



Hide and Seek

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Category: Horror

Description: How does your night go from a game of Hide and Seek with your best friend, to your parents being murdered the same night? On top of that, you're sent to live with your mother and father's best friend, Mrs. and Mr. Harmon.

Although Emily and her brother have no idea who these people are, they're given the luxury life and a dream every kid wants. However, those dreams soon turn into nightmares. A handprint in the dirt, a fired maid who still works in the garden, and a game where you have to kill to keep your soul from being sacrificed to a wicked book.

When you enter the house, you follow the rules, you play the game...

My name is Emily. I thought it was a normal, abandoned house. I thought she was a normal girl. I thought we'd play a normal game of hide and seek. Turns out I was wrong. Dead wrong...

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:16 pm

When you live in a small house owned by strict parents, hiding spots are limited.

Don't touch this, don't touch that, watch out for this and watch out for that.

My mom would explode at the sight of a pillow on the floor and my dad, well don't get me started. He hated messes more than my mom, which is why I was always careful in the house.

I had lots of friends, but only one could come over and her name was Abby. My mom and dad knew Abby was a clean freak, but, they did not understand how reckless she could be when they weren't home, just like now.

The wooden floor creaked beneath my bare feet. I tip-toed through the hallway as my brother, Caleb, counted to twenty.

"7... 8... 9... 10... 11." He shouted out loud.

Abby, my best friend, grabbed hold of me, accidentally pushing me into the wall.

"Emily, where should we hide?" She whispered into my ear.

Without waiting for my response.

She pulled me into the laundry room before I could even say a word.

It was dark, and I couldn't see a thing. That's what made hide and seek in the dark more fun.

"Ready or not, here I come!" Caleb yelled, running down the hallway and past the laundry room.

I could hear his little feet stomping hard against the floor.

Abby and I both hid behind the dryer, struggling to keep our giggles contained.

The darkness played tricks on my mind.

Shadows formed and spiraled around me, shaping into strange figures and sending my imagination out of this world.

The dark was scary, very scary, but I loved the thrill of it.

Abby took out her phone for a quick second. Using my hand, I covered the screen where she had been texting her father. "He's going to find us if you don't turn that off," I said.

She did as she was told, placing it inside her pant's pocket.

Quiet giggles escaped from our lips as Caleb rummaged around in closets. I pulled Abby's ear closer. "Let's run to base."

Abby stepped out from behind the dryer first. I shook my head because she was so gullible, always falling for my tricks. To win hide and seek in the dark, sometimes you had to eliminate those closest to you, and that's what I had to do.

There was a door behind me that led into my parents' bedroom. While Abby stepped out of the laundry room, I snuck into my parent's room, closing the door behind me.

There was a loud clicking sound when it shut, and I thought it would give me away.

I sat against the door, fearing Abby had figured out my trick.

I was alone in the darkness.

I felt the surrounding nothingness.

My mind started to play tricks on me, filling my imagination with monsters and creatures that could lurk through the darkness.

I closed my eyes, feeling afraid, but I enjoyed it too much to get up and leave.

"Found you!" I heard Caleb scream. "You're it, Abby!"

"Yes," I muttered under my breath. I ran out of the room and into the hallway to turn on the light. The look on Abby's face made me laugh. Caleb smiled and danced around knowing he would not be it again. He had been it three times in a row.

Abby looked sternly at me. "Ha-ha. Hilarious."

"Come on, it was funny!" I retorted with a smile. Abby, it's just a game."

Abby continued to argue with me. "You know this isn't the first time you've done that. It's the hundredth. And the only reason he found me is because of you. That noisy door gave me away. You should be it." She pointed at me.

I am never it. I'm the best when it comes to hide and seek. If anyone wants me to be it, they have to find me first. It's not my fault I'm so good at the game. My dad even told me that I should get a trophy for my excellent hiding skills. I was the best at hide and seek. Everyone knew it.

"Look, I wasn't caught, you were. You should've heard him coming." I said defending

myself. "Why are you so upset? Just step up your game. You act like our lives depend on this on Hide and Seek. It's. Just. A. Game." I smiled then punched her on the shoulder.

Abby sighed and placed her hands in her pockets. "I think I should head home; it's getting late." I followed her into the living room where she packed her homework and pencils away inside of her backpack.

"It's only 7 PM." Caleb moaned in disappointment. He tried his best to make her stay by pulling her backpack off her back.

Abby smiled at him and ruffled his hair. "I'll be back another day." She gave him a weak smile.

"You can't possibly be that mad," I crossed my arms.

"Mad? Why would I be mad? My dad just wants me home," Abby sneered at me.

"That I'm the best!" I said proudly. I might as well admit it since it was true. If Abby wanted to get jealous, then okay. But why get so upset and leave a game?

She rolled her eyes.

I thought she'd say something back. I wanted her to, but she just smiled at me and walked away. She knew that was the best way to upset me and it worked. I hated when she left things alone without trying to work it out. Abby had a temper, but she didn't show it much.

She would just leave you there by yourself then act like nothing happened the next day.

I watched as she walked out of the front door, not daring to say goodbye to me.

I wondered if she was getting tired of me.

Before, me tricking her during a game wasn't a big deal, but lately, she has been distant from me. She was my best friend but the good days between us were dying. Games always ended with her leaving in a miserable mood, glaring at me as if she almost planned a revenge scheme. My parents said it was puberty. Abby was two years older than me, she was sixteen and I fourteen. I doubted it was puberty. Whatever it was, it was killing our friendship. She didn't come over as much as she used to, but one thing she could never turn down was a good game of hide and seek in the dark.

Caleb ran up to me holding a small box of black hair dye. "Can you dye my hair now?" he whined. I snatched the box from him.

"No way, little dude," I ran my fingers through my hair, and long strands of it fell onto the floor. "You don't want this to happen, do you?"

He smiled then snatched the book away from me. "I'll ask mother when she comes," he stuck his tongue out at me.

Caleb being only six, went into his room to play with his toys. He asked me to play with him, but I turned him down. I watched a movie on TV instead. My mother and father walked in, catching me red handed not watching my brother. I hadn't heard them come inside.

"Having fun?" My dad said, unbuttoning his jacket while leaning against the corner of my wall.

Mother smiled at me. It was one of those disappointing smiles. "TV off," she demanded softly.

I was about to do so, but a movie called "Murder" was playing. I clapped my hands together. "I'm sorry, mom. Can I just watch one more movie?"

My father sighed, looking at the TV. "Horror films. You watch them so much that I'm surprised that you're not afraid of the dark."

My mother laughed. "She is," she crossed her arms. "otherwise she wouldn't sleep with a nightlight."

I stuck my tongue out at them playfully. Dad stuck his tongue out. "Goodnight kiddo. See you tomorrow," he said. Mother blew me a kiss. "Love you. See you in the morning, dear."

My mother grabbed his arm, whispering something in his ear almost as if she didn't want me to hear it. "Can you make sure the door is locked and the windows are closed."

He looked at her strange then nodded.

After they had closed the door, I got comfortable with my blanket and watched Murder. It was one of my favorite movies. It was about these teenagers lost in the woods. They would get murdered if they broke any of the rules that had been given to them by the dwellers of the woods.

I sat back and enjoyed the movie.

I would often have dreams of hide and seek games with my friends, but I wished I had a chance to play in a haunted house, forest, or an abandoned place like in the

film.

There was something about the thrill of it that made me want to try.

As long as my parents were around, I would never get a chance to play hide and seek in the dark anywhere outside of the house.

The only way that would happen is if they were dead or if I moved.

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I woke up at around 1 am, startled by a noise I heard coming from outside my room.

The TV was no longer on.

I figured that my parents had turned it off after I'd fallen asleep. I started to get up, but my attention fell onto the lights outside. Flashing blue and red strobes engulfed every object in its wake. I got up to look out the window and saw two police cars pulling up in front of my house.

"COME OUT OF THE HOUSE!" Yelled a man from outside. "We have the place surrounded!"

My eyes widened, and my heart raced. I was so unsure of what was going on and considered the possibility that I could have been dreaming. I continued looking out of the window, seeing more, police cars surround the house.

I stepped away from the window when I heard unfamiliar voices coming from outside of my door.

The voices sounded muffled, but I could tell they were male.

Footsteps were getting louder and closer towards my door.

I worried about Caleb, fearing they would get him because his room was before mine.

Scared, I did what I do best: I hid.

It seemed unfair to save myself, but if you had ever been in a situation like me, you'd have hidden too. I wasn't ready to die. I wanted every chance to save my brother and get back to my mother and father. I flinched at the loud crackling sound of gunshots being fired from just outside of my door.

Two more powerful shots made my ear ring for a few seconds. Not wanting to hear any more shots, I rolled underneath my bed and pressed my hands against my ear, crying wishing I could be curled up in my parent's arms.

Caleb and I climbed into the back of a police car.

The sun hadn't risen yet. Nurses and cops walked beside two bodies that were separately strapped onto rolling carts and encased inside a dark body bags. More policemen walked out of our house, followed by two strange men that were handcuffed. I got a good look at them: both were covered in blood. I was hoping to see my parents walk out. Instead, I saw two strangers. At that moment, my world fell apart.

My parents never walked out of the house.

I didn't realize it right away, but I was crying. It hit me all at once. I furiously began beating on the window, which caused Caleb to wake up with fright. Helpless screams for my parents flew from my mouth, I knew that they were dead now. Caleb was confused and worried. He kept squeezing my arm, calling my name, begging me to stop screaming.

I didn't.

One of the cops stepped inside of the car.

In a stern, emotionless tone he told me to stop yelling and that everything would be 'okay.' I calmed down for his sake as he started up the car and drove away from our home.

Caleb grew impatient and pushed me for answers as to what was going on.

I didn't answer him, though. I didn't have one that was good enough for him.

The only thing that I could do was to wipe my tear-stained face and wait until we had arrived at our unknown destination.

I was tired.

I was cold.

I was scared.

I sat in a room with a woman and a cop who asked me millions of questions.

First, they addressed me about the people who broke in last night.

The police told me that I had slept through the whole thing.

That two men broke in, my dad woke up thinking it was probably Caleb or me but was shot by the intruders.

My mom called 911 but shot during the call.

"It was one of the most...strangest calls we'd have ever gotten," a cop had told me. "She said that her kids were in danger and someone was after them. 'Protect them' was the last thing she said." I didn't find anything strange about until the cop added on. "She could have just told us someone was in the house, but now we have to investigate more. She could have known them."

The cops didn't know the men's motives for entering the house, and that was something that angered me. The only thing they said was that they didn't know why or how they got there. "We were just there...with guns. Then all of this happened." That's what the monster's said.

After informing me of all of that and me crying for another twenty minutes, we talked about my other relatives, the ones that were still alive.

The cops had to make a bunch of phone calls because guess what?

We had no relatives to live with.

My grandma and mother hated each other, so we had no contact with her, ever.

She also lived in Alaska, so she wasn't really an option at the time. My uncles and aunts weren't stable enough for us to stay with them.

I had fallen asleep at the desk.

I was awakened by two police officers who I was told would be taking me to my new home.

My new home, with new foster parents.

Apparently, during the hours I was asleep, the cops were able to find someone for us

to stay with.

The people were on my parent's will. Well, their first will. The police said they had found it in an old suitcase. The new will was never finished, so the cops just went with the old will. Caleb and I would be staying with The Harmon's: my mom and dad's old friends.

They had gone to school with my parents, and we had visited them a few times.

I knew their daughter, too.

I forgot her name, but I remember that we were the same age.

They used to come over to our house when I was young.

Before Caleb was even born.

After that, they never came over again.

I didn't know why but I remember the day my mom snatched me out of The Harmon's house, and we never went back there after.

Now we were about to live with them. The Harmon's. Our new family.

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Of course, we had to pack for the move.

I kept some things that belonged to my parents, especially my mother's jewelry. I gave Caleb some of Dad's model cars and a few of his shirts.

I don't know who it was harder for, Caleb or me? Our parents had died, and we had a new family to live with. My mind couldn't process everything that was happening, but I was limited to other opinions.

I couldn't bring my parents back no matter how bad I wanted to. I had to be strong for my brother and for me.

Caleb refused to talk. He wouldn't say a word to me or anyone else. He hadn't finished crying about it either. Sometimes, he'd cry for five whole minutes, then stop and then cry again for another twenty minutes. I felt so sorry for him and myself, of course.

Abby was sad about me moving away.

Saying goodbye to her was so hard.

I could barely speak to her, or anyone, that I said goodbye to.

Abby didn't seem that sad about what had happened. She said sorry, and hugged me, then told me that everything would be okay. There were no tears. There was no sympathy.

Living with people that I hadn't seen in ages was not a pleasant compromise for me. They weren't family. They were barely acquaintances. After I had said goodbye to my friends and neighbors, Caleb and I were on our way to our new home.

After two hours of black tarred roads and twenty minutes of passing nothing but green lands and trees, the car finally turned into a long driveway that led toward a mansion.

I couldn't believe my eyes. It was an actual mansion. It was huge, to say the least. A classic blood red and milk white mansion with gold and silver adornments.

"What's that?" Caleb asked while looking out of the window.

Hearing his voice again made me smile.

I was about to tell him that it was a mansion, but that wasn't what he was looking at. Further away from the mansion, in a stock of tall yellow grass, was another house. Boy, was it creeping me out. It seemed to be an abandoned house, gray in color. Well, maybe not entirely 'gray.

' I couldn't really tell for sure, it was at a pretty far distance.

"It's just an old house," I stated reassuringly while placing my arm around him, but he quickly lifted my arm off of him and continued to stare out of the window.

The car stopped in front of a middle-aged couple. I guessed that they were them: our new foster parents. It killed me to say that. As Caleb and I stepped out, the woman ran over to hug us.

"Emily! Caleb! You two have grown so much!" Her voice, bubbly and high as she stretched her words with what seemed to be plastered on affection. She took one long

look at us before wrapping her arms around our bodies in another embrace.

Her husband, Mr.

Harmon, gathered our belongings from the car and thanked the policeman.

As he took off and the Harmon's were 'awing' and 'ooing' over Caleb, I studied them. The woman had short, straight black hair that covered one of her eyes. A light pink bow rested delicately in the pitch black mass, it was cute. She had brown eyes, a small nose, and very thin lips. Her skin was pale, but not overwhelmingly so. She wore a sleeveless yellow dress and a pair of flip flops.

Mr.

Harmon, on the other hand, was a man probably in his thirties or forties, but it seemed as if he was just twenty-five.

He had brown, curly hair that reached the creases of his bright blue eyes.

Faint freckles lined the bridge of his nose and scattered across his face.

He had perfect cheekbones and a huge mouth with perfect teeth.

He wore a pair of dark blue shorts and a gray sports shirt.

Yet something was missing. Oh yes, the daughter.

"Where's your daughter?" I asked.

Suddenly their gazes were glued to me. They froze completely, and Mr. Harmon's smile slowly sculpted itself into a frown. He then smiled for a quick second before

chuckling nervously. "She won't be here."

I waited for more of a coherent answer, but that was all I got.

"Oh." I merely stated.

Mrs.

Harmon grabbed the suitcases, followed by Mr.

Harmon, and then led us inside.

Mr.

Harmon asked Caleb if he liked scooters.

My brother answered enthusiastically, and the objects which instantly caught our attention were two brand new scooters stood in front of us.

The scooters were beautiful, but honestly, they could never compare to the immaculate mansion that surrounded us.

Even Caleb gasped.

The inside was so enormous and fancy.

"Your rooms aren't quite done yet, but please feel free to ride around. There's so much to explore!" Mr. Harmon happily said. "Unless you're tired, then you can sleep in our bed."

Caleb ran over to the silver scooter.

I saw him smiling, and it made me grin like a buffoon.

I looked over my shoulder to see the Harmon's whispering to each other, nodding in agreement. Once they noticed that I was looking at them, Mrs. Harmon cleared her throat and walked over to me. She rested her hand on my shoulder.

"Although, we ask that you, please follow one rule." She pointed upwards. "See the fourth floor? Which is also the last floor of this house?"

Both Caleb and I nodded warily.

"Mr. Harmon's lifework is up there, so no one is allowed on the fourth floor. There's also expensive artwork up there, and if anything gets ruined, well, that's a lot of money lost."

Sure enough, sculptures decorating the hall and paintings hung along the walls. There were all kinds of amazing art pieces that added to the excellent feel of the mansion. Caleb and I promised to never go up there.

"Well, good," Mr.

Harmon said.

"You two get some rest or go and play whilst we get your rooms together. Some workers will be here later to paint and do some redecorating in your room, Caleb, since it's filled with girl's stuff-" Mr.

Harmon cleared his throat again, suddenly very cautious of his next words.

"some of my wife's stuff.

Before I could say anything, Caleb began to ride around the house.

I called after him, telling him to wait for me, but he was already gone.

I wanted to explore the new house with him, but I wasn't ready to leave him alone. Not again. I thanked the Harmon's, hopped onto the motorized scooter and followed Caleb around our new house.

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I'd seen over ten rooms in this house by now. My favorite had to be the library. There was a fireplace far away from the books, and in front of it was a soft carpet with small chairs for reclining on- sort of like a bean bag chair, but square and without the beans inside. Mr. Harmon had numerous books on animal taxidermy. There were no stuffed animals anywhere in the house, so I wasn't quite sure why he had it.

Maybe he enjoyed the concept of it.

Being in a mansion and all, there wasn't too much for Caleb to get into. Mr. Harmon told us once Caleb's room was done, he'd never want to leave it.

After Caleb and I had finished exploring the house, we got off of our scooters and went into the garden behind the mansion.

The garden was huge and consisted of flowers and plants.

There were even a few mini waterfalls.

Of course, Caleb wanted to play around them, but I told him no out of fear that Mrs.

Harmon would get upset.

I wouldn't want us to get off to a bad start.

Caleb saw a couple of birds inside a large oval shaped cage. He skipped ahead of me toward them. I began to run after him but stopped short. Caleb stopped too when he saw her. A few feet away from us stood a tall fountain, and in front of it, watering

plants was a woman that wasn't Mrs. Harmon.

She saw us but didn't say anything. She just continued to water the plants in silence.

"Who is she?" Caleb asked.

"Probably the maid?" I said.

Caleb shrugged. "Mr. Harmon didn't mention a maid," he whispered.

Trying to make a good impression, I decided to greet her.

Caleb and I walked over to her.

She stopped watering the plants and looked up at us.

I couldn't tell if she was a maid or what. She wore a long white dress with a pair of white pants. Her hair, which was light brown in color, was a bit messy. She didn't smile at us, either.

"Good evening," she said in a sharp monotone voice. "Who are you two?"

"I'm Emily, and this is my brother Caleb," I said. "The Harmon family adopted us."

The woman smiled. This wasn't a natural smile. She smiled off into the distance, like us being here was the best thing ever, and she was going to be the happiest human being on the planet. Maybe I'm weird, but her smile really struck me as odd.

"Emily and Caleb. A pleasure to meet you," she said, shaking both our hands.

"I'm the gardener. I come to water the plants. It's my job here. I like to keep the place

alive, you know?" She began to smell the air.

"Alive," she repeated while holding her hands together near her chest.

Her attention was focused on the bird that flew passed us.

She sniffed the air then gazed at Caleb and me.

She seemed even odder to me than before.

Caleb scratched at his hair. "What's your name?" he asked shyly.

"My name is Rosemary. Call me Rose," she said.

"That's a lovely name," I said.

Rose nodded and smiled.

"Well, my time is up for today. The sun is setting, and I should really-" I expected her to finish her sentence, but she didn't. She waved goodbye to us then started walking forward, away from us and away from the mansion until we could no longer see her. If she was the maid, shouldn't she have had some kind of transportation?

Where was she going?

All I saw was fields and fields of grass.

The only house nearby was the gray abandoned looking one, and I wasn't sure that's where she wanted to go.

I could have been wrong.

...

We were allowed to see our rooms after supper. That's what Mr. Harmon told us.

We were all now sitting down, waiting for the food to be served.

Caleb was too small for the chairs which were for people my size or taller if you wanted to actually reach the table.

This dinner table was twice the size of our old table.

It was huge.

There were four chairs on each of the table's sides and at the end of the table were Mr. and Mrs. Harmon's seat.

Caleb was told to eat on the couch by the TV in the living room, a privilege we had never gotten back at home.

I sat at the table with the Harmon's. We were quiet, and it felt bit awkward until the food was ready.

...

The food was great. I couldn't believe Mrs. Harmon cooked this wonderful meal all by herself. I thanked her for the food.

"You're welcome," she said. "So, tell us about yourself, Emily."

Before I was about to speak, a moth flew out of nowhere and frantically fluttered around my head. It then went over near Mr. Harmon. He stood up slowly with his

hands in the air and as slowly as he could, closed the moth in between his hands without killing it.

"Are you going to kill it or add it to the collection?" Mrs. Harmon then took a sip of her drink.

"Excuse me," Mr. Harmon was about to leave the table. "This is exactly what I needed"

I looked at Mrs. Harmon. "He collects moths?"

"No," she said while wiping her mouth. "He uses them for his art projects."

I was about to say something but this time I was interrupted by Caleb. "I don't like moths," he said.

"Then we will make sure no moths get in here again just for you," she playfully poked his nose.

Mr. Harmon got back and sat at the table. "So, as we were saying," he smiled at me. "tell us about yourself."

I didn't go into too much detail about myself. I just talked about my love for sports, video games, shopping, going out with friends, and hide and seek.

When I said hide and seek, they looked at me like, isn't she a little too old to play hide and seek? That's what most adults think of a fourteen-year-old. I told them that I don't like just regular hide and seek. I prefer to play hide and seek in the dark. They seemed intrigued by this statement.

Mrs. Harmon cleared her throat and linked her hands together.

"Well, I can assure you that there will be no hide and seek in this house. The house is far too big for that and someone could get hurt or lost. My art could get destroyed. I wouldn't want any accidents." He said.

To be honest, that excuse made me mad.

It upset me to know that I couldn't play my favorite game in my new house, with my new foster parents. It was silly to ban hide and seek. It's not dangerous.

I controlled my anger and nodded my head.

There was no one to play hide and seek with anyway, so I just accepted this.

I guess I would just have to find something else to do.

One in my room, I started to cry. I wished my parents were still alive. I didn't want to be here. I wanted to be at home where I could play hide and seek with Abby.

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After excusing myself from the table, I went into the living room with Caleb, and we watched TV until we were called up to the second floor.

Once upstairs, Mr. Harmon took Caleb by the hand and told him to look at his new room. Mrs. Harmon and I followed them inside.

Caleb and I gasped at the same time as we looked around his new room, his aquarium and dinosaur themed room.

He had his own bed, twice the size of his old bed.

It consisted of dinosaur sheets, neatly folded blankets, and T-Rex shaped pillows.

The walls were blue, green and painted with all sorts of wild forest colors.

To the side of his bed stood an enormous red lava lamp that nearly touched the ceiling.

Around his room were all kinds of planes, race cars, and toys.

There were even model cars like the one's dad used to have.

Caleb was smiling from ear to ear. I knew that he was still sad about losing mom and dad, but right now, he was happy, and it made me glad to see that.

Mrs. Harmon called me over. She said we would a take a look at my room now.

The room was painted light pink with purple polka dots in all sizes all over the wall.

My bed had pastel blankets and pillows.

There were a few things strewn around such as electric cars and planes, stuff I actually liked.

I don't know how the Harmon's knew that I wanted that kind of stuff, but I'd always preferred it over toys. There was a huge makeup kit on the desk and a few notebooks for writing. There were also paint supplies. Like Caleb, I got a lava lamp, except mine was orange.

"We hope you like it dear," Mrs. Harmon smiled.

I turned to her noticing her arms were out for a hug. I nearly started crying. She hugged me. However, it wasn't like mother's hugs.

"If you ever need anything, just ask me. I'm here," she said while stroking my hair.

Caleb and Mr. Harmon stepped inside of my room, and we thanked the Harmon's for everything. They suggested that we get ready for bed because it was late and that we would have all the time in the world to play and enjoy our new rooms tomorrow.

...

The nights were the hardest for me. Getting over my parents was not easy, I started to cry. My crying paused for a second when my door opened, and I saw a short silhouette standing in my doorway.

"Caleb?" I asked concernedly while getting up.

"I'm scared," he said monotonously, not coming into the room. "Can you come sleep with me?"

Before I could answer, Caleb walked away into the darkness. I went after him. I looked to the left and saw his silhouette walking in the wrong direction and toward the stairs. Of course, I rushed over to stop him. I didn't want him to fall and break his neck. It was dark after all.

By now I figured that Caleb was sleepwalking. His room was in the other direction. I struggled to catch up with him in the darkness and finding a light switch would take forever.

I finally got by the stairs where Caleb was waiting. It was still hard to see him, but I managed to take his hand and carefully lead him toward his room, quietly.

"Your hands are so cold," I said to him concernedly.

He didn't answer me.

"Caleb? Are you awake?" I pressed again, looking down at him to see if his eyes were open, but it didn't seem like they were.

"Hey? Caleb? Are you awake?"

Panic set in. I don't think that I'll ever forget that terrifying sound.

It wasn't Caleb. The voice I heard was slow and grim and sounded like an old dying woman. No, two dying women. I definitely heard more than one voice. I started to back away, and as I did, I saw two eyes open, staring right back at me. These eyes began to rise higher and higher until just two eyes were floating over me.

My body wanted to collapse. I screamed and as soon as I did the eyes vanished, just like that. The lights on the third floor came on. The Harmon's ran out of their room and toward me, asking me what happened.

It was hard for me to explain everything, but I managed. Mrs. Harmon sat next to me on my bed with a cup of juice. She was telling me that it was probably nothing. She started going on about how maybe I'm just too stressed out and that I imagine things.

She offered to sleep with me, but that made me feel a bit awkward, so I declined. She went back to bed. I tried to go back to sleep, but it just wasn't happening. I didn't exactly want to stay awake either. This was going to be a long night.

Check out [KozmicKookieDxD](#) and her book: Battle of the Killers

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The last four days had been entirely normal.

I learned to get more comfortable in our new house.

I also noticed that the Harmon's weren't around all that often.

Mr.

Harmon stayed in his room or in his workplace, while Mrs.

Harmon spent most of her time in the garden or in her room cracking up at some talk shows.

I've been starting to feel lonely lately. I mean, can you blame me? I wasn't in school yet, no one lived close to the Harmon's, and I had no one to do anything with. I couldn't even play hide and seek!

Even Caleb avoided me and I didn't know why. He spent most of his time playing with his toys or his scooter, which he found out was electric. Whenever he saw Mr. Harmon, he'd get excited and would follow him around.

Mr.

Harmon seemed to like that because he would take Caleb's hand and they would walk around and talk.

Bored out of my mind, I decided to go to the garden. Mrs. Harmon was there

watering the plants. She looked exhausted. I went over to her and asked her if she needed help.

"Why thank you," she said, standing up and wiping her forehead. "This is the last one. Boy, even though I love flowers, I sometimes regret buying and growing so many."

I smiled. "Yeah, it looks pretty tiring."

She sat the flower sprinkler on the ground and wiped the dirt off of her hands using a rag that she carried on her shoulder.

"I wish Mr. Harmon would let us hire someone to do this, but he's so worried about people stealing from him. We've had some occasions like that," she said.

Okay. In my mind I was thinking, they have someone...right? I needed to ask because I already met their gardener, Rose. She was here, watering the plants and talking to me. Even Caleb saw her.

"I thought you had a gardener," I said, realizing my voice shook as I spoke. "I mean, Caleb and I met her. She was out here watering the plants like you do. She said her name was Rosemary."

Mrs. Harmon looked at me like she was unsure if she should believe me or not. She opened her mouth to speak then closed it and nodded. "Rosemary, huh? She was our old gardener. She's been doing that for some time. I think it's time for a restraining order," she said with a laugh.

I laughed too. "Wow." I'd felt better for knowing that.

"If anyone ever comes here, just come inside ASAP," she said in a serious tone.

"Don't talk to them. People often come here, and I can't say if they're all friendly or not. We have some priceless things in this house so if you ever see anyone around just come on inside and let us know. Got it, peanut?"

My mom used to call me peanut too. My small smile was replaced with a frown. I scratched my hair a bit then nodded.

"You okay?" she asked, placing her hand on my shoulder.

"I think so," I replied. "I was wondering if we would start school in September. I think I'm just a bit lonely and need some friends."

"Of course you will start school. Mr. Harmon already hired some teachers for you and Caleb. You two will be home-schooled," she said.

Ew, I thought. I did not want to be homeschooled.

"But...but what about having friends?" I argued.

"Well, no one lives close enough. Besides, friends aren't going to help you be successful in life. A good education will," she said, looking at the house. She then turned her gaze back to me.

My eyes widened at her statement. It upset me more than it should have. That was a bunch of nonsense. Sadly, before I could say anything, she started toward the house.

"Gotta start dinner now, darling," she called to me before walking inside the house.

I woke up in the middle of the night. I was sitting on a chair and in front of me was

my window. The outside seemed to be zoomed in at me. The moon was a huge ball of white perfection. The light from the moon made the garden glow. It was truly beautiful.

All of a sudden, a man walked into the garden.

He was dragging a woman around by her hair.

Her screams were terribly loud.

She struggled to get away from him, trying to pry his hands off of her.

He dropped her to the ground and started beating her face with a rock he had picked up off the ground.

He yelled words of hatred, but I could only hear her screaming.

She screamed and screamed as he beat the life out of her.

Then it was over.

At least, I thought it was over. The man looked into the window that I was sitting in front of. My eyes widened, and my heart started racing. He stood up and balled his hands into fists. That was when I saw his face. It was Mr. Harmon. His angry face stared at my terrified face through the window.

"Why won't you be a part of us!" he yelled. He started to yell words of hatred and ran back toward the house until I couldn't see him anymore.

I couldn't seem to sit up. I could only look out the window. My body sat there, completely paralyzed. I yelled for help, but my voice was muffled and unclear for

some reason. Somewhere behind me, I heard footsteps approaching me. I felt the presence of someone behind me. The figure walked out in front of me. It wasn't Mr.

Harmon.

It was a girl.

She stood there, mouthing words that I couldn't make out.

I can't explain how horrified I was. There was a time in my life where I would never have imagined something like this happening. I could tell that it was a girl, I was sure of that but get this: her hair was ripped out in patches. There were some long, bald, and short strands of hair. Her face had some serious deep slashes where the blood dripped out of them and onto the floor. Her body, well I couldn't see it due to the darkness of my room.

By now, I was starting to feel my body loosen from the paralysis.

The girl was still mouthing words to me.

As soon I realized I could move, I got up from the chair.

I ran outside of my room and into the hallway then bumped into a silhouette about my size.

I looked behind me to find the girl slowly walking toward me.

"Emily!"

Someone yelled my name from downstairs. It was Mr. Harmon. So far, I was dealing with a girl, a silhouette and an angry, crazy Mr. Harmon. I closed my eyes because,

what else could I do?

I woke up in my bed looking around like crazy.

The sun had just risen, and everything in my room was normal.

There was sweat on my forehead.

My heart felt heavy.

I told myself over and over again that it was just a dream.

But it felt so real.

Too real.

However, I was thankful it was just a dream.

I tried to shake it off, but my horror quickly became a reality.

In my room, in front of the window, was a chair. As I edged toward the chair from, I saw the footprints on the floor begin to fade. The footprints weren't the only thing fading. The blood was being sucked into the floor.

And just like that, the footprints and the blood are completely gone, leaving behind no sign of their presence.

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I never got over that nightmare. I tried to tell Mrs. Harmon about it, but she proclaimed that I still wasn't over my parent's death. Like that made any sense.

As the weeks passed by, Caleb and Mr.

Harmon got close.

Really close.

While Caleb, Mrs.

Harmon, and I just became more distant from each other.

Mr.

Harmon never actually associated with me except for a "Hey!" and "How are you?" every now and then.

I think Mrs.

Harmon was just annoyed with me at this point.

Caleb on the other hand, I didn't get why he didn't talk to me anymore.

He didn't say hi or bye. He talked to the Harmons as if they were his best friends.

I didn't worry too much about them. Mrs. Harmon did buy me a phone and a laptop

two days ago. She even got Abby's number for me.

This made me feel less lonely.

Abby and I texted time to time, but she never responded fast enough.

Our conversations were dull and never fun.

Everyone seemed happier without me, and I was just left alone to my miserable self.

Two months with the Harmon's now and things have just been the same routines for me, although Mrs. and Mr. Harmon have often been arguing. Why? No clue.

I've been super bored, and besides Abby, I've no one to talk to. When I'm outside, I often try to locate the abandoned house that was out in the distance back when Caleb and I first arrived. Whenever I saw it, I thought about going over there. It looked kind of cool.

I was in the garden when I heard a noise behind me. I turned around and to my surprise, I saw Rosemary. She started watering some plants.

"How are you, dear?" she asked without looking at me.

I stood up and told her I was fine then tried to sneak back towards the house. I was going to tell Mrs. Harmon she was here but I changed my mind. I wanted to ask her some things. I walked back toward her.

"Can I ask you something?" I asked.

She watered more plants and said sure.

"Do you know why that house down there is abandoned?" I asked.

"I'm surprised they didn't tell you," she said. "That's Mr. Harmon's first house. He lived there since he was a kid."

"Really?" I said, "It looks awful now."

"Well, there was an accident. His parents died there. They were murdered, to be exact," she said, paying attention to me now.

"How?" I asked.

"I don't know. No one really knows how" she said. "But Mr. Harmon wasn't killed."

There was a moment of silence between us. "When you worked here, did anything ever strike you as odd?" I asked her.

"Worked, huh?" she asked with a chuckle. "I guess they told you they've fired me?"

I scratched the back of my head while giving her a fake smile. "Yeah."

"Yes, he did," she said.

"Oh," I said.

"Things aren't always what they seem around here, Emily," she faced me. "I hope you're smart enough to see the good from the bad and the good from the evil."

Her statement shocked me and to be honest, frightened me as well. "What do you

mean? Should I be worried?" I asked.

Mr. Harmon walked outside. I began walking away from Rosemary before I got into trouble for talking to her.

She didn't reply to my question. She only glared at me. "You don't have much time," she said getting up and walking away. "Get away. Far away and never look back!"

I stood there, looking at her as she left. Even though Mr. Harmon was looking in my direction, he didn't say anything. It was like he didn't even see Rose walking away. He stopped walking, stared at me with his hands on his hips, then walked back inside.

I stayed outside in the garden for the longest time.

I just couldn't quite get over what Rose had said. What did she mean? Not much time for what? Being here was starting to creep me out. I didn't want to be here anymore.

I wanted the cop car to just pick us up and tell us that our grandmother wanted us.

But I knew that wouldn't happen.

Being in the garden was making me feel uneasy. That was when I decided to explore, but not around here, around Mr. Harmon's old house. I was pretty sure he wouldn't care. No one lived around them, so I had nothing to worry about.

Little did I know, I was walking right into trouble. Trouble way beyond my imagination.

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It was a fifteen-minute walk to the old abandoned house.

Once there, I studied it.

An old house, gray in color.

Most of the paint had shed off of it, exposing nothing but brick.

The windows were cracked while some were completely broken.

The place, even though exhausted and worn out, somehow looked alive.

With a little effort, anyone could live here again.

It wasn't falling apart, it just needed some care.

"I found you!"

My heart bolted out of my chest when I heard someone from inside of the house yelling. I then heard laughter as someone yelled out, "I found you!" once again.

I couldn't believe it. There were people inside playing hide and seek! Well, I was guessing they were playing that. A smile grew on my face. I continued to listen to them play their game. I waited for over ten minutes, just listening.

Just then, two laughing boys and one girl came into view but stopped when they saw me. A small little covered in dirt ran back into the house.

"Violet! Someone's here," he yelled.

While the rest of them looked young, another girl around my age came out of the house. She looked at me like she had seen a ghost. I waved my hand. "It's okay. I'm cool. Just came to check out the place because I was bored."

"What's your name?" The so-called Violet asked. Her face was extremely pale. There was no expression on her face at all. Her hair was a fading brown, stopping at her shoulders.

"Emily," I said as I continued to study her. She wore a sweater and sweatpants, which struck me as odd, due to the warm weather of summer.

"Come join us," Violet said while smiling.

The other kids laughed and welcomed me as I walked up the rickety stairs. They started to introduce themselves to me. While I continued to look at her, a boy jumped out in front of me, ultimately blocking my view of Violet.

He held his hand out to me. "I'm Tate. I'm ten years old. How old are you?" he asked.

"Hello, Tate. And I'm fourteen," I said, shaking his hand.

The other girl walked up to me. She was super bubbly. "Ha! I'm Caroline, and I be eleven years young!" she exclaimed in a voice that made her sound like the cowgirl, Jesse, off of the movie Toy Story 2. "And this be my brother, Jasper." She grabbed the other boy, who looked extremely shy.

Jasper's hands were in his pockets, and his hair kind of hid his eyes from plain sight. He didn't say anything. Caroline punched his shoulder. "He's just a bit shy, but he's the coolest guy you've ever done met."

"How old is he?" I asked her.

To my surprise, he answered for himself. "Sixteen," he said. I was shocked, mainly because I was about a foot taller than he was.

"Where are you coming from, miss?" Caroline asked in a loud voice.

I pointed over to the mansion. "Over there," I said. "With the Harmon's."

All smiles disappeared. Jasper and Violet looked at each other. "Should I-" Jasper was caught off by his sister.

"Wow! That big ol' fancy house," Carolina said while linking her hands together and shutting her eyes. "I'd give a whole cow to live in a place like that."

"It's not all that great," I assured.

"It's probably lonely over there. Living in a big house in the middle of nowhere," Violet said. Just like that, she was smiling at me again.

I smiled back. Finally, someone who understood. "Exactly," I said.

Jasper walked up next to Violet. "We gotta go now." He turned to face me. "It was nice meeting you, Emily," he said. Tate and Caroline followed behind Jasper while waving goodbye to me. I waved back.

Pretty soon, it was just Violet and me standing there, watching the others go. I looked at her, smiling awkwardly as she stared at me.

"So, you never mentioned how old you were," I said.

Violet chuckled. "I'm also fourteen," she said.

There were a few seconds of silence between us before she asked another question. "I didn't know the Harmon's had another daughter," she said.

"They adopted us. My brother Caleb and I have been living with them for a month and a half now," I said, turning to face her. "Did you know their daughter?"

She shook her head. She walked over to a broken chair that I hadn't noticed before and sat down. I took a seat on the concrete, hoping that it was still stable underneath me.

"I've seen her around before," she replied.

"What do you think happened to her?" I asked.

Violet sighed. "Maybe she ran off. Maybe she wasn't happy." Before I could say anything, she started speaking again. "I bet it gets lonely over there. You should join us here. You're welcome to stay as long as you like. We have food and drinks and beds," she offered with a smile.

Then it hit me. She lived here. "Do you live here?" I asked.

She nodded proudly. "Yes, I do." It seemed she was happy about that. "It's perfect for games like hide and seek," Violet said, looking past me. "It's my favorite game."

My face lit up with joy. "That's my favorite game too!" I chirped. She looked at me before leaning her head back in the chair and staring at the sun that was slowly setting.

"I'm glad to hear that," she said with a smile.

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There are different types of punishments that a parent can give a child.

There's the kind of punishment where you're sent to your room, times that you may get hit, times where you may get grounded. You may receive extra chores and not be able to talk on the phone. I'm sure you get the point.

My punishment for getting home around 10 pm was walking around the garden, guarding it against groundhogs or whatever was lurking around in the dark.

"If you like to stay out late, then this is the perfect job for you, dear," Mr. Harmon had said once I got home.

I'm glad it was summer.

As I walked around the garden and the glow of the full moon illuminated the ground around me, I started to think about all the fun I had today with Violet.

We got along right away and talked for hours about games and horror movies and even offered each other hide and go seek tips.

I asked her to play, but she said no.

Sadly she didn't like to play in the dark.

"Not today. Come back tomorrow morning," she had said.

I was really looking forward to tomorrow, but right now, I had to face walking

around the garden looking for groundhogs.

Mr.

Harmon made it very clear to me that if anything got destroyed or went missing, I would water the garden for three weeks straight.

Ha!

Like I'd dare take Mrs. Harmon's job.

There were over hundreds of flowers and plants and I never understood how she got around to watering them all in one a day.

Too much bending down for me.

I didn't know how long I had to walk around the garden, but it had already been an hour, and I was pretty tired at that point. As I walked toward the mansion, I heard something shatter. I nearly jumped out of my skin. I looked around, glad to see it was no one. My heart was pounding in my chest and the loud thumping of it seemed to be all that I could hear.

I looked in the direction of the noise and, sure enough, there had been a flower pot that fell over.

"Oh man," I whined. I'd be stuck watering plants for weeks.

I walked toward the pot, hoping it could be fixed easily, but when I got there, I discovered that it had been shattered into big chunks of glass.

I stared at the huge clump of dirt with the orange flowers wilted over.

I know it sounded silly, but I felt as if the flowers were kind of mocking me in some weird way.

I looked around, trying to sight what was responsible for this.

I hadn't seen any groundhogs. There were never any holes out here for that. Believe me, I would know. I developed a theory that there weren't really any groundhogs out here at all, and that Mr.

Harfbarf just sent me out here for no good reason.

I chuckled to myself a bit.

Harfbarf.

Just then, as I looked at the dirt underneath the flower, I saw it. Was I just seeing this?

It's nothing. I told myself. I'm imagining things.

I'm not imagining. I froze, unable to breathe. My pulse sped up. My heart was thumping so loud that it actually hurt. Groundhogs were not responsible for this, and I was most definitely not alone. As I looked closer, I made out a fresh hand print by the clump of dirt.

I tried to create a logical explanation for this fresh hand print in the dirt. The huge hand print.

Suddenly, I heard a crackling sound. This sound was moving closer and closer to me. My gaze stayed glued to the ground, afraid of what or who I might see in the dark.

When you're alone and it's nighttime, noises tend to be scarier than usual.

You hear them, your chest tightens, and you become conscious of your own breathing; it's quiet again, but you're still on edge and your ears are pricked, and you hear it again, closer this time.

You want to run, but your mind is telling you, just one look.

See what it is.

Instead of running back inside, I slowly lifted my head. I shouldn't have. I should have just run.

Right in front of me, in clear view, were two long legs. I expected there to be, you know, a stomach and arms and a face? A human being. What I was staring at was beyond comprehension and any logic.

The air in my lungs was gone.

In front of me were two legs, normal ones, but above all, it was a creature unknown to man.

Standing and looking at me.

I think it was looking at me.

It.

.

.

had no eyes.

Its abdomen bent all the way over to the right, twisting and moving around.

The head of this creature had long white hair, brown rough shedding skin, and a distorted face.

A light shined out of its neck.

The head hung low like it was broke, nearly hitting the ground.

Know what else?

This creature had one hand.

It started to moan. As it moved, I heard the crackling of its body and decaying bones. The hair moved in front of its face, so I had no idea where this thing was looking. What's creepier than being out at night with an eyeless creature possibly staring at you?

"This is almost as fun as watching you sleep," she said.

It sounded like a woman but more, sinister. I heard more voices as she spoke.

My legs felt like noodles now but I made a run for it anyway.

As I ran, her limp and bent over body chased after me, screaming words of hatred.

She was reaching out for me with one hand.

The words she spoke were in a language that was most definitely not English, a

langue that I could not fathom.

As she screamed, the bright light radiated from her mouth.

I was so close to the door of the mansion. So close. But I was tripped by something. Or someone, I should say. When I looked up, I saw Mr. Harmon standing over me.

He had the biggest smile on his face.

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Mr. Harmon stared at me as I scrambled to my feet. I started pushing him toward the door of the mansion yelling, "Come on, she's coming!" However, he stopped me and turned me around so that I faced the now empty garden.

"No one is out here, Emily," he said.

She was gone.

He let go of me and placed his hands on his hips. "Boy, maybe this wasn't a good idea," he said, closing the front door. "Tell you what. Help me take out the trash, and then you can come back inside."

He stepped aside, revealing a black trash bag. The bag was bulging. It had a disgusting odor that made my stomach cringe. He must have seen my face expression change.

"Mrs. Harmon hates taking out the trash, and I haven't got around to it until today," he said.

I helped him lift and carry it around toward the back of the house. We placed it in a dumpster.

"Thanks!" he said. "Now close it and let's go."

I held my nose and placed my free hand on the lid of the dumpster. As I pulled it down, the bag twitched. I ignored it. There had already been enough craziness for today. And besides, it was probably a mouse or something.

The next day was average with a pinch of boredom. Caleb was acting so weird this morning. He kept staring at me. Every time I asked him if he was okay, he didn't answer me. When Mr. Harmon would come into the room with us, Caleb would leave.

"What's up with your brother?" Mr. Harmon asked me.

I just shrugged. "I don't know. He won't talk to me either."

After I had seen that Mrs. and Mr. Harmon were busy, I decided to head over to Violet's place.

When I got there, Violet had been sitting on the broken chair with her head down.

"Hey?" I asked, hopping up the steps. "You okay?"

She looked up at me and smiled. "Of course. What's up?"

I sat down on the rickety floor next to her. "Nothing. Just glad to get away from there," I said.

She chuckled. "Well, just make yourself at home."

"Where are the others?" I asked.

"Well, I told them not to come today," she said.

I stood up. "Oh, should I-"

"No," Violet said interrupting my sentence. "I just thought since you love hide and seek and I love it too, we should see who's better."

"Who's better?" I repeated after her.

"I mean, with the others it's just too easy. I want to see how good you are," she said.

I laughed and smirked. "Well, I'm pretty much a professional."

She raised an eyebrow then stood up.

She walked toward the door, opening it.

I walked past her and into the house.

The place sure did look abandoned.

Grey and black streaked across the walls where mold grew as the damp nights seep in.

Flaking speckles of paint lined the floor with dust and the corpses of unfortunate creatures.

The old, unused wooden furniture was rotting, stained with lichen while the curtains hung limp and moth-eaten.

It smelled of wet wood and moist air mixed with mold.

The place was neither welcoming or pleasant.

"It's not great," She said to me, "but, it's still home."

When she said that, I saw some sadness in her eyes that I couldn't exactly fathom. I mean, why was this fourteen-year-old living here? Where were her parents? I wonder if she even knew that this was Mr. Harmon's old house?

"It's also perfect for hide and seek. So let's get started?" she asked, walking toward me. "There are two floors. The first one is level one. When you pass level one, you may hide on the second floor. I'm it, so you go ahead and hide. I'll count to twenty."

With that said she headed toward the door, faced it, and started to count.

I looked around.

There wasn't much room in the living room part of this house. I ran into the next room, which was the kitchen. It consisted of broken tables, chairs, wrappers, bones, a huge trash bin and some old bags on the floor. She was at ten, so I grabbed the bags and placed them over my head and quietly stepped inside of the huge trash bin. I adjusted myself until I was comfortable.

"Ready or not! Here I come," she yelled.

I sat in silence, completely motionless. I could hear my heart beating. I heard Violet running around and rummaging through things.

"Oh, you're good!" she yelled out. "And fast!"

I laughed. My smile quickly faded when I felt something on my back. Something was inside the trashcan with me. It felt like five fingers sliding down my spine. I jumped out of the trash, tumbling down with it.

Violet walked into the room. "Ah ha!" she exclaimed.

I looked at me, but nothing was there. Violet helped me to my feet. "Something was touching me!" I yelled, looking at her, my eyes bulging and my heart racing.

"It was probably a bug or something. There are plenty of creatures around here," she said. Violet then smiled and tapped me on the shoulder. "It's your turn to count."

As I walked back inside of the living room and toward the door, she called after me. "Good luck," she said.

I barely counted to five before I heard her footsteps stop.

Once I got to twenty, I searched for her.

She wasn't in the living room or the kitchen. I walked back into the living room and into another room. I didn't know what kind of room it was, but it had a lot of chairs and curtains inside.

Much like the rest of the place, it was all worn out.

I walked over to the chairs and saw a blanket in the shape of a person sitting.

I tisked and shook my head.

"I thought you would be way better than this, Violet," I said while laughing. I reached for the blanket and pulled it off.

I nearly let out a scream. Underneath the blanket was...nothing.

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I took a closer look at the chair. With all the creepiness going on, I couldn't help but believe in the supernatural. Something I've never believed in before. Could a ghost have been sitting here?

I started to shiver. I shook my head at the thought. Maybe Violet set it up to look that way. Yeah, I'll go with that.

As soon as I decided to start looking for Violet again, about six feet away from me, I saw a man standing against the wall.

My eyes widened. It was an old man with gray hair and a gray beard. His clothes were all stitched up. His fingernails had been peeled off and were bleeding. His head faced the floor and blood leaked from a part of his face that I couldn't see.

"Gotcha!" Violet said, grabbing me from behind. "You couldn't have found me faster?"

I pushed Violet away from me, thinking it was something or someone else. I quickly looked away from her and back at the man. He was now gone. I turned to Violet, who was now on the floor, staring at me cruelly.

"I-I thought you were underneath the blanket," I stuttered.

She glared at me.

"I saw a man! He was bleeding!" I said louder, wishing she'd talk and not get mad.

She stood up and looked at me, wiping her pants.

I looked at her for the longest time. "Do you think they exist? You know, like ghost?"

"Of course they do," she said.

I didn't think she'd agree with me. I thought she would say something like, "Of course NOT!" But that didn't happen.

"Don't you believe, Emily?" Violet asked, walking towards me.

I almost stumbled back. "I don't know. I've seen so many weird things lately."

She stared at me. Her mouth was opening and closing like she wanted to tell me something.

"Violet?" I asked.

Before she could answer, there was a knock at the door.

"Viiiiioleeeeeet! It's meeeee. Opaaan the door!" Caroline yelled.

Violet went to answer the door and, sure enough, Caroline, and Jasper was standing there. No, Tate.

"Emily! Hay!" Caroline greeted, running toward me. "Yer paler than a new born baby. Are yer okay?"

I looked at her and smiled.

Violet stepped in front of me. "She saw a ghost."

"Oh," Caroline said, just like that. She nodded and looked at Jasper. It was odd. A girl her age should either be, one, extremely scared, or two, really freaked out. But she wasn't at all.

"Well, that's unfortunate!" Caroline exclaimed, shrugging her shoulders. "Can we play hide and seek? We almost got caught steal-"

Jasper placed his hand over Caroline's mouth. "Shut up," Jasper said, looking at Violet. "We were just really bored."

Violet nodded. "Sure. Shall we continue our game?"

"What about the ghost?" I asked, not sure if I still wanted to play in this house. I know what I had seen today. I know what I saw in the garden. Things just weren't adding up.

"Emily," Violet said walking towards me. "They say ghosts won't hurt you if you're not a threat to them. You have to, you know, ignore them. If they really are real."

"Yeah, that sounds super easy," I said sarcastically. "You don't understand. Since I got here, I've seen things. Strange things, beyond comprehension."

Jasper was staring at me, hard. So was Caroline.

"Were you hurt?" Violet asked.

"No," I admitted.

She smiled. "Then let's play. Jasper is it. The first floor only, just until Emily is not found."

For some reason, that last statement sent shivers down my back.

I ignored it quickly.

Jasper started to count.

As he counted, I ran back inside the room where the ghost appeared, and you know what I did?

I placed the blanket back on the chair and shaped it to look like a person.

I hid right behind the entrance door.

"19, 20."

Jasper was done counting and now looking for the others.

No one hid in the same room as me, and I was completely fine with that.

I heard footsteps coming my way.

I slid farther back towards the wall, hoping he wouldn't be able to see me. I was hoping he'd walk over to the blanket and while he had his back turned, I'd run into the living room and hide since he already probably checked there, then run BACK into the room with the blanket. It was great.

He'd probably say, "I thought I looked in there already. Wow, you're a genius." I longed for a compliment from him. Not that I liked him, but he was very cute.

The footsteps grew closer, and I saw him. Jasper walked into the room FACING me! That's right. He walked backward into the room and had the widest smile on his face.

I nearly screamed. Jasper laughed.

"Found you," he said, looking at me. He then looked at the blanket that was on the chair. He snapped his fingers, and the blanket fell flat onto the chair. "Don't be so simple," he said then walked away to find the others.

I watched him as he looked for the others. He found all of them less than three minutes. All of us then met in the living room. They were all laughing, except for me.

"Cheer up, Emily. You'll get better at this," Violet said, gently punching me on the shoulder.

I gave her a fake smile. "How do you guys do that? Hide so well? I thought I was good at hide and seek..." I looked at the floor. "I guess not."

Caroline placed her hand on my shoulder. "Hey now, don't be so sad."

"Yeah," Jasper said. "You'll be better in no time. I promise."

"Okay, Emily, you're it," Violet said.

I wasn't really in the mood to play, but I did anyway. I turned my head toward the front door and counted. As soon as I got to four, all the footsteps stopped. How did they do that?!

I had been looking for them for almost 10 minutes now. I looked everywhere. Inside cabinets, in the trash cans, under couches, and inside the cracks in the walls. I even looked outside and on the porch.

I walked back into the living room, cupped my hands around my mouth, and then yelled, "I give up!"

The laughter behind me scared the life out of me. My eyes were wide as all three of them, Caroline, Violet, and Jasper, stood there laughing.

"But, how?" I asked.

They continued to laugh.

"Some professional," Violet laughed.

"Hey, she's not that bad," Jasper said winking at me.

I was steaming. That, "some professional" remark was enough to send me walking out the front door.

Violet called after me, but I ignored her. I kept walking, heading back toward the Harmon's.

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"Hey! Wait up!" Jasper called, jogging after me. We were about thirty feet away from the house when he stopped me.

"Hey!" I exclaimed, taking his hand off of my shoulder.

"You don't understand," he said.

"And what is there exactly to understand?" I asked, crossing my arms.

Jasper looked away from me for a second then back at me and frowned. "She's just trying to help you."

I looked at him before laughing. He stared at me like I was crazy, but I kept smiling. "Help me what? Master hide and seek? Is it really that serious with you guys? It's just a game," I said.

"No, Emily. It's way more than just a game," he said, taking a few steps backward. "You may be in danger." He then ran off back to the house. I watched him leave.

What was that about?

I placed my hand on the doorknob to the mansion and almost turned it, but something stopped me. I heard Mr. and Mrs. Harmon arguing.

"I don't want to do this anymore. I can't do this anymore!" Mrs. Harmon yelled. "I

thought we'd start over! I don't want this to happen again."

"I can't change. It won't let me. We have to do this." Mr. Harmon yelled.

The argument was over. I waited three minutes before walking inside the house. Mr. Harmon was standing right in front of the door.

"Well well," he said.

My heart stopped. I was afraid. "Oh, don't be alarmed. Tell me-" Mr. Harmon said, walking outside with me. He shut the front door behind us. "Where did you go today?"

"I was just walking around. Getting some air, you know?" I asked.

He wasn't buying it. He leaned toward me until we were only a finger's length away from each other. I could smell his breath, which smelled like beans of some sort. "Don't leave this house again. Or there will be consequences." He then opened up the front door to let me in.

I went up to my room to Skype with Abby. I had told her everything. I told her about the strange things that had been going on, about the Harmon's, about Caleb, about everything.

"Wow, Emily. That sounds... rough. I'm sorry you're going through this," Abby said over Skype. "Be patient. Some good will come out of this."

I nodded. "Doubt it." Abby didn't really care. I heard it in her voice. You don't tell a friend about Ghost just to hear them say good will come from it.

"Emily!" Mrs. Harmon yelled from downstairs. "Dinner!"

"I gotta go eat, Abby. Talk to you later."

Abby sighed. "Alright. Later. Be careful." She smiled.

I ended the call, closed my laptop and headed downstairs for dinner. Mrs. Harmon was holding some notebook and smiling at me.

"Hey. I thought dinners at seven? It's 6:28," I said.

She smiled at me, her eyes were wide as she held the notebook.

"Oh. Well, I thought I'd cook dinner early," she said opening the first page of the notebook. There were huge letters on it.

She then closed the notebook when Mr. Harmon walked down the stairs.

"Hope you're okay with that," she said before going off into the kitchen.

Mr. Harmon walked down while fixing his tie. "Hey there, Emily. What were you and my lovely wife talking about?"

"Oh. Uh. Yeah, she was just asking me if I liked my...tacos...spicy," I stuttered.

He studied me a while.

"Hey, have you seen, Caleb?" I asked, my words rushing out of my mouth. I'm sure I sounded a little suspicious.

He tilted his head upwards. "Upstairs," he said in a monotone voice.

"Thanks," I said slowly heading for the stairs.

When I got upstairs, and into Caleb's room, I saw him on the floor playing with a toy car. He was wearing a blue jacket with some sweat pants. That was quite odd, it was so hot inside.

"Hey, Caleb," I said, running toward him. I then squatted down next to him. "I know you don't want to talk to me, but we have to go."

He shook his head.

I grabbed him. "Caleb, come on!"

"No!" he yelled.

I picked him up, but he struggled against me. "Why?"

"I can't leave!" he whined. "Mr. Harmon said I can't leave!"

He fell out of my hands, and I noticed a stain on the back of his jacket. It grew wider like water had just spilled on him. I quickly ripped off his Jacket which exposed deep cuts and slashes on his back. I put my hands over my mouth and held in my scream.

"Caleb," I whispered. I turned him around, which was also horrifying. His chest had multiple stab wounds in them. I wondered how he was still alive.

Without arguing, I picked him up and carried him downstairs. He kept telling me that he couldn't leave. I said I would keep him safe.

Mr. Harmon wasn't in sight, so I headed straight for the door. Luckily, I got out without anyone noticing. I ran to the only person I could think of. Violet.

I still held Caleb in my arms, but sadly, before I could even make it twenty feet away

from the garden, Caleb looked at me and said, 'Can't leave.' Then he disappeared. Just like that, he vanished, right in front of me.

I looked around. My heart started beating faster, and I felt the tears fall down my cheeks. I screamed Caleb's name. When I looked back at the mansion, I saw Caleb and Mrs. Harmon standing in the doorway. I ran back to them.

When I got there, Mrs. Harmon hugged me. "Emily." She started to cry. "I thought he would change. I thought we could have children again. We wanted to fix this and fix us. I'm just...so sorry. You have to go! He'll kill you!" she said, looking back over her shoulder.

"I'm not leaving without Caleb!" I yelled at her, reaching for him.

She pushed me back until I fell on the ground.

"I'm so sorry. Caleb's... Dead." she said before slamming the door.

I ran back toward the door and started banging and kicking on it, yelling Caleb's name. Around me, I kept hearing whispers. Over and over again saying, "Can't leave. Can't leave. Can't leave. Can't leave."

I then heard glass shatter behind me. I turned around. My heart felt like it stopped as the two of them stared back at me.

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As I opened my eyes and got used to my current dark surroundings, I realized where I was. I sat up. I was sitting in my bed. I was in my old bedroom. My door was wide open, and I saw a shadow hover across the wall, then I started hearing noises.

"Hello?" I yelled out.

My mother and father suddenly appeared in front of my door at the same time. They smiled at me. My mom went over to the TV that was on and turned it off. She then walked over to my dad who was still smiling at me.

"Do you think we should call the cops?" she asked my dad.

"I promise, everything will be okay. We'll decline his offer then call the police," he kissed my mother, then the both of them left my room, leaving me in the dark.

It's like they didn't acknowledge that I was awake.

I quickly pushed the covers off of me and ran over to the door.

When I opened it I heard muffled sounds.

I jerked myself back into the room.

The sound of my dad's voice made me peek out of the door again. I viewed the living room, a dark silhouette, and my dad. He was leaning in the middle of my view. It was dark. My dad's back was to me, and the silhouette held the gun out towards my father.

"Please, I'm sure there's another way," I heard my dad whisper.

Another silhouette stepped in front of my dad. "Try telling that to Mr. Harmon."

The stranger pointed the gun to my dad's head and shot him. Suddenly, my mother ran out into the hallway, but when she saw the intruders, she pulled her phone out of her pocket and ran back into her room. The strangers followed her then shot her as she hid behind the bed.

"Where is he? He said he'd be here before the cops come," one of the strangers said.

They seemed not to notice me. It was like I was invisible.

"Hey, he said to leave the will," one of them said, stepping toward Caleb's room.

Just then, the cops came in the house and shots went off. Everything then turned white.

I woke in the abandoned house with Jasper standing over me. "Jasper?" I whispered.

"Violet!" he shouted, looking away from me. "She's okay!" Jasper helped me to my feet and patted me on my back. "We thought we lost you."

"What happened to me?" I asked.

Jasper looked over his shoulder. "It was Violet. She told me you were in trouble."

"What?" I said looking around, expecting to see Violet. "How could she know?"

He cleared his throat

I looked behind me, and there Violet was. I walked up to her. I had it up to here with what was going on. I just wanted Caleb, and I wanted him now!

"What do you know?" I asked, pointing my finger at her while walking closer to her.

"Emily..." Violet murmured.

"My brother is dead! I don't know what's going on!" I yelled. I started to cry.

Jasper took my hand. "Emily. She's going to tell you everything."

Violet nodded. "Jasper, please wait outside."

Violet and I walked upstairs to the fourth floor. She led me into a room full of paintings. All of the paintings were of kids, families, soldiers, and of some old people. They were the most beautiful paintings I had ever seen.

Violet walked away to an old desk. I continued looking. There was one photo in particular that caught my attention. It was a picture of some middle aged woman. She looked so much like my mother.

Violet was now standing beside me, holding some magnify glass in her hand.

"Did you draw these?" I asked Violet.

She started to breathe hefty as she looked at the photo. "My dad drew these." She then turned to look at me. It was like she was scared and afraid.

Mr. Harmon's old house? Violet? I should have figured it out before. This was Mr. Harmon's daughter. She nodded her head as if she knew what I was thinking.

"What... happened?" I asked her.

She took a deep breath and looked back at the photo.

I stared at it too.

She placed the magnifying glass on the painting.

"My dad had some crazy obsession with art. He preferred his art to-" She then moved the magnifying glass back and forth which revealed two real eyes of the painting.

The painting had real eyes!

"To be alive," she whispered.

I stared at her horrified. "You recognized the painting didn't you, Emily?"

"Is it her?" I asked.

"Yes. Your parents knew my father was crazy, so they stopped us from hanging out again," she said.

"You remembered me? Why didn't you say anything?" I yelled.

"You weren't ready for the truth!" she yelled back.

"I wasn't ready to know that your dad is a psycho?!" I replied.

"You weren't ready to know that I'm DEAD!" she yelled.

My breathing sped up. "Dead?"

"He wants you so he can become more powerful. You can help us, Emily. You have to," she said, grabbing my shirt.

"Us?" I asked, pushing her back.

The painting we looked at earlier started to rumble. A hand reached out of it, then a leg, then the entire body. It was my mother. Her face was blue. She was almost unrecognizable! She fell to the floor, face down first. The thump of her hitting the wooden floor scared me.

"What's going on?" I screamed.

Violet ran up to me.

"Emily. Go back to the mansion, find the box. It's in there somewhere. Once you find the box, come back here. Jasper will go with you. If you come back here, I promise I'll get your brother back!" she said quickly.

"The ghost won't hurt you. They're afraid because they know you live with my father. Now go!"

Just then, my mother or whatever she was now, lifted up her head and faced me. Her eyes changed rapidly, her skin wrinkled, and her teeth turned into wood. She gave me a terrifying smile that changed her entire face.

"Run!" Violet said, pushing me toward the door. "Jasper can explain more. Just go!"

As I ran down the stairs onto the first floor, I noticed something crawling on the wall. It wasn't my mom, but another woman figure. Before she could catch me, Jasper pulled me out of the door and we ran.

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As we ran back toward the mansion, Jasper stopped us at one point. He placed his hands on his knees, his breathing heavy and labored.

"Okay, I think we're not being chased. They can't leave the house anyway. I hope." He looked at me, sweating and sucking up air. "I've never seen the others. The other ghost. Why can you see them?"

I looked at him then shook my head. "I'm going insane aren't I?"

He shook his head and kept walking. I followed him. "Violet was killed by Mr. Harmon. Not only Violet but Violet's mother too."

I stopped in my tracks. A chill ran down my side. "Violet's mother is dead? Mrs. Harmon is dead?"

"It was more Mr. Harmon has a crazy obsession with, live art. He took his obsession too far when he turned twenty. His paintings were sick! Violet said when she was three, she saw her father kill his parents. She said she never forgot. Mr. Harmon was living with his parents while Mrs. Harmon was still in college. It was sort of a long distance relationship thing at the time." He took a deep breath after talking so fast.

"Violet says he's killed more people than just his parents."

"Then he killed her?" I asked, looking back.

Jasper shook his head.

"Violet said she started waking up in the morning in so much pain. First, it was just her stomach and the inside of her mouth. She even woke up with a missing tooth. Eventually, body parts like her fingers, toes, and patches of hair went missing but were patched up. Mr. Harmon was drugging her at night and using her body parts for his sick creations of what he calls art. Her only way out was to sacrifice her soul to some evil book owned, or he would kill her.

I nearly wanted to puke. I was living with a psychopath. A psychopath that used my brother for art. I started to cry. "We have to hurry and find this...box," I said as I started running. Jasper ran along beside me. "What is this box?"

"Um, I'm not sure. Violet said if she had this box, she could be free to wander off wherever she wanted to. That she'd be free. But, I don't think she's sure of that. Someone told us that, but I forgot their name. An old friend of Violet told her."

"We could get caught!" I exclaimed. "We need to call the cops."

"And tell them what? We have no evidence of what Mr. Harmon is doing," he said.

"My brother's back," I said.

We were about three minutes walking distance away from the house. It had been five minutes since we spoke. "If we get the box and return it, I just want you to know that you can always trust Violet."

I looked at him, confused. "Why do I need to trust her?" I asked.

He smirked. "She's your friend."

I made a face like, eh, she's dead.

"But she's also a friend," he said as if he read my mind.

We were in front of the house now, hiding behind the shrubs.

"He's not home. Mrs. Harmon is," Jasper said.

"Wait how do you know?" I asked while looking at him.

"Violet told me," he said.

"When?"

"Earlier today," he said.

I stared at him. "Did you guys know this would happen? That Caleb would be killed?"

"Not until we saw you." He looked at the ground.

"We didn't know your brother would die. We wanted to tell you, but if you tried to leave Mr. Harmon would kill you right then and there. Violet had a plan to get you both out safe but..." He shrugged. "We tried... I'm sorry. But Violet says she can save him. Please, just trust her."

I realized I was crying again. Jasper noticed and hugged me, causing me to cry even more. "First my parents, then Caleb, now me. Why us? We don't deserve this."

He rubbed my hair. "No one deserved it, Emily."

The door to the mansion opened. It was Mrs. Harmon. I ran to her quickly. She looked at me with a shocked expression on her face.

"I told you to leave!" she yelled.

"Please. I need your help. I've talked with Violet!" I said.

"My daughter? She's alive?!" she asked.

I looked at her. Her face went from hope to hopeless.

Jasper shook his head. "She's not."

"My husband said she ran away a long time ago," Mrs. Harmon told us. Tears rolled down her cheeks. "I should have known."

"Mrs. Harmon," I said reaching for her hand. "Violet says if we find...a box...?"

Mrs. Harmon's eyes widened. She started to shake her head rapidly. "No! No! Not the box." She began to hug herself. It was so dramatic.

Jasper waved his hands in front of her face. "Hey, calm down."

"The box can't be in the wrong hands!" she yelled.

"Mr. Harmon is the wrong hands!" Jasper yelled back. "Think of your daughter!"

"I do, and I am!" she yelled back at Jasper. They stared each other down for a long time.

"Jasper," I said to get his attention. I then looked back at Mrs. Harmon. "Fine... let me

just say one last goodbye to Caleb before I go."

She stared at me for the longest time before nodding. "He's in his room."

Jasper and I started to walk into the mansion, but she stopped us. "But Jasper stays here with me. You have seven minutes before Mr. Harmon comes back."

"But..." Jasper started.

"That's the deal!" She looked at him, then to me. "Don't go looking for the box," she said. "You won't find it."

Before I walked inside, Jasper stopped me.

He leaned in toward my ear.

"The secret to hide and seek is never to hide where a human hides. Hide where a ghost hides. In plain sight. The box will be in plain sight," he whispered and then ran back over next to Mrs.

Harmon as I opened the door and walked back inside.

I closed the door behind me.

Time to find this box.

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Sadly, I didn't go straight to Caleb's room like Mrs.

Harmon told me to.

I quickly made my way to the fourth floor, and into Mr.

Harmon's so-called art room. It wasn't locked, so I just walked in.

What was inside were paintings, hundreds of them.

Sculptures, clay pots, colorful rainbow mannequins that were positioned into strange figures of something more monstrous than human.

The more I stared at each painting and mannequin, the more I saw something I didn't want to. I saw the eyes. It was like each one was staring directly at me. Each painting was somehow alive. It sent shivers down my back.

I had to ignore everything in the room and focus on what I actually came for.

The box.

I started looking in dressers, behind paintings and the mannequins.

Touching one of the manikins felt so uncomfortable.

They were so soft.

They were nowhere near the light in weight.

It was like picking up an actually human being.

"Emily?" Caleb asked, nearly scaring me to death.

I told him to close the door quickly, but he ignored me. Instead, he walked over to me and held my hand. He pulled me outside of the door then pointed to something on the floor. There were waxed fingers that completed a square. A box made of fingers and it was in plain sight.

This was the box. Caleb picked it up and handed it to me.

The last thing I wanted to do was touch that thing. It looked so disgusting. The wax that covered it was brown and sticky. It was a bit heavy, and as much as I wanted to shake it or open it, I did not. Caleb couldn't seem to stop staring at the box.

"Do you know what this is?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "Not the box, but the book," he whispered in a small voice.

"What?" I asked him, unsure of what he had said. Before I could get an answer, Jasper called me from downstairs.

"Emily! Come on, he'll be here soon!" he yelled.

I looked back at Caleb. "I'll be back. I promise."

He looked at me and took my hand. Tears began streaming from his eyes. "He's getting ready," Caleb stated.

"For what?" I asked him, feeling a bit confused.

"For your last hide and seek game," Caleb said. "Go!"

There were tears in my eyes. I quickly ran down the stairs and met up with Jasper. Leaving Caleb behind hurt me in ways I could not explain. I felt like there were rocks in my throat. Jasper dragged me behind the house, and we started running toward the trees farther ahead.

"We can get back to the house this way," he said then noticed the box. "That's the box?"

"Mr. Harmon could see us from here!" I exclaimed, ignoring his question.

Jasper looked behind him. "Well," said out of breath, "he hasn't got here yet."

We ran until we were no longer visible from the mansion. After fifteen minutes of walking, we managed to make it back to the abandoned house where we saw Violet sitting on the porch with Tate and Caroline. Her face lit up when she noticed us.

Jasper and I rushed over to Violet and handed her the box.

"Is this it?" Jasper asked, catching his breath.

"Yes," Violet said with a smile. "Now I can be free? Can I really be free?"

Jasper started smiling. "Ryan said this would work, remember?"

Violet closed her eyes. "I really hope this is it, Jasper. Its been too long."

All of us watched her as she pried open the box, breaking off fingers. Some cracked,

turning to dusk. Honestly, I was a bit scared. I didn't know what was going to happen.

When the box opened and all the top of the fingers were destroyed, what lay inside the box were many different bags of dirt or sand. When I got closer, I realized it wasn't sand at all. It was all ashes.

After a long moment of silence, I finally spoke out.

"You don't know which one is yours?" I asked Violet.

She gave me a smile. A smile that said, "I don't care."

I reached out for her shoulder, but she backed away from me.

"Violet," I said in a calm voice. "You don't know what can happen to you if you open the wrong one."

Violet held all the bags in her hand then reached behind her pants. She pulled out a box knife of the sort then, in one long cut, all of the ashes spilled onto the porch in front of her.

"Let's hope something good." Violet then fell to the ground, however, stopped and stared at the ashes. "Oh my God. These aren't ashes. It is sand. Feel how soft it is, guys. It's fake! It's fake! He lied to me!"

Jasper went to help her but deep and loud echoed moans from inside of the house startled us. The moans grew louder, and there were now screams from hundreds of voices. Screams of hatred, pain, and agony. I heard men, woman, and children. Some voices didn't sound human at all.

All four of us except Violet ran off the porch. We kept our eyes on Violet, who held

her chest and breathed heavily. "Violet, come on!"

Violet then pushed herself off of the porch and stood up to face us.

"I'm never leaving this place, am I?" Her head slowly tilted to the side. Veins began to appear on her face, her teeth were now sharp, and she had an excessive amount of teeth that I haven't seen before. She looked at us in the most frightening way. Something was happening and not at her own will.

"What happened?" Jasper yelled out.

"I don't know!" I yelled. "We need to run!"

Tate screamed. When we turned to face him, looking at us were three masked children. The masks were so distorted, so terrifying.

Everything then turned dark and my hands were pulled behind my back. There was something over my head. I then heard a familiar voice behind me. Let me tell you, I was beyond confused.

"Let the game begin," Mr. Harmon said.

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I opened my eyes to see nothing but darkness.

I heard sounds of people talking quietly around me.

They weren't actually talking, but more of a mumble or whisper. A foot kicked mine. My hands seemed to be tied up, and I was about to say something, but I couldn't speak.

My mouth wouldn't open. I tried so hard to say anything.

"Now everyone's awake," Mr. Harmon said. "Perfect."

The bag was lifted from over my head only to reveal Mr. Harmon standing in front of me with a broad smile on his face. We were in an entry room of the mansion. As my eyesight shifted away from him, I saw them. One, five, eight, ten, fifteen, sixteen.

Sixteen people were sitting around me, including Jasper, Tate, Caroline, and an angry Violet.

The three kids that wore the mask were sitting down with their tied hands together.

I saw Caleb too.

There was the girl who crawled on the wall when Jasper and I tried to leave.

There was my mom and dad, except they looked different.

There was a bullet hole in my dad's forehead and the same for my mom. Their faces were pale with thick blue veins pumping underneath their skin. There was the old man from the abandoned house. There was the distorted woman that chased me in the garden at night. The other two, girl and a boy, I couldn't exactly make out.

They were young.

The more I stared at the girl, the more I recognized her.

She was the girl in my dream.

However, I didn't know this boy. His eyes were gone, just black sockets.

I guess that wasn't the worse part. The worse part was that I now knew why my lips weren't moving.

Everyone's lips had been sewn together. I was surrounded by friends, enemies, dead people, ghosts, and a psycho. The only thing we had in common right now, besides Mr. Harmon, was that we couldn't speak.

Mr. Harmon stood in front of us. He cleared his throat. "I just wanted to say thank you, to all of you." He started to clap. "I'll be even more powerful than I ever was."

"We are about to play my favorite game!" He started to laugh, throwing his head back. He was a genuine nut case, and I had no clue what he was going off about.

Some moans grew louder. Mr. Harmon yelled for everyone to be quiet but the moaning only grew louder than before. He then held up a book. It was a thick book with weird designs on it. Everyone stopped moaning.

"Who wants to leave here alive?" he asked.

The moaning started again, and Mr. Harmon smiled and nodded his head. "Today, one of you will walk away alive, and the rest of you will unwillingly be sacrificed into an ancient book. The book.

I'm sure everyone wondered what we had to do to win.

"You have to win the hide and seek game that we're going to play. Sounds like fun?" he said. "Well, it's not fun. It's deadly, and people will die tonight. Now, we'll play by my rules. There are sixteen of you and today, only one of you will leave."

Mrs. Harmon walked inside of the room, carrying a box. She emptied the box onto the floor where knives, axes, tools, and kitchen utensils fell out. I was beginning to feel very nervous.

"In this game, each one of you is, indeed, alive and will be untied then given a weapon. You will then be given a card." He pointed his finger in the air. "If your card says murderer, it means you're it. You do not tell anyone that you're the murderer: that would be cheating."

Mrs. Harmon stepped next to Mr. Harmon. He placed his arm around her. "My wife has specially sewed your lips together for you to say only these things: You're dead, and, I found a dead body." He then pointed to Violet. "Please, try it."

She hesitated for a bit before saying it. "I found a dead body," she said in a soft voice.

Mr.

Harmon continued, "Whoever gets the card, murderer, will search for the others. The lights will be off. Once you found someone, you simply whisper in their ear, you're dead then kill them. You may leave the body or hide it. If someone finds the body they yell, I found a dead body! Once you yell that, the lights will come on, and all of

us will meet here in this room. We'll guess the murderer then the game will start over again until there's only one murderer left."

Mrs. Harmon started to untie everyone's hands. When she got to mine, I felt her hands on my hips and legs as if she was searching for something. When she was done with me, she gave me a long look. Mr. Harmon noticed her and cleared his throat indicating for her to finish untying the rest.

Once Mrs.

Harmon finished, Mr.

Harmon handed everyone a weapon.

I got an ax.

Caleb got a screwdriver.

Tate and Jasper got knives.

Caroline had an electric drill.

I looked at them nervously.

They stared back and shook their heads slightly.

Jasper kept eyeing the front door.

We could have made a run for it, but the door was gone.

We were hopeless.

"Also," Mr.

Harmon said, "cheating will kill you. If you are the murderer and you don't kill the person you come across in eight seconds, you'll die, and the lights will come on. If you refuse to play, you will also die. If you yell out, you found a dead body, and there is nothing there, you die." He placed his hands on his hips.

"There is no escape. The doors are gone. The only way out is to win."

Mr.

Harmon took out something from his shirt pocket.

The cards.

Everyone got a card.

Mine was blank.

I wasn't the murderer and thank God. As I looked up at everyone, I realized that one of them was the murderer. It could have been anyone. All these eyes stared around at each other, hearts full of hatred and no mercy. Except for Tate, Caroline, Jasper, and me: there would be no remorse today.

I felt the eyes of angry dead people on me. Today was about survival. No one could be trusted, I'm afraid to say.

Mr. Harmon smiled one last time before disappearing. He vanished right in front of us. The lights were still on, so the game hadn't started yet. I felt my heart racing. I wasn't ready for this.

"Lights off!" a voice in the air shouted. The words made my stomach ache.

"Let the game begin!"

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I crept around as I made my way to the kitchen.

I crouched inside Mrs.

Harmon's cabinet where she kept cleaning material. Since there was enough room for me, I closed it. My heart was beating so hard that it'd probably give me away.

I had tried to look for Caleb, but he was gone.

I even tried looking for Tate and the others, but they were gone, too.

As I sat there alone, I couldn't help think back to the last game I had played with Abby. I remembered something I had thought off during a game with her. Sometimes you had to eliminate those closest to you. This was exactly like that.

The sound of footsteps nearly scared me to death.

There was someone in the kitchen scrambling for a hiding place.

I heard them breathing very heavily.

I listened to a chair move, so I guessed they hid under the table.

While I waited, I thought about Violet and what happened to her.

She wasn't herself. Not at all. Mr. Harmon had held a book, and I didn't know what it was for or why people had seemed to fear it.

What was it about that damn book?

Just then, I felt something lean on my shoulder.

It was dark, I couldn't talk, and I was in a house full of nothing but superstition and dead people. Well, they were once dead. I heard a small moan. I felt tears running down my cheek and the other stranger's pulse on mine.

As I thought, maybe this could be the murderer, I quickly opened the door.

It was a stupid move, but I was just too afraid.

When I crawled out, I suddenly stumbled onto something.

My hands and knees fell to something wet on the ground.

I looked to my side.

There was a very still and hunched figure on the ground next to me.

Nervously, I touched it and poked it.

Nothing.

They were dead.

"I found-I found a dead body!" I exclaimed.

The lights immediately came back on.

The dead person on the floor was the little boy, about Caleb's age that I didn't know

about.

I quickly ran to the kitchen and washed my hands.

I started to cry again but stopped when I saw her come out of the cabinet I hid in.

It was the thing that chased me in the garden.

The only reason her head laid on my shoulder is because the body was so twisted and bent.

I wanted to puke.

She gave me a menacing look that sent me flying back into the front room.

Some of us met back in the front room by the entrance of the mansion. When everyone was present, Mr. Harmon appeared in the middle of all of us. He smiled.

"Magnificent, my dear," he said, looking at me. I gave him the best frown I could. He turned away and looked at everyone else. "So, who do we think it was?" he asked.

Fingers pointed to one another. Some even pointed to me. Most were pointed to the lady that had been hiding with me. I noticed that the old man's knife had blood on it. I pointed to him, stepping closer. Mr. Harmon saw me and smiled the old man.

"Wow, father. I'm so proud of you today," Mr. Harmon said.

The old man looked away. Mrs. Harmon pulled the dead body out of the kitchen and placed it by the entry of the door. Mr. Harmon passed out the cards again. Mine was blank.

"Lights out!" Mrs. Harmon yelled.

The darkness welcomed me once again.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:16 pm

This time I ran upstairs, that is, after bumping into several other things.

It was so dark that I could barely see.

When I walked towards the stairs, I worried about being ambushed by someone.

I would hate to die during the second level of the game.

That would have been a real tragic way to go.

Each stair I ascended gave me away.

My shoes kept clicking against the hard stairs, so I removed them before I made it to the top.

Once up the stairs, I headed for my room.

As soon as my hand turned my doorknob, I heard footsteps coming from behind me.

There was somebody on the same floor as me, and that wasn't good. I almost stopped to check who it was, thinking it could have been one of my friends. That was a risky step to take, so I opened my room door and closed it.

When I entered the room, the moonlight welcomed me. I could see everything in the room. No one was hiding inside from what I saw. I didn't check the closet. There was no time. Someone was close by.

I jumped on my bed and quickly hid underneath the covers.

I know it was a lame place to hide, but I was too scared.

Someone was outside of the door, and I heard the doorknob turning.

Again, my heart was pounding, I was sweating, and my legs felt like cooked noodles.

I mouthed prayers, hoping they would be answered and I wouldn't have to die in this stupid mansion.

My breathing froze when someone entered the room. I tried my best to calm my breathing down: to keep it normal. For a moment it worked until I felt someone else under the covers with me. I lost it at that point. There was someone behind me spooned against my back.

The person inside of the room rummaged through stuff in my room. I even heard them open my closet door. Whoever was behind me began breathing heavily enough for me to feel their warm breath on my neck. The footsteps left the room. That's when I sat up and looked to see who was next to me.

I reached my hand for the blanket to reveal the stranger. I stopped when I saw the pale arm clenching my blanket.

I honestly didn't want to find out who it was but I looked at their face anyway. At first, I didn't know who it was when I saw their blue face, but I recognized the hair.

It was the girl who wore the mask.

The ones that were outside of the abandoned house.

At that moment, I wish she had worn her mask.

I quickly got out of the bed and backed away, heading for the door which was a bad idea. When I started to open the door, the moonlight coming from the window welcomed someone crawling down the hallway, coming this way. It was the other masked kid, and they were coming towards the room.

I quickly shut the door and hid in the closet, only to realize that someone was inside with me. I closed my eyes out of fear of what I could have seen. The person behind me started rubbing my hair.

I cringed, feeling uncomfortable.

Whoever was behind me then tapped me on the shoulder.

I slowly turned around, still afraid.

The person grabbed my hand and raised it into the air.

Soon after, I felt hair that fell over the eyes of the person.

There was only one person with hair length like that.

Jasper.

I forced a smile through the tears falling down my cheek.

I felt so safe for a moment and so happy that he was alive.

The door to the room opened. My breathing seized. Jasper grabbed my waist and pulled me back. He walked in front of me. Scared, I gripped the back of his shirt and

looked over his shoulder.

Suddenly the closet door opened, and someone quickly crawled inside.

Jasper struggled to keep the masked child away from me. They seemed to be focused more on me than Jasper. Scared for my life, I began kicking the masked kid instead of drawing my weapon. Jasper was about to draw his weapon, but someone yelled out.

"I found a dead body!"

I was quickly released. I nearly started to cry, but Jasper held onto me and walked us both back into the entry room. He rubbed my arm on our way downstairs. Even though he couldn't speak, I knew he'd tell me everything was going to be okay. I could just hear it in mind.

Once in the entry room, I saw Mrs. Harmon dragging in another dead body. It was one of the masked children.

"So," Mr. Harmon said, "who's the murderer?"

I was going to point out the one who attacked me, but the girl who hid with me pointed to him first.

Mr. Harmon smiled, "Kill your own? I'm impressed. This game is getting interesting."

Everyone got new cards. Eyes fluttered around, looking for the murderer. I looked at my paper in disbelief. I didn't think it would happen so soon. I felt a sickening feeling come up my throat, making me feel like I'd throw up.

"Lights off!" Mr. Harmon exclaimed. "Begin!"

I was the murderer.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:16 pm

The sound of footsteps ran past me faster than I could comprehend that I was it. Little did everyone know that they were running from me this time. I was the murderer.

My feet felt heavy underneath me, and the small ax felt four times heavier in the back of my pants.

I gripped onto it, feeling the prickly wood against my sweaty palms.

I stopped and made my way towards the kitchen, carefully listening for anyone.

A million thoughts ran through my head.

I couldn't think straight.

I saw a light quickly pass me.

The light ran from the cabinet and into the entry room.

It was the woman with the distorted body.

I followed her.

I followed her because if I could kill her, I wouldn't have to kill Jasper, Tate, or Caroline; that is if I came across them. That left me the choice to kill the woman.

I went after her, slowly making my way through the darkness.

I managed to catch sight of the light that came from her throat on the second floor.

It entered my room.

I made my way upstairs and headed straight for my room.

When I got close, the light from the moon shone in front of my door where I found Caroline standing.

She looked at me with a smile, excited to see something I couldn't. I walked behind her to see what she was looking at. It was the distorted woman.

All of a sudden, she ran past Caroline and me.

She went into Caleb's room. I followed after her. Once in his room, the light from his lava lamp kept turning on and off. I didn't know why.

It lit up the room each second then plunged into darkness the next second.

Just then, I saw something in Caleb's closet. It was her. With each second the lava lamp clicked on, she got closer and closer until her hand was on my face.

I struggled and swung the ax around, but kept missing with every swing.

I was pushed down to the floor, my head bumping into another head.

Without thinking, I swung the ax to the side.

The sound of the ax resting itself on the neck of my victim made me sick to my stomach.

I'll tell you now, this wasn't the worse part.

"I found a dead body," Jasper's voice filled the air. I heard the sadness coming from his voice.

The lights came on.

Standing in front of me was Jasper and the woman.

Sat up on her knees, with wide eyes staring at me and a bleeding neck with an ax engulfed inside, was Caroline.

My legs weakened, and I fell to the floor.

Mrs.

Harmon came in and walked toward her body.

She closed Caroline's eyes herself then lifted her up. Jasper grabbed Mrs. Harmon, and she kicked him away. He then pulled at the string on his lips, but it wouldn't come off.

He then pulled at the string on his mouth, but it wouldn't come off. Jasper yanked the stitches off of his lips by force, and his lips started to bleed. He faced me, a face red and full of hatred.

"How could you!" he yelled, grabbing me by the neck. Tears ran down his cheeks, and they ran down mine as well. I wasn't even focused on him. I focused more on Mrs. Harmon leaving the room with Caroline. I had killed her.

Mr. Harmon walked in. He grabbed Jasper off of me. "Come on, you shouldn't have

done that, boy. I'm afraid it'll be more painful this time.

I followed Mr. Harmon out of the room and back to the entry room. Jasper glanced back at me a few times. The last thing I needed was another enemy and that's exactly what I got.

In the entry room, everyone watched as Jasper got his strings sewn on. His scream echoed throughout the whole house. I felt the warm tears roll down my cheeks.

When Mrs. Harmon was done, Mr. Harmon handed out the cards. Mine was blank and I was very okay with that. However, before the lights turned off, Jasper looked at his card then faced me. The grin on his face scared me more than anything right now.

"Lights off! Begin."

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:16 pm

Since everyone usually seemed to hide on the first and second floor, I decided to hide on the fourth.

It took me a while to get up there.

I was pretty sure someone decided to follow me, and I had to stop on a few floors to hide before I could continue to move.

Once on the fourth floor, I went in the opposite direction of Mr.

Harmon's art room. I hid behind a statue of some sort.

Once settled, I started thinking about Caroline. I could never forgive myself for that. Ever.

While I crouched down to hug my knees, something fell out of my pants pockets. It was my cell phone. That explained why Mrs. Harmon was touching me so much. She was trying to find my pocket. I guess it was a bit hard considering I only had one. I didn't even feel the phone this whole time.

I turned it on, exposing a bright light. I quickly turned the brightness of it down then covered it with my hand, hiding the excessive light. I immediately went to the text messages. All of them were from Abby. I read them.

I went to the sent text messages and found a text that said, "Help me." Mrs. Harmon must have sent it. She was trying to help.

I heard someone coming up the stairs. I quickly texted Abby, "Please come with cops. There are dead people." I then shut the phone.

Someone was on the fourth floor, and they were walking in my direction.

The silhouette was now standing an arm's length from me. I know I shouldn't have, but I did: I shone the phone light to see who it was.

It was the woman.

She stared back at me.

Moths were coming out of her mouth, and one landed on her head.

Why did she keep following me? She reached for my phone. I thought she'd break it or something.

All of a sudden she sat next to me and turned on my phone. Her head was anything but still. It rolled around like she had no neck bones. She started texting something into my phone.

I stared up at her then reached for the phone quickly and texted back.

Someone else on the fourth floor with us.

"I found a dead body!" someone yelled out from downstairs.

The lights came on. In front of us was Jasper. He was holding a drill this time. The drill Caleb had. How did he get Caleb's drill?

I thought the worst.

Jasper smiled at me. He pulled the strings off of his lips once again. Blood dripped to the floor like a faucet turned on low. "This is for Caroline." He shouted, tears pouring down his face.

He walked toward us then raised the drill in the air.

The game was over; he couldn't do that!

The distorted woman raced toward him, aiming for the drill.

Their hands were high in the air along with the drill, pushing one another here and there.

Her back faced the stairwell.

Jasper pushed the drill to her neck.

He was obviously way stronger than her.

He grabbed the drill, swung it back away from her then started drilling into her neck.

A part of stairwell broke off from weight, falling along with the woman.

The landing was loud and hard.

Jasper stared at me with empty hands. He attempted to run towards me but stopped. His eyes started to bleed and his bones twisted in his body. He screamed from the pain. Behind him stood Mr. Harmon with his arms crossed.

"Cheating kills you," he said.

Mrs. Harmon ran upstairs. She looked at his body and shook her head. "Wow, five dead."

Once downstairs, I found out Jasper murdered three other people: one of the masked kids, Mr.

Harmon's father, and Violet." Now that Jasper was now dead too, that left nine. The nine left were Tate, Caleb, my mother, my father, the girl who crawled on the wall, one of the masked kids, the girl from my dreams, and me.

The cards were handed out.

Blank.

Boy, was I tired. I hoped Abby got here real soon because of this time, Tate gave me a real hard look.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:16 pm

I hid in the kitchen, the living room, and the laundry room, but someone was still following me.

Every time I stepped forward, another step followed behind me.

Somehow, I got the guts to look behind me.

I faced a silhouette.

It wasn't much bigger than me. The person stepped closer to me then grabbed my hand.

It was Caleb.

I couldn't believe he was alive. I thought Jasper had killed him. At least, I believed that it was. He started tugging on my hand, wanting me to follow him somewhere. I followed him. We walked upstairs to the second floor. I was afraid and also concerned. No one was walking around. I heard no other footsteps.

We finally approached Caleb's room, where the moonlight from the moon exposed two dead bodies in front of me. Tate and my father. I turned to Caleb. He killed our father. Caleb then held up a screwdriver and faced me. The screwdriver dripped blood.

"I found a dead body!" someone yelled from behind me.

It was my mother.

The lights came on. As I looked at Caleb, his sinister look made me realize something. It looked nothing like him. His veins showed through his face. He looked like he was turning into a monster. He looked evil.

Caleb was the murderer. He killed two people. It was time for the cards to be passed out again. Once again, I was the murderer. The lights went out. I stood in place while everyone scrambled around, but I kept my eyes on one person. Caleb.

I followed him as he walked into the living room. He saw me walking behind him and didn't seem to care. We walked in circles in the living room until he hid behind a curtain. I approached him slowly, pulled back the curtain revealing no one other than Violet.

She smiled at me then crouched down on the floor. Her hand moved toward her mouth, and she yanked the strings off.

"Want to know how I died?" she asked through bleeding lips.

Although I wanted to know, there was a countdown in my mind. Only eight seconds. Seven. Six. Five.

I raised my axe in the air then apologized. As far as I knew, she was dead. That gave me a reason not to hesitate.

"I didn't die. My soul was stolen, and now, he'll take yours. This is not a game. This is him getting ready to ruin your life, just like he did mine." she said before I struck her in her chest.

The axe fell to the floor, striking nothing but air. Violet was gone.

Before I moved away from the curtain, I saw a car pull in. Stepping out was Abby and her parents. Behind them were cops. They made it! I reached for my phone and called her. The phone rang, and she answered but before I could answer, I was yanked onto the floor, but I grabbed the phone.

"Calling during the game!? That's cheating. We're not done," Mr. Harmon said.

He reached for the axe and raised it into the air. "Boy, did I really want you to win. Just so I could kill you, and then you'd be mine forever to torture."

"You will not kill her like you killed our daughter, Jason Harmon!" someone said, stepping into the room. It was Mrs. Harmon.

He looked at her and smiled. "Of course not." He then turned to me. "I won't kill her. Unless she wants to join us."

Suddenly the lights came on and in the room were others.

The little girl from my dream. The girl who crawled on the walls at Violet's house was now above Mr. Harmon. My mother.

All of them looked so much scarier. Why were they turning like this? So sinister. Was Mr. Harmon making them this way?

"I can't let you keep doing these things!" Mrs. Harmon said.

Mr. Harmon laughed. "So, this was your plan? Contact the cops, bring-" he pointed up "them here. And what? Kill me?"

"You can stop this. What are you trying to prove? You've done this for too long," Mrs. Harmon said, lowering her head. "Snap out of it, Jason. Please. We need to stop

this. Don't let this book keep doing this to us."

He laughed again. "Darling, don't act like you wasn't a part of this now. Don't play hero just because you found out I killed Violet."

"I had no choice," she said. "The book is controlling us, but fighting back. You can too," she pleaded.

"So, now what? You think that you can just leave now?" he asked.

"No. I don't," she admitted.

Mr. Harmon moved out his hand to face her direction. "You're damn right."

He then moved his hand upward, where it faced the girl on the ceiling. She fell to the floor then her body slid into Mrs. Harmon's. Their bodies stuck together, and both of them shook rapidly. Sounds of agony formed deep in their throat. It sounded like a broken record playing backward.

The arms and legs on both their bodies started to stretch and their bodies formed into one. Once the trembling stopped, their bodies, now together, rose on all four legs: their arms attached to the legs and heads stuck together.

"Lights off! Begin," Mr. Harmon said.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:16 pm

Once the lights were off, I ran upstairs. The thing on all four was after me but often crashed into stuff. By the time I was on the fourth floor, the thing was on the second, still crashing into things.

I went into Mr.

Harmon's art room and turned on my phone's flashlight.

Downstairs, I heard the cops yelling and Abby calling after me.

It brought back the same memories of my parents yet, they have been in Mr.

Harmon's grip the whole time, and I had no idea why. They weren't going to get in.

Not unless I somehow stopped Mr.

Harmon.

I shined the light around the room and noticed something.

Every single painting was different.

There were paintings of Tate, Jasper, Violet, the crawling woman, Caroline, Caleb.

There were regular pictures of them then there were paintings of them dead.

A picture beside the window was of me.

It was normal.

As I was lifting it, another picture from behind fell.

I picked it up.

I viewed the painting, and my heart stopped. My body started to shake, and I wanted to collapse right then and there. The painting was a picture of a clown holding me, passed out in his left hand. And in the other hand was an actual beating heart.

I put my hand to my heart to feel for a beat.

This whole time, I thought my heart was beating when I was scared, and it wasn't. There was no beat now. Only the beating of my heart on the picture. He already had me. That same second I felt my heart beating. False alarm. Guess I was just too afraid in that moment and my anxiety had reached over the limits.

I started looking around at every other painting.

I saw a picture of Caleb with devil horns on his head.

Another picture of Mrs.

Harmon standing in fire.

More paintings of the hide and seek players in a fire, even Jasper.

Mr.

Harmon's painting was what was making them so sinister. This was his way of torturing them, of controlling them I thought. That's when I got one idea.

Every painting needed to be destroyed, and I needed this so-called book.

I had an idea. I slowly opened the front door and peeked out of it. My neck was grabbed forcefully. I couldn't see who it was, but it ripped off its stitches and started yelling at me.

"Don't leave me! Don't leave me!" it said in my mother's voice.

I kicked her away and made my way toward the staircase.

I fumbled down the stairs.

Waiting for me on the third floor was Mrs.

Harmon's new body. It hissed at me and made its way toward me. I did my best to avoid it, then made my way past it. It scrambled all around the stairway, but luckily, I got off that floor and headed down the second and first.

I still heard Abby outside and the police trying to get in. I heard one of them even yell out that they were going to need backup.

When I got inside the kitchen, I pulled out my phone and called Abby. I pulled out my stitches, and it hurt like hell. I realized I would feel pain forever unless I stopped Mr. Harmon, which is what I planned to do.

Abby answered. "Get away from the house. I'm so sorry," I told her.

My lips trembled as I spoke. I turned off my phone. I turned on the stove up high, and the microwave then picked up a lighter that was near the sink.

Using the lighter, I turned to the table and set it on fire, then the chairs and the

cabinets.

I had run out of the kitchen before I heard something behind me. When I looked, I saw a body crawling towards me. It was skinless and almost bald.

Mr. Harmon was painting. Whenever the lights went off, he disappeared. But where too? And how did his drawings come to life?

I ran out and headed upstairs with the lighter. Once on the third floor, I looked to my left and saw the girl in my dreams holding my axe.

She walked closer to me and held the axe up high then struck something in front of me, something that I didn't see. The strike to Mrs. Harmon's head splattered black blood over my face. I quickly ran upstairs while the thing attacked the girl in my dreams and torn her limb from limb.

Once on the fourth floor, I opened the art room once again and got the lighter ready. Sitting at the desk was Mr. Harmon. He had a long piece of paper in front of him and was sketching rapidly.

He started to talk fast. "How do you feel about a shadow man? I'm more into vampires and skeletons but let's switch things up a bit."

His body changed into a large shadow with two bright eyes reaching for me.

"As for you, since you're so smart, I thought you'd like a challenge," he said, his voice airy and deep.

He showed me a picture of myself with the clown. Something was attached to my eye in the painting. Mr. Harmon showed me a mirror and after one look at myself, I knew this was going to be very painful if I didn't stop him soon. There were needles

beneath my eyelid, waiting for me to blink.

Mr. Harmon didn't just paint. He was painting a story. A sick story. Only I didn't know how it was going to end.

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There were two explosions downstairs. As much as I wanted to escape this hell hole, I couldn't. I was trapped until someone came to rescue me. So that's what I waited for.

Mr. Harmon stared at me. I kept my eyes open as long as I could. He smiled.

"What do you want from me?" I asked. My eyes were watering now, and I couldn't keep them open much longer. I blinked. My eyelids went over the needles so smoothly, and I felt the pain as I slowly lifted my eyelids up. Blood started to drip down my face. "What's the whole point of this?"

His shadow body formed into his normal body. "So my artwork can live," he said, reaching for a book on the bookshelf. "Ever heard of a book called The Book?"

I kept silent.

He opened the book, turning the pages. "Imagine," he started, "a book that unlocks the dark mysterious of the world. That unlocks so much power."

It wasn't making any sense to me. "That doesn't make any sense to me!" I yelled mostly from the pain I endured with my eyes.

He chuckled. "People like me don't have to make sense."

By people like him, he clearly meant psychos.

"Emily, sometimes power comes with a price. Sometimes, we can't pay that price, so we make sacrifices," he continued.

I groaned from the pain of blinking. The pain just got worse and worse.

"When I found this book, I didn't imagine I'd have to sacrifice my father and mother then child eventually. Bless them. My father's heart and soul went to the book exchange for power. Great power. I could talk to the dead. I took it a step farther. I sacrificed my mother and was able to shape shift. It wasn't really about the art, Emily. I wanted you guys to join me in my incredible world. Violet wouldn't stay, so we needed someone else, and you seemed to like the perfect choice."

"You left your daughter in your parent's house. You didn't want anyone to join you," I said.

"She chose not to," he said.

"Seems like a lot of people chose not to," I said.

"Try to understand that I'm doing what's best for everyone. Don't you realize that we don't have to live to live? Get me?" he asked.

"The paintings? Hide and Seek? What's the point?" I asked.

"Cause I can't sacrifice a soul and get power unless they say they'll sacrifice it. If that doesn't work, then we play the game with those I have in my grip," He smiled.

"Sicko!" I said.

"And the hide and seek wasn't my idea. I had a little help with that." He pointed to the curtain, and the little girl from my dreams revealed her face, only this time, she looked very familiar to me.

She started to grow to my size, and her features began to change. She looked at the

ground at first then slowly formed on her face. She gazed ever so happily at me. There's no way the girl with the slashes and gashes on her body was Abby. It couldn't be.

Abby nodded her head. "Why aren't you bragging about how good you are at hide and seek now?" she asked with a sinister smile.

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Abby faced Mr. Harmon. "I brought my stepdad, my mom, and a few cops. They're all dead a ready to be sacrificed."

"Good job, dear," Mr. Harmon praised.

"Will I get powers like you now? Making paint come to life! That's so epic," she said.

"Of course," he said.

"Abby, what are you doing? You were supposed to help me!" I yelled.

"Oh, yeah. I never mentioned the real reason you stopped hanging out with Violet years ago," Abby said. "I'm Violet's halfsister. My mom told your mom about it, and she didn't like it one bit."

Total mind games right now. Half-sister?

"I sacrificed my soul. Too bad Violet was too much of a wimp," Abby said.

"Don't call people names." Mr. Harmon waved a finger. "Even though, it's true."

"What? Then how come you look so young?" I asked him. Everything was still confusing.

"The book gave him that," Abby said. "The book gave us so much, don't you see that Emily? I could live among the dead and do so much more. I mean, not as much as Dad." She rolled her eyes. "Book. Sacrifice. Power. Get it?"

"So, that's what this is about? After everything, you think I'd just join you?" I asked, looking at Mr. Harmon. "Join? Then what?"

Abby stepped in front of him.

"You don't have to do it for him, just for me. At first, I was a bit mad that you thought you were better than me at hide and seek then. It was about revenge to me. You pissed me off for too long. You're a bitch sometimes. An immature one. Plus, I thought-" she placed her hand on the needles on my eyes then they fell off.

I blinked about a hundred times "you could join me; imagine the people we can bring here. Imagine the power! Imagine what's beyond! There's so much more than just to live." She pointed to her father.

"It's right in that book."

Suddenly the room was full of the 15 players who played hide and seek along with the cops, and Abby's parents. My parents, Caleb, Jasper, Violet, all of them. I looked at every single one of them.

"You have a choice, Emily. Be like us! Be like us and let's rescue humanity and show them what living truly is," Abby said. "But don't be like those who denied us. Except for Mrs. Harmon," she pointed to the other player.

Mr. Harmon nodded. "Maybe this seems like a horror story, Emily. But horror stories can have happy endings."

The flames got closer to us. So close, I could feel the heat. Mr. Harmon was right. Not all horror stories end badly. They don't have to.

"What happens to those who don't join you?" I asked. "I'm just curious."

"Of course you are," Abby said. "They become whatever my father wants to them to be. His sacrifice, his power, and his will. The book doesn't like those who deny the offer. Those who don't commit to their sacrifice, suffer! Forever."

"You can convince all of them to join us." Mr. Harmon said. "They'll listen to you. You could be with your parents forever!"

There was another explosion. This time, the walls in front and behind us blew off. We watched as the house burned, flames reaching toward us next.

"Emily, you can have your happy ending. Don't let your story end in horror. Pledge your loyalty to the book, and you can be just like us." He stood beside me with his hand on my shoulder. The flames were so close to us. Abby walked up to my other side and placed her hand on my shoulder.

Be like them and guide people to their doom. I couldn't believe that I was about to make my upcoming decision. I mean, they were right. Horror stories don't have to end badly.

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I could see Mrs. Harmon shaking her head from the side as I thought. I couldn't trust her. She called Abby here in the first place.

Mr. Harmon looked down at me and smile. We looked at each other, his hand on my shoulder, his other hand holding the book. I smiled at the both of them and reached for the book. I felt the book. It was so alive. I felt the weight of power it held. So much power.

I held the book and nodded to it. "I pledge my loyalty." I then ran forward and jumped off the remaining part of the floor. I heard Mr. Harmon and Abby screaming, 'no!'

The book opened and closed as I fell.

When I hit the floor, it was like it came to life and tried to escape the tight grip I had on it.

I heard so many screams, so many moans, and sounds I'd never heard before in my life. I held on as tight as I could as the flames surrounded us. The book began to catch fire, and the screams got louder by the second.

Everyone was looking down at me. The paintings began to fall off the remaining wall and onto the floor next to me, burning alongside everything else. My skin burned but, before it got to my face, I looked up at everyone. "I pledge my loyalty to my friends and family."

The book exploded in my hands. The last thing I remembered seeing was the bodies

of humans standing all around me. Some scary looking, some with faces, some distorted, some headless, all of the sort there were. I felt my eyes melting and my face burning away.

I saw eyes surround me for a second then heard something before my fate.

"And we pledge loyalty to you," the voices said.

My face then returned to its normal state. I took a deep breath and looked around. No one was around me. The mansion wasn't on fire. In fact, it was completely perfect again. There wasn't much light, just the moonlight.

A figure stepped forward in front of me. It was Mrs. Harmon. She smiled then hugged me.

"You saved us!" she said. Sadly, I pushed her away.

"You called her! You knew about Abby didn't you?" I asked. I was still a bit dizzy and trying to take in everything that was happening.

"Of course I knew. But I also knew you'd do what you did. I had so much faith in you. You set us free," she said.

I placed my hand on my chest. There was a heartbeat. "My heart! I'm alive?"

She nodded. "The dead gave you that, and that's something that's never been done."

"Violet said she didn't die," I told her. "Before I hit her with the axe she told me she didn't die." That felt awkward to say.

"What she meant was that her life was stolen," Mrs.

Harmon said.

"My husband would paint pictures of our daughter, beautiful and calm one second, then evil the next. The box of ashes were all fake. There was no mix up in the ashes; it was my husband's doing that turned everyone so scary and sinister. I guess the ashes was a distraction to cover up the real reason on how to stop him."

"How do we stop the book?"

Mrs. Harmon looked at me then turned her head. There was a light that shone outside of the house. "They want to see you now." She said.

Mrs.

Harmon opened the front door, and I saw my family and friends and everyone.

Their faces were full of light, and all of them looked so happy.

Violet stepped into the house, followed by everyone else who played the game even Rosemary.

She was a victim of Mr.

Harmon's sacrifices, and she finally got to walk into the light. They looked so normal. Even the masked children, they weren't masked, they were beautiful little kids; two boys and a girl.

Everyone shone like the moon.

"We're safe now, Emily. Don't worry about us," she said.

She then waved goodbye to me and walked outside into the light.

Her body then lightly rose into the air.

Everyone else waved goodbye and followed her.

Caleb took our parents' hands, and they left into the light too. Only Mrs. Harmon and I were left.

"What happened to Mr. Harmon and Abby?" I asked.

"Look behind you," she said.

The book was there. It seemed like a regular black book now. As I walked toward it, Mrs. Harmon stopped me.

"Don't open it; once you read it, you'll develop an obsession. An unhealthy obsession." She winked at me.

I gave her a smile as I picked it up. "This needs to be hidden from the rest of the world."

"Yes, it does. Hopefully, you do better than the person who tried to hide it last," she said.

"I wonder who that was," I said.

The light outside began to fade.

"May we meet again," she said before running off into the last bit of light.

I was there, left alone in the dark with the book before I saw a car pull up in front of the house. The headlights shone in my eyes. I walked outside. The person ran out of the car then toward me for a hug. I hugged her back, almost wanting to cry my eyes

out.

"It's okay. I know everything," my grandma said.

We walked to the car.

Once I was sitting in the front seat of the car, the mansion was nothing but a pile of rubble as if it had been burned to the ground, much like I had tried to do.

Nothing remained but wood, glass, and ashes from the stuff in the house.

I looked at the house once more before we took off.

My grandma explained to me that she had a dream that I was in trouble.

That she contacted the police and they told her everything.

I guessed when she said that she knew everything she only meant about my parents.

She knew nothing about what happened here.

She even asked about Caleb.

I had a long story to tell her.

But before I told her I asked her if we can stop somewhere. By the lake.

"Dear reader, if you have found this book then I advise you to contact this number: 803-667-2323. There will be a 7,000 dollar reward if you return the book unread to me. I will know if you read it. Trust me."

That was the best that my fourteen-year-old mind could do.

I placed the letter in the front of the book while closing my eyes.

I then closed the book, wrapped it tightly with duck-tape, wrapped it in many bags, and threw in a huge stone.

When we got to the lake, I stepped into the water and tossed the book as far as I could.

I hoped that years from now, no one would find that book because if someone found it, all hell would be unleashed once again.
