

Jack Owens stood outside the Mayor of Coldgrove's home. The sun had almost reached the horizon. Little Willow, only seven years old was playing in the yard not too far away. There were no nice restaurants in Coldgrove, so dinner for three was reserved at "La Lune," in the next town, twenty miles away.

"Jack, sorry to keep you waiting," the Mayor said when he emerged from his home. "I'm afraid I'm going to be a bit late for dinner, you and Elsa go. I'll get there in the other car."

"That's okay with me Mr. Mayor." Jack replied. The Mayor's wife, Elsa, came out the front door, waved and said hello to Jack. They both climbed into his truck and drove off.

"What's happening to Willow while you two are gone?" Jack asked her, yelling over the roar of his vehicle.

"We have a babysitter, Willow loves her." Jack nodded, then returned his eyes to the road. The rest of the trip passed in silence.

When Jack's truck began approach the restaurant, he noticed that both sides of the street were jammed with parked cars.

"Looks like I'm going to have to park a bit farther back," he said.

When Jack stepped out of his truck, he didn't feel his wallet falling out of his pocket onto the car seat. They began to walk to the restaurant. The street lamps had turned on to light their path.

"Hey, I know a shortcut to La Lune," Jack told the Mayor's wife. "I think it's right up here." He turned left into an alley and Elsa followed. There were a few homeless people hunched against the sides of the path, making the two, with their dress clothes, a little uncomfortable. Then, out of nowhere, one of the homeless men grabbed Elsa. He already had one arm around her waist when Jack lunged for him but then stopped immediately. Raised in the man's other hand was a knife, which he held to her neck.

"Stop! Please," Jack searched for words. His hand reached for his wallet. Both of his pockets were empty. "I have money-" too late. The blade slid through the woman and she collapsed to the ground. The man dropped the knife and ran, leaving Jack

frozen in his place. Crouching down, he put his arms under Elsa and cradled her body, unable to wipe away the tears falling onto her face.

“Get OUT!” the Mayor was in rage. His breathing fluttered and his eyes were red at the edges.

“Sir... I tried, there was nothing I could do. He jus-”

“You’re out. You will never work for me. Leave, just leave so I can prepare a funeral for my wife. My Elsa!” Jack was shocked. The Mayor was being unreasonable, he’d tried, this wasn’t his fault. Jack had worked hard in school and through college for a job like this. His efforts were being thrown out.

“Please, Mr. Mayor. I’ve worked too hard for this. Don’t let your wife’s death get in the way with-”

“My wife is dead because of you!”

Jack ran out the door and didn’t stop running until he found that his arms were wrapped around a tree. There were trees all around him. A blinding light climbed into his head and he felt pain in his arms and legs. They were being pulled, stretched. Jack was no longer Jack. His anger was transforming him. He shook violently. His body hit the forest floor.

The girl looked into the slender man's eyes, but wait, he didn't have any. No mouth either. Just a blank white head. He wore a suit and was very, very tall. The girl couldn't break her stare with the man. She was locked in place, horrified. She could no longer see properly, static flickered through her body and his arms reached out.

The air was still. No wind, no breeze, silent. The stars looked so beautiful out here, Willow thought. There were so many. She jumped the chain-link fence and dry leaves and yellowed grass crackled beneath her feet. Her father’s words echoed around in her skull. All those warnings and bad explanations he’d given her of the dangers that lie in the woods. These woods that Willow stood at the edge of. Hundreds of slender, almost branchless trees were planted firmly in front of the girl. A tingle crawled from the top of her neck down to her last vertebrae as she began her walk into the dark.

The floorboards creaked under Father's feet as he crept down the hallway to Willow's bedroom. Something had been stirring in the house and he intended to see who or what it was. He slowly put his hand on her door handle and turned it. When it opened, bitter-cold air rushed around Father. He flicked the light switch and saw that Willow's window was wide open. His hand grasped the covers on her bed and flung them to the floor revealing no Willow. Father walked to the open window and his heart sunk. She was gone.

The day that Willow decided to take a stand against Father was a terrible date in her town, Coldgrove. Exactly two years ago, a fourteen year-old girl disappeared sometime in March and was never found. It was a shock for everyone young and old, but after a few months, people behaved almost as if nothing had ever happened. Coldgrove was completely recovered from the occurrence, when a year later, on the same day that the girl had vanished, a second teenager disappeared. The town grew gloomy and all the residents feared the fates of those two girls. Many families packed their bags and moved to other parts of the country. Coldgrove was now a scary place for most people. Father was once the Mayor of Coldgrove. After his wife's murder and the first girl's disappearance, he couldn't handle the pressure. A cloud of fear hung over the town, and especially Father. His daughter was a teenager and it was almost April.

"You think you can lock me up?" Willow was laughing and talking to herself as she walked. Her arms were covered in goosebumps, not from fear, but from the cold, and she didn't care. It felt wonderful, she was free from her father's clutches. No one could tell her what to do. Out here in the woo- Willow froze. Off in the distance almost out of sight, she thought she could see someone. Quickly, she darted behind a tree, no one could know she was out of bed, she'd get grounded for weeks. On the other side, pinned to the bark was a note. It read: revenge. She hugged herself to keep warm and then peeked around the side of the oak. No one. Willow continued to walk a little longer until she finally decided it might be wise to return home.

"I got a pocket, got a pocket full of sunshine. I've got a love and I know that it's all mine oh. Oh, oh no..." Willow stopped her singing and squinted to see what she thought was a human figure. Something or someone was on the trail ahead of her. "Hello?" She called out. Hopping off the main path, Willow started picking up her pace through the

shrubs, which scratched little lines and dots of red on her arms. Suddenly, she was not having fun. Her breath emerged from her lungs in deep puffs. Her heart-rate had doubled. Willow looked over her shoulder and there stood a man. Her legs were moving so fast, too fast.

The layer of skin that normally covers your knee-cap was gone when Willow stood up. Her arms were brushing off all the leaves that had caught on to her clothing. What was that noise? Willow's ears were screeching and it felt like knives were being jammed into them. Checking behind herself, Willow again saw the man. He just stood there, staring. Panic was setting in on Willow. Stick your finger in his eye, kick him in the crotch, punch his throat. She was remembering all the things her mother had taught her when Willow was younger... before Mother had died. Her eyes shut and she took a deep breath. Opening them, Willow noticed that she was once again alone. Nobody in sight.

Her legs ached and she now had to admit to herself that she was lost and exhausted. Maybe this act of betrayal hadn't been such a good idea after all. Then, for the second time, her ears and head were screaming and being clawed at by nothing. The figure reappeared ten yards from where Willow was standing, but when she looked away, the pain stopped. Each time she turned back towards the man, it returned. She whipped her body around and began to run again.

Stopping to catch her breath, she noticed another sheet of paper pinned to a tree. Willow grabbed it. In jagged, sloppy writing someone had written: *no eyes*. Willow was beginning to question her sanity. This was so messed up. Glancing up, she spotted another square of white. *Always watching*, it said. Now, more than ever, Willow wished she was home with her dad. She took a deep breath, another, she closed her eyes. When they opened, the most slender man she'd ever seen stood before her. He didn't move, neither did she.

A voice talked to Willow in her mind.

*Your father will pay for what he did to me. All those years gone to waste. I haven't seen you in so long I forgot what you looked like.* Willow gulped down the lump in her throat. *My first two tries failed, those girls weren't you. It still gave me pleasure when I killed them.* Her ears were ringing from the silence. *I'm sure your father will be*

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*delighted to know that he is the reason his daughter is missing. He is the cause. None of this had to happen, but it's too late now. I love this job way too much.* Willow was grabbed at the sides and she felt her life being sucked away.