

The Willies

The Willies

Short Horror Stories

Billy Van

artisanPruett

The Willies

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For Braiden Matthew

In Memory of Glenn Dunk

Acknowledgments

To kick things off, I would love to give a huge shout out to all those who participated in the production of this book. Without the acknowledged, “The Willies” would be a manuscript and nothing more. You all have my unbridled gratitude. While producing this book I had a lot of help from friends, co-workers, and family. This is where I give them credit and pay homage to their work. Foremost, without my beloved kids, I wouldn’t have made it this far in life to even have considered penning these tangled yarns. They rescued me from my own destruction. They just don’t know it yet. I love you with everything I am, Braiden Matthew Van and Brittany Marie Van. Secondly, I would love to give thanks to my editor. Ruth Kilmer is a dear friend of mine and without her, you would be reading nothing more than a heap of free writes and rough drafts. She, herself, has a God given talent as a writer, and someday she will realize her genius. Now, let’s discuss the artwork itself. What is a book without a catchy cover? They say, “You shouldn’t judge a book by its cover.” However, we all know that it’s the contents that await inside that deliver the punch. A good cover, nevertheless, does attract the attention and lures the audience. Thanks, Artistic madmen for your talent. Lastly, without Scott Clements, this book would be four pages lighter. Upon review, I accepted the foreword he had written and was immediately filled with emotion. Also, included, there is a short bio of me that he wrote, as well. Thanks, Scott. But how can I forget to mention my mom? I can’t and I won’t. I hold her accountable for my interest in writing. She encouraged me to write my very first story. I enjoyed it so much that I never stopped. I love you, Mom.

Foreword

Before I begin, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Scott Clements. I reside in Barrington, Rhode Island—enough said. I remember sitting in the park on a beautiful summer’s day during a gathering. I had my nose dug deeply inside a book written by the great Aldous Huxley. Approximately twenty feet ahead, in perfect alignment with the trees that surfaced, I noticed a volleyball game. A ball bounced over toward me and after it came a very handsome young man. He asked me, “Huxley?” By the tone of his voice, it was apparent that he appreciated his work, as well. Then he added, “The Doors of Perception? Point Counter Point?” I was reading “Brave New World.” But it didn’t matter. He proved that he knew his Huxley. This handsome young man I speak of is the one and only Billy Van. “Fear is an example of one’s self, and when you lose fear, you lose existence. How can we forget that?—wisdom speaks volumes. I am a photographer and independent film maker. I know very little about writing—I admit. I am good at what I do, and I am true to my ground. However, Billy Van has the master possessions of a brilliant writer and poet. He is genius. As much as there is to say I will tone it down on the count of I don’t want to give him a bigger head than he already has. The book you hold in your hands is very much worth the time it takes to read. It is an undiscovered tour de force—a diamond in the rough. I encourage you to read on. In fact, quit reading this foreword and indulge in his stories. They are great! Each and every story included in this book is just terrific! Just when you think the one you had just read is a masterpiece of horror, the next one is even better. This book not only unleashes his every demon but demonstrates his brilliance at the macabre. And as the title suggests, this collection of tangled yarns is sure to give you “The Willies.”

S.C.

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One in the Grave and Two in the Closet

Lisa Meyer was your average teenager. She was popular in school and even made the honor roll, at least once a year. Yet, somehow, she felt slightly different from her peers. She was beautiful but felt ugly. She was thin but felt fat.

As she coursed through her senior year her lack of confidence worsened. She became a recluse. When she did go out she wore a lot of makeup. Close friends and family began to notice something awkward:—at the end of every meal, or eating in general, she would run straight to the bathroom. This became very frequent.

As she made it three-fourths through her senior year she had become extremely thin and very frail. You could see her bones bulging through her chest. Her skin was so pale and translucent. Her eyes sank in and her cheekbones showed definition. She looked like a skeleton. However, she would not admit that she had a problem.

Then, when prom came, all of Lisa's classmates gathered and her friends noticed that she wasn't there. They worried endlessly about her.

Later that night, they got word that Lisa had passed away at her residence. She had suffered from low self-esteem and anorexia.

They buried her that same week. She would have won Prom Queen. She was laid to rest with the tiara she would have worn. Her parents moved out of their house because of all the painful memories. Lisa was born and raised in that house and, in the doorway of the kitchen, were marks, one to two inches apart, where she had grown over the years. Her parents just couldn't cope with Lisa not being there anymore.

Lisa has been dead for more than thirty years now. Many people have made attempts to buy the house but the waterlines keep busting causing people to move elsewhere. However, it has been reported that within a year of living in the house, no matter how overweight or unpleasant to the eyes you are, weight loss and beauty would be restored to its residents.

Even though Lisa's skeleton has joined the earth the two left in her closet (her low self-esteem and anorexia) are acting as a ghost of good nurture. People used to pay to move in just to rejuvenate their appearance; however, one day, something horrid went wrong.

A family of five moved into the house—a couple in their late thirties with three kids. They had a daughter who was eighteen and two sons—one was sixteen and the other was seventeen. The father was a contractor and didn't let the waterline problem discourage him from buying the house. He was pretty confident that he could fix the problem. After hearing about the house's history of good fortune the two boys came up with a sick and twisted idea. This is where the story begins.

“What's the name again? Tommy! What did you say her—?”

“Lisa. Lisa Meyer. An' don't ever yell at me like that ever again. Instead of Jimmy Mom and Dad shoulda named you dummy.”

The two boys argued, like two brothers usually do, as they crept through the darkness with only a single dimly lit flashlight at Dover's Lawn cemetery.

“How on earth are we gonna find this grave? s'like lookin' for a needle in a haystack,” said Jimmy.

“Patience and lots of it. I don't care if it takes all night. Jimmy, we're gonna find this grave. Now quit your complainin',” replied Tommy. “Now I

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talked to sis yesterday and she said something about a mausoleum on the left side of a willow tree.”

“We’ve been lookin’ in this area for almost an hour. I think we’re in the wrong spot. Look over there. Is that a willow tree?”

Tommy pointed the flashlight in the direction that Jimmy suggested, squinting his eyes, and saw what appeared to be the silhouette of a willow tree and a mausoleum. “Yeah. Let’s go check it out,” said Tommy.

The two walked over to the willow tree. Tommy handed the flashlight to Jimmy. “Here. Hold this. I gotta take a leak,” said Tommy. As Tommy relieved himself Jimmy walked the area and waved the flashlight around looking for the tombstone as he tripped on a branch and fell forward. He landed with his arms bent up breaking the fall with his elbows. The flashlight landed in front of him and spun around stopping with the light shining on a tombstone. On the tombstone the name *Lisa Meyer* was etched. “Found it,” shouted out Jimmy.

Tommy finished zipping his pants and walked over to take a look for himself. “Yup. That’s definitely it,” said Tommy. “Tomorrow night. We’ll definitely do it tomorrow night. Sound good?”

“Yeah. If we can remember where it’s at,” replied Jimmy.

Tommy tore off a piece of his flannel shirt and wrapped it around a branch on the willow tree. “There.” he said, “Now we’ll find it.”

The next morning, back at the house, a lady stood at the sink. As water spurted out of the faucet she examined a glass filled with brown liquid—pump sludge.

“Hello, sexy lady,” said a man as he snuck up from behind and wrapped his arms around her.

“Charles. The water is nasty again. Something must be wrong with the pipes. Can you fix it?” she rambled.

“Margaret. Not today. Probably not tomorrow. I have to meet with a guy about a new job,” replied Charles as he turned loose of her and walked to the refrigerator. He prowled around looking for the orange juice when their daughter came down the stairs.

“Oh, Dad. If you’re looking for the OJ I drunk it already. Like, my bad,” she said as he turned to look at her and shut the refrigerator door.

“Dammit, Sam! Where’s your brothers?” replied Charles.

“Oh. The two stooges. Tommy and Jimmy. Where do you think they are? They’re upstairs sleeping in, as usual,” replied Sam.

“Go and tell them to wake up. It’s the weekend. They promised they’d mow the yard. Now’s the best time as any to get it done,” said Charles as Sam turned around and headed back up the stairs.

As she slowly approached the door she overheard them discussing something. She stood idly by with her ear pressed against the thin wood and, suddenly, swung it open really fast.

They were both crouched down and Jimmy fell backward due to her surprising entrance. Tommy turned as if to cuss her out but instead said, “I know. Mow the yard. C’mon, butt-munch. You’re helping too.” As he stood upright he gestured to Jimmy by smacking him on the head.

Later that night, the two assembled for their developed plan—desecrating Lisa Meyer’s grave. As they crawled out of the top-story window of their bedroom and shimmied down a nearby tree Sam entered the room. She glanced out the window and saw them scurry off into the darkness. Also, she turned to the right and noticed the moonlight shining on a piece of paper. It looked like a layout to a plan of sorts. Curiosity got the best of her as she grabbed it and headed to her bedroom.

“Jimmy. Stop for a minute. I need to catch my breath,” said Tommy as he gasped for air.

“Ah, c’mon. We’re almost there, dude,” replied Jimmy.

“Fine. Let’s walk then!” stated Tommy.

The two took off walking as Jimmy felt around in his pocket for the plan. “Dude. I can’t find it!”

“Can’t find what?” Tommy asked.

“The plan, man. I can’t find it,” answered Jimmy.

“Bro. It’s not that complicated. We’re just digging up her grave and taking the tiara. Then, we’ll sell it on eBay. I just posted a fake and already had over

a hundred bids. I wanna sell the real thing. People are sick, bro,” explained Tommy.

They made it to the cemetery and shined the flashlight around to find the piece of flannel shirt on the tree from the night before. “There it is, Tom.”

They ran over and, instantly, Tommy brought the shovel from over his shoulder and began digging as Jimmy held the flashlight. “Dude. I’m freaking out,” said Jimmy as he shivered from nervousness.

“Just hold the flashlight steady, butt-munch.” Within thirty minutes of digging, Tommy hit something solid. “That’s it. Now I just gotta dig around it and...BAM!...the tiara is ours,” said Tommy as he proceeded to dig around the casket.

“This is bad, Tommy. Very, very bad,” whined Jimmy. Tommy just nonchalantly told him to quit complaining.

Finally, after ten extra minutes of digging around the casket, it was ready to be opened. Tommy instructed Jimmy to hand him the crowbar and he did. Tommy grunted and strained but no dice. The casket was sealed airtight. He became infuriated. “Dammit! I need that crown,” he said. He stopped for a minute to brainstorm and, then, he told Jimmy to hand him a nearby rock about the size of a football. Jimmy handed him the rock and Tommy held it over his head and slammed it down hard on the casket. Still. No dice. “Gimme a hand, Jim. Help me out. Here. Grab the rock first,” said Tommy. Once Tommy was out of the grave he held the rock above his head and gave it one last try. The casket splinted.

“Oh, shit! We’re in so much trouble,” said Jimmy.

“Bro. Who’s gonna find out? You’re not gonna tell. Are ya?” antagonized Tommy as he nudged Jimmy’s right shoulder.

Tommy slid back down into the grave and pulled back the wood of the splinted casket. He felt around—touching clothing, dust, bone, and human leather when, finally, he found the tiara. He held it up and told Jimmy to shine the light on it so he could admire it. It was a beauty. Almost like the fake he had already posted online. It was bejeweled with a pearl in the center. It was perfect.

The next day Sam entered Tommy and Jimmy's room speaking loudly. She told them, "Dad needs you bozos downstairs." He needed help working on the waterlines. Jimmy cursed at Sam. Tommy told her that they'd be down soon. Sam ordered, "Dad needs you now!" They dragged themselves out of bed and headed down the stairs. After they exited the room Sam looked around and noticed right away, with a dirty shirt partially covering it, a silver, jeweled ornament beckoning to her. She walked over and yanked the shirt off of it, revealing the tiara. She held it up—eye level—and admired its beauty. She was suddenly distracted by the sound of footsteps scampering up the stairs. She immediately set it down on the floor and covered it back up with the same dirty shirt. Tommy entered. "What are you doing?"

"I was...um...just getting ready to leave."

"Well, hurry."

Jimmy entered. "Yeah. Get the f— out!"

"I don't have to!" she exclaimed.

Tommy shoved her and said, "You lied! Dad said later."

Jimmy said, "Yeah. Way later."

Sam left as Jimmy checked her with his shoulder as she walked past. He hit her so hard that she lost balance. As soon as she exited completely they both dashed over to see if the tiara was as it was when they had left. It appeared undisturbed.

Later that day, Sam, while in the bathroom, noticed that she had developed a huge blemish on her nose. It was not your average size pimple. "Ooh, I look like a witch," she said. "It'll look great at prom," Sam spoke with sarcastic tones. She fiddled with it a bit but it became really tender and sore. Finally, she gave up her attempts at popping it and went to her bedroom to search for makeup and other solutions at covering it. She searched wildly through her vanity but could find nothing. It was too big. Too big for makeup to hide. "Where are you when I need you, Lisa?" she said referring to the spoken powers of the house.

The next morning came and Sam didn't feel like going to school. Her mother entered her bedroom and sat down on the edge of her bed as they

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engaged in a heart-to-heart conversation. Her mother spoke tentatively, “Ya know, sweetheart. I wouldn’t let that little flaw on your nose stop me from winning Prom Queen.”

“I know, Mother. I just don’t want anyone to see me this way. I’d rather stay home a couple of days and, well, hope and pray it goes away.”

“Okay. I’ll call the school. But only two days. Do we agree?”

“Agreed.”

“Oh, yeah. You are so very pretty,” her mother said with a swift turn as she left the room.

Later on, at school, Tommy attended a senior prom committee. The principal entered with some bad news. He told the committee that their budget was cut so short that they had to either give up one of two things—the tiara or the DJ. Tommy hastily spoke out, “I can get you a tiara.” Everyone turned in Tommy’s direction awaiting more information. “Well, I’ve had it...um...my sister had it for a while. It’s no toy. It’s the real deal. I’m sure she wouldn’t mind.” The principal accepted his offer. He told Tommy to get with Sam and be sure it was okay and to bring it in so that he could examine it. He would give his final answer then.

Tommy told Jimmy about his plan to donate the tiara for the senior prom and Jimmy was against it. He wasn’t a senior yet so he could care less whether or not they had a tiara. “Gee, Tom. Would it have been easier to get some sound equipment? I could’ve made a decent DJ,” Jimmy arguably suggested.

Tommy explained that he already made the deal and that it was his idea to get the tiara anyway.

It was storming viciously as students gathered at Hoover High for their senior prom. The wind blew atrociously and people ran through splashing puddles to get from point A to point B. Sam arrived with her boyfriend—a lanky fellow with a ten-dollar haircut caked with pomade. She looked around as she entered the gym as if she barely acknowledged his existence. Her eyes set, with passion and lust, on Jay Carter—a popular jock for which

all the girls' hearts throbbed. He was at the punch bowl seemingly alone. Sam dropped the dweeb, cold turkey, as she made her way to greet Jay.

Tommy entered as Jimmy followed. Tommy walked at a fast pace in a failed effort to shake Jimmy off his tail. Jimmy was such a bother. Tommy turned and said, "Dude! Jimmy! Go home! Come back next year! You know. When it's your prom."

"I just want to be sure you get that crown back when this thing is over. We were going to sell it on eBay and split the profit. You promised, Tommy."

"Dude, it's a tiara...not a crown. And when it's sitting on Chrissy Thomas's head...well...let's just say...I'll have it later tonight."

"So that's what this is all about. A girl."

"Uh, yeah. I 'magine. And when you get past puberty you'll do the same. Now scram!"

With that being said Jimmy looked over Tommy's shoulder noticing a girl he had never seen before. She was slightly out of contrast but beckoned to Jimmy with mysterious curiosity. "All right, bro. See ya," he said as he wisped by.

Sam and Jay made their way to the dance floor as the DJ began to play a song suited for slow dancing. She spoke softly as he caressed her, "Are you here with—?"

"Chrissy? Yeah. I am."

"So there's no chance in me and you meeting after prom? I really want to, Jay."

"I can't. In fact, if Chrissy catches us together...well...there's no telling what she'd do."

"Oh, I see."

"I'm sorry."

"No, please, don't be."

"Sam. Come back," Jay said as Sam slipped through his delicate grasp.

Suddenly, the music died down as the principal approached the microphone. A light shone in the center of the dance floor as the crowd began to part. He cleared his throat and said, "I have a few announcements to make

before I announce this year's Prom King and Queen. He continued to speak.

Meanwhile, Tommy set his eyes on Chrissy as he began to move in on his prey. He made it halfway there when Jay approached her, beating him to the punch. Tommy stopped dead in his tracks in utter disappointment.

"Now it's time to announce this year's Prom King and Queen," the principal said as he was given a four-by-nine note card. "This year's Prom King is..." anticipation built "...Jay Carter." Jay approached the stage, where the DJ booth sat, in an egotistical manner. He knew with an overwhelming brew of confidence that he nailed it. He always did. The principal spoke again, "And for this year's Prom Queen..." Chrissy and Sam both wanted the title badly. They bit their lower lips and clenched air with their sweaty palms. "Chrissy Thomas." Chrissy ran to share the stage with Jay as the tiara was placed gingerly on her head.

Jimmy stood in the corner speaking to the strange girl he had fixated himself on when, suddenly, there was a loud blast. Windows busted out shattering shards of tiny glass fibers all over the gym floor. Doors flung open nearly off the hinges. Jimmy turned to acknowledge the carnage in complete surprise. He warily turned his head to look at his newly found friend when, shockingly, he noticed she was gone. He panicked and looked around frantically.

Meanwhile, onstage, Jay and Chrissy stood amidst the destruction.

Chrissy reached up to grasp the tiara when a distorted figure rose from behind her. The female figure was Jimmy's newly discovered coy mistress. However, she was no stranger to the school. At that, she wasn't coy. In fact, she was supposed to have worn that very crown years ago before her tragic death. It was Lisa Meyer. She had returned for her tiara.

Instantly all the female students began to lose confidence in their appearance and become thin and pale. They spoke amongst each other. Their voices sounded like several radio frequencies bleeding over one another; however, you could make out the negative statements.

Chrissy disintegrated to ash as Jay stumbled off the stage. Lisa reached down and grabbed her tiara as she faded away. After she vanished the devastation continued as if *the black plague* was placed upon the school. Sam,

Tommy, and Jimmy all managed to escape the ruins. They ran to the cemetery in a hurry. They followed a white somber glow. Jimmy led the way.

“Why are we going back?” asked Tommy.

“What have you guys done?” shouted Sam.

“I need that tiara,” answered Jimmy.

“Dude! Let it go! Nothing is that damn important. Let’s turn around and get the hell away from here,” gasped Tommy.

Finally, they reached their destination—Lisa Meyer’s grave. A ghostly figure stood upon the grave. In her hand was the tiara. “Man, this is so not happening,” said Tommy.

“Lisa,” said Jimmy, “gimme the tiara.”

“Dude, are you outta your f—in’ mind?” yelled Tommy.

She held it out to him as he took hold of it. In one hand he held the tiara, with the other he felt around in his pocket. He pulled out a jewel. It was a birthstone. June’s pearl. A representation of beauty. He reinserted it into the tiara. It fit perfectly and held itself in place without any need for adhesive. She thanked him as she returned to her grave.

During that time, at the school, the obliteration ceased. The scene recreated itself as if nothing had ever happened. However, there was one change. Instead of Chrissy being dubbed Prom Queen it was Sam. On her head was the tiara with a single pearl in the center.

Sands of Time

Steve Nash had just made it home from his routine, early morning, jog. He grabbed the paper from off his lawn that imprinted the date: Monday, Sept. 5th, 1994. Afterward, he reached his hand into his mailbox, feeling the grit of sand between his fingers that blew in from the beach and grabbed a whole cluster of stuffed envelopes. He entered his house and hastily set down the newspaper and mail on an end table by his couch. However, he didn't stay for long.

He walked over to his phone and rewound his answering machine. He played back the messages noticing he only had two: *Steve, this is Rick. I really wish you'd consider coming back to the force, man. I'm breaking in a new rookie... a real hot-head... he ain't catching on. So, how's therapy working out? You can't let what happened a year ago bring you down, bro. The LAPD really needs ya. When you get this, call me back.*

Steve lowered his head as if to consider Rick's offer until he heard his mom's voice on the answering machine: *Steve, I been try...* Steve turned off the machine immediately. It was obvious that he was avoiding his mom on purpose.

Steve frowned as he flopped down jadedly on his couch. He began to sort through his mail. "Bill. Bill. Bill. Bill," he said repeatedly as he tossed the unwanted mail aside. Then, he came to an envelope that grabbed his

attention. It had an unusual return address on it. Itching with curiosity Steve tore it open. It read:

Dear Applicant,

Upon reviewing your resume for our security guard position, we have arranged an interview. Meet with me at Oakland Drive, Suite 12A at 3:45 pm.

The signature was a huge, illegible, scribble. Steve contemplated the letter. It did seem rather odd to him. However, he had applied for several security guard positions the week before—a couple online. He looked at his watch and noticed that it was 1:32 and ran up the stairs to get cleaned up. He didn't want to be late for his first interview. He needed a job and time was slipping away.

Steve pulled into the driveway of the address specified and noticed a row of buildings setting his sights on 12A. He looked at his watch and saw that it was 3:43. "Made it. Two minutes early. Prompt as usual," Steve said as he got out of his car.

As he walked up to the building he noticed a piece of paper on the door. It was a typewritten letter that read: *Temporarily moved to the building warehouse across the street.* On it was the same signature as his letter—an illegible scribble.

Steve turned to notice the ominous building. It looked like something from out of an eighties Charles Bronson movie—one of the Death Wish franchise. It looked vacant. Steve hesitated for a moment. He stared at it callously.

He often passed by this old warehouse many times back when he was working the beat. At one time it had served as a meth factory. The thought crossed Steve's mind: Why on earth would they use a building like that for job interviews? Steve went against his cop-wise instincts and entered the building anyway.

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Upon entering the building Steve was cautious and alert. However, his alertness was faulty. As Steve walked through the entrance a blunt object came crashing against the back of his head. He lay twitching on the floor. He saw the shape of the man that attacked him, but his vision was distorted and slowly faded. Steve, then, began to relive an event that happened a year ago.

1432 Wilson Drive: that was the street address. It was revealed clearly. As the patrol car slowly took the turn the headlights shone brightly on the street sign—Wilson Drive and Clark Street was the street sign that crossed over the street that the patrol car originally turned off of. Then, the patrol car stopped in front of a house that, in the bright fluorescent glare of the headlights, revealed the number—1432.

Steve Nash stepped out of the patrol car. He was a year younger and was neatly groomed.

He and other local law enforcement officials were searching for a possible serial killer dubbed the Hourglass Killer. He was given this name because for every murder an hourglass was left at the crime scene. Steve crept lightly with his elbow bent and his Glock propped steadily beside his right cheek. He was ready to take aim and fire at the drop of a dime. Steve was a skilled shooter, for sure.

LAPD was given probable cause to enter the house. However, Steve had strict orders to wait for the other officers. Steve went against his orders and entered anyway. The door was cracked so entering was easy—no forcible entry was necessary.

Upon entering Steve heard a brisk scampering sound. He turned in the direction of the noise and took aim but hesitated. He noticed that the source of the noise was a cat. Then, Steve heard a resonance behind him. A door creaked. Steve turned, still in the position to fire, and just as he did the trigger was pulled. A bullet whizzed with warp speed and entered through the head of a small boy—possibly eight or nine.

A man came running out of another room screaming madly, “That was my son. You killed my boy. You will pay. Dammit! You will pay!!!” These words echoed and drifted in a fade.

Steve was slowly aroused by the echo of an elevator shaft's hydraulic system. He, then, realized that he was immobilized. Was he paralyzed? No. He was strapped tightly to an assembly table propped up against the wall in an upright position. Steve was fastened uncomfortably in a standing position and watched as a man exited the elevator and entered his open existence. Who was he and what did he want?

A small amount of light and a shadowy haze glared in a cylindrical motion. The man stood ten feet away at most. His face was obstructed by a shroud of darkness. Steve squinted his eyes to see the man better but he wore a shadowy veil. Then, he stepped out toward Steve—two or three steps. He moved with gusto—scuffed. His face was exposed. Light revealed his identity. It was the man whose son Steve had killed a year ago.

Things began to go awry. He spoke out in angst, “Didn’t expect to see me anytime soon. Did ya, cop?” Steve was at a loss for words. He twisted and lunged forward trying to wiggle free but the leather straps that held him were too strong. He struggled defiantly but his arms became sore and wet with blood from the straps that gnawed at his flesh. He ceased his unsuccessful strategy of breaking free.

Steve lowered his head and hung loosely on the table. He bled profusely from the leather straps that sank into his flesh and tore into his meat. He grew weary—semi-lethargic. The man just stood and watched as Steve slowly succumbed. It was a cinematic treat for him. For Steve, it was a macabre nightmare, but a definite realization. Steve knew his fate. It was, then, he spoke to the reaper and was handed his destiny. “Kill me. Do it now.” Steve said languidly.

“I’m getting more pleasure out of watching you kill yourself. Tell me, cop...when you killed my boy...did they reward you?” the man replied.

Steve grunted followed by a painful cry for help. He pleaded with the man but the man was heartless.

“Do you really want me to ease the pain?” the man asked.

Steve indolently nodded his head.

“Fine,” the man spat. He walked over beside Steve and grabbed a syringe, which was already prepared for injection. He found a good vein in Steve’s neck. He probed the needle deeply, releasing the poison like a snake’s

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venom, into Steve's bloodstream. He slammed down an hourglass beside Steve. He said, "In an hour you'll feel no pain. Nothing. Absolutely nothing." Then, he walked away—fading into the dark cylinders of illusion and into the elevator from which he came. The drug didn't waste any time crossing the blood-brain barrier. However, that only released his endorphins. The drug was designed to kill gradually.

The sands flowed slowly at first. Each and every particle looked like crystals. Steve watched as the bottom globe filled. His vision became a blur. Again, his movements became lethargic. His mouth—dry. And as time progressed the final particle of sand filled the globe.

Occurrence at Westwood

John Lotten was a studious fellow. He always asked for extra credit. He always paid careful attention in every classroom he ever attended—devoting time and energy to his studies. He was the least expected person that one could blame for such a hideous act, which I am about to explain.

The date was 1969. The location was Westwood University—just outside of Encino Valley, California.

Registration for the spring semester had just begun. A tall, lanky, conservative chap exited a student counselor's office. In his hand, he held a piece of paper. He fondled it nervously with oily fingertips. He approached the registration desk.

“Name?” a lady behind the desk asked.

“John, John Lotten,” the young chap replied as he handed over the piece of paper. He had a glare in his eye and a crooked grin—very handsome.

The lady behind the registration desk ran her fingers through her collar and slowly oscillated her head from side to side. By the way, she acted you could assume that she was sweltering; however, it was 70° at most. “If you'll take a seat, in a few minutes, we'll have a complete printout of your schedule ready for you.”

“No prob,” John replied smoothly.

She ogled and licked her lips as he just stood there. Awkward silence. John tilted his head and looked at her like a confused puppy. Then, he nonchalantly turned and walked away. Nothing to see here, as one would banter.

John sat down in a waiting area no more than five feet from the registration desk. As he sat there waiting patiently for his schedule to be printed a man walked past him. He walked briskly but with an aristocratic strut and light bounce to his step. John noticed him briefly at first and didn't pay much attention to detail. But, then, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that the man had stopped to talk to someone.

John found himself staring perplexedly at the man while trying to be unnoticed. John focused hard on the man's actions: his hand gestures and his frequent habit of placing his right hand in his jacket pocket, which was designed by Bailey Bartlby, Inc. John also noticed the man's constant habit of scratching his nose. But, then, John noticed something very unsettling to his liking. It was a minor thing, one would think, but it just didn't sit well with him. The man had a cleft upper lip. It was very distracting. John couldn't bear to stare at it much longer. Then, the lady called out his name, "John." Zapped away from the distraction John redirected his attention to the matter at hand and went to retrieve his schedule.

The next day John attended his first class. It was Anatomy and Physiology. At the time his major was unknown; however, he wanted a degree pertaining to medicine and health. That he did know.

The class assembled with everyone choosing their desired seat. John chose the front row. He was always the head of the class—that was his nature. As he sat contentedly, waiting for class to start, a man entered the room and approached the desk. The man wore a jacket with a tag that read: *Bailey Bartlby, Inc.* John noticed right away who the man was. It was the man with the cleft upper lip. John immediately looked away, avoiding unnecessary eye contact at all costs. John couldn't bear to look at the man for the sake of developing a nervous-tic.

"Hello, class. My name is Professor Doyle. Let me start by doing a quick roll call," the man said. As he called out students' names and received replies in the form of hand raises or single finger raises he came to John Lotten.

John was so distracted he paid no attention to what was happening. Due to the man's grotesque disfigurement, John had lost all focus in class. This was unlike John, however. He had never encountered a problem like this. "John. John. Lotten. John Lotten?" the man repeated.

"Oh, present," responded John with a quick flick of the wrist. The class cackled. All John could do was cross his arms and lower his head in embarrassment. Still, however, John avoided making any eye contact with his instructor.

At one point, during one of Professor Doyle's PowerPoint lectures, John made his way over to a corner and pulled back a piece of wallpaper, and wrote with a permanent marker: JOHN LOTTEN WAS HERE 1969. He figured he'd leave his mark before he left the class, as he planned to do.

After class was over John immediately got with a student counselor and asked if he could change classes or even drop one. He told the student counselor that he wasn't catching on too well.

"John. Your high school transcript is remarkable. You scored the highest in Biology out of your whole senior class. How can Anatomy and Physiology be a challenge?" the student counselor explained.

"It's not the class. It's the instructor. He doesn't...ahem...we don't get along," John replied.

"Professor Doyle? I find that hard to believe. He gets along with everyone. He's a very good man."

"Well, we just don't gel." John made it clear that he wanted to leave that class badly.

"John. If you drop this class it will affect you doing anything in the medical field. It's a prerequisite to every medical ca—"

"I can't switch?"

"All other classes are full. I'm sorry. You're stuck."

"Whatever," John said rudely as he stormed out of the student counselor's office.

Later that week, while attending lab, Professor Doyle was explaining to his class the potency of a chemical. The chemical was identified as CHEMICAL X.

He told the class that the reason it wasn't identified by its real name was that it was so lethal. He instructed the class to wear the provided protective gear, which included thick latex gloves, an apron, and a face mask. He also explained that ingesting the tiniest amount could cause immediate death. The fact that the substance was being used around a bunch of college students was uncanny, to say the least, but back then people had a lot more trust than intellect.

John's eyes lit up like two beacons in the night. Instantly the clockwork started to turn. John absolutely loathed his instructor. The man never did a thing to wrong John. At that, they had never become fully acquainted. John just passed immediate judgment on him over a simple flaw that drove him to the bridge of pure hatred. But was his hatred powerful enough to kill? By the look on his face...it was.

After lab, John left the college to grab a bite to eat before his next class started. His car would not start. He popped his hood but didn't have enough mechanical know-how to identify the problem. John wasn't mechanic savvy by any means. All he knew how to do was twist the battery terminals, and he did just that. But the car still would not start. A friend of John's approached him and told him that he could use his car.

John had made it no more than a couple blocks from the college when two cop cars pulled in behind him and chirped their sirens. "What did I do?" said John as he pulled over.

The police officer approached John balefully. He had a seventies porn star mustache and a tight uniform shirt with his biceps bulging out. "License and registration, son. And don't gimme any of that lip," the cop said as he looked back at the other cop car and gestured with a grin. He, then, proceeded to explain to John that he was driving a stolen vehicle. John was arrested on the spot and the car was impounded.

John was slightly resistant and pleaded his case but the cop was too stern and manhandled John with ease.

The Willies

At the police station, John was instructed to roll his fingers on an inkpad so that they could record his fingerprints. He did as he was told without any fuss. Afterward, they put him in holding.

After three hours of sitting in the cell, John was released. The whole thing was found to be a fluke. The friend that loaned John the car had borrowed it from his grandmother who had the beginning stages of Alzheimer's.

A week passed as John quietly sat in class with a distant look on his face. This is not the way it's supposed to be, John thought to himself. John fought hard at preventing hate from embedding its razor-sharp claws into his heart. However, he was losing the battle. His look and mannerisms even changed. He went from conservative to slacker. John was not himself and quickly falling apart at the seams.

Later that night, John entered the college with a book in hand. He walked past the library and dropped it off into the return slot. As he walked by the lab room he noticed movement—the slight scurry of a shadow. John stopped and persisted to find out the source of the shadow. He peeked in, carefully, trying to be unnoticed, and saw Professor Doyle. John's dark and twisted ego began to take over. The professor placed a cup of coffee on the edge of his desk and left John's sight by entering a storage area. John tiptoed through the room, grabbed the jar of CHEMICAL X, and stopped. He held on to the bottle remembering its lethal potency. Therefore, he slipped on a pair of latex gloves and, at a snail's pace, walked over to the cup of coffee. Hurriedly, but yet gingerly, he doused the hot beverage with the chemical. He heard Professor Doyle drawing near so he fled the scene with a cat-like reflex. However, he still held onto the bottle of CHEMICAL X. But it didn't matter. In less than a few seconds, the professor would be out cold and he could return it like it was never disturbed.

John reentered the lab while noticing the professor lying lifeless without a single breath left in his body. Cyanosis had already set in. There was no turning back now. John had to finish the task. He had to dispose of the body.

He remembered hearing the professor, at one point, discussing a plastic substance used to preserve and mummify corpses. He looked cautiously through the lab, trying not to make an obvious crime scene, and found a huge roll of transparent green plastic. It had a label on it that read: *Caution: this substance contains a synthetic form of Formaldehyde (HCHO). Direct contact has been known to cause cancer. Handle with vigilance.* That being the case John put on another pair of gloves and began to wrap up Professor Doyle.

Ten years passed and John found work as a Nurse Practitioner at the Cedar Grove Medical Center in Cedar Grove, Illinois. After receiving his Bachelor's in nursing John moved over the hills and far away from California.

Soon after the incident, John transferred to another University where he would successfully earn a degree that would lead to a profitable future.

Meanwhile, at Westwood, The University was in the process of being renovated. It was shut down and would eventually reopen, but not as the university. It was now the future site of the Encino Valley Prison—maximum security. During its process of renovation, a disturbing discovery was found—a mummy preserved in plastic. It hit worldwide news. They dubbed it: The Westwood Mummy.

Along with the discovery some latex gloves were found as well as a bottle labeled CHEMICAL X. The discovery immediately turned into an investigation. Dental records showed the mummy to be that of Professor Doyle. The bottle was dusted for fingerprints and matched with a set recorded in 1969: *John Lotten [car theft]*.

The authorities had no trouble tracking down John. In fact, he went willingly. He was arrested and escorted from his place of employment. His co-workers and other surrounding people were in total disbelief.

He was tried and given life in a maximum-security prison. While sitting in his cell John noticed a tear in the wallpaper. He walked over to tear it off the rest of the way when he saw written as plain as yesteryear: JOHN LOTTEN WAS HERE 1969.

The Emissary

It was storming fiercely the night I met her. I was driving along Salt Well road when, ahead in the distance, I saw what appeared to be a car on the shoulder. I approached it and drove by slowly. I looked in its direction. It was a 1998 Buick Skylark, which is a petite car. However, I saw no one. Then, I noticed a few feet from the car someone scurrying about. I looked closely and noticed that it was a female. She had a nice figure. I knew right then what I had to do. I pulled over and offered my assistance.

“Need help?” I asked.

“Sure. I could use a ride into town,” she replied.

“Hop in.”

I reached over and opened the door for her. She entered with zilch hesitation.

I could have easily taken advantage of her. I could have been a lunatic. She didn’t seem to care. She was polite and not at all coy. Also, she was beautiful. I knew right away that *love at first sight* truly existed.

I introduced myself, “My name is Jeff, Jeff Nichols.”

She responded, “Niki, Niki Smith.”

It may sound silly but, already, I was putting my last name with her first: *Niki Nichols*.

It sounded odd, but that didn't seem to matter. She was the one beyond questionable doubt!

We covered many topics throughout our trip—wellness of banter. We discussed everything from the weather to the economy. I had only driven ten miles; but still, I was able to learn a lot about her. She made it clear that she took an equal liking to me as well.

We exchanged phone numbers and, from that point, started to see a lot of each other. Within a month we were dating.

One day, I came over to her place. We discussed different restaurants to dine in just to break the monotony—sort of how couples do when they reach a snag in their relationship. We decided on staying in and just watching movies that afternoon.

I can remember sitting on her front porch when she came running out the door. She told me to make myself at home and that she was going to run into town and pick up a couple of movies. I was okay with that. She assured me she wouldn't be gone too long.

Soon after she left a fellow pulled up in a baby blue Ford pickup truck. He asked me where Niki was. I told him that she had left to go run some errands. He explained to me that he was her brother from up north and he just wanted to surprise her. He also told me to keep his visit a secret and that he would swing back by later. I thought to myself, "She never mentioned a brother." But, then again, I'd only known her for a short while.

I contemplated a clever way to bring him up in conversation without spilling too many beans.

He told me before he left, "She mentioned you. She told me that she wants you to pop the question. If I was you, I'd do it. You have my blessing. As a matter of fact, you should do it tonight. That would add to my surprise visit and then we'd really get her." Wow! I was without words! And even more surprisingly he reached out and gave me a diamond engagement ring. "Here...use this one...pay me back when ya can...no hurry," he said as he gave me the ring. Then, he climbed into his truck and drove away. Awkward, to say the least. I mean how does one respond to an encounter like that?

The Willies

Later that night, as Niki and I sat nestled in each other's arms I did it. I popped the question. Sure enough, she accepted just like her brother said she would. I was so happy. However, I was *also* slightly disturbed by something... Then, I asked her, "Do you have any brothers or sisters?" Very clever, if I must say so myself. But the answer wasn't quite what I had hoped for.

"I had a brother. He died last year in a wreck." I froze. I was speechless. And, already, I was pretty sure I knew where this was going. Then, she continued to explain, "Come here. I wanna show you something," she continued as she took me by the hand. She led me out to an old pole barn that sat in her backyard. We entered as she gave the light switch a sudden flick. There, dead center sat a baby blue Ford pickup truck...mangled.

Goldy's Pond

Sally Emerson lived a quarter of a mile from Patterson's Railway Station. Just a few feet from it was a small pond. Actually, it was nothing more than a reservoir, but all the local kids called it a pond. Sally was just eight years old but whenever she got a chance to sneak out of the house she did. Besides, her parents paid no more attention to her than *the man in the moon*. They were both alcoholics and way too irresponsible to be considered parents. At one time the *DCFS* got an anonymous phone call to visit them. And they did. Sally's parents were given a week to make some changes or else. But that's a different story.

One particular day, Sally snuck off to the pond to skip some stones and sail her toy boat when she made a friend. The little girl's name was Gold Smith. They introduced themselves to one another and shared interests. Goldy was about the same age as Sally and just as cute. They were two peas in a pod.

They spent the whole day together. The sad part was that Sally's parents didn't even get worried. I'm sure they just enjoyed their time alone.

Sally and Goldy played hide-and-seek, spin the bottle, sang songs, and just about anything else you could think of. They had a very festive evening.

When it got late, just right before Sally decided to go home, they told ghost stories. Sally wasn't too good at telling stories, but Goldy told one that was very well-developed and sounded very convincing. It was about a little girl that got hit by a train a couple of years ago while playing near the station. Actually, the story was more sad than scary, but it sure did hold Sally's attention. Goldy knew she had her attention so she just kept telling the story while doing everything she could to stretch it out. Finally, Sally told Goldy that she must really be going home. Goldy was fine with that but she did want to know if they could play again the next day and Sally said, "Definitely. Friends for life"

On Sally's way home she heard a lot of strange noises—noises she had never heard before. She'd never been out this late before. Also, she and Goldy were telling ghost stories earlier and she had become very frightened. She shook with fear all the way. When she did, finally, make it home her mother and father were outside waiting for her. This was very unusual. They were actually worried about her. When they asked her where she had been all day she told them about her new friend Goldy Smith. Her parents began to act strangely. They rushed her off to bed and just after she had gone up the stairs to do so her father turned to her mother and said with a shaky voice, "Goldy Smith. Wasn't she the little girl that got hit by the train about two years ago and she was dragged outta that reservoir?" With a blank stare on her face and a slow nod the mother concurred.

The Well

“Jeffrey! JEFFREY!” Tim screamed down the well trying to get his brother’s attention.

“I’m okay,” a small voice echoed back assuring that he was still alive. Tim halted and listened carefully. He could faintly hear noises, possibly the sound of Jeffrey moving about. He was just about to speak when, suddenly, he heard a loud KLANK!

“What is it, Jeffrey?”

“Nothing! I could use a light though. Tie the flashlight on the rope and slowly bring it down to me. I think I found something.”

Tim reached down by his side and grabbed the flashlight. He wrapped the rope around it twice and made a slipknot. As Tim worked the rope through his hands he leaned over to peer down the well. While losing his footing he fell in, as well. SMASH!!! Tim landed hard, possibly on Jeffrey as the two lay there unconscious on the cold, damp stone.

Tim regained consciousness first. He was aroused by the sound a blade makes when being wielded against a grinding stone. Before he had a chance to look around something unusual caught his attention. He felt something beneath his hand. It had the texture of flesh and was very lumpy. Looking over his shoulder, barely able to move, he realized that it was a decapitated

head. He shrieked in horror. He would have screamed but fright and shock had a tight grip on his vocal cords. He went to get up and tried to escape but he found it impossible. He had discovered that he was restrained to a long foldout table—the kind they use in mortuaries to embalm bodies.

Looking around, to become more familiar with his surroundings, he discovered the source of the noise that awoke him earlier. Standing four feet from him was a huge, disfigured mammoth of a man. He was sharpening a huge machete blade as if to claim his next victim.

The area was well-lit with candles and reeked of rotten flesh. Bones and dismembered body parts appeared to décor. A macabre sense of Feng shui.

Tim wiggled and wiggled, trying to escape, but found it impossible. His struggle was relentless. The man left the area to fetch something. Tim felt like this was his moment to escape. If there was ever a time to find freedom this was it.

He wiggled harder and faster but soon gave up. After a short pause, he kicked and squirmed some more but wore out way too fast. He just lay there—helpless.

As the man returned he wasn't alone; however, his accompanying friend was not willing. He dragged the poor boy by the hair of his head. The man was too strong so escaping his grasp was not an option. As Tim looked up he realized it was Jeffrey. Tim could not help Jeffrey. He still lay there motionless. At this point, he had just given up.

“I just wanted my ball,” Jeffrey screamed in fear as he begged for mercy. “I had no idea. I just wanted my ball. I wanna go home,” Jeffrey continued as he also screamed and begged for his mommy.

The mammoth-of-a-man had heard enough. He took his machete and swung it at Jeffrey, with a great deal of force, decapitating his head upon impact. His head flew toward Tim and landed in front of him. Tim just closed his eyes. He knew that he would be next. He knew that there was no escaping such a brute force. He prayed silently. Without a sign of remorse or no frail emotion the killer suddenly approached Tim as a scream of torment and pain was heard throughout the well.

The Willies

Later that year, two local boys by the name of Steve and Bobby were enjoying a game of pitch and catch. As Steve threw the ball it landed in a nearby well. “Hang on, Bobbo. I’ll go get it,” Steve said heroically as he shimmied down the well. A sudden blood-curdling shrill echoed below as Bobby soon followed.

Blood House

John Martin and Sara Baker were due to get married within a week. They had planned this day for several months. It was going to be a very expensive and sophisticated wedding.

On that day, they decided to check out some realty. They knew they wanted to stay in Cedar Grove. The question was: *where?* They started their search first thing that morning, which quickly became noon. They were about to give up when, finally, the realtor remembered a house that just had a foreclosure; however, before they could enter it she had to call the bank for permission. This is where the story begins....

“Well, Mr. and Mrs. Martin. It is Mrs., is it?” the realtor assumed as she questioned her assumption.

“In less than a week. We’re getting married in less than a week,” Sara explained as she kept focus on the beautiful mural art that consumed the walls of the study. “This artwork is splendid,” Sara paid compliment.

“Oh, yes. The mural. I believe this was done by Marcus Van Lotten. It’s an original, ya know,” the realtor explained in a language only to sell the house.

“Marcus Van Lotten? Isn’t he that Scandinavian artist that died last year? Yeah. He was found in a sanctuary with a dagger made of bone through his chest.” Sara blabbed as the realtor just nodded her head in agreement.

Later that day, John and Sara were given confidence that they stood a good chance at getting the house. They returned to John’s mother’s house where they had been staying. The realtor said that she may contact them either later that day or the next day to let them know that everything went through the bank okay. The rest of that day, they waited impatiently by the phone when suddenly...it rang. It was the realtor on the other end telling them that they got the house. John and Sara both went hysterical and started making plans immediately.

A week had already gone by:—John and Sara had just finished their vows. Sara looked beautiful in her white satin gown, and John was very handsome in his rented tux. They were both a match made in Heaven.

The reception was prepared as the two entered the lounge. It was a huge spacious room with white ceramic and laced décor everywhere. There was cake, alcohol, a hired band that only knew how to play Journey, and a lot of dancing. They made it through the night. The only thing left was the honeymoon.

While wedding plans were being made professional movers were hired to move their stuff into the house and interior designers were hired to organize their pictures and furniture. Basically, they were all set up.

This would be their first night in their new house—newlyweds to break in a new home—how romantic.

John carried Sara over the threshold proving that chivalry still existed.

They settled in and got comfortable.

John put on one of his old Air Supply albums as they both snuggled by a low-lit, crackling fire. The hearth of the fireplace was trimmed in marble and the mantle was pure marble as well.

The Willies

John slowly seduced Sara with soft whispers and erotic kisses. She was very turned on and he was more than ready, as well. Just as John was carrying Sara to the master bedroom he slipped on something. It was very thick and slimy. When they hit the floor they found themselves submerged in a thick, gooey puddle of blood. John noticed that it was coming from the study. He checked on Sara to be sure that she was okay and grabbed onto a nearby banister for support.

Slowly he worked his way up the pole. Once he regained his bearings he grabbed onto Sara and carefully helped her to her feet.

Together they ventured into the study to see what it was. What they found next was unimaginable. Surrounding them was the artwork of the late Marcus Van Lotten—a beautiful mural of fine art. Oozing from the crevices was blood. The entire study was filled with blood. The paintings, then, became reality. Every detailed definition and molecule of paint became real life. John and Sara found themselves trapped in the painting. They weren't alone. Others were wandering around just like them. They all claimed to have once lived in the house.

1700 Jasper Street

In 2009 an old and condemned nursing home was restored and set to reopen as a dormitory facility for students at SIC. On the date of its grand opening, it was vandalized beyond all repair. The building was condemned a second time and became the property of Murphy's Demolition Co. It was later auctioned and still sits in its manifested condition. It is said to be haunted and those who enter are never seen or heard from again. In lieu of this development, two college students mysteriously disappeared. They remain missing to this very day.

1994: "That call light has gone off thirteen times in a one-hour period," said Tad, a CNA.

The nurse looked at Tad and said, "Oh, that's Mrs. Jenkins. Don't go in there. She doesn't want anything." She continued as she filed her fingernail and chomped on her gum, "She's always on that damn call light."

The night fell upon them like a thick cloak. They were the only two working and they fraternized with each other heavily.

"So, when you're done do ya wanna go down to the basement with me?" Tad asked.

"And then what?" she replied with a blush.

"What we usually do."

“Oh.”

“Yeah. I owe you for that blowjob you gave me last week. Remember?”

“And how do you plan on repaying?”

“I’ll eat you out.”

“Ooh, Tad.”

“So, ya—”

Just then, there was an unexpected knock on the door. They both turned to see a man, who appeared to be in his early forties, with a box and some small white bags on top. It was the pharmacy guy.

“Well. Let him in,” said the nurse to Tad.

Tad walked over and punched a code into a box that was fastened just next to the door labeled Care Alert Track. The man entered.

“Cold out there, huh?” Tad asked in jest.

The man gave Tad a grim look as if he didn’t understand his humor. He walked over to the nurses’ station and slammed down the packaged meds uncaringly before the nurse. “Sign this,” he said as he handed her a clipboard with a slip on top. He was rude.

She signed the slip and noticed that his name badge read: *Leo*. She glanced at it as if she’d planned on making a complaint later over his uncouth demeanor. Perhaps it was just an intimidation tactic. However, it had no effect.

The man looked up at the call light that beeped annoyingly, still, as Tad’s staff seemed unconcerned. *Touché!* “We’re working short,” said the nurse. “Tad. Will you get that?”

Tad whizzed by and entered the resident’s room. She was a frail old woman. She was on the floor on her knees and reaching for her water pitcher that sat on the edge of her bedside table. He walked over and said softly, but in a rude voice, “Dammit, Mrs. Jenkins. Get back in your bed!”

He placed his forearms beneath her armpits and, in a huff, lifted her back in the bed. He slammed her down and she attempted to swing at him as she whimpered. He placed his hand over her mouth to hush her and grabbed her wrist squeezing tightly. He reached into his pocket and grabbed a syringe filled with medication. He put the tip in his mouth and pulled off

The Willies

the cap with his teeth while exposing the needle. He inserted the needle into a vein in her neck and injected the medication.

Soon after she closed her eyes as her respirations slowed.

Spring Break: Party at 5:00

2009: Signs were posted all over the college. On the community corkboard, beside the Spring Break sign, was another sign that read:

Register For New Dorms Available After Spring Break

Amanda Jones had just finished packing when there was a knock upon her door. “Who is it?” she yelled.

“Marcus. Open up.”

Marcus Anderson has been a friend of Amanda’s since grade school. Their parents used to take turns babysitting and they grew up like brother and sister.

Amanda opened the door. “Get in. Hurry. Marcus, if Leo catches you he’ll rat us both out.”

“That old bastard? He’s still kickin’?”

“Duh. He’s the custodian, dumbass.”

“He doesn’t speak. He’s a mute. A fuckin’ retard. He won’t say sh—”

“So what do you want?”

“I say we ditch the party and indulge in some late-night debauchery,” Marcus said as he looked around edgily.

“What kind of debauchery?” Amanda asked as she continued to pack.

“Let’s sneak into the new dorms.”

“Hell no!”

“C’mon. I heard it used to be an abusive nursing home. I heard an old lady was killed there by the staff and buried in the basement.”

“Don’t be silly.”

“Serious! C’mon. It’ll be great.”

Marcus could always talk Amanda into anything. She was skeptical of the idea and acted squeamish but caved. “When?” she asked with her eyes rolled back in her head.

“Tonight. Six o’clock. Be ready,” replied Marcus feeling his lungs with short gasps of air in between vocalizations.

Meanwhile, as Amanda and Marcus rapped, a familiar, but aged character, stood idly beside the door. He wore a pair of overalls and held a mop in his hand. A name tag was sewn in that read: *Leo*. He listened attentively and appeared somewhat ominous.

The emergency exit shuttered as moans of suffering echoed throughout the desolate building’s corridors. Blood-curdling shrills and profane use of verbalization dominated the existence of paranormal subsistence.

—Why did you piss your pants? You’re fucking lazy...that’s why.

—No...No...No...

—It’s the only way you’ll fucking learn, you old bitch!

—Help! Help!

—Don’t tell! Never fucking tell! I’ll kill you...

—Will you please help me to the bathroom?

—Go yourself...I’m busy.

Terror reverberated from hall to hall. The prominent fact of somber reality filled the turf. Down the road, just on the corner, a sign stood tall that read: *Jasper St. 1700* was the number. 1700 Jasper Street—a renovated shell of tortured ruins.

This was the place that had been remodeled and would soon open, after spring break, for the new dorm rooms.

Still, the clacking and mimicking of lost souls underwent retribution in their donjon-keep.

In one door went a single fly. Out the other door came a swarm.

Evil growls distinguished the presence of a lust for revenge.

The matter at hand: a dorm in reality but a donjon-keep for wandering ghouls within the realms of sanction.

The Willies

As Amanda sat outside, on campus, on a bench beneath a tree, Marcus approached her. It was getting late and the festivities had already begun. He approached her with a solemn voice and mischievous grin. Both hands were behind his back.

“I got the booze,” said Marcus as he pulled a fifth of bourbon from behind his back.

“I quit drinking, jerk.” Amanda sounded grave.

“Ahhh, c’mon. Don’t be a party pooper.”

“We better be going. I gotta get some sleep tonight.”

“All right. But cool it with the pushy. Loosen up, babe.”

“I’m not your babe.”

Amanda and Marcus usually argued like this—it was nothing out of the ordinary. They were like brother and sister (with an emphasis on like). Anyway, their relationship was proven to stand the test of time.

It was getting late and Amanda was in a hurry. She became pushy when she was under the pressure. Marcus was inconsiderate of this. He would purposely take his time. Amanda hated him for this. However, before the darkness crept in and made shadows dwell fearsomely Amanda would feel more comfortable in her room and her bed. People often got murdered where she resided.

The campus itself was notorious for hate crimes and college pranks gone awry.

The sign read: *Jasper St.* It was aged, deformed, and slightly bent. Victorian-style numbers pegged into the façade of the building read: *1700*. That was the address—*1700 Jasper St.* A nuance of evil lurked crudely on its exterior as paranormal, ectoplasmic fields existed stalwartly on the interior—haunted dwellings.

Once more the voices repeated.

—Why did you piss your pants? You’re fucking lazy...that’s why.

—No...No...No...

—It’s the only way you’ll fucking learn, you old bitch!

—Help! Help!

—Don’t tell! Never fucking tell! I’ll kill you....

Billy Van

—Will you please help me to the bathroom?

—Go yourself...I'm busy.

A poster on the front exit read:

November 1st, 2009

After the Spring Break Festival

New Dorms Located Here

Pick your application up at registrations

Blood swallowed it whole.

Echoes of pain...suffering...torture filled the inner corridor. Again the vocalizations filled the insufferable donjon-keep—beyond the pale.

—Why did you piss your pants? You're fucking lazy...that's why.

—No...No...No...

—It's the only way you'll fucking learn, you old bitch!

—Help! Help!

—Don't tell! Never fucking tell! I'll kill you...

—Will you please help me to the bathroom?

—Go yourself...I'm busy.

The voices reverberated with a ghostly effect as they swirled down the halls. Echoes of pain...suffering...torture filled the inner corridor—this time a somber weep followed by a blood-curdling shrill—torment exasperated.

This time, the poster read:

November 1st, 2009

After the Spring Break Festival

New Dorms Located Here

Pick your application up at registrations

...with *Fuck You* and *Stay Out* written in blood over the print. The blood ran downward creating a horror font manifestation.

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Amanda and Marcus arrived at the newly renovated dorm facility and admired its size and structure. It had an old bed and breakfast, Victorian-style construction—very primitive.

Marcus approached the front entrance and narrowed his eyes to read the poster that was on the door. It was now dark. It read:

November 1st, 2009
After the Spring Break Festival
New Dorms Located Here
Pick your application up at registrations

“Nice,” he complimented as he admired the building’s patio.

“What is it?” asked Amanda.

“The building. It’s very clean. Well built. I think I’ll like it here.”

“Is the door locked?”

Marcus reached out and grabbed the handle and tugged at it. It didn’t budge. Amanda tried her luck. She reached down and grabbed the handle and the door opened effortlessly.

“Why do you always do that?” spat Marcus referring to her ability to always show him up.

“I’m a girl. What can I say?”

The two entered the clean and newly restored building and as they did it altered into its ran down and seedy form.

The emergency exit shuttered as moans of suffering echoed throughout the desolate building’s corridors. Blood-curdling shrills and profane use of verbalization dominated the existence of paranormal subsistence. Echoes of pain...suffering...torture filled the inner corridor.

Leo crept carefully to the front entrance of the building tearing down the poster and replacing it with a multitude of signs that read: *Condemned—No Trespassing—Violators Will Be Prosecuted—Property Of Murphy’s Demolition Co.—Stay Out.*

Lost in Cognition

I want to tell you what happened about a month ago near Mathis Lane. I was out for a walk when I realized that there was a bad odor somewhere—very pungent and putrid like rotten meat. I felt a cold chill, and I knew that soon I would have to find the source of the hideous stench. My friend Michelle had called me the previous night and told me all about Steven’s problem with his brother, and I was a little worried about what would happen. Then, all of a sudden, I saw behind a tree what I realized was the person I least wanted to see, and, right then, I choked back a scream. I remembered what my psychiatrist had told me about a situation like this. It was very important that I not run away from my fears. Very calmly I picked up a big stick and realized I was no longer afraid. Before I knew it I was in the hospital.

Rather than disconcert you with a condensed version of my confounded tale allow me to revert back and explain, in greater detail, the events leading up to my hospitalization.

I had just picked Michelle up from work. She was a nurses’ aide at Sunny Oakes Retirement Center. She carried on complaining about how she was

getting tired of working short and how her charge nurse rode her ass. I stunned her when I unexpectedly spat out, “Shut the fuck up!”

She replied, “What’s your fuckin’ problem?”

That was just the thing—I definitely had a problem but was too afraid to tell anyone. If I ever did decide to tell anyone it would definitely be her beyond a reasonable doubt. I knew in my heart of hearts that she would at least pretend to understand.

By now, however, I had upset her. I didn’t intend to. I attempted to apologize. “I’m sorry. I’m-I-I-I have a lot on my mind here lately. Forgive me, Blue Eyes,” I said in a shaky voice with a slight stutter fumbling through my nervous lips. Blue Eyes was a nickname I had given her. She nodded her head yes and I felt relieved. I’d be lost without my Blue Eyes.

Then, I blacked out. I often did this. In a flash of light, I saw a man’s face. It was a man I was unfamiliar with in reality but knew all too well in my mind. He even had a name—Steven. I’ve mentioned this to Michelle a few times and she referred me to a doctor who specialized in this type of thing—a psychiatrist, nonetheless. Steven spoke to me in a distorted voice. What I heard was, “Behind you.” Just then, I came to. I found myself heading toward a ditch and quickly swerved to get back on the road. It was a close call, but I managed. Also, I looked behind me. The back seat was barren.

Michelle had dozed off. My swerving didn’t even arouse her.

I pulled into her driveway and woke her up. I wanted to kiss her badly.

We were friends, true. But it didn’t matter; I wanted her and couldn’t have her. She was hung up on this guy at her work named Trent. He was the maintenance man. I thought he was creepy, but she was taken in by him. Figures. He was a womanizer, and her attention toward him was just another log on his egotistical flame. At this point, I had convinced myself that I was losing my mind anyway. I was certain that Michelle felt the same way. And to think: what could she have seen in a guy like me? Not a damn thing.

That same night I went home. Falling asleep was not the problem. I was bushed—dead-beat tired. However, sometime within my hours of forty winks, I had a dream—No!—more like a nightmare. I was in the car, just

like earlier that night with Michelle, and I was on my way to her house to drop her off. Steven was in the back seat, but for some ungodly reason, for a dream's a dream, I paid him no mind.

I was talking to Michelle about my blackouts and visions and she nonchalantly suggested I commit suicide. I contemplated the idea. In reality I would have freaked out if Michelle had told me such a thing, but this was not reality. I told her that she has always had the greatest ways of dealing with my problems. Suicide sounds great. I pulled into her driveway and we sat and talked. She was giving me ideas, moreover suggestions on how I should off myself. I took it all in. And, then, I turned to see that Steven was sitting beside me instead of Michelle. He said in a spine-chilling voice, "Behind you." I looked again and it was Michelle's silhouette. She emerged from the darkness—a vampire.

She grabbed me and bit into my neck. Then, I woke up with a scream behind my lips. I was saturated in sweat and breathed heavily.

The psychiatrist that I had been referred to has a story himself. At the young age of ten, he stood and watched his father kill his mother with his bare hands. One could not fathom such a horrific experience. If memory serves me correctly, these days I'm more uncertain than assertive, I've only heard him mention this just once. He referred to it as a *somatic experience* rather than a traumatic one. I don't know why. Psychiatrists are generally in need of mental help themselves. I do recall a conversation we had at one time, however.

"Did your mother submit to your father's abuse?"

"What?"

"The abuse that your mother went through? You told me. Remember? Did she give in to him?"

"Oh, no. She was very afraid of him and what he could do."

"Really?"

"Indeed." And, then, he turned the tables, "But who is this...Michelle, and why do you fear Steven?"

I was already confused and thought strongly about a reply. I said, a tad bit perturbed, “No! No! The focus is on Steven.” I sobbed. Then, I choked, “He won’t leave me alone. M-M-M-Michelle...she-she-she is my friend.”

Fear is an example of one’s own self, and when you lose fear you lose existence, as well. My fear was weak, but my perplexity was intense. That’s when you know you’re going insane. My psychiatrist made no sense at all. And at the same time, I was almost certain where he was driving at. Scary. Does that make me the crazy one?

“You should make another appointment,” he said.

“Suffer? I won’t suffer,” I replied. He stared at me confounded beyond all belief. Now he had entered a state of confusion. How clever of me. I turned the tables on him. *Touché*.

“Make that two more sessions.”

“Why? Do you fear me, Doctor?”

He walked over to his door, opened it, stuck his head out, and said, “Carol, cancel my next appointment.” Then, he walked over to his chair and sat back down.

He told me that he had the key to Pandora’s box.

I grinned thinly—my upper lip at an angle. “And that would be?”

“You need to return to your childhood home.”

“I’m not going back to Mathis Lane! Never!”

“But you need to. Closure. Sean, you must.”

To hear my name being said sounded unusual. I was so close to the edge of my sanity that I had almost forgotten my own name. “Okay. I will. But you’re coming with me. Tomorrow.”

The look on his face was priceless.

While sitting on the edge of my bed the phone rang. I answered and it was Michelle. She had told me that she quit doubting my sanity and that she met Steven. She told me that Steven had recently lost his brother and he was looking for me—to protect me. She, then, told me to listen to him and not to fear him, and that he was no threat. He was a harbinger. Michelle’s voice faded and became distorted. Another voice took over. I knew that voice; it was Steven. He said, “Behind you.” I fell for it again.

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I thought that maybe a shower would do me some good. But just as the warm water touched down on my nude flesh I was standing in the cemetery, fully clothed, with a tombstone beside me that read: *Sean Williams*. Then, I saw Steven. He was a ghost. He approached me and said his two famous words, “Behind you.” Just then, he reached out to grab me and I was back in the shower. It was all just another vision.

I called Michelle back and received a dial tone. I redialed several times, and, still, all I got was a dial tone.

I confided in Blue Eyes. She always knew what to say. I never could recollect a childhood with her, but because of my mental disorder, my childhood was nonexistent.

I lay in bed that night and basked in my secret desires for Michelle. I wanted her badly, and, so far, as far as I’d gotten was with self-gratification. I caressed my cock with gentle warmth and stroked lightly. I envisioned her on top straddling me. However, somewhere within my erotic dimension, within my hungering need, once more, she became a vampire. I stopped just in time to cum.

Mathis Lane is the place I used to live. It’s an old back road with ancient Indian burial grounds and an ominous tale that would put you in shock. A toast to the macabre.

Years ago, a lady had just married the only love she’d ever known. He had just returned from the military and submitted to her wont. They had pre-purchased a home out in the country—Mathis Lane—and retreated there for their honeymoon. Somewhere, within the strokes of midnight, he claimed to have heard a voice telling him to kill her—and he did. Now, on the date of their marriage, if you drive down Mathis Lane and see a damsel in distress, keep driving. Legend has it, if you pick her up, a mile down the road, she will disappear and you will die in a fatal car crash.

Before picking up my psychiatrist I picked up Michelle. Being that it was his idea for me to find closure I figured I would take my best friend along just

in case he started in with his psycho-babble bullshit. She sat up front with me.

I swung by his office, where we had planned to meet, and he was outside, across the road, smoking a cigarette while waiting for me. He flicked the butt and went to get in the passenger side. I stopped him and told him that Michelle was riding shotgun and he had to sit in the back. He gave me that perplexed stare of his and appeased my request.

Throughout the trip, Michelle and I talked quietly about things and he kept interrupting as if I was talking to him. He would cut off Michelle and answer questions intended for her. Such a bother.

We turned off on Mathis Lane and, within minutes, pulled into the driveway of my childhood home. “So, when’s the therapy s’pose ta start, Doc?”

He answered soothingly, “The answer is not in the house, but down that road.”

“Can Michelle come with me?”

“Sure, Sean. Whatever you want,” he said in a sardonic tone. I ignored his uncouth demeanor, for, by now, I was used to him being such an asshole, and went anyway.

I walked slowly, creeping through the darkness, and looked behind me as I strolled. My psychiatrist faded out of sight. Michelle was by my side. I noticed, surrounded by small bulbs of light, a wreath of flowers, and a plaque with a picture on it. The plaque read: *In Loving Memory Of Steven Williams*. I was dumbfounded beyond all recognition.

A pungent and putrid odor nauseated my sense of smell. I searched for the source and found a dead deer. Suddenly I saw Steven emerge from the darkness. He walked toward me at a fast pace and held, in one hand, a rifle. I was defenseless—powerless and unprotected. I felt threatened—cornered and pressed. Then, I released every fear I felt inside and picked up a big stick that lay nearby, and———

I was aroused by the sound of multiple conversations and saw motion mixed with light like a flickering film projector on the inside of my eyelids.

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My head ached unbearably. This kind of headache only happened after I recovered from a blackout.

I slowly opened my eyes, trying to rid my ears of pressure, and just as I did I zoned in on a particular conversation.

“I don’t know. I’m stumped. My patient’s condition has worsened. I’ve never seen anything like it. In his mind, he believes that he has a friend named Michelle—and he’s really fond of her. She doesn’t exist. And his acceptance of his brother’s accidental death is so far away. Who would’ve thought that accidentally killing your brother with a rifle while hunting could have such a traumatic effect?—the fragility of one’s own mind. Through my observation, I’ve noticed that he has totally mistaken his illusions for reality and reality for his illusions.” My psychiatrist rambled to a colleague as I lay contentedly in a room of white. I disagreed with every word, and so did Michelle.

Room with Hidden Secrets

John had just gotten home from grocery shopping. He juggled two bags of groceries in his arms and still managed to swing by his mailbox to collect his mail. When he got inside he placed his groceries on the island and sorted through his mail. The only thing that attracted his attention was a letter from the Smith Jones Bank. He had a feeling of what the letter would read, but he had to see for himself. He opened the envelope and on the letter was written:

Smith Jones Bank
RE: Payment Delinquency
Date: 9/01/08

Dear Mr. Wilson,

Recently, our records show that you have been frequently delinquent on your payment. You are responsible for the said amount below or your home will be scheduled for auction two weeks from the date above.

Amt. Due: \$18,000.00

Out of rage John wadded up the letter and threw it into the garbage. He began to put his groceries away when he got an unexpected phone call. He answered the phone to find himself talking to an attorney that was handling his deceased father's estate.

"Is John Wilson there?" the attorney said.

"This is him," replied John.

"Hey, John. This is Ted Smith, the attorney at—"

"Now look. If this is about my payments—"

"No, John. This is regarding your father's estate. You are entitled to a very large share."

"No, ya see, that must be a mistake. My father wasn't too fond of me."

"Sorry, but my records show different. Can you meet me at the office in an hour to go over a few things? It is im..."

"Sure. Yeah. I'll be there."

"It's on Cider Avenue. Suite 12A." (*Click*)

John hung up the phone and stood still for a minute with a blank stare on his face. "Well. Didn't see that comin'," he humored as he continued to put away the lunchmeat and other perishable items.

He grabbed his car keys from the counter and swiftly ran out the door.

After the meeting with the attorney, John was flabbergasted to hear he inherited the family home. This was a tough break for John, being that his nice bungalow in the suburbs was on the verge of being foreclosed. But, then again, there was a darker side. John was very mistreated and abused in that home. In fact, to him, it wasn't even a home—it was a torture chamber.

He was afraid that going back to it would only bring back horrible memories. But, on the lighter side, desperate times cause for desperate measures. It was a huge house out in the woods and being that John was a bachelor the house would be great for parties and guests.

He received the deed and keys, signed a few papers, and took off out the door. He was headed for the house. He needed closure before he actually started to move in and refused to put it off. Besides, he had nothing better to do.

As he pulled into the driveway he noticed how ominous the house was in appearance; his skin began to crawl. Instantly he started to reminisce about his childhood. He looked at the yard where he would play with his younger brother Ricky. He was always neglected by his two older brothers, and his sister was a young slut. He noticed the tree and reminisced about the tree house he fell from and how he'd broken his arm in two places that summer.

Everything seemed so right until his flashback was disrupted by his father's verbal rage. John snapped back into reality and got out of his car. He stood for another moment and headed toward the front door.

Once he entered the house his first destination was his old bedroom. He went through the foyer, through the study, and into the den where the stairwell was. He shot up the stairs and went three rooms down the hall and stopped. He reached down to grab the doorknob but, then, hesitated. He had another flashback. In his mind, he relived a moment when his father would confine him to his room for a whole day without food or drink—such a cruel punishment. He came back to reality once more to find that he had already entered the room.

Everything was just as he had left it the day he moved to live with his aunt. “That old bastard. I figured he done made a guestroom,” John said as he started to pilfer through his old stuff. While caught up in the moment John heard a ruckus down the stairs. So he went to check things out. The noise led him back into the foyer.

The noise was louder now as he scratched his head trying to figure out its source. It sounded like the clinging of chains and a soft voice that murmured a foreign tongue. It sounded like gibberish. It sounded like the noise was coming from inside the wall. John kept feeling around until he wound up in a crawlspace. He pushed around on the wall until he found a loose piece of paneling. John removed it.

John had another flashback. It was about his younger brother Ricky.

When Ricky was six years old he disappeared. John and Ricky used to play under this crawlspace every day. It was their secret hideout. Ricky was mentally retarded and was slightly disfigured due to a rare form of elephantiasis disease. He required special attention. John loved his little brother and would always play with him. Ricky was never found, and years later his

disappearance was recorded as an *unsolved mystery*. It took John a whole decade to recover. He never fully recovered.

John placed the loose piece of paneling to his right and discovered a tiny entrance that was perfectly built into the wall. John became curious so he entered. The room was dark and moist. It reeked of feces and urine. The clinging of chains and voice became louder. John felt around for a light switch. He found one. When he turned on the light he turned around to find the unthinkable. The unimaginable. Chained to the wall was a slightly disfigured human being. The longer John stared he began to realize who it was. It was Ricky, poor Ricky, now with the mentality of a wild animal. John also noticed a shrine of every newspaper article ever published on Ricky's disappearance.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a powerful blow hit John between his shoulder and neck. John fell to the floor unconscious. When he awoke he found himself chained beside Ricky. Outside the entrance, a face popped in and said, "Surprise!" It was John's father. As John stared at him in disbelief his father placed the paneling back and nailed it into place.

Ricky licked his lips in hunger and stared at John with cannibalistic and feral instincts.

The Ring Finger

It was dark. I mean the kind of darkness that was enriched with ominous inclement. I had just finished removing the last layer of soil that made it possible for me to see the casket of my recently deceased aunt Laura. On her finger was the one thing I had always wanted more than anything in this world. I could have just as easily taken it at the funeral but there were too many sobbing acquaintances and relatives with keen alertness.

Alertness is an element that some people acquire when their emotions are elevated.

I had to pass it up, but I knew I would have it in due time.

An engagement ring with authentic rose-cut diamonds: this type of ring could sell for thousands of dollars if marketed correctly. And soon...it would be mine.

I struggled to escape the grave and to stay afoot. No pun intended but my feet were slipping. However, I made a valiant effort and succeeded. Once I reached higher ground I took a crowbar I had brought with me and latched it onto the casket to crack it open. I stifled. I took a short pause and my heart palpitated. I was very nervous. I closed my eyes and gave the crowbar a mighty tug. I fell backward and bumped my head on a rock but I landed knowing that the casket was now open and soon the ring would be in my hands. I must've collided atop my uncle Carl's grave that rested beside my

aunt's. Their deaths were only two months apart and coincidentally alike in many ways.

Carl and Laura were married for ten years and decided to take out a second mortgage on their home. They both died at their residence with a similar knife through their heart. Both deaths were ruled as suicides.

I stood upright and dusted myself off. I felt warm moisture on the back of my head accompanied by a slight tingly sensation. As I reached back to rub it I discovered blood and a knot that was tender to the touch. The mere thought of getting that ring and fleeing home before daylight was all I cared about.

I leaped onto the edges of the casket as delicate as a cat and bent over to grab my aunt's rigor mortis hand. I struggled defiantly to remove the ring when I heard a snap and felt a pop. I looked only to discover I had the ring but with it was her finger. "I got more than I bargained for," I chuckled. I scurried out of the grave and rushed to cover it back up. The grave had to look undisturbed or else an investigation would begin. That would be sloppy so I made sure I put things back the way I found them. A crime left unclean will leave you standing at the scene.

In all of my years of selling stolen goods, this was the first time I had robbed a grave. I convinced myself that it was my aunt, who loved me dearly, and there was no serious harm done. However, in my pocket, I had not only contained the ring but her finger, as well. I would wait until I got home to figure out a clever solution to separate the jewel from the dismembered digit. In the end, it would all pay off.

Upon entering my house I headed straight to the kitchen. My living room was off to my left from where I was standing and was in perfect line of sight. I tell you this, in an effort, to paint you a picture.

My kitchen was dark. I went to reach for the light when I felt an eerie presence skulking over me—breath-like ultraviolet rays beaming down on a wet leather satchel. I turned to see but there was nobody around. Odd. As I was looking I felt for the switch and noticed a shadow that slowly crept by

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the back door. And I rushed to turn the light on. When I did the bulb blew. Beside me, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a pale white face that cast in the flicker. By now my mind was playing so many tricks on me that I had to ignore one apparition for the other. The face did not bother me. It could've been an illusion designed by fear and by now my fear level was at its highest peak. I chose to be more concerned about the shadow that lingered outside my back door.

I stumbled to my living room where I had placed a flashlight the night before. I turned it on and began my hunt. I stormed out my back door. I was both curious and frightened at what I might discover.

Paranoia was seeping out of my flesh like a poisonous vapor.

Once more, I stifled.

My heart pounded like a bass drum.

I have never tasted fear like this.

I slowly slithered around the corner of my house when I ran into something or someone. It didn't matter. Whatever it was it made me lose the grip on my flashlight. I stood stiffly embedded in the darkness. The streetlights have never worked on my street and it was pitch-black to boot. Suddenly, as tension built, I saw a beam of light levitate right before my very eyes. I gasped.

"Is there something wrong, Jacobs?" emerged a voice.

I now felt a sense of relaxation set in. The voice was very familiar. The beam of light was my flashlight. It was Officer Patterson—one of the nicest cops around. In fact, he was an old high school buddy of mine.

I felt embarrassed.

My levity was a masquerade for his enjoyment.

"Oh, nothing. What brings you out here med'lin' around my place, Pat?" I inquired.

"There was a loud disturbance reported here earlier. The neighbors called it in. You wouldn't happen to know anything, would ya?" he asked.

"Uh...no...certainly not. I just made it home. What kind of noise was it?" I explained and questioned for now my fear slowly became torment again.

“It was probably nothing. Just a bunch-a-hooligans out running the streets,” he replied, soothing my mind and taking the edge off. “All right, take care,” he finished as he handed me back my flashlight.

Whew, what a close call.

As he turned and walked off I shined the flashlight in his direction, still slightly concerned at everything that was going on. My paranoia was still present but in a state of ease. I returned to my kitchen where I would replace my bulb and begin working on removing the ring from that blasted finger.

As I dug in my pocket to find the finger I was reminded by faint memories I had shared with my aunt. At the time of this experience, I was only twenty-eight and my aunt was thirty-two. It’s complicated to explain why she was only four years older than me but she died at a very young age, nonetheless. We’ll leave it at that.

I felt a huge amount of guilt at what I had done. I remember questioning myself, “Was it all worth it?” One more look at that beautiful ring and it all came back to me. So what. I’m a heartless bastard. I almost experienced a moment of regret...ALMOST.

I grabbed the finger and laid it on my countertop. I dug around in my junk drawer until I found my old Swiss army knife. With relentless effort, I administered the first incision. Nevertheless, I cut myself. I stopped what I was doing to run some cold water over my finger in the sink. Afterward, I looked for a Band-Aid. During my search, I noticed a shadow on the wall and felt the same eerie presence again of someone skulking over me. I slowly turned and when I did I saw the most horrific thing that one could ever fathom. It was my aunt Laura. She was a zombie and missed a finger on her left hand. I turned to escape but when I did I ran into another infuriated corpse. Perhaps, Carl. Was it all true? Have I gone mad? I was never able to find the answer for I blacked out with an over-exhilaration of fear.

I was awakened the next day by a police officer whom I assumed to be a grave keeper. I lay on the ground with a pulsating migraine and a desecrated grave beside me. It was all just a dream. I bumped my head and was

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knocked unconscious before I could retrieve the ring. I was unaware of the logistics of the damn thing, however, pleased to know that I imagined the whole experience. They inappropriately cuffed my wrists and treated me as though I was resisting. And I wasn't.

They escorted me to the car as leaches peeled and tumbled down my back.

When I was brought in for questioning I was asked to empty my pockets. I had nothing in my pockets. This I was sure. But to show cooperation I decided to feel around and do as I was told. I couldn't afford to get into any more trouble than I was already in. They treat grave desecration as a serious crime where I'm from. I reached my hand into my pocket and felt something. I thought aloud, "This is odd." I pulled out the object and what I held in my hand was a partially decomposed finger with a platinum ring encrusted with rose-cut diamonds. Just then, I heard an eerie shrill and looked up to see a shadow on the wall. Behind me...I felt a familiar presence.

Mr. Greenwick's Grave

A hand it seems, but many things
This creepy shape could be.
A branch of twigs, onto the ground,
That fall off nearby tree.
But slowly it waves, as if it sees
Me standing by.
I will not wait to reveal my fate
For I sense that death is nigh.

Terror comes in all different shapes and sizes. True terror is malformed, however, can be any size it chooses; it's not prejudiced by any means at all. When it lashes out it takes to a gaunt form. Remember the old saying?: Dynamite comes in small packages. This implies.

Terror is dubious with a warning. In fact, it's a creature in a convincing disguise. And for one little girl terror *was* just that—a false-faced creature. I do strongly emphasize *was*!

It was a windy night as three teenagers stood outside the gates of the Pinewood Cemetery. It was two boys and a girl.

“Are ya gonna do it?” one of the boys asked the girl.

“She ain’t gonna do it ’cause she’s a chicken,” said the other boy.

“Fine, I’ll do it! But I’m telling you now! Nobody’s climbing outta old man Greenwick’s grave! Nobody, I tell ya!” she fired back with overwhelming frustration.

The boys taunted her with chicken noises, “B’rock, b’rock....”

Mr. Greenwick was a very mean old man. Before his mysterious death, he had made an open statement to rid the town of its “bratty” children.

He loathed children and would scold the neighborhood kids every time one would near his property. Your presence alone will kill my beautiful gardenias. And, in lieu of this, the children were frightened by him. Their parents would just tell them to stay away from *old man Greenheart*. Although his last name was Greenwick he was given the nickname *Greenheart* for his crude behavior.

The teenage girl climbed the gate and entered the murky realm. Every sound carried a frightening chill. The wind was howling and it was extremely foggy out. The thick fog covered the graves like a cottony quilt and levitated above her knees. The only light she had was a *Wal-Mart special* that kept flickering.

As she got closer to Mr. Greenwick’s grave the fog began to subside—lessening to a thinner sheet.

Coming out of the grave was the silhouette of a hand waving back and forth. She screamed, dropped the flashlight, turned around, and took off running. And when she did she nailed an old oak tree with a massive impact.

The remaining fog slowly consumed the girl’s damaged body. As she stayed upright the fog crawled up her in a cylindrical motion—slowly. As the shape on Mr. Greenwick’s grave still waved back and forth the night slowly turned to day. The two boys left the scene knowing in their gut that something bad had to have happened to her. They were just too scared to enter the ominous void to restore her from the gag.

The next morning she was found by the grave keeper. She was pinned to a mighty oak with a thick jagged branch rammed through her chest and out

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her back. Lying on Mr. Greenwick's grave was another tree branch. This one was in the shape of an arm with sprouts on the end that took the shape of a hand. It waved back and forth from the wind that still howled.

So, there you have it. In closing, I simply ask you to reflect on this tale. If you think deeply about it you will see: it does have morale. Not too many horror stories do.

Again, it waves, as if it sees
Me standing near.
It's time to go, this I know,
For I assume it senses fear.

Route 13

Luminous visions of light—out of contrast and glaring—a streaking tunnel of mental mystification—I’ve driven this road many times before, but never drunk—never intoxicated with opiates. When my wife left me so did my sanity.

I was driving home from work one night, and I was feeling really drowsy. I was working an oddball shift, which was from 12:00 PM to 8:00 PM. At that time I was working as an orderly at a hospital. I decided to stay over a couple of hours to make some extra cash. My wife and I had gotten into a fight the night before and she had gone to stay at her mother’s. She wasn’t expecting me home anytime soon.

The night was moist with a cool gentle breeze. The stars twinkled like they were keeping a beat to an angel’s choir. The moon glistened as it hid behind a thin haze of ghostly white. The crickets crooned as country essence seeped through my window. I was at my calmest now and everything seemed so right. My brain had released euphoria all over my body calming my nerves and producing an overwhelming sensation of happiness, which was pseudo in its state.

The radio was blaring. I swear to this day that somewhere, hidden inside its layers of frequency, I heard a voice telling me to turn around. It was

distorted with static. I brushed it off. I had just taken a couple of oxies and was feeling overly medicated anyway.

I had planned to take my usual route when I decided to turn off on Route 13. I ordinarily travel Route 56, which is a straight shot home—just twenty miles from where I work. But, in this case, I figured some scenery would do me some good. Choosing this route was shocking to me because I am superstitious, by nature, to the point of being obsessive-compulsive and thirteen is a very bad number for me. I have tried taking this road once before with my wife Carolyn and I hit a ten-point buck, head-on, totaling the 1976 Ford Granada I was driving at the time. I swore that I would never take that road again. But, with everything that was going on between me and my wife, I figured that things could only get better.

I became annoyed with the moonlight casting fervent shadows through my window. I am referring to them as fervent because they came and went, making quick movements with much enthusiasm.

I began to develop a migraine.

I reached for my cell phone to call my mom. I thought that a little conversation would take the edge off and ease the tension. I had taken my eyes off the road for just a tenth of a second when, suddenly, I felt a powerful blow. I had made it no more than ten miles down the road. It was just my luck. I slammed on my brakes and skidded leaving a thick trail of burnt rubber for at least two car lengths ahead of me. Finally, I came to a complete stop. I sat there for a short period taking deep breaths. My heart palpitated out of my chest. I remember questioning the travesty aloud, “What the hell was that?” I shook relentlessly while avoiding sudden movements.

I got out of my car and slowly went around to the front. As I made my way around I inspected everything that surrounded me. I could feel my heart throb in my head. The pounding and pulsating created a feeling of vertigo I had never experienced before.

When I saw the front of my car I was devastated. Whatever I had hit turned my front end into rubble. I looked around and couldn't see a creature in sight. I searched the road, and ditches, and performed a partial search throughout the woods, and, still, I found nothing. I stood still, but it felt as if everything spun around me.

The Willies

Once more I reached for my cell phone to call my mom. I thought that she could send Dad out to get me. As I reached down to the floorboard to pick up my phone I heard an aberrant sound. It sounded like a moaning with the whimpering of a coyote's howl. It was a representation of pain in its wildest form. The mere sound made the fine hairs on the back of my neck stand erect. I stood still. Frozen.

I felt the warmth of breath on the back of my neck as slobber trickled down my back. I smelled the foulest of odors. This particular scent, I was very unfamiliar with. It was almost like a combination of musky skunk spray and rot. I stood motionless. I couldn't speak.

I slowly made a turn to see what stood behind me for it was now apparent that some presence skulked over me. It growled. My peripherals were excellent, but fear made me blind. All I could make out was a gigantic hairy figure standing over me, toying with me, and awaiting its next meal.

As I continued to turn I blacked out.

I opened my eyes to experience the most beautiful sunrise, not sure, at first, of my awkward displacement. Morning mist coated my body. The way I felt now was uncertainty mixed with animosity toward myself. I lay there looking around me. All I could see was Mother Nature at work and a thick, sappy puddle of partially dried blood. Sitting up I noticed that a trail of blood loomed from the puddle and led into the woods. This was a definite indication that my experience was no dream.

I am not really sure of what hideous beast I encountered that night, nor am I sure of its abominable intentions. However, I do know one thing. Because of this night, I absolutely refuse to take ROUTE 13 ever again.

Drip, Drip

Urban legends come in quite a variety. And every town, big or small, has its own take on some of the most familiar tales.

Delores Fitzpatrick was an elderly lady who lived all alone in a two-story Victorian-style house at the top of Pikes Hill. However, she wasn't entirely alone. She did have the company of her dog Max—a full-grown Pomeranian. Delores would stay up until midnight every night. On this particular night, she decided to turn in an hour early after listening to a news report on the radio. The newscast implied that strange disappearances of domestic pets were occurring throughout the whole town of Dalton. In lieu of this, an elderly couple was found dead. They were shredded apart like they had been attacked by a pack of wild animals. And for some vague reason, the authorities believed both crimes to be connected.

Delores showed a small sign of concern; after all, Dalton was just two miles down the road. “Is there ever any good news?” Delores asked as she turned off the radio and called for Max to accompany her to bed.

Delores was a very obsessive-compulsive person. Each night before she went to bed she had a routine. Max would jump directly onto the foot of her bed and tilt his head as if he awaited her affection. Therefore, she would

rub Max with three short strokes behind the ear, crawl into bed, turn her bedside lamp off, place herself into a partial fetal position on her right side, and quickly drift into a light state of slumber. Although Delores was a very light sleeper it never took her long to fall asleep.

It had been no longer than thirty minutes into the night when she was disrupted by a soft annoying dripping noise: *drip, drip...* “Where is that coming from?” she asked quietly as she turned her bedside lamp on and crawled out of bed. She wobbled down the stairs and peeked outside to see if there was any rain trickling on her window sill. “Hmm, there’s not a raincloud in sight,” Delores said reassuringly as she sealed her door shut and headed up the stairs to go back to bed.

Entering her bedroom she rubbed Max with three short strokes behind the ear, crawled back into bed, turned her bedside lamp off, and quickly subsided.

Again, Delores was aroused by the steady tap of dripping water. This time it sounded a bit louder: *drip, drip...* “What is that?” she asked again as she turned her bedside lamp on and crawled out of bed. This time she went downstairs to check her kitchen sink. She noticed that the aluminum basin of her sink was as dry as a bone. She felt the orifice of her faucet and even it was dry. But still, she was not convinced. She made sure that her sink knobs were very tight. “That should fix that!” she exclaimed with confidence.

Returning upstairs to her bedroom she rubbed Max with three short strokes behind the ear, crawled back into bed, turned her bedside lamp off, and fell asleep.

Drip!!! Drip!!! This time the annoying presence of dripping water revealed itself. It was so loud and obnoxious that the sound itself would lead her straight to the source. She turned her bedside lamp on, nearly knocking it over, and stormed out of bed. With her head slightly tilted, listening with her good ear, she followed the sound straight to its source—the bathroom. As she entered the door she looked to her left at the sink. There wasn’t a trickle or splatter in sight.

Drip!!! Drip!!! The sound adversely attracted her attention. She immediately looked at her shower curtain. She stood still just for a moment taking extreme, vigorous breaths. She grabbed the curtain with an ironclad grip and

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swung it open nearly tearing it from the hangers. She paused. She stood still while a cold chill slowly worked its way up and down her spine. Max had been hanged from her showerhead and steadily swung back and forth like a pendulum. The annoying drip was Max's blood splattering against her ceramic tub. Apparently, he had been there the whole night.

The Accident

[Up until 1982 there was a decree—a written act that protected an offender within his own rights. With no regard for limitation, if an offender wanted confidentiality, he was given that right—an act of anonymity.]

A car swerved violently as the scream of a little girl unleashed piercing tones with the sound of squealing tires, the impact of metal rolling wildly bashing pavement, and the shattering of glass. Tragedy was slapped in the face by prudence. The devil grinned.

“Mother wasn’t around much,” I told my psychiatrist as he stared at me for a while with a perplexed grin.

“Explain,” he proceeded.

At that moment I glimpsed back at my childhood and realized the reflection was dim. I soon realized I had no childhood, or so I thought. It was as if I was never really born—just placed here on Earth when I reached my late twenties.

“Steven. Steven.” my psychiatrist repeated noticing how distant in thought I was. By the third or fourth time, I can’t really recall how many times he repeated my name, I responded. Not with words but with an intent look. He

then proceeded, explaining to me how a mental block could be my problem. I believe he referred to it as a rare case of childhood trauma. I asked him to explain in greater detail, but the timer sounded, and he rushed me off telling me he had another appointment at 3:00 PM and that we would dig deeper sometime next week. I made my next week's appointment at the receptionist's desk and rushed home to take my mid-day nap.

I made it home right at 3:45 PM. I know this because I looked at the clock hanging on my wall as I entered my apartment. It was cold. "It's the frickin' middle of December and I can't even get a maintenance man to look at my furnace," I said fiercely through my gnashed teeth. I inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly just to watch the cold radiate from my mouth. A cloud of thick white breath lingered in the room before me as I stared at it for a while.

Scampering over to the phone I picked it up and dialed the maintenance man's number that I read posted on the wall. I waited for the dial tone and just when it picked up I ferociously tore into whomever it was on the other end not even knowing whether or not it was the maintenance man. Suddenly, as I continued to rant and rave, a soft, delicate voice on the other end said, "My daddy isn't home."

I stopped instantly, gave it a pause, and continued with a slight quiver in my voice. "I'm sorry. What'd you say?" I said politely, asking the little voice to repeat itself.

"I said my daddy isn't home. If you need him for an emergency try the bar downtown. I believe he calls it Rico's Pub or something." The little voice continued to ramble as all I could do was listen. "You see, ever since the accident my daddy spends a lot of time away from home. If you see him tell him I miss him and want him to come home."

The conversation ended between me and the little girl, or so I assumed it was a little girl judging by the voice that had just melted my heart.

I stood still for a brief moment hating myself for being so cruel. It was almost as if, for a moment, I had felt emotion. My subconscious questioned me. Why did I let something as simple as a child's voice have such an effect on me? It was almost as if I had just heard the voice of an angel. Not only was it soft, but it sent chills up and down my spine and made my flesh tingle

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followed by a warm sensation that traveled throughout my whole body leaving me paralyzed with bewilderment.

I had to break the calm.

I shook off the anxiety and headed out the door in search of the maintenance man. I faintly remembered what he looked like. It had been a while since the last time I had seen him. I'm thinking maybe a good couple of years. But I knew once I saw him I would know exactly who he was. I was on two missions at this point: to get my damn furnace fixed and to tell him that his daughter misses him something awful and that he needs to get his ass home!

I headed downtown where the little girl told me to go, but, at that point, it occurred to me that I wasn't given a street address. I went ahead and hit Main Street. I figured that would be a good place to start. Mostly everything can be found on Main Street.

I was searching for a place called Rico's Pub, but no dice. I had been driving around for a good hour and a half and was about to turn around and go home when, suddenly, I had a very intense flashback—like I do often. However, this time my vision became a big white glare. This has never happened. “I can't see the road, dammit! Where's the fuckin' road!?!” I screamed as I swerved from left to right trying to avoid oncoming traffic. Then, suddenly, I felt a powerful impact and everything went pitch black.

I woke up on the cold ground with a massive headache. All I could see, at this point, was the bright glare of neon lights. As my eyesight began to regain focus there was one sign I could slightly make out and so I focused on that one while blocking out the rest, when, suddenly, it became visible: “Rico's Pub,” I said as I rubbed my eyes to be sure.

As I went to stand up I stumbled while noticing the wreckage of my car where I had nailed a light pole head-on. I tried to catch my balance when I felt myself falling backward. I wasn't sure who, at that point, but someone reached out and clutched my arms breaking my fall.

I caught my balance, leaned up against my car, and slowly looked back. It was, then, I realized that the man standing behind me looked somewhat familiar. “Are you the maintenance man?” I asked with a drunken swagger.

“Are you from the Mahoney Apartments on Sherwood?” he asked.

I replied, “Yes.”

“Then, yeah. I’m the maintenance man.”

I began to tell him about my heater, which took a whole different direction when he interrupted and offered me a ride home. I turned it down by telling him I had to wait for the police to arrive. I paused for a moment and looked up at the aloof sky when I saw a beautiful bright star hovering above. It reminded me to mention his daughter, and so I did. He asked me to repeat what I’d just said; this time he had the quiver in his voice. I hesitated but repeated the message once more.

He immediately changed the subject. “Did you say your heater wasn’t working?”

“Yeah. I got home today, this afternoon, and—”

He interrupted again. “What’s your room number?”

“112.”

“I was just there this morning. State inspectors came in and inspected every heater. Your apartment was unbearably hot when we entered. We just closed the door assuming maybe you were cold-natured or something. We didn’t do any further inspecting because it was obvious yours was working fine.” He continued, “And as for my daughter, she’s been dead for over two years.” He stopped and, then, proceeded to explain, “Some nut job was on his way home from a ball game when he claimed to have blacked out and hit her. He was released and that was that.”

I stood there listening to him carrying on in disbelief. I have never, in my whole life, experienced the supernatural. This can’t be really happening, I thought to myself. But it was real. Very real. There was no denying its authenticity.

He continued, “He’s got this psychiatrist that covered for him by releasing documentation that he has a history of blackouts and flashbacks—called it a rare case of childhood trauma or some shit.” He paused. “I never had a chance to see his face or know his name. The courts protected him.”

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I knew this whole time what was going on. It was this very moment that made me aware of the truth. I'm a killer. When I black out I also have memory loss. I'm being haunted. I can't recall my own childhood, and, as a result of my illness, I took someone else's life—a child. Oh, my God. What have I done? I continued to blame myself as I wallered around in self-pity. Suddenly, I heard a whistle and a loud cheer. When I looked up it was the third quarter of the game and the Wildcats were down by nine.

The Confession

There is biblical proof that evil can possess a synagogue or church as well as the holy ground it stands upon. Satan is deceptive and has the power to take many forms. Despite human belief, the holy rite can be ruled by Satan and his demonic minions, for Satan is a fallen angel.

“And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.”

—Zechariah 3:1, *The Bible of King James*

“And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil and cried out with a loud voice, 34 saying, Let us alone; What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. 35 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.”

—Luke 4:33, *The Bible of King James*

Roger went into the Catholic Church around noon. The streets were barely populated and composed of red antique brick. The church was filled with mural art and stained glass windows that represented Jesus, God, and the Virgin Mary. The church was extremely heavenly and holy. It was the kind of holiness that made your skin crawl rather than feel blessed. It also reeked of floral and fabric.

He looked rugged and bent. Something was eating at him. That was why he came there in the first place. Something lured him there. Roger was on a mission and needed to confess—a repressed declaration of guilt. Roger was set on confessing his sins.

As he entered the church he stopped. He absorbed the spirits of every Catholic angel that lived amongst the Romanian construction.

After a moment Roger headed for the confessions booth.

He pulled back the velvet cloth and developed a sudden state of hesitation. He gave a sinister grin. He knew the Catholic priest in the master booth held the only key to his mental restoration.

Roger would never be the same. He had to confess his sins. Like handing over a box of bones collected from his closet—it would not be easy.

He simply had to confess.

He nestled himself inside the snug pine box and began to speak: “Father,” Roger broke the silence with a slight quiver in his voice.

The priest slid open the small door-like window used to exchange words. “Yes, my son,” the priest replied, giving his sanction to speak.

“Please, forgive me, Father, for I have sinned,” Roger said, and just as he finished the priest had already begun reciting the scripture of eternal acceptance. “It was a year ago today, Father,” Roger continued his confession. “It was a long horrific year the day I watched my son get killed. Why, I might as well killed him myself. It was brutal. So damn brutal. Pardon my language.”

“So what brings you here?” the priest asked.

“Closure...Therapy...Forgiveness...I dunno really...just to confess, I guess. Father, what I saw that day consumed me. I have guilt—lotsa guilt. I am the murderer. I killed my son—not that beast.”

As Roger continued to ramble he kept his focus on a crucifix engraved perfectly into the woodwork inside the booth. He took short pauses and gently rubbed it with his hand. He admired the fine detail with the tips of his fingers. The priest continued to carry on a conversation with Roger like a shrink would a client. “And...?” the priest nudged Roger to continue.

“Oh, yeah! It was late that night. I had just come home from a long hard day at work.

“I’m a foreman at Riley’s Plastics.

“My job is very stressful.

“I worked harder than ever that week pulling in OT, trying to catch up on some bills. You know, trying to get ahead. Anyway, I came home and grabbed me a beer, and collapsed on my lazy boy. I was sooo beat—”

“And so what happened?” interrupted the priest.

“Hold on. I’m getting there,” fired back Roger. “I called my mom on my cell ’cause she had Jason. Jason was...ahem...still is my son. He always will be. God rest his poor little soul. He was only six and meant no harm to anyone.” Roger broke down in tears.

“They never do at that age,” the priest agreed with a sorrowful tone.

“So I’m ready to tie one on. Right? By now I had already consumed a six-pack. I told Jason to head off to his room. ‘Go play,’ I told him. And he did. He always minded well. By now an hour had passed and I was already working on my tenth beer.

“I began to doze off when, somewhere within my subconscious, I heard a scream. It was more like a shrill. It didn’t bother me. I didn’t even budge. I just sat there. But, then, everything went silent—”

“So the silence got your attention?” the priest assumed.

“Yeah. I guess it did.”

“So, continue, my son.”

“I got up. It took everything I had but I managed. I staggered through the hall three doors down to Jason’s bedroom—his tiny little bedroom.” By now, as Roger spoke, he began to tear up and cry. “I walked into the room—his room. And I saw blood splattered everywhere. It was awful—my son’s very own blood that I was standing in the midst of. Then, I saw his body lying sliced open and lifeless. He lay there mutilated. Standing over

him was the creepiest, most demonic-looking creature. Words could not explain what I saw that night—”

“So you’re telling me a demon, no, a sadistic beast of some sort killed your son?”

“Yes,” Roger gave a direct answer.

“Tell me something, my son. Where was your wife throughout all of this? The boy did have a mother, did he?”

“She died in a car wreck less than a year prior to all of this.”

“I see. Carry on.”

“So when the cops, finally, showed up they took my statement. Of course, I mentioned nothing of the creature. They done some investigating and ruled it as a homicide of unknown origin. I am still being accused as a prime suspect. In fact, I am still on trial. They couldn’t find enough evidence to hold me. But I didn’t do it. I assure you. I didn’t do it.”

“So if it’s forgiveness you’re looking for the lord almighty forgives all but he needs a direct confession,” the priest said as he tried to pull the truth out of Roger.

“I didn’t do it. Dammit! I did not do it! Somewhere that monster—that thing—is still out there. Somewhere he is killing more children. And for every child he kills the stronger and more powerful he becomes,” Roger explained.

Roger glanced at his watch and noticed that three hours had already elapsed. “I must be going, Father. Thanks for your time,” Roger said as he rubbed the crucifix one last time and stepped out of the booth.

As Roger took a couple of steps he heard the priest speak one last time. “My son,” the priest said. As Roger turned around the door flew open with a mighty impact on the master booth. “You’re unforgiven,” said the priest in a blood-thirsty, snarling voice. However, it wasn’t a priest. In fact, it wasn’t even human. Standing before Roger was a creepy demonic creature who bared the markings of a Catholic priest. He was no Catholic priest.

The Yellow Rose

Mike Gribble just finished the first chapter of his upcoming novel. It would be the next installment to his massive library of work.

He had less than a month to meet his deadline and he was working really hard.

He had taken a week off from the university he currently worked at, and shunned family and friends.

The clock was ticking and time was money.

He took a sip of coffee, lit a cigarette, and leaned back in his leather executive chair to admire his written work. “Flawless,” he said as he sat erect to continue the saga.

He typed:

Chapter 2

As Jimmy languidly staggered down the hall he was beckoned by Stephanie, who by now had passed away. She wore a white veil and looked so beautiful. She looked just as he remembered her.

Mike stopped typing. He developed an unusual sense of writer’s block. This type of thing never happened to Mike. He has always had a broad and vivid

imagination. His prolific abilities to write were phenomenal. No modern-day author could compete. They all paled in comparison to Mike.

He was a bestselling author.

He had written fifteen novels within that year and eight of them were contracted to the movies—three already in production.

As Mike started to type some more he was suddenly distracted by a glare out the corner of his left eye. It took the shape of a woman dressed in white. When Mike, slowly, turned to see what, or better yet, who it was, he discovered that it was his thin white curtain blowing in the wind. “I must’ve left my window open again,” he said as he got up to close it.

He sat back down when he suddenly became fixated on a yellow rose his wife had given him just before she died. It was dried out; yet, somehow managed to stay preserved in its original shape. It was a beautiful rose, one he would cherish forever. However, it wasn’t as beautiful as his wife. Becca was a gem. She was a one in a million catch and Mike just so happened to have been the lucky bastard that won her over.

As he went to reach out and grab the rose to feel its paper-like texture the doorbell rang.

Ordinarily, Mike would’ve jumped right up and gone straight for the door. Mike was like that. But these days, since Becca passed away, he became somewhat of a recluse.

He was forced to relocate due to painful memories—the kind a person’s heart just can’t seem to digest. His old house was now the home of Becca’s ghost and Mike refused to have her that way. He wanted her physically.

That house was Becca’s pride and joy and he could no longer live there, not with those kinds of memories.

Besides, Mike never got company. “Who could that be?” he asked as he eventually got up to see. “Who’s there?” he yelled. Nobody answered. As he approached the door he paused for a slight moment. He got this sudden eerie sense that someone skulked over him. He slowly turned, avoiding sudden movements, and nobody was there. He did, however, receive a tender chill.

He opened the door and, once again, nobody was there. “The doorbell did ring?” he questioned his own sanity.

The Willies

He shook off the whole misconception and headed back to his study to continue his writing.

The eerie experience inspired him. It may sound creepy but fictitious horror writers do tend to get off on those types of things.

He sat back down in his leather executive chair and began to type once more.

Jimmy heard a sudden knock upon his door. He wasn't expecting company, at least not now. "Who could this be?" he asked himself. Suddenly, he heard a whisper. Ignoring the whisper he got up to answer the door. Nobody was there. Once again, he heard the same whisper. It sounded like . . .

The doorbell rang. This time Mike stood straight up and headed for the door. He couldn't focus with all of this going on. It was either him getting writer's block or these insane rings from his doorbell.

He opened the door and nobody was there. Frustrated and tempted to find a solution he disconnected the doorbell from its main wiring harness. "That should fix that," he muttered as he headed for the study.

As he entered the study he stopped to admire the yellow rose. A tiny tear trickled down his cheek as he burst into tears. He loved Becca so much. He began to remember the time that he and Becca met. With his eyes sealed tightly, he remembered the day as if it was just yesterday. He relived it as if it was really happening. The smell of her perfume, the touch of her skin, and their first kiss as they passionately pressed their lips against one another. It was magic.

"I don't think I can love again, Becca."

"What'd you mean, 'love'? Let's just start with today and see where we end up in a few years."

"Sounds good. Sounds real good."

He relived that conversation so perfectly. As he slowly opened his eyes he saw a shadow lurking in the far corner. Out of it came Becca wearing a white satin gown. "Did you miss me?" she asked.

"Oh, god, yes. I missed you so much," he replied.

“Mike, you must let me go. I’ve moved on. Someday you will too. We’ll be together then.”

As Mike began to reply she was gone. She disappeared. Still, yet, her soft soothing voice echoed. The echoes filled the room and gave him joy.

He now knew that Becca was with him.

He stared at the rose once more, only this time he reached out and held it in his hand. With vase and all gently, but firmly, in his grasp, he worked his hands up and down it feeling every ridge—the fine detail of its construction.

The vase was very rare. It came from Nigeria. Becca brought it back from one of her business trips. She was a landscape photographer and worked for a big business that published magazines for different countries.

While focusing really hard he noticed a chip on the vase and began to relive a time that was responsible for that chip:

It was 1993 and Becca had just come home from the hospital. She was admitted with gallstones and had to have her gallbladder removed. Back then, they didn’t deal much with laparoscopic surgery. They removed gallbladders the old-fashioned way. She didn’t make a quick recovery. They snipped her liver and bile came oozing into her bloodstream. Mike worried himself sick. When she did recover and was released Mike was so excited; he caressed her in his arms and lifted her, cradling her like a groom does a bride when carried over the threshold. He spun her around and her foot just barely brushed up against the vase. It wobbled, giving Mike time to gently ease Becca to the couch, and just when he reached out to catch it the bottom rim of the vase touched the ceramic flooring in their house. It was a great save but left one hell of a memorable flaw.

Mike went to set the vase back on his desk when he heard a disruptive sound. It was a knock; a loud obnoxious knock on his door. “Dammit,” he said violently as he headed for the door. As he swung open the door he noticed a presence. This time it wasn’t a wasted trip nor was it an eerie illusion. Standing at the door was his *long-time-no-see* brother Steven. “Hey.” The two greeted each other and hugged. It has been years since Steven and Mike had been under the same roof. They parted ways a long time ago.

The Willies

Mike offered Steven a cup of coffee as the two sat and reminisced all night. “So what brings you here?”

“I dunno really. Just got ta thinkin’ ’bout cha a few days ago and thought I’d look you up. You’re not that easy to find you know,” Steven explained as he noticed a picture of Becca centered on the fireplace. “Holdin’out?” Steven asked.

“Yeah, sorta,” Mike replied back but soon after changed the subject. He asked Steven where Claire was. Claire was Steven’s wife of seventeen years.

“We’re divorced,” Steven answered. “But, hey, it happens,” he added as it became his turn to change the subject.

The two continued to play catch up when it started to get late. “I guess I’ll be turning in now. Do you have a place to stay?” Mike asked, offering southern hospitality.

“Oh, yeah. I’m staying at the hotel down the street,” Steven answered.

“The Drury Inn down the street?” Mike spoke up. Steven concurred as Mike begged for him to crash at his place. He convinced him that the hotel was way too expensive, didn’t offer much, and that they’ve had reported cases of bedbugs. That’s all it took for Steven to go out and grab his things.

Once unpacked Steven carefully ventured into Mike’s study. Mike’s study was his place to think and create. It was very off limits to guests of any kind, especially family. Steven knew he’d been writing and he just wanted a sneak peek of what was in store. As he slowly and quietly opened the door he noticed the vintage beauty of the lair. Steven respected that kind of thing. He was very primitive.

He admired the artwork that Mike had displayed for he was an artist himself.

He became slightly aggravated, however, when he realized that Mike had none of his artwork. Nevertheless, Mike convinced himself that maybe he had it displayed in another room. That calmed him down.

As Steven reached down to grab some of Mike’s manuscript he was distracted by the yellow rose. Such elegance it displayed and the essence it released. It almost carried a primrose scent.

There was only one person in the world that he knew of that ever smelled like that. It was Becca.

Steven always had a secret crush on her and when she wore that primrose scented perfume it drove him crazy.

Steven reached out to touch the rose—to feel its paper-like texture and when he did he felt a presence behind him. His first thought was that it was Mike sneaking up on him.

He turned quickly to find Becca standing before him. There he stood face to face with the most beautiful ghost he had ever reckoned. They kissed.

It was never mentioned but there was one incident that Becca and Steven did have an affair.

After the kiss, Becca's eyes turned a fiery red and she spoke to Steven. She said, "Kill your brother. It's the only way." Steven took two steps back in total disbelief.

"I can't do such a thing."

"You must. It's the only way."

"The only way for what?" Steven asked but didn't receive an answer. By then, she had already faded into the night.

Meanwhile, in the master bedroom, Mike lay in bed reading a novel he had been slowly reading for the past month. He was suddenly surprised by the sound of glass shattering. He ran straight to the guestroom just a couple of rooms down from him. That was where the sound came from, or at least it seemed. He opened the door and noticed the glass was shattered from the window.

He lived in a two-story house and the bedrooms were all located on the top floor.

Tied to the bedpost was a rope.

The bed was heavy and sturdy.

He followed the rope that led outside the window and noticed Steven was swinging back and forth with, what appeared to be, a broken neck. He was not responding to Mike at all as he attempted to get his attention.

Steven had hanged himself.

The Willies

Mike made a relentless effort to hoist Steven back into the room but could feel the tiny bones crackle and pop in his neck as they vibrated through the fibers of the rope.

Once Mike was able to pull Steven through the window he noticed that there was no bringing him back.

Steven was dead.

“Why? WHY?” Mike questioned aloud. But there were no apparent answers.

Later that week, once the funeral was over, family and friends gathered at Mike’s. Some of them he had not seen in years.

As Mike and Ray, one of his second cousins, sat out on the porch remembering the good ole days, Sheriff Benson pulled up.

Although Mike was a well-respected resident, a proper investigation had to be done.

This kind of thing never happened in their town before and they were questioning whether it was a homicide or suicide.

Mike, of course, became a lead suspect in the investigation.

“Mike. Now ya know I need to ask you a few questions, right?” the sheriff explained.

“Gee, Sheriff, just go ahead and read me my rights why don’t cha,” Mike sarcastically replied.

As the two of them continued to chat Ray went inside the house to talk with other family members and friends, basically to give Mike and the Sheriff some privacy. Ray wanted no part of that.

Everyone knew that Mike couldn’t commit such a crime, but, unfortunately, foul play was suspected.

As Ray made his way to the kitchen to fetch his wife a drink he was lured into the study by the majestic yellow rose that sat on Mike’s desk. It was almost as if it called his name.

Meanwhile, outside, as the sheriff continued his interrogation with Mike, a loud blast was heard. It sounded like a gunshot.

Everyone ran to the study, including Mike and the Sheriff, and all they could see, at first, was blood splattered everywhere.

Mike looked down first and noticed Ray lying face down in his own blood. The whole backside of his head was skull fragments and mush. Beside him lay Mike's hunting Rifle.

Everyone was stunned at what they were witnessing.

Ray always had it together.

How could such a travesty occur?

Ray's death was the straw that broke the camel's back. Whatever the case it was a true tragedy.

Sheriff Benson went out to his Explorer and called in the fatality. He said it was a definite suicide. He was sure of that.

Mike became concerned; first, Steven, and now, Ray. What was next? He decided that he needed to get away.

Two weeks had gone by and Mike was packing his things. Nothing crazy had happened since. However, with what happened within that month, Mike wasn't taking any chances.

He had reservations at a Royal Suite motel in Las Vegas.

He could probably recover from the trauma and continue his writing there.

He now had less than a month to complete his novel and he was still on the second chapter. Besides, maybe Las Vegas would bring him some new inspiration.

Mike gathered enough clothes to last him two weeks and other needed accouterments.

He grabbed the photo of Becca that stood center on the mantle of his fireplace and admired it. He gently brushed her face with the tips of his fingers when he noticed her standing out of the corner of his eye.

She wore the white satin gown and lit up the room giving heartfelt warmth.

She spoke to him but soon vanished. All she had to say was, "Forget me, Mike. You must let me go."

Mike, once more, became saddened and miserable. This reminded him to go to his study and grab the yellow rose. That was his most valuable possession. He did it quickly for small remnants of Ray's suicide still remained.

He grabbed the rose and left.

While on his way to the airport, Mike listened to 101.1 FM The Wire. It was a local oldie station.

While listening to DJ B. Vinny ramble on about anything and everything the station started to fade. It started to make a tuning noise like a shortwave radio makes when tuning in a faraway station and white noise. A voice bled through. It said, “Good, Mike. You’re leaving. Soon you’ll forget all about me. Please. Mike. You must.” It was the voice of Becca. Her sweet voice would melt his heart each time he imagined it. Except for this was no illusion. It was real. Everything was real. Seeing her ghost, hearing her voice, Steven dying, and Ray dying—all of these things were real and were happening all at once. What did it all mean? Was Mike losing it?

Suddenly the radio faded back in with DJ B. Vinny continuing his countdown. “Next up, which comes in at number five on the countdown, is a band that needs no introduction. *Sweet Jane* by *Cowboy Junkies*.” As he wrapped up his introduction the song had already begun to fade in. Mike loved the eighties so he began to sing along.

As Mike pulled into the main drive at the airport he noticed the big plane that he would possibly be boarding. He also reminded himself that he was afraid of heights and hated flying.

Sucking it up Mike got out of his car and went to the service desk to order a two-way ticket to Las Vegas.

He was scanned and his luggage was checked as he made his way through the line.

Before he boarded the plane he told the person handling his luggage to be very gentle. “There’s expensive and very valuable merchandise in there,” Mike told him.

This peculiar incident gave suspicion that Mike was possibly smuggling drugs or a weapon.

His bag was set aside for further inspection, but still, somehow managed to board the plane—just not in the luggage department. Instead, it wound up in the cockpit.

Mike sat down and quickly became comfortable, which was surprising being that he hated flying, but somehow managed to stay with it.

Beside him was an elderly lady and she wasted no time at making his acquaintance. She knew exactly who he was. She loved to read, and she loved horror. “Why, you’re Mike Gribble, are you?” she asked. “The author. You wrote *The Last Dance*, *Ghost House*...” she continued to name off books.

Mike interrupted, “Guilty as charged,” and smiled.

He loved fans.

He treated them very kindly.

They hit it off really well until the lady eventually fell asleep. She did mention that flying made her fatigue. His reply to that was, “I wish that was all it did to me.”

As Mike sat, staring at the digital LCD screen in front of him, he was reminded that he brought his laptop in case of sudden inspiration, which he was experiencing. He placed it in his lap, booted it up, logged onto his account, and began to read what he already had written. Once he found his way back into the mind of Jimmy, his lead character, he continued the story.

. . . Stephanie. The whispers and voices he had been hearing all that time; they were Stephanie’s. She was with him. She was there when he was at the park. She was with him when he sold the house and met with the banking agent. He felt her presence but doubted it at first.

Meanwhile, up at the cockpit, the co-pilot asked the pilot about the luggage. “Open it and see, Charlie,” the pilot replied.

“You open it. I don’t like going through other people’s things,” the co-pilot responded.

“All right. I will.” He set the flight to auto-pilot as he reached down and grabbed the bag. He unzipped it, only to find regular items, when out of it the yellow rose fell. It was still in the vase and wrapped with a sponge-like material to keep the stem moist.

Albeit the flower had been dried out it was still a perfect fossil. It managed to maintain perfect health. The rose was at least eight years old.

When it hit the floor of the plane it shattered. The vase became a thousand tiny pieces and the rose lay there exposing itself to the outer world.

The Willies

The rose had never been removed from its vase. Immediately it turned black and fell apart.

As Mike continued to write the plane started to fly rough.

The jarring and bouncing back and forth knocked the laptop from Mike's lap and onto the floor busting it. Mike didn't care much for the laptop; at that very moment, he just held on tight.

A message came across the intercom. "Please, stay seated and don't panic. We are experiencing some minor turbulence..."

"Minor, my ass," Mike responded.

As the turbulence continued, causing much confusion and panic, the plane began to soar out of control and into a downward spiral.

The plane was falling at 50,000 feet.

All Mike and everyone else could do was pray for a miracle. Unfortunately, miracles don't come too often and good things come to those who wait. There was no waiting.

The plane exploded upon impact.

There were no survivors.

Amid all the fiery rubble lay the yellow rose.

Within the flame grew an odd shape. The smoke and gases caressed the shape. It was a lady reaching out for something.

The plane crashed in a cornfield so there was no one around to witness the apparition.

Mike was dead before he could finish his novel.

A week later, at Oak Ridge Press, they received an odd package. It read: *In care of Mike Gribble*. It had no forwarding address.

When it was opened they found, inside, a manuscript—a full 400-page masterpiece. It was entitled: *The Yellow Rose*.

Down by the Lake

It was a dark and stormy night as a small two-door sedan pulled up to the lake. “Dammit, Hanna! Shut the hell up!!!” the lady spoke in a very hateful manner.

“Stop it, Mommy! Stop it! I wanna go home,” the little girl pleaded.

The way she was bruised and the way she reacted to her mother’s touch it was obvious that she was an abused child. As the lady revved up the engine she threw the car into gear landing it into the lake. The car tipped up and the lake consumed it whole. The poor little girl sat helplessly in the back seat, kicking and screaming, making a valiant effort to escape. Unfortunately, the lake was too powerful. The car gracefully weighed itself through the deep body of water and settled heavily at the bottom.

30 Years Later

“Molly, hurry up and grab the bag of clothes! I would like to be moved by noon ya know,” the mother sarcastically instructed her daughter, Molly, as she ransacked through their car that sat solely beside the lake. “I can’t believe we got such a great deal on this lakehouse,” the mother thought aloud as she fragilely unpacked a box of collectibles.

As Molly continued to wrestle with the bag of clothes that was buried beneath boxes and suitcases she was suddenly distracted. She heard a voice. It was a soft voice. It could have possibly been the voice of an angel. Whatever it was it did not matter. The spooky part was it knew Molly's name and it said it repeatedly. It was a voice so serene that it blended with the gentle breeze that rustled through the leaves and filled the area with a botanical essence that was so therapeutic. Molly chose to ignore it as she continued to drag the bag of clothes out of the car and into the house.

Later that night, as Molly lay in bed she stared at the ceiling counting the little spots that blemished the tile overhead.

The new house was settling and Molly was slightly frightened by all the strange noises she was hearing.

In the kitchen, Molly's mother was preparing herself a cup of coffee when she looked outside and noticed that it began to rain. She slammed down her cup, shattering it on the counter, and immediately ran out to her car to roll up her windows. As she reached out to grab the handle she had a strange premonition. She envisioned an incident that was unbeknownst to her. She saw a car facing the lake and heard the scream of a little girl. Suddenly, she came back to reality. She stood still as the screaming continued.

"Molly!!!" the mother exclaimed as she ran into the house and straight to Molly's room. "What is it, Molly?"

"There-there-there's a lit-a-little girl in my closet," Molly explained as her lips quivered resulting in a slight stutter.

Molly's mother looked around. "Oh, Molly... there's nothing in here. Just us."

That night, Molly's mother stayed in bed with her singing *Down in the Valley* until Molly, finally, drifted off to sleep.

The next day Molly's mother awoke to a disturbing splashing noise. The sound was mixed with screaming and arguing as well as the sound of a little girl's cry. Even though she was awake she sat primarily in her subconscious. The racket she was hearing instantly jerked her out of her subconscious state and back into reality.

The Willies

As she sat still for a moment she seemed confused and disoriented. She looked around and realized that she was in her car. In front of her was the lake. "I didn't park this way," she thought aloud. Suddenly, she heard a noise in the back seat and felt the car slightly shake. As she slowly turned around, frightened by the uncertainty of what was behind her, she found Molly in a deep sleep. "What, what's going on?" she questioned under her breath. In an effort to debunk the paranormal event she just convinced herself that she was losing her mind. She grabbed Molly, headed into the house, and gently placed her back into bed.

Later that evening, while Molly's mother sat by the bay window reading a book, she, suddenly, felt a slight chill. She started to shiver and wondered why it was so cold. As she got up to adjust the thermostat she glanced out the window and noticed that Molly stood at the edge of the lake. "Molly!!!" the mother shouted frantically as she darted out the door. As she approached Molly she reached out to grab her shoulder. When the little girl turned around the mother realized that it wasn't Molly at all. Instead, it was a little girl about Molly's age. She had a very pale complexion and her eyes were as big and as black as coal. Molly's mother stood and stared at her in disarray when, suddenly, the little girl made the strangest most terrifying shrill. Her mouth opened up peeling back her face as a swarm of mosquitoes came jutting out. Molly's mother suddenly awoke. She sat curled up in her chair with the book on her lap positioned face down. She realized she was dreaming and looked out the window at the lake to make sure Molly was not there. It was apparent that it was all just an awkward nightmare, but still, she felt so very cold.

"Molly... Molly..." the voice called. It was the small voice of a little child. Molly woke up disturbed by the noise. The voice continued to call out. Finally, Molly answered.

"Come play with me," the small voice said. "I'm down by the lake. Mommy won't let me go nowhere else," the small voice continued to cozen Molly. The voice was ghostly and very haunting. Yet...it was so soft. It had the innocence that only a small child could possess and a slight reverb

almost like it was hidden between the layers of imagination that separate dreams from reality. Mesmerized by the voice Molly crawled out of bed and headed to the lake.

As Molly approached the lake it began to rain very hard. A bright flash caught Molly's attention from behind her. As she turned around she realized that it was the headlights on her mother's car.

"Get in the car, Molly! Get in now!!!" her mother demanded.

Molly asked no questions nor did she hesitate. She crawled into the back seat as her mother fastened her in.

By now it started to thunder and lightning struck down. The storm picked up heavily—it had the potential to develop a hurricane.

Molly's mother made sure that the seatbelt was very secure.

Molly became frightened. She looked up and noticed that her mother was not the same person. It was as if she had been possessed by evil. Molly's mother was being very mean and aggressive. Suddenly, she threw the car into drive and floored the accelerator. The car was headed directly toward the lake. Molly's mother unimpeded an impious laugh that echoed throughout the area. The car splashed into the lake as history repeated itself.

"Molly!!! Molly!!! Wake up and grab the clothes out of the car. Sheesh...I guess you expect me to do it all. Not today. Not on my watch. You'll help out or you won't get to play later, missy," the mother said as Molly stood still—hypnotized by the powers of the lake.

Meanwhile, beneath the lake sat a rusty two-door sedan with the skeletal remains of a little girl perfectly preserved in the back seat...

Room 14

It was your basic, everyday, run-of-the-mill nursing home. Sunset Manor lived up to its name. It was located in Rockford, Arizona, and sat majestically on a hill overlooking the horizon. It was a great location, but healthcare was as typical as any other facility.

On this particular night, Tommy Johnson came strolling into work late as usual. He was a male orderly on the midnight shift and some of the evening shift girls always had to stay over until he got there. It was a *one-for-all* and *all-for-one* cliché type bond.

Tommy thought he'd be sneaky so instead of going through the front entrance he went through the back entrance where the ambulance drive was. Unfortunately, for Tommy, a hearse was there along with two nurses' aides and three nurses.

"You're late again, Tommy," one of the nurses said.

"Sorry, Super-charge," Tommy spoke back in a sarcastic tone.

Tommy kept looking around trying to figure out what was going on. Finally, he asked a co-worker, "What happened?"

"Mrs. Smith passed away about an hour ago," replied the co-worker.

"Oh, but whatever you do, do not go in room 14."

"Why not?" Tommy asked but never received an answer.

Once Tommy was inside and clocked in he headed down the Alzheimer's unit to room 14.

The Alzheimer's unit was a lockdown unit so Tommy had to scan his card to enter the hall.

When he approached the room he reached down to grab the doorknob. He felt a sudden gust. It was an instantaneous sensation of chill that sent chills up and down his spine and goose pimples that formed throughout his entire body.

He stopped.

He felt a cold draft.

He looked up and saw a sign on the door that read: DO NOT ENTER. "Screw this," Tommy said as he went back up the hall to sit behind the nurses' station.

As Tommy sat, comfortably, reading a book, the same nurse that gave him problems earlier came unexpectedly around the corner. "Get back on your hall," she demanded. Tommy just sat and smirked at her. "Seriously, Tommy. You have a call light going off."

As Tommy looked up he noticed that it was room 14. "Shit! I ain't going in there," he screeched.

The nurse explained that he had to answer the call light because a confused resident could have wandered into the room.

"What happened to her anyhow?" Tommy asked.

"Oh, she hung herself. The noose is still in the room," the nurse replied nonchalantly. Tommy just stood there. "Oh, piss, Tommy! Do I need to go down with you?" the nurse asked rhetorically.

"No! I'm good," Tommy replied as he scanned his card and headed down the hall.

This time he just grabbed the knob and gave it a quick turn as he thrust the door open. He must not have known his own strength because the door came back hard and hit him in the face.

With a dazed look on his face, he stood still and weaved a bit, but soon realized his set mission.

The Willies

He peeked in the door but saw nothing. However, he did see the noose that still hung from the ceiling swinging back and forth. There was just a little bit of light that shone in from the courtyard.

Tommy stepped inside to turn off the call light when, suddenly, the door slammed. A shadow crept from behind.

Meanwhile, up at the main nurses' station, it was reported that Mr. Watson was nowhere to be found.

Mr. Watson was a very crazy and combative resident. Normally he stayed heavily medicated.

However, recently he ran out of medication and the nurse on the last shift forgot to put in an order for a refill.

The Passenger

The sky was pitch black but marbled with midnight blue.

The highways and byways were lit with streaks of white.

Rain began to pounce down as Jeff McCormack ventured along the busy interstate—ripping through the puddles as if he had no fear of hydroplaning.

While approaching the state line he decided to adjust his radio dial to tune in to a local station for his current one began to fade into static. Finally, after a few impatient minutes, he came across a news broadcast.

Curious and disconcerted, Jeff calmly listened to the news as he tried to regain focus on his peripheral vision and the long road ahead.

We interrupt this program to bring you a breaking news story. Four dead, five missing...Steve Romaine, aka the Roadside Slasher, is still at large...armed and extremely dangerous. Motorists are asked to avoid contact with anyone at the roadside at all costs....

“Bullshit,” Jeff said in his macho voice as he tried to tune in something else. “What the hell is this world coming to? If I came across a freak with a knife this late at night I’d tell you what I’d do.” Jeff continued to ramble as he

noticed an old pickup truck just off the shoulder of the road; it appeared to be abandoned as he drove by slowly, looking at it and gradually speeding up.

Suddenly, out of the darkness, came what appeared to be a deer. Jeff swerved really hard to avoid the collision when he came to a complete stop. As he took deep breaths he placed his hand over his chest to feel his heart beat at a rapid 4/4 rhythm.

As Jeff looked back he noticed that the silhouette of the four-legged creature still stood staring in his direction as if to taunt him for Jeff claimed to fear nothing.

Jeff put his car into gear and slowly pulled back onto the interstate to continue his trip. He tried to play it off as if the scare had never happened. This just proved that he was all bark and no bite.

Later, down the road, Jeff approached what appeared to be somebody flagging him down.

Jeff slowed down and turned on his bright lights to get a better look at the person. He pulled off onto the road's shoulder. As the person approached the window he explained to Jeff that he was on his way to Wayne County and his truck broke down just two miles down the road.

He was in dire need of a ride.

"Get in," Jeff said. The man entered the car and closed the door as Jeff pulled back onto the highway. "Wayne County's gonna set me back a bit. I'm headed for Steward County, but, hell, I'm already running late," Jeff explained as he continued to drive.

At this point, Jeff began to think about the roadside killings he had heard about earlier on the news and played it into the conversation.

The man seemed friendly and Jeff got a good look at him, and the man didn't appear to look like any serial killer he had ever seen.

As the two continued their trip Jeff noticed out his rearview mirror a set of headlights approaching him. Ordinarily, this wouldn't be that big of a deal, but the automobile behind them was traveling at a very high speed.

Jeff felt slightly concerned. He questioned in thought, what the hell do they want?

Suddenly, as the automobile approached them, bumper to bumper, it took a sudden swerve, passing them as if they were sitting still. The momentum nearly blew Jeff off the road.

The glasspacks crackled annoyingly as it sped by. “Dammit!!!” Jeff shouted in rage. “Shit, man. I need a beer,” he, then, said in a calmer voice.

“Right up here, just off I-57, there’s a liquor store. They have some pretty decent deals,” the passenger suggested.

As Jeff continued to drive he came to I-57 and just 1.5 miles in he noticed the bright lights and a flashy scrolling marquee that read: JOE’S LIQUORS.

“There’t is,” the passenger said as he pointed in the direction of the store.

Jeff pulled into the parking lot.

“I’m heading in. Ya want anything?” Jeff politely offered.

“No way, man. I’m fine. Gave the shit up a year ago,” the passenger replied modestly.

Jeff was in the store for a while as the passenger sat out in the car all alone—patiently waiting for Jeff to make his purchase. Suddenly, the door flung open and it was Jeff.

He had bought a case of beer and just tossed it in the back seat.

He glanced over at his passenger friend and noticed that his head was tucked under his coat. He didn’t ask any questions. He just figured he had fallen asleep.

Jeff pulled out of the parking lot and continued his excursion.

As he continued to drive he made several attempts to carry out a conversation. His, now, antisocial passenger friend just sat in the darkness. “Mmm, must be nice to get some sleep,” Jeff said in a jest.

Jeff kept looking in his direction to see if he was all right, but, once more, it was so dark and all he could see was the darkened silhouette of a man.

Jeff was trying to think of a clever way to pull over into a well-lit area and see if he was still breathing. He became worried that the passenger had become unconscious somehow. “I’ll just find me a truck stop up here, pull over, and grab me a beer. That’s what I’ll do,” Jeff thought aloud. He approached a well lit desolate truck stop and pulled in.

As he came to a complete stop he threw his car into park and turned to the back seat to grab his beer. That’s when he noticed something very

Billy Van

grotesque and devastating. The man that he had originally picked up lay dead in the back seat. His body had the appearance of minced meat and blood was everywhere. The sudden thought instantly flourished in Jeff's mind, *if that's the man I picked up then who is...*

A sudden scream was heard throughout the truck stop and traveled miles for Jeff, himself, fell victim to the brutal slayings of the Roadside Slasher.

The Cadaver

Blood filled the room like a fresh coat of paint as dismembered body parts and intestines scattered throughout the masses!...

...Mary had just snapped back into her true conscious state after having the most grotesque vision she has ever had. She was now able to make perfect eye contact with the man whose hand she had just shaken. It was Dr. Walker—her new Medical Biology instructor. He was courteous in every way as he proceeded to introduce himself and instruct the class.

Unfortunately, with Mary's bizarre history of having visions of those she came into physical contact with, the lines of communication were broken.

As Mary became moonstruck over Dr. Walker's rugged handsomeness she tried to make sense of her hideous vision, but was unable to do so; she continued to listen as Dr. Walker explained to the class that lab partners must be chosen.

"Today labs will begin and cadavers will be assigned," Dr. Walker said.

After Mary had just chosen her lab partner Dr. Walker led the class down the stairs to a very cold storage room. It must have been thirty-two degrees at most. The room consisted of gurneys that were arranged in rows of five. Each gurney had a corpse, or, as identified in the medical field, a cadaver.

Each cadaver was covered from head to toe with a white sheet and had a tag pierced through the right big toe. On these tags were a letter and a number. That was the cadaver's new identity for their true identities were kept confidential.

Mary and her partner were assigned A9.

As they approached their cadaver Mary began to tremble.

Mary's partner ripped off the sheet to reveal the ice-cold corpse. It was apparent that she was a female and possibly in her late twenties at that.

Everything was in perfect tact aside from the fact that she was eviscerated.

All that remained was bone and tissue. Her entire entrails had been removed, thus using the term, eviscerated.

Mary reached out to touch her cadaver, and, when she did, she had another vision. She saw the lady being feasted upon by another human being. He wore a white lab jacket and was in a hospital-like environment. His face was not revealed, however.

Terrified by her vision she let go, breaking her connection, and jerked back while knocking over a metal tray with some surgical tools.

As she looked up she noticed Dr. Walker standing in front of her with blood and shredded flesh drooling out his mouth and down his chest. In disbelief, Mary shook her head rapidly to try and shake out the illusion and looked up once more to notice that he appeared perfectly normal.

Embarrassed and confused Mary ran out of the room and back to her dorm.

Later that night, she broke into the storage room and Dr. Walker's office.

She ransacked through all the files on the cadavers until she found A9.

Mary discovered that the cadaver's real name was Lacey Jones.

As she rolled up the file she stuffed it down her pants and headed out the door.

She went back to her dorm and got online to see what kind of information she could pull up on Lacey Jones.

She found that Lacey was brutally attacked in a cannibal-like manner and that the perpetrator was still at large.

The Willies

She continued to read, but, unfortunately, she didn't find anything resourceful to help unravel the vagueness of the victim's demise.

At this point Mary became obsessed.

She felt like she had become one with Lacey Jones.

Suddenly, she had an idea. She went back to the storage room and clasped it onto Lacey. She had a similar vision except, this time, the attacker turned back to look in her direction as if to see through the vision. It was Dr. Walker. Mary let go while severing her connection with Lacey. She looked up to see a silhouette. It was the figure of a man. As he took a step into the light Mary recognized him to be Dr. Walker.

A week later, as a new class assembled, Dr. Walker introduced himself. Thereafter, he paired everyone into groups. Then, he led the class down to the storage room to begin assigning cadavers. Two immature giggle boxes were assigned A9. When one of them pulled back the sheet it was revealed that A9 was no longer Lacey Jones....

Sometimes it Sleeps

For the past two weeks, Justin had been awkwardly awoken at 3:00 AM every morning. For the first week, he considered it to be coincidental. *But for two weeks?* That's a little more than a coincidence if you ask me. It could be anything from a mouse scampering across the floor to a Civil War reenactment. Either way, it did not matter. Something wanted him awake at 3:00 AM every morning. For what reason, he did not know. Unfortunately, he was about to find out.

Smith Mills: a very close-knit community with a triple-digit census. What you see is what you get and what you get is all you see. Let's narrow our focus to the subject matter at hand.

Once a well-respected citizen, Justin had become the town hermit. As mentioned earlier sleeping undisturbed and soundly was nearly impossible for him. And being that he was frequently disturbed he chose to whittle away the long hours by gluing his eyes to the TV set. He'd flick through the channels while relaxing on his sofa trying to find something remotely worth the watch. However, as he quickly discovered that early in the morning, the only thing on air was breaking news stories and infomercials. *MY EYES!!!*—the dreaded infomercial...

This particular morning following a news report regarding an occurrence of murders that had happened every morning for the past two weeks around the area he came across a commercial that grabbed his attention. It was this skeezy old man talking about insomnia while trying to sell his product. His pitch was: “It’s 3:00 AM and you can’t sleep? Well, sometimes *it* sleeps.”

“*It*, what is *it*?” Justin pondered.

The man continued to ramble as Justin sank deeper and deeper into the alluring gimmick. Finally, a number appeared at the bottom of the screen. 1-555-GET-REST. Very well, Justin thought as he searched for a pen and paper to write down the number. He had no luck so he continued to flick through the channels when eventually he gave up the ghost.

He had a dream. He was running. Out of time and out of breath. And it seemed the further he ran the least distance he gained. He was getting nowhere. All that surrounded him was darkness.

Ahead in the distance, he saw what appeared to be a pyre. He ran with all his might, however, time went into suspension. A monster suddenly appeared behind him riding his coat tail. In relevance, Justin wasn’t running for his health. He was being chased and running for his life or at least trying to.

Suddenly Justin awoke. He looked to his right, as it was habitual, and beside him sat his alarm clock. It read 3:00 AM exactly. “That’s odd,” he pondered. A whole day had elapsed. Yet, he still didn’t feel rested.

He felt beneath him and looked around realizing that he was in bed.

He was very confused and disoriented.

He asked himself the mind-boggling question, “How did I—?”

He got out of bed, stretched, and took off down the stairs to pilfer for an early morning snack. On his way to the kitchen, he passed by the TV. He glanced over and just as he did it came on all by itself. Amazed, he stood still and stared at it—essentially in disbelief. It didn’t take him long to realize that he was experiencing a recap of the *exact* same commercial he had seen earlier. However, this time he noticed a pen and paper, which conveniently sat by the phone. He scrawled down the number and made the call.

The Willies

After he had placed his order and made arrangements for a scheduled delivery he put on a pot of coffee and sat down on his sofa to continue watching TV.

Justin lightly dozed off when he was startled by the annoying buzz of his coffeemaker. He stretched and yawned as he stood upright. Groggily he went to fix him a cup. “Mmmm,” he savored the first sip and headed back to his couch as he indulged in another.

As Justin finished his last sip of coffee he heard three loud knocks upon his door. *Who could that be this time of the morning?* And so he asked, “Who is it?” He listened closely but heard no reply. “Who’s out there?” he asked again, but still, there was no reply.

He gave it a moment as he looked around. “Okay. Two can play that game,” he said heatedly. He grabbed a baseball bat that was perched against his sofa. It was a Louisville Slugger with an *official* Babe Ruth signature. He stopped to admire it, but not for long. Slowly, he headed for the door.

He opened the door with the bat held high ready to swing. There in the aperture stood a very tall man. One could estimate it to be around seven-foot. His face was obstructed by darkness. He held out a clipboard and said, “Sign this,” croakily.

Justin carefully reviewed the form on the clipboard and realized it was the *sleep-aide* formula he had just ordered. “*Sheesh!* You guys don’t mess around, do ya?” he impassively snickered.

He signed the paper and handed it back while receiving the package in the other hand. He kept all eyes on the package. When he looked up to thank the man he was gone.

Anxious to get some sleep Justin tore open the package and chugged the serum neglecting to read the directions. Almost instantly Justin’s eyes felt heavy. As he made his way up the stairs to his bed he dragged his feet with every clobbering step. And as he approached his bed he collapsed. The serum proved to be effective.

The next morning Justin awoke with an overwhelming burst of energy. He looked to his right, at his alarm clock, noticing that the time was 8:00 AM. He jumped out of bed and looked out his window noticing glorious sun-

light. "I feel incredible! Wow! What was in that stuff?" Justin exclaimed as he headed for the shower.

While in the shower something extraordinary was occurring in his bedroom just beyond the surface of a wall. The closet door was slowly being outlined by the crawling glow of a mystical blue. The floor and walls were congruently changing as was everything else. Inch by inch the reds and yellows were being consumed by the glimmering azure until... And just like that, all was restored. Justin stepped out of the steam brewing room wrapped cozily in his robe while drying his hair with a brisk rotation.

Later that day, after Justin had devoured a farmer's breakfast he prepared for himself he peeked out his window and noticed that his lawn needed attention. Without a moment of hesitation, he replaced his good shoes with his old pair, already tinged with green, and headed out back to his building to dig out the lawnmower.

As Justin headed around front with his lawnmower cutting the grass he noticed that Mr. Jenkins was outside in his pajamas checking the mail.

Justin greeted Mr. Jenkins.

Mr. Jenkins was not in a good mood and acted very sorely to Justin's greeting. He demanded that Justin turned his lawnmower off instantly. When he did the upset neighbor tore into Justin with no remorse. The matter at hand: Justin was throwing grass on Mr. Jenkins's newly installed white wooden fence. "That damn grass is going to stain my fence you freaking idiot!!!" Mr. Jenkins growled. As Justin fired up his lawnmower his furious neighbor, still, continued to rant. Justin continued to mow as if nothing ever happened, but gleamed at him through menacing eyes.

Later that night, Justin retired to his sofa. He looked at his watch noticing that it was 10:00 PM. "I guess I'll turn in." As Justin headed up the stairs he stopped midway and started to think about the conflict he had with Mr. Jenkins. "I'll make it up to him in the morning," he assured himself as he continued up the stairs.

Justin tossed and turned trying to seek comfort when, suddenly, he heard a peck on his window. He opened his eyes and looked at his alarm clock. The time was 3:00 AM. “No, not again!!!” he cried.

The peck was nothing more than a tree branch.

Justin took off down the stairs to place another order. He dialed the number. However, he received a dial tone followed by a recorded message that said: “I’m sorry, but the number you have dialed has recently been disconnected—” ...He slammed down the phone and made a mad dash to his kitchen when he tripped over his baseball bat rendering him unconscious.

Later that morning, Justin awoke to find himself in bed. His alarm clock read 10:00 AM. He continued to think about his occurrence with Mr. Jenkins. Therefore, he went next door to make amends.

He knocked several times on the door but received no response. He looked off to the side of his house noticing that his car was still beneath the carport. As he walked around Jenkins’s house he noticed that his bay window was busted out and a trail of blood trickled down the deck. Hurriedly Justin ran home to notify the police.

As Justin entered his house he headed straight for the phone. He stopped. Maybe I should get dressed first, he thought. That way I will be decent when the police arrive. Therefore, Justin scuttled up the stairs. As he swung open his closet door the body of Mr. Jenkins tumbled out—stone-cold-dead. In lieu of the surprise, Justin was knocked unconscious.

Beyond the closet was a dark and moistened cavernous dwelling with more bodies piled high.

While Justin lay cataleptic he sank deep into another dream. It was the same dream only this time the monster was revealed. It was him! On the contrary, the monster that lived within him. While still dreaming he continued to run when, suddenly, he approached the pyre—a blazing colossus powered by souls. A man stood beyond the perils of destitution. It was the skeezy old man from the infomercial. “Now, you may rest,” he said with a black-tooth grin and the devil’s quiver echoing throughout his throat...

The Lark

The night was pitch black—desolate—cold. Ahead in the darkness, on a long stretch of road, an unexpected car, containing two teenage boys, sped through.

“Marsha, I’m goin’ ta bed early. Wake me up when Bobby gets home. I’m not going to let him continue living here if he can’t obey house rules. It’s way past his curfew,” Mr. Finley said to his wife, Marsha.

“Okay, dear. Will do,” replied Marsha.

Meanwhile, a set of headlights floated on the evening horizon. It was Chad. He drove heedlessly as Bobby (Mr. Finley’s grandson) sat in the passenger seat.

“Slow down, man. You’re gonna wreck. I thought we were gonna go pick up Mark,” said Bobby.

“I plan on it, but, first, I got some business to take care of.” Chad wasn’t acting quite like himself.

Earlier that day, he was greeted by a man who gave him a package. It was a bottle filled with a glowing liquid and a list—an agenda. The glowing liquid had the power of hypnosis as it manipulated him into pounding the entire bottle.

Chad pulled over and told Bobby to get out. He told him that he would give him a head start. Bobby looked bewildered but got out.

He took off running while dashing through the woods. Chad went after him quickly. Bobby didn't have a chance in the world. Chad caught up with him and started to beat him with a ball bat mercilessly to death.

In the meantime, Mr. Finley slept soundly in his bed as Marsha became worried. Bobby never stayed out this late. She went through her phonebook and started to call friends and relatives to see if they'd seen him. She had no luck.

Mark had just finished raking the leaves. He was putting up the rake inside the building when he heard a car horn blast annoyingly. He only knew one person to have a car horn like that. It was Chad (Mark's best friend since first grade). "C'mon, Mark. Hop in," said Chad as he gasped for air.

"What's wrong? What did you do this time, Chad?"

"Hop in. I'll tell ya later."

"Let me go and tell Mom and Dad."

"No! C'mon! We don't have time!"

Mark heard sirens drawing near and panicked. By now he was at six and sevens. He jumped into the car. "Let's go."

Chad drove recklessly trying to lose the cops.

He took a sharp turn on a back road that led to the bottoms. The cops continued to drive straight.

Chad parked the car and the two hung out by the creek until it got dark. "So what the hell did you do, man?" asked Mark.

"Will you shut the hell up? It was nothing. I'll tell ya when I'm darn ready!" replied Chad.

"So what's in the back in all those bags?"

"Oh, yeah. Toilet paper. I figured once it got dark we could throw the shit all over old man Finley's yard."

"That would be awesome. I hate that old bastard—" Mark continued to ramble as Chad gleamed at him with an irritated stare—gnashing his teeth.

"Fuck, dude! Let's go!" Chad said. "You're drivin'," he said as he threw the keys to Mark.

“Cool,” Mark replied.

As Mark drove carefully, obeying all road rules, Chad opened up and told him why he was running from the cops earlier. “So do ya wanna know the truth?” he asked.

Mark nodded his head yes.

“On my way to pick you up I-I...” Chad couldn’t spit it out.

“What, man? What?”

“The truth is, they’re not after me. It’s my brother. They must’ve thought I was him—”

“So you should just tell ’em. They’ll understand.” Mark contemplated for a brief second. “So what did he do?”

“You’re just a nosy fucker are you?”

Mark didn’t reply to that.

Chad was sometimes mean—overbearing. Mark just said no more as he continued to drive. However, Mark did try to find something on the radio. The only thing that came in clear was, what sounded like, a news broadcast. “Earlier today a teenage boy was found—” Chad quickly reached out and turned off the radio.

“So ya got that two hundred bucks ya owe me?” asked Chad in an impromptu manner.

“No. You know I’ll get it to you,” replied Mark.

“I need it by Friday, man. I’m goin’ on the boat. I’m goin’ ta win me some money. I have ta get out of this damn town,” explained Chad.

“Sounds reasonable. I can’t blame ya. I want out too,” Mark added.

Chad coughed while expelling the words, “You will.”

Up ahead in the distance a sign stood high that read: Finley Drive. “There it is. The old bastard lives right up there. Take that turn and it’s another mile. Straight ahead,” Chad instructed.

Mark turned at the sign as the car faded into the darkness.

The two pulled into a driveway that led to a huge Victorian-style house. There were cars parked in the driveway, which indicated that people were home but all was still.

“Dude, are you ready?” asked Chad.

“I sure am.”

“Okay. Grab the TP.”

“Sure thing, Captain. Got it.”

Chad jumped out of the car and ran behind a nearby tree as stealthily as a hooded ninja. “Psst, c’mon,” he said as he motioned to Mark.

Mark jumped out of the car with the toilet paper and quietly walked over to Chad.

Mark breathed heavily in fear that they would soon get caught.

Chad, however, was ready, willing, and feared nothing.

Together they began to vandalize the entire yard and house with the toilet paper.

The two boys were mischievously amused.

Tree after tree, vehicle after vehicle, the two of them threw toilet paper around as if they didn’t have a care in the world.

“We’re gonna be in so much trouble, Chad,” yelled out Mark.

“Quit being a crybaby. We’ll be okay.”

“This will go on our permanent record, ya know.”

“Dude, I doubt we do any time because we TP’d a house.”

“Oh, well. It is fun,” Mark continued to yell as he ran around a tree wrapping it in toilet paper.

Suddenly, a porch light came on and shone ever so brightly. An old man came wobbling out in his pajamas. “You darn kids! I’m gonna call the law on you!” he screamed with fists of rage.

He went back inside.

Chad continued to vandalize while ignoring the threat. The intimidation, however, set Mark in slo-mo as he came to a complete stop.

The expression on his face said it all.

Mark expressed his concern. “Dude, let’s leave.”

“I’m not leaving, man. I’m not done yet.”

“Bro, he said he was calling the cops. Let’s get outta here.”

“Gimme five more minutes and we’ll go.”

“No, dude! I wanna leave now!” Mark whined as Chad continued to deface the old man’s property with white swirling strands of tissue-like graffiti.

The Willies

Then, sirens were heard. Chad and Mark began to panic. They realized the old man wasn't bluffing.

They jumped into the car and quickly sped away.

“Dude! Slow down! We're gonna crash!” Mark shouted out. “Slow down!”

“I'm not goin' ta juvy, man!” Chad swerved on a sharp turn. “I sure ain't goin' ta prison!”

“It was just a prank. Remember? Dude, it's not this serious!”

“I forgot to tell ya, man. Before we left I killed someone,” Chad said.

Mark looked at Chad with an intent look of uncertainty. “You really killed someone?” he asked with a shaky voice.

“Yeah. And when I shake these cops I plan on killing you.”

Up ahead in the distance, Chad noticed a barricade of cop cars. He increased his speed as Mark begged him to slow down. Within a split second, just as Chad was about to crash into the barricade with lethal speed, Mark was gone. He jumped out while rolling to safety in a ball formation. The worst he would get was a few broken bones. Perhaps a concussion. Some hematoma and abrasions. Chad, however, crashed into the barricade and burst into flames.

As the fires blazed a band of demons emerged from the flame. They swirled in motion like demonic mutant sperm.

They faded into the darkness—the pitch-black night, which was still desolate and cold.

Los Catacombs

*“I hear voices—cruel intentions;
a monster lives in me—and so I breathe.
He controls my thoughts—I am he;
he is me and at one are we.
He gives to me to take from you
and so I’ll take—that’s what I’ll do.
My bones will rest—los catacombs;
beneath the earth—in igneous stones.”*

—G.G. McKinney

It’ll be the catacomb—inside the wall. They’re buried there. You’ll need a guide. I have provided a guide for you. You may refer to him as Carlos. His true identity is protected. He will meet you just outside the shaft. If you need any further assistance contact me by radio. I am Black Beard. No real names will be used during this mission.

Derk read the print given to him by the chief.

They were instructions.

He continued to read as he drove to the location.

He parked in an empty lot at, what appeared to be, an archeological site.

He noticed that the front entrance was that of a public building—maybe a bar—stucco with a glass door.

He was greeted by a man. “You Derk?”

“Yes. Are you, Carlos?”

Very few words were exchanged. Enough said.

The two ventured into the entrance while entering a shaft. They stepped onto an old elevator and down they went.

At the station, the chief called in an expert to monitor all tracking transistors. Derk was bugged just in case something went wrong. The chief was certain that everything was set up perfectly, but, still, he didn’t want to take any chances.

G.G. McKinney was thought to still be alive, and, if so, he had to be caught. Many innocent lives depended on his capture.

“Derk! Derk!” exclaimed Carlos.

Derk grinned heavily with thin lips. “Yes.” His voice was a sly cool.

“The main corridor is over there. Come. I’ll show you.”

Derk made frivolous movements while showing little concern. “I’ve not got time for this. I must be returning...with or without the McKinney journals,” spat Derk. Already Derk’s cool demeanor started to become overheated and tempered.

They were in search of a journal, possibly a collection of journals. The journals were composed by a serial killer known as G.G. McKinney. It contained details of his every kill.

Derk was an investigator hired into the case. He did not volunteer for this. He was calm, cool, and collected by nature; however, homicide investigating was not his cup of tea.

He was careless with his investigating methods.

Carlos was appointed his guide.

“Come on. We’re almost there,” said Carlos.

“Good,” Derk replied with a short burst and hesitant voice.

A dim light flickered ahead. The closer they got the brighter it got.

Suddenly, the light went out while liberating sparks that sizzled.

The cavern’s corridor was dark and damp—very chilly.

“What happened? Why did the lights go out?” asked Derk.

Carlos replied, “It does that at times, but don’t be concerned. We still have our flashlights.”

The temperature began to drop making it cooler than it already was.

“How much further?” Derk asked with quivering lips.

“Not too much further. We’ll be there in due time,” Carlos answered quickly.

Derk requested to stop for a moment so that he could rest. During this time a rat scampered swiftly across his feet.

Carlos shined his flashlight on the rodent and laughed insanely. His laugh echoed throughout the corridor bouncing off the stone walls with a resounding continuance. Derk lost his footing and fell backward. Then, Carlos’s laugh became more of a demonic cackle.

“Not funny. Not funny at all,” said Derk as he stood up while brushing himself off from the fall.

“Ya know, for a detective you’re clumsy,” Carlos said as he assisted Derk with regaining his bearings. “Come. We’ve not far to go.”

“I’m not a detective. I’m an ex-cop turned dispatcher. The chief decided to give me a chance to work the beat again. He assigned me this rodent-infested job—” Derk rambled out an explanation as Carlos showed no sign of interest. Up ahead the light flickered again. Derk asked the silliest question, “Have there ever been cases of zombie sightings down here?”

Carlos mumbled, “Not recently.” He was being sarcastic.

Still, the light flickered. It became dim, then bright, dim, then bright.

As they continued their journey Derk noticed a cryptogram etched upon the wall off to his right. It read:

*Persevero vestri iter itineris , amo plures has exertus ,
quod vos ero unus of plures animus irretitus inside.*

Derk told Carlos to stop. He read it aloud several times but made no sense of it. “What does it mean?” he asked himself.

“Ignore it. We must continue. That gibberish has been on that wall forever. It means nothing,” Carlos explained. His voice was direct.

“Hold on. I must take note of this. The chief told me to jot down everything that looked bizarre.” Derk pulled out a small notebook with a pen and wrote down the cryptogram.

Meanwhile, at the station, Derk’s voice was heard clearly as he wrote down the cryptogram. He read it aloud, purposely, so that it could be heard at the station through his transmitter.

Once the cryptogram was recorded it was sent off for translation. Results would take up to an hour, but they were hoping for sooner.

The two continued their journey.

Within minutes of their last stop, the two reached the flickering light. It was a fluorescent bulb that dangled and swung from side to side. They had reached a dead end; however, to the right was another corridor—darker and colder.

Carlos instructed fearlessly, “This way.”

“How far?” asked Derk.

Carlos shrugged his shoulders, “Not too much further.”

The two began their journey with an unexpected turn of direction, for Derk anyway. Carlos knew where he was going.

They walked for another five minutes when, suddenly, Carlos said, “Now we stop.” He looked at Derk as he continued to speak. “Let’s rest.”

“You said we didn’t have much further to go. Why rest now?” asked Derk frantically.

Carlos explained, using random hand gestures, “We will be climbing, crawling, squeezing our bodies through tiny crevices. An obstacle course, in other words. We take a break.”

Derk got the gist of his sentiment.

The Willies

The light still flickered annoyingly. Derk noticed, out the corner of his eye, on the ground, and beside his hand, something sticking out—wedged between the stone. He grabbed hold of the object and pulled. It was a bulk of notebooks grouped with a string around them holding them together.

“You found them,” said a voice. It was Carlos.

“You. Is it you?”

“I brought you here to complete my task.”

Just then, Carlos pulled out a dagger. He took a couple of steps back and cut a rope that pressed against the stone. A wall of igneous stones came crashing down as skeletal fragments released from the cavern temple—a catacomb. He snarled while exposing two long and pointy teeth.

Meanwhile, at the station, the translation came through. The cryptogram was Latin for:

*Continue your journey, like many has tried,
and you will be one of many souls trapped inside.*

The Tattoo

For years Bobby has wanted a tattoo. When he was thirteen he wanted one. His parents were very strict and attended church every Sunday. At this time Bobby was too afraid to even mention the word. “It’s the devil’s ink,” they called it. “It’s a sin to mark the body.” Bobby would constantly look through tattoo art magazines, and dream, someday, he would have one.

Like most teenagers hide their porno-mags Bobby did the same with his tattoo magazines.

Today Bobby had just turned eighteen and moved into a one-bedroom studio apartment. He no longer fears his parents. So what’s on his to-do list?

The streets were crowded as people rushed off to work. There were people in neatly pressed suits passing bums on every street corner. “Got any change?” they’d ask. “Spare some change?” Around the corner came Bobby. He held something tightly in his hand. It appeared to be a small piece of paper, possibly a magazine clipping.

As Bobby zoomed around the corner he went directly into a building with a big sign overhead that read: MELVON’S TATTOO PARLOR. “Is Melvon in?” Bobby asked.

“Depends on your business, kid,” a man answered.

“Nuttin’ serious. Just lookin’ ta get some ink done,” said Bobby.

“Then, I’m Melvon,” the man said with an eerie smirk on his face.

Bobby was put on an hour-long waiting list because Melvon was working on another tattoo, but Bobby didn’t care. He had already waited a lifetime. One more hour wouldn’t hurt.

Bobby sat quietly while staring at the piece of paper in his hand. It was an art design he clipped out of one of his magazines. He admired it as if it was something to be admired. It was to Bobby. Bobby really wanted that tattoo.

“Okay, kid. You’re up,” said Melvon as he finished with his previous customer and pocketed the cash. “What’s it gonna be?” Melvon asked with his scratchy voice.

Bobby showed him the clipping and Melvon’s eyes lit up like two beacons in the night.

“Where’d the hell did ya get this art, kid?” Melvon sounded intrigued.

Bobby explained that he found it in one of his magazines, but Melvon wanted to know the year, edition, and everything.

“A hundred and fifty bucks,” Melvon said.

“Did I mention it’s my birthday?” Bobby joked.

“A hundred and fifty. Take it or leave it, kid,” Melvon said as Bobby agreed.

The process started.

Melvon traced the design on thin tracing paper with a felt tip marker; he took a stick of deodorant and greased up a spot on Bobby’s arm. Bobby just sat and watched the master do his job.

Melvon placed the traced copy of the design on Bobby’s arm where he’d rubbed the deodorant and left a perfect pattern. Before he inked up the needle he did a couple of test runs upon Bobby’s request. Bobby wanted to get a taste of how it felt before it was too late to back out.

Bobby nodded letting him know that he could continue.

Forty-five minutes in and he was done.

Bobby looked at the artwork. He admired its glowing beauty. The petroleum jelly Melvon smeared on it to prevent infection totally enhanced its appearance.

The Willies

While Melvon took Bobby's money he told him to apply Neosporin to it at least twice a day.

As Bobby was walking out the door Melvon gave him a strange warning. "Oh yeah, kid. Stay away from bonfires." Bobby stopped, but, then, continued. He thought Melvon was a shady character anyway.

The warning went in one ear and out the other.

On Bobby's way home his cell phone rang. "Chad!" Bobby said as he pushed send to answer the call. "What up, G?"

"Not much, birthday boy. Just invitin' ya to the best ass kickin' party on the mutha f—in' planet."

"A birthday party? For me?"

"That's right, bitch. Eight-thirty. Pine Ridge. Near the docks. Bring yo' ass."

Bobby was way overzealous as he rushed home to shower and get ready.

As he made it to his apartment his arm felt really sore. He looked at it. He noticed it was bleeding badly.

His tattoo was a griffin engulfed in flames and the flames were bleeding around the edges.

Bobby took a quick shower. He got into his medicine cabinet and found some surgical tape, four-by-fours, and Neosporin. Immediately he doctored his arm.

Later that evening, Bobby noticed his arm was starting to swell. It was very sore and tender to the touch. He made several attempts to call Chad and tell him he couldn't come but he couldn't get hold of him.

After looking at the clock Bobby noticed that it was going on eight o'clock.

Bobby went ahead, grabbed his keys, and took off out the door.

As Bobby pulled into Pine Ridge he parked three cars down from Chad's Mustang near the docks. It was obvious; the parking spot had a banner near it that read: RESERVED FOR BOBBY.

Down by the river, Bobby noticed the party was booming. There were girls, beer, and drugs everywhere.

It was late, and the only light they had was a huge bonfire.

Bobby trotted down the hill to the party as he held tightly to his arm. By now his arm was swollen with pus oozing out. It appeared to be badly infected.

As Bobby approached Chad, down by the fire, it erupted into a massive explosion. Out of the fire came a creature. It had the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion—a griffin. Most of the kids were fed to the fire, but the others just ran around in panic. The creature snagged hold of Bobby and flew away.

The next day a teenage boy came strolling into Melvon's Tattoo Parlor. He had just turned eighteen. He boasted proudly to everyone in the shop.

He was put on an hour-long waiting list but didn't mind the wait.

He browsed a magazine when he found a design that was the perfect artwork. "That's the one," he said loudly.

"Okay, kid. You're up," Melvon said with his crooked grin and snarling teeth.

As the kid approached the stool he noticed a picture on the wall. He immediately changed his mind about the other design he had found. "Dude, that's sick. I want it," he said aloud.

"You sure, kid?" Melvon asked.

"Never been surer," the kid replied.

Melvon honored his decision and gave him the tattoo.

When Melvon was done he told the kid it would be a hundred and fifty bucks. Melvon pocketed the cash and just as the kid was going out the door Melvon said, "Hey, kid. Stay away from bonfires."

The Trip

Marcus just lay in bed like an old bag of bones.

He stared up at the ceiling as the room began to spin around and around.

His eyes felt heavy as they filled with fluid.

Patterns on the ceiling danced around and manipulated his thinking.

Marcus didn't care; he just stared and laughed like he was at a comedy club and there were thousands of people laughing with him.

Suddenly, he heard a creak—like the snap of a twig. He turned to his right and saw his door slowly open. Still, he lay in bed—frozen with curiosity.

Something began to enter the room. It was barely a foot tall and had green hair all over its body. Its arms were longer than its body so they just dragged behind. It had a red Mohawk and a face like a chimp. This was a very interesting creature. Once again Marcus just stared and laughed.

As the creature got closer it got bigger. By the time it reached Marcus, at the bedside, it was seven-foot tall and five feet in diameter.

Marcus still laughed.

The creature reached down and started to shred Marcus to pieces. He wiggled around and screamed but that was all he could do.

After Marcus was shredded the creature began to eat him like pulled pork.

Within five minutes Marcus was consumed and the only thing that remained was bloodshed—lots and lots of bloodshed.

The creature turned around and pleasantly walked out the door.

Meanwhile, outside the door, a stuffed furry creature stood propped up against the inside of Marcus's doorway. Marcus's little sister approached it and said, "There's Mr. Munchie." She picked it up and went on skipping down the hall.

Marcus lay in bed as stiff as a board and as cold as ice.

Marcus was dead.

His pupils were as round as dimes and as black as coal.

Ghost Train

Matt sat patiently waiting for the train to pull in. He was reading an Edgar Allan Poe collection and paying less attention to his surroundings. A screech went by followed by a sudden halt. The door flung open with a mighty ching. “All aboard,” the stagecoach said. Matt stood up, stuck his book in his bag, and stepped onto the train.

The first thing Matt noticed was an awkward, musky odor inside the train. He walked through four cars and the smell was everywhere. It was nearly unbearable—a horrible stench. And the further he walked the stronger it got.

Matt, finally, found a quiet resting spot in the corner by himself as he sat down.

He was beat.

He rested his eyes and began to relax when he was disturbed by a nudge on his left arm. He jerked and turned to his left to find someone sitting beside him. He doubted the situation and questioned himself with much skepticism. When Matt sat down earlier the seat was bare. Certainly, he wasn't in such a deep sleep that someone could have slipped by him. He would have felt them rub his leg. Whatever the case Matt did find himself admiring the beauty of the young girl that sat next to him. She had to have

been at least in her early twenties—about the same age as Matt. She was a gem. She sat with a pristine posture like an ornament to the seat.

Matt began to make small talk. The girl wasn't much for words. She did, however, keep mentioning how she missed being home. That held at least a five-minute conversation.

The girl seemed really depressed. Matt, finally, gave up and started to read again—The Murders in the Rue Morgue.

He was so tired. He eventually read himself to sleep—gave up the ghost, so to speak. The girl rested her head on Matt's shoulder and slowly faded away.

Matt awoke once more by a sudden impact. It felt like the train had crashed. He turned to his left to make sure the girl was okay but she was gone. Everyone was gone except for Matt. "Where are you? I didn't get your name?" Matt stood up and shouted in a state of confusion.

Suddenly, a band started to play. It was a delicate melody composed of violins and violas. Matt just turned and looked around as vertigo filled the room, and, then, he woke up.

He looked around and everything was normal. Even the girl lay resting on his shoulder.

Matt choked down a big gulp of spit with his Adam's apple as big and as round as a golf ball. He pecked on the girl's arm to try and get her attention. "Hey. Hey. What did you say your name was?" he whispered.

"Mmm?" the girl replied while still half asleep.

"Your name? I didn't get your name."

"Nicole James," she answered while still half asleep.

He hesitated for a brief second. "That name sounds really familiar," he quietly muttered. Then, it dawned on him. There was a Nicole James in the newspaper last week. The problem is it was the obituary section. She was twenty-three and died in a car crash.

He remembered, coincidentally, that he had last week's newspaper in his bag. He got it out and turned to the obituary section. He glanced at the picture and, then, glanced at her as cold chills went tingling down every vertebra connected to his spine.

The Willies

He began to go up and down the aisles asking folks their name and looking at the paper. They were all in there.

He panicked.

He freaked.

Suddenly, an old-timer approached him. “Got it all figgered out, do ya, sonny?” he said.

Matt went to turn to get away but he was stopped by another eerie-looking fellow on the other side of him. “Turn the page,” the eerie man said. “Go on. Turn it.”

When Matt turned the page he went pale from what he saw. There, in the paper, staring back at him was his picture and his name. He was the last addition to the obituaries. His cause of death was complications of a car accident. The ironic thing is it was the same date, time, and route as Nicole James.

The Thing that Crawls through Windows

It's a well known fact: *monsters do not exist*. But what evil dwells amongst the frightened and enters the homes of the lonely? This being feeds on fears. In the small, residential suburban town of Tigress, the emotions its citizens feel become a lingering scent for the unholy. The creature I speak of has no identity, but it is real—very real. To some, it just enters the residence and makes itself at home for a night. To others, it feeds to stay alive. What fate falls upon you?

Mary Jo Anderson woke up late for school. As tempted as she was to stay at home she knew she had to attend. The principal had already warned her, “One more absence and I'll fail you this semester.” Mary Jo could not let that happen.

“Sally,” she screamed out to her older roommate. “Sally, are you here?” Apparently, Sally was not there.

Mary Jo had just turned eighteen and was barely making it through her senior year. She lived a life full of hard-knocks and relied heavily on her older confidant Sally. Sally was like an older sister to Mary Jo. Mary Jo moved in with Sally because her parents kicked her out when she was seventeen—a drug related dissident. At the time her drug of choice was

heroin and Mary Jo was extremely addicted. Her parents basically turned their back on her by kicking her out.

Sally saved her from the wreckage.

While at school Mary Jo walked up on a group of girls, in the hallway, involved in an intense conversation. Once they saw Mary they snubbed her profoundly. However, Mary Jo did catch most of the conversation. From what she heard there had been reported cases of breaking-and-entering related crimes in their small suburban area—plus, one rumored death.

Nothing bad ever happened in Tigress.

Tigress had a population of 1200 and was a very quiet, residential location. People who lived there stayed there.

Hearing her schoolmates talk about something this serious slightly disturbed her. Immediately she became worried about Sally and ran home and check on her.

As she entered the door to her and Sally's small, one bedroom studio apartment she called out to her. Still, there was no reply. There weren't too many places to look for her, being that the apartment was so small; however, there was their tiny bathroom. Mary Jo went to open the door but something was blocking it. She pushed and kicked to open the door, but it was defiant. She tired herself out and paused a second.

Realizing that there was a crack in the door, at least a good half an inch, she attempted to look through. She saw a lock of hair. The color was brunette—the same as Sally's.

She grew nervous and panicked. She called to her, "Sally! Sally! Is that you!?!?"

The more Mary Jo called to her the more persistent and worried she became. She beat and banged on the door, and screamed for her to answer, but the body was inanimate—lifeless. Finally, the door began to splint. In the process, Mary's fist became bloody and sore. But that didn't bother Mary.

Still, she beat the hell out of that door. Then, the door started to unhinge. Mary Jo was able to enter the small bathroom and rescue her friend.

The Willies

Indeed, it was Sally. She was lethargic, barely breathing, pale white, and she lay in a puddle of her own vomit. In her arm was a syringe. Her flesh welted around where the needle was injected and pus oozed out—a sickly green.

Mary Jo held Sally in her arms and screamed a blood-curdling cry for help. She rocked back and forth trying to keep Sally responsive.

It was 5:30 in the morning—it said so on the digital alarm clock that sat on the right side where Mary Jo lay.

Mary lay wide awake.

She was restless.

Suddenly she heard a peck upon her window. The window was not far from where she lay. Mary Jo became frightened. She was all alone in the apartment and had no one to call. Sally was still in recovery at the hospital.

She remembered the conversation her schoolmates engaged in and became even more frightened. Then, she turned, once more, to look at the window. It was open. The curtains waved slowly as a soft breeze blew in.

Mary Jo reflected on her childhood and remembered what she used to do when she became frightened in bed. She would tuck her head under the covers and count. She did just that. Yet her fear only exerted.

Through her thin blanket, she could see a shadow move about. This was not good. Now it was certain—someone or something was in the room with her.

Later that evening, Sally came home. She entered her apartment, turned on her TV, and sat down at the foot of her bed. The news came on. The news broadcaster discussed the breaking-and-entering epidemic. Sally became even more interested in the broadcast when she heard that there had been two deaths reported and were thought to be related to the breaking-and-entering.

Feeling weary Sally pulled back her covers and turned pale with fright when she found Mary Jo shredded and eviscerated. It had already begun to get dark out as Sally, too, heard a peck upon the window.

The Thing in the Room

The room was dark and reeked of rotten meat. A flashlight waved *threshingly* through the black void of existence. “Mom,” a voice cried out. However, it was the voice of a grown man. No one answered. “Mother? Are you here?”

He searched high and low feeling every object in the room. Still, he found nothing. He almost convinced himself that he was the only person in the room. Then, he heard a noise. It was the movement of a presence—the shifting of objects.

“Hello,” he said. “Who’s there?” Nobody answered him. Yet, this time, he knew he wasn’t alone. “Mother? Mother is that you?” he spoke out nervously.

This time he heard a whimper.

He turned.

A sensation crawled all over his body like an army of fire ants. Disoriented with fear he began to lose his balance. He fell, but something beneath him broke his fall. Then, the light came on.

As he lay on the ground he noticed that a decaying corpse lay beneath him. The corpse broke his fall. To make matters worse he recognized the day-old mummy. It was his mother.

A chill went up and down his spine. Who else was in the room with him making the racket and who flicked the light switch?

Billy Van

He turned slowly to see as the lights went out once more, and a raging growl ravaged the darkness.

The Preacher's Wife

Date: January 5, 1992

Time: 5:30 PM

“Mary Beth, now what did I tell ya ’bout aggravating your mother? You’re gonna cause that woman to have a miscarriage.”

“I’m sorry, Daddy. Please. Don’t hurt me.”

Date: January 6, 1992

Time: 2:00 AM

“I’m sorry, Mr. Smith. There’s no other way to say it. Your wife died during labor...”

“And the baby? What about the baby? Could ya save the baby?”

Angel Falls—a little friendly town within a community where everyone lives next door to one another. Thereabout, beside a small church with a sign that reads *Angel Falls House of Worship*, three small children, possibly eight or nine years of age, gather for a session of jump rope. Down the way, more kids play games such as hopscotch, marbles, and blind-man’s bluff.

Sherriff Jones stops at Mike’s Diner every Wednesday at noon, smack-dab on the hour, to order the daily special. Beef Manhattan with extra potatoes. Shit on shingles is what he calls it. The best Beef Manhattan in Kentucky.

He sits for hours talking to Deb (the waitress). No serious crimes ever happen. It's mainly a huge playground / social community rather than a town. I believe Mayor Tom Whitman once referred to it as Happy Town. At that, it was a *happy town*.

About ten miles down the back road was an old farmhouse. John McElroy lived there. He took over his daddy's farm. John's brother (Dale) became Sherriff Jones's deputy and had sense enough to move. Wasn't a thing gonna come of that farmhouse except for a moonshine still. Depreciation got the best of it and market value was way below the minimum. The way John was thinking, it was a peaceful place to ride his four-wheeler, drink, shoot his rifle, and make and distribute his moonshine.

Angel Falls was what the old timers called a dry town. But still few people found a way to contribute to their addiction and bootlegging. Some attended a local AA group, but it didn't seem to work for them. The mayor wouldn't spill for it so everything that was funded came from Mary Beth's pocket. It was her brainchild.

There had been only one fatality in Angel Falls within the past ten or fifteen years. A little orphan girl by the name of Amy Joe was found face down floating in a nearby creek. Since then, there had been blockades built around the creek to prevent the tragedy from ever happening to another child of misfortune. She was only six years of age. They held a vigil for her at the creek and set candles afloat in multi-colored paper sailboats. They say that's how she died—sailing her paper boat. There's now a monument beside the creek dedicated to Amy Joe.

One day, during Mass, Father Thomas passed around the charity plate. Later, after Mass was over, he had gotten washed up to come home. He looked in the plate to discover a one-hundred-dollar bill amongst a pile of ones and miscellaneous change. This type of thing never happened. He remembered that during one of his lectures, he noticed an unfamiliar face. It was an old man with long hair and a vandyke—basically, an old hippy. He wore raggedy clothes and by false judgment, according to appearance, one could assume he hadn't a penny to his name. Father Thomas thought it over and concluded that the one-hundred dollar bill, possibly, came from him—a

pay-it-forward type cliché. Thomas went home that day to tell his wife about the mystery.

“Mary Beth, you would not believe what happened today at Mass,” Thomas said.

“What? What happened?” she responded in an evenly excited tone.

“Some man put a hundred dollars in the plate today,” he explained. “Pretty soon we’ll be able to build that addition to our church—your own building for your AA meetings.”

“Yeah. That’ll be great,” she replied as she went to the sink to wash her hands. She had just finished cutting chicken up for supper. She told Thomas that she had to hurry because she was holding another meeting later that evening.

“I thought you was only gonna do this on Mondays?” he said.

“These guys really need to be reached, Thomas. Now, I only have three in my class and I heard talk that someone else was wantin’ to join. I am not sure who but Debbie told me that I’d be surprised. I’m anxious to see who it is,” Mary Beth explained.

“Well, whatever. I was wantin’ to head on to bed a lil’ early tonight anyhow,” Thomas replied. Mary Beth continued to prepare the meal.

Later on, after supper, Mary Beth parked in the back of the church. There was a tiny room in the back. That’s where she held her meetings. As she unlocked the door to enter the room she stopped to stare at the old wood chipper. Oh, how she admired it. It sat by the door and called to her. After she rubbed the metal, feeling its smooth texture, she entered the room. She flicked on the light and walked over to her desk. After she got everything ready for her meeting her group began to enter the door. The three alcoholics that originally attended her Monday sessions sat down as a new member walked through the door. It was John McElroy. Debbie was with him. Debbie was a good friend of Mary Beth and well-known to the community. She worked at Mike’s Diner and contributed her assistance to many local events. She coaxed John into joining Mary Beth’s group and helped him to overcome his denial.

Mary Beth was very pleased to see John attend her first Wednesday meet. She explained to her group, from there on in, she planned on assembling twice a week. They all agreed that it would be best, except for John. He wasn't too happy about being there in the first place.

She made coffee and passed out Styrofoam cups to everyone along with packets of cream and sugar. Debbie stuck around just long enough to help pass out sobriety coins and to help Mary Beth get started and, then, she left while telling John, "I'll be back later to pick you up."

Mayor Tom dropped in unexpectedly to see how things were going. He really focused on cleaning up the town. He despised drunks; in fact, just being in the room with the four alcoholics made his skin crawl. Mary Beth explained to the mayor that she planned on staying late so that she could clean up and may even do some late-night praying so that she needed some privacy. He was okay with that. He didn't stay long. He never stuck around anywhere too long because he was afraid he'd end up doing some work.

After the meeting, everyone headed out the door. John, of course, was the first to leave. Then, one came back. He was probably the heftiest of the group. He told Mary Beth that he had forgotten his cap. Mary Beth walked around him as he still continued to ramble and she vigilantly closed the door. She dimmed the lights and looked at him with a seductive grin on her face and mischief in her eyes.

"I know what you want. You want me. I do have instincts you know. I can see it in your eyes. I've noticed you staring at me," she said as she slowly circled her prey rubbing the tip of her finger around slightly below his belt. Suddenly, she stopped in front of him and grabbed his crotch. He became worried, yet aroused. "Let's do it. No one will ever find out our little secret," she said erotically as she pushed him back against the wall.

He was a big guy but didn't resist. He did, however, try to reason with her. Mary Beth was a young attractive woman, not to mention she was the preacher's wife. *What did she see in me?* he thought to himself. It didn't matter. He caved. He wanted it just as badly. Therefore, they kissed and groped each other as if they both were deprived of sex.

She stopped and said, "Slow down, cowboy," as she went over to her desk and pulled a camcorder from the top drawer. That seemed to arouse him even more. He was all for the idea of filming their sexcapade.

She placed the camcorder on the edge of her desk, getting it in perfect alignment, and pushed the record button. She walked out in front of the device and started to undress for him as she did a strip tease. He watched as he rubbed his erect member through his jeans. When she was done teasing him and noticed the huge bulge in his pants she set him down, crawled on top of him, and began to pleasure him.

"Wait. I have a better idea," she said as she went to her closet. She pulled out a tub filled with miscellaneous items including a variety of sex toys and *S&M* gear. On top of it all was a huge machete. She pulled out a huge rope and tied him up securely. He enjoyed it. He figured that they were about to engage in some really kinky sex. She, then, took out a strap with a huge rubber ball at the end of it. It was a gagging device. She applied it to him. Then, she readjusted her camcorder to get a close shot of her defenseless sex slave. She got dressed. She went back to the tub and got the machete. She admired the blade. Then, she had a flashback.

"I really wanna thank you, Mary, for helping me to ride my bike. You're the best sissy ever. I love you, Mary."

"Don't mention it, Amy Joe. I love you too. With Mom not being here we're gonna have to stick together."

"What kinda person was Mom, Mary? I'd give anything to see her...just once."

"Someday you will, Amy Joe. Someday..."

Later that night, she made it home to find that Thomas was gone. However, as she pulled into the driveway his Blazer pulled up behind her. She got out of her rusty, orange Maverick as he stepped out of his Blazer, as well. "Where have you been, Mary Beth?" he asked worryingly.

"I stayed over to do some cleaning and reorganizing," she answered.

"I woke up to find you were gone. I drove by the church. We must've passed each other without even knowing it," he said. She agreed.

The next day Mary Beth told Thomas that someone was interested in buying the old wood chipper. She said, “I told him that you wouldn’t mind.” She, then, told Thomas that he was willing to pay a hundred dollars for it and that she would deliver it herself. It was already on wheels and looked heavier than it actually was. She would have no problem loading it up herself. They had an old pickup truck out back that had a flatbed trailer. They used it quite often for hauling and local parades. She told Thomas that the money would go directly into the plate at church and could go toward the addition for her AA meets.

He replied, “Ya know, Mary...that is not a bad idea. Yeah. Go ahead and sell it. Ain’t used it in a long time. I doubt it even works anymore. I think a belt’s locked up on it. But you go ahead and sell it. The metal is worth at least a hundred.”

She checked the trailer, making sure it was locked securely and that the brake lights and signal lights worked properly, and hopped in and took off to load the machine.

She made it to the back of the church and loaded up the wood chipper taking it out to her daddy’s old and condemned farmhouse. She pulled into a huge barn and unloaded the wood chipper. Once she plugged it in and positioned it just so she pushed over a huge pile of hay. There lay the man she had seduced the night before—stone-cold dead. She dragged him over to the wood chipper. She paused. She went outside and walked toward the well where she grabbed an old wheelbarrow. She placed the barrow directly in front of the wood chipper. Then, she hoisted the corpse up into the jagged mouth of the chipper—feeding his body to the hungry machine. In he went and out came blood, chunks of meat, and tiny fragments of bone. The sludge went straight into the wheelbarrow. When she was done mincing her victim into stew meat she wheeled him over to the well and that is where she discarded her victim. Afterward, she drove back to the church and placed a hundred dollars, out of her own pocket, into the plate.

“Quit hitting me, Daddy! MARY! MARY!!! Help me! Somebody! Please, help me!”
“Stop it, Daddy! Quit hitting her! Run, Amy Joe! Run!”

The Willies

The following Monday rolled around and Mary Beth was in search of a plan. During her last kill her husband almost caught her. She wasn't about to make the same mistake twice. She looked in her medicine cabinet that night, just an hour before she left for her Monday meeting, and found some sedatives.

She knew her husband to be really sensitive to medications. She wanted him to be comatose so she crushed up three pills and spiked his water.

Thomas was outside mowing the yard. He always drank water while working in the heat. She took him the glass of water and he downed it instantly. Within an hour he became extremely groggy and staggered up the stairs to lie down.

She left to begin her Monday session. Everyone showed up except for John and, of course, the man she had already killed. The whole night basically consisted of her discussing the twelve-step program.

The night dragged on, however, was cut short. It was only an hour-long meet. She pulled one of the men aside and whispered into his ear. She told him that she needed help so it would be great if he could stay over for a while.

When the session was over, one man left while the other one stayed. She dimmed the lights and the seduction began. He was just as easy as her last victim. She used erotic persuasion and seduced him. Just when he was at his peak of arousal she pulled out the machete and rammed it through his chest.

She wrapped him in a huge tarp, dragged him outside, and lifted him into her trunk. She cleaned up the blood and put all of her gadgets back into her closet where she kept them. Then, she locked up and drove out to her daddy's farmhouse. There she made minced meat out of his flaccid, lifeless body. When she was done she discarded his remains the same as the last time.

The next morning came and Thomas awoke feeling well-rested. He looked at his clock and noticed that it was 8:59 AM. He had been asleep more than sixteen hours. He also noticed that Mary Beth was nowhere around. He got dressed and headed downstairs to look for her. As he stepped out onto his front porch he saw Sheriff Jones and Deputy Dale McElroy talking to her.

He stood at bay—not wanting to be seen. However, he listened in on their conversation. Unfortunately, nevertheless, he couldn't make out what they were saying.

As the sheriff's car drove off Thomas stepped off his porch and yelled at Mary Beth in a failed effort to get her attention. She still stood at the end of the driveway keeping her sights on the sheriff's car. Being that she didn't respond Thomas decided to walk closer. "What did they want?"

"Uh...oh...it's a strange thing. Two of my group members are missing. Well...yesterday...only two showed up. John had recently joined and he didn't show and another one just wasn't there."

"One of them ain't John is it?"

"Uh, no...not John...it was two others. John is still out and about in denial as always."

Meanwhile, in the sheriff's car, Sheriff Jones and Deputy Dale McElroy talked about the two drunkards that were now missing. Deputy Dale McElroy took the case seriously but Sheriff Jones acted as if it was a burden and that he didn't really care. Nothing like this had ever happened in Angel Falls so the sheriff didn't know how to respond.

Dale rubbed at his chin. "Gee, Sheriff...what do ya think happened to 'em?"

"I'm not for sure. Hell...they'll pop up shortly. They always do. They're probably out getting liquored up." The sheriff quickly changed the subject matter at hand. "Boy, I'm hungry. How 'bout you?" He pulled into Mike's Diner.

Dale replied with a shrug.

The sheriff entered the diner, as Dale lagged behind, with loyal respect, and sat down where he usually did. He motioned for Dale to sit beside him.

He preferred the middle barstool over any other. There he could flirt with Debbie and get in on all the gossip. He was your typical small-town sheriff. He didn't even have to place an actual order. Debbie would look at him and ask, "The usual?" He would give a quick nod and within minutes he got his black coffee with two sugars and pork chop sandwich with extra mayo. This

had become his usual brunch. Dale had to think out his order. He didn't come there as often.

Debbie looked at Dale. "What's that brother of yours been up to lately? Trouble as usual?"

"John? Psst. I give ya three guesses an' the first two don't count."

Debbie shook her head in response as she shouted orders to the fry order cook. "Now, can I get you boys anything else?"

Just then, the front entrance to the diner flung open. It was John as drunk as ever. "I'm gonna kill you. You mother..." he slurred as he pointed at Dale. Dale stood up in a fighting stance as John collapsed in front of him. John was now unconscious. The sheriff and Dale just looked at each other as if to say: *What the hell was that all about?* Dale shrugged his shoulders as the sheriff shook his head. Debbie chuckled. She knew John better than Dale. This behavior didn't surprise her, to say the least.

John regained consciousness surrounded by concrete and metal. He was in a jail cell. He sat up on the side of the bed, with an excruciating migraine. Then, he saw Dale. He walked over to the bars and cursed at his law 'biding brother.

"What's wrong with you, John? Now...I never known you to act this way to'rds me."

"I'll tell you what's goin' on with him. He's a damn psycho. That's what's wrong with him." Sheriff Jones just had to butt in.

"Shut up, Sheriff! Now, this ain't got nuttin' ta do with you!!!" spat John in an overly aggressive tone. "You're goin' around town tellin' folks that I'm a worthless pile. A used up hasbeen just-a-drinkin' his life away, Dale."

Dale went to speak when Sheriff Jones interrupted, "Dammit, John! Your brother's an officer of the law. Family or not you can't speak to him like that while he's on duty. Especially not in here! Do you hear me!?" The sheriff pointed with a crooked middle finger while using a firm voice. "Now I'm puttin' ya down to see the judge tomorrow. I'm tired of your drunk ass. I'm cleaning up this damn town."

Dale stood breathing not a single word. Unlike most occasions, his ability to sense the sheriff's frustration was quite precocious. John, on the other hand, was a bit slow at thinking or determining another's frame of mind.

"Mr. Smith, I am a representative for the Angel Falls Child in Crisis Community. We have reasons to believe you have an abused child in your custody."

"Come with me, Amy Joe. Let's hide someplace they'll never find us."

"Where, Mary? Where?"

Later that night, Mary Beth boxed up her *Sc&M* gear, sex toys, and the machete she used to slice and dice her victims. She lied to Thomas by telling him that she was going to go and tidy up the place being that all of her clientele were disappearing. Also, she slipped him another heavy dosage of sedatives. This way, he wouldn't show up and catch her with the valuable evidence. He, indeed, was her biggest fear. And as she opened up the huge file drawer that contained her camcorder and an archive of tapes, all of which contained promiscuous and horrid footage of her dark side, she pulled out the photo of a little girl encased in a small frame. At the bottom of the frame, the name *Amy Joe* was engraved. She rubbed it gently with her thumbs and held it tightly against her breasts with both hands.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. She put everything back into her drawer and quickly shoved all the boxes back into the closet. She yelled, "Who is it?" She faintly heard a voice but couldn't make out what was said. It was a man's voice but muffled. After she finished hiding the evidence she opened the door. She was sweaty and slightly out of breath. The top of her shirt was unbuttoned, to stay cool, and her cleavage glistened in the moonlight. Upon opening the door she realized who the visitor was. It was the last of her group members.

"Oh. You. Come in," she said as her voice suddenly became soft and seductive. The man looked at her strangely but entered anyway.

"Now, Mary Beth. I 'preciate your help. I drove by and saw your car. I tried your twelve-step program an'—" the man rambled incoherent fragments as Mary Beth put her finger to his lips and shushed him.

The Willies

“There, there. Tell me all about it,” Mary Beth said as she patted his back and grabbed his hand while easing him further into the room.

“I’m drunk, Mary. I just found out that Laura Lynn’s been cheatin’ on me. I went down to John’s farm. Well. He ain’t home either. It’s goin’ around that he’s in jail. Anyways, I tapped into his moonshine—” the drunkard rambled incoherently.

Mary Beth reached over and locked the door as she still consoled him affectionately. “You know what you need. Don’t cha, sweetie?”

“What, ma’am? I’ll try anything,” replied the drunkard.

“A lil’ sexual healing,” said Mary Beth as she rubbed his crotch and passionately kissed his cheek. “Mmm, you do smell good. It makes me wanna eat cha.” She paused. “You know what I like ta do? I like ta tie my men up and record me sucking their cock.” She grabbed his bulge. Then, she walked over to her equipment. She positioned her camcorder, inserted her tape, and pressed record. This has now become a blood-hungry desire. She could not control herself. She needed tantric sex. She needed to kill. And whom better to kill than the town drunks. The mayor wanted them gone anyway. She dragged out the rope and mouth gag. She began to tie him up tightly. He was so drunk and aroused he gave two shits.

She skipped the strip tease and went straight into the sex.

After she climaxed she reached behind her back and pulled out her machete. He screamed in agony as she slew him. Soon the screaming ceased.

“Go ahead, Amy Joe. Don’t be scared. They’ll take real good care of you.”

“But I’m scared, Mary. I don’t wanna go.”

She bagged up his dismembered remains, cleaned up the mess, and threw him in the trunk. She was in so much of a hurry to leave she left her door wide open and all the paraphernalia was in plain sight as well as the camcorder, and it was still recording.

She pulled into the driveway of her daddy’s farmhouse and got out of her car. She entered the barn and began to warm up the wood chipper while positioning the wheelbarrow in place. Again, she fed the dismembered body to the hungry machine. The look on her face was sadistic. She enjoyed

doing this way too much. Blood splashed all over her as she grinned insanely and laughed maniacally. She had officially lost her mind.

Meanwhile, at the jail, John attempted to talk Dale into letting him go. He made a plea that he was in the process of seeking help.

“You ain’t attendin’ those meetings, are you? All the drunks are comin’ up missin’, man. You’d be better off just staying where you’re at!”

“I’m sorry, bro. It’ll never happen again. C’mon. I got some business ta tend to.”

Dale tried to show no favoritism when, finally, he caved. “All right. I guess it’s been twelve hours. I’ll let cha go...but go straight to the farm, John. I can’t lose my only brother.” Dale walked over to unlock the cell.

John exited the cell with that heavy chip on his shoulder. He looked at Dale really cocky as he passed. Unfortunately, as he stepped outside, he noticed his car was not there. “Where’s my damn car at, Dale?”

“It’s out back. The sheriff wanted it towed but I wouldn’t—” replied Dale as his voice faded. John was upset and kept on walking. He just wanted his car. When he did make it to the car he realized something. Dale had the keys. He sucked it up just long enough to go back inside and get his keys. Dale was in hysterics.

John thought to look in his trunk before he left the station. He admired the several jars of moonshine sitting in rows of five. He was concerned that they had broken. He looked at his watch and said, “Still got time to deliver the shine. Ol’ man McDaniel’s gonna love this batch. Extra fermented.” He chuckled. He got in his car, fired it up, and spun his tires as he left leaving behind two thick patches of burnt rubber. Albeit he had plenty of time he still sped.

He turned off on the back road that took him to his farmhouse and all the other farmhouses in Angel Falls. He drove past his. As he came near the driveway to Mary Beth’s daddy’s farmhouse he noticed that a light was on in the barn as well as Mary Beth’s car. Curiosity got the best of him. He checked his watch as he turned right and drove up the drive. “Yeah. I got plenty o’ time,” he said.

Mary Beth was cleaning up her bloody mess. Her clothes were saturated in blood and fragments of bone and chunks of meat were everywhere. She really made a mess this time. As she started out the door with the wheelbarrow full of human stew John met her. With half of her wheelbarrow through the door she began to back up steadily.

“Whatcha got there, Mary?” John asked as he stepped forward matching Mary Beth’s pace. A look of confusion came across his face. “What’s goin’ on, Mary?”

“Um...I...um....” Mary was at a loss for words.

“What in the hell is in that barrow, Mary?” asked John as he looked at the wheelbarrow while holding his nose in disgust.

Mary Beth screamed loudly and sadistically as she pushed John backward while using the wheelbarrow as leverage. She noticed how he stumbled and seized the opportunity to manipulate his lopsided equilibrium. He wasn’t far from the well and as she pushed him backward he fell into the well. But just as he did a blast was heard. It was gunfire.

Sheriff Jones and Deputy Dale McElroy stood behind Mary Beth. Dale was the one that pulled the trigger. Mary Beth collapsed, but she was far from damaged goods. She quickly stood back up and lashed at Dale. Then, another blast was heard. This one came from the opposite direction. Mary Beth collapsed again—only this time she was down for good with a single gunshot wound to the head. Sheriff Jones and Deputy Dale focused solely on Mary Beth but as they slowly raised their heads upward they saw Debbie standing with a smoking pistol. Everything was total silence.

“Help! Can somebody please help?” a voice echoed from inside the well. It was John—still alive.

“Mary. I have some bad news. That little girl—the one you’re so fond of at the orphanage—was found dead today.”

“Are you serious, Thomas? It can’t be! NO!!!”

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of son-ship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself

bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we, ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust....”

The Angel Falls Orphanage broke silence and told of Amy Joe’s death. The FBI caught wind of it and came down to conduct an investigation. They dug up the bones of Amy Joe, and with modern forensics, within, a period of, two months, they were able to determine that Amy Joe was raped and murdered. After a five-month stint with a thorough investigation, prior to lab reports, they matched an identity to the rapist/murderer. A local drunkard by the name of John McElroy.

The Bleeding Mausoleum

Trespassers will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of martial law.

The house of dead bleeds,
And out of it recedes
The secret of every crooked deed.
It sets out to fulfill its ghastly need.
A four-day curse to pursue the worse
Massacre one could fathom.

Day 1

Marilyn:

“God Dammit, Denise! I said get the fuck off of him!”

Marilyn had just come home early from work. She slowly walked up the stairs. The closer she got to the top she could hear the moans and screams of tantric enjoyment. She approached a door. An aroma of sex seeped through the crevices and converted her curiosity to a brooding conclusion.

With kid gloves, she grabbed the knob and burst through the door. Jimmy, Marilyn’s fiancé, lay beneath a friend of hers named Denise.

Denise straddled Jimmy as they both engaged in a sexual relation. Marilyn's belly turned as she became distraught.

Marilyn didn't turn away and leave like most people would in this situation. She stomped over, grabbed hold of Denise, and pulled her off while flinging her to the ground exposing her nude flesh and voluptuous bouncing breasts.

Denise stood up as a thousand apologies flew out of her mouth at once. Marilyn wouldn't hear of it. In fact, she made that clear.

Marilyn grabbed a gun out of her dresser drawer as Denise ran out the door—still nude. Overly frightened and in a frenzy, Denise tumbled down the stairwell.

Then, a loud blast echoed for miles around the neighborhood as the horizon glared orange over the plain.

Marilyn got out of her car dressed in a black cloak. It was storming viciously. She walked around to her trunk and opened it. From out of the trunk she dragged out two bodies—one by one.

Marilyn was surrounded by tombstones and mausoleums. She was in the cemetery.

Upon a hill, just a few feet from her, a light flickered from within one of the mausoleums.

This particular mausoleum was unlike the rest. It was like the granddaddy of them all. It was huge—like a church. It had a carport built onto the side of it. And it was two stories tall. Cast in the flickering of the storm's lightning, it was creepy—the stuff horror movies are made of.

Marilyn dragged one of the bodies to the front entrance of the mausoleum. She went back and dragged the other body to the front entrance of the mausoleum.

The bodies were enclosed in black body bags. She looked at one in particular balefully—as if she'd kill that meticulous person twice if she could.

She rattled the door with three consecutive knocks. It opened. On the other end of the door was a crypt keeper—a long, lanky fellow with thin

The Willies

strands of white hair and pale flesh, which sunk in revealing the exact shape of his skull—very hollow-eyed.

He did not assist her with dragging the bodies out of the storm. He did, however, prop the door open while she struggled to pull them over the threshold.

Prior to Day 1

Professor Stevens:

Somewhere within distinction, bodies strewed. On the ground lay a mass of scattered remains—an enigma to Professor Stevens. He scratched his head, favored the bald spot, and plied a confounded tone, “These poor kids.” Death took them all.

In the corner of the slipshod room was a whimpering. The corner was dark; however, someone or something existed—embedded in the shadow.

Professor Stevens, irritated by his crawling skin, carefully lurked over to reveal the source—the source of the whimpering. It was a little girl no more than five years old. She sat on her rump and balled up with her head tucked securely between her knees. “My God, child! Are you okay!?” asked the professor.

“No. Mommy. My mommy,” she muttered.

The professor could tell by looking at her that she had survived a vicious attack. The room possessed the grizzly remains of children that varied in age between four and eleven. Why did they spare her? Madness has no explanation. However, the distinctness in methods of killing was mismatched. This created a conundrum in the case. Already Professor Stevens knew he had a problem on his hands.

Never in his life, on the beat, or in general as far that goes, has he ever witnessed such a macabre display of homicide. However, to create a better visual I would compare the scene to a well-populated school, kindergarten through junior high, after a postal bloodbath—a massacre.

Day 2

Ray and Jennifer:

“Stop this car right now! I want out!” demanded Jennifer.

“Babe. C’mon. Quit cha bitchin’,” replied Ray.

“Dammit, Ray! I said let me out!”

“You want me to drop you off out here in the middle of nowhere?”

“Yes. Anything beats ridin’ with you right now.”

Jennifer and Ray bickered back and forth like an old married couple.

Ray’s driving was distracted by her continuance to gripe relentlessly.

She rambled, “You said we were going to your mother’s, but, no, that didn’t happen. And, then, we had a flat tire. You forgot the spare. We had to wave some weirdo down just to get—”

“Okay! Shut up! Damn. I get the point.”

Jennifer’s eyes lit up like a deer caught in headlights. Ray had never spoken to her in that tone. He always handled her in a chillaxing tone.

Professor Stevens:

Professor Stevens sat at his desk in his home office and scratched his head while in deep thought. He looked through pictures and other documents related to the Fort Meyer Church massacre. He grunted in angst and disgust—tilted his head from side to side. The more he looked at all the gore the more he wanted to find the culprit and wring his neck. He has now dedicated his life to finding this beast—tracking him down and bringing him to justice. He would kill him himself if he had to—kill him with his own two hands in the same cold blood as he, or she, did those poor innocent children. He had given up his oath as a police officer and traded in his days on the beat for a life of a crazed bounty hunter. To catch a psychopath, you must be a psychopath.

While he focused hard on a particular photo he heard his front door creak slightly open. Carefully he eased himself up from his chair and tiptoed through his house. He used the skills of a police officer entering a location of hidden danger. He stood diagonal from the door behind a corner wall—out of sight. He pulled a small handgun from his pant pocket and quickly jumped from behind the corner. The front door was open, but the perpetra-

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tor was just a malnourished alley cat. Professor Stevens called him Bones—a sensible name.

Meanwhile, back at the mausoleum, tiny bubbles of red appeared to seep through the porous cavities of stone.

Ray and Jennifer:

“Just drop me off at my aunt Marilyn’s house.” Jennifer pointed. “Just right up here.”

“Be glad to,” replied Ray hastily. He slammed on his brakes and reached over Jennifer and opened the door. Jennifer exited the car and slammed the door—almost on his hand.

“Men are pigs,” said Jennifer as she walked toward the house.

Ray watched with a long face of regret as he put his car in gear and pulled away.

Jennifer knocked on Marilyn’s door but nobody answered. She knocked a second time. Louder. Still, no one answered.

She walked around to the back. From the corner, Jennifer could see a lady dressed in black. It was Marilyn. She sat on her deck throwing marbles into a birdbath.

“Marilyn?” Jennifer slowly approached her. “What are you doing?”

Marilyn was unresponsive, at first, as she was content with her marbles.

Day 3

Marilyn:

The clock had just struck midnight. Marilyn looked at her calendar while realizing that it was Friday. “I’m going to get me a fucking drink!” she said as she grabbed her jacket, keys, and pocketbook and headed out the door.

She pulled into the driveway of Marty’s Midnight Oasis. She went inside and sat at the bar wasting no time at all. “Oh, shit!” she said as she couldn’t help but realize it was open mike night and all the weekend poets were spitting lyrics.

“Terror frightens me!!! Not the taste of fear but sweet justice. They find me here. I am him and he is me—” spat a poet with intense emotion.

Suddenly, someone approached Marilyn unexpectedly as she sat content while listening to the mutterings of mike’s beholder. She jolted nervously. She was somewhat relieved, however, to find that it was Professor Stevens.

“What do you want?”

“You better be glad you quit when you did.”

“Quit? Fort Meyer’s Church?”

“Yeah.” It, then, dawned on Professor Stevens that she *appeared* clueless.

“You did hear?”

“Hear what?”

“Awe gees—”

“What happened?”

“Some sick and twisted bastard went in there and killed them all.”

“My kids? Someone killed the kids I watched after for so long?”

Professor Stevens choked as he nodded his head yes.

Marilyn gave a performance worthy of a Grammy. Notice earlier the emphasis I put on *appeared*? Italics show written prominence where written prominence is required.

Day 4

Ray and Jennifer:

“Jennifer, we’re gonna get caught!” screeched Ray.

“We will if you don’t keep it down,” huffed Jennifer in a quiet but firm voice.

They were just outside the mausoleum snooping around. Their reason for being there was yet unclear.

Ray waited out in his car while Jennifer lurked through the darkness. The door opened as Jennifer entered the stone sepulture.

Meanwhile, in the same location the mausoleum trickled red before, it began to trickle again. Only this time more red fluid loomed out of the porous stone.

Marilyn:

She drove recklessly through the darkness. She kept a lookout through her rearview mirror and adjusted the volume on her fuzz buster. She didn't feel like getting pulled over. Up ahead she saw the turnoff to the cemetery. She took the turn sharply.

As she pulled in front of the mausoleum she saw Jennifer and Ray. Ray acted as if he had no clue of what was happening, but Jennifer knew all too well.

Before the events that led them there, Jennifer had told Marilyn of Jimmy's affairs with several women. Marilyn, blinded with denial, refused to believe her. She also told her about his plans to destroy her career and, by doing so, take the lives of many innocent children.

She followed by making it clear that she had no idea of his exact intentions.

Marilyn paused and entered a state of deep thought. To think of it she did recall finding blood on his t-shirt the same night she had killed him and his mistress.

"But what is your reason for being here?" Marilyn asked Jennifer.

"I received this," she replied as she handed Marilyn a picture. The picture was of Jimmy and Jennifer standing beside a fence. Jennifer was obscured with a red crust—possibly blood.

"So?" Marilyn said.

"Look on the back."

Marilyn flipped over the picture and read aloud, "Bring with you a sacrifice and the curse will be lifted"—the curse being Jennifer's streak of bad luck.

Marilyn choked on her words. She handed Jennifer something she had received. It was an exact message. Ray, nonetheless, looked bewildered.

Professor Stevens:

While on one of his late-night patrols, Professor Stevens decided to drive out to the cemetery. As he turned off on the road he could see, in the distance, headlights in the churchyard. Then, it began to storm.

He approached the mausoleum to which the headlights beckoned him. He was appalled to find Marilyn, Jennifer, and Ray. While exiting his car he said sternly, “What are y’all doing?”

Before anyone could answer the mausoleum began to spurt blood in every direction.

Ray slipped and fell with the physical brunt rendering him unconscious. Then, a force pulled him through the blood and up to the mausoleum. The door opened.

“Let’s leave!” shouted out Professor Stevens.

“I can’t leave Ray!” shouted out Jennifer.

“He’s come for us,” said Marilyn but in a quieter tone.

Jennifer and Professor Stevens stared at her with perplexity.

“What do you mean?” asked the professor.

“He needs a soul to resurrect his evil,” Marilyn explained.

By now Ray was completely in the mausoleum. Jennifer panicked.

Suddenly, everything got quiet.

The blood quit spurting.

The mausoleum door swung open and out of it staggered Ray. He appeared normal, aside from the fact that he was covered from head to toe with crimson life essence.

Professor Stevens shouted out, “C’mon now! Let’s go!”

They all entered their cars and sped off. Marilyn kept looking back possessed with paranoia. Professor Stevens got on his CB and tried to explain the phenomena to dispatch.

Jennifer drove Ray’s car as she kept looking at him. Then, somewhere down the road, a loud crash was heard. Fires blazed while consuming the cars of Professor Stevens, Marilyn, and Ray and Jennifer.

As red turned to orange and orange turned to blue a presence slowly escaped the inferno. It was Ray, unharmed by the flames. He stared and laughed madly at the destruction.

Meanwhile, the mausoleum was well preserved. There wasn’t a single speck of blood amongst the undisturbed grounds of the well-restored castle of death.

Aborted and Depraved

“In this world, we filter our beliefs. We separate the good from the bad. We neatly place the good in a file cabinet drawer labeled: well worth keeping. And we place the bad in a file cabinet drawer labeled: 13, knowing that 13 represents bad luck.”

*“Aborted and depraved
They roam throughout the night
Searching for their killers
Thirsting for a fight*

*No chance at life
An unlit candle blown out
Unable to be heard
No glory no clout*

*Who will avenge them?
These children unborn
Is nobody saddened?
Does nobody mourn?
Restless spirits*

Billy Van

*Without body or voice
Searching for their killers
The ones called "pro choice"*

—Ruth Kilmer

In the flash, you could see the colors of red and blue mixed in a strobe. The ambulance drove hurriedly to the Pine Graves Memorial Hospital. In the back, a young lady manifested pain as she kicked, squirmed, and held her belly.

After she made it to the hospital she was uncaringly dragged to a filthy and cluttered room and sedated.

Her eyes barely opened seeing blurs and streaks of light.

“The abortion was completed, Miss Sanders. You’re free to leave now.”

The hospital was no more than a dirty clinic that offered abortions to every expecting mother rather than the joy of life.

Abortions became more of an epidemic rather than a choice.

Ten Years Later

Suzy and Micah had just moved to Pine Graves. They found it kind of odd how every street corner, business, and bumper sticker spelled out in bold text: PRO-CHOICE. LET’S MAKE A DIFFERENCE. At that, the town looked more like a ghost town than anything. However, they were just starting outward and the cost of living in Pine Graves was cheaper than most anywhere else.

The day before their trip around town they packed their belongings from a U-Haul into a cozy three-bedroom two-story house.

They were very pleased and felt in their heart of hearts that they would live happily ever after.

During their town tour, they decided to swing by the hospital. Suzy was six months pregnant and wanted to register herself.

“Name?”

“Suzy Wallace.”

“Significant other?”

“Micah Cadence.”

The lady paused. Suddenly, she began to act peculiarly.

“You’re not married?” she asked balefully.

“In March...we’re to wed in March,” Suzy replied gleefully as she clutched Micah’s hand. Micah exchanged a smile, as well.

The lady reached into her drawer and pulled out a different form. “Here, sign this,” she said as she slammed it down in front of Suzy.

The lady was very disgruntled and unpleasant.

“Okay,” replied Suzy as she began to read the form.

“No!” The lady faked a smile. “Don’t read...just sign. It’s just your basic blah, blah, blah.”

Suzy trusted her. I mean, it was a hospital, and the code of ethics were abided by laws. Therefore, she signed the form.

As Suzy and Micah exited the hospital a strange man approached them and spat out, “You must get out. You’ll be sorry.” He reached out and caressed Suzy’s belly. “You’re expecting.” Then, he looked deep into her eyes. “You’ve yet to wed. If you cherish your unborn you must wed or get out!!!”

Suzy jerked away and said, “Ewe,” as Micah held her firmly by the shoulders and helped her to turn. Together Suzy and Micah rushed across the busy road to their car. It beeped as he pressed a button on his keychain to unlock it.

Meanwhile, the strange man still warned them. He screamed, “You must leave....” repeatedly.

On the way home Suzy acted squeamish.

“What’s wrong, babe?” asked Micah.

“That man...how did he know we weren’t married?”

“C’mon, babe...it’s obvious. We’re not wearing rings. But you...you have on an engagement ring.”

“Yeah, I guess it is pretty obvious. But what did he mean by we better get married or get out?”

“Not for sure. He did reek of whiskey though.”

“And why did the lady at the hospital act strange when I told her we weren’t married?”

“Again...don’t know...don’t care. Gees, will ya quit worrying?”

“Okay, I will.”

“If you ask me we moved to Hooterville, population wasted,” Micah said, followed by a burst of short laughter. Suzy joined in.

Suzy still looked worried.

“Look, we can move if you want to. But, babe, where are we gonna find living this cheap?”

To soothe Suzy Micah turned on the radio. The voice of a man preached about children having to live in today’s society, going pro-choice, and, then, he said something that really touched a nerve with Suzy. He shouted out, “Fatherless children”—referring to them as sorry bastards. Then, he said, “Thee who fornicates and enters a child into this world without exchanging the vows of the holy power will suffer.”

Suzy shrieked as she looked at Micah. Micah looked concerned, as well.

Micah turned off the radio and said, “Well, that didn’t help any.”

Later that day, Suzy rested in bed. It was 5:35 PM and she, absolutely, refused to get up.

“Babe, ya gotta move around a little,” said Micah as he rubbed her upper arm with a warm and gentle caress.

“I don’t feel good,” Suzy replied.

“Ya want some Gatorade?” That’s what her former doctor told her to drink.

“Mmm, mmm,” said Suzy as she nodded her head.

Micah jolted down the stairs and opened the fridge. He pushed aside the mayonnaise and relocated the ketchup noticing that there was no Gatorade. “I’m gonna run to town, babe,” Micah hollered up the stairs.

Suzy lay there with her eyes closed.

While leaving the store a man stood behind a corner alley as he watched Micah get into his car. It was the same stranger who approached them outside the hospital. He was a tall, lanky fellow, with eyes as black as coal. He stood at bay and watched Micah’s every move. He even watched him

drop the Gatorade from the torn plastic bag and bend down to pick it up. Then, he watched him pull away and drive off. He smirked, exposing his black-tooth grin.

The strange man walked down the alley a ways until he approached a corridor of stairs that led underground. He wobbled down the stairs and approached a door. He reached for the knob as he looked around with vigilance. He pulled open the door and entered. He stood in a dimly lit room infested with rats. Also, the room was filled with children. They were all about the same age and had the same color of hair and similar hair-styles—shoulder-length with jagged edges.

The children referred to him as Daddy. He responded positively to the reference.

The room was humid and damp. The man had beads of sweat forming on his forehead. He had been in the room for no longer than ten minutes. The children had no sweat and appeared comfortable with the room's temperature. Also, they were dressed similarly—in black schoolboy uniforms. Their fingernails were painted black, as well. They looked like a clan of emo children. However, their demeanor was polite.

One of the boys, the others referred to as Jonah, reached out and took the man's hand. Upon doing so the man had a flashback. He saw himself leaving the hospital. He was a lot younger, well-groomed, and was dressed in a long white lab jacket. In his hand, he held a small cooler—the kind that holds a six-pack of soda. Then his vision was distracted by a flash. Now, he saw himself in the very same room he was in now—only it looked more like a tidy room in a small apartment. The man opened the cooler and reached into it. He held in his hand a small glass jar. It was labeled: Chromosome X. Then, there was another flash and he came to. He looked at the child and said, "Yes, Jonah...it will be soon."

Micah made it home with the Gatorade. He shouted for Suzy but found that she was not at home. However, he did find a note. It read:

Had to go to the hospital. Called ambulance. Please come when you get home. Suzy

Micah jumped into his car and rushed to the hospital. He disobeyed every sign passed.

As he entered the hospital a young lady, restrained to a stretcher, passed him. She flailed madly and was surrounded by no less than ten, of what appeared to be, surgeons. They had blood smeared all over their scrubs as she appeared pale from losing so much. Also, he noticed that she screamed, “I want my baby!”

Meanwhile, as Micah stayed at the bedside with Suzy the strange man opened his door and yelled, “It is time! Go, my children! But bring Doctor Mathis to me.” As the children fled out, led by Jonah, the moon obstructed the sun and created an eclipse.

The hospital was only three blocks away from their lair. They ran through the alley like a pack of feral animals. The strange man stood at the doorway and watched them as they dashed. He looked back and admired what appeared to be a lab setup—flasks, beakers, Bunsen burners. He grinned crookedly.

Micah left Suzy’s side to go get him a cup of coffee. As he languidly walked down the hall he was pushed down by a group of feral children. He was bewildered. He hadn’t the slightest clue of what was happening. He looked around and saw people lying in pools of blood—blood strewed in every location of the hospital. Micah stood frozen with fear and perplexity. Suddenly, he remembered Suzy—they were headed in that direction.

Five of the blood-hungry kids had a doctor cornered. He was stalwart with a name tag that read: Gerard Mathis, M.D. He was the brain behind the abortions. He corrupted the town into aborting the children of the unwed. He called them fornicators. He stood in fear. The sight of all the devastation was submissive to his fears. What did these kids want? Better yet, who were they?

They killed and killed. They destroyed everything in sight. The hospital was now a slipshod slaughterhouse defiled by demonic minions of one’s own creation.

Micah managed to reach Suzy, again, at the bedside. It was easy. He didn’t have to put up a fight. The children showed no interest in him whatsoever.

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They only went after those in uniform and name tags marked with the Pine Graves Memorial Hospital logo: PGM.

Micah panicked and feared for his pregnant fiancée's life. He went ballistic. He was able to kill one of the minions by himself. It was easy. As brutal and persistent as they were to kill the little guy didn't fight back. It was as if they were only programmed to kill employees of the Hospital. Therefore, Micah stormed through the entire hospital killing as many as he could. He did not understand that, in a cruel sadistic sense, these children programmed to kill were doing the town a favor.

3 Months Later

In defeat, Micah was able to kill the entire clan—one, in general, he beat submissively. However, the experience led him to a padded cell where he slapped his cheeks till they bled, repeated the same vocalizations over and over, such as, "I'm not the baby. You're the baby," and ate his scabs.

Suzy was about to give labor.

Since the incident, she moved a town over to stay with a relative she never even knew she had. She was prepped for delivery. A nurse rubbed her head in an assuring manner and said, "You're ready. Let me go get the doctor." All went silent. As Suzy lay in discomfort a doctor entered the room. He introduced himself as Doctor Gerard Mathis.

Excerpts from the Journals of G.G. McKinney

Blood is a flavored wine...a cocktail that quenches my thirst.

—G.G. McKinney [1]

I hear voices—cruel intentions;
a monster lives in me—and so I breathe.
He controls my thoughts—I am he;
he is me and at one are we.
He gives to me to take from you
and so I'll take—that's what I'll do.
My bones will rest—los catacombs;
beneath the earth—in igneous stones.

—G.G. McKinney [5]

The catacombs are where the voices live...the voices inside my head.

—G.G. McKinney [1]

To where, to where, lingers me there?

Billy Van

—G.G. McKinney [2]

I am not dead; although, I reside in hell. Indeed I'm dead—a contradiction of pain, so I inflict with the saber. The enigma is partial to the capture.

—G.G. McKinney [5]

I'm a soulless survivor.

—G.G. McKinney [10]

Drink my blood, for I drank yours. Taste my renderings from the goblet septic wine.

—G.G. McKinney [10]

Pain is suffering, of which I endure.

—G.G. McKinney [8]

I killed him with a cork screw, just before I enjoyed my wine.

—G.G. McKinney [16]

Never again...naught less, nothing else matters.

—G.G. McKinney [2]

She will meet me before dawn. By dusk, she will meet her maker...if there is a god. I will arrange that!

—G.G. McKinney [9]

Renderings of lives once lived—my home is filled with ghosts.

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—G.G. McKinney [4]

I will have you to know of my pain, my heartache, your joy.

—G.G. McKinney [6]

Take the crucifix from my chest,
it causes my heart to burn.
Don't wake the spirits, for they must rest.
Their ashes are safe in urn.

—G.G. McKinney [11]

Lonely...I live lonely. When I die, I will not suffer. Pain knows me all too well. Pain, I endure you. Loneliness, I enjoy.

—G.G. McKinney [10]

Ten miles drowned in a lake of fire.

—G.G. McKinney [17]

There are no monsters...only me.

—G.G. McKinney [3]

“Who are you?” he said to me with fear playing drums on his throat. I grinned and said, “The Reaper,” as I bit down on him...removing the little drummer boy. He was off-time anyway.

—G.G. McKinney [19]

Naught less, I am naught less.

—G.G. McKinney [7]

I will never die, for I live inside everyone. I am what everyone wishes they could be—an immortal god. I take pride in my work as Poe took pride in his. Even when I do die, I will become more powerful for the lords will transcend me as an evil soul pulling lives. How do you think his work gets done?

—G.G. McKinney [20]

*Persevero vestri iter itineris , amo plures has exertus ,
quod vos ero unus of plures animus irretitus inside.*

Translated:

Continue your journey, like many has tried,
and you will be one of many souls trapped inside.

—G.G. McKinney [13]

The Reborn

They lurk in shadows, in black, they mourn,
The evil minions of thee unborn.
They seek vengeance, for their lives were torn.
Programmed to kill, they are reborn.

The streets were ruined and the census regressed the population. Pine Graves was once a nice little community—now, however, a no man’s land. Rapid Falls accumulated its former residents. One of which was the roughshod Doctor Gerard Mathis. He resumed his practice earning a lot of praise at his clinic. However, he worked the E.R. on call and continued his services at delivery in pediatrics. He hadn’t changed a bit. His intentions were still set on aborting the unborn of the unwedded.

Pine Graves still maintained one resident—a man by the name of Ernest Muler. Twenty years ago, prior to the events of now, he discovered a way to convert living chromosomes into living beings and he did just that.

Ernest, at one time, was a faithful employee of the Pine Graves Memorial Hospital. However, he didn’t gel too well with Doctor Mathis. You could say the doctor didn’t like the cut of his jib. He decided early on that he would become Doctor Mathis’s nemesis and rue him for his actions. So, as Doctor Mathis aborted the fetuses Ernest sampled their chromosomes and

stored them in jars in a small cooler. He was Doctor Mathis's assistant and was supposed to dispose of the waste. However, he had other plans.

Ten years ago an incident occurred that was covered up by the township. A soon-to-be wedded couple moved into town and set homestead. Ernest tried to warn them but they were too stubborn to listen to the old coot. Ernest had been working on a ten-year plan to rid Doctor Mathis of his cruel instincts but failed at the hands of the soon-to-be wedded residents. Unexpectedly, he didn't count on such a disruption. His plan was this: he would raise the children he created with the chromosomes he had collected and program them to mutilate every employee of the Pine Graves Memorial Hospital. Everything went as planned until they were single-handedly destroyed by the town's new resident as his *bride-to-be* lay ill in the ER.

That same night Ernest went to the hospital. His little minions were given direct orders to return within an hour of their deed and with them bring Doctor Mathis. Alive! It was thirty minutes past the hour so Ernest rushed to the hospital to check on them. Distraught—he found his children mutilated as if they were savagely attacked. In quick response he grabbed a specimen cooler from behind the nurses' station and began to collect blood and tissue; therefore, he could reuse their chromosomes to recreate his demonic soldiers.

This time his plans were to program them to be more savage and lethal. His target: Doctor Gerard Mathis at the Rapid Falls Medical Center. That was ten years ago....

"I can't believe I knocked her up!" said Jacob to his friend Steven.

"Don't worry about it, bro. Hey, I heard that weird doctor dude that delivers at the hospital just uptown kills the babies before they're born," replied Steven, "yeah, with a rusty knife."

"Oh, shut up!"

"It's true."

"You believe ev'rything you hear."

"No, I don't!"

"Do too, man. You're a sucker."

“Whatever.”

“C’mon, bro...help me think!”

Steven paused for a second. “Have you talked it over with Megan?”

“No, she’s pissed at me.”

“Suck it up, make amends, and try to convince her to get an abortion.”

“Dude, done tried that. And that’s why she’s pissed at me!”

Steven threw his arms up. “Then, I don’t know. It’s your baby. You rock it to sleep!”

“That was a bad pun, dude,” said Jacob as he gently shoved Steven.

“I’m sorry.”

Jacob and Steven had been the best of friends for at least ten years. The story of how they met is unforgettable. Jacob has lived in Rapid Falls since birth but Steven came along when he was about ten. They’re both the same age. If you do the math that would make them around twenty. Anyway, the day after Steven moved to Rapid Falls he was being bullied by Chester Mullitz—a junior high kid the size of Hulk Hogan. Jacob noticed this from a distance. During recess, Chester came up to Steven and started his shit. Jacob grabbed an aluminum softball bat, went up to Chester, and bashed him in the back of the head. Chester still stood tall...and he was pissed. Without hesitation, Jacob swung the bat a second time at his right knee. He dropped Chester like a bad habit. You know how they say, “The bigger they are the harder they fall?” Well, the school board had discussed digging a rut so that they could make a slope for a slide they had just purchased. Needless to say, today, a slide sits where Chester fell—courtesy of Jacob.

Megan was Jacob’s all-time girlfriend—even as kids, they were inseparable. They used to pass love letters in Miss Anderson’s fifth-grade English class. They’ve been gaga over each other forever and a day. But now things became more complicated. One night of unprotected sex led Jacob to the baby section at Wal-Mart. Still, Jacob and Steven’s conversation continued.

“I just hope she doesn’t tell her dad,” said Jacob with a worried expression.

“I don’t think she’s that stupid. Her old man can layeth the smacketh down when he gets upset.”

Meanwhile, back at Pine Graves, Ernest stood in the alley propped against the railing of his chambers. Below, in his lab, a new breed of minions emerged. They were nothing like the other group. These appeared as if they came straight from hell. Still, dressed in black, they were as pale as cold dead flesh. But their eyes—there was no soul in them. Their fingernails were painted black, long, and razor-sharp. Their teeth were fangs. This was his new breed...the reborn. They were programmed to have mercy on nobody and, of course, to obey him.

Ernest was their father—their creator. They were generated from chromosomes that rolled over for two decades and Ernest cared for them as his true flesh and blood. The next eclipse was in two days. Then, blood spill would quench their thirst and feed their hunger.

The next morning Jacob awoke to his phone ringing. He hit his alarm clock, still half asleep. Eventually, he got up to answer the phone. It was Megan.

“Look, can we talk?” she said with a shaky voice.

“I would love to,” replied Jacob.

“Meet me in the parking lot of the hospital. They’re things we need to discuss.”

“I’m leaving...now.”

Jacob hung up the phone as he rushed to get dressed. His clothes were strewn throughout his entire room. The result was a pair of jogging pants with a threadbare shirt. However, he was *slobbish* like that and didn’t seem to care.

Outside the hospital, Megan awaited just as she had said. She was only a month along so her belly didn’t show much; however, she rubbed it as though it did. Jacob pulled up beside her and got out of his car. It was a banged-up, two-door pile of junk with filler and primer spots all over it.

“What is it?” he asked as he reached out to hold her. She shunned him.

“Were you serious about the abortion?”

“Just a suggestion.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I mean, I wasn’t really thinking at the time. I’m stressed, Megan. I just lost my job and rent’s due on the apartment. I dunno.”

“Well, I didn’t bring you here for sympathy. I’ve got to tell you something.”

“What?”

“Before I called you I had an appointment to see Doctor Mathis. They say he specializes in abortions and similar procedures—”

“Well...?”

“I’m getting the abortion.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Really...an abortion this soon. Aren’t you supposed to be so far a—”

“He explained to me a new type of procedure he has created that kills the egg and not the baby.”

“Wait! Did you say Doctor Mathis...Gerard Mathis?”

“Yeah. Why? You know him?”

“Only that he’s a quack. Look. You should reconsider.”

“No! I done filled out the paperwork. Tomorrow. No one will *ever* have to know of this.”

That night, Jacob lay in bed worrying himself sick. He didn’t think his little impromptu statement about the abortion would lead to this. His mouth wrote a check his ass couldn’t cash. He thought he’d watch some late-night TV to take his mind off the dilemma. The first channel he turned to consisted of a person saying something about the eclipse that was supposed to happen the day after—! “Whatever,” he said as he turned again and saw a trailer for the upcoming film *Eclipse*. Jacob slammed down the remote and said with hatred in his voice, “Okay, I get it. We’re gonna have an eclipse. What’s that got to do with me?”

In the meantime, a rusty black pickup truck pulled into town. It had a camper shell over the bed. It pulled into the parking lot just outside the Rapid Falls Medical Center.

The next day Megan walked into the hospital. She sat patiently in the waiting area until a nurse came to get her. She was very nervous and, others could tell, that sat around her. She couldn’t back down now. She knew she

had to go through with it. The nurse took her to a room and, shortly after, Doctor Mathis entered. It was him all right. He posed in the doorway with an uncaring smirk. Regardless his bedside manner was conniving meaning he appeared to be polite. If only she knew of his barbarous methods of aborting. At that, she was about to find out.

Jacob was in a rush to get to the hospital. He wanted to lend Megan some support to help her through this desperate act. Just as he pulled into the parking lot the sun hid behind the moon resulting in a synthesis of darkness. And in the sky, there was a fiery ring. Jacob burst through the hospital door followed by Ernest and his evil creations. Jacob was unaware of their presence. Also, he was not aware of the bloodshed that occurred behind him. They killed everyone and everything in sight just as they were programmed. They leeches to people just like sociopathic dwarves. Finally, due to the climax of panic, Jacob turned to witness the horror. Luckily for him, he fainted. These minions only sought to attack movement.

They worked their way down every hall departing and regrouping like mutant cockroaches until they reached their primary target—Doctor Gerard Mathis. There he stood with Megan lying sedated and in the nude. He hovered over her with a surgical tool in his hand. There was no escaping. He was trapped in a room with a blockade of evil spawn. This was his demise—planned for two decades.

Jacob regained consciousness feeling vertigo with a huge knot on the crown of his head. He became distraught when he looked around and saw the carnage that surrounded him. It was a massacre. A slaughterhouse. He stood up! He was covered in blood and guts as he tried to regain balance. Suddenly, the front entrance burst open and a SWAT team dressed in their protective gear rushed in. They attacked Jacob and manhandled him to the floor. He was placed under arrest.

And the churchyard marquee read: **PRO-CHOICE** as a lady passed it. She was pregnant and, by the distention of her belly, close to delivery.

In a Dimly Lit Place

Quiet now,
Hush, my love.
I will assist you
To the heavens above.

Paleus sat quietly in the corner. His house was filled with guests and there was no place else to sit. However, he was in his den—the one place that nobody else had entered.

He was saddened—shadowed with depression.

His den was dimly lit, and the corner was warm. He wanted some alone time and this was his place of complete solitude.

He shunned himself from his guests. They too mourned.

Every room, excluding the upstairs, was filled with people, all of which were dressed in black.

The lighting in his den suited his emotions. He had nothing to do. He secluded himself. He refused to be seen. So, in resolve to adapt his absent mind, he rubbed at the crackled paint upon the corner's wall. This seemed to isolate his guilt.

In the process of his seclusion, Paleus developed a nervous-tic. He could hear the creaking of his den door. People knew he didn't want to be both-

ered. At that nobody had any interest in bothering him. His guests respected his need to mourn if mourning was his intent. But, with every movement, and movement was in abundance, the door moved steadily with every brush of wind. In lieu of this, Paleus would lift his collar and sink his head.

But what caused his depression? What made him decide to confine himself to a dimly lit den, and, of all places, the corner? But it was a warm corner.

It was two days ago. Paleus had just returned home from his editor's. He was called for a meeting concerning his upcoming collection of poems. Upon entering his door he received a phone call. It was his sister-in-law. She lived in San Diego, and, recently, his wife had gone to stay a week with her. The result ended with bad news. Paleus bowed his head and sobbed with a furrowed brow. Somber was his cast.

Paleus and his wife, Maria, had been happily married for fifteen years. And Maria was his muse. They met in college. She occupied her time with photography. Suddenly Paleus heard voices in his head.

—It only takes one drop.

—It needs to linger several hours, at least, before consumption.

—It can't be traced. Trust me.

—Don't worry about the cash. Consider it a favor.

These voices drove him mad. The tone of the voice itself was creepy.

What this had to do with Paleus was yet to be revealed. However, it meant something to him.

The rest of the day Paleus moped and acted oddly. He went to his den with a bucket of paint, the same color as his den wall, and painted an area in the corner. The very same corner he sat in now. After the paint had dried it crackled some.

But what did the phone conversation consist of exactly?

Paleus's wife was found dead. An autopsy was yet to be performed, but the main cause of death, at least known cause of death, was heart failure.

But why was Paleus in such a hurry to paint a spot on the wall after receiving such tragic news? And why, after returning from her funeral, did

The Willies

he confine himself to his den and scratch the paint from the spot he had painted earlier? Awe, questions that deserve answers.

He removed the paint so that he could repaint the area. It crackled, and that seemed to bother Paleus. But he was in no hurry. Still, he sat in his dimly lit den—the corner—and scratched away at the crackled paint. Yet, enough light shone in to reveal what existed beneath the crackled layer of paint. It was a phone number.

So, in resolve to adapt his absent mind, he rubbed at the crackled paint upon the corner's wall. This seemed to isolate his guilt. The guilt of indulgence from murdering his beloved.

I'll Never Tell

“Put ’em in here. Yeah. It’s filthy enough,” said a cocky and arrogant security guard as he had his partner help him manhandle the prisoner into the cell. It took everything they had. He was gargantuan and was not willing; however, he was shackled heavily and surrendered to their stab.

“Yeah. Let the piece of s— rot,” said the other guard as he locked the cell. Together they walked off with an aristocratic strut. The prisoner’s shadow stayed etched upon the stone wall as the shadowy figure hanged itself. The cracking of his neck echoed throughout the prison’s corridor.

The killer was dead set, no pun intended, on capturing his frightened, defenseless victim. He was brutal, and vicious, and had already proven that he would stop at nothing. He had been in the house toying with his victim for at least an hour. He could’ve already had her. She was helpless against his wont. He would capture her, drag her, and purposely let her slip away while skulking her closely.

He was skilled. It was obvious that this was not his first kill; however, his means were shoddy.

It was in the small town of Dalton, IL. The population was so small, and there hadn’t been a true crime in decades so the mayor wouldn’t account for

law enforcement. The closest cop was two towns over—approximately twenty miles.

Already he had put a gash in her leg, which was swollen and infected looking due to his enormous rusty and dirty blade. He enjoyed every bit of watching her plead and squirm about helplessly—breathing in fear like a toxic vapor. This kind of thing got his rocks off while gratifying his depraved fetish. To him, it was all just one big game. To her, it was torment—a ghoulish nightmare. She made several attempts to escape the brutality, but he stayed on her closely and would never let her stray too far. He kept her within his boundaries.

He was a gargantuan, all right—a mean and ugly psychopathic killer. The pleasure he got out of this was equal to most people achieving a hierarchy of magnitude. He had her right in the crosshairs and could strike her at any time like a rattlesnake.

She clawed at him, kicked at him, and screamed. He eventually got tired of playing games though. Without a care in the world or a moment of regret, he did what he came to do. He grabbed her with one gigantic hand—an ironclad grip—and with the other, he stabbed his blade below her right ribcage with an upward thrust and *pervious* twist. He stared deep into her soul-ridden eyes and released her. When she collapsed she bled profusely. He stood over her as if to admire his kill.

“Dori,” said a soft, delicate voice. The maniac turned. Standing by an armoire was a little girl. She was in her pajamas and held a teddy bear tightly in her arms.

“Go, Jennifer. Leave,” whispered the dying victim as she took her last breath. The killer took two steps forward, in the little girl’s direction, as a car pulled into the driveway.

The little girl said softly, “I’ll never tell.” Just then, the killer ran out the back door and into the darkness.

10 Years Later

“Jennifer. Think hard. You must’ve seen his face,” said the doctor as Jennifer sat comfortably in his office.

“Dr. Foresite. I told you. It was dark and he had, like, a mask or something on his face,” replied Jennifer, very indecisive about detail.

She knew what the killer looked like, and could’ve easily given a description. She knew like it happened only yesterday. She often had flashbacks and could see that malevolent face clearly. However, she had made a promise and was traumatized by the experience. She didn’t like speaking about that day. The night, her parents came home to find her babysitter murdered would haunt her forever. Her way of coping with this traumatic memory was to simply keep her secret. She vowed to never tell.

Years have passed and the killer was never apprehended. The case went straight to the FBI. They came in and tore Dalton apart. The State Police had very little to do with the investigation.

There was only one witness that night. Jennifer stood quietly in the shadows and saw the torturous acts up close. That very night stripped Jennifer of her childhood. Thereafter, she would never be the same.

“Can I go? I have an exam tomorrow in my Biology class. Mr. Dobbs done said one more F and I’ll have to retake the class,” grumbled Jennifer.

“Yes. You can go,” replied a slightly aggravated Dr. Foresite. He was supposed to be helping Jennifer with her mental trauma but focused solely on conducting his own investigation. She was merely a lab rat in his sick and twisted obsession.

It was 2:01 PM and Jennifer was on her way home to begin studying when her cell phone rang. The caller ID read: *Mellissa*. She answered, “Hey, girl. What’s up?”

“Not much. Just thought I’d call to invite you to a sleepover tomorrow night at my house,” replied Mellissa.

“Sure. Yeah. I have no plans. Is Dana and Tina gonna stay too?”

“I haven’t asked yet. I thought I’d call you first. You know they will though. Those no-life-bitches never have anything else goin’ on.”

“Oh, wait. I’m s’posed ta hook up with Lance. He’s taking me skating and we planned on staying out past midnight.”

“Hey. No biggie. Just have him to drop you off afterwards. Oh, s—! I gotta go. I left my bath water running. See ya tomorrow. Kisses.” (*Click*).

After Jennifer placed her phone down in her console she turned on the radio. It was a news broadcast:

“Now let’s take a look back. Ten years ago a local resident by the name of Dori Donaldson was found murdered. Cause of death: *a single stab wound to her right side*. The perpetrator, still at large today, has appeared on several episodes of *Still at Large*. Us here at WKQ100 FM are urging anyone that has any information to please give us a call. The hotline is 1-555-202-1107. Trey Parker, and that’s *Looking Back*.”

To hear that sent chills up and down Jennifer’s spine. They were never able to get a sketch or profile image of the killjoy. Jennifer had seen his face, therefore, knew of his grotesque appearance. That day haunted her often, and being that she could be a big help bothered her even more. It was mainly a combination of two things: one, she made a promise and was terrified that he would come after her. And two, at the age she was now she feared that coming forward this late would send her to prison for an “obstruction of justice” charge. At any rate a strong, very strong, and dominating force kept her from confessing.

Later that night, she lay in bed reading her Biology book. She was studying chapters 15-20 and had barely made it through the 18th chapter when she dozed off to sleep. She had a dream that she was that little girl standing in her old house while watching her babysitter get viciously attacked. It was basically a flashback of the murder. She often did this, mostly at night while she slept, but, at times, she had the vision while in her classroom. Mr. Dobbs just always thought she was daydreaming. Only she was aware of the dark veil that separated her from actuality.

Morning came fast. Jennifer awoke to her mom entering the room and gathering up laundry. “Oh, shoot! My alarm didn’t go off. I’m late!”

“Oh, sweetie. I turned your alarm off. You were sound asleep and Dr. Foresite says you need plenty sleep.” “But, Mom! You know about my exam, and screw Dr. Foresite!” Jennifer scurried around the room in her bra and panties trying to find something to wear.

“But, sweetie. You wore those yesterday.”

“I know. I don’t have time for this, mother,” Jennifer spat as she grabbed her book bag and zoomed past her mother. She ran quickly out the door as she hopped in her car and headed straight to the college.

Mr. Dobbs paced back and forth, taking turns looking at his watch and clock, wondering whether or not Jennifer was going to show. Everyone else had already started the exam. Jennifer was already fifteen minutes late. “Five more minutes and I’m failing her,” said Mr. Dobbs under his breath. About that time Jennifer came, quietly, through the door as she headed for her, *always assigned*, seat. Mr. Dobbs locked eyes with her as she sat down. Carefully she tried to be unnoticed. An epic fail, to say the least.

You could cut the tension with a knife. She knew her goose was cooked; however, Mr. Dobbs grabbed an exam from off his desk, walked up the aisle, and stopped at Jennifer. He placed the exam on her desk and said without trying to be too disruptive, “You have forty-five minutes. Make them count.”

Jennifer focused hard on every answer. Beads of sweat formed on her forehead as her anxiety increased. She could hear the clock ticking and avoided looking up at it for she was afraid that it would read: TIMES UP.

Later, as she stood outside the classroom anticipating her test results, Lance snuck up on her surprisingly. “So, babe. We still on for tonight?”

“I dunno. It depends on whether or not I pass this exam. If I fail I’ll probably be pretty darn depressed.”

“Well, call me and let me know,” Lance said as he continued to walk past her on his way to his next class. About that time Mr. Dobbs stuck his head

out the door and calmly motioned for her to enter the classroom. Nervously, she entered.

“I like you, Jennifer. You have a great deal of potential. The problem is. Well, how can I put this?” The tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife. “You failed the exam.” And the bomb dropped. “You scored two points under the passing grade,” Mr. Dobbs explained as a look of utter disappointment changed the look of conviction on her face. She attempted to interrupt as Mr. Dobbs raised his voice to a haughty tone. “I am gonna ask you two questions, both of which pertain to ecology.” He paused. “You did read up on your ecology and complete the exercises, did you?”

As Mr. Dobbs was explaining to Jennifer a chance for her to redeem her grade an uncertain look came across her face. “Uh. Yeah. Sure. I did.”

He resumed. “Both questions are worth five points each. You get one right, you pass, but barely. You get both right, you raise your score just high enough to be placed on the dean’s list. You get both wrong and, well...” His look said it all as Jennifer nodded in agreement. “Are you ready?” Jennifer nodded once more. “Here we go. Question one: what is a species?”

“Um...okay...um...a species is a set of living beings...um...able to...um...cross among...um...hold on...them...selves...um...generating fertile offspring,” she replied as she thought out a logical answer.

“Correct,” Mr. Dobbs said with a short pause of suspense. “Question number two: what is a population?” he asked with a sparkle in his eye. He knew that Jennifer was very familiar with population.

She answered, “A population is a set of individuals of the same species found in a given place in a given time.”

“Miss Nelson, my dear. Congratulations on passing the exam.” He was pleased to announce that she’d gotten both answers correct. She gave Mr. Dobbs a huge hug and ran out the door. With her book bag thrown over her shoulder, she dug around until she found her cell phone. Immediately she called Lance. She was so proud of her achievement and had to share the good news. He was as equally happy for her.

Later that evening, Lance escorted her to the skating rink. All she did was brag about how she’d passed the exam. She was so full of herself and

gloated the whole time. Then, her cell phone rang; it was Mellissa. She had called to remind Jennifer about the sleepover. She already had Tina and Dana with her. She told Jennifer that she was missing out on all of the fun and that they were getting ready to explore the darkness. She wasn't sure what that meant and never bothered to ask, nor did Mellissa bother to explain.

The three girls had an open conference conversation on speakerphone.

Lance began to get upset. It was noticeable.

"Hold on, girls. I'll have to call you back," Jennifer said as she ended the call. She asked him, "What's the matter?"

He retorted, "You're always on that f—ing phone!" The two of them began to argue. Out of anger, she demanded that he take her to Mellissa's. He did but argued intensively throughout the trip.

As he pulled in front of Mellissa's house he said, "Don't let the door hit cha where the good lord split cha, baby!"

As she slammed the door she replied, "Asshole!"

The two often got into squabbles like that. It was definitely nothing new.

She knocked on the door, but nobody answered. After knocking several times, she went ahead and entered—for the more she knocked on the door, which was already slightly cracked, it began to inch open welcoming her to enter.

She noticed that the lights were off when she entered the house. Also, she noticed a flickering effect coming from the kitchen. She entered the kitchen to find Mellissa, Tina, and Dana sitting around a circular table holding hands with candles lit. "What are you guys doing?"

"Shhh, don't speak. You'll bruise the aura," answered Tina.

"Grab a seat and join. We need a fourth element," whispered Dana. Jennifer joined not knowing she was engaging in a séance. It wasn't but a minute into her joining the séance when the lights began to flick on and off while splashing luminous sparks with a frightening chill. The candlelight flickered. There were three lit and two had gone completely out as smoke from the two smoldering candles formed the shape of a female body. Objects began to levitate.

Suddenly, the light came back on with a damp, cold sensation. Jennifer stood near the switch. She had seen enough. "I am leaving," she said as she turned to experience a cold chill. She paused for a few seconds and, then, took off out the door. After she left the other three turned to look at each other as if they feared the worst. And, then, there was a loud echoing shrill. She scampered home.

Jennifer had quite a distance to walk. Her house was way past town and across a highway. She didn't live in a residential, suburban area like her friends. As she walked briskly past houses and straddling ditches a car drove slowly behind her. "Babe. C'mon, babe. I'm sorry. Get in the car," said a young man's voice. It was Lance. He drove up beside her talking to her through the passenger-side window while he tried to watch the road at the same time. The walk had to have gotten the best of her because she got in despite her stubborn ways. Lance always empowered her.

Lance and Jennifer made it uptown and decided to drive around awhile. Jennifer explained to Lance that her condition was worsening. He asked her what she meant and she told him about the night her babysitter was killed.

He spoke to her in a gentle, kind voice while trying to rationalize with her. She wanted to just go on home, but he talked her into going to a twenty-four-hour bar and grill called Smokin' Joe's Roadside Grill.

They entered the small establishment to find that business was dead. They headed straight for the dining section.

Lance ordered a cheeseburger, fries, and a large Coke. Jennifer ordered a small salad and lemonade. Afterward, she discussed with him the phenomenon that occurred earlier at Mellissa's house.

"Oh, that was just a setup. They were just playing a trick on you," said Lance. He tried to convince Jennifer by turning her paranormal experience into true logic, but she knew what she had seen. She was there and saw no trickery whatsoever. "All right. Finish your salad and I'll take you home," he said as he took a huge bite out of his cheeseburger followed by a huge gulp of his Coke.

Later on, as Jennifer lay in bed, she had another vision. This time it was unlike any other. Through her window came the killer—the same man that

killed her babysitter Dori. She remembered every line, every freckle, every whisker on his face—and those eyes. They were pure evil. The killer reached out to grab her as Jennifer reentered reality. He was gone. It was just a dream, but this one seemed so real. She jumped out of bed and quickly got dressed.

Quietly she snuck out of the house and entered her car. She slowly pulled out not turning her headlights on until she was facing the direction she was going.

She pulled up into the college driveway. She entered the building and went straight to the computer lab. She sat down at a computer and powered it up while waiting anxiously for it to boot. Once she was online, she did a search for Dori Donaldson and her killer. She discovered that the only lead suspect in the case, and who they were certain committed the crime, was a prisoner at LeBlanc Terrace prison. He later hanged himself. He was given life for another murder and committed suicide. They later used modern forensics to match a blood sample left at the scene. It matched. The information was to be kept confidential, however. She also found out something else she did not know. The address of the murder, Jennifer's childhood home, was the same as Mellissa's. Soon after the murder they moved. Their old house was torn down and another one was built in its place—Mellissa's. All this time she was visiting the location of Dori's murder and did not know. Then, she got to thinking: *the séance, the spirit that was pulled through*. OH S—! MELLISSA!!! She immediately ran back to her car and headed to Mellissa's.

As she pulled into Mellissa's driveway she noticed a shadowy movement and the flickering of candlelight. She hesitated, at first, but, then, she talked herself into getting out of her car. She entered the house, and, at first, noticed a drafty sensation. The house felt like one big industrial fan. She took off down the hallway that led to Mellissa's room when she felt a presence creep up from behind her. She turned to discover that it was Mellissa. She was relieved to see her.

Thinking she was in the clear, and that they could easily escape the supernatural dwellings, she gave Mellissa a great big hug and began to praise her. However, Mellissa wasn't quite herself. Slowly she began to morph into

a ghoulish being. Jennifer still held onto her unaware of the change. The ghoul started to repeat the words, “I’ll never tell. I’ll never tell.” In a creepy voice, it repeated, “I’ll never tell.”

Jennifer slowly lifted her head off the ghoul’s shoulder, which, up until now, was thought to be Mellissa. She was staggered to see what stood before her. Despite its ghoulish features, sideways grin, and decayed flesh the ghoul resembled a person she knew, and whom she dreamed about often. It was Dori Donaldson—angry and seeking revenge.

Jennifer persisted in walking backward as the ghoul came forward.

“Psst,” came a noise somewhere nearby. Jennifer slowly turned to find Mellissa crouched beside a huge grandfather clock. Jennifer joined her. “Tina and Dana left me. I been here all night.”

“Is that the thing we resurrected?”

“Oh, no. This was no resurrection. We pulled a pissed off spirit out of her realm. She wants to go back. I found that if you hide in dark corners and shadows she can’t see you. She absolutely has no clue. See. Look. She walked on by. She can’t even trace voices,” explained Mellissa as the ghoul kept walking while unaware of their existence. “I’ve been doing this all night. Amazing, isn’t it?” Mellissa paused. “I’m not for sure who she is or what realm she came from but the bitch is pissed.”

“I know who it is. It’s Dori, Dori Donaldson. Mellissa, your house was built on the exact location she was murdered” It was now Jennifer’s turn to explain. Mellissa was beyond speechless.

“I have an idea,” said Jennifer as she pulled a torn piece of cloth from her pocket. She explained, “Her killer hanged himself in prison. This is a piece of his shirt that I’ve held onto since that day. It’s his personal possession. With it, we can redo the séance. Bringing him back and recreate the scene. The FBI is already positive that he is the kill—”

Mellissa interrupted, “Jennifer, that’s crazy. What if it doesn’t work?”

“She just wants closure. Let’s give her closure,” responded Jennifer.

“And how do we get rid of them afterward? What if we end up with two pissed off spirits?” Mellissa started with the questions—skeptical of Jennifer’s idea.

Jennifer was stumped, and, then, with a twinkle in her eye, she said, “We lead him back to his old cell where he hung himself. Hey! It worked on *House of Evil*. Remember, Mellissa?—that is one of your favorite horror movies. C’mon! Let’s do this!”

Mellissa looked at her like she was out of her mind. “A movie, Jennifer?” asked Mellissa, shocked that her only idea derived from a movie. With all that being said Mellissa agreed to perform the ritual.

As they tiptoed within shadows Lance helped himself through Mellissa’s front door. He called out for Jennifer. He must’ve driven by and noticed her car in the driveway. As he entered the house Dori appeared and grabbed hold of him—tightly while disintegrating him with her lethal touch.

Jennifer turned just in time to witness the tragedy as she broke down and screamed in fury. Mellissa grabbed hold of her and helped her to the dining area. “C’mon. We must hurry,” said Mellissa.

Mellissa lighted the candles and told Jennifer to sit down and relax. She was certain that the séance would be strong enough with only two. Jennifer’s aura was strong. With the piece of shirt in the center of the table and three candles surrounding it in a triangular formation, they called to him while referring to him as: *the one to whom the possession belongs*.

They went through the complete process but nothing happened. They attempted it once more with a higher anxiety level but Jennifer noticed, with peripheral vision, Dori, in all her ghoulishness, entering the room. She repeated, “I’ll never tell. I’ll never tell.” She had both arms extended and headed straight for Jennifer. Suddenly, the candles went out all by themselves.

Mellissa and Jennifer were safe in the dark. Then, the candles relit.

Behind Dori emerged another ghoul. It was, indeed, the killer. He stood tall and husky and wore the devil’s mask—a metaphorical mask. Jennifer knew that face, albeit the sadistic beast was decayed and had a gray complexion she saw through his ghoulish disguise and recognized his true identity.

The scene began to alter. Walls fell down and new walls rebuilt themselves. Furniture changed and rearranged. Everything became a complete transformation. Mellissa stood confusedly; however, Jennifer was familiar

with the change. It was her old house and Dori and the killer were no longer ghoulish; they were their normal selves. The entire moment was a reincarnation of that fatal night.

Mellissa and Jennifer stood out in the open and watched; however, they were unable to be noticed. Even though they appeared to be there they were not in the same realm. It was just an optical illusion.

The killer stabbed Dori like before. Everything happened the same way. Jennifer and Mellissa screamed, and, tried to enter the scene, but were stopped by an invisible wall. They wanted to help Dori but couldn't. However, one little girl could. She stood and watched the attack. The little girl was Jennifer as a child just like the murder that occurred ten years ago.

Albeit Dori and the killer were unaware of their existence little Jennifer was aware. They yelled at her and told her to dial 911 and give a description of the crime and the address. She was eight years old and had already learned her address and such.

The scene changed, which one small change in the past would alter the present in dramatic forms. Little Jennifer distracted the killer by dialing the number. The killer heard her scamper away and went, full force, after her. Then, her little voice screamed out while echoing throughout the masses.

Mellissa regained consciousness to the sound of police and ambulance sirens fading. She looked around and noticed everything was normal. She felt happy and relieved until she remembered about Jennifer, as a little girl, screaming. That was the last thing she remembered before losing consciousness. Where was Jennifer now? She searched high and low but Jennifer was nowhere in sight.

She began to panic. She also remembered Lance's ashen remains. Something just didn't seem quite right. She had an experience, or sensation, similar to a Twilight Zone episode. Then, she heard a car horn. It wasn't just any car horn. It was Lance's custom *iooga* car horn. Mellissa quickly opened the door to find Lance and Jennifer sitting happily in the driveway. "Come on, Mellissa. Finals are in an hour. We haven't got much time."

Mellissa headed out to the car with no questions asked. Then, a female silhouette slowly walked by the window as they pulled out of the driveway. And a somber glow was seen through the glass.

Till Death

I wish I was someone
That didn't know my name.
I'd live a different life
And ne'er be the same.

“I, Michelle Keats, take you, Jimmy Carmon, to be my lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, from this day forward, until death do us part.”

The candles were lit and the mood was set. Jimmy Carmon worked hard at getting everything perfect. A huge surprise this would be for his beloved wife Michelle. It was their tenth wedding anniversary. He had just finished creating a playlist on his laptop that was connected to his stereo system:—ten great power ballads from the eighties. Just then, she walked through the door. Her elegance shined. She was beautiful with her blonde hair and eyes of blue. She came through the door suspecting something, of course, but not to this degree.

Jimmy spoke softly to her. He told her how lovely she looked. Her smile was radiant as her glossy lips sparkled near the candlelight. He expressed

how aroused he was. She agreed that she was feeling it too. Both bodies collided with passionate intensity. Together, body to body, heart to heart, their sweaty bodies glistened by the fire as the two made love. She moaned with pleasure as he grunted with pure delight.

Morning came. Jimmy looked to his right and noticed that Michelle was not there. However, an imprint was left that took the perfect shape of her body. Jimmy rubbed his hand over the surface. It was still warm. After lying in bed for a few seconds, wondering where she could be, he sat on the side of the bed and stood up wrapping the sheet around his nude lower half as he dragged it off the bed. He went down the stairs and picked up the phone. He dialed her cell. After three rings she answered, "Hello?"

"Where are you?"

"I'm on my way to the market. I was gonna surprise you with breakfast in bed."

"Now I feel really bad. I was just worried about you. It's not every morning you just up and leave like that."

"I just thought I'd return the favor, babe. You know? Last night? I went three times. Unbelievable."

"Awe, yes. So you were pleased?"

"Very much so." The two continued with their erotic conversation when, suddenly, the doorbell chimed. "I gotta go, babe. Someone's at the door."

"Okay, love ya. I'll be home soon, tiger" she replied with a feline's grrr.
(Click)

Jimmy went to the door, and, as he slowly approached it, he noticed that it was a male figure. In his hand, he held a bouquet of wildflowers. His face was obstructed by a huge letterbox that fastened to the house. Jimmy held tightly to his sheet that was still wrapped around him as he cracked open the door.

He noticed right away who it was. It was Michael (Michelle's identical twin brother from up north). Jimmy didn't hesitate. Immediately he swung open the door to greet him. Due to the over exhilaration of Michael's surprise visit, Jimmy let go of the sheet. "Well. Hello to you too, cowboy," joked Michael. Jimmy's face turned beet red as he rewrapped the sheet and scurried up the stairs to get dressed.

As Michael waited for Jimmy he walked through the house glancing at family portraits while pilfering through their stuff. He noticed a locket that had an old photo of his and Michelle's mother in it. Their mother left that locket in her will to be given to Michelle. That's all Michelle had to remember her by.

Michelle and her mother never saw eye to eye. Michael, however, was left a small fortune. He was given access to her entire savings:—to the tune of two-point-five million dollars. It bothered Michelle, but it didn't ruin the relationship she had with her brother. They still remained close.

Michelle was married to a great man, Jimmy, who inherited his father's estate. In other words, she married into money so not inheriting her mother's loot wasn't too upsetting.

Instead of placing the locket back where he had found it, he slipped it into his pocket. He also found an invoice for a specially tailored dress. There was a phone number jotted down beside it so he copied it onto a piece of napkin. About that time Jimmy walked up from behind him.

"So what brought you here this time of year, Mike?"

"I came down to pay my respects."

"You usually come to visit your mom's grave on her birthday. That's a month away."

"I decided to visit a little early this year."

"How long ya plan on stayin'?"

"I gotta be headin' back. Just thought I'd swing by to see sis." Michael looked around. "Where is she, anyway?"

About that time Michelle came stumbling through the door with two sacks filled with groceries. Jimmy quickly pushed Michael into a huge walk-in closet. He intended to surprise Michelle. Michael was a quick thinker so he caught onto Jimmy's intent to surprise Michelle. He went willingly while asking no questions.

"Jimmy, darlin'. There's a Jeep parked in the driveway. Who does it belong to?"

"I'm not for sure. Can you come here, sweetie? I've got something to show you."

Michelle walked into the room with a look of curiosity on her face. Jimmy stood leaning up against the wall by the closet. He pecked on the wall three times while cueing Michael. Just then, Michael came out of the closet. “Surprise,” he said as he waved his hands in the air. In his hand, he still held the bouquet. “This is for you, sis.” Michael handed her the flowers.

“Oh, my God! Michael! We were just going to call you!” exclaimed Michelle as she looked at Jimmy while gradually slowing the speed of her voice. Jimmy stood behind Michael signaling for her to stop talking by waving his hands frantically in motion. He had not mentioned what Michelle was about to say and had other plans about telling him the big secret. “Call me? For what reason?” Michael was now curious.

“Jimmy and I agreed to renew our wedding vows. The date is already set,” answered Michelle as she hesitated at first, and looked to Jimmy for his okay to spill the beans.

“Great! I’m happy for you. Do it. That’s great,” replied Michael in an overly zealous tone.

He loved his sister dearly and thought a lot of Jimmy, as well. Michael and Michelle were more like best friends rather than brother and sister. Jimmy and Michael had a strong bond, as well. The three of them were all very close. Michael basically treated Jimmy as his own brother.

“You were gonna invite me, right?” asked Michael in a voice of uncertainty.

“Of course, silly. That’s why we were gonna call you,” replied Michelle. It was obvious that not being notified was Michael’s main concern.

As the two stood close to each other the resemblance was uncanny. They were indeed identical twins—their height, their weight, their bone structure—every featured match perfectly.

Their vow renewal was planned to take place, in one month, on the birthday of Michael and Michelle’s mother. She explained to her brother that she was putting off contacting him because he usually didn’t come down until then, anyway. Michael coming down this early was a surprise in itself.

They managed to talk Michael into spending the night. He agreed. He figured that after a good night’s rest, he could head out first thing in the

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morning and make it home by noon. He assured Michelle and Jimmy that he would definitely make it down for the wedding, but he had to be getting home. There was no way he could stay down for a month. He had things to be tending to that couldn't be put off.

Later that night, as Jimmy and Michelle had wild, tantric sex their bedroom door was left slightly cracked open. Michael had woken up to satisfy a late night hunger. He walked down the hall to go downstairs when he heard the sounds of orgasmic joy. He stopped at Jimmy and Michelle's bedroom and took a peek. Michelle sat on top, straddling Jimmy, riding him, while rocking back and forth. Michael licked his lips as he watched the show. As he stood and watched he masturbated. When he was done he went downstairs to make a sandwich.

While he was downstairs he heard a vibrating noise. He followed the sound to the laundry room and saw a pair of Jimmy's blue jeans stretched across the washer. It was Jimmy's cell phone. Michael answered it. A voice on the other end said, "It's going down tomorrow. I'll call your wife at home and have her go down to the *Gowns for All Occasions* shop." (*Click*). Michael had a confused look on his face.

The next morning Michelle awoke to find that her brother had left a note that read:

Sis,

I had a great time. As always your house is beautiful. Thanks for allowing me to stay the night. Don't worry, I will definitely make your vow renewal. Until then, God bless and take care.

Love ya,
Michael

After she read the note she headed straight for the shower. While in the shower a blurred silhouette, slightly out of contrast, seen through their sliding glass door on the shower, slowly came forward. The door quickly slid

open and it was Jimmy. He had no clothes on as he stepped into the shower with Michelle. The two began to make love all over again.

Meanwhile, a man in a long black coat walked into the *Gowns for All Occasions* shop. The man had a getup that looked unnatural, but no one seemed to care. He told the guy working the register that he needed to use the phone because his car broke down and he needed to call someone for help.

As Michelle stepped out of the shower the phone rang. She yelled at Jimmy to answer it as she slipped on her bathrobe. The phone still continued to ring. Finally, she said, “Forget it!” and trotted downstairs to answer the phone. The caller ID read: *Wedding_Gown*. That’s the way she had it programmed into her phone. A man on the other end with a raspy voice told her that her dress was ready. Overly excited she hung up the phone and scurried to get dressed. Jimmy had fallen back to sleep so she tried to be quiet. She wanted to surprise him with the new dress.

When she arrived at the shop she went inside and the guy working the register told her that it would be another day, possibly two. He explained that the dress had to be put on backorder. Then, she explained to him that someone had called her from that line and told her that she could come and get her dress—that it was ready. He looked at her like she was crazy. He told her that she was sadly mistaken.

She left the store confused. As she seated herself comfortably in her car and began to pull away her eyes were focused primarily on this shady-looking character across the road who pointed in her direction while talking to a female acquaintance. An arm with a gun in hand reached up from the back seat and told her to keep driving—not to make any sudden movements or else he’d pull the trigger.

A Week Later

Jimmy sat by a crackling hearth while drinking straight bourbon from the bottle. It was late and the lights were dim. In front of him was a cascade of photos. He barely wept with thin drops of tears. It looked as if he was

holding back. However, he was the only person in the house. In front of him was a newspaper clipping with a headline that read: *Local Woman and Abductor Found Burnt Alive*. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. It was a gentle knock at first but gradually became louder.

“Who is it?” Jimmy slurred as he wobbled his way toward the door. “Dammit! Who the f—k is it?” This time he shouted and cursed.

People had been playing pranks on him since the tragedy and he was getting sick of it. Still, nobody answered. The person just persisted in knocking. As Jimmy approached the door he grabbed the doorknob tightly and swung it open. In the doorway there stood the silhouette of a female. Her hair was frazzled.

Jimmy’s vision was disoriented. He saw just one big blurry shadow. Suddenly, she stepped forward into the dim light. It was Michelle. She appeared badly beaten and bruised, but it was definitely her. Jimmy looked as if he had seen a ghost. His chin dropped as he weaved from side to side. He passed out while hitting the floor with a massive impact. Michelle held a crowbar as if she intended to use it as a weapon. When Jimmy passed out, however, she threw it aside.

Jimmy languidly opened his eyes. He was weak and in a lethargic state. His eyes were swollen and glossed over—burning. He attempted to move in discomfort but found himself restrained. He looked around perplexedly.

He realized his location. It was his basement.

He was strapped to his working table with bungee straps and Duct tape. He, then, noticed Michelle pacing back and forth balefully. He spoke to her, but she didn’t say a word.

Still, nonetheless, she looked rough—rode hard and put away wet.

Her sole intent, at this time, was to play with his mind—to toy with him. And she was doing just that.

She held something red. It was a five-gallon gas can. She sparked a lighter, continuously, with her other hand. The smell of the flint wheel grinding the tiny alloy cylinder filled the room. It was a Zippo lighter.

She was driven, for some reason, to slowly torture him. But why?

“What’s wrong, baby? What did I do?” cried Jimmy.

“I’ll tell you what you did,” said Michelle.

Here’s the problem and where things become complicated. Jimmy stared at Michelle and her lips did not move. Also, her voice came from the opposite direction. Jimmy never knew Michelle to be a ventriloquist. As Jimmy turned toward the direction of the voice Michelle stepped out of a darkened corner. It was the real Michelle. Jimmy was confused. He looked at Michelle and, then, he looked at the imposter. He couldn’t figure it out so Michelle explained:

“It all started when Michael came over for his *little* visit.” She strongly emphasized little. “There was a reason he came down unexpectedly. I had known about your little plot to kill me for quite some time, lover. I told my concerns to Michael. I reached out to him and I guess you could say he came to my rescue,” she explained as the imposter tore off a wig to show his true identity, which was Michael. She continued, “The vow renewal thing. That was just a cover-up wasn’t it?” Michelle paused. “Anyway, I received a strange phone call. Some guy telling me that my dress was done. I bought it.

“I got there and the guy told me that it had been put on backorder. He was the only one in the store and he had an Italian accent. The guy on the phone that I talked to had a deep, raspy voice. I thought I was had. I figured you got me. This is it. The big setup. Thanks to my brother your little plan backfired. You see, I got in my car and some maniac with a gun told me to keep driving. It was my brother.

“I caught a glimpse of the real killers.

“I know more than you think.

“They were professionals and were paid in advance for their hit. Ten mill. That’s a lot of money to be throwing away. Don’t cha think, lover?” Once more, she paused.

It was Jimmy’s turn to speak. “But it was in the newspaper that you were found dead!” he exclaimed.

“Ha! Your hitman and perty lil’ accomplice followed us. We swerved causing them to hit a tree and knock them unconscious. This was vital to our plan. I pulled the bitch’s teeth out one by one and we set them both on

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fire. I pulled a couple of my teeth out and placed them near the scene. Pretty clever, uh?” she explained. And she wasn’t lying. She grinned exposing her two missing teeth.

Jimmy could not believe what he was hearing. “And the ten million dollars?”

“Oh. It’s put up in a safe place. I figured you owed me that much. Besides, it’ll be plenty enough money to get implants for my missing teeth,” she replied. Michelle motioned to Michael as he walked over and started dousing Jimmy in gasoline.

“But they’ll find you. They always suspect spouse before anybody else,” Jimmy shouted as he avoided getting gasoline in his mouth.

“Oh? But, sweetie, I’m already dead. Remember?” she responded as she shrugged her right shoulder, turned, and walked away. Michael followed her as the whole house went up in flames.

A Year Later

As the sun seared down on a tropical beach resort in Mexico Michelle lay comfortably as her tanned, sweaty body glistened in the sun. She sipped on her daiquiri as Michael came around the corner with a margarita in hand. “Damn, sis!!! Your tan is golden,” he complimented.

“I know. It should be a sin to look this damn good.”

The Cauldron

Now introducing, from the Margaret Thatcher collection, the only cookware you'll ever need. The compact, mini stovetop cauldron is great for boiling water and cooking stews. This product is for a limited time only, so act quickly. For the low price of \$19.95, order yours today. Dial 1-555-303-3310 and give your product code when prompted. The product code can be found in ads included in Daily Living magazines. Call now and receive your free kettle spout attachment kit. This offer expires soon.



September 11, 2001

John R. Mathers

To whom it may concern,

A butterfly gracefully fluttered away that Monday morning. I was sitting alone while elaborating on my thoughts. I recall the sunrise—a painted orange with a bright, red hue. I was trying to decide on a gift for my wife.

The day after was her birthday and I had already wasted too much time. I should've bought her a gift already, but, as always, I procrastinated.

Linda has always been into simple gifts. That's what made it so hard to buy for her. It always seems that bigger gifts are easier to buy. They're generally more expensive, however, easier to choose.

Anyhow, I can still recall admiring the picturesque horizon of the aloof sky. I was sitting in a white lawn chair near my garden when I reached down beside me to ruffle the weeds and wild stalks through my fingers. That is when I discovered a torn piece of, rain-absorbed, paper. It was dainty for it had dried, and there is no telling how long it had been subject to nature's abuse. I brought it upward to examine it. It was a page out of a magazine. I read the text aloud, "The Margaret Thatcher collection." The more I read I realized that it was an advertisement for a stovetop cauldron. The pitch was: *A trusted name in household supplies. The only kettle you'll ever need. Made from the finest grade of cast iron elements.*

Instantly the juices started flowing. I grabbed my cell phone and dialed the number. A lady answered the phone with a professional demeanor and pleasantly took my order. She did no suggestive selling, whatsoever. That was the quickest phone conversation with a salesperson I'd ever had, I thought.

I charged the bill to my credit card and requested overnight shipping and handling. I was proud so I basically gave myself a pat on the back. My worries were over. My wife's gift was in the mail and would only take a day to arrive.

The next morning I woke up around eight o'clock so that I could check the mail. I wanted to have Linda's gift wrapped and ready for when she, too, woke up. I was eager to surprise my beautiful wife. I got dressed and left to go check the mail.

I arrived at the post office and opened my box. There, in the slot, sat a notification card. I went to enter the office but the door was locked. I looked through the glass and noticed a lady putting away and sorting through the mail. She let me in. I entered and exchanged the yellow card for

my package. It was a hefty box—approximately ten pounds, or no lesser than.

I made it home with my package and sat in the driveway, just for a few seconds. I was debating on whether or not I should gift wrap it for her or just give it to her, as is. I figured that gift wrapping would be best.

I entered my house and immediately searched through the closet where we stored gift-wrapping accessories. All I could find was Christmas wrapping paper—Frosty bearing gifts. “Oh, well.” I said, “It’ll have to do.”

I took the kettle from its original packaging, while still leaving it in its box, and wrapped it the best I could. I’ve never been too good at wrapping presents.

I couldn’t wait much longer. I put on a pot of coffee. The smell of freshly brewed Columbian coffee beans always woke up my Linda. This was a well known fact. And it worked. Within five minutes Linda came trotting down the stairs. I met her at the bottom of the stairwell. I greeted her by saying, “Good morning, my beautiful queen.” She laughed for she was amused at my whimsical demeanor.

“What got into you this morning?”

“Just thought I’d surprise you.”

“Surprise me, huh?”

“Yeah. Happy Birthday.”

“You remembered.”

“Of course. Why wouldn’t I?”

“I don’t know. It’s just genetic for men.”

“Well, not today. Not this one.”

She entered the dining room and I told her to wait. This was my attempt to distract her as I prepared to give her the gift. I went and fixed her a cup of coffee and brought it to her. I went back and grabbed the gift and brought it to her, as well. The look on her face was priceless. I’ll never forget the cute expression she made with her rosy complexion and small fingertip-sized dimples. I guess you could say I did what I intended to do. I surprised her.

She took a sip of her coffee and gingerly set her cup down. She grabbed a chair, sat down, and opened my poorly wrapped gift. She was shocked when

she read aloud, “The Margaret Thatcher collection.” Better yet, she shrieked, “A kettle.”

“Not just any kettle. A cauldron. See. It says so on the box.”

She brought it out of the box while admiring it. “I’m gonna boil water for tea. Will you stay for some?”

“No. I have to be going into town. There’s a few things I need to pick up. I’ll have some when I return. I won’t be long,” I said as I kissed her on the cheek. Then, I left. That would be the last time I would ever see her alive. My, dear, sweet Linda.

My sole intent for going into town was to pick up some wine. It took longer than I figured it would. I wound up going to three different liquor stores before I found her favorite blueberry-flavored wine. I estimated thirty minutes, but I ended up staying gone for well over an hour. The wine was definitely a necessity for the events to come.

I pulled into the driveway with a huge smile on my face. I was going to make this a day she’d never forget.

I entered my house, with liquor in hand, and called for her. She did not reply. I called for her again as I hung the keys up on the key hook by the door. Still, she did not respond. I questioned the matter aloud, “Where could that woman be?” I briskly walked through the living room as I entered the dining room. She sat motionless with her head on the table. She appeared well rested. At first, I figured she was just exhausted from me waking her so early in the morning. I looked around the corner, into the kitchen, and I saw, on the stove, Margaret Thatcher’s stovetop cauldron with the kettle spout attachment sitting on the burner.

The burner was off, thank God. I also noticed a half empty cup of tea sitting beside her head as she sat hunched over.

I quietly set the wine down, that which I held in my left hand, and reached out with my right arm giving her a gentle nudge to arouse her. That is when I realized the worst. She had fallen out of her chair and nailed the floor. She lay, sprawled out and lifeless, unresponsive to my state of existence. I panicked so I immediately dialed 911. Within fifteen minutes the paramedics arrived.

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Soon after, I was given the bad news. My beloved Linda was pronounced dead at the scene. I cried abundantly. My eyes burned and my head ached something awful. I remember thinking as I questioned God, “How could this be?” Of course, you never receive an answer. It was just a martyr of fate, I suppose.

At that point, I wasn’t sure what killed her. Was it a natural death? We didn’t have enemies. This all happened way too fast and made no sense at all. How could this be? An ironic death is for one to die on their day of birth. She did just that.

Later, that same week, I attended her funeral. Pain is just a word, but what I felt goes way beyond. In other words, words could not express my anchored emotions.

I accepted the fact that, from thereon, I was on my own. It was hard. But what choice does one have when faced with such decisions? That day, I walked the bitter cold path of mourning.

A pianist was hired to play her favorite song, which was *The Rose* by *Bette Midler*. On a positive note, it was a beautiful funeral. I am sure that she would have been pleased.

Later that day, I lay down to ease my weary mind. I was restless and, as a result, could not rest—as if that doesn’t make enough sense.

Keep in mind, as I compose this tale, it’s mostly a torrent of my emotions.

Also, keep in mind, if and when this story gets published or made public by any other means it was written in verbatim without any editorial input whatsoever. Also, no revision was utilized—a rough draft at best.

I came down the stairs to boil some water. I used Mary Thatcher’s cauldron. I reminisced as I filled it with water. I placed it on the burner and attempted to turn it on but the flame would not ignite. I smelled no gas whatsoever. I thought aloud, “This is odd.” Then, I heard a knock on the door. I answered the door only to be greeted by the sheriff and his deputy with a few other hounds.

The sheriff introduced himself. I knew who he was, however, introduction is usually protocol for investigation. I didn't question my innocence. I allowed them to enter unconcerned about whether or not they had a warrant. I had nothing to hide. For this, I was certain. As the sheriff and his team of highly unskilled investigators tore my house apart I sat down in my dining room with the deputy as we engaged in conversation. Actually, it was more like an interrogation. During this time he explained to me that a lethal poison identified as *Solericmethanide-20* was found in Linda's bloodstream. I was speechless. How could that be? It was, then, I realized: *this did not look good on my behalf*. However, they found nothing in my home. Therefore, I was not placed under arrest. Still, I remained a lead suspect.

After they left I made several more attempts at trying to fix my stove but had no luck. I even called a repairman and he said that my igniters were corroded. He made the statement, "You're stove is a fairly new model. Man, I'd never seen nothin' like it before."

He shot me a price. It wasn't too steep. A hundred and fifty bucks was all. I accepted, but he told me how he had to order the igniters. He also said, just before he left, that they could take up to a week to arrive.

The rest of that week I survived on fast food and microwaveable TV dinners. Chicken and corn as well as burgers and fries never tasted so good. I gained ten solid pounds that week.

Then, Monday rolled around. Once again I was invaded by the hounds. My entire house was infested with the little blue men as well as local media. They arrested me, this time, on grounds of suspicion. Linda, my dear, sweet Linda's death was officially ruled as a homicide and I was the accused.

This time, nonetheless, I was taken in for questioning. However, I'd not yet made it to the police station. While I was being escorted a news bulletin came across the radio in the squad car. In a word, the broadcaster said, "Several deaths have occurred due to a new product. The product in question has just recently been placed on recall. A poison identified as *Solericmethanide-20* has been traced within the paint of the product and linked to the deaths. The product entailed: *Margaret Thatcher's mini stovetop cauldron*."

The Willies

On a positive note, I've been cleared of all charges. But I am condemned in the worst way possible. The guilt of giving that cauldron to my wife as a birthday gift will last forever. Perhaps I did kill Linda—unaware and with no intent. That's a hard pill to swallow.

P.S. The following reprimand will now serve as my last will and testament. Living is hell for the damnation I have brought upon my own subsistence is deliverance. Therefore, I shall fully serve Lucifer and grant him my begotten soul. However, by the time this document, as it may, is found I would have joined my Linda. My dear, sweet Linda.

House of Fears

It wasn't your average house. It was designed as if the wealthiest man on earth resided there. However, that wasn't the case. In the front room, just through the twelve-by-thirty-two inch foyer, hung a crystal chandelier—and it was a bute. The house was two stories, but capacious and luxurious.

Only it was more of a mansion.

It had a library that hemorrhaged literature, a den, a Pinewood room for meetings and things of the sort, an office, and a built in theatre. Well, this wasn't a house at all. In the backyard, there was a pool, a cottage house, and a fully functional game room. The second story consisted mainly of bedrooms—many bedrooms.

Each bedroom had its own lavatory. However, in the front yard, there stood, proudly, a sign that read:

PROPERTY OF SAN FERNANDO PHOBIA CENTER
HAVE AN IDENTIFIABLE FEAR CALL . . .

The phone number was obstructed by shrubbery from a nearby bush.

In exception to the beautiful construction and appeasing design, there was a downside. The house stood as a welcome mat for vandals. Also, there was an eerie sensation within its chambers—that of an unwelcomed guest.

Every room was either hardwood or tiled. There was a woven tapestry design area rug in the front room as well as a gigantic marbled fireplace. The mantle was pure ivory. But over the mantle, centered perfectly with equal dimensions on all four sides, was a painting. It was the painting of a man—a disturbing-looking fella. And beneath the painting was a golden tag with the name *Merlin Watts Lurin*, and FOUNDER OF THE SAN FERNANDO PHOBIA CENTER written just beneath that. His painted glossy eyes looked like the opened chamber doors to an endless void.

Lance Hart was a shy, but handsome, young man. His main flaw was critical for his age. No older than twenty-one Lance had a fear of kissing. It had to do with the thought of someone else's germs upon his lips. At "the center" they labeled his fear *philemaphobia*. The thought of never kissing a member of the opposite sex or caving to its desire is saddening in its own way. However, he acted as if it didn't bother him—as if he didn't yearn for the passion from another's lips.

Marie Gholson had a more common disorder. She was more reclusive than the others. As the saying goes: *We're not laughing at you. We're laughing with you.* Marie didn't feel that way. She had a fear of being laughed at, also known as *gelotophobia*. Her disorder was so overpowering that she couldn't even be in a room filled with jokes without thinking she was being ridiculed and scoffed at. So out-of-control she couldn't even bring herself to watch a comedy or sitcom. *Could you imagine?*

The most serious of the dysfunctional ailments existed within the mind of Vinnie Troph. He feared, of all things, religion. Crosses, bibles, men dressed in black with white collars, and anything else you could possibly think of, he feared. However, his fear led to a tightening of the chest, palpitations, and wheezing lungs. Without quick attention, he could die. At that, he has been near death on many occasions. And he didn't take to jokes too lightly. If he was drinking water and you told him it was holy you better be prepared to call 911. His fear is known as *hagiophobia*.

And, then, there's pretty, little Chloe Valentine—about the same age as Lance. She suffered, nervously, from the fear of falling in love called *philophobia*, which is similar to Lance's fear but more mental than physical.

She enjoyed love play and sex; she would just freak out, causing physical harm to herself, if she was told the three words: *I love you*.

Ever since she was admitted to the center she had a strong sexual desire for Lance. Once she realized his fear she backed off while fighting her urges with respect to his fear. You could make out with Chloe all night. Just avoid telling her you love her.

All four of these victims of fear were tethered together by hope and trust.

They confided in one another and protected each other. And they had three things in common. Firstly, they suffered from illusions and mistruths caused by fear. Secondly, they were all inpatients at the San Fernando Phobia Center. Thirdly, they were overseen by the same counselor:—Mrs. Chamberson. She, herself, had some confessing to do. For every action, there is a reaction—and hers led her to a career at the phobia center.

To rid her group of their fears she had a series of treatments she experimented with—none of which were found to be successful. The next step was to visit the Fear House, as the kids labeled it, or House of Fears. Anyway, she was certain a getaway filled with props pertaining to their fears and group sessions would do the trick.

She hoped, at least.

In the back of the bus sat Marie Gholson—timid looking. She was a very docile thing. She only related to one member of her group, which was Vinnie Troph. The rest of them laughed and joked too much. She did not like that. Vinnie took everything to the pilot. He was a very serious person. You could definitely label him as a *zero-personality* being.

“Okay, guys. It’s just around the corner,” said Mrs. Chamberson. “Does everyone have their bags?” she asked, however, a tad bit too late. She was good at that. She would wait until the task was near complete and time was about up before she asked any questions. A day late and a dollar short some would say.

“And we’re here,” said the bus driver. His name was Ernie. He was a short, round, burly guy with a big fat nose, and he always sucked on an unlit cigar.

“Bout time,” said Lance. Lance always tried to avoid Chloe. She ogled at him quite often and made him feel very uncomfortable.

“What a hottie,” said Chloe as she did often.

“All right, guys. Grab your things and head on in,” said Mrs. Chamberson. “Lance. Here’s the key. Would you care to unlock the door?” Lance slowly passed as Mrs. Chamberson handed him the key.

Each member of the group appeared normal. In fact, they were. Their minds were just corroded with the falseness of things, which was fear. They reacted strangely to things we take for granted every day.

Lance unlocked and opened the door as he led the group into the immaculate manor.

“Wow. Whoa,” they all sighed and gasped, with exuberance, in unison.

Vinnie stopped and began to shake. In the doorway, there was a crack in the wood. It was in the perfect formation of a cross. This exemplified the intensity of his awful fear of all that’s holy. Mrs. Chamberson noticed his response and reacted immediately. She walked up behind him, grabbed him gently, and turned him away while, at the same time, helping him through the door. On her way out she took a sticker out of her bag—(yellow with a smiling daisy)—and used it to cover the crack. “That’ll take care of that,” she said with confidence.

As it got late Chloe approached Lance. And he shunned her big time.

“You know, Lance. Just because I’m afraid to love doesn’t mean I don’t have needs.”

“Well, I can’t suit your needs. I don’t want your *nasty* germs. Please, just get away.”

“Grrrr,” Chloe growled, but in a sexy way.

“Did you just growl at me?”

“I have a new rule. One I just remembered. I don’t talk to assholes, especially the kind that’s inconsiderate of one’s feelings.” Chloe was upset.

“So you do feel?” Lance asked with a crooked smirk.

“What’s that s’posed ta mean?”

“Ahhh, never mind.” By now Lance gave up. He concluded that Chloe was bullheaded, and talking to her was like talking to a brick wall.

Suddenly Mrs. Chamberson came around the corner. “What are you two doing?”

“Nothin’ worth braggin’ about?” quickly replied Lance.

“I second that,” Chloe added.

“All right, you two. It’s bedtime,” said Mrs. Chamberson in a motherly fashion.

Lance and Chloe argued like an old married couple. A shame; their fears kept them apart.

Soon after Mrs. Chamberson told them what time it was they didn’t hesitate parting ways. But Lance knew that tomorrow would be another day.

“What a hottie,” Chloe said quietly. She stood still as Lance walked off—her eyes dead set on his ass.

The rooster crowed.

A shadow would intercept Vinny’s every corner. “Not the delusions again,” he grumbled. Three times was acceptable, but four times had him scared. “What do you want?” he screamed with fists clenched tightly. Then, he woke up. He hasn’t had a night terror since he was a child. That’s what his fears stemmed from—night terrors. He would dream repeatedly that he was being stalked by a demonic priest. His dreams also ended the same way—his own crucifixion. Anyway, his sheets were saturated. At first, he thought it was sweat, but it turned out to be urine. He put on his house slippers and slowly inched his way to his restroom.

Marie Gholson awoke with a reverb of laughter.

Cackles filled the room.

Instantly her anxiety rose. Luckily, for her, there was a knock on her door. It was Mrs. Chamberson. She was going around and waking everyone. She was hoping to assemble the group before breakfast. She ran in and found Marie a shade away from blue.

She carried her emergency bag with her just as most women do their purses. In it, she carried everyone’s medication. She gave Marie an instant breathing treatment—a discus with medication in it—an expectorant, to be

exact. Shortly after, Marie started to calm down and feel better. Vinnie walked in. “Oh, no...Marie...you okay?”

“She’s fine, Vinnie,” replied Mrs. Chamberson as she cradled Marie in her arms, and rocked back and forth while trying to soothe her.

Mrs. Chamberson helped Marie up and out the door. She told Vinnie to round up the rest and tell them that there was going to be a meeting in the Pinewood room. He did as he was told.

Death has many cultures. Fear has more. Needless to say, we fear not death but life. That is the belief of many.

Mrs. Chamberson opened up the meeting with a brief lecture while donning an ensemble of pure black. She discussed Merlin Watts Lurin’s theory of how fear relates to the senses.

Merlin Watts Lurin believed that fear was a sense—a seventh sense.

To this day the books do not agree. Merlin Watts Lurin conducted his research in 1945. Before he could finish, however, he died. His work was left incomplete. Rumor has it that his ghost—(a restless spirit)—haunts the corridors of every local library in San Fernando while trying to complete his studies. But Mrs. Chamberson believed differently. She felt his presence there instead. She picked off every group member one by one. She dug deep into their mind while asking questions that needed answered most.

Lance felt anger, Marie went into a state of total silence, Vinnie had mild anxiety attacks, and Chloe started in with her bitch-slap-rapping. Mrs. Chamberson was losing control over her session.

“What if I was to tell you, all of you, that I too suffered a phobia?” she said loudly to divert their attention while lowering her voice as she finished.

“Right,” said Lance, rudely.

“Fear, huh?” spoke out Marie.

“Ha!” laughed out Vinnie, but stopped, however, when he thought of Marie.

“We don’t believe you,” finished the round of disbelief as Chloe stared deeply into the windows of Mrs. Chamberson’s soul.

Then, Lance asked the question, “What fear?”

“I’m a, ahem, an ex *melanophobic*.”

“Mel-who-la-watt-it?” said Lance.

“No wait, guys!” spoke out Vinnie. “That’s the fear of the color black.”

And there she sat with a huge smile on her face—Mrs. Chamberson, fully clothed in black. She looked as if she was getting ready to fire up the cauldron and throw together a witch’s brew.

Lance, Marie, Vinnie, and Chloe all looked at each other and, then, at her.

She explained, “When I was a child my father would make me wear black as punishment. He would make me wear all black and lock me in a dark room.

“He explained to me that black was the absence of color and that I was being absent-minded.

“It was the same outfit every time.

“Even when I outgrew it, he still made me wear it.

“I wasn’t aware of my fear until my sophomore year of college. I shared a dorm room with a dear friend of mine and she showed me a black dress she had bought for her high school reunion. I reacted with angst. I beat her that night—nearly to death. Something told me to stop. It wasn’t my conscience, but an angel’s voice. Over time, she forgave me.

“I searched for help to overcome my fear. Then, I changed my major, so I too could help those who suffer from phobias.” Her story was awe-inspiring.

“Breakfast is ready,” said the butler as they all fled to eat. They were famished, indeed.

Lance’s fear was complicated by how it came about, but not really—just silly high school humor.

The amulet was passed to him. It was his turn to expel the demons. “It was prom. Cindy Jacobson, the hottest girl in school, asked me to the dance. I was so moonstruck. I thought, all right, my chance to shine. Of course, I accepted.

“That night, I picked her up. She was beautiful, but something looked slightly different about her. I convinced myself that it was her makeup. She was done up pretty good.

“We got to the dance and everything was going awesome, at least I thought. I figured it was all a setup—a hoax. But all was going too well for that. Even her preppy friends showed interest in me. I felt like I was part of the in-crowd. Then, she gave me the signal—the big sign. I was so excited. We put our lips together and...” Lance stalled with the bellyache of disgust. You could tell the story was narrowing down to its end and it bothered him. He was in no hurry to finish. However, everyone anticipated hearing.

“What, Lance? You can speak to us. Remember? We’re all friends. Family. We want to help you,” encouraged Mrs. Chamberson.

He concluded, “I kissed her, and when I did she...” He paused once more.

“It can’t be any worse than my story,” spoke out Marie. Her silent voice was enough encouragement—all that he needed.

“She vomited in my mouth. It was awful. I—” Lance finished.

“Okay, dear. You said enough. You mustn’t let one bad experience stop you from ever doing the same thing over again. What I mean is, you should try it again. Release your inhibitions and do it. Well, it’s its own reward,” said Mrs. Chamberson.

Lance bowed his head in shame. It was hard for him to tell that forgotten chapter of his past. But it wasn’t forgotten—just repressed.

“What a hottie,” said Chloe, quietly under her breath as she ogled Lance.

He felt her stare, and it bothered him. But afterward, he got the weight off his chest—the very weight that compressed his heart from keeping a steady rhythmic beat for so long—metaphorically. Her ogles didn’t bother him as much. He looked up at her and cracked a smile. That, within itself, was a revelation.

“Let’s continue,” egged Mrs. Chamberson quietly and mother-like.

Now, the amulet rested in Marie’s hand—Marie Gholson, the mute.

She started to tell her story without a second’s delay. “I was picked on a lot as a kid,” she said quickly as she hurriedly passed the amulet to Vinnie like a game of hot potato. Vinnie glanced down at it and began to say his piece when Mrs. Chamberson stood up and retrieved the amulet.

She gingerly placed it back into the hands of Marie and said, “Speak. You must let your voice be heard.”

“I have to use the bathroom,” she replied as she stood up and dashed to the master lavatory.

Upon entering the lavatory she leaned against the sink. Thereafter, she looked into the mirror. Her face morphed into a clown’s. Then, she heard the same laughter she heard before. This has never happened—not to this extent. She collapsed with unfilled eyes and bluish-pale skin. The clown was still in the mirror. He cackled one last reverberated laugh and disappeared.

Determined to move production along Mrs. Chamberson went ahead and passed the amulet to Vinnie. His story was deeper, darker, and more intense than Lance’s. As he spoke his voice trembled. “I was young. . . very young. Can’t remember when it all began, but I can remember what I know. The first night terror I recall was when I was eight years old. There was a man. He wore black and had a white patch in the front—a collar. The nightmares were horrible. They wouldn’t stop. He was terror! terror defined! a Catholic priest that morphed into a demon. Eyes rimmed with black, fiery red flesh, and a black cloak. His black outfit would morph into this cloak—terror defined. I was so afraid of this monster when I was young. But it didn’t stop there.” Vinnie gulped. “A church was pulled into my nightmare. It was the same church I attended.” He definitely held everyone’s attention.

“Then, one day, I attended church. I stared at the crucifix that was displayed near Christ. I swear to this day that it morphed into that monster. No one else saw it. Just me. It was *sooooo* real. I never want to see another church again in my life! Never!”

Mrs. Chamberson felt his pain, as did Lance and Chloe.

Before the session could continue Mrs. Chamberson decided to check on Marie. By now Marie had been gone for a while. She set out to look in all the lavatories, starting with the nearest one. All she found was a letter. It was written in Marie’s handwriting. It read:

I’ll feel better tomorrow. I would like some privacy for now. Maybe tomorrow I’ll be up to another session. Please, don’t be mad.

Marie

Mrs. Chamberson respected Marie's privacy and returned to the circle.

Now Chloe had the amulet. Rather than discuss her fear she chose to lay her feelings on the table. "I'm so afraid to love, but I haven't had sex in so long. I need it badly. Mrs. Chamberson, you must un—"

"Chloe! Discuss your fear! We need to heal," interrupted Mrs. Chamberson. "You must forget your desires and feel what is more important." Mrs. Chamberson explained that Chloe's need for sex was a scapegoat for her fear of falling in love. Chloe cringed at the sound of the word.

"Dammit! I just wanna fuck!" shouted Chloe with a sudden outburst.

"Chloe, not in this house! This is a holy place!" shouted out Mrs. Chamberson with an angry spat.

Vinnie began to panic. *Mrs. Chamberson made the statement that they were in a holy place.* He began to gasp for air as the shadow lurched from behind and pulled him through a void.

Down the hall came Marie. She was dressed as a clown. She brandished a dagger.

Everything began to fall apart.

Suddenly, Mrs. Chamberson's black dress became too tight. What she saw was her father jerking at her and shaking her. No one else saw it—just Mrs. Chamberson.

Now the whole house was plagued with fear.

There was a voice. A man's voice. It traveled through the house. It was a familiar voice. It was Ernie. "Come on, kids!" he shouted.

Chloe and Lance ran out, side by side. However, their escape would not be that simple. Blocking the doorway was a familiar face. It was a face only seen through paint and canvas. It was Merlin Watts Lurin. He came toward Chloe, but Lance distracted him. When Lance got Merlin's attention he threw a nearby vase in his direction. This allowed Merlin Watts Lurin's attention to be diverted from his sole intent and enabled Chloe to rush into the arms of Lance.

Together they ran out of the house as Ernie waited in the bus. It was running and ready for takeoff.

The Willies

As they neared the bus the house went up in flames behind them.

The creepshow was over.

All was consumed by the flames of trepidation.

Chloe and Lance gazed into each other's eyes. Lance caved. He took Chloe in his arms and kissed her with unbridled measures of passion. In return, she said, "I love you."

Black Wolf

Darkness rained its glistening dew on the blades of grass that embodied its tombstones and mausoleums. The full moon settled as hungry wolves vented their howls with black temptation. In the distance, a blood-curdling shrill was heard as a truck zoomed recklessly down the back road. It was an old truck that had a man-made towing crane and pulley welded into the back. It drove into the darkness consumed by the full moon fluorescents.

The morning was dry as if the crackled ground insufferably begged for rain. There hadn't been a rain there in months. The expansion of the area looked like a barren land—vacant and desiccated fields with one desolate road that stretched for miles. And it shot straight down the center. Scorpions crept along the roadside while tarantulas crawled from one side to the next nearly escaping the vicissitude of their undulating demise. Rattlesnakes rattled their percussive instruments. But still, no natives were in sight.

The sun faced east but the dry winds blew west. Birds lay dead from the scorching heat.

Although the landscape would serve an artist well to transfer its golden horizon and glistening grains of infinite sand to canvas this was no place for an artist to subsist. The devil's kitchen is what it was—a barren land beyond what is known as time.

Suddenly, a car sped through—a sixty-eight Maverick, to be exact.

“Chester, what does that map say?”

“I think we missed our turn, Lela. Three miles back.”

The car only contained two: Lela (who drove and by now was lost), and Chester (her carefree brother who made a poor effort at providing directions). They were on their way to an old friend’s house. Both attended college and were in their senior year. They took the summer off to free their minds and experience new encounters.

“Sylvia is gonna be so pissed!” said Lela. “I’m already thirty minutes behind schedule.”

“It’s not my fault she gave you sucky directions. According to the sign five miles back we’re definitely in Slotters,” replied Chester with apathy.

Lela found a place to pull into. It was a bare spot in a cornfield where tractors and combines once sat to gain equity. She intended to pull in and back out to redirect. But when she put the car in reverse the damn thing died. And that’s just what it was: *a damn thing!* Lela punched the steering wheel and kicked at the floorboard throwing a tissy. She turned to Chester and asked him if he could fix it. His reply was, “Shoot, sis! I don’t know anything about cars!”

She made a couple more failed attempts to start the *damn thing* when it dawned on her: there was just no use.

“We walk!” exclaimed Lela. Chester was not willing. He complained about the heat, calling it blistering, and said that the place reeked of death. Lela managed to cozen him into it. She always had that ability—the upper hand. And Chester was nothing more than a puppet on a string.

The two made their way down Death’s highway. To them, that is what it seemed. Lela power walked as Chester languidly lagged behind. And he complained like a little girl with every foot-blistering step.

“Come on, brother,” joked Lela.

They made it no more than a mile down the road when a familiar truck slowly skulked along before coming to a complete stop. Lela and Chester stood frozen in their tracks and shared looks of uncertainty.

The man stepped out of his truck. He was a goliath. He wore bib overalls, that were threadbare, as well as centuries-old steel-toed work boots that had

seen better days but were still intact. He was a man of very few words; however, he spoke, “What’s the problem?” His voice was relevant to the nature of his appearance—dismal and gruff.

“Our car broke down about a mile back,” answered Lela.

“Done checked it over. You’re outta gas. Hop in. We’ll go fetch some,” the man explained.

Lela and Chester were both skeptical but quickly decided that they had no other choice. They hopped into the truck. Lela was given the misfortune of being crammed in the middle. It was a tight fit but they all managed to suffice. The old man put the truck into gear and drove away—destination, unknown.

The man remained silent throughout the trip. His overall aura was still quite indefinite. Lela and Chester both attempted to make idle chat but he just stared. He had an eerie aura to him. He was a very ominous man. Something about him just didn’t settle well.

The trip was long and boring not to mention awkward. Lela and Chester felt very uncomfortable. The man took turn after turn, bump over bump, and it seemed that the further he drove the deeper into the woods they went. *Where is he taking us?*—that was their ultimate question. Chester noticed something out of the corner of his left eye. He slowly turned and noticed specks of blood splattered on the back of the seat. He looked back further and saw what appeared to be something gutted open in the bed wedged between the headache rack and towing gear.

“Oh, my God,” Chester sighed in repulsion with lunch in his throat and hand sealing the exit. However, he was careful not to be seen.

The whole time, thereafter, Chester tried to remain calm so that the man wouldn’t suspect his curiosity and concern. He abruptly, but inconspicuously, nudged Lela in her side and motioned for her to give it a gander. She had a dissimilar reaction. Instead, she licked her lips in a false sense of salivating hunger. The man had no clue of their demeanor; he just focused on the road and kept on truckin’.

Finally, after a long and agonizing trip, they reached their destination. The man turned right at the Black Wolf cemetery.

“Hey! This was on your sheet of directions you wrote out, Lela!” said Chester with an overzealous observation.

As the old man took the turn he pulled straight into a long drive that led to his farmhouse. There was a sign that read Hatchett’s Meats. Indeed, an ironic name for their fates to come.

The area looked somewhat familiar in Lela’s mind. There was an old broken-down combine, a rusted pickup truck, and a chicken house in front of an old barn. Suddenly, it dawned on her. It was all written in the directions. Sylvia gave Lela a description of the farm she lived at and this matched perfectly. As the old man parked his truck a young woman came walking out of the house. It was Sylvia. “Lela! You found me!” she said as she ran to greet her. “Oh, and I see you met my uncle Agustus.”

Sylvia wore an apron that had blood and bits of viscera smeared all over it. Her hands were caked in blood, as well. Lela and Chester looked at her with synchronized reactions and turned stomachs.

Noticing their reaction Sylvia explained, “I just got done butchering a hog. The lil’ booger wouldn’t stay still.” Lela and Chester looked assiduously at her. “Where’s your car?” Sylvia asked quickly changing the subject.

“Broke down. Your uncle said it’s outta gas. Just a few miles that way,” replied Lela as she pointed.

“Oh, he speaks? Hey, Uncle Agustus, take Chester with you to get the car. We got a lot of catching up to do,” said Sylvia as she nudged at Lela’s shoulder trying not to get any blood on her. The two headed toward the house.

“I’m suddenly famished. Got anything to eat...possibly a big fat *bloody* steak?” Sylvia turned to Lela with a mist of ambiguity orbiting her eyes as Lela inserted perception to smooth the edges. “I’m on a strict protein diet, ya know.”

“I’m sure I can feed that hungry monster of yours,” replied Sylvia appeasing Lela’s rigorous appetite.

They sauntered up the stairs and into the house. The screen door shuttered with a crackling hiss and creaky hinges. Just then, a row of clouds drifted past the mid-day sun which created a rippling tide below the cast.

Later, as Agustus and Chester were heading down the road to gas up the car, Chester attempted to make idle chat. “So, ya hunt much?” he asked.

Agustus replied with an incoherent mutter.

Chester felt ill at ease. He just wanted the day to be over with and soon. Agustus was very creepy and being around him sent chills up and down Chester’s spine. That being said, for the remainder of the trip, Chester just kept to himself.

Meanwhile, back at the farm, Lela complimented Sylvia’s relic collection as she gnawed on a huge turkey leg. Throughout the years Sylvia had collected many ancient artifacts and antique odds-and-ends.

“Where do you get all of this stuff?” asked Lela as she walked through the house handling them with delicacy.

“I just find what I can and sneak them in my pocket,” replied Sylvia.

“You mean you steal them?” responded Lela.

“No, silly. I just find them all around. I sneak them in my pocket ’cause people might think I’m weird,” answered Sylvia.

They bonded and in no time tethered the ties that bind. It had been a while since they had met so they were very eager to reconnect. As Lela resided to continue her conversation with Sylvia a room titillated the question center of her one-track mind. It was down the hall and in perfect line of sight from where she sat. All the other doors in the house were left wide open, but not this one. It was sealed tightly shut. But why? Lela thought.

“Lela! Lela!” repeated Sylvia trying to get her attention.

Lela replied, but in a distant and shallow voice.

Chester walked through the door. He headed straight to find Lela. “Don’t ever ask me to go with that man ever again,” he complained.

Sylvia approached them from behind pityingly. “Yeah, he just hasn’t been himself ever since the accident,” she said.

“What do you mean...accident?” Chester asked in a shaky voice.

In a single breath, Sylvia summed up Agustus’s dissent into madness. “I believe the year was 1975. Agustus was in his late twenties and was on his way home from work. He had just gotten off the phone with his estranged

wife—my aunt—before he left work. He was in a hurry to get home because she said that she'd been drinkin' and she was threatening to pack up and leave. He loved her dearly, so I've been told. Suddenly, someone swerved around a curve and hit Augustus head-on. He was driving a solid-body pickup truck—the same one that sits out front there rusting. He flipped his truck several times. God must've been looking out for him 'cause he somehow managed to survive. Anyway, later that night, he discovered that the person in the other car was his dearly beloved. She died. Yeah, poor ole Augustus hasn't been the same since."

"Awe, that poor man," Lela sympathized.

"If you ask me the bitch deserved it," Chester spoke harsh words. "Hey, I'm just sayin'."

They both stared at him like he was nothing of this world. If only eyes could condemn. Sensing the hostility he turned and walked away.

Meanwhile, outside in the old barn, Augustus hacked with an old rusty meat cleaver at what appeared to be a carcass.

The next day people came from all over to purchase fresh bacon, steaks, and roast. Hatchett's Meats was a very popular place to get freshly butchered meats raised on the farm. Pork belly took a slump on the stock market, but that didn't stop Augustus. He sold more bacon than anything. Just a couple of nights ago he had a few cows come up missing. Still, nothing seemed to slow him down. He still managed to make those frayed ends meet.

A young man arrived. He introduced himself to Lela as John. He was about nineteen. Perhaps the same age as Lela. He was originally there to pick up a pound of beef that his father had sent him after, during an errand. He took one look at Lela and forgot his sole purpose for even being there.

They hit it off well, nevertheless.

John immediately asked Lela out on a date. He told her that he wouldn't take no for an answer. She caved and he told her that he would run home, wash up, and return around eight sharp to escort her. It was already getting late and Lela was emancipated with exhilaration. After he left Sylvia came strutting out on the front porch and shouted out to Lela who still stood in

the front yard watching her newly discovered beau leave as dust from the Slotters' back road dissipated.

"Been here one day and you're already whoring around," joked Sylvia. Even Lela found that to be funny. "Well, don't just stand there. Come on in and get cleaned up. I got a dress you can wear."

It was already a quarter till seven. It was beginning to get dark as the sun started to settle. Lela waited by the door watching for her date. Suddenly she caught a glimpse of intrigue as she noticed Augustus dragging a heavy bag out and throwing it into the bed of his truck. He also threw in a shovel. Before climbing in and driving off he looked around swiftly to be certain he had not been seen. "That's odd," said Lela as she called out for Sylvia. But Sylvia did not reply. Therefore, she set out to find her.

As Lela took to her search a set of headlights traversed down the road about a half mile from the farm. It was John on his way to pick up Lela. He noticed up ahead there was a truck pulled aside and what appeared to be a body lying in the road. John stopped. He got out of his car to see if the person was okay or needed help. As he kneeled, someone approached him from behind. Blood splattered everywhere as John's skull was crushed by a sledgehammer. He died instantly and lay lifeless as his damaged body was dragged through the gravel and into the woods.

"Sylvia!" Lela called out as she continued to look for her. Lela approached the door—the one at the end of the hall. She reached down and grabbed the knob. She turned it to find that it was unlocked, but before she could open it to end her curiosity Sylvia approached her from behind like a lurking shadow.

"Lela, has your date made it?" Sylvia asked diverting Lela's attention.

Nervously, Lela turned around and replied, "No, uh, not yet." She noticed that Sylvia was slightly covered in blood. "Slaughtering pigs again?"

"Yeah. You know Augustus...always makin' that dollar."

"Where is Augustus?"

"I think he went down to the old reservoir to discard of some scraps."

"Ewe, gross."

“Well, sweetie, it’s close to 8:30. I believe you got stood up. Let me clean up and we’ll go out. I know a good place.”

“Hopefully we won’t run into Chester. He already went into the city looking for action.”

Later, as the two entered a popular nightclub named The Rave, Sylvia walked in with head-turning respect. Lela followed but didn’t get that kind of reaction.

Sylvia was very well-known in the community. And she shined like a star at The Rave. She came here often and had made many acquaintances. Lela, however, felt like she didn’t belong there. She wasn’t too big into partying and didn’t know anyone there except for Sylvia.

“Molly Hatchett!” said the bartender as Sylvia approached the bar. Sylvia ordered a Liquid Cocaine for her and Lela.

“You have got to try this drink!” she screamed. The music was very loud and flashing lights along with smoke filled the room. Lela began to feel nauseous. Suddenly, Chester snuck up on her. Accompanying him was a girl he had met. That made Lela feel a little more welcomed.

Chester was ten sheets to the wind. However, he was a blast when he got drunk.

Slowly the party began to invigorate.

When the DJ turned up a disco remix of the eighties classic Hungry like the Wolf Sylvia dragged Lela to the dance floor. “I love this song!” she screamed excitedly.

From a distance, a sophisticated-looking beau stood within the shadows and watched as Lela danced. By the second half of the song her body language had become inexplicably stimulating and her overall behavior somewhat fatuitous to her fellow partygoers. But that all made her appear that much sexier—to him.

After the song was over Lela and Sylvia made their way back to their table. Chester had already passed out. As Lela and Sylvia forced conversation the stranger made his way over to greet them with his overly confident swagger. He introduced himself as, “Reynolds, Paul Reynolds,” making a poor attempt to replicate James Bond.

The Willies

Lela was drunk so she thought that it would be clever to play hard to get...at first. Unfortunately, Paul was way too prominent for that. Besides, Lela caved much too easily in any circumstance—even so this one. But that was his parlor trick. Sylvia saw right through it. “Weak,” she slurred as she barely stood up, stumbling to the bar to order another drink.

“New here?” asked Paul.

“Yeah, pretty much,” answered Lela. “I’m off on summer break at college. Came to visit a friend.”

“You’re beautiful,” complimented Paul wasting no time making headway.

Lela was without words. She felt flattered but was also uncertain of his intentions.

Later, as the gang exited the bar, they all talked about going back to Sylvia’s to continue the party. Chester had to be carried out by the rest of them.

“How are we going to do this?” asked Lela. “I can’t leave the car here.”

“You take Chester home in your car and Paul will come with me to keep me company.” Sylvia batted her eyes as she turned to Paul. “Don’t worry, doll. I don’t bite...too hard,” she said snapping her teeth.

As they made their way Lela noticed that Sylvia’s car vanished, however, continued to drive. She made several attempts to call Sylvia on her cell phone but kept losing the signal. Just then, Lela found herself pulling into the drive that led her straight to Sylvia’s farmhouse. The Black Wolf cemetery looked spine-chilling this time of night.

She went ahead and helped Chester into the house as she waited for Sylvia and Paul to show up with the booze.

About fifteen minutes later, Sylvia pulled into the driveway. She got out of the car but Paul was not with her. She had blood and bits of viscera smeared all over her again.

“Sylvia, what’s wrong? Where’s Paul?” asked Lela concernedly.

“He attacked me. I had to scratch him and kick him out of the car. It could’ve been you, Lela,” cried Sylvia frantically.

Later that night, Lela had a dream. She dreamed that she was walking down the hall being led by a black wolf. As she approached the door at the end of

the hallway it turned into a corridor. The door became a huge metal chamber. As she reached down to push open the chamber door she was awakened by her alarm clock. She couldn't even open the door in her dream. For some reason, she wanted to know what hid behind that door.

She looked over and realized that Sylvia was gone.

She crawled out of bed, slid her feet into her fuzzy slippers, and slipped into her robe. She went to look for Sylvia. As she approached the hall she looked down to see that the door was slightly ajar. Wasting no time she strutted down the hall to enter the room. As she walked briskly her elbow rubbed up against one of Sylvia's antiques and knocked it off the rack. She stopped to pick up the shattered pieces as Augustus came out of the room. He held a butcher knife. He closed and locked the door behind him and exited to his right. Lela was crouched down in the shadows—an apparent oversight. Now Lela became more curious than ever. Lela stood and walked outside to search for Sylvia. Sylvia came out of the barn with her bloody apron on fitting loosely.

“A lil' early to be slaughtering pigs, huh?” asked Lela.

“Shoot, sweetie. Farmers work around the clock. I gotta whole mess-a-bacon I have to have ready by tomorrow mornin’,” replied Sylvia.

“Sylvia, what is in that room at the end of the hallway?”

“Oh, don't go in there. Ever! Lela, if Uncle Augustus ever catches you in there he will have a meltdown.”

The two began to speak loudly as Chester walked up from behind them. “Can you keep it down? Sheesh, you'll wake the dead,” he said as he continued to walk by in his skivvies rubbing his chest beneath his sweat-stained holy white t-shirt. Lela and Sylvia just looked at each other and laughed.

Later that night, Lela sat all by herself watching television in the front room. Her program was suddenly interrupted by a news bulletin. She instantly became interested when she saw that the main headline was a local homicide. A man identified as Paul Reynolds was found decapitated and his remains were discovered in a ditch two miles from The Rave. Lela readjusted herself on the couch sinking deeper into the story. They flashed his picture. It was the same guy Lela met at the nightclub. Sylvia was supposed

to have driven him back to the house but for some fabricated reason came back alone. She had blood smeared every which way but loose. Suddenly, it began to make sense. She stood up and inched her way over to the window. She stared at the barn as the light shone through tiny crevices and shadows flickered. Her immediate response was to go down the hall and *examine* that room—*scrutinize* would be a more depicting term. She didn't care. She feared nothing. Even if she had to break down the door she was going to enter that room. Nothing would stop her or stand in her way.

Fortunately for her, it was unlocked.

As she entered she noticed lit candles—sweet-aromatic and shimmering candles. The whole room was a shrine with a picture of a young female. On a mantle sat an urn with a slice of cake beside it. As the door slowly creaked a figure crept from behind her.

“That’s my wife in that urn,” said a gentle voice. As Lela slowly turned she noticed that it was Augustus. She froze with fear. He was certainly the most conspicuous of all. Moreover, with not much to go on and very few notable suspects to try it was just as easy to point blame at him rather than a friend or brother—both of which she had known for many years. But truth be told there’s two sides to every story. He continued to explain, “Every year on her birthday I bring her a slice of raspberry cake. That was her all-time favorite.” A tear swelled from his eye and dropped to his cheek. Suddenly, her feelings of fear slowly turned into remorse—true and unadulterated sympathy.

She stood breathless. But in a sudden hush of abrupt recoil, the door swung open. It was Sylvia as bloody as ever. Lela panicked hysterically. The three were in the same room together and, at this point, Lela trusted no one. Then, Chester showed up (with a mean dragon’s eye). Lela felt relieved, at first, until he pulled out a machete from behind his back and rammed it through Sylvia. She bled out the mouth and fell to her knees holding her chest as Chester yanked out the machete with a loud pop exposing her gaping wound.

“You know, Lela...you were always mother’s favorite,” Chester said.

“But how did you kill Paul?” Lela asked timidly.

“I went back after everyone else passed out. I wasn’t as drunk as you all thought I was. I went back to the club. Paul was there. I told him to come

with me. He remembered me so he trusted me,” Chester explained. “I killed your other boyfriend also. He didn’t forget to pick you up for your little date, Lela. I killed the piece of s—!”

From behind Augustus made an effort to attack Chester. Chester was too fast. He turned around and severed Augustus’s torso from his midsection with one powerful swing. Blood gushed everywhere. Chester turned around. It was just him and Lela now. He toyed with her.

As she looked out the window she noticed that rising from behind the black fluorescent clouds was a full moon. “Oh, brother...I have a secret, as well,” she snarled. About that time she began to shapeshift into an unworldly being—a werewolf. Chester froze as the werewolf lashed at him and consumed his body shredding him to pieces. She was a black wolf. And a very beautiful specimen at that, I might add. When she finished consuming her meal her howl echoed throughout the Black Wolf cemetery and the village of Slotters. The full moon glowed ever so brightly and added a ghostly hue to the backwoods villa.

Beyond the Tracks

– 1 –

1984: the winds blew like a howling ghost—tormented and suffering. I sat looking out my bedroom window. I bunked in the attic. Jimmy was there and so was Todd. We were the three amigos. Nothing in the world could ever tear us apart.

I remember talking to Jimmy: “I wonder if that shed out there really is haunted.” He shrugged his shoulders.

I was only eleven years old. Jimmy, he was thirteen. And Todd, the youngest of the group, was only eight. Todd and Jimmy were brothers. Todd always followed Jimmy around like a lost puppy dog.

We had planned to stay up past midnight when all the adults were asleep and go out to inspect that shed. It was huge and creepy—a rickety old thing. My dad told me it was filled with ghosts. By the looks of it, I believed him. My dad never fibbed and was one to be taken seriously.

Jimmy, Todd, and I stayed up late that night and talked. Actually, we talked ourselves out of our set plan. We worked ourselves up into a scare telling ghost stories and our version of what we’d find once we did inspect that shed. I remember to this day, it was some spooky stuff.

Todd talked about finding little green goblins. We all laughed. Jimmy talked about running into a female ghost in search of her killer. We awed in agreement. I was the most realistic of the group. I told them how I thought we'd find a bag of bones and buried human remains. That made everyone think.

We must've talked ourselves to sleep because the next thing I remember was opening my eyes to a beautiful horizon. I nudged at Jimmy waking him up. And he woke up his little brother Todd. We were already dressed. All we lacked were our shoes. We put them on simultaneously and took off down the stairs in a race for some pancakes and bacon. When Mom asked us what we did last night Jimmy and Todd froze. I spoke up and told her we played marbles and talked mostly. She left it at that.

* * *

Later that day, the three of us went into town. Back then, I lived in a small town called Stella. What few stores we had were right in the center and everyone lived no more than two blocks away.

We all crouched on the corner just in front of Marty's Hardware store and began to shoot marbles. Jimmy was the best—unbeatable. He shot 'em hard and collected everyone's marbles. I started a silly conversation just between me and Jimmy. Todd never spoke much. He was always a quiet little kid.

"Gee, Jimmy. Last night I thought I heard a ghost."

"What d'ya mean?"

"A real spook. An awful sound. It sounded like ooooooh..."

"We should go in that shed."

Then, Todd chimed in, "Not me." That was it—short and sweet.

I told both of them that it didn't matter. No one was going inside that shed without me. I was more curious than any of them and it was my dad's shed. It was my dying wish to see what mysteries waited inside. However, I wouldn't go at it alone. Todd and Jimmy were coming with me.

"Jimmy, let's do it tonight."

"Aw, come on. You said last night. An' that didn't happen."

“No, I’m serious. We’ll do it this time. We just won’t tell all the ghost stories at first. That’s where we went wrong.”

“Yeah, I agree. Okay. Tonight. We’ll do it tonight and no backing down. I mean it.”

Todd grinned and said in a jest, “I’ll go if y’all go.” Todd was a cute little kid—had cheeks you just wanted to pinch. And all the old timers did. He hated that.

We ran back home to talk to Mom about it—Jimmy and Todd staying another night. Her answer for that kind of stuff was always, “You have to ask your dad.” Then, his answer was, “Ask your mother.” I would spend hours at a time some days asking one question and getting nowhere fast—like beating a dead horse. Eventually, I would give up not knowing anymore than I started out knowing. I guess that’s why parents do that. It’s a tricky scheme for little brats like I once was. Anyway, after an hour of playing yo-yo with Mom and Dad trying to get an answer, we settled on, “Sure. Why not?” But of course, it would have to be okay with Jimmy and Todd’s parents. That would be a challenge.

We jumped the fence. That’s how we got back and forth. And walked a couple of houses over to Jimmy’s house. His mom was drunk, as usual, and his dad passed out. I’m pretty sure with a syringe sticking out of his arm. We took advantage of his mother’s inability to think clearly and her reply was, “Sure, what the fuck ever ya little fucking bastards.” On that note, Jimmy and Todd grabbed some extra clothes and we headed back over to my house.

* * *

Later that night, the three of us lurked in the darkness with a dimly lit flashlight. We circled the shed; neither one of us was brave enough to enter. Jimmy said, “Fine, I’ll go.” He made it to the door and stopped.

The shed looked like a monster as Jimmy stood face-to-face with the beast. The windows were its evil eyes and the door was its hungry mouth.

“Go on, Jimmy,” I encouraged.

“Yeah...go,” Todd seconded.

Todd and I began to tease Jimmy. That's all it ever took to make him mad. He entered the shed—storming in with no looking back. He screamed horribly. We feared. Todd pissed his pants. I shook nervously. Then, Jimmy came out and said, "I was just kidding guys. There's nothing in here." By nothing he meant ghosts. By guys he meant me.

He was right. For three years, that I can remember, I feared entering that shed. From all the stories my dad had told me. He was fibbing.

"You're right, Jimmy. There's no female ghosts, green goblins, or human remains in here."

"I bet your old man told you that to keep you out of here."

"I bet you're right."

Todd giggled, "Fooled you, dumbasses." Jimmy and I busted out laughing and Todd joined.

– 2 –

1986: two years have passed and not much has changed except for our ages. I turned thirteen. Jimmy had turned fourteen. As for Todd, he hit double digits—ten. This was a very depressing year. Allow me to tell you why.

The Smith Cove railroad shut down. The last train stopped toward the end of eighty-four, dropped off an old hobo, and the train broke down—beyond repair. Estimated prices on parts and labor ranged in the thousands. They talked about shutting it down anyway due to financial problems. This was the straw that broke the old camel's back. Now, right in the midst of town where the railroad runs, sits an old shell of a train—rusted and covered in graffiti from our local past and present artistic vandals.

I was sick that year. I was sick all right—chickenpox. Nobody could play with me. My mom wouldn't even let me infect the phone with any of my germs. I was quarantined—confined to my room. Jimmy had the coolest idea. We took two cups and tied them together with a long string. Jimmy fed me my end with a really long stick. I thought he was crazy at first but it worked—just like phones—better than walkie-talkies. Our voices sent vibrations through the string and we were able to communicate by speaking inside cups. We did that for weeks until the chickenpox worked its course.

The Willies

Todd was at the age of curiosity. He was constantly getting into trouble. If it wasn't one thing it was another. Jimmy and Todd had abusive parents anyway, which was easily suspected. Jimmy didn't get it much but Todd was always showing up with a new bruise, burn, some kind of sore, or identifiable mark.

Todd would always blame his newest marks on his clumsiness and Jimmy wouldn't back him up, but he wouldn't say much against it either. I knew.

* * *

A few weeks passed and summer turned into fall. School was starting back and my chickenpox was gone. However, I spent my entire summer vacation cooped up in my bedroom—in total confinement. We had a week left and we made them count. At the time no one knew it would end in tragedy.

Jimmy, Todd, and I started to hang out at the railroad track. Just a quarter of a mile from it there was an old reservoir we called the pond. We would skip stones and dig for crawdads.

One day, while Jimmy was deep in the woods taking a leak, Todd and I had the strangest conversation that haunts me to this very day.

“I stole my old man's gun.”

“You did what, Todd?”

“Yeah. Did it while he was passed out.”

“You better take it back. Your old man will tan your hide. Do you have it with you now?”

“Sure do. Thought we could shoot squirrels.”

Jimmy came out of the woods zipping his trousers and asked, “What ch'all talkin' about?” It was obvious. We were really loud. I would have to tell him. Our voices carried just loud enough to make distortion. As soon as Jimmy showed up we quit talking. I think he thought we were talking about him. If I didn't tell him he'd go on thinking that. Then, Todd left to go take a leak.

“Jimmy, promise you won't say anything to Todd but I need to tell you something.”

“What?”

“Todd stole your dad’s handgun.”

“He did what?”

“Yeah, he wants to use it to chase squirrels.”

Just about that time, we heard a loud pop. We immediately took off into the woods and found Todd laid out cold. He lay in a puddle of blood with a bloody wound in his chest. Beside him was the gun. It lay upon a perfectly round bare spot noticeably within the bright green grass. Paramedics couldn’t get to him soon enough. Todd was pronounced dead at the scene. Jimmy was so distraught. His parents acted like it didn’t faze them as much, but it did Jimmy. Afterward, Jimmy would never be the same. He would constantly have a dark cloud over his head.

For weeks we were convinced that Todd had shot himself, but it was revealed later that the bullet belonged to another gun—a poacher. No investigation was ever done. Officials declared Todd as being a victim of circumstance. The closest thing they did to doing anything at all about it was putting up a sign that read: All Poachers Will Be Fined \$1000. To this day his killer is still out there—undoubtedly unaware of his actions. He won’t even be punished by guilt. At least I used to think that...

– 3 –

1989: I turned sixteen that year—just got my driver’s license. Jimmy had turned eighteen and had become a wild child. As for poor Todd, he would’ve been thirteen—just a teenager.

A lot had changed. Jimmy and I were still friends. I concentrated on my schooling which Jimmy dropped out. He went crazy after his little brother passed away. Oh yeah, Jimmy’s mother died of cirrhosis and his dad went to prison after he knocked over a Huck’s just outside of Princeton. Mom let Jimmy move in with us—off and on. Everything just seemed to have fallen apart for Jimmy, which made him a wasted youth.

My mom was really pushing for me to complete school and go to college. She’d say, “Don’t be a Jimmy.” That aggravated me more than anything. Jimmy was messed up but he was also misunderstood. It must’ve been miserable for him.

The Willies

She would throw it up to me at how she took him in and that he was freeloading. Jimmy has had a hard life. Let the boy freeload, right? My mom was all about morale and ethics. Jimmy got it on both ends—the streets and at home. He was like an older brother that was a rebel—the black sheep.

I used to tell Jimmy, “Dude, things’ll work themselves out. You just gotta be patient, man. The best is yet to come.”

His reply was, “The worst is already here.”

He believed that death was the only way out but suicide was cowardice. There were times he would just pray for the good lord to take him. He wanted Death to come to him. He didn’t want to go to Death.

* * *

I remember a particular weekend that happened that year. My dad just left for an “out-of-town business trip” and my mom went to bed early complaining of a major migraine. The phone rang. The caller ID read: Unknown.

I answered, “Hello?”

An operator on the other end said, “Will you accept a collect call from—” and, then, Jimmy’s voice said, “Jimmy?” I waited for the options. “Press one for *yes* and two for—” I pressed one.

I spoke out, “What do you want, Jimmy? Where are you? Why are you calling collect?” I asked three quick questions—one on top of the other as if I expected him to give one answer summing up all three questions.

“I’m a few blocks from the tracks. Can you meet me there?”

“Sure. I’ll be right there.”

I grabbed my jacket and headed out the door. I was about to grab the keys to my mom’s Durango but decided to ride my bike instead.

It wasn’t exactly the coldest night but when the November wind is smacking your open face on a bicycle pedaling no less than fifteen miles per hour your cheeks do tend to get a little rosy, and nose drips like a leaky faucet. I made it in good time. Jimmy said, “That was fast.”

I pulled up beside the stationary row of cars and noticed that Jimmy had built a bonfire. I saw his leg extending out of the car we usually hung out in.

It was the one off-center but closest to the caboose. I threw down my bike, climbed in, and sat in front of Jimmy—just opposite him.

“So, what’s up?” I asked.

“I’m fucked up, man...think I overdid it.”

I asked, “On what?” He showed me his arm and I saw the tracks—little red needle dots welted with pus oozing out. I, then, asked concernedly, “Do you need me to take you to the doctor?”

He spat, “No! Hell no!” He looked away. “They’ll lock me up for sure.”

I mainly just comforted him that night—kept him alive by letting the side effects run their course. We talked about everything and anything. We shared both laughter and tears. He said at one point, “I miss Todd but that bitch can burn in hell.” The bitch was his mother—that was always a reference toward her.

* * *

The following weekend rolled around and Jimmy and I went back to the tracks. We went out there more than ever that year. Something just kept calling us back.

We walked out in the woods to take a leak. We were about ten or fifteen feet apart—our backs turned to one another. We heard a loud blast and a bullet whizzed right by Jimmy’s head splinting the side of the tree in front of him. He jumped back and flipped out. A man in camouflage emerged from the woods and said, “Shoot, boy. Ya better get outta here. Y’all get shot. Like that Anderson boy did three years ago.” He was referring to Todd. Jimmy snapped. He lashed at the man and started to beat the living shit out of him. If I hadn’t been there to separate them Jimmy would’ve killed the man—there’s no doubt in my mind.

Later that day, Jimmy and I were sitting on the porch—it was around evening time. Mom was cooking supper. It was fried chicken and I remember it smelled delicious.

Jimmy advised me of something time had forgotten. “Out by the tracks, near the fourth train car, the blue’n, Todd and I buried a time capsule just

before he died. I put a baseball card of Ozzie Smith in and Todd put in his stuffed bear Joey. “I want that bear,” Jimmy explained.

“Let’s go get it after supper. We’ll bring shovels and flashlights,” I replied.

“Yeah. Let’s do it. I won that little bear for Todd at the carnival a few years ago. I wanna put it up...ya know...a keepsake.”

That night, we did just as we planned. We made ten to fifteen holes digging for it but we found the box. Joey, the bear, was well preserved. Attached to him was a note. I read it aloud. It made Jimmy cry. I read, “When I grow up I want to be a cop. I want to arrest people that mistreat their kids like Mom and Dad do me. The world would be a safer place.”

– 4 –

1991: “Jimmy, did you hear? Did you hear about what happened today?” I asked Jimmy just after my graduation.

Two more years passed and Jimmy, finally, kicked his drug problem. I turned eighteen that month—the same month as my graduation. And Jimmy turned twenty. At this point, he lived in a studio apartment—just uptown. He found employment, or employment found him, in sales. He never did explain to anybody what it was he sold. At any rate, it was a very profitable job. Jimmy always had money.

He looked bewildered as I spoke to him. We went outside the school and he’d just lit a cigarette.

“What, man? What is it?” he replied calmly as if he was stoned.

“Another kid was killed...out in the woods...by the tracks. It was a stray bullet from a poacher...just like Todd five years ago,” I explained.

Jimmy looked perplexed as he sighed, “You don’t freakin’ say. Odd.”

About that time Mom and Dad came out and gave me a big hug—one parent on each side of me. I felt as if I accomplished something great but their pride was a more powerful emotion. Jimmy looked away. He was never given gratitude. My dad noticed the expression Jimmy wore (like a heavy cloak) and walked over to give him a pat on the back.

“We’re proud of you, son,” my dad said as he clutched Jimmy’s shoulder firmly and rubbed it. He was referring to Jimmy getting his GED. He received his high school equivalency that same year.

We were both diplomatically successful, Jimmy and I.

That night, we went home and enjoyed a huge feast.

* * *

Later that week, Jimmy showed up at my house. He was driving a sixty-nine Dodge Charger—a pin-striped orange with rust and primer spots all over it. Beyond its appearance, it turned out to be a pretty nice car. I stepped out on my porch and said, “Where did you steal the wheels, bro?”

He replied, “I have this uncle. He gave it to me on payments. Twenty-five dollars a month. Its overall price is three-hundred dollars. Not bad, uh?”

So, then, I started to do the math. “It’ll take you a whole year to get that thing paid off.”

“Still pretty cheap though, right?”

“Hey, dude. If it runs and gets you where you need to go that’s a pretty sweet deal.”

He offered to take me for a ride and before he could ask me completely I was already in the passenger seat waiting.

We drove out to the bottoms—a place we very seldom went. A girl got raped out there once and it was a notorious party pit for down boys. They banned together like a cult of vampires. They were mean. I avoided trouble at all costs. Jimmy, he tended to walk right into it.

We sat for a while listening to the radio and Jimmy pulled out a joint. It shocked me at first. Took me by surprise. And I hesitated. I thought Jimmy was done with drugs. I got to thinking: What’s marijuana? harmless. He fired it up, took a hit, and passed it to me. We passed it back and forth a few times in total silence. And, then, Jimmy spoke softly—breaking the silence delicately.

“I got to thinkin’ about what cha said. About that kid that got shot. I was talking to that uncle of mine and he informed me of something... crazy—” Jimmy continued as I sat contently listening to every word. “He told me that

back in eighty-one, just five years before Todd died, a kid was buried out there. Cops were never able to find a body. The man who was supposed to have killed the poor kid was his father. He wasn't convicted. He died a year later. He walked out into them same woods. Blew his fucking brains out. Crazy stuff, huh?"

"So the kid was never found?"

"Still to this fuckin' day, man."

As I sat there and listened to that story, deciding on whether or not I should believe it, I gazed out the window and stared at the silent lucidity of the stars. My mind started to drift. I remembered Jimmy and me standing over Todd as he bled like a sieve. And I remembered seeing a bare spot on the ground. It was unusual. Of course, I didn't consider this back then, but, at that moment, it made perfect sense. It was unusual in the sense that the surrounding area was a brightly green grassy knoll. Then, suddenly, as if I developed an overwhelming sensation of psychic powers, I said, "I know where he's buried."

* * *

The next day Jimmy and I loaded up shovels in his trunk. We headed to the tracks. We haven't been there all year and somehow going there felt anomalous. It was just past noon time—a beautiful day. We parked behind the train closest to the wooded entrance we'd be entering. We each grabbed a shovel and I led the way.

As we walked we exchanged words. "So, Jimmy, have you looked into this? I mean, what if I'm right? What if the boy was buried where I think he is?"

"What d'ya mean, dude?"

"I mean...what do we do if we do find the bones?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it, brothu"

Then, I changed the subject. "Jimmy?"

"What?"

"Remember when we were kids and we thought my shed was haunted?"

“Yeah. Todd swore that there were green goblins in there. Those were the days.” Jimmy smiled. “You thought an old bag of bones was buried out there. Just like now.”

“Pretty creepy, huh?”

Just then, we stopped. We found ourselves standing before the mound—still bare. Maybe, just maybe, human remains were buried just beneath the silt. I remember pondering that exact thought in my head as I wandered to the other side just opposite Jimmy.

Jimmy and I both gave each other a look as we began to dig.

We dug for at least five minutes when, suddenly, I hit something. It was so hard it made my hands slide down the wooden handle and injected a huge splinter in my palm. I jerked away from the shovel and flailed in pain. My palm, where the splinter inserted itself, throbbed and welted with clear fluid and blood oozed from the wound. Jimmy pushed my shovel out of the way and took over the area.

First, it was, what appeared to be—a small rib. Then, a femur or fibula (either one...it was hard to tell). Then, from the silt, out popped a skull. Suddenly, the pain in my hand was nonexistent. We both stood staring at the miniature human remains—frozen. It was obvious just from the size that the kid was no older than ten. The same age that Todd was when the stray bullet took his life. In the skull was a hole the size of a bullet.

In the years that followed I will never forget the loss of Todd. Sure he was Jimmy’s brother but, in a sense, he was mine too. One could never fathom the loss of a loved one until they too suffer the emotional scar that remains eternal. Not only was that my first encounter with death but I learned a lot about myself that year—and the years that followed. Also, I better understood the meaning of life. It was meant to be this. God does work in mysterious ways.

To this day, it burns my soul—the significance of mine and Jimmy’s find—the remains beneath that mound of dirt. A ghost led us there. It may sound crazy but it was the ghost of Todd. Sure justice wasn’t brought to its knees but it sure does make one hell of a story. And as for Jimmy, just in case

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you're wondering, he joined Todd in '98—a motorboat accident. His death led officials to the bottom of a muddy river. With his damaged body they found the remains of a little girl who came up missing back in '85—the same year as Todd's untimely death. I guess Todd missed Jimmy and decided that it was time to call him home.

Strangely, there's a message carved into a tree the three of us planted years ago. It reads: SOMEDAY SOON THE THREE OF US WILL SEE THE WORLD FROM HEAVEN AND WILL ALWAYS BE. The tree was just a twig when Todd died—and I refuse to believe it's a coincidence. I await the day he calls me home. I feel it's very soon. But whose death will my expiration avenge? I visit that tree often, as I do the mound of dirt beneath it just beyond the tracks.

The Grave Keeper

The grave keeper wobbled with little control as he held onto a black granite tombstone that read: MAY SATAN CONFINE HIM AND TORTURE HIS SOUL. This particular tombstone was the only one of its kind throughout the entire cemetery.

Pouring the last ounce of whiskey down his throat, from a fifth that once existed, he slammed the bottle against the tombstone, shattering shrapnel everywhere, and threw the jagged remainder upon the grave. “Welp, Lou o’ buddy ole pal, have a good night’s rest. I’ll miss ya, but after I find s’more whiskey,” the grave keeper slurred as he staggered his way to his shed upon the hill, just beyond the graves. It was located in the darkest part of the cemetery where even shadows dared to near-dwell. Wheezing and hacking, he finally reached his destination. It was an old, worn out building with waterlogged firewood piled high on the side and an old rickety fence that boxed it in. There was an old outhouse in the back with a half-moon and three-star design cut into the door toward the top. On the other side of the building stood a tall oak tree with a long branch that hung down and scraped against the window when the wind would pick up.

It was a far cry from what most people would consider their home, but it didn’t seem to bother the grave keeper. He knew of nothing else but to drink himself unconscious and to make sure that the dead slept, as well. The

grave keeper went inside and started rummaging through an old pine box that contained a lot of useless objects. “I know that pint of whiskey’s in here somewhere! I just know it!” he mumbled as he dug through the junk.

“There’t is.” He put the bottle up to his lips, holding it with both hands and gave it the most passionate kiss. “I’ll never let you stray again, my darling,” he joked as he hiccupped and stumbled over his own two feet, landing him flat on his face, and rendering him unconscious. As he lay there, the wind picked up and tiny drops of rain pounced on his rooftop while slowly leaking through crevices that traveled like spider veins throughout the entire ceiling. The old oak tree branch started to scrape upon the window, making the creepiest sound.

Suddenly, the door slammed open startling the grave keeper out of his sleep. At first, he lay still in a state of subconscious; however, as soon as he was able to understand the concept of what was happening, there was a sharp blow to his head. The grave keeper woke up, once more. This time, it was very dark and all that he could hear was the sound of the settling earth. He quickly became short of breath and felt restricted. Confined. Therefore, he panicked mercifully while feeling his location and realizing the confinement. His space was limited. He realized that where he lay was every man’s living nightmare. He beat and banged every area that surrounded him, splinting wood, which allowed the soil to seep through the cracks. This was definitely an indication that he was buried alive. He screamed frantically, “Help!!! Help!!!”

Six feet above ground, on the top layer of soil that consumed its living corpse, stood a figure. He leaned up against a black granite tombstone that read: MAY SATAN CONFINE HIM AND TORTURE HIS SOUL. While lowering his head toward the mound of packed soil he uttered, with a sarcastic grin, “You were a lousy grave keeper, anyway.” He tossed a broken, jagged whiskey bottle toward the packed mound of soil, turned around, and disappeared into the darkness.

The thunder clapped so loudly it shook the earth.

The rain poured down as the grave keeper lay confused—drenched in rain. “Oh, my. It, it, it was all just a dream,” he sputtered as his bottom lip

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quivered with a chill. As he sat up and looked around, he noticed his surroundings. Beside him was a packed mound of soil which, thereupon, rested a broken whiskey bottle. As he slowly turned, he noticed the black granite tombstone. Etched upon it was the name Lou. However, when he wiped away the smudge that obstructed the lettering that continued he read aloud the name Louis Manchuk. “Hey, that’s my name,” he said with a disoriented look on his face.

Untitled Rough Draft

It is believed by the natives of Favre Island that if you had done somebody wrong at one point in your life their ghost will take shape of a menacing shadow and haunt you to your grave. The following story you are about to read is based on a true account and a recorded conversation. Although legal rights prohibit me to pen this document in verbatim, the dialogue is very similar to the actual recording.

The setting is Wingate Mansion on Favre Island. The cast is Doc Smith and Master William Wingate. The story revolves around, the deceased, Mr. Anderson. And so we begin.

Doc Smith leaned up against a cold, gray, stone-textured wall and lit a cigarette. He took a deep drag and began to assist the anti-distraught Master William Wingate with resolving an issue concerning the passing of his dear friend Mr. Anderson and the possibility of the deceased's ghost lingering within the walls of the mansion. "Master William, if you only knew how preposterous this sounds. A ghost? Here? At Wingate Mansion? It's completely absurd." Doc Smith had a history of overreacting to the smallest things.

Suddenly, a mild, strong draft gusted through the room scattering papers and gathering attention from both parties. Doc Smith raised an eyebrow as Master William replied with an argument. "I know. I know. But I tell you, I

know what I saw. Doc, it was as plain as you're standing here now." It was obvious Master William wasn't a bit concerned about the surprising incident. And, apparently, neither was Doc Smith. Yet, he grabbed hold of a nearby pillar in an attempt to sustain his balance.

Doc Smith cleared his throat as he loosened his collar, "Ahem..." Then he rubbed the back of his neck as though he felt a tingle. "Have you ever had an eye exam? I know an exceptional ophthalmologist just outside of—" "Ophthalmologist? Really?" Meanwhile, a softer draft trailed behind the previous gust, which caused Doc Smith's lapel to move, but only slightly. "My vision is 20/10, Doc. Why, I can see for miles with perfect clarity. My eyesight being good or bad isn't the case. I was right there, not even ten feet away. Spend the night! I will show you! I will prove to you that I'm not a loon!" Doc Smith shivered as a small chill infiltrated his body. Still, he remained unconvinced. "Master William, I simply suggested an eye exam. I mentioned nothing about your mental state. You're taking this whole thing way too far...blowing speculation out of proportion. And as for me spending the night, I'm working the ER. Believe you/me, under different circumstances I would take you up on a sleepover." Doc Smith tilted his head for a moment in remembrance. "I haven't done such a thing since my youth.

"Tell me, Master William, did you by any chance have a nightcap? You know, the meds you are on will counteract the alcohol causing hallucinations and delusions."

The argument escalated and took a slight turn, but not for the better. The outside winds made the exterior doors shutter as a branch crashed through a bay window. Still, the two men seemed unconcerned. "I don't believe I'm hearing you correctly. I haven't dropped a drink since the night Veronica left."

"Really?—'cause you sound a little inebriated right now." "I'm ashamed of you, Doctor. Is that the best you can do? Deter the situation at hand using my prior bouts with the bottle as a crutch. Why, you're the great Doc Smith. You can give a better analysis than alcoholism."—(in a single breath)—"Or has your remedial clairvoyance, your ability to sense any condition before it manifests into something worse without assistance from Webmd, abandoned you?"

That infuriated Doc Smith. “Don’t you turn this on me, William! I’m only trying to be rational. I mean, ghosts just don’t exist. Debunking the occurrence with my medical tactic is all I know to do. Remember...you called me, dear friend. I’m doing you the favor.”

Master William shook his head in disappointment. “Clever, Doctor. How so very clever. I call to you in good faith, you come over and suggest that I’m crazy, and then you consider your cynicism a favor. Good faith, Doctor. This isn’t your clinic. Therefore, I’m not your patient right now. I called my friend. A friend that just so happens to be a doctor. Why, right now, I wouldn’t even claim you as my friend.”

Doc Smith was much too stubborn to give up that easily. Therefore, he switched gears and made one last attempt at rationality. “If that’s the way you feel right now then why do you keep referring to me as Doctor? Rather than further this discussion why don’t you use your authority and tell me to get out? Something is keeping me here.” Now the tables were turned. And Master William showed a slight affliction to Doc Smith’s retort.

“The hope that you will, at least, try to understand me rather than scorn me.”

“On that note, I will take leave. I just can’t bring myself to participate in such foolishness. I refuse to put my license on the line.” There was no use. Master William was even more stubborn than Doc Smith; therefore, convincing him, otherwise, was like beating a dead horse.

“How would you possibly lose your doctrine, Doctor? A diminished reputation?”

“Bye, William. I wish you well. I hope this little snag in our friendship doesn’t provoke you to look for another doctor. Your well-being is, and always will be, my concern.” Doc Smith held up his right fist and pointed at Master William. “Doctor’s code of ethics. Farewell, my friend.”

As Doc Smith took his exit he was approached by a shadowy figure in the foyer with a partition obstructing Master William’s view. Softly spoken, he gave instruction. “Continue with the treatment until further notice. The subject hasn’t a clue, thus far.” Then Doc Smith nonchalantly exited the mansion and boarded his pontoon boat. Into the dark void of night, he faded till he was seen no more.

Billy Van

The storm settled as a violent scream came from within the mansion walls and pierced through the ominous night. The moon reflected on the waters as they rippled and shimmered—a ghostly hue

About the Author



Picture courtesy billyvan.weebly.com © 2016 by Brittany Van

Billy Van was born on December 11, 1975, in Eldorado, IL at Ferrell's Hospital. He was raised in a middle-working-class environment. His father, Arval Van, did factory work while his mother, Anita Van, earned her degree in nursing and worked at Loretta Nursing Home in Shawneetown, IL from the time she was a teenager to the time it shut down back in '98. Billy is the youngest of three. At that, he would become the prodigy child. As a kid, Billy involved himself in the arts—drawing, writing, and music; he enjoyed challenging his creativity like a second language. However, as he grew older, writing poetry and prose, and performing music were the only two that stuck with him. At sixteen, Billy was encouraged by his mother to obtain his nurse's aide certificate and come to work with her. He did just that. He earned his merits at Loretta while working there as a student. To this day, Billy still takes pride in being a healthcare provider. Written by Scott Clements

