

# Paranormal Activities Unit

by Chris Slusser

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Will was 23, disheveled, blond, on the skinny side, and wore glasses. It was early morning. Still dark. He was just getting started at his bakery job. Taking a break to go to the bathroom. The fluorescent lights were bright in the employees-only hallway of the grocery store. Everything was quiet, except for the buzz of a malfunctioning fluorescent bulb at the end of the hall. Suddenly Will heard another sound from behind him. Footsteps. Creepy. Not walking normally as a person would walk to get from point A to point B, but sneaking, tip toeing. But not doing a good enough job of it. Like they weren't really trying to hide the sound, and didn't care if he heard. Maybe even wanted him to hear. They were close now. Too close. Invasion-of-personal-space close. Will was tired, but he stopped to turn around to confront the freak who would pull a stupid prank like that at this hour.

He turned. Strangely, it was no one he knew. Not a high school friend, not a bored co-worker. It was a young man, unshaved, messy brown hair, jean jacket. Handsome. And looking at him very intently, with a small mischievous smirk on his face. Will got the impression he was after something not so much of the prank variety and more of the sex-with-a-stranger-in-a-public-bathroom variety. He was immediately tense.

"Uh..." Will managed to get out, "You know, customers aren't really supposed to be back here."

"I know," the man said with a gruff smoky voice. He kept staring.

"So, maybe you should get back to the store now," Will

said nervously, because the man was at this point starting to lean in closer.

The man said nothing, only smiled and kept moving closer to Will, put his hands on Will's upper arms, and leaned his face toward Will's.

Will leaned back to avoid the man and, clearly shaken, he tried again, even while practically doing a backward somersault to politely avoid the man, "You know, I really don't feel *that way* about men, so..." But by now the man had actually leaned into his neck and began sucking on it! Will struggled, but the man held his arms tightly. All politeness now gone, Will yelled, "Hey, get off me!"

But then something new happened. Something unexpected and bizarre. The man bit into his neck! And with teeth sharper than a human's should be. Well, sharper than anything but a shark's would be, he supposed. Then he wondered why he was analyzing it so much as the man bit deeper into his neck. There was a searing sharp pain and Will could feel warm wet liquid flowing out of his neck. The man was lapping it up, sucking up every last drop that escaped Will's body.

Will was so shocked he couldn't really move. He did manage to let out a little yelp, though, as he began to lose consciousness and slid down the wall with the man still on his neck sucking away.

At that moment, his boss came around the corner from the office, looking at paperwork. He was blurry in Will's eyes.

"Will, I was wondering if you could work next Tuesday, and take Friday off instead. Stacy has to go to a—AHHH!" He screamed as he caught sight of Will on the floor, with a small pool of blood forming next to him. Will sank into the oblivion of unconsciousness.

The strange sharp-toothed man had gone.

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Will woke to a ring of bright lights in front of his eyes. Blurry at first. Then he noticed they surrounded a man's head. The man was staring down at him. He looked bored.

He was middle aged, wearing a suit and tie. As soon as the man was sure Will was fully awake and able to understand him, he began to speak, in a clearly bored voice, "You were bitten on your neck. You lost a lot of blood and were brought to the hospital. You had a transfusion and stitches." He paused for a moment, then continued. "I'm a part of a secret organization that trains field agents to trace and correct supernatural anomalies. We are searching for agents to work in this area, your town. I understand you have a wife. The two of you could do the job together. If you are not interested just let me know and I'll erase your memory and it will be as if we never met or had this conversation."

Will stared up at him with a dazed look on his face. He said quietly, "Am I dreaming?"

After a pause the man said, "No."

From a distance Will heard the sound of flip flops slapping the tiled floor of the hall as someone ran. He knew it was her. He recognized her footsteps. Emily rushed into the room, her face suddenly hovering over his as the suited man moved to another part of the room.

"Will! Are you okay? They said you were bitten by something and taken here and lost a lot of blood, and—oh, my God—look at your stitches!" She gasped. "Gruesome! Poor baby..." She put her hand to his cheek. He gave a weak smile.

Emily was a tomboyish sort of girl. Twenty three years old. Skinny, cute face framed by a wash-and-go basic bob with bangs. Her brown hair hung down toward his face as she smiled contentedly, happy to be with him and able to see the damage for herself and that he would heal. She stroked his hair. The serene expression lasted for about 30 seconds and then slowly turned to confusion and slight annoyance as she became aware of the suited man standing on the other side of Will's bed, staring at her. Eventually she looked up to stare back at him with curiosity.

"Doctor?" She asked.

The doctor was standing near the door in a lab coat and answered, "Yes?"

She glanced at the doctor, then back at the suited man,

"Cop?"

Will coughed a little, then realized he shouldn't do that and moaned because it hurt. Emily patted his head.

"Lawyer?" she said now to the man in the suit, really at a loss.

The suited man simply answered, "Here's my card." He handed it to her then left the room. The doctor followed him.

She looked down at Will with her eyebrows raised and a questioning expression on her face.

He looked back at her, pondering things for a moment. "Don't look at me," he said finally. "There's a good chance I'm dreaming or hallucinating from the drugs."

She nodded thoughtfully. Of course.

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Will and Emily sat nervously on a pea soup green vinyl couch in a one room office in the industrial section of their small Montana town. It was probably a comfy couch if you leaned back into it, but they were on the edge of their seats, literally.

The suited man from the hospital had just invited them into his office. Out of curiosity, they had decided to hear his strange offer. His card told them his name was Mr Dorand. That was all. A grumpy gray-haired woman in jeans and a flannel shirt had let them in and asked them to sit down. She was now in an adjoining room typing away. Finally Mr. Dorand wandered in, carrying a cup of coffee in one hand and files tucked under his arm. He looked at them as he came in, with half boredom and half smirk on his face. A look a magician might have before showing you what he thinks will be an awe-inspiring trick. But maybe Mr. Dorand had done the trick so many times, no reaction could truly surprise him.

He set the files down on a desk across the room and took a sip of the coffee. Then he set that down too. Then, like a professor, he began a lecture with a sort of rushed "let's just get this part out of the way" kind of voice. No greetings, no introduction.

"In 1996, the United States government released a technology it had been working on secretly for decades. The purpose of the technology was to attract extraterrestrial life forms to us so we could study them. Since 1947 and Roswell, the government has had and studied alien technology and biological entities. The new technology was a small stamp made up of nano-transmitters, held inside a special ink that magnified and protected their function. It was discovered this stamp was fairly inexpensive to make in bulk and the stamp was placed inside many different objects in production at the time: microwaves, pianos, DVD players, couches, lamps, TV's, whathaveyou. It was believed this project was just an experiment, with small chance of success, but a worthy endeavor, nonetheless. It had a side effect we could never have predicted at the time. Being men—and women—of science, we of course had no thought to paranormal things, such as ghosts, goblins, werewolves, demons, etc.

"Instead of attracting aliens, our carefully laid out program attracted something else. Paranormal creatures of every type and variety, and in droves. By the time it was discovered what the cause of the activity was, it was too late. Production and stamping of the technology was halted, of course, but now we needed a way to stop the onslaught of supernatural attacks and occurrences on our world." At this point Dorand paused to glance at the two listeners, to see how they were reacting to this news.

They sat on the couch, dead still, both with their mouths slightly open, with looks of incredulity and curiosity on their faces. They didn't completely believe quite yet, but were so engrossed in the story, they couldn't not hear the end. They endured his pause in the story with expectant silence.

Dorand loved this part of his job. The part when it became clear his listeners were entranced. He continued. "A recall was out of the question, of course. There would be no way to explain it. So many different types of product, and on such a massive scale. The expense would also be ridiculous. The best we could do was create another project, meant to cover up the unfortunate effects of the

first. This necessitated the creation of another branch of employment within the secret agency that governs this project and those of its type. Paranormal Activities Unit. Formerly called Paranormal Unit, or PU. A name which fortunately was changed fairly quickly because of extreme embarrassment." At this the couple gave a small distracted chuckle, still engrossed in the story. "The Paranormal Activities Units, PAU's, are charged with finding paranormal activity where it may occur, stopping or redirecting it, and erasing the memories of any witnesses to such events. The PAU must work in secret, and any unusual activity or methods used to halt such activity must also be kept a secret.

"To this end, we have developed a few types of new technology. Objects meant to facilitate the finding of, and managing of, paranormal activity. Any questions so far?" He looked at them with eyebrows raised, as if he expected none, as usual. He was not surprised. Will shook his head quickly and Emily said a quiet "No." Both still looking at him like children gathered around someone reading a delightful children's book.

Dorand paused for a moment to clear his throat and take another sip of his no longer piping hot, but still warm, coffee. He took a breath, and continued.

"Along with countless ancillary devices, there are four basic tiny machines you will need to know about and use in your work, if you choose to accept positions in a Paranormal Activities Unit, which is what I'm offering you today. The first is a Paranormal Activity Alarm. Very sophisticated. Meant to be set up in your home, but also portable. A small alarm that sounds like a music box goes off when paranormal activity is detected in the area of your jurisdiction. The music box sound is meant to hide its true nature from those not in the know who may be in your home at the time. The alarm will also display the geographic location of the anomaly, longitude and latitude, so it will be easy to find. Taking the alarm with you will also show you your location and help you locate the site of unusual activity. The second piece of equipment is this." He actually walked around his desk, opened a drawer, and



pulled out the strange object for them to look at this time. It looked sort of like a black shoe horn, but thicker, and with a few tiny flashing lights at the top. "This is—" At this point Will burst out laughing.

Emily looked startled, but then smiled at her howling husband. He was doubled over, laughing uncontrollably. Tears streaming down his face. Em laughed a little too, but mostly stared with wonder and a little worry at her hysterical husband.

Will finally came up for air, and looked at them both, "I'm sorry," he said, still chuckling. "I just can't believe I listened to it this long. But the techno shoe horn—oh, my God," He started laughing again. "I just can't believe we are sitting here listening to this story. For a moment I forgot I wasn't in a science fiction novel. That is a classic touch, though, really, the gadget."

Emily looked a little sheepish now for believing in the story too for so long. Dorand looked unaffected by the outburst. It was one of many reactions he'd seen to this tale since the project began. He merely looked from one to the other and said simply, "Shall I go on?"

Will tried to suppress his laughter and said, "Yes, of course." He leaned back into the comfy couch now, as Emily had done moments before, both comfortable enough now to relax in this strange man's office, for some reason. Will let out a few more suppressed snickers as Mr. Dorand continued his unusual tale.

"This," Dorand held up the shoe horn gadget again, to Will's increased peeps of escaped laughter, "Is a Veil Sealer. The hum of the stamp technology creates tears in the veil between this reality and others, mostly the veil between this plane and the afterlife, or other side. Spirits, or ghosts, pass through these tears and become visible to living people. The spirits are encouraged back through the tear and the tear is sealed with this." He shook the sealer for emphasis, then set it down. "The Veil Sealer will also read life forms in the area, to tell you if you have missed any. But as of yet we have no machine that tells the difference between living and deceased entities. You will have to use your own judgement and experiences to discover this. As a

hint, I will tell you, ghosts have no physical presence and can be gone through. Walked through, wiggle your hands through, whatever." Will let a peep of laughter escape again, and Emily smiled at him.

Dorand grabbed another object from the drawer and held it up to examine it. "This," he said, "may be the most important of the gadgets at your disposal. It is a... tranquilizer." They looked at him with seriousness and renewed interest now. Who or what would they be knocking out? "Together with the Memory Eraser," which he quickly lifted from the drawer and waved at them briefly, a smallish box shaped object, "you will take memories of paranormal events from people's minds. So no mass panic will erupt, and no unnecessary public knowledge of our secret agencies' programs will occur."

They stared at the tranquilizer, which he still held in his hand. It looked like a small dull grayish metal squirt gun. But rounder, almost like an egg, more toward that shape. He knew he had their rapt attention again. More than ever before. He smiled. "A small pellet is discharged when the trigger is pulled. The pellet contains the tranquilizing agent and erupts just under the skin of the person it is fired at. The wound it leaves looks like a small insect bite. The drug works immediately. It gives the person the sudden urge to lay down, to avoid unnecessary injuries. Then they are unconscious. The effects last for 15 to 20 minutes. The drug also erases the memory of the person from just before the pellet hits them to just after they arise and take whatever position they were in before. Sitting, standing..." At this point he took another tranquilizer gun from the desk drawer, identical to the first. "Just to give you an idea of what this feels like—" He suddenly turned to them and shot them both at once. They immediately closed their eyes and slumped where they sat in the comfy couch. Dorand chuckled happily and set the guns aside, and went to eat his lunch.

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Emily and Will slowly came to consciousness again,

opened their eyes, and sat up straighter. They looked like they were in a daze. Then as if they were snapped on again, they were suddenly alert, and back to listening for the story to continue. Dorand was in the same spot, but no longer held the guns in his hand. 'I must have spaced out for a moment,' Will thought to himself. Emily had a similar feeling swimming in her brain. But she felt well rested. Why was that?

Dorand saw the expectant looks come back onto their faces and continued as if nothing had happened. "You were chosen because we had been surveilling and studying a number of people in the area, seeing who would be best suited for this job. But then you," he looked at Will, "Were bitten by that vampire and we decided it may as well be you who we made the offer to first."

Will looked incredulous and shook his head as if he hadn't heard right. "I was bitten by a what?"

Dorand looked surprised, "Oh, didn't you know you were bitten by a vampire?" Maybe Will had repressed the memory.

Will answered with another disbelieving chuckle, "I thought I was bitten by a psycho."

"Ah," Dorand said. Not repression, only denial. "Vampire, psycho. Potato, potahto." He shrugged his shoulders.

Will gave him a strange look.

Emily looked only slightly surprised by the news that it was a vampire. She still wasn't sure it was a real one. Maybe some crazy man who believed he was one? Pretending to be one? She sighed. This was becoming a long exhausting day. Brain-wise.

"The two of you are apparently good employees, smart, open to the odd and unusual, judging from your avid reading of science fiction novels and renting of science fiction DVDs."

The couple looked a little taken aback by this personal knowledge thrown back at them.

Dorand went on, "You have high SAT scores—"

Will interrupted, "You have our SAT scores? How did you get those?"

"Do you really want to know the boring particulars?" Dorand asked.

"No." Will slunk back in his seat and continued to listen, suspicious.

"We find that married couples make good teams. For us anyway. Mostly because people have a hard time not telling their spouses what they do at their jobs. Having both members of a couple working for us solves that problem." Dorand walked around the desk and opened the files and began sifting through the papers in them, looking for something. "If you choose to begin working for us, you will have to sign a contract, with a very sturdy confidentiality clause. You will then have 3 days of tests, both physical and psychological, to see if you really are well equipped to deal with this job. Once having passed said tests, you will then have 7 days of intensive training where you will learn basic maneuvers and protocol. In future, I will be your only contact within the agency. I do not work in this town. I will give you a cell phone number only. Should any problems arise, you will contact me using it. Any updates to your job description, technology you are using, or definitions of paranormal creatures and phenomena will be sent to you in a timely fashion through secret but reliable channels." Finding the papers he was looking for, he set them neatly on top of the other papers, folded his hands over them, and looked at the awestruck couple on the couch in front of him. "Should you choose not to accept these jobs, I will erase the memory of these conversations you have had with me and it will be as if we've never met."

Will laughed again and said, "You can't really do that."

Dorand gave almost a half smile and said, "I can. I could prove it to you, but you wouldn't remember." Dorand smiled a bit wider now, in love with the private joke he had with himself. Will looked at him even more suspiciously now.

"We pay well enough, with insurance, etc., the usual benefits. Interested?"

Once more Will chuckled. He and Emily looked at each other. They shared a silent "Is this guy for real?" look.

Dorand got up and said, "I'll give you a moment to talk

it over." He left the room.

Will and Em stayed speechless as they stared at each other.

Finally Emily spoke, in a hushed voice, "How can we not do this?"

Will looked surprised by this.

She continued. "I mean just to see if it's real, see what happens. It's like an adventure, no?"

"I guess..." Will said, slowly coming around to her way of thinking. "This has *got* to be a crazy hoax of some sort, Em," he said.

"I know it could be," Emily said smiling. She spoke in even more of a hush now, excitedly, "But what if it's *not*?" Her eyes lit up.

He loved how excited and happy this made her. He smiled. "Okay," he said. "It's not like I had a thriving career in the bakery industry to look forward to."

"Yay!" She gave a small yelp, and grinned.

"Uh," Will said loudly, "Dorand?"

Mr. Dorand stepped back into the room from the file room again. "What have you decided?" he asked as he sat down at the desk once more.

"Um," Will said, "We decided yes."

Dorand smiled. He took the contracts off the top of the small stack of papers and stood up to hand them to the two, with pens.

Emily and Will huddled over their contracts, studying them carefully before signing. They were very detailed and full of big winding sentences with long boring words.

Emily said in a whisper to Will, "I'm just making sure we aren't signing away our first born or anything."

Dorand heard this and chuckled.

Emily and Will looked up at him, startled. They looked down again quickly, with worried expressions on their faces, and read their contracts even more thoroughly than before.

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"What is *that*?" Emily asked Will. He was holding a big

green hardcover book, with gold letters on the cover.

"Unexplained or Previously Undocumented Paranormal Creatures and Phenomena," Will read the title aloud.

"Shit," Emily said, amazed that such a book existed.

"And look at this," Will held up a similarly sized dark blue book. He read its title too, "Explained and Documented Paranormal Creatures and Phenomena." His eyes grew wide, "Look how big this book is." He opened it and began to flip through pages. "My God, the print is small too!" He put the book back in the cardboard box and pulled out another.

They were sitting in their tiny two bedroom apartment, looking through a box of supplies that had just arrived. Not by post office or any normal method. They had just come home to it sitting in the middle of their living room. With a folded note sitting on top. It looked like a TV box. It probably was. The note had said, "Here are your supplies. You start tonight." That was all. No signature, nothing.

So far the box had given up all the gadgets Mr. Dorand had told them they would be using, plus a few he hadn't explained at their meeting, and various books. They had already been through the tests and training required for the job, so most of it was familiar to them. But the training was not as thorough as they might have hoped.

"Oh, look at this," Will said, holding up two smaller books, paperback.

Emily read their covers. "Pocket guides," she said, smiling and nodding. Cool. He handed her one. They each thumbed through them for a minute. Then started pouring through the box again.

"A-ha," Emily said, pulling out a dark gray metallic box shaped object, "The paranormal alarm thing." She turned it over in her hands, studying it carefully.

"So it begins," Will said quietly. He reached over and took it from her. "There must be an 'On' button here somewhere—ah, yes." He flipped a tiny switch and set it on a nearby bookshelf.

They both stared at it in amazement. Nothing much happened except a tiny red light came on, just to show it

was on. They stared at it some more, expectantly.

Apparently nothing paranormal was going to happen just now. They went back to looking through the box.

"Hey, you know, it's a full moon Saturday night," Emily said casually.

"What are you saying to me?" Will asked.

"Extra paranormal activity probably," Emily answered, as she turned a little silver orb thing around in her hands. "It makes people crazy, anyway. Maybe 'explained and documented creatures' too."

Will just shook his head at her, "You and that full moon stuff."

Emily looked up at him a little annoyed. "You don't believe in the full moon affecting people, but you have no problem believing in a..." she picked up the pocket guide and flipped through it, "a freeziamort?"

Will made a disgusted face, then looked curious, "What the hell is a freeziamort?" he asked, taking the book from her.

"It's sort of a..." she tried to mime or show him with her hands, and he just looked at her, obviously still confused. "Never mind," he said, "I already have too much in my head." He shook his head, partly to make all the new information settle better.

Emily was diving deeper into the box now, bent over, with her head down inside it. "Oh, look," she said, sounding muffled by the box, "There's a whole other layer of stuff down here we didn't see before."

Will dropped his book, "Really?" He went over to join her, and started digging around down in the bottom of the box too.

"Hey, don't crowd me," Emily said, with a boxy muffled voice. Will laughed and kind of elbowed her over so he could stick his head in there too. Of course, now it was too dark to see inside the box. They both giggled. Will grabbed something metallic, "Hey, what is that?" Then suddenly the alarm went off.

They whipped their heads out of the box and stared horrified at the bookshelf where the alarm sat. It played a quiet little tinkling tune. Innocent sounding. They got

quickly to their feet.

"Uh, uh," Will struggled with his pocket guide while Emily looked through the various user manuals they now had.

"Oh!" She said and reached behind the alarm and pushed a button. The alarm was off. She then took it off the shelf and pushed open a display panel. A little door just pushed back and out of sight to reveal the LCD display.

Will came over to look over her shoulder at this. "Look, there's the GPS position... oh, and here's us," he pointed to the screen. "Neat," he said as they smiled at each other and nodded. Then as if realizing what this really meant, he said, "Oh, shit. Now we have to go fight something." Emily whimpered.

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Emily and Will stood looking puzzled outside of Emily's old office. The building she used to clean before they got their current job. It was empty, being Saturday, and nothing normal or paranormal seemed to be going on anywhere near it.

"Huh," Emily said. "Maybe they left the back door open again. They do that a lot. We could go inside."

Will shrugged. "Okay."

They trudged around to the back of the building. Both wore jeans and tennis shoes and T-shirts. Em had a hooded red zipper sweatshirt on, partly zipped up. Will wore a similar one in dark blue. As they turned the corner of the building, suddenly a deer leaped in front of them. A doe. They were startled and jumped back, hearts racing. "On edge much?" Will asked as he stopped to let his heart calm down. The deer trotted away into a nearby field.

The sun was still bright, though it was about 7 at night. They kept walking around to the back door. Emily went up to it and pulled the handle. The door swung open.

"Pfft! Sure enough," Emily said, sounding disgusted. Smokers left the door propped open with a little rock, so they could get back into the building after a smoke, but they always forgot to shut the door completely before they



went home. Very annoying for a young woman arriving alone hours later to clean it.

They went inside carefully, afraid something else would jump out at them, but this time not be so ordinary. They couldn't see or hear anything yet. Emily quietly kicked the small rock away from the door and shut the door all the way. They began to creep through the building, down each of the small hallways the cubicles made, with nothing but emergency lights and bits of sunlight from far away windows lighting their way. No paranormal activity yet.

"Maybe this thing is broken," Will whispered as he looked at the alarm again. "It still shows the anomaly as being here. Look. Our dot is pretty much on top of it now." Emily stopped to glance at the screen.

"Maybe," she said. Then suddenly she jumped, because a man had just yelled something unintelligible from outside a nearby window. They both spun around, startled.

There stood a man, in his mid-thirties, brown hair, jeans, red and white flannel shirt. He had a gun, and he had just been yelling in some kind of a fit of blind rage. After stopping to take a breath, he did it again. He hadn't seen them yet.

"Holy shit!" Emily whispered. "There's a man with a *real* gun out there! How is that paranormal?!"

Will shook his head and stared at the man. Suddenly the man turned toward them and saw them. Sort of. He stepped toward the window to get a closer look. Once he saw them for sure, face pressed against the glass, he banged on the window with his hand and yelled with rage again, in their direction.

Emily and Will looked at each other quickly. Will grabbed her by the arm, "Run!"

They ran away from the window, through the building, as far as they could go. To a part of the building with no windows. They stood panting, backs against the wall, trying to think. There was nothing in their rule books about guns!

"Is this the paranormal dot here?" Emily whispered as she took the alarm from Will to see where the dots were now. "This guy?"

"I have no idea," Will said, catching his breath. "How

are we supposed to 'contain' this guy?" He was whispering too. "He seems human, just kind of crazy."

Emily was flipping through her pocket guide frantically. They had brought a backpack of gadgets and books with them, not knowing what they would be fighting. "Oh, hey, here's a part about—"

Suddenly a bullet ripped through the wall between them, making a little sunlight hole. They screamed in unison, "Ahhhh!!!!" and bolted away from the wall. They ran for the middle of the building now, and stopped in a little lunch room area. Will flipped on the lights.

"Shit. I'm glad I don't have a heart condition," Will said, panting from the scare and the run. "What were you saying back there?"

Emily was out of breath too, and her hands were shaking. She began looking through the book again, finding her place, "What I was saying, before we were so rudely interrupted, is that this is what might be wrong with this guy." She had found her place in the book again and held it out to Will, pointing. They both stared at the page.

"Ah," Will said. "Demon possession." Emily nodded with a smile, happy to have found the possible solution.

Will took the book and read part of the section on possession. "Okay, less happy now," he said. "It says we have to tackle him and do an exorcism... *while* he's conscious."

"Oh," Emily sighed. "No gun talk?" He shook his head sadly.

Just then they heard the man yell in rage again. This time far enough away that they weren't too worried he could get at them.

"We'd better see what he's up to," Will said. They grabbed their stuff again and tip toed toward where the yell had last come from. Peeping around a cubicle wall, they saw the man outside another window. Next to the front door. He didn't see them. They crept closer.

"Well, at least he can't get to us in here," Emily whispered. "Maybe we fail this time, and go home and put our feet up?" She looked hopefully at Will, only partly joking.

Will shook his head. Then he realized the obvious, "You don't think he can shoot out a window and come in here, do you?"

But there wasn't really time to ponder this happening, because at that moment the man looked up at them, as if he had known they were there all along. Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a key.

Will grabbed her and pulled her back behind the cubicle wall. "He must work here!" he whispered.

"Uh-oh," Emily added. They peeked around the wall again. "Maybe it isn't a key to here. He is crazy after all?"

They watched in horror as the man walked out of their sight and to the door. They heard the key being inserted into a lock. It seemed to go all the way in.

"Damn!" Will yelled as they took off running again, this time toward the back door. They heard the man open the door behind them and begin running through the building after them. At one point he shot at them again. Emily screamed as the bullet crashed through a potted plant near them, shattering ceramic blue chunks everywhere. Will grabbed her hand and pulled her through the back door with him.

They ran toward their small old car, but the man was outside the building now too, getting closer. Emily started to fumble for her keys. "No time! No time!" Will shouted as they continued to run right past the car. A bullet ricocheted off a dumpster as they ran past it. They ran around a neighboring building and briefly stopped to breathe. Emily began digging through the backpack, and pulled out the tranquilizer gun.

"No!" Will said in a loud whisper, "He has to be conscious for us to do the exorcism."

"But we have to get that gun away from him," Emily whispered. The man made a far away yell of rage again. "And maybe tie him up," she added. But he was getting closer. They could now hear his footsteps on the pavement. How would she ever get close enough to shoot him with the pellet gun anyway?

They held their breath, hoping he might run by. She snuck up to the edge of the building, hoping to have a good

close shot at him. But he was closer than she thought and swung around the corner so suddenly, it made her scream again. He pointed the gun at her, but she was close enough to punch his arm away. Then he fired at Will, but Will jumped aside just in time, and dirt scattered behind him where the bullet hit the ground. Then Will jumped toward the man and grabbed the arm with the gun. He tried to wrestle it away from the man, but either adrenaline or demon possession was making the man super strong. He was having no luck. Emily tried to fire the tranquilizer at him, but he pushed her away and the pellet flew past him in the air, barely visible it was so small. Emily fell to the ground hard and dropped the pellet gun. Realizing he wouldn't be able to hold him off much longer, Will kicked the man in the groin, let go of his arm, pulled his wife up off the ground as she scrambled to collect their supplies, and started to run again.

The man must have been in "feel no pain" mode as well because he was barely slowed by the groin kick. As it was they seemed to be running around and around this one same building. After a few rounds of that Will suddenly pulled them in a new direction. Down the road further, toward a parking lot with cars. A bar. They dove between two parked cars, and stopped to catch their breath. Too hot for sweatshirts, they both took theirs off and tied them around their waists.

"Why do we not have weapons?" Will whispered.

"We can't shoot a guy for being pissy," Em whispered back.

"But he's homicidally pissy!" Will hissed.

Emily shrugged, annoyed and out of breath.

"Okay, bullet proof vests, then," Will said. Emily nodded agreement.

They peeked out from between the cars then to see where the man was. He had done a few more rounds of the building, thinking he was still chasing them. He even shot at imaginary them a few times, chipping stucco and plaster off the corners of the building.

"He's got to run out of bullets soon," Emily whispered. "Then we can tackle him."

"Sure if we have any strength left," Will whispered back. "And hopefully he can't crush us with his bare hands or something."

Emily nodded.

The possessed man was now standing in front of the building looking around to see where they had gone. Then like a homing beacon, he turned and looked right at them. Like he had some kind of super power to sense where they were when he wanted to. He started stalking toward them with long strides, ignoring the traffic between here and there. Cars swerved and honked and he fired the gun right at Will and Emily. It ricocheted off the car and smacked the ground next to them.

"Okay, too close for comfort," Will said and grabbed Emily's arm and started to run again.

They ducked down and wove in between parked cars as he shot and bullets bounced off the metal all around them. They each occasionally screamed as the bullets got too close. Then they ran back to the building where this had all started. Then past it. He kept firing, and ripped a hole through the backpack swinging from Will's shoulder, but never managed to so much as scratch the two of them. Then they heard a clicking noise behind them. They stopped, out of breath, to turn around and look. The man had stopped too.

He stood trying to fire the gun at them, but all the bullets were gone. He was acting almost like a wild animal, not able to understand why the gun wouldn't fire anymore.

Carefully and methodically Will and Emily were going through the backpack and gathering supplies for the exorcism they would have to do. The man—or the demons in him—had just realized the tables had turned. He dropped the gun as he turned away and ran.

"Dammit," Emily said. "I thought we were done with that part."

They gathered up their stuff and ran after the man. He ran away from the town, through fields and trees. Then he started to run toward some grassy hills. The alarm let out a little beep. Will and Em stopped to look at it.

"Oh, look," Will said, "he's out of our jurisdiction now."

The man stopped running and turned around, wondering why he wasn't being chased anymore. Then he tilted his head and looked at the couple, as if he were sizing them up or something. He seemed to decide he could take them because he started running again, this time right toward them. As he did the alarm let out a little beep again. He was back in their jurisdiction.

"Bastard," Will said under his breath. Tired of running, Will came up with a quick plan and told Emily his idea.

"Okay," Emily said, not quite sure it would work, but tired of running.

The possessed man let out a scream of rage as he got closer to them. Emily and Will stood perfectly still, but ready to move at a moment's notice. The man got within six feet of them, and Will screamed out, "Now!"

Suddenly they both dove toward the ground, toward the man's legs. They each grabbed one and he toppled over them to the ground. They scrambled around then and got on top of him, on his back. He bucked around like a bull at a rodeo, but they held on and held him down.

In a fit of bravado, Emily yelled, "Hog tie him, babe!"

"I don't actually know how to do that, my love!" Will yelled back. "Get the script!"

Emily was closest to the man's head, Will behind her. She reached for the book in the backpack and managed to pull it out and turn to the proper page as the man bucked around.

"Okay," she said, then she began to read the script loudly, to make sure the demon or demons inside the man could hear her, "By the power of all good forces of nature and creation I command you, evil spirits, to vacate this man! By all the gods that represent goodness and love, I insist that you exit the body you have taken over against the will of its owner! May the energy of the great creator or creators of this universe take your evil energy and dissipate it into the heavens and the earth! I command you leave this human and be here no more!" She looked back at Will then. "Very non-denominational," she said, as the man continued to buck them around.

Then she looked back at the book to see why the man

was still bucking around. Had it not worked? "Oh," she said out loud, and fished around in the bag some more while bouncing around, 'til she found it. A little injector gun, it was kind of like a really big ring. She put it on her middle finger, read the book a little more, then pressed the injector gun to the back of the man's neck and pressed a button on the injector with her thumb. That was the last step in the exorcism. It seemed to make the man even more enraged than before and he violently bucked them off of him. They flew into the air, then hit the ground. They looked wide-eyed at the man, expecting worse violence now. But he had passed out.

"Oh, thank God," Will said and laid back in the dead grass. Emily let out a sigh of relief and relaxed as well. She laid back in the grass and stared up at the still blue sky. Then she pulled herself up off the grass with a groan.

"There are other steps, I think," she said, staring once more into the book. "Yup. We have to erase his memory now." She pointed at the backpack a few feet away. "Do we have that gadget?"

He crawled over to the bag and looked inside. He reached in and pulled out the little silvery box thing that erased memories. He flipped it on with a switch and it hummed to life. He had studied this one a bit in the training class. "How far back do we go?" He asked.

She read the book again, "It says the machine can tell which memories are from when he was possessed. I don't know, there's a menu..."

"Ah, I see," he said, finding it. He held the device near the man's head, and pointed the back of it at him. It didn't actually need to touch the person whose memory was being erased. He started pushing buttons on the screen, selecting options. He nodded at the screen as if he agreed with it. He watched the progress as a growing line across the screen. A few minutes later, it was done. "Well, that was easy," he said, satisfied.

"Pfft," Emily answered. He looked up at her. She looked how he felt. Exhausted, sweaty, and hungry. Okay, maybe she didn't look hungry, but he was hungry, and figured she must be too.

"Let's go eat," he said, getting up and grabbing the backpack.

He held out his hand to her, but she said, "Wait, don't we even want to know who this guy is?" Will shrugged. Emily crawled back over to the man and carefully began searching his pockets for ID. "A-ha!" she said as she pulled out a wallet. "Henry Fillstone," she read, "Thirty... four," she said, doing the math.

"What's his sign?" Will said. "Does he like puppies and long walks on the beach?"

"William," Emily said firmly. She put the wallet back in his pocket and let Will help her up. They began to walk away and then she thought of something. "Do you think he needs some sunscreen?"

"What?" Will said exasperated.

"Well, he's just laying here out in the sun."

"No, he's fine," Will said. "The sun's about to go down."

She nodded. They walked away again. But then Emily stopped and reached into the backpack quickly and then ran back to Henry. She quickly spritzed his face with sunscreen from a little travel size bottle.

"Emily!" Will snapped.

"Sorry," she said, then put the bottle away and kept walking.

"Sun Fresh Skincare," he recited from memory. "I thought you didn't carry that stuff around with you anymore," he said walking after her.

"Well, I don't sell it anymore, geez." She kept walking.

\* \* \*

The sun was setting as they sat at an outdoor table on the walking mall. The library and the park next to it were at one end of the mall, and a busy street was at the other end, but if you turned left, there was the movie theater. They had just eaten dinner from a sandwich shop and were resting from their crazy evening.

Emily zipped her red sweatshirt up more, to keep out the slight chill of a summer evening. "I think my muscles are sore already," she said. "Is that possible?"



"Mine too," Will said. "I think they're offended that I used them."

Emily smiled. Will chuckled.

They sat in comfortable silence then, Emily reading the pocket guide and Will watching people walk by. The shops were closed now, it was after nine. A bar or two were open, though. The alarm was sitting on the table between them, turned on. Nothing more had happened of a paranormal nature since they exorcised Henry an hour or two ago. So much for Emily's full moon predictions.

The last orange rays of the setting sun finally disappeared behind the horizon and a blue twilight fell over the town. It was too dark to read now really, and the quaint looking streetlamps hadn't turned on yet. Emily put her book down. She looked at Will.

"Maybe we should go home now, get some sleep. There's no telling what tomorr—"

Just then the alarm went off. A dainty little music box song sweetly echoing off the empty buildings all around. It was quiet enough on the mall that the sound seemed to fill the area.

Both Emily and Will looked worried as they leaned in to look at the GPS screen on the alarm. But before they had a chance to check out the location of the anomaly, something distracted them. A blood curdling scream.

It came from right in front of them. A wail, a woman's voice, screaming bloody murder.

Shocked, Will and Em jumped out of their chairs and looked toward the sound. Unbelievably it came from a person. Or at least they thought it was a person. Standing in front of them. It was a woman, young, very thin, with long wispy hair, that looked... blue, at first gray, but now they realized more like purpley blue. She was as pale as death, and her eyes were large and dark blue. Almost glowing. She wore a long white flowy gown. It fluttered around her in the evening breeze, as did her hair. She never stopped screaming to take a breath. Then suddenly she disappeared, with the sound.

Emily let out her breath. "Oh, my God, I didn't realize I'd stopped breathing."

"Yes, uh huh, I agree," Will said nervously, catching his breath as well. "What the hell was that?!"

They scrambled for their books, eager to read about it before it came back. "Screaming, screaming... screaming. Ah—yes, here it is, 'Screaming'," Will said as he turned to the page. He read quietly to himself for a moment, then breathed out a long exhale. "I'm going to say that was a banshee," he said with certainty.

"Banshee..." Emily repeated, looking through her book for info. "Ohh!" She dropped her book as the banshee reappeared and started screaming again. Her heart stopped for a moment and then she grabbed her book off the chair where it had fallen. She tried to ignore the banshee while she looked up information about it.

Will very cautiously crept toward the banshee and tried to shoot it with a pellet gun. It gave him a quick disgusted look and then disappeared for a moment. Only to come back louder than ever a few feet away. "Well... I mildly annoyed it," he said loudly to Em.

It disappeared again. "Thank God," Emily said. "Okay." She looked at her book as she spoke to him. "It says here that disturbances in the thickness of the veil between this reality and others confuse banshees. They sort of teleport here and there, and the stamp technology stuff is messing with their... navigational systems or something. They are supposed to scream and wail outside of the homes of people where there is about to be a death." Will shuddered. "But... well, they lose their way now and scream in the wrong places... God awful horrible screaming..."

"It says that? 'God awful horrible'...?" Will tried to look in the book.

"No, that was me. I'm not reading." She shook him off.

"Well, how do we stop it?" Will said. The banshee reappeared then and continued screaming. "And I swear to God, does the sun setting have anything to do with this?"

"Yes!" Emily shouted above the screaming, which seemed louder now. "They only come at night, after sundown." She looked through the book further, looking for the spot where it told how to stop them. Just then, the banshee apparently decided to move. But it didn't walk,

though it was shaped like a person. It glided. It floated. In the direction of the nearest bar. And continued to scream.

"Well, we've driven it to drink anyway!" Will shouted. "Yay, us!" Emily gave him a worn out smile. They followed it into the bar. It stopped just inside the doorway. Emily kept reading the book. She and Will stood just outside the doorway.

"Ah! I've got it!" Emily shouted. She took the backpack from Will and began digging through it. She pulled out the black shoe horn shaped Veil Sealer. Will gave her a quizzical look.

"It has other settings!" Emily shouted at him. She looked at it in the light of the streetlamp and bar and pushed a few buttons on it. "You have to set it to 'Thicken' and walk around the banshee in a full circle!" Will grabbed the sealer from Emily, to take it inside the bar. "Press that button! Hold it down!" Emily shouted. He nodded.

They went inside the bar. The banshee seemed to have a light of her own inside. Or maybe it was just dark enough to see it now. An unearthly hazy white gray light. It kind of blocked out the view of anything around her. Will pressed the button Emily had pointed to and walked quickly around the banshee. With every step she got quieter and more transparent. When he got back to where he had started, she was gone. And so was her scream.

Will grinned.

"Oh, thank God," Emily said.

"Now why did that work?" Will asked her.

"I don't know, it doesn't fix the problem really. It just sort of restores their equilibrium. Though, they might still get stuck in a location warp in the future," Emily said.

"Wow," Will grabbed the book from her to look at the banshee page.

Just then they both noticed how quiet it was in the bar, and realized why with a sickening feeling creeping into their stomachs. They looked up.

Every customer of the bar was staring at them, mouths agape. Shocked at what they had just seen and heard. Em and Will realized they would have to erase every single one of their memories. What a horrible night.

In the silence, one woman in the back let out a quick sigh and fell to the floor, fainting from the excitement. Will turned to Emily, "Well, one down," he said sheepishly.

They both pulled out their tranquilizer guns, which they now realized looked a lot like small regular guns because people started freaking out. "Call the police!", "Oh, my God!", "Please don't hurt me!", etc.

"Dammit," Emily said under her breath. Will pulled out two little cartridges from the backpack and handed one to her. She looked at him, puzzled.

"Extra ammo, honey," he said.

"Oh," she nodded, and put the extra pellet cartridge in her pocket. Then they started shooting people in the bar with the pellet gun. They went down gently one after another to the ground. But obviously the people not tranquilized yet were running around in a panic, looking for back doors and such.

Which made Will think of the bartenders and cooks, etc. "I'll get the back door!" he shouted to Emily as he ran through the bar, shooting people along the way.

He came back a few minutes later. "I think I got them all," he said, "In the kitchen." She nodded.

She was still chasing strays through the bar, hopping over bodies, trying to stay between people and the doors. She ran for a woman cowering against the far wall. "Sorry, ma'am!" she said as she shot her. She turned back toward the main door. Will was closer to the bar, shooting a few old men who hadn't even bothered to get up when the banshee came in. And one stray middle aged drunken man was now running toward the door. "Ah! Escapee!" Emily shouted at Will.

"Got it!" he said, shooting the last of his barflies and running out the door. He chased the drunken man in the direction of the busy street. But before he could even aim his pellet gun at the man, the man collapsed onto the sidewalk. Will ran up to him, panting. He said, "Thank you, kind sir." He bent down and felt for the man's pulse. He had one. "Fair enough," Will said.

Emily ran up to them then. "He passed out," Will said. "But I got him." He smiled sheepishly. "I'll erase his

memory. You start working on the others."

"Okay," Emily said, still out of breath. She ran back to the bar to get to work erasing memories before people started waking up. Or before new customers arrived. Yikes.

Ten minutes later they were still working on people's memories inside the bar. They had closed the doors and locked them just in case anyone else decided to come in for a drink. They were working frantically before the pellet medicine started wearing off.

"I swear to God we are going home after this," Emily said.

"Yes, yes," Will agreed, calibrating his memory eraser to a new victim. "Yes."

\* \* \*

Emily and Will were sitting at the bar waiting for people to wake up. Slowly it began to happen. People groaning and stretching, as if they'd been asleep. Then sitting up or standing up again and looking slightly confused. Especially confused about the other people who weren't awake yet.

"What happened?"

"Why is everybody down on the floor?"

"Where are my car keys?"

That sort of thing. Then the bartender popped up in front of them. Sort of like he was spring loaded. Like a jack-in-the-box. They both jumped.

"What can I get you two kids?" He said cheerfully. "You know I'm gonna have to see some ID." He was an older man, in his mid-forties, looked like he'd had too many sunburns, but was in good shape physically.

"Oh, just a ginger ale," Emily said. "Thanks."

"And you?" the bartender asked Will as he turned to get Em's drink.

"Ah... root beer," Will said, distracted. He was still staring out at the bar full of people readjusting their mussed up clothing, getting the kinks out of their necks, and looking puzzled. After a few minutes they all seemed pretty alright with it, whatever had happened. It was like

they forgot waking up. Go government technology.

The bartender served them their drinks, and they sat there sucking pop through their straws like two young kids. The bartender shook his head at the weirdness. Just then the alarm went off again.

"Oh, you have got to be kidding me," Will said, reaching into the backpack.

The bartender looked puzzled, "You got a music box in there?"

"Uh, yes," Emily said. "It keeps going off by itself, crazy thing."

The bartender still looked confused.

"It was a gift," she continued. "We bought it." She thought more. "Today. To give to someone." The bartender seemed fine with this. "Let's go, Will." She smiled at the bartender and grabbed Will's arm and led him out as he read the GPS screen.

They got out onto the dark outdoor mall sidewalk again.

"Uh..." Will said, "Which way's north?"

"It's still that way," Emily pointed to the north.

"On the GPS!" Will said.

"Oh," Emily said and stepped closer to look at it. "That would be 'N'." She pointed.

Still staring at the screen, Will turned to point north, then started to walk.

"Car's this way," Emily said gently, turning him around again.

"Fine, fine," Will said as he was led away.

\* \* \*

They were out in the middle of a field again, just outside of town. It was darker now, of course, but luckily the full moon lit up the area nicely.

"Well, I don't see it," Will said. "Our dot is here, its dot is here. Where's our friggin' anomaly?"

"Testy, aren't we?" Emily asked. She was smiling. Despite the fact that she had wanted to go home before, this was kind of fun. What new crazy thing would they run

into now?

They looked around, turning, seeing nothing out of the ordinary. But they both stopped suddenly as they heard a panting noise. Like an animal panting. Like something was running towards them. Like a dog or a—crap!

They both realized at once what it must be. Full moon, dog sounds.

"Werewolf!" Will yelled as he finally spotted it. It was coming from a thicket of trees 50 feet away. Emily let out a scream and they both began to run. It was running on both legs like a human, but looked like a giant wolf. A human shaped wolf.

Will pulled out his pocket guide as they ran. But it was too dark to read. "Shit!" he said.

Emily dug around in her pockets and in the backpack. She handed him a pen light as they ran. He grabbed it and tried to shine it on the book and read, all while he was running. "Page 73..." he muttered as he frantically flipped through the pages.

"Why don't I just shoot it with the pellet gun?" Emily yelled.

Will read the page. "No, don't!" he shouted. "It takes about 20 shots of that stuff to knock him out!" He read further. "Oh!" he said, excitedly. "Silver bullet BB gun!"

She began digging through the bag in the dark as she ran. Apparently speed wasn't a big part of werewolfism. A real wolf or any wild animal would have caught them by now. That was something.

"It looks like a pistol!" Will shouted as he looked at the drawing. "And—" at that moment, he tripped on a gopher hole and quickly fell face down in the dirt with a loud 'thwump!'.

Emily gasped, "Will!" The werewolf ran up to Will, but Emily had found the BB gun pistol. She shot it at the werewolf's chest. It yelped like a dog and fell over backwards and laid still on the ground.

"Pthlp!" Will spit dirt out of his mouth as he got up. "I am not enjoying this day," he said through gritted teeth.

Emily helped him up, and began to brush dirt off his clothes. "Poor baby," she said, and kissed him on the cheek.

But she smiled too, because it was damn funny. Now that he wasn't eaten by a werewolf anyway, and hadn't broken any bones.

"Ohhhh!" Will said, disgusted with her laughing eyes as he brushed off his jeans and readjusted his glasses. "Woman."

"Now what?" Emily said. "We just leave him here like this?"

"No, see, what I was going to say is—"

Just then the werewolf suddenly began to shake and convulse, and then something weird happened. Like a cloud of soot or dust just a few inches around his body, the werewolf seemed to shake off his werewolf nature. And underneath it was a man. The dust of the werewolf lay on the ground around him.

"—that," Will finished.

"Wow," Emily said. "You mean he isn't dead?"

"No, he's not dead," Will said.

The man now lay perfectly still, and must have been sleeping.

"And, uh... he's nude," Emily said.

"Yeah, he is," Will realized and covered Emily's eyes. She snickered and wiggled away from him.

"I'll get a blanket out of the car," she said as she walked away.

The former werewolf seemed to be a yuppyish man in his mid-thirties, clean cut, dark brown hair. He was kind of short, a lot shorter than he had seemed as a werewolf. And in good shape. Not Olympic swimmer shape, but no beer gut either. Something in between.

Emily came up behind him with a chuckle, "Stop staring at the nude man," she teased.

He realized he was doing it again. Over analyzing everything. Sheesh.

Emily covered the man with a blanket and they both stood back and stared at him.

"So, do we just leave him here, or—" Emily started.

Just then the man gasped and his eyes popped open. Emily and Will jumped a little, this was so startling.

The man sat up with a snap. A cold sweat broke out all



over him. He clutched the blanket to him and stood up. He was shaking a little. He looked at the two of them, "W-where... am... I?" he asked.

"In a field outside of town," Will answered. The man looked around, still confused.

"I must have been sleep walking again," the man said.

"Oh," Emily said. "Yeah."

The man nodded with a shiver and smiled at her. "So who are you?" he said to them.

Will realized how weird it must seem to wake up to the two of them standing over you. "Uh... " then Will broke into a character, "Me and my girlfriend were like out here looking for aliens." He almost had a valley girl accent. Emily stared at him.

The man said, "You don't really believe in that stuff, do you?"

Will said, "Yeah."

Emily added, "Totally," in her own valley girl type accent.

Will gave her a strange look.

The man chuckled good-naturedly at them. "You kids should get home. There are wild animals out here, you know."

Emily and Will exchanged a knowing look.

The man tightened the blanket around his shoulders. "I can't tell you how many mornings I've woken up outside with cuts and claw marks—" he stopped himself and smiled an embarrassed smile. "Say, I uh," he peeked under the blanket, "seem to be naked under here. This your blanket?" They nodded. "You mind if I uh... take it with me?"

"No," they said at once. "Go ahead," Will added.

The man nodded and smiled, and started walking gingerly through the field, in his bare feet, back toward town.

When he got out of earshot, Emily thwacked Will on the arm, "'Girlfriend'?"

"What? I was play acting," he said, flipping through the pocket guide again.

"Hm," she said. "So, he has no memory of being a werewolf?"

Will turned a page in the pocket guide. He read aloud, "There is no need to use the Memory Eraser on former werewolves, as werewolfism automatically erases the memory of everything that happens when someone is in werewolf form."

"Huh," Emily said. "Imagine that."

They started walking back through the field to the car. Will said in a scary low English accent, "It's spooky out here tonight on the moor."

"Quit it," Emily snapped.

He poked her in the side and tickled her a bit. She swatted his hand away but smiled. Then he put his arms around her from behind as they walked and she giggled. He let her go and they held hands as they continued walking. He stared at her. She looked over at him and they both smiled.

Then she started to skip happily and he said, "No." They let go, "No skipping." She giggled. "Ugh," he said as she skipped to the car.

From behind them suddenly they heard a voice, "Hey."

They turned, startled. "Hey, I know you," the man said. It was Henry. Just walking back from waking up in the field, probably.

They both looked surprised. "You know us?" Will asked. Emily began turning pages quickly through the pocket guide.

"Yeah," Henry looked like the light was dawning. "I chased you two with a gun or something... through a building or—" Plunk. He fell to the ground as Emily shot him with a pellet gun.

"Why does he remember us?!" Will asked, bewildered. He took out a memory eraser. "Is this thing broken?"

"No..." Emily said, reading from the book, "Oh, look here, 'Possession splits the memories into layers, which makes it difficult to erase the possession victim's memory. Repeated memory erasing should work.'" She gave Will an exasperated look.

"Damn," he said as he bent down to erase Henry's memory again. "Do we get overtime?" he asked Emily seriously as he looked up from his work.

She shrugged her shoulders.

\* \* \*

"Well," Emily said as they eyed the small dark lake just outside of town, "Where is it?"

They had followed the GPS here, but nothing seemed to be happening. Forest Coal Lake was a manmade lake, practically a giant pond, with bushes here and there along the winding edge. They created private little swimming nooks. It had a dirt bank, and was grassy. They used to play catch in the water with little gobs of algae. Kind of gross, now that Emily thought about it.

Will glanced around, into the dark woods and hills surrounding them. Spooky. About half a block away was a little all night café. And on the other side of the road were houses, all dark and quiet for the night.

"Maybe it's in the water," Will said.

Emily glanced down at the dark rippling water. "Mmm," she said, tapping the surface with her toe. "Looks pretty calm to me."

Just then a giant black slimy creature vaulted out of the lake and slammed Emily to the ground as she screamed.

Will screamed too and fell backwards. He got up quickly and tried to pry the creature off of Emily. It was sort of manhandling her. Possibly trying to strangle her, but couldn't quite figure out how. its "skin" looked like black green tar, but not solid, more gel-like. And not smooth. It was kind of like those cakes that had that scalloped pattern all over them. But it wasn't neat like that, like scalloped frosting. It was more like someone had tried to scallop frost with black whip cream or something. Gloppy and messy like that. 'I'm doing it again,' Will thought. Over analyzing.

He tried to kick the creature, but it wouldn't budge. He pushed, he pulled. Nothing was moving this thing.

Emily was punching it with her fists. Trying to hurt it with the pointy edge of her knuckles. Knowing she didn't have much strength, but she could cause pain maybe. It sort of had a hold of her shoulders and was shaking her a

little bit. Her fists sort of sunk into it an inch or two before they hit something solid. It was kind of making her nauseous. Then it sort of laid down on top of her, to squish her or something and she couldn't hit it anymore. And she couldn't breathe really. She squirmed underneath it, and it still tried to shake her by the shoulders, slammed her back onto the ground now and then. She yelped. Her heart was pounding. She could see Will hopping back and forth over the monster, trying to get it off.

Then Will came around to her head and stood behind her. He reached down and grabbed under her arms and pulled as he simultaneously kicked the creature in the face. That seemed to distract it. Though not as much as you might think. For a thing being kicked in the face it barely registered mild annoyance. But it let go of Emily and tried to swat Will's foot away, as Will pulled Emily to her feet and got her away from the creature.

Emily gave the creature another angry kick in the head as soon as she was on her feet.

"Whoa," Will said.

They started to stumble away from it, but then it got up and started stalking towards them like a big slimy bigfoot. Will took one step towards it, turned to the side, and kicked one foot high in the air as he jumped and smacked the creature square in the chest with his foot. It fell backwards with a thump into the dirt.

"Ow," Will said as he awkwardly landed back on the earth. He grabbed Emily and helped her run as the creature, stunned for a moment, got up again into a crouch. It glared after them, or it seemed to. It didn't actually have eyes. Or a face. Just gloppy black green slime where its face should be. Then it turned and sort of slithered or slunk back into the lake. Making a big ripple that settled quickly.

Will was invigorated. Having beaten the monster back so easily. "Well," he said happily, "That wasn't so bad."

Emily, covered from head to toe in black green slime, snapped around to face him. She gave him her best PMS look. Will gasped.

"I'm sorry," he said. He patted her on the shoulder. He

barely had any slime on him. She was fuming now.

"Come, my darling," he said gently, "Let's read up on how to stop this thing." She stopped fuming a little.

"Was that a kung fu kick?" she asked sulkily.

"Have you seen my movies?" he asked in his strange dignified British voice. She swatted him.

They got to the picnic table where they had left their backpack before. Will wiped his slimy hands on his jeans and said, "Maybe I'd better look in the book."

Emily sat down moodily, looking at her slime covered arms in dismay.

Will flipped through the pocket guide, by the light of the small pen light. "Hmm," he said.

"'Hmm' what?" Emily asked.

He said nothing, only continued to read, fascinated.

Emily cleared her throat loudly. "Oh, yes," Will said, realizing he should be reading aloud to her. "'The slime monster guards bodies of water and is very territorial. It will attack anyone who tries to touch or go into the water it has claimed as its own.'..." He read further to himself and said, "Wow." Emily crossed her arms and pouted, slime dripping off of her. She kicked him under the table.

"Ow," he started speaking again, "It says it comes from some other dimension, and there is a tear most likely under the water. It's too hard to get down there to make it go back through it, so... we have to kill it," he looked at her with a grimace.

She sighed. He went on, "To kill it you need to pour salt in its... eyes." He looked grossed out.

Emily looked incredulous, and like she was at the end of her rope. "Fine," she said seethingly, and got up from the table.

She started stomping in the direction of the all night café. Will trotted after her. "You really don't like getting dirty, do you?" he said.

"I was almost killed!" she screeched.

Will looked around to make sure no one had heard that. No house lights came on. She fumed some more as they walked.

"This is stupid!" She said, "It doesn't even have eyes!"

Will looked in the book awkwardly with the pen light as they quickly walked, "Well," he said, "They sort of have an eye 'area'. Hit it with the salt in its 'eye area'."

"Oh, I will," Emily said angrily.

It was kind of cute when she got angry. 'Cause she was so non-threatening looking. Will tried not to smile at her.

They reached the café, and Emily stormed inside, took a salt shaker off of an empty table, and looked at the nearby waitress, who was staring at her with her mouth slightly open. Emily in fluorescent light covered in black green slime was quite a startling sight.

"Thank you!" Emily said briskly as she marched right back outside with the shaker of salt. Will quickly dug in his pocket for a few coins and left them on the table as a tip. He gave the waitress an apologetic look as he slunk back out the door after his crazed wife.

He followed Emily as she walked quickly and determinedly back toward the lake.

"Whoa," he said. "Don't we want to think this through? It's a big ugly messy creature, Em. We can't just go charging after it."

But she was not listening. She went right back up to the edge of the lake and bent down to tap the surface with her fingers. "Hey, slime monster!" She yelled. Will once again looked around at the quiet houses.

It took a moment longer than the first time, but as expected the slime monster projected itself out of the water quickly and tried to attack Emily. She had unscrewed the lid of the salt shaker and now quickly tossed the loose salt into the creature's face.

It screamed with a disgusting gloppy choked sound and grabbed its 'face.' It stumbled and fell forward onto the ground. They both jumped back to avoid it. It rolled around on the ground for a moment, clutching its face and moaning a muffled watery moan and then it stopped. It lay still. Emily crept forward gingerly and tapped its elbow with her toe. The slime monster instantly became a puddle of shapeless goo. They both gasped, it was so sudden. The black ooze started to roll gloppily back toward the lake. It was on the bank that sloped down into the water.

"Ew," Emily said.

"Yes," Will agreed. He was feeling a bit nauseous now.

"We have to seal the tear in the lake now," Emily said.

"What?" Will stumbled after her as she stalked back over to the table. "Is that even possible? It's underwater."

"Look in your little book," she waved her hand at him as she dug around for the Veil Sealer. "I know the gadget does that." She pulled out the black shoe horn and started messing with the settings as she walked back over to the lake.

Will shuffled through his book nervously as he walked along beside her. "Oh!" he said, reaching the right part of the book, "It says underwater sealing..." he trailed off as he watched her work.

She didn't need his instructions. She had studied the user guides a bit during their down time. She had readjusted the settings and now set the Veil Sealer on the surface of the lake.

Will said, "But—" then stopped.

"It's waterproof," Emily said.

And apparently it floated too. It was a timed release charge that went off a few seconds after you set it to 'Underwater Seal'. Suddenly it buzzed slightly and the whole lake lit up for a few seconds with a blue white otherworldly glow. Then it settled into darkness again. Emily picked up the dripping Veil Sealer and stood up. She put its settings back to normal and turned it off.

Just then a pretty little glowing haze of light fluttered by, from behind them and then past the bushes. It looked like a flock of partly transparent mystical fairy butterflies. Emily stood perfectly still.

"I'm going to choose to ignore that," She said. She turned around quickly and went back to the picnic table.

Will looked in awe after the butterflies, but couldn't see where they had gone.

He joined her back at the picnic table where she was packing up their stuff again, "Obviously, we are going home now," she said. But before she had even finished speaking the tinkling music alarm began to go off again.

He could see the inner fury rising up in her again.

It burst out of her all at once. "No!" She hopped up and down with anger.

"Aww," he said. He took her by the shoulders. "Come on, here we go..."

"Here we go' where?" She said, once again sulking.

He had an idea. He grabbed the backpack and led her across the road quietly to one of the houses. They went around to the back yard. She looked at him, puzzled.

He set down the bag and grabbed the nearby garden hose. He mimed hosing her off. She rolled her eyes and held out her arms. He turned the squeaky hose knob as quietly as he could and began to spray her with water. She scrunched up her face as the cold water hit her. He brushed slime off her as he watered her down. It came off fairly easily, considering how muddy it looked. She was a sopping wet shivering mess by the time he was done. He carefully washed his hands in the water and rinsed the slime off his shoes.

Emily cocked her head at him and smiled.

Will sucked in his breath, "What?"

She held out her hand and he reluctantly handed her the hose. He spread his arms and closed his eyes, waiting for the torture. Emily happily sprayed cold water all over him, soaking him completely. And brushing off the one or two slime spots on his sweatshirt. She turned off the hose with a squeak.

"All better," she said. Just then a light came on inside the house.

"Who's out there?" An older man's voice said out the open window.

Emily and Will quickly tip toed out of the yard.

\* \* \*

Will and Emily drove around the convenience store another time, looking for suspicious activity going on around it. They were still soaking wet and made squishing noises every time they moved.

"I think that's it," Emily whispered. "We have to go in."

"We can't go in. We're sopping wet. How will we



explain ourselves?" he whispered back.

"Maybe they won't notice," Emily said quietly. "Maybe they are busy being attacked by a freeziamort... why are we whispering?"

Will shook his head at her. He parked the car and they got out. They walked to the convenience store entrance in their soggy clothes, leaving wet footprints behind them, and went inside.

Nothing was going on inside. Nothing supernatural. Not even another customer besides them. The cashier looked up from his magazine and gave them a curious look.

"Uh," Will said.

"It's raining cats and dogs out there," Emily said, and started brushing the water off her clothes. "Whew!"

The clerk glanced out the window. "I don't think it's raining." He checked another window, and gave them another weird look.

"Oh, it must have stopped," Emily said, and sloshed toward the candy rack. She and Will just stood near the counter, looking at candy, glancing at the magazines, never touching anything or intending to buy anything.

"Can I help you with something?" The man said finally.

"No, no, thank you," Emily said. "We're just waiting for a friend." She smiled.

He looked at them warily, then went back to his magazine. He looked to be in his mid-twenties, had dark blond hair and a mustache.

Nothing at all happened for several minutes. A clock ticked loudly on the wall. They could hear the buzz of various machines. Slush-maker, etc. Then the bing bong of the customer bell rang as someone walked into the store. It was Henry.

He stopped right in front of them and looked like he was trying to place them. Then the light dawned and he pointed at them and was about to speak.

"Henry!" Will said boisterously and put an arm around him. Henry looked surprised that Will knew his name, and even more surprised that he had slapped his wet arm around him. "Let's go outside, shall we?" Will said, "I want to have a word with you."

He led Henry outside and around to the side of the building, the side facing the alley. Unfortunately, he seemed to be unaware he had stopped just outside a tinted window. Emily watched with a fake look of disinterest as Will put his arm around Henry again and pulled out the tranquilizer gun and shot him, then wrestled him to the ground as Henry leaned into him in a dead faint. The clerk's back was to this the whole time. Will popped back up and noticed the window. He looked horrified. He met eyes with his wife who was giving him a stern glare. He immediately popped right back down to the ground and out of sight to finish erasing Henry's memory.

A few minutes later, Will walked back in, "Phew! Brisk night out there," he said to the clerk.

The clerk said, "What happened to your friend?"

"Oh, he just wanted directions," Will said.

Will smiled at the clerk and led Emily by the elbow toward the back of the store. "I think we might have to buy something or look like we have business here. This guy is getting suspicious."

"I could eat," Emily said. She went over to the hot dog self serve station and began putting together a meal. Will did the same.

They each got a pop and put their money on the counter, and then sat at the round plastic table in the food area of the store. Partly out of sight from the clerk.

"So, where's the unnatural weirdness?" Emily whispered.

Will shrugged.

"And how come," Emily continued quietly, "this alarm thing doesn't go off constantly? Or continuously? I mean Henry must have been possessed for a while. And that swamp monster didn't just pop out of a tear minutes before we got to him. That werewolf guy has probably been a werewolf for months. Or at least ever since it got dark tonight. So, what's up with that?"

Will pondered this seriously as he chewed. "I don't know," he said finally. He scrambled to find the book.

He shuffled through it as Emily leaned over to look over his shoulder and read.

"Ooo, maybe here," he said excitedly, pointing to the page. He read aloud, "'The Paranormal Activity Alarm prioritizes threats and alerts to the worst cases first.' A-ha," Will said. "It also spaces the alarms to go off at intervals. Somewhere between 45 minutes to 2 hours. Seems kind of random." He frowned. "If you want to find the next paranormal anomaly, you may switch the 'Manual Override' switch to force the alarm to sound an alert for the next case, and show you its GPS position."

"Hmm," Emily said, interested.

Will looked at her, "Hey, your hair's starting to dry around the edges."

"Excellent," Emily said.

They sat at the table a while longer, reading the book, eating snack cakes, and glancing around for paranormal activity. They sat there long enough for their clothes to become damp instead of soggy. And their hair almost completely dry.

Emily casually glanced down the aisle at the counter to see what the clerk was doing. He folded his magazine in half, put it in his back pocket, stretched his arms in the air while he yawned, and then casually walked through the counter and disappeared into thin air.

Emily leaped out of her chair so fast she knocked it over. It startled the hell out of Will and he jumped up too. He pounded his sternum once or twice to dislodge some misguided snack cake. He coughed and then swallowed again the right way.

"What?" he croaked out.

"The clerk is the paranormal thing!" Emily exclaimed.

"What?!" Will asked in a stage whisper.

"It's okay, he's gone," Emily said, jumping up and down. "He's a ghost. He just walked through the counter and disappeared."

Will's eyes got wide and he walked quickly to the front of the store. He looked left and right, no sign of the clerk.

"Where's the shoe horn?" he said.

Emily ran back to the table to get it. She flipped it on and turned on the tear revealing light. Sure enough, right in front of the counter was a big old tear. It glowed white

limey green in the haze of Veil Sealer light.

"Holy crap," Will said, "Right in front of us the whole time." He looked amazed.

Emily was in awe too. "I guess we should seal it up or something?" she asked, trying to remember the drill. "Oh," she said, "We have to do a count for life forms first." She messed with the settings again, "In a 30 foot radius range, let's say..." But just then, the ghostly clerk came back through the tear, and brought about 20 friends with him. It looked like a dead frat party about to happen.

"Ugh," Emily said.

"Oh, no no, I don't think so," Will said to the dead party boys. "Hop right back there inside the afterlife."

They ignored him. One of them even carried a ghost keg of beer. "I don't know how they're going to drink that," Emily said.

"How do we make them go back in?" Will asked, confused. He started paging through the pocket guide again.

"Ghosts'," he read. "Okay, they like sparkly things, and jingly tinkling little noises."

"What?" Emily asked.

"Yes," Will said, "wave your keys at them or something and see if they come."

Emily rolled her eyes, but did what Will asked. She got out her keys and shook them at the ghosts. They turned around and kind of started to look entranced. "Oh, my God, it's working," Emily said.

"Here," Will handed her a handful of cat collars with bells from a nearby rack. She jingled those too. The ghosts started to come towards her. He grabbed a sparkly fourth of July hat off the shelf and started waving it at the ghosts too. They came towards them as if mesmerized.

"Toward the tear!" Will reminded her. She shifted over to lead them through the tear.

"This is so stupid," she said. "They look like grown ups. Why are they falling for this?"

"I have no idea," Will said.

"Maybe they're extra stupid or something," Emily said helpfully.

Will read more from the book as he waved the sparkly hat around. "No, it says here it works on all ghosts. Or most ghosts."

"Most'? Yeeks," Emily said.

One by one they faded into the tear. "Quick!" Will said. "Seal it!"

Emily ran around to the other side of the tear. Will joined her. They looked at the Veil Sealer, and switched its settings to seal the tear. Then Will read the instructions from the book. "Start with the bottom of the tear and make sure you have the edge of it in the sealer. Then press the 'Seal' button and slowly move the sealer upward. It should close the tear as if you are zipping up a zipper. When the tear is sealed it will disappear from view."

Emily did as she was told and slowly zipped the tear up with the sealer. "Oo, it moves around like real fabric, I can feel it." She was a little grossed out by this for some reason. She didn't want to *feel* anything ghostly. When she got to the top of the tear, the whole thing disappeared, just like the book said it would. "Hey," she said happily.

She turned the sealer off, and turned around to go get the backpack. Will turned with her, both smiling. Their smiles immediately faded as they saw what had been behind them for God knows how long.

An entire team of junior high soccer girls stood behind them in green and yellow uniforms, eyes wide, in a daze, mouths open. An old gray haired man with a pot belly and a baseball cap who must be their coach stood with them, equally amazed. Their green and yellow team bus stood big, bright and shiny just outside the door behind them. How had Will and Emily missed all this?

Wearily Will picked up the backpack from the floor and dug through it for the tranquilizer gun and memory eraser. Emily thumbed through the book. Her eyes lit up, and she handed the book to Will and pointed to a section.

He nodded, with a happy expression of discovery on his face. Emily was digging through the bag now. She pulled out two little folded packages and handed one to Will. The team just watched them do this.

Em and Will each unfolded a frighteningly solid

looking gas mask and put them on. Then Emily pulled out of the bag what looked like a little gray ball a cat had chewed on too much. She pulled a white string from it, and dropped it onto the ground. The girls and the coach watched it drop. Then they all swooned slowly and went down to the ground in a comfortable heap of sleeping people.

Emily then took the memory eraser and held it up. Will looked for a particular release on the side and unlatched it. Suddenly little antennas popped out of each side of the eraser. Expanding the range. They both stood well behind it as they set it to erase memories en masse. In a few minutes all memory of the paranormal events in the store had been erased from the girls' and coach's minds. They folded up the antennas and took off their gas masks.

"Batch mode," Will said happily. Emily let out a little laugh. She put all their stuff back in the bag and put it over her shoulder. They started to walk towards the door, climbing over sleeping girls, when the customer bell went off again. They looked up. Henry.

"You two," he said.

"Henry!" Will said happily, and pulled out his tranquilizer gun and shot him. Emily handed Will a memory eraser, and went to wander the store.

"Hey, Will," Emily said.

"Yeah?" he said, concentrating on the memory eraser screen.

"Where's the real cashier of this store?"

He popped his head up to look at her, puzzled too. "I don't know."

Emily wandered back behind the counter to check things out. "Well, here he is," she said, surprised.

The real clerk was a young skinny twenty-something guy with short brown hair. He was lying on the floor curled up happily, with a smile on his face, snoozing away. He had sand sprinkled on and around him.

"But—pahah," Emily said.

"What?" Will came around the counter to join her. They both looked down at the man.

"Does it not look like he's had a visit from the

Sandman?" Emily asked, bewildered.

"Yes," Will said. "We don't have to hunt the Sandman now do we?" he asked wearily.

She shuffled through the book once again. "No," she said, equally weary. "He's too hard to catch. If you don't catch him in the act, you may as well not bother." She closed the book. "Good," she said. "'Cause I am exhausted."

"At least we're all dry now," Will said sleepily as he helped her over girls lying on the floor.

"Yes," Emily said with a yawn. "You know, I don't remember this much bizarre stuff happening before. Or at all. Especially not in one day," she said. "Has this stuff always been going on and we just didn't know about it?"

"I don't know." He shook his head as they stood just inside the convenience store door, where Henry slept soundly behind them.

Emily suddenly gasped as a new thought hit her. "You don't think we've ever had our memories erased. Do you?" She asked in a childlike whisper.

They both looked horrified by the thought, and pondered it for a moment. Then they looked at each other and shook their heads, "Nah..."

One of the girls started to stir behind them, tossing and turning in her drug-induced sleep. Probably about to wake. They hurried out the door and out to their car. Finally bound for home. They hoped.

\* \* \*

Will and Emily were lying cuddled up uncomfortably in the backseat of their car. Too tired to go home, they had stopped along the side of the road near the edge of town. "Just for a quick nap," Will had said. Before they went home to go to sleep. The road had kept swimming around when he had tried to drive.

"I wish we hadn't given that werewolf our blanket," Emily said as she drifted off to sleep. Not that she was cold. They'd left the car running and the heat on. But she liked to be covered with something while she slept. It was all psychological.

"Mm-hmm..." Will answered.

They slept for a while. Long enough to get entangled in dreams that seemed real and very complicated. So much so that they barely noticed when a rumbling from the Earth gently woke them up. Then, the way sound does when a person wakes, it grew louder as they came back to consciousness. It shook the car. The rumbling was almost deafening. Like a downpour, but not. Suddenly the paranormal alarm went off from the front seat. Barely audible.

"Thank you!" Will shouted at it.

The windows were fogged from their breathing, but they could see dark shadows going by quickly. Shadows made by moonlight. Nothing made sense. It was like waking from one dream into another. Like they were in the pocket of an earthquake or an avalanche or... conscious reality started to become clearer.

Will took his sleeve and rubbed fog off one of the side windows so they could see.

"Oh," Emily said, realizing. Legs and hooves were going by.

"A herd of something," Will said loudly. "Something white."

They both leaned closer to the window.

"Oh, my God," Emily said. It was still a little foggy on the window, but she thought she could see something extraordinary. Something she couldn't really be seeing.

The herd was past them now and the sound was less thundering. "Were those unicorns?" Emily said.

"Wow," was all Will could get out. He opened the door and they both climbed out.

Their limbs were stiff and the night air was cold, but they barely noticed as they stared after the unicorns.

"I didn't know they hung out in herds like that," Emily said.

Will gave her an exasperated look.

"Oh, right," she said, realizing, "Unicorns aren't real... except," she gestured toward the galloping herd.

"Oh, yeah," Will realized. He'd forgotten they'd entered this new world of paranormal creatures and phenomena.



"Not a dream," he mumbled to himself. "Ugh," he said, "Let's look up unicorns." He opened the front door of the car and reached in to get their backpack and books. He handed her a pocket guide and she got back in the backseat to read, and closed the door.

Will got into the front seat and closed the door to keep warm. The lights went out. Emily cleared her throat from the back seat.

"Oh, sorry," Will said, turning on the dome light.

Emily read for a few minutes in a sleepy kind of way. Her eyes began to light up slowly as she read. A little smile crept over her face. She looked more awake.

"Will," she said, leaning forward to tap his shoulder. He had actually almost fallen asleep again in the front seat, clutching the backpack.

"Hmm?" He said, his eyes popping open again.

"This is so cool," Emily said excitedly. "The unicorns have a dimension of their own. Or they belong to this other fairy mystical dimension with other beautiful serene creatures. It's so cool!"

Will smiled in spite of his tiredness. He liked it when she was like this.

She read some more. Her face fell. "Ugh," she said. "We have to track the herd, and encircle it with a force field and send it back to magical fairy land..." She looked very tired again. She leaned back in the seat. "I don't remember this many weird things happening before," she said. Then she snapped to life and leaned forward and grabbed the alarm and looked at the GPS.

"Okay," she said. "It looks like they have run way the heck out of our reach. Dammit."

He grabbed the book from her and read some more. "Okay," he said, "There is a solution." He set the book down and turned around to put the car in gear. "We have to go home for some supplies first."

\* \* \*

They rushed quickly into their apartment, went to the cardboard TV box in the middle of the room, and started

rummaging through it. Will pulled out a big white boxy shaped thing, roughly an 8 inch cube. It seemed heavy and kind of looked like a block of ice.

"Ew," Emily said, "What is that?"

"You shall see, my love," said Will, in a hurry. He rummaged some more and pulled out a thing that looked like a gray pen. He held it up to the light and read the tiny writing on it, then put it in the backpack. "Okay," he said. "Let's go."

Back out to the car they went, with Will trying to carry the block of white. He was walking quickly and trying to keep the backpack strap from falling off his shoulder and trying to hold the heavy cube. Emily opened the passenger door for him.

"Okay, read me in the right direction," Emily said as she started the car up.

Will picked up the alarm to read the GPS. "Well," he said, "They are somewhere out here," he pointed to the screen. "Which is probably into the mountains by now."

She sighed.

"But," he continued. "If we go to the field where we were, we should be able to draw them back."

"Really?" She looked brightened by this. "William, why didn't you say so?" She started to drive back to where they had been.

Once there, they got out of the car and she waited for an explanation for the white cube. They walked out into the field about half a block and he set it on the ground. She raised her eyebrows.

"It's a salt lick," he said proudly, as if he'd created it from clay.

"Eh?" Emily said confused.

"It's not a real salt lick. Or maybe it is, but not just that. It has other mystical stuff in it. It attracts all hooved paranormal creatures. Like a real salt lick attracts deer."

"Huh," Emily said. "Does that mean we have to sit here for 3 days?"

"No, it works quickly," Will said, digging through the backpack now. "You're gonna need this," he pulled out the pen-like thing and handed it to her.

"Me?" she said, appalled.

"Believe me, you're gonna want to be the one to do this."

She didn't look convinced.

"You like to skip," he said.

Now she looked confused.

"Just—" he started to say something, but the sight of many white creatures in the distance instantly had his full attention. "Look," he whispered.

She looked. The unicorns were coming out of the woodwork, so to speak. Coming out of the woods in actuality. They almost glowed. They were more than white. They were practically a light of their own. They trotted and walked toward them and the mystical salt lick cube. Will grabbed Emily's arm as the unicorns began to get close, realizing they shouldn't be standing right next to the salt lick. They stumbled back a few feet, then walked backwards slowly, watching the unicorns with awe as they got closer. Em and Will were about 20 feet away from the salt lick when they stopped.

The unicorns, 2 or 3 at a time, went up to the white cube and licked it. They each took turns, as if to be polite. It's like they were noble and wise and had manners. It was amazing. There seemed to be about 30 of them, and dark smaller creatures were weaving in between them. Will hadn't noticed them at first.

"Look," he said to Emily, "deer."

"Wow," she said back.

They were so lost in the amazingness of the moment, staring at all the graceful creatures, that they didn't stop to wonder what to do about the deer. At first. Then it dawned.

"We have to separate them from the deer don't we?" Emily asked.

"I have no idea how we would do that," Will said. Both were whispering, as if the deer and unicorns couldn't see them. But they knew they were there. They stopped to look at the people every once in a while. As if judging to see if they were a threat, and, deciding they were not, kept taking turns at the salt lick.

"I think we may have to send the deer back with the

unicorns," Will said quietly. "I can't think of any other way to do it."

"I guess," Em said. "I guess they'll be happy in mystical fairy land, just as much as they are here. Probably more." She thought for a moment. "Unless we are separating them from family members or something." She looked sad.

"Don't think about that," Will said. "We want to get home sometime tonight, don't we?" He set the backpack down and pulled out the Veil Sealer. He got the pen light out of his pocket to look at the settings on the sealer. "It can create a tear too," he whispered, in explanation. "There's a specific code number for each dimension. I just have to enter the code and flip the 'Create Doorway' switch and press the button."

"Wow," Emily said, "They really thought of everything." She was astounded. She stepped closer to watch him enter the code.

"Now," he took the pen thing from her, "watch this." He shined the pen light on it to read something, then put the light away. He flipped a catch on the pen gadget and suddenly it sprang open. It quickly extended like an antenna and became about 3 feet long. He handed it back to her.

She looked confused.

"Now," he said, "when they are all gathered in a group—when we think we have them all—you have to run around them with this thing turned on."

"Why?" Emily asked.

"It creates a force field that contains them. Then I create a tear at the edge of the force field."

"Then what?" Emily asked.

"You ask too many questions," he whispered at her. He looked stumped. "I don't know, I have to read." He picked up the pen light and pocket guide again. "Okay, I..." he lifted up the Veil Sealer and pointed to a part of it, "Press that button."

She looked closer at the button. It said, 'Send.'

"Ha ha!" she said, then giggled.

"Okay," he said, "I think we have them all." He looked around. There didn't seem to be any stragglers or anything.

Of the deer or unicorn varieties. "I guess it's time to do your thing."

"Won't they run if I do this?" She asked, a little nervous.

"No. That salt lick thing is *really*... attention grabbing," he told her. "Now, skedaddle."

"But, but..." she said.

"They like skipping," he said. He kind of rolled his eyes. "They like happy stuff like that." He kind of looked disgusted by this.

"Really?" Emily smiled. "Yay!" she whispered.

"Push the button and go," he said. "I will brace myself and deal."

She smiled a big smile at him and looked for the button on the antenna thing. She found it at the base of it. "Okay," she said. "Here goes."

She pressed the button, and immediately the pen-antenna grew even longer. Two more feet of thin metal came out of the end of it, and then something bizarre happened. A glowing white flag made of mist came out of that last two feet of metal. It rippled in the breeze and everything.

"Wow," Emily said, amazed. She turned to Will.

"Oh, my God," Will said as he saw her face. "Emily, your eyes."

Her eyes were glowing white like the mist. With icy blue irises instead of her usual brown. She looked serene. She smiled happily. "I feel a buzz," she said and kind of laughed.

"Yuh-huh," he said, totally distracted by the eye thing.

She waved the flag around in the air like a huge sparkler, watching it flutter and flow.

"Uh," Will said, "Maybe you'd better go do your thing before you become radioactive."

"Pft!" She said to him.

Then she took off. She ran at first and then skipped because she couldn't help herself. She just felt so happy. The unicorns, the deer, the mystical flag thing filling her with happiness and a high on life feeling that was barely containable.

She didn't know it, but every step she took while holding the flag created a bright glowing footprint on the earth. She was literally drawing a circle around the unicorns. With footprints.

The unicorns watched her with contentment as she circled around them. And Will could swear he saw or heard a few of them laughing. With joy. The deer were a little less joyful. They were mostly curious and kind of wary, but stayed calm.

Emily was done with her circle now and was galloping back toward him happily. Her eyes were less glowy now. Maybe she had stamped it out through the bottom of her feet as she skipped. He didn't know. "Weeee!" she actually said as she ran back to his side.

"Off now," she said aloud as she flipped the switch to 'Off.' The rest of the glow immediately left her eyes.

'Phew!' Will thought. No radioactive wife.

He walked over to the edge of the footprint circle as the animals watched. He held out the Veil Sealer and pressed the 'Send' button.

Instantly the entire herd of unicorns and deer disappeared, and the footprints with them.

"Whoa!" Will said, stumbling backwards from the shock. "I thought it would take more... be more of a process... shit." He had fallen to the ground.

Emily laughed. "Ahh," she sighed. "That was worth waking up for." She smiled. She walked over to Will and helped him off the ground.

They gathered their stuff together again, white cube of mystical salt and all, and started walking back towards the car.

"So, uh..." Will began, "do you have super powers or anything now?" he smiled at her.

She swatted his arm.

"No," he said. "You still hit like a girl."

"Hey!" She said, and tried to swat him again, but he jumped out of the way.

He had a mischievous look on his face as he started to run toward the car, out of her reach.

"Hey!!!" she shouted as she ran after him. She tried to

catch him, but couldn't. Even though he was carrying both the backpack and the salt lick again, running like a dork because of it, and laughing.

\* \* \*

Emily was leaning with her back against the car, with her hands jammed into her sweatshirt pockets for warmth. Will was standing just in front of her, scanning the countryside with his eyes. Emily yawned.

"Maybe it was a false alarm," she said, still in the middle of her yawn.

"Maybe," Will said distractedly, still looking for activity.

"Is there a reason most of this stuff happens out in the boonies?" Emily asked tiredly.

Will didn't answer.

"Probably," Emily answered herself. "Probably has to do with microns and neutrons, and are those real things or did I just make them up? I am really tired. I hate how I feel when I'm really tired. And I'm a night person. It's amazing that I can't even make it to the sunrise anymore. Maybe I never worked this hard before. I thought I was working hard before. This is just kind of a different sort of work. And maybe I'm tired from the glowy unicorn flag machine thing. Except I was tired before then. I can't remember what I was saying. I better be careful, if I get too tired I start babbling. It's a good thing I'm not there yet. How funny would that be? I wonder—"

"Shh!" Will said, waving a hand at her without looking back. "I saw something."

She stepped forward to stand next to him and look around. They both saw a flash of light from a thicket of trees 20 yards away, in front of them to the right. It was so fast and so muted, it could have been a trick of the eyes, or the moonlight.

"Did you see it?" Will whispered.

"Yes," Emily's eyes got wide. She linked her arm through Will's. "This is so much creepier than something just coming right out and trying to get you, isn't it? All this

tense anticipation. Is it there? Is it not? It's so edge-of-your-seat scary. Something could jump out at us right now and make us jump a mile in the air. Or give us heart attacks. Or are we too young to have heart attacks? You know there was that one guy at school—"

"Emily!" Will hissed.

"Sorry," she whispered.

The smoky flash happened again. It sent a cold chill down Will's spine. "I'm afraid we're going to have to go in there," he whispered.

Emily whimpered quietly and held Will's arm tighter.

"No, it'll be fine," he said, patting her hand. He picked up the backpack and threw it over his other shoulder, then started to walk. She walked along with him, still holding on.

Eventually she let his arm go, it was too hard to walk across a field that way. But she stayed close to him. The light flashed a few more times, and as they got closer, they realized it wasn't a light. It was a person.

Or the ghost of a person. Standing beneath a tree. Flickering. They got more wide eyed as they approached it. It was like it was a TV channel not quite coming in right. Yet. They got within 10 feet of it. It was an old man. Wearing gray pants and white shirt, with a gray sweater. He had a look of fearful awe on his face. He stared straight ahead, not seeing them. They stopped walking. He looked so ghastly. Shadows falling across an expression of muted horror on his face. He stopped flickering. Like the signal had come in correctly. Then he slowly turned to look at them.

He seemed to look right through them at first. It sent another cold chill down both their spines. Emily shivered. Possibly partly from the cold night air.

"Where's the tear?" she whispered to Will, urgency and fear in her voice.

He slowly got the Veil Sealer out of the backpack. He switched it to 'Reveal Tears' and shined it in front of them. They saw nothing. "Damn," he said under his breath.

Then as if curious, the ghost started walking towards them. "Ahhh!" they both screamed, and Emily fell



backwards onto the ground. Will barely kept himself from falling over.

"Turn it off! Turn it off!" Emily said.

Will snapped the machine off. The ghost stopped walking towards them. It looked at the two of them, then it suddenly disappeared.

"What?!" Emily said. Will helped her up. "What?! It can't just disappear! There's no tear there." She looked disgusted.

"Whatever," Will said, heart still thumping a bit too wildly. "I just want to get some sleep. We'll figure it out tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay," Em said.

They both started walking back through the trees and back to the field. Then the tinkling alarm began to sound. Like a nightmare.

"Nooooooooo-ooooo-oooo!" Emily gave the word many syllables.

"I cannot believe this," Will said. He pulled out the alarm to look at the screen. "Huh," he said.

"What?" She stopped sulking long enough to look at the screen with him. "Oh."

The location was just a couple of blocks away. If you wanted to call them blocks, here outside of town where there technically were no city blocks.

They got back to the car and drove it down the road a little way, and stopped in front of a nice little well-kept house. It looked like it would possibly be pistachio green in the daylight.

They sat in the car staring at the house. No activity in or out as far as they could tell.

"Great," Will said. "More subtlety. Just when we're at our most sleep deprived and about to start hallucinating anyway." He sighed.

"Maybe the old dude is going to flicker here some more," Emily said, glancing around. "We're sure it's this house?"

He glanced at the screen again. "Yup."

"Maybe we should get out and have a look around before I fall asleep right here," Emily said.

"Yeah," Will agreed. "I could use some more cold air. Let's go."

They got out of the car and walked up the walk to the house. No lights on inside. No lights on outside. Moonlight lit up the house well enough. Will motioned for her to follow as they walked around back. He peeked around the corner behind the house, then quickly snapped his head back to the side of the house.

'What?' Emily mouthed.

He pulled her back to the front of the house. "There's a woman back there," he said.

"A ghost woman?" Emily whispered.

"No, a real woman."

Emily looked unconvinced.

"She's in a bathrobe and has a coffee cup," Will said, exasperated. Why couldn't she just believe him?

"Oh," Emily said, sulking a little bit. "What do we do?"

Will looked back to see that no one was coming around to the front of the house. "I think you should talk to her," he said.

"Me? Why me?" Emily said, flustered.

"Because you're a woman. She's gonna think I'm a criminal or a pervert or something if I walk up to her in her own backyard and start chit chatting. *Duh.*"

"Oh," Emily said. "What do I say to her?"

"I don't know. Find some way to get inside her house. Pretend your car broke down and you're on a road trip and you need to make a phone call."

"Oo, clever," Emily said. "A phone call to where?"

"I don't know!" Will whispered loudly.

Emily jumped back, "Geez."

"Sorry," he said. "Just get inside her house and then knock her out and snoop around. Or snoop around while you're chatting with her, I don't know. I'm tired. Just think of something."

"Okay," Emily said. "Give me the backpack."

"What?"

"I command you to give me control of the backpack," Emily said with her hand held out firmly.

He reluctantly gave it to her.

She put it on her back and started to walk around the yard. She stopped, "Why wouldn't I go to the front door?" she whispered to Will.

"I don't know," he whispered back and shooed her toward the back of the house.

She grumbled to herself as she walked around to the back of the house. She turned the corner and found the woman standing on the back porch in a pale green bathrobe, holding a white coffee cup with both hands and staring intently at the wind chimes hanging from the back awning, tinkling gently in the breeze. She didn't even glance over as Emily approached her.

"Uh," Emily said, "Excuse me."

The woman slowly turned her head to look at Em.

"Hi," Emily said.

The woman gave her a half smile.

Emily walked up a back step or two while talking, "I was just driving on the road—I mean, all night driving... somewhere... I have a—my car broke down and—AHHHHH!" Emily screamed. The woman had shot downward into the porch as if projected downward out of a cannon. Emily stumbled back down the steps, in shock.

Will bolted out from his hiding spot on the side of the house, "What?!" he said, startled. "What what?" He looked at her wide eyed.

"She just disappeared!" Emily said. "I am soooooo not in the mood for this!"

Just then the porch light came on. They both froze. Should they run? Should they stay and try to find the tear this ghost woman came out of?

They chose to hold still and wait, hearts pounding.

A roundish balding man in his late forties or so, with brown hair, came out onto the back porch, looking incredulous.

"What the hell is going on out here?" he asked angrily.

Will stepped closer to Emily, "Do you think he's a ghost?" he said quietly.

"He just opened the back door," Emily whispered back.

"It could be a ghost door," Will said. "An illusion door. A metaphysical copy of the real door—"

"Okay, I get it," Emily said. "But I am *not* going alone this time."

Will nodded. They both walked over to the porch and up to the man. They smiled in a friendly way as they ascended the steps and stood in front of him.

"What the hell are you doing?" The man said, still angry and bewildered.

Both Em and Will gingerly reached out with a finger to touch the man on a shoulder. He was real.

"Phew!" Emily said.

Will looked relieved as well.

The man still stared at them, looking pissed and tired. Emily had a thought.

She smiled at the man, "Can we come into your house?" she asked sweetly.

"No, you can't come into my house." He looked at her like he thought she was an idiot. "What are you, drunk?"

"No," she said with a quick little laugh. She held up her finger to say 'just a minute' and then turned to confer with Will quietly, so the man couldn't hear.

Will put his hand in his pocket and they both turned back toward the man. "Please can we come inside?" Emily said.

"Why the hell do you want to come in my house?" The man asked, voice louder than before.

Will and Em turned to each other and had a conversation with nods and almost spoken words. Seeming to agree, they turned back to the man.

Will said, "Sir, there's a ghost in your house and we'd like to get at it."

The man looked appalled, "God, what are you loonies, ghost busters?"

The couple laughed good-naturedly and as they stopped she said, "Yeah." Both were still smiling.

"What a bunch of crack pots, no you can't—" he said as he was going back inside.

Will took his hand out of his pocket and shot the man with the pellet gun.

The man fell gently in the doorway as they tried to heave him into the house.

Will said, straining, "I don't know why we bothered talking to him, we were going to erase his memory anyway."

"I wanted to be polite," she said, also straining.

They plunked the man down inside the door and closed it. They were in a small neat kitchen. They walked through a doorway and into a living room. It was big, had dark green carpet, a dark couch and an overstuffed chair. The green robed woman sat in the chair.

She no longer held a coffee cup. She just stared up at them. She had dark brown hair, layered and curled, framing her face. She appeared to be in her mid-forties.

Will and Emily just stood still staring at her.

"Tear," Emily whispered without looking at Will.

He immediately got the Veil Sealer out of the backpack she was still wearing and shone the reveal light around the room. The tear was in the center of the room. Right in front of the woman's chair. The woman looked at it with interest. So did Emily.

"Which way is 'in'?" Emily whispered to Will.

"Get out your keys and let's find out," he said back to her.

She took off the backpack and got out her keys and tentatively shook them at the woman.

The woman looked interested, but she didn't move. She turned her head and smiled up at Emily. Emily recognized that smile. "Uh-oh," she said. The woman quickly shot downward right through the chair and disappeared.

"Ugh!" Will yelled. "I see why you hated that."

Emily groaned. "How are we gonna get her back?"

"Let me see if they have advice for hard cases," Will said and took out his pocket guide and started thumbing through it.

Emily walked around the living room. It was big for this tiny house. Down the hall appeared to be bedrooms, probably a bathroom. There was a door to the right that might be a dining room or a den or something. And, of course, the front door near it, perpendicular to it. Will sighed. Emily glanced at him.

"Well?" she said.

"No advice," he answered. "We just have to do what we usually do, but 'more'."

"It says that?"

"Pretty much."

"Damn," she said. "So we load up on sparklies and tinkle noises and try to lure her back with them?"

"I guess," Will said. He looked around the room. "Hey, here's a little bell," he said. "And a crystal... angel looking thing..."

"Oo!" Emily said, "She was staring at the wind chimes on the back porch. I'll go out and get them." She walked back through the kitchen and out onto the back porch. The woman was standing out there again. Emily stopped walking with a start.

She knew what she would have to do, if it was at all possible. Try to lure the woman back inside with the wind chimes, which she was now staring at contentedly again, coffee cup back in hand.

Emily tip toed out the back door and over to the wind chimes. The woman didn't seem to notice or care. Emily unhooked them from the hook they were on and slowly started to carry them toward the house, holding them up high. The woman turned with them, following them into the house. Emily thought it might actually work. But then the woman noticed Emily through the wind chimes. She focused on her instead now, locked eyes with her.

The woman tilted her head downward a little bit, still looking directly into Emily's eyes, then she smiled.

"Ohhh..." Emily said, waiting for it. The woman shot downward quickly through the kitchen floor. "Ahh!" Emily let out a quick scream, even though she had known what was coming.

"You okay?" Will called from the living room.

"It happened again," Emily said. She walked into the living room holding the wind chimes. "I almost had her, though," she said. She set the chimes on the couch.

"Look what I found," Will said. He held up a bunch of Christmas lights. He had a big cardboard box at his feet. "They were in the dining room. That's where they hide their clutter," he said.

"They?" Emily said, whispering, suddenly wondering if anyone else was asleep in the house.

"Oh, I don't know," Will whispered back, "I didn't look. But if we can get that chick back, we can lure the heck out of her." He waved the tangle of lights around happily. "Find me a plug in."

They found one behind an end table and Will plugged them in. They were all tiny and white. Very pretty. The woman suddenly appeared, standing in front of the Christmas lights.

"Yah!" Will said, startled.

The woman stared at the Christmas lights, as Will slowly led her towards the tear. Emily flipped on the sealer again to illuminate the tear. The woman walked through it and didn't disappear.

"That must be backwards," Emily whispered. "Go the other way."

Will lured the woman back toward the tear from the opposite direction. This time she disappeared when she passed through it.

"Thank God," Emily whispered. "Now—" She was interrupted by a groan from the kitchen. The man was waking up.

"Dammit!" Emily said, searching frantically for her pellet gun. She found it and ran back into the kitchen. Will heard the 'thwip!' of the pellet being shot and the thud of the man falling back to the floor.

Emily walked back into the living room while tucking her gun into her back pocket with both hands, and then flipping her hair as she stood at a cool tilt with one leg bent.

"Feeling a little ultra cool, are we?" Will said with a laugh.

"Shut up," Emily said, returning to a normal posture.

"Now we have to do a life form reading before we seal the tear," Emily said.

Will held up the Veil Sealer and counted. "Five life forms," he said with a grimace.

Emily thought a moment and whispered, "You think this man has a wife and—"

"Who are you?" a little girl's voice said from behind them.

They were startled and turned to look at her. She was standing in the hallway that led to the bedrooms. She was about 5 years old, had long blond hair and a nightgown on.

"Oh, sorry," Emily said gently. "Did we wake you?"

"Yes," the little girl said after a pause, like she was thinking about it. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, we're just friends of... your dad's," Emily said.

"My dad..." the girl said, thinking.

She must be still groggy from sleep, Emily thought. She didn't want to have to zap a little girl with a pellet gun. Maybe they could make this all seem normal somehow. Will just stood watching the two of them.

Emily crouched down in front of the little girl. "I'm Emily," she said. She held out her hand to the little girl.

"I'm Lily," the little girl said. She reached out her hand to shake Emily's, but her hand went right through Em's.

Emily sort of fell backwards, shocked. The girl looked startled too and started to cry. Will stood still behind Emily, eyes wide.

Emily got a hold of herself and got back into her crouch in front of the girl. "Don't cry, Lily," Emily said.

The girl began to cry less and made a pouty face like she was trying to hold back tears. It broke Emily's heart not to be able to hug the girl to make her feel better. "I'm going to talk to my husband for a minute. Okay, Lily?" The girl nodded.

Emily and Will walked halfway across the living room and talked in a whisper.

"What are we supposed to do with her?" Em asked. "We can't just send her through the tear alone."

"Well," Will said, thinking, "She is already dead, Em..."

She looked aghast.

Will spoke quickly, "I mean what else can really happen to her? It's not like she needs food, shelter, and clothing at this point."

"Well, what if creepy otherworldly spookies try to freak her out in the afterlife?" Emily said.

Just then an orange cat slunk out from behind the big



comfy chair. Neither one of them had known there was a pet in the house. The little girl had been sniffing, but stopped when she saw the cat. It was like she forgot all her troubles. She bent down and sort of waved her hand near the ground to attract the cat. The cat slunk off toward the girl.

Emily dreaded the moment the girl tried to pet the cat and couldn't 'cause her hand went through it. That didn't happen.

The cat cozied up to the girl, who petted the cat happily. Then the little girl picked the cat up, as if it weighed almost too much for her, but she did it, and held her tightly, cuddling her.

Em and Will were shocked. The cat was dead too.

The little girl set the cat down then, tired of holding it, and petted it one last time. Then the cat started to slink off toward the tear in the middle of the room. The girl followed. The cat disappeared inside the tear. Just before the girl got to the tear, she turned to Will and Emily.

"Tara says it's time to go home now," she said. She smiled and waved goodbye to them happily. Then she took another step and disappeared inside the tear. Emily and Will were stunned.

They stood silently for a moment, staring at the tear.

"Do a reading," Emily said quietly.

Will looked down at the sealer's screen. "Three life forms," he said. "You, me, and the man who lives here."

He solemnly stepped forward and switched the machine to 'Seal' and sealed the tear.

"Done," Emily said when he was finished.

They put the man's Christmas lights away. Then they went back into the kitchen and erased his memory. They left him lying on the kitchen floor, not sure what else to do with him.

"He'll think he's been sleep walking," Will said. They both stepped around him and out the back door, locking it and closing it. They walked around the house in the brisk night air, back to the car. Both in a thoughtful and tired daze. When they got to the car they looked up to see the old man ghost from the woods walking down the street quickly

towards them and waving.

"Ahh!" Will said when he saw the man. "Car keys, sealer—we need ghost repellent or something!"

Emily whipped out her car keys and waved them at the man, trying to distract him anyway, even if they couldn't find a tear to put him through.

The man was out of breath and stopped near them. He cocked his head to look at her funny as she jangled the keys at him.

"I knew it was real!" he said as he caught his breath. "Ha!"

Will and Em exchanged a strange look with each other.

"Success!" the man went on. "So many years, you know, trying and not succeeding. Or not sure you were succeeding..."

Emily felt empathy for the man. "You were trying to communicate with the living?" she asked.

He thought for a moment, "Well, that's a funny way of putting it, isn't it?" he said with a laugh. "No, not at all. I was just trying to get out."

"Of... Hell?" Will asked solemnly.

"What?" the man asked. He shook his head. "Let's start again, shall we?" he said. "My name is Carl Sheffel." He held out his hand to shake Will's.

Here we go again, Emily thought.

Just to be polite, Will did hold out his hand, and waited for the inevitable moment of disappointment for the man when his hand went through Will's. The man grasped Will's hand. The man's hand was solid and real.

"Ahhh!" Will yelled and pulled his hand away from the man quickly. "What the hell is that?!" Will shouted.

The man looked taken aback. "Sorry?"

Emily looked shocked. She put her key jangling hand down to her side. "You're real?" she asked.

"What a weird thing to ask somebody," the man said. He had caught his breath by now and was standing with his hands on his hips. "I do apologize, I thought you knew. I was astral projecting before when I came upon you in the woods."

"Oh..." Emily said. Will still looked angry at being

shocked.

"I wasn't sure it had worked," Carl continued. "I've tried it so many times. I've never met people while out and about before. I had to rush out here and see if it was true. My car's parked just up the road."

They still looked incredulous. Too many shocks for one night.

"Uh-huh," Will said.

"I'm a professor at the local college," Carl said. They looked unimpressed. "Metaphysical Studies," he said.

The girl perked up at this. "Hey," she said, turning to the young man.

"Emily," the young man said in a warning way. "No."

She pouted. She turned to Carl and smiled at him and shook his hand. "Nice to meet you, though. We can't stay and chat. I'm Emily," she said. "This is Will."

"We'll just be leaving now," Will said. He took Emily's arm and gently led her to the car.

"Oh, let me give you my card," Carl said, searching his pockets. "Here." He handed it to Emily.

She took it happily. "Bye!" she said as she was put inside the car by Will.

"If you ever want to talk about the experience!" Carl called after her as Will shut her into the car and walked around to get in too. "About why you could see me astral projecting..." Carl continued, puzzled.

"Nice meeting you," Will said civilly as he got into the car, turned it on, and drove away.

\* \* \*

They were driving away from the ghost house and Carl, both dead tired.

"Home?" Emily said sleepily to Will.

"God and government-issued alarms willing," Will answered.

And at that the alarm music began to sound again.

Will dropped his head for a moment in utter frustration, "I hate reality."

"Maybe this is a dream," Emily said hopefully, and

pinched herself. "Ow."

\* \* \*

They drove up to a furniture store, dark and locked up for the night. They parked in the empty parking lot under the lone streetlamp in the middle of it. They both got out of the car and looked around.

"Well, it should be somewhere around here," Will said, glancing at the GPS screen.

Just then an old truck drove by and slowed down to almost a crawl.

"Maybe this isn't the best part of town," Emily said nervously.

The truck turned to drive into the lot as Emily and Will inched back toward their own car to get inside it again.

The truck parked about twenty feet away from them and a man got out. Wearing a baseball cap and a red plaid flannel shirt. Henry.

"Oh, thank God," Emily whispered in relief.

Henry walked toward them looking determined. "I know this is gonna sound crazy," he said, "but I swear I really know you from somewhere."

"What are you, drawn to us like a magnet?" Will asked.

"What?" Henry said, looking confused.

"It's okay," Emily said. "Get back inside your truck and we'll explain everything." She put her hand on his back in a comforting way.

"You guys are really freaking me out," Henry said.

"Really," Will said, "let's just get you back in your truck and we'll all have a nice little talk." He put his hand on Henry's back too. The two of them led him back to his truck while he looked suspiciously from one to the other. He climbed in reluctantly and closed the door and rolled down the window.

"Okay, what?" he asked.

Will pulled out a pellet gun and shot him in the shoulder. Henry's eyes slowly closed and he slumped forward onto his steering wheel, causing the horn to blare.

Will quickly grabbed Henry and lifted him off the horn

and leaned him back into his seat. "There's no need to be dramatic about it, Henry," he said.

They looked around quickly to see if anyone had heard the commotion. Apparently not. Emily climbed into Henry's truck to work on erasing his memory. Again.

Once she was done, she locked the passenger door. Then she went around and rolled up his driver side window. "To keep him safe," she said. Then she thought better of it and cracked the window open a little bit. "So, he can breathe," she told Will.

"He's not a dog," Will said. "What is it with you and this guy? You sure do mollycoddle him a lot."

Emily shrugged her shoulders as she made sure Henry had his keys, they were still in the ignition. Then she locked his driver side door and shut it. "Safe and sound," she said happily. Then she picked up Will's arm that had the alarm so she could look at the screen. "Where's our paranormal dot?" she asked.

He looked at it too. "Still around here somewhere," he said. Then he looked up and saw something that made him grab Emily's arm and pull her hard toward the ground as he ducked too.

"What the hell was that?" Emily hissed.

"That's the guy that bit me!" Will whispered back. "He's walking down that street!"

"The vampire?" Emily said.

"Vampire, yes, whatever," Will said.

"Well, that's our paranormal thing then," Emily said. "Let's look up vampires in the book and kill him right quick so we can go home to bed already." She dug through the backpack to get the book. She flipped through the pages to the vampire section.

"Oh," she said.

"What?" Will looked worried.

"Well, we don't kill him. We inoculate him. That's what they call it. Actually it's like an antidote to vampirism. There's a little gun thing that we shoot him with. See, here's a drawing." She showed Will. "Did we pack that one?" she asked nervously.

"Yeah, I have all the small ones in here," Will said,

digging through the backpack. But by then the vampire had turned the corner around the parking lot and walked down the street far enough that he could see them huddled behind the truck. He paused for a moment and then changed his path and started walking right towards them with a confident lazy swagger.

"Oh, shit," Will said. He dug through the bag more frantically as he and Emily stood up, prepared to fight or run. Will had just found the inoculation gun when the vampire took a flying leap and jumped on him. The inoculator fell to the ground and the vampire pinned Will on top of it. Emily screamed.

The vampire covered Will's mouth to prevent him from screaming as he bit into his neck. Emily dug frantically through the bag, looking for the inoculator, unaware that Will had found it. She wondered desperately if she had anything like a cross or holy water or a wooden stake or anything she knew was supposed to stop vampires. She kicked the vampire and tried to pry him off Will. The vampire just shoved her away with his free arm. Then he stopped sucking on Will's neck and spit on the ground.

"Now I remember why I left you before," the vampire said to Will. Then he turned to look up at Emily, "But I haven't tasted you yet."

Her eyes got wide as the vampire stood up and looked at her menacingly. She started to back away from him, and he lunged at her. She screamed and ran. He chased her. She ran around the building and into the alley, thinking she could hide better in the dark shadows there.

Will watched them go as he staggered to his feet. He grabbed the inoculator from the ground, and started to stumble after them. Then he heard her scream.

Even though he was dizzy from blood loss, he made himself run around the corner where she had gone. He got into the alley and saw Emily pressed up against the old brick building's wall, with the vampire holding her there and sucking on her neck. She was struggling.

Will ran up to them and shot the vampire in the neck with the inoculator. Nothing happened. The vampire kept sucking Emily's blood. She had stopped struggling now.

Her eyes had begun to close. Why was the antidote not stopping this guy?!

Will realized it must not be an immediate cure. It could take hours to work. He desperately searched his pockets for the pellet gun. He found it and shot the vampire once in the back. It had no effect at first. Then the vampire stopped sucking, went limp, and fell to the ground with a thud. Emily slumped to the ground as well, ashen and pale from blood loss, looking almost like a corpse, and with blood covering one side of her neck. Will thought he might be sick.

He caught her before she hit the ground. Even though he was dizzy himself, he felt as if he'd gotten a second wind. As if he was filled with adrenaline. He quickly picked her up and looked around, wondering what to do. He ran with her, stumbling as he carried her, to the nearest house he could find. He set her down on the front steps and pounded frantically on the door.

"Help! Please! Call an ambulance!" he shouted.

An overweight middle aged woman with curlers in her hair opened the door slowly with wide eyes.

"Please, call an ambulance!" Will said quickly to her.

She nodded and hurried back inside to make the call. Will looked at Emily's pale face. It was waxy with perspiration. She felt cold. He could not bear to take her pulse. He gathered her up in his arms and held her tight, trying to warm her up again. "It'll be okay, it'll be okay, it'll be okay," he whispered into her hair and rocked her. It was more a comfort to him than her, he realized.

\* \* \*

About an hour later, Will and Emily stepped out of the emergency room doors, both stitched and bandaged, and Emily had needed a transfusion. Will helped her into a taxi waiting for them.

"Now we know why PAU has such a good insurance plan," Emily said feebly.

Will responded with a weak laugh.

The taxi drove them to their car, where they gathered

up the backpack, still laying on the ground. Henry and his truck were gone. They got in their car and drove silently home, both afraid to say the words, "Home now?"

They walked quietly into their apartment, once home. Will set the backpack just inside the door, kind of hoping never to see it again. He dropped his keys on the little table next to the door. He dug the alarm out of the pack and set it on the table too. Emily watched as he quietly turned it off.

Then he took her by the hand and led her into the bedroom. Too exhausted to change, they both collapsed onto the bed. Their clothes still had blood on them. They kicked their shoes off, and Will dropped his glasses onto the night stand.

Will was laying with his hands on his stomach, staring up at the ceiling. Emily scooted over to him and propped herself up.

"Nightmare protection shields up," she said to him.

He half smiled and opened his arms for her. She laid down on his chest and snuggled up to him. He put his arms around her.

"Goodnight, Will," she said sleepily.

"Goodnight, Em," he said. A moment passed. He heard a car go by outside, saw the flash of headlights travel across the ceiling as they shone through the bedroom curtains. A dog barked in the distance.

"We can quit if you want," he said to her seriously.

"Nooooooo," she said earnestly into his chest.

He chuckled. Then he closed his eyes and held her as they fell asleep. It was still dark in their room, but outside the sun was just beginning to peek up over the mountains. The night was over.



Also by Chris Slusser:

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