



DREAMING IN DARKNESS

A Collection of High School Horror

FREDERICK DREAMCATCHER • OCTOBER 17

“Where there is no imagination,
there can be no horror.”

--Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Original cover art provided by Frederick senior Milagro Silva.

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Ruler of the Night

Kayla Lorimer

Blood dripped from the alleyway walls. The melodic staccato soothed Miles and he stepped back to admire his work. A grin spread across his face, and he spread his tongue across his red-stained teeth. But then Miles's face went slack as laughter began to bubble from the pale corpses... mocking laughter...

Miles shot into a sitting position in the pitch black, breathing heavily. He jolted as he realized that he was just having a dream sunk in. His breath came in sporadic gasps as he tried to calm himself. Miles tried to sit up by pushing up on his palms.

They slipped.

Miles fell back into the slick warmth that covered his sheets. The metallic stench of the fluid around him overwhelmed his senses. He could almost taste it. *This can't be real*, he thought. Miles sat petrified with fear until the smell finally became too much. After what seemed like an eternity, he made himself push up and out of the wetness to go turn on the light. *It's just a nosebleed*, he thought, trying to convince himself. *A nosebleed accompanied by a nightmare.*

He flicked the light switch on and turned back to his bed. His once-white sheets were stained by dark red patches. He looked down to see himself similarly soaked in warm blood.

He quickly surveyed himself: he ran his hands over his torso, neck, head, and legs but found no injuries that could have produced that much blood. He didn't even find scratches or paper cuts. His stomach dropped to the floor even as its contents rushed to his throat.

It's not my blood.

His panic rising, Miles ran to his parents' room to find it empty. He briefly worried before remembering they were out of town-- he had chosen to stay home to take extra shifts at work so he could get his first car. Miles ran through every room in his house, turning on every light, checking the lock on every window, and opening every closet door. He found nothing.

Fear-crazed thoughts raced through his mind, trying to compensate for the horror of waking up covered in someone else's blood. He ended up in the kitchen and settled into a chair.

Calm down, Miles, he told himself. You're alone. Covered in blood. At... He checked the clock on the stove. ...five in the morning.

Numb, he robotically made a cup of strong coffee. He stripped off his bloody clothes and added them to the bag. After he scrubbed himself down in the shower, he slowly put on clean clothes and wrapped himself in a blanket. He began to drift off and snapped himself awake, refusing to go back to the nightmare that just occurred. He drank another cup of coffee and turned the TV onto its loudest volume.



Morning came. Miles stared at the streams of sunlight, interrupted by the blinds. He checked his phone. There were a bunch of “I’m safe” posts on social media and a few texts from his best friend Layton.

Hey, something happened last night.
Remains were found. A teen. Don't know who.
Think it's someone we know?
You okay? Text me back.

Miles quickly texted back that he was okay, even though he really wasn't.

Good. See you at work.

Miles closed his eyes and sighed. *Work, I forgot.* He went into his parent's room and looked for his dad's boots -- his were still in his room, but Miles didn't want to back there yet. He couldn't face the mess. He finally found an old pair of leather work boots, snatched his keys off the counter, and got into his dad's old pickup. Miles looked in the rearview mirror.

Sunken, dark grey eyes looked back at him.

Miles hit the brakes, jarring himself with the force. Miles whipped around to the back seat, but no one was there. The only thing on the backseat was his toolbox.

He rubbed his eyes and pulled down the mirror. He looked at his reflection: black hair, blue eyes, everything normal except for the dark bags that replaced his eyelids. He swung the mirror back up and sighed.

Though it took twenty minutes to get to the orchard, Miles didn't turn on the radio. He needed the silence. He kept thinking, *Who's the missing person? Is that where the blood came from? Why... How did I do it? Why don't I remember?* Miles figured it must have happened while he was asleep. *Okay, so I just have to drink lots of coffee and not go to sleep again until I figure out what's going on.* He stopped at a gas station and bought every energy drink they had. As he drove off, he popped the first can open and chugged, hoping it would help him stay awake.

He pulled into the orchard. After clocking in, he took his post at the entrance and got ready for a long day of explaining the apple picking process and giving directions to the bathroom. Layton was there, waiting for him.

"You look awful," Layton said.

"Thanks, man. I really needed that." Miles rolled his eyes.

"So they found out who it was."

"What?" Miles was lost in his own thoughts.

"The body. The one all hacked up they found last night."

"Hacked up?"

"Yeah. They say it was done with a small blade, like a box cutter."

Miles gulped. "Who... who was it?"

"Kyle Tyson."

Miles took a deep breath, relieved. *Not as bad as I thought it would be.* "Oh. Okay."

"Okay? Dude, someone just died."

"Well, I mean it's bad, but..." A dark thought entered Miles's head.

"But what?"

"...You know, out of everyone that it could have been, I'm kinda glad he's gone. He was a total jerk."

"Well, yeah -- he was a tool, but that doesn't mean he should get sliced and diced."

"That's not what I'm saying." Miles felt his cheeks flush. "No one should just be killed, but if someone had to be found dead, well, at least it's him and not someone who matters."

Layton took a step back, tilting his head at Miles. "You're pretty calm about this. Didn't murder anyone to get in the Halloween spirit, did you?"

Miles felt his panic rise. "What? No!"

"You never did like him. Wasn't there a thing between you two a couple days ago... a fight?"

Miles felt himself go pale when Layton looked concerned. "I swear I didn't." He held his hands up in defense and Layton laughed.

"Relax, man. You look like I just really accused you of being guilty."

"Some friend you are," Miles said angrily walking away.

"C'mon, take a joke, man."

Miles walked back to his truck, and opened the door to the backseat. The toolbox was still there. He wasn't sure if he wanted to look inside. *Don't worry, he told himself, it'll be there. Like it always is. And if it's missing... still doesn't mean you did it.* Despite his shaking hands, Miles pulled the box toward him and looked inside.

His box cutter was there.

And it was covered in blood.



He couldn't wait until work was done. He got in the truck and raced home.

I killed him. I killed Kyle. It was me.

Once he got home, he immediately went to the kitchen and rinsed off his box utter. He then grabbed a trash bag and ran upstairs to clean up his bed. He gagged when he walked in: the stench of dried blood was overwhelming. He put his hands on his knees and squeezed his eyes shut. *I can't stop... I've got to keep going.* He forced himself to grab his bedsheets and throw them in the bag. The blood had soaked through to his pillows and mattress pad, but thankfully his mattress was spared. He wadded up the pillows and pad and took them down to the laundry room. He poured in as much bleach as he could and started the cycle.

Miles sat, staring at the pink water oscillate in the washer and considering what he knew. Kyle was dead. He did it. *I must have fallen asleep and... sleepwalked? Yeah, I must have sleepwalked to Kyle's. My dream... he was in an alley. I must have done it in the alley behind his building. But why did I do it?* He considered what Kyle had done to him. Years of bullying. Nicknames. And last week...

Miles remembered. *Katie. He took Katie from me. That was the last straw.*

As he watched the washer spin hypnotically, Miles considered his actions. *I'm glad he's dead. Now he won't be able treat anyone like that again. I'm glad I did it. I guess I only had the courage when I slept. A sleepwalking killer... who would have thought?*

His eyes felt heavy.

It-It's good what I did.

The doorbell rang.

Miles's eyes fluttered open as he stood up to answer the door. It was Layton.

"Hey man, why'd you take off from work like that? Mr. Ryan's gonna kill you."

Miles shook the sleep out of his head. "Sorry man, I was just upset and felt sick. I had to go home."

Layton smiled. "That's okay, man. Just let someone know so you don't get fired." Layton wandered into the kitchen and saw Miles's supply of energy drinks. "Mind if I have one?"

"Go for it," Miles said.

"Thanks." Layton took a large gulp, then started laughing. "You know, when you ran off like that, part of me thought you did it because I was joshing you about killing Kyle."

Miles swallowed hard. "Yeah?"

Layton kept laughing. "Yeah. The way you went all pale and stormed off. Imagine! You killing someone!"

Miles quietly asked, "What's so funny about that?"

Layton looked at him. "Come on. You're like, what, 120 lbs.? You don't have the stomach to do what happened to Kyle. You're too much of a pansy."

"Oh I am?" Miles eyed the freshly rinsed box cutter on his counter.

"Come on, you know it's true. Plus, they think they found the guy who iced Kyle. Some drifter. Can you believe that?"

"You know, I'm not a weakling that you can push around." Miles had an angry edge in his voice.

"Oh, okay," Layton mocked "Chill, *killer*."

Miles stomped upstairs to the bathroom. He breathed heavily, clutching the sides of his sink to keep his hands from shaking. *He's just like Kyle. Always acting like he's better than me. He's not. He doesn't know what I did. He doesn't know what I could do.*

Miles looked up at the mirror. Sunken, gray eyes stared back.

Miles smiled. He stopped shaking. He opened the cabinet, took out a bottle, and headed back downstairs.

"Sorry if I hurt your *feelings*," Layton said in a baby voice. He had finished his drink and bent down to throw it in the trash under the sink.

"It's been a very long day. I wouldn't test me, kid."

"Calm down, buddy. Just trying to cheer you up." Layton checked his watch. "Well, I've gotta get back before lunch is over. You feeling up to coming back to work?"

Miles calmly said, "No. I think I'll stay here a while."

Layton sighed. "Your loss."

"Before you go," Miles asked, "could you help me with this bag?" He watched Layton with a quirked brow and dark eyes. "I am such a weakling, after all."

Layton rolled his eyes. "Still can't take a joke."

Layton turned away and grabbed the bag, while Miles grabbed the boxcutter.

"You need help with this? It's super light. What's in here?"

Layton opened the bag as Miles popped the sleeping pill into his mouth.

Running from the Shell

Nathan Petersen

It was August 8th, 1918, and it felt like the end of the world.

“Private Jensen, did you forget how to use your legs?” Sergeant Freeman yelled over the impacts of the artillery shells.

I had been falling behind due to the exhaustion. I ran back up to them. There was pain and a burning feeling in my lungs. It felt as though we had been running through the trenches for hours. I, along with my younger brother Peter and two other soldiers in my squad, had been ordered to repel the German storm troopers and continue our advance toward the French town of Amiens.

“We’re almost there. The bunker just up the hill is firing down on our soldiers,” said Sergeant Freeman. “If we can get up to it, we can take it out.” Freeman had just recently become the leader of our squad. I didn’t like him very much.

As we neared the bunker, Freeman shouted, “Pop a grenade in there, Taggart,” to one of the other squadmates. He threw the grenade through the window of the bunker, and we ran to the trench below. The explosion shook the ground... yet there were no screams.

Suddenly, German soldiers jumped up from the mud, their rifles fixed on us. We were surrounded.

“*Auf deinen knien!*” they shouted. “On your knees!” We complied.

The German commander stepped toward us. “You thought you could kill us that easily?” His accent was strong, “We saw you running toward the bunker and decided you’d be of more use to us as prisoners rather than corpses.”

My heartbeat raced as I tried to find a way out of this. Almost instinctively, I leapt toward him, tackling him to the ground.

The rest of my squad tried to do the same. The German soldiers fought back. I decided to make a run for it. The commander got up and shot in my direction, barely missing me. The Germans stayed in the trench, as I scurried to hide in a nearby crater.

“You!” his voice echoed across the scorched battlefield. “You have his green eyes. The one who ran, he is your brother, no?” I realized that he was talking to Peter, and I put my hand up to my mouth.

He waited for an answer, but all Peter could do was sob.

“How does it feel to be left by your family?” he asked coldly.

Oh God, please don't let this happen, I thought, a knot in my gut.

“Perhaps I shall teach that coward a lesson.”

A gunshot shattered the sky.



After running for what felt like hours, I found safety in a bunker. Peeking through a crack in the wall, I saw the enemy soldiers run past, still looking for me. I let out a sigh of relief, but was then overtaken by guilt. *I left Peter to die. It should have been me.*

We had volunteered together right after Congress declared war. We had been through every battle together, both in the war and out. Peter had dreams of our postwar life, finding wives and living to be wise old men. Those dreams had been cut short. *I cut them short.*

I could feel the world falling apart, and I was unable to tell what was real. Sounds echoed through my head and my vision blurred. It was impossible to stand, and my breathing shortened.

I will die here, I thought. There was no way I would be able to get back to the Allies. I turned to the entrance of the bunker. A man stood there. A shadow. “Stay back!” I coughed as he slowly moved closer and closer. He knelt down in front of me. I could see his face a little better. It was pale as a sheet. There was a deep round scar on his forehead. It looked like a bullet wound. Through the rest of the scars on his face, I could make out some features.

“No. It can't be!”

I stared directly into his green eyes. My brother's eyes.

Peter's face was cold and empty, devoid of any emotion. The silence rang in my ears. I tried to move, but nothing happened. He slowly walked toward me, and I realized I could see light through him. Paralyzed with fear, I froze until I was face to face with the shadow.

"You killed me," he finally whispered. The words echoed through the emptiness. "You left me to die there."

I wanted to run away, but I couldn't. A gun appeared from Peter's side. He rose it to the scar and his forehead, then turned it toward me. I stared straight into the barrel.

The gun fired. Everything went black.



"Welcome back private," the medic said, "You were out for about a day now. We found you unconscious in a bunker deep in No Man's Land. Some of the boys brought you back here. It's a miracle you survived. That place was crawling with Huns. Though, from what I can tell, you're mostly unharmed, aside from a few bruises."

I was still in somewhat of a daze while he talked to me. *It must have been a dream*, I thought, though my uneasy feeling stayed.

He helped me up, but my legs felt like jelly. "The commander needs as many soldiers as he can get, so we're gonna have to get you back out there. Think you can walk?"

"I'll be fine," I grumbled. The pain shot up through my body, but dissipated over time.

"Go get in the infantry truck. It'll take you to Amiens. We'll be making our way towards the center of the town. There's a good spot for a command post there." The medic said. I got dressed and climbed into the truck. Another soldier handed me a rifle.

The trip there was loud and bumpy. While the other soldiers chatted, I remained silent, focused on my dream. We finally stopped at the outskirts of the town. A storm was approaching.

"Alright soldiers, move!"

We ran into the town, hiding in buildings and behind rubble. The chaos from the crossfire made my ears ring. A trench whistle blew, and the shouts of soldiers could be heard in the distance.

As we continued to push through Amiens, I started to lose sight of the other soldiers. The noises of battle began to trail off through the alleyways. I looked around, but no one was in sight. It started to rain, and puddles formed at my feet. I knew I had to move.

As I ran through the alleyways, the rain became more intense. Strong winds shot past me carrying what sounded like whispers. I ran faster. A feeling of uneasiness stirred up inside me. I turned a corner and slammed into someone. I dropped my rifle and fell to the ground, but the person didn't budge.

I looked up to see Peter, still pale, still angry. His green eyes glared down at me.

"Please. Leave me alone," I cried. With a flash of lightning he disappeared, though I could still feel his presence. I got up and continued running. I looked behind me and there he stood, around twenty yards back, watching me.

"You can't escape me," he said. The words sent chills through my bones. I tried to turn a corner, but there he stood, blocking my path. I continued running in another direction.

"I will always find you." I could see him, in buildings, in reflections. There truly was no escape. With each turn, I felt he was directing me to where he wanted me to go. I seemed to be running in circles and had no clue where I was. Each step I took led me further into this unending labyrinth.

"You let me die!" Peter grew closer and closer. The alleys became darker and I felt like I was going to suffocate. He appeared in front of me so I slammed through the door of a nearby building. I quickly barricaded the entrance behind me.

I was met with a massive dining hall. It was dark, but lightning flashed through the windows. The chairs and tables seemed untouched. I stopped to breath. He felt further away now, like he was planning what to do next. The smell of rain overpowered my nose. I shivered from the wet clothes I wore. Water dribbled down, leaving a large, shimmering puddle on the tile floor.

The building was quiet. My heartbeat seemed louder than the rain falling on the roof. My pulse slowly began to calm back to normal. Walking through the mansion, I saw the beauty of the French architecture. It was a shame the war was demolishing all of this, but I had no time to admire the craftsmanship. Peter was still after me, and I had to find a way to escape him.

As I walked, the air around me became warmer. My clothes began to dry faster, and sweat ran down my face. The air was thick from the steam, and waves of heat began to rise up from the ground. I approached a staircase. As I began to climb, a pillar of fire engulfed the top of the stairs. I could see the silhouette of my brother standing within it. He stepped out of the flames, a flamethrower in his hands.

“You’ve run far too long, Matthew!” he shouted over the roaring flames. “It’s time you got what you truly deserve.”

I ran in the other direction. He marched toward me, spewing flames around the room. Parts of the building came crashing down around me. I crawled through the rubble in a desperate attempt to escape him.

A voice came from outside. “All right me, let’s clear this one!” I recognized the voice. It was Freeman.

With new-found hope, I ran for the window. “Freeman! Help me!”

I heard Freeman’s voice. “Private Jensen. Is that you?”

“Yes.” I coughed. “The buildings on fire and I’m trapped. Help me!”

“This is the end, Matthew.” I heard Peter’s voice behind the flames.

“Jensen, back away from the wall. Sanders! Set a charge!”

“I loved you, Matthew!” he shouted. “You were the best brother I could have asked for!” I could see him approaching. He was only a few feet away. “But you left me to die.” The words made the ground shake. The scar of the bullet wound on his face became deeper. His eyes burned red with rage.

“I’m sorry...” I said, whimpering. “It should have been me. You’re right. It should have been me.”

An explosion deafened me. The wall before me shattered. A flaming column of bricks and wood buried Peter. I felt two arms under me, pulling me out.

“You don’t look good,” Freeman said to me.

“How... How did you escape?” I asked through my daze.

He had a grave look. “It wasn’t easy. But we made it out. All of us but your brother. Sorry, Jensen.”

“Where’s everyone else? Where’s what’s-his-name? Taggart.”

“We got split up in the alleyways. I think the Germans caught up with him. Not sure though. I just hope he made it somewhere safe.”

“Safe,” I whispered smiling. I saw what happened to Peter. How the flames engulfed him. How he screamed. My last thought before passing out was *I’m finally safe.*



I awoke to the sting of disinfectant on the cuts on my face. The same medic I had met before was treating my wounds. Sergeant Freeman and Private Taggart sat in the seats next to him.

“Consciousness must not be your friend, private,” the medic said as he cleaned my cuts. “You look like you lost a fight with a lion.”

I smiled. “Not lost. Won. Won the fight.”

As we drove back toward camp, the feeling in my legs started to come back. When we stopped to pick up some more wounded soldiers, I sat up and climbed out of the back of the truck with the help of the medic.

“Jensen! We need some room for these boys to lay down,” Jensen shouted. “Since you can walk, go sit up with the driver.”

I stumbled my way around to the driver’s side of the truck. “Sergeant wants me to sit up here with you, if that’s alright.”

“Oh, it’s alright,” the driver said slowly. He then took off his helmet and turned to face me. My heart stopped as I stared at his bright green eyes and the deep scar on his forehead.

Click

Jessica Kelley

I woke up to the sound of my alarm, the usual three beeps, signaling that I needed to get up for school. I still wasn't use to walking up to the sound of an alarm. Back in high school, my mom would usually wake me up by letting our dog jump onto my bed and attack me with his kisses. I missed my mom, and living ten hours away didn't help.

I rolled over and slammed my hand over the button, my face still shoved into my pillow. When I peeked my eye out, I noticed that my room was darker than it normally would be, but I shook it off and assumed that it was just storm clouds blocking out the sun. I didn't even think to look out my window at the weather.

Maybe then I would have realized where I was.

I sat up and looked over at my bedside table. I noticed that my phone was missing, along with the charger. When I looked at my desk, my laptop was gone to. *It must be my roommates playing a practical joke on me*, I figured, but we all just met, so it seemed unlikely. I stood up off my bed and began walking over to my door. I turned the knob on the door and pushed.

It wouldn't open.

I tried pushing harder, but the door was sealed shut. *Maybe my roommates put a chair in front of my door*. I pushed even harder and nothing gave. *Maybe a bookshelf*. Whatever it was, I was not going to be able to push it out of the way.

I began pounding on the door yelling. "Come on, guys, this isn't funny. I'm gonna be late for my first class!" I put my ear to the door hoping to hear light laughter of my roommates from the other side, but there was nothing--only silence.

I sat down on my knees and tried to look under the door, hoping to see their feet. However, there was nothing there, not even something blocking the door. I stood up and tried to open the door again, but it was still sealed stuck. I took a step back and looked at my door, analyzing it.

My alarm began beeping again. I thought I had turned it off the first time. As soon as I walked over to it, it stopped.

I heard a loud *click* from behind me.

I turned around slowly and looked at my door. Something wasn't right. The click sounded metal, as if a big iron barricade was moved from in front of my door. I walked over to my door and placed my hand on the knob and began to turn. I lightly pushed on the door and it opened with ease.

My heart began to race. My apartment's living room was replaced with a long corridor of metal. I couldn't see the end. Hundreds of doors lined the walls, all slowly opening to reveal different bedrooms. Different girls began emerging from the rooms, all of them between the ages of 13 and 25. They all had long brown hair and blue eyes.

Just like me.

Some girls had tears in their eyes while others just looked scared. Some were talking among themselves, asking where they were. Some were speaking English, others Spanish, and I picked out a few speaking French. Once everyone was out of their respective rooms, the doors slammed shut. My small white wooden door was now large and metal.

The same loud *click* rang from the doors.

The hallway then was filled with the sound of moving gears. The sound was so loud, some of us covered our ears with our hands, hoping to drown out some of the noise. The gears only lasted for a minute, and when they finished, the same *click* vibrated from the doors.

The doors all swung open to reveal the same large room full of tables and chairs. It looked like an old high school cafeteria but lacked the smell of meat and sweaty teenagers. All the us began slowly filing into the room. I didn't want to go in, but I was pushed by the remainder of the women behind me.

On each table were trays covered in food: a bread roll, grapes, carrots, and a large pork chop covered in gravy. To the side of the tray sat a glass of water along with a napkin and a set of utensils. I walked over to a table and sat down at one of the trays. I looked around and saw most of the women already eating, but some were hesitant.

They're probably afraid the food is poisoned, I thought. And they may be right. However, I figured it couldn't get any worse, so I began to eat.

After a few minutes, we were interrupted by a loud beeping. The room grew silent. The doors opened again and ten men, all dressed in blue surgical clothes, stepped out. They all walked around the room stopping behind different women. Simultaneously, like machinery, they grabbed the arms of the women and inserted a small needle attached to a syringe full of blue liquid. The women went limp, and the surrounding women leapt up from their chairs and backed away. The strange men lifted the injected women and carried them back through the doors. As soon as the last man passed through the opening, the doors closed again.

click



After what seemed like a lifetime, an alarm went off and the doors opened up once again. Some of the women began filing in through the doors, but I stayed back. I was terrified of what would happen once I walked through those doors, but I was even more scared of what happened to those poor women that got taken. My stomach felt queasy just thinking about it. The alarm rang louder. It was too much to bear, so I decided to walk back through the doors.

I looked back at five women that refused to leave the dining room. One girl didn't look older than 13 and was sitting in a corner, crying. Another was still sitting at a table, staring down at her tray, while two more stood close to the door staring at us. One of the women turned her head and looked right at me. Her stare was dark and cold. She slowly shook her head as the door in front of me closed. I never knew who she was and I never found out. I never saw any of them again.

As soon as the doors were fully closed, they clicked shut. I stood in the cramped hallway with all the others. The noise of gears shifting filled the corridor again.

click

The doors opened, and our rooms had returned. All of us slowly and cautiously walked into our appropriate rooms. My door closed as soon as I walked in. *I don't know what's going on, but at least I can sleep in my own bed*, I thought.

The door never opened again for the rest of the day. I walked around my room for hours. Everything was exact as I remembered from moving in, from my desk to the scratch on the wall. My window was the same, though there was nothing outside the window. It was blocked by metal. My clock was still working. I watched it tick, but it only made time go by slower.

I tried to lay down, but I couldn't fall asleep. My brain was jolting back in forth between theories of where I was. *Maybe I'm abducted by aliens. Maybe I'm in a top-secret government facility to study young women*. However, every idea I came up with was flawed. I slowly began to run out of ideas and my mind slowly began to drift. My eyes grew heavy and I finally fell asleep.



I was awoken by my same alarm. Three beeps.

“It was all a dream,” I said. But then I heard it: *click*

My door flung open. This day was all the same as the last. We went into the cafeteria, some women were taken, then we went back to our rooms. Every day became the same. I started learning more about the women there, but every time I met someone new, they were taken away. This continued for twelve days, and every day, there were fewer of us. Until the last day.

Day thirteen. My alarm went off. Three beeps. *click* My door opened.

But no one else's did. I was the last one left.

I walked into the cafeteria, and I knew exactly what was going to happen. The doors opened and one man, dressed in blue nurse clothes, stepped out. He was alone and I knew he was coming for me. I stood up from my table and slowly began walking toward him. I wasn't going to put up a fight--there was no reason to.

“Make it quick,” I told him. He grabbed my arm placed a syringe full of blue liquid into my arm. I quickly faded off.



My eyes jolted open to the sound of my alarm. Beep one. Beep two. Beep three.

Beep four. *Wait, how is that possible?*

I sat up and stared at the floor. Suddenly, my door swung open. My roommate Nicole ran into my room.

“Get moving! You’ll be late for your first college class if you keep sitting there.”

I stared flabbergasted. Was it all just a dream? It felt so real!

“Uh, hello?” Nicole stared at me.

“Sorry,” I said. “I’m just really glad to see you.”

“Oh, aren’t you sweet?” Nicole said. “Now get out of bed. Jay made pancakes if you wanna come grab some before you head to class.”

“Yeah, definitely.”

Nicole left, and I stood up and walked over to the door. I hesitated before I swung it all the way open and looked through. I saw Jay flipping pancakes in the kitchen while Nicole sat on the couch to talk with Kait. I smiled, glad that it was all just a dream. I went over to my dresser to change out of my pajama top and into a shirt. As I lifted my top over my head, and looked down at my arm.

There was a small bump.

A bump in the exact place I dreamed that the syringe entered.

My heart began to race and my eyes widened. Behind me, I heard a familiar sound.

click

Room F66

Jocelyn Lyles

“You’ve heard of Room F66, right? It was the old art room before... the accident.”

I looked at the nervous freshman around me. We had turned the lights down in the library, but even with only a flashlight, I could see their fear. *This lock-in will be more fun than I thought.*

“It’s said that a student died in there the year the school first opened. Nobody knows how he died--there were no wounds or signs of struggle. It’s as if he saw something and dropped dead from fright.”

Livi grabbed her knees as her face slowly turned into a terrified look.

“At first, they only changed the room number and pretended nothing happened. But that only resulted in more disasters. Soon, students started to disappear. The few that were found alive were covered in scars all over.” I paused briefly, closing my eyes and taking a deep breath to keep from laughing. “The only words they can say are the same phrase over and over: ‘Can’t escape... can’t escape... can’t escape.’ They found a note in the hand of one girl—she scribbled about how she went to the room to access the spirit world.”

“Did it work?” Sam, the only freshman that wasn’t petrified, asked.

“Yes. To enter, you must have red paint, matches, and a black candle. First, you have to paint a pentagram on the floor of Room F66. Then you have to put on a mask.”

“Mask?”

“Yes. So the spirits don’t know who you are. If they see your face, they can steal your soul. So you have to wear a white mask with red tears and a long black robe. Now, once the pentagram is painted and your masks are on, you place the candle in the middle and light it.”

“What happens next?” Livi asked. It was hard not to laugh. *These freshies are so gullible*, I thought.

“Then you must chant these words:

*Make us feel what you feel,
Let us see your awful pain,
Take a step into our world,
So you may live once again.*

“After you say this, you blow out the candle, and in a few seconds, the spirits start coming in from their world. You can talk to them, but don’t let them see your face. If they do, then you’ll die.”

Cindy squeaked in fear. Sam asked, “So how do you make the spirits go away?”

“Uh... well, blowing out the candle opens the door right?” I fibbed. “So to close it, you need to light the candle again. But don’t think of trying it,” I told them. “When the school found out that students were trying to summon spirits, they made it storage room and locked it with a chain so no students could get in.”

I leaned back in my sleeping bag, confident that I would make this lock-in one these kids would remember. Livi shivered. “Well, who here isn't able to go to sleep anymore? Say ‘aye.’”

Everyone replied with an “aye.” I smirked a little when I realized only Sam and I weren’t scared to sleep. I laughed a little and turned off my flashlight, the only light in the room. “Now go to sleep, freshmen. It's just a story we seniors tell to scare you. It’s not even real.” I rolled over in my sleeping bag, listening to everyone sigh in relief. But I was still feeling a little evil, so I waited for everyone to settle in and then said in the creepiest tone I could muster: “But then again, I could be wrong. Sleep tight.” I fell fast asleep, giggling to myself.



I’m dreaming. I’m in a room full of boxes and supplies. I look behind me and there’s a teenage boy in the room. He’s in the middle of the floor. I look around and realize this is an art room. I look at the boy. He’s crying. I move closer. I see that he’s got cuts and bruises all over his body, and he’s dressed in clothes that are dirty and torn. I look past his messy blond hair and see his face. He’s crying blood. I hear him mutter the same words as he rocks back and forth: “Can’t escape... can’t escape... can’t escape.”

I swallow hard and I ask him: "Are you the boy who died?"

Right then, he looks at me. His eyes are as blood-red as his tears. "You've got to wake up, Jordan," he whispers. He grabs my arm. He has an icy-cold touch and he digs his nails into my skin. "She's waiting in the doorway. You've got to wake up. Wake up. Wake up."

I jolted up and gaped for air. It was the middle of the night, and all the freshmen girls were staring at me wide-eyed.

"What's wrong?" I asked them.

"You... you started yelling in your sleep," Livi said, quivering. I looked at the panic on all their faces.

"Wait... where's Sam?"

"We... we don't know."



"This lock-in was a huge mistake," I said as I checked each room's door to see if Sam was inside. The first free door was the girls' bathroom. I walked inside and winced as the automatic light popped on.

"Sam?" I called. "You in here?" I checked every stall, but all of them were empty. I walked over to the sink, and sighed heavily as I looked into the mirror. *Last time I choose to be a group leader*, I thought.

I looked at my forearm and froze. Deep in my skin were a bunch of crescent shapes. As if someone grabbed my arm and dug their nails into my skin. I remembered my dream, and suddenly realized where Sam was.

I ran down the halls until I got to the F wing. I looked down the hallway and saw only darkness. "Sam!" I yelled. "Come out here right now! The ghosts of F66 aren't real. It's just something stupid we tell the freshmen. Come on, I made half of it up."

I saw a glow from a door at the end of the corridor—a door I'd never realized was there. I reached the door and looked at the dust-covered plaque with the room number: F66 -- Art Room.

“No way,” I whispered as I opened the door.

There was no one there. The room was filled with art tables with boxes of paint and other supplies atop them. In the center was a crudely painted pentagram and a black candle, lit. “Sam...” I sighed. “Come out and help me clean this up. Principal Lee will kill me if he sees you painted the floor. And this candle’s a fire hazard.” I picked up the candle and blew it out.

The table I was leaning against started to shake a bit. I looked under, thinking Sam was there. Instead, I heard a voice behind me.

“Jordan!” Sam ran up to me. She was wearing a crude white mask and had on a black robe. “Hurry! Put this on!”

“There you are! Where did you get that mask? And the candle?”

“They were already here. Now hurry! You need to put this on so the spirits don’t see your face!”

“Sam, aren’t you listening? I made all of that up! There were no dead kids, there’s no ritual, and there are no...”

I froze in my spot when I saw it. I swallowed the lump in my throat and felt Sam hug my waist in terror.

It looked into my eyes. It wasn’t human... not anymore. It was soaked in blood but I could still make out its black eyes. And its wide, horrible smile.

“Two brave girls,” it said in a dark, demonic tone. “Two brave girls who’ve let me out and want to play.”

“Jordan, where are you?” Cindy and Livi were yelling for me down the hall, and its smile got wider.

“More friends to play with? How nice.”

“Don’t open this door!” I yelled to the hallway. I faced the thing in front of me. I felt Sam hug me tighter. I could barely speak. “S--Stay back.”

The creature moved closer. “You can’t send me away. Not until I have my fun. I can see your pretty face, so you must want to play.” It raised its hands, if you could call them that. Instead of fingers, the creature had sharp red claws.

"I -- I'm warning you. Stay back!" I yelled, terrified at what would happen when it reached me. I cursed at myself. *Why did I start this? Why did I tell Sam that made up stupid legend...*

The legend. I suddenly remembered what I told the girls. I turned to Sam and whispered. "Sam... do you still have some matches?"

Sam was shaking. "Y-y-y-yes."

I whispered, as the creature was slowly circling us. "I'm going to distract it. When I do, you need to light the candle to close the doorway. Okay?"

"No!" Sam squeezed tighter. "I can't do it."

"Yes, you can. Now let go of me on three. One... two... three!"

I pushed Sam away and lunged at the creature. It smiled and tore at my shoulder with its claws. I fought it until it was on top of me, digging its sharp fingers into my arms. They were freezing cold and I screamed.

"You can't escape," it said, grinning at my pain. I closed my eyes.

"I lit it!" I heard Sam yell. "I lit the black candle!"

I felt the creature pull its razor fingers out of me as it was sucked back into the spirit world. I grabbed my bleeding arms. Sam ran over and helped me up, then we both ran out of the room into a terrified Livi and Cindy.

"What happened?" Livi asked.

"Doesn't matter," I told her. "We're safe now. Just go get me the first aid kit."

Cindy ran to the library and brought me the bandages. I went into the bathroom, once again wincing at the light. I started to wrap the cool cotton around my arms when I looked in the mirror.

A blood-covered, black-eyed shape grinned back at me.

"You really thought relighting the candle closed the door? Or did you forget that you made that up?" I backed away from the mirror in terror as I felt the long claws close around me. "You should know that you can't escape. Can't escape. Can't escape."

The Devil's Promise

Jordan McGroarty

I arrived home from school. Just like any other Friday, I heard the muffled shouts upstairs between Mom and Dad. I walked into the kitchen to see my older brother.

"Andrew, have Mom and Dad always been fighting?" I asked.

"Sadly, yes. Even when it was just Hannah and me."

"Why do they fight?"

"Money, Jimmy. Always money"

"That's stupid. If they have money troubles, why'd they have five kids?"

"Ask them. I'm gonna go work on some math work in my room. Make sure Jaden and Camilla get home on time."

I sighed. "Fine." *Why do I always have to walk the younger ones home, I thought. Andrew has a car, and all I can do is walk.*

"If only there was a way to get a large amount of money, then maybe Mom and Dad would stop fighting. How can I make a million dollars?"

Andrew laughed. "Well, first you'd need to win the lottery or sell your soul to the devil!"

"I'm serious!"

"I don't know. Check online and see if you can raise money or something."

"Thanks for the help," I said sarcastically.

As I walked to the middle school, I started thinking more about Mom and Dad. *Looking online doesn't sound like a bad idea, I suppose.* I pulled out my phone and started searching for some way to get rich quick. I mostly found pyramid schemes and illegal activities, but as I got to the middle school, I came across a link that looked promising.

"The Devil's Deal," I muttered to myself. The website was for an online game show. It seemed to be put on by man known as "The Host." He was a pale white guy with slicked-back, pitch black hair. He also had an eyepatch and a super creepy smile. Around him were the words "Looking for a quick way to earn cash? Play against other contestants in 'The Devil's Deal. It won't cost you much... just sign the contract and play."

I clicked on the contract and saw lots of fine print. I decided to look up this game show on other sites and almost nothing appeared.

I reached the school and my siblings were coming out. I shrugged to myself. "What's the worst that can happen?" I said, and pressed the sign-up button.



I had a restless night. Every time I shut my eyes, all I could picture was the face of The Host. "Thanks for playing, Jimmy. It won't cost you much..." he kept saying. All I could hear was my heart beating, getting louder and faster. I woke up and felt cold. I decided to head downstairs for some water to calm my nerves. As I closed the fridge, I noticed a package on the table labeled "For Jimmy."

It must be a gift from Andrew. He knows I've been upset about Mom and Dad. I took the package upstairs and opened it. All that was in the box was a small white pill labeled "EAT ME" in red writing. *It might help calm me down,* I thought, and I swallowed it.

I laid back down in my room, feeling even colder than before. My head felt heavier, and I started to see spots in the dark. I fell asleep.

I woke up in a cold sweat again. I was no longer in my room. I looked around, but couldn't see anything in the pitch black. There was a horrid smell that reeked of death under an overpowering scent of vanilla. Suddenly, I heard:

"Let's welcome today's contestants on "The Devil's Deal!"

Moments later, bright lights blinded me. I could feel their heat as I regained my vision. I was at a platform with a buzzed facing what is labeled "Audience." As I looked into the audience, I became horrified—the crowd was filled with decaying corpses and skeletons. At my right was a wheel with seven different sections labeled: gluttony, lust, greed, pride, wrath, envy, and sloth. *The seven deadly sins,* I thought.

I looked to my left and saw a southern man with dirty, worn clothes and the middle-aged women that looked like a junkie. A man walked out onto the stage. "Hello everyone, and welcome to The Devil's Deal!" I recognized the voice: it was The Host.

"We are joined by three new contestants. Contestant 1, tell me why you're here today."

"Well, I'm here because I need money. My farm wasn't working out, so my wife left me and took the kids. I had nowhere else to turn, so I went to that website, and here I am."

"Thank you, Contestant 1. How about you, Contestant 2?"

"I need money 'cause I'm an addict. I want to go to rehab, but it's so expensive. That's why I'm here."

"Thank you, Contestant 2." The Host turned to me. "Now possibly our youngest competitor in history, Contestant 3, tell us your story."

"Uh, I'm 15, and I need the money to stop my parents from fighting."

"Thank you, Contestant 3. Now here are the rules for the first round: you will all spin the wheel and tell us of your sins. The size of your sin determines the amount of points you'll get. Lowest score wins. Now, please tell us what the prize for Round One?"

"One million US dollars," thundered a raspy voice

"Thank you, Beelzebub"

"Any time, Lucifer." The smell of phosphorus filled the air. "I promise one of you will go home with this money and solve your problems." The Host then started laughing--a strange laugh that had screams embedded in it.

"Let's get started shall we? Contestant 1 first."

The southern man spun the wheel and it stopped on Lust. "Lust, I see. Tell us your sins, farmer, and be truthful--I *will* know if you lie."

"I had 'n affair. Never told my wife. I didn't mean too. I was drunk it 'n it jus' happened."

“Let's see how many points you earned: 60! That's a sinful act, so lots of points.” I started to smell burning flesh, and the farmer started to groan in agony. I saw his arm--seared in his flesh was the statement *A heart that deviseth wicked acts.*

“Okay, next contestant. Spin the wheel!” The addict got up and spun the wheel. “Pride! Tell us your sins, addict.”

“I was the most beautiful women alive. I was a world-renowned supermodel before the drugs got to me.”

“Very proud. Let's take a look at how many points that earns: 45. Very sinful but not as much as the farmer.” Her flesh began to burn, and I saw the words *A proud vain look* appear on her stomach. I grabbed my own stomach in fear.

“Contestant 3, the last of the sinners: Spin the wheel!”

My heart was pounding at this moment. I could feel the heat of the host's eyes and I found it hard to stand up. Despite my weakness, I spun the wheel. “Sloth! Tell us your sins, troubled boy.”

I felt something in my throat. I begin to speak without wanting to, as if my body were possessed.

“I don't do any school or housework and have never cared too. I always tell my father I do my work, but it's all been a lie.”

“Lets see how many points for you, boy: 25. Such a small sin compared to other two! I guess it's true: children are always more innocent.”

I suddenly felt an intense pain on my back searing my flesh. I ran my hand across the charred letters. “W-What does it say?” I asked.

The Host smiled. “A lying tongue. Now, that's Round One. Lowest score wins and that means... Contestant 3! You win the million! Now, let's send our winner off while our two other contestants compete in... Sudden Death. Congratulations on your win kid--see you soon.”



I woke up moments later in my bed, my heart racing. "Really," I said aloud. "That was all just a dream?" I wiped the sweat off my brow. *It seemed so real though. I can even still smell vanilla.*

I flopped back down on my pillow and felt something hard under it. I reached under and pulled out a package that said "For Jimmy."

Timidly, I opened the package. There were two things inside. First was a couple bundles of bills. I counted, and they added up to a million dollars. Attached was a note: "The Devil never breaks his promise."

The second thing was pill. It said "For tonight. Round Two."

Resident of Terror

Lindsey Castro

Emilee Price was my best friend. We lived just down the street from each other. I even talked to her the night she disappeared.

It was around three in the morning, It was winter break, so I was up super late. She sent me a Snapchat of her naturally beautiful face with a caption saying, "I love you, goodnight." I screenshot it and sent her one back.

Little did I know that was the last time I'd see her face.

Now half of break was over and I'd barely came out of my room that whole time. Suddenly my phone buzzed, which was unusual considering most everyone has left me alone since...

It was Jess.

Party at my house tonight at seven. Please come Charlie. You need to get out for a while. And Ryder misses you.

Ryder. We had a thing, but since Emilee vanished, I hadn't texted him back. I thought for a few minutes. *Maybe it would do me some good to go out for a little and try my best to forget about all my stress.* My eyes shifted to my window, leaves were all over the street but no snow. That made me smile. I texted back,

I'll think about it. If I do come, will you pick me up?;))

My phone buzzed again,

of course I gotcha gf. I'll get you at 6.

The first smile in weeks spread across my face. It was small, but it still counted. My clock on my desk read 3:30. I've got time. My wardrobe was cluttered, but after fifteen minutes of searching I found the only dress I owned.

I smiled. *Maybe it'll be a good night.*



Jess was quiet on the way there, which I appreciated because I didn't feel like talking about Emilee. Instead, she turned on the radio and "Love Drunk" by Boys Like Girls came on. Jess started singing in her awful voice. I laughed then joined in. As we approached her house, I felt uneasy.

"I'm not much of a party person," I admitted. "I'm not sure this was a good idea."

"Hey, you'll be fine." Jess reassured me. "Just picture it like a concert." I smiled to that comment and we walked inside. Jess wandered off to host her party and Ryder walked over.

"Hey," I said.

"Wow! You look beautiful." He smiled.

"Thanks Ryder." Ryder was a few inches taller than me with longer black hair that was always in his eyes. Overall, a pretty decent looking guy. I got a little wobbly and he held my arm to steady me. Eventually, he pulled me in and we just danced for a bit, even though it wasn't a slow song.

Hours went by like minutes. My feet started to hurt and I was about ready to leave. Jess was asleep on the couch and Ryder was starting to doze off. Suddenly, I started to feel really dizzy. I tried to make it to the counter to lean against, but my legs gave out then everything went black.



My mind was spinning while I regained consciousness. I looked around. I felt some type of liquid seeping into the back of my dress and my hair was sticky. The walls around me were all moldy. I guessed I was in some type of abandoned house.

I heard a chain be pulled and something above me opened. It was too dark to see anything, but that noise made my skin go cold. I heard footsteps of creaking wood on a ladder. Looking up, I saw a lamp flickering.

Calm down, Charlie, I told myself. I stood up. I could see a figure of some sort and I slowly walked to it. Then I realized my phone was still in my bra, so I pulled it out and turned the flashlight on. The figure stood there looking at the wooden structures ahead.

"Jess?"

I touched her body. Her face was all bloody. Her body was cold. I went to scream, but quickly put my hand over my mouth. Her face revealed missing teeth and electrical burns around her mouth. I cried silently. I looked past her and saw electrical wires plugged into the wall and were still sparking. *She was forced to eat the wires*, I thought, horrified.

My mind instantly thought of Ryder. Terrified, I walked to the wooden ladder and climbed up. Then I walked slowly to the opening of the crawl space. Once I stood, I saw a tape on the table. "Watch me" was written in crude red pen. I crossed to the TV. I turned it on and put the tape in.

There was a figure in a heavy waxed fabric overcoat which a beak-shaped mask. The eyes part was glass. This Doctor moved to a table with a sheet and tore it off. It was Jess, alive and struggling. She was crying and pleading, but her mouth was pulled open by a wire harness. The Doctor picked up the sparking wire.

I stopped the tape. I couldn't watch any more.

I ran out the door down the hallway. On the left was an open door to what looked like a hall closet. Little dolls hung from the ceiling on thin strings. I looked closer and realized they were voodoo dolls.

I found my way to the kitchen. There was rust or mold on everything. The fridge contained some sticky, oozing meat. There was a pot on the table. The microwave contained a blood specked raven. There was a little gloss in its eyes. Before my hand touched its feathers, it squawked, making me jump back into the table. The pot spilled, and the cockroaches inside covered me.

I bolted out of the kitchen, brushing the bugs off me. I looked up into the room I was in. Halves of cows were spread all over the floor, their insides scattered everywhere. Surgical supplies laid by every one. My hand covered my mouth again, but this time to prevent me from throwing up. I knelt down, and grabbed one of the scalpels on the floor.

I then got grabbed by a tight grip. When it turned me around, I saw The Doctor. I stabbed one of the eye pieces, causing the glass to shatter in their eye. It shrieked and dropped me. I then ran back toward the kitchen and up the stairs.

"Ryder!" I shouted but got no answer. My flashlight faded. I banged my phone against my hand until the light came back which shined right onto Ryder's dead face.

I gasped and jumped back. He was among dozens of bodies posed like mannequins. Most of the people at the party were there. I stood there traumatized. A quiet devilish laugh came from behind me.

I turned and saw The Doctor fully for the first time, scalpel still stuck in the eye. "You just had to show up to the party didn't you Charlie."

"How- how did you know my name?"

There was another quiet laugh. "Maybe this will help." My eyes shifted to the mask which was removed.

I stood there frozen.

"Emilee... Why?"

Another laugh. "It's complicated. But mostly, I didn't want to be ordinary and boring anymore. Now, I think I'm missing one part of my museum, don't you?"

Emilee moved toward me. I held onto the two stair posts and kicked her, sending her tumbling down the stairs. A pair of scissors fell out of her pocket onto the stairs. I grabbed them and stabbed her leg. The front door key was hanging on her waist. My hand grabbed them, then I ran to the door.

I ran and didn't look back. Tree after tree my legs kept moving. My arms were bleeding due to the sharp branches, but I didn't stop. In the distance I could see a small light so my adrenaline rushed even more. After about an hour, I made it to the actual road, emerging from the trees and falling flat on the unpaved road.

A cop found me lying there. Ambulances screamed and detectives asked me questions. I couldn't find the words not wanting to admit that everything was true, but I led them to the horrid cabin. They searched everywhere, but Emilee was gone.

Promise

Ryan Bacca

“I hate you!”

Hannah ran to her room and slammed the door behind her. Ever since her mom died five years ago, her dad was always on her case. She wasn't a bad kid. Most seventeen-year-old girls were skipping school, chasing boys, or shoplifting, but not Hannah. She spent her time painting, drawing and hanging out with her best friends. Her dad just didn't seem to notice that she was a good girl. Today was no exception.

“You are grounded!” her dad bellowed to her. “Now clean that mess you call a room. I'm not your maid!”

I have to get out of here, thought Hannah as she sat crying on her bed. Hannah didn't understand why her dad was so mean to her. It was days like this that she really missed her mom. She grabbed her phone and texted her two best friends. “Meet @ the mall. 20 mins!”

Hannah quietly sneaked down the creaky stairs so her dad wouldn't hear and slipped right out the front door. The fresh air was exactly what she needed to clear her head.

With her head down, she started walking toward the mall in the center of town, totally oblivious to the car slowly following her.



“Let's see that new clown horror movie at the theater,” suggested Hannah. She knew that the movie would last at least two hours and that would mean two hours less that she would have to spend at home with her dad.

“Sounds good,” Aston said.

“Really, guys?” Trinity whined. “You know I that can't do that jump-scare stuff.”

“Suck it up,” Aston replied. “You're the one who convinced us to see that last Transformers movie. You owe us.”

Trinity sighed. "Fine."

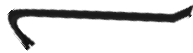
"You guys stand in line and get tickets," Hannah said. "I need to call my dad really quick so I don't get into any more trouble." Hannah walked around the alley beside the theater to make her phone call.

He was waiting for her in the alley. Buck had been watching Hannah for a long time now. Watching her walk to school... watching her long blonde hair... watching her smile and her blue eyes...

"It's like she's back with me again," Buck whispered to himself. Buck had been alone for years after his sister's death in the fire three decades before. Hannah looked so much like that Buck couldn't help becoming obsessed with her. He missed his sister so much.

She's so close, Buck thought. Closer than ever before.

Something in him snapped. Before he could stop himself, he reached out and grabbed Hannah by the back of the neck as she walked past him. Hannah's eyes became wide as she looked into the face of this stranger. His crooked teeth and thick mustache scared her. She tried to scream, but Buck's hand quickly covered her mouth. He tightened his grip around her neck until she lost consciousness.



Buck gently carried Hannah from the back seat into the back door of the lake house. He set her unconscious body down on the floor in the back bedroom. As soon as he did, a feeling of dread began to creep into his mind. *What have I done?* he thought. *If I get caught, I'll be sent to prison. I need to get rid of her.*

Buck was panicking. *Should I strangle her? Stab her? Poison her?* He headed to the dark, musty garage in search of anything he could use to kill Hannah. *Something that won't hurt too much,* Buck thought.

Inside the house, Hannah moaned as she started to wake up. She felt groggy as she reached to touch her sore neck. "What happened to me?" she wondered aloud to herself. She stood up and wandered through the rest of the house, eventually making her way outside.

"Hello? Anybody?" she called out. "Where am I?"

In the distance she noticed the old garage with the door opened. As she approached the garage, she saw the same strange man who had kidnapped her from outside the theater. *I'd recognize that mustache anywhere*, she thought to herself. She inched closer and closer to the garage. Hannah spotted a steel pry bar in the corner and carefully picked it up without taking her eyes off Buck. She was now a foot away from the still panicking Buck.

With the pry bar raised high above her head, she swung. It came crashing down on top of Buck's balding head.

He hit the ground with a thud. Hannah dropped the pry bar and sprinted back to the house with her heart pounding in her chest. She felt in her pockets. *Where's my phone? There's got to be one in the house!* Hannah rushed to the kitchen and lifted the receiver from the old phone on the wall. She frantically dialed 911 and held the phone up to her ear. There was no dial tone.

"Stupid phone!" Hannah started tracing the wall cord, seeing if it was just unplugged. Suddenly she heard it. A quiet, odd shuffling sound was coming through the hallway of the living room.

"What's that?" she whispered.

Before she could turn around, Buck had the steel pry bar around her neck. Her knees buckled from fear and she fell to the floor.

"Don't kill me," she pleaded.

"I... I don't want to hurt you, but... but I have no choice," Buck stammered.

"No choice? It's easy! Let me go!" she replied.

"No! If I let you go you'll run straight to the police!"

"No, I won't!"

"Yeah? Who were you trying to call on the phone then?" Her silence confirmed his suspicions. "See? I am not going to prison. My only choice is to get rid of you."

"But why? Why'd you kidnap me in the first place?"

Buck froze. Hannah worried if she had gone too far and he started to cry. “My sister. My sister was the only person who ever loved me. After she left, I had nobody who cared about me. For so many years I have been so lonely.”

“What does that have to do with me?” Hannah asked. Buck’s grip on the pry bar had weakened, and Hannah thought she could possibly slip away.

Buck sniffed. “You look just like her. She was so beautiful like you and I thought... no...”

“Tell me,” Hannah said gently.

“I thought maybe you could live with me here and keep me company. I just... I want a friend. But look at you. You’d never be my friend. That’s why I need to kill you: so I don’t get caught by the police.”

At that moment, Hannah elbowed Buck in the stomach. “Get away, you crazy old man!” She slipped out from under the pry bar and quickly ran out the door as Buck tried to pick himself off the floor.

“No! Come back!” He crumpled to the ground with his head in his hands. “Oh, what have I done? What have I done?”

He started to weep in a ball on the floor. He didn’t hear the footsteps coming back toward him. Hannah stood in the doorway, perplexed by her would-be killer.

He looks so sad and old sitting there on the ground. Hannah wasn’t sure what to do. I should run. I should take his car and run. But he looks so sad. Hannah knew what it felt like to be bullied. To feel alone. Should I go back and talk to him? No, he kidnapped me. But he’s so sad...

Hannah took a deep breath and did the unthinkable. She walked back in the door and closer to Buck.

“I don’t understand you,” she said. “First you kidnap me, then you try to choke me, you chased me outside, and now you’re crying?”

“When you said that to me... I realized I must be an old crazy man,” Buck admitted. “I’d have to be crazy to think anybody would want to be around me.”

Hannah bit her lip. “I... I didn’t mean that. I’m sorry.” She hesitantly placed her hand on his back as he sobbed. “Listen, if you let me go, I won’t report you to the police.”

“It doesn’t matter!” Buck cried. “I’ll still always be alone.”

Hannah suddenly felt sorry for Buck. His life seemed so sad and lonely. In fact, it wasn’t much different than her own sad life. “I know how you feel,” she told him. “I lost my mom last year. And my dad...” She winced. “He’s horrible. He yells at me and bullies me and... and I hate him.”

Buck stopped crying, filled with concern. He looked up at her. “That’s terrible. You’re such a good person. You’re beautiful and kind and sweet. How could anyone not like you?”

Hannah gave a weak smile. “Thanks.”

Buck continued. “If you were my daughter, I’d never let you live a day without knowing how special and wonderful you are. To have someone like you in their life...” He wiped his nose. “It’s like my sister. She brought a smile to everyone’s face and we spent every day together talking and playing games.”

“That sounds nice.”

“It was,” Buck said. “You deserve so much better.”

Hannah looked into Buck’s eyes. “What’s your name?”

“Buck.”

“Buck? I’m Hannah.”

“Hi, Hannah.” Buck paused. “Hannah, are you going to call the police.”

Hannah took a deep breath. “No. But only if you do something for me. Make me a promise.” She held out her pinkie.

Buck hesitated. “O-Okay.” He intertwined his pinkie with hers.



“So, are we going to the movies this weekend?”

Hannah pulled her hair back over her ear, waiting for Aston and Trinity to respond.

“I’m game,” Aston smiled.

“Sure,” Trinity said. “But no horror. I just stopped having nightmares about clowns.”

Hannah smiled. “We’ll see a comedy. Promise.” Just then a black car pulled up next to the girls. “Oh, that’s my dad. I need to go. Text you tonight.”

“Bye, Hannah,” the girls waved.

“I’ll talk to you later.” Hannah climbed into the car. “Hey! Right on time!”

“Of course! I made Thai for dinner and picked up your new paint supplies.”

“Awesome!” Hannah gave Buck a quick hug, buckled her seatbelt, and said, “Let’s go home, Dad.”

Skin Deep

Mr. Coon

Before I start, I just want to let you know that I'm okay.

Yeah, I know this is a horror story and I'm supposed to leave you in suspense on whether I live or not or whatever, but I'll be honest: I'm not good at this whole horror thing. I'm a pretty happy person.

But this is a horror story. Trust me.

So I guess it all started at cheer practice. See, I'm a flyer--that means I stand at the top and then I get tossed up in the air and the other girls catch me. Now sometimes they miss catching me -- accidents do happen -- and I fall. This fall was pretty bad, though. I landed right on my right patella, rupturing the skin and straining my quadriceps.

Oh! Sorry about that. See, I really want to be a surgeon after college. I have a 3.94 GPA, I'm in AP Bio as a junior, and I've been through *Grey's Anatomy* twice (the book, not the insipid TV series). I used to tell everyone I wasn't just another dumb blonde... but I get that sometimes I can talk over people's heads with my medical words. Sorry.

So anyway: I landed on my right knee and split it open. Not only was I in pain, but I was pretty pissed that they called my dad and I had to go to the hospital. While I aspired to spend my adult life in a hospital, I wasn't in the mood: I had an AP test and English essay to get done and didn't have time to spend a couple hours getting x-rayed.

"I'm fine," I told him. "I could feel if it's a fracture. The bruising doesn't even look like it's affected the subcutaneous tissue."

"Better safe than sorry, pumpkin," he said back to me. Dads, right?

Anyway, I was in the hospital for a while. They found no fractures (of course) and cleaned out my split skin. I then went home and burned the midnight oil to keep up in my classes. Mom stopped by sometime around one.

"Alyssa, you're still up?" I rolled my eyes at the concern in her voice. "Don't you think you're pushing yourself too hard?"

“Mom,” I said, not taking my eyes off my laptop screen, “If I’m going to be cheer-captain-honors-student-prom-queen-valedictorian-Harvard-premed, I can’t let sleep or injuries get in my way.”

“Okay. I just want you to be happy,” she said, closing my door.

“It’s not about happy,” I muttered. “Not if you want to be the best.” After another half an hour of quick edits and checking citations, I hit the sack, alarm set for five.



The aspirin had worn off around three. I felt a sharp pain in my knee and jolted awake. I sat up, grabbing my knee as I tried to grimace through the pain. I cursed silently that I had reopened my wound in my sleep. I felt my leg once again wet with blood.

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I started to make out something. It was an insect about the length of a baby carrot. It was thin as spaghetti with dozens of legs lining its segmented body like a centipede. It was jet black and unnaturally shined silver in the moonlight.

The insect was crawling on my knee -- no, it was *in* my knee.

I fumbled to turn on my bedside lamp. Now I could see it clearer: its head was as small as a pin, but I could still make out three tiny red pinprick eyes. Its two mandibles were the size of its own head, serrated and a deep yellow. The insect’s tail looked exactly like its head, except it flicked back and forth.

I started to yell and tried to pull it out, but it was too small and moved too fast. When its body was halfway under my skin, I managed to grab its tail, which stabbed at my fingers with its sharp little legs until my fingers bled and I had to let go.

I watched it disappear inside me.

Despite the pain in my knee, I ran down all to the bathroom. I took my tweezers out of the medicine cabinet and sat on the counter, close to the light. I could see the thin imprint of the insect’s body just under my skin. It looked just like a small vein, except it was slowly moving down my leg. In just a couple minutes, it had already slithered a couple inches. I couldn’t possible pull it out now--I’d have to dig it out.

I went back to my room and took the artist's blade from my desk drawer. It was the closest thing my father would let me have to a scalpel. I shook my shoulders and took a deep breath, preparing for the pain. Starting at my knee wound, I made an incision. I yelled at the pain as blood ran down my leg.

As if it knew what I was doing, the insect started to go deeper under my dermis and started to burrow into my muscle. The pain was so intense that I cried out and dropped my blade. A tear flowed from my eyes as my leg felt like it was on fire. I opened an eye to see that the bulge in my skin was gone -- I could no longer find it. Another jolt of pain hit me and I passed out.



I woke up groggily to my alarm. My leg ached. I touched my knee and felt the crisp flakes of dried and clotted blood. I staggered to my bathroom for my morning shower and a couple more aspirin. After I locked the bathroom door, I pulled off my night shirt and undies. I started running the water in the bath when I caught a glimpse of my body in my full-length mirror. My left side was covered in dark red crisscrossing lines. The lines reached down to my foot and up to just under my chest. I looked down and pressed on one of the lines.

The bug, I thought. It's eating its way through me.

See? I told you this was a horror story.

I started to scream. I threw on my underwear and I ran to my parents' room.

"Mom! Dad! Help me!" I cried. "It's inside me! Help!"

My bewildered parents shot out of bed and tried to calm me down. I was hysterical. They took me back to the hospital. I begged for x-rays, CAT scans, parasitic blood smears -- but the doctors couldn't find a thing wrong with me.

I was silent on the car ride home while my parents lectured me.

"It's these late practices. Alyssa, you're too overworked and it's taking a toll."

"I agree with your father. We need to cut back. And if you're seeing things -- well, maybe we need to find a psychiatrist."

I don't need a psychiatrist, I thought. I need an exterminator.



"I'm so, so sorry I dropped you." Jessica put her hand on mine. "You know I'd never mean to do it."

"It's fine," I told her. I was in her passenger seat, getting a ride to lunch. Jessica insisted: I had missed a day of school to get tested for my bug, but she assumed it was because of my knee and insisted on treating me to lunch "for my pain and suffering."

"I was so worried when you weren't here, you know?"

"Oh, I know worry," I muttered. I looked at my right arm. The insect hadn't moved from my arm since yesterday, but also hadn't risen to the surface.

"You didn't miss much yesterday," Jessica continued. "The AP Bio test was pretty easy, but we got a surprise DBQ in AP Gov." Jessica, like me, is a member of the Not Dumb Blondes Club... at least she would be if she wasn't a brunette. "So is your knee really bad? Like out for the season bad?"

I heard a soft sound as she talked. A crackling. Something in the engine, I assumed. "Not really. But no lifts until my skin heals. One week at least."

"That sucks! You worked so hard to get there. And Payton's going to take your place, and she's not half the flyer..."

I tried to concentrate on Jess's words, but the strange engine sound was getting louder. It sounded like the crunch of a rice cake, only muffled.

"...I just. hate. Payton. You know what Courtney tells me? After last week's Varsity game, she saw Payton in the back of Bobby Latham's car and was..."

I shifted my weight and my forearm started to feel like it was on fire. I suddenly grabbed my arm. The noise got louder. I realized what it was.

"Alyssa, are you listening to me? Hello?"

"It's eating my bones," I quietly told her.

"What?"

“My bones! It’s eating my bones!” I yelled so loudly that she slammed on her breaks and my head crashed into her dashboard.



I looked in my bathroom mirror at my bruised forehead. *I can hide it with concealer*, I dully thought. I touched it -- my head felt as tender as my arm. From what I could tell, the insect had eaten the marrow from along my ulna, and if I wasn’t careful, I could easily fracture it. *At least this headache has distracted from the pain.*

I sat down on the toilet lid, defeated. *I’m doomed. This bug is eating me alive. My parents think I’m crazy. My best friend doesn’t believe me. The doctors can’t find it... and neither can I.* I looked weakly at my arm.

There it was. A long bulge, bigger than it was but unmistakably the bug. I could see the imprints of each segment, of its horned head, of every one of its spindle-like needle legs.

It was at the surface, resting on my radial artery. Now was my only chance.

I couldn’t get my artist’s blade, but I had my leg razor. I carefully opened the medicine cabinet, took out the pink razor, and, straining with my left hand, broke the plastic. I took the thin blade in my fingers, preparing to end this bug once in for all. *Take it slow*, I told myself with a future surgeon’s discipline. *If you nick the artery, you could bleed out.*

I plunged the blade into my skin. I felt it make contact with the chitin of the bug’s exoskeleton and I pulled. My forearm throbbed with pain and it was soon wet with blood. I wiped the blood away: I had done it. The bug was bisected. Its tail went limp, while its head thrashed back and forth. *It’s not dead yet*, I thought. *I have to cut it again.*

I took a deep breath and plunged the blade back under my skin. This cut was harder, with the bug moving so much, but after a couple minutes, there were there segmented bulges under my skin.

I smiled. *Now to pull them out.* As I reached for my tweezers, pain shot up my arm. I looked back down.

All three segments were moving.

It can't be possible, I thought, but it was. The insect was regenerative, and instead of killing it, I'd just made my problem three time worse. I dove for my razor, hoping to just cut them out before they squirmed away.

That's when my mother opened the door and screamed.



I sat on the bed, scratching the cotton bandage on my arm. The bandage itched. My pajamas itched. My neck burned--after trying to kill them, the insects moved north to my head.

I was pretty depressed at this point. I figured I'd be dead meat if the bugs put holes in any of my vital organs. Heart. Lungs. Stomach. But I didn't think they'd reach my brain. I could feel one crawling in my sinus cavity just under my left eye. My vision went hazy for a moment and my eye teared up.

I could feel the sharp needle legs of another running across my teeth from the inside of my upper lip--it actually kind of tickled compared to the pain of when they gnawed muscle or bone.

The third was just under the scalp at the base of my ponytail. *So that's how I'll go*, I thought. *My parietal lobe*. I could feel it burrow into the folds of my brain. *Parietal lobe. Center of motor function--I'll soon get dizzy, then I won't be able to walk, then I'll be paralyzed while it eats me alive*. I hugged myself and prepared for the pain.

For a second, it felt like my head split open. Then... nothing.

Shocked, I felt my skull. There was the bug, and it was moving down the back of my head. I could feel the pressure of it. I knew it was there. But it didn't hurt. For the first time in three days, nothing hurt.

It was then I realized: the parietal lobe. Center of feeling.

It ate away the part of me that feels pain.



It's been a week since then.

And it's been the best week of my life.

I know what you may be thinking: *how can you be happy with those creatures still inside you?* And that's a silly question. I'm happy *because* they are inside me. Before my knee injury, I was always worried and stressed and in a sour mood. But now? Now there's no pain in my life. I only see the bright parts of life. The half-full part of the glass.

My parents are still worried, of course. They worry over my stress levels and are taking me to a therapist. It's funny really: they finally are paying attention to me, but nothing's really wrong anymore.

It's not perfect, of course. I know I'm going to die soon. That's the downside of being a medical encyclopedia: you see every symptom. Every now and again, I cough up a little blood, and my right arm is pretty useless since my friends ate through it. It's caused some changes. I had to quit cheer, and I know I'll never get to be a doctor. I probably won't get to seventeen.

But like I said at the beginning, I'm okay.

I do feel sorry for Jessica though. She worries too much. Ever since I quit the team, she's been trying to spend as much time with me as possible. She hasn't gotten a lot of sleep lately, between her class load, cheerleading, and checking in on me. She looks stressed and anxious and...

...well, like how I used to look.

That's why I'm going to give her one of my friends. I hate to part with one, but I really should do something nice for Jessica. After all, she deserves to be happy too. It will eat away her worries just like it did mine, and if I can give her happiness, I should. I mean, isn't that what friends are for?

I know that my friends have made me so much happier.

It's funny, really. My mom was right. All that matters is that I'm finally happy.

And everything's okay.

The Last Breath

Mikyla Massey

Boo.

Lisa King awoke to The Thing as she did every morning.

Oh God, what time is it? Lisa thinks as she wiped her forehead of the glistening sweat beads that had formed from hot flashes throughout the night. Lisa tucked the matted damp hair sticking on her freckled face behind her pink tipped ears. She glanced at the alarm clock. *6:30 in the morning*, she thought. *Right on time, as per usual.* Lisa left the sweat soaked bed sheets behind, replacing her night wear with her regular jeans and a t-shirt.

What, hoping I'd leave? Thing mocked. Lisa grabbed her necklace from her dresser, more than willing to shut the Thing up. Her mind wandered to her curse and The Thing who wakes her up in the morning, teasing her. Lisa had the curse since the death of her grandmother.

The light rain that fogged the edges of the clear kitchen window worried Lisa. Her cat Willow jumped up to the window, and she petted behind her ears. "Grandma, I never knew that you were in so much pain," Lisa wistfully said to Willow. "But I know now."

Lisa begrudgingly thought of the exact moment when her grandma died.

"Remember Lisa," her grandma told her as she unclasped the necklace from her wrinkling neck, "Do not lose this necklace. You have a choice now: you can either see or hear. I love you, and know you're strong."

Lisa smiled sadly. *Alzheimer's is no walk in the park*, she thought.

"Grandma, everything is okay," Lisa consoled her by clutching her gray hand. Life was being drained from Lisa's grandmother as she spoke, but Lisa denied all the wrinkling in her eyes, all the machines beeping, and all the white in the hospital room. Lisa gasped slightly when cold metal touched her hands, and sobbed when her grandmother fell dormant. This time she didn't deny the heart monitor... and its flat line.

That's when she first heard it. **So you're the next in line**, a Thing inside her head rasped. And it had never left since.



Lisa unconsciously clenched the necklace swaying between the bridge of her collar bone. It didn't have any intricate markings - it was just a singular tear drop shaped ruby, similar to the size of a flame on a candle wick. She sighed, knowing she'd have to take it off before she got near anyone.

Lisa closed her eyes momentarily, trusting her feet to carry her to the final but unwanted destination. *Gym*, Lisa thought, *a mandatory class that is despised by all teenagers*. She unclasped her necklace.

And you're no exception Lisa, Thing stated in her mind. Lisa rolls her eyes at the deep but menacing voice - it still gives her chills.

Not today, Lisa thought, *I am in control*.

Thing laughs haughtily, of which sounds like a fork on a chalkboard. ***You say that every day***. Lisa cringed at the truth, reluctantly focusing on the swishing inside the stashed pill bottle in her backpack. ***You try to block me out, with what? Medication? You that won't work. Only one thing works.***

You can't get me to put it on, Lisa thought.

Oh, I can't? You were thinking about your grandmother's final words this morning. But I know her final thoughts. Lisa stopped, knowing that Thing had her. ***I know what she secretly feared at night. Want me to tell you?***

Lisa grit her teeth in anger and quickly put on her necklace before it could say anymore.

"Lisa!" A familiar voice said behind her. Before she could react, Lisa felt a hand on her shoulder. Her vision flooded red.

Lisa saw her best friend Charlotte, a few years older than she was now. Charlotte's tan and beautiful face was pale. Charlotte's chocolate colored hair normally tied up into a perfect bun was ragged, and her usually joyous eyes were barren. A burglar sneaks up behind her and shoots her in the back. While the intruder searches her apartment for anything valuable, Charlotte moans in pain and grips the blood-stained carpet, searching for anything to help her.

"Lisa!"

Charlotte's scolding voice broke Lisa from her vision. Lisa apologetically looks up, and is relieved to see her regular bun matching with her loving hazel eyes. "We have to go to gym." Lisa nods and follows her friend into school.

"Hey Charlotte, hi Lisa!" Although Lisa had been looking down trying to avoid all of her peers, she had to look at Josh. Lisa took a deep breath, forced a smile, and looked up at Josh. He leaned down and kissed her.

Lisa disappeared from the school's hallway and dove into a car. Lisa was in the backseat with a drunken Josh. Josh was laughing to the words on the radio, unaware of the swerving of the car -- the driver was drunk too. Headlights hit Josh's car with a devastating *screeeeech*. Lisa watched, as she did almost every day, Josh's body heave its last breaths then die silently.

"Lisa, are you okay?" Josh's voice turned from the heart shattering whisper to normal, shaking Lisa out of her vision. Josh's concerned blue eyes greet hers. "Why are you shaking so much?" Lisa gazes down at her quivering hands, and shrugs. But in her mind Lisa was thinking, *I wish I could tell you.*

This was the irony of Lisa's curse. The Thing would always be in her mind, taunting her, belittling her, telling her terrible truths and wicked lies. It never slept and no medication could completely silence it. The only thing that got it to shut up for a while was her grandmother's necklace.

But the necklace... it was cursed as well. The necklace gave Lisa the power to see the death of anyone she touched right before her very eyes. Unwillingly. Every time Lisa even so much as brushed past a person, she sees their death. Charlotte. Josh. Her parents. She's seen all of them die, and every time Lisa has tried to warn them of their impending deaths, her skin blisters and sears in pain -- as if she were being burned from the inside out.

This was her grandmother's warning, the burden she lived with: Lisa could either live with the rantings of Thing or live with seeing grisly death.

"C'mon," Charlotte said, "Let's get to gym."



"Lisa... I'm worried about you. So is Josh. I know that you've been distant..."

Charlotte began her typical rant as she was shoving her clothes into her over piled locker. She glanced at Lisa whose eyes were focused on the ground. *Just like they always are*, Charlotte thought. "I think that maybe, well, maybe you're an-"

Lisa sharply interjected, "I'm not an addict, Lottie." Charlotte opened her mouth but closed it. She doesn't like it when Lisa gets mad at her - especially about being a pill popper.

I'm going to talk to her neighbor after school and tell him to stop selling her Xanax, Charlotte thought to herself. There was a silent but mutual agreement to end the conversation, and the two continued fixing their hair in the large rectangular bathroom mirror. Lisa finished tying her scarlet curls into a pony and began leaving Charlotte behind, still upset about the incident.

"Lisa-" Charlotte began, but Lisa interrupted her angrily.

Lisa turned around furiously, her face as red as an overripe tomato and said, "I am not an addict, Charlotte. Can you please just drop the damn--"

"No! It's not about that. It's just that you look like you're always fighting, Lisa. And I'm not talking about your parents, or even about how your grandma died. You look like you're in a constant battle. And... well most days you look like you're losing."

Charlotte had gotten closer and closer to Lisa, and at the end of her sentence she gave Lisa a hug. Lisa barely got her necklace off in time. It was a pleasant hug that warmed Lisa's lonely and isolated heart. With that, Charlotte left quietly.

Lisa turned to the mirror again, and her eyes filled up with that slowly rolled down her face. Lisa saw her true depression standing right there in the reflection of the stained mirror: the sunken eyes, shaking hands, and her skinny bones. Lisa was a skeleton, that would crumble to dust from a slight summer breeze.

Poor little Lisa. Too afraid to face her fears, she hides behind a bottle of pills. Typical of the King name. Thing laughs maniacally.

Thing's insult burned her chest. Lisa wiped the tears trailing down her face with a swipe of her palms. "Come on," she said, her depression setting back in. "We need to go home."

With each step that hit the ground, Lisa cried louder and forced herself to sprint home faster. Burning sensations tingled in her feet, but Lisa only paid attention to the harsh breathing that she was ashamed to call her own.

What are you? she thought as she ran. *Why are you torturing me, Thing?*

Did your grandmother never tell you the story? Thing asked. ***It's quite interesting. My mother was a witch, and the King family burned her at the stake centuries ago in the old country. Your family made me watch my mother burn in front of my very eyes. I was nine years old. But while she was burning alive, she put a spell on me, binding my soul to the eldest woman of the King family line. That's why your grandmother only had boys and prayed she never had a granddaughter. Too bad you came along.***

Lisa held back her tears, not wanting Thing to get her to cry again. *Let's say I believe you. Tell me this then: why does the necklace make you go away?*

Oh, the necklace is an old family heirloom. Of my family, not yours. The only way to fight the curse is through objects my family owned. What you keep wearing my mother's necklace.

Her necklace?

Yes. She was a very paranoid soul, my poor mother. Always worried about me, worried that I would leave the house and never returned. So she made a necklace that allowed her to see my death every day. That way, she'd be sure no harm would come to me that day. And now, you get the treat of watching your loved ones die too.

Lisa reached her house and sat, thinking. *There has to be a way out of this.*

There isn't. I've been bonded to ten generations of your family. They couldn't find a way out. Your grandmother couldn't break the curse. The only peace you'll ever get is death.

Shut up, Lisa thought.

I don't think so. I'm in control, Lisa. Not you.

Lisa put on the necklace so she could think. She ran her hand through her hair. Willow came and nuzzled against Lisa's leg. "Thank God, I can only see human deaths, she said, picking the cat up.

Lisa looked at Willow's face, wishing they could trade place. Willow had an itch, and started vigorously pawing at her right eye.

"Careful!" Lisa said. "You might accidentally put out--"

Lisa froze and grimaced. She knew what she could do.

Lisa went over to the counter and picked up a small paring knife. This will do, Lisa thought. She looked over at the picture of her grandmother and took another look at Willow. Then Lisa lifted the knife in the air, smiling and thinking, *I win*.

In the driveway, she faintly heard Charlotte say, "Lisa? You home?" before the knife came down.



Charlotte stumbled upon Lisa unconscious and facedown in a pool of blood. She looked to be crying. Charlotte screamed and called the ambulance. She then turned back to Lisa, who seemed to be crying.

"Lisa? Are you okay? Lisa, what happened?"

Charlotte turned Lisa over to see her face. There were two bloody depressions where Lisa's eyes used to be. Charlotte brought her hand to her face, seeing Lisa's two blue eyes carved out and sitting on the floor.

She looked back at Lisa and saw that she wasn't crying.

She was laughing.

And whispering "I win... I win... I win..."