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Short, Short **SPOOKY** **STORIES** *Contest*



A contest for amateur writers of all ages.

October 2013

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Age 6 to 12 Entries

AGES 6-9 FIRST PLACE:

Kraken Attack, by *Finnegan Connors*, age 9

“One dark night, there were sailors lost upon a stormy sea. They had been out there for many a long year. Suddenly, the ship bumped against something. They braced for impact and death, but nothing happened. The crew slowly looked over the railing, and they found nothing but a pebbly beach. They slowly filed off the ship. No sooner than had they all abandoned the ship, the “pebbly beach” rose out of the water. The Kraken! The crew screamed, and that was the last noise they ever made.” Mr. K turned off his flashlight. As always, Carter, unlike the other Boy Scouts, wasn’t scared of campfire stories. He decided to go fishing that night.

Carter grabbed his fishing pole, his worms, and his boating oar. He was very headstrong, and he had a special talent of holding his breath under water for three minutes. He walked down to the lake, which was very far away, so it was midnight by the time he reached the boat. He tore the rain cover off his boat, and who was he face-to-face with but Mr. K. The Boy Scout leader grinned, and he started changing form, and only then did Carter realize that K stood for Kraken!

Carter quickly jumped into the boat, sending the Kraken tumbling out of the craft and into the lake. Carter rowed out into the lake as fast as he could. The Kraken was a squid, so of course it could catch Carter, even though he paddled furiously. Carter felt a tremor, and the Kraken rose right under the boat. Carter fell into the water. The last things he saw were the Kraken’s suckers, which were nine feet in diameter. Then he blacked out.

Carter woke in the Kraken’s lair. Of course he wasn’t scared, but the scenery was surprising. He was in an upturned boat with a hatch in the bottom, and there was no water. It was filled with algae and lit by only a single lantern. Manacles, which were hung on a hook in the wall, suspended him and his feet just barely scraped the floor. It was a tricky situation, but he knew that he could get free.

Carter’s first try at escaping was trying to wiggle the manacles off, but all he accomplished was chafing his wrists. However, he had other ways to escape. His second attempt was trying to pull the manacles off the hook, but his feet couldn’t get close enough to the ground to even try. He realized that the Kraken was gone, so his third attempt might be successful yet. He groped around, and his fingers met a skinny, sharp, rock. He put it into the locks of each of his cuffs, and they fell off his arms with a dull *clunk*. Carter grabbed the hatch, and swam upwards to freedom.

The Kraken had been waiting for this, and it swam upward also. Carter was never heard of again. The Kraken turned into Mr. K again. He walked back to the Boy Scouts’ camp. No one asked a single thing about Carter. Underwater, his bones slowly floated down to the floor with the rest of the Kraken’s victims. The Kraken was still at large!

AGES 6-9 SECOND PLACE:

A Mid-Summer Scare, by *Adarsh Payyakkil*, age 8

It was 3:00 PM in the woods where Alex was camping. Even though the sun was still up, Alex shivered. You see, Alex was not the “big adventurous type”. His mom and dad had gone hiking. So, there he lay outside his tent staring at the sky. For Alex, the forest had always been a depressing place. Alex wished he was back at his home. “No one camps for two weeks. No one except us”, Alex thought. The trees were very tall and blocked out the sun. Gloomy and dark – not a good combination for an eleven year old on his own in the middle of nowhere, Alex thought to himself.

As he was lying down, he heard a sound. “Mom, dad, is that you”? , he called out. No answer. He stood up and looked around. There was no one. “Was it my imagination?” he thought. Then he heard a piercing scream. Alex tried to run back to the tent, but before he got in, he tripped on something. He tried to get up and run. And that is when he saw the man with a scarred face, but his body was not human at all.

Alex woke up, found himself locked in a cell and realized he was a prisoner. He looked around and peered outside through the only window in sight. Alex saw what seemed to be a side of a flying saucer. Alex felt his blood freeze. “Where am I”? Alex thought. “Am I being transferred to a different planet, an unknown one?” he wondered. He took a few deep breaths and found himself calming down.

Right now he had to break out. He saw some keys on the wall outside his cell. “One of those might unlock my cell”, he thought. He tried to reach the keys through the cell bars but a second later the keys exploded. The shards went flying. One of the pieces went deep into Alex’s left arm. He screamed in agony. He heard a deep muffled cackle that reminded him of a scary he movie he saw last Halloween. “Why would anyone want to kill me”? Alex thought. When sharp shards come straight at you, it’s no fun, especially in a filthy, dark and damp dungeon. And the he felt, something black was drinking the blood oozing from Alex’s wound..... and he passed out.

Alex looked around. Darkness! He felt like a tiny bug about to be crushed by a giant foot. He banged on the cell gates and miraculously they opened. He saw a long corridor. Alex walked and walked and walked. The corridor seemed endless. Then he felt like the walls around the corridor closing in on him. He looked to make sure it was just his imagination. That is when he noticed the claw marks on the walls. He felt something was wrong. Suddenly the wall burst open. Something that looked like a black hole sucked Alex in. He felt like acid was in his blood and his energy was being drained. He wanted to scream but he was too tired to even scream. He fell in a heap. “Why would someone be so cruel?” he thought. “Put him back into his cell”, a deep voice said. He felt himself being dragged back into a cell, but this time, it was a different one.

It had been three hours since he was in his new cell. And by that time, he had regained some of his energy. He looked around. This cell room had no windows but had a number lock. "May be I can crack the code and get out of this cell" Alex thought. He was very good at puzzles and cracked the code for the lock easily. He quietly ran through the corridor. He carefully dodged death rays and laser guns and saw weird animals. Finally, Alex walked into a large room. The man with the scarred face materialized in front of him. To his surprise, the man with the scarred face screamed at the same time Alex started screaming.

"You... are... scared... of... me...?" asked the scarred face.

Alex nodded cautiously. "My... n-name... i-is... A-Alex ... a-and I a-am from the p-planet e-earth", he said.

"M-mine is Ron di Doom and I a-am from p-planet Zartok-5", said the scarred face. "I was banished from my tribe. I stole some food for my family and I was caught and banished".

"How did I get here?" asked Alex.

"My powers, they go crazy sometimes, and I unknowingly brought you here" Ron said.

"Then why did you keep me in the prison?" Alex asked.

"I was scared of you and so, to protect myself, I had to use my Robots to keep you in the cell", Ron said.

"Then what was the black thing that was drinking my blood?" asked Alex. "Oh, that was just 'Black Frost', my pet and he was just licking you", Ron said laughing.

"I am sorry, I scared you. The least I can do is to send you back home", Ron said.

"Can I have a souvenir?" asked Alex.

Ron gave him an alien coin to keep. Ron focused all his energy on Alex and a few minutes later Alex found himself back in the tent. Ron's tribe saw how well Ron had behaved and de-banished him.

Alex had to wait a few more hours for his mom and dad to come back so that he could tell them all about the adventure he just had. Alex was sure his parents would not believe him, but he had the alien coin to prove himself.....

AGES 6-9 THIRD PLACE:

The Night of the Death of Gloria, by *Benjamin Gage*, age 9

Gloria stumbled over the fence. Ever since she moved into the woods, nothing worked out for her. Her garden would never grow, so she rarely had anything to eat. Because she was so poor and hungry, every now and then she stole from her neighbor's garden to get dinner.

Gloria was a short and old woman. She lived in a small lumber house on a dirt path deep in the woods. Nearby, there was a dirty old woman known as the old witch. They had both moved to the woods long ago. On the day that Gloria moved to the woods, she started to build a fence around her property. Without realizing it, her fence ended up on the witch's property.

When the witch went outside the next day, she freaked out seeing that the fence cut through her property. She peeked over the fence and saw Gloria sitting outside on her back lawn. Since the witch had magic powers, she cursed Gloria's life. Gloria never knew.

Ever since, bad things started happening to Gloria. Eventually, she realized that she had a next door neighbor. She also realized that her neighbor had magical powers. Strange things were happening to her ever since she moved to the woods. Over the fence, she sometimes saw flashes of light reflecting off of the trees.

Anyways, let me get on with the story. Gloria brushed the dirt off her vest. She stood fixed to the ground and eyed the old witch's garden.

Gloria picked up the first thing in sight: a pumpkin. She ran, jumped the fence, and then started running again. She could hear the old witch screaming and cussing behind her. Finally, Gloria made it back to her house. She took her sharpest knife, which was covered in wilted lettuce and moldy bread. She peered out of her largest window and watched the full moon shimmer down on her cobwebbed counter. She turned back to the pumpkin. She grinned with her old, dry lips. She muttered to herself, "Stomach, here comes dinner!"

Gloria picked up the knife with her right hand and held it over the pumpkin. Her arm shook as she slowly lowered the knife. Forcing the knife down, she groaned from the effort of cutting the strong pumpkin open. Suddenly, there was a bright green explosion. Gloria screamed in shock and fell to the ground.

Slowly, a wispy human figure came out of the remains of the pumpkin. The spirit had long, black hair that drooped down to her long, buttoned coat. Under that, she wore rugged, leaf-covered khakis. Her shoes were small and black with glittery, golden buckles. One thing that stood out was her face. She had large, black, beady eyes. Her mouth was like a cave of cavities. Her nose was awfully strange. It was squashed into her face so the nostrils were sticking outward. At first, you couldn't even tell that it was a nose.

She laughed an evil laugh. Gloria recognized this laugh immediately. It was the old witch's laugh. The body also looked like the witch. "I demand my precious pumpkin back or else!" hollered the old witch's spirit.

"N-no!" stammered Gloria.

"Fine," snarled the witch.

The witch drew a small hand knife from her pocket. "Prepare to die!" she gnarled. She slowly drifted towards Gloria. Gloria's heart raced as the witch laughed an evil laugh. All of the sudden, Gloria's world went black. No one knows what happened to Gloria that night, and I think for the good of humanity, we are better off not knowing.

AGES 10-12 FIRST PLACE:

The Madness, by *Olivia Chatfield-Scott*, age 12

"Run. RUN!" the voice in the back of my head says. **"Run!"** I obey, the trees grabbing hold of strands of my brown hair, ripping them out of my head with their gnarly fingertips. **"Don't let them catch you."**

I remember my brother, the Dark-Keepers first gaining on him, closer, closer, catching him. Visions of my brother's scarlet -red blood spattered on the fallen maple leaves dance before my eyes, blurring my sight. I shake my head vigorously, silver tears flying off my face as I do so. I must focus or I will end up like him. He wasn't fast enough. I grit my teeth. You think I'm heartless? Maybe so. Only because I am sticking to the number one survival rule; don't focus on the past, and your heart will be strong enough to withstand any sword.

I dash through the fir, maple, and aspen trees, swerving around the rotting corpses of The Dark-Keeper's victims so I don't trip. As I gather speed, my surroundings get more blurry. The Dark -Keepers are probably far behind. I stop for a rest, to finally let myself break down for a moment. Why my brother? Why? As my emotions overload, I catch a glimpse of a dark cloak swirling around a shadowy figure nearby. I hold my breath. I start running again. I emerge through the trees, sprinting towards the town. "Maybe I can hide in someone's home...." I think desperately. I zig-zag around a pile of muck and burst into someone's house. "Hide me! Please..." I beg the tall man staring at me. He looks over my shoulder, sees the angry Dark-Keeper outside the window, and quickly shoves me into a closet.

"Don't. Make. A. Sound." he hisses in Common, shutting the door. I hear the Dark-Keeper come in the house.

"Gulam she na ho'te kimyode'su ka?" the Dark- Keeper growls in the language that all Dark-Keeper's speak; Omega.

"No, there is no-one in here except me, Ma'am." the man answers, sliding over a bit so he is blocking the door from the Keeper's line of sight, but leaving a crack for me to see by. "Oh, nice cloak you have there! Is it new?" he stalls, bravely looking the disgusting Keeper woman in the eye.

The Dark-Keeper makes a facial expression that if you squinted, could probably pass for a smile. "Kono sh'shiki!"

"It is? I thought so. It almost looks like silk, it's so beautiful. Well, I'd love to stay and chat, but I have got things to do, you know? Maybe stop by later." He moves toward her, gently trying to push her towards the door.

"Who would want someone as horrible as that to come over again?" I think. But I had a feeling he would get around it. The Dark-Keeper leaves, slamming the door behind her. The man waits a couple seconds, then jogs over to the closet.

"You better get out of here quick, kid. There's never only one Dark-Keeper 'round here." He helps me up, pushes me over to the back door, and shoves me out.

"Shiishan." I say, then realize he probably doesn't speak my language, Monoshe. But I am mistaken.

He nods, smiles, and says, "Ju'ko mell oteha. See you later." I gasp, smile at him, and say, "I hope so. Shiishan, shiishan."

I run out into the cloudless green day. Yes, green. It's about afternoon, so the sky has turned colors. I hide behind trees, rocks, houses, and anything that is tall enough for me to hide behind. I run into a stretch of aspen trees again. Seems like aspen trees are the only living plant that The Dark-Keepers spared, for they are everywhere. All of a sudden, I get dragged out of my little reverie by the sudden realization that a Dark-Keeper is right there. Right next to another tree in this stretch. I slowly crouch down, trying to make myself as small as possible. "Darn!" I curse to myself. If I hadn't been daydreaming, as usual, I could have gotten farther away! The Dark-Keeper comes closer.

"Please don't let it see me..." I beg silently to no -one in particular. Sad to know most wishes don't come true. At least mine, anyway. The figure spots me. Starts coming closer. I scramble to get up, to start running, to hide. Then I trip over a protruding tree root. My head makes a loud crack against the barren, dusty ground. Blood starts running into my eyes, and then into my mouth. I spit the salty-tasting liquid out, quickly swipe the blood out of my eyes, regain my footing, and try to regain my sense of balance. But it's hard since my head is hurting so bad, the world around me is spinning. *"Where's that Dark- keeper?"* I think, running backwards so I can keep a look out. Then I suddenly have a sense that someone is behind me. I have just enough time to turn around and see the scythe before it swings into my neck.

That was when I died.

AGES 10-12 SECOND PLACE:

The Haunted Dress, by Katie McDonald, age 11

The day it began was quite uneventful. I finished up some last minute homework, watched some TV and went to the second hand store to get a Halloween costume.

As we got out of the car, a long gust of wind slashed us. I hid behind the car for protection along with my mom. When the wind died down a little my mom and I sprinted into the store.

“Some weather,” I exclaimed to my mother. She laughed and nodded and as we entered the Halloween section of the store.

We strode along the aisles as we tried on funny wigs and costumes.

Finally, my mother came up to me with a beautiful wedding dress.

“You want me to be a bride?” I asked, not loving the idea.

“Not just any bride, a zombie bride!” She said excitedly.

I immediately knew that this was the way to go. I picked up the wedding dress to get a closer look: It was a long sleeve dress with ruffles and jewels. In addition, it had beautiful ivory lace that shimmered like nothing else in the universe.

“It might be a little hard to trick-or-treat in,” mom questioned as she picked up the long train of the dress.

“We could cut it just a little,” I said still in awe of its beauty.

“I am going to go get the zombie makeup; you just stay here with the dress.” I said to my mom who still, was speechless.

After I picked out what I thought was the perfect makeup, I came over to my mom who looked very pale and weak, with the dress high in the air with her hands.

“Are you okay?” I asked

“I am fine sweetheart, I guess I just feel a little eerie thinking that this was once somebody’s wedding dress and now we are going to cut it up for a monster dress,” my mom said as she began to regain the color in her face. I took the dress from her hands and also felt the sad, eerie feeling my mother had felt.

When we got up to the cashier, the girl who was checking us out held the dress up and look confused.

”I have never seen this dress here before,” and put the dress down and that that same depressing feeling filled the air.

That night when I got home my mom announced she would be taking the dog on a walk. She asked if I would like to come, but much to her surprise, I declined, wanting to admire my dress that evening.

I searched around the house for my dress when from the corner of my eye I swear I saw something move from my bedroom. I walked into the bedroom. Then, something moved again, and this time, it looked like the wedding dress was the thing that moved. The wedding dress HAD moved, not because of the wind, not because of a mouse, but all on its own it had completely shifted positions. But it didn't stop there, the wedding dress had gotten up out of the chair. Slowly, a person began to fill in the dress. At first, she was quite beautiful, long blond hair and piercing blue eyes, then the scars and scratches appeared on her pale face. She came over and grabbed my arm so quickly that I couldn't even react.

"You have no idea of the power of this dress, look what it has done to me, burn it, do whatever you have to do to never see it again!" The bride vanished as quickly as she came, and the dress looked like any other dress again on the chair.

I ran out of the house and screamed at the top of my lungs for my mother. When I finally found my mother, I told her what happened. But to my disappointment, she refused to believe me.

"Fine, don't believe me, but whatever you do get that thing out of my sight and my bedroom, I am going to have to be something else for Halloween!"

The next morning I woke up, and felt sharp pains in my arms. When I sat up, I saw the wedding dress on my body, the sleeves of the dress stained red and the words: "**This will be the last warning,**" in blood on the wall of my bedroom.

AGES 10-12 THIRD PLACE:

The Pencil, by *Emma Beatty*, age 11

It was a cold, wet, foggy morning in October (right after a dark and stormy night) and Steve was almost ready for school. He just had to find his pencil. As he was looking, he heard a “clink-clink-clink”. He looked behind him, but no one was there, only strange pencil-like marks on the kitchen floor. Steve went on looking for his pencil.

Then it happened again. “clink-clink-clink.”

Steve hurriedly decided he could borrow a pencil in class and he headed off for school.

He heard the “clink-clink-clink” as he was walking to school. He continued walking. Then he heard it again. “clink-clink-clink.”

“Hey, come back here, you!” You won’t do anything right in school without me!” , a squeaky, mocking voice said.

Steve looked around. Who’s voice was that? He wondered. All he saw was a pencil rolling on the sidewalk. He went back and picked it up. I can use this at school, he thought. He pondered a moment about what the voice had said. Steve sighed. He didn’t do well in school.

Then he remembered that if he didn’t hurry, he would be late for school.

Later that morning, he was trying to write a story in English class when all of a sudden, he couldn’t control his pencil anymore. It seemed as if the pencil had control over his hand. His hand moved up to him, so that he was face to face with the pencil. The bite marks on the pencil turned into what looked like a tiny menacing face.

“I can write better than you!” said the pencil, in its squeaky mocking voice.

Steve was too surprised to say a word. His hand moved back to his paper. The pencil raced across the page with great speed, (along with Steve’s hand) and erased every word Steve had written, (not that he had written much) then substituted words of its own for Steve’s.

As the pencil was doing this, Steve snapped out of his shock.

“Oh no you don’t”, he said.

Steve tried to take the bewitched pencil from his hand, but it was stuck like glue. The sinister pencil carried on taunting and writing relentlessly until it had nearly finished Steve’s assignment.

The bell rang, and it was time for recess. The pencil dropped down on Steve’s desk. It rolled there like it had on the sidewalk. It looked like an ordinary pencil. As Steve left, he threw the pencil in the trash.

When he got back to his desk later, the pencil was inside.

“You can’t get rid of me, you can’t do anything right without me!”, said the relentless pencil.

Steve tried to sharpen the pencil to shavings, but it kept popping out the sharpener. Steve tried to bury the pencil in the sandbox, but when he went back to his desk, there was the pencil again. (but this time it looked dirty and smelled musty,) when it was quiet reading time his teacher asked him to walk with her in the hallway and talk about things.

“Steve your work is getting better , but you’ve been acting strange today, is something the matter ?”, asked the teacher.

“W – w- well”, stammered Steve, “it was my pencil. It told me it could write better than I do and then it did.”

“Steve”, said his teacher, “ you know pencils aren’t alive, you have a wild imagination. You need to learn to see and hear only real things.”

“But-” Steve started to say.

“Let’s get to back to class,” said the teacher.

As Steve walked back down the hall with his teacher, he thought... pencils weren’t alive, so he must have written the paper himself. But how and how could he have thrown away the pencil, buried it, and found it back in his desk after he had tried to get rid of it? It was a mystery, but he decided he wouldn’t let an immortal pencil boss him around. He was puzzled as they walked back into the classroom.

Later at math time, he wrote answers in a flurry, wearing the pencil down to a stub and threw it out as he was leaving the last class Friday afternoon.

That night, Steve was asleep, despite the storm that was going on. It might seem like the storm and sleeping people were the only things that were happening on Steve’s street, but they weren’t. That was because the other thing that was happening was a “clink- clink-clink” sound coming from the kitchen floor. Steve woke up. The clinking sound got louder and closer, as it was then creeping up the stairs. Steve heard the sound and covered his head with his blanket. "Clink-clink-clink", the sound was now on his bedroom floor!

The next day, Steve explained the story to everyone he knew, but no one believed him. He told his parents, his friends, he called relatives who lived out of town and many others, but nobody believed his story. Steve didn’t mind. He didn’t believe it either. But he locked that pencil in a toy safe and put it in his basement.

Steve tried to forget about the pencil over the weekend until Monday when he found a pencil with identical bite marks. He looked all around him. Maybe someone had put it in his desk by

mistake. He looked up, the teacher was shoving a picture of herself with a black cat in her drawer. She whirled around to look right at him, she winked. He gulped. It must have been she who had given him the pencil that was in his desk.

The pencil his teacher gave him he kept, but he didn't use. He never took another pencil off the sidewalk again.

Sometimes in the wee small hours of the night when everyone was asleep, he could hear a "clink, clink, clink" on the kitchen floor.

The Last Seen Family, by Jaden Aguilera, 4th grade

Chapter 1 It's the end

Once upon a time there was a Family who lived in Oklahoma. The next day there was an earthquake the biggest one ever. HE HE HE. It struck Oklahoma and the two parents were protecting the kids so the kids wouldn't get hurt then it struck their house making them disappear. The next day John the father's father went to the house to check on them. Then their door cracked open something came in what was it? The dad yelled HELLO as loud as he could there was no answer then it came out what was it was it a ghost or a vampire or a monster? Hello it said then it said goodbye and all of a sudden it quickly slayed the dad. HE HE HE. The next morning everybody was looking for John. Then they sent John's brother George went to that house he saw the exact same thing that John did. This time George knew what it was a GHOST. HE HE HE. Then he saw John was on the floor surely dead he was covered in dry blood. Then George saw it again but this time he shot an arrow at it and hit it. Something was strange the arrow didn't go through the ghost. It killed the ghost. The next day it happened again but they killed the people in their sleep there were only two people left. One was named doctor Doomsday and Oliver Queen. They went by every one's house only finding two things heads and blood. HE HE HE. So with the work of both of them they turned the people into ROBOTS. Then Oliver forced the robots to build a time machine. When it was done the Robots had Oliver Queen go through. He stepped in the time machine and his head popped off.

Chapter 2 Life Again Maybe

When the robots and doctor Doomsday were sowing Oliver's head back on they were attacked by the most disgusting animal alive. The animal was a baby jaguar. It was so scary that doctor Doomsday peed his pants. HE HE HE. When it was over there was only 2 robots and doctor Doomsday but luckily Oliver was still there. When they were done with Oliver he got up his eyes were upside down and his legs were cricked he was a zombie. bugFrom that moment on doctor Doomsday never wanted to be a scientist. But he knew how to turn Oliver back into a person. So doctor Doomsday did turn him into a person. So they had their army fight. They won the war of monsters. HE HE HE. You wouldn't know how it felt to be done with the war but as Oliver didn't know it was far from over. That night the worst monster of all came his name was doctor destruction. He slayed doctor Doomsday. So it was up to Oliver to totally win the war.

Chapter 3 Survival

then it happened again the next morning the robots were fighting the monsters when they were done fighting Oliver and the robots went to find out who started it. it was doctor madhouse. HE HE HE. Oliver shot an arrow at him it missed he ran out of the room Oliver was very nervous he didn't know what to do he was all alone in that dark and creepy building then it happened. Dr. madhouse went and stabbed Oliver in the spine. Oliver nearly died so while Oliver was on the ground Dr. madhouse walked up to Oliver but as far as Dr. madhouse knew Oliver's robots weren't coming but they were. When they arrived they took Oliver's bow and shot Dr. madhouse in the

head. Oliver was safe and he swore that that would never happen again. They rebuild the city and it grew and every one lived happily ever after.

The Haunted House, by Kylee Bacon, 4th grade

One day a family got a new house and the family did not know that the house was haunted. One day when someone was taking a shower the light turned on and off and the water turned off and on.

When someone was sitting in a chair and then the chair tipped backwards. Then the family knew that the house was haunted. The family started to pack up it was very hard to pack because the ghosts took out all the cloths. Finally they got all packed up then took off.

Once they took off they were still afraid that they were haunted by ghosts. They were not haunted by ghost but they were haunted by a vampire and a zombie one child said we are doomed. They got out of the car and got all of their stuff out of the trunk and ran off.

It was so hot they looked behind them the monsters were still behind them. Then they had an idea.

You know that vampires and zombies don't like light then we walk to the lightest cave and then they will die. Do the monsters follow the family to the lightest cave.

They looked everywhere but they could not find the lightest cave. Then one night they saw something bright. Can it be the lightest cave?

The family walked closer and closer and then found the lightest cave. They looked inside of the cave and then they saw a lot of monsters that were dead because the monsters went to close to the lightest cave and the monsters died.

The monsters wanted to run away but the family pulled on their sleeves and put the monsters in their cave. Then the monsters went to the light and then closer and closer and then the monsters died and hanged the monsters on the wall where the other monsters were hanging. Once the family hung the monsters on the cave wall and then left the cave it was a long walk to the car. Then the family got into the car and took off.

Now the family was trying to find a new home. The mother was trying to find a home on her phone. The mother found a home on her phone and went to their new home. They went into their new house and unpacked and laid on their beds and went to sleep and the family did not know that the house was still haunted.

Once the family woke up and got ready for the day, then someone died from a ghost. The family was afraid that they might die by the ghosts. Then another ghost killed another person. Now the family was very afraid. Then the mother died from another ghost. Then the last kid got killed by another ghost. Then the father died by another ghost. After that day you will be haunted.

It's Raining Black Cats and Wolves, by Annabelle Beatty, age 8

One October day it got a little cloudy. The next day it got even cloudier and a few days later it got even cloudier. Until one night when I was about to go to sleep, there was a thunder storm. It was very loud and booming as they always are. It was pouring down, it looked like it was raining cats and dogs, but not ordinary cats and dogs! It looked like black cats and the dogs looked more on the wolfier side, like wolf-dogs.

I covered my head with one of my pillows and then I could sleep.

The very next morning, I peered out my window. There were black cats out and dogs that looked like wolves. Everyone seemed to be in their houses. Then I remembered that I was in Mystical Town. Anything could happen in Mystical Town. Oh ! and it was Halloween last night.

I somehow screamed as loud as I could. My parents ran into my bedroom! they looked at me. Then they noticed it was raining black cats and wolves. They screamed too. Mama even called 911! And my neighbors did too, but the operators wouldn't believe it, but they offered to send the animal control truck because we said there were probably fifty thousand of 'em out there.

We ran to the basement. There we saw a foot of water flooding in our basement. Then suddenly it was gone. My heart was beating hard. I slipped near the basement window and in a flash it flew open. A black cat jumped through and started talking to us and we could understand it.

"What's up dudes? " it said, why look so scared? "

Then a wolf jumped in and said, " Hey Christa!"

"Joe!" Christa the black cat said. They hugged.

"What's going on!" shrieked my mother. The cat hissed and pointed its paw out, as if it was saying 'talk to the paw, screaming is ridiculous'. The cat and wolf jumped out the window. I froze for a very, very , very long time.

I could hear meowing and howling from outside.

"We better get out of town," my mother said.

"Like refugees?" I said.

"I guess so, if you think about it that way, my mom answered.

Soon my dad called 911 again and asked the guy to send the National Guard with a helicopter. They came and got us and our little caged rodents. I look down below from the helicopter and I saw regular cats and dogs in the neighborhood yards.

I woke up from a dream feeling confused at first. I stretched and put on my slippers. Then I got out of bed to wake up my family to say, "rabbit" because it is the first of November and the first person to say it gets luck for the month. I looked out my window and saw down in the yard that there were cats and dogs, I guess all the neighborhood cats and dogs were out this morning, but wait, these were not ordinary cats and dogs . They were black cats and the dogs looked on the wolfier side. uh-oh . "Heeeelllllllllppppppppppp!!!!!!!!!!!"

The End

October 31, 2013, by Cedar Bennett, age 12

When humans meet somebody new, they introduce themselves. I don't know you, you are somebody new. My name is Elvira Barnabas, Mistress of Darkness. And you are Soon To Be Expired.

The legends are true. Two thousand years from the Twilight of Zorak, a portal opens, letting in Zorak, along with his frightening army. Frankenstein, Dracula, Bloody Mary, Casper, they will all be let into your world. Except one, who ran away five hundred years too early. Elvira Barnabas. Me. I came to warn the world of the day of decease, the end of all humankind. My name was erased from the list of monsters before you were born, so you may not know me.

Two thousand years ago, in a town called Moripa, lived a girl by the name of Elvira Barnabas. Elvira was always alone, and hated by other kids at school. Eventually, her anger built up, towering over anybody who stepped into her path. One day, a boy named Peter Jenkins looked at Elvira as he passed her in the halls. Furious, Elvira grabbed Peter by his collar and screamed in his face, "Listen here Peter Jenkins! You listen to me! You will meet me by Coros Pond today at 3:30 on the dot! A second late, and you shall see the end!" So after school, at promptly 3:31, Peter stepped next to Elvira without saying a word. Elvira, once again, grabbed the boy by his collar. She bit him square on the neck, and threw him into the pond, leaving him to drown. The next day at school, Elvira grabbed a girl named Gaby and instructed her to meet her at Coros Pond at 3:30. Gaby arrived at 3:32. You know how the rest goes. Today, Elvira is known as the Mistress of Darkness, making our lives awful.

That's my story, and now you know the reason I was considered a monster. I hate to say the truth, for it scares me forever. Peter and I were walking by the river, he was angry at me, I betrayed him for nobody. Peter was my friend, but right then, I was the last person he wanted to see. Peter threw himself into the clutches of Zorak, who was patiently waiting in the water. That day, my monster raged inside of me, turning my whole life around. Nobody's seen Peter since the day he, as Casper, joined Zorak. I really need to see him. I've even felt the evil is lurching back into my soul. I don't know who I am anymore.

Today, you rely on my fate. For if I die, life as you know it will end, forever. On October 31, 2013, I turn 2500 years old, the day my full powers assemble. Full power can kill me, hurt me, or leave not a scratch. I do not know what to expect. By the time I understand my abilities, it could be over.

October 31, 2013. That is today. I feel evil. I feel sick. I feel like I should hate everything in my footsteps. But today is the day the world changes, and it's up to me who shall remain standing. Either Zorak's legend shall end, leaving the world worry free, or Zorak shall rise, forever terrorizing every human as they become his slave.

My heart is pounding and my life is changing. I am confused at the world, and at myself. The only thing I can think to do is fly, but I can't. Or can I?

I can feel my hair reaching into the morning sun as I soar above the world, heading to a destination unknown. I decide to let myself relax, but become aware when my usual brown hair starts growing longer and longer as it becomes a solid black color, then twists itself into a tight braid. Next came my clothes, ending in a black masterpiece. Then my skin, changing to be as white as a piece of paper. I now realize I am the Mistress of Darkness, fully.

The shock from my feet touching the ground shot up my legs quicker than a bullet. I was surprised to find that rather than walking, I seemed to float above the ground. I was even more surprised when I looked around. I was in the middle of a field full of wildflowers, all dead. The most surprising factor though, was that there was not an insect in sight, and the more I looked around, I noticed that there was nothing alive at all. Then it hit me, Zorak's portal. I was in exactly the spot the portal closed at 500 years ago, the day I escaped. I was in exactly the spot the portal shall open today, and I am not at all ready.

Suddenly, the ground began to shake. The ground cracked and crumbled. This was it. The black hole began to swirl, and smoke began to rush out of it. I dived into the abyss, my ears burned but hands froze.

"Look who's back," a voice rumbled as I slowed to a stop.

"Zorak. I have more power than I've ever had in my hands. But I'm here for a different reason than you think," I replied proudly.

Zorak raced to my side, grabbed my braid, and yanked it around my neck. I thought it would be the end of me. Slowly, my vision blurred, pain swarmed into my mind, and black took over. When I awakened, nothing was in sight, except for a small slip of paper on my chest.

Zorak escaped, but freed us monsters. We have all agreed to join your side, helping to stop

Zorak's next attack. Meet us here tomorrow, when your instincts tell you to.

-Peter (Casper)

Watch out behind you, Zorak may be peeking around the corner. The attack of 2013 is still on, just changed. Be aware of where you step, you never know what you might get yourself into.

Creatures, by Audrey Carter, age 7

Chapter 1

Once upon a time a little ghost lived in a far-away forest. At night the little ghost comes and scares people. At Halloween, a little skeleton comes and scares people too. How, you ask? Well, he comes trick or treating like everybody else... but the person handing out candy says, "I like your costume. It's almost like I can reach through."

"You can try," says the little skeleton.

"Okay," he says, laughing and sticks his hand through.

"AAAAAAAAAAUUGH!" says the candy person. Now you know how the skeleton scares people.

Chapter 2

Once upon a time someone was exploring a haunted mansion. That someone was named Lucy. Lucy found many things like ancient crowns and other ancient things. One time she found a ghost.

That ghost was little ghost. He tried to scare her. She was frightened. One time she found a skeleton. It was actually Little Skeleton. He was sleeping.

Chapter 3

Once upon a time a little werewolf was living with Little Ghost and Little Skeleton. They were best friends. The werewolf only came out when there was a full moon. One time, on Halloween, there was a full moon, so they went trick or treating together.

Chapter 4

Once there was a little bat. The bat's favorite food was bugs because he didn't eat meat like his friends. His friends were Werewolf, Ghost, and Skeleton. They ate meat. Even Skeleton. But it just falls out. Bat also likes to scare people. He flies out on their heads and they scream. The creatures made up a club named The Scare Club.

Chapter 5

While Lucy was sleeping, The Scare Club pretended to be the Tooth Fairy and pulled out one of her teeth and put a dollar under Lucy's pillow. When she woke up, she was puzzled. Then she remembered the Ghost and Skeleton. She went to the Haunted House and pretended to be a

Ghost Hunter. When she caught Ghost, she asked him if he pulled out her tooth. Ghost said, “Yes” and then he realized he’s a ghost! He can go through her. So, he did.

Chapter 6

The Scare Club once took a trip to California. They tried to scare people but they didn’t. They tried three things. Ghost tried going through people. It didn’t scare them. Skeleton tried to trick or treat. Everyone thought it was a costume. Bat tried sitting on people’s head. It didn’t work. They decided to go to Florida. That worked.

Chapter 7

Once Little Bat had three babies. The Scare Club named the babies Bob, Tom, and Julia. They learned how to fly. Then they learned how to scare people. They were good scare-ers. They scared people by flying into their houses. The babies became part of the Scare Club. The babies were very jumpy because they loved to drink soda. They always jumped around on people’s heads. The people ran five miles because they were so scared.

Chapter 8

One time Lucy kept track of the creatures and decided to have them as pets. They all lived in the Haunted House.

The End.

The House, by Caleb Cenderelli, age 10

I looked up from my map and saw three large gates among some trees. I knew this wasn't the way to my nephews' house. It was so dark the moon seemed to hide behind the trees. "Great I'm lost! Which turn did I miss? How did I end up in the woods? My nephews will be so upset. Boy, I don't like car trips!" Towering above the three gates was a large house with two towers and bats circling around the towers. It looked creepy! I tried to floor the gas pedal, but it didn't work! Why did my car choose this moment to break down! All of a sudden a bolt of lightning illuminated a three-headed dog that was as tall as the gates it guarded. My door opened by itself and I was drawn toward the gate and the three-headed dog by an overpowering force. All of a sudden a mist surrounded me and all I could see were the gates and the dog. The dog looked like a living shadow except its drool was so green that it glowed in the dark. When the drool hit the ground all the vegetation died. The dog smelled worse than the sewers in New York. I would have hurled if I had food in my stomach. I was terrified. It got worse.

"Th...th...the dog talked!" His heads spoke in unison with a voice like fingernails on a chalkboard. "One of these gates takes you to the castle, one will return you here, and one leads to your sudden death." "Which gate do you choose?" the three-headed dog asked in unison. His left head said, "Go left!" His right head said, "Go right!" His center head said, "Go straight!" The right gate was the farthest from the hideous dog therefore I went right. I ended up right back where I was a second before. I couldn't believe my rotten luck! I dove into the left gate before the dog got me and made it to the porch of the house. I looked back toward where I thought the gate would be and all I could see was black. Having no other choice, I knocked on the door. A guy wearing khaki shorts and a shirt that read, "I love haunted houses," stepped out of the house. I was relieved that he looked so normal. He said, "Hello, may I be of assistance?" I said, "Yes, my car broke down and..." He said, "Whoa slow down I can help." He then jumped off the porch and vanished. With some hesitation I jumped after him into the darkness. It felt like jumping in warm water. When I landed I was next to the guy. As we walked past the dog it moved away. I felt relieved that I didn't have to talk to the dog again. He fixed my car and gave me directions back to the highway. As I drove off and looked back there were only trees standing where the gates used to be. A chill went up my spine as I sped away.

The Woman Who Had a Thing for Souls, by Savannah Chavez, age 12

She was back. You could hear it in the whisper of the trees in the forest. You could see it in the way people kept sneaking glances at the lake.

“Where are you my pretties?” she would chant over and over.

They say she is looking for her lost children, but she knows, deep in the stone she calls a heart, that her children will never answer. The people always tell the story of the day she disappeared.

Have you ever heard of the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*? It was not a wolf that she stumbled across in those woods that fateful day. You see Red found the woman who had a thing for souls, the woman grabbed Red in a bear hug, whispering “Why did you leave me dearie?” Red stuttered out, “H h h how could I l l leave you? I d d d don’t even n n know you.” The lady ignored her. “

I... will...make... sure... you... never... leave... me...again... soul!” she snarled, her voice getting louder and louder with every word.

She stretched out her hand deep into Red’s throat and grabbed her soul! Red crumpled to the ground in a heap, the soul looked like a diamond bright and shining in her hand and in the center she saw what she had been seeking, for oh so long.

“A soul you shall find. A pure one, that is one to hide in, one to control” the woman whispered the words of the gypsy seer from years ago. She held it aloft and murmured, “one... one... one!” each time her voice increasing in volume until the woman was shrieking at the top of her lungs. There was a mighty **CRACK!** And, she disappeared. Everyone believes she died that day but, I think not.

She controls Red’s body to make it easier to seek out the treasure she desires and needs. Today I saw Red at our school. She was small for her age, with bright red hair, fair skin and of course wearing a bright red cape.

I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Juniper (nice to meet you). I am ten years old, and have just completed my first day in the fourth grade. I noticed that Red was not herself today. I should know because I have been seated in alphabetical order since the first grade directly behind Red.

After school I walk home alone as usual. I swear Red is following me.

“Hi mom” I shout as I burst through the door.

How was your day sweetie?”

“OK I guess”

“I made you chocolate cookies and don’t forget I need to go check on your grandmother this evening after dinner. I may be awhile because she hasn’t been feeling well. Don’t wait up for me.

Later in the evening mom kisses me goodnight.

“Bye mom! Tell grandma I love her” I shout as she walks out the door. I’m not worried about being alone. I know that my father will be home from work after his shift that ends at 11:00. (How could I know that he was planning on working overtime?)

I’m tired and shortly after mom leaves I go to bed. I’m having a hard time getting to sleep. The wind sounds as if it is singing softly” seashells... cockle shells... easy... easy... over!” “*Now that’s creepy!*” I think as I get up, put on my robe and fumble for the light switch. Someone grabs my arm chanting that crazy song, “seashells... cockle shells... easy... easy... over!” I scream, “Who are you?”

“I’m just a friend of your mothers” she says.

While she is talking I have an idea. I grab her wrist and yank hard, hoping she would fall over, but, all I manage to do is pull her towards me. I yank her so hard she stumbles into the moon light. She is hideous with patches of red hair, burnt blackened ends, and a ghostly white face with two black holes filled with evil that seem to paralyze me. She is dressed in a black shroud covered with what looks like diamonds, each inscribed with a name.

“Hello dearie” she replies in a craggy grandmotherly voice.

I’m thinking, she’s only ten years old, what’s with the grown up act?

“What are you doing in my house Red?”

“I am here to retrieve what was taken from me.”

“What was taken from you Red?” I ask.

“The wood cutter split my soul in many different parts and I have been tracking them down for centuries, Sunshine.”

As she’s talking I break away and run out of the house and into the woods to hide because she’s definitely not in her right mind.

I can hear her shouting her story as I run.

“THE WOOD CUTTER PUT ONE PIECE OF MY SOUL INTO A 100 DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN THIS STUPID STUPID WORLD!”

All of a sudden I trip. You probably know they say that your life flashes before your eyes when you are about to die? Well I see not my life passing in front of my eyes but, the lunatic's life, the one that I know now to be possessing Red.

I can see her moving ever so slowly advancing towards me, knowing that she has won.
“Good-by, Sunshine,” she teases in that too sweet voice. She grabs me by the neck and just then I see as her life is passing before my eyes what has caused the pain in this woman's life before she was a ripper of souls. Turning her into the witch I see before me.
I see a piece of paper with a poem written on it.

*Die, die, die! I say
Another day you shall not live
Do go, do go,
Do go away!
Yet, you will not see another day
Die!
I cannot let you live
Do you not hear me?
I command it!
Then she died*

I see what it says as she grabs my neck. “Daddy did it” I finally understand her father was the one who caused her to be this way. He cursed her to never be alive or dead.

“You will always haunt the earth. I will ruin your life just like you ruined mine.”

Jessica, which was the woman's name before she was cursed, wanted to be immortal and the only way to become immortal was to kill someone close to her. So, she decided to poison her father. With his final breath he cursed her and had her children murdered.

My last words before she yanks out my soul and crushes it under her heel are, “I forgive you.”

Flarret Furdie, the Scared, by Leander Didier, age 9

Flarret Furdie, the Ferret, was awakened suddenly in the early hours of the morning. He felt cold. He sat up and opened his eyes slowly and sleepily. His burrow seemed to be filled with fog. He blinked, and realized that the fog was green. In the black of night he heard the cry of a bird of prey. Now he was fully awake. He decided he should go outside to see what was happening. He took his flashlight and his heated coat and headed out.

(I should tell you here that Flarret is a special ferret. He is an inventor. One of his best inventions is the Heated Coat. It is not magic. It is made of electrical circuits, like an electric blanket, and it keeps the wearer warm in all kinds of weather.)

Now back to our story. He stepped outside. He looked in all directions. In the distance he could barely make out a fire burning. He inched closer to the fire. As he got close, he could see a green substance melting in the huge flames of the fire. Flarret started trembling in fear and wanted to return to his warm burrow – but he remembered the fog filling his burrow with a green chill. Being a Ferret, and an Inventor at that – he just had to figure out what was going on. Was this a dream? Then his fear took over again and he decided to find his way back to his burrow – but he couldn't find his way! Flarret Furdie was lost in his own forest!

Just then he heard a terrifying booming CRACK and the earth split before him! The crack was wide enough to swallow fifty ferrets at a time, and so deep that he could barely see the bottom. He crawled up to the edge and peered over. Still more burning flowing green substance, like liquid glass, flowed through the crack. It bubbled and boiled and hissed. It foamed into bubbles filled with white steam, popping and vaporizing.

Flarret backed up in fear, turned around and spotted the entrance hole to his burrow, off in the distance. He ran as fast as he could toward it. Just as he reached it and was about to get safely inside, another huge crack split open and separated him and his burrow. “No!” he shouted as loud as he could. *He had to get to his burrow; he just had to!* He peered into the huge crack, and found that the bottom had the same weird green slime – strangely burning. The only good thing about the situation is the fact that ferrets can jump very far, and Flarret was a particularly athletic ferret. (When he was little he won jumping contests against the other ferrets of the forest.) He just hoped that he could jump far enough to carry him to safety on the other side. He hesitated. If he could only get to his burrow, he could get his newest invention, the All-Dooer. (The All-Dooer is a heavy machine on wheels that does anything you command. He had never tried it out on a problem as difficult as the one now facing him.) Flarret backed up, sprinted to the very edge, and took a tremendous leap. He landed just short of the edge, and was able to grasp onto a mass of dirt on a ledge. The dirt crumbled and fell with him grasping onto it. As it fell he was able to grab onto a thin protruding root. With nowhere to put his back feet, Flarret struggled up the root with the strength of his front arms. His body swung dangerously, but the force of his swing flung him up onto a ledge. The green slime was trickling over the edge of the wall. A rather large snail was climbing the wall too. Just before the slime reached the snail, Flarret

grabbed him up safely and held him in his hand. As he held the snail and himself the dirt crumbled and a large rock tumbled down into the slime below. Still holding the snail, he tossed him up to higher ground and took a big lunge and made it out of the crack. He quickly darted into his burrow. In the very last room of his burrow he found his All-Dooer. It was leaking green fog and slime! He wondered to himself: could the All-Dooer have been malfunctioning? Did it do something on its own? There was no time to wonder. He had to fix whatever had been done. He commanded the All-Dooer, “take me back in time 30 million years, to prehistoric times!”

WHOOSH! Flarret Furdie found himself on an island. He saw pegs in the ground with rope attached holding the earth together. A crack in the earth was sown up with giant stitches. Suddenly out of the sky swooped a giant prehistoric dinosaur bird with sharp fangs. It cried out with a shriek. It began to attack the rope, tearing it apart. The stitches were coming undone, and the crack in the earth was starting to open up! Flarret managed scare off the bird with his All-Dooer by squirting out huge globs of green slime and fire and fog from the machine. He sewed the crack back up and commanded his All-Dooer to take him back home.

When he arrived, Flarret found that the crack had disappeared and the earth was healed up. But, there were blotches of slime here and there. He heard a familiar noise, looked up and saw an eagle circling. It looked and sounded strangely familiar. Flarret recognized it as the prehistoric bird that he had frightened away with the slime and fog. Now, 30 million years later, it had evolved into an eagle. It circled peacefully above, and Flarret Furdie went back to bed.

THE END

Griffin At School, by Cara Dove, 4th grade

Today is the first day of school we are having a new principal. Our old one was really nice I hope this one is too. I walked in my classroom. My teacher was an angel she has beautiful brown hair she has sparkly green eyes. Today we are going to meet the principal. She was walking down the hall and entered the classroom. She is old and has lots of wrinkles my name is Mrs. Bird she said I am the principal she picked up a ruler and smacked it on a desk. Since I am the principal things will change. Now there will be uniforms she left the room lunch the teacher said. At lunch everyone was afraid to take a bit. Mrs. Bird was breathing on my neck her breath stinks. The next day at school everyone was in uniform it was so plain so boring. I am starting to think Mrs. Bird is a bird.

Chapter 2

When I got home I drew a picture of what she would look like as a bird. It was the next day at school I was afraid to even look at Mrs. Bird today. Right now she is in a teacher meeting and she probably gets so mad she turns in to a griffin or something. Right as I got home I studied all about griffins. Sometimes the principal brings something for lunch that looks like sand from the sandbox from my house. On Monday I was writing a paragraph on Griffin's and got a B-. Then the principal walked in and I hid the paper in my jacket. "Are you ok?" said Mrs. Bird. "I was so scared." I looked up and said "Yes" really quietly. That day when she walked away, I saw a feather on her back. I wonder how old Mrs. Bird is. Maybe she is 100. Maybe she is 1000.

Chapter 3

Next month, in November, I heard a growl on the intercom. It was the principal. I knew it was her because it sounded like a Griffin. She probably is a Griffin. Today, I got rainbow tickets. Rainbow tickets are little pieces of paper that you get for being a good student. I was so scared to go down to the office to get my reward, but I went anyways. When I got there I walked into the room and said "Oh my gosh" I ran out the room just as I saw her as a Griffin. I don't care about my tickets, I care about my life. I ran to the back of the room and threw my jacket over my head. I was really scared now. I remember when I read that book on Griffins. It said that they can turn people into Griffins so that they can multiply. Today after school there is a teachers meeting. She is probably going to turn all of the teachers into Griffins. Then we will not have school. The next day it was picture day. "This is taking too long" said Mrs. Bird. She got so mad that she grew feathers and a beak. She became a Griffin in front of the whole school. I ran out of the room and hid in the bathroom. I came out and she was still a Griffin. Then I was a Griffin. I looked at my hand and all I saw was feathers. I yelled so loud, then I woke up and I discovered it was a dream.

The Red Door, by Hadden Eckert, age 10

Creeaak... the door slowly opened and I stepped through. I was investigating this old building before someone decided to destroy it. I wanted to see if it had anything interesting in it and I was pretty sure it would be dangerous, but I don't think I was fully aware of what I was getting into.

As I walked down the hall with my camera, I saw a shadow flash in front of me. "It's just your imagination," I told myself over and over again, but I was starting to wonder if I wasn't alone. I saw that next to me was a large crevasse and I took some pictures. "Whoa!!" I cried out as I slipped – or was pushed – off the edge. I managed to catch the side of the hole with my fingertips and heard my camera taking random pictures. It was too dark to see anything as I pulled myself up until I grabbed the camera from the floor, its light slicing through the darkness. I looked at the pictures the camera had taken.

The first few pictures were just of the ceiling. The following pictures showed that it had somehow been sliding along the floor. Suddenly, in the next photo there was a horrible, ugly, bug-eyed creature with slime dripping off of it! I almost shrieked in surprise and fear but I held it in. I needed to get out of here! I started back the way I had come and saw some kind of computer resting against the wall. I picked it up and it turned on automatically. Someone had typed: "The Year 1999: We have created these creatures to save us against war, but something has gone wrong. They eat everything they see. I have kept them behind a red door next to the entrance. If you are reading this, DO NOT OPEN THE RED DOOR!"

I found myself standing next to that very door. I was just too curious. I convinced myself that the message was just a trick, and flung open the red door! There was a room and inside the room there was nothing. I sighed with relief and walked out the entrance door, happy to be out of that place. I heard a squeak like a door with rusty hinges and the entrance door burst open with thousands of ugly creatures! I was frozen with fear for the next ten seconds, which turned out to be too long. The creatures were suddenly everywhere, a scraping noise radiating from them. I looked around wildly for a place to hide, but the only spot I could see was the building I had just been in. I quickly slipped inside. It seemed quieter, darker - spookier than it had before. The scraping noise was all around me; yet I didn't see anything. "Ouch!" I felt something scrape my elbow. I couldn't stand this anymore! I shoved open the door to get out, half expecting the creatures to grab me. Fortunately, they were all gone – as if they had disappeared. I flew home so fast that it seemed like a blur.

That night I felt weird. My vision was different and my breathing grew rapid. I leaped out of the window and ran down the street. I had become one of the creatures and I knew the scratch one had given me had turned me into this. And only thing zipped through my mind: FOOD!

The End

Frighful Mountain Adventure, by Annelise Eldredge, age 8

It was pitch black as I crept silently up the dark mountain. The dark mountain is blacker than tar. At the top you can see clouds swirling like a tornado overhead. But the worst part is that it is home to the scariest animals. Spiders, owls, bats, toads and many more animals live there. Why did I come here? Oh, I wanted to meet an owl.

So, I crept forward very carefully making my way to Owl Forest and went through the thorn tunnel to get there. The first owl I met was named Blood. He was the color of blood except for his wings, tail, and beak. He also had black around his eyes. I asked if he could help me find more owls. To my surprise he agreed. He was actually kind of friendly even though I was still scared.

He led me to a huge grassy patch in the forest. There a cloud of bats hung from the trees. When they saw me they jumped up. Blood led me to a carpet in the center of the clearing. I gasped when I saw it. The carpet had the scariest picture on it. The picture showed the forest's rivers in blood and the animals fighting witches, ghouls, mummies, and other creatures. I sat on it, fearful. The bats picked the carpet up and Blood settled down beside me.

Off we went. The bats let me meet all the animals on frightful mountain. I met Slime the toad, Snappefer the alligator, Midnight the bat, Creep the spider and many other animals. We landed in front of a big castle. The bats told me I was in for a special treat.

The castle was clearly scary. Blood led me through winding hallways. I could see zillions of cobwebs hanging from the ceiling. Finally, Blood stopped. We were in a room made of pure fire stone. Fire stone is golden red and is from deep within the earth and is given the power of fire when a fire dragon breathes on it. In the center of the room there was dragon stone. The dragon stone is a rare stone with the power of fire, ice, the sun, the moon, stars, storms, plants, and animals.

While looking at the amazing dragon stone, an evil witch flew in on a broom stick. Her name was Dread. She wanted to steal the dragon stone because she wanted its power! Blood got up and zoomed around the mountain picking up all of our friends. We made a plan to stop Dread from stealing the dragon stone.

Then we quickly jumped into action. First, we all separated into different halls that went into the room with the dragon stone. Then we all raced into the room as one half of us chased the witch away while the rest of us got the stone.

Once we secured the stone we were invited to a celebration with the dragons. I didn't eat any of the food though. No fire cones or ice cakes for me! After the party I flew home on a new dragon friend.

The Mystery Story, by Gabby Franklin, age 9

One day in October , a week before Halloween a house was built. On the corner of Sweet St., and Spooky Drive. A family moved in the next day. Their names were Alex, Gab-Gab, Jayden, and Cara. The family was almost all kids, and a pet parakeet , Hazelnut. Jayden and Alex were the oldest ,19 years old. Gab- Gab was 12.Cara was 10.

Hazelnut was the leader. It sounded funny to other kids. But Hazelnut was the smartest and the funniest of the group. He could talk in 5 languages and was very small so he could hide in small places to spy on someone. He knew karate, and more than 10 other fighting strategies. Once they all were moved in, they wanted to explore the house across the street. So they quickly ran across the street and opened the front door. They took 10 steps in, WHAM! The door slammed shut “ What’s in my masters home?” a voice boomed. “We’re kids....” Gab-Gab slapped Cara’s mouth shut. They heard footsteps from the kitchen. “Run” yelled Hazelnut.

CHAPTER 2: What’s going on?

So they ran outside. “ Uh guys” Said Jayden “ our house is gone” “ very funny Jayden” said Hazelnut. “Oh Snap. You’re right”. “Sup dud and dudettes” said a voice, it was a shoe. “ Hey guys, I didn’t mean to scare you, my names Mason.” He rested himself on the grass. They all joined him on the grass. They talked for about an hour or two. “ What happened to our house Mason? Do you know?” “I’m sorry to say, but no. But I think I know someone who would.” Gab- Gab asked “Are you going to tell us?”

Chapter 3- The journey begins

“There’s a man in the attic, he knows everything. Give him a loaf of bread and he will tell you anything you wish to know. “So they all got up to find a loaf of bread and take it to the attic. “ Sir, are you there?” Cara yelled up the stairs. “Give me a bread and I will tell you anything.” A voice said. “That’s my master” said Mason. “His name is Andrew- the Great and Powerful. “

Chapter 4: Silly Children

“Here’s your bread Andrew” said Cara handing him the loaf. “What do you wish to know” “ Where our house is” she blurted out. “Right across the street, silly children.” He giggled. “Have a great day.” Andrew said. So they walked home. “Goodbye Mason, bye Andrew said Alex and Gab-Gab. “ We’ll visit again soon.

When they got back they saw Hazelnut on a chair fast asleep. “night, night birdie” Said Cara, putting a blanket over him.

“Today’s been a weird day, let’s get some sleep,” said Jayden with a sigh.

The Haunted House, by Cooper Guirey, age 10

“I’m bored”, moaned Michael as he sat on the not so soft couch in front of the temporarily useless television. The previous night a storm had knocked the cable out, and the rain still pounded against the window.

“Maybe I’ll go down to the basement to see what old, discarded items are left down there to take up space”, he said reluctantly as he slowly and lazily moved towards the dim lit underside of the old house.

It had been twenty years since anybody had occupied the dull household, and Michael was beginning to wonder if the house was haunted.

Michael was a youth of 9 with short, black hair, a small mouth, and a nose that was bent to one side from a car crash the year before. He wore a plain brown shirt and a pair of shorts that could fit a professional football player. The worst thing was his big, green eyes. They were some kind of birth defect. The bright green things would always seem to glow if you stared at them too long. So, he didn’t have many acquaintances because, well, everyone thought he was a freak.

As he reached the bottom of the stairs and began to search for the light switch through murky darkness, there was a slam as the door banged shut. As Michael didn’t scare easily, he just started and said “Oh great. Mom probably opened a window and the wind blew the door closed. Now I’ll never find the switch.” He felt his way around in the dark, and could feel something squishy and scaly. He could feel warm air on his neck. Just as he was about to run back upstairs he heard a tap tap tap in the room. “Rain!” said Michael to himself. He soon realized his fear boiling up inside him. There was no way to hear the rain down here. Gulping, he cautiously continued searching. But he never found the light. As soon as he overcame his fear, there was a bang and an agonizing scream, and Michael fell to the floor. Mom opened the door.

“Michael, are you alright?” She called down. The light from the kitchen behind her flashed on a green scaly face with two curved horns. A dark realization came over her face. She screamed and made a dash for the telephone. Next thing she knew, the monster grabbed her ankle and dragged her downstairs. She could hear Michael screaming as she was being dragged across the floor. There was another flash of lightening and she saw Michael covered in monster goo. She tried to scream for him, but there was no sound. Michael’s Mom remembered about his eyes and stared at them. They started to glow and all the goo instantly melted off his body. Michael ran to save his mom and tripped over an old baby toy. Suddenly, Michael’s dad came in and at the same time there was a crack of thunder. Startled at the sudden crash, he yelled and the lights came back on. The green monster was gone.

And so were Michael and his Mom.

THE END

Enter if You Dare, by Sophie Johnson, age 10

“Whoa!” Kate said as the crumbly stairs creaked under her weight. When she opened the door it made an evil creak. Kate didn’t know if she should go in. The inside of the house was dark, dusty, and gloomy. She didn’t know how she got here, one minute she was walking through the park, the next Kate was at the Shadow Falls house. Kate had heard stories about this place; the stories were about how this house was haunted. Of course she didn’t believe them. Kate was standing on the porch with the door wide open letting the fall leaves blow in. She started to walk in, her conscience was screaming no but her body was forced to move, like an invisible black hole was sucking her into the house.

Kate looked around with horror. She saw rats and mice dead and alive scattered on the floor. There was a hole the size of a bowling ball in the ceiling. A large puddle had formed underneath it from the continual rain. She kept walking on. The door slammed shut behind her. She spun around but nobody was there. She went into the kitchen; the tap water was on. It looked like there were maggots coming out of the faucet. There were mouse traps with moldy cheese that looked like it was a hundred years old (which it probably was). Something moved behind her and she heard a noise. She whirled around but nothing was there except a mouse that was caught in a mouse trap. “It must have been the trap when it snapped” she thought but wasn’t so sure.

She started to go out the front door when she heard a noise coming from the library. Kate went to the library door. She listened, no sound. She was about to turn around when she heard the noise again. “Squeak, squeak, and squeak”. It sounded like an arm chair going round and round. Kate opened the door. There was a person sitting in an arm chair. “Excuse me.” Kate said. Nobody answered. Kate went to the front of the arm chair. “Ah!” Kate screamed. There was a skeleton in the chair. She ran out of the library and to the front door. It was locked. “Help me!” Kate screamed. She was banging the door with her fist. Squeak, squeak, and squeak. That sound! The skeleton was walking towards her!

Kate ran like she was an Olympic runner. She sprinted up the stairs and ran into the closet of the master bedroom. Something in the bed moved. A scream rang out. Kate covered her ears. A ghost came out of the bed screaming. Kate was now running around the house like a psycho. All the doors in the house were slamming open and shut. Kate went for the back door. It was locked, too. Kate tried to bust the door open but she couldn’t. She was freaking out now. The skeleton and the banshee were after her, there were doors slamming everywhere, and there was a lot more crazy stuff going on. Kate didn’t know what to do.

She had heard that if you talk to the haunter you will be able to save yourself. She didn’t know where she heard this but she would put it at the top of the list of things she had to do. So Kate went to the skeleton and started saying random things to it. The banshee was listening, too. Nothing happened. Kate tried for minutes, hours, weeks, months, and even years. Now she was 56 years old. And still trying to get them to set her free.

Kate has been a missing person in Washington DC for 46 years. She was just a 10 year old girl when she entered that house.

Twelve years later a boy named Scott walked up the steps. "Come on punk!" the school bully yelled. "You do this or I punch you for a month." The door opened then Scott went in, never to see the outside world again.

The Deep Creepy City, by Andrew Kahn, 4th grade

Once upon a time there was a girl and her mom bought the girl a doll. The man that she bought it from said lock it up in the basement when you're done playing with it, so that what she did. The next day the girl forgot to lock it up in the basement and it came to life the doll said "I'm on the first step I'm on the second step I'm in the hall way I'm in your room look down" so she did.

The doll got a nail gun from the basement and shot her against the wall. The mom heard the noise and came to her room and saw the doll the doll shot her and the doll cut off their fingers to put them on and brought them to her finger friends.

A few years ago some other family moved in the house. The same thing happened they heard a noise and the doll came out instead of going to the kids' room the doll went to the parents' room and killed them. The kid ran out of the house and screamed his head off! That house stayed haunted. The doll screamed to his friend I'm going out!!

The doll went to every bodies house and camped out there until night to kill. Another day some weird thing happened zombies came!! They killed 5,000 people last night. The doll liked the zombies and the doll tried to talk to them but they ignored the doll. The zombies tried and tried to break through the brick houses but they couldn't. The people bought gun and weapons to kill the zombies. The people killed most of the zombies. They went out of their houses and tried to find the rest of them.

A zombie snuck up on someone and ripped his guts out! One guy shot the zombie in the head. The doll died from a stupid zombie☺. There was only 1 zombie left and a little girl found it and killed it. The people won again the people never went in that spooky haunted house ever again. Finally someone moved in and wasn't afraid of the dead people and through them out in a river and they floated away forever and they were never seen again. The people lived happy and one nights came they heard lots of howling and the people got scared.

The next day they woke up and they saw blood everywhere on the ground of the dark streets. They started thinking and the little girl said maybe it was the war last night. They walked around the city. They saw a dead person and a living wolf the wolf heard them talking and it ate only 3 up for breakfast. One guy killed it. Then the people packed all of their stuff and they moved to France. The same thing happened in France so they moved to Las Vegas. Then they built a time machine to teleport to places and they lived happily ever after.

The Spooky Story, By Haze Kammerer, 4th grade

Chapter 1: Haunted hole

Once there was a boy that was walking home. And he fell down a whole and bam something made his head fall off! So he was walking on, it started getting darker and darker. And then when it was pitch black he thought he felt his head so he picked his head up and put it on. Then he started feeling dizzy and then he found light. He took his head off since it was making him dizzy. Then he was felling around and he felt another head and he put it on and it was the right head. Then he looked at the head he had in his hand. And the other head started laughing it was a creepy clown head! And then he saw the body of the head. Then he throw the head on the creepy clown body and kept moving forward. He thought he found the end of tunnel but he was wrong. There was a big room painted in green and blue and in that room he saw his best friend John. He said hey Haze. Haze asked him how he got past the creepy clown. He said he didn't and Haze said how. Then John was moving around and a zombie bunny was ripping out of John's skin then guts splattered everywhere. Then the zombie bunny started chasing Haze. Haze ran right into the creepy clown then the creepy clown started chasing him. Then he saw were he from. The zombie bunny tried to hop on Haze but he jumped really high in the air. Then he jumped on the bunny's head and that gave him an extra boost and he jumped right out of the hole.

Chapter2:The freaky forest

Haze was just heading back home and he had to go through the freaky forest. So he started walking through the freaky forest. Haze started hearing footsteps and he looked behind him and no one was there. Then he started hearing noises in the trees and he looked up in the trees and nothing was there. So he started walking on and he saw an ax drop right in front of him. So he looked up and again and no one was there. When he was walking on he started hearing zombie noises. So he started to run faster and faster and it sounded like the footsteps were getting louder and louder. Tell he got to his house and all the noise stopped besides the chirping of crickets.

So Haze went to his front door. And knocked on the door no one answered. So he just walked right in and saw a spilled drink. Haze heard a shriek and slowly looked up and saw the c c c creepy clown. At the edge of the forest was the zombie bunny, started moving to him. Then the clown started to jump to Haze. But Haze moved out of the way and the zombie bunny and creepy clown bumped into each other. So then Haze ran and ran right into another portal. That gave Haze an idea. So he went back were the creepy clown and the zombie bunny was. When they saw him they started chasing him so Haze and when he reached the portal the zombie bunny exploded so guts went every were and when the creepy clown reached the portal he exploded and John came flying out of the clown. Haze said John is that really you and John said no I am still the creepy clown Haze started to run then John said I'm just kidding. Then Haze thought it was so funny. Then John said that if the clown and bunny went they would explode because undead things can't go through other portal. Then John and Haze were so happy now.

THE END

The Forever Frightened Family, by Sofia Mackey, 4th grade

Once upon a time there was family there were two kids a boy and a girl they were always getting into trouble. One day the dad decided to take a family vacation. He had found what seemed like a nice place for not that much money. He said, "In two days we will be going to the house. We will stay there for three weeks so go pack and they did. They both felt suspicions about the house so they packed the necessary stuff like night vision goggles, black suits, and plastic swords. Two days later it was time to go they looked at each other and walked out the door. They were going out of the country so it took a while to get there. While they were waiting they played for eight hours. Eight hours later they were there. They grabbed the stuff and looked at the house it was a mansion, it was tall and wide. When they went inside they were amazed and totally forgot about the haunted part. They squealed and went upstairs to unpack. When they got up there they saw millions of books about the haunted murder. The children were so amazed that they dropped their bags and started to read.

Chapter Two: The Forgotten

When the children got to chapter three in the book they read about a ghost that still lives in the house and the yard of Rotteds skull Lake. They stared at each other in amazement. The boy laughed and said "What a fake, a ghost that still haunts." I would not believe that for a second." The girl that little and scared said "How do you know? It may be true." The boy chuckled and said "It's not real. It's time to go to bed anyway."

Chapter Three: The Believer

The next day, Tommy the boy was gone. When Abby woke up she screamed. All that was left of Tommy was a bloody foot hanging from the door handle. The parents ran upstairs to ask what had happened. When they came up to ask what had happened they screamed and yelled "Where's Tommy?" Abby was screaming and crying. She pointed at the bloody foot. The parents called the police. The police assumed it was Abby because they had gotten in a fight and she was mad at him. No matter what she said, they would not believe her. So, they kept her in a temporary cell. The next day the police told her what had happened. They said that the father had gone missing and all that was left of him was his hand. The mother came and took her home to look. They went looking at Rotteds skull Lake. Nothing was there but a clue. There was a blood trail that led to the haunted forest so they started walking to the forests. As soon as they walked four feet into the forest they heard screaming. They saw the boys with all of their limbs. The other ones were fakes. They found them, but they still didn't know who did it. The little girl said, "I don't know who did it, but we know that it is dangerous and he or she does not want anyone to find out who it is."

The Haunting Hour, by Mikyah Moore, 4th grade

Once upon a time a family moved into an old house. Little did they know that something was going on. Up in the attic a mad scientist named Dr. Destructo and his weird sidekick Gorey but people called him Gore. The family down stairs were eating dinner when Steve, the dad said it was time to go to bed to the two children Ben and Anna. Ben and Anna shared a room. Ben didn't like it because Anna was very superstitious. Upstairs Dr. Destructo was planning on how to scare the family out of the house. Gore was sitting down waiting for an idea to come to him. Dr. Destructo didn't think he was doing anything so he said, "don't just sit there. Get up and help me think!" Gore felt so angry he went down stairs where Dr. Destructo couldn't yell at him. He secretly climbed into Anna's bed. Anna was a very deep sleeper so she didn't feel a thing. About one hour later. Ben woke up and said, "Anna what's that behind you?!" Anna turned around and screamed. Ben grabbed a broom and knocked the living day lights out of him.

Chapter 2 The Chase

Gor went to Central Park to think when the clock struck mid night. Jack Alantern walked up behind him. Jack Alantern was the evilest, scariest, meanest villain of them all .He saw who? Ahhhhhh Gor screamed like a little girl and the chase began. Gor ran and ran until he thought he lost Jack but he was wrong Jack was standing right behind him. So he ran back to the house. He ran inside and shut the door. Jack was outside banging on the door Jack said "I just want you to come with me to the dark side." Jack knocked down the door violently and took Gor. Ben and Anna heard all of the banging and commotion so they rushed down stairs but nothing was their but an open door and a gentle breeze. They thought the case was very very mysterious. They began to get even more scared and frightened then they already were. They both went up the stairs, and got into bed thinking it was all a super scary dream.

Chapter 3 The Dark Side

Gor was hanging a pot of boiling hot green acid." I will kill you now" Jack said. "Just let me lower you a little bit more" said Jack. Gore replied "The jokes on you. I have over 50 weapons on my utility belt." Jack yelled at his spider monkey named Froggybob."

Go and take all of his weapons but one so that I will have a little competition. Do not climb on the rope or it will snap and it can't hold both of you. By that time it was too late. They had both fallen. The spider monkey fell into the boiling hot acid while Gor managed to hang on a ledge with just three fingers. Jack said, "What!, Noooo how could this happen? I will get you next round." "Wait, I guess this is the only round so I guess you win." Gor let go of the ledge onto the throw pillow on the floor. Gor then ran off into the night back to the house, calling Dr. Destructo's name. He told Dr. Destructo the whole story of what happened. He was not listening most of the time. He thought he was just making up stories. It was morning and the kids went back up into the attic and nothing was there. It was all just a dream... or so they thought. They weren't at home. Nobody knows what happened to Jack or Gor or Dr. Destructo. Ben and Anna

told their parents what they thought had happened. They left and everything became normal. For now....

The End

The Legend of the Deathly Shadow, by Aritra Nag, age 11

One day, a man was walking back to his cottage in the woods from the city, where he worked as a blacksmith. As he was walking, suddenly he noticed a peculiar shaped shadow started following his footsteps. He started to run, but no matter how fast he went, the shadow was able to keep up easily. He was really panting and getting very tired.

Suddenly, the mysterious shadow vanished. He was a little suspicious, but he thought that the shadow was gone comforted him enough that he slowed back down to a walk. At this time of the day, the beautiful colors of the sunset were just fading and the sky was becoming dark. The bright moon was soon up. He looked to the side and saw the shadows of the gnarly trees starting to sway in the moonlight, as a strong wind picked up. As soon as he looked back down the path, the shadow appeared directly behind him. His heart skipped a bit, he immediately turned around. He was ready to sprint but within a moment, it appeared right in front of his face, with its mouth gaping like a hungry monster.

The holes in his eye sockets were staring straight into his eyes like lasers. He felt the life being sucked out of him. He dropped to the ground as lifeless as can be. About an hour later, he woke up only to find himself in his own house, he was found lying unconscious by his son who dragged him home. As he opened his eyes, he found himself, lying on his cot, with a hot rag on his forehead and a bowl of soup on the table on the side of the bed. As he looked up, he saw his wife and his two sons standing over him and inspecting nervously. He started told them what had happened on the way back. His family thought that he had surely gone insane. His wife gave him some medicine and he fell asleep, fatigued. The next morning, he woke up weak but ready to go to work. He ate a hearty breakfast and went to the city again for his daily work. At the end of the day, it was time to go home. On his way home, he saw the creepy shadow again, just like the previous day.

Again, it appeared right in front of him and seemed to suck the life out of him. This time, when he found himself lying on his cot, his family thought he worked too hard and so fell ill because of his age and exhaustion. The man became bedridden for many days. He woke up to a breakfast of oatmeal, fell back asleep, woke up to a lunch of soup, fell back asleep, woke up to take his pills, and ate his soup leftovers from lunch for dinner.

Each day, the routine was repeated. Finally, after about a month or so, his family agreed that he had enough energy to go to work. His family was running out of money. He went to work the next day. That night, he walked home triumphantly because he had just finished forging a nice metal fixture. He was fearful and thought about the shadow but tried consoling himself that it must have been his imagination. *Ghosts don't exist*, he thought. He crossed his heart and kept walking. No sooner he crossed the bridge that led him to the wooded path, he saw the shadow appear behind him and started to follow him.

This time he pulled up his courage. He said, “You can’t scare me,” but his voice seemed weak and muffled. The shadow replied with a raspy voice, “I may not be able to scare you, but I can suck your life out of your body.” Hearing that, the blacksmith’s face became pale white. He started walking briskly. The shadow sped up. It jumped in front of him. The man’s whole body became weak and he fell to the ground, his face hitting the road. Again, his life was being sucked out of him, and it was more powerful than ever. The shadow started to spiral and turn into a ball. The ball was hovering straight in the air. It flew around for a second, and then sped straight into his heart. The man fell over, winced, and writhed. His face became dark. He tried to speak. With some effort, he heard him say, “What just happened?” Oh no. His voice was raspy, just like the shadow. He realized the horrifying reality. His body was the shadows’ host.

Now, he would walk around sucking life out of innocent people, to feed himself. He was a nightmare. He screamed and ran away. Nobody ever saw him again. His wife and son searched for him everywhere and at last they assumed he was dead. What they didn’t know was that he was now possessed and was running around hurting and killing people and getting stronger as he drew life juice out of his victims. People were just vanishing, and nobody knew the reason of the problem. Nobody knew the reason that he was dangerous. He was a murderer. He was a monster.

The Tarantula, by Aubrey Petersen, age 10

“AAAHHHHHHHHH!!!! GET THAT THING OUT OF MY ROOM!” Screamed Anna.

“Come on don’t you want to hold it,” said James. “Mom!”

“Yes, Anna.” replied her mother.

“James got a tarantula for his birthday.”

“WHAT!”

“James come into my room right now!”

“Why?” asked James.

“Who gave you that tarantula?”

“Dad.”

“Rex why did you give James a tarantula?”

“He asked for it.” said dad.

“Does it have a cage?”

“Well of course.”

“James do you promise you will take care of it?” asked Mom.

“Yes, I promise I will take care of my tarantula” “Good.”

“Oh wait, do you promise to not scare your sister?”

“Yes, I promise. May I leave now?”

“Yes, you may.”

When it was 9:00 pm Anna and James went to bed. During the middle of the night Anna woke up screaming from a terrible dream. It was about the tarantula. It crawled into her bed. The rest of the night Anna couldn’t sleep.

When the sun came up Anna got ready for school. Anna couldn't focus in school all day, the only thing she could think about was the tarantula.

When Anna got home she ran and looked to make sure the tarantula was still in its cage. Whew, it was still there. The whole week Anna kept having bad dreams. When she got home from school Anna was looking at her colander and realized that Halloween was only four days away! Anna was looking for her custom when she heard her brother scream. She ran to look at what had happened. Her brother was looking at the tarantula's cage it was empty! They looked for the tarantula and they found it under his bed eating a fly. After that Anna found her custom in the basement. It was a jelly fish.

On the day of Halloween Anna got into her jelly fish custom and went to see if her brother was ready, he was in the bathroom so Anna waited for him. After he was done changing into his shark outfit they left the house to go trick-or treat. They went to door to door till their bags were filled to the top. Once they were home they went to James's bedroom where they were trading their candies when the doorbell rang. Anna and James raced to the door, Anna won. At the door was a bunch of trick-or treaters so Anna ran and got the bowl of candy and handed treats out to all the kids.

Anna's grandma and grandpa came over to visit. They brought a lot of candy! James got a Three Musketeers candy bar, Anna choose a Butterfinger. Anna really liked Three Musketeers so she traded with her brother. After their grandparents left Anna got her pajamas on. When she was done her mom called everyone together to read a spooky story. The story was called The Ghost in the Graveyard this is a summary of the story:

There once lived a beautiful little girl who died of a horrible sickness. She was buried in a graveyard with flowers, trees, and rocks for a path. It was very pretty, but on Halloween night she would haunt the graveyard. There was a man who did not know about the haunting. The men enter the graveyard on Halloween and got supper scared. Now no one has ever seen him again.

It was now 7:30pm and Anna was going up the stairs when she heard her brother say "OH, NO!"

Anna walked to his room and saw that the tarantula was gone again! Anna and James looked for hours and never found it. By 10:00pm they had to give up. Anna went to bed with a terrible feeling. Days have passed and the tarantula has never found! Anna soon forgot and it all was fine, but beware the tarantula is still lurking some were.

15 Days in a Canyon, by Nate Redstone, age 10

In the year 1910, Mike Colvin was on his way to discover fossils of an undiscovered species. Fiddling with his unlicensed equipment, he is not aware of the dangers of how metal affects flight. Suddenly, as the passengers were travelling over a profound pit of pure darkness which looked as though it was trying to coax the plane to enter its mysterious depth, the aircraft lost its balance, shaking not only the people but their thoughts. Stunned by these circumstances, the passengers lost the ability to control their fear. And there before their very eyes, the plane takes a deep, fatal dive toward earth.

Those who escaped died of starvation in this barren wasteland and were prey for vultures while others died from the crash. Only Mike and a crewman name Joe McClouth survived. Unfortunately, Mike lost an eye and as for Joe, he broke his neck although he still lived. In distress, Mike tried to search for an entrance out of this gloomy canyon leading to another world. Making great effort to climb its steep, sleek walls, Joe's attempt failed miserably because of his injury. Mike tried to stay calm and think of a way out before they became prey to the creatures that had already inhabited this place. Knowing that there was no way out, they decided to make do with what they had-- broken uranium detectors which were oozing mercury, a few ragged coats, and little provisions of peanuts and chunky milk.

The first night was misery. After their food supply crumbled away, Joe's hunger took over, causing him to grow sharp talons with bulging eyes of fury. If he had known better, he would have realized that a demon with pitch black eye sockets whose name was Zorak had possessed him. Foaming a white, frothy powder, Joe's need for food was stronger than ever. Searching for food, he noticed innocent Mike sitting around pondering his life. With Joe slashing at his chest, Mike felt like falling face flat on hard asphalt. Mike was completely unaware that the demon had passed from Joe to him, causing Joe to fall in to a deep, depressing sleep.

After 14 days, Joe finally woke in the darkness feeling quite disoriented. He tried his casual routine. Feeling as though his sickness could destroy the world, he cried "Put me out of my misery!" Suddenly, without further notice, the mercury from the uranium detector trickled down his throat! Amazed at what had just occurred, he noticed two fearsome red eyes glaring at him. One of the last things he heard was "I'm Migron the Devourer of 1,000,000 Souls—Conqueror of the Universe!" He now knew that Mike was attacking him, and that Mike had been possessed quite a good time longer so that the demon had developed to be a much a greater threat than when Joe was possessed by a demon.

Today, Migron haunts and murders people who fear him, murdering them by showing them their worst nightmare. For those who don't fear him, they must remember he is a crafty foe who will do everything to dominate you.

The End.

A Sleepover Gone Bad, by Ella Ryan, age 10

Once there was a girl named Annabeth. She was just an ordinary girl except for the fact that she and her whole family were werewolves. She did not always look like a werewolf, she only turned into one when the moon was full and she was outside. Her mother always told her to never go outside when the moon was full for when she did she would transform and would not be able to control her actions. She went to school, ate, and played just like a normal kid would and one day at school one of her friends, Kaitlin, said she was having a sleepover party and she wanted Annabeth to come. Annabeth knew that the night of the party was also a full moon but she really wanted to go. She wanted to be like the other girls. She didn't mention the moon to her mother and she went to the party.

She had a plan. "Let's just stay inside." she said to her friends, but they wouldn't listen and pushed her out into the moon light. She yelled, "Go inside. We will play hide and seek. I'll come find you in a minute!" The rest of the girls went inside laughing and just in time too. Annabeth turned into a werewolf just as the other girls got inside. It was a feeling as if her insides had just caught fire. She felt like she was dying a slow mournful death. She passed out. When she woke up she felt fine like nothing had happened. Then she realized she had fur, claws and when she looked at herself in the water on the side of the road she had the face and body of a werewolf. She screamed so loud she was surprised none of her friends came out to see what happened. She didn't know what to do. In fact she couldn't think at all. Five minutes later she had sniffed the whole neighborhood and came back just as her BFFs came out to see why it was taking so long for her to find them. When they saw her as the wolf they thought the wolf (Annabeth) had eaten Annabeth. They screamed and ran inside to tell Kaitlin's mom about what they had seen. Kaitlin's mom called Annabeth's mom and instead of being scared and worried like a parent would be she said, "Ok I'll be there in 5 minutes." Kaitlin's mom was shocked at how casual Annabeth's mom was when she found out what happened. Luckily the sun was beginning to rise and Annabeth was outside slowly transforming back into her normal human self. Once her mom got to Kaitlin's house, Annabeth was already back to human form trying to make up a story for why it looked like she got eaten. Her mom saw what was going on, apologized for what happened, said, "Thank you for inviting Annabeth. I'm sure she had a great time." She left with Annabeth.

When they got home her mom and dad yelled at her for what seemed like hours about how irresponsible she was. She was grounded for a week. She wasn't happy about being grounded but she was mostly thinking about what her friends would say on Tuesday when they went back to school on Halloween day. She tried saying that she was sick, had the measles, or was just feeling too nauseous to go to school but her parents knew it wasn't true and sent her to school anyway. When she got to school she soon realized that her friends thought it was awesome and that it was just a joke. She was happy.

When she got home, she was so excited to go trick or treating. There was a note on her desk in her room that read, "We went out to the market. Don't ever ask to go to another sleepover again."

It will never happen.” She was so mad that her skin started to tingle. Then it burned and then once again she was a werewolf. She raced down the stairs, broke through the door, and ran. No one knew what happened. She never came back. Years later her mother was reading a werewolf survival book to make sure what happened to Annabeth would never happen again and she found out what had happened that night. The book said that if any werewolf got too happy, sad, mad, excited, or emotional on Halloween they would turn into a werewolf forever. It said that they would become cursed and truly evil. So from that day on Annabeth would go around the continent tormenting little children on every Halloween night in return for what happened to her on that Halloween after school.

The Halloween That Never Ended, by Tess Ryan, age 8

One morning I was walking to school. Everything was normal. It was the morning after Halloween. The bell rang and I had to run. While I was running the sky grew darker. I got to the classroom. Everyone was still in their Halloween costumes. Were we still celebrating Halloween? I thought I was just seeing things but I wasn't! When I sat down, I looked to the right. My best friend was a vampire! I screamed so loud in my head. When I looked to the left, my other friend was a zombie! This time I screamed out loud. My teacher and all the kids in the class heard me. Then I saw they were all monsters. I opened my desk to make it look like I was not scared. When I opened my desk you wouldn't believe what I saw! Bats came flying out of my notebooks and binders. Once all the bats were out, a hand shot up and tried to grab my neck! I moved quickly and it shot back down. I slammed my desk shut.

Luckily, then the bell rang for recess. My sister and brother's classes were out. I found them and told them everything. They said they had that problem too! We spent our recess hiding. Then I had to go inside for lunch. Their classes stayed outside. I wondered what would happen to them. Would they get eaten? Would they be turned into something else?

But it was time for me to eat. I had hot lunch. It said sloppy joe on the menu, but I was afraid of what it would really be. I was in line. On the salad bar they had eyeballs and arms. They even had legs! Then I got to the main tray. I was relieved they actually had sloppy joes! I went to sit down at my table, but there was no room. I was happy I got to sit alone. I took two bites, but in the third one there was something hard. I took it out of my mouth. It was a finger! I screamed! AHAHAHAHAAA!! No one seemed to hear it. So I just went through the sloppy joe and pulled out all the fingers. It was so disgusting! Of course, I used a fork.

I had to go back to class, even though I didn't want to. We had read aloud. We read a spooky story. I was the only one who thought it was spooky because all the others were monsters. We had writing after the story. I had to write a scary story. I wrote about today. It wasn't that long before recess.

When we went outside, I found two little frogs instead of Ella and Miles. So I thought Ella and Miles got turned into the frogs. I know it was them because they talked to me! I was surprised at first, but then they explained what happened. Then they started to glow and they turned into wolves. They still talked to me. I had to go inside now. I thought about them until the end of the day, so it seemed short.

For some reason I had two leashes in my bag. I thought I could use them for Ella and Miles. I went to their classroom. They already had collars on. I put their leashes on and walked them home. I told my Mom everything. She said that everything would be fine but then she stopped. "Mom?" I said. She didn't answer. She just stood there. Everything was quite. "I'm scared," I said to myself. My mom started shaking. "Mom, are you ok?" I asked. She just stood there shaking. I tried to call everyone I knew but no one answered my calls. I found my dogs I

brought them in a room and locked the door behind me. After a while we went out. My mom was ok. She had stopped shaking.

“Mom?” I said again. This time she answered. I was so happy. My mom finished her sentence. I had to go to a graveyard to get Ella and Miles back to normal. So my mom told me where it was and how to get there. The next morning I started walking to the graveyard. It was five miles. When I finally got there I had to find three things – a ladybug, a yellow aspen leaf and the hair of a vampire bunny. I thought that was a little weird but I knew I had to do it. First I found the ladybug. Near the gravestone of Mary Lou Mawk was a perfect aspen leaf. I still had to find the vampire bunny hair. It was hard to tell the normal bunny from the vampire bunny. I looked down closely and eventually I found a bunny with sharp, scary fangs. I plucked a hair from it, but it must have hurt him because he started to chase me. I ran fast out of the graveyard. The vampire bunny stopped at the end of the grave yard. I ran home the five miles. It only took me twenty minutes. My mom mashed up all the things I found and put them in a dog dish for Ella and Miles. It took only a minute or two to get them back to normal. Once they did, we hoped none of that ever happened again. I am not looking forward to next Halloween or the day after!

The Shadow, by Linnea Somerstep, age 10

Diane was a normal city girl with long golden hair like the bright rays of the sun. Her father and mother loved her dearly. Diane's sister is much older than her and so now her sister lives alone. Diane's sister's name is Opal. Opal is the opposite of Diane, while Diane has long blonde hair, Opal has short raven black hair.

Diane wanted to visit her sister in the country, but she had to cross a forest and her car was broken. She quickly walked through the light filled city and into the forest. Diane didn't know her way very well and soon got lost in the great maze like forest. Diane tried to walk faster but darkness dripped down the trees like blood creating a puddle of midnight on the ground. The moon and stars were not to be looked upon that night. The forest was completely silent but to Diane, that silence screamed. A cold serpent of fear slithered down her spine making her shiver. Rustling leaves and a stick breaking made Diane aware of a shadow flitting around behind her. She started running blindly through the forest but she tripped over an unseen vine. The vine with leaves like fingers wrapped around Diane's legs. The shadow moved faster and faster towards Diane's struggling and useless body. Diane saw glinting teeth and claws reaching, tearing at the trees in its path. The shadow stilled and seemed to take a crouching pose. Suddenly it lunged Diane went limp. Blood trickled from her arm and gushed from a deep cut on her head. Then it went black...

Diane awoke to Opal and a doctor staring at her. Diane didn't remember much. The doctor said that she was found passed out in the forest with a horrible gash on her head and a bleeding arm.

"We surmised that you tripped," Opal explained.

Diane's arm throbbed and her memory was running away from her but she was sure that that was not what happened. Diane was very grateful that whatever was after her didn't get her. After the walk through the forest Diane was never the same. She didn't return home but stayed at her sister's farm. Diane was too afraid to do anything. If her sister left than Diane would have a screaming fit. Diane's long blonde hair kept growing and growing and Diane never let anyone cut it. Diane stayed in the house so much that when she went out to get some air the sunlight almost blinded her. Diane's sister was most annoyed because she couldn't do anything without worry of her younger sister.

"I can't live like this. If I walk through the forest and get your car fixed and return alive and well, will you leave?" Diane's sister asked with a hint of annoyance. Diane nodded her head. In the morning her sister left. When Opal entered the forest coldness surrounded her. Opal walked quickly but carefully. Still darkness found that forest. Opal stopped and turned around. A shadow was lying down. The shadow had razor sharp teeth and claws. Opal ran swiftly. The shadow awoke and started to chase. When Opal arrived at the edge of the forest something grabbed her from behind. She caught a glimpse of the evil shadow. Opal screamed when suddenly a rosy pink sun peeked over the landscape. The shadow disappeared in a flash leaving behind only the most

beautiful deep red ruby. If you look into that ruby you can see the shadow's spirit trapped in there. Opal returned as she promised and Diane went back to live with her loving and caring parents.

The Monster That Came to Woodland, by *Brendan Stanley, age 9*

Introduction

Do not read If you have scaredy cat disease or have scare issues. If you do, do not read this book! It will scare you so much you will explode, so do not read this book unless you wish to die.

Chapter 1: The Woods of The Underworld

Once upon a time there was a very little boy in a very big dark forest. He thought he saw ghosts (which he did but he did not know.) He thought that he was just imagining. But then he saw a shadowy figure. He knew just then that he was in the Underworld Woods. "I'm in the Underworld Woods" he whimpered. "I just want to go home" he said.

Chapter 2: The Monster

The little boy ran and ran and ran and it got darker and darker and darker until KERSPLAT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! He ran into something hard and cold like cement. He did not think it was cement though. The little boy was named Robert. He is always curious. That is why he is in this situation. Then he fainted.

Chapter 3: What happened

Robert was playing racquet ball with his friends. He hit the ball and it went over the fence. Robert went to look with his friends. They went into the dark forest. It seemed like only a few seconds when Robert looked back and they were gone.

Chapter 4: The Underworld Woods

Then the ground gave way and Robert fell down, down, down. Just then, when he thought it would never end plop he landed in something like a pool. Robert realized that he had landed in the River Styx. He had read Percy Jackson. He knew all about the Underworld.

Chapter 5: The Real Monster

Robert then heard a loud bang. He went to go check it out. He saw a bunch of sparks and in the light of the sparks he found a flashlight. Robert shined the flashlight on the area. It turned out it was a metal monster. Then he felt a giant glob of doggy drool. He looked up and saw a giant hellhound looming above him.

Chapter 6: The Journey

“Nice doggy I mean duck I mean hellbound I mean hellhound.” Now the hellhound’s name was Mrs. O Leary. Mrs. O Leary did not mind being called doggy or hellhound but she did mind being called duck or hellbound. At first she was fine but then Robert called her duck and hellbound and she got a little angry she barked and the ground shook. Then unfortunately Robert fainted. But Robert did not get eaten. Mrs. O Leary was a nice hellhound, that is why she did not eat Robert. Robert woke up and realized that he was not dead. He then realized that Mrs. O Leary was a good hellhound. He decided to take her home with him.

Chapter 7: back home

Robert took Mrs. O Leary back home with him. At first his mom freaked out, his dad was not normal so he just shrugged. Then his mom calmed down and said “What is that?” “Mom it is a nice creature,” Robert said. Robert’s mom said ok but Robert had to take responsibility for Mrs. O Leary. His dad just shrugged.

A Pile of Bones, by Jensen Tanner, age 10

It was Halloween night and Jack was ready to go trick or treating. He was wearing a dark gray robot costume with antennas and flashing lights that his mom had made him. Just as he opened the door his dog named White Paw jumped out into the dark and stormy night.

"Come back White Paw," he said. He had to go after his dog so he ran outside. He followed his dog all over until he came to a cemetery. He had never seen this one before. This cemetery had a huge metal gate around it. Luckily the gate had been left wide open so he went inside.

"Where are you White Paw?" he yelled. He was making his way around graves when he met a tall figure that was cloaked in black.

"Who are you?" Jack asked

"I'm the Grim Reaper" the cloaked man said.

"Where is my dog?" Jack asked

"I have him" the Grim Reaper said with a laugh.

"Let me have him!" Cried Jack.

"Only if I can have your soul in return" the Grim Reaper said with a wicked grin. Jack launched himself by jumping at the Grim Reaper. Before he could land on him the Grim Reaper disappeared in thin air. Jack landed on his stomach with a smash. White Paw jumped on top of Jack and started licking his face. Jack and White Paw headed home, they were both very tired.

When they got home their mom said that it was time for bed. Jack got his pajamas on, brushed his teeth, and got into bed. That night he thought about what the Grim Reaper had said.

"It's nothing" he said to himself and fell asleep. The next night it was cold and raining. Jack could not find his dog. He thought the Grim Reaper must have stolen him. He got his rain coat and ran out. Jack went back to the creepy graveyard where he had met the Grim Reaper the night before. He walked around the graves until he found the place he had met the Grim Reaper. There he found the Grim Reaper waiting for him.

"I want my dog back now" Jack said bravely.

As before the Grim Reaper said "I must have your soul!"

"Never!" Jack yelled back to him

“Then you will suffer,” the Grim Reaper said in anger. The Grim Reaper threw White Paw into Jacks arms and disappeared. Jack and White Paw ran home scared to death. Jacks mom asked him what had happened and Jack told her he had met the Grim Reaper. His mom said it was his imagination and sent him to bed. Jack fell asleep very fast that night.

The third night he thought he saw the Grim Reaper outside his window. Jack thought it must be his imagination. That night Jacks parents heard a scream coming from his room. They raced to his room and turned on the lights. When they looked at Jacks bed where he had once been, there was only a pile of bones. A tall figure cloaked in black was hovering next to the bed. He laughed then disappeared without a trace.

On Halloween Night, by Kara Tromble, age 12

There are dark creatures that stalk me, constantly lurking in the shadows. Never quitting the schemes that they plan to release, destroying the dreams of many innocent people. I am Blair Crimson others say I am different. I am not the kind of girl who stands still and lets tragedy occur and rip through the seams of respect and decency. I am the kind of girl who fights back. I don't know if I am noble or if I am beginning to slowly morph into evil nature. Scientists from all around the globe have offered to launch experiments on my ability, but I have turned them down. I'm said to be the one who will save or extinguish all of mankind. Experts tell me it will all happen on October 31, 2013, the day I turn 13, three years from now. I can no longer take the constant stares that people give me in the streets. You will never understand the horrible pit that sat in my stomach ever since the day I turned three, when my ability was freed.

That is when I knew things had to change, before it was too late. I am Blair Crimson and this is the truth, my personal account of what occurred the moment I traveled into the future to the day that is assumed to be the scariest Halloween of them all. To either join, the Monsters who want me as their hostage, or to save all of mankind from their downfall. October 31, 2013.

It all began the day of October 30, 2010, as I walked towards the place, the place that is known to contain creatures that possess souls. I held my only source of protection, a splintery stick that dug into my palm. I led my gaze to the sign that was etched in jagged letter's on the iron gate, I could almost imagine the sound of nails grinding against a chalkboard as I read the sign, Hollow Ville Graveyard. A lump grew in my throat as I took my first step into the overgrown courtyard. Voices seemed to hum from the back of my mind singing a song of endless suffering, and endless depression. I couldn't help but let a tiny tear flow down my cheek and drop onto the already soaked ground, no doubt from the same cause. I searched the grounds with a fierce expression, reminding myself what I came here for, my eye rested on the patch of grass that held all knowledge of my fate, of my secret, of my destiny. I slowly walked forward. With each step, I got closer and closer to the pile of grass that would finally answer my questions. At about 100 yards away I felt as if though my heart had come to a complete stop, as if paralyzed with fear by Medusa's gravestone that lay at my side. I did not dare take my eyes of the grass pile, as it only appears every 10 years. I took one last step, this time onto the grass pile, falling into what felt like a world where midnight prowls the skies.

After what felt like hours, I hit the ground, with a mighty thump.

"Well that will awake any monsters nearby." I quietly whispered to myself.

I looked at my surroundings, my mouth gaping in awe, as if I were under some sort of spell. I stood in a dark corner of a large cavernous room. Doors with vicious gargoyles guarding the entrance stood at nearly every edge of the gigantic ballroom. My eyes fixed on one door that seemed suspicious. I shook my head trying to clear my vision, not believing what I was seeing. My eyes narrowed, sure enough, directly across the room stood a door, but this was no ordinary

door. With great scrutiny, I looked at the door and saw, for a brief moment a small orb of glistening purple.

“This can’t be possible, there is no way it could be so simple,” I thought, in a mix of puzzlement and confusion.

“Oh No,” I nearly screamed, “It’s a trap!”

I swiveled on my foot turning in the opposite direction from the purple ball of light, the one thing I desired most. I bolted towards the portal that was beginning to close. I shielded my eyes from the blinding blue light that radiated off the portal which swam with black cursive writing that read... October 31, 2010, 12:00am, forward to October 31, 2013, 12:00am. The words that told my future hastily diminished into absolutely nothing. I burst into tears of sheer terror, the noise that echoed back was nearly as loud the noise that followed. I stopped just as a trembling force vibrated through the ground. In desperation, I fell to the ground, grasping my one valuable, a photograph of my parents. The doors began to shake, crumpling the gargoyles into piles of stone and allowing the doors to fly open at full force, releasing the monsters, the creatures that were hidden inside. Growls, roars, and shrieking calls rang through the cavern, as vicious critters of all shape and size, stretched their wings, and sharpened their claws. I looked at the glowing orb of lavender, then back at the first door. A claw the size of an index finger reached forward, suddenly retracting backward leaving a thin claw mark engraved in the marble floor. I held my breath, as a long slender body emerged. It was a Tigershark, my renowned enemy. Slotted yellow eyes glared at me from the darkness. I managed to muster two noises; “HELP!” and a small yet defined “GULP!” The Tigershark spoke in a raspy voice showing off his blood- stained teeth, “Blair Crimson, color of scarlet blood, welcome to your doom!” Dozens of monsters walked and flew from doors, surrounding me. I was outnumbered, for now. I remembered the night my parents died, the night I was attacked, the night I found my ability. Feelings so sentimental and forceful churned inside me. My eyes turned flaming amber. I rose off the ground, first 10 feet into the air, then 20 feet, finally arriving at 30. I brought forth my hypnosis, and in my most meaningful voice, spoke the quote that will remain in my heart forever,

“You should be ashamed of your ruthless behavior, you are no more than a group of monsters who find joy in the tragedy in others. I order you to disappear from existence, to never again prowl the earth, to never again muster words that haunt. You no longer belong, you’ve past your second chance!”

I leaned down and picked up the orb that would either save or extinguish all of mankind, and threw it to the floor. Smashing all the monsters that surrounded and pulling them against their will towards the orb. Ending the race of monsters.

Tales say that I didn’t save nor extinguish humankind, for the orb was the only source of rescue. I am said to be neither hero nor villain. No one knows what happened to me after the disastrous and elated events of October 31, 2013. For all I say in reply is that I am a source of light, in a gloomy world.

The Black Cat, by Cora Watkins-Brown, age 8

Once upon a time, there was a dark graveyard. There were many trees, big and small. The wind would howl through the leaves sounding like wolves. When you walked through the graveyard, the fog would curl around your ankles. It was in a very busy city, so almost no people came to the graveyard. Instead, they went to places like the zoo. Under a tree there was a gray gravestone shaped like a cat that said “*The faithful black cat, Midnight, January 1st 1987.*”

December 8th, 1989, two years later, as the clock struck midnight, it went “*Dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong*”, twelve times. The ground in front of the cat’s gravestone moved slowly. The graveyard was very quiet and still. The full moon shone on the grave. The cat rose out of the ground like a shadow but her light green eyes were alive like dancing flames. She looked at a house with those eyes, and scratched at the nearest door. She waited on the nice doorstep for 5 minutes. Then the owner of the house opened it, sleepily, but could not see anything but a faint shadow. She turned and went back to bed. The cat slipped through the front door, and up the white carpeted stairs. When the owner of the house went back to bed, the cat scratched at walls and doors, chewed on the corners of the blankets, and mewed mournfully.

Day after day, night after night, she tormented the owner of the house. When the owner died the cat went to the next house. Midnight tormented the house owners by mewing, scratching at walls and doors, scaring dog and cats, chewing on blankets and tablecloths, and spilling things like water, soup, juice, and milk. She haunted and spooked each house. House by house, the black cat emptied each and every house in the town but one. The very last house in her sight looked spooky. It had cobwebs and spiders on it and the gray paint was peeling and old. When she scratched on the door no one opened it. Then, a shadowy ghost floated through the door. Midnight thought the ghost looked familiar. The ghost looked for a while, then said “Midnight, I knew you would come!”

Midnight was confused. The ghost said, “Please come inside.” Midnight came inside and then the ghost did too. The first thing the ghost did was say “I might seem familiar to you. I was your owner.” Suddenly, everything came back to her and she remembered her owner. She remembered passing through the scary tombstones. She remembered long ago, she was just a young kitten, being loved. Her name was Midnight. Midnight loved to adventure in the dark graveyard in between the trees. She lived happily, being fed, watered, and loved for 17 years. Then, Midnight had fallen ill, and Tom, her owner who was in his 70s, had done everything he could to save her, but she grew sicker and sicker, until she died. Tom had then buried her in the graveyard under a tree.

The End

The Where Wolf Problem, by Alecia Whitton, age 10

Ahh! Something's coming after me! I'm so scared!

It all started one night when everything was normal. My family and I were watching TV when all of a sudden I hear a "boom! crash!!". Something, someone, was in our house! First, my brother, Skyler, and Mom and Dad went out front. I stayed inside to look upstairs. I was slowly walking up the stairs and got up to the top. At first, nothing was there. I got to my room and nothing was there either. I thought, "What was going to happen?", since we were far away from anyone else. What were we going to do?

Then all of a sudden my room became darker and darker. I could feel the cold wind blowing at me. As I was standing in the middle of my room, I saw a black shadow in my window. I slowly walked over to my window. As i was getting closer it started to smell like wet dog. Since we didn't have a dog, I wondered "what could it be?". I carefully looked out the window. The smell of wet dog was getting stronger and stronger. I looked out my window and I saw something moving around in my backyard. It was about five feet tall and on four legs.

So I thought to myself that the only way to catch this thing was to go back downstairs and out back. As I opened the screen door I could hear the creaking sound and it made me jump. And then I slowly just walked out back. I could hear howling. Then I started to wonder to myself "what has four legs and howls?". A where wolf! "That's it!", I said. I solved the mystery. Then I realized that I haven't, because I didn't know where the where wolf was.

So then I remembered, my family, where did they go? So I walked out front. No one was there. I kept walking. And then I see them. And in front of them was a where wolf! One second he was there and then he was gone. I wondered "what just happened?". Was he a ghost? So then I went over to my family and told them that this was a real mystery that had to be solved. We all walked back to the house.

As we were walking back I held my brother's hand. My brother's hand was shaking and was freezing cold. I asked him if he was scared and he said "yes". We got home and we sat down. Then the where wolf comes and takes my brother and I try to reach him and they were gone! And then we were really worried. Then the where wolf comes back and takes my Mom and Dad and I'm left all alone! I run to where the where wolf grabbed them.

I hear a weak sound calling my name. It sounded like my brother Skyler. I started to yell "Skyler!" Then I hear him yell, "I'm in the basement!" So I run down into the basement and see the where wolf and my family. Then the where wolf spots me! He starts running after me! "Ahh, help!" I yell. Then I look back and see the where wolf. And I think to myself. He doesn't look like a where wolf. He looks like a regular dog. The dog looked like the one I've been seeing outside a lot. I stop running, look back, and it turns out that it was just a dog and he

was running towards me to give me kisses! So then I run up to the dog and pet him. Then I run over to my brother, Mom and Dad and give them huge hugs.

All in all, I learned not to let my imagination get the best of me!

The End.

Age 13 to 17 Entries

AGES 13-17 FIRST PLACE:

Siblings, By Robert Dekari, Age 16

The cloying smell stung her nose, filling the room as she lifted the sheet. Looking under it, she got another blast of the sickly sweet smell, causing her to retch at the stink. And in hindsight, that was a bad idea. She gagged again at the taste; the very air had been putrefied under the reddish-white sheet. But, she didn't stop her from looking at the tattered corpse, wearing the remains of some fine business suit. It's fine silk now grimed, and bloodied from the fall. And then there was the dagger. A Grisly affair, the handle smashed from the impact upon the stone, its serrated blade standing up from his chest like a pole. Looking away, she stood up, letting the sheet fall again over the man, a fitting death shroud for such an act. The Nervous Police Officer shifted from foot to foot under her steady gaze until she asked, her harsh voice causing him to flinch. *'So why was I called in again?'* The Officer looked about, at his squad mates, but they avoided his gaze, he had been singled out. "Well Ma'am, this is similar to a murder you worked a year ago..." She sighed, she'd hoped that case was a straight forward one, find the killer, and put him away for good. She pressed for a Death Row sentence, and got it, the circumstances provided for her. A Pang of guilt struck her then, maybe she was too harsh on...? She brushed the thought away, he was a criminal, and got what he deserved. "Ma'am?" The Officer's voice snapped her out of her thought stream. *'I'm sorry, repeat what you said.'* He gulped, mistaking her reply for one of hostility. "Well Ma'am, we were thinking it has to be a copycat, cause' he's dead right? He has to be." She nodded unconsciously and repeated the Officer's last phrase to herself. *'He has to be....'*

It was cold, and dusk was setting in as she made her way home. Fall was setting in, and the dry, dead leaves danced across the old worn pavement. The dark purples and reds of the sunset cast long shadows, to some it might be a beautiful scene, but here, it made the skeletons of the trees seem twisted, gnarled, more threatening. She made it to her door just as the lampposts lining the street flickered on one by one. The key slid into the door, and retracted the bolt with a 'shunk'. She stepped inside, shrugging off her light windbreaker onto the floor, glad to be in her house, and safe from the prying eyes of the world outside. She flicked on the hallway's lights, not noticing the slight delay before they came on, giving a dull cast of light about corridor. The messenger machine on her coffee table blinked on and off. Pressing the play button, she went into her bedroom, ready to change out of her work clothes. The Machine played a single eerie tune, a funeral dirge, at which the end of it all the lights in her house went out. Growling her annoyance at this, she pulled on an old T-Shirt and padded out into the hallway. Blindly she stumbled over something cold, and slammed her head into the wall, and slammed away her consciousness.

She woke up, blackness still around her, but it was colder, and she shivered at the change in temperature. Still groggy it took her awhile to notice, but she was kneeling, her hands bound behind her with a thick coarse rope. She twisted her hands then, trying out the strength of the bonds, and she got for it was chafe and a burning feeling. Then, the blindfold around her eyes was ripped away, exposing her face to the light of a single candle. As her eyes adjusted she could

make out a stone altar. The altar where they had HIS funeral, the altar where she cried over his body, remorseful for what she had done to him. A Deathly Cold hand closed around her neck, the prick of a serrated dagger tickled her spine. And a raspy, chocking voice whispered next to her. *"Hey Sis."*

AGES 13-17 SECOND PLACE:

Trick or Treat, My Princess, *by Amy Beery, age 17*

“Trick or Treat!” shouted three children in front of Mr. Mark Negron’s open door. A pirate, a Superman, and a blonde fairy princess hold out their pillow cases, expecting to add more candy to their collection from their evening’s adventure. Mr. Negron smiled down at them, his eyes crinkling around the corners, as he reached for the bowl on the chair right inside the door. It had been the tenth time that he had opened to door for a variety of children in an array of costumes, and he still had several candy bars left. He knew the night was winding down, and he wanted to drop by the pharmacy before he went to bed.

“I’ll tell you what,” he cheerfully cooed, “You can take the rest of my candy.” Their smiles illuminated their faces as their eager hands fisted the different types of candy. He noticed the fairy princess only grabbed the Hershey Milk Chocolate Bars as her tiny porcelain hand dug and picked through the bowl. Her companion, most likely her older brothers, blindly grabbed as much as they could grasp without taking time to choose, but the princess was patient in her search. After the boys cleared out the bowl, they rushed away down the walkway with unbounded joy. The blonde head turned to follow them, but paused before she descended the steps. She looked back at the doorway with her sky blue, Bambi eyes.

“Thank you, Mister!” With a smile, she spun around towards the street, and skipped to catch up with the pirate and Superman, who had their made their way to the next house. Her blonde curls bounced on her fairy wings with every stride. Mark watches her until her small delicate hands cling to Superman’s cape. His mouth curls into a grin as he turned toward the doorway. He reached for his keys before crossing into the garage to his blue Cadillac.

“It’s getting late,” he mumbled to himself, “I hope the pharmacy hasn’t closed yet. I have something I need to pick up.”

~*~

Emma Jarr woke up in a worn out arm chair in the middle of a dimly lit room. She rubbed her sleepy eyes until the rest of the room came into focus. The walls were white, with pictures evenly spaced above the bookcase. Rows and rows of leather bound text books and classic novels stood tall on each shelf. The wood floor was complete clear. There were no toys. Confusion clouded her mind as she realized she wasn’t at home. She searches through her brain for any explanation for why she was in this strange place. After trick-or-treating until dark, her brothers, Nathan and James, and she had gone home to be greeted by their mom and dad with popcorn and hot cocoa. Her dad and the boys had huddled on the couch while they watched a Halloween movie, and she sat in her mom’s lap in the old arm chair: The armchair where she had dozed off half way through, and the armchair that she was sitting in now. How had the armchair gotten into this unfamiliar room?

“Hello, princess.”

Whipping her head towards the voice, her blonde curls bounce as her eyes settle on looming figure in the entryway. Her hearts start to pound as the shadow steps towards her.

“Where is my mom?” she squeaked, cowering to the back of the chair, “Where am I?”

One more step, and the figure was illuminated by the lamp in the corner of the room. Recognition made Emma’s baby blue eyes grow wide. The shadow had turned into the man who had given her and her brothers the rest of his candy. Her confusion and panic rose in her throat.

“Where am I?” she cried, tears crowding her eyelids.

He steps closer to the chair and kneels so he is even with her eyes. “You are safe, princess, and that is all that matters”, he whispered with a tranquil look in his eyes.

Emma pushed her back further into the back of the chair as the tears spilled down her cheek. “Where are my mom and dad?” she asked with a panic shaken voice.

His hand reached towards her face. She cringed while he brushed away her tears with his calloused thumb. Hushing her only made her scream louder. “WHERE’S MOMMY AND DADDY?!”

His other hand cradled her face, and she was frozen with terror. His fingers were sticky and red; the smell made her want to puke.

“It’s alright, my fairy, I took care of them. You are with me now.” He smiled had his finger lace through her golden locks. “You are so beautiful, princess. I had to bring you to my castle. I’ve been waiting and searching for you for a long time. I will keep you safe, my princess.” He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a Hershey Milk Chocolate bar. “It’s your favorite, my sweet.” He gently kisses her hand as she tries to squirm away.

Her tears fall on her pink satin dress from her puffy blue eyes as her child’s innocence was shattered bit by bit through the rest of the night and the days, weeks, months to follow. Her screams turned to whimpers to silent sobs. He never stopped smiling.

~*~

Two days later, the police swarmed the Jarr residence after a neighbor called the authorities when they hadn’t answered the door in days. Mr. and Mrs. Jarr had been found stabbed to death in their bed. Nathan and James Jarr, ages eight and ten, were found gagged and tied in their closet. Emma Jarr, age six, nor the armchair, were anywhere to be found. The poured all their resources into finding the killer and kidnapper, but no final arrests were made.

Her body was found on Halloween night ten years later. Now sixteen years old, she still wore the pink satin dress and fairy wings. Her hair and blue eyes were never found. The killer was never found.

AGES 13-17 THIRD PLACE:

Nothings, by Mounira Aboellail, age 16

There is something in the dark.

It happens when you get sick. It could happen to anyone. Right? It's nothing. Figments, figures, failures of the mind to conjure reality. It's supposed to be nothing. But there's something in the dark.

Something unknown perches on my windowsill and watches through the blinds, eyes fixing only on me, unmoving. I always try to ignore it, always try to ignore the stares from outside the bedroom, from outside the living room, from through the bathroom door.

There is something in the dark. I can feel it slide through spindly black shadows, a sickening surge of air slipping against my legs, the sensation of something slithering in the silence. There is something in the dark, something that makes my temples pulse in my head, something that sends my clenched up heart palpitating wildly. I lie in bed and sweat, turning this way and that as I am assailed by the soft fall of something against the carpet all around me. There is something in the dark. I can feel it lurking low, slinking past, circling me.

There is something in the dark. When I wander out of bed in the quiet hours of a soundless night, I can feel it standing behind me in the kitchen. There is something in the dark. At three in the heavy morning, it pauses behind my turned back. It waits somewhere beyond my feet, the glint of glazed eyes gleaming just past my thin socks on the too-cold tile floor. There is something in the dark. But it's nothing. It's always nothing. It has never touched me, never been more than that—something in the dark.

There is something in the dark. I can feel it by the door, scratching quietly at the frame, can hear the breathing, soft and measured, the signature of something poised to ravage. There is something in the dark, and sometimes I catch a glimpse of its outline: grisly, morbid, a harbinger of something foul, a shadow pressed against the light just before it flickers out. And then there's nothing.

There is something in the dark. I know it's nothing. But when I hear the soft, inevitable progression of its measured footsteps padding down the hallway, drawing nearer, unaccompanied by the sound of breathing, I run, feet tearing down the carpeted hallway, seeking refuge in my bed.

There is something in the dark. It's nothing. It's nothing. I tell myself, remind myself, constantly and forcefully and without fail. But my own desperation rises in a tide, a swell, choking off my air, smothering me beneath tarlike black tendrils, climbing me and pulling me down, down, down, there with the thing in the dark. There is something in the dark. The air is filled with screaming and shrieking, filled with the thrashing of legs in defense against something that will

never touch me, but will always watch. There is something in the dark. It's the sound of a heart thump-thump-thumping in my pillow, beating angrily against my ears, it's the tapping on my window, the whispers of my name just beyond the glass. There is something in the dark. It calls me softly, an inhuman voice, broken and creaking, something impelling me to come closer, closer, closer still.

There is something in the dark. It's nothing. It's supposed to be nothing. There is something in the dark, something inside me. Something invites itself in like a creeping cold; I can feel it squirming between my ribs, can feel it pounding angrily in my head, coiled around my throat. There is something in the dark. But my thoughts are a forcible reminder, drumming in my skull, a high pitched whirring in my head: it's nothing. It could happen to anyone.

I found something in the dark. I found something in the distant, unkempt reaches of my sickly and suffering mind, something that will not stay hidden, will not stay quiet. I found something I cannot put back, cannot shake off. I try to remember that it's nothing. I try to swallow it down, force it down my throat, the idea: I found nothing.

There is something in the dark, something among the gnarled and bloodied hands that reach forward from the pools of inky murk around me, grabbing at my chest. There is something in the dark, its grip like iron clenching around my foot. Touching me. It was supposed to be nothing, a nothing that would always watch—only watch—and never touch. It was in my head, not on my skin. It was the sickness, the mind. There was supposed to be nothing in the dark.

But there is. There is something in the dark.

There is something gripping my ankle. There is something in the dark, something crawling up my legs, something clawing its way up my body. There is something in the dark, something cold and hard pinning me to the bed, something I can't strain against. There is something in the dark, something cutting off my air, something leaving me paralyzed and breathless and wriggling, wide eyed and caught. There is something in the dark, a twisted face, crunched and malformed, sunken in and split, looking down at me. There is something in the dark, a hair's breadth from my nose. It's not nothing.

It could happen to anyone.

A Strange Encounter, by Ben Ballinger, age 13

Hello, my name is Chance. I was named this because I was born by sheer chance.

My mother was very sick when I was born, and the doctors didn't think I would live, but here I am today! I'm also an albino. I think it has something to do with my genes on my father's side. I never got to meet him. Anyways, let's get to my story here. It all began last summer. I love cryptids. Mummies, vampires, werewolves, ghosts, I love them all!

So school had just gotten out, and I decided to go on a camp out. I was obsessed with locating the king. The king of the cryptids. He is said to roam the woods, turning anything that moved into his servant. He has white eyes and white hair. Just like me! That's why I'm so obsessed. He is so elusive, no one has ever seen him before. That doesn't change a thing about me believing in him. So there I was. It was dark. I looked around, hoping to find something new, but no. Pitch black. I didn't know what I expected to see, I had been seeing black for hours. My eyes were beginning to adjust, the further I got from the city. The forest swallowed me whole. It got denser, and denser as I chopped away at the foliage with my machete.

I finally came to a clearing, where I set up my tarp, set some traps, and fell asleep next to my fire. I woke up at exactly midnight to a loud stomping. The ground was shaking. This was it! I had found him! Towering higher than the tallest skyscraper, heavier than 500 elephants, and I, Chance Blackhawk, had found him! It was getting closer, and closer. I got my torch ready. I was going to see him! Then, he was practical right on top of me! Then, I went as fast as it came. The forest was silent. I went to check my traps. I said to myself that it could have been an earthquake, but it was shocked. My traps were crushed flat.

I decided to get some sleep, I had obviously lost him. My fire had gone out. Great. I notices a plume of smoke rise from the ashes, and I could have sworn it was words. The ground suddenly shook again, and I was lifted up into the sky by a massive being. "Chance", he said. "Who are you", I replied with courage in my tone. "Who do you think I am", he asked. "The king cryptid", I said. "I'm more than that", he stated. "Say hello to your father." "What? I don't understand." "Chance, your mother was a monster hunter. She located me, but felt bad. We fell in love." "Oh, so to not hurt me by having this knowledge, you left before I was born." "Spot on, chance." "So am I old enough to know now?", I asked. "No, he said. Now that you have seen me, I must erase your memory."

Hello. My name is chance. My story begins in the woods. I don't know how I got here, but I'm going to find out.

The Witch, by Claire Chung, age 13

“I am afraid of cats.” Timmy’s lips trembled as he crunched the blood-red leaves beneath his feet.

“Timmy! You’re such a fraidy cat!” Lexy snickered as she strode on the leaves, her sneakers pounding against the sidewalk.

“Oh, Lexy, don’t make fun of me. I’m just afraid, that’s all.” Timmy inched away from her as he spoke. He shuddered in his white bed sheet. His brown hair was matted against his forehead. Sweat dribbled down his neck. His shattered eyes attempted to see through the misshapen holes in his bed sheet. Lexy’s eyes glittered as her laughter lingered into the dimly lit night. Lexy was short for Alexis Young, but she hated when people called her that. She was adopted by the Young’s that lived next door to Timmy. Lexy was special because of her eyes. One eye was yellow, while the other eye was green. She twirled a strand of dark hair and laughed. Her laughter sounded like bells. “Timmy, if you always get scared, I won’t come trick-or-treating anymore. Besides,” She punched his arm playfully, “Halloween’s supposed to be scary.” Lexy laughed nervously as she pushed her stringy black hair away from her face. Timmy blushed profusely and shoved her back. Lexy didn’t move a muscle, but instead, stuck out her tongue at him and smiled. A lot of boys at school liked Lexy because she was pretty. Her face was flushed a deep red and her bangs were tilted to the side of her forehead. Timmy had a slight crush on her; she was stunningly beautiful (and not to mention a great friend). But he never had a chance with all the boys chasing after her. Her witch’s hat bobbed up and down as she walked. She held it on with one hand and grabbed her tangled wig with the other. Lexy rubbed her slender hands together. The wind brought chills down Timmy’s back. He looked around, but no one was there.

“Is Evvy coming today?” Lexy jumped excitedly as they hurried to their last stop. Timmy sighed. Evvy was his babysitter and a total nightmare. Unbelievably, Lexy adored his awful babysitter. He ignored her and rummaged through his bulging bag of candy. So far, they’d been to twelve houses. The bag was filled to the brim with snickers and licorice and a handful of other goodies. Timmy dropped a tootsie roll as he rummaged through. As he bent down to pick it up, more candy spilled out of the sides. He put his bag on the ground and picked the spilled candy up and into his bag. Lexy munched on the apple that the dentist gave her, juice trickling down her chin. She wiped it off with her sleeve and continued walking. Timmy trudged after her, murmuring under his breath. Lexy was a great friend, but she could be really oblivious to everything. Timmy gazed into the dark.

Lexy arrived in Blackthorne academy a week ago, and she was always there when he needed help. He remembered when Mickey, the big guy whom everyone was afraid of, tried to shove him in his locker. Timmy pleaded and screamed, helpless. “Hey, Cowgirl. Got any money?” Mickey slammed him against his locker. Timmy didn’t have any money, so yelped helplessly as Mickey’s fist landed sharply in his gut. Mickey tried pushing him further into his locker, “That’s what you get for being stupid!” Mickey pushed him in further. Timmy screamed for help again.

That was when she came. The lip glossed cheerleader stood by the boy's locker room, glaring at Mickey coldly. Clearly, she had heard Timmy's pleas for help. Mickey locked eyes with her and stepped back.

"Who do you think you are? Pick on someone your own size!" The girl hollered through cupped hands.

Mickey blushed at her and glared one last time at Timmy, then, he slowly unfurled his hands around Timmy's shirt. "You're lucky this time, Cowgirl." Mickey stepped out of the hallway. While he left, the girl held out her hand for Timmy and pulled him out of his locker. "You okay? What's your name?"

"Timothy."

"Lexy."

"What?"

"My name's Lexy, and if you don't hurry, Cowgirl, you'll be late for class." Lexy winked at him and walked down the stairs. Timmy could only gaze at her, motionless.

After school, he found Lexy waiting for him on her bike. "Hurry up! I want you to show me the neighborhood!" she shouted. Timmy grabbed his bike helmet and smiled. He knew that he had just made a new friend.

"Earth calling Timmy. Earth calling Timmy." Timmy snapped back to reality. He found himself gazing at the Halloween decorations on the Owen's house. Timmy turned beet red. "How long was I here?"

Lexy laughed. "You were only there for a few minutes. What were you thinking about?" "Oh, nothing. I was just zoning out." His hands twitched nervously.

Lexy shrugged and grabbed his hand. "Come on, Timmy. Mrs. Norman doesn't like late comers." They ran up the squeaking porch. It was dead silent. "I wonder what's wrong. Mrs. Norman always gives out the best candy." Lexy whined as Timmy rang the doorbell and waited. Nothing. He rang it again. Nothing. Lexy reached out and was about to ring the doorbell when the door swung open, startling them both. "Trick-or Treat!" They said in unison. Mrs. Norman looked presumably frightened. She had a lipstick frown and her blonde hair was loose over her tensed shoulders. Her plump figure leaned against the door for support. Quickly, she reached out and dumped handfuls of candy in the open bags. She looked around cautiously. Her chubby fingers tapped the door impatiently. She was about to close the door when Lexy pushed it open again. "Mrs. Norman, what's wrong?" Mrs. Norman stared sadly into the dark. "You shouldn't be out at this time, darlings. Do you know what time it is?"

Timmy scraped his foot on the wooden porch. His mouth dangled open, not knowing what to say. Mrs. Norman gasped, "Oh, poor things. Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what, Mrs. Norman?" Timmy knew that something was wrong. Not one child was out trick-or-treating. None. Usually, there were tons of children.

She relaxed a little and smiled weakly at them, exasperated. She looked around one last time. Her eyes gleamed mysteriously as she gazed at them. Her brown cinnamon eyes were squinting with worry, and her brow was wrinkled and tensed. She spoke in a soft voice, "Twelve o'clock." "What?" Lexy looked worried. She stepped away from Mrs. Norman.

"The witch. She's here tonight." Mrs. Norman whispered one last time. She slammed the door and was gone. Timmy fumbled with his bag nervously.

Lexy looked calmly at her friend. "Come on, Timmy. This is just a story to scare little kids. You can't believe everything you hear!" But even Lexy had a little doubt in her voice. He looked at her; her eyes were filled with an emotion he couldn't place.

Normally, Mrs. Norman would be out on the streets, giving candy to young children. Today was different. Lexy gripped his hands for support. Timmy could tell that Lexy knew something that he didn't. They walked a few blocks down to Timmy's house. It was a quaint, little yellow house with a stable in the back. There was a small patch of dirt where a garden should be next to the stables. In the stables, Timmy's family kept three beautiful horses; one for each member of the family. Lexy bit her nails nervously as she entered the house, pulling off her wig and revealing coffee brown hair that curled gracefully at the bottom. Whatever Mrs. Norman said troubled her as much as it did to him. He'd never seen her so scared. Timmy made sure that Lexy was okay and went to check on his horse, Piggy. Piggy had a beautiful white mane with cream colored skin. Her eyes were coffee brown, and she nuzzled his chest as soon as he got close. He checked on the other two horses: his mother's horse was named Mabery, while his father's horse was named Buckwheat. Buckwheat was the least calm out of all the horses. His temper was ferocious. Yet, today, he seemed in a better mood. His fur was groomed, and he had ugly dark spots all over his skin. Timmy liked Buckwheat, but he liked Mabery better. She was a gentle horse. Her copper skin shone in the moonlight and she stared at him with her calm brown eyes. He scratched Piggy's mane gently with one hand. She whinnied gently and sunk up against a patch of hay, falling into a troublesome sleep while Mabery chewed on pieces of hay gently.

"Good girl." He smiled. He walked out of the stables and his spirit fell immediately. He remembered Mrs. Norman and her odd remarks about the witch. Suddenly, he heard blood-curdling laughter echo through the house. He ran in, despite the uneasy feelings inside. To his dismay, evil Evvy was there. Her dark and murky eyes followed him as she propped on the couch.

"Your parents aren't here so I am in charge. Got it, punk?" She snickered as Timmy gritted his teeth.

“You’re late.” Lexy called from the second floor. She peered through the corner of the stairs. “Hurry! I got to show you something!”

Evvy smiled hungrily at him. “Go on.”

Timmy grabbed the staircase railings. His knuckles turned white as he flashed his eyes murderously. Evvy didn’t seem to notice.

“Relax. I’m not here to get killed.” Evvy picked up a magazine and started to read. Timmy gave one last glance at her and climbed up the stairs. Evvy combed her slick and greasy black hair with her fingers. Her hair was really short, with purple and blue highlights. She always wore combat boots and black leather jackets. Her jeans were torn and broken. She smiled wickedly. As Timmy walked up the stairs, Lexy smiled happily, “Isn’t she awesome?”

Timmy groaned. “Not again.” Lexy loved Evvy and she didn’t mind Evvy’s ridiculous looks. “Read this. It’s an article from 1978. I found it in Evvy’s backpack.” Lexy gave him the article. She desperately urged him to read it. Timmy finally conceded.

Timmy walked into the room with Lexy tagging behind. “What’s it about?” Timmy grasped on to the newspaper and read it.

The Cat, By Gary Walters

It was reported that there were ten missing horses in Blackthorne village on October 31st, 1978 at midnight. Reporters exclaim that the world is in peril of a humongous black cat that the owners saw after hearing the screams of their horses. They said that they even heard the screeching and meowing of a cat. Police have found gigantic paw prints this afternoon that have led to their neighbor’s house. Their neighbor, Mr. Keene, is in court for vandalism that he said he did not commit. Later, the police will hear more about the shadowy Mr. Keene, who protested, “It wasn’t me! I don’t know where the paw prints came from!” Mr. Keene reported that, out of his five daughters, his youngest disappeared. Police do not know about the disappearance of Mr. Keene’s daughter, but investigators say that it may be possible that the daughter of Mr. Keene is a witch.

After reading the article, Timmy looked at Lexy, his mouth wide open with fright. Lexy shrugged unhappily and stared at the ground. Her eyes were wide and her lips trembled. Timmy gulped nervously.

“You want to play a game?” Lexy poked him gently. Timmy shook his head.

“Well then, we should get to sleep.” Lexy yawned uninterestingly and turned off the lights. That night, Timmy was wide awake. Lexy was a crumpled mass beside his bed. Realization hit him. Piggy. Only his family had horses in Blackthorne right now. Timmy sat up. He stared at the clock. It was 12 o’clock. He stared frighteningly at the wall. Timmy also remembered that he left his bag of candy in the stables. This was bad. He climbed out of bed and grabbed his jacket. He desperately wanted to tell Lexy, but she was always a grouch when people woke her up early. He grabbed his jacket and the pocket knife that his father gave him. Then, he sneaked silently

past Evvy, who was snoring on the couch. Quickly, putting on his pair of boots, Timmy jumped over the worn out fence that led towards the stables, dodging dead tree branches, scraping his skin. He jumped inside and looked around. All of the horses looked frightened. The horses all crouched in a corner. None of them moved. Mabery's gentle eyes were dark and fearful, and Buckwheat would not meet his gaze. Timmy sighed with relief. He sat in a corner, gasping for air. His pocket knife was open in his hands. "It's gonna be alright, guys. I'll guard you with my life!" Even as the words escaped him mouth, he thought it sounded a little different than his old self. The him that everyone loves to tease about. The shy him that would always stand in the shadows and corners of everyone and everything. The him that nobody ever wanted.

Without knowing, he fell into a deep sleep. Hours had passed. Then he heard it. The scrape of fur against dirt and the screech of a cat. It rang around the stables. The sound pierced his skull as he raised his hands to his ears. The horses looked at Timmy; their eyes pleading for his help. The cat seemed restless. It jumped in and landed with a crunch on Timmy's Halloween candy bag, the contents spilled and mushed along with the dirt. Timmy screamed a high pitch scream. The cat locked eyes with him and bent its back legs ready to pounce. The creature's pink tongue licked the corner of her mouth. Razor sharp claws appeared on its massive paws. Timmy's hands gripped the knife tightly. He was horrified. The cat pounced and went right past him onto the limp figure of Piggy. All he could see was a flash of black fur and a high whinny. With a rush of adrenaline, Timmy jumped up from his corner. He leapt onto the feline's back as he was swung, back and forth, until his head grew dizzy. With a swipe, his pocket knife flew out of his hands through the air and stabbed Buckwheat in the calves. The horse bucked and neighed and stomped on the cat's feeble neck. The cat screeched and clawed, digging its claws into the poor old stallion's side as the pocket knife fell onto the floor, stained crimson red. The stallion staggered back, eyes as wide as saucers, and stampeded out of the stables and onto the field, leaving a trail of blood behind. The cat leaped after the horse. Timmy, who was still grappling onto the cat's back for dear life, grabbed for the knife and cut the cat's left paw clean off. The black cat's fur stood on end. It screeched and yelped. The cat roared so loudly that Timmy's eardrums felt like they were bleeding. Its yellow eyes glared menacingly at him as he was swung off of her back. Cherry red drops fell from its paw as it ran away, vanishing into the dark. The cat's blood stained the coffee floor.

Knees shaking, Mabery trotted out of the stables, startled and terrified. She continued along the cobbled trail, disappearing into the dark depths of the neighboring forests. Piggy, on the other hand, all bloody and swollen, nudged Timmy's hand one last time and before he gave up his soul to god. Timmy gasped, the adrenaline washed away from his pale and solemn face, tears welling up in his grief-stricken face. He reached for his former horse and waited, his fingers smoothing the blood stained hair. Nothing. He didn't even get to say goodbye properly. He watched as Buckwheat ran, farther and farther over the horizon, until it was just a tiny speck. Dawn was just breaking. With a shaky voice, he gasped, "Oh well. I'll have to explain to mom and dad later on. They probably won't believe me." Tear drops trickled over his swollen and puffy cheeks. There was nothing he could do.

With one last sprint, he jumped over the fence and ran into the house. His body was completely exhausted, yet his indefatigable mind filled with thoughts of Lexy. He wiped his red, puffy eyes; he could not wait to tell her what had happened over the night. Closing his eyes shut, he opened

the door again and ran in. He closed the door silently behind him and crept up the stairs. Evvy was still snoring, ear buds still on. He could not believe how she didn't hear anything from that entire racket the horses made. By that time, curious neighbors had left their homes and watched with awe at the galloping mare. He crept up the stairs and was about to walk into his room when he saw the lights. Lexy was awake. He sighed with relief, happy that he didn't have to go through another scare. He peeked through the door and gasped. Lexy was sitting there, panting heavily. And her left hand was missing.

Jack O' Lanterns and a Pile of Bricks, by Gareth Eckert, age 13

It was the late autumn of 1721. A man and a woman walked down the streets of London. They felt as if someone was watching them. But when they turned, all they saw were grinning Jack O' Lanterns from the month's holiday. "John, let's go," said the woman. As they walked away, back to the comfort of their home, the flames in the Jack O' Lanterns flickered, growing larger and smaller, making the faces look as if they were laughing... all of the sudden, the candle flames sputtered out. The faces went dark.

A few days later, a fifteen-year-old boy named Dale was wandering in an alley, looking for his missing dog. He heard a yelping coming from behind a wall and ran towards it. "Nicky!" He shouted. He found his corgi growling at a Jack O' Lantern. "Come on, it's only a Jack O' Lantern," Dale comforted his dog. Dale didn't know, though, that Nicky hadn't been growling at the decoration.

After that day, Nicky wasn't the same. She scratched at the doors, trying to get out, and barked at random objects. If somebody let her outside, she tried to get away. There was one thing that she barked at and avoided the most: a large pile of bricks. There was a legend about the bricks that told about a huge mean creature that had hidden in the pile. When people looked for it to kill it (because the thing took their food and ate their animals, a few times eating people) they found nothing but bones and the skull of SOMETHING. Mostly people believed it had been an unnaturally large rat, while some thought it had been a giant lizard. Still other people guessed it was a mix of the two, while some assumed the legend was made up by people hoping to make money.

One morning, as Dale chased Nicky, his corgi made a sharp turn towards the brick pile and ran straight into a small hole in it! Dale expected his dog to sprint out, but she didn't return. Dale had no choice but to crawl after her.

If Dale had known, he would have brought a light. He found a tunnel leading down, and, feeling brave, crawled in. "AAAAAAAHHHHH!!!!!!!" Dale screamed as he slid down the suddenly smooth slope and into a cavern. Dead leaves were scattered everywhere and somehow trees were growing down there. It was then that Dale found the reason of the tree's growth: they fed on animals. Under the leaves were bones of the victims, and growing off of the branches were pumpkins with holes... Dale realized the holes weren't regular holes, but the beginning of Jack O' Lantern faces! Some branches snaked off through the roof of the cavern and Dale understood why Nicky had barked at a Jack O' Lantern- it had been one that had been attached to a tree! Unbeknownst to Dale, a tree's tendril was winding its way toward him. Just as the pumpkin at the end was about to chomp on to him, he heard a bark. Nicky raced towards him and bit the branch, severing the pumpkin and saving Dale. As the branch disintegrated, a low moan of anger and pain emanated from the tree. A few seconds later, the Jack O' Lantern creature scooted towards Dale and Nicky, gushing a greenish purple liquid and snarling.

Fortunately, the monster turned to dust since it had been separated from its life support. When it died, it left a poisonous smelling smoke and its glowing, orange eyes seemed to stay a little while after. Dale had to get out of there before he was eaten! “Come on Nicky!” he called to her. They managed to climb out of the tunnel. Once they were out of the brick pile, Dale pushed the bricks into the tunnel to jam it. He then ran back home with Nicky, feeling as if they had forgotten something.

The Jack O’ Lanterns watched him, waiting for their next meal to come by...

The Basement, by Isabel Hills, age 13

You'd always been told, "Stay out of the basement, sweetie," by your mom. "Don't go down there," by your dad. "*Really* bad idea," by your aunt, her cringing whenever you brought the subject up, looking worriedly around for your parents. "Want some pie?" was the response from when you asked your grandmother about it, avoiding the question. You always received a blank stare from your granddad when you asked him, like he didn't even know what basement you were talking about.

You've been curious about the mysteries the basement holds since you were first told you weren't allowed down there. You've written stories about it, each more impractical than the last. You've even found yourself thinking about it in the middle of class when you're supposed to be working on something.

After yet another day of dozing off in the middle of class because of the basement and getting detention because of it, you decide to put all caution to the wind, and head down there that evening. Walking home that afternoon, the sun setting over the horizon, its final rays casting hues of orange and blood red across the sky, you have time to come up with a plan.

You know your parents disappear down there almost every night just before dinner, so you've got to wait until after dinner, probably going down after you're supposed to be in bed that evening. You decide to wait until you're positive your parents, and aunt, are asleep before exploring it.

You walk home a bit faster than you normally would, just wanting the day to pass by even faster than it would otherwise, and get home around eight. You walk inside the door, and chuck your backpack full of textbooks and semi-finished homework on the floor beside the couch.

As you move farther into the house, the smell of cooking meat slips into your nostrils and beckons you to enter the kitchen. You peak your head in to see your parents hustling around making dinner. Mom's making the burgers, and dad's making the sauce while also getting out the other ingredients. Mom catches sight of you, and shoos you out of their way, telling you to wait until later.

The time between then and your plan being able to be executed is excruciating. Dinner passes slowly, not even the fantastic burgers make it pass faster. Once it does, however, you extract yourself from your blankets and hop out of bed. Not even bothering to put on proper clothes, you slink past your parents' room and down the two flights of stairs to the basement.

When you get to the entrance to the basement, you try the door handle and are surprised to find it unlocked. You slowly pull the door open, and step inside the dark room.

You can see nothing in the room. Your hand touches the wall, fumbling for a light switch, but you yank it back when it comes in contact with something wet and sticky, as well as oddly warm to the touch. You stick your now covered hand back outside the room into the slightly

illuminated stairway, and fight the bile rising up in your stomach. The liquid has coated your hand is bright red. *Blood*. No other option comes to mind, just *blood*.

As much as you'd like to run screaming, something inside you says *Well, it's already covered in gore. May as well turn on the lights and see what other horrors await*. Sometimes you hate your inner voice, especially when it overwhelms common sense. Nevertheless, you suck it up and grope for the switch once more.

When the light finally flickers on, your good hand flies up to cover your mouth for two reasons: 1.) The bile in your stomach is now in your throat, and 2.) To block your horrified scream. The walls are covered in blood, dripping from various points on the ceiling to the floor in uneven rivulets. It also covered the multiple tables scattered across the room, as well as what seemed to be a refrigerator and miscellaneous kitchen supplies on a counter. Puddles of it were splattered across the floor where the uncarpeted cement floor had sagged. You move slowly across the room, wanting to flee but at the same time wanting to know just *what* your parents had been doing down here. Your question is answered when you get to the "kitchen".

Rotting flesh off of what seems to have once been a human leg is sitting abandoned on a cutting board, a butchers knife imbedded at the bottom of the knee. An arm and something you don't recognize, and aren't entirely sure you'd like to, are sitting in similar states next to it. You pull open the refrigerator door only to find assorted body parts of all shapes, sizes, and color. From feet to heads, it's all there. Something inside you clicks, and you puke what of your dinner hadn't yet been digested, the burger burning your throat as you look between the leg and parts in the refrigerator.

You slam it shut and scramble back out, only to bump into a fairly solid body on your way out. You look up warily and find you dad's face looking down at you contempt, and a quick glance to the side reveals your mother with the same expression.

"We told you to stay out of the basement," Dad says. With that, your he grabs your arms and pulls you over to the counter, your mom following.

"Sorry, sweetie, but we did tell you to stay out," is the last thing you hear. The last thing you see it your dad yanking out the knife from the dismembered leg and it swinging toward your neck.

Reaper, by Madison Kaine, age 15

It all began on a blue bench. The bench was as green as the grass underneath it, which contrasted greatly with the barren tree reaching its leafless limbs way over my head. A slight raspy cough came from my right. A little old man was seated next to me, one leg crossed over the other and a top hat pushed down so far on his head you could barely make out the silhouette of his face. He must have noticed me staring; he nodded without turning to look at me.

“Afternoon,” he coughed quietly.

“Is it?” I replied, focusing on the cars rushing by on the road in front of us.

Something about this whole situation was oddly serene to me. I wasn’t worried the slightest bit of where I was, or where I was going. There were no distracting noises, and no people other than the man next to me. The road was a dark black, not yet faded with time. Each car was a different bright color, but it was impossible to tell which was which because they were all moving so fast it blurred into a big colorful splotch. It was very relaxing to sit on the blue bench next to the little old man. The sun beat down through the knotted, dried branches of the tree above us. Still, I was cold. Very cold. I shivered.

“Where am I? I ask after a moment of silence.

The little man didn’t respond for a while. “Not sure yet, depends on what you see.” He lifted a wrinkly, yet very steady hand and pointed to the road. “That a giraffe right there?”

I followed his finger; nothing but cars. I shook my head, but he wouldn’t look at me. So instead I answered with no.

He let out a raspy sigh. “Very well then. The box?”

“What box?” I asked.

“The box you have.”

“I don’t have a box,” I trailed off, trying to focus on the way the cars blurred all the colors together. Something about this whole place was starting to make me uneasy.

“It’s in your lap.” He replied.

When I looked down, I found he was right. A box that was covered in layer after layer of face shaped stickers plastered to it sat in my lap. I had no memory of it being there before. At least I thought they were stickers.

Each face was different. Some wore glasses, some were wrinkled and old, and a few were extremely young. That was not the disturbing part of all of the stickers. The worst was how sickly they looked. They were all deathly pale, like someone took a syringe to their faces and

sucked all the color out. Purple underlined their eyes, and their sunken cheek bones. None of them smiled, or had any expression on their face other than a glare. Their eyes were clouded over, grey and distant. It's as if they were a permanent painting of a photograph, with every detail perfect and no evidence of a brush stroke. Even the eyes of the youngest children on there, their heads still bald from youth, were cold and harsh. They seemed to follow you wherever you moved the box, like they watched and judged everything you did. It was extremely uncomfortable to have them all staring like that. I felt this cold acceptance seep into me as I stared back at them all.

Morbid curiosity got the better of me; I shifted where I sat, and reached for the gold brass lock to open up the box.

“ah-ah-ah” the man said. “That’s mine, not yours. You can’t open that one. Only for me.”

I shuddered. “Is there one I *am* supposed to open?”

For his answer, he leaned down and reached for something underneath the green bench. He pulled up a box of the same size, except void of the stickers. It was bare so you could see the ugly old knots in the warped wood. It reminded me of the tree above our heads. He shifted slightly and turned to place the box in my lap. I tried to lift my arms to take it from him, but found I couldn't. He propped it on top of my legs, and made eye contact with me for the first time. His eyes were sunken too deep into his head, and the iris seemed a darker black than the pupil. Snaking from the outer edges of the eye, moving in towards the center were bloodshot veins. As I stared, one of them popped and blood spread around the eye in a fog. On one side of his cheek, the skin was dried and curling away from the bone, as if something from the inside of his face pushed its way out. The rest of his skin was scarred, and strips hung around his whole face. Yellow puss dripped from one nostril, and he sniffed, pulling it back out of visibility. His lip was split in the middle, and you could see the gash all the way through to his rotted green tooth. He grinned and the split lip opened more.

“*This* is yours.” He rasped.

I looked down at my box. There was one sticker like person staring back at me, with the same cold eyes and pale face. Except this person was no stranger; this person was me. I stared wide eyed at myself for a moment, before jerking my eyes back to the man next to me. He grinned again, displaying to me even more rotten, crooked teeth. “You’re one of us now.”

Seeing You, by Maddie Leidholt, age 17

There's a soft hand on my shoulder. Gentle, warm, and ever so slightly damp. There are cold words on her lips. Cruel, cutting, dry. Empty medical terms and forbidding hidden meanings.

Vitelliform macular dystrophy, perhaps a dab of Retinitis pigmentosa with a twist of Choroideremia in the mix. All artfully arranged as a dry bitter taste in the back of my throat.

"Let's get you something to help you through this transition."

XANAX might do the trick. Don't take too much, Dear. Just enough to keep this from bringing you down. Drug away the lost opportunities. You can forget about caring what colors look like with this lovely chemical concoction. You won't miss your loved ones faces if you take this light blue treat first. Everything will be fine. You're not losing anything.

I take my first blue distraction a week after the diagnosis. I hadn't even intended to open the bottle, my will was strong, until I noticed the blur framing my vision. Until my eyes finally started going.

Side effects aren't too bad. Drowsiness means nothing when I don't want to wake up anyways. Slurred speech would only matter if I felt like answering the phone. Blurred vision was just an ironic little punch to the gut. No reason not to pop one....or maybe two. Was that three? Who even fucking cares?

Two weeks and things are getting obvious. Morning starts out with soft grays and yellows. Gentle swirls and dips of color. It's beautiful until the yellow turns to sickly morning light, grinning like a sarcastic smoker and the grays turn to piles of dirty laundry. Three weeks ago it would bother me, now I just reach for my little blue miracle.

Days blur like my vision. Slowly and cruelly. Shadows come creeping in as the days creep on. The XANAX keeps me steady. Awake, asleep. Awake, asleep. Go to work. Go to bed. It took me a day to remember when I quit my job. It took two extra pills to make the memory go away again. My tiny savior blocks out the ringing phone, then blocks out the slight panic once it stops. I'm alone with my secret. Alone with my diagnosis. My disease and my little life saver. My soft blue pill.

Four weeks? Were shadows always so shifty? Had they always seemed to be looking at me? Ha. One extra dosage and they were just tricks of the light. Nothing to worry about. My armor is made in a lab. I'm safe wrapped in chemicals. They warm me and distract me from how blurry the picture of my mom has gotten. It was never that great of a photo. Barely even recognizable really. Why did I ever get it framed?

Five weeks would mean I was keeping track of time. What day is it? I don't care and neither does XANAX. We make our own schedule. Dosage times take over the clock. Eventually even those disappear. The second I start to feel something, anything, is the second I forgot to take my latest pill.

Shadows are getting restless again and that little extra boost of calm isn't stopping them anymore. Tonight I locked myself in the bathroom. I curled up into the smallest ball I could make and waited out the darkness. It's the brightest room in my house and the mists in the corners shy away from the light. Everything was fine until something slipped past my "little something extra" dosage. Panic welled up inside me, bubbling at my blurred corners until it poured out of me like champagne. Giddy frantic laughter filled the room. It echoed from the corners and rubbed against me like warm poison. Terror slowly transitioned to almost excited anticipatory laughter. Nervous and crazed. It rose and boiled inside me until I shot upwards, clutching at the countertop, blood rushing to my head and reminding me that I can't remember the last thing to pass my lips that wasn't my precious damage control drug. My vision cleared slowly but never as much as it should of. I met my eyes in the mirror for the first time in weeks. Scared, blood-shot, and far too awake. Laughter bounced gently though out the room now, softer but no less excited. My eyes drifted down the mirror to my pale, cracked lips. Giggles screamed against my senses but my lips weren't moving. Panic pricked me, millions of needles imbedding in my flesh. What is this?

"Illusions are just a side effect, sweetie."

My mind whispered the half seen memory into the front of my thoughts. When had my inner voice started to sound so evil? Shadows boiled in the corners behind me. Were they coming closer? Had they always felt so dangerous?

Shaking, coming down from the high dosage I'd grown to need, I unlocked the bathroom door. Things were going dark. My eyesight was tunneling. This was too soon, I wasn't ready. Stumbling to the kitchen, I pulled out my pill bottle. So small but so consuming. I scanned the directions, the dosage,

"So small, such nonsense",

and the side effects. Nothing about hallucinations. Nothing about shadows. Coming closer, looking lively. Twisting, hissing, hungry.

I need something to calm me down. Frantic, I unscrew the bottle top and pour out my pills. A crumpled long dead spider falls into my hand and I drop it with a screech. No! I need help! I can hardly breath, my vision is barely pin pricks and I turn, pressing against a wall. The shadows are converging. Combining. A creature pulls itself together before me, sickly thin and the colors of a long dead bruise. It straightens and shudders, creaking and hissing. Humanoid but so wrong. Bones poking out from stretched tight skin. The monster comes closer. My sight is going dark, fading. It's going...going....

Gone.

A voice I've come to recognize hisses through gurgling, hysterical giggles, through nightmares and through the darkness.

"Finally."

"I can see you."

There is No Escape, by Brandon Reynolds, age 14

Freedom is something everyone wants and needs. But let me just tell you that freedom, though it seems like we all may have it, none of us do.

Not at least while he is still out there.

I had just moved into my new house, and I was so happy to start a new life. As soon as I was done unpacking my items, I decided to meet the neighbors. I rang the doorbell of my neighbor as the so familiar “Ding Dong” of the bell rang out from inside. A man answered the door, and said, “You must be our new neighbor! Welcome!”

I simply replied with, “Thank you,” and moved on. As I kept along the rest of the street, the closer it got to the end, the more frantic people got.

Finally I got to the second to last house and rang the doorbell. I heard a little creaking from the door. He had barely enough room to stutter out the words, “G-g-get out o-o-of h-h-h-here,” I started to reply and protest, but then his voice came back and he screamed at me “GET OUT OF HERE NOW!” He started to mumble about “him” whoever that even was. I just decided he didn’t know what he was talking about and moved on.

I walked up to the last house, but something about the house set me off. I don’t know whether it was the paint color, which was black compared to the other nice pastels, or whether it was his lawn, which was strewn with weeds, wilting flowers, and dead grass. With all of these factors, I should have just turned around there, and thought better about this neighbor. Nonetheless, being the responsible neighbor I was known to be, I rang the doorbell. This bell sounded more like a scream than a bell. The door slowly opened, and then crashed open. Suddenly a shadow crosses the doorway, and a man appears in front of me. He looks at me sinisterly and says nothing, forcing me to start the conversation.

“Hello,” I state with a nervous smile. He looks at me and then says,

” If I were you I would leave before anything gets out of hand.” Foolish me, I should have taken his advice there and just left that terrible, terrible neighborhood. Instead, I question, and say,

” What do you mean?” not knowing the consequences of my actions. He starts mumbling, with little words here and there I could pick up like, ” just like the others,” and,” become trapped.” He looks at me and says,

“Look just keep your mind off of him, and you will be fine.” I try to reply, but he slams the door on me before I can even say,” Wait.” I walk back home, and do not take his advice, but instead keep thinking, ” Who is this guy? What has he done? Is something wrong with this neighborhood?” as I reach my house, and walk inside.

As I finished placing my things around the house, it was about 10 at night, so I decided to get to bed. The last to hook up was the TV, but I could do that in the morning. I went to bed right away, and started dreaming. However, this would not be a dream, but a nightmare, a very real nightmare. All I remember was a man sitting a room, I knew he was not one of my neighbors, but his head was down. All I could hear was, "must escape, escape is the only solution, I must get out of here, help me, HELP ME NOW," Whenever the words help me now would be heard, his face would be the only thing I could see. His face was pale, and looked straight at me with bloodshot eyes. I woke up sweating and looked around my room. It was empty however, other than the closet that I had not filled yet. That closet, I could not remember it being there, or being ajar the slightest bit. That's when he showed up. I could barely see his eyes outlined by the white of his face and immediately recognized it as the man in the dream. He opened the closet more and stepped out, me panicking and backing up into the wall. He smiled, then laughed and screamed at me,

"I HAVE YOU TRAPPED NOW," I didn't know what he meant, I had to act quickly, but my mind did not know what to do. He started advancing and my mind switched on to running, as I sprinted into the hallway. I knew he was following me, as his laugh trailed into the distance. I finally made it into a room with him not being in it, and took refuge until morning. When it was in the day, I found myself in my radio room. I decided maybe I could relax myself by listening to some music. I switched on the radio, and static was apparent. I tried tuning it, and hit a radio channel so I stopped it. However all I could hear was

"There is no escape. There is no escape. There is no escape." over and over and over again until finally I heard the laugh. It was his laugh. I now could recognize it from anywhere. I screamed and ran out of the room and stumbled into my living room, where I looked around frantically. The exits were no longer there though; my return to safety had been covered by plaster. I looked around screaming for someone to help me, but all the items in the room were gone other than my TV. Something was wrong though; I looked at the TV and realized that I had never set it up. I walked closer, thinking if I dared turn it on. I pressed the power button. There was only static, and then he popped up and said:
"There is no escape."

Windfall, by *Isabella Rogge*, age 16

The wind had not blown for fifteen days. Not a single gust had touched the white sails of the ship; the stale air hung around them, the scent of salt clinging to their mouths.

There was nothing the crew could do but go about their lives and wait for a breeze to blow. Save the food, sweep the decks, check the stars – that's all their lives became, a repeating pattern and a way to survive.

While most sailors whispered of a curse, voices filled with quiet suspicions, there was a single man who called it all false. The eldest there, he knew the sky and ridden the waves many times before. He would silently listen to the other men fight amongst themselves, arguing about how to appease the gods, and shake his head. All they had to do was wait, and the wind would continue to blow. That's the way the way the world spun.

It was the sixteenth morning when he was proved right, and he woke to the gentle motion as they moved ahead. He donned his cap, trimmed his old, gray beard, and proceeded to his regular chores.

He could hear the men in the next room, loud as they gambled, cheer in their voices. They were celebrating, of course, when there was work to be done. The old man blamed their youth, but said nothing.

The decks were empty; even the wheel was unattended. The old man paid no mind, he merely went about his day – mopping the deck, tying the ropes, testing the winds. He could hear the men occasionally, still laughing below deck.

The sun set and the stars rose, and the old man took his measurements, frowning as he realized they were off course. Indeed, none of the stars were nearly where they ought to be. He found none of his long-studied patterns, and even the northern star avoided his wise eyes. Storing away the quadrant he used, the old man lumbered over the captain's quarters and gave a knock on the door. There wasn't an answer, so the old man pushed it open. "Captain," he called in a low tone, "Captain, the North' Star isn't in the heavens. I think we be lost, sir. Sir?"

There still was no answer.

The old man hobbled towards the desk, atop which was a freshly lit lantern. "Captain, the reading's show the an-" He stopped mid-word as his eyes fell upon a very unexpected site. Behind the desk sat a total of fifteen skulls, arranged in a neat little square – with just one spot vacant. The old man stumbled back, noticing each skull had various marks that looked almost as if they'd been gnawed on.

Fifteen skulls. It taken a total of sixteen to run the ship. Fifteen sets of hand pulling the ropes and sweeping the decks, and one man to study the stars.

The old man went as fast as he could out of the captain's quarters, hissing a stream of curses as his leg jammed up. He made it to the edge of the ship, and looked out, eyes wild for some sign of hope.

And all he saw was water, water, water. Dark waves lapping the side. A black sky filled with useless, twinkling dots.

The creaking of footsteps appeared behind him, a soft reminder he wasn't really alone. Cold, thin fingers wrapped themselves around his throat, and then a voice that could only have been Death itself floated into his ear—

“Welcome to the crew, mate.”

The House of Secrets, by Vanessa Torres, age 17

Seeing that beautiful house on top of that hill caught my eye, it was beautiful, big and perfect for my new business. What really caught my eye about it is that it needed some work. Looking around the house I realized it was going to need a lot of work, a lot of money was going to go in this project. I was expecting to move people in as I finished on the rooms. Realizing the only way I was going to finish this was me myself moving into a room. Night came down and as soon as the sun dropped I started working. I was into it drilling the nails into the wood, my hand was tiered so I put my driller down, reached out to get it and it wasn't there. I turned and saw the light flicker in the bathroom and I thought "well that's strange I haven't even been in the restroom". I opened the door to the bathroom and there in front of me was my drill. There was no explanation to this.

Assuming I was just tired I kept on working, and odd sound disrupted me, "STOMP STOMP STOMP!!!" it sounded like heavy footsteps were approaching my room, I went rapidly to the door thinking well maybe someone walked in seeing light up here. I opened the door rapidly...but...There was no one there. I went back to work left the door opened this time, and.. "STOMP STOMP STOMP!!!" hearing the footsteps running this time I was sure there was someone with me I was not alone. I flashed to the hall way looking around cautiously I saw no one. I was not a big believer in ghost so I brushed it off and went to bed I was very tiered. The next day I had laundry to do as I was doing my laundry I hear the closet door down in the basement open. Out of the tip of my right eye I saw a shadow run quickly up stairs, it startled me I jumped to tell the truth nearly had a heart attack. I ran after whoever that was, ran up to the third floor and followed it...Right into, a closet. About to take the biggest risk of my life I open the door; "CREEEEKK", is the only thing I hear. "BOOM!" all the stuff just fall down, there were no one just personal belongings to maybe past owner. There was no one there in that closet but I swear I saw someone go in.

The next day I started moving forward with the renovations of the hotel I was going to open, having one room finished; I really started seeing improvement I was really moving forward. I had in a woman call to see the room. She came in the next day and was very impressed with it, her name was Marge. What really caught her eye was the architecture of the whole place, she brought with her dog. I didn't think of telling her about the house I didn't have a logic explanation for what was going on I didn't feel like I should tell anyone else.^ One day doing laundry, I noticed my dog Guppy shoot out up stairs onto the third floor, I chased after him, found him in front of the door, locked up. It was very cold up there you can tell the difference and it did not fell to well.

I finished more rooms up, nothing strange had really happened for a while, there was no complaints from Marge I figured it had probably went away. A few days passed when a woman called in she had a small soon approximately 8 years old, they were looking for a place to rent. They moved in loving the apartment and its complex space. As the woman went in the room she said "it's got kind of chilly in here don't you think?" I helped move in the furniture.

“Michael what’s wrong?” looking at my son sitting on the tables chair “mom there’s someone breathing on me”. His eyes were very wide; he looked like if he’d just seen the devil. I thought he was just tiered from the trip all the way up the hill. I felt odd every day, never was there really a time I didn’t feel eyes on me it felt heavy... evil. Cooking dinner I noticed a man standing in my apartment, as startled as I was I asked him how he got in here, he looked pale, dressed in a suit, he was old and looked sick. He ignored me and walked right into the wall. I ran down stairs as quickly as I could told the manager there was a man in my room and he’d gone straight through the door!.^ I didn’t have words to explain to the woman what was going on, I didn’t know myself. Having this not only happen to me but to one of my guest I decided to do some research on the house. I was startled flipping through the pages I saw there was more than 100 deaths, the ones that stood out more were of 2 children and their grandfather which had died of tuberculosis. Images ran through my mind I had no words.

Driving back to the hotel I realized marge was frantic, screaming. She seemed scared to death pointing at her room window telling me she saw two kids up there and that they seemed dead. I looked and saw nothing. I talked to my guest told them the information I had found. 2 kids and their grandfather had lost the battle to tuberculosis not just them but more than 100 people. They used this house because it was so out in the wilderness; thinking tuberculosis had a way of cleaning its self by fresh air. They were in disbelief. I thought the most logic thing to do was bring a priest to pray for those lost souls, and to protect the hotel; giving them rest. The hotel felt much quieter after that, many days passed and although you could still feel their presence, they were not mad any longer. Each day I set flowers for them as did guest after guest. And I prayed they were only in peace, and it worked.

Mouse, by *Shaley Toureene*, age 13

The soft glow of 3 lighters was illuminating through the dark room. That was the only light the gang had.

“Did you hear that?” Mouse asked. “Where’d Will go?” Mouse was the newbie. He wanted into the gang because he was in love with Hush. It was initiation night so the gang had took Mouse down to the abandoned asylum.

“His name’s Snake dammit, not Will!” Vex yelled. “You ain’t got a chance if you can’t learn to call us by our real names!”

Not that Mouse had a chance anyways. Snake would never let him in, but what’s the hurt in having some fun?

“Hush,” Vex whispered. Hush looked up at her. “Are you ready?” She nodded and turned to face Mouse.

They called her Hush because of her silencing beauty. Mouse watched the reflection of the lighter’s flame in Hush’s eyes. He remembered thinking how pretty she was in the dusk sunlight before entering the asylum. Her envious green eyes resembled an emerald. But now as he studied the dancing flame, he saw her eyes as autumn leaves; once so luscious and green, but now shriveled, dry, and dead.

Hush quickly blew out the flames and darted away with Vex leaving a helpless Mouse tangled in darkness.

“Ok. You’re testing me. I think I could try to light this thing again.” Mouse finally got the lighter lit. He glanced around, realizing he was now alone. Somewhere in Mouse’s mind, he felt that he would never leave the asylum.

A long shush seeped through the unknown. Mouse shivered uncontrollably. He recognized the sound of old metal wheels squeaking somewhere in the dark. They gradually became louder, and soon it was distinct. His gaze quickly moved through the room. The sound became horrifically loud when suddenly, it stopped.

He began to hear a solid object rolling across the ground. He instinctively looked down when he felt the object hit his feet. The lighter went out.

He reached down at his feet to find a flashlight. He checked the button to a quick beam of light that sliced through the darkness to reveal a figure standing in a doorway. Mouse gasped and moved the beam to the other side of the room.

A sudden screech pierced the darkness and Mouse jumped. He guessed it was Vex and shifted the flashlight to the doorway again and found that nothing was there. He heard whispering somewhere behind him. The light exposed two figures crouched down. Mouse ran towards them believing it was Hush and Snake. He tripped over something large, but flimsy and heard squeaky wheels roll away. He shined the flashlight and saw that it was a rusty gurney.

Another scream stabbed the air. Mouse hopped off the ground and jerked the flashlight around the room, then stopped when he felt an icy breath on his neck. He turned around quick and howled at the sight of a deformed face, paler than the moon, with eyes black like ebony and lips like blood. Within seconds, it whooshed out of sight leaving Mouse gasping for air. When he looked up again, he spotted a twisted creature insidiously crawling on the ceiling. It was in a yellowish hospital gown that looked like it would crumple if you touched it. It had greasy locks of black hair flailing about its head. Mouse shouted and it crept away, somewhere in the pitch blackness.

He felt for a wall and slouched down against it. He felt a thump behind him and realized that he was sitting against a door. He stood up and fumbled for the doorknob. As he finally managed to get it open, a cold body fell against him. He fell back to the ground after a screech that bounced off the walls. He disgustedly shifted the body off him and moved the flashlight to reveal a body. Vex's face emerged from the darkness. Mouse backed away in fear. Vex was dead. Bloody, cut up, bruised.

Mouse gasped when the squeaky sound suddenly rolled through the room. He knew the sound to be the gurney. He imagined it rolling by itself somewhere in the darkness. Finally Mouse gained the nerve to say, "Who's there? I'm serious," he got louder. "Show yourself!" The squeaking started up again and he turned around to find the source. The gurney stopped. Mouse realized he could hear himself breathing. He felt something softly roll into him. It was the gurney and he forced himself not to run. He turned to look when the flashlight went out. He reached to feel the mattress which he imagined to be stained with some type of bodily fluid. As he continued to search the gurney with his hands, he felt something wet and smooth. He jerked his hand away, then forced himself to keep searching. He felt higher and recognized lips and a nose.

Mouse thumped the flashlight until it flickered on again. A short flash showed a body lying on the gurney covered in a thick, vermillion substance which was all Mouse allowed himself to think. He thumped the flashlight again and saw Hush lying dead on the yellowish mattress. She was covered in blood. Her eyes were torn out of their sockets. And her hair was cut off. Mouse screamed and fell to the ground. But soon he tore through the sadness and blamed Snake.

"Snake!" Mouse screamed like his voice was a knife slicing through the darkness.

"Help me." A coarse whisper came from behind him. Mouse turned but nothing happened. He couldn't see a thing without the flashlight.

There was a sudden noise; a sort of squirting sound and a soft, dying grunt that followed.

"Mouse, run," the whisper came back from somewhere in the darkness.

“W-Why?” Mouse didn’t know what to say, or if he should run. It was too late anyways. The sight of the twisted, bloody creature was the last that ever crossed Mouse’s eyes. He never left that asylum. Nobody did.

The Figure, by Emma Walston

“Casey...Casey” said Josh, his blue eyes staring intensely at his little sister. They’d been planning to escape their abusive father for years, and right now it was time to go. Casey shot out of bed and tossed on her warmest set of clothes. She absently knotted her light brown hair into a sloppy pony tail, wrapped her bunny in her arms, and ran to her brother.

“I’m cold, can we stop?” Casey said shivering several hours later .

Of course, Josh thought sarcastically, *there just had to be a freak storm tonight, of all nights*. It was the kind of eerie night you would watch in movies; cold, dark, silent, with an ever present feeling of being watched. Josh couldn’t decide which one would be worse, being utterly alone...or realizing you’re not. Josh set Casey down with a sigh, “Give me a minute.” He pulled a wadded handful of cash out of his pocket and counted it grimly.

“We should have enough to get a hotel room but after that...” Joshes voice faded out as they approached an old motel. The lights were low and flickering, giving off a grinding hum. “I need your cheapest room” Josh said to the tall gentleman at the front desk. As he paid, he gave a quick glance at Casey who had started to fall asleep standing up.

“Come on Cas,” he said as he swept her up.

He lugged her up the stairs to the second floor where they found their room, 202. “I’m scared” said Casey as she clung to him.

“It’s ok, I’ve got you, you’re safe now.” They entered the musky room and Josh tucked Casey into the unfamiliar bed.

“Good night Casey”

“Good night Josh” Casey whispered already drifting asleep. Josh stepped out of the room and shut the door letting out another heavy sigh. Leaning against the door he thought about what they would do the next. Josh was terrified. He had to be brave for Casey, but now he had a moment to himself, so he let the fear wash over him. Josh gazed through a frosty window, his eyes scanning pointlessly through the wall of darkness. He was afraid to miss anything. Images of some unseen threat staring back with malice lurked into his mind. Then again, *ignorance is bliss* he thought to himself as turned away, his gaze dropping to the floor. Josh nervously laughed at his overactive imagination and strode back into room. He only managed a few steps before froze with horror. The blood drained from his face as he stared in to Casey’s blank, glazed over eyes. Her body wet with blood and tossed carelessly on the cold floor. Josh’s eyes were locked with hers, as if she held him captive. A cold chill released him just in time to see a dark figure wearing a blank mask

streak to the balcony. “No!!” Josh screeched and ran to Casey “Casey! No Casey!” He screamed until his voice gave out. Fury and fear pulsed through his veins as he ran to the window. His eyes mercilessly searching for the masked man, but he was gone. All he saw was an older woman in her car on the phone, and a bald man silhouetted under the flickering light post, smoking. Josh felt himself losing it, but could no longer fight in reality. He submitted to the chaos in his mind and retreated into the depths of himself... where he found Casey. He saw her; she looked the same as always but with a sad expression. She pointed down the hall “*you need help Josh.*” Casey was right, he needed help. He ran down the hall, blindly, slamming right into a plump maid.

“Please help...” Josh gasped, His lungs burning. He tried explaining but was brought up short when he realized she didn’t seem to understand English. Suddenly Josh heard a rush of air then saw a river blood gushing out of her neck and she collapsed on top of him. He struggled to push her lifeless body from him while blood drained on to his face. When he finally sat up he saw Casey standing there pointing to a hotel door ‘*help*’ she said again. He ran to the door and pounded at the wood until a man with squinty eyes cracked open the door. He looked at Josh annoyed. About one sentence in to his plea for help the man slammed the door only to reveal Casey. “*The phone*” she said pointing down the hall. Josh ran to the front desk, his heart ready to give out. He grabbed the phone and called the police. He could barely get a clear sentence out when the phone went dead. And then, he was there, the dark figure. Again Josh’s heart skipped as he mindlessly grabbed the phone and threw it at him. Josh tried to dash around him but the figure grabbed his arm. Josh fought back wildly and managed to pin him to the ground. The police burst through the doors and it was over. Josh went outside with the police but after the first question they realized he was too shaken to help. Other guests strayed outside to see what was going on. Some people tried comforting Josh after hearing rumors of the situation. For Josh, everything was a blur as a man with a broad chin said, “It will be ok, son”
3 months later...

Josh was still talking to Casey; nowadays he **only** talked to Casey. Josh was sitting under a bridge. “*I’m sorry*”, Casey said. Casey looked at Josh “*you were wrong*” Josh looked confused as Casey’s form started to fade back into his mind. She pointed for the last time. Josh turned around to see the squinty eyes of a tall, bald man with a broad chin covered in blood. Josh’s blood. Then his mind faded away with Casey.

THE END

The Artist, by Jessica Ward, age 15

He told me to do it. He screamed and his voice echoed around in my ears until I agreed. Until I promised to make more art.

It wasn't the first time.

It started months ago, in the summer, August. I was washing dishes in the kitchen sink, staring out the window and marveling at city skyline against the polluted sky, when the man walked by. His polished black shoes clacked along on the warm pavement, like the ticking of a bomb. (do it) The crisp, ironed lines of his business suit stayed straight as he walked along, impossibly linear, almost unmoving. (do it) I imagined what important news he could be excitedly yelling at his phone, what his last words might be. (DO IT. now.)

The over-whelming heat made the flesh smell ripe, like it had spoiled. His body had so much blood, more than would seem possible, pooled underneath his twisted corpse, matting his hair. His bones were cracked and had splintered through his skin in places, and shattered under my footsteps. (like music) The sun was setting behind the towering city buildings.

It's always a man's voice that commands me, gives me ideas. Always a man's.

He didn't speak again until October, when the air smelled like autumn and was tense with the anticipation of the first snow.

She looked like she was walking to school, early in the morning, with her backpack slung over her shoulder and her hair braided back. (how lovely) She looked young, beautiful, and vulnerable. I (we) had no choice.

She died like the golden leaves of the trees outside. (slowly) The coppery smell of her decaying remains hung in the air of my (our) apartment for days.

It only got worse from there. Soon it was every week, a new person, a new body, new smells (how sweet) and new pleas for mercy (how funny).

But now the fall is gone, and the snow has blanketed the city in a pure white. (a canvas) The winter has grabbed the landscape by the throat, but he spoke through its strangulation. It was the first child (so tiny) to become a piece of my (our) art show.

His body was significantly smaller than the others', so there was less blood. But what spilled out of his remains was so red against the white ground, it was beautiful (like a painting). The insignificant cries of the little one's screams cut through the air, as he writhed under my hands. He shivered from the cold and the pain of being ripped apart, at his bones being snapped and

twisted. Tears streamed from his blue eyes until they finally glazed over and his chest fell for the last time.

The voice spoke again when the boy was gone, his body limp. He said that the boy was the last one (the masterpiece).

But now we have to clean up the mess (the rope).

I've finished what he wanted. Painted the streets red (make sure it's tied tight).
I know they'll come looking for me (us). It's only a matter of time. But when they do, I'll be
dangling like a piece of thread, lifeless, cut loose from an empty world. A true artist's death.
Like I (we) deserve.

He told me to do it.

But he didn't have to.

Over Age 18 Entries

FIRST PLACE:

The Lighthouse on Crooked Man Island, By Nathan F. Johnson

It's been said that you always fear what you don't understand, and the people of Carston, Maine didn't understand Davis Gilbert. I didn't understand what I'd done to deserve being his nephew. He ran the lighthouse on Crooked Man Island, a cramped chunk of granite stuck out just beyond Carston Harbor, invisible from shore with its thick fog hanging around it like a gauze that never went away. The only sign that something was out there was the insistent beam of light steadily poking through. It was a shroud of uncertainty that made everyone close their blinds whenever his rickety little skiff puttered into the docks.

Given this cult of anxiety he'd created just by existing, the discovery that he'd flat out disappeared was like dumping hot coffee on a cat. Then my cousin, Miles, showed up on my porch looking like he hadn't slept in a week, clutching a rumpled letter from Davis in his grubby fist. I took him into the kitchen for some oatmeal, and rather than sit and listen to the atrocity of him eating, I lit a cigarette by the sink and pored over the letter.

*Miles,
Heading out, got some things need done Southerly.
Watch the old place til I'm back.
Always got to be someone to man the lighthouse.
-D*

Cryptic as all hell, sure, and it didn't help that it looked like it was written with a charcoal stick from a fire pit and not a pencil, but the point seemed pretty obvious. What was the harm in watching the old shack until Davis returned? Miles balked at the prospect, so I told him I'd come along to make him feel better.

A day later, Miles' slapdash dinghy bore us into the dismal fog surrounding Crooked Man Island.

It'd been years since I'd set foot on that moss-covered shitpile, but I was still astounded by how ugly it was. It's grotesque topography changed as suddenly as a shift from man to werewolf, staggering up and out like a bony finger pointed at the sky. The lighthouse jutted off the top like a hangnail, followed by a sudden plummet straight down to hell, and despite everything looking like there should have been a constant and unbearable gale of wind, the air was always uncomfortably still.

The first few nights were fun, mostly because of Miles' reactions to the house's unearthly noises so common in old buildings. Eventually, though, his jumpiness threw a wet blanket on everything. He'd always been a spaz, but his erratic behavior on the island was something different. He'd stand out on the cliff's edge, chain smoking Camels and twitching like demons would leap out of the fog to devour him. I wasn't sure if he even slept. A week of this and I

wanted to go home just to be away from him, so we agreed to head back on the weekend, instructions be damned.

Incidentally, our last night in the lighthouse brought in one of the worst storms I'd ever seen, raging well into the night as we drifted off to sleep. I was yanked into wakefulness by the colossal sound of breaking glass from somewhere up in the tower. I started to talk to Miles, only to discover that he wasn't in his bunk. I found him in the kitchen, but the picture that greeted me replaced my satisfaction with clammy fingers of trepidation.

A cheap nightlight washed the room in a feeble yellow glow. Miles stood perfectly still with his back to me, his bathrobe hanging open with the belt dangling on the floor, gazing at the stairs leading up to the tower.

"Miles?" I asked hesitantly.

His head turned slightly.

"What the hell are you doing, man?" I didn't intend for the last word to come out with a querulous tremor, but it matched my rising sense of foreboding.

"We have to go up," he droned.

"It's probably a broken window, man. Are you okay? Maybe we should call somebody." When he spoke again, his voice was strangled by restrained tears. "I'm sorry, man. We have to go up." Without another word, he glided up the stairs and out of sight.

I stood rooted to the floor, my uncertainty now a seething panic. If Miles had finally snapped and was now a danger to himself, the thought of him doing something rash that I could've prevented sent me bounding up the stairs after him.

The strobing flashes of lightning made it difficult to see, and staying calm seemed impossible as adrenaline pounded through me, making the shadows look increasingly like hazy figures clawing at me from the walls. Upon reaching the top, I saw the wind had indeed broken the glass and was howling in and around the tower like a banshee. Yet as I noticed this, I became aware of a different fact.

Miles wasn't up there.

And as I thought this, I felt an impact in the floor.

Miles had dropped down behind me from the ceiling.

Somehow.

Tears streamed down his face, but inexplicably, he was also smiling. Maybe I screamed.

He said, "I'm sorry. This is how it has to be."

One shove to my chest and I careened through the glass.

And Davis Gilbert was there, standing next to his smiling, weeping son.
He wasn't smiling.

He was nodding slowly.

Then he was gone.

I've fallen to my death a thousand times in my dreams.

Maybe this is a dream, and I only need the impact to wake up.

Maybe my death wasn't a bargaining chip to release my uncle's soul from the curse of wandering the lighthouse forever.

Maybe I'm not still out there, waiting for my turn to escape.

Maybe the townsfolk were right to fear Davis Gilbert.

Maybe there's more to Crooked Man Island than anyone knew.

Maybe there's always got to be someone to man the lighthouse.

SECOND PLACE:

Night Conversations, *by Charles Kaine*

There was a “**THUMP**”.

There had to have been, that is why you are awake, right? The sound’s shadowy echo trails off into whatever dream you were having. A noise, a sound, a . . . something outside the norm of night house sounds. It was the cats, you tell yourself, cats engaged in some nocturnal wrestling contest of cat agility and speed and the heaviness of the night settles back over you; but a spark, the lightest of heart flutter, pushes back.

No, not the cats.

One is asleep at your feet and the other rests comfortably on the back of the overstuffed bedroom chair because you can hear the soft sleepy half wheeze he has had since he was a kitten. The night pulls back and there is a tingling on your neck; a whisper on your skin. No cats, then it was the dog.

But the dog has long since taken to sleeping in the bathroom, a fluffed up rug as a pillow, her location safe from the nocturnal wrestling matches of the cats.

But she can hear right? If there was a problem, she would be up and barking like mad, right? *But her hearing is soft with age. Would she hear something “odd” in the house?*

You shift in the bed, trying to lure back the darkness of sleep, only 7 hours as it is, no time to make up stories to keep yourself awake. But the spark has taken hold.

Not cats, not dog, then what?

You listen hard, straining to get past the soft hum of the water pump in the fish tank. There is nothing there, no repeat telling thump. You keep listening for a long, long moment. You realize you are holding your breath and you shift again, turning your back on the door and push hard at the pillow, trying to force the sleep from it.

But something made a noise, right? It was real because it had taken you away from a dream, brought you aware enough to listen.

And you grab the spark and choke it. There is no problem, go to sleep. But it is too late, the THOUGHT, aggressively staggers in;

Someone in the house.

That whisper on your skin now a dark, warm breath. Absurd, there is no one in the house, no burglar, no crazed killer; there is no one in the house. You pull your foot and leg back towards

the center of the bed, placing it securely under the protection of your blanket. The spark has become bonfire, your neck hairs on end, you roll back to face the blackness of the open doorway. Your eyes strain through sleep, trying to see a form darker than the shadows of someone, big, small, medium and you listen now, listen hard, sleep pushed into a nightstand with a dismissive hand.

Did you lock the front door?

Of course, you flipped the bolt when you turned off the front light.

Did you?

Of course you did,

But you never can be sure, can you?

Of course you can. No one is wandering down the street in the dark, creeping up to houses and checking to see if it is locked, just to see, right? Of course. You reach for the sleep you careless pushed away, but the spark cries out,

The GARAGE!

The garage, did you leave it open? Of course you didn't. You opened the door to the garage to check to make sure the car dome light wasn't on because of an errant open car door. You would have seen the garage open to the night. Sleep, damn it, sleep. You adjust your position and through sleep heavy eyes stare at the blackness at the top of the stairs.

The stairs are "split", half way down; there is a landing and then they switchback down into the living room.

Anyone coming down the stairs, creaky with age, in the dark, would be at a disadvantage.

Anyone lying in wait, watching and listening could simply stand out of view until you are halfway down and with a gloved hand, snake out and grab your ankle and you fall flailing forward, unable to right yourself as your face smacks into the floor. You roll, trying to right yourself and call out but it is all happening too fast and there is a weight on your back and you can't breathe, can't call for help and there is a knife, you can see it blink and blur in the shadowy light and it is so fast and it enters you between the third and fourth rib, sharp and cold and so alien and you try again to call out but nothing comes and the weight, your attacker, pulls the knife and you try to roll away but it pulls you over and you see the shape of a man, in dark clothes, hooded, it's face shadowed and reeking of alcohol and rotting teeth and you can't see who it is and there are no eyes and you see the knife flash again, this time its RED. . .

. . You pull back, angry at yourself, and curse your own stupid imagination. There is no burglar, no monster with slimy hands and rancid breath. You wipe your sweaty palms across your blanket and wrench your mind from the dark. There is nothing there. Go to sleep. And your heartbeat slows and you take a deep breath and begin to slowly work calm onto your spirit.

There are only 6 hours now; it is going to be a long day and this is absurd and you reach out to pull back the dreams you left behind.

Silly, so silly. How the mind works. . .

And you drift back towards sleep.

THUMP

THIRD PLACE:

The Hunger House, by *Miriam Engle*

When Shannon came back that Friday night—or early Saturday morning, as was actually the case—her eyes were unblinking, her normally smiling, rosy face pallid. Her sandals were gone, bare feet muddy.

I looked up from my term paper on *Beowulf*. “Another interesting night?”

She padded to the window, stared through it, seemingly at nothing. She left dirty footprints on our dorm room floor.

“I just swept,” I muttered. That’s when I noticed the blood on the back of her nearest hand, crusted in the crevices between her fingers and under her nails. “Did you try to take the shortcut through the woods again?” Shannon had come back scratched-up before after getting lost in the dark, forced to forge her own trail through the brambly underbrush. She looked unusually grim tonight, though. I felt slightly uneasy myself. A storm was cooking, and humidity had spiked since midnight.

Her blank expression snapped into a smile. “Yeah,” she laughed. “And someone made off with my shoes at Mike’s because I guess they thought they were theirs. I need a shower.” She left before I could respond. I returned to my paper.

The crack of thunder jerked me from sleep. It was so dark and stormy I thought it must still be the middle of the night, but my watch read just past eight o’clock. I had fallen asleep to the side of my computer, not quite done with my paper. Grendel as the physical manifestation of *Beowulf*’s inner beast came back to me. I still had plenty of time to finish before the noon deadline.

Shannon was already awake, reading her psychology textbook in bed with a highlighter in one hand, the cap clutched between her teeth. I must have dozed off before she returned from the shower the night before.

“Little adventure last night, huh?” I asked, stretching my back.

She grinned. “I got lost in the woods and accidentally ended up at the Hunger House.”

I waited for more, but she returned to her reading, highlighting a passage.

“And? When you came back you were kind of strange. Was it creepy?”

“Yeah,” she replied. “Sorry—I have to get this reading done.” She bent her head to the textbook in her lap. I couldn’t remember the last time Shannon had ever preferred classwork to recounting her nighttime exploits.

I turned to my computer to touch the mouse, bringing the dark screen to life. I gasped—illuminated by the bright monitor, a streak of dried blood, like an angry hand dragged across my paper. Flakes chipped off the screen when I touched it. “That dark-death shadow,” I had quoted, visible beneath the smear, “who lurked and swooped in the long nights on the misty moors; nobody knows where these reavers from hell roam on their errands.”

“Shannon,” I started, pointing to my screen.

Lightening flared through the drapes, thunder clamoring on its heels. The smile slid off Shannon’s face when she saw the blistered scab of blood. “I have to go back to the Hunger House,” she said.

“What happened last night?” I demanded. My uneasiness turned to sickly dread. “*I* didn’t do this.” When she still didn’t respond, I practically sobbed, “This is weird. What happened?” Shannon stood. Still in her pajamas and shoeless she wrenched the door open to leave the room. I leapt out of my chair to follow.

I was chasing her down the hallway, watching her exit through the nearest fire escape, when I realized I’d forgotten to pull on shoes. I hesitated but followed outside, wincing in the pelting rain. The wet ground was soft under my feet, leaves slick and grainy. I was sopping by the time I caught up on the wooded path.

Shannon strode down the trail. It was so dark in the thickly grown woods I couldn’t see fallen branches and almost fell. We reached the Hunger House, named for the dormitory caretaker who had lived there decades ago and reportedly starved himself to death. Students now used it as a hideaway to fool around in or get high. The small wooden hut stood in a clearing, gleaming wetly in the lashing storm.

I realized I was crying, my tears momentarily warm but untraceable in the rain. Shannon approached the door. It swung open before she touched the handle. I stayed frozen on the edge of the clearing, clinging to a low-hanging, slimy branch. The wind howled, ripping a blizzard of leaves free that swirled into the clearing.

Shannon disappeared into the black interior of the house. A putrid smell wafted from the open door, overpowering even in the gale. I struggled not to vomit.

A figure stooped out, illuminated in a blaze of lightening. It straightened on its back legs, towering over the doorframe, easily eight feet tall. Its front paws—big as shovels—dangled from colossal shoulders almost to the ground. Its roar drowned out the thunder. I wanted to run, but my feet had taken root. It looked at me, eyes blacker than shadow. It leaned on its front paws and slunk toward me on four legs, graceful and repulsive, alluring and grotesque. The foul stench grew more offensive, yet my feet wouldn’t move.

I realized I wasn’t afraid, that my breathing matched the creature’s heavy panting. I abhorred yet desired it. It looked at me with a kind of fervid hunger I was powerless to repel, a hunger that

couldn't be satisfied, that only grew with each fresh kill. The black pits of its eyes promised knowledge of all the ugly, twisted things. I no longer wanted to run. I wanted to know. In one flash of darkness the beast devoured the space between us. I yelled in triumph, but my voice fell flat against the rush of the storm.

Reflection's Child, by Camille Anthony

Fierce rain pummels the garden. No plants will survive. The fragile tarp suspended above the plants is filled with holes, the solid drops pause naught for its resistance. The soft green shoots expected to grow strongly are now concealed by the shadow of an anguished night, and drowned by the destructive tears of a sorrowful sky.

Waking to wails from the force of the storm against the old house, I rise from my bed and stride to the window to look at my reflection. There I see myself, but there is something different becoming more and more apparent. Startled, I jump backward, for I have never seen a sight such as this that appeared at my pane that moment. A pale, knotted, and twisted face peers through the thickening vapor caused by *my* breath – for she has none. Though she opens her mouth to the cold, she has no breath! Her eyes, turning ever-slowly towards mine, begin to transform. Sublime agony coalesces with the malignant calmness inside my room—the temptation to become enchanted by this perverse version of my own face equals my desire to flee; held paralyzed by these forces, I can do nothing but try to understand the reality of the impossibilities that she presents.

She is youthful, yet shows signs of advanced age; her face melting and creasing in the natural folds, seemingly allergic to the cleansing rain gives her an unnerving, alien appearance. Her mouth opens ever-wider, and reveals a shaded portrait –swallowed down and begging to be released. Confidently, she presents this image to me. It has a purpose, I know, but terrified, I refuse to look.

Suddenly, her eyes turn bright yellow from their previous abyssal, greasy-black and the pupils shrink into narrow slits. Her eyes hesitate, and then lock on mine. Silently they compel me to look at the deceptive image concealed in her mouth. My attempt to scream is stifled. I know not whether it is this creature's suppression or my own. An air of mystery captivates me and no longer can I feel my body or breathe. Time seems to be suspended, except for the continued depletion of my air supply. Desperate for relief, I stare down the beast's throat and hope to find an escape.

Down the passageway I view an unexpected scene. A flower floating down from the warm sun draws my attention and once more I can breathe. Sensations return to my limbs and my body is warm. Color rewraps the scene, and the rain ceases. The flower glows pink and glides effortlessly to the tall grass below. A swallow sings with its swooping voice; playful and serene. The golden tips of the ripened field, inspired by the sun's warmth, bring a cheer that could not have been more tranquil even if the soil beneath my feet did not tickle them so that I flowed continuously from foot to foot across the field. White, beautiful butterflies beat their wings calmly and float dreamily among the tops of the fragrant grasses occasionally landing to rest and laze in unison with the other luxurious surroundings.

Lightning rips me back to sheer horror, and robs me of my breath—suffocating, painful. Then sharp teeth close around my utopia and tear through my field, returning my mind to this

terrifying reality. The glass of my window no barricades me from the wrath of this creature. The monster breaches it and watches me choke—a fish desperately flapping its gills; collapsing from the outside in, my lungs suck what they can in to stuff themselves with *something—anything* while this malicious entity is murdering me viciously; I writhe—a worm caught exposed in the sun. Struggle as I may, I cannot escape the claustrophobia, the creature transforms into a devious, slithering serpent; squeezing out every last molecule of air from every cell in my body. I go limp, not able to withstand the pressures.

The beast retracts its coils and rips my soul—the very lining of my dying body—out of my shell and thrusts it to the dark, black, blank floor, and on it the creature feasts. Through my body's fading eyes, I can see the tearing of it—my essence—to pieces. For every snag sliced in it, an excruciating torture I do endure. Such torture that blood boils over from the insides of my body and seeps into the floor. It may yet elude the pain that I know I never will overcome except in the calm of death, toward which I am surely headed.

Hearing my wails, the serpent charges for my body, thinking it has left some soul in me, for I doubt that any who has endured this agony before has survived to experience this stage of soullessness. But now without soul I am stronger; I see this worm crawling to destroy me and I laugh a hearty laugh, spraying the lingering red in a fountain's arch across the room. In hand I take its head and firmly twist it off its body that now lies writhing on the floor as I had done seconds before. Now to vengefully take its soul, as it has taken mine; I slice open its cold belly with its own gnarled tooth and reach in for the lining, as it had reached for mine. I cannot find a singular soul, but find four instead including my own; it had not found such a number in mine. Supposing it should agonize four times worse than I, I tear out the other three and hear screams from the first floor, where my brother, and my mother, and my father were before. I turn my eyes to the glossy veils in my hand—the souls. I smile slightly, and cast them through the shards and into the night.

Spike, by Sally Bowlby

It was a day like every other. I was stretched out among the soft bedding in my cage, smelling the faint wood scent of its cotton-like material. I moved my head to the right, without moving my impressively large body, and nipped at the fresh dandelion leaves that had been brought to me. They were my favorite. The drone of the television kept me company. Fluffy sat nearby, washing her multicolored fur contentedly. Big Kitty snuggled against Nellie, our Golden Retriever, as they looked out the front window from the entry way.

I could tell everyone was expecting a visitor. And they were excited. Aunt Tanya was coming from Nebraska. Her car pulled up to the curb and everything was about to change.

My Mom and Ally went to greet her warmly at the door. They hugged and we saw that Aunt Tanya held a small animal tightly in her arms. Nellie seemed approving with her wagging tail and constant circling to see.

Then Aunt Tanya lowered the animal to the ground. He took off like a streak. It was instant and unbelievable! He was running, but faster than anything I'd ever seen! His muscles bulged underneath his skin as he raced around. His mouth was wide open with enormous jaws held open and sharp, sharp, teeth clearly barred for us to see.

We had rules in this house. Only cats could venture up above floor level, and no one ever spoke crossly or bothered them. They had their own breakfast table in the sun room where they ate out of the same three bowls every morning. Nellie always respected their bowls and she had her own below. They all shared the water dish. I was always held gently and spoken softly to.

This monster-dog leapt up onto the furniture. Then on up onto the tables – the coffee table, the end table, even the dining room table with the lace tablecloth! He had huge claws that dug into everything and he could jump several feet into the air with his tremendous, hideous, muscular legs. The claws were several inches long and thick.

He raced around the room - seemingly around the walls themselves, it was so fast. I trembled in my cage and ran for my plastic house, but not in time! This monster-dog (who I found out was a Jack-Russell Terrier called Spike) jumped up to the bay window behind my large cage (at least 5 times longer than his body and probably 10 times his size in total) and he leapt! The full force of his four clawed feet launching toward me! He shoved the entire cage over. Never had anyone been able to do that! My heart was pounding wildly in my chest. It began to rattle in my mouth and long guinea-pig teeth, it was beating so fast!

My Mom ran from across the room where she'd been standing near Aunt Tanya and leapt to my rescue. She grabbed me and cradled me tightly in her arms, holding me high, knowing that Spike was capable of jumping 10 feet straight up into the air. Spike relentlessly jumped and jumped and jumped toward me. His jaws open and gaping toward me. Drool fell from his lips

and splattered as he flew in the air. Mom's heart beat pounding in her chest as she held me and tried to make sense of the mayhem.

Knowing he could not pry me from her arms he turned slightly, just in time to spot Big Kitty running for the bedroom. He flew down the hallway. No one saw his paws touch the ground. He seemed to spring directly from his back claws to his front claws, going forward. He cornered Big Kitty under the bed and began a horrible, loud barking that would not stop. His dripping fangs and open jaws pushed and darted forward again and again and again, trying to get all the way under the bed. Then came the cry - a sharp high-pitched yelp.

He withdrew from the bed and retreated. As he did, large drops of red blood began to drip from his ear. It followed him in a long line on the almost-white carpet down the hall. He flung his head from side to side repeatedly and the blood splattered about the room and onto the furniture. He ran in circles from my Papa who was trying to catch him with a towel to stop the bleeding.

Finally Aunt Tanya and Mom went out the front door with the dripping Spike. I was returned to my cage, but moved to the safety of a bedroom with a closed door between me and the monster. They returned hours later with Spike sporting a large plastic collar around his neck and bandages on his ear. It seemed a fitting punishment that he could not reach anything without the pink plastic clunking against the floor or walls. Those daggered teeth and slacking jaws were imprisoned inside it. He posed for the humiliating face-book pictures while we all looked on.

My heart beats faster just remembering it. My view of the world as an orderly place, with rules and unspoken boundaries, was forever changed that day.

Gifted, *by Stina Branson*

People give me things. I've never known why. I'm no great beauty, and I don't think I look especially in need of charity. But ever since I can remember, others seem moved to give me things.

I couldn't have been more than three when we were passing some vendor tents at the state fair, and a lady selling beaded macramé called out to me. With the speed of a tireless toddler, I scooted over to her table before my mother could reach for my hand. I don't remember what the lady said to me, but she gave me a necklace of black waxed thread intricately knotted around lavender ceramic beads.

Mother tried to pay her, I remember that much. But the lady shook her dark curls to emphasize her broken English as she pushed my mother's hand away. "No, no pay. Is gifted. Is gifted." And she nodded at me, smiling.

Swallowing her reluctance, Mother allowed me to keep the necklace. It was far too large for me, so for years I wore it looped around my wrist. The beads are chipped now, and it spends most of its life in my treasure box, itself a gift, this time from a man in Camden Market during my semester abroad. I had just paid an absurdly low price for a sweater made of yak's wool, and it was like he felt guilty for taking any money at all from me.

"'Ere," he said, thrusting the carved wooden box into my hands. "You must take this."

Ever my mother's daughter, I pulled a five-pound note out of my pocket and proffered it. But I was not surprised when, gently echoing the macramé lady of my childhood, he took my hand, curled my fingers around the note, and shook his head. "No, luv. This is my gift to you." And he bowed formally from the waist, like a Japanese diplomat.

Now, I caress the treasure box as I lift the lid. The box is not full, but my collection has grown to the point that I have to nudge objects aside as I search:

Three jet beads etched with a wheat design. These from the woman who won the bidding war for the bag of assorted jewelry at the estate sale.

A small ceramic "worry stone" painted to look like an owl. I seemed to collect a new trinket every time I went to a fair or carnival.

A long-expired Metro pass. I'd been standing at the ticket machine, calculating the best deal for sightseeing in DC, when a woman tapped me on the shoulder. She was a commuter, wearing a business suit and tennis shoes, her fair hair in a sleek bob. "It's a three-day pass," she said as she handed it to me. "I bought it an hour ago, so you should be fine." And she was gone before I could offer my thanks, let alone any money.

My fingers stumble on the darker gifts. Like the desiccated rose that lay on my stomach as I awoke in Italy. My roommate and I were doing a cheap Euro-rail tour that did not include sleeper compartments, so we had flipped up the armrests and sacked out on opposite benches while the night train carried us from Vienna to Florence. I sniffed at the flower, and Anna cried out in dismay as she discovered that somebody had made off with one of her bags in the night. Not knowing what else to do, I held the rose out to her. Her face contorted in revulsion, she snarled and slapped the dead flower out of my hand before storming off to find a security officer. I scooped up the fragile bud that had snapped from its stem and I cradled it in my palm. I carried it like this all the way back to London and my newly acquired treasure box.

I never saw who gifted me the pen, either. It simply appeared in my workstation one day, a dull, gray cylinder marring my pristine desktop. When I asked the girl next to me about it, she shrugged. "Maybe Marge was cleaning out Jack's desk again. She knows you like old things." And it was a very old thing. I played flute in marching band, so I recognized the patina of tarnished silver. I prodded it gingerly and it remained stubbornly inanimate, so I picked it up and eased the cap off, exposing a rusty-looking nib. Curious, I screwed the barrel open. The brittle bladder crumbled at my touch and released a viscous red fluid that was not ink. But it is none of these things that I seek now. The macramé necklace is once again wrapped around my wrist, like a talisman, as I search for the one gift I don't remember.

That's not entirely accurate. I remember it. I just never knew it was mine.

And there it is, as Mother said it would be. She must have known she didn't have long, because until now I've only seen this key hanging from a ribbon around her neck. It was conspicuously absent when I said my goodbyes, and she told me where to find it. Told me it was mine all along.

"It arrived from your Aunt Genevieve's estate lawyer minutes after you were born. I hoped I was wrong about what it meant, but after the necklace, well, I knew. I thought keeping this first gift would protect you. But they always found you."

The key feels heavy in my hands, and unexpectedly warm. It's carved from bone, and I find myself entranced by the chiaroscuro shifting in the filigree as I turn it this way and that. I begin to understand how my gift is also my curse. Balance. Like Aunt Gen and the women of our line before her, I am the universal fulcrum of reciprocity. My mother's gift of silence took her from me, but I now realize that the ebb and flow has barely begun.

Kibbles and Bites, *by Marc Chimonas*

Instead of rescuing a perfectly good mutt from a shelter, my next door neighbor, city slicker that he was, paid top dollar for some kind Doberman Great Dane mix. Late last summer, my neighbor appeared rather unexpectedly on my front porch holding his designer dog at the end of a leash. His forehead wrapped in bandages, I asked if he had been in some sort of accident. He waived me off as if the injury were of no consequence and explained that he was returning to New York City. He asked if I would be willing to take Grendel, his dog, off his hands. I couldn't bear the thought of a dog cooped up all day in a small apartment, and I yearned for canine companionship ever since my own mutt, Roofus, succumbed to the effects of old age the previous winter. I eagerly accepted the man's proposition.

Come fall, the weeds in my neighbor's yard were knee high. I had found that Grendel was high spirited, requiring lots of exercise. He growled aggressively when unfamiliar people ventured too close. A large dog, he had a voracious appetite.

There was a terrible storm the last week in October. High winds knocked down a large branch, flattening my rear gate. Grendel sped away into the dusk. I donned my raincoat, grabbed a flashlight, and hurried out the back.

Grendel's paws left deep prints in the mud. I followed the tracks into the ankle deep storm waters of Arthur's Trench. Splashing forward, my rain coat did little to protect me from the torrential downpour. Lightening flashed, and thunder boomed. Around the bend a bright light shone in my eyes from above, blinding me. A familiar voice cried out, "Who's there?"

Recognizing me as his neighbor a few doors over, Frederic asked if I needed assistance. I explained how I had lost my dog. He had not seen Grendel and was out looking for his elderly father, Thurston. Previously a gruff man who boasted about the all the communists he had killed in Korea, Thurston had changed recently with the early stages of dementia. When thunder sounded, he ran for the hills, fleeing what he thought was Chinese artillery.

"I'll keep an eye out for him," I said, refusing Frederic's offer to pull me out of the trench. The walls too steep to climb, Grendel (and I) had nowhere to go but forward.

Darkness prevailed as the sun set. Thousands of tiny glimmers, rain drops reflecting the glow from my flashlight, obscured my view ahead.

A gale had toppled a giant tree. Where the roots once clung to the ground was a gap in a rocky outcropping, the entrance to a type of cave. I crawled through the crevice, holding the flashlight ahead of me as best I could. The light grew dim, the batteries dying. There was an odd shape a few yards away, a pile or mound of some sort, not rocks but something soft, Grendel seeking shelter perhaps. A flash of lighting illuminated the cave briefly. The shape was not a dog but a man, supine, his arms bent stiffly at his sides.

"You okay, Thurston?" I called out, aiming my flashlight.

Covered in blood, limbs motionless, vacant dead eyes wide open, Thurston was not okay. Another lightening flash but from a different angle, I could see teeth, fangs, the jaws of some sort of demon. Darkness and yet another flash, the jaws lunged forward clamping around Thurston's wrist. A sickening crunch as bones cracked and split, the sounds of my scream were drowned out by thunder.

I scrambled backward through the gap and fell face down into the storm water, which had risen considerably. Struggling to my feet, I dropped my flashlight. It struck a rock and went out. Lightening flashed again, only further away and less bright. I could make out a shadowy figure slinking around the roots of the toppled tree. I turned to flee, but in the darkness I tripped over a rock and fell. Splashes in quick succession and the sounds of footsteps on the ledge above me, exceedingly strong, the demon had vaulted the cliff wall with a single bound.

I clambered up and ran as fast as I could. Should the demon pursue me, all would be lost, for I was no match for the beast's strength and speed. I hoped hunger would keep the monster at bay, that it would prefer to stay and feast rather than run down new game.

Somehow I managed to claw my way out of the trench and find my way home. I slammed the door behind me and secured the dead bolt. The lights wouldn't turn on, a power outage. I tried to call the sheriff, but the phone, like Thurston, was dead.

I heard scuffling at my rear door. Lightening flashed, and I jumped as a shadow loomed across the back garden, ears pointed like devil horns and powerful limbs that could easily tear me apart. The scuffling continued, and alas I came to my senses. A familiar sound, the source of the shadow became clear. Relieved, I unbolted the door to let Grendel inside. Grendel whined pathetically to let me know he was hungry.

"You have no idea what a fright you gave me, old boy," I said, stroking his wet muzzle. In the dark I fumbled in the pantry to retrieve Grendel's kibbles. I heard gasping noises, the unmistakable sound of Grendel being sick on the hardwood floor. During his escapades he must have consumed something nasty. Rag in hand, I bent over to clean up the mess. Suddenly power returned; lights flickered back to life. I recoiled in horror. My hand was bloody, slick from petting Grendel's muzzle. Thurston's army issue wristwatch lay in the bloody mass of dog sick. I felt Grendel's hot murderous dog breath on the back of my neck. Paralyzed by fear, I was unable to move.

The First Turning, by Ricardo E. de la Garza

I was in a back alley, when the moon began calling to my blood. I could feel its terrible power filling my every essence. I knew that I should have gone someplace more remote, but I was naïve in thinking that I would die before this night came. I was bitten one month ago, and, now, I was starting to turn. I screamed out, as every cell in my body burst with agonizing pain, fighting to remain human but forcibly changing into the wolf. My thoughts of fear about what I was about to become were slowly turned to the savage bloodthirstiness of the beast. My remaining human thoughts were of what my actions would be tonight and their aftereffects. Who would I attack? Would I feed on them or would they survive? If they survived, would the curse of Lycanthropy kill them before they turned, as I so hoped it would have done to me or would they end up like me a month from now? The alley was in the center of a crowded city. How many would I attack tonight? How many would see me for what I am? How much chaos and panic would I spread throughout an entire city in a single night?

The change was complete. My body was fully morphed, and the terrible bestial mind had taken over.

I could smell my first prey. Its source was close by. I let out a bone-chilling howl, as I began my pursuit. The source of the scent was a teenage girl. Stealth didn't matter to me. She would not be fast enough to outrun me nor strong enough to fight me off. I lunged at her, biting her throat before she could even make a sound. Life left her eyes in mere seconds.

As I fed, I caught another scent. I left the dead girl and began to follow this new scent. An elderly man was taking his dog on a walk. The dog caught my scent and started whimpering in fear. The man turned to see what frightened his dog so much. His scream of horror was satisfying to me. The dog lunged at me in order to protect its master, but I slashed it with my claws. The dog was dead before it even touched the ground, and now, the elderly man was all mine.

I was able to feed on the man longer than the girl, but as I fed, another man came up to me with a gun in his hand. I bit him before being struck by his bullet. This man was too much trouble. I retreated and began my search for another prey.

I stayed close to the shadows of the trees, as I found a small boy at a city park. Out of all of my preys tonight, his scent was the most alluring. The scent of his sweet and tender flesh made my mouth water profusely. He was coming towards the trees, unaware that I was waiting for him. When he was finally close enough, I slashed him with my claws and grabbed him, pulling him into the darkness.

As I finished feeding, the moon was begging to set. I ran off to find a place where I could change in peace.

Through the Glass, by Brian Diaczun

I'm really not so different from you. Everyone knows the fear I felt that day, it's a contagious feeling. The fear that after even after your friends have left, you might begin to feel watched.

It was Fall – a season named after the leaves underfoot as we walked home from school that day. The sun felt warm and the air was crisp against our cheeks. We were in 5th grade and the Kings of our school, so we laughed louder and longer than we had any right to. There was nothing special about that day, we were getting home a bit early I guess, but I still think it could have happened to any one of us.

After my family moved out of the old apartment both of my parents had to work. When I was little, I would come home from school and my Mom would always be there. She'd have a snack ready and would usually ask how my day went just as I took the first bite. The new house was bigger, and we had our own yard, but when I got back from school Mom would still be at her stupid job. I was almost 11 years old, so it wasn't like I missed her or anything, but that big house did seem to get pretty quiet, especially when it got colder and the days got shorter.

It was a big deal when my Dad gave me my own key to the house. Not too many other kids were trusted like I was, and I took it pretty seriously. I think that's why my face started to feel hot that day after my friends said goodbye and I started walking to the front door. My key was usually on a short piece of string tied to a loop in my front jacket pocket, but that day it just wasn't there.

The front door of the house had a small column of windows on the side of it, so after anxiously trying the doorknob, I looked inside. What I saw made me glad that the door hadn't been unlocked.

Someone who looked like my mother was in the kitchen, and someone who looked like me was at the table, almost robotically eating some kind of snack. They both looked really tired and there was no color in their faces. It was as if the old afternoon routine from our apartment was playing out before me, but this time I was on the outside. And this time it felt lifeless and wrong.

I wanted to look away but I couldn't, even as the boy at the table slowly, unnaturally turned his head to look towards me. I wasn't able to avoid his dark black eyes and lifeless stare. Immediately I went from being an audience member to having an unintended role to play, and I didn't know if through the glass any of it could be undone.

I don't know what happened next, but everyone knows that fear I felt that day, waking up confused and lying on the ground, next to the door. The leaves were falling on me and it was getting dark. When I finally stood up I saw that my key was in the keyhole of the front door, and the string was dangling lifelessly.

I've never felt quite comfortable with this house, or what happened in it. You can judge me if you want, but I want you to know that I was a good kid and I want you to know that I always loved my mother.

Ghost Train, by Douglas P. Dotts

Shifting hot desert wind blew sand in my face as an ominous warning. Peering into a red rock cave, I noticed an unusual, unnatural color. The blackened ceiling and the surrounding walls told me that perhaps I had found an Anazai cave. Dropping down to my knees, I crept into the cave. A single human skull, split across its broad forehead, rested in the remains of a once crackling fire. I sifted the softened charcoal earth searching for clues and artifacts. Finding none, I put the skull and jaw bone into my rucksack and hiked back to camp as dusk fell. Perhaps I should have heeded Granddad's warning to let dead men's bones rest.

Whispering winds warned me to return the skull as I entered the camp's circle. Excitement eased my apprehension as curious family members examined my find. Dad said, "The skull might be older than that of the Anazai because of the larger-than-normal brow." Uncle Dan said, "I can take it to the university in Salt Lake City and see if those college fellows can carbon date it." Mom didn't want to touch it. My grandfather took out his prospectors' eyeglass, rotated the skull, scratched some of the charcoal from the temple, and mumbled to himself, "The poor soul must have crawled into the cave, built a fire to keep warm, then fell over in the flames...dead."

A gust of wind flipped open a flap on my nearby pup-tent. Granddad looked into my eyes and said, "Boy, I'll tell you, I'd put this man's skull back and let it rest before his soul comes looking for it...I bet he was the last man to die from the cursed ghost train." My heart pounded in my eardrums at the thought of carrying the skull back to the cave in the dark. Slowing my breathing, I said, "Ghost train...there ain't no trains around here." Granddad responded, "Well, one time..." My grandmother, shaking her head, interrupted him and saved me by saying, "He can return it in the morning."

Later that evening we sat around the camp fire and listened to everyone's theory about the skull. My Grandfather's said "A train track had been built in the canyon's valley on sacred Indian land to connect an 1860s silver mining community to Nevada. A Paiute holy man cursed the white men's fire-breathing horse. On the train's maiden voyage, a high bridge collapsed and sent the passengers to their deaths. All aboard died. A couple of folks had just plain disappeared. Maybe the skull belongs to one of the injured folks that was crawled away and died." He let the story set in and added, "The silver-vein gave out and the town folded, but some folks claim they still hear strange sounds on dark nights...a ghost train."

The moon hid between clouds as we listened to Granddad's stories. Stopping in the middle of a sentence he strained to hear. He said, "Did you hear that?" We listened but heard nothing. He continued the story. Suddenly he stopped again and listened. This time I heard a faint sound of a steam engine. I looked around to see if everyone was near the camp fire. They were. I was alarmed by the unusual look on my father's usually rugged fearless face. My father said, "What the heck?" Locomotive sounds grew louder as if they were going to swallow us. To my relief,

the wheels and whistle began to fade. Feeling the need to act I asked my father, “Should I get your gun?” “Quick, go!” he responded.

Rushing to my father’s pickup, I madly searched to find his large heavy duty flashlight. Relieved, I clutched it hard. Fading, the beam came back to its Eveready life with a tap against the battery’s casing. Picking up my father’s Ruger 44 magnum, I opened its cylinder, rotated it and checked for bullets; satisfied, I put the hammer down on the empty sixth chamber and moved toward the sound. I doubted that the world’s most powerful handgun would stop a locomotive, let alone a ghost train. Walking with a hunter’s heel--to--toe soft step I crept into the darkness. Each step alerted my brain to the quickening rhythm of my heart. My scanning eyes searched. My breaths pounded my chest. I wondered if the silent blackness would absorb me. I wanted to scream. I wanted to run. I froze as a twig broke underneath my hiking boot; the maddening snap roared through my body. Faint familiar winds whipped my taut face. Train wheels squeaked. The echoing call of the train’s whistle and turning of the wheels grew louder. Looking over my shoulder I saw the safety of the faint blaze of the campfire. A train whistle screamed in my ears. Squinting, I scanned for movement. Frantic, I hit the fading flashlight on my thigh and its beam reflected a hint of movement directly in front of me. Frigid terror grabbed me as I prepared to fire. “Always be sure of your target...don’t fire blindly at movement” my father’s teachings cautioned my mind. Gripping the handgun with sweaty hands, I squinted. My mind raced. Calm breaths! Slow! Don’t lock elbows! Relax! Wheels? Clouds parted the night sky...and I saw the wheels of a massive reel-to-reel tape deck...turning, slowly, reflecting the moonlight. My weak knees wobbled and worked hard to allow me to follow the wires I had noticed. They guided me back to the camp circle of intestine ripping laughter.

The skull rests on some unmarked dusty shelf labeled “unknown” at the University of Utah’s anthropology department. Granddad deserved an Oscar for a lifetime tall tale. Memories flood back at the sound of turning train wheels or whistles. I smile when desert winds whip sand in my face. My Grandfather would often grin and ask me, “See any ghost trains lately?” Then he’ll wink one eye, chuckle to and say, “We sure got you on that one...didn’t we?”

Just Another Face, by *Don Edwards*

The folded sheet of paper stood on the desk under an ethereal pool of light from the fluorescents above. Typed animated script read: YOU'RE INVITED... At the top corner was a primitive computer drawing of a moon, flanked by two bat silhouettes.

Jen Miles was thirteen and didn't have any friends at Learwin Junior High School. She kept to herself, and protected her individuality as if it were a cloak that kept her warm from the cold, pervasive winds of small-minded gossip and ridicule. To most, she was just another face. But she had enemies.

Those she attracted.

So who would invite her to a party?

Her fiercest and most formidable foes were Charry Lincoln, Marge Stickwood and Bella Michaels. They were in her homeroom and they seethed every time Jen walked into class, as if determining in their minds a way to haze her and throw her into the vast pit of humiliation until she was fully enveloped in their masochistic circle. Jen endured their abuse.

And before she even picked up the invitation, she knew who it was from. The Kick It Club. That's what they called themselves at least. They were a fraternity of nihilists, drawn to each other's hatred and arrogance. They were the types who graduated to smoking three packs of cigarettes a day before they reached puberty and made their home underneath the lights at night, their faces shrouded in darkness. They actually did belong to a club. It was an after school activity led by Miss. Misens, an overweight woman with a uni-brow and a contemptuous disposition who couldn't stand her own children let alone anyone else's. The club consisted of the three bullies and a few other classmates and they stood around the room after school playing hard rock while talking about guys. Jen picked up the invitation anyway, unfolded the thick sheet and read the typewritten, falsely benign script. They wanted her to attend their costume party, which was to be held at Bella's house Halloween night and where Jen would no doubt be the sacrificial goat. There was no way she would attend, and could honestly say that no matter how badly her mom wanted her to go so she could "belong to something", Jen knew all too well it was just a ruse so they could humiliate her...or worse. And she found as she read the note, a pair of eyes followed her. Sometimes peripheral vision was her biggest curse, an adversity she inherited from her mother. But she preferred that inheritance than a myopic outlook of society, a trait her mother wore with her designer jeans.

And of course she was alone with the Kick It Club. They were at the far corner, and as usual they were clothed in shadow. They were frowning and unblinking, three imps trying to intimidate her.

She summoned the courage to walk up to the three of them.

Jen said, "Uhhh, about the invitation." "What about it?" Charry said.

“I can’t make it. I have plans.” “Whatever,” Bella said. Her large frame dwarfed the other two girls. “I do,” Jen said. “Like what. You have no friends. No life,” Marge said, walking up to her. Jen started to walk away. Behind her she heard: “*She’s just a loser who thinks she’s all that...*” “*No wonder she has no friends. She’s a stuck up snob.*” “*Show her.*”

As Jen walked out into the cold, cloudy late afternoon day, she blew a sigh of relief. She knew that she did the right thing. Her mother would’ve admonished her, though, accusing her of being a spoiled sport who purposely drove herself into isolation. But that was fine with her. And as she looked up and seen three shadows under a large, formidable oak, a small voice inside her told her that maybe she was wrong on this one. But it was too late to make a run for it. One of the small agile ones would catch up to her with no problem.

So she walked straight toward the oak.

They grabbed her, and as Bella held Jen’s two arms by wrapping her own blubbery ones around them, the other two took turns kicking and punching her. The cold weather prolonged each stinging slap, each powerful punch. Someone’s heel, Marge’s maybe, connected with her small nose, crunched it almost instantly and caused an eruption of crimson blood to fly out. It lasted for only a few minutes, but as the tired cliché went, it seemed a lot longer. The cold weather, the blows to her face and stomach and back, made her feel like a battered block of stone after a sledgehammer constantly chipped away at the rock. And she was still held by Bella’s meaty arms, as Jen’s fell limply, her face down, a bloody crucifixion.

“Hey, she can go to the party now. As Rocky. Yo, Adrian,” Charry said, walking up to the beaten body, holding up the chin and exposing her bloodied, bashed in face. The right eye was swollen shut and in the slit some blood pooled there.

And finally, Mr. Gunklin, the sixth grade homeroom teacher and every student’s ideal lookalike to Ichabod Crane, came to the rescue. The girls fled when he arrived, leaving Jen’s battered body resting on one of the outcropping roots of the gnarled oak.

And when Sharon Miles, Jen’s mother arrived at the nurse’s office and seen her daughter sitting on a plastic bucket chair, white tee shirt spattered in blood, her right eye shut, her nose twisted and crusted in crimson, hands wrapped around a stuffed toy lion, her mouth dropped. Jen lifted her face slowly and gazed at her mother.

Knock, Knock. *by Melissa Keller*

Avery slipped through the door of her small home, closing the door quickly behind her. With her back against the solid wood and her hand fumbling haphazardly for the lock, she breathed a sigh of relief. It was only six o'clock and yet she could already begin to feel Them stir out there. Those sickly creatures that came for her every year. Soon enough the sunlight would fade completely from the skyline, leaving only sullen shadows that would quickly deepen into true darkness. Once this happened They would be out there moving on fevered feet with greedy claws outstretched, converging in on Avery's small home. Nestled among tall cottonwoods the house was modest and not a structure to attract the attention of most passersby; but still every year They came for her.

Pushing herself away from the doorway Avery moved into the kitchen forcing her breathing to slow and hoping her heart wouldn't beat itself right out of her chest. She was working herself up for no reason, surely the Halloween spirit that saturated the town had pushed her imagination into overdrive. With her hand on the heavy copper kettle Avery forced one last shuddering breath and set about making her tea.

The sun had already slipped halfway behind the mountains, streaking the sky a startling orange so perfectly matched to the night's festivities. Looking past the thick sentinels of her beloved trees Avery watched as her neighbor, a middle aged man she had never bothered to introduce herself to, move around his patio giving light to his jack-o-lanterns devilish grins. Luckily heavy winds earlier in the week had uprooted his ten foot Frankenstein and the monstrosity had been shredded to pieces against the nearby fence. Avery had been thrilled to see the destruction of this particularly horrendous decoration. Normally should could ignore the pumpkins barricading stairways and fake spiders hung from doorways, the massive blow up monstrosity had been another story all together. It had spent its few precious weeks of use illuminated in the yard, gazing directly into Avery's window taunting her with its constant reminder of the quickly coming holiday.

With her mug in hand Avery moved through the house, flicking on lights in every room she came to. As she flicked the final switch in her bedroom Avery's heart all but stopped completely. The dark shape pressed against the upstairs window bristled as its jaws stretched open revealing ghostly white canines. Avery stumbled backwards her hot tea scalding her hand and but a moment later the mug crumbling to pieces at her feet.

"Damn it, Leo!" Avery cried as she wiped her already reddening hand against her shirt. "How the hell did you get outside?"

Moving quickly Avery pulled open the window, ceasing Leo's shrill meowing and allowing him to jump quickly inside. The glossy black cat threw her a look of indignation as he examined the broken mug and soiled carpet, his stark yellow eyes locking with hers.

“Oh, I’m sorry I cursed at you Leo. You know how worked up I get on Halloween” Avery apologized as she reached for the scorned animal. Leo let her caress him for a moment then ran off down the hallway, likely more interested in food than halfhearted apologies. Avery set about cleaning up her mess and started the kettle up once again, by the time she was settled comfortably in her favorite reading chair the night sky had been saturated by darkness.

Once she had settled down comfortably, Avery began to brace herself for what was to come. Because no matter how hard she wished and willed she knew They would always come for her. Her fear grew as she thought back to when she was young and would spend every October 31st clinging to the legs of her parents, refusing to join the monsters and ghouls outside. Then as she grew older how she would recite to her friends her well scripted excuse about religious differences or some such nonsense. They always found her in her home, Their greedy hands clawing at her, stealing from her. What gave Them the right to demand such things from her?

She had endured Them every year of her life, the knocking at the door, the demand for sustenance, their disgusting forms crowding her, hurting her. It had gotten worse once she moved out on her own, there was nothing to deter them and it seemed that more flocked to her doorstep every Halloween. The fear they instilled in her had grown to paramount proportions but she felt helpless in trying to stop them. The year she had bolted the door and extinguished the lights had only made them angrier, pounding on windows and shrieking in the streets. Eventually they had wormed their way through the window and a few had splintered the heavy wooden door. This year they would come, and she would let them take what they wanted. Avery had no more fight in her.

A few hours later Avery stepped back from the doorway for the final time, twisting the bolt into place. The candy bowl beside her was empty, the neighborhood children sent off happily counting their lot. Turning off the lights as she went, Avery slipped easily into her bed. She had survived yet another onslaught from the neighborhood children and was safe for another year. Lying down amongst her heavy comforter Avery shut her eyes for a moment. Downstairs Leo began to meow uneasily, his voice growing louder and shriller with every call. Avery could hear the small taps on the door downstairs, as she lay there she heard them turn into heavy thumps against the wood. The thumps crescendo into chaos, banging throughout the house. A window is smashed the glass clattering nosily against the wooden floor. Leo gave out one last loud yowl, followed by a silence pervaded only by the sound of those fevered footsteps.

They had come.

A True Story of the Unknown History of Somerville, by Sonia Koetting

10 years old and the youngest of four children, she swallowed another bite at the family's suburban dinner table before offering, "Sure, I like the idea." Her parents, middle class with yearnings for the extraordinary, had landed on the dream of selling out the suburbs of D.C. to buy an historic mansion somewhere in rural Virginia. Being an airline captain made Dad's commute less frequent than daily, and therefore tolerable.

This adventure had taken the family on several country drives. It was a reason to picnic, imagine the Civil War, and picture the enhanced self-worth that comes with living in such grand old homes.

The older kids stared into their plates and continued to chew. Dad kept the television in the other room loud during dinner so as not to miss Watergate news from Walter Cronkite's broadcast.

The youngest still had her naiveté — void of teen posturing with every reaction — and was practiced at ignoring the pervasive national news.

A leader in romantic notions, Mom took a turn toward practical to make her case.

"The Somerville mansion has 13 rooms, each with its own fireplace, 20 acres and 4 outbuildings. All of that for the same price as this house!" Who could argue that?

Siblings chewed more slowly. Reality was taking shape that they would have to switch schools and friendships.

Mom continued, "We'd be spending evenings and weekends fixing it up."

Youngest is unfazed by the challenge. The baby generally gets the lightest workload.

Mom's site shifts to the elephant in the room. "How would you kids feel about times you had to be alone there?"

Reticence jumped from the teen side of the table to Youngest, who began staring at her butter knife.

Big Sister blurted, "Seriously mom? Scared to be left without you?"

Plans were made that weekend for another look at this particular looming, leading contender.

Never shy to test a realtor's wits, Mom secured permission for the family to spend a day exploring the property. And for the teens' sake, friends could come along!

It was a sparkling fall day when kids burst from the Country Squire — with facing flip seats in the back — having arrived at The Somerville Mansion. Her majesty's faded beauty echoed the weather. *Great Expectations*.

Renters, gone for the day per the realtor's request, had barely been caretaking. Gates were off hinges, front door glass was covered with Contact paper... And this: chickens roamed the foyer. When Youngest saw this preposterous scene, she pictured the renters illiterate with missing teeth.

On the parlor wall next to the first of the 13 fireplaces were old photographs from long before the renters' day. Here was the grand dame, with carriages on the front lawn and ladies on lemonade missions with blurry faces and parasols. Before the Civil War, hopeful barons groomed their influence with summer socials for those who mattered.

Mom hadn't mentioned at dinner that the mansion was once the residence of Mr. Somer himself — of address Somerville.

Why would this mansion have been forsaken by its community? Did one family have the energy to restore its pride?

After running through the house to count fireplaces and tiptoeing the cook's secret staircase to the kitchen, the children dispersed across the property. Most carried their mischief outside to the fields and carriage house. Mom and Dad roamed with pencil and paper, budgeting the dream. Bookish Youngest stayed in the mansion to gather clues.

Upstairs the hinges of a long, dark wood door creaked to reveal a claw-foot bathtub. Layers of orange rust rings above two inches of stale water showed that it was once a full bath left to evaporate. Someone had drawn a bath, and then suddenly left it, forever. Was the orange only rust? Youngest wondered how many weeks or years in humid Virginia does it take to evaporate an entire tub of water? Do Renters avoid the upstairs?

Sleigh beds and antiques remained in some of the rooms. Doll cradles and mirrors suggested Somer had daughters.

Walking the high-ceiling hall, Youngest heard laughter from behind the attic door. This was Big Sister and her girlfriend, thinking they were hidden from all.

Time for a Perfect Prank.

Quietly opening the big door, Youngest crept up the staircase. Midway up, Youngest began her eeriest humming... "OOOOooooooOOooooo..."

She had frightened them because the laughter stopped.

At the top of the stairs, Youngest realized she was instead alone in a vast attic draped in history. Exposed was a baby buggy, a trunk. Sunlight from the partially boarded cupola window streamed through dusty air.

In disbelief, she walked to the window. Below and faraway on the lawn were Sister and her friend. The rest of the family was near the drive. Youngest was alone in the house.

The ride back to the D.C. metro area that evening was quiet. Youngest didn't share her story for fear of ridicule, and the others were unwilling to open the conversation of what return Somerville would offer in exchange for the life it would suck from them.

Mom and Dad were emboldened by their budget predictions and told the realtor they would go for it. Youngest imagined the renters retreating to the nearby woods. Would they watch her family toil?

A For Sale sign went up on the suburban home and weeks passed while the family waited to consummate with the Castle of Somerville. No one spoke of it at dinner. They were bracing for what they couldn't know.

Then one evening, over Walter Cronkite's voice on T.V., Mom sadly announced that the move was off... Something about a 24-hour Contingency Clause. Another couple had fallen for Somer's mansion and could pay cash. The family had one day to come up with funds to honor their contract.

As the clock ticked through the next day, Youngest, in particular, was deeply vexed by the tease of history that would never be told.

Disappointment and Relief are girls who share space in a silent attic.

The Writers Dream, by Benjamin Koschke

Startling myself awake I couldn't help but trying to shake the sweat off from my most recent nightmare, they seem to be coming more frequently now, but if only I could remember what they are about. Looking over at my window seeing it's still dark out I look at the clock resting on my nightstand flashing 12:00 over and over, for some reason it reset itself again while I slept. This would be the perfect time to pick up my writing again so it seems I should move downstairs to my study, the quiet place where all my ideas take flight. Slowly moving over to the door with my hand on the knob there it is...that all too familiar creak from the other side right before it swings open, but this time something's different I can feel this tension in the background as if something is watching me.

"Must be the house settling down from the storm earlier." I say aloud to reassure myself.

Still resting in the back of my mind sits that doubt that maybe something is there waiting on the other side, so I grab the flashlight I keep atop my dresser just in case. Turning it on with the sweet click it makes as the room is illuminated with a harsh white light I thrust the door open pointing it all around... only to find nothing there. Shaking my head side to side telling myself it's just from the nightmare there's nothing to worry about, but as I move into the hallway I swear the soft patter of feet resounds behind me, and there it is the slow chill crawling up my spine to my neck making my whole body stand on edge. Turning around violently I yell out into the house. "Is...is someone there..." and I wait for what seems like minutes, but nothing responds.

Again that feeling rests upon my shoulders as it has done every night for weeks but this time feels so different then all the rest, this time it feels real, but I resist the urge to head down the hall where I heard the footsteps and instead move towards the staircase to head downstairs. Flashlight in hand before I even take the first step I shine it down the steps checking carefully as if something would be waiting for me at the bottom, and as usual nothings there. With each step I take the house creaks and groans underneath me, and while I watch myself go down each step off in the far corner of my eye I see a shadow move towards my study. Immediately stopping right before the final step I shine the flashlight down the hall over the railing only to see nothing..., but the familiar pictures hanging on my wall. Again shaking my head I continue stepping down one last time, rounding the corner of the railing into the primary hallway of my house only to see the light of my study peeking through the cracked door at the very end.

Staying on edge from the chill up my spine I look around thinking maybe someone is messing with me but who? So I swallow every ounce of courage I have to take a step forward only to begin hearing the faint clicking and clacking of the typewriter I've used to write every book I've ever published. Taking another step forward the air begins to chill, and for a second I almost swear I could see my breath flowing before me like fog along a harbor town. Another step forward and the clacking gets louder and louder with each step I take, but the hall gets colder and colder...I shine my flashlight about searching for anything to explain this, ...but nothing always nothing. Approaching the door with the studies soft light upon my face I take a hard breath and see my exhale clear as day in the light, I look down to the knob to see a light coating of frost

covering it stretching outwards along the door. Pumping my hand a few times I place my hand upon the door as the clacking suddenly stops, and with only a light push the door slowly creaks open...and as the warmth of the rooms light washes over me...the room is empty.

Nothing not a soul except for mine, maybe it was all in my head, or maybe something else is at work here... and before I could finish that thought the protection of my study is taken away as the door slams shut forcing me to the ground. Dropping the flashlight as I fall it rolls across the hallway reaching the entrance to the basement stairs, and it's pointing its light directly down into the hell awaiting me. A faint sound comes to my ears as I regain my composure the sound of scratching coming from the basement, shaking violently I crawl over to the flashlight grabbing it and begin peering down over the horizon of the stairs.

Standing up once again I yell through my house. "He...hello? Is anyone th...there?" the only response I get is an eerie laugh that echoes up from the basement towards me. Continuing to tell myself it's all in my head I slowly move down the stairs into the basement, trying the light switch with no avail as I go, one deep breath and I finish moving down the steps, and as I look around with the flashlight it's ripped from my hand and flies across the room on its own, and as the light lands it shines towards me as the last thing I see is a shadow with deep blood red eyes.

Lobo's Birthday Surprise, by Nicole Kraipowich

Five minutes after he walked into the room he knew something was amiss. The smell, acrid and copper tinged, the stillness, the flashing light and the microwave alarm beeping every minute signaling that whatever had been in there was long since done. Nigel went in a little further, he was beginning to shake with the uneasiness he felt and then he started heaving as he saw the carnage. Arms that should have been attached to bodies, legs in singles and pairs, bodies without heads and blood. The blood was everywhere. It splattered the ceiling, soaked into the carpet, pooled on the hardwood, ran down the walls. There was so much blood.

He was supposed to have been greeted by “Surprise,” it was, after all, his 40th birthday. Francis, his beautiful wife of 19 years, had always gone to so much trouble to celebrate his birthday. By the looks of it, all of his friends had been in attendance, and actually still were, scattered piecemeal all around the room. He began to stumble and headed for the wall, weakness spreading throughout his body. As he stood in the corner retching, his feet slid out from under him. His legs had turned to Jell-O and he began to black out.

It was during this moment of utter helplessness as he lay collapsed in a heap, his face lying in his own vomit, that the creature came for him. He could just make out the glowing green eyes, pointed, fur tipped ears, and razor sharp, gleaming, white fangs. It couldn't possibly be Lobo. He had raised that wolf from a pup, practically let him sleep in his bed every night. He had nurtured him, played tug of war in the back yard with him, treated him as the child that he and Francis wished they could have had. What could have caused this animal to turn on him, on his family, on everyone that was special to him? How could this be happening? He slowly inched himself up. “Lobo, good boy, easy there, please, PLEEAASSSEEE...” he plead as he grasped the nearby curtain frantically trying to protect himself by attempting to wrap up in the blue Damask fabric.

Lobo lunged at him, blood tinged saliva dripping from his mouth. It felt like a scorching flame as the wolf clenched the flesh of Nigel's left leg in between his jaws of iron. Nigel could not believe the pain, the searing and burning, the tearing and ripping. His thigh was now half gone. He could see the bright red strands of muscle, his muscle, in the animal's mouth. Again Lobo struck, this time going straight for his face. The incisors protruded through his right orbit in mere seconds and the eyeball ruptured instantly. This time Nigel screamed in agony. This simply could not be happening. That was his last thought as consciousness left him. The wolf continued in his frenzy until the no longer beating heart of his master was torn to shreds. Lobo crept out of the open front door of the house, scampered across the front lawn and headed for the woods. After about 10 minutes of loping through the undergrowth he came to the pack he desired so strongly to associate with. Playing his part in the human world had been only too easy. He was put in a position of trust that he could overcome at any time of his choosing.

The giant Alpha male stood erect in the moonlight forest clearing. He bared his teeth and raised his hackles as he sauntered over to sniff the newcomer, a low guttural sound constantly escaping his throat. The overpowering scent of the blood filled the still night air. This was unquestionably

human in origin. By the number of subtle differences, the Alpha could discern that the blood represented many, many humans. He approved. The pack would be stronger with the addition of such a member as this. There was only a little more to be done. The end of Cliffton Creek as a quiet little town was almost complete. The pack would rest for the night and then on the eve of the marrow, would commence with the destruction of the rest. Just three more families and then, then the wolves would rule as they had done in so many other places. It was just a matter of time before all of the humans were gone. After all, that is what evolution is all about right? Survival of the fittest...

Loose! by Jackie Leidholt

“Stop!” , I screamed. “Stop!” But it was too late. The car hit the dog with a sickening thud- or maybe that was just me slamming my hands over my ears while screaming and scrunching my eyes shut as tight as they would go. I opened them soon after but the sight I beheld was calm, peaceful. There was no bloody body, no car, no scene of any disaster at all. There was nothing there but a paved road, with houses on either side. Mowed lawns, nice landscaping, blue sky.

Utterly confused, I looked around, wondering if anyone had witnessed my terror. My screams echoed in my head. I was embarrassed. I headed up the street toward my house. That was in September. That was the first time it happened.

The next time it happened I had almost the same exact reaction, only this time I didn't scream quite as loud. Still, I panicked, screamed, closed my eyes...and when I opened them, I saw nothing but a peaceful scene. No body, no car.

It had been about three weeks since the last episode. I'd had time to rationalize the whole experience in my head. I hadn't mentioned it to anyone. I didn't want anyone to think I was going nuts. I figured it was one of those cases where your brain makes up something to explain an unidentified object. Maybe that was it. There had been a flash or a memory. Looking back now, I find it bizarre that I explained it away so easily.

Three more times it happened after that, always in the same place. I would have believed I was going insane except that every other aspect of my life seemed normal. After the third time, I tried to avoid that particular place in the road. But I soon found myself wondering if it would happen again, and I started walking that way again.

The fourth and fifth time it happened, I stared with all my concentration at the scene. The “dog” seemed to be more like a lion. It was huge, maybe the size of lion, but with coarse, dark, shiny fur and powerful hindquarters. And when the vehicle hit it, and I really couldn't call it a car in our sense of the word, the creature just sort of rolled away, unhurt, and then disappeared. Solid, powerful, then gone.

The “car” was also strange. It didn't seem to have any windows, but it was so shimmery, I couldn't name it's color or even a shape. I couldn't bring it into focus.

I wish now I'd been able to take a picture or brought someone with me to verify what I'd seen. But before I had a chance, it all became moot. I had half decided that I would start walking right through the spot where I saw this happening and one day, I stood there pondering when I suddenly felt a hot gust of wind so strong that it knocked me over. And before I had time to think, that huge creature smashed into my chest, knocking the wind out of me, smashing me into the road. It's huge head swung above me. It had solid black eyes and hot sulfurous breath. For a long second, it seemed to stare down at me with its soulless eyes. Then it pushed off me with a painful jab to my ribs.

I lay there for a few moments, unable to breath. Then I was able to gasp for air. Finally, I gingerly sat up, sure I was next going to be run over by a car. Then I realized that this was not over. Because instead of disappearing as it always had before, the creature was trotting down the street, a massive, muscular, monster, swinging his head from side to side. Like a hunter.

What Hides in Sunlight, By Ayah McGinness

We're always afraid of the things we can see in the dark, my grandpa used to say. What we ought to be afraid of is what we *can't* see in the light.

Grandpa Henry would take me on long fishing trips every summer, and I'd listen with rapt attention to his stories as we waited for a bite. Not only stories of ghosts and monsters, but of all the places he'd traveled with the Army, all the other fishing trips he'd taken and the huge fish he'd caught, the one so big it almost pulled him in along with it. The happy times with Grandma and all their kids.

But the monster stories stuck with me. After each trip, I'd imagine I was being stalked by monsters that were invisible in the sunlight. Nights weren't so bad; I could see the shadows, but they never came too close. But in the daytime I couldn't see if they were coming, I wouldn't know until I felt the hot stinking breath in my face.

In journalism school I learned to think differently. I left behind my childhood terrors, forgot the stories my grandfather told. I came to believe that the only way to fight evil was to expose it to as much daylight as possible, and I threw myself into investigative reporting. Fighting evil might sound melodramatic, but I was idealistic and passionate and that was really how I thought of it. With every misappropriated dollar or unsafe workplace I exposed, I was a *heroine*, making the world a little bit better for the underdog.

My grandfather passed away just before final exams in my senior year. I didn't make it to the funeral. The day of my wedding I broke down crying while I was putting my dress on, and walked down the aisle a good half hour late because I'd ruined my makeup. I wished so badly that Grandpa was the one walking down the aisle beside me, it was like losing him all over again. But Shawn beamed when he saw me, and I beamed back, and I think for the first time, I really let go.

By then I was working for a local television station. My big break came when I was assigned to cover the congressional campaign. Often I drove home late at night, after a campaign event or a long day of digging up information on the incumbent's many donors.

On one of those nights, I saw it for the first time in years. Just a shape lurking in the ditch. It might have been a deer, or a big dog. But it wasn't. I told myself it was a deer, and didn't mention it to Shawn. I made myself forget what I'd seen. Later I would have no choice but to remember.

Within another year I was pregnant. When the ultrasound tech told me I was having a boy I knew just what we would name him: Henry after my grandfather. I'd told Shawn about my grandfather and his fishing trips so many times, I think he already knew what name I'd want, and he agreed wholeheartedly. So we made all our plans for little Henry and decorated the nursery and went to childbirth classes, all filled with hopes and dreams.

And I saw it again, a shape in the dark as I closed the curtains one night. Definitely a stray dog. A stray dog with flashing orange eyes. A stray dog that pulled itself up onto its hind legs and stared at me for a long moment before it dropped back to all fours and sauntered off into the night. I climbed into bed and said good night to Shawn.

But then I saw it, or creatures like it, three more times before Henry was born. At work, at home, they kept showing up. Never in daylight; I began to feel the familiar childhood fear creeping up on me again. At night I watched for them incessantly; during the day I couldn't stop myself from expecting them to pounce on me at any moment. I told Shawn about it; he assured me that they were only animals. It was natural to be a little on edge just now—he was nervous about so many things himself. Just perfectly understandable anxiety about all the ways our lives were changing.

I willed myself to listen to him over the whispering doubt in my mind. I willed his voice to be louder than the memory of my grandfather's warnings about the things that hide in sunlight.

At first it worked. Even though I continued seeing the creatures, I let myself believe what Shawn said. It was just nerves, completely natural for a new parent.

Just nerves, until the night Shawn was found dead in his car, the front bumper mangled, the windshield smashed in. It was the hooves of a frantic deer that caused the lacerations, they told me. Not claws. So where was the deer, I wanted to know. They hadn't found it. It must have gotten free of the wreckage somehow, probably gone off to die in the wilderness. The coyotes would get it.

I didn't believe.

Some days I force myself to take Henry to the playground. He wobbles around on his pudgy legs and laughs, and I make myself smile for him. But I'm always waiting for the hot, stinking breath to touch my face, bracing myself for the thing that hides in the sunlight.

Subconscious, by Benjamin Pauls

Long swathes of night intersperse sections of yellow-lit sidewalk- the city is on a budget this year, so only every other street light is lit. Each time I immerse myself in these pools of darkness, I control my breathing as a precaution, counting out and in. Even still, I swear I can hear whimpering now and again. It's probably just some kids goofing off a few blocks back, but I can feel it burrowing into my mind, implanting itself like a spore. I know better. He told me what to do, his face haggard and grey. As if it made this any better. I had to smother the thought; bury it under real worries, tangible worries. Perhaps passing on this bit of advice, such as it was, was how he soothed his conscience. Some comfort to me. The wind blowing in my face makes sounds indistinct, and, despite myself, I glance over my shoulder. Something pale passes from light into the darkness a block away.

I turn back. It was a cat, a trick of the imagination. Don't think about it, don't let it feed from you this way; I can't help but to see it crawling, jerking from the patch of light into the darkness. Another whisper of a sob, a cobweb carried by the wind, and, God, I'm almost into the next section of dingy light. The streetlamp ahead flickers, gives an electrical shudder. I watch it, willing it to stay lit. Just think about something else. I start to count my steps, focusing, but the light flickers again, buzzes. He didn't say it could do anything like that. She- no, not "she."
"It"-

The street light flares bright and white, then hisses into blackness. This happens. I've seen it happen all the time, just a burnt-out bulb or a glitch in the lamp's timing system. It doesn't stop the clenching of the muscles in my back, the nerve-fire tingling through my scalp to the back of my neck. Like a fool, I'd been staring into the light, so I can see nothing in the blackness of the newly-descended night. The lamp's blurry afterimage bisects my vision- a flickering ghost as my retina readjusts. It seems to pulse, like something alive. I try to resist the urge to look over my shoulder again, but I look anyway. I can't see a damned thing, just the tar-thick night, the island of light behind me. I'm sure- Christ- I'm sure I can hear someone whimpering, words incoherent and choked.

"Don't bring it home with you," he said, "just don't bring it home."

I pass under the faintly buzzing street light, hear a scrabbling drawing closer even through the death-rattle of the burnt out bulb. I can't help it anymore; I start running, then sprinting, spurred on by another whisper from behind. I just have to find something to distract myself, to redirect my thoughts. The apartment isn't far, just another block, and another streetlamp looms ahead, offering respite from the night. As I near it, it flickers too. It doesn't matter; I'm running so fast now that I'm under and past it in only a few seconds. Don't turn to look, don't keep calling to her. I try to black out the thought, but I can see it -her- crouched under the flickering light, watching me run even as my thoughts give her form.

I plunge off the main road and down the side street, toward the blank face of the building ahead. Lights over a few doors gouge the night here and there, but seem only to throw the other doors

into deeper darkness. My light is off, the entryway leering. It never really bothered me before. I stumble up the flight of stairs to the first landing, fumbling for the keys in my pocket. I swear, fear and anger swirling. That grey-faced coward, why did he pass this onto me? I slip the key into the lock.

Something is standing on the landing to my right now. Something pale, twitching in the dark corner. The lock turns, I slip through the door into the unlit hallway, slamming the door behind me and pressing myself against it. Silence now, aside from my gasping. I should turn on the light, but I don't want to.

“Don't bring it home.”

A whisper crawls from ahead, a faint rustling in the hazy darkness. She scuttles, jerks, forward, palms and knees scraping against the wood of the floor. My whimpering twins her own as she tilts her head upward, looking into my eyes with empty, hungry sockets darker than the night.

The Old Mine, by Shari Petersen

Katie had never liked the short walk between her house and her best friend Chloe's condo. The quickest route was a wooded and rocky path that passed by an old, deserted silver mine. Although the true history of the mine and its fortune hunting owner, John Patsy, had long been lost to local folklore and campfire tales, Katie had heard all the stories, but she didn't believe any of them to be true. However, it still spooked her every time she walked past the gaping hole in the hillside.

Chloe had called earlier begging Katie to come over so they could work on their English homework together, but Katie was reluctant knowing how the autumn days were bringing the dark shadows of night much earlier. Mr. Barnes, their English teacher, loved what he referred to as, "the lost art of sentence diagramming." Determined that all students in his charge would master this tedious grammar exercise he constantly assigned endless sentences of diagramming homework. Eventually, Katie's reluctance to walk by Patsy's Mine was forgotten as Chloe's pleas resonated with her own desire to get the assignment completed. The walk over to Chloe's had been uneventful, even refreshing as the cool evening air crept in and the sound of fallen leaves crunched under her feet as she stepped.

The homework took much longer than Katie had expected and it had long been dark by the time they were finished.

"Maybe you should call someone to come pick you up," remarked Chloe.

"That is silly, it is less than a mile and I will be fine. Look, I even remembered to bring a flashlight this time." replied Katie confidently.

Starting off on her walk Katie slowly felt her initial confidence fade. Her older brother, Brad, had filled her head with so many stories of John Patsy that it became impossible for her to block his words from her mind as she walked.

".....They say he just went into the mine one day and never came back out. No one knows for sure what really happened to him."

"The mine drove him to insanity and anyone who ever worked for John Patsy ended up in the loony bin."

Katie knew there must be some truth to the stories because Chloe's grandfather had worked in Patsy's mine, and did in fact spend the last years of his life in a mental hospital yelling something about the rocks that breathe and whisper to him. Chloe didn't believe it had anything to do with the mine and said there was a family history of paranoia. Still it all seemed a little weird to Katie.

The night was moonless and seemed darker than usual. Katie's flashlight seemed to barely penetrate the thick blackness of the night which slowly crept in around her. As she approached the path that past the old mine her thoughts and imagination were getting the better of her. To

calm her nerves Katie would always sing a little song she learned in church when she little, but tonight it only seemed to be making things worse.

She started in with the first few lines of the song, “Sing your way home at the close of the day. Sing your way home; drive the shadows away.” A dark wispy shape passed through the dim glow of her flashlight. She jumped back with a start, tripping over a stick, and dropping her light somewhere in the sagebrush nearby. Katie struggled to recover her light from the prickly, brittle, twigs of the bush, but all her moving seemed to make the light slip deeper into the bowels of the plant which now seemed almost to be breathing and clinging to the light. Feeling slightly panicked Katie crouched more determined by the bush to reclaim her light, but as she reached into the branches they whipped against her and left a long shallow cut across the front of her right arm. Quickly pulling away, she fell flat on her back, clenching at the cut on her arm. At that moment, she could feel the ground beneath her moaning and heaving, and the sound of the wind was beckoning her to the cave. Katie could feel her heart racing and her mind panicking, but the idea of running to the cave seemed like the only reasonable option.

Even during the brightest of days, Katie had never dared go into the old mine; it seemed dangerous and scary even in the light. To think that she was even considering it now was bizarre. The rocks and the wind seemed to be speaking reason to her mind.

“You just need a moment to regroup, to calm down, and warm up.”

“Get out of the wind, and then come back for your light once you get the bleeding from your arm to stop.”

Her thoughts, the rocks, the wind were all encouraging her to get up and come to the old mine. “*This is crazy!*” was Katie’s last rational thought as she stood and walked cautiously to the opening in the mountainside. She sat down just inside the mine, pulled an old t-shirt from her school bag and wrapped it around the wound on her arm. Glancing up, she thought she caught a glimpse of silver twinkling in the rock. In an instant everything changed and the cave seemed to be closing in on her, pressing down closer and closer until it was right on top of her. As she tried to stand and run, something or someone grabbed at her feet and held her firm. She screamed and yelled for help, but the sound of her voice seemed muffled and low. Fear seized her thoughts, once last scream caught in her throat, followed by complete blackness...

Later that night her brother Brad found her unconscious, unhurt, and clinging to her flashlight stuck in the sagebrush.

Shadows in Between, by Rachael Platten

Andrew wanted to research what he had seen in Peru, but the shamans had said that he could not delve the other realities without guidance.

“I want to prove the existence of these creatures as more than just ancestral memory,” he had told them.

After several moves that were unsuccessful, Andrew, his wife, a prissy six year old girl, a helpful four year old boy, and a Labrador named Smoke moved to a small town in Missouri that was rumored to be a nexus of strange phenomena. The antique house he chose was inexpensive being right next to a marsh that was reported to have paranormal incidences.

Every evening Andrew would set his cameras and instruments up in several locations. He would write down what he did and where and would sit outside for hours waiting for something to happen. Occasionally, he would catch something on the cameras or other devices: a weird light, something blurring across the screen, odd noises, and strange energy readings. It wasn't enough for substantial proof.

After staying up several nights determined to find something concrete, he fell asleep on a lawn chair with his camcorder in his hand.

“Why don't you take a break from this,” his wife pleaded earlier. “It is impossible to find believable evidence for this research. Besides, your children need you. I need you.”

“Kelly, you don't understand. This is something that needs to be revealed.”
At that she had thrown up her hands and briskly walked away.

His dreams were a dark mist. A hazy light filtered through and spoke with a deep sinuous voice, “I can help you find what you are looking for.” A beautiful pearlescent face appeared flecked with tiny translucent scales. Her hair was white satin that flowed around her. Her eyes were golden like cat's eyes.

“Meet me by the stream,” she called disappearing in the mist.

Something cold and wet touched his face waking him. “Oh, the cameras!” He fumbled around in the greyness for all his equipment hoping he got to them in time before they got rained on. He gathered them up and ran inside.

Kelly met him at the door. “Did you see Smoke out there? We thought he was in the backyard, but when I went to go get him he was gone. I was about to come get you. I need you to help me find him before the rain starts coming down hard.”

They didn't find him that night despite going up and down the streets calling his name from the car window. The two children were distraught. They loved their dog dearly.

“Maybe the man with the black eyes took him.” Morgan told her father.

“What man with the black eyes, sweetheart?”

“The one that stands in the trees.”

His heart jumped. It was scary to think his little girl had seen something like that. This made him more determined to find out.

Being out of options, he went to the stream the next day. As he walked along it he thought he saw Smoke running through the trees. He called out to him three times. The third time he heard a voice echo back the name from far away. Then the voice was beside him shouting in his ear: “Smoke!” It made him jump and drop the camera that was in his hand. He looked around him but didn’t see anything. Picking up his camera, he quickly headed back towards the house.

As he hurried along, he slid and fell in something wet and sticky. The trail of blood led him further down the stream where he found Smoke by the riverside. The dog had been torn open on his side, eyes glazed and staring, and his tongue lolled to one side of his gaping mouth. They buried Smoke wrapped in a blanket in their backyard the next day. Cory, the little boy, was especially upset.

Andrew’s camera showed him something unnerving when he looked at it later. By the riverside he saw the woman he had seen in the dream except this time her hands had extended into bloody claws, her eyes turned blackened coals, and her maw was a row of sharp gleaming teeth. “I told you I could show you,” she laughed turning away.

In the days that followed he got more coverage of strange phenomena than ever. He even was able to catch a picture of a pale man with completely black eyes and long angular face up in the trees.

Kelly told him he needed to spend some time with his family. The children were quieter than usual and she thought maybe they needed their father. Andrew decided to take a little break from his research so that night he ate dinner and watched a movie with them. The children both wanted him to close the curtains and turn on the light before bed.

Andrew awoke suddenly to Morgan standing over him with a knife in her hand and behind her was the man with the black eyes holding her shoulders and maliciously grinning at him. The blade hit his throat with surprising force stopping a scream before it reached his lips. Sometime later Kelly realized her husband had been acting strangely for days. He wouldn’t talk, eat, or sleep. He just walked around in a stupor. She decided she was going to her friend’s with her kids.

As they drove away Cory started to have a seizure. Kelly stopped the car and ran to him, opening the door. He then grabbed her by the hair and smashed head against a tree with surprising strength. As her vision blurred she could see a woman with golden eyes staring at her.

“We lord over humankind. We are the whispers in the vine. You are slaves to us as you will always be. Us the dragons of the greater sea,” the woman rasped. “Shadows in between show you what they want you to see.”

The Dawn of Eternal Midnight, by Randy Reynolds

As I dream, my subconscious admirably attempts to conjure a hazy image of hope: my family enjoying a picnic at the beach as the waves lazily crash down on the shoreline. They look to me, an open invitation to join them. My troubles evaporate against the picturesque tranquility of the scene and I feel myself beginning to smile.

It's only then that my brain corrects me, reminding me that happiness is incoherent with reality, and jarringly awakens me. Hope fades to reality. Despondency trumps fiction.

Wearily, I rise from the floor of a research laboratory where I spent the night and pull a small notebook from a shirt pocket. I write another tally mark. Day 251. As I peer out a window, I laugh at the obsolete definition, for "day" infers light. Since the Dawn of Eternal Midnight, the sun is forever eclipsed behind deep swarms of shifting shadows.

In retrospect, we all should have acknowledged its inevitability. Science kept pounding on the lock holding Pandora's Box sealed until it finally yielded in the name of advancement. Some say the genetic modifications they made on the vampire bats were an attempt to isolate the genes for sleep. It would be quite a triumph, they said then, to change a nocturnal animal to diurnal. I don't know if "triumph" is a word I would have used.

Now the creatures are active 24 hours a day and they certainly effectively use their time! A couple of other genes must've also been modified, as they've become quite prolific in multiplying and replenishing the earth. Now they *are* the earth.

Oh, and somewhere during the genetic manipulation, the bats developed a fierce, aggressive appetite for blood. These bats now occupy the food chain's apex. I don't even know what they feed on anymore, as there's nothing left. We survivors are but the brief holdovers.

I get to work, opening a few notebooks and impassively scanning the contents. The original gene splicing was done here, and my clan charges me to find valuable information about these experiments. I know I'm not going to find it: I've been on enough reconnaissance missions by now. They're looking for an antidote – some way to reverse the splicing effects, a gas to destroy the bats by the billions. They hunger for anything remotely promising. Unfortunately, rebuilding civilization isn't as simple as destroying the dominant predator. Entire ecosystems have fallen victim in its wake, and nothing we humans will do can resurrect that.

Flipping a page, I smile at a scientist's silly doodle of a bat, when I suddenly have an acute sense I am being watched. I hear a faint scratch behind me and stare straight ahead, hoping not to alert the spectating specter. Grabbing the heaviest notebook within reach, I quickly whirl around and block the incoming attack just in time. The bat flutters backward, momentarily dazed by the unexpected impact. I seize the initiative, smacking the creature again and again with my makeshift weapon until it stops moving. Then I hit it a couple more times.

I collapse into a nearby chair to collect my composure. Luckily for me, the bats' power lies in their numbers, not in individual strength. Our clan's shelter helps ward off attacks, but it's not impervious. Every few nights, we find another few more victims of a rogue bat that somehow breached our fortress. We now view each day very differently. We never fully appreciated the utter miracle of each new day of life before the Eternal Midnight. How strangely often it takes a catastrophe to recognize this simple truth!

I'm merely postponing the inevitable trek back to base by staying any longer. After placing the goggles over my eyes, I don layer after layer of thick, heavy clothing until it nearly becomes more of a liability than a boon. I pick up my trusty crowbar and march outside toward my clan's base.

The acrid stench of decay immediately fills my lungs, nearly choking me. The horde immediately senses my presence and swarms, furiously focused to finish their foe. I swing my crowbar at them to make progress, but I'm swinging at water. It's not their screech that terrifies me; it's the collective thrash of thousands of vindictive wings. The combined cacophony begins to disorient me, and soon my courage is wavering against the constant onslaught of bats.

My heartbeat and pace both quicken in trying to escape the unavoidable. For a while, I make good progress and my confidence mounts. But the reckless approach eventually catches up to me and I trip onto a corpse. Terrified, I kick the body away as bats continue their ferocious thumping against my makeshift armor. Swinging wildly at them, I regain my footing and race the last few yards into the shelter.

The anteroom for the shelter serves as a buffer to destroy any bats that managed to follow me. Eventually, the persistent pests are dead and after careful inspection, I open the main entry to the shelter. I smile as a friend greets me with his young daughter, and I silent lament my own losses as I see them together.

"Well, if it isn't our scavenger. How goes the search?" Caden asks me as his daughter looks up at me with angelic innocence.

For a brief moment, I consider telling the truth this time about the empty expedition. But then I say the right thing. "I've uncovered a compound that might repel the bats! It'll take a few weeks to get the necessary ingredients together, but the research indicated this might do the trick!"

Yes, I lie to my clan. But I provide them the rarest resource available now: hope. It shimmers in the distance, a beacon to now replace our sun. It may always dance just beyond our fingertips, yet it ignites the spark of courage within each survivor that no winged horde can ever extinguish. And with this hope... we shall endure.

Native Tongue, *by Laura Fairleigh Richardson*

(Based on a true story)

I still get that cold, prickly feeling sometimes at night. And the only reason I remember it now is because I heard Mama telling Grandma about it last night when she thought we kids were asleep. It's the only time I ever heard her speak of it. It all started when we moved from rural Texas to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Mama told Daddy she was so happy to leave that God-forsaken land and that we kids should be grateful. We all sat quiet and teary in the backseat of the station wagon and then finally, we pulled into the newly built neighborhood. The dirt was still fresh, piled up near the creek that followed alongside the road there. Over the next month, we got settled in as school was starting soon. The days were long and hot so we spent most afternoons down at the creek alongside the neighborhood kids. We found dozens of arrowheads, Indian marbles, dried up bones and small stones that gleamed like jewels in that clear, flowing water. The neighbor kids told us that this used to be Indian land, Cherokee or Sioux maybe, hence the name 'Broken Arrow.'

As nice as our new house was, it always felt cold. And not that refreshing kind of cold you wish for in summer but an eerie cold, not like home at all. Lying in bed at night, when the moon was full and shining through the window, I could almost see my breath. It was one of *those* nights that I first heard it. A murmuring of sorts that I couldn't tell where was coming from. I crept out of bed, careful not to wake my sisters and saw mama in the hallway, crouched down by my baby brothers door... listening. She didn't see me so I silently stood a few feet from her and listened too. I must have done that two or three times before I finally got up my nerve and asked her, 'what is that talking I keep hearing in the night?' Mama looked at me hard and then softened, quietly answering, 'nothing, sweetie, just the settling of the new house.' I shrugged, though didn't really believe her. As time passed, I mostly forgot about it. The harvest celebration was almost here and we were getting ready for a neighborhood party. That night was most unforgettable.

Strangely, many of our neighbors didn't come. In fact, their houses looked deserted as we walked down the street that night toward a big bonfire. Afterward, we came home tired from a long day and got into bed. The moon was the biggest I'd ever seen, gleaming its opaque blue light into all the rooms of our house. I felt restless but soon went to sleep only to awaken a few hours later to hear a low, mumbling voice. Was it singing? Talking? I couldn't tell but it was louder than before and coming from the next room. I crept out of bed, shivering as I tip toed toward my baby brother's room. There, through the cracked door, in the bright moonlight I saw my mother standing in the center of the room looking horrified at my brother's crib. My eyes followed her gaze and there he was, all chubby in his footed jammies, sitting up, straight as a board, eyes wide open and ... chanting. Yes, chanting. Louder and louder, faster and faster he went. Then something caught my eye in the corner of the room. There. Standing tall with dark eyes was an old Native American man wearing a full headdress, just like I'd read about in old western books. His face was deeply lined and his figure dark and bluish, like the moonlight. He was chanting in unison with my brother, stiffly shaking what looked like a large staff toward

Mama. He seemed angry. I was frozen as was my mother who suddenly saw me and gasped. Shrieking, she dropped whatever was in her hand, screamed for daddy and charged toward me, scooping me up as she thrust herself across the hallway into her room, shaking daddy awake like a mad woman. The next thing I remember is all six of us in Benny's room with the light on, mama crying, holding Benny to her chest. He awoke, startled and began to cry, too. Daddy hushed us all and put us back to bed, telling us that mama had a bad dream and everything's alright.

But it wasn't. I knew it.

The next morning mama wasn't herself. Lips pursed, wild eyed, and not saying a word, she packed up hurriedly and told us to do the same. We were moving. What? 'Back to Texas,' she said in a stern voice. And that was that. Daddy didn't even argue. He simply left for work right after he said the movers were coming and that we are to do as we're told. I can't remember much after that except that I wasn't sad to leave. And the motel we stayed in that night was warm and cozy as I snuggled with my sisters and sweet little Benny in front of the TV. Mama never did talk about what we saw that night. But it was no nightmare. It was for real.

I learned many years later that Mama had a tape recorder in her hand that night. And a linguistic professor at a fancy University who specializes in Native American languages confirmed that indeed, it was a Cherokee Tribe language that my baby brother was speaking. It was a warning chant, a warning to leave. The ground that house was built upon was holy. A burial ground. And I believe it. I've never been back to Oklahoma since. And have no plans to visit.

First Frights, by Briana Elizabeth Rousey

“Trick-or-treat!” I yelled out, holding out my jack-o-lantern to the first elder couple.

“What do we have here?” The man smiled, “Are you a princess?”

“I’m a fairy princess!” I spun around, my pink tutu circling around me, and my pink fairy wings behind me flapped in the cold autumn wind. I stopped after three turns. Fixing the crown over my head I smiled again. The man and woman in front of me returned my smile and the woman passed me a handful of candy. “Happy Halloween!” I shouted turning around to mommy and daddy. They stood at the edge of the driveway waiting patiently for me.

I bounced down to them, and grasped daddy’s hand. Pulling him towards the next house.

Knowing that mommy would follow behind us. “Wait for your mom,” daddy said, making me jump.

I turned to see that mommy had stopped to say something to the older couple, and I felt my small shoulders droop in sadness. “Mommy,” I yelled out, she turned and nodded, before turning back to the elder couple continuing her conversation.

I crossed my arms, wanting to yell out again, but before I could daddy turned to me and in his stern voice he said. “Mari.” I jumped, looking up at him my eyes close to tears, “Be patient.” I looked away from him. In the moonlight of the full moon daddy and I waited for mommy to finish.

“Mari.”

I heard the word, my name, who was saying my name? I turned around, and took a step away from daddy, looking for whoever had said my name. I turned back to daddy, he was watching as mommy spoke to the elder couple, neither of them saw as I walked a few feet down the street.

“Mari.”

The voice whispered again. I turned down the street to look at mommy and da--, my eyes looked down the long street where I had just come from, only to find it empty.

“Mommy?” I asked the empty street, “Daddy?” When no one answered, I started running towards the house where I had left them. Expecting to find them just past the hill. Expecting them to run up to me and pick me up and take me home.

“Mari!”

I froze, it sounded like mommy. I turned from where I stood, gulping as I looked up at the house that I stood beside.

The size of this building alone made me feel smaller than I was. The house was surrounded by an ominous black iron gate. A sign besides the gate had faded and was unreadable.

I gulped.

“Mari.”

The voice whispered this time. I jumped, it sounded like mommy, but mommy was nowhere near that building. The Iron Gate before me twitched in the wind and a loud *creak* ran through the air. I took a voluntary step backwards, and watched as a light flickered on in the top window.

“Mommy?” I asked. My stomach twisted into knots as I stepped forward, mommy was in that house. I walked past the Iron Gate. Forcing myself to walk up the cracked sidewalk. It twisted in the yard. The overgrown grass had fallen onto the sidewalk clinging to it like the arms of a fallen man. I crept forward, along the path. Reaching the edge of the sidewalk, and the beginning of the wooden steps.

Creak
Creak
Creak

I stepped up them one by one. Climbing up them until I reached the top. The dark wood of the top step fell under my weight, and I jumped away from it. My small figure landing hard on the worn green door. The door fell inside of the house, the hinges on the door breaking, my small body toppled on top of the door. Dust scattered around me, and I looked up, tears springing to my eyes as I did. “Mommy!” I cried, “Daddy!”

Again, there was no answer.

I looked around the room, my tears falling down my cheeks. Where were they? They would never leave me alone like this. I pushed myself up from the door, and looked in the room. It was small, long and thin. Webs clung to every corner. Wallpaper hung limply from the walls. To one side was a long staircase, the wood rotted away on most steps. To the other was a hallway along the side of the staircase. Two doors were closed along it, and at the end was a crooked picture.

“*Mari.*”

The voice came from up the stairs. “Mommy!” I yelled as loud as I could. There was no response to my cries.

I pushed myself up, she had to be up the broken stairs. I crept up them, carefully watching my feet as I went.

“*Mari, Mari, Mari, Mari.*”

The voice grew louder every time it said my name. Every single syllable it whispered grew into a fierce growl. I stepped up the final step, and looked down the hallway, it branched out to my right, and I turned down it.

“*Mari.*”

The voice was loudest here.

Even though, the hallway was empty. Along it was four evenly spaced doors, the last one hung wide open, so I went for that door. Mommy and daddy would be in here. I know they will be waiting for me. I stood up, and walked that way.

I looked around the corner.

Then I saw who had been saying my name.

Two ghost-white eyes watched me, a single red slit running through each of them. Her hair black as a raven's feather, looked disastrous. Each hair cut at different lengths and angles, some going to her ankles, and others to her shoulders. Her dress was torn at her knees, soot-covering inches up it. Bright red flames licked up her legs and her torn dress, inching closer and closer to her fingertips.

Her thin lips parted and her voice, like icicles, whispered one word to me:

“Run”

Grandma's House, by Cara Rousey

Elyse was feeling a little overwhelmed. The funeral was just days ago and although her grandmother had raised her after her parents died when she was six, she hadn't been back to the house since long before her grandmother died.

She turned the key and locked her own apartment and got in the car to make the two hour drive to Salem to her grandmother's house, no it was her house now. She had been making plans to move back in with her grandmother since she had graduated last spring, but she was waiting for her lease to end at the end of August. Now she bitterly regretted that decision. She had been looking forward to being home again with grandma and looking forward to searching for and starting a new job.

She was off her first weekend in October when it first started. Elyse pulled the cover off and slipping into slippers and grabbing her bathrobe she slid out of bed. The scent was strong as coffee usually was. She went into the small kitchen but saw nothing unusual. She walked through a wide but short hallway. The china rattled as she did. A sound that she had heard from childhood. She stopped short noticing in the dining room that ran the length of the back of the house. She saw it. A steaming cup of coffee sat on the yellow checkered oil cloth that was on the table. The curtains were drawn back on all the windows allowing for the view of Lilly lake. Her grandmother would always draw back the curtains to look down over the lake. She remembered closing the curtains the night before. She couldn't move. She couldn't breathe. Where did the coffee come from? How did it get inside and who put it there? The cup was familiar and Elyse remembered seeing her grandmother use it all the time.

She could not breath as she checked the bathroom the kitchen and last the living room at the front of the house. She walked back to the back dining room opening the walk in closet on the right she jump back at the figure in the closet but gasped as she realized it was just a coat. Nothing she took a deep breath the only room left was the basement. She put a hand on the door knob and made herself open the door. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest. For no reason since her childhood, she had ever liked to go down in the basement. It was an irrational fear but a fear none the less. It was morning so at least sunlight was streaming in from the back windows. She checked the door leading to the back patio it was locked. The only place left was the back storage area. She slowly pulled back the curtain and saw nothing. Her shoulders fell. She couldn't explain it no one was there.

She went back upstairs stopping as she came in the cup was gone. It was grandma's favorite the white one with the blue flowers. Elyse went into the kitchen to the cupboard that held all the cups. It was there in the front it was cold to touch. It should not be if hot coffee was just in it.

She must have dreamed it, imagined it come on Elyse. She slammed the cup on the counter a little harder than she thought and it cracked in two.

"Damn!" She swore. "Get a hold of yourself!" she grabbed at the shards and tossed them in the trash. She turned and went to get dressed trying hard to forget.

She had been gone on three interviews today returning to the house tired she ate watched some TV and went to bed.

The next morning Elyse got up and stopped short as she came into the dining room. She slid into the chair across from where her grandmother would sit. Across from her in her grandmother's chair where she sat was a steaming cup of coffee. Yes, the cup was white with blue flowers.

Elyse stared out the window looking down over the sloped yard down to the willow that was on the edge of the water. She looked down at the pier and when she brought her eyes back to the table. The cup was gone but the aroma of coffee filled the air.

Dolly, by Susan Rumph

Dead leaves crackled as the bike tires tracked over them. The roadway was a tunnel of shadows beneath the overarching bony branches of autumnal trees. Mallory felt the immediate change in the bicycle's ride as the rear bike tire was punctured. She pulled hard on the brake handles, coming to a lopsided stop.

Shivering uneasily, Mallory looked around at the deserted street. Pulling out her cell phone to check the time, she murmured fretfully, "I have to get home before they do."

This evening Mallory had done something she had never done before-deceived her parents. Even as a little girl, Mallory was a compliant and biddable child. So, every time her mother said plaintively, 'I can't lose another daughter,' or her father gruffly warned her to 'be careful out there,' Mallory vowed she would never cause either of them a moment of grief or worry. Claire, Mallory's elder sister, had died before she was born but her loss hung like a smothering shadow over their entire family.

Mallory had spontaneously accepted an invitation issued by a classmate to come to a party that night. She regarded it as an opportunity to rebel since it coincided with her parents' monthly date night.

She only lasted forty-five minutes at the party. Everyone was either drinking or amorously entwined with a partner or both. Mallory finally managed to escape through the kitchen into the fresh air of a mid-autumn night.

Inspecting the flat tire, Mallory sighed, "I should never have come."
"Have you seen my dolly?"

The tremulous voice came from behind Mallory. She gave a startled gasp, swiveling around to see whoever had spoken to her.

The child stood in the middle of the road looking tiny and frail. Her long, dark hair blew wildly in the chilly breeze. Her face was a pale oval dominated by the shadowed circles of her eyes. She was dressed in a thin, white nightgown that provided scant protection against the weather.

"Well, have you?" The little girl's tone became demanding as she moved toward Mallory,

Mallory dumbly shook her head as she noticed a dark, irregularly shaped stain upon the left breast of the nightgown. Something about the mark repelled Mallory, making her wish the girl would keep her distance.

"I haven't seen your doll," Mallory managed to say, "What are you doing out here dressed like that? Where are your parents?"

The little girl shrugged her shoulders indifferently, “They don’t care where I am. I need to find my dolly.”

“Of course they care,” Mallory snapped irritably, setting the kickstand on the bike. She knew that her duty was to make sure the little girl was safe. “Let’s go. I’ll take you home and then tomorrow you can search for your doll.”

There was no answer. Mallory spun around to discover the child had vanished into the night. “Little girl,” Mallory called softly, “Where are you?”

There was a slight increase in the wind which whipped Mallory’s hair across her face. “She probably knows how to get home on her own,” Mallory said uncertainly. She started pushing the bike down the road, glancing nervously back down the dark street.

Mallory ascended the stairs happy in the realization that she was lucky enough to have arrived home before her parents. Switching on her bedroom light, she gave a sharp, surprised shriek. “What are you doing here?” She demanded of the little girl sitting on the edge of Mallory’s bed cradling a doll in her thin arms.

The girl glared at Mallory. “You lied to me. You said you didn’t know where Dolly was but she was right here all the time!”

Mallory stared in disbelief at the child. Uneasily, she wondered how the girl could have arrived before Mallory herself or bypassed locked doors to get into the house.

“I came to get Dolly, she’s mine,” the girl said sullenly as she rocked the doll.

“She’s not yours!” Provoked, Mallory responded by turning toward her bureau, “I can prove she’s mine.”

Mallory grabbed a photograph of herself as a little girl holding the doll in question. In shocked realization, Mallory peered at the picture of her younger self and then at the child perched upon her bed. They could have been the same person.

“Who are you?” Mallory asked shakily.

The little girl crooned to the doll. “They gave me Dolly when I was good. Then they said I was bad. They said I had to take my medicine.”

Mallory whispered, “Who are they?”

Horried, Mallory realized that the dried patch on the little girl’s nightgown was now a bright, shiny maroon color. She watched in disbelief as scarlet drops of viscous fluid oozed down the thin fabric.

The girl’s face suddenly contorted with fear, “They’re here!”

Terrified, Mallory spun around toward her bedroom door but no one was there. She turned back to question the little girl but her bed was now empty.

“Mallory!” She jumped, her mother was calling from downstairs, “Are you up there?”

She was prevented from answering by a fierce “ssh!”. The little girl peeked out from under Mallory’s bed, her finger pressed to her lips.

“Mallory,” her father was speaking angrily in a tone she had never heard before. “We’ve been out searching for you. You weren’t here when we came home.”

“We trusted you, Mallory,” her mother chimed in, sounding sad, “You lied to us.”

Mallory realized that the voices were drawing near. Panicked, she scuttled under the bed, joining the little girl and their shared doll. She moved backward until her feet hit the wall. Desperate for some form of comfort, Mallory blindly reached out, searching for the little girl but she found only emptiness.

The bed skirt flipped up and Mallory saw the now alien faces of her parents peering at her. Her father pushed his glasses up his nose, the large chef’s knife from the kitchen butcher block glinting in his hand.

“It’s time for you to take your medicine, Mallory,” he said gravely.

Jack, by Jen Ryan

The cobweb ghosts are splayed across the windows. Our pumpkin squats on the front steps. The time for ghosts and goblins is at hand. The kids are a flurry of costume ideas and plans for Halloween night. They start again this year, pleading, “Mom, couldn’t we please carve a pumpkin this year? Please?” Each year, I buy the pumpkin, but, new excuses each year, they never get carved. “Let’s plan ahead this year, Mom, so we are sure we have enough time to carve him.” They start planning, designing faces. They don’t know how carefully I do plan each year to run out of time.

They are older now and it has been so many years. Could we this once? The pictures have blurred. I rationalize and reconfigure the events of those nights. But, I won’t let myself forget. I bring it all into focus; the screams, the blood, the tears...

The first Halloween I was away at college. My flat mates and I grabbed a pumpkin on a whim. We carved it without considering. We set it on the steps and laughed our way thoughtlessly to a party. We thought nothing of it when we came home and he was gone. A Halloween prank, another pumpkin smashed no big deal. The next morning we read about the two girls. The next few years went along the same; Halloween parties with friends, carved pumpkins on the porch. I remember thinking how nice it would be to someday live in a neighborhood where the pumpkins didn’t get stolen each year. And each year there was tragedy. But there was so much everywhere all the time, how was I to know?

A few years passed. I was busy working. There wasn’t as much time for Halloween mischief. Then I met Dan. We rented a house. We bought things. We planned our life. When Halloween came, we of course bought a pumpkin. We carved him together, carefully, happily. Our jack-o-lantern sat on the porch that night. Kids came trick or treating. We smiled and complimented costumes.

The next morning we saw the flyers about the boy. We joined the neighbors in searching. Days passed. The jack-o-lantern sat still on the steps. Days later I picked him up to add him to the garbage. He had a crushed bottom, but he had made it through Halloween! Had his face changed? His crooked smile was cruel.

More years passed. Each year I grew more disheartened by all the violence and tragedy that came with Halloween. Each year I carved happier, sillier faces into our pumpkin. But every year that face surprised me as uglier, more frightening after Halloween had passed. You may criticize me for not recognizing a connection. I can’t say it ever crossed my mind. Really, it was just a pumpkin and I didn’t believe in things like that.

I do now. The kids were too small to remember that night. We had bought a pumpkin for them. We carved it together as a family. Well, the kids squished the seeds between their fingers and

cackled about the goo. But they oohed and ahed at the finished jack-o-lantern and we set him on the porch that Halloween night.

Dan heard a noise in the middle of that night. He told me he didn't think he had put the light out in the pumpkin. He said that he would be back in a minute. I waited. I dozed off. I was surprised when I woke up and he wasn't there. I called. I got up and looked around. I didn't find him anywhere, until I opened the front door. I screamed. I heard the door slam. The police arrived later. They said I called. They asked questions. They tried to comfort me. Someone asked if they should take the pumpkin away too. It was covered in blood. I must have said yes. I watched as they took the body away. I screeched in agony when I saw the face on the jack-o-lantern.

As I said, it has been years now. Another Halloween is here. I am busy planning activities to distract the kids from carving pumpkins this year. We bake and decorate. We design costumes and buy candy. We miss how life might have been. But we go on.

We went on - until tonight. I see him when I pull into the driveway. I fly into the house. I scream for the sitter. "What have you done?! Where are the kids?" She looks at me like I am a crazy person and tries to explain. The kids had told her that every year we run out of time to carve our pumpkin. So they had done it tonight as a surprise for me. I rant unintelligibly. She backs toward the door. I push toward her screaming, trying to explain. She opens the door trying to get away. She stumbles on the door mat, takes a giant step backward to catch her balance, catches her foot on the jack-o-lantern and tumbles over the railing. More screams, more blood, more tears. The ambulance comes. The body is taken away.

I stagger back inside, silent. As I turn to close the door, I see the contorted face of the jack-o-lantern. Jack looks pleased to have had help this time.

The Rock and The Ghost, by Betty J. Simecka

It was a beautiful Halloween night in 1945 with a moon that scooted in and out of clouds while a slight, brisk breeze kept the evening just chilly enough to make us shiver. Margie and I had split off from the rest of our little Halloween Trick or Treaters because our mothers thought that as girls ten years of age we weren't old enough to venture clear downtown and across the railroad tracks. Dressed as cowboys we reluctantly sauntered up the hill to walk the mile home. "Hey, Margie!" I yelled. "Let's do one more trick or treat." Of course, Margie agreed because neither of us thought we had near enough goodies to compare and gloat over at home with our older brothers who, by the way, got to go clear downtown and across the railroad tracks. Sometimes life can be so unfair when you are ten years old and a girl!

We were passing the Parker house. Old Mr. and Mrs. Parker were two of the grouchiest people in town. He was the local postmaster and never cracked a smile, especially when all one bought was one 3 cent stamp. Their house set up on a small hill so we climbed the four steps and crossed their yard and then up more steps on to their porch. There they were sitting at the table with the door open like they were welcoming us kids. A big bowl of oranges was in the middle of the table and the Parkers looked as if they were playing cards. So, I strode up to the door and gave a big knock while Margie and I yelled lustily, "Trick or Treat!" An orange would sure be good to eat on the way home.

They just sat there. They didn't even look at us. Thinking we weren't loud enough we repeated our actions. Again, nothing! Well, that did it! We marched off that porch and marshaled our best 'Trick' strategy, since we didn't get a treat and were ignobly ignored as well! Margie said, "Let's pull up all their Irises."

"No, no," I answered, "not good enough for those hombres." I had to stay in character. After all, we were cowboys! I spotted a huge rock by the flower garden and going over to it I told Margie, "We will let them know we were here. They won't ignore this!" I lugged the rock over to the porch and thought about the times my mother made me carry heavy baskets of wet laundry and buckets full of water for the pigs. I was pretty strong for a ten-year old girl. The rock made a resounding crash and in fact, more than I had anticipated. Margie and I looked at each other and took off like the two cowboy villains we now were. We reached the end of the block trying to catch our breath when we saw a blur of white. We both screamed thinking it was a ghost and then realized it was Old Man Parker running after us. We split and took off. Who knew the old guy could run so fast!

Margie headed straight up 6th Street but I took off to the west and hit Alma Street like a cowboy on a horse, except I didn't have a horse! "Oh, great!" I yelled. Parker was following me. I am a good runner having won blue ribbons in the last two track meets at school but the old guy was somehow not far behind. I turned right at 7th Street and then had another chilling moment when out stepped Mrs. Gerhard, the woman we called The Crazy Lady. We kids always walked on the

other side of the street from her house. Go near her house or yard and she would run out screaming with a broom. Yes, undoubtedly a witch!

I was running hard and I hear two sets of feet running behind me, Old Ghost-like Parker and the Witch Lady and she had her broom! All the while I am running they are yelling at me. *Where are the other kids? Where are the people in the houses? Why isn't anybody aware that I have demons on my heels?*

By now, I am getting winded running all out for several blocks. I turn left to go up to 8th street where I live but I still have about a half of mile to go. It's all uphill. That will slow my pursuers down. Oh, great! I am going past the funeral home! My legs are aching so I slow down to what? Rest my legs or watch out for ghosts coming out of the funeral home?

I screamed! Jumping out from behind a bush are two ghosts! At first I thought it was Parker and the Crazy Witch Lady, but no, after coming to a complete stop and looking I saw it was only Bobby and Clint, Margie's brother and his friend. "Oh, you two! You scared me!" They were laughing as they threw the sheets off and turned to head down the street from where I just came. Heads back laughing away in their cowboy outfits guess who they met up with? An old man in a bright white shirt and a Witch with a broom.

All I heard the next day when Margie's mother called my mother was that Clint had to spend the night at the police station explaining why he and Bobby threw a rock through Mr. and Mrs. Parker's porch and broke 3 boards. No one cared what Crazy Lady had to say but Mr. Parker was the Postmaster after all and had a sterling reputation. Clint and Bobby were finally cleared when the owner of the funeral home, who was Bobby's father, explained that the boys had been there at a special Halloween party.

I'm sure glad Margie could keep her mouth shut.

The Mantle Piece, by Dylan Smith

“Fuuuck what happened?” I mutter, trying to sit up. My brain it feels like it’s been through a blender. I start to sit up, but can barely will myself more than a few inches, and fall back down. “Shit” I say, “Wonder what I’ve got myself into this time...” I try and think back to the night before but it’s all a blur, party, pretty boy, he calls me his tiger, I blush, and then... something, I can’t get it straight. I’m spiraling and oh god, I manage to turn over and vomit onto the dirt. Dirt? Where the hell am I? There’s not dirt in the city. I stand up, but get knocked back down, wrenching up only some yellow and green bile. I look around, I’m surrounded only by the unhallowed silhouettes of trees.

I start to panic and try to think back. What the hell happened? Where am I? I can’t think straight, all I remember is the party and then what? We went to his car, started to tease each other, and then we got to.... a house, a big house. “Dammit!” I shout, my voice is hoarse and my throat sears at the exclamation. The memory slips away again. I steady myself and get onto my feet, all I want to do is go back to sleep again but not here, it’s freezing, and these trees seriously give the claustrophobic me even more of a reason to get out. Then I hear it, a horn, it’s blaring some simple tune, it sounds like something I’ve heard on the TV or radio before. Ugh fuck, never mind that, I need to get to the noise, maybe they’ll be able to help me I think to myself hoping I can reach them soon. I stumble my way through the trees, I can barely see, only the moonlight is filtering through the half fallen leaves and branches of this hell hole.

I hear another horn, it sounds closer now but playing a different tune, and then “BANG” What the fuck is that?! Someone’s screaming, shrieking in pain, and I hear a group yell, mocking him, making him beg, plead for his life. Then, “BANG” an uneasy silence settles over the forest. I’m breathing fast, shaking, I sit down. My memory starts to come back to me more. “That bastard” tears start to sting my eyes as I recall the man. He brought me back to his mansion, we had some drinks, and shared laughs. Soon my vision started to blur, and that’s when he kissed me, and whispered in my ear “I’ve drugged you, so now and when you wake up, well you my tiger, will become the prey.”

A jolt of adrenaline rushes up my spine and throughout my body. I turn and bolt away as fast as I can from the noise. I can hear dogs barking, loud, shit what’s happening? I keep running, as fast as I can, I need to get away from these psychos. I hear a branch snap against me, and can tell it cut deep when I feel the blood well out of my chest. I can’t slow down for even a second. My chest stings, I hear another horn. “BOOM” then more silence. From the sound of it they’re gaining on me, I hear their laughs as they lavish in the thrill of the hunt.

I pick up the pace, rushing to find any way out, and then crash into something, I hear a groan and look down to see a man, old enough to be my grandpa, lying on the ground. He looks at me, I see a tear run down his face and onto his tattered clothes. “Run, go! I’m going to die soon anyway, go save yourself!” He coughs and I see blood gush into his hands. I nod and sprint away. I have to make it out of here, I need to I tell myself. I can see an opening, it’s my only hope, I hasten speed, trying to dodge branches with the help of dawn’s light. “BANG” I hear the old man’s

final cry. I stop and turn around for a moment before rushing off towards the light. I hear a dog bark and the gallop of a horse just behind me.

I charge and crash through the last of the trees and see it, the ocean, lapping waves, and no end in sight. There was never any way for me to survive. “CRACK” the shot pierces through my leg, I fall to me knees and start to weep. I hear two voices, arguing, all I can make out is a woman saying “Fine, whatever you want, asshole” I turn and see the sun start to rise, and then turn around to see him walking towards me. My one minute love, sporting a cocky grin and dark red coat. All I can do is watch as he walks up to me and bends down, cupping my head with my hand. “Congratulations Tiger, you won, you’re the last man standing. I knew you had it in you” I can barely get the words out, “Do-does... this mean I’m free?” He looks at me, softness in his eyes and sweetness in his smile, and then kisses me. I can taste his fire, he takes my breath away. And that’s when I feel the blade slide across my throat, and hear my hunter say “Don’t worry Tiger, I won’t forget you, you’ll be right on my mantle.”

Dark Eyes, by Joey Sutter

“I think that the band Marauder has gotten better. I think that their sound is more mellow and...” the DJ’s voice trailed off.

“What is it, Brett?” Jeremy, DJ of KOWL, asked his partner.

“Look over there.” His voice sounded distant.

A brief pause. “What in the world? Who let those people in here?”

Thirty seconds passed. “Look at their eyes. It’s like they are zombies.”

“What is this...” Jeremy said with annoyance creeping into his voice. “Some kind of prank? I’m going to call security.” They heard a window shatter.

“Oh no, they are coming in!”

“Run for it Brett! Run!” Wild animal growling dominate the airwave before it went completely static.

“That was weird.” Ashley walked over to the radio and changed the station.

“It’s just a joke.” As he swept the floor, Bruce didn’t flinch. “Let’s just finish cleaning and go home.”

She agreed. “Yes, but I do much better with music.” With a new station blasting music, she went into the kitchen. She loaded the dishes into the dishwasher. Then, she started it. She put the dish tray away and returned to the dining area only to find her co-worker staring out the window intensely.

“What’s going on, Bryce?” She furrowed her brow. He pointed out the window. She jumped when she observed a man with his face up against the window. His breathing fogged up the window.

“That’s freaky.” Their reaction didn’t deter the man’s staring. She moved closer to Bryce. “What’s he doing?”

“I think we should call the cops,” she told him.

“And tell them that a man is staring into the window? I don’t think that illegal. It’s called window shopping.”

“It’s just like the radio.” Goosebumps washed over her skin. “Remember before it went off air, they said there were people staring at them with black eyes.”

He shrugged. “I think you’re overreacting. He’s just some druggie. Just close the blinds if you have a problem with it.”

She couldn’t believe his nonchalant attitude. Hesitant initially, She pushed herself to the window. What if he tried to break the window? She desired to ask Bryce to do it, but he would call her a baby. Sighing, she found courage to close the blind. Ignoring the man as best she could, she grabbed the curtains. Just as she closed it, three more zombie men stopped to stare. She backed away from the window.

She sprinted over to the radio and flipped the station, hoping to find news about the situation. KOWL still broadcasted static. As she searched for a new station, the power drifted off, causing her to scream.

He rushed back into the room. “What is going on?” Holding her hands to her face, she breathed deeply.

He stood right in front of her face. “What’s going on?”

“They are out there. I saw three more. There are four out there now.”

“What?” he looked toward the window. “No way. It’s your imagination.”

“No, I saw them.” She sobbed. “Go see for yourself.”

Sighing, he touched her shoulder. “I’ll check and then you have to drop it.” She nodded.

Covering her eyes, she held her breath. He cackled. “There’s no one out there. That first freak is gone.”

Confident he lied, she ran over to the window to discover no one outside. “They were just there.”

He laughed. “They were just playing with you. It’s fine.” He walked away from the window. “I’m going to go check out back and see if I can fix the lighting.” using his cell phone for light, he walk toward the kitchen. Before he entered the, she grabbed his arm. “No don’t go out there. They are out there.” She blocked his path.

“Oh, come on, you’re being paranoid.” Gently, he patted her on the back. “Stay here. It’s probably nothing.”

“I’m calling the cops.”

“Please don’t. If you want to call someone, call the electric company.” His words left her flabbergasted.

She called 911. "Sorry we are experiencing a high volume of calls right now. Please leave your name and your phone number and we will try to reach you as soon as possible." Ignoring the message, she hung up and sped to warn Bryce.

In the kitchen, reality hit. She stood all alone in the dark with four crazed maniacs outside. "Great," she sighed. The back door stood open. She wanted to save Bryce, so she calmed herself and stepped toward the door. One baby step at a time, she peered outside. She found no Bryce. The lamppost provided a slight light into the alley.

Pausing, she thought about calling Bryce, but if someone heard her, they'd know she wandered outside. Silently, she tiptoed out. No Bryce. Two more steps, still no sign of Bryce. "Bryce," she whispered. She checked the back of the restaurant, but still no one. She walked toward the sidewalk, stepping over bottles and trash. "Bryce."

She treaded out of the alley and onto the sidewalk. "Ashley!" She jumped and punched her co-worker in the chest.

"Ow!" he yelled. "Why did you do that?"

"You're a jackass! Go inside now!" she pushed him down the alley and into the restaurant. Once the door slammed, she bolted the lock.

"You think this is a joke! They're out there!" She rushed back into the main room. She called 911. "Listen to this," she handed it to him. He listened to the message and stood like a statue. "I told you." She reached out and tried to use her cell phone to look up news stories when she noticed he still remained frozen.

"What is it?" she asked.

He pointed. She turned and saw the four men standing before them with lifeless eyes. "Oh, no," she whispered.

The Bridge, by Thomas Vega

Everyone In Crimson Cove knew about the covered bridge outside of town. It was a decrepit bridge built in the early 1800's. It stretched across the river north of town where an old farm once stood. Stories were told of strange sightings and disappearances during the numerous fogs that would roll through Crimson Cove from the sea shore west of town. It was common knowledge amongst the locals to never go near the bridge during a fog.

Three young boys; James age 12, Kyle age 13, and his little brother Michael age 10 were walking through the town one day when James came up with the great idea of going to the bridge one day after school.

"Hey c'mon James, you're not afraid are you?"

"Of course I'm not. I just don't think it be a good idea to bring Michael with us."

"I can go too, I'm not afraid!" The youngest boy responded angrily.

"See James it'll be fine."

"Okay Kyle, but if the fog comes we aren't going to stick around. Deal?"

"Deal."

After school the three boys left and headed straight for the bridge to satisfy their curiosity. When they got there they immediately stopped to look around. They noticed the wood beams supporting the ceiling though aged seemed to still be in good shape, and the planks themselves looked almost new.

"Strange looking at it you wouldn't know that this thing is over 200 years old." James remarked as the three made their way across. On the other side they found a small clearing where they sat and talked about their classes and teachers. They even played keep away with one of Michael's books when James noticed it was starting to get cloudy.

"Guy's we need to head back." He looked down and noticed the fog around his feet. The three took off running for the bridge hoping to make it back before the fog grew thick, but as they reached the bridge the fog became so thick you couldn't even see a foot in front of you. When Kyle and James made it across they noticed Michael was missing.

"Where is he!?" Kyle asked frantically looking around.

"He was right behind us!" James answered. As the two drew close to the bridge to look for Kyle's brother they heard a loud shriek from across the bridge followed by a blast of warm air

that cleared the fog for just an instant giving them a brief glimpse of a tall dark figure staring at them. The two ran for town as fast as they could and told Kyle's parents what had happened. When the fog finally cleared the whole town started looking for young Michael, but all that was found was his book bag covered in blood and splatters of blood on the ground and ceiling of the bridge.

Two weeks had passed without a sign of the young boy. James and Kyle hardly spoke a word to each other, until one day another thick fog like the one before rolled through. James decided to go visit Kyle and his family, and told his mother he was going to Kyle's for a bit and left. When the fog lifted James' mother tried calling Kyle's house, but there was no answer. She tried Kyle's mother on her cell with no answer. Soon James' mother became frantic and left for Kyle's house. When she got there cops were all over the place. From her car she saw what looked like small bloody handprints on the front door. She ran up pushing past the cops and through the front door.

"James!" She screamed heading into the living room where a set of bloody footprints led. She stopped and gasped covering her mouth to keep from screaming when she saw Kyle's father lying dead on the floor. His face twisted in a look of fear; his body dried as if he was mummified. She then followed the trail to the kitchen where Kyle's mother was sitting on the floor by the stove clutching a butcher knife. The family's supper was still cooking on the stovetop burner. She knew this was not possible. Kyle's mother also looked like she had been dead a while, her body a dried husk with the same look of terror, but she had just talked to her yesterday and there was food cooking. There was no way they've been dead long enough to look like that. She then went upstairs following the bloody footprints to Kyle's room where she found Kyle curled in the corner dried and terrified. She followed the footprints back out into the hall and to Michael's old room. When she opened the door she immediately noticed her own son a dry dead corpse with a look of horror on his face. As she kneeled down to touch her son's face she heard a creaking from the closet door behind her. She followed the footprints to the door and opened the closet and let out a blood curdling scream. The cops ran up the stairs to Michael's bedroom and saw James' mother screaming and pointing at the closet.

"Dear God!" One of the cops exclaimed as the other opened the door completely to reveal the bloody corpse of Michael heaped on the floor. His skin peeled from his body, and his lower jaw and tongue missing. No one knew what really happened in that house during the fog, but the police and fire department burned the bridge the next morning, and shut the road heading up to where the bridge once stood hoping to rid Crimson Cove of that curse once and for all.

Idaho Springs, *by Erin Virgil*

We start driving on Saturday morning, no place in mind, nothing to do. On the edge of Arapahoe National Forest we pull over. You take your pipe, I take my camera.

We set out on a path, step off and become lost immediately. Twenty minutes later we come to a tree house lookout tower strung between two trees and a stone wall half sunk into the ground. The Aspens are gold, are losing their gold. A dozen meters on: two boarded up, bullet-riddled cabins. As soon as we get to the clearing between them, a sharp wind rushes in, picks up a pile of leaves and throws it at us.

The first shots were fired a little before five in the morning.

The bodies were half gone by the time the law arrived, the guns never turned up. Around the corpses: scattered shell casings like shit from some monstrous bird. The babies were a week old, give or take. Windows were blown out, just eyeholes. Walls all scarred with lead.

You climb up to a dirt road above the cabins. "What's there?" I call. "It's...*fear*...I think something terrible happened here," you say, and walk off.

The bent over old man fired first, with a .22 rifle. With a bone pipe clenched in his jaw. Bone on bone. He started everything and now his nasty ghost won't stray an inch off the property.

The larger cabin is not boarded up. I scale the wall: it's black as pitch inside, with the suggestion of furniture. Then there is a noise like something trying to push something across a dirty floor. In response I fall to the ground, the fall of someone trying to protect an expensive camera.

John Calway and Nessa Jones grew up three towns apart in Ohio. They met at a dance when he was seventeen and she was fifteen and she'd certainly put him off for a while but they ended up married and leaving town before the year was out. They messed around in Chicago and St. Louis, jumped trains going west, west, always west and somewhere in Oklahoma they stopped to find a doctor for Nessa and a job for John. No jobs, ("There's a depression on, haven't you heard?") but the doctor said she was fine to travel so they caught out again, to Denver this time, where the mines were hiring. John got a job in a mine outside the city in a dead town, Idaho Springs.

Nessa was seven months on when they finally found a cabin with a real floor, deep in the woods. Before this they'd shacked up in a hobo camp.

We're less brave as the light retreats, we're in a valley between stone mountains. One cabin is low to the ground and has the outline of a horseshoe over the door. The other cabin, a hundred feet uphill, is larger and an Aspen leans over the roof like a bony hand. The sense of something rattling around.

H. Rath, Jr. rented his spare cabin out of need only; he didn't want anyone else in his woods. He'd put an ad in the paper and suddenly these kids knocked on his door. She was busting out of her floozy dress but they had two months' rent upfront. He'd kick them out before the girl had the baby.

John & Nessa moved up to the small log cabin in August. Their cruddy old landlord was always muttering curses, staring at them through the curtains of the big cabin. John sensed this man had failed someone important and was living out the rest of his cursed life in solitary confinement, chewing his bone pipe.

Later, we stand apart between the cabins. In the little yard: rusted shovels, rakes, remnants of a chicken coop. There's a dilapidated outhouse between the cabins and what could once have been a mailbox. The junk here is threatening; if you touched the mailbox you'd slice your hand and need a tetanus shot. The outhouse wood is rotting, traces of red paint remain. The smaller cabin sags like an old mouth. You say, "I've never felt such fear in a place, it's like a bloody battle went down right where we're standing."

Nessa had twins on a Friday evening in October. No midwife would come up for the delivery, there was an early storm and the dirt road lay under a foot of snow. The landlord would not let them use his truck, tires already chained, to get down to a hospital so it was just Nessa, John and a howling wind. He cut the babies free with the kitchen knife. A boy and a girl. They wouldn't stop crying, so John put them on their sheepskin blanket and they quieted down. He gave his wife some brandy and talked softly about their train rides until she fell asleep.

The sun's half set, a chill is gathering. I photograph the shadow parts of the cabins and we start back.

Shortly after the babies were born, H. Rath snapped. Six days six nights of constant wailing was all he could take. On the gray morning of the seventh day, he cleaned out his .22 and shot into the air, a declaration. The young man, sooty-faced from the mine, ran from the cabin with a pistol in each hand; H. Rath stood ready, rifle at his shoulder and pipe in his jaw, bone on bone. Breathing smoke.

It takes serious effort not to turn around and look back. Just a few meters away the atmosphere changes, the woods are like any other woods, calm and quiet. Occasional night birds wake up, sound off. We walk in very quietly; most of today has happened quietly. There's the first trail we stepped off without trying, how did we ever get lost? All around: the absence of what hung around the cabins. The sky changes from dusk to evening as we walk. When we reach the car it's night.

Phantom of the Operating Room, by Kelvin L. Woelk

Despite my vow—made after visiting my father after his surgery—to never enter another one by choice, I found myself on Halloween helping Jason move his last few boxes and couch into the old hospital building. The restoration was on hold again because another worker quit. Jason’s mom served on the Historical Society’s board who agreed to the arrangement. At least the pipes wouldn’t freeze.

“You know what they say about it,” I said as he parked.

“It’s just a building,” he said.

Some buildings shouldn’t be lived in, I thought.

We carried his boxes into a large room that smelled of stale air, sawdust, paint, and something unfamiliar, medicinal. We brought in the couch, setting it against the wall next to a partially open window. There was also a small desk, a lamp, and a coffee table with an old photo album on it.

“The recovery room’s there,” Jason said, “my kitchen now. Bedrooms are back here.” We crossed to a small, dark hallway. He flipped a switch inside a room empty except for a gray metal frame on wheels, with a handle on the side and a worn mattress on top.

“Check this out,” he said excitedly. “Original equipment!” He cranked the handle and one end of the bed started to slowly rise. The sounds of old wires and springs being unwillingly stretched echoed in the room, sounding disturbingly like metallic screams.

“What’s back there?” I asked, looking toward a closed door further down the hall.

“Don’t know,” he said. “I wasn’t given a key. The only way into the apartment is the door in the living room. So you wanna move in? Rent’s cheap. Five minutes from campus.”

I said I’d think about it, but all I could think about was that door. And being alone in the place at night and hearing a knock on the other side. Unlikely, sure. But the place wouldn’t seem like such a bargain afterward.

“Oh, and you gotta see this,” Jason said, heading back to the living room and the couch. “My mom found these.” He flipped pages in the photo album. “Look at this one.”

Three figures in white gowns, their faces nearly hidden by masks, one wearing a pair of small wire glasses, stood around a low table. On the table another figure lay flat, with something held over the nose and mouth. A caption read ‘First surgery, October 28, 1928.’

“My living room’s the OR!” he said, tapping the picture. I looked closer. The window

behind us was the same one visible in the picture. Incredibly it was open in the picture too. “Dr. Ritzliff!” I said, recalling stories I had heard. “I hope *this* operation was necessary.”

“You’re so morbid,” Jason said, closing the album. “That stuff gets blown out of proportion. Besides, the heart attack put an end to those questions a long time ago. I’ll give you a lift home. I gotta get the place ready. Party’s at seven.”

Later, at dinner, my mom said Jason’s mom had called her while I was out. “She’s worried about him there,” she said. “Said she was having second thoughts, that some buildings shouldn’t be lived in.”

I didn’t mention having the same thought or Jason’s offer.

I went upstairs and put on a pair of sweats, some slippers, and an old t-shirt, adding a spot of fake blood above my appendix. I put makeup under my eyes and slipped on my old bathrobe. Not the most original costume, but I was tired of my fears ruling my life sometimes.

The apartment was packed. Jason apparently knew a lot of people. I talked to a lot of girls and felt surprisingly sociable. Four or five hours passed so enjoyably that when the last people left, I wanted to move in. I also realized I hadn’t seen Jason in a while and that I had drank more than I thought. I decided to stay for a bit longer so my head could clear and I could tell Jason my decision. A neatly folded blanket and a pillow sat on the end of the couch. I briefly wondered who had put there as I pulled the blanket over me.

What seemed like just a few minutes later, I opened my eyes and shielded them against a bright light. I’m fine, I tried to say. But what I saw choked off the words.

The figure stood beside me, looking down. A mask obscured the lower part of the face, a pair of wire glasses sat just above it. Something metallic glinted in the light and I yelled just as I felt the cold edge of the metal on my side. The bright light went out, leaving just the room’s dimmer, familiar one.

“You okay?” a voice asked.

“Yeah,” I managed to say.

“Not bad for the first party,” Jason said. “Hope I didn’t miss much. Sorry to wake you. You were making some weird sounds out here.”

I sat up. “I had more than I thought,” I said. “And I don’t sleep well in strange places. Maybe I should head home.”

He didn’t protest, and I drove home with the window open and slept without any more dreams.

“I’m guessing you had a good time,” my mom said the next morning.

“Yeah,” I said, feeling a strange sensation on my right side. Recalling the dream, I nervously raised my shirt. There was nothing. “Yeah, I think he’s going to be okay there.”

Then the phone rang. Somehow I knew who it was. I said I was thinking of moving in.

"You'll have the place to yourself," Jason said.

I asked why, which is when he told me about the dream and the mark on his side.

“Some buildings shouldn’t be lived in,” he said. “Can you help me with the couch?”