



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



**A contest for amateur writers of all ages.**

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# Table of Contents

## AGES SIX TO EIGHT

<b>FIRST PLACE: Don't Be Afraid</b> , by Annie Jones .....	5
<b>SECOND PLACE: The Dream</b> , by Hennie Wu .....	7
<b>THIRD PLACE: Anabel and Her Family</b> , by Amy Sweek .....	9
<b>Death of the Dark Angels</b> , by Dylan Farnsworth .....	10
<b>The Light at Night</b> , by William Johnson .....	11
<b>No Tears or Sweat, Just Blood</b> , by Sonika Khosla .....	14
<b>The Girl in the Hole</b> , by Fin Little .....	17
<b>The Passage</b> , by Sarah Sweek.....	18
<b>The Old and Spooky Amusement Park</b> , by Levi Teck .....	20
<b>Rise of the Scary Yellow Moon</b> , by Thadeus Walsh .....	21

## AGES NINE TO TWELVE

<b>FIRST PLACE: The Silisk And Madeline</b> , by Sierra Farnsworth .....	24
<b>SECOND PLACE: Don't Go Into Jackson's Room</b> , by Acacia Sack .....	26
<b>THIRD PLACE: Hall-O'Ween</b> , by Adarsh Payyakkil .....	29
<b>The Shadow</b> , by Tyler Cox .....	30
<b>Death and Other Inconveniences</b> , by Evan Grubb .....	31
<b>Howls in the Night</b> , by Aidan Johnson.....	32
<b>The Legend of the Haunted Castle</b> , by Tiran Little .....	35
<b>The The Jack in the Box</b> , by Raven Myhre.....	36
<b>The The Bat Cave</b> , by Aubrey Petersen.....	37

## AGES THIRTEEN TO SEVENTEEN

<b>FIRST PLACE: The Confession of Curtis Kupine</b> , by Adeleine Grubb .....	40
<b>SECOND PLACE: The Job</b> , by Chris Knebel.....	41
<b>The Pumpkin Queen</b> , by Nicole Knebel.....	44
<b>Mila- A Story Told by Spirits</b> , by Olivia Chatfield-Scott .....	46
<b>A Drifter's Story</b> , by Natasha Crowe .....	47
<b>The Library</b> , by Mary Failing .....	49
<b>House on the Hill</b> , by Andrew Teck .....	51

**AGES EIGHTEEN AND ABOVE**

**FIRST PLACE: Mrs. Whittiker's Cat**, by Craig Hartsough .....54  
**SECOND PLACE: Mr. Thirsty**, by Kelvin L. Woelk .....56  
**THIRD PLACE: For Sale or Lease**, by E.A. Summers .....58  
**Penny Drive**, by Emily Alligood .....60  
**The Beast**, by Nick Armstrong .....62  
**Eve**, by Ivan Bliminse .....65  
**Stairway to Hell**, by Stina Branson .....68  
**The Corn Man**, by Jared Fowles .....70  
**The Season(ing) of Beer**, by Steve Heller .....72  
**A Stranger's Visit**, by Ken Martin .....74  
**The Dark**, by Cory Parks .....76  
**Motley's Last Throw**, by Sarah Reichert .....78  
**The Animal Within**, by Randy Reynolds .....80  
**The Unexpected Visitor**, by Susan Rumph .....82  
**American Harvesters**, by James Sack .....84  
**The Graveyard**, by Marika Ujvari .....87

## **Ages Six to Eight**

AGES SIX TO EIGHT FIRST PLACE:

## **Don't Be Afraid, by Annie Jones**

Sophie was eight years old. She loved the color pink. She hated ghost stories. They gave her the creeps.

Tonight her friend Kayla was over for a tent sleepover in her back yard. Kayla always wanted to tell ghost stories. After telling Sophie a tale of blood, brains, and eyeballs Kayla went right to sleep and didn't see or hear a thing .... But Sophie did.

She could hear the crunching of leaves and the snapping of twigs. She curled up in a ball inside her sleeping bag and zipped it up so tight that only her eyes were peeking out. "Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid." she kept telling herself. But she could hear footsteps coming closer and closer. Soon she saw a shadow outside the tent wall. It slowly grew larger and larger and the figure looked like it had some sort of wig on it's head. The zipper of the tent door began to wiggle. Sophie started to panic. She couldn't move a muscle. She was completely frozen in fear as she watched the zipper unzip all the way. Suddenly the flap was pulled back and much to Sophie's relief, she found out it was only her mother who had just come back from the grocery store and wanted to check on them.

Sophie's Mom didn't look like herself. Her shirt was dirty, her pants were ripped and her hair was a big mess. She did not look happy at all. Sophie said, "What happened Mother? Are you alright?" Her Mom said, "I went shopping and fell. I did a face plant for no reason. It was the weirdest thing. All of my groceries flew everywhere. It was almost as if someone had tripped me but no one was around except an old woman across the street. She had a wart on the right side of her nose and I could have sworn I heard her cackle. And when we locked eyes her mouth broke into an evil smile. She had a hundred teeth in her mouth, ninety nine of them were white and one was yellow." "Do you think she was a witch?!" said Sophie. "She must have been," said her Mother "because she suddenly blew up, turned into fire and completely vanished." "Well, I'm glad you're okay!" said Sophie. "Me too. Goodnight dear. See you in the morning." Sophie's mother left and went into the house.

Sophie began to realize that she was very tired, but she had to calm down her beating heart. "Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid," she again told herself. Soon, she fell asleep.

Usually when Sophie slept outside in her tent, she would wake up when she heard birds chirping. But this morning was different. She woke up to the sound of Kayla screaming. It was a terrifying scream but it also sounded muffled. Sophie jumped out of her sleeping bag and saw that Kayla was completely tied up in a spider web. She was cocooned so tightly that she couldn't move an inch. And yet she was moving ..... Sophie could see a giant spider slowly dragging her victim away.

Sophie tried to kill the spider with her shoe, her flashlight, anything she could find but each time she hit it, the spider grew bigger and bigger. Soon the spider was as large as a skyscraper. Sophie watched in horror as it drank her best friend's blood. Then, slowly, the spider looked

back, locked eyes with Sophie and smiled an evil smile with ninety-nine white teeth and one yellow tooth. Now it was truly time to be afraid!

AGES SIX TO EIGHT SECOND PLACE:

## **The Dream, by Hennie Wu, age 8**

“Are you asleep yet?”

“Yes.”

That night, when Serenity was about to nod off to sleep, she heard some howling and booing coming from the forest next to her house. She got up and lumbered over to the window. She couldn't see or hear anything, so she went back to sleep. Then, a flashing light came from the forest. So she got up to investigate again, but again there was nothing. Overcome by curiosity, Serenity stayed for a while at the window. There was a flashing light again. “Weird,” Serenity thought, “Very weird.”

Finally, she made up her mind. Even though her parents had warned her to always stay away from the forest, she wanted to go in it. Throwing on her coat and grabbing a flashlight, she raced out of her house. Everywhere was dark. Even the moon was a new moon. She saw the dim light easily, the light that was in the forest. Following it, Serenity suppressed a shudder. As the light led her deeper into the forest, her flashlight flickered feebly. “Please don't go out!” Serenity whispered.

The flashlight didn't go out. But Serenity's shudder came out. She had just felt a tap on her shoulder. As she turned around, her flashlight went on-off-on-off. Dropping it on the snowy ground, Serenity narrowed her eyes and tried to see through the dark. Soon, shadows of everything came to her. She saw no one behind her. “I need to go home,” Serenity thought desperately. She started running, but tripped over a rock. As Serenity lifted her head, a door shone brightly in the air in front of her. Putting her hand on the doorknob, she hesitated. Should she open the door? Maybe not. Yes? Or no? Yes? No? “No,” she decided. When Serenity turned her head, the door creaked open a little. It sounded like it hadn't been opened for years, all rusty. Considering again, she looked at the open door. A little voice in her head said, “GO IN!!!” but Serenity thought about it still. Yes? Or no? No? Or yes? Yes? No? “Yes!” Serenity thought finally. Entering the room, she found herself in a room where everything is upside down. A rocking chair was rocking back and forth, back and forth, and a clock was ticking away happily. She decided to leave the room, but when she turned she saw a doll trapped in... a thing. Just something. She couldn't describe what it was like. And it was BLINKING AT HER! Finding a mirror, she saw herself upside down. She pushed at the mirror in horror. Without knowing it, Serenity had pushed herself in to the room of mirrors. She started pushing all of them, trying to get out, but they would't do anything. She was trapped. She sat down against one of the mirrors, pushing her back against it. Then all she remembered was herself falling through darkness...

Waking up, Serenity found herself sweating; laying on her bed. “Serenity Penelope Jocelyn!” her mother called. “How many times do I have to call you down?”

Then Serenity realized, as she was getting out of bed, it was all a dream. but then she stepped on something on the floor. It was the doll! Staring at it, Serenity backed away from it in fear. She tossed it into her trash can, and went downstairs. When she came back from school, the doll was

gone. She felt very relieved, but that night she had the same dream. When she awoke, the doll was on the foot of her bed again. This time, she threw it out of the window. Then she went to sleep. However, she had the same dream again, and again. She had that dream for a week. On the seventh night, she finally decided to take the doll to the forest for real. The moon had changed a little bit, so it shone off some light on her way to the heart of the forest. She placed the doll into a hole in the ground. When she turned around, about to leave, she heard the creaking sound of the door opening. She curiously stepped in, and saw the doll trapped in the thing again. This time she tore the thing off, and ran out off the forest as fast as she could.

Second day morning when she woke up, the first thing she did was looked at the floor next to her bed. There's no sign of the doll.

The End

AGES SIX TO EIGHT THIRD PLACE:

## **Anabel and Her Family, by Amy Sweek, age 7**

Anabel was riding in the back of the car on the way to the new cabin she and her family were moving to. Once they were there Anabel jumped out of the car before any other family members and ran into the house. She was amazed by the look of the house and she loved it. She really wanted to unpack her toys and play in her playroom and decorate her bedroom.

Once the rest of her family had gotten out of the car they all took a tour of the house. After the tour they started unpacking but Anabel was getting in the way! So, her parents told her to go outside and play.

When she got outside she was surprised, the garden was full of vines that looked at her and snapped at her, and of strawberries that had smiley faces on them and they started talking to her. She tried to get her parents to come out with her to the garden but they were still busy unpacking. So she played with the plants. Soon her parents called her in for dinner. It was spaghetti, one of her favorite foods. After dinner she brushed her teeth, and put on her pajamas. Then her mom and dad tucked her into bed.

While she was falling asleep she heard foot steps above her room so she got out of bed and tiptoed up stairs to the attic to see what was up there. It was a bunch of big fluffy spiders that were all smiling at her, and cuddly bats that opened their wings and hugged her. She stayed in the attic and played with the bats and the spiders for a little bit. Then she went back to bed.

In the morning she asked her parents to come see the animals in the attic. Her parents went with her to the attic and then they all played together with the spiders and bats and it was really fun. Anabel asked her parents to come see the garden with her. When they got to the garden they taught the snap vines not to bite them and talked to the strawberries. Then it was time to wash the clothes.

When they got to the laundry room they found the laundry ghosts. The ghosts asked the family to wash them. Then the ghosts jumped into the washing machine and Anabel started it. After the ghosts were all clean, and while they were drying, the family put their clothes in the washing machine and when the ghosts were dry the family hung up their clothes. While they were waiting for their clothes to dry, they played with all the nice animals and plants in the house.

It was very fun living with all the animals and plants that lived in the house. They played with them every day. The family asked the spiders and bats what they ate and the spiders and bats said that they ate bugs. So the family, at breakfast time, went out in the front yard and caught the bats and spiders each a little container of bugs to eat. Then the family ate their breakfast.

They lived in the house forever, it was really fun, and everyone was happy.

The End

## **Death of the Dark Angels, by Dylan Farnsworth, age 6**

My name is Dylan, one day me and my friend Zion went down into our dark basement. It had a small storage room with a crushed door, no one knows what lived there. Me and my friend went into that hall and once we went into that hall you wouldn't believe what we saw! We saw doorways and small trees. We went through a door with a skeleton on it. Once we were inside that door we found the craziest things you would ever believe, monsters were everywhere! There was one that was very blue, tall, and fat. It had a long tubed mouth and its eyes did not have any pupils, they were just black. When it folded part of its tube like mouth back there were very sharp teeth. There were a bunch of these monsters around me and there were also barking dogs. There were also street signs hanging over our heads that read "Beware the dark angels are here. They could take your weapons. Hunt monsters as soon as you can." Me and my friend tore back out of the hall and ran up the stairs and looked for things to hunt monsters with. I grabbed two Nerf guns, we made special kits with things we thought would be good. We had Walkie Talkies that worked better than phones, we brought in small surprises just in case (for instance: a pack of water balloons to throw and small flash lights that produced bright beams of light, some monsters can die from light). This was it, we went down into my basement to start hunting the monsters. But the monsters were all hidden, all we saw were dark angles creeping along the hall. They looked like people in dark robes holding B.B. guns, but it was really scary because their faces looked like a gray skeletons. They shot their B.B. from the guns but our Nerf guns broke their B.B guns in half. We reached into our pocket and took out little metal balls. When we pushed a button the balls unfolded to look like pine beetles, their backs were silver and their eyes were green. When the beetles raised their arms they could shoot out a grappling hook. My little bug was named Ralph and Zion's was named Fred. The grappling hooks shot out and gripped onto the dark angles cloaks. The bug crawled onto the dark angles heads and burrowed down into their hair. One of the bug's legs could turn into a knife to cut out a piece of flesh, but it doesn't hurt. The bugs dived down into the dark angles heads and grabbed their brains and then went all the way into the stomach. The bugs were so special they could not be eaten up by the stomach acid. They found the dark angles heart and made changes so the dark angles could not hurt us anymore. Finally the monsters came out! Zion and I threw small white torpedoes with orange water balloons on the side and these exploded with water. When the water hit the monsters, the monsters evaporated.

End of chapter one.

## **The Light at Night, by William Johnson, age 8**

John Fridy, a blond boy with a red sweater, black boots, and blue jeans, was walking down the sandy beach when he spotted a lighthouse, and nearby a little white building. He went to the white building and knocked on the door. A tall man with black hair and gray eyes opened the door and grinned. John was surprised to see it was a store.

“My name is Fred. What do you want?”

“My father wanted to know who runs the lighthouse.”

“No one,” said the man.

“But my father sees the light go on every night.”

“Well I don’t know if you’re right or not but I’ll keep my eyes open just in case.” Then he slammed the door and locked it.

“Well, that was strange. One minute he’s really kind and the next he slams the door in your face!” thought John.

Then he began to walk home. When he got home John told his father what the man had said. That night John looked out his window. He spotted a bright light coming from the lighthouse. He waited and waited. When the clock struck midnight the light turned off.

“Strange,” thought John. The next morning was the same: get up, eat breakfast, and get the mail. Today he got a letter from his best friend Toby. The letter said this, “Last night I saw a bright light shining through my window. It was coming from the beach. Do you know what it is? Your best friend, Toby.”

John hopped on his bike and rode to Toby’s house. When he got there, he got off his bike and knocked on the door. A black haired boy with red overalls and a stained shirt answered the door. The two boys shook hands.

“Come in, come in,” said Toby.

“Thanks,” said John. “I got your letter about the lighthouse.”

“My letter didn’t say anything about a lighthouse!” said Toby. “Do you mean the strange light was the lighthouse?”

“Yes,” said John. “Yesterday I saw a little house right by the lighthouse. In the house there was a man. He said no one ran the lighthouse, but last night I saw the light too!”

“Well, this is a mystery John. Should I tell my dad?”

“No, I think we’ve got this, and if you told your dad he wouldn’t believe you.” The two boys sat in some armchairs in Toby’s backyard and thought.

“I have an idea!” shouted John. “We could tell our dads we want to go to the beach until midnight. That would give us enough time to look around.”

“I’ll have to ask my dad if I can go,” said Toby.

“I know my dad will let me go.”

“Okay, bye!”

When the clock struck five, John asked his dad about the playdate. At 6 o’clock, John met Toby at the beach. Suddenly, John noticed that there was another little head right by him.

Toby explained, “My dad said I had to bring my sister Jane.”

Toby’s sister was six, while Toby and John were nine and ten.

“How are we going to do this with your little sister? She is definitely going to have nightmares!” said John.

“No, I’m not! And what are you talking about?” asked Jane.

And so the day went on. When the clock struck eight John said, “It’s time.”

“For what?” asked Jane. “Is it time to go home already?”

“No, we go home at midnight,” said Toby.

“Good thing we brought flashlights!” said Jane.

Toby and John started walking towards the lighthouse. Jane skipped behind them. When they reached the lighthouse, John slowly opened the door and peeked around the corner. Toby thought he heard footsteps, but he didn’t tell John.

Jane asked, “Are we allowed to go in here?”

“No,” said John.

Jane’s eyes got big. The three carefully walked up the twisty stairs. John and Toby felt excited. Jane was scared. When they reached the top, each one took up a flashlight and hid in the corner. They waited. They heard footsteps. The door began to creak. John saw the doorknob turn slowly. A dark shadow walked into the room.

John softly counted to three, then he and Toby jumped out! Jane hid in the corner still. John and Toby were surprised to see the man was Fred from the store.

“What are you doing up here?” asked John.

Jane asked “Should we call the police?”

“The police?!” said Fred. “I’m just trying to look for the boats! I’ll explain. My wife and my son are on a ship that has been lost, and I’m trying to look for them so they can find land.”

“I know what to do,” said Jane. “We could call the Coast Guard. Maybe they could find the lost boat.”

“Good idea!” said Fred. “I never thought of that.”

John and Toby ran home and called the Coast Guard from Toby’s house. When the Coast Guard arrived, they got into their boat and went out to sea. Fred went up the lighthouse again and turned on the light.

Toby asked Fred, “Why did you keep it a secret?”

“Because I didn’t want anyone to think I was mad. People say the boat crashed, but I don’t believe them.”

A few minutes later, they heard a big giant boat coming onto the beach along with the Coast Guard. A woman and a boy ran off. The woman was Fred’s wife, and the boy was his son. Now that the family was back together, Jane asked Fred, “Will you still run the lighthouse?”

“No,” said Fred. “I think I’m good. No ship lost at sea now!”

So Toby and Jane went home, and John did too. That night when John looked out his window at 7 o’clock, he did not see a bright light. “Good,” he thought, “Fred kept his promise.”

## **No Tears or Sweat, Just Blood, by Sonika Khosla, age 8**

Anabeth Jones was a regular girl, living in a regular house, she had regular parents, a regular dog, a not so regular little brother, living in a regular neighborhood. She was eight years old and was rather troublesome. She tried not to be, but she couldn't help it. Anabeth's friend, Gennifer, was the exact opposite of Anabeth. She had glossy nails, had a different hair style everyday, was in LOVE with Taylor Swift's newest hit, and ... well, you get the idea. You can call them Gigi and Anna. Well, enough explaining, I'm getting bored, bored bored. Just like Anna on a rainy Saturday morning sitting at the window sill.

"I'm BOOOOOORED," yelled Anna, for what seemed like the thousandth time.

"Deal with it," her mother said.

"You could read a book, draw a picture, write a story, paint rocks, play with that archeological dig I gave you four years ago."

"No, no and no," Anna said sheepishly, while trying to do a handstand against the couch. "Can we get a trampoline," asked Anna.

"Of course not," her mother said, dropping the dish towel.

"Geez, you guys are BOOOOOORING."

"I'm going to Gigi's house," Anna said, rushing to the door, whacking her brother, Tom in the face. She grabbed her coat, ran all the way to the other neighborhood and rang Gigi's doorbell.

"Come in," Gigi said, running to the door, while tripping in her high heels, "I was just going to go walking. Wanna, come?"

"Sure", Anna said. On their fourth round around the neighborhood, Anna found a hundred dollar bill and this is where the trouble began.

They decided to go to the mall. When they got there, Gigi remembered, they hadn't told their parents. Anna convinced Gigi, everything would be fine. Then Gigi saw a billboard.

"Hey, look," said Gigi absorbed in the picture, "there's a scary movie that's starting now!".

Anna was there before you could say scary.

"What movie is it?" asked Anna rapidly.

"Let's go in", said Gigi impatiently.

They watched the movie and by the time they finished, Anna's hair was standing on end, and Gigi was hiding beneath her seat.

They got home and her parents noticed that Anna was acting weird. She got easily startled, slept with her flashlight on, and was really quiet most of the time staring into space. Anna knew she

had done the wrong thing, she was scared but couldn't tell her parents without getting in trouble. She kept reminding herself that all of it was fiction, until a few days later on Oct 31st, Halloween night.

The two went trick or treating in the evening, and got so engrossed in collecting candy that they wandered further and further away from home. Somewhere along the way they got goofy. As they saw a few cracks on the road, they started chanting, "Don't step on the crack, you'll break your back".

"Oh, I'm so scared", Gigi laughed sarcastically getting ready to leap onto a crack.

"Do it, do it", Anna dared her.

When Gigi jumped on a crack, she felt as if snakes were slithering down her back. She collapsed as a streak of pain shot through her as her bones rattled out of place.

"Gigi!" Anna shouted scrambling to her side.

"I think I broke my back," Gigi finally managed to say.

Just then an old man came.

"Maybe he can help us," Anna thought.

Anna called him over and he gave Gigi a green liquid.

"Look away," he ordered to Anna.

While Anna turned around he slipped out a knife and stabbed Gigi. She yelped a blood curdling scream. Anna turned around to find the old man staggering towards her. She was forced to run before she met the same fate as Gigi. She ran and ran. The higher the moon rose the louder the wolves howls echoed.

Suddenly Anna noticed a pale figure coming towards her. She was too tired to run any longer, so she sat down and watched. As the figure came closer and closer, it became clearer and clearer to Anna what it was. The figure looked eerily similar to Gigi, yet Anna could see through it. Anna horrifically realized it was the ghost of Gigi. The ghost smiled but soon her smile faded away and turned into an angry frown.

"Why did you abandon me when you knew I was hurt?" said Gigi's ghost. "Why did you dare me to step on the crack at all?" cried Gigi.

"I-I didn't mean to", Anna stuttered. "It was just for fun".

"I was always there for you, and this is what you give me in return", boomed Gigi. "You will PAY!"

All Anna wanted to do was for the day to start over. She could make everything right. If only she could turn back the time. But she also wanted to be safe as she knew her wish was impossible. She turned around and sprinted towards what seemed like home. After a while she

slowed down to find blood on the concrete. That must have been where Gigi died. Just thinking of Gigi made her shiver. She started running again and her thoughts wandered towards the events of that night. Anna stopped dead in her tracks as she realized that all of the events of this horrible night have been a replay of the movie she'd watched. She heard the midnight church bells ringing. Just then she felt something pulling her. Anna turned around to see the familiar mist of Gigi's ghost.

She pulled away as hard as she could and then ... she sat up with a start, safe but confused, in her bed. Her heart was still beating wildly. She looked at her bedroom clock and it was 11:59 pm.

"Thank goodness, it was all just a dream," Anna thought, still looking at her clock. Just then the midnight bells started ringing again. Anna's closet door creaked open and she saw a ghostly hand reaching out ....

## **The Girl in the Hole, by *Fin Little, age 6***

Once a boy named Griffin had a nightmare. In the nightmare his family was on a long vacation at a hotel in Paris. His dad's name was Brian. His mom's name was Kathryn. His sister's name was Tiran.

The hotel had beds and stairs and it was dark and scary. There was a hole downstairs and the boy's dad looked in to the hole. He saw a girl and the girl climbed out. She had red hair. She was wearing a pink and purple and red dress. She was a little kid and she was a ghost. She said that her name was Stella. She was a little girl who wandered in to the hole. Her parents thought she was with them but she wasn't and they left without her. She turned in to a ghost in the hole.

The girl talked to the family. Her voice was high. She said she was so happy they looked in the hole because she could have died. She was sad to be in the hole. The family was scared when they saw her and the boy jumped into his dad's lap. Then the family went to bed. The girl watched the family until they fell asleep and then went back into the hole to sleep. She freaked the family out.

The next morning the family woke up. The girl came back out of the hole. The family said that they had to go get something to eat at the grocery store. They didn't really have to but they just wanted to get away from the girl. The girl watched the family until she couldn't see them anymore.

Finally the family went back to Colorado on a plane. The girl couldn't find the family for a bunch of days. The girl went back in to the hole after a lot of days. The family talked about how scary the girl was. They wanted to be nice to her but they just wanted to get away from her. They were afraid she would grab them and take them in to the hole.

When the family got back to Colorado there were other people that were going to that dark and scary hotel in Paris. The people looked in the same hole and the girl came out again. She said she was so happy that they were here because she almost died. She said there was another family here and that they left her. They weren't being nice because they left her. She had been in the hole a long time and wanted to get out.

The other family wanted to leave her too. The girl thought they weren't being nice either. They just wanted to get away. So she grabbed them and took them into the hole with her. She turned them into ghosts too. They had to go into the hole forever. The girl went back into the hole forever too. Then the boy woke up and found out it was all just a nightmare! He told his family all about the dream at dinner and they said it was really scary.

## **The Passage, by Sarah Sweek, age 8**

Madeline has just moved into the house at the end of Spooky Hallows Drive. Madeline is fidgety and is getting in her parents way so they say for her to go outside and since she is obedient, she goes outside .

When she goes outside, she goes into the forest beside her house. In the forest she sees a cat and decides to follow the cat. She does not know the cat is a vampire in disguise. Madeline follows the cat to a door out of nowhere. After she examines the door she leaves to tell her parents about the door, but they are too busy to come and see it.

The cat goes through the door, into his realm, and changes his disguise into looking like Madeline's dad.

Madeline goes back into the forest and goes to the spot where the door that came out of nowhere is. She goes in the door.

Inside the door is her house, or so she thinks. When she is looking around she finds her father, at least she thought it was her father, until she saw his red eyes. Her real father has green eyes.

The man who was not her father motioned for her to follow him and they went into a kitchen. Madeline could hardly believe her eyes. She saw a giant turkey and lots of other scrumptious food on the table. "Sit down please." said the man who looked like her father. Madeline sat down because she was very hungry. She asked for him to serve her and he served her what he thought she would like. She loved what he had picked for her. She loved it so much she had a second serving.

After dinner she brushed her teeth and went to a bedroom and went to sleep. The next morning she woke up, brushed her teeth again, and went downstairs for breakfast. She sat down at the table and ate some cereal and blueberries. Then she went to find the man who looked so much like her father.

Madeline found the man holding a blood covered girl and drinking her blood. Madeline stared at the sight in horror.

"What on Earth do you think you are doing!" she yelled.

The man looked up and stared at Madeline. He drops the body of the girl.

"What, I am a vampire." he says, "I need human blood to stay alive."

Still shocked, Madeline says "Well, I didn't know that!"

The vampire looks surprised. "I thought you did." he says. "You saw my red eyes and you did not act afraid, so I believed that you were accepting of my nature."

"Well, it's not like I have a problem with vampires, just the ones who kill people." Madeline says politely. "You should have told me you were a vampire right away and then I would have understood."

“So, can I finish my breakfast then?” he asks.

“No!” she says firmly, “You are not allowed to eat people!”

“But I need human blood to survive. I just told you that.”

“Well then, since she is already dead I suppose it would be less wasteful if you just finished her blood... But after this no more humans!”

“But how shall I live?” he asks politely.

“I’ve read all about vampire eating abilities, you can eat whatever you want you just have make a habit of it.”

“Really?” he asked. “I’ve always wanted to try other foods.” he said hopefully.

“Then it’s decided,” Madeline said, “you can come live with me and my family and we will feed you lots of good food and we will live happily ever after.”

So the vampire finishes his breakfast. He washes up, and packs a few of his favorite things, including a little plushie vampire.

He and Madeline go out the door out of nowhere and he changes into his true form which looks like a pale man in a tuxedo with a long flowing cape. Madeline smiles at him as the door disappears and they walk to her house.

When they arrive at the house at the end of Spooky Hallows Drive the vampire meets her parents and introduces himself as Cedric. Madeline’s parents seem to like Cedric just as much as she does and so he moves into the spare bedroom.

Cedric and Madeline have an excellent time learning to cook together and trying new foods and they do live happily ever after.

The End

## **The Old and Spooky Amusement Park, by Levi Teck, age 8**

We wanted to go to an amusement park but our parents would not take us. So I snuck out with my brother at midnight. It was super foggy and rainy, we could see something moving in the distance and we heard some weird noises in the distance. We found a stranger driving a car and we asked him if he could take us to the old and spooky amusement park. His laugh sent shivers down my back. He said I will take you there HAHAHAAAAAAAAHA... There was a dead body in the back seat! When he dropped us off at the amusement park at 1:30 A.M there was no one there except for a man in dark black. We got on to the roller coaster when we got to the highest point of the roller coaster we saw the man in dark black behind us. So we jumped out of the roller coaster and we didn't know how high we were and smack I fell right on my face and Andrew fell on me! When we woke up we were in some old western town jail! It was pretty beat up. But Andrew and I slept there for a couple of nights. There were skeletons and cobwebs everywhere, and mice running all around, and we did not know where we were, and it was raining, I could hear chains clanging together but we did not see anyone. We tried to find our way back home but instead we found the man in dark black. He said what are you kids doing up this late! We said we just woke up early so we were getting something to eat. When we tried to run away he stopped us! We were terrified; we did not know what to say. The man made us go back to the old and spooky amusement park. So we did. This time we tried the toilet bowl. In the middle of the ride we stopped! We were floating in mid air and we saw the man in dark black again. We fell on the ground again, I fell on my back oof I said I had many scars, and scrapes, and bruises. Then we fell in to a haunted school there was coffee and fruit punch and the teachers were all zombies. The teacher zombies were Mrs. Ghouley and Mr. Screammore! They chased us to the amusement park. This time we did drastic park then we went back in time to the year of dinosaurs! One of them tried to bite me but I dodged it. One of them had a really big neck so I climbed up its neck and slid down its tail but that lead me to a haunted office. It had witches, goblins, werewolves, and vampires in it. I was freaked OUT!!!!!!!!!! And then I somehow went back to the dinosaurs! And then there was one that was really tall so I climbed up to the top of its head and jumped down. I landed in a black hole and then I realized it was all a big AWESOME, SCARY, COOL, INSANLEY, COOL DREAM!

## **Rise of the Scary Yellow Moon, by Thadeus Walsh, age 6**

Yellow moons make slippers come to life and grow huge. (Yes, bedroom nighttime slippers!) Huge pink, white, and brown bunny slippers become EVIL.

At first, the evil slippers become giant. Their eyes glow, and if you have dinosaur or bunny slippers, their teeth snarl. This happens only on yellow moon nights when yellow moons are out in the nighttime sky.

Those fluffy, soft slippers (of all different shapes, sizes & colors) come out from under your bed, pitter-patter down the hall and out your front door. THAT'S when they become ALIVE! Their heart starts to beat, their muscles start to work, and their brain starts to think. After they're outside, they become bigger and bigger and bigger -- until they're giant! EVEN BIGGER THAN HOUSES!

All of the slippers come together after they're huge to gather together on White Willow Street. They don't have names, but they can tell who is who. They huddle together.

The largest white bunny slipper is the master. He has long hair and glowing red eyes. His teeth are long and very sharp. He steps out from the group and thumps his ears together to get everyone's attention.

He says, "DYNAMINE ANEEA! We are gathered here, awakened by the yellow moon. We have a mission."

The other slippers answer him calling, "Yes, Sir."

They make an evil plan and prepare. They launch their plan to crush Ft. Collins!

Very quietly, they march around the whole town crushing and stomping, stomping and crushing. They make their way to Old Town trying to crush everything they see. But, since they don't have feet they can really only bounce.

They meet at Old Town Square where they begin searching for ice cream. They look up and down the streets. They are hungry for the sweet treat.

They can't see it, but a ghost named John is spying on them from inside the only ice cream shop in Old Town Square.

John recognizes the master slipper. The white bunny slippers were once HIS VERY OWN SLIPPER! He is happy to see them, but knows what he needs to do.

He picks up his gun and goes outside. The gun is a magical gun that makes John and the gun invisible to the slippers.

John says, "STOP! Please, don't do this!"

John's voice is familiar to the slippers. They freeze and stop what they're doing. They see the ice cream shop and start to hop towards it.

Quickly, John uses his magical gun to shoot all of the slippers. One by one, the slippers shrink and turn back to normal. Pink, white, brown & blue tufts of fur float through the air when they shrink. Their eyes stop glowing and look kind again. Their teeth stop snarling and turn to smiles.

Just before the sun rises, the yellow moon turns white. The slippers hop back through the streets and return to their owner's bedrooms. Up the stairs and down the hall, they hide under the bed until morning – exactly where they were left. Their owners wake up and put them on - never even knowing where their slippers have been.

The End.

## **Ages Nine to Twelve**

AGES NINE TO TWELVE FIRST PLACE:

## **The Silisk And Madeline, by Sierra Farnsworth, age 10**

Silisks generally like hanging out way down deep in the ocean depths, which is why no one has ever seen them. Silisks are good at hiding and blending in; they live in ocean trenches where no one has ever ventured. They have horns; some curly like a rams, some straight and pointy, and gills sticking out of the sides of their heads. Their eyes are big and slanting like aliens and their nose is two slits. Their fingers and toes are webbed and they have two sharp wing-like fins sticking on their sides. The creature we're talking about now, led a normal life, with food, water, a family and a home range. But there was something special about this particular Silisk, he had an uncanny knack for getting into trouble. But I've said enough.

Now about a girl who just happens to be on a cruise boat for the first time in her life, though her father was a sailor. "Madeline is there anything I can get you?" her mother asked. Madeline, whose pretty face had gone slightly green, shook her head and leaned farther over the railing of the yacht. Her golden curls swung forwards to hide her face. Madeline's mother's eyebrows furrowed over her small, but kind hazel eyes and long nose. "She'll be fine," said Madeline's father a stout man with a long black beard and bald, sunburnt head "Sailing gets some getting used to." Still worried, Madeline's mother went into their cabin. People all around them laughed and gossiped. Madeline's father looked out to sea with his soft blue gray eyes and clapped Madeline's shoulder, nearly making her vomit over the edge. That's when the Silisk noticed her. Perhaps it was that her face was now green like the sea monsters and he had mistaken her for his own species just more beautiful, or that, in his life he had never seen a human, let alone a child. Whatever the reason, he had to get to her. That's why he came to the surface and revealed himself to a human for the first time.

At first when everybody saw the Silisk, they thought it was their imaginations and then, as he swam up to the side of the boat, everyone realized the truth. Needless to say it didn't help when his family came to the surface and called him back in harsh croaky voices. At first there was silence and then someone screamed and everyone turned to look and then... AAAAAH! Everyone was yelling and some people were running away, some turning towards the side of the boat harpoons at the ready or guns drawn. Madeline stood paralyzed in the middle of the crowd still at the edge of the boat. Her mother was screaming trying to pull her away and her father stood at the side of the ship aiming an arrow at the Silisk, "Aliens!" Madeline's mother screamed, losing control completely and abandoning her daughter to scurry to safety. It was pandemonium.

Then a hush fell over the crowd, the Silisk had climbed onto the deck and everyone had backed away except for a few brave sailors including Madeline's father and Madeline herself. The Silisk bared his teeth at Madeline who turned white and then Madeline's father stepped up, "You are not welcome monster!" he roared, a wild look in his eyes "Go back to where you came from!" the Silisk gurgled but did not move so Madeline's father drew back his bow and open fired. It happened as if in slow motion Madeline now turned white and dove in front of the Silisk her skirts flapping in the wind. A gasp issued from the onlookers as the arrow pierced Madeline's arm and she fell like a feather over the railing of the ship into the water. The Silisk did what is

natural, he dove after her. Madeline's father gave a roar of outrage and launched himself over the side of the boat. For a second it was all thrashing limbs in the water and then Madeline's head slowly sunk out of sight into the sea. So did the Silisks. "It took her!" Madeline's mother cried and now completely crazy jumped over the side of the boat. But then something amazing happened, the Silisk returned to the surface clutching Madeline and pulled the arrow out of her arm. Madeline's eyes were closed and her breathing had become ragged. The crowd watched the Silisk sink his teeth into her arm. "No!" The cry was echoed on all sides but then something even more amazing happened. The wound closed and healed and all that was left was a tiny scar. Then the Silisk swam to the boat and placed Madeline gently on deck and went back for Madeline's parents, desperately trying to keep afloat, and lay them next to their daughter. Then the Silisk sank out of sight along with his family, who had been watching in silence, back into the depths of the sea. Everyone was quiet. Then Madeline's mother began crying. Madeline's father got to his feet and looked out to sea. "Wonderful," he murmured and once again his gray eyes danced with light. Then Madeline opened her eyes. At first no one noticed but then "Madeline!" Madeline's mother yelled "Madeline can you hear me?" to many people's surprise Madeline responded with equal enthusiasm. "Oh yes mother, oh yes the most amazing thing happened!"

Madeline's mother got up and hugged her and Madeline's father walked over and did the same. Madeline knew she would always remember the monster and as she looked at her scar she muttered "well, he wasn't half bad." So that ends our journey with Madeline. She sailed back home and went on many sea voyages in her life, though none as exciting. As for the Silisk, for once his family wasn't lecturing him. Only occasionally did he rise to the surface again but he never met another human like Madeline.

AGES NINE TO TWELVE SECOND PLACE:

## **Don't Go Into Jackson's Room**, by *Acacia Sack*, age 9

My advice is that you don't go to my next door neighbor's house. It looks fine on the outside, but on the inside you can feel that there is something wrong with it. The creepy feeling is coming back to me while I walk through the door. But, if tonight is a success, hopefully this will be the last time I feel this way.

I hear a car pulling up in the driveway. Could our heroes have arrived? The ladies come in with their tools that everybody is hoping will connect with the spirit. They start setting up the equipment so they can be ready to convince the see-through creature to leave this house once and for all. Fear hangs in the air.

I look around this two-bedroom, old-style house, built in the 1920's. A picture of Jackson and me sits on the end table next to the sofa in the living room. It shows the multi-colored orb next to Jackson's head, just as with many of the other pictures. Jackson's parents have tried to make the house look normal. They've painted each room in the house a different bright hue. The troubled room is an annoying shiny blue and that is where the equipment is set up. Two cameras on tripods will try to detect motion, while a microphone will attempt to record voices. A Ouija board is held by one of the ladies, as she patiently gets to asking the spirit its name and story.

We soon learn that it is not one spirit, but two. They are brothers and died from tuberculosis in the 1930's. They are sorry for scaring Jackson, chasing the dogs out of the room regularly, and waking up Jackson's dad every night at 2 a.m. sharp. All they want to do is play, they say. As we get to know the story of the boys, our fear melts away and we become sympathetic for them.

From our perspective, this has been easier than I thought. Jackson's family is relieved, and so am I. The two boys have been urged to move on, and even if they stay, we will understand. However, I look again at the one woman's face, and she is deeply troubled.

"I'm afraid our work isn't done," she says in a hollow voice. "There is a grown man's spirit behind the front door." She begins trembling. Her partner grabs the Ouija board and immediately goes to work, communicating with the dead man. Only a few minutes pass and she looks up. We all understand her body language. Shivers spread throughout my body.

She abruptly packs the board away, and begins gathering her belongings. We ask what is going on. "I've never encountered a spirit so angry, so dangerous," she says in a cracking voice. "I've asked him to leave this house, but he won't." She continues, almost in a panic now. "I've asked him if he would ever hurt anybody here in the house." She doesn't complete her sentence.

Urging the women to stay and work more with the evil dead man is not an option. They've been spooked and they want to leave immediately. My dad, who was scared of ghosts before this, is putting my coat on for me and pushing me to go. The thought of having to leave this house, passing by the dead man, is a sick feeling. My chest feels like it is going to cave in, as I pass by. We exit into the cool night air, and go back home.

Six years later, Jackson, his three brothers and sisters, his mom and dad, and their two large dogs, all sleep in their parent's bedroom, in that same house. The two boys and evil man still reside there, as well.

AGES NINE TO TWELVE THIRD PLACE:

## **Hall-O'ween, by Adarsh Payyakkil, age 9**

My name is Brady and I'm in fourth grade. I live with my parents and my ultra-annoying sister. We often play funny pranks on each other, but her pranks are no match for mine because mine are based on R.L. Stine's Goosebumps series.

I love reading horror stories. My parents want me to read different genres, but I always read horror stories. They do scare me, at times. When I am scared I write down the words that plop into my head and then my fear vanishes.

My friend, Darren, dared me \$15 to sign up for a Halloween adventure. "That is a lot of money", I thought. My parents encouraged me to take part and said it would "build character". All I thought about was the \$15 Darren would give me if I signed up. So, I did.

The day of the adventure dawned. Soon after my school Halloween party, I rushed off for the adventure, dressed up as a Grim Reaper.

There was this large creepy building at the corner of my street. I had never even ventured near it. I realized that this is where I had to go. I was terrified, but wondered what was in there.

As I walked toward the towering building, I saw faces peeking out of windows from the nearby houses and they looked frightened. I was beginning to think that this wasn't such a good idea after all. As I neared the building, I felt beads of sweat sweep through my hair. The building's window panes were dark and foreboding and I could picture thick spider webs dangling on the towering roof. Was it my imagination? No, I actually saw a ghostly face appear in one the windows. It had a murderous look in its eyes. I heard a click of a button or was that a small cackle, I was not sure.

Uncertainly, I knocked at the door. It creaked open automatically. I felt afraid but I still went in. The door closed behind me. I felt trapped. I saw other kids dressed up in their Halloween costumes wandering around the alleyways. I never expected to see so many kids trapped in the building just like me. I cursed myself for agreeing to sign up for this! I tried to go back to where I came from, but I somehow could not find my way out. Helplessly, I started to wander around with other kids trying to find the least scary place to hide. That is when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around and saw the ghostly figure. It's face was bloody and it had a scythe in its hand, just like the one I had.

The ghostly figure pointed me towards a hall and I went in. I saw a large man lumbering towards me with a huge iron axe in his hand. With a roar, he beckoned me closer toward a large stone bench. I refused to sit down. I was met with a stern gaze and my resolve of not sitting down just melted away. I meekly sat down.

More kids entered the hall unaware of the dangers that lurked inside the hall. Some of them looked confident in their stride; but some were scared and sat down right away when asked. After a while, the large man welcomed us to the hall of danger. He spoke ominous words about the fate of the world and how only a few shall survive in the hall. I was so scared that I decided

to do what I do when I am scared - write down the words the man was saying on a piece of paper in front of me. I wrote them as a SOS to my parents.

Dear Mom & Dad,

I need divine help because I've been captured by a giant. This building has dark terrors and is entwined in horrible secrets. I anticipate the zombies will make me a hors d'oeuvre. Malice is erupting everywhere and I am quite sure that I will not be able to sleep without the lights on ever again. I truly wish I had never come to this horrifying building.

Sincerely,

Brady.

P.S. I heard him say global warming. What does that mean?

I looked around and saw other frustrated kids writing on paper just like me. We stared at each other curiously when the man pushed some of the kids out of the hall. Were they being taken away to be executed? Did they escape? I was not sure. I looked at the kids blankly, debating whether or not they would pounce on me. Their faces were pale and their eyes seemed to burn me. Then, there were just three of us remaining in the hall.

Suddenly, a bell rang. The large man stopped speaking and turned his head in the direction of the sound. Then he looked at each of us with his menacing eyes and seemed to stare into my soul. Tentacles crawled up my back. He kept talking and I kept writing. Then one by one, he sent the other two out of the hall and slowly walked towards me. I felt the world burst into flames and my eyes burned with fear. A keen sense of dread washed over me like a flood. I tried to scream, but no sound came out. I tried to run, but felt like a hundred snakes had coiled around my ankle.

The large man reached forward, shook my hands and roared "Congratulations!!! You won the Halloween Spelling Bee Adventure!!!"

Suddenly everything burst into reality. I rushed out of the hall to see happy faces around me. My parents hugged me tight. For once, even my sister congratulated me. The O'ween middle school teacher who had dressed up as the ghostly figure came and shook my hands. But, all I could think of was the \$15 Darren would give me. I had big plans for that money.

## **The Shadow, by Tyler Cox, age 11**

The old, desolate house crumbled and groaned. Its wailing sounded like a slave working against his will. The wind whistled through the trees and over the hills. John shivered. He contemplated his surroundings. There were a few dead, cracked trees, some old barns, and a few old buildings. Evidently, it had once been a great city, but had since lost its attraction. The ghost town repelled visitors with its aura of spookiness, and its devastating sadness overwhelmed the senses. John slowly strolled through the barren, ghostly streets. Suddenly, a shadow crossed the road. John jumped back. The shadow crept up from behind and leaped! John's head swam. He tried to get up. Then, he realized that his hands were bound and tied. His legs were tied together to the chair. Come to think of it, the chair was rather like a modern dentist's chair. "Hello?" he called out. "Anyone there?". A low hiss came from somewhere in the shadows. "Yessssssss. He is awake. Yessssssss. We mussst say hello, musstn't we." A tingling ran up and down John's spine. "Who are you?" he whispered. "You knowsss me, doesn't you. Yessssssss. I isss your nightmaressssss." The low hiss came again. "You mussssssst die." John fiddled with the chair. "There has to be some way out." he muttered softly to himself. Knives were everywhere. The shadow held twelve black knives. The knives slowly lowered to his throat. John fumbled with the straps. There was a sudden small click, and he was free! He slipped right under the shadow, knives raking his face. John ran with all of his might. The shadow, instead of being surprised, only laughed. It was an insane laugh, like the screech of nails on a chalkboard. "You will never essssscape. I am everywhere!" The shadow appeared in front of him. John veered to his left. The shadow snatched at him. John ducked. Its tendrils bent downwards. John ran with all of his might. Suddenly, the world seemed to twist and shatter. John's head ached with a great ferocity. He collapsed on the road. When he awoke, nothing was the same. The moon was bloody red. The moonlight shone, but John could not see anything. He felt a strange cold inside him, but at the same time he burned. He felt eyes on him. The shadow appeared out of thin air. "You make me laugh" it hissed. John staggered to his feet. "Ah, I ssssee you have not learned your lessson yet." it blasted him with an energy ball. "Now, you die." John felt the cold again, a sickening cold that froze the blood in his veins. He doubled over in pain. He felt like vomiting. His head felt as if it was falling off. Darkness enshrouded the buildings. Evil red mist wafted through the air. The shadow loomed over him with blood red eyes. "I revel in your pitiful attemptssss at living, bug." The shadow hissed, its voice filled with contempt. " I might keep you assss a pet." John's mind raced. He could not formulate a plan to escape. No matter how much he thought, his head seemed to be empty. Unfortunately, the shadow was getting closer and closer. A knife flew out of nowhere. It grazed John's arm. He cringed in pain. His arm bled. John woke up. "Oh, it was just a dream. Just a dream." he gasped. Then, he saw a shadow staring at him from across the room. "Hello."

## Death and Other Inconveniences, by Evan Grubb, age 12

Claude shook himself awake again and stood up to go to his soda when he heard a noise. Splattering the Dr. Pepper all over his crisp white suit and pasty shag carpet, he scrambled to his firearm, which lay waiting for use on his coffee brown oak desk. As he snatched it, he hurried out into the cold of the A/C blasted hallway. Quickly scanning the vestibule and seeing no threat, he cursed himself for his paranoia and went back to his desk, tossing the pistol to where he spilled his soda. He unwrapped a piece of citrus gum (his favorite) and noticed the cola stain was gone from the floor. He clambered to his mirror, hoping for the best, but that stain was still there. *Strange*, he thought as he strode to where the stain was at one point, and he heard another sound. He sprinted outside again, and panting, realized he didn't get his gun. He rushed back in to get it, but it was gone. He cocked his head and looked at the cabinet that sat innocently in the corner of disappearances. He furrowed his brow as he reached for the brass handle but was interrupted by a screech.

"CLAUDE!!" the voice called. He grabbed his letter opener that preceded the galloping Claude into the hall. He investigated the area with great scrutiny before walking back in, befuddled. *What is going on?* He thought, quite frightened. It was only 1:12, meaning he had 48 minutes left in his shift before his partner, Dwayne, would take over the night watch of his office. He got up to go to the cabinet again, because he discerned he left his gum pack there. It was gone, as were most of his belongings now. *Hey*, he noticed, *my soda glass is gone, as are those lilies I just bought. This is really weird.* He picked up the letter opener and threw it at the cabinet's ornate door. As it flew, he heard a noise. Knowing it was a hoax, he stayed in the room. He smirked, satisfied about his knowing and dug into his drawer for another sharp object. Abruptly, he heard a thud on the wall where his head had just been. Looking up, he saw the opener quivering in the wall. Shaking, he turned around to the cabinet and screamed. The key was turning in the lock. He didn't even bother to grab the letter opener as he tore to the door. It slammed shut in his face and locked him in. He ran to the wall, where he extracted the letter opener and retreated to the wall, intently watching the cabinet. It opened, and he could see his possessions sitting neatly in a row, but nothing else. He stood where he was, and stared at the back wall, where a gnarled, nasty hand that was missing a finger, protruded slowly. Suddenly, the walls seemed to be closing in on him. He shouted to get someone's attention, to no avail. Eventually he was face-to-face with the putrid hand and his property. He still had the letter opener and cut off another finger from instinct. The hand got mad and pulled him beyond the wall. The last thing he saw before his death was a growling gnarled face, which smiled as it took poor Claude's life away.

15 minutes later, Dwayne Green would enter the office with the gun, soda glass and stain, gum and letter opener all left messily on the floor in front of a pine cabinet.

## **Howls in the Night, by Aidan Johnson, Age 10**

Andrew was having a fantastic Halloween. While out trick-or-treating, he came to a slightly older house. None of the lights were on. When he rang the doorbell, no one answered except for a few ominous creaks and groans from inside. He tried the door, and was surprised to find it unlocked. He slowly pushed the door open, and stepped inside. It was dim, and smelled of rot and decay. As he stepped inside, he noticed the floorboards didn't seem too sturdy. There was a staircase in one corner.

Suddenly, a huge black wolf ran down the stairs! Its eyes were glowing blue and burned with icy hatred. The wolf had froth around its jaw and its fangs were bared. It growled fiercely. Then the most frightening thing happened. The wolf threw back its head and howled, loud and fierce. It had a strange metallic note.

The sound made Andrew's blood run cold. Once he got his senses back, he bolted for the door, opened it, and ran outside. He wondered what to do next. He called his friend Jason and explained everything that happened.

"Be over right away!" Jason answered. In five minutes he was with Andrew in front of the house.

"Let's see this big, bad wolf of yours!" Jason said jokingly.

Andrew raised an eyebrow, "Go in there yourself and see if you think it's funny!"

"Okay," Jason said, suddenly becoming serious.

Andrew noticed that Jason had a bag slung over his shoulder.

"What's in the bag?"

"Be patient, and I'll show you," Jason answered, as he spilled the bag's contents onto the ground: a flashlight, several foam dart guns, cookies and juice boxes, and a net.

"One problem," Andrew said. "What will foam darts do to a huge wolf other than make it mad?"

"That's exactly what we want to do," Jason said excitedly, "make it mad!"

"Why make it mad though?" Andrew said with a frown.

"So it follows us into the open, where we catch it in the net!"

"More like it catches us," Andrew muttered.

The boys gathered up the equipment.

"You ready?" Jason asked.

"As ready as I'll ever be," Jason replied.

The boys picked up the dart guns and started towards the house.

“Wait!” Andrew said. “We’ve got to put up the net.”

“Oh yeah! I almost forgot.”

The boys put their weapons down and started stringing up the net, stretching it across several trees.

“Alright,” Jason said. “Once we get the wolf to follow us, we run outside. You run around the left side of the net, and I’ll run around the right side. The wolf won’t know which way to go. It should get stuck in the net.”

The boys picked up the weapons again and went inside the house. The floor groaned and the house had the same musty smell that Andrew noticed earlier. It was dark inside, and the boys almost couldn’t see. Jason pulled out the flashlight. The beam of light flickered and eventually steadied. It wasn’t much light, but it would have to do.

Then they heard it - snarling and growling from upstairs. The boys looked at each other with frightened expressions on their faces. Then they slowly snuck up the stairs.

“Stay close to the wall,” Jason whispered. “The boards won’t creak so much.”

When they got to the top, Jason slowly turned the knob.

“We better be careful,” Andrew said in a frightened tone. “There might be traps.”

“Good point,” Jason said back. He took a gadget out of his pocket that consisted of several iron bars that slid into each other, similar to a telescope, with a little claw at the end.

“What’s that?” Andrew asked.

“It’s a doorknob opener,” Jason said. “You put the claw around the handle, and then you expand the iron bar, so you can open the door from a distance.”

Andrew hooked the claw over the doorknob, and they extended the iron bars, which were a little rusty.

They grabbed the handle together and twisted hard. The knob turned, and the door opened. The boys stepped back, afraid of what they might see. All they saw were clouds of dust. When the dust cleared, the boys walked into the room cautiously. There was a ladder in the corner, with a trapdoor on the ceiling.

“The wolf must be up there,” Andrew said.

Jason nudged the trapdoor open and they climbed up the ladder. In the corner of the attic they saw the wolf - huge, black, and menacing. Its icy blue eyes were staring at them intently. It growled and lunged, but they leapt out of the way. As they jumped, Jason’s leg struck the trapdoor and it closed with a clank!

“There goes our escape route,” Andrew thought.

The boys quickly grabbed the dart guns and started firing rapidly at the wolf. Some of them hit his eyes and jaw. The wolf’s eyes again gleamed with icy hatred, and the boys’ blood froze.

“I think it’s mad enough!” Andrew squeaked.

Jason took the door opener and swung it at the window. It broke with a shatter, and the boys jumped into the backyard below. The wolf began to follow, but hesitated at the window. But it soon jumped out after them. The boys tried the fence gate, but it was locked. They looked to the side of the house and saw a back door. Andrew tried it, and was relieved to find it unlocked. They ran through the house to the front door, opened it, and ran around the net. The wolf followed them, but got stuck in the net, which the boys had smeared with glue. The boys gathered up their stuff outside the house, but didn’t stop running until they were back in their own neighborhood.

After calling the police and getting the wolf into one of the trucks, Andrew looked at Jason and said, “Well, I think I’ve had enough Halloween for one day.”

## **The Legend of the Haunted Castle, by Tiran Little, age 9**

I am going to tell you a true story about one of the scariest things that ever happened to me. One day, me and my family went to Scotland on vacation and visited a haunted castle that had collapsed and only a few pieces were remaining. The castle was in the middle of nowhere with no people or houses nearby. There were towers and walls still standing, but they were a little spread out. The legend about the castle is that an evil wizard lived there and that goblins had made the castle for him. It wasn't what I expected when I first saw it because I thought it would be more like a mansion, but instead it was mostly stones. It was very deep in the woods and hidden by a bunch of trees and was by a river.

First, we were frightened when we saw it because of the legend, but we dared ourselves to do more exploring. There were windows that were blocked with bars so we couldn't really see into the castle. We were sad because we thought we couldn't get in. Then, me and my dad found a secret passage. We yelled to my mom and little brother to come down the path to see.

The passage was little, but we went into it. The walls were very skinny and the roof was very low, so we all had to crawl on our hands and knees to get through the passage. Inside the passage, there was no light. Me and my dad didn't have a flashlight, so to see in the passage, we had to take pictures with the flash on to see where we were going!

Once we got through the passage, we saw we were in the main part of the castle where the windows had been blocked with bars. In the main hall, the ceiling was really high, and I felt really small. While we were in hall, we noticed that the gurgling and splashing of the river outside, the wind and the birds had all stopped. It was dead silent and black as night.

My little brother freaked out. He was crying and telling my dad and me to go no further. He was so upset that my mom had to take him back outside. Even though we were scared, me and my dad decided to do more exploring. We found a staircase and took it down underground. My dad kept taking pictures with the flash so that we could see. He said to take a step every time I saw a flash. We took about 15 steps, and then we saw a bunch of boulders. We had to crawl on our hands and knees to get passed them.

Then, we came to a wall that blocked off the rest of the castle so that we couldn't go any farther. I was so afraid that the passage to get out would close and that the evil wizard would come to get us! My heart was racing, so I pulled on my dad and said we had to go. We climbed back up the stairs and went through the main hall of the castle and back through the passage. We got back out into the woods and saw my mom and brother and could hear the river and birds again. But, it was starting to get dark, so we had to leave. We went back through the woods, and the trees blocked the castle. We walked to our car, and I never looked back!

## **The Jack in the Box, by Raven Myhre, age 11**

Once there was a young girl named Stormy, Her 16th birthday was coming up so of course she was really excited. For her sweet 16 she wanted to ask her mother and grandmother if she could have a sleep over they said yes. So she instantly pulled out her fancy phone and called her five friends Jada, Quinn, Meghan, Alex, and Lily. They all decided to come to celebrate her birthday. But little did she know her life would change forever that night.

Alex was the first to show up Stormy instantly ran to the door and opened the cold knob. "HI! Alex!" she said Alex instantly handed her a box with a knob and turned it. **Dun da dun duh da dugh dugh dun dun dun dughn dughn duh duh duh.** Then popped a little smiling face of a little joker. "Aww thanks so much Alex this means a lot to me!" The girl replied then **DING DONG!** The girl opened the door again to see everyone else. "Ok since everyone is here let us begin!" the girl said "Wait Raven can I use the bathroom please?" said Lily "You don't have to ask you know your way" Replied back the girl. So while Lily was in the bathroom everyone else got started singing, dancing, and playing around. Then an hour passed then THUUUUUUUD! Instantly the girl ran upstairs and ran into the bathroom and flung the door open. She looked around and in the toilet was Lily's head and body parts in the sink and for some reason there was a Jack in the box who was holding up 7 fingers while singing slowly in a scary voice la-la-la-la-la-la I see youuuu. The girl looked surprised and thought I must be asleep so she went back down stairs and joined in the fun of the other girls and they were having a blast. Then they got tired so the girl put said lets watch a scary movie so the girl pulled out some movies and said lets first watch Insidious. Then Meghan and Quinn said hey were going to make popcorn k? K the girl replied then Meghan and Quinn walked in the kitchen. Insidious started and the popcorn wasn't done DING the microwave beeped they have to be done soon she thought. But no one came back out "I'll check on Meghan and Quinn Alex wait here k?" I said "k" she replied back Stormy walked into the kitchen blood was every where and a head in the microwave a decapitated body of whom she thought was Meghan and the little Jack in the box was holding up 5 fingers and going lala lalaaaa I see youuuuu "Where's Quinn's body?" she said the jack in the box looked up and she did to and to her horror she saw Quinn's body on the ceiling staying up by a knife in her chest. Oh my god the girl thought she ran out of the kitchen and in the corner Alex was curled up really close to the wall crying the girl asked her friend what's wrong? Alex said "I thought the jack in the bo-"she stopped fell on the ground dead.

By the time the mom and grandma came home the girl was crying on the couch and the mom said 'mom (the grandma) can you see what's wrong with Stormy while I take a shower? The grandma nodded her head yes and the mom walked up stairs Stormy jumped up trying to pull her down so she wouldn't take a shower because of the jack in the box. But her mom won and she had to force herself to let her mom go and she went to her room THUD! Her grandma ran to the door also flung the door open and screamed. The jack in the box was now holding up 2 fingers, the grandma ran to the girl's door and said pack all your stuff we're leaving the girl obeyed and then HOOOOOOOONK! The girl looked out her window and saw her grandma's body by the window and her head on the front trunk and there was the jack in the box next to the girl's grandma's head holding up one lone finger. Everything went black after that.

## **The Bat Cave, by Aubrey Petersen, age 11**

My frightening adventure started in New Mexico where I was sitting on my bed harmlessly scanning a travel book. I was working on planning a trip with my two best friends, Brooklyn and Olivia. When I flipped to the next page of the vacation guide, the headline immediately caught my attention:

### **Carlsbad Caverns**

Carlsbad Caverns is a United States National Park in the Guadalupe Mountains in southeastern New Mexico. The primary attraction of the park is the show cave. Carlsbad Cavern is home to 400,000 Brazilian Free-tailed bats. Visitors to the cave can hike in on their own via the natural entrance or take an elevator from the visitor center.

I thought about Carlsbad all night long. 400,000 bats! What would that look like? I could not get my mind off of it. The Caverns were a perfect trip option because it would only be a short drive from where we live in Santa Fe. In the morning I called my friends and read them the article from my travel book. Everyone was thrilled with this vacation plan. After a quick discussion we decided to begin our travels Friday after school.

When we finally arrived at Carlsbad Caverns we immediately signed up for the tour of the bat caves. The caves were amazing and it was even more fun when our tour guide explained how we could do a little exploring on our own if we had a flashlight. Luckily, Brooklyn had remembered that she had won a Fun Fall Festival pumpkin charm that lit up. Brooklyn dug into her pocket and pulled it out. I said, "Perfect now we can explore!" As we wandered the pumpkin charm light would cast a giant eerie shadow on the cavern walls. At first the frightening shadows had startled us. We had been creeping around a corner when we first noticed the strange glow from our light. Olivia let out a little screech, but we quickly realized what was causing the strange figures on the wall and laughed about it.

We started talking and lost track of how far we had wandered from our guide. We did not hear the tour guide say, "Okay, time to come back." Our flashlight was really small which also made it difficult for the guide to see us. Soon the darkness gulped us and we had no idea where we were. "I think we are lost!" Brooklyn finally admitted.

I pointed out some bats, but Olivia had pulled out her MP3 player and was absorbed by her music so she did not notice we had stopped. Olivia bumped into me, which caught me off guard and I lost my balance. I tried to keep from falling, but couldn't and smashed into Brooklyn's shoulder as I fell to the cold rock floor. This really spooked Brooklyn who let out a piercing scream.

All of the bats I had been pointed to just moments before came flying at us like a giant swarm of bugs. We tried to swat at them, but there were thousands, and they scratched our faces as they

flew by. Brooklyn dropped her light in the chaos of the moment. Once the bats were gone we began to frantically search for the missing light. In a cave without a light it is absolute total darkness, we felt completely blind, and had no idea where it was. We got on our hands and knees and tried to find the pumpkin charm by feeling all around us. We had no luck.

It was so dark we could not see our hands in front of our faces, so we had to feel the walls to try and find our way. We had to stop several times to take a brake. When I sat down I saw a glimmer of what appeared to be a ghost like finger coming toward us. I said to my friends, "There is something coming!" We started running, faster and faster, using the walls as our guide. It was gaining on us. We were getting really tired, our breathing was hard and loud, but we still kept running. We turned a corner and thought we must be safe. We had been stopped only a moment when Olivia spotted the faint glow again. Speaking to me Olivia yelled, "Hazel, it's still coming toward us!!"

Our feet started to ache and our muscles burned. We eventually had to slow down to a speed walk. After about 20 minutes we looked to see if it was still there when....ahhhhhhhhhhh!!!!

Two days later a Search and Rescue volunteer found us. I have been told we were found deep in a forbidden part of the cave, thirsty, hungry, and confused. One of the rescuers found a bat hanging up sided down and in its grip it held a little pumpkin light that still was on.

The End

## **Ages Thirteen to Seventeen**

AGES THIRTEEN TO SEVENTEEN FIRST PLACE:

## **The Confession of Curtis Kupine** by *Adeleine Grubb, age 16*

*“Is what I did so wrong?”*

For years now, the confession Leonard Kupine had given to Curtis Keel had haunted the psychiatrist. He could never place why, maybe it was the way Curtis himself had gotten so emotionally involved with the story, feeling all the emotions Len had wanted him to feel. He never ceased to be amazed by the numerous occasions that the case clawed its way out of the depths of his mind, and he'd get angry all over again. He had sat up many a night with the notes taken from Len's session, wondering why it got to him so much. On September 16, 2013, the tenth anniversary of Len's death by electric chair, Curtis reached his breaking point. He loaded his duffel bag

*with a butcher's knife, a box of matches, a fire-poker and a box of spaghetti,” Len told Curtis. Curtis nodded, jotting the notes down hastily on his notepad. He also wrote down his first impressions of the young man. Leonard Holston Kupine-23. He looked like a nice boy, with short black hair, parted neatly down the center and sensitive green eyes, not the type you would pin the murder of a well-to-do family on. “Go on, Mr. Kupine.” “Oh, no, just Len, that's what my friends call me. You are my friend right? Not gonna call the police on me are you?” He smiled. Curtis returned the smile, and for once the smile was not forced. In his profession, he had gotten used to the forced smiles, the fake sincerity of it all. But with Len, it felt natural to smile back. “Of course I will try to help you...Len. Now, tell me what you did after you packed your...gear.” “Well, I had done my research*

so Curtis knew the McLane family was just like the family Len had targeted. A successful father, who had conquered a hard past. His wife was a stay at home mother. They had two children; a two-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy. Curtis checked the clock in the Ford Taurus; the exact same car Len had drove. The time was 6:33 P.M., right on schedule. He climbed out the passenger door and walked calmly to the house.

*“I didn't bother knocking, I knew they would be having dinner. Besides, I knew from my research that they always left their back door unlocked so that little Rosaire could go out and play whenever she wanted to. So I let myself through that door and began making myself at home.” “You knew it would be unlocked?” “Of course. I have never been one to leave things to chance. Once I was inside, I admired their dishes. They had a really nice set you know? Some of those fancy porcelain ones that have festive blue parrots on them? Obviously, Mr. Patrick's job was paying off.” He looked upset, Curtis's notes read. And somehow, Curtis had gotten mad too, and the more he started seeing red*

the more he wanted to break down the door and finish the McLane family off. He knew it was too early for the recreation of the murder, but the anger was too much. In the distance, thunder rumbled. With a great howl, he broke the fancy glass of the French doors and turned the door handle, letting himself in. He heard Mr. McLane tell his wife to take the kids and hide, he'd take care of this. But he wouldn't. Curtis reached into the duffel bag and

*“I pulled out the butcher’s knife. I waited until Mr. Patrick was close enough and then I put the pointy end right between his eyes. Then, I found the rest of his family. They were smart; had locked the door. Course, all I had to do was jimmy the lock a little and bam! I’d be in. But I always wanted a neat way of being identified,” Len leaned in closer to Curtis, like a kid about to tell a secret. Curtis found that he had scooted to the edge of his chair as Len’s story had gone on, like when he watched Luke Skywalker fly in to destroy the Death Star as a kid. For 10-year-old Curtis, that was the most anticipated moment of his existence, but 10-year-old Curtis had not met Len. This story was far more captivating. “So I got down on my knees,” Len whispered, “and*

*Curtis began humming, saying the words to the old child’s rhyme in his head simultaneously. All around the mulberry bush, the monkey chased the weasel...He broke a match and fiddled around with the lock until he heard a satisfying click as the lock released. The monkey thought it was all in good-fun...He let the door creak open. A bright flash of lightning illuminated the room, revealing Mrs. McLane and her two children pressing themselves against the wall. Pop! Goes the weasel...Curtis slowly cocked his head to one side as he regarded them. “I don’t know, Len. That doesn’t look like wallpaper to me.” “No,” Len agreed, “it most certainly doesn’t.” He produced his fire poker.*

When the young policeman found him, he was eating spaghetti off of one of the fancy porcelain plates. He had called the police himself, wanting to make a confession; Sargent Finn Gayle was here. He sat down across the table from Curtis Keel, turning on his tape recorder, unaware this disturbing statement would drive him insane. “Ok, Mr. Keel, whenever you’re ready.” “Sargent, just call me Curt. That’s what my friends call me and you are my friend right?” A loud crack of lightning followed. The power went out. Finn Gayle might have been young, but he was old enough to have seen the electrocution of Leonard Kupine. So when lightning lit the room again, Finn couldn’t tell if he was sitting across the table from Curtis Keel or Leonard Kupine as the person across from him asked, “is what I did really so wrong?”

AGES THIRTEEN TO SEVENTEEN SECOND PLACE:

## **The Job**, by *Chris Knebel*, age 16

She heard him coming before he came into view. Her trained ear listened to his gentle gate, to his steady breathing forming wispy white clouds in the frigid December air. Her heart ticked down the seconds until his arrival at the opening to the dark alleyway. Her plan was simple. A turn of the head, a snap of the neck. This one would be clean. She preferred it that way.

It was four years ago that He first contacted her. It was waiting on her nightstand when she awoke, a single white business card, seven small digits etched in red across its rigid surface.

The man never saw it coming. His pace did not slow as the shadow rose behind him. His breathing did not quicken as she swiftly covered the distance between them in two silent strides. He did not even have time to turn as she loomed behind him like a black wraith and placed her cool hands on his burning cheeks.

It was the first time she had heard His voice, speaking quietly through the receiver pressed against her ear. His voice was beautiful. So soft, so clear, so full of understanding that she wished to curl up in its rich tone and never shed it from her. *I have a job offer for you.*

She breathed in the night air and smiled. The man had succumbed easily, without screaming or begging. Those types were the worst, always thinking they could cheat their way out of death. What a joke. She was not one for humor. Now, as she relieved him of his wallet, watch, and phone, she marveled at the simple beauty of death. Such a strong fellow before, Death's victim was now reduced to a worthless contorted sack. There was no force in the world more powerful than Death, and so she was its slave. She slowly dialed the number that she had long since memorized. *Well done.*

At first, she had refused to kill; no amount of money could stifle the screams of the innocent and silence the pleas of the undeserving. But the path of righteousness traversed a slippery slope, and it was not long before down she had willingly tumbled to the greed that lay below.

But the job had become about more than just satisfying her desire for wealth. Killing had become an art form. Now she killed for fun. She did it to break the bones and spill the blood, to dance among the shreds of flesh, falling like confetti, among a cacophony of screams. She had become an artisan, an expert in her trade. There was nothing in this town, nothing in this *world* that could stop her from doing that which gave meaning to her life. That night she dreamed of roses, bleeding red as they fell from their stems. Such a beautiful dream, she hadn't dreamed like this in years.

It was two days later that she received a phone call. She knew who it was, there was no longer anyone else left to talk to her. *I have one more job for you... if you are ready.* She was more than ready. It had been only 48 hours, but in that time she had lived an eternity waiting for Him to speak to her, waiting for that voice to caress her ear and surround her with its cool embrace. *You will need strength for this one. Go to your bedroom,* the voice purred in her ear.

She had no choice but to obey. As if in a dream, she strode through her empty house. Through the kitchen she walked, not even noticing the rancid smell of the food she had long since forgotten about. Up the stairs she climbed, running her hands over the wooden handrail scarred with dozens of deep scratches torn by countless victims. Down the hallway she strode, focusing straight ahead, paying no mind to the blood stained walls on either side of her. Finally she arrived in her large, dusty bedroom. It had been so long since she slept here atop those ripped, red sheets.

She swept her eyes around the room and instantly spied the bottle. It was sitting on her nightstand, a business card taped to its slender neck. *Drink*. She hesitated. *Drink and you will be ready*. How could she refuse? How could anyone refuse? She slowly guided the bottle to her trembling lips and sipped Death's sweet gift. Then, gasping, she began to shake. An icy hand gripped her heart and as it squeezed, she fell to the floor. The ice spread through her stomach, down to her feet and up to her face. She began to convulse on the cold wooden floor, her legs kicking violently in time with her racing heart, her hands clenching and unclenching looking for something to hold onto. And for a moment she was scared. She saw the raw power of that which she served and her mind went wild with terror. Tears streamed from her eyes in an uncontrollable wave. Alarm, confusion, disbelief, and dread swirled through her conscious in a tempest of emotion. In her spasms of terror, she lashed out and touched something that had fallen off of her nightstand and onto the floor. She was blinded by fear and pain, but she knew exactly what it was: a white business card.

Slowly, her fingers traced the seven beautiful red digits and suddenly everything became calm and she saw the truth: Death was not punishing her. This was a reward. An invitation. And like us all, she had to accept. With this realization, she succumbed to the pain, to the darkness. And now the tears that fell from her eyes were ones of joy.

The light faded from her eyes just as the smile reached her lips. Finally she got to experience that which she had witnessed in so many.

Softly, her phone buzzed beside her. *Your job is done. Your contract is fulfilled.*

AGES THIRTEEN TO SEVENTEEN THIRD PLACE:

## **The Pumpkin Queen**, by *Nicole Knebel*, age 16

There is a legend in this town. A legend of mystery, a legend of horror.

It has been many years since the last incident. Many years, but a shiver of the old fear still runs through the town. The very air seems to chill, and the last leaves quake on their skeletal branches, a reminder as autumn closes that the time of the legend has come again.

Legend has it that pumpkins dance. They dance for their queen, both to choose and to honor her. It is told that if the pumpkins dance for you, you are doomed to become their ruler, doomed to a life of malevolence as wicked as the pumpkins themselves. When the pumpkins dance for their queen, they celebrate and commemorate her cruelty as a vehicle of their own. Their last queen ruled for time untold, keeping the balance between the pumpkins' violence and the humans' suspicion, but she grew old. A successor had to be chosen.

The legend says that a young girl, following family tradition, was out gathering pumpkins early one fall morning. She became separated from her parents, picking her way over twisted vines and through planted rows by the light of the harvest moon - on the hunt for her perfect jack-o-lantern. Her earthy brown eyes gleamed innocently as she wandered along. Her green jumper swished over her orange shirt, her braids bounced behind each ear. Maybe that's why they took her - she looked like them.

Whatever the reason, the pumpkins danced for her that morning. Standing half a field away, her brother saw it all. A dry wind blew, rustling their vines into a whispery roar. They rose from the ground slowly and surrounded her, an imposing sea of orange. Each one swirled and danced, spinning around each other; faster and faster, the wind matching their pace: a scene of chaos and menacing force. She was in the center - the eye of the maelstrom. Seized in their terrifying, alien power and torn by their unconscionable base emotions, she flung her head back, arms straight out from her sides, and screamed. The wind whipped at her braids and carried the sound, long and piercing, as the dance reached its peak. Then the wind died, and the scream dropped.

All was still - the pumpkins merely pumpkins once more. Her brother could only gape. The girl's parents came running towards the sound and found her collapsed on the ground. All she would say was that she tripped.

The next day, a couple was murdered. The perpetrator was never caught; the only clue was a pumpkin. Her coronation act. That night, a whispery roar rose from the pumpkin patch as a dry wind blew.

It has been many years since that day. Many years, and the queen still holds a tight rein; keeping the secret of the pumpkins' menace, keeping them quiet until, by the light of the moon, they dance for her. The humans don't need to know their danger. But every so often, something slips. A voice must be silenced. The girl's brother has long been gone, a pumpkin found in place of his head. Only the few who have connected the odd disappearances to the legend remember, and they quake with fear. They whisper that the pumpkin queen's still out there, biding her time.

Only after horror sufficiently fades into distant memory does she strike again – her nefarious subjects must be satisfied.

Most folks are scared to speak of it, so on this October day, the sound of the legend carrying through the chilly air on children’s voices is unusual. Their teacher has just told them the story. Now, they tease each other as they race around the playground, the afternoon sun and the rush of the wind burning away the last cobwebs of fear clinging to them.

After the school day ends, a young girl skips along the tree-lined path, delighting in the crunch of dry leaves beneath her orange Converse. At the end of the path is her grandmother’s house. The comforting scent of cinnamon and apples wafts over her as she runs through the door, to be greeted with a floury hug.

At dinner, she tells her grandmother, “We learned about legends today!”

“Really? Which ones?” Grandmother asks casually.

“The one about the pumpkins dancing!” she chirrup, “And now we have to find stories to share with the class! I want to tell the one about the corn-maze boy. You know, years and years ago, when he goes missing, and they find his body in a maze in the morning with a pumpkin but no head? And there’s no evidence, so no suspect was ever tried? That was long enough ago, right? Right Grandma? That counts as a legend, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, dear. That certainly was long ago.” She replies nonchalantly, despite the sudden leap in her heart. “But don’t you think it’s a bit scary for class?”

“But that’s the point! I bet the boys that I could tell the scariest one!”

“Alright, dear.” She says with a slight laugh. But the smile doesn’t reach her eyes. “Now finish your dessert, and let’s get you off to bed. We’re getting up early to pick pumpkins tomorrow! It’s a tradition, you know.”

“Yeah! I’m going to get the biggest one ever!” The girl yells, running down the hall to her room, as if getting there makes the morning arrive faster. The woman smiles amusedly after her.

Later, after the girl has been put to bed, the woman sits in her rocking chair. The embers of the fire light up her face, casting warm shadows over the room and hiding the corners. “Yes, that was a long time ago, wasn’t it,” she muses quietly, staring intensely into the flickering flames. She glances up at the mantelpiece, her eyes seeking the small pumpkin sitting there. It tremors in response to her gaze. “It’s been a long time, but the pumpkins still dance for me...”

“Maybe it’s time for a new Queen.”

## **Mila- A Story Told by Spirits, by *Olivia Chatfield-Scott, age 13***

Tangles of black hair lay on the concrete like shadowed spiderwebs. Her green eyes are covered by a thin layer of skin stuck to her eyeballs by the glue of eternal slumber. Her name is forgotten by most, except for the ants who have started to burrow in her skin, who remember her name was Mila. Mila. Mila. Mila. The name sounds like a heartbeat, a rhythm no longer drumming out in her delicate chest. Red designs decorate her dress like a fine embroidery, giving away what happened days before. Mila's hands and feet are gone, chopped off like a butcher slices meat in his workshop, messy, careless, uneven. One of the limbs is just inches away from her body, facing backwards. The girl's pale face is ruined by a eerily artistic splatter of blood. A long gash runs across her face. No-one has found her. The only ones who remember are the spirits in the walls. Our memories are crystal clear.

We will always remember the shattering sound of the glass used to cut her. We will always remember the frenzied, murderous thoughts of her killer. We will always remember her screams as her blood sprayed before her eyes. We will always remember how her hands still twitched as they were detached from her arms. We will always remember how her feet were thrown to the side like pieces of trash. We will always remember the blood curdling screams she emitted from her tiny pink mouth. We will always remember how her frantically beating heart was thrust from her chest, how her killer held it over her mouth, how her blood looked like red lipstick.

We will always remember the terrified look in Mila's eyes as her spirit started to float away from her earthly body. We will always remember the dark presence of the Reaper, come to take her away. The spirits in the walls remember how we cringed as he came, his shadows making everything shrink in fright. We will remember how she went quietly, without a fuss, for her mouth had been crudely sewn shut. Tears ran down her face, but she couldn't wipe them away, for she had no hands. She floated, without walking, for she had no feet to touch the ground. Her head tipped to one side, for her neck had been cut in three places on the left side, which caused blood to trickle on her white birthday dress. Mila was only six years old when Death came to call.

Mila's family was long gone, their lives taken by pneumonia. She was the only one left. Dropped off in a foster home one day, Mila's life was worthless, her birthday was the only day in the entire year she looked forward too. Her little white dress was her prized possession. They shouldn't have let her walk alone. They shouldn't have let her go out at night. But these things can never be changed, for the past is the past.

We will always remember.

No-one else will ever know.

## **A Drifter's Story, by Natasha Crowe, age 13**

I wander the street aimlessly. I see a few people each with their own agenda, hardly aware enough to care about the other lives circling them. When I look at one I don't see the dark shell that surrounds their essence as I used to, but instead I see each beat of their heart, each spark that signals an idea in their mind. Not a single one of them sees me though, for I have left my body far behind, cocooned in solid wood and wrapped in a heavy brown blanket. Now I wander the streets seeing past the shells and into souls.

I don't know why I am here, I have a feeling that I am not supposed to be. I don't remember much from my life, only small fragments that drift on the breeze of my wandering soul. There is one thing I do remember from my life though. One utterly cruel and ancient feeling that not even light can scare away.

Fear.

I shudder at the thought of this feeling and a dull yellow street light flickers next to me as if it is shuddering too.

I don't feel this now though, as you might think. I feel alone and out of place but at the same time like I am right where I am meant to be. Another emotion I can remember, that is just as strong as fear is, Love. When I think of this I see many faces. Faces of those I have left behind. Faces that drift away as soon as they have appeared. There are other emotions, I can't remember what they are called. I have a feeling I am drifting too far away to remember the small emotions, no matter how big a part they played in my life. I do remember a certain word however, one which is attached to an emotion. It is called Melancholy. If this is the name of an emotion, it is what I am feeling now.

I remember a name too. Andromeda. I am not sure if it is my name or that of one of those many faces I can't quite remember. Maybe it is where I am from? Then again maybe it is just a name that sounded just right, leaving an imprint even now.

I see the sun rise just beyond the city, outlining the dark rectangular skyline in bright orange and pink. I wish I could remember the name of this city, I wish I could feel just a little less lost.

As I watch the sun slowly creep up a feeling ignites inside of me that tastes bitter, even more so than the one attached to Melancholy. It inhabits my soul; I am both hollow and full. I don't know what it's called or rather I can't remember. Just another piece of a fragmented puzzle.

The streets start to fill with more people and the sun is climbing higher.

As soon as the rays touch me though I start to fade away.

I fade away as the sun floods into the morning.

## **The Library, by Mary Failing, age 16**

I walk into the library about half an hour before it closes, rushing toward the nonfiction section. I have a report for school to finish by tomorrow and I still need some information. My backpack bumps against my back as I jog through the maze of bookshelves, looking for the books on ancient Egypt. I push my hair out of my eyes, scanning the books on the shelf as I pass. I nearly trip over a book sitting in the middle of the aisle. Confused I pick it up and look around. Someone must have dropped it but I seem to be the only person here so I look for the book's title. There are no words anywhere on the cover. It looks kind of old and worn. I open it and flip through till I see words. This is odd, I think to myself.

October 29th, 2010

I seem to be locked in the library. I arrived here about ten minutes ago and went to the bathroom. I came out and all the lights were off. My watch seems to be broken, and it's dark in here. The labyrinth of bookshelves seems eerie in the dark. I can hear something. It sounds almost like a scratching noise. I hear---

It looks a little like a diary entry. "Interesting." I say quietly to myself and flip to the next page, as I slowly sink to the ground and lean up against the shelf behind me.

Something is in here with me. It tried to grab me. I can hear it moving behind every shelf. I'm hiding now. I don't know where it is, but I can hear it.

There are water marks on the page, making it look like the person who wrote it was crying. I feel a chill run up my spine and continue reading.

It's looking for me. I can feel it. There's a shadow, moving. I can't---

I hurriedly flip the page, looking for the next entry.

There's more than one. I can almost see it. Hissing. Scratching. I can hear labored breathing. I am alone. I need to make it to a door. I need to get out. My cellphone isn't working. I need help. I'm going to try and move.

My eyes widen as I read on.

The library clock says that it's close to one AM. I need to make it to the door, maybe I can get it open.

It's locked. The door is locked. I cannot get out. I'm stuck. It's locked. I can hardly breathe. I can hear it moving toward me. Terror, that's what this feeling is. Is this a nightmare? I feel like I'm in a horror movie. Something is knocking. I swear I can hear knocking. Am I going mad? There's something else. I can hear a shuffling. It's almost a shuffle, drag, shuffle, drag sound. There's something coming. Slowly, I can hear it coming---

There's a streak of ink down the page as the words taper off. I can almost hear the shuffling noise myself. I quickly whip my head back and forth. Oh, I'm being ridiculous, this is just a story. I shake my head to clear it and turn the page.

It chased me. I'm not sure if it's not quite fast enough to catch me or if it's just toying with me. It's still out there. I can't see what it is, it's so dark. I'm in the bathroom again. I can hear it outside the door.

More water marks.

It's trying to get in. It's banging on the door. I can't do this. I think I might be insane. What is going on? It's banging, moaning on the other side. I can't breathe. I can hardly write.

I feel my breath coming faster as if it's happening to me. I try to swallow, my mouth dry.

It's gone quiet. I'm going to try and get out of the bathroom.

I got out. I'm hiding again. It seems like there are sounds coming from all directions. Plugging my ears doesn't help. I---

There is another streak of ink and a tear in the page.

Eyes, I saw eyes. On the other side of the bookshelf, they were staring at me. I'm so scared. What is it? I need to get out.

The writing looks shaky and unsteady.

The clock says it is nearly five. The sun should be coming up soon. Right? I need to try the doors again. No one is going to believe me.

The doors are still stuck tight. I would try to break them but that might attract one of them. I'm going back to the bathroom.

I'm in the bathroom. It's been quiet for a while now. I think---

It cuts off again. There are dark drops on the paper and the next page has been torn out. Frustrated, I flip the pages, looking for more words. Suddenly, the lights go out around me. I clutch the book to my chest, breathing hard.

"Hello? Is there anyone there? I'm still in here..." I say into the thick darkness around me, my voice fading. I look up at the shelves in front of me. Are those... eyes?

## **House on the Hill, by Andrew Teck, age 14**

It never occurred to me when I met him that he would drag me into a situation like this. Albert has been my best friend since the fourth grade. When he transferred to our school, he seemed to be a friendly kid. Seemed shy but had a good sense of humor and a knack for adventure, but he didn't always make the smartest decisions.

It was a few hours past sundown on Halloween night. The idea was blurted out after one too many pieces of candy, to go explore the house on the hill. Our town doesn't have a lot of folklore and disturbing historic events, but the house on the hill was enough to put shivers down the toughest man's spine. The most well-known story about the house on the hill in our town was that it used to be a small insane asylum in the early 1900's, but the conditions there were pretty bad leading to much death and disease between the workers and the patients. Shortly after it was opened, the health department closed it down and it's been abandoned since. Rumor has it that the mentally unstable souls of the patients haunt the building, and the land around it. If that's not enough to freak you out two teenagers who were vandalizing the property were found by the police, dead, their faces were filled with horror as they were loaded into the hearse. Cause of death unknown.

Knowing all of this, my friend Albert was dying to go to the house on the hill, and see if anything happened in front of his own eyes. Right from the start I was seriously doubting that this was a good idea, but once Albert gets his mind set on something, it's hard to stop him. Albert is a major skeptic about most everything supernatural, so he wanted to prove that the house on the hill was not haunted at all and show everyone that there is nothing to be scared of. After all, it's just a house.

The date was set, November 7th at 9:00 PM. We would tell our parents we were going to the movies but instead we were going to meet at Thaed road. Which was at the bottom of the hill which the house was located on.

The day had come. At 8:30 I told my parents I was off to the "movies", but instead started riding my bike to Thaed road, where I would meet Albert. As soon as I got on my bike I sensed a weird vibe in the air, but just blamed it on the unusually cold temperatures for this time of the year. At 8:55 I arrived at Thaed road. I didn't see Albert anywhere but just as my watch ticked nine, I saw him ride from the fog with a big grin on his face. He asked if I was ready and I said no, so he called me a baby, and started riding his bike up the hill, so I followed him not wanting to be alone this late at night. Within minutes we could start to see the outline of the house piercing the dark night. I hadn't noticed but it had become eerily overcast since I left my house. Within two more minutes we reached the top of the hill and set our bikes down by the No Trespassing sign.

As I walked through the door I felt like I was being watched. The house was filled with graffiti on the inside, and was very musty, and almost everything was decaying. I looked back to see if Albert was still behind me. He was. All of a sudden a cry pierced the air, it sounded like it was down by the kitchen, but when we got there, nobody was around, just a moth darting around in the air, trying to find a window. At this point of time I definitely felt like we were not supposed to be here and that we should get out of here. But during that same moment, I heard Albert

walking up the stairs to the second floor. He called for me to follow him which I did. At the top of the staircase was a long hallway. There was a dim light at one end of the hallway which was very peculiar because no one has lived here for decades. As we walked around upstairs Albert was getting to look a little on edge, but we just kept walking. Nothing happened for about 30 minutes, and as we were about to leave, declaring the house on the hill not haunted, I noticed something that looked like a slim shadow walk out of a room in front of me and seemed to follow Albert for a few seconds, I rubbed my eyes for a second, but before I could comprehend anything or even warn Albert, he was gone. I didn't know how he disappeared or where he went, all I knew was that I wanted out of this house before anything happened to me.

I rushed up to the third level of the house remembering that I saw a balcony, with stairs leading up to it from ground level. I was going to get there and out of the house before anything happened to me. But before I even got to the third floor I heard footsteps trailing behind me, they were gaining on me, but I couldn't make out the figure following me, I did see the knife in his hand though, it glimmered in the dark house. As I reached the third floor without thinking I ran through the sliding door which I thought lead to the balcony but instead it was a window... which lead to a three story drop.

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Later that week the police recovered Vincent Johnson, and Albert Hanson's bodies a fourth of a mile away from the cabin, brutally slaughtered, cause of death unknown...

## **Ages Eighteen and Above**

AGES EIGHTEEN AND ABOVE FIRST PLACE:

## **Mrs. Whittiker's Cat, by Craig Hartsough**

“You shouldn’t do that... you’ll get in trouble,” I told Billy. Billy was picking up rocks by the sidewalk, throwing them randomly at houses, parked cars, and the occasional bird that waited too long to move to safer heights.

Billy smiled. It was his usual smile, the one that I hated. “Who cares? It’s fun.” He slung another rock at a shed about 30 yards away. It clanked off the shed door, and Billy snorted.

We were walking home from school, as we’d been for the past two months since Billy’s family had moved in a couple houses down Ash Street from us. I knew immediately that I wouldn’t enjoy the walks. It was clear that Billy was trouble. But I was in a good mood – this would be the last time I would have to walk home with Billy. The last time I would see Billy at all.

I turned onto Third Street. “Wait, where ya going?” called Billy, annoyed at my lack of interest in his rock throwing. This wasn’t our usual path home. I saved this route for special circumstances.

“I want to say hi to Mrs. Whittiker’s cat.” I said over my shoulder, not slowing down.

“Who’s cat?” Billy asked. When I continued on without replying, he trudged along behind me, picking up a tree branch and rapping it against fences as we walked.

I walked down Third Street to Maple Street, turning and walking on at a deliberate pace. The neighborhood was more deserted than our usual walk, which pleased Billy, who no longer had to watch for adults before swatting mailboxes with his stick. I turned onto Sixth Street past an empty lot toward a dirty, unkempt house.

“Cool!” Billy cried as I stopped in front of the worn picket fence that lined the border of the property. “Who lives in that dump?”

“Mrs. Whittiker,” I replied matter-of-factly. “At least she used to. I haven’t seen her in a while. But her cat lives there.” With that I clicked my tongue a few times and waited. Soon a silhouette appeared in the window. A large grey cat stretched against the cracked windowpane, looking out lazily at the street. When it saw me, its eyes brightened and it stared intently at the two of us. Then it was gone.

“Is that it?” Billy asked, annoyed. “You came all this way to the edge of town to have that stupid cat look at you?”

“Wait.” I whispered.

A minute later a rustling noise came from the overgrown shrubs next to the house. The cat trotted out of the clump of bushes and padded to us. About 15 feet from us its pace slowed and it

eyed Billy hesitantly. Then it hopped onto the fence next to me, letting me scratch its ears. “Hello friend,” I murmured, having never learned its name.

Billy reached out to poke at the cat with his stick. The cat flashed a paw and batted the tip away, letting out an annoyed hiss. Billy got that smile again, the one I hated, the one that meant he was thinking of something nasty to do. I’d seen it at school a hundred times already – when Billy pushed the younger kids in the hall; when he skipped class to hang out in the bathroom; when he snuck outside behind the cafeteria to smoke. I hated that smile even more than I hated Billy. But this time I watched. I wanted to memorize that smile.

Billy swung the stick at the cat, but it was more agile than he’d anticipated and dropped behind the fence. Billy leaned over the fence, and the cat reached through the pickets and scratched Billy on the ankle.

“Ow!” Billy shouted. “Oh, you...stupid... cat!” He pulled down his sock, and the sight of blood angered him more than I’d seen before. “I’m gonna kick your...” He reached down and scooped a handful of gravel, throwing it at the cat, which was slowly backing through the yard toward the overgrown shrubbery. Instead of running off the cat stopped, sat and began to groom itself, taunting Billy.

This was more than Billy could take. He grabbed the fence and shook until it gave way. The cat, hearing the noise and seeing nothing standing between it and Billy, began its backward crawl again.

“You shouldn’t go in there, it’s not safe.” I said, but my heart wasn’t in it. I’d been through this before and I knew how it would end. Billy would get what he deserved, just like the others. Like Mary Ellen, who had teased me mercilessly over my freckles and braces three years ago. Like Jerry after he’d taken my bike last summer and hid it with all the other things he’d stolen from me. Just like the Carpenter twins after all my hours of babysitting them. No need to cry or ask the grownups for help. Just bring them here to see Mrs. Whittiker’s cat... and its friend.

Billy was near the house, the cat edging to a small hole in the thicket. There was a moment’s pause, and the cat turned and squeezed into the bush. Billy dove after it, ending up halfway into the shrubs.

“You’re gonna get it, you little... Ow! Hey! Nooo...” Billy’s voice cut off. His legs kicked as if he was caught, trying to pull free. The line of shrubs shook violently for a few seconds, and Billy’s legs went still. Then they slowly were dragged into the brush.

I watched the shrubs for another minute, but just as with Mary Ellen and Jerry and the Carpenter twins there was no more noise, no more movement. I turned and began my walk home. At the corner, I looked back. In the window of the old forgotten house, Mrs. Whittiker’s cat sat calmly licking its paw. He looked at me and let out a yawn.

“See ya again, friend,” I said quietly, turning for home.

AGES EIGHTEEN AND ABOVE SECOND PLACE:

## **Mr. Thirsty**, by *Kelvin L. Woelk*

“Thanks for doing this on short notice,” Tim says opening the heavy wooden door. “I have to go to this dinner, but just starting out I didn’t want to turn away business. And with a body in the viewing room, someone has to be on premises.”

“Sure,” I say, feeling resigned to my fate, and ridiculous for being afraid of a body. I tell myself it’s easy money.

We pass a large dimly lit room. I look straight ahead rather than at the casket I know is in there, the front half raised and visible in my peripheral vision. A triangular plaque sits at the front of Tim’s desk, his name carved neatly into the black laminate. For a second, I feel sorry I ever doubted his intent to become a mortician. Then I realize his accomplishment is why I now have to spend the night next to someone deceased.

“Who is he?” I ask, hoping a name might make it seem normal.

“Edwin Thurston,” Tim says, putting on his coat.

“Thirsty?” I ask.

“Thurs-ton,” Tim says. “In town for the final stop on his book tour. Scheduled to fly home to England today. The driver and hotel maid found him at 11:01 this morning. Heart attack.”

“When they say checkout’s at 11:00, I guess they mean it,” I say, smiling.

“Good one,” Tim says, not laughing. “He shouldn’t be any trouble. I sewed his eyes shut.”

“Good god,” I say quietly, my smile instantly disappearing.

As if I asked, he says “I had to be sure he’s ready to travel tomorrow. You wouldn’t believe the tricks a body can play. The needle’s really small and it takes practice. You want to see?”

“Please no,” I say. “Why do you even tell me these things?”

“Because you’re one of the few who don’t think I’m weird when I do,” he says, giving me a friendly pat on the back.

“I’ve got news for you,” I say.

From the desk drawer, he takes out a check made out to me and puts it on the desk, the amount still blank.

“We can discuss tomorrow what you feel your trouble was worth,” he says. He motions toward the viewing room. “Too bad the two of you didn’t have the chance to meet, both being writers and all. Anyway, I’ll see you in the morning.”

He walks to the door and steps out. The door closes. I sit down in the oddly soft chair behind the desk, feeling like Mr. Thurston is daring me to make it through the night, challenging me to some bizarre, silent game of chicken.

Five minutes pass. An hour. The quiet, strange at first, gradually becomes sort of normal. I write some, losing myself and my sense of time in sentence creation. I listen to some podcasts, though not any of the paranormal ones I sometimes listen to. My eyelids grow heavy, and I place my pen in between the pages of my notebook, cross my arms on the desk top and lay my head down.

Sometime later, I get up and walk to the bathroom. Still half asleep, I exit and without thinking look directly across into the viewing room. It takes a second to realize what I'm seeing, but even then I don't believe it.

The casket is still there, but something is very different. Mr. Thurston is sitting upright, his hands on the edge of the casket's closed portion. For a second I wonder if he is climbing out or in, then realize neither is good.

My brain, as if to reassure me, recalls Tim's words about a body's possible tricks. Then the head turns toward me.

"I fancied a bit of water and didn't want to take you away from your rest," a voice says, and I note the English accent. "Dreadfully thirsty business, all this laying about. I won't trouble you further. Cheerio."

I watch the body slide itself back down into the casket, noting the paper cup on the edge of the lid. I see the hands fold across the chest and then lie still. I expect the eyes to close, realize they have been closed the whole time. Then I remember the needle and thread, and I make it to the door just before the last thread of sanity slips through my hands.

I am not surprised when Tim calls me the next morning, but am surprised he doesn't seem angry. As if I didn't know, he says I must have left in a hurry, and says my shakily scrawled note of apology wasn't necessary, says he knows the quiet of the place can be difficult to take.

"Sometimes it helps to talk to them," he says, "but I guess you figured that out."

"What are you talking about?" I ask.

"There was a cup on the casket. Had to be yours. His ride was here when I arrived, and I didn't see it until we entered the room. It looked a bit unprofessional, but it's okay. I just hope Mr. Thurston wasn't upset at your sudden departure."

"Sorry about the cup," I say, knowing he'd never believe the truth. "But you can trust me when I say Mr. Thirsty does all right by himself."

AGES EIGHTEEN AND ABOVE THIRD PLACE:

## **For Sale or Lease, by *E.A. Summers***

When my parents initially found the house in Longmont, they were ecstatic. Finally, a suburban home large enough to house their growing family at a price they could afford. My mother worked at a large department store during the day. My father worked the graveyard shift at Denver General. Afternoons, he would sleep on the sofa in the living room while my little sister and I, too young to be in school, napped. He never foresaw how living in that house would change his perspective forever.

One afternoon, he woke suddenly. There was a distinct pitter-patter on the wood floors in the hall. He rose and staggered sleepily to the bathroom. There was no movement or sound of any kind. He strolled to our bedroom, and leaned on the doorjamb. There we were, sound asleep, our little faces flushed. Shaking his head, he took his place on the sofa again.

A few days later, the same thing happened. The sound of footsteps was too distinct to be caused by imagination. He wondered if his little girls could be getting up, then playing possum. He sat up, and called out, "Eileen? Julie?" There was no answer. Annoyed, he called out more sternly, "Eileen! Julie!" He heard the footsteps patter down the corridor. The hallway led past the bedrooms and bathroom, around to the kitchen. A shorter way into the kitchen was directly through the living and dining room. He shuffled sleepily into the kitchen, hoping to intercept whoever was up. All was quiet. He walked around to the bedroom, where again, my sister and I slept soundly. He stared at us more closely, trying to ascertain if we were faking sleep. Telling himself it must be his imagination, or maybe noises a house makes when settling, he returned to the sofa.

Distinct footsteps in the hall way, like those of a grown man, had my dad sitting upright in an instant. Instinctively, he bolted into the hall. The footsteps, running now, hurried around the back into the kitchen. Dad raced close behind. As he crossed the threshold of the kitchen, he heard the back door open and bang shut. He flew into the kitchen. All was quiet, empty. Heart racing, he then saw something he cannot explain: the back door was locked on the inside. The chain was latched. He stared, gooseflesh rising on his arms. The chain was swinging back and forth. One thing was certain: the moving chain was not his imagination. And this wasn't caused by a house settling.

Each day afterward, he would toss and turn, and lie awake, obsessed. The only rational conclusion, he thought, was that someone was playing some kind of joke on him. He became determined to catch whoever it was.

The next time a man's footsteps were heard walking toward him down the hall, he flew off the sofa like he was shot from a gun. The footsteps ran for the back of the house. Almost together, the two raced into the kitchen, thundering on the bare floors. The pantry door slammed. Dad had to grin. He had him now, whoever it was. There was no escape from the pantry. It happened that his Louisville slugger leaned against the wall by the door. Never taking his eyes from the door, he reached for the bat. It felt good, heavy and solid, in his hand. With the bat in his left, he snatched the door open with his right. "Get out here!" he roared. "Game over!"

The kitchen darkened slightly as it might when a cloud passes over the sun. The pantry was a narrow, deep closet with shelves on both sides and along the back. Dad pulled the string for the light. It did not come on. The chain jingled helplessly against the bulb: the only sound.

“Come on!” my dad commanded. But nothing happened. Bat in hand, he stepped into the pantry. The pantry was so dark he couldn’t see the back of it. Squinting, he cautiously stepped forward, but suddenly, he stopped. He felt a strange sensation. It felt as though his hair was standing on end. He knew, somehow, that there was a presence at the end of that room, waiting. He could feel true evil. He knew that he must not go any closer.

Fighting his fear, he swung the bat back and forth across the narrow room. Each time, it cut through the air with a whoosh. His breath came in harsh gasps. Never before afraid of tight spaces, he felt suddenly terrified the door might close behind him, trapping him in. Panicked, he stepped back quickly. Out in the kitchen, he closed the pantry door. He continued to back up, until he was at the doorway to the dining room, all the while staring at the pantry, the bat still in his hand.

The realtor said our family stayed there longer than any other, but the experience changed my father. For the first time, he realized there were some things in this world he might not be able to protect his family from. Sometimes, he says, he still drives by the old house. It’s a pretty house, but it looks a bit forlorn, with heavy curtains always closed at dark windows. It looks like a house that needs a family. There is a sign in the front yard offering: For Sale or Lease.

## **Penny Drive, by Emily Alligood**

The thin man a few seats down flipped a heavy coin and slapped it on the counter with relish. He peeked under his bony hand and asked “Heads or tails?”

His unusual question and even more unusual odor pulled Luke away from his train of thought. He had hoped that the greasy diner would offer some anonymity for a man down on his luck, but the late hour and unrelenting rain seemed to attract the characters. Luke eyed the shabby man who smelled vaguely of rotten eggs and turned his attention back to the astoundingly bad coffee. The man peeked under his hand again and looked at Luke expectantly.

“So, what’ll it be?”

Luke had been asked that question a lot this week. His boss asked him that when he gave him the choice to quit or be fired. His girlfriend had asked him that when she gave him the choice to give up gambling or hit the bricks. There was the girl on the way out of town. She had come out of nowhere on the dark road...but he couldn’t think about that now. Here he was, in some godforsaken town, facing the same question. What little control he had over his frustration began to bubble over.

“It’s the same everywhere you go, isn’t it? Either way you choose, you end up giving something up. There’s no right or wrong answer. Why even make the choice in the first place?” Luke was surprised at how easy it was to unload on the stranger. To his surprise, the thin man seemed pleased.

“But, sir, don’t you see the duality? It’s black and white, yin and yang, right and wrong dualities that are up for grabs,” said the stranger as he spun the coin. To Luke, the coin seemed to speed up rather than slow as the seconds passed. “I see what you mean, though,” the stranger continued. “You’re looking for higher stakes and better odds. You want your choice to mean something. I know a betting man when I see one. What brings you to these parts anyway?”

“My car,” said Luke as the waitress refilled his cup.

The man stared at him with an unnerving intensity before cracking a yellowed grin. “I’m just passing through town, myself. I had some business to attend to, but I’m ready to move along. Did you hear about this story?” The man gestured to the small television mounted on the wall. On the screen, a concerned reporter was standing next to a dark strip of road. The rain continued to pour.

“Someone run over some poor girl a few counties over,” said the waitress. She checked her lipstick in the reflection of the toaster and ran a brightly-lacquered nail through her stiff hair. “The driver didn’t even stop. What could possess a person to do such a thing?”

As she sauntered off to refill more chipped mugs, the stranger turned to him. “You look like you could use a friend. I don’t mean to pry, but you look like you’ve seen better days. What’s the trouble? Is your woman getting on your case? Are you a little low on funds?”

“I’m experiencing a little bit of everything at this point,” replied Luke. He didn’t want to confide in the odd stranger, but he didn’t feel like he had much to lose.

“I’m sorry to hear that. I have a heart for the needy. When I hear that a fellow is need of a second chance, I just have to lend a hand. Can I offer you an opportunity?”

“I’m not interested in doing anything illegal,” said Luke.

“Illegal? You misunderstand me, friend! I just know of a little place in the woods that a gambling man can go to try his hand. There’s no crime in that, right?” The stranger leaned in and lowered his voice. “Take this coin, get into your car, and let the Fates decide. Keep driving until you reach a fork in the road. If you land on heads, then turn right. If you land on tails, then turn left.”

“Is this a joke?” said Luke, reaching for his wallet.

“Only a lucky man will find the place,” said the stranger. “Have a little faith in yourself. You’ll be rewarded for it.”

“What makes you think I’d agree to this?” Even as Luke asked the question, he knew the answer. He had seen the highway patrol car pull into the parking lot and he knew he had to get going.

“A gambler always tries his luck,” said the stranger. He tossed the coin to Luke, who caught it with one hand. “It’s up to you.”

Luke threw some bills on the counter and edged around the cops as they walked through the door. Back in his car, he fingered the heavy coin as he put his key in the ignition. Turning on the radio, he took off into the night.

Luke stepped out of the car and walked towards the front door. The rain had finally let up and the wind began to push against him as he neared the front door. He pulled out the coin and asked the coin whether or not he should knock on the door. If it was heads, he would enter. If it was tails, he’d leave and never come back to this place again. He flipped the coin. Heads.

The front porch creaked as Luke reached for the door. One last time, he thought as the coin itched in his hand. He ran his thumb over both sides of the coin. How could that be? He turned the coin over in his hands and saw that both sides now bore a head, a head that was familiar. He could almost smell the rotten eggs. You lose either way, Luke thought as he reached for the door handle.

## **The Beast, by Nick Armstrong**

It was finally time to go Meet The Beast.

It was a religion, of sorts - nightly for the last six months, we would gather with TV dinners and sit in silence while contestants squared off on our favorite trivia gameshow against The Beast. We'd play along online, Sarah, Kyle, Danny, and I vanquishing countless digital foes to earn the highest score ever seen and a 15 hour roadtrip to become contestants ourselves.

He wasn't literally a beast, just a behemoth of a man whose IQ matched his enormous mass. He towered by way of his 8'1" frame added to the ten foot gothic spire that was his roost on set. One couldn't help but look up to The Beast.

The Beast, AKA Dave Underwood, graduated high school in 1993 in only two years from, in his words, "the most unconscionably dumb backwater hick school you can imagine". He absconded with his neighbor's truck and landed without a dime in an outskirt of Pasadena, CA. He spent a decade waiting tables, every night studying book after book at the Pasadena Public Library. He never attended college, he didn't need to.

We schooled ourselves as much in Dave Underwood as History, Pop-Culture, Politics, Geography, and Science. Know your enemy and all.

Two shows were filmed daily and ours was the second. Our arrival was unceremonious. Wordlessly a gawky, pale-looking intern ushered us directly into our greenroom by way of a blackened labyrinthian hallway.

After a while, the flustered, oddly pretty stage manager named Tina appeared. "You're next, ready? We haven't cleared the set of the last contestants yet, but we're almost done."

"God! Are you OK!?" Sarah was staring intently at a large blood-red splatter on Tina's otherwise pristine white dress shirt.

Tina followed Sarah's gaze. "Yes, just..." she sheepishly fumbled a messy looking marker from one hand to another, "leaky pens."

Kyle and Danny briefly looked up from their iPads to register the California dime that was Tina before returning to their study. There was no point in needless distractions this close to showtime, but no kind of stain would prevent these two from stealing a glance.

Tina vanished as quickly as she'd appeared, noting we had 5 minutes before showtime.

That's when it happened. Dave Underwood, The Beast himself, appeared at our greenroom. His massive frame filled the doorway. We, the assembled youth of Colorado, were insects by comparison. We paused, caught between unbridled admiration and unmitigated intimidation, sheathed by a veneer of false bravado toward an indomitable foe.

The Beast had faced defeat only twice in two seasons and it was high-time for another team to beat him - ours stood a fantastic chance.

He broke the silence, smiling wider than I'd seen any human smile. It wasn't the mean, condescending smile that he wore on the show when someone got the answer wrong. It was a genuine, endearing smile and I immediately suspected he was trying to psych us out.

The tree trunks Dave called arms wrapped me in a bear hug. "Top scorers! It's a pure joy," southern honey dripped from his Cumberbatch-ian baritone, "to meet people who love knowledge as much as I do. Your profiles are outstanding, all of you."

"Thanks," I squeaked. The team stayed silent, afraid any sudden noise might startle The Beast into popping my spleen across the room.

He released me, ignoring our awkward pause, "I'm gonna be mean to you today. Don't take it personally."

Kyle's brow furrowed. Sarah visibly deflated. Danny buried his face in his iPad. Sympathizing with the man we planned to ruthlessly dominate? Not good. This was a mind game.

With startling grace, Dave spun on his heel and exited pausing only to say: "I'll see you after the show. Anything I can do for you," he paused to look each of us in the eyes, "just let me know."

We were ushered to the stage and took our places next to the host, Sasha Pedersen. Admiring the view, the boys were too preoccupied to notice the glint at the corner of the set. Two shining reflections. A set of glasses on a horrified face with lips mouthing something.

Help. Me.

"Everybody in place - ready to roll," Tina pipped.

"Who's that?" I pointed to the terrified man.

"RUN! THEY KILL THE WINNERS! SHE'LL KILL YOU!" the man burst out, sprinting full-on at Sasha. He tackled her with a sickening crunch. Nothing moved for a long moment.

Kyle rolled the man off Sasha.

"Are you OK?" I asked, helping her up. Sasha nodded. Her lip bled. Inconceivably she looked as pristine as any time we'd seen her on screen.

Neck skewed awkwardly, the man hadn't moved. Kyle checked for a pulse, cursing as he stumbled backwards. "He's dead!" Masked by concern, the faintest smile played on Sasha's face.

The Beast peeked out from the spire, "Dead!? We have to close the set."

"No!" Sasha bellowed. "Tina, the police are on their way?" Tina nodded as stagehands ushered away the body. "Then let's continue."

Danny guffawed, "You punks!" Stunned eyes darted to Danny.

"That's the best psych-out prank I've ever seen," he added.

“Studio’s money at stake. Gotta keep our record somehow,” an evil grin played on Sasha’s face, “can’t get anything past geniuses.”

Concern creased The Beast’s face as he shrunk into the spire.

A nervous chuckle teetered through the crew as we took our places. My mind reeled.

There was no cut on Sasha’s lip. The crunch? The dead man’s neck?

Had she killed him? Why?

Intro music flared, lights danced on set, and Sasha introduced The Beast.

Had the other team won? Were they killed to avoid the payout?

The Beast didn’t appear like we’d seen him do countless times. His massive hand fell on my shoulder.

The Beast whispered in my ear: “Can’t pay a deadman. One murder too many, she’s getting greedy. The whole crew gets a cut. Be smart. RUN.”

He reached back and belted Sasha across the room.

## **Eve, by Ivan Bliminse**

On the night before her 18th birthday, Eve entered the forest.

She had known no other home her whole life. She knew the histories, the importance of the forest's sacred protection of their town and what lay beyond it. The townsfolk had once lived on the other side of the forest. There were those on The Other Side who had too much to say about how a family brought up its children. It was a community of harsh oppression, her mother said sternly. One should be free to govern oneself, and likewise choose for oneself how their children are raised.

Eve's parents had been among the most vocal of The Instigators, as they were known. Yet they spoke in the minority, and their voices were silenced among the hordes of the meek. Eventually, they were given an ultimatum: be silent, or die. Instead, they banded together with those of like mind, setting out for the mountains under cover of night, to realize their freedom or perish.

From the edge of the clearing, Eve looked back at the town, glimmering dully in the moonlight, the fulfillment of their grand vision. The town was the pride of its people, but it always came back to the children. Eve knew. She had been their firstborn, arriving before the buildings were even finished. Eve, the first woman of a new world. She was followed by more. Many more, in fact. At times the townsfolk wondered if the water that yielded such fertile soil for their wonderful forest produced the same effect on their women. They prospered, their houses, stores, and banks knit together by the dark color of the timber they harvested from their surroundings. Time passed in its fashion, the people living as they wished, teaching their children as they saw fit. There was only one lesson taught to all children the same: never enter the forest.

But why? Eve asked her father. He simply said it was best she not know. It was the only question they had never answered her.

In truth, the deep silence of the forest never frightened her. It always seemed to her more sweet than the charms of any bird, or the chuckle of that rich black water from the pump behind her barn, or the soft hush of her own bare feet on the kitchen floor. It was to her parents a dark silence, but to her it was magic. She knew she wasn't alone. The children were taught to hate the forest, but grew to love it all the same. The forest was their forbidden fruit, and each had their own dreams of the secrets it kept from them. Tonight, Eve would find hers.

So she crept from the clearing into the forest, silent as the air around her, her bare feet cushioned by the softest carpet of fallen leaves. She wore no clothes, but felt no chill, for no wind blew in the forest. Her hair fell long and thick down her back, black as original sin, her skin luminous and pale as the moonlight that only now began to filter through the trees. She was the bride of the forest tonight, the lovechild of the moon and its shadows.

She wandered for a blissful forever, that exhilarating silence all around her. The trees, so somber and immobile by day, were so much more alive in the stillness of the night. They seemed to breathe as she did, almost human. A chill of delight ran through her as a faint breeze touched her skin, goosebumps standing out along her torso. She laughed, beginning to scamper faster through the foliage. Tonight, there was only Eve, the forest, and the breeze.

The breeze.

She stopped. The wind did not blow in the forest. The trees were too thick. So why did she feel the breeze?

She listened, but heard only the silence.

And it continued as she felt the breeze on her skin again.

It was no longer a beautiful silence. Now it was the absence of a sound she wanted--needed--to hear. All at once, she wanted to go home, to be back in bed, safe.

Her question had been answered. She suddenly knew why her parents had denied her the knowledge of why she mustn't enter the forest.

There was no reason.

They simply knew, as a rabbit knows the shadow of the hawk.

It was the intuition of fear.

She turned to flee.

And saw only the trees.

She began to run.

And saw only the trees.

She crashed through the undergrowth, her feet catching on a root, falling into the foliage, hair snarling in the brambles and clinging fast like fingers. She cried out in pain and tried to break free, tears welling up of their own accord. But the moonlight returned, and her weeping curdled in her throat like wet ash.

For now, she saw him.

Tall and faceless, a shimmering creature of shadow, with arms as long and powerful as branches.

He walked toward her where she lay motionless on the ground.

He loomed over her, then bent down until his gaping, blank face was next to hers.

And she heard it.

The sound of breathing.

Barely louder than a whisper, but to Eve, it was a roar.

He raised a dark hand, extending one long, razor thin finger, placing it lightly on her pale throat.

White and black.

A jerk of the finger, quick as a snake.

Crimson.

Her gurgling chokes hung on the air for an instant before vanishing to join the eternal silence of the forest.

She lay where she fell, eyes staring blankly into the canopy of the forest above her, a tiny splash of moonlight surrounded by a dark pool of her hair and her blood.

And where her blood had watered the ground, a tiny black seedling had already begun to grow.

The town was the pride of its people, and their children were the pride of the town.

The forest would wait for both.

## **Stairway to Hell, by Stina Branson**

Andrea squinted at the tiny screen of her handheld GPS unit. Maybe it was time for her to upgrade to a smartphone and get a geocaching app. She'd have to look into that once she got home from her trip. Right now all of her savings were dedicated to investigating her grandmother's death.

Then again, she wasn't exactly making progress in the investigation. It had taken her own mother's death to reveal that Andrea's grandmother had died at the Sappington County Hospital in 1956. Heart failure was recorded as the official cause of death--which could mean just about anything, especially when the decedent was barely 34 years old. So here was Andrea in Sappington County, a thousand miles from her life and smack up against a brick wall.

Literally as well as figuratively. Andrea was beginning to think that Sappington County Hospital had never existed. Unlike the metaphorical wall erected by the locals anytime she inquired about the hospital's history, however, this wall was a crumbling ghost of its former self. It would present little barrier between Andrea and her quarry: the "Stairway to Heaven" geocache.

How odd, thought Andrea, that I don't remember downloading these cache coordinates. That was Mom's favorite song. She also hadn't printed out any of the cache notes that would give her clues to locating the carefully hidden box of treasures. She didn't even know what the terrain rating was, so she hoped her tennis shoes would prove equal to the task. If she was going to be a serious cacher, maybe she should keep hiking boots in her Jeep. But now that she had her bearings, Andrea looked around surreptitiously for muggles (non-geocaching folk) and, seeing nobody along the quiet and none-too-well-maintained county road, clambered over the brick wall.

On the other side, Andrea gaped at the sight. There were stairways, all right. Perhaps a dozen concrete stairways were spaced throughout the large clearing in the forest. Stairways to nowhere--and nothing else but a luxuriant growth of ground cover that threatened to swallow some of the staircases whole. A frisson overwhelmed Andrea, and she sank to the ground. After a few panicked seconds, though, she forced herself back up and consulted her handheld. She was close to the cache. She'd make a quick log entry, not even pausing to examine the trinkets, let alone swap any. And then I can get the hell out of here, she thought, at the same time chiding herself for being such a wuss.

Intent on the course plotted on the handheld's screen, Andrea heard the child before she saw her. "Mommy! Mommeeee!" The toddler crouched atop one of the staircases, wailing and beating her fists against an invisible door. Andrea felt her heart shudder to a stop.

"Mommeeee! Mommy!" The plaintive cries turned into unintelligible shrieks that tore chunks out of Andrea's soul. Andrea drew a ragged breath and willed herself to run towards the Stairway to Heaven. As soon as she reached the bottom step, however, a teenager in a poodle skirt and a twinset materialised at the top of the stairs and scooped up the little girl. Then they both disappeared.

In a daze, Andrea began to climb the Stairway to Heaven. With each step, she felt a strange tingling sensation that grew stronger and stronger. Every hair on her body stood on end, and a metallic taste filled her mouth. She crawled the last few steps, her breathing labored, her mouth foaming. A dark green film seemed to be encroaching on her vision, and as it faded to black, Andrea could feel the vines wrapping around her wrists and ankles, securing her to the railings. The last thing she heard was the little girl screaming her name.

Detective Sergeant Jill Bergstrom pulled onto the shoulder of Sappington County Road 19 and parked behind the silver Jeep with out-of-state plates. The Coroner's van was parked in front of the Jeep, and as Bergstrom exited her vehicle, she saw Deputy Coroner Sarah Beaufort hop over the brick wall of the old mental hospital's ruins and walk back towards the road.

"At this rate," said Beaufort, "I really think we should install a door in this wall, don't you?"

Bergstrom nodded and made a sound somewhere behind a sigh and a laugh. "Let me guess. Another dead cacher?"

"Looks like. GPS battery is dead, of course, so you'll have to see what Winston can find once he gets it up and running again."

Bergstrom shrugged, knowing that their best forensic computer analyst had all but given up on this series of suspicious deaths. "What does he ever find? There's never a waypoint plotted in this area, so I don't know what they're doing out here or why they even bother to bring a GPS unit along. And Winston has scoured all of the geocaching sites he can find, and there's no mention of a cache anywhere near here."

"And as with the others, there's no obvious trauma. It's like they're literally scared to death."

Bergstrom shrugged again. "I don't have a better explanation. We may never know what these folks were looking for. But my guess is they found it."

## **The Corn Man, by Jared Fowles**

I sprinted into the rows of corn against my better judgment, my heart racing. I always knew Mr. Buttons was going to be the death of me someday. His talent for finding new and strange ways of risking my life seemed to know no bounds. In the nine months since he entered this world I have nearly drowned, caught fire, lost a leg to snake bite, and dang near got fed to a grain combine. You'd think he'd give me a break knowing I had to mind the farm by myself with a killer on the loose? Nope, not Mr. Buttons. I'd begun thinking that devil of a dog hated me.

"Stay out of the fields while we're gone, is that clear? Just keep Mabel milked and the animals fed," my Dad instructed as he packed the last bag into the truck two days ago. "Oh, and Kate, try not to burn the other half of the barn down if you can manage it."

I scowled as Little Maisy stuck her head out of the back seat window, her blonde curls bouncing and eyes rimmed with tears.

"Give Mr. Buttons lots of hugs and don't forget to feed him and rub his tummy and tell him I love him, okay?"

I forced a smile and gave her the thumbs up. After the truck rounded the corner I took a deep breath full of crisp autumn air and twirled for a bit in the driveway. Don't get me wrong; I love my family and all, but sometimes a girl going on 13 needs some time alone, you know?

Funny how fast feelings can change. We had all heard about the girl gone missing across town, but it wasn't till the day after my family left that the body was found. I heard it on the radio right after listening to "The Falcon". The police found her near her house in a corn field. Strangled, they said. The bowl of sugar and cherries I was treating myself to fell right out of my hands, staining the carpet. I planned on blaming the dog.

"Mr. Buttons! Get back here right now before I kill you!" I yelled at his dark shadow darting ahead of me in the corn. He broke out of the house while I was setting out the trash. The last time he escaped it had taken me 4 hours to catch him. And that was at midday, unlike now with the sun already down. I had to catch him fast or I might lose him for good, which if not for Maisy didn't sound all that bad truth be told.

"Mr. Buttons!" I hollered right before tripping on a stalk and getting a mouthful of dirt. When I looked up, he was gone. A half-moon hung in a twilight sky, and the chilled ground caused me to shiver. I hadn't had time to grab a jacket. I lay there listening for sounds of dog above the rustling wind. In a row to my left I heard the soft crunching of leaves, and my hopes returned. That mutt was close. If I was lucky he would emerge right in front of me any second.

I was wrong.

Just then I heard Mr. Buttons bark, a short and faint sound, in the distance to my right.

I felt all of my blood leave my body. Lying there frozen to the ground I heard the corn next to me being pushed aside. The first thing I saw was yellow toenails, jagged and crusted over with dried blood. A thin man stepped out in front of me, his threadbare overalls tight against his bony

frame, the bottom of his pants ending just below the knee. It looked like a child's outfit. His dirty blonde hair and patchy beard were long, his eyes pale and deep set.

"Josephine?" The voice was high and cracked with emotion. I was still sprawled out, my limbs paralyzed although my mind was screaming to run.

"Josephine! I can't believe it! Papa said you must be dead! I told him I'd find ya, though, and lookie here, find you I did!" The moonlight showed me his eyes were glistening as he crouched down like a grasshopper, his face so close I could smell his hot, sour breath.

He grabbed me by the shoulders and forcefully lifted me up to my knees. The man's face erupted with slimy brown teeth, but then his expression fell and his eyes grew scared.

"Josephine, something's wrong. Papa's mad all the time...and...Josephine...can you still keep a secret? You were always good with my secrets..." He looked at me pleadingly. I couldn't respond.

"Josephine," his voice trembled, "when I look in a mirror...my eyes...they don't move...they don't move at all, always in the same place..." He started tearing at his hair. My strength finally returned so I spun around and began pushing myself up when he pulled me back around to face him. Bony fingers wrapped around my throat and squeezed, cutting off my air.

"You can't leave me! Not again! Papa's mad all the time! My eyes don't move Josephine! THEY DON'T MOVE!!"

I'm going to die, I thought, looking up at the mad man's face, his brown teeth gnawing on a bleeding tongue, his pale eyes rolling. I started seeing spots, and then suddenly a dark shadow flashed across my vision. Growls mixed with the man's screams in the air as I felt the cold fingers release my throat. Somehow I found myself running, and didn't stop until I had locked myself in my bedroom with Dad's shotgun. I stared out the window until the sun came up. The dog padded up to the back porch the next morning. From there on out, we were thick as thieves, Mr. Buttons and I.

The Corn Man was never found. Life returned to normal, I guess. Maybe someday I will be able to look at a mirror and stop waiting for my eyes to move.

## **The Season(ing) of Beer, by Steve Heller**

I was pretty excited. This was to be my first interview at a brewery and for a beer geek like me it was all I could think about for two days. I'm a reporter for the local paper and normally I get to do puff pieces. I finally talked my boss into letting me do a bigger story to show him that I wasn't just some fresh-faced cub reporter out of college.

And so it was, on Friday, October 21; two months before the official start of winter, I made my way to the Rheum Bane Brewery just outside of town. It was a small micro-brewery that had only been open ten months but in that time they had already won numerous awards for their beer. I was to meet with the owner, Damian Andersen. It was a crisp fall day when I drove up the long and winding driveway to the brewery. Damian was waiting for me by the door.

Damian invited me into his office, well more like a closet it seemed. He said he didn't have a lot of extra space as the brewery was doing so well that he needed all the room he could use. We sat down and he poured me a pint of his new fall beer which was simply named "Autumn". It was a nice amber color with hints of pumpkin and nutmeg. In fact, all of Rheum Bane's beers were simply named. Their spring beer was called "April", the summer one was "Sunny". They hadn't been around long enough to brew a winter ale and I asked Damian what it was going to be. He said that they had just started the brewing process and were deciding on a name and that's when he saw one of my small articles in the paper. You see, my name is Jackson Frost, but of course everyone calls me "Jack". As it turns out, they wanted me to be the name and face of their winter beer. To say I was thrilled is an understatement, especially since I knew that their custom was to put the person's face on the label. Damian let me know that all the prior beers were people he knew from back in his hometown in Norway and I was to be the first local person so honored. I asked him where in Norway. He turned to me, smirked and said; "Hell". Seeing the disbelief in my face he proceeded to let me know that Hell was a very small village of about a thousand people north of Norway's capital, Oslo. He chuckled as I wrote it all down while shaking my head.

Before we started on the tour, he pulled out artwork from his other beers, showing me the actual person that they used as a model and the cartoon rendering that graced the label. I was going to interview them later via email as well as the artist (his sister) who would draw the version of me that would end up on the label. On top of all this, Damian said he would also pay me, not a lot, but a token for using my likeness. As if they needed to pay me to put my face on a beer label! And then we commenced on the tour.

First he showed me the small tap room. It was empty today and usually was. Although the beer was great and most people in town loved it, the brewery had a reputation for keeping weird hours so you'd never know if someone was there to pour a beer. After a while, people stopped coming and just waited for it to appear on the shelves of the local liquor stores. Next, he showed me the tanks, barrels and other areas that make up a brewery. Being the beer geek that I am I knew much of what they were doing but I asked many questions and kept a good notebook so I could translate it for the general public.

Along the way I sampled each of their beers and then Damian asked if I wanted to see the malt barn. Usually malt is kept in a silo outside, so I was curious. The barn was huge and as we walked closer I figured it probably had a couple small silos within the barn. Damian got to the door and I was surprised to see an electronic lock on it. He said that it was for security as their malt was the key to the beer. Malt is made up of grains and Damian said that they got theirs from “somewhere in Europe”, but he couldn’t elaborate as it was a trade secret.

As we walked in, I was amazed at how big it was. It looked much smaller from the outside. Then I realized that the floor went into the ground, so it added some extra space. I looked around and sure enough, there were four small silos in here. The smell was amazing, a beer lover’s olfactory sense dream! There were a few workers milling about and the usual brewery equipment and electronics.

And then I noticed them. Up on a platform above each silo was a box. No, they weren’t boxes were they? I turned to Damien to ask him about them but all I saw were the words “Louisville Slugger” coming at my face. As I stand here now, I know now they weren’t boxes. They’re cages. And I’m in one. The other three are empty. But the metal tags that are on all sides say “April”, “Sunny” and “Autumn”. The cage I’m in says “Jack Frost”. I also know that the floor has a hinge on it. With nothing else to do but think I realized that “Rheum Bane” is an anagram for “Human Beer”. As a beer geek I’m not sure which is the most flattering: To have a beer named after you with your likeness on it or to be the beer.

## **A Stranger's Visit, by Ken Martin**

5 pm. Where was the babysitter? Mr. and Mrs. Enmedio had to leave in just a few minutes for the annual Larimer County Attorney's Dinner.

Suddenly the phone rang. The babysitter, Mrs. Gabriel, wasn't feeling well and couldn't come out on such a windy, wintry night.

Mrs. Enmedio hung up the phone fuming! The county dinner was important but it was too late to get another babysitter. Marie, ten, overhearing the conversation spoke up. "Mom, I can babysit. We'll all get our pajamas on right now. The pizza we're having for dinner is ready. We'll even clean up afterwards!"

Willie and Rose, seven and five, immediately agreed. And three year old Lizzie nodded her head smiling.

Mr. Enmedio frowned, looking at the younger children. "This means you do exactly as Marie says. She's the boss. Understand?"

Everyone nodded. "Okay," said Mr. Enmedio, "Let's see if this works."

Ten minutes later, Mr. and Mrs. Enmedio headed out the door saying, "Be good you guys. Do whatever Marie says."

The kids quickly hurried to the kitchen. Willie and Rose set the table while Marie readied the pizzas and Lizzie set out napkins for everyone. After dinner and cleanup, the kids all went downstairs to watch a movie, *The Pirates of the Caribbean*. Suddenly the phone rang. A strange, deep voice said, "May I speak with Mr. Enmedio, please?"

Marie answered, "My dad's not here right now. May I take a message?"

The caller laughed, a deep, heavy laugh, and said, "Good ..." and hung up.

"Who was that," asked Willie.

"I don't know," said Marie, "Let's get back to the movie."

A short while later at the best part of the movie, the phone rang again. The same strange voice said, "Now the scary time begins. Ha, ha, ha."

No sooner had Marie hung up the phone, then the lights went out. Nothing worked anywhere in the house.

"Let's go up to mom and dad's bedroom," announced Marie, trying not to sound afraid.

"What did the caller say this time? I'm frightened," asked Rose.

As they hurried up the stairs, Willie whispered to his big sister, "Marie, what's going on? Let's call mom and dad."

Marie held Willie's hand tightly and replied, "I tried, but the house phone doesn't work and my cell phone battery is dead. We're here all alone."

Huddled on the bed in their parent's room, Marie tried distracting her younger sisters. "We'll all sleep in here. But Rose and Lizzie – you have to share the blankets!"

Lying together in the dark, Willie tried to laugh. "Yeah, you guys, no hogging the bed either."

Suddenly, the kids heard the garage door opening. "Mom and dad are home!" shouted Rose and she started to jump out of the bed.

But Marie held her back. "Something tells me it's not mom and dad."

Willie went to the door and listened. "The door from the garage just opened." Then silence.

"Mom?" Willie yelled from the doorway. Again, just silence.

Marie told Willie to come back into the bedroom and lock the door from the inside. Then the four frightened children squeezed together on the bed hoping they'd hear their parent's voices. But again ... silence.

"Someone's on the stairs," whispered Rose as she cuddled closer to Marie.

"It's just our imagination, Rose. Let's just stay close to each other."

Creak – someone was trying to open the bedroom door. Thank goodness they had locked it. Then a laugh. Marie knew the sound of that voice. It was the stranger who had called earlier in the evening. Again ... silence. Then Marie remembered – Lizzie's room shared the bathroom with her parent's room. That door was unlocked. Slowly the bathroom door opened. The kids saw a shadowy figure in the doorway.

The Enmedio children huddled together under the covers.

Then Marie felt someone shaking her. "Marie, Marie honey, wake up. We're home. It's time for everyone to go into your own beds."

It was Mrs. Enmedio. Marie jumped up and hugged her mom. Then she told her parents what had happened while they were gone.

Mr. and Mrs. Enmedio listened intently. Then Mr. Enmedio smiled saying, "Marie, you were just having a bad dream. It wasn't real."

Slowly Willie reached over to Marie. "No, Marie. I had the same dream."

Rose and Lizzie began to cry.

THE END

## **The Dark, by Cory Parks**

There once a man named Rick who lived in a house in the woods who only lived with his dog. He loved that dog and would play fetch with him and his name was Romy. They lived with each other for twelve years and Romy would always go with Rick whenever he went to the nearby village for food or water.

People always asked him why he lived in the woods and not in town. He would always respond with, "It's peaceful and quiet."

That was his life with Romy every day. One day when Rick was digging a hole for an outhouse, he uncovered a mysterious piece of pottery that had a skull engraved on it and he thought that it was just an old artifact for some passed family members and he decided to keep it in his house. A few weeks later when Rick let Romy out for the morning dog ritual, Rick went back in and started to make breakfast for both of them, then suddenly he heard a YELP from Romy. Rick ran out and noticed that Romy was badly injured and Rick grabbed him to patch him up but when he got back inside Romy stopped breathing and Rick started to cry. After that he never left the house again and nobody ever saw him back in town. The town's people were beginning to wonder if something bad had happened to Rick and a few people went to Rick's house to see him.

"KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK" Rick answered the door with a sad face. They asked him what had happened and he told them that Romy was killed.

They asked, "What, how?"

Rick replied, "I have no idea, I didn't see any trap or anything. One day he was just outside doing his morning ritual and something just nearly killed him and I took him inside and that is where Romy died."

Rick started to cry once again. The visitors started to pat his back and soothe his pain. Twenty years went by, Rick was depressed thinking about Romy every day.

Over that time Rick started to get angry that Romy was killed. He was determined to find out what had killed Romy and was constantly digging holes around his property in hopes of finding some clue. He gradually started to go insane looking for the clue. Then a thought came about the piece of pottery he had found in his yard. He was looking frantically around his house in hopes that it would somehow contain some kind of clue to Romy's death. When Rick found it the pottery was glowing at the engraving a bright red.

"AWWWWWWE!!" Rick screamed so loud that people in town heard it. When a few guys ran to his house they knocked and no answer then they busted the door open and there was Rick dead without blood or any signs of physical murder just dead without a pulse. No one could figure out what had killed Rick and all they found was the piece of pottery that Rick had been holding when he was killed.

The town's people held a funeral for Rick and buried his body in one of the holes that he had dug up. Years passed and Rick was gradually forgotten over time. People that lived in town stopped talking about him and then his name was eventually forgotten.

Back at the abandoned house where Rick was buried, the pottery started shaking and glowing. Suddenly, the pottery shot out a light so bright that it lit up the entire house. A low booming voice came from nowhere, "ROMY, WHO KILLED YOU!?" A cold gust of wind started blowing through the woods and into the town. This wind was not a normal wind because it was still late summer and the town's people knew it was not normal and figured out that it was coming from the direction of the house they have yet to find again.

One day a group of teenage boys were bored and wanted to find something to do and they decided to go on an adventure around town. So they went around with spray paint cans and started tagging signs, fences, houses, and cars. They decided to go out into the woods and see if they could find anything cool. That is when they rediscovered the old abandoned house that belonged to Rick. They decided to go inside and see what they could find.

When they got there one of them said, "Uh, guys? I don't think we should be here?"

Then one of them heard a whisper that said, "*Do you know who killed my dog?*" He asked someone if they heard that but no one else did. When they continued searching they all heard a haunting sound with a scream that said, "AWWW STOP!!" and they all stopped in their tracks and looked at each other and ran as fast as they could but one of them tripped over an old grave. "OOPFF!" he sounded. The other two were still running and didn't hear him trip. "Hey guys stop can you help me up?" he yelled but they were too far to hear him. He managed to get up himself and looked back and saw a glowing bright pair of floating eyes that were looking straight at him and he screamed from the haunting look they had and started to run back towards the town. Silence fell upon the forest once again not a sound from the house or town.

The End...

## **Motley's Last Throw, by Sarah Reichert**

Janey says its Motley's ghost that does it. I say she's just playing tricks on me. She's just trying to scare me, and it did. The first time. Waking up, I looked down on the late and cold September morning, a couple of days after we'd buried Motley's ashes under the backyard tree, and there was my shoe. My one red, stinky, tennis shoe, waiting at the foot of my bed just like always. I started crying. I yelled her name and she came in, still in her pajamas, asking what was the matter. Like she didn't put it there, right there, where he used to drop it.

"S'not funny, Jane!" I yelled at her. She looked down at the shoe and turned white.

"Aiden!" she gasps. "Again? I swear, I didn't—"

"He just died a couple of days ago. That's not funny!" I yelled again. Mom and dad came in then, and told us to break it up. Dad said that I must have just left it there last night. But I know that I didn't. He took Jane out of the room, and left mom and me staring at the shoe.

Mom got a funny look on her face. She picked it up by the laces and smiled warmly. She looked into my eyes, with tears in her own, and sat on the edge of my bed. Her fingers traced over the floppy tongue and worn sole. An odd light, from the sunrise caught her blond hair and I could see she was trying to sort it through.

I should explain, that dad says my mom's a little touched. When we were little, really little, she used to tell us about fairies, and gnomes, and the magical things we couldn't see but that we should always believe in. We built fairy villages in the back yard with Popsicle sticks and buttons, and lost treasures like seashells from the cape, and old costume jewelry from grandma's closet. Mom would spend hours leading us down these fantastical paths. Dad would shake his head. He said she never stopped believing in magic.

But I was eleven now. I knew fairies weren't real, that mom and dad were Santa Claus, and that magic was just made up. But sometimes, when the light would shine through my mother's hair, just so, those magical moment in the garden came back to me. She scooted closer to me on the bed and took my hand in hers.

"This happened before?" she asked quietly. I nodded.

"The morning after we buried him." I ran my other hand under my nose. She sniffed.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought Janey was doing it. I thought she was trying to scare me, and I didn't want her to know that it did."

Mom thought for a moment and she brushed my bangs off of my forehead.

"What did Motley want when he'd bring you your shoe?" she asked softly.

"For me to throw him the ball, or get him a treat, or anything to get me out of bed." I said. She took my fingers in her own.

“Here,” she placed them on the heel. It was wet. Slobber wet. I took my fingers away quickly.

“Mom?” I said softly, my voice shook and she squeezed my hand. The smile on her face was odd and charmed. She reached over my head, to the shelf above my bed and picked up an old ratty baseball.

“Let’s go out to the garden,” she stood up and took my hand and I followed her out into the crisp morning with my one slobbery shoe in my hand. In our pajamas and bare feet, she led me to the tree and we sat by the sad little pile of dirt. She took the shoe in her hands and handed me the ball. She smiled.

“You know, Motley was my first baby.” She sniffed and I could see her face screw up in that funny way it does when you try not to cry. “And when we brought you home, he loved you right away. He guarded you with his whole life.” She paused to look out into the yard. The sun was throwing orange light on the tips of the trees to the west. We stared at it, and then something drew my gaze down. I heard my mom gasp beside me. She saw it too. Paw prints in the dewy grass, leading straight to us. I felt my breath come out in a puff.

“Mom, did you put my shoe there?” I asked suddenly. She stared at the paw prints and smiled, a beautiful smile. The kind of smile you remember about your mom for the rest of your life.

“No,” she said simply. “I think he did.”

I felt chills race up my spine, but an odd happiness filled my heart. I smiled too and fingered the worn threads of the ball in my hand. I closed my eyes, pictured Motley there, sitting in the grass, tongue lolling to one side, brown eyes bright and never leaving the ball. “Okay, boy.” I whispered. “One more time.”

I threw the ball to the far edge of the yard. Mom took my hand.

“Close your eyes,” she whispered. I did. Within seconds I felt the ball drop at my feet. It rolled against my bare toes. When we opened our eyes, the yard was quiet and still. I could tell he’d finally gone.

“Why’d he come back?” I asked and held the ball between both hands.

“I think he wanted you to know it was all right.” She said and put her arm around my shoulders. We sat in the wet grass a long time that morning, the small pile of dirt between us. One ratty ball and a slobbery shoe the gentle reminders of a lifetime worth of love and the possibility of more magic to come.

## **The Animal Within, by Randy Reynolds**

It was nearly a month ago when I was attacked by that beast.

I had heard reports on the news about a dangerous killer lurking about, but why the hell would that worry me? Besides, I had important business of my own that night. I remember that particular sensation of my blood, chilled within me, as I felt watched by someone or something. I whirled around to confront my assailant... But it's always too late by that point. I should have known better.

The werewolf's fangs sank deep and I could only utter a hoarse gasp of shock, a voiceless scream that went unheeded. I awoke later, surprised to be alive at all, but somehow knowing what I was to become now.

It was pointless to visit a hospital for aid. I've heard cases of this in the past, where they've supposedly quarantined these individuals for public safety. "Quarantined", yeah, right. Poor saps are probably getting experimented on, all in the name of science.

I thought about just barricading myself in for the night, allowing the transformation to just take a benign course. But I had important things that needed to be done tonight, and perhaps the curse of being bitten was just a dream, right? I wasn't going to change.

But oh, how wrong I was...

I know many of my kind prefer to do their hunting at the midnight hour, but not me. There's a magical time, right around dusk, when the light succumbs to darkness, when hope fades to despair – that's when to instill the most fear. And when one is captive to fear, they are powerless to react. The unfortunate soul needs to simultaneously feel both imperviousness and that slightest hint of doubt. That's the Petri dish where the cultures of terror flourish exponentially.

Ah...there he is. Exiting a cab, crossing the mostly deserted park to a rural apartment. He probably just had a fight with his girlfriend – you can tell from the slight slump in his posture. Or maybe it's a bad day at work. I follow him quietly, knowing exactly how much slack to provide in the invisible rope holding our fates together. Some think the stalking is all random, but it's not. You have to pick up on these visual clues to find just the right target. It comes with time.

Oh, and if you ever find yourself in my position, don't keep your stalking totally silent. The occasional twig snap or rustling of leaves is the perfect canvas upon which to paint my favorite color: paranoia. He looks around...but he doesn't see me. He won't see me...not until it's too late.

Sometimes, there's a chase. Now if you're good at what you do, you can easily just skip this step. But a good chase can often be just the thing to rapidly ratchet up the paranoia. You just have to make sure you're clear on where the boundaries are, because you've lost your chance if the chase ever exceeds the set parameters. They'll find safety and you start all over again. In this case, though, I don't need the exercise. He's already consumed with it. It's that scent of fear – many can't even detect it, but to me...it's the sweetest perfume known to man. And he's radiating it from fifty yards away. I attack.

Ah, and now the truly macabre dance unfolds! First, no one really knows how to react to an attack like this. So many think they know self-defense techniques, but coupled with the shock of the actual assault, so few can really put into practice even a glimmer of their instruction. The ensuing struggle is like watching a condensed version of a life in seconds: the vigorous raw energy at the start, which eventually yields to disillusionment as their resistance proves futile, finally to the cold, empty, hard inevitability of death. You can truly see it in his eyes as they gradually transition from fiery to glazed. Oh, the power! Oh, the rush! As the blood starts flowing, be warned that a second wind often possesses the victim, causing them to fight with renewed vigor. He was no exception, but I knew enough to steel my own resolve.

Finally, towards the end, I make him look me in the eyes. Diametrically opposite to a coup de grace, it is absolutely integral that he looks into my soul and sees the animal within. Any trace of humanity which he had believed would eventually become manifest has long since evaporated along with his hope. It's that quenching of the spirit, that abandonment of civility, which truly becomes the crowning achievement. For at that moment, I **am** his fate. I **am** his god, far more powerful than any being he ever worshipped on Sundays. We both share that one brief unmistakable moment where we both know I have complete absolute control over his life.

And then the final blow comes.

The euphoria I feel after the deed is done is truly exquisite, as the control I crave is sated. At least for a little while. Sometimes a little while is enough. Sometimes the appetite returns far sooner than I expect.

As I walk away from my work, giving the police yet another clue of my majesty, my muscles all involuntarily clench simultaneously. I drop to my knees in agony as large beads of sweat form across my brow. My lungs feel oh so very empty and I find myself gasping like a fish out of water. A pounding within my brain trumps any logical thought that ever remained as I recognize what's happening.

It is time. I struggle to open one eye and notice the hair on my forearms growing longer and darker and thicker. With tremendous resolve, I crane my neck to look up at the sky, where a full moon, previously masked by thick clouds, finally emerges to shine.

The transformation, I can feel it! It is... It is...

...starting.

## **The Unexpected Visitor, by Susan Rumph**

The quietude of the dusty hallway was broken by the squeaking hinges of a door being slowly opened. A woman's pale face, framed by dark curls, peered timidly into the empty corridor. After hesitating for a few moments, she stepped slowly from the dark room. Her anxious expression suddenly vanished as she darted over to the window and stared intently outside.

Amarenthe whispered in delight, "It is a full moon tonight."

Beneath the uncanny incandescence of the pure, white moonlight everything in the backyard stood out in sharp relief, as clear to her eyes as though it were broad daylight. The frost rimmed grass shimmered while the skeletal limbs of the trees danced with wild abandon in response to random gusts of autumnal wind. An owl perched uneasily upon one of the moving limbs until, with a hoot of irritation, it winged away to find a more stable perch from which to hunt.

Amarenthe delicately traced the intricate hoarfrost patterns which had formed upon the chill exterior of the window. Resting her cheek upon the cold glass, she sighed her contentment. "Tonight will be special, I just know it!"

Turning away from the enticing view, Amarenthe began to slowly drift down the palely illuminated hallway. The skirt of her old-fashioned white nightgown trailed upon the dusty floor while she ran her fingertips along the faded, rose-patterned wallpaper.

The corridor ended at an archway leading to an open space at the top of a wide flight of stairs carpeted in faded red velvet that looked black in the monochromatic light. A large Palladian window was set into the far wall of the landing with a window seat beneath it. Amarenthe quickly settled into the familiar soft cushions, a regular occurrence at this juncture in her nocturnal wanderings.

Directly across from her was a portrait of an imposing looking man. He was bald with an impressive grey beard and stared at Amarenthe with disapproving eyes.

"Good evening, Grandfather," Amarenthe said politely, as she did every night, "Isn't the moon simply glorious?"

Amarenthe then turned her head to the left and looked at the cluster of paintings and photographs which lined the wall next to the staircase. "Good evening, everyone," she called out, "Have you all noticed the moon?"

There was no response to Amarenthe's cheerful greeting. She slowly rose from her seat and started to descend the stairs, her right hand resting lightly upon the banister. Whenever she passed a picture or portrait, she would pause and say something.

"Hello, Grandmother, you're looking exceptionally lovely this evening." She addressed a painting of a diminutive woman who looked as austere and forbidding as her spouse.

"Mother and Father, I hope to find you well tonight."

Amarenthe lingered next to the black and white wedding photograph of her parents. They were staring directly into the camera lens, into a point of space beyond their daughter. She always hoped somehow that they would one night acknowledge her, the young woman she had become but they had never known.

The rest of the wall was filled with pictures of Amarenthe herself and another young woman who bore a striking resemblance to her. “Hello, Tessa,” Amarenthe stopped by a photograph of the twentysomething woman standing next to a teenage Amarenthe, both of them in white dresses. “It is a full moon this evening. Remember that August night you woke me up and we went swimming in the moonlight?” She smiled wistfully, “That occasion is one of my most cherished memories of our brief time together.” A tear, shining bright in the borrowed sunlight, traced down her cheek, “I miss you so much, sister, but I am keeping the house just as you left it. I promise.”

A sharp clattering noise echoed unexpectedly, cutting through the silence of the house and making Amarenthe jump. “That sounded like it came from the kitchen,” she said nervously, peering into the darker regions where the moonlight didn’t penetrate. Taking a deep breath, Amaranthe threw back her shoulders and turned to Tessa’s picture, “I will investigate the disturbance,” she stoutly assured her sister who smiled placidly back at her.

With a final longing glance up the stairs, Amarenthe resolutely walked down the remaining steps and turned in the direction of the kitchen. Upon drawing closer to her destination, she realized that it was no longer so dark, there was a soft yellow glow emitting from the far end of the house. Puzzled, she moved cautiously toward the kitchen from which she could clearly hear the sounds of someone moving around without bothering in the least to be quiet.

“What a forward burglar this scoundrel is!” Amarenthe muttered to herself angrily, her previous fear forgotten in her indignation at this invasion of her home.

Amaranthe moved swiftly across the formal dining room toward the kitchen which was clearly the source of the light. Now, she saw that it wasn’t yellow at all, but a harsh, unforgiving white light which she had never before encountered. From the kitchen entryway, Amaranthe stared in shocked surprise at the scene which greeted her. A stranger in a plaid dressing gown stood with his back to her. His bent body was partially immersed inside an odd silver rectangle with a brightly lit white interior.

Gasping, Amaranthe raised her hand to her throat, she felt faint. The man abruptly swiveled around with his arms full of platters of food. He kicked back at the silver rectangle, shutting it and cutting off the light. He caught sight of Amaranthe standing in the doorway. His eyes grew wide as the plates dropped from his nerveless fingers, shattering upon the slate floor.

The crashing noise startled them both out of their mutual paralysis causing the man to turn and flee up the narrow kitchen staircase screaming, “Ghost!”

Amaranthe rapidly retreated in the opposite direction. She flew above the ground, her legs vanishing into trails of vapor. She raced for the sanctuary of her room, shrieking as she went, “Human!”

## **American Harvesters, by James Sack**

*Go away*

*Go away*

**GO AWAY!**

No matter how many times she repeats the phrase, her plea is futile. From where she lays, the blue ball of fire hovers right over her. She cannot move-cannot even think of moving. Her shivering body is drenched in sweat, her clothes wrapping themselves selfishly around her cold, goose-bumped skin.

Her peripheral vision detects only darkness. She could be in her bedroom, or at the bottom of a hole, for that matter. A sick feeling sits in her stomach. It's not that the blue ball is speaking to her, or showing her an image. No, it is there to tell her that this is the most extraordinary event of her life-that her life has changed forever.

His image is now front and center. She faintly hears him saying something mundane, his quirky way of tilting his head ever so slightly trying to talk out a problem. His beautiful brown eyes shine, thoughtful and empathetic, unaware of the danger he is now in.

Just as she gets the urge to act, the blue orb fades out. It has done its job.

Suddenly, she is able to sit up, and realizes where she is. Another sick feeling comes over her, but this time it is out of pity for her own self. The cord tying her wrists together has cut deeply. Blood has since dried, but reds and purples, bordering on blue, now dominate the skin on her lower arms and hands.

The long, slender, dust-caked windows at the tops of the walls tell her it's a basement. An octopus furnace, or at least that's what her grandpa called a very similar looking contraption in his own basement back in Kansas, stretches out above her. Its long arms reach out in all directions, casting the allusion that a monster presides over her.

The floor above her creaks-not the sound of somebody walking, but of somebody standing, doing something in place. She is now at the foot of the stairs, guided by the daylight trying to make its way through the multitude of dirty windows and a half-window door on the landing up the stairs. The steps are made of wood. She'll be discovered if she's not careful, or unlucky, with a squeaky stair.

First she needs the use of her hands, though. In the corner closest to the stairs, she discovers a cellar. Feeling her way along the concrete walls, she finds no light switch. *It must be manual.* She stutters to the middle of the room, reaches up, and finds it. She pulls the chain as quietly as she can, bringing light into the windowless room. Dried up apples from years past litter the table and floor, and an apple press with gleaming metal edges presents itself. She kneels in front of the machine, and gets to work, extending and retracting her arms, dragging the cord over the metal edge. Upon snapping the cord, she becomes more nervous, knowing the next task will be uncertain and dangerous.

Before heading up the stairs, she looks around. *That dusty fire extinguisher? Or the larger-than-life pipe wrench?* She'll need something for defense.

After a hasty walk around, she settles on the plastic jug of bleach, sitting above the long-forgotten washing machine on the opposite end of the basement. *If I can't bloody them up, at least I can blind them.*

She makes her way up the stairs, ever so carefully. At the landing, she sees that she could escape out the door right now. He needs her, though. Briefly looking at her reflection in the door's window pane, it dawns on her for the first time that her t-shirt has been torn from the neck down. Her left shoulder is exposed, and...

*WHAT IS THAT?*

Black magic marker lines encircle her heart. She pulls up her shirt from below and finds more black lines on either side of her belly button.

*What the?*

She doesn't even finish the question, the answer hitting her like a locomotive.

Looking up the last set of stairs and at the door to the main floor, she realizes that at some point, she will be detected. Taking in a large, quick breath, she unscrews the cap from the bleach. Quickly but light-footed, she runs up the last few stairs, turns the knob, and pushes open the door.

Looking past them at first, she zeros in on his limp body, lying on the table. His shirt is off, and they have shaven his chest. There are no visible cuts-he still has his eyes, his organs.

*Okay, he's fine*, she says to herself, mindlessly sloshing the contents of the jug at their faces. They cry out in pain, the one dropping to her knees in agony.

Taking a knife to them seems too brutal, too inhumane, but for some reason, the cast iron pan containing the steaming water and instruments is perfectly acceptable. It takes the strength of both of her hands to pick it up. She dumps the boiling water on the one still standing, and then brings it down over his head with all her might. The one kneeling in agony meets a similar fate, and she drops the pan to the floor. The nightmare is over.

Weeks later, fully healed and perfectly safe, they learn of the organ smuggling operation run by the Poudre River librarians for over seven years. They vow to each other never to turn their backs on another librarian, ever again.

## **The Graveyard, by Marika Ujvari**

Finding the ornamental iron gate of the cemetery padlocked didn't surprise me. Nobody in their right mind would have the desire to visit a bone yard at night. But I was on a mission. The detailed map the psychic handed me clearly marked the path to the body. I flashed my penlight on the lock and found it missing its mark. I leaned on the heavy portal and it opened with a screech that echoed back from the nearby headstones I stopped in my tracks and tried to slow my heartbeat. The gravel walk, which I was to take, led from the gate to the chapel that loomed on top of the hill. I detached myself from the wall and took a few uneasy steps. My legs felt heavy. I followed the course of the designated path lined with poplars and other tall trees. This graveyard, which during daylight is a beautiful sylvan setting with architectural marvels of monuments, crypts and mausoleums, in the cover of darkness turns into a playground for sinister ghosts I wasn't bent on hobnobbing with. Moonlight can play tricks on the imagination. To my eyes every headstone appeared magnified and threatening, and shadows danced behind every granite marker. Winged cherubs heads beckoned to me with menacing smiles. Blood pulsed in my head as I inched forward. The gravel crunched under my feet giving away my presence. A cloud hovered over the moon when I finally reached the small, garlanded church and provided a momentary camouflage. I turned to my right to look for the stone bench that signaled the nearness of my target. I didn't see it right away for dense ivy covered the half-sunken seat. As I fought my way through the malevolent tendrils something moved behind one of the crypts and a shiver ran through me. I was so close, only a few more steps. I didn't know what to expect, but I had to find him. Somewhere in a distance a church bell tolled. It was midnight.