

THE HILLIARD HAUNTING

a novella



Scott Donnelly

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Although this story takes place in Hilliard, Ohio, it is completely fictional and any similarities between this or any other works is strictly coincidental.

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“When black cats prowl and pumpkins gleam,
may luck be yours on Halloween...”

-Unknown Author

**ON THE BANKS OF THREE-MILE CREEK
WEST HILLIARD, 1980**

Jefferson Collins wiped the sweat from his forehead as he knelt down under the kitchen sink in the house that he and his crew had just constructed. The pipes under the sink were leaking, so his team had been called back to fix it and do one final walk-through before the Watkins family moved in the next day.

It was said that this would be the Watkins' dream home – from the blue prints to the countryside location – the woods and Three Mile Creek in their backyard, cornfields as far as the eye could see - everything was decided on by them personally.

“Jeff! Hurry up, we have to get moving out!” one of his crew called to him, his voice echoing from the empty and hollow living room. Jefferson tightened the pipes with his wrench and looked it over – it all looked good.

Jefferson walked out the front door with his toolbox in one hand, and locked the door with the key in his other. He walked towards the truck where the three other members of his team stood waiting for him.

A cool wind blew in from the south, quivering the cornfields to the right of the property. *Kill them...*

Jefferson stopped in the middle of the front yard and looked towards the cornfield. He then peered down the side of the house towards the barn in the backyard. The locked barn sat still in front of a canvas of dead trees and the creek.

Kill them...

The autumn breeze carried in the whispering words he'd been hearing all week on the property. Jefferson wasn't sure if it was just in his head, or if it was something more sinister.

“Maybe I will,” Jefferson said under his breath. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened his eyes, everything was foggy and distorted. There was a ringing in his ears – a commanding one.

The ill-omened voice had convinced him it was what he needed to do. With a crash, his toolbox hit the ground and opened up, spilling out all of its rusted contents.

Jefferson clenched his hand into a fist, and released the hidden blade from the box-cutter he threateningly held in his callused grip.

Kill them...

Jefferson approached his men, the autumn sun glistening in the blade...

**THE WATKINS RESIDENCE
WEST HILLIARD, 2005**

HALLOWEEN

Five students stepped out of a white minivan, as did their driver and teacher, Mr. Vincent, and walked up towards the large house on Amity Road. They walked up the remainder of the gravel driveway, holding their notebooks and pencils. One of the students carried a voice recorder and another carried the school-issue video camera. They were doing a project this Halloween – an interview that Mr. Vincent had been trying to secure since he started teaching at Darby High School four years earlier.

It was an interview with Seth and Elizabeth Watkins, the elderly couple who lived in the big house on Amity Road with their caretaker, Valerie. The property on which they lived was the backdrop to a triple homicide the day before they were supposed to move into the house back in October of 1980.

When the police arrived at the property that next morning, Jefferson Collins was still there and confessed to killing his three other crewmembers. Although a solid motive was never exposed, sources said that Jefferson heard voices on the property – voices telling him to protect the land and kill those men. He told police that the grounds were home to a witch named Raven who once lived there.

Jefferson was arrested and locked up in a maximum-security prison two hours north of Columbus, Ohio. Despite the brutal crimes, Seth and Elizabeth moved in as soon as they could, and had made it their permanent residence.

Mr. Vincent led his five students to the front door of the Watkins home and knocked gently. The door opened a moment later and a woman in her mid-thirties answered. She greeted them with a smile and introduced herself as Valerie Warner.

“Good afternoon, Valerie. My name is Mr. Vincent; you can call me Steven though. These are my students from Darby High: Ava, Mason, John, Melissa and Corey. We’d like to thank you and Mr. and Mrs. Watkins for letting us stop by for an interview.”

“It’s no problem, Mr. Vincent,” Valerie said, “please, come in.”

Valerie let the six of them into the house. It was a large house – a lot of open room and old antique furniture. A grand piano sat in the far corner of the living room covered by a white sheet. The furniture was old, but looked brand new – it was barely used. An old chandelier hung from the ceiling.

“If you all will wait a moment, I’ll go get Mr. and Mrs. Watkins,” Valerie said as she left the living room, disappearing into the house.

“Any place with a white sheet-covered piano is already creepy in my book,” Mason, a senior, joked. He got a chuckle out of his classmates.

Ava, another senior with her long blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail, walked over to the staircase that led upstairs and put her hand on the rickety old railing. She looked upstairs and then stepped back. “It sure is dark up there.”

“Okay everyone, stay together,” Mr. Vincent said. “Mr. and Mrs. Watkins are finally letting us into their home for the interview, and I don’t want them to regret their decision by seeing everyone walking around getting into stuff.”

The five students gathered around together and waited for the caretaker to bring the hosts into the room.

Ava looked to the right, where Valerie had exited the room, and then to the left where there were two large windows covered by black curtains. She walked over to the curtains and pulled them back to reveal the windows were painted black; you couldn't see in or out of them.

"Hm," Ava said, "I wonder why -"

"Please don't touch anything, young lady," an older woman spoke. Everyone's attention turned back to the right where Valerie brought Elizabeth Watkins in, in her wheelchair. "Those curtains are very old and I don't want you to rip them."

"Sorry, ma'am," Ava said, re-joining the rest of her classmates in the center of the living room. Behind Valerie and Elizabeth, Seth Watkins was walked in slowly, trying to balance with his walker. He was obviously suffering from Parkinson's disease with his uncontrollable shaking, but still managed to sneak out a smile to everyone.

"Mr. and Mrs. Watkins," Mr. Vincent began, "thank you both for letting us into your lovely home. We really appreciate your time."

"Well, you've been asking long enough," Elizabeth said in her shaky old voice.

Valerie helped Seth sit down on the couch, and wheeled his wife right up next to him. Seth reached his fragile hand out and rested it on his wife's lap.

The students each sat down in whatever seat they could find, and Mr. Vincent took center stage.

"Well, let's begin so we can let you two enjoy the rest of your Halloween evening. I'm sure you're expecting a bunch of trick or treaters tonight," Mr. Vincent said with a smile.

"We don't get a whole lot of that nonsense out here," Elizabeth said. She looked up at Valerie who stood next to her. "You can leave us be, darling. I'll ring the bell if I need you."

"Certainly," Valerie said. She smiled at the guests and then left the room.

Mr. Vincent looked to John, who was holding the voice recorder, and gave him the OK to hit the little red button. On that mark, Corey, the only freshman in the group, lifted the video camera, aimed it at the old couple, and began rolling.

Mr. Vincent continued, "Well, I've been trying to do this interview for almost four years now, because I think it's a big part of Hilliard's history. Three people were murdered on your property the day before you were supposed to move in. Now, there is a lot of mystery that surrounds this crime."

"Indeed there is," Elizabeth said.

"First of all, I'd just like to know in general, why move in after something so horrific happened?"

"It was our dream home. We put a lot of time and money into getting this home built. We weren't going to just abandon it."

Mr. Vincent scribbled down in his notepad, as did the students. “My next question, do you think this was an act of cold-blooded murder? Or do you believe the spirit of a witch named Raven really could have spoken to Jefferson Collins?”

Elizabeth pointed to the wall with the windows that were painted black. “There’s nothing supernatural about this property or the cornfields out there.”

Ava noticed which wall she was pointing too. On the other side of those windows was the cornfield. Did the Watkins’ not want to see what was out there? Or did they not want something to see inside?

Elizabeth continued, “That man, Jefferson Collins, was mentally insane. He took the box cutter from his toolbox and slit those poor men’s throats. There was nothing supernatural about that at all.”

The old woman was starting to get visibly frustrated. Seth just sat on the couch, not saying a word to anyone. Mr. Vincent, slightly put off, continued anyway:

“Over the past few decades, especially the last couple of years, there have been strange occurrences out here on Amity Road and the surrounding country roads. Strange howls in the night, reports of mysterious fires in the middle of the cornfields - some people tell stories about their pets going missing around here and never turning up again.”

“Mr. Vincent,” Elizabeth said, “I’m not long for this world. Seth and I are knocking on death’s door. The only reason I agreed to do this God forsaken interview was to set the record straight. There was never a witch named Raven and there is no haunted cornfield. Seth and I have lived here for twenty-five years, and not once have we been spooked by anything!”

The five students set their pencils down and felt nervous by Elizabeth’s shouting.

“Mrs. Watkins, I apologize for any -” Mr. Vincent began but was then interrupted by Elizabeth picking up the bell that Valerie had sat next to her and frantically ringing it.

“What about the black paint on the windows?” Ava called out, silencing the ringing bell.

Elizabeth looked directly at Ava, as the room grew silent. “What did you say, young lady?”

“The cornfield is on that side of the house,” Ava said, pointing behind her. “The same side that you have the windows blacked out on. Why are they blacked out, Mrs. Watkins? Is there something you don’t want to see out there in the cornfield? Maybe you saw something that frightened you? Maybe you didn’t want someone, or *something*, to be looking inside the house?”

Elizabeth snarled and started ringing the bell again, faster this time.

“Alright,” Mr. Vincent said to his class, “it’s over. Turn the camera and recorder off.”

John and Corey shut their equipment off and abruptly, all the lights in the room shut off. The students all screamed.

“It’s just a power surge, guys.” Mr. Vincent tried to calm his students.

Elizabeth shed a sinister smile. “Is it?”

The house slowly began to darken into murky shadows, and the students panicked. Melissa dropped her notebook and ran towards the front door, but by the time she got there, the house had already surrendered to unnatural darkness.

Nobody could see anything. There was a loud hiss that emerged from the darkness, and then an even louder shriek from Melissa.

The light bulbs on the chandelier above flickered on and off and everyone saw quick, terrifying glimpses of Melissa's bloody body hanging from it. The flickering lights went out for good and the screaming came to an abrupt end, leaving only echoes lingering in the hauntingly dark house.

CHAPTER I

Halloween – Present Day

A mail truck squealed to a puttering stop on Amity Road right outside of the Watkins residence. The mail carrier, Patrick Snowden, cranked the ignition but the truck just wouldn't start.

"Crap," Patrick said to himself. He looked over his shoulder and into the back of the truck to look at his load. He still had over half the route to deliver. This was the last thing he needed on Halloween. He grabbed his cell phone and called in the breakdown.

"Hey, Nancy, it's Patrick. I just broke down on Amity Road. How long until you can get out here to try and jump me?"

Patrick looked out the driver's side window and saw the withering cornfield next to the Watkins' home. A gentle breeze blew through and rustled the endless stalks of dead corn. "Any chance you can make it sooner?" Patrick asked.

"Okay, I'll be here." Patrick hung up and set his phone down on his lap. He looked from the cornfield to the house. A curtain in one of the downstairs windows moved and caught his attention, but he couldn't see anyone behind it.

~

The Hilliard Municipal Park was buzzing. Halloween fell on a Saturday this year, so Hilliard put on a Harvest Festival in the park. There were games for the kids, candy give-a-ways, costume parades and face paintings. The pink Crumbz on Wheelz trailer was set up near the entrance of the festival selling pumpkin-spice cupcakes and sugar cookies decorated with black bats and orange pumpkins.

A car drove up the main road through the park, a black Sedan. It passed a small wooded area where the dead trees appeared as ominous skeletal figures - their branches reaching into the gray sky.

Inside the car, Holly Gibson adjusted the radio. She was in her thirties and thin with short brown hair. She parked in a mostly empty lot and stepped out of her car.

She checked her watch – 9:28am. Her brother was supposed to meet her in just a couple of minutes. Holly heard the crowd from the park and looked over her shoulder. There were kids in costumes dressed as their favorite horror villains, and their parents were trying to settle them all down.

Holly smiled and let out a small chuckle as one of the kids dressed as Batman punched the Joker.

Something out of the corner of Holly's eye caught her attention. She glanced over to the wooded area and saw something in the thicket. Six dark figures stood just behind the tree line. Holly squinted and leaned forward to get a better look, but they must have blended back in with the trees. Just like that, the six distinguishable figures were gone.

"Holly!" Kevin Gibson shouted right behind her. She jumped and turned around and gave Kevin a friendly punch on the shoulder. She laughed.

“You scared me!”

“Eh, it’s Halloween. That’s what you’re supposed to do,” Kevin said in a very ornery manner. He was a little older than his sister and noticeably heavier. He dressed in a large hooded sweatshirt and blue jeans that were slightly too big for him. Even his belt couldn’t hold them up completely.

“What were you looking at?” Kevin asked.

“Oh, nothing. I thought I saw something in the woods, but I guess I was just seeing things.”

“Gotcha. You ready?”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

Holly climbed back into her car and Kevin jumped in the passenger seat. She started the car and they drove back down the road.

~

A cold October breeze weaved in and out through the headstones in the Wesley Chapel Cemetery on the east side of Hilliard.

Valerie Warner pushed Elizabeth Watkins in her wheelchair down a path in the cemetery and off into the grass. They stopped at a small headstone - Seth’s headstone.

Valerie stepped aside and hung her head as Elizabeth started to cry over her husband’s grave. Elizabeth was ten years older and showing it, physically and mentally. Her long straggly gray hair was thinning rapidly and her mind was touch and go, but she still knew to cry for her husband.

In her hand, she held a single red rose.

“Let me know when you’re done, Ms. Watkins,” Valerie spoke softly.

Elizabeth struggled to lean forward and dropped the rose in front of her husbands’ fractured headstone.

Near the entrance to Wesley Chapel, the black Sedan drove in and parked along the stretch of gravel road. Holly and Kevin got out and walked side by side up a path off the road and to a well-kept grave.

They both knelt down and put their hands on the headstone. Holly ran her fingers over the name: Ava Gibson. A single tear formed in the corner of Holly’s eye and trickled down her cheek.

“It doesn’t get any easier, Ava. We miss you everyday,” she said.

Kevin put a comforting hand on his sister’s shoulder and blankly stared at Ava’s name.

Holly looked into her brother’s eyes. “It kills me to not understand what happened to her, Kevin.”

Kevin nodded. He looked past his sister and saw Elizabeth Watkins and Valerie Warner about thirty yards away. The sad look on his face turned to anger. “Someone knows what happened

to her,” he said.

He stood up and walked fast across the green grass in Elizabeth’s direction. Holly stood up and watched him.

“Where are you going?” Holly asked. She noticed the two women and then ran after Kevin. “Kevin, no!”

“Hey! Watkins!” Kevin shouted aggressively as he stormed towards them.

Elizabeth Watkins turned her head slowly and watched Kevin approach. Valerie stepped in front of her and Kevin stopped.

“We’re here mourning the ten year anniversary of our baby sisters death – a death she suffered at *your* house!” Kevin shouted. “The cops have not been very cooperative in the past with us. Tell me, Ms. Watkins, how does a young girl hang herself in your home and five others die of heart attacks? Tell me, how is that possible?”

“You need to step away, sir. Ms. Watkins is paying respect to her deceased husband,” Valerie sternly spoke.

“Oh, I’m so sorry for your loss,” Kevin said sarcastically as Holly joined his side. “Our sister died in your home and you all walked free!”

“There was never any proof of foul play, sir, if that’s what you’re getting at,” Valerie said, defending the ones she cared for.

“Then what happened? Everyone just dropped dead from heart attacks – at the same time? None of that makes *any* sense! You owe us an explanation!”

Valerie stood her ground and Elizabeth put her hand on her caretakers’ side. Valerie noticed and stepped aside.

“Young man,” Elizabeth began, “I am sorry for the loss of your baby sister, I truly am. I know what it’s like to lose someone close to you. But I haven’t done anything wrong. This town has looked upon me with accusing eyes and whispering words about murder and witchcraft since the day we moved into our home. If anyone owes anyone *anything*, this town owes *me* an apology.”

Kevin stared at the old woman with his mouth open in disbelief. He couldn’t believe she just said that. “You really are a witch...” he said and then turned around and walked away towards Ava’s grave. Holly followed him.

Elizabeth watched Kevin closely as he left. Her upper lip trembled with anger.

~

Postal Supervisor, Nancy Harris, turned the corner onto Amity Road and drove up about a quarter of a mile where she saw Patrick Snowden’s broken down truck sitting off to the side of the road.

In the passenger seat of her SUV, twenty one year old Chris Potter sat with jumper cables on his lap. He was the young custodian at the Post Office, hired right out of a failed two-year stint

at community college.

“Whenever you want to make the jump to mail carrier, Chris, let me know and we’ll get you started on the training,” Nancy said.

“Okay,” Chris said. “Who knows? Maybe someday.”

“It’s a good job. It pays well.”

They approached the broken down mail truck and pulled up behind it. Nancy looked in the rearview mirror to make sure no cars were flying around the curve behind them, and then got out of her car. Chris climbed out the side door and the two of them walked up to the driver’s side of the mail truck.

Nancy peered in the truck. The sliding door was open but no one was inside. She leaned in over the seat and looked into the cargo area.

“Patrick?” she called. There was no answer.

Nancy stepped back out of the truck and looked around. “Patrick?” she called out again. There was still no answer. She looked behind her at the Watkins’ house. It didn’t appear anyone was home. She then looked to the cornfield. It waved eerily in the wind and the stalks towered over the land like an unnerving and dominant creature. All she could hear were the wind chimes singing on the Watkins’ front porch.

Nancy pulled her cell phone out of her suit jacket and dialed Patrick’s number. She waited through a few rings and finally heard his phone behind her. It rang from deep within the tall, dead stalks of corn.

She held the phone down by her side and called out once again: “Patrick?”

Nothing.

Nancy looked around with her eyes and at once, felt uneasy. Something wasn’t right. She ended the call with Patrick and dialed 911.

CHAPTER II

Traditions

Holly drove up Main Street and curled through the connecting roundabouts and into Old Hilliard. About a quarter of a mile up on the left, Holly parked her car along the street and she and Kevin stepped out. They walked into Abners Casual Diner for an early lunch.

The bell hanging above the door chimed as the two walked in and grabbed a seat along the wall.

A young woman approached them and laid out two menus.

“Drinks?” the girl asked.

“Water for me, please,” Holly requested.

“Same,” Kevin pouted, still upset at his run-in with Elizabeth Watkins.

“Let it go, Kev,” Holly said as the waitress walked away.

“It doesn’t make sense, Holly. How can we go ten years without actual answers?”

“Aside from that poor girl that hung herself, all five of the other autopsies were conclusive – heart attacks. There’s not much you can accuse someone of when a cause of death is undeniable.”

“Meaning what though? Don’t you find it completely far-fetched, Holly?” Kevin queried, confused and angry. “We’re supposed to believe that the Watkins’ knew nothing? There’s something that they’re not telling us.”

Holly looked at a small, carved and lit pumpkin in the center of their table. She glanced around the dining area and saw that each table had one. She smiled, remembering how the two of them use to enjoy Halloween before Ava died.

“We need to go back to the traditions,” Holly said.

“What are you talking about?”

“After lunch, let’s go get a pumpkin, go back to my place, carve it and watch monster movies all day. Like we did before what happened to Ava.” Holly began to twist her necklace in her fingers. It was the left half of a broken heart necklace that she and Ava had split over ten years ago. Holly didn’t go very long without feeling the heart in her fingers.

“I don’t know, Holly. I don’t feel up to it.”

“Please,” Holly said to her brother, batting her eyes.

Kevin smiled and shook his head. “Fine.”

A chill pierced the air inside the restaurant. Goosebumps took over Holly’s arms and she shivered. The candle inside the pumpkin on the table began to flicker and then went out.

Kevin looked around and noticed all the pumpkins were going out. The lights in Abners Diner flickered and then shut off. Everyone inside the restaurant started muttering and looking

around, confused by the random power surge.

Suddenly, Holly screamed and turned around in her seat, grabbing the back of her neck. The customers who were in the diner gasped and looked at Holly; all eyes were on her.

“What? What is it?” Kevin quickly asked, concerned about his sisters’ fright.

“Someone touched my neck!” she said. “Their fingers were ice cold!”

“Nobody’s there, Holly. There was no one behind you.”

A short buzzing sound brought all the lights back on in Abners Diner. Everyone shrugged it off and went back to enjoying their food, while occasionally shooting a glance in Holly’s direction.

Holly was upset. She turned back and faced Kevin while rubbing her neck. She was breathing heavily and closed her eyes tightly, trying to regain her composure.

“Are you okay?” Kevin asked.

Holly didn’t answer.

After lunch, Holly and Kevin pulled into the gravel parking lot at Kuhlwein’s Farm Market off of Walker Road. They got out and Holly locked her car with the remote. They walked up to the barn where they started looking at hay bales stacked with pumpkins.

Kuhlwein’s was a year-round farm market, but autumn was their time to shine. They had hayrides, fresh produce, pumpkins, baked goods and fresh apple cider.

Cooper, an older employee and good friend of the Kuhlwein’s, walked up to them with a plate of cookies.

“Happy Halloween, guys,” he said in a very peppy and polite tone. “The wife just made fresh pumpkin sugar cookies. They’re over by the pies if you’re interested. Want to try a sample?”

“Sure,” Kevin said. He grabbed a cookie, as did Holly, and they each took a bite.

“Mmm,” Holly said finishing off the cookie.

“I’ll be around. Let me know if you guys need any help,” Cooper said.

“Thank you,” Kevin replied. Cooper walked off to the next person and Holly continued looking at the pumpkins.

“Are you okay?” Kevin asked her, noticing she was a little shaken up still from the diner incident.

“It’s just a weird day, Kev.”

Kevin just nodded, knowing something was off. He felt it too.

~

Two black-and-white Hilliard Police SUV’s pulled up behind the mail truck on Amity Road with their lights spinning, but no sirens. An officer stepped out from each of the cars and approached Nancy and Chris who stood by the abandoned government vehicle.

“Are you the one who called in?” one of the officers asked Nancy.

“Yes, sir. I’m Nancy Harris. I’m a supervisor at the Hilliard Post Office. One of my carriers called me a little while ago saying his truck broke down. Chris and I came out to jump him, but he wasn’t with the truck. I called his cell phone and he didn’t answer, but it rang from somewhere in the cornfield.”

The officer looked towards the cornfield, and then to the Watkins’ home, sitting eerily quiet. “This is the old Watkins home, isn’t it?”

“I believe so,” Nancy said.

The officer looked back to the younger officer who was in the other vehicle. “Call the Chief. We may need some extra bodies out here.”

“What’s wrong, York?” the younger officer asked.

“You’re new to Hilliard, Westman, this house has a history here. Trust me, it’s probably a good idea to call in some back up,” Officer York said.

“Okay,” Officer Westman reluctantly complied. He walked back to his SUV and picked up the radio.

“Mrs. Harris, why don’t you head back to your office and we’ll take a look around. We’ll call you when we find anything,” Office York said.

“Could I send someone out to pick up the mail from the truck and finish the route?” she asked.

“Not yet. This could be considered a crime scene, and in that case, everything needs to remain here, untouched.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll be in touch.”

Nancy nodded and she and Chris got back into her car, u-turned on Amity Road and drove away.

Officer York looked around the large yard leading up to the Watkins’ home. Everything was still - eerie and still. Westman joined York back near the mail truck.

“Let’s go see if anyone’s home,” York said.

Westman followed York up the gravel driveway and onto the wide front porch of the home. Both officers had their hands on their holsters, strictly as a precautionary measure. York knocked on the front door and then peered into the window next to it. The curtains were obstructing any kind of viewing.

“Who lives here again?” Westman, the young and inexperienced officer asked.

“Elizabeth Watkins,” York said. “She’s widely been accused of being a witch.”

“A witch?” Westman laughed. York looked at him with a serious face.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about Hilliard,” he said. York knocked again, but no one ever came to answer it. “Follow me.”

York led the way around to the backyard, walking in the grass between the house and the cornfield. The gravel driveway stretched around the other side of the house and into the back where there was room for more than one car to park. The lot was empty.

Just beyond the gravel parking area was an old barn, gray and brown in color. The shutters on the front and sides were old and barely hanging on. The front door to the barn was opened, and inside the barn sat in darkness.

The officers walked up to the barns’ entrance and York noticed a silky spider web stretching across the entire doorframe. The web was huge, but there wasn’t a spider to be seen.

The loud squawk of a bird fluttering overhead startled the officers and instinct told them to duck. York looked up and watched as a black raven perch itself on the top of the barn and tilt its’ head to look down at them.

The raven squawked again as it sat there, watching them.

“That’s a big bird,” Westman said.

York nodded. “Indeed.” His nerves started to get the best of him. “Let’s go back up front and wait on the backup.”

York led the way back along the side of the house.

~

Holly and Kevin were walking through the pumpkin patch at Kuhlwein’s. There were a few other people scattered around in the fields, but most everyone else in Hilliard had already picked their pumpkins. Halloween might have been considered a little too late to be picking out a pumpkin to carve.

“What about this one?” Holly said, picking up a short and plump one.

Kevin looked it over with hesitation. “Maybe we’ll get something a little taller. We’ll have more options for carving.”

As Holly set the pumpkin back down in the dirt, a chilly wind picked up and blew in from the west. Holly shielded her eyes from any flying dirt debris. She looked around at the few other people in the patch. She looked passed the fields to the tree line in the distance and watched the trees, vacant of their leaves, sway in the wind.

Something seemed off to her. This Halloween felt different. It felt...menacing.

The cold wind howled past her ears and she covered them with her gloved hands and squinted to avoid it stinging her eyes. She took her hands off her ears and the wind howled deeply all around her, whispering “Ava...”

Holly turned around fast as to see where that whispering voice came from. Her heart began to pick up beats and she heard it again: “Ava...”

Kevin, oblivious to anything, picked up another pumpkin. This one was taller and had a wide, sturdy base. “This is the one, Holly. *This* is our pumpkin.”

He noticed his sister was startled again, frantically looking around in every direction. Concerned, he sat the pumpkin back down and approached her.

“What’s wrong?”

Holly had a cold tear dripping down her cheek. She swallowed hard and looked Kevin in the eyes. “Something’s really wrong, Kevin. I heard Ava.”

“Huh?”

“When that wind just blew through, I swear I heard Ava’s voice in it. She said her name.”

“Holly...” Kevin began, but didn’t know how to comfort her.

“The whispers, the cold hand on my neck at the diner – this morning when I was waiting for you at the park, I thought I saw shadowy figures standing in the trees...”

“What are you saying?”

“I think it’s a warning.”

CHAPTER III

The Corpse

Police now swarmed the area around the Watkins home on Amity Road. Police cars, with their spinning blue lights, sat on the side of the road and a couple of them even blocked Amity Road in both directions. It was officially a crime scene.

The coroners van sat parked in the rocky driveway with the back doors open. Patrick Snowden's corpse laid still in the back of the van on a folded up gurney.

The coroner covered the body with a white sheet after Detective James Miller got one last glance at it. Patrick had burn marks curling around his neck. It appeared to be a strangulation, but with burn marks? It didn't make sense.

"Thank you," Detective Miller said to the coroner as he shut the back doors to his van. Officers York and Westman joined Miller in the blocked off roadway. "So, he was found in the cornfield?"

"Yes, sir," York said, glancing back at the field of dead crops. "We found him laying in there, facedown."

"And no one's home, you said?"

"No, sir."

"What can you tell me about the family who lives here?"

York began, "It's Elizabeth Watkins and her caretaker. Mr. Watkins passed away several years ago."

"And this is the house where those murders took place some years back? What's that whole story?"

A car horn honked viciously just outside the police barricade. Detective Miller's attention was immediately drawn to an old green and tan station wagon.

"Who's that?" he squinted.

York took a careful look and identified them. "That's actually Ms. Watkins now."

"Let them through!" Miller shouted, and waved for the officers blocking their way to let the car in.

Elizabeth Watkins sat in her wheelchair on the front porch, and Valerie stood behind her very protectively. Detective Miller pulled up a fold-up chair that was leaning against the railing and sat down, leaning forward.

"Where have you been all morning?" Miller asked.

Ms. Watkins' hands started shaking, probably from her old age.

"We went to the cemetery to visit her husbands grave," Valerie chimed in.

Miller looked up at her, annoyed she had answered when he was addressing Elizabeth. But he took what information he could, from whoever was going to offer it up. "Which cemetery is that?"

"Wesley Chapel, on the east side of Hilliard."

"What time did you leave to go there?"

"We left around eight. We grabbed breakfast first."

"It's noon," Miller checked his watch. "Did you go anywhere else afterwards?"

"Nope," Valerie said, slightly irritated. She wasn't even 100% sure what was going on.

"Did you see your mail carrier at all today?"

Valerie looked down the driveway to the mess of police cars. She noticed the empty mail truck sitting off to the side of the road. "No," she said. "Why? Where is he?"

"He's dead – found strangled in your cornfield with some sort of burn marks around his neck."

Elizabeth grew uneasy in her seat and looked towards the cornfield off to her right. Valerie put a comforting hand on her shoulder, and Elizabeth finally calmed down.

"Are you implying anything, detective?" Valerie asked.

"I'm just trying to figure out why a man is dead on your property, Ms..."

"Warner," she said. "Valerie Warner."

"And you're the...housekeeper?"

"I care for Ms. Watkins. I feed her, bathe her, wash her clothes and sheets, and keep the house clean. I cared for her husband too, before he passed on. I've been with the Watkins' family for a very long time, detective."

Miller jotted a few notes down into a small black book he had sitting on his lap. He clicked his pen closed and stood up. "Ms. Watkins, Ms. Warner, I'll be back a little later on. I'm going to have two of my officers stationed at the end of your driveway for the day just to keep an eye on things. Would that be okay?"

"I don't see why not," Valerie said.

Miller smiled. "Great." He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out his business card. He handed it to Elizabeth, but Valerie reached for it instead. Miller pulled back on the card and Valerie stopped, the two of them making eye contact. "Ms. Watkins," Miller proceeded to hand her the card, "call me if you need anything."

Elizabeth reached out with her shaky arm and grabbed the Detective's card. He smiled at both of them and then turned around and walked back up the driveway where the coroner's van was just pulling away from the scene.

Valerie pushed Elizabeth in through the front doors and into the house. She made sure the door was shut and locked behind her.

“I don’t know how on Earth they could insinuate that we had something to do with that man’s death,” Valerie said, offended.

Elizabeth didn’t say a word, but instead looked up to the ceiling where the chandelier hung still. It slowly started to rock back and forth creating a quiet jingling sound. The ceiling then started to creak like someone was walking across the floor above them.

“It’s just the rats, Ms. Watkins. No worries.”

“Just the rats,” Elizabeth repeated quietly. “Just the rats...” Elizabeth closed her eyes and pictured the young girl, Melissa, hanging from the chandelier – her body bloodied from an unseen attack.

Elizabeth smiled as she heard the screams in her head.

~

The crowd at the Harvest Festival in the Hilliard Municipal Park had grown. As the day progressed, more and more people found their way to the heart of Hilliard to celebrate Halloween.

An older man walked side-by-side with his granddaughter, holding her hand tight. They walked through a crowd of kids fighting with their fake weapons and up to an apple cider stand.

“Do you want a small one, sweetie?” the old man asked the girl. She nodded and smiled, showing off her teeth, which were stained blue from cotton candy.

“Two small ciders, please,” the man told the young lady behind in the booth.

“Grandpa, what kind of costume is that?” the little girl asked, tugging on her grandfathers track jacket.

“Where, sweetie?” he asked, looking in the direction she was pointing. She was pointing at one of the ponds off the right, just beyond the festival barriers. He squinted to try and get a better look. Someone was wading through the pond towards the shore. “I don’t know, but he’s going to get in trouble – you’re not allowed to be in that water.”

They watched as the person slowly walked out of the water and, little by little, made his way into the grass. It appeared to be a young man, but in heavy Halloween make up. The skin on his face appeared to be deteriorated and hanging off the bone. His clothes were brown and tattered. The skin on his arms was dark green and dripping off the bone as well. It was a disgusting costume...

The old man put his hand out to keep his granddaughter behind him. “Something’s not right with him sweetie. Stay here by the booth.”

The old man made his way through a group of festivalgoer’s and walked towards the boy coming out of the pond. The boys’ clothing was soaked and muddy. The closer the old man got, the more unnerving things became.

“Young man, you must have spent a lot of time on that costume,” he nervously laughed as he approached the boy. “You’re scaring some of the little ones over here.”

The old man came face to face with the boy and immediately noticed his eyes balls had vanished into a pair of deep, shadowed eye sockets. The boy opened his mouth and a steady stream of muddy water gurgled out and spilled into the grass.

The old man stepped back and the young man collapsed and crashed into the ground, making a loud, wet 'squishing' sound in the grass. An overwhelming stench from the boys' body rose and invaded the old man's nose.

He backed up some more and fell backwards. He put his hand over his mouth and nose and stared at the mysterious and gruesome corpse.

CHAPTER IV

A Warning

“It doesn’t necessarily mean this is some kind of warning, Holly,” Kevin said to his sister as they sat next to each other on the couch in her one story home on Wakefield Drive.

“What else could it be?” she asked as she stared at the pumpkin they had picked out sitting on the coffee table in front of them. It had yet to be touched. A movie played on the TV – something about a killer doll – but it was on mute.

Kevin didn’t know what to say. It certainly was weird though – everything that had been going on. The figures in the woods, the cold touch on her neck at Abners, the whispers – and this all just happened to be happening on Halloween? There wasn’t much he could say to try to convince her otherwise.

“Do you want to carve the pumpkin?” he asked.

Holly shook her head. She didn’t seem to be in the mood anymore. She looked up at the TV and saw the psycho-doll stab a janitor over and over with a switchblade knife, and she turned her head and winced. “Can we turn the channel, please?”

Kevin grabbed the remote and turned the channel. He sat back in the couch and flipped through the channels to find something good. He flipped right past the news, but a glimpse of Hilliard’s Harvest Festival caught his eye and he turned it back.

A young reporter was live from the festival. She stood in front of police caution tape and spoke directly into her microphone while keeping eye contact the camera.

“It was a shock to everyone who was out at Hilliard’s Halloween Festival this afternoon – a muddy corpse, of what an eyewitness described as a young man, was discovered in the grass at the Hilliard Municipal Park near one of the park’s many ponds. The boy’s body was removed from the scene and the festival was shut down.

“There is still no official word from local police as to what happened, but a witness tells us that an older man discovered the body, after believing it was someone dressed in a Halloween costume.”

“My God...” Holly said, disturbed by the breaking news on TV.

~

Officers York and Westman sat in their police SUV at the end of the Watkins’ gravel driveway. York sipped a coffee; Westman, a hot chocolate.

“What’s the big deal about this house anyway?” Westman asked.

York swallowed a mouthful of coffee and looked at his partner. “Long ago, there was a witch named Raven who lived in this area. Supposedly, before the Watkins family moved in, the witch told one of the construction workers to kill the other members of his team. Well, he did, and the Watkins’ moved in as soon as they could, ignoring the murders.”

York's attention drifted a little as he looked out the passenger window and saw the raven still perched on top of the barn in the back of the house. He watched as it shook its' feather and cocked its' head again. The raven lifted itself off the barn and flew to the top of the house, where it sat next to the brick chimney. York continued, "These roads out here in the country are infamous for strange things. Unexplained fires burn in the cornfields, strange noises erupt in the night – someone was out here jogging early one morning and swore up and down that something large flew over top of her numerous times before flying away into the darkness."

"Like a bird?"

York stared at the raven on the roof. "Well, if it was, it must have been a pretty big bird." He turned his attention back to Westman. "Most people in Hilliard know the stories and have always tried to connect all the witchcraft to the Watkins family – some people even claim that Elizabeth Watkins is Raven herself. Who else would move into a house on such violent grounds?"

"I heard something about a group of kids getting killed here, what, ten years ago?"

"Sort of. There was a group of students from Darby High School and their teacher here interviewing Elizabeth and Seth about the creepy history. No one for sure knows what happened, but it's understood that Elizabeth and Seth both blacked out, and somewhere in there one of the students hung herself from the chandelier, and the others all dropped dead."

"How is that possible?"

"There was always the assumption that the Watkins' had something to do with it, but medical evidence guaranteed us that five of the kids just dropped dead from heart attacks – they were not murdered. The only violent death was the girl who hung herself."

"How could she get up there without anyone seeing her?" Westman inquired.

York shrugged.

"What about the caretaker?"

"Valerie was found unconscious in the kitchen."

"Did no one think this situation was suspicious?"

"Everyone did. But it's hard to blame them for murder when there is absolutely zero evidence of foul play. When the case wrapped up, it felt very unfinished – no one was happy about it. Elizabeth and Seth became outcasts that everyone looked at with condemning eyes. We all know they're guilty – there's just no proof."

York looked back up at the Watkins residence and noticed the curtain in the upstairs bedroom was pulled back. He could see Elizabeth sitting in her wheelchair, staring out at them. She closed the curtains once she saw York look at her. York then turned his attention to the raven on the roof. It hopped around on the shingles for a moment before taking flight and flying over the cornfield.

York peered up the side of the house at the barn behind it. "I'm going to go have a look in the barn back there. Stay here."

“Okay.”

York opened the driver’s door and stepped out of the car. He zipped his coat up, but before he could shut the car door, Westman grabbed his attention.

“What about Raven?” he asked.

York leaned back into the car. “What do you mean?”

“What’s her story?”

“I don’t know. It’s been a while since I’ve read up on her. There’s stuff online if you get bored.”

Westman nodded and York shut the car door. He walked around the car and made his way up the driveway.

~

Detective James Miller stood in the morgue staring at the decomposing boy’s body on the cold metal table. They had removed the clothes from the boy and covered the bottom half of his body with a white sheet.

Miller studied the boy’s face – it was shredded. The skin was old and brown with a thick layer of some sort of slime covering it. The eye sockets were wide and the eyeballs were missing. Miller could see right into the skull where a mushy brain remained.

The boy’s skin was deteriorated and the odor was awful. Miller did all he could to avoid vomiting.

The door to the morgue opened and a middle-aged woman walked in wearing a lab coat. She wore her hair back in a ponytail and her square-framed glasses sat down on her nose. She held her clipboard down by her side and smiled at the Detective.

“Good afternoon, I’m Betty Sims, the senior medical examiner.

Miller shook her hand. “It’s nice to meet you. You took over for Dr. Richards?”

“I did – two months ago. He retired.”

“He was a good man.”

“He was my mentor for quite a while. Everything I’ve learned, I learned from him. I’m pretty quick on my feet when it comes to my job.”

“Then it should be a pleasure working with you. What can you tell me about this body?” Miller asked.

Betty pushed her glasses back up her nose and referenced the clipboard. She read directly from it. “Well, a DNA sample would take some time to get here, but I can tell you right now who it is. I knew this kid.”

Miller was confused. “Who is it?”

“His name was John Kelly. My daughter dated him in high school,” Betty said.

Miller knew exactly who that was. John Kelly was one of the five students who dropped dead at the Watkins' home ten years ago. He didn't understand how this could be possible.

"I don't understand," he said. "How does his body end up out in the open? Wasn't he buried?"

"Cremated actually. There is no logical reason for his body to be in tact, and laying right here on this table for that matter," Betty explained.

Miller looked back at the muddy and soggy body. "This doesn't make any sense."

Miller covered his mouth and nose as another waft of the odor made its way into his senses.

CHAPTER V

Her Name Was Raven

Westman sat in his patrol vehicle and searched the Internet on his phone. He pulled up a screen and spoke to himself quietly as he skimmed the article. “Her name was Raven...guilty of witchcraft in 1870, a year after Hilliard had been incorporated...residents, confused and scared by her dark practices, attacked her at her home on Halloween night and set her on fire...Raven ran into the cornfields where she burned to death...body never recovered...”

Westman looked out the window to see if York was on his way back yet. There was no sign of him.

Westman stepped out of the car and slipped his phone back into his pocket. He shut the door and put his hand on his gun holster as he started to make his way up the driveway.

The air was getting colder and the cornstalks rustled as Westman walked along the side of the house. A loud ‘kaw’ caught his attention and he looked up into the sky. He watched the pitch black raven fly overhead and land on the roof of the barn again.

Westman gulped nervously and moved slowly towards the barn. The door was open and he could see nothing but blackness inside. He put his hand on the barn door and peeked his head into the darkness.

“York?” he quietly called out. There was no answer from inside.

Inside the barn, a creaking sound emerged from the dark. It sounded like someone walking on a fragile wooden floor. Westman’s heart began to beat faster – he could feel it throbbing in his ears.

“York?” he whispered into the barn. He couldn’t see anything. He reached for the flashlight on his belt and flipped it on. He pointed it into the shadows and moved it along the back wall. In the small glowing circle of light, he saw hay bails sitting against the wall – one of them with a pitchfork sticking straight out of the top of it. He continued to slowly move the light across the wall. There were boxes covered in white sheets, rakes leaning up against the wall, and...a black cauldron.

Westman squinted to make sure he saw it right. The cauldron was large – maybe five feet across and three to four feet deep. Something was sticking out of the top of it, but he couldn’t see what it was.

Westman took a small step into the barn and slowly walked through it, keeping his flashlight focused on the cauldron. He got close enough and noticed that there was a bloody arm hanging out of it.

“What the...” Westman leaned over the cauldron and pointed his light directly inside. It was York – his bloody body mangled, twisted and contorted into unnatural knots. “My God!”

Westman stumbled backwards and dropped his flashlight and the bulb shattered. He tripped over something behind him and fell flat on his back. He looked behind him, as his only light source – the partially open barn door – closed and locked on its own.

Westman's breathing picked up and he was starting to panic. "Help me! Somebody help me!"

He rolled onto his stomach and began to crawl in the direction he had seen the barn doors close. He reached his arms out, gripped the floor and pulled himself to his knees. He stood up and looked around. It was too dark – he didn't know which way was up.

He spun around aimlessly in circles, frantically looking for any kind of salvation. "Help me!" he called out again before being silenced by a whispering "*Shh...*"

Westman froze and he felt every single hair on his body stand on end. He began to feel flushed and flu-like. His beating heart felt like it was going to burst from his chest.

The icy touch of a brittle and quivering hand gripped the back of his neck and he screamed. He started to cry as the ominous grasp tightened. The fingers started to feel so cold that they burned. Westman's eyes rolled into the back of his head and he could no longer breathe. The last thing he thought of was the stench of his skin melting.

The blackness became darker.

~

Detective Miller sat in the Hilliard Police Station an hour later with the old man who discovered John's body. They sat together in a small interrogation room. Miller hit record on a voice recorder and slid it into the center of the table.

"State your name and age," Miller said.

"George Courtney, 65 years old."

"Tell me, George, how did you discover the body?"

"We were at the Harvest Festival and I was getting apple cider for my granddaughter and I. My granddaughter tugged on my shirt and asked me what that man was dressed up as. I think she was a little frightened by what we thought was a costume. I saw the man walk out of the pond and I approached him – I could tell something was off with him. When I made contact with him, a stream of muddy water spewed from his mouth and he collapsed to the ground."

"Wait...he *walked* out of the pond?" Miller questioned.

"Yes, sir. I know there are signs posted that say no swimming, fishing or wading. I thought he was just out to cause trouble."

"He *walked*?" Miller asked again.

George nodded. "Yes. Why?"

"Because that boy's been dead for ten years. There's no way he could have walked."

"Detective, I know I'm getting older," George laughed, "but I know what I saw."

Miller didn't respond. There were about a million different thoughts racing through his head – none of them even remotely plausible.

As the afternoon progressed, the clouds over Hilliard started to darken and small rumbles of thunder echoed in the distance. A cold wind blew through the city, delivering a ghostlike chill. There was a storm coming...

CHAPTER VI

Lights Out

The wind blew through the streets of Hilliard, off of Main Street, and down Wakefield Dr. The dying trees lining the old neighborhood roads let go of their leaves one by one, and they gently road the breeze down to the ground, collecting along the curbs.

A one-story house, midway down Wakefield Dr., sat quietly. Inside, Holly and Kevin Gibson remained on the couch. A kitchen knife sat off to the side of the pumpkin on the coffee table along with a plastic grocery bag for discarding the pumpkins guts, but they had yet to begin carving.

The TV remained on, and they had it back on the horror movie marathon, but neither of them were paying much attention. Holly was leaning her head back on the sofa cushions and Kevin sat back deep in the couch with his feet propped up on the glass coffee table, scrolling through Facebook on his phone.

The TV flickered a few times, catching Kevin's attention, and he looked to his left out the window. The sky was darkening in the distance and a few light raindrops hit the windows.

Kevin looked back at his phone. The TV flickered again, this time going black for longer periods of time before the picture came back.

Holly leaned over and looked at Kevin's phone. "What time is it?"

"A little after three. Why?"

"Just wondering," she said, yawning again.

~

Detective Miller sat in his office at the police station. He was staring at John Kelly's high school picture on the computer. There were enough similarities from the picture that reflected the muddy corpse at the park. It was definitely him, but how?

Miller minimized the window on his screen and clicked into the next file. He selected all the photos in the file and opened them. Pictures of the other kids and teacher that died on that Halloween popped up – Ava, Mason, Melissa and Corey. Miller studied their faces and then reached for a folder on his desk.

The phone at his desk rang. He glanced at the caller ID. It said: Watkins – Hilliard. He quickly picked up the phone.

"This is Detective Miller," he said. There was slight static on the other line. "Ms. Watkins?" The static would get louder and then subside to silence. "Elizabeth?" The static returned loudly and squealed. Miller pulled the phone away from his ear and cringed.

He could still hear the static as he slowly put the receiver back up to his ear. "Ms. Watkins, can you hear me?"

With a click on the other line, the call was ended. Miller was confused. There must have been some bad interference somehow. But Ms. Watkins must have needed something – or had

information. Who knew, maybe she was even going to confess.

Miller stood up and put on his long coat and fedora that hung on the wall. He grabbed his car keys from off the desk and left his office.

~

Holly dozed off on the couch and startled herself awake to the sound of a woman screaming. She sat up fast and looked around – Kevin was gone.

The woman screamed again and Holly looked at the TV – another scary movie was on and a woman was screaming as she was forced into the corner of a room by the undead. Holly took a deep breath.

“Kevin?” she called out. She looked on the coffee table and the pumpkin was still sitting there untouched. The kitchen knife that was beside it, however, was gone.

“Kevin?” she called out again, slightly more tense. She turned around and saw Kevin coming out of the kitchen with his mouth full of a half-eaten cookie that was in his hand. Holly put her hand to her chest and caught her breath. “You scared me. What are you doing?”

“I was cleaning up,” Kevin said, still chewing. He swallowed hard and continued: “I put the knife away. I figured we probably weren’t going to be carving the pumpkin.”

Kevin sat down next to her on the couch. “I was thinking I might head back to my apartment in a bit.”

“Why?” Holly whined.

“Well, first of all, you’re exhausted. If I leave, you can get some rest. Secondly,” Kevin began, and right on cue, a loud crack of thunder shook the house, “...*that*. If I stay any longer, I’ll get caught in the storm.”

Holly understandably nodded in agreement. “Okay. You want to do breakfast tomorrow?”

“Sure,” Kevin smiled.

The TV flickered again, and shut off completely this time along with all the lamps. Even the ceiling fan lost power and slowed to a stop. They both looked around, waiting for everything to come back on. Nothing did.

A strong gust of wind blew through the neighborhood and rattled the pictures hanging on the wall. A quick flash of lightening lit up the now dim room.

“Don’t leave yet,” Holly whimpered. Kevin nodded, slightly intimidated himself.

“We’ll need some candles,” Kevin said.

“They’re in my bedroom, I’ll be right back.” Holly stood up and walked off towards her bedroom on the other side of the house. Kevin pulled his phone out of his pocket and double-tapped the screen to turn it on. The screen remained black. He tried again with the same baffling results.

Holly walked through the doorway and into her bedroom. She shuffled straight to the nightstand by the side of her bed and pulled the drawer open. The room began to darken as the storm drew closer. She fished around, blindly, in the drawer for the candles and matches.

A strobing series of lightening flashes lit up the room and Holly jumped back and screamed in fear as she saw a dark decrepit hand reaching for her face.

The series of lightening bolts came to a stop and left the room in ominous shadows. Holly stood up against her closet door with her hand over her mouth, staring at her bed – the hand came from a dark figure laying on it.

“Are you okay?” Kevin called out from the living room. Thunder roared outside and Holly caught her breath. “No...” she said back, her voice shaking in dread. She kept her attention on the bed – something didn’t seem right. There’s no way she could have imagined that.

She took a couple small vigilant steps back towards the bed. A quiet gurgling sound coming from the bed made her stop. She stared into the shadows and the thunder crashed again and another series of flashes illuminated the room.

A rotting corpse lay on her bed, with its arm reaching out for her. Holly screamed again and backed into the closet door again. The flesh on the carcass was falling off the bone and murky water gurgled out of its mouth. The long straggly brown hair on its head made it obvious it was a girl, and the right half of a broken-heart necklace around her neck made it obvious who it was – Ava.

“Ava! Oh my God!” Holly covered her mouth again and ran out of the room. Kevin met up with her in the hallway and grabbed her.

“What’s wrong? What’s wrong?” he frantically asked.

“It’s Ava! She’s on my bed!” Holly said, a hysterical and emotional wreck. Kevin dashed into the bedroom and immediately heard the gurgling sound. A couple quick flashes of light lit up the room and Kevin saw the body. He backed out into the hallway.

“Who is that?” Kevin screamed.

“It’s Ava!”

“It can’t be! She’s dead and buried!”

“It’s her! Call the police!”

“My phone isn’t working, give me yours!”

Holly fumbled in her pockets and pulled out her phone and handed it to her brother. Kevin pressed the buttons on the side and tapped the screen, but her phone didn’t work either.

“We have to go to the neighbors, Holly. C’mon!”

Kevin grabbed his sister by the hand and they ran down the hall and out the front door of the house.

The wind was gusting, blowing dead leaves violently across the yard. Kevin pulled his sister up the porch to the neighbor’s house and pounded on the door. He waited a moment but no

one answered.

A crack of thunder shook the earth and rain began to pour from the sky. Kevin and Holly were instantly soaked to the bone. Kevin looked at his car sitting along the side of the road and he felt for his keys in his pocket.

“C’mon!” he yelled over the hard-falling rain, and drug Holly back across the yard by her hand. They climbed into his car and he started the engine and took off down the street.

Kevin turned onto Main St. and followed the roundabout straight through onto Scioto Darby Rd.

“Where are you going?” Holly screamed. “The police department is back *that way!*”

Kevin had a concentrated look of hostility on his face. He snarled behind the wheel and he stared through the frantic windshield wipers and watched the road. “We’re going to the Watkins house. She’s the only one who can explain this.”

Holly sat back in the passenger seat and looked out the window. She took notice on how dark the storm was making it. It was almost like nighttime. She looked down at the clock on the radio, but it was flashing all zeros.

“What time is it?” she asked.

Kevin first looked to the radio, but once he saw it wasn’t working, he glanced at his watch. “It’s a little after three.”

“It was a little after three earlier when I asked you.”

Kevin looked at his watch again. “The battery must have died. I don’t know what time it is.”

The car splashed down the puddle-riddled road and they came up fast on another car. They were nearing Amity Rd. when the car in front of them put their brake lights on and came to an abrupt stop in the middle of the road.

Kevin swerved to avoid a collision, but his car jolted and the engine shut off. Kevin spun the steering wheel and the car slid sideways. Kevin and Holly braced themselves for impact just as their car smashed into the back of the other car. The windows on the passenger side shattered and Holly covered her head with her hands as the glass showered down on her. The airbag on the driver’s side deployed and pushed Kevin back in his seat.

As the white powder from the airbag disappeared, Kevin focused. He looked at his sister. “Are you okay?”

Holly lowered her hands from her head and looked around. “I think so.”

Kevin aggressively opened his door while grumbling under his breath, “Why on Earth did that guy just stop.”

Kevin stepped out of his car and into the cold downpour. The driver’s door on the other car opened and a man in a long coat stepped out.

“Why did you just stop, buddy?” Kevin shouted.

“It was an accident,” the man yelled back, “my car locked up and then shut off. I didn’t have a chance to pull off to the side.”

Kevin approached the man and noticed a police badge hanging from a lanyard around his neck. The man reached out to shake Kevin’s hand.

“Detective Miller. I work for the Hilliard Police,” he said. “Sorry about your car – mine just up and stopped.”

“Same here.”

Miller saw that they appeared to be in a hurry and that Holly had been crying. He became concerned and curious. “What brings you guys out in the middle of this storm?”

“Um,” Kevin began, “you wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“Try me.”

“Our sister died ten years ago at the Watkins house, and...well, her dead body is laying in my sister’s bedroom right now.”

Kevin cringed and waited for Miller not to believe him. Holly hung her head and started to cry again.

“I believe you,” Miller said, shocking both Kevin and Holly. “Another student that died in that house appeared at the park earlier today.”

Holly gasped, “That was one of the students?”

Miller nodded. “I was on my way to the Watkins house when my car crapped out.”

“Same here,” Kevin said. “It’s not too far up the road.”

Miller turned around and looked up the dark road. The rain was pouring and lightening flashes lit up the sky. A rumble of thunder shook the ground, startling them. “Follow me.”

Kevin and Holly trekked up Amity Rd., shielding their faces from the hard-hitting rain. They followed Miller who had his flashlight shining out in front of them. Miller was being very cautious. He kept glancing off to either side of the road as something felt off to him. He called back to the siblings:

“Last I checked, before my watch stopped, it was almost five o’clock. That’s way too early for it to be this dark.”

“My watch stopped too – and our cell phones don’t work,” Kevin yelled back over the rain.

“The cars stopped working, the watches, the electricity – what’s happening?” Holly whimpered.

Neither Kevin nor Miller had an answer that would make sense.

“Hilliard is haunted,” Miller yelled over the rain. “I never believed it until tonight. There’re just too many strange things happening that I can’t explain.”

“Yeah – I’ve been hearing things and seeing things all day. And then our dead sister ends up on my bed...” Holly said.

“Elizabeth Watkins knows something. She *has* too.” Kevin said.

The police SUV where Westman and York were stationed was in sight. Miller picked up his pace to a slow jog as Kevin and Holly tried to keep up.

Miller ran up along side the SUV and looked in the windows. York and Westman were gone. Miller turned around and called for them:

“York! Westman!”

A crack of thunder was the only response. A violent stream of lightening flashes ignited the sky and all of their attention was drawn to the Watkins house, sitting threateningly in the storm. A light in one of the upstairs windows was still on and a dark figure peered out from behind the curtain.

“How does she still have power?” Holly trembled. The curtain in the window closed, leaving only the silhouette of whoever was behind it. Then, the light turned off.

CHAPTER VII

Hollow Eyes

Miller pounded on the front door of the Watkins home; he gripped his gun in his other hand.

“Open up, this is the police!” he shouted.

Kevin and Holly stood by on the porch shivering from the cold, incessant rain. A moment went by and Miller pounded on the door again - harder this time. “Open the door!”

The door cracked open and Miller stood back and waited. Through the crack, the house could be seen in complete darkness.

“Hello?” Miller called out, waiting for someone to open the door the rest of the way.

But no one did.

He flipped on his flashlight again and shone it through the two-inch wide crack in the door. In the beam of light, he could only see sheet-covered furniture.

“Ms. Watkins?” Miller called into the home. “Valerie?”

In the shadows just beyond what the flashlight beam could pick up, a figure moved closer. Miller aimed the light up and to the left and illuminated Valerie Warner. She shielded her eyes from the blinding light.

“Can you not shine that in my face, Detective?” she said irritated.

“Ms. Warner, may we come in. We have some questions,” Miller demanded.

“Sure.”

Moments later, Miller, Kevin and Holly were inside from the storm. The house was pitch black, and the four of them sat around on the old furniture by candlelight.

Valerie held a candle in her hand, which presented her face in the darkness. Three other candles were lit on the coffee table and supplied little, but enough, light for the three guests.

“Now, what were these questions, detective?” Valerie asked in an eerily calm manner.

“Is Elizabeth going to join us?” Miller asked.

“She is not,” Valerie said sternly. “Ms. Watkins is resting upstairs. She is not well these days.”

“I want to see her before we leave here tonight,” Miller added.

“Detective, what can I do for you?”

“Where are the two officers that were stationed at the end of your driveway? Officer’s York and Westman?”

“Last I knew they were still there. Why?”

“Because neither of them are right now. Did either of them come into the house?”

“No.”

Holly looked around, creeped out by the room, which was half hidden in shadows. Hilliard was in a state of menacing darkness, and this home – the Watkins home - was the only one to show signs of electricity. That upstairs bedroom stuck out in her mind.

“Why did you guys have power?” Holly cried out. “Why was my dead sister in my bed? Why are you lying to us-”?

Kevin reached up and calmed his sister. “Holly,” he said, “let the detective handle this.”

“They’re lying, Kevin!” Holly exclaimed.

“I know, I know, but just-”

“You have a lot of nerve coming onto our property - into our home - and accusing us of lying, miss!” Valerie raised her voice. “I’ve cared for Elizabeth and Seth for as long as I can remember. This city has treated them like outcasts ever since they moved in here!”

After Valerie’s outburst, the room fell quiet. The floor above them started to creak. It sounded like someone was walking across the floor.

“Now you’ve disturbed Ms. Watkins. Excuse me.” Valerie stood up and held her candle out in front of her as she left the room.

Miller waited until he heard Valerie’s footsteps going up the stairs, and then he stood up and turned on his flashlight.

“Where are you going?” Kevin asked.

“Those officers out there know not to leave their post. I’m going to go look for them. Something doesn’t seem right here.” Miller walked to the front door and quietly opened it. He slipped out and closed the door behind him.

“Something definitely is not right, Kevin,” Holly said.

“What do you mean?”

“That couldn’t have been Ms. Watkins walking up there – she’s in a wheelchair.”

Miller walked down the steps on the wet front porch and into the yard. The rain had slowed down to nothing more than a steady drizzle. Miller shone his light across the yard at the police SUV. It was still empty. He turned to his right and came face to face with the cornfield.

He aimed the light into the tall stalks of corn and watched them rustle in the light rain. He then turned around and pointed his light down the side of the house and noticed the barn in the backyard. He slogged through the grass on his way to the barn.

The candles on the coffee table flickered, making shadows dance on the walls and ceiling. Kevin and Holly sat uncomfortably in the darkness, waiting for Miller to return with the two officers, and hoping Valerie wouldn’t come back any sooner.

“I want to leave,” Holly whispered, her bottom lip quivering.

Kevin looked at his sister. “Why?”

“I don’t like this. Not one bit. What’s happening here, Kev?”

Kevin didn't know what to say. He wasn't oblivious to all the happenings, but he didn't have any answers either. At least, none that would calm Holly down or make any logical sense.

"Why was Ava in my bedroom?" Holly asked.

Kevin chose to remain quiet.

The floor above them creaked again and ended with a thud. They both jumped and looked up at the ceiling. A second thud shook the coffee table and one of the three candles went out, sending a thin stream of smoke into the air. Kevin and Holly watched the table as a third thud from above somehow took out a second candle. Holly grabbed Kevin's arm and gripped it tight.

A cold wind blew through the room and the third and final candle fizzled out. The room sat in darkness. Holly's breathing picked up. "Kevin?"

Kevin didn't answer. Holly gripped his arm tighter and called his name again. "Kevin?" Still, there was no answer.

Holly then shook her brother's arm and started to cry, "Kevin! Kevin!"

A sharp static sound buzzed above them and the chandelier on the ceiling came to life for a brief moment, showcasing a dead girl's bloody body hanging from it. Holly screamed and looked at her brother during the flickering light show. Kevin was gone – replaced by another fleshy, rotting corpse.

Holly screamed as the hollow-eyed corpse faced her and opened his mouth, expelling a gushing fountain of muddy water. It splashed all over Holly and she stood up fast. The chandelier lights flickered back off and Holly stumbled backwards and tripped over the coffee table. She landed on her back and heard a groaning sound coming from the mysterious corpse.

Her breathing picked up and she started to hyperventilate. A warm sensation overtook her cheeks and flushed through her face, making her dizzy. She felt her eyes roll into the back of her head and she collapsed onto her back and passed out.

Detective Miller snuck up to the barn and aimed his light at it. One side of the door was open and the other was closed. He pointed his light inside the barn and looked around. He noticed the large black cauldron sitting near the back wall and squinted to see what was sticking out of it.

A shuffling noise from behind him caught his attention and he swung around fast, shining his light at the back of the house.

"York? Westman?" he whispered loudly. There was no answer. He heard the noise again, and realized it was coming from above. He aimed his light up to the edge of the roof where he saw a black raven sitting still, staring down at him. Miller kept his eye on the bird and noticed something next to it, sitting in the shadows. He moved his light slightly to the right and noticed a dark figure perched on the roof. It was a gray, fleshy tone in color and was hunched over.

The dark figure then moved forward and dropped down off the roof and knelt in the soggy grass with its head tucked down by its chest.

“Show yourself!” he called out, aiming his weapon.

The figure sat still and then slowly lifted its head and studied Miller. Miller stared back at the figure – dead into its dark, hollowed-out eyes. Without warning, the figure leapt towards him, in-humanly shrieking, and Miller fired his weapon.

CHAPTER VIII

She's Real

Kevin opened his eyes to darkness. He was lying on a hard wood floor, but he wasn't sure where. He sat up in a quick panic.

"Hello?" he called out into the dark room. He could hear a low, sickly breathing coming from somewhere nearby. He stayed quiet and listened. Someone was in the room with him. He shifted his eyes back and forth trying to make out anything, but it was just too dark.

"Holly?" Kevin whispered.

"Holly's not here..." the sickly old voice cackled.

Kevin waited a moment to respond and then thought he knew who he was in the room with. "Ms. Watkins?"

"Yes..." she whispered.

"Where am I?"

Elizabeth didn't respond. Her breathing became phlegmy. Kevin didn't know what to do or say. He wasn't sure what was going on.

Elizabeth finally broke the uncomfortable silence and quietly spoke softly to Kevin: "You know, there was a mass murder at a house on Roberts Road – the guy killed his family with an axe and then hung himself with a chain at the bottom of their main staircase.

"The auditorium at Davidson High School is supposedly haunted too," she continued, "but for some reason, for the past thirty years, the city of Hilliard has mistaken me for the Devil. The murders on my property, the fires in the fields – I've been accused of all of this. I've been called a witch – a woman named Raven who used to live on this land; this very lot of property."

Kevin spoke up. "How do you explain all of this stuff then? Five people died of heart attacks in your house – one of which was my little sister – and a girl hung herself. Tell me, Ms. Watkins, how does this happen?" Kevin's voice trembled as he held back tears.

"I've already told the police that I know nothing. I did not kill anyone, nor did my husband. I am not a witch...Raven, she...she..."

Elizabeth quieted down. Kevin couldn't even hear her breathing anymore.

"Ms. Watkins?" he whispered loudly.

Elizabeth cleared her throat and then whispered very quietly: "...she's real."

"What do you mean, she's real?"

"Raven is real; she's not a legend or a myth. She's not just some piece of local folklore. She's a living, breathing, hellish creature who haunts Hilliard. And she terrifies me..."

Elizabeth's speech was starting to send chills down Kevin's spine. He adjusted uncomfortably in the darkness and stood to his feet. His heart was now beating faster and the room grew colder. Elizabeth continued:

“She used to look through the living room windows at me. She’d put her hand on the glass and smile the vilest smile you could imagine. She had no eyes – only hollowed out craters in her face. Her teeth were jagged and rotten. She’s very protective of her property...”

“We have to get out of here,” Kevin spoke loudly. “Where’s Holly?”

“It wouldn’t do any good to run, young man. She’ll find you.”

“Where’s Holly!” Kevin shouted.

Elizabeth laughed. “We’re all going to die tonight and Raven will win. She always wins.”

“Ms. Watkins...where’s your caretaker. Where’s Valerie?”

A cold hand reached out and grabbed Kevin’s arm. He screamed and stumbled backwards in the dark room. “Who’s there? Who is that?!” he cried.

“She’s here,” another woman’s voice whispered right into Kevin’s ear. The lights in the room flipped on and Kevin was face to face with Valerie – her neck was bleeding from deep burn wounds. “She’s here...” Valerie repeated as she gurgled up blood. She then fell towards Kevin. He caught her and laid her down on the floor gently.

Kevin looked up and saw two more of the dead corpses slowly shuffling towards him. “Jesus!” Kevin jumped to his feet and saw Elizabeth sitting in her wheelchair, blocking the door – the only way out of the room.

Kevin made a split decision and raced towards the corpses and threw all of his weight into them. They both hit the back wall and squished up against it. Both bodies fell to the ground, spilling muddy water out of their mouths. Kevin kicked one of them in the head, and the head exploded in a gushing fountain of blood. He gagged and turned towards the door and saw Elizabeth sitting in her wheelchair – as white as a ghost.

“Ms. Watkins!” Kevin rushed up to her and tapped her gently on the shoulder. Elizabeth’s eyes were plastered wide open, forever caught in a frozen state of fear. She was dead, and she appeared to have been dead for hours.

A slimy hand grabbed Kevin’s ankle and he turned around fast. The other corpse had crawled up to him and was trying to stand. Kevin held his breath and stepped down on its head, smashing it into another gooey, gory mess.

The lights shut off and left the room in darkness once again. Kevin fumbled with the wheelchair and moved it out of the way before opening the door and feeling his way back out into the upstairs hallway.

CHAPTER IX

Ashes to Ashes

Kevin stumbled down the stairwell and into the living room.

“Holly!” he screamed, but there was no answer. He looked around in the dark but could barely see anything. The front door busted open and someone rushed in holding a flashlight. It was Miller.

Kevin stopped and watched as the detective hustled in and shut the door behind him. He was breathing frantically.

“Detective?” Kevin called out. Miller swung around fast and pointed his gun directly at Kevin. Kevin threw his hands in the air. “It’s me!”

Miller lowered his weapon and caught his breath. In the dull light of the flashlight, Kevin noticed that Miller’s coat was drenched in blood.

“What happened?” Kevin asked.

“Something’s out there...” Miller said. “It attacked me...”

“It’s Raven – she’s real,” Kevin said.

Miller looked around the room, aiming his flashlight. “Where is everyone?”

“I can’t find Holly. Ms. Watkins is dead – so is Valerie. There were more corpses upstairs. What the hell is going on here!?”

“The corpses, the creature outside – isn’t it obvious? Hilliard is haunted!”

“What do we do?” Kevin panicked.

“We need to get out of here!”

“Not without Holly!”

“Then let’s find her quick, because we have to leave – now!”

Miller aimed his dimming flashlight at all corners of the living room. Holly was nowhere to be found.

“Holly?” Kevin called out.

A scratching sound caught both of their attention and they both froze.

“What’s that?” Kevin whispered.

Miller shone his light around the room trying to locate the source of the scratching sound. He ended up at the blackened window. Miller took a few steps towards it. Something was on the other side of the window.

“It’s her...” Kevin whispered.

Miller slowly raised his gun towards the window, as the scratching sound grew louder. Miller kept his focus, and the scratching came to a stop.

The flashlight flickered and then died.

A deafening, inhuman shriek erupted from the darkness of the room and something pounced at Kevin and tackled him to the floor.

“Help!” Kevin screamed.

“Kevin!” Miller shouted back, aiming his gun blindly in the dark. All he could hear was the rustling sound of Kevin being attacked.

“Miller, help me!”

Miller couldn't see anything, so he aimed his gun at the ceiling and fired off a shot. The room lit up for a brief moment with the muzzle flash of the gun and he could see the disturbing creature from outside – Raven – thrashing over top of Kevin in the corner of the room.

“Miller! Help!” Kevin screamed again.

Miller took a couple steps closer and fired his gun at the ceiling again. The flash ignited the room and Raven was still thrashing on top of Kevin.

Miller shot towards the ceiling one more time as he moved forward – the muzzle flash allowed him to see that he was close enough, so he quickly aimed his gun towards Raven while he still knew where she was, and he immediately fired a shot.

Raven shrieked a piercing cry and Miller heard her scurry away in the dark. Miller slapped his flashlight and it popped back on, only very dimly. He saw Kevin on the ground covered in cuts and scrapes.

“Are you okay?” Miller asked.

Kevin couldn't respond – he was succumbed by fear. A crashing sound exploded behind them and they both turned around. The front door had been bashed outwards and they saw a quick glimpse of Raven scurrying down the porch steps and into the yard.

A woman screamed outside.

“Holly!” Kevin shouted. He stood to his feet fast and raced out the front door. Miller followed him outside.

The storm clouds had cleared and left a cold dampness in the autumn air. A full moon sat in the sky and illuminated the property in a soft, yet eerie glow.

Kevin and Miller ran down the front porch steps and into the soggy grass of the yard.

“Holly!” Kevin called out.

She screamed again – it was coming from the backyard.

Kevin sprinted down the side of the house and Miller followed close.

“Kevin, slow down!” Miller yelled.

As they reached the backyard, they saw a vivid glow radiating from inside the barn. Without hesitation, Kevin dashed for the barn and ran inside.

The large black cauldron, layered in spider webs, was boiling. There was a fire spewing from a nest of firewood underneath it. Inside the cauldron was a black, bubbling liquid with body parts sticking out of it – the two officer’s body parts.

Miller ran in behind Kevin and watched as the body parts boiled.

“Kevin, help!” Holly screamed. Kevin and Miller’s attention was drawn to the back corner of the barn where the decrepit corpse of Raven levitated just above the ground, trapping Holly in the corner.

“Get away from her!” Kevin shouted. Raven swung around in mid-air and finally revealed herself in all of her glory.

Her aged naked body hovered just over the barn floor. Her body was ill – her bones clearly visible through her thin and gristly skin. On her head, long and stringy erratic black hairs hung down low, covering her chest and most of her face. Her eyes were nothing more than hollowed out black craters that were oozing a thick, dark liquid. Blood was crusted in the corners of her mouth, which was wide with rows of jagged and broken teeth.

She tilted her head to the side and then reached her arms out towards Kevin and Miller. She hovered towards them at a quick speed. Miller lifted his gun and fired a shot, which impaled her chest. Blood sprayed out of the exit wound in her back and covered Holly’s face.

Holly screamed.

The impact of the bullet did nothing to stop Raven – she continued on course and wrapped her hands around Miller’s neck. He dropped his gun and flashlight as she lifted him off the ground. She tightened her grip and smoke began to billow from between her fingers. She shrieked and howled in a most inhuman way. Miller’s eyes widened and his throat closed up, preventing him from squealing.

The skin on his neck, under Raven’s grasp, began to bubble and melt. Holly cringed in the corner of the barn. Miller’s eyes shifted over and he looked at Kevin, who had frozen in fear. He snapped out of his state and looked to the wall where he saw an old, rusty hand scythe hanging on the wall. He ripped it from the wall and turned around to face Raven, just in time to see Miller’s body – from the neck down – fall to the ground.

Raven held Miller’s head in her hands and turned around. She dropped his head into the boiling cauldron and it sizzled.

Kevin swung the hand scythe down and stabbed it into Raven’s leg. She screeched and dropped to the ground. Kevin ripped the blade out of her leg and plunged it down into her shoulder. She screeched again, only louder this time.

“Kevin!” Holly screamed. She ran up to her brother and grabbed his arm.

He knelt down and picked up Miller’s gun and held it in other hand. “Come on,” Kevin said. They made a quick dash for the exit, but the barn doors closed before they could get there.

Kevin and Holly stopped and turned around. Raven was hovering just above the ground again, directly in front of the cauldron.

Kevin released himself from Holly's terrified grip and charged towards the ghoul.

"Kevin, no!" Holly shouted.

Kevin raised the blade and slammed it directly into Raven's head. He released his hand from the handle and watched Raven drop to the ground again with the scythe sticking out of her skull. She collapsed into the cauldron, knocking it over.

The black liquid spilled all over the floor and ignited like gasoline from the fire underneath it. The fire quickly spread across the floor and climbed the walls of the barn. Raven screeched and shrieked hellish growls as the fire latched onto her and quickly engulfed her body.

She rose up off of the ground and lifted her arm, pointing directly at Kevin. Flames roared off of her and then she shot towards them.

Kevin ducked just in time and Raven crashed through the barn doors.

"Come on!" Kevin yelled and grabbed Holly by the arm. He led them out of the barn and along the side of the house. They passed a large propane tank against the house and Kevin stopped to look at it.

"Kevin!" Holly screamed. He looked up and saw Raven flying towards them, covered in flames.

"Run!" Kevin yelled. They both took off running along the side of the house as Raven was gaining on them. She let out an eerie cackle and then knocked the two of them to the ground.

Kevin rolled over and fired two shots at Raven, but missed. She hovered above the ground and circled the siblings.

A 'kaw' caught Kevin's attention. He looked at the side of the house and saw the black raven land on the propane tank. He had only one chance.

He aimed the gun at the propane tank and pulled the trigger. The bullet collided with the side of the tank and exploded.

A giant fireball erupted from the tank and spread across the grass and to the cornfield, igniting the stalks. The side of the Watkins' house crumbled and the explosion spread into the living room. Within seconds, the house was completely engulfed.

Raven watched as the house burned just as she did. She turned back around and fell to the ground – the fire was eating away at her skin. She was becoming weak.

Kevin helped Holly to her feet and they faced Raven. With the scythe still sticking out of her head, and her entire body on fire, she found enough vigor to make one last dash towards them.

"Run!" Kevin grabbed his sister by the arm and they turned and ran into the cornfield. They dodged the tall stalks of corn, trying to outrun the witch. Holly looked behind her and saw a ball of fire following them, sending the flames reaching just above the tops of the corn.

Raven screeched loudly and finally came to a stop. She dropped to the ground and started to crawl. Kevin and Holly stopped and watched as the stalks of corn around Raven burned and dwindled away. They watched as she burned in the cornfield once again.

Kevin looked up over the tops of the corn and saw the Watkins home burning. The flames reached up into the night sky and lit up the entire property.

They both watched as the body of Raven deteriorated in a burning pile of black ash. The fire continued to spread in the cornfield.

“Come on,” Kevin said calmly to his sister. They turned and headed through the field in the direction of the road.

Moment later, they exited the cornfield and walked out onto Amity Road. They followed the street back towards the Watkins property and stopped when they reached the vacant police car. They stood there and watched as the house and barn burned down.

The blaze in the cornfield began to dwindle and isolated itself to just the edge of the field. Kevin and Holly were speechless. They didn’t even know what to say or how to react.

Kevin felt a vibration in his pocket. He reached in and pulled out his phone and saw that it had restarted and was turning itself back on.

“My phone’s working,” he said with a smile on his face. He thought for a moment and then opened the driver’s side door of the police car and sat in it. The keys were still in the ignition. He turned the key and the engine started.

Holly sighed in relief.

CHAPTER X

Epilogue

As the sun rose on the cold morning of November 1st, the fire department was on the scene at the Watkins' property. After hours of battling the flames, they were able to extinguish the threat, and it left the house in a pile of charred rubble.

A portion of the cornfield that sat next to the house had been singed and left a vacant space in the lot. All that was left of Raven's terror was a pile of black ash and a body count.

~

Neither Kevin nor Holly slept. They went back to Holly's house after they left the Watkins' home to burn. Holly had cautiously walked into her bedroom, expecting to see a decaying corpse of Ava, but it was gone. There was no sign of her, or any evidence that anything was ever wrong. The electricity was back on, the phones and cars worked – it was almost like nothing even happened.

But Kevin and Holly knew *something* happened. Something unexplainable. The supernatural force of a murdered witch had overpowered Hilliard. Raven's hatred and anger towards the city had reached its breaking point, and she unleashed a terrifying hell upon the town. People were dead, and an old rage was to blame.

Raven was burned alive for her craft, but her spirit never left her home. It took to shape of a ghoulish presence and inflicted a disturbing punishment upon a city that shunned her, blamed her, and ultimately killed her.

The haunting of Hilliard had come to an end, but for how long? Raven had been burned alive once before, and was reborn as a morbid, vicious creature. Who's to say it won't happen again?