

# HALLOWEEN CRIMSON NIGHTMARES



A L A N  
D R A V E N

**HALLOWEEN**

**CRIMSON NIGHTMARES**

**ALAN DRAVEN**

**\* UNOFFICIAL – FAN FICTION \***

## **Halloween: Crimson Nightmares**

By Alan Draven

Scary Jack-O'-Lantern image by David Wagner

Ghoulish title font by Chad Savage

Cover Design by Alan Draven

Author Photo by Martine Jean-Gilles

Michael Myers, Laurie Strode, Sam Loomis, Lindsey Wallace, and Tommy Doyle are based on the characters created by John Carpenter and Debra Hill. The “Halloween” film franchise is the property of Compass International Pictures and Trancas International Films

Bitternest and all other locations and characters created by/property of Alan Draven

**This novella is strictly unofficial and should always be distributed freely in PDF format**

October 2011

**HALLOWEEN**

**CRIMSON NIGHTMARES**

**ALAN DRAVEN**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To my sweetie, Chantal, for her never-ending support. To Sara for her sharp editing skills.

To John Carpenter and Debra Hill for creating such a compelling vision of Halloween. And last but not least, to all the faithful readers that continue to read me. This one's for you.

## **FOREWORD**

John Carpenter’s “Halloween” is one of the biggest influences responsible for my being a horror writer. After all these years, I never tire of it. It’s by far my favorite horror film and Michael Myers, my favorite bogeyman. No other horror film has captured my imagination or the essence of what a scary movie should be as much as “Halloween” did. Halloween, the holiday, is my favorite time of the year so needless to say, this story is a labor of love.

The novella you are about to read is my love letter to the “Halloween” film series. It was written in two months flat and edited by my trusty editor in less than three weeks. It’s entirely unofficial as I don’t have the rights to the Halloween franchise so this one will have to fall under “fan fiction.” The story takes place thirty-three years after the events of the second Halloween film which itself picked up immediately after the first film ended. The first two films of the franchise represent the complete Halloween night of 1978 where Michael Myers terrorized the fictitious town of Haddonfield, Illinois. For the benefit of this

novella, I completely disregarded anything that happened after the second film (not that I have anything against the rest of the series).

I decided to have my story take place in my fictitious city of Bitternest, Louisiana, where supernatural events occur on a daily basis. Michael Myers coming to Bitternest made perfect sense. Those familiar with my stories, novellas, and novels will find themselves in familiar territory. And who better for a protagonist than the little girl that the Jamie Lee Curtis character babysat in 1978! Little Lindsey Wallace is all grown up in 2011 and the events of that Halloween night scarred her so much that she moved to Bitternest to get away from the past.

I'm very proud of this story; it's a great snapshot of where I'm at in 2011 as a writer. I think it ranks among my best work to date, if not my very best. But then again, I always say that of the latest novel or story I've worked on. Doesn't every writer? As writers, we are constantly evolving, always improving, and becoming wiser with age.

I hope you'll enjoy my take on the "Halloween" series. It'll give you a good sample of my writing and a taste of my little city of Bitternest. I've had a blast writing it. Happy Halloween!

**HALLOWEEN**

**CRIMSON NIGHTMARES**

**OCTOBER 29<sup>TH</sup>**

# ONE

**It was an idyllic autumn afternoon.** Lindsey Wallace ran through a field sprinkled with pink flowers; the sweet smell of bleeding hearts was almost intoxicating. She found it odd to be surrounded by the flowers as they usually appeared in April or May. This was October, no doubt about it. She was still ten years old and living in Haddonfield, Illinois. The nine-inch long blades of grass caressed her bare skin. Her temples pulsated and her vision blurred as she forced herself not to glance behind her. She could hear him breathing heavily and his footfalls were growing closer. She was too old to believe in the bogeyman; he wasn't supposed to be real.

But she knew better.

She'd had a first-hand encounter with him and had nearly lost her life. He'd come after her and her friend Tommy Doyle on Halloween night last year.

His name was Michael Myers.

On Halloween night in 1963, six-year old Michael committed sororicide, killing his older sister. He was sent to Smith's Grove Sanitarium where he remained under the

supervision of Dr. Sam Loomis. Then on Halloween night in 1978, fifteen years later, he escaped the sanitarium and returned to his hometown of Haddonfield, Illinois where he proceeded to stalk a babysitter by the name of Laurie Strode; the babysitter of Lindsey's friend Tommy.

Michael developed a fixation on Laurie and wound up murdering all her friends that night. Meanwhile, Dr. Loomis came to Haddonfield to warn of Myers's homecoming and to track him down. The events of that Halloween night culminated with Laurie fighting for her life and the lives of Tommy and Lindsey—whose babysitter, Annie, had died at the hands of Myers—as the three of them barely made it out alive. Dr. Loomis showed up just in time to save them, firing numerous shots into Myers's chest. The gunshots propelled Myers over the house's second story balcony ledge. When Loomis looked out the window to glimpse at the body, it was gone.

Later that night, after Laurie had been brought to the hospital to recover from her wounds, Michael Myers showed up and went on a killing spree, disposing of the staff that stood in his way to get to her. In the meantime, Loomis was still after him and learned that Laurie was Michael's younger sister and believed that Myers's fixation wouldn't stop until she was dead. He hurried to save her once more and a showdown with Myers ensued where Loomis caused an explosion in which he perished and set the bogeyman on fire. Laurie watched in horror as Michael Myers stumbled and burned right before her eyes.

Subsequent to the bogeyman's murderous killing spree that night, the police department and city officials failed to recover his body inside the hospital. No one was able to identify Michael Myers's charred remains.

Apart from Tommy and Lindsey, Laurie was the sole survivor of that Halloween night that would forever be etched in Lindsey's memory. Laurie left Haddonfield shortly after that, never to be heard from again.

That was last year.

Unable to hold herself back any longer, Lindsey finally peeked over her shoulder only to have her suspicions confirmed: The bogeyman was real and he was after her.

Wearing the same emotionless white mask as the year before and the same dirty dark blue overalls, the bogeyman was marching—not running—towards her. The sun reflected off the blade of the long butcher knife he held firmly in his right hand. The bogeyman had returned to finish what he had started last year.

*But it's not Halloween yet,* she thought in a moment of lucidity; *not for a few more days.* She guessed it didn't matter to him. It seemed the faster she ran, the more he gained on her. Pretty soon she'd be at the edge of the forest and that's one place she didn't want to go. The trees were so close to one another that she'd have a hard time running in there. She was certain she'd be signing her death warrant if she went in there while the bogeyman was after her.

She was almost out of breath and felt a throbbing pain in the left side of her abdomen. She wasn't going to be able to keep this up much longer. Again, she looked over her shoulder but this time, he was nowhere to be seen. She came to an abrupt halt. She surveyed her surroundings, sweeping the horizon with her eyes. Where had he gone? Had he disappeared like he'd done at the house last year after getting shot?

She felt a wave of panic overtake her. Was he hiding and waiting for her to retrace her steps so he could leap out of nowhere and stab her to death? The wind rose and chilled her sweaty little body to the bone. A murder of crows landed in a nearby tree, cawing. *They've*

*come to pick at my flesh once he's killed me*, she thought. If she'd been in the desert, it would have been vultures waiting to get a piece of her.

She could hear the sound of her heartbeat echoing in her ears. Boo-boom. Boo-boom. Boo-boom. Like tribal drums at a nocturnal offering. She was about to be sacrificed to the evil bogeyman who wore the scary faceless mask.

A dark cloud hid the bright sun. She took a step forward, undecided as to what course of action to take next. It was a long way from home from here; if she cut through the forest, she might be able to get home faster. She turned her head to look at the forest's entrance and she was startled as if she'd received an electric shock.

The bogeyman stood there, staring at her, immobile as a leafless tree. There were less than a hundred paces between them. How had he gotten there so fast? Never mind how fast; how had he made it past her without her noticing him?

She hit the ground running in the opposite direction and almost immediately, the pain in her side returned with a vengeance. She wasn't going to be able to run for much longer in such a state. She didn't dare look behind her. Her whole body quivered. She couldn't feel her legs anymore; it was as if she were running on clouds, weightless.

Then she tripped and fell. She hit the ground hard, face first in the prickly grass. She spun around on her back and wound up face to face with the bogeyman. He was looming over her like a skyscraper. He leaned towards her in what appeared to be slow motion and reached for her head with his left hand. She screamed louder than she ever had in her life—louder than last Halloween, she was sure of it. He grabbed her by the hair and lifted her head up from the ground. He raised his right hand high in the sky—the one holding the oversized knife—and brought it down with tremendous strength and speed. She shut her eyes so hard she thought they would burst from within.

“Mommy, Mommy, Mommy!”

Lindsey woke up startled and drenched in sweat; her ten year old daughter stood in bed next to her, a big smile on her face.

It had been just a dream—a nightmare rather. It had been recurring every year around Halloween for thirty-three years now. The nightmare was always the same and it would always pop up like clockwork the week prior to October 31<sup>st</sup>. She’d been plagued with it since that dreadful night in October 1978 when the bogeyman came close to ending her young life.

Lindsey was forty-two years old now and the mother of two beautiful children. She glanced at the clock on the nightstand; it was seven AM on Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup>.

“Mommy! Can we have pancakes for breakfast this morning before daddy leaves for his trip?”

“We’ll see, Cassie. Is Dylan up?”

John, her husband, had obviously gotten up already. She felt his side of the bed and it was cold; he must be ready to leave by now.

“He’s brushing his teeth. I already brushed mine,” Cassiopeia said, smiling.

“Good, sweetie. I’ll tell you what; if you and your brother promise to clean your room after breakfast, I’ll make you some pancakes, all right?”

“Yay! I’ll go tell Dylan.” Her daughter jumped off the bed and ran down the stairs of their bungalow. Lindsey rubbed the sleep from her eyes. Her hair was all wet and tangled. She needed a good shower. She got up, slipped out of her nightgown, put on her bathrobe and headed for the upstairs bathroom.

“Hey doll, sleeping in this morning?” John said, pulling her to him and kissing her neck as she came out of the bedroom.

“I wish. Cassie woke me. It’s happening again.”

“What’s happening again?”

“The nightmare. Michael Myers.”

“Oh! No. Not again. Crap; is it the same one in the bleeding hearts field?”

“Yeah, but this time it was scarier. He was about to kill me. He’s never gotten so close to me before; I always wake up as he’s about to grab me. I was on the ground and he pulled me up by the back of my hair and was about to stab me when Cassie jumped on me.”

“You probably would’ve woken up right as he would’ve been about to stab you. Are you gonna go see Janet about this?”

“I’m not sure she can do anything to help anymore, apart from prescribing me sleeping pills that render me groggy and grumpy. She’s a good listener—aren’t all shrinks supposed to be? I’ve been seeing her for over a decade around Halloween every year and nothing’s changed.”

“I hate seeing you like this. Are you gonna be okay this weekend while I’m gone?”

“I guess. They’re just nightmares. It’s not like the bogeyman’s gonna find me all the way out here in Bitternest, Louisiana. Besides, this city’s got its share of folklore and supernatural lore. There seems to be worse things to fear than Michael Myers here. Glad we never ran into any of them though.”

“I really hate to have to go to that seminar and leave you behind at a time like this. I know how hard it is on you. You could still get a plane ticket and tag along.” John held her face in his hands, staring tenderly in her eyes.

“And what about the kids? No, it’s not a good idea. I’ll be okay. I’ll go shopping with Jamie to take my mind off it.”

“All right, if you say so. But text me or call me whenever you feel the need to.”

“You’re a good husband. I don’t deserve you.” She hugged him and smelled the sweet cologne on his neck. It was comforting. She’d always felt like nothing bad could happen to her as long as she was in his arms. Her knight in shining armor. She really hated the idea of him being away for the weekend at his computer tech seminar. It was all the way up in Washington, D.C. and seemed so far away from her and the kids.

“I love you. Always will. And you deserve me more than I deserve you,” John said, kissing the top of her head.

“Okay, I have to take a shower; I feel sticky and yucky. I told Cassie I’d make them some pancakes for breakfast.”

“Good idea. I’ll get everything ready so you can just get started once you’re out of the shower. Have a good weekend and promise me you’ll call if there’s anything?”

She made a hand salutation. “Scout’s honor. Now go or you’ll be late for your flight.”

Lindsey had just finished cooking the pancakes when the phone rang. “Cassie, Dylan; breakfast is ready.” She picked up the receiver and a smile formed on her lips as soon as she heard who was on the other end of the line.

“Tommy! How are you doing?”

“Meh; I’m surviving. It’s really over this time; Vivian went to stay at her parents’s place. We’re getting a divorce.”

“Oh! No. I’m so sorry things didn’t work out. I really thought you guys were gonna be okay after all. You’ve been together for so long!”

“Thirteen years, four months and three days. Two days if you don’t count yesterday because she was just here to move some of her stuff out to her parents’s place. Thank God

we didn't have kids! For once I'm thankful we couldn't have any. I'd hate to have to raise a child on evenings and weekends."

"Wow! That does sound pretty final. What are you guys gonna do about the house?"

"We'll sell it and share the proceeds fifty-fifty. We're still on speaking terms but I don't know for how long. You know how she is."

"Yeah, you don't want to get on Viv's bad side; she can be one mean lady."

"That's a polite way of putting it," he chuckled.

"At least you're laughing about it, right? Oh, I wish I could give you a big hug. How's work?"

"I'm taking some time off. Today was my first day off and I have thirteen more to go."

"Why? What's happening?"

"They're restructuring. The economy's bad and the projects are very slow to get off the ground. Who knew becoming a graphic designer for a small movie distributor would be such a headache!"

"Could you do some freelance work in the meantime?"

"I've been thinking about it; I'll see at the end of the week. Right now, with Viv and I splitting up, my heart's not into it." Tommy sighed and then changed the subject. "How are things on your end? Halloween's approaching and I've been thinking of you a lot lately. Did you have it already this year?"

"You know me so well, Tommy. Yeah; just like my period the second week of every month; the nightmare is back with a vengeance. It's always the same crimson colored nightmare, as if I were wearing crimson-tinted sunglasses only this time it's worse; he actually caught me and was about to stab me when I woke up. Actually, I didn't wake up; my

daughter jumped on me and woke me up. It freaked me out, like a foreboding of some kind.” Lindsey shuddered.

“I know the nightmare feels very real; I’ve had my share when I was a kid after what we went through. But he’s long gone, Linds.”

“They never found his remains. Laurie swore she saw him wobble and fall face first while the fire consumed him, but no one ever found his body. Every corpse they found in the hospital was accounted for. None of them were Michael Myers. I really believe Dr. Loomis was right when he said that Michael Myers was pure evil. He really was—is—the bogeyman.”

“So what are you saying? That he’s still alive and he’s gonna come after us—you—one of these days? It’s been thirty-three years, Linds. That’s an awful long time. What’s he waiting for? I still live in Haddonfield and I’ve never seen or heard from him since that horrible Halloween night back in ’seventy-eight. He’s dead, Linds. And if by some unexplained twist of fate he survived the fire, then he sure as hell won’t go all the way to Bitternest, Louisiana to come after you. I think you’re safe.”

“I know, I know. I sound like a paranoid loony. It’s just that I have the strangest feeling; like someone is stepping on my grave.” It was Lindsey’s turn to sigh. “Listen to me; your marriage is falling apart and here I am complaining about a silly nightmare.”

“Don’t trivialize what you’re going through; it’s very real and it’s affecting you. I mean, it shocked the nation back in the day. Our little town of Haddonfield was splashed on the front page of all the major newspapers in America after Myers’s killing spree that night. Hell, it even inspired Hollywood to make a whole bunch of slasher movies based on the real life events of that Halloween. If it weren’t for Michael Myers, there’d be no Jason, no Freddy and no insert-supernatural-killer-name movies. No wonder it scarred you for life.”

“What bums me out is that John is going away for the weekend to a seminar for work. The last thing I want is to be alone on Halloween weekend.”

“Did you tell him about that?”

“Yeah, he knows and he even offered for me to go with him.”

“Why don’t you go?”

“We have no one to baby-sit the kids and I would just be in the way over there. Besides, his seminars are long and boring. Between having nightmares in a hotel room by myself or at home, I’ll take having them in my own bed, thank you very much.”

“You got a good point there. Hey, here’s a crazy thought: How about I fly down there and spend the weekend at your place? We could have a horror movie marathon!” Tommy laughed. Lindsey did too.

“Are you serious?”

“Well, no; not about the horror movie marathon but I’d be up for flying to you. Besides, it’s been over three years since I’ve seen my two favorite little monsters. How are they doing?”

“They’re doing great. They grow up so fast! Cassie just started third grade and she’s the best of her class. Dylan’s been falling a little behind at school; he’s more of a dreamer. Still, he’s only in first grade so school is still very new to him.”

“So, would you want me to come down?”

Lindsey gave herself a moment to ponder the idea. She thought of going to bed alone in bed tonight and not having another grown-up in the house if she woke up startled from being chased by the bogeyman.

“Yes. When can you get here?” They were both smiling at each end of the line.

## TWO

*“We’re standing just outside of the Bitternest Correctional Facility. The maximum security prison is center stage today as infamous serial child killer Sid Barlowe, nicknamed the Harbinger of Sorrow, will be executed by electrocution at ten o’clock this morning. Barlowe has been responsible for the deaths of one hundred and thirteen children between the ages of four and twelve in the last ten years.”*

The reporter broadcasted in front of the imposing jail. The press came from all across the US and beyond for this occasion. Everyone wanted to see Sid Barlowe ride the lightning. A large number of parents whose children had been taken away from them too soon were gathered at the entrance of the building. Justice was going to be rendered and they wanted a front row seat to the event of the decade.

*“For those just tuning in, we are standing in front of Bitternest’s maximum security prison, home to Sid Barlowe for the last six months. The Harbinger of Sorrow, as the Bitternest Herald dubbed him, will be sitting in the electric chair in less than twenty minutes to the satisfaction of a nation. This instance of execution by electrocution has been specially reinstated for the occasion by the Board of Correctional Facilities*

*which deemed it a fitting way to execute Barlowe due to the heinous nature of his crimes. Barlowe's name will go down in infamy with those of Ted Bundy, Ed Gein, John Wayne Gacy and many other somber characters.*

*"Barlowe made a name for himself by drawing children to him while being dressed as a clown. He would then invite them aboard his mini-van, tie them up and drive off, never to be seen again. When found, the missing children's half eaten remains sometimes needed dental records to be identified. Barlowe has said in a rare one on one interview last month on this very station that he believed eating children was akin to drinking from a fountain of youth and that it would ensure him a long life and a slow aging process. The multitude of sightings and discoveries over the years has helped corroborate his MO but he always seemed to slip through the fingers of the authorities until he was caught by chance one morning by a mailman who'd recognized him from the sketches he'd seen on TV."*

Families whose children had been victims of Barlowe's were being led inside the correctional facility to Cell Block C one at a time. A parade of grief-stricken parents, others angry parents, and some showing no emotion walked single file inside the walls of the cold prison as they sought closure to this chapter of their lives.

*"Stay tuned after the commercial break for the latest updates in Sid Barlowe's execution this morning at ten AM. Cindy Foster, Channel 4 News."*

Within the prison's walls, there was a lot of commotion. Prison guards shuffling in all directions to make sure the media, the parents of the victims, the authorities, and city officials all followed procedure and stayed on the right path of Cell Block C. They were all being taken to a room behind a see-through glass wall where they would sit and watch a man's life come to an end, like spectators at an auditorium of death. The only things missing were beer and pretzel vendors.

"He's gonna be wearing what?"

"His clown mask. It's his last request; they have to grant it to him," a young police officer said.

"That's in real bad taste," the plainclothes detective said. His name was Clyde Majors. Like his father before him, he was in charge of homicide for the Bitternest Police Department. "Do the families know about this?"

"They haven't made it public yet."

Majors shook his head. "The press is gonna have a field day with this."

"Don't worry, Clyde, at least it's the last we'll ever see of his ugly face," the officer said, smiling.

"I know I'm gonna have a pint or two when this is all over. This monster's been the bane of my existence for the last decade. It just bothers me that I wasn't able to catch him."

"Hey, he was caught; not by you but it's the end result that matters."

"It's not as satisfying. The victory ain't as sweet. A civilian caught him, of all people. Sheer dumb luck. I wanted to be the one to put my hands around his filthy collar. And maybe squeeze a little while I was there."

The young officer put a hand on Majors's shoulder. "I'll be buying you a round of drinks once we get to the bar; you deserve it, big guy. If it weren't for you, the media would never have been as involved and the sketches and posters and warnings wouldn't have been as efficient. Come to think of it, that mailman probably caught him thanks to your hard work. You worked day and night on this; evenings and weekends. Everyone knows you've earned the entire city's gratitude for this one."

*Yeah; it even cost me my marriage,* Majors thought. The prison warden walked in the room and addressed Detective Majors. "Barlowe requests to see you."

“So we’re granting him his every wish now? What is this place: a country club or a maximum security prison?”

“I thought you might want to hear what he had to say one last time.”

“Whose idea was it to let him wear his mask to the electric chair?” Majors frowned at him.

“It’s the prison’s policy; he waived his right to a special last meal last night saying he wanted to wear his mask one last time instead. He’ll be buried with it. Between wearing the black leather face mask and that, there isn’t much of a difference. As long as the spectators don’t see his face while he rides the lightning, who cares?”

“Really? He has a flair for the dramatic. It’s only gonna make him look like a bogeyman straight out of a bad slasher movie.” Majors took a deep breath. “We obviously don’t see eye to eye on this issue, Warden.”

The warden shrugged, looking as if he could care less.

“Where is he? I might as well go see what he has to tell me.”

The warden escorted Majors deep into the neon-lit hallways leading to the bowels of Cell Block C where Sid Barlowe awaited to be brought to the electrocution room. Two heavyset guards stood at the entrance of his cell. Inside the narrow cell, Barlowe sat in a chair, wearing the customary one-piece, orange prison jumpsuit, wrists and ankles tightly shackled, appearing pensive and quite relaxed for a man who was about to meet his maker in less than fifteen minutes.

“You have five minutes,” the warden said as he unlocked the door. Majors stepped inside and waited at a safe distance from Barlowe.

“You wanted to see me?”

A grin immediately traced itself on Barlowe's wrinkled face. The mid-forties man just sat there, not saying a word. He eyed the detective from head to toe.

"This must be the day you've dreamt of for the last ten years, isn't it, Detective?"

"Let's just say I'll be sleeping soundly once you've left this world, Barlowe. You've shattered hundreds of lives and families, destroyed children's futures and scarred this city's memories forever. You deserve the most painful of deaths. I hope you rot in Hell."

Barlowe erupted in laughter. He stood, his ankles restrained by the shackles around them. He took one step forward.

"Hold it right there, Barlowe; that's as close as I want you to be," Majors said, raising his left hand while his right hand unsnapped the gun holster on his belt. "I don't appreciate standing this close to a pedophile."

Barlowe obeyed and froze in place. His face contorted. He was a tall and robust man; six feet three inches, 250 pounds. A crew cut hairstyle that he'd sported since his days in the military. His ice-cold eyes showed no remorse for the pain he'd inflicted upon his victims.

"Don't ever call me that; I never touched any of those kids that way."

"No? You just ate them, right?"

"You wouldn't understand. They are pure and their flesh holds special attributes that if ingested can prolong our mere existence here on earth."

Majors looked at him to detect any hint of sarcasm. "You really believe this bullshit you're feeding the press, don't you?"

Barlowe smiled. "It's the whole truth, Detective. There is nothing sexual about my actions. You're gravely mistaken if you think that's what this is about."

"Whatever. If I didn't know better, I'd say you almost look serene, Barlowe. You must be happy that you're getting all this attention until your very last breath. You've turned this

prison into a circus show. And wearing that stupid clown mask of yours while you're being electrocuted I'm sure will get the desired effect: outrage."

"You're still sore because you're not the one who caught me. It was a blow to your fragile ego that day when I was finally apprehended and you weren't the one who got credit for it. I was too smart for you." Barlowe's smile grew even broader.

"One more minute and it's time to go," the warden said from the other side of the door.

"I'll have the last laugh when I watch you burn to a crisp. And when they put you six feet under, I'll spit on your grave, Barlowe. You don't even deserve a burial. You should be incinerated and flushed down the toilet." Majors's anger was rising. Barlowe had gotten under his skin over the years. He'd sent the detective personal messages at the precinct and in the last year prior to his arrest, he'd even sent a few to his home. Majors had a strong hatred for this man—or rather, this monster.

"We'll see who gets the last laugh, my dear detective. I just wanted you to know that it was fun playing the game with you. You were a good opponent. Too bad you were no match for me in the end."

"Is this why you wanted to see me; to taunt me one last time? Well, enjoy it because this is the last time you'll ever see me."

Barlowe slowly shook his head. "No, my dear detective, we'll see each other again. All in due time."

"I swear if there wasn't anyone on the other side of this cell, I'd wipe that smirk off your face for good. Where you're going, I'm never gonna go. All you have to look forward to is the burning pits of Hell. There's no way you'll see me there so get that notion out of your ugly head."

Barlowe snickered as if he were up to something.

"Time's up," the warden said, opening the door.

"I'll see you very soon, my dear detective."

The two guards walked in and each grabbed one of Barlowe's arms, flanking him. They escorted him out of the cell as Majors watched Barlowe drag his feet.

"Are you coming?" the warden asked.

Majors sighed. "Yeah. I wouldn't miss it for the world."

The small auditorium was filled to the brim. The hundred plus seats were all taken and people stood in the aisles to the left and to the right. They were all eager to witness Barlowe make his entrance on the other side of the glass cage where the electric chair stood facing them.

When Barlowe walked into the execution chamber, the chatter ceased instantly. It became as quiet as a lake in winter. The guards were joined by a doctor and a technician. The two guards sat him down in the chair as the technician shut the door behind them. Barlowe sat staring at the populace through the glass whose hatred was so palpable it could be cut with a chainsaw.

They strapped him in; chest, groin, legs, and arms. Then the technician brought forth a metal skullcap-shaped electrode and attached it to Barlowe's scalp and forehead over a sponge moistened with saline. Following that, the technician lifted Barlowe's pants up to his kneecap on his right leg and attached one more electrode that was moistened with conductive jelly.

Once he was all set in the chair, the technician fetched a black cloth bag and plunged a hand within. What he dug out of the bag made more than half the audience gasp; it was

Barlowe's notorious clown mask. The technician put the mask over Sid Barlowe's grinning face. The milk-white rubber mask sported messy bed head purple hair, a red nose the size and shape of a golf ball, blood-red lips highlighting two rows of blackened rubber teeth, and two bushy black eyebrows above large oval-shaped holes for the eyes.

The chattering resumed as the crowd watched, appalled by what they were witnessing. Majors walked into the room at the moment the mask was being slid over Barlowe's head. *Yep, real bad taste*, Majors thought. The warden went down the stairs to the front of the auditorium.

"We'd ask you to please remain quiet while the proceedings are ongoing. This was the convict's last request; to be able to wear his mask one last time as he sat on the electric chair. We felt it was reasonable to grant him this last wish."

"Reasonable my ass! He's a child murderer! He doesn't deserve any last requests," a man from the crowd yelled, followed by cheers from the rest of the room in agreement with him.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please! If this can't be done in an orderly fashion, we're going to have to ask you to leave," the warden said, beads of sweat forming on his forehead. More guards entered the auditorium armed with sticks, and ready for a riot.

The unruly crowd appeared to behave and the procedure resumed. On the other side of the room, Barlowe could be heard laughing quietly under his mask.

"Cut that out," the technician said as he walked away from him. "You're about to have 2,450 volts of electricity delivered to you like a bolt of lightning for fifteen seconds straight. It's no laughing matter, I assure you."

Barlowe mumbled something from under the mask followed by laughter.

"What did he say?" one of the guards asked the technician.

"We can't tell what he's saying because of the gag in his mouth. It's of no importance; he had all the time in the world to speak before and he chose not to." The technician motioned for the two guards to retire. The doctor and the technician stepped inside an adjacent chamber where the power supply was located. They were joined by the warden. Glancing at his watch, he nodded and the technician pulled the handle to connect the power supply. A jolt rocked Barlowe to the crowd's delight; a few even whistled. The guards were growing nervous.

For fifteen seconds, Barlowe's body shook in the chair as he rode the lightning. His limbs quivered with violence as his hands gripped the arms of the chair. Defecation occurred and a scent of burnt flesh permeated the room. When the technician finally pulled the lever back up and the current surge was turned off, Barlowe went still as a statue. They waited a few moments for the body to cool down; then the doctor came out of the chamber to determine whether another jolt was required.

The doctor slid on thick gloves and approached Barlowe. He placed a stethoscope over Barlowe's heart and listened. Barlowe's heart had stopped ticking. He removed the medical device from his ears and turned to face the technician and the warden, nodding. The process had been successful and Barlowe had been electrocuted. The crowd on the other side of the room rose from their seats and a handful of them started applauding, joined by more and soon the entire room followed in unison.

Then as the doctor was about to walk away from the chair, Barlowe's left hand grabbed hold of his waist. It caught the doctor by surprise and he let out a scream. The guards posted by the door hurried inside the room. By then Barlowe had let go but the doctor had collapsed on the floor. The guards quickly pulled him out of there and left the

room. The warden ordered the technician to repeat the procedure one more time. Meanwhile, the spectators in the other room were literally on the edge of their seats.

This time the electrocution lasted thirty seconds and Barlowe's body did not flinch. He remained immobile throughout the duration. When it was done, the technician himself went out with the stethoscope to verify that Barlowe was truly dead.

"No doubt about it; he's gone. No man could have survived this much electricity," the technician said.

"Are you sure?" the warden asked, incredulous.

The technician nodded. "I don't know what happened earlier but he's really dead now."

The warden came out of the chamber and into the room full of spectators; he spoke into the microphone: "All right, show's over folks. Please exit by the doors at the rear and leave quietly."

"What happened back there?" someone yelled.

"No comment; we'll have a press conference later today. Thank you."

The guards made sure everyone left peacefully. There was no trouble but a lot of talk between the people as they left the prison grounds. The media would be all over this.

"Care to explain what went wrong?" Majors asked walking into the warden's office.

"Sometimes more than one jolt is required to electrocute someone. It hasn't been done in years so we're all a little rusty."

"You guys didn't perform any test runs?"

"Of course we did but it's not like we have guinea pigs to practice on. The first fifteen second jolt should've been enough to fry his brain. Once the doctor comes to and Barlowe's

body cools down, he'll perform an autopsy on him and we'll be able to know if it was just a post mortem muscle reaction or if he was really still alive when Barlowe's hand grabbed the doctor."

"Are you kidding me? I saw it, you saw it, and a room full of people saw it. No one's gonna deny that Barlowe grabbed the doctor's waist and held him for at least five seconds before he passed out. That wasn't a reflex after death or whatever you wanna call it. He wasn't dead when he did that," Majors said, angry.

"Well, when we gave him a second jolt, he didn't move a muscle so he must've been already dead otherwise he would've shaken like he did the first time." The warden fluffed the little bit of hair he had left on his head with both hands. "Besides, I don't know why you're getting all riled up like this; he's dead now and it's all that matters."

"All this could've been avoided. The press is gonna splash this little incident across the front page. I can already see it; 'Barlowe refuses to die - scares doctor out of his wits.' As if him wearing that God-awful mask on the chair wasn't enough. It's just what we needed. Even dead the son of a bitch will make headlines."

## THREE

A brooding shape stood on the patio in the moonlight. The house lit up as the couple in their late fifties returned from a play.

“I don’t know about you, Edna, but I’m famished,” Randall said.

“Would you like me to make you one of your favorite roast beef sandwiches?”

“That’d be heavenly, my dear.” He kissed his wife on the forehead. She smiled at him and patted his belly.

“You always get hungry when we stay out later than ten. Don’t eat too much or you’ll be no good to me once we get to the bedroom.” She giggled.

“Oh, so you’ve got ulterior plans for me, I see.” He pinched her butt as she walked away.

“I’ll go run myself a hot bath and I’ll be right down to make your sandwich.” She climbed up the stairs and Randall went to sit at the dining room table with the newspaper’s crossword puzzle section.

The shape outside began playing with the patio door handle. It made a clicking sound and the locking mechanism broke. He pulled it open with the speed of a turtle crossing a road. Randall was too engrossed in his puzzle to notice anyhow. The shape blended perfectly with the darkness of the kitchen, becoming one with it. He spied a kitchen knives block on the counter and pulled out the longest one. He stood with his back against the wall next to the doorway's beaded curtain, the long and shiny knife in one hand, ready to greet Edna when she would walk into the kitchen.

He could hear the stairs creaking as she came down. She turned towards the kitchen and as she passed through the beaded curtain, the shape's knife plunged into her stomach. Before she had time to scream or try to make a run for it, the shape had grabbed her by the throat and stabbed her repeatedly in the chest. She tried to hold onto the curtain but she crumbled to the floor.

“Edna dear, can you put a lot of mustard in my sandwich, please? Oh, and could you make it with some pickles on the side; I've got a craving for them.”

It was the shape's turn to walk through the beaded curtain, out of the kitchen and into the dining room. He went around the wall separating the kitchen and the dining room and now stood twenty paces behind Randall who was oblivious to what had occurred in the kitchen.

“Edna? Did you hear what I said?”

The shape raised his bloody knife and slowly started for his sitting prey. The floorboards squeaked as the blade was about to descend down on Randall. He turned around to look, but it was too late—the shape had already stabbed him in the back. As Randall's jaw hung open, the shape stabbed him three more times in the back. Randall rolled out of the chair and made a loud thud as he hit the floor.

The shape wiped his knife on the tablecloth; then went back to the kitchen. He dragged the wife to the dining room and left her there to bleed on the hardwood floor next to her husband.

\* \* \* \*

The moon wouldn't be full for another ten days but it was as bright as a thousand watt spotlight in the foggy night sky. Lindsey drove her green Volkswagen beetle to the airport en route to pick up Tommy. This impromptu visit came together faster than she had believed possible. An hour after their phone conversation, Tommy had already booked a flight and packed his suitcase to come spend the weekend with her. She was delighted at the idea of seeing him again; it had been a good number of years since they'd seen one another. She wasn't going to lie to herself: she was relieved she wasn't going to be alone on Halloween weekend.

She got to the airport at ten o'clock sharp. *Tommy should be coming through the terminal within the next fifteen minutes if he's on time.* She found herself to be a little nervous. Was it the excitement because she hadn't seen him in a long time or was there more to it? She was puzzled by the way she felt. She dismissed it as the anticipation to see an old friend she cared for very much. They'd been through a lot together. They'd escaped from the clutches of the bogeyman after all.

*The bogeyman. There's no such thing as the bogeyman. I'm obsessing too much about this stupid holiday. Michael Myers is dead and he isn't coming back; Halloween or not.*

She snapped out of her fixation the minute she saw Tommy wave at her from behind the turnstiles. A smile formed on her face as they hugged. They remained in each other's arms in silence for almost a minute.

“Oh! It’s so good to see you, Tommy!”

“Right back at you, Linds!” All he had for luggage was a small carry-on that he pulled behind him.

“How was your flight?”

“I had the choice between two horror movies and a war movie filled with horrors so I opted to not watch anything. I read a book on the art of making a marriage work.”

“A little late for that, isn’t it?”

“Yeah; I should’ve made the trip out here sooner; who knew airlines had such educational reading aboard their planes!” They laughed.

“We have a lot of catching up to do!”

“That we do,” he said smiling. “Are you parked far?”

“Nope; right across. You travel light.”

“Hey, I’m a man; what did you expect!”

They were on their way to the green beetle.

Once he was out of the vestibule and standing in front of the stairway under the chandelier, Tommy whistled. “Wow! I really love what you’ve done with the place. Last time I was here, if I recall, the place looked much smaller and didn’t have that majestic staircase.”

The spiral staircase disappeared into the second floor where the kids came running out of their room to greet Tommy.

“We’ve remodeled a lot since you last saw it; we’d just bought the house when you were here the previous time. It needed a lot of work.”

“Uncle Tommy! Uncle Tommy!”

“It’s my favorite nephew and niece!”

They ran down the staircase, leaped from the last two stairs and jumped into his arms.

The teenage babysitter surfaced above them holding the railing. “That was fast; I didn’t even get a chance to read them more than two fairy tales!”

“Thanks for coming over on such short notice, Candace,” Lindsey said. “I’ll pay you for a full evening.”

“My pleasure, Mrs. Wallace. I wish all the kids I babysat were as cool as your kids.” She came down and Lindsey introduced her to Tommy then she left.

“You kids have grown a lot since I last saw you!”

“I’m the tallest in my class,” Cassiopeia said.

“Oh, I believe you. How about you, Dylan; you enjoy going to school?”

Dylan shook his head. “I can’t watch my cartoons on TV during the day anymore.”

Lindsey and Tommy laughed. Tommy crouched down to be at Dylan’s height. “Well, I’m sure you’ll find other stuff to keep you busy at school. The best part of going to school is that you’re going to make new friends. Some of them will stay with you all your life.”

Lindsey smiled at Tommy. They’d been about Dylan’s age when they’d first met and had been in each other’s lives ever since.

“All right, kiddos; it’s way past your bedtime. You’ll have plenty of time to talk to Uncle Tommy tomorrow. Off to bed now.”

“Will you tuck us in, Mommy?” Dylan asked.

“Yes; let me show Tommy his room first and I’ll be right with you.”

The kids hurried upstairs as fast as they had come rolling down the stairs.

“You must be tired from the flight. Would you like a nightcap before turning in?”

“No, I’m bushed. I think I’ll just go to bed. I’m afraid I wouldn’t be a good conversationalist tonight.”

“No worries. I’ll show you to the guest room.”

They went upstairs and Lindsey showed him to the room at the end of the hallway.

“It’s a single bed but the mattress is really comfy. We’ve been procrastinating buying a double bed.”

“Right about now, it looks fantastic. I’ve spent a lot of nights on the couch lately when Viv and I stopped sleeping in the same bed. This will be perfect.”

“Need anything else? An extra pillow? A glass of milk? A bedtime story?”

“Ooh! A bedtime story,” Tommy jumped into bed and pulled the bed sheets over him.

“Can I choose? Please! Please! I wanna pick the story!”

They both laughed.

“You’re worse than they are!”

“Go to your kids and we’ll chat a little when you get back. I can’t promise I won’t fall asleep but I’ll try.” Tommy yawned as he finished his sentence.

Lindsey went to the kids’s room across from the guest room and whose window faced the street.

“Can you read us a story, Mommy?”

“No, sweetie; it’s too late for that.” She kissed him on the forehead and covered him up to his neck. She did the same for Cassiopeia.

“Good night, Mommy. Sweet dreams.”

She prayed she'd have sweet dreams. Or none at all. Now that it was dark outside and time to sleep, she felt a knot in her stomach. She was afraid of going to sleep. She pursed her lips. She was hoping Tommy would want to stay up with her and talk or play cards or help her keep her mind busy from thinking about it. It. The bogeyman. Michael Myers.

As she was about to exit the kids's room, a glance outside sent shivers down her spine. She got the strange feeling someone was watching her. She walked up to the open window; a nice cool breeze blew through the translucent blue curtains. When the house across the street came in sight, she stopped dead in her tracks. Left of the house, on the balcony that wrapped itself around it, stood someone in the shadows. She could only see the lower part of his or her body due to the faint light emanating from the lantern hovering above.

She wasn't able to discern much in the twilight and distance, but she was fairly certain it was the shape of a man, standing there, immobile. Staring right at her. She shook her head and blinked hard. *Great; now I'm imagining things. I think I'm becoming a little too paranoid.* She strained her eyes and looked again. Maybe it was just a Halloween decoration? After all, it was that time of year. Besides, why would anybody be standing there at this time of night?

She was about to step away from the window when the shape moved one step forward and came into the light. Her jaw dropped open and a scream died in her throat before forming itself.

The bogeyman. He was here. After thirty-three years, she'd recognize him anywhere: that dreadful mask and those dirty blue overalls. He was looking right at her, tilting his head a little to the side.

Michael Myers had come to Bitternest. She backed up from the window and ran to the guest room.

“Tommy! Tommy! He’s here!” She felt as if she were nine years old again—but not in a good way.

The light was out in the room and there was no response. Her heart stopped and she turned on the light.

“Tommy!” she said, raising her voice, surprised she wasn’t screaming.

“What? What?” He rubbed his eyes. “I think I passed out. What time is it?”

“Michael Myers is here!”

“What? What do you mean he’s here?”

She grabbed his hand and pulled him up, dragging him to the kids’s room. She hesitated before going to the window. Then whispering, she said, “He’s right across the street; he was staring right at me.”

“When?”

“Just now, right after I tucked the kids into bed.”

Tommy looked at her for any sign on her face of a prank. It wasn’t her style to pull pranks but he had a hard time wrapping his head around the notion that Michael Myers was outside her house after all these years. The idea made his skin crawl. He cautiously walked up to the window and peeked outside. He looked straight ahead, to the left and to the right. Nothing. The only light came from a lit pumpkin in the living room window. Whatever Lindsey had seen—or thought she’d seen—it was gone.

“There’s no one there, Linds.”

“Are you sure?”

“Come see for yourself if you don’t believe me.”

She did. And he was right. Apart from the wind blowing fallen leaves in the street and on the neighbors across the street’s lawn, there wasn’t a soul stirring outside.

“Great. Just great. Now you must think I’m completely nuts.”

He held both her shoulders. “Look, you’ve been obsessing about Myers for years, your sleep has been plagued by nightmares of him lately, and you’ve had a long day. It makes perfect sense. That’s why I’m here. Come on, let’s go downstairs. I think I’ll take you up on that nightcap after all.”

Lindsey sighed. “He was right there, Tommy. I’m not making this up. He’s back.”

“Have you told any one of your neighbors about your fear of Michael Myers?”

“A couple of them; why?”

“Well, with Halloween coming and with the fact that it was such a high profile story back in the day, maybe someone’s just dressing up like him to scare you?”

She was perplexed. “I don’t know anymore; I suppose it’s possible. All I know is that whoever it was; they scared the living daylights out of me.”

Tommy smiled. “Well, that’s what Halloween is all about, isn’t it? Everyone’s entitled to one good scare.” He put an arm over her shoulders and they headed for the kitchen downstairs.

Outside, on the wraparound porch in the darkness, a shape came forward under the light. He tilted his head, staring at the window where Lindsey and Tommy had been. Halloween was approaching. Two more days.

He would finish what he had started thirty-three years ago.

## **FOUR**

**The doctor woke from his slumber** a little before midnight. He'd been out cold ever since Sid Barlowe had grabbed him by the waist in the electrocution chamber. He'd passed out and had appeared to be in a semi-comatose state. He rose from his hospital bed, unsure of where he was.

His clothes had been neatly folded and placed on a chair beside the bed. He put them on and went to the sink to splash some cold water on his face. He stared at the reflection in the mirror as if it were that of a stranger. He examined his face, touching it with his hands. A faint smile graced the corners of his mouth. He glanced at his watch; the two hands were on the twelve and the date was now Sunday, October 30<sup>th</sup>. He was glad to see that he'd been unconscious for less than twenty-four hours.

He tried the doorknob in the tiny hospital room where they'd placed him to convalesce; it was unlocked. He pushed the door open and glimpsed both ways before stepping out. The coast was clear. He had no intention of staying there a minute longer.

He went down to the emergency exit on his left. Five floors down later, the cool night air greeted him. The bright moon above lit a path for him to follow to the back of the hospital. He searched the pockets of his pants and produced a cell phone from his right pocket. He dialed the number for a taxi.

Minutes later, a cab pulled over to the curb not too far from the hospital's back parking lot.

"Where to?" the cabbie asked.

"Bitternest Correctional Facility," the doctor replied.

"Sure thing. Were you there earlier today when Barlowe's electrocution was held? What a circus, man!" The cabbie glanced in the rearview mirror to look at his passenger.

"Yes, as a matter of fact I was."

"So, are you a prison employee or something?"

"Or something."

"I heard it took double the dose to kill that son of a bitch Barlowe. He was a tough motherfucker, wasn't he?"

"Indeed he was."

"So what do you do there?"

"I'd rather not discuss it. Actually, I'd rather not discuss at all, if you don't mind."

"I didn't mean to intrude; I'm like a hairdresser, you know? People take a cab and they like the conversation. They tell me things. Talk about the broads they're banging. How their job sucks. The in-laws they can't stand. How good their kids are at school. That sort of thing. If you don't wanna talk, that's fine with me. Either way, it's the same rate," he chuckled as he glanced at the doctor through the rearview mirror one more time.

Ten minutes later, they arrived at the prison. The good doctor walked up to the front entrance and put a hand in his pocket once again. This time, he pulled out a plastic card. He slid it into the slot at the door. A red light turned to green and a beep could be heard. He pulled the door open and walked in. He passed in front of the reception desk and a security guard nodded at him.

“Glad to see you back on your feet, Doctor. You gave us a good scare; I saw when they took you to the hospital. Wasn’t expecting you back so soon.”

“You know what they say; can’t keep a good man down.”

The security guard smiled. He wrote down the time the doctor walked in on his ledger.

“Where did they put Barlowe’s body?” the doctor asked.

“In the morgue. No one’s had a chance to perform an autopsy yet. Is that what you came to do? At this hour?”

“Kind of. Can you escort me there?”

“Well, I can’t leave my post but I’ll ask Joe to come and take you there. Still a little shaken from the morning’s events?”

The doctor nodded.

The guard talked into his walkie-talkie and the low voice of a man responded on the other end. “He’ll be here in a minute.”

“Thank you.”

Joe looked like a big bear. He was a black man in his forties; six foot six, 300 pounds, and sporting an afro. He looked like the kind of guy one didn’t want to mess with. He escorted the good doctor to the prison’s morgue.

“Will you find your way inside?”

“Yes; thank you for taking me.”

“Do you want me to stand by the door while you do your thing?”

“No, that won’t be necessary. I just didn’t want to come here alone. If you don’t hear from me in five minutes, you can go back to your occupations.”

“All good then.”

The doctor walked into the dimly-lit room. The neon glow flickered and was the only sound in the quiet room. Barlowe’s body lay in the middle of the room on a table, awaiting autopsy. It was probably scheduled for the morning, with or without the good doctor.

He walked up to the body and stopped right next to it, less than three inches from it. Barlowe’s face was a little distorted. His eyes were shut and his mouth hung open. They’d washed his body after he’d defecated on himself during the electrocution. The doctor yanked off the aqua blue sheet covering his body with one quick tug. He examined the damages resulting from the electrocution. The body had a bluish tint to it and sported a handful of purple marks as if it had endured extreme physical injuries, especially around the areas where the electrodes had been.

He looked around the room for cameras; there was one in the corner where the door was. He went and pushed the rolling autopsy table to the opposite corner of the room, out of the camera’s rotating trajectory. The doctor walked up to the loading dock at the other end of the room where they came to collect dead prisoners once autopsies had been performed.

He glanced at the camera. When it turned away from the dock’s general direction, he slid his card into the slot and the magical green light blinked. He pushed the two metal doors open. The fresh night air filled his nostrils. He shut the doors fast before the camera could pick it up. On his way back to the corpse, he spotted Barlowe’s infamous mask peeking out of a bag on a table nearby. He smiled at the mask.

Back at the autopsy table and out of the range of the security camera, the doctor took a deep breath and rubbed his hands together.

“Here goes nothing,” he said out loud.

He placed his hands on Barlowe’s chest and as he did so, he immediately collapsed the same as he had in the electrocution chamber. A minute went by and Barlowe’s toes started twitching. Then his fingers, followed by his legs and his arms. His face contorted and pretty soon, his entire body began quaking.

Finally, his eyes sprung open.

Sid Barlowe was back from the dead.

He stretched as if awakening from a hundred year sleep. He sat up on the autopsy stretcher and wiggled his toes. The blood flow resumed and got back into them and the tingling slowly dissipated. He clenched his fists a couple of times. He was hoping rigor mortis would have been delayed. He’d read that it usually set in three hours after death and reached maximum stiffness after twelve. The process had worked well. *Time is on my side*, he thought, smiling.

He finally set his feet down on the cold floor and took a couple of steps toward the table where the mask was, making sure to stay under the radar. He held on to the table as he got there. He felt a little frail but it was to be expected after what he’d been through. He looked at the doctor’s body on the floor and then at his naked body. He crouched down and began undressing the doctor.

Minutes later, he now wore the good doctor’s clothes; a cheap navy blue suit and a tie. The sleeves were a little short and the shirt was a little tight around the belly, but apart from that, it fit him better than he had hoped.

“Thanks for everything, Doc; it’s been an experience knowing you,” he chuckled and turned around to grab the bag with the mask in it. When the camera turned away once more, he hurried to the light switch and shut off the lights in the room. He headed for the exit through the loading dock’s massive metal doors. He slid the card, opened the doors, and jumped out. He shut them behind him until he heard the latch of the lock make a clicking sound.

He found himself in the jail’s back parking lot. He searched the good doctor’s pants and found a set of keys with a remote car starter. He pressed a button and heard a short beeping sound to his right. He clicked on it again and heard a car roar to life. He followed the sound and arrived in front of a beige Cadillac DeVille from the seventies. He climbed aboard and buckled up. He drove up to the gate and making sure to keep his head out of the light, he waved to the security guard.

“Have a great evening, Doc.”

He had hoped that the good doctor’s particular car would be well known amongst the prison staff and that they wouldn’t think twice about who was driving it. He had figured right. He smiled at how easy this was.

“Where to now?” he said out loud to himself. At a red traffic light, he went through the good doctor’s wallet and read his address. “Magistral Lane, huh? Nice neighborhood, Doc. Is there a Mrs. Doc and maybe even little kiddies?” He let out a throaty laughter.

When the light turned green, he stepped on the gas. One hand on the wheel, his free hand sought out the mask from the bag. He plucked it out and slid it on while driving. He felt goose bumps once it was over his head. Underneath the mask, he was smiling from ear to ear.

“Oh, it’s so good to be back.”

He drove for about ten miles and stopped in front of an old abandoned shoe factory. He got out of the car and pushed the rusty gate open. The chains holding it shut had been broken by vagrants long ago. He walked up to a vandalized phone booth right next to the first loading dock and stepped inside. He opened the phone book and a file folder with the letters "SID" written on it slipped out. Barlowe smiled and thumbed through it. He took the folder, shut the phone book, and walked back to the Cadillac whose engine was still running.

"I owe you one, buddy," he said to himself as he drove off.

First things first though; he needed to ditch his not-so-inconspicuous escape vehicle. Right off the highway on his way to Magistral Lane, he glimpsed a gas station. Plenty of cars there, he thought. He pulled up to a pump and removed his mask. A gas attendant who wore dirty red overalls immediately came out of the gas station store to serve him.

"Evening, sir. What'll it be?" He talked just above a whisper and had a shy demeanor. His face was hidden behind a pair of thick glasses and his growing belly was concealed under the non-flattering overalls. Barlowe eyed him from head to toe and got an idea.

"Do you have a cheap throwaway car I could borrow or trade for?"

"What?"

"My car takes too much gas and I've grown tired of it. Do you have a smaller, cheaper, and less ambitious car, for lack of a better word, that you could trade me for this one?"

The gas attendant look puzzled. "Euh ... I wouldn't know, sir; I just work here at the gas pumps. If you want you could come back tomorrow after lunch when the owner will be here. I'm sure he could work something out with you."

Barlowe immediately took him for a thirty-five year old loser with no future. He had probably never had a girlfriend and if he did, she must've been an ugly duckling. No friends

or fake ones that just hung around him for ... scratch that; he was probably more the reclusive type with no friends and very few acquaintances. Most likely he was the shame of the family or they were all idiots like him and didn't care. Barlowe had a knack for guessing people's types by the way they looked and what they did for a living. He was rarely wrong.

“Anything else I can do for you tonight, sir?”

“As a matter of fact, there is. Tell me,” Barlowe read the name off the attendant’s breast patch. “My dear Pluto; how much do you weigh?” Barlowe smiled through the window. *He’s even got a loser’s name for Christ sake!*

Pluto seemed even more perplexed by this question. “Euh ... 250, give or take a few pounds. Why?”

“A size or two too big but you know what they say; beggars can’t be choosers! I’m gonna need you to strip for me, Pluto.”

“What?” Pluto turned beet-red and it made Barlowe laugh; in daylight, he’d be matching the color of his outfit.

Barlowe grabbed the clown mask on the passenger seat; he put it on, and pushed the door open.

“Wha ... what are you doing?”

“What are you; deaf *and* stupid? I said strip for me, Pluto.”

Pluto backed off, shaking his head.

“But ... but ... I don’t understand....” He was trembling now.

“Come on, hurry up; I ain’t got all night!” Barlowe raised the volume of his voice a notch. Every step he took forward translated into a step backward for Pluto. “Oh, this is boring the shit out of me already.” Barlowe charged him and they went down; Barlowe straddled him. Barlowe hammered him with a shower of fists on the nose and jaw. Pluto’s

glasses slid off at one point and he showed no resistance, only letting out whimpers in his defense.

Barlowe couldn't tell if he had passed out from the beating or out of sheer fear. He was hoping he hadn't pissed his pants or the outfit would be ruined. He felt the crotch area and it was dry. Barlowe proceeded to remove Pluto's clothes, then his, and slid into the one-piece dirty red suit with Pluto's name patch on it. It was a little loose on him but at least it was more comfortable than the good doctor's clothes. It reminded him of his one-piece clown suit. Good times, he thought, grinning.

He suddenly got very thirsty and decided to go see what he could find to drink in the little gas station store. Walking in, he caught his reflection in a mirror next to a stand of cheap sunglasses. He didn't look too bad in Pluto's red suit with the mask and all. He ripped off the name patch; no way was he going to be mistaken for someone named Pluto.

After snatching up a six-pack of beer and a couple of bags of Doritos, Barlowe headed out to the garage. There were three cars parked inside. *All pieces of shit*, he thought; *just what I'm looking for*. He glanced over to the wall where sets of keys rested on hooks. One of them had a big happy face for a keychain. It brought a smile upon his face under the mask. He unhooked it off the wall and pressed the button, and a half painted car roared to life. It must've been there for a paint job; half of it was grey and rusty and the other half was a shiny silvery color. It was a two-door Honda Civic; a car Barlowe loathed but it was very common so it met his requirements.

“Sold!” he said out loud, laughing. Before taking place aboard the car, he searched the garage for something to replace his trademark red mallet that he had used to knock the children out. In his eyes, it was irreplaceable but he'd have to settle for some other kind of tool for the time being. A sledgehammer leaning against the wall caught his attention. He

picked it up; its handle was red and it matched the color of his outfit perfectly. “This’ll have to do for now. Let’s take it out for a test drive.”

He peeked through the garage door’s greasy window to see if any customers had driven up to the pumps since his arrival; the coast was clear. He lifted the garage door and walked up to Pluto’s still unconscious body. He raised the sledgehammer high in the air and brought it down on Pluto’s head. It sounded as if he had smashed a watermelon. He brought it down again and again. He had rendered Pluto’s face unrecognizable.

“Not too shabby. I’ll take it.” He laughed all the way to the Cadillac DeVille. Once there, he seized the file folder and shut the door. “It’s really too bad we have to part so soon, dear classic.” He tapped the roof of the car. “Especially in favor of such a piece of shit car. But as they say; *c'est la vie!*”

He walked back to the garage and opened the door on the driver’s side and tossed the file folder and the sledgehammer on the backseat. He sat behind the wheel of the two-color car and sped away from the scene of his first murder—he wasn’t counting the doctor—in over six months. He felt like a new man; alive and kicking.

“And now, off to Magistral Lane.”

**OCTOBER 30<sup>TH</sup>**

## FIVE

The knife came within an inch of her face as she sprang up and sat up in bed. Another crimson nightmare had visited Lindsey. She tried to catch her breath, almost hyperventilating. She checked the alarm clock; it was six AM—way too early to get up on a weekend morning. Especially since she and Tommy had talked and watched TV shows until three o'clock last night after she thought she'd seen the bogeyman across the street. They'd talked about a lot of stuff except Michael Myers. They'd avoided the subject for the time being.

Tommy was probably sleeping at this hour. Even the kids were asleep this early. A ray of sunshine found its way into the bedroom through the blue curtains. She tried to go back to sleep, turning left and right in the bed but just couldn't seem to get comfortable.

"Might as well get up and taste that nice sunshine," she said out loud.

In the kitchen, she made herself some coffee and went to get the newspaper. When the coffee was ready, she opted to go read the paper and have her coffee on the front porch. It

was still a little foggy at this hour but then again, it always seemed as though a thin layer of fog shrouded Bitternest at all times.

The headline on the front page of the *Bitternest Herald* was dedicated to The Harbinger of Sorrow's electrocution. All the details were on page 5, it said. Apparently, it hadn't gone as planned and a doctor had been injured. The good news was that Sid Barlowe had finally died of electrocution a little after ten in the morning yesterday. "That's another bogeyman that went up in flames. At least this one's body didn't disappear," she said to herself while reading the article. The details of the electrocution sounded like a lurid horror movie. Barlowe had worn his trademark clown mask during his electrocution.

The whole article made her shiver. She folded the paper and set it down next to her chair. She eyed the Gordons's house across the street where she had seen Michael Myers last night. It seemed less threatening in daylight; not to mention that the bogeyman was nowhere to be found this morning. Had she imagined the whole thing? Either way, it wasn't good news. If she imagined it, then she was going crazy. On the other hand, if what she saw was real, then she and her kids were in danger. And Tommy. He'd be in danger too and it was all her fault for inviting him over.

She wanted to go knock on the Gordons's door and ask them if they had noticed or heard anyone on their property last night. It was too early to disturb them. She sipped her coffee and tried to focus on something else instead; like that grandiose weeping willow on the Gordons's lawn whose leafy branches hid half the house. The wind blew through its branches and made it weep, its leaves caressing the house's roof and windows.

\* \* \* \*

Little did Lindsey know that on the other side of one of the front windows at the Gordons's place, someone was staring right back at her, observing her from behind the curtains. As he stood there, hidden by the tree's generous foliage, Michael Myers's view was partially obstructed. He could see Lindsey clearly enough. He walked away from the window and went to the dining room adjacent to the kitchen where Mr. and Mrs. Gordon's corpses lay on the floor. He stood above her, staring. There were stab marks on her chest and the dried blood tainted her flowery orange dress. One might even argue that it improved its design and style.

Mr. Gordon was sprawled on the floor right next to the table. Randall and Edna Gordon had been the first victims of the bogeyman this Halloween.

Myers's knife still lay on the table beside the newspaper's crossword puzzle section. He seized it and walked towards the staircase to go upstairs. He'd have a better view of the Wallaces's house from up there.

He made it to the second floor and found a trapdoor on the ceiling in one of the rooms. He pulled on it and it opened to reveal a folded ladder. He climbed up the rungs and found himself in an attic where the only source of light came from a hexagonal window overlooking the street. He bent down and looked through it. The window stood just above one of the weeping willow's branches and gave him a straight line of sight to Lindsey who sat across the street on the porch.

He stayed there for a good five minutes, unmoving, like a predator studying his prey.

\* \* \* \*

“Trying to sneak out of the house without us?” Tommy said followed by two running little monsters.

Lindsey turned around startled; she’d been lost in her thoughts. “Oh! You guys look so cute in your Halloween costumes!”

“Yeah; Dylan looks positively frightening dressed up as Ghostface from the ‘Scream’ movies and Cassie is probably the cutest Bride of Frankenstein in history,” Tommy said, standing behind the two kids.

“How long did it take you to do her makeup?”

“She did it herself. They came to wake me; they wanted to surprise you. She had already done the makeup; all I did was to help put her hair up. By the way, you’re out of hair gel and spray net.” Tommy laughed. “For Dylan, it was a piece of cake; he slid under the black cloak and put on that creepy Edvard Munch-inspired mask.”

“Mommy, can we go out for breakfast?” Cassiopeia said.

“Yeah! Let’s go to the Waffle Palace!” Dylan added.

“But what about your costumes? You just finished putting them on,” Lindsey said.

“It’s Halloween tomorrow; we can wear them today too!” Cassiopeia said. She and Dylan laughed together.

Lindsey looked over to Tommy for approval/disapproval. He nodded, smiling.

“All right, all right. Mommy and Tommy are gonna get dressed first and then we can go.”

“Yay!” the kids yelled in unison. They all walked back into the house.

On the other side of the street, the bogeyman had observed the scene from his choice spot, unseen behind the small window above the towering weeping willow. He walked away

from the window and went down the ladder and out of the attic. He was going to have to find a better location to observe his prey.

\* \* \* \*

At the table inside the Waffle Palace, the kids perused the menu as the grown-ups chatted.

“So, since you didn’t bring it up, I’m gonna have to ask: Did you sleep well last night?”

Lindsey shook her head. “As if it weren’t enough that I saw him across the street, Michael Myers visited me in my dreams again.”

“I’m sorry.” Tommy seemed at a loss for words, wanting to comfort his friend.

“Are you surprised? I’m gonna keep having nightmares about him either until Halloween passes or until he actually shows up on my front porch.” She took out a pack of cigarettes from her purse and searched for her lighter.

“I want the chocolate waffles with blueberry ice cream,” Cassiopeia said, her head peeking above the menu.

“And I want the mini banana waffles with strawberries.” Dylan smiled and his two missing front teeth showed that he was still a growing boy. “Mommy, can we go to the mall afterwards?”

“What for?” She found her lighter.

“To get a Halloween storybook.”

Lindsey glanced at her watch. “The mall won’t be opened for another hour.”

“Let’s go to the park across the street until it opens,” Cassiopeia suggested, smiling with a mouth full of teeth.

“Hmm, I don’t know. How about we eat first and decide what we’ll do after,” Lindsey said, taking a look at the menu for the first time. She wasn’t really hungry.

“If you want, I could go with them and you could go back home. We can walk back; it’s not too far,” Tommy offered.

“I might be up for it; don’t know yet.” She yawned.

“Look, you didn’t get a lot of sleep; go back home and take a nap after breakfast. I’ll go to the park with the kids and then we’ll head for the mall. I remember where it is from the last time I was here. We’ll be back before lunch.”

She pursed her lips, undecided.

Tommy held her hand. “Let me do this for you. Then we can hang out at your place the rest of the day.”

At last, Lindsey smiled. “I guess we could do that.”

The kids said “Yay” in unison. A waitress came to take their order. The kids ordered, then Tommy ordered the waffle castle with pistachio ice cream, and Lindsey decided on a fruit smoothie instead of having food.

The kids went playing in the playpark on the other side of the restaurant while the adults remained at the table.

“Cassie, watch over your brother and don’t let him go down the slide alone.”

“Yes, Mommy.”

Now that her kids had left the table, Lindsey lit up a cigarette.

“When did you start smoking again?” Tommy asked.

“Four days ago. Guess why.”

“You really believe Myers is gonna show up on your doorstep?” Tommy asked, a concerned look on his face.

“Oh, I think he’s gonna do a lot more than that; he’s gonna break down the door and barge in with a big knife.”

“You know, we got older over the years and if he were still alive, so would he. Michael Myers would be about fifty-four years old now,” Tommy said.

“Maybe he didn’t age and he’s still twenty-one. I swear, it’s as if time stood still for him all these years. That mask and those old dirty blue overalls looked the same as they did thirty-three years ago.”

“Come on, Linds; you know that’s not possible.” Tommy shook his head. “Besides, Laurie saw him burn in front of her eyes in 1978 after shooting him many times in the head. He’s dead.”

“You know they never found his body and if he was able to get up after falling from the window when Dr. Loomis shot him repeatedly, he can surely survive a few third degree burns.”

“But why would he come after you now? And how would he know where you live? I was there too; why didn’t he come after me? I never moved out of Haddonfield. I’m easy to find.”

“I don’t have all the answers, Tommy. If I did, I wouldn’t be such a wreck. I wouldn’t have spent the last thirty-three years living in fear every Halloween. I hate this holiday. Everything reminds me of him. The smell of the fallen leaves, the Halloween decorations in the windows and on the lawns, the occasional documentary on TV flashing back to the events that transpired in Haddonfield in 1978. And those goddamn nightmares I get every year like clockwork. I can’t escape it; wherever I go, whatever I do, it follows me. But if he ever comes for me, I have my getaway route planned. I won’t let him get the better of me.”

As if on cue, the waitress returned with their plates and drinks.

“Cassie, Dylan; breakfast is served!” Lindsey killed her cigarette in the ashtray.

She didn’t have to tell them twice; unlike when they had to clean their room and she had to ask half a dozen times. For this they came running without delay.

While they were eating breakfast, Lindsey glanced across the street over to the park where the kids wanted to go. Traffic was obstructing her view. Beyond the park, the mall overlooked the vast parking lot. When traffic finally resumed, her heart skipped a beat. The silhouette of Michael Myers—the bogeyman—stood right across the street from where she was sitting facing the window. She wondered if her eyes were playing tricks on her.

She pointed with her index finger. “Tommy!” she said, her voice a loud whisper.

Tommy gazed out the window. Nothing but traffic. “What? Where?”

“On the sidewalk right across from me, on the other side of the street. You’ll see him when the light turns green and the cars take off.”

They waited for almost a minute. The kids were oblivious to what the grown-ups were talking about, too busy devouring their food. The light changed and the vehicles were in motion again.

Michael Myers was gone.

“I don’t see him, Linds.”

“That’s so not fair. He was right there, Tommy.” She felt like a little kid trying to convince a parent that she saw a ghost or to look at her imaginary friend. “I’m not making this up, you know.”

“I know, Linds. Look, it’s Halloween weekend, there’re bound to be people dressed up in all kinds of costumes. Maybe it’s someone dressed up as Myers or maybe it’s an outfit that looks a lot like what he wore. After all, his wasn’t a very hard uniform to come by. The mask he wore was nothing special either.”

She shook her head. "My nerves are shot. I should just go back home and take a nap."

Tommy placed a hand on her hand. "You sure you're gonna be all right? I could go with the kids later today if you need me."

"No, I'll be fine. I just want this damn holiday to be over."

They finished the rest of breakfast in silence. Tommy picked up the check.

"We'll be home by lunch time, all right?"

"Kids, promise me you'll listen to Uncle Tommy, okay?"

They both nodded, huge smiles on their faces. Dylan put his Ghostface mask back on and they left.

In the parking lot, Lindsey glimpsed at the backseat through the car window before unlocking the door. She was always scared someone would be hiding back there and would leap on her as she drove away. *Better safe than sorry*, she thought. She turned the key in the ignition and drove off.

When she was a few blocks from her place, she noticed a car behind her in the rearview mirror; an old brown station wagon. She made a left at the next intersection. The station wagon followed suit. It appeared to be following her while keeping a good three car length of distance between them. She increased her speed and the station wagon did the same. She couldn't tell what the driver looked like; it was too dark in his or her car.

The next traffic light turned yellow and she stepped on the gas pedal and yellow became red in mid-crossing. The station wagon got stuck at the red light. She celebrated this small personal victory by raising her fist in the air.

When she finally made it home, she checked the rearview mirror again before getting out of her car. Not a vehicle in sight. The street was quiet. She hurried up the steps on the front porch and unlocked the door. A beeping sound greeted her. She punched in her six-

digit code for the security system and it went silent. She kicked off her shoes and unbuttoned her shirt. She decided a warm shower and a nap might be the best medicine right now.

Just before she stepped into the shower, she toured the house and made sure all the doors and windows were locked. She looked out the window from behind the curtains upstairs in the kids's room for any sign of the bogeyman. All seemed quiet at the Gordons's house.

Satisfied, she snuck into the steamy shower.

## SIX

**“How the hell does a dead guy escape from prison?”**

“Calm down, Detective. Our technical people are looking at the surveillance video as we speak,” the warden said, wiping his brow with a white handkerchief.

Detective Majors glared at him. “I need to see that footage right away, goddammit!”

A rapping on the door punctuated the detective’s sentence. “Come in,” the warden shouted.

A shy-looking young man walked in. He held a laptop in his hands. “He escaped from the loading dock in the morgue, as we suspected.” He set the laptop on the warden’s desk. “Here, look for yourself.” The warden and the detective gathered around the portable computer as the technician hit the play button on the video player. They were only able to witness very little of what went on in the darkened room on the screen. The technician fast forwarded through parts of it.

“Stop! Rewind that last bit,” Majors said.

The technician rewound it and they resumed their watching of the video.

“So he was aware there was a camera there. He shut off the lights and calculated to move in front of the camera while it was turned away. We never see his face; he made sure to do everything off-screen. Except for when he jumps out of the dock; we see a beam of light coming from the exterior into the room.” Detective Majors pursed his lips.

“But that doesn’t explain how he came back to life,” the warden said. “Are you sure that’s all you could find?”

“I’ve looked at all the security cameras from every block with my team. That’s the only footage we have of him. According to the security guards, Doctor Lovecraft went in the morgue around twelve fifteen; it matches the time on the surveillance video. The time when the loading dock doors open and shut is twelve twenty-seven so twelve minutes elapsed between the moment the doctor went in and Barlowe escaped. He must’ve been waiting for whoever walked in to knock them out and grab their access card. That’s the only way to get around anywhere in the building.” The technician appeared at a loss for words in providing any insight on how Barlowe had accomplished the feat of resurrection.

“Something’s not right. What about exterior cameras?” Majors asked.

“We’ve recovered the video for every exit and the only way to leave the grounds is through the main gate. It was the end of shift so there are a handful of cars leaving the premises all within a short period of time around twelve thirty,” the technician explained.

“I’d like to have a look at it, please. I’ll also want to talk to the guard at the gate and the guard who let the doctor in, and the one that last saw him.” Majors paced the room. “What puzzles me on top of Barlowe coming back from the dead and pulling off a disappearing act on us is the doctor. We have officers at the hospital right now that interviewed the staff and apparently, he snuck out without telling anyone. And what’s the

first thing he does after everything he's been through today? He comes right back to the prison and wants to inspect Barlowe's body. Something definitely doesn't add up here."

"It is strange to say the least but Doctor Lovecraft was a consummate professional and a workaholic," the warden said.

"Professionalism's got nothing to do with it. We're talking about common sense here. Who in their right mind would want to come back here in the middle of the night to perform whatever it was he wanted to do?"

"Maybe he wanted to make sure he was really dead this time," the technician said.

Majors waved him off with his hand. "No; it just doesn't make any sense. When Barlowe spoke to me in his cell, he said something about seeing me again very soon. He genuinely seemed to believe it wasn't the end for him. I wrote it off as him simply trying to taunt me at the time but now, I'm not so sure."

"So what are you saying; he has some magical powers and he can come back from the dead? Listen to yourself; that's preposterous, Detective!" the warden's eyeballs were bulging out of their sockets.

They were interrupted by another knock on the door.

"Come in," the warden said.

A police officer entered. "Detective Majors, we can't get a hold of Mrs. Lovecraft at the doctor's house or on her cell phone."

"Is Doctor Lovecraft's address in the file?" Majors asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Send a patrol car to the house and see why she's not answering the phone. No one's been able to get a hold of her since her husband was brought to the hospital. Something might have happened to her."

“Yes, sir.” And he left, shutting the door behind him.

Majors appeared pensive. “Before I talk to anyone else, I want to have a chat with Barlowe’s bunkmate and any other prisoner he was close to. They might be able to shed some light on what happened here.”

“Well, that’s gonna be easy; he only spoke to one prisoner during the whole time he was here. He kept mainly to himself.” The warden walked up to the filing cabinet and pulled out a file. “Kessler Blackwood’s his name. And here’s everything on him.”

“Good. I’ll read it on the way there. Lead the way then, warden.”

## SEVEN

**Sid Barlowe was in the middle** of exploring the good doctor's house when he heard the sweet sound of children laughing outside. A quick peek outside the window confirmed his suspicions; two kids were running down the sidewalk across the street from the doctor's house. He felt his tummy rumble. Their soft and tender flesh would taste heavenly and allow him to live far beyond a man's normal lifespan.

An adult walked behind them; probably their father. Barlowe went to the front door and opened it slightly to get a better look at which house they lived at. They kept going for another six houses before turning onto the front lawn of a house with a yellow rooftop.

"This is a real nice place you got yourself here, Doc," he snickered to himself and headed back inside for breakfast. After a good night's sleep in what he assumed was the master bedroom—the underwear in the drawers and the picture frames of the good doctor and his wife on the nightstand gave it away—he now rummaged through the fridge.

"And where is the missus, I wonder." He liked thinking out loud. Barlowe didn't enjoy the company of others but loved himself a great deal and reveled in one-sided conversations.

He took out some bacon, eggs, and a carton of milk and set it on the counter. He drank from the milk carton while he opened the cupboards and went to look for a plate and some frying pans.

He had just turned on two stove-top elements and thrown half the contents of the bacon package into the frying pan when he heard a car pull over in the driveway.

“Is that the missus joining me for breakfast?” He walked up to the window, all giddy like a kid at Christmas. It was a squad car and two police officers came out of it and were heading towards the front door.

Barlowe grabbed his mask that he’d left hanging on a hat hook in the vestibule and put it on. Just before the officers made it to the balcony, he unlocked the front door and walked back to the living room. On his way there, he took hold of the sledgehammer that rested against the wall in the hallway.

The doorbell buzzed.

“Come in,” he said in a high-pitched singing voice.

The bacon was burning in the pan and he could see a cloud of smoke rising in the kitchen. He heard the two cops push the door open.

“Mrs. Lovecraft? Bitternest PD. Could you come to the door, please?”

The fire alarm began wailing like a banshee. The smoke was easing down the hallway now.

“Something’s on fire,” one of them said. “Are you okay, Mrs. Lovecraft?”

They rushed down the hallway as Barlowe held the sledgehammer high in the air like Barry Bonds swinging for a homerun. The blow landed right in the first officer’s midsection and sent him crashing against his partner.

Barlowe finally showed himself, towering over them in Pluto's overalls, clown mask on and raising the hammer once more. "Just like at the high striker at the carnival," he said as he delivered a fatal blow to the head of the first officer he had hit previously. The second one managed to pull a hand free from beneath the weight of his partner and unholstered his gun. Barlowe swung the sledgehammer sideways and knocked it out of his hand.

"Owww!" the officer yelled in agony. "You sick fuck, Barlowe, you're not gonna get away with this."

"Oh yeah? Just watch me!" Barlowe raised the heavy hammer once again. "Batter up!" The second officer raised an arm as best he could to shield himself from the blow but it was no use; the deadly hammer crushed his head the second it struck him.

"What a mess!" Barlowe laughed as he hurried to stop the fire alarm. He swung the hammer and shattered it, sending it to the floor in pieces.

"That takes care of that. They ruined my breakfast." He threw the pan with the bacon burned to a crisp into the sink. He ate a couple of pieces of it and grimaced. "I'll keep my appetite for those delicious-looking kiddies."

He went back to the hallway and slung one of the officers—the thinner of the two—over his shoulder. He went past the kitchen and pushed a door open. He flipped a light switch and a stairway appeared: It was the basement. He bent down and flung the corpse down the stairs. It landed with a loud thud at the bottom of the stairs.

He returned for his partner but this one was too heavy to carry over his shoulder. He dragged him across the hall and past the kitchen, leaving a long trail of blood on the floor. He placed him in a sitting position atop the stairs and kicked him in the back to send him whirling down the stairs to join his dead buddy. He flicked the light switch off and shut the door.

“Now to get rid of the car in the driveway,” he said aloud.

Barlowe drove the police car three streets down. He left it in front of a random house and made sure nobody saw him exit the vehicle and walk away from it. He walked back to the doctor’s house.

Once he got to Magistral Lane, a little boy riding a Big Wheel almost bumped into him as he turned the street corner; it was one of the two kids he’d seen earlier with what he assumed was their father.

“Hey there, little fellow. That’s a nice looking costume you got there.”

“Thanks, mister. I’m dressed up like Ghostface.”

“From the ‘Scream’ movies, right?”

The little boy nodded. “I didn’t know adults dressed up in costumes on Halloween,” he said.

“Oh! You’re talking about my mask? I wear it all year round; it feels like a second skin to me. Besides, it’s fun dressing up.”

The little boy laughed. “Yeah, it is. Clowns are cool and creepy. My mom’s afraid of them.”

“Is she?” It was Barlowe’s turn to laugh. “Tell me, what’s your name, son?”

“I’m Dylan.”

“Dylan. That’s a good, strong name. Tell me, Dylan, would you like to see something really cool?”

Again, Dylan nodded enthusiastically. “What is it?”

“It’s a surprise. Follow me and you’ll see what it is.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“I’m not supposed to talk to strangers.”

“But you’re talking to me, aren’t you?”

“I guess.”

“So we’re not strangers anymore. Besides, I’m not asking you to talk to me; I just want to show you something.”

“Where is it?”

“Come, follow me and I’ll show you. It’s not too far from here.” Barlowe pointed to the doctor’s house.

“Doctor Lovecraft’s house?”

“Yes, I’m visiting for the weekend. You know him?”

Dylan nodded. “Yeah, daddy talks to him sometimes.”

“You see? I’m no stranger; I’m a friend of Doctor Lovecraft.”

“Okay, I guess it’s all right then. But not for too long; my mom’ll be worried if she can’t see me.”

“Don’t worry; this’ll only take a minute.”

Barlowe walked up ahead of him and Dylan pedaled on his Big Wheel until they got to the doctor’s house. Barlowe offered his hand and Dylan climbed off the Big Wheel and took it.

“We’d better bring your Big Wheel inside in case someone wants to steal it.”

“Okay.”

Barlowe grabbed the Big Wheel with one hand and held Dylan’s hand with the other. They went inside and the door slammed shut.

## EIGHT

**“I ain’t telling you shit, buddy.”**

Detective Majors nodded and pursed his lips. He sat across from Kessler Blackwood at a table in an interrogation room. A guard stood outside the door and the warden and two police officers watched through the two-way mirror.

Kessler Blackwood had shared a cell with Sid Barlowe and had been his confidant so that gave him a unique perspective on the man. Apparently, whatever he had confided in him, he wasn’t going to tell.

“Barlowe’s a very sick man. If he’s out there right now, he’s going to hurt children again. From what I hear, you’re the only one who might have a clue on how he achieved this little stunt of coming back from the ethereal. So, please, pretty please with a fucking cherry on top; tell us what you know.”

“What do I get out of it?” Blackwood sneered at Majors. He was a tall, skinny man in his late forties.

“You get a clear conscience; that’s what you get. If Barlowe kills even one kid, I’ll personally be holding you responsible. You’ll be able to add accessory to murder to your resume.”

“Fuck you.” Blackwood said it without emotion and ample nonchalance.

Majors browsed through his file. “You might be many things but nothing here tells me you’re a killer, Blackwood. You’ve robbed museums, galleries, libraries, and stole precious artifacts across the country but you’ve never killed anyone, have you?”

Blackwood stared at the ceiling.

“Why do you even care about a piece of shit like Barlowe?”

“I don’t rat on nobody.”

“Has he told you what he did to those kids? He kidnapped them and then he killed them with a mallet. And that was just an appetizer for him; once they were dead, he ate them. Did you hear me, Blackwood? He would *eat* the kids he kidnapped and killed. What kind of sick monster does that?” Majors was running out of patience with this guy. He wanted him to talk and spill the beans.

Blackwood finally returned his stare to the detective. “They’re not dead. The kids, I mean. They live through him. He’s absorbed their life-force and their souls.” He seemed as serious as a heart attack.

“You really believe that, don’t you? Then you’re just as bad and twisted as he is.”

Blackwood leaned closer to Majors. “Do you believe in Black Magick, Detective?”

“Whether I believe in it or not is irrelevant; do *you* believe in it?”

Blackwood nodded. “Magick is very strong. The four elements have boundless properties if you know how to tap into them. Like many of us, Barlowe wanted to live forever. And now, at last, he’s succeeded. Well, almost.”

“Succeeded how? How does a man escape death the way he did, Mr. Blackwood? Through some kind of incantation? Is that what he was mumbling when he was about to be electrocuted?”

“I don’t know. I wasn’t there.” Blackwood smiled.

“Quit being a smart-ass. My patience is wearing thin and we’re wasting precious time here.”

“Yes, time is very precious, Detective. And I am wasting mine locked up within the four walls of my tiny cell.”

“How about we transfer you to a bigger cell if you share some of Barlowe’s secrets with us?”

Blackwood shook his head. “Even if I wanted to help you, which I don’t, Barlowe is long gone by now. He achieved the ultimate feat and now the world is his. He’s not so stupid as to stick around in Bitternest waiting for you to catch him again.”

“Oh, but that’s exactly what I think he’ll do. He wants to taunt me. He’s angry with me and I think he wants me to find him because he has plans for me. I don’t believe for one second that he’s left Bitternest. Not yet, anyway. It’s Halloween weekend; tomorrow there’ll be kids everywhere on every street corner trick or treating. He won’t be able to resist the temptation. So for God’s sake, if there’s even an ounce of good in you, tell us what you know.”

Blackwood sighed. “I’ll tell you one last thing and then we’re through. You give me a bigger cell as you promised.”

“I never promised anything. You gotta earn it. Tell me first and we’ll see what it’s worth. If it’s something useful, I’ll see what I can do. I give you my word on that.”

Blackwood looked him right in the eye for what seemed like forever. Then, he spoke. “The spell Barlowe recited before they pumped his body full of electricity was a hex of mine. I only told him half of it. The other half is hidden on a scroll somewhere. He has to get to it before the aftereffects of the curse start to manifest themselves.”

“And what will happen if he doesn’t?”

Blackwood smiled. “The first half of the spell brings him back to life. The second half keeps him alive. Without it, well, let’s just say this’ll be his last Halloween.”

“And I suppose you won’t tell us where you hid that scroll, will you?”

“Start by giving me a bigger cell, Detective. We’ll see how I feel after that.”

Majors paused to think for a moment. He hated this. Stuck between a rock and a hard place. He didn’t like to negotiate with criminals but children’s lives might be at stake here. “Done. I’ll get you your cell, but I’ll be back to hear the rest of your story in a short while.”

“Good. Then be prepared to give me something else in return.”

Majors got up and left the room without saying anything more.

“Are you kidding me? What makes you think you have the authority to grant his requests?” the warden asked, pacing the room of his office.

“Just do it, all right? We don’t have much time here.”

“You might be in charge of this investigation but this is my prison and I call the shots.” The warden shook his head. “Besides, you must be out of your mind to believe that Barlowe came back from the dead. And Black Magick? Really? That’s the best he could come up with? And you went and fell for it.” He chuckled.

Majors turned around at the speed of a whip cracking and grabbed the warden by the collar. “Listen to me and listen to me good. Barlowe is alive out there and the first chance he

has, he's gonna go after some poor kid and abduct him. Then he'll eat the flesh off his bones and he'll do it again and again until he is stopped. If this Blackwood guy can even remotely help us in apprehending him, then by God we're gonna give him what he wants as long as he makes reasonable demands." Majors released his grip on the warden. "I'm not letting Barlowe get away this time. There isn't any way he's taking a child's life; not on my watch. And shame on you for being so naïve and not believing in the supernatural; we're in Bitternest where the strangest shit happens on a daily basis. If there's one thing my father taught me it's to keep an open mind at all times and to believe in the unbelievable."

"Fine. You don't have to get carried away. Don't say I didn't warn you if this blows up in your face." The warden fixed his tie and his ruffled suit.

"Just make it happen and let me know when it's done."

As Majors was about to exit the room, a knock came on the door. Majors opened it. It was a prison guard.

"You wanted to see me, warden?"

"Yes. Come in, Lonnie. You were working the graveyard shift at the gate last night, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir. That's what I was just telling the others. It doesn't make any sense that Doctor Lovecraft was found dead in the morgue."

"Why's that?" Majors asked.

"Because I saw him leave a little after midnight in his car."

"Are you sure?" Both Majors and the warden asked in unison.

"Positive! He's the only one that works here that drives a beige '76 Cadillac DeVille."

"Did you speak to him?" Majors asked.

"No; usually we chat a little when he finishes his shift but last night he just drove off."

“Did you get a good look at him?” Majors stood waiting for the guard’s answer eager as a race car driver at the starting line of a race.

The guard stroked his furrowed brow. “Now that you mention it, I guess I never got a good look at him. It was dark, you know.”

“So it could have been anyone driving his car then?” the warden asked.

“It was Barlowe. I’m sure of it. I’m gonna issue an APB on the doctor’s car. Maybe we’ll get lucky.” Majors opened the door and before leaving, he turned towards the warden. “I’ll be back to speak to Blackwood once you’ve upgraded his cell.”

And then he shut the door and left.

## **NINE**

**“Where’s Dylan?”**

“He’s playing outside with Cassie. He was going up and down the street on his Big Wheel a little while ago,” Tommy said.

“Cassie’s in the backyard playing with her dolls. Dylan isn’t with her.” Lindsey marched to the window and looked left and right in the street.

“Dylan’s nowhere in sight. Are you sure he didn’t go to the park?”

“I told him to stay near the house and that lunch was going to be ready soon.” Tommy came to the window and glanced outside. “I’ll go look for him.”

“I’ll go with you. First I’ll tell Cassie to stay in the backyard.” She went to the back door. “Cassie, sweetie; have you seen your brother?”

She sat in the grass in the middle of a circle of dolls; they were having tea. She shook her head.

“Uncle Tommy and I are going to go look for him. Don’t leave the house, all right?”

She nodded without looking at her mother, too wrapped up in her game.

"I'll take the left side of the street, you take the right," Tommy said.

"Dylan!" Lindsey walked until the end of the street and looked both ways once there. No sign of Dylan. Then her eyes fell upon a brown station wagon parked less than sixty paces from her. Her heart stopped. Squinting, she tried to see if there was someone inside; the shadow of the trees obstructed her view. She backpedaled.

The car's headlights switched on.

She froze there in the middle of the street.

The car came alive and she spun around, running as fast as her legs would take her. Her nightmares were becoming reality, she was sure of it.

"Tommy!" she yelled but it felt as though it had been but a whisper dying in the back of her throat. "Tommy!"

He heard her and started towards her. "Linds! Watch out! There's a car approaching behind you!"

She looked over her shoulder and saw the station wagon less than thirty paces behind her. She ducked to her side of the street on somebody's lawn and the car swerved, climbing on the sidewalk. She jumped over a hedge and rolled to safety under a balcony. The car stopped and she caught a glimpse of the driver.

Michael Myers. The bogeyman.

Her jaw dropped and she felt as though her heart would burst from fright.

"Hey! Are you out of your mind?" It was Tommy screaming at the car. She turned to look at her friend, shaking her head. Myers stepped on the gas and drove full speed ahead on a collision course with Tommy.

Tommy barely had time to jump on the hood of a parked car before the station wagon would have run him over. He gave a fleeting look over his shoulder only to see that the car was already turning the corner and was soon long gone.

Lindsey came running to him. "Are you okay?"

He nodded, catching his breath. "You?"

"Yes." She took a deep breath. "Tommy, I'm not crazy; it was Michael Myers. I got a good look at him."

Tommy looked down to the ground and then at Lindsey again. "I know. I saw him too."

\* \* \* \*

Dylan woke up dazed and confused as to where he was. It was dark all around him save for a faint light at the top of the stairs. He deduced he was in a basement. It slowly came back to him. The man who wore the clown mask. He'd brought him to Doctor Lovecraft's house. Said he was a friend. He told him to turn around and shut his eyes tight, that he had a nice Halloween surprise for him. Dylan complied.

Then came the blow to his head and everything had faded to black.

"Hello? Is there anyone here?"

No response. Dylan's heart rate quickened. He looked behind him and the only window had been blocked with a dark drape. "Please, let me go." He started sniffling. That's when he realized that the clown had taken his mask from him. The rope that bound his wrists together behind his back was starting to chafe them. Tears streamed down his face. The chair was big and heavy—too heavy for him to topple.

He could hear footsteps approach the door upstairs.

It opened and the light switch was turned on. Someone came down the stairs.

"Hello my little Dylan!" Barlowe said, smiling behind his already grinning mask.

"You're finally awake!"

"Please don't hurt me." Dylan's chin was trembling as he spoke the words. For that matter, his entire little body was trembling.

"I'm not going to hurt you, my little man. I promised you some candy, didn't I?" Barlowe revealed the hidden hand behind his back and it contained a handful of colorful sour candies still in their wrappers. "These were my favorite when I was a kid." Barlowe began unwrapping one of the wrappers.

"I don't want them. I just want to go home to my mommy."

Barlowe shook his head. "I'm sorry, my little man. I'm afraid I can't let you go ... yet." Barlowe's left hand started quivering. His right eye began twitching and he was beginning to feel a dull pain in his chest. "I'll be back soon." He set the candies on a nearby table and went up the stairs.

"No! Don't leave me here in the dark!"

"I'll leave a light on for you; how's that?" Barlowe shut the door.

Sitting in the Honda Civic he'd stolen the night before, he took a deep breath and steadied his left hand. The trembling of the hand and twitching of the eye had started this morning when he woke up. The dull pain in the chest was new to him.

"Goddamn Blackwood and his spells. This better go away." He pulled a file folder from the backseat of the car. "At least his contact was reliable." He smiled under his mask

and opened the folder. It was half an inch thick and there was a Post-It note on the first page that read: "This is all I could gather; use it well." And it was signed Kessler Blackwood. "Don't worry, my friend, I'm already using it very well." He chuckled and took off, leaving a cloud of dust behind him.

## **TEN**

**“Never mind the Cadillac; we have a homicide here.”**

“What?” The two officers had been patrolling and had stopped to put some gas in their cruiser. One of them noticed the beige Cadillac DeVille right away. He stepped out of the car to examine it while the other one punched the plate number in their computer.

“That’s why we couldn’t get any service; the gas attendant is dead. He’s been stripped of his clothes too.”

“Well, I just got confirmation that the Cadillac was Doctor Lovecraft’s car. So I guess that solves the mystery as to who killed the attendant,” the officer said, still sitting inside the car.

“That’s not funny, Jerry. He did a real number on him. His head’s been smashed to bits.”

“Don’t touch anything; I’ll call it in.”

He called it in and right after, he got a call from Detective Majors. “We’ll hold the fort until you get here, sir.”

“Good; I want to see the crime scene for myself. I’ll be there in ten minutes,” Majors said from the other end of the cell phone.

“Whatever happened to that car that was sent to Lovecraft’s house?” Majors asked a plainclothes agent at the precinct.

“We haven’t heard back from them yet.”

“Try them again and send another car if you have to. We know for a fact that Barlowe is loose and he’s already killed one man. I’m on my way to the crime scene now.”

On his way to the gas station, Majors heard about something else gone awry at the other end of the city.

“Magistral Lane; why does that ring a bell?” he said out loud to himself. His cell played a familiar tune; his boss was calling.

“Majors, we have a problem,” he said. “Some kid’s just gone missing on that doctor’s street.”

“That’s why it sounded familiar. When did the child go missing?”

“About an hour ago. We’ve got two squad cars on their way there. I put Rubin on the case since you got your hands full with Barlowe.”

Majors grimaced. “If you want my opinion, it’s obvious that it’s all part of the same case. With all due respect, sir, I’d like to be on the case.”

“I know you and Rubin hate each other’s guts but he’s efficient and I don’t want you to spread yourself too thin. Follow up on that lead at the gas station and then you can head out to Magistral Lane. But keep in mind that Rubin’s in charge.”

Majors grimaced. “Yes, sir. Will do. I’ll report back once I’ve been to both locations.”  
And they hung up.

Majors pulled up to the gas station where another patrol car had already arrived on the scene joining the two officers who'd made the discovery.

"Forensics should be here any minute," one of them told Majors as he stepped out of his car.

Majors crouched down and took a long look at Pluto's dead body whose sole clothing was his underwear.

"Poor guy; this ain't no way to die," Majors said, standing up. "That's definitely Barlowe's calling card. He used to use a mallet. This looks more like the work of a sledgehammer. I guess a gas station and a garage is a good place to find such a tool. Has anyone looked around to see if his uniform could be retrieved?"

They all shook their heads. "Nope; I thought the same thing when I saw him half naked. My guess is Barlowe stole his clothes to get rid of the ones he'd borrowed when he escaped. We found a suit on the front seat of the Cadillac. Must've belonged to the doctor," one of them said.

"Anyone have an idea what the attire looks like at this gas station?" Majors asked.

"The gas attendants wear a red outfit. We found this one's wallet in the garage next to the cars and a name tag matching the name on the driver's license; a Pluto Oswald."

"So Barlowe stole Pluto's clothes and switched cars. Do we know what kind of car he took?" Majors walked to the garage door and peered inside.

"I glanced at the ledger and there are supposed to be four cars in the garage for repairs and paint jobs. There are only three at the moment," the officer explained.

"So we can assume that Barlowe took the fourth one." Majors walked around the garage, looking for clues.

“If we go under that assumption, the car that’s missing according to the ledger is a grey Honda Civic.”

“Oh, he must really hate driving that. Barlowe’s a fan of vintage American cars. He’s gone an extra mile to try to throw us off. It makes perfect sense that he would choose a Honda Civic; it’s out of character for him. He doesn’t expect me to look for that type of vehicle. That’s his first mistake. Actually, it’s his third mistake; his first mistake was killing this attendant and his second mistake was kidnapping a child. Strike three and he’s out.”

Majors exited through the store portion of the gas station, giving it a quick glimpse.

“He’s already kidnapped a child?” an officer asked.

“We don’t have confirmation yet but I’m on my way to the house that reported it once I leave here. My gut tells me he’s behind it; especially since it’s on the same street as the doctor’s home.”

“Christ! He’s moving fast, isn’t he?”

“He doesn’t have much time ahead of him. His luck is about to run out one way or another and I’m gonna be right there next to him when it happens.” Majors headed back to his car. At the same time, a forensics unit arrived. “I’ll put out an APB on that grey Honda Civic.”

“It’s a 2006 model,” the officer added.

“Brief the forensics team on your discoveries, will you? I’m heading to Magistral Lane. If you make any new discoveries, you know where to reach me.” And within seconds he had already taken off.

“Well, well, well; if it isn’t our expert on Barlowe himself,” Rubin said as he exited the Wallaces’s house.

“Nice to see you too, Rubin,” Majors said. “So what’s the story here?”

“This is my case, Majors, so why don’t you let me handle this.”

“Your *case* happens to be on the same street as the house of a man whose life Barlowe took and whose car he stole. So I’d say that pretty much makes this a part of my case as well. It doesn’t take a genius to see the correlation here.”

Rubin sniggered. “You’re chasing a man who was electrocuted yesterday. I think you’re a little out of your league here, Majors. We’re dealing with a copycat or some sick-minded individual, nothing more. Give it up; Barlowe’s dead; time for you to move on. God knows it already took a lot from you.”

Majors stepped right up in his face. “Don’t you dare allude to my personal life. It’s none of your goddamn business. And if you think we’ve heard the last of Barlowe, then you’ve got another thing coming.” Majors went around Rubin and up the stairs on the porch.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Rubin asked.

“What’s it look like; I’m going to talk to the parents.”

“This is *my* case, Majors!”

“Yeah, yeah. It’s your case. I’m allowed to ask them questions about the Lovecrafts and if they’ve witnessed any strange comings and goings on their street in the last twenty-four hours.” Majors knocked on the door and turned around to face Rubin. “Besides, shouldn’t you get going? I’m sure you have an investigation to conduct.”

Rubin fumed and walked away without saying a word.

As Tommy opened the door, Majors flashed his badge. “Detective Clyde Majors. Bitternest Police Department.” Tommy let him in.

“We just spoke to a detective a minute ago,” Tommy said.

“I know but I’m here on a different matter that might be related to your child’s disappearance.”

“This is really hard on Lindsey. Halloween brings back a lot of bad memories for her and now on top of that, her son’s gone missing.”

“Are you implying that you’re not the child’s father?”

“No, the father’s out of town at a seminar. I’m a childhood friend.”

“Can I speak to the mother, please?”

Tommy sighed. “Sure. Will you leave us alone afterwards or are we going to have to answer more questions from other police officers?”

“I’ll personally see that we leave you alone after this but it’s important that I speak to the mother.”

Tommy disappeared into the kitchen and returned with Lindsey. Cassiopeia hid behind her.

He introduced himself and she told him about her son going missing while riding on his Big Wheel and how Michael Myers had attempted to kill both her and Tommy with the station wagon. In return, Majors told her about Barlowe escaping from prison.

“What do you mean he escaped? Wasn’t he electrocuted yesterday?”

Majors scratched the back of his head. “This is strictly off the record but it’s probably gonna leak and be all over the news by dinner so I might as well tell you.” He proceeded to explain to her and Tommy about how Barlowe had come back from the dead and how he had probably been roaming in the neighborhood. Majors realized how outlandish it all sounded as he was recounting the events.

“So you’re saying we’re dealing with a zombie, is that it?” Tommy said, flabbergasted.

“I wish I had an answer for you but the truth is I don’t. Your guess is as good as mine on that.”

“I’ll believe anything at this point,” Lindsey said. “I’ve been living in Bitternest long enough to know that strange and unusual things happen on a daily basis here.”

“That makes two of us,” Majors said. “In the meantime, I’m gonna ask you if you have a photo of Dylan you could spare so I can know who I’m looking for. I know you probably gave Detective Rubin some but we work in different divisions.” Majors didn’t want to get into the nitty-gritty of how he and Rubin couldn’t stand to be in the same room together. Lindsey provided him with a recent photograph and Majors thanked her, and then left.

Back behind the wheel of his car, he heard more progress come through on the airwaves.

“Where was the car found?” The car of the two officers who had been sent to Lovecraft’s house and had failed to report back had just been found a couple of streets from Magistral Lane.

“I think it’s time I go make a house call to the doctor’s house.” Majors drove a few houses down to the Lovecraft residence. After ringing the doorbell three times and peeking inside the house, he decided to call two of the officers down the street.

“We’ll be right over, Detective.”

Less than two minutes later, they were on the Lovecrafts’s front porch. “What can we do to be of assistance?” one of them asked.

“You can start by helping me search the premises after I break down the door. We’re going in.” Majors said as he charged the door. It didn’t budge. The two officers joined him and they rushed at it together. On their second try, the door flew off its hinges and they each unholstered their firearm.

“He’s been here,” Majors whispered. “The alarm system’s been deactivated.”

“Maybe it’s the doctor’s wife?” one of the two officers said.

“Nope; the trail of blood in the hallway confirms that he was definitely here.” Majors pointed to the long crimson stain on the floor going past the kitchen. “Be careful; he might still be here.”

They tiptoed past the hallway and split up at the kitchen. One of them went down the corridor where the rooms were and the other made his way to the other side of the dining room.

“I’ll take the basement; the blood trail ends here,” Majors said as he opened the door leading to the basement’s stairway. He flicked the light switch and saw right away the stairs were covered with blood. He climbed down and at the bottom of the stairs was met by the bodies of two police officers. “I found Parks and Jones.”

He continued to explore the basement, turning the lights on as he went deeper into the unfinished cellar and the workshop portion of it.

Not a soul stirred. One of the two officers came down to join him.

“He’s long gone. At least it solves Parks and Jones’s disappearance. Can you handle the crime scene here? I think we need to put out an official statement that Barlowe is alive and loose. We’re gonna need all the help we can get to apprehend him. Still no sign of Mrs. Lovecraft though; it has me worried.” And on that note, Majors headed back to the precinct.

\* \* \* \*

The hours passed and it would be dusk soon. A few houses from the Lovecraft house, on the same street, someone with a watchful eye observed what was unfolding on what used

to be a quiet street. Through the small window in the attic, Michael Myers kept an eye on the Wallaces's house. The commotion would make things harder for him and it was rapidly escalating with two crime scenes. And who was this man they kept talking about, this Sid Barlowe? There were two roosters in the henhouse and that was always one too many.

**HALLOWEEN**

## ELEVEN

**Halloween morning. The fog rolled in**, so thick one could choke in it. The red and gold leaves that covered the ground and the pumpkins that adorned the windows of houses painted the grimdest of postcard picture.

A police car with two officers inside was parked in front of the Lovecrafts's house and another in front of the Wallaces's. Not too far from the Wallaces's house, a Channel 4 News van had just pulled up to the curb.

*"We're standing at the end of the street here at Magistral Lane where the bodies of two of Bitternest's finest have been found brutally murdered. Early indications point to Sid Barlowe, the Harbinger of Sorrow, whose electrocution two days ago was supposed to have put an end to his reign of terror. In a bizarre twist of events, his corpse was found to be missing from the morgue after the head doctor at the Bitternest Correctional Facility was found lifeless early yesterday morning.*

*The authorities have refused to comment any further on the matter or on how it's even possible for Barlowe to have survived the 2,000 plus volts of electricity that were pumped into his body. For the moment, one thing is certain: Sid Barlowe is alive and on the prowl. It's Halloween and the streets will be filled with*

*children trick or treating tonight. To all the parents out there, don't leave your kids out of your sight even for a minute. Make sure you lock up your doors and windows after you're done handing out candy and trick or treating tonight. Bitternest is in full alert mode and the Bitternest Police Department assures us that every precaution is being taken and that they are following leads to catch the Harbinger of Sorrow for good this time. Stay tuned to this station for more on this incredible story as it unfolds throughout the day. Cindy Foster, Channel 4 News."*

\* \* \* \*

“Great! We’re on National Television now.” Lindsey grimaced as she drove past the Channel 4 News van. “And I really don’t like Cindy Foster. She looks fatter in person, doesn’t she?”

“It might actually be a good thing; the more attention the street has, the less likely it is for that child predator and Myers to show up. Besides, there are two cop cars parked in the street. They’d be crazy to try anything,” Tommy said, sitting in the passenger seat.

“I wouldn’t bet on that. It’s Halloween! Michael Myers is probably hiding in plain sight, for all we know. Myers is oblivious to authority and from what Laurie described, absolutely fearless. As for Sid Barlowe, he’s a monster in every sense of the word so I doubt a couple of cops are gonna stop him from doing what he wants.”

“Mommy, when is Dylan gonna be home?” Cassiopeia asked from the backseat.

“Soon, sweetie. Soon.” She glanced at Tommy who returned her glance with a faint smile. He grabbed her right hand that was resting on her purse.

“They’ll find him; you’ll see. He’ll come running through the door before you know it.”

“John says he’ll be on the plane on his way back after dinner. He won’t be back till after midnight. He feels guilty for leaving now.”

“He’s being too hard on himself and so are you; I know you blame yourself for Dylan’s disappearance but it could’ve happened to any kid and any parent. It was just freak bad luck, Linds.”

“If I hadn’t been fixating so much on Michael Myers, I might have been more aware of what was going on right under my nose.”

“Quite the contrary; I’d say you’re hyper aware. Your awareness has been heightened ever since I got here. You’ve spotted Myers multiple times and I’m sorry I doubted you. If anything, I’m to blame for Dylan going missing. I should’ve kept an eye on him after we got back from the park.”

“Don’t beat yourself up; he was just playing in the street in front of the house. Christ! Isn’t there anywhere safe for a child to play nowadays?” Lindsey pulled up to the school yard. She gazed at Cassiopeia who sat in silence in the backseat. “What am I even doing sending her to school on a day like today?”

“She’ll be fine; the school has security and they’re aware of the situation. She’ll be with other kids and it’ll keep her mind busy. It’ll be good for her; she won’t worry about her brother as much this way.”

“Thanks again for coming out this weekend, Tommy; I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“That’s what friends are for, Linds.” They smiled at each other as Cassiopeia exited the car and went running to the school yard.

“I’ll be back to pick you up at three thirty, sweetie; wait for me inside.”

“Yes, Mommy.”

Lindsey watched her go and her heart sank. If it was any consolation, her daughter didn't seem too perturbed by the events. She wasn't sure how much of the situation she truly grasped at her young age. She was a smart girl; she had to have known her brother was in danger.

"Come on; let's head back to the house. We'll make flyers to post in the neighborhood and we'll go look for Dylan," Tommy said. Lindsey nodded in silence and they drove off.

\* \* \* \*

It was almost time to pick up Cassiopeia. Lindsey and Tommy had spent the day plastering posters of Dylan with his photo, age, height, and weight all over the area. A handful of neighbors had joined to help. Pretty soon coffee shops, Laundromats, restaurants, bars, parks, the mall, the police, and fire stations, and even the strip club on Fascination Street all displayed posters of little Dylan. Police cars could be seen on every third street patrolling. They weren't taking the situation lightly at least. If anything, the city hadn't felt this safe in a long time.

"I'm gonna go pick up Cassie. You wanna come?" Lindsey asked.

"No, I'll stay here and I'll finish installing the additional locks on the windows and the back door. Besides, someone should stay here other than the cops outside if Dylan turns up. After all the posters we handed out today, someone is bound to have seen him somewhere."

"I really hope so. All right, don't open the door to strangers and I'll be back in twenty."

“Yes, Mommy,” Tommy replied and they both laughed. Lindsey immediately felt guilty for having fun while her son was missing. She didn’t dare imagine what could’ve happened to him; it was just too painful. She had to stay strong to take care of Cassiopeia.

Tommy put on a KISS album and “God of Thunder” resonated throughout the house as he fastened new locks on the windows. When he got to the back door, he realized he needed a drill. He headed for the basement.

As he went down the stairs, it occurred to him that he’d never been in Lindsey’s basement before. She’d showed him around the house every time he visited and this time as well, but she’d always neglected the basement. She’d come down here yesterday night to make the rounds and double check all the windows. He’d have to install extra locks on these ones as well just to be on the safe side.

He switched on the lights and rows of bookshelves appeared in front of him. On the far right corner of the room rested a pool table. The subdued ceiling lights reminded him of a pool hall he used to hang out at back in Haddonfield when he was a teenager. On the far left side stood a mini bar with shelves of hard liquor and wine bottles. There was a cushy-looking sofa not too far from it with a round glass table facing it.

The basement had a nice retro feel to it, without being old fashioned. If he didn’t know any better, Tommy would’ve thought he was in a lounge somewhere downtown. It was all very classy. He walked across the room and stood facing two doors; a red one on the wall to his left, and a black one on the wall perpendicular to it. He started towards the red door which he hoped would lead to a workshop of some kind. He presumed John was like most men and liked to keep an assortment of tools in his basement.

He pushed the door open and found himself in a dark room. A faint light coming from a small window across the room greeted him; it came from the garage. He felt a draft and realized that the garage window had been smashed. He flipped the lights on and found himself in a genuine workshop that would make any handyman proud.

He walked over to the broken window. There were glass shards on the floor in the basement; the window had clearly been broken from inside the garage. It was large enough for someone to come through. Tommy's heart rate quickened. He took a peek inside the garage and all was dark save for the fragment of sunlight that shone through the garage door's plastic window. Surely Lindsey would've noticed last night if the window had been smashed. It must have happened while they were handing out posters to people and shops.

The thought that crepted him out was that if someone had broken in, they might still be inside the house. How had they gone past the alarm system? And the more pressing question on his mind; which one of the two bogeymen was it: Myers or Barlowe?

Tommy turned around and without even looking, he found a drill on a work table nearby. He picked it up and looked around the workshop. It was quiet. The only sound in the house was the KISS song still blaring but sounding muffled there in the basement.

Tommy did some recon around the room, passing by the freestanding wood heater and coming back to the red door from which he'd entered. He appeared to be alone. He let out a sigh of relief. He was going to come back to fix the broken window as soon as he was done with the back door lock.

He turned off the lights and left the workshop, making sure to shut the door behind him. He stared at the black door on the other wall and figured it was a closet of some sort. He walked up to it and turned the door handle towards the right.

It was pitch black in there, but it seemed to be a walk-in closet. There was a string dangling from the ceiling and he pulled on it. Nothing happened. He pulled on it again and still nothing. When his eyes became accustomed to the darkness of the closet, he realized that the light bulb was missing from its socket. He took a step forward and heard a crunching sound as his foot landed on something on the floor. He crouched down and found debris from the missing light bulb.

As Tommy stood up on his feet, a jolt in his stomach greeted him. It was followed by a twisting sensation in his abdomen, then by a burning sensation. Next, an atrocious amount of pain washed over him.

That's when the bogeyman stepped forward from the darkness and Tommy noticed that his arm was inside his stomach. He pulled it out to reveal a lengthy knife.

"No!" Tommy whispered upon the grim realization of what had just happened. Immediately, the bogeyman grabbed him by the neck and rammed the knife deep inside Tommy's stomach again. Like a deflating ball, Tommy collapsed on the floor at the bogeyman's feet.

Michael Myers stood there motionless for a minute, looking down at the dead man at his feet, tilting his head to the side, like a fox examining his latest catch.

## **TWELVE**

**“Any news from Blackwood?” Majors said** on his cell phone.

“He refuses to share anything more with us,” the warden said.

“Damn him! The clock’s ticking and now we know Barlowe’s kidnapped a child. It sickens me how some people don’t even have a conscience.”

“Are you going to let the media know about the missing child?” the warden asked.

“That’s our next step. We’ll issue an official statement for the six o’clock news bulletin. All hell’s gonna break loose in Bitternest once we do. We were hoping to find the kid before it came to that. We’ll be facing a mob of angry parents. Be prepared for them; they’ll show up at your doorstep too; Barlowe was supposed to be long dead by now. Someone will have to be blamed.”

“I know; this whole situation is so unreal.”

“Welcome to Bitternest! Unreal doesn’t begin to describe it. Sometimes I think even the goddamn fog is alive here.”

“I’m not superstitious but I’m starting to have a change of heart as of late.”

“Anyhow, I gotta run. I’ll keep you posted if anything new comes to light.”

“Good luck finding him,” the warden said, hanging up the phone in his office. He stared out the window. He couldn’t wait to go home to his wife and put everything on hold for a few hours.

Detective Majors had just finished putting together a press release and had brought it to the chief. He’d been awake for fourteen hours and was exhausted. He wanted some peace and quiet to go over Barlowe’s and Blackwood’s files one more time to examine them side by side to see if he’d missed anything, a past connection or any common known associates.

He drove to his apartment with the files and poured himself a can of Guinness in a tall beer mug; he was officially off-duty. He thumbed through the files while sitting in his favorite brown leather armchair. The two files shared nothing in common. Nothing could be considered a red flag in either of the files as to a link between the two men. Blackwood was mysterious and although he served a sentence in a maximum security prison, Majors didn’t believe him to be a cold calculating killer.

Barlowe, on the other hand, was a different story. He was a psychopath without remorse and to whom human life had no value. He was a monster who ate children similar to the ones in the Grimm fairy tales Majors used to read as a little boy. He dressed up as a clown—Majors had always hated clowns—to attract the little children and to gain their trust.

On the surface, these two men were like night and day. Their only link as far as Majors could tell was that they had shared a cell together. Prisoners bond in jail. Some even become good friends and stay in touch outside of prison if and when they are released. Blackwood had helped Barlowe survive an electrocution via a black magic spell. But he’d left something out and Barlowe wasn’t immortal—yet.

It took until the third ring on Majors's cell phone for him to realize that it was ringing. He was too absorbed in the files to notice. The screen on his phone announced that it was his ex-wife, Vanessa.

"Hey you," he said with a faint smile. "Happy Halloween!"

"Right back at you!" she sounded jovial. "You seem to be in a good mood."

"Meh. Why wouldn't I be?" he said, doing his best not to sound sarcastic.

"I heard about Barlowe on the news. You must be furious. How did that happen? He escaped from the electric chair and out of prison entirely? It's right out of a horror movie!"

"No one knows for sure yet. If that wasn't enough, a child's disappeared not too far from the house where he fled to right after escaping."

"Oh no! Any clues?"

"Very little. The mother's going nuts, of course, and she also thinks Michael Myers is out to get her."

"Myers? You mean the Haddonfield killer from the late seventies?"

"The one and only."

"Wow! Didn't that guy perish in a fire after being shot in the head multiple times?"

"Yeah. But these days it appears people can sit in a chair, take 2,500 volts of electricity, get up and escape a prison so anything's possible I guess."

"So what're you gonna do?"

"Drink beer and try not to let it drive me crazy. It's the wait that's unbearable. We've got the entire force out looking for him."

"Barlowe or Myers?"

“Barlowe. Myers isn’t on my radar yet; we’ll see what happens. The night is still young. Aren’t you glad you don’t have to be part of these cases anymore? The good times never stop in Detective Majors’s life.”

“You were a good husband, Clyde. I just got tired of spending all those long nights alone, always wondering when and if you were going to come back to me in one piece.”

There was a pause for a moment; not an uncomfortable silence, just a few seconds of quiet time between the two. It was what it was. They were divorced now.

“Anyhow, how are things with you?”

“I’m doing well. Just got a promotion at the office; I’m now in charge of foreign customers too.”

“Congratulations!”

“Thanks. What it really means is that I get paid a little more than I used to and now I do the job of two people. Not much of an improvement but it’ll look good on my resume. That’s getting ahead in corporate America, as they say,” she chuckled. “Listen, the reason why I’m calling is that I think I might have found someone who’d be interested in the house. I left the deed of the house on the kitchen counter when I went there last. You think you’d have time to pass by and grab it and fax it to me? I won’t be going back there until next weekend and it’s a two-hour drive.” Vanessa had moved out of state.

“Sure thing. I’ll drive by after dinner and I’ll fax it to you first thing tomorrow at the precinct. Do you have a fax at your place?”

“No, not yet. Just send it to the office as usual.”

“Okay. I’ll call you before sending it.”

“Thanks, I really appreciate it.”

“Hey, if it helps us sell the house, I’m all for it!”

“It was nice talking to you, Clyde. Good luck on catching Barlowe; kick his ass when you get him.”

“Will do. Have a good evening, Vanessa.”

“Same to you.”

\* \* \* \*

“Now, now; no crying. If you keep crying, I won’t give you that surprise I promised you. It won’t be long now. Be patient. In the meantime, you’ve got plenty of candy to tide you over.”

“I don’t want any more candy,” Dylan said between sobs.

“You’re being a spoiled little brat, aren’t you?” Barlowe said getting angry under the grinning mask. His left hand was now shaking uncontrollably. He went up the stairs without saying anything more to the sobbing child. He slammed the door to the basement shut behind him.

“Goddamn kids; if they didn’t taste so good, I wouldn’t put up with them. I’ve become hooked on their fountain of youth essence. And goddamn Blackwood and his goddamn hexes. It only half worked. I ought to slip back into jail and slit his goddamn throat,” Barlowe cursed as he shut the lights in the empty house before exiting. He made sure to lock the door behind him. A searing pain shot through his chest and knocked the wind out of him.

He caught his breath and walked down the stairs to his parked car. On the lawn of the house, there was a sign that read: FOR SALE BY OWNER. On the mailbox were inscribed the names “Vanessa & Clyde Majors” in bright blue letters.

Barlowe had to steady his hand to unlock the car door. Before taking place behind the wheel, he smelled the crisp autumn air and smiled. Dark black clouds hovered over Bitternest. It was going to be a Halloween to remember.

## THIRTEEN

**“Tommy, we’re home!” Lindsey said** almost singing it as she came through the front door with Cassiopeia.

All was quiet in the house. She called him out again. No reply.

“Did Uncle Tommy leave, Mommy?”

“No, sweetie. Maybe he’s in the basement and he can’t hear us.” It made Lindsey nervous. “Go start putting the groceries away and I’ll go look for him.”

“What about the surprise pumpkin pie we got for him?”

“We’ll have it for dessert.” They brought the grocery bags to the kitchen. Lindsey crouched on her knees and held her daughter’s head in her hands. “I’m gonna go downstairs but I want you to stay right here in the kitchen, all right?”

Cassiopeia nodded. Lindsey kissed her on the forehead and headed for the basement. Her little girl started rummaging through the various grocery bags and opened the fridge door.

As she went down the stairs and saw the basement light on, Lindsey began to feel a little better. “Tommy? Are you down here?”

Silence.

She reached the last step and came to a halt. She surveyed the room. Nothing seemed out of place; no sign of a struggle. She shook her head. “I’m really losing it. Maybe he went to the 7-Eleven to get some beer or something,” she said aloud to comfort herself.

She walked to the red door and turned the knob. The door squeaked as it opened. She immediately turned on the lights in the workshop. Basements always made her feel uneasy. There was something about a basement’s eerie silence, its musky smell, and faded darkness even when lit that unnerved her. She never outgrew the childhood fear that most kids have of cellars.

The first thing she noticed when she looked straight ahead was the broken window staring right at her. She gasped. She didn’t know whether she should take another step forward or run back upstairs. She pursed her lips. “I’m not gonna be that stupid chick in horror movies that goes to investigate a strange noise instead of running out the door.” She spun around and headed the other way, climbing the stairs two by two. She remembered that there was a police car parked outside. She’d go ask for help.

“Cassie, I need you to come with me and stay by my side, okay? It’s really important.”

Her daughter was still putting the provisions away in the fridge and cupboards. She smiled as she held an oversized box of sugary cereal in her hands. Lindsey patted her on the head and she grabbed her little hand. They went out the front door and down the stairs towards the cop car.

“Officer, someone’s broken into my house; the window in the workshop—”

Lindsey stopped dead in her tracks as her eyes set on the police officer slumped over the wheel.

“Cassie, wait here, all right?” She left her on the sidewalk. The child nodded in agreement.

Lindsey made her way to the car on tippy toes to confirm her fears. His eyes were still open and his throat had been slit. His partner was nowhere to be found. They were supposed to take turns making rounds around the house.

She frowned, had he already been dead when she came back with Cassiopeia? She hadn’t paid attention. She searched her pockets for her cell phone and remembered it was in her purse. She picked up her daughter and ran back inside.

She grabbed her purse on the floor by the front door where she had left it when she got in. She dialed nine-one-one on her cell and sat Cassiopeia on the couch.

“What’s wrong, Mommy?” Her daughter looked at her, eyes big as plums.

“Give me your hand.” She held her daughter’s hand tightly.

“Nine-one-one, what’s your emergency?”

“Yes, I’m on Magistral Lane; my name’s Lindsey Wallace. A cop car was assigned to my house and one of the officers is dead at the wheel; his throat’s been slit.” She felt bad for having to say that in front of her daughter but she was panicking and didn’t want to let her out of her sight.

“I know where that is. Where’s the second officer, madam?”

“I can’t find him.”

“We’ll send all available units. Lock your doors and stay inside the house.”

“No; my basement window’s been broken and my friend is missing as well. I’m afraid there might be someone inside the house.”

“I see. Then go to a neighbor’s house until a squad car arrives.”

“Okay. How long will it take?”

“It won’t be long.”

“Thanks.” She hung up.

Lindsey crouched to Cassiopeia’s eye level and put her hands on her shoulders. “Cassie, sweetie, listen to me very carefully. There might be an intruder in the house. I’m just going to leave a note for Uncle Tommy in case he comes back while we’re gone since he doesn’t have a cell phone and there’s no way I can reach him. We’ll go wait for the police at the Gordons’s across the street, okay?”

Her daughter nodded. She seemed to understand. “Can I go to the bathroom first, Mommy?”

“Number one or number two?”

“Number two. I don’t want to go in a stranger’s place.”

Lindsey pursed her lips. “Okay, but make it quick, all right? I’ll go with you.” Lindsey got on her feet and clutched her daughter’s little hand and they ran up the stairs to the bathroom.

\* \* \* \*

Barlowe dragged the cop’s body down the staircase behind the Lovecrafts’s house. The poor officer was his third victim at this house. He was part of the squad car parked in front of the house. Barlowe had parked his car one street below Magistral Lane and had cut across the fence from the Lovecrafts’s rear neighbor. He’d stayed in the backyard, patiently waiting,

sitting on the stairs leading to the basement until one of the two cops came to the back to make their rounds.

Then the sledgehammer had taken care of the rest. There was only one officer left and it wouldn't be too long before he would come out back to see what was taking his partner so long with his rounds. Barlowe would dispatch him with the same finesse he had used on the other.

About twenty minutes after he'd hid the body down the stairs, as sure as night follows day, his partner showed up.

"Dean? Where the hell are you? Did you go into the house?"

Barlowe came up from behind him and tapped him on the shoulder. The officer was startled and spun around; his right hand reached for his revolver.

But there was no time. Barlowe struck him with a left hook in the jaw and finished him off with a solid sledgehammer blow in the stomach. The cop crumbled to his knees like Houdini after the unexpected punch in the abdomen that cost him his life on this very day in 1926.

He gasped for air for a few seconds and expired shortly after. Barlowe grabbed him by the feet and dragged him down the stairs where his partner lay. The Bitternest Police Department's crime scene unit had removed the previous two policemen's bodies; they'd have fresh meat awaiting them again.

Barlowe shut the door to the basement and left the sledgehammer behind so he wouldn't attract too much attention to himself. He'd rely on his large hands for his next victim and whatever tool he'd find along the way. He went around the backyard to the front of the house. He spied the other police car down the street in front of the Wallaces's house.

"Looks like it's open season on cops today," he chuckled to himself. He stayed on the Lovecrafts's side of the street and whistled while he strolled towards the Wallaces's home. As he got closer, he noticed there was only one cop in the car behind the wheel. The closer he got, the more it seemed as though the cop was asleep at the wheel. With balls the size of pumpkins, Barlowe got the nerve to walk up to the car and see for himself.

He pulled the cop's head by the hair and sat him upright behind the wheel. That's when he realized the cop's throat had been slit. For the first time since his escape, Barlowe held a puzzled stare under his mask.

"I don't remember killing this one. Who'd have the guts to murder a cop right under the nose of two other cops?" He was perplexed. He glanced at the house; it was quiet. "And where did your partner go?" he asked the dead cop before letting go of his head.

Barlowe climbed up the front porch's steps and stood at the Wallaces's door. "No matter; I'll be out of here in two shakes of a lamb's tail. And now to get myself the other little kiddy."

He rang the doorbell.

## **FOURTEEN**

**Majors burned rubber on his way** to the house. Not that he was in a hurry but he just wanted to get the house deed as soon as possible and be done with it. He'd only had one beer but he was planning on having a few more and wouldn't be able to drive later.

He pulled up in the driveway of the unlit bungalow. He climbed the stairs one by one while fishing for the house keys in his pocket. He unlocked the door and walked in. He flipped on the porch light and the living room light. The empty house came alive. There were a lot of happy memories in this house. He felt a twinge of sadness as he remembered them. Those days might be long gone but the memories would always remain.

He headed for the kitchen where Vanessa said the deed would be. He spotted it immediately as he stepped into the kitchen; it was resting on the island. His eyes traveled to the folder next to it. It was a manila folder with the word "SID" scribbled on it with a black marker. Majors's jaw hung open. He picked it up at once.

His jaw dropped open half an inch more as he flipped through the file folder. There were pictures of him, his ex-wife, alone and together, and all kinds of notes on him. His

schedule at the station, his pay rate, his apartment address, his ex-wife's, and the blueprint to this very house, among many other personal details.

"Son of a bitch!" Majors felt his blood boil. "He was in my house." He looked around and listened for any noise in the house. He reached for his revolver but remembered he'd left it and its holster back at the apartment. Rookie mistake but he wasn't on duty anymore and had only planned on stopping at his house. What could've gone wrong?

In Bitternest, plenty can go wrong in a matter of seconds. He should've known better. He cursed at himself.

He tiptoed to the hallway where his old office and the master bedroom were. He glanced inside the bathroom and stepped inside. He pushed the shower curtain open with one quick shove. He let out a long breath; he hadn't breathed out since the kitchen.

He moved on to the office and flipped on the light. He slowly turned the knob of the closet door and jerked the door open. On to the master bedroom, then the guest bedroom. Both rooms and closets were empty. He even looked under the beds. That left the basement, the garage, and the shed out in the backyard.

While he retraced his steps and headed towards the basement, he was trying to figure out how Barlowe had gained such a detailed file on him and more importantly, what he was planning to do with it. He already had a lot on his mind; this was the last thing he needed.

He thought of calling for backup but wanted to make sure the house was cleared first. He opened the door leading to the basement and turned on the light switch. He proceeded down the staircase. He hadn't yet reached the basement floor when he caught movement from the corner of his eye. His first reflex was to duck. He crouched down and finished going down the stairs that way.

When he got to the last step, the gravity of the situation hit him like a cold shower. He recognized little Dylan Wallace from the picture his mother had given him; he sat strapped to a chair, a puddle of urine glistening at his feet.

Majors rushed to untie him. The little boy's first reaction was to hug the detective. Warm tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Are you hurt?" Majors asked, examining the child's frail little body. Dylan shook his head. "Is he still here?"

Dylan shrugged. "I hear him walk around upstairs when he's here."

"When did you last hear him?"

"Not long ago; maybe twenty minutes, half an hour." He sniffled.

Majors ruffled Dylan's hair. "I'm gonna get you back to your mom, I promise." He dialed the station on his cell. He told them about finding the boy and the file on him, and to send a crime scene unit on the double as well as a squad car to search the premises and keep an eye on the house for the rest of the evening.

"Can you believe that son of a bitch was trying to set me up with the child's disappearance? He was staying both at the Lovecraft home and at my house. And someone will have to call the mother to tell her that her son is safe and sound," Majors added.

"We have two cars on their way there right now; she made a nine-one-one call not too long ago," the detective on the other end of the line said.

"What? Why? Did something happen?"

"I didn't hear the call, but I got word of it. She thinks that someone broke into her house."

"What about the patrol car out front?"

"I dunno; like I said, I didn't hear the call."

“Why wasn’t I told about this?” Majors picked up little Dylan with his right arm and headed for the stairs.

“You were off-duty.”

“Are you fucking kidding me? This is a case I’ve been on for a decade and nobody bothers to give me a call when something happens?”

“Don’t get mad at me, Clyde; I’m not the one in charge of that.”

“I’m on my way there with the kid. I’ll leave the front door unlocked here; tell the CS unit to let themselves in. Have a squad car meet me at the Wallaces’s house to retrieve the kid. And I’m gonna need a gun, too.”

“What happened to yours?”

“I left it back at the apartment. I gotta go.” And he hung up. Before he left, Majors snatched up both the house deed and the file folder containing the precious information. He put Dylan down once they were outside.

“I need you to listen very carefully, Dylan. I’m going to bring you back home but you won’t be able to go see your mom right away, all right? I’ll go in first and you’ll wait with an officer in their car until I call out to you.”

The boy nodded. “Is the bad man going to come back?”

Majors smiled faintly. “No; I’m gonna make sure he never comes back.” Majors crouched down and looked Dylan in the eye. “It’s over, son. You’re safe now.”

They hurried to the car and Majors made sure the boy had fastened his seatbelt before taking off. The drive to the Wallaces’s was a quiet one without any exchanges between the detective and the boy. The poor little fellow had endured quite an ordeal.

Dusk had begun to set in and the customary Bitternest fog was becoming thicker a lot faster than usual; Majors realized that the night had just begun: Halloween night. Kids were

slowly taking the streets dressed up like ghouls, super-heroes, movie characters, and a myriad of flashy costumes. The sidewalks were covered with leaves that made crunching sounds when stepped on. Every third house's lawn was decorated with Jack O' Lanterns, tombstones, scarecrows, and other similar Halloween-oriented things. The sky threatened to rain but the temperature was ideal for a Halloween night. Barlowe would be able to hide in plain sight wearing that God-awful clown mask of his. He couldn't wait for it to be over.

Once they arrived at Magistral Lane, Majors drove up to the parked squad car and saw the officer slumped over the wheel. He looked across the street at the Gordons's house.

"Do you know the neighbors across?"

Dylan nodded.

"You wanna run over to their doorstep and ring their doorbell to see if they could keep an eye on you until the other police cars arrive?"

"Okay." He unbuckled his seat belt and opened the door and started for the Gordons's house. Majors watched him go and ring the doorbell.

No answer. The little boy glanced over to him as if to say "What do I do now?" Majors motioned for him to come back in the car.

"I'll tell you what; I'm gonna park the car in your neighbors's driveway and you'll wait for me in the backseat. Some police officers should arrive any minute now."

Dylan opened the rear door and climbed aboard the car. Majors drove it across the street and put it in park. He looked at the kid via the rearview mirror and turned around to face him. "Whatever you hear, don't open the door to anyone but the cops, you got that? Make sure the windows are all the way up and the doors locked."

Dylan nodded. "Yes, sir." He locked the door on both sides. Majors exited the car and locked his door before slamming it shut. He couldn't even see the Wallaces's house due to

the fog. It looked and felt like a surreal dream. The fog would only make it easier for Barlowe to hide and go after the kids. He had to find him ASAP.

Majors walked up to the dead officer's car. He wondered where his partner was; he'd probably suffered the same fate somewhere else. It occurred to him that there was another police car parked in front of the Lovecrafts but figured they were dead as well; otherwise they would've been dispatched to the Wallaces's house. He pulled out his cell from his pocket as he opened the police car's door.

"Yeah, it's me again. I'm at the Wallaces's. All hell's broken loose. Send backup; we have multiple officers down." Majors leaned over the dead officer and reached for his holster. He unholstered his revolver and slipped it between his belt and his pants.

"What the hell happened?" the detective on the other end of the line asked.

"Barlowe. That's what happened." Majors shut the door of the police car. "I gotta go."

He put his cell phone back in his pocket and started towards the Wallaces's front door.

## FIFTEEN

**In a frantic whisper, Lindsey urged** Cassiopeia to come back. She had heard the doorbell ring and had rushed down the stairs.

“Cassie! No!” But it was too late. She was almost at the door. Her mother ran down after her. The child unlocked the door and opened it. Lindsey froze on the second to last step.

It was dark and foggy outside but there was no one at the door. It was so quiet it was eerie. The fog made it hard to see farther than five feet ahead. Cassiopeia took a step forward.

“Cassie! Stay where you are.” Lindsey hurried to her daughter.

“Boo!” A masked figure materialized through the fog wearing a grinning clown mask.

Sid Barlowe. Cassiopeia shrieked. Before Lindsey had time to get to her, Barlowe had already taken hold of her. She screamed and kicked him in the left shin and he let go of her, yelling. She ran past him across the lawn and collided right into Detective Majors.

“Help us!” she said as he caught her just before she fell.

“What’s happening?” he said recognizing her as the daughter of the Wallaces.

“There’s a scary clown on our doorstep.”

“Barlowe!” Majors crouched to the little girl’s eye level and pointed across the street.

“It’s too foggy to see, but I’m parked right across the street and your brother’s waiting in the backseat. Run to him and lock the doors. Help is on the way. Now go!”

She nodded and vanished into the thick fog.

Majors ran up to the front door. Lindsey stood in the doorway; she looked frightened out of her mind.

“Thank God you’re here! Barlowe; he was just here.”

“I know; I just ran into your daughter; I sent her across the street. Your son is safe, by the way. I found him. He’s waiting in my car in your neighbor’s driveway across the street.”

Lindsey became teary-eyed. “Dylan! He’s alive! Thank you so much for finding him. Where was he?”

“Long story. Quick, we better get inside. Backup is on the way.” Just as Majors finished his sentence, a whooshing sound resounded in the foggy night.

“Watch out!” Lindsey yelled.

Majors spun around, only to be met by a cold hard shovel. It smacked him on the left side of the face and he fell to the ground like a sack of potatoes.

Lindsey panicked and ran back into the house. She shut the door and locked all three locks. She scurried to the kitchen to get to the door leading to the backyard but something made her trip and fall as she got to the kitchen doorway. She looked up over her shoulder as she tried to get back on her feet and caught a glimpse of another masked figure.

Michael Myers. He towered over her like a vulture circling its prey. He held a large, sharp, and shiny knife in his right hand.

She froze on the floor, incapable of flexing her muscles. Her mouth was dry and she tried to swallow, hoping she'd be able to scream. But who would hear? The other bogeyman was outside probably killing the only chance of surviving she had. And Tommy; where was Tommy?

\* \* \* \*

Majors shook his head; he was dazed from the unexpected blow.

"Look at yourself, Detective; you look like a wounded horse that tripped in a hurdle race. You ought to be put down."

"Fuck you. Is that what it comes down to, Barlowe? You catching me off-guard and putting me out of my misery? Is that how you did it with all those kids you murdered?"

Barlowe's smile vanished. "Watch your mouth, Detective. I could snap that pretty head off of your neck in less time than it would take you to tell me to fuck off."

"Fine. Then go ahead and do it." Majors slowly moved his right hand under his jacket to reach for the revolver tucked in his belt.

"Arrgh!" Barlowe screamed all of a sudden, a trembling hand on his chest. "Goddamn Blackwood," he muttered.

"I see you haven't found the scroll yet."

"What? What scroll?" Barlowe appeared to be gasping for air, his once firm grip on the shovel loosening.

"The scroll that contains the other half of the spell to keep you alive. So you didn't know, did you? Looks like Blackwood played you." Majors gripped the revolver and unleashed it from his belt and aimed it straight at Barlowe's head.

“You’re lying!”

“Am I? Your right hand’s been shaking like a leaf the past couple minutes and your heart seems to be giving you a hard time. And how’s your breathing? Face it, Barlowe; your minutes are numbered. You’ll die one way or another tonight.”

“That son of a bitch! I knew I shouldn’t have trusted him. That’s why I do everything alone; can’t trust anybody these days.” Furious, at lightning speed, Barlowe raised the shovel to strike Majors.

“No!” Majors shot at him but the bullet grazed his left shoulder. Barlowe brought the shovel down on the detective who had just enough time to put his right arm over his face to shield himself from the imminent blow.

The shovel struck his forearm and Majors yelled in agony. The sound of sirens approaching echoed in the foggy night. Backup was here at last.

“You’re finished, Barlowe. Kill me if you want, but you won’t be able to kill them all. There are a lot of them coming.”

Barlowe paused seemingly to think of his next move. At least three distinct sirens could be heard now. He dropped the shovel and leapt over Majors, heading towards the back of the house. Majors got up, holding his wounded arm with his left hand. A squad car’s tires screeched as it came to a stop nearby, followed by another one. Doors slammed shut and two pairs of men in blue came running out of the fog.

“It’s Barlowe. He’s headed for the backyard. I’m gonna go after him.”

“Are you injured?” the officer asked.

“Yeah, but I’ll be all right. I’ll have to hold the revolver with my left hand though. I think my right arm might be broken.”

“We’ll handle it from here on, Detective.”

“No; Barlowe’s mine. The mother’s inside the house. Her two kids are just across the street in the backseat of my car.”

A third car arrived. “Send the last unit over to the Lovecrafts’s house. Make sure the house here is secured.”

“Fine, but I’m coming with you,” the officer said.

“Negative. You’re needed here. There’s an officer missing from the patrol car that was parked in front of the house. He needs to be found.” Majors turned his back on them and started after Barlowe.

“Are you sure you’ll be okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just go get the kids and the mother.” And he disappeared into the mist.

\* \* \* \*

Lindsey searched her pockets for her trusty Swiss Army knife; she flicked it open and rammed it as hard as she could in Myers’s right foot. He grunted as the blade pierced his thick shoe. Lindsey scrambled to her knees and fled through the kitchen while Myers was distracted. She felt the swoosh of the bogeyman’s blade whistle an inch past her right thigh as she got away.

“Lindsey one, Michael zero,” she whispered to herself as she burst out from the kitchen’s exit leading to the backyard. She’d played this scenario in her head many times before. When she had first moved into this house years ago, she had planned how to escape the bogeyman if the day ever came that he found her and came after her. She never told anyone about it, not even her husband. She needed to have an escape route to feel safe. In

her nightmares, she was never sure where she had come from when she was fleeing and running for her life. Now all she had to do was keep her cool and follow her getaway plan. Easier said than done.

She ran for the fence but six steps later, she tripped and fell again. She realized she'd just stumbled over the missing officer from the patrol car assigned to her house. His throat was also slit. She got to her feet as if nothing had happened and resumed her course.

She climbed over the backyard fence and landed in the rear neighbor's yard. She cut across the yard and found herself on their front lawn. This was the last street before the forest clearing. Beyond it was Canterbury Hill, a borough of Bitternest. And right at the borough's limits stood Mr. Fulci's land; a field the size of a Baseball stadium.

She glanced behind her. The fog was so thick that she couldn't tell whether Myers was behind her or not. She hated going into the forest at night, especially when it was so hazy but it was the only way. She hoped her two kids were safe in the detective's car.

The detective. She'd almost forgotten about him. Barlowe might've killed him by now. Reinforcements were on the way, if not already there. She suddenly felt guilty for running away. But that was just it; she wasn't really running away. She was leading Myers away from her home and her kids. And hopefully she'd find the strength and courage to dispatch him once and for all. She wanted to end her crimson nightmares tonight, no matter what. She was through living in fear every Halloween.

Myers limped a bit thanks to the knife wound inflicted by Lindsey. He plucked the Swiss Army knife out of his foot and tossed it aside. He stepped outside and surveyed the area. His eyes rested on the fence. Lightning lit the foggy evening and thunder followed it

like a shadow. Myers paused for a moment as if debating whether to follow his instinct and climb over the fence. Movement from the corner of his left eye made him turn around.

Another man who wore a mask had entered the backyard; he clutched his chest and left arm. At the sight of Myers, he stopped dead in his tracks.

“What the fuck?” Barlowe exclaimed.

Myers stood facing him, clenching the knife in his right hand. Barlowe noticed it.

“Who the hell are you supposed to be?”

Myers stood there in silence. Barlowe made two steps forward. He glanced at the body lying in the middle of the yard. “So I have you to thank for that, huh?” he said, pointing at the corpse.

It was Myers’s turn to step forward. They stood less than five feet from one another.

“Come on, let’s work together. I don’t know how you get your freak on, but there’s a shitload of cops coming our way. What say we team up until the smoke clears?”

Lightning and thunder echoed again. Droplets of rain started to fall.

Barlowe extended his hand for Myers to shake. “Just put your big paw in there, buddy. Come on. Let’s shake on it. The detective’s gonna show up any minute now.”

Myers stared at the outstretched hand. Barlowe grew impatient. “What are you; deaf or stupid or both? What is it with people wearing overalls these days; does it stop the oxygen from getting to the brain?”

As if Myers resented the remark, he swung his knife at Barlowe. The blade nibbled at his stomach. Barlowe yelped in pain.

“What the fuck’s the matter with you?” Barlowe felt with his fingertips where the blade had struck. “That really stung, you son of a bitch.”

“Barlowe!” It was Majors.

Myers focused his attention on the fence and spun around. He walked away and vanished into the fog and out of Barlowe's sight.

The pain in Barlowe's chest was becoming unbearable. "You found me, Detective. The question is, what are you gonna do now? Are you gonna shoot me with that big gun of yours or take me in?" Barlowe was waiting for Majors to resurface out of the mist.

A punch on the nose from Majors greeted him. He held his face with his hands. "I'm not taking you anywhere, Barlowe. It ends right here, right now."

Majors punched him in the face again. The rain became heavier; it was no longer a light shower.

"Quit hitting me, you dumb fuck!"

"I'm gonna hit you until you fall to your knees and beg me to stop."

Barlowe had more and more difficulty breathing. "I think you broke my nose, you asshole."

"Good. I'm gonna break every bone in your body."

"I need to go to a hospital; I think I'm about to have a heart attack. You're a cop, you're supposed to protect and serve. So serve me and call nine-one-one."

"What part of 'it ends tonight' don't you get? No one's coming to help you. You're not even supposed to be alive, Barlowe; it's not natural. Your time has come."

"Oh yeah? Well, fuck you! I ain't gonna let a washed up cop take me down. No, sir!" Without warning, Barlowe kicked Majors in the testicles. The detective instantly bowed down, cupping his balls. Barlowe struck him with the back of his right hand in the face and headed for the fence.

Majors took a deep breath and got back up on his feet. He gripped his revolver with his left hand—his right arm was out of commission—and started towards the fence. As soon as he saw movement through the mist, he fired two shots.

As if struck by a lightning bolt, Barlowe clenched his fists on the top of the fence; he'd almost made it over it. He slowly let go and fell backwards, landing on his back.

Majors came to him and crouched down to get a closer look at him. His eyes were wide open through the holes in the mask, his arms alongside his body, his legs spread wide.

"Where did I get you?" Majors felt for bullet holes. He didn't find any.

Barlowe coughed up blood. Majors removed Barlowe's mask. "You didn't get me, you son of a bitch. Your aim's not worth a shit."

"It's all your fault; I'm right-handed." Majors could see that Barlowe was dying; his heart was failing him at last.

His breathing sounded like he was Darth Vader trying to catch his breath. He motioned for the detective to come nearer. Majors leaned closer, his ear to Barlowe's mouth. "I'll see you in hell, Detective," he whispered. He breathed out a final breath and then his head turned sideways, his eyes still open.

Majors let out a sigh of relief. Two officers spouted out of the fog and rain. Majors looked up at them. "It's over."

"Not yet; we can't find Mrs. Wallace anywhere."

Majors glanced at the fence and beyond it. Where could she have gone?

## SIXTEEN

The cold October rain flogged Lindsey as she crossed the road to the clearing. The wind picked up and worked against her. The fog seemed to dissipate a bit. Once on the other side of the road, she stopped to see if Myers was chasing her. In her dreams, he never ran after her; he always walked as if he had the conviction that he would catch up to her regardless of what she did to get away. Part of her was hoping he was after her so she could finally put an end to the control he'd had over her life these last thirty-three years. But she wasn't there yet. First she needed to lead him right where she wanted.

She squinted as she perceived something in motion through the fading mist.

It was him.

Like a good hound dog, he'd sniffed his prey and had gone after her as she had anticipated. He'd brought his long shiny knife along for the ride. He saw her and stopped his stride, eying her, remaining quiet as usual. She found it made him even more unsettling, the fact that he never said a word.

"What's the matter, Michael? Cat got your tongue? What took you so long?"

He just stood there staring.

"You didn't come all the way to Bitternest just to stare at me, did you? Well, come and get me, Michael. I'm older now; I'm not a kid anymore, Michael. I'm through running scared. If you want me, you better be ready for a fight." She wasn't sure if taunting him was a good idea but she'd gone this far, she might as well get it off her chest. She was taken aback by how confident she had sounded.

She ran through the clearing in the pouring rain and entered the forest. Rumors would have it that it was haunted, that the trees came alive at night and that many had disappeared in it over the years. She always believed it was folklore like many of the strange things that supposedly went on in Bitternest. But then again, if two men can come back from the dead on the same weekend, maybe the forest *was* haunted after all. She shook the notion from her mind. She had enough to worry about for the time being without thinking of ghosts and goblins.

The forest would take her about ten minutes to get through from one end to the other with the wind and darkness against her. She knew the way well; she'd gone through it numerous times with John, her husband, over the years. Beyond the forest, at this time of year, Mr. Fulci's field was full of pumpkins. She intended to lure Myers there. She might have been bait but she sure as hell wasn't the fish. No, not this time. In her dreams she always got caught. Now, in real life, she'd do the catching. This time, she'd be the fisherman—or fisherwoman.

Within the forest, it was almost pitch black and the wet leaves on the ground assisted to conceal her swift footfalls. The trees's branches scratched her at least a dozen times in the face. It made her wish she wore a mask like Myers and Barlowe. She reached a point where she couldn't run anymore; the forest was too dense. She was thankful for her inner GPS; she

knew that if she kept walking straight ahead, she'd reached the forest's end soon. At least her foe wasn't running but he couldn't have been very far behind.

When the trees grew farther and farther apart from one another, she knew that the end was near. She paused for a moment to listen for her pursuer's footfalls. They were distant but they sounded hasty. He'd be on her like white on rice in less than a minute if she didn't keep going.

She was able to pick up the pace and even run a bit. By the time she reached the edge of the forest, the rain had lost its vigor and the fog hovered in patches over the pumpkin patch. The bright moon looked almost full up in the sky. Now that the mist had evaporated, the moon lit the path to the field. It was all so unreal; she was being chased by the bogeyman in a field of pumpkins by the moonlight. Life, it seemed, was imitating art.

She turned around to see where her hunter was. He broke out from the trees and bushes to resurface less than twelve feet from her. She could hear his shallow breathing under his mask. He sounded out of breath; so he was human after all.

"You're not gonna get me so easily tonight, Michael. You're gonna have to work for your meal." She whirled around and ran through the path, making sure not to stray like Dorothy on the yellow brick road.

Pumpkins of all sizes flanked the muddy path. In the distance, she could see the old windmill. Mr. Fulci's property was the only remnant of an old farming community. Everything else around had gone the way of modern civilization.

The path soon disappeared and she found herself walking in the open field, tangled roots covering the ground amidst the mounds of earth and pumpkins. She was so close she could almost taste it.

That's when her foot got caught in a tangled root. She was stuck. Myers came up right behind her; he didn't waste any time. He slashed at her with the knife, tipping her jeans along her right thigh. The wound was only superficial but it tingled like a spray of scalding water. She kicked at him with her other foot as she tried to cut loose of the root. He kept on stabbing at her, but she was able to repel his attacks with her legs. She managed to give him a solid kick right in the throat. He let go of his knife momentarily and grabbed his throat.

She had to get rid of her shoe in order to break free from the root's clutches. She hobbled on her left foot. She was a wounded animal now—one missing a shoe. It was going to make things a lot easier for Myers to catch up to her. Within seconds, she lost all her cockiness and the small amount of self-confidence she'd built up since she'd left the house. Myers picked up his knife and resumed the chase.

A few more steps and she'd reach the windmill. Her whole body was shaking now; this was it—the grand finale. She'd replayed this crazy plan of hers in her head time and time again. It required a lot of luck and an even larger amount of audacity. So far so good, she thought. She always wondered if she'd be able to go through with it. She was going to find out in the next few minutes.

A sharp pain fetched her out of her fantasizing; Myers had caught up with her and held her by the hair. She tried pulling away but he pulled in the opposite direction. She screamed so loudly her ears hurt. She thought for sure he was going to pull a big chunk of hair off her head.

With one hard tug, Myers yanked her off her feet and to the ground. He began to drag her like a caveman hauling his mate back to the cave. He was heading back to the forest. Lindsey kept reaching for his hand with both arms, but it was all in vain.

Then he stopped and let go of her. As she was finally able to take a breather, he lifted her off the ground again by the hair.

“Let go of my hair, you creep!” She began thrashing her legs and she slipped from his grip. She found herself landing face first in the mud on her hands and knees. A pumpkin the size of a soccer ball stood less than a foot from her. It gave her an idea.

She leapt for it as Myers plunged his knife down, missing her by an inch. She picked up the pumpkin, got up, raised it at arm’s length, and spun around to face Myers. He stood staring at her, seemingly startled by how fast she had recovered from his attack.

Lindsey brought the pumpkin down and squashed it on Myers’s head. He didn’t even bother raising a hand to shield himself; the wallop sent him to his knees, dazed for a moment.

Lindsey glanced behind her at her initial destination and hesitated whether she should go through with her plan. Myers seemed stunned but it wouldn’t be long until he’d be back on his feet and ready for another round. She might not be so lucky the next time. No, she had to go all the way. She resumed her initial course and headed for the mill.

She made a run for it without looking back. Her feet carried her there so fast that she felt as if she had grown little wings. She removed the wooden plank that held the windmill door shut and pulled the door open. It made a loud creaking sound. She looked in the distance at Mr. Fulci’s house. It stood a good two hundred feet from the mill. There were some lights on. She contemplated running to the house and asking for help. On second thought, she didn’t want to put him in harm’s way; he was such a nice old man.

She penetrated the mill. At its center, seemingly hovering in mid-air stood the gears that propelled the turbine. Hay padded the ground floor. A dozen or so propane tanks surrounded the inside of the mill. Mr. Fulci was known for his weekly barbecues in the

summer and always made sure to have plenty of spare tanks. She turned the valve on three of them and headed for the ladder on the left of the mill leading to the second floor.

Once done climbing the ladder, she found herself on the circular footbridge that went around the gears and back to the entrance where a second ladder stood to the right of the mill. She wanted to lure Myers on the second floor. Then it would be a game of cat and mouse.

Myers reared his ugly head in the doorway as she reached the last rung of the ladder. He looked up and spotted her. She waited for him to start climbing the ladder before running to the other side. She hurried and already had a foot on the ladder ready to climb down when he was just coming up from the other end and stepping on the footbridge.

She basically let herself slide down the ladder and fell in the hay when she was three rungs from reaching the ground. She hurried to her feet and burst through the door. She placed the wooden plank back on its hooks to seal the entrance of the mill. She searched her pants pockets for her lighter. She was glad she had started smoking again; it might just be saving her life. She lit some brushwood that lay around the mill. It took a couple of tries before the spark started a fire but when it did, the flame was red hot.

Myers began beating on the door, trying to open it. The door caught on fire within seconds and would spread to the other side where the propane tanks were leaking gas.

“Welcome to my barbecue, Michael; you’re the guest of honor.” She stood back from the door. She heard him hammering at the door and kicking. It was frightening to hear. The sound of another human fighting for his life—if he was human at all—in silence, no less. Apart from the drumming of his fists and feet against the door, not a single cry from Michael Myers could be heard from inside the mill.

She heard a loud bang and felt an intense heat emanate from the mill. She hurried away from the mill and didn't stop running until she was at least a good two hundred feet from it. With that many propane tanks in such close quarters, it was bound to explode sooner than later. She sat in the wet earth in the field of pumpkins. She noticed the rain had stopped and the fog was almost all gone.

The windmill burned bright and strong. The wind blew the smoke away from the house and towards the forest. Thankfully, the forest was far enough from the fire that there was no chance of it catching fire.

She couldn't hear Myers pounding on the door anymore. Had he caught on fire? In the distance, she spied Mr. Fulci running towards the mill. She felt bad that she'd set his mill on fire but it was for a good cause, she decided.

Then suddenly it all went up with a big bang. The explosion propelled the mill's four blades to smashed pieces across the pumpkin patch. The fire doubled in size and raged like it meant to consume everything in its path.

Less than half an hour later, Mr. Fulci's field had become a circus. The firemen, paramedics, and cops were all over the place. No amount of water seemed to tame the fire. Detective Majors arrived at the scene in the middle of it all. He walked up to her.

"Wanna fill me in on what happened here?"

"I killed the bogeyman."

Majors nodded. "I killed one too. Well, sort of."

"Congratulations. This Halloween night gets a perfect ten for bogeyman-slaying," She said it without any emotion in her voice.

Majors laughed. Lindsey didn't. The evil was gone. She would finally have dreamless nights around Halloween. She'd be able to sleep the whole night without waking up. From now on, she'd go trick or treating with her kids without looking over her shoulder. She'd resume the life she put on hold thirty-three years ago when evil came to Haddonfield one Halloween night. It had come full circle in Bitternest.

Fatigue hit her like a ton of bricks and she thought she was going to pass out. She was going to ask the detective for a lift back home. Ashes from the mill floated in the air. It looked like snow. What a night this had been.

Something in the distance caught her eye. She decided to go investigate it.

"Where are you going?" Majors asked. She didn't answer.

Resting on a pumpkin was Michael Myers's mask. It must've been expelled from the mill when it exploded. She picked it up. It didn't have a scratch on it; it was unscathed and untouched by the fire. It even felt cold. She glanced over to the mill. No one could've survived a blaze like this.

"Come on, I'll take you home," Majors said from behind her. She nodded and clenched the mask in her hand.

## EPILOGUE

**“Michael Myers’s body is nowhere to be found,”** Majors told Lindsey. It was almost dawn and the fire had raged all night. The paramedics had tended to her light wounds and her kids were both asleep at a friend’s place.

“Somehow that doesn’t surprise me.” She sighed.

“The flames were so fierce that they may have consumed his body, you know.”

“Is that your expert opinion, Detective Majors?”

It was his turn to sigh. He wanted to have some good news to tell her. At least her kids were both safe and sound. She’d lost her best friend and was still waiting for her husband’s flight to arrive.

“Did you ever find out what happened to Mrs. Lovecraft?” she asked, changing the subject.

“As a matter of fact, she just got back half an hour ago. Turns out she was at their summer house in the sticks outside of town with no TV, no cell reception, and no Internet. Mr. and Mrs. Lovecraft had been going through a rough patch and she’d decided to go away

for a while. She found out about what was going on when a clerk she knew at the general store told her Sid Barlowe had escaped and killed the doctor in charge of his electrocution.”

“Quite the homecoming.”

“Yeah. Listen, you must be exhausted. Why don’t you try and get some sleep? We’ll leave two patrol cars out front to watch over the house and I’ll personally keep guard inside if you’ll let me.”

“And how long will you and your watch dogs look out for me? A couple of days? Weeks? Months? Years? I can’t keep living in fear. If Michael Myers survived this bonfire tonight, then nothing will stop him from getting to me. You and I both know that, Detective.”

He wanted to lie to her and tell her that everything was going to be all right. But he didn’t. She deserved better than that. She deserved the truth. And what was the truth exactly? He didn’t have a clue. This was outside of his area of expertise, as she had put it earlier. So he just stood there in silence.

Within an hour, the police had wrapped up all three crime scenes—the Wallaces’s house, the Lovecraft residence, and the Fulci Mill. The crowds dissipated now that the show was over. At first glance, Magistral Lane appeared almost as if nothing had happened.

Two bogeymen had come to Bitternest on Halloween this year. Lindsey prayed it was the last she would hear of both of them. She knew that she was asking a lot. This day would remain etched in her mind forever. Much like that fateful Halloween night thirty-three years ago when it had all begun.

**THE END**

## BIO



**Alan Draven** was born the same year KISS's first album was released. He lives in Montreal, Canada. His stories have been published online, in magazines and anthologies. He is also the founder of Pixie Dust Press. His first novel, *Bitternest*, was published in 2007. In 2008, he edited the gothic anthology *Sinister Landscapes* which went on to become a number one Amazon bestseller. In 2009, the novella collection *Creeping Shadows* was released featuring his novella "Vengeance is Mine". In 2010, his short story and novella collection titled *The Bitternest Chronicles* was published. His screenplay for his short story "Breaking and Entering" was adapted into a short film. *Fractured Time*, his second novel, was published in July 2011 by Black Bed Sheet Books. His books can be found everywhere online. He can be reached 24 hours a day on Facebook and via his blog at <http://bitternest.blogspot.com/>

