

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 THREE

## The Cloaked Saviour

Will closed the back door of his house carefully, wincing at the sound of the lock clicking into place. He listened, standing in the kitchen, stomach grumbling and his eyes darting to the fridge which he knew would be empty. From the living room along the hallway he could hear the usual cheers and monotonous chatter of a game show, which was the only thing that was ever on the television. His father wouldn't have it any other way. If Ashley Bennet was home, the TV was on and a game show was blaring out.

“That you, lad?”

Will cringed, one foot toward the fridge. “Yep!” he called back, a croak in his voice he could never clear when he was back in his house. In the house where shadows filled every corner. Where the smell of dirty dishes, damp walls, cigarette smoke and stale beer hung like a thick fog in the air.

“Get us a beer!”

Pulling open the fridge door, Will peered inside. It was nothing but beer. His father spent every pound he picked up from the Job Centre on booze. And if it wasn't booze, it was cigarettes, scratch cards or spending money on the 'dogs', as Ashley would call it. Gambling; just another one of Will's dad's vices. Just another addiction that had driven Will's mother from this pit of despair.

Grabbing the neck of one of the many beer bottles, his stomach gurgling hungrily even now it knew there was nothing to eat, Will closed the fridge door and traipsed down the cold hallway to the open living room door. He took a breath to prepare himself, though it was never enough. Every night was different. He could never predict what mood his dad would be in. Would Will receive just a grunt and a dismissive wave of Ashley's tattooed hand? Would he receive a slurred yelling lecture? Or would Ashley be just drunk and angry enough to give Will a matching black eye? Would Ashley be so deep within his own self-loathing that he would feel the need to take it out on his fourteen year old son tonight? Will never knew and so as he rounded the entryway, beer at arm's length, he held his breath.

Ashley ripped the bottle from his grasp. With a bottle opener attached to his belt – a belt Will looked at with a shudder – he cracked open the lid. The lid fell to the floor and joined its fellow caps on the pile on the stained carpet alongside an overflowing ashtray. Ashley was, as usual, reclined in a tatty old armchair, wearing his usual uniform of jogging bottoms and a Liverpool football t-shirt. Looking down, Will spotted his father's feet in their usual position up on the equally battered footstall; his ginormous feet practically bursting out

of his old socks as if the material could no longer contain the unstoppable force that was Ashley Bennet. This was where Will found his father every night. When Ashley crawled out of bed in the late afternoon, this was where he inhabited until the early hours of the morning when he would drag himself back to his bed drunk and seemingly content with his existence. He held no care for his son and Will didn't believe he ever had done.

“What yer looking at?” Ashley snapped.

“Nowt,” Will said quickly.

“Do yer wanna smack?! Get the fuck out of ‘ere, you useless shit!”

Will scuttled out of the room, narrowly avoiding the newspaper which Ashley chucked, which was a feather compared to some of the things his father had chucked at him over the years. Doctors, of course, asked questions, teachers too. How could one explain a broken jaw without telling the truth? That Ashley had smacked Will so hard he'd fallen into the mantelpiece of the fireplace in the living room? How could one explain a cracked rib without telling the story of the time Ashley shoved him into the kitchen counter? The dislocated elbows, the broken noses, the twisted ankles and sprained wrists. Ashley had a way of wriggling out of punishment each time. But then again, no one cared about Will Bennet. Who would care if one day his father hit him just a little too hard?

*Emily...*

A small sigh escaped Will's lips as he returned to the kitchen to scavenge for food. The hunger of his belly would be far worse if it wasn't for Emily and her cheese and ham sandwiches. He hadn't tasted anything like it in an age. He had savoured every mouthful and now, he salivated at the mere memory of them. But not only the sandwiches...

*Emily Fox...*

From the moment he saw her tumbling down that steep incline in the forest, dark hair tousled and covered in leaves, her lip and chin bleeding, Will had been struck by this girl. This shy, round shaped girl with a constant terrified expression on her face. What did she have to be scared of? But, of course, he'd found out that very afternoon. Of what Emily had experienced; losing her family in that horrific crash. And those bullies? It wasn't fair. Someone like her, someone so smart, so beautiful, needn't be scared. Will would make sure of it. Like a shield, he wanted to stand against all that frightened her, all that threatened to harm her and keep her safe. Keep her safe the way no one could keep him. He may have only known her for little over twenty-four hours, but he had known the moment she met his gaze yesterday afternoon, wearing her school clothes, grazed knees and palms, her skirt tucked into the back of her tights, that he wanted to protect her. He felt an undying urge to keep her safe. No harm would come to her. Not while he was around.

After scavenging the cupboards, he found a handful of dry, soft biscuits that had once been custard creams. Somehow, Ashley hadn't already scoffed them and so, after making a

cup of tea, black and sugarless – he daren't use his dad's milk or sugar (he would notice) – Will headed out into the back garden.

It wasn't so much a garden but a narrow rectangle concrete yard with an old outhouse at the end that had once been a toilet and now stood derelict and crumbling down on the cracked paving stones where weeds fought their way through. Will sat on the brick wall to the side of the yard, sipping on his tea and savouring every mouthful of biscuit. It didn't matter that they were soft or dry. They were sweet and filled his aching belly, the tea soothing the unsettled grumbling. He made it last; every bite, every swig. The tea was stone cold by the time he swallowed the last mouthful. It was also now dusk.

After saying goodbye to Emily, Will had gone down into the woods by himself to their den. He didn't like to return home until it was almost dark so he could sneak in the back. It was also so his father would either be drunk enough to be unconscious or too intoxicated to fight him. Even with the curfew and the posters of the missing children littering the streets, Will braved it. A child kidnapper didn't frighten him as much as his stone cold sober father. When the sun had begun to set and the forest had come alive with night noises and the sound of laughter from older teenagers, he'd snuck back out and pedalled down Dorrington Road, being sure to keep to the alleys and shadows. Though he didn't like the alleys much.

Ever since he was a child and his father had punished him by locking him out in the alley at the back of their house, Will had despised the dark, dank, dirty places. Narrow, foreboding, silent and completely cut off from the rest of the world. The alleyways which ran along the back of the rows and rows of terrace houses belonged to the bins, the cats and the weeds. Not a place for little boys who had wet their beds. Not a place for small children who had cried because they were hungry. And yet, Will had spent many cold hours shivering in the alley; until his tears froze or dried and he realised that crying would get him nowhere.

Alleyways filled Will with a sense of dread. While he was fourteen now and much too old to believe in things that go bump in the night, as he sat on the low brick wall in his yard, his eyes dancing to the high garden gate which just clung to its hinges, Will couldn't help but remember Emily's words.

*Do you ever see things that aren't there?*

He gulped and dragged his eyes away from the gate.

*Yes...but that's exactly it. They aren't there.*

Taking his empty mug, Will headed back into the kitchen, closing the back door behind him.

“Shut that door any louder, lad?!” his dad hollered from the living room.

Will flinched. For a single second, lost in his thoughts that had slowly transformed to be consumed by Emily and her round face and chestnut eyes, he'd almost forgotten who he was and where he lived. For a single second, he'd been somewhere else. He'd been *someone*

else. Someone with loving parents. Someone who didn't need to fear his alcoholic father. Someone who didn't wonder every single day why his mother hadn't taken him with her. Why had she abandoned him? Why did nobody care?

“Oh and take those bottles out too!”

Will cast his eyes to the collection of empty beer bottles on the countertop. With a quiet sigh, he scooped them up into his arms and headed back out into the yard.

He came to a halt in the middle of the yard, eyes on that back gate. He envisioned the alley beyond. Full of impenetrable shadows. So often as a child, he'd imagined figures hunched behind the wheelie bins which lined the alley at the back of every house. It was silly of course. Who would be hiding behind a wheelie bin in his alleyway?

With a tut at his own childish thoughts, Will marched toward the back gate. He would not be scared by his own imagination. Yet when he reached for the latch, he hesitated. Something in his rumbling gut told him to go back. To leave the bottles until the morning. His dad would never know if he hid them behind the outhouse. It wasn't worth it...

*Don't go out there.*

“Stop it,” he hissed.

Yanking up the latch, he stepped out into the alleyway. Even with his demands for his mind to be silent, his heart continued to thunder in his chest.

Clutching the bottles close, he stepped down onto the jagged paving stones where weeds and grass sprouted up in between the overgrown mess. He was wary mostly of dog and cat poo which often littered these alleys along with rubbish and rotting food. His nose wrinkled at something foul as he approached his house's wheelie bin. Beside it was the recycling box. Every other Tuesday the bin men carted off the evidence of Ashley's addiction. The bins had only been collected last Tuesday but already, it was overflowing. So instead, Will dumped them into the wheelie bin. He hated litter and just the sight of discarded crisp packets and cans strewn up and down the alleyway irked him.

With another tut, he cautiously stepped across to pick up a nearby drinks can. His compulsion for tidiness was all about control; that much he understood. Even with his broken home, he wasn't stupid and knew that he needed this control. And so he didn't try to stop himself as he collected up more rubbish around him, tipping it all into his wheelie bin. Further and further he widened his radius, picking up more and more litter with only one thought in his mind now. The fear had been replaced with this compulsion. It consumed him, blinded him even as he reached for a discarded tin and hissed from the sharp scratch that cut across his forefinger.

“Fuck,” he cursed. He went to stick his bleeding finger into his mouth when he thought better of it. He had touched a lot of grimy objects and God only knows what type of germs coated his hands now.



Shaking his hands, as if he could shake the bacteria away, Will straightened. As he did, his eyes caught sight of something else. But this wasn't litter. Nor was it the broken sofa that had been dumped along with a washing machine at the back of another house further down. No, this was a figure.

Just like the ones he'd imagined as a child; slouched against a wheelie bin a couple of houses down. Squinting, Will was motionless as he tried to make sense of what he was looking at in the thick darkness of the alleyway. Taking a step closer, he halted himself as the figure moved.

Paralysed to the spot, his exhale becoming a lump in his throat, Will viewed as the hunched figure fell forwards. For just a second, Will eased in the realisation it was just another drunk – like the one inside his house – but when the figure began to move toward him, he was filled with terror all over again.

He willed his legs to move, to head back to the gate but he was unable to even tear his eyes away from where the figure was slowly crawling towards him in an inhuman manner; its behind reared up like a child on all fours, its legs out behind it, propelling itself toward Will as its long arms reached forwards, pulling at the weeds with every step.

Finally, Will's exhale released from his throat and with it came the power to move again. Staggering backwards as the figure quickened, he reached for the fence, for the back garden, for anything to steady himself before he went crashing to the ground on his behind. He felt the shock of the fall ripple up his spine through his tail bone. Momentarily, the dull pain dampened his fear, only for it to come back to him like a punch to his face as the figure gave a whispered hiss...

*"William..."*

"No," he stuttered, his mother's words finding him then as the figure, now it was close, edged towards him.

It wore a tatty overgrown jacket like one of the homeless in town that hunkered outside of shop fronts. It wore fingerless gloves and where it should have fingers, it had only claws, ripping into the paving stones and weeds. Will panted for breath then as his eyes rose up to its grotesque face; covered in boils ready to burst, lipless and a rotting hole in its cheek. It sneered hungrily in his direction. So scared, Will couldn't even conjure a yelp as It closed those final metres between them. Its yellow eyes gleamed back at him. Will could finally see the peculiar red bow tie It wore around Its decomposing neck.

*"William..."*

"No!" he yelled, covering his eyes. "One...two...three...four...five..."

*"William!"*

"...six...seven...eight...nine..."



The shrill unmistakable sound of a cat's meow caused his hands to fall from his face. Then there was a vicious hiss followed by another long, drawn out shrill meow that echoed down the empty alleyway.

Empty. The homeless man was gone. Will was alone.

Not quite.

At his side, through his blurred vision, he saw a black and white cat. It was sleek with a glossy coat that shined in the lights from the houses on either side. It curved its way around Will's arm and looked up at him with a peculiar knowing expression. Still panting, Will sat up from resting on his hands and gently patted the cat's head, viewing the animal properly; its large eyes, long tail and patch of black along its back like a cloak. Over the cat's eyes was another black patch like a mask, and on its chin a small black goatee, just off from the centre. Staring down at it, all the while wondering if what he'd just seen had been a figment of his imagination – *but it felt so real* – Will viewed the cat's slightly boss-eyed expression. And yet still, it didn't appear stupid. Far from it. If whatever he'd seen had been real, the stuff of nightmares, this cat...this slinky, handsome cat had saved him.

"Thank you," Will whispered, stroking the cat around the back of its ears as it purred. "Thank you, Bruce."

*Bruce...*

*Yes, that's your name.*

With markings like Batman, a name like Bruce was the perfect title for Will's cloaked saviour. The one thing that had seemingly stood between him and what had felt like death.

*Do you ever see things that aren't really there?*

*Yes. Yes I do.*

Yes, he did. But this...*this* had been there. The rotting stench of It lingered in that alleyway. That was not his imagination. This was real.

But what did that mean? What did any of this mean?

Taking one last look at his dark knight, Will tickled the cat's chin and got to his feet. He didn't want to spend another minute in that alleyway.