

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

# TWENTY-FIVE

## The Ninth

On Tuesday morning, the body of Angela Higglestone was found by construction workers. She had been rested in front of the depilating fireplace in the 1910s mansion at the end of Pathfinders Drive just off Ashton Road. Opposite the asylum and a few paces from the mental health hospital. She had been partially cut up, missing both eyes and her tongue. Fully dressed in the clothes she'd been wearing the day she was stolen, Angela was first covered respectfully by a construction worker with a High Vis jacket and later, moved into a black body bag by coroners to be taken to a refrigerator in Preston. There, her parents would come to view her body carefully concealed beneath a modest white sheet. Her eyelids would be closed and her skin cleaned of the filth in which she was found covered in. Her parents, Sandra and Henry Higglestone will weep; collapse in on one another as a black hole opened between them. In an instant, any hope they had left of finding their seven year old daughter, a girl with more kindness in her little finger than most people possessed in their entire lifetime, a girl with ruby red ringlets that the pathologist would detangle before her parents viewed her, would vanish.

Angela Higglestone was dead. She was the eighth child claimed by the Clown. Ninth if you included Toby Johnson, which Dominic Johnson did.

Oh boy did he.

The police were no closer to catching the killer. A killer they would never find. Scratching their heads and answering urgent, pressing questions from the media and the people of Lancaster, all demanding an end to this season of terror. A suspect. A clue. Anything.

The police had nothing.

But the losers did. And it was time they acted. It was time they brought about the end.

The end of It.

On Wednesday, the eight losers met in Tom's grandparents' garage at the end of Dorrington Road. It had become a clubhouse of sorts. One that could be locked. An unassuming location for what they had planned.

On the wall, pinned up by Erika – who didn't worry about it being uncovered since Mal Right hardly ever visited his garage – were all the newspaper clippings, missing posters and a map of Lancaster with red pins for every disappearance and found location. Alongside it, Tom had pinned the photo of the eight; the photo which contained Pennywise. He had bravely enlarged it with the help of his grandfather who hadn't seen the Clown. Of course not.

Adults couldn't see it. Only the kids could.

Resting beneath this macabre wall of death, on top of a tool cabinet, was the dagger. It sat pride and place in this clubhouse for losers. Erika's attention hardly ever left it. She was guard of the Witches' Weapon. It was the only chance they had against It.

Spread out across the garage, the eight decided; it was time to visit Pathfinders House. The house seven of them had grown up fearing. Elivia, new to the area last September, was yet to understand the true terror of this decrepit building.

"It makes sense as the next step," Dominic said, seemingly hosting this meeting as he stood before them all, the noticeboard of missing posters and the map of Lancaster, covered in red dots like chicken pox, behind him.

"What? To deliberately put ourselves in danger?" Sam said. "Will can barely walk!" He pointed across to their friend sat on the sofa between Emily and Anna, one leg propped up on the lawnmower as Bruce, the cat, slept on his lap, snoring loudly. Emily had stitched the wounds on his leg the other night the best she could with needle and thread. Anna had found some old antibiotics in her mother's medicine cabinet. He looked perky but in no fit state to trek down to Pathfinders House and investigate.

"I'm alright. Bit stiff," Will said confidently.

"Poor soldier," Elivia teased to which Will blushed.

Only Dominic noticed the twist of jealousy on Emily's mouth.

"It almost got us on Saturday night!" Sam bellowed, getting to his feet to join an increasingly irate Dominic. "It almost got me, Anna and Erika again on Monday! Now you wanna walk into Its last known location and offer ourselves up on a plate? I mean – fucking hell! Why don't you just put up a sign outside the garage saying – *Kid Meat Here?*!"

"Coward," Tom muttered.

"Excuse me?" Sam rounded on Dominic's boyfriend perched on the end of the sofa. However, it was Dominic who spoke.

"Listen to me." He placed his hands on Sam's broad shoulders and peered into friend's scared blue eyes. "We have to do *something*. It will take another kid and this time it could be Anna's sister or Erika's! It could be Emily's siblings!"

"Adopted siblings," Emily squeaked.

Dominic ignored her, his focus entirely upon Sam. "It could be one of us." His focus danced away from Sam to where Erika was sat on the other arm of the sofa, smoking on a cigarette as usual,

seemingly uninterested in this conversation. He knew that wasn't true and when Sam looked her way also, Dominic knew he'd succeeded in convincing his friend. "We need to do this."

"Alright," Sam grumbled.

"When?" Anna asked.

"Tonight."

"Why tonight?" Emily questioned with a fearful look in her eyes. "And what about Will?"

"I'll be fine!" he insisted, to which Emily tutted like the mother hen she was. He gave her a small nudge, waking Bruce who gave an unhappy meow before falling quickly back to sleep again.

"I don't know," Dominic said, "I just – Erika?" She looked up from the spot on the floor she'd been staring at ever since everyone had arrived. This was now *her* garage in a way. The only home she had left. "Remember Pendle? That gut instinct you had? Well this is mine."

Everyone turned to look at Erika. She tapped the ash from the end of her cigarette and took another pensive drag. With an exhale, she twisted on her perch, meeting each of them in the eye. She finally came to stare back at Dominic who was practically beseeching with her. She was, for some reason, the unelected leader of these losers. If she said yes, no matter how the others grumbled, they wouldn't refuse.

He needed her.

"Okay," Erika said, stubbing her cigarette out in a mock ashtray plant pot on the floor by the sofa. "We go tonight. But on one condition."

"What?" Dominic frowned.

"We take the dagger and if It turns up, we end It once and for all."

"Once and for all," Dominic nodded. He glanced to the others who all seemed to sit up straighter in their seats; raise their chins and welcome this challenge.

Hopefully the last.

"Once and for all," Emily concluded for them all.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

## Pathfinders House

“Everyone got their tokens?” Anna asked, clicking on her torch.

“Bloody hell, Anna!” Sam winced, covering his eyes as the brilliant beam of the torch shone straight into his eyes. “Put it down, woman!” He pushed the torch away as Anna giggled, shining it back into his eyes. The two danced and struggled, tittering under their breaths as they wrestled for the torch.

“Quiet, guys!” Tom hissed, smacking Sam across the back of his head. One quick look around them told Tom that they shouldn’t be here. If the blue and white police tape wasn’t clue enough, the white lights of the mental health hospital across the road was. They could be caught at any moment. Not only trespassing on private land but breaking curfew. They had enough things to worry about without the police turning up.

“Are we really doing this?” Elivia said, shivering in her light cardigan, the beam of her slim torch bobbing in the treeline as she struggled to stay warm on that unseasonably cold evening.

“Yep,” Erika said, smoke from her cigarette trailing about her face made even paler in the moonlight. “Come on.” She marched away, up the incline of the overgrown lawn, leaving the seven to exchange nervous looks before quickly following.

Yes, they were really doing this.

Tucked back from the view of Ashton Road and the security cameras of the mental health hospital, Pathfinders House was a place deeply rooted in the youth of Lancaster. Since their first days in primary school they’d all heard the stories about this place. Akin to the ones told about the woods at the end of Dorrington Road, rumours of the occult, ghosts, drug addicts and even some of the patients released from the asylum across the road ten years ago. These were all stories that swirled around their minds as they ducked beneath the police tape flapping in the cool breeze and drew closer to the sandstone house; its windows and doors boarded over with great squares of chipboard.

It was though a rotting body had been left to decompose on this land. It was an affliction to the eyes, slowly falling to pieces beneath the weight of time. Forgotten and left to be reclaimed by the nature creeping in around it. But for some reason, even the overgrown grass came to a halt around the property’s boundaries. The trees grew away from the building and as the night came to a halt at the edge of the grass, staring up at the house looming over them, the night was silent. Not even the noise of the city could reach them here.

“We stick together,” Dominic said, holding his torch in one hand and grasping Tom’s fingers tightly in the other. “We don’t split up. This isn’t a cheesy horror film.”

“And don’t die,” Sam said.

“Obviously, Robinson,” Anna groaned.

“Just saying. Ole Willy over there almost got himself killed on Saturday with his heroics.”

“I –,” Will went to defend his actions when Tom cut in.

“Stop it. The bickering ends now. We’re a team. A family.” He took Elivia’s hand and almost instantly, her trembling stopped. “And family means no one gets left behind.”

“*Lilo and Stich*,” Emily smiled.

“Ohana,” Erika whispered.

A hushed, peacefulness fell across the eight as they prepared themselves for whatever would happen next. They vowed to stay together and, as Sam had said, *not die*. Though the last one none of them could promise.

“As affectionate and gooey as this moment is, shall we get on?” Sam said.

“Go on then, big man,” Erika said, flicking away her cigarette.

“No, no, ladies first,” Sam mocked, gesturing to the house.

“Fine.” Once again, Erika stomped away. Without a torch, she disappeared into the darkness, moving around the side of the house.

She wasn’t alone for long. Soon, she was engulfed in bobbing torch light as the others joined her and came to a halt at the back door. An entry point Erika already knew was weak; it was now gaping open, evidently from where the police had entered yesterday.

She had visited this place before; somewhere to sleep when her mother had kicked her out a few months ago. She didn’t care for the ghost stories of children. She had just wanted a roof over her head. However, she hadn’t managed to pry the door of chipboard away from where it had been haphazardly nailed into place. And perhaps it had been a good thing, knowing what she knew now.

“Here?” Dominic said, nodding to gaping hole in the house. There wasn’t a shred of light inside.

“Here,” Erika said, suddenly no longer as keen to lead the way.

“They didn’t even bother to secure the crime scene?” Anna tutted, the natural lawyer in her appalled.

“Why should they?” Emily said quietly, attracting all of their attention. “It doesn’t leave evidence. It doesn’t leave a single trace. The police have nothing.”

“No surprise there,” Dominic scoffed.

“Are we doing this?” Erika huffed.



“Alright, keep your panties on, *pauper*,” Anna said with a wink and without malicious intent as she patted Erika’s shoulder.

A truce seemed to have fallen upon the girls since Monday and without Sam and Erika’s bickering, the eight came together as one. Tonight, they would need to be a unit. If they stood any chance against It, they needed to be, as Tom had said, a family.

One against It.

Only then would they stand a chance.

Dominic went in first. He felt it was his duty, as Toby’s brother, the person to have started this all, to lead the way.

Erika went next, devoured by the darkness.

Sam watched her go and quickly followed, that scrunchie back around his wrist.

Anna followed without looking back for her best friend who cowered in the long grass outside.

Will hobbled in after her, Emily at his side, two in a silent agreement to not leave each other’s sides.

Finally, Tom went to go inside when he stopped upon noticing Elivia’s reluctance. Inside, the voices of their friends echoed throughout the house, their torch lights like stars in a fathomless night sky. It made the whole circumstance marginally less frightening. From the looks on Elivia’s ashen face, she didn’t feel the same. Stepping back, he took hold of her dainty shoulders firmly but with a gentleness he reserved solely for Elivia.

“It’ll be alright,” Tom said.

“It’s not that,” Elivia muttered.

“What is it?”

“I – well, everyone has a token. You have your camera. What do I have?”

“You don’t have a token?” Tom frowned.

Elivia shook her head. He thought for a moment and then reached into his jean pocket. He retrieved an empty film canister. He held it up between them, watching as Elivia’s face softened.

“I kept it. The film canister from that day after the rock fight. It felt – I dunno, special somehow. You have it.”

“Really?” Elivia took it carefully, holding it in her open palm and inspecting it with eyes of awe. “But it’s yours?”

“I’m giving it to you. As a gift between friends. As a symbol of our friendship. *That’s* something you can always believe in. Something you can always rely on,” Tom said, closing her small fingers around the canister.

"I've never had a *boy* friend before," Elivia smirked, colour returning to her cheeks.

"I'll be yours forever, Lil," Tom said, kissing her cheek warmly.

He didn't see it. Elivia wouldn't let him. But the power of that kiss, that film canister, that symbol, it filled her with all the belief and hope she would ever need.

"Ready?" Tom asked, holding out his hand.

"As I'll ever be."

Sam shone his torch along the rafters above their heads, the light catching the spiders and their webs, the dusty particles swirling in the air like lost little souls desperately trying to find their homes.

"Creepy," he murmured.

The eight came to a halt in a semi-circle around the fireplace. The same fireplace where Angela Higglestone was found just twenty-four hours ago. While crime scene tape cornered off this area, there wasn't a speck of evidence in sight. Or at least none the losers or the police could see.

"Who's that?" Anna asked, pointing her torch light at the dusty portrait above the fireplace; the only item of furniture or decoration in the entire house; or at least what they'd seen so far. Not that any of them felt the desire to explore.

"Lord Ashton, James Williamson. First Baron Ashton if you want to be semantic," Emily said.

"Who?" Sam grunted.

"He built the Ashton Memorial. Hence, *Williamson* Park," Will explained.

"Oh so he's the bastard that built that ugly piece of shit," Sam groaned.

"I like Ashton Memorial," Elivia squeaked.

"Me too," Emily nodded.

"Oh I'm sure it's lovely when you're not being chased by a murderous statue," Sam replied.

"True," Anna said. "Only *you* would be scared of statues."

"I'm not *scared* of statues. Well, no, I am now," Sam corrected.

"A Crone. A Merman. A Hobo. A Puppet. An Executioner. A Crab. And a Clown and yet yours was a statue," Anna teased.

"And a road sweeper?!" Sam exclaimed. "I mean, who's scared of *road sweepers*!"

"Ever had one coming at you wanting to eat you?" Elivia snapped.

“And a toy monkey?” Sam swung around to look at Dominic who was too busy staring at the dusty portrait of Lord Ashton. For that matter, Erika was also fixated on it, indifferent to the banter that had broken out amongst them. “What the fuck is that about?”

“Leave it out, Robinson,” Dominic grumbled.

“I’m just saying. Don’t you dare say shit about my fear when –.”

“Shut up,” Erika demanded.

While the rest listened, Sam did not. “I mean, *come on!* A road sweeper!”

“I said, shut up!” Erika hollered, silencing him once and for all.

Sam followed their grim gazes across to the portrait on the wall.

It was moving.

Not the canvas itself but Lord Ashton’s face. The painted features, over one hundred years old, began to morph and mutate. Slowly, the grey hair of the Baron’s head retreated into his skull and, at the side of which, two sprouts of red grew; sprouting out like great blooms. His moustache retreated too, his muted expression becoming that of a wide, gaping grin as the end of his nose became bulbous and bright red.

And all at once, it was no longer Lord Ashton staring back at them out of that antique portrait but the Clown.

Pennywise the Dancing Clown to be exact.

Still dressed in a shirt, tie and pin-striped blazer, the Clown grinned back at them all as the eight stood paralysed, their torch beams wavering and flickering the longer they stood there.

Then, It began to laugh.

Laughter which shook the very foundations of Pathfinders House; the dust and age falling through the cracks in the rafters above, and raining down upon their heads. The eight coughed and choked, the dust smattering their eyelashes and creeping into their eyes. They could barely keep them open long enough to see the Clown’s next move.

The ultimate move.

Two white gloved hands burst out of the portrait and came to rest on the crumbling mantelpiece. Finally, the eight could move; stumbling backwards in the fog of dust, reaching for one another as It climbed out of the picture and rolled effortlessly onto the wooden floor of the house. Bouncing up to Its feet, It jingled – though free of bells – as It stared at each of them in turn, sizing up Its target. Choosing who should die first.

“Erika!” Dominic bellowed. “The dagger!”

“*Erika, the dagger* – don’t think that will save you now, Dominic,” the Clown turned to him then and only Dominic.

Uncontrollably, he found himself staggering away from the rest of the group, instinctively edging back from the Clown as It stalked towards him, almost comically, on tiptoes and wearing the grin of a Clown and a Monster. Grasping the doorway to what had appeared to be the kitchen upon first arrival, the torch dropped from Dominic's grasp as he stared back at the Clown; into those yellow eyes. The same eyes Toby would have peered into. The last sight his little brother saw of this world.

The end.

*No! It won't have me too!*

And so while his friends stuttered, frozen in their fear behind the Clown as it moved closer to Dominic, he straightened. Perhaps it was insanity. Maybe it was bravery. Dominic didn't know what it was as he stuffed his hand into his pocket, grasped Toby's rocket and met the Clown's gaze. Stared straight into Its eyes and spoke.

"Do you think I'm scared of you?" Dominic said, a slight stutter to his voice that he couldn't control, no matter how much he willed himself to be brave.

The Clown's grin widened, revealing Its rows and rows of teeth, Its face distorting to make way for this gaping mouth far too large for this form's head. "I know you are...I can smell it on your skin...and –." The Clown gave a long inhale of the air, a deep growl rumbling at the bottom of Its throat. "– it tastes delicious."

It made a move closer when Dominic held up the toy craft; as if this small rocket could save him now.

"You won't have me too!" he roared, tears streaming from his eyes as the realisation of his imminent death took a hold of him.

The Clown cocked Its head to one side. With a playful chuckle, It shook Its head. "I will, Dominic. Just as I had Toby."

"No!" Dominic bellowed, his body trembling as the fear paralysed him. As the grief broke him in two all over again. "No!"

"Go on," It purred, "let me feast on your terror...*pretty please?*"

"No," Dominic squealed one last time as he felt himself toppling forwards...forwards...forwards straight into Its open arms.

*Toby...*

The howl was deafening. It split their eardrums leaving them ringing as Erika stabbed the dagger deep into Its back.

Dominic fell backwards into the kitchen, staring up from the floor as It shrieked and cried out like a siren. He covered his ears, grimacing through his tears as he watched It swing around to face the perpetrator. He didn't have the energy to call Erika's name. All Dominic could do was lie on that grimy kitchen floor and watch as chaos ensued.

*My friends...*

*My family...*

*These brave losers...*

Erika felt Its full force around her throat, tossing her across the room and sending her small body slamming into the window ledge. The edge of which caught her in the middle of her back, winding her and sending her forwards to her hands and knees on the dusty floors of Pathfinders House. Before she could consider fighting back, there was a loud crash as Sam threw the portrait of Lord Ashton down over Its head.

Still struggling with the blade stuffed deep into Its back, It wailed and writhed around and around as each of them took a bite. Anna sprayed her mother's perfume into Its eyes. Tom took photo after photo, the flash leaving burns across Its face. The others tossed their heavyweight torches at any part of It they could get at. Emily held that golden cross outwards, truly convinced that she would be protected. That she would not be harmed.

She was wrong.

In the chaos as It howled and screamed and Elivia tore the dagger from Its back in an attempt to stab It again and end this – *once and for all* – Emily dared to get close. And in Its panic, in Its desperation to flee, It chose Emily. And as she realised this fate, as she opened her eyes and stared back into Its yellow ones and knew It was her It wanted now, Emily threw up arms to shield herself.

Before any of the others could stop It, before Will could leap in front of her, It clamped Its jaw down on her left forearm.

And Emily screamed.

Pain tore through her body as It chewed down on her arm, each of Its teeth piercing her skin as It sucked thirstily on her blood bursting from her veins. Falling backwards into the bannister of the stairs, Emily saw it all.

*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen.*

*Emilia? Where are you?*

*Say please, Emilia, there's a good girl.*

*...three, two, one! Ready or not, here I come!*

*Put your seatbelt on, Emilia, there's a good girl.*

*Callum be careful – please, the rain! The roads!*

*Will you shut the fuck up!?*

*Mum? Mummy!*

*Be good, Emilia and good things will come to you.*

*Mummy!*

Emily saw it all flash before her eyes as It bore down on her and shook Its head from side to side intending to pull the flesh from her very bones. The pain danced in spots across her eyes as her mind threatened to give up; as her body screamed in agony and Emily knew that this was it.

She hadn't died that day in the car crash for she had meant to die here. In the jaws of It.

And as she stared into Its yellow eyes, triumphant and satisfied, sucking on her blood, Its teeth tearing the skin from her arm, Emily felt okay.

*Time to go now, Emilia.*

*Time to come home, there's a good girl.*

But she'd forgotten one thing.

*My friends...*

*My family.*

*I have friends. A family.*

*And that always counts for something.*

Something else tore through Emily then. A power of sorts. A foreign one. Perhaps the same one that had saved her that night when she was ten. Perhaps the same one that had led her into the woods at the end of Dorrington Road. The same one that had awoken her that night all those weeks ago and told her that someone she cared about was in danger – told her that she needed to be brave. Emily had always believed that little voice to belong to her mother. But she doubted it now as a new voice whispered to her...the voice of something else...something more powerful...Perhaps even more powerful than It. And its words?

*Do it, Emilia. Do it now.*

Ripping the cross pendant from the golden chain necklace, Emily stabbed the point of it into the right temple of the Clown. A shocking white light burst out from this tiny crack, expelling her cross and sending it across the floor. Much to her relief, Its jaw sagged, releasing her arm. She collapsed back on the floor and watched through the black spots across her vision as It gave another piercing scream and slithered off of her. In the background, her friends were silhouettes dotted across the room. In the small seconds that had passed since It had attacked her, they'd barely had a chance to move. She'd acted quickly but in her mind, it had been hours. Looking down at her arm, she subdued a wave of vomit at the gruesome sight.

It had her. Right there, in Its grasp, ready to eat her whole. Looking to the crack in Its temple still filling that dusty room with blinding white light as It screeched and wriggled backwards toward the open doorway and night beyond, Emily could hardly believe it. She had done that. She had finally done it. Stood up for herself.

*You're brave, Emily. Braver than you realise.*

In those last seconds before consciousness left her, Emily looked to Will who had fallen to his knees at her side. She grasped his hand as the lights went out, content in the knowledge she had finally found her courage.

“Elivia! The dagger!” Erika howled, pointing to the Clown as It slithered out the doorway.  
“Go!”

Leaving Will cradling Emily on the floor of Pathfinders House, the others rushed out the door, Elivia at the helm and the hilt of that knife grasped in her hand with intent. Intent to kill It.

With a stumble, Elivia lost her footing in the long grass. The dagger fell from her hand, leaving her to watch as It slithered backwards into an open manhole, Its yellow eyes the last thing she saw before the manhole cover slammed closed.

“No!” Erika howled, falling to her knees beside the manhole. She tried to pry it open, breaking her short nails. Tears streamed down her red dusty face as she banged her fists on the metal cover. Her cries of anguish filled the night air like that of a dying animal. Even when Sam tried to pull her away, Erika fought him off, still trying to open that manhole cover. She didn’t even stop when her fingers began to bleed.

Elivia sat still in the long grass, the dagger at the toes of her shoes, tears thick in her eyes. Numb to her surroundings, she heard only Erika’s screams and felt only her own failure. She didn’t need to look at any of them to know.

This was all on her.

They had failed. It had got away and the result? They’d almost lost one of their own.

They had merely wounded It. When would they get a chance again? And if they did, what would they do? The dagger had only injured It. The Witches had failed them. They had nothing left to fight It.

It was as It promised.

Impossible.

They were just kids. They couldn’t win. There was nothing they could do. It was over.

They had failed.