# THE FARMINGTON LIBRARIES



## **FEATURING STORIES BY...**

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The stories included in this volume may have been edited for publication.

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#### Dead of Alive

by: Toshita K.

In the ICU, there are always "difficult patients and families."

But none like the Crawfords in Room 6.

Mr. Crawford—a large man with a scar running across his face, a broken right tooth, and skin weathered like leather—had been convicted of murdering five people in a hate-fueled shooting. While fleeing police, he'd suffered a massive hemorrhagic stroke. Some called it Instant Divine Justice.

He had not been kind in life—to his victims, his wife, or his children. Yet now, his family gathered daily at his bedside, seeking redemption or closure that would never come.

He'd been in a persistent vegetative state for over a month. No brain activity. No chance of recovery. He breathed only because machines commanded him to. Still, the Crawfords swore they saw flickers of movement, glimpses of expression—proof, they said, that "he's still in there."

To the staff, he looked anything but alive.

His skin had taken on a waxy gray hue, his half-open eyes clouded white. The smell of decay clung to his room despite the constant cleaning. When his family prayed aloud, "God will take him when He's ready," every nurse wanted to say the same thing: He's been ready.

You're the ones holding Him back.

Ethics consults, family meetings, endless paperwork—nothing changed their minds. They refused to withdraw life support. "He's still here," they insisted.

And maybe, in a way, he was.

Strange things began to happen in Room 6. Lights flickered. Objects fell without warning.

Alarms went off in the middle of the night—sometimes when the room was empty. The ventilator alarm screamed at exactly 3:03 a.m., every night, no matter who was on shift. It became a running joke— Crawford's curse. But no one laughed long. Every nurse who entered felt it: the sudden chill, the hair lifting on the back of the neck, the sense of being watched.

Then on March 3rd it happened again, like it did each night.

The clock read 3:03 a.m. Nurse Mia sighed and went to silence the ventilator alarm. As she entered, the lights dimmed one by one until only the monitor glowed a dull red.

Then came a whisper, rasping through the hiss of the ventilator:

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"Let ... me ... go."
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Mia froze. The patient's face didn't move, but the breathing tube pulsed with each word.

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"Let... me... go."
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Her mind spun. It's just exhaustion, she told herself. A trick of the noise. She backed toward the door, but before she could leave, every monitor in the ICU flashed flatline for half a second.

Then the ventilator detached from the trach tube.

No one had touched it.

The code team rushed in. Tubing was reattached. Suctioning done. Settings checked. But his oxygen wouldn't rise. His chest heaved shallowly, the monitor tracing chaos.

Dr. Nair arrived, her face tight with fatigue and grim understanding. She'd seen the nightly alarms before, the endless false calls. Still, she called the code. CPR began. Mia pressed hard on his chest, feeling ribs crack beneath her palms. Medications were pushed. Minutes dragged. Nothing.

Finally, Dr. Nair called it. "Time of death, 3:33 a.m."

The team filed out, leaving the two women alone with the body.

Mia exhaled shakily. Dr. Nair leaned over to sign the paperwork.

That's when the ventilator came on—by itself.

The lights flickered. The monitor flared red again.

In its reflection, behind Dr. Nair's shoulder, stood Mr. Crawford. His opaque eyes were open.

His broken tooth gleamed faintly.

He was smiling.

#### The Number Three

by: McKinley G.

When the clock strikes ten, and the sky turns dark, Levi's in a big city and he's trying to park. He types in his license: Htl303. All he has left is to pay the fee. It costs \$30, a dollar a day, then he walks to his hotel where he's planning to stay. Levi is a 30-year-old man and parking cost thirty bucks. Levi can't tell if it's bad or good luck.

"Welcome to the Hartford hotel. I hope that tonight you are feeling well!" The woman sounds weird, Levi doesn't feel right. But now it's 10:30 pm, he should go and sleep through the night. "Hi, I am Levi. I'm here for 30 days. What room will I be in for my month long stay?" "Room 303," the woman replies with a sickening smile. "No one has been in that room for quite a while!" She seems a bit off, like she's not really alive.

Levi went up and what he saw scared his poor eyes. Room 303 the sign clearly read, but when he walked in there were bones on the bed. Levi was freaked! But maybe it's just from a dog. But when he walked in the bathroom, it was filled fully with fog! It slowly clears but on the mirror in red, someone wrote something, here's what it said: "I can see you Levi, you'll never be free. Try to escape, and then you'll see...." Now he was panicked, almost died just from fright. He tried and tried but couldn't sleep all night.

The next day came. Levi didn't sleep on his bone-filled bed. He couldn't sleep at all cause of the note that he read. He wanted to run, but he did not wanna see, he couldn't escape, he was trapped completely. He turns on the TV, straight to channel 3, but instead of cartoons, it spoke to him directly.

"Look out the window, in the light of dawn." The curtains were pulled, but the figure had already been drawn. Levi stared in horror, at the screen and the show, almost as if there was nowhere to go. "Have you noticed a pattern, containing the number 3? It's been everywhere, can you not see?" It all added up, the fee, his age, his license, the room. Now he feels something different, the feeling of doom.

#### **UNeASe**

by: Sam R.

Dim moonglow lights Farmington's bank, Fog curls, wispy and rank. A brook hums making practically no sound, And obviously no charm, Just a hiss chilling my arm. Curvy limbs arch; My boots tap roots. Slipping on mud, Who's in pursuit? A hush grows thick My mind is numb. Lack of sound, My mouth is blank. I look around. No man, no fauna, no fowl, Only that dark and hooting owl. I go on. I walk, though quickly now

A path I trod nonstop 'til dawn.

#### The Witch Tale

by: Anandi R.J.

Once upon a time there was an evil witch. Every night before Halloween she comes and eats all of the kids. But if she doesn't like the taste of the kids, she would make them her servant for a hundred years.

"Ahhh..." screamed Franky and Robin.

"Ok-Ok, I will stop but it's just a joke," said Nancy.

"That's good," said Robin. "Because I wouldn't like to be eaten or be a servant for a hundred years."

"None of us would like to be eaten or be a servant for a hundred years," said Franky.

"Well come on girls, I am getting some ice cream and popcorn for the movie," said Nancy.

"We are coming too," said Franky and Robin.

When all the girls were done picking out all their snacks for the movie, they all went into the living room.

"I called dibs on this chair first," said Robin.

"Oh, Robin! You always want to get best things first," said Nancy.

"Guys, the movie's about to start," said Franky.

"Thanks, Frank," said Robin.

"Hey, don't call me that," said Franky.

"Ok, I wouldn't," said Robin.

"Well, guys, you know how Franky was just telling us the movie is about to start?" said Nancy.

"Yaa, so what about it?" said Robin.

"Well, the movie is about to start," said Nancy.

"Oh, thanks Nance," said Robin.

"You're welcome," said Nancy.

"Noooo," screamed Franky and Robin.





"Wait," said Franky, "Where is Nancy?"

Franky and Robin both felt fear. They waited for Nancy when she wasn't coming, they felt even more fear but then suddenly...

"BOOOO!" screamed Nancy.

"Ahhhhhh!" screamed Franky and Robin again.

Movie playing: Down in the deep dark, there was a girl that flew in the night and every night before Halloween she either eats a kid or makes them her servant for a hundred years.

"Haah got you again," said Nancy.

"Hey, that's not funny and by the way I wasn't scared at all," said Robin.

"Yes, you were," said Nancy.

After the movie the girls asked Nancy's mom if they could play in the backyard for a little bit. After Nancy's mom said yes for playing in the backyard, they all went to get their shoes. They were all outside and played freeze tag. Franky was the tagger.

When they stopped to take a break, Nancys saw something in the sky. It looked like a witch. At first, she thought it was her imagination but then she saw it again and again. She told Franky and Robin about it.

"Is it actually true?" said Robin?

"No, it's not. It is probably one of her tricks again," said Franky.

"No, it is not one of my tricks and if you really think it is my trick then go and look in the night sky," said Nancy.

"I will," said Franky.

"After looking at the night sky, am I dreaming. Somebody pinch me," said Franky.

Robin pinched Franky. "You said that you want someone to pinch you and that's what I did," said Robin.

But when all of that was happening, the witch was flying right above them and she was listening to every word said by the girls. And in a matter of seconds the witch flew down and said to the girls, ''Hello, little girls, I heard you were talking about me. Either way, I don't care. Now it's time for you girl to die because I am going to eat all of you."

"No, we are too young to die," said the girls.

But as soon as the witch was about to eat them something happened that never happened.

BOOM! In a flash Robin's, Franky's and Nancy's friendship bracelets all started glowing and suddenly they turned into weapons.

"So, you want to do this the hard way? Then let's do it," said the witch.

"Let's fight!" BOOM, CRASH, THUD.

"Hey little girls can you be a bit quieter with the fight?" said the evil witch.

"Can you?" said Nancy.

"Good one, Nance," said Robin.

"Thanks, Robin," said Nancy.

"Oh, Nancy you always come up with best story," said Nancy's mom. "Thanks, mom!"

The end.

## The Tale of Asa Wormley

by: Aviva R.

A warm autumnal sunshine enveloped me as I sat in my living room, enjoying a good book and a cup of English Breakfast tea. The sun was streaming through golden leaves and casting a cheery glow across everything it caressed. The terracotta soldier and horse statues outside my house were holding their resolute guard, and even the tall, ancient tree seemed to be smiling its old crinkled face. It was, in truth, a perfect October day. No mind that tomorrow would bring trick or treaters to my door, where I would put on that pointy black hat and scare the Kit Kats out of those children's youthful faces. Truly everything seemed calm, with no mind to when the ghouls and goblins would frolic in their sinister, mischievous ways. As the sun dipped below the horizon, I brought my withered bones up the stairs and enjoyed one last night of tranquility before all the festivities began.

A loud beeping noise aroused me out of my slumber. Startled out of my dreams, I glared angrily at the alarm clock. The clock read 0:00 and was emitting the noise in question. I banged the top to shut it off with all the energy I could muster (which wasn't very much at all, because I had gotten much too little sleep to do much). I was just about to drift back into my serene dreamland when a sharp rattling noise appeared at my window. I dragged my sleepy body out of my soft pink covers and willed my trembling, arthritic fingers to open the shades.

I really wasn't scared of course, for what had I to be scared of? After all, I ruled this village, and I was probably the oldest resident here! I could walk to the library or my neighbor's house with my eyes closed, and I certainly had nothing to fear from some evil-doing teens pulling a prank, or an escaped housecat.

After taking a deep breath and making sure I could turn around and run if a scene outside prompted me to do so, I opened the curtain. Holding my breath, I peered outside, and there was nothing but the trees brushing their fingertips against the shutters. I most certainly did not let out a brief sigh of relief that it wasn't anything worse, and climbed back into bed. Alas! My refuge of the covers would not push that calm mindset back into me, and I couldn't get an inch of rest for the whole long night.

At daybreak, I ran (well, I did whatever the equivalent of running is to me) to my window and pushed back the curtains with unnatural speed. I saw nothing, nothing at all, just the view of my neighbor's house, just as it always has been. Then my eyeballs nearly popped out of their sockets as I remembered the trees of last night. Surely that was a nightmare, or I had remembered wrong in my sleepy deliriousness, it couldn't possibly be...

Forgive my thoughts for trailing off. Yes, something was indeed wrong, although I couldn't place what. I made my cup of tea, and went to sit in the living room, when I noticed something else was wrong. My statues had moved. The terracotta man was now sitting on the terracotta horse. I muttered a curse under my breath, and put on my slippers to walk outside.

As I stepped onto the porch, the man turned his head to stare at me. I froze and glared him down. To my horror, his eyes started glowing a deep and malignant crimson, and the horse gave a whinny and a puff of smoke came out of his nostrils. A deep and gravelly voice came from the two of them, yet neither moved their mouths, saying, "Your time is up, Madame Wormley. You have survived on this earth for far too long, indeed about 200 years too long. You should have rotted with all the others, buried deep under Memento Mori. How you have escaped your fate, I don't know. However, I do see the effects of age. Oh, Asa, your nose could be put in a pickle jar and sold, with that long, bulbous, bumpy, and all-around awful shape. Your eyes look unsightly, all tinged with red. Your hair is tangled and knotty, your knees are like horrifying lumps, and let's not forget your surprisingly small shriveled ears. Asa Wormley, I have come to deliver you to where you belong: underground."

I stared at the devil in its eyes. I thrice coughed and proclaimed to the beast, "While it is true that I have survived for three hundred years, and while in my past I have done some extremely bad things to achieve that age, I mean nothing wrong. My nose has always been long, and it's wrong of you to insult it. If you do have the power and means to end my life, please do so kindly. My eyes are red because your omens woke me up and I got far too little sleep. Of course my hair is tangled, I recently woke up! You wouldn't know, you have no hair on that bald clay head. You also have no knees, so you don't know that everybody's knees are like lumps.

Well, mine are a bit more protruding than others, but in a skirt you can't tell the difference! My ears are shriveled because many of the fashions of the past couple hundred years have involved lots of hats, and centuries of hat-wearing has shriveled up my ears. See, blame those tall lacy bonnets, not my age! I have stopped my old ways and have paid for them many times over by the guilt that has haunted me for two hundred years. I don't need to be punished anymore! All I want out of life is the beauty of nature, and I have been enjoying it without hurting anybody. I am reformed! Let me be! Begone, vile demon!"

With the end of that speech, I hunched over, gasping for water. I had not spoken so much in fifty years! The demon's eyes were still glowing red, and to my horror, I watched the trees move to surround me. They had a much higher speed than I could ever hope to go, and soon I found myself entangled in a thick leafy jungle. My poor old brain could not take it anymore, and I began to cry. My brain started to recall all my old evils, and I savored each

one of them, choking myself on the salty taste of my tears. I was so overcome in my emotions, that I didn't notice the trees recede.

The demon spoke again in its thick, scratchy voice, saying, "I have decided there is no better punishment for you than to stay here and drown in your memories. You will stay on earth until it gets swallowed up by the sun itself." With that, it vanished in a puff of disgusting-smelling smoke.

My tears turned to laughter as I realized how I had once again thwarted death. Realizing how silly I looked sitting on my front lawn in my old nightgown and bunny slippers, I went back inside to recall the morning's events. The demon had made a crucial mistake: It is good to look back on past mistakes and to see how you've improved.

As I sat in my comfy leopard-print chair, smiling at my thoughts, I watched the sun dip below the horizon. Grinning, I put on my long black dress and matching conical hat, and watched the children run up the driveway for treats and a story. I always tell the best Halloween stories, that's for sure, and this year's would not disappoint. "Gather up," I said as they sat in front of my blazing fire, shining eyes eagerly awaiting what was to come, "Listen as I tell you about the terracotta demon..."

## Uprooted

by: Lea K.

I was hanging on by a thread of my body, blood dripping down me as I desperately tried to hold on. I had been just lying there, doing my job, when I started to be relentlessly picked at. At first, it was just a jab, a poke, a pick, then my body was ripped from my place, and there I was, hanging on by the thread of my "feet," the blood gathering where I was supposed to be. Suddenly, I was lifted up, my body swaying freely as I hung upside down, while my feet were still connected to the ground. I was lifted up to a giant, open hole-like thing. It had big shiny white things lining the edges of the hole. There was a clear, slimy goo all over the hole. I was inserted into the hole, and the next thing I knew, a bite had been taken from my feet, separating my body from the ground. I was held between 2 of the white rock-like things, then, before I could register anything, I was spat out onto the ground, the cold tiles hitting my body, like a wave engulfing me. I saw my host, the one with the big cave, and the goo, and the shiny white things, walk away, never to be seen again.

And that's how I got here. Living in a pencil eraser that had been forgotten. Just like me. My wounds had healed, for the most part; the backside of me, however, was still raw and painful from being torn out of the ground like that.

Then, of course, there was my heart, which ached constantly. I vowed to get revenge against the host who did that to me. I had done nothing wrong; all I did was lie next to the nail, simply to protect my host, but that's how they repay me. By ripping me out of my home, uprooting me, and spitting me out on the cold, hard ground.

Literally. Why must life be so hard for a Hangnail?

## Big Bad Wolf

by: E.J. H.

Standing in the middle of the room, looking up at the rafters, I wish with all my heart I had the courage to take my own life. Instead, I take up my musket, open the door to the cold dawn and lie to my entire village.

The mountains are heavy with mist, the ground soft with last night's snow. Around me, the once-cheerful faces of my hometown hurry for the safety of the indoors. The past month has been agonizing, but far worse is this very morning, when we all have awoken knowing that one of us will soon die. Everything, from the endless horizon of stretching pines, to the squat cottages, to the people within, has shrunk in fear of an enemy that cannot be seen or outrun.

The air is sharp with the sound of a creature on the hunt.

\* \* \*

I knock on the door of Friedrich Hoffmann. He is disheveled and unshaven. His hair has turned a premature gray, and his face is haggard with want of sleep; a far cry from the boy I grew up with. Worst of all is the hunted, resigned look in his eyes.

"Hans? What a surprise."

"Good morning, Friedrich. Or, as good as it can get. I realize this maybe asking a bit much, but I need some ammunition."

"Mein Gott, Hans, you're not going out again, are you?"

"Where else can I go?"

"Haven't you heard what everyone has been saying? They say it's come up from Hell itself! They say nothing can kill it!"

My hand tightens around my musket. "Trust me. If there is a way, I will find it."

"Grandma says it's one of the Old Kind," says a voice behind Friedrich. A little girl appears in the door. Blonde hair falls over her shoulders, and her rosy cheeks show her mother's dimples. Her hand clutches a stuffed lamb.

"Rosalind," Friedrich says sternly, falling to a knee, "Mr. Wolfheim doesn't want to hear Grandma's silly stories."

"It's not a story. She says it's as old as the mountains. Our ancestors banished it years ago."

"Now Rosalind, I'll have none of this superstitious nonsense. This is a Christian household, and we don't put any faith in the false gods of heathens."

"She also says Father Kohler is more full of straw than a scarecrow."

I break Friedrich's temper with a false laugh.

"The things children say! I tell you Rosalind, you sound more like my Johanna every—"

I choke as I say this. Rosalind vanishes while Friedrich puts a hand on my shoulder.

"Hans, for goodness' sake, see reason. Don't go looking for the Beast. Not on your own."

"I'll find it, Friedrich. And I'll kill it. After what it did to Isolde and Johan—"

"Hans!"

His voice cuts through the quiet morning air. Passersby glance at us for a moment, and I can feel their eyes lingering on me. They've been doing that for months now. Friedrich drops his tone.

"I respect your grief, I really do. Your family were the first to fall victim to this monster. But you haven't found anything, and every time you go into those woods alone—"

"I know the risk, Friedrich, and I'm prepared to take it."

The man before me sighs and shakes his head. He knows what he would be doing if he were in my place. And I think he also knows that, deep down, I wouldn't mind joining my wife and child.

"You said ammunition?"

"And a bit of powder. I haven't sold many furs lately, so..."

"All right. But please be careful."

"I promise."

He comes back with what I asked for. He also carries a bag over one shoulder, and his gun over the other. His daughter follows at his feet.

"Are you going somewhere?" I ask.

"We're going to visit Grandma." Rosalind pulls a hood over her head.

"We may stay for some time," Friedrich tells me. "This village is too dangerous now."

He closes the door, and as I watch him walk away, his daughter in tow, the bite mark on my arm begins to itch.

\* \* \*

I enter the woods behind my house. This path was blazed when my grandfather was young. He taught my father and I to know our prey – to know their objectives, their drives, and their land. I know the forest like I know my own name, but in all the time that the Beast has terrorized our village, I have never been able to find where it sleeps. Only where it feeds.

As I tread my way through the frigid morning, my breath rising before me, I place my feet to avoid the patches of snow on the ground. I've come to hate tracks. It is one thing to follow them, but another to be followed.

It's nearly midday when I finally catch the trail.

In the shadow of a cliff, the ground has been disturbed by something massive and hungry, and a young tree has been knocked off its roots. From one of the brambles I pull a tuft of wiry black fur.

I set off at a run in the direction of the main road. The tracks, though massive, are difficult to follow. They are very far apart.

"Papa, look at this!"

I crouch when I hear her voice. It's as though the Beast wanted to lead me to them, singling them out before I could.

Up ahead on the road, I see Rosalind standing in the middle of a great paw print. It comes up to her ankles.

"Rosalind, get out of there!" Friedrich practically shouts.

He pulls her out by the wrist and continues down the road at a brisk pace. I step out to meet them.

"Friedrich!"

"Hans! Bless you, you've come just in time. Look at this!"

"I've seen it," I say as he shows me. "It's the first time I've found its trail."

"I've never seen anything so big. Hans, it's...it's massive!"

"It's just as Grandma said."

"Stay away from it, Rosalind! Don't touch it. The sooner we get on our way, the better."

"Hold on there, Friedrich. Look at this print. See the way it points? It follows the road."

"Oh please, no!"

"Look, here's another." I show him the next print, just beyond the edge of the trees, walking alongside the road.

"What should we do, Hans? We can't turn back, but if the Beast waits up ahead..."

"If the Beast is nearby, then I won't leave you."

"And if we meet it?"

"Two guns are better than one, don't you agree?"

"Are you coming with us, Mr. Wolfheim?"

I pat her on the head, as I did for my daughter.

"That I am, Rosalind. But just for a little while."

Friedrich smiles and welcomes me along.

\* \* \*

We follow the road for an hour or so.

I linger behind slightly, stepping where Friedrich steps. Every now and then I look behind me at the road, where the snow is beginning to melt. I think of the day and night that awaits the village. My heart breaks, but I ignore it. This is no time for second thoughts. My future is as inescapable as my past.

"Look, Papa! The tree!"

Rosalind runs ahead of us to a clearing where the road circles an enormous oak. To me it's only a tree, but to Friedrich this is a sacred place. It was here that he met his wife, Hilda. After her illness, all that was left of her was this tree, older than anyone can remember, and the girl running beneath its branches.

"I appreciate you escorting us," Friedrich says, "but I think I can take it from here. The town is only a few kilometers more."

"Just as well. The trail broke off from the road a while ago. I'd better recover it before all the snow melts."

"I don't think I'll ever understand it, Hans, what your fixation is with this Beast. Why do you feel you must hunt it?"

"I don't know if I can explain it. I wish I could abandon the hunt, but some things are beyond our reasoning. Some things we simply must do. And I must do this, whether I want to or not."

Rosalind circles behind the tree.

I look off into the woods and raise my gun.

"What's that!?"

Friedrich wheels around in horror, his own gun raised against the invisible enemy. As soon as his back is turned, I drive the butt of my gun into the back of his head, and he falls to the ground. I crouch beside him.

"Papa?"

"Rosalind, come quickly!"

She runs to my side.

"Papa? What's happened to him?"

I stand up.

"Nothing at all."

With one more drive the girl falls to the ground beside her father. I drop my gun. My hands are trembling, and I hunch over, ready to be sick. My vision blurs, my head spins, and the dragging weight of my conscience pulls me down to my knees.

I steady myself. One step at a time, I drag my best friend up to the base of the tree. He mumbles as his senses return. Tears run down my cheeks as I lean him against the trunk. His eyes flutter.

"Hans?" he says meekly.

"I'm so sorry, Friedrich."

I position his gun between his knees. I place his hands just right, and put the barrel in his mouth.

His eyes finally open when I place his finger on the trigger.

\* \* \*

With wrists tied and a rag in her mouth, Rosalind's delicate frame hangs limp over my shoulder as I traverse the ancient pathless woods. I've wrapped her in a woolen blanket. I tell myself it's to keep her warm, or to keep her from dying too soon, but I can't fool myself. I can't bear to see her.

For hours I walk through the snow, through places long since forgotten by the world. I retread the steps I took when I followed that stag through the deep valleyed forest, my gun in hand, my head full of ambition and arrogance. I enter the chasm my grandfather warned me about as a child, where stones hang precipitously overhead. I climb the craggy path that overlooks the horizon as it winds upward, the sheer drop beside me a tempting offer. The stone beneath me smooths and evens, until I find myself climbing stairs in the mist. I shudder to think of who else trod this way, in some remote epoch of history.

By the time I reach the top of the path, the sun has set. I stand at the summit of the mountain, the entire world laid out around me. The mountaintop has been hollowed into a gaping cave. In the center of the cave is an altar – a block never carved away. All around it, the ground is etched with sigils and signs. A small idol lies broken at the back of the cave, an eternal reminder of my failure.

The mark on my arm is burning now, and I set about my work. I light torches in their niches, casting shadows in all directions. From far away, I'm sure someone could see the lights, and I wonder if they will ever be as curious as I was. I drag a set of chains up to the altar, and there I bind Rosalind. I look down at her tiny figure. I think of the day she was born, and how happy Friedrich had been. I can still hear him hammering on my door, eager to tell me before anyone else.

At last I can control myself no longer. I cry over the little girl.

"Please forgive me, Rosalind! I don't want to...but it only takes children!"

Her lifeless form will not stir. I stand up and pace before the altar, the torches throwing my shape against the walls like a chorus of tribal dancers.

"Don't you see? I can't stop it! Nothing can! I would if I knew how, but... The ones who sealed it died years ago. All the knowledge is gone. And this thing, it hasn't eaten for thousands of years. All I can do is serve it. If I don't, then I'll be..."

I look back at her. Her eyes are open, watching me.

A sharp howl breaks the night air, and I look out at the sky. The full moon has risen.

The sound of a heavy tread reaches my ears. I race to the proper place and fall to a knee. I keep my eyes firmly fixed upon the ground.

Down below I hear it getting closer. Trees bend aside as it passes. The stones of the mountain crumble and crunch beneath its feet. The tread becomes as deafening as thunder, until finally it reaches the stony cliff where servants and sacrifice are waiting. I can hear Rosalind's fear, but more than that I can feel the presence of the Beast. It's very spirit drags a cloud of oppression over the mountains, a monster of both mind and flesh. With every step, it shakes the torches. It comes close to me, but I dare not look at it. Instead, I listen to the twitching of its massive snout about my head, and feel the warm, rattling breath on my face.

The chains behind me clatter, and the Beast leaves me with my shame. Her screams are muffled, but to me they are deafening.

The creature takes its time with her. Moment by moment I listen to the claws against the stone, the chains against the altar, and the teeth against the bones. Every moist shred, every crunch, every split, and every agonizing vocal sound rings in my ears, until I can take no more, and darkness overtakes me.

\* \* \*

When I finally awaken, I am alone on the mountain. Somewhere out in the distance, a low howl rises to the moon. The cold of winter pierces my flesh. I return to the cave, sidestepping the bloody paw prints. I think of the long night walk ahead of me, and of returning to the empty house where my wife hung herself. I think of Friedrich lying dead out there, and what the villagers will say when he's found. I think of the search they will

conduct when Rosalind doesn't turn up, as pointless as all the others. But most of all, I think of what will happen when the village runs out of children.

The torches are nearly burnt down. Before I snuff them, I approach the altar. All that's left of Rosalind is her dripping red riding cape. I gingerly picked it up and took it to the back of the cave. There I place it beside the remains of Jack the shepherd boy, young Peter, and my poor little Johanna.

#### Our House is Full of Ghosts

by: Mariah R.

Our house is full of ghosts. Hammers strike copper strings that vibrate as ivory keys shift, but there is no trace of fingertips or a shadow behind the baby grand. Verde green lamps along our curved drive illuminate without ever flicking a switch, following a Circadian rhythm of their own accord. A lamp shines in the parlor at precisely one hour before sunset each night with no one around. The work of ghosts is here every day.

Our ghosts hear our commands. They open and close blinds, change the temperature of our rooms, start timers, report the weather, and even tell us jokes. Modern day conveniences? Home automation? Alexa? Google? Siri? What is the name of your ghost? Are these impossibilities even viable in centuries-old structures like our home—with tree trunks for joists and whispers of Rochambeau's memorable journey through town?

There are mysteries in these walls. Now "the cloud" takes command. Wireless information is traveling in our home, invisible yet powerful. Should we duck? Do we need to get out of the way? What do the spirits think of all these home improvements? Are we taking jobs away from ghosts?

Let's set the story straight once and for all. We like to pretend that this is all just technological advancements. We fantasize about the strengths of science and technology and glorify modern convenience. But next time you ask Alexa to play your favorite song or when you lock your door and turn off the lights while your own bodily presence is in a different zip code, remember that it is truly the service of our longtime residents, these hard-working ghosts. Let us celebrate our friendly ghosts haunting our historic homes in this modern-day fantasy. Thank you, ghosts.

### **Red Ghost**

by: Elizabeth C.

"Many, many years ago, not too far from where we've set up our campsite, there used to stand two stone houses," Tomas intoned.

Ellie stirred the coals of the fire, and added one more log for good measure. The kettle steamed; Tomas wrapped his hand in a towel to pull it from the fire. This part of the night had grown on her in the seven years they had been camping together.

"This one again?" she whined. "I'm pretty sure in the Adirondacks they were log cabins."

"That was like three years ago! How do you remember that? Anyways, this is a totally different story, and I have it on the strongest authority that it's true."

"Oh yeah? Says who?" Needling her husband came naturally to Ellie.

"Says the park ranger this morning, while you were taking forever, doing whatever it is you do in the bathroom." Tomas could hold his own. "So just let me tell the story, would you?" Ellie bit her tongue, and he continued. "As I was saying, a pair of brothers, William and Arthur, packed up their young wives and schlepped them out to the wilderness to seek their fortune. Their wives, Winnie and Alice, were none too happy about the situation, but they abided.

"One summer morning, the menfolk left their ladies to do the relentless work of keeping house, while they set out to strike it rich in the blistering heat. Winnie begged her husband not to leave her alone. 'Something has been watching me for days,' she pleaded. William disdained her fears, saying that she might as well make use of her expensive nerve tonic, because he was leaving regardless. William and Arthur expected to come back home to hot dinners, fresh clothes, and soft beds. Instead—mayhem, havoc, and chaos. Laundry tumbled across the bare ground. The wash copper smoked over the fire, and only one wife sat on the front porch. The dry wood of the rocking chair complained as she rocked, staring blankly across the shimmering sand and rock. No dinner waited.

"A whiff of Winnie's smelling salts brought Alice mostly back to reality. Still dazed, Alice told the tale like this.

"Winnie had still felt uneasy after breakfast. She refused to leave the cabin, until Alice yanked her by the arm into the bright sunlight. Even the sun shining kindly on their bonnets and gingham dresses couldn't lift her anxiety. Alice wound up toting the buckets; it was Winnie's turn, but she clearly preferred dirty laundry over leaving the yard.

"They slogged through the washing, and Alice settled the heavy yoke over her shoulders to fetch more water from the spring. On her return, she spied a dust devil. Fearful for the dirt ruining her clean and steaming laundry, she picked up the pace. Somehow, though, that little twister was making a beeline straight for the house. It was moving impossibly fast. The hair at the nape of her neck stood up. Something was deadly wrong.

"She shrugged off the buckets, hitched up her skirts, and bolted. Alice could almost touch the corner of the house when a scream rent the air, only to be cut off sharply by an inhuman bellow.

"Alice froze. She cowered there behind the wood shack. It might have been only minutes, but it felt like it would be the rest of her life. Her straining ears heard no more screams, only crunching, squelching sounds, then a long, slow dragging noise that faded away."

Ellie slurped her tea.

"I'm setting the scene here, and you're ruining it!" Displeasure flickered across Tomas's face. Ellie made a noncommittal noise, and gestured for him to continue.

"Alice collapsed like her puppeteer had cut her strings. She felt none of the temptation of Lot's wife to look behind her as she crawled to her house, sobbing the whole way. Alice settled into the rocking chair and didn't move.

"William hadn't moved, either. 'Arthur,' he croaked, 'Arthur, I can't take it. I can't look at her myself, not at my beautiful Winnie.' So Arthur went and looked.

"He found nothing, or nothing of Winnie to be exact. He found a tuft of red fur caught in the fence, and a single footprint in the mud, though what animal made it he had no idea. They never found any real evidence to support Alice's claims, except that no one ever saw Winnie again.

"Later on, when questioned by the sheriff, Alice would swear that at the base of the

duster was a red beast, ridden by Ol' Scratch himself.

"No one saw neither hide nor hair of that brute again. Arthur and William looked for her for weeks, long after their neighbors had stopped helping. And probably, the gentlefolk gossiping about poor Winnie thought Alice had gone off her rocker, or that one of the brothers had done her in. People talked for a while, but eventually, the brothers and Alice moved back East and out of this particular story."

"Is that the end?" A gust kicked up a small flight of sparks, echoing the Milky Way above.

A shadow moved on top of the hill, and caught Ellie's eye. She shivered and threw another log on the fire.

"Not even close!" Tomas said ominously. "You know I only like long stories that grab you by the seat of your pants.

"In twenty years, the talk had died down. Now, though, the hapless victims were a group of men, company miners, the whole lot sharing a camp after a long day of work. Their wagons were circled up for protection from who-knows-what, as none of them had heard the tale of the Red Ghost. While they waited for pork and beans, they told ghost stories, like I'm doing so very well. Each man tried to outdo the others, though some stories were better than others. One such man quivered in his boots. 'I feel a cold dread coming over me. Has someone stepped on my grave?' he asked.

"Not you, not tonight,' another replied. 'I didn't sleep for a week after your last yarn, and I'm too tired to stay shivering in my bedroll, with every sound spooking me all night.'
"This is no flight of fancy," he proclaimed. 'Evil lurks in the air.' But the old bean rustler came up with grub right at that second, and everyone tucked in.

"Well, they should have listened to him, because not half an hour later, something whirled over their heads and stamped out the fire right in front of them. The overcast sky covered all starlight, and although it was a full moon, the darkness was complete. There was panic. Confusion. Screams rent the air. A wagon groaned balefully, then exploded into a shower of splinters that no one could see. It certainly hurt, though, when the splinters tore through their overalls. The cook relit his lantern with trembling hands, and he was gifted with a scene nothing short of a massacre. Six men suffered broken bones. Fourteen bled from vicious bite marks.

One was never seen again.

"But someone claimed to have seen the culprit. The yarn spinner called it a demon thirty feet tall. He said it rattled and creaked and reeked of the undead. He said he knew in his bones she was coming back for him. But his tall tales came back to haunt him, and although his story never changed, all the others ostracized him.

"Those prospectors never hit the motherlode. One by one, they all left Arizona for greener pastures. None of them ever talked again about what happened that night."

"Then how did you hear this, dear?" Ellie grinned.

"Now you quit your yapping, young lady. I'm giving you the facts as I know them. I've got one more part to tell you. And this part is the scariest, for sure.

"Again, the evil monster wasn't seen again for years. By this point, the West was won. Trains left tracks across the land. Cities bloomed where before there had only been cholla and rattlesnakes. California beckoned, full of gold. But even the smallest town told the tale of the Red Ghost and his many victims. Maybe some used it as an excuse to do away with someone they didn't like. After all, plenty of outlaws still roamed. But none of the stories could tell where the Red Ghost came from, or how to keep it from killing you.

"Deep in a nearby valley lived a cantankerous old man, Eustace, who brimmed with spite and had no friends or family to speak of. He guarded his miserable little spit of land with an arsenal fit for an army battalion. No one could accuse him of taking defense (or offense, for that matter) lightly. The only person he let onto his land was the milkman, who came once a week.

"That's why, when Eustace heard footsteps tromping through his yard, he was armed to the teeth before he stepped out of bed. He was expecting a wayward cow, or maybe a travelling salesman that he could put the fear of God into. Instead, he flung open the door to the Red Ghost himself. Now, this old man held no truck with the supernatural. So he let fly at the saddled figure, figuring he was shooting at the Devil himself and—

"BOOM!"

Ellie jumped sky high. "Wait, what happened?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all happened to the Devil astride the creature. The leering face turned towards him, its empty eyes somehow looking deep into the old man's soul. Eustace staggered back and pressed himself flat against the wall. The red monster lunged toward him with its frightful rider. He could see that its fur was matted and torn; some spots worked down to the bone. It stank of death and decay. The horrifying visage presented to him? Well, I wouldn't want to meet that thing, either.

"Thud. Thud. Thud thud thud thudthud—it thundered still closer, one terrifying stride after another. Eustace pulled back the hammer again and aimed as if his life depended on it.

"Now, though, he aimed at the misbegotten critter itself and pulled.

"Thud.

"This time, the blackguard did fall, skidding right up to the old man and his door. The fetid and verminous carcass slammed into him. Eustace was pinned against his door. In fact, he stayed trapped there under the beast for almost two whole days until the milkman came back, and only by chance did the milkman notice the old man there at all as he called feebly for help. Even the rustle of wind through his tomatoes might have masked the sound of his voice.

"The milkman had already made his delivery in his normal spot, just at the gate. He was on his way back to his truck when the wind carried Eustace's weak calls to his ears. He looked at the pile of fur on the ramshackle porch—it wasn't just trash or some project, it was...something. He held his breath as he approached, barely keeping from losing his breakfast. The milkman braced himself to touch the putrid corpse but found that he couldn't even begin to budge it. He unhitched his horse from the wagon, and fought it, bucking and kicking, over to the carcass, where he wrapped a rope around the worm-eaten neck, and pulled.

"It moved just enough to free Eustace's numb legs. The better part of an hour passed before the old man trusted his feet again.

"The two of them hauled it back into town in the back of the truck, milk forgotten, though it was a tall order for them to hoist it into the back even with Eustace's block and tackle. It was fully night before the skittish horse got them into town with their repulsive load. The milkman delivered Eustace to the doctor, then pounded the door to roust the Sheriff from

his bed. The sheriff, a veteran of these parts, gave it one look and declared that the Devil was actually a mummified corpse tied to a saddle. And the red terror..." Tomas paused dramatically.

"Was a camel."

"Tomas!" Ellie laughed. "I was quaking in my boots for that whole song and dance right up until the word 'camel.' That's absurd!"

He looked hurt. "It's not that ridiculous. Like I said, in those days, it wasn't nearly so easy to get around. Trains didn't go everywhere, and there weren't flying cars yet—"

"Dude," Ellie interrupted, "We don't have flying cars yet either!"

"Well, the point still stands. It was hard to get around in those days. People had to work at it. People needed days and days to get anywhere at all, and the desert made it just about impossible to cross. So mid-century, someone had the bright idea to import camels."

"You're serious. Camels?"

"Yes, camels. You see, it's a great idea because camels live in the desert, right? They can go really far with not much water, which was a big problem for oxen and horses. Even donkeys need a lot of water. It's one thing to cross the prairie or a forest where you can refill your barrels every day or two but lugging that much weight across the desert is really hard.

Camels don't need to drink as often—don't get me wrong, they still need water, but they can go a lot longer between drinks."

"So they're perfect for the desert," Ellie said.

"Yup, perfect."

"But you haven't told me why anyone wanted to cross this wasteland."

"To go to California. Or to the mines. Whatever. That's not the point." He resumed his storytelling posture and demeanor. "Let me get back to it. No more interruptions.

"The sheriff and his deputies lugged that stinking mess out to an old shed and locked it up tight for the night. The moon gleamed full that night, and the sheriff, despite the gore, was deliberate in his examination. Saddle straps had worn down deep into the dromedary's sides. A belt buckle shone gold, and the bony feet were in fancy boots. Strands of sunbleached hair still clung to the skull. In the morning, the priest would say a few words over the bodies, then they'd both be burned, just in case.

"But when he went out in the cool dawn air, the only evidence of the specter and his rider was a tuft of red fur caught on the splintered door."

"Ooh, spooky," Ellie giggled.

"Be quiet. You're ruining the vibe. The spookiest part? The sheriff didn't tell anyone about the missing bodies. He only told the townsfolk that there was nothing left to take care of, and let them think that meant it was dealt with. Then he bided his time until his day off and went over to the library. Let's be honest about him, he had never been in one before. But uneducated doesn't mean unintelligent, and he had his suspicions. He asked the librarian for help, and she brought up a stack of old newspapers they kept in storage. Page by ancient, crumbling page, he read the lurid details. Cold sweat creeped down his spine. The old prospector's family had plastered Missing Person ads for weeks, and they all included the same details. Boots with blue stitching, a belt with a brass buckle in the shape of Texas, a red shirt. Just like he had seen on the skeleton astride the camel.

"But he was still curious. He looked deeper and longer ago. All the stories mentioned a rider on a red beast, just like his camel. The man who saw the creature in the miners' camp referred to the rider as 'she' and said it was wearing blue gingham and a tattered white bonnet.

Which sounds an awful lot like—"

"—Winnie! Oh, Tomas! Was it all the same camel? Did it just keep ensnaring new captives?"

"That's sure what it sounds like, doesn't it, hun? But no one has seen it for many, many years. So either it's been stopped for good, or it may be looking for fresh meat. I guess we'll never know..."

"But now bedtime is upon us!" The fire smoldered low, so Tomas banked the coals. Ellie climbed into the tent, put on fresh thermals and fresh wool socks, then snuggled down. A low rumble sounded off in the distance as her eyes drifted shut.

As quickly as she fell asleep, Ellie jolted awake. Wind whipped in a frenzy, pelting the tent with pebbles and dust. It screamed around the zippered vents. She reached for Tomas. He wasn't there.

"Tomas?" she called. "Are you out there?" No answer.

She grabbed her jacket, then tugged on the tent zipper. It wouldn't go. "Tomas, help me with the zipper!"

It pulled free. Ellie scrambled out of her twisted sleeping bag. Instead of Tomas, an overwhelming reek of decay greeted her. She retched involuntarily.

As she stood up, her land under her feet wobbled. Ellie realized that this must be an earthquake. But in Arizona? That didn't make sense. But a steady thumping shook the ground.

"Tomas!"

She realized she couldn't see the light of the moon, and her flashlight wasn't in her pocket. It must be back in the tent. The thumping felt like it was coming from all around her; Ellie reeled, trying to pinpoint the location in the wind. Maybe it was Tomas. Her skin prickled with fear. Someone was watching her. She called for Tomas in a whisper now, afraid to attract the attention of what—or who—ever was out there. She crept away from the tent and the fire.

WHUMPH. Something smashed the tent behind her. Ellie shrieked, then ran.

Her jacket slapped her legs as she ran. Was it the flashlight? No, whatever it was jingled. Keys! Car Keys! But where was the car? Ellie could still feel the presence watching her as she looked frantically.

They had hiked in from the east. But clouds blocked the moonlight—which way was east? There was no telling anymore.

All at once, the wind stopped. The trembling ground stilled. Ellie's terror rose to a fever pitch. A malevolence closed around her. Something thumped to the ground and rolled towards her. She reached forward, hesitating, then grabbed it. It was dry, and round—her finger and thumb found two empty sockets. The clouds parted, and the sudden moonlight revealed a skull in her hands. She dropped it. A hulking mass loomed in front of her. Her body froze as her mind raced, and her eyes slowly climbed from the wide feet to the scrawny legs, then still further up. A distant part of her mind understood why the old prospector had called it the Devil. The massive, lumbering camel was flea-bitten and mangy, and astride its ratty back, eyes unblinking and jaw slack—

Tomas.

## The Loop to Pikesville

by: Toshita K.

Nina had been driving for hours. She passed small-town roads, empty meadows, and leaning telephone poles. Everything around her began to feel strangely familiar, though she couldn't say why.

After a while, the rain began—soft at first, then steadier. *Blop*. Raindrops splattered against the windshield. A flash of lightning split the sky, followed by a deep, rolling thunder. And then—something changed. The world dimmed. The sky turned darker. Her phone's GPS froze on the screen.

Only then did Nina truly look around and realize she had no idea where she was. Her pulse quickened, but she tried to stay calm. She took a sip of coffee—cold, bitter, lifeless.

A creeping restlessness set in, mixed with irritation and a strange, numbing boredom. And underneath it all, the nagging sense of déjà vu. She could almost see what came next—a red barn up ahead. When it appeared moments later, her stomach dropped.

Then came the sign: "Welcome to Pikesville."

She glanced at the clock. 2:15 p.m. She could have sworn it had said that an hour ago. Just as the low fuel light blinked on, she spotted a gas station. The paint on the walls was peeling, the sign flickering weakly. For a moment, she thought it was abandoned—until she noticed the dim "OPEN" sign in the window.

After filling her tank, she decided to refill her coffee, too. Inside, the place smelled faintly of dust and gasoline. Behind the counter, an old woman called out, "I'll be right with you, dear."

Nina grabbed some chips and a soda while waiting. She glanced at the cigarette display, although she hadn't smoked in years, something about the sight stirred an odd nostalgia.

The woman appeared at the register, smiling knowingly. "Told you before, those things'll kill you, you know."

Nina frowned. "Before? I've never been here before."

The woman chuckled softly. "Of course you have. You got lost a while ago—been looking for something ever since."

As she handed Nina the change, Nina noticed the woman's wrinkled hands—a large mole on the right, a thin scar beside it. Her stomach twisted. She *had* seen those hands before. A chill ran down her spine. She dropped the coffee, bolted to her car, and sped away—heart hammering, tires splashing through the rain.

The same barns. The same fields.

The same sign.

#### "Welcome to Pikesville."

She glanced in the rearview mirror—and froze. Staring back at her was herself, but older. Paler. Dark circles beneath her eyes. The reflection smiled faintly and whispered, "Maybe this time you'll make the right turn."

Her breath caught. She slowed as a narrow side road appeared on the right—one she hadn't noticed before. No sign. Just a path disappearing into the trees. She turned.

The radio and GPS flickered back to life, murmuring through static that almost sounded like a voice. Then, clear as a bell:

#### "Welcome back to Pikesville."

The dashboard clock reads 2:15 p.m.

#### The Caretaker

by: Manikandan M.

There once was a girl named Claire, and she loved books. She loved all kinds of books but one thing she hated was paranormal activity. There was a cemetery she walked by every day while coming back from school. She always wondered if the rumor about the cemetery is true, that it was haunted. but she never dared to even take a single step into the cemetery even though she doesn't believe in that kind of stuff. She's still scared.

But one night she had a dream where she and her friend were on a trail, and it got dark and when she and her friend heard the sound of someone crying on the other side of the cemetery where there was a pond. My friend ran towards the entrance of the cemetery, and I followed behind.

There was a girl saying that her diary fell to the bottom of the pond. My friend, acting like someone was controlling her, jumped in to get the diary. But when I was about to jump in too, then suddenly the girl said "1, 2 caretakers here, 3, 4 no room to breathe, 5, 6 you better run, caretakers coming back again." I ran as fast as I could back to my house and then I suddenly woke up.

"Caretaker," I said, my voice trembling. It was still nighttime, and I heard my brother talking about going to the cemetery to play hide and seek on the phone. Of course he didn't invite me.

The End...

#### Untitled

by: Kristen S.

It's Saturday, October 18, 2025. It felt like a regular Saturday morning, but this day would prove to be nothing short of extraordinary.

I have a full day ahead of me: a soccer game, costume swap at the library, and with only 13 days left 'til Halloween, continuing to decorate my front yard with tombstones, skeletons and other festive decorations I can find or create out of plywood. But what I'm most looking forward to is riding my bike up and down my neighborhood streets, looking for treasure because today is...the weekend before Farmington town-wide Bulky Pick-up! And I'm on a mission!

Bulky pickup is an institution in our town, a chance to basically pick through people's garbage to see what they don't want that still has some useful life. As the saying goes "One man's trash is another man's treasure"! And I have found a LOT of treasure over the years! I have a few more hours before my game, so I scarf down a piece of cinnamon raisin bread toast, grab my backpack and head out the door!

After several weeks of summer-like weather, it's starting to feel like fall, and I wish I'd worn the sweatshirt my mom told me to, but I'm already on my bike and there's no going back now, especially as I already spot what I think might be a skeleton two houses down. I need to get there before someone else gets there first!

I pedal like I'm coming in hot like an Olympic bike racer, and I see that it IS in fact a skeleton, albeit missing a limb. No matter, it will still be perfect for my graveyard display. Dismembered is almost better. It will go great with the plywood tombstone I just painted. As I ponder how I'm going to transport it, I see something that looks like a small suitcase out of the corner of my eye. I go to pick it up, but it's heavier than I expected, so I kneel down on the grass, still wet from the overnight dew.

The latch is a little rusty and I eventually have to sit on the case to get the latch to budge. My eyes grow wide as I open the case and see something that looks like an antique keyboard, but bigger. I remember I've seen one of these at Goodwill and was curious about it, and my mom telling me it was typewriter. Cool!

I know this will be too heavy to carry on my bike, so I decide I have to leave the skeleton and the typewriter and hope they'll still be there until I get back in 5 minutes with a wheelbarrow or if I'm lucky, my mom will drive me.

Later that day...

I'm home from my soccer game. I run up to my room to change out of my uniform and see that someone has already set up the "new" typewriter on my desk. Cool! There's already a piece of paper in it so I press a few keys (e...l...i...) but nothing appears on the paper. Darn, I don't think there's any ink in it but I will have to deal with that later—for now, Halloween decorating is a more pressing priority!

#### That night...

I'm admittedly exhausted as I get into my pajamas and make my way to bed. I stayed up later than usual watching a scary movie, and my body is feeling it. As my head hits the pillow, I swear I hear a "click, click" noise but I'm too tired to deal with it and think that maybe it's just part of the dreamland I'm entering, so I ignore it.

I wake up startled from a deep state of me flying over my house in a wingsuit. It's one of the better dreams I've had lately, so I'm disappointed to not get to finish it. It feels like the middle of the night, so my room should be pitch black, but there's a faint glow coming from my desk. It's not my alarm clock but it's just enough to keep me awake and curious, so I stumble out of bed to see what it is. As I take some tentative steps (careful not to step on LEGO brick or a book I might have left on the floor), I see that the light is coming from the typewriter. Interesting, I think to myself. I hadn't realized the keys light up. That's cool! But as I get closer I see that it's actually NOT the keys glowing...there are words on what had looked like a blank piece of paper, including the e-l-i I had typed earlier but didn't see. And the other words are written AFTER that, so someone used this typewriter after I did! And this is what the words say:

"Eli, this is a special typewriter like no other. It has special powers. I don't want to scare you, but it is a HAUNTED typewriter. You see, there was once a boy who didn't like to do his homework and tried to rush his writing assignments and sometimes forgot to put punctuation marks in the correct places and made spelling mistakes. Because he didn't double check his work even though his teacher told him to, his teacher (who was actually a witch) put a curse on him and his soul got sucked up into the typewriter. And now he tries to write letters to people to get them to help him create a spell that will get him out of the typewriter. But everyone is too scared, and immediately closes the typewriter and puts it out on the curb at bulky pick-up for the next unsuspecting person to pick up. Eli, please help me!"

And then.... My mom runs into my room and shakes me awake, but it startles me so badly I fall out of bed! "Eli!" she yells, "are you okay? You're having a bad dream. Wake up!" Phew, so it was just a nightmare. I was still feeling rattled, but it was just a dream and I didn't need to fear my soul getting sucked into the keys of a typewriter!

Monday morning, back in school.

I get back to school on Monday, and settle into my 4th grade routine. My teacher hands out

our graded homework from last week. My writing assignment has a note on it, written what looks to be in typewriter font. It says:

"Eli, you forgot a comma and parentheses in this sentence. Beware the curse of the haunted typewriter...for it finds the children who rush their homework."

I gulp.

## Spooky Halloween

by: Sandra V.M.

Once upon a time, it was Halloween day. But this Halloween day was not like any other; it was a spooky Halloween day because, on this night, the Halloween decorations came to life!

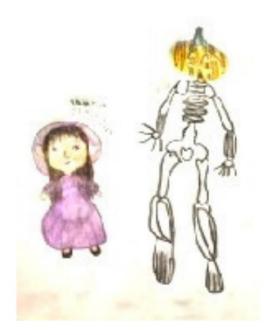
We have all seen the decorations that fill our neighbors' yards; skeletons, goblins, and ghosts that line the streets. But on this Halloween, they all came alive!

The Halloween decorations wanted to play a game. Everyone was too scared to play a game with the decorations; everyone, except Sandra. She was small but brave. She told the decorations she was not scared of them and that she would play their game.

The decorations asked her what she was afraid of and challenged her to a contest: whoever got scared first would lose. If Sandra won, the decorations would turn back into ordinary decorations. But if she lost, they would stay alive forever!

The decorations tried everything to scare tiny Sandra. First, they tried heights, because many people are afraid of heights, but Sandra was not afraid. Then they tried other things people fear: roller coasters, bugs, spiders, cats, dogs, and many other phobias. Finally, they tried to scare her with a dark hole, which really frightened Sandra, because she was scared of the black hole, but she stayed brave, and she won!

Many people wonder how she managed to scare the decorations and win. Some say she touched a disgusting, dirty sponge and the decorations were impressed! But what truly frightened the decorations was her bravery and determination to never give up and win.





## To Find the 3<sup>rd</sup> Story of a 2 Story House

by: Zohana R.

Here is Lagoona. Lagoona loves little stuff.

"Mom, can I go somewhere else?"

Her mom was shocked. "Lagoona! No! Stay here, darling daisy!"

Lagoona sighed. "What about my closet?"

"Yeah?"

"My CLOSET!"

"Yeah."

Lagoona ran upstairs to her closet. When she got inside, she felt like she was in Florida! She was warm, she was happy, it was sunny. And it looked like Florida, there was a door in the wall.

Wait. Lagoona turned to look at the door. A door in the wall? That can't be right.

Lagoona slowly opened the door. Inside, there was a dark staircase. Lagoona slowly creeped up the stairs....

To find a gloomy room. Lagoona looked left, right, up, down. "I'm in the attic." Lagoona said slowly. "But our house has only two stories. Where am..."

"leeee!" finished a voice.

"Thanks, Attic," said Lagoona.

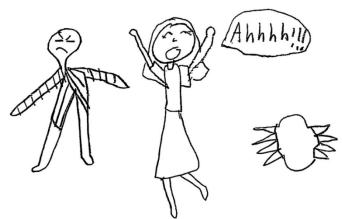
"Woooooleeeee!" droned the voice.

"Attic!" Lagoona said, frustrated.

"Stop! Ahhhhhkeeeee, Ahkiee" the voice continued.

Lagoona found a light switch. She turned on the lights. Lagoona screamed. She saw ghosts, tarantulas, skeletons, devils, mummies and spooky spirits.





"Did you climb the Starecase?" asked one ghost.

"The third story welcomes you!"

Lagoona screamed. "Ahhhhh!!" She spied a coffin...

It opened up to a VAMPIRE! Lagoona screamed once again.

And, when she turned to the door, it was not there. But the WINDOW was. Lagoona ran to the window and jumped out. She landed in the kitchen.

"Mom! Can I have some GARLIC?" She asked.

Mom sighed, "fine."

Lagoona took it and went up to her closet and through the door, up the 'Scarecase' and into the attic. She pushed the garlic into the vampire's face and...

The vampire melted away, along with all the other ghosts, tarantulas, skeletons, devils, mummies, and spooky spirits, and the door, and the window.

"How will I get out?" asked Lagoona to the Attic.

Lagoona prayed to get out in one piece.

The Attic suddenly turned into a lovely woman in a white gossamer gown. "I am a birch fairy," said the woman.

Lagoona stared. "The one from 'Dancing with the Birch Fairy'?"

The woman nodded. "Yes, Lagoona. Let's come down from these clouds, let's drop you off at home."

#### **THE END**

