

# GHOSTHUNT<sup>®</sup>

The title 'GHOSTHUNT' is rendered in a large, red, dripping font. The letter 'O' in 'GHOST' contains a brown dog. The letter 'H' in 'HUNT' contains a blue ghost figure. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the end of the word.

The Beginning

# GHOSTHUNT

*The Beginning*

Kevin Knill

*GhostHunt: The Beginning*

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## Contents

**One**      **Invitation**

**Two**      **Arrival**

**Three**     **Welcome**

**Four**     **Baptism**

**Five**     **Finale**

**Six**      **Return**

# INVITATION



It was inexplicable; Yes inexplicable, and yet at the same time, quite ordinary. It was after all only water vapor, a simple gathering of excited molecules all swirling and twisting together. But what made it so curious was that it shouldn't have been there at all. Katie hardly ever saw mist in her garden, not this much and certainly never at this time of year, and yet, there it was. It entered her garden and like a fluffy blanket unrolled itself across the lawn. Katie noticed this invasion from her favorite part of the house; a seat in a large bay window of her kitchen. It was a comfortable vantage point from where she could see almost all of her beloved garden. Unlike the typical Italian and French gardens which were geometric and very orderly, her quintessential English garden rambled and sprawled like a lazy sunny day. There was no clear division of plants or colors. The roses, the lupines, larkspur and dahlias, the shapes, the textures and colors all blended together beautifully. Tending her garden satisfied and soothed the lighter side of her personality. Beyond her sixteenth century cottage the moss green English hills rolled endlessly in all directions, echoing the gentle rhythm of her inner soul. Katie enjoyed the quiet and solitude; leisurely walks down secluded country lanes and tending to her flowers yet, as with many of us there was another side of her personality, a side that enjoyed the darker side of life; ghosts, monsters and all things spooky. This alter ego reveled in the fun and

excitement of playing GhostHunt, a board game she and her close friends regularly enjoyed. Katie always had a fondness for things that scared her. There wasn't a spine-chilling movie made that she hadn't seen, but her favorite were ghost stories. Some of her most cherished memories were as a small child sitting around a camp fire at night with her family listening to tall tales of vampires or haunted houses. Playing GhostHunt indulged her love of the supernatural world and brought her as close as she could get to being in a ghost story of her very own.

Today was a special day, not only because it was her turn to host GhostHunt but also because the last day of exams at her junior college was over, allowing herself and her friends to finally relax and unwind after six weeks of arduous studies.

It was late afternoon when Katie observed the mist creep into her garden; she was munching on salt and vinegar potato chips lost in her daydreams. Her thoughts were full of ugly, wart covered witches casting spells as hoards of fanged bats circled overhead and of malevolent ghosts floating through hallways of an ancient castle searching for their next victim. She was, as so often was the case lost in another world. But today Katie was even more distracted, her mind wandered from her realm of monsters and the wonderful combination of salt and malt vinegar to the mysterious hazy

vapor outside. Although she was expecting company, she was so far away with her thoughts that when the door bell rang it startled her. Katie Jumped out of her seat scattering her bag of chips all over the floor in the process, she hurriedly tried to scoop them back in the bag. *'The five second rule, right?'* she whispered to herself. She walked up the hall toward the front door still slightly exasperated at losing some of her chips but far enough in her dream world to not really care.

She opened the door and was greeted by five of her good friends and counterparts. "Hi everyone, come on in." She said excitedly.

First in was the effervescent Susan, who was far from the stereotypical blond, she had both beauty and brains. Behind her was Marylyn who longed to become a country and western singer and could make up lyrics at the drop of a hat. Pam was next, an earthy "new age" girl who loved to read tarot cards and people's vibrations. Then came Liz, she was a party loving daredevil who craved a livelier life style and traveled to London as much as possible. Next through the door was the only boy in the group. Nigel. He was a real 'dear' as Katie like to say. The fact that his soft and gentle mannerisms made Katie weak in the knees and slightly gooey inside was kept strictly to herself. However, the fact that he helped Katie the



last time they played almost costing him the game, had made it obvious to everyone else that there was something between them.

Katie began to close the door but the scene outside in the garden was all wrong; the sun was not due to set for a while, it had been lovely and bright with birds still singing in the trees; now it was as though the evening was playing in “fast forward”. In just a few seconds the burnt orange sun plunged below the horizon and was replaced by an overly large full moon which appeared superimposed on the cobalt sky. The birdsong had disappeared and the garden became unnaturally silent. Katie took a couple of steps outside to get a closer look. A heavy, almost suffocating feeling of foreboding overcame her; she quickly tried to dismiss it as she felt herself become panicky. *‘What the heck is going on? First the mist and now this. Come to think of it, no one commented on the mist...perhaps they didn’t see it...maybe I’m the only one that can see it.’ Maybe...maybe I’m the only one that can see any of this?’* She was about to turn to go inside when a loud rustling broke the silence. The forest that bordered the far side of her property suddenly burst into life. Its canopy of leaves began to ripple back and forth like ocean waves. Katie watched as an energy force appeared to take over and possess the trees. Branches swayed and groaned and grew more frantic with every second. Katie’s spirit was hypnotized and drawn helplessly

into the storm by the flickering, twitching leaves that appeared to be talking in a language all their own. She found herself being held captive and unable to move. Suddenly a rouge wind whipped through the tops of the tress, gaining speed it encircled the garden in a violent vortex of leaves and debris that menacingly swirled together. In a split second the whirlwind left the tress, raced across the garden and with a tremendous blow hit Katie full in the face. The force of the cold blast forced Katie to shut her eyes. Her body trembled as a vision began to materialize behind her tightly shut eyelids. Agitated blotches of color moved and flowed together. Gradually these random shapes began to take on recognizable outlines and she found herself standing on a large stone pathway surrounded by a desolate and barren landscape; the light was so intense everything appeared bleached and washed out. Katie shuddered as a barrage of sensations engulfed her. An arid dry taste was followed by an invocative smell of wind driven sand. Then the screeching of crows cawing to each other as they circled overhead mixed with the haunting melody of the wind as it blew across the deserted terrain. Her jeans and sweatshirt had transformed into a thin white flowing dress that along with her hair, billowed and danced in the wind. Katie could just make out the ruined walls and crumbling towers of a medieval castle in the distance. Her overloaded mind was tingling and sparkled with the experience

until and as quickly as they had risen up, the wind and the vision died away. She blinked repeatedly as he tried to ground herself and clear her mind. She was somewhat of a loss to understand what had just happened, trembling she struggled to comprehend it and although it was not an overly unpleasant experience, the fact that it could not be explained left her feeling invigorated yet uneasy. With no clear rationalization she began to doubt herself and find an alternative explanation; was all just her imagination? Maybe it never really happened? The only problem was...it had. She turned and went back into the house and decided it best not to mention the vision to her friends. They'd think she had just made it up to add to the ambiance of the evening, Katie knew she would have a very difficult time describing it anyway.

“What do you want me to do with the sandwiches?” Asked Liz as Katie entered the room, oblivious to Katie's recent encounter.

“Oh...I err...I put some plates out on the kitchen table, just set them in there.” Replied Katie, attempting not to let her voice break.

The rest of the girls followed Liz into the kitchen and began to get the food and the drinks ready.

“Nigel, can you put the GhostHunt sound affects CD on and dim the lights please?” Asked Katie with a smile.

“Sure. Who do you think will win tonight?” Nigel responded as he sauntered over to the stereo.

“How about me? Its been ages since I’ve won.” Replied Katie.

The CD began to play sending the sound of an eerie wind swirling around the room.

With the promise of an evening full of ghostly adventures, Katie sat at the dining room table and with great anticipation began to set up the game. She pulled the lid off the overly large game box and began to empty it of its contents. The house grew darker as Nigel began to dim the lights, shadows spread out and inhabited every nock and corner of the room. Katie unrolled the oversized canvas GhostHunt playing board with its blueprint of the ground floor of ‘GreyFriar Hall’; displaying in great detail its many rooms; the kitchen, music room, library and its two towers to mention just a few. It also illustrated in vivid color the surrounding grounds of the Hall with important locations such as the graveyard, forest, ruined Abby and lake. Katie wondered if tonight would be her turn to triumph. She knew she played far too conservatively staying away from the most dangerous places and that in order to win, she would have to become bolder. She longed to come across the giant rat or meet the master vampire but her instincts not to get eliminated from the game kept her from venturing into their lairs. She

had played the game for so long yet hardly ever traveled to the graveyard or the ruined abbey, let alone the island or the dead forest. She was far more inclined to linger in the safer rooms of the hall. Even though she had won on more than one occasion, Katie could not claim to be a regular winner. She rolled the dice around in her hand as she gazed down at the graveyard and thought about all the creatures that could be found there. If she wanted to increase her chances of succeeding tonight, a change of strategy would be in order.

She sorted out all the location cards and put them in their respective positions. Each location had a specific set of cards, the top card was turned over when a player landed on its corresponding place on the board. They would bring your character either good or bad fortune. You might find a defensive item such as a silver cross, some wooden stakes or a bible, which would assist you in fighting the evil forces you encountered during the game and thereby gaining you points. Conversely if you encountered a vampire, ghost or other creature of the night without the previous good fortune of having found a weapon to defend yourself, your player would probably lose points or possibly be knocked out of the game entirely.

Katie accounted for all the dice, two six sided, one four sided and two ten sided. Then she placed the GhostHunt clock which was used to track

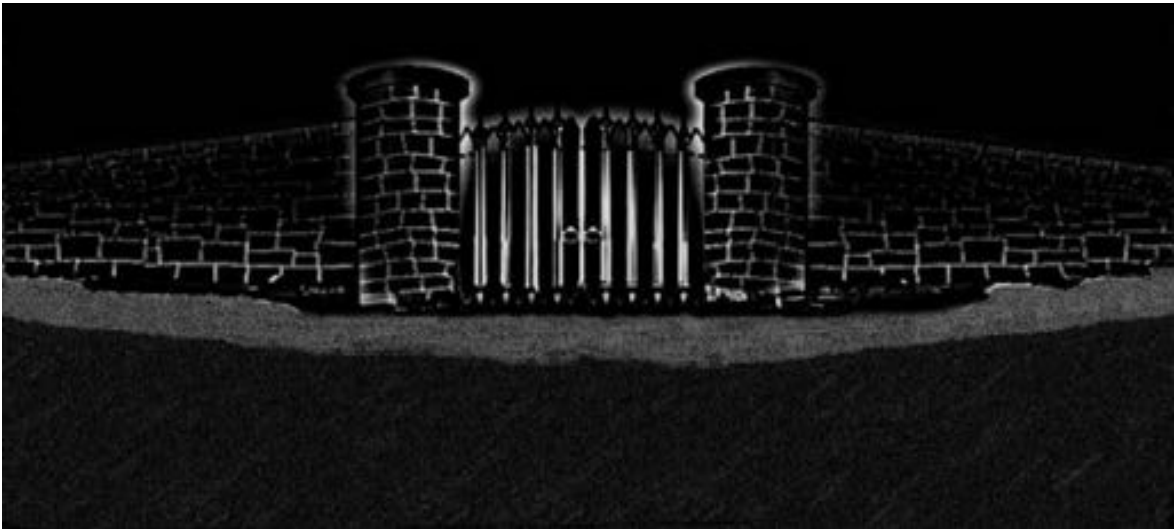
time within the game beside the board and set it to 11:30 p.m. When she reached into the box for the playing pieces, one of which everyone would choose to use as their 'character' in the game, she noticed that something was not quite right; there seemed to be too many. How very strange, she thought. She took each piece out of the box one at a time and named them silently to herself as she placed them on the board. ' *The mad scientist, the newspaper reporter, the lost Swedish hiker, the ghost hunter, the Victorian policeman, the ...* ' "What?" she said aloud. The playing piece she held in her trembling hand was not any of the characters from the game but in fact an exact likeness of herself, right down to her jeans, red sweatshirt, fiery red hair and grey-green eyes. Katie couldn't believe what she was seeing. She was looking at an exact miniature representation of herself. Katie was so stunned and intensely fixated on the figure, she didn't notice the serpent shaped darkness that had just slithered into the room and was making its way odiously across the floor toward her. Like a predatory snake snaring its latest victim, it twisted and coiled itself around her. From her feet it moved up her waist and arms to her shoulders, finally engulfing her in its evil darkness.

Katie shuddered as the fangs of biting cold sank into her body. The sounds from the CD and her friends' voices started to slow and eventually became an indistinguishable muddle of slurring.

She did not feel panic or shock, the venom of the darkness didn't allow her to feel any emotions at all as it consumed her. Her eyes were open, but she couldn't see much of anything now. The room had faded almost completely away and only vague outlines and patches of color remained. Unable to move, Katie felt as though she was floating in space.

She began to shiver as it became colder and darker. Goose bumps sprung up all over her arms and legs. Gradually the shivering stopped and her whole body became as frozen as a block of ice. There was no sound and no light; she closed her eyes. She was alone—swirling and tumbling in a vacuum, void of time and feeling. The blackness had totally enveloped her ... she was surrounded by complete and utter darkness.

# ARRIVAL





The moor was a bleak and inhospitable place. It's only colors were dismal shades of grey which blanketed its lifeless, windswept landscape. Anything or anyone unfortunate enough to stray into its bogs would, after a brief and pointless struggle, disappear completely under its dark, brackish watery mud. Much like all the others, this evening was bone chillingly cold and damp but tonight it seemed even more morose than ever. As the night beckoned, storm clouds gathered above the surrounding hill tops and hung there like a foreign army lying in wait for its orders to strike. The clouds were gray at first; changing to dark purple and finally morphing to pitch black. The unrelenting gloom of the moor was enough to drain one's very soul. If the moor had a purpose, it was to drain all life, light and energy.

In this place existed a life force, a darkness so intense, its void so unfathomable, that it could seize your mind and soul forever. It was as old as the land itself, a patient predator with one goal, the collection of souls. To the people who were unfortunate enough to have seen this entity, it appeared as though they were looking into the bottomless pit of Hell itself. For them, there was no escape; they were locked into an inevitable conclusion, everything contrived to consume them.

It was the perfect location for GreyFriar Hall, remote and uninviting. Like a giant Venus Fly Trap that collected people instead of flies, it waited

patiently for its next victim. It was here, just outside the bogs that the darkness was about to deliver the unfortunate Katie. The undulating ripples of darkness that had carried her farther and farther away from her home turned into waves, which became larger and stronger. A prisoner of this dark ocean's tide, held captive until eventually, like a piece of driftwood, she was beached onto this distant shore.

Her feet touched the ground, the blackness parted and with a jolt she lurched forward. Katie cried out as her face slammed into hard, icy cold metal bars. She attempted to open her eyes, but they were crusted over with a gooey, sticky sleep, as if she had just awakened after a long hibernation. Eventually, she managed to force one eye open, then the other and found herself looking up at a massive pair of tarnished iron gates that loomed at least twenty feet above her head.

Convinced that the wrought iron had left a mark or a gash, Katie nervously ran her fingers over her face fearing that she had been disfigured her for life. Timidly she brought her hands into view, finding no blood, she sighed with relief. With the worry of injury gone a million questions and fears began to fill her head. Was she dreaming and if so, how would she know? It didn't feel like a dream, but if she was awake, where was she and how on earth was she going to get home? She felt so weak that her legs

wobbled and almost gave way. Desperately she grabbed hold of the iron gates for support. They felt like icicles in her grasp but she knew she couldn't let go or she'd fall to the ground. She peered between the rusty black railings and tried with some difficulty to focus her gaze as it traveled along the gravel driveway that stretched away from the gates and into the haze. She could make out a large, dark shape in the distance, but she felt too queasy to bring it into focus. *'Probably a country house of some kind.'* She thought to herself.

With the suddenness of a broken shoe lace, Katie was aroused from her trance by a squeaking noise that sounded in the distance behind her. She turned her head to see what it was and as she did so notice that the enormous gates she was so desperately clinging onto for support were flanked by massive stone walls which dwarfed the gates in comparison. Their sheer size was remarkable, reaching a height of at least twenty-five to thirty feet. The rough uneven stones were covered in moss and centuries worth of vines which kneaded and gnarled their way between the rockwork, clinging to them for their very life, much as Katie clung to the gates for hers. She stared up at their enormity and wondered why anyone would build them so high. *'Was it to keep people out or to keep them in?' she wondered.* Katie looked to her left, the wall continued in what seemed to be a perfectly straight line

until it disappeared into a fog bank about fifty feet away. She looked right, It was the same story; the wall was swallowed up by fog at about the same distance, beyond which nothing could be seen. She surmised the walls probably did not end at the fog line but continued and ran the perimeter of the grounds of a large country estate.

The squeak pierced the murky air again. *'What the heck is making that noise?'* She shifted her gaze to the rough, dirt road she was standing on. It ran parallel to the walls in either direction and disappeared into the grayness of the dense swirling mist. Katie turned herself around as far as she could without letting go of the gate to see if she could figure out where the noise was coming from. Behind her on the opposite side of the road lay scrubland covered with bushes and brambles. It too was obscured by the dense haze that appeared to completely encircle her.

For a moment there was silence, but just as she began to think she was imagining it, the squeak rang out again. It seemed to be coming from beyond the veil of mist to her left. She tried to take a step to investigate but having not fully recovered her balance her legs almost gave way, quickly she grabbed onto the bars again. Maintaining a tight grip on the railings she carefully maneuvered herself around, being certain she had held on tightly with at least one hand at all times.

Katie stood with her back pressed firmly against the gates. Her weakened legs quivered as she fought to maintain her balance. The sound grew closer. The squeak continued in a regular pattern, stopping every so often for a few seconds before continuing again. She held her breath, frozen to the spot and waited for whatever was making the sound, to break through the white, cloudy barrier.

Gradually, from behind the white billowy fog bank appeared a large round man riding what seemed to be a very old bicycle. Its rusty peddles squeaking systematically as they went around. He was moving so slowly he could barely stay upright and was in danger of tipping over at any moment. The brief pauses of squeaking were explained by the fact that every few yards he would lose his balance, lean to one side and almost fall over. Eventually after a few more painful maneuvers he was close enough for Katie to see that he was a middle-aged, overly large man in an ill fitting, old fashioned police uniform with sergeant's stripes on the arms. By the bulges and tightness, it was obvious that he had put on a few pounds since the uniform was issued to him. His helmet was also too small, by at least two sizes and was balanced precariously on top of his large, egg-shaped head, barely held in place by a thin chin strap. He reminded her of an old English 'Bobby' from Victorian times.

Despite her circumstances, she found the sight of him painfully and slowly making his way up the uneven road toward her with an almost superhuman effort, extremely comical. The road was in a terrible condition, full of potholes and ridges. *'Surely, walking would be quicker?'* she thought. Wheezing and gasping for breath and with sweat beading and dripping down his face he hit another large rut in the road and almost toppled over. It was not until he was almost on top of Katie that he finally noticed her presence. In a panic he immediately applied the brakes, of which only the front ones appeared to be actually working. Any average size person traveling at even a relatively steady pace would have been thrown over the handlebars and into the air. Fortunately for the sergeant, his large size and almost imperceptibly slow speed saved him from this fate. He did not so much stop as execute a controlled crash landing right in front of Katie. With one final wobble, he and his bicycle leaned to one side and for an instant it seemed both he and his bike would fall over. However, at the last moment he managed to steady one foot on the road before the bike fell to the ground from underneath him. He struggled for a few moments as he attempted to untangle his other foot from the wreckage. Finally, free from his wounded bicycle, he paused for a moment to gather himself and brush the dirt and dust from his dark blue uniform. After appearing to be satisfied that he was presentable, he stood

upright, almost to attention. The triumphant look on his face after completing such a Herculean task turned to one of puzzlement as he caught Katie's gaze.

“What's all this then, young miss?” he asked, his voice sounding shaky but with a forced air of authority. The sergeant narrowed his eyes and peered down at her from beneath his helmet, waiting for an answer.

The question confused her. “Sorry?” she replied.

He leaned forward and it appeared that he was about to repeat the question.

“Mmm.... but.” Katie began, not knowing what to say or whether to ask any of the million questions that were spinning around her head.

“What in 'eavens name are you doing out 'ere in this weather, young lady?” he replied.

“Well ... I ... I'm not sure,” Katie stammered.

“Not sure?” he parroted back, his face turning slightly red.

“Well, I'm not sure where I am,” Katie said.

“Well, little lady.” He began, taking on a slightly pompous attitude.

“You is standing outside GreyFriar 'all. That's where you is.”

All at once, the pieces started to come together. The cockney accent, the uniform and what he had said, all made a connection. Her mind started

reeling and she began to feel faint. “Did ... did you say GreyFriar Hall?”

Katie asked weakly.

“Yes, miss I did, and ...”

She only heard him say yes; the rest was lost as her focus became muddled again. GreyFriar Hall was the haunted mansion in GhostHunt.

“What’s your name?” she asked with a trembling voice.

“Oats, young miss, Sergeant Oats at your service.” He smiled as he reached up and touched his police helmet with his forefinger in that old-fashioned way that indicated a kind of salute and sign of respect.

*‘What...no it can’t be. Sergeant Oats is one of the characters in GhostHunt...an overweight Victorian police officer... called Sergeant Oats...what’s happening to me?’* Katie thought she might faint, but by a miracle, she managed to maintain her composure and her balance. Before she could say anything else, another voice came from beyond the mist.

“Hello, please. Yes, lost I am, thank you much.” Someone else had emerged from the fog and was now standing right next to a befuddled Katie and what was apparently the real, live Sergeant Oats. It was the figure of a blond leggy girl in her early twenties wearing what resembled, hiking gear.

“Oh my God!” Katie said under her breath. “It...it is.... it’s Svetlana, the lost Swedish hiker.”



“Where I am, not knowing. Further up the road, on the left, yes?”

Svetlana continued.

Oats seemed much taken with the newcomer’s obvious charms, and he switched his attention to Svetlana. “So young miss, what brings *you* out to the ‘all then?

“Next town, far is it traveling miles?” Svetlana replied.

“I detect that you’re not from around ‘ere, are you?”

“Straight on and keeping going?”

“What *are* you talkin’ about?”

“Walking on, turn right and now here.”

“What on earth?”

For a few minutes, the bizarre and disjointed exchange continued. The hiker clearly not comprehending Sergeants Oat’s broad, cockney accent and the poor Sergeant trying in vain to understand the hiker’s heavily accented, broken English.

Finally, Katie couldn’t stand it any longer. “I think she’s lost!” she interjected loudly.

“Well then,” Oats said, apparently taken aback by Katie’s sudden outburst. He thought for a second and then continued. “Well then, that makes two of you, don’t it?” He seemed quite amused by his observation,

the shiny buttons of his uniform were barely able to contain his large jostling stomach as he chuckled to himself.

Katie watched the two of them interact and thought back to GhostHunt. The game contained a small comic book which outlined its storyline and introduced each of the characters in the game. Sergeant Oats certainly looked exactly as he had been depicted.

As far as exaggerated, formula characters go, it would be very hard to find one more cliché than the 'Lost Swedish Hiker.' Sergeant Oat's stomach wasn't the only large thing moving around; Svetlana's enormous chest was barely kept in place by her flimsy blouse. Its buttons looked as though they were about to burst open at any time. From the moment Katie had arrived, she had been shivering from the cold. However, Svetlana dressed in inappropriate mini hiking shorts didn't seem to be affected. *'Obviously her character doesn't feel cold.'* Katie surmised. Svetlana's Scandinavian good looks and blond, braided ponytails finished off the ensemble perfectly. The only way in which Svetlana remotely resembled a hiker was the fact she was wearing hiking boots and carrying a backpack, but even the latter was suspiciously small. *'A serious hiker and rambler couldn't carry anything useful in that.'* Katie reasoned. Sergeant Oats and Svetlana were so similar to the characters in the cartoon, Katie wondered if she had somehow been

transported into the comic strip itself. But they did seem to be real flesh and blood, even if they did look and act like the bizarre characters from the game. The idea that she had been whisked into their cartoon world was completely ludicrous, besides which, a real cartoon would be fun and safe; what was happening to her here was not fun at all. This place was strange, her sweatshirt was not doing a good job of keeping out the cold and she was uncomfortable. With every passing minute Katie grew more miserable and desperately and wanted to go home.

Nevertheless, Katie felt a bit sharper now and more disposed to take on the situation. “What are *you* doing here?” she questioned Oats.

“I always stop by the ’all once a day to check on things,” he replied.

“What things?” Katie pressed. She felt that a direct line of questioning might uncover some answers or even a solution to her predicament.

“I can’t rightly say that I know miss. I just come round; that’s all.”

The Sergeant seemed unsettled not knowing the answer to Katie’s question and stood there for a moment with a puzzled look on his face, trying to remember exactly why he was there.

Svetlana broke the silence. “I many miles traveling. Walking I am long. Lovely, yes country...?”

She was interrupted by a low a grumbling sound that emanated from somewhere behind the veil of fog. As the noise became more intense, it was accompanied by two lights that appeared from down the road to their right, they doggedly piercing the mist, which by now had become a good deal thicker and had moved even closer to the trio. The two giant eyes became brighter and bigger, and the rumble louder and deeper until with a crescendo of light and noise, a car burst through the curtain of fog and lurched wildly down the road toward them.

*'I wonder who this will be.'* Katie thought. The characters from the game she knew so well swirled through her mind. Which one would she meet next? She shook her head. *'I'm going crazy! This couldn't be happening.'* Katie thought she might be dreaming or that maybe she had slipped, hit her head and passed out and would come around any second to find the faces of her concerned friends looking down at her, as she lay staring up at them from her dining room floor.

The car was an old Buick. Its long black hood, magnificent chrome detailing and wonderful sweeping running boards were reminiscent of cars featured in American gangster films. With a screech of brakes and a cloud of dust, the gleaming whitewall tires came to a sharp stop about twenty feet from them. But instead of a gang of ruffians, a lady dressed in a black pin-

striped business suit jumped out from the driver's side. With her pencil skirt, Mary Jane shoes and bobbed hairstyle, she looked like she'd stepped straight out of 1930's America. There was an air of tension about her. Her demeanor spoke of busy offices, the constant clattering of typewriters and ever-present deadlines.

*'Oh.'* Katie mused. *'It's Natalie, the reporter.'*

Aiming at no one in particular the reporter barked "Where in God's creation are we?" in a loud scratchy Brooklyn accent.

"Well ..." started Katie.

"Is this that GreyFriar place?" the reporter interrupted.

"Yes, ma'am," Oats confirmed.

"Well, it's about time. I've been driving for ages, and these roads are appalling! I'll need all your names." the reporter demanded, producing a notepad and a pencil as if from nowhere. "Let's start with you, young lady." she continued as she walked over to Katie.

"Do you always have to speak so loudly?" Katie inquired, still wondering where the notepad and pencil had come from.

The reporter seemed taken aback by this and was momentarily stopped dead in her tracks.

*'She's awful.'* Katie thought *'And I always like to play her character in the game.'* She resolved right then and there that if she managed to get out of this situation and make it home, she would never choose to play as Natalie again.

“Weeeeeel?” the reporter continued in a voice that was not as loud but had suddenly become very patronizing. “What’s your name, cutie?”

“My name’s not cutie; it’s Katie,” Katie replied. She was getting a bit tired of the whole situation and was not going to add to her lot by taking any nonsense from a woman like this.

“OK, and what about the rest of you?” continued the reporter coarsely.

Katie let out a gasp—not one of distress. Far from it. She had just noticed a very handsome, rugged-looking young man in his early twenties stepping out from the passenger side of the car. He stood before them with a strong and reassuring look on this face, and a wonderful smile.

“It’s Nick the ghost hunter.” Katie gasped to herself.

The reporter, realizing that she had lost everyone’s attention, turned and saw that her passenger had disembarked. “Oh, that’s Nick and the reason I’m here; he’s some kind of ghost hunter. He’s going to investigate

the strange goings on here and I'm here to investigate him; isn't that right good lookin'?" she said, winking at him garishly.

Natalie's abrasive accent was already starting to grate heavily on Katie's very delicate sensibilities. It was obvious that "Miss Pushy" had designs on Nick, who had a rare charm about him which had instantly caught Katie's attention.

She reminded herself that Nick was also a character from the game, and he presumably like the others, carried his own set of limited characteristics. Knowing his character was designed to be charming, Katie felt uneasy about how well his magnetic attraction was already beginning to work on her. There was something irresistible about him however which made Katie, at least momentarily, put these reservations aside.

"In a way, I suppose that is correct," Nick said as he walked over to the group. His clothes were earth toned and practical. He wore combat-type trousers, shirt and boots, and a utilitarian brown leather jacket.

"Good evening everyone. I'm Nick. I was on my way here and my car broke down about five miles back down the road. I had started walking the rest of the way and Natalie, who, as it turns out was heading to the same destination as myself, kindly gave me a ride."

“Yes, yes, yes,” Natalie retorted, showing obvious signs of irritation. It was obvious to Katie that Natalie would have preferred to have been more directly associated with Nick.

Sergeant Oats, who had allowed himself to become a little overwhelmed by the proceedings, decided to speak up. “But *why*, might I ask, would the two of yer, want to come all the way out ’ere to GreyFriars ’all in the first place?”

“Tell them, hon,” Natalie said, motioning to Nick with a long cigarette holder which had appeared out of thin air complete with a lit cigarette.

*‘How does she do that?’* Katie wondered to herself.

Nick continued, “I’m not sure if any of you realize this, but we are all standing outside *the* most haunted house in England and maybe even the whole of Western Europe.”

Katie barely remembering to breathe was hanging on his every word. Nick had a perfect well-bred Oxford accent, but not so proper as to make him sound stuck up. His tone spoke of boarding schools, musty reading rooms, rugby matches, cozy old pubs, and warm country houses with those wonderful big log fireplaces that crackled and popped. Without realizing it Katie was losing herself in the romance of his character.



His voice took on an almost hypnotic cadence. “GreyFriar Hall has been the sight of some sort of building or another from as far back as Pagan times, where it was believed that human sacrifices would guarantee a mild, short winter and the coming of a fruitful summer harvest.”

“Gosh,” Katie said out loud. Falling ever deeper under his spell.

“There are records of a Roman fort being built here, as well as Saxon and Norman castles. Henry the VIII even built a fortified manor house at this location. There are also many other old structures on the grounds of the hall—the ruined abbey for example. The name GreyFriar Hall is derived from a friar who is believed to have lived here and who has haunted the main building since the twelfth century.”

Nick oozed knowledge and reassurance from every pore, and he had an authority about him that was very genuine without being pushy or pretentious.

As he continued speaking, Katie began to recognize some of the things that he was saying as coming from the comic and the introduction section of the GhostHunt rule book. It contained references to most of what Nick was describing. But to Katie he was conveying the hall’s history in a much more detailed and informative way.

The reporter was busily taking notes. “That’s all very well Nicky boy, but all that stuff happened a long time ago. What about more recently?”

Standing in front of them Nick resembled one of Katie’s many college lecturers, strong, confident and assertive. He continued, “Over the last hundred years or so, the occupants have made their own various modifications. The building as you see it today is part hall, part manor house, and part mansion. There are also remains of construction from the various castles which have occupied this piece of land over the centuries. Some of the outside walls for example are testament to these earlier fortifications and of course the two magnificent towers speak for themselves. There is also rumored to be a dungeon somewhere under the hall, and legend says some investigators have unfortunately gone missing while searching for it. There is no current owner, and it has been empty for about fifty years...”

Suddenly, without warning and completely silently, like a giant bird of prey that had spotted its next meal, a large woman on a bicycle swooped into their midst. She glided to a perfect stop in front of them and announced “I expect you’re all here for the visitations?” Her question was delivered as casually as though she were asking who would like more sandwiches at a church tea party.

“My name is Ruth, but I expect you all know that,” she beamed as she glanced around the crowd. “Or maybe you don’t,” she concluded at seeing everyone’s blank face.

She looked to be in her sixties. Her accent was English, West Country—cream teas, village fetes, and long, brisk walks before breakfast. She was as intrusive and direct as the reporter but much more acceptable in her demeanor. She exuded genuine niceness, like a favorite aunt who had everyone’s best interest at heart. She was wearing a tweed skirt, matching hat and jacket, very thick brown tights, a large knitted shawl and a pair of sensible brogue shoes. Despite her large size, she dismounted her bicycle with ease in one fluid movement. Her size and shape were an almost exact match to Sergeant Oats.

*‘I wonder if all large round people travel around on bicycles in this part of the country?’* Katie pondered. She realized at once that this newcomer was another GhostHunt character, Ruth the psychic. Despite her pleasantness and obvious good intentions, the psychic seemed to have a slightly annoying habit of talking down to people in same manner that some of Katie’s teachers did. Ruth walked her bicycle over and purposefully leaned it against the shiny car.

“Hey lady, watch out where you put that thing!” spurted the reporter, clearly concerned for her car’s paint job.

“Oh, don’t you worry my dear; my bicycle will be perfectly safe there,” Ruth said. Her reply was so smooth and effortless it was obvious to Katie that the psychic was a master at deflecting objections and of getting her own way.

“Now,” Ruth said, walking over to Nick. “You must be Nicholas Wheatley, the famous ghost hunter. I have been following your adventures for many years, ever since you found the master vampire on the Isle of Wight.”

Nick shifted his feet. He seemed uneasy about being recognized and receiving such acclamation in public.

Ruth turned to face the reporter. The psychic’s stone cold, unblinking stare made the reporter look decidedly ill at ease. It was obvious that Natalie was not used to having to deal with anyone who had a stronger personality than her own. Ruth looked Natalie up and down. Katie got the distinct impression that Ruth was, as yet, unsure how to deal with the reporter. “I get mostly irrelevant facts and non sequiturs from you; not very much to report here at all, I’m afraid.” Ruth concluded.

“Huh, thanks a lot lady,” the reporter snarled.

But Ruth was not listening. She was about to turn her attention to Svetlana when Sergeant Oats came back to life again. He had lost control of the situation some time ago and had become more of an observer than a figure of authority. Flustered and hurried, he started to push his way into the center of the group attempting to assert his presence over everyone once more. He took one step forward, but before he could say anything, put his foot straight through the spokes of the front wheel of his bicycle, which was still lying on the road where he had left it. For a split second, it seemed as though he might prevail in his attempt to stay upright, but after a few twitches, he quickly succumbed to gravity and over he went. Everyone was transfixed by the sight of the ensuing struggle between man and machine, and for a while the sergeant and the bicycle appeared to be as one.

“My money’s on the bike,” said the reporter coldly as she took a long draw on her cigarette.

With the bicycle now apparently gaining the upper hand, Oats was indeed beginning to lose the wrestling match,. The more Oats wrestled to extricate himself from the bike, the more animated it seemed to become. Before long, like a bizarre type man trap, the bike had the sergeant pinned to the ground.

Katie's good nature took over and she ran over to help the Sergeant. Nick had the same idea and each of them grabbed one of the sergeant's arms in an attempt to rescue him. For a brief moment Katie and Nick's eyes met as they looked across at each other over the crumpled, writhing figure on the ground. They both took a firm grip on Oats and prepared themselves for the ordeal of lifting him up. Katie had never been a love struck gooey type of girl. She'd never ogled pop stars or dreamed of being swept off her feet by a young handsome prince. This was the closest to swooning that she had ever been. In fact, she wasn't convinced she even knew what swooning was. But when their eyes met, she was sure that she was dangerously close to experiencing it. Time seemed to slow down and it was as if she was a starlet in an old movie. The soft-focus lens slowly closing in on the unexpected duo as Nick's face became all misty and fluffy around the edges.

A totally unfamiliar and uncontrollable romantic sensation surged to the surface and in an automatic-response mode Katie spurted out, "Gosh, you've got wonderful eyes."

"Thank you," he replied, almost blushing.

"And a great smile," she added.

Remembering Nick was a cliché game character somehow her defense mechanism kicked in. Katie shook her head in an attempt to regain some

kind of reality. Her flirtations seemed absurd, but it was too late now; the deed was done and the second compliment hung there, hovering in the air between them. Nick did not reply. Instead, he began to hoist the Sergeant off the ground and onto his feet.

“You should be more careful where you leave your bicycle Sergeant Oats,” Ruth ordered in her motherly, schoolteacher way.

“How the dickens do you know my name?” Oats blurted out, annoyed that he had failed again to gain control of the conversation.

“Oh, I know everybody’s name, don’t I Svetlana?” Ruth said, looking in the direction of the hiker.

Svetlana having not been involved in any conversation for a while, was unprepared for this direct question and offered up a “Sorry?” and added, “I am proceed straight, is right or left at crossroads? Thank you.”

“Oh, what a lovely girl, so full of innocence and youthful energy,” Ruth said in a wistful, dreamy sort of way. “And we’re going to need loads of that tonight.” Her tone becoming slightly more pompous as she continued. “I am a psychic, and a medium and I am highly respected in the field of paranormal study, you know.” Her mood then became more somber. “But I have to say that, for some extraordinary reason, I am being prevented from knowing the exact outcome of tonight’s events. I can only sense the most

rudimentary pieces of information, such as names, personalities, and feelings.” She turned her attention toward Katie. “I am getting mixed vibrations from you, my dear. You are a bit of a contradiction. Part of me feels that you belong here, and part of me believes that you don’t. Everyone else is supposed to be here and has a part to play tonight, but you ... you seem different ... but in a special kind of way,” she said, smiling pleasantly as if to reassure her.

Ruth weaved in and out of the assembled group, studying each person carefully. “Yes, tonight is very special. Isn’t that correct, Mr. Wheatley?” Not waiting for a reply, she continued, “You see, tonight is October the twenty-fifth, and October the twenty-fifth is an especially important night here at the Hall. Throughout its long and colorful history, all sorts of events have happened on this date, some by chance and some by design. People have been murdered in every way imaginable and some ways that you wouldn’t believe. There have been many suicides, ritualistic human and animal sacrifices, witches’ covens, and macabre pseudo scientific experiments performed on these grounds. There is a long list of the undead that exist here, not only the victims but vampires, ghouls, and even werewolves. Back in the late nineteenth century, the hall’s owner at the time, brought mummies back from his travels in Egypt. There were a number of



reports from the locals that he attempted to bring them back to life. The odd thing is the mummies have never been found or accounted for. The cemetery contains hundreds of graves, some of which date as far back as the time of the druids. It is said that one or two of the previous owners of the hall tried reanimation experiments on some of the cemeteries occupants ... with mixed results.” As Ruth spoke these last few words, she paused and swallowed nervously, her steely demeanor having finally been broken. Quickly, she attempted to shift the focus away from herself. “Did...did I miss anything, Mr. Wheatley?”

Nick eagerly picked up the story. “Well, other investigators have reported seeing strange creatures roaming these grounds, half human, half animal; others describe beings that defy any normal classification. Then of course, there is the island, where legend says a master vampire rests. Two of my colleagues lost their lives in search of this creature. My main objective tonight is to find and dispose of it as well as ...”

Looking more composed, Ruth seemed eager to regain center stage and abruptly interrupted him in mid-sentence. “Thank you, thank you, Mr. Wheatley. So there you have it. The list goes on and on. It is definitely not a place for the faint of heart. But that is not all. There is something else that even Mr. Wheatley may not be aware of.” She paused dramatically. “For

some unknown reason, the activity here on the twenty-fifth of October is more intense, much more so, every seven years. And my darlings, it has been six years since the last anniversary. With the addition of tonight's full moon, we should be in for some extra surprises.

"Still, something is not quite right," Ruth said, looking directly into Katie's eyes. I can sense that you are also aware of this, but I do not think your knowledge is psychically based. Nonetheless, you do seem to possess an understanding of tonight's gathering, your method of doing so defies even my comprehension."

"Yes, there is someone missing," Katie said. The unexpected validation gave her a sudden rush of excitement. She had temporarily forgotten about the absurdness of her predicament, and she felt herself merging with the moment. "We are missing the scientist," she continued, being politically correct to leave out the word *mad*.

"Yes, the scientist," Ruth confirmed. "He should have been here by now." Then leaning in towards Katie she whispered. "He's completely mad you know."

While Ruth had been speaking, the encroaching fog had been joined by a steadily creeping darkness—a pitch black gooey nothingness now surrounded them. It had drawn in so gradually that no one had taken notice

as it formed a large pocket around the group. The only remaining light came from the large, full moon overhead and the car's headlights.

Slowly, the darkness crept over the ground. First, it took the car. Like thick mud, it oozed and swirled over the roof until the car along with Ruth's bike, completely vanished. Now they only had the moon to see by. Oats turned on his regulation issue bicycle lamp. Everyone began retreating backward in the direction of the gates.

"It's too late. With or without the scientist, we have no choice; we have to go in," Stated Ruth.

"Go in? Go in where?" asked the reporter. She had not missed a beat, and even though she was walking backward in heels, she was still taking notes.

"In there!" Ruth exclaimed dramatically, pointing towards the imposing gates of GreyFriar Hall.

"What? Go in there?" Oats exclaimed. "You must be mad. Besides, those gates are always locked. That's one of the things I check for ... or at least I think it is,"

The blackness was almost upon them and they found themselves pressed up against the gates. From her periphery vision, Katie noticed a white figure move across the driveway on the other side of the gates. She

turned and pointed in its general direction, but it was gone before anyone else saw it. *'Maybe it was a ghost?'* She thought excitedly. *'My first real ghost.'* She was quite proud of herself for not being at all scared.

Suddenly, the figure appeared again; this time everybody saw it. It scampered and weaved backward and forward, in and out of sight. Then suddenly it changed direction and charged at full speed toward them. The figure arrived with a crash, forcing itself against the other side of the gates. It turned out not to be a ghost but a middle aged man wearing thick, black-rimmed glasses, dark ill fitting trousers and a white lab coat with pockets stuffed with medical instruments and various pens and pencils. He was a disheveled creature; his most prominent feature was his hair, its long white fizzy locks were completely out of control sticking out in all directions around his pale, wrinkled face.

*'Well here he is, the mad scientist.'* Thought Katie to herself.

“Dun’t chu know vat’s gouing on in hyere?” he blasted in a strong, East European accent. Unfortunately for him, he had arrived directly opposite Svetlana, and it was to her that he had posed his question.

“Thanking you yes. Rambling and hiking enjoying mostly, very much I am, please. How much further? on the left?” Svetlana volunteered.

“What?” he replied, his face contorting as he tried to make sense of what she had said.

Oats took the opportunity to speak up. “And what, might I ask, are you doin’ in there?”

But before the scientist had a chance to answer, Ruth interrupted. “I’ll deal with this, Oats.” Have you seen anything yet, any visitations?” She demanded.

The scientist’s eyes rolled back as he paused and seemed to ponder the question. Just as he opened his mouth to reply, Katie let out a terrifying scream. The blackness had crept over one of her feet, and the cold it brought had almost frozen it, quickly she pulled it out.

Nick, ever the explorer turned to examine the phenomena. Everyone held their breath and watched as he slowly moved his hand into the darkness.

“Oh my goodness, that is cold!” he exclaimed.

The group let out a collective gasp as his hand completely disappeared from sight, it looked as though he were reaching into a murky pond. He pulled his hand out slowly, examining how it reemerged. “How extraordinary.” He exclaimed.

The blackness was now only inches away and brought out a renewed urgency in Ruth's voice. "Come on everyone, push!" she bellowed as she leaned against the gates with all her weight.

But no one needed to be told. The gates creaked and moaned as the group used all their collective strength to push against its old, tarnished railings. For a moment nothing moved; it seemed as though everyone's effort was in vain. All of sudden the gates swung inwards, causing the scientist to fall backwards onto the ground. The opening between the two gates was barely large enough to allow entry, the group piled through it as if they were running for the last lifeboat on a sinking ship. Once inside everyone stopped to catch their breath. With a loud bang the gates shut behind them. Everyone turned around to find the gates had closed on their own.

"I bet there's no point checking to see if they will open again," Katie said, reading the situation perfectly.

"They probably wouldn't. Anyway, there's no point. " confirmed Nick.

The darkness had met the gates. They had no choice but to go forward into GreyFriar Hall.

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The darkness had fulfilled its part; it had delivered a new group of souls to the Hall—one of which was far more valuable a prize than the rest.

# WELCOME





Katie had always thought of herself as independent and strong, but most importantly, resourceful. As the group gathered themselves, Katie tried to clear her head and take a moment to assess the situation. The situation that she found herself in was so bizarre that it was probably a dream. The problem was that it all seemed very real to her, and if it were real, she reasoned, well ... there would be real consequences. For whatever reason and by whatever means, she had been brought by some strange force to the real GreyFriar Hall. and. The more Katie thought about it, the more it seemed to her that she was about to play GhostHunt for real, for one thing, all the characters from the game were here. When she played the game at home, only points were at stake, but here, it would probably be her well-being that was on the line. So, she would have to start making decisions based on that fact. Katie knew she had to think fast. She had an edge because she knew the game and how it was played and must use that to her advantage. Despite her surroundings she tried to focus her mind. *‘The game begins with all the players placing their pieces in the gatehouse on the GhostHunt playing board. The game clock is set to 11:30, and every player in turn would take a “Gatehouse” playing card. By doing so, each player had a chance of finding a useful item like a flashlight, a knife, or a Bible.’*

Almost at the instant the gatehouse came into her mind, the darkness was broken by some dim lights over on the right hand side of the driveway. They were coming from inside a very old, beaten up building.

”The gatehouse!” she exclaimed, as she grabbed Nick’s arm.

Instinctively, she knew that if she wanted to increase her chance of surviving the night, she would need Nick. *'After all.'* She reasoned *'He was a real ghost hunter. Of course he was handsome and intelligent, too, but that was beside the point. Also it would help me enormously if we got inside the gatehouse before anyone else, that way I would be the first one to search for items that could be useful.'*

She pulled him in the direction of the lights.

“Nick, why don’t we see what’s inside that old place?” Katie said, pointing at the gatehouse and pulling at his sleeve at the same time. Nick seemed reluctant to move. His feet were firmly planted in place. Katie realized that Nick’s handicapped, two-dimensional character probably did not allow for much deviation from his single-minded task of ghost hunting. She decided to try another tactic.

“If you are a ghost hunter, why don’t you have a supply of ghost hunting equipment with you?”

“Well, you see, when my car broke down, I left everything in it, planning on returning later. I really needed some of those supplies. Hunting that creature on the island would be quite dangerous at the best of times, and empty-handed, it would be ...” He stopped midsentence, appearing slightly unsettled. “I do feel extremely unprepared, I agree.”

“Since all your equipment is back in your car, and I’m sure there is some possibility of finding useful items in that old building, why don’t we at least take a look,” Katie enticed.

After a brief pause, he endorsed her plan, “I agree with you...Katie I believe your name is Ka...”

“Yes yes...come on lets go.” Interrupted Katie. With Nick in tow Katie broke into a run and quickly scurried across the gravel driveway. Her quick-wittedness paid off and they arrived at the door of the gatehouse first.

Katie recalled that the GhostHunt comic book explained that in the old days, this building housed members of staff whose sole job was to open and shut the gates as people came and went. Now after countless years of neglect, the building was in a terrible state of disrepair. In fact, the entire structure appeared to be leaning to one side. Most of the windows appeared cracked or broken and the wooden steps leading up to the front door looked rotten and dangerous.

Katie carefully picked her way over the disintegrating steps. The decaying wood creaked and moved under her feet. She finally had made it to the door and turned and motioned for Nick to follow her. Katie tentatively reached out her hand, grasped the door handle and twisted it. To her surprise she was met with little resistance as it turned easily. She quickly pushed the door open and was greeted by a thick wall of musty, stale air which momentarily stopped her in her tracks. Katie caught her breath and peered inside. On first impression the contents of the room consisted of nasty mustard color wallpaper that was peeling and hanging down from the walls, dust and dirt. After a second or two her eyes adjusted and upon closer inspection she could make out that the room also contained centuries-old furniture and fixtures. On the wall to her right was a large fireplace and on the opposite wall were a set of stairs that presumably led to the second floor. Every surface appeared to be covered in a thick layer of dust and dirt, but to her horror it contained the largest collection of cobwebs she had ever seen. To Katie cobwebs meant spiders, her biggest phobia. She hated spiders with a passion and her eagle sharp eyes spotted large deposits of spider webs hanging from the picture rails and all corners of the room. The atmosphere was still and lifeless. It was as though they had entered some ancient tomb. With the vision of countless numbers of spiders laying in wait for her Katie

to a deep breath to stiffen her resolve and ventured inside. Each cautious step she took left an impression on the on the dust-covered floor.

The lights they had spotted from outside were old, smoky gas lamps that hung from the walls. They also had their fair share of dust laden webs that now danced in the unfamiliar drafts of air that flowed through the open door into the room. Their dim, yellow flames flickered and gave the room a sinister, creepy atmosphere. As they started searching Katie could hear the others arriving outside. Ruth's voice rang out above everyone else's. It sounded like she was still trying to take charge. Katie went around to each piece of furniture hurriedly pulling out draws and opening doors. "Come on Nick hurry." As they urgently rummaged through the room, more and more clouds of dust were sent billowing into the air. Katie was hoping they would have time to explore the Gate House undisturbed for as long as possible. However, the longer her search proved fruitless, the more frantic she became. All she had found so far was a dead mouse, stacks of dirty plates and some old newspapers. *'Dam it! Why can't it be as easy as turning over a card.'* She muttered angrily to herself. In a growing state of anxiety she called out. "Nick, we have to find something soon or the others will be here and they might find the best stuff."

Suddenly, from outside the front door came an enormous crashing sound followed by yells mixed with painful moaning and groaning. Katie rushed to the front window. Her wish had come true. Seemingly in an attempt to reach the gatehouse door before each other, both Oats and Ruth had arrived on the disintegrating steps at the same time. Under their combined weight, the old and rotten wood had given way and the crashing sound had been the explosion of splintering wood as they fell through the rotten steps. Both the psychic and Sergeant Oats were lodged in the large hole that they had made in the stairs, and everyone else was unable to get around them.

Katie and Nick hastened their rummaging. Katie eventually found an old Bible on the top shelf of a cupboard. Nick triumphed with the discovery of a leather shoulder bag which he gave to Katie for her bible, an oil lamp, and some matches that he'd found inside a sideboard. Katie returned to the window to get an update on the situation outside. With great effort, several of the others had managed to extract the sergeant and the psychic from their wooden prison. Stepping carefully on the edges of the remaining stairs, one by one, everyone managed to get safely inside the gatehouse.

“Ah,” Ruth said, nodding toward Katie’s Bible. “You have been busy my dear; very good. Come on everyone spread out and look for something, anything that might be helpful.”

While the rest of the group got busy searching, Katie and Nick took the opportunity to take a break. On inspection of the available furniture, an old couch seemed like the best place for a rest. However, on closer examination Katie wasn’t sure that it was such a great idea after all. By its condition it looked as though rats could be living in it. But it felt as though she had been standing for what seemed like days and her feet were really soar, so she decided to throw caution to the wind and risk it. A huge billowing cloud of dust and particles filled the air as they sat at down, it momentarily formed a cloud around the couple before dispersing and adding to the general fog in the room. Katie found the seat unnervingly spongy underneath her but was so glad and relieved to take the weight of her soar feet. *'Well at least I have a bible.'* She thought to herself. *'Now what's that good for? mmmmm...fending off malevolent ghosts...what else?...not much, well it's a start I guess!'*

They had barely had time to relax when the reporter walked over to them, exuding a haughty attitude. “Hey there, Nicky boy, what’s with the new friend? Don’t forget, we have a deal, and you’re with me.”

Nick appeared flustered. “W... we can all go together,” He stammered appearing ill at ease with the reporters demands.

“Well, okay Hun, but don’t forget I have a story to write and I don’t need any complications.”

Katie sat there and just smiled up at Natalie; it would be pointless, she thought, getting into a battle with Miss Pushy...just yet.

Ruth was helping the rest of the group with their search. “Look, Svetlana has found a candlestick, and I have given the sergeant some garlic that I found myself. What have you found Mr. ... um, I don’t know your name?” Ruth said, gesturing at the scientist.

“I haff foond an ald piztol!” he said, pulling a revolver out of the pocket of his lab coat. He began to wave it around erratically, causing everyone to flinch and duck for cover.

“Very good, very good, but do be careful with it please,” Ruth commanded.

"Where the heck did they find those things Nick? Asked Katie. Both annoyed and confused as to how they could have missed them.

"No idea, I thought we looked everywhere. I wonder if that guy even has a firearms license?" replied Nick



The sergeant didn't seem very happy with the long string of garlic that Ruth had been given; he sniffed it warily and then held it at arm's length.

"Don't you want to find something useful that might help you prepare for what lies ahead?" Ruth asked, walking over to the reporter.

"I have everything I need right here," the reporter said, looking down at Nick.

"I feel ill," Katie said to herself in a low voice. Again she tried to bring her mind to bear and focus and what to do. She closed her eyes and despite the circumstances tried to concentrate. *'What happens next? I must think and try and get ahead of proceeding and figure out what the best plan of action is.* Katie recalled the countless games she had played and brought into her mind a mental image of the rules. *'OK after taking a "Gatehouse" card each the players have to leave the gatehouse and make their way up to GreyFriar Hall by throwing two six sided dice and moving accordingly. The game clock starts at 11:30 PM, and everyone has three turns or thirty "game minutes" in order to get to a desired location on the board before the clock struck twelve o'clock, and the ghost hunting begins.* Katie opened her eyes. *'But what was to stop me and anyone else from remaining here for the night? It was damp, musty, and dirty, but it did offer shelter of some kind. In any case, why couldn't I just wait it out here until the first light of dawn?'*

No sooner had she formulated this unquestionably brilliant new idea, than another concept flashed into her mind, that maybe in order to get home she might have to play and win the game, and by remaining in the gatehouse all night she would not be able to play the game. Just as this soul-destroying revelation entered her mind the lights dimmed slightly. This caused everyone to stop what they were doing. Then from the direction of the large fireplace came frantic and very worrying scratching noises. Dirt and soot tumbled from the chimney into the fireplace and out into the room filling the air. The atmosphere quickly became toxic; people started to cough and sneeze. Then a steady stream of large black bats followed the soot and dirt down the chimney. Their screeches filled the room as they flapped around like a swarm of bees. Soon, there were so many bats and so much dust and soot that it was impossible for anyone to see even a few feet in any direction. Everyone was gasping for breath and waving their arms around in an attempt to fend off the flying beasts. The scene was pure chaos—bats twisting around in people's hair and everyone frantically running into each other, the walls, and the furniture.

“There it is—the reason we have to leave,” Said Katie aloud.

“What?” Replied Nick in bewilderment.

Just as he spoke a bat landed on Katie's head, its clawed feet scratching her scalp. She cried out in pain, jump to her feet and rushed in the direction of where she imagined the door would be behind the cloud of dust and bodies. Katie desperately made her way through the black cloud of creatures and dust, she tugged at the bat only to find that its feet were completely tangled in the curls of her hair. Katie kept pulling the leathery creature until, at the expense of some thick strands of hair; she finally managed to yank the squirming creature off her head.

"Come on, Nick, let's get out of here!" she cried clutching her wounded head.

Katie watched out for the hole in the steps left by Ruth and Sergeant Oats and maneuvered herself around it and into the darkness outside. Once outside Katie bent over and rubbing her head frantically brushing at her hair. "I bet that damn thing was covered in fleas and mites!"

Nick joined her on the driveway in front of the gatehouse. Behind them loud voices erupted into the still night air. Still combing through her hair she turned her head to look. The scene back at the gatehouse was almost comical, like an old black-and-white slapstick movie. Everyone was pushing his or her way out the door in a frantic panic to get away from the bats and the dirt-filled air. Unfortunately, the reporter was not able to avoid the hole

in the steps and fell feet first into it. The rest of the group could not see her as they piled through the door and into the cold, bat-free air outside. The reporter was stepped on, fallen on, tripped over, and generally flattened.

Nick, ever the gentleman, went back to help her.

"Rather you than me." Katie said to herself and she continued to comb her fingers through her hair.

Katie watched as with some considerable effort Nick managed to pull the reporter free from the hole in the steps. Natalie emerged resembling a refugee fleeing a war zone. Crumpled, creased and disheveled. Ever concerned about her image, she anxiously tried to keep her composure and not let anyone see how flustered she was.

*'There is justice in the world'*. Katie smiled to herself as she straightened up, being somewhat satisfied that she had managed to brush out of her hair any creature that bat might have left behind.

The lights inside the gatehouse went out, and it disappeared back into the darkness from where it came. The only evidence that it was still at all was the sound of hundreds of bats flapping and screeching their way out of the front door and up into the night sky.

For what seems an eternity the group was bathed in darkness. The large full moon only provided enough light that Katie was able to make out

the faces of the rest of her companions. Everyone froze in place seemingly unsure of what to do next.

Gradually the blackness was pierced by small yellow and orange dots. Steadily their number grew and they joined together to form a continuous string of light that flanked both sides of the drive way and meandered off into the distance. Soon the dots had grown in size and revealed that they were in fact torches that were lining the driveway. The flames grew larger and brighter, collectively they looked like a bright orange and yellow snake winding way in the general direction of GreyFriar Hall.

Nick returned, followed closely by the dazed reporter, who was desperately trying to put her hair back in place.

“Where did those lights come from?” he asked.

“I have no idea,” Katie replied. “One second, nothing, and then this.”

Momentarily, the three of them were transfixed by the spectacle of the flaming torches that wove back and forth before disappearing into the foggy darkness ahead.

Their trance like state was broken as they were joined by the rest of the group. Fortunately for everyone, the mad scientist had re-pocketed the gun that he had found. Oats, still unsure of what to do with the garlic, was resisting Ruth’s efforts to make him wear it.

Svetlana was the last to arrive, proudly holding her candlestick. Seeing the flaming pathway leading off into the distance she mustered her best English yet. “We going there, yes?” she said pointing.

No one answered.

After a moment, Katie remembered what she had seen earlier. “When I first arrived, I think I saw a big, black shape in the distance.”

“That’d be GreyFriar,” Oats responded

Ruth broke the air with a resounding, “All right, everyone, let’s get going!”

The group moved off slowly down the torch-lit driveway. Ruth was at the front leading the group and still trying to convince the sergeant that the best place for the garlic was around his neck.

“Look, it will ward off anything that might want to bite you,” she explained.

Oats looked mortified at the prospect of anything wishing to bite him, especially his neck.

The unlikely group made their way down the winding driveway. Intermittent rustling noises called out from the darkness on each side of the driveway. This had the effect of distracting everyone so no one was actually looking where he or she was going. With each new noise, the people at the

front would stop walking, causing the people behind them to crash straight into them. Then everyone would stand all bunched up together for a few moments, listening for and trying to locate the source of the sound, their minds, no doubt, inventing all sorts of possible culprits. Then everyone would start walking again, and the line would slowly thin out until the next noise which caused them to run into one another again. And so, like a human rubber band, the group continued on its way deeper into the grounds of GreyFriar Hall.

Just as Katie was thinking that they were on a road from nowhere to nowhere, things got worse. The rustling sounds were joined by low growls and snarling. ‘*Nice.*’, Thought Katie, holding on to Nick even tighter.

The reporter was starting to come back to life again after the trampling she had received back at the gatehouse. This had caused her to take on an almost pathetic appearance and, for an extremely brief period in time, Katie had almost started to feel sorry for her. However, any chance of that diminished the instant the reporter had regained enough strength to open her mouth once more.

“What the hell’s making that noise?” she demanded.

“I tell you what, we’ll all wait here while you go and find out,” Katie responded. She got no reply.

After what seemed hours but was really only a 15 minutes or so, the driveway turned into a circular crossroads with connecting paths branching off to the left and right and continuing on directly ahead. The torches followed the driveway as it continued straight on but not to the left or right.

“I turn left or right at the crossroads, yes?” said Svetlana.

Everyone stood frozen to the spot, unable to make a decision.

“Which way should we go Nicky?” asked the reporter.

Katie knew from the game that the path to the left led to the haunted bandstand and the one to the right would take you to the forest or to the lake. She did not care which way they went; her only concern was that she was with Nick. Ruth decided that the best plan would be to follow the torches and head straight on for the hall.

Katie’s eyes had become used to the dark by now, and with the aid of the full moon, it was possible to see farther into the gloom that surrounded the group, trees, pampas grass and bushes were now just visible. The motley crew continued to shuffle forward until, gradually, from behind the veil of murky darkness, an outline of the hall started to emerge. A storm appeared to be hovering over the building. Black clouds spewed bolts of lightning and emitted giant thunderous bangs. The Buildings menacing outline appeared not to be symmetrical, towers and buttresses seemed to be randomly



attached to the main building giving it an unbalanced schizophrenic appearance. The group quickened their pace slightly and as they turned the next bend the clock tower of the hall came into view. Illuminated by moonlight, the old numbers on its ancient face were just visible.

“It’s 11:50,” Katie announced. “Nick, we’ve only got ten minutes left.”

Nick looked confused. “Left until what?” he inquired.

Katie realized that, as Nick knew nothing about the game and the fact that he was a participant, she would have to stop making references to it.

“Oh nothing...nothing.” she replied casually.

The group took a few more steps, and GreyFriar Hall finally came into full view. The rest of the sky was completely clear but storm clouds loomed right above the Hall as though drawn to it as metal would be to a magnet. They were arguing violently with the large, old building. Mist and fog swirled all around as it stood silhouetted against the large, full moon.

Instinctually Nick maneuvered himself to the front of the group and turned to face them. Raising the level of his voice to be heard over the storm he began. “Most of the front of the building was rebuilt in the Gothic revival style in early Victorian times. You will notice, for example, the arched

windows.” He announced with the easy and informal manner of a seasoned tour guide.

It was almost too strange and non-sequitur for Katie to take in. With the backdrop from a horror film this little assembled group was getting a guided tour from a ghost hunter. A foul stench had started to make it difficult to breathe. "What's that awful smell!" Katie squealed holding her nose. *'Why does no one else seem to mind that much'*. She wondered.

Nick shifted his feet slightly. "Ah the aroma, well err, it's...it's the results of the decaying soil in the ground where we are all standing on. I know it's a little ripe but I find that you...you get used it after a while." He smiled nervously.

As if to announce their arrival, a jagged bolt of intense blue lightning flew from one of the storm clouds and struck the clock tower sending showers of sparks into the air that fell like liquid light all around them. The size of the building dwarfed the small gathering of people in front of it. The hall appeared alive and angry; it seemed to Katie that it could consume every one of them in a second. On top of the front wall, a row of large gargoyles stood guard; these stone monsters with their horns and snarling mouths looked down at them like predatory nightmare creatures examining their prey. It was the most terrifying place that Katie had ever seen. She could not

estimate its actual size due to the ever-present fog that surrounded it. There appeared to be three or even four levels to the main part of the building. The front of the hall was covered in countless mullioned windows and deeply carved vertical gothic stonework elements and decorations, most of which were topped with statues.

Nick broke the silence. “The hall, like all the structures that have stood here before, acts like a sponge absorbing feelings and emotions of everyone it comes into contact with. Each building in turn storing the energy like a vile repository, eventually passing it on to the next manor house or castle that was built here. It feeds on all the negative feelings—fear, hatred, jealousy, envy, and madness, to name but a few. However, the building is merely a symptom of the illness. The cause of the sickness is the ground, the land itself. The earth here is more than cursed; it is damned beyond redemption. Century after century of murder, misery and death have sealed its fate. The downward spiral went out of control long ago. It has become a life force of its own, creating the blackness as its servant to seek out new life for it to feed on. The innocent and the lost become a temporary sustenance for its ever-increasing appetite.”

Katie swallowed hard. "How nice" she muttered.

After a brief but heartfelt warning to everyone about ‘keeping together’ and ‘GreyFriar not being a place to trifle with,’ Ruth approached the large double front doors and tried to push them open. Not meeting with success, she called out, “Come on, someone, help me!”

Nick and Katie went over to assist her. As they got closer, she noticed that the walls were covered with a foul-smelling slime that was oozing from between the stonework. The borders of the large wooden doors were deeply carved with images of faces that appeared to move and contort their shape.

The rest of the group joined them in putting their shoulders to the task. Reluctantly, inch by inch, the double doors began to slowly creak open. Everyone’s body language gave away the fact that no one wanted to be the first person through the doors; yet at the same time no one wanted to be the last one left outside. Suddenly, without warning, the doors swung completely open causing everyone to fall through the doorway. Some people ended up on the floor on their faces, others tripping over and landing on top of the people already on the ground. At that very moment, the huge clock tower above them struck the first chime of midnight.

If atmosphere could be measured in ounces, then GreyFriar Hall had pounds to spare. A chorus of voices began speaking to them, asking questions, whispering warnings; some of them were even singing. The sheer

numbers of voices made Katie's head feel like it was going to split open. She picked herself up off the floor and pressed her hands over her ears, but it made no difference. The voices were going straight into her brain. Then as suddenly as they had erupted all the pleading, the wailing and the cursing grew silent. With only the sergeant's standard issue bike lamp for illumination, it was too dark to see much of anything. Nick quickly lit his oil lamp and then helped Svetlana with her candlestick. The huddled group tentatively took a few paces forward.

Just as the last chime of midnight faded away, the sound of a galloping horse could be heard outside. Hooves landing on gravel; high pitched whinnying and snorting filled the air. Everyone froze where they stood.

This disturbance reminded Katie about a rule in the game. The game clock was moved on ten minutes after each round of turns was completed, when the top of every hour was reached, an 'Hour Card' would be turned over. It indicated an occurrence, either a special spectral visit somewhere on the game board or some other kind of event like a storm over the lake or a tombs opening in the graveyard. It would affect anyone who playing piece was in that location.

Katie quickly spun around, took a few steps back towards the open front doors and peered at the scene outside. Back up the driveway, less than a hundred feet away and galloping straight towards her was a monstrously large black horse. It was being ridden by a figure dressed in grey tattered rags who had no head. Both horse and rider were enveloped in an unearthly luminous glow. When they reached the front of the Hall the horse made a sharp turn, its hooves sending pieces of gravel flying through the air in all directions. The gruesome pair passed briefly in front of the building and was close enough that Katie could see sweat running down the horse's glistening ebony skin and jets of steam erupting from its nostrils. It reared up whinnying and snorting like a beast from hell almost unseating the rider who pulled sharply on its reins to regain control. In a flash it charged off and disappeared from sight into the swirling blanket of fog.

From high above the last strike of midnight rang out like a booming canon. Without warning, the doors started to close. Katie jumped back just in time as they slammed shut with an enormous bang! *'Oh my God, it had no head...it had no head!'* Katie felt herself start to feel a little shaky. *'Well I'm glad I wasn't out there...what would I have done? A bible wouldn't have been much use against a man on a horse without a head. I guess I could*

*have thrown it at him...not sure what you can use to depend yourself in a situation like that...a silver crucifix maybe...or a...'*

“What the heck was that?” Croaked Natalie, interrupting Katie's flow.

“Horsy coming, yes?” inquired Svetlana

Katie hesitated for a moment about what she was going say, but then decided that honesty was probably the best policy. Turning around she cautiously uttered. "It was a headless horseman." With the notable exceptions of Nick and Ruth, the rest of her party seemed stunned. A couple of them half opened their mouths to say something but nothing came out.

With an air of resignation the straggly group moved cautiously down the hallway, the antique wooden floor creaking with each step . Svetlana's candle and Oat's and Nick's lamps created a small pocket of light that surrounded them like a cocoon. The combined illumination from the lamps and the candle revealed that there were doors on either side of them. Katie strained to remember the layout of the ground floor plan of GreyFriar on the game board and what room lay behind each of the doors that led from the main hallway. Everywhere she looked there were huge spider webs covered in countless years of dust. Awakened by the groups movements, some of the webs came to life, the individual strands shook and stretched as whatever kind of creature was inside began to move around. Katie was fairly brave,

but to say that she was not hugely enthusiastic about creepy, multi-legged creatures would be an understatement; the thought of being so close to them made her skin crawl over her cold bones

From somewhere behind them, two gunshots rang out, followed by the sound of a door slamming. Everyone span around to see what had just happened.

“Bang, oh my goodness.” Cried Svetlana.

At once Ruth noticed that someone was missing and barked out an order immediately. “The scientist, he’s gone. Spread out everyone and find him quickly!”

Splitting into two groups, everyone backtracked. Ruth, and Svetlana stayed closely behind the Sergeants flickering bike lamp. Katie and the reporter followed Nick as he held up his oil lamp and ventured forward.

Seemingly picking one of the side doors at random, Nick with great purpose strode over, pushed it open and walked through into the room beyond. This caught Katie slightly caught off guard and she quickly followed in behind him continuing desperately trying to re-call the floor plan from the game board. *‘I have to be more prepared, I really need to know what rooms these are before heading into them.’*



Nick held up the flickering and somewhat inadequate oil lamp, its mellow light only just able to pierce the darkness and illuminate a few feet in any direction. Katie's eyes gradually adjusted to what little light there was in the room. On the nearest wall patterns began to emerge, rectangular shapes that repeated over and over in all directions.

Nick took a few steps towards the middle of the room. The small globe of flickering light moved with him causing the pattern that Katie was trying to focus on disappear into the gloom. A large round table appeared in front of Nick which had another lamp sitting in the middle of it. He quickly placed his lamp on the table and pulled out the box of matches that he had found back at the gatehouse. The second lamp spluttered into life and the room began to reveal itself.

Katie discovered that she was standing in a large well appointed room that contained floor-to-ceiling bookcases on every wall, holding what must have been thousands of books.

"This must be a library," said the reporter with her raspy voice.

"Gosh, do you really think so?" replied Katie sarcastically.

"Well, there's obviously no scientist in here. We should probably rejoin the others," Nick said in his now familiar reassuring and sensible tone.

The cold hard logical side of Katie knew that in order to win the game, but also be able to survive the nights activities, she still had to find something better to defend herself with than just a bible. She began to list out other items from the game. *'Flashlight...garlic...holy water...a knife...a gun with silver bullets.'* "A gun?" She inadvertently blurted out loud, at the notion of using a gun.

"What did you say?" inquired Nick

"Oh nothing...nothing." Katie replied as she pondered. *'I would probably end up waving it around just like the mad scientist did anyway.'* She needed to stall them and buy herself time to do a bit of searching. "Let's check around a bit first." Katie suggested. *'What do you find in a Library? I already have a bible, what else is found in here when I have played the game?...books...more books? ...ummm...Maps, yes...maps, I remember, there are a couple of them that are sometimes found in the library.'* Contemplating this thought she walked over to the nearest bookcase and cast her eyes over the contents of the shelves. She reached forward and slowly ran her fingers along a row of books. *'Maps can hide in books can't they?'* One of the books caught her eye and reaching forward, she gently grasped it between her fingers and lifted it towards her. The old leather-bound volume left a delicate trail of dust floating in the orange light cast by the smoking oil lamps.

'Mmmm, 'Bleak House'. Now that's appropriate.'" She mumbled to herself as she thumbed through its yellowing pages. The logical part of Katie's mind started to kick in again. *'Maps can lead to sleeping vampires...to kill a sleeping vampire you need wooden stakes...and a hammer...and possibly a silver crucifix or two.'* Different parts of her conciseness came to life and started to battle it out for dominance. Momentarily the self preservation part gained the upper hand. *'I must be in a dream, I must be. I can't believe that I'm actually contemplating tracking down and killing a real live vampire! Me, opening up a coffin and hammering a wooden stake through the heart of a sleeping vampire..right!'* Searching through the book Katie's hands twitched and they became as schizophrenic as her mind. The logical part of her mind took back control. *'You need to pull yourself together and start dealing with it!'* Frustrated by the realization that the book neither contained a hidden map or had any value in the game, Katie slid it back into its place on the shelf. Just as she did so a sudden clicking noise broke the silence. This was immediately followed by 'werring' and clanking sounds that a large clockwork mechanism would make, wheels spinning and gears turning in unison. In the blink of an eye the whole bookcase turned around taking Katie with it. In an instant she had been removed from the library and unceremoniously deposited on the opposite side of the wall into almost

pitch-blackness. She was too stunned to move. Her mind reeled at this new and abrupt turn of events. In a split second she recalled all the times she had stumbled into secret passageways or a trap door while playing the game back home. Turning over a card she would read it out loud to other players sitting around the table. *'You have sprung a trap door, throw the 4 sided dice to see which of the following locations you have been sent to...'* But nothing could have prepared her for falling into trap for real.

Katie flew into a blind panic and screamed, "Help! Help! Get me out of here! Please get me out of her!" Her skin crawled. "There are probably spiders crawling all over me...aaaaaaaaa!"

"Hang on. Don't worry. We'll get you out," Nick called out from the other side of the bookcase.

His words were quickly followed by the reporter's own retort. "Quit screwing around, will you? I don't have time for this crap."

Suddenly, the floor moved under Katie's feet, with a jerk it fell away to one side. In the darkness she reached out to try and hold on to something...anything. Her fingers found nothing and she started to slide down the incline and into nothingness—slowly at first, then picking up speed.

"Oh no...help me!" she yelled as she fell backwards onto her butt.

Katie couldn't see anything, it was just like a "Haunted house" ride at a fairground, but for real. She continued her rapid decent catching cobwebs on her face, she could feel them as they covered and stretched against her skin. The thought of spiders on her head made her shiver and breakout in Goosebumps. But that was the least of her worries as she continued to pick up speed plummeting ever faster. Unable to see anything Katie waved her arms around in front of her to deflect any more oncoming webs and any creatures that might be dangling in her way. Eventually the incline leveled off and she began to slow down, then eventually came to a stop. With her pulse racing, Katie remained very still and did her best to calm down. Through the pounding of her heartbeat in her ears she could just make out the sound of trickling water and the "plip plop" of drips falling into pools. The echoes of the splashes gave her the impression that she could be in some kind of large sub terrarium room or possibly even a cave.

Minutes that seemed like hours dragged by as Katie obsessively checked her hair for unwelcome passengers and took in her new environment. *'God, I wonder if I fell into that dungeon that Nicked described. If I did, what will happen to me, the dungeons not even in the game!'* Mustering all the courage she had, even though she could now hear what she thought might be mice or even rats scurrying around, she got on

her hands and knees and started to feel around in front of her. By its texture, the ground seemed to be made of roughly hewn stone that was ice cold and damp. "Well here goes." She muttered to herself and started to crawl forward. In no time her hands and knees were soaking wet and covered in a thick layer of a slime . She sat up and rubbed her hands together in a fruitless attempt to rid herself of the gooey substance. "Oh this stuff smells nasty! Wow this is great, first I materialize in a board game with a bunch of freaks, then I fall into a trap sending me to god knows where, which I guess makes me 'double lost', *now* I'm covered in some nasty sticky stuff *and* on top of that I bet I'm going around in circles!" Just as the words left her lips her hand came across a bump on the floor directly in front of her. After a brief examination she concluded that it was probably a step. '*A step to where?*'. She thought to herself. Feeling quite drained, it took all her strength to get to her feet. She placed one foot onto the step and with the other felt around until she found the next step, then another. Noticing that she seemed to be going around in a circular manner she thought. '*I wonder if this is one of the towers.*' Very slowly, she took one step at a time. As a precaution she maneuvered herself to the inside of the stairway and pressed her back against the wall as she continued to climb.

Looking upwards she could see way off in the distance a very faint point of light piercing the blackness. This at least gave her something to aim toward. The slime covered steps gave no traction and her feet were constantly slipping. Around and around she climbed in endless circles, she was forced to stop and rest about every ten minutes to take break when she was out of breath. With every step the distant patch of light grew slightly brighter and eventually turned into several beams of lights which gradually became more distinct. After many more circles the streaks of light were finally bright enough to illuminate the stairs. Katie paused and looked down. *'Aaaagh...It feels like I've been climbing for hours, I wonder how high up I am?'* She pressed on and soon found herself just a short distance from the top and was able to see that the points of light were originating from between large cracks in a arch-shaped door at the top of the stairs. When she reached the last step Katie took a brief moment to gather herself. Examining the door she found it to be made of dark, thickly grained wood which was reinforced with large, metal studs that formed a crisscross pattern. A faint buzzing sound and crackles of electricity emanated from the other side. Careful to avoid splinters, Katie pressed her face against the rough uneven wood and peered through one of the larger splits in the door. Involuntarily her eyes blinked as they adjusted to the light. She was looking into a

brightly lit room. The far wall was covered in boxes with numerous knobs, switches, cables, flashing lights and dials with needles that were flickering back and forth. In the middle of the room was the figure of a small man, who due to a large hump on his back appeared to be leaning over to one side. He was dressed in a lab coat much like the one worn by the mad scientist.

However unlike the scientist this strange looking man's head was smooth and shiny having no hair whatsoever. He was standing next to a long narrow table, which had something or someone lying on it. Katie could not see clearly what it was, but it had a large and misshapen appearance. The small man limped over to the electrical boxes dragging one foot along the ground behind him as he went. Feverishly he began to push buttons, flicked switches, and adjusted wiring. Katie thought that she had come across him before in the game. *'Oh wow, this could be the scientist and his monster creation who are often found in one of the two towers.'*

The man reach up and pulled a big red lever, there was blinding flash, followed by a suddenly loud crack of electricity, then sparks began to spew up into the air. Soon the whole room was alive with glowing embers that cascaded like liquid in a waterfall that spilled onto the ground and danced across the floor. Whatever was on the table jumped and twitched. Then the



'thing' lifted a large, putrid blue arm up from the table. Even though she was trying to keep perfectly quiet, Katie gasped at the sight.

The humped figure stopped what he was doing and turned to face the door. Katie recognized his grizzled face, she had seen this man many times before on GhostHunt playing cards, but seeing him in person was an entirely different matter. On a card, he could only cause her to gain or lose points, but now that he was real flesh and blood, who knew what he could do to her? He limped over to the door and looked back at Katie through the same crack Katie was staring through. His eye was bright red and appeared to be his only working one as the other eye looked as though it had been gouged out. Katie instinctually jumped back at the sight of his bloodshot eye. He opened the door abruptly and pulled Katie into the room before slamming it shut again.

“Sit down and don’t interrupt,” he commanded in a harsh, high pitched voice, gesturing to a chair on the other side of the room. Without a word Katie obeyed and sat down on the old, rickety chair. *'Well things have worked out perfectly, I'm cold, wet, lost, covered in slime and now I'm next in line for the table.'* Katie hunched over assuming an almost fetal position and gently began to rock back and forth. Watching with disbelief as the man continued with his work Katie knew she had to come up with a plan.

Coming face to face with one of the real life nasty, evil characters from the game was inevitable but still a big shock for her. The creature on the table looked almost human, but it had a strange color, and some of its parts did not seem to match the rest. The head was too large for the body, and one arm seemed much longer than the other.

The scientist had a very bad smell that traveled across the room. He was covered in blood and a gooey blue substance which matched the color of the creature and had flies swarming around his head. He attached more wires to the monster and fiddled around with the equipment muttering to himself.

Katie found herself with a decision to make. She could remain sitting quietly, feeling sorry for herself and almost certainly be the scientist's next victim, or she could take charge and do something about her predicament. She was very close to being too nervous to do anything, but she took a deep breath and shouted, "I just want to go home!"

Without looking at her, the scientist pointed a crooked finger in her direction. "I told you not to interrupt!"

Having been in the towers many times while playing the game, Katie knew that there would be another door opposite to the one that she had entered through. She looked across the room and there it was just as she

thought. Problem was, to get to it, she would have to pass very close to the creature and the man. Although her mind was somewhat paralyzed with fear, she quickly tried to come up with an alternative plan. With the unalterable realizing that this other door was her only way of escape, Katie sat up in the chair and prepared herself. She took a deep breath to steady her nerves, jumped to her feet, and sprinted across the room. As she passed by the table, the man's awful smell became overpowering. Glancing down at the creature she could see that it consisted of a mass of mismatched body parts held together by screws and large metal staples. With her heart almost bursting through her chest she raced towards the door praying that it would open straight away. With Seconds seeming like an eternity, using all her strength she twisted the handle but it did not budge an inch. Continuing to struggle, Katie glanced back over her shoulder in the direction of the scientist. He had turned away from his work at the table and was staring at Katie with a twisted, angry expression. In the same instant the creature sat up, looked over at Katie and snarled. A stream of steaming black liquid flowed from its open mouth. Boosted by a newly found extra surge of adrenaline and a heart that was about to explode, with almost super human strength she forced the door open and ran through it.

Swatting at flies that had come along with her for the ride, Katie raced down a narrow and dimly lit corridor. Her surroundings were a blur as she tried to put as much distance between herself and the gruesome experimentations going on back in the tower. Her legs felt like jelly but somehow she managed to encourage them to keep moving while at the same time hoping beyond hope that she was not being followed. Up ahead Katie could just make out that there was a half open door at the end of the long passageway. Scraping every last bit of energy she had left, she ran like the wind. When she reached the half open door she rested against it for a moment as she checked behind her for possible pursuers. With a sigh of relief at not seeing any one or anything she staggered through the open door and closed it behind her. Katie paused a few feet inside the doorway with her hands on her knees panting for breath.

Looking up from her crouched position, she glanced around, hoping that her headlong frantic escape into this unknown room had not put her in any further peril. Katie was relieved to find herself in the back of a small chapel. Before her hundreds of small flickering candles gave the room a soft, warm feeling. There were several rows of seats on both sides of the chapel separated by a central isle. Lovely colorful stained glass windows ran down the length of one side, which she assumed must be an outside wall. At the far

end of the chapel stood an altar with a large crucifix on the wall above it. She sat down on one of the seats at the back and rested until her heartbeat was restored to normal. Breathing a sigh of relief, Katie was filled with a feeling of well-being and healing. For the first time since she arrived, she felt safe. Katie knew that the chapel was the only truly secure location on the whole GhostHunt board. You could actually gain points by just simply by being there. *'Points.'* She thought to herself. *'On the subject of points, I wonder if I lost or gained any points back there in the tower? I didn't actually fight back, not that I had anything to fight back with, I just ran. But it would be nice to know if I am currently ahead of everyone else. Trouble is that I'm sure wherever the rest of the group is, they could be scoring points as well, which means that I most likely could be losing.'*

On this depressing thought Katie decided to poke around a little. There were some shelves with books stacked in rows. A small, handwritten note was pinned on the wall: 'Prayer books - Please take one.' She picked one up and placed it in her shoulder bag. *'Great, Now I have a bible and a prayer book, all I have is books, I could become a librarian!...which is better than nothing I suppose.'* She admitted begrudgingly. *'But even a pointed stick would be more useful, at least I could have poked that weird guy with it if he had gotten too close. Not sure about the monster though, he probably*

*would have snatched it off me and eaten it or something. A gun like the mad scientist found might have been the only thing that would have worked against a beast like that.'* Katie's mouth went dry at the thought of actually firing a gun at a rampaging creature.

Contemplating the use of these items triggered the thought in her mind again, that, if the only way to get out of this place and go home was to win a real life game of GhostHunt, then this presented a huge problem. Because logically to earn the most points, you had to be in the most dangerous of situations, combating the nastiest of the game's creatures and ghosts. To win the game here in this reality, it would be the same as if she were playing the game at home, she would have no choice but to seek these out monsters, not avoid them. Katie knew that her reasoning was sound, but the realization did not sit well with her. In the game, only certain objects worked against specific monsters; a gun with silver bullets was effective for werewolves, flaming torches against mummies and crucifixes and garlic against vampires. *'Maybe I could have used the Bible against the creepy guy back in the tower?'* Katie wondered. *'Perhaps I missed an opportunity to score some points back there. I'm not sure if a bible would have done anything to him, and at the time, running away did seem the best course of action. Bibles are normally used against bad spirits, black witches or evil*

*ghosts, but maybe it could have turned him to dust or stone or something.*

*When I encounter a creature when I play the game back home and have an object that is effective against it, I simply show my card to earn the points.*

*But here and now in this place...how would I have used the Bible anyway?*

*Would I have to read it aloud, or should I have thrown it at him?...maybe I should have just thrown it at him anyway.'* She shrugged her shoulders.

Katie momentarily contemplated going back to the tower and showing that creep what she was really made of. The positive effects of the chapel appeared to have done their work. She felt better, stronger and 'possibly' ready to take on whatever the game could throw at her. Therefore Katie knew that it was unfortunately time to leave this wonderful sanctuary. She desperately needed to find useful weapons and start earning some serious points. Apart from the door that she had come through, the chapel had two others. Recalling the game board, she knew that the one on the wall with the stained glass windows went outside and eventually led to the graveyard. The other one would take her back to the hallway inside the main building and where she might possibly find the rest of her ramshackle group. *'I wonder if I should stay on my own, in the actual game you are on your own and don't play cooperatively, so why here? Well...there is Nick I supposed.'* She mused wistfully.

Katie had no intention of going into the graveyard until she was much better equipped. But knowing that she would have to go there eventually, she was curious to get a glimpse of it, to see what it was like in real life and not just the colorful illustration on the game board. But if she were more honest, it was to prepare herself for what was to come.

Katie walked over to the wall of stained glass windows. They were all round and about the same size, but each one depicted a different religious scene. Katie paused and marveled at the beauty of each picture and the workmanship it took to hold the infinitesimal amount of small pieces of colored glass together. Just as she was approaching the last window before the door to the outside, she spotted something at the front of the chapel. Almost hidden by a hanging tapestry was a small white marble pedestal. With great anticipation she hurried over and to her delight it was exactly what she had hope it might be. Katie pulled back the heavy tapestry to reveal a ceremonial font that contained a small amount of water. On the floor nearby was a wooden box with a quantity of small glass vials. Katie jumped up and down excitedly. "Holy water...holy water...holy water." she chanted out loud. *'This stuff is good against loads of things. Vampires, werewolves, the undead...and witches...I think...maybe...well the bad ones anyway.'* Katie hurriedly filled 3 vials with the water from the font and put them carefully in



her bag. With a swagger, Katie sauntered over to the door that led to the graveyard. "Not just a librarian *anymore*."

Despite her new-found energy and bravado Katie cautiously opened the door just a few inches. She peeked through the gap and after satisfying herself that there was no immediate danger, decided to take just a few steps outside. "*Well here goes.*" She said to herself as her feet left the smooth floor of the chapel to the uneven gravel outside. The difference from being in the well lit chapel made it difficult for her eyes to adjust as she stared deep into the darkness. There was a path that led away from the door and meandered off into the distance. Even though Katie couldn't see the graveyard through the blanket of mist and fog, she knew it was there, its presence was so great she could feel it goading her, challenging her to enter it. Then from somewhere above her in the distance, with a loud resounding boom, the clock tower struck one o'clock shattering chilled air. The top of the hour had arrived and Katie knew that something, somewhere was about to happen. '*I already had the headless horseman, please let whatever is going to happen, happen to someone else.*' Almost as a rebuttal to her wish, faint noises followed by moaning and wailing oozed out of the darkness. These were accompanied by shapes that rose upwards out of the gloom with pairs of red eyes that stared back at her. Suddenly from nowhere a scream flew out, so

loud that it almost knocked her off her feet. "OK time to leave." Katie announced to herself as she turned around to make a quick escape back inside the chapel. She had only taken a couple of steps towards the chapel door when behind her way off in the distance, she could hear a faint 'whooshing' sound. It reminded her of something long ago in her past, she paused and turned her head. It was a curious sound, like if the air was being beaten. A sense memory sparked in her mind and a picture flashed before her of when was a young child. Watching her mother hang rugs up in the garden and whack them with a special carpet beater to get the dust and dirt out. These thoughts of home caused Katie to fall into a momentary day dream, a luxury she could not afford, even for a second. In an instant the sound had grown louder and her wistful imaginings were interrupted by the by the flapping of a large pair of wings that had emerged out of the night sky just above her. She broke into a sprint, reaching for the door handle. Katie could feel the wind from the wings on the back of her head. She flung the door open, ran through it, and slammed it closed behind her. Just as she did so, something very large smashed into outside of the door almost taking it off its hinges. Katie found herself out of breath again. *'That was close...way too close.'* She thought, realizing that she had come within a split second of a close encounter with some kind of large winged creature. *'Maybe a*

*vampire...or a ...'* Having no choice but to run away again, she became instantly infuriated and frustrated. “You wait...next time, it will be my turn to chase you!” she yelled at the door.

Katie leaned against the wall while she compose herself. *'Geeze, this is exhausting, I've only been here a couple of hours and I've got to make it through to dawn!'* Dragging her feet she walked across the chapel and opened the other door. Katie stood in the doorway and allowed herself time to survey the scene. *'Yes...yes, this looks like the main hallway, there's still not much light in here.'* Katie quickly went back inside the chapel, selected a large candle and with wax dripping down her hand she set off cautiously down the hall.

Thick layers of dust hid most of the delicate geometric patterns of the elaborate tapestries which hung on one side of the hallway. The other wall was covered with row upon row of oil paintings of all different sizes. Huge landscape paintings that reached from floor to ceiling. Smaller ones depicted people on horses or with their naively painted two dimensional prize livestock, mainly cows and pigs. But the majority of the painting were portraits. Stern looking men posed in military uniforms, women wearing their best dresses and adorned in fine jewels. Each pair of beady eyes seemed to follow Katie as she passed by. After thirty feet or so another

slightly narrower hallway branched off to the left. Katie paused a moment to decide. *'I think I will go down here.'* Turning the corner Katie walked into an arm from suit of armor that was sticking out, almost knocking the whole thing over. Instinctually Katie grabbed the swaying iron figure, preventing it from tipping over and crashing to the ground. The price she paid for avoiding the noisy catastrophe was heavy one. Holding onto the creaking suit she was powerless to prevent the thick furry layers of spider webs and dust that was previously covering the armor from cascading over her head and face. "Yuuuuck!" She cried out. Unable to stop herself, she let go of the metal figure which despite her previous efforts, leaned over to one side and with a gigantic deafening 'clang', collapsed to the floor. Panic stricken she frantically attempted to wipe the webs off her face, at the same time turning in circles shaking her head back and forth. The webbing was so thick that it coated her hands, sticking to them as if it were glued in place. Some of the web covered lumps she pulled off herself were unidentifiable but each time a spider fell from her head and hit the floor, she cringed in agony.

Busy de-spidering herself, Katie had not noticed that she was standing in front of another door. Suddenly a crash, then a bang and a jarring slam came from the other side. The noises were followed by muffled cursing. Katie's full attention was now on the door. Leaving a trail of dust and debris

but with adrenaline flowing and with great purpose, she opened the door and walked unhesitatingly into the room beyond.

For its day, it must have been the largest, most up-to-date and modern kitchen for miles around, but now it was ancient and unused. Still scratching her head, Katie looked around. *'Wow this place is huge, they must have been cooking for hundreds of people in here.'* She thought in amazement. There were five large black cast iron stoves, several open fireplaces with spits, long work tables for food preparation and shelves everywhere that contained numerous stacks of pots and pans. But there was no one in sight and no obvious cause for the noises. Then a jar moved from its shelf, briefly hovered in midair, and smashed to the floor, its contents oozing out.

“Never can find anything in here!” a voice complained.

A large container rose into the air, and its lid came off. Then it too crashed to the floor. It was not until it fell and broke open that Katie noticed that most of the floor was covered in broken jars, tins, and other containers, all with their various contents spilling out.

“When you want something you can never find it!” the scratchy voice continued.

A large glass bottle flew across the room and smashed against the far wall.

“Who's in here?” Katie questioned the empty room sternly.

As she spoke, another bottle lifted from a cupboard and into the air, but this time an outline of a hand that was holding the bottle started to appear, then part of an arm. The outline was very faint at first, but as it grew more distinct, Katie could see that the fingers were very bumpy, knobby, and green, with very long, broken nails. The outline continued to fill in and this bottle was also discarded on the floor.

“It drives me mad. I mean, it’s not too much to ask for, is it?” the voice questioned.

Gradually, as though an artist was magically illustrating in mid air, the outline continued being drawn. What looked like very fine sand started to materialize, it swirled around and began filling in the outline. In just moments Katie found herself looking at an old, hunchbacked woman with long, grey scraggly hair. She was wearing a black cape, large brimmed floppy hat, a pair of shoes that came to a point and black and orange-striped stockings, one of which was rolled down around her ankle. The old woman was searching the contents of some shelves and had her back toward her so Katie could only see part of the old woman’s face. She lifted up a very large storage jar and examined its contents.

“You put something away and you can never find it again,” she complained.

“Why are you breaking everything?” Katie questioned.

“You try and keep things in their proper place, but no one cares.” the old woman pointed out. Without turning around, she threw the jar over her shoulder and onto the floor with a large crash, it shattered sending splinters of pottery everywhere.

“What are you looking for?” Katie inquired.

“Bats’ feet,” came the answer.

“Bats’ feet ... bats' feet...what for?” Katie responded.

The old woman turned around to face Katie, “My feet!” she shouted.

Never having actually seen anyone with a green face before, Katie was a little taken aback. She recognized immediately that the woman was a witch. The last witch she had come across playing the game had turned out to be evil, and Katie had been temporarily turned into a slug and lost fifteen points. This witch seemed to be in a bad mood, but, luckily for Katie, she was evidently friendly. The thought of being turned into a slug for real did not appeal to her very much.

“Oh, I see,” Katie said, not really knowing what to say.

“My feet’s been playing up something rotten, but who cares? No one... and no one listens!”

“Oh I see,” Katie replied again.

“Who listens? No one, and no one cares!”

Katie noticed that the old woman had pointed teeth and her nose, which was quite long, had at least five warts on it, some of which were quite large and had hairs growing out of them. “Oh I see,” Katie replied yet again.

“Is that alls you say, 'oh I see'?” chastised the woman.

“You’re a witch, aren’t you?” Katie inquired bravely.

“People calls me all sorts of names,” she replied.

As the old woman turned back to the shelves, she asked, “What do you get called, young dearie?”

“Katie,” Katie said proudly.

“My name’s Gertrud, but you can call me Gurty,” said the witch as she threw another jar on the ground, followed by another bottle. “I give up!” The witch cried out.

Gurty had a bottle in one hand and a jar in the other. She put each one up to her eye. After examining each one in turn, she threw them both against the opposite wall. This time Katie had to duck to avoid flying glass and the



gooey contents. “You see, bats feet is the most important thing when making a foot bath for bunions. These damn shoes gives me right terrible bunions,” she said, lifting a leg in the air to show Katie her shoe.

“Well, no wonder; they’re pointed. Why do you wear pointed shoes?” Katie responded, baffled at such inappropriate footwear.

Gurty paused for a few seconds. “I’m not sure. I’s always worn them, and I’s always had bunions. Anyway, I must go and find my bat feet somewhere else,” said Gurty.

“Where do you live?” Katie inquired.

“Well, dearie, I normally live under a big tree near the lake. But when its gets cold like it is now, I stay in a lovely cave in the forest; nice and cozy it is, moss on the walls and a big fire. I must go, as it’s a long way, especially in these shoes.”

“Don’t you fly? I thought most witches had a broom.” Questioned Katie.

“Oh, I tried that a couple of times; never could get the hang of it; broom finally just went off on its own. I still sees it flying around on its own some nights. If you ever see it, try calling to it by its name, ‘Gurty’s broom.’ Maybe you will have more luck with it than I did; us girls have to stick together.”

“Oh I do agree ... girl power!” Katie replied excitedly.

“There’s some bad things roaming around this place, so you’d better take this,” Gurty said, handing Katie a small potion bottle. “Drink that, and it will make you invisible for about ten minutes, just enough time to get away from any of the creatures you might run into. Bye for now.”

The witch gradually became fainter and more opaque until she had completely disappeared.

Katie was all alone except for the large pile of debris on the floor.

*I'd better get out of here before someone makes me clean all this up!*

she thought. Placing the invisibility potion carefully in her bag, she opened the door and took off down the hall at double speed. For a second, she thought that she heard something, voices maybe, or perhaps it was her imagination. Katie paused for a moment to listen. Nothing, she could not hear anything. Katie noticed that she had stopped in front of a painting depicting an old man and his dog out hunting. The eyes of the old man seemed to be watching her. Katie took a step forward and noticed that the eyes turned to follow her.

Playfully, Katie asked the painting, “How are you today?”

Then the voices echoed down the hall again, louder this time. She thought she could make out Ruth's voice, and it sounded as though she was giving orders as usual.

The hunter in the painting winked at Katie, and before she took off down the hall in the direction of the voices, she winked back at the old man. The voices appeared to be coming from around a corner. Katie increased her speed, ran round the corner and straight into Sergeant Oats, almost knocking him off his feet.

“Thank the Lord that you are OK,” Ruth said with a sigh, giving Katie a big hug.

Oats piped in with, “You ’ad us all quite worried, young lady.”

“Yes lost are you, everything OK,” Svetlana said with a smile.

“My gosh, I have had some interesting adventures,” Katie spurted out. Overjoyed to see a friendly face, she eagerly began to fill them in on what had happened to her. Katie had barely got to the part about the chapel and the graveyard when Ruth interrupted.

“Well my dear, you have been very busy, but we still need to find the others. The whereabouts of the mad, I mean the scientist are still a mystery, and we've not seen 'hide for hare' of Mr. Wheatley or the reporter since we split up.”

*Nick.* With all that had gone on, Katie had almost forgotten about him and wondered what he and the reporter had been doing all this time.

“All right, everyone, let’s get going,” Ruth commanded. “We have not looked in the dining room yet, so I suggest that we try there next, and please do try to keep up Sergeant.” Ruth strode off down the hallway with the rest of them in tow. No one spoke as the group made its way down the hallway, everyone’s attention taken up with the numerous statues, paintings, and suits of armor that all seemed to come to life as they passed by.

Eventually, Ruth stopped in front of a large pair of elegantly carved double doors.

“This, by my calculations, should be the dining room,” she announced pushing open one of the doors.

Svetlana let out an ear piecing scream.

“Oh, I do wish you would refrain from doing that!” Chastised Ruth.  
“Can’t you see he’s perfectly harmless?”

A very tall figure stood just inside the doorway. The butler’s uniform was recognizable, but the person wearing it was mostly just bones with just a little flesh hanging off them here and there. The head turned to look at them. It did have both of its eyes, but one of them was hanging out. The rest was just a bare skull with some gray, stringy hair.

“May I announce you?” he said in an articulate voice, looking straight at Ruth.

“Of course, please do,” Ruth replied.

The butler turned and faced into the room.

Katie peered round the skeletal figure to get a better look. The room was alive with dancing, flickering light that reflected back and forth from full length mirrors that decorated each wall. The light source came from a row of elaborate candelabras on extremely long dining table surrounded by two dozen or so empty chairs.

“There’s no one here!” exclaimed Oats. “Who’s he going to announce us to?”

The butler shifted slightly on his feet, and, after clearing his throat with a small cough, he announced, ”Miss. Ruth, Miss Svetlana, Miss Katie, and Sergeant Oats.”

There was a silence big enough to drive a bus through; then he turned and motioned for them to enter the room. Ruth led the group in single file past the butler into the room. For a moment, the group stood transfixed not knowing what to do. The butler turned and left, the door closed behind him with a bang that echoed around the empty room.

“How very strange,” observed Katie.

Unsure if what to do next, they stood still and gazed around the large, empty room. Just as Oats opened his mouth to say something, the clock way off on the tower, struck two o'clock.

Ruth put a finger to her lips. "Shhhhh, can't you hear it?"

They all craning their heads one way then the other, trying to hear what she was talking about. Gradually the sound of many voices could be heard. Svetlana suddenly squeaked out loud with surprise. Waving her arms around and almost dropping her candlestick, she pointed at the dining table and everyone turned to look. The voices grew louder and as they did, people started to materialize sitting at that table. Place settings began to appeared with and all the items that you would expect to find at a fancy banquet. Highly polished Knives, forks and spoons all and glimmering in the candlelight. Fruit piled high in shining silver bowls and crystal vases containing large colorful arrangements of flowers. Soon the wonderful smell of delicious food started to fill the room. This made Katie realize that it had been ages since she had last eaten anything, but strangely she had not felt hungry until now. The group was transfixed at the sight they beheld.

"Look at the clothes; it must be the 1920s. How wonderful!" Ruth said excitedly.

Katie walked slowly toward the festivities. None of the revelers noticed her, even when she was standing right next to the table. All the guests were elegantly dressed. There were bottles of champagne and platefuls of delicious food everywhere. There was a lady sitting at the head of the table who looked extremely glamorous. She was covered from head to foot in the very latest fashion of the day, complete with a diamond-covered headband. She noticed Katie and motioned the rest of the diners to quiet down.

“Look everyone, we have guests; simply smashing, what fun! Please join us, won’t you?” she announced, motioning them all to sit down.

“Don’t you find it interesting that the butler knew all our names and that there are exactly four empty chairs?” Katie whispered as Ruth, Svetlana, and Sergeant Oats came over to the table.

After a brief hesitation they all sat down; it was hard not to get caught up in the excitement of the party. They were all made to feel very welcome, and everyone was having a great time, laughing, eating and drinking, and making merry.

Katie was sitting next to a nice young man who, in between drinking large glasses of champagne, told her about all the money that he had made on the stock market that week.

Just as it seemed that the noise of the party couldn't get any louder, music—a very fast, syncopated variety—started to swirl around the room. Everyone sprang to their feet and started to dance wildly. Even Sergeant Oats danced; he was really given no choice as he was pulled to his feet by two lovely ladies. Everyone was having a fabulous time, the music getting faster and louder.

Then, just as suddenly as it had started, the party stopped. All the people stopped dancing and started to fade away.

The lady who had been sitting at the head of the table walked over to Ruth and Katie. "It's all been too fun, but unfortunately our time is up, and we have to go," she said. Then she handed Katie a small, brightly decorated box. "This is for you, my dear. I found it years ago, hidden in the house. I believe it's yours." Then with a big smile she began to fade away. "Thank you all for coming. Goodbye."

As the last word left her lips, she, the rest of the diners, and all contents of the table completely disappeared, and Katie's intrepid group was once again all alone. Svetlana seemed quite upset, gesturing in the direction of the empty table.

"Oh don't worry I'm sure we will meet them again sometime or another," Ruth said in her calm, reassuring voice.



“No, candlestick gone, put table bye bye!” cried Svetlana. It appeared that she had put her candlestick on the table when they sat down, and it had been spirited away along with all the other dinner items.

“It seems that the house can give, but it can also take away. Never mind. We will find you another one,” said Ruth reassuringly. “Our quest to find our missing members must go on.”

After leading them out of the dining room and into the hallway, Ruth turned to address them in the manner of school teacher on a day outing. "I think we all need a break. Why don't we drop in on the chapel for a bit of a boost?" She nodded her head in Katie's direction. "Since you know how to get there, why don't you lead the way?"

Ruth's request only gave Katie enough time for a quick look at the box that she had been given. It was about two inches square, red velvet with silver edging and two small hinges with a clasp to hold it closed. After placing it in her pocket, she led them down the hall past the kitchen and into the chapel.

Once there, Ruth immediately let out a big sigh. “Oh, I feel the rejuvenating powers at work in here. Let's remain and rest for a few minutes to charge our batteries.”

While Svetlana and Oats poked around and explored, Ruth took Katie by the hand and sat her down. “You know, my dear, I have become very concerned for you. With the added clarity that this lovely chapel has afforded me, I can see that you are the one person who has most to lose and for whom, there is the most danger tonight.”

Katie shifted uncomfortably in her seat.

“Back when we first met I knew that there was something different about you.” Ruth continued, “And now I think I know what it is. You don’t really belong here, do you?”

Katie shook her head slowly.

“My belief,” Ruth said, “is that if you cannot get home tonight, then you might end up a permanent resident here ... or worse. You are going to have to beat this place at its own game—fight fire with fire, so to speak.”

“I think I know what you mean,” said Katie.

“I will help all I can, but it’s really up to you; you know that, don’t you?”

Katie stared into the kind eyes of the psychic and nodded.

Ruth stood up and joined the rest of the group leaving Katie alone with her thoughts.

Ruth had just confirmed all of Katie's conclusions and her worst fears. Back home, her game strategy had always been to avoid the most dangerous places, therefore not being in a position to gain a huge amount of points, but at the same time, not lose them either. Unfortunately, here, simply surviving the night was not enough; she would have to win the game. Not only would she have to pit herself against the worst that this place had to offer, but at the same time, be in direct competition with all the other players. How would she overcome their tailor-made expertise? Ruth, with her inner wisdom, Nick with his unfailing bravery and the rest, who could simply bumble their way through to perhaps winning. If she wanted to home, Katie would have to meet danger head on. Apart from the holy water and invisibility potion, she had not found any significantly useful items. In the game, if she came across a creature in the graveyard unprepared, it meant losing points. What would the consequence of such an encounter be here, when everything was real? And, if she did win, how would she know and how was she going to get home anyway? Question followed question and soon her thought process was paralyzed with 'what if's' and 'how to's.'

Ruth's appearance hovering over her, shook Katie from her trance.

“Come on then; let's go get them!” Ruth said encouragingly with an outstretched hand. Katie took it and stood up, feeling a little shaky at first.

“Where shall we try next?” Ruth asked the group.

Now that she had the safety of the group, Katie thought that it was time to seek out some of the more dangerous places.

Svetlana looked like a deer in headlights. Wearing the familiar confused blank expression, it was difficult to know if she ever understood anything that was being said.

Sergeant Oats looked as though he was attempting to form a sentence.

“Let’s try the graveyard,” Katie suggested.

“My dear, you really are a brave one...but why not? I’m confident that this group can handle whatever surprises the graveyard has in store.” Ruth replied.

Katie felt uneasy, even though it had been her suggestion to make the graveyard their next destination. Her rational mind tried to take over again and began cautioning her. *'Graves...dead bodies, what was I thinking?'* The graveyard back home next to the village church was quaint. Just a small gathering of mismatched, moss covered stone crosses and slabs with the names of the dearly departed. Despite its 'quaintness', Katie wouldn't have considered going into it at night, even on a dare from her friends. The graveyard here, based on events from previous games she had played, could be the very epicenter of evil, and she had just suggested that they go

wandering around in it. Before Katie had a chance to change her mind or lodge a last minute objection, Ruth herded them out of the chapel to the sobering chill of the night air outside. "Fortunately for us, the full moon will provide us with some light to see by but Sergeant can you please turn on your lamp." Then with the heir of an African explorer, the psychic led the small group down the path towards the graveyard.

# BAPTISM



A thick blanket of mist swirled around their feet sending delicate wispy tentacles into the air searching for prey to wrap themselves around. The storm over the hall had dispatched a few of its more angrier clouds to chase after the group and were now close behind them. Soon the sky grumbled and moaned and the air became thick with the squeaking of bats that were circling overhead. Arriving at the gate to the graveyard, Katie and her fellow Ghosthunters were greeted by the sight of hundreds, possibly thousands of graves that stretched off into the distance. As far as the eye could see there were grave markers of all shapes and sizes in various degrees of decay. Katie shuddered, not just from the cold, but from the dread feeling that emanated from the graveyard itself.

“This is a place of constant turmoil.” Announced Ruth. “Be very careful where you step, and for heaven’s sake...*keep together!*” she added with a concerned tone in her voice that Katie had not noticed before.

One by one, the group passed through the ancient iron gate and into the graveyard. Katie felt the drizzling rain on her face as it began to fall from the black clouds above. *'Oh great, all this and rain too!'* A warm odor of dirt and decay rose from the ground; it was an evil, nightmarish smell. Katie walked cautiously, trying to keep an eye on where she was putting her feet as well as maintaining watch all around her. It was a truly horrid place; it felt

as though at any moment something could appear from behind a gravestone and grab her.

There was no real path—just a rough track that weaved in and out of the gravestones, tombs and occasional dead tree. Katie noticed that along with the mist that had now almost engulfed her, in some places steam appeared to be rising from the ground. She stopped and bent down to examine where the force of the steam had formed a large crack in the earth. She pulled her hand back sharply from the heat; it was as if the soil was on fire.

She found herself falling slightly behind everyone else, even Sergeant Oats was doing a better job of keeping up with the group. Katie thought she heard the sound of a shovel scraping against gravel and earth. Instinctively she turned her head one way then the other to see if she could make out what direction the sound was coming from. But due to the gusting wind, it seemed to be coming from everywhere at the same time.

With the others almost out of sight, she hastened her speed to catch up. The combination of mist and rain made it increasingly difficult to see the ground. The sound of shoveling drifted out of the darkness once more, she turned her head to locate it and momentarily forgot to look where she was stepping. Her foot caught on a tree root that was protruding from the ground,



and over she went, falling flat on her face. The ground where Katie landed was covered in a combination of a foul-smelling ooze and mud. The warm, slimy concoction covered her face and soaked into her jeans and sweatshirt. For a moment Katie did not move, choosing instead to lie where she had fallen, to savor the feeling of being completely miserable. Katie closed her eyes tightly and drew an image in her mind of being at home having a nice, hot bubble bath. Realizing that this brief attempt at escapism wasn't going to help, she slowly pushed herself up on her elbows and rubbed the foul smelling muck from her eyes. In the distance, the bell in the clock tower struck three o'clock. *'Oh no, this is the worst place to be when the clock strikes the hour!'* To her horror, she noticed that the ground just in front of her had started moving upward, creating a pile of loose earth. *'But...but...but I already had my share...it can't happen to me again!'* Katie pleaded aloud. Like a volcano erupting, something was trying to push its way up from below. Katie decided that now, would be as good a time as ever to leave. Attempting to get on her feet she watched in horror as a large hand broke through the top of the mound accompanied by vast amounts of foul-smelling viscous liquid and steam. Katie's sneakers repeatedly slipped in the mud as she frantically tried to stand up. The hand which looked more like an giant animal's paw felt around and grabbed at some roots with its claws, pulling an

arm and then a shoulder out of the ground. After much effort, Katie was able to get to her knees and was in the process of trying to stand up as the top of a bulbous head became visible. It was a large with pointed ears and large black eyes. A long protruding hairy snout followed by a second muscular arm broke the surface. Katie went into a frenzy. "Damn these shoes!" She screamed. The more she struggled, the more hopeless her situation become, until by some miracle, she finally got to her feet. Despite being in an almost blind panic, she managed to wrestle the Bible from her bag. *'Oh my god, what kind of creature is this? I can't tell what kind it is, I have no idea if the Bible will have any effect on it!'* Nevertheless, she held the bible at arm's length, pointing it in the direction of the emerging creature. Her efforts appeared to have no effect whatsoever as the monster continued to drag itself out of the ground, its eyes firmly fixed on Katie. The creature opened its mouth to reveal a terrifying set of fangs. Its torso appeared to be covered in a combination of skin and matted fur. Realizing that there was no time to start reading from it, as a last ditch attempt, Katie threw the Bible at the beast. The Bible bounced harmlessly off the top of its filthy, fur-covered head and landed on the slimy ground, where it sank into the ooze and quickly disappeared.

Without knowing what direction she was going in Katie instantly took off. She could hear the others, who now realizing that she was missing, had started calling out for her; unfortunately Katie could not tell what direction their voices were coming from. She kept running as fast as she could, tripping and scrambling over tombs and graves as she went deeper and deeper into the graveyard.

When Katie could not run any farther, she was forced to stop and rest. Her heavy breathing made clouds of steam in the frigid night air. It was unusually quiet all of sudden, the only sound that Katie could hear was that of her own breathing. Then suddenly, a bloodcurdling and horrifying howl broke the silence. It sounded like the roar of some gigantic beast. It was terrible and frightening; her mind raced a mile a minute. *"How on earth am I going to be able to fight creatures that sound like that?"*

Her situation seemed hopeless. Katie started to run again, faster and faster, but an inhuman growling seemed to be getting closer each second. What was she going to do? She needed weapons: silver crosses, a gun with silver bullets. As she ran, she tried to think of a plan. If she could find her way back into the hall and find these objects, then she could come back and have a chance of killing this creature. The rational part of Katie's mind began chastising her for being extremely foolish and venturing into the

graveyard without anything to protect herself with. *'I thought I was safe in a group.'* She answered herself.

Katie reached an area full of newly dug graves; there were no gravestones, just rows of empty rectangular holes in the ground and piles of earth. She decided it would be quicker to jump over them rather than running around. The heavy footsteps were almost upon her. Katie took a running jump over the first open grave. Then thinking that she heard the sound of digging again, she turned to look in the direction it was coming from. Losing her footing, she tumbled into the next hole. Katie found out the hard way that six feet is quite a long way down. Despite the muddy conditions she landed hard at the bottom of the hole.

Alone, wet, cold, pursued by a creature from hell and now trapped at the bottom of grave, Katie found a new level of terror. It consumed her, she began to hyperventilate causing her pulse to race and heart pound. For the second time tonight, her face was covered in a thick layer of goo, rendering her unable to see. Fearing that she might pass out, Katie desperately tried to control her rapid breathing. Wiping her eyes with her frozen fingers she heard a familiar voice.

“Well, what’s a nice girl like you doing in a grave like this?”

*'Oh my God.'* She could not believe her ears; it was Nick. Katie was about to launch herself at him and give him the biggest hug that she had ever given anyone in her life, when she was stopped short by the same bloodcurdling howl that she had been running from. She put a finger to her lips, indicating to Nick to stay silent, and with the other hand, she pointed upward. The footsteps came closer, she could hear something sniffing the air as it paced back and forth just above them.

Katie remembered the potion that Gertrud the witch had given her. If it could make one person invisible for ten minutes, then maybe she reasoned, it could make two people invisible for five minutes. Katie drank half and handed the small bottle to Nick. He hesitated, but Katie gestured urgently for him to drink it. He put the bottle to his lips and drained the rest of the liquid. The awful-tasting potion worked very quickly. First Katie and then Nick became completely invisible. She could not even see herself—not her hands, her legs, nor any part of her.

The potion worked just in time; earth was beginning to fall into the grave from above. Katie looked up and saw a huge, horrific creature standing just above them, part animal and part human. It came to the edge of the grave and looked down at them. It had massive muscular legs like a bull. Its hands and arms were almost human except that the forearms were much

longer and in place of fingernails, it had long, razor-sharp claws. Most terrifying of all was its torso and head, which were like that of an enormous wolf. It stood for a while at the top of the grave taking in lung full's of air. By its actions the creature appeared confused, it could smell something, but could not see anything. Strong animal odors mixed with dung and wet fur wafted down into the grave, mixing with the smell of damp earth it made a heady concoction. Katie did a silent prayer that the creature wouldn't jump down into the grave with them. Enormous gobs of the saliva drooled from its mouth and landed on Katie; it was so gross that it was all she could do not gag out loud.

The creature raised its head toward the sky and silhouetted against the large full moon, let out a long terrible roar before moving off. Almost immediately, somewhere off in the distance, they heard the reply of another creature, that sounded equally as horrifying.

“Oh my God, there’s more than one of those things!” exclaimed Katie under her breath.

The potion was starting to wear off, and she and Nick were becoming visible again. For a few minutes, they sat quietly, making sure that they gave the creature enough time to get a good distance away.

“Where the hell did that come from?” asked Nick in a hushed voice.

“It come out of the ground and chased after me. I’m not certain, but I think that it was some sort of werewolf,” replied Katie, still slightly breathless.

"And that potion...I mean, we were invisible. Where did you get that from?"

"Oh a witch gave it to me." Replied Katie almost nonchalantly. “What happened to the reporter?” she asked, changing the subject.

“Well,” Said Nick. “She went missing shortly after we gave up looking for you in the library. We went back into the hall; one second she was there, and then she was gone, disappeared into thin air, along with my oil lamp as well. She could have fallen into a hidden trap door. But I think that it is more likely that she walked into a displacement field. They can transport you to another location in a split second.”

“Oh." Replied Katie. Feigning concern, but inwardly enjoying the mental image of the reporter in a displacement field. "I have no doubt she'll show up eventually. As you know, I was lost for a while, but I managed to find the rest of the group. What the heck are you doing at the bottom of this grave anyway? Did you fall in like me?" Then Katie saw a shovel propped up at the other end of the grave and added, “Oh, it was you that I heard digging?”

“Yes. You see I found a map in the library just after you disappeared. It shows the location of the master vampire’s lair on the island as well as the location of a buried stash of vampire-hunting weapons. If my calculations are correct, there should be a chest about another two feet down at the bottom of this grave.”

Nick had already dug down about a foot or so. Taking it in turns with the shovel, they soon managed to find the top of the wooden chest. The drizzle turned to rain, making the task of getting it out of the ground even harder. Attaching a rope to a metal ring on the top of the lid, they eventually managed to pull it from its hiding place.

The chest looked old, it was covered with intricate medieval carvings. It had been in the ground for so long that the lock had almost rusted through. Without much effort, Nick broke it off with the end of the shovel and raised the lid.

“Look!” Nick excitedly pointed at the contents. The chest held silver stakes, a large hammer, a silver crucifix, and a deadly-looking crossbow with quiver of silver-tipped arrows. There were also two strange-looking bottles containing a clear liquid.

Katie picked up one of the bottles and turned to Nick. “Is this ...?”



Nick nodded. "Yes. That would be holy water, an essential item in any comprehensive vampire-hunting kit.

Katie, now realizing that she was in competition with everyone including Nick refrained from telling him that she had already found some holy water. "Please, can we get out of here now?" Katie pleaded, noticing that the rain had started to come down even harder.

"Yes, you need to dry off. Let's get going."

They split the items from the chest between them and with a god deal of effort, finally managed to climb out of the grave.

After readying themselves for the walk back to the hall, Nick inquired. "Do you have any more of that invisibility potion left?"

"No, that was it." Replied Katie.

"If we come across that creature again, we could try throwing some holy water at it. That thing, whatever it was, looked pretty evil and holy water does protect against evil entities of all kinds...worth a try."

Katie first reaction was that she hoped that they wouldn't have the opportunity of testing his theory, but in fact that is just what she needed to happen. She had been running away from everything. Now she was with Nick and they had some protective stuff, it was time to get into the fight.

Nick seemed to have a pretty good sense of direction, which was very helpful since most of the graveyard looked the same.

They reached the chapel door without incident. Katie reached to open the door but stopped.

"What about the others?" she asked.

"Oh don't worry about them. I'm sure that Ruth can handle most situations," Nick replied, opening the heavy door for her.

Once inside the chapel, they rested for a while as Katie warmed herself up.

Nick stretched his arms as he walked around. "This is a great place, I feel a very powerful, positive energy in here. I was feeling a bit tired, but now I feel great. Do you think that you could handle a trip to the island for a little bit of vampire hunting?"

Katie hesitated, wondering how much crazier this night could get. *'Me vampire hunting!'* But she knew that she had no choice, she had to go back outside in the freezing rain and head to the island and confront whatever was there. Overall, things were looking better. Not only was she back with Nick, but they had also found some great equipment. However, she also knew that time was running out. If the rules were the same here as in the game, then she only had until six o'clock to win, which meant that there were less than

three hours left. “Yes. Let’s go!” Katie replied. She could see by the look on his face that Nick was pleased. “How long till four o’clock?” she asked.

“I never wear a watch. I always seem to break them,” he answered. After checking the map one more time, he led the way into the hallway. “We should probably try the kitchen for some garlic,” he said.

“Ah, I know exactly where it is,” Katie replied. “Follow me.” And strode off in the direction of the kitchen.

Opening the door, she warned, “Be careful where you walk. There is glass and stuff all over the floor.”

But when they entered the room, there were no broken bottles or jars and no goo; in fact, there was no mess of any kind, except, of course, for the ever-present, thick layer of dust that seemed to be everywhere. “How very strange,” Katie said, walking around checking everywhere for any signs of Gertrud’s destruction.

“Let’s see what we can find,” Nick said as he opened a drawer.

In no time at all, they found a string of garlic cloves, a large kitchen knife, and a flashlight.

*‘I suppose instead of running away from the mess, I could have searched in here myself.’* Katie mused. *‘Oh well, too late now.’*

They were almost done searching, and Katie was exploring the last few cupboards when she noticed a strange smell. At first, it was quite mild, but very quickly it became so bad that they both started choking. Nick put his jacket over his mouth and nose. Grabbing Katie, he rushed them out into the hallway.

“What was that?” Katie exclaimed as she coughed and gasped for air.

“I am not sure. It could have been gas from the oven, but it had a distinct smell of sulfur about it. My guess would be that someone or something didn't like us. I think that we got out just in time,” he said, clearing his throat. “I think that we have all we need, so let's get going.”

They made their way down the hallway toward the main entrance. They had almost reached the double doors when the sound of music filled the air.

"That sounds like a harpsichord." Katie said pondering what piece of music it could be.

The melodic sound floated all around them, its echoes reverberating up and down the hall. The music was extremely soulful and sad, instantly Katie felt a strong emotional reaction to it. She stopped walking and stood paralyzed, her eyes closing involuntarily. Katie saw a vision of a young man and a woman. The man was wearing a silver and gray wig, a long tunic coat,

and shoes with big, silver buckles. The lady was also wearing a wig, but hers was very long, big, and elaborate. She wore a beautiful flowing dress with several layers of petticoats. The pair was walking arm in arm in a field full of brightly colored flowers; there was such a feeling of happiness. Katie felt a gentle breeze on her face and inhaled the fragrance of the sweet smelling flowers.

Then the vision changed. The couple looked older and were sitting in the parlor of Grey Friar Hall. The Hall looked very different from how it looked now—everything was new and bright. They were playing with their new baby. Katie smiled as joy and contentment flowed through her body.

The scene changed again. The baby was now a small girl playing by a lake. The man and woman proudly watched as she splashed around in the water.

Then a cold chill ran through Katie as the scene changed yet again. The man was kneeling beside two new graves; one of them was much smaller than the other. Uncontrollable grief filled Katie's soul. Floods of tears ran down her cheeks. Her whole body shuddered in anguish and sorrow. Her entire mind became racked with a crippling pain that was unbearable, the feeling of loss...eternal.

Katie felt someone shaking her. When she finally managed to open her eyes, she saw that it was Nick with a concerned look on his face. Katie tried to speak, but she was sobbing uncontrollably.

Eventually, through her tears she cried, “There is so much pain and sadness; the poor man is all alone.”

“I’m not sure what just happened to you, but I think that you’ve had enough. Let’s get out of here now,” Nick said, as he started to pull her toward the front doors.

Katie resisted. “No. I want to see him. I want to see him play. Where’s the music coming from?”

“It seems to be coming from the room just behind us, but I don’t think that ...”

Nick was cut off as Katie started walking toward the direction of the music. She stopped in front of the door, paused for a moment, then slowly turned the handle and pushed the door open. Katie stood just inside the doorway and looked into the dimly lit room beyond. There was sheet music stacked on shelves and scattered all over the floor. At the back of the room there was a man sitting at a harpsichord. Katie could not see his face as his head was bent over the keyboard as he played. Katie reacted to the music

again, it was haunting and evoked such strong sense memories that she fell into a trance.

Nick walked up and stood beside her. "Are you alright?" he asked, putting a hand on her shoulder.

Katie did not reply, she was being held captive by this stranger and his music. The man looked up in their direction, but his stare seemed to go straight through them.

"I don't think he can see us," said Nick unaware of Katie's condition. They continued watching him play, the melody becoming almost hypnotizing.

After a while, noticing that Katie hadn't spoken or moved, Nick picked her up and quickly took her through the front doors of the Hall. Once outside in the reviving chill of the night, Nick lowered Katie onto her feet and steadied her balance. After unsuccessfully trying to shake her back to consciousness, he reluctantly resorted to slapping her across the face. Katie slowly opened her eyes, which were now quite red from crying.

"What...what happened?"

"It must have been a kind of incubus". Nick replied.

"A...a what?"

"A male form of succubus." Even though Katie was still coming round from her ordeal, Nick sensed a greater confusion and went on to explain. "A ghost or spirit that sucks the energy from you."

"But he was so sad and lonely." Replied Katie. Her lower lip quivering. "I saw his life and his family, they..."

Nick interrupted. "I'm sure what you saw was quite true and very real to you, but nonetheless you were in a good deal of danger."

Katie felt drained and confused by the experience. "In that case, I believe that I should thank you for saving me."

Nick seemed uncertain how to respond. His body language became awkward and he was momentarily unable to look Katie in the face. "I've come across them before...and I...well..it...it was nothing." He said turning away. "Do you think that you are able to walk?"

"Yes, I think so."

Nick must have been able to sense that Katie needed time with her thoughts. She appreciated his momentary silence as they slowly walked together down the path. The images Katie had seen kept repeatedly flashing through her mind like a slide show.

After a few minutes, they arrived at the circular driveway. Katie turned to Nick and broke the silence. "Which way?" she asked



“Sorry ... what?” Nick said after staring at her for a few seconds.

“Which way to the lake?” she replied.

Just as she spoke, the clock tower started striking—one, two, three, four. As the last strike died away, Katie felt something: a presence, like someone was watching, staring at her. She nervously looked around but could not see anything. Then she heard something moving around behind where they were standing. Turning slowly around she discovered a big, black cat sitting on the ground looking up at them. Katie stared back at the cat. It cocked its head to one side as if it were analyzing them.

Nick, who had not noticed that cat broke the silence. “We should be on our way. Are you feeling all right now?”

“I feel totally drained, but in a strange way, I also sense that the experience has somehow changed me. I...I feel different now, more whole, it’s hard to explain.”

“I think I know what you mean,” Nick said in kind voice.

After a pause, he continued. “It’s this way.” He pointed to the left. “This way takes us past the forest, the ruined abbey, and finally to the lake. The map that I found said that the master vampire mostly sleeps between the hours of four and five, so we need to get on our way.”

They set off down the path at a slightly quicker pace, with the cat following just a few feet behind them.

The frigid air was a sharp contrast to the air inside the hall, which had been still and musty. The ever-present mist that swirled around had thinned out, and the rain had stopped. Every so often Katie paused and turned around to check on the cat. Each time she did so, the cat would stop, sit down, and stare back at her. Shortly, they came to a branch in the path that went off to the right. A dense, wooded area was just visible in the distance.

“That’s the haunted forest,” Nick said as he rearranged the backpack on his shoulder.

Katie stared intently into the darkness of the forest as Nick put the backpack on the ground to rest for a second or two. “That’s where a witch called Gertrude has her cave; I don’t suppose we have time to go and visit her?” said Katie hopefully.

“No, not really. We have to get to the island as soon as possible,” Nick replied as he reorganized the contents of the bag.

Katie borrowed the flashlight, turned it on and aimed the pale beam of light in the direction of the forest. Peering into the gloom she started to pick up more detail. Then out of the corner of her eye, she noticed something red half hidden behind one of the black, decaying trees on the edge of the forest.

“Do you know anything about the forest, like who else lives in it or what goes on inside it?” Katie inquired, keeping her gaze fixed on the red shape.

“No not really. Not much is known at all. In fact, I don’t know of anyone who has even put a foot inside it,” Nick explained.

The red object moved very slightly from behind the tree, and Katie made out the dark outline of a very small figure hiding in the shadows. The red shape turned out to be a tall, pointed hat that was sitting on its head. She wondered if it could be the gnome that she had occasionally come across while playing the game. “Nick, I think that were being watched,” she said.

“Oh, probably,” he replied in a very matter of fact tone.

That cat, who had also been observing everything, let out a long, low growl.

Katie pointed in the direction of the figure. “There—look ... look.” But just as she spoke, the figure disappeared back behind the tree into the shadows. “Oh no, it’s gone; oh well.” Katie sighed despondently.

Nick picked up his backpack "Where did that cat come from?" He waited for an answer which never came then stated walking.

Katie, who was intrigued by the forest, followed, reluctantly glancing over her shoulder until the forest was out of sight.

For awhile, their journey was uneventful. Eventually, the path they were on came to an end, and two new paths continued, one going to the left and a smaller one that went right.

Nick paused at the intersection and pointed down the smaller pathway. “That’s the way to the ruined abbey. If you look carefully, you can just see it's outline against the sky.”

Katie strained her eyes, but couldn't make out anything. While she was squinting and gazing into the distance, a shot rang out.

“That sounded like it came from the abbey,” said Nick.

Then there was a second shot, followed by a third.

Nick pointed at two very large shapes that appeared just above them in the sky. “I don’t like the look of this,” he said.

Suddenly, two gigantic owls plunged out of the sky and swooped down on them. Katie and Nick ducked, but the cat stood its ground, jumping and swinging its claws at the large, dive bombing birds.

“I think that whoever is shooting that gun off has probably upset them,” Nick said as he covered his head with his hands.

“That’s got to be the mad scientist; he was the only one who has a gun,” said Katie.

Katie, remembering her first encounter in the graveyard, was quite relieved that it was only owls that were attacking them. The assault didn't last long, the owls backed off, either out of boredom or because the cat's aim was getting better. Eventually, with a few parting screeches they disappeared back into the sky.

Katie and Nick picked themselves up off the ground and brushed off the mud and leaves that were clinging to them.

"This is the way to the lake." Nick said as he led the way down the path that veered to the left.

They had been walking for a few minutes when the path started sloping upwards, quite soon they found themselves climbing up a steep hill. Their progress slowed, but eventually they were able to see the brow of the hill up ahead. A shimmering glow from the other side silhouetted the ridge line against the night sky. As they got closer, the light spilled over the peak of the hill, and like a laser, it cut through the darkness, illuminating everything around them. Nick turned off his flashlight. With one last effort, they traveled the last few feet quickly and were both slightly out of breath as they crested the hill.

Before them the landscape was spread out like gigantic masterpiece painting. The charcoal sky contrasted with the iridescent full moon which

was mirrored in the lake's rippling surface. The reflected shards of light rescued everything they touched from the sticky velvet blackness of the night. The lake stretched into the distance. Dense fog rolled over the surface of the water obscuring the far shoreline making it impossible to tell how big the lake actually was.

Immediately in front of them, the path descended the hill and meandered back and forth until finally ending up at a boat dock on the edge of the lake.

"Where's the island?" asked Katie.

"Oh, it's there somewhere. It was at the other end last time I was here."

"What do you mean by 'somewhere'?" Asked Katie. "Isn't it in the same place all the time?"

"It moves around a bit. Sometimes it's in the middle, and sometimes it ... well, it's ... well, you just have to find it," replied Nick. "Looks like it must still be at the other end. Anyway, let's get going. Hopefully, there should be a rowboat tied up at the dock, or we're in for a cold swim."

Katie gave him a look that could kill at twenty feet, but he stopped her before she had a chance to say anything. "Only joking; there's normally at least one there."

Katie was taken slightly aback. *'Funny guy eh, good looks and a sense of humor, who knew?'*

Before they made their way down the hill, Katie took a second and turned slowly around; this vantage point offered a spectacular view of the east side of GreyFriar Hall, the forest, and the ruined abbey as well. The stream of bats that flowed into the air from most of the abbey's windows and towers was a sure indication that something was still going on there. She wondered if the shots they heard were really from the mad scientist's gun and, if so, what on earth he was doing in there.

Nick was already halfway down the hill before Katie realized it, so she hurried after him, almost slipping on the wet paving stones. She was becoming more than a little irritated by the constant cold and damp. Katie yearned for a hot bubble bath and her nice, warm bed. She wondered again if this were all a dream from which she might wake up at any second.

She caught up with Nick just as he stopped dead in his tracks; he had a strange look on his face.

"What's the matter?" she inquired.

"Shhh; not so loud. Look straight ahead, by the boat dock, can you see?" he whispered.

They were still a little way from the boat dock, and so she had to strain her eyes to see what he was talking about. As she squinted, she finally saw something. It was hard to make out at that distance, but there seemed to be the figure of a man at the entrance to the wooden jetty. He was sitting on something, but she could not tell what it was. There was something odd about him, but they were too far away for her to decide what it was. Neither of them had noticed the figure when they'd been on top of the hill. Somehow he had blended into the surroundings.

“Don't you notice anything strange about him?” Nick asked her quietly.

“He's sort of hard to make out, like he's camouflaged or something,” she replied.

“Yes, I know, but apart from that, look at things that are close or nearby, like the trees and the boat dock and then compare them to the figure.”

Katie looked again and realized exactly what Nick was getting at. Whatever they were looking at must be enormous. Even sitting down, the creature dwarfed everything near it. Katie had never come across a creature like this one playing the game. The game had so many different creatures and monsters that you could play the game for years and never meet them



all. That was one of the things that she loved about the game; every so often, you would encounter something that you had never seen before. That might have been fun back home, but here in reality, she had no idea what this thing was or what it might do.

“He’s right in the way. We have no choice but to get closer,” Nick said under his breath.

They edged slowly forward a few feet at a time, looking for any sign that they had been noticed. As they got closer, the enormity of the creature’s size became apparent—even though he was sitting, he was at least seven or eight feet high. Katie shuddered at the thought of how big he would be if he stood up. She hoped that they would never find out. When they were only twenty feet away, they could see that the giant was sitting on a huge tree stump directly in front of the entrance to the boat dock. About halfway down the jetty on the right hand side, there was a small rowboat tied up and bobbing up and down in the small waves that rolled across the lake. Even though the giant was not completely blocking their way, it was painfully obvious that they would have to pass very close to him in order to get to the boat.

“What do we do now?” Katie asked softly, not taking her eyes off the man for a second.

“We stay calm, and we don’t make any sudden movements. We just have to see what he does.”

Katie was not totally convinced that this was the soundest of plans, but as she could not think of a better one, she nodded her head in agreement.

Each step forward felt agonizingly dangerous, but as they drew closer they noticed that the man was completely engrossed in what he was doing and seemingly still unaware of their presence. Every so often, he would put his hand into a large, cloth bag that was on the ground next to him, take something out, and then hold it up to his eyes. He would then look at whatever it was very closely, pull at it a couple of times, and put it in his mouth.

He was a most peculiar-looking person; apart from his size, his skin and hair was milky white and almost translucent. This and the fact that his clothing was mostly a nondescript, light brown color was why he had been so hard to see.

When Katie noticed the cloth bag move, she let out a slight gasp. It was enough to break the giant’s concentration. He lifted his head and looked up at her. Katie swallowed hard. Katie and Nick froze to the spot. What was he going to do? Katie’s mind was reeling. By the look of him, he could do

anything he wanted, including picking them up single-handedly and throwing them into the lake.

*Calm down*, Katie thought. She reminded herself that this could be one those major point-winning opportunities that she needed. The creature looked back down at the bag, picked it up, and held it out, offering it to her. Katie could not move even if she had wanted to. Her feet were glued to the spot. The man looked at her; he shook the bag and extended his arm toward her. Again she did not move.

“Go on; take it,” Nick said.

“You’ve got to be joking,” she replied. “Why don’t you take it?”

“But it’s *you* he’s offering it to. I really think that you should take it.”

Nick seemed almost to be begging.

Very slowly, she moved forward, looking at the giant and then the bag and wondering what on earth could be in it. When she was just close enough, she placed one hand underneath it. The man let go of the bag. Katie almost dropped it but was able to get a hold of the top of it with the other hand. It felt very weird—soft and spongy and not as heavy as she had thought it would be given its size, which was about the size of a soccer ball.

Unsure as to what she should do next, she looked at the bag then Nick and then at the man. The giant gestured her to open it. She gave Nick a blank look.

“Go on then; open it,” Nick said.

With a deep breath, she pulled on the draw string to loosen it and then pulled the top of the bag open. It was the worst horror that she could have ever imagined. She was holding a bag full of spiders—small ones, big ones, and large, hairy ones, all squirming and moving around in her hands. It was all she could do not to drop the bag and shriek at the top of her lungs.

Nick could not see what was in the bag, but clearly the look on her face told him that there was a big problem. “Keep calm. Whatever it is, just stay calm. You can do it,” Nick reassured her.

Katie barely heard his words. The sheer terror of what she was holding blocked everything else from her mind. She mustered every ounce of self control that she could and slowly and very deliberately handed the bag back. Katie’s refusal of the gift appeared to puzzle the creature. A disbelieving look came over him. His face, which was huge like the rest of him, wrinkled up, and his eyes narrowed, as if he was pondering the strange turn of events. It seemed like an eternity to Katie, but eventually he reached out with his enormous hand and gently took the bag from her. It was not a

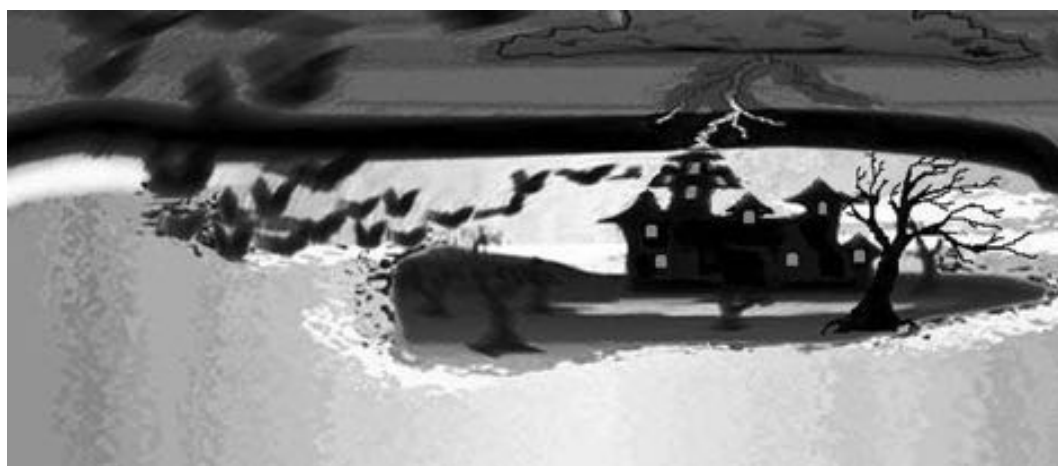
moment too soon as several very hairy legs had just appeared through the opening at the top of the bag.

With a shrug of his shoulders the large man put his hand into the bag and pulled out a huge, fat, juicy spider. He held it up to his eyes and closely examined it. Apparently satisfied with his choice, he pulled its legs off one by one and then, with a look of great anticipation, pushed the legless, furry body into his mouth. For a while, he moved it around with his tongue, sucking on it. Then after a couple of chews and some more sucking noises, he swallowed it.

At that moment Katie's legs turned to jelly and a cold chill ran through her body, completely covering her in goose bumps. The man sighed with pleasure and then emitted a loud, deeply resonating belch that reverberated in Katie's ears. He put his hand back into the bag and retrieved another spider. Katie's stomach was turning over and over, but she was unable to move or even look away.

Nick took the initiative, and with one quick move, grabbed her and guided them around the man and down the dock toward the boat.

# FINALE



Nick maneuvered himself and Katie down the old wooden jetty to where the boat was tied up. First he helped Katie into the back seat and cast off the tie line before jumping in himself. The cat, who both of them had forgotten about, had followed Katie and Nick down to the boat and was sitting on the edge of the jetty. Katie was grateful for the way it had helped them fight off the owls and had grown to enjoy its company, so she waved at it to jump in with them, but it showed no sign of moving, probably because of cats' general hatred of water. Nick pushed off. As they gently drifted into the lake, Katie looked back and wondered if the cat had anything to do with Gertrude; had she sent it to keep an eye on them?

Nick soon got the oars in place and started to row. They had not spoken since the spider incident, and Nick looked eager to break the silence.

“Rats are my thing. I cannot stand them—all that dirty hair ... and the teeth, errrrrr,” he shuddered.

Katie did not reply.

“So I know how you must feel. It's quite a shock to come face to face with your fears,” he said, doing his best to draw her out.

This time she did reply. “Oh, I suppose I'm all right now. It *was* quite a shock, and it's just ... it's just that this place is so strange. I shouldn't be here at all, you know.”

“What do you mean by that?” he replied.

Katie was unsure how to explain how she had come to be at Grey Friar Hall without sounding as though she was totally mad.

“Oh, it doesn’t matter really,” she said with some resignation in her voice.

Nick did not seem to want to pursue the point; he kept on rowing wordlessly. In no time at all, he had them gliding across the moonlit water.

It was very peaceful now. The only sound was the rhythmic squeak of the oars and the lapping of the water against the boat. Katie thought how spectacular the full moon looked in the night sky with its reflection in the rippling water. It could almost inspire her to write poetry—poetry that had come fairly hard for her in the final exams that she had taken just a few days ago. Seeing things that inspired her and then putting her thoughts into words had always been a difficult task for her. Everything felt a million miles away—her home, her friends, and her bed. Katie sat back, and for the first time in hours, was able to rest and catch her breath. After ten minutes or so, she could tell that they would soon be entering the fog that had been waiting patiently for them in the center of the lake.

Through the previous events of the night, Katie had learned to become more vigilant in cases where fog and mist were involved, so she sat up in her



seat. The fog rolled over them; very gradually they became totally engulfed by it and were unable to see more than a few feet in any direction. It only rose a few feet above the surface of the water, so the moon and stars were still visible above them, and Nick was able to use their light to keep on a fairly straight course.

Back at the hall, the clock tower began striking five o'clock. The sound drifted lazily across the water. Just as the last chime died away, Katie noticed something break the surface of the water next to the boat. She could not make out what it was, but it looked like a bundle of rags. Then another one popped up, then another and another. Soon their boat was surrounded by the "bundles." Nick stopped rowing and pushed at one of them with the end of an oar.

"I think I know what these are. Do you still have those bottles of holy water?" he asked.

Katie noticed some alarm in his voice and quickly pulled one of the bottles out of her sweatshirt pocket. "But they're just a collection of rags ... aren't they?"

As she spoke, the bobbing bundle that Nick had just pushed turned over in the water. She could now see that it was a body. A better description would be that it was a half-rotten body, and the rags were what were left of

its clothes. There were dozens of them, and, one by one, they came to life and started moving.

The ones closest to them reached up and grabbed hold of the side of the boat. Nick hit them with the oar; their skeletal hands and arms, half covered in rotten flesh, snapped and broke like twigs. Most of them fell back into the water, but some of the broken limbs and fingers dropped into the bottom of the boat where they continued crawling around.

There were so many of the flesh-dripping corpses that, despite Nick's defensive attacks, some managed to pull themselves up out of the water and were practically in the boat. Katie scuttled backward using her hands and feet; when her back touched the stern, she stopped and kicked frantically at the skeleton nearest her.

“Use the holy water on them!” Nick shouted.

Katie pulled the cork out of the bottle and splashed the nearest body with the water. It was as if she had thrown acid on the corpse. The rotten body twitched and writhed, falling back in the water with smoke pouring from it. She kept sprinkling the holy water over them until the air was foul with the smell of burning flesh.

Suddenly, Katie felt something grab at her leg. It was one of the severed limbs that had fallen into the bottom of the boat. A slimy, rotten

hand that was still attached to part of an arm had gotten a hold of her ankle. Quickly, she poured some water on it. It smoked and eventually let go of her as it convulsed and jerked around at the bottom of the boat.

“Are these undead?” she yelled.

“Yes. There’re the zombie bodies of everyone who has ever drowned in the lake, and if they get hold of us, we’ll be just like them,” he called back.

*Oh great!* She realized that her bottle was almost empty. She kept on spraying the corpses as they climbed over the side of the boat until the water was all gone. Hurriedly, she uncorked the last remaining bottle. With Nick smashing the skeletal undead with his oar and Katie spraying them with the last remaining bottle, they fought the zombies back until the last body slipped into the lake and disappeared under the surface of the water. Quickly, they pushed and kicked the arms and fingers that had fallen into the boat back into the lake.

“Well done. You were great. How much holy water is left?” Nick asked triumphantly.

Katie held up the bottle to check. “About half,” she replied, her pulse still racing.

She sat down at the back of the boat as Nick resumed rowing. Katie knew that she must have gained “points” for this encounter. After all, she had been the one who had used the holy water. She reasoned that she must have also gained some points from some of her other encounters, even though they had not been such resounding successes. Just surviving them must count for something, she thought.

After about fifteen minutes more of Nick’s rowing, they emerged from the fog at the other side of the lake. For the first time, they could see the island, complete with a dark, mysterious-looking old house that sat a short distance back from the shoreline.

“There’s the house,” Nick said. His tone was almost reverent. His gaze didn’t leave the house as he continued quietly, “The map said that the vampire sleeps down in a hidden cellar. I’ve searched every inch of that place over the years without finding anything. I didn’t even know that there was a cellar.” Then suddenly, he broke his stare and turned to Katie, his eyes shining and his body animated. “But now with this map, I will finish that unholy creature once and for all!” he proclaimed.

Katie wished that she felt as excited about it as he did. Nick slowed his rowing as they drifted toward the shore. Just then, a wind started to blow across the lake and dark clouds gathered in the sky above. In no time at all, a

fierce storm was raging, complete with thunder, lightning, and gale force winds. Their tiny boat was thrown around like a toy in a bathtub. Neither of them saw the huge wave that crashed into the boat, throwing both of them out and into the cold water. Luckily, Nick had hold of his backpack as they were tossed out. And fortunately, they were close enough to the island that it was shallow enough that they could stand up on the bottom. With their feet slipping around in the mud, they gradually made their way to the shoreline and dragged themselves out of the water and onto the rocky beach.

Katie and Nick sat on some rocks and watched helplessly as their row boat drifted farther and farther away. Finally, it disappeared into the murky darkness at the center of the lake.

“What are we going to do now?” Katie questioned in a slightly depressed tone.

“Well, we should carry out the task that we came here for, if you’re still up for it?” replied Nick.

“Well, yes, OK,” she responded, hesitating slightly.

“There’s no need for both of us to go, and I would prefer that you wait here and watch my back. I don’t want to get surprised by anything coming up behind me,” Nick said.

“Good idea,” she answered, secretly happy that she would be able to rest for a while and try to dry off.

“Do you think that you can handle the automatic crossbow?” quizzed Nick, as he loaded the arrows into it.

“Yes, I think so,” she said.

“Here take this.” He handed her his leather jacket. “And you should probably wear some of these.” He handed over some strings of garlic.

Then he picked up the silver stakes, hammer, silver cross, and the flashlight and walked off in the direction of the old house.

Katie looked out over the lake. The storm that had taken their boat away so suddenly had now almost faded away completely; there was hardly any wind, and the waves had calmed down.

Nick reached the large, weather-beaten, old house, opened a side door, and disappeared inside. His flashlight moved from room to room, until it vanished completely from sight; presumably, he had gone down into the cellar. Apart from the sound of water lapping on the shoreline, all was silent. She looked down at the crossbow. It was bulky and heavy. She was concerned that she would not be able to make good on her word. Her mind reeled at the thought of the task that lay in store for Nick down in that cellar. Would he find the sleeping vampire just like the map indicated? Would he

be able to plunge the silver stakes into its heart? Would that be enough to kill it?

The thought of an imminent vampire slaying brought on a reality check. Despite years of playing GhostHunt, the game, she had been absolutely unprepared to meet creatures of the night face to face. She looked at the crossbow and reasoned that, in case she needed to use it, it would be a good idea to try firing it.

She heaved the bow into the air and almost lost her balance. She steadied herself with a wide stance and pointed the weapon at a tree that was about fifty feet away, pressing her eye up to the sight. She braced herself and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. After some examination, she discovered that the safety switch was still on. As her finger pushed the switch to the off position, she accidentally pulled the trigger. Unfortunately, she was no longer aiming at the tree, and a tremendous shower of arrows shot into the ground about thirty feet away. She swung the crossbow upward and pointed it back at the tree, and a continuous hail of arrows moved along the ground, tracing a line up to the tree and thudding into its trunk.

She let go of the trigger; there seemed to be arrows everywhere. *Not a bad first attempt*, she thought, as she lowered the crossbow back onto the ground by its strap.

She paced around, trying to keep the perpetual cold out. Nick's leather jacket was helping, but her bones were starting to freeze up again. Katie glanced over at the house, but there was no sign of anything happening. She had already become more than a little tired of wearing the strings of garlic around her neck, and she wondered if the smell would ever wash off. As she continued to go back and forth along the shoreline, she thought she heard a voice. What little wind was left over from the storm was swirling around, and it made it impossible to tell where the voice was coming from.

Then, very suddenly, a great swarm of bats flew from the broken windows at the top of the old house's tower. Soon, the air was full of the creatures as they formed a long spiral up into the sky. *This can't be a good thing*, Katie thought, shuddering at the infernal squeaking of their calls to each other.

Where was Nick? Somehow, Katie sensed that he had been in the house for too long. Then again, she wondered, how long did it take to kill a vampire, anyway? The bats were almost gone, and the mystery voice had become a little clearer. It seemed to be coming from the lake. She peered into the darkness and could just make out the boat coming back toward her with someone in it. Then a large bang came from the direction of the house.



She ran back toward the crossbow, trying to keep watch on the house and on the boat at the same time.

There was no way to get back to the mainland except to swim, and so the boat was a very welcome sight. But the passenger was not: Katie recognized the voice now; the East Coast accent was unmistakable. *Not her!* Katie moaned. Despite her slight build, the reporter was maintaining a very good rowing speed and was soon pulling up onto the shore.

“What are you doing here?” they both asked at the same time.

But before either of them had a chance to reply, the reporter pointed over Katie’s shoulder in the direction of the house. Katie spun around; Nick was running from the open front door toward them, waving his arms around, and screaming.

“It wasn’t asleep! It wasn’t asleep!” he called.

“Oh my God!” Katie screamed.

The sleeping Vampire wasn’t sleeping? Nick was about a quarter of the way between the house and Katie when another figure appeared at the door. It was a tall, slender woman; she had jet black hair with a large white streak in it. She was wearing a dark purple, velvet dress and a black cape. Even though she was some distance away, Katie could see the glow of the woman’s dark red, demonic eyes.

Nick called out as he ran, “It’s her, the head vampire!”

The vampire put her head back and opened her mouth. She let out a scream so terrible that it could have waked the dead. She raised her arms into the air and, in a split second, transformed into the vilest and most evil-looking creature that Katie could have ever imagined. Gray and black scales covered its body. It had huge, leathery wings with long, pointed claws. The vampire lifted into the air screeching and started to fly toward the escaping Nick.

*Do something, do something,* Katie said to herself, but her mind was not reacting. As each second went by, the vampire got closer and closer to Nick, its giant wings flapping through the air until it was hovering just above him, keeping pace with him as he ran. Nick stumbled and fell. The creature looked down at Nick in joyful anticipation of devouring its next meal.

Katie’s eyes moved from the vampire to the crossbow. Everything seemed to be in slow motion. The vampire raised its talons into a strike position. It was about to drop down onto Nick when, from behind her, Katie heard the reporter start screaming.

“Over here!” she yelled. “Over here! You ugly reject, over here!” she kept screeching and waving her arms around.

Noticing the reporter, the creature hesitated in its attack. Katie knew that this was it; she had act.

“Girl power!” Katie yelled at the top of her lungs.

She looked down at the crossbow, which was balanced on a large piece of driftwood, her mind and body going into autopilot. She raised her foot and brought it down with all the force she could muster, stamping on one end of the crossbow. The crossbow flew into the air going end over end. As soon as the weapon was at her waist height, she grabbed it. She raised the crossbow into the air, swung it around, and aimed at the vampire in one movement. She pulled the trigger, sending a torrent of arrows stinging through the air.

The creature was about to slam its claws and teeth into Nick when the first of the arrows hit one of its wings, momentarily sending it off course. As the vampire tried to get to Nick for a second time, it was hit by the full fury of the silver arrows. They smashed into its chest with such a force that the creature was thrown backward about twenty feet. Katie kept her finger on the trigger until she had emptied the crossbow of all its ammunition. The vampire was covered in arrows. It twitched and writhed. Momentarily, it seemed to be frozen in midair. Then before their eyes, with one last, terrible

scream, it turned to dust and what was left of it, along with the arrows, fell to the ground.

The trio looked at each other in stunned disbelief. The reporter got out of the boat and ran over to help Katie pull Nick to his feet. For a while, they stood hugging each other in silence.

Eventually, they sat down on some rocks by the shoreline. When they were able to, they discussed everything that had occurred, from the moment that Katie had been swallowed up by the bookcase at the beginning of the night's adventures to the point when the reporter had arrived at the island. It turned out that the reporter, who had been walking around the side of the lake, spotted the boat near the shore. She grabbed it and rowed over to the island with the help of an unusually strong following wind. Knowing that Nick had always intended to go to the island, she thought it was the best place to look for him.

As dawn's first light started to break over the horizon, the issue of how three people were going to fit into a two-person boat was raised, and it was just then that Katie spotted something out of the corner of her eye. A slim, black shape had flown through the air, landed on the roof of the house, and was currently hiding behind one of the chimneys. Katie could just make

out some bristles and the round end of a handle; she knew immediately what it was.

She stood up and called out in the direction of the house. “Gurty’s broom!”

Nothing happened. The other two, who were still sitting on the ground, looked up at her as if wondering whether she’d finally lost her mind.

Katie called out again. “Gurty’s broom!”

This time, a black broomstick with gray bristles took off from the roof, flew over to where Katie was standing, and hovered about two feet off the ground right next to her. Katie could hardly believe her eyes as she watched it slowly come to rest on the ground.

After a brief pause while she gathered her thoughts, she announced excitedly, “I think that I have my own way back.”

Nick and the reporter watched in disbelief as Katie emptied her pockets of all the things that she had gathered during the night—the bottles, the Bible, and all the spare garlic—then walked over to the broomstick, lifted her leg over the broom, and sat down on the handle.

Nick and the reporter looked up at Katie with their mouths open. The sight of Katie sitting on the ground, her knees bent, squatting over a broomstick clutching for all her worth on its neck had left them speechless.

Katie closed her eyes; she felt overwhelmed. Just a few hours ago, she had been sitting in her dining room getting ready to play a game of GhostHunt with her friends. Then some mysterious force had spirited her away to endure a night of real ghost hunting, and now, here she was, sitting on a witch's broomstick! Maybe it was a prize or a reward of some sort for surviving the night? Or maybe it was still just part of the game? Whatever it was, it didn't really matter.

She opened her eyes and looked over at her new friends and said, as casually as the circumstances would allow, "I'll see you back at the gate house."

Then holding onto the broom handle as hard as she could, she said out loud, "Gurty's broom ... fly!"

Nothing happened.

She tried, "Gurty's broom ... go!"

Still, nothing happened. Katie started to feel slightly foolish. If it had not been for the fact that they had all seen the broom fly off the roof, Katie might have thought that she'd actually cracked under the strain.

She tried again. "Gurty's broom, up!"

This time, the broom started to slowly rise into the air. Katie gasped. As she climbed up into the sky, an intense euphoria swept through her. She

looked down; Nick and the reporter had stood up and were waving at her. After rising about fifty feet up in the air she gradually came to a stop. Katie was floating in a sort of weightless ecstasy; she was in a dream within a dream. The wind was in her hair, and she could feel the warmth of the sun. Darkness had finally been replaced by light, and she had never felt so alive. She had taken back all the fear, all the fright, and all the power that all the creatures and the creeps had used against her. She had fought back, and she had won. Katie had the feeling that anything was possible now; this was the most thrilling moment of her life.

She took a deep breath and commanded, "Gurty's broom, forward!"

The broom launched forward and like a bullet, she flew straight out over the lake.

Katie scream "Girl power!" as loud as she could.

By the time she made her first turn over the boat dock, the broom had begun picking up on her thoughts; all Katie had to do was to think what she wanted, and the broom did the rest. The sheer thrill of flying through the air was causing adrenaline to pump through her body, and it was impossible to keep up with all the sensations that she was feeling.

As she twisted and turned over the top of GreyFriar Hall, she looked down at all its towers and gargoyles; she thought how it looked so much less

intimidating in the daylight. Then Katie took a low pass over the graveyard. Even at the height that she was flying, it still seemed to go on and on forever. The stench that it gave off was so powerful that she could still smell it, even at top speed.

Katie wanted to see if she could spot Gurty's cave, so she flew slowly over the forest. The trees were so dense that it was impossible to see anything. She flew all over the grounds of GreyFriar Hall. For the first time, Katie saw the bandstand and down inside parts of the ruined abbey. As she flew around, she noticed that the broom would not go outside the boundary of the grounds of the hall; if they ever got close to the edge, it would gently turn back inside.

As she passed back over the hall again, she noticed that some people were returning up the path toward the gate house. She wanted to check on Nick and the reporter, so she did a big loop back over the lake; she spotted them just leaving the boathouse and making their way up the path. She knew that it was almost time to make her way over to the gatehouse, but before she did, she wanted one last look around.

Katie flew a big figure of eight over the lake and then, after reducing her height and speed, she made her way over to the gatehouse. She could see Svetlana, Sergeant Oats, and Ruth waiting between the gatehouse and front



gates. After completing several fly pasts for everyone's benefit, Katie maneuvered herself so that she was hovering just above their heads.

"How do you like my transportation?" she called down.

Everyone stared up at her looking very excited. Reluctantly, Katie completed a graceful descent. She dismounted the broom, and, holding her arms up triumphantly, she attempted her best impression of an Olympic athlete who had just completed a gold medal-winning routine. For a second or two, the broom remained there, hovering right next to her. Then in an instant, it shot off and disappeared over the top of the house.

"Well, my dear, I don't think that is something that you will soon forget," Ruth said, as she walked over and gave Katie a huge, crushing bear hug. "We were all very worried about you after we parted company in the graveyard."

"Oh, I was fine. I met up with Nick and had some adventures," Katie replied.

"Oh, I'm sure you did. As did we all," said Ruth.

"Look," Svetlana said, pointing down the path toward the hall. She had spotted Nick and the reporter, who had just come into view.

"Let's make our way outside, shall we?" Ruth suggested.

“Good idea!” said Sergeant Oats in a very relieved voice. It was apparent by his disheveled appearance that the night’s activities had worn extremely hard on him.

“Ruth, what happened to the scientist?” Katie asked.

“Not sure. I was hoping that you might have come across him, but we can’t wait all day for him.”

With everyone pulling, the big iron gates opened easily. Nick and the reporter arrived so that everyone walked through them and outside into the lane almost at the same instant. For a moment or two, no one spoke; everyone looked around and took it all in: Ruth’s bike was still leaning up against the reporter’s car. Sergeant Oat’s bike was still on the ground lying in wait for him. There was no mist, no fog, just the sun and the sound of birds in the trees. Behind them in the distance, the clock tower began to strike six o’clock, and, just as it did, a soft light materialized around Katie. She did not notice it herself at first and wondered why everyone was looking at her.

“Looks like your time is up, my dear,” said Ruth.

Then Katie felt a tingling sensation. The light surrounding her grew brighter and more intense. She looked over at Nick; there were so many

things that she wanted to say. Everything and everyone was becoming fainter and fainter.

“Do you think that I’m going home now?” she asked Ruth

“Oh, I’m sure of it, my dear,” Ruth replied.

“Goodbye, everyone,” Katie said with a melancholy tone in her voice.

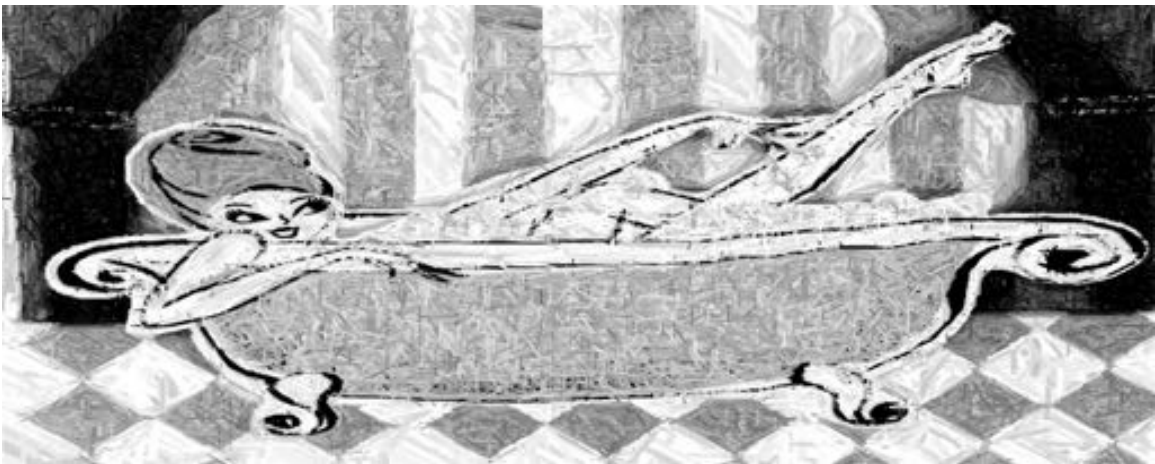
All of a sudden, she was feeling quite sad.

“Maybe we’ll all meet again,” Ruth said, as she smiled and waved.

It was very strange, Katie thought. For most of the night, she had wanted nothing more than to be at home with her soft, warm bed and her bubble bath. But now that she was actually leaving, she felt quite sad and emotional. It had been, after all, the most amazing and exciting adventure of her life. Then, very quickly, everything was gone, even Nick’s dimples; everything was covered in a blindingly bright, white light.

Darkness had taken her away, and now it was light that was going to send her back home.

# RETURN



Feelings of disorientation far greater than the confusion one feels when waking from an extremely deep sleep overwhelmed Katie. It was a difficult process reconnecting with her physical self and her surroundings. Katie slowly began to feel herself return to her body. Her vision focused, and she found herself at the dining room table with the GhostHunt board laid out in front of her.

Almost immediately, Mark walked into the room, carrying a plate of sandwiches. Mark gave Katie a curious look as he set them out on the table. “You’ve got a strange look on your face, are you all right?” he asked.

“No ... I mean, yes ... I’m fine ... really ... I’m fine,” Katie said stumbling over her words.

“Here, let me help you finish setting up the game,” he said, as he sat down next to her.

The complete change of reality was startling. Her brain was straining to comprehend and put everything in its place. The others came into the room. Everyone carried on as though nothing had happened, but, of course, to them, nothing had. The first few minutes were the worst, but Katie managed to keep it together. She spoke very little and casually checked herself over. All the scratches and scrapes, along with the smell of garlic,

were gone, and there was no mud on her anywhere. It was just as well, for she would have had a big problem explaining all that away.

The rest of the evening became surreal for Katie. At first, the game was uncomfortable for her. But as it unfolded, she relaxed, knowing that this version of GhostHunt really was a game.

Katie abandoned her normal conservative method of playing. She was more daring—she went into the graveyard and over to the island; she took risks and easily won. Several of her friends commented on the difference in her play, and Susan pointed out that no one had ever won by more than fifty points as Katie had done.

She felt exhausted, and although she loved her friends dearly, she could not wait for them to leave. Clearing up, putting the game away, and saying the goodbyes seemed to take forever, but finally she was alone.

She sat for a while in silent contemplation as her mind filed everything away—all the things that she had seen and all the crazy things that she had done. She thought about Sergeant Oats and smiled, remembering how clumsy he was, almost breaking his neck on his own bike, and how he said *'all* instead of *hall*. She thought about all the creatures and the ghosts she had met up with, especially the ghost of the man who was so sad about losing his family; she had made a very special connection with

him. And then there was Gertrude, the witch with the bad feet, who had gave her the invisibility poison and had made it possible for Katie to have the thrill of a lifetime riding on a broomstick. When she had first been taken to GreyFriar Hall, it had felt like she might be stuck there for eternity, but now she was having a hard time imagining having been in that completely different world at all.

Now that she was back safe and sound at home, she had the luxury of thinking about what a wonderful adventure it had all been. Slowly, she got up and walked into the bathroom; for a few seconds, she just stood there looking at her bath—the bath that she had yearned for, for so long. She turned on the water, and, after adding some bubble bath, she got undressed and sank into a wonderful oblivion. Although there were no outward signs of her adventures, inside she did feel the aches and pains of her experience. As she sank into the bubbly warmth, she smiled and thought about Nick, reliving some of the things that they had done. Laying in her bath, it was hard to believe that she had really been in some of those situations; she thought of sitting at the bottom of an open grave in the rain covered in mud. Nick was very cute, and she knew that she was going to miss him. Nick's playing piece was a poor substitute for the real thing.

Later on that evening, as she was putting her jeans and sweatshirt in the laundry basket, she felt something in one of the pockets. This surprised her as she thought that she had discarded everything back on the island before climbing on the broomstick. She d pulled out a small box. *Oh my God*, she gasped; it was the tiny box the dinner party hostess had given her, saying something strange about it belonging to Katie.

The box was about an inch square and covered in small, white stones that sparkled and flashed as Katie held it up to the light; she wondered if they could be real diamonds. It seemed to have a lid, and there was a miniature key sticking out of one side. Carefully, she turned the key; it made a clicking sound as though she were winding a clock. She opened the lid, and music started to play. It was the same tune that the man had been playing on the harpsichord. The way he had played had made the melody sound incredibly sad and melancholy, but the music coming from this box did not seem so tragic or sorrowful. It was tender and strangely nostalgic.

Katie put the box on the table beside her and, with an unrestrained sigh, surrendered herself into the cozy softness of her bed. The haunting melody floated around the room as she drifted off into sleep.





Katie

Swedish  
kitch hiker





Newspaper  
Reporter

de l'hr



Mad  
Scientist



Victorian  
Policeman





