

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 SIXTEEN

The Frontierland

They took their bikes and met at the bus station at the bottom of town. From there, they caught the number 100 bus to the bus station in Morecambe and cycled up Central Drive to the seafront. Most of the beaches on Morecambe's five mile coastline were shingle but further down to the shore it became soft, squishy sands that sank between their toes. With packed lunches made by Emily and money for drinks, the eight set out to have a wonderful day under the bright July sun.

The beach was busy with holidaymakers, dog walkers and other children their age; alive with happiness and colour from the windbreakers propped up in the shingles and the kites flying across the clear blue sky. They stayed in the shallows, Morecambe Bay's notorious undercurrents, quick changing tides and quicksand something they were all aware of. But none were interested in swimming, simply kicking their way through the surf, splashing water at one another in their swimsuits as if there wasn't a child-killing all-powerful creature hunting them down.

Just that morning, several of them had seen the news and the new missing posters printed over the old of Angela Higglestone, the latest child to go missing. Seven years old and swiped from just outside her house. It was getting stronger, more confident. But for one day, the eight losers wanted to forget. They wanted to be kids again.

Emily watched them playing in the surf as she sat on her towel further up the beach. She hadn't brought her swimsuit. The last time she'd worn it had been during the winter term when her class had been forced to take swimming lessons. She had tried to explain to her teachers her fear of water, begged Rupert to sign her out of them, but the adults had been adamant. She needed to know how to swim whether she was afraid or not. But it wasn't only her fear of water keeping her away from swimming pools and the cool surf of Morecambe Bay.

To wear a swimming suit would mean showing her bare legs and arms; her chest and torso in a constricting Lycra suit. No one wanted to see that, least of all Will. Or Emily, for that matter. She wasn't like the other girls. Not Elivia; tiny, petite and bird-like in her bikini as she danced through the surf. She didn't even have breasts to worry about slipping out. Unlike Anna, who was well endowed for a fourteen year old. But unlike Emily, Anna's breasts were forming naturally, not because she was overweight. Already, she had a curve at her waist and her skin was browning nicely under the sun. Emily didn't tan. She burnt. Looking to Erika with her pale skin, she wondered why her friend wasn't afraid of the sun. Then again, she was wearing more clothing than Anna and Elivia. She wore shorts with a

swimsuit underneath. Even so, her fair arms were exposed to the burning afternoon sun. Emily guessed that her friend didn't care so much for burning or cancer; not with those bruises and fading self-harm scars beneath her upper arms and at the tops of her thighs. Who would care about a little bit of sun burn when there was far worse that could happen to?

Emily's eyes drifted to the boys who'd teamed up to splash and chase the girls. Sam was racing after Erika, scooping her up into his arms and threatening to drop her into the waves. She screamed and cried for mercy, laughing wildly. It made Emily smile but the happiness didn't quite reach her eyes. She felt, once again, like the odd one out. Forever destined to observe this type of joy from the side-lines. Never to join. Even with these friends, Emily felt like an outcast; not totally with them even after everything.

Just as these thoughts were beginning to leave a sour taste in her mouth, Emily blinked up to see Will standing over her.

Water dripped from his bare arms. Unlike Sam, Dominic and Tom, he wore a vest and long swimming trunks that looked a little too small for him. Shooting her a bashful smile, he sat down beside her, knees bent and his long arms slung around them.

"You having a nice time?" Will asked, leaning forward ever so slightly, his focus switching back and forth from their friends laughing and playing in the surf, to Emily sitting tense beside him. She could never be fully relaxed around Will. Not Will Bennet.

She viewed him then. The growing size of his arms, the strength of his back – the welts. She averted her eyes quickly but he'd already spotted her expression. Horror. Shock. Erika had said Will came from a broken home with an alcoholic father, but Emily had never, not even in her wildest dreams, imagined how broken. It went to prove how naïve if she was still. Even after everything she'd witnessed, she was still shocked at the sight of those vicious pink and red lashings decorating Will's back.

He twitched uncomfortably, pulling his vest higher to cover those marks.

"I'm sorry," she stammered, "I didn't mean to –."

"It's okay," Will whispered, "You didn't do it."

"No," she murmured "Your dad?"

He nodded, eyes on the sparkling water. Across the bay, Burrow-in-Furness rose like a ragged-back creature from the ocean; curving around the north side of the bay and back around. To the north, the Lakeland Fells were a stunning sight. Sometimes, it seemed like Lancaster was the only place in the country with such outstanding beauty that stretched from country to city to coast. From the mountains, the moors, right down to the sea. It was a magnificent place and yet it held such darkness. Here on that beach, shuffling closer to Will, her eyes on the side of his handsome profile, Emily could almost forget the shadows.

"Why?" she asked.

“He gets drunk...completely ratassed. Then if I so much as speak too loudly, he’ll leather me.”

“Leather you?”

Will shot her a weak look.

Those were lashings from a leather belt, inflicted by his own father. Emily gave a small gulp of revulsion. Her disgust wasn’t for Will, but for his dad. For that monster. It seemed as if the clown wasn’t the only monster Will had faced and survived – so far.

“Where’s your mum?” Emily asked.

“Gone. She left when I was about four. Not seen or heard from her since.”

“You don’t have any other family?”

“I have an aunt, she lives in Wigan. But she’s young. Got kids of her own. She don’t have time for me.”

“Will,” Emily whispered, resting a hand down on his forearm. He flinched. “I’m sorry –.”

“Stop apologising,” he softened, taking her hand within his large ones.

Engulfed in his warmth and the smell of his bare skin, Emily wanted to lay her head down on his shoulder but stopped herself. Those types of actions, that type of affection, it didn’t belong to girls like her.

“I’m glad I met you,” Will said, turning his head to look at her, peering up through his long dark eyelashes with a small bashful smile on his lips.

Emily’s gaze lingered there, raising slowly up to find his cinnamon coloured eyes; warm like honey and beautiful like sun-drenched bark in the summertime. “Me too.”

For a few short moments, barely minutes, Emily and Will stayed staring at one another, sharing that same corner of the world where everything else seemed to melt away and in its place sat only them. In this little corner, nestled inside, they felt safe, untouchable from their tormenters, be that their bullies or Will’s own father. But all good must come to an end and Sam’s loud thunderous burp broke them out that special moment that they wondered if they would ever find again.

“Frontierland?” Tom scoffed, “It closed down like eight years ago.”

“Yes but they couldn’t afford to clear the place,” Sam said around a mouthful of his sandwich. “All the rides are still there!”

“Doesn’t that sound a bit dangerous?” Emily said with a nervous twist of her lips.

“Pfft,” Sam grunted, “And everything else we’ve done wasn’t?”

“Good point,” Erika smirked, “Alright then. We’ll vote.”

Sam stared around at them hopefully as all those for raised their hands. Only Will and Emily kept their hands on their laps, while the others grinned around at each other. Sam clapped his hands excitedly. “Come on then, you bastards, let’s go have some fun.”

In order to get into Frontierland they needed to climb through the tall construction fences that had been in place since the park closed in 1999. While some of the rides inside had been demolished or moved, most had been left where they were. As Sam had said, the park’s owners had been bankrupt and too poor to even clear the site. Morecambe council, who were just as penniless, decided to simply square off the park and allow it to be forgotten. But forgotten it was not.

Since being built in 1906, it had become a staple of the Morecambe seafront; its Polo observation tower to be seen from miles around like a miniature tacky version of the Blackpool Tower just down the coast. Within the park there had been many beloved rides such as the Cyclone, a wooden rollercoaster from a bygone era, later renamed the Texas Tornado. Built for the 1937 Paris World Expedition, it was moved to the park, named then the West End Amusement Park in 1939. Then there was the Log Flume, opened in the 1980s along with the revamp from the park’s owners to bring in more visitors. It had become a Western Theme and given the name Frontierland. It was ironic as since it was closed in 1999, it had become a western ghost town which the eight now climbed their way into, walking beneath the wooden archway where the cartoon mouse still announced ‘Frontierland!’

Sam wasn’t sure which rides had been taken or destroyed but as they headed into the park, dusk falling upon them as the sun set beyond the land mass of Barrow across the bay, walking further into the park under the shadow of the Polo tower, they came across the old log flume first; still intact, though rotting at its core. As they searched around, passing the row of Western style shops all boarded up and left derelict to age with the unstoppable force of time, they came across more and more rides from their youth. Passing the Haunted Silver Mine, Sam could still smell burgers and hot dogs grilling, and hear the laughter of the theme park and the ride clacking across the tracks. It brought about a deep nostalgic ache in his gut as he came to a halt by the abandoned tea cups.

“Sam?” Erika appeared beside him.

The rest of their friends had wandered off in numerous directions in twos to explore more of the deserted park. Sam was beginning to wonder whether this had been a good idea. The emotions this old place stirred was starting to make him feel ill. Suddenly, he couldn’t fathom why he’d thought this would be fun. This was like a can worms he never wanted to open. The deep seated happy memories of his youth he never wanted to revisit. What had made him come here?

“Sam?” Erika asked again, a hand on his shoulder.

He snapped his head around to look at her. With her long hair gone, sheared off at her jaw, her face appeared harder, older somehow. Tentatively, he reached out to caress those cut strands. Erika jerked away.

“Sorry,” he stuttered.

“It’s okay,” Erika mumbled, “I’m still getting used to it.”

“Did you have to cut it?”

“I fear if I hadn’t, it would’ve ripped my scalp from my skull,” she said this with such earnest eyes Sam knew he had to believe her.

It would stop at nothing. It was ravenous and stalking them like prey.

“Just as long as you’re okay,” Sam said, lowering his hand to his side.

Erika grasped it, surprising them both. She went to let go when Sam edged closer.

“Erika –,” he opened his mouth to somehow express these foreign feelings inside of him when a loud boom shook the ground they stood upon and silenced them both.

Carnival music piped out all around them; loud, tinny music with a slight drone to it as though it had been slowed down. The lights hanging from the rides switched on, a buzz of electricity sounding all around them. But that couldn’t be possible. There was no power running to this abandoned theme park. Neither Sam nor Erika could think about that then as they raced towards the sound of a howling laughter and a piercing shriek of fear.

All around him, the smell of popcorn, candy floss and hot dogs burned his senses. The teacups whirred around their old rusty tracks, there was the splash the log flume and the ticking of the haunted train running across its tracks nearby. None of this was possible but reality had long since gone out the window since the first time they faced It.

Ghostly laughter followed him and Erika as they ran toward the source of the screaming. Rounding the corner, they came to a halt alongside the rest of their panting friends with their ashen faces and hands gripping one another as the colourful stage in front of them lit up with bright white lights; its red and white stripes reflected in their wide terrified eyes. It was a circus stage; one where clowns and comedy acts had once performed during the summer. Now, dry ice washed across the dilapidated stage as the carnival music blared and the red curtain flew upwards to reveal the main act. The performance they’d all been dreading.

The clown.

It.

“Boys and girls!” It gurgled, laughing wildly as It leapt to the front of the stage in Its silver all in one, those puffy red buttons bobbing back and forth as It cackled and leered down at them all with those glowing yellow eyes. Grinning, It revealed those gruesome rotted teeth beneath its cracking white makeup. Its hair, just two red tufts either side of Its head, turned this way and that as It gleamed. “Boys and girls! Come, come! Come see! The amazing, the truly incredible and despicable – Pennywise the Dancing Clown!” It gave another howl of laughter and a high-pitched childish giggle as It flew to Its feet, jaunted from foot to foot, jingly as It did, white gloved hands on either of Its hips. “See him dance! See him laugh! See it *kill!*” It roared, launching to the edge of the stage, one clawed hand tearing free of Its glove and reaching for Tom.

“Tom!” Elivia shrieked, yanking her friend back from the stage and that giant claw; but not that of a beast or creature, but that of a crab or lobster, snapping at Tom’s neck as she and Dominic staggered back.

“Well?” the clown said, still leaning off the stage, that clawed hand dangling. “Isn’t this the part where you’re supposed to run?”

“Depends,” Erika said, standing at the front of them all, huddled and too petrified to move. “You gonna chase us?”

The clown gave another little giggle before Its jaw widened to reveal those razor sharp teeth. “Why of course! You always taste better when you run.” With one last booming roar, It jumped down from the stage.

“Fucking leg it!” Sam bellowed, grabbing Erika’s hand and racing away from the stage, their friends following close on their heels, and the clown never far behind.

Sam didn’t need to pull on Erika’s hand to get her to keep up. She matched his hasty, panicked pace as they raced down lane after lane of the abandoned theme park. Their friends had scattered, all in fear for their lives, grasping hands, sweat pooling on their skin, with only one thought on their minds.

To get out of there – alive. But with the clown snapping at their haunches, the likelihood of getting out of here at all was becoming less and less so.

Still, Sam ran, his fist tight around Erika’s smaller hand, holding his back with a grip he didn’t get a chance to appreciate. With his heart hammering in his chest, at the base of his throat, every breath strenuous and gasped, Sam could only think of getting to the fence they’d climbed over, onto his bike and getting the fuck out of there. But not alone. Never alone again. With Erika, with Dominic, Emily and all the others. They wouldn’t let It get them. Not tonight. Not ever.

It had been a bad idea to come to Frontierland, for a multitude of reasons that Sam would surely face the consequences of if they got out of here. But until then, he couldn’t dwell on his urge to come here. They simply had to get out!

“This way!” Sam hollered, yanking Erika down the side of one of the boarded up western style shops, turning off of the main path where the clown had been right on their heels, cackling and shrieking with triumph. Sam would make It feel disappointment; he did it so well with his father, he was practically skilled in the art of letting people down. And tonight, this thing, this It, would know disappointment as Sam and Erika reached the end of the narrow alley and faced a tall chain link fence.

Sam watched in awe as Erika began to scale it, the heels of her tatty old shoes in the small holes of the fence, her fingers clasping and pulling her petite body upwards. He daredn't climb it until she was down the other side; his weight would send them both off balance. And so he stood, his eyes dancing from where Erika was swinging her legs over the top, to the end of the alleyway, where that skittering, bone-chilling sound grew closer. Breath caught in his throat, Sam clung to the chain link fence, noticing then as Dominic and Tom appeared in the gloom on the other side.

“Come on!” Dominic roared, reaching up to collect Erika, who, while had seemed composed with Sam, now seemed to tremble and shake as she fell into Dominic's arms. “Sam!” Dominic turned to him then, Erika in his grasp, Tom at his side, all three staring wide-eyed beyond Sam's shoulder.

He didn't want to look. He didn't want to turn and see what had silenced his friends. What had turned Erika's eyes white, Dominic's body motionless and Tom's expression to pure terror. Sam didn't want to see it but knew he had no choice then as he gulped stiffly and crunched on the rubbish underfoot to stare up to the mouth of the alleyway.

It was here. No longer a clown but a great hulking crab with snapping pinchers that clung to the walls of the shops either side of the alley. Its beady black eyes glowered back at him from beneath the hunched rim of its bloody red shell. Its gulping mouth twitched hungrily, almost seeming to lick Its lips, if It had lips. Instead, it was just a hole, one Sam would be devoured by if he didn't move. If he didn't do something other than stand there and gaze at his own strange death.

“Sam!” Erika bellowed, the shriek chiming into his ears and breaking him out of his daze. “Please!”

“*Sam, please!*” the crab shrieked in a mimic, almost mockingly so.

This ignited something inside of Sam as he turned his back on the creature at the mouth of the alley and began to climb. A type of frustration that's origin he couldn't ascertain. Perhaps from deep in his memories...from a memory he'd tried to forget. One he'd been running from and running from still as he hooked his fingers into the chain link fence and hauled his body upwards.

The fence rocked under his weight; in and outwards it fell like lungs breathing, almost throwing him backwards into the path of the crab, of It, rushing Its way up the long narrow alley, half of Its body up on one of the walls, Its pointed legs stabbing into the wood and leaving great aching holes in the abandoned shop. But no one would care. No one would ever

care if one of those pointed legs stabbed straight through Sam. Not his father. Not his mother. Not his brothers. Not even the papers. He would be just another death in this morbid world. However, even as he thought this, even as he climbed, his body losing the fight against his exhaustion and fear, he stared down into Erika's wide terrified eyes.

“Sam! Climb!” she screamed.

Flashes of light bounded off the tall wooden walls of the buildings surrounding them. Tom was snapping away again and again at his camera, an awful hissing noise radiating from behind Sam as the crab wailed and the hot smell of cooking flesh burned in Sam's nostrils. It slowed It but it didn't stop It. It was coming and in a matter of breaths, It would be upon Sam.

Grasping the top of the chain link fence, he daren't look down or back as he swung his leg over the top. From here, he could see the rest of their friends at the mouth of the opposite end of the alley. Anna's golden hair. Will's tall stature. Emily's round one. Elivia's hair as white as the moon which now shone down on them. Down below, Sam still only saw Erika, illuminated by each flash of Tom's camera, those eyes, pleading with him –

Sam, please!

She would care. Erika would care if he gave up. If It caught him. Devoured him. She would care and for the first time in Sam's life, he understood what it meant to matter. Not just in a court of law, not just in another argument between his parents, and not just as a cross on a pregnancy test fifteen years ago, but to truly matter. To be missed if ever lost.

Reaching into his pocket, straddling the top of that fickle chain link fence as the crab, the clown, whatever It was, skittered closer, practically salivating with Its triumph, Sam found two things. One was his token; the thing he had kept in his jean pocket ever since his fingers had found it. A hair scrunchie. Simple, black, old and the elastic almost gone. It was Erika's and he had taken it from her bedroom that day they'd cleaned her bathroom. She wouldn't be needing it any more, her hair too short to need this scrunchie. But Sam needed it. It gave him strength. It gave him hope. It filled him with light, banishing back the shadows as his fingers found the other item.

Upon buying drinks for all his friends earlier that day with money he'd swiped from his father's wallet, he'd also bought something else. Bang-Snaps. A tiny little box of novelty fireworks that one threw to the ground to make crackles and bangs. Made with a minute quantity of silver fulminate, and gravel, this was a child's toy. Packaged in a small yellow box akin to a box of matches, Sam had played with Bang-Snaps as a kid; the type of toy only his father's generation of parents would deem appropriate. The noise of each one popping and cracking against the ground or wall or even in his own palm as delightful as the pop of bubble wrap. He hadn't owned a box for many years; there wasn't much cause for them anymore when he had porn and an Xbox. But something had made him buy that small pack of 'Fun Snaps', just twenty-five pence from the small off-license on the seafront. He'd tucked it into his pocket to sit beside that hair scrunchie perhaps waiting for this very moment.

For the moment when It reached the chain link fence, Its pincher snapping for him. For when Erika's screams became cries of agony. For when Tom's camera flash blinded them all. For when Sam opened that box and threw down a handful of those gravel packages, tied in cigarette paper like little white cherries, straight into Its face.

It recoiled with a howl, Its pointed toes clattering across the tarmac below, cans and decomposing cardboard sliding beneath It as It fell back against the wooden shack of a shop with a great thud. Sam couldn't believe it had worked. Staring down at the harmless-looking box in his palm, he was motionless as It released inhuman cries of pain, followed by an almighty roar. Tom was right; they could injure It. And if that was true, they could kill It. But from the looks of it, tonight wasn't that night and as Its pinchers fell away from Its crustaceous face, Sam knew he'd also run out of time.

"Sam!" Erika yelled.

Shoving the packet back into his pocket, Sam swung his right leg over the fence. With no time to climb, he leapt the nine feet to the ground, falling forwards on his haunches with a wince of pain. But no sooner had he fallen, Erika and Dominic were dragging him to his feet as the chain link fence gave way, the crab barrelling straight through it. Tom gave another flash of his camera before the four set off up the alleyway to the rest of their friends waiting for them.

Bursting out into another wide street of the desolate theme park, Sam stumbled only to feel Erika's hand in his, tugging him right with the others as they pelted toward the high blue construction fence which seemed even taller than when they'd first scaled it only an hour ago. At the back of the pack, Sam kept hold of Erika's sweaty palm as he reached once again into his pocket and removed several more bang-snaps, chucking them behind him into the face of that pursuing crab that galloped towards them, pinchers up in the air almost comically like two waving fists. The skittering of Its pointed toes across the tarmac and the hissing from Its gaping mouth were sounds that would scar Sam for the rest of his life. Deep in his mind, etched across his soul, he would hear It for years to come along with the pop and crackle of each of those bang-snaps as they smacked into the hard shell of the oncoming crab whose form was faltering all over again.

Slopping down to the ground in a slither, It was Emily's merman, howling like a banshee as It reached out a scaled hand, almost touching Erika's ankle. With a guttural growl, It flipped forward into Dominic's monkey; Its cymbals crashing against the ground with each pace that began to close the gap between Sam, his friends and It. And as the first of them reached the construction wall, helping one another upwards and over to the top, It staggered into Will's rotting hobo; one side of its mouth gaping open to reveal Its rows and rows of razor sharp teeth.

"Sam!" Erika yelled one last time as she hung from the construction wall, Will and Dominic at the top reaching over.

This time, Sam didn't hesitate as he leapt onto the wall with such strength and force, it shocked him. But with this much adrenaline pumping through his veins, making him no doubt positively irresistible to this monster, which had quickly morphed back into the clown as It made those final steps towards them and the construction wall, Sam didn't question his abilities as he hiked Erika up the final few inches by the back of her hoodie and pulled himself up the rest of the way.

With a clatter and an oomph, he found himself on the damp grassy ground on the other side of the construction wall, tangled with Erika, Dominic and Will. But they didn't have time to nurse their bruises or swollen limbs as their friends helped them to their feet and over to their bikes. Leaping onto his own, Sam beckoned Erika onto the back of it. Unlike this morning when he'd offered – since she'd had to leave her bike behind at the apartment block – Erika didn't hesitate. She hopped onto the parcel shelf behind his saddle and wrapped her arms tightly around his waist as he went to pedal forwards. Just as he did, he caught sight of Emily fiddling with her helmet.

“Leave it, Emily!” he roared, the construction wall behind them shuddering as It rammed against it again and again. It was all charade. If It could change Its form, It could have become Sam's statue and flown over that wall. It didn't need to catch them this time. There would be more opportunities to taste their flesh. That Sam could be certain of. Until they killed It, once and for all, It would keep hunting them. But if Emily didn't hurry up, It would be able to tick one off Its list.

“But you have to wear a helmet when cycling on the road!” Emily wailed around at the rest of their friends perched on their bikes, ready to leave.

“Emily!” Will shouted this time, tearing the helmet from her hands and pushing her onto the bike. “Go!”

“I didn't do a three week cycling proficiency course to ride without a helmet!” Emily said, about to climb back off her bike to reach for her helmet when this section of the construction wall came crashing down.

Once again, all eight of them were faced with the clown. It didn't even look out of breath as It stood with Its hands once again on Its hips, that beaming gruesome smile shining back at them as It cocked Its head and tutted.

“You're very right, Emily, It's dangerous to ride without a helmet. You might fall and die. And we wouldn't want that, would we? It's me that's going to kill you – squeeze your big brain from your skull and feast on its sinewy flesh. Me! So wear a helmet! I want you all intact for when I scoff you whole!”

No one need speak as Emily left the helmet behind and pushed off on her pedal, the group cycling away as fast as their thighs and calves could pedal, the sound of Its laughter following them all the way up the street, but no more.

They pedalled with a screech of their brakes around the corner at the top of the street and onto the main Marine Road which ran along the seafront. Looking back, Sam saw Erika first, still grasping onto him, her face buried into the back of his neck, and then, he saw the empty road. It hadn't followed. It didn't need to. Just as Sam had said back in Erika's bathroom upon seeing the blood smattering every inch of that dingy room, It was messing with them; testing them, stretching Its legs, challenging Its own abilities. It was pure luck they escaped It tonight; Sam's bang-snaps and his friends all working together to escape It. Pure stupid luck. But it would run out soon and as Sam pedalled away, one hand lowering to his stomach where he found Erika's fist tightly knotted in his sweat-sodden t-shirt, his friends cycling ahead, their puffs of breaths echoing off the Victorian townhouses which faced the Bay, Sam knew that it was only a matter of time before It devoured them all.

Unless we kill It.

It was no longer a matter of 'if' but 'how'. And for that, Emily and Dominic had the answer.