

The day was ending just like any other. I was walking down the slate paved streets, almost dragging the heels of my grey chucks against the rain drenched stone. The sun was hiding behind the grey clouds as she slowly started her descent to her bed. My day at work had been filled with the usual stresses that occur as an employee of the Target Customer Service Desk. A woman was screaming at me about a rocking gamer's chair that had split at the seams. "My son's only 120 pounds!" she had shrieked, "You *have* to exchange this!" Normally this wouldn't have been an issue, I explained, if she had come to us in December when it had ripped, as opposed to now, in July. I had offered to get her in touch with the manufacturer, but no. She needed to have her little temper tantrum. I laughed as I recalled her perfect, blonde, suburbanite hair style. Through all the shrieking, screaming, and puffing, not a single hair had fallen out of place. The power of hair spray.

I kicked a pebble out of my path and sighed. I wondered if she knew how stupid she looked, blowing her top over a gaming chair. A 40 something acting like a 3 year old in front of a 22 year old. It was amazing to me that people felt it was okay to treat another human being with such disrespect and anger. Did she pride herself in her communication skills? I hoped not. No, I liked to imagine her as being a trapped-at-home mother with mostly grown up children, no one to talk to except her fake, also blonde friends and a rich husband who didn't care about his family. She had probably just discovered that said "perfect" husband was having an affair. *That's why she was angry*, I told myself, smiling at my unoriginal yet humorous story. *Not that that was any excuse.*

As I continued my slow walk home, I passed by my old school. It was not much to look at, just a large, rectangular, red brick building surrounded by a playground of cracking concrete and hop scotch squares that had been fading since the day they had been painted. The only odious part of its appearance were the iron spikes that topped the brick half-wall on the street side of the grounds.

Attending the school had not been a difficult experience by any means. No one had really bothered me, nor I them, unless they were hurting my friends. The only reasons I'd ever had detention were for forgetting a pencil, and calling in sick as my mother. I was a really tough student to deal with, for sure.

I stopped to peer into the playground through the iron fence. It was eerily quiet, especially since school had only been let out an hour ago. There were no cars in the car park; also peculiar as teachers usually didn't leave until at least 5:30 or 6. I pulled my phone out and checked the time: 4:23pm. I started walking again, trying not to be distracted by my intuition that was begging me to climb the fence and explore.

"You pass this place every day, Beth," I told myself, "Why the sudden fascination now?"

I couldn't explain it, but something was drawing me to the grounds. I stepped back, looking at the iron fence. It seemed a lot higher, now that I had to climb it. It was then that I remembered:

The back gate that the groundskeeper used to enter was only a latch. All I would have to do was flip the latch and I'd be in!

So as not to raise suspicion, I walked at my regular pace as opposed to running like I wanted. I made my way around the building, then down further still to the back gate. The wood had turned from a rich brown to an ashen green over the years, and I remembered watching its beautiful warm tones get more and more washed out as I progressed through my studies to graduation. I pushed against the gate to see if the lock was in place. It wasn't. I heard the latch lift and the gate creaked open. I stepped over the muddy threshold and onto the football fields. I could see the playground from where I stood, the blue rocket shaped jungle gym and swing set closer than they had seemed in middle school. I jogged over to the swings, the gravelly cement crunching under my rubber soles.

"What are you doing here?"

I jumped so violently I nearly experienced cardiac arrest. I looked around for the source of the voice, but saw nothing.

"Where are you?" I asked, my voice wavering. I continued my search, turning in all directions. I rubbed the back of my neck, uncomfortable.

"What do you mean?" The voice sounded. "I'm right here!"

A dark haired girl of six or seven appeared before me. I gasped. Had I really just looked over her in my search? Impossible. Her presence had a strange pull, it was beautiful...and because it was beautiful, it was unsettling. Regardless, I sank down into a crouch, wanting to meet her at eye level.

"Are you alright?" I inquired, concerned that a girl her age should not be walking around alone. I touched her cheek. "Are you lost?"

"I'm not lost! I live here!" She giggled and ran over to the jungle gym. Her curly pigtails sailed behind her as she lifted herself onto the first rung of the frame. She seemed completely uninhibited, not a whiff of fear about her. I approached her.

"Live here?" I asked. "You can't live here! It's a school!"

A darkness overcame her body, her eyes becoming ringed and sunken in, her gaze chilled as she looked down at me from her position on the frame.

"Is it?"

I gasped. Her voice had turned as gravelly as the ground we stood on, as if possessed. A shock of cold shot down my spine as her eyes met mine. Trying to keep things light, I smiled.

"What's your name?"

"What's yours?" She frowned.

“Bethany!” I answered, hoping that my giving of information would encourage her to give something in return.

“Bethany?” She inquired, her visage returning back to normal. “That’s a bit boring, isn’t it?” She continued to climb higher up the frame, making me nervous.

“Eh,” I shrugged. “I don’t mind it!”

I joined her on the frame. She didn’t seem as though she was going to budge, so I just sat with her at the top of the rocket’s “cockpit” and watched the sun continue her descent.

“Do you have any food?” She asked in a whiny tone. “I’m hungry.”

Ha! This is my chance, I realized. I feigned uncertainty, digging in my coat pocket. She watched me intently, biting her lower lip.

“Aha!” I whipped out a candy bar. “I thought I had something!”

“Can I have it...?” She reached to grab it, but I snapped my hand behind my back before she could take hold of it. “Oh, come on...” She whined.

“What’s your name?” I smirked, eyebrow raised. “Tell me that, and you can have a bite.”

She sat back and considered my offer. She was frowning so severely, I could almost see the cogs in her head turning.

“Audrey,” She said, hand out.

“Audrey?” I scoffed, ignoring her hand. “Yeah right! That’s far too old a name for someone your age!”

“No it’s not! I’m sixty five!” She cried defensively.

“Sixty five? Impossible!” I nearly fell off the frame, I was laughing so hard.

“It’s true!” She fussed, then turned away. “Not that anyone ever believes me...”

I shuffled in my perch, suddenly feeling guilty for teasing her so. There was nothing more infuriating than being upset and someone laughing in your face. I put my hand on her shoulder, turning her body slightly so she was facing me again. Audrey looked at me, her face softening somewhat. I broke the chocolate bar in half and handed her one of the pieces. She took it, smiling before starting to nibble at the edges.

We finished our sweet snack in silence, and by the time we were licking our fingers, the sun had finally put herself to bed.

“I should probably take you home for some real dinner, Audrey,” I started.

“I told you, I *am* home.”

I sighed, tired of her games and power plays.

“Audrey. You really expect me to believe that you live at a school?”

“Yes!” She smiled, starting to climb down the frame. I followed her down, not sure how to proceed at that point. She beat me to the bottom, and waited for me, hands on hips.

“So, let me get this straight,” I puffed, a little upset at my lack of breath. “Your name’s Audrey, you’re sixty five years old, and you live here, at Rosewood Academy.”

“Want me to show you?” Her eyes shimmered. As I looked at her, I realized that she wasn’t wearing anything over her t-shirt, mini skirt and leggings combo.

“Audrey! Where’s your coat?!”

“Don’t need one!” She turned and took off running. “Come on!”

I pursued her hesitantly, but could not deny that my interest was piqued. We ran around to the front of the school, and stopped at a manhole. Just as I was opening my mouth to make a snarky, sarcastic comment, Audrey lifted the cover and pushed it aside.

I gasped, stunned at what I had just witnessed. “Audrey, are you-are you real?”

I was beginning to question my mental health. How could it be possible that a frail little body like Audrey’s could lift a manhole cover unassisted? *It isn’t*, I told myself.

“Of course I’m real!” She exclaimed. “Come on!” Her tone was somewhat whiny and impatient, which distracted me from the surprising sight that followed. Before I could reach out and grab her, Audrey jumped into the blackness of the unseen abyss below.

“No! Audrey! Wait!” Instead of clothing, my fist held air. I bent over the hole, waiting for the sickening thud that was sure to follow, the gut-wrenching scream of agonizing pain as her little bones broke on the bottom of the chute. And yet, no such sound was heard. In fact, no sound came at all. In my mind, that was even worse.

“Oh, wonderful.” I muttered, begrudgingly pulling out my phone and crouching closer to the opening in the cracked cement. “Just wonderful.” I turned on the flashlight function and reluctantly shone the light down into the tunnel. I made a conscious effort to control my breathing... I didn’t *want* to see what was at the bottom of the hole. I stared into the illuminated darkness, forcing my eyes open despite my fear of the inevitably horrific sight that they would be seeing for the rest of my life.

The beam of light traveled into the thickly blanketed gloom. It was almost as though there was a vitreous screen, a flat and somewhat glassy surface blocking the sight line into the tunnel. It wasn’t too far down, so I gulped deeply and prepared to climb down the hole. As I lowered myself down, my feet felt for rungs of some sort. I’d seen countless construction workers climb

into these while I waited in traffic; they always seemed to climb down some sort of ladder...they certainly didn't jump in idiotically as Audrey had.

About three feet down, I found the first rung. Relieved, and feeling a little braver, I held the light lower than before. If I was about to go sloshing around in godforsaken tunnels, I would at least prefer to know what was in store. The beam revealed nothing but tunnel for a good few feet, maybe ten, and then curved under. There were enough rungs to get me to the curve, I just wasn't sure if I wanted to pursue Audrey further into what was clearly some unknown world, possibly of her design. I hung there for a moment, not above ground and not below, simply flopping side to side, weighing my options.

"Let's be honest..." I sighed. "Your life is boring, Beth," I told myself. "You're always wanting adventure, well, here it is! What's the problem?"

I took a deep breath. I knew I was right. It was the same schedule for me, day in, day out. I ate the same thing for breakfast, I went to bed at 1135 every night, falling asleep during the same damn paragraph I was constantly trying to read past but couldn't. It was a cruel cycle, and tedious. I remembered reading something once that stated that adventure is fun *because* it makes you afraid.

"Remember that, Jones? Buck up. Let's go." I shook my body to get the shivers out, then descended down the rusty, slimey rungs and dropped feet first onto the brick path that was laid before me. The light from my phone flew all around, unmasking nooks and crannies that had probably not been seen for an age, even by a plumber. I looked up at the navy blanket of sky still visible through the round of the manhole. There was still time to go back. I reached up towards the light, wondering where that screen-like disk I had seen from above ground had gone.

"Strange," I continued to try and reach for the screen. Nothing. I climbed back up a few rungs, then felt my head hit an invisible shield. "What the...?" Panic started to set in as I continued to try and climb up the ladder. I couldn't breach it. I reached my hand above my head, hoping to scratch through.

"It won't let you out..." Audrey's voice alerted my already raised senses. I flinched, then breathed in and out slowly.

"Audrey," I said in a measured tone, my nerves frayed. "You *really* have to stop popping up out of nowhere." I climbed back down to meet her, but she was not there. "Audrey?" I looked around. I heard the pitter patter of small feet running away from me. I ran after the sound blindly, trying to focus in the dark. "Audrey!"

I sped around the curve of the bricked path, hoping Audrey would stop when I called her. While I was unfamiliar with the ground I stood on, she apparently knew every step and the cracks within them. Just when I felt like giving up, the sound of my shoes on the bricks changed. I screeched to a halt. Initially my Converse were scuffing across the ground. Now, they squeaked. I shone the flashlight on the ground and found that I was no longer standing on brick, but on

highly polished, hardwood floors. As my eyes adjusted, I realized that the room was growing lighter. I looked around, trying to ascertain what this room's original purpose would have been. It seemed to have very high ceilings, and I could just about make out three tall windows on the walls on either side of where I stood. A whisper of air traveled around me, which was somewhat worrying since last I checked, I was underground. It was slightly cool, like the breeze after an evening rainstorm in the fall. I felt it wrap around my legs and work its way up my body. It felt like a quick squeeze, or a sudden hug, only cold and unnatural. When it came to the back of my neck, I shivered. *This is not normal*, I shuddered. *I need to get out of here*. I stepped forward, hoping whatever was following me would leave me be. It was then I realized: Audrey had either stopped running, or had run out of earshot, because I could no longer hear the pitter patter of her little feet. *Where is she?* I stressed.

Nerves still on edge. I obviously wasn't getting out of here the way I came, so I'd have to push through to wherever it ended.

"Stop right there, young lady!" I froze. The voice that demanded my attention was not a friendly one. Stern, unwavering, and steely. I felt the urge to put my hands above my head, as if I were being arrested. I heard the harsh swish of layered skirts approaching, a strong booted walk punching the hardwood with every step. I started to turn and face the woman, hoping to gain stronger grasp of my situation.

"Did I tell you you could turn around?!" She shrieked in an alarmingly high tone, considering what she had sounded like when she first addressed me. I felt the sting of a switch snapping across the nape of my neck. "Impudent child!" She struck me again.

"Ow!" I exclaimed, touching the back of my neck with cautious fingers. "That hurt!" Physical pain mingled with emotional anger, and I spun around to face my bully, ready to react if she tried hitting me a third time. "Listen, lady, I--"

Her unearthly appearance stopped my sentence short, my lungs refusing my breath its exit. The woman was dressed as a nun in all black. Her habit had no white lining, nor did her skirts. The habit seemingly served no purpose, least of all modesty, as she had no head that I could see. She was faceless, a black hole where her visage should have resided. I looked down to her feet, and saw none. It wasn't even that her skirts were hiding them...she was literally floating a foot or so above the ground. So many questions were zooming through my head, I could barely recognize them to try and find an answer. *How was she talking? Was she dead? Was she a spirit? Am I dead?*

"Oh my--, what *are* you?" I gulped. She did not respond. It was almost as if she was in shock herself, not used to being seen. The nun started to slowly raise her switch arm, ready to strike me. The next few seconds were all a blur- a scene played in slow motion. I raised my arm to block her switch, but she was too swift. She took hold of my neck and started to squeeze. I felt my feet leave the ground, and my eyes bulged at the shock of my predicament. I fought with all my might, grabbing at her ancient peeling hand, hoping to scratch her hard enough to be

dropped. I tried kicking with both of my legs, but she could not be stopped. Slowly the room started to blacken around me, and it was everything within me not to close my eyes.

“Time for detention,” She purred eerily. I felt my body grow limp in her grasp. Just as I was releasing my last ounce of life, I heard it. A child, singing. It was faded and warped to my oxygen-starved brain, but still clear as a bell.

*“They had come on wings of black,
Faceless and deprived,
Thinking they were God’s own wives,
Knowing no demise.
Then came children young and free,
Threatening their say,
With the strength of peace they won,
Sending them away,
Sending them away,
Sending them away...”*

I felt the nun loosen her grip as she turned to face the child. Air rushed back into my lungs, a merciful flood of life. My eyes regained their sight, and I turned in the direction of the beautiful voice. It was Audrey. She was standing about ten feet away from us, her dark curls swimming around her face as though she were underwater. She started walking towards us, and I felt the nun shiver in fear. Audrey sang again.

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The nun turned her head, screeched at Audrey and released me. The cry was horrible. It sounded like the screams of a thousand suffering children. I fell to the ground heavily, using my hands to

cover my ears instead of catching myself. It was the most grateful I have ever been to have my face hit the floor. I tried to stand and help Audrey but lacked the strength, my brain was still air-starved. The light in the air was strobe-like, flickering white and black, black then white.

“Be gone,” Audrey ordered, her voice saturated with an almost celestial tone.

The nun stood her ground, but did speak.

“You have plagued these lands for long enough, witch!” Audrey stated. “Be gone!”

She advanced towards the nun, and for a flicker of a moment, I was worried for her safety. I mustered up what strength I had and stood. Staggering towards her, I pushed in front of her in an attempt to act as a barrier between them. The nun started cackling, her floating body jiggling up and down.

“You think you can defeat me?” She retorted. “I could end you with a kiss.”

She drew herself to me, her body hovering only a few inches off the ground. The stench coming from where her face would have been was almost too much to bear. I pulled my head back, hoping to avoid whatever was about to come next. I felt Audrey slip something into my pocket and nudge me. I pulled the object out of my jeans and felt its surface. I couldn’t quite make out its shape, but the stench was getting closer, and the proximity between us lessened. I whipped the mystery object out.

“How about *that*?” I cried, thrusting it out in front of me like a talisman. There was a moment of silence as everyone took in what was happening. I followed the line of my arm up to my wrist, then examined the item I had just pushed into her visage.

“Audrey, what the heck is this?” I despaired. I knew exactly what it was: a pocket watch. How on earth was a pocket watch going to help me against an otherworldly force?

“Look!” Audrey pointed at our mutual foe from behind my tensed body.

The nun was frozen, as though someone had pushed pause. She simply hung there, bobbing up and down slightly, like a buoy on the waves of a calm sea. The strobed light had stopped, and the sense of tranquility was strangely unsettling.

“Wow!” I put the watch away and started circling the hanging nun. I reached out to touch the nun’s skirts.

“Don’t!” Audrey grabbed my wrist. The strength in her little hand was surprising. She released her grip. “They wake up when you touch them.”

“They? You mean there’s more of those...things?”

“Black Matrons, yes. I’ll tell you on the way,” Audrey pulled at my coat, directing me across the large room. We entered another tunnel (*not* something I was overly excited by) and started walking. I couldn’t see a thing. I reached for my phone, fully intending to turn on the screen and light our way.

“Don’t!” Audrey whispered tersely.

“Why not? I can’t see a thing!” The air was becoming heavier and more humid, only exasperating me further.

“You’ll never unsee what you take in if you do.” The possibility was eerie enough to keep me moving sightless, but only just. We carried on for a good ten minutes without saying a word.

“Are you going to tell me more about the nun back there?” I demanded. “And maybe where we’re going?” I was getting a little tired of following her around aimlessly like a puppy. I heard my guide sigh, agitated at my lack of patience.

“Could you bring yourself to waiting another *five* minutes?” I could see her eyes glowing in the slowly greating light.

“Fine.” I threw up my hands, exasperated. I would follow her for another five minutes, then I would put my foot down.

We started walking towards the light (which I’ve been informed you should *never* do, and yet there I was, doing exactly that). As we did, I could hear the sounds of children splashing, laughing, screaming. I was expecting the smell of chlorine to enter my nostrils at any moment. We continued walking towards what I was expecting to be a pool scene. Audrey stopped suddenly and turned around, causing me to wave my arms and will my weight to balance on my tippy toes in order to stay balanced.

“One thing before we go any further,” She pushed me back a little, creating a more comfortable proximity between us. “Bethany. What you’re about to see is going to seem strange to you, but you need to trust me. Can you do that?”

“I don’t know,” I replied carefully, fear gripping my insides. “What am I about to see?”

She smiled brightly, seeming excited to show me whatever it was that was beyond the tunnel. She took my hand and pulled me forward, ignoring my hesitance. As soon as we crossed the threshold, I felt a heavy, warm air surrounding me. It was a comforting humidity, so much so that I removed my coat and slung it over my arm. The pleasant feel in the atmosphere relaxed me almost instantly, and I felt the fear that been holding my body hostage melt away. The warm fog cleared gradually, and Audrey took my hand.

“Do you trust me now?” She piped.

“I never said I didn’t,” I smiled, looking down into her bright eyes.

“Good. When I say ‘Go,’ breathe in deeply and jump into the water.”

“Wait, what?” I exclaimed, surprised.

“Go!”

I took a deep breath and jumped. My feet hit the water, and it was only then that I realized that I was still wearing my shoes. The water swallowed us whole, its cold sending shivers through my

body. Audrey let go of my hand, and I assumed she for headed back up for air, so I followed. Or at least, I tried to.

Something brushed against my foot, startling me. I opened my eyes, not thinking about the fact that I was underwater and that I couldn't see like I would be able to on land. Everything was a murky, green fog. I instantly started to hyperventilate, flapping my arms and legs, frantically trying to get to the surface. My lungs strained, trying to stretch the last few ounces of air left for use. I was panic-stricken, and scared out of my wits. Why was the pool so dirty? And what on earth just brushed my leg?

I broke the surface, gulping in as much air as I possibly could. My lungs stung, and it took me a few seconds to be fully aware of my surroundings. I called out for Audrey, worried for her safety. I treaded water and turned slowly in place, just looking and listening. I was slightly anxious about what had stroked my foot below, but Audrey was more important at that point in time. While I was searching, I noticed very quickly that I was not in the pool that I had jumped into. The water had been murky because I was in an ocean. A cold, rhythmic ocean. I was surrounded by water, not even a floating piece of debris to hang on to for when my arms and legs would inevitably grow tired of treading.

"Come on..." I coached myself. "Don't give in to fear or hopelessness. You can survive this. You just...need...to stay..." It was then I noticed something...frothy bubbles rising slowly in an almost trail-like fashion. The trail of bubbles grew closer.

"Please don't be a shark, please don't be a shark..." I tried to calm myself down, knowing that this could very well be my last moment on the earth. Or under it. I wasn't quite sure. The beast was growing ever closer, the top of its head about to breach the surface of the water. For some reason, at the very last minute I decided to duck under water. There was a flash of light, and all of a sudden I was under the waters of a completely different ocean. These were warm and a light teal, a complete opposite from where I had just been.

"Well done!" I heard Audrey cheer below me. I opened my eyes, hoping to make out a shadow or a shape that looked like her. "Down here!" She called.

To my surprise, I could see better than I did above water. Could I talk as well? I didn't want to risk it...but Audrey could talk. I located her about fifty feet below me, lounging on a large rock. I swam down to her, but was quickly running out of breath.

"You can talk, you know...and breathe. You're not really underwater. You're floating in ectoplasm."

"Ectoplasm?!" I shrieked. The thought of floating around dead people's soul matter was a little too much for me. Audrey looked at me, seemingly offended.

"If it bothers you so much, pretend it's water!" She frowned.

"I'm sorry, but this is just...weird..." I sat beside her, glad for a rest. "What is this place, anyway, Audrey? Whose souls are we floating in?"

“It’s the battleground of the War of the Children. The children that died in battle are all around us, guiding us, comforting us...they are what keeps this place thriving.”

“The War of the Children? Is that what you were singing about when you saved me from the creepy hag back there?”

“The Matron, yes. We, the Children have always lived here. We are like what you call aliens, I suppose, but we’re not from any sort of planet. We are celestial.”

My head was spinning. All this talk of aliens and celestial beings...how did I have no clue that the Children existed? There was a whole world I was experiencing that I never knew about, and now I was breathing in the ectoplasm of dead children! I needed to get out of there.

“Can we keep moving? This place bothers me a bit.”

“Don’t you want to meet the Children?” Audrey smiled sinisterly. Her face was growing dark again, the rings forming around her eyes as they sank. Her curls were floating again, and her usually presumptuous tone was more of an eery hiss than a child’s voice.

“I thought I already had...you!” I responded, voice trembling.

Audrey crawled over to me, her form suddenly stretched out and long limbed. The ends of her fingers grew dark claws, her hair turned frizzy and wild.

“Audrey, stop that. You’re scaring me.”

She hissed and coughed like she was an animal trying to speak a human language. Immediately my fear turned to concern.

“Audrey? Are you alright?” I tried to reach out and touch her, but she snapped at my fingers like a wild dog. Her eyes were glowing a terrifying amber. She started to advance towards me, causing me to clamber backwards over the rock. I slipped and lost my grip, cutting the palm of my hand as I fell. I started sinking deeper and deeper into the ocean. The light grew less and less, “the waters” thicker and more viscous.

Everything slowed down. I found myself on my back, arms flailing, trying to grab onto anything that would keep me from falling further. Like a nightmare, I could see the beast that used to be Audrey jump off the rock a hundred feet above me, in pursuit of her prey. I tried to roll onto my stomach and swim, but the ectoplasm wouldn’t allow it. I was forced to descend not knowing where I would land or whether I would even get to before dying at the hand of a half creature half little girl.

Soon the area around us closed in. I felt like I was traveling through a tunnel again, only this time I was only dropping. I had no option to climb in or out like I had before. Soon I grew tired of flailing. My heart told me to keep going, that it really was making a difference, but my brain told me that it didn’t matter whether I panicked or not. I had no control over what was about to happen to me. I could sense the beast getting closer and closer to me. I was still moving, but somehow she had increased her speed.

“Need!Human!Soul!” She spluttered, claws extended.

“No!” I screamed. I started wriggling again, trying to break free of whatever being had a hold on me. *This is a dream, Bethany. I told myself. Just a dream. It’s okay...let go!*

“I don’t wanna die!” I cried out. “Are you trying to teach me something? What do you want from me?!”

She was less than five feet away from me now. A grim smile laced her repulsive face as a claw pierced the skin of my forearm and dragged down the vein. I struggled to break free, waiting for the stream of blood that would inevitably send me away to the afterlife.

“The Children demand your soul.”

The beast leaned in close to my face. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I searched for a glimmer of the little pig-tailed girl I had just met, but I could not see her. Only a corpse-like face with sweating yellow teeth, glowing amber eyes and skin that was fresh as a newborn baby’s. I closed my eyes, praying that my death would be quick.

I felt my body land. It was not on a rock, or in a pool of souls, it was my bed. My eyes snapped open and I sat up, shock coursing through my body.

“No way,” I said, taking in my surroundings. It was indeed my bedroom, in the exact state I had left it in: laundry spilling out of the hamper, posters of superheroes peeling off my sloped ceiling and a cat snuggled at the end of my bed. I sighed, relieved that all that nastiness had just been an awful nightmare.

The doorbell rang. I jumped in my skin, not used to having people ring the doorbell unless I was expecting them. I got out of bed, not caring at all what I looked like. As far as I was concerned, I had just escaped an early (not to mention painful) death...Who cared what I looked like?

I glanced through the peep hole to see if my visitor was anyone I recognized. I couldn’t see anyone there.

“Who is it?” I called through the door.

“Girl Scout Cookies!”

I opened the door to greet the tiny voices. I instantly regretted it. There stood Audrey, back in her human form, looking innocent as can be. She looked up at me, smiling.

“Hello, my name is Audrey. Would you like to buy some Girl Scout cookies?”

I glanced at my arm, screamed in despair- the claw mark was still there. I slammed into the door, hoping to shut her out. She pushed back with an unparalleled strength, bringing me to the floor. Audrey leaned over the threshold. Her eyes had started to glow and become sunken in. She bent over and whispered into my ear:

“Come, the Children are waiting.”

