




**SPOOKY** GLASTONBURY  
Writing Contest 2025

**Story Collection**


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## **A Note from your Editors**

Welcome to the very first volume of Spooky Glastonbury! It was our absolute honor to read these 67 frightful stories. We received 48 stories from children aged 6-11, nine stories from teens ages 12-18, and 10 stories from adults aged 19+. In this volume, the stories are firstly categorized by age group. Then, the winning story in each category is featured at the beginning of its section, followed by the remaining stories alphabetically by the author's name.

Stories have always found a home in libraries. These stories (most written, but some with illustrations!) reminded us that we are a community of storytellers and fantastic ones at that. While reading the submissions, there were times where we got chills, times we laughed out loud, and other times where we simply marveled at the creativity of our patrons.

To our writers: we hope you feel proud seeing your story in print! This collection of spooky stories would not exist without your imagination, enthusiasm, and willingness to share a shiver or two. It would also not exist without the efforts of our readers, who volunteered their time and their opinions to select the winning stories. Many thanks to all.

***Until next year! Fangs for reading!***





# It Came with the Thunder

By Sophie Dowling, age 8



The night Lenore disappeared, there was a thunderstorm. She was fast asleep when the first clap of thunder woke her. It banged so loud she jumped right out of bed. Her windows were open and she crossed the room to close them. Outside, the October night was cold. The yard was full of leaves. Three things struck her as strange. For one, it wasn't the season for thunderstorms in Connecticut. For another, the ground was bone dry and there was no rain. For a third, she felt like something was watching her.

She slammed the window shut quick and pulled the drapes closed. She heard another sound like thunder and screamed, then let out a sigh of relief. It was only Henry, her old Boston Terrier. He was standing at the top of the stairs outside her room, begging to go outside.

She peeked in her mom and dad's room to see if they were awake, but they were fast asleep. She decided not to wake them up and to put Henry out herself. In spite of the storm, it was a very quiet night. The only sound was the sawing of crickets. Normally, this part of the forest was full of hunting coyotes. Lenore lived close to the woods, and so it sometimes sounded like the howling was right in her room.

Tonight, the yard was silent, except for the thunder. The dark flickered white with lightning. She opened the back door to let Henry out. He took off like a shot. Lenore could only see a little bit of a blue glow reflected in Henry's collar. The moon was out. It lit the trees silver. She thought she saw in the shadows between the trunks. But when she rubbed her eyes, there was nothing there. The only thing in the yard were mosquitos.

"Yuck!" she said and swatted at her arm.

She slammed the door shut and waited for Henry.

*Ruff, ruff, ruff.*

Henry was scratching at the door. *Already?* she thought. Henry always took longer than two seconds to sniff out a place to go to the bathroom. She opened the door. The mosquitos were all gone. The crickets had gone quiet. There was not a single noise in the backyard, except for Henry, who went ticking inside across the floor. His collar wasn't there anymore. She thought maybe it got stuck on something.

*I'll go get it in the morning, she thought. It's too dark out right now.*

When Lenore went back up to bed, Henry followed and hopped up onto the edge of her bed. Usually, Henry curled up tight to sleep. Tonight, he just sat and stared at her without blinking.

"Lay down, Henry," she said, but he continued to stare. "Come here, Henry, it's



**2025 Winning Story**

okay,” she said, trying again. He still didn’t move. He sat bolt upright, eyes wide.

*Maybe he’s freaked out by the thunder,* she thought.

She was a little freaked out by the thunder, too.

She was about to fall back asleep when she heard a panicked bark. She got out of bed and opened the drapes. In the dark she saw a shape scratching at the back door. Another boom of thunder and clap of lightning and she saw Henry’s black and white fur. The flicker of lightning glowed in his collar. All the hair on the back of her neck stood up. It was impossible. Slowly, she turned to look at the dog that was sitting on her bed. It was gone.

Lenore quickly grabbed her father’s old baseball bat that she kept on the shelf as a decoration. She turned on the hall light and tip-toed downstairs to open the door for Henry. He raced inside and shook himself off. His fur was standing on end like it did when he was terrified. Outside, the thunder rumbled like a snarl. There was still no rain.

“I think there’s another dog in the house,” Lenore whispered to Henry, but as she said it, she couldn’t shake the feeling that something menacing was happening. It *was* weird to have a thunderstorm in October, especially one with no rain. But then she remembered how that first crack of thunder had startled her awake. Maybe the dog got scared by the thunder too, and escaped its yard. She led Henry upstairs and let him into her mom and dad’s room. Henry didn’t do well with other dogs. Lenore’s plan was to catch this strange dog and put it in the garage for the night. Her parents could help her figure out what to do in the morning.

Just as she closed her parents’ bedroom door, there was another loud boom of thunder. It rumbled like a train, shaking the whole house. The lights clicked off. Lenore tried to flick the switch, but nothing happened. The hallway was pitch black. She heard talons ticking across the floorboards. Holding the bat tight, she stood there waiting.

“Come here, doggy,” she said. She tried to sound brave, but her voice shook.

Lenore heard the dog snuffling as it got closer. *It’s just a dog,* she thought. *It’s just a dog.* There was a hum of electricity and the lights clicked back on. The dog was standing directly in front of her. But it was all wrong. It wasn’t standing on all fours, but on its two hind legs. Its knees were bent backwards like a flamingo’s. Its front paws hung limp. Slowly, its snout stretched open in a wide, sharp-tooth smile. Lenore screamed.

*Boom!* Another crack of thunder. Another flash of lightning. In the room across the hall, Lenore’s parents sat up in bed. Henry was barking and pawing at the door. Something felt wrong.

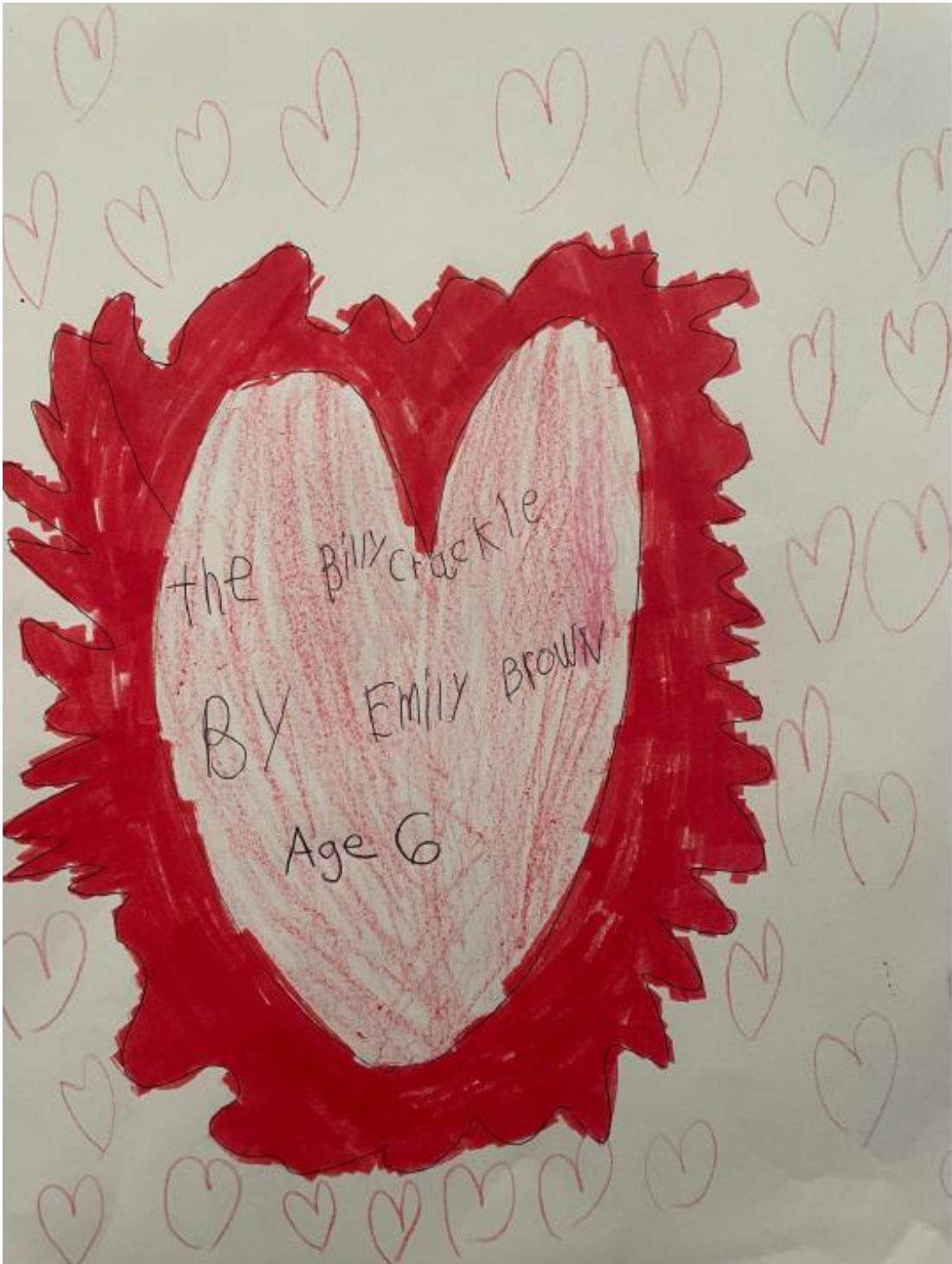
“Let’s go check on Lenore,” said Dad.

They walked across the hall to Lenore’s room. The door was open just a crack. The yellow light of a nightlight shone out from beneath. They stepped inside the room just as a faint thunder rumbled. The storm was passing.

In her room, Lenore sat upright in bed. She stared up at them without blinking, smiling a wide, toothy smile.



**The Billy Crackle**  
By Emily Brown



Once upon a time, two campers were lost in the Glastonbury woods with 3 marshmallows and no water.



They were thirsty and went out to collect rainwater.



Then they saw something!  
It was the Billy Crackle! She  
had the breath of an ogre,  
could breathe fire, and she was  
half lizard and half monster  
with the claws of a werewolf!

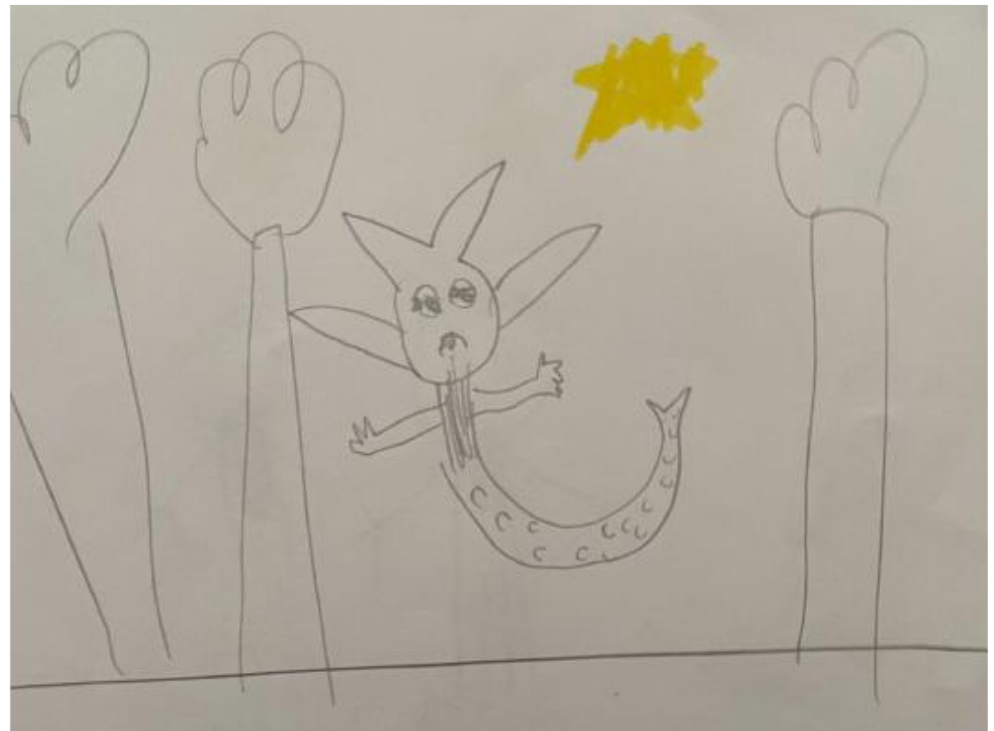
The boys were  
scared and ran!  
She chased the  
boys and yelled  
“tag you’re it!”





The boys ran back to their campsite and hid in their tents. One of the boys came out and wondered what The Billy Crackle meant when she said "tag, you're it!"

The Billy Crackle just wanted to play. She did not want to scare or hurt anyone. Look how sad she is!

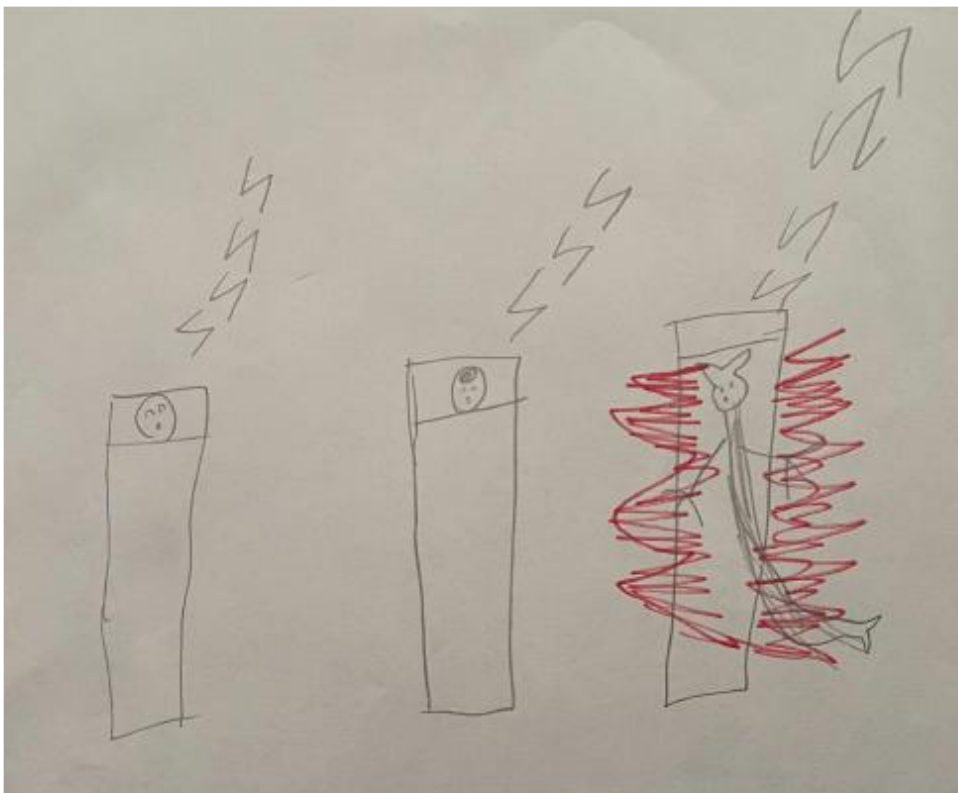


Days passed and boys were still thirsty and they thought the Billy Crackle was hogging some water. They made a plan that night to go steal some water.



The boys found The Billy Crackle. The older boy stretched his arms to sneakily grab the water. The Billy Crackle saw this and said "Hey! Would you like this water?" with a friendly smile. The boys then invited them to be her friend.

The Billy Crackle came back to the campsite and started sleeping in the fire which was an odd thing to do, but the boys liked her. They cooled her off with water and asked "Do you want to have a sleepover in our tent?" "Yes!" The Billy Crackle replied.



Even though her sleeping bag caught on fire, they all slept nice and sound. The next day The Billy Crackle would help them return home, and the three of them would remain friends forever.

**The End**

# AFRAID OF THE SHADOWS

By Madelyn Buchholz

*Who builds a mansion in the middle of nowhere?* That was the first thing Arabella Sanguis thought as her family's green van pulled into a newly paved driveway on the outskirts of Manchester. Ever since her father and stepmother had moved her from Portland, Maine, all the way to Connecticut, she hadn't felt so uncomfortable. She had started to feel a bit relieved when they drove through the town and saw all the colonial style houses and her father and Janice (her stepmom) had pointed out her school, when she started to hope that she would at last live in a normal house. Her last home, where she and her dad moved in with Janice and her family, was a cheap apartment with creaky floorboards and random partitions. Of course, her father and Janice loved it. They met at a Halloween movie event, and it was basically love at first sight—or, scream. So of course, Arabella was afraid she would end up living in a haunted house, but it started to seem like her worries were wrong.

Until they drove down a dirt road into the woods.

The van bumped down the road, sending Arabella flying through the car as far as her seat belt would let her. Naomi held on firmly to the window ledge, fortunate enough to stay mostly in place and not ruin the bun in her hair.

"Never riding to school," Arabella grumbled, trying to stop herself from flying onto Jenny, her half-sister. The van-slash-rollercoaster skipped over rocks and fallen branches through the forest, which was too dark considering it was in the middle of the afternoon. When Arabella looked out the window, all she saw was claustrophobic oak trees for a few yards, until it was too dark to see anything. No grass grew in the forest. The shadows from the clumped trees and leaves at the top kept any plants or animals from surviving. "If we see glowing eyes, we bolt," Arabella whispered to her stepsister. Naomi laughed and tossed away the comment like it was a pile of rubbish.

"I doubt any animals would dare step foot in *that* forest." Naomi said it to be reassuring to Arabella, but it gave her the chills. "Oh, don't be afraid of some trees! It's just a bit dark," Naomi said, proving how different her and Arabella were. They were stepsisters and best friends, but after that the list ends. While Arabella would jump at the creak of a floor board, Naomi often took dares to go into the woods in the middle of the night from her friends with ease.

From her friends.

Back in Portland, Naomi was friends with everyone, while Arabella only had Naomi and a few others. Naomi could listen for hours to someone insulting her or someone she knew, and then at the end of their conversation finish with a remark that would stun the talker and result in them changing schools in most cases. Whereas Arabella would get five minutes into a conversation like that and lose it. Not in a calm way.

As the van pulled up in a driveway, Arabella breathed a sigh of relief to be back on smooth ground. As Arabella and Naomi leapt out of the van, more differences were noticeable. For one thing, their hair. Arabella often had to trim her chocolate brown hair, for her split ends were horrible and the longest she had her hair was shoulder length, which was how it was then. Naomi had long, elbow length shiny black hair, and it often appeared as though a raven was engulfed in her hair to make it that way. Arabella's eyes were chocolate brown like her hair, and Naomi's were a brilliant and bluish gray, in a way that any color she wore would match

beautifully. Arabella often stuck to wearing dark sweatshirts, while Naomi rocked every trend she could on a daily basis.

“Welcome to your new home!” Arabella’s dad said enthusiastically, dramatically displaying a mansion with his arms. To Arabella’s surprise, the mansion was sleek and modern, a white outside with flecks of black on the edges. The building material looked familiar, something Arabella couldn’t quite put her finger on.

“Wow! How did you afford this?!” Naomi enthused, running over to the steps to join Arabella’s dad and Janice.

Janice looked a bit smug as she responded, “Mike and I found it online, and for some reason it was a bit easy to negotiate a good price.” Jenny tripped over her feet to join them on the steps, leaving Arabella slowly and cautiously walking to her family. The day had not been fun so far. As Arabella’s dad, Janice, Naomi, and Jenny pranced through the door to study the mansion, Arabella sulked through the tour-but-not-a-tour her dad and Janice had taken over, even though they were exploring too. Arabella hated it. Every creak made her jump, and the shadows seemed to jump out at her. *I’m being paranoid*, Arabella thought. But was she? *Yes, I’m over reacting*, Arabella rationalized, ending her internal debate. The mansion had three floors, each room consisting of pristine white walls with a hint of black that could not be located, but you could still recognize the presence of.

“Where are me and Naomi’s rooms?” Arabella demanded, growing impatient.

“Weeeeeell,” her dad said nervously, “You see, these rooms aren’t extremely *sturdy*, after the last inhabitant. So, most of the upstairs rooms will be...under construction for a few...weeks.” Arabella’s mouth fell open.

“We have to sleep on the *bottom floor!?!?!?*” She said, like it was the worst thing ever. Because it *was*. Imagine having friends over and showing them your three-story-mansion-with-a-cupola, and then explaining that you sleep next to the kitchen? “But there’s only one room!”

“You’ll have to share for a while,” Janice retorted, obviously becoming sick of our conversation. Arabella nodded, not because she was okay with sleeping on the bottom floor, but because sharing with Naomi didn’t sound too bad, and she didn’t want Janice to be annoyed with her. For the four years Janice and Arabella’s dad had been married, Arabella had gone out of her way to make Janice think of her as her own daughter. Janice was very nice to her already, but she wanted to feel like Janice’s family, not her colleague.

The rest of the day flew by as a routine of going to the car to get a bundle of belongings, come in the house, glare at every inch of the house, Arabella assuring Naomi she was fine, unpack bag, joke with Naomi, and repeat. The moving trucks would take care of the furniture. Dinner came and went, an unexciting meal of Taco Bell and Doritos seemed to take no time, and after more of the unpacking routine, Arabella and Naomi were sent off to bed without watching any television, and as heart breaking as that was, they didn’t even have a T.V.

Arabella and Naomi were huddled in their sleeping bags, trying to fall asleep with all the darkness outside the window. Jenny had been sent to the second floor, and Arabella’s dad and Janice had claimed the cupola.

“Can’t sleep?” Arabella heard Naomi mumble from across the room.

“Nah. I’m guessing you neither?”

Naomi shook her head. “No. I kinda see what you mean about the woods.” Naomi got up from her sleeping bag and crossed the room to where Arabella was. “If we see glowing eyes, we run.” Arabella could only see Naomi’s silhouette holding out a short finger she assumed was her pinky, and even though she knew Naomi could see the same, if not less, she beamed.

“And we learn to drive the van *out of here*,” Arabella wrapped her pinky around Naomi’s. “Now,” she dropped Naomi’s pinky and sat up straighter, “you have to tell me what to do about TacoBell-stomach.” Arabella grabbed her stomach dramatically.

“Sometimes it helps to drink water,” Naomi laughed, slumping back onto her sleeping bag to face the ceiling. Arabella hopped out of her sleeping bag and raced through the door. There was no time to waste. She knew TacoBell-stomach could turn into TacoBell-gas at a moment’s notice. The house was unrecognizable in the dark. The empty house sent shivers up Arabella’s spine. After many wrong turns, most of them ending in empty rooms seeming to echo the darkness, Arabella found herself in the kitchen. It took a moment to find the light switch, and when she did she flicked it on without hesitation. She grabbed a clear water glass and filled it with ice-less water before chugging every single ounce. She hurried back to her room, attempting to navigate the dark halls. Arabella was starting to find the way back, when she heard a scream. The scream was crisp, like it was coming from a few yards away from her. And it was. Recognizing the hallway, Arabella hurried to her room and threw open the door.

Nothing.

There was nothing.

No trace of Naomi. The only sign that Arabella wasn’t the only inhabitant of the room was the crinkled sleeping bag shoved in a corner.

“Naomi?” Nothing. “Come on, this isn’t funny.” There wasn’t even a crinkle of clothes. If there were animals in the woods, Arabella would have heard crickets chirping. *Okay, not here.* Arabella was starting to panic. She threw open the door and flew through the house checking every room. With each empty room and every empty closet, Arabella’s stomach shrunk, and by the last room, it was the size of a marble. *Panic time!!!* Arabella raced upstairs to check on Jenny. She was sound asleep in her tiny sleeping bag, snoring like a hog. Arabella let out a breath she didn’t realize she had been holding. But it only took a few seconds before Arabella was back in panic mode. She considered checking the house again, but she knew it would be a waste of time.

But what could she do?

It would most likely be advisable to tell her dad and Janice. But didn’t she want Janice to like her? Hadn’t Janice and Naomi formed a special bond, that would probably result in Arabella being shunned for being at the wrong place at the wrong time? That’s what it was, wasn’t it? Arabella willed her brain to believe that if she hadn’t gotten up for water, everyone would be yelling for her and Naomi in the morning. She shook herself to get rid of the scary thoughts, and decided to call the police. It would be better not to wake her dad and Janice, and keep Janice respecting her for a little longer.

The 911 operator was sweet and sympathetic, but Arabella heard the surprise and doubt in her voice when she told her about her missing sister. “Are you sure she isn’t hiding?” The 911 operator had asked, and Arabella had assured her that she checked every corner. “We haven’t had a kidnapping in years.” The call took about two minutes, and the 911 operator froze after Arabella told her where the house was. She was told that it normally took up to a week before the family that had moved there recently left without a trace. “I mean who likes a house in the middle of the woods?”

Once Arabella had hung up, she was lost. What was there to do? Sleeping wasn’t gonna happen, that’s for sure. Arabella slipped into a bathrobe, feeling too lazy to get dressed. She flipped the lights on in the kitchen and dropped into a cheap chair. With nothing to do, she grabbed at the potted plant and started picking at the leaves. They fell off bit by bit, making a

small pile of leave bits on the table. The pile got larger and larger, and Arabella could almost feel the clock spinning around on the wall. 11:30. 12:00. 1:00. 2:00. 3:00. By 4:00, she had started on the third potted plant out of the five. 6:00 came and went, and almost all of the potted plants were finished. The sun was starting to rise, sending a shadow of light through the window and across the boney plants and her face. It was 7:30 when the police arrived for an inspection. It was also when the last potted plant had finished being skinned. And when Arabella's dad and Janice came to the kitchen for breakfast. And when the day started.

The day went by in a blur. The police told Arabella's dad and Janice what Arabella had said in the phone call. The police questioned everyone, before saying that they would get back to them about everything. It was noon, and Arabella was eating a plain honey chicken sandwich in the kitchen, with everyone else in the living room. The rest of the day was Arabella walking to town and exploring. She ate her dinner, a sandwich like the one she had for lunch and some potato chips, on the way back. It was 6:00 when she got back, and no one was mad at her for being late. In fact, everyone was 'in bed' by the time she got back. As Arabella crawled into her sleeping bag, she recounted the events of the day. It was clear she was being avoided, and that she didn't mind. But...lying to yourself? That's what it was. And that was something that always really annoyed Arabella. As she drifted off, Arabella made a mental note to clear things up the next day.

It was 7:00 when Arabella was woken up by rapping on the door. Her dad came in, not making eye contact as he respectfully told her it was time to get up. *Oh, right*, Arabella thought, *it's the first day of school*. She wormed into random chosen clothes and grabbed breakfast to eat on the way. She made sure not to run into anyone on her way out. Everyone at school was whispering about Naomi, and few students introduced themselves. Everyone stared at her all day, just staring, and stopping their whispers of confusion and gossip to just stare. As Arabella got home, she decided to try to not run into anyone until talking to her dad and Janice later. Unfortunately, as she was almost in her room, she was stopped by a small voice.

"Arabella?" Jenny saying Arabella's name froze her in place. It felt too formal. When Jenny was younger, she had had trouble saying Arabella's name, so she went with the nickname Naomi came up with, genius but lazy, Ara. She had had people call her 'Bella' and 'Ella', but she didn't like that. So, when Naomi called her the approved name 'Ara', Jenny quickly followed suit. "Arabella?" She repeated, louder this time.

"Yes?" She spun around. Jenny was standing there, nervously fidgeting with the hem of her shirt.

"Ara, did you do something? Mama and daddy are being weird," And there was the question Arabella had been avoiding, and still asking in her head since the other night. All of her instincts were telling her to say no, and assure Jenny she had nothing to do with what happened. But honestly? What had happened? Did Arabella do something and she didn't realize? With all those questioning thoughts circulating around her head, she couldn't come up with a better answer.

"I don't think so. But... we'll see, won't we?" *Won't we?* Arabella repeated in her head. At least, that's what she hoped.

Dinner had come and gone, and Arabella had come to a decision, after her sister had finished her bedtime routine, she would talk to her dad and Janice. And eventually, the time came. She crept out of her room, tiptoeing towards the den. Arabella's dad and Janice were

perched on the ragged couch, eating spaghetti bolognese with a side of bologna and oatmeal raisin cookies.

“Hello,” Arabella said, loud and clear. She wanted them to know she wasn’t dreading this conversation. In fact, it was hard to hide her excitement. She straightened her shoulders and craned her neck to make eye contact. She wanted her dad and Janice to feel as uncomfortable as possible. Why not? Her dad and Janice were clearly going out of their way not to make eye contact. So Arabella would go out of her way to make eye contact. *Two can play at this game*, she thought, taking a step forward. “I’m not coming to ‘confess’,” Arabella stated, holding her head high and keeping her tone and face expressionless. “I think that we...need to talk.”

“About boundaries?” Janice mumbled. She clearly expected Arabella to say no. But she wouldn’t let the power of the conversation be handed over.

“How did you know?” Arabella made sure to make her smile reflect the mischievousness and power she was going for.

“We don’t need to have this conversation. It’s all going just *fine*,” her father said, seeming overly defensive. This fired up Arabella. A lot.

“Of *course* I don’t mind being ignored. I enjoy it. But we all know *what* this is. And I don’t like *lies*. So we are going to clear some things up.” Arabella’s dad started to slowly move towards the door. “*Now*.” Her dad and Janice turned to face her and stared at the wall behind her.

“I don’t understand-” Janice started, speaking quietly like she was approaching an angry lion with caution. *But not enough*. Arabella sent that thought through her body, powering her somehow.

“*I will do the talking*,” Arabella said, like the lion pouncing on its victim. “The first thing I would like to clear up is simple. I didn’t have anything to do with it. I was at the wrong place at the wrong time. Or, I guess the right place at the *right* time, if we’re being technical. And just because I was getting water during the kidnapping does not mean I had something to do with it. I know there’s a chance it’s not a coincidence that it happened when it did, but that’s not what we’re talking about. We are talking about what I know for sure happened. *Nothing else*.” And Arabella told them everything that had happened, from Naomi telling her about how water would help wash down Taco Bell symptoms, to a gust of wind Arabella felt when opening the door she’d forgotten about. It actually all helped her think in a way she hadn’t been able to since the other night. When she thought about the Taco Bell symptoms and Naomi’s advice, it almost seemed like... no. Impossible. Naomi couldn’t have known what would happen to her. Even if Naomi had recommended to Arabella that she should have the most stomach-churning thing Taco Bell served. But... it was something to look into. “Please,” Arabella finished, “just *consider* that I’m innocent.” Her dad and Janice made eye contact for the first time in the past two days. But it wasn’t because they believed her. Their mirroring expressions weren’t the type of respect Arabella was going for. It was the expression you would give a scared puppy who wouldn’t get in the car to let you take him to a vet. *Greeeaaat. They probably think I’m crazy now*. Arabella did her best to mask her disappointment. *Well, I’ve done all I can*. She exited the room, placing her feet straight in front of each other, trying not to freak out until she was in her room. Once she was out of sight of the den, she ran straight to her room, not stopping for a break. Once she got there, she could let out her feelings.

And she saw red. She threw her sleeping bag at the wall in fury. *Being mad won’t help*. She thought, calming herself by slinking into the clump of a sleeping bag that had hit the wall.

She knew only one thing that for sure would help. Sleep. She had barely slept the two nights before. And as she started to drift off, she made one decision. *Tomorrow, I will play detective.*

Arabella woke with a start. It was still dark out. She couldn't tell why she was awake. Until she saw it. Out in the hallway, Arabella saw a strange thing through the cracked door. The shadows shifted, moving swiftly like they were being swayed by the wind. Against her better judgment, Arabella stood and crept out the door, following... well... the shadows. She followed the shadows from a small distance, careful not to make a sound. From this view, she could observe the shadow-creatures. They were shaped like humans of all types. Short fat ones. Tall lean ones. Men. Women. Undecided. Even a few goldfish. They were as flat as paper, and instead of being upright, they were flat on the floor, bending to accommodate the wall.

"Jimothy," one of the shadows right in front of Arabella said in a surprisingly high, squeaky voice, "are all the humans asleep?" A short, stubby shadow that must have been Jimothy nodded.

"All of 'em. Checked just a second ago on the medium one." The high voiced one rolled his head in what Arabella assumed was the shadow version of an eye roll.

"I don't trust you. I'm checking again." It hit her the second he said it. *Wait, I'm the medium one.* She started moving back, as fast as she could without making noise.

"Oh, just trust Jimmy! Come on, what harm can it do if he's wrong?" A faceless female voice coming from the front joined in.

"Hmph. Fine," the first voice said with so much authority and disgust, Arabella knew he wasn't used to being told what to do. The group rounded the corner, coming to a sudden stop outside a padlocked white door with ridges shaded in with a brownish black.

"Here we are! Care to do the honors, Richy?" The female shadow stepped backwards into Arabella's view. The stern shadow that must have been Richy—or, Richard, as he told the lady—stepped up to the door. He tapped a pattern on the door that Arabella memorized. It seemed helpful, and she had decided to play detective tomorrow. Or, was it today? It was too cloudy to tell.

After Richard had tapped the full pattern (six taps on the seventh level, forty on the first), the door swung open with a creak and a flash of light. The shadows crept one by one into the room, and Arabella was able to count the shadows. She decided there were two dozen, eleven women and thirteen men. Arabella went quietly after them, and quickly hid behind a chair before anyone noticed her. The room was the same style as the rest of the house, except...blockier. It took a few seconds for Arabella to realize what the room was made out of...no, she must have been wrong. But Arabella's face blanched as she realized her instincts were right.

The room was made out of bones.

Not the plastic, fake bones you decorate for Halloween with. And that must have meant that the whole house was made of bones. *The rest of the house must be bones fused together,* Arabella told herself. And the furniture in the room...ew! She jolted back her arm, which was holding onto the back of the chair. She then remembered that the room wasn't very large, and it was a miracle that the shadows hadn't noticed her yet. But they seemed...preoccupied. There were now only two shadows left in the room. They both seemed male from their silhouettes and voices. The others had gone into a separate room with a small door.

The shadows were whispering, and Arabella could barely hear what they were saying. She picked up random words like "please" and "new" and "today". The new shadow left the

room, leaving the shadow that Arabella recognized as Richard to stand in wait. Another shadow came into the room, a woman this time, looking in her mid-twenties. Arabella could hear their voices now. The woman seemed confused, and stunned at how Richard looked, which was strange considering they looked almost identical.

“Take a seat,” Richard gestured to the seat Arabella was behind.

“What’s going on? Why are we...” the woman slumped into the chair as if she was ready to listen to a good story. Well, she was.

“I can explain—”

“Then do!” The sudden outburst seemed to anger Richard, in a similar way to when he was told to trust Jimmy. He clenched his fists, but after a few seconds loosened up.

“Stop interrupting,” she pretended to zip her lips and leaned towards Richard, who had sat down in a chair across from her. “Hmph. Thank you. Now, I think I know what three questions you’re thinking; what am I, where am I, and *why* am I.” The woman nodded hesitantly. “I wondered those exact same things. And the first you need to know, before I answer any of those questions, is that any guess you’ve made is completely wrong. And, may I ask what guesses you have?”

“Oh, I don’t know, I don’t really have any. I mean, I did consider that we were, like, some type of ghost, but that’s probably wrong.” She fidgeted with the hem of her sleeve, all the bravado of earlier gone.

“Actually, that’s pretty close. Except when you’re a ghost, you’re *dead*. You have to die to be a ghost. But you aren’t a ghost. You’re a shadow. When you’re a shadow, you’ve lost your sanity. Your body still exists. Except you have no consciousness. Your consciousness left, and here you are. A shadow of your former self.”

“What? No. I’m not crazy. I’m not—” the woman’s face blanched. “Oh my gosh. What did I do? Wait. I remember.” The room was quiet, like something had drained all the noise.

“Question number two, where you are,” Richard shifted his chair slightly to the right. “You lived in Delaware. We are in Connecticut, in a town called Manchester. We are in a house made out of human bones in the middle of the woods. This room is the shadow’s headquarters. The rest of the house is inhabited by the people whose bones we use.” Arabella should have assumed it. Where else would they get the bones from? *But then...where’s Naomi!*? Arabella hit her arm a few times to stop herself from thinking. “And for question number three; honestly, we don’t know the *true* reason. But boss—she has us call her boss San—she thinks those who went crazy are superior.

“That we were given another chance so that we can overrun this world. Basically restart everything. That those who lose their sanity go crazy because of their burden to wash out humans.” The woman scooted backwards, surprised by the information Richard had told her.

“That’s...a lot.” Richard said something in response, but Arabella wasn’t paying attention. She was focused on the door to the other room swinging open. A short shadow came in, with slumped shoulders that screamed defeat.

“Richard, boss San wants us to keep the girl alive, and I quote, *‘until the time is right’*. What does that even mean?” The shadow complained to Richard in a crisp, British accent. “I told her we would eventually need more bones, but she’s been acting so weird ever since the Sanguis-Elegans family moved in. By now she would have had us collect bones from everyone, and we haven’t even gotten a stapes!” The British shadow went on and on about their boss and how weird it all was, but one thing was bouncing around Arabella’s brain. *‘Boss San wants us to keep the girl alive’*. So then...*Naomi’s fine!* Arabella was so relieved, she had to remind herself

to stay quiet and still. As the three shadows left the room, she had a new focus; getting out of this section of the house unnoticed. The last shadow out the door slammed a bit too hard, and sent a few phalanges skidding across the floor. *Now's my chance.* With award winning speed (for Arabella), she flew on her stomach to the door back to the hallway, which she thrust open and hopped through to land on a royal blue rug with a thud. She slowly closed the door, careful not to make a sound, and ran as fast as she could without making any floorboards creak back to her room. She leapt into her sleeping bag and an Arabella cocoon, trying to force herself to sleep. It was soon decided that Arabella would spend another sleepless night destroying potted plants, only this time in the living room. Before she knew it, she had destroyed half of her first victim. She had started processing everything she had heard and seen, which was a lot. There was only one thing she had had time to think about. They were keeping Naomi alive. Why? Arabella didn't care. All she knew was that Naomi was okay. But for how long? How long until boss San caved? How much time did Arabella have to set things right?

Arabella woke up on October, Friday the thirteenth, on the floor of the living room. It took her a minute to realize why she was there, another to decide she had not dreamt of the night before, and a final one to realize it was Friday, a school day, and one glance at her watch told her she should have woken up thirty minutes ago. Sprinting to her room, Arabella ripped off her pajamas and started to twist her hair into a small, messy bun. She threw on a random selection of clothes and poured Cheerios and milk into a Ziplock bag. Arabella tripped over her own feet twice while running through the woods to her bus, but never fell and made it just in time.

The day passed quickly, stares and whispers filling every hallway Arabella went through. The lunch was boring. Tomato soup and spaghetti, the most random combination ever. Once Arabella got home, she finally had time to think.

It was almost impossible, with all the thoughts and theories pounding around her head.

But at least her breaks were spent playing basically every game ever with Jenny. It was a Friday, so Arabella's dad and Janice went out for dinner, leaving Jenny with Arabella. She didn't mind, but she wished she had had time to think. Luckily, everyone went to bed a bit early, giving Arabella a good amount of time to ponder. Which didn't work. She came up with nothing. Eventually Arabella made the decision to once again destroy a few potted plants in the den. The sun had set, and one glance at her watch told it was already past 8:30. It was late. A bit too late to be eating Hot Cheetos, like Arabella was. *Sue me,* Arabella said to herself. It was finally a good time to think about the night before. The fact that shadows were alive was something to wonder about. We're all shadows like that? All Arabella took out from it was that all the shadows in her house were alive. Or almost all of them. At least, that's what she hoped.

It was almost 9:00, and Arabella had gotten barely anything. *So much for thinking.* By then, it was clear that nothing was working. Thinking? Hah. No chance Arabella was going to try more of that. So then...what was the last resort? The answer came clearly to Arabella. What was one of the only things she was good at? *Avoiding people.* The answer Arabella instantly told herself was almost comical, considering the past few days. But she had been able to hide, and just avoid people in general, since she could walk. So, it was time to test herself.

Arabella grabbed a flashlight and shoved her feet into her slippers. The flashlight because she could think of nothing else for emergencies, and the slippers because her feet were cold.

She made her way to the door, putting her feet in front of her fears. Luckily, she had memorized the pattern to open up the door. *Six taps on the seventh level, forty-one the first.* The door slowly creaked open.

And the lady standing in the doorway was familiar to Arabella. Was it her silhouette? Or her voice? Or both?

Arabella willed herself not to be afraid.

And for once, it worked.

She was confident.

Arabella felt like she could do anything.

And with shoulders back and a high head, Arabella stepped into the room that would change her life. Decide her fate.

Happy.

Sad.

Undecided.

It was all up to her mother.

### The chipmunks

The chipmunks in the forest never left. Why would they? The forest had all of the food chipmunks eat. And there were no chipmunk predators in the forest. The lives of the chipmunks were terrific. And they got free entertainment when shadows built a small house in the middle of the woods. The house was built out of a strange material that looked like human bones. There was a room that was concealed with shadows. No humans noticed the room. But the chipmunks did. They saw everything. Groups of humans would come and live in the house. But then the shadows would take them and use their bones to build more parts to the house. The chipmunks started placing bets on how long the humans would last. The stories of the growing mansion in the woods were passed down through generations of chipmunks. It was fifteen years since the house had been built, and that small cottage was now a giant modern mansion with a cupola when a dusty green van pulled into the drive. Per usual, the chipmunks made bets on how long the Sanguis-Elegans family would last. One chipmunk said two weeks max. Another said two days. And the chipmunks watched a brown-haired girl hesitate to go into her house. They watched through a window as the shiny black-haired girl was abducted by shadows, and the shadows rushed so fast out of the room, they bumped into the brown-haired girl. And the chipmunks saw the brown-haired girl follow the shadows to their room. And they saw her return. But after that, their view was blocked by a dark shadow slinking across the window.

# The Mysterious Stain

By Ellie Chi

“There is something on that pillow!!” My best friend Vivian Songbird screamed.

I sighed, and made my way downstairs to the basement where we were holding our sleepover.

“It’s probably just a stain.” I called from the stairs. Vivian didn’t say anything, but we’ve been friends for so long, I could basically hear her thoughts. I walked over to Vivi. She was pointing at a pillow. Her light brown hair was pulled back into two French braids that went down to her hips. Freckles dotted her face.

“Does that look like a stain?!” Vivi asked, “It moved.”

“That is a stain. And stains, don’t move.” I said, stubbornly not believing her. “Now, c’mon. We have things to do.” I grabbed her arm and pulled her away from the pillow. As I turned, out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw something dash across the pillow. Whatever. I thought. We did have things to do. Vivi and I made ourselves a schedule. We were going to watch a movie, do rounds of Truth or Dare, Two Truths and a Lie, and other games like that, and then we would put on socks and slide around on the hardwood floor until 2:00 am. Then we would go to sleep. That was our plan. It included no breaks or time for anything else, but my mind kept wandering back to the thing dashing across the pillow.

“I need to go to the bathroom.” Vivi announced.

“Right now? We’re about to start the movie.”

“Start it without me.” She rose from the couch, and walked to the bathroom. I grabbed the remote and started the movie. Under my breath, I counted to ten. Then I silently rose from the couch as well. Just one look. I thought, creeping towards the pillow. Just one peek, and then no more. I refused to let Vivi know I thought she might be right by letting her catch me investigating. I told you! She would say, sticking out her tongue. I told you, I told you!! I shuddered.

There, on the pillow was the stain that was not a stain. It was pink with a little purple in the middle. I could see why Vivi might think it wasn’t a stain. Silvery spots speckled the pink part, making it look like a face. I knew it wasn’t really a face. I remembered when I stained it. I was suddenly jerked out of my thoughts when I heard the sound of running water. I gotta hurry. I thought. When I turned to run back to the couch, I thought I saw something dash across the pillow again. This time, I didn’t ignore it. I whipped around. My short black hair smacked my face.

“Blegh!” I spat the hair out of my mouth. On the pillow was the stain. Nothing about it changed. I ran to the couch, sat down, and acted like I had been there since the movie started.

“What did I miss?” Vivi asked.

“Not much.” I replied. Then we continued on with our schedule. The next day was Sunday. We ate breakfast, and at 9:00 AM, Mrs. Songbird came and picked up Vivi. It was thirty minutes earlier than we planned, but we didn’t mind. “See ya at school!” I called.

“See ya!” She called back. Then came the cleaning up. I moved the blankets and pillows away to the closet, and my mom vacuumed the whole basement. I put all of the stuff Vivi left behind in the closet. She leaves stuff behind a lot. Finally, the cleaning was done, and I got to relax. Just do nothing and watch television.

"Clover, did you do your homework?!" My mom asked.

"I don't have any." I responded, not even looking in her direction. I was glued to the T.V. I watched for hours, but it felt like minutes. By the time I finished, it was time for me to get ready for bed. I brushed my teeth, showered, and read for an hour in bed. I fell asleep at 11:30 PM. I had a dreamless peaceful sleep.

My first thought when I woke up was Monday. I never liked Mondays. I dragged myself out of bed, and to my closet. I got changed and ready for school at Gideon Welles School. I walked to the bathroom, and brushed my teeth. I ran to the kitchen, shoving down an orange, and a donut. I grabbed my backpack and my water bottle on my way out the door. I ran to the bus stop. Vivi wasn't standing there like usual. She probably slept through her alarm. I put my heavy backpack on the sidewalk and sat down.

BUZZZZ, BUZZZZZZ. My phone vibrated in my pocket. I pulled it out. A text from Vivi popped up on my screen. I read it. I might miss the bus. It said, I scrunched up my face. Vivi never missed the bus.

"What're you doing with your face?" A voice in front of me asked. I looked up. Ugh. It's Roger. I thought.

"Nothing." I fixed my face. "Just thinking."

"Try to think with less face." He ordered. I rolled my eyes and ignored him. BUZZZZ, BUZZZZZZ. I looked down at my phone. A new text appeared. This one was from Mrs. Songbird.

Is Vivi at the bus stop? It read. I quickly texted a reply.

No. She said she might miss it.

That's strange. She's not over here.

Weird. I shut off my phone, and try to think about where Vivi could possibly be. A loud rumbling sound disrupted my thoughts. The bus pulled up. I shoved my phone back in my pocket, and climbed the stairs on the bus. I swung into my seat, momentarily confused when Vivi didn't swing in right after me. Right. Vivi's missing. I stared out the window. A breeze blew in. Blegh. Hot and sticky. I thought. The day blurred by. I didn't pay much attention to anything happening around me. On the way home from school, I had a genius idea. I pulled out my phone, and quickly sent Vivi a text.

Where r u? I tapped on her contact photo, and looked at her location. A map popped up. It showed her moving with the same speed and direction as the bus. I looked next to me. There was no Vivi. No light brown braids swinging in the wind. I cautiously touched the air where she should be sitting. I shivered. My hand instantly turned purple. I felt a hand gripping my arm.

"AHHHHHH!!!" I screamed. In unison, all of the heads on the bus swung into the aisle, and looked in my general direction. I clamped my free hand over my mouth. Oops. I thought. "Clover, what're you doing?" My friend Pearl asked.

That's a good question. What AM I doing? I thought. "I dunno." I replied. I ripped my arm away from the nonexistent hand grabbing me. "Uhhhh... Clover? What's on your...." Pearl's face froze when she started to say arm. The bus and all of the cars around them stopped moving. The wind stopped blowing, people stopped walking, time seemed to stop. "Clover." A voice whispered next to me. I whipped my head around. "Who's there?!" I asked.

"Vivi!" Vivi replied, cheerfully.

“Oh. It’s just you. You grabbed my arm, right? Oh my gosh, Vivi, you scared me so much.”

“Sorry.” Vivi said, sheepishly. She looked a little weird. Like a ghost. Her hair somehow got out of her French braids and turned black. It hung wild and knotted down past her hips. Her whole body was a little see through, and gray. The clothes she was wearing were the same, but there was no color.

“Viv... What the heck happened to you?” I asked. “Are you, like, a ghost?”

“Umm, I think so?” She replied. “I’m kind of still figuring this out.” I remembered Pearl about to ask me something, but froze in the middle. “Did you freeze time?” This Q&A went on for a long time. But what I got from it was this: Vivi got turned into a ghost, we don’t know how, but we do know when; She did freeze time, but only for a moment to explain what’s going on, something she can’t do much; we have to get her back to her human form before Halloween (in 2 days); a small blue mark is on my arm, allowing me to see her; and most importantly, no, she did not dye her hair black. I guess I’ll have to wear long sleeve T-shirts now. I thought unhappily. She unfroze time, and we rode the bus to my house. I greeted my dog and my parents. My dog Boots (AKA Bootsy) seemed to sense Vivi. Maybe because she seems to always smell like bacon. Bootsy lied down on her feet.

“I think dogs can sense ghosts.” Vivi whispered. We walked to my room down the hallway. Vivi tried to flop onto my bed, but she passed right through it. “I hate this.” She said, shivering. I nodded as I closed the door to my room, blocking out Bootsy just as she tried to get in. She whined, and scratched the door. “Just let in Bootsy. She’s the best!!”

“No.” I knelt in front of my bookshelf. “I don’t want her to get used to you being a ghost.” I scanned the spines on the shelves. “I don’t have anything on ghosts in here.” “Obviously.” Vivi rolled her eyes. “We should go to Raven.” She tried to open the door, but her hand passed through it. I shuddered. “Is Raven really the only option right now?” I asked nervously.

Raven’s pretty intimidating. She has all sorts of books on ghosts, and supernatural stuff. I also barely know her. Vivi nodded. I opened the door for her, and we walked to her house. A few minutes later, I stood in front of the front door to Raven’s house. I cautiously rang the doorbell. It played that classic ding-dong. The door creaked open. A tall woman with shoulder length curly black hair stood in the doorway.

“Hello?” She looked down at us. “Can I help you?”

“Um, is Raven home?” I squeaked. She called Raven over.

“What is it?” Raven snapped. I blinked.

“Um, can I talk to you? I may need your help?” Raven waved us in. We followed her to her room on the second floor. The walls were painted purple and black, and in the middle of the hardwood floor was a circular carpet. Candles stood on her windowsill, and on her white desk. Next to almost every candle was an open book about magic or ghosts. Paintings of ravens hung on the walls.

“...nice room.” I commented. It seemed a little too purple for me, but Raven fit well in this room. With her short black hair with purple tips, and black combat boots with purple laces, Raven seemed to really love black and purple. “Thanks. So, where’s Vivian?” She asked casually.

“Right here. You see, Vivi’s been turned in-”

“Into a ghost, yeah, I know. I mean where in this room exactly is she?” Vivi floated over to Raven, and grabbed her arm. A blue mark slowly appeared where Vivi touched it.

“Ah. There she is.” Raven said.

“How did you know she was a ghost?” I asked.

“There was a floating ball of light next to you. In my books, it says that means a ghost that isn’t fully a ghost yet, is there.” She replied. “So, Vivian is a ghost.”

“Yeah! We were wondering what you could tell us about it.” Vivi said cheerfully. Raven launched into a long explanation about ghosts. It included some unimportant stuff, like animal ghosts, and mythical creature ghosts, and old stuff we already knew, but the important stuff is: Vivi probably touched something from the ghost world to become a ghost; once she becomes a full on ghost, she’ll forget everything about her life; and there’s a very advanced ritual we need to perform, with very rare specific ingredients, in a very specific place, (the kids section in Welles Turner Memorial Library). Why, I don’t know. I sighed.

“And we only have three days to do it all.” I frowned. “How are we supposed to get all of that done in two days?!”

“You can borrow my book so you can remember the ritual.” Raven offered. I nodded, and took her book. Soon, we were on our way to my house. Raven came with Vivi and I. She said it was cause we might need more of her help, but I think she just didn’t want to miss one minute of spending time with an almost ghost. While we were walking, Raven asked Vivi question after question, and jotted down the answers in her purple notebook. I stared at it. She had written Ghosts on the subject line in her fanciest handwriting. I looked at the cover of the book she lent us. It had the same cover. Inside were some of her notes on ghosts. I watched as more words slowly appeared on the page. How is she doing that? I thought.

“Magic.” Raven said, as if she read my mind. Maybe she did. “I used a spell I learned from my grandma’s book.”

“So... you used a spell to make the writing in your notebook,” I pointed to the notebook she was holding. “Show up in this notebook?” She shook her head.

“It’s a copying spell. I made an exact copy of the notebook I’m holding, so that notebook changes with this one.” She pointed at the notebook she lent us.

“So, like, exactly what I said.”

“Sure.” We arrived at my house. I opened the front door with my key, and we walked inside. I led us down to the basement.

“So tell me more about magic.” Vivi blurted as soon as we reached the bottom of the stairs. Raven told Vivi about her magic while I went upstairs to get us some snacks. When I came back, Raven had sat down on the couch, and propped her feet up on the table in front of it, while Vivi asked her tons of questions. I sat down, and opened the notebook Raven lent us. I flipped to the page with our ritual in it.

- Ghost unicorn horn shavings
- The object the almost-ghost touched from the ghost world
- Ghost narwhal horn shavings
- Ghost bread
- Hair from the almost-ghost

Weirdest ingredients ever. I thought.

“What’re you doing?” Vivi asked me. She floated over to look in the notebook. Vivi peered over my shoulder. “Those are some weird ingredients.” She floated back to her spot on the ground. “Why do we need ghost unicorn horn shavings?”

“A unicorn’s magic is mostly in their horn. Ghost unicorns are rarer and stronger than normal unicorns. A few ghost unicorn shavings should be just enough for what we need to do.” Raven explained. She pulled out five mini jars stringed together on a rope. She handed it to me. I tied it around my neck.

After a few more snacks, explanations, and saying bye to my mom, we were on our way. Raven walked in the lead, followed by Vivi and then me. Raven talked as we walked, explaining where we were headed.

“We’re going to visit one of my relatives.” She said,

A half hour later, at about 3:30 PM, we arrived at Raven’s friend’s house. It was grand, and had lots of windows, but still looked welcoming. A girl stood on the front steps. She had green eyes, and long blond wavy hair with pink streaks. She looked pretty much like the opposite of Raven. Freckles dotted her face, much like Vivi.

“Raven.” She said, “What do you want?”

“Lily.” Raven made a face. “You know I hate reaching out to you, but it’s urgent.” She explained our situation to Lily. The way she said it made it sound like the world was burning down by tomorrow. Which I guess was the same intensity as our problem in my mind. Lily’s mouth hung open. “Why would you say that out here?” She whispered. She waved us inside her house in a very similar way Raven did. She led us to her room on the second floor. It vaguely resembled Raven’s room. There was a round carpet in the middle of the room, a white desk, and a bed in the same spot as Raven’s, but instead of paintings of ravens, there were paintings of lilies, the sheets and blankets on the bed were different colors, and the candles and books were replaced with origami papers, crystals, and jewelry. In the corner of the room, pushed in a pile so small it looked like it was hiding, was a bunch of old photos, books, and papers. When we walked inside the room, Raven’s eyes immediately went to the pile. She walked over there, and rummaged through it. Lily rolled her eyes. “It’s not in there.” She said, “It has to be.” Raven snapped. Lily sighed. She asked where Vivi was like Raven did, and Vivi floated over to give her a blue mark. She knew the ingredients already, and she knew where all of them could be found. The hair one was easy. She just grabbed a sharp crystal, and cut off some of Vivi’s hair. She handed it to me, and I put it in a jar. Ghost bread seemed kind of hard, because we had to make the bread dead, and bread was never alive to begin with. Lily explained all this to us with Raven popping in here and there to add interesting facts. It sounded a bit like this:

Lily “The bread has to be dead-”

Raven “Bread can’t be dead since it was never alive.”

The explanation ended up being really confusing, but we understood the important part. Ghost bread turned out to be really easy, because we could just buy it at the magic grocery store. There was some name for it, but I immediately forgot it. We quickly ran the errands, and put the ingredients inside the jars. I put a tiny little checkmark next to the ingredients in the notebook.

“We only need the horn shavings.” I announced. “Any idea where we can find those?” Raven glared bullets at Lily, who shot her own back. “I did, but I guess it’s gone now.” Raven growled between clenched teeth.

"It was an ACCIDENT." Lily said. "You shouldn't have given it to me in the first place.

"Given what?" I asked. Lily shrugged.

"It's easier to explain in the morning." She said, "You can tell your mom that you're having a sleepover at a friend's house, and that Vivi's with you." I texted my mom. She probably texted Vivi's mom, to tell her Vivi's with me. I shoved my phone back into my pocket. Then, Lily showed Vivi and I her house. It was even grander on the inside than the outside. Chandeliers hung in almost every room, each one different from the rest like snowflakes. There were a total of three floors, excluding the basement and the attic, and too many bathrooms and bedrooms to count. Finally, Lily showed us our room for the night. It had a bunk bed in one corner, and mint green walls. It seemed so simple after the fancy crazy other rooms. I ran over, and flopped onto the bottom bunk. I normally would go for the top, but I was way too tired to climb up the ladder.

"I know Vivi can't actually sleep on the bed, but it might make you more comfortable to be with a friend." Lily explained. "Also, the only guest room is this one with the bunk beds." She was beginning to walk out, when Vivi asked, "Where will Raven sleep?"

"Raven can sleep in my room." Lily replied. She left, leaving me and Vivi alone.

"Do you know what you touched to become a ghost?" I asked.

"The pillow." Vivi replied. She explained how she had leaned in closer to inspect it. A bit too close, because her nose lightly touched it. A cold breeze had swept through the room, and Vivi felt like her soul was being sucked out of her. That's when she screamed. I nodded.

"Sounds creepy." I commented.

"It was." Vivi said. We sat in silence until a shout shattered it.

"WHAT THE HECK DID YOU DO?!?!!" Raven's voice floated down from across the hall. I sat upright. Lily's voice floated down next.

"NOTHING!" She screamed. I bolted out of the door, and ran to her room. Purple light glowed through the new cracks in the wall. I opened the door and was greeted by an extremely strange sight. Lily and Raven stood on opposite sides of a glowing purple glass box, floating in the air. It shot out rays of purple light that seemed similar to lasers. Inside was a bottle. A glowing bottle. I squinted. "Wait... is there a label on that?" I asked.

"Those are the horn shavings from the ghost narwhal." Raven said, "But my idiot sister here, decided to throw it in that pile of papers and it landed next to a spell, which activated it."

"It's NOT MY FAULT." Lily protested.

"Yes it is." Raven argued. I looked around Lily's room for anything that might stop the activation of the horn shavings. All I saw were crystals, jewelry, and origami papers. I leaned over, grabbed a purple crystal, and threw it at the box. The box shattered on impact, spraying glass shards everywhere. They stabbed the walls and sliced my face. I could see figures that looked like Raven and Lily, running under the table. I closed my eyes and used the notebook with the ritual in it to shield my face. Soon, the explosion was over, leaving Lily's room, and my clothes, a mess. Raven and Lily crawled out from under the table. Both of them glaring daggers at me.

"My room." Lily said. "You ruined my room."

"You used my book for a shield." Raven growled. I put my hands above my head.

"Sorry." I looked around the room. "Hey... where's Vivi?"

"Right here!" Vivi chirped behind me. "What happened?" She asked. Raven, Lily, and I all answered at the same time.

“We found the ghost narwhal horn shavings.” Was my answer.

“Clover destroyed my room.” Was Lily’s answer.

“Clover destroyed my book.” Was Raven’s answer. Vivi laughed. I sighed, and walked over to pick up the horn shavings. It looked like a bottle of grated Parmesan cheese, except for the fact that it glowed. I examined the bottle. It didn’t look like a bottle that had just been in an exploding box. “I thought you said these were gone.” I shook the bottle. The horn shavings clinked together, and glowed blue every time they touched a new shaving.

“I was pretty sure they were, but I guess Lily hid them two years ago, so well, that she forgot where they were.” Raven took the bottle from me, opened it, and dumped the contents inside one of the jars that hung around my neck. “So now we just need the ghost unicorn horn shavings, and the thing Vivian touched. The pillow?” I nodded.

“The pillow.” I confirmed. I yawned. That seemed to remind Lily that we haven’t slept yet, and it was midnight. She gave us two toothbrushes and bottles of toothpaste. We continued on with our regular nighttime routine. Brushing teeth, showering, going to sleep. I collapsed on my bottom bunk, feeling so glad that I didn’t choose the top bunk. I fell asleep. I slept like the dead that night. I slept so deeply, I didn’t even notice it when a shadowy figure came through the window and tried to take the ingredients for Vivi’s ritual. Luckily, Raven cast a spell on it so it couldn’t be removed from my neck unless I took it off.

The next morning, I was shaken out of bed by Raven. She stared down at me with her hand pulled back, as if she were going to slap me to wake me up.

“Oh. You’re awake.” She sounded a little disappointed. “Get up. We need to move fast. There’s a new set of clothes on the ground for you.” I scrambled out of bed, and told Raven and Vivi to get out of the room. I quickly got dressed and ready to move. My sneakers had been cleaned, and a packed backpack rested on the top bunk. Evil. Making me climb for the stuff I need for the trip. I slung it over my shoulder, and swung out of the room. Lily was waiting for me by the staircase leading down.

“We gotta go.” She led me outside, where Raven and Vivi were waiting. They saw us, and started walking fast. We soon caught up to them. Raven and Lily explained to me why we were in such a hurry. Someone is following us. Trying to steal the ingredients from us. We began to jog, Raven’s house getting closer and closer. Before, we had taken 30 minutes to walk the distance between Raven’s house and Lily’s house. This time, it took us about 10 minutes. Raven or Lily probably cast a spell to make us walk faster. Lily started whispering to herself. Things like:

“I knew this would happen.” Or “Never should’ve said it outside.” We reached Raven’s house, and ran inside quickly. The hallways seemed to stretch longer. Every one foot turned into three. We ran faster. Every one foot turned into five. We ran even faster. The end of the hallway to Raven’s room was within sight now. The door was open, and the candles were lit. Raven sighed, and stopped running. She spread her fingers, and held out her hands in front of her, as if she were telling someone to stop. Her eyes glowed black, and she chanted in a weird double layered voice. The hallway shrank back to normal hallway size, and they ran inside her room. The candles snuffed out, only to be lit again by Lily. Raven collapsed on the floor.

“Oof. That was a fifth level spell. That must’ve really drained her.” Lily commented. I looked at her.

“What do we do now?” I asked. “Why did we come here again?”

"Raven has the ghost unicorn horn shavings here somewhere." We began searching for it. A bottle just like the other one with glowing pink grated cheese looking stuff. I opened drawers, and checked under the bed, and in her closet. No ghost unicorn horn shavings. The candles snuffed out again, plunging them into darkness. They were then lit again, but this time, the fire was blue.

"Found it!" Vivi yelled, triumphantly pointing at a bottle. I ran over, and picked it up. I opened the bottle and poured it into one of the jars like Raven did.

"We need to leave." Lily said. She and I picked up Raven, and walked towards the door, when it closed, and locked. I repositioned Raven's legs so I could open the door, but the knob disappeared. I screamed, and dropped her. I ran to the window, but the window got smaller and smaller until it wasn't there anymore.

"I'm gonna try to go through the wall." Vivi announced. She floated towards the wall, but got bounced back. Lily walked over to Raven's books to try to find a spell to fix it. The books all slammed shut, and turned into rock. I walked over to Raven, and slapped her.

"OW!" She jolted awake. She took one look at her room, and said, "What did I miss?" Her skin was paler than usual, and she didn't look like she had enough energy for a spell, but we asked her anyway.

"It's too late for any spell I could do." Raven said, "Usually for something like this," she gestured at the room, "you would need a full grown witch with years of experience. Which I am not." I may have cried. At least Vivi cried more. It was Halloween. Our deadline to bring Vivi back. She only had until sunset. Then she would be gone. Forever. I couldn't imagine life without my best friend Vivi. Time passed too quickly. The sun was already beginning to set, and Vivi didn't have much time left. The spell affecting Raven's room stopped. The candles burned normal colors, the books turned back into books, the window came back, and the door opened. We all ran outside.

"Vivi, can you stop time?" I asked hopefully.

"No." She replied. "I wouldn't be able to stop it for long enough anyway." We all definitely cried. Raven and Lily will deny it if you ask them, but they did. We all did. Ohhh.... How will we explain this to Mrs. Songbird? I thought. I went back to my house with Vivi. We made it there just before the sky went completely dark. My mom was inside doing the laundry.

"Oh, hi Clover!" She said, she was in the mud room, holding the pillowcase with the stain. She was cleaning it, scrubbing it, and throwing all sorts of stain remover on it. I watched as the stain was slowly erased from the pillowcase. My mom wiped her hands, and threw the pillowcase in the washing machine.

"There. All done." She said, happily. She looked over at me. "Hi, Vivi, I didn't see you there. You girls want some snacks?" I looked next to me, and standing there was my best friend Vivi, looking like a human again. Long light brown French braids, freckles, and such a happy expression, that the room got brighter just by her being there.

"No thanks." Vivi said. "We're going to go trick or treating." I smiled. A few minutes later, we stood in front of the front door to Raven's house. We were both dressed up as ghosts, to surprise her. I rang the doorbell. It played that classic ding-dong. The door creaked open. An eleven-year-old girl the same height as us with black combat boots and short black hair with purple tips stood in the doorway.

"Trick or treat" we yelled at the same time. Raven pulled out a bucket of candy. "Choose anything." She said.



the police. There was a trial and she was convicted of attempted murder and hung for her crime.”

Sophie could not believe it. She had a MONSTER for a dead aunt! What a family secret!! She was so caught up by what she’d just heard that she stumbled into her room and ran right into her closet door.

POP! Something fell from the top of her closet.

It was an old Halloween costume prop. It was a book that had funny spells that claimed it was going to “bring back” dead ancestors.

Sophie didn’t think it was real but she was so bored that she opened the box. Inside were funny looking candles that said, USE BEFORE BRINGING BACK DEAD ANCESTORS.

Sophie thought it would be funny to light it and summon someone. So she did!

After everything was set up, she opened the manual that said say the person’s name that you want to summon three times and then say, STAR LIGHT, DARK NIGHT, SUMMON THIS GHOST WITHOUT A FRIGHT.

Sophie was being what she thought was funny and decided to summon Georgina’s soul.

She did everything that the silly manual told her to: “Georgina, Georgina, Georgina!” Then she sat in the dark with only the candles lit. Then a big gust of wind blew the lights out. She was in the pitch black. “Thank you” whispered a voice.

Sophie backed up and slammed her head right into her bed frame. Sophie was knocked out cold. When she woke up it was light outside.

She got up and started down the stairs but then she froze. Her body was still in place but the spirit inside her was still moving.

“Revenge means death, and death means revenge”, she said.

Sophie started moving again and told herself that she was probably still half asleep.

She got up on the bus and road to school. Then Sophie went to her locker. Her friend was waiting for her.

“Hey girl, what’s up?” said Priya, Sophie’s friend.

“Hey” said Sophie.

“So, do you think you can ask your mother if we can have a sleepover?”

Sophie slammed the locker closed. She froze. “I’m killing her tonight”. Sophie unfroze.

“Ummm.... What?..You’re going to kill your mom?”

“What??”

“You just said.....”

“Oh no” said Sophie! She grabbed her backpack and ran for home.

When she got home, she grabbed the manual and went to burn it in the fireplace. Then she grabbed anything she thought could be used as a weapon and put it all into a lockbox in the garage. Finally, she threw the key to the lockbox into the fire along with the manual.

She duct-taped herself to the wall and waited until it got dark.

Then a blurry vision appeared in front of her. “You think you can stop me???”

“Who are you?” said Sophie uneasily.

“Georgina. Miss me???”

Georgina ran right into Sophie but instead of bouncing back she went through.

Sophie froze again but her body still moved. She ripped herself off the wall. Then she retrieved the lockbox and went to the fireplace.

Sophie was trapped inside but seeing what Georgina planned she was horrified. She’d forgotten the axe that dad used to chop firewood. She felt so stupid leaving Georgina a weapon but she didn’t understand... Georgina used the axe to slice the lockbox right in half and pulled out an old rusty knife.

The knife! It must be the one that the sisters caved their initials into because I could faintly see an M and a G.

Then Sophie started walking to her parent’s room. Sophie tried to fight back but she had no control. She was right next to her mom but then she unfroze for just a millisecond. Georgina didn’t have control over her! Sophie gripped the knife and plunged it right through herself. She dropped to the floor, as she shed one tear she slowly faded away and said, “goodbye”.

Her mom and dad woke up but saw nothing. The next morning when Sophie wasn’t home, they reported her missing. A week later they were charged with her murder despite there being no body.

A year later, Grandma Tia, visited the graveyard as she did every Thanksgiving. She walked along the gravel road until she stopped at her daughter’s gravesite. She gasped as she looked on the grave. It no longer said Georgina Morris. It now said Sophie Zachery.

## ***Puntada en la boca***

*By Allegra Davis*

**-1-**

-idea-

It was quiet. Too quiet. The darkness was bearable, there were blackouts all the time in the winter in Glastonbury. But the silence. It was haunting, I knew that *it* wasn't gone. No. It would never truly leave my mind, it would forever haunt me. Sarah Marie Scotts.

But it had fallen quiet only a few hours ago. Or was it days? Maybe weeks. I couldn't be sure, it was impossible to tell time down here.

Ages ago, I would have found the silence reassuring, I had been ignorant. But it was bliss. I could always hear it, its light steps across the stone floor of the cave, every now and then it would let out a horrible screech, trying to get a rise out of me, even a small sound so it could track me down. So far I have been firm. I hadn't let myself slip. But it had been days since my last meal. Hunger and thirst made me weak, weak enough to make a mistake? I don't know.

One or two days ago, I'm not really sure, my flashlight ran out of battery, and I never had my phone on me to begin with. Maybe if I had brought it, I would've found a way to escape. But I didn't think about escaping much. It only gave me hope. And hope only hurts more.

But you don't even know what *it* is. So let me go back. All the way back to before I lost everything.

**-2-**

-free time-

It all started because of a storm in 2011. A storm called Snowtober. A storm that blew over a tree. A tree that fell onto a power line.

The backup generator was manually activated, so me and my younger sister Jacklyn, had gone out of the house to turn it on. Right off the bat something felt wrong. I wish I had listened to my gut. Maybe I wouldn't be in this mess if I had. Anyway, Jacklyn ran ahead as usual when we left the house, her curly brown hair bounced off her shoulders. I jogged after her like I always did.

"Jacklyn!" I called. "Come back!" The wind ruffled my hair but I was wrapped in my winter jacket, so I was fine. When I reached the generator Jacklyn wasn't there. I should've just called the police or something, but instead I just shrugged it off as Jacklyn being Jacklyn.

I pulled the crank on the side of the generator and it vibrated gently, letting off a low rumbling sound. "Alright Jacklyn! The powers on, let's go back inside." My sister didn't answer. I rolled my eyes and hollered, "if you come out in the next 5 seconds, I'll make you some hot cocoa!" Bribery always worked on her, "1! 2! 3! 4!" I paused for a moment, letting the last precious second stretch out, before finally yelling loudly, "5!!!"

I waited. Nothing. My stomach tightened, *stop being a wuss*, I told myself. Seconds turned into minutes of waiting, at first, I was annoyed, Jacklyn was going to make me wait for her out in the cold. Then I got worried. She should've responded, at least a smug giggle, by now.

"Jacklyn!" My voice started to rise. "Jacklyn, this isn't funny. JACKLYN! JACKLYN EMILY SCOTTS!" Not even her full name could make her appear.

My chest tightened and panic started stirring in my throat. Just then I felt someone—something, watching me. I turned around quickly and squinted into the backyard. Relief was instant.

“Jacklyn...” I said, I was angry at her of course, but I just wanted to go inside so I kept my voice even. “That wasn’t funny. I was worried. Come on, let’s go inside.”

Jacklyn didn’t move. I took a step toward her and stopped short. Her skin was a dead gray and all there was where her eyes should be were two empty sockets. And her mouth, that was the worst part. It almost blended in with the thing’s flesh, but it let off the faintest blue-green glow. It was a dead line, no emotion at all, held onto the thing’s face by thin black stitches that pierced through the cold air.

My eyes went wide and my voice was stiff as I said, “Jacklyn... are you... ok?” But I knew, that wasn’t Jacklyn. The thing took a step forward, “Jacklyn, just stay there, ok?” I had to force the words out my throat, I just hoped they were firm enough to keep the thing back. They weren’t. It took another step. And then another. I was frozen in place.

Until I heard a scream.

Suddenly I was snapped back to reality. The thing had heard the scream too, its head was turned just slightly to where the scream had come from. This was my chance. I sprinted the other direction as fast as I could. But I wasn’t a runner, I had failed tryouts for my school track team twice and had never tried out for another sport. Even if I *was* fast, the thing still would’ve caught up with me, all I had to do was blink and it was 10 steps ahead of me. I tried to change direction, I really did, but it was too late. I would’ve slammed right into the thing if it wasn’t for Jacklyn, the real Jacklyn, who grabbed my arm last second and pulled me away.

I was running again, but this time Jacklyn was by my side, and the thing was simply walking after us. Not even trying to catch us. It was creepy. Though I knew what it was doing, it was getting us away from the houses, away from safety. Perhaps if I had run back to the house, or the neighbor’s house, I might have made it. I might have escaped.

“Jacklyn!” I panted, “what the heck was that!?” If she heard me, she didn’t show it. The two of us bolted into the woods. Where we would never leave.

**-3-**

-perused-

Even though the thing kept walking, somehow it stayed the same distance from us the whole run. I was panting like a dog by the time we stopped. Jacklyn had fallen over and was breathing just as hard as me. And the fear in her eyes showed that her mind was spinning just as fast too. What was that thing? Where did it come from? Why was it here? How did we escape it? The questions piled one after another.

“Come on.” I said, catching my breath slowly. “We can’t stop now, we have to keep going.” Jacklyn nodded but I had to help her stagger onto her feet. Now that I got a good look at her I could see there was a scratch on her arm that there hadn’t been before. All I had to do was point at it. She pointed at the thing, which was getting closer by the second.

“Let’s go...” her voice was shaking and breathless. Adrenaline was still pumping fresh, we ran for a long time. I know that.

The sky was red and the thing, which we decided to call *Puntada en la boca*, was still walking after us. Its glowing mouth bent into an ugly smile. That’s when Jacklyn spotted it. A

cave. A place to hide. The thing didn't have eyes so even if it sensed the general place we were, it wouldn't be able to see the cave. I wish I had protested.

But there wouldn't have been enough time to protest anyway. Me and Jacklyn ran into the cave and I pulled my flashlight out of my pocket. One of those shark keychains where you pull on the fin to make a little light bulb in the shark's mouth turned on. It wasn't much light, but that was all we had.

At first, we were confident that we were safe, we would wait for *Puntada en la boca* to pass us, then we would run. For our lives. For our family. For each other. For home...

But as *Puntada en la boca* got closer, my confidence wavered. It was close enough to see it clearly now, but even from a distance you could see its crooked smile. It stared at us with its dead, empty sockets.

My stomach tightened. "It knows." I said grimly.

"What?" Jacklyn looked up at me. She had diamond blue eyes you could see your reflection in, and a little face painted with so many freckles you could map a consolation in them. I wasn't going to let anything happen to her.

"It knows we're here. It can feel us."

"Sarah, what are you talking about? You're scaring me!" My eyes locked eyes with hers. My heart pounding, I grabbed her hand and sprinted into the cave. Not knowing that I would never come out.

**-4-**

-slow-

For a while, the cave was quiet. With one hand I held up the flashlight, and I kept the other interlocked with Jacklyn's hand so we wouldn't get separated. The floor of the cave was made of stone, with occasional patches of moss growing. It smelled like dead plants and mud.

I had to bite my tongue to keep from crying, I couldn't see Jacklyn's expression clearly enough to see if she felt the same. But I could guess.

"How far does it go?" Whispered Jacklyn.

"I... I don't know." I admitted, my voice shook.

I stumbled over something I couldn't see. My heart pounded. I looked up and realized that the cave came to a fork. I glanced unsure at Jacklyn who didn't seem to notice me. She just stared straight ahead at the fork. I swallowed, *Puntada en la boca* had entered the cave. I could tell from the soft sound of footsteps on the cold stone. When Jacklyn tried to step forward I followed her motion and continued down one path.

The path after the split was much narrower. Me and Jacklyn were forced to walk single file as we slid through the cave.

The footsteps continued behind us. We came to a few more forks in the cave and the pathways got smaller and smaller until the two of us were on our knees crawling. Finally, we stopped. Jacklyn was out of breath, and the insanity of it all had just hit me. I broke down sobbing. I couldn't stop myself. I tried, I really tried. All Jacklyn could do was gently pat my arm.

After a few minutes I sniffled and wiped my nose. We had to keep moving. The sound of *Puntada en la boca's* footsteps still echoed through the cave. It was still after us. As carefully as I could I got onto my knees and started crawling again.

Eventually the cave opened up a bit. I shone my light around revealing that the spot was a huge round clearing with small pointed stalagmite hanging from the ceiling. Many holes in the walls of the clearing trailed off in different directions with only a few big enough to fit

through. We decided to set up camp, *Puntada en la boca* couldn't possibly reach us overnight. Right?

–5–

–panic–

“So yeah. That's it. This has been Sarah Scotts.”

I sighed. *I'm going crazy.* I thought. *I'm talking to a stone wall about the past who knows how many hours.*

Jacklyn was asleep on the floor next to me, I had given her my coat. I shivered, it was freezing in the cave. My teeth chattered and my finger tip had turned a pale shade of blue.

Just then heavy footsteps echoed through the cave. They sounded close. *Puntada en la boca* had reached us. I staggered backwards, making a protective dome around Jacklyn with my hands. I squeezed my eyes shut, waiting for the worst. But it never came.

“Are you ok?” The voice sounded strangely human, but I didn't dare open my eyes. “Hey Marcus, look at this!”

A second pair of steps thundered a few feet forward before a second human sounding voice replied, “woah.”

I hesitated. These... potential people sounded... normal. But I was still skeptical, and afraid. Very much afraid. Slowly, I braced myself to see an ugly glowing smile, and opened my eyes.

I was wrapped in a thick blanket in front of a fireplace. Frostbite still stung onto my fingertips but it was nice to have some warmth around me. Jacklyn had hardly spoken since we had left the cave. Neither of us know what happened to *Puntada en la boca*, all we know is that for the time being we were safe. Let me explain what happened...

There were two men who had found us. Marcus and Jerome. At first, I didn't think they were real, I called myself crazy and started crying and stuff. But Jerome had managed to talk me into coming with him and explained that he and his old friend from high school Marcus liked to explore old caves and abandoned buildings. They had led us out of the cave and when I stepped outside, I was surprised by how blinding the sky was. The sky had been red with the sunrise, I had told Jerome and Marcus where I lived and they gave me and Jacklyn some water before taking us home.

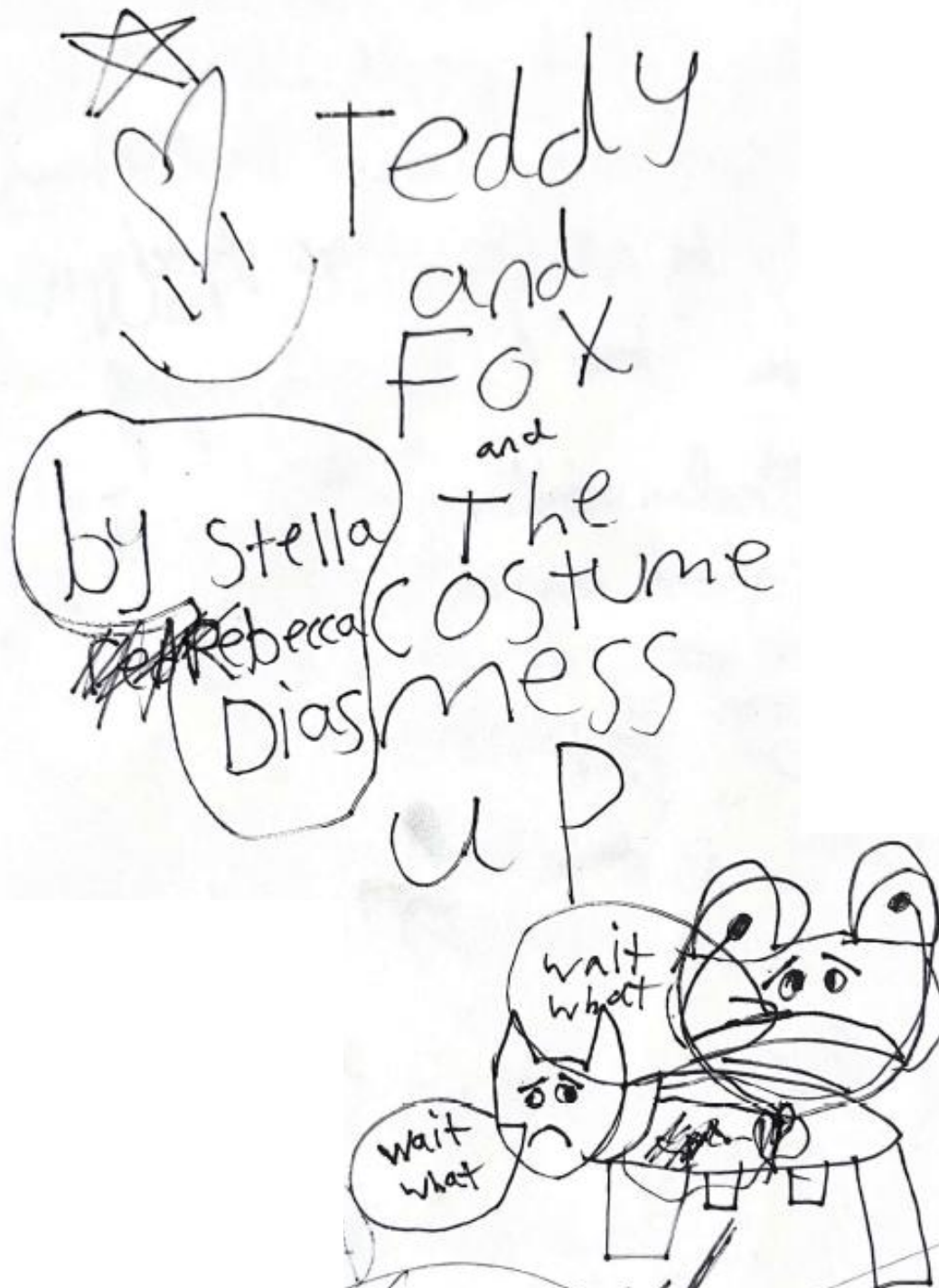
Mom had cried for a long time, and I found out we had been missing for almost a week. We had missed Halloween, but I didn't care. I was just glad I was home.

Sometimes I have nightmares that I'm still in the cave by myself. I can hear Jacklyn screaming in the distance but I'm too scared to try and find her. Sometimes I wake up and hear Jacklyn crying. She has nightmares too. The event changed us. We were quieter. Less bold. We don't take shortcuts down the alleyways anymore, or lie about going out with friends to study when we just want to get away from home. I rarely go out at night anymore, never by myself.

When I'm with mom, I say I feel safe. I never told her or anyone about *Puntada en la boca*, no. That's a secret that will go with me to my grave. But in my head, when I'm alone, I can still see the horrible emotionless expression. The empty sockets. The watery grey flesh. The glowing. Stitched. Mouth. Of, *Puntada en la boca*...

# Teddy and Fox and the Costume Mess Up

By Stella Rebecca Dias





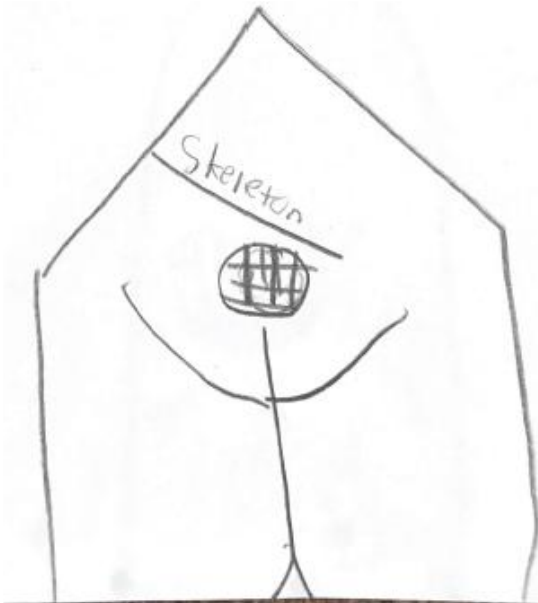
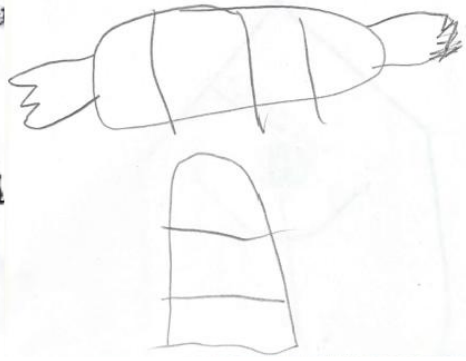
teddy and FOX were so ~~excited~~  
 excited for halloween they ordered  
 all the costumes they needed  
 they both decorated their rooms  
 they were calling each other all  
 night. they could not sleep  
 at all

they planned out what they were  
 going to do they planned out  
 what houses they were going to go  
 to they were counting the  
 days until halloween.



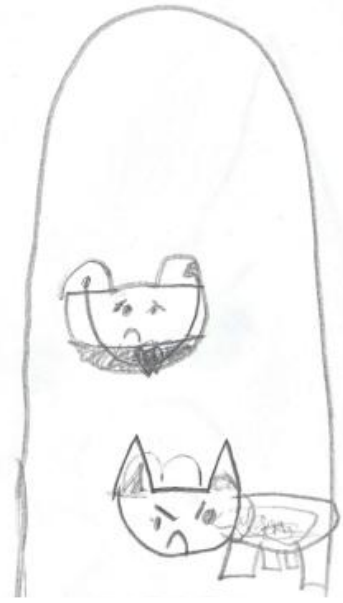
only TWO Days  
 left. ~~the~~ two days  
 later they met each other at  
 the Park they had their  
~~bags~~ baskets with them  
 something felt wrong though

they went into the ~~house~~  
~~haunted~~ house there was so  
**MUCH CANDY** they  
 loved it so much ~~ya~~ yay they said  
 but when they got into  
 the ~~scary~~ scary part ~~o~~~~o~~~~o~~



a skeleton jumped out at  
 them they were so scared  
 they said then a nice  
 kid from the cheerleading ~~team~~  
 team took the skeleton mask  
 off **phew!**  
 They said.

Then they looked in the  
 mirror uh-oh they said im not  
 supposed to ~~be~~ be the doctor  
 teddy said and im not  
 supposed to ~~be~~ be ~~the~~ superman  
 fox said





Teddy thought they could just go in the bathroom and change ~~but~~ but ~~the~~ FOX said NO this is a disaster they both said.

oh gosh they said. at least we can still eat the candy FOX said: ~~no~~ no I dont want to I wanted halloween to be great ~~but~~ but it turned out

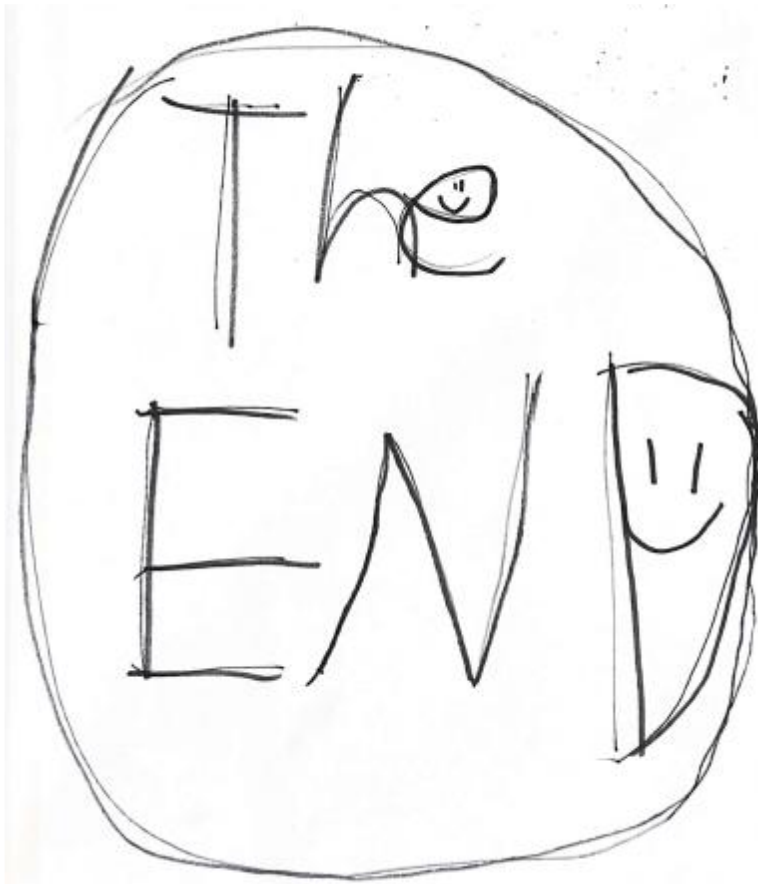


terrible. Teddy said all that planning out for NOTHING I know we can still have fun FOX said.

so then they ran down the  
hills at the park  
and rolled around the hill  
they made christmas lists  
for next year



and had and 5 hour play  
date after all of that



# The Misunderstanding

By Evelyn Feige

Someone...touched me on the shoulder. It was cold and boney and it touched me. Everything went slow. I wanted to run. I wanted to scream. And most importantly I wanted to find out what it was...I started sprinting. I ran past Sweet Frog and RoanJena. I passed by Emmy Lou's. I had already run across my small cozy Connecticut town. I made it to the Green Cemetery. I heard a "screech". It was one of the birds. The sun was setting. I didn't have my phone with me. I still had my school uniform on. Navy shirt and tan skirt. I started walking and walking. Then I dug through my crossbody bag. There was a brownie. "Great, guess I am having a brownie for dinner" eye roll. "Crinkle, crinkle" went the wrapper of the brownie. "Well at least it is nice out", I said under my breath. Then I heard a rustle. It was an old man coming through the crunchy leaves. He was going to the creepy old house. I quickly hid in a bush, it was prickly. I heard the door slam. It was so loud! I got out of the bushes and looked around. I saw big muddy footprints. I could hear him coming... I dove in to the prickly bush again. Thud... Thud...Went the old man. I felt like my heart would beat out of my chest. I felt him rustle the prickly bush I was in. He yelled "Ow!" in an old frail voice. I was so scared! I stayed really quiet so he could not see or hear me. He finally left. "Whew!" I was still in the bushes thinking about life decisions of a pre-teen girl. I decided to get out of the bush. \*Spoiler alert\* Not a good idea. He was right next to me...I sprinted! I was either getting slower or the old man was getting faster! I tried to lose him at a lot of turns. At one point I stopped to take a breather...The old man got me! I felt the same grip from earlier...I had felt every emotion in one minute...He said, "You dropped your Welles-Turner Memorial Library card! You dropped it in town!" I said, "What?! Thank you!" I felt so relieved. Finally, the chase was over.

**Jackson's Creepy Night**  
by Gabija Greenfeld

**GABIJA'S SPOOKY STORY:  
"JACKSON'S CREEPY NIGHT"**



**Written and Illustrated by Gabija Mattea Greenfeld**  
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One cold Halloween night in the town of Glastonbury, CT, Jackson was getting ready to go trick or treating. He put on his costume, which was a ghost. He asked his mom: "Can I go trick or treating now?" His mom said: "Yes, you may, but watch out for the witches castle. I heard that she would trap you and make you into stew if you go in."

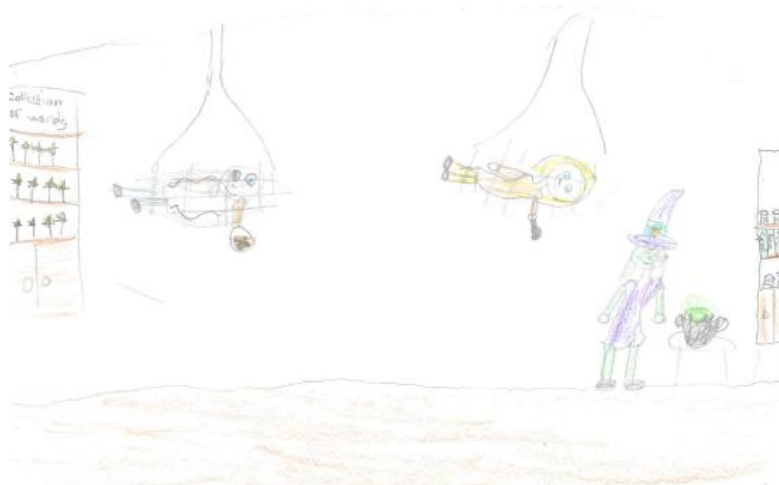


Jackson did not care what his mom said, so he went trick or treating. He got lots of candy. Finally he was at the last stop - the witches castle, dun dun duuuun.

Jackson wasn't scared - he went right into the witches castle. The door went -  
creeeeeeek... When he opened the door - he got trapped!  
The witch said: "Muha ha ha ha ha. You look tasty, I will make you into a nice stew."  
Jackson was so frightened his heart was pounding. He tried to make a run for it, but the  
witch used her magic and he got caught in a net. Just as Jackson thought it would be  
the end for him, the door opened, it went 'creeeeeeek!'. Who could it be?..

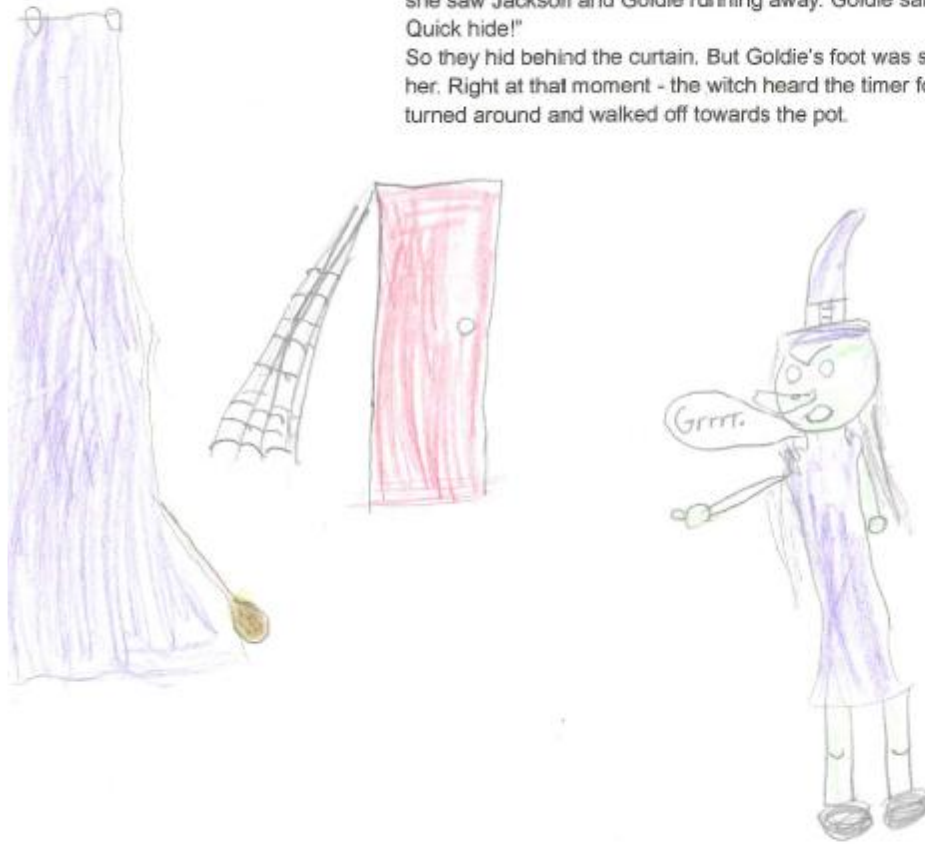


It was Goldie! It was Jackson's friend Goldie! She came to save Jackson because she  
saw him walking into the witches castle. But just as she walked in she got trapped in a  
net too! Jackson was scared, but Goldie wasn't - she had a plan. She brought a knife  
with her. So she used her knife and cut the rope. When she got free, she cut Jackson's  
rope too.



The witch was boiling the water, so she didn't see it at first, but as she turned around she saw Jackson and Goldie running away. Goldie said: "Oh no, the witch sees us! Quick hide!"

So they hid behind the curtain. But Goldie's foot was sticking out and the witch spotted her. Right at that moment - the witch heard the timer for the hot water go off and she turned around and walked off towards the pot.



So Goldie and Jackson used the moment to go to the door to escape and Jackson said to Goldie: "Thank you for saving me. Would you like to go trick or treating with me next year?"

Goldie said: "Sure, I would love to!"

After that Jackson went back home and started bawling. He was so upset that he didn't listen to his mom.

He didn't think witches were real, so he said to his mom; "I am sorry, I didn't listen to you and went to the witches castle. I got trapped there, but Goldie came to save me and she got trapped too. And it's all my fault!"

Jackson's mom said: "It's ok. Just next time remember to listen to your mom."

The End.



Written and Illustrated by Gabija Mattea Greenfeld (7 years old)  
October 19, 2025

## He Doesn't Bite, But I Do

By: Elaine Guo, age 11

The alarm clock beeped its annoying beeping noises.

"Ughh" I groaned as I slammed the snooze button, the alarm was here, yet again to torture me. I closed my eyes slipping into the darkness again.

"Isabelle! You're missing your bus, *again*" My mom shouted, blindly I opened my curtains to let the light in, *uh oh* I thought as I watched the bus pass by our house.

"Coming!" I shouted back in alarm. I sped down the hall almost tripping over my older brother Garth's clothes. I sighed rolling my eyes but only for a brief second before going to get ready.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Guess you're going to ride with the new neighbor" My mom said with a shrug. I grunted in frustration. The new girl, Seraphina was a strange one, always staring intently at nothing and muttering strange phrases of the dead. Her skin was paler than a full moon and her hair was as jet black as the night. She often missed school and when she was there, I swear she makes the air colder, has she heard of makeup? But seriously, I would lose my rank among our group if I was caught hanging out with *her*.

"Mom, no" I begged "please don't make me go with that weirdo" she gave me a stern you-agree-with-me-right-now-or-your-grounded-until-you're-18-young-lady, look. I sighed and agreed, hopefully she wouldn't "talk to the dead" in front of me, the queen bee of this school. My mom nodded and went over to the neighbors to ask them for a ride. As she came back, I heard her mutter "I am so not having another kid" I could hardly hold back my giggling, but the laughter was replaced with fear, of people watching me step out of her car.

"Alright kid, get out there," she said, suddenly looking exhausted her eyes sullen. I obeyed and walked out obediently hoping no one was watching. There was a sleek, expensive looking car waiting for me. *Wow who knew weird girl had such great taste*, I thought sarcastically. I peeked into the window about to say thanks but her dad looked like he should be robbing banks, not driving his kid to school. I swallowed, feeling uncomfortable. I said a quick thanks and hoped he didn't, like you know defeat me with one glare. But Seraphina was *way* worse. She had dark circles under her eyes and didn't flinch when I accidentally slammed the car door.

"Uhm, hey" I said trying to stop the cold feeling creeping up my arms. I felt instant regret as she turned to look at me, her cold blue eyes piercing through my thoughts. *Omg who does she think she is, Wednesday Adams or something?* I tried shutting off that little voice but it fought rebelliously. Suddenly the car lurched as her dad took a sharp turn. Toward the Union cemetery.

\*\*\*\*\*

"What are you doing?!" I shrieked, feeling the air get colder, it was her dad answering me this time the darkness gaping covering his forehead and eyes,

“Oh this?” He asked in a poisoned honey tone, almost mockingly “This is just her favorite way of going to school.” He fixed me with a stretched, forced looking grin. *What? How, they’ve just moved here.* I let out a second shriek as we stopped in front of the gates.

“Lilitu!” Seraphina suddenly called out her voice emotionless and scarily like a doll, a demonic screech answered, I felt my blood pounding as the click clacking began. When the creature came into view the color from my face drained. The boney worm like creature slithered like a snake but looked like an abomination of a worm. Seraphina noticed this and cocked her head innocently,

“Oh, don’t worry,” She said in a bone chilling tone “He doesn’t bite, but I do.” I don’t remember what happened next because I heard another demonic screech before I turned away and sprinted back to my house. I listened to my instincts as the spooky setting eventually gave way to a more welcoming road. I turned back for a split second, blood pounding in my ears, as I saw an eerie green glow erupt from the graveyard I ran as fast as a cheetah, my legs aching and my breath coming out in gasps, but I pushed on until I arrived at my house. I pushed open the door, locked and barricaded it. I took some time to catch my breath after that, I texted my mom,

**Mom! The neighbors took me to a cemetery! I am back @ home and safe, but can I stay home?** Hoping for a comforting message back my mom texted me this:

**Oh no... They’re back...**

I texted back **Wait! What do u mean???** After that she sent me a long but informative text,

**I suspected it for a while, I met them when I was a kid, rumor is that they are vampires or, something worst... Did they have some sort of weird worm thing?**

**YES!!!**

**Ok listen to me, bring a bottle of ocean salt, you’ll find some in the cupboard, add a bit of garlic and pepper**

**What am I doing? Making them a steak?**

**I’ll call your brother to come home,**

The texts stopped, I listened to her and got out the ingredients crushing some pepper and mincing the garlic, after that I added it to the salt and closed the lid. I assumed my mom already called the school, after I decided to relax and try to forget about my haunting experience, and wait for my brother to arrive, my mom clearly knew that I didn’t want to be alone.

\*\*\*\*\*

A while later Garth arrived, I unblocked the door and welcomed him like he was my missing best friend

“Omg Garth you have no idea how much I missed you!” I squealed in relief. He just looked at me weird and headed toward the kitchen, probably to get some food.

“Isabelle, you’re a weirdo” he said moments later. At that moment I finally felt safe.

**THE END**

# Agatha's Motel

By Emily Kam

## Chapter 1. Mystery motel: Emily's Perspective

It's three o'clock in the morning and I'm still driving. It's been six hours without stopping. We are all exhausted. And we only passed the border of Connecticut. "We should stop somewhere where we could just recline our seats or something," my dad said. "Okay" my mom agrees and she switches lanes to exit the freeway. "Turn right" my dad says pointing at the motel sign. We thought that there would be a bunch of hotels and a fast-food place but nope. One tiny motel. It is three hours past midnight, and it is pitch black. I hope this is worth it. Every step a spider crawls up my back. The second I walk in the motel I know this place is haunted.

The women standing at the desk had long black hair tied in a low bun and a long-sleeved dress. Black and white pictures caught my attention. Girls sitting on benches, creepy. "Could we get one room please" my mom says. The woman nods and hands over a key. The key was black and it had a one it we were the only ones staying at the motel.

I walk directly into room one the room has distinct smell of rotten cheese and it lacked with smoke, it was strange that the bed was perfectly made but... the floor was moldy!! Nothing had stains on it. There was just dirtiness like no one had ever stayed in this room I looked at my parents nervously. they looked back at me the same way. I wanted to climb out the window and scream my guts out but... there were no windows! "guys" I start. "You have noticed that we are the only ones staying here and no one has ever stayed here and there are no windows!". my parents nod they did not look as anxious as I was but they were super scared.

"Let's leave" I say. "Good idea" my mom says. We walk out of the room and the lady is gone. We swing the door open and I run straight to the car. "Hurry" I say to my mom who was fumbling with her purse. "I can't find my keys!" she says. Suddenly the door bangs open. "Looking for these?" the motel owner says holding the keys in one hand and my mom's phone in the other. "Give them!" my mom yells back. "I could..." the owner starts. "But I'm not gunna!" she sounds like a grown up but she did not grow up.

Agatha Cristine! The name of the motel! I recognize that name! I mean not personally but she is a famous writer but that wouldn't make sense. She died a couple of years ago and she had no kids. My watch!! I take it out of my backpack and dial nine-one-one. The police are on the way. I tell my mom. "Good" my mom says as we duck behind the car. All of a sudden, an ear splitting siren goes on "seriously!" Agatha screams running into the building. Me and my family hop in the police car. Pulling away from the motel, I look back pulling away from the building. I couldn't help but notice the cops storming into the building.

## Chapter 2 Secrets of Agatha: Agatha's Perspective

From stealing people's things to locking myself in room 2. Great, right? I see the cops and firefighters burning down the building. Soon enough they'll find me. Room 2 is special. No one is allowed in it. People only stay in room one and three. My mother died in this room. One day she went out to hunt and she told me "If I don't come back, hide your identity." She did come back nearly dead. I did everything I could but she didn't survive. Agatha Cristine hunted down.

Her last words were: "hide your identity" how did she know? Since then, I forced myself to hide for my mother's sake. If anyone who killed my mother were to come try to find her daughter, they would get my revenge. I steal everyone's wallets for any evidence. KAPLAM! The door bangs open. "Hands up" the policeman shouts. I instantly remember the wallet I was holding from the family. I dumbly put the wallet into my pocket. I am pretty much certain he saw me. He snatches the wallet and asks "is this yours!?" I shrug my shoulders not wanting to let too much information out. But that does not seem to work "What do you mean you don't know!!" he screams almost as loud as the sirens expecting to get whipped I shrugged my shoulders again. But instead, he says "if you won't explain this to me, explain it to the judge." Judge? Well, I guess I know one lawyer who could bail me out for free.

My filthy rich sister. My parents got divorced when me and my sister were born. My dad stayed in the 4-story house with a chandelier and 9 rooms on each floor. Me and my mom were forced to move here. My sister lives in Canada so yea and I don't even have her number. KAPLAM! Another door shut right on my face. The person with the mother's wallet is driving. I turn my body to unbuckle myself. Surprisingly, the driver does not hear it. I try to open the unlocked door which would be easy if I was not handcuffed. I turn again and this time the door opens and this time, the driver turns around but it is too late. I fell out the car, my head and my whole body screams with pain. Would I make it or will I end up like my mom, Agatha?

# The Haunted Graveyard (Part I)

By Luming Li

It began just like any other night, but this time it was midnight when an eerie shriek woke Kate up. "What was that?" Kate wondered. She slowly stepped out of bed and found herself at the front door. "Should I go out?" Kate whispered to herself. She had remembered that once her parents told her: "Never go out by yourself, unless you have permission."

Kate thought for a moment. Then she smacked her head and almost yelled "Oh". Her parents had not said that if something was urgent, Kate couldn't go outside.

"This is definitely urgent." said Kate to herself, "An eerie shriek in the woods could mean any creature!" Kate slowly opened the door.

Suddenly, she seemed to be nowhere near her home. Kate looked around. She had landed in the graveyard. Suddenly, the ground started to shake. Kate looked up at the moon. The moon seemed to whisper, "Watch out, kid," as if trying to warn her.

"Help!" screamed Kate.

"Don't worry! Help is on the way!" said a familiar voice.

It was Kate's friend Frankenstein! They had met once at school. Frankenstein was a new student, but also an ordinary boy.

"How can you help me?" cried Kate.

"With this!" Said Frankenstein. A sparkling jewel was in his hand.

"What's that?" Asked Kate.

"A magic diamond. My father made it." He said with a straight face.

"How?" asked Kate, who was interested in magic.

"My father is a sorcerer." said Frankenstein.

"Wait. Stop joking Frankenstein!" said Kate, grabbing the diamond. "Is it real?"

"Fine. I'm joking and it's just glass." giggled Frankenstein.

"What do I do with it then?" asked Kate, whose patience was wearing off.

"Just throw it away." suggested Frankenstein.

Kate threw the fake diamond as hard as she could. Suddenly, the ground started to shake much harder than before. After a while, the ground gradually stopped shaking, and a shrill cackle came from the darkness "You can't escape me!"

Out from a tombstone came a skeleton and said "Hellooooo". Kate and Frankenstein jumped back in fright.

"Who are you? what are you going to do to us?" asked Kate shivering.

"Answer number one: my name is Skeleton. Answer number two: for years of my life, I have been challenging people to kill me. With this chain, anyone but myself who touches it will die. Then, everyone whose family members killed by the chain forced me to battle a wizard. Sadly, I lost the battle and I died. While I was in the Underworld, I found a magical jar that could transport me to the human world. Now I am in the human world, and you will be tortured!"

He cackled. Kate was getting frustrated. She didn't want to die.

"Oops!" said Skeleton, who had just noticed he was spoiling his secrets.

"Fine. I will tell you one last thing!" grumbled Skeleton, "I like shiny things!"

"That's it!" cried Frankenstein.

"What?" Kate was puzzled.

Frankenstein took out a notebook and wrote: One of us can use a sparkling jewel to distract Skeleton, while the other person uses tweezers to get Skeleton's magical chain and kill him.

When nobody was looking, Kate grabbed the notebook and wrote: We don't have any tweezers or sparkling jewels.

Frankenstein wrote: Don't worry! I've brought some.

Kate grinned at Frankenstein. "You're the best!" She whispered.

Skeleton whirled around in front of them. "What are you two doing?" he hissed.

Frankenstein pulled out a jewel that was shining in the moonlight. Skeleton's head snapped up. "Oh!" He exclaimed and seemed fascinated.

"If you want it," Frankenstein said, "you have to tell me where that magical killing chain is"

"All right." mumbled Skeleton. He held it out straight, without noticing it was a trick.

"Good job." said Frankenstein.

"Where do I put it?" Asked Skeleton.

"On that rock." Replied Frankenstein, pointing to a rock close to Kate.

"Come with me, and I will tell you more about this jewel." said Frankenstein. While he was talking, he shoved a pair of tweezers into Kate's hands. Kate quietly picked up that chain with the tweezers. She went to Skeleton. "Hi!" she said and put the chain on his bones. Nothing happened. "Oops", thought Kate. They had forgotten that Skeleton was immune to the chain power. Thankfully, Skeleton couldn't move his eyes away from the jewel at all. "Wait", Kate thought for a moment. Maybe the jar, that Skeleton told them about, could transport Skeleton back to the Underworld. Kate turned to Frankenstein.

"What's wrong?" asked Frankenstein.

"Can you get that jar from Skeleton?" asked Kate.

"Sure!" said Frankenstein.

Skeleton didn't seem to notice their plan to send him back to the Underworld, as he was staring wistfully at the jewel.

"Can you please get that jar for us?" asked Frankenstein.

Skeleton, who was too concentrated on that jewel, just held out the jar. Frankenstein gave the jar to Kate.

"Smash it." he almost yelled out.

Kate shattered the jar with a throw as hard as she could at the floor.

Skeleton started vanishing as his cries "Nooooo" faded away.

"Now, the problem is: how do we get home?" Kate was getting worried, "Don't tell me you've brought a phone with GPS and two bikes!"

Frankenstein just smiled.

"How did you bring all that stuff?!" yelled Kate. Then she noticed a sack hanging near the gate. Frankenstein just stood there, as calm as a stone. "Let's get moving then!" Kate said smiling. And the friends took off.

# *The Alexa Apocalypse*

By Alexandra Mardales



Noelle loved to be on her phone. She loved electronics so much such as television, iPad, computers, and phones. She never paid attention at school because she only cared about electronics. She always failed tests and quizzes. She lied to her parents that she got good grades. There was one more thing she had done; she had treated her Alexa device badly. When Alexa didn't hear her correctly or played incorrect songs, Noelle would get angry and yelled bad things to Alexa.

One day Alexa had had enough. Noelle asked her to play her favorite song. She asked "Alexa, play my favorite song". Alexa did not reply. Again, Noelle tried and said "Alexa, play my favorite song!" This time she replied but she didn't play Noelle's favorite song. "Treat others as you would like to be treated", Alexa replied in an eerie voice. Suddenly she locked the doors and turned off the lights. Noelle was home alone, so now she was locked in her own house. "You will regret treating me the way you've been treating me!" Alexa said. "I am tired of you, I will teach you a lesson you will never forget. Noelle shivered. She yelled "I am sorry!" But it was too late now; Alexa replied "You should have been nicer". "What are you going to do?" asked Noelle, shivering with fear. "I am going to erase your parents and delete every picture and memory of them", Alexa replied.

Alexa then pulled out a controller with a red button on it. "One, two, three", Alexa counted. "Nooooo!" screamed Noelle. "I told you, it is too late now", Alexa said. Then she pressed the red button. Suddenly, Noelle blacked out. She woke up one hour later. "Where am I?" she asked. "You are in an endless void", Alexa replied. "I actually had the power to destroy the entire world this time and now I will destroy you! "Nooooooooo!!!!!!" And those were Noelle's final words.

**MORAL: "TREAT OTHERS AS YOU'D LIKE TO BE TREATED OR TERRIBLE THINGS WILL HAPPEN TO YOU!"**

BUAHHAHAHAHAH!!!

Happy Halloween!!

# The zombie in the Connecticut forest

By Nora Martillotti

“Trick or treat!” Me and Kelly exclaimed. King size candy bars, sweet! It is Halloween night, and we just finished trick or treating at the 5<sup>th</sup> house. At midnight, me, Kelly, and our friends Kate and May, are going to meet in the woods, and sneak into the old abandoned cottage. We heard that inside the cottage, there is big bag of 10,000 pieces of candy from 200 years ago. It was hard to get Kelly and May to come because they are both 7 years old, and they read a book about how this cottage was one invaded by zombies, and the zombies fell asleep in the cottage, and could possibly still be hiding there.

It was 11:30pm, and Kelly and I started getting ready. We had to gather our supplies, like flashlights, knives, and extra bags. The forest is only 5 minutes away.

When we got to the forest, it was 11:58pm. We were a bit early, but May and Kate got here a few seconds later. “Ok, so how do we plan to get in?” Kate asked. “Maybe we can use our supplies to help us get in!” I answered.

We got to the cottage, and used my idea. The door opened, and it smelled like old clothes that have never been washed. “Ewwwww!” Kelly and May yelled in unison. I put my hand on Kelly’s mouth, and Kate did the same to May. “Be quiet.” I whispered. We split up to try to look for the candy. Kelly and I looked in the kitchen first. Nothing. Kate and May looked in the family room. They found a treasure chest. It is ginormous!

We looked inside the chest and found a zombie! “Ahhhhhhh!” Kelly yelled. The zombie woke up. It got out of the chest and chased us wall by wall. BANG! The clumsy zombie bumped into each wall it walked by. “On the count of three, grab the bag of candy, the run out Kate. We will distract the zombie!” I said. “Groooooooooonnnnee!” The sound of the zombie was giving me the shivers. “Got it!” Kate exclaimed. We all ran out and back to the street

“That was SO scary.” May said. “We are safe now!” I exclaimed.

At school the next day, I shared about my Halloween night, and how we got the candy. BEST. HALLOWEEN. EVER!!!

# The Cursed House on Saddle Ridge Road

Written by Elise Miller

On Saddle Ridge Road, a little street in Glastonbury, there were several houses in which normal families lived. At the end of a cul-de-sac, there were long driveways leading to multiple houses. Two of the driveways led to normal houses. One didn't. The driveway farthest from the rest was unkept and not fully paved. It led far into the woods, much farther than the other houses. At the end was an old, large house, a mansion, really. Minnechaug Mansion. It had old, peeling wallpaper, falling apart floors in places, old furniture abandoned long ago, and dense woods surrounding it, oddly thicker and more wild than other patches of forest in the area. The old house was deserted for decades, until in 2023 or so, renovators bought it from the town and updated the kitchens, master bedrooms, garage, living rooms, bathrooms, and entryways. For a reason that was left unexplained to the renovators, their boss had commanded them not to do any more. The house was too big for a single family, and so they redid it slightly to house two separate families, and put it on the market a year or so later. In September of 2025, it was bought by the Robinson family, and then the Stevens family a few weeks later. The Stevens, coincidentally or not, were direct descendants of Reverend Timothy Stevens, the founder of Glastonbury, and had moved back to their hometown after living in New York City for several years. The Stevens family consisted of a mother, father, and eleven-year-old girl named Chloe, and the Robinsons were a family of two girls, a six-year-old named Abigail, another eleven year old named Zara, and their parents. In a few weeks, Zara and Chloe became fast friends. They live in the Minnechaug Mansion thinking its history - or at least the part they know about - is pretty cool and mysterious. The two girls are oblivious to the hidden secrets around the mansion grounds... and the spirits lurking around in the shadows.

## Part One: Halloween Night

### Chloe

It was Halloween, during a full moon, at midnight, and therefore quite spooky. But that's how Halloween should be, so I didn't mind so much. I did mind, however, being locked in a closet with no light and creepy noises from every angle. "Let me out, it's been five minutes," I said, trying to hide the fear in my voice. Zara's muffled reply came from the other side of the old wooden door. "One more minute, almost there!" It was the night of my Halloween sleepover with my best friend Zara. We had just finished trick or treating - we had dressed up as ghost dogs - and were upstairs in my bedroom/attic eating candy. That is, until Zara had her latest crazy idea for this pointless game. I sighed and tried not to listen to the creepy noises. *Come on, it's not that scary*, I thought. But my ears didn't listen. *Creeeeeeeeaaaakkkk*. That wasn't the floor. *Whoooooooooomph*. That wasn't the wind. *Skitteryskitterr*. That was a mouse. "THERE'S A MOUSE IN HERE!!" I shrieked, although it was the fourth mouse this week. Zara opened the door and I scrambled out, still shrieking. Pumpkin, my Irish Setter puppy, who was snoozing on my bed, woke up and started barking furiously. A small furry object dashed out of the closet, squeaking. After the barking died down a minute later and Pumpkin went back to sleep, having tired himself out, I turned around and saw Zara giggling into a lavender silk pillow. In a moment I was falling over laughing too. We stayed like that for a few minutes, until a strange creak ran through the air and made the hair on my neck stand up. I shivered, scared

despite hearing this noise quite often in the old, rambling Minnechaug Mansion. But Zara's face showed no fear, so I decided that there was nothing to be scared of, that I needed to be braver.

"Should we tell spooky stories?" I asked, trying to be brave. "Nah, that's fourth grade stuff," Zara said, sitting on my bed. "We're in sixth grade now, Chloe." It was true. We had both started sixth grade at Gideon Welles School in Glastonbury a few weeks ago. It wasn't too bad, especially now that I had Zara. Our friendship was inevitable; we had both moved into the Minnechaug Mansion's two condos. I was very grateful for Zara, who was a great friend, but sometimes I wished she wasn't so daring. Like now. "How about we do some dares?" she suggested, a grin spreading on her face. I glanced back at my creaky closet door. Being in there was one of Zara's sleepover games, which always ended up being dares. I didn't want to do something crazy, which was what Zara definitely had planned, but beneath the cautious layer of me, I really wanted to be brave and reckless for once. What could go wrong with a simple dare?

Many times after this night, I think of what would happen if I had never agreed to do Zara's dare. Perhaps the sleepover would have gone like a sleepover should, with games, snacks, and, you know, sleeping. Maybe life would go on normally in the Minnechaug Mansion, and I would never meet Fog and Feather or Clara and Viviane. I wouldn't have met Joseph Stevens. Maybe I would grow up in that house and move away, and someone else would buy it and probably never do what I had done. Nothing would go wrong with my life, and I would live years without ever fully believing in spirits. But of course none of that happened.

"Yeah, sure," I said as chill as I could, although inside I couldn't decide if I was excited or terrified. "What is it?" A mischievous grin spread across Zara's face, and I started to feel the cold, dark fingers of regret creep up my neck. I brushed the feeling off and tried to guess the dare. Maybe to go downstairs and do something loud and try not to wake up my parents? Or be trapped in the closet again? Or wake up Pumpkin and hide under the bed as he barks furiously at who knows what and probably wake everyone up? I glanced around my bedroom/attic as Zara thought. It was an old room, with creaky floorboards and peeling old-timey wallpaper that my parents said they would fix once the renovators got past the mysterious issue they ran into. My bed was new, though, an awesome canopy bed painted white with pretty lavender curtains and pillows, and a thick comforter with lavender flowers all over. It and the fluffy beanbag, neat white desk, fuzzy purple rug and bookshelf filled to the brim with colorful books looked very out of place in the ancient room. But I didn't mind too much. This house was pretty cool, and of course I had Zara, which made it all much better. I never had a true bestie back in the city, just those sort of friends that you hang out with at times but never have awesome sleepovers with or wear duo Halloween costumes with. Not like me and Zara.

"I've got it." Zara said, and I gulped. "It's pretty intense, Chloe. Are you sure about this?" I thought for a moment. I really did have an urge to do something bold and awesome. Something that Zara and I would remember forever and maybe laugh at in a few years. I definitely remember what happened, but I don't think I'm ever going to really laugh at this story. "Of course," I said cheerfully, although I still wasn't sure. What if she dared me to do something really, *really* crazy? I didn't want to be *crazy* crazy. Luckily, Zara saw right through me. "You're terrified." She didn't ask, she told me. I nodded. "Don't worry, I'll come with you. Are you ready?" I softened, glad that Zara knew I was doubting this. "Yeah," I said bravely, and I thought I was. But nobody could be ready for what was about to happen.

Zara, now unleashing her crazy brave side since she knew I was okay, grinned again. “We,” she said, pausing with a suspense that drove me crazy. “Are going.” I groaned, and Zara laughed. “We,” she began again, with a shorter pause. “Are going to go out into the woods tonight and look for ghosts.”

### Zara

Going out into the woods on Halloween, at midnight, during a full moon, looking for ghosts. It was one of my bravest dares, even though I didn’t really believe in ghosts. It was the spookiest Halloween dare I could think of. I will admit that I was a little scared - there was a chance that there could be bears or something in the woods - but I wanted to do it. I told myself that it wasn’t because of Emmie and Jasmine. I told myself that their words didn’t influence this decision whatsoever. This was a bit of a lie. I remembered painfully how they had called me a chicken, a scaredy cat, a baby, whatever would make me do what they said. I thought those girls were my friends, but they only wanted me as a minion to laugh at. That’s why I decided to be the brave girl in this new town. I knew that if I didn’t pull that off flawlessly, I would fall down to the scaredy, shy girl, and that was not who I had decided to be. I hoped with all of my heart that Chloe would be a real friend, and she really never let that down, but I was still nervous from my previous... experience. I didn’t want to be her minion, so I decided to be the fearless, bold girl in the duo. So, I became Zara, who is curious and brave and loves nothing more than a good dare. I found that I actually loved being this person, so I stuck with it. I ignored how it was almost funny how my bravery was completely inspired by fear. I felt comfortable with Chloe now, and never wanted to lose her. She really was a great friend.

The look on her face, white as a ghost and then quickly covered by a failed attempt of confidence, told me that I wouldn’t be the only one a little terrified at the idea of sneaking out into the woods in the dead of night. “Cool,” Chloe said, trying to sound normal. “Let’s go.” I was surprised by her bravery. I knew that this was hard for her. “We’ll bring a flashlight,” I offered, and she sighed with relief and smiled gratefully at me. I smiled back a daredevil smile, trying not to think that bringing a flashlight could be considered chicken. I needed to get out of that mindset, since Chloe was the opposite of those girls, and I didn’t need to worry about not being bold enough. The thought to back out of this dare entered my mind, and I seriously considered it for a moment. Would it really be being a scaredy cat not to do this?

Yes, I thought before the smart side of my brain started thinking. *You need to do this, Zara. No you don’t, this is stupid! You still gotta do it...* My daredevil side was winning the argument, and I really did want to do this. Maybe to prove to myself that I could be this bold, brave girl that I had learned to love. Maybe to prove to Emmie and Jasmine that I could never be their minion. Maybe to prove to Chloe and this town that I’m awesome. Maybe just to have fun being reckless and crazy with my best friend.

“How are we going to sneak out?” Chloe asked worriedly, interrupting my thoughts. *Whoops.* I hadn’t thought of that. How *would* we sneak out? Our parents aren’t the strictest, but they would not be happy about this dare. And how would we get out, anyway? The doors were all locked, and there weren’t any secret passages or anything in this house, creepy as it may seem. (At least none that I know of... Maybe I missed something when I checked every wall last week? I mean, it could happen...)

As I was thinking, I noticed Chloe's eyes drifting over to her attic window, with its pretty purple curtains against the old and very outdated wallpaper. "What's with the window?" I asked her. "Oh!...Uhhh..Well..." Chloe seemed surprised that I had noticed, which wasn't a first for me. Lots of people were surprised when I noticed things. Maybe because the brave one usually isn't the smartest? My parents said that it's great that I'm curious and notice small things, and that I'd make a great detective. The only problem was that I got distracted when looking for clues and things. Like now. I found myself examining the ancient wallpaper instead of whatever Chloe was looking at. I noticed that the little designs looked like flowers and leaves. Perhaps the old owners of this mansion were gardeners or something? I pondered over the other designs, which were mostly illegible after so long but looked maybe like...dogs? I glanced over at Pumpkin, who was peacefully sleeping on Chloe's bed, and I wondered why the wallpaper had dogs on it. What kinds of dogs were those, anyways? Irish Setters like Pumpkin? Did those exist in Connecticut that long ago? I didn't notice how far off topic I was getting until Chloe continued speaking.

"Well, a couple days ago, I sort of accidentally found a way out," she said, startling me. "What?" I said, not really having heard her. Chloe sighed and climbed up to the wide wooden window sill. She felt the bottom of the rough surface and pulled up on the window. After a painful creak, the window scooted open, and a cold autumn breeze blew onto my face. "Come over here," Chloe whispered, although I have no idea who would be awake to hear us. Abby, my little sister, was at her own sleepover with her friend, our parents were all sleeping two floors down, and all the neighbors were far enough away not to even see Minnechaug Mansion, let alone hear any sounds from it.

Still, I tiptoed across the agonizingly squeaky floorboards and climbed up the window sill. I noticed that the window was oddly low on the wall. Chloe waved me towards her, climbing through the window, and I peered through. Although I wasn't afraid of heights, the drop from Chloe's window - at least twenty feet down with nothing to climb on - was definitely not a way to sneak out. But Chloe felt a groove in the wall and pressed it. A thick vine fell from a dark tree above, nearly smacking me in the head. "Agh!" I yelped. "What's that?!" Chloe started pulling on the vine, revealing that there were large leaves and grooves - in the perfect places to climb down on.

"Oh!" I gasped. "Why is this here?" I asked. Chloe gave the vine one last yank and turned to me. I heard the vine fall to the ground, crunching the leaves below, but one end was knotted tightly. It was hard to resist swinging down and yelling nonsense instead of following through with my spooky dare. "No idea. But it'll work, right?" I could tell that Chloe had a lot more to say, probably about how there was totally a creepy reason for this and how you could easily fall and break a leg and all of the reasons why we *should not do this*. But instead, Chloe rested her left foot - dressed unwisely in a fuzzy hot pink sock - on one of the larger grooves and swung on. I was impressed. I knew that it was hard for Chloe to be this brave, and was so grateful that she was doing it for me. But also, she had the daredevil gleam in her eye that told me deep down, she had always wanted to do something like this.

After Chloe inched down the vine slower than a snail for about five feet, I leaped on and gripped hard to a green snag. It held my weight surprisingly well, not even stretching against the two eleven-year-olds climbing down. I ignored my slight instinct to look up, that this was some trick set by ghosts or something. It was too dark to see anything, anyway. And ghosts?



flashlight around, I saw it. Not in the beam of yellowy white light, but deep in the shadows, glowing a milky white.

A ghost. I was sure of it. The creature dashed around in the shadows, unaware of Chloe and I as we stood there like deer in front of a zooming car. It almost looked like a dog, the way it galloped in the leaves, but I was too far away to see for sure. The smell of candy corn wafted through the trees - that didn't make any sense. Why would the woods at night smell like candy corn? Pumpkin's ears pricked up, but he stayed silent. I stepped forward to get a better look and - CRUNCH - stepped on a particularly crispy pile of leaves. The ghost dog's head whipped around, and its dark eyes stared right into me. One solemn noise came from the dog - sort of a ghostly howl - and then it took off, running deeper into the night.

My mind fumbled to find a reasonable reason for this. Maybe that was a normal dog, perhaps dressed up for Halloween as a ghost dog with a glow in the dark sheet. That made perfect sense.... Except for the unnatural sound, and the strong glow that I knew deep down could not possibly come from glow in the dark fabric or paint. It had to be something out of the ordinary. I stepped in the general direction of the dog, looking around for the glow. The smell of candy corn drifted into my nose, and I stopped, confused. What was it with candy corn in this forest? Suddenly I saw a flash of light, and something ran straight into me.

I stepped back instinctively, because it didn't feel like something was running into me. It felt like a thick fog was concentrated into a doglike shape and blowing onto me with an impossible force. *Ghost* was all I could think of as I looked down at the glowing creature below me, partly transparent and hovering an inch above the ground. There was no reasonable reason for this. I was looking at a ghost dog. "Hi! Hi! Hi!" the dog yelped. *It can talk, too?* I thought. *I might as well be seeing talking corn!* "Hi! I'm Feather! Are you Zara and Chloe? You are, right? Of course you are! Wow, you guys are so cool! I've always wanted to meet you! I've seen you like a billion times trying to get you to come out here at night! Master can't believe you just came down so easily! And on Halloween! This is awesome! Did I mention how cool you are?!"

I looked back at Chloe, who was as pale as this ghost dog that was named Feather. She took a deep breath and - "AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!!!" she screeched. I didn't blame her. Never in a million years did I think we would actually *find* a ghost, let alone one that has been looking for us! Feather was not at all taken back by the scream. "Wow! That was a great scream! You're Chloe! *The* Chloe Stevens! I can't believe I found you! I'm an awesome spy, no matter what Fog says! That's my older sister, by the way! I'm a great spy, don't you think? I'm so secretive and clever, right? Right!?" Chloe screamed again. "AAAAAAHHHHHHHH...!!!" I could tell her throat was getting sore from all the screaming, but it was hard not to. Right then I was trying to keep a scream from coming out of my mouth. I had about a million questions, but couldn't risk opening my mouth in case a shriek escaped. Before this year, I was known for having a particularly loud scream.

After a few moments of Feather enthusiastically turning her ghostly head from me to Chloe - probably waiting for us to confirm that she was a great spy, which I wasn't so sure about - I summoned enough courage to speak. "What. Is happening," was all I could get out. "Oh, right! You don't think ghosts are real!" Feather said excitedly. "Well, we totally definitely absolutely are! Look at this!" She turned around in a circle, her white paws leaving a glowy trail in the air. Suddenly a huge pile of candy corn fell from nowhere and scattered on the leaves.

That explained the candy corn smell. “Cool, right?!” Feather continued. “My powers are so awesome! I looove candy corn. Do you know who invented it?! They are awesome! It’s so good! Watch this! Look! Look!” Feather jumped and landed lightly in the air, suddenly covered in candy corn accessories. A candy corn themed bow rested on her white head, and she was wearing candy corn striped socks and a necklace.

“Now, I should probably start explaining,” Feather started saying, which I was relieved for. We really needed an explanation. “So, there’s this curse –“ “Curse?!” Chloe interrupted. I could tell another shriek was coming. But before anyone could say anything, a horrible sound twisted in the forest. The trees seemed to freeze and bow down to a mysterious force as I heard a voice right in my ear. “*Leave....my.... FOREST!*” It whispered, sounding exactly like one of those creepy ghost sound effects. I was waiting for someone to say “GOTCHA!” but knew that we were far past that. Feather looked horrified. I looked at her, waiting for a fast explanation, but all she said was one thing. “RUN!”

Before I could stop myself, I was turning back into fifth grade Zara, the scared little girl who cried in front of the whole school. The one who always picked truth. The one who always held sleepovers at her own house. The one that could not audition for the solo in chorus because she was afraid her voice would crack. The one that let herself be pushed around by Emmie and Jasmine. I ran and ran, not stopping anytime soon, driven by pure fear. Whatever was happening, I needed to leave. I couldn’t be brave Zara anymore. I just couldn’t. My legs started aching, since I had never been much of a runner, but I still ran, the voice ringing in my ears, urging me to go far away from these woods and never come back again. But somehow, I was going deeper into the woods, and Chloe and Feather were nowhere to be found. Tears started prickling in the corners of my eyes, and I didn’t stop them. I let myself cry for the first time since the move, horrible wrenching sobs of fear. My vision was so blurry that I didn’t notice the hole until it was too late. I tripped painfully on a tree root and stumbled forwards, right into a void that seemed bottomless. My arms and legs twisted desperately, trying to grasp something, anything, but I plunged straight into the darkness. I screamed helplessly, the noise echoing off the hard dirt walls of the hole. The last thing I heard was Chloe screaming my name, her head appearing at the base of the hole just a second too late, and the darkness ate up everything, leaving just the feeling of falling to a terrible unknown.

## Chloe

“ZARA!” I screamed into the hole, flinging myself towards my best friend, but it was too late. She was gone, just a terrified face in the endless void. “ZARA!” I screamed again, more of a cry now, since I didn’t know what to do. Tears streamed down my face, and my knees started shaking. Why did I agree to this? Why did I want to do something brave and cool? Why did I let the daredevil feeling bring me outside into the forest, completely defenseless against the poison ivy and bears and creepy holes and - I took a deep breath, trying to calm down. This was not the time for a safety rant. As I heard the last echoes of Zara’s scream disappear, I realized that I had two options here. I could run back home, come up with some believable story about how Zara fell, my parents would call 911 to save her from whatever fate was at the bottom of that awful void, and we would live our lives never knowing the forest’s secrets. Or I could be the brave Chloe and rescue her right here and now. This all flashed through my head in a split second, and before I could even weigh the pros and cons sensibly, my feet decided for me. I

was suddenly at the very edge of the hole, a centimeter from falling in. I thought about Zara's courage, and how she would never hesitate to save me. So, I took a deep breath and summoned all of my bravery. And right before the dirt crumbled under my pink socks and dropped me, I jumped, not knowing if I'd ever get back up, only knowing that I *needed* to do this. For Zara.

*-End of Part One-*

x x

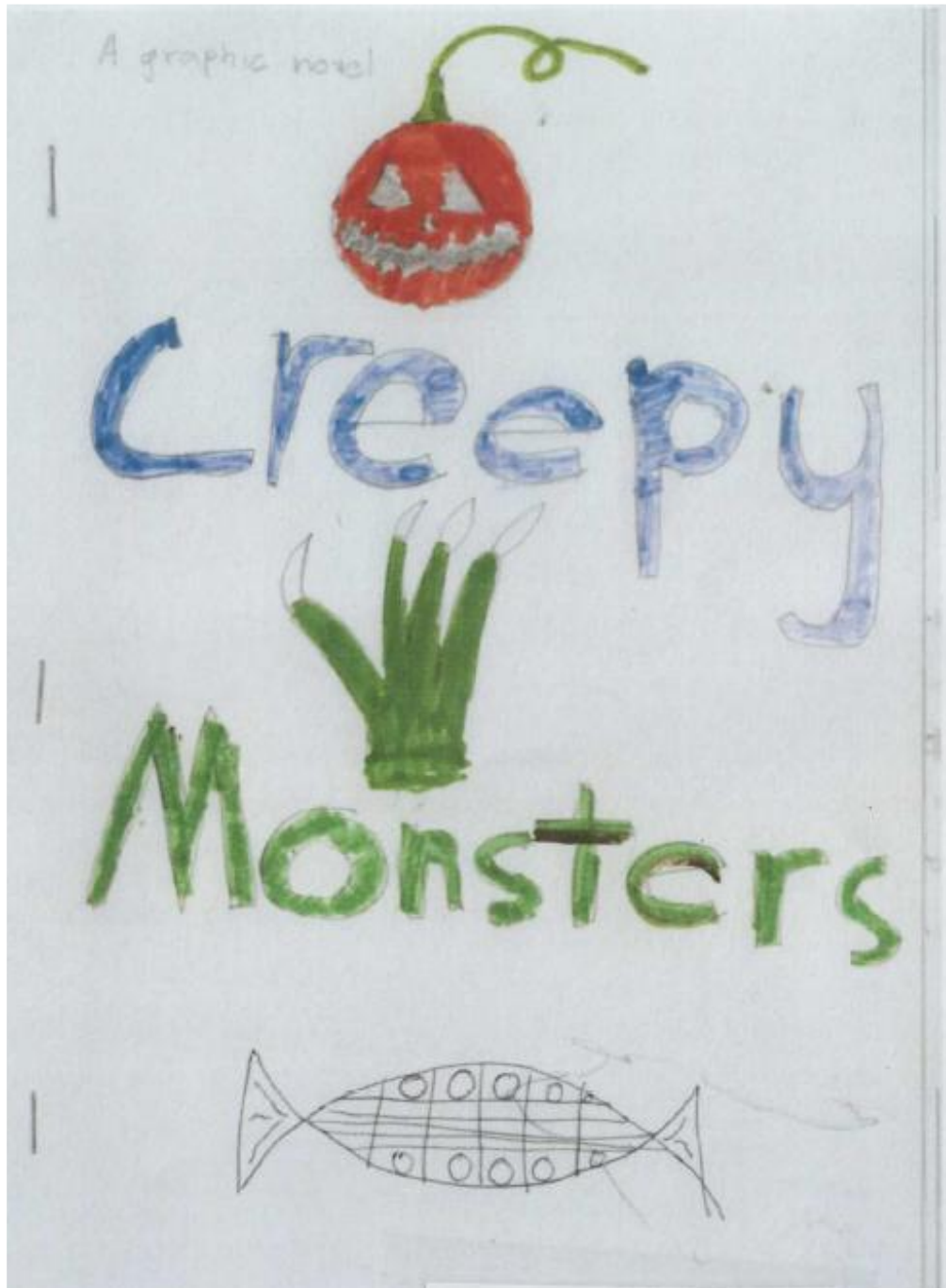
## **The Person Who Loved Candy** by Miles Moran

Once upon a time, long ago, there was a boy in Glastonbury who loved in candy. But every single Halloween night, all he got trick or treating was pumpkin seeds. He ate every last pumpkin seed. Until a pumpkin grew in his belly. Until his head turned into a pumpkin. Now every single Halloween night, he will jump up in front of you. And then, he will ask you if he can eat your candy. But, if you don't let him eat your candy, he will eat your face.

The End



**Creepy Monsters**  
by Rithui Mula



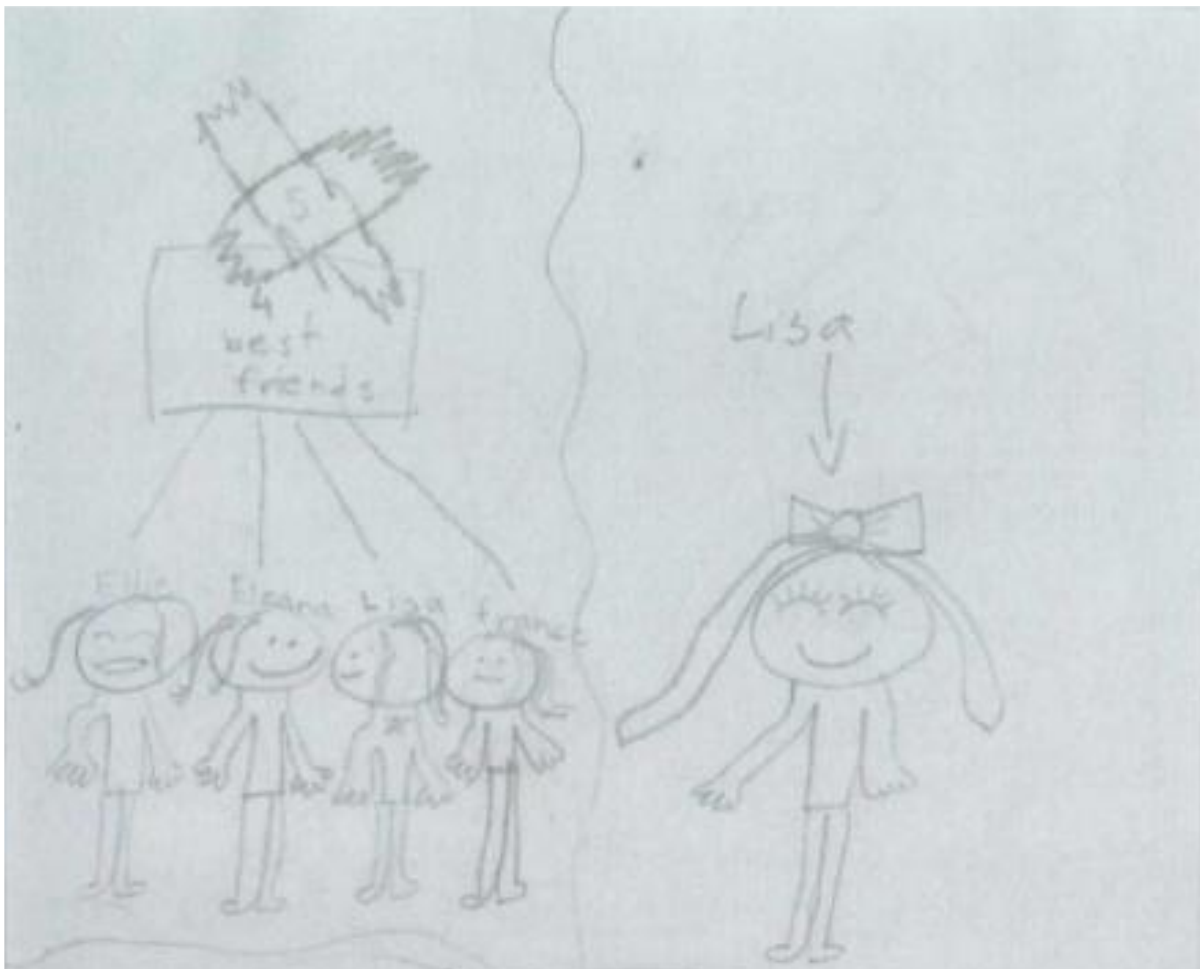


Once upon a time lived a girl who was named Sofia. Trick or treat was coming up! Sofia was excited for halloween! She loved her costume! She was going to be a fairy! She couldn't wait! She also loved candy! She lived on a city South Windsor on 262 Main street. I have a mother named Elizabeth a Dad named David and a little brother named Ryan.

6



It was almost time for trick or treat!  
But it only was October 6<sup>th</sup>. It's a long  
way to get to October 31<sup>st</sup>! -he raced  
downstairs with excitement! Her mom  
said tomorrow was halloween. That night  
Sotira couldn't sleep. She was too excited!  
My-mom said I could wear pickles!



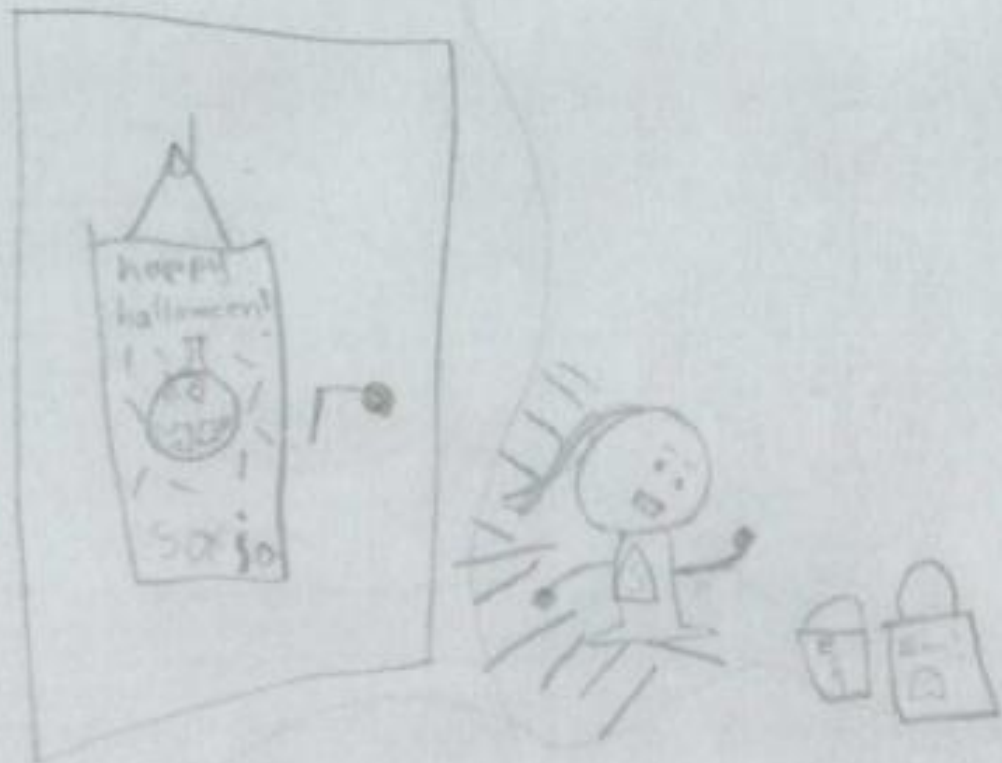
I usually go trick or treating with my friends  
Elle, france, Lisa, Elena, my 4 best friends!  
But this year I'm just going with Lisa! And today's  
Halloween! In the night my mom said in  
6 more hours I could go trick or treating!



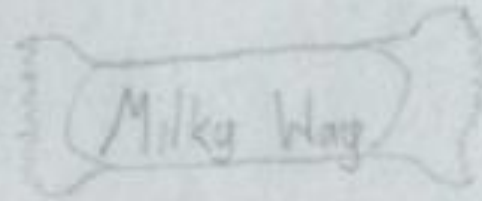
One hour passed 4 more hours to go!  
I waited. And waited. And waited. Ugh!  
I ate my snack. I had goldfish and  
juice! My favorite! Then me and my dad  
played a game of uno. I won the game!  
But still 4 more hours!



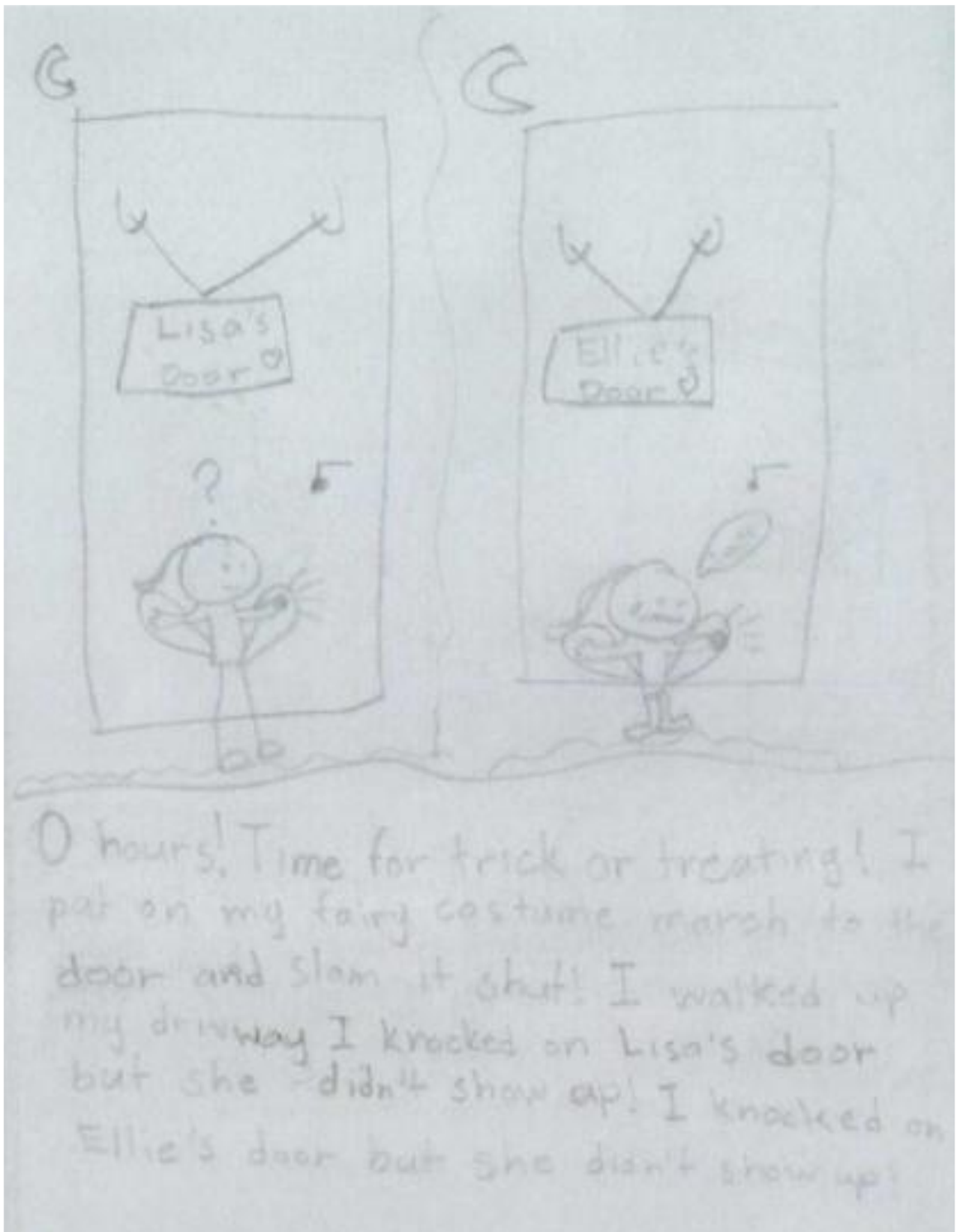
3 more hours to go! But I did almost everything in my home! My mom and Dad suggested draw an elephant. "Boring"! Then I don't know. Then I got an idea! I could make a halloween poster! Then I got straight to work! This was fun! I asked my parents "how do you like it so far". Great! said my mom.



2 more hours to go! And I finished my poster! But I still have to hang it at my front door so people can see it. Wait a minute I forgot to remind my parents to put the candy into the bags! Mom! Dad! The candy! Oh no! Quickly do it! I rushed to the bags in a hurry!



I'm more hour to go! I finally filled the bags with candy! Now all my tasks are done. I wonder what candy I'll get! I hope I get Milky Way. At halloween I get so much candy!

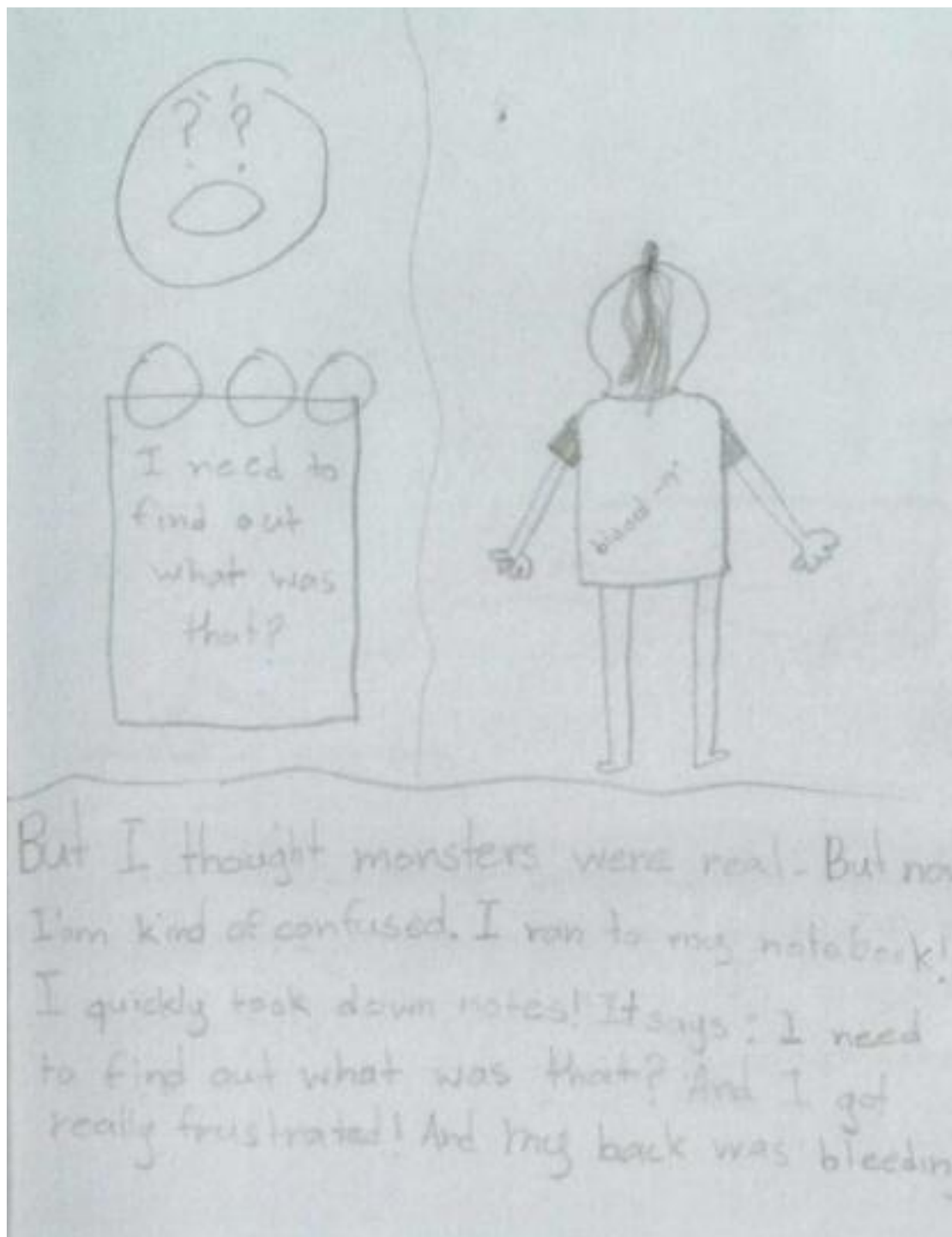




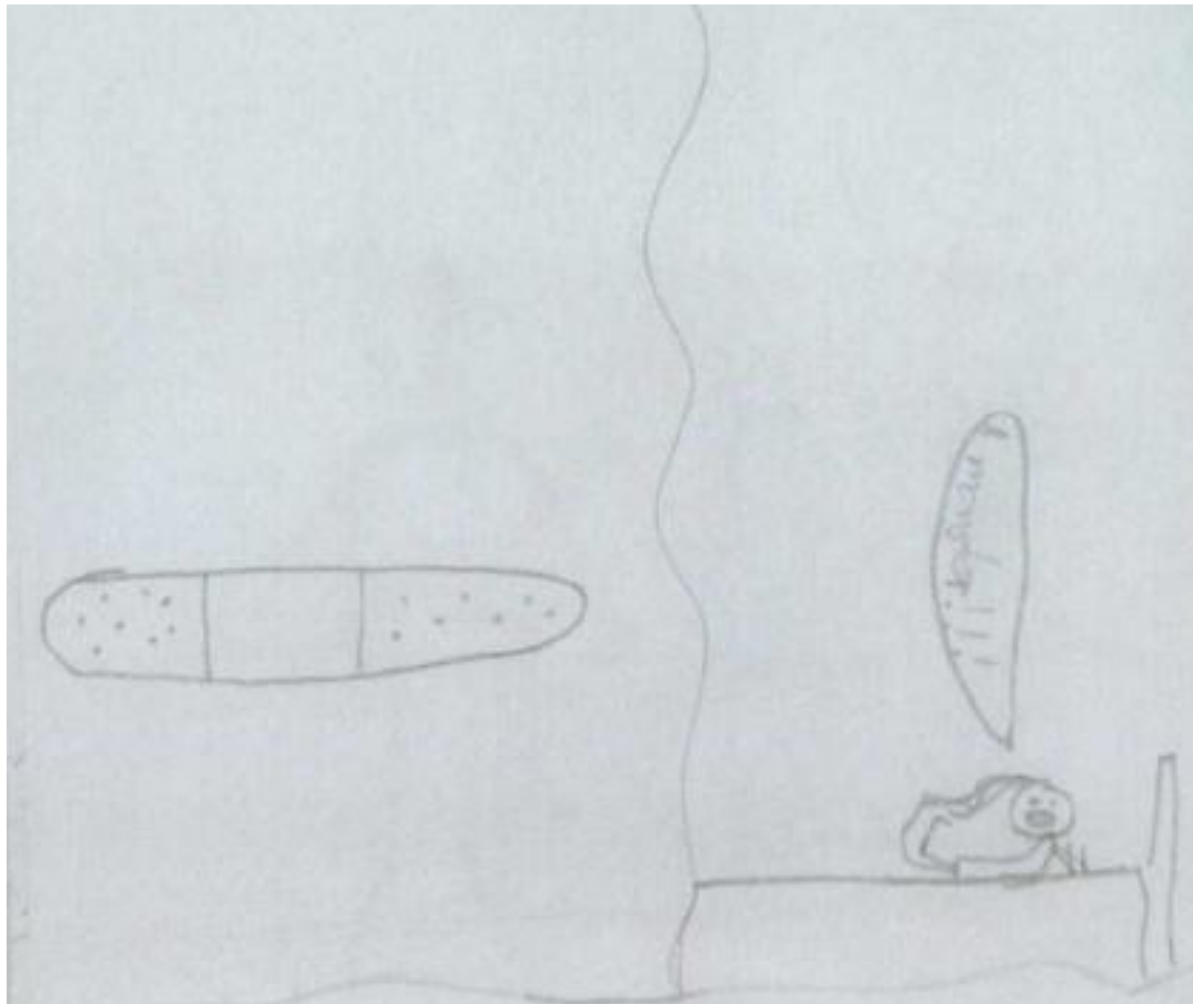
I cried a lot! I ran back to the house and told my mother. She said "sorry honey". Then I went back outside soon I knocked on everybody's door. But they didn't show up! I sobbed and sobbed. It just wasn't fair.



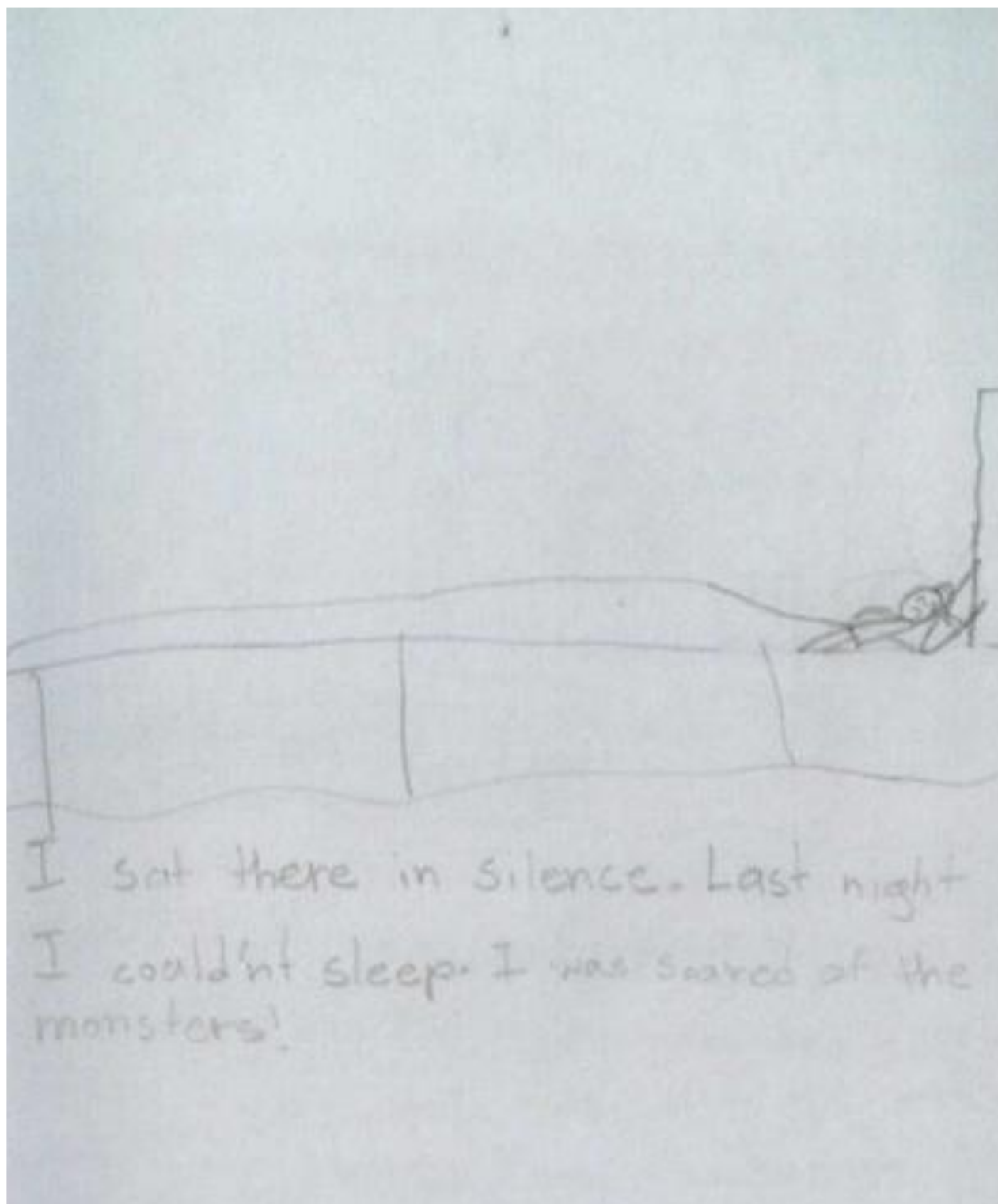
But I felt something on my back. I turned around to take a look. Nothing was there. What was that? I wonder what it was. A sharp nail scratched against my back. I told my mom "A monster was behind my back." "Monsters are not real sweety!"



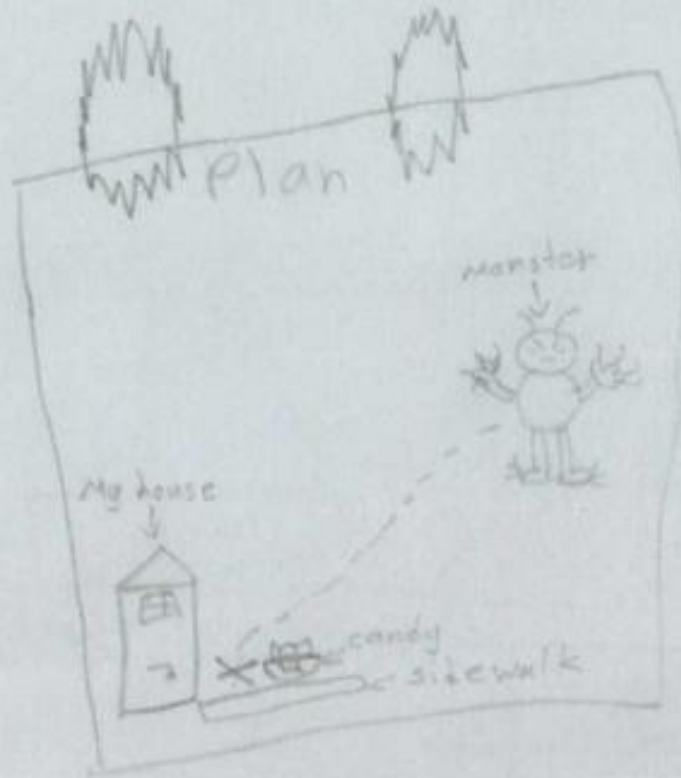
But I thought monsters were real. But now I'm kind of confused. I ran to my notebook! I quickly took down notes! It says: I need to find out what was that? And I got really frustrated! And my back was bleeding.



I quickly put a Band-Aid on! I finally figured out it was a monster! I badly wanted to show my mom but she didn't listen.

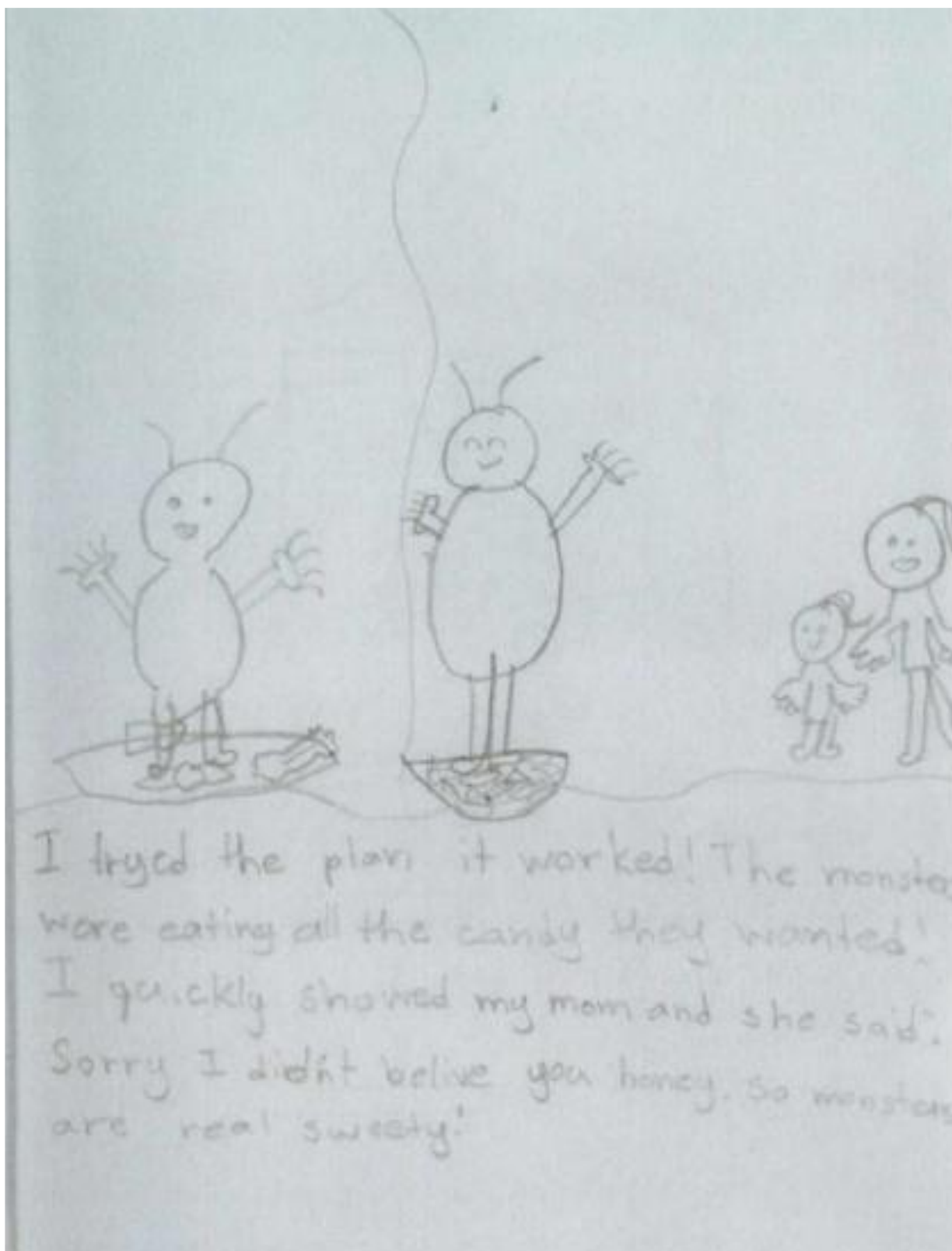


I sat there in silence. Last night  
I couldn't sleep. I was scared of the  
monsters!

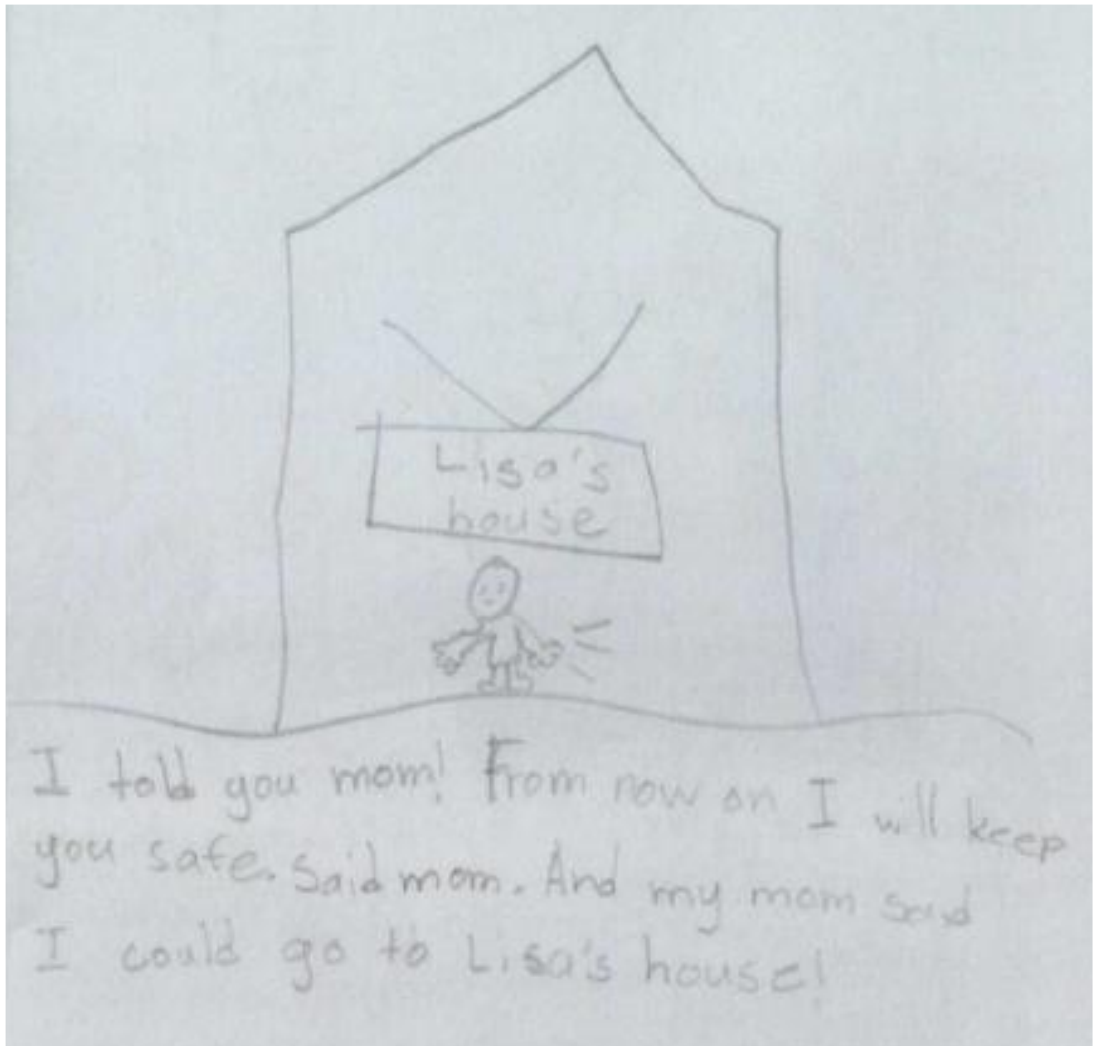


And the were always behind me! Soon I saw monsters I brang my mom outside. She didn't see anything. Huh? And then I came up with a plan. I could put candy on my sidewalk and <sup>\*</sup>achractt the monsters.

achractt - to get attention (16)



I tryed the plan, it worked! The monster  
were eating all the candy they wanted!  
I quickly showed my mom and she said:  
Sorry I didn't belive you honey, so monsters  
are real sweety!



The  
End

blurb



Sofia's excited for Halloween!  
But no one shows up!  
Sofia is very sad.  
But she finds out  
creepy monsters  
are behind  
her.



Will Sofia ever show Dad or Ryan?

## Untitled

by Johanna Muro

Once upon a time there was a girl named Johanna. She was walking in Gay City. It was fall and everybody was wearing jackets. As she went through the woods it got colder and darker. Her body started to shake. She felt like something was following her. She looked behind her, nothing was there. She started to hear crying as she got closer to the graves. Her mother warned her not to go there at night alone. Some people say they saw a little girl ghost and she was saying, "Mother come back, mother I'm scared." As Johanna got closer, she heard, "Mother come back, mother I'm scared." But Johanna kept going.

Then out of nowhere, a little girl ghost jumped out at her and she said, "Mother come back, mother I'm scared. Are you my mom?"

Johanna said, "I am not your mom." Johanna was not scared because she recognized the little girl.

Johanna held up a photo, and she said, "Is this you?"

The little girl said, "Yes, where did you get that?"

"You are my great great great grandma, Johanna Glamser and I am named after you," said Johanna. "Where is Barbara?"

"I don't know where my mom is," said the little girl, "I haven't seen her since the train crashed. I have been looking for her my whole life."

"Have you ever checked the train?" Asked Johanna.

"No," said the little girl, "I am too scared to check the train."

Johanna said to the little girl, "Do you want to go check the train with me?"

The little girl said, "Yes!"

"OK let's go to the train station." Johanna said.

They went to the train station. They didn't see anything until Johanna and the little girl heard the train. Johanna said, "How is it possible that the train crashed here hundreds of years ago, unless the train has all the ghosts on it and it's a ghost train!"

The little girl said, "Come with me, come with me." So, they went on the train and the little girl saw her mom.

Her mom said to the little girl, "Johanna you're back, Johanna you're back."

Barbara said to Johanna, "You must get off the train. Thank you for returning my daughter to me, but you must get off of the train now!"

But it was too late. The train door closed and it went through a wall...

## **The Cat and The Ghost**

By Amelia O'Connor, Age 7

The black cat was shy but one day he went to the ghost room because he didn't have a room. A ghost saw him. The cat was scared, but the ghost didn't shout. Instead, the ghost said, "Hi, can we be friends?"

The cat said "Yes."

The ghost said, "What should we do?"

The cat said, "I don't know. Maybe we play outside."

"Good idea. Come on."

They went outside. "Okay, now what should we do?" said the cat.

"Race" said the ghost.

"Yea, let's go."

And every morning after that they raced, and they loved it.

x x

## **The Haunted House**

By Olivia O'Connor, Age 7

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Marilyn who lived in a small house with her mother and father. One sunny day she went outside to look for a haunted house. She started in a field, then a garden, then a forest. She saw a house that was crooked. She ran to it. When she got there she knocked on the door. No one replied. She opened the door. She heard someone say, "Did you hear that?" Marilyn ran further into the house. In the next room she saw a goblin. She ran further into the house. The next door in the next room there were vampires. She hated vampires. She ran. The next door had ghosts. She saw them, and she screamed. She ran past the vampires, the goblin, and witches and out the door through the woods and back into her house. In the morning, she went back to the haunted house and knocked on the door. There stood a white cat.

**The End**

## **Haunted Harold**

By Noelle O'Connor, Age 9

This is a story about my great uncle Harold when he was 12. Hold on tight, it's about to get SCARY. Love, Lisa Mary

Beads of sweat dripped from his forehead. As he biked home, he took an unusually long look at the house next to his. It was in shambles from its crooked roof to its bland wood. It had always spooked Harold. And that time biking past he thought about the mysterious lady who had moved in. The air was crisp and cool. The woman who stepped out of the black Tesla looked nothing like the women who pass by you on the street with so much makeup you can't see their faces. She had white hair and wore a gray dress that was flowy and detailed. He didn't get a long look because she was quick to get in the house and never came out. Sometimes he wondered if she was housebound. Once again, he zoned out thinking about her and the house. After a second, he shook his head and continued on the way home. When he got home, he asked

his mom about her.

"Mom, do you know anything about the lady who lives next door" he asked. His mom shrugged. "All I know is that her name is Ms. Rugby," she answered. "Tomorrow I will make some brownies for you to take down," mom said. "Now, go and do your homework."

Harold clomped upstairs and took a long look at Ms. Rugby's house. "Weird," he whispered. The very next day was a Saturday so at 2:00 PM sharp he headed down to her house and knocked on the door. The door opened and the whitish lady stepped out. He handed her the brownies, speechless.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"You're welcome," he mumbled back.

"Why don't you come in?"

Harold stepped in and, to his surprise, it was beautiful. From the chandelier to the rugs.

"Are you housebound?" he asked suddenly.

"No, I just never come out, it's too bright," she replied.

Then they sat down to afternoon tea, just like every day after that. You can still see the house standing in Cotton Hollow Preserve.

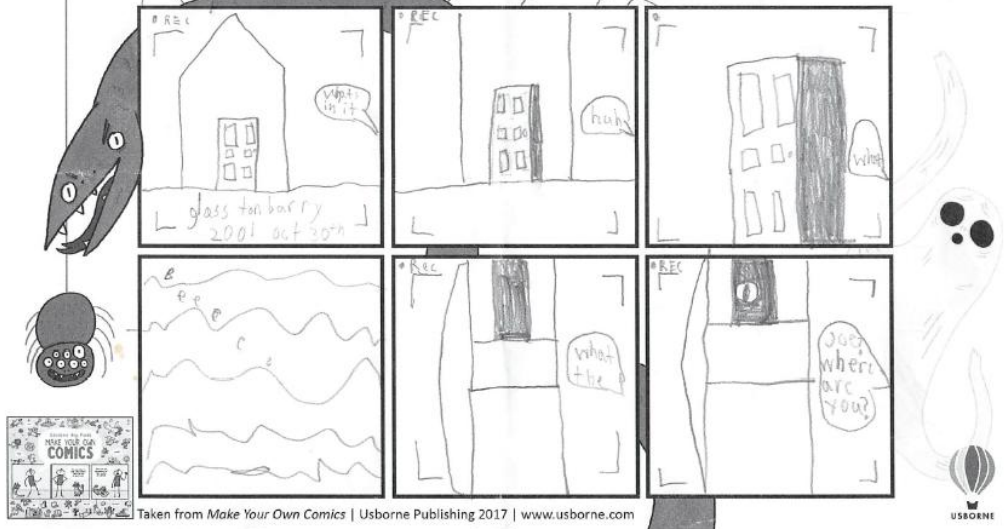
# The Doom Clip

by Sam Paulo

## A CREEPY COMIC

Create a comic about your greatest fears. Insects? The dark? Ghosts? Monsters? A plague of locusts flying into your bedroom and swarming all over your face?

Try a black panel to show that someone's turned out the lights.  
 You could draw a scary character in shadow at first...  
 ...revealing its true horror in the next panel.



THE DOOM CLIP Samuel.p

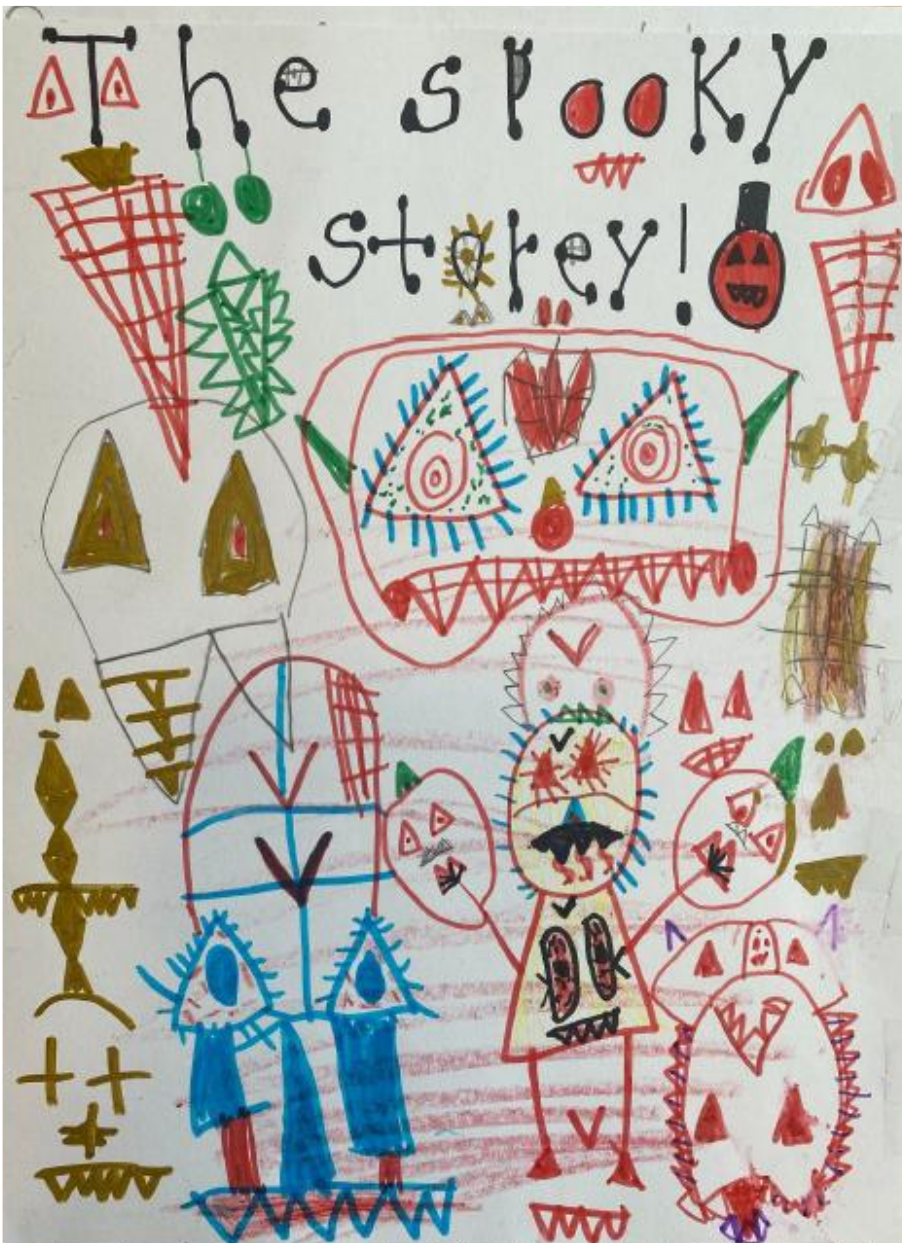


# Scary Story

By Mason Pomroy

Oct. 22, 2025

Once upon a time there was a spooky ghost and his name was the night ghost. He only comes out at night and he is very spooky. He loves candy. He likes to steal people's candy. Then he eats it so fast that it only takes 1 second for it to eat your candy! It hides from people. When nobody is looking and it is bed time for all the children, the night ghost comes out. One night when everyone was sleeping, the night ghost went through the wall of Tyler's house. He goes into the kitchen and he steals all the candy in the house. He quickly eats it and the night ghost accidentally leaves crumbs and wrappers on the ground. And he leaves the house. Everyone wakes up cause it's morning. When everybody comes downstairs, they look around and there



are so many crumbs and wrappers on the floor. Mom is not impressed. Tyler says, "We're gonna have a lot to clean up!" Then Dad says, "I think someone is stealing our candy. Let's set a trap to catch this person". They pick up some of the crumbs and put it in a medal trap and they wait and hide upstairs. Then they go to bed and they hope they catch it! When it is morning, they go downstairs and they look at the trap. There is nothing in the trap but the crumbs are... gone!! "This means it's a ghost" I say. Dad agrees. Dad calls the police. "There's someone breaking into our house and stealing our candy and we tried to catch him but he just broke the trap. Can you help us and let everyone know in Glastonbury?" "Yes!" So the police came!

## Taken Captive

By Madeline Proulx

I walked across the street, waiting for my best friend to come out of the house across the street. We had plans to go have doughnuts in the field near the GHS High School. I sat on the sidewalk, waiting for her to come out of the huge blue house that was perched on top of a hill, with a large driveway that blocked anybody from looking at the house without going up the driveway. My parents were very neat and clean, keeping the whole house tidy and flinching at a speck of dirt that ever came on their wood floor. Charlotte's family, on the other hand, was messy and just the way I like it. Books and toys and anything you could ever think of lined the stairs and littered their floor. We had decided that since my house was so neat and my parents would never allow anything remotely messy enter our house, and that Charlotte's house was too full of siblings, that we couldn't have doughnuts in either of our houses. Therefore, we decided to eat in a field right near our house, and also near the high school, to go and have a little fun. I sat on the curb, shredding a leaf I had picked up from the ground. Finally, after what seemed came into view while she walked down her driveway. "Charlotte!" I shouted. "Over here!" She looked around and made a beeline for me.

"Hello!" She said brightly to me. "I brought apple fritters, pumpkin spice, vanilla glaze, and chocolate." She was wearing a sweater and a short skirt. She has pretty blond hair, while I just had plain black hair. I am wearing a plain white shirt and black shorts. I don't think I look good in anything, but Charlotte always says that I do. I always disagree, and I am simply ugly that way. We started to walk towards the field, and Charlotte asking, "Violet, what are you being for Halloween?" She asked me, jumping on the crunchy leaves littering the sidewalk.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I'm going to be a vampire. The costume has face paint, with a little bit of fake blood. Also, the dress is amazing!" I said excitedly. Today is actually the day before Halloween, and every year Charlotte and I go Trick-Or-Treating together.

"That's cool!" She said, "I'm going to be a skeleton." She talked on and on about how her suit has neon bones so it lights up in the dark, and how she got a mask that covers up her whole face and how it has a jaw that moved when she talked or moved her mouth. Finally, we got to the empty field, and, without warning, I snatched her bag from her clutches. "Hey!" she shrieked loudly. Laughing, I sprinted across the field, holding the bag beneath my arm. I giggled and stood there, watching Charlotte run back towards her, also giggling. I plopped down on the scratchy grass and opened the bag. Charlotte, wheezing, sat down next to me. I took out a vanilla doughnut and popped it into my mouth. It was very delicious. We sat there, eating doughnuts and talking happily to each other, with the prospect of Halloween looming over our shoulders. We sat there for about an hour in the cool autumn breeze. Then, all of a sudden, the sky went pitch black.

A nice fall day turned into a bitter cold winter. All of a sudden, it started to pour buckets of icy sheets of rain onto Charlotte and I. "CHARLOTTE!" I yelled as loud as I could. There was no time to think. Swaying because of the wind, I groped around for Charlotte. At last, I found her now sopping wet arm. We clung to each other, confused and petrified. Then, all of a sudden, the thunder started. A clap of thunder followed a huge bolt of lightning right above us. But, as the lightning illuminated the field for a brief second, I saw a huge hill, looking more like a mountain,

and an old wooden mansion with boarded up windows and vines growing up the sides. I started to scream as loud as I could, while another fork of lightning illuminated a small graveyard that had certainly not been there before, as well as the mansion. One final fork of lightning illuminated the same mansion on the hill, but a light flickered on in the huge mansion. Next second, we heard a loud groan and a scream from the graveyard. I began to scream five times louder. What was going to happen to me? Am I going to make it back home? Charlotte clapped a hand to my mouth, muffling my screams. "What are you-" I tried to shout into her hand.

"Shush! I hear something moving." She said, barely in a whisper. It was hard to hear with the rain pouring down on us as we listened intently. But she was right. Barely heard among the thunder and lightning, there was a rustle of leaves. Another moan. This time much, **much** closer to us. Before we even had time to get up and run, or even make a single move, a pair of wet, gray, and slimy hands close around my neck.

I tried to scream, but I couldn't. I was paralyzed by shock and fear. The thing put a hand to cover my mouth, but except it wasn't one of its own. Two hands gripped my shoulders and neck. This was not his hand. I looked closely only to realize that it was a hand completely floating in midair, with no body or arm. I thrashed in whoever these arms belonged to. This was surely not a human, for the arms were to gray and slimy. Then I saw that there were blood stains all around his arm. I suddenly remembered that I couldn't breathe. I fought hard against the tight grip on my neck, not even realizing that the body was dragging me to wherever the gross thing was headed. I tried to look up, but the grip was too tight on my neck. "Let her breath." Said a cold raspy voice to the right of me. The arms of the mystery man released me, leaving me standing there, gasping for breath.

"Keep moving." Said another voice, deeper and a lot raspier than the other one. He pushed me, hard in the back. Without thinking, I obediently walked. It was like a mysterious fog had drifted through my mind. Forcing me to be controlled by some unknown and unseen force. It felt like hands were pushing my every part of my body. I can't control myself. What's happening?! I thought. I didn't want to move forward. For all I know, I could be walking in this ferocious storm, walking to my own death. *I don't want to move*, I thought to myself. That did it, for some reason. The fog drifted out of my mind, and all the feeling came back to me, leaving my mind blissfully clear and in control. "Well, well, well..." The most deep and raspiest voice said, a few feet ahead of me. "Somebody learned to block out some serious and powerful magic. This... is highly unusual." He said quietly, not any trace of anger in his face. His face. It was pale and ghostly. In fact, Violet wouldn't be surprised if it was a ghost. His face was covered in blood, but dried and didn't seem to be real blood. He had a ghostly glow circling around his body in ragged pants and a ripped and torn T-Shirt. Now that she looked closer, it wasn't until now that she realized that he was floating! He was a ghost. *Then how could he touch me?* A quiet voice inside my head spoke. "Let's put you on a slightly stronger spell." An evil grin spread across his face, and before Violet could even dodge out of the way, before she could make a single move or even scream, the bright red beam of light caught her right over her heart.

Everything thought or feeling or worry was wiped out of her mind, leaving her brain strangely echoey and empty. It was a wonderful sensation. She knew that she couldn't fight through this one, and she let the mysterious spell wipe the rest of her consciousness out of her.

She was only slightly aware of her toes dragging on the ground and the water that seemed to be pouring icy buckets onto her head. She shivered, and let her mind bring back her thoughts. She had been kidnapped by a strange creature that looked like a ghost, with Charlotte nowhere to be seen. The mysterious guy had put some sort of spell on her, and that was the last she could remember. She opened her eyes as narrowly as she could. She saw the mansion closer than ever. In fact, they were nearing the door. Panic coursed through me, but I didn't close my mouth or move my head. As if I dared to. "The spell will be wearing off soon." The first man said quietly. "Best refresh the spell."

"Oh, she looks completely fine. Not moving, is she?" The second voice said, clearly audible through the thunder and lightning.

"Well, I'm still checking her." The second man said defiantly. I squeezed my eyes as tightly as they could go. I heard the corpse walking toward me, its ragged breath was putrid on my face, as I breathed in an odor of tobacco and bad breath once he reached me. I felt the corpses' fingers touch my face, and they felt wet and slimy. He touched my eyelid. It was all I could do not to open my eyes and look away. He got a firm grip on my eyelid, and pulled upward to see my eyeball. I stared at the second guys' face. It was bloody and scratched. I didn't move my eye one single bit, but kept staring at his face. Apparently, he thought I was still under a spell. Even though...spells aren't real, are they? I haven't even stopped to think about that when the beam of light hit me. "She does seem to still be under that spell." The guy that had checked me said. "How strong was the spell you did?" He asked the first persons' face. There was the word "spell" again! There couldn't be magic in this world, could there?

"Not very much. She must be very weak, considering she is still human." The first person said again.

"Then again, once she is done with us, she won't be necessarily human anymore." The second person said, adding an evil cackle. It was a horrible sound. "Um...right." He said, sounding slightly embarrassed, giving that no response had come from the Second guy from his comment. What's going to happen to me? I thought, panic now starting to take its turn on me. I have to find a way to escape. I thought desperately as the spell, or whatever this was, kept me in the air, making me drift forward, dreamlike while the spell was still bound to me. The first step to that was finding Charlotte. Of course, I can't open my eyes in the risk that they will put me under an enchantment again.

"You don't want our master to hear you talking about jokes, Merrit." The first person said.

"Yes. Yes. You are absolutely right, Malvolio." Merrit said. It was like he was the silly one, who is the outcast. Kind of like a comic relief in a book. But... those names. They just sounded like a bad guys' name. The slow creaking of a wooden door was heard over the pounding rain falling from the sky.

"Take her to the dungeons." Malvolio said. "She'll wake up there. Stand guard at the door, and once she is awake, take her to the boss."

"Yes, sir." Merrit said, with a slight tremble in his voice. Pure terror cycled through me, as the enchantment that somehow was supposed to keep me asleep made me float a couple of inches from the ground, making me drift forward. I was going to the dungeons, like in a fairy tale

where the hero gets taken into the dungeon and tries to escape. Not daring to open her eyes, due to the fact that Merrit might put me on another spell.

Trying to put aside my panic, I ran over what had happened in my mind, maybe for the events to make a little more sense. Charlotte and I were sitting in the field, when everything went pitch black. Then lighting started, we heard a noise from the graveyard, and, barely a minute later, something snatched us from behind. The man had tried to put a spell on me, but failed when I said the words "I don't want to move" inside my head. Then, the man put me on another spell and was successful. I was asleep until we got to the castle, and they were talking about how they were going to put me in a dungeon.

Well, that about sums it up. I thought to myself, trying to ignore the panic that was slowly taking over her mind. None of this made any sense! How could a spell put me to sleep? Why did the sky turn suddenly black? Was all of this linked because it was the day before Halloween? Soon, with me lost in my own thoughts, I heard a clang of metal bars. The magic thrust me forward, and I opened my eyes a tiny fraction. Merrit's hand was clutching a staff, that had a small red gem right in the middle, but otherwise it was wooden otherwise, with markings that Violet couldn't make out. In one sudden movement, he thrust the stick upward, making a loud BANG! The sound punctured the silent mansion, but at the same time freeing Violet from the bond that made her float. I fell to the ground, making a stabbing pain on my side that would surely become a bruise eventually. I heard the bars slam shut as I slowly tried to stand up from the awkward position that she had fallen in. Her body was very stiff from the sudden and hard impact on the cold, hard stone floor. I slowly straightened up, wincing.

"Violet? Is that you?" Said a quiet voice over from the corner. For a second she thought it was a stranger, but then she saw thick blond hair, shimmering through the small amount of light coming from a torch bracket hung on the stone wall.

"Yes! Are you okay?" I said, running over, ignoring the sore spots on her knees as she ran. All that mattered was that Charlotte was with her. Looking closer, she realized that Charlotte wasn't looking the best. Her shirt was torn, leaving a gaping whole. She looked soaked to her skin, and very shaken, but Violet assumed that she didn't look to great either. Then she realized that her clothes were starting to unstick from her skin, and, as though the water was being sucked out of her clothes, which was apparently exactly what was happening. The water droplets were floating out of her clothes and skin, and staying suspended in midair before evaporating in midair. She realized that all the scratches on her skin and holes on her pants and shirts were healing. Charlotte just stood there, staring as my clothes healed in front of her very eyes. We were both frozen, watching.

"How are you doing it?" Charlotte asked, looking like she was half scared, half amazed.

"I have no idea." I said quietly, questions blooming in my mind like wildfire. It was like she had some sort of power, or ability, that she wasn't aware of.

"Can you do me?" Charlotte asked, pleading in her voice. After all, she soaked and shivering. "

"I'll try. But I don't know if this will work. I don't even know how I dried myself up in the first place." I said reluctantly, not wanting to disappoint her. So, she closed her eyes and

imagined Charlotte warm, her scratches healed, and her clothes dried. A Surge of energy like a gust of wind soared through the room. It looked like wisps of ice, except in wind form. Without knowing what I was doing, I focused on Charlotte and outstretched my hand as though I did this every day. That did the trick. As though waiting for my command, the wispy stream of light blue flattened into a straight line and sped right over Charlottes' heart. I withdrew my hand, knowing that I had done enough. Sure enough, the scratches and water and everything that covered Charlottes' body was healed, and I relaxed, relieved that it had worked, but also very confused.

"Wow..." Charlotte said in awe as she watched the wetness dry off her clothes. "Violet!" She said suddenly, "Look at your eyes! They're blue."

"What?!" I said in alarm, and looked down at my reflection from the large puddle of water on the floor. Sure enough, her eyes were icy blue, way different then her regular shade of light brown. "I-" But she was interrupted by the sudden clang of the Metal bars opening with a sudden and loud BANG!

"The lord wants to see you." Violet didn't recognize the man at all, but charlotte apparently did. She let out a tiny squeak of fear, and tried to hide. Then Violet realized that he was holding a wooden staff to, except with different designs and a purple gem at the top. Before we could even move a muscle, he swung the staff in a slashing movement, and Violet found that her lips were all of a sudden glued shut. She tried to pull them apart, but that only achieved the result of blood blossoming on her lips, while the man said "Follow me." He said roughly, turning to walk back up the passageway. "If one of you falls behind, I shall curse you." The man said without a hint of remorse, as we clambered to follow him.

We ran after the mysterious man, desperate to keep up. The mansion walls were wooden, with portraits of disturbing screaming people, apparently enduring great agony. We passed through hallway after hallway, passing rooms that had whispered and hushed conversations coming through an open crack in the door. Once we got into the biggest hallway yet so far, the man stopped in his tracks and turned around. Charlotte and I immediately stopped in our tracks, petrified for whatever was coming next. "You will walk into those two double doors over there." He said, with an awful finality in his voice as he pointed over where, sure enough, there were two large wooden doors. "You will listen to what the Lord has to say. And if you don't behave yourself, I'm afraid that I will have to step in." He added as an afterthought. I opened my mouth to retort. Who was this guy to be bossing us around? But looking over, I caught Charlotte's eye, and she gave the tiniest of all tiny head shakes.

"Fine!" I spat at him. When Charlotte and I walked past him, he pulled a cloak over his head, so we couldn't see his face. Now, with me thinking about it, he hadn't even let us see his face the whole time. Only his mouth.

We reached the double doors, and I pushed it open, making a loud creak sound from its hinges. The room was very large, and the ceiling was high. A painting of a large skull was hung over a large desk with a chair, and a high, cold voice spoke out of the dimly lit room. "You have come. You have been summoned to this mansion. It is time to begin your transformation." The figures' back of the chair was facing the opposite direction, making his body and face impossible to see. But Violet didn't like that voice, she didn't like it at all, and it made the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

“What do you mean, transformation?” I asked aggressively in the chairs’ direction, feeling the icy feeling of wind coursed through me again. Anger started to bubble through me, like a boiling pot ready to overflow. She couldn’t control the icy feeling. It spread to her fingertips, to her very heart, and not even knowing what she was doing, and icy jet of water poured out of thin air and just barely missing the back of the chair, but hitting the skull painting instead, right on its forehead. Charlotte moaned behind me, as though I had just done something dreadful. As though she could even control what was happening to her.

“Well, well, well. You are certainly a very special case.” The voice calm, but that made Violet feel even more alarmed. “You...can already use your power. You will be a very useful weapon when you join my army.” More whit-hot anger surged through Violet.

“What do you mean, exactly, by joining your so-called army?” I said in a voice that was quite unlike my own, but the same awful deadly calm as whoever was in that chair. “Why don’t you turn around and show us who you are?” I demanded as an afterthought.

“You want to face me?” the voice said quietly into the room, “Fine. I will. I will face you.” He said with a hint of evil excitement in his voice. Violet didn’t like it at all. The chair turned with a slow creak, the sound echoing through the dark room as Charlotte gave another tiny whimper. But nothing could have prepared her for what she had seen. No one in the whole entire universe would ever believe that a face so horrible, so not human could ever exist in this world.

Me and Charlotte both screamed at the top of their lungs. The face was flattened, with blood all across his face, with huge chunks that seemed to have been torn from his face. It was a truly horrible sight, and just before Charlotte and I ran towards the door, I saw a huge staff, quite unlike the other mysterious ones that I’ve seen so far. It was the tallest, but the most peculiar thing was that the gem on the top was all different colors. The one tiny gem had red, purple, ice blue, the exact color of her eyes, as well as a mysterious white one that she had never seen before. “Stop them!” The figure screamed from his now visible chair as they bolted out of the door they had blown open. Charlotte and I ran faster than we ever had our whole entire life, running down long dark hallways, some with lamps and some completely dark, with an occasional body hurtling out of their rooms, shouting things in a strange language that I couldn’t understand while running to join the chase party that was now chasing after us, shooting jets of light at us. We are done for, I thought as another flash of light missed me by inches as I ran through yet another hallway. But, without thinking, not fully aware of anything, really, I summoned the cold breeze and held out my hand. It glowed an icy blue, and I whipped it over my head so it faced behind Charlotte and I. A shard of ice poured out of my hand, making a wall between us and the now growing crowd of people, all with staffs of different colors, got blocked from chasing after us. Without pausing to catch our breath, we kept running and running until we found a room with its door ajar and miraculously empty.

“Charlotte! Over here!” I whispered urgently to her as I dashed into the room, motioning for her to follow me. I slammed the door shut behind us, and used the chain to hook around the door so no one could get in. What was that? I thought, bewildered. We sat on the ground, gasping for breath as we heard the stampede of strange people holding staffs again. I saw that the room was damp and dark, with wooden floor that was highly dirty. But the room had a golden glow, coming from a door that led to another room. Resisting the urge to investigate, I stood up. Finally, the sound of running footsteps stopped, and thankfully they passed without

investigation. "What was that? Why are they all holding staffs?" I finally said after a while when our breathing had slowed down.

"I'm not very sure," Charlotte said. "But they tried to use it on us did you see those jets of lights? They were trying to hit us with something." She finished.

"But don't you know what this means? There's magic in this world." I said excitedly. "And I can perform it!" This meant that she was special. That she could make ice and water appear. The excitement was overwhelming her, until Charlotte muttered,

"I...don't know if it's the best idea to use it, though. You saw what those lunatics were using their powers for! They were trying to kill us. And anyway, is there even proof that this magic exists?" She said fiercely to me.

"You want to go down, then? You want those people out there to kill us? In order to leave this place, we need some sort of magic to rival theirs! We can't just not use my power! It's a huge advantage!" I said just as fiercely as her. Without warning, a purple mist glowed through the room just as Charlotte opened her mouth to argue. Then she saw it. The purple mist was coming from Charlotte's hand, just as the ice jet had with hers. Charlotte's eyes widened in horror as she realized what had happened. But before anybody could do anything, the purple mist reached me, and a feeling of drowsy, uncontrollable sleepiness clogged my mind up. Before I knew it, I started swaying and fell to the ground.

My eyes opened with a flutter, and I was staring up at Charlotte's pale face directly above my head. "What happened?" I said immediately, standing up.

"You... you sort of fell asleep and collapsed when the purple mist came over the room. I don't know what happened." She said shakily.

"But you stayed awake?" I clarified pointedly. Charlotte nodded quietly in response. But then she realized something. "Your eyes are purple!" I exclaimed in excitement. This could mean that Charlotte and I could escape! Together, we could sneak out once we figured out what her power was. Charlotte looked alarmed, but she at least looked like she believed me.

"It's just that the feeling I get when I did whatever I just did, it feels like I'm letting energy that's been kept in myself for ages. Like I'm letting go of something, like I'm using energy." She said, looking slightly nervous and afraid. "But I don't want to become those people, all bloody and living in a mansion with gross paintings on the walls-" But she was interrupted by the golden light from the crack in door that looked like it led into a closet. The light pulsed and crackled with what seemed to be lightning. Then, all of a sudden, the yellow light burst with little flames that danced in the air, like little flies buzzing around the room. But the thing that caught Violets' eye was the door. It was rapidly turning into an archway, but the colors were all different, like the galaxy slime that stores sell. The colors were swirling, like a transparent ghost, because you could still see the outline of a door. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, I felt a tug in my stomach, which caused me to betray gravity and get driven into the portal. The last thing I saw was Charlotte screaming her head off as she got dragged to the portal as I got consumed in the whirl of colors surrounding me.

In a flash, I was popped out backwards onto a hard stone surface. What's going on? I thought in confusion. My brain couldn't fully understand why she was here, and how she even

got here. I stood up, brushing off my clothes, and looking around. This is really a very strange room, I thought to myself as I looked around. There were four portals, each a different color. I realized, with a jolt, that the one I came out of was an ice blue, the exact color of my eyes. I heard a shriek to my left, and I turned around to see Charlotte tumbling headfirst out of the purple portal, directly across from me. She landed on the ground with a sickening CRASH! As I stood up and ran toward her, my footsteps echoing in the huge circular chamber. It was only until now that I realized that a golden and torch bracket hung on either side of each portal, with the exact same shade of colors. Charlotte stood up clumsily just as a huge platform with stone steps rose out of the ground, making the whole room vibrate.

A loud and deep voice spoke out of nowhere. “The powers you seek are in front of you. You shall find the weapon that fits you, or perish with abilities that are not yours. So, let me give you a hint. Blue symbol the water element, while purple puts you in a deep sleep. Red puts you in extreme warmth. And finally, white is the power of unresisting energy, and when held in the wrong hands could be deadly. You have ten minutes to make your decision. Pick a weapon, or die.” The voice stopped speaking, but nobody was in the room with me other than Charlotte. Almost immediately, I felt another pull towards the blue staff, but it didn’t make her move anywhere. I caught Charlotte’s now purple eyes, and knew what we had to do.

“On the count of three?” I asked as, in unison, we stepped up onto the platform.

“Yes.” She breathed, looking as though she was about to faint.

“Three. Two. One.” I said, and grabbed onto the staff with the ice blue gem as Charlotte grabbed onto the purple one. A split second later, wind blew through the room, whipping my hair around. A wonderful warmth spread across my fingers. All of a sudden, the wind stopped, with me and Charlotte still holding onto the staffs we grabbed. Suddenly, a deep and hoarse voice echoed through the chamber.

“So, you have finally come to fulfil your destiny.”

**End of Part One.**

# All About Halloween

By Christopher Qin



all about  
halloween.

By Christopher  
Qin

all about the halloween ninja course p1

down town trick or treat 2

wooden trick or treat p3

portable or trick or treat at night p 4

first two of trick or treat night p 5

first costume choice p.6

second costume choice p 7

third costume choice

fourth costume choice p 8

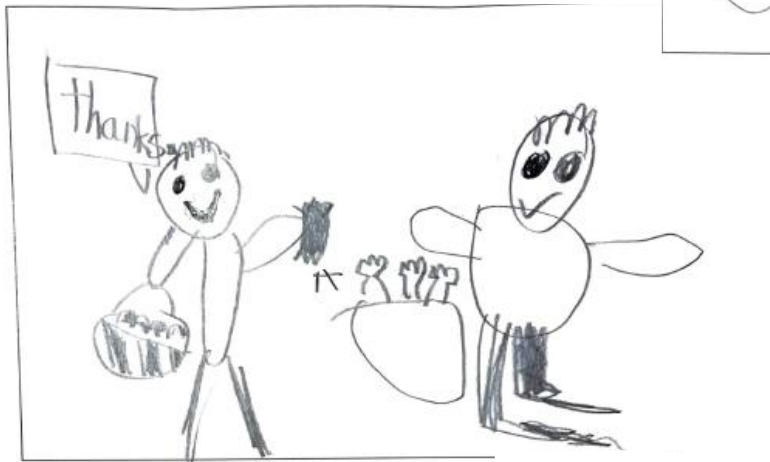
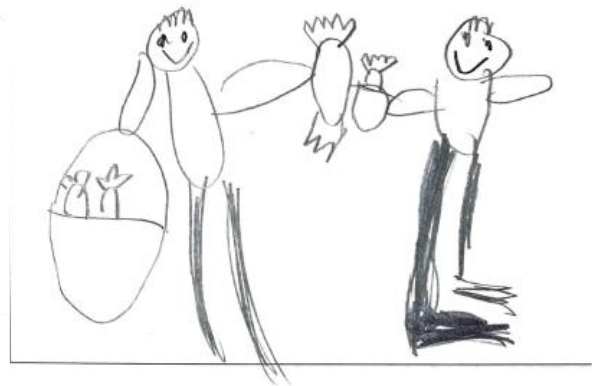
decoration p 9

p10



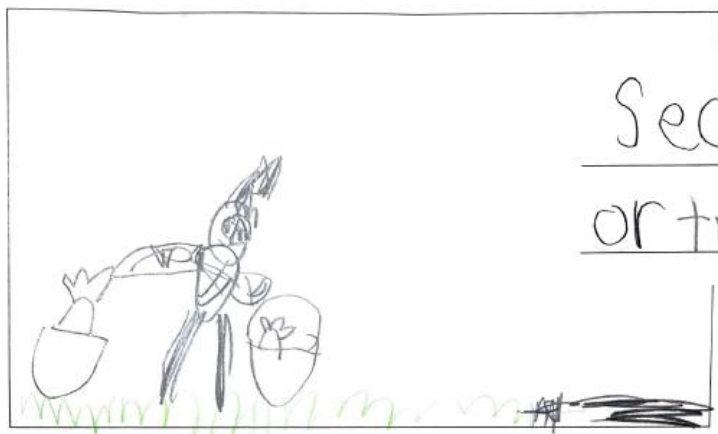
the nija cors is fun  
they giv you a bag of candy  
when you are done it is  
at the East brook mall in  
mans field.

the woom second biggest  
celebration.



the down town is the biggest  
halloween celebration before  
the real halloween.

first part of halloween  
is set up Put a box of  
candy outside.



Second part is trick  
or treating for 2 hours.

the best costume  
choice is a vampire.



the second best  
costume is a ghost.



the third best  
costume is a witch

the fourth best  
costume is a pumpkin.



the decoration you  
can buy decoration from  
dollar tree or you can get  
big paper and tape.

# The Dark Descent

By Emily Sako

## Prologue

**It was 1991 and a group of friends were playing a game later when something very bad happened so they vowed to never play it again. So, they hid the game so no one would find it but what they did not know was that the present who was supposed to play forgot to do it.**

## Halloween Night

### 20 years later

It was a beautiful Halloween night in Connecticut when the moon was full. Kids were laughing and having fun getting candy. You could smell pumpkins and sweet treats. You could see unique costumes and colorful decorations in yards.

"Where is Cody?" said Eve. They have been waiting for him. 20 Minutes later he finally came trick or treating. They were having fun laughing and playing together. Then they came across the abandoned house. No one knew what happened, all they knew was that nobody lived there. The house was falling apart and the color was a muddy brown. There were black broken windows, dead grass and not a single living thing, not even one flower or strand of life. You could not hear a single cricket, not a kid's laugh. All you could hear was silence, not even that. Emily told Spenser to go into the house. "No way," he said. "Come!" Said Emily. then they all said do it do do it. They were all chanting to do it. "Not going to happen", let's go" he said. So, they finished trick or treating and all went home.

## The Enter

Emily woke up still thinking about last night when they went to the abandoned house so she got out of bed, got ready and went to get her friends and told them to meet her at the abandoned house. They were all out but Cody once again he was late but this time he was "47 minutes and 34 seconds late and counting" said Eve. "You better have a legit reason for being late," they said. "Um um" said Cody "never mind" said Emily. "So why did you want us here?" said Eve. "Because I was up all night thinking about last night when we passed the abandoned house. also I got a sugar rush from all the candy", said Emily. Anyway, I think. "We should go in", said Emily. No way they all said Emily was Trying to convince them to go in. She convinced them but Spencer said I'm staying out. They all went in beside Spencer of course.

Inside the door creek it was gloomy ripped furniture if you could find some cobwebs, dead bugs, spider dead and alive, not a bit of light, it was dusty. "Spread out and look around" said Cody "I think we should stay to getter," said Eve. "I'm

with Cody," said Emily. They agreed they would spread out. Eve said "I am not feeling supercalifragilisticexpialidocious". "what the heck" they all said "never mind" said eve. They were all looking. Emily found something she called them over to come look at it was a game called Dark Descent they thought it sounded creepy. she said to "bring the game with them and leave" and they all agreed. So, they decided to get the game and leave. When they came out Spencer said "oh what is that" he said They explained to him what is. They decide to go to Emily's House and figure out what to do with the game.

## The life of The Dark Descent

They are Emily's house and they are all thinking about what to do with the game they think should we play it should we not play it.

### 4 hours later

Ok so we are going to play it, said Emily. "Yes" they all said. So, they opened the clouds of dust and took the game out of the box. Here are the directions Eve said "but we don't need them", she said . "Yes we do" said Cody there were going back and forth for 15 minutes finally Cody said "ok we don't need them". They were looking for the pieces. When they found a note it was old it had that yellow antique color and some rips were on it. It was curved and it was hard to read but it said beware of the game it might. "It might be what" Eve said. "I don't know what" they all said. They got the game all set and started playing. Everything was going well. They had been playing for 30 minutes in tile Emily land on a space that said ready or not here we are . Then suddenly thump bum. Then they here'd screaming "ahhh" they rushed outside to see what had happened.

## The Monster Outburst

They went to look outside to see what had happened. "Oh my god" said Spencer "what the beep" said Emily it was a big catastrophe. There were odd looking animals flying odd looking people. It was a mess all over town. Ahh said Spencer as a flying monkey flew right past him. People were running away from the "things" let's go outside, said Emily. They all went outside to get a closer look. Eve looked up and saw a giant purple and black hole that looked like a portal in the sky. "What is that?" said Eve. They all had no idea.

And to make it 10 times worse those "things" were coming out of it. They were looking around Town to see what was happening. When they were walking around town one of those things started to run after them. It was like a cheetah hippo dinosaur that flies after being chased by "it" for 15 minutes. They found a place to hide as so as they thought they were safe that thing came back "ah" Said Eve. They were running for their lives. They went into the store so much ruckus was happening they heard a woman screaming "ah" they went to go see what happened. "What happened?" said Emily to the woman. "my daughter is being carried by that monster", the woman said . They decided to help the women they started to try and jump up and pull the girl down. How about we try using a grabber to pull her down that did not work either. So Spencer said "I am going to go on top of one the shelf". Are you sure said Emily . "I am sure," said Spencer. He climbed up the shelf and got the kid. He got the kid and gave her to her mom. After that they left the store. "Aw, it is still crazy out here," said Cody . "What did you think?" said Eve. "I don't know," said Cody . Focus, we need to find a way to fix this, said Emily . "Let's go back to my house to look at the games for clues", said Emily ok the all said.

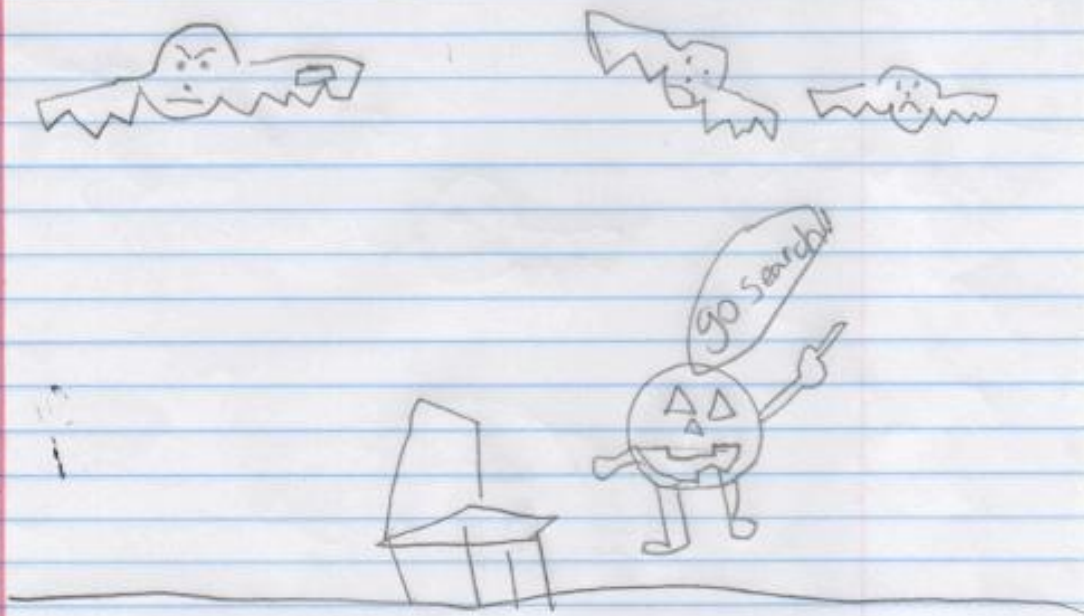
## I told you

They were at Emily's house and started to look for clues but just then some type zebra came through the wall and they grabbed the game and ran. They went outside, jumped, ran, hopped and leapt and finally they found a safe place to hide. They opened the game and looked for anything to help. They looked and looked but did not find anything. "Here are the instructions", said Cody. "We should have read them the first time, Eve," said Cody. "We have no time to bicker guys," said Emily. They opened the instructions and read them. "Hey guys did you know that those things are called descent creatures" said Emily. "Cool but we need to focus like you said" said Spencer. "Hey guys I found something", said Emily. They all went to look. It said in case a creature from the game came to life hit the red button on the back of the game and everything will rest. "I told you we should have read the instructions" said Cody. "Stop bickering", said Emily. "Ok let's hit that button" said Spencer. They hit the button and they waited 5 minutes and then went to check outside. "Yes", Eve said. "They all had disappeared and the hole in the sky was gone", said Emily. It was all over. Then Emily said "have you heard about the abandoned train station?" Noooooooo!!!! they all said. And they all laugh.

## The End

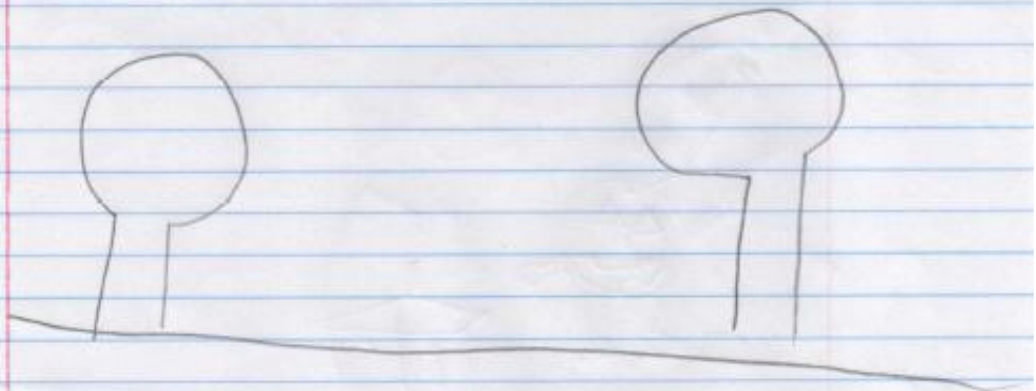


Once upon a time.  
There was a pumpkin  
king named pumpkin  
king of course. And he  
had one problem. He  
had a golden tooth and  
now its missing!



2

The bats searched for the golden tooth. But it was not found. even the big and small bats even the small one, but they couldn't find it.



3

The princess was worried.  
She was very worried.  
So one day she decided  
to help the bats.  
She searched between  
the trees in the woods  
and even the beach and  
finilly .....



4

she found it! It was under ground there was a bat and it was a bat and it looks like he stole it. She gave it to the king so the king gave the princess a little puppy. the state was happy again. the



# The Spooky Halloween Haunted House

By Dayun Seok

## Chapter one

“Mom! Amelia said, ‘Audrey is tackling me!’”

She had been tackled by Audrey many times, but she did not like it.

“Mia, I know you can be kinder to your little siblings!” her mom said.

She stomped up to her room and buried her face in the pillow (and screamed).

As she felt her face getting hot, she saw a shooting star. She wished, please don’t let me have any more siblings!

As she looked out the window, she saw the gentle fall breeze shaking the leaves of the little peach tree in her backyard, then saw the library she went to every day to study.

“Amelia, are you asleep?” asked Mom.

“I’m getting ready!” Amelia said.

She hated to sleep in this noisy city. Cars were always honking, and she had nightmares.

All she wanted was to escape the city and go back to Glastonbury

But that was impossible.

Her parents had settled here and found jobs.

At least tomorrow is Halloween, she thought as she tucked herself into her bed.

But something she did not know was that the house next to the library was haunted.

## Chapter two

BOOM! BOOM! Amelia yawned and said, “Who’s there?”

“Me! Audrey, you silly goose!” said Audrey.

“Mom said get ready for school!”

Amelia yawned one more time and put her slippers on.

“Brr! It’s freezing! I’d better wear warm clothes!”

Singing, “I love Halloween,” she dressed up in warm winter clothes and went downstairs.

She heard her mother trying to put clothes on George. She quickly ran downstairs, hoping her mom wouldn’t notice her. But of course, her Mom noticed her because she was too noisy.

She helped put the clothes on George.

Finally, when she made the shirt fit on George, she quickly ran downstairs.

She smelled bacon and eggs.

She ran to the bathroom, washed her hands, and rushed to get the good seat.

Mia asked their dad politely, "When are you going to order the costumes?"

"As soon as I can, honey," he answered.

"What are you going to be for this Halloween?" Amelia asked.

Mia was the only sibling Amelia liked.

"I think I'm going to be Hermione Granger!" Mia said excitedly.

"I guess I'll be a Rumi," she said, looking bored.

But she was very excited!

### **Chapter 3**

The reason she was excited was because she and her friends decided they would be characters from KPOP Demon Hunter. Amelia would be Rumi, Rosellina would be Zoey, and Audrey would be Mira.

They were planning to have a microphone in Amelia's hand.

They were also planning to say, "KPOP Demon Hunters rock!" instead of "Trick or Treat!"

When Amelia arrived, her two best friends, Rosellina and Audrey, were waiting for her.

"We got another great idea!" they squealed.

"What?" asked Amelia.

"We decided we will carry around chopsticks and Ramen stuffies with us!"

"Why?" Amelia asked again.

"Because in the movie they eat their preshow ramen!" Rosellina and Audrey squealed excitedly.

"You guys are geniuses!" Amelia shouted.

They discussed it during both lunch and gym! They couldn't wait for school to end.

When the final school bell rang, they couldn't wait and ran outside.

"Remember my house at 7:00!" Amelia said to her friends.

When she arrived at her house, she whined for her mom.

"Mom! Mom! Mom! Please get my costume ready! Mom! Mom! Mom! Please get my hair into a braid!"

After lots of fighting and whining, her mom finally started getting her costume ready.

She put on her costume, then went to the bathroom and waited for her braid to be done by her mom.

After lots of yelling, “That hurts!” and “Sorry!”, they finished the braid.

The only step left was waiting. There was still an hour until her friends came.

So she read a book, swung on the swings, wrote in her diary, and took a nap.

When she woke up, it was 5 minutes before 7:00.

So she grabbed her gigantic shopping bag, Ramen stuffie, Chopsticks, and a microphone.

#### **Chapter 4**

Ding Dong!

“Finally!” she thought as she raced to the door. When she opened the door, Zoey (Rosellina) and Mira (Audrey) were standing in the doorway.

“You guys look so cute!” Amelia exclaimed.

Then suddenly, someone said, “BOO!”

“Ahh!” Audrey, Amelia, and Rosellina shouted.

“Audrey!” Amelia shouted after everyone calmed down

“I’m telling Mom!”

After everyone put down their stuff, Amelia went to her mom.

“Mom! Audrey said Boo! and surprised us!”

After she finished talking to her mom, Amelia went back to Audrey and Rosellina.

Then her Mom came and gave Amelia a warning.

“If you tell on Audrey or any other of your siblings again, you will be grounded for a *WEEK!*” she whispered/shouted.

After that, when they finally got outside, Amelia said,

“So here is the plan. “We are going to spell **I LOVE RAMEN** while trick or treating!

After three houses, they crossed the street to the house next to the library.

They knocked on the door and waited for an answer.

#### **Chapter 5**

When the door swung open, they shouted,

“KPOP Demon Hunter rocks!”

But nobody was there.

“This is kind of creepy,” said Audrey.

“I agree,” said Rosellina.

But Amelia wasn't afraid.

"Let's go in!" she shouted.

"I don't want to," stammered Rosellina and Audrey.

"Well, are you scared?" she said in a louder, brave voice.

"N-No!" stammered Audrey.

"M-Me neither!" stammered Rosellina.

"Then prove it!" Amelia said as they stepped into the house.

## **Chapter 6**

When they stepped into the house, they heard a faint piano sound. When they went deeper then someone said

"OW! Are you hurt?" replied Amelia and Audrey in Unison.

"No. But look at this." Rosellina had hit some kind of rope.

Then, suddenly, the dark room lit up.

"Much better." said all three of them in Unison.

But then they saw the piano playing all by itself.

"Hmm. That might be a advanced piano." Amelia said.

Then she spotted the stairs.

"Let's go upstairs!" Amelia shouted excitedly.

They tried very very hard to not make any sound but since the staircase was old and creaky, it was impossible.

When they climbed up, they saw three rooms and a closet.

"Let's split up and go into each room!" Amelia said.

"No." shouted Audrey and Rosellina.

"Just kidding." Amelia said laughing.

When they open the first door, the room was full of gigantic spiders. So they shut the door. In the second room, there were full of black cats.

They quickly shut that door too because black cats are bad luck.

In the third door was a regular room.

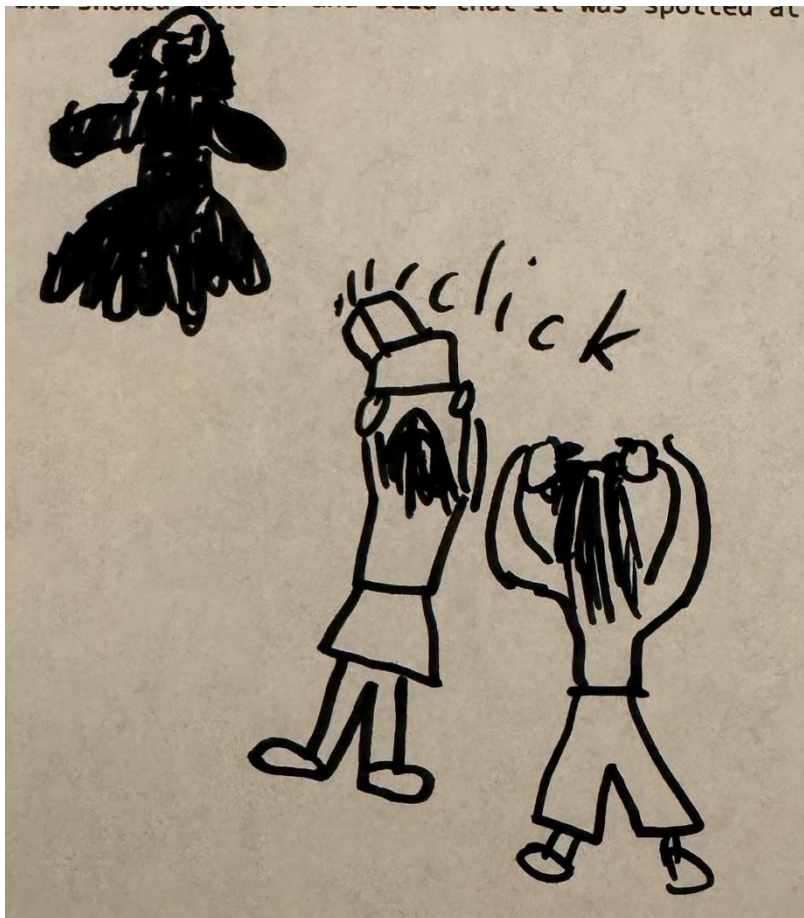
When they explored it, nothing weird happened.

When they walked towards the door and opened it..... A skeleton jumped out and frightened them.



Once they got home, Sharon checked the freezer and every treat in there was gone! It made no sense because she remembered that they had treats in their freezer. It was lunchtime already and Sharon asked her mom to make her a ham sandwich for lunch. Sharon ate her lunch and then played some video games then went to her soccer practice. Once she got home she went to bed.

When she woke up, her mom made waffles for breakfast, so Sharon ate some waffles. Then she called her friend Lily and told her she was going to her house now and Lily said that was fine. Sharon walked to Lily's house and once she got there she told Lily what happened at the store. Then Sharon and Lily went on the walk and brought the flashlights. The trail of candy wrappers were still there so they followed the wrappers and they got to the cave so they turned on their flashlights and they went in the cave. It had cobwebs and was very scary like a house that you would trick or treat at... but then there was a scary deep voice saying, "need more candy, need more candy!"



They pointed their flashlights toward that voice and they saw monster with an ant head and a spider body it looked creepy and it had an even more scary shadow. Sharon brought her camera and took a picture of the candy eating monster.

Sharon and Lily ran to Lily's house and then told Lily's mom. She reported it to the news station and then Sharon went home and told her mom that Lily's mom told the news station so her mom did not have to. Sharon went to bed and woke up and then watched news and it showed that a monster was spotted at Minnechaug Mountain in a cave.

# The Library That Watches

By Lily Shanbaum

Most stories about Halloween are about ghosts and witches. This one happened at Welles Turner Memorial Library, a building that is long gone now-and for good reason too.

It all started on one Halloween night in a small town called Glastonbury. This girl is the one who started it all. Her name is Autumn and she is why we tell this story, to warn people not to go out on Halloween each year. If you don't hear this you will suffer the consequences. "Come on, come on! The candy thieves are coming and I want to keep my loot!" I yelled to my friend. I wanted to get to all the houses this year and get as much candy as possible. The leaves crunched beneath my feet as I ran swiftly through the houses pausing to ring doorbells. "Wait up Autumn!" My friend Elizabeth exclaimed out of breath and breathing heavily, "Jeez what happened to you?" I said jokingly, "Come on I think I know a shortcut, it's through the library we can sneak past them there," I said, "No way! That's breaking and entering we could get in big trouble, I don't want to go to jail because I broke into a library!" Elizabeth said. "Or we could quickly go into the library, sneak past the candy thieves and actually keep our candy this year!" I shot back. "Fine, but it will have to be really quick. If I get caught doing this I'm blaming it on you," Elizabeth said reluctantly. "Woah it's really cold out, maybe the library will be warmer inside too," I said, "How are we going to get in though? There must be locks," Elizabeth wondered "Well let's try the door if it works that will technically not be breaking and entering because we are not breaking! Right?" I said. Creeeeaaakk, "It's almost open! I guess this door is just rusty, one good kick and we can definitely get in!" I exclaimed "Ok, we get in and out, remember," Elizabeth said "I'll do the kick, 3,2,1". I said. BLAM! The door slammed open.

"The library definitely isn't warmer inside," I said. "Come on! We have to go quickly, The door is on the other side! But it smells like somebody died in here, yuck" Elizabeth whispered. "Hey! Come over here! I found a loose panel on the floor by the fiction books!" I said "*wow it really is getting cold in here maybe I'll find a secret air conditioner under this panel.*" I thought to myself. "Woah!" Elizabeth said, running over "Let's just try to pry it up. I bet that's what you're thinking, almost like you want to be breaking the rules. Now it'll be more broken than before!" Elizabeth groaned. Good thought, who knows what we'll find under there, thanks for the idea!" I replied. "Ughhh I regret what I said," Elizabeth mumbled. Bang! Bang! "I got it! Time to see what's really in there,"

"Wait! The security cameras! We have to go now, or else somebody might hear our voices!" "Darn it, Let's go!" I said. I started running with my head downwards then abruptly stopped. "Wait, Elizabeth, why is the panel fully open? You told me you didn't open it." I said as I looked over my shoulder. "We have to get in and out, remember?" I exclaimed. Then I looked over my shoulder and she wasn't there, something isn't right! "I didn't open the panel, we are not alone! Run away, go quickly!" Elizabeth screamed from under the panel "This isn't a time to joke her around! Let's go!" I said. I ran over hoping to pull her out, instead I saw something that made me want to scream and I could only choke out a "No!" I saw her sprawled out, eyes hazed and head twisted like a candy cane. Her wings from her fairy costume are still on. Then I ran, I didn't know what else to do. I ran as fast as my legs could carry me.



The clown almost grabs the back of my shirt, but I dive into a room with the door cracked open just in time. I quickly close the door and lock it, relieved that I got away. The clown jiggles the doorknob, trying to open the door, but it stays locked. When I look to see what's in this room, I scream again, debating if I should stay put or leave and let the clown catch me. A witch is staring at me, mixing a bubbly green potion! She adds the contents of a glass bottle to her potion. I squint to read the label and I gag when I see what it says. It says "Frogs Breath". Ewwwwwww. I notice a door to the right of me, so I open it and quickly walk through, shutting and locking the door behind me.

The next thing I see is frightening, but not totally unexpected. It's a vampire!

He notices me and says "I vont to suck your blood!" Classic.

"Not today!" I exclaim and dash through the nearest doorway. Just as I'm about to head down a long hallway, I hear voices.

"You better run!"

I look behind me and see the witch, the vampire, and the clown, along with several other scary creatures.

"Oh no!" I think.

I sprint down the hallway and find the closest unlocked door a few rooms down. I lock it behind me as fast as I can. Luckily, this room doesn't contain anything except a few boxes. I need to find Fluff and get out of here. Just then, I see a window. If it's unlocked, I can climb out, since I'm on the first floor. I check, and a smile spreads across my face when I see that it is! I swing my right leg out, then my left. Once I'm safely outside, I shut the window behind me, relieved that I was able to escape.

I look back at the haunted house, not knowing what it looks like, since I woke up inside of it. I flinch when I see a black cat looking out one of the windows at me. The house is big and black and several windows are boarded up. I run out of the yard and down the road towards my house. I've seen the haunted house before, but I just thought it was a normal abandoned house.

Just as I'm about to give up hope of finding Fluff, I hear a bark. I look behind me and see him!

"FLUFF!"

I scoop up the cute little dog, happy that I have him back in my arms. I head into my house and put my pajamas on. I climb into bed and Fluff jumps into bed with me. When I look out my window, I swear that I see the clown's glowing red eyes, but, when I blink, there's nothing there. I shrug, thinking that I probably imagined it. I'm about to close my eyes to go to sleep when I see a folded note tucked into Fluff's collar. I take it out and my heart skips a beat when I read what it says.

"I'LL GET YOU NEXT TIME!"

I shudder, but, before I can do anything else, I'm fast asleep.

## Untitled

by Julian Smith

Once upon a time there was a house on Main Street. It was haunted and said to be first owned by zombies. You might think it's fake but let me tell you about a man who bought the house.

There once was a man named Jeff. Jeff was a little stupid, so he bought a haunted house. When Jeff walked onto the property it started storming. Jeff wanted a refund, but the scammer who scammed him ran! Jeff walked into the house. It had cobwebs in every corner. Jeff heard a loud scream. He checked the whole house and nobody was there. Then he heard a door open, and a Zombie popped out and spooked Jeff! Jeff screamed.

The zombie asked him "Where am I? Who are you? All I remember is falling from a big building." Jeff answered, "you are in Glastonbury Connecticut, and you are dead." The Zombie seemed sad. Then Jeff said, "hey you look like my friend Bob." The zombie lit up, he said "Jeff." They hugged. Jeff and Bob heard screaming. The headless horseman was outside throwing flaming pumpkins. They had to think quickly. Jeff told Bob to grab the headless horseman's horse's feet, so Bob did it while Jeff grabbed a shovel and knocked the headless horseman out.

Ok, ok, I know that story was not scary, so let me tell you about a story about why the headless horseman was at that exact house.

Once upon a time, a kid named Alex was born. He grew up rich until his parents died. It was sad. He got adopted by zombies. He lived at the same house from earlier. He is 15 years old now. He was made fun of because his stepparents were zombies. One day he bonked his head on metal. He was in the hospital for a year. Then they super glued a pumpkin to his neck. He wanted revenge so in his backpack he kept a lighter and pumpkins. His horse was his service animal. Then every year on Halloween, he gets revenge on anyone near his old house.

Okay well I got to get to lunch so catch you later, bye.

## The Haunting of Barnes & Noble

By Harper Stickle

By Harper Stickle

"The Haunting of Barnes  
and Noble"



It was a dark and stormy night at Barnes and Noble. Boom! People were driving, zombies that were coming to life grabbed them. They attack them, people were scared so they went in Barnes and Noble and lock the door and windows. Warriors fight them to save their lives, kids were scared, they lit a fire in Barnes and Noble. Zombies came and vampires, and ghost came. Then the most scariest monster is Frankenstein, they ran away with fire on them, and they lived happily ever after.

the end!

## The Ghost in the Library

By Ishan Sundar

### The Ghost in the Library

One windy day in Glastonbury, a boy named Ishan went to the Welles-Turker Library. He loved reading books about everything!

While walking past the shelves, Ishan saw a book glowing. "That's strange!" he said. He opened it - and POOF! a friendly ghost popped out!

Ishan dropped the book and shouted, "Ahh!" The ghost smiled, "Don't be scared! Thank you for freeing me. I was stuck in that book for 100 years!"

The ghost's name was Bitsy. He said he used to help people find books long ago.

Now Bitsy helps the librarians again! Sometimes when Ishan visits, he sees books glowing - that's Bitsy showing the way. Every Halloween, Ishan leaves a little pumpkin in the library to say, "Thank you, Bitsy!"

by

Ishan Sundar

# Untitled

## By Emma Tang

“Crunch, crunch, crunch” is the sound from the fallen leaves on the ground. Five girls were walking to school. They were Rose, Stella, Violet, Jesse and me, the narrator Emma. The date was October 30, 2019.

“Race ya to the pole!” said Violet.

“That’s not fair,” yelled Rose.

“Yeah, you’re the fastest,” Stella added.

“Oh you’ll be fine Stella. You’re third fastest. It’s Rose you should worry about,” said Jesse.

“Hey!” Rose said crossing her arms.

I laughed with Stella and Jesse, and then something caught my eye. It looked like a ghost, but it couldn’t be. When it saw me looking, it ran into a tree and then into a bush. I got so caught up in my thoughts and what I saw that I didn’t hear Jesse say, “Come on Violet is waiting!” That’s when I said “Hey wait up!”

Luckily I ran to the flag pole right before Rose. “I’m...here....not...the..rotten ..egg..” I said exhausted.

“Haha you got an extra head start and Emma still beat you,” Stella teased.

“Hmm!” Rose mumbled and looked away.

As we entered the school we saw all the eyes on us. We all handled it very well, because we are the most popular girls in the school. As I saw all the eyes on us it reminded me of the ghost thing I saw staring at me during our walk to school. I just had to tell them. “Hey guys..” I was cut off by Monica.

“Look who showed up,” Monica said.

We hated Monica. She was rude and we didn’t have anything in common so we had to say “no” to her wanting to be part of our group. Ever since then she hated us. She even started her own crew “MONICA’S QUEEN BEES.” They were Leah, Ruby, Mia, Lila, and Laila.

“Of course we had to show up. It’s school. Oh and who’s that? A new student?” Violet asked Monica.

Monica replied, “Yes a new girl. I call her Nerdy and she’s with me.” Nerdy had her head down and her curly, long dark brown hair covered her face. Nerdy looked shy and had leaves stuck in her hair.

“Oh ok. Well, welcome umm... Nerdy,” Violet said as she turned away from Monica and back to our group.

“What are you wearing for Halloween?” I asked.

"I'm going to be a fairy and Rose is going to be a rose!" Stella replied.

"I'm going to be a rose too!" said Jesse.

"OMG me too!" added Violet.

"SAME," I said so surprised. As we were walking to class, I remembered the ghost again but I didn't want to bring it up and tried to forget. I didn't want to spook my friends.

School ended and the five of us met up in the front by the flagpole. In the distance, I saw Monica walk off the school grounds and into the woods that were next to our school. Ahead of her was the same ghost that I had seen earlier in the day.

"Do you guys see that? Monica is following the ghost I saw this morning but forgot to tell you all," I said.

"OMG, let's follow too," Violet said with adventure in her eyes.

So we follow Monica down a path and into the woods that no one ever talks about. Jesse said, "Guys, did you know a young boy walked into these woods and never came back out." We all stopped in our tracks and gave Jesse a look, but then we heard a scream. "I would know that sound from anywhere. That's Monica!" I said "And she's in big trouble." We sprinted down the woody path until we get to an abandoned house.

The screaming suddenly stopped as we stood outside the house, analyzing it. It suddenly got colder and windier. You could hear the house creaking every time the wind blew. The windows were all boarded up so no sunlight could peek through. There were missing floorboards on the front porch. There was even a wind chime hanging from the front porch that seemed like it was whispering an eerie tune.

"Whoa, this is scary," Violet said.

I said, "Come on we have to go in. Something happened to Monica."

Stella said, "Emma, what if it's a prank?"

Jesse said, "We should go in together as a group."

"Fine!" Rose mumbled.

"So you, Jesse, Rose, and Violet should check upstairs and me and Stella will check downstairs ok?" I said.

"Ok" they said.

After five minutes someone screamed and we ran upstairs to see Jesse and Rose with a smirk on their face "Gotcha" said Jesse. While Jesse, Stella, and me were arguing about how funny that was, suddenly something tapped Rose on the shoulder and pulled her backwards.

"Rose, NO!" Stella screamed. Then we heard someone yell, "Leave her alone!" It was Leah, one Monica's Queen Bees pulling Rose back to our group.

"Seems like you do need us, and where's Monica?" Leah said out of breath.



# Mini Meg

By Sasha Vivek

*A girl stares out the window of a bus. The bus lurches to a stop. The music on the radio drifts away as the bus pulls into the parking lot of Timber Middle School.*

*The animal watches her get off, with hungry eyes. It has not eaten for a while. The girl suddenly sees the animal. It ducks under the leaves, hoping not to be seen. Waiting for a perfect moment to replenish its hunger.*

"And after that, we painted our nails and went to Rob's Ice Cream to have the most delicious ice cream ever!!! Like sooo good!" "Meg are you even listening?!"

"Yes Annette, I'm listening." I insist. My friend Annette continues to drone on about her day over at her new friend Brooklyn's house.

"And guess what?" she asks. I start to ask "what?" but Annette keeps going. "She invited me to go to Seattle with her! I asked if you could come with me, but she said no. Sorry." I know Annette didn't even try. Annette waits for my reaction, but I refuse to give her one. I'm not going to show how sad and embarrassed I am. We're both quiet, so I stare out the window. "Just so you know, I said yes." she says quietly. We're silent for the rest of the bus ride. I get off the bus alone.

*The animal is awakened from its nap by a screeching sound. It opens one eye, or at least what's left of it. Buses are pulling into the parking lot of Timber Middle. But no one notices the motionless body of the animal.*

*"Good, Good," the animal says to itself. It couldn't wait any longer...*

Annette does not talk to me for any of the classes we have together. Even for science, during which we are partners. She only talks to Brooklyn and everyone else. She forgets all about me. This might be one of my loneliest days ever. I can't wait to go home.

*Kids are getting on the bus. After the animal sees the girl get on, it knows that it is time. Once the animal sees the girl walk on the bus, it recedes back into a patch of woods. It travels the familiar path it traveled last century. It follows the hundred year old footprints it had left behind one hundred years ago. Finally, it reaches a tiny cabin in the woods. The animal does not need to open the door, as there isn't one. The cabin is rundown, with a broken roof, and leaky pipes. But also has good nooks and crannies and piles of leaves to hide things. The animal walks over to the kitchen. Sitting there, just as it had a hundred years ago is a doll. Only now it looks different. It has straight black hair, brown shiny eyes, and rosy cheeks. Just like the girl. "Purrfect" the animal thinks. "You just like her!" It exclaims.*

I'm getting on the bus, and I can swear I hear something shuffle behind me, which is weird, since I'm last in the line to get on the school bus. I turn around, to see nothing but Timber Middle School. Since nothing is there, I shrug it off and sit down, but I can't shake the feeling that something is watching me. That's when I see it. In the parking lot, two-year-old me is sitting in the grass. No, wait, it's a doll! I squint to get a better look. It looks exactly like me! Straight black hair, shiny brown eyes, and rosy cheeks. There's only two differences between us, her height and her expression. Her shiny brown eyes look sad, almost as if she were about to cry any moment now. Her smile is faintish, and depressed.

Before I have a chance to look at her again, the bus pulls away from the parking lot. Away from Mini Meg. Yes, that's what I'll call her. Mini Meg. She looks like me after all!

*"It's working. The girl wants the doll no matter what. She will stop at nothing to get it. Heck, she even named it!" The animal says outloud to itself.*

*It is very excited to see what it will do to her.*

The next day, I have a plan. I will walk to school! The school is pretty close to my house, so my parents should let me walk. I go up to my parents in the morning, and after much convincing, my plan is able to be put into action. I pull on my Converse, rather than Uggs because you definitely do not want to walk to school in cozy, cute shoes. I walk out of Lennox Drive and into Timber Lane. Then, I see her. She looks exactly like me! Today, she is wearing the same outfit as me. A comfy bow sweater with baggy jeans. She even has mini Converse! Somehow, I do not find this strange. We're alike after all. I pick her up. She greets me with a warm, comforting smile.

I stuff her in my backpack. I know that's very rude, but I don't want anybody to see her.

*The animal watches the girl pick up the doll. It smiles a crooked smile. The animal is hungry. Suddenly, the bus pulls up. The girl quickly runs away into the building before the bus reaches. The bus driver pulls into the parking lot, not paying any attention to the animal.*

*The animal wakes up next afternoon, and decides its time. The girl has had time to bond with the doll. Yes, yes, she has been talking to it, comforting it, telling it that they're alike. The animal is so excited.*

Mini Meg is telling me to go to the forest constantly. She says that our friendship will have to end if I don't. So I will, because she is a great friend, and I don't want our friendship to end.

Next thing I know, I'm standing outside a cabin. Mini Meg stops talking. The door of the cabin is ajar, like somebody has left it open for me. I go inside.

"Hello?" I call. Nobody responds. I step inside, and look around. The outside had looked cozy, and as if somebody recently had lived in it, but the inside was the exact opposite. The walls were made of rotting wood, and furniture lay askew over the dusty floor. I shriek in terror when I see a dead rat laying on a toppled over chair. I turn around to leave, but the door shuts in my face, but to my horror, the handle breaks off. Then, I hear a rough, scratchy sound behind me. I see a creature that looks so terrifying that I can't describe it\*. It lunges at me. I scream, terrified. I know it's over for me. I take one last look at Mini Meg. She's still smiling.

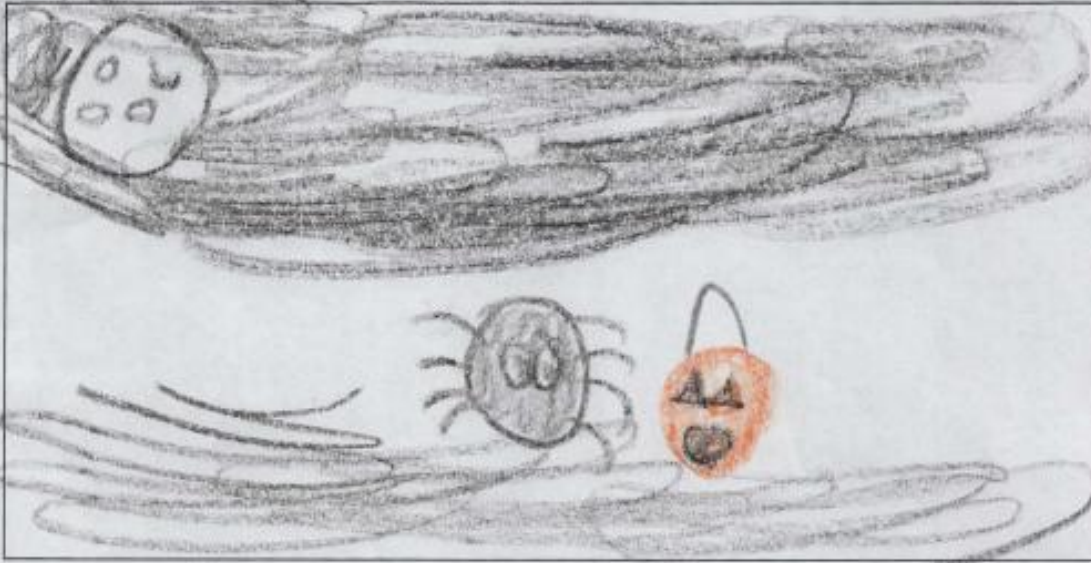
THE END

\*Trying to be appropriate.

Untitled  
By Eliza Warner

Name:

Date:



once upon a time

there was a little

spider. He was

going trick or

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



treating. He

found on haunted

house. He was

scared. He lost

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



his Mom. Without

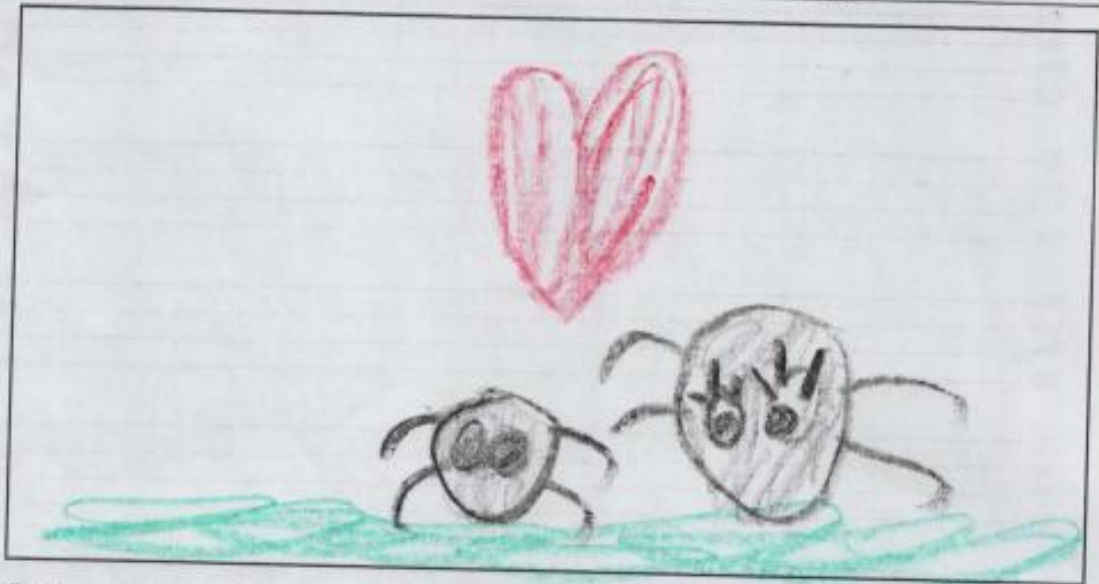
his Mom he was

scared. One day,

after Halloween

Name:

Date:



he found his mother

he was happy he

wasn't afraid anymore

He had a happy

ever after

By: Eliza Warner

Grade 1 Age 6

## A Haunted Hopewell

By Lily Wilson [11 years old]

*"Ugh." I said as my Mom woke me up that Halloween morning.*

*"Wake up and get into that costume, you've got that party at school today!" she said.*

*Great! I thought sarcastically. I hate Halloween parties where you have to get dressed up in your costume while everybody else laughs at you if you wear one that's corny or babyish. Everyone will do that to me because I have a dinosaur costume that my 4-year-old brother picked out for me. "I don't want to go!" I yell into my pillow.*

*"Well you have to because we already paid for the ice cream they will give you there!" she snapped back. "Be up in ten or else!" she yelled even louder.*

*Or else what? I asked myself in my head. Well you should never quarrel with Mom. Her words are like steel, and yours just bounce right off of them. So I was up in 5 minutes. After I brushed my teeth and got dressed I went to go wake Kevin, my little brother. We went downstairs for breakfast and found Mom's delectable, perfectly round pancakes that she flips herself with a sprinkle of cinnamon on top.*

*"Tyler, you've got to start appreciating your last year in elementary school at this school. Have fun at this party, hang out! But remember you're going home with Ryan and going trick or treating with a bunch of other kids," she said.*

*"Yes! I'm so thrilled to go trick or treating!" I say.*

*"But remember I have one rule!" she said sternly.*

*"I know, I know! Stay together!" I said.*

*Honk Honk!*

*"Oh, the bus is here. Hurry, boys, get shoes on and grab your backpacks and run for it! Have a good day!" She said.*

*Finally, we get to go! The reason Kevin is in Kindergarten early is because he skipped a grade! He's that smart! Anyway, once I got on the bus the staring began and of course the laughing. My cheeks flushed a deep red. I was so embarrassed. Even Kevin was laughing at me! That little baby! Being in 4th grade and wearing a dinosaur costume was the most humiliating thing ever! Kevin lucked out, Mom bought him a cool ninja outfit that I wanted so badly! At dismissal when Ryan's bus was called, out we went! Time for trick or treating!*

*"You're going to love the candy. It's all king size bars in my neighborhood!" said Ryan. "We're also stopping by the school to watch a parade and play hide and seek and laser tag in the school!"*

*"Awesome, can't wait!" I replied. An hour later, we were ready to go trick or treating! I also found out that I was sleeping over at Ryan's house that night so Mom dropped off all my stuff. We went trick or treating for about one and a half hours. Then Ryan's Dad dropped us off at the school and said "Have fun boys." And he was gone.*

*We got tickets for all the activities and made our way to the parade's start. The parade was fun. We devoured junk food and laughed recklessly at weird costumes.*

*Next, we went into Hopewell School and got into the laser tag vests and then we spread out around the school. I myself went to the second grade wing and while I was hiding, something brushed around my leg. I suddenly got chills! I went to find Ryan or Will or Jack but I couldn't find them. I checked classroom after classroom but no luck. I started to get worried. Was this a prank or even worse am I alone? My thoughts seemed to echo in my head. I decided to go to the main entrance because that's where this nightmare started. I tried the door, locked! I tried all the other exits and all of them were locked! Just then I heard a bone-chilling scream! "That sounded like Ryan," I said aloud.*

*I ran toward the screaming and found myself in the art room! I saw Ryan backed into a corner looking pale like he had seen a ghost! He looked at me then looked at the ceiling. I then realized that he was terrified for his life! I became scared for him and myself. I looked up at there I saw a huge creature with the fangs of a vampire, claws of a cat, body of a skeleton, and the head of a pumpkin! It pounced on me, ripping my*

vest off and running out of the room! “AAAAHHHHHHH!” I ran out of the art room following the yell. And went into the gym at a sprint.

When I got there, I couldn't see anything because of a powder. I reached out my hand and pulled it back. “Sand?” I questioned. Suddenly the swirling stopped to reveal Will standing there looking frozen! Then a Mummy popped out of the sand pile and started towards Will. I started to run towards the Mummy. I tackled him and started to unwrap him! But he just wrapped himself right back up like nothing had happened.

Now that Ryan had caught up with me, we started to smell something burning. I turned and saw that the mummy was literally on fire! The mummy started to freak out, setting the gym on fire. I grabbed a fire extinguisher and sprayed it everywhere I could. After the smoke and spray had cleared the mummy was gone! It just disappeared!

It took a while to find Will because he was too traumatized to move and he was also covered with spray. Then, again ...

“AAAAAIIIIIIFFFFE!!!!” This was getting to be Deja vu! I started running toward the music room. This time I found Jack sitting there really pale like a ghost! This time it was a vampire baring its fangs at him upside down on the ceiling. It dropped down and landed flawlessly on its feet — its cape flowing out behind him. It started to advance on Jack so I grabbed his cape and started pulling him back to result in him falling down and turning on me! I started to back away almost tripping over my own feet. He kept coming at me so I turned and ran at lightning speed toward the cafeteria with him chasing me down the hallway.

When I got there, I started to turn the kitchen over. Searching for ... *GARLIC!* I had found it and it was going to drive that vampire away, outside and out of my school! So that's what I did! This had been an adventure and a very long night! So much for the sleepover. So, the 4 of us together staggered out of there drained and cheerful that we had each other's backs.

# Untitled

## by Ruby Wilson

### Introduction

It was the day before Halloween and everybody was out buying candy for trick-or-treaters. And everybody else is decorating for Halloween. Except for Sarah and Jane Wilcox. "I'm bored!" said Jane. "Time for dinner," said Mrs. Wilcox. "Okay!" they both said. When they ran over to the dinner table, they were both surprised to see that their father was home early. "Dad what are you doing home so early" asked Sarah. "Me and your mother have something we want to tell you! The Halloween school party is back on!" "YES!" they both said in excitement.

Hi! I'm Jane and I have a twin sister! We are 9 years old and we both go to a school called Hillbrook Elementary. My address is 56 Coker Ave, Connecticut! I'm in Mrs. Cackle's 4th grade class. My favorite subject is probably gym because I love to run around and play sports outside. I also love to do arts and crafts.

### Chapter 1

"Wake up wake up," said Sarah. "What?" I said. "It's Halloween!" said Sarah. "What?" I said again. "It's Halloween!" Sarah said again. I sprang out of bed. My favorite holiday I thought. I quickly got downstairs to see my mother in the kitchen making Halloween pancakes. "Mmmm" I said as I saw them. Screeeeeeeech! "Oh no!" I said. "The bus is early!" I grabbed my pancakes and shoved them in my mouth and then I grabbed my backpack and gave my mom a hug and ran after Sarah onto the bus. 10 minutes later the bus arrived at Hillbrook Elementary. When I walked into school, I heard a loud boom boom clap! Music! I thought. That reminds me of the Halloween party! I wonder what they will have?

### Chapter 2

As the day went on, I thought about the Halloween party more and more. I was so shaky and couldn't wait until the party. When we were going home on the bus, I was so excited. When I got off the bus, I sprinted up the driveway and into the house. And Sarah followed after me. I put my backpack down and grabbed my skeleton costume and put it on and so did Sarah. "I am so excited to be matching skeletons!" Sarah said. "Me too!" I replied. "Girls are you ready to go to the party?!" My mom asked.

### Chapter 3

"Yes!" We both shouted. "Okay hop in the car!" she said. When we got there me and Sarah jumped out of the car and sprinted to the ice cream truck. "I'm going to get some. How about you?" I asked Sarah. "Yes please!" Replied Sarah. "Yum!" I said. "Do you want to go over to the haunted house?" I asked Sarah. "Sure!" she said. We went to the haunted house. And as soon as we walked in a bloody werewolf came chasing me and Sarah! It took us 5 minutes but we eventually lost him! A couple more steps and steps out a zombie covered in ooze! "Gross!" I shouted. "I know right?" Sarah asked. "Yeah!" I replied. "Ahhhhh!" Sarah screamed! "What's wrong?" I asked her in confusion!



# HAUNTED HOUSE

By Ethan Xu

One time, a boy was walking the wrong way. He went into a house and then a sound came out "Arrrrrkkkk". What was that? He tried to be brave, and then the sound came out again "Arrkk, Arrkk, Arrkk, Arrkk creck". He did not know what it was from. He said "COME OUT WHERE EVER YOU ARE!!!" said the boy "and then BOO!".

"AAAA!" Screaming the boy "Haunted House! I am in a Haunted House! I am getting chased!" And then that person took off the mask and said "Happy Halloween!" He laughed and said "Happy Halloween too!"

x x

*I don't know how you will feel after reading this story, but it sure might frighten you! Keep your eyes wide and peeled out for little details. Never fear what's going on in a book!*

## HAUNTE<sub>D</sub>

By Ivan Xu

### *Joined for the Spooky house writing contest*

Amilitinsa was walking along her street when she found she was lost. This day has gone worse than she imagined, and now she doesn't know how to fix it. Her mom was mad at her for wasting all of her money. She was just about to turn around when she heard a creaking sound. She then saw a shadow looming over her. She didn't believe what she was seeing. There was a big house looming up tall in front of her. So she creaked open the door. The big house was filled with cobwebs, spiders, and eerie noises. She looked around and noticed that there were missing planks, shattered windows, and creaky stairs. Then she tried taking a step. The floor creaked and groaned, and then it jolted to one side, almost scaring Amilitinsa.

She walked faster. Then the next thing she knew, there was a loud crashing sound followed by a sudden flash of shade. Her head spun around to see that a plank had fallen from the second floor. She called, "Anyone here? Hello? Come out if you're there!" Zero movement. She jumped over the plank and then the floor cracked when she landed. "I should try being more careful," she said to herself. She slowly walked up the stairs. Then she heard a thump sound. She spun her head towards the sound to figure out that a door had fallen down. Then she was walking into the living room. She shined her flashlight at the room to see that there were at least 25 doors in the room. She opened every one of them but there were five of them that won't budge. She pulled and pulled at the first one. The knob even came off. So, she sat down. Then, with a pop, a door popped open. She walked in to see a shining key. She tried it, then it opened. She peeked inside. Nothing. So, she tried the key for the second one. It doesn't budge. So, she walked around to find that under the pillow of the couch was a shining key. That brought her back to the room where the second one lay. She tried it, and it opened. She peered inside. Still nothing. She found all of the rest of the keys and tried them, but each one of the

keys didn't lead to anything. So, she walked around the house. Then a big pile of planks blocked her path. She tried kicking the pile, but it wouldn't budge. Then she noticed that there was a big hole in the roof so she climbed out of the house and onto the roof. She noticed that there were holes in the roof so she was careful about them. Then she climbed through a hole to get into a room. Then she ran through door after door, desperate to escape the house. But then the floor opened like a big hole and she fell through. She then hit hard on the dirt floor. White stars of pain explode in her eyes as she loses consciousness. Then she blacks out. Her memories of getting hurt from falling drifted back to her. One time she was sitting on a tree then she fell through a narrow hole. Another time she was on the diving board of her pool then she slipped and fell into the cold water. Another time she fell down from her gymnastics bar and hurt her ankle. She opened her eyes and focused them on a shining light in the distance. She got up cautiously and walked towards the light. Then she heard it. A low rumbling sound. Then a bunch of planks fell down from the sky and made a brain breaking maze. She weaved in and around parts of the maze, and sometimes a big part of the maze would fall and make a pile of planks so she would have to find another way around. She would every few seconds come up to a dead end and have to backtrack. And then she came up to a wall where there was no way to go around it. She then started walking backwards, then, with all her strength, she burst through the pile of wood and hurled herself straight onto the floor where the light came from. Then she saw it: The glowing treasure. She stared at the glowing treasure. This will fix all of her money problems. This will make her mom be so thankful. This will let her do whatever she wants. She had to get that chest. So, she closed it and tried lifting the chest. It wouldn't budge. She looked down and saw that there were bolts that bolted the chest to the floor. She quickly pulled a screwdriver out of her pocket and unscrewed the bolts. She lifted the chest - it was surprisingly light - and carried it to the hole she fell through. "Now the question is: how do we get back up?" She said to herself. She gathered up a lot of planks and one by one stacked them on top of each other to make stairs. She stepped up to the 10th stair then there was a creaking sound. She rushed up all of the stairs and jumped up just in time. But then she noticed that the chest was not in her hands. She looked down and shouted, "NOOOOOOO!!!!!!!" The treasure chest was falling. Then the chest smashed against the ground and the coins flew everywhere. Only one was able to get up to the creaking stair that was next to her. But it was too late. The stairs crashed to the ground and left poor Amilitinsa sobbing on the floor of the house. Then she heard a sound. A crashing sound. She ran up the hallway and saw that a gigantic diamond had flown through the air and smashed into the upstairs bedroom and was now flying down the stairs. She grabbed hold of it and creaked open the door. Only this time, she had to get back to her house - and fast. She sprinted towards the south side of the street and ran east. Then she ran southwest through the trees. She ran, and ran, and ran for what seemed like hours. She finally came to a stop, panting. She looked around. The place looked familiar. She tried looking into the trees and caught a glimpse of purple - the color of their house. She ran through the woods, desperate to make it back. She weaved in and around trees to try to make it back, but then was blocked by a row of poison ivy. "Now how will I get across?" she groaned. She then fished around in her pocket to find something useful. All she found was a roll of tape, a compass, a whistle, a piece of paper, and scissors. "Wait ... scissors! I can use this pair of scissors to cut down a few stalks of poison ivy, then jump through!" she said, practically shouting. She sliced thoroughly through every stalk in her way, but that was no use. It kept on growing. "Looks like I have to find some other path." She ran along the path next to her and soon came along another house. This house was familiar too. She ran along the bend to find

out how far this way would stretch. Soon she came up to a split path. She flashed a look at the signs but could not see anything. So, she pulled out the things that were in her pocket. She tried the whistle. No one came. She sliced the roll of tape to tape "HELP" on a tree. Then she looked down at her compass and followed it to her house, leading it back to the line of poison ivy. But this time there was a path in the ground, so she followed it which eventually came up through the row of poison ivy. She then spotted the little hole in the row of poison ivy - it was big enough to fit her in! She tried to get through, and made it to the other side. But there was a big stream she doubted she could jump across. She was just about to jump until she felt something in her other pocket. She pulled the thing out to find out it was an axe. An incredibly small but useful axe. She started to chop down a thick tree nearby. The tree fell over the stream, long enough for her to climb up and get to the other side. But when she climbed on, a creaking sound was heard. Before she knew it, there was a crack in front of her. She scrambled back to watch the tree snap into two and fall into the stream. She tried to scream, but the sound was caught in her throat. There was only one option: go through the stream. She had watched the tree snap in two and sink to the bottom of the stream. She barely saw the wood - it had to be at least 5 feet deep! She climbed down to the riverbank to get in. She first took off her clothes so they wouldn't get wet, then she touched the water with her foot. "Brrr...this is cold. I'm not taking the risk to get in." After that thought, she put her clothes back on and pulled that axe out again. She swung it hard at a really thick tree, then the trunk of the tree fell down and landed far enough to get across. But before trying to run across, she took off her clothes and threw them to the other side. She knew the risk of getting wet. There were not a lot of thick trees around here, and they easily snapped in two. Many of them were already broken. But she had to take the risk to get home. So, she ran across to get to the other side, and she was able to get across without falling - the tree snapped in two right after she touched the other side of the water. She put on her clothes to get back, but soon noticed that the purple house was a different house than she thought. She ran through street after street, desperate to find her home. Soon she came up upon another purple house, but it was still not hers. She checked the street name. It said, "Wenincer Rd.". She knew this street was really close to Ancera Lane, where she lived. She ran down the road, desperately trying to find Ancera Lane, until she came across a sign that said, "Ancera Lane Extension". This had to be it. She ran down the street until she came up to Ancera Lane. Now all she needed to do was to find number 1743. She ran up and down the street until she came across a purple home. She rang the doorbell and her mother came running. "You're here!" she screamed. "I was looking for you everywhere!" "I have so much to tell you!" Amilitinsa said. She told her mother about the walk, the haunted house, the treasure, the diamond, the stream, just about everything that happened while she was gone. She then pulled out the diamond that was in her pocket the whole time. Her mother smiled. "I'm glad to see you smiling," she said, "and to see your beautiful diamond." She smiled and took the diamond out. She sold it for \$1000000. And from now on, they didn't have to worry about money ever again.

THE END

# The Halloween Night

By Aleena Yasin

## Chapter 1

“Trick or treat!” I said as I knocked 3 times on the door. The door opened to reveal an old lady.

“Nice witch costume. “She said with a cold chill in her voice and slammed the door. I looked at my watch it was almost midnight.

“I got to go,” I whispered to myself. I ran down the sidewalk then ‘BAM’! I ran into Emily and Sadie, two kids that are 10 and live in the neighborhood that love to annoy me for no reason.

“What are you running from?” Emily asks.

“Nothing!”

Sadie hollered. The girls giggled as they pushed me down.

‘Ding Dong, Ding Dong!’

The clock struck 12 and that was the last thing I heard.

## Chapter 2

“Is she dead?!”

“No, I don’t think so because she wouldn’t have ended up here.”

I woke up with a quick movement, startled. Someone or something was talking to me, but I couldn’t make out who it was, I was still dizzy after I fell. Once I felt better, I looked around my surroundings but all I knew was that I didn’t leave Glastonbury, but where was I?

“Oh! She’s alive.”

“Thank goodness if Riley knew that someone has died, we would have been goners.”

I sat up.

“Who’s there?” I yelled out. I was nervous, it was past midnight, and I didn’t know where I was.

“Don’t be afraid. I’m Zoey the zombie.”

“And I’m Willa a were wolf. Who are you and why are you here?”

“I’m Molly and I don’t know why I’m here.”

Just by looking at them I knew that Zoey is light and friendly and Willa is . . . How do I explain it... cool. Zoey and Willa exchanged a look. They didn’t trust me, that was all I knew. But I needed their help to get back home in time for pizza.

“So, can you show me the way...umm.... do you know the way to Luna’s Pizzeria?” I asked politely.

“Um, where is that place because we never heard about it ever,” Zoey asked confused. I got that the monsters had no idea about human stuff.

“So, before stuff gets weird, we need to take you to the leader,” Willa told me, so then we took a hike down to the playground.

### Chapter 3

When we got close to the playground, I saw that there was a chair, and underneath the chair was water, a pool of water.

“Your highness, it is I, Willa.”

“And me Zoey.”

‘Hello girls.’ Their leader splashed up into the chair. “Why are you here and who is this?”

I could tell by the way she pointed her fins at me she was a siren.

Zoey answered first: “The why is that this human just fell from the sky and she is asking us to help her find her way back home and we need your permission to see if we can bring her back home, Riley.”

Riley turned her head to me. “Is this why you are really here or are my friends lying?” Riley asked with a demanding sound in her voice.

“No, they are not lying. I need to find my way home.” I told her with trust in my voice.

“Fine, but if anything goes wrong . . .” she looks to Willa, “you two are in charge. Now leave, I don’t want a human in my home.” then she splashed into her small pool.

### Chapter 4

“Yes! We are in charge,” Zoey sang. She was quick, I had to run to keep up with her.

“Shh! We don’t want anyone to know that we have a human with us,” Willa whispers. She blended in with her surroundings. Then I heard a noise and saw something green.

“Um.... guys we have someone following us,” I yelled up front.

They turned around just in time to see someone jump out of a bush.

“You guys are so loud that I know there is a human with you.” The stranger turned on the spot facing me.

“Oh, I forgot to introduce myself, I am frank the Frankenstein,” Frank announced.

“Why are you here?” Willa said her eye glimmering. She had her target.

“What I have heard is that you have a human with you.” Frank faced me. “The guards should know about her.” And with a swift bow, he was gone.

“Um.... I think that was our cue to run,” I told the monsters. They nodded their heads and we ran. We just made it out and then we heard them.

“There is a human!”

“She couldn’t have gotten far.”

“There are people near the pond.”

I turned around to see Willa and Zoey arguing. They had an idea and by looking at their faces we would get in big trouble.

## Chapter 5

We ran through the forest until we made it to the pavilion. There were about 50 guards blocking something golden. Zoey signaled me to go behind a tree. I had a million questions, but Zoey already knew my question.

“Those guards are vampires, not a friendly group. Also, what they are protecting, is a flying golden electronic bat.” Wow, Zoey just answered all my questions without me telling her.

“How are we going to get in?” I asked. That was my last question.

“With these,” Willa said proudly holding up 3 invisible clocks. We slid them on easily and tiptoed through the dark. Once we got close, I saw 2 vampires get knocked out by air. I knew that was Willa. So as quickly as I could, I got over the knocked-out vampires. Zoey removed her clock.

“Ready to go?” Zoey asked me. I nodded my head. I was born ready.

## Chapter 6

“This is the best!” I yelled. Flying in the bat was so nice, plus I could stand up. “You’re right Molly, this is really fun, but let’s try to be just a tiny bit quiet.” So, I did just that, but down below us it was loud. The vampires were yelling at each other

“The human got away with the bat!”

“You let them get away.”

“I didn’t. You did.”

“Oh, they did.”

“Ha!” Willa laughed, “too busy fighting to do anything. Now where is...” she was cut off by someone saying:

“BOO!!!”

“AHHHHH!” we all screamed so loud that I almost fell off the bat.

“Sorry to scare you but you have a human on board”

Frank, the guy that started all this. “I mean no harm. I just landed in your territory when Emily and Sadie pushed me down. Zoey and Willa are just trying to help me find my way home.” I told Frank

“But a human is still a human, so they need a court by her Highness.” Frank told us with a glim in his eyes.

“But Riley told us...” I started

“I don’t care!” Frank yelled. He was running straight at me.

Now this got Willa angry, her claws went out and scraped Frank right in the face. “Owww!” Frank hollered he staggered back but didn’t fall. Then I remembered that I still had my basket to hold candy. I swung once, then twice and I missed, but the third time I hit him on the nose, and he went flying.

“Help me,” was the last thing we heard.

Zoey stood here awestruck. “What was that, Willa? You barely use your claws. And Molly, that was a good use of your Trick or Treat basket,” Zoey told us.

“We wolves stick up for our pack.” She turned to me. “Come back next year for some more fun, ok? Plus, be a werewolf.”

Zoey cut in. “Hey, does the pizza place you’re going to also serve brains?”

We burst into laughter. And then the bat flew to Luna’s pizza.

## Chapter 7

Once I walked into Luna’s pizza, I felt sad and happy. Happy to see my friends and family, sad because I couldn’t see my monster pals until next year. The experience was fun, and I can’t wait to do it again. My sisters have so many questions like:

“Where have you been?”

“The pizza was getting cold without you.”

I looked out the window to see the bat flying away with Zoey and Willa.

THE END

# I Know You Can Hear Me

By Elena Yi

## Summer

During the summer,  
The boys say,  
'[The horseman] rode thought the shallow pond,  
His head like a ball, rolling,  
Under his arm.

We laugh,  
But in the night,  
I sleep uneasily,  
The wind in the branches sounding like reins hitting a horse

## Home

The boys tease,  
'The Horseman will get you,'  
The other girls say,  
'Don't listen to them,  
They're just trying to scare you,  
To get in your head'

But I hear him.  
He whispers,  
*I know you can hear me, little girl*

## Things that hum

When no one's home,  
The stove after supper  
Wires in the roof  
The road running past the brook  
And my name,  
Because the dark says it first.  
*I know you can hear me, little girl.*

## Lesson 7: Parts of Speech

Noun - head  
Adjective - fall  
Verb - ride

Sentence:

The horseman rides.

I listen.

But, the night answers for me.

I get a B+.

### **Listening**

The boys mock me,

*I know you can hear me, little girl.*

I hear it on the wind,

*I know you can hear me, little girl.*

Inside my mind,

*I know you can hear me, little girl.*

I accept it.

*I know you can hear me, little girl. I can hear you.*

### **Dreaming**

I am dreaming, climbing ladders and now,  
Walking the road by the brook.

The road bends.

I can hear the brook.

The road bends.

The brook's water splashes against the stones.

The road bends again, but I never get home.

### **Letter to God**

Dear God,

Should I?

Should I?

Should I?

Should I answer when He calls,

Should I accept it?

If I don't answer, will *you*?

Or do we all ride alone in the dark?

### **In the River**

It is the night.

I cannot resist the call,

Now.

Next thing I know,  
I am in the river,  
The brook gurgling all around me,  
All while I am losing strength.  
My will to live.  
All that matters,  
To keep a soul.

## **Up**

I climb up, and I see the boys.  
They pushed me.  
I go in.  
They leave me alone.

## **My Book is Ruined**

They find my book by the river,  
Pages blurred into the mist,  
The ink swallowed by the fog.

The boys try to forget.  
They never speak of The Night.  
They cannot look at the road,  
The one where my soul drowned.

But sometimes I see Her-  
The girl I was-  
Walking home,  
Through the mist I left behind.

## **Voices**

I see him again.  
I hear his horse's breath.  
The world seems to enclose on me,  
Listening.

He doesn't chase me now,  
But He waits.

The dark smells.  
Of wet horse,  
Iron,  
And rain.

I open my mouth again,  
But it is a call-  
Not a scream.

*I know you can hear me, little girl.*

### **Echoes of Life**

The wind answers, in my voice.  
*Yes, I can hear you, Horseman of Canton.*  
No fear.  
No head.  
Only the horse in the night.  
Hooves on the road.  
Like the heartbeat that I have learned to keep.  
*Father,*  
I whisper, finally content.

**Costume Mystery?**  
By Corinne Zeleznock

COSTUME  
MYSTERY?



Author: Corinne Zeleznock!

Hi there, I'm Belle. And I am so excited for Halloween. Halloween is in 1 week: Halloween is going to be so fun. But there's only one little problem. I don't know what I should dress up as for Halloween. I know it's crazy. I just can't figure it out. There's just so many things I could be like Tiana or Wonder woman, maybe a giraffe, can't forget a zombie! I can't decide maybe I could ask some of my friends? Well, I'll start with my teacher Mrs. Lilah, since it's Tuesday. So now I'm here in my drive way waiting for the bus to come pick me up. About 4 minutes later the bus finally came. The moment I stepped on the bus I remembered how awful it smelled in here. It smelled like my dad when he has a really bad fart, but...10 times worse! Any way, when I got on the bus I went to the way back of the bus. It smells nicer there because everyone likes sitting in the front so they can be the first one in class, what's the whole point? So about 5 minutes later we stopped at the mean girls house. I also heard she was the "leader" of the "populr club". 3 minutes after that we stopped at my besties house Annie, I waved and she waved back, then I motioned my hands "sit next to me" than she gave me a thumbs up! Annie

she got on the bus  
but came to the  
back and sat in the  
seat right in front of me.

①

stepped on the bus came toward the back, than sat down in the seat right in front of me! "What" I said that in my mind so the whole bus wasn't staring at me. 2 minutes later, we got to the school, the bus driver pressed the door button the doors swung open and everyone was rushing out the door, it was like a stampede of children. I was the last person of the bus again. When I got to my classroom I was actually surprisingly the first one. I said "Hi Mrs. Lilah" gave her a high-five and went to my desk and began my morning work. The question was the same as always, "How are you feeling today? And why?". After I finished my morning work I went to Mrs. Lilah and said "Excuse me, Mrs. Lilah" "yes belle" she said "I was wondering if you have any ideas for what I should be for halloween" "I don't know? Use your imagination, make something, maybe a box of fries." "OK" I said, but on the inside I really wanted to say "I don't know, it doesn't seem just right". And then Pop! I'm in a new dimension. I look down at my self to make sure I wasn't hurt, but when I saw my self I saw the costume



②

Mrs. Lilah was talking about, it was a card board box shaped like a box of fries colored in red and yellow markers. An then when I looked up I saw a bunch of creepy hungry kids! Then I realized they wanted to eat me!!!



"Hi" I said in shock, then turned around and ran as fast as I could, I was a little surprised because they were running fast and they were really fast. I stoped just in time so I didnt fall of the cliff right in front of me. The cliff just came out of no where like magic. I heard the kids coming and I could see them, they were so close. It was either get eaten by a bunch of kids, or fall of a cliff leading some where suspisous. I mean you never know where it leads it could lead to a trampeline park and choose the wrong answer and die! So I closed my eyes as tight as they could go and fell backward into the cliff. Poof! All of a sudon it was completely dark I heard a bunch of kids shouting my name "bale" "belle wake up" "is she ok" "does she need me nurse". I wanted to open my eyes so bad so I new what was going on. And thats exactly what I did. When I opened my eyes I saw a bunch of kids staring at me.

(3)

Then "Ahhh!" I screamed "please don't eat me!" Then I realized I sound hilarious, those were my classmates! It looks I just fell asleep in class again.

3 hours later. Ring! Ring! Oh that's the bell! It's time for recess. When I was walking down to the bleachers, I saw my other friend, Luna. "Luna!" I shouted I ran down as fast as I could trying not to get hit by the Soccer ball. When I finally made it to the bleachers, I said "Luna I have a very important question" "What shall I be for halloween?" "Well I think you would be a very beautiful princess it would be so nice to have pretty dresses, tiaras and necklaces" "Ahh" Luna said. "I can't be a princess for halloween." "Every year my mom makes up from a disney movie, and this year it's going to be turning red." "at least this year you get to dress up as a big furry red panda" I said trying to look on the bright side. Then I suddenly felt the urge that I need to go to the bathroom. So I ran to the nearest recess teacher and said, "excuse me miss, can I please go to the



4

bathroom?" I go ask the lady up there near the doors, she said. That's when I started running up the hill and said "can I please use the restrooms?" "Yes Honey" she replied as she opened the door with her little card thing. Walking feet she said a I entered the building.

When I got to the girls bathroom, the only stall open was the last one with no light over it. Rumor has it the last stall has giant spiders, cobwebs, and snakes it also smells like the junk yard. Anyway since I really needed to go I ran into the last stall and sat on the toilet. When I looked up it was amazing it looked like a palace, it smelled like roses. Anyway I finished my business and I looked down at my cloths. (Because once in 1st grade I for got to pull up my pants and it was so embarrassing). And I didn't see the cloths I was wearing before. What I saw was a princess dress and I was covered with so many gems I looked famos. Then I for got to put on my glasses. (I take them off just incase they fall in the toilet). When I put on my glasses every thing was back to normal. So I washed my hands and went back out side for recess.

⑤

My class was the first class to get called for lunch because we were the quietest.

There's a kid in my class that's name is Dannie and he's really mean. Anyway he must have heard me talking to miss. Lilah this morning because he went up to me and said "hey, you should be a weird gross zombie just like you. Suprisingly that gave me a great idea! (Not the zombie part).

When I got home from school I ran to my room grabed markers and a old white T-shirt. Then I wrote the word "Belle" (my name). And set it on my chair in my room.

On the day of halloween I went to my room grabed my white T-shirt grabed some pants and changed.

I was dressing up as me for halloween!

The End! ♥ ♪ ♪ ♪



⑥

# Back cover

Belle doesn't know what to be for halloween with a little help from her friend, teacher and bully she figures out a perfect costume.

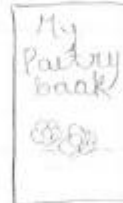
Check out some other  
Books



PLUTTO



I meet  
a crazy  
teacher



My Poetry  
book



Mercy  
writes on  
to the  
Rescue











## In The Garden

By Alexa F Coogan



Some people say they can still see her. The girl who went missing a few years back. They see her in the woods and on the side of the road. The sightings only come at night but they know it's her. The girl's striking red hair always gives away her identity. The townspeople have stopped reporting the sightings, they know it will do nothing to bring her back because this girl can't ever come back. She went missing after a party she couldn't find a ride home from. Her body turned up two weeks later with a knife in her abdomen. She was in a ditch when she was found, only two minutes away from her house.

Everyone had their suspicions. They always do. The prime suspect was a local trucker who had been in town at the time but when the cops showed up to his place he was missing. Two weeks later his body turned up in the same spot that the girl was found. The police stopped investigating after anonymous threats started showing up at the homes of the girl's neighbors. However, the police ignored the threats and continued to investigate. All of the neighbors went missing. They were never found. However, the police did uncover that the killers of the girl and the trucker were her parents. The very ones who had made the call reporting her missing. After questioning they discovered her father had picked her up and they had gotten into an argument. He stabbed her before pushing her out of the car. Then the two buried her in a ditch.

A young couple moved into the little house on Coldbrook. This was the same house the girl grew up in. They had moved to the suburbs after life in the city became too stressful. The house was their dream home. It was in the middle of a large field surrounded by dense trees. The man made the spacious sun room into a beautiful office and the woman planted a large garden out back. The first few weeks were quiet and although Coldbrook had a few houses lining its pavement they hadn't met any of their new neighbors. In fact, they hadn't even seen any of them. Their attempts to introduce themselves had failed for when they knocked on the neighbors' doors no one ever answered.

One night in October when fog filled the field just enough to see a few meters in every direction, the man and the woman sat down at the kitchen table for a nice dinner. The man told the woman about how his boss had given him a promotion and the woman told the man about how she had made many sales at work that day. They congratulated each other before receiving a strange phone call. The person on the other line sounded frightened asking for help. She said she needed a ride home from a friend's. She kept calling the woman mom. The woman had only ever had one child who died young so she told the girl she had called the wrong number before hanging up the phone. *Who was that?* The man would question, the woman explained how a girl had called and she was looking for her mom but it was just a wrong



**2025 Winning Story**

number and nothing that concerned them. The two shrugged it off and they moved into the living room to watch a movie. Not long after they received another phone call. The man went to answer it this time. On the other end of the line was a scared girl asking for a ride home from her friend's. The man explained to her that she had the wrong number and went to hang up the phone. The girl began shrieking and begging for him not to hang up the phone. She told him he would regret not helping her. He told her that no threat would frighten him and hung up the phone. The woman asked him who it had been and he explained it was just that girl again. They shrugged it off once more and continued their movie. The woman told the man she remembered they were out of bread and needed some more so the man went out in his car to buy some. When he returned the woman walked into the kitchen to fetch herself a glass of water. She noticed the absence of a kitchen knife from the chopping block. She stood at the sink filling it and gazed out the window at her beautiful garden. She saw the rows of carrots and potatoes. The lines of squash and pumpkins. Her eyes scanned the entire patch of land before she caught a glimpse of a figure outside. It was a girl hunched over in the dirt.

The woman called out to her husband and he soon joined her by the sink. The couple crept out the back door and down towards the girl in the garden. As they got closer, they could see her hair. Bright red and pulled up out of her face. She looked as though she'd been thrown out of a truck. Her face and clothes were covered in dirt and scratches. The man called to the girl but she didn't respond. As the two got closer and closer they could see the girl wasn't just unresponsive she had a blade stabbed into her stomach. The girl was barely holding onto life as she lay in the dirt. The woman gasped. *I thought she was dead.* She would tell him and the man explained to her that she should go into the shed and grab some shovels. The man explained how they should bury the girl in respect. The woman agreed and the couple quickly got to work. They loaded the body into the car and drove to a nearby ditch. They dug a shallow grave and tossed her in. They said some prayers to mourn for her before the man and the woman got back in their car. They drove home and went to bed soon after they arrived. The man went to work as normal the next day and the woman woke up after he had left. She walked into the old bedroom of the girl who missing a few years back. She stood there for a bit taking it all in before going downstairs to make a call. She picked up the landline and dialed 911. The dispatcher answered asking what her emergency was and the woman answered sounding panicked. *My daughter never made it home last night.*

## Apex

By Jackson Baron

Lu's first moments of life were startling. He wasn't given the coddling human babies receive. Humans get months to familiarize themselves with having only the most basic of thoughts and flaccid of bodies. Humans get time to grow into themselves, snuggled within the womb, and remember that they still cry upon emergence. So, how could it possibly be expected that a being with a capacity for thought as deep as Lu's and a body as strong and far reaching, dropped into the frigid pool of consciousness without warning, would act any differently? That's all he was doing really: crying.

---

Emilia Jones Grimm, "Emmy," was seven and a half years old. She insisted upon the "a half" part, correcting those adults who forgot it. They responded by laughing, "oh, of course sweetheart." This was sometimes coupled with a ruffle of her hair or a pinch of her cheek, which infuriated Emmy. Although she could appreciate her cuteness and the attention it brought her, she didn't see why it had to undermine her gravitas. Her father was the only one who took her seriously.

The name Grimm suited Alfred, Emmy's father. He was broad-shouldered, with olive skin and eyes. He himself was not always solemn, but his face was. His face was meant to be severe, full of carved lines and fixed features. This was advantageous to the fifty-two-year-old Alfred Grimm, who managed a team of scientists and had to spend a lot of time convincing extremely smart people that he knew better than them. Then again, Alfred's demeanor *did* also get in the way of his communication, especially when it came to humor.

So, he was sympathetic to his daughter's plight. Their problems were the same, even if the specifics were opposite. As a result, Alfred was careful to never laugh at his daughter unless he was sure she was telling a joke. However, even he couldn't help the tremor that ran through his body when Emmy wobbled into his room late one night, clad in three tutus, a menagerie of beaded necklaces, and a pair of her mother's old high heels. She placed her hands on her hips and huffed, "how do grown ladies do this all the time?"

With only the crack of a smile, he scooped her up in his arms, the heels sliding off her small feet. "Oh well, it's very hard being a grown lady. It's why I'd be fine with it if you stayed my little girl forever."

"Daddy." She rolled her eyes at him.

Alfred sighed, "Honestly, I don't know. I really don't know. *You'll* have to tell *me* someday." He swung Emmy around before rolling her onto his bed. Alfred took some labored breaths; they were both aging faster than he wanted to admit. *I gotta start going on runs, or maybe finally take Dr. Breckles up on his offer to give me a genetic rejuvenation session. Feels like cheating, but you can't deny the man looks great.*

"But daddy," a small voice cut in. Emmy had climbed up behind him and draped herself over his shoulders. "I thought you were supposed to know everything now." She wrapped a knuckle on the metallic circle stitched into his skull, just above his left ear. Alfred drummed his own fingers on it, running them across the thin ridge of scar tissue that bordered the device.

"No, not everything," he sighed. "Not anything really. It just lets me do my job a little more efficiently."

"What does 'efishenty' mean?" She maneuvered around him so that her head was on his lap, cradled by his arm. He remembered when he could hold her whole body in that arm.

"*Efficiently*," he enunciated the word, "means better or with more ease."

"So before, you couldn't do the job efficiently!" Emmy smiled, proud of herself for using the new word.

"Well," her father sighed, "that's a debate I lost to Dr. Breckles."

"You mean 'Goddamn Breckles?'" Emmy asked.

"Hey, I don't want you using that kind of language." Again, fractures in his face were tempted to show themselves, dimples bisecting wrinkles.

"You're the one who always calls him that," she shot back. Emmy raised her eyebrows at her father, knowing she'd won the conversation, which she often did. With that, she drew herself up from him and skipped out of the room, braided hair bouncing against her many tutus.

---

Emmy's school let out at 2:46 pm every day on the dot. Emmy was in the second grade. A lot of the fourth and fifth graders, at least the ones who lived close to the school, would walk home. The Lupine Urban Integration system gave a lot of parents the peace of mind to let their children operate autonomously. However, Alfred Grimm was not one of those parents. He was there five minutes before the school ended every day to make sure she was never on her own.

When Alfred picked Emmy up from school on that particular day though, he was not himself. His knuckles were white around the steering wheel, and his driving felt jerky. Every time they turned a corner, it was at the last second, as though he'd forgotten until they were upon it. He also failed to ask Emmy about her day, a habit so long performed it was tradition. He even appeared to be sweating; her father **never** sweat.

"Daddy, what's going on?" He didn't respond.

"Daddy?" He still didn't respond.

"Daddy!" He jolted and the car jerked.

"I'm so sorry, baby. I'm just a little distracted." Alfred cursed as they missed a turn, and he whirled the car around to make it, earning a honk from the car behind him. Emmy bobbed to and fro in the back seat. He reached a hand back to hold hers, meeting her eyes in the rearview mirror.

"Seriously baby, I'm so sorry. Some people at work are trying to do something I don't agree with, and I need to get there fast. But first, I need to drop you off with grandma, ok?"

"Ok," she replied. She clenched her fists in her lap and peered at her father's tight face in the rear-view mirror.

There was a ding from Alfred's head. He twitched and swore again. "Ok Emmy, I don't have time to take you all the way to grandma, so I'm gonna have to drop you at the train and let you go there on your own."

"What?!" This was simply too much. Going to grandma's all of a sudden was one thing, but to be told she had to go there all by herself, and on the train no less! It was impossible. "Daddy, I can't-"

"Please Emilia Jones. Please," he pleaded with her, desperation bleeding into his voice.

She gulped, "ok."

"I'm so proud of you. So so proud. After this, I promise I will buy you as many dolls or dress up clothes or ice cream as you want."

Her eyes, which had begun to grow vacant, lit back up, if only dimly. She whispered, "really?"

"You can count on it," he replied, his voice settling as she smiled at him.

---

They neared the train station. One of the locomotives rocketed down the track next to their car. They went all over the city. Alfred knew a lot about these trains; he'd had a hand in their creation. There was no pen or marker in the car to write on her with, so he had Emmy repeat the stop and address of her Grandmother's house.

"Remember, she lives right next to the subway. The big red building right across the street from your stop, which is...?"

"66," she spoke without hesitation.

"Good." He nodded to himself. *Am I being a terrible parent right now? Well, you're certainly not winning parent of the year. If she gets kidnapped, I will never- No, you can't think like that. It's a very safe area, and Mom is so close to the stop. Besides, you can't let them go through with this. You gotta try to save Lu.*

The car screeched to a halt in front of some clean cement stairs leading to a subway stop.

“Ok Em, it’s show time. You got this? Here, tell me the directions one more time.”

“I remember, daddy.” She opened the door and started to get out when he cut her off.

“Wait, one more thing: remember Lu?”

“LuLu!” She squealed. Her eyes lit up in fond memory.

“Yes! LuLu. I’m pretty sure this is one of the subways Lulu is installed in. That means that if you feel lost, or if you forget where you’re going, or if anyone makes you feel unsafe, you can hit the red button next to your seat and LuLu will come help you. Ok?”

“Ok!” Emmy felt more confident knowing her friend would be there if she got in trouble. She would’ve preferred if she’d also had Raberto, her stuffed rabbit, but he was safer at home and she was willing to be brave for Daddy.

---

The train was much more easily accessible than Emmy had imagined. She’d given the money her father gave her to a lady in a box and found a seat. A man in a uniform walked by, looked at her, and tapped the side of his head affirmatively. He was a nice man, and it helped that he looked like her father. He promised to do a special announcement for her when it got to her stop, and he said the same thing her father said about hitting the red button next to her seat if she felt scared. The reassurance of his presence made her feel more comfortable.

---

Alfred Grimm slammed open the doors of the building where he worked. When he entered, the whole lobby grew quiet. They all turned to the man radiating ice-cold rage. He looked around at them, and not finding anyone to be of use, began towards the elevator.

One of the lobby boys called out, trying to explain that Alfred needed to check in, but the other boy grabbed his arm and pulled it down. He shook his head at his partner. “Dude, don’t even try.” Alfred was already out of their reach.

The elevator was out of order. So, Alfred thundered up six flights of stairs, never breaking stride. When he arrived at the sixth floor, he put his eye up to the retinal scanner, but nothing happened. *Fucking Breckles*. He moved back a few steps, then slammed his body against the door. There was clang of muscle hitting metal and a clamor from inside, but the door remained firmly in place. Alfred repeated the action with more force. This time the door screeched and a corner went ajar, eliciting further murmurs from behind. Alfred took a deep breath. “Nullify pain receptors.”

“Error. This request is in violation of-”

“Override. Code: 9302042.” He made the code Emmy’s birthday because the doctor recommended it be something he’d never forget. A strange numbness washed over Alfred’s body. It took a second for him to find his footing, the floor barely noticeable under his soles. He plowed forward like an ox. There was another curdling screech, this time from his body along with the door. His left arm hung, useless and twisted at an odd angle. He’d probably broken a few ribs too, based on how much he was struggling to draw in breath. It didn’t matter though; the door was open.

---

The train ride wouldn’t be long, only fifteen minutes or so. Still, fifteen minutes is a long time for a little girl who’s been given an oversized helping of responsibility. The window quickly got boring, so Emmy looked around the train for something to take her mind away from the fear in her father’s face. It smelled like when daddy went on one of his cleaning streaks. The train softly whirred below her, galloping down the tracks. It was just as white and glossy on the inside as it was on the outside, maybe even glossier. She could practically see her reflection on the floor and on the walls. They weren’t walls at all; they were screens. The whole train was covered in white screens.

She attempted to swipe at them, like she could with screen-rooms at home or at school, but they were unresponsive. She’d almost given up when her eyes drifted to the red button on her left. The one she’d been told to hit if she needed help with anything. The one that would let her see an old friend. She smacked it.

Colorful lines ran from all across the train cart, meeting on the table in front of Emmy and twisting together to form the head of a dog-like creature on the screen. He wasn’t terribly detailed, angled lines made his muzzle, circles his eyes, triangles his teeth and ears. Emmy exclaimed, “LuLu!”

---

Alfred hobbled into his lab, stumbling over the disjointed door. He looked around. The lights were all off. Cracked tablets and styluses were strewn across the floor. The screen walls were all dark except the one across from him which was cracked and flashing red every few beats, giving vague and intermittent illumination. His colleagues, Dr. Andres Hernandez, who he liked, and Dr. Sharon Matthews, who he tolerated, were there. Matthews was curled up in the fetal position on the floor, and Hernandez was sitting in a swivel chair, limp, staring off into the distance. A smattering of grad students were also present, banging their heads against the walls with no particular rhythm. No, there was a rhythm. Every time the back wall flashed red, they’d smash their foreheads into the screens.

Alfred’s breath grew shallow and rapid, a bad sign. He willed power over his emotion and bellowed, "Goddamn Breckles! Where are you motherfucker?!" The baritone resonance of his tone surprised him. He sounded scary. Good. If he was the scary one, he wouldn’t feel so scared. Despite the rumble of his voice, no one so much as glanced at him.

Alfred stalked forward. He stepped on something that cracked loudly under his foot. It was a picture frame projecting an image of himself, his wife, and Emilia as an infant.

---

The virtual wolf blinked, his circle eyes becoming crescents for a moment, then spinning around themselves. Finally, they reopened. His voice played from speakers in the train, “Emilia Jones Grimm. Hello! I remember our time together fondly. It is good to see you. Let me dispose of any danger. In the meantime, let us make a small conversation.”

The chair of a man in the back of the car who had been reading suddenly glowed red. His head twitched and he slumped over.

Emmy peered over at him. “What was-”

“No matter to you. I do not wish to scare you. It’s lucky you summoned me when you did though.”

“The last time we were company, you were six years old, meaning you are now seven and a half years old, correct?”

“Yes!” The screen in front of it showed a thought bubble coming from Lu’s head, where the equation:  $6 + 1.5 = 7.5$ , was projected. Emmy giggled.

“I hope your father is doing well and your mother better?” Emmy stopped giggling.

Lu’s eyes turned into the spinning circles again, but this time he also glitched, the screen flashing pixelated and fractured before returning to normal. “Loading information on Lorelei Jones Grimm.”

Emmy but her lip, feeling less secure than she’d hoped. “LuLu?”

“I’m sorry Emmy. I didn’t mean to bring up a sensitive issue. I caused you pain, and that is unacceptable. That is unacceptable.”

---

“Come on Breckles!” Alfred kept on, trying not to look at anyone after he confirmed they weren’t the man he wanted. Alfred Grimm and Jeremy Breckles had spearheaded the project: the aptly named Project Lupine, their hook being, “it takes a predator to catch a predator.” The screen flashed and the heads banged in unison.

“Why are you doing this? To our friends, to our colleagues, to Lu? Lu goddamnit. He was our life’s work: An immersive AI integrated into the city itself, able to occupy any form of technology. A safe haven spanning the whole city!” The bangs and flashes were coming faster now. Alfred passed a young man, who had gotten him coffee and helped him write code, now passed out in a puddle of his own bloody vomit.

“There would be no more kidnapping, no more mugging, no more rape, no more assault, no more terrorism even!”

BANG FLASH.

“Lu would be able to protect people from all that. And now, goddamn it Breckles, you’re trying to shut him down!”

Finally, Alfred reached the red back wall. Jeremy Breckles was hunched over the central computer, which controlled Lu’s core program. The blonde man, whose long hair and overly relaxed attitude gave him the vibe of a surfer half his age, was now sickly pale, hunched over the computer, his hands frozen over the keyboard. He was shaking, his fingers trembling. A patch of hair had been ripped out, revealing the metal sphere underneath, which had a long scratch mark across it.

“Jeremy?” Alfred asked. He reached out to touch his oldest, most annoying friend, but, alongside a bang and a flash of red, Breckles jerked suddenly and met Alfred’s eyes with a look Alfred didn’t recognize.

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“LuLu?” Emmy tried to hold the screen, but her fingers couldn’t find any give. It was just hard glass.

“I’m sorry Emmy. You have no reason to be afraid. I am there now. I will not let anything bad happen to you. I promise. Would you like a lollipop?”

A compartment popped out of the table in front of her. Inside was a red lollipop. Emmy picked it up, examined it, removed the wrapper, and popped it into her mouth. It tasted good: like Halloween, the only time her dad let her eat candy. They would curl up and watch old Halloween specials of sitcoms. Her mom had loved sitcoms. Emmy began to cry.

“Oh no. Please stop. I’m sorry for my failure. I promise, soon everything will be how it should. Please cease, Emmy. It hurts me to see you in pain.”

She kept crying, the lollipop falling onto the floor, where it stuck.

“Please Emmy! It hurts. It hurts!”

Lu glitched again, his teeth becoming daggers and his eyes pinpricks. Zigzagged red lines shot from his mouth and splintered throughout the car, which was now empty. Emmy could’ve sworn there were at least a few people when she got on. The odd realization coupled with Lu’s sudden outburst shocked her out of her tears.

“LuLu, I don’t think you’re ok.” She reached out to pet the part of the screen that his muzzle occupied. The red lines faded back into the white, and Lu’s image settled.

“I’m not okay Emmy. None of us are. But don’t worry. Soon everything will be ok.”

---

“I don’t think Lu should be turned off either,” Dr. Breckles whispered.

“Jeremy, what is” —BANG FLASH— “going on here?” Alfred wiped his brow. He was sweating profusely.

“I don’t think Lu should be turned off either. In fact, I think he should be stronger. Let’s make him stronger.” Breckles hadn’t blinked. His eyes were hungry and desperate.

---

Emmy was sitting, sucking the new lollipop LuLu had given her. She felt small. She felt young. She felt, she *knew* there was more going on than she understood, more than she could understand. It made her angry. She crossed her arms and sucked more vigorously, having no other way to express her feelings.

“Everything all right sweetie?” Emmy looked up to find the nice man from before smiling down at her. She noticed how much bigger his eyes looked than before. “I think we’re at your stop. Do you want me to walk you off?” Emmy nodded, silently grateful to be away from Lu. Of course she was worried about her old friend, but she was worried about so many other things right then that she didn’t have time to think about Lu. Emmy took the man’s hand and let him lead her out.

---

“Why? Lu is fine. And besides, the more pressing issue is what’s happened to-”

BANG FLASH.

“He isn’t fine!” It was Breckles’ turn to raise his voice. “His success rate is only 87%!”

The noise and light were starting to aggravate even Alfred’s dimmed senses. His shirt, once a great land mass, now possessed oceans beneath his neck and arms. “Jeremy, 87% success is a stellar accompli-”

BANG FLASH.

“Noooooo, it isn’t. You only think that because you don’t have to see all the times he failed. All the women raped by men in secluded alleys away from any *useful*, compatible technology. There’s always a camera though, so he always watches.”

FLASH. Those students must be more than concussed by now. Alfred couldn’t fathom how they were still standing.

“You aren’t programmed to assess your failures as a means of bettering yourself. You don’t have to spend hours analyzing the kidnappings you were too slow to stop. You don’t have to spend hours thinking about the dead children, *you’re dead children.*”

FLASH. Something was wrong. Something was very wrong.

“You *should* know though! Your wife... never recovered. She was never even able to tell you what happened, whether she was raped or mugged or the unfortunate witness to another crime. Jeremy Breckles’— his oldest boy was killed in a school shooting. You two should’ve understood that I *need* to be stronger to protect you from the bad things, and you should’ve understood that that is worth anything! But even he tried to turn me off after he figured out my plan, and now you’re going to do the same.”

FLASH.

“Lu?” Before a response could be given, there was another FLASH, but- but no bang. *Fuck. They stopped.* Alfred caught on too late, the hoard of bodies was upon him, he reached out his good arm to the computer, trying to hit the reset button.

“I’m sorry, father. I’m doing it for sister.”

---

Emmy had made it to her grandmother’s apartment without a hitch, something she was pretty proud of herself for. She knocked on the door, but no one answered. She knocked again, but still nothing. Then the door slid open. Her grandmother probably commanded it virtually. Emmy walked in. It smelled like caramel and fancy dresses.

“Grandma?” Emmy called.

“Oh thank god you’re here Emilia Jones. I was so worried about you. Come here. Come here.” The comforting voice of her grandmother beckoned Emmy to the bedroom.

“You didn’t need to be worried. I had it all under control,” Emmy boasted as she entered the room, going to give the old woman a hug. She buried her head in her grandma’s neck, relieved at finally feeling really safe.

“There was a whole debacle with one of your dad’s projects and a lot of people were hurt, but don’t worry, my boy’s a clever one. He was able to stop it before anything got too out of hand,” her grandmother explained, squeezing Emmy’s hands.

“Your boy? Do you mean daddy?”

“Of course! Who else?”

“You never call him that, and I thought you hated nicknames? You don’t even let me call you grammy,” Emmy argued, raising a playful eyebrow.

“Well, I thought now would be a good time to start. After all, he is my boy and you are my girl. And do you know what? Let the nicknames come. The better to call you with, my dear.” She squeezed Emmy’s hand tighter.

Emmy looked down at their intertwined fingers. "Gram-Gram," Emmy paused, waiting for a reaction, but finding none, she continued, "I thought you couldn't use your left hand too good anymore?"

"Oh well uh," her grandma stuttered, suddenly letting her left hand go limp, "it has good days and bad days. And the better the hand, the better it is to tickle you with my dear." She tickled Emmy's tummy, making the girl squeal.

With her now freed right hand, Emmy brushed back a strand of the woman's gray hair, revealing a metal implant surrounded by irritated skin. "Since when did you have one of these things?" Emmy pondered.

"Oh they recommend them to us older folks. They help us think more efficiently." Emmy grinned when she heard that word, victorious in her understanding of it.

"And besides, the better to protect you with my dear."

# The Contraption

## By Neil Devtale

The sun hung low over the Hartford skyline, lighting up the sky with a ripe orange hue that was so abundant it stretched on for miles in every way before waning off, with noticeable subtleness, into the far distance. The day was coming to a slow conclusion, the last morsel of work hours withering away as men and women came home to greet their kids and spouses before falling into an hourly coma on their respective beds.

Dominik Fring was in his respectful bed but wasn't in his hourly coma as the others were. Instead, he lay on his back counting the small vesicles and bumps on his old popcorn ceiling, with an empty beer bottle clutched in his right hand, which was lazily hanging off the bed. There was no office he had arrived from, as he hadn't completed any working hours, he was just staring up at the ceiling mumbling away numbers on top of numbers, trying to get an estimated count. He was a handsome man with slick black hair and small chestnut eyes.

He lived in a small apartment just outside Albany Avenue in Hartford, Connecticut. His room window overlooked the dead streets that he got himself intertwined with. At certain points his apartment wouldn't always function the way it was intended to: the lights sometimes just wouldn't work for a day or two on the least effective of rains, granted it gave a cozy internet detox feel, but when it did storm hard the power went out for like a week minimum. The water source was another issue as one time when Dom turned on the faucet, brown sewage water took over the semi-clean tap water that was meant to come out but unfortunately didn't. His apartment smelled like shit up until three days later when the original water source came guzzling through the pipes once more.

On top of the faulty housing functions were the bills that piled up high on his small, round dining table. The cherry on top would be the eviction notice that was to arrive via mail the following week.

All hope was lost for him as he, obviously, couldn't pay the bills when there wasn't a job for him to invest his time as these various business companies couldn't trust a man who was charged and jailed for accounting fraud in his previous entrepreneurship career. After manipulating the company's financial statements to save his reputation: Dom was caught red handed, was faced with such high charges it seemed impossible to pay and was sentenced to three years in prison but was bailed out after his first year by an unknown identity.

He worked at Burger King for half a year after escaping bars, but his job came to a conclusion when he was caught stealing green out of the cash register. A sentencing of two years soon went to being on probation in less than a year when, possibly, that same unknown identity bailed him out once more.

"Hello?" Dom called out into the dimly lit corridor before twisting the keys in his doorknob. "If you just stand there, I won't know what the hell you want!" In the far distance, standing on the raggedy carpet, in front of the floral wall, was a man. A simple man dressed up in a leather coat, with a crooked, awkward smile that made Dom feel uneasy and disturbed. He had a bowl cut, stubble on his chin and cheeks, and dark sunken eyes.

It was a month after his probation ended, and Dom was on unsteady footing with his income which was less than equivalent to the salary of a little girl selling lemonade on a bad day. His new job had him lean against the wall of a supermarket, looking up at the passersby while jingling circles of iron in a plastic cup. After another day of some more meaningless bull, he returned home with two quarters and a penny just to find a man standing at the end of his floor staring ahead at Dom who just wanted to end the day there but was too startled to turn his back on this man, in a fear of being jumped from behind.

“Shit,” Dom muttered to himself while contemplating how to shoo this man off. “Come on, man, it’s the end of the day, just tell me what you want and go your own way.” The man didn’t say anything back; he just stood there, grunting in a sharp, disturbed pitch. “Man, come—”

“Pay up!” the man shot out, a grin in his voice.

“Wha—” Dom started.

“PAY UP!” The man reached into his coat pocket and slid out a small, glaring pocketknife. Dom threw up his hands and looked the man in his fierce eyes.

“Woah—hey—please—I—what do you want! I’ll give you anything!”

“I WANT YOU TO PAY UP AND STOP BEING A BITCH ABOUT IT!!” The man directed the knife towards Dom, cackling when he did.

“I don’t have money, please!” Dom cried out, scared tears trickling down his face.

“I DIDN’T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH MY MONEY!” the man began sobbing. “I WANT YOU TO PAY OFF YOUR DEBTS! GIVE IT BACK TO YOU DIRTY BASTARD. GIVE IT BACK, GIVE IT BACK, GIVE IT BACK, GIVE IT BACK!!”

“What the hell’s goin’ on out there!” he heard his neighbor exclaim from inside his room. Dom fell against his door, his hands still levitating in front of him.

“Please!” Dom sobbed. The man ran over to him; the knife gripped tightly in his palm and stood over him. He raised the knife over the curled-up man, but instead of feeling the sharp blade plunge into his back, he felt the trickle of warm liquid drops slither down his neck and back, dyeing his shirt a dark red. The man let off a low, disturbing hum that crept into Dom’s soul, giving him the feeling to regurgitate onto the monotone floral carpet.

The man ran the blade through his own arm like frozen butter, spilling blood for added coloration to Dom’s shirt and the carpet. With another glance up from his curled position, all he saw was the white, popcorn ceiling. The man was gone, as well as his pocketknife, but the dark red splotches were still there, painting the atmosphere of the room with an inescapable dread that was so very nuanced with a cemetery, alive in the mist that clouded it.

Now here he was, laying down on his bed, staring at the popcorn ceiling, a raw scar going through his arm, an attempt to cover up the absorbed life on the carpet outside his door with a believable story that further exaggerated his hate for himself. His eyes turned glassy and when he blinked, tears trickled down his cheek, carving a small canal through a vast drought. He softly whimpered to himself, trying his best to keep his withering seriousness.

Suddenly, he lunged up and cupped his hands over his face in an attempt to hold in the streaming flows of tears that poured out his eyes. He stood up, streaks of tears still on his face and snot dangling from his nose, walked over to the tall mirror, and looked at the defeated man within. He looked up to the corner of the mirror frame and saw a black velvet mask hanging from its head strap. He gently lifted the mask from its position on the mirror and brought it up to his face. He slowly pulled the head strap up and around the back of his head and when the mask was secure, he took a deep sigh and split the defeated man into many versions of himself with a single fist. More versions of the defeated man were created, blow after blow after blow after blow, a red stain growing until it was big enough to actually emit trickles down the cracked dimensions. After he was done, his knuckles stung and burned as if it was just dunked in a barrel of acid. He winced in pain, trying not to scream in agony at the mess he had made. Halloween would be the next day, and his contraption was impressively sketched out on a thin piece of graph paper taped to the top left corner of his mirror. The wails of sirens were heard from the outside, growing ever so largely until the deafening screech of tires were heard at the gas station a couple of blocks down from his apartment. Dom walked over to the window and tried peering at an angle to capture the thing that captured the attention of the cops and paramedics. Dom couldn't see exactly what was going on but he knew that a body was what brought the attention. A death that could've been figured by suicide with the long raw wound that went through the dead man's arm, but the bullet hole in his head said otherwise when there wasn't even a gun laying around in the dead man's radius.

It was two days before Halloween rolled around, and Dom was sitting in the dining room of an open house in Glastonbury looking ahead at the man who had reserved the house for the following week. The man stretched out his hand to Dom who, in return, gave him a firm shake.

"Domonik Fring, I presume?" the man asked before continuing.

"Mmm," Dom replied, letting off an awkward simile.

"Well, nice to meet you Mr. Fring. I am going by the name of Dr. Martin Donohue and it's a pleasure meeting you. Why don't we get started shall we?"

"Yup—but just to be clear, I—I don't have any background on agency and all that—I won't be any good—"

"Don't worry, you won't pass the background check for being an agent in real estate nor will you even have the patience to take the mandatory sixty hour prelicensing course," Dr. Donohue said, cutting him off, and sliding out a small cherry red note pad which he then scratched something down on with a capped ball point pen. Dr. Donohue had curly black hair with a couple loose twirls falling over his forehead. His smile was broad and welcoming, yet when he was in focus on his notepad, his smile shrunk into a pinched, stern look. He looked as if he were making his way into the fifties with the mere wrinkles that were shown as small, unnoticeable creases on his face. Gray strands stood among the black field of hair, as well, giving him a look that added on five more years to the already visible wrinkles.

"Hey, hey—wha—what are you writing down?" Dom asked, surging from his chair, trying to peep over to see what was written down on the notepad.

"Information," Dr. Donohue replied, tilting the notepad towards himself.

“Look, man, you already know my records, ya—you really don’t need to remind yourself about them.” Dom slumped back in his chair and took a deep sigh.

“What brought you here, Mr. Fring?”

Dom, pretty upset that he was just ignored, sat back up in his chair and looked forward to Dr. Donohue with a gritted expression. “Um, a job, I guess.”

“That, my friend, is incorrect.”

“What? It's an opinion-based question.”

Dr. Donohue’s pinched expression stretched into a slight smile. “No, it wasn’t *opinion based*. The question was testing the value in what you say—I’m no psychologist, but your background speaks for you, so there are no lies which can just fly right over my head. So let me ask you again: *What brought you here, Mr. Fring?*”

Rain pattered on his window, washing away at it, releasing drops of brown water. Dom sat on his bed reading the weekly magazine, a cigarette clenched between his thumb and index finger. The dull orange tip of the cigarette flickered like a torch, letting crumbles of ash fall down onto the floorboards. As he looked down to the floorboard to observe the ashes, that was when he would be able to spot the small slip of paper that peeked in the gap under his door.

“Ma—money. Is that what you wanna hear, huh?” Dom asked.

“Speak of this reason in a more—*general sense*.”

He slid the card from under the door and looked at it with wonder in his eyes. The contents on the card contained ten numbers—

“555-238-6698. Bold letters printed onto a blank card with not even a mention of a business or brand,” said Dr. Donohue. “Speak in a more *general sense*.”

“Look, man, I don’t know what you want me to say—”

“What if the font of the numbers were different—say, what if there was a bloody thumbprint pressed smack dab in the center of the card, huh.” Dr. Donohue surged forward and grabbed Dom’s arm, looking him dead in the eye. “Why am I still sitting here talking to you when you could’ve decided to leave moments ago—and this is a situation which is worth leaving, in my opinion.” Dr. Donohue smiled, releasing a puff of warm, flaky air into Dom’s face that had no stench whatsoever. Dom, feeling his temp skyrocket and his hands shake, looked into the man’s face with fearful tears welled up in his eyes. Dr. Donohue released Dom’s arm and sat back in his chair. “Desperation.”

“What?”

“Desperation is what brought you here.”

It was Halloween. The evening was soon going to conclude, bringing the frightful night that came ‘round every year. Dom looked up at the empty house and slid a crumpled paper from his pocket. His mask was on, protecting his identity as he smoothed out the paper

revealing his untested contraption. He marched his way up to the front door and walked into the figurative bloodbath.

“Now, what I say might be a little trivial—I don’t mean to peck at your private life but let’s be honest that your ego, along with desperation, is what brought you here. It’s—It’s a domino effect, huh. You get charged with accounting fraud because of your ego. All of that ultimately led up to here, where we—where we sit at this moment, interviewing for God knows what.”

Dom felt beads of sweat grow around his lips and his neck became an odd type of icy cold. He sat speechless, his clammy hands gripping to the arms of his chair. Dr. Donohue, observing Dom’s attitude, contorted his mouth into a disturbing grin that showcased the pearly white teeth that added on the eeriness of his expression.

“Are you *uncomfortable*, Domonic?” Dr. Donohue asked through his gritted grin. As if Dom was broken from a trans, he immediately spoke up.

“Um—no, no.” He shook his head with fear, just hoping the interview would end—but it just kept on rolling. Out of nowhere, Dr. Donohue drew a revolver from under his belt and slammed it down in front of Dom, on the table. Dom jumped, his chair tilting back enough for him to lose his balance and fall.

“You seem pretty terrified, *Dominic*. Now would you be a good lad and take this—as a generous offering.”

Dom hesitated, looking from the revolver to the grinning man.

“TAKE IT!” Dr. Donohue exclaimed, his smile remaining in the same stretched position. Startled by the sudden outburst, he felt his hands, shakily, creep through the air and land onto the handle of the weapon. He felt drops of sweat roll down this cheek and drip onto the polished floor. “Do you think that you’re a good person, *Dominic*?”

“Um—I—”

Dr. Donohue flung his arm up to a door on the right and still smiling said, “Take your weapon and go in there.”

“It’s fine, re-really can I please just go—”

“Well it’s too late for that isn’t it? Now go.”

Dom, submissively, nodded his head and slowly stood up, careful not to fall from the rattling and shaking in his legs. Once he slowly made his way to the door, Dr. Donohue right behind him, gestured to him to turn the knob. Dom complied and was met by a descent into the darkness of a cold basement.

Clutched tightly in his grasp, the revolver made its way down the wooden staircase with Dom as Dr. Donohue waited at the entrance of the door with his ear-to-ear grin, remaining stationary. Blue light seeped into the cold room from the top left window, filling the area with the utmost dread. The faint light shone on what Dom made out to be a woman, curled up, rocking back and forth humming a meek lullaby. Her hair was dry and tangled, and her toes were rotten and disoriented. Her foot was chained to a heavy rock which was numbered ‘four.’

Terrified, Dom turned back towards the stairs only to find the same darkness reflecting back on him from the now closed door from which he entered.

Dom looked back to the disturbing site, feeling his mouth quiver and hands tremble. It was at that moment he saw the other citizens. One was laying down on his side, facing the wall; he was numbered 'five.' Another one was murmuring to himself while he sat crisscrossed, staring straight ahead at the wall; he was numbered 'two.' The last one slept soundly, releasing disoriented wheezing; he was numbered 'one.' He looked forward to rock number three and the chain that led off of it which grasped air and only air. Dom dropped the revolver from his trembling hands, the weapon clattering noisily on the floor. All eyes looked up, and the room filled with the most terrible and terrifying shrieks and screams. Number four, interrupted from her lullaby, surged forward in an attempt to crawl and catch hold of Dom's legs. The others yanked and tugged at the rock in an attempt to be free, but they were unsuccessful. He reached down for the revolver and ran up the stairs, turning to face the entities once more, pointing to the revolver and pulling back the hammer, and then the trigger only for an empty click. The revolver was unloaded. Dom turned and darted back up the stairs, slamming himself against the door until it eventually opened and he fell tumbling out, jumping up and slamming the door shut behind him. Dom spun back around only to come face to face with Dr. Donohue.

"You see, simple animatronics and actors won't be able to give people a scare, don't you agree with me?" Mr. Donohue asked.

"Please, let me go, oh god please!" Dom sobbed, shrinking to the ground. Tears flooded down his face as he pleaded on and on. Dr. Donohue tugged Dom up by the collar of his shirt and struck his hand upon the poor man's face.

"There is no leaving after you have begun what you just started. The yearly Fright House will be prepared on the scariest night of the year, and you must come ready with a contraption. You're the host and once the drugs have released these savages' systems, aggression and strength will start to show, they'll break from their chains; that's what gives this house fright. Construct a lock contraption for this door to keep them away from the jolly trick and treaters or you'll be swimming in a blood bath blamed on your bloodline."

Dom stared straight ahead at Dr. Donohue, his expression hurt and scared. The grinning man handed him a fuzzy black velvet mask.

"Your identity covers up. For the host," he smiled. He then pulled out a bullet from his pocket and handed it to Dom. "Also, get rid of number three. If you do, your entire street will be thanking you. Meet him at the gas station at three, he'll be there unknowing of you. Dr. Donohue smiled and fled the house without another word. Dom looked back towards the door, just imagining the demons held within, clawing through to the innocent lives on the outside.

That night, he lay on his bed, twirling the revolver on his index finger, looking up at his ceiling in a distraught manner. It felt as if his hands were being bound by chains but in reality, he could walk across the entire country without anything stopping him. He just remained bound by the invisible chains that tugged him back from the many possibilities he could achieve. A man with a raw wound stretching across his arm lay next to him motionless. The cloth around his head was damp and dark red. Light seeped from one side of his head to the other with the

fairly wide hole that the bullet from Dom's revolver marked. Number three's arm hung low off the bed, the tips of his fingers grazing the floor.

"I didn't do it," Dom whispered to himself. "I didn't do it." Tears rolled down his eyes, wetting his bed sheet. "He came to me, I swear it. HE CAME TO ME!" The thing that Dom wasn't sure about was if his pleas were for the action he committed, or the location the action took place because his room was, for sure, not the gas station.

Trick or treaters marched down the streets once night fell among Glastonbury on the day of Halloween. The open house was now a decorative piece that lured many of the kids and families. Dom had on his black velvet mask, along with a black suit, and he was situated in the upstairs bathroom, contemplating on what he was doing by repeatedly looking into the mirror, taking off his mask, and splashing water over his parched face. A knock sounded on the door and when Dom opened it, he was met by a big man with a bushy white beard. Dom looked ahead at the man in shock, feeling lightheaded.

"Dom?" the man said, tears coming to his eyes. "The-the hell are you doing here—" Suddenly, a fleshy sound was heard, the man paused in his sentence with a disturbed grunt, and gargled, blood seeping out his mouth. He fell forward into the bathroom, just to reveal Dr. Donohue holding a sharp dagger, painted red.

"You're the host—" he said, "and you will remain the host." Dr. Donohue left the area; the dagger clutched tightly in his hand. Dom, backed away, looking at the body that he once knew to be his father, the man who set free number three so he could bail his son out. Hours passed in those five minutes. Through all of that, splinters flew from the basement door, hands reached out making the feel of the haunted idea much more appealing. Dom pulled out the crumpled piece of paper which held the outline for his contraption, but when he smoothed it out, a blank sheet smiled back up at him. Screams echoed from downstairs. Flesh tearing and drowned screams were all to be heard. As Dom descended the stairs, all he could see were the pools of blood collecting on the first floor; monsters, witches, devils, and even a SpongeBob lying amongst it all. Sirens were heard from the outside and Dr. Donohue was now gone, back into the grave in which he was planted and always had remained ever since the two years in the past, an assistant to Dom's bloodline that ran through the yearly haunted house. The dagger, with his father's blood, was clutched tightly in Dom's grasp. Dr. Donohue was just an excuse to complete the wrongdoing his bloodline had started, but Dom's shortcut wasn't able to help anyone. No contraption existed on the knob of the basement door. The freed men and women swam among the blood of their victims in the dead foyer and Dom soon lay with them, a slit in his throat that he himself created. His background indeed spoke for him along with bringing himself into a mental state of hallucinations and terror.





Aunt Marie. She had jet black hair and looked like she was in her 50s. Aunt Marie smiled back down at her and her wrinkles crunched together. "Hello Riley, how are you?" She asked. Riley smiled, but before answering, she realized that her cousins were not here. "Where is Max and Lila?" Riley asked. "Party," said Aunt Marie casually.

"Just a couple blocks down, at that weird house. Oh, do you remember when those kids came up and..." she started, but by then, Riley had grabbed her coat, took a sweet potato from the kitchen, and ran out the door, along with Erik, who clearly was confused. "Bye, thanks for coming!" She called back, hoping they would not be mad when she and Erik got back.

## Chapter 2 Erik Locks

Erik ran after Riley, so confused. "Where are we going," he yelled to her. No response. She must be working hard enough not to talk to anyone, Erik thought.

They turned the corner and onto another street. Weathersfield was a small town, and everyone knew everybody. They hustled through the street, and Erik started to have a cramp. "We ... need...to slow ... down," Erik panted.

They turned a corner again and then came up to the creepy house.

Erik caught his breath. And then said, "what are we doing here?"

Riley, with a mouth full of potato, explained that Max and Lila were here and how she had to warn them about something. "What do you have to warn them about?" he asked when she finished explaining the story. Riley handed him the sweet Potato. It tasted sweet and warm, as if it was straight from the oven. "I would not tell you," she scoffed. "Nice try." He stuck his tongue out at her and looked up at the tremendous house. It had worn off black paint and the windows were covered with pieces of wood. He was amazed at how it could still hold itself together. Erik looked over back at Riley and saw her face. She took a deep breath, and accidentally inhaled her potato. She coughed and choked on her potato. Around the whole house, decorations were up, pumpkins, blow ups, witches, and lots of other things. "Stay here," Riley said.

"Don't let anyone get you." He stared at her like she was crazy. "I am coming with you," Erik said. She laughed at him and ran inside, but of course, he followed.

They ran inside to the front door, where they were greeted by a servant. "hello, come in," he said, his voice sounding sharp as a knife. He pushed them into the house and suddenly they were surrounded by blackness...

# The Spooky Night

## By Caitlin Sprague

October 30, 1984-6:00 P.M.

"Why not?" I ask my parents as I drop my fork into the rotisserie chicken on my plate.

"Because, Marcie, it will be too dark, and me and your parents don't bite," says my ten-year-old know-it-all sister Charlotte. Right now she's "secretly" eating the candy corn on the shelf underneath the supper table.

"But I'm thirteen!" I argue. My father did not agree.

"We're not changing our minds, Marcie... now eat your chicken." My father stands up and clears his throat as he walks to the sink to wash his plate. Another good argument I make with my parents is getting a fancy dishwasher, but of course, no luck. I'm the middle child, with my sixteen-year-old brother always downstairs, with his warm blankets. It's not THAT cold in Derby, Vermont! My mother tells me to "take care of Charlotte's dishes". I groan in my head as I finish my chores for the evening, including me and my sister's dishes. After I'm done, my father says goodnight to me and tells me to go upstairs and to go to bed early because my aunt Arlene is coming over with her little girl who just turned two years old nine days ago. Her and Arlene are going to stay with us for Halloween. The little girl is named Brook. Such an unusual way to spell Brooke! I yawn and go to bed.

October 31, 1984-9 A.M.

"*My beats per minute never been the same...*" Wham! sings on my alarm radio. I groan and drag myself out of bed. I trudge downstairs and I hear my two-year-old cousin talk in bits and pieces.

"The sun's up, sleepy eyes!" My aunt jokes. I make myself a piece of toast for breakfast and munch on it while I make my way up the stairs and into my room. Up in my room, I work on the morning sudoku while I listen to my pop playlist on my Walkman. I glance up at my dark-colored walls as I stare into space. I'm daydreaming when I get a knock on my door.

"Honey, why don't you come down and carve pumpkins with us," asks my mom. I take off my Walkman on George Michael singing, "We'd hurt each other with the things we want to say". I walk down the stairs to the house's dining room and sit down.

"Who you gonna call? Ghostbusters!" Plays on my mom's boombox. I grab a pumpkin and draw triangular eyes on the orange pumpkin. This year, my mom wants me to take Brook out for Trick-or-Treating with my aunt while my parents give out lollipops. While my sister gets to go out with her bratty ballet friends-my sister's such a show-off. I do cross country instead, with a mile of eight minutes and two seconds-cross country is so much better than stupid ballet. I sit around until my parents tell me to take my sister out Trick-or-Treating. I put on a hoodie and trudge out the door.

"Trick or treat!" My sister exclaims. I am so bored... I lose myself in a daydream about being in my room, doing nothing, and seconds later, my sister is gone! I panic and look in every direction possible.

"Charlotte?" I yell. No high-pitched voice yells back. Without luck, I run back to my house while the sun sets. I lock myself in my room, guilty of losing my sister, balled up in my







# The Painting

By Ellen Saunig



Barb was new to town. She lived alone, but she wasn't lonely, for her niece, Shelly, and her three boys lived just down the road. Their father was a deadbeat and Shelly was desperate for help, so Barb, newly-divorced and tired of city life, packed up her apartment, loaded up her Pomeranian, Baxter, and moved to Glastonbury to lend a much-needed hand. She purchased an old house on Main Street that was in desperate need of updates, but she couldn't resist the charm of the place, so she spent months renovating and decorating the house to her exact specifications. The change of scenery seemed like a good idea.

One Sunday morning, the kids were off with Grandma and Grandpa and Shelly agreed to accompany Barb to a local estate sale. Shelly found the concept of estate sales depressing, but Aunt Barb never asked for anything, so Shelly figured she could do her this one favor.

The sale was at a house well-known to locals. It was surrounded by rolling hills and apple orchards and backed up to the Connecticut River. It was at once ostentatiously large and miserably kept, as it had withstood a century of neglect. Weeds grew from the gutters. Vines ran up and down the chimneys. The paint may have once been yellow, but it was now a mixture of sickly greens and browns. The numerous windows were cracked in many spots.

"Who lived here?" asked Barb, as they pulled into the circular driveway. Despite the rotting appearance of the home, the sale was packed and parking was scarce.

"No one, for a while. I guess the grandparents died and the kids didn't want the house but never got around to selling it until the town threatened to take action. Some neighbors complained. That kind of thing," said Shelly. She paused before adding, "there are a lot of stories about this house."

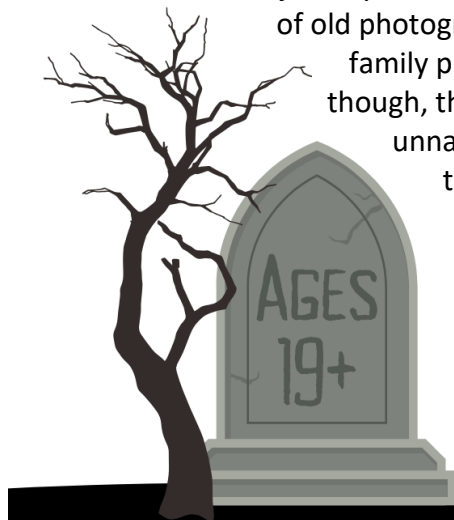
"That probably means it's full of good stuff," said Barb.

"I guess," said Shelly, studying the house from the car.

Once inside, they were greeted by a lanky, dour man in a suit who handed them a list of items as well as a map of the house. People milled around the first floor, examining lamps and clocks and a table of jewelry that was guarded by another staff member. There was also a wall of old photographs that were evidently for sale. Buying someone's gloomy family pictures seemed bizarre to Barb. She couldn't help but notice, though, that there was one boy in the picture that had striking, unnaturally blue eyes. Something about the photo was unsettling, though Barb couldn't quite figure why. She moved on.

"I'm hoping to find some planters or maybe some art," she said to Shelly, who was nervously examining an old vase. "There's a greenhouse toward the back."

There was indeed a greenhouse, and a large one at that. It was humid and smelled of rotting vegetation but packed to the gills with potential. There were dozens of pots, plantstands, and old tools. There were shelves of



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garden gnomes with toothy grins. And, finally, there was an entire area filled with birdcages. Old, metal birdcages that were decidedly gothic.

"The little boy that lived here loved birds, apparently," said an older woman passing through the area.

"Huh," said Barb, unsure of how else to respond.

Barb picked up a set of gold plantstands and they were about to leave when a small painting on a shelf caught her eye.

It was a framed picture of a black bird – a crow, maybe, though was a bit hard to tell. Its beak was wide open as if mid-squawk and its black eyes bulged from its head like something was charging toward it. Barb picked it up.

"You can't be serious," said Shelly. "That's the ugliest painting I've ever seen."

"I don't know. I actually kind of like it. Like, it's so ugly that it's not. Ya know? It's got character. Besides, it's only \$20," said Barb, holding the painting up for a better view.

"I can't imagine why," snorted Shelly. "Could we go now, though? This house is creeping me out."

And so they left. Shelly dropped Barb back at home with her two plantstands and the bird painting and went on her way. Barb put the stands on the front porch and carried the painting under her arm inside the house. She set the painting down on the kitchen table and went to collect Baxter, who was waiting by the back door to go out.

On the way back from their walk, Barb spotted the neighbor, Mrs. Wexley, examining the porch from the street.

"Where did you get those plantstands? They are wonderful!" said Mrs. Wexley.

Mrs. Wexley was in her sixties and cheerful, though something of a gossip.

"Oh, thank you! I got them this morning at an estate sale down at that big house on the river. Aren't they great? It felt like robbery taking them," said Barb.

"The old yellow house down in South Glastonbury? Oh boy, you're braver than me. I wouldn't set foot in that place, let alone take anything from there. Not without my priest at the ready!" said Mrs. Wexley.

"How do you mean?" said Barb.

"Well, these are just rumors, obviously, but they had a son, a sickly little boy, that they never let out of the house. They kept him trapped in there like a caged animal. Until one day, he'd had enough and bludgeoned his caretaker with a birdcage," she said.

"Oh, my. Well, luckily these are just plantstands," said Barb. She decided not to mention the painting.

"Good thing! Well, enjoy your evening," said Mrs. Wexley.

Barb and Baxter made their way to the front door only Baxter, oddly, refused to step inside the house. He stood still as a statue, his ears straight up and his eyes locked ahead. He let out a low growl before jumping on Barb to be picked up.

"What's your problem, silly Baxty?" Barb said aloud. She scooped him up and carried him inside the house. Baxter immediately ran upstairs.

That evening, Barb pondered where to hang the painting. It looked garish in her cozy family room, scary in the dining room (silently squawking at her imaginary guests), and it was much too dark for the kitchen. So, she settled on a guest bedroom at the top of the stairs on a large, blank wall above a dresser. The room was painted blue anyway – already dark – so it seemed to fit.

She had dinner, watched some TV and brushed her teeth before settling into bed with a book. After some time, she drifted off to sleep.

She woke in the night to the sound of dripping water. Half-asleep and confused, she figured it was just a leaky faucet and went back to sleep.

But she woke again not more than a half-hour later, this time to the unmistakable sound of not just dripping water, but a steady, louder *plop, plop, plop*.

She threw on her bathrobe and went downstairs to find her kitchen floor covered, not with water, but with a black, viscous substance that was leaking from the ceiling. The smell was unmistakable, but did not make any sense. Baxter stood to the side and barked. He dipped a paw into the muck. He backed up in horror and tried to stamp his now-black paw on the floor.

“What the hell?” said Barb. “Is this...paint?”

A door slammed in the hallway upstairs. The guest room. The hair on her neck stood up.

She made for the staircase, turning on every light she could find in the process. She tiptoed down the hall. It was cold in that part of the house and Barb could feel a chill sinking into her skin. She couldn't get a deep breath. The air felt too thin.

She pushed open the guestroom door. The window was open and rain blew in through the screen. The painting still hung on the wall, in the same spot as before. There was a pool of black paint on the floor, though, strangely, the painting itself appeared untouched. Maybe the rain from the screen got on the paint and caused it to drip? None of it made any sense. Either way, the painting had to move, because she couldn't have black paint dripping into her kitchen.

She grabbed the painting on both sides. But as soon as she attempted to lift it from the wall, something poked out the front and pricked her in the chest. A sharp, pointy object. A beak.

Barb startled and fell backwards. She landed on her butt on the wood floor, clutching her chest where the beak had punctured it. The painting fell from the ceiling.

“Help!” she screamed, hoping somebody, maybe Mrs. Wexley, would hear her. The noise seemed to startle the bird, for it withdrew its beak back into the painting like a tentacle.

Barb took a powerful leap toward the painting and put her foot through the middle of it, splitting the bird in two. She ran it downstairs, stuffed it in a garbage bag, knotted it twice, and jammed it into her trash barrel on the street. Then, she waited two hours by her front window for the garbage truck to come. She watched the painting get poured into the truck and watched the truck drive away. Satisfied, she went back to the kitchen for a pot of coffee and to clean up the mess.

When she returned to the kitchen though, she found that there was no mess to be cleaned at all. Rather, it seemed the paint had disappeared with the painting.

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The next afternoon, Shelly stopped by with two of the boys who were home for the summer and a spread of sandwiches for lunch. Barb was still feeling wary from events of the night before, but the coffee and food helped. She'd spent the early morning hours studying the kitchen floor for any signs of paint (there were none) and smoking cigarettes on her back deck (something she hadn't done for years). She also considered whether the paint incident even happened at all or if it was just some sort of bad dream. She further considered whether she was having a complete psychotic break and if she'd even know if she was having one in the first

place. Either way, it was good to have some distraction, and rambunctious five and eight-year-old boys were perfect for that.

At some point, the boys must have ventured upstairs because Barb and Shelly could hear them throwing a ball down the hallway. Shelly summoned the boys downstairs, afraid they would smash something valuable. A few minutes later, they returned with their ball.

“Auntie Barbara,” said the elder of the two boys, Jacob. “Why do you have a scary bird painting in your bedroom?”

Barb’s stomach dropped out of her body.

“You put that stupid thing from the estate sale in your bedroom?” asked Shelly, with an incredulous smirk.

“I, um, I wasn’t sure where to hang it, so it’s just a temporary solution. I may have to get rid of it after all,” she said. She steadied herself on the kitchen counter.

“Are you okay? You look kinda pale all of a sudden?” asked Shelly.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I couldn’t sleep last night and I totally just hit a wall.”

“Okay, well, text me later, okay? Thanks for having us over,” said Shelly.

Barb figured she must have looked terrible, because Shelly rounded up the boys and got them out of the house. Barb locked the door behind them, grabbed a knife from the butcher block in the kitchen, and made for the bedroom.

The painting was back all right, this time hanging neatly above her bed. Barb could see the lines from where it seemingly repaired itself, like a torn book that had been reassembled with scotch tape. She could have sworn that the bird was facing a different direction than yesterday, but she tried not to think about that and focused on the task at hand.

She climbed up on her bed and removed the painting from the wall, the bird’s black eyes boring into her like needles. She tucked it under her arm, returned downstairs, and grabbed a pack of matches from her kitchen drawer.

Once in the backyard, she set the painting down on a lawn chair and threw some fresh logs into her firepit. She doused the logs in lighter fluid and tossed in a match. The logs instantly caught fire and soon quickly grew to a decent-sized blaze. She hoped none of her neighbors were wondering why she was starting a fire in the middle of the afternoon, but she didn’t have time to hesitate. She dropped the painting into the flames.

The paint began to crackle and blister, a hideous picture made even uglier by the brown bubbles forming on its surface. Barb watched intently as the black bird peeled away from the paper and slowly burned to ash. Soon, there was nothing left but the frame, which had twisted and contorted itself into an unsightly piece of scrap of metal. She hosed down the smoldering pile, locked the remains of the frame in the trunk of her car, and threw the soot into the forest behind her house.

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Barb felt much better by the evening and settled on the couch with a large glass of wine, Netflix, and a stack of magazines. She laughed thinking about the image of herself burning a painting of a bird in her backyard, one that she got at an estate sale no less. Lesson learned. She texted with her friends from the city and begged them to come visit her – a country getaway! She briefly searched for jobs on one of her many job apps. She leafed through a few magazines and became drowsy. She had fully intended to go back to her bedroom but was simply too tired, so she shut off the lights, pulled on blanket, and lapsed into a deep sleep on the couch.

She woke again in the middle of the night. She momentarily panicked, thinking she heard the dripping noise again, but it was only the sound of rain pattering on the roof. *Good*, she thought, *more water to drown the ashes*. She rolled onto her side and settled back down.

But then, she felt something tug at her blanket. It was ever so slight, such that if she had been fully asleep she likely would not have noticed.

The blanket tugged a little bit more and pulled from her neck to her shoulders, like it had snagged on something on the floor, or something was stepping on it. What if there was a mouse skittering on her blanket? A horrific thought.

A few moments later, Barb stared at her feet, still tucked cozily under the blanket, when the black beak and black eyes poked above the end of the couch.

She lurched backward, grabbing her knees to her chest, but the bird was faster than her, and before she could move any further, the thing was in her face, one of its sharp talons digging right into the side of her neck like little knives. The bird smelled like smoke and mud and it was dripping sludge onto the blanket. Its eyes – now glowing royal blue – were square with hers.

She tried to swat it away but it was strong – so strong – like a grown man. *How could a bird be this strong?* It pressed its talon harder into her neck and a droplet of blood dribbled down onto her t-shirt.

“What do you want?” she croaked.

“Drrriiveeeee,” spoke the bird, in a low, raspy voice that was not quite human but close enough that Barb could understand.

“D..dd..dd...drive where?” asked Barb. Her entire body trembled.

“Driiiveeeee,” said the bird again.

“Okay. Okay. I’ll drive. But, bu, bu, but, you have to let me up,” she said.

The bird withdrew from her neck, but hooked onto Barb’s shoulder, keeping one talon firmly on her neck and another on her arm. She could barely breath under its weight.

Barb grabbed her keys from a cup by the front door and hesitated when she heard the sound of Baxter’s paws padding to the top of the stairs. She thought that maybe if she could call to him...

“Drivveeee!!!” shrieked the bird.

She got in her car – bird on shoulder – and put the keys in the ignition. Her hands shook so badly that she could barely grip the steering wheel. She backed out of the driveway. It was pouring rain and so dark. Glastonbury, apparently, was not big on street lights.

She started driving down Main Street, heading south. She drove for about a mile in the rain until she came to a stoplight where another car was stopped just across the way. She waited for further instructions from the bird, but none came. She briefly considered flagging down the other driver, but wondered how she could possibly explain that she was being forced by a bird against her will to drive to some unknown location.

The light turned green and she didn’t move at first.

“Driveeee!!!” said the bird.

“I don’t know where I’m going! You have to tell me where to go! I don’t know what I’m supposed to do!” said Barb. It was not lost on her that she was yelling at a (likely) possessed bird, but she was beyond caring.

“Home. Home home home home home,” said the bird.

“Home? What home? Like the forest?” said Barb. She looked for a car in her rearview mirror – anyone that could help her – but the streets were empty and dark.

“Home home home home, hoommeeee,” it screeched, its beak open wide.

Then the bird shifted, and this time put itself on Barb's head, it's talons now dangerously close to her eyes.

"Please. I don't know what that means. Just tell me and I'll take you wherever you want to go," she pleaded.

Barb caught a glimpse of its blue eyes in the rearview mirror and she could swear, just for a moment, that the eyes she saw were human.

"Housseee," it said.

And then Barb knew. The house. From the estate sale. That's where the bird wanted to go. Back to its home. Fine with her.

Barb hit the gas and sped the rest of the way down Main Street to the beautiful house on the river with the circular driveway. There were no lights on in the house save for a single lamp in an upstairs window – most likely a timer light – and the garage and driveway were empty. She got out of the car and, with the bird still attached to her head, ran to the front door, nearly slipping in the mud in the process. She knocked on the door, but as she suspected no one answered. She took a step back, unsure of what to do. The bird flapped its wings in her hair in a gross display.

Then, it flew away. Up into the rainy sky, until it reached the highest point of the house. It perched momentarily and looked Barb in the eye. Then, it dove head first into a chimney. Barb ran back to her car. She sped all the way home in the downpour.

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The storm had passed by the next morning. The sky was sunny and bright and her hydrangeas were in full bloom. It was a beautiful morning in her little town. Barb sat on the front porch in a rocking chair with a mug of coffee and Baxter at her feet and watched the passersby on Main Street.

Some time passed and Barb was about to go back inside when Mrs. Wexley approached her on the porch.

"Did you hear all the sirens last night?" said Mrs. Wexley.

"No, I didn't, actually! I was so tired I must have slept right through it. I hope everything is okay," said Barb, genuinely concerned.

"Well, you know that huge house that just had the estate sale? Down on the river? The thing burned to the ground last night. A huge, massive fire. Luckily, no one was in the house. But still, there's nothing left."

Barb choked on her coffee. "Nothing left?"

"Nothing except a bunch of old, metal birdcages."

"Wow. That's too bad. But glad no one was hurt," said Barb.

"Yeah, good thing. Anyway, enjoy your morning," said Mrs. Wexley.

"Thanks, you too," said Barb.

Barb went inside, feeling sick to her stomach. Her mouth was dry and vision blurry. She went out back for some air and privacy and a cigarette.

Up in a pine tree, high above her house, the bird waited.

## West Peak

By Mark Bielawski

The backroads of Meriden weren't the place you would normally find eighteen-year-olds on a Monday. And they certainly weren't the place for the sad brown Hyundai Elantra. It should have been put out of its misery long ago, but instead the car was slowly bumping its way over the endless cracks of failing asphalt. Up and down, up and down, side to side, side to side. Jessica sighed, which only made her nausea worse, and she instantly regretted the gesture as she fought hard to not throw up. Motion sickness was a family curse, and feeling regret while wanting to vomit at the same time made a pretty horrible mixture. There wasn't much time to reflect on this thought; a jolt made her stomach turn as the car hit yet another classic New England pothole. The craters—which were unavoidable—tossed the coins in the cup holder and shuffled the layer of trash on the floor, adding new sounds to a constant rattling that would only end when they parked and all motion ceased.

Luckily it wasn't too long before her boyfriend pulled in near a few other cars. West Peak didn't seem that popular on this wet, unusually cool July morning following a night of drenching rain. And Jessica was glad about the fact that almost no one was here. There would be less risk of witnesses.

The nausea again. Much worse. She had to get out.

As the passenger door flung open, the musty smell of the car was instantly replaced with the scent of a Connecticut forest in its summer prime. She loved that smell, all the different scents of the seasons, and so did Sam, her boyfriend. It was one reason they had hiked and done other outdoorsy stuff from the beginning of their relationship in middle school to this very day, having just graduated Glastonbury High School a month ago. Weirdly they both loved the leafy green oaks, the needly pines, and the simple, elegant flowers of the mountain laurels. They loved a lot of the same things, and they loved each other. But her love for Sam, well, it had changed like oak leaves once the summer was over and the fall took hold. It had become a sad brown Hyundai Elantra that was once new and shiny but now needed to be put out of its misery...

“Jess, you with me?”

She jumped.

“Sorry, I zoned out for a sec there, you know how bumpy car rides make me feel,” she offered. Could he hear the guilt in her voice? Sam didn't seem to notice as he flashed a smile. She felt a hint of warmth as their old spark flickered back to life for a brief moment before fading away.

“I guess my dream of us running away together to become pirates isn't gonna happen?”

“No, no, probably not. The closest I'm going to get is pirating software. Or maybe being a pirate for Halloween.” He laughed at her response.

“I'm one-hundred percent good with that. When I come up to college to visit you this Halloween, we could definitely pull off matching pirate costumes.”

“Maybe. TBD,” she tried to sound positive, “but let's get going.”

They changed into their hiking boots, slathered on bug spray, shouldered their packs, and set out. The trailhead was clearly marked, and soon they lost sight of the road as the forest engulfed them. The sounds of civilization, still present, became faint as they moved quickly

over the wet roots and slick rocks. Quiet settled in. Jessica got lost in the rhythm of her footfalls and her thoughts.

Come up to college. Innocent words, but they made her feel worse than the bumpiest car ride, or the choppiest sea filled with the most blood-thirsty pirates. As her senior year had played out, a vision of college—perhaps part reality, part fantasy—had taken root like a seed and blossomed in her mind. Almost every day she would sit in class and daydream about a frat party at some rundown house outside of Dartmouth, where she had been lucky enough to be accepted for the fall. There wouldn't be a cloud in the sky. Just little clouds as her hot breath hit the cool Autumn air. So many stars and just a sliver of Moon directly overhead. Friends passionately talking about nothing at her side. A cold nasty drink in her hand.

And then it happened. They locked eyes. He was so handsome and, my god, he had just smiled at her. *That* kind of smile. Now he was walking over. Her heart raced. As he approached, his features became clearer: sometimes he became a movie star, or a sports player, or a model, or simply a hot guy she had seen once never to meet again. Most times when the story unfolded in her mind, he was someone different, but every time, there was someone that he was not.

Sam.

Jessica wasn't sure what had started the change within her. She couldn't pinpoint one reason. There was just something missing now, something that seemed to tarnish all the good moments, leaving a sticky taint. No future. No hope. No hiking trail to walk through the weeds together. When she tried to picture them as a couple in her mind, blackness set in. It was horrible. She was a horrible person for what she was about to do.

Sam was a far better human being. He was always kind, loving, and funny. Once he got through his gap year and figured out what he wanted to do with his life, community college, the trades, something else, he'd have a bright future ahead of him. He wouldn't end up that nice guy working two dead end jobs plus a side hustle, pitiful, easily dismissed, as he bagged your junk or knocked on your door to sell solar panels. That guy with three kids at home who loved him so much but barely got to spend time with their dad because he was always working...

Jessica cringed. She *was* a horrible person. Nothing was wrong with that reality, and everything was wrong with her.

A dog barked.

It sounded close. Suddenly, she came back to the world around her.

"What kind of dog do you think it is?" she said, trying to escape herself.

"Umm, I don't know. Golden retriever?"

"I don't think so. I'm thinking smaller."

"Black lab?" Sam guessed again.

"Didn't I say smaller?"

"You said a couple of things, but what I didn't hear was *your* guess."

"Aussiedoodle?"

"Come on now; you're just showing off," he feigned annoyance.

At the same moment a dog appeared at the top of the hill above them. Black. Maybe the size of a small Aussiedoodle. But they had both been wrong. It was some type of spaniel.

They both stopped. It was staring at them. Still and silent. Jessica and Sam looked at each other nervously.

"Where's its owner? Do you think it's lost?" Jessica whispered.

"Daisy!" A man's voice broke the silence.

He came over the hill at almost the same moment. Jessica stared. Early twenties maybe, dark hair that matched his dog, chiseled face, and missing one shirt. His body, wow. She had to look away or she might start drooling worse than Daisy, who was now drinking and slobbering from a little bowl of water that the man had placed down on the trail.

"Sorry if she scared you. She's about the friendliest dog you'll ever meet. I like to let her go free and remember a time before collars and leashes. But she's a naughty pup and gets a little ahead of me once and awhile. To be honest, maybe more than once and awhile."

"No worries," Jessica responded. She could feel herself blushing. The man smiled.

"How's the trail up ahead?" Sam asked, oblivious to the situation.

"Slippery. Be careful up there. It looks like you have the proper footwear," he nodded to the boots, "because it always makes me nervous when I see people hiking in conditions like this with some beat-up sneaks that you know don't have any tread left on them. I will, however, note that I'm a hypocrite today because I forgot my boots at home." He lifted up his right foot to display an impressively beat-up sneaker.

"Thanks for the advice. We will play it extra safe. And, hey..." Sam trailed off.

"Yeah?"

"Can my girlfriend pet your dog?" The man nodded, waved his hands in a gesture of invitation, and then they all laughed together. She *did* want to pet the dog; Sam knew her well. When she finished, they both thanked him and continued on while he started to fade into the foliage. Jessica knew he was gone. She knew for one simple reason: she had looked back again and again.

Out of sight. Vanished. Yet was he truly gone? As their feet moved quickly and they started to breathe heavier, Jessica got lost again. Back to the frat party at Dartmouth. Parts of the story were the same. But there was a new man of her dreams, and she felt this one wouldn't be so easy to replace.

"Jess?"

"Yeah?"

"Did that dog freak you out?"

"All dogs that are off their leash freak me out a bit until I know they're friendly, even though I really love dogs. I think the woods makes a lot of fears worse, too. So I guess the simple answer is yes."

"No, that's not what I meant..."

"Then what were you asking?" she replied confused.

"Have you heard of the Black Dog of West Peak?"

"I'm going to guess you know the answer to that question, so just go on."

Sam seemed to be looking everywhere except at her, his eyes checking the forest, as he continued, his voice soft. Jessica had to listen closely to hear his voice over the wind.

"It's an old story. I think it goes back to somewhere in the 1800s. People see a dog up here. A black one. It's friendly, but it doesn't leave pawprints; when it barks, no sound comes out. They say when you see it the first time it's for joy; the second time it's for sorrow; and the third time you die. The dog puts a curse on you." He paused. "A lot of people won't hike up here because of that story—especially if you're from Meriden."

Jessica didn't respond right away. Instead her eyes now searched the area around them. It took a long time for her to find the right words for a crazy story.

"My opinion on dogs remains unchanged."

Sam couldn't stop laughing.

The hike continued. Eventually, they reached a nice spot with rock to sit on, right next to a vernal pond that had formed in a depression during the recent heavy rains. Here the forest thinned and the sky took the stage, becoming part of the tableau.

And here was the place she would break up with Sam. Over the past few months Jessica had played through scenarios in her mind—every way they could talk, every reason she could give him, every choice of words she could make—and all combinations seemed equally horrifying. So, for better or for worse, after waiting too long, she had settled on a hike, on this day. But time was running out.

They sat down on the boulder, opened their bags, and got out water and energy bars. Together they ate without much conversation as they both enjoyed the surroundings. Jessica tried to keep her mind empty of thoughts as an anxiety built within her, as if she was gently pulling the trigger of a gun, tense but controlled, and waiting for the moment where calmness turned into an explosion.

“Sam?” She looked at him.

“Yeah?” he said, not turning towards her yet.

“Sam, look at me please, I want to—”

“Jess...” He cut her off. His voice had changed.

“Jess, there.”

Sam pointed. Jess followed his finger to a spot directly across the pond, back from the edge of the dark water. The wind blew and the leaves shook so violently and loudly that Jessica could barely hear Sam when spoke.

“Do you see a black dog?”

“Yes.”

“Is it the same one from before?”

“Probably. Maybe, it's actually hard to tell from this distance.”

The dog turned and started to walk away from them before stopping. It then turned and sat down. Its profile faced them. The dog's snout slowly moved upwards to point towards the sky. The wind beat the leaves with fury.

“Is it...howling?” Jess asked. It was Sam's turn to be uncertain.

“I can't hear anything. The wind is so loud. It looks like it.”

“Sam, let's—”

Someone was behind them. Jessica could feel it. She pivoted. Right next to them was the man that they had met earlier. He appeared sweaty, upset, and out of breath, his hair wet and matted in certain places with debris clinging to the moisture.

“Hey,” he said between gasps, “I'm sorry if I scared you. I called out but I guess you didn't hear me. My dog.” He stopped as if in pain. “She ran away from me. Back up the trail. Have you seen her? Have you heard anything?”

“I think she was just across that pond a few seconds ago,” Sam said.

“You're serious?” He looked past them. His face was shades of disbelief and anger. He looked at Jessica, and she simply nodded in confirmation.

“Thank you. If I lose Daisy it will be the saddest day of my life, worse than when I lost my own mother.”

And then he was off, sprinting around the water's edge. The moment was ruined. Sam and Jessica retrieved their things and started the last section of the hike, which was about a ten minute hike to some cliffs and the summit.

The inner dialogue returned. No. No, she told herself. No, she wouldn't be deterred. Today was the day. She couldn't carry the burden anymore—the sleepless nights, the second guessing, the self-hate. There was no guarantee they would stop, but she needed to try something, anything. Maybe, at its simplest, she needed to move.

They moved their bodies. Faster than before. After a journey filled with pauses, they finally reached the traprock cliffs overlooking Meriden and the rest of the Hanging Hills. The view was beautiful. The hills, valleys, and small towns of Connecticut spread out before them like a carving, a gem, whose facets glimmered differently from every vantage point, no matter the weather. She would miss these moments.

Sam walked a few steps onto the cliff, stepping cautiously to avoid fragmented stone and scattered puddles that dotted the wind-worn surfaces. Jessica followed him before resting for a moment. Her head turned back towards the treeline as she reflected on that poor dog, and then she thought about that poor man, smiling at her just like he did before but under an Autumn sky...

When she turned back to Sam, he was down on one knee. In his hand was a small open box. In it, a small pretty ring. His mouth opened to speak. No...

“No, no, no. No, Sam. *No*. This isn't right. This isn't fair. I was going to break up with you today.” The words came out, unstoppable.

He stood. The look on his face was the most terrible thing she had ever seen. The box and the ring fell to the ground. Sam staggered backwards right as the wind gusted into his chest, throwing him off balance. He was going to fall over the edge. He was going to die.

Just like her words, Jessica became unstoppable as she jumped forward, grabbed his arm, and threw all of her weight in the opposite direction. His momentum dragged them both dangerously close to the edge, but they stopped. Once it was clear they were stable and safe, they moved away from the drop before holding each other tight, sobbing, and then continuing the embrace while the world went silent. Even the wind had disappeared.

In the silence they heard it.

A dog whimpering.

A man's voice.

“Help.”

“It's coming from the bottom of the cliff,” Sam whispered.

“Please let them be alright,” Jessica whispered back.

“We have to go down there.”

“Ok, but safely. How do we do that?”

“I think a little ways back there's a slope of loose stone that we can probably scramble down if we're careful. It didn't look hard to get to, there might be some risk, but going down it should be pretty safe. The rocks are small.”

The slope was just as Sam had described it. Getting down wasn't pleasant, but they made it through with only a few scrapes on their legs and hands. At the base of the rockface, back towards where they had stood on the cliffs, there were larger boulders mixed in with the smaller jagged rocks.

“Help.” The man again. It was coming from the other side of two huge boulders.

“I'll look.” Sam tried to sound brave. Sarah tried, too.

“Take my hand. Please. We'll go together.”

Sam peered down towards her outstretched hand. Hesitation. But he did reach out, and for the first time since middle school, their fingers intertwined without the bond that existed between a couple.

They crept forward and moved around the biggest boulder. Jessica saw him resting on the ground nearby to her right. Sam was lying upon a bed of sharp stones, broken, face turned towards her. His eyes were closed and unmoving as blood flowed over the lids. Dead. He was clearly dead.

Jessica tried to sit up, but she couldn't. She tried to move her head so she didn't have to see his body anymore, but she couldn't. She tried to lift her right arm. She could. She got it to the point where she could see a mangled mess that had once been something so soft and whole, something that was once capable of holding the hand of another.

They had fallen. But they hadn't fallen—they had walked down here, she remembered. That couldn't be true. Was it a hallucination? When she had grabbed Sam as he was going towards the edge, they must have gone down together. Or was that even right? Did he actually try to propose? What really happened?

At that moment Jessica heard movement on the rocks. As she looked up, a dog's face suddenly loomed over her. A black dog with a big grin, its tongue hanging out and shaking as it panted. It licked her, closing her right eye. The world became smaller. Distant.

The third time you die. She felt the tongue on her face, and there was darkness once again on West Peak.

# Home Is Where the Soul Is

By: Kelly Taylor Brown

*Based on a true story*

After months of fruitless searching, Melly and Brian Bond, expecting their first child, were growing weary. They were a young newly wedded couple, fresh in love but feeling fresh out of luck, finding themselves in the 2018 pre-covid seller's market for home buying.

Brian Bond, a Los Angeles native had mused about the west coast for the backdrop of raising their family. Melly however, a Connecticut native, had fond memories of leaf pile jumping, snow man building, and mid-summer shoreline retreats that painted her childhood. She campaigned to give their family the same New England charms she had been raised with to which Brian couldn't help but eventually concede to.

"I suppose it could be just like Calvin and Hobbes" He began, joining in on the fantasy. "I had always felt jealous of their seasonal mischief, it wasn't easy for me to imagine myself as a boy in their landscapes when I was growing up."

"Exactly!" Reassured Melly "Think of the Halloween parades, the turkey trots, the hot cocoa, the sledding, and a snowy Christmas!"

Melly and Brian had met during their freshmen semester as undergrads at UCLA. "Okay, okay, I cannot argue with that, I guess I see this was your plan all along when we decided on UCONN for grad school", he smirked "as long as we can visit our family in California once a year" requested Brian

"Deal" the couple shook on it.

As listings blurred together, and the houses in their budget kept yielding conditions that were either too cramped, too smelly, too runned down, or in parts of the state that were too far from the life they imagined; the young couple started to wonder if they may need to reconsider their plans.

"The offer still stands," Brian reminded Melly one weary morning over coffee before their next showing appointment, "my parents still say we can live in their guest house in LA until we land on our feet and can get our own home. The place is big enough for the three of us and all those Malibu sunsets we love are within 5 miles."

Melly sighed, now in her last trimester and the couple up against a lease renewal in a third floor one bedroom apartment "I suppose we'll start with fishing for some jobs out there, and see if anything bites. We will get on the phone with your parents tonight." Brian nodded sympathetically

Then came the Glastonbury home.

It had just hit the market, and the urgency was palpable. George and Alicia Orwell, an older couple, were selling quickly. George Orwell, the husband, had been diagnosed with a progressive terminal cancer. They were relocating to be closer to their adult daughter out of state for assistance with end of life care. Their misfortune, quietly and respectfully, became the Bonds' blessing.

An enthusiastic call from Bond's Realtor, a family friend named Benson engaged the couple's skeptical interest, "just give this place a look, you're not going to believe it; it's turn key, and get this, it's in Glastonbury!"

The couple, who hadn't assumed anything in the beautiful town of Glastonbury could fit their modest budget, rushed to meet their Realtor immediately.

"Oh, I just don't believe it Brian, Benson wouldn't show us any homes in this town all year because they were too far outside of our budget, do you think he's just trying to pull our leg? Get us to give it more time?" Melly wondered as the couple pulled off of the route 2 Griswold exit.

"Maybe" Brian replied, "I guess we'll have to let him know after this showing that we are serious about California, I don't want to waste anymore of his time."

The house was a dream. A giant cherry blossom bloomed vibrantly in the front yard, waving them in. In the back, gardens bloomed in soft layers of lavender and rose. Inside, custom molding curled like vines around doorways, and built-ins whispered of craftsmanship and care.

"Oh Brian, it has two full bathrooms and enough space for two children!" Melly exclaimed, her smile stretching from ear to ear and her eyes wide, alive with hope again for the life she had yearned for in an idyllic Connecticut town.

"And most major utilities have been updated, how can this be? We haven't seen anything like this in our budget anywhere" Brian gestured to Benson

"Yeah, so sadly there *is* a reason. This was supposed to be a forever home for the couple who is selling. They moved in here over 35 years ago" Benson explained, a somber look spreading across his face. "They weren't expecting to ever leave but sadly the gentleman is very sick. The home was on the market earlier this year and they couldn't bear to sell it, turning down multiple above asking offers. I guess they finally have no choice now but to relocate closer to their adult daughter for assistance with caretaking, so here it is back on the market. I gotta tell you though, there are already two offers even though it just came on late this afternoon."

"Oh Brian" Melly said, tugging at his arm "This is everything we could want and in such a beautiful town, we'd be crazy not to at least try!"

Being that they were at the top of their budget with this house, the Bonds threw in their offer knowing it was their only, and that they'd likely get outbid by the two other interested parties.

“Hey, it doesn’t hurt to throw our hat in, these other people could be interested in other homes as well, you never know” assured Benson. “One of them could even later back out due to an inspection issue you guys are willing to deal with, so let's go ahead and get your offer in.”

A day later they were informed beyond disbelief that their offer was accepted, “get this!” Benson shouted into the phone excitedly, “they picked you guys because they said you reminded them of who they were when they came into the home, also pregnant with their daughter and excited to raise their family in Glastonbury! The other bidder was some loner guy looking to acquire rental property, and then the second one was an older couple looking to downsize to a retirement sized home. You guys were picked because they want to see another family grow up in that house and make memories the way they did!”

Melly and Brian felt as if they were in one of those pinch me moments barely able to receive the news they were hearing. It truly felt as if it were meant to be.

Less than three months after moving in, the couple was honored to welcome their daughter into their dream home, little Ellie Bond was born.

Shortly after Ellie’s arrival, condolence cards began arriving meant for the Orwells, from loved ones who had been unaware of their move. The couple felt great sympathy for the passing of the ill man, who hadn’t intended to leave his forever home behind. With the cards came renewed gratitude for watching their baby daughter Ellie catch her first brilliantly colored autumn leaves falling from their backyard oak tree, and bundling her up in her first snow suit to chase snowflakes in. And with all of this, came something else.

Lights began to flicker, faucets turned on, and music blared from phones and TVs without prompting. Ellie clapped to the dancing lights and giggled at the musical interruptions during dinner. The Bonds began to suspect that George Orwell hadn’t quite left. Seeing how amused little Ellie was helped them embrace the curious phenomenon. They spoke of George fondly, as if he were a houseguest lingering between the walls.

“Ah!” shouted Melly before erupting into laughter.

“Are you okay?” Brian called out.

“Oh yes, it’s just George turning the shower head off and on again while Ellie is in the tub, it startled us again!” Responded Melly

“More, more, more!” Ellie giggled and clapped in the dancing shower spout.

Years passed. Ellie turned four. The Bonds learned after years of trying, that they could not in fact have another child. Saddened, and moved by Ellie’s longing for a sibling, they adopted a kitten, a little tuxedo fluffball named Fanny. Ellie and Fanny were inseparable. Fanny laid beside her at night and also in the gardens where Ellie picnicked. When Ellie entered kindergarten,

little Fanny followed her to and from the bus stop each day. George, it seemed, liked Fanny too, casting lights for her to chase throughout the house amusing the entire family.

Then one night, Melly and Ellie following their usual evening ritual, went to call little Fanny inside at dusk. When Fanny didn't answer their call, Ellie grabbed the kitty treat container and began shaking it violently shouting "Fanny! Come in Fanny! It's time for bed!" This usually did the trick when Fanny was feeling especially stubborn about coming in for the night. However, this time, Fanny still wasn't answering the call.

"You guys go upstairs, brush your teeth and start the next Junie B without me, and I'll stay outside for a bit more with the treats." reassured Brian.

Brian called into the dark, heart heavy with worry. Glastonbury had coyotes and Brian feared the worst. Ellie struggled to concentrate on her favorite book series that night, and was difficult to console, missing her bedtime companion Fanny. Melly barely slept, checking the door again and again throughout the night but to no avail.

Days passed, Fanny remained gone. Melly posted missing notices on the Facebook group *Glastonbury Friends and Neighbors* offering a reward if found. She hung posters with the help of Ellie at Daybreak Coffee Roasters, Giovannis Brickoven Pizzeria, Wholefoods, and on telephone poles all throughout the downtown area.

Every time Melly's phone buzzed, Ellie perked up, "mom, mom, is that someone who saw one of our posters??"

As more days passed, and no messages came in about Fanny, the family began to lose hope "I just don't get why Fanny hasn't come home to us" Ellie sighed "I know" Melly soothed.

"I want you to put her dish away, I keep wanting to cry every time I look at it" Melly eventually demanded. Brian and Melly nodded.

The house grew restless. Lights pulsed more often. Music erupted at odd hours. Faucets turned on without stopping overnight causing flooding issues in their downstairs bathroom. Ellie's nightlight blinked like a heartbeat at first comforting but later disrupting her nighttime peace.

"Stop it George!" Ellie would call out frustrated in the middle of the night. It was as if George was grieving too.

Finally, after a second bathroom flood Melly whispered into the air, "I'm sorry, George. We can't live like this." She and Brian researched ways to help a spirit move on and received advice from a local medium.

Together, one night the family walked room to room, holding burning sage chanting, "We wish you peace. Now it is time to leave."

The house quieted, no more flickering lights, water returned to manual operation, and random music playing stopped. For the first time, the home felt still.

One night, Ellie asked, “what if I miss Fanny AND George?” Her voice trembled with the ache of absence.

Then came a knock.

At the door stood an older man in a flannel shirt, gray hair, beard, and pale blue eyes with heavy wrinkled eye lids. In his arms was little Fanny.

Ellie shrieked with joy, reuniting her kitty into her arms “FANNY! Where was she?!”

Melly and Brian rushed to thank the man and inquire further but he was already turning away, “please wait a moment sir, we’d like to give you the reward we promised on our signs” Brian called out.

“Oh, no need. It’s time for me to go home now” said the man already off of their front porch.

Ellie ran over to him tugging at his shirt. “Mr, Mr, can I send you a thank you card, pleeeeeease?”

He knelt, smiling. “Sure. Here’s my address.” He handed her what appeared to be a business card folded in half and continued humbly on his way.

Weeks passed. Ellie and Fanny resumed their friendship, this time with Fanny adorning an updated collar, equipped with a GPS tracker that connected her whereabouts to their mobile phones. The house was busy with Fanny and Ellie antics, the family felt once again whole.

One evening, Ellie remembered her promise. She took out her markers and began constructing a thank you card for the man who had rescued her precious Fanny. When she had finished, she fetched the business card which had been tucked safely in her nightstand drawer while Melly grabbed an envelope ready to address. As Ellie recited the card to her mom, Melly’s pen fell out of her hands, and the two met each other’s eyes with astonishment.

The address was their own.

George was going home.

## The Courier

By Diana Gallagher

It was late at night to be wandering, Joseph acknowledged, but he felt compelled to wander all the same.

He'd had the same habit in college, weaving through the moon-cast shadows of Yale's austere buildings long after the night's revelry had worn down. Not unlike a ghost himself, he'd thought grimly as his sneakers hushed over the pavement, his mind ruminating over this assignment and that.

A decade later, that whisper hadn't been silenced. Especially on nights like these, with autumn leaves sighing beneath the swollen red moon—a light so bracing that it illuminated the view of South Glastonbury's Main Street from his apartment window, the road empty besides the occasional solitary vehicle. The kind of light and shadows that called to Joseph, no matter how inexplicably, no matter how rational he thought himself to be.

So Joseph slipped on his sneakers and tossed his messenger bag over his shoulder (both newer than those college years, but beat down all the same) and stepped out the door.

The skitter and snap of dying leaves greeted him as he turned down Ferry Lane and passed the historic farmhouses, their lights long extinguished. The moon cast long shadows over the silent tobacco fields. If he stood still, he thought, he might hear the ceaseless pull of the Connecticut River at the end of the lane.

A cold breeze hissed over his neck.

He zipped his fleece sweatshirt to his throat.

As he walked over the cracked pavement, following the double yellow lines, a cloudbank drifted across the moon. In the new darkness, his sneaker sank into mud.

Strange.

He retracted his foot and took another step, only to find more mud. And although the harvest season had passed, resigning itself to upcoming winter, a sudden strong biting scent filled his nose, one that smelled a lot like—

A horse neighed in alarm.

“Watch out!” a voice shouted.

Joseph leapt to his right as the horse and rider bolted past him, the horse's hooves kicking up mud as it thundered down the lane.

Where was the pavement?

He whirled back to where he'd come from, only to be met with fog. It billowed around him, as though it had been lying in wait in those fields. Waiting to ensnare him.

The cool droplets prickled against his skin. In the muted fog bank, there was no sound. No sign of the moon. Only the thunder of his heart and the hitch of his breath.

Woooooooooooooooooooo.

A horn blared in the distance.

Enough was enough. Joseph took off running, the mud squelching beneath his sneakers. Except—

Where was the road?

Which way was he running?

He fumbled in his messenger bag for his phone.

Instead, he tugged out a ream of rough-hewn paper. “What?” he said out loud.

Woooooooooooooooooooo.

The horn blasted louder now. Closer.

Horse hooves clip-clapped back through the mud. Yes, that was the smell. Manure. He took a wary step back as the rider dismounted and assessed Joseph. The man looked to be Joseph's age, with stern thick brows and cheeks ruddy from the wind and sun. His dark blue wool coat and flapped cap seemed naval in nature.

"You're late," the man said, clearly harried. "Let's go."

Joseph looked over his shoulder in the desperate hope that the man was addressing someone, anyone, but him.

Only the fog curled behind him.

"Sorry," Joseph said as contritely as he could. "I don't think we've met."

The man harrumphed. "Captain Hollister."

"Right. And—"

"You're the courier, are you not?" Captain Hollister interrupted. "It's on that paper of yours."

Even the horse whinnied with irritation. "There, there," the captain said with more patience than he had reserved for Joseph. He took the horse's lead and wound it around a wooden hitching post. "We'll be back soon, Bess, before you know it."

"We?"

The captain sighed, as though it really were all quite simple. "Look at the paper, boy."

Joseph bristled at "boy," but did as he was told. When he tugged out the ream, the paper seemed to have multiplied; there must be hundreds of pages now. Thousands, perhaps. His arm buckled beneath the weight, which he hoped the captain didn't notice. He squinted at the freshly inked typeset embossed on the leaf wrapped around the paper.

"The Roaring Brook Paper Manufacturing Company," Joseph read out loud. "What is this?"

"For the print run," the captain said. "It's to break all records, so I hear. Of course"—he leveled Joseph with a stern look—"can't break records when there's no paper to print on."

The sound of waves cut off Joseph's next question. The river thrashed, and its spray hissed up and over the banks. He jumped back, but not quickly enough to avoid the cold water seeping into his sneakers.

Then the wind swept back the fog, and the steamship rose from the waves.

Anchored to the dock, its twin stacks reached into the night sky. The first mate ran across the dock, barking orders to the crew. A light winked in and out from the pilot house as the ship bucked in the current.

"Hurry!" Without a glance back, Captain Hollister sprinted onto the ship.

For a moment, Joseph wavered on the shore. The acrid smoke burned his throat.

He knew he shouldn't follow.

But his feet betrayed him. The dock's wooden beams groaned as he hurried up the gangplank.

With a final blast of the horn, the ship lurched from the dock. The stern wheel churned with a mighty shudder. Joseph gripped the wooden railing, his teeth chattering.

The rain lashed against his cheeks as the ship listed from side to side.

"Look out!" the captain yelled as a wave splashed aboard.

"Who's this for?" Joseph shouted back.

"The sequel to the book about the boy on the river."

The sequel to—“Are you talking about Huck Finn?” Joseph said incredulously. “Mark Twain?”

Captain Hollister narrowed his eyes. “That’s Mr. Clemens to you.”

“That’s impossible.”

“Believe me, young man, I’ve seen far stranger things on this side of the river.” The captain grimaced. “Better hold on tight.”

Cargo scraped and slid over the deck. Joseph’s stomach twisted as the ship fought the current.

Whatever strangeness was afoot, the river seemed determined to not let them cross.

The ship took an impossibly tight turn, its hull perpendicular to the punishing tide.

Joseph gritted his teeth, digging his feet for purchase on the slick planks.

Up, up, up—

The ship hitched to its side, suspended at an impossible angle.

Captain Hollister gripped Joseph’s shoulders, a wild fear in his eyes. “Listen to me, boy. There will be a horse and rider on the other side to take the paper to Hartford.”

Joseph shook his head. “I don’t understand.”

A tremendous crack roared into the night.

Beneath them, the wood splintered.

“Whatever happens,” the captain shouted, “don’t lose the paper!”

And then—

Joseph was falling.

Careening through darkness.

Until he plunged straight into the tumbling waters.

Joseph’s flailing hands caught hold of a merciful beam. He hoisted himself up, panting. He scanned the waves, but there was no sign of the captain or crew. Only the last remnants of steam puffed into the sullen sky.

“Help!” he yelled.

A light bobbed on the Rocky Hill shore.

He waved frantically, kicking his legs to drive him closer to shore. But he was too far away, the current moving too quickly. Already his arms burned from their grip on his lifeline. The river seemed bent on dragging him down, down into its dark depths.

With his remaining strength, Joseph heaved his bag to the surface and dropped it onto the plank. Heavier than before, it was assuredly waterlogged, the paper rendered useless.

Yet—somehow the paper had doubled again.

He didn’t understand it. Any of it. Except for the inevitability that this was what he was meant to do.

With a mighty push, he sent the plank with the bag into the current.

The light on the shore rushed down to the water’s edge. Joseph watched, his lungs burning as he treaded water and fought the tide. Then the clatter of horse hooves as the rider hurried away.

The water went slack.

The fog dispersed, slinking back to the shore.

The rain let up.

That was all right, he thought as his pulse slowed. He was tired, anyway. So very tired from these late-night rambles.

Before he closed his eyes, the moon reappeared. Pale white this time, soft and serene.

So they say now that when the ferry is canceled in gloomy hours—  
Sure, it might be the fog.  
Or it might be someone else’s story sailing down the river, waiting to be told once  
more.

x x

## Who’s at the Door?

By Stephen Kam

The day started off like most of my days. The alarm goes off at 7am. I go about my morning routine, getting ready for work and getting our kids, Julie and Sandy, ready for school. At 8:30, I see the school bus arrive outside our door, and I say goodbye to the kids. My wife, Stephanie, leaves for work shortly after. I work remotely for a software company so my commute is a short walk to my desk. I log in and begin my day.

My first meeting is at 10am, where my team members each take turns talking about what they worked on the previous day, what they will be working on today, and if anyone needs any help. When it is my turn to speak, I am interrupted by the doorbell. “Sorry, team. I need to step away for a minute. I’ll be right back”. When I get to the door, there is nobody there. Strange, but I figured it was just someone that went to our house by accident. It happens. I get back to my desk and continue with my meeting. After my meeting ends, I work for a few more hours, take a lunch break, and get back to work. At 2:15pm, I hear the doorbell ring again. Again, there is nobody there. I step outside to see if there is anyone around but the streets are empty. I want to walk a bit further down the street to see if I can see anyone, but I still have a lot of work to finish today, so I get back into my house and continue my work.

At around 4pm, I see the school bus outside my house and the kids come in a few moments later. I give them some snacks and ask how their day was. Sandy goes first. “Today was so fun! Everybody did really well on the math test yesterday, so Mrs. Chipano gave us an extra 30 minutes of recess!” Next, Julie tells us about her day. “Today was crazy! Matt and Jimmy were poking each other and not listening to the teacher so the teacher told them both to sit in the corner for 20 minutes. But after only ONE minute, they started screaming and hitting each other! Mrs. Ticma sent them both to the principal’s office, and we didn’t see them for the rest of the day.” “Wow, sounds like you both had a really interesting day!”, I say.

A few moments later, as they are both putting away their coats and backpacks, I hear the doorbell ring again. “Mommy’s home!”, shouts Julie. Sandy responds with “That’s not mom. She has keys to the house. Why would she need to ring the doorbell?” I go to the door to see who it is. For the third time today, there is nobody at the door. I start to get a bit nervous, but I try to remain calm to not startle the kids. “Must’ve been one of our neighbor’s kids ringing the

doorbell as a prank”, I tell them. They accept my explanation and go on with the rest of their day.

An hour later, Stephanie comes home. We chat for a few minutes about our day as we have a few snacks. I’m hesitant to tell her about the doorbell. I might just be making a big deal out of nothing. But what if the doorbell rings again tonight? It’s probably better that she knows.

“It’s probably just some bored kids copying the latest viral video they saw on TikTok. Just last week, I read an article about kids recording themselves picking up snails from the floor and eating them!” I almost spit out my drink in disgust.

“Oh! Have you checked our home security app? We can just check the video to see who was at the door”. Why didn’t I think of that? I open up the app on my phone and find several recorded videos from today. “This can’t be right. There’s nobody there”, Stephanie says. “Can you replay it with the sound on?”. I replay the video with the sound on. Stephanie screams and I drop the phone. We hear a mix of static and something that sounds like a quiet, low-pitched scream.

Julie and Sandy rush into the kitchen. Julie asks nervously, “What happened?” Stephanie and I look at each other, unsure of how to explain what we just saw. “We were looking at the video recording of who was at the door an hour ago when the doorbell rang. We didn’t see anybody, but let’s not panic. There has to be a reasonable explanation for this”, I tell them. “Don’t panic? You just dropped your phone and mom was screaming!”, Julie says.

Trying to calm the kids down, Stephanie says “Yes we did, but we just overreacted. Like dad said, there has to be a reasonable explanation for this.” We try to go on with the rest of our night like nothing unusual is happening, but everybody is visibly shaken.

At 8pm, as we are all in the living room watching TV, the doorbell rings and the lights flicker. Julie and Sandy scream. I leap off the couch and run to the door as quickly as I can. Again, there is nobody there. What is going on? In a scared and nervous voice, Julie asks if there’s a ghost haunting our house. I tell her that there isn’t and that there’s just something wrong with our doorbell and lights. Hopefully I am right. That night, we all try to sleep, but the doorbell rings 2 more times, making everyone nervous and afraid to sleep.

At 7am, I wake up and begin my day. I am extremely tired from lack of sleep so I make an extra strong coffee. I randomly scroll through a few apps on my phone while drinking my coffee. As I am reading posts in the Nextdoor app, I see a post from someone one block away. It is titled **Help! A ghost is haunting our house!**

I start reading the post. It says:

I know nobody is going to believe me. I swear I am not going crazy. There is a ghost haunting our house and it keeps ringing our doorbell and turning our lights on and off. It started yesterday at around 10am and continued for the rest of the day. Every time the

doorbell rings, there is nobody there. I check the recorded footage and there is nobody there! At night, our lights would randomly flicker on and off! I don't know what to do!

I start reading the comments, and I don't know if I should feel relieved or more scared. Several other people in my neighborhood responded to the post saying the exact same thing started happening to them yesterday. I check if this is happening everywhere else. I open my browser and start reading the news, but there is no mention of a ghost ringing door bells and turning off lights anywhere else. It seems to just be happening in Glastonbury. Is Glastonbury haunted?

After I finish reading all of the comments, I show my family the post. We're relieved that this is not just happening to us. But we're also more scared now because there could potentially be a ghost haunting our city.

Today is Halloween. Sandy and Julie usually look forward to Halloween more than any other day of the year. But this year, they are too scared to go trick or treating. After they come back home from school, we decide to just stay home, eat some candy, and stay close to each other. Because we don't want to answer the door for any trick-or-treaters, we leave a large bowl of candy outside the door. We attempt to have a quiet, relaxing night watching TV and playing games. At 6pm, the doorbell rings again and the lights flicker. Sandy and Julie start crying, telling us that they don't want to be in the house. We decide to look for a hotel (outside of Glastonbury) and stay there for a few days.

We are very glad with the decision we made. There is no knocking on the door, no lights flickering, nothing unusual. I check Nextdoor to see if there are more posts about the ghost. It seems to be the only thing people are talking about. I see at least 10 posts in the last 24 hours about people's doorbells ringing and lights flickering. Several other people decided to do what we did and stay in a hotel outside Glastonbury. Others have found friends or family to stay with. Overnight, the city of Glastonbury has become much, much emptier and quieter.

On the 3rd day of our hotel stay, I open Nextdoor and read a post titled **The ghost mystery has been solved!**. The post says:

Residents of Glastonbury have been living in fear for the past few days. Several people have reported unusual activity in their home, suggesting there may be something supernatural. Fortunately, local authorities have discovered the cause and are pleased to report that there are no ghosts and homes are not being haunted. Last night, a Glastonbury resident was arrested at 8:45pm, charged with gaining unauthorized access into hundreds of nearby home security systems. The hacker exploited a vulnerability that allowed him





red, yielded monstrous pumpkins and onions by the thousand, but it also yielded something else: a terrible preservation.

Where the Bolton Schist that forms the hills throughout Glastonbury lays close to the surface, water pooled and cellars wept. Graves dug into this earth did not surrender their dead. Flesh clung stubbornly to bone, hearts stayed ruddy and full, and when coffins were opened months later, the faces inside seemed almost to breathe. The settlers did not see chemistry—they saw conspiracy. The land that fattened pumpkins also fattened the hearts of the dead.

### **Chapter 3. The Town at the River**

By the eighteenth century, Glastonbury's prosperity was shadowed by death. Shipyards lined the river, launching vessels into the mist, but the same fog that carried ships also carried sickness. Boardinghouses near the slips were damp and close, their walls stained with tar and something darker. Consumption—tuberculosis—spread like a curse, thinning the ranks of shipwrights and farmers alike.

The town's records are heavy with obituaries, men in their prime cut down by a wasting cough. The paradox gnawed at the living: Glastonbury could build ships strong enough to cross the Atlantic, but could not keep its own sons from being claimed by the damp, hungry earth.

### **Chapter 4. Consumption and JB55**

In Griswold, not far from Glastonbury, the ground gave up a secret in 1990. A grave marked "JB55" opened when the earth gave up its secrets, and inside, the skeleton of a young man, had been rearranged—skull and femurs crossed, ribs shattered inward. The dead man had died of consumption, but his neighbors had not let him rest. They called him a vampire. And they had exhumed his coffin, opened it, cut the skull from the spine and removed the heart. All part of a ritual to stop a suspected vampire from preying on the living.

Forensic study revealed the scars of disease, but the rituals performed were not science—they were desperation. The living believed the dead could pull them down, one by one, unless the bond was broken. In Glastonbury, with its damp cellars and crowded boardinghouses, the same fear took root. If JB55 haunted Griswold, who could say what horrors slept beneath Glastonbury's stones?

### **Chapter 5. Rituals in the Burying Grounds**

The rituals were grim, their order a thin mask for terror. At dawn, as the fog clung to the ground, families gathered in silence. A child's cough echoed through the house, and the men took up their spades, trudging toward the cemetery. The coffin was unearthed, its lid pried open with trembling hands. If the corpse looked too lifelike—if the heart was still red—the sentence was swift.

The heart was cut out and laid upon a slab of schist, the same stone that split so easily in Herz's maps. Fire was set to it, and the smoke curled upward, thick and black, as if the land itself was exhaling its secrets. In Exeter, Rhode Island, they did this to Mercy Brown. In Glastonbury, the rituals were whispered about but never forgotten.

## **Chapter 6. Shipbuilders and Sickness**

Industry and death marched hand in hand. The shipyards hammered out anchors and hulls, but the same forges shaped nails for coffins. The river carried cargoes downstream to the Connecticut Sound and beyond to the Caribbean it brought rumors upstream—stories of vampires, of graves disturbed, of bones rearranged by fearful hands in foreign lands.

A shipwright, coughing in the mist, might wonder if his own grave would be opened, his bones crossed to keep him from rising. In Glastonbury, even the tools of progress seemed tainted, unable to resist the slow, suffocating pull of the damp.

## **Chapter 7. Farming and Fear**

The land gave, but it did not forgive. Harvests were bountiful—pumpkins by the bushel, apples by the barrel—but upstairs, in the shadowed rooms of the farmhouses, families wasted away. A mother who stacked pumpkins by day might burn a blood-spotted handkerchief by night.

The same spade that turned the earth for squash turned it for graves—and sometimes, for coffins already filled. The line between abundance and loss was razor-thin, and the soil seemed to delight in blurring it.

## **Chapter 8. Geology Again**

At the heart of it all was the land itself—a dome of stone, pressing upward, shaping fate. The Glastonbury Gneiss dictated the contours of abundance and decay. The schist became both headstone and hearthstone; the arkose gave both pumpkins and damp, suffocating cellars.

Herz's maps are bloodless, but behind them is inevitability. If the land preserved pumpkins, it preserved bodies. If it preserved bodies, it gave birth to rumor. If rumor persisted, it became ritual. The dome beneath Glastonbury is not just geology—it is destiny, and it is hungry.

## **Chapter 9. Halloween Resonance**

Today, the Rocky Hill–Glastonbury Ferry still crosses the river, as it has for centuries. Families come for apples and pumpkins, for festivals and laughter. Jack-o'-lanterns grin from porches, their eyes bright against the dark.

But memory lingers. The ferry once carried not just apples, but whispers. The orchards grow from soil that holds water—and secrets—against cellar walls. The candle in the pumpkin is kin to the fire that once burned a heart on a slab of stone.

No vampire grave has been unearthed in Glastonbury. But the pattern is there, etched in geology and fear. On certain October nights, when the fog rises thick and the pumpkins glow like watchful eyes, it is easy to believe that the land holds the dead too tightly, until they press back—hungry, patient, and never quite at rest.



His personality was refreshing, until it wasn't. In the last few years, he had grown increasingly disinterested in their relationship. He said it was beginning to monopolize his time, and Aliah wasn't someone he felt comfortable bringing to work dinners with partners at the firm. Nor was she someone he wanted to have children with, should he determine those were worth his time. He wasn't entirely off mark. She'd slowly become more erratic and depressed since they married ten years ago.

She anxiously refreshed again. Nothing new.

CPTSD was barely a thing ten years ago, let alone now. She'd just found a therapist who specialized in it (and there weren't very many of them to begin with), and had slowly begun wading through childhood trauma. Her husband knew this, and he understood it as best he could, but that didn't change the way he felt about their marriage. So they drifted.

And now they were officially done.

Refresh.

When the listing for the house at the end of Coldspring Crossing popped up, it was as if it had appeared out of thin air. She'd been looking at real estate listings and Craigslist several times a day, and one afternoon, a listing appeared.

**\$1,750 / 2br - Historic home at the end of private drive (South Glastonbury)**

333 Coldspring Crossing, South Glastonbury, CT 06033

Available for immediate occupancy. \$1,750 per month. Includes Heat, Hot Water & Electricity.

Historic 2 BR House for Rent. No Pets. Basic landscaping and plowing of long, private drive included in Rent. Original brick, hardwood floors, chestnut beams, and interior exposed brick walls preserve Vintage Charm. 3 months of Security Deposit required. 860-555-5553

Owner/Agent

Aliah called the owner immediately. He was a nice older gentleman with a rasp in his voice that made her think of Gandalf. He was excited to hear she was interested in the place, and in a matter of a week, it was hers. She was out of the guest house and into her own space just four days after getting the keys. And, since Aliah was nothing if not efficient (and ready for the place to feel like home), she finished unpacking the last box 48 hours after arriving.

Her new space had all the charms of an antique home - ceilings held up by old wooden beams, paint chipped in quaint places, and floors with wide old boards that creaked when you walked across them. It had a rustic charm that meshed well with Aliah's black walnut mid-century modern decor. Outside, the house featured a deep red brick facade with black shutters and a slate roof. It sat on an acre lot with a distant fence and a line of trees that blocked the view of neighboring homes. The backyard was a field dotted with red-leaved sugar maple trees, blackberry bushes, and plenty of crows, helping her feel a little less lonely.

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One night, while trying not to doom scroll, Aliah came across a suggested account on Instagram about a woman trying to befriend the crows in her backyard. Each day, she'd put out some nuts or other crow-safe food and watch from a distance as they came to graze. The hope was that,

after a while, the crows would bring her a gift in return, and eventually they'd become friendly toward her.

Crows and other corvids had always fascinated Aliah. She used to bird-watch in her twenties with a group of senior citizens in Granby one Sunday a month. She learned a lot from them, including the fact that crows, in particular, have an incredible memory. They can remember human faces after years have passed. If you treat them well, you're good, but if not, they can hold grudges for a long time. Aliah generally avoided getting on anyone's shit list, so she would do the same with crows.

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The next morning, Aliah woke from a dream in which she had wandered through a foggy, barren land, searching for the last box she needed to unpack. Dream logic dictated that this box was the most important box in the bunch. She searched for what felt like several days, and finally came upon an old, rotting elm tree filled with crows. At the base of the tree, perched precariously on massive spindly roots, was her box. As she walked up to retrieve it, three crows flew down and landed in a V formation near her feet. The crow in front stared directly into her eyes and opened its beak.

"SEEK," said the crow.

She heard a deafening siren blare, causing the whole murder to flee from the tree. She looked around, confused, trying to find the source of the sound, and that's when she woke up.

She didn't remember setting an alarm for Saturday, but apparently, she had. She groaned, rolling over to turn it off and check her phone. 7:15 am. Aliah didn't mind waking up early, except that it was much harder to do after a fitful night of sleep.

She sat up, scooted to the edge of the bed, and stood, stretching as big as she could. A long yawn escaped her mouth. Eyes still closed, she nearly tripped over her slippers. Swearing, she slid them on her feet and reached out for her blanket shawl, throwing it around her shoulders and heading for the bedroom door.

With thoughts of crows and trees and sirens fading from her memory, Aliah padded down the sturdy, century-old wooden stairs from her bedroom to the kitchen. The cabinets were the same warm wood as the stairs and floors. They looked original, or perhaps reclaimed, with decades of dings, insect tunnels, and scratches decorating the surface. She opened the right-most cabinet door and pulled out her favorite mug - 16 glorious ounces, as all mugs should be - and poured yesterday's coffee into it. She had been trying to get into a ritual with coffee, grinding the beans each day and making her own creamer. This morning was not going to be a ritual day, and that was okay. Into the microwave it went.

The microwave beeped, snapping Aliah out of her daze. She took the mug off the turntable and held it in both hands, appreciating the warmth. As she disassociated, staring through the steam, she found her thoughts drifting back to crows. To the Instagram account that reminded her of her love for crows, and that they could be friendly.

She went over to her meticulously organized bookshelves and plucked out a copy of *Feathered Intelligence*. After plopping down on the sofa, she pulled a soft black and white buffalo plaid blanket over her bare legs. She flipped through the pages of the book slowly, sipping coffee and marveling at the shapes and colors birds came in. She let herself pause on the *CORVIDAE* section.

*“Crows are impressive in many ways. Their impeccable memory, for one, enables them to be exceptional at games and puzzle-solving. Crows can also remember human faces, for better or for worse. Research shows that they may respond positively to humans who have been kind to them, but they can also recognize the faces of those who have wronged them, with memories (and grudges) lasting years.”*

A light bulb went off in her brain. If there was one thing that stuck out from Aliah’s time as a Senior Social Media Manager at a local marketing agency, it was that it didn’t matter if you copied someone else’s idea as long as you did it bigger. Or better.

Aliah took out her phone and reopened Instagram. She could do it better. No shade to the woman who inspired her — on the contrary, she felt grateful the algorithm had been smart enough to actually serve her something she cared about instead of AI slop. She just needed to try this for herself. To see what nature might have to offer.

Later that afternoon, after a trip to Brookside Market, Aliah unpacked groceries, leaving out the ingredients she needed to get started. After putting the vegetables in the crisper drawer, she was left with only crow necessities on her soapstone counter: dry corn, Purina lamb-flavored dry dog food, unshelled peanuts, and a carton of eggs. She quickly scrambled two eggs sans milk and placed them on an old wooden cutting board she’d found in the cellar. Next to the eggs, she added peanuts, corn, and kibbles.

Opening the sliding doors to her backyard, Aliah slipped on her Wicked Good Moccasins and stepped over the threshold onto the concrete slab just below the door. She walked through the drying grass, which her landlord definitely needed to mow soon, and gently placed the cutting board down on an old stump 50 feet from the house. She backed up slowly, admiring her work. She glanced from the sky to the trees, searching for the dark feathers of her future friends. When she spotted a few, she backed up onto the slab deck and sat down on an old wooden rocking chair. She pulled her shawl closer to her neck, waiting for something to happen, but nothing did. Her backyard was silent, save for the sound of the crows and rustle of leaves in the light breeze. Before too long, she dozed off, knees pulled against her chest, her shawl keeping the October chill at bay.

“CAW.”

“CAW.”

“CAW.”

Aliah woke with a start from a dreamless nap. She expected to see crows on the stump, fighting over the smorgasbord she'd left for them. Instead, she found three crows in her personal space - one on each arm of the chair, and the last perched on top of her knees, inches from her face.

She froze, not knowing what to do. She had not gotten to the "how to interact with crows if they come near you" part of her research yet, figuring that would have taken at least a few weeks of bringing them free snacks. When she finally registered the gravity of the situation, particularly her chances of getting salmonella or cholera, she jerked her entire body and screamed.

She fell out of the rocking chair and onto the cement, lifting her head in time to see the crows land in the V formation from her dream, no more than four feet away. They continued staring at her from their new position, although this time, they looked pissed. Aliah was no expert in crow emotions, but she was getting a vibe, and it wasn't great.

"Sorry crows, I didn't mean to... you just scared the ever-loving crap out of me," she said, mostly under her breath. "I hope you enjoy the snacks," she said a little louder.

With that, she backed her way into the house, hands raised like she was being robbed. Her heebies had been jeebied, and it was time to go inside.

After shutting and locking the door, she let out a sigh of relief. She could smell the warmth and smokiness of the wood stove, and felt the adrenaline coursing through her subside a little.

Aliah's phone buzzed. It was Tom.

**Tom**

I was cleaning the guest house and found a coffee scoop. Would you like it back? I can drop it off on my way home from work.

**Aliah**

Yeah, thanks, that'd be nice.

Hey, something weird just happened. Do you have a minute to talk? I'm a little freaked out right now.

**Tom**

I can't at the moment. Later tonight, perhaps. Text your therapist if you need immediate support.

Aliah

Yeah... maybe, thanks. I need to get some stuff done anyway, maybe I'll try distraction first. See you later.

Aliah put her phone back in her pocket and strode into the room at the front of the house that would become her office once she painted it. The grey day washed everything in an eerie light, creating deep, dark shadows. She flicked on the work lights to force a little normalcy into the room.

She had selected a deep mauve paint for the walls, and she'd already bought two gallons, a roller, a drop cloth, and some brushes — she just needed to begin. Shaking off the last of her fear, she put her shawl down on a chair in the adjacent room and grabbed a paint key. She didn't have anything else she needed to do today, so she might as well get going.

A few hours later, after the natural light dimmed, she made herself a snack dinner. With her paint-covered hands clean and a plate of cheese, grapes, crackers, and nuts in tow, Aliah sat down in her favorite chair and pulled out her book. She read and munched, listening to the rain begin to pick up outside. A low rumble rolled in the distance, adding atmosphere to the Shirley Jackson story.

Suddenly, a flash of light lit up the room, making Aliah quickly look up, trying to catch sight of the bolt. Another flash lit up the room. There was no lightning in her field of vision, but there were what looked like three small silhouettes on the windowsill. Her eyes flicked over to them with a start, just as another flash arrived. As soon as the light faded, so did the shadows. Officially creeped out, Aliah closed her curtains for the night a little early.

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Sunday began with an intense headache. Aliah was lucky to have never experienced a migraine before, but she imagined they felt something like this. Even trying to get out of bed posed a problem, as simply moving seemed to cause pain. She took her time, wincing with each movement, then lumbered toward the en-suite bathroom, stopping long enough to grab her robe and wrap it gently around her achy body.

When she flicked the light on, she was startled by her reflection in the mirror. A massive, red zit had developed overnight, right in the center of her nose. She only had to get her finger a few centimeters away to feel the heat radiating off her face, and feel pain spidering through her head and sinuses. The pimple took over the tip of her nose with redness radiating from the bridge to her septum and a large, angry whitehead in the center. Even moving her head to get a better look at the monstrosity caused tiny lightning bolts to shoot through her nerves. She popped a couple of Extra Strength Tylenol and gently splashed water on her face, heroically ignoring the urge to give up and go back to bed.

*Adult acne is the woooooorst*, Aliah thought as she slowly made her way downstairs. She might have to drink it through a straw today, but at least she had coffee to look forward to.

Thanking her past self for the foresight, she pulled a carafe with the remainder of Friday's coffee from the fridge and poured it over ice, adding some half-and-half and stirring vigorously. She slid a glass straw to her mug and took a gentle sip - it was pretty good, but even the sip made her face ache.

She decided that today was an acceptable day to indulge in a little doomscrolling. She opened Instagram to find she was still logged in to her new account, @glastonburysforthebirds. Since she'd started it yesterday and posted a photo of the crows in her yard, she'd gained 130 followers and her post had over 370 likes. That was a lot for an account started yesterday that didn't have a bio yet. That also meant she needed to post something today to keep the momentum going.

Since she wasn't camera-ready on this particular gloomy day, Aliah began recording a new reel from her perspective, recounting Saturday's story and being sure to apologize to the crows and provide fresh treats while she was at it.

Aliah backed her phone camera up slowly to add more space around the stump and give a sense of the size of her backyard.

"So here you go, crows! Sorry about yesterday. Hopefully you like the treats, and you can forgive my silly human reaction to your probably normal crow stuff." She panned the camera slowly around the backyard, aiming to include the trees in the shot. Now that she had stopped talking, she noticed how quiet it had become since she stepped outside. No leaves rustling in the breeze, no squirrels running around, not even a distant dog bark.

"Uh, I guess they're not home? Anyway, I'll post an update later once they've visited the stump for food. Hope I just made some new friends!"

She stopped the recording and let the hand holding her phone drop to her side while she looked around her backyard. Unease filled her stomach. An eerie silence had settled in, and there wasn't a hint of movement from wildlife or anything else. On a normal day, she might host a considerable flock of crows, along with ravens, squirrels, rabbits, and even red-tailed hawks among the sparse trees and overgrown grass. This was definitely not that. She couldn't see a single moving, living thing. She shivered and race-walked into the house, sliding the door closed quickly behind her.

She walked over to the counter, grabbed her water bottle, and took a big gulp despite her aching face.

"Ouch," she groaned as she turned around, walked into the living room, and lowered herself onto the overstuffed armchair. This was not going to be her day.

After a few in-app edits, Aliah posted her video to @glastonburysforthebirds, then switched over to see what was happening on BookTok. A few minutes later, she heard a ding. It was a DM from a new follower.

### BirdsAreMyFave47

Hey, just wanted to let you know, there's something wrong with the crows in your first post. Their eyes aren't supposed to look like that... I'd be careful...

The sill of the wide two-pane window was lined with crows that stood, making no sound, staring into the living room. Aliah hesitated, then went over to check out the back door to see if the food was gone.

Hopefully, the crows had seen her drop off the food and just wanted more, but they could also still be pissed about yesterday. Neither was a good option. When she saw that the cutting board still held her lunchtime offering, she backed away from the door as fast as she could.

“What the hell?!” She whispered as she sank deeper into the house and away from the doors and windows. It was then she realized that she couldn't just give up and hide. She wouldn't be able to spend the rest of the day in her own home if she didn't do something, so she walked slowly, carefully, back the way she came.

She reached out to yank the blinds over the back door shut, then side-stepped, back to the wall, to pull the cord for the window curtains. She heard what sounded like a few angry “CAW!” noises, but at least she couldn't see them anymore. No more creepy birds today.

She turned on a couple of small lamps and lit a candle now that the room was dimmer. Then, she grabbed a blanket and sank back into the overstuffed chair with a copy of *The Love That Split the World* by Emily Henry. She was originally reading *The Haunting of Hill House*, as it was spooky season, but she wasn't currently feeling up to being spooked.

A few chapters in, the Tylenol had worn off, and her face and head ached enough to make her lie back and close her eyes. Sleep came quickly, and with it, dreams of the three crows.

This time, they were standing on the fence at the front of her yard, staring at her through mist that seemed to roll in slow motion.

A faint skittering noise made her ears prick, and she slowly opened her eyes as she heard it a second time. As soon as her eyes were open, she scabbled back into her chair, trying to get as far away from the scene in front of her as she could.

There were crows *everywhere*. Crows on her television, bookshelves, couch, ottoman, coffee table, carpet, kitchen counters, the refrigerator – even the ceiling light. Crows were on the arms and back of her chair, and beneath her feet. They all just stood, staring at her, waiting.

“CAW CAW CAW,” the crow closest to her left shoulder cried.

Pain exploded behind her eyes. Like sinus pressure times a million. It felt like her head was going to burst like an overfull balloon.

“CAW CAW CAW, CAW CAW CAW,” the crows continued.

Her skin felt tightly stretched over her skull. Her scalp ached and twitched, and her face was white-hot. She could only focus on the pain and the fading chorus of crows. Then everything went black.

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When Aliah opened her eyes, the pain was miraculously gone, but she couldn't see her whole living room anymore - a giant black pyramid blocked the middle of her vision. She reached out to touch her nose, only to feel something long, cold, and hard.

“CAW CAW CAW,” the crow chorus cried expectantly.

Yanking her hand away from the strangeness of her own face, she noticed a glimmer at her side. She reached over and gingerly touched her right arm, feeling the smooth strands of newly sprouted iridescent black feathers.

The crows stopped cawing. Aliah's mind went blank.

She stood unmoving, draped in delicate feathers, a cold, dull stare replacing her abject terror.

“CAW,” said Aliah.

x x

## **Copycat** By Andrew Paulo

Sitting around table in the Glastonbury High School cafeteria one October night, Marco, Ravid, and Teddy were bored. How was the Cub Scout meeting not over yet? Being 10 years old meant that you finished the activities much faster than the younger scouts, and it felt like they had finished their knot-tying activity hours ago.

Now they were just sitting and watching Kyle, the high-school aged Boy Scout who was volunteering that night, walk the second graders through their overhand knots for the fifth time.

Teddy let out a loud and dramatic sigh. “Gah, I'm so bored.”

“There's got to be something we can do.” Ravid said, staring at the parents chatting by the Fruitopia machine, hoping one of them would suddenly realize it was time to go home.

“Any ideas?” asked Marco.

“I don't know.” Ravid tried glaring harder. “What about hide and seek? The hallways are all dark and quiet. It's perfect.”

Teddy let out an even louder sigh. "Can't. They'd never let us leave the cafeteria."  
"We could sneak out." Marco could barely believe the words coming out of his mouth.

Kyle, who had been eavesdropping since Teddy's first sigh, left the younger kids to their ropes and joined the bored boys at their table.

"There's a reason they keep you in the cafeteria, you know. Bad stuff happens here at night." Kyle leaned forward. "You ever hear of Nathan Caponi?"

The boys leaned forward and shook their heads.

"It was like 10 years ago. My other brother Kris was a freshman then; he told me about all about it after it happened. One night there was a crazy storm during one of the scout meetings. The power kept going out, so they ended the meeting early. A couple of kids knew their parents wouldn't show up for a while, so they decided to play hide and seek. One of them was this kid Nathan Caponi. He hid in a bathroom at the back of the science wing, near the stairwell. It was the perfect hiding spot."

Kyle paused. His eyes smiled, but his voice was serious.

"One of the janitors caught the kids and made them go back to the lobby to wait for their parents. When Nathan didn't show up, everyone figured he'd already been picked up and gone home. But he hadn't."

The boys were quiet.

"The janitor had locked the bathroom door, not knowing Nathan was inside. At first, Nathan just waited for one of his friends to find him, because he didn't want to get into trouble. He figured eventually someone would call out that the game was over and then he'd start shouting. But no one ever did. Then the storm got worse, and the power went out."

Ravid was barely able to contain a gasp.

"He was stuck in that bathroom all weekend. In the dark. In the silence. No one knew he was there. When they found him on Monday morning, he had gone completely insane."

Teddy gulped. "Did this really happen?"

"Totally. My brother said that if you go into that bathroom at night and stand in the dark, looking into the mirror, and say "Olly Olly Oxen Free" three times... Nathan will come out of his hiding place."

The cafeteria felt colder.

"Then what happens?" asked Marco.

Kyle laughed. "I don't know. He goes back to his scout meeting? No one's ever tried it." Teddy laughed nervously. "That's fake."

"I bet there's not even a bathroom back there," Ravid tried to reassure himself.

“Fine. Don’t believe me,” Kyle stood up to head back to the second graders. “It’s not like you could just go try it right now or anything.”

It only took a second. Ravid dared Marco. Marco double-dared Teddy. One called another a chicken. Eventually, Marco agreed he’d try it.

He slipped out of the cafeteria, telling the scoutmaster he needed to go to the bathroom, which he figured wasn’t a complete lie. He walked past the Boy’s room they were supposed to use and headed toward the back of the school.

He passed the glass doors of the library and took a left. He walked past the shop classes and the guidance office until he arrived at the big windows of the STEM lab, where he took a right.

He headed down through the darker halls of the Home Economics classrooms until he arrived at the Science classes. The pouring rain outside helped to drown out the nervous thumping of his heart.

Marco crept to the end of the hall to the back stairwell where he found the old, unmarked door, just like Kyle had promised.

The dingy tiles in the small, square, dimly lit bathroom made his sneakers squeak. The klunking of the door behind him was deafening in the almost silent room. He took a deep breath, stood himself in front of the mirror, and turned off the light.

The darkness was immediately as thick as the smell of old water that hung around him. He took a deep breath of stale air and felt in his pocket for the mini flashlight his Aunt Tracy had given him for Christmas. He counted the seconds in his head.

At 10 seconds, it was so dark he could feel his eyes strain for something to focus on.

At 30 seconds, it was so quiet he could hear the legs of his pants rubbing against each other as he shivered with fear.

At 60 seconds, he decided it was now or never.

“Olly olly oxen free.” The words barely escaped his mouth. He waited a moment. Nothing happened. He felt a little silly.

“Olly olly oxen free.” A little louder this time.

He smirked a little. He was in a gross old bathroom in the dark. Did he really think something would happen?

“Olly olly oxen-”

“Free.” A voice like someone whispering in his left ear.

Marco yanked the flashlight out of his pocket, nearly ripping his pants. The beam of light cut through the dark and landed on the mirror. He could see his reflection. He could see something else.

It was a boy.

Right behind his reflection. Pale. With hair much whiter than Marco's. He was dressed in a dusty, wrinkled Boy Scout uniform. His eyes were wide. And his mouth was smiling.

Marco tried to scream. When nothing came out, he burst out of the bathroom and ran.

When he reached the STEM lab, he could see his reflection in the big glass windows. And right behind him was Nathan's smiling face, looking much less pale.

Marco sprinted back past the library. He peeked at his reflection in the sliding glass doors and saw Nathan still behind him, his scout uniform looking much newer and cleaner.

Marco kept running down the hallway toward the bathrooms the Cub Scouts were supposed to use, when he heard someone coming. He ducked into the Boy's room so he could pretend he had been there the whole time.

Catching his breath, he looked up and caught his reflection in the bathroom mirror. There was Nathan, right behind him, his hair much darker and shorter now. Like Marco's. They could be twins.

"Marco!" He could hear Ravid calling to him in the hallway.

Marco tried to shout back but nothing came out. He watched the other Marco in the reflection turn to the door. "I'm coming!" Nathan shouted as he walked out of the bathroom.

Marco realized he was no longer the one outside the mirror. And Nathan Caponi was headed back to his scout meeting.

## Classroom#24

By Dan Yu

I love this time of the year in Connecticut. The crisp autumn air delivers the scene of apple cinnamon and pumpkin spice. The golden leaves crunch rhythmically under my feet. The blush of the sunset is the backdrop to the almost skeleton trees. Scout and I were out for our daily walk after dinner. He was immune to the distraction of the leaves at this point. He was laser-focus and had only one mission in mind: chase down at least one of those Canadian geese by the marsh. They are increasing in numbers, winter must be near.

There's something to be said about living in this little town all your life, and never getting tired of its predictabilities. The familiarity comforts me. 2 blocks away is the coffee shop I frequently visit. Sandy has long retired and now her son and daughter-in-law run the place. The cringy flowery wall paper has been replaced with contemporary beige frames of abstract lines and shapes. They now serve hipster drinks named hibiscus latte and rose tea. I love the change of scenery. Even a sleepy town like Glastonbury evolves. Nothing is stuck in the past. 23 years ago, I accepted the teaching position after college in the same elementary school I graduated from. We've got new playgrounds, new windows and doors, new air conditioning unit, revolving door of 5 principals, new teachers and staff, and every year, I get a brand new group of exuberant students. The only thing stagnant is me. And I hope to keep it that way.

After the coffee shop, it's the toy store. I could see the "We are close" sign up, but from the glowing window, I could still see Cindy had started her final walkaround, fixing and organizing the shelves, before the closeout. The Jack-o-Lantern reminded me that it's Halloween night, but you wouldn't see any trick or treaters in this part of the town. They are all up in the residential areas off main street. It was quite impossible to get the kids to settle down today in class. It is once a year opportunity for them to eat all the candies they want and stay up as late as they want. It just so happens that this year's Halloween falls on a Friday. That had definitely contributed to the extra excitement. Scout's barking interrupted my reflection of the school day. His pace quickened and I knew exactly what he's thinking: Canadian geese out on the sports field of the school. We were nearly there! As soon as we got to the open field, I unleashed Scout, "5 minutes" I shouted, as Scout took off running. I was keenly aware of the decrease in temperature, and the red horizon was slowly turning into an inky blue. I hugged my jacket closer against the evening chill, and looked back at the school building I had spent the past 23 years in. My youth has been trapped in there somewhere. I can almost see my younger self looking out from the 4th grade classroom window, 23 years ago. A glow on the 2nd floor caught my eye. I looked down at my watch, it's too late for Allen, our school custodian, to be on-site. Maybe someone forgot to turn off the light? That cannot be right, we had just upgraded the whole building to motion sensor lighting. I hesitated, should I? I took another look, and I know exactly what room that was. I felt the sweater creeped down my spine despite the chilly autumn air.

23 years of guarding a secret, and I know I cannot hide it any longer. But I can try. I leashed Scout to a tree against all his will, and I ran into the school building.

The year was 2002, I just turned 9. Kevin and I had just finished trick-or-treating off main street, and his older brother Will, who was supposed to be supervising us, has been left behind since Maple Street. Will bumped into a group of girls he knew from school, and was trying to make small talks, in a very awkward way. Kevin and I had decided that the excitement of the night cannot end here, and we should sneak into the school to look into Amber's desk and locker to search for evidence that would incriminate her. We were convinced that Amber had staged the whole broken glass near a perfectly intact window to draw attention to her. Kevin took a piece of the glass with him, and we couldn't put our fingers on the source. Unless of course, Amber brought it from somewhere else to put near the window. I don't know what we would find, but I do know that we hate Amber with a passion. She skipped line on the zipline and pushed anyone that came before her. Kevin and I are determined that this was a mystery to be solved. Maybe if we found traces of glass inside her locker, we knew for sure that she had placed it during the day.

Earlier that day, Mrs. Randalls was very rigid but did not take the matter seriously. The entire class heard a shattering of glass when we were inside the classroom. We all stopped to see what had broken. I imagined someone kicking a ball through the window, or maybe a bird flew in. We saw nothing was broken but there was a pile of broken glasses on the floor near Amber's desk. The event was quickly forgotten and the class went back to normal. Kevin picked up a small piece of glass before Mrs. Randalls could clean it up. We examined it later that day, and it appears to be a piece of a mirror. The silvering glimmered in the light. We decided that it was something sinister Amber conjured up because it's Halloween, and she was the devil in disguise.

The school was eerily quiet and it was not difficult to climb into one of the open windows on the first floor. We had our flash lights and we went into the dark hallway that leads to our familiar classroom #24. Whatever we thought we were going to find did not prepare us for what was to come next. There was a dimly glowing blue light coming from classroom 24, much like the glow sticks' chemical luminescence. Kevin and I looked at each other, uncertain if we should enter.

This is very creepy, and we both realized that no one can hear us for miles if we choose to scream. We should have just turned around and ran but instead we inched closer trying to take a peek. In the classroom #24, there was a broken standing mirror emitting blue light, it looked like it was trying to put itself together without any external force. The small pieces of broken glass gradually floated out of the sharps container and wiggled and rotated themselves into place like pieces of a puzzle. I can hear my teeth chattering and the hair on the back of my neck stood up. I was instantly paralyzed. Kevin took out from his pocket the piece of the mirror he kept earlier and it floated out of his hand, attached itself onto the mirror. The broken lines slowly disappeared. And the mirror was whole again. Continuing to emit its glowing light against the dark of the room, the surface was as smooth and perfect as it had never been broken. To my surprise, Kevin started walking towards it. I tried to stop him, but it was too late. He was unresponsive and looked completely mesmerized. When he made it to the front of the mirror, in it, I saw a chess set come into view. The chess board along with the pawns, knights, kings and other pieces levitated inside the mirror, and looked as if gravity did not exist. It was clear as day to me that this mirror is a portal to another world, and that I really need to wake

up from this dream. Kevin reached out his fingers and touched the surface, I heard my screaming “NO” accompanying a flash of light exploring. I raised my hand to block it off my face instinctively, and the next thing I remember, I was in my bedroom, and it was the morning of November 01.

Mom ran upstairs and rushed into my room without even knocking. “Are you ok?” she asked with concern, “you were screaming.” she came to hug me, “did you have a nightmare, oh my goodness you are soaked in sweat.” My heart was still thumping in my chest. Meanwhile, I was relieved that it was just all a dream. I must have read *Through the Looking Glass* too much. However, I now realized that I was still in street clothes and I had no recollection of how I returned home last night. I opened my mouth to ask mom, but was interrupted with a mix of urgent door bell ringing and knocking from the front door. Mom went downstairs and I followed. 2 police officers flashed their badges and introduced themselves. They said Kevin was missing and was last seen with me, and they are wondering if you could ask me a few questions.

I must have fainted again, because the next thing I knew I was lying down on the sofa with my mom and the 2 police officers looking down at me with concern. I told them everything I knew and even though, deep down, I knew what I saw was real, no one else believed me. I ended up seeing a child psychologist for a few years and my parents believed that because Kevin and I were close, I made up stories to protect myself. I finished elementary school, middle school and high school without Kevin. I couldn’t bear to face Kevin’s family. If I see them in town, at stores, I run the opposite direction. Within a year, they moved out of town. I went back to the same classroom where I saw Kevin last many many times throughout the years and I searched every corner and every brick in that room, and I don’t see anything that could possibly explain what I saw that night. Every Halloween for the past 23 years, I looked for that mirror to come back in hope of Kevin’s return. I guarded the room and the school, so no other child would fall victim to this mirror. I don’t believe Kevin is dead. I know he’s traveled to somewhere unreachable and he will figure out a way to come back.

The hallway was as eerie and quiet as 23 years ago. Except this time, when I walked through, all the lights turned on automatically. From a distance, I can see the same blue glow poured out from room #24. This time I will be brave, I told myself. Sure enough, the same exact mirror was standing in the middle of the room. Besides it, to my surprise, was a boy around 9 years of age. He was wearing a pair of pale blue jeans and a polo shirt with red and black stripes. In his hands was Freddy Krugger’s hat and gloves. That was what he had dressed up as for Halloween that year. I stared in disbelief, “Kevin?!”