gotta find the purpose of this whole place still being here to this day.

“Alright everybody!” Sophia said.

“Time to find the secrets,” I finished.

## **Chapter 2**

What felt like a million years later, ... we found nothing. “Great what the HECK are we supposed to do here!” I yelled.

I looked over my shoulder and I saw Landon laughing. I looked away immediately and my heart was beating fast. I felt a rush of heat come to my face.

“You know what I’m out of here,” Ava said. Right away, Ava whipped around and did a sassy strut towards the door.

**\*BAM\*** All of a sudden, the doors slammed shut. “Oh, come on!” Ava yelled.

“You know what it’s fine Ava, just looks like we’re stuck here,” Alex said. “Just gives us a chance to figure this place out.”

“Yeah, Alex is right!” Sophia said as Landon nodded his head.

**\*SWOOSH\*** “AAHH! WHAT IN THE WORLD WAS THAT!” I screamed. All of a sudden, we all saw a black figure run across the hall. It was tall, and had a body like a stick, and from my angle, it didn’t have a face. It had long fingers like claws and I could tell after that nothing of a smile there were razor sharp teeth. But I decided it was just my imagination! I gave a scared chuckle. “Heh heh. You know what guys, it was just our imaginations! ... Right?” I looked around and everyone was shivering in fear.

“Yeah totally! ... you can think that,” Landon said.

“Hey hey hey. Let’s look at the positive,” Ava said. “I’m looking at you, Landon,” Ava gave him a stern look.”

“I’m just saying the facts,” Landon replied.

“Yeah yeah sure,” Ava said, “JUST LET ME BE POSITIVE!!! Stupid cousin.”

“Oh, you guys are cousins! I see the resemblance,” Sophia said, kind of teasing them. Ava and Landon rolled their eyes at the same time (literally at the same time).

*That was kinda weird, I thought. But hey, maybe my amazing humor is opening Ava’s cousin Landon up!*

“Ok guys, so looks like we’re stuck in here sooo-” \*RRROOOAAARRR\* All of a sudden, there was a booming roar that went out throughout the whole library, cutting Alex off.

“AAAAHHH!” Landon screamed. I couldn’t help but break out in laughter, even though I was just as terrified as well.

“Ok, Ella, I swear if you say that is fake, I won’t have your back,” Alex said.

“Since when did I say I was gonna say that was fake?!” I said, still breaking out in laughter.

All of a sudden, Landon gave a small chuckle, “Well she does have a point, she never said that was fake,” I gave him a smile and he gave one back.

“Uhh guys do you have this weird feeling that we’re being ... watched? Or even why we are here?” Sophia said.

All my friends and I (and Landon) gave a slight nod. It did feel like we were being watched.

All of a sudden, a note gave a graceful fall, right in front of my feet.

“What does it say?” Everyone but me asked, clearly with a shiver down their spine.

I shrugged my shoulders. Honestly, I didn’t want to read this note, it just gave me a creepy vibe. This place did not slay. But I didn’t have a choice, so I picked up the note. Right away my eyes shot to the blood stain on the note. See, I told you, this is not a normal note.

“Okay, this is what it says...”

*Dear Ella and friends, ... On this dark night of fright, I hope you didn’t see me with your sight. As the Demon king comes near, I hope you truly shrink in fear. Meet me in the study for your first greetings. I’m truly excited for our first meeting. Mwahahaha Haha!*

... and that’s it ... unless the blood smears count,” I read.

“Okay that is way creepier than expected,” Sophia said.

“No really... I can’t tell,” Alex teased.

“Okay guys, you need to calm down,” Ava said, then she looked at me. This kind of surprised me, I mean I’m not the smartest “Well Ella, what do you think we should do?” And all of a sudden, everyone was looking and relying on me.

### Chapter 3

I was completely confused. What was I gonna do? I looked around, and all I could see were blank eyes staring at me. But then I stopped at Landon. Our eyes met. The deeper I looked inside the more I got mesmerized. *Oh my gosh, SNAP OUT OF IT!* I thought. But I couldn’t. The more I looked into his eyes, the deeper he looked into mine. I wonder what he thought of me, I mean I made fun of him!

All of a sudden, Landon started to walk towards me. *Oh no this can NOT be happening!* I thought. But no matter what I thought, he still got closer to me until he was at least 10 inches away from me. He put his hand on my shoulder and I felt a rush of heat run up to my face.

“It’s okay if you can’t decide, just know that I will never put pressure on you!” He whispered. Then, he gave me a short and sweet smile and left. I could tell he was embarrassed, but so was I. So fair is fair.

When he turned around, he gave me a thumbs up and I smiled. I think I had finally made my decision. It was way easier than I thought, just that boost of confidence helped me.

“Let’s do it!” I said.

Sophia gave me a slight nod, “are you sure you want to go?”

I nodded. I’m not gonna second guess myself. I made the choice and I’m sticking with it! I looked over at Landon and he gave another thumbs up.

After a long annoying time looking for the stupid study, we finally found it. And guess what ..... There was nobody there!

“See? I told you guys there was nothing here!” I said, and immediately I turned around to walk out the door.

\*WOOSH\* All of a sudden, the door shut in my face.

“Ahem, so, about no one being here?” Alex teased.

I sighed, “I think I figured that out now.”

“Well let’s not sit here, maybe there are some books about this place .... Or what lives in this place,” Ava suggested.

“Oh yeah, you’re right! Maybe you’re not as dumb as I thought you were!” Landon teased.

Ava gave him a stern look and Alex just started to laugh. Then I saw Alex give Landon a bro hug. I just rolled my eyes. Of course, they would bro hug.

<10 MINUTES LATER>

\*gasp\* Guys, guys! I found something!” Sophia called.

We all ran over to the center of the study. But then I just realized, since when was it raining out? But that doesn’t matter, let’s worry about what Sophia found!

“What is it?” Ava asked.

“It’s a book!” Sophia said confidently.

“Oh woow. Very revealing,” I said.

“I know right? But when you look inside, it shows something that looks like what we saw 20 minutes ago!” Sophia explained. Sophia opened the book and there it was, the shadowy, black, stick figure with the fingers like claws as sharp as a knife. And the thing that creeped me out the most was the blank face, like a piece of paper that was never filled out, never written on, never ... complete.

“Well?” Alex said looking as confused as ever, “what does it say?”

“Let’s see ... *Case 146: The human, Status: incomplete. Everything has gone wrong. Test run 132. We added too much Givanium. But what did we know, Givanium is the only source that we truly know how to use when it comes to making creatures real! The moment we put the ... thing in the test room and got security to its max limit, it went on a rampage. Its fingers like swords stabbing my co-workers in the room like mad. It was not ready for the final test. This thing was NOT human. With razor sharp teeth, it destroyed my friends like it was nothing. That gray face was not as peaceful as it looks. The only way to defeat it is to ..... get it away..... From his ..... home. Please someone —.*”

“Please someone what?” Landon asked.

“I don’t know it just ... ends,” Sophia replied.

“WHAT?!?! BUT WE NEED TO KNOW!” Landon screamed. He snatched the book from Sophia’s hands and went absolute ham on it.

“Hey, hey, hey! We do not go ham on books! The librarians would not appreciate that!” I said as I picked up the poor book from the ground, “Well, now we know what to do so let’s do it!” I said.

## Chapter 4

\*SCRATCH\* All of a sudden, a creature jumped out of nowhere. But it looked ..... familiar.

“AAAHHHH! OH MY GOD! IT’S THE MONSTER FROM THE BOOK!” Landon screamed. This time I didn’t laugh. This was not a funny situation whatsoever! No doubt about it!

“Ella ...” The creature said in a raspy voice, “I’m glad you came. I thought I felt my tummy ... rumble. Mwahahahahahaha!”

“Umm. Excuse me, Mr. Monster. Why did you ask us to come here?” Ava asked innocently.

“Well, ever since these things called computers or whatever the heck they’re called, all my snacks have left me because no one needed real books anymore. But luckily, you guys are much too naive so you fell right for my trap!! Mwahahahahahaha

Hahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!” The monster explained in a raspy but booming voice.

“Guys, I’m getting a feeling that he wants to eat us,” Landon said.

“I think we all figured that out by now,” I said. All of a sudden, Landon’s hand and mine latched, and this time I didn’t care because I was about to run for my dear life.

Right when the monster took one singular step forward, I heard someone cry out, “RUN FOR YOUR LIIIFE!”

I didn’t need to be told that twice because right away I ran for it, with Landon’s hand still latched into mine.

I wanted to look behind me to see what was happening and what the monster was doing but I didn’t.

“Guys! He’s after us!” Alex yelled. “I just saw him!”

All of a sudden, I heard a scream. An Alex scream.

“Heh heh, one down, four more to go,” I heard the monster say under his breath.

Man, that monster is fast, I thought. The monster was probably around 6 foot 5 or 7 feet tall and had massively long legs. But luckily, I’m a runner. I’m hoping I can outrun this thing any day.

“AAHH! Guys help! I fell!” I heard Ava call. I started to turn around, but I felt Landon tug on my arm. I felt awful, but we had to keep going. I heard Ava scream. Now she is gone too. I was kinda mad at Landon but he technically just saved my life. And I was grateful for that.

“Don’t worry Alex and Ava, I’ll get you guys back,” I whispered under my breath.

“SAVE YOUR BREATH FOR LATER JUST RUUUN!” I heard Sophia scream. She must have been right behind me then. Good. As long as we stick together, everything will be okay, .... right?

“You cannot run from me!” The monster screamed.

“Well, we’ve been running from you this whole time so I can’t believe that,” Landon said.

“I THOUGHT I SAID TO SAVE YOUR BREATH!” Sophia yelled.

I saw Landon rolling his eyes in the corner of my eye.

*This cannot be happening, I thought, This can NOT be happening!*

I must have looked like I was having a heart attack because Landon just started to absolutely suffocate my hand. “Everything will be fine, Ella. We’ll get them back. I promise,” Landon said.

That’s it, I can’t let Landon make decisions for me, if I want my friends back I have to make a move. “Guys! Turn left!” I said casually.

“The way you said that I think you meant turn right.” Sophia whispered in my ear. I nodded back and I felt Sophia’s hand wrap around my arm.

“THREE, TWO, ONE, ... TURN!” Landon yelled.

All of a sudden, we just siked that monster out!

“HA—” Sopha started but Landon cut her off, “Shh, he didn’t notice.”

“Is this monster dumb or something?” I asked.

“Must be,” Landon said.

“Okay guys, maybe we can hide over here,” Sophia said. Then she pointed to an old looking bookcase with old biographies of people long ago,

“Perfect!” Landon replied.

<5 MINUTES LATER> “Oh my gosh, I think we’re doing it!” Sophia said.

All of a sudden, we heard stomping noises, \*STOMP STOMP STOMP\*. I put my finger over my mouth to signal to be quiet.

“*Where are you brats?*” The monster snarled.

Out of nowhere, the monster popped its faceless head into our hiding spot. “*There you are!*” The monster said in triumph. All of a sudden, the monster grabbed on to Sophia and gobbled her up right in me and Landon’s faces.

“NOOO!” I screamed. I felt sharp tears stabbing me in the back of my eyes. They’re all gone now.

## Chapter 5

“RUUUUN!” Landon shouted out as he grabbed on my arm and dragged me out of the not-so-good hiding place.

“It’s all my fault!” I cried, “if I didn’t make the decision to come here none of this would have happened!”

“That is true,” Landon said clearly out of breath, “but if you didn’t make that choice, we would have never met,” He looked over at me and smiled but then looked away, because clearly this was no time to smile.

“You know what?” Landon said and all of a sudden, he turned around. I opened my mouth to say something like, “Are you out of your mind?”, or “What in the world are you doing?!” but I didn’t, I felt like I knew what he was doing.

I turned around too, soon to realize that the monster had stopped as well, must be wanting to hear the “last words” of Landon.

“Before you eat me alive,” Landon began, “what is the point of eating people, when you can help them?” Landon asked.

The monster seemed confused. *Must have not been the response he thought he was gonna get*, I thought to myself.

“Well,” The monster began in the same raspy voice as before, *“I know you already figured this out but, I was an experiment to a lab because they wanted to create life. So, they came up with me, Case 146, I was gonna be their “new life”. But as time went on, things kept going wrong from adding too much stuff, in my case, too much Givanium. The more Givanium, the more power you get, they added a LOT to me which gave me a lot of power, but the thing about Givanium is, you need human flesh to power you,”* The monster explained.

“But I still don’t get your point. *Why* do you need to eat humans?” I asked.

“*It’s the only thing that keeps you alive,*” The monster said almost immediately.

“Oh,” I said. That wasn’t the answer I was quite expecting.

“Ella,” Landon said, “I did this so you can get your friends back, so get to the point!”

I took a deep breath in, this was my chance. Before, when Sophia grabbed that book about the monster, I might have taken it when we were done and taken a little peek, and apparently, only true love can destroy the monster, not getting it out of its “habitat”.

“Landon,” I said as I grabbed his hands and wrapped them into mine, “I just wanted you to know that, I love you.” I gave him a little wink wink to make him catch on.

All of a sudden, I felt Landon’s lips kiss me on the cheek. Perfect. According to plan, “*EEEEEW!*” The monster screeched, “*That is absolutely disgusting!*”

All of a sudden, the monster started to melt into a black sticky goop that kind of looked like tar. “*NOOOOOOOO!!*” The monster screamed. And the monster was gone, just a black goo left. But, most importantly, there were my friends! Standing right there in the middle of the black goo!

“Ella!” Ava yelled as she ran over to give me a hug, “You did it!”

“Of course, she did, it’s Ella!” Alex said, also running over to give me a hug.

“We knew you could have done it!” Sophia said.

“See, Ella,” Landon said, “I told you we would have gotten them back.”

I didn’t really want this part to get all mushy mushy, but I couldn’t help myself. I embraced all my friends including Landon. “Oh my gosh guys, I thought I lost you guys forever,” I said, drowning in happy tears.

“Oh, we wouldn’t let that happen on our watch!” Alex said proudly.

“Yeah! We will never leave you!” Ava said, “But why are we sitting here! Let’s get out of here!”

“Agreed!” Landon said.

Right away, all my friends and I joyfully ran out the door, which was now unlocked by the way, and ran off back home.

“Hey,” Landon said, “do you think I will ever see you guys again? I go to JFK.”

“Of course, we will!” I replied, “we will see each other on our next adventure!”

And off we went, the best friends that are now even closer, ready for the next adventure.

## **Angelina and the Ghost from Down Under by Aubrey Elizabeth Amos**

I stared out the black inky window of the car looking at the Southington street. I was new to the town but it was looking okay at first. It wasn't a small town like my old one, but it was pretty, as it had gorgeous flower fields and a beautiful sunrise I couldn't help smiling at. As we arrived at the creaky new house, I started having second thoughts. "Where are we?" I asked my mother curiously. She hesitated before saying, "Our new home Angie" I sighed, Angie was a name my mother called me. I HATED IT. It's so babyish.

I opened the car door and started walking to the front of the house. It took me a few minutes to open the door but eventually I was able to turn the dirty metal doorknob. When it opened, I took a few steps inside and looked around. It looked creepy, really old and very dusty. The stairs were tan wood with black carpets. I walked up the stairs and it creaked every step... I gulped afraid of what lurked upstairs. I knew it was a normal house in this normal town, but I couldn't help but think to myself... what if it's not?

I shook the thought away as I finally reached the end of the creaky steps. I slowly browsed through the rooms opening the room doors deciding which should be mine. I finally found a room with gray walls and a pink carpet, it looked as if it belonged to a younger girl. I bent down to feel the carpet and it felt as if I were touching a fluffy cloud. I breathed in and the smells smelt fresh, but how could it? It was abandoned for 20 years. Well. That's what Mom said. I put one hand on my knee pushing myself back up off the floor and walked over to a small brown dresser with red rose patterns on the drawers. On top of the dresser was a distinguished golden flower case. The flowers were a vibrant lilac color as the petals showed beautifully. I sighed as a refreshing scent filled my nose when I sniffed them. Before I could explore more, Mom opened the door, making me jump. "Whoa! You're jumpy!" she exclaimed, "Though I can understand why being in a new town and all." I smiled as she rubbed my back. I sat down on the lumpy bed, but before I could say anything, my mother sat next to me and said, "Thanks for being so cooperative with the move." She smiled at me before getting up and heading outside of the room. I grabbed my suitcase and started to unpack. As I unpacked, I placed my Taylor Swift poster on the gray wall. "Maybe this move won't be so bad" I said to myself.

A few hours later as dawn approached us, I was finally done unpacking and I decided to rest for a little but and read a graphic novel called "All Hail to Thy Queen". Mother called out a little while later to let me know it was time for dinner. I was thrilled about that because I was starving! I walked down the creaky steps once again and sat down at the dinner table as we ate in silence. I was thinking about the new school I was going to attend named Flanders and wondered if I would make any friends. I finished my food pretty quickly and out of the corner of my eye all I could see was my mother giving me a look as if I hadn't eaten for years. I laughed and said "at least I ate it and didn't complain!" It was sushi after all, my favorite takeout of all time and the new place we got it from, Masago Sushi, did not disappoint! I headed to the kitchen to place all the dirty dishes in the dishwasher, washed my hands and placed the dishtowel back on the medal handle, hanging it in the middle. I headed to my room after that where I laid on the lumpy bed, soon drifting off to a slumber as the full crescent moon rose from the sky and the moonlight lit my room. I heard a loud whisper of some sort and woke up with sweat in my eyes.

After a few seconds I was able to see a little bit better but when my eyes fully adjusted they saw a girl...only she was transparent! She had long black curly locks and beautiful brown skin with glimmering sapphire eyes. She was wearing a pink flower gown and looked to be

about five years old. "You are not alone!" she said, "Beware of what lurks on the streets of Southington. One wrong move and it will be the takeover of the ghost realm. Are you willing to save the world you live in? Will you be a hero to all? You shall make the right choice at heart. But must be warned...you are not alone...a companion with a heart pure as gold shall be your guide, and lends a helping hand in a time of need. Goodbye Angelina...And good luck, you shall need it..." and just as the girl came, she was gone.

"WAKE UP FOR A NUTRITIOUS BREAKFAST!" I heard my clock repeat until I hit it to stop. My eyes adjusted to the light getting up and I yawned and remembered what happened that night. It must have been a dream, I thought as I headed down the stairs slowly for breakfast. I sat down in a chair at the dining room table still very tired but mom placed waffles and orange juice in front of me. "Thanks Mom." I said with a yawn and Mom said "It's time for school!" My eyes shot open and I groaned "What?" She smiled and said "You heard me." She used her fork to point to my breakfast. "Eat," she told me as she sat down sipping her coffee she had just brewed. After I ate my waffles I got dressed and Mom kissed me on the forehead and off I went. I stared at my feet slowly walking down the sidewalk headed to school.

As I arrived at Flanders, I grabbed my hoodie and threw it over my head trying not to draw attention to myself being the new girl. In the distance I heard a whisper "Your companion is here within the school walls; find them and remember they have a heart of gold." I continued to walk thinking this day would not go so well. I walked in the door and saw two boys watching me walk in, they snickered and walked towards me. "New?" the tallest boy asked, smiling. He had brown hair curved to the side. I shrugged my shoulders and the other boy who is a little bit shorter than me then said "Who's the shy little girl?" in a mocking tone. The taller boy nudged him to stop. "Hey, sorry about Justin, he can get a little rude at times. Anyway, my name is Anthony, what's yours?" he said in a friendly tone. I smiled, "Angelina." He smiled once more and then said "See you around Angelina! Nice to see someone new once in a while!" I waved goodbye and a tingle went through my neck.... could he be the one I'm supposed to be looking for?

I headed into my classroom and sat down looking at the front of the class where the chalkboard was. All I heard from the class was whispering. "Tomorrow! Ghost! Haunted house! Spooky!" I sighed as I heard the doorknob rattle and everyone went quiet. The teacher, Ms. Marino, walked in and said "Sorry, class, there was traffic." No time for morning meeting, let's head to math!" The class quietly groaned. After that I couldn't pay attention in class. I had that tingle in my neck that sent my skin to a shiver. All I heard was "Divide the two numerators" ...or "multiply to divide" ... I sighed thinking Anthony must be the one.

After class (which I didn't learn anything), I went to Anthony. "Sup!" he said waving and of course his "wing man" Justin was there. (Justin is definitely not the chosen one with a pure heart). "Anthony, can we talk alone? Please?" Anthony nodded to the left signaling Justin to leave. He gave me a glare before heading off. As we watched him leave my eyes darted to Anthony's. Our eyes met as I spoke. "Um...out of curiosity...Did you have a dream about..." Anthony held his hand to interrupt, "Yes, a ghost? Something about a companion with...uh...oh yeah! Heart of a lion!" I laughed. "Mine was a companion with a heart pure as gold!" He'd laugh, then he'd suddenly stop. "Do...do you feel that?" I waited a minute, I felt a tingle go down my spine. I nodded, "Something's happening...And we have to find out." Anthony nodded, running outside the school building with me on his trail.



### **Justin's Perspective**

As they told me to leave I walked behind the turn of the wall listening to what they were saying, "companion...with...oh yeah! Heart of a lion!" I groaned "What?" I grunted. When I turned my head, they were gone. I sighed angrily...but I sneered knowing they...They. They were the champions that WE needed to defeat. I snapped my fingers and I disappeared in a snap.

### **Angelina Perspective**

As dawn approached, I knew I would be visited by the girl so I laid my head on my fluffy pillow, and closed my eyes. I heard the loud whisper and I woke up. She stared at me with disappointment. "You failed..." I gasped and covered my mouth. "But-but how?" she sighed. "Justin was the one who is going to destroy the world...you let him hear the legacy of your defeating him and His companion...it's over Angelina...you failed..." and she disappeared as she appeared.

As my alarm clock rang, "WAKE UP FOR A NUTRITIOUS BREAKFAST!" I heard a siren blare through the house, I covered my ears as the sound burned my ear drums. Mom raced in my room with her nightgown, and ran to me. Pulling the covers off me and grabbing my wrist to pull me out of bed. "WHAT'S GOING ON?!" I said screaming so she could hear me over the blaring of the alarm. "I'M NOT SURE, BUT COVER YOUR EARS AND FOLLOW ME!" she screamed back. I obliged and followed her out the door, where an angry ghost looked at me. He looked like...Justin...My hands shook and my breath trembled, salty tears fell down my cheeks. He looked at my mother and snickered. He raced to my mom taking hold of her body. Mom wasn't herself...she grabbed my wrist and held on tight and a low voice came rumbling out. "RUN" was the last word I heard from my mom before she wasn't in control anymore. I twisted my wrist and "Mom" let go. I ran and ran and ran until I ended up near an apartment. Exhausted I fell to my knees on the grass and placed my hands over my eyes and I sobbed miserably. I would never see my mother again.

## The Night of Halloween by Leia Arroyo

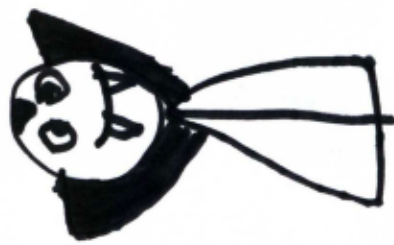
It was a Halloween night at my house and I was getting into my costume. My parents left the house to go eat before we went trick or treating. As I was putting on my Dorothy costume, I heard the doorbell ring. I went downstairs and looked through the window. I saw two little girls dressed up as Cinderella and the other one dressed up as Elsa, their mom standing right behind them so I opened the door to kindly greet them. "Hi, Cinderella and Elsa" I said sweetly and asked if they would like to have some candy. "Yes please!" they said and ran away with baskets full of candy.

I closed the door and went back upstairs to do my hair and grab my basket with Toto in it. While I was waiting for my parents to get home I watched TV and my dog hopped right on my lap. I had to get up a few times to open the door and give some kids some candy. The costumes I saw were Cinderella, Elsa, Batman, a witch, Spider Man, and three Ninja Turtles.

When I heard a knock on the door I opened it and there was no one there. I also looked around and didn't see anything. I heard something come through the backdoor. I wasn't sure what it was so I QUICKLY grabbed my dog and ran up the stairs and into my bedroom closet! My heart was beating so fast and my dog was barking so I had to close his mouth. I took a peek outside to quickly grab my phone. I dialed my mom's phone number which was weird because I heard ringing from the outside of my closet. As I heard footsteps getting closer I kept holding on to my dog tighter and tighter!

After a while I didn't hear anything so I held my dog and slowly walked out of my closet. As I walked out of my room I heard scratching from the bathroom door. I was EXTREMELY scared but kept walking down the staircase. From up the stairs I heard footsteps but still didn't know what it was. I went to the kitchen and grabbed a fruit snack and sat on the couch. I put on a show and right after that I heard "BOOM". I was done with this so I grabbed my dog so he wouldn't get hurt and I ran upstairs and said "hello?". I heard a screeching sound, and I said "hello?!". I heard a little whine so I opened the bathroom door. "OMG" I say in shock. Spots?!. I can't believe all this time it was my dog who'd run away! So now I have both of my dogs.

Scary Riddles to Trails  
in Southington

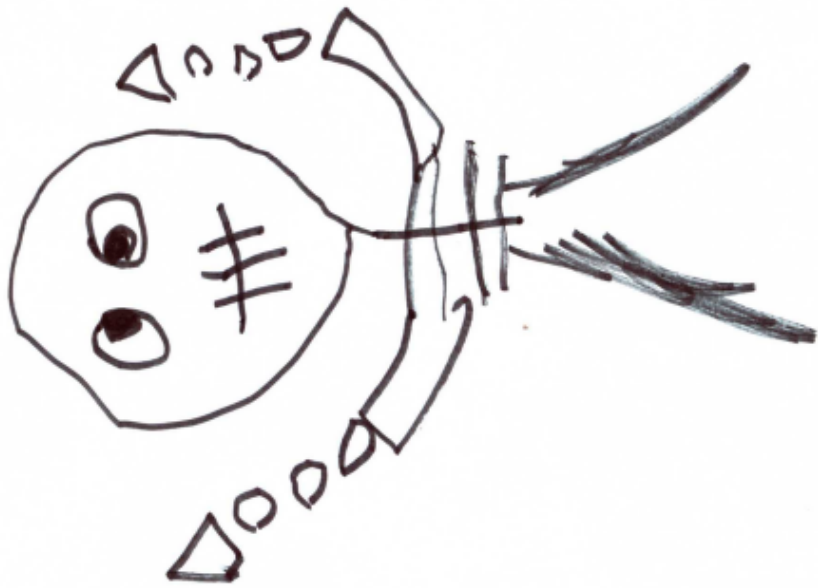


By Harper Beierlage  
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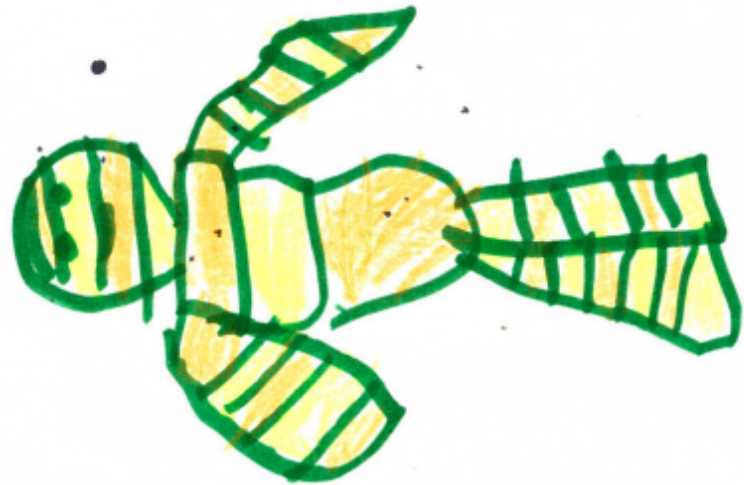


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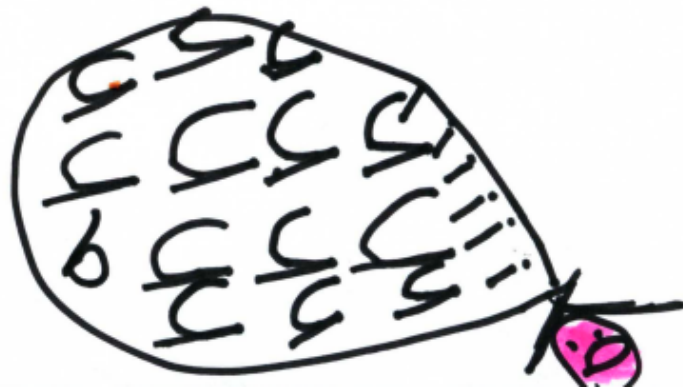
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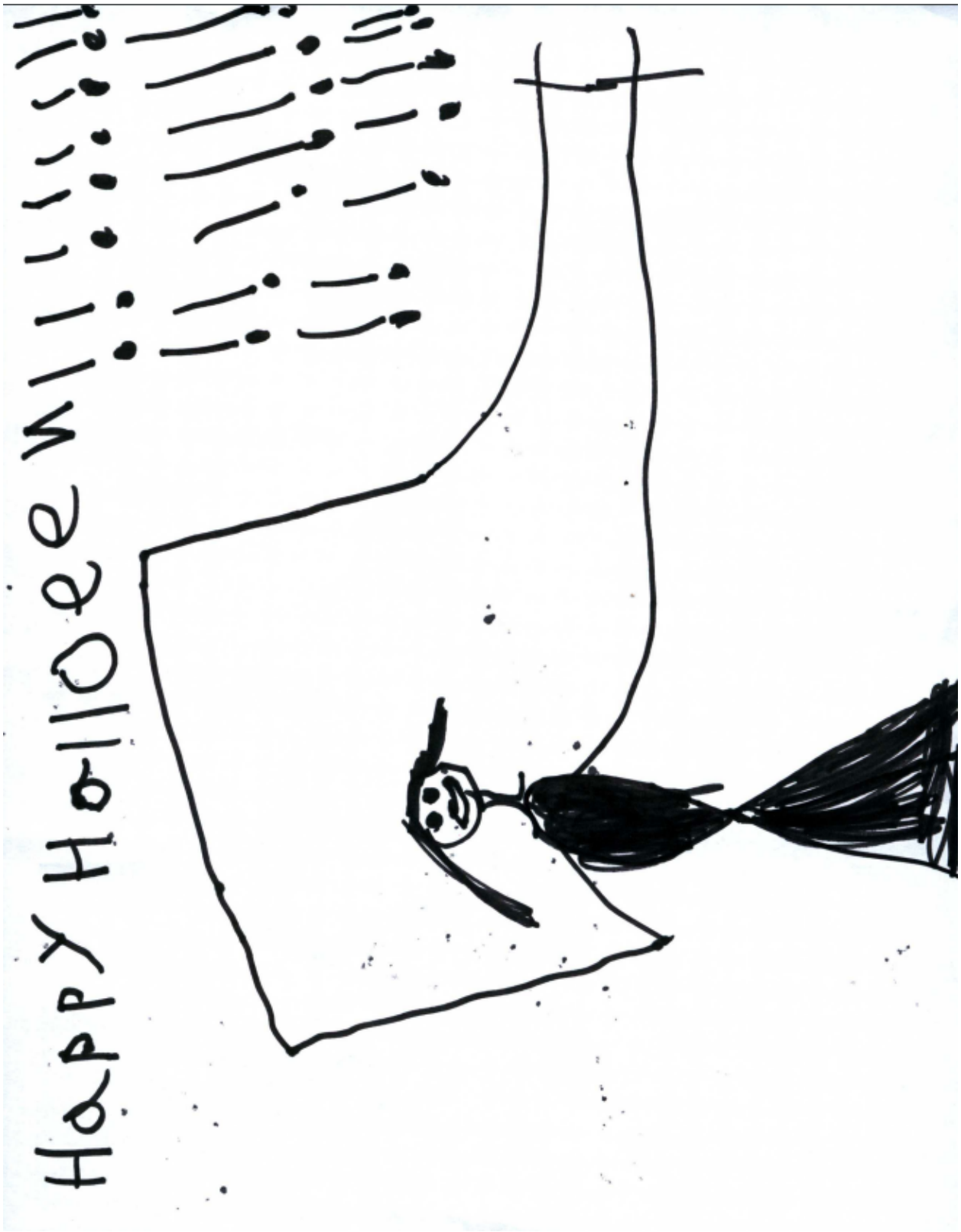






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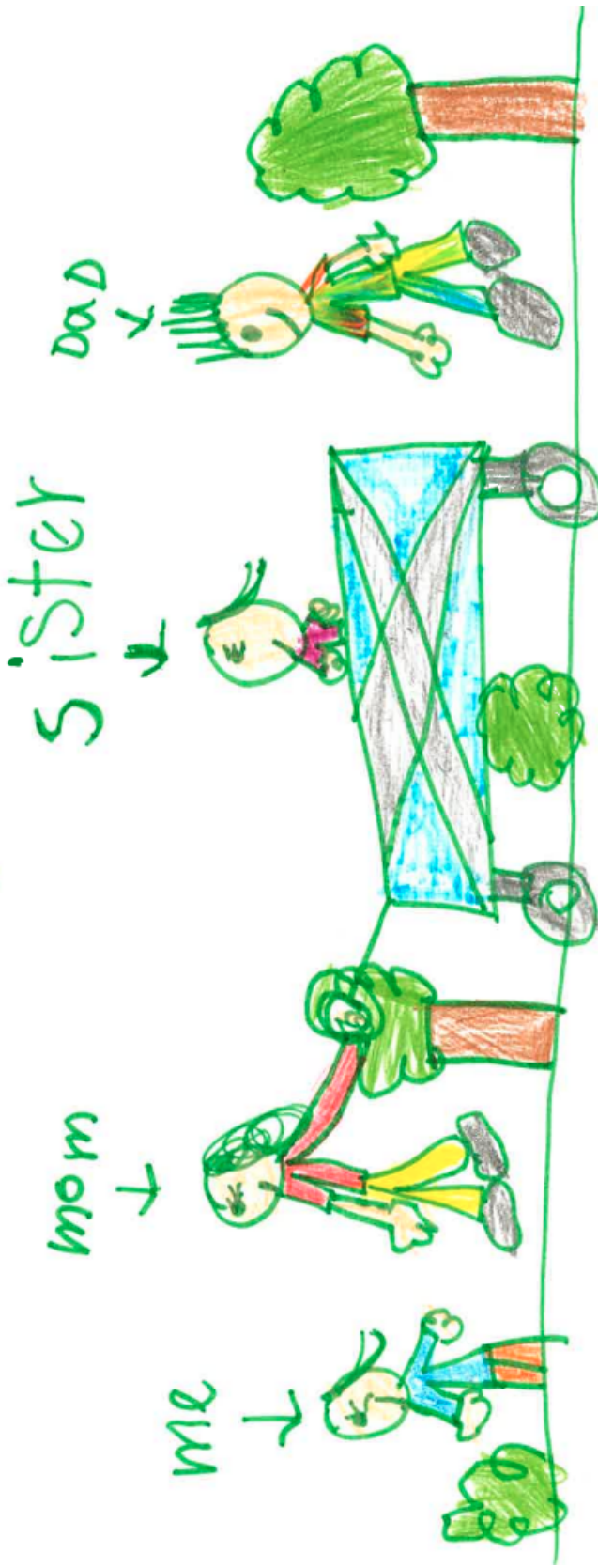
# Spooky Story

on the Southington Trail

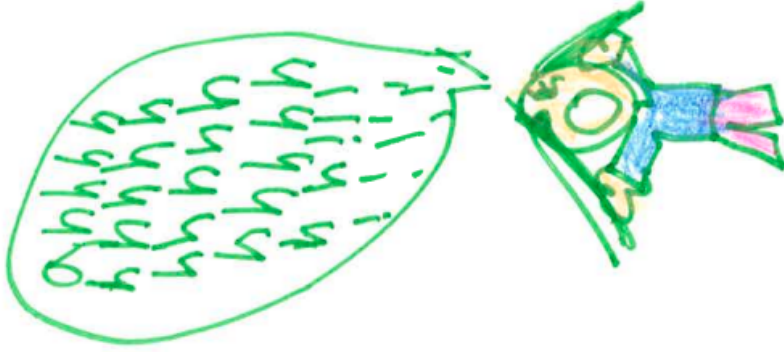
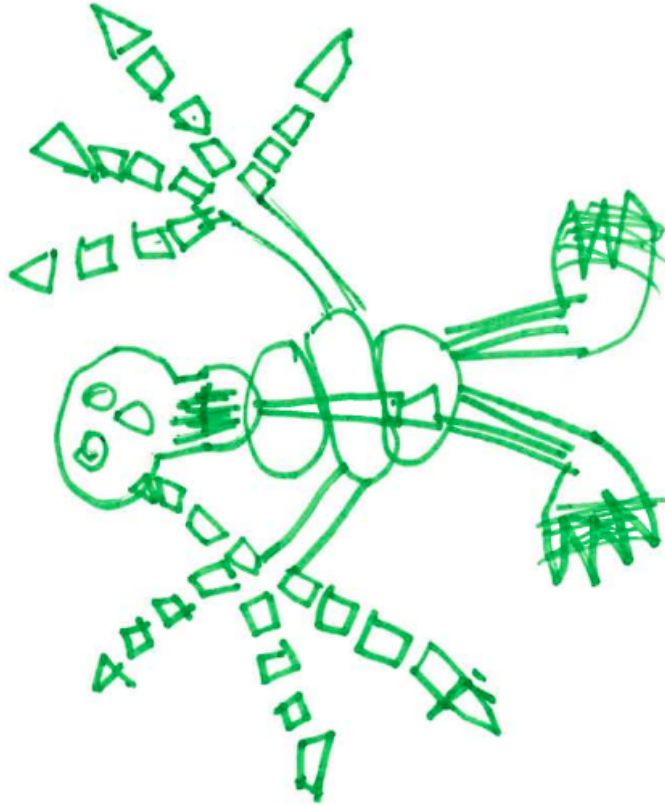


By Poeton Beier, age 6

Me and my family are  
looking at scary things.  
We are on the ~~chrate~~ trail  
Southington.

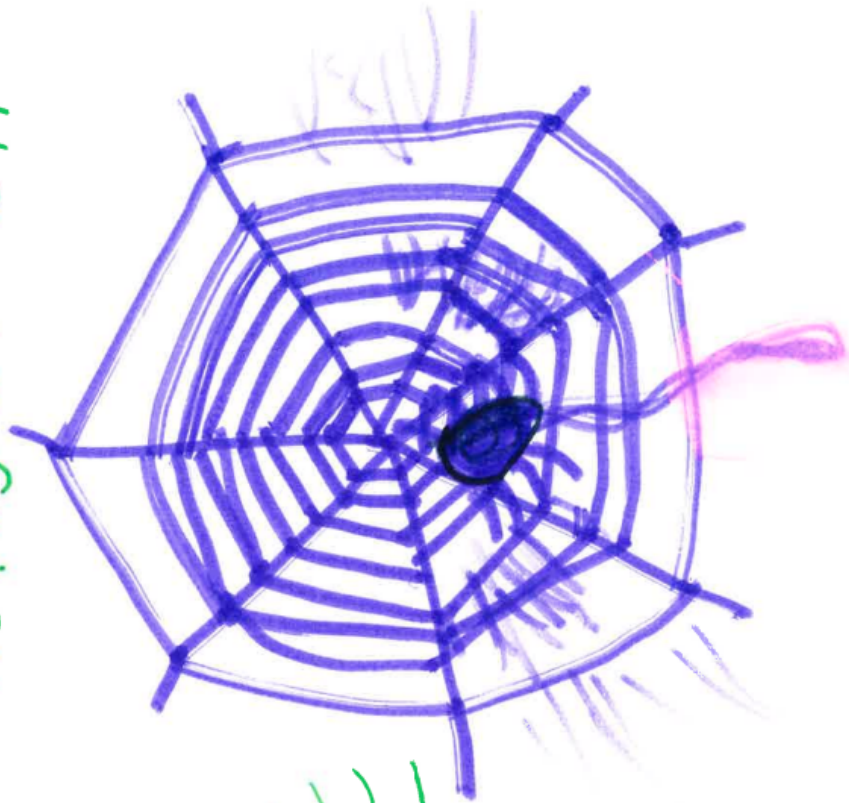


We saw a scary skeleton  
oh the trail.





Next we saw two mean spiders.  
they were ~~dancing~~ dancing on their  
webs.



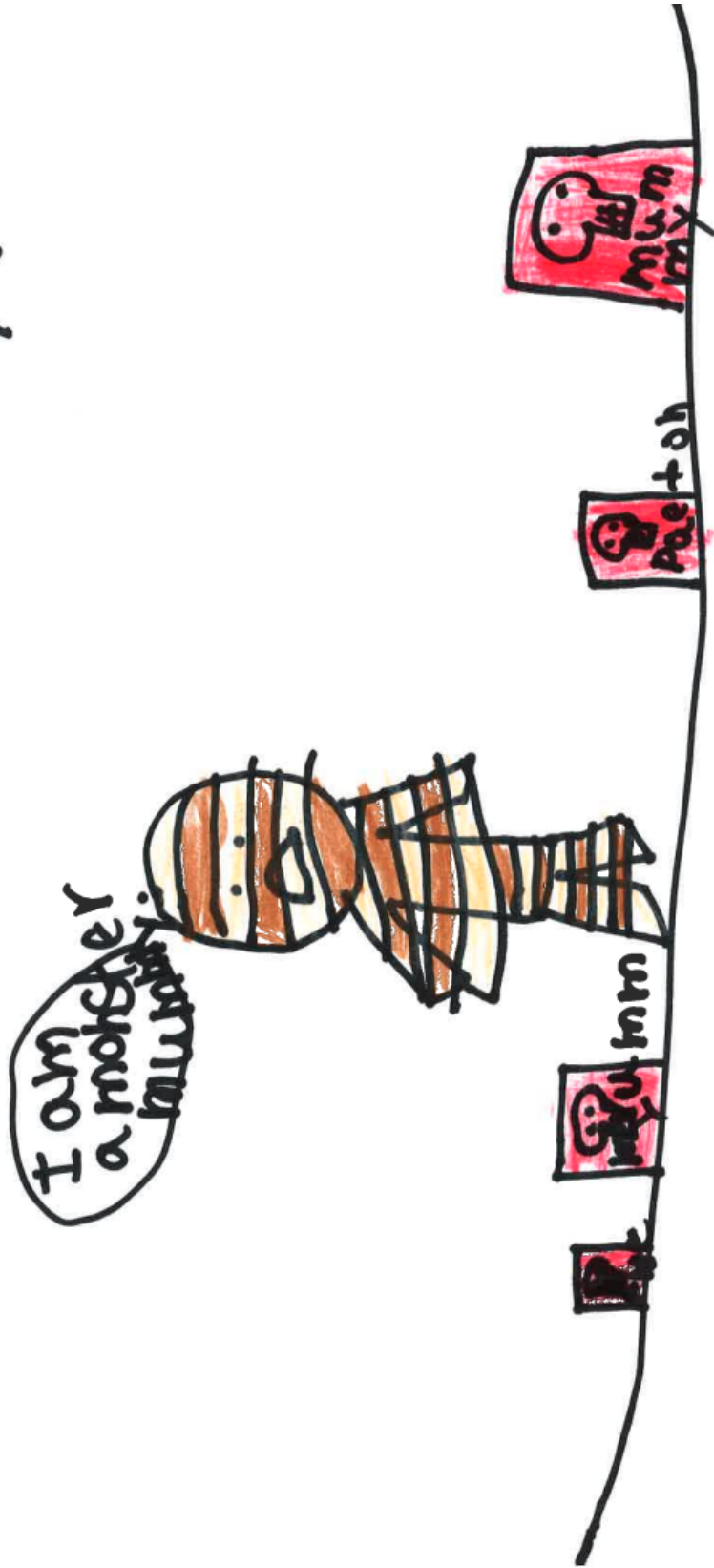
then we saw a vampire.  
It was spooky!

I will  
kill  
you

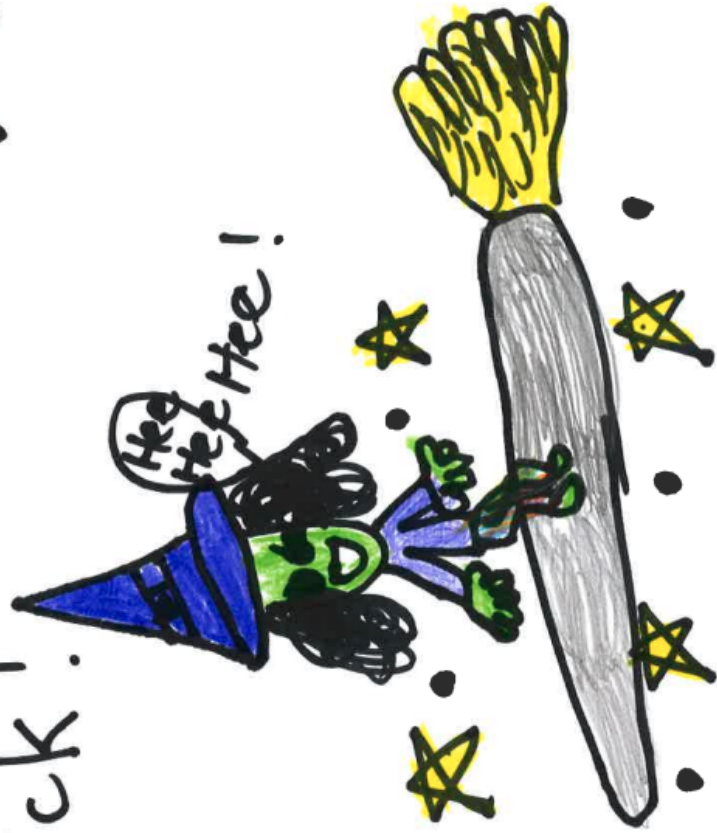




I looked to my left and there was a monster mummy!

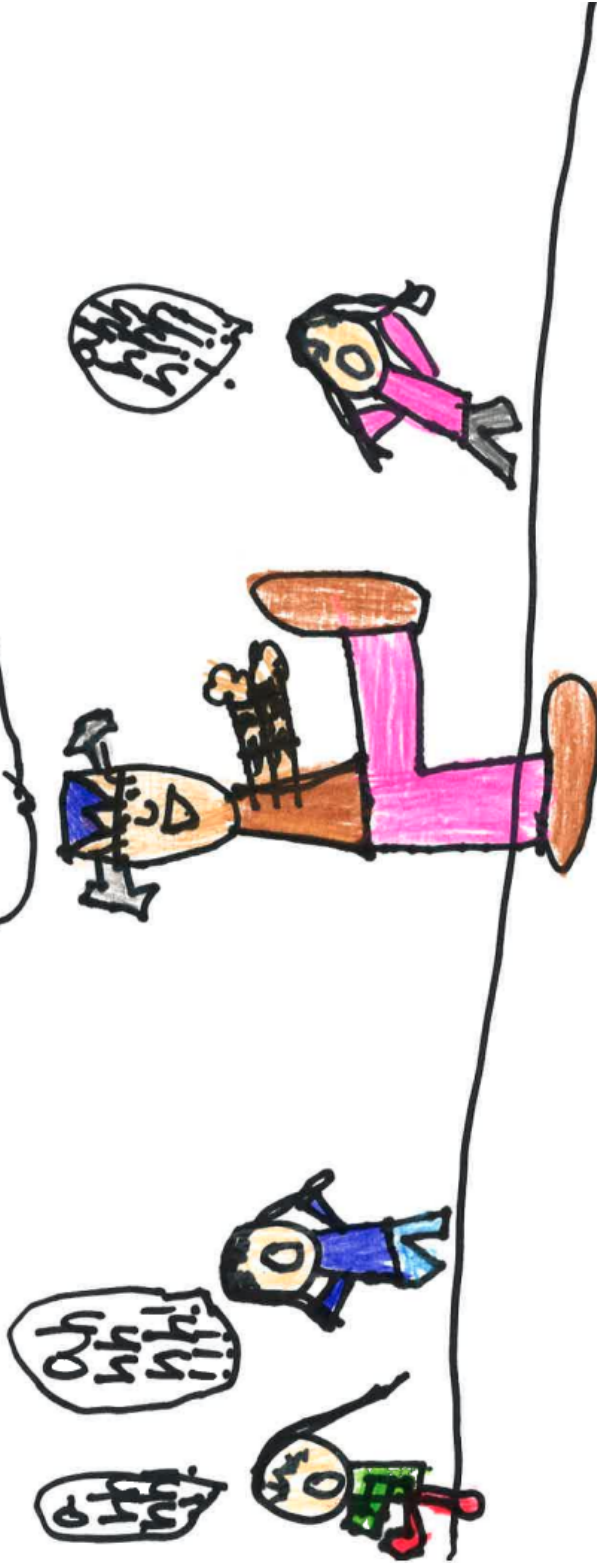


then I looked to my right I saw  
a witch it was flying on her  
broomstick!

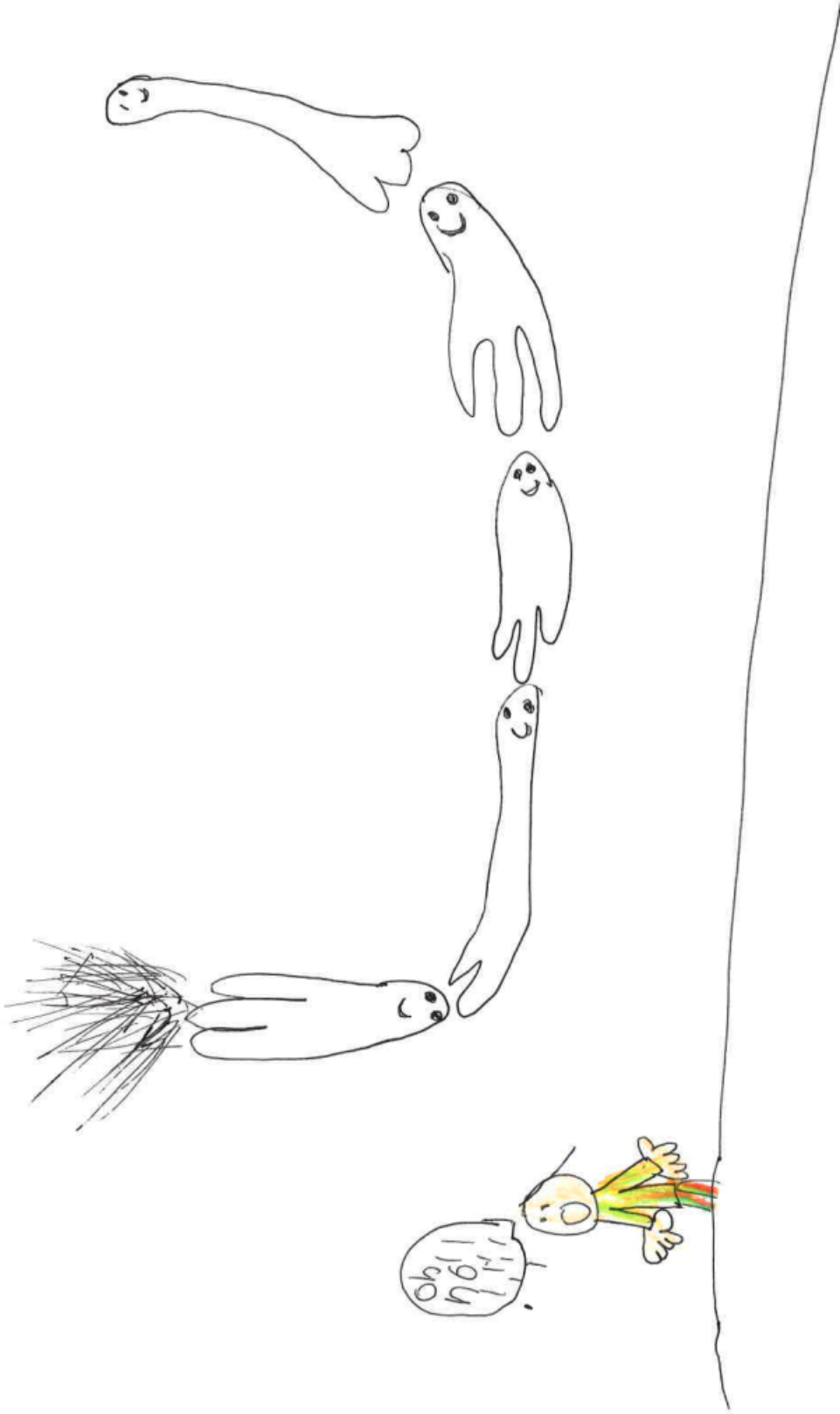


After I saw a Frankenstein  
beside me!

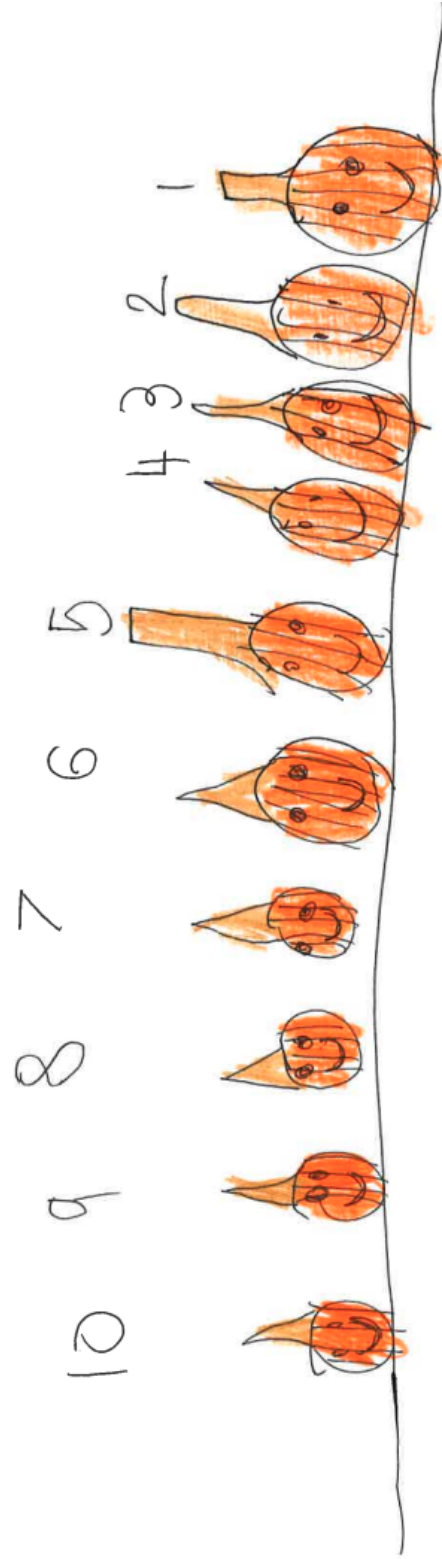
I am Franke  
I like Franke  
not Frankenstein  
much!



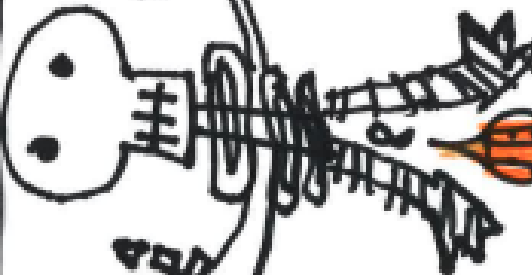
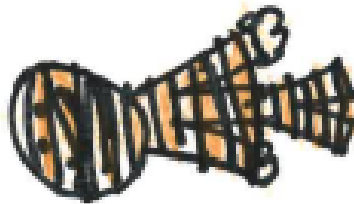
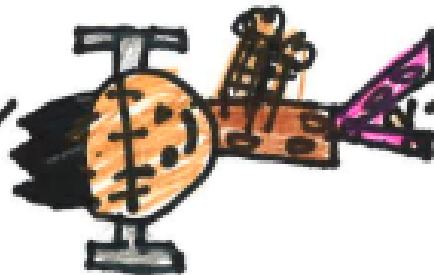
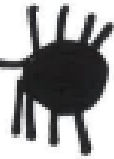
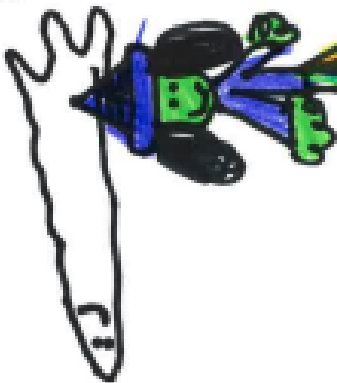
end of the I saw a ghost three hp  
five ghost I do not like ghost!



and and and I Saw + e h jack-o-lanterns  
on the ~~street~~!  
Side walk!



# HAPPY HALLOWEEN!



## The Call by Leia Boulmona

Hello, this is 911. What's your emergency?

Help! I think there's someone in the house.

Okay, what's your name?

Kathy Recce

Kathy, please stay calm. I need you to tell me your address.

369 MT VERNON RD. PLEASE HURRY THEY'RE COMING UPSTAIRS!!

Okay. I'm sending a group now, just stay hidden and be quiet.

I think they're in another room. But I'm staying

hidden just in case they're armed.

Where are you hiding?

In my closet.

Are there any other hiding places around you?

I could hide under my desk but it's very open

Anywhere else?

Maybe I could fit in a drawer under my bed  
He wouldn't find me there.

Yeah, that's great but try to wait until the timing's right.

Okay... Ahhh they're coming down the hallway!!

Booo!!! (man walks in with phone) thanks for the information. Couldn't have done it without you! But now it's time for you to say bye-bye.  
(static) screams (static) Bang..

## It Was Her by Avenley Briggs

I hated school. It sucked! But hey, I'm at a new school. Southington High School.

"HI!" yelled a blonde bimbo girl.

"Oh uhm, hi."

"What's your name, I'm Maria!" Maria rejoiced

"I'm Primrose and this is my sister, Rosemary." I added.

"Wow... Awesome names. Anyway, wanna sit at lunch together?" Maria asked.

"Uhm maybe, I mean, it is the first day of school so I'm kinda really busy."

"Oh, okay 😞, I get it, I guess." Maria whimpered.

"Bye Maria." I replied.

"B-b-bye p-p-p-prim a-and r-r-rose." Maria answered.

As I walk down these blue and yellow brick walls, I notice my surroundings. "Yellow lockers on the right, blue on the left." I thought.

"Room 221 with a creaky door." I wondered.

"Blonde bimbo girl's locker, Wait what?"

"Primrose, come to the office right now."

"Okay." I notice someone walking into the office. And I see red stains on the carpets. No one was there but this old man. He looks like my dad.

As I walk I notice my dad holding a gun.

"D-d-a-dad-d-daddy?"

The announcements go on:

*"Attention students this is not a drill I repeat this is not a drill, lockdown lockdown. There is a suspicious man in the building, lock all doors and windows, and also close the curtains. I repeat this is not a drill. I repeat this is not a drill, may God be with us all."*

"Sweetheart, I'm here to kill you." Then he has an evil grin .

"Daddy, please NO!"

"Yes, yes sweetie."

"Dad, I'm 16."

"And you shall stay 16,"

Then I ran as fast as a horse, into the bathroom at my school! I hear boots clicking. I hear screaming. I hear... my voice. "Crap, crap, crap, crap." I'm dead. Then I hear my daddy's voice,

"Sweetheart, remember you turned 16, Then you had your boyfriend, I loved him, I love that you hated him. Also, I adopted you because I needed you, I don't need you now, so I am gonna kill you!"

"Dear heavenly father-" I spoke

"Found ya kid!" My dad hissed.

"Daddy, please, no." I sobbed. Then he puts the gun to my head.

"Night night sweet love-"

I heard a gunshot.

"POLICE, PUT YOUR HANDS UP, DO NOT RESIST!" The police officer fumed.

"Y-y-y-yes, o-officer." I gulped in fear.

Then I saw my dead "Dad" but he didn't look like my dad.

"Officer, this can't be my dad, my dad has red hair, not blonde, and his eyes are green not blue!" I spoke.



“Hmm do you have his ID?”

“No, because I’m at school and also it’s at home underneath his mirror in the cabinet that has his name on it.” I replied.

“What is your father’s name?” The officer asked.

“John H West”

“Age?” The officer asked?

“39” I replied.

“Date of birth?” He asked.

“January 18 1984”

“Address?” 255 Woodruff Street. City, obviously in Southington.”

“Good job gal, we will take it from here, but for now get into the police car.”

“Yes sir.” I gulped with nervousness, again.

As I walked to the car I looked back... WHERE IS THE DEAD BODY?

The police freak out. They think this school is haunted!

A few months later they re-opened the school. They closed it after the incident. I saw that blonde bimbo girl. I decided to make conversation.

“Uhm Hi Maria, long time no s-”

“Save it Prim, I have changed over the months, you can’t try to act nice, I know you are truly evil.”

*Maria please come to the principal's office immediately. That's Maria to the principal's office.*

An hour later me and Maria passed the halls.

“Hey jerkface, wanna fight me you ugly pathetic baby victim” Maria hissed.

“Fine we can fight, I just don’t wanna kick your butt too hard and make you cry to your mama. Oh that’s right, you don’t have a mom, I know the rumors are true!” I snarled. Then Maria runs off sobbing into the bathroom before I can throw my fists at her ugly gapped crooked very yellow teeth! But I kinda felt bad. Then I walk into the bathroom. Then once I walked in I noticed puddles of blood.

“Uhm Maria, where are you, are you okay?”

Then Maria turns around... with... a LEG IN HER MOUTH!

“OH MY GOSH, WHAT THE HECK, Y\_Y\_YOU C\_C\_CANIBAL!” I screamed.

I scream in terror, but I can’t move my body. It’s like I’m a rat in a glue trap. All I could do was... scream. Ten seconds later that blonde bimbo cannibal girl started running towards me.

All I remember next was that I passed out. Blood was everywhere. I’m still so dizzy. Is this how I’m gonna die? I start to cry and shockingly I see my crush. “A–A–Austin?” I mumbled. “P—P–P–Prim?” Austin spoke.

“OH MY GOSH, AUSTIN, ARE YOU OKAY?”

“What do you think, Sherlock?”

“I’m sorry, I am just... tired... weak... broken.”

“It’s okay Prim, I understand, it’s gonna be hard for the both of us.”

“Thanks for understanding Austin.”

“How are we gonna es-” I tried to speak.

“Why don’t you finish your sentence pipsqueak.” Maria snarled.

“WHY DID YOU DO THIS MARIA?” I fumed.

“YOU TOOK EVERYTHING FROM ME, YOU KILLED MY DAD YOU RUINED ME!”

“Why do you like hurting people?” Austin cried.

“Because it’s fun!” replied Maria.

“YOU ARE INSANE!” I screamed.

“All the best people are insane hunny.” Maria spoke cheerfully.

“When are you gonna let us go?” I asked.

“Never Prim, you hurt me, you don’t deserve a good life. I deserve the light, I deserve the world!” Maria spoke.

I realized something. I was almost friends with her. It was never my fault.

It was hers! I wasn’t the problem. I wasn’t the issue. It was all her.

“Now we must get ready for the hanging, or the robots, ooo maybe even the electric chair!” Maria cheerfully said.

“Is she gonna kill us?” I whispered to Austin.

“Duh Sherlock, No she's a sandwich artist.” Austin replied.

“Okay okay.” I spoke.

Then Austin gets grabbed by the cannibal and gets... HUNG! She leaves his dangling body hanging there above the old wooden broken chair.

“Your turn Prim.” Maria cheered.

“P-p-p-p-please n-n-n-n-no.” I stuttered.

“Ohh y-y-yes!” Maria rejoiced!

Next, Maria grabbed me by the collar of my shirt, dragging me into the hanging room.

“Please no!” I cried.

“SHUT UP PRIM!” Maria hissed.

“Just let me go!” I screamed.

“No Prim, you see, I can't. And I never will, you have hurt me too much. “

“PLEA-” I tried to speak.

“Let her go.”

“Omg Primy, you have your bf, looks like he was FAKING and is actually gonna die.” Maria teased.

Then Austin tased, Maria leaving her to sleep.

“Prim hurry, she won’t be asleep forever.”

“Okay thanks Austin.”

“Of course, Primrose!”

Then we ran off to the police station and told them what had happened.

Then I see her in the glass and I point scream “It was her!”

The police grabbed her and took her to jail forever. “And she had never bothered me nor my dad again.”

“I loved that story Mom! Tell it again please!”

“Go to bed. I love you, goodnight.”

“Night Mom, I love you,” Peyton replied.

And we all went to bed.

“Hahah they thought they could escape from me that easily, they will have to wait until I make them suffer.” Maria growled.

## Monsters in the Closet by Liliana Brungard

One night there was a little girl that saw red eyes and sharp teeth from the closet. Then she heard growling. The girl grabbed a baseball bat and ran back to her room to hide under her blanket. She ran as fast as a blink to her mom's room instead.

"Mom," she said. There was no answer. She turned on the flashlight and looked on the bed to find her mom torn apart from an animal. She saw big teeth marks. Suddenly, she heard **BOOM BOOM**, heavy footsteps from the hallway getting louder and louder with every step it takes. The footsteps stopped heavily in front of the door.

She went to shine the flashlight, it flickered and then it died. She tapped it and it turned back on. **SCRATCH, SCRATCH** at the door. She shined the light at the door to see bloody scratch marks dripping. Swiftly she felt a cold wind flash past her. Something pulled her baseball bat so she hit the monster with it and it went away.

Then there were chewing noises from behind her. "What do you want from me?" Said the little girl. "Why would you do this to my mom?" Nothing answered back. She started crying until something growled "**AARRRR**". Suddenly a loud **BOOM** came from the kitchen. Startled, she jumped for her mom's phone and called 911. She was bitten as she heard the dispatcher,

"Southington Police, what is your emergency?"

Nothing answered back.

## Lip Gloss by Layla Campolo

Tina looked up in horror as the meanest girl at Strong Elementary, Vanessa Goldman, giggled and held her phone up for everyone to see. She re-applied her pink lip gloss as always.

“His brown eyes I’ll never forget...” the phone blared. Tina knew she talked too much, but she didn’t think it would result in this. Vanessa had recorded the unpopular Tina’s voice when she was in the last stall of the gross girl’s bathroom reciting a cheesy poem for her crush. But the worst part had yet to come because next, Elijah Bakers, her crush, chanted louder than anyone. “Hey look!” He cried, “Talking Tina can’t hold her tongue!” The kids’ laughter drowned out all thoughts. Tina felt a big lump in her throat and swallowed down hard, but she couldn’t stop the hot tears pouring down her face in time. The world seemed to go dark. Like she was the only thing left and everyone was staring at her. The only place she could think to go to was the open nurse’s office where welcoming Mrs. Hooks stood. She bolted to the warm, safe room.

“I want to go home!” She cried, only to see that more people were in there memorizing her poem while laughing in their sick beds, or in line to get to Mrs. Hooks. *Why me?* She thought, even though she already knew the answer. Tina was the biggest loser at Strong. She was the teacher’s pet, she couldn’t keep secrets and she talked about herself way too much. But how could she change this late in her life? How could she get kids to stop bullying her? There was only one answer: revenge. Not now, but eventually.

Soon the nurse got to her turn and they decided to have her mom pick her up and walk her home on account of her “stomach ache” since the flu was going around. Tina was so relieved. Her tight palms stopped clenching into balled fists. She stopped biting her lip too. But when she got out, as she burst into tears, crying her way home, she saw huddles of random strangers just pointing, whispering, and laughing. And they all had their phones out. *Did Vanessa post the video?* She thought to herself. This had to be the most embarrassing thing to ever happen to poor Tina. She ran ahead of her mom and started crying so hard her stomach and eyes both hurt.

“Tina!” Her mom called, “You better get back here young lady!” But Tina just kept running all the way until she got home. And for once, she didn’t talk at all that dinner.

The next day, Vanessa was texting in class. *Looks like Talking Tina was too scared to come back to school. She probably went home and cried to her mommy.* “Hey Elijah!” Vanessa whispered, “Look!” She held up her phone. “Ehheh!” Miss Sugar cleared her throat, “Do you have something to say, Vanessa?”

Vanessa was never a straight A student and she always talked back, even at Miss Sugar’s responsive eye rolls. This time, she asked to use the bathroom. Miss Sugar sighed and motioned toward the door which was her way of saying “be fast”. Vanessa giggled at her excuse as she applied some lip gloss and left. Usually she just checked her hair and makeup, but today she actually had to use the bathroom. She turned toward the stalls. Dirty, dirty, dirty... clean! The last stall didn’t have toilet paper thrown across the stall, or a wet floor. But there was something written in glossy pink on the door. It said: *Never go into the last stall.* Vanessa scoffed. *Stupid myth*, she thought, wiping it off with a paper towel. She opened the door with a loud “CREEK!” and she stepped into the stall.

## **2 Years Later**

At first, the loss of one of their students really took a toll on Strong. The police had to do an investigation and all the students were freaking out. Rumor is, the last thing they found was lip gloss in the last stall. The pink gloss was put into the lost and found bin. But one day, it finally disappeared. And that same day the lip gloss went missing, a girl named Vanessa Goldman came trotting through the door.

No one really remembered her, they just thought she was conveniently a different Vanessa, so when she started acting weird, no one noticed. And when she always looked like she really wanted to talk, but acted cool and held herself back, no one noticed. And when she nervously put on an abnormal amount of lip gloss, again, no one noticed. Because little did they know, this wasn't the Vanessa Goldman they all thought they knew: this girl went by the name of Tina...Talking Tina. But Tina wasn't talking a whole lot, and she was the only one who knew why. It was all the power of the lip gloss. The same one that Vanessa once used, but now never will. The same one that was in the lost and found. The same one that the bully Vanessa Goldman was trapped inside of. Of course, no one ever figured this out. Tina just kept living the best life she could as Vanessa. She talked normally now, and she could keep secrets too, as long as she wore the lip gloss. Tina has made lots and lots of friends since then.

To this day no one knows what really happened to the real Vanessa Goldman, but if you're really quiet you can still hear the faint cries of help coming from the pink stain of lip gloss in the last stall of the bathroom.

## Shadows Walk the Night by Taylor Chunis



Welcome to Southington, a place where monsters live harmoniously, but all of that changes when something new comes to town.

Ok, let's start from the beginning. A girl named Violet was a normal girl but her best friend is Zoey, the zombie. It was one day before Halloween.

### **The Something New**

Many people were dressing up as vampires because it is going to be a blood moon on Halloween. Vampires like to strike when it's a blood moon. but Violet was thinking otherwise.

“What are you going to be for Halloween?” Zoey asked. “A spy,” Violet replied. “What are you being?”

“A zombie again,” Zoey replied, “why are you being a spy, what about the vampires?”

“I will wear all black so it will be hard to see me. And don't bite me,” Violet said.

“Good idea and I want to bite you, I'm joking.” Zoey said.

“Hi Grim,” Violet said. There are duplicates of zombies, vampires, aliens, mermaids, skeletons, dragons. but there is only one grim reaper. He lived at the time of Adam and Eve. If you are wondering where the witches are, they are extinct and Violet is the only human.

“What is that” Dago said. Yes, Dago a dragon and yes, I will stop this story to talk to you.

“It looks like a dragon, a big dragon,” Grim said.



“And there's babies I think,” Violet said. “I can't think,” Zoey said. “We know,” they all said.

“Hello, I am Hin. Sorry, don't worry about my other heads.”

Hi, it's me again, the narrator. Did you know at the end of the story... no spoilers? Fine back to the story.

Hi, I am Daler and I am a dragon.

So, you sure you don't want spoilers? No spoilers. Fine, back to the story.  
“I am similar to your species,” Daler continued.  
A mysterious figure said “interesting”.  
“We read about this,” Violet said to herself.



### **The Myth**

In ancient times the hydras reigned over the land. One man was able to defeat them.



Nobody knew who he was. Then Hin said “we know that this is the place where monsters and humans live together.  
“Yes” Dago said. “We would like to stay here.” Hin said. “Yes” Dago replied.  
We all thought that the hydra was something new from the beginning.  
Well, you were wrong.

### **Halloween or Hallows Eve**

It was Halloween. Everyone has their costumes on. Violet, Zoey, and Hin were watching the blood moon rise. “Bye Hin.” Violet said.

Violet and Zoey were out trick or treating then Maddilin came up and said, “I heard that hydras can make people forget time so is it Halloween or Hallows Eve?”. “Halloween.” Zoey said.

Hi it’s me, the narrator. Maddilin is a mermaid so how can she wake, see you later or sooner, bye.

Then Violet said to herself “It must be Halloween because of the blood moon.  
Thin the Mysterious figure replied. “Perfect.”

### **Kidnapped**

Violet went off on her own for a while. She felt like she was being followed. She ran as fast as she could. She tripped on a rock. The next thing she knew, she was kidnapped.

### **The Wild Witch**

“Hello Violet,” the Mysterious figure said. Then she pulled her hood and she is a witch.



“Look, I’m Wendy, the witch.

Us witches are underestimated. So tonight, I will strike” she said and then she left.

Hi it’s the narrator. The rule is that we can’t interfere but I’ll only do this once. From her perspective, it looks like the chain unlocked by itself.

“Violet!” Zoey yelled. “Zoey, let go stop that witch!” Violet replied.

### **Violet’s Secret**

“I beat a witch before and I can do it again.” Hin said. Then violet jumped in and bit Wendy, and she died. Violet’s secret was that she was a vampire but she was not in full control so when she bites someone they die.

### **Shadows**

So now you know violet is a vampire but the adventure is not over yet  
“Ahhhhhhhhhh!” Violet screamed because we all know that the *shadows walk the night*.



## Jane's Library by Emma Ciccarillo

CREEK. Alexx opened the front door of her new house, 456 Helen Drive. She looked around. It was so dark. She felt the walls for the light switch, but tripped on something. "Ouch," she said, stumbling again trying to get up. She saw something gray staring at her. Alexx stood up. The gray figure was gone. "Alexx, the switch is right here." her older brother Jordan said, while turning on the lights.

Alexx and her family moved to Southington, CT from Massachusetts because her dad's business moved here. She didn't like it at all. She looked around her new house. It looked so old and dirty. There were weird paintings everywhere, in the hallway, in the kitchen, in the living room, and even in the bathroom. Their Dad walked in. "Well, why don't you kids go for a walk around town with your mother," he offered. Alexx and her brother went outside. Their Mom was waiting. "C'mon. Let's walk." she said. They walked down the sidewalk, looking at all the nice houses.

"Why isn't our house like this?" Alexx asked. "Don't be dumb, Alexx." Jordan said. "Cause, this was the only house available near your dad's new work building." their Mom said, ignoring Jordan's comment.

They walked past huge houses, on even bigger fields. One looked like a castle. Their new house looked nothing like these ones. Their new house was old and only had two small stories, unlike the ones they were walking past. They came across a small library named Jane's Library. They walked inside. It looked small on the outside, but on the inside, it was huge! Books were lined up on all of the shelves. There was a room for little kids to play in. There was even a video game room! Alexx looked up. There were paintings of lions and dragons on the ceiling. She walked around the library looking at all of the graphic novels, while her brother ran to play video games.

Then Alexx saw something that caught her eye. There was a picture of a girl about her age, standing in front of a house that looked like their house, but newer. It read, "An eleven-year-old girl, Jane, drowned in the small lake in her backyard, 40 years ago. It happened right when we were building this library, so we named it after Jane." Alexx's new house had a lake. Alexx couldn't wait to go swimming in it during the summer. Alexx continued, "She lived at 456 Helen Drive. Some say that Jane haunts that same-" before Alexx could finish the last sentence, her Mom called for her. "Alexx, Jordan, time to go." she called. "But Mom, I didn't even get to play the game!" Jordan shouted. Their Mom ignored him again. Alexx was shocked. Jane had lived and died, in their new house!

As they were walking back home, Alexx was thinking about the girl. She wondered if the girl, Jane, would haunt it. Finally, they made it back. Their Dad was unpacking his stuff now.

"Ahh, your home now, finally! Unpack your backpacks and bags." he said, relieved he didn't have to do it himself. "Jordan, your stuff is down stairs." he told Jordan. "Your stuff is upstairs." he said, pointing at Alexx.

Alexx slowly walked towards the stairs. It was really dark. She couldn't find the light switch, again. Alexx frowned. She didn't want to trip on the stairs.

She walked up the stairs and on to the second floor. It looked just like the first floor. There were weird paintings everywhere that they NEEDED to get rid of.

Alexx walked towards her bedroom. Her room was the only good thing about the whole house. The walls were light blue, her favorite color. Her room had a huge dusty mirror over her old white dresser. She had a fancy fluffy stool and a white and gold desk. (Those were also old.) Her bed was twin size. Everything looked a little dirty, but other than that, it was okay.

Alexx saw a paper sticking out from under her bed. She picked it up. It was old and ripped. Neat swirly cursive was written all over it. It read,

*“Dear diary, I really hope my mom lets me swim in the lake tomorrow. I’ve been waiting forever! Sorry this is so short, I really need some sleep. Sincerely, Jane.”*

Alexx gasped. It must have been the last time Jane ever wrote in her diary! Alexx looked under the bed some more. She didn’t see anything else.

Alexx turned around to unpack her bags. Then she saw a gray figure with glasses in the mirror. It was staring at Alexx smiling. It looked familiar. It was the gray figure she saw earlier! Jane! Alexx screamed. Her mom rushed upstairs. “Alexx! Honey, what happened?!” her mom asked, frantically. “I... It’s...” Alexx stuttered. She couldn’t believe it! Alexx definitely didn’t want to tell her mom. “Uh... just... umm... tripped.” Alexx lied. “Oh. I thought you saw a ghost!” her mom laughed. Alexx smiled, relieved that she got away with it.

As her Mom walked out of the room, Alexx saw a piece of white paper under her dresser. It wasn’t there before. Alexx picked it up. It read,

*“Dear Alexx, You found a page of my diary, didn’t you? Well I’ll make a deal with you. If you find the remains of my diary, I’ll go. I’ll leave you alone. Sincerely, Jane.”*

Alexx turned pale. She definitely didn’t want a ghost around. But how was she supposed to find Jane’s diary?

That night, Alexx was snug in her bed. It was dark. She was afraid Jane would pop up. But Alexx didn’t want to have nightmares, so when her parents went to bed, Alexx snuck out. She crept downstairs. Lucky for her, she knew where the light switch was now. She turned it on, and started to search for the diary. Alexx looked under the couch, in the oven, in the kitchen cabinets, and even in the vent. Nothing. Alexx plopped on the couch, about to give up, when she saw something in the brick wall behind the small, old, TV. One of the bricks was sticking out. Alexx pulled it out. There was a piece of paper. Has Alexx found the rest of the diary? The paper was fresh and white.

It read,

*“There’s a room. With old hats. The attic is creepy, but not creepy enough to match. Open it, and there will be stairs. Go in if you dare. I’m telling you, BEWARE. Check in there. Good Luck, Jane.”*

Alexx didn’t want to go in there, but she didn’t want a ghost around either. “Old hats,” Alexx repeated. The closet? Alexx walked over to the coat closet and opened it slowly. She saw hats, but nothing happened. “Open it,” Alexx repeated. She moved old coats around. Then, Alexx saw a trapdoor. It was tiny, but tiny enough to crawl through.

She suddenly felt chilly. Alexx spun around. Nothing was there, except for a mirror. Then Alexx saw Jane. She was smiling creepily. Alexx shivered. She spun around. Jane wasn’t there. Alexx faced the mirror again. Jane was back. Alexx tried not to scream but that was hard. Alexx shut her eyes. When she opened them, Jane had disappeared from the mirror.

Alexx faced the closet again. She bent down, and very slowly opened the trapdoor. Alexx made sure that her phone was with her, just in case. Then she crawled through the small trapdoor, leading to blackness.

She stood up on the first step, and slowly walked down. As Alexx walked down the stairs, she got chillier. Alexx shivered. It got darker and darker. It felt like the stairs could go on forever.

Then, Alexx saw something. Something gray. Alexx froze. The figure moved closer. It was Jane again! But this time, she wasn't a reflection in a mirror. Jane was floating right in front of Alexx. Alexx didn't scream, but her eyes were the size of a frisbee. Jane waved. Alexx stayed still. She wanted to walk through Jane, but that would be disrespectful. But Alexx had no other choice. She shut her eyes tight, and ran down the stairs, right through Jane.

Alexx opened her eyes, still running. She didn't dare look back. Finally, she made it down. Alexx looked around. The room was small. The floor was concrete and dirty. She saw boxes and boxes of stuff. She saw a light bulb in the ceiling, with a rope hanging from it, to turn it on. Alexx walked over to it and pulled. It was barely bright, but it still hurt her eyes. She bent down on her hands and knees, and dug through the box in front of her. Everything in it was dusty, and old. She found a picture of Jane's parents. They looked just like Jane. Then Alexx wondered why Jane's parents had left their stuff down here. She didn't want to think about it. It wasn't important at the time. Alexx found tons of pictures, all of them pictures of Jane's parents. She also found a pot, a watch, and three old rings. One was gold, one had a diamond, and one was silver. Jane's parents must've divorced after Jane's death.

Alexx stood up. She felt a chill on the back of her neck like someone was watching her. She spun around. Jane was watching her. Alexx shivered, as she slowly turned back around. She walked over to the next box and bent down. This box was taped shut. Alexx tore it open, and slowly peered inside. Alexx saw the same picture that was in the library. It was framed in swirly gold. Alexx took it out gently, and placed it next to her. There was another picture under it. It was a picture of Jane and her parents, standing in front of a blue ocean.

Alexx heard a creaking noise above her. Oh no, Alexx thought. Were her parents awake? Alexx dug through it quicker. Then she realized that Jane was floating next to her. Alexx screamed. Her scream echoed through the weird dark basement. Jane smiled creepily, as if the scream didn't bother her. Alexx jumped up. She ran to the far end of the room. Alexx looked back. Jane was gone.

Alexx ran back, digging into the box again. There was a hair tie, a comb, and a teddy bear. Then Alexx found a piece of paper. It was old and ripped. It was Jane's birth certificate. Under it was an old book. It had what would've been colorful flowers on the front. Jane's diary! Alexx carefully picked up the diary and walked slowly towards the staircase. She walked up the stairs quickly, keeping an eye out for Jane. Finally, Alexx made it to the trapdoor. She heard her parents in the kitchen. Alexx crawled through the trapdoor. She didn't want to be seen by her parents, so Alexx opened the door that led to the garage. "What was that?" her dad asked. Uh oh. "What?" her mom asked. "Never mind." her dad said. Alexx sighed with relief. She heard the fridge shut, and they walked upstairs. Alexx opened the door wider.

It was pitch black in the garage. Alexx turned on the light. She grabbed the tallest ladder she could find, and opened the door that led to the backyard. Alexx walked through, carrying the ladder. It was so dark outside. Alexx extended the ladder so it reached her window. Luckily, her window was open from the night before, so Alexx could get through. Alexx set up the ladder against the house gently. She stepped on the first step. She was shaking with fear. But

she stepped higher and higher. She remembered how clumsy she was, and started to shake. That wasn't helping. She was so close. Alexx looked down. She was so high! Then she heard someone scratching the ladder. SCREECH. That made Alexx go faster, until she reached her bedroom. Alexx climbed through the window, and looked down. Jane was at the bottom of the ladder, smiling. Alexx shut her window quickly, and closed her blinds. She tucked Jane's diary under her mattress, and hopped in bed. SCREECH. Jane was still scratching the ladder. Alexx shut her eyes and pulled the covers over her. Eventually, she drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, Alexx took the diary out from under her mattress. She put it on her dresser, and walked downstairs. Everyone was eating breakfast.

"Alexx, do you happen to know what that ladder is doing outside your window?" her dad asked her. "Uh, no idea." Alexx lied. Her mom looked at her suspiciously. "Let's call the cops then." her dad said. "Wait! Uh, It's not that big of a deal, right?" Alexx said. "No, Dad. I did it." Jordan lied. Alexx stared at him surprised. "I umm, couldn't fall asleep, so I, uh, just hung out on the roof for a while." Jordan said. That was the worst lie ever. "Why did you think that was a good idea?!" her mom asked. Jordan shrugged. "You're grounded for a month!" Alexx just sat there, shocked. Jordan looked down. Her dad ate slowly. Alexx's mom rolled her eyes. "Umm, I'll be back." Alexx said. Jordan followed.

Alexx walked in her room, Jordan still following. "You put the ladder there right?" Jordan asked. Alexx nodded. She told him everything. About Jane, the diary and the hidden basement. "Wow." Jordan responded. "Where is the diary?" asked Jordan. "It should be on my dresser." Alexx said, looking at the dresser. It was gone. In its place was a note. Alexx read it aloud,

*"Dear Alexx, Thanks for my diary. I will never bother you again. By the way, that doesn't mean you won't see me ever again. Sincerely, Jane."*

Jordan's face was pale. Alexx laughed. "Thanks," Alexx said. Jordan smiled. "Now, let's explore that basement you were talking about." Jordan said. Alexx smiled, as they ran downstairs.

## Spooky Story by Adrianna Colwell

I slowly shimmy down the stairs. My mom is watching some HGTV show in the living room. I am sneaking out for the first time. My stomach is doing flips, it's turning and turning. I can't believe I'm doing this right now. But I have to. The sun has snuck behind the hill in our backyard. There's a haze outside. Almost creepy. I tiptoe around the corner into the living room. My mom is into the show "Love It or List It" right now. She's wearing her favorite at home hoodie. It's an old gray UConn hoodie that she got when she was a student there. That must've been a trillion years ago.

I threw a safety pin into the kitchen to distract her. My mom looks over at the unexpected sound and leaves the living room. "Mom! I'm going to bed!" I shout.

"Okay, Lexi. Good night." She answers as she picks up the safety pin. When she walks over the trash can, I slip outside. \*click\* The door shuts behind me and I hold my breath. My mom doesn't come out so I guess I'm in the clear. I wait one more second and then sprint down the steps.

I'm free! I know where I'm going. The Apple Harvest Festival.

I've waited my whole life to go, but my mom would NEVER let me. She always said it was dangerous but my friends go every year so I have no idea what she's talking about. I start to get tired so I slow down to speed walking. I walk for a couple minutes until I see it. Brightly lit, with people everywhere. They're eating, laughing, and dancing. I can't believe I have been missing out on this. I'm supposed to meet my friend Gabby at 8:15pm. I look at my watch, it's 8:16pm. Perfect, she should be here.

I look around some more as I walk closer to the main entrance.

Oh! I see her!

"Gabby! Gabby!" I shout, trying to get her attention. But, I don't think she hears me because she keeps walking in the opposite direction. I see her long blonde ponytail slip behind a crowd of kids. I start running in the direction I saw her go. As I run, I keep seeing glimpses of her hair disappearing behind people. I don't know where I'm going because I've never been here before but Gabby should know where she's going.

Why can't I catch up to her? I've been following her for like 10 minutes but she seems to be slipping away.

"What is that?" I stop in my tracks. I didn't even notice where I was when I was following the ponytail. There are no people in sight, not even Gabby. I think I'm in an alley. But I don't know exactly where. How did I not notice where I was going? I nervously turn myself around. Everything is dark. There are no bright, joyful lights. No children laughing while eating ice cream cones. It's all gone. The Apple Harvest isn't even in sight. There're only tall dark buildings. But wait, it seems like there's a flashlight shining about 10 meters away. I think it's near a dumpster. But I'm not sure what it is.

I slowly start to walk towards the light. What is there? The light starts flickering and I stop walking towards it. The light is like a ghost telling me not to come closer.

All of a sudden, the light starts moving across the alley. Winding through the trash and debris on the floor I follow. I don't know why I'm following, I just am. It's so mesmerizing, I can't stop.

I follow the light all the way down the alley until it stops just at the edge of the buildings. I stare at it confused. Why did it stop? I want to keep going! It brought me some sort of joy to follow it.

*Hello, Lexi...*

I jolted at the sound of the voice.

*It's nice to finally meet you. I've been waiting all your life. But your mother has been keeping you from me.*

I don't know what to do, where to go, or what to say. The voice sounds so familiar. But not at the same time. It also doesn't sound like somebody is talking to me. It feels like I'm talking to myself aloud but my mouth isn't moving.

*Your mother is quite interesting. She has this way of keeping you out of reality. I think it's time for you to know about the world. But we have to start in small chunks. So, let's start with your mom. Your poor little mother. She has kept everything from you. Your whole life she hasn't alerted you of your abilities. Your abilities should be used to their full potential.*

"What abilities?" I muster.

*Instead of telling you, I'll show you. Breathe in and out five times. Place your right hand over your heart and push into your heart as hard as you can.*

I do as I'm told and- "Oh my gosh, OH my GOSH, OH MY GOSH!" I'm taller, stronger, and I have FUR!

All of a sudden, a bright silver mirror appears in front of me. I'm a WOLF...

*YES! Very, very good Lexi! First try! It might take some time to get used to, but you're a special kind of werewolf. Not the normal where if it's a full moon you turn into a wolf. You can turn into a wolf anytime you want!*

"I can't believe my mom has been keeping this from me!" I yell at no one in particular.

*When you were a baby she tried to kill you. She didn't know how much strength and power you had. When she couldn't get rid of you, she just tried to keep it out of your life. She tried to keep it away from me. Told me that you were just a random kid. That you didn't take after my powers. For year and year, I had no idea of what and who you were. But just recently, I found you. Walking to school, going to the ice cream shop with your friends, playing volleyball on the beach every summer. I just couldn't hold back. I needed to teach you how to show your true colors.*

"My own mom tried to kill me? Who does that?!" All of my anger that I've been holding back all these years about not being able to go to the Apple Harvest comes out. My own mother didn't let me go to the Apple Harvest because she wanted to keep me away from, from my- "DAD? You're my DAD? You're not even real. You're not even a physical person! How can you be my dad?"

*Yes, I'm your father. I'm in California right now. I'm not able to see you at this moment. I just needed to contact you, and help you with your abilities. The second I finish up with what I'm doing here, I will come visit you. I promise. I can help you train to your full potential.*

"But you haven't even been here! How am I supposed to believe you and trust you if you left?"

*Because I HAD to leave. I wish I could tell you what I'm doing. I just really can't. Please don't blame it on me, okay? I wasn't the one who tried to kill you. It's all your mother's fault, okay? It's her fault for pushing your powers out and for pushing me out. I'm the same man I was when I married her. Now remember, NOT MY FAULT. It's all YOUR MOTHER'S FAULT.*

"All mother's fault," I repeat, "She tried to kill me!" And I'm gone. Running. I don't know where but somehow, I know I will end up home. I'm even faster in wolf form. The wind is whistling in my ears. My eyes start watering from the freezing wind blowing. All I know right now, is that I need to get pay back on my own mom.

There it is. My house is right there. My mother is almost within my grasp. I come to a sudden stop right outside my house. I'm standing right in front of the front door. I growl. I'm so ready. My dad was right. She's a monster. My eyes water as I take another step towards the door. This idea was put into my head only ten minutes ago but somehow, I feel like this is me. That this is meant for me. Like I've wanted to do this my whole entire life.

**\*\*SWISH\*\***

With one clean swipe, I knock down the door. Man, I love having all this strength.

"HELLO?" I hear my mom yell, in a terrified voice.

"Hey, Mom," I drawl.

"Oh, thank goodness it's you. I thought there was a burglar," She sighs.

I can tell she's in the kitchen. I hear her drop something. Probably a knife she had grabbed. I take a couple steps into the entrance hall and breathe in the smell of roses. The scent of my mother. She always sprays it in the morning, after her shower, and before she goes to bed. I listen to her footsteps coming towards me.

"Hey! Be careful with that door, Lexi." She laughs. As she comes into view, I grin a large toothy grin.

"NOOOOO!" She screams a dreadful deathly scream, "Why did you do this to yourself?! Your crappy father is unbelievable! He can't take you away from me. I've tried for too many years to keep you away. But I just can't!"

"You don't care about me! You tried to KILL me! *You* are so unbelievable! You almost took the life of your own daughter!"

"And then I almost took my own life for the guilt it gave me. It took me so many years to come out of that depression! Don't be a monster to the world. Remember how happy we were before you found out? I'm still the same person! You're fine! I promise we can be a perfect family! You just have to try to get past what you hear!"

"Well. I think it's a little too late for that..."

***GET HER!***

I run towards my mom at full speed. I pick her up in my mouth and run through the sliding glass door into the backyard. I feel the glass shattering around me but I don't care. I keep running until I'm in the woods next to my backyard. "Now what do I do?" I ask my dad. I know he's listening to me.

***KILL HER!***

I open my mouth and drop my mother onto the leaves and mud. I glance at the sky and scream as loud as I can, "HECK TO THE NO! You're joking, right? She's my mom and why would I ever do that? She took care of me for my whole dang life. What have you done to give me orders like that? If you want to get rid of her you'll have to do it yourself. But first, you'll have to get past me..."

## **The Night of the Zombie Apocalypse by Dean Cardone**

A tick to midnight the zombies waken and they break through the ground. It is a misty evening and the fog is rolling in. All of Southington is sound asleep, but one is not. "The Ninja" laid awake waiting patiently for the zombies to attack.

The zombies begin walking through the streets, banging on the doors. The zombies awaken a little boy who lives on Belleview Avenue. He calls to his parents and tells them to look out the window and when they do, they all scream and call the police.

The police arrive on scene and the zombies are taking over out of nowhere. The Ninja arrives and defeated the zombies with a slash. The whole neighborhood cheered and everyone felt safe. The Ninja leaped away quietly, like ninjas do and everyone was sad, they wanted a photo with "The Ninja" but he was gone. Everyone went back to their homes and the little boy who lived on Belleview Avenue felt safe to sleep. The next day he couldn't wait to tell his friends he saw "The Ninja" who saved the town of Southington.



## The Spooky Halloween Night by Hayden Dube

It was two nights until Halloween. Anna was going to be Jack Skellington from *The Nightmare Before Christmas* for Halloween. Her little sister Sam, who was seven, is going to be Sally from the same movie. Lastly, Anna's four-year-old brother Max was going to be Zero, Jack Skellington's dog! Anna was counting down the days till Halloween: she couldn't wait! Halloween was Anna's favorite holiday because she loved getting candy, and dressing up, but the one thing Anna loved the most was the Halloween decorations! "Anna," her mom yelled. "Get ready for bed!" That means Amy has to get ready for bed too! Amy screams when she has to get to bed!

"Beep,Beep,Beep" "I don't want to go to school." Anna said dramatically. When Anna got to school she saw everyone in their Halloween costume. "Oh no! I forgot that we were supposed to wear our Halloween costumes!" Anna thought to herself. So, Anna walked around the long 6th grade hall. Everyone was staring at her trying to guess what Halloween costume she was wearing. Anna was wearing gray Nike sweatpants, a pumpkin sweatshirt and a pumpkin headband that she had gotten for her early Birthday present. *RING*. It was time for lunch. Anna has a sandwich shaped like a pumpkin and some Halloween candy like Reese's peanut butter cups and Sour Patch Kids. After lunch, my homeroom teacher wanted us to show off our costumes! I didn't have a costume though. Ellie went first and dressed up as Spider-Woman! Then, five minutes later it was my turn. Of course, I had to go last. So, Anna went up and said that she was a pumpkin but she couldn't find her pants to her Halloween costume. Everyone stared at her suspiciously.

When Anna got home she went to her friend's house to make her Jack Skellington costume. Her friend Maya is going to be a cheerleader for Halloween. Maya had already made her costume. Maya likes to make Anna's costumes because Maya is a designer and she has to practice. Maya wants to make costumes for thirty dollars each. Anna thought that was a good idea so Maya and Anna made a deal. The deal was that Anna would always buy the supplies they needed with half of the money and half of her allowance. After Anna went home and went to bed, she couldn't wait for Halloween.

The next morning, Anna already knew that her mom wasn't going to make her go to school because it's a holiday. The whole day Anna made her bucket for her candy and watched some Halloween movies. When it was time to go trick or treating, Anna brought her sister and her brother to go pickup her friends and then go trick or treating. Anna got a lot of candy but most of the candy was chocolate. It was getting dark and Anna and her friends started to walk home. Anna was starting to get scared. Her friends were telling scary stories about kids who got lost in the woods they were walking by now and that the kids were never found. Then, Maya dropped her water bottle and it rolled into the forest. Anna is making excuses for why she can't go into the forest. Anna was telling her friends that she can't go into the forest because...Anna was allergic to the berries in the trees which was a lie. Her friends knew it was a lie so they pretended to believe her and grabbed her into the forest. Anna was very worried, Anna had to grab her siblings and face her fear to walk into the forest so they could find Maya's water bottle that she dropped. Anna was shivering in the freezing cold. It was very dark and her friends and Anna were actually getting scared. Then, Anna heard someone coming. Leaves ruffling as they hear someone coming towards them. Anna and her friends started running.

Five minutes later, they were deep into the forest. Max was crying, Sam was whining and Anna and her friends were scared. Beep!! It was a truck! It was going right towards Anna

and her friends. Anna grabbed her friends and her siblings and went towards the side. It was Anna's mom. "Mom, how did you find us?" Anna asked. Anna's mom explained that she put an air tag on Anna so she could track her and Anna's mom said that she knew she was lost because she was in the middle of the forest. Anna told her mom about how Maya dropped her water bottle in the forest. Ten minutes later, Maya found her water bottle.

"Anna, we have something to tell you." Maya explained. Anna's friends explained to her that Maya dropped her blue water bottle on purpose so that you could try to face your fear by going into these woods." Aww thanks guys!" Anna said blushing. "Of course, we are always looking out for you!" Ava said. "BOO!" "What was that?" Anna shivered. Anna saw something white in the wind. Maya saw it too. Maya explained that she heard a boo and she saw something white in the wind. It could be a decoration or an actual ghost. Max was sleeping because the sound of the wind knocked him right out. Also, Sam is sleeping in the wagon with Max. "BOO!", "There it was again!" Maya screamed.

"What is that noise?!" Anna asked. Anna's mom explained that every five years a spirit comes out to haunt the people who come in this forest for one whole year! "WHAT!" Anna, Maya, and Allie yelled at the same time. SHH! There was white smoke coming out of thin air! *R.U.N.* The smoke spelled out! "RUN!" Maya screamed at the top of her lungs. They all started running, but Anna had tripped! The ghost was getting closer to her! "Anna get up!" Allie yelled at her. The ghost had pulled Anna away!

"Anna!" Allie and Maya screamed! Crunch, crunch "Who was coming towards us?" Allie asked. "BOO!" Anna yelled. "AHH!" Allie screamed. Everyone was laughing except Allie and Maya. "You guys just got pranked!" Anna's mom said. "Oh my god, thank goodness." Maya said in relief. Anna explained that she loves pranking her friends. Especially her closest friends. "Aww, thanks Anna!" Maya said. "Why are you saying thanks?!" Allie asked. "It's because she said that she pranks her closest friends!" Maya explained. "Oh yeah, thanks Anna you're the bestest friend ever, except the pranking part. We were actually scared for you!" "Yeah it was a test to see if you would just leave me behind or come to try and help me!" Anna explained again.

Anna also explained how she did the setup. She said that her dad was in the truck and he got a smoke machine and he drew in the smoke and he just had a Halloween decoration and had a sound machine too. Maya and Allie were both relieved. "Well it's really late so I guess we should start getting back home." Crunch, crunch. "Who was that? I swear that wasn't me this time!" Anna said. "I don't know!" Allie said back. "Just kidding, it's my dad coming to walk with us so he can get more steps in." Allie explained. "Oh, ok good." Maya said. So, they all walked home still a little scared of Anna.

The next year, Anna was in seventh grade and had more friends to prank this year for Halloween. The whole school knew about Anna pranking her friends and they wanted to get pranked! When it was Halloween time again, Anna did a different prank! She pretended that there was an actual zombie and that they were coming for them. Her new friends thought it was a prank but Anna convinced them that it was not a prank and they had to run. Anna pranked thirteen people this year! Anna was declared the pranking queen at school. If you messed with Anna she would prank them back hard! She doesn't do it to be mean but sometimes she takes it a little too far. Like one time someone called her a teacher's pet and she told everyone that he had to get a new change of pants because he peed in them but actually he just spilled lemonade on himself. Anna is very good at pranking but she can go a little too far sometimes!

Anna was in seventh grade and she was the queen of the whole school. Nobody messed with Anna and if they did, Anna would have some serious payback. No one ever dared to be mean to her. But, Anna didn't like how everyone was treating her. So, Anna changed and Anna had no fake friends anymore. The reason why she had fake friends was because nobody wants to be pranked. Now, Anna only has real friends and she loves them. That means they're going to get pranked on Halloween night next year! Her friends were so excited to get pranked. This year Anna actually enjoyed pranking her friends because they were real friends.

This year Anna pranked her friends that she ate a candy and she fainted after she ate it. Her friends were very nervous and they didn't think that was the prank. Her real friends actually almost brought her to the hospital. Right before they got to they started to walk to the hospital Anna jumped up and scared them! "Ahhhh!" her friends screamed. "We didn't know that was the prank," they all said! Anna had so much fun with these past two years pranking people.

Now, Anna is in eighth grade, her sister is in fourth grade, and her brother is in day care. Anna was not the pranking queen anymore. Anna was okay with that. Anna didn't care if people called her the pranking queen or not. She was happy that her family is happy and she has real friends that are always there for her. Anna will never forget that night with Allie and Maya. She remembered that night as The Spooky Halloween Night!

## **Ring by Felicity Edmonds**

Maggie Brooklyn hates ghosts. Not that she believes in them anyway, but she hates them. That's why she is devastated when she hears that she has to help her dad with a paranormal activity show. Maggie is doing fine until she spots a girl with dark eyes in the back of the auditorium staring at her. She starts walking to her dad but turns around to make sure the girl is okay, but she has disappeared.

Maggie tries to ignore it. She must be imagining things. Remember, ghosts aren't real. Right?! But then, the ringing started. Ominous singing grips her in the dark. Random alphabetical letters appear everywhere she looks. Then, the girl starts following her around everywhere she goes. Maggie is being haunted. She needs to figure out how to stop this madness... And before it's too late. RING

Maggie Brooklyn was in a gloomy mood. She was sitting on the steps of her apartment as she sulked about the following problem. Her life was going great until her best friend, Midge, got stolen from her by the new girl, Hannah. But it got even worse the minute she found out about the fact that she had to help her dad with a ghost show. You see, her dad was OBSESSED with paranormal activity. On the other hand, Maggie hated it. She had no interest in the paranormal, let alone the fact that she was EXTREMELY afraid of them. Not that she believed in them.

Maggie had almost gotten through the auditorium showcasing, the last part of the ghost show. Thank God. Wait; who's that random girl standing at the back of the auditorium? Maggie thought. The girl had dark eyes, black as night. Maggie started to walk towards her dad, thinking; Just act casual, Maggie. This isn't creepy at all. Suddenly, she turned around to check on the girl to make sure she was OK., but the girl was gone. Maggie tried to pretend that nothing had ever happened. She must be letting the cold of this freezing night get to her. Because, ghosts aren't real, remember? Right?!

When Maggie got home, she still had fifteen minutes to play with Biscuits, her dog, until she planned to fall asleep. Except that there was one problem. There was this odd ringing sound in her ear, making it really hard to play with Biscuits, so she apologized to Biscuits for letting him down and went to bed early. About fifteen minutes later in the dark, she heard ominous singing. "Lalalalalaaaa." She turned on her light. The singing stopped. Hmm. Weird.

Maggie didn't sleep last night. There was this ominous singing whenever she turned off the lights. Suddenly, she saw this weird red writing on her window spelling, "I'm coming for you Maggie! 😊" Wow. The cold really did get to me last night. Maggie thought shakily to herself.

That night, Maggie saw the letters, felt the ringing in her ears, and heard the ominous singing. But one more thing started to happen. Maggie started seeing an odd figure. It looked like a girl, hmmm.... Wow. That girl looks exactly like... That girl from the auditorium?!

Oh no, does she want something from me?! Maggie thought. "What do you want?!" Maggie said very shakily. Her opinion on ghosts not being real had just changed. No response from the girl. The girl started getting closer. Then, Maggie heard whispering. "THIS IS YOUR LAST MOMENT ALIVE!" It was the girl. "Wait! Stop! Please!" Maggie shouted. "I'll do anything!" "Anything?" the girl replied in her usual ominous way. "Anything!" Maggie pleaded.

## The Reminiscence of Ronny Joe Mason by Odudu Eyamba

The Apple Harvest Festival. The gathering of people to celebrate the arrival of the autumn instead of the apples the town turned to when its people were lost.

I, Cupid Derenger, have been long gone since 2011, but I still watched from the shadows. I saw the carnivals and the stands and the atrocious music that was always audible from wherever you are.

I sometimes reminisced about what it was like living as flesh instead of such a being as I was, but there was no way to get back to the other side. I wasted my life on such useless things, but I did take pleasure in watching the lives of other people, which was why the breeze of the fall was the way it was.

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I walked through the crowded streets, my hands in my pockets. Haily was right beside me in her dark red sweater and brown hair.

“The apple fritters get better every year,” Haily said while pointing to a family holding three full bags of apple fritters.

“I’ve always wondered,” I said watching the family walk by, there were two toddlers and a mother who hugged the three bags tightly against her stomach while the children bobbed after her. “Why is it called the Apple Harvest when there are no apples?”

Haily shrugged and crouched down on the grass to watch the band play. Its music was horrendous, but we liked spending time with one another, so here we were, under a large tree turning several different shades of red and gold. “You always think about the stupidest things.” I couldn’t tell if this was an insult or a joke, but then her face turned and she was wearing the biggest grin I’d seen in a while.

“It’s not stupid if I have a higher IQ than you,” I said sitting down beside her with my hands planted in the cool soft grass.

“Well, that’s irrelevant,” Haily said, pointing a finger at me. The band finished playing their song, and some people left. They quickly launched into their next song as if they were trying to bring those departing back.

“I believe you told me a notable quote was ‘Pointing fingers is bad. Bad Cupid,’” I said with a smile. The band’s music grew louder and I couldn’t hear what Haily said next.

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Three months after I left my life in flesh on Earth, I went to find Haily. To this day, I could never figure out why I waited so long. I walked back into Southington and went back to our house to find her. She wasn’t there, and in the yard was a small stone slab that read our cat’s name in the neatest handwriting you’d ever see. Solar was dead, just like me, and surely, in the small forest behind the residence was Solar, trotting aimlessly around town. He saw me, but didn’t bother making a sound. After a few seconds of eye contact, he left, wandering away like he never even saw me.

I went back to the front of the house and looked at it again before I departed. That’s when I saw a small yellow note in the corner of the porch. I walked up the steps and picked it up to read it. *If anyone is looking for me, Haily D., I have gone down south to live with my dear sister. I am selling the house and will not be returning.*

I ripped the note and left the house, wishing I never found the note and read it. That house was part of my history. My grandparents bought it in 1936 and it was in the family for three generations. Then I discovered it was being sold by Haily who had loved the house dearly

and had left Connecticut altogether. As a dead man eternally in his forties, I wasn't sure why I was so enraged by this. All I knew is that I never wanted to see that house again.

Just like Haily, I suppose.

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We united with our friend and classmate Ronny Joe in a small, cute little store selling fall decorations. He was a large boy with ginger hair and a small number of freckles speckled under his eyes and the bridge of his nose.

"Hey, Ronny Joe," I said. Ronny swiveled and smiled when he noticed us.

"Oh hey, guys," Ronny said in a bright voice. "Uh, hey, Haily," he said a bit more shyly. I raised an eyebrow at Haily who smiled, but said nothing.

"Are you just going to keep calling me Ronny Joe?" Ronny asked.

"That's your first name, isn't it?" I said sarcastically.

"Yes, but it's Ronny for short," Ronny said, putting his hands in the pocket of his hoodie.

"I like Ronny Joe. Has a nice ring to it," Haily said before I could answer.

"What she said," I said with a grin, elbowing Haily. She smiled at me and after that, there was an awkward silence with me staring into Haily's green eyes and Ronny staring at the both of us, not knowing what to say next.

"Um, wanna get some apple fritters or something?" Ronny asked. I blinked rapidly for a moment so I could snap out of the trance I was in with Haily. She cleared her throat quietly.

"Uh, yeah, sounds great," I said. "Don't have any money though," I said, pulling out the insides of my pockets. All I came up with was a lollipop.

"I'm broke all the time, don't look at me," Haily said with her hands up.

"Don't worry, my dad gave me twenty dollars," Ronny said, pulling out two ten-dollar bills from his jeans pocket. We wandered out of the store and down to the apple fritter line, which was surprisingly lengthy.

"Hey, Ronny, what's that thing in your hoodie pocket?" I asked, pointing. Upon closer observation, I noticed that the item had a straight edge then disappeared into the rest of his pocket. What could possibly be so heavy?

"It's nothing," Ronny murmured, quickly turning away so his back was facing me and Haily.

"Stop worrying about stupid things," Haily said with a smile. But I couldn't smile back. Something was wrong. I felt disassociated, disconnected with the Earth I was standing on, my own two feet planted firmly on the sidewalk. Nothing was the way it should have been.

"Nothing is real," I said involuntarily. The light breeze picked and turned into a gusting wind, blowing rapidly, moving the leaves on the trees and the leaves on the ground. The wind became a gale and I felt like I was about to be lifted off my feet.

"What's going on?" Haily exclaimed. She put her arms in front of her face defensively while everyone in the line seemed to vanish. But they were right there in front of my face. How could they vanish?

With his back turned to us, Ronny hunched his shoulders intimidatingly and pulled out a shiny, reflective knife out of his hoodie pocket.

*Oh.*

*That's what.*

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After I crossed over to the land of the unseen, I set out to find Ronny to make him pay for his crimes. The guy was a Christian for Pete's sake, yet he chose to murder the people of Southington. To this day, I had no idea what threw Ronny over the edge, but there was no way I'd ever find out.

Probably because I could never find Ronny again.

I sincerely hoped that he was imprisoned for his crimes against the people of Southington, Connecticut, but I would never be certain. For all I knew, he could be hiding out in Malaysia, never to return to the United States.

After that fateful, tragic day of Ronny Joe Mason's rampage, the Apple Harvest of 1983 was canceled. The whole town was panic-stricken, principally for the reason that Ronny disappeared and nobody ever saw him again.

His parents were questioned when the police showed up to the Mason residence. They weren't even present at the Apple Harvest and didn't have the faintest clue that Ronny was homicidal to begin with. Not even they—his own parents and primary caregivers—had any idea where Ronny had escaped to.

Soon, a real investigation was opened and four months later, it was found that Ronny Joe was identified in Erwin, Tennessee after a farmer and his wife were found dead in their barn. Which meant Ronny Joe was running from the police.

After that, no news about Ronny was ever reported. He just disappeared. Like the twenty-two people from the 1983 Apple Harvest Festival.

On October 18, I ambled into the Southington Library, bored out of my mind. There's not much you can do after you emerge from the grave as an intangible being. It was quiet, although there were still people talking in low voices.

I strolled around with my hands in my pockets and watched people select books and chat quietly. Everything felt warm and cozy just like I remembered it, and the earthy scent of books and old paper was olfactible.

I was observing a small girl pick out a large picture book from the shelf when I saw her.

On the other end of the aisle was Haily flipping through the pages of an eighth-grade level fantasy book with a crestfallen expression, her long scar still on her hand.

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"Ronny, what the hell are you doing?" yelled Haily as Ronny kept his back toward us. People cowered away from him and quickly left. A large man was barking questions at him.

On instinct, I grabbed Haily's hand and started running, running like the wind, the wind blowing against us and slowing us down. Leaves were whirled around and in a matter of seconds we were getting showered by them as they descended back down to the earth.

Ronny was slowly walking after us, with the knife close to his side so it wasn't as visible. An elderly woman was carrying a brown paper bag of baked goods. When she went by Ronny, he raised his knife and sliced her neck. The knife went deep, and she collapsed.

People fled, screaming at the violence. A pool of blood started around the elderly woman and as I blinked, looking back at the chaos, Ronny Joe Mason started sprinting after us, faster than I'd ever seen him run before. He was catching up to us.

I felt Haily's hand tug on mine and I looked down to see she had tripped. In a span of 7 seconds, Ronny Joe would be face-to-face with me.

"Go!" yelled Haily as the wind blew against us faster than it had before.

“No!” I shouted back briefly. There was no time for a full sentence. I grabbed Haily’s hand and pulled her up just as Ronny’s knife came swinging down to cut Haily’s hand.

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“What are you *doing* here?” I said in a voice way louder than I had expected.

“Browsing,” said Haily with a shrug. Her face became firm and she carefully wiped a tear away with her thumb.

“Through eighth-grade level books?” I said skeptically, looking down at the book she’d selected.

“When I died I woke up with severe dyslexia. I can’t even read anything,” Haily said as her voice cracked. “Reading was my favorite thing when I was alive.”

“You’re dead,” I repeated with a strange shock.

“Yes,” she murmured, trailing off. She walked out of the aisle and stood near the entrance, looking at me several times.

“What?” I asked.

“Ronny Joe Mason killed me.”

We walked outside into the evening sunlight that glinted down on the Earth blindingly. Everything was golden and beautiful at this time of autumn. The shock had rendered me speechless, but Haily didn’t bat an eye. Her face was sorrowful and her mouth was tight.

I wanted to ask her everything, even though all the memories of Ronny Joe came running back into my head. The Apple Harvest Festival of 1983 was a traumatic experience for the both of us and the fear couldn’t be controlled. Ronny Joe Mason was a murderer and a psycho. No matter where I went, I couldn’t escape him. Even here, as I walked into the parking lot of the library, lifeless, Ronny Joe Mason still inflicted some strange fear in me that entered my bloodstream and caused a chill from head to toe.

There was nothing anyone could do about it. Ronny could still be alive, in a home with his wife and children. I was angered. I vowed I would make Ronny pay and I had the chance to fulfill that vow.

“I assume you want to know what happened,” Haily said with a questioning voice.

I simply shrugged. Did I really want to know? Did I really want to place the thought of another Ronny Joe Mason murder in my mind? “I guess,” I muttered, completely uncertain.

“So, after you died, I moved to Erwin, Tennessee to live with my sister,” Haily explained, looking into my eyes. Her eyes were still beautifully green, although dimmer and darker than before. “We lived in a rural area.”

I stared at her. “No,” I said firmly. We were sitting down on the sidewalk in front of the entrance watching cars pull out as the library was soon to close.

“No?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Erwin, Tennessee is where two farmers were found dead. They were killed by Ronny.”

Haily’s face instantly snapped into a stern expression. “Those farmers were my sister and brother-in-law.” Her voice cracked as she said so.

There was pure, eerie silence as we sat there, shaded by the library’s structure from the setting sun. The wind blew, ruffling the leaves on the trees, creating a moving golden-bronze landscape before us.

Nothing felt real. I felt like I was withering away. And this time I felt like I would not wake up like nothing happened, like the pain wasn’t real. I felt like I would not get to enjoy another beautiful, unseen world through the gate of death.

I was dead.



Not of the breeze or unseen in a spiritual way.

I was dead. And that was all I was.

“Ronny was hunting me down. The reason why I left Southington is not really about running away from bad memories. It was about running away from *Ronny Joe*.”

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“Are you okay?” I shouted frantically. Haily’s hand was bleeding at an alarming rate. The entire back of her hand was cut open. She pressed her other hand to it to keep the blood from flowing out, and she screamed and cried at the pain.

“GET HELP!” she screamed. The blood was dripping out around the hand covering the injury.

For the first time in my life, my high IQ was failing me. I didn’t know what to do and my best friend was dying in the middle of a near-vacant Apple Harvest Festival.

“Where the hell is that guy?” I hissed, looking up. Ronny Joe was gone.

“Who CARES?” Haily roared, furious from the agony she was in.

Seemingly involuntarily, I sprinted in long strides back to the fall decoration store. It was completely vacant, but it was open and the lights were on. There was a telephone there, so I quickly rushed to it and called 9-1-1.

“Hello, what’s your emergency?” said the call operator.

“My friend is DYING we’re at the apple harvest,” I babbled, running my words together. Sweat dripped down my face, even though the air was cold and breezy. When the call operator got all the information they needed I sprinted back to Haily, realizing I shouldn’t have left her alone in the first place. Thankfully, she was still there, her whole face filled with fat wet tears.

“The ambulance is coming,” I said to her. By now the scene was empty, but one question spiraled through my mind like a crazy roller coaster going around and around for eternity. *Where is Ronny Joe? And is he going to come back... to finish off the both of us?*

Before we even knew it, we heard sirens and the ambulance bustled down the road. Paramedics exited the vehicle and took Haily away. She kissed me on the cheek as she was taken inside the ambulance. My face got very warm in a matter of seconds, but it wasn’t the time to worry about my love life.

I brushed myself off and called Haily’s parents with the telephone in the store to tell them what happened. Then, I walked home, praying that Haily wouldn’t walk into the rose garden of death.

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The moon was up by now, full and beautifully bright. It shone down on everything and created a scene with the silver silkiness of a graceful ballerina. Haily and I walked down the streets, wandering aimlessly, just like our cat Solar.

I studied Haily’s face and it was quite bizarre to see her older than me. It wasn’t as apparent as before, but under the light of the full moon, her wrinkles seemed more defined than in regular daylight.

It was almost frightening to see your wife (who is supposed to be younger than you) in her sixties while you were trapped in your forties, eternally younger than her. But then I smiled to myself and felt a toasty sensation all over. It felt quite nice to finally be free from the subjugation of life, strangely.

“How did Ronny even find you?” I asked out of the blue.

This caught Haily off guard. Her face froze for a second then she frowned. “I don’t know. I’ve always theorized that he was working with other people.”

“Other people?” I echoed. Repeating that seemed to reverberate off the edges of the sky. My hands started trembling slightly. Ronny Joe was in a *partnership*? I couldn’t believe it, but it also didn’t seem impossible for Ronny’s capabilities.

“I don’t know how else he found me. I was careful,” Haily explained, kicking leaves into the street.

“Are you... still scared of Ronny?” I asked hesitantly. “That day was so frightening.” I shook my head to clear things before the thoughts seeped in.

“Sometimes,” said Haily. “But, he can’t get us now. We’re dead.”

Instead of responding, I looked down at the sidewalk. But this question burned inside of me. “Do you ever think about being alive again?” I forced out.

“A lot,” Haily murmured. “But this is who we are now, Cupid.” Haily sighed then laughed briefly. “I think I’m wiser than you now. Finally.”

I couldn’t help but snicker. “Comes with the old age,” I countered and then we were both laughing. A few moments after we caught our breath, the wind picked up and started blowing harder than I’d ever felt it blow before.

The moon and sky flickered between sun and daytime so rapidly I thought I’d go blind. At this moment, I sincerely believed it was the end of the world and above us was the tropospheric ticking of a celestial time bomb.

When I blinked again, it was nighttime (and stayed nighttime). But there were no cars or people or lights on. The only people in the town at the moment were Haily and I.

*Oh.*

And Ronny Joe.

“Am I seeing things?” Haily asked, rubbing her eyes and blinking several times. “Must be a symptom of dyslexia.”

“No. He’s back,” I muttered.

No matter where on Earth you go, you cannot escape Ronny Joe Mason.

“The *hell* is *this* godforsaken man doing back in Southington?” Haily growled. “Come on, we’re following him.”

I silently agreed and we jogged after Ronny. He was walking quite briskly, not as if there was somewhere he urgently needed to be, but as if he needed to arrive at his destination as speedily and inconspicuously as possible.

“I’m going to make this guy *pay*,” Haily hissed faintly, even though Ronny couldn’t hear or see us. I said nothing in response, predominantly because I was too dumbfounded to say anything. Ronny Joe Mason was unequivocally up to something and I was going to find out what it was. I was so flabbergasted the only thing I could focus on was the howling of the wind around us.

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I took a deep breath and confessed my feelings for Haily O’Brien.

“I like you, Haily.”

Haily got out of bed and hugged me. “I like you too, Mr. IQ,” she said and I could hear the breath of laughter on my shoulder.

I smiled with a warm sensation inside. We released and stared at each other for a long moment. Then, we briefly kissed and hugged each other again, this time holding each other for a while, with uncontainable grins on both of our faces.

But I could feel the large bandage on Haily’s hand on my back and my grin disappeared almost instantly.

Ronny led us to a damp wooden shed on the outskirts of a forest. He entered, and so did we, careful not to make any noise when we opened the door.

The only thing inside it was a beautiful shiny mirror with the most intricate, ornate silver border around the glass. It was polished and it reflected the rays of moonlight shining through the cracks in the shed roof.

“That’s beautiful,” Haily couldn’t stop herself from saying. She always loved things like these, fancy expensive antiques with breathtaking detail and a shiny polish.

Ronny Joe Mason walked up to the mirror and stood in front of it. He turned around to make sure no one was watching (I palpably flinched) then stepped into the mirror. He walked through it like it was the thinnest of liquids and, as he did, ripples like those of water moved from the center of the mirror where Ronny had entered.

“What the *hell*?” I exclaimed, immediately walking up to the mirror. I stood there, looking at my reflection only visible to the dead. I squinted into the glass and saw Ronny; he was miniscule as he moved further and further away in a place on the other side.

“How the—?” Haily examined the mirror, even pulled it away from the back wall. There was nothing behind it.

Upon closer inspection, we both simultaneously realized that the intricate details we assumed were flowers or something of the sort were actually pleasantly-arranged silver skulls, lining the outside of the mirror’s glass.

“What even is this?” Haily asked. She looked like she just found out that the universe wasn’t even real. I mean, was it real? The wind, the way things disappeared, the lunar/solar flickering, then this? Was reality even an existing concept, or was everything as we knew it just a complete illusion, a fantasy?

“We have to go into the mirror and follow him,” I said. “There’s something going on with the universe and I think Ronny Joe might lead us to the answer.”

“We’re already dead. Nothing can happen to us anyway,” Haily said and without another word she put her hand in the mirror. “Feels cold. Dead. Strange. Even empty.” Haily took a deep breath and put on a fearless face. “I’m going all the way in.” Then, she was gone.

Squinting, I saw a shock course through Haily’s face and she patted her arms and stomach and face in complete flabbergast.

But what scared me the most was that she was sixteen again, in the clothing she wore to the Apple Harvest of 1983.

In the split second between my feet leaving the earth as I involuntarily jumped, and me phasing through the glass to the secret world on the other side, everything that happened relating to Ronny Joe Mason flashed through my mind. Me at the 1983 Apple Harvest where this all began, Haily getting hauled away in an ambulance, the blood and violence and chaos Ronny Joe had inflicted on the town of Southington, Connecticut. Other memories: Solar dying from heart cancer, me falling off an eight-story balcony and dying, picturing Haily getting killed by Ronny. My life practically revolved around Ronny Joe and it was time to find out why.

It felt like slow-motion, me passing through the mirror, then I landed on the other side. Everything was black. Light was present, but it didn’t come from anywhere. There was no floor, no ceiling, no walls, just black void.

I was in my attire from the Apple Harvest of 1983. I stared at Haily, who looked like she was about to pass out. I was seventeen again.

And I was alive.

## What Lies Beyond by Nathaniel Gardner

It's Tuesday, October 31st 2023. Halloween was a little well.... There are bats everywhere and umm.... Well I'll tell you later. The news said it's bad, so it's not safe to be outside. Come to my house and discuss it there. Three minutes later, wow Southington is wrecked. At least it's not Salem, like last time. "Well Southington is my home and it's the only town that's still living in Connecticut. It's safe and not, from time to time. It's life.

"And those are?" "Well those are all the birds," Henry said while driving the truck. We arrived at 3:00 am. We were so far from where we were, I had forgotten about the birds and how scary it is. Tick! Tock! Tick! Tock! The door had a clock on it and it was ticking down. "Get in now!" Henry yelled as I jumped as far as I could, like a pogo stick.

The door shut behind me, I saw the lock flicked. I thought to myself *they must have been prepared for this*. I started hearing groans from outside "What's that noise?" I asked Henry. "Zombies." Henry answered. "What!? Zombies? St..stop i..it," I said frightened. He shook his head in a clean, *No*.

The moaning got louder and louder by the second. It had gotten really, really irritating to my head. It felt like I was going to go crazy. I shook my head and stuffed it into a pillow. Three hours later, the hours stopped but my head didn't stop aching. It really didn't feel good. I got up three minutes later and my head hurts. I still felt a little dizzy then I fell whamp!

I finally woke up and the house was gone. I couldn't really breathe and the air was foggy. I saw a gas mask. I crawled to it and I put it on, breathing heavily. I saw a lake and I looked at my body. It was so dirty I jumped into the lake. I saw fish but then I saw bubbles coming from the water. I saw a zombie come from the water. I jumped out of the water and ran as far as I could and swore to never come back to Southington.



THE END

## The Legend of Mr. Woodstruff by Quinn Reagan Gohagon

Once there were four friends; Daisy Marlin, the outgoing one, Rachael Tannsil, the preppy one, Carol Katez, the shy one, and Masha Varlini, the gentle one.

Our story starts in 2005 at Crescent Lake, Southington, CT. The four friends went out on a camping trip with their families. This was their fourth year going to Crescent Lake. They now understood the directions better than when they were 6 in 2001. They could now swim farther in the lake and go on short hikes without supervision.

The day they arrived, the girls decided they would stay at the campsite for the day to get to know the campers. It was a public campsite, you know. There could be new people each day. They noticed old Mr. Groove and crazy Mrs. Spark. But, they did see a new and very unusual tent. It was like a small circus-like tent with purple and black stripes. Right when the girls were about to go say hi to the old lady in the new tent, their family called them over for the campfire.

“Aw, already? We just got here!” Daisy complained.

“C’mon, Daisy. We’ve been out here for two hours. Besides, I think my dad has some pretty spooky stories for us.” Masha said.

“S-spooky st-stories?” Carol sputtered. Carol was easily frightened and, in fact, hated spooky stories.

“Oh, don’t worry about it! It won’t be *that* scary. Now let’s get going before everyone eats all the s’mores” Rachael said. Nobody wanted to listen to Daisy’s or Carol’s whining any more.

Thankfully, when the girls arrived at the campfire there were still a few s’mores left. They each grabbed a s’more and scarfed it down while their parents went on and on about life. Finally, Mr. Gravel, the best storyteller on the block, stood up to tell a spooky story.

“Excuse me, may I have everyone’s attention?” Mr. Gravel called out. “I think it’s time for a spooky story!” A wave of fear flushed over Carol’s face, while excitement took over Daisy’s.

“Well I should begin before it gets too dark.” Mr. Gravel said. “So, in 1818, there once was a man named Gerald A. Woodstruff, but everyone called him Mr. Woodstruff.

“One day, when his wife was on a very important work trip, he was very lonely. So, Mr. Woodstruff went camping for a week.

“He set up his tent in these very woods. But little did he know that bears and snakes roamed these woods. When it was well past midnight, Mr. Woodstruff heard a tree branch snap. Then, he heard a bolt of lightning in the midnight sky. He quietly peeked out the tent and investigated the woods.

“Suddenly, right as a bolt of lightning struck the sky, a bear appeared and started chasing Mr. Woodstruff as if he was the bear’s runaway dinner. Then, when Mr. Woodstruff hit a dead end, he picked up a huge tree branch and hit the bear right in the nose with it.

“The bear looked like it was in so much pain that it might faint. But, instead of fainting in the middle of a very bad storm, the bear gobbled up Mr. Woodstruff like a Thanksgiving turkey. Ever since, Mr. Woodstruff haunts these woods to this very day, haunting any animal he crosses.”

After that spooky story, everyone except Carol and that old lady from the new tent gave a huge round of applause.

“Thank you, thank you. Now, we best get back to our tents before it gets too dark.”

This year, the girls were sharing a big, white tent with each other. They set up their sleeping bags and snuggled tight into them.

“I-I’m scared! W-what if Mr. Woodstruff comes in our tent?” Carol sputtered.

“Oh, c’mon, it’s just a spooky story. Mr. Woodstruff doesn’t *actually* haunt the woods. Have we *ever* seen a ghost in the woods before? We go hiking all the time!” Daisy explained.

“I guess you have a point...” Carol said. “...but what if he only comes out at night?!”

“Go to sleep! Please?!” Rachael said.

“Okay...” Daisy and Carol said. They huddled in their sleeping bags and went to sleep. Well, except Carol. She was still frightened over Mr. Gravel’s story.

The next morning, Rachael insisted that they go check out that new tent. Though Carol was tired after a sleepless night, she decided she better go check out the new tent. The girls walked up to the old lady in the new tent.

“Um, hello? I’m Masha and these are my friends, Carol, Rachael, and Daisy.” Masha said. The old lady looked at the girls curiously. Then, a wide smile stretched across her face.

“I’m Mademoiselle Rose. I am new to this place, but I know a lot because I travel a bunch for my job.” Said the old lady, who was now known as Mademoiselle Rose.

“Oh, cool! What’s your job? Why do you wear that outfit? Are you a clown?” Daisy asked.

“Daisy! Don’t ask that!” Rachael said quietly.

“No, it’s quite alright!” Mademoiselle Rose said. “I am a hypnotist/fortune teller.”

“So that explains the clown costume!” Daisy said. Rachael then socked Daisy in the shoulder. “OW! What was that for!?” Daisy yelled.

“Just be quiet!” Rachael whispered.

“Now, now girls! Don’t fight unless you want to know a secret. Perhaps a spooky story?”

Daisy immediately stopped arguing and listened to Mademoiselle Rose.

“Now, I know you’ve heard the story about Mr. Woodstruff before, but did you know it isn’t true?” Mademoiselle Rose said.

“No way!” Daisy exclaimed. “Mr. Gravel is the best storyteller on our block! He even got nominated for best librarian in our TOWN!”

“Does that mean Mr. Woodstruff isn’t real?” Carol asked hopefully. “Does that mean he doesn’t exist? That it was all a scary story?”

“Dear children, calm down! Daisy, you may not believe it, but what Mr. Gravel said was wrong. It doesn’t mean he isn’t a great storyteller, it just means he got the wrong information.” Mademoiselle Rose explained calmly.

“And Carol, I know you might be scared of these stories, but you have to get over your fears!”

“Okay.” The girls said. Daisy started drawing in the dirt with a stick while Carol fidgeted with her bracelet that she had made at art camp the year before.

“Hey, now, don’t sulk!” Mademoiselle Rose said. “I’ll tell you what really happened.

“One dark, stormy night, Mr. Woodstruff was sulking in his lounge after the funeral for his wife. He was all alone, no one to comfort him. So, he decided he’d do what he wanted to do to become rich: go hunting and sell the fur for money. From then, it seemed like he transformed from a calm, understanding man into a greedy, savage wreck.

“Anyways, he started his trek into the dark, stormy woods, all suited up to hunt some bears. When he spotted a big black bear, he hid behind a bush and fired up his machine.

“He blasted at the bear, but the bear ran away before it got shot. Just when Mr. Woodstruff was about to call it a night, the bear leaped out of the dark and charged at Mr. Woodstruff. He ran for his life as the bear chased its midnight snack. He ran all he could, but the bear kept catching up. Eventually, he found a key on the ground. He quickly picked it up and ran to an abandoned shed. He hid in there, waiting for the bear to leave. After hours of laying in the shed, he decided to stay in there for eternity since his life was mostly useless.

“In 1902, some scientists went into the forest to collect data on bears. They found the abandoned shed and carefully crept towards it. When the scientists were about one foot away, the ghost of Mr. Woodstruff leapt out from a cracked window in the shed and chased the scientists down to the river. The chase ended and the ghost of Mr. Woodstruff faded into the crisp fall air when the scientist fell into the river.

“When the scientists returned to the laboratory, the only thing they came back with was a shirt full of leaves and a fearful memory they would never forget.”

“Wow.” Daisy said. She stood up and peered into the forest. Suddenly, a great idea popped into her head. “Thank you, Mademoiselle Rose! Bye!!” She grabbed her friends by the arm and led them towards their white tent. “Guys, I have the best idea!” She exclaimed when they entered the tent.

“What?” Rachael said. She was curious, but mostly nervous. Daisy's plans always seemed crazy and either ended in getting yelled at or a minor injury.

“What if we...” Daisy said. She patted her hands on her knees as if to say *drumroll, please!* “Went into the forest at midnight to settle this mystery once and for all?”

“What?!?” Carol yelled. “No way!! I’m NOT doing it!”

“Yeah, Carol’s got a point. That’s super crazy!” Masha said.

“Well...it won’t be that scary. Ghosts aren’t real.” Rachael said nervously. “I think we should do it.”

“What?! Are you crazy?!” Carol exclaimed. She sat down on her sleeping bag, her face a mix of shock and disappointment.

“Actually...” Masha gulped before she finished her sentence. “...Rachael’s got a point.”

“You guys are unbelievable!” Carol exclaimed once again. “You guys can go, I am staying in the tent!”

“Fine.” Daisy said. “You can stay here in the tent all by yourself with no one.”

Carol gulped. “Um...actually...how dark does it get at midnight?”

“That’s my girl!” Daisy said as she slapped Carol on the back. “Operation Find-a-Ghost is a go!”

That night, at 12.00 AM, the girls woke up and grabbed their flashlights and sneakers. They crept out of their tent and into the dark, eerie woods.

“Here we are.” Daisy said. She pointed to an abandoned shed that was pretty much busted. Moss was crawling around the edges as vines tangled the roof.

“Look!” Rachael exclaimed. “A key!” She pointed to a rusted key abandoned into the musty dirt.

“I don’t like this...” Carol muttered as Masha picked up the key and showed it to her friends. Daisy smirked a little and pointed to the shed. The girl's eyes bulged.

“Are you sure?” Masha gulped.

“Positive” Daisy replied. Masha nervously handed Daisy the key. “Here goes.” She walked towards the shed and inserted the key into the lock as the rest nervously watched. Carol was basically shivering with fear. Daisy then swung the shed door open. Nothing.

“Huh.” Daisy said. “I thought there would be something in there.” Suddenly, the wind started to pick up as the leaves formed a pile. Then, out from the pile came a big, eerie ghost.

“I am Mr. Woodstruff.” The ghost groaned. “And no one enters my forest!”

“RUN!!!” Carol shouted. The girls fled in different directions as Mr. Woodstruff chased them. Rachael shrieked as tears ran down Carol’s cheeks.

Suddenly, Daisy hit a dead end. “Please don’t hurt me!” Daisy cried. “This is all my fault. I shouldn’t’ve dragged my friends and me into this mess. I’m sorry!”

Mr. Woodstruff stared at Daisy for what seemed like forever. Finally, Mr. Woodstruff turned to the girls as he drifted away. “Remember,” He said. “this isn’t the end.” And then he was gone.

To this day, the girls remember this horrific experience and will never forget.



## Memories by Jovie Goodrich

The carnival lights spit out colorful lights and loud sounds, the scent of apple fritters filled the air. The sky was pitch black like ink spilt over a piece of paper, with little white specks of stars or the paper seeping through the ink. The sound of children laughing and music blasted from the loud speakers hidden around the Town Green. The moon was full that night, the cold heavy breeze swayed through the dark streets. It was the night of the Laser Show before the Apple Harvest Festival and I was with my friends at the Festival. The lights were shining and crowds of people were swarming around the food market. My friends and I decided to first go on the carnival rides. As we stepped in line, I laughed at Casper's jokes.

"Where did the ghost go on his vacation?" asked Casper as we waited in the line for the Ferris wheel. "To Mali-Boo!" We all laughed and giggled as the line moved up one. "Not time right now for that Casper" Luna laughed. I giggled at that. The line cleared to an end, the cool breeze began to grow. I sighed, as me and Luna hopped on a gondola together. I waved to Casper and Marina who were in the gondola behind us. The gondola was slippery and soft with a small bar in front of us. I smiled, "Luna?" She glanced at me. "Yeah Raven?" she questioned. "Do you ever think about how scary myths can come true?" Luna took a second to think, "You know, a dream I had once did come true sis. When I had surgery on my leg, I hoped everything would be perfect, and I felt like an angel was watching me. Like it was Mom and Dad, watching over me" she sighed. I nodded, but on the inside my mind was swirling and I had huge elephants stomping in my stomach. My heart was beating as the gondola took us all the way to the top of the Ferris wheel, I smiled and took a deep breath.

I looked out at the horizon and the festival. "Luna, do you want to go get some apple fritters later?" I ask her while staring at the line of the apple fritter stand. The beautiful scent of the fritters fills my nose as I admire the bright gleaming stand. But it's silent in the seat next to me. My heart is pounding, "Luna..." I panic slightly. Where is she? "LUNA!" I called aloud. She's not here...

I begin to slightly panic, suddenly something flashes through my mind as I blink, I see Luna and she's running. A new scene, she's crying and running through piles of stuff, they sort of look like books! She's in the corner on the floor practically sobbing now, she looks alarmed. My eyes open, the ride is over, I dash off the gondola and find the others. I'm crying at this point, I spot them by the cotton candy stall. I dash to them, feeling light headed and panicked. "Luna's GONE!" I belt out. I don't care about the fact that about 20 people are staring at me like I've gone psycho. I need to find my twin sister. She's the only one I have left at this point.

Marina's eyes pop open, "What do you mean..." she took a quick bite of the cotton candy she just purchased. "I mean she has literally disappeared! I had a vision that she was panicky and crying and running from someone. I don't know who" My heart was pounding at this point. I felt lightheaded and then before I knew it, everything was just pitch black, like ink, like nothingness. Where did I go?

The sky was dark as my eyes awoke from the cold ground. I saw Juniper and Marina's eyes hovering over me, the look of panic and pain flooded their faces as I started to sit up. "Omg! Raven! I missed you!" Sobbing, Juniper approached me, I wiped my pants from the little pebbles and dirt that was on me.

Suddenly an exploding pain burst into my arm, I suddenly saw Luna. She was writing in a book, her hand covering her eyes, I could see heavy water droplets dancing upon her cheek,

slowly slithering down. It stopped, but the pain in my arm had suddenly appeared as a cut. I looked at the others standing around chatting, “Guys...” I sighed, “We need to go, now, follow me.”

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I rushed out the Carnival and Food Market, Casper, Juniper, and Marina were following behind me as I ran as fast as I could. My arm was burning in pain, making my heart pound hard so hard it hurt as I ran. As the others caught up, we began walking in the direction of the library. My eyes were focused on the location I could just barely spot in the pitch-black inky sky. I was crashing into people along the street. I didn't pay attention to them. My only thought was that I could lose my one and only sister if I couldn't be brave.

I could feel the guilt of my missing parents. When Luna and I were just around four years old our parents had disappeared the evening of Halloween. They never came back for us. We had to learn to raise ourselves, after all, our parents abandoned us with a house. But the part that scares me is all their stuff is still in our house: their clothes, their favorite books, their accessories, and their pictures. Sometimes I can feel them there, but I never know where they are. Tears began to swell up in my eyes as I thought about Luna. Luna has always been there for me. She is five minutes older than me and is like my big sister. If she dies, I will be by her side. I can't live without her. She's the only person I can really look up to and ask for help from, besides our friends of course. I sighed as the brick building came closer, my feet stepping around the tons of other feet wandering the Town Green as we journeyed through to the library. I had a cold feeling inside, the one that I felt 10 years ago when my parents disappeared. I felt the urge to run but knew it was too late.

The street was a few inches in front of my feet as I stood still by my friends on the side of the road. I could feel my heart pounding. Luna was just up ahead. I could sense it. As we sprinted across the street I took a deep breath. Just a quick dash in, find Luna and then I'll be back. But all of a sudden, my stupid fear came in: libraries at night time. I've always hated libraries at night just because they always end up having something bad happen in them. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Casper, I looked up at him. He nodded, “I'll be ok Raven.” He smiled slightly, he still looked a little scared but his eyes glowed with confidence. It made me smile back. I took a deep breath as Casper removed his hand from my shoulder. I sighed and walked in the doors, “I got this Raven, this is for Luna” I told myself. at least trying to be brave.

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We were standing inside the library, I was shaking. I felt dizzy and unreal. This moment felt deadly and nerve-wracking. I sighed, “OK guys. I know this might make me panic more but let's split up. We have our phones so we can call each other when we find her” I stated, slightly unaware that my plan was still in progress. The others nodded, “I want to go with Juni, you can go with Casper” smiled Marina. I glanced at Casper.

“Sure, OK Mar, let me know when you and Juniper find her and I'll let you know when we find Luna or if you find her let me know” I sighed, “Love ya girl” I smiled. I flipped my hair and turned around, Casper at my side. I could hear the voices of Marina and Juniper searching the bookshelves behind us. I looked up at Casper, he was focused on the shelves. The smell of the old and dusty books lying upon the shelves danced into my nose. Making me shiver, I began to think about how old these books may be: 10 years, 30 years, 70 years, 100 years, How would I know? Thousands of people could be in this quiet library right now, from all those years, still, their fingerprints left in the book. I continued searching for Luna.

“Any luck yet Casper?” I asked him as I jogged slightly to catch up. He checked a row of books, “Not yet Raven, not yet” He frowned, I sighed. My heart began to pound so hard it almost hurt. I felt like I was in a dream. My eyes wanted to float away, my feet were in pain, but I kept trudging on. I will not rest until I can find my sister. My only, loving, beautiful sister. Suddenly my back pocket began to buzz. I reached my hand in and pulled out my phone, it was Juni and Marina.

“How’s it going?” I sighed depressingly as I answered the video call. I suddenly heard the high-pitched sound of Marina’s long scream come from the phone, the lights began to flicker above me and Casper. “Raven! Help us!” I barely heard through the phone. My heart was pounding. “No, no, no, no, NO!” I panicked inside my head. I felt like my head would bleed, it was immensely painful. “Casper!” I belted aloud, Casper came running toward me, “Marina and Juniper are in danger! I heard them scream and they asked for our help!” I sobbed showing Casper the phone. The call had suddenly ended, I flopped onto my knees, whimpering and sobbing.

“It’ll be OK, Raven. It’ll be OK.” I heard Casper say.

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The bookshelves seemed endless as I sprinted throughout them. I was wiping tears from my eyes as I ran. I couldn’t lose my friends too. I didn’t agree for this to happen when I agreed to come here. I knew since I was a baby I was cursed, cursed with stupid unluckiness. I don’t usually come to the Apple Harvest but this year, Luna made new friends and I couldn’t be alone in the house., so I agreed to join her. I know some of her friends such as Marina but Juni and Casper are new people to me. I’m glad they care for me too. I’ve always felt like an outcast at school but these new people might actually be my friends. I stopped running suddenly, Casper behind me. I heard a loud terrified yelp. Following along, I heard a sudden growl and the lights suddenly flickered. It was inky black in the library now. “Casper, what are we gonna do?” I asked him, feeling like an empty ocean, confused, lost and ready to give up. I sighed, Casper looked as if he was hard in thought. “Raven, it’ll be OK, let’s go that way” He smiled, pointing to a section of the library we could just see through the shelves of books. My eyes widened as I observed the area.

I smiled, “Ok, do you think Juni and Marina will be there?” I pondered realizing we needed teamwork to help find Luna. I sighed, “OK, Juniper and Marina first then we can all find Luna” I told myself hoping I could muster the slightest amount of courage. Casper sighed, “I hope we find them there,” I nodded in agreement. On the inside my heart was melting as all my friends, and family were disappearing, it’s all because of my stupid unluckiness. I make every bad thing happen to me, and Southington. We trudged on to the section, I was at this point praying they could be here somewhere, I was on the last straw. They were in danger; my heart was pounding. My sister has disappeared, she could be dead! I wanted to cry my heart out yet I have already done that at least twice during this mission.

Suddenly I heard another high-pitched scream, one that belted into my ears and almost flung them off. I wanted to scream back but I knew I couldn’t do that now. I had to focus on finding my friends, my only loving sister, and my real parents. Not the stupid foster parents I’ve been traveling between. One treats us like brats, the other one acts like we don’t exist and the other one is so obsessed with us that it hurts to speak to her. I wanted to yell at them all so badly. I wanted to have a real family, one that can care for me, one that truly loves me, one like my real mom and dad. Suddenly as I began to sob at the thought of my stupid life, I saw Marina

and Juniper, huddled in the corner. Crying in tears, scars across their faces, their clothes ripped, their skin shattered and covered in blood. I could cry from staring at them for too long. But the thing I didn't notice right away was a big, ferocious monster, practically three times the size of me. It was wide with spiky scales crawling upon its back, the bright bloody red tortuous eyes hurt my head to look at. Its long sharp nails could go right through you if you dared to get close, its dark black skin was sharp and scaly, it shimmered in the light and became as dark and melty ink in the shadows. It made me shiver. Suddenly it roared and faced me and Casper. Then, it ran toward us.

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I screamed as I dashed down the aisles of books. Casper just stood still. I turned around, "Dude are you gonna run!" I screamed, Casper said nothing. The monster picked him up and chucked him across the library. He flew like a bird over the many bookshelves. "Casper!" I heard Juniper yell. I stared in shock at the monster, it resembled a dinosaur. I screamed. My high-pitched scream shattered my ears, it was the only thing I could hear at this point.

The monster growled and jumped over me. I stared into its eyes, before I could run, it scratched my left arm, blood dripped out from it like a flowing river. I began to pant hard. I need to fight this thing if I really want to save my only friends and my only loving, caring and amazing sister Luna. The monster was practically in my face. I could smell its dirty, crusty rotten egg breath, its bloody red eyes were piercing my brain as I sat, crumpled into a ball against the bookshelf. I could hear the whimpers of Juniper and Marina. I was trying to quickly think of a plan before I died. Suddenly I got a smart idea. I am super flexible. The book shelf doesn't have a backboard to it! I had my idea racing through my brain like a Mario Kart race car. It was like the Grand Finale of the race, the idea was almost complete, almost to the finish line. I could practically see my plan as if it was a picture in my head. I could feel the drips of the drooling of the monster upon me as my eyes were glued shut. I was scared to try this plan, but I knew I had to try.

I took a deep breath and fell backwards through the bookshelf, knocking down at least five books. I opened my eyes and flung my hand up to the bookshelf. I grabbed the ledge and pulled myself up. I leaped up and climbed like a mountain climber on top of the bookshelf, I sighed. My face was turning as red as a tomato with all that flexibility I just attempted. I was fanning myself as I glanced at the scar on my arm, it was sharpening with pain. I felt like I was steaming like a kettle on the stovetop. I could hear the loud screams and howls of Marina and Juniper below me. I waved to them with the power I could barely muster in my right arm, from all the pain I was collecting in my left arm, it was like a river of blood, slowly dripping down my arm onto my brand-new camo green cargo pants. There, laid a puddle of dark red, seeping through the pants, I could feel the blood dripping onto my leg. I looked at the monster, it was stalking up upon Juniper and Marina. My hand was trembling as I reached for an old book on the bookshelf to my left.

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As I grabbed the book, I could see Marina's pale terrified face, it had scars covering it, her long black hair was all ripped and frizzy, her eyes were red and filled with tears. I've never seen Marina that way before. It made me want to scream and run. I wanted to get others' attention but who would pay attention to me, I'm just some little girl that tries too hard to fit in, I'm just some weirdo, I'm no one. Who would pay attention to me? My pain took control

suddenly, my tears blurring my vision. I chucked the heavy, thick, dusty book at the monster, it was right at Marina and Juniper's face.

"SMACK!" I heard as the book suddenly knocked the monster over. I smiled with the power I could. The monster fainted, I wiped the blood from my arm off as it was beginning to stop bleeding. I leaped off the bookshelf onto the ground, catching myself from breaking a bone. I walked over to Marina and Juniper, my smile turned into a frown as I looked at them all, they looked hurt and in danger. Juniper's hair was messy and tucked everywhere, his shirt was ripped and his leg was scraped, it was bleeding, I could tell by the red spots on his pants. Marina's hair looked frizzy, she usually had such straight perfect hair. It hurts to think about all the pain that they have been through today. But my mind triggered back to Luna, it made me almost cry, she hasn't been found yet, she hasn't called me. I can't live in a world without her. At this point I've already lost pretty much half of my life, half of my heart and half of my future. If I want to be with my sister, have a happy family, I need magic or my stupid unluckiness to disappear if I want this dream to come true. I looked into Marina and Juniper's eyes.

"It's OK guys, trust me. We'll be safe, we'll be OK" I cried, their heads nodding. "We believe you Raven, we trust you with our lives" Juni nodded. Suddenly I heard a chatter coming from the bookshelves behind me. I suddenly turned around. It was Casper, and a girl. A girl so familiar.

My eyes teared up, I jumped up and sprinted into Luna's arms. My brain is forgetting about all the tough adventures I'd been through that day. I could feel the warmth of her surroundings filling my heart with joy. I could hear nothing except for the whimpers and the cries of Luna, so happy to see me. I felt her tears dropping on my head, she was two inches taller than me. To be by her made me super delighted, I felt a warming of love rush through my veins. It made me smile, as rivers of tears emerged from my eyes. I sighed, it felt magical seeing Luna again. I stepped away from Luna. I noticed her normally perfect and luscious hair was frizzy and some parts had been ripped. It was just sad to think that my sister could have gone through something insanely scary, and I wasn't there to comfort her. Her perfect, brand new shiny leather jacket was ripped up and torn in various places. It felt so wrong just to see what I believed was my perfect, lovely, amazing and beautiful sister like this. She had always protected me so why did I feel like this, needing to protect her instead of her protecting me. I wiped my tears off of my face and continued staring at Luna. Juniper and Marina suddenly stood up with the power they could muster. Their eyes seemed to be lit up, as if they were glowing in some sort of light. I glanced over at Casper, his face was smiling as he stood and looked at the state of Luna.

"Luna" I stuttered still in complete utter disbelief that Luna was really alive and well. I mean she disappeared off a huge Ferris wheel at the Apple Harvest. I couldn't believe it. "Raven" I heard her whimper, her eyes were glowing with lots of empathy and trust, she seemed to be as happy as I was to see her. My eyes are still watering slightly with tears like a gardening can. I felt ecstatic to see my loving and only sister alive and with me. It felt like days we were searching for her, yet it was only a couple hours. I've never felt this loved by anyone until today, when I saw Luna's sorrowful face. It made me feel loved that she really cared for me and trusted me when I needed her. I couldn't hold it in anymore, "Luna, what happened to you? I was worried sick about you" I cried, it made me feel heartbroken when I couldn't find her. I truly thought she was gone forever.

Luna looked into my eyes, “I...I...I really don’t know Raven, I was with you and the next moment I saw Casper in the library”. I looked to the floor, hard in thought as I noticed, Casper’s leg had a cut on it. It was bleeding fast and nervously quick, I looked at Casper. “I know Raven” He sighed as if he could read my mind. There was silence for a minute after that. It was enough time for me to feel as if someone else was there in the room. Right next to me and Luna, I felt the sense. I closed my eyes and took a few deep breaths. But before I could open my eyes I whispered to myself, “Mom? Dad?”. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder, I opened my eyes. Luna was there, as if she could feel it too. I smiled, “They’re here Luna” I grinned with a smile. She nodded, I looked at Juniper and Marina which at this point were standing next to Casper. The three of them seemed happy that Luna had been found. I was too.

“Guys, let’s go back home, heel our cuts and change our clothes” I suggested to the group. They nodded, “Yeah, I probably broke my leg, it hurts to stand” sighed Juni as I noticed his leg was bent awkwardly. It looked like it could be broken. I pointed to the door to the exit which was just behind Casper. “Let’s go,” smiled Luna. As we began to leave the library, I turned around and noticed a four-year-old was hanging out with her mom. I chuckled, wishing that could be me, but at least I have my sister that can keep me alive for a while, that can protect me and that can be my best friend. “You coming Raven?” I hear Luna ask, I turn around, “Yeah, Let’s go” I sigh running after them.

### **The Unexpected by Joshua Grezlik**

It was a foggy morning at the Apple Harvest. While waiting in the apple fritter line, I heard the lady behind me talking on her phone. At first, I did not think anything of it but when she said “there is a headless horseman behind me” I froze and looked back behind me.

Trust me, I am not lying to you: there was a headless horseman about twenty people behind me waiting in line to get apple fritters. When I looked back I also heard other people's reactions and I think all of us were pretty confused. He was holding his money right in his hand ready to buy. The next day as I scrolled through Facebook, I found a picture of him and when I looked I could really see what he or she looked like.

That day I was waiting in line for fritters was the day I would bring some into my class. We all started cracking up when we saw the picture.

After all that, after school I went to the hair stylist and she showed me the picture and that is how I knew it was on Facebook.

# ATTACK OF THE

# GHOST.



Written  
& illustrated  
by Aracelis  
BAPTISTA  
3rd grade  
Strong School

Andy  
Rosem  
age: 62

Greg  
danner  
age: 115

of wight  
m  
2016

Michael  
Jackson  
Age: 50



**Attack of the Ghost** by Ayaansh Gupta

“Hello, my name is Marcello Smith.” I watched TV and all of a sudden, the lights turned off. Oh noooo, I moaned. A voice whispered “Be gone and dead.”

A ghost came poof, appeared!

“Who are you?” I finally managed to choke out.

“I’m the ghost of Michael Jackson, and I am here for revenge.” the ghost said. “The doctor killed me. He was your great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great uncle and now I am here for revenge!”

“But I’m not him,” I cried.

“Oh, but you’re in his family so I want all the Smiths dead!” He said firmly.

The lights came back on.

“I hate light!” The ghost screamed.

He disappeared.

“That was a close call.” I said.

## 7 Nights by Shay Hemingway

### **A Week Before the Party: Night 1**

Once upon a time it was a hard-working mom's birthday. Once upon a time there was a clown. Once upon a time, a family of five lives were changed forever. It was a week before my mom's birthday, she was turning 50 and it was a big year for her. I live in a family of five, that's including me. Me, Layla, my older brother Benjamin or Ben, my little brother Tom, and my mom and dad. My mom had said when she was five how much she loved clowns. Ben and I thought clowns were weird but Tom and my mom seemed to love the idea.

So later that evening Dad called some website number to see if we could hire a clown. The website's name was *Squeaky*. Dad called and they said they would send someone. Later that night, a knock came from our door. We were all in the living room. My mom and I were playing with Tom. Ben was on his phone, and my dad was watching the news. We all turned to the door.

"It's 9:30. Who's knocking on the door?" asked my dad, clicking off the news. My mom and dad rose up and went to answer the door. Me and Ben exchanged looks. Mom opened the door and a clown was standing there.

"You need a clown." The clown said, not asking, almost telling us we need a clown. "We don't need a clown til *next* Friday," said my mom. But the clown just looked at her and he stepped inside and looked at us.

He was about the same height as my dad, so about 6'1 he was bald and had somewhat of an egg-shaped head. He wore the regular painted clown smile with black paint that circled his eyes, a striped buttoned up shirt with striped baggy pants. And of course, the classic red nose. But the nose seemed stained with dirt. The costume must be old. You think if you were going to put in the work to come to someone's house to entertain you would at least wash it.

He looked around and circled our downstairs twice, through the living room into the lime green dining room with the big wood table. Through the yellow kitchen down our hallway with the maroon colored rug past my parents and went around again. Then went upstairs I could hear him walking through each room and then came back downstairs. He was about to go around again when my dad cut him off.

"Mister. We don't need your services today, can you please leave and come back *next* Friday?." The clown was facing us but he whipped around and turned to face my parents. He did something that I couldn't see that made my parents look very scared. Then he walked down the hall and into our basement. After 20 minutes of silence we all sat in the dining room and discussed what just happened.

"Dad, tell him to leave or call 911!" Ben whispered loudly. I looked nervously at the basement to make sure he wasn't listening. "We don't think we should. He seems dangerous, he could be violent." Said my mom. "We think he will just stay here for the week and then pay him and he leaves. If not, we will call 911." says my dad.

"So, we're stuck with him!" says Ben panicked. "It's only 7 days," says my mom.

"Now let's all go to bed." Said my mom. "With that freak in our house!" says Ben.

There was a creak from the kitchen, we turned around and the clown was standing there watching us. "It's past your bedtime." He said in a scratchy voice. We all stood up and started walking towards the living room watching the clown as we walked. "Squeak your nose!" says Tom. "Not now, Tom," says mom, pulling him by the hand. But the clown obeyed his wish and squeaked it three times. "Yay," Tom said with a big smile. We all rushed upstairs.

I was in the first room and closest to the stairs so that was a bit nerve racking. Then my parents' room where Tom slept too, and finally Ben's room. Almost the whole night I could hear the clown opening up the closet doors, and walking around all the rooms, going into the kitchen and opening the freezer. There was one point where he went up one step of the seven steps we have on our stairs. After an hour of him I'm guessing just standing there I heard him go back to the basement. And I fell asleep.

## **6 Days Before the Party: Night 2**

When I woke up, I immediately went to Ben's room since he is always up before me. I went in and sat next to him on his bed. "Can I stay here?" I asked, "I don't like it near the stairs".

"Please do, and if you want you can sleep here tonight as well." he said, probably desperate to have some company. Same as me. About 30 minutes later we hear our parents and Tom get up. We all got dressed and braced ourselves for the clown downstairs. We moved the puppy gate that we had set up so that our dog Scout wouldn't go downstairs with the clown. Luckily, Scout sleeps on my parents bed soundly through the whole night and gets up with us.

Scout- he is the cutest German shepherd in the world. He goes to sleep early and sleeps in like us. We go to bed at 10PM, even Tom, but he is 5 now so we feel on summer days if he's up to it he can go to sleep at 10PM. Ben spends most of the time with Scout playing with him, taking him on walks, and car rides. Ben is 17. He has a car and a job that he goes to three times in a week, but not this week; he was off. . Scout is the best around new people; he licks them and jumps on them. Scout had fallen asleep last night at his usual time, 8PM. Meaning he had not seen the clown yet. When we started to go downstairs, Scout started to whimper and ran down the hallway into Ben's room. "Well at least we won't have to worry about Scout going near the clown." says my dad with a hint of worry in his voice. "Poor Scout, he must be scared of the clown." I said feeling bad "I'll bring up his food and water for him later."

We walked downstairs and it was silent. The only noise was the stairs creaking. I walked through the living room. There is a wall so you can only see one half of the room. "I think he's gone" I said smiling, I turned around to face my family who was also smiling. But my smile quickly dissolved into sorrow and nervousness, as I saw the clown sitting on *our* couch. He stared at me emotionless, he's taken over our whole house UNINVITED! "I thought you were supposed to be a clown!?" I said, staring at him feeling a boost of confidence and frustration. He stared back. "You haven't made us laugh once!" I shouted. I saw my family looking at me in shock. "If you're gonna take over our house, at least make it worth it!" I scream. Then something unexpected happened.

He stood up and got close to me, I backed up. He stared right into my eyes, his pupils got bigger and bigger. They completely coated the white of his eyes. I fell back in shock. He wasn't hurting me but I felt a sharp pain in my side. A sharp pain of fear. His eyes went back to normal and he walked through the dining room and to the basement.

Even though I was still in shock I stood up. And my family walked in. Ben looked at the hall and Tom looked at me scared for the first time that the clown had been here. "What was that!" Ben whispered aggressively. "H-his eyes!" I stuttered "We know, he did to us," said my dad. "I CAN'T DEAL WITH THIS STUPID CLOWN ANYMORE!" Ben yells. "I wanna go down stairs and throw him out!" Ben screams. "Ben! Not so loud, maybe what we all need is some time out of the house." Says mom. "Yeah I'm going out with my friends!" Ben marched

to the closet door. “What the heck!?” Yelled Ben. “What?” asked my mom walking over to investigate. She gasped, I walked over and inside the closet written in black drippy gunk was “DON’T LEAVE”. Ben picked up his shoes and on the back was the same message. The black substance had oozed all over the closet and would take days to wash out.

“He has no control over what *I* do in *my* house!” Ben exclaimed, yelling loud at the basement door down the hall. He threw on his shoes and left slamming the door behind him to wrap up his point.

“Are we going somewhere too?” Asked Tom. “No, we have to stay here with Scout and... The clown.” Dad said trying to sound happy, but the last part came out disappointed. “I’m going to give Scout his food.” I said blankly and grabbed Scout’s food and went upstairs to see him. Scout wagged his tail when he saw me. He ran over and started to eat his food. He gulped it down in less than a minute. “Wanna go for a walk?” I asked him, holding out his leash. On a normal day he would bark and be ready to go, but today Scout whimpered and jumped back onto Ben’s bed. I sighed and went as slowly as possible down the stairs.

When I got to the end Ben came barreling through the door looking so mad.

“What’s wrong?” Asked my mom. “What’s wrong!? What’s wrong!?” Ben mimicked angrily. “I’ll tell you what’s wrong, that creep that’s taken over our house has broken off the steering wheel of my car!” Ben yells looking like he was gonna blow up.

“What!?” yells my dad.

“And that’s not it, he certainly was busy last night! Because he stole all of our steering wheels! And yeah that’s not it, that freak popped the tires!” Ben yells “Call 911 now Dad! Or I’ll do it for you!” Ben says.

“Yeah, you’re right, being in our house is one thing but writing on my walls and breaking our cars is another thing!” My dad says getting out his phone.

“My phone’s dead, Sally gave me yours” Says my dad asking for my mom’s phone. She scrambles around and grabs it.

“Mines dead too, Ben.” Says my mom

“Mines not dead,” he said, taking out his phone. He tried turning on his phone but it didn’t turn on. “What?! I just used it to text my friends. It was at 89%” Says Ben.

“Danial get the charger” Says mom pointing to the dining room.

“Someone cut it in half!” Yells Dad from the dining room.

“I wonder who could have done that! OH! Probably the same sociopath that lives in our basement.” I said starting to get riled up.

“Get rid of him!” I yell

“I should go down there and strangle him now!” yells Ben

“We should email the website!” Yells my dad. We all started to talk at the same time shooting out ideas for what we should do.

“EVERYONE QUIETTTTT!” Yells mom getting our attention! “Where’s Tom”

We ran into the living room and found Tom sitting on the floor with a coloring page of a clown.

“Tom, where did you get that?!” Asked my dad.

“Clown!” Tom said, raising up his hands in happiness.

Before we knew it, it was night, I set up my bed on the floor of Ben’s room. We all said goodnight and closed our doors. And locked them. Again, the clown walked around opening closet doors throwing things? Cutting noises? And at one point he walked up two of the seven steps on our stairs, stayed for 50 minutes then went back to the basement. My mind was at ease knowing he was two staircases farther away from me. I fell asleep.

### 5 Days Before the Party: Night 3

The next morning was the same as before. Ben woke up, then me, my parents, and Tom. We all are about to go downstairs but Scout whimpers and runs to Ben's room. We make our way downstairs, one step at a time. Ben goes first and scours the living room, but the clown was not in there. We move on ahead into the dining room, nothing. Things seemed to be looking up. Maybe he got bored and left, or his website found out what he was doing and fired him.

Or... my thoughts were interrupted by a creak at the end of the hall where we had started. There was a dog? Not Scout but some weird dog. Wait, no dog...clown. It had brown shaggy fur like our carpet in the basement... That must have been all the cutting noises. The fur was dusty and dirty with patches of black all over, the same back stuff that we found in our closet. And of course, the same dirty stained red noise. Tom started to laugh, oblivious to how creepy it really was. We walked into the dining room and went over the situation.

"This is getting really weird!" I whispered loudly.

"I say we go to the basement and see what the heck is going on." Says Ben.

"The basement? What's wrong with the basement?" Asked my mom.

"Seriously Mom? You haven't noticed? Ever since he's been here he has always been in the basement, like all the time. And I've heard some noises coming from the basement and sometimes when I walk by, there is that gross black stuff dripping from the cracks in the door!" Ben whispers loudly every now and then looking towards the hall.

"I've seen the same things, I'm with Ben, we should investigate it. Now." My dad chimes in.

We all get up and make our way to the basement. When we're right at the door the dog/clown at the end of the hallway stands up. Tom looks at him with wonder.

"Don't go in there." The clown warns.

"This is our house we go where we please when we want. And as long as you're 'staying' in *our* house you can listen to us." Ben says, reaching for the door.

"I said DON'T GO IN THERE!" The clown shouts.

Ben steps forward "And why not! What kind of freakish thing are you hiding in our house? Or did you forget that this is our house and not yours!"

The clown stared at him, he took off his dog suit and got leveled with Ben. Ben didn't budge.

"Listen here clown. My parents may think it's the right idea to keep you around because you could be dangerous, but if it were up to me I would throw you out right now with my own two hands. Am I clear?"

"You have no idea how dangerous I can be." Says the clown, which by the look of Ben's face was not the reaction he expected.

The clown's pupils began to get big like he had done to me, but all of a sudden, his black soulless eyes started to drip. Not tears but black gunk all over the place. The clown covered his eyes and started to make a dash for the basement. Tom started to cry. The clown crashed into the walls, banging against the closet doors. He opened the basement door and ran down shutting the door behind him. There were gushing noises along with something that sounded like a scream. It was so revolting that I ran to the bathroom and vomited.

The clown didn't come up for the rest of the day. I didn't hear him till 10PM at night when he walked around opening the door, the same as every night. And he went up three of the seven stairs we have.

#### 4 Days Until the Party: Night 4

The fourth day of this nightmare, I wake up and hope it's just a dream, like every morning. But every morning I wake up in my brother's dusty, damp, dark room. I sigh looking around as I sit up. I looked around the room, Ben was gone. I stood up and looked around his bed just in case he was trying to scare me. I opened the door that had been unlocked. I look down the hall and see him sitting on the stairs looking intensely downstairs.

It reminded me of the times when I would wake up on Christmas morning and would sit on the stairs with him. We talked about what we wanted, and how excited we were. But he barely has any time to care about Christmas anymore. And this was no exciting night of wonder, it was a dreadful morning of horror. I sat beside him and stared down the stairs like him.

"I set up a video camera." He said not looking away from the stairs.

"Really? Have you looked at it yet?" I asked.

"No. To be honest I'm scared to go downstairs alone, with..." He said looking up at me blushing.

"Should we go down now, or wait for Mom and Dad?" I asked the same thing I would ask on Christmas morning.

And no surprise, just like Christmas Ben said with a small smile "Yes."

We cautiously go downstairs and into the living room. He grabs the camera and plays back to the night. For most of the night he stood on the fourth step of our stairs, and the other time he rammed like a ghost around the house.

"Does he ever sleep?" I asked

"Doesn't look like it." Ben replies.

Our parents stayed up the stairs so we rushed up, and showed them the recording. They didn't seem that surprised.

"We've heard him at night walking around roaming the halls." Says my dad

"Who does he think he is!" My mom said flustered.

"Wait... do you smell that?" I asked, a smell of sewer filled the house. There were sizzling sounds coming from the kitchen.

"What is that?" asked Ben.

We swiftly ran downstairs, and entered the kitchen and discovered the spine-tingling clown flipping... pancakes? But not warm gooey light brown pancakes. These pancakes were black, chunky, revolting muck.

"Pancake." The clown said in a raspy voice.

That was no pancake

"I love pancakes!" Yelled Tom running over towards the clown.

"No Tom" I say running over to him, but it was too late. He had already taken a big bite out of the pancake. Tom tried to swallow it but he didn't make it. He started to cry and threw up the black gunk all over the floor.

"Tom!" Yells mom running over to him. She carried him into the living room I watched until they disappeared behind the wall.

"That's it! Get out of my house or I'm calling the police!" Dad says, whipping out his phone. "That's right, I have an extra charger. Now, get out." says my dad. The clown seemed completely unfazed at this, which was surprising.

"I wouldn't do that." The clown says slowly revealing a very sharp knife from behind his back to his side.

It was a subtle gesture but a very important one. He didn't hold the knife up or even crack a smile like a crazy person. Instead he simply held out his hand and said "Phone. Charger." Looking at the knife Dad's face was white as the clowns, he slowly handed over the phone and ordered Ben to grab the charger. Sitting in the room with a clown, a knife, and a phone that would be so easy to just call the police on was scary. The tension was almost unbearable, but Ben broke it by coming back with the charger. He carefully handed the charger over and backed up. The clown placed the phone on the counter. It lit up with a picture of a football as my dad's background screen. With no warning the clown held up the knife and full force hit the phone. The phone screen cracked and black started to spread through the screen completely coating the whole phone. He twisted and turned the knife to really make his point. Then he simply took some scissors and snipped the charger with one clean snip. I was petrified, so was everyone else in that room. I couldn't even move, the clown walked to the basement, casually... Well as casually as a creepy clown holding five people hostage in their own house can walk down to the basement, closing the door behind him.

You may be wondering why not just go to a neighbor and get help or use their phone. Answer: We live in an urban area where we used to have a little horse that I could ride, but everything comes and goes and he didn't quite make it. Now we live in a house that is miles away from any store or person. Not even a little pony can help us out of this one.

### **3 Days Until the Party: Night 5**

Tom stayed upstairs the whole day so did the rest of us except for occasional visits to the kitchen for food and something to drink. I stayed in my room, mostly telling myself that it would be fine and half scared for my life. We all stayed in our rooms terrified to go downstairs.

How could our normal lives, and innocent wishes for laughter from mom's childhood turn into the scariest week of my life?

How could such a small skinny little man make the two toughest men in the house scared to go to the downstairs of their own home? And what kind of revolting heartless soul could make my adorable little brother fear something he used to be so excited for? At this point my only question is ... How?

As I went to sleep that night as I do every night, I listened closely, hearing the creaking of the stairs as this night he had gone up five out of the seven steps. A haunting thought occurred to me: what would happen when he gets up the seventh step? What will happen? I didn't want to flood my mind with these thoughts so I just tried to fall asleep.

### **2 Days Until the Party: Night 6**

In the morning I opened the door and a card laid on the floor. It said:

*You are invited tomorrow to come to the living room to watch the show for Sally's birthday*

*Come.*

The next night he came up six steps.

### **The Day of the Party: Night 7**

The family slowly comes downstairs and walks into the living room, the clown waiting holding a balloon.

"Happy birthday Sally ... Sit." He says slowly. We cautiously sat on the couch. Even Tom was nervous. He hid behind our dad's leg whimpering. The clown starts to dance and

dance and dance. Black goo started to come down his eyes. As he emotionally danced, Tom cried. I closed my eyes not wanting to look, praying that this whole week was just a bad dream. Or a nightmare.

He danced and danced and danced until... "KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!" The clown's eyes widened and he made a dash for the basement. The police came crashing through the door. We pointed to the direction the clown ran. They went downstairs and after 10 minutes of silence they emerged from the basement, the clown in custody. They said that the website was fake and the group of clowns had made it up. They were insane. The only thing I had to see was what was in the basement. I slowly cling to the railing and go down the stairs. There was black muck all over the floors. I turned the corner and what I saw made me shriek.



## Halloween Magic At Hatton School by Sebastian Ieraci

*A big new year at school, but strange things are going on. Can Lisa get ready with passing grades to prove to her parents she can enter the talent show and can Lisa figure out what's going at Hatton School at the same time? Let us find out.*

Today my friends and I are going to Hatton School. But this year is going to be great. I signed up for the talent show and I'm going to sing the "Marry Peaches" song. I saw a dragon cardboard cut-out that said sign up for the talent show.

I saw a new teacher in the school named Miss W. She looked creepy but we have another teacher to help us. The kids in Miss W.'s class look like they are in a trance. Tomorrow is the talent show and I'm a little nervous too, by the way.

In math class I see a kid bring the dragon cardboard cut-out into Miss W.'s class. I was wondering what's going on in there. Then the math teacher slammed her ruler on my table to finish my test. The math teacher walked away and took my test from me. The test had a C- and if I don't get an A+ on the test or in science class my parents will make me miss my talent show. The science project is tomorrow so I better do good. While in class a giant light fell from the ceiling onto the stage, scaring all the kids practicing for the talent show.

Then I went home and went to sleep. When I woke up I ate eggs and bacon. After eating I went to school. When I walked by Miss W.'s classroom I felt shivers on my body. I went to my classroom and sat in my seat. The morning Southington loud-speaker came on. It was Mr. Gary and he said the talent show was moved to tomorrow since one of the giant lights had fallen. "Yes, I was saved"!

It was finally science class. So, I grabbed my volcano and put it on my desk. My teacher came in and I told her about my volcano. I turned the volcano on and it spit out toothpaste lava. My teacher loved it and gave me an A+. This made my parents happy and I got to be in the talent show!

The following day at school I found out my friends Sim and Marry were changing classes to Miss W.'s class. I gasped in fear. What was going to happen with them? Are they going to enter a trance too, or become zombies, possessed, or some strange test subject of a wicked science experiment?!?!

The talent show had arrived and I was next in line after the kid who can burp the whole alphabet. The burping scholar had finished the alphabet and I was next. I was nervous, but I went on stage and sang. While I was singing a bunch of ghosts appeared and began flying at me and the audience. I had to duck and run and the audience screamed! I thought about Miss W.'s classroom and the students in a trance. There must be a connection. I quickly ran to Miss W.'s classroom.

When I got to the classroom a dragon crashed through the wall. It was the dragon cardboard cut-out. It was big and alive! I couldn't believe it. Behind the dragon was a ghost army and this "thing". The thing had a green body, a long sharp nose, and moles all over it. I looked closer, it was Miss W. Miss W. was a witch!

An idea popped into my head. Since she's a witch, I know her weakness. The students were running. The principal Mr. Gary hid under his desk, squeezing a teddy bear, crying, and sucking his thumb.

I was scared too, but I had to save the school. I shouted to Miss W. "Hey you witch" and she looked at me. I started backing up toward the sink and she shouted "get her"! I lead Miss W., ghosts, and the dragon to the sink. I quickly grabbed the hose and turned on the sink.

Miss W. screamed “Noooo” as the students covered their ears. I pointed the hose at Miss W., the ghosts, and the dragon. I squeezed the hose and sprayed. Miss W. melted and the dragon and ghosts all disappeared. Now we all are safe.

The students all cheered! We were safe and Miss W. was gone. The students gave me high fives and were happy. I then realized what the “W” in Miss W. stands for, WITCH!

The Scared

GHOST!



Illustrated by Madeline Jesudowich  
Written by Madeline Jesudowich

The Scared Ghost  
By:Maddie Jesudowich

Once upon a time, there was a little ghost named Ethan. His people, the people of Southington nicknamed him "Scaredy Cat." Do not feel sorry for Ethan. There was a reason that they called him that. It was because he screamed with fear, a LOT! Even the tiniest tiniest tiniest things scared little Ethan. Even BUGS. The weird thing about that is ghosts eat BUGS. There was one thing that little Ethan can not stand HALLOWEEN!!!

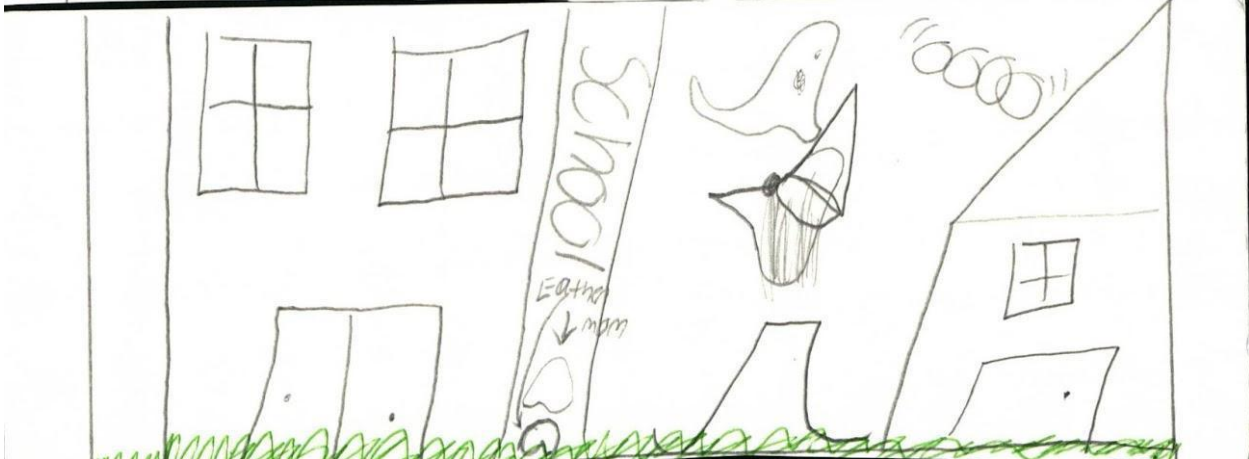
There were 3 things about HALLOWEEN in the town of Southington.

1. The town of Southington made it the spookiest this year, They say that it is going to be way scarier than last year.
2. Everybody dresses up so scary.
3. This is the worst one of all, the house get so very very SCARY! Then little Ethan almost faints.

Today is Halloween. When Ethan wakes up he screams, cries and flails. When his mother tells him to stop and says "Halloween is fun, you will have a great time." No I will not says Ethan. "Now get up and get ready for school." "No school is scary!" but his mom urges him to go to school. They walk to school and mom drops him off at the door. School is still scary. When school was over his mom took him trick or treating. Ethan screams not to get out of the door. They go to many scary houses and Ethan starts to think that halloween is pretty cool. But still a little scary.

About the author and illustrator

Maddie is 8 years old. She is soon to be 9 on March 2nd. Maddie has a sister named Amelia, a mom named Sarah and a dad named Chris. Maddie loves, loves, loves and loves BOOKS. She loves to go to the library any time she can. Maddie's favorite food is Kielbasa and Mac and cheese. Maddie's in third grade and she hopes that you enjoyed the book.







## **Halloween Fest by Quetzali Fuentes Kilburn**

“OK everyone! Since today is Halloween, we are going to type spooky stories, make crafts and play a game,” said Mrs. Pastick. “Yay!” everyone in my class said.

Click went my computer as I made my spooky story. The rest of the morning went by as usual, and soon it was time for music class. “Line up for music class, Emily’s side first”, said Mrs. Pastick. We lined up and walked out the door and down the hall.

As we walked into music class, Mrs. Racine said, “Hi.” Then we grabbed our folders off of our seats and sat down. Mrs. Racine told us to take out the song, “Ugly Sweater”. As we started singing, the lights started to flicker, then they turned off completely. Everyone screamed. “Stay where you are”, said Mrs. Racine, “I am going to get a flashlight”. I didn’t listen- I ran as fast as I could to Emily.

Just then, Jake yelled, “Something touched me!” We all looked over at Jake. Right at that moment, we saw a shadow move. All of a sudden, the lights turned on and we saw what had touched Jake. “Mummy!”, Sofiia and I screamed, and we all jumped from our seats. As we ran out of the room and into the halls to hide, I noticed all the lights were off. I ran with Emily, Brely and Sofiia to the girl’s bathroom and slammed the door closed.

We were scared. We heard something in the vents. Just then it jumped out at us. Then I realized who it was. It was Diego, the Saber Tooth Tiger. “Hi. Sorry I jumped on you.” When we got out of the bathroom Mrs. Pastick was staring at Diego. “Mrs. Pastick, there was a mummy in the music room”, I said,” and I think it took Mrs. Racine”. “I will tell Mr. Garry. He said there were a lot of monsters today”. Mrs. Pastick said. “Your parents will pick you up right now”. When it was time to go home I said to Brely, Emily and Diego “My dad will pick us up, and you too Diego”. Then my dad came to pick us up. He had my sister, and he said, “What...? Is Diego real? “Then we all walked to my house.

When we got to my house, we went in the front door and my cat was waiting for me and Camila in the kitchen. As we opened the kitchen door, the cat ran down into the basement. “Leafy, come back!” I yelled. It was pointless, she had already disappeared into the darkness of the basement. I turned on the basement light, and my friends and I ran down the stairs after her.

As we walked in the cold basement, I saw Leafy go into the crawlspace. “Oh no! That’s where the Black Blob lives!”, I cried. I had never seen the Black Blob before, but Poppa was always talking about it. “We have to go in after her,” I said. “No way I am going in there,” said Brely and Diego. I was scared to go in the crawlspace, but I was worried about Leafy. Just then, my dog, Loki, came down the stairs and ran to me. “Loki!”, I cried. I was so happy to see Loki. Now I was ready to go into the crawlspace. “Come on guys, this is for Quetzalli “, Emily said, then we all climbed into the crawlspace.

As we walked through the dark and spooky crawlspace Diego guided us. Then we saw light coming from the end of the tunnel. When we reached the end of the tunnel there was a beautiful oasis and Leafy was on top of a waterfall. “Leafy come down from there”. I said, just then, Diego screamed,” Black Blob!”. Leafy jumped down from the waterfall. She landed in the water. I grabbed her and ran as fast as lightning. As we ran from the Black Blob, Brely tripped. “Brely!”, Emily screamed, and she ran back towards Brely to help her up. Everyone stopped and waited for them to catch up, then we all ran back through the tunnel, towards the entrance to the basement. Just as we thought we would be caught by the Black Blob, we all made it to the entrance and climbed back through. We were safe at last. “Quetzi!,” my sister Camila said, “I was so worried”. I gave her a hug then we all went back upstairs.

We were all so tired from running, we collapsed on the couch. Then my dad reminded us that it was Tuesday, and they were doing a special Tuesday night Music on the Green. “Aw man!”, we all cried. We were tired and really didn't want to go, but I didn't want to disappoint my dad. As we got in my dad's red and shiny car I asked my dad if Diego could go too. “Okay”, my dad said, and Diego climbed in too. Pretty soon we were on our way to Music on the Green.

When we got there, we set up a blanket. I wanted to throw myself on it because I was so tired, but that would hurt, so I didn't. Soon, the music started and it was very loud. “Look, they're giving out candy,” Emily said. Then we all got up and started to walk to get some. As we got there, something suddenly appeared on stage and people started screaming. “What is that?”, Diego said. Just then the thing on stage replied, “I am the Phantom of the Green!”. We grabbed our candy and ran. We had seen enough monsters for the day.

We ran back to the blanket where my dad and Camila were sitting, and saw both of them staring at the Phantom in horror. “Come on, Dad, let's go!”, I cried. “Wait,” my dad answered. “I want to see who the Phantom of the Green really is.” He started walking towards the stage, and we had no choice but to follow him. As we got to the stage, the phantom disappeared. Just then, we realized that we had forgotten Camila at the blanket. Quickly we turned around and saw the phantom grab Camila. I saw the phantom run into the abandoned bank, and we followed him.

When we went into the abandoned bank, everything was dark. “Camila!” we all yelled. Suddenly, the lights turned on, and there was Mrs. Racine and Camila with the phantom standing in front of them. My dad went up to the phantom and took off his mask. “Uh... Jake?”, we all yelled. “Aw man you caught me”, Jake said. Then I said “Today was a spooky day, and I am glad it's over”.



**Free by Kayo A. Klatt**

Follow Me, You'll Be Free, I Take His Hand, Now I Stand, Here Alone, Now I Follow.  
Please Help Me. I'm Not Free. Forever Bound, Trapped Underground.  
It's Dark Down Here, He Is Near! Southington Is Where I Begin, To Rot Away Please Just Stay!  
I'm Scared Over Here, DON'T DISAPPEAR! This Is Where I Roam, I Wanna Go Home!!!!  
You Hear Me Plead, DON'T IGNORE ME! These Chains Weigh A Ton, HE HAS A GUN!  
He Just Left Here, But the Monsters Are Near! Bloody and Foul, Do You Hear Them Howl?  
Broken Hearts, Full of Darts, Trapped Here. Just Like Me They're Not Free.  
So Please Help Us, We Won't Make A Fuss! Where Are You Going? Did I Say You Can Go?  
The Answer Is NO. YOU CAN NOT LEAVE WE'RE NOT FREE!  
You Little Traitor, I Thought You'd Do Me A Favor! I Hate You, I Thought You'd Stay True.  
I Am Crying, And Cold, My Life Is Crumbling Like Mold.  
You Hear Me Plead, Now You Watch Me Bleed. You Fed on My Tears, For All These Years,  
Trapped Down Here...I'm Just A Kid, Now I'm Up for Bid.  
Kidnapped on My Birthday, It Felt Like Yesterday, I Was with My Family But Now I Lost My  
Sanity.  
I THINK I'M GOING CRAZY, EVERYTHING IS GETTING HAZY....!  
What Did I Do to Deserve This? Stuck in The Abyss.... STOP!  
Please Don't Leave! I'm On My Knees, PLEASE HELP ME!  
Oh No....I See My Biggest Foe...**HIM**. He's So Dark and Grim, He Eats Kid's Souls,  
Swallows Them Whole....  
Quickly Unlock These Chains! Before He Shoots My Brain! \*K-Chick,Chick,**BOOM!!!**  
Chick-A-Chick Chick-A-Chick Chick,**BOOM!!!**\*

....Don't Think You Can Get Rid of Me That Easy-Peasy....  
..... I'm Coming for You, Andrew.....

## Mori's Halloween Adventures! By Leon Krah

### **Chapter 1: Planning**

It was the day before Halloween, and everyone was getting ready for it. Mori was getting her spooktacular costume ready for the big day. She went out shopping at the Halloween store looking for her spooktacular costume, but didn't find it. She went to 30 stores, and at the 31st store, she finally found the perfect dress for the big day. She wore her dress every day, even if she didn't wash it every night. She started to smell like a rotten pumpkin by the 10th day.

### **Chapter 2: Disaster & Fight Back**

'Twas the night before Halloween, and Mori was getting ready to go to bed. She got her favorite pumpkin flavored milk and started up the stairs to her room. She turned the dimly lit bulb off, and she closed her eyes. CREEK... the door opened to the house. It must have been the HALLOWEENSTERS! Every Hallows Eve, they went to the houses that had the BEST costumes. And this year, they chose Mori. They snuck into the house to steal the costume. It would be easy to do that, but they figured that her costume was in HER ROOM. The Halloweensters crept to Mori's room. With each step, the old stairs made a CREEAAK.

"Who's there? I want to know!" said Mori. "FREEZE! Don't move an inch!"  
"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!! There are robbers in my house! No, I won't give you my beautiful Halloween dress! If you want it, come and get it."

"Oh, it's on, alright!" said the Halloweensters. One of them lunged at Mori who was holding her dress. Mori wrestled one of them away. Another one managed to touch the dress, but as soon as Mori noticed, she pulled it away. As she ran down the stairs, the other Halloweenster tripped, falling on her toys. Mori rushed to the phone, and dialed 911. When the police arrived, they put the Halloweensters in custody, and Mori told the officer what had happened.

### **Chapter 3: Trick or Treating!**

It was finally Halloween, and everyone in town was dressed in their best costumes. When Mori went around, she received a lot of compliments, like, "Really nice dress, Mori! Love it!" or, "Cool dress, Mori!" She knew that she chose the right dress for her. She went around the Southington Library neighborhood, and she got TONS of CANDY. She got 3 Musketeers, a Milky Way, and even her favorite candy, Nerds. She thought that this must have been the most EXTRAORDINARY (and dangerous!) Halloween that she has ever experienced in her life!

## The Best Friend by Maia Lord

Katie Alfred was a 12-year-old girl who went to DePaolo Middle School. But she only had two friends: her best friend and her normal friend. Her best friend was named Agatha Daman. Agatha always said she was adopted. But one time, Katie searched up her house but it was abandoned and old, like REALLY old. Her other friend was her neighbor across the street named Olivia, just Olivia. They always did everything together except Olivia hated Agatha and told Katie but they both thought that Agatha didn't know but she did! But never told anyone. Agatha also looks a little um... yeah anyways, Olivia looked normal like everybody else.

Katie's mom told Katie to go pick Olivia up and walk with her to school. Agatha was never late and never missed a day of school. Which was kinda weird. When Katie got to the house nobody answered and saw everything was dark and locked inside. "SCREEEE!" Katie looked back at the house. She tried breaking the door but couldn't. She ran home and told her mom she walked by herself to school and Agatha wasn't there either.

The next couple of days, Olivia and her family were not seen yet by anybody so the police came. They found Katie dead on the ground with her family. They couldn't explain what they looked like though because they thought it would give them nightmares. Katie cried herself to sleep as she thought about Olivia. The next day Agatha looked happy? But Agatha didn't "know" so when Katie told her Agatha was "sad." As the days passed Olivia and her family's funeral was here. Katie sobbed as they talked and went up to them. Agatha wasn't there. She said she was visiting her grandma who lives in Wisconsin and Katie thought she was lying because Agatha said she didn't have a grandma who lives in Wisconsin. The next day Katie's dad hasn't come home yet. It had been four hours. Katie was scared so she's texted and called him a bunch of times "KATIE!" Katie turned her head quickly in a frantic way. It was her dad. He had cuts and bruises all over him "HIDE!" "Dad, what's the matter?" "There's a creepy girl chasing me and she looks like like-" "CRASH!" "DAD!" Katie quickly runs to the attic, pulls down the string and quickly climbs up, pulls it back up and hides in one of the boxes. She hears the door knocking. It gets louder and louder sooner or later she hears the window break "CRASH crinkle crinkle." Katie suddenly hears footsteps that get louder and louder "Creek!" Katie peeks out of her box and sees a familiar face who looks like Agatha! "CRASH crinkle crinkle!" she hears again. She peeks out of her box again and looks out the broken window in the attic and someone sees flying?

She quickly ran downstairs to check on her dad. She called 911 and they took him to the Hartford Hospital and the police examined everything but couldn't find anything. Katie went to the hospital to see if he was ok. He was ok but he dislocated his arm and had a concussion. She missed a week of school and when she came back, Agatha wasn't there during Social Studies. The teacher introduced a new student. Her name was Ivy Smith. She sat next to Katie and Katie asked if they wanted to sit together at lunch. Ivy said yes and Katie was really happy. When they sat next to each other Katie told Ivy everything that happened over the weekend. Ivy was surprised what happened and Katie asked "hey you wanna sneak into the house?" "Um yeah sure." Ivy said. "OK," Katie said. At 5 o'clock they met at the house, got a flashlight and went inside. "You go upstairs and I will stay here." Katie said. Ivy went upstairs and Katie turned on her flashlight "AHH!" WHAT... WHAT?!" "Nothing."

Katie found a bloodstain on the wall and it was in the shape of a hand. "AHHHH!" "IVY!?" "SCREEEE!" ... It was silent then. "IVY!" Katie ran out of the house and was terrified. She called her aunt to see if she can live with her for a couple weeks. Her aunt said yes

and picked her up. When Katie was playing in the backyard with her cousin and their dog they saw something in the woods. It came closer and closer. Katie picked up her cousin and the dog and ran inside. She looked out the window “AHHH.” The girl was right there and looked like Agatha??

Katie ran to her aunt and told her what happened. After dinner Katie went to take a shower when she heard voices like this: *Kaaattttiiiiieee Katieeeeeeee*. Katie ran out the shower, put her towel on and ran into her room. After she got dressed, she slept in her aunt's room. Katie remembered seeing signs that Ivy was missing. Katie thought it was her fault that Ivy got killed and she just moved here. Katie's mom was on a work trip for two months in North Carolina. Katie wanted to tell everybody what happened. Sooner or later she was fast asleep. “Knock Knock!” Katie heard downstairs. She woke up with a fright. She didn't want to wake up her aunt and uncle so she crept slowly downstairs. “Creeeeackkk.” Katie lifted up her foot fast and went downstairs. She opened the door and it was pitch black. Someone grabbed her shirt “AHH- someone covered her mouth and was flying like 90 miles per hour. “SCREEE!”

Katie was gone.

## Scary Stories by Richie Lovings

So, I got a job interview at Fazbear's. Teenagers say it's haunted. I shouldn't think about it too much. But I get 100 dollars per week so I'm going to do everything I need to. Also, my friend is going to be there. They're in the same room as me. I'm going to work and let's see what happens.



“We’re here at the security office Hunter, let's go in.” said Tyreek. It's about 8:30 pm and we're staring at the office. Time lapse 12:00. After 8:30 Hunter and Tyreek are on shift. Hunter sees something and he says “Did you see that Tyreek?” Then he saw it again Hunter said “Hey Tyreek did you see that am I going crazy” “What?” said Tyreek “A ghost” said Hunter “What ghost” said Tyreek then Hunter pulled out his flashlight and wanted to check the halls there it was a full on bunny was right there AAAA! Run keep running, what are we gonna do now? We're running for our lives. I didn't know what to think. I didn't think the stories were true. I was shocked that there was a bunny I'm getting. Soon they got to the bathroom and hid in a bathroom stall. All of a sudden they saw a chicken “I love eating pizza. Then Hunter turned blue seeing that there was a chicken...

We were cornered, how would we escape from the chicken tyreek had an idea they would slide under the chicken they only had one try tyreek DID IT but the chicken got hunter tyreek pushed the chicken the chicken fell down “hunter RUN NOW !!!! We got out of there Quickly and never came back, that is...

## The Big Bad Furby by Hero Luu

I was walking down the street, a dark road somewhere in Southington. I look over in a corner and I see a glimpse of a man or woman hiding in the corners, it looked like it was getting closer faster and faster.

“What do you want!”

Once I said that it ran back into the alleyway but then I realized it wasn't looking at me. When I turned around I saw something so horrifying it was a 1994 Furby. The man came out again and yelled.

“RUN!”

I looked back at the Furby and it grew to 100% times its size! And then it started to run at me, but I was much faster than that old thing. And ran to the old man in the alleyway he pulled me in and said.

“Be Quiet.” He whispered.

So I did exactly what he told me to do. The giant Furby walked by without noticing us. Then something scary happened.

“Come out to play! I ate Mr. Beast aka Jimmy, what makes you think I won't eat you?” Then he looked into the alleyway we were hiding in. So we tiptoed to a door and jumped in quietly.

“Kid you might not like what you're about to see.” He flicked on the lights, and he... he.. Was.

“GEORGE WASHINGTON!!!” I screamed so hard it broke one window.

“SHHHH! Keep your voice down okay.”

“Well okay but why did you walk up to me in the dark?” I asked.

I thought he was going to take me away. I thought I was going to get ..... Can't say that.

“Well the reason is because I saw the giant Furby behind you. I wanted to help you but it noticed me out of the corner of its eye, and well I backed off.”

Man this dude just told an entire chapter book god dang. Well I'm just going to ignore the fact that he's George Washington so we can survive, this Furby dude. But then I started to float, not figuratively. Literally.

“George! Help me please help.” didn't The Furby bashed through the wall and started to fight him until I flew all the way to the moon then, I just got out of bed. It was a dream. Or was it?

## Ann Marina by Maureen Maisano

Ann Marina sat there in her torn apart kitchen staring at her phone, but her phone didn't stare back; it was as if it was a blank sheet of paper. It didn't completely hit her what her friend had said,

“ Hey if you're really in a time loop, then how come Fill knew that you were re-shooting?” It had been five hours since her friend Rina had asked her that. Ann squeezed the side of her phone together in distress un-aware of what she was doing, or what was going on. Her phone screen cracked, a shard of it popping out in Ann's face, snapping her out of her delusion. She peered down at her phone, it was about to strike 12. She watched as the time was ticking down.

4  
3  
2  
1

The second the clock hit 12 Ann got a glimpse of what she looked like. On the cracked phone screen was a girl burnt with a meadow of red flowers, hair and skin smudged with dirt and dust. Her hair was knotted and her eyes bloodshot. But she just woke up in her bed like she had done days ago, months ago, a year ago.

Ann sprung out of bed. It had been five months since her first time loop and she was going to live her looping life to the fullest. She walked down her quiet street to the train station. She was going wherever the train took her as she had snuck on the back while no one was noticing. The train went through the countryside passing through fields of long swaying grass, cows and sheep chowing down on the ground. She took out her thermos and some pasta and meatballs, drenched in her grandmother's homemade sauce that she had made for her three days ago. She poured warm tea from the thermos and gazed at the glimmering lakes and turning prairies as she ate. The crisp breeze brushing through her hair, as she sipped her tea. It was a dream come true. Sure, sitting on the back railings of a train and relaxing wasn't the most exciting thing, but it was a relaxing break from destroying a set for the 12th time. She watched the farm dogs run, the butterflies flutter, and the gray catbird swing with excitement. Ann combed her hair, eyes glimmering out in the sun, a meadow arose from the curves off hills and Ann pulled up her basket, swung to the outer side of the railing and the pole and fragrance of the meadow brushed through it. Ann's right hand grasped the railing so she faced out to the meadows and she jumped off the railing to the meadow, rolling down with her basket. Her dress grazed the flowers as she walked by them. She walked through the meadow admiring the flowers for miles. When the sun got drowsy and started under the covers of the horizon, Ann leaned on one hand, her bent knees next to her, one falling over the other. She had her dinner of tomato soup and saltines and laid soft on the bed of flowers as she went to bed.

Ann woke up like she would any other day, but today was different, she jolted up and sprung out of her house. She turned to her neighbor's house and smashed the window, slithered in and shoved in the keys that her neighbor un-discreetly put under a rock.

The car rolled up a hill and stopped by the gate of the Chase Mansion. It was Fill's house, and Ann Marie was fed up with his game. She knew it was him, everything in the script he wrote happened to her: the tearing apart the room, the long deep brown purple hair, the

porcelain skin, the small house, the swimming, the personality. The main character wasn't like her, the main character was her, and she was tired of playing out her own life. She slid the pocket gun out of her purse and into her right pocket. She began strolling up the hill the Chase mansion sat upon. She then thrust the back of her gun into the window, dashing in.

Alarms went off screaming into what seemed like the void. Ann Marina ran down every hall and corridor. Kicking down the doors for even a soul in sight. The living room was draped in books, with a fireplace in the middle and two sets of long curved velvet couches facing it. There lay a book, *How to Move On*. Ann shot it down, and ran to the dining room. It was an empty, sad dining room, all of the drapes in not only the dining room, but the entire Chase Mansion's drapes shielded the sunlight from the sun. The dining room had a long table with a grand chair placed at the end. The room was the stereotypical room, but it was the darkness looming over the grand chair that gave Ann a sense of uneasiness.

The kitchen was stripped of color, looking bland and tired even though it was white and lit up, the light felt artificial, with no windows. Most of the rooms were empty guest rooms that all looked the same: empty. They had chandeliers and closed velvet curtains, and king-sized beds with large red comforters, a rug on the floor and more than human sized dressers. Ann thought she was in a state of hysteria because all of the rooms lined against the hall were the same except for one.

The master bedroom was placed at the end of the hall, and now that Ann had checked all of the rooms she was positive that Fill was there.

Ann Marie's slippers sliced through the door, her eyes immediately locked on Fill. She pointed her gun at his face.

"GET ME OUT OF HERE." Ann Marie demanded, but Fill was silent, frozen in fear. "I JUST WANT TO MOVE ON."

"I'm sorry." Fill whimpered.

"I DON'T CARE THAT YOU'RE SORRY. I WANT TO LEAVE. I KNOW THE GIRL I WAS PLAYING WAS ME, AND THE MOVIE WAS MY LIFE."

"I'm sorry Ann Marina." Fill smiled a forced smile.

"How do you know my name!" Ann Marina tightened her grasp, but Fill just smiled. "I wiped the proof of my real name; how did you know it!" Ann Marina was enraged. When she was younger Ann Marina considered herself useless, acting more like a puppet for others after her mother had passed. But then something changed, Ann Marina couldn't exactly pinpoint when or how, but she just changed. She wanted a fresh start, and changing her name was the first thing for her to start fresh in her mind.

"Omar."

Ann Marina gasped for air, how could she have forgotten? It was the most important thing that had ever happened to her, the reason for all of this. Her tears blossomed and danced away in the wind. The world around her cracked.

Fill's real name was Omar. He was the reason Ann Marina accepted her father's death, the thing that helped her move on, but he was erased from her memory in the time loop. The same time loop Ann Marina was stuck in, the same time loop he made. He was never a director, but Ann Marina was in a movie. Ann Marina loved acting more than anything. She found it as her way of inspiring people and she finally, after trying and trying, got the main character. She was ecstatic and every day when she got home she'd tell Omar about it. Rehearsing her roles to him and filling him in about the movie.



“The roads are wet today so they’re going to be slippery, especially while covered in leaves.” Omar warned Ann Marina while assisting her in combing her hair.

“I know, I’m a good driver.” Ann Marina’s feet were kicking back and forth in her chair.

Omar lay on the couch in his blanket, scrolling through channels on his day off.

“Breaking News. A car crash on Route 10 has set a blaze. One civilian confirmed as Ann Marina Leslie, has been confirmed dead.” Omar turned off the TV, in such a state of denial that he acted like his day was normal. He slept on the couch from 3PM to 5PM, made dinner for Ann Marie and him, and then waited for her to come home. And waited and waited and...

The layer of grief consumed Omar, causing the time loop.

Omar’s tears broke out of his eyes, overflowing with grief. Ann Marina dropped her gun, and drifted to Omar. Her arms wrapped around his curled-up state on the master bed. He cried into her, as she held him.

“Why did you have to go?” He asked, staring up at her hiccupping.

“Sometimes people just have to go, and although it may be hard, you need to let go. I never want you to remember me from sobbing. I want you to think about me and think about this hug. I love you, and I always will. This time loop was fun being able to do whatever I wanted, before I died, but I think it’s about time I move on, and you let go.”

“But I’ll never get to see you again, I’ll never get to hear your voice comfort me, or hear you laugh or see your bright smile.”

“That doesn’t mean you won’t be able to remember my smile, or my laugh, or my voice. You’ll be able to remember them your entire life.”

“But,”

“Listen, I’m not mad or sad at you, I’m happy I was able to know and be happy with you, and to me that’s all that matters to me. You can end this time loop. I want you to hold my hand, and accept that you’ll never hear my voice or my laugh again, and that you’ll never see my smile again. But you’ll know I always do, and always will love you no matter what.” Ann Marina’s soft hands brushed away Omar’s streaming tears. As she curled her hands around him, and her vision went white, she smiled.

## The Real House by Evelyn McDowell

Vera Ryan and Darina Francis find themselves in a quite literally sticky situation when they go to the Apple Harvest Festival in Southington, Connecticut. An innocent festival celebrating the harvest can have a dark side. But, the two girls find that out the hard way. But how will they get out of this mess?

### **October 1**

#### **The Worst Month of Everyone's Life**

Vera and Darina had made plans to go to the Apple Harvest Festival together. They expected everything to be the same as last year. The apple fritters, lemonade, and the beat to the drums and music heard from half a mile away. The band playing, the food, shopping, sweet treats, and the stands. The Apple Harvest stands. Darina had been thinking about opening one herself, but both the girls enjoy walking around together.

"Vera, how about October first? It's on Sunday and I am free then." Darina asked on a rainy Wednesday.

"Of course!" Vera answered excitedly.

Their plans were made, and nothing could stop it.

Sunday came quickly. Vera and Darina walked to the Apple Harvest. They went around for hours, and they found this one peculiar stand was very sketchy. The girls walked up to it at first, not thinking anything at all. Vera got a chill, creeping down her spine. Darina got a cold sweat. "I don't think we should be here," Vera murmured, shaking.

"Vera, what's that?" Darina pointed. Her finger led to a brown door, hidden behind a sheer cloth. The cloth was patched up, with so many rips and moss all over it.

"Probably where they keep the supplies?" Vera replied.

"What supplies would they need, Vera? I don't understand."

The girls managed to sneak through the crowd away from the stand that brought the horrible feeling. "Let's keep walking," Vera suggested.

The other stands made them feel much better, but Darina couldn't get the door off her mind. "I'm hungry. You get some fritters, and I'll wait for you, near the jewelry stand." Darina mentioned.

"Alright," Vera agreed, and the girls proceeded to separate as the crowd grew larger, almost as if it were swallowing the space in between them.

As Darina made her way to wait for Vera, she crossed the same stand again. With the door. And the moss. And that same cold sweat came back to Darina with a sharp tingling feeling that made her wobble, and then drawn into the stand. Darina did something she never would have done that day.

"Darina?! DARINA! There you are! Want an apple fritter yet? Whoops! They're really hot. Let's sit over there and they will have enough time to cool!" Vera said, excitedly. "Darina?"

Darina was drifting towards the same stand, except this time in amazement. Like she was a little kid on Halloween or Christmas. She snuck behind the stand, opened the door behind the sheer cloth, and disappeared into the dark abyss as if there was somebody in there waiting for her.

“WAIT! DARINA!” Vera managed to yell before the door shut. The people around her didn't seem to notice in any way, so Vera needed to get some help. Fast. “Excuse me? Miss? Um I'm looking for my friend, can you??”

“Name? Dear?” The woman asked, sharply. “Yours.”

“Oh my name is Vera but I'm looking for my-”

“I don't speak English good, my daughter, ” The woman said with a heavy Italian accent.

“Mom, she needs help. Hi, I'm Lucia. I will help you.” Lucia said.

“LET ME OUT!!! PLEASE!!!” Darina screamed. This was not just any haunted house. It was a real one. A disgusting, rotting zombie with ripped up clothes and some sort of green substance on its arms, face and legs, was following Darina. She didn't want to die.

Lucia and Vera made their way to the spine-chilling stand with the door, left slightly ajar. “Should we go in?” Lucia asked.

“My friend was drawn into this door, so maybe. LUCIA! NO!”

Lucia was pulled into the same dark abyss that had made Darina disappear. Vera felt she had no other choice but to go inside as well. When Lucia got pulled in, a dark, bony hand pulled her by her shirt. Vera felt the need for the cops. But she didn't want to make a scene. Vera slowly stepped inside.

She looked down and saw bodies everywhere. Scared and trembling, her first step was made, Leaving the door shut tight so nobody would make this mistake. Cages, moss, fateful creatures, and syrup? There was syrup dripping down and oozing from the wooden boards up on the ceiling. She was trapped, and stuck to the floor. “Help...” Someone whispered. Nothing had happened to Vera yet, but this was definitely a human and they might be severely hurt.

“Hello? I'm here! Let me help you,” Vera called out to the person.

“Vera! I'm so glad to hear your voice! It's me, Darina. Quickly now, that devilish zombie? Yeah, he put me in this cage... made out of razor blades! Help! The key is on the ceiling!” Darina instructed her.

“Alright! I found a ladder. I'm going to let you out.”

Lucia was nowhere to be seen, and Vera had to just focus on getting Darina. The razor blade cage had been opened, and Darina was free. “Are there other people here?” Vera asked.

“Yes, I was running away with this girl. She said her name was Lucia or something??” Darnia gasped.

“Yes! She came with me to help you. Now, let's get out of this syrup and find Lucia and hopefully some other people.

Lucia was terrified. “*Why did I offer to help-*” But Lucia's thought was cut off by a horrendous bear with human features, with a huge sword and several people in his arms.

The bear human came closer, and Lucia felt as if she was frozen to the ground. “Lucia!?” Vera called out, as she ran over to her. The syrup was like glue, Lucia *was* frozen in place, but at least she could still talk.

“Guys, you should not be yelling in here...” Lucia whispered, trying to back away as the bear inched closer and closer. One of the people broke free, and bolted to the exit. Another one. Two little girls, one boy. Soon they were gone for the door. Darina made a run for it, but the bear was much faster, and he had a *sword*! How was Darina going to go without getting chopped in half!

All the bear managed was a cut on Darina's leg. That was great, but Vera and Lucia still had to get out before it was too late. The bear sat down, and he looked like a giant teddy bear from a great distance. Lucia stepped forwards, then another step. Vera followed.

Luckily, the girls finally got out, unharmed. Darina waited from across the street. They sought medical help immediately, for Darina's leg. "A cut from WHO and WHAT?!?" The nurse asked, so confused.

"You won't believe us." Vera responded.

"I fell," Darina said, and winked at Lucia and Vera.

When Vera and Darina got home and Lucia was safe with her mom, they sat down to finally take a break. "Wow. I'm never going to the Apple Harvest ever again!" Vera announced.

"Me too. I agree." Darina closed the conversation.

## The Game by MJ Mojica

“Hey MJ!” I heard my friend Cam yell to me as I was about to leave Kelley School, “Do you want to sleepover tonight?”

”Yeah, let me go home and ask my parents!”

”Ok, bye!” Cam says.

When I arrived at Cam's house on Farmstead Avenue, it was windy like I've never seen and it was thundering and lightning out. The lighting lit up the sky while the boom from the thunder sounded like a cannon outside. We were *lucky to be inside right now*. I could tell it was going to pour.

Cam met me at the door and we both ran upstairs trying to beat each other to his room. When we got up to his room, we hopped on the bed and played some Madden for a little bit. After yelling and laughing at each other, and beating each other up during the game, we went downstairs and watched in awe the 30 mile per hour wind. We also listened to the tornado siren singing its song, ”Weee OOO Weee OOO!” Also, the rain- THE RAIN! The yard looked as flooded as a river outside. Cam and I never saw a storm like this. *It was like a massacre!*

After finishing our pizza and fries, we sat on the couch and watched our favorite show where a YouTuber named Faze Rug played this game called Charlie Charlie. This is where you put two pencils stacked on top of each other and say, “Charlie Charlie are you here?” Then, if it moves to yes, he's here. After the show we went back into Cam's room and tried it ourselves - and what happened kept me up all night.

“OH MY GOD!” We both screamed in unison. Still in shock, we crumpled up the paper and chucked the pencils downstairs, slammed the door shut, and sat on the bed. *We just sat there worried about what would happen next.*

\*BANG CREEEEK \*BANG. We jumped out of our positions on the bed and stared at each other for a long time worried and scared. We opened the door slowly like a sloth and crept downstairs as quiet as mice. It was about 5PM now and both of us had reached the bottom of the stairs and went to where we heard the noise. I remembered a couple other experiences with ghosts when I came to his house. Years ago, we were playing in his room and heard footsteps run across the door into his sister's room. But nobody else was home. I was having that same horrified feeling then that I am having now!

We looked outside and saw a human shaped form in the fence outside, the door to the basement from the outside was open, and nobody else was home but Cam's mom upstairs. Then we heard another BANG! Five seconds after that bang, the TV turned on to the Faze Rug Show and we were watching Charlie Charlie. And that's when we saw the body of a man faintly in the doorway and a growl from the entity.

“AHHHHHHHHH!” We both screamed and ran to Cam's mom's room and hid- shaking and speechless. *That is how we spent the night, scared as babies.* We both had no sleep, and have never played any of those games ever again in our life.

## Who Lives at Hard Core Sweet Bakery??? by Madison MoneyMaker

Linda inhaled the scent pouring out of Hardcore Sweet Bakery, such as cupcakes, cookies, muffins and last but not least cinnamon rolls! Linda skipped into the shop, "Can I have one lime cupcake"? The worker spun around to get the cupcake while saying "Sure thing, that will be \$1.50." Linda traded the worker the money for the cupcake. The cupcake was bigger than Linda thought it was going to be, so she called her husband Rob to see if he wanted some. *Ring ring ring* "Hello honey, why are you calling?" "I just wanted to know if you wanted some of this cupcake when I get home?" "Yeah sure I will have some." *Clunk*. Rob hung up.

Linda peacefully ate her cupcake in the store. Then when she walked out of the store a chill went through her body, she looked around and everything was frozen in place. Then Linda started to walk again but still nobody moved. Now Linda was sprinting out of the shops when she felt a tap on her shoulder. She slowly turned around to see who it was but nobody was there even the people that were frozen were gone and all the shops were now closed. Linda thought she was going crazy, she told herself to leave but she could not. She looked left and right, up and down in stores and under chairs but nobody was there. So, she decided to leave. She walked out of the doors and opened her car door.

When Linda got in the car she could not shake what just happened. When Linda started to drive the other cars stopped in their place but Linda went faster and faster until she was home. Linda ran to the door and reached for her keys but they weren't there. She checked the car, they weren't there. She checked the driveway and the road, not a sign of them. Lastly, she checked under the doormat where her spare keys were and NOTHING! Linda banged on the door hoping Rob would hear or maybe see her but he did not. Linda swiftly walked over to the side of the house where there was a glass door and peeked inside but Rob was not home. Linda ran over to her neighbor's house and no one was home. Linda sat down on the hard, cold pavement and cried as she reached in her back pocket for her phone and there were the keys! Linda's face lit up and she dashed toward her house but she got frozen and then was picked up in the air "Help, help, help me"! Linda screamed but then a cold hand slid across her face and over her mouth "Mmmm mmm." Linda screamed under the hand.

She looked around frantically but no one was there except the stray dog that wandered there all the time. Linda then gasped for air, but it felt like a rock had just slid down her throat and there was no more hand covering her mouth. Linda panicked. Had she just swallowed the hand that was covering the mouth? Linda stopped to think about it and then realized whatever that was is probably still near her. So, she continued to run to her house, thoughts rushed through her head "What was that? Why was the hand so cold? Why was Rob missing? Why were the neighbor's not home? She thought to herself. Finally, when Linda got to her house she unlocked the door and slammed it behind her. Then she turned around and there was Rob staring at her like she was crazy.

"Hi, honey what is wrong" he said in a confused and sweet voice "There is something haunting us and our family and it needs to leave right now"! Linda screamed at her husband. "Are you tired honey? Let's go to bed." Rob said in a shocked voice "That's not the problem," Linda argued back. Rob picked Linda up over his shoulder and turned off all the lights in the house and shut the curtains, then placed Linda down in bed and put the covers over her, then laid down next to her.

The next day Linda is cleaning at home with Rob. "Whooooo" something had been whispering to her all day. But every time she looked at Rob he did not seem to hear a thing. "STOP" Linda shouted "STOP! STOP! STOP!" she demanded. Rob rushed over with a scared face "It's back and we need to stop it"! Rob just nodded his head and stood next to her and chanted "whoever you are or whatever you are, needs to stop and leave us and our family and friends alone"! "But" a deep voice bellowed "You have my hand" the ghost bellowed. " You want it back, fine you can have it back!" Linda forced herself to cough and cough and finally it came up "HERE, now go!" Linda barked at the ghost. "Fine," screamed the ghost, "but don't come back to MY home." Linda felt a rush of cold air fly past her. And there was no sound except Linda squealing happily. But Linda thought " what did he mean DON'T COME BACK TO MY HOME"???

### **The Device at The Abandoned Store by Michael Moneymaker**

Ryan wanted to continue what his mother started' Ryan wanted to continue investigating the abandoned store near the library!

A week earlier Ryan's mom laid lifelessly in the parking lot of the store after she screamed in the store. "MOM! MOM!" Ryan shouted as he ran over and aggressively shook her "Stop she's gone!" Ryan's dad said "No!" Ryan shouted at him. He turned around and pleaded "please come back please!". But the police took her.

He dragged his feet to the car with hot tears running down his face. But now, he was ready to continue what his mother started. So he stepped inside it was pitch black but there was one white thing he walked over to it and almost ran out but he stayed and saw a skeleton with a spear in his head. "Spooky... probably what mom screamed about..." he whispered but now he saw a light on and two people talking in it.

Uh oh he thought they were coming closer. He sprinted and hid behind some old boxes and heard them say "it'll never work, the police will find us." Said one voice. He peeked out to see his mom's friend. He chucked a piece of cardboard then metal and that gave him a chance to run away, able to go to the police station he ran and told his dad who told the police and the people were arrested. They were planning on making a device that could kill anyone; their test subject was Ryan's mom.



### Night of the Clowns by Trip Newland III

Hi I am Trip, and I am 10 years old. I live at a scary old house on Andrews Street. At night the window panes rattle, when you open a door an awful ear-piercing sound comes out "creak". Just to set the record straight, from the beginning I didn't want the bedroom with the closet and no windows but my annoying brother called the good room on the ride to Southington. But my parents said "You can handle it Trip," because next year I'm going into 6th grade. The Apple Harvest is coming up and I guess it is some kind of Southington tradition? So since it's my first year in Southington I wanted to see what it was about.

When we got there, my parents told me the cost of rides were outrageous so I could only do one. I picked this hang glider ride and it turned out to be really fun but I was scared at first. In the end, it was actually fun. My mom and little brother went to the baby rides and to get food, my dad and I went to go do rides. After that we got some fritters and apple cider. We headed home to have dinner.

After dinner we watched a movie. After that it was time to go up to my sad, scary, old, creaky room even though I had my old bed. It was a different room and I didn't like that, especially the closet. *BOOM*. It's the middle of the night and I hear a pounding on the closet door and a scary chuckle I bolt to try to get out of my room but the door slams in front of me, making everything go black.

Hours later I find myself in a weird looking room I don't recognize. I saw a flipped over chair and table and I found blood stains on the wall and a knife lay on the table. Suddenly a door opens and a hideous clown walks through. He says in his creepy voice "You can't escape. No one can!" HA HA HA He laughs his hideous laugh. I start banging on the wall for help but no one can hear. It's only me and the clown. After I found out it's no use, I looked behind me and found the clown had the knife that was on the table. I ran into the wall at full force and to my surprise turned around and I found myself falling though nothing. *Crash*. I hit my bed. I lay there for a moment, dazed, and suddenly I fell asleep. The next morning, I tried to explain to my parents what happened but they thought I was just having a dream.

*Guess they will never know the truth.*

## **JFK After Dark by Jameson O'Rourke**

### **Chapter 1, 3:00pm**

#### **Eli Elliston**

By the time the final bus announcement was made, everyone was gone. Except me. Once I get out of the bathroom I look around and see nothing. I start to panic, where is everyone? "Hello?" I yell. Nothing. I run down the hall and to the main entrance. I try to open the door but it's locked. "Darn it!" I yell. "I hear you buddy," a voice says. I turn around and can't see anyone. "Who are you?" I ask. I see someone come around the corner. "I'm Maddy," she says. "Is the main entrance locked?" she asks. "Yep," I tell her. "Who is there?" I hear another voice say. "Over here, by the main office!" I yell out. I hear footsteps and then see another person. "I'm Ben and I swear I thought I was the only one here," he says. He joins our small little group. "Maybe we can try the windows?" Maddy suggests. I run to the nearest window and try to open it. No luck, it's like it's made out of steel. Ben comes over with a chair but still the window holds its place. "Guys, we may be stuck at JFK overnight." I say. The horror on their faces and probably mine explains everything. "Well, let's look at the positive! This could be fun..." Ben says. Maddy and I just stare at him. "How are we going to leave? Where will we sleep? What will we eat? What about our parents?!?!" Maddy says having a nervous breakdown. "Can you guys shut up?" I hear a voice yell. Ben goes into the main office to look and comes back out with a girl. She looks very sassy. "I'm Chloe, and I have tried everything to find an exit." she says. So now there are four of us. Me, Maddy, Ben, and Chloe. "I'm Eli," I tell everyone. They don't say anything. Everyone is scared, even me. "So, what are we going to do?" Maddy asks. "Easy, we just sleep the whole time," Chloe snorts. "No, I'm not doing that." Maddy says. It hits us all at the same time that we can't leave. "So, we can't leave." We are stuck here for the whole night. We all realize that this is gonna be a very long night. We better get used to it, this is going to be a while.

### **Chapter 2, 5:15pm**

#### **Maddy James**

My mom would always joke about me being stuck at school overnight. I never thought it would actually happen. The guys are exploring and trying to find a good place to sleep and what to do. Me and Chloe are planning what we are going to do. Here is our night time plan:

1. Get food from the Cafeteria 5:30ish
2. Do homework or any other work 6:00ish
3. Freshen up in the locker room 6:45ish
4. Watch movie and eat food 7:15ish
5. Be asleep by 10:00
- 6.

I can tell Chloe is scared. Even more scared than the rest of us. She is really quiet now that she knows we are stuck here. Soon, Ben and Eli come back with some news. "We found a

good room to sleep in. Ms. Solty's room has comfy chairs we can sleep in upstairs." I feel a little relieved because there is no way I'm sleeping on those hard, plastic chairs. "This sucks!" Chloe yells. "JUST TAKE ME HOME!" she screams. "Chloe," Eli soothes. "It's OK, we're all in this together," he adds. "This is not High School Musical!" she blurts at him and starts to cry. Eli goes over and comforts her for a second and soon she is back up, pale. Me and Chloe show them our list of stuff and they seem to like it. Out of everyone, Eli seems to be the chilliest. I kinda like that about him. But this is no time to think about boys, this is life or death. We are all in 6th grade but we didn't know each other until now. We are already close. Things happen when we are all terrified to be alone. Then I come up with an idea. "What if we call our Mom or Dad to pick us up?" I say. Chloe's face lights up and she smirks. "I didn't think of that." Eli says. We all fumble in our pockets and call. Both my Mom and Dad go to voicemail. "No luck," I say. By the looks on their faces I can tell no luck for them either. I sigh, "We're stuck here, just admit it"

### **Chapter 3, 5:45pm**

#### **Ben Cara**

When I first heard Eli and Maddy talking, I got so happy that I wasn't going to be alone. Ever since then, I don't leave any of their sides. I was never very well known around school. So, it's nice to find some people that have my back. Maddy and Chloe came up with a good plan. Right now, we are eating in the cafeteria. Eli was able to get in since a gate goes up to block anyone from stealing any snacks. (Lucky us). We all have some chips and cookies for dinner and after that we eat some ice cream. Later, Eli and I go to the locker room to use the showers that no one uses while the girls use the other showers in the girl locker rooms. We met back at 6:45. Turns out we went a little off schedule, so now we do homework. The rest of the time is really boring, but everyone is done by 7:30. Chloe is not doing so good...she is really not liking this. I can tell something is bothering her. But every time I ask her what's wrong, she just goes "Ah nothing I'm OK." If anyone can find out what is bothering her, it's Maddy. Maddy seems like the type of person that always has her friends back. Out of all of us, Eli and her have been the chilliest. Or as chill as you can be trapped at school. They are kind of the leaders of the group, and I'm not mad about that. Chloe doesn't seem to mind it either. We find Ms. Solty's room and we start claiming chairs. Maddy has the one you sink into, Eli has the soft one, Chloe has the floor which is weird and I have the other chair next to Maddy. Eli then has an idea. "What if I connect my computer to the smart board and we can watch YouTube or something?" he suggests. We all go along with that idea and soon he is figuring out how to do that. It takes him a little bit but he gets it eventually. We decide to watch some "Try not to laughs" and "School fails" which makes us laugh a lot. Then I feel my brain telling me, "Go to the bathroom idiot, you have been holding it all day." So, I get up and tell the others where I'm going. I leave and right when I'm a little down the hallway I hear something. It's a grunt followed by a sigh. "Kids, kids, kids," the voice says. I'm horrified, we're not alone.

## **Chapter 4, 12:00am**

### **Chloe Heart**

My eyes shoot open when I hear the sound. It is very faint, but you can definitely hear it, especially if you have my kind of hearing. Maybe that stupid goody goody Ben was telling the truth. He came sprinting back from the bathroom looking like a ghost. We all thought he was just hearing things, and I think he came to accept that too. But here it is, a clear grunt echoing down the empty hallways. Maddy is up too and Eli is starting to wake up. “What is that?” Maddy asks, horrified. “I told you guys I wasn’t lying!” Ben exclaims. “Shut up,” I tell him. Ben is always getting into my business. He keeps telling me something is up with me, and that’s kinda true. OK maybe it is really true but I can’t tell the guy that he was right and I was wrong. Can I? Anyway, I was not myself today and nosey McNosleyn had to come up into my business and wouldn’t shut up about it. I was upset because my cousins were coming to visit from Florida and I only get to see them once or twice a year. I’m just so upset that I’m not going to be able to see them. But I get that thought out of my mind and focus on that sound. Maddy gets up cautiously and slowly goes over to the door. “I don’t see anything,” she says calmly. Then it happens. The arm reaches out and the hand just brushes her hair. Her instincts kick in and she kicks and punches trying to escape. Eli runs over and slams the door. We hear a loud scream and the arm is out the door. “Thank you,” she says to Eli all out of breath. Meanwhile, Ben and I are watching, frozen with fear. Eli and Maddy come back over to our spot and sit down. Maddy catches her breath and Eli is just calming down. Then the whole room shakes and a light comes crashing down. We all scream. The door is shaking, the windows are cracking, and here we are, frozen like headless chickens. I build up some courage and go over to the window, science supplies falling all around me. I punch the window and it shatters. A shard gets in my arm but I don’t care. “Let’s go!” I tell everyone. They all come over and one by one we go out the window and down to the field. We did it, freedom.

## **Chapter 5, 12:30am**

### **Eli Elliston**

The air outside is pretty cold. After all, it is mid-September. All of us are out of breath, especially Chloe. Maddy finally breaks the silence. “W-we did it,” she says quietly. Chloe can’t say anything back. I see the road, stretching far into the distance. “Well what are we waiting for, let’s go!” Chloe yells. “Ben, you have been very qui-” Maddy’s face turns into horror, as she looks around frantically for Ben. Chloe notices too and soon all of us are looking for him, calling his name, Chloe is threatening him. “Guys, guys, what if he didn’t go out the window? What if he is still inside?” I say. Maddy looks up at the window. “We have to go back,” she says, sighing. Chloe is not happy about this, none of us are. But we can’t leave Ben in there all alone. We go back over to the window and Maddy starts climbing like a monkey up the side of the building and back inside. Then Chloe and I go up. Soon, we’re all back in the room that almost killed us. All of the stuff is still on the ground. It looks like a mess. (Sorry Ms. Soltys). Maddy approaches the door and looks into the hallway. “We have to split up,” she says. “No way I’m doing that.” Chloe says. She is super scared to be alone. All of us are, so the thought of

being away from each other is terrifying. All of a sudden, I see myself say “I’ll go with you!” She looks at me confused. I just smile my best smile and she seems to agree. Maddy goes down the A and old C team hallway while we go down the rest of the B team hallway. We sneak by corners and look down longer hallways. “Forget it,” Chloe says. “We’re not going to find the little scaredy cat.” That’s when we hear it. It’s the same voice going, “Kids, Kids, Kids!” I look at Chloe. “Run!” I scream. We take off down the A team hallway. The thing is chasing us. There are holes in the floor and lights are falling all around us. Wires are falling from the ceiling and fire is blocking the hallway. We crawl under bookshelves, carts, and pieces of debris. My heart is racing, I’m sweating, I’m terrified. We see Maddy. She sees us running and joins us. We go down the stairs and lose the thing, phew.

## **Chapter 6, 2:00am**

### **Maddy James**

We’re all out of breath, no one dares to speak after what we just went through. We’re back at the bottom of the main staircase. I look around us, nothing but darkness surrounds us. I peek through the big double doors of the cafeteria and see a wrapper sitting on the ground. “I’ll be right back,” I tell the others and walk into the cafeteria. I pick up the wrapper and something grabs my hand. “Hey, what gives?” It’s Ben. “Ben!” I say happily and wrap my arms around him. I call the others and they come rushing in. “You stupid idiot, why didn’t you jump you big life sized turkey?” Chloe asks sarcastically. Ben starts to blush. He looks very embarrassed, Chloe is responsible for that one. “Well, what are we waiting for? Let’s go!” Eli says. Ben gets up and we head back to the staircase. Just as we are about to go up the stairs, Eli freezes. “What?” I hesitate. Then I hear it too. “Kids, kids, kids, you got lucky the first time, now I’m coming for you again!” Eli looks at us. We all read his face, he means run. He takes off, me right behind him up the stairs. The A team hallway is back to that course. I duck under a bookshelf, wires shaking all around us. The thing is right behind us. A window shatters striking Eli right in the face. He falls and a light falls right on his head. I pick him up, (I don’t know how) and we keep going. He is too stunned to speak, so it’s all up to me. I see Ms. Solty’s room, the window. I run in, slam the door and drop off Eli. He gets up, blood is gushing from his head. “Here let me help,” I tell him. I grab a paper towel and start dabbing at his cut. I guess I don’t notice, because he points to my arm. My sleeve is torn off and I have multiple shards of glass poking into me. If my mom saw me now, she would freak out. Eli sits down in the comfy chairs, I grab some tables and chairs and put them in front of the door. I sneak a look at the clock, 3:45 is shown on it. Then I remember Ben and Chloe. “Eli, did you see Ben and Chloe?” I ask. I can tell by his face that he doesn’t know where they are. Freedom is so close, yet so far.

## **Chapter 7, 3:50am**

### **Ben Cara**

My head is pounding, and I can barely see. I try to comprehend what just happened, but I’m in too much pain. I look around, trying to figure out where I am. Then I notice I’m tied up.

The rope is holding me against a huge metal pole. Then I hear something, I look around and see Chloe tied up too. She doesn't look too good, she has bruises, cuts, and her clothes are ripped. "Chloe, are you ok?" I ask. She looks at me, tears are flowing down her cheeks. "Don't you get anything? I'm upset because I'm going to miss my cousins from Florida, this is my only chance to see them." That's all she can say before she bursts into tears. If I could move my arms, I would comfort her. "We need to get out of here," I tell her. Then I remember Maddy and Eli. I saw them run up the stairs before something grabbed my leg and knocked me unconscious. They may need our help, but we can't help. I all of a sudden feel anger burning inside of me, I look into the dark room and see a piece of glass laying on the ground. I use my leg to drag it to my arm and pick it up. I start cutting at the rope, trying so hard. Miraculously, the rope gives in and I'm free. I stand and run over to Chloe. I cut her rope and she gets up with me. "Tha-thank you," she musters. "No problem," I say shyly. "Now let's get out of here," she says. We get up and start to explore the room we're in. We find a door and try to open it, it's locked. "I got this," Chloe says. She takes a pin out of her hair and starts picking the lock. "Kids, kids, kids, you can't escape me!" It's the voice again. I hear footsteps and it sounds like it is right behind us. "Any minute now," I tell Chloe. She starts to panic and shakes the lock super hard. I get ready to lose freedom when Chloe grabs my arm. She forces out the door and I fall on my butt. She slams the door and locks the door again. "I guess we're even now," she says chuckling. We have a little laughing moment then we get up. I look around and see a set of stairs. "Look!" I told her. We start to walk up the stairs and into the school. We come up into the supplies closet in the gym. I shut the trap door and sigh, freedom.

## **Chapter 8, 4:45am**

### **Chloe Heart**

Ben has changed. He went from the goody goody shrimp to a brave and kind person. We have been wandering around for a while and during this time I tell him about my cousins. He seems sad for me and even apologizes for coming into my business. I apologize for calling him names and not treating him the best way. We kind of are friends now. I hate to admit it, but he is a pretty fun guy. Anyway, we have been chilling in the Tech-Ed hallway, eating food Ben grabbed from the cafeteria. I am trying to think about what happened to Maddy and Eli. Did they escape through the window? Did they get caught? There are about one million possibilities to what happened. "Hey Ben, do you think you could jump out the window now?" I ask him. His face turns white. "I-I-don't know," he says nervously. "Please? We can get out of the living heck and be free!" I whine. He looks at me, like if he is trying to figure out what I have planned. I give him my best puppy eyes and he finally gives in. "Fine, let's go," he says quietly. I smile and we start to walk towards Ms. Soly's room. He is really silent the whole time, he is terrified. I think that we have to go through the course on the A team hallway but when we go up the stairs, something changed. The hallway is back to normal, almost as if nothing happened. "What th-" I say. Ben looks at me confused. "But the hallway was just-how did it-What?" I say. He just keeps walking and I follow him. We trudge down the hallway until we reach Ms. Soly's room. Weird, the door is locked. I try to open it but something is blocking it. I hear some sounds inside and it sounds like talking. All of a sudden, the shade blocking the window goes up and I see who did that. Maddy. She sees us and starts taking stuff away from the door. She opens the door

and smiles. “Chloe, Ben!” She yells and hugs us. Eli comes over with a paper towel soaking up blood. “You got messed up.” Ben says. We go into the room and Maddy closes the door. I lay my eyes on the window, and go over. But it's not broken anymore, it's normal again. It's like it magically healed. Too freaky.

## **Chapter 9, 5:30am**

### **Eli Elliston**

It's almost dawn. The sky is just starting to light up the tiniest bit. Soon teachers will arrive, and that means freedom. All of us are hurt, cut, bruised, tired, dehydrated, and sweaty. Chloe fell asleep on one of the comfy chairs and Ben is asleep on the one next to her. It just leaves me and Maddy. I'm over near the windows looking out into the distance. The field is starting to light up and the moon is getting lower in the sky. Maddy comes over to me. “Whatcha doin?” she asks. Then she sees the sky lighting up. Her face lights up almost as much as the sky. “Freedom is close, I can feel it!” she says excitedly. I can see the sun, rising up above the horizon. Ben and Chloe are passed out I think, they look like they got the worst out of all of us. Then I start to feel my eyes getting heavy. I go over to the chair and before I know it, I'm fast asleep.

“Eli!” Maddy yells. My eyes shoot open and I'm greeted by Maddy's scared face. “What is it?” I ask. She points to the door and then I see it. The room starts shaking again, the windows start cracking, stuff is falling. This time, it's even worse than before. Maddy and I go and wake up Chloe and Ben. Chloe gets up quickly and runs over to the window. We all follow her, even Ben. We look out the window and see a pit of fire right below the building. “We can't get out!” Ben screams. “We've come too far!” I yell. Maddy runs away from the window and heads over to the emergency shower. “No,” I told her. “The windows will break, putting out the fire, so we can get out safely,” she replies. Before I can say anything back, she pulls the cord and the shower flips on. She clogs the sink and flips it on. The room is flooding fast, Ben is screaming, Chloe is screaming, I'm pretty sure I am too. The water is up to my knees and soon it's up to my waist. Stuff is floating and Chloe gets on a table. Ben tries to get on too, but can't get the strength. Soon, the whole room is full and we hold our breath. I can't hold on. It's too late to give up, I've come too far, no way I give up.

## **Chapter 10, 6:40am**

### **Maddy James**

I'm banging on the window, trying to get it open. No way I survive a horrible night and drown with the sun up. A window cracks, but it's not the outside windows, it's the window by the door. The water starts draining out into the hallway. All four of us are pulled out of the window and we are swept down the hallway. I pull the fire alarm when I go by causing more water to fill up from the sprinklers. I see Eli, struggling to stay above water. I'm on the swim team, so I can stay above the water a little better. I grab Eli and drag him over to a table. We get

on top and continue to drift down. There is so much water that it's like the ocean. We round the corner and start to go down the stairs. We wash up and more water comes down the other hallway. It pushes us into the auditorium and our table breaks. I grab onto the chair just in time to grab Eli and hoist him up with me. I then see Chloe and Ben come in. I grab Chloe and Eli grabs Ben. Soon, all of us are on top of chairs, just waiting. The water is filling up again, water is coming so fast that I'm treading water up near the ceiling. The water goes above my head and we're underwater again. I start swimming out the auditorium door and I see the main entrance. A window breaks, then two then all of them are broken and I'm being pulled out. Eli is right behind me, followed by Chloe and Ben. All four of us are forced out through the windows and onto the sidewalk right outside. I'm coughing and trying to catch my breath. Eli gets up and smiles. "We did it guys!" The sun is up and it is shining above us. We're all cut, bruised, hurt, tired, our clothes are ripped. We look like we just survived a horror movie, which is kinda true. All of a sudden, a car pulls up in front of us. I can't see the driver yet but as it gets closer, I can see who it is. It's Mrs. Colaccino and she has a horrified look on her face. "Get in!" She yells. It takes a second but before we know it, we pile into her car. "You made him mad, we need to go!" she says. I'm scared, confused, and terrified but we did it. Survivors.



## The Lone Wolf by Gianni Paparello

### Chapter 1

It was late at night when 12 year old Max Covico was alone at night. Nobody is near me. I can only hear the owls and one singular wolf. I quickly ran panting and sweating. I was cold and scared but adrenaline kept me running. My pants and shoes were covered in mud. Splash! Splash! My leg got caught on a very rusty, sharp fence, but I quickly got out. Now my leg was cut and blood came rushing out but I don't care at all about the condition.

### Chapter 2

"Good morning!" My mom yelled.

"AHHHHH MOM IT'S TOO EARLY!" Mom had been mourning and grieving with the loss of my dad differently than from other relatives. She acts like he was never born. Which is okay but it makes me pretty sad. We lived in a small town called Southington. It was cold during the fall, super cold. As I stepped out of my house the cold breeze gave me goosebumps. The leaves had a crisp and relaxing smell. I felt so calm which never happens. After school was over I walked home with my best friend since we were five and he was six, Bryce Sawdna. He is in the 7th grade while I'm in the 6th grade. Middle school is a lot different than elementary.

"Woah look at this pond!" I yelled over to Bryce. "It's so dirty, and muddy,"

"Wait" I paused. "I think there are woods and a cabin over there,

"I was so confused. I have lived in Southington for over eight years and I have never seen that before." "I might go home," Bryce said, trembling.

"Don't be a scaredy cat, come on, you're supposed to be a good example since you're older," I said feeling proud. "Exactly not dragging you into some weird cabin in the middle of some weird woods," Bryce said, actually sounding mad for once in his life. He kinda sounded mature, to be fair, neither of us are. "Come on, don't be a fun killer," Bryce looked angry. "You know what, fine I'll go in the woods with you," he finally said.

"Real-" He cut me off.

"But under one condition, you have to listen to me," He said once again, sounding serious.

"Fine whatever." As we walked into the woods we could see a weird glow and something was not right, I could feel it. As we approached the glow with fear we noticed something unusual. It was a massive spider web and when we tried to break it, nothing happened. It was super strong and hard to rip. Bryce had some scissors in his pocket for arts and crafts. It finally broke but the only thing under the web was a hollow of a tree. "Dang it," Bryce yelled with anger. As we explored the woods, my phone started to vibrate.

"It's my mom, what should I do?"

"Just text her and say I'm at Bryce's house," Bryce is really smart, he may be my best friend but he can sometimes lie to my mom so I don't get in trouble.

"Ok she said be home by dinner. I think we are out of the clear for now," I was relieved that she didn't say to come home immediately.

### Chapter 3

After I got home for dinner my mom asked “What did you guys do,” She knew something was wrong. “We just played some video games and threw the baseball,” I said, obviously lying.”

“Oh then did you bring your glove to school because I picked it up today on your floor,”

“No Bryce had an extra,”

“I’m pretty sure he only has one,”

“I used his brother’s,”

“His brother doesn’t play baseball,”

“He played when he was my age,”

*Why won’t this woman stop interrogating me and just accept the fact that I am lying about playing baseball?*

“You’re right. He did play at your age,”

*Finally she resigns.*

12 hours after the arguing with mom I was at school and 4th period just ended which meant it was finally lunch time. I was so hungry I almost barfed. I sat with Bryce, Joey, Andrew, Miles, and my brother Will. “Guys, me and Bryce have something pretty important to tell you. We found a forest.”

“Why is that important,” Joey said looking at us like me and Bryce had three heads.

“It’s just, a forest?” Miles asked. “No, we think it might be different from other forests.” Everybody but Bryce thought I was crazy.” This forest,” Miles said, “Is it near our houses or is it just near the border of Butternut and White Oak?”

“It’s on the road near Miles’ house,” Everyone thought me and Bryce were crazy because Miles had lived in Southington longer than anyone and he had never seen this so-called magical forest or whatever.” “OK fine after school,” Miles said, “We will go to this forest, 5:00 pm sharp.”

### Chapter 4

It was 4:58 and we were about to approach the forest. It was muddy and rainy which made all of us a little scared. After we entered it seemed as if something was wrong again. “Guys, I don’t feel good about this,” Miles said with his face all red. I noticed something weird again: the ground was rumbling and before any of us noticed, it was too late. A massive wolf jumped out of the ground and it looked like it hadn’t eaten in days. “Run!” I yelled. I ran panting and sweating until all of us were separated. It had just turned to 8:00. I was scared. I continued running and panting. I wasn’t gonna let the wolf get the best of me. Nobody is near me. I can only hear the owls and one singular wolf. I quickly ran, panting and sweating. I was cold and scared but adrenaline kept me running. My pants and shoes were covered in mud. Splash! Splash! My leg got caught on a very rusty, sharp fence, but I quickly got out. Now my leg was cut and blood came rushing out but I didn’t care at all about the condition. As I ran from the wolf, I wondered where my friends were. Then I saw the wolf in the corner of my eye. He jumped for me but I dodged his tooth scraping across my arm. Now I had a burning pain in my arm but I didn’t feel it until I got away from the wolf. I was so scared. I thought, *Where are Miles and Bryce and Andrew and most importantly, Will?* All these thoughts made me sad and I wanted to cry until I saw all of them together, hurt and injured but they were OK.

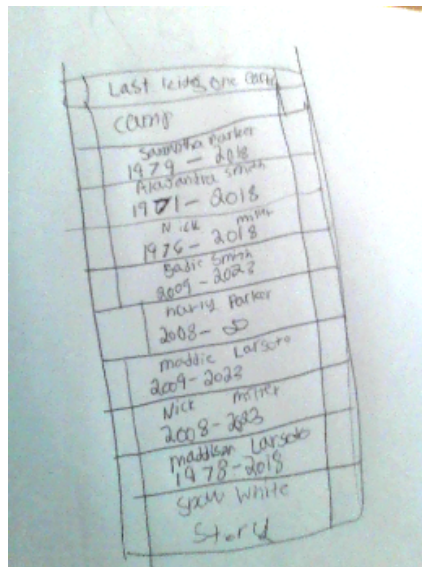
“Guys! Where were you?” I yelled. “The wolf chased all of us, almost as if there were more of them,” Miles said.

## After Hours by Ava Paradore

“Come on guys, let's go, we have to get to our math class.” Harley exclaimed while flipping her long blonde hair, “We're coming!” Sadie and Maddie said. “Hey, where are you guys going?” Nick yelled from the other side of the hallway. “Hopefully Mr.Anderson will not yell at us!” Harley replied. “Do you guys wanna do something fun after school?” Nick suggested. “What is it?” “Go to the library after it closes!” “SURE” they all cheered. Then they all went to math class.

After math class they walk home. It took about five minutes. “Omg guys, school was so boring!” Maddie said annoyed. “For real,” Sadie replied. “Oh my gosh guys, the library is going to close soon. We only have one hour!” Nick yelled in shock. They ran to Harley's house so they could grab their spy stuff and get changed to go to the library. After it closes, they're going to wait outside until someone closes the door and they're going to catch the doors before it closes. “Do you really think this is going to actually work?” Maddie asked, “It has to,” Sadie replied. “Okay, so is everyone ready?” “YES, of course” everyone exclaimed. “Let's get the show on the road”.

Everyone left the house and Harley brought a backpack with some supplies . We sat outside for about another hour to let the staff clean up because there were still like three people in there. “Come on guys, I think it's time to go in,” Sadie exclaimed. Everyone goes in and has their flashlights on. They go to each section and look at the books. Harley finds this weird section. It has everyone's first and last names on them followed by years. It looked like this:



It was titled Last Kids On Earth. Our names are listed as follows: Samantha Parker 1979 to 2018; Alejandra Smith 1971 to 2018; Nicholas Miller 1976 to 2018; Sadie Smith 2009 to 2023; Harley Parker 2008 to Infinity; Maddie Larson 2009 to 2023; Nick Miller 2008-2023 and lastly, a book titled Snow White story. “OMG, it's our moms and my dads book” Nick yelled “What could this possibly mean?” Harley questioned “Everyone grab your book and parents book and your book”. Sadie exclaimed “OK!” Maddie replied so they did that.

Then they see four people walking in the distance, one person wearing a prom dress, one wearing a cheerleading outfit, one wearing a football jersey and lastly, one wearing a video game shirt and a really tall person that's like 12 feet tall. Nick, Harley, Madie, and Sadie all looked frightened and Harley whispers to all of them “On three, run in different directions 1.....2” they got closer and closer to them “three! GO!” They ran different ways.

Sadie started crying. The people walking close were their parents and a random person. She sat there while her mom dragged her. Sadie screaming “HELP MEEEEEE!!” HELPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPP” “NO!” her mother Alejandra said. Sadie didn't know where she was going. She was going to a locked closet filled with water. There's a bucket in there she said and got put in the bucket and drowned to death.

Nick sprinted off to the upstairs and hid under a table. He sat there for a few minutes then he got up and realized no one was there. Then from the back he realized his dad with the football jersey came up to him and said “Hi son.” “Ddddddad” Nick says crying. Next, he goes on a wild goose chase and runs the 50 yard dash. He ran for a while but then his dad got a A book and slammed it on his head. Nick ran away again but next to a bookshelf a bookshelf fell on him and he couldn't get up. His dad kept on hitting him with books and then he gave him lots of paper cuts. He grabs scissors and cuts him and he dies.

Maddie ran to the desks and there was a weird wall in the desk. In that wall there was a door and the door led to the outside. She was really relieved that there was a door outside because she heard really loud noises from Nick and Sadie. She ran outside and her mother followed her. “Mom, what are you doing here? I haven't seen you in forever.”

“I know sweetheart. Wanna come join me? The dark side is much better, Maddie.”

She sees her mom covered in blood. She runs to the Dollar Tree, nearby into the parking lot and hides in someone's car because the window was rolled down. She jumped into the car. Her mom broke the window with her fist and Maddie got cut by the glass. Her mom took her somewhere. The same place where she put Nick and Sadie.

Harley ran fast to the downstairs crying. She had her phone and called her dad. Her dad wasn't answering so Harley hid there until Nick, Maddie, and Sadie came and said “oHhHh hArLeY”. They called and she came out and sprinted up the stairs and outside the door without hesitating and ran to her house. She hid in the bathroom and fell right asleep. The next morning she woke up and found a note under the bathroom.

## Halloween Spook!! by Natasha Quaye

“Let's go to this house!” “This one over here!” “Wow look at the decorations!”

I hear these words all night long on this spooky night. I'm walking house to house with my little sister, baskets in hands, all dressed up. The crescent moon shines in the sky. I know what day it is! It's HALLOWEEN!

I jump awake and immediately grab my phone to see what the day is: Tuesday October 31 2023. I basically jumped out of bed and rushed to get ready for school. I was done brushing my teeth, showering, and all that stuff now. I just needed to wear my Halloween costume. I knew I wanted to be someone from Monster High, I just didn't know which character, so I ended up having my friend choose for me. She ended up choosing Dracula! She's one of my favorite characters. I quickly throw on the costume and sprint downstairs for some breakfast. In less than five minutes I'm out the door waiting for my bus to arrive. I whip out my phone and start texting my friend. I asked her if the bus had come because we were on the same bus. She replies no, so I decide to wait longer. I end up looking around at our neighborhood houses. I see the beautiful autumn leaves on everyone's lawns. I also see their Halloween decorations around their homes. I hear a really loud screeching sound come to a stop right next to me. When I turn around, I see my bus.

I'm walking in the halls of my school and hear all the chatter going on. I see many different people in different costumes, inflatable suits, cartoon characters, witches, matching costumes, and many, many more. That whole school day felt like a small memory, because it went by so fast. Soon enough, I was on my bus and my stop was in five minutes.

“Are you going to come trick or treating with me?” I asked my friend Anya.

“Obviously! I already planned three weeks ahead.”

“Thank goodness,” I sigh in relief. “I thought I would be stuck doing it with my sister. Good thing you're tagging along.” I realized that my stop had come and the bus driver was yelling at me to get off her bus.

“Guess I have to go now, see you soon Anya!” I open my front door and my two cats, Moon and Luna run to my legs, along with my little sister Sage.

“Mama help me find my costume!!” She cried. I drop my backpack, pick her up, and go to her room. I see **tons** of costumes scattered all over her bed.

“Help me pick one Mala!!” She cried again. I sigh and start getting to work.

After a whole hour had passed, we had finally picked a costume. The costume she chose was the queen bee costume. She looked so adorable in it! I couldn't be angry at her because of how long she took.

“Mala and Eli you should both go out trick or treating!! Your friend's mom is here!” My mom called out. I pick up my sister and rush to our front door. I quickly tell my mom goodbye and head into Anya's car. Soon enough, we were trick or treating. The beautiful autumn leaves were falling all over the place and in my hair. I have my candy basket in my hands and I'm already trying to get my sister and friend to start trick or treating immediately. We were all laughing and laughing, having the funnest time ever. I really wish I could relive that night over and over.

## The Library of HORROR! By Ryan Scott

### **Prologue 15 years ago**

“The wolf ate Little Red Riding Hood. But just then, a hunter came, looked in the window and saw the wolf. He pulled out his gun and shot the wolf and he saved Grandma and Red Riding Hood. The end”.

“What did you think of that story, sweetie?” “I didn’t really like it Mommy,” said Heather. Heather was two at the time and it was a week before Halloween so her mother was reading her fairy tales. I’m sorry you didn’t like it, sweetheart.”. Goodnight then.” Heather’s mother turned off the light and left.

“Hey honey?” “Yeah?” “When do you think we will have to break it to her?”

“What do we have to break to her again?”

“She’s going to have to face him like I did. It won’t be for a long time if it happened to you when you were 17.”

“I know, but she won’t be able to do it.”

### **15 years later**

Heather was now 17 and finished her school day at high school. She started walking home, thinking, *man this day sucked. Well at least I can go home and relax,* but then she got a text saying

“Heather, you are so close to the Southington Library. I need you to go pick up a book for me”.

“Oh my god! Doesn’t she know what I’ve been through today?” Heather complained. She shoved her phone back into her sweatshirt and tossed up her hood. As she turned back around to the library she heard a *klink*. Huh. She turned around to find a shiny medallion on the ground with two books on either side with a star in the middle. *Ugh, stupid necklace medallion thingy. Why do I have to wear you everyday? Why does my mom make me wear you everyday of my dang life? You’re so uncomfortable and itchy and-*” she stopped and looked closer at the medallion. The medallion was glowing purple in the center of the star. “What the... why is it purple?” exclaimed Heather in the most confused voice ever. “I’m just gonna put this back on and walk away and act like this never happened and go to the library. Heather put the medallion back on and walked to the library to get her mother’s book.

When she walked into the library she smelled the smell of old books and fresh books and she thought, *this is boring. What does Mom want me to pick up? Some stupid romance novel?* She knew the desk was right next to the entrance but due to work on the roof and them accidentally falling through the roof, the path was blocked so she had to go through the kids books. She walked around some more, trekking through the rows and shelves of books. But then she walked into the fairy tales row. “Nope. I hate fairytales. No thank you.” She walked into the next row but there wasn’t one. “That’s odd, I could’ve sworn there was another row here.” She walked the other way but there were two library carts there in her way. “Uhhhhhh weird. I would’ve heard that moving. Those are the noisiest things on earth. She started to climb up one of the carts but then heard a Ka-Thunk! She turned around, got off the cart and looked at what had fallen. It was a book and the book was flipped to the second to last page where a wolf was dressed up as a grandma eating a small black haired girl that looked exactly like Heather but with a red sweatshirt. The book was Little Red Riding Hood.

“This is getting weird and I don’t like it”. She turned to go onto the carts again but the carts were not there. Heather had seen enough horror movies to know what was going to happen. She would walk the way where the obstacle vanished and then would get eaten alive so she turned to go through the fairy tales section. She walked down the aisle of the fairy tales, nervous something would happen. She was almost to the end when “Howl!” She froze suddenly knowing what that sound was. She turned and saw a wolf dressed like a grandma with blood smeared all over its mouth and razor sharp teeth. The expression on its face said, “Ooooh another girl to eat and she looks exactly like Red Riding Hood. Yummy”.

Heather made a beeline for the end of the aisle. She could hear the sound of the wolf behind her running on all four legs. Heather kept running down the aisle which started to turn and go up and down “What kind of place is this?!” yelled Heather who was crying tears of anxiety. Her heart was pounding and she was wearing an *I’m going to die* face. She thought this would never end but then she ran into the stairs face first. *THWACK*. “Ow!” yelled Heather. She fell down on her back. She looked back. The wolf wasn't there. She got back up, vision a little blurry.

She went up the stairs, one step, two steps. She was almost up when something grabbed her. She turned her head and saw the wolf clutching her shoulder. It pulled her back and opened its mouth, teeth blood red, face still smeared with blood. But instead of eating her he growled, “You're a weak one this will be easy”. He then threw her up onto the second floor and she crashed to the floor with a big *CRACK* on her right arm. It felt so sore that it would fall off.

Suddenly a quick flash of gray bolted up from the stairway and pounced down onto the ground, sending a gust of wind that knocked all the bookshelves down, forming a half of a circle barrier around them. It looked like spikes coming from the ground because they were also at an acute angle. The quick flash of gray was the wolf still dressed up as the grandma “So, you're the new one I’ve been hearing about”. “What are you?!?” asked Heather, slowly backing away “What? I showed you.” He put out his hand and suddenly with a popping sound the book, *Little Red Riding Hood* was in his paw and he chucked it to Heather. It fell to the ground with a thunk and flipped to the page where you could see the wolf. He was just himself, not dressed up as grandma but this time with a black robe and blood red eyes. He was holding a cracked skull in his hand and her medallion on the forehead of the skull. The skull was cracked because the medallion was shoved into the skull. “What the...” Heather stuttered as she checked around her neck.

“Looking for this?” Suddenly the wolf threw the medallion like a chakram straight for Heather's forehead. It hit but Heather felt no pain. The wolf kneeled down and the books started swirling around him. Heather's heart was beating as fast as a cheetah right now. She could not escape the stairs that were behind the wolf who was fully surrounded by the swirling books. He was doing something and that something didn’t look good. Heather's only option was to jump off the balcony and pray that she would live. So she took a big breath and jumped but right as she jumped “WHOOSH” a giant gust of wind blew her off the balcony. She was screaming her lungs out and saw a glimpse of the wolf just as she was just about to crash head first. A yellowish portal appeared right before her eyes. She flew right into the portal and was inside one of the offices upstairs, the ones behind the wolf. “WHAT THE -Mmmph,” her mouth was suddenly covered by someone's hand. She looked at that someone and that someone was her mother.



“Mom!” yelled Heather. “Shhh” shushed her mom. She pointed to the window. Heather looked out of the window and saw the area where the wolf had trapped her and Heather. The bookshelves were still knocked down. Books were either ripped or in a big floppy mess. In the middle of all that mess, there was the wolf with a black robe, blood red eyes tramping around. It looked annoyed that Heather had disappeared. It turned in their direction and Heather and her mother crouched down so it could not see them.

“Come on,” whispered her mom. Heather's mom led her into a vent in the office. She climbed in and Heather followed. “Mom! What is going on? I thought you wanted some dang romance novel!” yelled Heather. “Heather, will you be quiet for one second?” Heather's mother opened a secret latch in the vent system which they both climbed into. “There is an exit this way through the vents. It's the exit near all the computers.” said her mom. “Come on, we can escape.” “OK,” Heather said cautiously. They reached the exit of the vent. They looked for the wolf which was not there. They opened the exit door. Heather sprinted to the outside but then all of a sudden she froze right before her foot could even get out the door. She started feeling weird. Her hands started shaking. She looked down at her legs. One of them was turning purple and then it felt like her head exploded and then she started to black out “Heather!” exclaimed her mother. “Don't pass out on me. Don't fall asleep. Don't-” and then Heather was gone.

When Heather woke up she found herself in a lair of some kind. Her hands were chained to a wall behind her and the chains were purple. Right in front of her was the wolf and behind him was Heather's mother lying on the ground dead with blood pouring out of her. There was a bloody sickle right next to her. “So you figured you could just waltz right out of here and not have to fight me? Well, no. You can't,” said the wolf mockingly. “What do you want with me?” growled Heather. “Oh, it's quite complicated but I'll put it into a few words. Her soul is mine.” growled the wolf. He pointed to Heather's dead mother. The wolf clapped his hands and Heather's mother started to float. Blue light started shooting out from her and to the wolf's hand. The wolf started absorbing the blue and then he blew out purple back to the corpse. The corpse started to turn black and then Heather's mom stood up. She had yellow eyes and her body was now darkish purple. She stood there like a motionless puppet. “What the...? Why is she-” “She is now under my control,” snarled the wolf. “Now, if you will excuse me.” The wolf put his hand near Heather's forehead and with a flash he swiped something from her head. It was the medallion which had been thrown into her head like a chakram. “Now let's make this quick,” the wolf said disturbingly. He walked forward to Heather with the medallion in his hands. It was glowing a darkish purple/ He aimed it at Heather's forehead and it shot a darkish purple beam at Heather. Heather dodged out of the way and it hit the wall behind her, breaking her chains “You little runt!” screamed the wolf. He threw an uppercut punch, sending Heather flying and crashing through the ceiling. She ended up in the area where all the tables were and where performances were held. “Oog,” moaned Heather. “If I got a nickel for every time something like this would happen, I would have two nickels. Which isn't a lot, but it's enough.” Heather stood up and then the wolf jumped up from the bottom of the hole and onto the floor Heather was on. Behind him was Heather's mom still in shadow form. “I could only shoot that beam once. Now I have no choice but to fight you!” screamed the wolf. He pulled two sickles from his waist and tossed the medallion back to Heather in a chakram stance. Heather braced for impact but nothing happened and when she looked, the medallion was glowing bright yellow. “NO! It cannot be. You can't be the chosen one. I have fought so many times and no one has gotten this far!” screamed the wolf.

Heather had no idea what he was talking about but then her hands and legs started to shake. She looked at her leg. It was no longer purple but covered with silver. In fact, her whole body was now coated in armor and in her hand was one of the most powerful bows she had ever seen. It had an arrow in it so Heather knew what to do. She pulled back the arrow and shot it at the wolf. The wolf threw his sickles at Heather right as she shot her arrow. The arrow hit both of the sickles, destroying them and then hitting the wolf. It pierced through him. "NOOOOOOOOOOO!" screamed the wolf in a distorted voice and then there was an explosion of purple and the wolf was dead.

"Mom!" Heather shouted. She ran over to her mother who was back to her original self but still dead. Heather was crying at this point because she was scared. She would never see her mother again but when everything seemed lost, the medallion started glowing the brightest yellow anyone would have seen. It shot a yellow beam at Heather's mother and then she started to rise and then she was alive again. They hugged each other so tightly and Heather told her mom everything that happened while she was dead. They picked up the medallion and Heather's mother said some words Heather didn't understand. The medallion shattered, sending a wave of yellow dust across the library "Good riddance to that" joked Heather.

"When I was a little girl, my mother would always bring me here to read me old stories. One day she disappeared while we were here and that's when I ran into the wolf. He did the exact same thing like he did this afternoon but I ended up defeating him with that medallion. I had no idea that you would be the chosen one." "What is the chosen one?" asked Heather. "The chosen one is the person who was sworn to defeat the wolf." Heather and her mother turned around to find a ghost and that ghost was Heather's grandmother.

"Mother, how are you still alive-" stuttered Heather's mother. "Oh I'm not. But you, little one," she pointed to Heather, "have freed my soul from this library and now I can go to the heavens. And you, my daughter, protect this one with all your love but for now, goodbye." And then she was gone. Heather wiped the tears out of her mother's eyes and held her hand. Together they left the library to go back home.

### Spoooooooky Story by Rylee Secondo

It was 3:00 a.m. in Chicago, Illinois and 7 year old Andrew was in his bed sleeping when he heard noises coming from the hallway. He got up, grabbed a flashlight and checked. He did not see anything suspicious but he knew that if he went looking in the living room or kitchen he could find out what was making that noise. He checked his parents' door. It was closed. "Phew," he said, "I can turn on the light." He turned on the light and did not see anything so he turned off the light and thought *I must be imagining this*. When he got back in bed he saw his parents' door was...OPEN!!!! He hesitated as he hid under his covers and cried "My parents are gone"! He was hearing the noises again, this time from his...ROOM!!! He decided to go out on the couch and sleep but when he got out there he saw a random guy on the couch holding up a sign saying COME HERE IF YOU DARE!!!

Obviously, he did not dare but the random guy dropped the sign and jumped through the window and a piece of glass landed on Andrew's foot. He went to his parents' room and they were awake and asking Andrew why he was up and he told them everything that had happened. His parents laughed so hard, they couldn't breathe. Andrew showed them his foot and now his parents knew he was not lying. All three of them went out and checked the whole house. They couldn't find anything.

Randomly, all three of them heard "I CAN HEAR YOU  
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA"

They were creeped out and ran out of the house so fast the parents forgot their shoes! When they got outside, the grass and driveway were filled with spikes and needles so they could not run anywhere! They were trapped!!! It was the morning and they decided to move to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. When they moved they were sleeping perfectly. Now, they know they will never move back to Illinois, Chicago. They set an alarm for intruders every night.

## TRICK OR SCARE by Allie Shea

There once was a girl named Allie who is now haunted. Ding! Dong! Allie rushed to the door in her slippery socks. She almost slipped and fell flat on her back. She yanked the door open making a big bash noise because the door hit the wall. Greeting her friends with a big smile in her costume of her favorite character from star wars, Rey and a plastic pumpkin trick or treat bucket. Allie bent down and put on her brown fleece boots. She was so excited because this was finally the year of trick or treating with just her friends and with no parents. Allie was also excited because she loved trick or treating in Southington because her whole neighborhood decorates their whole house and hands out giant candies. She remembered to look both ways when crossing the road and not go past Kelley School. She slid through the door with a huge smile greeting her bestfriends, Birdie, Gianna, and Brianna. Allie and her friends were so excited they dashed down the stairs with Allie and her friends chuckling.

As she and her friends walked by each house of her neighborhood they saw how cool the decorations were. One house had a ten legged spider on the roof. Allie hated spiders. It was her greatest fear. There was also a hired clown walking the driveway and skeletons hanging from the roof with some little decorations hanging on the door .Another house had holograms of bats and spiders projected on the driveway. Allie's neighborhood is super close. They all know everyone and everybody plays together.

She and her friends love to hang out together; they all don't like Halloween [scary things]. Allie and her friends love sports. They all play at least one sport. They also all like to do art and to create things. They all are 9 or 10 and they think the same way and get along. Allie was excited because she got to go to a house that gives out mega sized candy but the only way to get there is to pass a haunted mansion and Allie hates scary things but she decided she would face her fear.

She was regretting passing the haunted mansion but she was already on the street so she couldn't turn back now. Eventually she was one door away, constantly regretting crossing the mansion's street. So Allie and her friends walked like a snail in nervousness. Bumps covered all the girls' skin. Once they got to the driveway, she started sprinting to cross the driveway with her friends watching. Gianna, Birdie, and Brainna look like slow motion in their perspective of her foot dragging on top of a sharp rock. The rock made Allie's leg kick up to her waist, making the rock jump across the rest of the driveway and making the top of her body make a straight line. Soon enough Allie's legs make a straight line with her body too and makes her back hit the ground and and her legs end up twisted in a knot.

She looked back to her friends to try to get help but Allie realized they weren't there. She started to panic. She tried to get up but she couldn't . Allie saw a tiny black shadow figure with a string attached to it. She soon realized it was a... SPIDER! Allie screamed for help but nobody heard her. She tried to stand up but it seemed she couldn't. She also tried to wiggle and shimmy out of the way. But Allie felt she was woven in a spider web so she pushed her neck down and saw white silk going back and forth on her. The spider slowly approached her. It was purple and hair. It looked like eight eyes that she stared into, it made Allie zone out. The spider had eight legs but her head was spinning so she saw 16 legs in blur. The spider's eyes started to get wider and it started pouring out thick green sticky goo onto Allie "Gross"! Allie whined in disgust. Allie tried to stop looking into the spider's eyes but it looked like a bunch of lost souls floating around. *Wait don't I have my extra scissor pair that everyone makes fun of me for?* she thought. Allie wiggled her arm down to her pocket and pulled down a mini pair of scissors and

put her thumb into it. Allie started to point the scissors up, moving her thumb and finger back and forth slowly cutting into the silk cutting it.

Allie was haunted to that day.

## The Ghost of Me! by Liliana Skinnon

It was a windy October afternoon in Southington, CT, and everyone was getting their Halloween costumes ready. Cowgirls, cowboys, football players, Wonder women and maybe even a pig. Here I was sitting on my bed without a costume.

Ring Ring! It's Jessica, what does she want? I didn't answer. It is probably not important. Ding! What now? Jessica, again. I look down to see two texts from her. *What are you being for Halloween? I'm being a cowgirl.*

*Halloween?* I thought *Who cares about Halloween? I am not going* and I clicked send.

She texted me back right away, *What are you talking about?*

*What do you mean?* I answered. *What am I talking about? Halloween is stupid and people just dress up in little costumes, say trick or treat, and get a little piece of candy. Sometimes people give out little boxes of raisins.* I clicked SEND.

DING... it's Jessica, *Whatever, if you don't want to hang out with your friends and make memories then don't, BYE.*

Wow, I thought. Sassy much? Whatever... I'm going to go to bed, but I keep wondering why so many people even like Halloween? As I toss and turn, I look to my nightstand to see what time it is. 11:30!? What!? Good night!

Da-da-da-ding...da-da-da-ding... Yawn, what time is it!? 3:30 in the morning! Why did my alarm go off at 3:30 in the morning? That's weird, I grab my phone and my alarm says that it never went off. That's really creepy: it's Friday the 13th!

Meanwhile, little did I know that there was a small girl standing at the end of my bed frame. She looked exactly like me, except for the scratches along her arms. Her mascara was running down her eyes like drops from a waterfall. I was so frightened and I thought that I was in a nightmare. Her mouth opened and she whispered, "how could you ruin my holiday? Halloween is the best holiday in the hall of fame of holidays."

I was brave enough to actually reply, but was this even real? My sister was probably fooling around with me. "Excuse me what." I bravely said.

"I know what you said to our friend or is that what I should call her? I am going to make a deal with you, OK? If you do dress up for Halloween you don't have to come with me but if you don't dress up you are coming with me." Said the weird ghost.

"Fine but come back tomorrow morning so I can think about my decision ." I said.

"Deal." said the ghost but when it was talking to me it started to glow then... Poof. It vanished.

I opened my eyes, looked around my room and didn't have a good feeling about the day ahead. First of all, that "weird little ghost" is definitely coming back. And then out of nowhere, "Boo! Ahh!"

I jumped out of my sheets. "You're here, wow! How long have you been watching me"?

"I have been here since you went to bed" says the ghost. "That is what we do in ghost town" The ghost said in a creepy voice.

"Well, that is not what we do in the town of Southington." I responded.

"Well, what is your decision" ? asked the ghost.

I hesitated and answered out of fear "I will come with you." But what if this isn't my sister and I'm about to risk my life.

"OK, let's go, hop on."

“Hop on? Hop on what?”

“My back.”

“OK.”

And there we went. We zoomed in between the tree branches, just like it was a cat chasing a mouse. Before I knew it, we were there. It just looked like a normal house. In fact, it was Jessica's house. It was Jessica all along! I told the ghost to stop. Well actually, I told Jessica to stop where we were.

“Jessica, I know it's you.”

“What? What are you talking about, I'm not Jessica. I am the ghost that haunts you in your nightmares,” Jessica scrambled around her words trying to talk. “I was just trying to trick or treat with you because I really like to trick or treat with you. It is really fun!”

”OK , I will trick or treat with you, but we are twinning because I love your costume.”

“OK, deal!” Jessica responded.

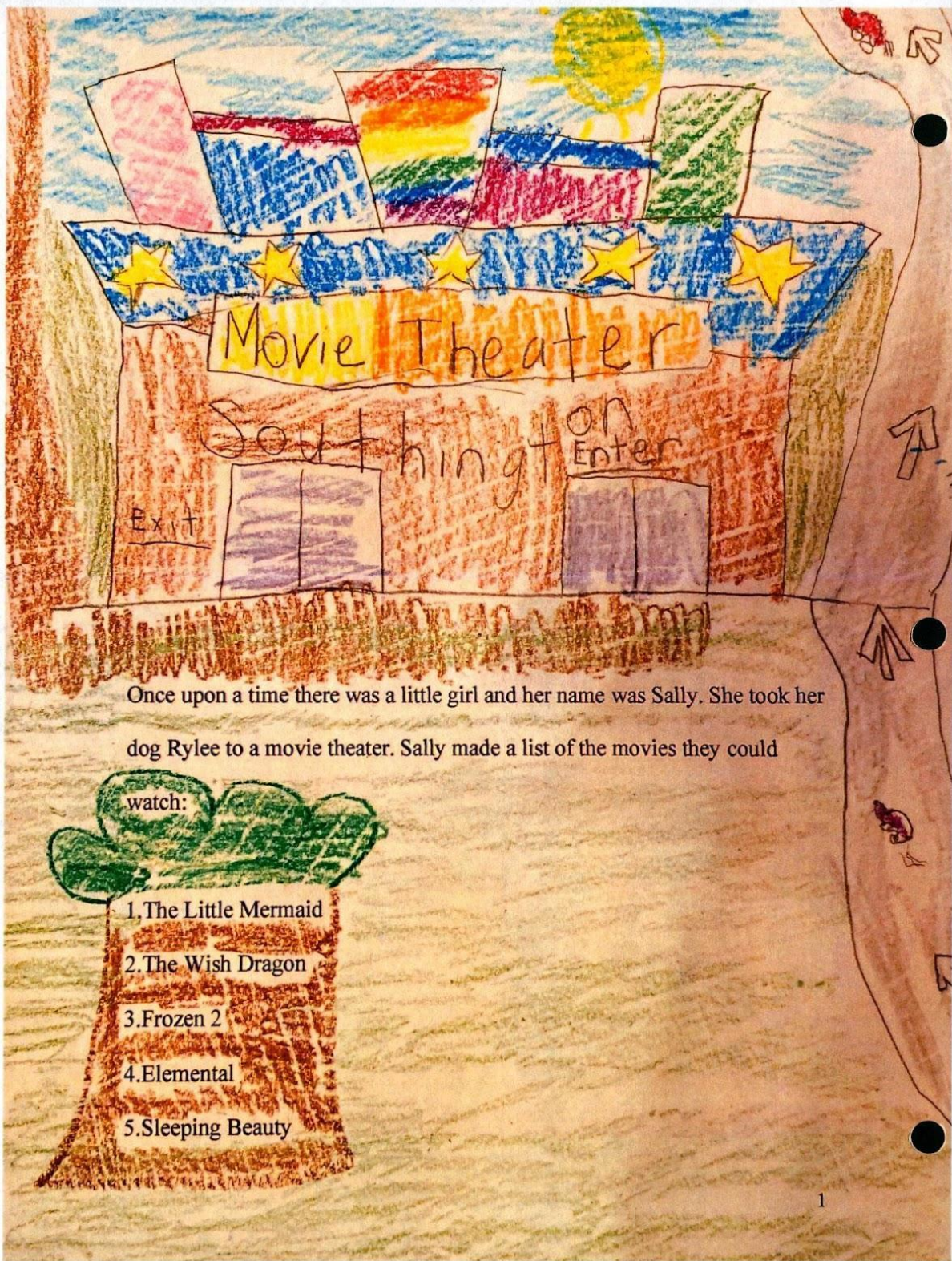
In the end everything turned out to be OK, and ever since we have been trick or treating.



Sally and Rylee Go to the Movies by Mia St. Pierre







Once upon a time there was a little girl and her name was Sally. She took her dog Rylee to a movie theater. Sally made a list of the movies they could watch:

1. The Little Mermaid
2. The Wish Dragon
3. Frozen 2
4. Elemental
5. Sleeping Beauty





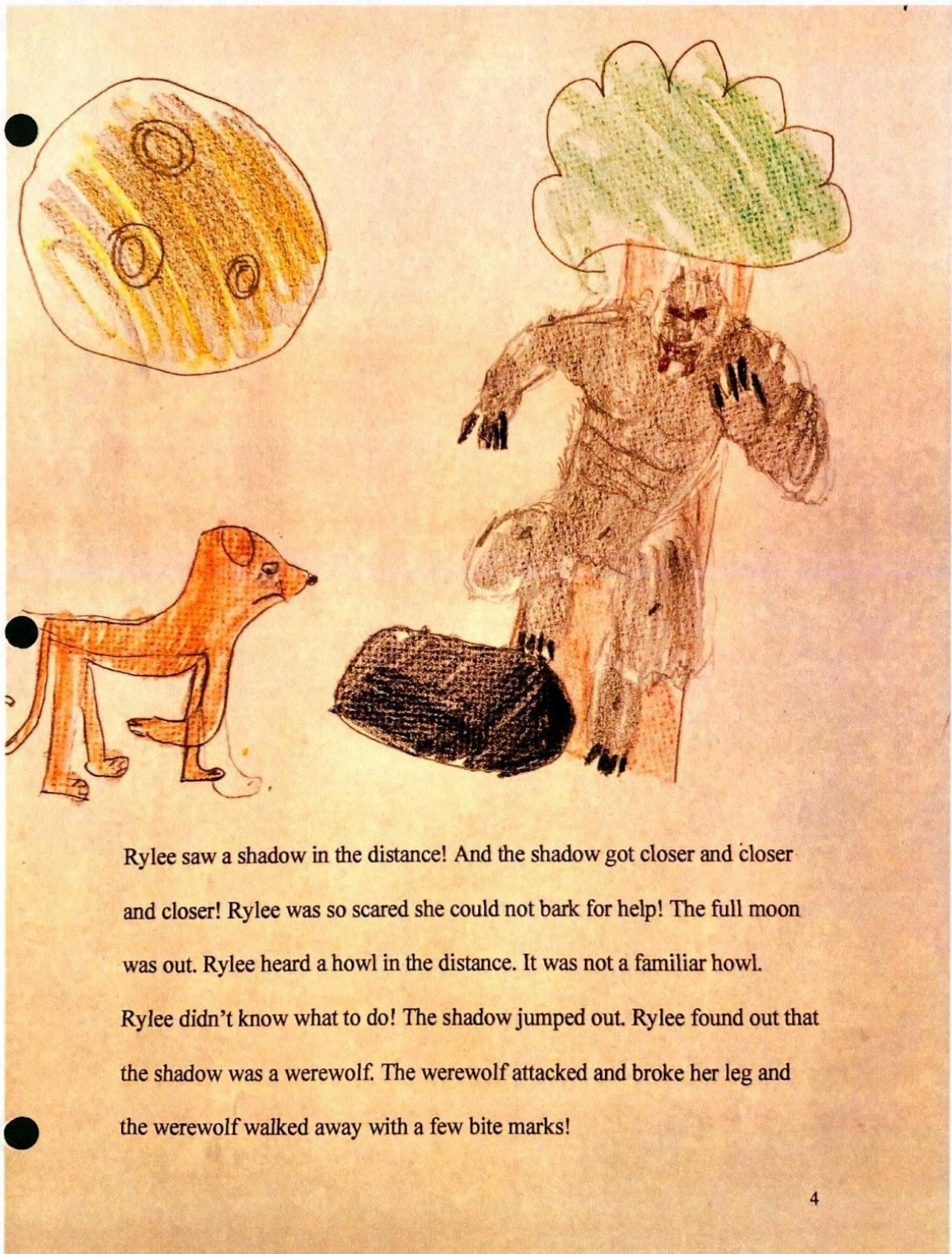
Sally picked *The Little Mermaid*. It was one of her favorites. Sally's Mom booked the tickets before they left the house and gave them some money for snacks. They got some popcorn and cotton candy then headed to their seats. The intros started, then the movie started. As the movie started to go on, the fireworks part happened. Rylee was frightened! Rylee ran to the exit.





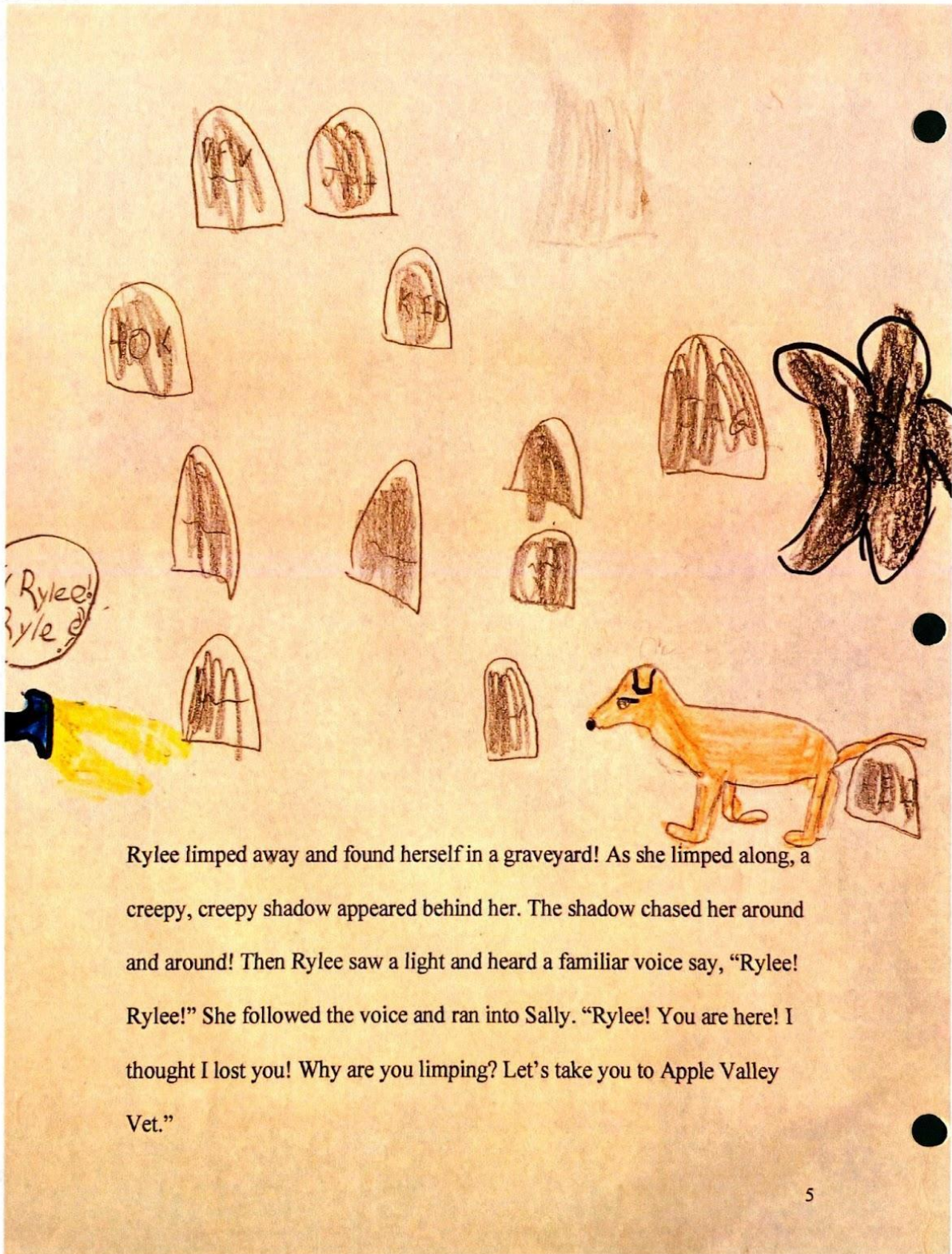
Then someone opened the door and came in the theater. Rylee dashed out the door. Rylee could still hear the fireworks from outside the building, so she went a little farther. Then Rylee made her way into the woods.





Rylee saw a shadow in the distance! And the shadow got closer and closer and closer! Rylee was so scared she could not bark for help! The full moon was out. Rylee heard a howl in the distance. It was not a familiar howl. Rylee didn't know what to do! The shadow jumped out. Rylee found out that the shadow was a werewolf. The werewolf attacked and broke her leg and the werewolf walked away with a few bite marks!





Rylee limped away and found herself in a graveyard! As she limped along, a creepy, creepy shadow appeared behind her. The shadow chased her around and around! Then Rylee saw a light and heard a familiar voice say, "Rylee! Rylee!" She followed the voice and ran into Sally. "Rylee! You are here! I thought I lost you! Why are you limping? Let's take you to Apple Valley Vet."





Sally carried her to the vet and the vet fixed her leg up. "Rylee, do you promise to stay with me? And if you get scared, jump in my lap and I will keep you safe, ok?" And Rylee wags her tail! "Lets go home and eat some dinner and play some fetch and take a sunset walk."

The End.

## Halloween by Abigail Sutter

### **October 31, 1943: The First Victim**

Squash! The pumpkin flew into a million pieces. Grab! All the candy was emptied out of the bucket under the sign that read “take one.” Swoosh! Toilet paper flew over the trees of peoples houses. “It’s Halloween!” a 15 year old boy yelled as he threw the last of the toilet paper. He turned to walk away when he saw something terrifying! He screamed and ran but the next day, he was reported missing.

“Come on. Live. Live!” A 14 year old girl, Alora said in a playful voice. Her little sister, Ariel, who is 10, rose from the couch and made a fake zombie voice. “My creation is ALIVE!” Alora continued. Her little sis started to playfight with her older sister. “Wait, why are you attacking me?” Alora said in a playful voice. “I created you!” Just as Alora was about to continue her mom yelled “Girls! Time for dinner!”

Just as their mom yelled to them, Alora and Ariel ran to the kitchen, smelling the scent of freshly made pasta with hamburg and the perfect seasoning of pepper and salt. They sit down eagerly ready to munch down on the buffet in front of them. “Yes!” Alora yelled excitedly while winding up pasta with her fork. “You always make the best pasta,” Alora continued. “Thanks honey,” their mom said as she patted Alora’s and Ariel’s head.

“Eat up, buttercups,” her mother continued. Buttercup was a nickname for Alora and Ariel.

After the filling event of dinner, Alora set off to go to bed. “Mom, can you tuck me in?” Alor asked.

“Yes honey, coming,” their mom said, as she followed Alora and Ariel to the bed. Their mom turned on their nightlight and kissed them goodnight. *I’ll never get too old for this*, Alora thought, staring at the ceiling filled with stars from the nightlight. She took out her phone and looked at the video playing. It was called “spooky sighting ghost takes kid at night.”

Obviously, Alora didn’t believe for a second that ghosts are real, but something grabbed her attention. In the making of this fake ghost video, she saw something behind them. It was hard to make out but she couldn’t ignore the horrific face of this thing, a wide open mouth, practically drooling. *Ew*, Alora thought, *probably just another fake ghost to freak people out. But, why would it be so hard to see then?* Alora thought again. With the thought in her head, she fell asleep. Bang! She heard a huge bang, she looked up, and saw a black shadow scramble up the dresser at the end of the bed. Alora screamed.

She heard her mom run up the stairs. While she did that, the figure got closer and closer and...Swoosh! The door flew open and the figure was nowhere to be seen. “You okay buttercup?” Alora’s mom asked. Alora nodded, while shaking a bit. *Must have been a bad dream*, Alora thought. She couldn’t shake the feeling, and some part of her wanted to go outside and that’s what she did. She snuck past her mom and out the door with a flashlight. She just wanted to look around a bit. The monster she saw was there again. She got chills all through her body. The figure didn’t move, nor did Alora. Soon the creature twitched and ran to her. When it was an inch away from her, Alora woke up. It was a dream Alora thought. As soon as she got out of bed for dinner, it grabbed her foot.

## Coraline Laz by Julia Swift

It was the year 1968, on Pleasant Street, in Southington.

It was Halloween night. The day that would change everything. That day there was a chance of a bad storm. Coraline was out trick or treating with a few friends. Katey, Emily, Mary and her. They were going to a Halloween party. Coraline's mom had to go to the airport to drop their dad off and would be staying in a hotel for a night. Coraline's mom offered her to come but she said there was the biggest Halloween party going on tonight.

"Come on girls." Katey said, holding the door for them. It started to rain a bit. That night the girls partied and partied, until... It started thundering and lighting outside.

"Sorry guys, I have to go. I promised my mom I would be home by 9:00." Emily said.

"Yeah I should probably leave before this gets worse." Katey and Coraline stayed a little longer.

"We should head out. I promised my mom we would be back at 9:30." Coraline said.

"Fine. Katey said, rolling her eyes.

Coraline and Katey ran home since it was pouring out.

"Hurry." Coraline said, holding the door for Katey.

"Coming! Coming!" Katey yelled. Coraline and Katey went upstairs to Coraline's room and shut the door.

"Should we go trick or treating?" Katey asked.

"What? No. It's thundering and lighting". Coraline replied. The lights flickered a few times.

"Is th-the power going out?" Coraline muttered.

"Maybe, I mean we have to go to bed anyway".

"But, I can't sleep without a light on." Coraline got scared.

"You baby, we'll be fine." Katey said hopping in bed.

They tried to go to bed to get their mind off of what was happening.

"Coraline, I'm hungry. Can we go and get food?" Katey said with a quieter voice.

Coraline didn't answer.

"I guess I will go down alone." Katey turned on a flashlight and headed down stairs to see if there was any food.

Knock! Knock! Katey heard a knock on the door. Katey ran upstairs to tell Coraline what had happened. It was around 10:30 pm. "Coraline!"Coraline!"Katey yelled, pushing Coraline so she would wake up.

"What?" Coraline whispered.

"Someone's at the door, someone's at the door!" Katey had a flashlight still in her hand pointing it at Coraline. The room was pitch black except for the flashlight.

"What do you mean someone is at the door!" Coraline started getting nervous. Her mom wasn't gonna be home until the next morning and Katey's mom is out of town.

The girls ended up falling back to sleep.

*Knock!Knock!* Someone knocked again. Except it was longer. They kept on knocking for 10 seconds.

"What's that noise?" Coraline said.

"The knocking I heard earlier." Katey replied. They were silent for a second. Coraline texts her mom, but there was no reply since it was so late.



They heard footsteps downstairs.

“Hurry get to the closet, we'll hide there.” Coraline said quickly but quietly. They opened the closet door and hid behind the clothes on the ground. The footsteps started getting closer.

“Coraline, we can't stay here.” Katey said tiredly. The footsteps were coming upstairs.

“We can't leave. It's dark and we'll barely even see anything.” Coraline said with a bit of anger. More knocking came, but it was on the bedroom door instead.

***Hello, little girls. I'm not gonna hurt you, the voice said.***

“AHH!” Both of the girls screamed but covered their mouths after.

“Katey ran out of the closet out the door and down the stairs.

“Katey, don't!” Coraline screamed.

***BOOM!*** Katey fell to the ground.

“NO KATEY!” Coraline screamed with all her might, grabbed her flashlight and ran out to see Katey on the bottom of the stairs.

“KAtEy!” Coraline's eyes were watering. The flashlight was pointing right at her dead body face first to the ground. Coraline slowly kneeled down to the ground and looked up.

***Kaboom!*** The thunder struck. Coraline's eyes started to shut until it was totally black.

That night both Katey Spares And Coraline Laz were found not breathing. Coraline Laz from shock and Katey Spares? Not sure how she stopped breathing.

### **The Skeleton Skat by Amelia Taricani**

Once upon a time there was an itsy bitsy skeleton hiding in a plant. When some trick or treaters walked by he said “BLEH blah blah”. The trick or treaters ran away and dropped their candy buckets so Skeleton ate all of their candy. Now the itsy bitsy skeleton was a BIG skeleton. The candy made him grow, it must be magic!

Big Skeleton got his friends Spooky Ghost, Creepy Monster and Baby Vampire and he told them to hide too. When the grown ups walked by, all the friends jumped out and said “BOO”! The grown ups dropped their candy and ran away. Spooky Ghost, Creepy Monster and Baby Vampire ate all the candy and now they were big too. The friends kept scaring trick or treaters and eating so much candy that now they were the biggest and scariest in the whole world! The big group of friends drank lots of coffee, took pictures and knocked everything down. It was fun being big.

## The Tent of Nightmares by Madison Taylor

Me, Sam and my friends James, Charlie, and Evan were sitting at the lunch table at Charilson Middle School. This girl was handing out papers for the Apple Harvest. It has finally come, it only happens once a year and there is so much good food and games!

“Óh there is something new at the carnival this year, it's the Tent of nightmares that sounds cool”! Said James.

“Do you guys wanna go with me tomorrow”? I said.

“Sure let's go Sam!” said Evan.

It was the next day and me and my friends were going to meet at the Ferris wheel. “Oh hi guys” I said. Everyone was here,

“I'm kind of scared...” said Evan.

“It's going to be fine, scaredy cat!” Said Charlie. We walked into the tent and there was this creepy guy at the counter...

“Here's the money sir” I said, kind of scared.

“I don't need money, the price is your fear.” He said

“That was creepy” Evan said in a creeped out voice.

“Let's just go in!” I said trying to be brave.

### **Chapter 1: Sam's Point of View**

Suddenly everyone was gone. I was by myself when I heard a clown, my worst nightmare.. “Go away, I know it's a prank!” I said hoping it was. I looked around trying to look for a door but it was just an empty room with nothing in it. “Let me be!” I screamed.

Then I saw a creepy clown staring at me just standing there. Doing nothing else but staring. “Hello,” I said in a soft voice. He just came closer. I closed my eyes hoping it was just a dream but it wasn't. It was real and he was here. Then I saw another clown come from behind his back like it was there the whole time just waiting to come out.

I started crying as quietly as I could, so they wouldn't know I was scared. But they knew I was scared. He walked even closer to me as if he could touch my arm. I tried to stay as still as I could hoping they couldn't see me. I stepped backwards trying to move away as slow as I could so they wouldn't notice. “I'm not scared anymore, hurt me I don't care!” I yelled. Then they were gone.

### **Chapter 2: Evan's Point of View**

The last thing I heard was Sam saying “let's go in!” Now I was in a room with nothing in it except me. “Hello anyone there?” I yelled. Then I saw the walls closing in, my worst fear was coming true. “I am scared,” I said in a nervous voice. The walls were closing in slowly, and that was the scariest part. A slow death that's my second greatest fear, My greatest fear was being in small rooms. I could barely stand up in the room “Please stop” I whined.

Then I heard a voice “This will all go away when you're not scared anymore.” The walls were so close I couldn't even put my arms out.

Then I heard the voice again, "I'll give you one more chance or you will be trapped in this room for the rest of your life." He said.

"Who even are you?" I said hoping he would answer.

"I'm your worst nightmare" he said in a scary voice. Now I was really scared, and I also had a lot of questions.

"Fine I'll say it, I'm not scared anymore!" Then the walls went back to normal and the voice was gone..

### **Chapter 3: James' Point of View**

The last thing I heard was Sam saying "Let's go in!" Then everyone was gone and I was by myself. My socks started getting soggy, water was filling the room. My greatest fear was coming true, thalassophobia. (Thalassophobia Is the fear of rising or deep water.)

Then I remembered when the guy at the counter said "The price is your fear" That must mean I have to face my fear, but how am I supposed to do that!? The water keeps on rising and rising, "What should I do?" I said out loud.

"I told you to face your fear" The voice said.

Is that the guy from the counter? I said in my head.

"Why does it matter?" The voice again. The water in the room kept on getting higher and higher, I almost was floating off the ground. Why was this happening and why to me, also where is everyone else? I said in a confused voice in my head. This time the voice didn't respond, I was surprised, that guy talks a lot.

"Fine, do really want me to say it fine! Just joking funny right, can I go now?" I could barely breathe the water is up to my throat.

"Fine, I'm not scared anymore!" The water stopped rising and all of it was gone..

### **Chapter 4: Charlie's Point of View**

The last thing I heard was Sam saying "Let's go in!" Then everyone was gone, I was by myself in an empty room. I thought about what the man at the counter said, "The price is your fear." I kept thinking about that until I heard a chirp from a cricket.

"Umm what was that?" I said out loud knowing no one could hear me. Then I felt something on my back.. I knew what it was but I wish I didn't know. I flicked it off my back and looked at the floor all covered in bugs. I yelled as loud as I could "Help!!!"

Then I heard James voice, "Is that you Charlie?"

"Yes please help me!" I yelled.

"All you have to do is say "I'm not scared anymore, then it will all go away" James yelled.

"I can't!" I yelled. Then I couldn't hear his voice. He probably left, I said in my head. I tried my best to stay still, but bugs were climbing up my leg. I wanted to run but I knew it would make it worse to move around. I kept on wondering if the bugs would bite me. Would they hurt me? I thought. I had so many questions about what was happening and why. The bugs

were all over me, almost on my face. I tried to shake them off my body but it only got a little off. I wanted to yell I wasn't scared but I wouldn't mean it so it probably wouldn't work.

"You have to mean it" a voice said. Ok now I mean it I just want this to end.

"I am scared I can't do it!" I screamed. Then all the bugs crawled off of me and went through a crack in the wall.

## **Chapter 5: Getting Stuck!**

Then all of a sudden we were all in the same room. Me (Sam) and Evan, Charlie and James were all back. "What happened!?" Yelled Evan.

"I don't know the last thing I heard is Sam saying "Let's go in!" Said Charlie.

"Wait did you guys hear that voice too?" James said.

"Yes I did, I think it was the guy at the counter who was talking to us." I said.

"How about we just forget about what happened and just finish the day." Said James like nothing happened.

"Wait, it's Tuesday?" We came on Thursday, we were here for 5 days." Yelled Charlie.

"Omg how is that possible?. This is the last day of the apple harvest" I yelled.

"Let's just finish the last day, " said Evan.

We went to the Ferris wheel and at the ground of the stand was the man who was at the counter. "Here's four tickets," I said.

"Here you go kids have a fun time." He said. We all walked by but the guy said something to Charlie. "You never faced your fear, watch your back." He said.

"What did he say to you Charlie?" James said.

"Uhh uh umm he said to have a nice time!" Said Charlie.

"Really?" Said Evan.

"Yep totally" said Charlie. We all were sitting on the Ferris wheel, when it started moving.

## **Chapter 6: Is She Delusional?**

"Guys I need to tell you something, I didn't face my fear."

"What that means something bad will happen to us or you!!!" I said.

"I just couldn't. It was too scary for me." Said Charlie.

"You're usually the brave one!" James said.

Suddenly the ride stopped and we were stuck. Then we heard an announcement, "The park is closing, get off the rides everyone." We looked around and nobody was on it except us. "Why did it stop?" We were up there for 2 days sitting there.

Finally we saw somebody cleaning up the rides. We all yelled "Please help us, we're stuck!!" He looked up and then got a ladder to help us down.

"Those were the worst two days of my life!" Said Charlie.

"Let's just go home. I will call my mom to pick us up." I closed my eyes and opened them, suddenly I was in my bed laying down. I looked at my clock and it was 2:00 PM.

"What happened, I knew it was real. It has to be!" I said. I ran over to my phone and texted my friends and they said nothing happened. "Am I going crazy?!" I yelled in my head.

I walked down stairs and looked at the TV and saw the guy who was at the counter for the tent of nightmares. He was on the news announcing that there is a new feature at the Apple Harvest, the tent of nightmares..

## **GONE MISSING by Gabriella Vassar**

The wind whistled, leaves blew, thunder boomed. *!CRACK!* ‘Lighting struck. It was a stormy night in Southington, CT. Luna yelped at the door. I sighed. “Alright! Let's go girl! We gotta make it a quick one! It's raining!” I exclaimed. I hooked the leash on her, I opened the old creaky slider door, then closed it, and set off outside. I walked out onto the grass in the backyard. Luna tugged on the leash to go to the front of the house. I ran around the side of our big old yellow house and then let her sniff around.

*BOOM!* Thunder hit, and it sounded like a big stampede of elephants. Luna pulled me over to the bushes in the front of our house. Luna did her business. Then I ran around to the back of the house and ran inside cold and wet. I slammed the slider door shut just as Luna hopped in over the little stair. I quickly grabbed a rag and wiped Luna's body, paws, snout, ears, and tail. I unhooked her from the leash and she ran to her bed.

*BOOM!* Thunder hit again. I could tell that the rain was starting to calm down. I checked the time. “Only 6:00!?” I said, talking to myself. ”Ugh! Only 3 more hours until mom and dad get home! Being home alone is the WORST. *RUMBLE.* The rain had stopped now, the sky was still as dark as the TV, but I was fine with that. I hit the UNPAUSE button on the remote. The show starts playing. ”Yeah well, you shouldn't have done that! I'M LEAVING! GOODBYE MARTIN!!!” the TV screeched. I turned the volume down. “ See You On Another Episode of Drama Mama.....” I turned off the TV.

I looked outside. There was no more thunder. No more lighting. Just the bright stars. I glanced at the sky once more and thought to myself, “ I should probably get some fresh air and gaze at the stars!!” I got up and opened the slider door, I walked outside, then shut it with a *SLAM!* I skipped the little stair and then grabbed a little porch chair and set it aside from the bushes. I sat down and tucked my arms into my hoodie. I could see one star glowing brighter than the others. Maybe it was the north star, you never know.

“Eh this is boring, and I am cold,” I thought to myself. I got up and untucked my arms, and they went back into my sleeves.

“Hehehehehe!” a strange voice echoed around the big oak tree.

“Hmm? I must just be hearing things,” I said to myself.

“Come here Dancia....Hehehehehehe!” The strange voice echoed again.

“Wait, what!? How do you know my name!???” I said as my heart skipped a beat.

“DanciAaAa! Danica! Come to the big Oak tree... DaNcIA!” The strange voice echoed again.

I don't know why but something told me to walk over to the big oak tree in the front of my house.

“Hmm, Nothing! Yeah totally things in my head!!” I turned around and started to walk away from the oak tree.” I mean I'm tired and-” I stopped in my tracks as it felt like something had just tickled my shoulder. I turned around and nothing had changed except for an oval shaped mirror with doll heads glued to the top. It felt like a tight rope around my stomach was pulling me to the mirror.

“Danciaaaaa,” the strange voice said again.

I closed my eyes, and when I opened them I was face to face with the mirror. Tried moving but couldn't. As I looked at myself in the mirror I saw my eyes were pitch black and you could see my veins through the skin. The longer I looked at myself the tighter that the rope

around my stomach would get. I closed my eyes once more. The rope squeezed so tight I could barely breathe now.

When I opened my eyes I was on the other side of the mirror in a strange room. Blood stains all over the walls. I closed my eyes and sat now and crunched in a ball.

“Danica, it's okay.... Ladeeladee, look over here and I can guide you to safety!” The strange voice said.

I looked up. And all I saw was a doll with something in her hand. She was walking closer and closer to me. I got up and tried to run but there were walls all around me. There was something in the doll's hand. The doll was getting closer. I realized that the something in her hand was a knife. There were no blood stains on it. It was shiny. It showed a reflection of her bloody button eyes and that stitched in frown.

I backed up to the wall. Closed my eyes as she was only about 2 feet away from me now. I prepared for the worst *!Click, Clack, Click, Clack!* her small black Mary Janes went as they hit the floor.

All of a sudden I didn't hear footsteps anymore. I opened one eye to see that there were about thirteen more dolls. Some with shiny knives, some bloody. I opened both eyes as they circled around me. They started getting closer. Now about only one foot away from me. The knives were pointed straight at me. I felt a sharp stab in my left leg. Then my thigh. Then the left leg. I looked down to see that blood was dripping down my leg and the dolls were looking straight up at me. Some tried to jump and stab me in the face. One took a leap to my face and stabbed my cheek. I could smell the blood that was dripping from my cheek now. I fell face forward and that's when everything went black.

3 Days Later...

“*WEEWOOWEEWOO*,” cop sirens burst.

“Where is my daughter!?! Where?! It's been 3 days!” Mother screamed at one of the cops.

“We don't know. We have officers all around town looking for her.” The officer says back.

“I don't care, just find her!” Mother yelled. Dancia has been gone for 3 days now. There was no sign of her. Nothing. It's been in the front cover of the newspaper twice.

Somehow there was a picture of me, my eyes were black and you could see my veins. Dolly :) was written at the bottom of the card. Mom almost fainted when she saw that.

Now there was caution tape all around the house. The night my parents walked in through the door, blood was all over the place. But, they have been sleeping at my grandparents house just a few blocks away. They slept on the couch the night that they came home. They heard little whispers and footsteps. They thought it was a prank. But when the morning came and there was no sign of me they were scared, anxious. They thought maybe I had run away.

But nope, I kinda just died then floated away to a place that the dolls took me.



## The Note by Kaylee Waters

“Are you ready yet?” My older sister, Grace, called to me. I ran down the stairs. Suddenly, my shoes slipped and I fell head first down the stairs. “Izzy!” Grace shouted, running over to me. My legs were flopped over my body, and since I was probably the least flexible person in this world, it hurt *very* badly. I groaned, getting onto my feet.

“Are you okay!?” Grace’s eyes were wide and full of worry. I gave her a weak thumbs up.

“This is what I get for having permanent bad luck, huh?” I grinned. Grace put a hand on my shoulder.

“Oh come on, Izzy, it’s just a coincidence,” she told me. *No it’s not*, I thought. It’s been happening since I was an infant. The first time it happened, I was just trying to crawl onto the slide on the smallest playground ever and lost my footing. I landed on my head, on the wood chips, there was a huge cut for days. Let me tell you, though, that day was the driest day of the year, how could I slip?

“Let’s go pick up Cassie,” Grace grabbed her jacket from the closet.

“Don’t bring your phone, Izzy, it’ll waste our data and I can’t pay more than it is. I’m not bringing mine either. Plus, the wifi doesn’t even work at the Apple Harvest.” I looked at my sweater dress, thinking about what Cass would wear. *Not this, but it’s better than nothing, right?*

I followed Grace to her car. Grace was ten years older than me, twenty four. She barely got her driver’s license because no one was there to help her train. I basically only live with Grace. She pays the bills, and only sometimes do I see Dad. He has to leave for business trips for months usually and Mom lives in a different house. Our house has two floors--surprisingly. Grace works three jobs, just to make enough, even though Dad’s *really* rich, he just has “no money” to help us. He’s too busy spending it on fancy cars that he won’t let Grace have. But then again, he always buys something from his trips and sends it to us.

Once we started moving, I looked outside the window. It was a foggy day out, but a nice temperature. I shivered, turning the A.C. to the left, away from me.

“I have to pick up James on the way,” Grace told me. “So you’re sitting in the back.”

“Why? Because you want to hold his hand?” I teased.

Grace glared at me. James was her fiancé, and they were planning on getting married. He had already proposed.

Soon, we arrived at James’ house. He was already waiting outside, his curly brown hair was swaying in the wind. Grace climbed out of the car. I stepped out of the car and watched them. Grace kissed James and started talking. They walked over to the car and I climbed into the back. I hid so I could give them some privacy--but mostly to eavesdrop.

“Babel!” James suddenly shouted. “We should buy apple fritters!”

“Yes!” I cried. James spun around, like he didn’t know I was there. He pointed at me.

“Isabella is coming?” he asked, turning back to Grace.

I frowned. “I like *Izzy*,” I hissed.

“It’s fine, guys. She’s going to have her own friend, James,” Grace said, squeezing his hand. Plus, you’re going to have to get used to her if we’re getting married.

Later, we arrived at Cass’ house. I jumped out to knock on her door. “CASS!” I shouted. Cassie slowly opened the door, smiling.

“Girl, you *scared* me so bad, I thought you were *dying*!” Cass cried.

I grinned. "Sorry," I pulled her towards the car.

As soon as we hopped into the back, James said, "Great. Now there's two of them." I frowned.

"*We're* going on our own, for your information," I snapped. As much as I loved to see my sister happy, James--to me--is not for her.

James rolled his eyes. We headed towards the Apple Harvest. "Can we go to the library? I heard there's candy and treats!" Cass suggested.

"Oooh! Sure!" Grace smiled.

James held Grace's hand and kissed her cheek. "We'll share one," he said, almost demanding.

"Of course!"

I knew we were at the Apple Harvest when I heard laughter, but most especially, the smell of apple fritters. I closed my eyes. I could imagine the sweet, sugary taste of the soft donut hole.

Suddenly, Cass nudged me. "Are you falling asleep *already*? It's only four o' clock!" Cass whispered.

I rubbed my eyes. "No, I'm fine," I assured her. Grace stopped the car and we all hopped out. James took Grace's hand and they walked into the library. Surprisingly, we saw no one.

"Juliett is supposed to be here," Cass told me. Juliett was our other friend who was going with her 'popular friends.'

"Where is she?" I asked, looking around. *No one*. I looked over at the apple harvest. *No one*. So where had the voices come from? Grace pulled us into the library.

"What were you looking at?" she asked.

I shrugged. "I don't know. Juliett is supposed to be here."

Grace raised an eyebrow. "Juliett? The girl I don't like? Izzy, she's a *fake* friend. Remember how she took all of your money and never gave it back?" she told me. I sighed. *Juliett can't be like that*, I thought. *She's not a fake friend*.

"WELCOME!" boomed a voice. Cass made a scared squeak. A big woman with long, curly, stringy black hair stood before us. Her skin was white, it had matched her chef's hat and apron. "WOULD YOU LIKE A COOKIE? OR PERHAPS A DONUT? AND WE ALSO SELL APPLE FRIIITERS! I JUST KNOW YOU LOVE THEM! I MEAN, ERM... YOU'LL LOVE THEM!" The woman shouted.

I backed up. "This is really weird," Cass whispered to me. Grace was holding James' hand, terrified. I was too. She was *really* ugly and horrifying.

"S-S-Sorry, we actually need to get g-g-going," Grace took my hand and tried to pull me out, but the door was locked. *BOOM! BOOM!* I spun around. The woman's long striped neck came close to mine.

"LEAVING SO SOON?" she asked. I gulped. Cass took my hand and pulled me away.

James bravely grabbed the woman's neck. "Stay away from her!" he cried.

Cass and I pressed against the wall. The woman screamed. It pierced my ears so loud that I fell to my knees.

"Get up, Izzy! You have to get up!" Cass cried. She pulled me up. I held my ears. *That hurt so bad!* The woman grabbed Grace and James and dragged them into a dark hallway, hissing, "HOW DARE YOU!?"

"We need to get out of here," Cass whispered to me, her eyes full of worry. "Before she comes for us!"

I found a door with a sign *DO NOT ENTER* on it, but I had to go in. What else could I do? That woman--or *thing* could come back any second. I opened the door and pulled Cass in. Inside there were humans. Not *dead* humans, tied up humans. They're mouths were covered with tape and they were upside down.

"H-H-Hello?" Cass stammered walking over to a boy our age. His face was scratched and was bleeding. The boy made a grunting noise. I ripped the tape off his mouth. He sighed in relief.

"Thank you!" he said.

"What's happening? Who is that woman? And why are we here?" I demanded. Cass nudged me.

"She *means*, you're welcome," Cass said kindly.

I rolled my eyes. "Cass I need to know the answers so we can get out of here *A.S.A.P!*" I whispered.

Cass sighed. She turned to the boy. "Could you tell us who she is, please?" Cass asked. The boy opened his mouth, then he closed it.

"Her name is Mrs. Quilla. She was a kind old lady who ran the library and made special treats...she was my grandmother." I looked at Cass. Did that mean he was like her? "But I'm not like her!" the boy added quickly, as if he *knew* what I was thinking.

"What happened to her?" Cass asked. She looked worried and sad because of that story.

The boy closed his eyes, a tear slowly running down his cheek. "I poisoned her."

"WHAT!?" I cried. Cass held my mouth. We were all silent for a moment, making sure Mrs. Quilla didn't hear us.

"You need to be quiet, Izzy!"

I sighed. "Sorry, but like, I thought you *loved* her!"

"I do," the boy told me. *Okay...I thought.*

Cass took my hand. "We need to rescue them," she told me. I nodded.

"We do, but not right now. We don't have the tools, and we *need* to get out of here." I turned to the boy. "Isn't this where Mrs. Quilla comes after she finds some humans?" By all the humans, it was an easy guess.

The boy nodded. "Yes, usually very quickly. She's probably looking for you. You know, if you just untie me, I can help you, a lot. I've been here for a *long* time, trust me. And also, she *is* my grandma after all." Just when he said "Trust me", it made me think I shouldn't. But then again, he was really nice.

Cass grabbed a small shard of broken glass. "Sure! As long as you *promise*," she said, staring into his eyes. The boy nodded. Cass carefully ran the sharp glass through the rope. Fortunately, it ripped. The boy fell head-first onto the floor. Suddenly, that reminded me of the time I fell headfirst down the stairs. *Oh, Grace...I thought. I wonder what's happening to you.*

The boy got up, rubbing his head. He stuck out his other hand. "I didn't get to introduce myself, I'm Luke!" he said, smiling warmly. Cass shook his hand. When Luke stuck it out to me, I was hesitant, but slowly shook it. Luke smiled as he looked into my eyes. I looked away. *This guy*, I thought, *I don't trust him.* But I couldn't tell Cass, I could tell she liked him.

"I'm Izzy," I told Luke, frowning. As soon as he let go of my hand, I rubbed it on my shirt. Who knows what kind of germs he has!

Cass pulled me away from him. "Come on, let's go rescue Grace and James."

Cass, Luke, and I decided to head down the hallway. Mrs. Quilla took Grace and James, but we didn't expect to see what we saw.

“What *is* that thing?” Luke whispered. Cass peered behind the wall. There was a tall figure standing before us. *A giant!* He was blocking an entrance, but to what? To Grace and James? If so, we *needed* to get past him, but how?

I turned around. *Since when has it become bigger?* I wondered, staring at how high the ceiling was. Suddenly, I gasped. I pulled Cass. “We’re *trapped!*” I hissed. Cass’ jaw practically fell to the ground. The walls had closed and standing in front was Mrs. Quilla. Her pointy teeth shone in the bright light. Her long thin fingers were moving impatiently.

Mrs. Quilla laughed. “Hide and seek is all done now,” she smirked, moving closer to us. I held onto Cass’ hand tight, but she was too focused on holding Luke’s hand. “I...” Mrs. Quilla started. Her long neck came to ours. Her head spun 360%.

“FOUND YOU!” Mrs. Quilla reached for me but Luke suddenly jumped in front of me. “NO!” he shouted. And then, everything went black.

*What is this? Why can’t I feel my body? Where’s Grace? Or James? Or Cass? Or Luke!? What is this blackness? Can I get out? Wait...Are those voices? Voices! Hello? Can you hear me? They’re so faint... Why isn’t mouth mov–*

I gasped for air. I sucked in a deep breath. I panted, holding my throat. My eyes adjusted to the light. I was in a bright room with bed-like objects with straps. Some had people in them, including Cass and Luke, but most importantly Grace and James. Fortunately, Grace was awake. Her face was bruised and she had a big black eye.

“Grace!” I squeaked, I was still getting used to speaking. She tried to smile but I could tell that it was painful.

“Izzy! I’m so sorry.” A tear rolled down her cheek. “This is all my fault!”

Hearing her say that broke my heart. “This is *not* your fault, if anything, it’s Cassie’s fault--no offense to her, though,” I assured Grace. She sighed. Suddenly, there was movement next to me. *Cass!* was my first thought.

“Guys? Grace? Luke? Izzy? What happened?” she asked. She looked at the straps. “Why are we strapped into this bed?”

“We were put to sleep,” I told her.

Cass groaned. “Can’t we just *get out* already? Haven’t I deserved it?”

I laughed. Suddenly, the lights went out. The only light shone on Mrs. Quilla, who stood in the center.

“Well, *hello*, I’m happy to see you are all awake.” She walked over to James and punched him. He woke up coughing.

“Hey!” Once he saw Mrs. Quilla he froze.

Her long neck crawled back into the light. “You are all going to be staying here, until I have you put into a different room,” Mrs. Quilla told us. *That must be the “do not enter” room*, I thought to myself.

Suddenly, I heard a *click*. My straps suddenly felt loose, but I laid there, frozen. *Someone had turned them off!* I thought. *But who?* That’s when it hit me. Where was Luke? Mrs. Quilla must have killed him! “Where’s Luke!?” I demanded. Mrs. Quilla stared at me. My eyes were full of tears. *Don’t cry Izzy!* I told myself. *You never do! Stay strong!*

“You... Didn’t kill him, did you?” I asked, a tear slowly running down my cheek. It was at that moment I realized how much I had cared for him.

Mrs. Quilla smiled, showing her razor teeth. “Well, of *course* I didn’t kill him. He killed himself!”

The room was silent. *No...* At that moment, all my tears rushed out of my body. “*No!*” I cried. He saved my life...I needed to repay him. He was part of my life and I planned to know him for the rest of it. *Click!* There it was again. Cass’ straps were now loose! *Who was doing that?* It couldn’t be Luke. He was dead...right?

“Aw, are you *sad?*” Mrs. Quilla asked.

My fists clenched. *Yes, I am.* “No.”

I saw James’ face. He was sort of surprised and jealous. He knew! He knew it was unlocked! Maybe Grace and James would get unlocked, too!

“Well,” Mrs. Quilla smiled brightly. “Since you are all *settled*, I’m going to go now. I have new guests!” And just like that, Mrs. Quilla was gone.

As soon as the door closed, Cass and I jumped up. “What!?” Grace cried. “How are you loose!?” I signaled her to be quiet.

“We can’t be loud,” I said.

James nodded. “We *know*. But how are you *loose?*”

Cass and I looked at each other. “We don’t know,” Cass told them. “But we think it might be Luke.”

“We do?” I asked.

Cass glared at me. “Who else would it be!?”

I sighed and walked over to Grace. I hugged her. “We’ll come back, I *promise*. I need to find the button first.” Just then, like God had given me luck--*for the first time!*--I saw it. A red button. I pointed at it. “Is that the button?”

Cass followed my finger and walked over to the big red button. “For what?” Suddenly, her mouth made an O. “Oh my gosh! That must be the button to make all of them loose!”

As soon as Cass was one centimeter away from pressing the button, there were footsteps. *No! Not right now, Mrs. Quilla!* “Quick! Press it!” I hissed. Cass pressed it quickly. *Click! Click!* Yes! Grace and James slid out of the bed. They hugged each other.

“Not the time!” I whispered. “We need to hide! Before Mrs. Quilla sees us!”

All four of us hid behind a desk. Our breaths were short. We were all worried. Worried that Mrs. Quilla secretly had X-Ray vision. *Please!* I thought. *Please, God, let us get out!*

Mrs. Quilla silently entered the room, carrying a young child with his mom. They were both sound asleep. Suddenly, Mrs. Quilla stopped short. She scanned the room. Was she looking for us? *Probably.* I could hear and feel Grace’s breath.

Just then, Mrs. Quilla screamed a beastly scream. She strapped the woman and her child to the bed and stormed out.

That’s when it hit me. I had seen something on her neck. A black heart. It was a necklace, but something told me the heart was real. What if...? What if it was *her* heart? I mean, she doesn’t have one now, so what if I was right?

Grace sighed. “I’m not doing that again,” she said, standing up. Everyone stood up except me.

“Um... Izzy? Are you okay?” James asked.

I stood up. “Guys, I know how to defeat Mrs. Quilla. To change her back!”

I silently walked out of the room. I was back in the main part of the library. Mrs. Quilla was silently reading a book. It was a book about knitting. Maybe there was a part of her that wasn’t bad after all.

Just then, a sharp scream filled the room. James had grabbed Mrs. Quilla's neck and Cass was pinning her down. It was all up to me and Grace. We ran over to her. I ripped the necklace off her neck. She screamed and thrashed around, but James and Cass held strong.

"Open it," she said, pointing at the locket. That's when I saw the crack.

"No!" Mrs. Quilla cried. "Don't open it!" *I'm sorry*, I wanted to say. *But this is for your own good!*

I slid my fingers between the crack and pulled. Grace helped me. It must've been closed for many years judging on how hard it was to open it. As soon as I opened it, there was a tiny folded up piece of paper. "Read it!" Grace whispered.

"NO!" Mrs. Quilla screamed. I ignored her, opening it up. It said: *Gunda Oipnia Peinga Uerun!*

"Say it out loud, maybe it's a spell!" Grace suggested.

I shut my eyes. *And if it's not? What if I'm wrong? I was already wrong once.* "Gunda, Oipnia, Peinga, Uerun!" I shouted. Suddenly, Mrs. Quilla began to shake. James and Cass ran over to us. Mrs. Quilla's arm soon disappeared and became very tiny. Her whole *body* changed! Her hair turned into a gray bun and she had huge, round, black glasses. She turned into a cute, old grandma! Now *that* looked like Luke's grandma. *Luke!* I had no time to think about him.

"Is that...?" I stuttered. We were all shocked.

Mrs. Quilla looked at us innocently. "Hello, children, do you know what happened? I remember falling asleep--"

"You were sleepwalking and we helped you," James said quickly. Mrs. Quilla made a 'Oh' sound, nodding. What else could we say?

Mrs. Quilla yawned. "Well, thank you children, but I must continue making my biscuits. Guests will soon arrive! Speaking of guests, would you like a biscuit? Since you helped me, I'd love to give you one."

"Sorry, but we must be going," Grace told her.

Mrs. Quilla nodded. "Ah, that's alright." Mrs. Quilla turned around. "Luke? *Luke! Luke!!*"

I almost cried again. I missed him so very much! "We'll find him for you," Cass assured Mrs. Quilla. What was she saying? Was she saying he *wasn't* dead? Or was it just a white lie?

"Thank you, children, you really have done a lot for me." Mrs. Quilla beamed at us. "Alright, well, I'll let you go."

I nodded. "Thank you, Mrs. Quilla," I said. We all walked out of the main part of the library and started walking towards the place where we last saw him. As soon as we got there, there was a body laying on the ground. Blood surrounded it.

"Luke!" I cried. I ran over to the body. Luke's blonde hair fell over his eyes, but showed just enough of it to show they were closed.

Shaking my head, I shook Luke. "Please!" I cried, tears streaming down my cheeks. "You can't be dead! You just *can't!*"

Cass ran over to me. She rolled Luke onto his stomach. "He's bleeding! Mrs. Quilla must've hurt him!" *No!*

"*No !No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No!*" I repeated. Just then, my hands started to glow. They glowed a gold color. I couldn't feel them, though I knew they were there. "Izzy? Are you okay?" Cass stammered. She was so shocked.

My hands shone bright. A string of gold wrapped around Luke's body. "Hey!" I shouted. "Stop! Don't hurt him!" Just like me, Luke's stomach glowed gold. When it started to fade, I noticed there was no blood anymore and Luke's breath was back to normal. "Luke!" I cried. Luke's eyes opened slowly. He smiled and hugged me.

"Izzy! What happened? Where's Mrs. Quilla?"

"I'll explain it later, but what matters now is that you're here. And you're alive, too!"

Grace pulled me up. "We have no time to kiss boys--"

"GRACE!" I cried embarrassingly. "I am *definitely* not kissing boys!"

Grace shrugged. "Whatever you say! But we *need* to get out of here while we can!"

I was about to agree when I realized Cass had made a promise, and I had to help her.

"Cass, we have to do our promise," I insisted, turning to Cass. Grace looked confused. "What *promise*?"

Cass nodded. "We do." Cass looked at everyone. "But we're going to need *everyone's* help!" And so, Cass explained our promise and everyone agreed to help. And we all returned to the DO NOT ENTER door.

"*Cut, cut, cut!*" Cass repeated. We all had a shard of glass and were cutting people out of their ropes. There were so many people rubbing their heads and reuniting with their families. It made me think about mine, although I barely had one.

More and more and more people fell to the ground until *snip!* The last person fell. It was a young boy and his mother--the people we saw in the beds!

As soon as everyone left, we all had a group hug. "Well, we've got to go home now. It's six." James said. He turned to Luke. "I'll bring you home, kid."

"Oh... Okay," Luke said. Was he *disappointed*? Weird. "Um, Izzy?"

I turned around. Luke was talking to me, and his face was bright red. "I go to the same school as you but I'd...um...I like you, Izzy," he stuttered. Cass' face turned pale. James pretended not to hear, but Grace? Grace was making an 'Ooooooooh!' sound.

Smiling, I held Luke's hand. "I like you, too, Luke." Luke smiled, relieved. He walked over to James.

"Alright, I'm ready to go home now!" Luke grinned.

James smiled. "Alright, bud, let's go." He kissed Grace and left. All that was left was Grace, Cass, and I. Grace smiled.

"Let's go guys, we still have to eat," she told us. We all nodded and followed her out of the room. That was the biggest adventure in my *entire* life. *And the best!* I'd *never* forget that moment. Not *ever*.

## Rosemary by Mia White

It was the year 2023, the year where some Southington girls changed their town, and here is the story of Jenny, Isabelle, Hailey and Linda. ....

It was a couple days till Halloween and some girl scouts, Jenny, Linda, Isabelle and Hailey were out selling some cookies door to door. They had tons of kinds like thin mints, coconut cookies, lemon cookies and other flavors. They had been selling cookies for three hours now.

“Guys I’m tired and my dinner is almost done. Let’s start heading back.” Isabelle said, turning away and waving them to follow her.

It was chilly out that night so the other girls decided to start heading home, but someone didn’t agree.

“Come on, at least one more neighborhood just to get rid of some of the last boxes of cookies we have.” Jenny called to the other girls stoppin in her place.

“Fine, just one though.” Linda said, walking toward Jenny with Hailey and Isabelle following her.

They walked till they found a small neighborhood, it was called Pepperidge Dr. It was close to their school, Hatton Elementary, so maybe they would know some people. Their shoes were crunching in the yellow, orange and red leaves as they walked in the neighborhood.

They walked up to a small blue and white house and knocked on their door.

“Hi I am Hailey, a girl scout selling cookies with others. Would you like to buy some cookies from us?” Hailey was singing the girl scout theme song.

“Bark, woof!” Their little dog barked

“Sure, what kinds of cookies do you girls have?” The nice lady asked us.

“Pretty much every kind.” Isabelle said pointing to their wagon full of cookies.

“Ok I will have some thin mints, how much?” The lady said taking out some money out of her wallet.

“Five dollars would cover it, thank you.” Jenny said, giving her the cookies and taking the money.

Then they left and went house to house selling almost all the cookies but they still had two boxes left so went to the last house on the street, 45 Pepperidge Dr. It was a white house with a teal door and was a medium sized house. It looked really dark on the inside but they still went to knock on the door. They walked up the stairs to get to the door slowly.

“It looks a little too dark, let’s leave and go home.” Linda said stopping at the last step.

“No, we have to sell these last two boxes.” Jenny said, pushing Linda closer to the door.

They all walked up and knocked on the door. The door opened slowly but know one was there when it was opening.

“Umm, what the heck, that is a little creepy.” Hailey said.

“Yeah, Jenny can we leave now?” Linda said, walking back down the stairs.

“Come on, don’t be so scared it is probably just a little prank.” Jenny said, pushing her back.

So they all walked in and yelled, “Anyone home?” There wasn’t an answer but just then the door slammed shut!

“AHHH!” They all screamed.



The house turned pitch black and started to creak. They didn't talk for a second because they were too scared to even move their mouths.

"What just happened?" Isabelle whispered.

"Welcome....." A creepy voice said slowly.

They all looked around to try to find the voice. Then there were footsteps coming their way.

"Go to the door and try to open it Jenny." Linda whispered.

"No, and what was that voice? I am too scared to, you can." Jenny said.

The creaks started to get louder and sounded like they were even closer.

"I can hear you. Now sit down or you could meet your death now!" The voice continued.

"Ok we will." Isabelle said loudly so the voice would hear her.

The girls sat down on a black and very dusty couch. The creaks stopped and then the voice said, "Can you find me?"

The girls stopped to look around but it was nowhere to be found.

"Ahhh, look. At. Your. Feet!" Hailey yelled.

The voice was an old DOLL! It was like in the movies but this was NOT a movie.

"Are you real?" Jenny asked.

"Of course I am, what else would I be?" The doll yelled.

"Sorry, sorry it is not everyday you are trapped in a dark house with a talking doll." Jenny said.

The girls couldn't believe that Jenny was fighting with a talking doll. The inside of the house was nothing like the outside. The outside was nice and looked clean but the inside was like a haunted house from the really scary movies, dusty, dark and definitely spooky.

"Oh and I forgot to tell you that if you don't get out in an hour you will become a doll like me, good luck." The doll said with excitement in her voice.

"WHAT!!" The girls all screamed at the top of their lungs.

They all got up and ran around trying to get the door open and finding things to open it.

"The clock is broken to see what time it is!" Linda said, pointing to a large clock hanging on the wall.

"Oh no that means we should work even quicker, come on we can do this." Jenny said.

They worked hard but the door still stayed in place. It had scratches and marks all over it but that didn't help one bit from opening the door.

"I'm so scared what will happen to us if we don't get out of this place." Hailey said. She looked like she was shaking while she was squeezing a piece of wood.

"We already know what is going to happen to us. If an hour goes by we will be dolls just like that one. But she is right, what about our parents they won't know what happened to us." Isabelle said, stopping and started to shake even more than Hailey.

It started to get cold.

"It must be past dinner by now, right? That means we don't have much time left, hurry!" Linda said, grabbing a shovel quickly and hitting the door with it.

The girls started to work faster. The wind started to blow even faster, everything was being knocked over. It was now below freezing inside.

"What is happening!?" Jenny yelled trying not to fall.

"This is your fault that this is happening to us, you are the one that made us do this." Isabelle yelled back at Jenny.

“Uh oh, looks like you girls ran out of time.” The doll said walking slowly over to them.

“Oh no, RUN!!” They all screamed at the same time.

They all started running different directions in the house. The doll started running after Hailey first.

“Please don’t turn me into a doll. I have a new baby brother. My mom and dad need help!” Hailey said with fear in her eyes.

“They could get a babysitter, now say the words that you want to say.” The doll said.

“I love my family with all my heart and I hope that one day they will know what happened to me.” Hailey said.

“Bye Hailey.” The doll whispered.

The dust in that room all came up and made a small tornado. The doll could hear the screams of Hailey slowly stopping. Then the tornado stopped and the doll of Hailey came out. It had dark brown skin with a blue dress on and a small ax in her hand.

Then the doll went to look for Linda in the house. She searched for a minute or two and found her in the kitchen.

“Well look who we have here.” The doll said, walking over to her.

She was all squashed up in the corner near the broken sink.

“I am so sorry we went in here. I can leave right now and never come here again!”

Linda said, frightened.

“You had your chance but you wasted it so say your last words.” The doll said.

“I’m sorry for anything I have ever done and I love all of my family.” Linda said, looking up to the tall ceiling.

The dust came up into the tornado and with her inside it spinning around. It stopped after a minute and she came out like a doll.

She had tan skin with green buttons for the eyes with a yellow skirt and shirt and a hammer in her hand.

“Hope you like it here Linda.” The doll said and walked away to find Isabelle.

She found Isabelle pretty easily after she left the kitchen. Isabelle was in the master bedroom.

“Please don’t do this. I need to live. I have to help with moving to a whole new state.” Isabelle said.

“I already got two of your friends, so end your complaining now and say your last words ever.” The doll said.

“Ok. .... I love my friends and family so much and I hope they will still love me too.” Isabelle said.

The dust came up and she was in a tornado too. It ended and was tiny compared to the others. She had pale skin with a pink dress with a big bow on it with a pair of scissors in her hands.

The doll moved on to find Jenny, the last person. After a while she found her in the third bathroom.

“You are the last one. Now you caused this, so say your goodbyes now before you will never be seen again.” The doll said.

“I am so sorry to all my friends by getting you into this and I love my family so bye.” Jenny said, looking down at her knees looking ashamed of herself.

“Well now you are going to join them so bye Jenny, my last person that I will ever see.”  
The doll said, looking sad.

Then the same thing happened again to all the other children that day.

She looked a little bigger than Isabelle with tan skin, dark green pants and a shirt with a sharp piece of wood. Those girls never left their place and never talked and never were seen again. But after Jenny turned into a doll the other doll vanished away and left a mark where she was standing that said: ROSEMARY.

## Mr. Giggles by Joseph Zipadelli

It has been a while since it happened. The town has been devastated ever since. Maybe I should tell you the story. Can you handle it?

My name is Karla. I was a senior in high school. I've always been the quiet kid until... Well it started when me and my friends Steve and Sonya were walking in the woods near Sloper exploring climbing trees and playing games.

This time we went into the woods hearing the leaves and sticks crunching under our feet. Crick crack crick crack. The town is in the suburbs and there are a lot of old houses still standing since 1776. You can see the old signs still at the house. But I don't know who lives there.

The town is quiet and reminds me of the woods. There's never anything in there. The whole place is like a carnival, once a happy place and now devastatingly cold and haunted.

We start walking through the woods a little more.

"Hey guys, wanna sit down and take a break on that log?" Steve said.

"Sure!" Me and Sonyah responded. We sat down playing rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

"He! He! Ha! Ha!" We heard an unexpected sound.

It was probably nothing just my imagination. If only it was my imagination. There was a "psss" sound right in my ear then I knew I wasn't alone. Then I saw it carved in the tree. The word was written out "pssss." Kinda strange.

"What was that?" Sonyah said.

"Let's get out of here," I responded.

There was something behind us. He looked like a clown, a bright red wig, white war paint, bright red cheeks, and big puffy hands. And his long shoes. He was there running after us.

The three of us ran as he followed. He had a name tag that said Mr. Giggles. He suddenly paused, putting his head down like a lifeless doll. He stretched his arms out very, very, wide. The sides of him started to giggle as all of us watched and stared as Spider legs came out of his sides. As he used these new legs, his own human legs and face hung lifeless, like a doll. He started to giggle more as he chased behind us.

I looked at him while he was running down the path. I looked behind me while I was still running. I looked forward and saw a tree stump sticking right out in front of me. I almost tripped but was able to jump over it and keep running.

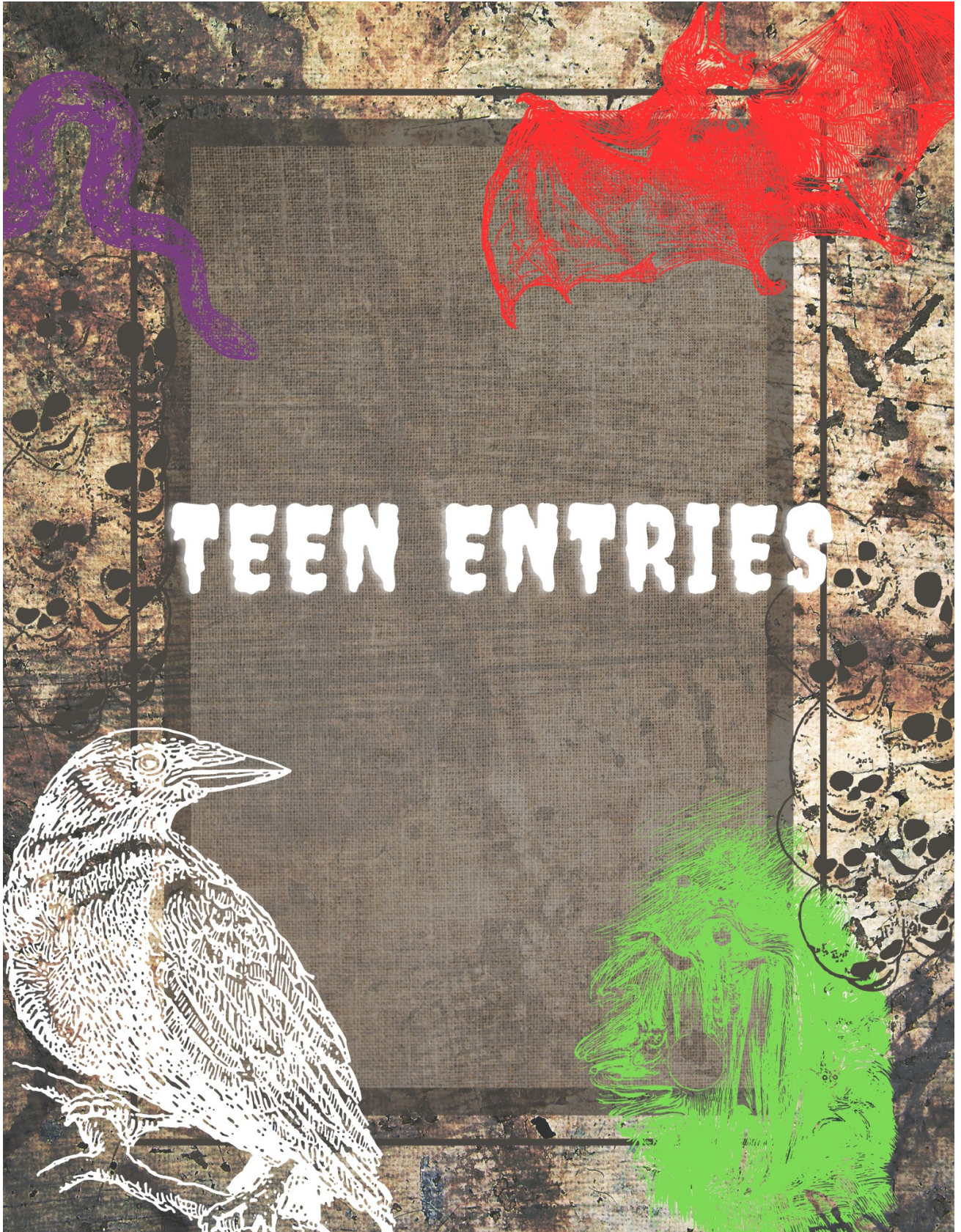
Then looking back again, I noticed Sonyah behind me failing to jump, tripping on the stump. The clown was about to grab her, but Steve was on the way.

Then suddenly both of them were gone, and I was about to call out, but everything went black. I was gone too...

When my eyes opened, I was in a hospital. I looked at the scars and bruises on myself. The doctor walked in and I thought it must have all been a dream. The doctor came in to inspect me. He said I had been missing. I was found on the road. He turned to walk out of the room, and I got a glimpse of his name tag spelling: Mr. Giggles. Then I saw him tuck a bloody handkerchief into his back pocket.

Where was I really?







## Spooky Southington by Linnea Caldas

I can feel its presence; its breathing against my neck. I just stand there with my mind going 1,000 miles per hour. Wondering *do I run? Do I stay still? Do I turn around and dare face it?* Its breathing is getting heavier and my heart is racing faster than ever. Suddenly,

*BEEP BEEP BEEP*

“Willow! What are you doing still in bed? I swear your alarm has been going off for like 5 minutes now! Mom made breakfast, better get ready fast before it gets cold!” bellows my older sister from the stairs.

“Ugh, why must I be surrounded by morning people?”

“Get dressed loser.”

I roll out of bed and quickly get dressed and usher downstairs to eat breakfast.

“Omg, it’s finally awake!” teases my sister.

“Leave your sister alone, she stayed up late studying last night” says my mom as she hands me my waffle.

“Nerd” my sister says smugly under her breath, just quiet enough so my mom doesn't hear but just loud enough for me to.

“Thanks Ma” I grab my waffle, go behind her back and stick my tongue out at my sister, and walk to the table. “Hey Bee, how's the puzzle coming along?” My little brother finished a 5,000 piece puzzle two days ago and has been working on his 10,000 piece puzzle since yesterday.

“I'm almost done with the border and already found two chunks, wanna help?”

“Maybe after school I can help out, I'm really hungry right now.”

“Willow hurry up, you're gonna make me late to work.”

“Oh God forbid River Jane Spell is 5 minutes late for work at Mcdonalds.”

“And now you're not getting fries today.”

“Noo! I'm so sorry! Please have mercy!” I ran to the car as fast as I could. I am on a mission to get my fries.

I walk into school. Nobody can explain the actual feeling of school, some days I would feel stressed and overstimulated by the crowded halls. Others I would be one of those kids yelling in the halls with my friends. Without your friends you feel drained and overwhelmed by every little grade. That one flickering light mocking you. But then even just one friend comes along and you feel happiness. You can laugh and joke about getting a grade as bad as a D, sing Christmas songs in the middle of March, joke that they're going to push you into your crush, and so much laughing.

“Boo!” My best friend always attempts to scare me yet never seems to succeed.

“Ahhhh so scary~” I say sarcastically

“one of these days i'm gonna get you!”

“Whatever you say, Kalylah. Oh, look there's Yesenia!”

Yesenia is one of the four in our small friend group. Her and I share the role of the therapist, I listen to her problems, she listens to mine, and we share with Kalylah and Alana. Kalylah i've known the longest, her and I were the start of the group. She is my #1 best friend of all time. Alana is the energetic and the friend who's bouncing off the walls, she surly keeps us on our toes.

Before I knew it five periods passed and I was at lunch. I sit down with my friends and we talk about the most random things. I suddenly remembered my dream last night so I decided

to share.

“Children!” I call to get their attention. “I have a story to share, about my weird dream last night.”

“Ooh, what was it about?” says Kalylah.

“So basically, I was walking through a parking lot. Y'know the AutoZone on the street with the YMCA, the bakery, and all the other random stores?” they all nod. I’m honestly relieved I didn't have to explain where it was exactly. “I have no clue why I was at the AutoZone considering I've only ever been there once when I was like six. But anyways I'm getting sidetracked, so I was sent inside to get lighter fluid and when I went inside I went into this door that led to those weird stairs that are like a shortcut to the cemetery. I went up the stairs and walked around the dark and foggy cemetery. It was really weird, then I felt an extremely cold hand grab my shoulder, and cold breathing against my neck. And then I woke up.”

My friends just stare at me, they look concerned and almost shocked.

“You have way too many dreams about this creature thing following you.”

“Alana's right, do you have any idea why you're having so many dreams about it?”

Yesenia says in a concerned tone.

“Well I have an idea; It's probably the fact that the night before last I did stay up pretty much all night, some nights because I have that feeling that I was being watched and like somebody was going to brutally murder me”

My friends just stared at me in horror.

“What if you're being haunted by a ghost!”

“Come on Kalylah, I doubt I’m haunted, it's probably just nerves.”

*RING RING RING*

Ugh, finally home! I walk into my room to relax from a long day at school, luckily for once I don't have any homework! So all I did was go to my room and relax for the rest of the day.

Beep beep! Beep Beep! Beep beep! I picked up my phone and answer it.

“Hello?”

“Hey Willow, the girls and I are trying to have a sleepover tonight, we’re gonna go to the abandoned building by the cemetery, wanna come with?”

“Oooh yeah bet, I'll ask my mom if I can stay over!”

Time passed and I was packing things for the sleepover; pencil and paper for if we want to draw, portable phone charger, and extra crochet hooks for Yesenia in case she loses any.

I made it to the haunted building by the cemetery and walked into Yesenia having a full on breakdown because she messed up her crochet project all the way in the beginning of the project, which I know the pain of having to completely restart a project after hours and hours of just working. After Yesenia calmed down we started our sleepover.

“Let's go for a walk in the cemetery!” Suggested Alana.

“We should do that later, first let's do some spooky games like Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board, or like that other thing that's like ‘crack an egg on your head and the yolk drip downs’ and you feel like you fall off a roof.” Suggested Yesenia.

“Ok, I brought pencils and paper, we can make a list and go down.” I probably had more fun with the girls that one night than my whole life! After we finish the list we go out to the cemetery to walk around. Every gust of wind feels like when you open the freezer so fast and all the freezing air hits you. Everything over two meters away was not visible due to the fog. It truly was a creepy night at the cemetery. The moon was our only source of light, she shines

brighter than what it seems most nights.

“You guys want to play hide and seek? I feel like it would be so much fun here!” Said Kalylah.

“Bet! I'll seek first.” I replied. I counted for 30 seconds and started my search for them. “I'm gonna find you~!” I said in a spine-chilling voice trying to creep them out. As I walked around I made sure to always check my back in case someone ninja rolled from gravestone to gravestone. *SNAP*

A twig snaps and scares me half to death, I do a full 180 turn and start walking backwards, Suddenly my heart dropped as I fell into something. I landed on my back, mortified, I looked around, the walls looked like dirt. I must have fallen in a grave. I looked up to see how far down I am and all I see is a small light so far off into the distance. I think to myself, *this is it. It's over.* I finally get to my feet, I pick the soft soil stuck from under my fingernails from when I pushed myself up. I feel a freezing sensation run down my spine, a normal person would shiver but I was stuck. I couldn't move. I can feel its presence; its breathing against my neck, its cold boney hand touches my shoulder. I just stand there with my mind going 1,000 miles per hour. Wondering *do I run? Do I stay still? Do I turn around and dare face it?* Its breathing is getting heavier and my heart is racing faster than ever. Suddenly I feel something that gives me hope; a warm, less boney, smaller hand grabs my shoulder bringing me back to reality. Finally I can move, I reach up to grab the hand and finally I'm being pulled up out of the cold dark hole. The relief I felt seeing Alana's face, tears started streaming down my face as I hugged her as tight as I possibly could.

“Willow. Look” Alana said in a horrified tone, pointing at the stone above the hole I fell in. It read *Here lies Willow Stephanie Spell, 2006-2023*

I audibly gasped and fell to the floor. I sat there just staring with my friends around me for a good minute. To think it tried to kill me! I can't even wrap my head around it. If it weren't for my best friends I actually wouldn't be here, I would have never seen my family ever again. That's terrifying to me. I still, to this day, don't know what it was that tried to kill me nor why it even wanted to in the first place. I still have nightmares from that evening. No, it's been a little under 20 years since that night and nothing happened. I feel at ease, I don't know what happened to the spirit following me and I don't care, I am just happy it's not in my life anymore. *KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK*

"Sweetie? Come in. "Are you okay, what's wrong?"

“Hey mom. I can't sleep, I have that feeling that I am being watched and like somebody is going to brutally murder me.”

The end....?



## Spooky Story by Celeste Chawner

A corkboard hung on the wall in the dimly lit room, two scientists from the SCP foundation sat at a wooden table, Dr. Bright and a member of the 05 Council had a meeting to discuss something that would change everything. A gray wood bookshelf with no books sat in the corner of the room, a metal file cabinet beside it, stacks of papers covered the floor.

“Dr. Bright, you’ve proven yourself to be... Well, not exactly relevant in our recent anomaly tests.” The Council member sighed, folding his hands. Dr. Bright shifted on his chair. The dim light coming from the singular light bulb in the room flickered.

“Am I in trouble for giving SCP-999 soda last week? In my defense I thought that he deserved a treat, y’know, being locked up and all...” He ran his fingers through his copper colored hair.

“No this has nothing to do with... the incident...” He was standing now, he was tall, with black slick hair.

“The reason I called you here from your... non-existent duties... is to speak about you proving your worth for the foundation,” he sneered.

“I’ve consulted the 05 Council, and we’ve agreed to let you choose a team of scientists and security personnel to map out the area of a new anomaly we discovered approximately 1500 hours ago...” He slid a file over to Dr. Bright.

“Whether you accept or not is up to you.” Dr. Bright looked down to the file. Written in a messy handwriting, as if done in a hurry, was SCP-3008-C on the front. He opened the file to find multiple documents, missing posters and a few photos. He lifted the photos out of the pocket and looked close at each one. There were four worn out photos showing the new discovery.

“A Walmart?” Dr. Bright asked, looking up from the photos.

“Yes, these posters show only a fraction of the amount of people who have gone missing in this area... along with a search team from our facility.” Dr. Bright picked up the posters and slid them back into the file.

“If you do accept, then meet me at the next 05 Council meeting. You have three days time to decide Dr. Bright.” He stood up and turned away, walking out of the office, leaving Dr. Bright alone.

“Non-existent duties-” He stopped short as one of the photos fell to the floor. He grabbed the photo and stuffed it into his pocket, which contained a paper clip and some lint. Dr. Bright stood up brushing off his lab coat and grabbing the file from the wooden table. As he reached for the door he suddenly heard a wail, usually the foundation was filled with them coming from SCP-096’s containment chamber, but this wasn’t muffled by the concrete. Dr. Bright slowly opened the door to find security personnel’s bodies littering the hallway floor. “What in the-” He was cut off by a scream. A tall, white, skinny figure loomed in the hallway hunched over its victim. Once it finished it sat down and began sobbing, rocking back and forth. Dr. Bright knew this monster well, SCP-096, also known as “Shy Guy”, was one of the Euclid-class SCPs.

Dr. Bright covered his face with the file so he could avoid seeing the face of almost death itself. Dr. Bright ran down the hallway opposite of SCP-096 in search of security. The hallways seemed to get longer and longer as he ran, hearing the wails and sobs behind him. He ran by a few scientists and security personnel heading the monster’s way. Like a maze, the walls twisted and turned, door after door of SCP containment chambers, he got closer.

“Code white, SCP-096 broke free from containment!” He burst through the door. Three security personnel stood up and stumbled to get off their chairs, the rest followed after they were out of the room.

“Pursue code white!” One guard shouted. Their black suits created a dark sea of bodies as yellow helmets met the fluorescent light. It seemed as if almost every guard was running. Dr. Bright ran with them to the D-class containment area. He heard yelling echoing off the walls as the guards dragged two D-classes towards SCP-096’s concrete cell, a tall man, slightly taller than Dr. Bright, and a shorter man, about 14, maybe younger, he looked young to be in the foundation. D-class’s were criminals who were sentenced to death, somehow the 05 Council managed to persuade the judge to give the offenders to the foundation as test subjects and ‘disposables’.

“You will do as we say, or your fate will be worse than what we’re using you for!” The guard barked at the shorter D-class. He produced a key from his pocket and unlocked a box hanging on the wall next to SCP-096’s containment cube with a silver lock, holding what could end the world if the photo was leaked on the internet.

“Everyone look away!” A shorter guard shouted to the others. The security personnel and two D-class’s covered their faces.

“No, not you two.” Another guard scowled as he threw them both in the cell with a photo of SCP-096’s face.

“No please!” The shorter D-class pleaded.

“Please! I- I don’t want to die! Please!” The D-class cried, “Please, I’m sorry! I’ll do anything! No!” His pleas were cut off by the cell door slamming shut. Dr. Bright winced, he knew what the D-classes were used for, and what they did to deserve it but it was still a horrible feeling. A screech rang in the air, followed by thunderous foot falls heading their way. The lights in the hallway flickered as the ground shook, the guards shielded their eyes and huddled against the wall. Dr. Bright turned away as the tall white figure turned the corner. A crash came from the cell door, a howl of pain came from the cube, followed by screams, until it fell silent. One of the many guards stood up, still facing the wall, murmurs filled the hallway until they were drowned out by the sound of sobbing from the monster.

“Close the door!” The lights flashed red as the thick concrete door slammed shut. “I want you all to report back to me once we figure out who opened the door in the first place!” The head guard ordered.

“Yes, sir!” The security personnel left Dr. Bright standing in the hallway, he glanced towards the door as muffled cries came from the monster inside. Something warm and jello-like sat on his foot and purred with joy.

“Hey, buddy.” Dr. Bright uttered crouching down and stroked SCP-999’s head. SCP-999 was one of the few safe-class anomaly’s kept in the foundation. Whoever came in contact with it immediately felt overjoyed. The orange blob warbled and slid across the marble floor leaving a trail behind it. Dr. Bright stood up collecting his files and wandered around the building. There were no windows, just fluorescent lights and long hallways, door after door, death seemed to be everywhere. No one but the people who worked in the facility knew this place existed, but yet it seemed like their mistakes and griefs were obvious. If you didn’t go insane from the things you’ve seen then you would be one of the many casualties. Dr. Bright walked past many doors with the numbers indicating what anomaly was behind it. 939, 035, 079, 106... He listed in his head as he strolled past the doors. The screams of D-classes echoed off the walls, the pleas, the cries, it would drive someone mad if you listened long enough. Dr. Bright

stopped when he had tread past the room where the 05-council meetings were held.

“And we're sure he is able to do this?” A male voice came from inside.

“That's if he even accepts the task.”

“I don't follow on why him though, he's as dim as they get.”

Dr. Bright listened closely, who are they talking about?

“We're not here to call the personnel here names, administrator.”

A fist slammed against the table. “You do not tell me what to do!”

“Please calm down sir, were only trying to-”

“I don't care what you're trying to do, we've already had a breach from 096, and that... that... useless scientist is going to ruin everything!”

“I'm sure he'd be able to manage one task, without burning the place down.” A female voice suggested.

A murmur rose from the room in suspicion.

“Dr. Bright made his share of mistakes, that's for sure, but he's helpful in his own way.”

Dr. Bright's heart quickened. They're talking about me...

A purr came from behind him, startled, he stepped back tripping over the blob with a shriek. “Who's there?” A voice called from inside the room.

Dr. Bright stumbled to an upright position before he ran down the hall and into the nearest door to escape from being punished for spying. Once he could catch his breath he peeked from around the door seeing that no one was there. Of course they wouldn't give chase, their identities are to remain a secret, ugh I'm so stupid for listening in. He thought, gritting his teeth. An overwhelming presence came from the room, it made the air thick and hard to breathe.

“What brings you into my office?” A deep voice came from behind him.

Dr. Bright gasped and turned around looking up towards a towering figure above him. He had black gloves, a dark gray cloak and a white bird mask.

“Who... What are you?”

“SCP-049, well that's what they call me, I prefer to be called Plague Doctor.” He sighed. The Plague Doctor offered his hand to Dr. Bright in a formal gesture.

“Oh, no, um, I'm okay...” Dr. Bright trailed off, as his eyes adjusted to the dark room he noticed the eerie atmosphere. The walls ran with a dark colored liquid behind a counter lined with medical tools, the room smelled of rot and decay, but the most obvious was the cage that was covered with a sheet.

“Where am I?” Dr. Bright asked weary of the smell coming from the cage.

“You're in my office.”

“Your office is very... um, nice.” He lied.

“Oh dear, I reckon I'm not prepared for guests.” The Doctor frowned.

“Oh well, no one said curing the pestilence was clean.” he shrugged.

“The pestilence?” Dr. Bright asked as he looked around the room.

“Yes my research proves that there is a vile illness in every organism, except myself of course, for I am the cure.” The Plague Doctor let out a bellowing laugh that sent a chill down Dr. Bright's spine.

“Well it's been nice, um, getting to know you and about this whole pestilence stuff, but... really must be going now.” Dr. Bright said, backing slowly to the door.

“Oh, no, no, no, no, no, I haven't cured you of this disease. You must stay here” He ordered.

“I don’t feel ill, so it must mean I’m cured! So I’d better get going-” Dr. Bright began. “You don’t understand! I need to cure... everyone, you are sick! You cannot leave, no, no, no, no, no!” He laughed insanely. The Plague Doctor tore the sheet from the cage letting it float to the floor.

Dr. Bright could see now what was causing the smell. Mangled hands stuck out in between the bars as pale mis-shapen bodies thumped against the door trying to break free.

“I must cure... everyone” He repeated.

“I need a new patient to cure...” He laughed again.

“It humors me how the scientists here are very uneducated on this pestilence, when in fact... they, themselves... are the pestilence.” He looked from Dr. Bright to his tool bag sitting on a table with a dim light above it.

“I’m afraid I must leave.” Dr. Bright said, opening the door, before the Plague Doctor slammed it shut on Dr. Bright’s hand.

“I SAID NO!” The Doctor screamed.

A loud snap echoed in the room, Dr. Bright’s eyes slowly fell down to his hand which felt like it was being torn apart. Dr. Bright let out a wail of pain and slumped to the floor.

Security personnel swarmed towards the chamber to find Dr. Bright kneeling on the floor clutching his misshapen hand with tears rolling down his face, with a plague doctor laughing crazed. Dr. Bright fell to his side, still clutching his hand. He tried keeping his eyes open, seeing the Plague Doctor being shoved into a collar with two poles on either side, and his hands being forced into chains. His laughter filled the room. Dr. Bright looked at his hand, throbbing. Now it was swollen at his fingertips. He tried to move into an upright position, putting his right hand on the floor, followed by his left, he collapsed against the floor hitting his head on the concrete. The voices of security and medical personnel were silenced when one of the 05 council members waltzed in with a grin spreading across his face like no other.

“Show him our newest anomaly...”

Drifting in and out of reality. That’s all that Dr. Bright remembered. What was real anymore? The secrets, the lies, the missions. It all felt like a nightmare. He signed a contract to never speak of his work to anyone, but what would he even say? That monsters were real? That there was a secret foundation doing tests and experiments on them? Many scientists went missing on site, or were found dead. Who would believe him?

His eyes opened to find himself sitting on a chair facing a desk with a single piece of paper.

Project-303-BRIGHT

His eyes widened as he flipped it over to find the photo that was taken of him on his first day. A voice sounded far away from Dr. Bright, followed by yelling, screaming. The lectures, the orders. The pleas and apologies. They all merged into one horrible sound that seemed to last an eternity... Until it fell into two voices, his own and his father’s. “You could’ve let them live.” His father said flatly.

“But- they’re D-classes...” Dr. Bright issued.

“They’re human.”

“They’ve committed crimes! Felonies! Offenses!”

“And testing on anomalies and forcing them into horrible experiments isn’t just as bad?”

“I-”

“Wake up, Jack! You can’t keep hurting everyone because you’re hurt!”

“They’re criminals sentenced to death! I’m sorry if I’m doing my job to protect humanity!”

“Call it what you want, but you’re no better than your mother!”

“DON’T TALK ABOUT MOM LIKE THAT!”

“Leave it be Jack, you know I’m right!”

“You’ll see! I’ll save everyone, but you! I’ll be a hero, don’t ever speak to me again!” A scream rang through the air, his parents, his siblings, burning, the pale white house Dr. Bright grew up in, was in flames, shrieks pierced the sky from the people inside. Dr. Bright stared at the house and then to his left when a small whimper came from that direction. A kid, shorter than himself with fluffy orange hair and an oversized lab coat clutching a pair of glasses, too big for him to wear, his cheeks were wet with tears. Dr. Bright recognized him immediately from family photos, himself, this was his family burning, this was his house.

“What are you doing? Save them!” Dr. Bright blurted, reaching out to the kid. His memories flooded back, the nightmares, the wails, the pleas, the cries. “Stop...”

His mother’s smile, his father teaching him how to use the computer, his brothers’ and sisters’ playing games together outside as he sat inside using a lab kit. “Please... make it stop!”

He clutched his head, a migraine formed, it felt like something was shaking his brain in his skull back and forth.

“Make it stop!”

The corners of his eyes went black, reaching other parts of his vision, making it almost impossible to see, until the only thing left was the pain inside his head.

“Do you think he’s alive?”

“I think he’s dead.”

“No, he’s breathing.”

“Barely.”

“He looks alive.”

“I still think he’s dead.”

“Well, I think he’s alive.”

Something was shoved into Dr. Bright's mouth; it tasted like bread. He sat up choking and coughing, attempting to swallow the food.

“Great job Mark, you killed him!” A female voice came from his left.

“I didn’t mean to!” Mark protested.

Dr. Bright coughed again and responded horsley. “N-no, I’m fine.”

A sigh of relief came from Mark, a scrawny kid with fluffy brown hair, brown eyes and freckles dotted along his nose. He had a white shirt with blue cargo pants. He looked perfectly normal except for the green cloth wrapped around his right eye. He must’ve been about 7 or possibly younger. The girl who sat next to him had curly brown hair, and wore a brown tank top and black pants. She had green eyes with no freckles to be seen on her face.

Dr. Bright looked at his surroundings as his vision cleared, they were huddled in a room which resembled a medical office.

A banged up clock hung on the wall next to a shelf with two med-kits stacked neatly on top of each other. A wall lined with more shelves was filled with food, mostly canned fruit and a few water bottles, some with dirt inside, which must have

been used for gardening purposes.

“Who are you two, where am I-” Dr. Bright looked to see if they had identification badges.

“Im Isabella,” she pointed to herself and then to her bother. “And that’s Mark.” “But where am I, what is this...” Dr. Bright looked around at the makeshift medical office. Isabella glared at Dr. Bright and responded with anger. “It’s our sick bay.” Dr. Bright put on a fake smile. “It’s... uh... very, well... nice.” He offered to Isabella, who was rolling her eyes at him. Mark had left to talk to one of the other people in the sick bay.

The dull colored cots lined the wall, some were or had been occupied. Dr. Bright didn’t see anyone in uniform, or with the SCP Foundations logo on their shirts. These weren’t security, scientists, or D-Class personnel. The D-classes wore orange and white jumpsuits with D-class written on the front. Who are these people?

His thoughts were interrupted by a siren, much like the one at the Foundation when there was an outbreak.

“Barricade the door!” A tall man bursts through the hallway connecting the sick bay to whatever areas might have been outside of this gloomy room.

Yells of people filled the air, the slam of a door being shut sounded from farther down the hall.

“Isabella!” Mark cried running towards her before he pulled her into a tight hug.

“What’s going on?!” Dr. Bright shouted over the sound.

“They’re coming.” Mark sobbed, still clutching Isabella.

“What? Whos comi-” The lights went out, Mark’s face went pale, Isabella hushed him. The darkness covered everything; there wasn’t a single light in the entire room. Dr. Bright opened his mouth to speak but fell silent when heavy footsteps came from outside the wall. It circled around the sick bay until it stopped at the front door. “No one move.” A female voice whispered from the darkness.

“The store is now c-c-closed, please exit the b-building.” A deep voice came from behind the door.

Dr. Bright lowered himself onto the floor next to Isabella and Mark and felt around for something to use as a weapon. The only thing he felt was a roll of bandages. Whatever was outside the door took it time to observe the structure. What is that thing? It can’t be human, humans’ don’t... glitch...

When the thuds from the monster’s footfall faded away to nothing, Isabella gave a small sigh and Mark wiped his eyes with the back of his hands. Light flooded the room, and everyone gave a relieved sigh.

“What was that?! Where are we?! What’s going on?!” Dr. Bright demanded. Mark had left Isabella and disappeared down the hallway. The woman who silenced everyone stood up and hung the lamp on a hook. She had dark brown hair and a teal shirt with white pants that went to her ankles. Isabella bit her bottom lip and sighed again. “I’m going to tell you a story, and you’re not going to interrupt me if you want answers, okay?” Dr. Bright nodded. “It was June 27th, 2019, me and my...” She looked at the ground. “Me and my... brother were going to pick out a gift for our mother for her birthday. We didn’t have a lot of money, so we could only really shop at a Walmart since I can’t drive, and it was within walking distance from our house in Southington since we lived in the apartment complex next door...”

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“Sissy, can we get a card and some flowers?” A kid with brown hair and a red shirt with black pants begged and tugged on the bottom of Isabella’s shirt. “I think so... can you go pick out a pretty card for her? Can you do that by yourself, while I get flowers, Finn?” Isabella asked, grinning as Finn’s face lit up.

“Yeah! I’m gonna get the bestest flowers for mommy!” Finn beamed, skipping into the next aisle. Isabella peered over to the entrance of the building where Finn had acted like he was a wizard and opened the automatic doors with magic. She smiled to herself as she strode over to the cash register, picking up pink roses. *Mom’s favorite*, she thought as she placed them on the counter to the self-checkout.

There was no-one inside Walmart; no employees were in sight even though the sign at the front said open.

*I better go check on Finn...* Isabella sighed, the roses bounced with every step she took towards the cards. When she arrived she didn’t see Finn. Her heart dropped.

“Finn?!” She shouted running up and down the aisles of the store until she had checked every aisle. “Finn!” She screamed running around the corners of the aisles, double-checking to see if Finn was there. Her heart felt like it would explode beating faster and faster with every aisle she found empty.

“Finn!” She yelled before she saw Finn talking to a tall figure. Taller than any human, it wore the regular employee shirt complete with matching pants. Until she saw it’s head... no face, just indents where the eyes, nose, and mouth should’ve been, with hands that dragged across the floor and fingers sharp as knives. Finn followed the monster into a room half the store away. Speed-walking... sprinting... running, she raced towards the door until she stopped dead in her tracks in front of the freezer aisle. Isabella stared, paralyzed in shock as everything moved in slow motion, her brother’s head turning at snail-speed towards her as his smile turned into a face struck with horror, his hazel eyes widened, expressing fear before he opened his mouth for the last time.

“Sissy?”

The hand of the monster raised, grazing the ceiling before striking down on Finn’s neck making his body fall to the floor, with a sickening thud.

“NO!” Isabella hollered dropping the roses, pink petals falling to the floor, tears streaming down her face as she ran towards her brother. The one who made her smile. The one who always cheered her up. The one who protected her from the dark. The one who hugged her at dad’s funeral. The one who made her a drawing when she was sick. The one who loved her no matter what. The one who told her jokes. The one who had never left her side. Dead.

“No... no, no, no!” She barreled into the room collapsing next to Finn’s corpse. “Please Finn, you have to be okay! Please Finny! Finn please!” She sobbed.

The door slammed shut as heavy breathing came from behind her followed by the sound of scraping along the floor. Her tears fell onto Finn’s body and she brushed them off as new ones fell. A pair of hands snagged into her shoulders and dragged her slowly. “No!” Isabella dug her nails into the floor trying to break free.

“Finn!”

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“Finn is gone...” Isabella wiped the tears from her eyes.

“Isabella I’m so sorry...” Dr. Bright put his hand on her shoulder wincing at the pain.

“Don’t be, it’s in the past. I have Mark, he needs me to be strong. Without me to protect him, who will?” She stood up and trotted into the hallway calling after Mark.

“She’s been through a lot; thinks she has to protect everyone and anyone who she comes across. Names Randy by the way” A man leaning against a wall uttered.

“What’s Mark’s story? Why is he here?” Dr. Bright questioned.

“Mark? He’s never told me how he got here, hasn’t told anyone actually...” Randy trailed off.

“What about you? Why are you here?” Dr. Bright inquired.

“A nosey one aren’t you? But if you must know, I’m not sure. I woke up, went to work, went to sleep, and woke up here.” He shrugged.

Dr. Bright pushed himself off of the cot and trudged down the hallway. “Isabella? Mark?” He stumbled into a room, smaller than the sick bay but larger than the office he was in at the start of this mess.

“Isabella?” Muffled crying came from inside.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine... don’t you have somewhere to be?” She huffed, drying her eyes with her sleeve.

“No, I’m not sure where I would even need to be. Where’s Mark?” He looked around.

Isabella cried again and shoved her head in between her legs. A gust of wind came from outside as sobs came, not from Isabella, but outside the door.

“Isabella, where’s Mark?” Dr. Bright urged.

Her rasped breaths came short and she started to hiccup as she cried harder.

“Where’s Mark, Isabella?!” He grabbed her shoulders and shook her until she replied.

“I d-don’t know!” She sniffled.

A scream came from outside. Isabella rose from the ground so suddenly she stumbled backwards a few steps before rushing towards the door.

Another scream came from outside before the door swung open sending Isabella hurdling into the wall opposite of the door.

A boy emerged from the dust dragging a limp figure... he wobbled until he latched onto the side of the wall for support, and dropped the lump on the floor. Dr. Bright recalled the kid from Isabella’s story... Finn.



## Life Like by Violet Hansen

The leaves have turned red under the influence of the new season and Walter Booker has been dead for several months before Oliver Moore finally realized he was crazy. Oliver Moore looked just like any other pedestrian in Southington - two eyes, two legs, two arms - but he also possessed a brain two times the size of anyone else's. And this brain was too much for him to handle.

Now Oliver Moore had been rather close with Walter Booker, like Watson and Sherlock. Or Jekyll and Hyde. Partners - not in crime - in business. Oliver had been to many events in Walter's favor - police questioning, court appearances, the wake, the funeral - all the basic protocol when one mysteriously dies.

But even before Booker's death Oliver earned the right to be called crazy. He found joy in making dead animals look presentable. But what others found sick and twisted, brought Oliver peace and joy.

In the quiet of his workshop, and the loudness of his mind, Oliver Moore knew there was still so much to do before the Apple Harvest Festival. Every year since Walter Booker and Oliver Moore had met in college, they ran a stand with all of their greatest taxidermy work at the Apple Harvest and this year would be no different. Except that this year there would be no Walter Booker to showcase squirrels in scarfs and crows wearing witch hats. It would just be Oliver Moore, in the chaos of the fair, and the chaos of his mind, with the quiet triumph of his work.

"Mr. Moore, there is someone here to see you," said Snappy.

Oliver found Snappy Wilson, high and dry, in the crisp air a couple of weeks after Walter Booker's death. He was a skinny boy, but tall. He always wore a hat to cover the shagginess of his hair. Snappy was not a replacement for Walter, no one could ever replace Walter. He was just...there.

"Thank you, Snappy."

Over his lifetime of taxidermy work, Oliver Moore had been greeted by many different faces. Police officers, old women, little children that cry and point when they see one of his many creations. But the face that would now greet him in the doorway when he went up stairs was different. The type of different that sent a shiver down his spine. A familiar face that he hadn't seen in a long time.

"Walter?" Oliver asked hesitantly.

"Um, no Mr. Moore, it's me. I have your mail."

Oh.

That was crazy.

Oliver is crazy.

He is crazy.

*Crazy, Crazy, Crazy.*

That was not Walter Booker at his doorstep. Why would he even think so in the first place? Walter's dead. Oliver needed to accept that.

He took the packages from the mailman and returned to his workshop, placing the parcels on his worktable. He had needed a replacement rabbit foot. Oliver had to get his own head in place, he needed to work on his animals. Glue. He needed glue. Rummaging through his many drawers, paper, bags, string. But where was his glue? He needed glue.

Oliver looked over at Walter's side of the workshop, everything still in the same place, exactly the way he left it. A broken lamp, old, tattered paper, even the coffee ring on the tabletop from the last cup of coffee he'd had. Everything, except Walter.

Walter always had glue. Oliver didn't. But Oliver didn't want to mess up Walter's desk. Every single item placed in such a carefully thought out way.

But Walter is dead.

Slowly Oliver crept up to Walter's side of the workshop. Sliding his fingers along the fine wood of his desk, he opened a drawer. Oliver had never been through Walter's side of the workshop before, it was their unspoken rule. Now Oliver was breaking it.

Cyanoacrylate super glue was the best glue a taxidermist could find and guilt was the most common feeling a person could feel. Walter's side of the workshop would never be the same now that Oliver picked up the glue. He would try and make it seem the same. He would close the drawer, like it was never opened before, but just as he was about to, a shimmer of light buried in the darkness beneath papers and twigs caught Oliver's eye.

*Close the drawer, he told himself, close it.*

*Oh but wouldn't it be nice to see the light that is buried in the dark?*

*Close the drawer.*

*Close it.*

Oliver reached into the drawer and grabbed the light that made him betray his best friend's privacy. But it was not a light. What he found was not a magical ore, or a recipe to cause all of his problems to cease. It was a key. A simple key that had glinted in the light.

Oliver recognized all the keys Walter possessed, his house keys, and - nothing else - he only ever knew what his house keys looked like. And Walter never had a car, he took the trolley. But he had never seen this key.

Placing the key on his own desk, Oliver knew he had broken his and Walter's unspoken rule. And the key glowed in the lamplight.

Five days to the Apple Harvest. Oliver found a type of peace in the stuffing process, especially with raccoons. Oliver loved raccoons. But he hated mice, their little bodies made the stuffing process quite unenjoyable.

*Tip, tip, tip.*

*Crash!*

Oliver flinched in surprise. His mind had been so occupied with his work that he didn't realize how close to the edge of the table his glass of paint was. But now his wood floors were stained with red. It wasn't uncommon for his floors to be stained with red but usually it was not paint that stained his wood floors.

"Snappy?" He yelled from the basement below, "get me some towels will you?"

Oliver had never *scrubbed* a lot of things in his life. He didn't have a car to get dirty, he had other people to *scrub* his shoes clean for him. And usually he was so careful about his work, making sure that animal guts weren't all over the floor.

But here was Oliver scrubbing the floor with a once white towel and using a once full container of soap. His shoulder was sore and he had already gotten a splinter from the wood that fractured away the more he scrubbed. He inhaled the deep scent of chemicals, breathing shallow with the effort. The hypnotic, dizzying effort of scrubbing and scrubbing a spot on the floor. Oliver slowly noticed that the more he scrubbed the more his floor wasn't looking like a floor. Dark lines began to form around the soapy mess. The wood became more smooth, less harsh.

And that is because Oliver was no longer scrubbing the floor. He was scrubbing a door. A door built into the floor.

Standing up, his mind fuzzed from the fumes of chemicals, Oliver leaned back on the table to support the weight in his head and still the shakiness of his body. The door he stood in front of had a hole for a key. A hole perfectly fit for *Walter's* key, the one Oliver found in Walter's drawer. The way in which Oliver would walk to Walter's desk was a mix of a stumble, a run, and a falling motion. The key was still sitting on the table, shining brighter than ever, making Oliver's finger dance whenever he'd see it. With a grab of the key and a grab of the hem of his shirt, he opened the door on the floor.

Stairs. Lots and lots of stairs going down is what greeted Oliver when he opened that door. Creaking, Oliver stood on the first step. Breath in. Breath out. And with that, he walked down the stairs.

Oliver had never seen so many stairs in his life. He tried not to fall knowing that the stairs were steep and spiral, like a vortex into a bottomless pit. By the time Oliver got to the bottom of his stairs he couldn't tell if the mix of the chemicals and the dizziness in his head had gotten to him, or if what he was seeing now left him horrified or amused. As his eyes began to adjust to the darkness, furniture and some items began to take shape. He ran his fingers along an old wood desk that stood in front of him, something wet smearing across his index and middle finger. He frantically searched the desk looking for a light to explain the feelings he was feeling. The *things* he was feeling. As he did he felt cold metal, running his hands up along the post of the cold metal, he flipped a switch. Light burst through the room, giving Oliver new things to feel. The wetness on his fingers went from invisible to red. Not like the paint. More like the blood. He stumbled back, trying to find something to hold him upright, but his knees buckled and his hands met the ground, staining the floors with blood too. With a steadying breath, he brought himself up to his feet. It took him some courage and strength but he did it, and made his way back to the desk. Blood dripped off the desk to the floor. Papers and papers filled the desk. Only Walter kept so many papers on his desk.

Oliver foraged through the pile of papers, looking for answers. Walter never kept secrets from Oliver, or at least, that's what Oliver had always believed. Walter had always been discrete about his work. Private. He never talked too much or too little, but Oliver had never thought too much about that until the day the police came to visit his house a couple of days after Walter Booker had disappeared.

"Did Walter Booker ever mention thoughts of death to you, Mr. Moore?"

Oliver could only shake his head no, "Walter never showed his emotions, even after his wife Evangeline's miscarriage did he still seem normal."

The police officer's eyes widened, the man next to him taking notes.

"Mr. Booker has a wife?" He asked. "Do you know where we might be able to reach out to her?"

"*Had,*" Oliver corrected him. "Evangeline shot herself last April." Oliver fixed himself in his chair, grunting into his next words. "She left a note but Walter never showed it to me. I don't even know where it is."

The officer nodded and looked at his co-worker, "Well, thank you for your time Mr. Moore." And that that was.

And now here Oliver was, in some secret workspace of Walter's. And there among the papers on Walter's secret desk, was the note from his wife that he had kept secret from Oliver.

*I cannot do this anymore, Walter. You need professional help that I can not provide you. You are crazy. All you do is sit in that stupid office of yours, stuffing once living and breathing creatures for other people's enjoyment. I do not want to keep your little secret anymore Walter Booker. I cannot keep acting like there is not a horrifying creature beneath the floorboards of your workshop. I cannot keep acting like the perfect wife to the perfect husband. I do not want to silently go crazy because I'm under the influence of your foolish dreams. They will put you in jail if they find out what you're doing. They will put me in jail. You are going to drag everyone down with you and I will not be here to see it. I'm sorry.*

*Evangeline*

Crazy. Crazy, Crazy, Crazy. Walter was crazy. Only Evangeline had known. But there was one sentence that lingered in Oliver's mind like the scent of crusted fried dough oil at the fair.

*I cannot keep acting like there is not a horrifying creature beneath the floorboards of your workshop.*

Oliver had simply assumed that all the noises he'd been hearing were just Snappy upstairs. Except Snappy wasn't home right now. He was out buying Oliver the local newspaper. And still there were noises.

Just then, the closet pressed against the wall didn't seem like a normal closet. Oliver wouldn't save his precious thinking time to go over the pros or cons of what would happen if he opened this closet. He just allowed his hand to take over. The closet doors flung open, and what Oliver saw next would paralyze him with horror.

Wendigo.

In Cree mythology Wendigos have been known to possess humans. It was never real of course. No mythology was ever real.

Everyone had always thought he was the crazy king of Southington. Walter, on the other hand, was always seen as his quiet and content co-worker.

But oh if Oliver had known - if anyone had known - about this sooner, he wouldn't be crazy anymore, he would almost seem normal in comparison.

It wasn't uncommon for taxidermists to try and make their wares into mythical creatures, but none of them have ever tried to make them *alive*.

Walter had.

Wendigo, the creature that possessed people in their sleep. Fifteen feet tall, including the antlers. Long, black hair going down its back. Sharp teeth. Sharp claws. Chains on its arms and legs, keeping it intact within the closet.

"Oh Walter, what have you done?" Oliver muttered to himself.

The creature made a noise like no other noise Oliver had ever heard before. It let out a shriek, almost like a broken trolley. Oliver wanted to close the closet. Pretend like this never happened. He just wanted to go back upstairs, to the quietness of his workshop and the loudness of his mind. But for some reason, instead, Oliver reached out to it. Why he was reaching out to it he couldn't quite comprehend. It just felt *right*. That is, until red became the color he saw most. Oliver held his arm, groaning in pain. The Wendigo had gotten a firm grip on Oliver's arm before it let go. Oliver shut the closet doors. He never wanted to see that skull of a face ever again. He ran up the stairs, shut the door beneath the floorboards.

A week had passed. A week and Oliver had done a fair amount of work. He finished the majority of his animals for the Apple Harvest. He'd frequently walk to the Southington Public library to ponder the aisles. And he was very proud of himself for the way he so carefully wrapped his arm. And he had even put new floorboards over the trap door. The one thing that had thrown him off his schedule was the dreams he had at night. He would open his eyes to a forest, a dark forest. He would hear noises, the same ones that that *creature* made when he opened those closet doors. Then out of nowhere Walter would grab his shoulders. Except the Walter who grabbed his shoulders did not look familiar. His face was all torn, his eyes hung low, and as he shook Oliver's shoulders he'd say in a panic, "Oliver, Oliver you need to run. You need to leave."

Then Oliver would wake up.

But Oliver wasn't phased by these dreams, they were just a sign that he still needed to recover from what happened, though they did leave him tired. Still, Oliver would just continue on with his normal routine. Wake up like nothing happened, make breakfast, eat breakfast, then brush his teeth because he just had breakfast.

Oliver stood in front of the bathroom mirror in his pajama bottoms and his wifebeater, sleepily running his toothbrush under the cold faucet. He looked up to see if it was time for him to shave, but then his toothbrush fell from his grasp. His bare shoulders were imprinted with a handprint on each side. It had brought him back to his dream. Walter shaking his shoulders in the same place where those prints were now. All Oliver could do was shake his head in confusion. Maybe he had been holding his own shoulders in his sleep? Maybe Snappy had come into his room and he hadn't known?

This wasn't real.

So Oliver continued on with his routine. Today on the agenda, Oliver had to visit Karabin Farms. They had a sick pig for him.

"And you're positive she's sick?" Oliver always needed the clarification that he wasn't gutting perfectly healthy animals. Oliver was never a fan of farm animals, it wasn't elegant to try and make an animal that lives in its own waste presentable, but he also couldn't blow off a good deal.

The farmer spit into the hay, "Sick as a dog, I'd be surprised if she even lasted a day."

Oliver nodded his head, "I'll take her."

The farmer gave him a weird look. Oliver was unsure if the farmer was re-thinking the deal.

Finally the farmer opened his mouth, "Uh, Mr. Moore, your nose is bleeding."

Slowly, Oliver touched his finger to his nose and blood dripped down, turning the hay beneath his feet red.

"I'm sorry, can I use your restroom?"

Oliver bundled toilet paper around his hand and leaned his head back to pat the blood off of his nose. He looked down, curling his hands around the edges of the sink. Before Oliver could even blink he saw it, the Wendigo. Fifteen feet tall. The skull of a moose for a face. Blood dripping from its teeth.

*Kill them.*

Oliver blinked, stumbled backwards, then it was gone.

One day until Apple Harvest. Oliver had done a fine job knitting scarfs onto squirrels and hats onto racoons. He had had several missed phone calls from Karabin Farms, wondering where he had run off to after using the bathroom.

Oliver wiped the blood off his hands on a white cloth. It wasn't his blood though, it was a rabbit's. He tried his best to ignore the awful sounds that came from below. He told himself it was a work crew outside.

"I am worried about your Mr. Moore," Snappy said, pacing back and forth in the living room. Oliver sat down, sipping out of a beer bottle.

"I'm fine Snappy, just a little worked up."

Snappy began to rant about Oliver's recent behavior. But after a while his voice just became a blur. The Wendigo. Walter. They began to blur in and out of motion.

*Kill.*

His brain glitched.

It was Walter.

*Kill him.*

Ringings filled Oliver's ears. The noises of the Wendigo. Walter glitched in and out of Oliver's frame, the Wendigo standing behind him. Oliver's head began to pound as Snappy continued to rant.

"Snappy-" Oliver tried to stop Snappy so he could clear his head but Snappy just went on.

"Snappy please-"

The ringing. The noise. Walter -

*Kill him.*

"Snappy that's enough!" Oliver finally yelled. Snappy looked at Oliver, fear and alarm in his eyes. Oliver brushed his hand over his face, "I'm sorry, I just -" Oliver stopped, "I just need to go now."

Oliver ran down to his workshop. He rubbed one hand over his mouth, his other hand rested on the table. Oliver didn't even have to turn his head to know who was staring at him.

"Go away, Walter."

Walter's face and clothes were still torn, but his tophat was still perfectly placed on his head. No dents or nothing.

"You're like me now, Oliver."

Oliver looked up, "Oh yeah and what is that?"

A smile spread across Walter's face. "Crazy."

Oliver walked over to the other side of his workshop and poured himself a glass of bourbon, his tie loosely strung around his neck.

"I've always been crazy," he said. "I mean look at me right now, I'm talking to a *dead* person." He laughed and took a sip of alcohol.

"Oliver, you cannot go to the Apple Harvest tomorrow."

Oliver began to laugh even more. His laughter turned into words, "Why should I listen to you? You're dead for pete's sake!"

Walter - or *dead* Walter - looked down at his dead feet and fixed his tie.

At this point Oliver had become completely unhinged, though he didn't feel the need to do anything about it. He just leaned back against the desk, his hair all messy and his mind all fogged. Walter cleared his throat, "I can see you're upset-"

“I’m not upset, I am losing my mind!” Oliver cut him off, looking at Walter’s tattered face in disgust, “Go away, Walter.”

“Oliver you cannot go-”

“Go away! Go away, go away, go, go away, go away!” Oliver squeezed his eyes shut and continued to shout, and when he opened his eyes Walter was gone.

The Apple Harvest Festival was all the usual. A long line for apple fritters, people walking around with carts of toys and whatever else kids seem to be into these days. At his booth, Oliver organized his creations. The squirrels with the squirrels and the rats with the rats. He tried to put the cute ones, like bunnies with raincoats, in the front to make it seem more appealing to kids. But mothers would still cover their children’s eyes as they walked past. Finally a man came up to Oliver’s stand. He had a perfect, even tie and a simple black suit like he had just come out of work.

“Hey, so do you have anything like, *really*, unique?” The man asked.

Oliver looked around his booth for something that could blow someone’s mind away. He picked up one of his creations.

“I have this one,” he exclaimed, “it’s got the head of a duck and the body of a rabbit.” The man in the suit turned his head to the side. “What about that one?” He asked, pointing to something behind Oliver. Oliver smiled at the eagerness of this customer and a potential sale. But when Oliver turned around his eyes widened and hands began to shake.

The head of the Wendigo was mounted on the wall of his stand. He dropped his rabbit-duck, and all of a sudden he felt blood tap, tap, tapping out of his nose and onto the ground.

“Yeah, I really like that one,” The man continued on. But Oliver was no longer listening. He turned around, covering his nose with his hand.

“Excuse me? Are you even listening to me?”

Oliver stared blankly into space. The voices around him blurred as the world began to spin.

So he ran.

Oliver ran out of his booth, through the crowd of people, through and between cars that passed. He just ran. He ran all the way to his house and down to his workshop. He frantically tore up the newly placed floorboards above the door. The door flung open and he ran down the creaky, wood stairs. When he made it to the bottom he undid all the locks on the closet, cutting his hand in the process. When he finally undid the last lock he opened the closet door. But it wasn’t there. The Wendigo wasn’t there.

In horror, Oliver ran back up the stairs, and shut the trap door. He ran out into the large empty field behind his house. The cold fall air brushed over his face, his hands turning red in a shivering fright. He stood there, panting. He saw his breath in the cool air as he saw the Wendigo’s silhouette appear from behind the trees in the woods. Oliver fell to his knees on the dry, straw like grass and screamed.

“Go away!” He repeated over and over until he had lost his voice.

The Wendigo approached closer and closer with every scream and Oliver gave up screaming. There was nothing he could do. The man was crazy. Oliver Moore was crazy. Oliver, still on his knees, the Wendigo in front of him. It put one of its long fingers on Oliver’s forehead, right between the eyes. All Oliver could see was the skull-faced deer before he pulled the match book he had used for his cigarettes out of his suit pocket. Behind the Wendigo, who still held on to his head, Oliver saw Walter. Walter, his partner in business, the Watson to his

Sherlock, his best friend. He nodded at Oliver as he stood behind the Wendigo. He gave Oliver a reassuring smile through his tattered face. Oliver knew what that smile meant. It's over. He scraped the match against the match book. The flame brought warmth to the Wendigo's face, the last face Oliver would ever see.

Oliver dropped the flame to the dry grass, sending flames all around him. The Wendigo released Oliver, causing Oliver to fall on his back into the flames as the Wendigo and Walter dissolved into a puff of smoke.

The flames rose higher around Oliver's body. But Oliver felt at peace as the flames made it up to his legs and hands. He laid in the now burning grass, but he didn't cry out or weep. Instead, he began to laugh. He began to laugh because somewhere in between the quietness of the flames and the quietness of his mind, Oliver Moore, the craziest man in Southington, had never felt more sane.



## **Heart Harvest by Amanda Maisano**

The aroma of fresh apple fritters fills the crisp autumn air with a welcoming scent. The evening air is cold but my big coat and hot apple cider are keeping me nice and toasty.

*Thud*, a handsome tall man bumps into me.

“My bad” he apologizes in a charming British accent. He smelled like warm chestnuts and looked like a supermodel.

My cheeks flush but before I could say anything he disappeared into the crowd.

A small pain creeps its way into my head and my limp body thuds into someone’s arms. The last thing I see is his inhuman wide smile, then it fades to black. My sore, dry eyes strain as if a bright light is being shined onto my face. My vision is blurry and my head is foggy, everything hurts. A strong blast of mildew causes my eyes to water. I can feel and hear my heart pounding in my head. I try to speak but nothing escapes my dried out throat.

I survey my surroundings, it looks like I’m on the hard, dirty floor of a dimly lit abandoned hospital room. I burst out into tears, Southington doesn’t have any abandoned hospitals so where was I? I slowly heave my body up and collapse onto the bed, soaking the stale sheets in my tears.

I feel something wet on my chest and a sharp pain radiates through my body. I burst out into tears, I slowly switched my gaze to the once white sheets that were now covered in my blood. I was now wearing my tanktop and some shorts, my coat and pants were on the floor.

An icy dry breeze grazed my bare skin leaving a blanket of goosebumps on my whole body, which made me cry even harder. I look over at the table next to me to see a water bottle. Without hesitation I reach over and gulp down as much water as I possibly could. I had felt that I hadn’t drank in days and it hurt to drink. The water also tasted funny. I slowly fell out of consciousness again.

I awoke again to see a glowing white figure looming over me, limbs bent into a dome shape. It smiled at me but it looked like it hurt to smile. It didn’t look human. They weren’t clothed and had no genitals. Their limbs were abnormally large and boney.

It takes me a bit to process this information so we just sit there, staring into my reflection, staring into his eyes. Its eyes were an endless black void of mystery and its teeth were almost luminescent.

My eyes widen and my heart feels like it’s going to explode. I lay there, locking eyes with it for what seems like a lifetime. I break eye contact and in the corner of the room is a human heart, and on the floor is my dead body.

## **The Day I Almost Died by Benjamin Marek**

Have you ever spent a year in the hospital? Well, I have and I'm going to tell you all about it. When I was 11 years old I kept getting headaches everyday at school. They would get worse and worse as time went on. So, one day we decided to go right to the hospital. The doctors ran every test from CAT scans, MRIs, CT scans, blood work, and every other test known to man. Soon they would find out that I had a super rare brain tumor called a Craniopharyngioma.

My family and the town were devastated. I felt so scared and angry because I needed one of the most dangerous surgeries in the world. Mason said, "holy crap, is he going to be ok?" My whole town and community rallied around and supported us. I was sent to CCMC for surgery to have the brain tumor removed. During my surgery I suffered from a couple minor seizures but the tumor was successfully removed.

After the surgery I couldn't eat anything, I would throw everything right back up. Then my Mom decided to try a restaurant across the street from the hospital. She got me a lobster roll with truffle fries. I woofed it down like a hungry bear. The next day, the hospital discharged me and we headed home.

After about one week I was sent back because my head was swelling. They put a shunt in (a brain fluid drain). One day they wanted to send me home so they made me get up and walk. I collapsed because of a pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lungs) . As a result of the embolism I was put on life support for 3 months.

Next I was sent to the Franciscan Children 's Rehabilitation Center and that's when I met Colleen and Kaylee the physical therapists and Ray the occupational therapist. Although it took a year, they got me up and walking. Many times during rehab I would tell my mom, "I can't do this anymore, I don't want to live." My next hurdle was fighting with the insurance company to get me transportation to and from Mass General Hospital. I needed to go there everyday for proton treatment, also known as radiation. Insurance was a headache for my poor mom.

While all this was happening my dad was home with the boys trying to keep life as normal as possible for them. This was not easy for my dad, my mom was always our primary caregiver. Dad is a worker, bringing in the money.

I moved from the Franciscan Rehab to Mass General then to Spalding Rehab. in Boston once I was off the ventilator. Each day I become stronger and stronger. I soon got my trachea out and then my G tube and I headed home.

The day I got home was one of the best days of my life! The whole town was there (quite literally the whole town was there). Some pretty important people were there, my best friend Mason, Jack Perry, Town Council and Victoria Triano, Chr. She gave me a proclamation declaring Christmas Eve Benjamin Marek day in Southington, CT. I was very fortunate that this was not "the day I died"!.





## The Wake Up by Lara Bryant

The tapping at Kate's bedroom window didn't immediately wake her up, but it did pull loose the drowsy threads keeping her in a dream. Her hand sloppily slapped her nightstand, searching for her cell phone. Finding the charger first, her fingers traced up the cord and landed on the smooth, flat surface of her phone's screen. She tapped it twice. 2:13 a.m, her phone's screen read.

Next to her in bed, her husband Tom stirred in response to her phone's light. She flipped her phone over, withdrew her arm back under the covers, closed her eyes and sought sleep. It was a Saturday, and she'd be damned if she couldn't catch at least seven hours of sleep. The tapping at the window slowly but irregularly persisted, like a skipping CD track. She tuned it out and sought sleep.

But her search for sleep didn't last long. The frightened wail of her young daughter, Macy, carried from outside the house and into Kate's ears. Adrenaline pumped through her mind. Ready or not, she was up. Kate swung out of bed, crossed the bedroom, and looked out their window.

The moon wasn't quite full yet but it was a cloudless night, and that was enough for Kate to make out two small figures standing below her window. Macy was one of them, wearing her Paw Patrol pajamas and clutching her stuffed penguin Pubs under an arm. Standing next to her was her older brother Liam, dressed in his rocket ship pajamas. His arm was swung back in a pitch, but it dropped when he saw his mother at the window.

"Tom, the kids are outside in the backyard," Kate announced, not bothering to mask her annoyance.

"Mm, wha--?" With a deep inhale through his nose, Tom flipped onto his back. "Why are they outside?"

"Maybe he was showing her Mars?" Liam was obsessed with outer space, which meant Macy was too. At her preschool's weekly show and tell, Macy brought in an orange painted Styrofoam ball and declared she wanted to be an astronaut like her brother and land on Mars. A snotty five year old crushed Macy's otherworldly aspirations by lying to her that girls couldn't be astronauts. Fueled with a special, fiery determination only an eight-year-old big brother could muster, Liam made it his life's mission to teach Macy everything he knew about outer space.

Kate sighed. "I'll take care of this."

"Mm," was all Tom said.

"Can you go to kids and tell them I'm on my way?" Kate asked, grabbing her phone off its charger. She seized her fleece bathrobe off a hook on the door. "And keep an eye on them, too, until I'm out there."

"Mm."

Kate closed the door behind her and, using her phone's screen to light the stairs, made her way down to the back door in the kitchen. She plucked Tom's keys from the kitchen counter, just in case she locked herself out, slipped into her moccasins, and opened the door into the backyard.

It was cool out, a temperature somewhere between "sweater-weather" and "wait until the clocks go back before we turn on the heat." The sweet smell of decayed leaves cloyed the cool air. She pulled her bathrobe tighter around her chest, thankful for its warmth, and stepped onto the lawn. It was loamy and sunk ever so slightly under the weight of her body.

She hadn't made it fifteen feet when Macy and Liam turned the corner of the house and ran for their mother. Kate knelt and Macy ran right into her arms, her hot face wet with tears. Liam stood behind Macy, waiting for his chance to hug their mother.

"What are you two doing out here?" Kate asked, careful not to sound as panicked as she felt.

Macy was all snot and tears, but Liam held it together. "You were out here, Mom," he said. "You woke us up."

"What?" Her panic grew into fear so fast, she almost choked on her question. She looked over her son's shoulder, scanning the tree line for anybody before turning her gaze back onto him. "Sweetheart, I've been inside sleeping. Why didn't you check our bedroom first? Why did you come outside for a stranger? Don't you know what could've happened?"

"Mom, it *was* you. You threw these at our window." He held out his pitching hand. Small, pointy white pebbles, like a cache of babies' teeth, glistened in the moonlight. "You said you were locked out and needed us to open the door. But when we did you weren't there so we came looking for you."

"Liam, sweetie, that wasn't me." A sharper fear, primal and frightful, rose from the pit of her stomach. What did the kids see? Had a stranger actually been in their backyard? These things weren't supposed to happen here, to her family. She had questions, but they were tangled so firmly within her anxieties that she didn't know where to start pulling without raising panic.

"Mom, it was *you*," Liam insisted. Whatever tank of courage he ran on had now reached E. Tears swelled into his eyes. He fell into Kate's shoulder, gently nudging Macy aside, and cried into her bathrobe.

A light from inside the house flicked on, lighting up the backyard a little more. *It's Tom*, thought Kate with relief. Her back was to the house, but she could tell it was the kids' bedroom ceiling light that had turned on. She soothingly ran her fingers across their scalps and through the tangles in their hair, drawing in deep bellied breaths as she grounded herself from the fear that had almost taken her over.

"It's okay now," Kate lulled, the pressure of her fingertips reduced to a light caress on the back of her children's heads. "We'll go inside where it's safe, and we'll talk about what it was that you saw."

"Kate!" Tom opened the bedroom window and called down to her.

"Just a moment, Tom!"

"Kate, what are you doing?"

"I'm holding the kids!"

There was a pause. When Tom spoke again, his words was hollow, like all the life was drained from his voice.

"Kate, honey, look up."

She looked over her shoulder and up to the window. Tom stood there, rigid like a cadaver, his face a pale, stony mix of fear and confusion. Flanked on either side were Macy and Liam, wearing identical Paw Patrol and outer space pajamas, clutching their father's hips like kittens seeking warmth. They stared down at Kate, Macy, and Liam with an equal combination of disbelief, amazement, and horror.

Instinctively, Kate pulled in Macy and Liam before realizing what she was doing. She pushed both kids off of her. Who were these outside kids? Who was her husband standing with? Her mind went back to the jagged white stones Liam held, of the vicious white gleam

they emitted in the chilled light of the moon. The smell of rotting leaves seemed to grow stronger, causing Kate to feel dizzy.

“*What are you?*” she screamed. “*What is going on here?*” Her voice was piercing, like the tip of a needle, and resounded off the vinyl siding of their neighbor’s house. She didn’t care if she woke up her neighbors, the houses on nearby Loper Street, or the whole town of Southington with her voice. Outside-Liam and Outside-Macy started a new round of crying, as did Inside-Liam and Inside-Macy. Together they made up a grim chorus of crooners.

“Come back inside, Kate,” Tom yelled. His voice was tense as he tried to keep calm, but his eyes, wide like two saucers of milk, revealed his panic. The inside kids clutched him tighter, their weeping eyes pleading for their waking nightmare to end.

Behind Tom, Kate could make out a blurry figure in the doorway. It was taller than the children, and built with the heavy weight of an adult, but Kate could not make out any features. The more she tried to see the figure, the harder it was to make it out. It was like staring into a Magic Eye puzzle that couldn’t keep its shape.

An appendage from the figure moved against the wall.

“Tom! Kids! Look out!”

Kate watched as Tom turned his head before the room went dark. The figure had turned off the light.

Everything was silent. The outside kids, the inside kids, Tom and Kate.

And then, Tom screamed.

It was a scream Kate never heard before. It was high and frightened, like a bull in a slaughterhouse. Tom’s scream kept rising in pitch, like his fear was being drawn out of him on a baited line, then suddenly it was muffled. Something had crawled up his body and covered his face. Kate couldn’t be certain what she saw, but a flash of Paw Patrol pajamas in the moonlight confirmed it was Inside-Macy.

Kate turned to Outside-Liam and Outside-Macy. Both kids were in hysterics, wailing like police sirens. Knees scraping the loamy lawn, Kate scrambled to the children and scooped them both up in her arms. Liam fell instantly into her embrace, burying his head into her shoulder, but Macy thrashed to be free.

“Honey, honey, it’s okay! It’s okay! It’s Mama. It’s me, it’s Mama! It’s me!” She sounded like a broken record player, but she didn’t care. Maternal instinct had now taken over Kate’s mind. She had to bring the kids to safety. “We gotta go, we gotta go to the car. Come on!”

Pubs had fallen out of Macy’s hands. She cinched the penguin with her pinky and thumb, then rose to her feet with a grunt and lumbered off for the driveway.

“Help!”

Kate turned over her shoulder at Tom. His head was free, but his arms were bound by his back by two child-sized shadowy forces. The tall figure was now behind him, hooking its arm like a crook around Tom’s neck. Though Kate still couldn’t make out the figure, the way its arm arched over Tom’s neck was not unlike the awkward curve Kate’s right arm had from a teenage volleyball injury.

Kate turned the corner of the house and rushed towards Tom’s F-150. She placed Liam on the ground, then thrust her hand into her bathrobe pocket and smashed her thumb into the key fob. Like fireworks on New Year’s Eve, the truck’s panic mode burst into life. Cussing, Kate pulled out Tom’s keys and repeatedly clicked the unlock button. She opened the back door,

dropped Macy and Pubs into the seat, then half-helped, half-shoved Liam into the backseat after his sister.

“Kate!”

It was Tom’s voice, billowing from the depths of the backyard, but it was different. His voice was calm, and hollow. “It’s okay!” his voice reassured her. “Bring out the kids. We’re safe.”

Kate slammed the door shut, then pulled open the front passenger side door and threw herself into the cabin. She shut the door behind her, pressed the lock button, and scrambled over the center console and into the driver’s seat. In the back, the kids’ cries had reduced to whimpers. Had they heard Tom’s voice?

It didn’t matter. Not now, maybe later when the sun was up. Kate started up the truck. The dashboard blinked into life, and Ozzy Osbourne’s *Crazy Train* blared through the speakers. She turned down the radio, slammed the gear selector into reverse, and peeled backwards out of the driveway and into the road. As she turned onto Loper Street, she remembered to turn on the headlights. Dry mist rose from the asphalt streets, rising above the hood of the truck and vanishing back into the night.

She sped down the road, then took a hard right onto Queen Street. She pulled another right into a hotel and parked under a lamppost close to the lobby. From outside the hotel looked vacant. There were a few other cars parked in spots, cold and empty like discarded husks.

Kate shifted into park, turned off the engine, drew in a shaky breath, and turned to the kids. Macy and Liam clung together in the back, their expressions a caricature of absolute fear. Without saying a word, Kate opened her arms. Both kids crawled into the front and huddled against her for safety.

Macy and Liam were able to pass out, but Kate stayed awake all night. She watched every shadow, every tree, every movement for danger. More than once she had considered calling 911, but would that have done any good? What if doppelgangers of armed officers arrived? She couldn’t let that happen.

As the sun rose over the not so distant hilltops, a white Malibu pulled into the parking lot and parked near the lobby. A young woman with a mid-length skirt and cobalt blouse slipped out of the driver’s seat and walked into the lobby, paying no mind to the F-150 several spaces down. A monitor at the front desk flashed on.

However minimal this sight of civility was, it was enough to embolden Kate with some courage. She called 911 and reported a home invasion at her house. She advised she and the children were safe, but her husband was in danger. The operator tried keeping her on the line, but Kate hung up before the operator could ask any more questions.

Liam and Macy would wake up soon and be looking for food. And answers. Kate had neither. She thought about finding a drive-thru, but she didn’t have her wallet on her. Fortunately, she had her credit card information saved to her phone. She pulled out her phone, picked an app for a fast food chain nearby, and placed an order for take-out. With time to spare until the order was ready, Kate started the truck back up and left the parking lot to go for a drive.

She drove across Queen Street, then turned up Spring Street and then a left onto West Street. She meandered down Curtiss Street, then turned back onto Queen Street. Against her better judgment, she turned back up Loper and then onto her street.

The neighbors gathered like a tribe outside of her family’s home, where a pair of police cruisers were parked, their lights blinking crimson and blue in a silent, disorderly pattern. One

of the officers was jotting down notes by his vehicle, but he looked up as Kate pulled up to the house.

She rolled the window down an inch as the officer came around to her vehicle. “Ma’am, do you live here?”

Kate nodded. “Yes. I called in a home invasion about ten minutes ago.”

“And is this your vehicle?”

“It’s in my husband’s name, but I think of it as the family’s.”

The officer looked down and noticed Macy and Liam sleeping in the front. “Do you mind stepping out of the vehicle and having a word with me?”

“We’re not leaving this car,” she replied, pressing the Lock button for good measure. A reassuring *ka-click* emanated from within the four doors. “It’s not safe for us to go inside.”

“Ma’am, there’s no one inside other than your husband.”

Kate felt her whole body go cold. She had to pull her gaze away from the officer and drag it to the front door, where a second officer spoke to someone in the doorway. It was Tom, hale and fresh like he slept ten hours the night before.

The officer continued. “Your husband called us and reported his family missing and his truck stolen. We were en route when Dispatch told us about your call.” Leaning in closer to the cracked window, the officer spoke in a low, baritone voice. “Is there something going on? Some sort of abuse we should know about?”

Kate caught Tom looking at her. She looked back at him. His face was calm, but an unfamiliar smile spread up his lips. A cruel, grisly smile of a fiendish creature, unhuman yet able to live its lie among people. A cruel, *hungry* smile, happy that it found her.

Without hesitation, Kate rolled up the window and took her foot off the brake. The officer pounded on her window with a closed fist, but she ignored it. He pulled his radio up to his lips and spoke into it as Kate drove down the road, away from the terror now living in her home.



## **BE VIGILANT by Katherine F. Donohue**

“Tonight’s Tale of Terror - the Corn Maze Murders - is a cautionary tale. Thirty years ago tomorrow...,” YMCA Teen Counselor Dan Connor paused. The teens snickered and shifted uneasily around the campfire.

“Shut up,” someone shouted. The chattering quieted. The kids leaned forward to hear Mr. C’s voice over the crackling wood.

“...Three teens from town were brutally murdered. Their killings remain unsolved.” He lowered his voice to a near whisper. “In 1993 before cell phones, before Amber Alerts, before ....”

“Before Horse and Buggies?” Taylor interrupted. Someone giggled. Mr. Connor frowned.

“This is serious, Taylor,” he said angrily. “Before any high tech, these high school friends disappeared after a hayride to Rogers Orchards. In the Corn Maze, they got lost and were never seen alive again.

“I supervised them that Saturday. I was only a few years older than the Y teens, but I worked my shift checking out the Apple Harvest Festival with them. They were a fun-loving bunch - like you clowns. They weren’t just classmates. Sara, Dierdre, and David hung around together *ALL* the time.

“I called them the triplets. Sara was never seen without Dierdre who was never without her twin, David. Of course, maybe it was because beautiful Sara with her long black hair was crazy over David who was just as smitten. Sara’s face glowed when David gave her the apple locket he bought at the Craft Fair. I watched her have it engraved: SB loves DM 10/02/93. Her green eyes sparkled when David clasped it around her neck. She couldn’t stop touching it.

“Right next to the Jewelry table was the Apple-head doll booth. Althea Bugbee, a shriveled-up old character ran it. Her dolls looked like shrunken heads, with puckered cheeks and beady eyes bugging out with ghost-like bodies attached.

“I’ve seen her – she still sells them. Those doll heads are kinda terrifying,” said Gina. She shuddered.

“When my shift ended at 3 o’clock, I left the kids. Later, I got the call telling me they were missing. I told the police what I told you. I read the rest in the newspaper.”

Mr. Connor shined his cell phone flashlight onto yellowed newspaper clippings.

“According to eyewitness accounts in the Southington Observer, this is how the tragedy unfolded. They interviewed Althea Bugbee.

“I remember those kids. They flocked to see my dolls but none of them spent money. They poked fun at my puckered apple faces. One of the girls shrieked – ‘Ooh – it’s staring back at me. They’re so creepy.’ That’s when her boyfriend, I think, picked one up and started chasing her with it. Danny Connor yelled at him to put it back and he finally did. They made me angry. But their behavior drew customers. Once the kids got bored, they wandered off toward the rides. I had a booth to run. I didn’t pay no

more attention.”

Taylor spoke up over the crackling wood. “And then, *Danny Connor*, what happened?”  
Mr. C ignored her.

“The next eyewitness was a quiet girl in my group.”

“Sixteen-year-old Miranda LaPierre said,  
‘I got on the Ferris Wheel and sat above Sara, Dierdre, and David. Jason sat next to me and kept throwing popcorn at David below us. We all were swinging the cars as hard as we could. Stupid Jason kept tossing popcorn but always missed David’s mouth. Every time the ride revved up, we’d swing our buckets harder. By the time the Ferris Wheel was fully loaded, we’d only gone one revolution. That’s when the ride operator pulled the brakes. He made us all get off because our swinging made it unsafe. Jason and I wandered over to the Fritter Booth then hung out on the Green. I lost track of the others after that.

Mr. Connor looked up from the paper at the faces rapt with attention, the flames flickered across their innocence as they huddled around the campfire.

“The paper reported that Mr. Davis, one of two drivers, told the cops he drove the kids to the Corn Maze.”

Pickup and drop off was at Town Hall. There was a long line of moms, kids, and these three teenagers waiting to ride the wagon. The maze was very popular. We arrived at 4:45. I says to them it’s going to take you a half hour to find your way - so don’t fool around.

These are the rules I says to the three, like I told every rider - The Hayride runs until 5:45. There are 2 wagons. We tag team so either Joe Iadorola or I will get you by 5:45 because the tractors get locked up by dusk.

No exceptions. The wagons run every 15 minutes so check your watches. If you miss the last ride, you’re stuck walking back to town.

No one wanted to be left behind. Everyone knew that Flanders was a winding, country road up by the orchards with only one farm out there. Cars never go by.

It’s so pitch-black out there, you can’t see your hand in front of your face let alone the road.

They weren't on my wagon for the last run. I assumed Joe had picked them up 15 minutes earlier. I assumed wrong. I have nightmares of leaving them out there lost; out there where they shouldn't a been."

Mr. Connor paused. "Should I continue?"

"GO ON!" They yelled in unison. He carefully opened the tattered clipping.

According to local police, at 11 p.m. on the night of October 2nd, the parents of Sara Boisvert, Dierdre and David McAvoy reported the trio missing.

The Police formed a search party. Cars using high beams crept slowly searching the back roads for the three.

Teams with flashlights walked the maze inch by inch calling out their names. Others paced the rows of apple trees pointing their lights right, left, and forward. When dawn came, a new shift of townspeople linked arms

looking for any clue. They found nothing until Hank Kasinski saw pink under some fallen leaves.

Sara's mother positively identified Sara's sweater by her initials on the label.

Combing intensified. By nightfall, after 18 hours of searching with countless volunteers, three police departments, the State Police, and a German Shepherd dog, nothing else was found. Then the canine sniffed a pair of Reeboks along a row of trees where turkey vultures were circling.

It was there at the orchard's edge, the Shepherd dog found three headless bodies."

The collective gasps around the fire broke the silence and echoed across Sloper's Pond. Preston yelled out. "You're lying, Mr. C. How come we never heard this? You're making this up just to scare us." Mr. C shook his head.

"I wish. Nobody talks about it because the killer has never been found. We don't have a Corn Maze anymore because the story's true. Ask any old-timer."

A quiet sob rose from the group. "Mr. C is telling the truth." Allison hiccupped to stifle a cry. Everyone turned to her.

"I know it's true because Sara, the girlfriend of David and best friend of Dierdre – was my mom's younger sister. They named me Allison Sara after her. Mom NEVER talks about this. She said it was too hard. Last year she finally explained what happened when I asked her about the three high school kids in the photo on our mantel." Allison wiped her nose on her sleeve.

A couple of kids idly poked sticks into the dying fire. No one spoke. Finally, Mr. C broke the silence.

“I’m very sorry, Allison. I never noticed how you resemble Sara.” He looked away. A misty drizzle began to fall.

“It’s 10 p.m. and raining; better wrap this up. Remember, tonight’s tale was about three lives needlessly taken. It’s also a warning to be careful among strangers.”

“But was it a stranger?” blurted out Katie. “I mean we know all about Stranger Danger – but what if? What if it was someone they knew? What if the killer lived next door to them but they were clueless?”

The kids murmured among themselves. Mr. C shook his head. “You’re right. You don’t know. So BE VIGILANT.”

Car lights dotted the parking lot. As Mr. C doused the remaining embers, the teens huddled around Allison. Together they ran through the rain to their rides.

“You’re a Not-So-Happy-Looking-Camper.” Said Allison’s mom. “Wasn’t the Tale of Terror scary?”

“It was *AWFUL*,” she sobbed as she climbed in. “It was about your s-s-ister Sara,” she stammered.

“What?”

Mr. C told us the whole gory story, even reading us a newspaper article. He was their counselor and was with them that day when David gave the necklace to Sara.”

“What necklace?”

“The apple locket with her initials? It wasn’t on her?”

“No.”

Allison shivered. “But Mr. C knew all about it! He noticed a lot about Sara. I think he had a thing for her! I think he knows way more than he told us tonight!”

His Honda passed them in the parking lot. “Look, Dad. Mr. C’s leaving. Quick, - follow him.” She pleaded. “I need to talk to him.”

“Allison – stop it! This isn’t Criminal Minds. Mr. C. is probably as traumatized as Mom. He looked after those kids!”

“But did he, *really*?” Allison wrapped her arms around herself tightly. Hot tears streamed down her cheeks as she stared into the darkness. At home, the car had barely stopped as she raced up to her room. She pulled out her cell and searched her contacts.

“This is the Y’s Mr. C. I’m busy now – leave a message.

“Damn,” Allison called again. “Leave a message.”

She texted Preston and Taylor.

Allison: “Hey - I feel like Mr. C knows what happened to those kids.”

Taylor: “OMG I thought the same thing. Like he was obsessed. Did u c the thumbtack holes in the clippings? He must tack them to his wall.”

Allison: “I keep getting his voicemail. Why does he always turn his cell off at night? He knows something. I need answers. Pres, since u drive, will u *PLEASE* pick up me & T?”

Preston: “Tonight? Are u freaking serious?”

Allison: “Totally. I’ll google his address & text u when it’s safe. Ur the best.”

When Mr. C reached the dirt road at his farm off Flanders, he knew his Honda would stall if he drove through the muck. He gunned it anyway.

“Shit. ” Stepping out into the downpour, he tried to get a footing but his boots sunk deeper into the quicksand-like mud.

He was drenched by the time he opened the kitchen door. The usual stench of decay and rancid apples wafted up his nostrils.

“Nana?” Dan Connor called out.

“Where have you been Danny?” Althea barked at him.

“I told you I had to work tonight,” he said, wiping his face with a dirty towel.

“Did you forget that you also work for me? And that I need to make more dolls to sell? Did you bring me someone new?”

“NO! I keep telling you I won’t do that anymore. It’s sick.”

“I’m only doing it for you, Danny. So you can find a girlfriend. But every girl you pick out always tries to escape.” She reached up to the hook on the wall and removed her apple picker. As she spun its rotating silver blade, Althea’s eyes glinted.

“I don’t want to kill them, but I can’t let them leave. So, they get...,” she pretended to slash her neck as she spun the rotating blade again. “It’s quick. But their terrified faces make great doll expressions!

“No matter if they’re dead because no one bothers to look for runaways.”

“Sara and the twins were not runaways. They got lost, I tried to help them, but you killed them out of spite.”

“I had to, Danny. They saw too much. And your precious little Sara? She didn’t care about you. They didn’t get very far after you let them escape!”

Danny turned away.

“Going somewhere? Don’t bother the cops; they won’t believe you. I’m just an eccentric old lady. Leave and take your Sara doll and her stupid locket.” She threw them at him. Danny stuffed them in his pocket and slammed the door.

Preston drove the girls cautiously through the pea-soup darkness while his windshield wipers strained to keep up with the deluge. Using his sleeve, he rubbed the fogged-up glass to no avail.

“It makes sense now why Mr. C knew so much about those murders. He lives right around here near the old maze.” Taylor said.

Danny returned to his Honda but found it had sunk deeper into the swampy field. With no car, he trudged slowly to the unlit road. In the distance, he saw lights.

“Thank, God.” He muttered and waved his arms furiously to stop the car.

Barely able to see through the thickening mist, Preston froze when he saw the flailing arms. He slammed the brakes, skidding sideways across the slick road. They all felt a thud. The Jeep landed in the embankment. For a microsecond, an eerie silence prevailed until a panicked Preston jumped out of the Jeep! “Oh my god, did I hit someone? I can’t look.”

A crumpled mass lay in the middle of the road. Allison ran to him, “Please be breathing!” she whispered. “Oh no! It can’t be. PRESTON, TAYLOR – We hit Mr. C!!! Call 911!” She could hear Mr. C’s erratic breathing. She knelt beside him to do CPR.

“NOOOO!” She screamed hysterically. Clutched in his hand she saw the tarnished locket.

Feeling nauseous, Preston bolted behind the jeep to puke. Taylor fumbled for her phone when a flash of silver caught her eye. She looked up. She never heard the “swish.”

Allison's world was spinning. Was this nightmare real? Althea turned to her and deftly swung her blade again. Allison's lifeless body fell in a heap, her head beside her.

Preston emerged from behind the Jeep. In the headlights, he saw a woman staring at the man in the road.

"Someone help!" She cried.

"Don't worry. He'll be ok. I'm calling the police now."

"Don't bother." She said sarcastically. From behind her back, she swung the bloody blade.

Strike three.

"Get up you fool. We have work to do." Althea ordered her grandson.

Danny, injured and still breathing hard, lifted himself up. He waved Althea's flashlight to assess the carnage. "We have lots of work to do."

Together they dragged the bodies to the Jeep. Althea carried the heads.

"Get their cell phones. We can't leave a trace," he said. He took the SIM cards and crushed the phones throwing the pieces in the Jeep. Reluctantly, Althea set her bloodstained blade next to the bodies. Danny wrapped the locket around Allison's hand.

They drove through the downpour without passing another car. When they reached Sloper's Pond, Althea watched Danny roll the Jeep to the edge. He grunted and pushed with all his strength until it plunged into the deepest water. Bubbles slowly rose to the surface as the Jeep filled with murky water and sunk into the darkest depths.

Once again, the rain returned in torrents as they slogged back to the farm. Danny felt like a weight had been lifted. The storm was a blessing, washing away all signs of blood, erasing footprints and tire tracks. Rivulets carrying evidence disappeared down storm drains. Like holy water cleanses one's sins, the rain absolved Danny and Althea's transgressions.

Neither one saw the Mack truck rounding the bend. The driver couldn't stop. He struck the two, propelling them into the blackness. He found their heads embedded in the grille.

### **The 2021 Tour by Joanne Kelleher**

“Are you ready to go?” she asked the group, and we nodded our heads in consent. She led us down the long stairs towards the basement, kicking the dried leaves that had been blown in from the back door. Spiders had been blown in too as cobwebs were spun into the corner of the steps. After we made the turn at the landing and continued down, the light from the outside faded and then could no longer be seen. She held open a heavy wooden door for us to enter and it thumped closed ominously behind us.

Looking at the locked room directly in front of the group, she sadly said “This space used to be filled with joy, but it can no longer be used as it isn’t safe.” Turning into the long hallway, the carpet was dingy, and the ceiling tiles were stained by water, mildew or perhaps something else. The stain at the bottom of each door was faded, as if there had been a long-ago flood.

We paused in front of the one open room, the distinct odor of dusty decay coming from within. I saw a team of masked, gray-haired women hard at work at their task. Behind them were thick black pipes that ran from the floor to ceiling, marked with a danger sign, and I wondered why they needed to toil under these conditions.

As we continued, all the other doors along the length of the gloomy hall were closed. I noticed the faded posters from past events, and I wondered if they would ever be offered again.

At the end of the hall, the caretaker pulled out his keys, unlocked the room we had come to see, and swung the door open. We cautiously stepped down the rickety wooden steps onto the cement floor. The air was stale and had odors I wasn’t sure I could identify – was it sewage? Several kinds of pipes crossed the tall ceiling and disappeared into the walls – yellow, red, blue, copper, and rusty iron. Two plumbing lines were tied together with a leather cord, “so they don’t rattle,” she explained. An occasional drop of water plinked as it fell over 10 feet and landed on the equipment below. It was unclear if the water was coming from the joints that were bolted together or if the rust went all the way through the thick iron pipes. Some pipes appeared to be wrapped in asbestos and the covering was flaking off. I wondered what we were breathing and what was causing that strange taste on the back of my tongue.

We didn’t dare move too far into the space as tools, ladders, chemicals, and unmarked boxes were stacked precariously around all the equipment. A low humming sound came from the blue and gray metallic box that covered almost the entire wall at the far side of the room. I hoped we didn’t have to enter that enclosure as it was large enough to trap everyone on the tour.

The group jumped as a hissing noise was blasted from a machine on our left. The caretaker chuckled and said, “That air compressor startles everyone the first time they visit this room.” The Library Director nodded in agreement and said to the board members, “Welcome to the boiler room of the Southington Public Library.”

By Joanne Kelleher

(Based on true events. Thanks to Stanley for a second peek.)

## **Junior Prom by Stacy Lynne**

It was the night of Southington High School's junior prom, and Billy and I were dressed accordingly. He looked handsome in the navy blue jacket he had borrowed from his father. The shiny brass buttons gleamed. I always did like shiny things.

As for me, I felt like a princess in the scarlet red, velveteen gown I had worn only once before (for a family reunion).

Billy picked me up at 5 that evening. He had in his hands a bouquet of black roses. "I know you like roses, Stacy. These are for you."

My blood ran cold. Why did those roses feel like an omen?????

"Thank you," I had managed to choke out.

I went into the kitchen, out the back door, and threw the roses into the garbage can. When I went back into the living room, Billy smiled and said, "Trick or Treat!" and presented me with a white baby rose corsage which he pinned on my gown.

We posed for photographs, but the Polaroid did not work properly. Strangely, the background developed in the photos, but Billy and I never did. I was disappointed that there wouldn't be any photos by which to remember this night in the future.

No time to futz with the camera. The sun had set and Billy and I were ready to roll! He was driving his Fleetwood Cadillac. It was dark green, and man, did that thing sparkle. Tonight the car was our party wagon. Big, roomy, and with a very nice back seat. Perfect for necking!

Billy and I were off! First stop, St. Thomas Cemetery on Meriden Avenue in Southington. But we had gone in by the opposite entrance, the one off Belleview Avenue. There was a mist on the ground, a foggy shroud which hugged the bases of all the tombstones. Funny, there hadn't been any shroud-like mist when we were driving on the main road. But there it was, in the cemetery.

Billy and I began our party. We were joking and laughing, and we climbed into the back seat. We were the only ones around! No one could see us! (Or could they?)

Time to go to our next stop, the restaurant for pre-prom dinner. We straightened ourselves out and climbed back into the front seat. It was a long bench seat, so I slid myself next to Billy.

"Uh-oh." It had escaped Billy's lips before he realized what he had said.

"What's wrong," I asked.

"We have a dead battery. We need a jump."

Billy and I got out of the car. The air smelled dank, and with the mist on the ground, the atmosphere was somewhat electrified. Each little hair on my arms tingled. Billy took my hand and together we walked along the cemetery roads toward the only lights we could see. They came from a house on Meriden Avenue.

As we walked up the driveway, we saw a sign: The Snedeker House. Enter at your own risk.

Billy and I looked at each other. "Strange sign," we said in unison. We didn't know the house was reputed to be haunted.

We walked up to the door and pressed the doorbell. Instantly, LOUDLY, the sounds of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor assaulted our ears. The door creaked open on its own. A foul-smelling odor nearly knocked us off our feet. If the air in the cemetery had smelled dank, the air surrounding this home like a heavy miasma was beyond my ability to describe it. My stomach began to churn. Ready to throw up, I heard a knock on a door.



"Stacy, Stacy, come out of your room. Your date is here!"

I came to, covered in sweat. It would take time to dry up and change. I went downstairs to explain to Billy and to apologize for delaying us.

When I went downstairs, Billy presented me with a bouquet of roses. They were black. I passed out. When I came to, he said, "Trick or Treat. Let's go, Baby."

I said, "I have to change."

He said, "No you don't," and scooped me up in his arms and walked me outside. There was a hearse in the driveway! The back of the Hearse was open. There was a casket in the hearse. The top of the casket was open, and I could see a body inside the casket. I went cold all over. The body was ME!

I opened my mouth to scream, but what came out sounded like knocking on a door.

"Stacy, your date is here. Time to take prom photos." I woke up with a start. I didn't know what was going on. My brain was foggy and my heart was beating fast, but as I continued to wake up, I began to feel better.

When I went downstairs, Billy presented me with a dozen roses, which, to my relief, were deep red. "Trick or Treat," he said, and presented me also with a corsage of white baby roses, which he pinned on my gown.

We posed for photos but the Polaroid had no film. My disappointment was short-lived. There would be plenty of photos from friends we would meet at the prom.

Billy and I got into his sparkling dark green Fleetwood Cadillac and our date began. First stop, the St. Thomas Cemetery. We drove along Belleview Avenue and took a right into the cemetery entrance. There was a mist on the ground, a foggy shroud which hugged the bases of all the tombstones. I felt the otherworldly sensation known as *déjà vu*. I had been here before.

Billy and I began our party. We were joking and laughing and we climbed into the back seat to do a little harmless (but fun!) necking. We were the only ones around! No one could see us! (Or could they?)

When we were ready to go to our next stop, the restaurant for dinner before the prom itself, we straightened ourselves out and got back into the front seat.

"Uh-oh."

Although I already knew what was wrong, I couldn't stop myself from asking, "What's wrong?"

"We have a dead battery. We need a jump."

Billy and I got out of the car. Dressed in our prom outfits, we walked along Belleview Avenue to the first house on our left to ask for a jump. The man who answered was very kind.

"Hi," he said as he opened his door.

"Hi," we said. "Can you give us a jump?" He looked out the door but didn't see a car.

Noticing our clothes, he asked, "Where are you parked?" When we told him, he did his best not to crack up laughing. Boy, were we embarrassed. Our night's hero had the good grace to refrain from asking any more questions.

After we got our jump, we decided to skip dinner at the restaurant, and instead went straight to the prom.

After the prom, Billy wanted to go to Hammonasset Beach, but I had had enough. The nightmare within a nightmare I had experienced before the prom had taken a toll. Some of the elements had come to pass, and I was exhausted and I just wanted to go home. So Billy took me home and that was the end of Junior Prom.

## **The BEAST in South End by Jennifer Pelkey**

As the full moon competes with the alternating streetlights, I realize I am not alone. I have been walking since 4:00 a.m. trying to expel the electricity that fills up my limbs and makes me want to escape. Why, dear Reader, am I a prisoner? What have I done wrong? What phantasmagoria is this South End Road? Who or what is my captor?

My legs move, but my conscience struggles to keep up. I realize I am at the holy Saints Domenic's and Vinnie's, but I struggle to escape the parking lot. Someone has blocked the entrance with their car; another car, perpendicular, is turning into the parking lot. Yet another car to my side is sidling up next to me. I am trapped and feel a BEAST sandwiched between the car and me. The beast has followed me. How do I get out of this and lose the BEAST?

Darting across the street, the glow of the heavenly McDonald's arches beckons me. Like a Chinese finger trap, pushing in and pulling away, do I push in the one-way exit or exit by pulling through the one-way entrance? Again I sense the BEAST, but this time it fills my brain, drowning my thoughts and foisting me onto South End Road again. I know if I can get onto Meriden Waterbury Turnpike, I might be able to make it safely home, but alas, dear Reader, with the BEAST now in front of me I must make a quick decision and run.

Coming to two roads where two parts diverge, I am left to choose one path in this labyrinth to guide me to safety. No markers to guide me, no signs to read, and no painted lines to keep me from straying. Suddenly I see red, yellow, and green lights flicker, yet the cars don't notice as they move serpent-like around each other. Who caused this chaos? How do I get through this obstacle course? I feel the BEAST on my back and know this is part of its plan to directionally confuse all who enter here. I sprint hoping it will fall off in the shadows of the cars. I think it is gone.

Weaving in and out of traffic, I see an oasis on TOP of the IGA mountain. This is a place of respite; here it is warm, clean and full of nourishment with miniature mythical creatures wheeling hoards of bounty to all who enter. It wasn't long ago that it was a place of smoldering ash and rubble when the BEAST burned it asunder. But before our eyes, it rose like the Phoenix and returned to it to its grandeur. I am safe. There are no signs of that fiend. Has the BEAST finally left me?

A murmur grows into a whisper which grows into a calling....I leave the oasis as I am drawn to an uncertain destination much like a siren does to a sailor. I enter into a venerable house of books where a coven of the stronger sex (female, that is) convenes to study wisdom from the past and educate those future disciples who may, too, learn the secret language of knowledge. I felt the BEAST lurking behind the bookcases and eyeing me from behind splayed newspapers whispering, "You are not worthy of a new house made of glass! I will shrink the print of your foot and box you into a cave made of stone!" The coven, unfazed, still continues its mighty work and ignores the BEAST.

What is this BEAST, dear Reader, that stalks me and controls my every thought? It is the amorphous ANXIETY; the sinister beast that lurks in my belly, addles my brain, and constricts my throat often strong enough to choke but never kill (although the latter would often be a welcome state after endless spaces of wrestling with it). It is only with kindness and knowledge that it has no power in the Valley of Apples. With every book that opens, and every good deed, the beast shrinks to little more than the shadow of an apple fritter.

## The Memory of Worms by Karin Terebessy

*Valaska* : a lightweight, multi-functional shepherd's ax, used long ago in the Carpathian Mountains. Its long, wooden shaft ornately carved with spirals and swirls; galaxies and worms. A brass butt at the tip, brass head at the top. Contoured to fit the hand if used as a walking stick. One end blunt as a hammer, other end sharp as a blade.

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"*Lumbricus terrestris*," Kati lisped through her missing front teeth. The garbage truck splashed down the road and she skipped backwards to avoid the spray.

Tibor scooped the worm from the puddle, water dripping through his knuckles. Kati watched the brownish-red worm in her father's hard palm.

"Do you think it knows what's happening to it, *Apu*?" Kati asked him.

Tibor's back broadened with a rich slow breath in, his shirt stretching across his shoulders. When he exhaled, his back sank, and the hair of his mustache quivered.

"No sentient being truly knows what's happening to it," he answered. His Hungarian accent was muscular, undulating, a peristalsis of vowels. The emphasis stressed the first syllable, softened on the next.

In Tibor's hand, the worm wriggled with gratitude. Or maybe just in a photoreceptor response to the sun.

"*Nuh*?" Tibor encouraged, extending the worm to his young daughter.

Flattening a few blades of grass, Kati gently laid the worm on the soil by the curb, then fluffed the grass blades back up around it.

"So the birds don't get it," she whispered. She could hear her school bus rumbling up the road, but she kept her eyes on the ground, pleased they had rescued a worm from the rains, when she noticed her sneakers were untied. "*Apu*, my laces."

The cotton weave of her loose shoelace sucked up rain water. To Kati it looked like a curly, gentle squiggle, darkened with damp.

"Why isn't *that* a worm, *Apu*?"

Tibor crouched down and made two rabbit's ears. "You are asking me about divine providence?" The rhythm of his speech was trochaic meter. High-low, high-low, like a poem.

"I'm asking you about my laces."

He nodded. Head bent over her shoes, his voice was soft with amusement. "When you grow up, Kati, we will be scientists together. But for now, I will tie your shoes."

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Their little house was furnished in a customary Eastern European fashion. With a thriving Polish population, many homes in Southington were. Decorative plates hung on the kitchen walls. Traditional red and white tapestries draped over armchairs and bookcases. Lamps stood on every available surface, dim compensation for the absence of overhead lighting. Intricately designed painted eggs teetered precariously on shelves, beside hand painted nesting dolls. Kati often played with those dolls. Cracking them open, rebuilding them in order of descending size. She brought them in once for show and tell and called them *matryoshka* which is what her Slovak mother called them but only the Polish kids at school knew what she meant. The rest of the kids teased her. She prickled with indignation and fantasized for the week after

that she had brought in the impressive and daunting *valaska* ax, which was mounted above their fireplace, instead.

\*\*\*

The earth vibrated with worms on the muddy trails around Crescent Lake.

Kati combed through the wet soil with her fingers, stroking away single sopping grains of carbon and quartz, exposing a red-violet worm.

Her older brother Keve jabbed his trowel at the ground.

“You'll kill them!” Kati screamed and gave him a shove. He lost his footing and fell back on his elbow, soil flying from his trowel.

“They're going to die anyway, stupid! Why do you think we're digging for worms?”

“*Gyerekek*. Children.” Tibor's tone was quiet, final.

Kati blinked up at her father. Behind him, the sun burned the early morning mist from the glittering surface of Crescent Lake. She could only see his outline and the long thin line of fishing poles gathered in one hand.

Down by the banks, Tibor placed a worm in his open hand, and smacked his other palm on top of it, stunning it for a moment and swiftly baiting his hook.

Phlegm dripped down the back of Kati's throat and she swallowed hard. She could hear the faint woeful bleating of the goats from the farm across the water. “I thought we saved worms, *Apu*.”

“What does it mean to save another? Tell me, *nuh*, what are the rules?”

Unable to meet his eyes, Kati stared at his mustache, trim and manicured over freckled lips.

She struggled to still her quivering voice. “The rules are you do what's right.”

“And what is right for the worm is not what is right for the fish is not what is right for a man. And so...” He held a fat worm out to her. “One swift stroke, Kati. Do not be afraid.”

\*\*\*

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Hungarian warriors modified the *valaska*, making a weapon of the shepherd's ax. Few of these remain. From time to time, one may see an old man in the Carpathian mountains using a *valaska* as a walking stick. But more commonly, they are found in traditional dances or sold as souvenirs. They are seldom, if ever, used as tools.

\*\*\*

Tibor stood by the fireplace, leaning his elbow on the mantle, the beautiful *valaska* mounted on the wall above him. With his eyes on the open book in his hands, he was only vaguely aware of the school bus stopping on the road. Vaguely aware of the distant squeak and compression of steam.

Kati slammed into the house and threw her bookbag on the floor.

“Mark convinced the WHOLE seventh grade that if you cut a worm in half you get two worms. I tried telling them that if you cut a worm behind the clitellum the head might regenerate a tail— I *tried*, *Apu* — but no one would believe me. They just ran around saying 'clitellum' like it was the funniest thing they'd ever heard. I got so mad I screamed and then I got sent to Choices!”

Arms crossed tightly over her chest, hands balled into fists, she shouted, “Oh that Mark!”

Tibor closed his book, holding the page with his index finger.

“Who is this Mark?” His careful Hungarian accent allowed *esses* to sound like *esses*, skirting the American habit of sharpening them into *zees*.

“A boy at school,” she spat. “Just moved here from New Britain and he thinks he's so smart and cool.” She let out a hot breath. “Of course he's blonde.”

Tibor raised a bushy eyebrow. “I see.” He drummed his fingers on the spine of his book. Kati rocked from the balls of her feet to her heels. Rocking herself quiet.

“Are you calm now? Yes?” Tibor asked. “So then *nuh* Kati, tell me, the planarian flatworm?”

Kati opened her mouth in protest, then snapped her lips shut.

“Kati, can the planarian flatworm be cut into two pieces and regenerate into two separate worms?”

When she didn't answer, he continued. “The planarian flatworm can be cut into upwards of three hundred pieces. Each piece may regenerate into a whole worm. You misspoke, Kati.”

Heat roared through the channels of her nose and ignited behind her eyes. She clamped her teeth together to still the trembling.

“Tomorrow you will find this Mark and admit your error.”

Tibor opened his book again, dismissing her with his silence.

\*\*\*

Hungarians call the shepherd's ax, *fokos*. But Kati's mother, Eva, being a Slovak, referred to it as *valaska*. Tibor and Eva rarely fought. Since English was their only language in common, arguments were clumsy, often peppered with spittle and unrecognizable words.

The only memorable argument they ever had was over the *valaska*.

Kati and Keve hid in the dark of the living room door, listening to their parents fight. Eva's accent glinted with “v”'s like shattered glass. Tibor's accent rolled deep like approaching thunder.

“...I want it above the fireplace!” Eva shouted. “It is part of my culture!”

“It is a weapon,” Tibor countered.

“It is a tool!” Eva shot back.

“And for what purpose do we need such a tool? In a house with children?”

“It is symbolic of our home!” Eva pounded her fist into her palm.

“Symbolism is an evasion. It is utilized when one is unable or unwilling to speak the truth. And if you revel in symbolism,” Tibor huffed, “then you have the mind of a child.”

Eva charged at him. Pushed him with such force he stumbled into the bookcase, knocking the nesting doll to the floor. Kati sucked in a breath as a chunk of wood splintered off the head of the largest doll. Tibor glanced toward the doorway. The argument ceased.

And the *valaska* stayed.

\*\*\*

In the garden, Kati lifted an old clay pot, exposing the living earth, pulsing with worms. She inhaled the rich aroma of soil. “How rapidly can something decay?”

Tibor stared out at the horizon. A hot air balloon drifted across the blue Southington sky.

“*Apu?*”

Tibor looked down at Kati. His eyes glazed as if he had just woken up or was still sleeping.

“*Mi?*” He asked, his brow knitted together. Then he grunted in frustration. “I had a thought and now you've made me lose it.” Irritated, he walked back to the house.

\*\*\*

Kati tried to glue the nesting doll together, but there were too many splinters.

“Without the big nesting doll, the rest won't stay together.” Distress colored her voice.

“Your fault for loving something breakable,” Keve said. But still he sat with his sister, holding the tube of glue, while she picked up the pieces. “Me?” He continued, “I don't care about the dolls. I only ever wanted the *valaska*. It isn't breakable. It does the breaking.”

\*\*\*

At the kitchen table, Tibor stared into space, fiddling absently with the soft corner of the Southington Citizen, the smooth gray newspaper curling beneath his fingers. The lead article - a referendum to finance improvements to the library - remained unread.

“*Apu*, can you help me with my homework?” Kati placed her biology textbook in front of him.

Tibor blinked. “*Mi ez?* What is this? Pictures?”

Soreness flamed from her tonsils into her ears. When she spoke, her voice cracked. “It's the cross section of a worm.”

\*\*\*

As the brain degeneration progressed, the doctor suggested, to prevent self-injury, they keep sharp objects out of Tibor's reach. They hid the scissors and kitchen knives, removed the razor blades and mustache sheers from the bathroom vanity and locked the garden shed, with all its fish hooks and hedge clippers.

But the *valaska*, a simple decoration, was forgotten in this process, and remained.

\*\*\*

In the sunlight, Mark seemed even blonder than he had as a child. Blonde hair. Blonde skin. Bright and shiny blonde longing.

“Maybe we can go to the Apple Harvest this weekend?” He struggled to keep up with her fast pace, weaving through crowds of students leaving school. “Get some fritters or something?”

“I don't have time for that. Too much studying,” she said brusquely.

“Maybe we can study together,” he tried, “Maybe I could come over some time.”

“No. My father wouldn't like that. He doesn't like anyone new at the house.”

She hopped onto the school bus and fell into an open seat. Planted firmly on the aisle side, she refused to slide to the window, forcing Mark to find seating elsewhere.

\*\*\*

Tibor rocked in his chair, rolling a cough drop around his mouth. Kati heard the click of his teeth, the sip of his tongue. The smell of menthol filled the living room.

“*Hol van az anyam?*” He asked. He lapsed into Hungarian more and more.

Kati put down her homework and crouched beside him.

“Mom's at her night job, *Apu*. She helps the old people at Mulberry Gardens, remember?”

Keve stood in the threshold between the kitchen and the den, wiping a plate with a dishrag, cleaning up from the dinner he had cooked.

“He's not asking about *our* mother,” he said bitterly. “He's asking about *his*.”

\*\*\*

Mr. Sullivan hustled into the classroom, slapped a magazine down on Kati's lab desk, and asked, "Is that your father?"

Her father hadn't written an article in years. But there in a sidebar, a reference to Tibor Kovacs' work on planarian flatworms.

"Your father did groundbreaking work. Did you know if you cut off the head of a planarian flatworm, it will grow a new one?"

"Yes -"

Mr. Sullivan let out an excited breath. The scent of stale coffee floated through the air. "I have so many questions for him. Can I meet him sometime? Come over – when it's convenient of course."

"He's quite introverted. We don't have company over."

Mark glanced up from his lab notes.

"Maybe I can message him or talk on the phone -"

"Why don't you write your questions down," Kati offered. "I'll pass them along."

Mr. Sullivan clapped his hands together. "Wonderful! I'll do it right now." He hustled to his desk. "All right everyone, notebooks away. We're having a pop quiz. I have work to do," he added, smiling knowingly at Kati.

Among the shuffling papers and groans, Kati's classmates heaved a few choice words her way.

"He was probably going to give us a pop quiz anyway," Mark whispered kindly.

But Kati didn't respond. She was trying to remember where her father kept his research on worms.

\*\*\*

Tibor sat rocking in his chair. Soft fingers pinching some fabric up from the knee of his trousers. Pads of his smooth fingertips slipping in and around each other.

"*Valami faj!*" He cried out.

Kati sprang to his side. "What, *Apu*? What hurts?"

His thick mustache flowed over his dark lips and curled into his mouth. Moisture leaked from his nose along single hairs.

"*Ki vagy?*" He asked.

"I'm your daughter," she answered hoarsely.

His eyes traced the features of her face.

"*Valami faj,*" he repeated. Almost a question.

"What hurts? Talk to me."

\*\*\*

Before gym class, Kati faked a stomach cramp. She sat in the hallway, back to the lockers, notebooks piled beside her, pouring over her father's research.

Sound flooded the hall as the door to the gym opened.

"Hurt my knee," Mark apologized. "Can I?"

Engrossed in reading, Kati nodded impatiently.

Mark sat, knees drawn in, stealing furtive glances at Kati's thighs in the long silence. So when she suddenly whipped around to face him, he let out a small whimper and blushed.

"It's not just the head of the planarian flatworm that grows back," she said excitedly, clutching a notebook page, "the memories grow back too. It remembers everything!"

“Cool,” his voice cracked.

“Do you understand the implications for studying degenerative brain disease in humans?”

“Kind of -” he stammered.

Her body sagged. “Of course that kind of science is decades away.”

“Too bad we can't just cut off our heads, huh?” He laughed.

For a moment, Kati was stillness. No sound. No movement. No breath. Then her face opened. Flickered. Flushed so brightly, Mark felt the heat.

In an instant, he pressed his mouth against hers. Moving his lips into hers. Waiting for her to move into his. When she didn't, he opened his eyes and saw her staring at him. He pulled away quickly.

“I thought – sorry,” he mumbled, and swiftly went back into the gym.

\*\*\*

Dark night rain hammered the shingled roof. Slashed across the poorly sealed windows. It had been raining for days and days. Local roads were flooded and closed. Eva was detoured on her way from work and wouldn't be home for sometime. In the house, Keve slept. Tibor slept. Slept soundly in the cradle of white noise.

When all the while, worms were drowning.

Kati dragged a chair near the fireplace, and climbed onto the seat. She lifted the *valaska* from its mount and walked to her parents bedroom.

Kati watched her father sleep. Eyes moving beneath the lids, dreaming, thinking, maybe even remembering, if that was even possible for him, anymore.

She felt the weight of the *valaska* in her hands. A burst of lightning flashed through the window and she saw the glint of the sharp blade.

She lifted the *valaska* above her father's throat.

“One swift stroke, Kati,” she said to herself, “Don't be afraid.”

\*\*\*

“Kati, wake up.” The voice was urgent, harsh. Someone was shaking her arm. “Kati.”

“I was dreaming,” Kati said vaguely, blinking. Adjusting to the darkness she saw her mother crouched in front of her with a face worn and distraught.

“Kati, wake up now.” Her speech was clipped. Wet and raw-like.

Moonlight filtered into the room. “The rain's stopped,” Kati said. She stood suddenly and the *valaska* fell from her lap. It was covered in blood.

“Yes, the rain's stopped,” her mother said, rising, swaying unsteadily. Panic surged through her voice. “There's blood on the bed.”

Kati looked to the bed and saw her father sitting there. He rose, bed springs squeaking, and joined them near the window. “I told you it was not safe to keep that ax in the house, Eva.”

Bending down, he picked up the bloody *valaska*, and kicked something else under the bed. Kati saw it roll. Dark. Hairy. The size of a bowling ball.

Tibor met her eyes and held them. In that brief moment Kati saw in her father's eyes a massive tangle of thoughts and feelings. Scientific curiosity, reproach, fear, gratitude, comradery, all twisted and knotted like writhing agitation of worms.

Throwing a quick glance at Eva, he looked back at Kati, and shook his head almost imperceptibly.

In the moonlight, Kati saw, his mustache had been trimmed.

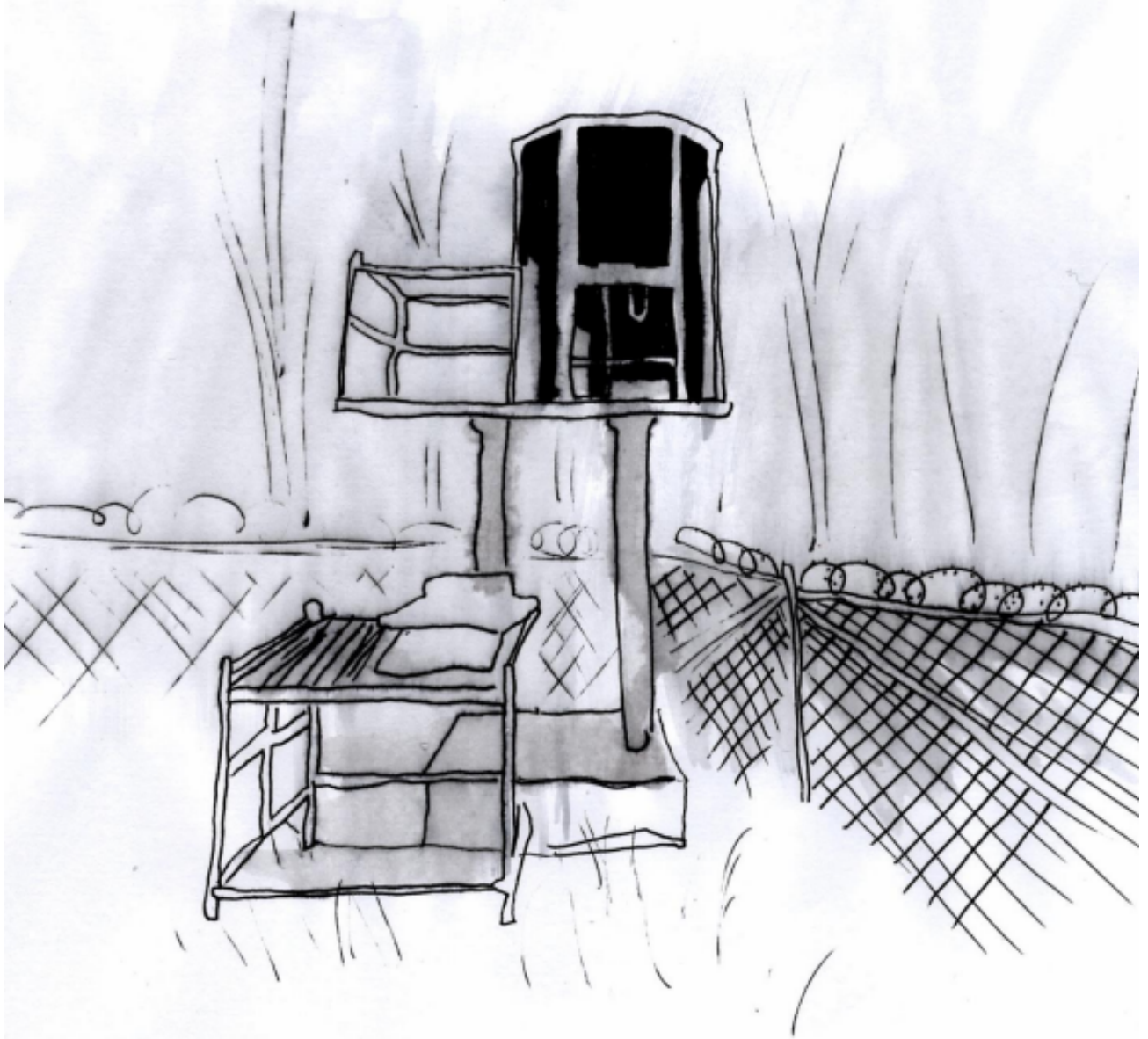


“Go get cleaned up now,” he said tenderly, his accent burrowing a rolling tunnel through the air. “The rain has stopped, Kati. It will be morning soon. Time to go rescue the worms.”



# THE NIGHT IN THE TOWER

WRITTEN BY TOM TURCI



COVER ART BY TOM TURCI

I reached the age in which donning a costume on Halloween had lost its zeal, its novelty. The popular thing people my age engaged in on these nights were lively parties, overflowing with crudely put-together drinks. They erupt throughout the town annually.

I am not one to partake. While my peers drink to their heart's content, I find time for other things on Halloween nights.

People would say I am a wanderer. On the weekends you'll find me alone about the woods or the streets in town. Every Halloween since I had stopped trick-or-treating, I would find time to walk around town, or another place that wasn't too busy.

There was always something about those nights. As a child there would consistently be a certain feeling...

Maybe it was the crisp air.

The lunar glow through bare branches.

The smell of wet leaves.

The clouds hanging down low, moving slowly across the black sky.

I remember it well. The times haven't changed. Though I may not go door to door for candy, I always yearn to go out every October 31<sup>st</sup>.

This year I wanted something different.

I decided to go up into my town's little range of hills early that day and watch the sunset up top.

I am an experienced hiker, and have been on night hikes before, so trekking back in the dark wasn't too out of the ordinary for me. It'd be a unique encounter, all the more dramatic on Halloween night.

I began to throw together my bag. Extra socks, snacks, and jackets. The forecast looked cold, but at nine hundred feet of elevation, the windchill would bite. I grabbed a windbreaker. A flashlight. And of course, extra batteries.

After finishing packing up my bag, I strapped on my boots, and got in my car to leave.

The sun loomed above the horizon, sinking ever so slowly. It was about 3:45 in the afternoon.

I reached the end of a road named Panthorn Trail, reminiscent of my town's colonial name. It was right off the main road at the bottom of the mountain, in the western end of town. The mountain divided my town and the neighboring, Wolcott. I parked in the small dead-end turnaround, which is where the trail began. *How hauntingly poetic*, I thought.

The weather couldn't have been better; the air was fresh and the sky was cloudless.

Stepping out of my car, I immediately noticed the trailhead. The scene was darker than I thought it'd be.

Quite a few trees at the lower elevation still had leaves clinging to their branches; the shade was thick.

In the faint light I could see the beginnings of the familiar trail. I've hiked this trail before in broad daylight, but in the aging autumn afternoon it looked ... different.

There were boulders all the way up, steep, until they disappeared into the trees.

Before I began my way, I double checked everything, taking extra caution to make sure my flashlight still worked and I had the extra batteries. No way of getting down the mountain without it.

Everything was ready and I started my way up.

It was quiet.

Besides my own footsteps, I could only hear my breath, increasing in depth as I climbed, and my heart thumping heavily as I scaled the boulders.

There was no wind. No birds.

*I recall that means there's something lurking about. Or maybe it's just me.* I quickly straightened my thoughts.

The trees began to grow bare as I moved up through the mountain, stripped down to their grey skin.

The sun journeyed closer toward the horizon and the forest was filled with a gentle amber glow, the light reflecting off of the leaves.

The woods were still. *I feel like I'm the only thing on this mountain alive.*

As I had just about reached the top the trail narrowed and it appeared like a small canyon. A giant stone wall loomed to my left, and a hill ascended to my right.

The sun was fading quickly.

*Hurry up.*

My pace quickened as I passed through the crevasse, imagining it a perfect spot to get ambushed by an unknown foe.

The temperature began to drop.

The trees grew shorter.

The air dampened.

Shadows crept their way through the mountainside.

### **5:05 p.m.**

I reached the remains of the old ski lift stationed at the top of the mountain. It used to be part of the local amusement park, but the area has been abandoned. All that remains is the skeleton of the little tower that held the controls, with a small enclosure about twelve feet up.

A ragged chain link fence surrounding the tower was broken in multiple places. Barbed wire adorned it. I could tell people had ventured here countless times before.

I slipped through the fence.

There was scaffolding near the base of the tower, the only way to get into the enclosure.

*I need to get up there now.*

Something urged me to climb out of the darkening woods.

I scaled the scaffolding quickly and jumped up onto the metal floor of the enclosure.

I noticed the green paint of the tower slowly rotted off over the years and flaked off in large chunks. The old control panel had a couple of bulbs still inside of it, but the majority of the components were stripped away. No more power, no more light.

Dead.

The tower posed on top of this mountain like a silent sentinel. I stood still for a moment. I could hear the wind brushing against the side of it.

The sun began to touch the horizon.

I promptly looked west from the tower to watch it make its final dive. The deep burning light made the trees glow so vibrantly with life, even though the leaves that hung on were lifeless.

The entire land below me looked like a rug built from autumnal hues, with the distant homes and buildings sitting like shiny trinkets on the carpet.

The sky faded, a dying ember, and the mountain was soon engulfed in darkness.

The moon was rising and full, harkening back to memories of nights like this...long ago.

I turned to look back east across my hometown of Southington. Campfires dotted the landscape, contrasting against the blackened land. Halloween decor flashed and sparkled.

Flashlights, ever so faint, moved about the streets. It truly was a sight on this Halloween night.

Silence surrounded me.

Alone.

You could've heard a pin drop when the wind died down. For a moment, I sat there in peace. Until I heard a crack.

I froze.

I could feel the hair on the back of my neck stand on end.

I tried to listen. The wind picked up, so it was difficult to hear any other sounds besides the breeze whipping through the tower's frame.

I sat static.

I heard another snap of a branch, followed by a flurried rustle of leaves. A little part of me wanted to turn on my light, another part of me wanted to stay hidden.

I held my breath and attempted to peer over the edge of the enclosure, trying to make out any shapes in the woods below, squinting to try and see, but all the trees and bushes swayed and shook, veiling whatever could be below me.

The full moon provided light, but not *enough*.

The feeling I had earlier of wanting to get off the ground and into this tower had proved itself right. The last thing I wanted to do now was climb down.

I stood up, stepped back, and just listened.

All of a sudden I heard a loud metallic bang, as if something were thrown at the tower. I instinctively ducked. The breath left my body, and I covered my mouth to keep quiet. I was like a stone.

All sorts of thoughts flowed through my head. I feverishly explored my mind trying to make sense of what was going on.

I calmed myself down. For an hour's time all was still.

Then the fence below unexpectedly rattled.

I heard several footsteps go around the perimeter of the tower.

*Too quick to be a bear...too slow to be a racoon.* I could not believe what I was hearing. I sat there terrified.

I didn't know what to do.

I couldn't think straight.

Then I heard something on the scaffolding below me, as if something began to climb it.

I could feel the blood rush out of my face. At this point all the alarms in my wiring began to go off. *What do I do?!*

I couldn't stand it anymore. I would not wait in the dark.

I gathered up the courage and I pulled out my flashlight. It shook in my hand.

I slowly peered over the railing to look down.

But there was nothing.

I stood there confused. Scared. I sat down on the floor of the enclosure.

My head spun. *I need to get out of here, but I can't go down into the woods now.* I told myself it was safer to stay in the tower.

I hunkered down, my only choice.

I sat there on the floor keeping my light on. An old hunting knife which had hung at my side was at the ready. I scanned the border of the enclosure, beyond it lay the unknown. There were no doors, no walls. I had no real sense of cover. I sat in the tower's remains, the corpse of its former self.

The night was passing ever so slowly. The stars above floated across the sky, a black canvas: in it, holes where the light of the distant morning, I imagined, shined through.

Big leaves fell off the oaks, old and dried, and scraped across the concrete below as the wind carried them. The hissing sound they made kept me on edge. I took in every single sound emanating from the woods.

I checked the time, hoping it would soon be dawn.

**7:50 p.m.**

My heart wrenched.

I was famished, but I did not want to make any noise. I was too frightened to do anything else except listen. My body was very tense, as if it couldn't decide whether to fight or flight.

The hours wore on. I was mentally drained.

I was tortured throughout the night by images and assumptions, my thoughts still trying to organize themselves into some cohesive idea about what could've made the sounds. The edges of the tower's cold steel floor beckoned a face to pop up from the abyss below.

An image appeared in my mind of someone standing far away in the woods below, *watching...waiting...*

*Breathe.*

I tried to convince myself it was just an animal. A bobcat maybe. A squirrel. But nothing in my mind could explain the loud bang upon the tower, or the footsteps I heard.

The wind came and went. When it did, it deafened any sound below me, masking everything. It whistled through the ribs of the old enclosure, producing haunting melodies.

I did not move at all as the night wore on. My legs cramped from sitting on the floor for so long, and the incredible tension in my muscles did not help. I was just trying to keep as much of myself away from the edge as possible.

I waited.

And waited.

I didn't even need to fight sleep. It's not what my body wanted. It wanted to run.

*This will be over soon.*

The night buried me.

Finally the endless dark gave in to dawn.

The morning light shot up into the sky. My saving grace.

I restlessly waited for the sun to rise enough to brighten the entire forest. I could not risk walking through any shadows after the night I just had. After enough light trickled into the woods, I nervously climbed back down the tower.

I attempted to scan the area to see any signs of life. Maybe a few footprints, clumps of fur. But I reached no conclusion. I shivered. *What?...no.*

The memories of last night still rang clear in my head. It was worrying to be back on the ground, but my desire to get off this mountain was too intense. I did a quick check of all my gear and began to run down the trail toward my car.

I did not stop once.

I ran as fast as I could down the rocky trail, falling flat on my face more than once. My adrenaline was too high to stay down for long.

I reached my car at the bottom of the trail quicker than I thought I would've. My breath was heaving, my head was in pain. I hadn't had a drop of water for several hours, but thirst was the last thing on my mind.

I turned around to look back up the trail, just as I had done the day before. The forest was still.

Too still.

The eyes of the beech trees stared into me.

I was uneasy.

After dumping everything in the back seat of my car I scrambled into the driver's seat. Then I left in such a hurry, it was like I was never even there.

I began to ease up on the drive home, but until I was inside my house safe, the alarms still sounded throughout my being.

I could not make sense of anything. All I knew was that the fear I had felt was the most intense kind I've ever felt in all the years of my life.

Maybe I had narrowly escaped something...whatever was up near the tower last night.  
*Stalking me.*

Every Halloween from now on, I'll stick to sidewalks and streetlights.