

# The Swing

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*Horror Thriller the swing*

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Chapter- 1

Hard rain slammed against the windshield of the Hoffman station wagon as it ploughed its' way past dense forests of evergreen trees. The road was narrow and extremely rough. The cars strong headlights piercing their way though the blackness of the now fading daylight.

"It's very quiet in here you two," Mrs. Hoffman said, looking round at her daughter in the passenger seat and Jake in the back.

"Mum are we nearly there yet!" Jake groaned, looking up from his game boy. "We've been on the road for ages since our last stop."

"Not long now Jakey boy," his mum stated, doing her best to lighten to mood. "Another hour or so." Not paying any attention to the pointless banter, Barbara gazed out at the fast melting twilight. There seemed to be nothing for miles in any direction just never ending trees. She really hated having to leave San Francisco. If only dad hadn't been made a partner, in running the business, we could still be living near the beautiful shoreline. Not stuck in the middle of nowhere. Studying her reflection, large brown eyes peering out from behind thick-rimmed glasses. She had shoulder length brown hair, and short pointed nose. A look of despair always on her small mouth; she had always looked young for a seventeen year old, though the glasses made her look a little older.

"I mean who calls a place Winterfield!" she finally broke out. "It sounds like a really cold place to me."

"Oh, ha, ha," Jake laughed sarcastically. "That's so funny sis,' maybe you should become a comedian. Everyone would laugh the instant they saw you." He laughed at his own weak attempt at humor.

"Shut up!" she snapped. "We should drop you in the woods, so you get raised by a pack of wolves . . ."

"All right that's enough you guys, now we agreed there would be no arguing on this trip."

Both of them moaned, it seemed the only time they did talk it was arguing with each other. Jake had always had a morbid streak; he loved anything scary, from movies, books and pets, like his tarantula Milly!

Barbara sighed, peering back out into the enfolding blackness, as the tops of the trees blackened to a blue glow. She lay back in her seat, trying her best to get comfortable. After a while the walls of wood seemed to descend away from the roadside, but not quite out of sight.

The wagons headlights picked out an old poorly lit road sign. Barbara had to squint through the falling rain to make out the dark lettering. 'ALL WELCOME TO WINTERFIELD.' Passing the sign the trees seemed to re-grow around them.

"Mum is our house the only one in this town!"

"No of course not Barb," Mrs. Hoffman chuckled. "Look, there," she gestured to a large group of pointed silhouettes a little way in front.

No lights burned bright from these houses, the headlights reflected off darkened windows. They must go to bed early in this town, how boring, Barbara thought to herself.

Jake shifted excitedly in the back seat. "I bet there's a few haunted houses around this place." His glare going over the ghost like town: "I hope our house is going to be one of them."

But his glee vanished and he sank down, seeing the trees surround them once again.

Just then a blur of street lamps spread out ahead of them. Along with a brightly lit building, a gas station and shop. It's the perfect place for a stop.

"Mum," Barbara asked, "can we pull over for a while, my legs are numb!"

"Yeah!" Jake put in. "I'm hungry!" he continued to wale.

"Fine, fine," Mrs. Hoffman relented. "But don't complain that it takes us longer to get there." She pulled hard to the left into the brightly lit building. But as the car pulled to a stop, it was clear that the shop was closed up for the night.

"Oh, I don't believe this, I thought these places were open twenty four hours a day."

"Who cares about the shop, I need some fresh air," Barbara said pointedly.

Despite the rain she forced her way from the car. The wind swirled around her, leaves and dust blowing in her eyes. As she walked away from the station wagon she headed for the shelter of the building, wrapping her arms around herself to keep warm.

Apart from the glimmer of the lights overhead the garage was cast in deep shadows. Just then she spotted movement on the ground, from a crack of light in the wall she moved closer. The crack of light was coming from under a large roller door. But there was not a sound. She was about to thump on the door when a firm hand grabbed her from behind.

"Ahhh," Barbara shrieked, turning to face a shadowy figure. At that moment there was a sound a labored movement as the door slowly opened. The yellowy light washed over the figure.

He was about average height, but well built. He looked about sixteen or seventeen. His nose cast a lot of gray on one side of his face. "Can I help you?" he asked in a smoothed over voice, not appearing to notice how much he had startled her.

"Yeah," she stated not thinking. "We just . . . Just pulled in for a rest, the garage seemed to be the only place alive here."

"Where's your car?"

"Well it's round the front, I think my little brother wanted something to eat."

"No problem." He smiled. "I'm Jeff, Jeff Newborn. My old man runs the place, I kind of help out." Leading the way, he took her round the front. "So you're just passing through?"

"Yeah kind of, we're heading deeper into town." Barbara realized she hadn't introduced herself. "I'm Barbara Hoffman."

"Well Miss Hoffman." He smiled warmly, pulling some keys out. "Why don't you get your brother' I'll go and open the shop."

"Thanks," she said sounding surprised. "You don't know how much that means to me, it'll keep him quiet for the rest of the trip." At the car she found her mum sitting on the bonnet smoking. "Mum the shops open!"

Just then a flash of white light grabbed they're attention and the shop filled with light.

Jake leapt out of the car and into the shop.

Barbara got some money from their mum, and followed her brother a little way behind, doing her best to act calm. For all she new, he might be the only good looking guy in town. She started to browse, hoping to get some new batteries for her CD player, but taking as many chances as she could to glance up at the cash register where he was standing.

"I've picked what I want." Jake came to stand beside her. "Now can we hurry up otherwise we'll never get there." He shot out dropping the load of sweets and chocolate bars onto his sisters' arms.

Shyly Barbara headed up to the shop front, doing her best to remain collected.

"Who'd have siblings, eh?" Jeff laughed running the various items through the till. "So where are you headed?"

She was too busy gorging at him to realize the question. "Huh . . . Oh, yeah." she stuttered. "We just moved away from San Francisco, something to do with my dad's job."

"Moving must be a real bummer?" He looked at her casually from his deep-set eyes. "I've been here all my life; the place does grow on you. Getting used to being bored."

"Well life can be a real bum." Barbara looked beyond a food shelf out into the now pouring rain. "I don't want to keep them waiting. Thanks for all your help."

"No problem," Jeff yelled as she went outside.

The howling wind nearly took her off her feet. Trees whipped frantically from side to side, baying up the great force around them.

"Where have you been?" Jake questioned, his face pressed against the glass. "I'm still hungry."

"Here." she threw the pile of food on the seat. "Now stuff that mouth of yours for all I care. Why not do the world a favor and choke."

"Thank you," he giggled. "You're great really sis'."

"Oh, don't go all mushy on my account," she retorted, ignoring her mother's disapproving look.

Not long after they were back on the road, the rain had stopped and they were clearly driving through the living part of the town. Nice houses with warm glows at the windows raced by. It seemed so far from the blackness of the road behind them. But it wasn't long before they cleared that too and were now back near the woods.

Barbara slipped the batteries into her CD player and put on her music. She started to drift off to sleep to the beat, but a pothole in the road pulled her out of it.

Just then the car slowed to a near stop. She leaned forward trying to make out the break in the trees.

"Looks like we're here." Mrs. Hoffman regarded both her children with a smile. She turned off the road down a long over grown driveway. Branches grappled at the windows, cracking sounds under the vehicles heavy wheels. Bouncing nearly all the way there.

Clearing the trees they entered a large unattended yard. A large structure rose from the long grass. When the engine finally faded Barbara wished she could just go to sleep where she was. But a kind nudge from her mother put pay to that idea. She forced herself out into the cool night air. Her eyes darted around the blackness, but they both shot a glimpse of the house and she gasped.

The houses walls rose tall from the damp ground. It was almost dead, only the sounds of the living woods that surrounded them. Large black windows seemed more like holes. It's chimneys barely visible from ground level. Creepers crawled up the walls; somewhere in the shadows a shutter thumped the wall in the strong wind.

It sent a shiver down Barbara's spine. I can't believe this. It has to be some kind of a joke!

"Cool," her brother stated cheerily. "This is better than I ever imagined it would be. I bet there's loads of places to hide Milly."

"Don't you even think about it," she snapped, frowning at him.

"Sorry I already have," Jake said dryly. "I really think this place could be a great home mum."

"Okay let's get inside before it starts to rain again," Mrs. Hoffman said looking up at the clouds looming way above them. She turned and went to open the trunk of the wagon.

Barbara was about to assist her mum when movement caught her eye. A sound of whispering in the wind, something seemed to grab her mind making her step towards the motion. Moving slowly along the sidewall of the house to the back garden. The howling wind picked up dead leaves and other debris toying with it, tossing it in the air. It swirled around Barbara as if it were a whirlwind.

Out of the moving shadows came a swaying platform. She got closer; it was a swing blowing in the wind. The whispering was in fact a low-pitched squeaking of metal against metal as the support chains rubbed against the frame.

Feeling the raindrops on her face and arms she reached out her hand to grab one of the chains. The driving force that had pulled her there released its grip on her. Barbara was soon aware of her mum's voice calling her.

"Coming mum!" she called back, wondering why she had just wandered off like that. The rain began gushing down. Reaching the house she ran in slamming the door behind her.

"I helped mum bring your stuff in," Jake boasted. "Weird you walking off like that wasn't it. Getting out of work." He grinned, ridiculing her.

She just ignored her brother. Did I just feel the urge to find that swing! It must be me, just wanting to know what was out there for my own peace of mind, noticing how dark it was.

Feeling around the walls for a light switch, her hand fell upon it. She flicked the switch, nothing happened.

"Blast," she cursed. "That's all we need, the place probably doesn't have any bulbs." Just then she heard a creaking sound from somewhere in the dark hall. Barbara froze. The echo seemed to be coming from all around her, it was hard to pin point the exact direction.

"Oh, there you are," Mrs. Hoffman said, flicking on a torch. "I think the powers turned off. I was just going down to the basement to turn it on. Sorry about this, your dad did say everything was paid for and ready."

"Well you know dad," her daughter replied, doing her best not to show her fear. "He always picks cowboys. I'll bet they made off with the refrigerator, oven, TV and radio." She crossed her arms over her chest. "We'll be forced to spend the night in this damp old house, with no power, no nothing."

Her mum didn't respond she just headed off into the darkness.

Using the fading light from her mums torch, Barbara found a door. She pushed her way inside stumbling over something on the floor. Something fell beside her. "Ow," she groaned. I already hate this place.

Pale light flooded into the room from two table lamps, still leaving half of the room cloaked in shadow.

Rolling over she saw a white smiling face, it grinned back at her in the poor light. It gave her a start.

"Ha, ha. It's just a dumb toy clown." Getting to her feet, she propped the figure out of the doorway and looked around the room. Dustsheets covered the furniture. The floor seemed to be littered with old toys of all kinds, from dolls houses to a small carousel. That's funny. Why didn't the owners take all these things with them, surely their kids would miss them'

"We got power!" Jake exclaimed running through the open door. "We've got a refrigerator, oven, radio and TV. Looks like dad really pulled through for us this time huh." He studied her for a brief moment.

Taking in all the room, he thought for a moment. "Looks like we found your favorite room."

"Oh, very funny Jakey." she retorted.

"I bet Colin is going to love this place."

"Oh, poo!" she moaned. She had forgotten about Colin, her older brother was off at College. Or half brother, his dad had died when he was young. His mother remarried and had her and Jake. Colin never really suited the new family unit he would always spend his time alone.

"You'll be truly out numbered then sis', me, mum, dad and Col' all liking this house."

"Oh, will you please get lost you little dork!"

"Yeah well I'm going up to choose my room," he gloated. "I'm going to pick the best one."

"Who cares!" She certainly didn't. Leaving her old school, places she knew well and loved like The Golden Gate Bridge. Thrown into the middle of nowhere. The only advantage was no more appointments with Dr. Mcrobbie, her shrink.

Finding the kitchen didn't take too long. Barbara found her mum in the middle of cooking supper. She was sitting at the dinning table reading a house design magazine. She peered up as Barbara came in.

"It won't be ready for a while dear," she said, looking up from a book. "Why don't you choose a room, not the biggest' I've already warned your brother about that. It's reserved for your father and I." Mrs.

Hoffman flipped the page over. "Your things are near the stairs.

"Okay mum!" She headed back out into the dimly lit hall; the light flickered constantly. The stairs rose silently upwards. Once so proud with intricately decorated banisters. She stooped to pick up her bag of personal belongings.

Wear and tear showed up everywhere, creaky stairs many of which were cracked. The entire house seemed to shake to its' foundation on every thunderclap. At the top a dull red carpet spread out like a sea of blood leading to stern looking wooden doors.

At the far end of the landing, a light burned brightly. That's the one Jake chose. She picked one right at the opposite end, it was small and nicely compact, it's curtainless window looked out on the back yard and woods. And that swing. A small wooden chair sat in the corner.

Barbara dumped her bag on the single bed and slumped down beside it, taking her new room. Images of her old cosy suburban room clogged up her mind. Quickly she shook them away like flies.

Emptying her bags contents of books, videos, a few clothes and personal items such as hair, tooth brushes and her blanket, with riddens on the corners. Despite being seventeen she had always relied on it for comfort.

After sorting through it she lay back on the strange bed. Even though the room was small the shadows still managed to follow her wherever she went in this awful place.

Huge drops of rain started pounding against the single pane of glass, nearly drowning out her mum's faint calls that supper was ready. But the long journey had taken its toll, as well as being locked in the same space with Jake.

Sighing, Barbara got to her feet, and groped her way down the kitchen and dining room. She found her mum and brother sat at the table with burger and fries in front of them.

"Come on we're waiting!" he snapped. "I'm starved."

She dragged herself to the table and sat down, taking a couple bites of food. "So when is dad coming then?"

"He said he'll be here next Thursday." Mrs. Hoffman laughed. "You have the weekend to explore the town before school starts next week."

"Now that should be interesting," Barbara scoffed. "Winterfield High should be a great fun." After finishing of her meal and she looked at her watch, eleven o'clock was fast approaching. Her eyes felt so heavy as though they could drop out. "Well you two, I think I'm going to call it a night. Its been a rough couple of days."

"Goo . . . d night," Jake said in a deep spooky voice. "That's, if you can get a wink of sleep! Ha, ha." He burst out laughing till his mum clipped him round the ear.

"That's enough!" she demanded. "It's way past your bed time young man."

He looked stunned, whipping the smirk off his face. "Oh, mum, I . . ."

"Bed!"

"Gutted," she just scolded her brother. "At least I got the choice."

Jake pushed his chair away and rose, his head held high he marched out the room. Thumping could be heard as he rocked up the old stairs.

Not wanting to end their first day in Winterfield on a bad note, Barbara slowly went up and knocked on her brother's door.

"Come in!" he called back. "It's open."

Slipping inside, the light was out, but the boys form could be seen over by the window.

"I wonder what kind of wild animals live out there!" His gesture took in the surrounding forest. "Wolves maybe, if you keep quiet you can hear them howling in the still night air. If you think Milly's bad." Jake pointed at the spider as it rested up against her plastic case

"Oh, cut it out will you!" She slapped him on the back. "I only came to say good night, not to be frightened to death. The only monster around here is standing right next to me."

"Have a really nice night," he said meaning it.

There were times, very few of them when he could be quite sweet. She closed his door and crept down the hall to her small room. Slipping on her nightshirt she flopped down on her bed crawled under the covers and dropped off to sleep.

Barbara's dreams only seemed to be pleasant memories of her old life, but it was cut short as the sound of thunder awoke her. Or was it the thunder, she heard an odd giggling sound floating up from the yard.

The window seemed to pull her towards it.

The gales still pounded the trees making the old house groan as it swayed under the hammering weather. When a flash of lightning lit up the yard, what she saw made her heart begin to race!

## Chapter-2

"No that can't be possible," Barbara told herself, breathing hard. She was looking down over the back garden. A huge bang rocked the house from the sky with another bolt of lightning. It was real! There it was going back and forth, the swing. Not in a confused manner as if it were blown by the wind. It was like someone was swinging there.

Then came the sound of giggling from all around, it was as if all the trees were laughing at her, trapped alone in the frightening old house. Or was it a ghost swinging on there' Laughing about happy memories. She pulled back away from the darkened window, shivering. This can't be happening! It must be the wind that's all, nothing but the silly wind but what about that giggling' Closing her eyes, as if when she awoke, the nightmare would be over.

"No." She slowly opened her eyes, but the same controlled motion of the swing continued, as did the laughing. It's mocking me because I'm so paranoid there's no such things as ghosts! Saying that didn't let the feeling of terror slip away, "There's only one thing to do," she ordered herself. "Go down and check the swing myself, prove that it isn't real."

Barbara was about to reach for the switch on her bedside lamp, but she paused for a second. If it sees a light come on in the house it may flee, and that doesn't help me. At that moment it clicked, she hadn't put on her glasses. Using the pale light from the window to slip into some jeans and T-shirt she put her glasses so they rested on her nose snugly.

Making her way out into the hall, she trod lightly on the creaking floorboards. The last thing she wanted to do was wake her mum, and the last thing she needed was Jake waking up. It was hard navigating along the pitch-dark landing.

Barbara negotiated her way to the stairs, crept quietly down past the hall and kitchen to the back door, which opened outward into the swirling storm. Placing her hand just ahead of her, she kept the rain of the glasses as the wind whistling through her hair.

The giggling seemed to have stopped, only the squeaking of rusty metal. As she thought, the swing just motioned the way that the strong winds forced it.

Grabbing hold of the chain to steady the wild platform she killed the lonely sound.

"I knew it," she scolded herself. "I imagined the whole thing, there was no giggling out in the woods." She sighed, leaning on the metal supports. Closing her eyes she thought, it must be what Dr. Mcrobbie said, "If you don't like something, your mind will find a way to avoid it." Again that irresistible urge that she had felt before came! Stepping under the frame, she clasped at the chain. Sitting down on the blue plastic seat, not even feeling her bottom getting wet from the soaked seat. Building up speed, she glided back and forth, the frame began to rock uneasily. Her mind was playing tricks, making me see things that weren't there.

At them moment there was bang. Thunder she thought, but no. It was the door back door to the house thumping against the wall. I closed that door. I'm sure of it!

Had someone entered the house while she wasn't looking? The giggler? Jake, this would be the sort of thing, was he hiding out there in the forest, laughing at me. "Well I'm not going to play this game, that little dork. If you're out here I'm going to lock you out here in the wet and cold."

Barbara slammed the door behind her, double-checking that the door was locked. She headed back up to her room, making sure it clicked shut. Lying down she drifted off into a deep and sound less sleep.

Thin vales of sunlight came through the window, projecting its image on to the wall. Barbara stirred, feeling the warmth of the sun on her back. She rolled over onto her front, having a good long stretch. "What an awful night," she yawned. What a awful nightmare." She peered around the room at the damp patches on the walls the house really did need a lot of work.

But that couldn't have been a dream! I'm dressed! Not feeling like spending hours alone in the house before her mum and brother awoke, she chose to take a long walk back to town along the road. It should be quite interesting to see Winterfield in daylight.

Barbara slipped off her bed, putting on her glasses. Then going into her pile of clothes she pulled out her denim jacket. Then she gave her hair a quick brush before leaving a note for her mother, she headed from the front door.

The air was warm and still, in sharp contrast with the weather last night. Sounds of birds singing in the trees seemed to bring the place to some kind of life. Even the house with its' gray construction seemed more welcoming now.

Taking a deep breath of fresh air she headed round the back of the house, just to make sure.

There it was, the swing, its' rusty frame with peeling dark blue paint. It was totally still. She took a sigh of relief. What I saw through the window last night didn't happen. It's just I didn't have my glasses the giggling was some kids playing in the forest.

Back to the front garden, she headed off down the long overgrown driveway. Dead leaves crunched under foot, large tree roots broke thought from under the sopping wet ground. It was more like a dirt track, which not many cars used. She had to steady her self it was no wonder the ride was so bumpy. After about ten minutes a break in the barrier appeared, it lead out into the rough, bogged down roadway with even more threes on the other side. It was just a matter of sticking to path.

The treetops gently swayed in the light breeze. A warm feeling came over Barbara. This place doesn't seem to be that bad to me. I guess it's just one of those places that kind of grows on you.

She shortly became aware of a rough chugging sound of an old diesel engine coming round the steep corner. Turning she saw an old metallic blue Cadillac car coming down the steep road. As it neared a lone figure sat poised in the drivers seat. The old car looked more like a spacecraft with its high tail fins. To her surprise the vehicle slowed right down to a stop. The driver wound down the window. "Hi," Jeff yelled. "Need a lift"

It was the boy she had met under the week lights of the gas station the night before. She turned to greet him with a warm smile. This day can only get better!



Stopping the rattling gas-guzzler, he leaned over and opened the passenger door. "Hop in!"

Not having any second thoughts, she got in the door slamming made the car nearly fall to bits.

"So your brother had enough of you last night" Jeff laughed. "Looks like he kicked you out." Slowly he got the car in motion. "So where are you heading this time of the morning"

"I'm heading into town, get to know Winterfield, our new home town." Barbara leaned against the loose sounding door.

"So you live up here in the woods"

"Yeah, in this freaky old house in the forest."

A frown broke across his features. "You don't mean the actual Winterfield house"

"I don't know what's it's called," she admitted. "I never even got a look at the place when my parents bought it. They've always had this dream to move away from the city. Now he's a partner in the business. He . . ."

"Where did you say you lived" Jeff cut her off.

"San Francisco." It felt so odd being so close to him, but it was good having friends around. "So what are you doing up here"

"I like to go for a drive most mornings." He adjusted the roof mirror. "-before I go to work at the local clothes store."

"But I thought you working in your dad's garage. Last night . . ."

"No, I just help out. Winter Clothes is my weekend and evening job. So you'll be starting Winter Mall High on Monday" Jeff didn't let her finish. "Of course you will be, there's no where else around here."

Soon they reached the town. Passing through it seemed a lot larger that it did last night with plenty of new well-kept homes and shops. A few people walked up and down the narrow streets.

"Most of the shops around don't open until ten, so you'll have to hang around a while if you're planning on shopping." Jeff turned the car and pulled it to a sharp halt. It felt as though the force would throw them out the windshield. "Here we are Barbara." He laughed, gesturing to the white shop front. "The one and only! Winter Clothes the only place to by your clothes. The name suites this place, if there's any bad weather around we get the brunt of it."

A family of mannequins stood in the window, a view of woods in the background.

"Thanks a lot Jeff," she said opening her side door. "Looks like I owe you an awful lot."

"That's okay." For a brief moment they're eyes locked. "How about I pick you up for school on Monday, it's quite a walk from the Winterfield's place."

"You have a date." What a dumb choice of words girl. Slightly embarrassed she slammed the heavy door, waving to Jeff. Barbara walked down the street looking in shop windows as she went. Off in one direction there were no trees for miles, just the odd group of houses. While in other were dense woods where her new home was situated.

The people also seemed pleasant enough, nodding to her or saying hello, none really in the mood for any kind of chat. Neither am I. Feeling rather warn she settled back into a colorfully painted wooden bench.

For a moment Barbara paused, glancing around, suddenly feeling quite uneasy. She looked around as the street slowly started to fill with shoppers. She had an impression of some stranger's eyes boring into her. At that instant she caught a glimpse of man little old man hobbling a little way behind her.

Why would he be watching me' Oh, this is so dumb, he isn't watching me, it must be the paranoia coming back.

Soon the little man was out of sight, the feeling died away with him. Safer now she got up and carried on walking. She neared the end of the high street through to a small park leading onto a large wooden fence from. Beyond which lay the woods. A warning sign was posted up. 'NO TRESPASSING' A small burned out cottage stood off to the right.

Stumbling slowly toward the gutted place, she felt an urge of excitement that normally only her brother would show. It was the same driving force that propelled her to the swing, but this time with a sense of terrible danger. She stopped outside the front gate where a rough wooden plaque hung.

'IN LOVING MEMORY OF THE CRAIL FAMILY, KIND AND LOYAL SERVANTS OF THIS TOWN.  
MURDERED IN HOUSE FIRE.'

Surly it would have been an accident! Not hanging around to contemplate the answer Barbara pushed her way into the garden. The blackened front door stood wide open, it beckoned her inside.

Sunlight slanted through shattered glass, as water from the night before dripped from the frames to the windowsills. A sharp gust of wind blew the door to it thumped as it collided the frame.

What I'm I even doing in this place' Why is this happening to me' Edging further into the hall but she stopped. If I were followed, staying in here I would be an easy target. She was about to turn and head out the door when she heard the sounds of the gate creaking on its' old rusty hinges. Then came the sound of slow and steady footsteps.

"I was being followed," Barbara muttered to herself. "But who' Why"

As the door slowly opened, she froze solid scared of who was waiting on the other side. The wooden boards creaked as the small crooked figure stepped inside, supported by a large stick. His face hidden in the dark for moments, he raised his stick above his head, ready to strike.

Barbara screamed in terror.

### Chapter-3

She backed up against the wall, staring in horrid disbelief as the stick hit the ground not far from her. Barbara gazed up, her heart still pounding as the black cold shadow stepped into the warm light. His face looked very rough, his dark skin chard and blackened with patches of burn marks all over. His dead set eyes peered out from under large bushy eyebrows. He wore an old battered suite. For a moment studying her, and his lips parted.

"You shouldn't be here girl," he warned. His muttering voice was course an unsympathetic, more to himself that to the frightened Barbara.

"I . . .I'm sorry," she stuttered. "I thought you were following me. I mean I did see you watching me," she pleaded, rather clumsily. "You did follow me here, right"

Seeming unmoved, his eyes narrowed. "You should leave this place, you have no business being here."

Plucking up a little bit of courage, she managed to say. "I would except you're blocking the doorway."

He didn't even seem to notice that she had said anything at all, but slowly a wicked grin lined his wrecked face. "It's for your own good girl."

Was that a threat' Is he going to do something nasty. Maybe he paid some local kid to giggle in the

woods last night'

Very slowly the stranger stepped away from the door. Barbara jumped at the chance, flung her self out. It threw her out into the now blazing sunshine. In a frantic panic she tackled the gate only to hear the man's echoing shouts.

"She's not dead, she's still out there!"

The rest of the stranger's words faded into the distance as she ran for the relative shelter of Winterfield town. I have to tell someone! Someone that may know that old man! Then the letters flooded back into her mind. "Winter Clothes," she mumbled to herself. "Winter Clothes . . .The only place to by you clothes. Jeff."

Hastening her pace, not looking behind her Barbara ran across town, doing her best not to run anyone down. At last there it was the blue words bring relief into her shaken body. Not stopping to think she burst in, knocking over a rack of shirts. "Sorry." She tried her best to smile at the stern looking man at the counter.

After she placed the now creased shirts up, she ignored the comments about young people from an old couple. "Where's Jeff Newborn' I . . .need to see him now!"

The stern man nodded, he turned and called out into the storeroom. "Jeff. There's someone here to see you. Hurry up before she wrecks anymore of my store!"

Jeff yelled something in return, but she couldn't make any sense of it. He stepped through the door, not seeing her at first. "Ah who," then he realized. But his smiled died when he saw the state she was in. Shunning the looks from his boss Jeff led Barbara into the back room, pulled her up a chair. "You look like you could do with a drink" She smiled. "We have tea or tea" he joked.

"Oh, tea will be fine," she teased him a little. "I'm sorry I . . .I upset your boss, but I didn't know where else to go."

In a while he came back with two piping hot mugs of tea. "What happen to get you so worked up"

Barbara placed her numb hands round the warm cup. She recited the story, about being followed and cornered by the old dark skinned man, how he had threatened her.

"You're saying old Creeps was watching you" he reasoned. "What did he say to you"

"First he told me to get out." She sighed, shaking a little. "It was for my own good. If that's not a threat then what"

He took a sip of tea. "He then cornered you in the servants house, I knew that guy was weird, but -"

"You know him" she broke him off.

"Well so do most people around here, though they do there best to stay clear of him." He sat down on an old packing crate. "I can't see why he'd threaten you, unless . . ."

"Unless I what" Barbara continued to push, she had just been scared half to death, finding why was most important.

"Well Creeps or Mr. Crail is the last surviving member of the Winterfield servants." He loosened his collar with his free hand. "They used to service this towns founding family. The Winterfields. They were the ones that built your house. Well they all died in a fire, he got his burns from trying to help them."

"So that's what the plaque meant." She thought for a moment. "But the plaque said they were murdered."

"Old Creeps was kind of broken up." His eyes suddenly turned sad. "He said the Winterfield's daughter Sarah burned and killed them, but that's whole other story. Most of the other people around here don't like to talk about it."

"How come"

"Well for a start my parents went to school with her, that was before she disappeared. But as I said . . ."

"No one wants to talk about it, I guess all places have their weak points." Feeling rather disappointed she got to her feet. "Well I feel better now," she lied. "Thanks for the tea."

"Hang on a second there," Jeff ordered. "Your hands are still shaking I'll go and see Mr. Kenny. Then I'll give you a lift home. I won't be long."

Barbara was about to argue, but didn't she was still a little bothered by the threats. "Okay, but please don't tell my mum, she wouldn't understand."

"Anything you say." He patted her shoulder. Leaving the room for a short while he returned, his jacket on and car keys in hand. "Shall we go our chariot awaits us"

Leaving the shop via the back exit, they both got into the blue Cadillac. Jeff put the radio on. Soon they were heading back down the country lane away from town.

Yet Barbara was having trouble facing it, the house was certainly feeding her fearful streak. She sat back trying to get comfortable, but every time she moving the seat would click or squeak, her driver would only laugh.

Heading of the road, they drove down the driveway into the front yard. Jake could be seen clearly sitting on the front step. He got to his feet amazed as the car pulled to a stop.

"Thanks again Jeff, see you on Monday eh." She was about to opened the door when Jeff grabbed her arm. "Are you sure you'll be okay" His cool eyes regarded her with worry.

"Don't worry, I'm seventeen years old, I can handle creeps." She did her best to convince him. Slamming the door she waved as the car headed away.

Jake just smiled at her. "Looks like you've got that dweeb wrapped round your little finger," he sneered. "I take it you had a good swing last night"

That question made her turn cold. "What did you just say you little dork"

"You heard me sis' "

It was times like this she really hated her younger brother, no matter what she said or did he would have a comment to make. "I'll throttle you in a minute!" Barbara warned. "I've had it with you!" Making a rough noise with the back of her throat she stormed inside.

"Morning dear," Mrs. Hoffman greeted her with a hug. "How was your trip into town. I was just planning to take Jake with me to stock up the refrigerator."

"Good," she muttered. "Oh, it was just fine, plenty of interesting places to look."

Saying goodbye to her mum, alone Barbara went straight up to her room. It would be a good thing to get a break from Jake. He is sick, watching me last night. This must be his doing, and I'm not falling for it. Not thinking about what Creeps had said. She lay back on the bed, placing on her headphones. Closing her eyes, she did her best to lock the fears away.

The music stopping woke her; she got to her feet and went over to the window. Now the sky was dull and gray, a few spots of rain on the window. And the wind had pick up. Dead leaves scuttled across the back garden, but the swing was almost still.

Wait. What was that' Something shifted in the woods. Is it an animal' The woods must be teeming with them. Just then a large rodent bolted from the trees chased by some kind of wolf or wild dog, vanishing in the opposite side.

"Stupid, stupid!" she cursed. Being frightened by some dumb dog.

When Mrs. Hoffman and Jake returned, the afternoon was spent sorting out food and other such essential items. Darkness fell over the hills, but the rain didn't come to much.

Over dinner Barbara played around with her spaghetti, not really feeling like eating much at all.

"So what did you think of Winterfield town" her mum asked, looking quite concerned. No reply. "Are you okay' You look a bit white."

"I've just had a hard week," she sighed. "I think I'll take an early night, tonight."

About nine o'clock she dragged herself back to her room. Getting changed she curled up on her bed and drifted off to sleep.

Again Barbara was awoken, but this time by the sound of a phone ringing. Her mum hadn't said there

was a phone. Maybe she deliberately in the dark, so if she did make any friends the bill wouldn't go up. Sighing, she threw the covers off, going out into the hall. The sound was coming from the spare room next to hers'. Maybe it's dad, only he would ring in the middle of the night.

The door creaked slowly out onto a large room; she noticed a small window opened out to the woods. An old phone stood on a table in the corner. She picked up the huge receiver placing it to her face. "Hello, Barbara speaking."

But the voice that answered wasn't her father's kind voice, but a cold deep routed to anger. "Get out!" it said, threatening. "Get out before you die!"

"Who's there!" Her lips quivered as the words spilled out. The line clicked off and went to the dial tone.

#### Chapter-4

Barbara held the phone against her ear, not able to take in what she had just heard. The deafening silence kept her still. Finally replacing the receiver, she felt her arm still shaking. This had gone to far now. Was it Creeps for filling his promise'

Slowly the stillness dawned on her. She turned and headed out the room, back to her own. Even as she lay there on her bed, the words echoed in her mind. Get out! They had said. Get out before you die! As she slowly drifted off into a deep sleep Barbara found herself in some woods. It was almost dark and cloudy. Sounds of birds up in the trees could be heard. Feeling alone and afraid, she had a sensation as though an unknown watcher was stalking her.

Echoing around came the sound of shouting, dogs barking. Are they after me' I don't understand. Bushes moved at her side. As if driven by an unknown force, she ran deeper into the thick trees. The blackness seemed to close all in around her, like a thick mist slowing her pace. At that moment a hand wrapped around her ankle, forcing her fall on the ground.

She got to her knees and looked around. There was a tree house near by, its' black form blocking out the moonlight.

A tall figure, their face cloaked in shadow towered over her like a giant. The air was filling with the sweet sound of giggling. She screamed as the shadow fell on her.

The next thing Barbara knew, she was gasping for breath in her own bed. Only to the same ringing sound, it was the phone ringing. Yawning loudly, she forced herself out of bed. I'm going to give that Creep a piece of my mind. Going back into the empty room she picked the receiver and shouting. "All right you creep you can't frighten me!"

"Hey. Hey," Mr. Hoffman's voice said. "I didn't think the house was that bad!"

Barbara's face turned a little red, slightly embarrassed. "Sorry dad . . . I . . . thought you were someone else. Isn't it a little early to be calling"

"Barb it's gone nine." He paused. "Already stirring up the local boys are we" he joked. "So what do you really think of the house"

"Oh, it's really great." It's the worst place I've ever been in. "Nice and big. Jake's really taken to the place." Well he would. Wouldn't he' "So when's the rest of our things coming"

"The van will be round tomorrow. I take it you're looking forward to school, everything's been arranged. I spoke to the supervisor, a Miss Falconer, when I finalized the deal for the house."

"Kind of," she sighed. "I've already made a friend here, he's going to be giving me a lift."

"That's the way my Barbed Wire," he laughed. "Is your mother there"

I hate it when he calls me that. Looking up at the small window, she could see it was morning. I must have over slept. "Hold on a sec.' I'll call her."

Going down the stairs, she called out for her. "Mum the phone, it's dad!"

A moment Mrs. Hoffman ran in from the back, bolting up the stairs. Not even saying good morning. Barbara headed back into her room. She slipped on some jogging trousers and sweatshirt. Running

downstairs through to the kitchen, she found Jake was sitting at the table, brooding over half a sausage.

"Morning sis.' I take it was dad on the phone"

"Got it in one." She stepped up to the table and pulled up a chair. At that moment she got the impression of her brothers prying eyes. "What"

"Oh, I'm just figuring out, what drives a person like you to go out into the middle of an electric storm, in the middle of the night and have a go on that old swing."

"And what were you doing out of bed" Barbara cross-examined him.

"I never went to bed after you left me. I stayed awake, looking for animals." He took his last bit of breakfast. "Then, there you were, walking out into the wind and rain, swinging."

"It's hard to explain. I don't even know if I can." You'll just laugh at me. "I just had the urge."

Jake's face broke into a smile. "An urge! Well that confirms something I've thought from day one."

"And that is"

"You are so weird." He started laughing. "So what gave you this spooky urge' Is the swing haunted"

"Oh, will you please shut it! You don't know a thing pea brain!"

"I know." His gaze passed from her to the window. "Why don't we take a walk into the forest' Just you and me, who knows we may see a ghost."

"All right," she agreed. "As long as you leave me alone for the rest of the week! Do we have a deal" She placed out her hand Jake got to his feet and shook it.

"Sounds good to sis' mums going to be on the phone for the next hour."

As brother and sister made their way through the uncut grass Barbara stole a glance at the swing, it was still, no motion at all. It wasn't going to do it while Jake is around.

The weak sunlight hardly penetrated the thick layers of leaves and branches, only thin beams revealed small insects flying around in the still morning air.

Their feet crunching on soggy wet foliage.

"I wonder how far back these woods go" Jake asked. He looked from side to side. "Or how much of it belongs to the owners of the house' We could have a swimming pool put in, or even another house."

"Well there's a fence running around it, when I went into town . . . I saw the old servants house."

"Servants." He laughed. "Some people have all the luck, how come we don't get them' After all the house is ours now."

"Because they're all dead." She watched her brother's expression change. "They were killed in a fire."

"To bad."

"For you or them"

"Both I guess," Jake reasoned. He turned, peering ahead of him. "What's that" Without warning he bolted away deeper into the forest.

Barbara called after him. "Jake! Jake! What is it" There was no reply. "Jake stop fooling around!" she ordered. What had he seen to make him run off like that' Quickly she followed her brother's trail.

There it was standing right in front of her, an old tree house. The building had been lowered onto the forest floor, its supports could be seen in the tree above. Light blue paint hardly covered the rotting house. Its' front door open, Jake's back was to her. He started bouncing up and down. The outline looks very familiar.

"Don't fool around in there!" she ordered. "It may be dangerous. The old place is falling to bits."

"Oh, come in, it's great in here!" Jake turned to face his sister. "I can't imagine why the owners would want to move out"

Seeing that he wasn't going to co-operate she pulled herself together, Barbara climbed the broken stairs inside. It was almost dark apart from the weak daylight coming from the small round windows.

"Come on you," she commanded, grabbing his arm. "Mum will be wondering where we've got too."

"Oh, you're such a spoil sport," Jake groaned as she dragged him down the small ramp.

It must have belonged to Sarah Winterfield. And so did the swing. What happened up here that no one likes to talk about'

The rest of the day seemed to lag on, since the discovery of the tree house. In the afternoon they sat round the TV and watched a couple of movies. One of Barbara's the other Jake's. James Cameron's Titanic and Ghostbusters.

But the very same questions still pondered in her mind.

## Chapter-5

The next day dawned bright and early. Barbara made sure she was up before her mum. Jeff would be giving her a lift while Mrs. Hoffman would take Jake to school. There had been no incident over night, no giggling, and no ghost moving the swing.

She was down stairs making her mum a cup of tea after all, she had only complained since the move. It was time to make up some lost ground.

"Morning," Mrs. Hoffman yawned. "I didn't expect you to be up and about so early."

"I woke up, and there was no point in laying around doing nothing." Barbara looked down the boiling mugs of tea. "And I kind of wanted to clear the air between us." She placed the mugs on the table and sat down.

"Look the move was tough on all of us." She gripped her daughter's hand. "But being in the city was a bit of a strain."

"I was glad to leave that Dr. Mcrobbie behind," her daughter stated, seeing her shrinks face in her mind. Mrs. Hoffman suddenly regarded Barbara with concern. "How do you feel now?" She seemed so uneasy about bring the subject up. "You've coped very well."

I can't tell her what's happening to me now, she'll think it's the paranoia setting in again. "I'm feeling great now mum, like a new person."

"Glad to hear it! So you're getting a lift to school are you, that nice young man from the garage."

"His names Jeff. He's been so kind to me." Knowing where this conversation would lead she altered the topic. "I think Jake's settling better than the both of us. It seems like dad had him in mind when he bought the house."

After finishing off her tea, Barbara went up to her room. In passing she glanced at herself in the mirror on the landing. The stress of the first two days was showing, dark rings under her eyes.

I can't go to school looking like a bog eyed monster. The rest of the belongings were due to arrive later in the day, so she'd have to make do with the limited supply of clothes. She dressed into jeans and sweatshirt, and dragged out her bulky puffer jacket to protect her from the bitter October winds.

Even though she looked better now, Barbara still felt awfully warn. Too many days of fear the future, the threats from Creeps and on the phone. It was starting to press down hard.

Quickly she dabbed some foundation under her eyes to cover the rings.

It came as a relief when she heard the horn of the Cadillac pulling up out the front. Making sure she had all her things, Barbara ran down stairs shouting a quick goodbye to her mother and brother.

The cold wind bit the exposed parts, her cheeks and nose, but the thick jacket was very warm.

Jeff gave her a quick wave he leaned over and opened her door. "Good morning." He greeted her kindly.

"It's pretty nippy out there."

"It's not that much warmer in here," Barbara replied as she watched her breath curl into the air. "I hope the school is heated otherwise I'm going to end up freezing."

Winter Mal High was small compared the other schools Barbara had grown accustomed to. Some of the building was old and in need of repair. It seemed as though that money had been spent on extension after extension. Kids from the next town up, Malmouth also used the school, hence the name. Jeff had taken her for a small run around the school, before he dropped her off at the adviser's office. The door was open, so Barbara stepped up and knocked shyly on the door.

"Come in!" a short middle age woman called. She was sitting on the other side of a large desk, a small American flag stood on a great pile of paper work. She had large blue eyes, with glasses to match, her hair looked as though it had been died brown. "You must be Barbara Hoffman' I'm Jane Falconer, but the students call me Miss Falconer." She gestured for her to sit down. "Your father came in to see me, so everything's been arranged."

"Yeah, he's good at that sort of thing." She smiled wryly. "I hope I pick up some of his organizational skills."

The adviser reached forward, picking up a file. "I've been through everything from your old school, it's quite good. I see you're a very good artist, I would suggest that you start with Mr. Walker's art class, though I do take it sometimes. Outdoor sketching mostly." She regarded her new student closely. "I also took the liberty of putting your name down, I do hope you don't mind"

"Sounds great."

"Being such a small high school we're very trusting of our students to be responsible and mature. You will be allowed off campus during your lunch break, not at any other time. So if rights are abused, then privileges will be revoked." Miss Falconer drew to her feet. "Well I guess that leaves me with the honor," she laughed taking Barbara by the hand and shaking it. "Welcome to Winterfield. . ." she paused for a moment. "Welcome to Winter Mal high. You'll have to forgive me, I happen to be very patriotic. As Winterfield put more money into the school, than our neighboring town."

"Ms Falconer' This may sound a little bit off me asking you on my first day, but . . . Well the removal van's coming to our house this afternoon, and I don't really want my mum doing all that by herself." She looked guiltily into her lap. "Could I go home after lunch and help"

"Of course you can."

Feeling slightly more at home, Barbara stepped out into the corridor. It was alive bustling with students going to break. She hoped to see Jeff in the group, but he wasn't there. Taking a walk further down past the student car park, there was no old Cadillac. I wonder where's he gone. I guess I can't expect him to be my taxi service. If he doesn't come back I'll have to walk home.

Setting out into the hazy sunshine of the student garden where it was nice and quiet. She was about to sink down on a bench, but a small movement snatched her attention. Barbara got the impression of eyes, again watching her. Then she noticed, standing under one of the many trees, a figure looking right across at her. It moved slowly into the sunlight, red hair shining in the sun.

Turning, Barbara headed towards the person, not wanting to be too hasty, acting cool. As she got closer she could see the watcher closer. The girl was short, but well built.

"Hi there," she called out. "You looked kind of alone over here. So am I. Maybe you could use a friend. I'm Barbara, my family just moved into town."

"I'm Sally," she replied. "Trust me you don't want to hang around with me. No one else does." Sally had small brown eyes, a few freckles on her rounded face. "No one wants to be seen with the teachers daughter."

"Whose"

"Do you know Miss Falconer" she asked.

"You're my adviser's daughter, I just met her she seems kind of nice." Even knowing this Barbara pressed on. "No problem, why don't we just hang around together' My other friend, Jeff Newborn has run out on me. Maybe you know him"



Sally seemed shocked by the name, but she did her best to hide it. "Yeah I've seen him around, his dad runs the garage."

"That's the same guy all right, he did me a big favor when we first arrived here." Barbara explained a few things about herself, where she had come from and her family. On the other hand Sally just listened, not adding anything to the one sided conversation. "I've got art class next thing, how about you?"

"Me too," Sally replied.

As it turned out they had the next two classes together. When lunchtime came, Barbara waved goodbye to her new friend. But then she thought about the long trek back to the house would be a long, cold and lonely one. Dark rain clouds loomed over blocking out the hazy sunshine.

The road leading up into the woods was still pretty water logged since the last spells of rain, some it would be flooded and their house would really be cut off from the outside world.

Barbara slowed her pace. There was a sloshing sound in the mud behind her. Is there someone behind me? Was I followed from the school? She turned, but of course there was no one there. She moved on, only to hear the same splashing footfalls. If I turn round there's going to be no one there.

The safest bet was to make it through the trees, maybe they won't be able to keep track of her. She slipped her way through the surrounding trees, hoping to lose her pursuer. Leaves crackled under her feet, but the echoing of her own footsteps were still close, getting closer as a hand came down on her shoulder!

"Ahh," she screamed, the sound bouncing off the endless rows of trees.

## Chapter-6

"Hey what's your problem Barbara?" said a voice she knew all too well. She swung round to face her older half brother Colin. Glaring at him in anger she thought, How could he scare me like that?

"What are you playing at? Sneaking up on me like that."

"Wait a minute," he ordered, grabbing her arm. "I wasn't sneaking up on you. The car packed up, so I asked the way to the house." Colin paused, studying her white face. "Then I saw you ahead of me, all of a sudden you started running."

Her heart was still racing from the scare, though a great half of her was relieved that it hadn't been Creeps or who ever had threatened her. "We didn't think you'd be back before dad got back."

He gave her a look Barbara had seen many times, as if to say, 'Not my father.' "I've got some extra study time, the College is having an internal investigation for fiddling funds."

"Mum will be glad to see you." She forced a smile. "Shall we head back to the road or head through the trees?"

Colin said nothing he just peered around. "I'll leave it to your good judgment."

For a long long while Barbara glared at him. Colin always seemed to look down on her and Jake, as though they were something to be pitied, like a kitten or puppy and she really hated it when he acted like he knew everything.

"No!" she shot back. "Why don't you choose?"

"Well for one thing, you've been here longer than I. So I think you should know the better way. Besides

you chose to leave the path in the fir . . ."

"Oh, will you shut up!" Barbara yelled. "You haven't changed one bit you . . .you know it all!"

"So neither have you."

Few words between them as they headed towards the house Colin just whistled to himself, very out of tune. As they broke through the tree line into a clearing, he paused for a moment, regarding the swing.

"What's up?"

"This swing doesn't look very safe to me," he stated coldly. "It should be condemned."

"Condemned! Colin it's only a swing." Condemned, what did you mean by that! Maybe he's been here all along! Trying to scare me, just to prove how inferior I am.

With that Colin turned towards the house. "Looks like a nice place. Nice and quiet." He looked at his half sister. "I'm going to be relying on you to keep the place nice and quiet when I'm studying."

"Oh, yes my Lord!"

At that moment the silence cracked as the sound of an engine poured into the front yard.

"It's the removal truck," Barbara stated, a gleam in her eye. All the things they had in their last house. It should make things a lot better here. She took off leaving Colin viewing over the house. Round the front a large blue removal van stood poised as its engine cut out.

Mrs. Hoffman came running out, she seemed surprised to see her daughter home from school so early.

"Ah. Hi. Barbara what are you doing home so early, I thought -"

"Miss Falconer. She's my adviser . . .well I asked her if it was okay if I came back to help, and she said it was fine."

"Hey mum!" Colin yelled as he stepped into the front lawn.

"Colin we weren't . . ."

He finished of the lines. "Expecting you till your husband gets here." Then he explained the situation.

"Barbara" Mrs. Hoffman said at length. "Can you help the removal men I'm pretty sure Colin's hungry after the long trip."

"Sure," she huffed. "I came back to help, not to end up doing it all." But both of them had gone inside. Sighing, she turned to face the van it was now being unloaded. None of the removers had said a word. She slowly stepped forward and started picking up some of the smaller boxes.

Barbara slammed them down in the living room, trying not vent her anger too much on the items inside. She collapsed on an armchair, feeling tired again. This moving house thing's totally wrong! I can feel it. The loud thuds and bangs came from all over the house as the family things were brought in. So not much chance of getting a quick nap! At last she heard her mum's voice, giving instructions on where various things should be placed. But the noise soon died as the removal guys headed away.

Just then the lounge door slowly creaked open, Colin stepped inside.

"I thought you would have been going through this stuff, taking your things to your room."

"I'm not in the mood," she replied frankly.

"You can't despise me that much." He smiled warmly. "If you like I can stay in a motel in town"

"Oh, it's isn't just you." Barbara wasn't going to rule out his involvement in her current unhappiness. "No one seems to understand everyone loves this place, yet I don't. Do you think I'm being selfish?"

"Well I wouldn't know, this house is pretty much the same as any other. But as I won't be living here for too long I . . ."

"It's a weird house, not to mention the swing," Barbara stopped him. "This isn't pretty much like any house, it's kind of freaky." She stopped herself at that moment, the last thing she wanted right now was being told that swings don't move on their own or there are no such things as ghosts. "Where's mum?"

"She's gone to pick up Jake from school, so it looks like it's just thee and me."

Oh, joy! "So how are things going at College?"

"Well College is College. What else is there you can say?" Colin reasoned. "Would you mind if I put on a

video"

"Why not?" Barbara got to her feet, placed her glasses up on her nose and picked up some of the boxes that belonged to her and stormed out. Leaving Colin's glare to follow her out the room.

When she stepped into her room, it seemed a little smaller, but it soon clicked why. The old oak wardrobe that her granddad had made was in there. He had given it to Barbara on her thirteenth birthday, but familiar that it was it still refused to belong.

Just as I don't belong here! She groaned. "Oh, well there's no point in complaining, I've got to fit in." Slowly she started to unpack her clothes, but in the end she just gave up and lay flat out staring at the roof. It's patterned forms slowly sending her into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter-7

The next morning Jeff arrived very late, on the journey in he also seemed very preoccupied about something. Barbara had to coax him to even talk to her. "Are you okay?" she asked. "You seem a little lost."

"I'm fine," he almost muttered to himself. "I've just been a little worried. I'm sorry I wasn't there yesterday, but my dad was taken into hospital, heart trouble."

"Jeff you're not my taxi service, you don't have to ferry you everywhere." She sighed. "I could use the exercise any way."

"But you had to walk home, and since you told me about your encounter with Creeps." He shifted uneasily in his seat.

"How come?"

"Well . . . um. You remember I told you about the girl that lived in your house. Some people think he may have killed her."

That really grabbed her attention. "Sarah Winterfield' Because he thought she had burned down the servants quarters and killed his family"

"I guess so." Jeff glanced sideways, trying not to lose his fix on the road. "The anniversary of the fire is coming up pretty soon. He's kind of crazy, if he knows you're living in that house then -"

She stopped him, "You think he maybe after me next?"

"Look, I can't be certain. I know I said it's best not to talk to anyone about Sarah, but Miss Falconer used to know Sarah, you know before she disappeared. She does seem pretty open about it."

"Have you ever met Sally Falconer?" Barbara asked. "I met her yesterday, she seems like a nice girl."

Jeff seemed to stiffen. "I know of her, I've seen her around I mean. But most of the students here have a thing about . . . Well you know."

"Teachers children, she already told me about that." Barbara seemed rather disappointed that Jeff would be at the level. "I mean that's hardly fair judging her, just because her mum's a teacher."

"It's not just that," he protested, doing his best to hold out. "There's all these strange stories about her. Have you seen how much she looks like Sarah?" Jeff gave into a deep sigh. "Most people see her as bad luck."

"I don't care what this Sarah looked like, that's no reason to treat Sally like a freak." Before she could continue the car pulled into the school grounds. As they were both late there was no time to finish the debate.

"Meet you back here after school if you want a lift" he shouted, before heading off to class.

Barbara made her way towards her block, but paused. She could see Sally hovering about outside, folder clasped against her chest. How come she's not in class? "Hey Sally!" she cried out, running up to her new friend. "What are you doing out here alone?"

"I wasn't feeling to well," she responded. "So you're getting lifts from the great Jeff Newborn, you're lucky."

That comment struck her. "Do you know him?"

"We were kind of close one time. Well I thought we were." Sally laughed to herself. "I must have been a complete dork thinking anyone could love me for who I am. But he dumped me after two weeks. At the time he said I wasn't his sort, I learned later he thought I was boring."

"But he said he hardly knew you."

"Well he's hardly lying, you can't exactly get to know someone in just a fortnight."

Barbara looked at her watch. "Look I'd better get going, it's only my second day and I'm already late."

She chuckled. "See you at lunchtime." She headed off to her lesson feeling rather strange.

As it turned out that Mr. Wrinkler was off with the flu, and that the lesson had been cancelled. At break time she took Jeff's advice, and went to see Miss Falconer. Her adviser was busy cleaning her desk.

"Barbara please come in." She seemed very surprised to see her. "I wasn't expecting any visitors this morning. How are you settling in? I take it all your stuff is in place" She sat down at her desk. "Please take a seat."

She edged slowly into the room and sat down. "Well it's only my second day, but everything seems okay."

"Sally tells me you spoke to her yesterday, I'm really pleased that you took the time to befriend her like that, going against the grain as they say." Miss Falconer smiled, trying to make her guest more welcome. "So what can I do for you?"

"I've heard a few stories about the Winterfield house, about Sarah and the fire and all that."

"And someone suggested that you ask me" She started tapping her fingers on the table. "Well I can fill you in on a few of the details." She sat back ready to begin. "Sarah was the daughter of the last heirs to the Winterfield family, the founders of the town. It all happened quite a while ago, when most of the current parents were about your age as was Sarah."

"Tell me about her," Barbara pleaded. She had to know what was going on, how it involved her present situation.

Miss Falconer nodded. "She was a very sweet fun loving girl, though some people who didn't really know her said she had two personalities."

"What do you mean?"

"Sometimes she would be very down to earth, like by most kids, though she could be quite the trouble maker. She was very good at winding up the teachers, they never would complain. Yet other days she could be quite the little snob, criticize other children's behavior and suck up to the teachers."

"Sounds strange." Barbara raised her eyebrows. "Did she have that Jackal and Hide disorder? When the person acts like two different people."

"We never knew. The Winterfield's were very secretive about the subject, even embarrassed. They believed very strongly in the individual."

"What happened to her?"

"You know how racist some people could be. Sarah was brought up to believe that dark skinned people should be servants. But the hatred grew beyond that, the next step up from her parents arrogance."

"That's why Cree . . . Mr. Crail thought she burned and killed his family."

"Well he's always claimed she was in the house just before the fire, he said he saw her leave so calmly. The next thing he knew was that the servants quarters were in flames." She sighed wearily. "He ran into the house, did his best to save them, but he failed, getting badly burned in the process."

"Sarah always denied setting that fire, I believe she was too kind to do anything like that, even with her views."

"What did Crail do?" Barbara interrupted her.

"He went round spreading lies, stirring up the pot you may say, and before long he had gained an angry mob. They started marching up to the house in protest, making their views known. Mrs. Winterfield told me that Sarah was out on her swing -"

Barbara felt a large lump form in her throat. "You . . . You mean the swing round the back of the house" "That's the one," Miss Falconer continued. "A couple of yobs had joined the maddening crowd, you know the sort that join protests just to cause trouble."

An image floated into Barbara's mind, of a lone girl happily swinging there, with the echoing shouts of approaching protesters. As her adviser continued, the picture became more vivid. The troublemakers spotting Sarah as she swung.

"The yobs broke away from the main group, they forced her into the woods that night and Sarah Winterfield was never to be seen again. No body, no item of clothing found. The disappearance destroyed the Winterfield family. They moved away a short while later, the house remained empty till you arrived."

"Did they ever find the yobs?"

"Yes in the woods, but there was no body, there was nothing the police could do." Her eyes ran deep into Barbara. "There is a story that Sarah's spirit still haunts those woods."

And the swing! What if it was Sarah I heard giggling in the woods'

Chapter-8

"Ghost!" Barbara almost spat out the word. "But there's no such things as ghosts! Are there?"

"As I said, Barbara, it's only rumors, people saying they've seen her and so forth. Nothing to be worrying about." Miss Falconer seemed to be doing her best to calm her ever-present fears.

"Has anyone heard her . . . I mean giggling and all that stuff, it's just -" She stopped herself and her lip began to quiver. If I tell her, she may get worried and tell my parents. "Oh, it's nothing."

"Are you sure you're okay?" She gave a warm, but rather concerned expression. "I am here to help. If there's anything bothering you?"

At that moment the chimes sounded signaling the end of that period. Barbara thanked her advisor as she walked out into the corridor. As she slowly drifted through the rest of the morning's lessons, she found the idea of a ghost very disconcerting.

Lunchtime soon arrived, but instead of leaving the Campus for lunch. She sat down in the student garden eating her packed lunch. What if some joker knew Sarah's story, was playing the tricks on me. So that does seem to rule out Jake's involvement.

"Barbara!"

She looked up seeing Sally running towards her, a huge grin on her face. She did look a lot better now.

"Hi Sal, what's going on?"

"Oh,," Sally's grin vanished. "You're already having your lunch." She sighed trying not to show her disappointment.

"Don't you like me eating my lunch?" Barbara frowned. It did seem an odd thing to say.

"No! No!" Sally's pale face turned red with embarrassment. "Oh, I'm sorry, I was kind of hoping that you'd sit with me in the Cafeteria, you see my mum says I should, you know hang out get some friends. But you see they don't talk to me."

"Sorry." Barbara smiled at her friend. "Look how's about I join in the Cafeteria tomorrow. I was planning to go up to the library to do some research on my house. You want to come?"

"Well there isn't much else to do around here. I'll take you up there, the library is in the old part of the school." Sally gestured to an old looking three story high building, with a small tower attached to the roof. "Right up there, I hope your fit it's quite a climb."

The girls headed through a pair of heavy wooden doors at the entrance. They squeaked longingly open. A long dark corridor lay out in front its dull lights flickered hardly breaking the dull place. Thin streams of daylight could be seen coming through open classroom doors. On reaching the stairs, they started the long climb up within the tower. Round and round, way above their heads.

"I have to admit," Sally said as they reached the third stair well. "I've always hated coming up here, I'm

afraid of heights." Her tone became more serious. "You have any fears Barbara"  
What a funny thing to ask. "No I'm not afraid of anything," she lied, trying to keep her calm demeanor.  
"Why do you ask"

"Well most people are afraid of me. I take it you all ready know that I look like Sarah Winterfield, I suppose I can't really blame them."

"No I'm not afraid of you. Do you think that people aren't avoiding you because your mothers a teacher, or because you look like her"

"Maybe a bit of both," Sally did her best to reason.

Soon they reached the top of the stairs, looking up at two large red doors just ahead. Fresh air blew in from two open windows on opposite sides of the walls.

"It's through here," Sally said as she pushed open on the doors.

The room itself was a small one, laid out in a tennis court formation. Book cases ranged along all the walls with one in the middle parallel with the end walls. A middle aged Librarian regarded the students with his suspicious brown eyes, as if it was abnormal for the room to be used at lunchtime.

"What exactly are you looking for" Sally asked. "This is only the second time I've been up here."

"Newspapers, old ones, anything to do with Sarah's disappearance and the house."

"Can I help you two" the Librarian asked coldly.

"Yeah, kind of," Barbara smiled at him, but his expression didn't change. "I was wondering if you had any old newspaper cuttings, I'm kind of new in town and ah . . ."

Before she had a chance to finish, he had already vanished into a small storeroom at the back.

Sally shrugged. "I think he likes the quiet most of the students here use the public Library. Most of the books here are older than the school."

"I heard that young Sally," he called form the store. "Don't you set off another complaint that I get paid for doing nothing. It's not my problem that the kids in this town have no interest in their history."

"Yes Mr. Hartly."

"Good. I hope you find what you looking for Miss . . .ah . . ."

"Hoffman, Barbara Hoffman."

"Quite." Hartly raised an eyebrow. "I hope you find what you're looking for. There's a photocopier next to the history section." He slammed three large books full of newspapers down, a cloud of dust took to the air.

Barbara sneezed. "Ah . . .I must be allergic to dust." She took two of the books off the top, leaving Sally to pick up the last one. They placed them down on the table and started the long hall of searching for the disappearance or any other Winterfield Family event.

Each of the sheets had been placed in clear covering which had now turned a yellow color along with the newspapers themselves. The town seemed to be a very quiet place where nothing seemed to happen, reports on various founders' day celebrations and other such local events and School student's achievements.

Turning the to the next page, Barbara stopped and flicked back. There it was as clear as a candle in the darkness. 'WINTERFIELD'S HEART TORN APART' "Sally I found it!" she nearly yelled.

"Keep the noise down," Hartly complained.

She carried on reading out loud. "Yesterday Winterfield was shattered with the tragic news of Sarah Winterfield's abduction from her own back garden, while a group of trouble makers distract unsuspecting parents." It was dated the 21st November. Quickly she ran over to the copier. Sally found an appeal by the family to the abductors to tell them where their daughter was, and lastly about the Winterfield's packing up and leaving.

It wasn't till Barbara gave the first article a proper look over did she realize, "Oh," she gasped to herself. In the center was a picture of Sarah; if there wasn't such a time lapse between them she could have

been Sally's double. The freckles and the frizzy hair! The photo was black and white so it was hard to get the hair color, she was pretty sure it would have been red. That image were to remain with her, she could see why the towns folk feared her. Almost a ghost like image on Winterfield's last heir! Taking all the information she could get her hands on about the house, also about the family, getting it done just before the afternoon session began. Barbara separated from Sally at the end of the day. She headed straight to the student car park to meet Jeff, having the intention of confronting him about Sally. The Cadillac stood out like a sore thumb in amongst the other smaller cars.

"Sorry," Jeff puffed, running behind her from the school building. "We got kept behind in class." He unlocked the car. "Hop in! So how was your second day?"

"It was okay. I got some stuff on Sarah's abduction. Miss Falconer was very helpful." Barbara glanced across the dashboard and up his arms to his face. "You didn't tell me you went out with Sally, you said you only saw her around."

He rubbed his forehead, trying to his best not to meet her gaze. "I was, well kind of afraid. I didn't know you were friends with her."

"You were afraid I would think you were weird?"

"Yes, but I've regretted ever since, I never wanted to hurt her feelings." His voice was very regretfully.

"She really wasn't my type, cross my heart it wasn't because of my image. Honest."

"I believe you." She smiled.

Pulling into the long driveway up to the house Barbara jumped out of the car and waved Jeff goodbye. She watched as the car pulled away, but before going up to the house she checked the swing, but everything was quite normal. For this place any way. Pulling out her keys, she found that the door was a little way open.

"That's odd," she told herself. "Mum should be picking up Jake, Colin said he was picking up his car."

Her whole body seemed to grow cold the door creaked as she slowly pushed her way inside. "Hello!"

The gloomy hall seemed to bounce back her cries in a warped echo. "Colin, Mum, Jake, is that you?"

No answer.

The door to the corridor, that led to the kitchen was open. Pulling herself together Barbara crept quietly down the corridor. The kitchen door was also partly open. Just then her attention was drawn to the back yard, by the sound of giggling. As silently as she could, Barbara pushed open the back door.

The swing was moving again in a plain blur of laughter, and sat in the seat was a red haired girl.

"Sarah!"

## chapter-9

"No! It can't be!" Barbara's hand flew to her mouth, but it was too late, the scream was out. The girl leapt off the swing and was now running for the woods. "Hey come back here!" she ordered starting to pursue the intruder. Ghost! Then for a split second, a name came to her mind. "Sally! Wait!" But girl had vanished.

Starting across the backyard as fast as her legs could carry her, she past the swing. Leaves crackled under foot as naked branches clawed at her hair. She was sure that the red head was just a little way in front of her. At least I get to find out the truth now. Doubling her pace, Barbara felt sure she was gaining on the intruder. But as she neared a small clearing in the trees, she knew that she was alone, the ghost or who ever it was had long gone.

"Great, just great," she panted, checking her heart rate. "I was so blastedly close. I didn't imagine that." It was very reassuring to know that she hadn't imagined the whole thing it was a real as she was.

Bushes moved beside her, she turned in to the movement. There was something there, she was sure of

it. A feeling of dread washed all over her. But pressing forward she moved aside low hanging vines. Laying face down in the mud was a body, its limbs were twisted at awkward angles, its' frizzy red hair was matted and soaked.

Barbara shrieked out in terror.

Not looking back she ran back for the house, not stopping till she cleared the tree line. A soft drizzle fell from the heavy gray sky, soaking her face and hair. Seeing Colin coming the other way, he seemed surprised to see her.

"Hi there." He smiled.

Barbara grabbed his arm, trying to sputter out the words. "Bo . . .there's a body in . . .in . . .the woods, it's her!"

"There's a what' Who" Colin pulled her hand off his arm and shook her hard by the shoulders. "Calm down! Now say that again, slowly this time."

The shock was too much, it was hard searching for the words in amongst the fear, but at last she managed to say it. "There's a body in the woods back there, I think It's Sarah Winterfield's!"

"Who's that" he persisted.

"Blast you Colin, there's no time for that now!" She pulled away from his grasp. "Don't just stand there! Follow me!" Not waiting for him to follow she headed right back towards the swing, trying to remember her route. Almost on instinct alone Barbara reached the clearing, she looking around, trying to think back over the past moments.

"Where abouts was this body" Colin asked as he came up behind her. "You do remember don't you" She bit her lip. "It's . . .ah this way, I remember now." Leading the way through the trees they came to the spot, but no body. "It was here I'm sure of it, she was lying front down . . .and . . .and -" She saw Colin lean over a bush and pulled something over.

"Here's your body Barb." It was a dummy. "Looks like someone dumped it out here. We'd better get you back to the house you've had quite a scare."

"But . . ." her words trailed away. Barbara reluctantly followed her half brother back into towards the house. It's a bit convenient that the dummy looked exactly like Sarah. This is just getting out of hand now. And where have I seen that dummy before' Going through to the kitchen she slumped down that the table as Colin poured her a glass of milk.

"So what were you doing in the woods in the first place"

"I . . .I can't tell you, you'd never believe me." She buried her face in her palms, feeling like crying out.

"Why don't you try me"

After calming down a little, she started with Sarah's story, but not mentioning the threats to her, he'd think she was paranoid and tell her mum or dad. "So I started running after her, but all I Found was that dumb, dummy."

Colin just sat there taking it all in, till a grin crept across his face. "You can't chase ghosts Barb, you'll never catch one."

"Don't mock me!"

"I'm not, I swear. You really have lost that great sense of humor you never had."

"All right," Barbara sighed, her head still spinning. "Did you lock all the doors when you went out"

"Sure," he replied studying her expression as though she were a test subject. "I double- checked them too. Why"

"Because when I got back from school, both the front and back doors were left open."

Colin shrugged. "Then I don't have a clue, maybe the place is haunted, who knows, but I Think we should keep this to ourselves."

She could only nod; telling her parents would only make them worry about her state of mind. Getting to her feet she shoved passed Colin and went up stairs, throwing herself on her bed.



Soon Thursday had arrived Barbara's first week in the new school would be coming to a close in one day, and also in their new home. It was later in the afternoon than usual, when Jeff dropped her off after school. She thanked him as always.

"You've been here six days," Jeff stated. "What do you think of our nice little town?" He noticed worry in her eyes. Apart from Creeps that is."

"Everyone else here seems to be nice, very helpful. I think I may stay a while." Not that I have much of a choice. She just smiled.

"I'm really glad you like it, don't worry the place will grow on you in the end." His expression changed to a serious one, "You must be getting pretty bored up here on your own"

"Well I've got mum, my dad should be home by now, Jake and Colin." She paused for thought. "You're right I am a little bored, it's kind of hard getting used to such a quiet place."

"How about I take you to Grandville, it's a bit bigger than Winterfield, and a few more things to do."

"What like?"

"There's a bowling alley there for a start, normal and fast food restaurants etc. So what do you say, about seven?"

Barbara smiled. "I'd love to, it sounds a lot more tempting than spending it in there." She pointed at the house. "See you before school tomorrow." She patted the windshield as the car drove off.

This is so perfect Barbara, I can't believe it, my first week here I get a date. Barbara paused when she saw Colin sit down in the front step, he had a glum look on his face. "What's up with you College boy?" He looked up, a scowl on his face. "Your father's come home, and I have had enough of him."

She nudged him up a little to make room for her to sit down. "He's not that bad Colin, I'm sure you'll make mum much happier if you at least acted like part of the family."

"Well I'm not. Okay!" Colin got to his feet. "I won't be around here for long anyway, so there's no point in pretending anymore." He walked away towards the woods.

Barbara really hated it when this happened. He had never really accepted anything, as if he liked being an outsider. Was he still mad at mum because she remarried after his father's death. He must have really liked being the man of the house. But even after eighteen years, people can surely hold grudges for a long time.

She got to her feet, throwing her backpack over her shoulder and went inside. The hall echoed with the sounds of laughter coming from the living room. Sounds like dad's trying to make this place seem like home. Dropping her bag to the floor, she slowly opened the door.

Jake was standing in the middle of the room wearing a cap, with clapping hands on the top. Mr., and Mrs. Hoffman were sitting on the settee laughing with him.

Her dad looked up, and smiled. "Hi there Barb's, good to see your old man again." He got to his feet and gave her a huge hug. "Looks like you and I are going to be spending a lot more time together."

"Yeah, great. It's good to see you dad." She forced a smile. Had he really ever liked Colin, stupid boneheads.

Mr. Hoffman pulled away, and picked up a large bag. "Here you go." He handed her the bag.

"What is it?"

"Well if you looked in the bag you may find out," he laughed, and sent Jake off giggling.

Slowly she pulled open the bag and there was a wooden box inside. Pulling it out she said "That art studio I asked for." Barbara dropped the bag to the floor and sat down on an old wooden chair. She pulled it open, her eyes panned over the many paints, pencils, brushes and pastels. "Thanks a lot dad."

"You're quite welcome," her father replied proudly. "Maybe over the weekend you and I can sit out the back of the house, and paint the view"

But then she spotted a nice new leather briefcase. "Who's that for?"

"Your father bought it for Colin . . .but -"

"He refused it," Barbara concluded her mother sentence. "Can't believe you let him get away with that mum. Why doesn't he just grow up"

"Leave it where it is dear," Mrs. Hoffman pleaded. "The day isn't going to be spoiled."

"But -"

"You heard your mother, this isn't for you to be worrying about."

"What do you mean this doesn't concern . . ." her words trailed off when she saw her mums face suddenly sadden. "I . . .I'll find a place for this in my room, for this." Slowly she backed out of the room feeling beaten.

Colin didn't come back for tea, though Mrs. Hoffman was worried, what could they do, after all he was twenty-five years old. She just kept on saying he had some thinking to do.

A while later when Mr. Hoffman had taken Jake out for a drive Barbara found her mother sat in the kitchen, a pile of dishes in front of her. "Are you okay mum"

"I'm just resting," she insisted. "Would you mind giving me a hand out here, it harder having to cater for two more."

"Sure mum, your wish is my command," her daughter joked good naturally. "I'll do the lot if you want"

"Just help would be fine." Mrs. Hoffman tried to smile. "Well there's no point in just sitting around."

"Mum what is it with Colin, I mean it's not as if you divorced his father, he died."

"Barbara please, I don't . . ."

"Well I do mum, he can't keep treating us like this, he's being a complete jerk."

"He needs time, that's all."

"Mum he's had eighteen years to adapt, how much for time does he need, for goodness sake!"

Just then the back door open, in stepped Colin. His blonde hair was damp from the drizzle. His deep eyes scoured the room.

"Where have you been" his mum demanded. "We've been worried."

"For a walk." He looked at the floor. "I'm sorry I stormed out like that."

Those words seemed to break the wound between Colin and Mrs. Hoffman, but for Barbara this was going to be just the beginning, along with all the other worries she had.

## Chapter-10

When Saturday came, Barbara had had it with the whole situation. Colin had continued to alienate his stepfather, always saying sorry to Mrs. Hoffman all the time. But now she was going to let her feelings known to him.

She hammered repeatedly on his bedroom door, before she forced her way inside. "Colin It's time you and I had a talk!"

He was lying on his back staring at the roof. "Weren't you supposed to be going on a date today"

"It's not a date," Barbara said defensively. "He's just taking me out of this awful house. And it's not bodies in woods I'm running from, it's you."

Colin rolled his eyes. "What did I do this time then"

"What do you mean this time' You've been doing it since my dad got back. I don't understand."

"That's your prob' not mine." He slowly rose up from the bed and swung his legs over the side. "Why don't you get ready for your boyfriend"

"He isn't my boyfriend. Don't keep on changing the subject! Can't you see how you're hurting mum"

"She didn't think about me when she remarried," he retorted.

Her eyes widened. "How can you be so selfish"

Colin placed his headphones on and started playing a CD. It seemed he wasn't going co-operate in any way shape or form.

It was time to take up her dad invite to draw the forest, her new artist studio. His fowl attitude isn't going to spoil another day! After she found her dad, they both sat outside sketching the tree line. But Barbara couldn't help herself, as if something told her to draw the swing.

"Why don't you draw the house' It should be an interesting subject," asked Mr. Hoffman.

"Why don't you do it dad' I'm drawing the swing at the moment."

"What' You're drawing that old thing. Why'" He frowned. "It's not exactly very inspiring."

I don't know myself, so I can't tell you. "It's a very interesting subject for me I like that sort of thing. Why don't you draw the house"

"Okay. I'll just do that."

All the while something in her mind, almost controlling her will, forcing her to draw a red headed girl swinging there.

The day stretched out in front of them like a new sheet of paper, from this point on there would be no more threats. Nonsense from Colin, but she couldn't keep the coming evening with Jeff from her mind, which made the day drag on, minutes seemed like hours.

Choosing not to eat much for her tea, Barbara went up to her room. She was still trying to convince herself that this wasn't going to be a date though she was planning to be more daring with her clothes. But looking at her collection she just picked out jeans, shirt and denim jacket. Tying her brown hair into a ponytail, she made her way down the stairs.

"You could have been more imaginative," Mrs. Hoffman commented. "You do want to impress Jeff don't you"

"Oh, mum! Please," Barbara laughed. "I'll be fine like this."

"Leave the poor girl alone Deb," Mr. Hoffman pleaded. "She's being herself." He swooped down on his wife, kissing her.

Barbara chose to leave, when her parents started acting like a couple teenagers. "I'll see you later you guys."

No response.

Going out onto the porch, the sky was red as the sun vanished behind the trees, it would soon be dark. She found Jake sat outside. He had a pot of putty in front of him, making a lot of mess on the ground.

"Now what are you doing"

"Just pottering sis," he said, joining the putty into a large ball, and pulling it apart again.

"Well don't swallow it, whatever you do! I think it's time you went inside, I don't think that mum and dad would be too pleased if they knew you're out here."

"Don't worry. You just go and enjoy your date." A wide grin broke across his small face.

A short time after, Jeff pulled up out the front, she told Jake to say goodbye to her parents for her.

He wore a thick lumberjack shirt, also jeans.

"Are you ready for a good time"

Barbara smiled at him. Oh, this is going to brill. "Yep, it's going to be a welcome change to that house, and family."

Jeff looked rather surprised. "What's up with the family"

"Oh, it's a long story," she sighed, "I'd rather not go into that again, I'm just sick of it!"

Not pressing the subject again, they headed out of town, but not the way the Hoffman's had come into town, it seemed to be in the opposite direction. Clearing the trees they were out on a long country road, flat fields lay on either side, rolling into the bleak distance as darkness fell.

"This isn't to far, is it" Barbara asked, taking in the view of flat land all around. "I'm not one for long car rides."

Jeff said nothing, keeping his eyes fixed on the road as out of the darkness came a blur of light at the bottom of a steep hill. Slowly the large car plundered down from the gravel track to a smooth road.

All the lights in the houses around them were burning with life, such a contrast compared with Winterfield, Grandville was going to be a fun town.

"So this is where all the youth of Winterfield hang out," she remarked, as they paced groups of kids walking around, laughing, just having fun. "I wish mum and dad had picked this place to live."

"Hm," he just made a funny sound. "But this town doesn't have half the character that our town does." "I'd swap character for a normal life. "I guess you're right."

"I mean who in their right mind breaks into a store just to nick a dummy? Now that is -"

"What did you just say," Barbara cut him off. Images of seeing that body lying there sent a chill down her spine.

"Didn't I tell you? We had a break in at Winter Clothes on Monday night." Jeff shook his head. "There are some weirdos around here, like Creeps."

Then the picture flickered in her mind like a flame, one of the dummies in the window. "Let me guess, it was the girl with the red hair they stole, the one in the store front?"

"What are you psychic or something? You got it in one." He seemed very surprised. "How did you know?" Tell him! she scolded herself. Tell him what's been happening to you, he may be able to help. "You know I told you . . . how Creeps had threatened me?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Someone's been menacing me on the phone, telling me to get out before I die. An the other day I could have sworn I found Sarah Winterfield's body . . . but . . . well it was your dummy."

"That is really sick," Jeff snarled as he turned into bowling alley car park. "Have you told your parents?"

"No." Barbara gulped, the words catching in her throat. "Things are bad enough at home without even more worry."

"Is that why got all that stuff of on Sarah's abduction?"

"Partly," she sighed, turning her gaze out the window. Feeling his soft hand on her shoulder, she flinched. "Ah . . . It's not the only thing, you may think it's weird but . . . well -"

"Take it easy, you can tell me."

"On the first night we got to the house, I heard giggling coming from Sarah's swing . . . and . . . and . . . it was swinging on its own."

"Are you sure it wasn't the wind? There was gale's that night."

"You don't believe me. Do you?"

He shifted slightly, leaning over he caressed her cheek. "I'm not saying that, did anything else happen?" For a while Barbara's words seemed to be lodged, she felt a tear in her eye. "Just before I found the body I saw someone on Sarah's swing. I thought it was a ghost."

Jeff suddenly pulled back at such a rate it gave her a fright.

"What's wrong?" She took the opportunity to rub his shoulder. "Did I say something to -"

"No!" he snapped. "I've seen her too, when I was up driving in the woods one evening. She ran right out in front of me." He rested his head on his hands as he grabbed the wheel.

"I can't believe she'd go that far, though there were other times when she tried to split me up with other girls! But you've been so nice to her!"

"Jeff what are you talking about?" Barbara asked, suddenly becoming very, very scared.

"Sally Falconer."

She realized that thought had never even occurred to her. Is Sally jealous of me because Jeff dumped her, and was trying to frighten me off. I can't believe it. "Even if it is true, don't let it spoil our da . . . ah . . . evening out together."

"You're right, that's what she would want."

With that said both of them made their way across the car park, booking a lane for just the two of them. Loud music blasted from all around them, the atmosphere was much more lively, and Barbara even felt

like having a good time.

As soon as the game had started, things got off to a flying start; she got a strike on her fourth go. Though Jeff managed to get two, but he persisted that was because he got practice every weekend. Even with that they won, one game each. But most of the second he just larked around, doing silly things with the ball. She just couldn't help, but have a good time.

Shortly after they retired to a small bar out the back, and got some Coke to drink.

"I'll have to come with you every time you practice," said Barbara as she slumped at a blue glowing table. "I'll having you running for your ten pins when I've finished."

"Don't you start getting big headed, it takes a curtain class to practice with me and my friends."

"OOh, is that so. Well I've kicked your butt once tonight. Isn't that good enough to make that grade"

"Yeah why not" He pulled out a small bit of crumpled paper, and unfolded it. Grabbing a pen he scribbled on and passed it too her.

"What's this"

"It's a membership paper, for the club." Jeff placed his hand on her arm, smiling warmly at her. "Shall we take a drive"

Turning the car back towards Winterfield again, Jeff pulled off down a small country road into a small park. The stars could be seen clearly, shinning like crystals over the young couples heads.

Jeff led her to a small park bench and sat down, for a while they both gazed up at the ready-made light show. Slowly his arm went round her shoulder.

"I'm truly sorry about the welcoming committee you've had," he apologized. "It's petty."

"Don't worry, I'll get to know off Sally, when I see her on Monday." Barbara shifted closer, feeling his grip tighten around her. Oh, it feels so good! Please don't end. Then she felt his soft touch, her hair feel to the side of her face. Their lips touched, only the soft rustle of the breeze in the trees stirred in the cool night air.

## Chapter-11

It was getting very late when the Cadillac stopped in front of the Winterfield house. Barbara peered out into the thick blackness as the clear night was transformed into rain. "I wish they'd call it the Hoffman house now," she stated. "Keeping its name seems to bring up so many unhappy memories."

"I see your point, but there isn't much we can do about it. This house after all is part of our history." Jeff slipped his arm round her shoulder. "So did you have a good time tonight"

"I loved it, thanks a lot, I really needed a break from all this." She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. "See you in school on Monday."

"Are you sure you're going to be all right"

"I'll be fine. Don't worry about me. Bye." Climbing out of the car, she watched it roar away. Well, here we go again, another night in this dump. Barbara pulled out her key to unlock the door. But the key wouldn't fit. She leaned down a little, making sure it went in the lock.

"Oh, what!" she groaned. There was something stuffed in the keyhole, it felt like putty. Then she noticed the pot on the floor that Jake had been using. "Oh, very funny little brother." Not wanting to wake her parents, she went round the back of the house, that was also locked, putty in the lock.

She started shaking the door, thumping on it. "Mum! Dad! I can't get in!"

Large drops of rain began to fall from the sky, becoming faster and harder. The sky seemed to have turned to a redy color as lightning lit up the night sky.

Frantically she started kicking the door. "Come on! Some one up there must be able to hear me!"

Just then something moved in the shadows at the back of the house. It seemed to float in amongst the trees. Barbara flinched, whatever it was had moved towards the swing. "Who's there!" She swallowed hard slowly edging away from the back door. "Mr. Crail is that you"

There was no reply.

But then it veered away, coming out of the trees right towards her as she stood there frozen unable to speak, so afraid even to scream. The shadow seemed to mutate into a figure as it glided ever closer. Just then a light came on in the house, the figure stopped, its' eyes reflecting the yellow light, in a flash it vanished back into the blackness to which it had come.

Barbara collapsed against the back wall, her heart still hammering. The handle on the back door slowly turned, but of course the door wouldn't open.

"Barb' is that you!" Mr. Hoffman called through the door. "I can't unlock this Blasted door, come round the front!"

"Dad! Dad, it's no good, someone's put putty in the lock!"

There was a moment of conversing. "Hold on a minute dear," Mrs. Hoffman requested. "We're going to find something to clear the locks."

"Hurry, please. I'm going to soaked out here." She wrapped her arms around herself, huddling against the wall, doing her best to keep in the dry, with the limited roof cover.

"Not long now!" her father called. Then to Barbara's relief, a thin metal poker pushed out the sticky mess, and the lock clicked. Quickly she nearly stumbled into the house. "Where's Jake, I could kill him!" she bawled. Feeling confused, scared and very very annoyed.

"He's in bed," her mum whispered, "try to keep the noise down."

"I'm hardly going to wake the neighbors am I' Don't you get it' He was playing with silly stuff earlier. He must have stuffed it, after you locked up."

"I don't think so," Mr. Hoffman said frankly. "Looks like it was put in there from the outside, did you see anyone out there"

I don't know, what I imagined that figure. "No . . .ah, I mean yes, in the woods. They came right for me, but the light must have scared him."

"That means he can't be far off, I'm going after him." Barbara's dad's eyes narrowed. "You'd better get changed before you catch the flu." With that he bolted out the back door into the rain.

Wrestling out of her soaked clothes, she slipped on her nightshirt and dressing gown, while her mother made her a hot Coco, which she sipped slowly, hoping her dad would catch her tormentor.

It was then they heard shouting from the back garden. Both mother and daughter raced to the kitchen as Mr. Hoffman came back in.

"Get in there you!" he pushed someone into the light.

Barbara's eyes widened, and her mouth dropped in disbelief. "Jeff!"

## Chapter-12

Barbara stood there, just refusing to believe her own eyes. "I . . .I can't believe you did this to me!"

Thoughts kept on spinning in her mind, weaving a web of confusion, trying to figure it out. She gazed deep into Jeff's shamed eyes.

Why would he do this! Does he want to scare off Sally's only friend, just because she lost him those other girl friends'

Mr. Hoffman looked perplexed. "What' You know this guy." He wiped some droplets from his forehead.

"Yeah dad, he's the one I just spent three quarters of an hour snogging on a park bench!"

"You mean he was your date"

"Listen," Jeff pleaded. "I can explain . . ."

"Well, I don't want an excuse, using me to get at Sally! I've had it with all of you!" She glanced from Jeff to her dad, then her mum. "Just get out of here and leave me alone. Oh, Jeff don't bother about the lift

on Monday, I can walk!"

Running up the dark stair well to her room Barbara bounced onto her bed, feeling a tear run down her cheek.

I can't even trust the one person I thought I could! I'm such a fool, no ones ever going to love me for who I am.

"What's up with you" Colin stepped through the open door. "It's hard to get any sleep up here."

"Just leave me alone!" she sobbed, rolling over onto her stomach. "First we have to move to house of hell, then you come back, upset mum and now . . .now -"

"I know how you're feeling." He sat down on the bed, pushing her legs over.

"No you don't, otherwise you wouldn't have upset mum like you did. You don't even try to get on with my dad!"

"I didn't come here to start a fight with you, but that isn't true. Your dad never liked me in the first place, the only reason he bought me that case was to get on mums good side."

"Liar!" she bawled, whipping a tear away. "Now why don't you make like an atom and split!"

He just laughed. "You've got a lot to learn about life, you spoilt brat! You've got two parents and a brother that love you. There are thousands of kids out there that don't."

"Don't you tell me what you think I have, you don't have a clue what it's like. I can't rely on anyone anymore. So just leave me alone!"

"The truth hurts, so why don't you just grow up!" He ducked out the room as a shoe, and a fluffy duck flew after him.

Barbara just sat there in the emptiness of her room, knowing full well that Colin had told her truth, but she did have a reason to hurt inside, more than one in fact. Going out into the landing, she picked up her little trail of mess from the landing.

Next Monday, Barbara found each minute a chore. She felt ever so tired it was like living in a thin mist. All the lively chatter from all the other students seemed to be a lifetime away. Battling a headache from the day before made her very touchy. Jeff didn't seem to be in school, she had no idea what her dad had done to him on Saturday night. Maybe he plucked his eyes out with a poker. The way I feel at the moment I wish he did.

"Barbara! Barbara!"

There it was again, it was so hard to distinguish between her own name and the rest of the noise. She turned to see Sally's beaming face beside her.

"Guess what! I just got a 'A' in my science test. Isn't it great!"

"Huh . . .Oh, hi Sally I didn't notice you. I'm not feeling too well today. My heads spinning, I can't see, or even think straight."

"Ha, you're like I am, most of the time anyway. What's up!" Sally shook her friends arm gently. "I'm sure it can't be all that bad!"

"Oh, it is," Barbara huffed, stuffing her books in her locker. But the question she had to ask rose in her mind. Was It Sally I saw running into the woods before I found that body' "I just think I need some fresh air. Want to take a walk with me in the garden!"

Sally agreed, they both headed out into the rather lukewarm autumn sunshine. The student garden was almost empty, apart from a boy and girl kissing on a bench.

Barbara flushed, doing her best to shut out Saturday night. She sat herself down on a bench that faced away from the couple.

"Have you managed to go through all that stuff we got from the library yet!"

"Not yet," Barbara confessed, there was too much other stuff going on.

"I bet Saturday was pretty hot, a lot of girls here say he's the best kisser in Winterfield. Though he never

kissed me when we dated."

"I'm not in the mood to talk about it Sally." She looked at the dead leaves on the floor. Gathering strength, she peered up. "Were you near my house last Thursday, on Sarah's swing."

Sally's face seemed to go bright red here was someone that couldn't hide anything. "It was me."

"I knew it! But why"

"Not now," Sally peered around her, checking to see if anyone was watching. "I can't tell you here it's too dangerous. Are you free tonight"

"Sure, I have no pressing engagements."

Sally pulled out a piece of screwed paper and she unfolded it and started writing. "Here take this; it's my address. We live in the older part of town, my mum will be working late here tonight, then we can talk."

Why's she so afraid! Doesn't want anyone else to know that she's been scaring me. But if it was Sally, a glimmer of hope washed over her. Jeff may not have been involved, but what was he doing in the woods late at night! I suppose! I could have been caught in the middle of a running battle between them.

At lunchtime Barbara gave her father a call to say that she wouldn't be home for tea. He was pleased that she was fitting better now. In your dreams, she thought when placed the receiver down.

After lunch, dreaming her self through lessons, wondering what would drive Sally to do that. Wondering if she had felt the same urges she had felt every time she came close to that swing.

Sally wasn't in the car park when she got there, so Barbara chose to walk to her friend's house on her own. The weakening sunlight sent shadows, reaching out like a deadly black carpet. Plus it was an area of the town that she had briefly passed by car. All the houses seemed run down, like a ghost town waiting for the clock to strike midnight.

Crossing the thin road, she did her best to find the number as all the houses looked so much alike. Their dull gray exteriors blending in with the road and footpaths as if the same material formed them all.

Cracks in the pavements sprouted plants of all kinds, litter and dead leaves skittered around in the cool evening breeze.

While wondering around the road, she got that same feeling, as if someone somewhere were watching her every move. No! I'm giving into you. Paranoia!

The numbers led her to a larger house, it reminded her so much of the 'Hoffman house.' It's shaped windows, doors even the curtains were in the same style. But the lawn was neatly kept, bar the odd patch of bare earth.

Barbara stepped through the squeaky gate, stopping half way up the path. I wonder whose this house once belonged too! She thumped the door hard three times.

A form appeared through the frosted glass, it stood there for a moment before the door opened. "Hi Barbara!" Sally's concerned expression eased to relief. "I'm sorry I wasn't there to meet you."

"That's all right, it's time I started finding my way around on my own."

Leading her friend inside, Sally bolted the door as tight as she could. "You didn't see anyone around out there did you"

Barbara shook her head. "How come"

She didn't answer instead Sally went up stairs. Noting the same blood red carpet in the landing. In fact the deeper Barbara went into the house, the more like her own it became.

Both girls went into a small room at the end Sally closed the door, then went swiftly to draw the curtains, before sitting on the edge of her bed.

Barbara placed her hands on her hips. "Okay mind telling me what this is all about, and why you were on that swing"

Her friend still seemed very afraid. "I'm sorry I scared you like that . . .I. . .I had no choice."

"What do you mean, you had no choice"

Sally's mouth dropped, as if to say, but she was interrupted by the sound of the phone ringing. She



seemed to freeze for a moment in terror. "Barbara you take the extension in here, I'll get the one in my mum's room."

There was no time to argue, she waited till she heard Sally pick up, then so did she.

"Hello," she heard her friend say.

For a moment there was silence, but then as if it came to life, a voice Barbara knew all too well.

"Hello Sally," the raspy voice replied. "You did a good job, don't you think about telling anyone or someone will get hurt!" Then the line clicked off.

That voice, it was that same voice that had warned me to get out!

## Chapter-13

"Who was that?" Barbara called out. Placing the phone down, she ran out into the landing. Doing her best to work out which room Miss Falconer would sleep. She found Sally stood by her mother's bed, tears rolling down her cheek.

"He must be watching me," Sally said as she placed down the receiver, her hand was quite visibly shaken.

"Someone's been threatening me too' It sounded like the same person."

"That's what I wanted to tell you, that caller told me to go into the woods and play Sarah."

"You just went and did it!" Barbara bawled. She felt her head become heavy with that same mist.

At that very same moment the phone began to ring again, both girls ran back to their posts. Sally picked up. "Hello."

"Hi Sally, it's mum," came the voice from the other end. "I was just checking you were okay"

"I'm fine mum." Sally took a huge sigh of relief. "How many times do I have to tell you I'll be fine when you work on."

"I know that." Miss Falconer laughed. "I'm afraid I'll be home later than planned, I've just got a load of new paper work to do."

"What time do you think you'll be back mum?"

"About eight quarter past see you later." The line clicked off.

Barbara slammed the receiver down, and went back in with Sally. "Why didn't you tell her about that Blasted caller?" she demanded.

Sally said nothing, just stared as if Barbara were invisible. "The caller hurt my mum. He rang me up a couple of weeks ago, told me to go into the woods and giggle. I just laughed at him," Sally sat slowly on her mother's bed. "He threatened to hurt someone if I didn't do what he told me. Then one night someone attacked my mum."

"How did you know it was the same person?"

"He rang me up just after, and that he had proof. The next moment my mum came home, she said someone had knocked her over." She started swinging her legs back and forth. "After that I did what he told me . . ."

"Then what did you do?" Barbara said she was starting to get a little angry.

"I didn't want him to hurt my mum so I did what he said, on the Friday night before I met you I went into the woods and. . ."

"Giggled!" Barbara hissed, finishing the sentence, she felt her hands turn into fists. "That's what I heard."

"I thought that would be it, but it wasn't," Sally continued. "He must have been watching the house because he rang the next time she worked late. Ordered me to get on Sarah's swing."

"Lead me right to that Blasted dummy!"

"I'm Sorry. Please don't be mad, I'm sure you'd do the same if your mum was in danger."

"I understand." Barbara calmed herself down. "Did you see anyone in the woods when I chased you? Someone placed a dummy that looked like Sarah. I think it was her body. And that same person that just threatened you, also rang me. Told me to get out or die. Do you have any idea who it might be?"

"None," Sally admitted, she ran her hand through her hair. "It's been such a nightmare since the calls started you've been such a great friend to me. I really am sorry." She placed hand in her pocket, and drew out a little plastic bag, inside was a key. "It's a key to your house, he placed it in my bag."

Barbara patted her friend's shoulder comforting her. "We'll catch the prat that's doing this." But who is it, would it be creeps, had he hit Miss Falconer what that stick of his. He had done the same a caller on the phone, warning her to leave. But he hadn't said I'd die, but said it was for my own good.

Or is it Jeff, he was out in the woods when I was putted out. But there was no way he would have had time to place the putty in the lock, I was with him all evening.

It was all so confusing, but the main question on her mind was why'

Both girls sat down in the kitchen, waiting for their sausage rolls too cook. Again darkness fell, but not the clear dark from the moonlit sky, but thick clouds spreading out across the dim sky. They were both trying to shut out the horrible events from their minds.

Barbara wanted to get to know her friend a little better. "Do you have a father, I mean around here."

"No, mum fell pregnant with me in the city. When she came back my grandparents had gone, everyone treated my mum like a complete stranger."

She couldn't help, but revert back to the current problem. "Sally do you have any idea who it might be? You must have your own thoughts."

"I have asked myself that over and over, but I can't come up with anything. Winterfield is such a close nit community, I can't understand why anyone would do it."

When the timer alarm sounded, it made them both jump. Sally got to her feet and opened the oven. "If we keep this up we're going to be have high blood pressure or heart attacks."

"Know what you mean. My parents left the city to leave the stress behind, looks like both of theirs gets passed down to me."

Both girls laughed at that. Setting the table about eating their meal, they turned on the television and flicked through the channels to see if there was anything worth watching on. Time drifted on, the next time Barbara looked at the clock.

"It's quarter to eight, my parents are going to be getting worried." She got to her feet. "Your mum should be back soon anyway." A look of concern crept across her face.

Sally noted it. "Don't worry, I'll be fine." She smiled. "Thanks for coming over tonight. It's nice to have someone around. This place can get quite lonely"

"If you're sure you'll be okay, I could always ri . . ."

"Go on. I'll see you in the cantina tomorrow lunch time."

Barbara gave the front of the house another quick run over with her eyes, wondering if it had at anytime, had anything to do with the Winterfield family. Hesitantly she left the front garden out onto the street. The older part of the town was very poorly lit, it seemed as though this was the way it was back when the town was made.

The sky was burdened with rain waiting to fall. Barbara was starting to wish she had rung home, get her dad to give her a lift home. It didn't take her many minutes of walking up and down endless, but gloomy, empty streets to realize that she was lost.

"Oh, great, I doubt I'll be able to find my way back to Sally's house, let alone go home." She sighed, letting her shoulders drop. Shivering, it was starting to get cold she wrapped her arm round herself, trying to keep a little warmth.

A light sleet began to fall to the ground. Oh, this is the last thing I need, it's no wonder I hate this place

so much. Not having a clue what to do, if she carried on going, getting even more lost. "I'm going to get drenched if I stay here."

Barbara began pacing aimlessly, looking around for the Falconer's house. But as they all looked alike in the daylight, now it was near most impossible to distinguish between one from another. The next thing she realized, she was standing in front of the fence that led into the Winterfield estate.

Now I know I am lost, this fence goes back miles! Relief broke her chain of thought as she heard footsteps, and they sounded close. It maybe someone that could help me, maybe let me use their phone.

"Hello!" she called out. "I'm lost, could you help me"

Only the wind whispered an empty reply.

The footsteps appeared to have stopped.

"Ah . . .they've probably gone indoors out of this wet weather, not bothered about a person lost and alone."

But no, the footfalls began once again they seemed to be all around her. Was it the person that Sally said he may have been watching her house, the one that assaulted her mother.

Barbara pace quickened, she knew this could be a matter of life or death. She needed help, and fast. Stumbling along she tried to locate where the steps were coming from. Were they behind, or in front of her, waiting in the shadows to pounce.

In a split second she knew, as a jab of pain shot up her leg as she fell face first to the ground.

Something cracked right next to her, and silence. Everything was a blur. She touched her face, but her glasses had fallen off. Then for a moment a dark shadow stood before her, when something clumped her on the shoulder blades, as darkness cloaked her sight.

#### Chapter-14

Barbara felt restful, floating above the clouds that were her troubled life. She tossed and turned, trying her best to shut the painful memories out. But they were there, so real as though she could touch them. But no she wasn't drifting at all she was swinging, on Sarah's swing. Filled with the joy of the ride. The cool night air on her face, and the wind on her hair! So free.

The daylight was easing slowly away, but that didn't bother her, she would be quite safe in her own back yard. The joy seemed to flee from her like a flock of migrating birds.

Something moved amongst the trees, coming closer, and closer. Then it was there right in front of her, pure evil with no face. It grabbed her arm.

The next thing Barbara knew she was wide-awake, and that she had been dreaming. Life slowly flooded back into her body along with a splitting headache. A sweet smell of hot chocolate bought her back, and

the sound of rain hitting a near by window pain.

Everything around her was blurred, shapes moved about her like aliens. She shook her head, the image improved a little.

"Barbara thank God your okay." Sally's voice sounded hopeful. "It was lucky mum found you. It must have been quite a fall."

It was painful trying to remember last night, her head still hammered with pain. "No I . . .I. Sally where are my glasses, I can't see very well."

"They must have been cracked in the fall." She placed something into her friend's hand. "It's hot chocolate it should make you feel a bit better.

"What happened Sally" She took a sip of the warm substance.

"Your mum rang up last night she was worried because you hadn't come home. So we went out looking for you, my mum found laying on the pavement."

"But I didn't trip. Someone tripped me up. I . . .I . . .heard someone was following me. It must have been the person that made those phone calls."

"Maybe," Sally whispered.

"How are you feeling Barbara" Miss Falconer said, as she came in the room. "You must have hit your head pretty hard last night. Your mum will be here soon, I've told her what happened."

Why can't I tell them the truth' Sally will be able to back me up she was threatened too!

"Miss Falconer, someone tripped me up last night I didn't fall. There were the footsteps . . . and . . . and -" She turned to towards the red headed form. "Sally tell her how he threatened you, how it was the caller that attacked her."

"Barbara you're confused," her adviser said. "I may have been us out looking for you."

"No," she continued to protest till a pounding came at the front door. It was Mrs. Hoffman. She heard her mother's worried voice.

"How is she"

"She seems okay, had a little bit of shock. Her glasses have been broken," said Miss Falconer.

"It must have been quite a bad step, it was lucky you found her when you did."

Then the talking seemed to grow quieter, Barbara new they would be talking about her. Miss Falconer would tell her mum about what she had said about being knocked over, her mum would say it was her paranoia, and that she was having a hard time at home.

The next moment the door opened, she saw her mother's form enter the room.

"Barbara." She drew closer and gave her daughter a hug. "How are you feeling"

"Oh, just great mum, but it would be nice to see properly again. Now we're going to have to find an optician." Getting to her feet, Barbara groaned, the area at the back of the neck where she had been struck still hurt like hell. "Ow!"

"Take it easy," her mum said. She helped her to her feet. "All we have to worry about is getting you back home."

Oh, that's the last thing I need, going back to that swing, house and Colin. "But I've got to go to school." She looked up at her Adviser for help.

"You're in no fit state to go to school," Mrs. Hoffman warned. "I'll find an optician for you, while you're resting."

"Your mums right Barbara," Miss Falconer joined in. "We've managed to keep going while our students are off sick."

"There's no way I'm going to win this is there"

Sally was nowhere to been seen when they stepped out the front door. It was still bucketing down with rain; the ground was soaked to a dull gray color. Just the way they looked last night.

"If there's any way we can repay your kindness, just let me or Barbara know, okay."

"I'm here to help, please call me Jane when I'm not in school." She turned and headed back indoors. The journey home was in complete silence. Barbara couldn't help, but feel betrayed by her mother. Talking to Miss Falconer like that behind my back, she thinks I'm being paranoid again, I know she does, I can see it in her eyes. I've seen it so many times before. She stared out of window, watching the grayness around her. It would fit into her dull life very well at the moment.

Something cracked on the front windshield as the wipers flopped back and forth.

Again, the same snapping sound as hail started pounding from the sky above. For a moment it seemed as though some would brake through the glass, but it held as the onslaught eased a little.

"That was pretty heavy," said Mrs. Hoffman.

"Yeah right," Barbara mumbled.

When they got back to the house, it was a matter getting into shelter as fast as they could. The house was totally silent bar the sound of the hail hitting the roof.

"What a couple of weeks it been," Mrs. Hoffman let out a long sigh. "I hope things settle down soon.

Don't you dear"

She just nodded, her mum talking only seemed to add too the rest of the noise in her mind. "I need a pain killer." Why can't they make pills for heart ache as well as head' Going up to her room, she went through a couple of boxes that were still to be unpacked, Barbara pulled out her last pair of glasses. Wearing them for a couple of hours and her eyes used to hurt, it was better nothing.

She pulled out a small card file witch contained all the copies of newspaper clippings from the school library. But it was no use Barbara needed to start gathering her thoughts. Everything she hand learn, that the caller wasn't only threatening her, but also Sally. But why'

## Chapter-15

It was still raining hard in Winterfield when Barbara and her mum left for Grand Ville, where she would see an optician. The night before had seen a debate in the living room between her mum and dad. She had a feeling it was about her.

"It can't all be in her imagination," Mr. Hoffman had said. "After that Jeff kid was hanging around in the woods, maybe it was him that struck her"

"Don't you tell her you think that," Mrs. Hoffman threw back. "We can't afford to take any risks, you know what doctor Mcrobbie said." She sighed. "We don't know how the situation with Colin has effected her." It's like everything I do or say scrutinized over and over again, and it's not even my fault.

"You're very quiet this morning Barb," her mum said. "Are you feeling okay"

"I'm fine mum, really," she lied. "I didn't get much sleep last night, I guess. The place we're going, it's where Jeff took me on Saturday."

"Did you see him in school"

She forced a smile. "No, he hasn't been in."

Suddenly Mrs. Hoffman changed the subject. "What's your feelings about Colin, you wanted to talk to me about him the other day."

Though she was taken aback by the question, its' motive was clear. She's trying to find out what's wrong with me. Well there is nothing wrong with me someone is out to scare me. "Colin's just . . .just a dumb dork, he doesn't care about anyone but himself."

"He has been through a lot," her mum pleaded.

"Mum, don't defend him! He's just . . .well getting in the way, if he doesn't want to be part of our family, make him get a place somewhere else. Far from us."

"It doesn't work like that, after all he still is my son, and I still love him, like I do you and Jake." She smiled. "He's not such a bad person, if you dig deep enough."

"Yeah right, as soon as you start digging with him, he throws the spade away."

"Please try and get on with him, we have to make this work, which means all parties have to do their best."

"I'll do it for you mum, I know I was a bit of a pain about moving, wasn't I"

"A bit." Mrs. Hoffman laughed. "But it's good you're letting us know how you feel, instead of keeping it inside, like you used to. Otherwise we don't have a clue what to do or say."

I tell you how I feel about the night before last, but you still don't believe me.

Grand Ville seemed much larger than it had before, but nowhere near as lively, but compared with Winterfield it was shopping heaven. "Mum after we've finished, can I look round the town"

"Why not"

The time spent in the small optician was very little Mrs. Hoffman agreed to wait while Barbara's glasses were repaired. She headed out onto Grand Ville town. Agreeing to meet her mum by the car at midday. Everything about the place was more modern than Winterfield, even the style of the buildings.

Buying a couple of books to keep her busy over the next few days. Rain had been forecast at least till the end of the week. Though her old glasses did bother her eyes a little, she would remove them to give her eyes a break.

Seemingly to be drawn in by the welcoming shop-fronts she could there is a feel of community in this place. But her dreamy state soon ended when she passed the bowling alley, it made her think of Jeff. A feeling of guilt wash over her like a dulling cloud. Hadn't he been in school because he was avoiding her' I never even gave him a chance to explain himself, but what was he doing in those woods' She crumpled down on a bench.

That night, still meant so much to her. Jeff had been so kind. Opening the garage for them, giving me lifts to school and back every day. Barbara reached into her pocket and pulled out the signed membership of his bowling practice. She stared down at the little slip in her palm.

"Oh, I don't know what to think now," she laughed to herself. A very important question filtered slowly into her mind. "The whole thing has to be a sick joke. If this creepy caller was for real, why hadn't he threatened her parents also' "There's no way I could leave that house without them. They sure went through an awful lot of trouble just to scare me."

Meeting her mum, as arranged they drove back home. With her glasses repaired, things looked a little brighter. Mud nearly all the way back sloshed the station wagon.

In the afternoon she settled down to research Sarah Winterfield. Most of the articles said little about her or the family, more on the sadness felt by the town's folk. But the one thing they all had in common was one question. 'Is Sarah Winterfield Alive Or Dead' Despite knowing that she hadn't seen or heard a ghost, it was after all Sally.

Pulling out her school bag, Barbara started looking for her pencil case. Pulling out books. A neatly folded slip of paper floated to the ground by her feet. She bent down to pick it up. On the outside, written in blue pen was a date. 'NOVEMBER THE 20th' Slowly she opened the slip, and read on in fear.

'BE OUT BY THIS DATE OR YOUR DEAD AS SHE IS!!!' A freezing chill ran down her spine. What on earth did this letter mean' As dead as Sarah' But there was no way anyone could have slipped this note in my bag without me knowing. For a moment she thought. Unless the person that tripped me up, placed that letter in my bag. But there was something very familiar about that date, where had she seen it before.

"Barbara!" she heard her mum call up. The sound made her jump. "I'm going to pick Jake up from school! Your father's in the study if you need anything!"

"Okay mum! See you." Quickly she folded the letter away, pondering what to do next when she heard creaking coming up the stairs. In panic she tossed her backpack into her wardrobe, and turning to face who ever entered.

"How are you feeling?" Colin asked as he pushed open the door.

"Geez, haven't you ever heard of knocking first? I . . . I could have been getting changed or something!"

"Op's sorry." He placed his hand over his mouth pretending to be shocked. "Shall I go out, and come back in again?"

"Don't bother," she snarled. "What do you want?"

"Mum had a little word with me before she went out, said that I should get to know you. And that I shouldn't let my feelings about your dad get in the way of our relationship."

"And you actually listened to someone else's opinion, now that has to be a first," Barbara snapped sarcastically. "Don't feel pressed upon to be part of the family."

"It's not just what mum said." Colin's stern line broke into a small smile. "I've been doing some thinking."

"Ha. Now that's got to be a first!"

"Barbara," he said suddenly serious. "Want to tell me what happened, mum says you most probably tripped, but you don't agree with that."

"Oh, so now we're trying to fault lines in my relationship with mum!" she scolded.

"Will you please be quiet, and let me finish," Colin said ever so calmly.

"You . . ." But the words seemed to evaporate before they reached her mouth. "You really want to know what I think happened, all the things that have happened to me since I got here?"

"Yeah I do. Mum seems to think everything should be normal, no matter what happens. Everyone should be happy in her life."

Surprisingly she found herself agreeing with everything her half brother said. Telling him about the phone's call, Sally, why she had been so scared seeing the dummy in the woods.

"Could it be your boyfriend, the one dad caught in the woods after your date?"

"But there's no way Jeff would trip me up, hit me from behind and stick a letter in my backpack." Her feelings for Jeff were still so mixed up she wanted to believe so much that he wasn't involved.

He frowned. "They left a letter in your backpack, lets see it."

"Okay." Slowly Barbara got her pack out and rummaged through it. "Here we go." She handed Colin the letter. "What do you think of that?"

"Maybe the person followed you from Sally's, perhaps to scare you. Watch you trip up and seized the opportunity"

"I guess, but why didn't the caller threaten mum. But I was the one that answered phone, they couldn't threaten someone who didn't." She smiled at him. "Thanks Colin, it means so much that someone around here to believe what I say."

"Sure," he mumbled.

## Chapter-16

Barbara reached her locker, panting. She was totally soaked to the skin as it started bucketing down halfway on her walk to school. Nothing seemed to be going right, even with Colin on her side. It had been over a week since then. Mrs. Falconer had suggested that she make an appointment with the school councilor. She had hated the very idea.

I've been through it all before. Looking from the locker over for a homework assignment, she thought she had done that was due in this afternoon. But it was nowhere to be found. She swore under her breath and slumped her head against the lock door.

"Barbara!" a voice shouted from down the corridor. "Wait there a minute I need to talk to you."

It was Jeff. She had seen him around after a short absence from school, but neither of them had tried to speak. "Jeff I'm very busy would you mind coming back later"

He came up beside her. "We need to talk, it's important."

"I'm already screwed, I haven't done Mrs. Kane's History assignment, and I have an appointment with the school councilor." Barbara looked at her watch. "Starting five minutes ago." She started off down the corridor.

"Meet me in the car park after school!" Jeff called after her, before he too headed off.

"Room 106, 106," she murmured. This was a part of the school Barbara hadn't spent a great deal of time in. Going up a small flight of stairs, she checked all the room numbers in passing. A little while later she found the room, but it was locked. I'll bet she thinks I'm not coming, so now what do I do'

Light footsteps padded along the echoing corridor behind her. She swung round to see a youngish woman half running, half doing her hair.

"Barbara Hoffman," she said. "I'm really sorry to keep you waiting, but I had some problems getting my daughter to school."

"No worries, I only just got here myself." So much for missing the appointment!

"I'm Kate." She rummaged through her handbag and pulled out some keys, and unlocked the door.

"Please go in." The councilor smiled warmly, seeing the anxious look on Barbara's face. "Don't worry, I don't bite."

The room was a small, cosy one, with blue carpet, large windows, and a settee. Along side it was a table with a coffee machine, electric kettle, and a plate of biscuits.

"Please sit down. Would you like something to drink' We have tea or coffee."

"Tea would be fine, two sugars please." She sat down on the settee, trying move bits of wet hair that kept falling in front of her eyes.

"So tell me about yourself" Kate asked as she poured the tea. "Here you go, you'll find I make a great Cuppa."

"Well there isn't much to tell." She shrugged. "You haven't got a file on me too, from my last school."

"I'm afraid pieces of paper aren't much good in this area of the school. Most students that see me have had more happen to them than old school reports. Around here I'm known as the teacher with time."

"Well I was San Francisco born and raised; I have one brother Jake who's ten. A half brother Colin, we have the same mother, but different father's, his died, so mum remarried."

"Now that much I do have on paper. Barbara you are free to talk about whatever you want. This is your time. I can promise you it won't leave these four walls. Is there anything bothering you at home or in school, heaven forbid it." She laughed at the comment. "So are going to help me out"

Let's start with the part she will believe. "Colin came back from College a couple of weeks ago he's . . .ah. . .well um -"

"It's okay, take your time."

"He doesn't seem to have forgiven mum for getting remarried. It's upsetting mum . . .everyone really."



Though he does seem to be getting to know me a little better now."

Barbara chose not to mention her fears she needed time to find out whether she could really trust Kate not to go back to her parents with what she said.

"Think that will do for the first day don't you think?" The councilor got to her feet. "Shall I put in the books for this time next week."

"Okay, that would be great, ah . . . Kate." She turned to head out the door. At least I get to miss one lesson of sports a week.

At lunchtime Barbara met Sally in the cantina, getting themselves burger and chips. Picking a quiet table in the corner, they hoped to remain out of sight from the groups in the middle.

"I got another call last night," Sally whispered. She looked around, making sure no one was watching. "I don't think he knows that I told you, so that's good."

"What did the caller say?"

"Just said I'm watching you, don't do anything to endanger your mother, I'll start with her and finish with me."

"But he had to have been watching the house, when he attacked me and slipped that note in my bag. Or whoever it was had just arrived."

"Sally, there you are!" Miss Falconer called. "I've been looking all over for you."

She looked up, surprised to hear her name called out. "Yes mum."

"You were meant to help me put the folders in the car remember."

Sally apologized. "I totally forgot, and as I always meet Barbara for lunch I just assumed -"

"Can I help too Miss?" Barbara interrupted. "If you don't mind us finishing our meals."

"Thank you Barbara," Miss Falconer smiled. "It's nice to know there are some selfless students on site.

Your help would be appreciated, thank you."

Her daughter groaned. "We'll meet you out side Miss."

After finishing their meals, the two girls headed out into the staff car park. "There she is." Barbara pointed to a form lumbering a large box out of an open fire exit. They turned and made their way across the car park, weaving in and out of parked cars.

"Ah, you're just in time girls. Go into the office, all the boxes are laid out on the table, you can't miss them."

Going through into the office, both friends grabbed a box each, and stepped out to the car.

Miss Falconer laid them in the boot. "So Barbara, how did your appointment with Kate go this morning?"

"It was okay; she was really nice. I've got another one next week."

"That's good I've seen her work amazing feet with kids of all kinds. Most on the verge of being expelled."

"Mum," Sally interrupted.

"Sally I'm talking, go and get the next box!" she snapped. "You know you don't talk when I'm talking, I don't expect Barbara would do that."

Sally snorted and walked off.

"Sometimes you can't get anywhere with that girl!"

That was the first time Barbara had ever heard her adviser shout, she clearly wasn't the sort of person you wished to get on the wrong side of. She headed back into the office expecting to see Sally come out with the next box, but no, she had gone.

After school Barbara marched out into the student car park ready to meet Jeff. She had chosen to be fair, and here what he had to say for himself. I'm not going to be a push over I am immune to his charms. Right! I will get there before him and -

But he was already there, propped up against his car. She paused, awe struck as she found herself studying him, up and down. It's what is on the inside that counts.

"Hi." Jeff grinned. "Thought I'd impress you by getting here on time for a change."

Here I am on the verge of date the most gorgeous guy in Winterfield, and all I can think about is whether he's a creep or not'

"I'm impressed, now shall we get down to business"

"Don't you want to talk about this on the way home" He got closer, reached out his arm, but she jerked away.

"Ah yes . . .no, I mean I do not think so. Now what were you doing in the woods after our so called date"

"It wasn't so called," Jeff said, sounding hurt. "That time meant more . . ."

"Save the crap Jeff and answer the question." Don't blame him if he never what's to speak to you again.

"This may sound silly, but just after I left you I kind of got worried. So I pulled the car to a stop by the woods and walked back." He sounded a little confused. "I saw you stood around outside the house, then the light came on and I panicked. Then something . . ."

"Something!" She laughed.

"Someone came at me so fast, pushing me into a tree."

Barbara shivered, remembering that dark finger. It just stood there, staring at me, those eyes those awful eyes watching me!

"Then the next thing I knew I was being carted in by your dad. And that's the truth."

Believe him please believe him. Or I could be getting in a car with a complete maniac' "Okay, let's get going Jeff."

The Cadillac sped along the rain soaked road both driver and passenger not saying a word, just looking out their side windows. It was down to Jeff to break the spell.

"It rained like this for four whole days a couple of years ago there was sure a lot of flooding. Even the roads into Winterfield were flooded."

"Do you think it will happen again" Barbara asked, not paying much attention to the conversation. She had many more things to think about than the weather.

"Oh, it's hard to say really."

Barbara turned to face him. "Is there anything special about the twentieth of November by any chance would there"

Jeff thought for a moment. "Not that . . .ah yeah, the twentieth. It's the anniversary of Sarah's disappearance."

That really sent a shiver down her spine. I have to be out of the house, by the twentieth, at least that's what that letter said. Quickly she explained to him about the letter.

"The last time we spoke you said you were going to have a word with Sally, did you get round to it"

"It was her I saw in the woods. I went round Miss Falconer's house. There was a phone call. Whoever's been threatening me has been blackmailing Sally."

"Hm," Jeff replied, as if he didn't quite know what to say next. "That call could have been a set up, to make you think . . ."

They turned into a steep bend. There was a flash of bright headlights from the road ahead. Barbara had to raise her hand to block out the blinding glare. The car skidded she felt forces of all kinds pull at her body, as the car came to a halt, in a large crack.

## Chapter-17

As after the blur of sudden light came dark forms getting closer, all around the clawing at the glass. Barbara could have sworn for a moment that they were trying to get her. A dark form loomed a little way ahead, its thick arm towering over them like a monstrous giant. With a large crashing sound, both of them were thrown forward, barely saved by the dig of their seat belts then silence that lasted for a long dragging time.

Jeff finally stirred. "Ah," he complained as he sat up looking across to the passenger seat. "Barbara are you okay?" He wiped some blood from his forehead.

"Yeah," she mustered, still shocked. "What happened?" She felt a throbbing pain in her head, and neck. "That car, it . . ." but her words trailed away

A huge tree stood in front of them, twisted wreckage of the hood rose in front of them. The front windshield had been shattered quite badly it was lucky it hadn't fragmented.

Slowly he forced the driver's side door open. "Some people sure don't know how to drive," Jeff complained.

Barbara tried her side door, but a tree blocked it so she had to scramble out the driver's side to join him. "It doesn't look very promising does it?" She shook her head.

"Think the cars the least of our worries right now." He placed a firm arm round her shoulder, but Barbara was too stunned to complain. An idea filled her mind, someone she hated to even consider.

"What . . . what if it wasn't a loony driver?" She shivered as she said the words. Crossing her arms to keep warm.

"What do you mean?"

"What if someone tried to force us off the road on purpose, it's possible right?" She pulled away from his grip. "It could be the next step, he can't frighten me off using the phone, dummy's, and Sally so he's going to try and kill me!"

"Look there are a lot of nut drivers out here, it's a rough country road that hardly anyone uses. I could think of a couple of guys in my class that come up here, to drive." He sighed. "There isn't much else to do in Winterfield on a school night."

Glaring up at him in confusion and disbelief, she at least expected Jeff to be on her side. Or was the idea of someone threatening her, when it involved Sally. "At least tell me that it's possible. Please, so that I'm not totally going round the bend!" Even she was shocked by her own nasty tone.

"Calm down Barbara," Jeff pleaded. "But trying to run someone off the road doesn't happen in Winterfield."

"Well I for one have had enough of this stinking place!" Barbara was still yelling. "Now I'm going to walk home now!" She turned and started walking back towards the road. Jeff stood for a moment watching her in silence.

"Wait," he called stepping up beside her. "I'll go with you, just to be on the safe side."

Evening seemed to be growing colder, and faster each moment. When they reached the house it was getting rather late. Mrs. Hoffman was stood outside the front door. Her eyes narrowed when she saw Jeff, but promptly came up to them.

"Where the hell have you been young lady? We've been worried sick!" she snapped. "Your fathers gone out with Colin to try and find you!" Her eyes shot up to Jeff. "What's he doing here?"

"Please mum, I'll explain everything, let's just get inside, in the warm."

Going into the lounge, they sat down, while Mrs. Hoffman attended to Jeff's wound. Barbara did her best to explain. Telling her that Jeff hadn't meant to scare anyone, that it wasn't him that had putted the locks. And about the car running them off the road. During the explanation, Mr. Hoffman, and Colin

came in. It was clear that they had been arguing.

"It appears we got you all wrong Jeff," her father said. "I hope we find out who that joker is, you saw how worked up Barbara was. And it's been very kind of you to give her lifts."

"That's fine, the pleasure is all mine." He got to his feet. "I guess I'd better be off, my folks will be getting worried too."

"If you like I could run you down there" Mr. Hoffman asked. "You've done so much for Barbed Wire as it is."

Jeff gave her a funny smile. Barbara felt her face go red hot with embarrassment, wishing a hole would appear in the ground and swallow her whole. Now I look like a complete fool.

"That'll be great, thanks."

"Just give me a few moments to get my things a moment." He hurried up the stairs.

"I'll go and wait out by the car, I doubt he'll be to long." Jeff turned and headed out. Barbara chose to follow him out onto the porch. "It feels almost like a winter's night, doesn't it"

"Yeah it is," she laughed. "It's funny. Despite everything that's happened, I seem to really like the view from here. I . . . I can describe it. It's like there's any echo of past joy. Magical even, especially the swing."

He nodded. "That was Sarah's favorite place, my mum said she's always be out there at night. Laughing, maybe it's something to do with it"

All the apprehension she had felt about Jeff seemed to flee her like a bat from a belfry. Her heart pounded deep with her chest. Moving closer, Barbara stared into his eyes. Maybe the magic's him not the swing'

"Let's get on the road," Mr. Hoffman broke the trance. "Barb I suggest you go in doors before you catch cold."

"Oh, yeah you're right," she blushed. "See you tomorrow, when we go bowling." To her surprise Jeff leaned forward and kissed her. Despite her father's attention placed her arms round his waist. He can look all he wants this is my moment!

After seeing the station wagon pulling away, she bolted up to her room and slammed the door. Un able to control her excitement she bounced on the bed. "Yes, Oh, yes, I don't believe this. It is so- . . .so super!"

Slipping into a nightgown and turned out the light, dreaming about Jeff being with her always. But as she tossed and turned, a feeling from the other side dragged her out of the peace of dreams. She became aware of the sound of creaking floorboards. And her bedroom door was now open. I closed that door! I know I did!

Getting out of bed, Barbara went out onto the landing. Her palms felt sweaty, even though it was cold. The rest of her body ached. Reaching the bottom of the stairs, she shivered. It crew colder, as an icy breeze rustled the fabric. The front door stood ajar, going back and forth in the wind. Her head suddenly felt so heavy.

I'm not alone here. Off to her left the door to the toy room was open also. Urging herself forward, she eased it open, and peered inside. But she already new that who ever had been in the house would be gone. They gave Sally a key to our house, which means they must still have one, or even more copies so they can just slip in and out when who ever it is wants too.

Closing the front door, Barbara went to the kitchen and picked up a chair and blocked the door with it. Going up to bed, she hardly got a wink of sleep all night long.

## Chapter-18

It seemed like a few moments after when Barbara awoke, she shook her head, not knowing what had broken her wonderful dreams. But there it was, coming from above her head; sounds of thumping and something being dragged along floorboards. Throwing the covers off. Because she was half asleep, she had slipped carelessly into some old clothes.

When she stepped out of her room, something in the hall was strange. Then she hit it, there was a small ladder leading up to a large square hole in the roof. Something shuffled up in the pale light, throwing shapes on the low roof.

"Morning!" Colin peered down at her from the loft. "Sorry about the ladder, I thought I had enough time to get through up here before you woke up."

"Seeing it was your banging around up there that woke me in the first place." She tried to smile. "I didn't get much sleep last night, after that crash and all."

"Oh, yeah, I saw that barricade against the front door." He shook his head. "It's going to take more than a chair to stop anyone from coming in." Slowly he moved away from the hole.

"Yeah well." She crossed her arms. "It made me feel a lot better, since the front door was open last night." Or did I dream that, but if I did that chair shouldn't be there. "Someone was in the house last night."

"Mum or Peter could have forgotten to lock up, they did have other things on their minds." Colin's face reappeared at the top of the ladder.

"I thought you were on my side," Barbara objected, feeling a little hurt by the comment. "And I'm pretty sure someone tried to force us off the road last night."

"You think the person that wrote that letter would be willing to kill you, I mean we're only on the sixth of November, anyhow."

She pushed some hair from her face. "So where are mum and . . . ah . . .dad now' Surely not still in bed."

"They've gone into town, doing some shopping. As for Jake, now he is still in bed. You wouldn't mind giving me a hand up here they want to make some room up here with our stuff. Looks like the Winterfields left a lot of junk up here."

"After Sarah vanished, Miss Falconer said they picked up and left pretty soon. So they must have left a lot of thing they didn't need behind."

"That's great, so how's about you give me a hand"

"Oh, right . . .sure. She brushed passed the ladder and started to ascend. It wasn't very stable, and like most of the house it creaked at every motion. Popping her head up through the trap door. Gasping at the extent of the loft, it seemed run the length of the house. "Wow, they sure knew how to make space." Her eyes ranged along there were of different sized boxes.

"They also knew how to fill it up too, if we add to much more the whole roof will come down. It's lucky I

won't be here for much longer."

"Hm. Maybe it would be a good idea to through some of these boxes" She stared at Colin frankly.

"Whatever's happening to me, it has something to with what happened to Sarah."

"And you think there maybe a clue to your tormentors identity it these boxes." He ran his hand through his hair. "Just like they do in those detective shows."

"Well it's possible isn't it"

Colin just shrugged. "Though you were supposed to be up here helping me, not getting in the way." He carried on stacking boxes. "If you are planning to go through this stuff, you'd better do it fast. Your father is planning to dump the lot."

"Doesn't he realize how important to the history of this town, about the family that built the place up from dirt."

"It's not exactly something to be proud of, I mean the place in a total waste of space."

"I bet you couldn't set up a town, if you tried." She seemed surprised way she was defending the very town she never wanted to come to in the first place.

"I don't think I'd want to, it's not my style." He said nothing further.

Barbara didn't want to alienate the only friend she had in the house. So helping him out would be the least thing, she could do. Jeff made sure the job was complete before midday; he didn't want to be in the house when her mum and step dad got back.

Later at the dinner table Mr. Hoffman kept on asking her all kinds of questions, on all kind of subjects. It was hard to work out what he was driving at, even if he had an aim. But it soon became clear a pure water.

"How did your meeting with the councilor go yesterday" he finally came out with, getting his wife's look of approval.

"Oh, she was really nice," Barbara sighed. She reached for the ketchup. "Though I don't know why I need to see her, there's nothing wrong with me."

"We know that dear," Mrs. Hoffman added. "We know it hasn't been easy for you, with Colin being like he is. Soon we'll get to the bottom of this."

"The bottom of what" She paused in between bites.

"Well Miss Falconer was a little concerned about you. She said you told her that you were attacked, when your were glasses broken." Her mum gently took her arm.

"But it's true mum, it's true!" Slamming her fork down on the table. "You think I'm lying. Oh, Barbara's still paranoid, even after that shrink gave her the all clear." She got to her feet. "You didn't believe him, you don't believe, even though someone put putty in those locks!"

"Barbara sit down. Now!" he ordered. "Can't we just talk like two -"

"No! We can't, you just won't listen, you've never listen to me." Turning to her mother. "You never listened to Jeff either, you're just so wrapped up in what you want!" No longer able to face the table, she ran out of the kitchen and up to her room. "No one listens! No one ever listens!" Feeling the anger building up like a fountain she picked up one of the packing boxes which was still to be thrown out. Tossing it across the room. "Why can't I just be normal!"

Storming into the bathroom, Barbara locked the door. She was feeling so frustrated that no one out there would listen, even she was the target of some lunatic. Walking up and down aimlessly, trying to work thing out clearly in her mind. Maybe they're right, maybe I am going over the edge. Mcrobbie never said it wouldn't come back! The threats are harmless, I did trip up, and that car driver didn't mean to run us off that road!

Running the water for the bath, she undressed and slipped into the warm water. Letting it ease all her aches, and pains. It was all fast becoming too much. Waiting about half an hour, she got dressed and went back across the hall, only to hear the sound of the phone ringing. Knowing they would still

downstairs, Barbara by passed the ladder into the spare room, picking up the phone. "Hello."  
Silence for a moment! Then a chilling laugh!

. "Times running for you," the raspy voice said. "Do you wish to go the same way as she did"  
Her hand started to tremble. "Yo . . .you mean Sarah" Words were spinning in her mind. "But . . .b. .  
.why, I can't leave without my -"  
"Then you'll be responsible if they get hurt." Again that chuckle before the line clicked off.  
"Nnnoo!" She let go of the receiver and it hung free. Claspng her hands over her ears she fell to the  
ground in a flood of tears as Barbara rocked back and forth.

## Chapter-19

One after another, the bowling ball skipped down the blind ally. She just felt like dropping the ball and  
not picking it up. Jeff had told his friends how well she had played the last time round. And right now she  
wasn't in the mood for the mocking laughter, even though it was meant in fun.

"Great she nearly clipped that one," someone said. "Thought you said she was promising Jeff."  
Barbara didn't bother to grace the comment with a reply. She pushed her way through the small crowd  
and sat out in the bar, burying her head in her arms. A few moments later Jeff came up, rubbing her  
shaking shoulders.

"Don't worry about them, they're just a load of hot air." Moving away he sat on the opposite chair, facing  
her. "Is there anything wrong Barbara" Taking her hand he gave her reassuring smile.

She looked up. "My whole life's tearing me apart right now," she stated. " My parents have to go back to  
San Francisco, to finalize the deal on our old house. Which means I'll have be in that house on my own  
with Colin. I got another blasted phone call this morning, this time he threatened my parents."

"You still think that accident, or crash yesterday was caused on purpose" He took a long deep breath.

"So why don't you tell your parents about the phone calls maybe -"

"They'll never believe me Jeff," she whined. "I have to find proof, something to make them take me  
seriously."

"So what do you want to do"

"I don't know, that's the problem." She rested her chin on her palm. "I know it's not Sally because she's  
been threatened, I know it isn't you because you were in the car last night."

"And that leaves" Jeff asked calmly, trying to push for a direct answer.

"Creep's, he's threatened me face to face. Told me to leave for my own good. It could be someone I  
haven't even thought of." Barbara withdrew her other hand from his. "Do you know where Mr. Crail lives"  
"Yeah, he . . .ah, lives in a cottage out in the woods." Seeing her face brighten, he continued. "It's a bit  
late to go traipsing off there at this time, it's dark outside."

"Oh, shoot, you're right. There's no way I'm going out on my own at night again, especially at night, in  
those woods."

"How's about we go there on Monday, skip some classes. I should still have my dad's car till mine gets  
back on the road."

"But Ms Falconer warned me about skipping classes, my mum will kill me if she finds out." She groaned. "Besides, I've got another appointment with Kate."  
"We'll just take the afternoon out. Don't worry nothings going to happen, otherwise the time we get up there it's going to be dark."  
Gritting her teeth, Barbara said, "Oh, all right." She looked over to the exit. "I'm feeling very tired tonight, I just want to go home."

## Chapter-20

From somewhere in the deep world of dreams Barbara heard a strange ringing sound, it seemed to be tugging at her, forcing her to come back into the world of the awake.  
She had a really hard time sleeping last night, tossing and turning while thinking about going to creeps house. Not really wanting to go, even though Jeff would be there if the old man got nasty. It had to be done; it was the only to make sure.  
The ringing seemed to get louder, she finally forced her eyes open. It was morning, and the ring was that of her bedside alarm clock. Rolling over to stop the clock, the sound was going right through her head like knives.  
Barbara stopped when her hand felt something odd on her pillow. It was hard to tell what it was without her glasses on.  
Making sure she didn't touch the mess, she placed her glasses in her nose. She let out an, "Ahhh!" and leapt off the bed feeling her heart pound. She bolted out her room, down the stairs, almost tripping over her nightshirt.  
"Mum. Oh, mum!" Barbara called out as she almost flew into the kitchen.  
Mrs. Hoffman looked up from her breakfast, a mouthful of food in her mouth.  
"Oh, mum!" There were now tears in her eyes. "This has got to stop!"  
Her mum cleared her mouth. Getting to her feet, she ran to her daughter's side. "Barbara. What on earth's the matter dear' What has to stop"  
Using all her might, Barbara pulled away from her mum, nearly falling into the oven, she was just unable to control herself her body was shaking out of control.  
Mrs. Hoffman grabbed her by the arm, and slapped her.  
Standing there frozen, sanity slowly returned, along with it self control. "There . . .the," she grabbed her mothers arm, tugging her towards the stairs. Only easing when Mrs. Hoffman starting moving at her pace. Heading back up to her room  
"Oh, my" said Mrs. Hoffman as she saw the pillow. "Oh, Barb' you poor thing."  
"Mum!" Jake called as he came out of his room. "I think Milly's escaped, his case is open." As he to stepped into the room, his faces color drained away.  
All eyes turned to the flattened spider on the bed.  
"You squashed her . . ." Jake's words were broken by a huge sob. "I knew you hated her . . .but . . .but, that is just gross!" He turned, ran down the stairs wailing.  
Barbara was still to frozen with her own shock, to even think.

Hauling her self to see Kate, the councilor was already in the office. She got up when hearing knocking on the door.  
"It's so nice to see you again." She Gestured too the student to take a seat. "How have things been since we last met"



Barbara slumped down on the settee. "Oh, things have been great," Barbara lied. Trying to sound light and breezy. "I went bowling with Jeff, and his friends on Saturday." She tried to swallow the lump forming in her throat. "There was some bad news. For me that is." She reported the news about her parents phone call about the house. "They're really pleased, so they'll be going to San Francisco in a while."

Kate took a sip of coffee. "So how do you feel about them just picking up and leaving so soon?"

"I guess I knew it had to happen sooner or later, it just came at a rather bad time for me." She crossed her legs, shifting around, worrying where the next few questions would lead. "It's just me I guess, we've been here over a month now."

"Do you think your feelings about your half brother have anything to do with you not wanting to stay?"

"No I don't think so." Barbara bit her lip. Maybe if I tell someone that maybe able to help me' "You said that anything said in this room, stays in this room."

"That's right, you have my word."

"I've been threatened on the phone, warned to leave the house or die, someone left a dummy in the woods, so I would think it was a body. Someone struck me over the head, and placed a threatening note in my pack, broke into our house and place my brothers dead spider on my bed." She picked up her backpack, and withdrew the letter. "Here. The other night I was in the car with Jeff, someone tried to run us off the road."

Kate's mouth seemed to drop as she read the note. "Why would they want you out by the twentieth?" She rubbed her chin, trying to think.

Barbara shrugged. "I guess it has something to do with the anniversary of Sarah Winterfield's disappearance."

"Barbara, are you sure you're not reading too much into this? I mean I can understand you being afraid, but for all we know it could be some prankster."

"I don't know!" She yelled, leaning forward in her seat. "But I can't afford to take them too lightly otherwise something bad might happen!" Calming herself down, she sat back, and shaking all over. "I'm sorry, it's just this, and everything else."

"I understand, that's why I'm here, to help you." Kate patted her kindly on her knee. "Try not to take it to much to heart, someone around here may have a weird sense of humor, but they wouldn't kill anyone."

"But what about Sarah, something terrible happened to her?" Barbara's mind was working over time. Followed by a feeling of real danger. What if the caller was the same person that took Sarah? The next thing she knew she was on her feet. "Kate, I want to leave it there for now."

Without looking back, she was through the door, and out into the dull gray day light of the student garden. Perching herself on a bench, she pulled out a study book, so it looked as though she were on study period.

It seemed a little plainer now. All this while she had been suspecting the kids, but the adults in the town would have more reason to dislike her. Those who were alive like Creep's when the Winterfields still lived in the town.

Not realizing how fast time had slipped by she was confronted with a group of students leaving for their lunch break. Remembering her rendezvous with Jeff, she stuffed her study book away, and made her way to the student car park. When she got there, he was standing by his dad's car. Ready.

"Hi," he greeted. "Are you all set for the ride?" His expression changed to a serious one. "Still sure you want to go to Creep's house? I've been up there once before when I was younger. It isn't a pretty sight."

"No," Barbara tried to laugh. "But I have to do this, at least to prove to myself that I'm not crazy. Then I maybe in a better position to convince my parents."

"I don't think you're crazy, far from it. I want to catch the snake that broke into our store and stole that dummy." They both laughed. "We'd better get going." He glanced up at the sky. "It's going to be quite a

trek up through the woods."

"Then let's not waste a second."

On leaving the school, they drove through the town till about half way through, and turned up a steep road that led off into the distance. In which dark storm clouds loomed ready to pounce on the town once more.

Dead leaves blew against the cars dirt covered windshield, as it bumped along the old gritty road. Jeff pointed on ahead. "If you keep going for a couple of miles you'll end up in Mal, this is the road most of their kids use."

Reaching the top of the road, trees spread for miles down below them. The view forced Barbara's breath away with all the different shades of green, brown, and orange. But soon they would be in amongst those giant trees, alone. Their beauty would be lost. Is there really some psycho down there, willing to kill me. Had he killed Sarah out of revenge for his family's death in that fire'

When the ground finally leveled off, Jeff pulled the car to the side of the road, and stopped the engine. The darkness under the trees wound off into the distance, like pillars in some natural formed temple of blackness, and shadowy forms.

Barbara unclipped her seat belt. "Are you sure you'll be able to remember where we parked" She started to open her side door to climb out.

"Sure I will." Jeff leaned over, and kissed her. Trying to make her feel better. It worked. A little. "All we have to do is find the road, and double back or . . ."

"Forth. Don't worry, I trust you."

Locking the car up, they trudged into the break in the trees. Sounds of animals echoed all around them. Branches waved in the breeze, the whole place was alive with noises. Tree roots snaked their way ahead. Eerie, it was as though every step they made took them nearer to watching dangers. Somewhere an owl tooted in the treetops.

She saw images of seeing that dummy in these woods, the shock it had given her. What other horrors awaited them. Trees seemed to clam close in around them. She felt as if her heart rate double as the shadows curled around them.

"Are you nervous" asked Jeff as he took her hand, she squeezed it tighter than ever.

"Can't you guess" She forced a smile. Creeps also invaded her mind, his chard face appeared in her minds eye. His cane gripped above his head, ready to strike her down in the name of his course.

Whatever that was. "I'm not looking forward to see him again."

The sound of water trickling stopped them as they reached a small stream. Jeff pulled her along the bank.

"This our supply line surface, leads us right near his front door step." He paused a moment. "That's if I remember rightly, it was a long time ago." Jeff laughed, when she pulled a face. "Don't worry."

"I'm not worried," Barbara insisted. Though she had not will to be there when nightfall came. Now that would be too much. "But can you really trust your memories, all the trees look the same."

"Not to a local. City girl. And there it is." Jeff gestured to a gap in the trees, a small window could be seen.

Hopping across the river, they hurried into some brush for shelter. Barbara felt her heart pound with fear, but with an air of excitement. It was like that start of a new life here.

The cottage was small, dead ivy leaning on moldy walls. A large woodpile stood by the side of a crumbling wooden shed. Thin wisps of smoke curled sky ward from the chimney, blending with the clouds.

"Looks like there maybe somebody home," Commented Jeff. "Come on." Tugging on her hand again, not giving her a chance for second thoughts right up to the doorstep.

Barbara broke her connection, and slid along the wall, and peered in the window. Orange flames of fire

danced in the gray light, but that was the only movement. So she returned to his side. "It doesn't look like he's anyone in there."

At once there was a loud cracking sound of a gunshot. Barbara screamed.

## Chapter-21

Jeff pulled her to the ground as Wood splinters ricochet as the bullet hit the door.

"Get out of here!" an angry voice growled. "You kids are nothing but trouble, now get away."

They struggled to get to their feet. Trying not to make any sudden moves that would provoke Mr. Crail to shoot again. But when he saw Barbara, his battered face eased a little.

"You're the one." He hobbled closer. "I thought I told you leave, for your own good I told you! And yet you stay, don't blame me if you die!"

"What are you talking about?" Jeff called back.

"Why have you been threatening m -" She stopped when she studied his posture. His back was hunched, his legs looked like twigs. Not someone you'd expect to see drive a car at high speed. "What do you mean, when you said leaving was for my own good. Did you know this was going to happen?" Crail's lips formed a smile. "Then it has begun, the one is you that will save the town from it's past."

"What?" Jeff started.

"Jeff! Shut it!" She slowly edged away from the door. "Do you know who's been doing this to me. Please tell me!"

"Only the house will tell you the truth, let it tell you what it knows."

"But I don't understand, tell me what you know?"

"What the Winterfields did, they are the cause of your suffering. Expose them, and it will all be over. I will contact you when you have it. Bring it to me." He turned, and walked away.

"Wait!" Barbara started after him, but Jeff grabbed her arm. "Get off me, he knows who's doing this to me!"

"Don't push him Barb, there's no telling what he'll do with that gun."

She gave in, knowing he was right. But this visit had only raised more questions. How could the Winterfield's be the cause? Their not in this town anymore? How can the house tell me who's doing this?

"I'll have to go over that house with a fine tooth comb when mum and dad leave."

Barbara watched Jeff pull away she took a huge sigh. Looking at her watch, she saw it was still pretty early, the school would be out in a moments. Pondering whether not to go in, what would her parent's say if they knew she skipped afternoon lessons? "I'm seventeen, I'm old enough to make my own choices." Straightening herself up, she unlocked the door and stepped inside.

Not greeted by the sounds of silence that would usually greet her, but the sound of shouting coming from lounge. Instead of announcing her arrival, Barbara closed the door quietly, and stepped up to the lounge. She peered through a small gap.

Colin, and Mrs. Hoffman were talking, or even arguing. It wasn't that easy to tell.

"Mum she is pretty sure that someone's out to get her, she even showed me a note." He sat back in a chair.

"We have to make sure Colin, you were there when she did this sort of thing before. As far as you know she could have made that note herself."

Barbara couldn't believe her ears she thought her half brother had turned to her side. Now it appeared as though her mum had asked Jeff to pretend to believe her. Now she really will end up thinking I'm as mad as a March hare. She felt sick once again she had been led by someone! Was that the only way this family could ever function? Feeling the hurt well up once again, the next thing she knew, she was in that room, glaring at them as though they had just arrived from another planet.

"Barbara," her mum said sweetly. "We weren't expecting you back so soon."

"Stop it mum! I may have trouble with my eyesight, but my hearing is perfect." She turned to Colin he just sat there gazing at the wall. "I trusted you! Everything I told you, you told her you little creep!"

"Barbara! Stop this at once and listen!"

She felt tears welling up it took all her might to hold them off. "Mum! Shut up, you've never believed me."

The words started to catch in her throat, which had gone dry. For a long time she just stared. Then she stormed out, slamming the door as hard as she could.

Stumbling up stairs, she flopped on her bed crying. It seemed as though the whole world were laughing at her. With those closest to her leading the evil laughter. Somewhere in the background her tormentor cackled.

## Chapter-22

Another day drifted into night, Barbara marked off the eleventh of November on her calendar. Nine days till the twentieth. Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman, and Jake were due to depart in the next few hours. And she hated the thought of them leaving her like this. She had refused to say one word to her mum or Colin. The feeling of betrayal still hurt a lot.

I'll ring to patch things up when I want to, and as for Colin I've still got to sort that out. Mr. Hoffman had been confused, so she took it that he wasn't in on it. And she intended to have Jeff round as many nights as he could manage. "Screw Colin," she scolded him. "Can't worm your way around me." "Is that so?" He stepped through the doorway. "It's just going to be you and me for a whole fortnight." Her half brother smiled. "So we're going to have to get on with each other, if you want this thing to work." "Why don't we both just stay well clear of each other?" She crossed her arms. "You think I'm weird, and I think you're a stuck up prat!"

"I would like to make this thing work," said Colin, knowing full well he had the advantage over her. "For what it's worth, I still believe you about that note, I don't think you made it up."

"Why, that makes me feel so much better," said Barbara. She turned to look out over the back yard.

"How am I supposed to trust you, how do I know it's not another one of mum's tricks?"

He paced up to her side. "You could trust me."

"Trust you!" She swung round, glaring him right in the eyes. "Colin I don't even know you. Yet you were there nearly every day since I was born. All those times I tried to get you to play with me. This may sound silly, but . . .but I always saw you as my big brother."

"Look Barbara I -" but he was cut off.

"No. You're going to hear me out. You can't understand what it's like. I spent so many nights awake, wondering why you ignored me. Thinking there was something I'd done that made you hate me." For a few seconds she closed her eyes, remembering those awful days. "But when I saw you treated Jake the same. I realized you were the one with the problem."

"And you were right sis' I was so stupid." It was the first time he had ever acknowledged that fact. "You

don't know what it's like to lose your father, then your mum go off with someone else."

"But people have to get on with their lives, time can't stand still when someone dies." Barbara realized that this was the first normal conversation they had ever had. "People learn to live with it."

"I know that now," he laughed. "It just took me eighteen years of my life to realize that. I'm sorry was such a . . ."

"Stuck up, half witted, total jerk with sugar on top." She managed to produce a smile. "So big brother, how's about we check out this house for the secret that will uncover that nasty caller?"

"I'd love too." Colin leaned forward, and hugged her. "Promise me you'll give mum a call and patch things up. She was only trying to help you, but didn't listen to you."

"It's funny, a while ago she wanted me to let my feelings, and thoughts show. But when I do, she doesn't believe me." Pulling away. "It's time to find the truth about what happen in those woods, to Sarah."

Neither of them had a clue where to even start looking. Barbara rang Jeff and Sally up to see if they would come and help look. But she neglected to mention to Jeff that Sally was coming, and vice versa.

The situation of their past relationship.

He arrived first, with a huge bunch of flowers on the passenger seat of his dad's car. Barbara stepped out into the porch to greet him. After a moment of kissing, she invited him in.

"Thanks for coming Jeff, we need all the help we can get around here." She smiled. "So far we've had no real luck what so ever." Taking his hand she led him into the toy room, where Colin was Busy sorting though yet more boxes.

"Well if it isn't our little prowler!" Colin joked sarcastically. "Jeff right." He stuck out his hand. "I'm Colin Murry, Barbara's half brother." They both shook hands. "I take you already know someone out there seems to be trying to scare her."

"Yeah I know, almost kills me and ruins my car in the process." Jeff stated coldly.

"Well I'll go and put these in a vase." Closing the toy room door, she headed for the kitchen. Filling up and old blue flowered vase with water, she placed the flowers when a knock came at the front door.

"That must be Sally, her mum may have given her a lift." Going back down the hall, Barbara called out. "I'll get it!"

"Hi," Sally beamed, as Barbara opened the door. "Mum gave me a lift to the end of your drive."

"Come in." After her friend was through the door she led Sally up stairs. "We're looking for anything to do with the Winterfield's, it could be anything that could give a clue to the ID of that caller."

Sally wrinkled her nose. "Check in your parents room too, I mean -"

"Yeah," Barbara cut in. "That's part of the house isn't it' But we'll start with my room first."

There wasn't much to find. Besides turning the bed inside out, everything had been moved in from the outside even going as far as looking over the walls for any hidden spaces.

"Nothing," Sally sat back on the unmade bed. "Who's room gets the make over next?"

"The phone room, no one sleeps in there, I've only been in there to answer calls."

Leaving the small room in its' uncanny state. They both headed down the landing to the spare room. A light breeze blew in from open window. The phone sat in its' bed side resting space. Barbara couldn't help but think of the first call she had received in this room. Get out! Get out before you die! She shivered.

"Are you okay?" asked Sally, sound worried.

"I'm fine." She took one glance round the room. "Nothing in this rooms been touched, so maybe we'll hit the jackpot."

Going over every square inch of the room, they found a few worthless bits of paper, even some clothes, but nothing so far to help. It was the same story over the next two spare rooms. Finally both girls stood in the door of Barbara's parent's room.

The sound of the creaking stairs made her cringe. Please don't be Jeff! Please! Colin was meant to be

keeping him busy. But it was too late; his head appeared over the banister.

"Barbara the to . . ." his word fizzled away leaving his mouth wide open. Sally's did the same. For a moment looks past between them both saying. "What in the world are you doing here" Then as if controlled by some unseen force they turned to face Barbara.

"Ah . . . I . . . I can explain." Wait a minute, this is my house and I can have who ever I want here. "I would like both of your help. But no one is forcing you to stay, if you want to leave then go ahead."

"I have no problem with that," Jeff put in. All eyes turned to Sally, who shrugged.

"I don't have a problem either," Sally said boldly. "I want to catch the creep that attacked my mum."

"That's settled then," Barbara said haughtily. She crossed her arms over her chest. "We've still got some places to go over yet!"

"Got it!" Jeff turned and marched down stairs, back to Colin.

Sally said little as the rest of the top floor was searched. As evening drew in, every room and closet had been searched from top to bottom. It was time for a break, for the rest of the day. Sally chose to go home, while Colin wanted to be alone in his room. Leaving Barbara and Jeff in the living room.

She huffed, as she sat down on the settee. "We've gone through the entire house, all the places we can think of anyway."

"There is a small chance that, whatever it is maybe in the garden." Jeff sat down beside her, leaning back and closed his eyes.

"Or in the woods." Then she thought of something. "What if he wasn't even talking about this house, Creeps could have meant the tree house out there in the woods. Jake found it when we were out walking in the woods."

"Could be, that guy never seems to say what he means."

Barbara yawned tiredly. "Sorry. It's just been a petty hard da . . . y" she did it again. "I hope we found this thing soon before all this searching kills me, before he gets a chance."

"Maybe," Jeff also yawned a little. "Looks like it's catching."

She kicked off her slippers, and snuggled up against him. Feeling that nothing out there could get at her while they were side by side. Resting her head on his broad shoulders.

"Well I guess I'd better be off," he sighed. "My old man will be wondering where his car is." Motioned to stand, but he couldn't. Turning his head, he saw she had fallen asleep. "Okay, I'll stay a while." Stroking her hair, he whispered, "Everything's going to be all right, I won't let any sicko hurt you. Not ever!"

## Chapter-23

A glimmer of autumn sunshine broke through the thin fog that had formed over night lighting up the operation to find Creeps' secret. It had begun very early that morning. Jeff had stayed at the house all night he too had soon drifted off after Barbara had. It took a while to locate the tree house without the aid of Jake's nose. It was the first time she had ever wished her little brother was still here. But right now he was much safer than she was right now.

Sally had rang up, saying she wasn't able to come until later on, but wished them the best of luck.

An eerie stillness all around her made her shiver. Barbara's feelings were so different here. It wasn't like it had been at the swing there was a feeling of sadness, despair, and death. It built up like a wall around her, urging her to cry out. Why here, she was taken from the swing!

Even after going through the small house, they found nothing.

"I don't think we're going to find anything here," said Colin finally. "Looks like he pulled the wool over your eyes after all. Don't you think it's time you went to the police with this?"

"Colin! I have a history of paranoia, my families in rags, and I'm in the throws of seeing a school councilor." She marched around him. "They'd laugh me from the building."

"Shoot!" Cursed Barbara as she lay flat out on the floor in the lounge. The others stood around.

"Nothing! Nothing at all of any help," she sighed long windily. "Maybe creeps made that crap up!" Rolling her eyes, she rolled onto her back. "And now we've got to tidy this dump."

"Well it isn't going to get done, while you complain all the time sis'." Colin sat down. "Are you sure this Crail meant it was in this house?"

"That's what he said," Jeff added. "This house is pretty big, are you sure there's no where else?"

"Yeah," Sally doubled. She had just arrived at the house a few moments ago. "Doesn't this place have a cellar or something, most old houses do. Mine does. Mum keeps all her memories up in the loft."

Then it hit Barbara, as she had hit the ladder earlier that day. "That's it!" she called excitedly. "Colin where's that ladder you were using yesterday morning?" A grin broke across her face. "We forgot to check the loft, there's loads of boxes up there that belonged to the Winterfields."

"Let's take a look then shall we," Colin said as he turned and walked out.

The other three went up the stairs, milling around under that trap door that led up to the roof.

"It's up there, it's just got to be." Barbara looked up and crossed her fingers. Be up there. Please! When her half brother returned with the ladder, it was placed under the trap door. "I'll go up first." Slowly she crawled up inside the loft. "Jeff you come up here and give me a hand, we don't want the risk of four people's weight on the ceiling."

"Got it!" he replied making his way up the ladder. "Why don't you two go and put some food on! I'm starved."

"Typical," Sally commented. "Come on Col! we'll leave the love birds to feather their nest!" She made sure that the two in the loft heard every word she said.

"There sure is a lot of boxes up here. Where do we start?" Jeff looked around the large space.

Barbara pulled herself along a beam, nearing the boxes. "It looks like all these things have got names on them." She pulled out a box at random, and read the name. "Roger Winterfield." Opening the lid, she pulled out pictures and school papers, awards. "We need to find a box with Sarah's name on it." She looked up to the end. "As she was the last heir to be born here, she should be right up the other end."

"Sounds promising." He edged closer to her. "When we're through here, we should take these to the library, so the people here can see."

Barbara didn't answer. She was looking along the rows of boxes, just in case it wasn't where they thought it would be. But sure enough it was near the end of the line, but one box that had no name on.

"I've found her! Come quick!" Removing it from its slot, she rested the box marked 'Sarah' on the floor and ripped the lid off. It appeared to be just the same documentation, but nothing that was any help.

"It isn't here Jeff," Barbara complained.

"What about that box." He pointed to the unmarked one. "Her box is pretty full, maybe the rest's in there!" She passed the first box to Jeff and withdrew the second one. Taking the lid off. Inside was a hand full of drawings and paintings. Pulling them out she started thumbing through them. Till one caught her eye, the picture was framed. It was of the tree house when it was still up in the trees. Sarah was stood arms crossed against a tree.

"You found something"

"I don't quite know." She glanced down at the bottom of the page, a signature. 'Love Tam.' "Do you know if Sarah had any younger brothers or sisters"

"Not that anyone around here knows about, she was an only child." Jeff frowned. "Why"

"Some of these pictures are of Sarah, there was no way she could have drawn herself like this."

"Maybe it was a friend who drew them and gave them to her as a gift. The family must have chosen to keep them."

Placing the artwork back in the box, she placed the lid back on. "I think we should take both of these boxes to Creep's. Maybe he can explain them, he worked for the Winterfield's as a servant."

After the boxes were laid out for all to see. The rest of the day was spent bringing order back to the house. Jeff volunteered to give Sally a lift home, which was a good sign.

"Maybe forcing them to be in each other company was a good idea" She turned to Colin who was stood that the front door.

"Could be, as long as they don't get back together." He laughed and headed back inside.

## Chapter-24

November the sixteenth was marked off, as the date neared. Barbara had heard nothing from Creep's. The idea of leaving the house on the twentieth was swimming around inside her head. She hated the thought of giving in to the caller's demands, but there wasn't much else she could do. Colin didn't seem to mind the idea either.

School days seemed to mill on, lessons took life times. Hating to wait around, part of her wished time would hurry on. To find out whether it was worth the worry.

Lying on her bed, she found the time to go through all the newspaper articles from the library. But some of it was far too heavy to read, when her mind was on other things. Looking up at the window, fierce dark clouds loomed close as rain-washed down the windows. It had been wet nearly none stop over the past few days. Local flooding had blocked some of the roads.

Though there was one part of each article that caused her to wonder. The speed the Winterfield family had packed up and gone. There was no evidence to remotely suggest that Sarah was dead.

"Why on earth did they leave so soon" She closed her eyes a moment, trying to picture the grief. "I know if I went missing, my mum and dad wouldn't just leave without knowing the truth."

"Maybe they knew what happened to her, but didn't want to tell anyone"

Colin stepped through the door. "I just came up to tell you that dinners ready."

Neither of them said much over their Cola, burger and fries. Everything was on a low ebb. "Thanks Colin that was a nice meal." She stood up and carried her plate into the kitchen. "Do you really think we should leave the house on the twentieth"

"Why not" He stood up and walked beside her. "We don't know whether the caller really means what he says. So if he doesn't, we won't be here. But if he does, you won't be in any danger. You've done what he wanted."

"I guess it makes sense, so we don't take any risks right" For a moment she regarded him with appreciation. "It's good to see you using your wisdom for a good reason, instead of make others feel small." Then Barbara remembered something she hadn't yet done. "I'd better ring mum and patch things up."

Not waiting around for a comment, she headed up to the spear room with the phone. But as she reached



the door, the phone began to ring. Oh, no, what if that's the caller' Should I answer it' If it is I can tell him we'll be out on the deadline. Without another thought she grabbed for the receiver. "Hello."

The line just crackled.

Then came a hoarse voice, not the same as the caller. It was Creeps on the other end. "Are you there girl!" He demanded. "Bring the boxes into the woods, wait for me there."

Barbara shuddered. "Wait!" It was too late, the line went dead. But it was clear enough. He wanted her to take Sarah's and the unmarked box into the woods. The call to her parents shot from her mind. She went into her room and picked them up when the phone rang again.

Had he forgotten to tell her something' She ran back and grabbed the phone. "Yes."

"Your times running out!" the caller threatened. Again came that nasty laugh that had purged her dreams. "Are you sure you want to die!" For a moment there was silence. But in background she could hear shuffling and someone screamed shouted something unavoidable. "Maaa!" and the line went dead.

"Who was that" Colin asked, he moved in slowly.

"It was the caller." Barbara paused for a moment. "It was weird though they started to threaten me, when someone must have interrupted him. I've got to go into the woods to see Creep's. Give Jeff a call. You'll find you'll find his number in the book."

She shoved past Colin, without giving him a chance to say anything. It was still storming outside. The rain was like a moving mist swarming across the blackened sky. Not having time to worry about getting wet. Putting on her puffer jacket and went out into the swirl.

The woods were alive with movement, crazed trees swayed from side to side as lightning lit up the yard. Barbara pushed forward, doing her best to stop the boxes from getting soaked or blown away. She only stopped for a quick glance at the swing, which was gently swaying back and forth. But there was no time to stop now. Breaking the tree line she hurried deeper, and deeper into the forbidding trees.

"Hello!" Barbara called out, as loud as she could. Her voice seemed to get lost in the howling wind. "I've got what you want! Mr. Crail."

Just the whistle of the trees answered her.

Slowly bad thoughts entered her mind, as trees clawed at her hair. What if this is some kind of a trap, I should have waited. The chain was broken. Was that a scream I heard, out there somewhere. No it's just the wind. Losing her concentration for a moment she tripped, the box flew from her grip.

She landed on her knees. Pain shot up her legs. Barbara clung a near by tree and pulled herself up.

Luckily the box hadn't flown open. Picking it up, she pressed on.

Clearing some trees, she could just make out the shape of the tree house. Baying to get out of the rain Barbara ascended the ramp and into near darkness. But she wasn't alone. The floorboards creaked, as a black form moved closer. For a moment lightening revealed a burned face, cold stare in his eyes.

"You have the box girl!" Crail asked. He shifted a little and a pail yellow light skittered around the walls.

"Here." She held out the boxes in front of her. "Hope you meant these, they were the only ones we could find."

Stepping forward, he withdrew a knife. Barbara's eyes widened with complete surprise. Slowly creeps raised the knife, as Barbara cried out.

## Chapter-25

Pointing the weapon down, Crail Lifting the unmarked box from Barbara's shaking palms. He then placed it on the floor, then handed her the light. Opening the box he pulled out the framed picture and turned it over.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

Creeps said nothing, as he slowly ripped a line in the soft backing. Then holding it up he shook it hard till a couple of photo's fell out. "Behold beauty and the beast." He took the light back.

Barbara bent down to picture up. Both of them were school photos of Sarah, but different years. "How's this meant to help me?"

He rested his wrinkled fingers on one of the images. "This is beauty." Then he moved to the other. "This is beast. Tammy and Sarah Winterfield, the twins."

Her mouth dropped. "Sarah had a twin, and not one but the family and the servant knew. What happened to Tammy?"

"There lies the biggest deceit." He grabbed the Sarah picture and crumpled it up. "The last heirs didn't want twins. As Sarah was the first born, she was treated like a little queen." Closing his eyes, he inhaled. "She was a nasty piece of work. Always miss treating the servants. But she was jealous of her sister."

"Tammy?"

"Despite the way her parents abused her she was the kindest person I ever knew. She didn't care whether you were black or white. She made all the friends at school. Sarah hated her for that."

"Did the family send the girls to school on different days, acting as Sarah. My adviser said she seemed to have to different personalities."

"Sarah murdered my family, when she burned down the servants quarters." He dropped the crumpled picture to the floor. "We got a group together and started the protest -"

"Sarah was out on the swing, and the yobs abducted her," Barbara finished with the turn of events that Miss Falconer had given her. "Then they must have taken Tammy and left."

"No girl!" He suddenly grew angry. "Sarah never used the swing, she always thought she was to sophisticated for it. It was Tammy who was on the swing that night."

At that moment an ear-piercing scream echoed through the woods. Crail stopped as though listening. "I know Sarah killed her sister you have got to prevent history repeating itself. You must go!"

"But!" Barbara protested. "I have some questions."

"Go before your friend goes the same way as her aunt!" The next moment he was gone.

Running out into the storm, she looked frantically around her, trying to make out where the scream had come from. But it wasn't long before there was another one. "Sally! Are you out there' Sally!"

Silence.

She pushed her way forward, fighting the icy gusts. Lightning flashes lit her path. Calling out her friends name in desperation. Not really understand what she had just heard, but it was clear that her friends was in real danger.

Something emerged from the trees right behind her. Barbara screamed as a dark figure lunged at her, arms open wide.

## Chapter-26

Sally's eyes were wide with fear, for a split second before she hit the ground. Barbara rushed to her friend's aid, helping her up. The girl was covered from head to foot in mud, cuts lined her forehead and mouth.

"Help," she almost spat before collapsing again in her friend's arms. "I . . . I don't under. . .s . .stand."

At that moment in a flash of blue, Barbara saw those eyes she had seen, stood frozen that night on the front porch. Eyes that seemed to be feeling her terror then everything went black, something moved in

the underbrush. When the next bolt flashed from the sky the figure had vanished.

Helping Sally to gain her balance she said, "We've got to get back to the house. Soon!"

Sally mumbled something inaudible. But there was no time now. The nasty caller was out in the forest stalking them like prey. They had no choice, but to keep moving. Throwing all her weight and using Sally's Barbara pushed forward, being beaten back by the tempest.

Clearing the tree line, she called out in desperation for Colin. To her relief a light came through cracks in the back door, which slowly opened.

"Barbara!" He called out, seeing dark form leaving a massive shadow along the back yard. "What happened?" Making his way out into the woods, he slowed when he saw Sally.

"Quick we've got to get her into the house, she's been hurt!"

Colin wrapped Sally's other arm around his shoulder. They both helped her inside, and down on a chair.

"What happened out there?"

Quickly she went over her meeting with Creep's, and the hunter in the woods. All eyes turned on Sally.

"It was my mum," Sally put her head in her hands. "I caught her on the phone, using one of those voice synthesizers, threatening someone. She just went mad. She . . . she took me. . . me out into the woods. . . a. . . and she tried to kill me." Her breathing was very labored, and weedy. "Kept on calling me Tammy." Tammy. No wonder, she looks so much like her. "Colin get her something to drink, she's still in shock!" Barbara threw him a glance. It was no time for an interrogation.

"I'm going!" He relented, raising his arms in the air he turned and walked out.

Then came a loud knocking sound at the door, she nearly had a heart attack. "Colin!"

No reply.

What if that's her! Waiting outside that door. Not taking any chances, Barbara reached for a poker her the fireplace. Before going she rubbed Sally's shoulder, realizing how bad it must be for her. But why was Miss Falconer doing this? Then it clicked, what Creep's had said.

"Go before your friend goes the same way as her aunt!" That meant that Miss Falconer wasn't her real name. It was Sarah Winterfield. The person that had murdered her twin sister out of jealous rage! It was becoming for too much to take in. Was Sarah still crazed, would she kill again? It had all been there; the likeness of the Falconer house interior to this house.

She pulled herself together; there was no time to thought gathering. Nearing the door. 'Thump!' again and again. Barbara readied the poker. "Who's there!" she shouted.

"Jeff!" was the reply.

Her heart sank with relief. She had totally forgotten that she had told Colin to call him. Quickly Barbara unlocked the door.

"You don't want me to catch pneumonia, do you?" he laughed, seemingly unaware of the current danger. Without giving him a chance to step in, she had her arms round him. "Hey! Watch where you're pointing that thing will yer!"

"Sorry." She pulled away from him. "I went to see Creeps." Pulling through the door, she locked it, before explaining to him what she had learned.

When Sally had calmed down a bit, they all gathered in the lounge.

"It's too dangerous for us to stay in this house," Barbara stated. "I think your mum must have this for the twentieth. But when you found out, she must have bought her plans forward."

"My car's out the front," Jeff stated. "We'd better hurry there's no telling what she might do, especially if she wants Sally that badly."

"He's right," Colin joined it. "Looks like everyone else in this household miss judged you Barb'. Jeff I'll come out with you. Barb' you stay and get Sally ready, we may have to leave in a hurry." He pulled on a raincoat and went outside.

Barbara sat on the arm of the chair by her friend. "We're going to have to leave this place. They're

outside getting the car ready. She expected to hear the sound of the car come to life, but there was nothing but the thunder and rain.

"Why would she do this to me Barbara." Sally clutched her friend's arm hard. "I know I'm not that bright, but . . ."

Barbara rubbed Sally's arm. "I don't think she sees you as her daughter anymore." It seemed such a nightmare to find the right words. How do you explain to someone that their own mother would try and kill them? Slowly she helped her to her feet, feeling Sally's body shaking with confusion.

A shrill gust of wind blew in from the outside as Jeff came back in. He was soaked to the skin; his eyes were wild, darting around the room. "The . . . the car wouldn't start!" he coughed

"What?" Barbara's head suddenly became very heavy, she felt giddy, ill. "Is there anything you can do?" She peered behind him. "Where the hell is Colin?"

"I left him outside checking the car." An expression of guilt broke across his handsome face.

"You did what?" She placed her hand up to her forehead. "With a psycho running around in the woods!" Shouldering past him, she opened the front door. A strong gust of wind nearly took it off its hinges.

Peering deep into the swirl, she saw the car, its hood still up, but there was no sign of her half brother.

"Colin!" she bawled. "Are you out here. Come back into the house quick, you're in danger. Barbara moved closer and closer to the car, thinking that he maybe inside sheltering. "Hello!" There was a shape in the car, but it didn't move, it was Colin. Is he dead? No he can't be.

Then it occurred to her how exposed she was. "I've got to help him." Pulling the car door open, she pulled him away from the wheel; his head was soaked with water. No, turning her hand over, she could see it was blood. "Colin! No!"

For a moment the clouds parted letting the pale light wash over the front yard. A heavy hand came down on her shoulder. She swung around to see the ghost like figure of Sarah Winterfield, (Jane Falconer) the dye had been washed from her hair. It was now the frizzy red hair that Sally had. Her frenzied eyes burned into hers. She looked so different without her glasses.

Barbara fought for freedom from her grasp; she pushed the ghostly form away. Screaming in terror she ran back towards the house. She felt Sarah's eyes bore into her as she ran for her life.

Running up the porch, she slammed the door behind her, and locked it. Jeff was standing in the lounge doorway. She didn't give him a chance to speak. "S . . . she's . . . outside, we've got to block the door, she has a key!"

Rushing into the kitchen they pulled a chair each, piling them in front of the door. Barbara dashed for the toy room, dragging out some boxes of old toys. Just as the door handle slowly started to rotate, and a key turning in the lock. It slowly began to creak open, but struck the obstacles. Both of them sighed with relief.

"Wait!" Jeff stopped. "What about the back door?"

"Oh, shoot!" Reaching the kitchen they found the door wide open. "Quick." Running outside they forced the door closed and locked it.

"Phew," she panted, "that was close."

"So what do we do now?" he asked. "We're stuck out here it's not exactly the easiest situation. We've got to call the police."

"Yeah." She hurried past him to the stairs and started to climb. Reaching the landing, she headed for the phone room. As she reached the door the phone was already starting to ring. And she wasn't expecting any calls.

## Chapter-27

"Who on earth could that be" Barbara asked herself as she edged into the room and picked up the receiver. She held it up to her ear, feeling it shake in her hand. In a weak and trembling voice she said, "Hello."

"Hello Barbara." It was Sarah; it was in the sweet and kind tones she had used in the school office. "Why don't you hand Tammy over to me and I'll let you and your friends live."

"But she isn't Tammy," Barbara pleaded. "She's your daughter, you already murdered your sister." Time, she had to buy time. Sarah had to be near a phone, unless she was using a mobile. "Why did you do it' Sarah."

"So, you worked it out," she sounded smug, evil now. "Looks like I underestimated you."

"Yes. I know you were the one threatening me, using Sally to frighten me by threatening her. How did you fake the wounds" I've got to keep her talking!

"I just tripped in the woods, rolled down an embankment. I told her I was pushed, then she did anything I wanted." She cackled. "I broke into your boyfriend's store, stole the mannequin. Put it there so you thought you found my body."

"You tripped me up, hit me over the head and pretended to find me after you put that letter in my bag. But I thought you were waiting for the anniversary. The twentieth"

Sarah seemed to be enjoying the spectacle, the power she had over them all.

"Running off the road was a nice touch I saw in a movie. Your dad told me everything about you, including your paranoia disorder." There was a pause for thought. "It was all going like clockwork, till Tammy walked in, I had no choice but to bring it forward."

"But . . ."

"Enough talk!" Sarah demanded. "Now are you going to hand her over, or will I have to take her from you"

"I won't let you touch her," Barbara mustered, not really knowing what she was saying. "You'll have to get passed me and Jeff first!"

"Then die simpleton, fool!" There was a crack and the line went dead.

She punched in the number of the police, but there was nothing. It was clear that the phone line had just been cut. Which meant that Sally was near the house using a mobile. It was like a bad dream.

Everything she had ever feared in her childhood was coming real, just when she was on the verge of leaving it. Or did she find a way into the house'

Hastily she ran down the stairs, nearly tripping over her own feet, when the house was sent into darkness. Something crashed nearby as she stumbled down the stairs.

"Ghjfirfh! Ghjfirfh!" someone shouted light's dance on the walls around her. "Barbhin! Barbara!" The murmuring came to make sense. Jeff knelt down beside her, torch in one hand, poker in the other.

"Sarah has cut the phone-lines." He gave her a hand up. "She has to be somewhere in the house, it uses its own generator." Looking around frantically. "You shouldn't have left Sally alone."

"I'm okay." Sally wobbled through the door. "Where's my mum, I've got to talk to her."

"Somehow I don't think that'll make much difference. Looks like she's lost her marbles. We can't stay here, at least outside in the woods we'll have a fighting chance."

"But with the power down," Barbara protested, "She will be just as blind as we are surely!"

"No!" he cut her off sharply. "Sarah lived in this house for seventeen years, I think she knows it like the back of her hand."

"That's right Mr. Newborn," came the wicked voice, all around them, almost ghost like, echoing in the night. "Do you really want to take a chance in the dark." The laughter seemed to go on endlessly. "Do you really want to take a chance against the darkness? Soon this house will be in the hands of its rightful owner!"

This was followed by dead quiet.

"We can't just sit here." Barbara went up a couple of steps. "But it's going to take forever to be through the barricade, she'll expect us to head for the back door."

"So what do we go?" Jeff questioned. "We've got numbers on her side, she's on her own."

"I have a plan." She peered down the hall to the kitchen. A dark form shifted around in front of the windows. "Jeff I want you to go down and get the lights back on, darkness is her greatest defense."

"Got it!"

"Ssh, we don't want her to hear us."

He turned to leave.

"I know what you're trying to do!" Sarah called out. "It won't work, you'll all die!"

Barbara smiled to herself, feeling a sense of unease in the voice this time. "Do you want to take the risk, with the power up you lose your cloaking shield." Peering round the side again, she saw the figure pondering for a moment. Come on Sarah, if he turns the power on, you lose. If you let us through the back door, you'll get another chance outside.

Sure enough she disappeared. She gave Jeff the all clear he headed off to find the power supply. For a while both girls huddled in the darkness. Waiting for Sarah to clear. But something creaked nearby. Sally's ears pricked up. "What was that?" she whispered.

"I don't know, but I think it's time we made a move." Barbara clasped Sally's hand. "We're going to make it. Okay!" They started to head right for the back door a blinding light filled the room. For an instant she was taken completely by surprise. A hand shoved her to the ground, her glasses slid along the polished wooden floor.

Sally screamed in pain, as Sarah's shape took hold. "I know your every weak spot Barbara Hoffman, now it's just a matter of finishing you off!"

She tried to reach for her glasses, but she couldn't feel them. It was hard to make out, only two misty forms with clouded red hair. Height. Girl the light. Barbara lunged forward, when the light clicked off, and the hall was plunged into night, but it wasn't the whole house this time. Jeff.

"Oof!" Sarah cried out as the girl's head hit her stomach. She let go of Sally who grabbed Barbara's glasses. Reaching she got hold of her friend's arm, bolting through the now unlocked back door into the cold night, as Sarah's screams followed them out as she tackled Jeff. But it would buy them moments only.

## Chapter-28

Stopping for a few moments, a chance breath. "Here's your glasses," Sally said, holding out her hand.

"You saved my life."

"Well we're not out of this yet!" Barbara yelled. Both girls turned to see the ghostly form leave the back door, running for them. "Come on!" she ordered. "We've got to keep moving." This time she grabbed Sally's arm and ran for woods.

"You can't escape from me!" Sarah yelled. She seemed to be almost gliding up at great speed. "If you let me catch you, I'll make your deaths less painful!"

Yanking her friend towards the swing, Barbara aimed to go right underneath the frame. She slowed off a little, giving their pursuer a chance to catch a little ground.

"Sally, go on!" she demanded. "I'll be along in a second."

She gave her friend a fleeting glance and pelted for the woods. "Hurry Barbara hurry!"

Barbara gave the swing a good push. It sailed high in the air, getting tossed around in the air currents. Sarah had to slow down, to avoid being struck. She cursed out loud as her prey vanished into the woods.

"Where do we go now!" Sally asked, when Barbara finally caught her up. "These trees can't hide us for ever!"

"I know you're out there girls!" they heard the highpitched 'Screech'. "You can't hide for me forever. Ha ha. I know these woods better than both of you combined! All this running is making me mad!"

"You're already there," commented Barbara. "There's only one place we can go."

"Where?"

"The tree-house." Turning on their heels, the friends pounded through the thick forest. She could be anywhere by now, in front, behind or even behind the next tree.

"Are you sure you know the way?" Sally asked in panic. "Won't that be the first place she'll look?"

"That's what I'm counting on Sally!" she huffed. Urging her friend to hasten a little. But she kept on tripping, still in shock from her last ordeal. "Not far now," she said, pointing off into the woods. They broke through the clearing. A pale yellow light could still be seen from the window.

Barbara paused to study the trees. "Sally you're going to have to climb for your life!"

"I can't," she panted. "I never could climb trees, my mum never let me." Somewhere in the trees a white figure moved quickly along, shouting into the howling wind.

"No! Sally I'm not going to let her kill again," she turned back to the tree. "I'll give you a shove, now get going!"

"Are you ready to meet your maker!" The harsh voice was getting closer each time. Sally's eyes went cold with fear she was clearly in a bad way, too afraid even to move. It was too late.

The blur of white gown came into view Sarah's eyes wilder than ever. Untamed red hair clinging to her like snakes, a mud covered knife in her hand.

Both girls stood there in fear unable to move, just clasping for each other's hands.

"It's all over for you!" Sarah hissed. "This game will end in tears, like the games we always used to play. Right Tammy!" She edged closer, a venomous smile on her strangely pretty face. "Are you afraid of me Barbara?" Her voice was calm once more.

She just couldn't help but stare at the knife. It looked as though it had been buried outside for quite a while. "Yes, I . . . I'm scared," she trembled. "Is that the knife you used to kill your sister?" Buy time! try to bring her out of this.

For a moment she paused, lapping up the atmosphere. "Isn't it wonderful, my dear mummy's kitchen knife?"

Barbara had to think of another question, but they weren't coming fast enough. "What happened that night? What drove you to do it?" She felt Sally's hand shake in hers.

"Tammy. Tammy," she said, stepping closer and lifting the knife. "You made us so popular at school, but I lost all the friends you made. But they hate me when I go to school." She was talking as though she was reliving that day.

"Those Crail's were making my life hell, I couldn't do anything without them telling mummy or daddy. But they liked you!" The gentleness in her voice slipped away. "They were only black, who'd care if they died"

"So you did kill Mr. Crail's family"

"They deserved to die, all of them. And then there was Tammy! My face, why did she have my face" Sally backed away from the moving knife-edge. "She was out on that swing she loved so much. I watched the yobs take her into the woods." Sarah took a deep breath. "I sneaked the knife out when my parents were at the front door dealing protesters. It was so easy I followed them out into forest. They just left her alone out here. Knowing she'd head for the only place she knew. This tree house."

"You waited, and you killed her, just like that"

"This was in my past, I wanted to leave it behind me and become someone new! Then she came along!" She jabbed the knife at the whimpering Sally. "Almost like some punishment from God she looked exactly like me and her. It reminded me every day as she grew up and I hate her for it! This is my only way out! I have to choose Sally, honest, if there was another I'd take it! Now it's time to end this once and for all."

At that moment there was a sound of sirens in the distance. Sarah lost concentration, moving the knife away. There was a gush of wind, as a heavy piece of wood was brought down on Sarah's knife hand. The weapon sailed off into the air and Sarah cried out in pain.

## Chapter-29

The sound of the knife falling on wet leafy ground was the only sound bar the wind and rain, and the soft sound of crying of a little girl. Sarah was knelt on the ground clutching her hand, as a dark crooked form came from the dark.

"I always knew you had set that fire," Mr. Crail laughed. "You haven't changed one bit."

Barbara almost fainted with relief, Sally was just glaring at her mother, tears rolling down her dirt and blood smeared face. Her eyes haunted by her parent, knowing the truth would take years to sink in, if it ever did.

"Get out of here girls," Creeps snarled. "Your roll in this is over I have my families murderer. Now go!" He turned his head away for a second.

Sarah saw her chance she got to her feet. For a moment her eyes locked with Barbara's stopping her from screaming. But instead of attacking she turned and ran into the woods like a little child, hiding from a parent that was going to punish her.

Crail cursed, he dropped his cane and started right after her. Barbara couldn't believe how fast he had run. Everything went dead quiet for what seemed like an age until Sally collapsed to the ground in floods



of tears.

Barbara tried to get her friend to her feet. "We've got to get out of here, she may come back!" But she knew it wouldn't work. Instead she sat down beside Sally and put her arm round her shoulder, as the sounds of shouting moved in all around them. Huddling alone in the darkness waiting for a sign that the nightmare was now over for them.

\* \* \*

What seemed like hours later, the rain had stopped, with only the distant rumble of thunder. Flashlights bounded off trees, and calls of friendly, but unknown voices. Barbara couldn't move, she felt frozen, with a weight on one shoulder.

Sally was leaning on her, and she was fast asleep.

Her mind wandered, unable to take in what had just happened to them. This sure was going to be one house move she'd never ever forget. And that was a promise.

"Hello!" someone shouted. "Is there anyone out here?" There was clearly no reply to the question. Then it occurred to her. Were these people here looking for them? Had Jeff managed to escape and get help? "We're over here," she tried to call out, but it was no more than a low murmur. Her throat was dry, and felt very sore. Using all her might she tried again and again each time getting louder still.

The sound and movement stopped. And then there was an excited commotion. Bright lights pieced the darkness like weapons as they shot up and down till a dark figure loomed over them.

"I've found them!" he called out. The person knelt down he wore a uniform. "I'm deputy Mills of the Winterfield police."

Soon their little spot was swarming with life. Sally stirred a little, but didn't awaken. Mills shook her gently on the shoulder. "Miss, Miss."

Her eyes opened, when she saw the man she grabbed Barbara's arm even tighter. Still shaking with cold, and very bewildered. "Please stop this, please."

"It's okay Sall," Barbara comforted her. "There it's the police." She eased herself to her feet, taking her friends trembling hand. "I'd better help her." Shutting out her memories of the experience was tough, but Sally would most likely be mentally scared for life.

The officers placed blankets around the girls shoulders and led them back out of the woods, the buzzing of sirens, radio talk, and the flashing of blue and red lights. Sally was led to the ambulance. Barbara heard a familiar voice. "Jeff!" she called out. Turning she ran straight into his open arms.

For a while neither of them said anything just remained in each other's arms. Both were crying, some joy, and some sadness.

"Jeff it was horrible," she sobbed into his chest. Her body was shaking all over. Then she remembered Colin. "Oh, what about Colin he's -"

"He's in hospital," Jeff eased her. "Sarah only knocked him out. The police said he ran all the way into town to get help, his head was cut pretty bad."

"Thank God!" she cried out, hugging him tighter.

When they did finally part, Barbara was checked over by a medic. But apart from a few cuts and bruises she was fine, though she didn't feel it right now.

"You'd better come and stay at our place tonight," Jeff said finally. "If you don't want to spend it here, in this house" He shifted his bandaged head.

She laughed. "I think I've had enough of our new home for a while Jeff." Putting her arm round his waist. "What happened in there?"

"She bit me," he moaned. "Want to kiss it better?"

Barbara didn't reply. She looked back at the house, the yard, and the swing. And for a moment she saw Tammy swinging there, giggling in the night. "She's under the tree house."

"Who?" he questioned as they got in the Cadillac.

"Tammy's body." She stared out over the now so familiar surrounding of trees. "It's where Sarah killed her." Barbara said nothing more on the ride home, nor at the garage despite of the kindness of Jeff, Mr. and Mrs. Newborn. She couldn't find the words. Her mind was on poor Sally; her world had been cut to shreds. How would she cope with the future knowing the truth? "We'd better hurry up and get to the hospital."

### Chapter-30

Four weeks had passed, and winter had set in. All of Winterfield was now getting into the Christmas spirit. A blanket of snow had covered most of the sleepy town over night. Barbara gazed out from her small bedroom window. Everything thing looked so different under the white covering. A pale reflection of lights on her Christmas tree gave the room some life.

But the events in those woods one month ago. The police search had turned up nothing. It seemed as though Creeps and Sarah had just vanished, leaving another mystery to solve. Though they did find Tammy's body, she was put to rest properly a week later.

Colin was home he would be going back to College at the beginning of the New Year, and for the first time in her life she would be sad to see him go. As for Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman, they would never doubt their daughter's word in quite the same way again. It was they who ended up apologizing to her. The buyer of they're old house had never shone up at the meeting. Was it all part of Sarah's plan to get them away from the house?

Jake had kept on at her, asking what it felt like being held a knifepoint, being stalked by a psycho. The idea of it being so awful never seemed to enter his mind, as though I had spent that evening watching a horror movie.

Jeff was now officially her boyfriend. So things were looking up for the near future at least. Though Barbara hadn't heard from Sally since she was discharged from hospital, she had said, "I have some thinking to do."

Somewhere out there lurked her crazed mother, Mr. Crail hot in her trail. It sure wasn't going to be easy. There had been severe flooding in the town on that night, just like there had been the night Tammy was murdered. The swing now sat motionless under its' blanket of snow. A few flakes floated down from the sky, coming to rest on the still seat.

She turned to look back into her small room. It felt more like home now, but there always would be that feeling of unease here.

"Barbara!" her mum called from the stairs. "There's someone here to see you!"

Jeff, she thought. "I'll be right down mum." Hurrying down the heavily decorated stairs, and hall. But it wasn't Jeff that the door, it was Sally. She huddled just inside the door. Barbara slowed down in pleasant

surprise.

"Hi Barbara," she smiled. "Long long time no see." She leaned across and hugged her friend. "Merry Christmas." She let go and pulled out a card. "I got this for you."

"Oh, thank you." Barbara hastily took the card, and opened the envelope.

TO BARBARA

THANK YOU FOR SAVING MY LIFE, AND BEING  
SUCH A GREAT FRIEND. . . MERRY! CHRISTMAS!

FRIENDS FOREVER  
LOVE SALLY

"I've got this really great Christmas tree up in my room," Barbara stated. "Want to come up and see it" She led her friend up the stairs. "So where have you been"

"I spent some time in a local motel, trying to get things into some kind of order back into my life." She sighed. "It took quite a while for it to sink in, sometimes, even now I wonder." Reaching into her other pocket, she pulled out a piece of paper. "I got this from my grandparents. You know, the Winterfield's. There living in Chicago, they asked if I wanted to go and live with them."

"So what's it like to be Sally Winterfield" Barbara chuckled. But it was clear that her Sally wasn't at all amused. "Sorry, I didn't mean to sound so -"

"It's okay, I suppose I'll have to get used to be the lost heir of this town." She forced a smile. "I don't have a clue what's going to happen to me, seventeen is a little old for adoption."

"Do you think your grandparents knew what your mum had done to her twin sister"

"Yes Barbara, I think they worked it out." She turned her gaze out the window. "That's why they left town in such a hurry. So if the body was ever found, everyone would think it was Sarah . . .ah mum, they found."

"It must be so hard for you"

"Guess, but it isn't the time or the place to dwell on it." Slowly Sally's smile faded.

"Jeff, Colin and me are going bowling later in today, do you want to come." She brushed some hair out of her eyes. "So what do you say, it should be great fun."

"I don't know," Sally sighed. "I was bad enough being the daughter of a teacher, but being one of a teenage psycho and murderer. Maybe I should move away"

"No Sally!" Barbara pleaded. "It was your grandparents fault, if they hadn't raised Sarah and Tammy the way they had, none of this would have happened."

"And I never would have been born," Sally fell back onto her friends bed, putting her head in her hands, and started to cry. "Everything things gone to hell around me . . .an. . .and there's nothing I can do," she sobbed.

Sitting down beside her friend, Barbara finally said. "We were victims in a cruel game Sally." She placed her arm round her shoulder. "It's not going to be easy, but we have to get on with our lives. Not let them win, you have to fight."

"You really think I'll be welcome in Jeff's bowling team again"

"Yes. Don't blame yourself for something that was far beyond your control. I never for a moment gave in under my parents pressure, though there was a few times when I came close to believing I was crazy."

Sally looked up, doing her best to put a brave face on. "Okay I'll go, but if it gets to hot in there, I get out. Right!"

"It's a deal." Barbara put a finger in her mouth. "You'll be alone this Christmas. I'm sure my parents

would be happy to have you here, seeing what happened."

"I don't want to be any trouble." She looked up, tears drawing red lines on her face.

"It's no trouble, really, the more the merrier." Barbara got to her feet. "How's about you help me decorate the rest of my room?" She glanced out onto the landing. "This place could really do with make over, it's so dull. I've been thinking of painting my room sky blue, something bright."

"Yeah I could really do something to get my mind of everything else. Maybe you should ring Jeff, see if he wants to head into town, do some shopping." A grin broke across her face. "I'll be buying more presents this year, before it was just mum and me."

"Well let's not think about that right now," suggested Barbara. "We've got so much to do, and such little time to do it in."

Jeff agreed to come and take the girls down to Winterfield for some last minute Christmas shopping. But somewhere in the woods a scream echoed, drowned out by the merry cheers of the season.

END

M.J. WOOD THE SWING

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M/F