

JODI MAY'S



HSA vs IT

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FOREWORD & DISCLAIMER

First and foremost, I do not own the characters of 'IT' nor the original concept. All rights remain with the original author, Stephen King. It's important to note that this is a homage to the original story, which happens to be my favourite book. I was inspired by every single page and read it once a year, every summer, to be whisked away to Derry all over again. It occurred to me, after the two recent films (I prefer the 1990's television series) that a lot of people love the story and adore 'Pennywise the Dancing Clown' but they never get the chance to read the book. Put off by its length, they miss out on the magic of the tale as King wrote it. With this crossover homage fan fiction I wanted to bring a piece of that magic (and horror) to life and it's my hope, above all, that I'll be able to encourage just one person to pick up the original book.

Secondly, the '*Hillside Academy*' characters featured in this fan fiction are all my own. The only character I took from King's story was 'Pennywise'. The rest are mine and all belong to me by law. I will also add that much of the main characters' backstories have been changed to fit this specific 'alternative universe' and several of the minor characters of the story have also been altered. To conclude, there are no spoilers to the main '*Hillside Academy*' series. Rather, it is a way for me to highlight the main eight (Erika, Dominic, Sam, Anna, Emily, Will, Elivia and Tom) in this horror fan fiction that is dedicated to not only Stephen King for inspiring me to keep writing all these years, but also to the people of Lancaster, Lancashire.

Thus bringing me to the penultimate point of this disclaimer. Throughout the book, Lancaster is referred to not always kindly and sometimes in a negative light. This is fiction. I wanted to set this gruesome fan fiction homage in this city because for one, it's truly beautiful and has a rich, fantastic history, and secondly, because I love it. I moved here just over two years ago and fell quickly in love with the history and architecture. My babies were born here and in a way, so was I. By leaving the place I grew up and all its ghosts, I was liberated. This city has quickly become not the place I was raised but the place I was born. And the people? The people of Lancaster are wonderful. They're community-orientated, kind and generous, and during a rather arduous period, the community of Greaves specifically aided us greatly. My partner and I are eternally grateful for their generosity and kindness during this time and this is my strange way of saying thank you; of bringing Lancaster to the forefront again and displaying it in all its glory. So whatever you may read, remember it is fiction and that Lancaster, UK is my favourite place in the world. So to the people of Lancaster, thank you.

And last but not least, a disclaimer to say that the content of this chapter and all the following contain strong language, violence against children, sexual references, scenes of gore and peril and is quite frankly inappropriate for young readers or anyone easily offended. But if this is all to your taste, go ahead and read.

I hope you enjoy reading this 'alternative universe' fan fiction homage as much as I enjoyed writing it. All comments are welcome (though don't be mean), shares are encouraged and remember –

Once you begin this story...*you'll float too.*

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Rock War

Ben Hope's body was found Friday morning on the banks of the Burrow Beck. He was missing his left leg, several fingers and his nose. The police statement revealed that he too had been mutilated by what they believed to be an animal. But the gang didn't believe it.

This was no animal, or at least, not one they'd ever encountered before. One that could shift Its shape to ones greatest fears. One that could talk and taunt. One that could find you wherever you were.

The body had been a warning for them. Poor little Ben Hope had been left in the exact spot they met every day. It had left Its latest kill there for a reason. So they knew It was coming for them next. And this time, they might not be as lucky.

Since they could no longer meet at the Burrow Beck or in the forest at the end of Dorrington Road – a place they hadn't returned to since It had attacked Erika and Emily – they all agreed to meet by the railway bridge on Bridge Road. From there, they would head to the wide banks by the railway tracks. It was wide enough so that when trains passed, there was no chance of being hit. Hidden by the high fences and foliage at the end of the gardens on Dorrington Road on one side, and obscured from the back of the old asylum by more forestry on the other side, it was the perfect setting for their plan of action.

Elivia wasn't particularly happy about hanging around near the train tracks. While Tom had assured her they wouldn't be anywhere near the actual tracks, she could already hear her parents lecturing her.

Don't play near the train tracks.

You could be hit.

You could be electrocuted.

Wasn't it one of the first things you were taught before being allowed to play outside? Don't talk to strangers, always stay in touch and don't play near the road, the river or the train tracks. Already, she felt as though she'd broken several of those rules. She'd tried to express her concerns to Anna but she hadn't seemed to care, making Elivia feel like a child. Was she being a baby for wanting to stay away from the tracks? No one else seemed to mind. Not even Emily had quibbled. That thought only made Elivia feel even worse.

The only thing she could be thankful for was that the train tracks were a lot closer to home than the Burrow Beck in Hala; just a ten minute walk uphill from her house. They left

their bikes at home and strolled along in the muggy summer heat that made their clothes stick to their skin. Fortunately for Elivia, her swan feather hair was short; cut in a pixie style that she adored but the girls at school called 'dykey'. Why did short hair make a woman a lesbian? She would never understand it. Long hair would irritate her, as it did her best friend, Anna; her long golden hair pulled up into a ponytail that Friday afternoon. There were beads of sweat across her neck. Elivia tried her best to ignore them as they walked, talking occasionally but mostly remaining quiet. There wasn't much to say anymore. Talking about boys, clothes or gossip at school seemed trivial compared to their reality.

Walking along the pavement on the left hand side of the road heading north into the city centre, the two girls strolled along in their shorts and t-shirts, sandals on their feet. Elivia considered seeing Tom and the rest of the group again. They were going to discuss everything they knew about It. She tried to remember what her life was like before all of this. It was a blurred haze unlike the stark colour that existed now. Everything vivid, every word, smell and moment haunting her. And Tom? Well he stayed rooted in her mind and her heart, his presence toying with her like a dangling donut. She could never have it...*him*...so she needed to get her head out of the clouds. She needed to get into the game.

Just as they were coming up to the junction of Bridge Road on the right, that gaping drain where Toby Johnson had died last October like a black spot on the street and in their minds, Elivia heard Anna's sharp intake of breath.

Coming up the pavement, a few hundred yards away, was none other than Samantha Rose and her posse. But they weren't alone and it wasn't them that made Anna gasp and come to a halt.

With them, thickening out this hungry pack of wolves marching towards them, were several boys from the private school on Quernmore Road. The same school Sam attended. In amongst them, Elivia spotted two people neither Anna or herself had wanted to see again.

For one, Bart was with them; dark blond hair reflecting the burning sunlight and that usual smug grin on his lips as he flirted with a giggling Samantha Rose. Secondly, and more importantly to Anna, was Damien.

Damien Ashcroft.

He was infamous at both their schools. Possibly the richest person Elivia had ever associated with, he had a personality that could turn people to stone. He was cold, callous and cruel with steel grey eyes and ash blond hair that looked like snow today. Glancing to Anna, Elivia could see how just the sight of him sent chills down her best friend's back.

"Come on, let's cross, maybe they won't see us." Grasping Anna's clammy hand, Elivia looked both ways up Ashton Road before crossing, dragging a paralysed Anna along behind her.

Once across the road, within the cool shade of the ancient overhanging trees, Elivia felt marginally better. Anna, however, looked no different; her hard eyes staying upon Damien, who had noticed them.

Panic shot through Elivia's petite body as Damien nudged Bart. He followed his friend's cold gaze across the road to find her. He grinned, a wide predatory grin that made her suddenly nauseous. But they couldn't just stand there. Not now Samantha and her team of bitches had caught a whiff of their frightened scent. They had to get out of there. They had to run.

"Come on!" Elivia said, yanking at Anna's hand and hoping her best friend could remember her hockey training. As the fastest on the team, Anna was ferocious on the pitch but at just the sight of Damien, she had been reduced to a mere shell of the girl she was.

Anna had never told Elivia what had happened between herself and Damien Ashcroft but now was not the time for stories. They needed to put distance between themselves and the pack of jeering teenagers, swaggering across Ashton Road towards them.

With another tug, the two girls broke into a run and sped away down Bridge Road. However, their change in gait had the opposite effect on the following gang. Instead of giving up and forgetting about the fleeing girls, it spurred them on, causing them to transition into hunting mode; chasing after them down the road, past the drain, the block of flats on the left and under the railway bridge where a freight train thundered by.

Emerging from the shadows, still tugging Anna behind her, Elivia looked up with relief to see Tom, Erika and all the rest of their unlikely friendship group sitting on the high brick wall of the grassy bank leading up to the tracks. Legs dangling over the sides, a joint shared between them, they waved and cheered their arrival, only noticing something was wrong at the sound of Bart, Samantha and the rest of their jeers echoing beneath the bridge.

"Up here!" Tom exclaimed, leaping to his feet and pointing to his right where the wall made a staggered descent.

Without looking back, Elivia pulled Anna along to the wall where they were met by Tom, Sam and Will. With Sam and Will's strong hands, they were able to pull Anna up onto the bank, followed by Elivia, as light as feather compared to her tall friend. Up here, Elivia felt safer; protected, like a queen peering out from a turret window of a castle down at the enemy approaching. Stepping back, Tom at her side and backing away up the bank, the group were on their feet watching as the other gang approached.

"You hanging around with these losers now are you, Anna?" Damien sneered up at her, viewing each of the members of their little club with disdain. "Looks like you dodged a bullet, Bart."

"You too, mate," Bart smirked, his unyielding stare upon Elivia who allowed Tom to wrap a supportive arm around her waist.

“Why don’t you come down and chat?” Damien said, stepping into the middle of the road without any fear for being run down by passing cars. He was that type of person; completely fearless, with the belief that nothing could hurt him. That no one could do him wrong. And everyone else? They were ants. “*Sam*, what a pleasant surprise.”

“Fuck off, Ashcroft,” Sam spat, though Elivia see the fear in his red cheeks.

What followed was a loud jeer as Damien’s friends ‘oohed’ and laughed mockingly. Meanwhile, Samantha’s stare had never left Emily.

Emily stuck close to Erika who stood bravely glowering down at this group as if they were dirt on her shoe. Even so, this didn’t stop Samantha.

“I told you I’d catch you eventually, piggy!”

Elivia gulped at the cruel words, glancing to where Emily recoiled as Samantha and her friends squealed and honked like pigs, encouraging the boys to join in.

“Hey, Sam!” Damien said, capturing his attention once again, “Looks like you found a piggy girlfriend. Mr and Mrs Piggy – how adorable.”

“Fuck you!” Sam roared, his aggression bursting out of him, frightening Elivia and the others.

“Big words,” Damien smirked. “Why don’t you come down here and say that?”

“Why don’t you come up here and I’ll tell you?” Sam said, gesturing to the high bank.

“Alright,” Damien said, his grin growing broader and hungrier.

With a snap of his fingers, his friends raced toward the bank, Samantha and her friends lagging behind with uncertainty. It didn’t matter. Already, Elivia, Anna and the others had run; further along the bank, away from the metal railings of the tracks and through the forestry leading out to the wide grassy patch on the other side.

Damien and his friends were in close pursuit and as Elivia ran, she watched Erika, at the front, heading straight toward the tracks.

She opened her mouth to call out to stop her, the thunderous noise of an approaching train growing louder and closer, when Erika leapt out onto the southbound tracks. Elivia came to a slamming halt, her hand tightly in Tom’s, stopping him from going any further.

“Come on, Lil! Or they’ll catch us!” he yelled, the train getting closer.

“I can’t! I can’t, Tom!” Elivia bellowed, glancing over her shoulder to where the jeers of the gang grew louder. “It’s dangerous!”

“And so are they! Now come on! Trust me!” Tom said, grasping her hand tightly and as she stared into his eyes, she knew she had no choice.

Glancing up, she spotted Erika, Dominic and Sam already on the other side. Anna was skirting across the wooden planks, careful not to touch the tracks themselves; the electric humming above them. Then, Will took Emily's hand and lead her cautiously across. Elivia saw Emily's shoulders shuddering with fear but she went nonetheless, because Emily knew. Because Emily Fox was smarter than Elivia and she would rather risk being hit by a train than be caught by Samantha, Damien or Bart and their friends.

Looking back to Tom's pleading sky eyes, Elivia nodded and allowed him to pull her down the last few paces to the tracks. Looking north, she could see the train. It was honking its horn as a warning to *them*. To get out of the way or they would be blown to pieces by the oncoming steel snake shooting down the tracks. The earth rumbled beneath her feet like an earthquake. Gripping Tom's hand, Bart's yells for her to come back in her ears, Elivia stepped onto the first plank of the southbound track, and then took another step when she suddenly paused. Staring down the tracks at the train flying towards her.

"Elivia!" Tom screamed.

Elivia froze in those moments, the horn of the train blaring into her ears, her knees trembling beneath her. Her head swam and she felt her body gave way beneath her.

Two arms around her waist, Tom yanked her off of the southbound tracks just as the train went barrelling through. He was able to keep his balance on the shaking ground as he stumbled over the northbound tracks and to the safety of the bank the other side. Collapsing onto his behind, Elivia between his spread legs, Dominic's arms wound around his neck, Tom blinked as carriage after carriage flew by, the wind like a hurricane in his ears. It hit him then just how dangerous this had been. Just how close to death they'd come. The clown would have got the chance to tick them off of Its hit list.

But not today. Today, pure luck had saved them. Pure stupid luck.

"Are you insane?!" Dominic roared, but not to Tom. This was to Elivia. "We told you to run!"

"I –," Elivia wept.

"Leave her alone!" Anna said, pushing a furious Dominic away from where Elivia was still on the ground.

Finally, the last carriage of the express train had passed them and all was silent. But not for long.

"You survived then!" Damien shouted across the tracks, flanked and backed by his large posse of friends.

Tom slowly got to his feet, him and Anna helping Elivia to hers; the eight of them standing in a long, brave line, facing the larger group. Tom's eyes fell to the tracks once again. To the great hunks of rock that made up the mounds around the tracks. Crouching down as the back and forth between his friends and the gang across the tracks continued, he inspected one of the rocks within reach. Picking it up, he held it in his hand; it was heavy with jagged edges. Throwing it up and down in his grip, his eyes rose to Damien grinning back at them.

“Why don't you just fuck off?!” Anna hollered.

“Oh we will – once we're done,” Bart grinned. “Eh, Elivia?”

Tom looked from the small mousy girl to that hungry grin on this boy's face, the rage inside of him almighty; vibrating through every inch of him. And so, without any hesitation, Tom flung the rock across the tracks, smacking Bart square in the face.

Silence fell across them all. Tom couldn't believe he'd hit him. He'd never hit anyone in his entire life. Never had to. Now, seeing the blood pouring from the deep cut on Bart's face, Tom couldn't help grinning with triumph.

“I can't believe you just did that!” Samantha shrieked.

“Little faggot!” shouted another boy.

“Arm yourselves,” Tom ordered to his friends, his eyes never leaving Bart's as he glowered back at him, his fury palpable. “It's a fucking rock war.”

At once, the eight grabbed rocks from the ground and began flinging them across the tracks. Some of the rocks hit their targets, smashing into chest, shoulders, outstretched hands and a couple of faces. Very quickly, some of Samantha's friends shrieked with fear and backed down. Samantha wasn't one of them. As Damien and Bart did, she picked up her own rocks and began hurtling them across at the eight who dodged and swerved the assault.

Sam stumbled back upon receiving a rock to his forehead, leaving a nasty gash across his hot skin. It didn't stop him. Collecting up another handful of those sandstone rocks, he flung them with all his might, watching with sick delight as they struck Damien and his little buddy Charles Freeman again and again like giant bullets.

Anna roared with her fury, aiming all of her rocks for Damien also. She dodged skilfully, ducking down and tossing rocks to Elivia who showed great aim that afternoon as she elegantly chucked a rock which ultimately smacked Bart across his jaw.

There were rocks flying everywhere; blood spurting from wounds, curses and shouts, screams of fury and exultancy for every hit. Before long, the gang across the tracks were growing thinner and thinner as the girls ran away through the foliage, receiving rocks to the backs of their heads and legs, leaving only Samantha and the boys behind.

Samantha looked positively ugly with her rage as she flung a rock directly at Erika's head, sending her flat to the ground. In retaliation, Emily knew what she needed to do.

With this last rock in her hand, she aimed it square at Samantha's pretty symmetrical face. Throwing with all her might, with every ounce of the fury that had built up from all the years of bullying, all the taunts, all the hog noises and squeals –

Piggy!

Fat pig!

Piggy, piggy, pig, pig, PIG!

Emily panted as the rock flew through the air. Samantha could see it coming but wasn't quick enough to move from its path. And in the end, it found a home against her long thin nose.

Emily could hear the impact from the other side of the tracks.

"You bitch!" Samantha swore, clutching her nose and halting the rock battle momentarily. "You fucking fat pig!"

"Fuck you!" Emily bellowed, trembling with her anger.

Her powerful words were followed by a wild cheer from her new friends as they tossed the last of the rocks which acted as a way to shoo away the stragglers. Their enemies dragged themselves to their feet and with one last glance in the direction of the eight, still armed with rocks, they staggered away, sobbing quietly to themselves.

"We'll get you for this!" Damien roared, blood pouring down his face.

"We'll fucking murder you!" Charles spat.

"Watch your backs, losers!" Bart said, pointing across at them.

But the eight weren't scared. They'd all faced far worse.

"Come on then!" Tom bounced on his toes like a bouncer, pacing up and down, and waving about his arms as his friends jeered. "Fucking fight us!"

Bart lowered his arm, his eyes dancing over to where Elivia was sat on the bank catching her breath. "Watch your back."

Tom looked down to Elivia who slowly raised her fist. With it, she lifted her middle finger. Raising her second hand, she did the same. Tom and the others laughed breathlessly as Bart shook his head, spat a wad of blood to the ground and beckoned Damien and Charles away.

"Yeah, that's it, fuck off!" Sam bellowed.

“Go blow your dad, you rich gits!” Tom concluded for them all as they laughed hysterically.

Across the tracks, Bart and the rest of their posse disappeared into the forestry, leaving them finally all alone.

“Fuck,” Sam spluttered, turning around to face them all as they gathered themselves.

Will and Dominic helped Erika to her feet, a nasty gash across her eyebrow. Viewing the rest of them, they also looked worse for wear but alive.

“Who were those people?” Tom asked, his eyes dancing from Anna and Elivia, to Emily and Sam.

“Just some gits from our school,” Sam replied, wiping the blood from his face on the bottom of his t-shirt.

“Samantha Rose,” Emily said tightly. “She was the one chasing me that day when I met you guys.”

“She’s a massive hoe,” Anna scoffed. “Did you see that hit you got in, Ems?”

“You got her right in her mug,” Sam laughed, the others chuckling and congratulating each other on their hits. “Not so smug now is she?”

“What if they come back?” Emily asked, glancing across the tracks.

“And suffer another rock war? Which they lost? Nah,” Will assured, one hand to her back.

“And if they do, we’ll fuck em up again,” Sam jeered. “Just send Emily and Elivia first ‘cause they’ve got the best aim.”

“Yeah, Ems, I wouldn’t fuck with you,” Erika smirked.

“She hurt you,” Emily frowned.

“I’m fine,” she smiled, taking her hand tightly. “Thanks to you.”

“Oh enough of this sappy bullshit. Anyone else see the state of Damien’s face by the end?” Sam chuckled as they headed into the forestry at the back of the asylum. They weren’t going to risk crossing the tracks again or bumping into an even angrier, wounded Damien and his friends.

“He almost looked as ugly as your mum,” Dominic snorted.

“Fuck off, you don’t know my mam!” Sam gave him a light shove, unable to stifle the grin from his face.

“I knew her well enough last night,” Dominic jeered along with the rest of them as they waded through the thigh high nettles and over to the fence.

“Thought you liked cock?”

“I like both,” Dominic winked. “Your mum and your dad.”

“You’re disgusting,” Sam spluttered a laugh.

“That’s what they tell me!” Dominic grinned.

Holding back the fence, Dominic and Sam held the gap open to allow their friends through and onto the grounds of the abandoned asylum. It wasn’t a place any of them would dare visit during the night but throughout the day, it was possible to find this place beautiful. Ancient trees in full bloom, and the grass, while wild and unkempt, was like a soft green sea which blew in the warm breeze gushing through the grounds, bringing with it pink blossoms and the smell of summer.

Trudging through, collecting sticks to whack away the weeds, they nursed their wounds and chatted animatedly about the previous fight, running on adrenaline.

“Hey, what’s that?” Elivia asked, bringing the group to a halt.

She pointed across the forestry to a large concrete building. It looked rundown and abandoned just like the rest of the buildings on the expansive grounds of the foreboding asylum; its tall gothic tower visible from miles around.

“It’s the old water pumping station,” Dominic replied. “Can’t you smell it?”

“Like onions,” Erika grimaced, “and damp. Old. Lost. Forgotten.”

A chill breeze swept across them, blowing about their bare ankles and up through the trees where the leaves parted to reveal the sandstone asylum ahead.

“Come on,” Tom said with a nervous frown, beckoning them on.

Elivia’s eyes lingered on the old water pumping station where the forest was trying to reclaim it to the wild; ivy and brambles growing up and through its crumbling walls. The wide entrance where the steel door had fallen in swung on its hinges, creaking in the wind. Looking back at the group, she saw they were already walking ahead. She hurried to catch up, the shivers stroking down her back like icy hands.

Leaving the forestry behind, they came out onto the long grass of lawn and made their way around the Gothic French style structure. It was from the late eighteen hundreds, the Royal Albert Hospital for Idiots and Imbeciles of the Seven Northern Counties, or so Tom remembered. It opened in 1870 as a place to care and educate children with learning difficulties. In 1913, adults were also admitted and from there, the place fell into bedlam.

Older locals spoke of the screams which resonated from the building late at night. The flashing lights, the electrical surges and the howls of pain. In the 1960s, it was said to hold over 2000 patients, both male and female, and children too. Those deemed too unstable to live amongst normal citizens were sent here to be caged like animals. Mental health problems ranging from the truly insane to just depression and anxiety, though it wasn't called that then. The hospital was said to have also performed illegal abortions at one point; the bodies of all those dead babies – and some women who'd died of infections post-surgery – were buried in unmarked graves across the grounds. Still to this day, there were rumours of the spirits that wandered the woods looking for an escape.

In 1998, the asylum was shut down and several of the doctors arrested for their ill treatment and malpractice. None were charged and all the prisoners were released under the newest mental health act. With no money to rehouse them, not even to the second asylum in Lancaster, Moor Hospital, up near Williamson Park, the mentally unstable and the truly insane were allowed out into the wild. Like furious, starved animals that had been beaten and whipped, they'd run rampant through the streets. It had been mayhem, left to the police to round up the dangerous and cart them off to secure units where they would no doubt spend the rest of their lives. The rest had faded into the shadows of the ancient city, only to be seen huddled in shop doorways or outside the cathedral looking for shelter. Just like every other awful thing that had happened in this city's history, it was soon forgotten. The people of Lancaster had very short memories indeed.

It made Tom feel uneasy as he traipsed along with his hand in Dominic's, his eyes sweeping up to the front of the building. The urge to photograph this place found him even there, for in truth, it was beautiful; with hipped slate roofs, dormer windows and a three-bay pavilion. And that tower. So peculiar and awe-striking.

Tom brought Dominic to a halt and pulled his backpack around to the ground.

"Come on, Tom, this isn't a photo op," Sam grunted as the rest of them paused to watch as Tom took his film camera from his bag and removed the cap.

"I'll be quick, I just...this place." He couldn't explain it and nor did he believe any of them would understand as he held the view finder to his eye and closed his left eye, adjusting the aperture and shutter-speed with the buttons and wheels on the old camera that had once belonged to his mother. After snapping several photos, he looked up to see them all staring at him. "Go on, line up," he grinned.

"You want a photo? Of us? Looking like this?" Anna hinted to the dirt and grime across her shins and clothes; the trail of crusted blood across her arm from a hit of a rock. Then to the others who looked equally as battered.

"We just won an epic rock battle. Of course we need to photograph this moment," Tom beamed, searching around him for a place to position his camera.

Meanwhile, his friends reluctantly lined up, the asylum behind them. Setting the time and the correct settings, Tom balanced his camera on an old log and rushed over to the group.

He crouched down alongside Elivia, grinning from ear to ear. He may be bruised and battered from the onslaught of rocks just fifteen minutes ago, but he felt alive. More alive than he'd felt in years. And all around him were his friends; old and new.

The clown, the merman, the crone, whatever It was, had thought by attacking them, It would make them fear It. So fearful in fact they would scatter. But it had had the opposite effect completely. It had brought them together, and together they were strong. Stronger than ever before and they weren't afraid. Far from it. They were full of hope and nothing could destroy that.

They crossed the sloping lawn down to the high brick wall which dropped onto Ashton Road, coming out by the West Lodge, which had once acted as the gate house for the asylum. It, like the main building, was a peculiar structure with that green slate steeply pitched roof, along with red sandstone bands and ashlar dressings. It was as ominous too, with a large carriageway in the centre and a smaller one meant for pedestrians on the right.

The group of friends gathered outside the gate house as the last of them climbed over the wall and dropped down to the ground. As Elivia joined them, she noticed that all seven of them were staring across the road up the street opposite to the large dilapidated house on the hill. It was large, sandstone built like most old structures in Lancaster; its windows and doors boarded over as it resided over the mental health institute next door. She wasn't sure what it was about this place but from the looks on her friends' unnerved expressions, it wasn't only her that didn't want to linger.

"Pathfinder's House," Dominic said for them all.

"Creepy as hell," Will muttered, his hand grazing Emily's as they stood close together.

"Why?" Elivia questioned.

"They say a little kid was killed in there. By teenagers," Erika explained. "They stole him from the street and took him there and –."

"Erika, please," Emily beseeched.

Erika nodded in agreement and fell silent.

"Dangerous place to be a kid, this city," Sam grunted.

"Nothing new," Emily said. "When Dominic and I looked, it has the highest abduction rate in the country. And unlike most places, these children never come home. And it's been that way for hundreds of years."

"You'd think people would stop living here," Anna mumbled.

“Everyone forgets,” Will spoke, his focus on the house unfaltering. “It’s like all the adults have amnesia or something.”

“Maybe It doesn’t just kill children,” Erika said, catching all of their attention. “Maybe It’s not just a creature, or at least not like one we’re used to seeing on television. But something stronger. Something more powerful.”

“We need to find out more about It, that’s for sure,” Dominic agreed.

“But how?” Tom asked.

They all began to speak at once, making suggestions and talking louder when one of them interjected. Soon, it was all just chaotic noise, becoming heated among some of them. Sam had had enough.

With a sharp, loud whistle, he silenced them. “I have a suggestion.”

“Go on, then, dickhead,” Erika snubbed, making Anna and Tom titter.

“Charming,” Sam rolled his eyes. “We’re kids, right?”

“Well spotted, you git,” Dominic scoffed.

“So what do we need to do?” Sam said, searching their faces with an expectant expression as if he wasn’t talking total nonsense. “Duh, we need to be kids. If we stand any chance of fighting this thing, whatever It is –.”

“A clown,” Tom said darkly.

“Okay, the clown – we need to not be afraid. So before we do anything else, I suggest we be kids.”

“How can we?” Elivia squeaked. “When that thing is all around us? Watching us –.”

“We get out of the city. We go to the beach,” Sam grinned.

“The beach?” Anna snorted. “Your great plan is to go to the beach?”

“Why not?” Sam threw up his arms, staring around at them all as they smirked to themselves and shook their heads. “Just one day where we’re just kids again. Restore some strength, some power and then we’ll be ready. Then we’ll hit him where it hurts.”

“Why are you so sure it’s a man?” Erika raised an eyebrow.

“Cos if it was a woman, Sam would have already tried to put his dick in it,” Tom teased.

“Ha-de-ha-ha,” Sam rolled his eyes as they all laughed at his expense. “Come on you cretins, tomorrow, we got to the beach!”

None of them declined the invitation. He was right, for once; they needed to be kids again. Find what was inside of them that made them strong. They couldn't be scared when they faced It. A trip to the beach was exactly what they needed.