

Nicole A.

Spoooooky Storyyyy

Highschool Senior

Age:17

Goatman

My hands are searching my pockets. *Where is it?* All I feel is the denim rubbing against my fingertips. My fingertips are losing hope until I check my bag. In it lies nonsensical necessities: a finger, a rabbit's foot, a dried flower, an eye, a blistered tongue. *Found it!* I pull out my wallet; *money isn't real*. The most fantastical thing in my bag is the money that hides in my wallet. The most real thing about it is the blood stained onto the paper's face.

"That'll be \$9.14," the one behind the register has the eyes of a goat, and I think about how they'll taste.

I hand her my card, and I walk over to the other side of the shop, where I'll pace to the left and right in anticipation of my package awaiting me at the foot of my door. *People aren't real*.

"Order 19!"

It is 8 or so in the morning, I'm grabbing my coffee, and I am heading back home in anticipation of my package and sleep. The workday was long, 39,000 hours long to be specific.

My eyes droop to a solemn close as I stumble disappointedly through the front door, where I'll slam the door in disappointment because my package hasn't yet arrived. *I'm going to kill myself*. My body collapses in a rage of disappointment and loathing. My face hits the cold wooden floor; I don't feel a thing.

Many hours pass as I dream of small men in tempered spectacle; twirling and spiraling, they go pass through absent minds and joyful smiles.

BRRIING!- it goes! I tell you-BRRIING! My doorbell shakes a violent spur. My face, drenched in drool and sweat, awakens, my hand wiping the sleepday's evidence away. My body is heavy as I force it up into a tabletop; I peer into the peephole, and all my eyes are able to capture are knees. *Ughhh, why not the mailman?* I drag my body into an upright position, and peering through the peephole that meets my eye in an upright position, a visage of a man with an elongated, grizzled snout and horned head greets me. *Oh god! Is that **my** package? Oh dear, if there's a god, please tell me it is.*

The door knob turns. *Why not the regular mailman?* The door is open only a crack. My arm unnaturally bends and writhes through the open crack and snatches the package right from the goat man's hands. *Wait, a goat man? There was a goat man at the door! Don't see that handsome devil everyday! Oh wait, he is me and I am him.*

"Behhhh," came from the other side of the door.

I hastily grab the pair of scissors to open up Pandora's box. *Why are they called a pair of scissors when it's just one tool? Yes, there are two blades, but separated, you do not call them a "scissor". What madness is that?* Tearing open the box, I see a glimpse of heaven shine out; it nearly blinds me. I see my father: a bony frail man. His mouth is gaping open, as if someone had hung from it like a tree branch.

"Son...You...You're a-a... Goatman..." I blankly stare back at him. *What is he going on about? Isn't he supposed to be still and quiet? Forever trapped in this moment as I willed for him? I am no goatman.* But as I stare further into the box, I see myself. *By God, I **am** a goatman!* I threw the box across the room. *What witchcraft is this? Who dares humor me with such juvenile*

tricks? At this point, I am furious. My hooves stomp on account of their own will. Then a thought passes through my head: *I forgot to take my insanity.* Quickly, I trot on over and take the pills that guard my nightstand. Ashamed and furious at my fear, I resolve quite quickly. *I am in hell. I am not this man's son. I am his savior. I will not dare live in his son's mortality.* I crave, and the next workday begins. *I am the devil.*

12th

Age: 17

Grade: 12

My Favorite Coustume

Once upon a time, there lived in the quaint little town of Whiskerwood a naughty but lovable cat named Toby. Whiskerwood was known for its love of Halloween, and the town celebrated the holiday with great enthusiasm. The autumn leaves painted the city in reds, oranges, and golds, and the warm air carried spooky tales and witty ghostly tales

Toby was no slouch. He loved to travel, had a curious heart, and had a great love of Halloween. Every year, when the city was filled with joy in the days leading up to the holiday, he longed to be part of the celebration. And every year she would come up with a costume idea to be the life of the Halloween party.

This year, Toby decided he wanted to be a ghost. He spent his days planning, plotting, and carefully studying the details of the town's history, the friendly spirit of Whiskerwood, and a dog named Casper Whiskerstein. Casper was famous for walking around town in a white tie and carrying his fun antics with delight children, but he disappeared years ago, and Toby wants to pay tribute to a phantom he loved

Toby roamed the city in search of the perfect ghost suit, sneaking into basements and attics in search of perfection. She gathered some old white paper, scissors, and yarn, and set to work creating the most amazing ghost dress the town had ever seen with sparkly star eyes with buttons and a flowing, ethereal tail with old knots has been done. Its heart-shaped snout peeked out from under the leaf, giving it a very attractive appearance.

As Halloween night approached, Whiskerwood was abuzz with activity. Every house is decorated with bananas, witches, and spider webs, and children wonder fondly if their costumes The city had seen it before. It had sparkly starry eyes with buttons and a flowing, ethereal tail made of old wires. Its heart-shaped snout peeked out from under the leaf, giving it a very attractive appearance.

As Halloween night approached, Whiskerwood was abuzz with activity. Every house is decorated with bananas, witches, and spider webs and children fondly discuss their costumes at school. Toby couldn't wait to show off his masterpiece.

One chilly Halloween night, she slipped into her ghost costume and went out into the streets. Her heart pounded in excitement as she joined the crowd of costumed creatures and ghouls, all smiling, and joining in the celebration.

"Toby! What a beautiful ghost you are!" Mrs. Tubbypaws, the oldest dog in town, shouted as she passed.

"Thank you, Mrs. Tabbypaws," Toby replied with a ghostly nod. He felt a warmth in his heart as the townspeople admired his outfit.

Toby happily took in the Halloween parade. She danced and played tricks, made new friends, and shared in the holiday cheer. Along the way, he also met a friendly character named Belfry, who told him horrible things that sent shivers down his spine.

As the night wore on, the moon shone higher, casting a new-world glow over the city. They gathered in the town square for the annual costume contest, and Toby decided to join. He strode onto the stage, his tie dramatically wobbling, and introduced himself to the judges.

The judges, three owls known for their intelligence, were in awe of Toby's costume. "What's your name, little spirit?" asked a squirrel.

"My tribute to Toby, and tonight's friendly spirit Casper Whiskerstein," he replied politely.

The judge of Toby and his ghostly hospitality captivated them. When the winners were announced, Toby took the lead, to loud applause from the crowd.

Toby's heart tightened in pleasure. She had achieved her dream of becoming a Halloween star in Whiskerwood, and her costume had won the town's accolades. She felt more belonged and accepted than ever.

Once the night was over and the townspeople had dismissed, Toby took off his clothes and headed home. He couldn't stop thinking about the Halloween magic he experienced. She found the best part of the holiday wasn't the uniforms or the prizes, but the sense of community and friendships it created

The next year, Toby was already thinking about his next Halloween trip. He had learned that the true spirit of Halloween was not to be spooky or spooky but to celebrate the magic of the season together with his loved ones and in Whiskerwood where every Halloween is an unforgettable night of fun, he was Toby knows the celebration of the holiday That he will always have a special place in the stars.

Robert S

30817

MRHS Senior

“Liminality”

If you sleep, you die. That’s how it has been for the past however long. This car ride home is making me drowsy. But I won’t succumb to it just yet. Because if I do, I will be dead in a short while, and I would take everyone down with me.

Apparently there is this... thing... happening to people around this area. I don’t know what it is. No one knows, really. Anyway, it’s some wicked thing where anyone who goes to sleep will have this dream of... utter bliss. Everyone is calling it “liminality”. Sounds fitting, I suppose.

Again, I don’t know what the dream is or how blissful it could be. Well, you could have gotten that from the fact that I haven’t croaked yet. This dream makes you go bananas. People who have had it will try to kill anyone they see. They say they do this to make the world like their dream they had. Sounds like a silly reason to--

“Does anyone need anything? If so, I can stop by the next town over.”

That came from Ellen, my good friend and the driver of the ride we took to Seattle earlier tonight. She looked to be very focused on the road ahead. I would do the same; driving on harsh January roads under the waning crescent of the 1 AM moon is no easy task. Knowing this, I answered in a way as to not draw too much of her attention.

“I have everything I need already.” This is true, as I have an almost full canteen of lukewarm water, a bag of Cadbury Caramellos that I had been routinely snacking on this whole trip, and I wasn’t in any rush to find a washroom.

“Okay. Monica?” Ellen queried. A few seconds came and went, and she went unanswered. Perhaps Monica couldn’t hear her over the early 2010s industry-standard party pop trash that Ellen liked to blast out of the aux at almost max volume. I will never understand why she does that.

“Monica!” Ellen belted out with a touch more force. Afterwards, we heard nothing but crickets. Crickets, and that autotune spaghetti that the radio was emitting. I swiveled my head leftward, and there lies Monica, passed out and sprawled across the rear seats, with her almost black hair barricading her face.

“Damn it. She’s knocked out cold.” I quipped, this time so loud that Ellen could clearly hear me. I didn’t care if I made the car smash into a stake. Right now, falling asleep is a death sentence, both for Monica and for us in the front.

Ellen replied with a worried expression which was devoid of speech. Even though she said nothing, I could tell she was internally hyperventilating. I am too, but I am a lot better at suppressing my inner thoughts. I was trying to untangle them, when we heard some disturbing sounds coming from the radio. Even more disturbing than 2010s pop trash, which before now I thought was impossible.

We heard those blaring tones that made you think the world would soon end. You know those ear-piercingly annoying sounds that your TV or your cell phone makes whenever a flood is coming or a kid goes missing? We heard those, but we were all in one place, and I couldn’t tell how the weather was, but it didn’t look like it could harm us.

Then came the computer-like voice that sounded like it was announcing the apocalypse. And with all the wicked shit that happened earlier, it might as well be. The voice started.

“The following message is transmitted at the request of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in conjunction with the United States Department of Health and Human Services and numerous state level governments.”

God, help us. Whatever news this frightening voice had for us, we knew it wouldn't be good.

The voice continued. “The exponential growth of the liminal dream condition has created a significant danger to civilian life in the western United States, particularly in the Pacific Northwest, where crime has skyrocketed from liminality victims. Unfortunately, with this civil threat present, it has been determined that normal life cannot continue until the current threat is resolved.”

I had been paying so much attention to the alert that I hadn't noticed that Ellen stopped the car along the county road we were driving on. We just gave horrified glances towards each other. Neither one of us dared to let a word slip from either of our lips. We both looked back afterwards. Monica was still sound asleep. It's almost impressive that she's still knocked out after that radio kept running its speakers.

Good for us. The longer Monica stays asleep, the longer Ellen and I live.

“Effective at 12 AM tomorrow, martial law will be declared in the following states: New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Montana,...” The voice kept going. Ellen and I both knew we would be stuck in this conundrum, even if the voice hadn't said it yet.

“... Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, and California.” There it was. We were now trapped here in Washington, with just the two of us for god knows how far. I was just in a trance, and so was Ellen, from what I could observe.

“All transportation to, from, and within these states will be heavily monitored, and a mandatory curfew of 11 PM to 7 AM will be enforced for all residents. Periodic checks of households will be conducted to ensure that all members of the household are--”

Ellen summoned enough courage to finally shut that damned radio off. I guess she couldn’t stomach the gravity of reality right now. Well, neither can I. All of this shit is about to make me hurl. A half-unconscious voice coming from the back was what finally did me in.

“What happened--where are we?” That voice was Monica’s, but her voice was the last one I wanted to hear. Those first words, I thought to myself, might as well be announcing my death. I wordlessly wedged open my car door and excused myself from the vehicle. In contrast, Ellen did nothing. I could hear the commotion left in the car, as I hadn’t closed the door when I stepped out.

“Get me out of here. I want to go back.” Monica started to squeak out in a barely intelligible, half-awake mumble.

“Go back where?” Ellen shot back.

“That... place... where I can be alone, and happy again.”

“That’s where we’re trying to go.” Ellen assured. I wanted to correct her, but the less we set Monica over the edge, the better for us.

“Why can’t I just be the only person left in this world?” Holy. Those words made my bones tremble. I can’t just stand here and do nothing.

“Just trust us. Only a few more hours, and you can go back home, and not have to talk to anyone.” I said that like she really liked solitude. I knew it wasn’t true; Monica wouldn’t shut up about whatever dumb thing she overheard in school or over social media all the time. My SMS inbox is cluttered with crap she sent me. But if that god-awful voice was telling the truth, then she really wants to be alone. Either that, or die trying.

“I want to be ALONE! JUST DIE ALREADY!” Monica sprung at Ellen, who was climbing out of the car at this time. The sudden pounce Monica made forced Ellen out for good. Everything was a blur, partly because it was 1 in the morning and I couldn’t see much, but also because the little smackdown between Ellen and Monica happened so fast. Something something, Monica trying to strangle Ellen, something, Ellen throwing a spare fist back at Monica, something something, Monica screaming about that liminality shit and being alone, something else. Whatever that was, both of their fates were sealed. Ellen would fall into one of Monica’s hands, and Monica herself would fall into her other. I knew Ellen would die, and Monica too sometime after, but I wouldn’t be there to witness it.

Thankfully for me, Ellen left the car keys in the ignition. All I had to do was get in the driver’s seat, close the door, and turn the key. I could barely hear the car start over the conclusion of Ellen’s fate, who was likely on the last threads of her life after indirectly falling victim to liminality. I don’t want to be there to watch. I’m just getting out of here, either to find a safe harbor somewhere, or to find a stake to crash into so my fate isn’t sealed by liminality. If I choose the latter, then hopefully I’ll find Ellen in heaven. And Monica too, given that after she passes in the hands of liminality, she makes it to heaven and not the liminal world she dreamt about.



Spooky Story Entry

1 message

Tue, Oct 31, 2023 at 8:36 PM

Madison J

12th Grade

I Hate the DMV

I remember when I was 16, my older brother was missing. *What an idiot*, I always thought. He drew way too much attention to our family that we didn't need. I remembered hoping he would turn up, preferably alive because the family business could barely function without him. As stupid as he was, he was really the brawn of operation, and we needed *a lot* of brawn.

I remember after his disappearance my parents told me that I *had* to get my stupid drivers license. And I *hated* driving. I couldn't park. Parallel, nonparallel, none of it. It's ridiculous. Then, if I managed to actually get my license, I would have to drive my dad's old, janky black van around, which he always thought was pretty inconspicuous, but I always believed it had the opposite effect.

Technically, I had already taken the test. Three times, in different states. In my defense, each state has its own ridiculous regulations that have prevented me from actually obtaining my license. Like when we were in Utah, I barely- I *mean* barely- hit the car in front of me. But it barely even left a dent, so really I'm not even sure why they failed me- the brakes of their stupid testing car were obviously faulty. Then, when we were living in Missouri, I took it again and failed because I went a *little* over the speed limit in a school zone and I was "hazardous to children". It's not my fault that the second graders crossing the street weren't

where they were going. I think if anything, I was sharpening their senses because there are lots of dangerous things to be aware of out there. I was definitely doing a service to the future generation.

In Maine, I was actually doing pretty well, but there was this annoying thumping noise in the trunk. *Thump, thump, thump.* In Maine, I had to provide my own car for the test, so I took my brother's. It was a black car that he kept really clean, for the most part. Except for what he kept in his trunk, obviously.

Every stop sign, stoplight, every turn- that's all me and the test guy heard. *Thump, thump, thump.* I kept thinking in my head- *What could that idiot possibly have in the back of his car...it sounds really heavy...oops! Swerved off the road for a second there...*

When I was lost in my own thoughts, I think the driver test guy was slowly losing his mind to the *thump thump thump*-ing too. He looked as if he was going to pull out his thin, white hair. *Looks like it's going to fall out any day, anyways...* "Can you *please* pull over and contain whatever is in the back of your trunk?" His hands were clawing the door handle, as if his life depended on his grip.

"Yessir." I pulled over, the car jerking to a sudden stop. Never exactly mastered the use of my brakes...

We were in a sort of deserted part of town, near sunset. I took a minute to observe the orange-reddish hue painted across the horizon. You know how some days you really admire the gorgeous horizon and that really sticks with you? That was for sure one of those days.

I finally opened the trunk and immediately rolled my eyes. It was the bloodied body of our across the street neighbor Mr. Reynolds. By the looks of it, my brother got him last night, came straight home, and went to sleep for the next 12 hours, forgetting that I had my driver's test the next day. *Not even properly wrapped. Talk about incompetent.* I thought to myself. *Maybe it's a good thing that I'm getting my license...*

Once again, lost in thought for a couple of minutes, I didn't notice the driving test guy get out of the passenger seat to come and check on me. In my defense, he didn't scream, his mouth was just gaping wide. He suddenly grabbed his chest and fell down. His fall was immediately followed by a *cracking* noise. Hesitantly, I lifted up his head to see that he had cracked his skull on a sharp rock. I winced. I wasn't so used to *fresh* dead bodies- I usually handled the ones that were already chopped up and ready to go.

walked to a gas station we had passed about two miles back. I used the payphone outside to call my brother. He picked up immediately. *What a loser...nothing better to do.* "Hello?" His deep voice answered.

"Hey, genius. You left our dinner in the back of your car. The driving test guy found it and he had a heart attack."

He swore under his breath. "I'll get Dad's van..."

He arrived about 30 minutes later, loading up Mr. Reynolds in the van. The night finally cast its cover upon us, leaving me to call 911 about the old driving instructor.

It took a bit of lying, telling the police I was in such a state of shock I had to sit in the driver's seat for 30 minutes before realizing what to do. They believed me, of course. Didn't really question it much at all, actually. Unfortunately since my test administrator dropped dead during my test, they couldn't give me my license and while I don't count it as a fail, the DMV certainly did.

When I returned home that night, Mom had already prepared dinner. Thankfully, Mr. Reynolds made for quite a tasty meatball. It was one of the last times I was truly happy, I think. Spaghetti and meatballs for dinner in my favorite season of autumn, hollowed out skulls with candles inside illuminating the dining room for decoration. We're not wasteful people. Also, if you know of a way to get a Mr. Reynolds meatball for my final meal that would be absolutely delightful.

We moved not long after that to Wyoming. Where my brother went missing and his body was found in the trunk of his black car, drained of all his blood, a threat from a rivalry business, I'm sure. I also finally got my license, which was cool for a while. Until the family was caught. And I was old enough to be tried as an adult, just for having a different taste in cuisine, compared to your next door neighbor.

This is a student email account monitored by Widefield School District. The contents of this email are governed by state laws and the board policies of the school district.

Horror Stories in the Dark

In the middle of a fog-shrouded town, between ancient forests, stood an antique bookstore known as "Buckets O' Blood Bookstore." The shop has been operating for generations upon generations. The shelves of this book store are lined with mysteries, general knowledge, and, as local folklore says, cursed books. Among all of these wonderful books, there was a book lined in dusted over cork leather. This relic was known only as "Salem's Lot."

On a particularly chilly evening, Charlie, an exceptionally curious student with an obsession with the supernatural, wandered into Buckets O' Blood Bookstore. She had never visited this store before or even heard of it, but she was drawn to the ominous name hoping to find a good horror story to read. She wandered in and walked around searching for the horror tales and stumbled upon the old shelves in the back that were labeled as non-fiction horror tales. She was drawn to the book "Salem's Lot." She picked this book up and dusted off the back cover trying to find the summary that's on the back of most books, but she had no such luck in finding one. She decided to take the book anyways and decided that she would go and read the first few pages and if she didn't like it, she'd come back and pick another book. She was drawn to this book because she felt as though there was a malevolent energy to it and she needed to figure out why exactly she was feeling this.

As she walked to the counter to purchase this forbidden feeling book, the shopkeeper, a frail, old woman, issued her a warning as he rang up the book.

"Remember dear, not all stories are meant to be told. This book holds secrets, and once they are released, they will haunt you."

Charlie laughed off his warning and thanked him after he had given the book back and walked out of the store. She returned to her apartment eager to dive into this book and its forbidden secrets. As she opened the book, she thought she felt the room grow colder as her arms filled with goosebumps. The words seemed to come to life as she read them, "In the village of Salem..." As she read on, the room began to feel even colder, and suddenly a spectral figure appeared before her. It was this figure, dressed in tattered garments, and Charlie could feel its hollow black eyes locking onto her.

Terrified, Charlie tried to slam the book shut, but her hands were not obeying the commands. The room began transforming, and within the mere blink of an eye, she found herself standing in this village of Salem. Her surroundings matched perfectly with the descriptions listed in this book.

Panicked, she called out to this being "What do you want from me?"

The being replied with nothing more than a whisper. "You summoned me, and now, the tales will continue to unfold around you. You are trapped in these stories of the book."

Desperate to escape this nightmare, Charlie frantically tried to flip the pages, hoping to find a way to release herself from this curse. However, each page she turned unveiled a new horrifying scene, and this figure moved closer with each chapter that passed. Charlie's heart began to race as she realized that the tales were coming to life, with her as an unwilling protagonist.

Her friends who happened to be visiting her apartment, shared the same demise. They huddled together in this village, inside of how they were going to escape this nightmare that they've wound up in.

As they faced the horrors in the village, Charlie and her friends desperately brainstormed ways to break free. The spectral figure hovered nearby, its presence chilling their souls. One of Charlie's friends, David, who was a history major, remembered reading about an amulet that helped break curses. After searching, they discovered a passage that described the amulet's location. Charlie focused on summoning the amulet to her and using all her will, and it soon began to materialize. With the amulet in hand, Charlie raised it high, and the spectral figure recoiled in agony. The village around began to disintegrate into nothingness.

Gasping for breath, they found themselves back in Charlie's apartment where the book lay before them. The figure was nowhere to be seen. Relieved, they knew they had to put an end to this malevolent book. Charlie, her hands trembling, reached for the book, and her friends helped her close it.

But the story was far from over, as the book still had many tales it could bring to life. They needed a way to ensure that this book could never harm anyone again.

The group decided to take the cursed book back to the bookstore. They believed the shopkeeper might be able to provide them with some guidance.

Upon their arrival, this shopkeeper revealed her true identity as a guardian of the cursed book. She explained how the book was a creation of dark magic that was bound to trap those who dared to read it. It had been stored away, but time had weakened its enchantment and allowed it to resurface.

She gave them an ancient key, and explained that it was the only way to seal the book's malevolent tales. She explained that the key could only be used once, and they had to choose which of the stories to lock away.

Back at Charlie's apartment, the group looked over the stories within the book trying to decide which was the most dangerous. They needed to ensure that the curse was contained once and for all. After much debate, they settled on the story of a vengeful spirit who terrorized a small village. It was a tale of relentless malevolence, and they feared what would happen if they let it roam free in the world.

With heavy hearts, Charlie placed the ancient key onto the page containing the story. A surge passed through the room as the story got locked away. The room filled with newfound tranquility.

As the book lay dormant, the group sighed with relief. They knew the book's influence had been contained, and the tales would no longer come to life.

Charlie and her friends returned to their normal lives. The book remained locked away in a hidden vault, acting as a reminder of the dangers that lurked in it.

Years passed, and the tales within remained silent. However, deep within its pages, one story, locked by the ancient key, held a secret. The darkness within could not be contained forever.

On a stormy night, years later, the ancient key began to vibrate. It levitated from its resting place, drawn back to the book. The story it had sealed away was calling out and seeking release. As the key hovered over the book, the story began to emerge once more. A spectral figure, the spirit from the tale had materialized. It was free again, and its hollow eyes glowed with malevolence.

The curse had not been contained; it had merely bided its time, waiting for an opportunity to strike again. The nightmare had returned, and this time, there was no one to stop it.

Brooklyn
Hi

Taken

Magdalen B.

18 years old

12th grade

10/28/2023

It was 10:30 on Halloween night and Grayson pecked through the living room window to see if his boyfriend Felix had arrived. Grayson was home alone. While he waited he started to make snacks, drinks, and get the movies prepared. Once he was done making sure everything was perfect and in place. Grayson checked the window again, still no sign of Felix. Checking his phone again for any type of message from Felix, Grayson heard a faint knock at the front door.

Grayson's head snapped up from his phone and turned toward the front door. Normally Felix would text Grayson that he's here or he would use his key that Grayson gave him. Getting an uneasy feeling, Grayson decided to call Felix. After a few minutes the phone line picked up.

"He-"

"We're sorry but the number you're trying to reach is currently not available" Still having that unsettling feeling Grayson decided to look out the living room window again. This time there was a man, he was wearing a mask, dressed in all black. Both making eye contact, Grayson slowly backed away from the window. Struggling to get his phone out, Grayson manages to call the police.

"Um h-hi, I-I need the police, there's a strange m-man standing outside my h-house. M-my address is 1827 GreenField Drive. H-how much longer until they get here?" Grayson was quivering in fear.

“Not mu-” The phone call drops.

“H-Hello?” Grayson asked in fear. Pulling the phone from his ear, Grayson eyes widen to see that the phone call has been disconnected. He heard the front door open and footsteps coming towards him. His body tenses.

“Felix? Felix, this isn’t funny.” Grayson says with a light laugh.

“I’m not Felix.” With that a hand came around Grayson’s face. Within minutes everything in Grayson’s vision became blurry then dark. Waking up with a pounding headache, Grayson sat up rubbing his head in hope to rub away his pounding headache. Once he was fully awake he realized that he was in an unfamiliar room. Looking around the room he noticed that there was a cracked window, the walls had water damage, wallpaper starting to peel, then there was a furnace, it was broken. Grayson tried to get from the floor, but then was pulled back down to the floor. He looked down to see what pulled him back down, he saw a chain wrapped around his right ankle, the chain was connected to the furnace. Grayson starts to panic.

The chain rustled and clinked together as Grayson tried to get the chains off. No matter how hard he tried the chain wouldn’t budge. Still trying to get the chain off Grayson heard something walking towards the room. He stopped pulling on the chains. The footsteps grew louder and louder until they stopped in front of the door. The door opened revealing a man. This man had spiky black hair and wore glasses. Grayson could see in his left hand he was holding an envelope.

“Good morning,” he said with a smile, then started moving toward Grayson and bending down to his eye level.

“W-where am I? Who a-are you? What do you w-want?” Grayson stammers. The man just smirked and looked down.

"I'll tell you, if you tell me who Felix is," the man said looking up at Grayson. *Is this man crazy?* Grayson thought

"F-Felix is my boyfriend." Grayson said while looking at the man, the man sighed, showing a simple smile as he pushed up his glasses. He waves the envelope in front of Grayson.

"Are you sure about that? Because I might have proof that says otherwise" he says while making eye contact.

"Who are you? What do you want? " Grayson said again more firmly.

"Hmm, who am I? I suppose I'm somebody. What do I want? Hmm what do I want? I want you. Here with me." Then he tossed the envelope at Grayson. Grayson hesitantly grabbed the envelope. Opening the envelope, there were pictures of Grayson. Pictures of him in his house, outside, at school, he then stumbled across a picture of Felix with another man. *Who is this guy? Who is the man with Felix? What does this guy want from me?* Grayson's thoughts were all over the place.

"W-who's that guy with Felix?" Grayson asked while staring at the picture. Tears were threatening to fall from his eyes. Grayson tried his best to keep his composure.

"He's nobody. You know Grayson, Felix doesn't deserve you" the man said as he snatched the pictures and envelope from Grayson's hands. Grayson looked at the man with teary eyes.

"Why did you bring me here? Why did you show me that picture?" Grayson cried as tears spilled from his eyes. The man sighed while pushing up his glasses. He stood up, turning to the door then turned back to Grayson. He smiled at Grayson and started kicking him until he could see Grayson starting to bleed. Bending down to Grayson's level the man's smile was gone.

He grabs a fist full of Grayson's hair, pulling him closer to his face. Groaning in pain Grayson looked up at the person who just beat him.

“You know, you shouldn’t ask so many questions. It annoys me.” then shoved Grayson’s head away as he stood up and walked towards the door slamming it as he left. Trying to catch his breath, Grayson cried in pain. Grayson slowly moved his legs to his chest. He broke down and cried in pain.

“I-I want t-to go h-home..” Grayson said to himself. That night Grayson cried himself to sleep that night. The next day Grayson woke up covered in his own blood and bruises. Trying to sit up Grayson hissed in pain, he was wheezing, and coughing up blood. He stopped moving for a moment. Moving his right hand to the left side of his chest, Grayson slowly continued to sit up. Wiping the fresh blood from the corner of his mouth. Hearing the same footsteps coming towards the door panic took over Grayson’s mind his eyes widened, body tensed, breathing hitched. The door swung open revealing the same man from yesterday. He was holding a tray of food. He set the tray of food on the floor near the door, then he walked out the door.

He came back with a bowl of water, a rag and bandages. He walked over to Grayson. Bending down to Grayson’s level, setting the bowl, towel, and the bandages on the floor.

“I’m sorry Grayson.” he said, looking down at the floor as he dipped the rag into the water. He moved the rag up to Grayson's face to wipe off the dried and new blood off Grayson's face. Grayson hissed in pain from the rag rubbing up against his fresh wounds. The man dipped the rag in the water a few times and it slowly started to turn a bright red.

“Why..why am I here?..Who are you?..” Grayson asked faintly. The man just sighs, putting the rag on the edge of the bowl, now applying the bandages to Graysons wounds.

"I'll answer one question. Only one." the man said, making eye contact with Grayson. Grayson gulped. So many questions ran through his head. *Who is he? What's his name? Why am I here? Why was Felix with that man? Who was that man with Felix?* All these thoughts swarmed Grayson's head.

"Who..Who are you?" Grayson asks in fear. He heard the man lightly laugh.

"My name is Rome. Lee Rome." he responded with a smile.

"I really am sorry Grayson." Rome said, hanging his head low as he started to pick up the bandage wrappers then ring out the bloody rag.

"Are you hungry?" Rome asked as he stood up walking towards the tray of food. When he picked up the tray of food Rome heard the sound of chains rattling together, turning around he saw Grayson trying to crawl towards the window. A fit of rage ran through Rome. Throwing the tray of food on the floor Rome rushed over to Grayson and grabbed a fist full of Grayson's hair. Dragging Grayson back to the furnace, Grayson screamed in agony. Grayson was trying everything to get out of Rome's grip. But Rome just tightened his grip on Grayson's hair. Rome slammed Grayson hard into the furnace. Grabbing Grayson's hair again, Rome heard Grayson hiss in pain.

"Why did you do that? Huh? Were you trying to escape?" Rome asked in pure anger. Minutes passed and Rome grew impatient waiting for Grayson's answer.

"ANSWER ME!" Rome yelled as he tightened his grip with Grayson's hair. Rome felt Grayson trying to pull Rome's hand off his hair. He just pushed Grayson's hands off. All he could hear was Grayson groaning in pain. Released his grip on Grayson's hair and walked away from Grayson.

"Get up.." Rome said, while looking at the boy laying on the floor.

“GET UP” Rome yelled as he grabbed Grayson's shoulders to make him sit up.

Rome was trying to calm down. He sighed while rubbing his eyes, turning his head to see Grayson crying and holding the side of his chest. Rome turned around then walked out of the room slamming the door. Grayson flinched, then started to cry even harder from all the pain he had endured from the last two days. It's been a few hours and Grayson had calmed down and now he was starting to get hungry. He regretted trying to move towards the window.

Grayson then heard footsteps coming towards the door. Seeing the door open and Rome walking through. Rome's head was tilted, a smirk was plastered on his face. He stumbled towards Grayson bent to eye level, the strong stench of alcohol ran through Grayson's nose. Grayson's face scrunched due to the stench of alcohol. Grayson turned his head to get away from the smell but Rome grabbed Grayson's face and pulled it close to his face.

“What's *hiccup* the matter love? Do you not like *hiccup* me?” The speech was slurred. Scared of being beaten again Grayson decided to play along and nodded his head as a response.

“I need a verbal *hiccup* response love *hiccup*” Rome said with a big smile. Looking down at the floor, Grayson was fidgeting with his fingers.

“I-I do l-like you R-Rome..” Grayson said in a low tone of voice then looking up at Rome. Rome tilted his head and just stared at him.

“Liar! I hate liars Grayson.” Rome said as his gaze grew dark looking at the frightened boy.

“N-No, R-Rome I do l-like you. I'm not l-lying” Grayson said, trembling. Grayson sees Rome struggle to stand up.

"I hate liars grayson, and you just lied to me " Rome says as he staggers towards the door.

"N-No..No I didn't R-Rome please! Rome please I-I want to go home.." Grayson cried, but it was too late. Rome had already left the room.

"I miss Felix..I wish I was at home.." Grayson cried. He curled into a ball and continued to cry. Days turned into weeks and Rome hasn't come to visit. Grayson soon realized that Rome wasn't coming back. Fading into the darkness Grayson was never to be heard from again..

What's Really Hidden in the Mountains

It started as a hike. Before the winter weather starts to roll in, we decided to hike one last fourteener for the season, Mount Quandary. We never expected this to end our hiking season forever.

One day earlier...

Amaya is fumbling to tie up her thick, blonde hair into a ponytail in the backseat of the car. "Ugh, I don't understand why we had to leave so early, it's not even light out yet, haven't you heard of Bigfoot? This is definitely the time he'd be out." she said.

"Seriously Amaya. Bigfoot? I can't believe you even think that'd be real," I said, "It's best to start now so we can get off the mountain quicker, the weather app said it's going to start raining at noon, do you really want to still be on the mountain when that happens?"

Amaya says "I guess not."

"Does everyone have their gear on? We should start heading up," Ella says.

I open the car door, "Yep! Let's go guys, we should be back down in 5 hours."

We've been hiking for about 2 hours and I can see the peak of the mountain just a couple hundred feet up. I look up into the sky and I see the dark clouds a few miles away.

"We'll be able to make it off the mountain before they roll in," I think to myself, but I feel a little uneasy as we continue to hike up.

All of a sudden I look straight ahead and see Ella trip on a loose rock and fall straight down on her knees.

"Ouch!" Ella yells with blood gushing out of a cut on her knee.

Amaya immediately goes to help Ella and pulls her first aid kit out of her pack.

After Amaya cleans up Ella's wounds, Ella says "Guys I don't think I can finish, I can barely walk on my left leg."

“Really, Ella? We’re so close to the top, you can definitely make it up,” I say.

“No guys. I definitely can’t. You go on up and I’ll wait here,” Ella tells us.

Amaya sits down with Ella, “I’ll stay here with Ella, I don’t want to leave her alone, who knows what’s out here.”

“Are you sure? I feel bad about leaving you guys down here,” I say.

Carter says “I don’t! Come on, let’s go up Megan.”

“Okay,” I say, “We’ll be back in about 30 minutes.”

Once we make it to the peak, I’m instantly grateful for choosing to finish the hike, the view of the surrounding mountains is nothing like I’ve ever seen before, it’s breathtaking.

After taking pictures with our written sign that says “Quandary Peak. Elevation 14,271’” I tell Carter “We should probably head back down and check on them.”

“You’re right, let’s get off this mountain.” I say.

We make it off the peak, except once we get back to the spot where we left Amaya and Ella, they are nowhere to be found.

Carter takes his glasses off and wipes them on his shirt, “Maybe they already started to head down,” he says.

I think about it, “Yeah probably.” I notice a blood trail of blood going down the trail. “Look! It’s blood, probably from Ella’s knee. We’ll just follow that, we’ll definitely find them.”

We continue to follow the trail of blood, except all of a sudden the trail of blood goes off trail and heads into the trees. “Well we need to follow it, it’s definitely Ella.” I say.

“I’ll wait here in case they’re still on the trail, you go on ahead to check if Ella’s over there,” says Carter.

“Okay” I responded. It seems like a good idea, there’s no service out here so it’s best he stays there in case he runs into them.

I follow the trail through the trees, except the farther I get, the thicker the trees get and I can barely see any sunlight through the leaves. All of a sudden there’s an open clearing, I walk into it and my jaw drops when

in greeted with Ella's dead body. I scream and run to her, as I get closer to her I see that her body is covered in huge scratches. I don't know what to do, so I run back to where I left Carter to tell him that there's something out here on the mountain with us. When I get back to the spot, Carter is still waiting there like he said he would be.

I continue walking down the trail and Carter follows after me, "We need to go now." I say, not stopping to talk to him.

"Why what happened?" he says, "Where's Ella?"

I turn around "Ella's dead," I say, and I turn back around and keep walking.

"What do you mean," Carter says, "She can't be dead."

"Well she is," I say, "We need to find Amaya, I don't know what's out here."

All of a sudden we hear a scream in the distance, it has to be Amaya. It sounds like it's further down the mountain, so I start running down the trail. "AMAYA" I scream.

Carter's running after me and he starts yelling for her too. We've been running for 5 minutes when all of a sudden I see Amaya, she's laying on the ground covered in blood. We run over to her and she's still breathing, but barely.

"Amaya, what happened," Carter says. While putting his extra jacket on a deep cut on her leg.

Amaya manages to get a whisper out, she says "Bigfoot."

"This is serious, Amaya, what happened to you," I say.

"Bigfoot." is all she says.

"We need to go, there's something out here KILLING people, and the rain clouds are almost over us. We need to go now." Carter says while picking Amaya up and putting her over his shoulder like a potato sack.

"Okay," I say, "Let's head down, it's only about a mile left."

We start walking down, slow and steady to make sure Amaya's not in too much pain. It slowly starts to rain, but I try not to panic. I see the parking lot through the trees and feel relief when I realize we're going to make it out of here alive.

"Look," I say, "Our car is right there, we're so close to getting out of here."

I turn around to check on Carter and Amaya. Carter looks like he's struggling to carry her, but I know he can get her there, we're so close. All of a sudden I look in the trees behind Carter's head, and I see it. It's bigfoot. Amaya wasn't lying.

I lower my voice to a whisper and say "Carter don't panic, but you need to walk faster. Bigfoot is right behind you."

"That's not funny. Don't say that." Carter says with a concerned look.

"I'm being serious." I said.

I look back at where I saw Bigfoot and he's gone. When I turn around he's right in front of my face. Before I can react, I see claws coming straight for my face. The last thing I see before the light begins to fade is Carter and Amaya getting scratched to bits right in front of me. "We were so close," I thought, and I closed my eyes, feeling the rain begin to pour down.

Isabella R.

18 years old
12th Grade.

Enchanted Shadows

In a small, isolated village nestled deep within a dense, ancient forest, an eerie silence hung in the air. The trees loomed like ghostly sentinels, their gnarled branches stretching out like skeletal fingers. Locals spoke of a sinister legend that had haunted the village for generations: the tale of the Phantom Woodsman.

On a chilly October evening, a group of friends gathered around a campfire, their faces flickering in the firelight. Among them was Sarah, the village historian, who knew the legend better than anyone. Sarah began the tale, her voice trembling with apprehension. "Long ago, in these very woods, there lived a secluded woodsman named Elijah. He was said to have made a pact with the spirits of the forest to gain power, but it came with a terrible cost. One night, he vanished without a trace, leaving nothing but whispers of his hostile presence." Nervous laughter filled the air as the friends exchanged uneasy glances. One of them, Tom, scoffed, "Ghosts and curses, Sarah? You're full of it!"

Just as Tom finished speaking, a faint rustling came from the nearby trees. Leaves fell silently to the ground, and a cold breeze swept through the clearing. Sarah's voice grew even more somber. "That's what they say, but some claim to have encountered him. Those who do speak of a shadowy figure who roams these woods, his glowing eyes the only visible feature of his spectral form." The wind howled through the trees, making it seem as if the forest itself was echoing Sarah's words. The group huddled closer to the fire, fear creeping into their hearts.

Suddenly, a voice, soft and ethereal, spoke from the darkness. "Sarah, you tell the story so well." It was Lily, a new addition to the group who had arrived late. Startled, Sarah turned to her. "Lily, I didn't know you were so interested in local legends."

Lily smiled mysteriously, her eyes gleaming with an otherworldly light. "Oh, I'm very interested, Sarah. In fact, I've come to see if the legend is true." Before anyone could react, a chilling gust of wind blew out the campfire. The forest fell into a heavy, unsettling silence. In the darkness, the group felt an unpleasant presence drawing nearer, and from the shadows emerged a figure with piercing, glowing eyes.

"Who dares to seek the Phantom Woodsman?" The figure hissed. Panic gripped the group as they realized that the legend was all too real. They had unwittingly summoned the spectral entity. The figure, which appeared to be a ghostly version of Elijah, the woodsman, spoke again, "The price for meddling in dark secrets is steep. Prepare to face your doom."

As the chilling specter advanced, the group's frantic cries filled the night, but their fate was sealed. They had unwittingly entered a world of supernatural horror, confronting the curse of the Phantom Woodsman they had dared to invoke. The forest swallowed their terrified screams, and the legend continued to haunt the village for generations to come.

Name- Abagail L _____

Age/Grade- 14 years old, 9th Grade

Phone Number- _____

Address- _____

Colors

Benji wasn't sure how it had happened. One minute they were on the bus, waiting to be dropped off to camp. The next, pinned against a tree, slowly losing consciousness from blood loss. Where had the vampire come from? Benji didn't know. What became of the rest of the bus? Gone, most had run off or been caught by the vampires. Benji slumped to the ground as the vampire released them, dizzy and feeling weak and sick. Their vision was blurry, and they couldn't move much. They heard a shriek, then a thunk. Then they heard a loud male voice yelling, then before they passed out, they felt themselves being lifted. When Benji came around, they were laying on a cot in what seemed to be a bunker. Benji slowly sat up, still feeling sick and a little dizzy. The first thing they noticed was the girl (was she a girl? Benji couldn't really tell) who was asleep in a chair. Benji sat there for a moment, and the girl began to stir. She slowly opened her eyes, and looked at Benji. "Oh, good! You're awake!" She smiled and stuck her hand out. "I'm Melika, but everyone calls me Mikey." Benji shook her hand. "I'm Benji." Mikey smiled. "Is that short for anything?" Benji shook their head. "Cool! How do you feel right now, Benji?" "A little dizzy. All I remember are the vampires." Mikey nods. "That makes sense. You're really lucky you survived." Benji and Mikey both turn towards the door when it opens. A tall African American boy walks in the room. "Oh, you're awake." He sounded a little annoyed. Benji just nodded. "Casey, this is Benji." The boy, Casey, just stared. It was making Benji a little uncomfortable, and Mikey seemed to sense it. "Casey, stop scaring him." Benji winced. They hated being misgendered, but didn't want to say anything. They were afraid of being judged. "Whatever," Casey grumbled.

"Just help him change and get him something to eat." Casey leaves, and Mikey sighs. "I'm sorry about that, Benji. Casey is a little moody." Mikey holds out her hand. "Come on, let's get you a shower and some food." At the mention of food, Benji's stomach grumbles. They take Mikey's hand and let themselves be led to the showers. After the shower, Benji dresses in a simple pair of sweatpants and a hoodie a few sizes too big. Mikey led them to the dining hall, where Benji ate a bagel. "Aren't you going to eat anything else?" Mikey asks gently. Benji shakes their head. Mikey just nods. After eating, Mikey takes Benji and introduces them to her friends. Reyna, who was part Native American and not afraid to show it. Jesse, an Italian boy with a gift in math and coding. Dimitri, a loud girl who lived in Greece most of her life and studies mythology. Anomaly, a shy, neurodivergent Korean boy who loves books and tea. Benji was blown away by the diversity of this group of kids. *'And all around my age too,'* Benji thought to themselves. Casey walks in the room shortly after the introductions are finished. Everyone falls silent. "Alright people, get it together. We found another nest." Casey's voice echoed across the room. Benji had a feeling of dread creeping up their spine. "Nest? As in, a nest of vampires?" Benji's voice was quiet, yet firm. Casey looked a little surprised. "Yeah, how'd you know?" Benji didn't want to share exactly *why* they knew about vampire nests, so they said, "I sometimes study vampires." Casey nods. "Do you know a vampire's weakness, new boy?" Benji had to suppress their urge to wince and correct Casey. "Yeah, I do." "Name them." Benji sighed. "Well, holy water, for starters. And vampires can't walk on hollowed ground. The stake through the heart, too. Wood works best for that." Casey lifts an eyebrow. "You forgot garlic and the sunlight," he said. Benji shakes their head. "Garlic doesn't work. Neither does sunlight. At least, not anymore. Vampires have become too advanced from years of inbreeding." "Huh? Did you just say *inbreeding*!?" Everyone looked shocked. "Yeah. It happened a lot hundreds of years ago through royal families because they didn't want any tainted blood in their lineage. Vampires picked up the habit, and have just kept it going." Anomaly spoke up a little. "Well, is there anything other than hollow ground, holy water, and wooden stakes that can hurt them?" Benji had to think. "Yeah. A very specific mix of blood." Dimitri and Reyna look at each other, and Anomaly, Jesse, and Mikey just stand there, gaping. "Is that so?" Casey sounded

as unconvinced as he looked. Benji nods. "Show us then, new boy." Another urge to screech overtook Benji, but they shoved it down. "Well, I need the blood of a pig, raven, mouse, and cow. And a blood bag." Jesse nods. "I can get you some." Benji smiles a little. "Thank you." Jesse smiles back. "No problem, Benji. I'll be back soon." Jesse pulls on a jacket and heads out the door. It didn't take long for Jesse to get back. He was carrying four bags of blood, labeled, and still warm. Benji lays out the bags, and sets the empty blood bag upright. They carefully mix together two cups of pig blood, an eighth of a cup of raven blood, a few drops of mouse blood, and four and a half cups of cow blood. Benji mixed them in a bowl, then transferred the mixture into the empty blood bag. "There. All done." Casey still looked skeptical. "Are you sure this will work?" Benji nods. "Positive." Casey nods. "Alright, but if this doesn't work..." "Yeah, I got it." Casey addresses everybody. "Alright people, get your gear on and let's go. Those vampires ain't gonna hunt themselves." Everybody runs around, getting on gear and grabbing vials of holy water and wooden stakes. Dimitri helps Benji find gear that fits them, and is very enthusiastic about it. "Oh my god, you're gonna love vampire hunting. It's this crazy thrill, and such an amazing experience!" Benji smiled a little. Casey calls everybody over and goes over the plan, ninety percent of which Benji wasn't listening to. When Casey finished, they headed to Reyna's van out back, and headed to the general area of where the vampire nest is spread out. Benji puts the blood on the inside of their coat to keep it warm. Anomaly was humming all of the *Attack On Titan* openings to himself while they were driving. It wasn't too long before they reached their destination. It was a secluded area a few miles away from a small village. Everyone files silently out of the van, armed with the vials of holy water and their stakes, Benji with the blood. They all follow behind Casey, absolutely silent. They wander around for a while, with no results. But when Casey stops suddenly, his fist in the air, everyone's breathing shifts. *'It's happening,'* thought Benji. In the silent night air, all sounds can be heard, including the breathing that seems to be coming from the trees. *'No, not from the trees. The breathing is coming from on top of the trees, in the branches.'* Benji slowly opens his jacket, pulling out the blood mixture and holding it out. As soon as they do, a vampire comes at them, fangs bared. But Benji was ready, letting the vampire take the blood bag. Two others

came out of the trees and the three of them drank the blood. Then the vampires start to wither and screech an awful noise, falling to their knees. It didn't take long before the three of the vampires were reduced to nothing but ashes.

Everyone looked surprised, Casey the most. "How did you know that was going to work, Benji?" Mikey's voice was small. "My dad." Benji whispered. They could feel the presence of more vampires. "Huh?" "Shh!" Benji put their finger against their mouth. "There's more of them." Casey walked to stand behind Benji. "How do you know that?" Casey murmured against the shell of Benji's ear. "Later."

Benji whispered back. Casey nods. Benji slowly rolls up their sleeves, baiting the vampires. They take a few steps towards the trees, their arms up in the air. Benji can hear the vampire's ragged breathing. They keep their arms lifted, trying to tempt the vampires into coming down out of the trees. And it worked. A younger vampire jumps at Benji. Benji dodged, rolling under the vampire. Reyna reacted quickly, tossing the holy water on the vampire and letting it crumple to ashes.

The group made quick work of the rest of the vampires. When they finished, everyone was sweaty and covered in disintegrated vampire. Casey walked over to Benji. "So, are you going to tell me how you knew that there were vampires in the trees, other than the first three that drank your blood concoction?" Benji stares at their feet. "I'm..." They sigh. "I'm half vampire. I can naturally sense when other vampires are near, and usually how many as well." A round of uncomfortable silence settles. Benji breaks it. "And I'm nonbinary. So, if it wouldn't be too much, I'd like to be called by they/them pronouns." Silence. "Are you kidding?! You tell us you're half vampire and you think it'll be too much for us to call you by proper pronouns?" Mikey yells in a sort of half screech, half concerned and supportive mother yell. Benji backs up a little. "Benji, we'll call you by proper pronouns." Anomaly whispers softly. "Yeah!" Dimitri and Reyna shout in unison. "Thanks for telling us, Benji," said Jesse. Casey stays quiet.

Benji smiles softly. "Thank you all." Their voice comes out small, but carries. Anomaly yawns, and Jesse wraps his arms around him. "Alright, let's go," Casey says. Nobody argues with him, instead following behind him, going back to the van. It's a silent ride home, the only sounds being the sounds of Anomaly's soft snores. When they make it back to the bunker, Anomaly and Jesse both excuse themselves and head to bed. Dimitri and Reyna head to the back room to put

away all of the leftover vials of holy water and stakes. That leaves Casey and Benji together in an uncomfortable silence. Casey breaks first. "So, half vampire, huh?" Benji nods. "Do you drink blood?" "Sometimes." Benji's voice is soft. "Not often, but sometimes." Casey nods. "How often is not often?" "About twice a year, sometimes less." "Huh." Benji sighs and sinks into the couch, curling up into a ball. Casey sits down in one of the chairs. They sit in a comfortable silence. Benji eventually drifts off to sleep on the couch. When Benji wakes up in the morning, they're not on the couch, but in one of the rooms in the bunker. Not their room, Benji realized. There was a desk in a corner, cluttered with paper and other things. And a trunk (probably where the clothes go). Benji sat up, and looked around for anything else. But it looked like the desk, trunk, and cot they were on were the only pieces of furniture in the entire room. *'It's minimalist. There aren't even pictures.'* Benji is broken out of their thoughts when they hear the door open. They look up and see Casey standing in the doorway. "Morning, Benji." Casey's voice sounds rough, sleepy. "Good morning, Casey." Benji mumbled back. "Mikey made breakfast. She can't cook." Benji tilted their head in confusion. "Sorry. I meant, Mikey is the worst cook ever." "Oh." Benji mumbled. They slowly dragged themselves out of the bed and stood up. Casey turned to walk back down the hall, and Benji followed after pulling their hoodie on. Benji follows Casey to the kitchen, where Mikey stands, working on... *pancakes?* Benji isn't really sure. "What are you making, Mikey?" Mikey turns around. "Oh, hey Benji, Casey! I'm making eggs." *'Eggs? Those are eggs?'* Benji shakes themselves out of their thoughts. "Looks good, Mikey." Benji mumbled. "Thanks, Benji!" Mikey smiles and goes back to cooking. "If we leave now, we can go out for breakfast." Casey's voice is low in Benji's ear. "Let's go, then." Benji whispers back. Casey takes Benji's hand and leads them out of the kitchen and down the hall. Benji finds themselves being led to a shiny black 1970 Dodge Challenger T/A. "Wow..." They muttered. It was a pretty car, painted a shiny black with matte purple racing stripes. The interior was all dark purple and black. "Pretty cool, huh?" Casey's voice brought Benji out of their thoughts. "Yeah..." Benji mumbles. Casey moves to open the passenger side door, and Benji climbs in. Casey shuts the door and goes to the other side of the car, climbing into the driver's seat and starting the car. Casey drives to Waffle House, and

finds an empty spot to park in. Benji's face lights up. "I haven't been here in years!" Casey laughs. It's a strange sound, and gives Benji butterflies. "Well, come on." Benji scrambles out of the car and follows Casey into Waffle House. They find a booth in a quiet corner, and sit opposite from each other. A waitress comes and takes their orders (and gives Casey a very flirtatious wink), then goes to make the food. Benji didn't know why they were so jealous of the girl (there's nothing wrong with harmless flirting) but her flirting made Benji uncomfortable and a bit possessive (not that they would ever admit that). When the waitress disappeared to go get the food, Benji and Casey fell into light conversation. Turns out, they had a lot in common. When the waitress brings their food over, she hands a napkin to Casey with her phone number on it. Benji almost smacked her. Almost, because they weren't dumb enough to cause a scene like that for a ridiculous reason. Benji and Casey ate in a comfortable peace, finishing rather quickly. When they were done, they threw away their trash, and Benji caught Casey sneakily throwing away the napkin with the waitress' number on it. They walk back to Casey's Challenger. When they get inside and Casey turns the car on, *Somewhere Only We Know* by Keane comes on the radio. Benji hums along to the song softly, and doesn't notice how much Casey keeps glancing at them. When they get back to the bunker, everyone is in the 'living room' playing Monopoly. And it's going about as good as you can imagine. Anomaly swearing worse than a sailor in Korean when Reyna makes him bankrupt, Mikey giggling a little too much for it to sound normal, and Jesse making more money than anyone. "Uhm..." Benji can't even comprehend what's happening. When they make a noise, everyone turns towards them and Casey. "Oooh, the lovebirds are back from their date!!!" Mikey teases. "H-huh?" Benji's face flushes a tomato red. "Shut up, Mikey." Casey mumbles. Benji notices he doesn't seem to mind being called a lovebird. *Maybe he likes me,* Benji thinks to themselves. But they quickly dismiss the thought. "Wanna join?" Jesse questions. Benji shakes their head, but Casey says, "Sure." Benji takes a seat on the couch to watch, and Casey sits down on the floor in front of Benji, and joins the game. The game goes on, and on, and on. Benji's pretty sure they dozed off a few times during the game. It only ended when Jesse had all of the money. *All of it.* Benji couldn't believe Jesse had managed to make everybody bankrupt *and* gain all of the money without

ever losing any himself. "That was... scary. And impressive." Benji's voice shakes a little out of pure shock. "What can I say?" Jesse shrugs. "I'm just that good." Benji laughs, holding their sides while they cackled on the couch. A knock on the door makes everyone go quiet in an instant. Everyone stays absolutely silent while Casey gets up to go answer the door. Benji listens quietly. The door creaks as it's opened. "Yes?" Casey is annoyed. "Hello, is Benjamin Einar here?" A beat of silence. "Who?" Casey still sounds annoyed. Benji, though, is sitting stiff as a board on the couch. They knew that voice. That voice came with several bad childhood memories. "Benjamin Einar." The voice repeats, before describing Benji's appearance down to the last detail. "Oh, you mean Benji?" Casey questions. "Yes, that's him." Casey comes back to the living room, the person following behind him. Benji slowly turns their head towards the person, finding it to be exactly who they thought it was going to be. "Alexander." The name leaves Benji's mouth in a hiss. "Benjamin." Alexander says in return, a smug smirk on his face. "How have you been?" Benji doesn't answer. Their fangs poke out over their bottom lip, their breathing labored. "Oh, so that's how it's going to be, Benjamin? You can't even greet your old boyfriend nicely?" "Shut up. What are you doing here?" Benji's voice was dark, angry. "Ah, classic Benji, always gets straight to the point. The Covenant wants you back, Benjamin. They believe you to be their best asset." A half hiss, half snarl leaves Benji's mouth. "Do not call me him, I do not associate with those pronouns. And I don't care what the Covenant thinks, I left for a reason." Alexander laughs. "Come on. You know better than that, Benjamin. The Covenant won't stop sending spies after you until you come back and complete your right of passage." "Whoa, hold up." Mikey's voice cuts through the tense air. "What are you two on about? What is the Covenant, and what is a right of passage?" "Benji sighs. "The Covenant is a group of higher ups that basically control the vampire population, and a right of passage has to do with... killing an innocent." Benji mumbled the last part. "Huh?" Mikey sounded absolutely confused, and Jesse, Reyna, and Anomaly jaws were all on the floor. "What do you mean, 'an innocent'?" Casey inquires. Alexander chose this time to butt in. "An innocent is a pure child, preferably young and untainted by sin." Benji is pretty sure he saw a few brain cells fall out of Mikey's ear from an information overload. "You mean, like a toddler." "Oh,

no.” Alexander’s Virginiaian accent was creeping into his (very annoying, according to Benji) voice. “An innocent is a newborn child. Their blood is always the sweetest.” Anomaly fainted, Jesse catching him. Reyna and Mikey were standing there, gaping. Casey was just standing there, but Benji could tell he didn’t know what to think about what had just been said. “Alexander, you are not welcome here. Now leave.” Benji didn’t bother trying to hide the venom in their voice. “My sweet Benjamin, don’t be like that.” Benji had to force their thoughts away from Alexander’s honey sweet voice and to Casey’s rough Louisiana accent. “You need to leave.” Casey said. “And what will you do if I don’t leave?” Casey sighed. “I don’t know about you, but I don’t think you’d win against Benji, if this Covenant calls Benji their best asset.” Alexander bares his fangs. “He is weak to my charms.” Benji could feel the urge to tear Alexander’s throat out becoming stronger. “*They* are much stronger than they look. That much I can tell.” Casey’s Louisianan accent was thick now. Alexander laughs. “Oh, really? And has he shown you just how dangerous he can be?” Casey shakes his head. “They haven’t, but if they want to go at you, I’d let them.” “You mean you wouldn’t mind if I just tore his throat out now?” Benji’s face lights up. “Sure. Go ahead,” Casey turns around. A smile worthy of the Cheshire Cat spreads across Benji’s face, and he jumps at Alexander. It took two seconds flat for Benji to tear the other vampire’s throat out, Alexander turned into a pile of ash after bleeding out a little from his wound. Casey left and came back with a broom and dustpan, and Benji swept up the dead vampire and dumped him in the trash. Later that night, Benji was sitting in the garden on the roof of the bunker, absently chewing on mint leaves. They didn’t notice Casey until he was sitting next to them, two bowls of ice cream in his hands. “Here, Benji.” “Thanks.” Benji takes the ice cream being offered. They were pleasantly surprised to find that it was mint chocolate chip, their favorite. “Casey, are you telepathic or something?” Benji asked. “What do you mean?” Benji motions to the ice cream. “Mint chocolate chip is my favorite. You must be able to read minds.” Casey laughs his deep, rich laugh, giving Benji butterflies. “No, I can’t read minds. But I’ll remember that.” Benji and Casey sit together in a comfortable silence for a while. Casey breaks the silence. “Hey, Benji, I got something to tell you..” Benji looks towards Casey. “Yeah?” Casey rubs the back of his neck. “Uhm...” A soft

sigh leaves Casey's lips. "I like you, Benji. A lot. And I wanted to ask if you would be my partner." Benji's face flushes. "You mean.. you want me to be your lover?" Casey nods. A smile splits across Benji's face. "I'd love to be your partner, then." Casey smiles too, and leans forward. They share a sweet, soft kiss, before breaking apart, both red as tomatoes. Then they look up when everyone walks outside, cheering loudly. "Finally! It took you two long enough!" Mikey shouts. Casey and Benji both smile at each other, then reluctantly allow themselves to be dragged back inside to celebrate.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Benji wakes up with a startle, hearing their mother yell from downstairs "Benji, honey! Get up! You're headed to summer camp today, remember? I don't want you to be late for the bus!"

The End

Futuristic of the underworld

by . Heather E.....

12th grade

They hate being Hades' kids. The kids hate Hades's reputation. When the kids were younger, they got bullied. They were full of emotion. Tyler is a wacky 10 year old girl. However, she has ADHD, dextrocardia, and autism. Her brother Alex is very quiet. On the other hand is a devious little 5 year old. Their mom left them when they were only 8 and 3 years old.

Even though Hades' kids had a messed up childhood, they still had an enormous amount of self confidence. The underworld is a dark place similar to a teenager's mental health. When you are looking for them they will be in a dark, creepy alley.

Tyler said, "why do we have to live with someone who is out of his right mind."

Although she said that, she loves him either way. When her brother was 3 she remembers how her mom told her to look out for Alex. He always had to be watched carefully because he is a lot like their dad.

"I want to be with mom, she is nicer than you." said Alex.

Because of this, Tyler said, "You know why mom left, she got arrested because she killed someone."

When they were done arguing it was time for the school of the wicked. This is so villain's can go to school, and have an education on "their" people. Tyler always gets in fights and if she gets in one more fight she will be as squashed as fast as her mom was

killed. Alex's school was not necessarily the best school either. When they both have lunch they have Menudo and fresh chopped eyeballs.

Tyler went up to the lunch lady and said, "When will we eat real food again?"

The lunch lady growled and said, "We will once we drink your sweet and dirty blood."

"THERE IS NO WAY YOU ARE DRINKING MY BLOOD," said Tyler!

Once she went back to class she got a call from her father.

Her father said, "Why are you terrorizing the lunch lady's again?"

Then she said, "they were terrorizing me, you are the WORST FATHER EVER!"

Alex just got on the phone and said, "Why do you not believe us father?"

"Once again," the father said, "You guys are like your evil mother so I don't trust you."

Although Tyler is like her mom she still has a heart. When she gets caught with her phone, she has to go and have 10 people drink her blood, 5 people whip til she bleeds, and 3 days of detention. Tyler likes to look at her mom's old photos that she gave to her when she was her age. Her dad really hates it. Her brother on the other hand likes to look and touch his dad's ember that takes people's souls.

When he brought his dad's ember to school he took 10 classmates' souls, 5 teachers' souls, 3 administrators' souls, and 2 upperclassman's souls. On the other hand he may not think anything of it; he might just have an issue with those people.

"Hades' is the type of dad that thinks he's not rude to them, but he actually is." Says Tyler and Alex.

The kids sneak out and Hades' didn't think his kids were gone. When he went upstairs, he noticed that the kids were not there. The kids thought they were in the clear, but they didn't realize that their dad knew they weren't there. They went inside and Hades' caught them and they got grounded for 2 weeks. Tyler and Alex went crying upstairs, and they went to their comfort objects from their mom like their photos.

Even though they like that comfort object, the dad took it away for two weeks. In the dark and gloomy room their vampire friend helped them sneak out. They both said yes, let's do it. When they did it, they almost got caught. Although Hades' seems crazy, he's just misunderstood.

Tyler and Alex both said to each other, "I hate dad. He took our pictures of mom to help calm us down."

Their vampire friend said, "Maybe he's just misunderstood."

They both said in unison, "Are you serious. He just hates that we both miss mom."

"You guys should get back." Said the vampire friend, "so you don't get more time."

"Whatever," Tyler said.

When they got back they realized they should have gone through the window, so they didn't get caught. The dad caught them.

He said, "you just added 3 weeks and a week of eyeballs to eat."

They both said, "Why is this so unfair."

They both stomped angrily to their room and went to bed. When they woke up, they hopped out of bed before their dad and went to his room, grabbed the ember and

mom's serpent to bring to school. Then they headed off to school to go steal people's souls and start something.

Tyler said, "I'll set the fire in the bathroom and start a fight for no reason."

Alex said, "I'll take people's souls."

They were both off. They first started with the fire and fight. She went to the principal's office after the fire was out. Then after Alex took 50 souls in the school he went to the principal's office.

When their dad went to the school, they knew they were going to be in more trouble. Although they worked hard in school, it's time for them to find a new school. Now they are off to home.

Their dad says, "Now you are up to three months and eating chopped eyeballs for 3 weeks."

Fast forward three months they realized that they were in the wrong for trying to take advantage of a single parent. Although they thought it was fun to say that they hate being Hades' kids, they love him more than ever now.

Gyston C
12th grade

Figures & Skinwalkers?

Why are they just standing there like that? I woke up in my car in the middle of the road. I gotta stop sneaking out. My moms going to kill me. It's about one in the morning and very very dark with just the street lights as my only source of light. Even worse, my car barely has any gas. I gotta get home. I put the car out of park and into drive and I started to cruise down the street.

Being out so late at night there are barely any cars around. It tends to scare you a little bit knowing that anything bad could happen because of how quiet, dark and lifeless it is. Every stop sign, stop light, or just turn into a different lane anybody can come up onto you and all you can hear is your car and the blinking of your turning signal. I live about thirty minutes away from where I was so it was gonna be a drive to get home. I take my first turn to get on my route back home and I stop at the light while it turns red. I never understood why a light would turn red when there's no cars turning or coming from a different side to where they can hit me.

While I was at this light a car pulled up next to me. At first I didn't think anything of it, but then as the light turns green the car swerves and almost hits my car. I had to slam on the breaks not to hit this guy. What a dick. I continue to keep on driving, as if the first thing wasn't bad enough. While I was driving about thirty-five miles per hour, someone or something running started running up to my car window and the man started slamming on my windshield.

I start speeding up to get away from this thing. What a weird night I need to get home soon. I'm finally about ten minutes away from my house. So while I'm on the highway to get to my last turn I stop. There's some weird figure standing in the middle of the round just standing

there not moving my headlights shining into its empty eyes. I honk a couple times but it doesn't move. It actually starts to move closer one step at a time.

It starts to pick up speed damn near sprinting towards my car. I put my car into reverse and reverse back as fast as I can. I then hit something and I stopped. I looked forward again and the figure was gone. I got out of my car to see what I hit. It was a girl, a really young girl. Oh god what the hell. I pick up the girl's body and I make sure she's still breathing and she is.

Thank god. I put her in the back seat of my car and started to drive to the nearest hospital. Before I could even put the car back in drive the figure was back in front of my car. It starts to point at the little girl in the back of my car. I look back and she's gone. I then look forward and the figure is gone as well. God, I must be drunk. I finally got home. I put my key in and enter my house. As I walk in I see my mom sitting in the living room.

Oh hey ma sorry i snuck out again, but i'm home safe and sound. My mom slowly turns her neck towards me with a huge smile. Uhh mom are you ok. Her smile keeps getting wider and wider like her face is about to break. Ok, I'm sorry. She slowly gets up and starts running towards me. I turn around and sprint up the stairs and run into my room and shut the door and lock it.

There was a loud banging right when I closed it. I started to barricade my door with my bed and my desk. Then the banging stopped. What the hell is going on? Honey, come on out. What's wrong? Are you ok? I hear my mom say. You're not my mom, who are you, what are you? Then my room starts to shake while a bunch of demonic voices start talking all around the room. I start to scream and my door bursts open and the lights suddenly go out.

The "Thing" in the Woods

Malayhi F
12th grade
(Sp1 email)

"What is that?!" I said looking at a tall dark figure. It was a normal day as any other, going to school doing my homework, talking with friends etc etc. But, today was different the air felt heavy on my body as if something was weighing me down, I of course just shrugged it off and thought nothing of it. As i arrived home i hopped out the car having casual talk with my Mom about my day, the usual as we went inside the house i started my daily routine of dropping my backpack in my room, changing into more comfortable clothes, getting a snack and watching tv before starting my stack of homework i had to do. "Man i hate ap classes". I said to myself watching T.V, eventually i drifted off due to the stress and tiredness the school day had brought me. I woke up some hours later not knowing what time it was, sleep marks all over my face, sweaty, mouth dry, The usual for after school naps. I got up off my bed stretched got a glass of water and walked out my room. As I walked down the hall to go see my parents i felt that same heaviness I had felt earlier that day at school, I thought to myself "I've never felt this way before, am I coming down with something?" I continued walking to my kitchen and once i got there i read our oven clock "5:30", "Pretty good power nap I took". Once in the kitchen i walked over to the sink to wash my hands, As I was washing my hands I looked out our kitchen window which faces a very ominous forest due to the huge amount of land my parents owned. Continuing to look out the kitchen window i noticed a dark black figure dart across the tree line, my heart jumped. I scanned the treeline to see if i would find the figure again, of course seeing how fast it was i couldn't make out wether it was a animal or a human. " What the hell was that?!" I began to say " What was what?" my dad said just arriving home from work. " I saw a black figure or something dart between the trees" i said. "Probably a squirrel or some other small animal" My dad remarked. " but it was really fast, usually with a squirrel i would have been able to at least see its tail but i saw a black shadow then nothing". " Stop worrying so much" he said "you

overthink things so easily son". I chuckled "yeah you're probably right" i said walking out the kitchen. As the nigh whined down i was sitting outside on the deck of my porch on my phone just scrolling mindlessly enjoying the breeze and nice atmosphere of the night. A dark figure skates across my periphery as i continue scrolling. My head shot up and i stood up, heart beating, chills began running through my body and i felt that same feeling i had felt throughout the day but this time it was stronger and almost as if it was drawing me towards the woods. I began walking towards the woods and as if i wasn't controlling my own thoughts or body anymore i began sprinting towards the treeline and then darkness fell over me. I woke up some time later realizing i had passed out, i slowly got up and looked around the cold hitting my skin, then i heard this loud screech and saw that same dark figure between two trees staring at me. My heart began to beat even faster than before as the figure approached me and hovered over me. " What is that?!" staring at a tall dark figure. It bent down towards me and screamed once again and thats when i realized its face it was direct replica of me. As i continued staring into my face memories started flooding my mind from a time i was at my lowest. I had shut these memories out long ago and then realized once again that this wasn't a monster it was a creature of past pain and failures.

Nevaeh F1

12th grade

The Haunting of Moonlight Manor

Late at night, the wind howled through the old, creaky house as shadows danced on the walls. A group of friends gathered around a flickering candle, eager to share spooky stories.

"I've got one," said Emmy, her voice trembling with excitement.

"Legend has it that in this very town, there's a haunted mansion hidden deep in the woods. They say it's cursed, and anyone who dares to enter never returns the same." Emmy says with confidence.

Mark, Emmy, Alice and Aide huddled closer, their eyes wide with both fear and anticipation.

"But that's just a story, right?" whispered Mark, trying to hide his unease.

Emmy grinned mischievously. "Only one way to find out," she said, as the group made their way towards the eerie woods, their hearts pounding in their chests.

The moon cast an eerie glow as they approached the mansion. With each step, the air grew colder, and a sense of foreboding filled their souls. As they reached the front door, it creaked open on its own, inviting them inside. Hesitant but curious, they entered the mansion, their footsteps echoing through the empty halls. Strange noises echoed from the depths. The friends stuck together, their nerves on edge as they explored room after room, each one more unsettling than the last. Suddenly, they discovered a hidden library filled with dusty tomes and cryptic symbols. The pages whispered tales of an ancient curse that befell the manor, casting a shadow of darkness over its inhabitants.

“Maybe coming here wasn't a good idea.” Whispered Mark.

“Don't worry! It's just an old mansion.” Emmy whispered with confidence.

They learned of a forbidden ritual that took place in the manor's grand ballroom, where the spirits of the past were summoned and trapped within the walls. The friends realized that by entering Moonlight Manor, they had unknowingly become part of the haunting, bound to the manor's secrets forever. As they continued their exploration, they stumbled upon another hidden room, its door covered in strange symbols. Inside, they found a collection of old photographs, revealing the tragic fate of the manor's former residents. The photographs depicted a sorrowful bride, a groom consumed by anger, and a ghostly figure lurking in the background. Each image told a haunting story of lost love, betrayal, and revenge. The friends couldn't help but feel the weight of the manor's dark history pressing upon them. In their quest to uncover the truth, the friends stumbled upon the manor's underground catacombs. The air grew colder, and the flickering candlelight revealed ancient coffins lining the walls. Whispers echoed through the walls as the spirits of the past beckoned them closer. They realized that Moonlight Manor was not just haunted by restless souls, but also by the evil force that had cursed the manor long ago.

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew out their candle, submerging them into the darkness. Panic set in as they fumbled for a light source, their hands trembling. And then, they heard it—a low, haunting laughter that seemed to come from all directions. Their hearts raced as they desperately searched for an exit, but the mansion seemed to have a mind of its own, twisting and turning, trapping them within its walls. There was a subtle laughter coming from each direction. The laughter grew louder, echoing through the halls, as the friends realized they were not alone. Shadows danced and whispered, and ghostly figures materialized before their eyes. The friends screamed in terror, their voices blending with the eerie laughter. But just as all hope seems lost, a

beam of moonlight pierced through a cracked window, illuminating a hidden door. With a surge of adrenaline, they sprinted towards it, their fear giving them strength. Bursting through the door, they found themselves outside, gasping for breath in the cool night air. The haunted mansion stood behind them, silent and still. As they caught their breath, they exchanged relieved glances, knowing they had escaped the manor.

With their hearts pounding, the friends made a daring escape from the manor, vowing never to return to Moonlight Manor. As they emerged into the moonlit night, they couldn't help but feel a sense of relief and gratitude for their risky escape. The haunting of Moonlight Manor would forever remain etched in their memories, a chilling reminder of the darkness that lies hidden within the woods.

Trey T
Address:
Phone No
Age: 17
Grade: 12th

The Hungry Hungry Pumpkin

At midnight the pumpkin ate the kid. However the kid was not killed, he was trapped. Engulfed by the monster that consumed him. After hours passed crammed inside the monstrous pumpkin, the sun rises yet it is still dark for the kid. By noon the kid was reported missing and a search party was issued by the police department of Squashville. While organizing the search party, the sheriff announced, "It's a small town so he couldn't have gone far, I want everyone to search until we find this kid." After searching all day, there was still no sign of the kid.

As the sun started to fall, the sheriff was checking the pumpkin field. He walked past rows and rows of pumpkins, and not a sign. As he was checking the last row, he saw a shoe. This shoe was torn up like it was ripped apart by sharp, massive teeth. The kid was inside the pumpkin right next to the shoe and the sheriff. The kid could hear the sheriff speaking and calling other people to his location. The kid tried to scream for help but no sound was heard by the sheriff. The kid tried punching out but couldn't. There were many people surrounding the pumpkin and the shoe trying to find any clues to where this kid could be or what had happened. The kid was still screaming and banging for help, he continued until there was no one around. After another cold night inside the pumpkin, the kid was still helpless. The Sheriff continued the search in the morning and he was still not found. The sheriff also called in a detective to investigate what happened to the kid and where he could possibly be. After a few days of investigating and searching for the kid, the cold winter started to come and the search was called off.

The cold winter approached, still no sign of the kid anywhere. It is turning to winter and there is a major snow storm approaching. The temperature dropped to 10 degrees overnight and came a blizzard that covered the whole town in a foot of snow. More and more snow was added over the week. Towards

the end of the week, there was close to two feet of snow. The kid was still stuck inside the pumpkin, warm but trapped. The kid eventually fell into a deep sleep and woke up after the winter. By that time, he had become one with the pumpkin. All his body except his head managed to escape the pumpkin, becoming a pumpkin monster, hungry for revenge.

As the snow finally cleared from the town after the snowy winter, flowers began to bloom. Life started to appear and people started to go outside more, kids started playing in the fields. The pumpkin monster decided to eat more kids to start his revenge. He first ate one kid then after a week another, then another. Week after week, another kid is gone. After three weeks, the sheriff had enough. The sheriff decided to find out what is making these kids disappear. The sheriff decided to use a kid to bait out the monster. The sheriff asked for volunteers on this plan and to his surprise he got a kid to help. His plan was to send the kid out in the field and watch him and anything for any explanation for the kids disappearing. The sheriff watched from afar, but once the kid got far enough out in the field, he disappeared. There was no sign of any monster, or any explanation for the kid disappearing. The sheriff decided to go into the field to find answers, but there was no sign of the kid or any monster. The sheriff decided to leave and come up with a new plan. This plan was to set a curfew for all people in the town. After another week, this plan was in action and everyone was at home, asleep by nightfall. But one day, another kid was missing. The pumpkin monster had managed to get a key to a house, and had snuck in and ate a kid.

The town was in utter chaos because of the missing kids. The sheriff had one last plan, gather everyone in the town hall on the night of the next attack. A week later, on the night of the attack, the town hall was locked with everyone, including the sheriff. The sheriff went to his office and a few minutes later, the pumpkin monster came into the town hall. The pumpkin monster ate everyone in the building. The pumpkin monster walked into the sheriff's office. The pumpkin monster took the pumpkin off his head and revealed himself. He was the sheriff's son. Then he let the evil pumpkin eat the sheriff, his father.

Always Sunny

By Jeremy _____ r. Se _____

10th grade

The sun glistened through the clouds on a frigid autumn morning; Damian made his daily, tedious trek to school. The crisp leaves crunched beneath his feet as he walked past the houses, each housing its own stories.

Mr. Drake's house is always the one Damian passes first. His lawn is always immaculate, with not a single weed in sight. He lives an isolated life but doesn't seem to mind. Occasionally, Damian sees Mr. Drake's grandkids playing in the front yard, kicking around a soccer ball or tossing a football. Today, however, it seemed that Mr. Drake was home alone.

Damian halted once he arrived outside and waved to Mr. Drake, who waved back from his porch. Then, Damian continued his walk to school.

The next stop was Mr. and Mrs. Shirleys' house, which had seen better days. The paint on the outside of the house was peeling, and weeds were a frequent sight in their yard. They stopped being seen around town much or outside their home when their son died last year. Everyone believes they killed him. Damian doesn't think Mr. and Mrs. Shirley did. Their son was a close friend of Damian's. He would've loved a fall day like this.

Creak. Damian heard as he walked past the house of his friend. Then, he heard it again. He slowly turned around to see where it was coming from. The fence to Mr. and Mrs. Shirley's backyard is open.

"Mrs. Shirley?" Damian called out.

No answer.

"Mr. Shirley?" He called out this time.

Still, no one answered.

Damian slowly walked down the side yard into the backyard, trying to figure out what had opened their gate. *Bang. Bang. Bang.* Damian stopped in his tracks. Three loud bangs

echoed through the air from his deceased friend's backyard. Cautiously, Damian continued through the side yard to the backyard. His heart thumped violently; It felt like it was coming out of his chest. The hair on his neck stood up as he slowly approached the noise. Once there, he noticed the trap door to the basement was open.

"Hello?" Damian whispered once he arrived at the rickety entrance to the basement.

"Damian?" A voice called out from below.

The voice sounded tired and in pain. It was a voice Damian knew all too well. A voice he hadn't heard in a year. A voice he last heard on October 13th. His deceased friend. Logan Shirley.

"Logan?" Damian called out, feeling all sorts of different emotions. He's dead, Damian thought to himself, this can't be real. He's dead, he kept repeating to himself in his head again and again.

"Help." The voice said to Damian. Damian could see the person. It was Logan, with his hazel eyes and brown hair. He's dead, Damian thought to himself again.

"This can't be real, you're dead." Damian said to his friend. Logan looked disheveled and malnourished. A chain was attached to his ankle, which fastened him to the brick wall.

"I wish I was." Logan responded, "Get me out of here. Please."

Damian walked around the backyard, looking for anything to undo the chains attached to his friend. Then, he heard footsteps from the side yard, heavy footsteps. Damian quickly hid behind the shed and watched as Mr. Shirley came around the corner.

"How'd you open this door?!" Mr. Shirley screamed at Logan, "You'll never get out of here! You're suffering here forever for what you did! Then, he slammed the door shut and went back inside through the back door.

Damian slowly made his way back towards the door and lifted it open. There, he saw Logan crying on the ground. He was covered from head to toe in bruises and marks.

“Damian?” Logan painfully whispered.

“Yeah,” He replied, “I’m gonna try to get you out of here.” Then he slowly entered the basement and closed the door behind him.

The basement was horrifying. Strange stains were scattered everywhere, and a table had many different, intricate torture devices laid out. Then, Damian heard a creak behind him. The door was opening.

There stood Mr. Shirley with a crazed look on his face. He wore an apron and a belt adorned with knives and other brutal weapons.

“Hello, Damian.” He said while he slowly entered the basement and closed the door, “You should stay awhile, we do have room for two.”

Mr. Shirley slowly marched towards Damian. Damian’s heart was pounding. Then, the lights went out.

He heard the thump of Mr. Shirley’s feet slowly come closer and closer. He felt Mr. Shirley’s breath on his face. Then, it disappeared. Damian slowly pulled out his phone and turned on the flashlight. A guttural growl echoed from behind the closet door in the basement.

“Logan?” Damian whispered.

“Yeah?” Logan said from behind Damian.

Damian pointed the light behind him to see his malnourished friend sitting behind him. He then looked around with his flashlight to find Mr. Shirley. He was gone.

Damian looked back at the closet door and asked, “What’s behind that?”

“I don’t know,” Logan said shakily, “I’ve never heard that noise before.”

Logan tried standing back up but couldn't support himself and fell back down. The growling from the door continued.

Damian slowly walked towards the door, the floorboards creaking under his weight. He grabbed the handle, and the door flew open.

A strange beast ran out of the closet, up the stairs, and out of the basement into Logan's backyard. From what Damian could see, it had strange flesh-colored skin, scraggly limbs, a prominent spine, and rows of sharp, pointy teeth. After his astonishment dissipated, Damian glanced up.

"Logan, the door is open." Damian turned around and muttered.

"Grab something off the table over there and get me out of this then." Logan hoarsely yelled to Damian.

Damian rushed over to the table and scanned the table for something that could work. Then, he saw the sledgehammer. Damian heaved the sledgehammer off the table and walked over to Logan.

Logan watched him and, before Damian went to swing, whispered, "Be careful please."

Damian nodded his head. He brought the sledgehammer down over his head at the chain. *Clank*. The chain broke. Damian pulled Logan off the ground and carried him out of the basement. He set Logan down outside and heard leaves crunching behind him. That thing was escaping through the woods behind Logan's house. Then, a voice called out from the side yard.

"Damian?" An older man called out. His voice sounded breathy like he had been running.

Damian looked down the side yard and saw the man.

"Mr. Drake?" Damian said, followed by a sigh of relief.

Damian turned around and looked back towards the forest. Whatever that thing was vanished. Mr. Drake ran towards Damian as fast as his old, frail legs could. Then, he saw Logan. His face turned into a mix of confusion and horror.

“Logan,” Mr. Drake stuttered while he spoke, “I...I thought you were dead.”

“That would’ve been better than the hell my parents put me through,” Logan responded.

Damian grabbed his phone, called 911, and told them the situation. They came speedily and got the information from Logan and Damian. They didn’t tell them about the creature, though. That would stay between Damian and Logan. The cops sent out an APB for Logan’s parents, specifically his father, who had vanished once the lights went out in the basement. That APB would go unanswered. Logan would never hear from his parents again, which was all for the better. Maybe now his days would always be sunny; That was his hope, at least.