

OCTOBER'S SHATTERED GRAVES

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October's Shattered Graves

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The Cast of *October's Shattered Graves*

Noah Swan – One of the two drama teachers at the Stewart Hollow Regional High School. His gory demise quickly sends the town back into an all too familiar panic.

Sheriff Ben Carter – Stewart Hollow's prized Sheriff. He's a year older, a year wiser and much more confident this time around. He's engaged to be married and is looking forward to his future.

Deputy Jamie Dart – The officer who worked his way up to Deputy following the murder of Allan Reed last October. He's more dedicated this time around and is out to prove his importance.

Doug Roberts – The shy senior who wrote *October's Shattered Graves* as a tribute to last fall's innocent victims. He has an increasingly obsessive crush on Charlotte Sheldon, and a very overconfident attitude towards everything he does.

Kevin Maida – Doug's loyal best friend since middle school. He scored the leading role in the play, per Doug's request. He always seems to have his pals back, but sometimes, he's not sure if he should.

Charlotte Sheldon – An attractive and popular senior who was instantly engrossed by the *October's Shattered Graves* script. She calls it 'edgy and spine chilling'.

Levi Cole – A popular junior who is more obsessed with who he's seen with than actually being in the play. He's on a mission to snag the hottest girl in school – Charlotte – but then again, who isn't?

Harper Cole – The Sheriff Department's new, fresh out of college dispatcher, and Levi's older sister. She has a knack for not being as bright as her predecessor, Bethany Kidd.

Jude Coffman – The shy junior desperately wants to 'come out of his shell' before his senior year by joining the cast of *October's Shattered Graves*. But he's also the first one to drop out.

Libby Hatcher – A neighbor of Doug’s, the unattractive senior joins the cast primarily because there is something she has been desperately trying to tell him since they were little.

Samantha Weber – Charlotte’s best friend has a reason to be upset. Someone she can’t stand screwed her out of her last chance at performing in a high school production.

Jasper Finch – His best friends are girls - Samantha and Charlotte. Growing up in an all woman household, you’d think he’d want to branch out a bit.

Thomas Murdock – The other drama club teacher is behind *October’s Shattered Graves* 110%. He shows this by going through drastic measures to make sure the play is a success, but that also might mean there’s something in it for him.

Principal Molly Bain – The seldom seen high school principal always seems to be the bearer of bad news. She makes a major decision midway through the killing spree that causes someone to snap.

Bud Lockwood – The creepy, middle-aged groundskeeper at the Hollow’s End Cemetery discovers something on the property that could be of grave importance to the new string of murders.

Mayor Bernard Hopkins – Stewart Hollow’s Mayor is running for re-election in November and he does everything he can to stop the killings. He brings in an old acquaintance from his days in Portland, to assure the town’s safety.

Agent Spencer Holland – The old friend of Mayor Hopkins’ travels in from a Portland FBI hub to prevent another serial killer from walking all over Stewart Hollow – or is he just there to simply make the Mayor look good?

Riley Little - The young woman, who recently welcomed her first child into the world, becomes mysteriously connected to the recent slaughters.

Amber Gibson – Sheriff Carter’s fiancé came into his life at just the right time. They have plans for their future together, which possibly includes leaving Stewart Hollow behind.

CHAPTER ONE

September 30th – 9 PM

He sat in the dark room, rocking back and forth in his chair, listening to the pitter-patter of the rain on the roof.

She was asleep on the bed in front of him – brittle in her old age. He was dedicated to her and her past; ignoring what she truly was.

He'd smile at times, but it was rare anymore, especially because of what lied ahead. Stewart Hollow had a storm brewing – one fifty years in the making.

The first warning was only a couple short weeks away, and in three hours, the final warning would be only 31 days away. Then, in just over a year, the ghastly storm would arrive in Stewart Hollow.

He'd patiently wait for the old woman's final requests, and then carry them out.

First, the eldest. Second, the condemned. Last, the Lores.

A sickness grew in his stomach.

11:59 PM

Rain dumped down on Stewart Hollow as midnight grew closer. It'd been raining for the better part of a week and the

skies had remained dark and tedious through the incessant storm. The weather had been clammy with early signs of cooler temperatures arriving.

The grandfather clock in Noah Swan's house struck midnight, and the solid gold pendulum inside began to sway back and forth. A bold chime rang out in the house, waking Noah from his slumber.

He got out of bed and walked downstairs and into his kitchen. He grabbed a clean glass from the dish drain and filled it halfway with cold water from the tap. He poured it back into his mouth and rested the glass back in the dish drain.

Noah looked at the digital clock on his stove – 12:01 AM. October had begun. There was a lot to do in the coming weeks before the play. It was going to be performed one time only, and on Halloween night – honoring the nine innocent people who were senselessly killed a year ago.

Noah walked back into his living room, crossing it to the stairwell. With his bare feet, he stepped in something cold and wet. He looked down, but couldn't see anything in the dark. He reached over to the lamp next to the stairs and flipped it on. He looked at the floor – mud.

Noah squinted, making sure he saw it right, then looked all around the living room floor. There were muddy shoeprints everywhere.

“What the heck?” he quietly spoke to himself. There was a noise that came from the dining room to his right. He looked up and stared into the blackness the room sat in.

“Hello?” he called out.

There was no answer.

Noah stayed quiet and listened. The sound occurred again – it was a creaking sound from the finished wooden floor in the dining room.

He focused his vision on the dark room. “Show yourself, or I’m calling the Sheriff’s Department!”

In the dining room, a dark figure could be seen materializing from the black abyss. Noah squinted again to try and make out the trespasser, but it was useless without his glasses. He stepped forward and saw a shining glare coming from the dark room.

“What the...”

The glare shifted, and Noah was able to see that it was the light reflecting off of a steel butchers knife. The attacker made a move and blood was spilt.

October 1st

The bell rang to begin classes for the day at the Stewart Hollow Regional High School. The halls were filled with students rushing into their respective classrooms. The halls emptied out, and classes began.

The hallways were decorated with orange and black construction paper cut outs of pumpkins, ghosts and bats. Black and purple streamers were strung on the tops of the lockers that lined the hallways.

Classroom doors all over the two-story, brick building were plastered with 8x10 advertisements for the upcoming school production. It read: *One Night Only! Never forget the Innocent Souls we lost last year! Halloween Night Only – ‘October’s Shattered Graves’.*

It was lunch period, and senior Doug Roberts walked into the empty band room with his backpack over his shoulder. He was stocky, wore glasses, had disheveled brown hair and fit in perfectly with the ‘geek crowd’. He carried a brown paper bag with his lunch in it and a bottle of Pepsi in his other hand. Out of the office in the back of the band room, Mr. Thomas Murdock walked out, wiping ketchup from his mouth with a dirty napkin.

“Doug! You’re here,” Murdock said with his mouth full of hamburger. “Excuse me.” He swallowed his food and pointed at a chair against the wall. “Have a seat.”

Doug pulled up the chair and faced the thirty-year-old teacher with a buzzed cut and thick-rimmed glasses. Doug pulled out a packet of papers held together by a messy makeshift binding of string and paperclips. It was a script he had written; a play titled *‘October’s Shattered Graves’.* He handed it to his teacher.

“I made the changes you asked for. I changed the names and cut out a few scenes.” Doug said.

Murdock flipped through the script, which was plagued with red marks, crossed out words, and added dialogue.

“This is going to be great, Doug,” Murdock was inspired. “I think the town is really going to appreciate what you’ve done here. This is so original. And with the Mayor canceling the Halloween Festival again this year, I think the public will find your play very fulfilling.”

Doug smiled. “I hope so.”

“I know they will.”

“So, did you cast it?” Doug asked, tearing into his bagged lunch.

“Of course. I went through everyone’s auditions and came up with the best six we had. Jude Coffman, Libby Hatcher, Levi Cole, Jasper Finch, Charlotte Sheldon, and your buddy Kevin Maida.”

Doug smiled again. “Kevin is going to be so pumped. He’s playing Dev Liles, right?”

“Yes he is. The rest of them, obviously, are playing the Innocent Souls.”

“Good enough for me. Do they all have scripts yet?”

“I am going to get everyone their scripts by the end of the day and have a meeting with the cast and stage crew tomorrow after school. You still want to direct it?”

“If you don’t mind.”

“I’ll have to run it by Mr. Swan – you know how he always likes to be in charge – but I’m sure he’ll be fine with it since it’s not a typical school production.”

Doug smiled again, satisfied with how smoothly everything was running, and took a bite into his sandwich.

1:00 PM

Police cars flooded Franklin Street, particularly in front of Noah Swan’s home. The house was being torn apart – the discovery by a neighbor of Noah Swan’s slain body did not sit well with anyone – especially on the first day of October.

Sheriff Ben Carter – a year older and a year wiser – walked from his department issued Jeep, and up to the front door. Deputy Jamie Dart was there to greet him.

His thick, black mustache and shoulder length black hair, made Dart appear more experienced, but he really wasn’t. There hadn’t been much action in Stewart Hollow since the previous October, aside from a few fatal traffic accidents and a bank robbery or two.

Carter appointed Dart as his new Deputy because of the help he had given in the Harvest Slasher case. Allan Reed's unfortunate demise left an opening, and the eager Jamie Dart showed his hustle at the time, and it was just enough for Carter to give him a promotion.

Carter was graying in the hair, and wore a thick scruff around his neck, chin and cheeks. He loosened the cuffing around his wrists and looked Dart straight in the eye. He knew what had happened here. It was a day that he was dreading, but a day that he knew would come. He felt queasy at times during the past year just thinking about what would, or could, possibly happen as October grew closer.

“I don't want to know, do I?” Carter asked.

Dart shook his head.

Carter walked into the house where blood had been spun on the walls, and soaked deep into the fine fibers of the carpet. Noah Swan, a drama teacher at the Stewart Hollow Regional High School, was dead – stabbed to death in his own living room.

Carter stood in the room and cuffed his hand over his mouth and nose – the stench was already getting to him. Carter looked around. Forensic officers were flashing photographs and dusting for prints, but by the looks of it, they had yet to find anything significant.

“Over here, Sheriff.” the Deputy said, tapping Carter on his arm. He turned around and saw Dart was pointing to the wall behind them. There was a message written in blood – Noah Swan’s blood.

*Kelly, Kelly
Rise from your tomb.
Stalk and Kill
Under the autumn moon.
Kelly, Kelly
It’s blood you crave.
Kill and Kill,
Then return to your grave.*

The message lingered in his mind as he tried to make heads or tails of it. Dart interrupted his thoughts:

“It’s an urban legend.”

“What?” Carter asked, captivated by the menacing words.

“It’s almost like ‘Bloody Mary’. It’s been going around the high school for a few months now. They say the ghost of Kelly Rodgers is suppose to come back this October and start killing again.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

Dart pointed to the bloody body on the floor. "Obviously someone doesn't think so."

“This is simply the work of a sick individual; someone looking to stir up some panic this month.” Carter pointed to the slain carcass. “Who is this man?”

“Noah Swan. He’s a teacher at the high school.”

“Any known enemies?”

“Not that we know of, but it’s still early.”

Carter took quick notice of the muddy footprints. “What’s the deal with these?”

“We’re not sure yet. It’s been raining for like a week straight. Obviously the killer came in from outside.”

Carter took another look around at the gory mess. “If you find anything, let me know.”

Dart nodded as Carter left the scene. The Deputy looked at the writing on the wall again. He was deeply concerned.

CHAPTER TWO

October 2nd

School ended for the day, and the students who were going to make up the cast and stage crew for *'October's Shattered Graves'* gathered in the band room right down the hall from the auditorium.

Doug Roberts walked into the room with his buddy, Kevin Maida. Kevin dressed in an oversized flannel button up shirt and faded blue jeans. The two of them had been friends since middle school. He and Doug set their backpacks down in the corner, and joined the rest of the students who were all sitting around in chairs, chatting with one another.

Doug looked around – Mr. Murdock wasn't there yet. He looked over at a small section of chairs that were occupied by Charlotte Sheldon – a gorgeous girl who was out of his league – and her two friends, Samantha Weber, who was equally as pretty, and Jasper Finch – a junior who seemed to get along better with the girls than the guys for some reason.

The band room doors busted open and Mr. Murdock came in, in a huff. He appeared to be short of breath and was sweating. He quickly gathered his thoughts, and grabbed everyone's attention.

“Alright, guys. Sorry I’m late. I just received some news that I have to attend to, but before I leave, I’d like to talk about the play – written by our very own, Doug Roberts,” Murdock said, pointing at Doug.

The room applauded softly and Doug stood up.

“Doug, if you could just quickly speak to the group about what you’re trying to accomplish, we can get moving.”

Doug cleared his throat and looked out among the fifteen or so students. Speaking in front of groups was not his idea of a good time, and his shaky voice proved he was uncomfortable. “I wrote *‘October’s Shattered Graves’*, as a tribute to the people who were killed last year by the Harvest Slasher. In a nutshell, it tells the story about five Innocent Souls, whom a man named Dev Liles, kills. A year later, they return from their graves to haunt Dev, and torture him with visions of Hell, as well as the shattered lives of the families in which he’d destroyed. It’s basically a redemption story.”

The idea behind the play seemed to go over well with the students. Mr. Murdock, once again, took center stage.

“We are looking for a one night only performance, on Halloween night – very fitting if you ask me. Tickets will cost \$10 a person, and all the proceeds will go towards a scholarship in the victims’ names. I have assigned everyone their roles, so I suggest you start learning your dialogue tonight, and we’ll begin some early rehearsals this Friday after school. I’m going to need

the stage crew to start coming in tomorrow after classes are finished to start creating the sets. There will be bedroom setting, a city street setting, as well as a cemetery one. So please, use the next few minutes or so to get to know your cast mates and the crew!”

Mr. Murdock grabbed his briefcase from against the wall, and left the room almost as quickly as he’d arrived.

Doug and Kevin looked around and everyone was starting to chat and introduce themselves with one another.

“Did you suggest me to Mr. Murdock for the Dev Liles role?” Kevin asked.

“Yeah,” Doug said. “I figured with all the Facebook stalking you do to half our class, you could pull off a psycho-creep perfectly.”

“Um, excuse me, but you’re the one who is constantly hopping onto Charlotte’s page with the mouse cursor hovering over the ‘Add as a Friend’ button,” Kevin said, glancing over in Charlotte’s direction. “Why don’t you just talk to her, man?”

“She’s out of my league, dude. Plus, we have nothing in common.”

“Well, I think you do actually. You wrote this play, and she answered the call sheet. She obviously wants to be in it.”

“Well, what I am supposed to say to her?”

“Just say you appreciate her interest in the play, or something. You’re going to have to do it sooner or later.”

“You’re right.” Doug stood up and saw Jasper Finch break away from the small group.

“Now’s your chance, dude,” Kevin said, giving Doug a small nudge in Charlotte’s direction.

Doug stumbled for a moment, and slowly made his way to the two girls. He stood over them and saw they were skimming through a copy of the script. Charlotte’s character’s name was highlighted throughout the pages. She and Samantha looked up at him.

Charlotte smiled.

“You wrote this script?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Doug responded. “Did you like it?”

“Loved it. I think it’s a great idea. People are going to love it. You have some serious talent, Doug,” she said, still smiling.

Doug looked at Samantha, who was missing her smile.

“I liked it too. That’s why I auditioned. But I guess Libby Hatcher was a better choice – a freckled, fat, loser. Is that what you imagined the character to look like?” Samantha was rude. Doug had not known that about her. He didn’t know anything about their group of friends, aside from the fact that they hardly ever interacted with Doug’s crowd.

Doug stood there, not sure how to respond after Samantha's buzz-killing remark. The girls were quiet, and Charlotte shot him one last forced smile before he awkwardly walked away.

4:45 PM

Doug was at his house, upstairs in his bedroom on the east side of Stewart Hollow. He was at his desk, typing on his computer below a collage of movie and music posters.

Lying on his bed was Kevin, strumming an unplugged electric guitar.

"You think we could be the next great rock band?" Kevin asked, talking to himself more than he was to Doug.

Doug, busy typing, blandly responded. "Sure, why not. I'll write the music and you play the guitar."

"We'll, we'd need a bassist and a drummer," Kevin said, strumming harder. "And some groupies." He stopped strumming and looked over at Doug. "Like Charlotte."

Doug swung around. "Alright, I knew that was going to come up."

"It was weird, man. Awkward too."

"I know. That doesn't mean you have to keep talking about it. It was a fluke. I'll get better with talking to her. That Samantha girl threw me off." Doug turned back and continued typing.

Kevin sat up, setting the guitar on the bed. “What are you typing?”

“The sequel.”

“For ‘Shattered Graves’?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?” Kevin stood up and looked over Doug’s shoulder. Doug turned the monitor off so Kevin couldn’t see.

“Because I have more ideas. I’m thinking about writing a feature length script, and maybe trying to get it made into a movie next year when I’m in college.”

“Don’t you think that’d be a little – disrespectful?” Kevin asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, a high school play is one thing – we’re remembering the deceased. A movie though, would be a little much.”

“Just let me write, man. That’s all I know. Shouldn’t you be starting to learn your lines? Dev Liles is not the type of character you can just perform. You have to get inside of his head.”

Kevin backed away as Doug turned the screen back on. “Alright then, my scripts at home. I’ll see you at school tomorrow, man.”

“Uh-huh,” Doug said, diving back into this script.

5:50 PM

Harper Cole sat at the dispatchers' desk at the Sheriff's Department. She was in her mid-twenties, with short blonde hair and wore more make-up than she should.

The phone rang at the desk, interrupting her from her Cosmo magazine.

"Sheriff's Department." She answered in her typical high-pitched voice that sounded more normal coming from a teenager. She listened to what the caller had to say, and then responded. "Sure. Hold one second please."

Harper put the call on hold, stood up and walked back towards the offices.

Sheriff Carter sat at his desk. Deputy Dart was showing him photographs taken at Noah Swan's house. Dart held one up of the muddy footprints.

"They came back as a woman's size 8 – an office shoe," Dart explained. "There were no fingerprints, so the killer obviously used gloves of some sort. There were no witnesses, no known enemies, or anything. They think it happened around midnight."

"Great," Carter said, taking a deep breath.

"We don't know for certain that this has anything to do with The Harvest Slasher, Sheriff. For all we know, it could be just

another hoax – like that poem we received on November 1st last year.”

“This is not a hoax, Dart! There’s a man dead, and bloody words written on the wall talking about Kelly Rodgers. It’s connected.” Carter sat back in his seat. “I’m just not sure how, yet.”

There was a knock on the door. Harper stood before the Sheriff and his Deputy.

“Sheriff, there’s a man on the phone for you. Line 1,” she said.

“Who is it?” Carter asked.

“He said his name is Bud Lockwood,” Harper said with an upward inflection at the end, not sure if she got the name right.

Dart looked at Carter, confused. “The groundskeeper at the cemetery?”

Carter was just as confused. He picked up the phone and answered line 1.

“This is Sheriff Carter.” Carter listened to Bud Lockwood. “Okay, thank you Bud. We’ll be there.”

Carter hung up and looked at Dart. Harper still stood in the doorway.

“What is it?” Dart asked.

“Something’s happened at the Hollow’s End Cemetery,” Carter said, blown away by what Bud Lockwood had told him.

The red-orange sun was starting to set to the west, as Sheriff Carter and Deputy Dart followed Bud Lockwood through the Hollow’s End Cemetery.

Bud was a middle-aged man, balding and heavy, but tall. He wore old, dirty clothes with his pants being held up by worn suspenders.

“I found it like this when I was doing my trash pickup rounds. It’s terrible to think someone would do something this unsettling around this time of year, you know?” Bud explained.

“Did you find any shovels or any other digging equipment?” Carter asked, as the three of them cut across the graves and over the winding hills in the cemetery.

“No shovels. Only footprints,” Bud said.

“Footprints?” Dart looked at Carter.

They arrived at a tall, cracked headstone. The name on the headstone was that of Kelly Rodgers. Sitting below the stone was a dug up grave. The rainwater had melted down the sides of the muddy hole, where a broken casket sat – empty.

Carter stared down into the muddy grave. He was terrified. It appeared someone had dug up the grave, smashed in the top of the casket, and removed Kelly Rodgers' rotting corpse.

Dart felt sick. He backed away, trying to regain his composure.

Carter looked at Bud. "You said you found footprints?"

Bud pointed down at the muddy banks around the grave. There were footprints embedded in the mud – a possible women's size 8.

"I remember the day we buried her," Bud began. "Not many people came. Her family didn't want anything to do with it after what she had done."

Dart rejoined the two men in looking down into the hauntingly empty grave.

Bud looked at Carter, who was speechless. "It's almost like Kelly Rodgers has come back from the dead."

CHAPTER THREE

October 3rd – Dawn

The alarm clock switched on at 6:30 AM, and Creedence Clearwater Revival rustled Carter out of a deep sleep. He reached for it and shut it off, then rolled over and looked his girlfriend, Amber Gibson, in the eyes. She smiled at him, and pushed her long brown hair away from her face.

“Good morning,” she said, her voice cracking from a long night of sleep.

“Good morning.” Carter pecked her on the cheek. He climbed out of bed and grabbed his folded tan uniform from the chair against the wall.

Amber sat up, keeping her body under the warm covers. “Do you have time for breakfast?”

“I don’t think so. I want to try and clear up this murder as quick as possible. I really don’t want a repeat of last year.”

Amber smiled and nodded, understanding, but feeling slightly distanced. Carter grabbed the bath towel hanging from the doorknob and looked back at her. “We’ll get dinner tonight.”

Amber’s smile returned. “Roasters?”

“Roasters.” Carter smiled and blew her a kiss before walking into the bathroom.

Amber grabbed the television remote and turned on the flat screen. The news was on, and Brent Tiles was dressed in a new spiffy suit and stood out in front of the Sheriff's Department:

“We're here live this morning in front of the Stewart Hollow Sheriff's Department, where we're trying to get confirmation that there has been another murder. That would make two murders in three days, making people very uncomfortable due to its' similarities to last year's Harvest Slasher attack on our town.”

The camera panned from Brent's top half, over to the Sheriff Department's entrance. Brent continued to speak off camera. “We understand that Sheriff Carter may not be at the station just yet, but we assume he may only be minutes from arriving.”

Amber stared at the television, shocked. “Ben!” she called out, but the shower overpowered her voice.

Brent Tiles continued: “Stewart Hollow is already feeling the affects from the killing spree last year when shop owner John Blankenship and Hollow Gazette reporter, Kelly Rodgers, murdered several people, including our town's Deputy Sheriff. Tourists have begun to flock to our town hoping to catch a glimpse of the local legend – The Harvest Slasher – in action.”

Amber called out again, louder. “Ben!”

8:05 AM

Sheriff Carter held a news conference almost immediately after arriving at the station. He stood before a small crowd of reporters and concerned citizens.

“I would like to make one thing clear this morning,” Carter began, as Deputy Dart stood by his side. “We do not, I repeat, do not have a confirmed second murder. As far as we’re concerned, this is just a rumor that has been blown out of proportion. We are currently dealing with the death of Noah Swan only.”

Carter looked out in the crowd and noticed quite a few people he didn’t recognize; the tourists. “And to all of you that have come to our town, searching for the unrest that we had last year, I would like to say that there is zero connection between the crimes last October, and the murder of Noah Swan. The Harvest Slasher was John Blankenship, who is currently locked away in a maximum security prison up north, and Kelly Rodgers, who was fatally wounded last year.”

“Sheriff!” Someone in the crowd called out. “What about Kelly Rodgers’ grave! There’s a rumor going around that her body is missing from the graveyard! Has she returned?”

Carter was infuriated. He didn’t have time for ghost stories. He turned around and walked back into the station, with Dart following. The crowd groaned, displeased.

10:00 AM

The Stewart Hollow Regional High School was for the most part quiet. They were mourning the loss of one of their beloved teachers, Mr. Noah Swan. Rumors had been circulating in the day's prior, and the absence of Mr. Swan at the school only fueled those rumors, but Principal Molly Bain had made the official announcement to the students at an organized assembly.

Her words were "Our very own Mr. Swan unexpectedly died on October 1st." She kept the gory details to herself, in hopes of not upsetting the student body, but they already knew.

Doug Roberts walked down the hallway and stopped at his locker where he began to put some books in and take others out. Through the crowd of people, a girl – a little on the chubby side – waddled up to him and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hey," she said softly.

Doug turned around to see Libby Hatcher. He smiled. "Hey, Libby. What's up?"

"Not much," Libby said. She was shy and not the most attractive girl in the world – she knew that, but didn't let it bother her. She was the kind of girl who liked Dungeons and Dragons and hung out at coffee shops after school, but brushed it all aside every time someone would make fun of her for it. She was proud to be her own person.

Libby continued: “Do you know if the play has been cancelled because of Mr. Swan’s death?”

Doug shook his head. “Not that I know of. I hope not.” He instantly realized his words came out wrong. “I mean, not it a bad way. It’s a shame that Mr. Swan died, but I think this play is going to be great.”

Doug’s cocky attitude towards his own piece of art didn’t turn Libby off. She’d had a crush on Doug since she moved next door to him when they were little. Doug never seemed to catch on to Libby’s advances or flirting, but that didn’t bother her. She was going to keep trying anyway.

“So, are you going to be at rehearsal after school?” Libby asked, her smile never once leaving her face.

“Yeah, I’ll be there. I want to hear all the words out loud from the actors,” Doug said.

“I loved the script by the way.”

“Thanks,” Doug said, smiling back at her. He slammed his locker door shut. “Well, I have to get to class. See you later.”

“Bye!” Libby waved as she watched Doug disappear into the mass of students.

The school day finally ended and the final bell released the students from class. In less than thirty minutes, the stage crew, dressed all in black, was already cutting wood and designing

scenery for the set, and all of the actors were gathered around, sitting in a large circle on the stage, reading their lines out loud.

Doug stood behind them all, reading along with them on his 'Directors' copy. His eyes seemed to stray quiet a few times from the pages and focus on Charlotte Sheldon. She was so beautiful and she read her part perfectly. Doug caught himself smiling at her, but pulled it back quickly before anyone would see.

Kevin read his part aggressively, as he should have. He was reading the role of Dev Liles, the serial killer Doug had created in his tribute.

Libby Hatcher read her part well too, except that she seemed too happy and upbeat when reading her lines. It should have been darker and more depressing, but that would come after a few more cast readings.

Jude Coffman, a junior, was reading the role of 'Steve'. Jude was the kind of kid who didn't really get involved in much. He always came into school, did his work and went home. As far as Doug knew, he was a straight A student. Jude said he wanted to try to 'come out of his shell' before he started his senior year the next fall. He said that was the only way he would be able to enjoy it.

Levi Cole sat Indian-style next to Charlotte. He was a jock – the captain of the lacrosse team – and Doug didn't think he belonged in the play. Doug knew why he was really here. Not in

hopes of becoming an actor or pursuing theater in college, but for Charlotte. His brash attitude and the way he constantly flipped his blonde ‘surfer’ hair back over his ears just ticked Doug off in every way imaginable. Levi kept reading his lines wrong on purpose or giving them a strange accent – anything to pry a laugh out of Charlotte.

Jasper Finch was reading his part perfectly and with emotion. Jasper was a close friend of Charlotte’s, and Samantha Weber – who was never too far away. She was sitting out in one of the auditorium’s chairs texting with God knows whom. Jasper didn’t have too many friends, but the ones he did have were girls. A lot of students would yell gay slurs at him, but he wasn’t even gay. He grew up in a house with five sisters and a mother. He just felt more comfortable around them.

A rustling sound behind Doug caught his attention. He turned around and saw Mr. Murdock shuffling out from behind the curtain. The cast continued to read their lines and he waved Doug over.

“What’s is it, Mr. Murdock?” Doug asked.

“I just wanted to give you fair warning. The school board is talking about pulling their funding on the production,” Murdock said.

“What? Why?” Doug asked.

“Because of what happened to Mr. Swan.”

Doug's eyes widened. "But..."

"Don't worry. I'm going to meet with them tomorrow and see if there is something we can work out. This play was created as a tribute, and it will remain as one, even if we have to include Mr. Swan as one of the people we're honoring."

Doug shook his head, agreeing. "Good idea. I would hate to see this play fall apart."

"Me too." Mr. Murdock looked out to the stage floor and saw the cast reading their lines. "How's the read going?"

"Great, so far. A couple of them need work and Levi needs to vanish off the face of the Earth, but it'll all work out," Doug said, looking back at Levi who was now making funny faces at a reciprocating Charlotte.

Mr. Murdock laughed. "Yeah, he didn't really strike me as 'drama club' material from the start. Keep up the good work."

"Thanks," Doug said as Mr. Murdock left. He returned to the circle, and over the buzz sawing and hammering of nails by the stage crew, he listened to his cast read out the rest of '*October's Shattered Graves*'.

CHAPTER FOUR

5:10 PM

Sheriff Carter sat in his office where he was reviewing paper work from the Noah Swan murder. On his desk was a picture of him and Amber in the mountains, holding each other and smiling for the camera. Next to that was a picture of Bethany Kidd, sitting and smiling for the camera at her desk in the front of the Sheriff's station. Carter made a point of keeping pictures of people that meant something to him. It kept him motivated.

He slid his reading glasses over the bridge of his nose and looked closely at picture from the crime scene. Blood was all over the carpet and walls – staining them a dark red. He looked more closely at photographs of the ‘urban legend’ on the wall.

It was ridiculous to think that Kelly Rodgers had come back from the dead – absolutely ridiculous. And technically, she had not even committed a single murder the year before. John Blankenship had confessed to all of them. So why would she be back to kill again?

The creation of the ‘urban legend’ was obviously from someone uneducated in the Harvest Slasher case, and since all the students at the high school seemed to know about the ‘legend’, it might be school related – not to mention the murder victim was a teacher there.

Carter studied the pictures some more before Harper Cole's voice pierced the intercom.

"Sheriff, you have some visitors," she said.

"Who are they?"

"Mayor Hopkins and some guy in a suit."

"Could you be more vague next time, Harper? Send them back."

Carter removed his glasses and straightened up the collar on his shirt. He stacked the pictures in a neat pile and stood up just as Mayor Hopkins entered his office with a tall man with dark hair, wearing a neatly pressed suit.

"Carter, good evening." Mayor Hopkins extended his hand and shook Carter's.

"Mayor, as always," Carter said, focusing his attention on the stranger in the room. "And this is?"

"Spencer Holland," the tall man said, shaking Carter's hand. "Agent Spencer Holland."

"FBI?" Carter asked.

"Yes sir," Holland said in a deep and gritty voice.

"Spencer and I go way back, Carter. We worked together in Portland for a while, and then he was accepted into the Bureau and I went into politics," the Mayor explained.

“What brings you to Stewart Hollow, Agent Holland?” Carter asked, sort of confused by a Federal presence.

“The Mayor here wanted another set of eyes and more experience in town for a while.”

“Carter, it’s not that I don’t trust your investigation, but after last year, I think we need to take better care of it this time around,” Hopkins said.

“Better care of it this time around? Mayor, with all due respect, we are dealing with a single murder here. Besides the message on the wall at Mr. Swan’s house, there is nothing else to suggest this is in any way related to the killings last year. Our station has not received any threats or letters, and it’s been pretty quiet over the past couple of days.” Carter pleaded his case.

“Sheriff, do you currently have any suspects in the Noah Swan murder?” Holland politely asked.

“Not yet. I think it might be somehow related to the school, so my Deputy and I are heading there tomorrow to ask some questions to the students and staff.”

“That’s a start. Can you point me in the direction of Mr. Swan’s home? I’d like to take a look around,” Holland said.

Carter wrote down directions and handed the paper to the Agent. He nodded his head, thanking Carter, and left the office.

“Mayor, we don’t need help. What kind of message is that sending to the community? Their own law enforcement can’t even handle a murder investigation?” Carter asked.

“Carter, it’s not you. I need this thing to be wrapped up quickly.”

“Because of the election next month, right?”

Hopkins nodded. “If I win, we all win. It will mean good things for me and for you, Carter.”

Carter didn’t say a word.

“Clear this thing up before Spencer. Make me regret bringing him in.”

“This is not like last October, Mayor.”

“Just keep trying to convince yourself of that, Ben. But you know just as well as I do that it’s not over. This was all part of Kelly and John’s plan last year. They wanted the legend to live on. This is *it* living on.”

Mayor Hopkins left the room and Carter sat back at his desk, irritated.

October 4th – 12:45 AM

Jasper Finch walked out of his bedroom with his ear buds in, blaring a deafening ‘screamo’ band. His house was dark for the

most part, and completely empty. His mother and sisters, who still lived at home, were visiting family in Washington.

Jasper grabbed a bunch of clothes, which had been piled up in the hallway, and shoved them into a hamper at the end of the hall. He then jogged down the stairs and into the living room.

Outside, the night was still and the air was cool. A dog was barking somewhere nearby, and echoed in the dark. Leaves fell off the trees in the neighborhood and floated down, landing gently in the grass. It seemed peaceful, but something was off. Something was interrupting the night's stillness. The evening grew uneasy.

Jasper lay on the couch with the dull light from the television flickering in the otherwise dark room. His ear buds were still in, but his playlist had run out. The only sounds were coming from the screaming victims of the army of vampires on the TV.

Jasper's iPhone began vibrating on the coffee table, jerking him out from his sleep. He quickly gathered his thoughts and grabbed it. It was an incoming text from Samantha.

SAMANTHA: U up?

Jasper checked the time in the corner of the small touch screen – 1:25 AM. Why was she texting so late? He responded.

JASPER: Yeah. Why are U?

SAMANTHA: Couldn't sleep.

JASPER: Me neither. Darn dog kept me up earlier.

SAMANTHA: If I tell you something, promise you won't tell Charlotte?

JASPER: Sure. What?

Jasper was intrigued. It wasn't like Samantha to go behind her best friends back about things.

Outside, the dog started barking again. Jasper leaned over the back of the couch to the window. He pulled back the curtains and looked outside. He couldn't make out too much, but it looked like someone was walking on the sidewalk. *That's probably why the dog was barking. Why is everyone up so late tonight?*

SAMANTHA: I'm jealous that she's in the play and I'm not.

Jasper read the text, already knowing Samantha was jealous, but not sure why it was keeping her from sleeping. He responded.

JASPER: I don't know what to tell U. You'll have another chance.

SAMANTHA: No I won't. The theater department isn't sponsoring a musical this year, and this is the only production the school is going to do. It's our senior year. I wanted one more chance on the stage.

JASPER: Maybe Charlotte could use an understudy?

SAMANTHA: Oh please, Jasper. Charlotte loves this play. Even if she did get sick, she'd still find a way to be in it.

JASPER: What do you want me to say, Sam?

SAMANTHA: Well...

Jasper smirked. *Here it comes...*

SAMANTHA: We find a way to boot Libby Hatcher from the play. She's a terrible actress anyway – not to mention ugly as sin. Then I'll just take her part.

JASPER: Lol. Easier said than done, Sam. Try again.

Jasper waited for her response. Samantha was always doing things like this. Every time she wanted something, she would make sure she got it. Or she would at least put up a huge fight in an elaborate attempt to get it.

The dog outside had quieted down. Jasper ripped the curtains aside again and looked out. There was no one. He turned back around, still waiting for Samantha's response. She was probably thinking up a Plan B – a useless Plan B.

Jasper looked up at the TV and watched a teenage girl get ripped apart by a horde of vampires. There was blood everywhere. He smiled. What *couldn't* they show on TV anymore?

He looked back down at his phone. There was still no response. Jasper quickly created and sent the next text.

JASPER: This better be good, Sam. Lol.

He sat back and waited for a response. The minutes went by and Jasper's smile departed. There was no response coming.

CHAPTER FIVE

7:25 AM

Carter sat at his kitchen table, putting spoonful after spoonful of Cheerios into his mouth. The Hollow Gazette was spread out in front of him and he was reading the top story: ‘Has the Harvest Slasher Returned to Stewart Hollow?’

He read the article, which was chockfull of lies and rumors, shaking his head as he read.

Amber Gibson walked in from the living room in her bathrobe. She leaned in and kissed Carter on the cheek. He smiled, instantly forgetting about the Gazette article.

“Good morning,” Amber said.

“Morning,” Carter said, holding up his empty coffee mug.

“Um, I don’t think so. We’re not married yet, Ben,” Amber said, brushing it aside with a smile.

“What time do you have to be in today?” Carter asked.

“Rachel said around ten or so. I’ll probably be working late though, so you’re on your own for dinner.”

“I’m glad your hours are finally starting to pick up.”

“Me too. Every hour is more money in the savings account.”

“Very true. And the bigger our savings get, the longer our honeymoon will be.”

“Hawaii?” Amber pondered, wrapping her arms around him.

“Bahamas.”

“Well, whichever it is, it’s not Oregon.”

She kissed him on the cheek as he glanced at his watch.

“I have to get going. The Mayor is really adamant about getting this case solved quickly, you know, before his precious election next month. Did I tell you he brought in an FBI agent?”

“No. Why?”

“Well, obviously he doesn’t have enough faith in his own law enforcement. Supposedly they go way back – I’m not sure how though.”

Carter’s phone began to ring, sending Amber into a goofy jig to the sound of his ‘Lady Madonna’ ring tone. He answered it, trying to keep a straight face.

“Carter,” he said sternly.

Harper Cole spoke on the other line. “Sheriff, we need you at the station. Now.”

Carter arrived only a short ten minutes later. He entered the station and was greeted by a panicking woman in her early forties. The woman had been crying and shrieking hysterically. Her make-up ran down her pale face and her clothes appeared to have been just thrown on, as nothing matched. The woman was

yelling at Deputy Jamie Dart and Harper Cole, who were standing at the front desk.

“Whoa! Calm down, ma’am!” Carter said, approaching the woman and resting his hand on her shoulder.

“Sheriff,” the woman said, seeing the man she wanted to see.

“What’s going on here?”

“My daughter’s missing.”

“Since when?”

“Last night. I went to wake her up for school this morning and she wasn’t in her room. The bed was still made and her clothes for today were still laying on top of her dresser.”

“What’s your daughter’s name?”

“Samantha. Samantha Weber.”

“And you are?”

“Heidi Weber.”

“Do you have a husband, Ms. Weber?”

“I do. He’s in Vancouver for business.”

“When was the last time you saw Samantha?” Carter asked, nodding to Dart, who took out a pad of paper and pen.

“Um, I saw her,” Mrs. Weber began, trying to remember, “I saw her last night around six. After dinner, some guy she goes to school with came over. I’d never seen him before.”

“Do you remember his name?” Carter asked, nodding to Dart once again. Dart was ready to write.

“Um, Levi something. Levi Cole, I think.”

Harper let out a gasp, and everyone’s eyes were on her.

“What?” Carter asked.

“That’s my brother.”

The Stewart Hollow Police force tore apart the Weber house looking for any signs of forced entry or clues to why Samantha may have left. There was nothing that jumped out of the ordinary. Carter and Dart met up in front of the house, and were approached by another officer.

“What do you got?” Carter asked the young officer.

“Not much, Sheriff,” he said. “There is no sign of anyone breaking in, or any kind of struggle for that matter. The girl’s phone is the only thing missing, but then again, she’s a teenage girl. I doubt she’d go anywhere without it. Maybe she ran away?”

Carter didn’t think so. “Mrs. Weber didn’t give any indication of that. As far as I know, they had a very happy home. It wouldn’t hurt to look into that possibility though.”

“Yes sir.”

The officer walked away. Carter and Dart walked to their Jeep.

“Where to, Sheriff?” Dart asked.

“The high school. We’re going to start asking questions.”

11:45 AM

The bell rang, ending fifth period, and the students poured out into the halls of the Stewart Hollow Regional High School.

Doug stopped by the water fountain and took a sip. When he stood back up, Kevin was there.

“What’s up dude,” Kevin said, startling Doug with his sudden appearance.

“Hey, man. What’s happening?”

“Did you hear about the cops?”

“What about them?” Doug had no idea what Kevin was talking about.

“Supposedly there are cops at the school right now talking to random students.”

“About what?”

“No one knows for sure, but the rumor is it has to do with Kelly Rodgers.”

Doug’s eyes widened and he smiled. “Kelly Rodgers? That reporter from last year?”

“Yup,” Kevin said with an ornery grin on his face.

“What about her?”

“Her grave was dug up the other night and her body is missing. You know that poem that’s going around? ‘Kelly, Kelly, Rise from your Tomb, Stalk and Kill...’”

“Yeah, yeah I know it,” Doug said, cutting him off. “You’re telling me that everyone thinks that Kelly Rodgers came back from the dead?”

Kevin answered with yet another ornery smile.

“Let me guess,” Doug laughed, “*she* killed Mr. Swan.”

Kevin’s smile disappeared and his jaw dropped. He hadn’t thought about that. “Dude, you’re right! It all makes sense.”

Doug shook his head, laughing at Kevin’s wild theory. Doug looked down the hall and saw Charlotte and Jasper talking by the science room. He fixated his eyes on her and shut everything else out.

She was dressed nicely again. Her clothes always seemed to be so new and clean. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she had her glasses on. If there was ever someone who actually made wearing glasses attractive, it was Charlotte.

“Doug!” Kevin yelled for a third time.

“What?” Doug said, snapping out of his daze.

“Dude, just go talk to her.”

“I can’t, man, she’s with Jasper,” Doug said, shying away again.

“Then talk about the play.” Kevin was frustrated with Doug’s infatuation with her. “Look man, I’ll see you at rehearsal after school.”

“Uh huh,” Doug responded as Kevin walked away.

He made his way through the hall and stopped by Charlotte and Jasper. He gulped as they noticed his presence. Charlotte smiled.

“Hi, Doug,” she said. Doug instantly smelt her intoxicating perfume in the air. He smiled back.

“Hi Charlotte.” He looked at Jasper. “Hey, Jasper.”

Jasper nodded. “What’s up, man?”

There was a moment of tense silence between the three of them and then Charlotte spoke up.

“I think the play is starting to come together,” she said. “I think it was cast well; Props to you and Mr. Murdock.”

“Oh, thanks,” Doug said, excited about another compliment.

Jasper turned to Charlotte to quickly finish their conversation they were having before Doug showed up. “Well, if you hear from her, let me know. Okay?”

“Will do!” Charlotte said, cheerfully. Jasper threw his backpack over his shoulder and trotted away.

“Hear from who?” Doug nosily asked.

“Samantha. She was texting Jasper last night and then stopped out of nowhere. She must be sick or something, because she’s not here today. Have you seen her?”

Doug shook his head. Charlotte smiled once more at him.

“You’re shy, huh?” She asked.

Doug could feel his face turning red. He shook his head unconvincingly and mumbled, “No. Why?”

“You don’t talk much. You don’t get involved in sports or anything, and then you write this brilliant tribute to those people last year. It’s really amazing.”

“Thanks. I just know what I like to do and I do it. I like to write.”

“Good for you. I had a babysitter when I was little who said the same thing. She always encouraged us to just go for it and get creative. You just have to stay positive and everything will work out the way it’s meant to.”

Doug looked into her blue eyes. Could that mean make a move on Charlotte as well - a double meaning?

“Well, I have to get to class. See you at rehearsal!” Charlotte said. She turned and walked away before Doug could say anything else. He stood there a little while longer, basking in her scent.

Sheriff Carter sat in the Principal Molly Bain's office with Deputy Dart. Mrs. Bain stood in the back of the room and watched all morning as the Sheriff and his partner interviewed random students and staff members. Sitting before the authorities was Levi Cole, decked out in his lacrosse jersey – number 11.

“Samantha Weber is missing. What were you doing at her house last night?” Carter asked right away.

“Huh?” Levi pretended like he didn't know.

“Please, Levi, don't do this to yourself. Just tell me. We want to clear you of all possible involvement.” Carter said.

Levi sighed and gave in immediately. “I went to her house because she is best friends with this girl, Charlotte Sheldon. I was looking for an easy way...”

Levi stopped, embarrassed, then continued. “An easy way into her pants.”

Dart held back a small chuckle as best he could. Levi looked up annoyed.

“What about October 1st? Where were you around midnight?” Carter continued his questioning professionally.

“Um, probably sleeping. I had school the next morning,” Levi answered sarcastically.

“This Charlotte girl, she's attractive to you?” Carter asked.

“She's attractive to everyone. She's the hottest girl in school, guy.”

“She a cheerleader?” Dart asked.

“No. She’s actually in drama club.”

“Drama club?” Carter asked. Something sparked in his brain. “Is Samantha in drama club too?”

“Not really. I mean, she read for a couple parts in the play, but didn’t make the cut. She was pretty mad. But she usually sits around during the rehearsals and just watches.”

“Was Noah Swan her drama teacher?” Carter asked. Dart’s interest was peaking. He jotted notes down in his pad.

“Uh, yeah. Him and Mr. Murdock.”

Carter looked over at Molly Bain. “We’ll need to see Mr. Murdock next.”

Mrs. Bain nodded.

Carter returned his attention to Levi. “What play are you guys doing this year?”

“Actually, it’s an original play written by this geek here at school. It’s called, *‘October’s Shattered Graves’*. It’s a tribute to those who were killed last year. Between you and me it’s actually not bad. There’s murder and ghosts and stuff in it. It’s pretty cool.” Levi got excited just thinking about it.

“Ghosts?” Deputy Dart asked. Carter sat back and thought as Dart stepped closer. “Levi, what do you think about that Kelly Rodgers’ rhyme?”

“Um, it’s pretty cool I guess.”

“Do you think it’s true?”

Carter looked at his Deputy. Was he serious?

“Not really,” Levi said. “It’s just a story that got passed around here at school. The Harvest Slasher’s a legend around here now. Something like this was bound to start.”

“The Kelly Rodgers’ rhyme is about her coming back from the dead to kill. What’s the play about, just out of curiosity?” Dart asked. He and Carter both looked at Levi. Even Mrs. Bain was interested, even though she already knew the plot.

“It’s about five people who were murdered, coming back from the dead to...” Levi stopped after noticing the similarities.

“Who’s this ‘geek’?” Carter asked, using Levi’s terminology.

“Doug Roberts.”

Carter looked back at Mrs. Bain, and she nodded, knowing he was now on the list.

Carter’s walkie-talkie began to crackle and finally Harper’s voice sifted through.

“Sheriff Carter, come in,” she said.

Carter took out his walkie-talkie and spoke into it.

“Right here, Harper. Just talking to your brother. What’s up?”

“We found Samantha Weber.”

“Is she okay?” Carter asked hesitantly.

“She’s dead.”

CHAPTER SIX

A blue sky hung over the Adams County Park, where the trees were still full and burning a bright red. Police tape quarantined off a small section near the back of the park, along the tree line, which lead to a few acres of thick woods.

Carter and Dart examined the body of Samantha Weber. She was propped up against a tree, and secured to it by rusty barbwire. Blood had drained out of lacerations on her face, neck, chest and arms – more than likely from the wire. The part which was confusing, however, was the muddy prints all over her white shirt.

Forensic officers snapped dozens of pictures before they let Carter and Dart get a closer look. They knelt down next to the body, where Samantha’s eyes remained opened.

“Mud,” Carter said.

“Like Noah Swan’s home,” Dart added.

“Like the empty grave.” Carter rubbed his temples. “I really didn’t think this was going to happen again.”

“Well, it is,” Dart stated, brushing away a foul odor that surrounded them. “What the heck is that smell?”

“I’m not sure. Have someone check the area,” Carter instructed before glancing down at Samantha’s left pant leg. Something caught his eye.

“Gentlemen,” a voice startled Carter from behind, and he stood up. Agent Spencer Holland stood before the Sheriff and his Deputy.

“Agent,” Carter said, nodding his head in a friendly, but forced manner.

“Looks like you were wrong, Carter. Two bodies in the first week of October - it appears that your town is cursed,” Holland inappropriately joked.

“It’s nothing that we can’t solve. We’re more experienced this time around. We know what to expect,” Carter said.

“You do? What, then?” Holland asked.

Carter hesitated for a moment, and then Holland continued: “You know nothing. Should I call some buddies down from Portland? We can handle this.”

“I don’t think Mayor Hopkins would like that.”

“What do you mean?”

“He needs *us* to solve this for his political career. You’re just here to lend a hand. You probably won’t even get credit for your work here.”

Holland stared at Carter. “Well, if *you* guys are going to be the ones to solve this, you better plan to step it up from last year. Your investigation was a riot.”

Holland grinned as Carter stood there and took it.

“You’re going to have to either take a different – better – approach,” Holland said, “Or just get lucky.”

Carter smiled. “Well, we might have more to go on this time around.”

“Like what?”

“Like the autograph on her pant leg.” Carter pointed to Samantha’s left pant leg. There appeared to be a very sloppy signature scribbled on it with red ink.

Holland squinted and knelt down next to it. He examined it, as did Dart. Dart looked up and smiled at Carter. “A clue.”

“Heck yeah a clue,” Carter said, unprofessionally excited. Carter grabbed the nearest forensics officer. “I’m going to need this portion of her pants,” he said, showing the officer.

“Yes, sir,” The young officer responded.

Holland stood up. “Well, if that *is* the killer’s signature...”

“We need to review pictures from Noah Swan’s murder,” Carter said to Dart, interrupting the Federal agent. “The killer may have left his signature there as well – we might have overlooked it.”

Holland couldn’t believe the treatment he was getting. He looked at Carter and his Deputy, turned, and left. Dart smiled and patted Carter on the shoulder.

“I don’t need the FBI to do my job,” Carter said. “Let’s get moving.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

October 5th – 9 AM

The school was overwhelmed by the news of one of their students senselessly murdered. More than half the student body was in tears, as well as many of the teachers. An assembly was held when school started to explain the tragedy, and eventually everyone had returned to their classrooms.

Doug Roberts sat at his desk in the back of the history classroom. The teacher had assigned the class period as a study hall in light of the news. A few students sat with their head on the desks, buried in their arms. Some hazily stared into their textbooks, and some didn't even show up to class.

Doug had his eye on an empty desk in the front of the room where Charlotte usually sat. *Of course she wouldn't be here. Her best friend was just murdered*, Doug thought.

He then looked down at a sheet of paper in front of him with the printed schedule for the play rehearsals. October 5th – 4-7 PM. Obviously that wasn't going to happen now.

The classroom door opened up and Mr. Murdock came in and went straight for the history teacher. Doug watched as they exchanged whispers for a moment before Mr. Murdock waved for Doug to follow him.

Doug quickly gathered his things and jogged his way out into the hall with the drama teacher.

“What is it?” Doug asked.

“Well, Deputy Jamie Dart from the Sheriff’s Department is here, and he wants to talk to you.” Mr. Murdock said.

“For what?”

“He wouldn’t tell me.”

Doug mildly nodded.

“Also,” Mr. Murdock began, “the school has officially pulled the funding.”

“What? Are you kidding me?” Doug shouted, disturbingly more upset over that news than the police asking about him.

“Don’t worry though. I really think the town needs this play. I am going to personally fund it. We’ll cancel the rehearsal tonight, and I can focus on getting a loan.”

“Cancel the rehearsal?” Doug pouted.

“We’ll, it would only make sense given the events. Plus, the only other person who showed up today that’s even involved in the play is Kevin.”

Doug nodded again. “Where’s the Deputy?”

Doug sat in Principal Bain's office. She eloquently stood in the back of the room and watched as Deputy Dart sat down in front of Doug. Another officer stood at the door.

"Doug Roberts?" Dart presumed, shaking the student's hand. "I'm Deputy Jamie Dart. The Sheriff would have been here himself, but is currently tied up following a lead."

"What's this all about?"

"Well, the thing is, we're five days into October, and we already have two people dead as a result of brutal homicides that echo the murders from last year. Our investigation led us here, where we find out that your school is putting on a play to pay tribute to the victims from last year – a play that you wrote."

"Okay..." Doug said slowly.

"Your play is about the dead coming back to terrorize the person who killed them, correct?"

"Yeah."

"Have you heard the poem that's been going around? The one about Kelly Rodgers?"

"Yeah, I've heard it. So?"

"Then you'd be able to see the similarities between that and your play."

Doug thought for a moment. Dart looked him dead in the eyes, trying to read them and trying to figure out what Doug might be thinking.

“Well, it’s not similar.” Doug said. “My play is about the innocent people coming back to get revenge, not the guilty coming back to kill again.”

Dart sat back and looked at his notes.

“What size shoe do you wear?” Dart asked.

“Huh?” Doug was broadsided by such a random question. He gathered his thoughts quickly though. “A ten.”

“Where were you on the night of September 30th and the early hours of October 1st?”

“Um, probably sleeping. I had school the next day. You can ask my mom, she was home too.”

“That late at night, she’d assume you were asleep. She’ll probably tell us that, but there is nothing to say you didn’t sneak out of the house.”

Doug was growing red in the face and started to blink and breath heavily. “Are you serious...”

Dart sat back and watched the kids’ reaction. Doug held his eyes shut for a moment.

“Are you accusing me of killing them?” Doug said, starting to fade out of consciousness. Dart jumped up and rushed to his side as Doug fainted and fell out of the seat. Principal Bain jumped to his aide as well.

“Is your school nurse in?” Dart asked.

“Yes, she’s just down the hall.” Molly Bain said, helping Dart try to pick Doug up.

“He fainted?” Carter asked again, making sure he heard it right over the phone.

“Yup. Either the kid is guilty or was just completely overwhelmed by the questioning,” Dart said on the other line. “Any word on the signature?”

“Well, sort of. We were going through the pictures from Noah Swan’s home and found another one. It was on the wall, underneath the poem. It was scribbled in blood, so it just blended in with the rest of the mess.”

“Any idea what it says yet?”

“Not yet. I have some guys trying to decipher it now. It appears to start with a ‘B’, but it’s kind of hard to read after that.”

“Alright,” Dart said, “I’m going to question a couple more people here. I’ll catch you later.”

Dart hung up and Carter closed his phone. He stood up from the desk in his office and left the station.

CHAPTER EIGHT

October 6th – 7:30 AM

Doug laid in his bed with the sheets a wreck, and half on the floor. His eyes were wide open and he was staring into space, worrying about the possible cancellation of the play. He'd put so much work into it. If Mr. Murdock couldn't come through with the money, the tribute would be dead.

Doug went downstairs and into his kitchen. A note on the table from his mother told him to enjoy his Saturday and she'd be home late from work. He pulled his cell phone from the pouch on his hooded sweatshirt and called Kevin.

“Yo, bro.” Kevin answered on the other line.

“Hey, Kev. Want to meet up for breakfast?”

“Sure man, where?”

“Oregon Trails in 20 minutes.”

“See ya there.”

Doug and Kevin sat in the crowded Oregon Trails Diner with full plates of eggs, bacon and toast in front of them. Doug chugged his juice and sat the empty glass down on the table.

“The cops questioned me.” He said.

“Huh? For what?” Kevin asked, swallowing what food was in his mouth.

“I think they think I’m involved with the murders.”

Kevin froze. “Like, you committed them?”

“I don’t know. They were comparing the similarities from the play and the Kelly Rodgers poem, and tried connecting them to Mr. Swan and Samantha’s deaths.”

“They’re crazy. I mean, you’re crazy too, but I don’t think you’re crazy enough to kill someone. Are you?”

“Now you’re the crazy one.” Doug joked, slurping down a strip of greasy bacon. He continued, “Have you heard from Charlotte?”

“Why would I?”

“I don’t know. I know Samantha was her best friend. I just hope she’s ok. I’d like her to still be in the play.”

Kevin shook his head.

“What?”

“Nothing, man,” Kevin said, “It’s just that people are dead, and all you’re worried about is the damn play. You have to consider the fact that the tribute play may not be appropriate anymore. Plus, I heard the school pulled the funding for it anyway.”

“Mr. Murdock is working on the money situation.”

“Ha! That guy’s just as obsessed as you are. Why do you guys want this play to happen so bad, huh?” Kevin’s voice rose.

“Because it’s brilliant.” Doug boldly stated. Kevin looked back at his friend, hoping he would say something else, but he didn’t. Doug was dead serious. The play was everything to him.

“Are you still working on a sequel?” Kevin asked.

“Yeah. I have a couple sequels planned actually.”

Kevin sat quiet for the rest of breakfast before they split and went their own ways.

1:00 PM

Amber Gibson sat on the couch in her sweats with a hot chocolate in one hand and the television remote in the other. The news came on about the murders and she turned the channel.

Carter strolled into the room buttoning up his beige uniform and straightening the badge on his chest.

“Oh no you don’t.” Amber said standing up and stepping his in his way.

“Amber, don’t do this now.”

“Today is your day off. You and I – who are getting married soon, may I remind you – have plans to start looking into venues and reception halls,” she said, sipping her drink.

“Yeah, baby, and as much as I’d like to do that,” He started, “There are two dead bodies out there and I would really love to wrap this thing up as soon as possible.”

Amber looked at him with her glistening puppy dog eyes.

“That’s not going to work, honey.” Carter said.

She made her lips quiver like she was about to cry. Carter smiled and shook his head. “Okay, I’m going in just for a couple hours, then I’ll be home. We’ll go to dinner, and start talking about ventures and stuff.”

“Venues.”

“Anything you want, babe.” Carter said, kissing her on the cheek. “I’ll see you in a couple hours.”

Carter left and Amber sat back down on the couch.

Harper Cole sat at the dispatcher’s desk in the front of the Sheriff’s Department. She was reading a magazine, and smacking a strawberry scented gum in her mouth.

Deputy Dart walked by and looked at her. “Bethany would be rolling over in her grave.”

“Who?”

“Bethany Kidd, the sweet old woman who use to sit right where you are.”

“She wouldn’t approve of me working here? Is that what you’re saying?”

“I’m just saying that Bethany did her job well and everyone loved her. You on the other hand are sitting there, reading teenager magazines, chewing gum and flirting with all the cops.”

“I’m not flirting with you.”

“Thank God.” Dart said as he turned away, laughing.

Harper took mild offense to it, but knew he was joking. A young female officer came rushing up behind Dart.

“Deputy!” She called out. Dart turned around and grabbed the folder the officer handed him.

“What’s this?” He asked.

“We deciphered the signature at the murders.”

Dart urgently opened the folder and stared at the name on in the inside.

Carter sat at his desk and his Deputy stood before him, reviewing the findings in the manila folder.

“The signature at both crime scenes is Braxton Summers.” Dart said, looking for a reaction on Carter’s face. The name didn’t ring any bells.

“Do we know who Braxton Summers is?” Carter asked.

“That’s the thing. We checked the records and there is nobody in Stewart Hollow, or even Oregon, with that name.”

Carter was confused.

“We think it’s a pen name.” Dart said.

“Like an author would use? For what?”

“Here’s the kicker. Our murderer is also a writer.”

Dart laid a sheet of paper out in front of the Sheriff. On the paper was book cover. A bold, black title sat on a dull orange background, and read: *‘Bloody October’*. At the bottom of the book was the author’s name, Braxton Summers.

Dart continued to explain what he knew. “*Bloody October* ’is an independently published book on a website called *Write It-Sell It*. Anyone can write a book and sell it on the site. This book has sold over six thousand copies since last December when it was published.”

Carter looked Dart in the eyes, stunned. Dart continued:

“It’s about the Harvest Slasher.”

“Someone wrote a book about the Harvest Slasher?” Carter said, grabbing the folder from Darts’ hands, and rifling through it.

“I think the writer is here in Stewart Hollow, creating a sequel.” Dart added.

Carter stood up and put his hand on his chin. He thought for a moment. “Find out everything you can about ‘Braxton Summers’, and try to figure out who he is.”

Dart complied.

October 11th

By the middle of the week, Mr. Murdock thought enough time had passed since Samantha’s murder, and held a cast and crew meeting after the school day had ended.

Mr. Murdock stood in front of his cast, who were all sitting in the front row on the auditorium, as the crew were on stage painting the set pieces.

“Okay, guys, listen up. I was able to come up with enough money to support the show, so even though the school dropped the funding, we’ll still be able to do it.” Mr. Murdock announced to his cast.

Doug and Kevin sat next to each other, listening to everything their teacher had to say. Doug sat up straight in his seat, appearing very proper and important. Jude Coffman sat next to him, and Libby Hatcher was next to Jude, but Doug kept glancing down the row at Charlotte. She sat at the end, next to Jasper. She appeared dazed. Why wouldn’t she be, though? Her best friend was dead. Jasper kept patting her on her leg every once in a while, letting her know that he was there for her. Doug’s eyes

shifted to the seat next to Jasper's, where Levi Cole sat, staring right back at him. He put two fingers to his eyes, and then pointed them towards Mr. Murdock, telling Doug to pay attention.

Doug faced forward where Mr. Murdock's speech lasted a few more minutes before his closing comments.

"So I'm thinking we come back tomorrow after school's over and have our first rehearsal. The set pieces should be done by then, and we'll see where everyone's at as far as their parts go. Have a good night guys, and try to take it easy. I know it's a rough time for everyone."

Mr. Murdock gathered his briefcase and split. The students stood up and started to slowly make their way for the exit. Jude Coffman, the shy junior, tapped Doug on the shoulder.

"What?" Doug asked.

"I, uh, I don't think..." Jude stuttered. "I don't think I want to be in the play anymore."

"What?" Doug shouted, catching everyone's attention.

Jude shied away, obviously embarrassed by the sudden attention brought upon him.

"You can't just quit the play, Jude. We're closing in on the performance and there's no one else who knows your lines." Doug continued to shout. "Why don't you want to be in it?"

“I, uh,” Jude said, quieting down. “I don’t feel comfortable doing it now. Because of...you know.”

“Samantha?” Doug asked without any consideration for anyone around him. “She wasn’t even in the play.”

Charlotte sprinted towards them, furious. She stood by Jude’s side and faced Doug. “Doug, if Jude doesn’t want to be in it anymore, he doesn’t have to! This has been very rough week for us, especially for the people who were close to Sam. I’m actually thinking about dropping out too. The whole thing is starting to seem a little disrespectful anyways.”

Charlotte gripped the strap of her purse on her shoulder and stormed out of the theater. Doug stood there, angry and embarrassed. Jude turned and followed Charlotte, hanging his head.

The rest of the students stood around in shock. Kevin put his hand on his best friends shoulder.

“It’s alright man. You have to walk this off. You hungry?” He asked.

Doug peeled Kevin’s hand off his shoulder. “Get the hell away from me, Kevin.” Doug turned around and left the theater from another door.

Kevin, Jasper, Libby and Levi stood around. Levi was loving every minute of it.

“He, uh, he’s a little too much into the play. It means a lot to him.” Kevin said, attempting to defend his friend, even though he didn’t know why.

Libby forced a smile. “Well, I’m still in if you guys are.”

Kevin nodded. They looked at Jasper. He opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted by a series of three quick ‘beeps’. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone. The screen said ‘New Text Message From Samantha’. His eyes opened wide and he read the text:

SAMANTHA: Sorry I didn’t respond the other night. See you soon! ;)

CHAPTER NINE

October 15th

October was crawling by, and an uneasy tension was starting to engulf the town. The massacre from a year earlier seemed to have picked up where it had left off.

Carter pulled up in front of his house in his department issued Jeep, and went inside. He dropped his keys on the coffee table and walked into the kitchen to open the refrigerator. Written on the dry erase board was a note from Amber: *Working Late – Tons of Bodies.*

Carter smiled and opened the fridge. A row of decapitated heads sat on the top shelf - Mayor Hopkins', Agent Holland's and Jamie Darts'.

Carter reached under them to the second shelf down and grabbed a beer. He cracked it open and shut the door. He walked back into the living room, sipping his beer. Some dribbled out of his mouth and onto his shirt.

“Dammit!” He yelled, accidentally dropping the bottle. It shattered on the ground and Carter jerked out of a deep sleep.

He was at his desk in his office. He gathered his thoughts and looked on the floor; his coffee mug had shattered. Deputy Dart walked in with a sheet of paper.

“Sleeping on the job, Sheriff?” Dart asked.

Carter didn't answer. He looked at the paper Dart was holding. "What's that?"

"It's our first big break in the case." He explained it as he handed it to Carter. "There is no one named Braxton Summers in Stewart Hollow, but there was a Summer Riley Braxton who lived here about ten years ago. She lived up on Baker Street."

"Where is she now?"

"Well, she moved out of Oregon after she graduated high school. She ended up getting married to a guy named Jacob Little, and dropped Summer as her name. She goes by Riley Little now."

"Do you think she's worth looking into?" Carter asked.

"I sure do. Turns out they moved to Westfield – about fifteen minutes from here – back in March."

Carter's expression was one of relief. "Let's move."

Twilight settled in over Stewart Hollow, bringing with it dark clouds and a light misty rain.

Jasper Finch sat in his living room, talking on the phone with Charlotte.

"If you're dropping out of the play, then I will too. That text today scared the shit out of me." Jasper said. He had the television on in front of him showing the horror movie marathon.

“You should call the police about the text. Maybe they can trace where it was sent from.” Charlotte said on the other line.

“I don’t want them to think I’m involved.” Jasper said.

“They won’t. You *got* the text. Why would you send yourself a text?” Charlotte spoke softly, trying to ease Jasper’s mind.

They both sat quiet for a moment. Jasper glanced at the television where a clown-masked psycho slammed an axe into a bikini-clad girls’ back. He cringed and grabbed the remote, shutting the television off.

“Is your family home?” Charlotte asked.

“No. Mom’s working late and the sisters are at some Halloween party.”

“You can come over tonight if you want.”

“Nah. I might just go to bed.”

“Okay.”

Jasper looked at his watch. “It’s a little early though.” He laughed. “I’d feel like I’m an old person or something.”

“Who cares?” Charlotte chuckled on the other line. She paused for a moment, and then broke her silence. “We’ll quit the play together tomorrow.”

Jasper smiled. “Good. Doug’s not going to be happy.”

“Forget Doug. He’s too self-centered to see anything that’s going on around him.”

“Agreed.” Jasper said. “See you in the morning.”

“Goodnight.”

Charlotte hung up, as did Jasper. He stood up and walked into the kitchen. He flipped the light on and walked to the back patio glass doors. He looked outside, but couldn't see much because of the glare. He walked to the fridge and looked for something to drink, eventually grabbing a bottle of water. He poured it back into his mouth, but was interrupted halfway through by the series of three 'beeps' from his phone. He pulled it from his pocket and saw a picture message from Samantha staring him back in the face. The blood in his body froze and he dropped the bottle of water to the floor. His palms started to sweat and his hands were shaking. Jasper opened the picture and saw it was of him from behind, standing in his kitchen, looking in the fridge.

Jasper dropped the phone and spun around. The glare from the kitchen lights were too much on the glass doors to the patio. He couldn't see a thing outside. He slowly backed out of the kitchen and into the living room, not once removing his eyes from the patio doors. Jasper backed up, step by step, through the living room and to the front door. He unlocked the door and opened it, only to get jabbed in the stomach by a butchers' knife.

Jasper grunted upon the knife's entry, and looked down at his stomach. Dark red blood began to soak into his shirt and spill onto the carpet. His muscles began to tighten as the knife was

retracted, spitting more blood onto the door. Another thrust of the knife into his abdomen brought Jasper to his knees. He cuffed his stomach, and watched the blood flow out. His vision became foggy as he tried to look up at his attacker. It was just a dark figure standing over him. The figure held the knife over his head and let the blood drip from it and onto this face. Jasper finally keeled over and exhaled his last breath.

Carter and Dart arrived in Westfield just as night had fallen. They drove through the historic town, following handwritten directions to the east side, and down a rural neighborhood street. Streetlights on both sides of the road lit up the neighborhood and the well-kept colonial style homes sat in rows like the American dream, complete with white picket fences, full gardens and freshly cut lawns. The fallen leaves only added to the beauty.

The Sheriff's Jeep pulled up in front of 4200 Oak Hill Drive where the front porch lights were on, as well as the downstairs living room lights.

“Let's see what we can find out.” Carter said, shutting off the engine. Dart followed Carter up the driveway and to the front porch. A group of small pumpkins and gourds sat next to the door, adding an appropriate elegance to the season.

Carter knocked on the door. Seconds later, a young man in his mid-twenties answered. He wore a gray hooded sweatshirt,

jeans and slippers. His appearance was like that of an athlete's – a good shape and a clean-shaven face.

“Can I help you guys?” the man said, looking at their uniforms. “Officers?”

“Good evening sir, I'm Sheriff Ben Carter and this is my Deputy, Jamie Dart, from the Stewart Hollow Sheriff's Department. Are you Jacob Little?”

“Yes.” Jacob said, warily.

“And your wife is, Riley, correct?”

“Yeah.”

“Is she home?”

“Well, she's in bed. She needs all the sleep she can get lately. We just had our first baby a month ago.” Jacob said.

Carter nodded, speechless. He and Dart looked at each other, then back at Jacob.

“Um, will you have her call our station tomorrow so we can set up a meeting? We really need to discuss some things with her. It's pretty important.” Carter asked, handing Jacob a business card with a phone number on it.

“Sure. Is she in trouble?” Jacob asked.

“We just need to ask her some things. She'll be in touch, then?”

Jacob nodded.

“Great. Have a nice evening, Mr. Little.” Carter said. Dart smiled and followed Carter back to the Jeep. Jacob shut the door, and locked it.

“A brand new mother could possibly be involved with a murder investigation?” Dart asked.

“You never know.” Carter said. He started the Jeep and sped off.

CHAPTER TEN

The call came in before Carter and Dart had a chance to get back to the station. They arrived at the scene – the Finch residence. Jasper Finch was sprawled out inside his living room, sopping wet with blood. There were muddy footprints all over the carpet, almost like the attacker had walked aimlessly in circles, then lead outside where they went from the porch, and ended in the grass.

Mud had been smeared all over the front door, the nearest walls, and mixed with the dark red blood on Jasper's shirt.

“What is the deal with the mud?” Spencer Holland asked, hovering over the Sheriff and his Deputy in his freshly pressed suit.

“It's an elaborate signature – obviously for dramatic effect.” Carter said, standing up. “Who ever is doing this obviously wants us to believe that Kelly Rodgers rose from her muddy grave and is committing these crimes.”

“You have some Halloween nut-jobs in your town, Carter.” Holland laughed. “Last year was a ‘legendary’ killer, this year it's a ghost, or is it a zombie?”

“It's all part of our history, Agent. We are known for our Halloween Festival, our fall foliage, our apple orchards – hell,

there're even old stories of witchcraft." Carter said. "Halloween is embraced here."

Spencer Holland started to chuckle.

Carter watched the unwanted Federal presence laugh at the town he loved. "What part of this do you think is funny, Agent Holland? I have three dead bodies in my town, midway through October, and the killer isn't even done."

Holland wiped the smile from his face. "How will you know when he's done?"

"If my hunch is correct, unless we find him soon, it won't be until the 31st."

Holland looked back down at the slain corpse of the innocent youth. "What can I do to help?"

"You can stay out of my way." Carter said, pushing him away and walking back outside. He quickly stopped and turned back to Dart, who was positioned in the doorway. "Dart, take a picture of the wall behind the door. There's another Braxton Summers signature."

Carter made his way through the crowd of police and emergency workers in the front yard. Dart pulled the front door back and saw the sloppy signature – this time in mud.

Holland was impressed. "He's got a good eye."

The sun broke the horizon in the east, and nature's light trickled through Stewart Hollow, bringing all of the autumn colors to life. A cool breeze crept through the streets, gently pushing the fallen leaves around. The town was quiet.

A knock on Doug Roberts bedroom door woke him from a deep sleep. "Yeah?" He muttered with his eyes still closed.

The door was pushed open, and his mother stood there, dressed for a day at the office. Doug opened his eyes and saw her.

"What is it?" He asked.

His mother was hesitant, but she needed to tell him. "Did you know Jasper Finch?"

"Yeah, why?"

"He was found dead at his house last night."

Doug sat up quickly. "What?"

"It's all over the news. They actually cancelled classes today at the high school. They think more students might be in danger. Especially the ones involved in your play."

Doug didn't know what to say.

"I can't get off work today, I have a series of important meetings. Just do me a favor, hun, and stay home today with the doors locked."

Doug nodded.

“If you need me, call my cell phone.”

“Sure.”

“See you for dinner, Douglas.” His mother left, closing the door behind her. Doug sat in his quiet room, thinking to himself.

The high school was pretty much vacant from teachers and staff by nine o’clock, but Mr. Thomas Murdock walked heavily into Molly Bain’s office. He startled her at her desk.

“What are you doing to me?” He asked loudly and distressed.

“What on Earth are you talking about?” She responded, blindsided.

“First you pull the financing on the play, and I went through all the trouble of getting the money to keep it going, and now you cancel classes? I need my actors to rehearse.”

“Un-freaking believable!” Molly shouted, appalled by the drama teachers unsettling ego. “Students are dead, Thomas! Our students! Students that are in you’re precious play! And you want to continue it?”

“You don’t know how much this play will mean for my career and yours, Molly. Not to mention the fact that it’s a tribute play. People will come to it to pay respect and remember the deceased.”

“I can’t believe you, Thomas. You are honestly disturbing me right now.”

Thomas got quiet and stared at the Principal. His eyes were burning with a sort of suppressed rage. He began to breath heavily. Molly noticed this, and slowly made her way around her desk.

“Thomas, go home. I’ll let you know when I want school to resume.” She nervously said, slowly walking past him.

Thomas reached out with force and grabbed her arm.

“Let go, Thomas!” Molly yelled.

He looked into her eyes, and she saw something that she didn’t know was in him.

“You don’t know what your doing, Molly.”

Molly pulled her arm free, and quickly left the office.

Doug sat in his living room with a ham and cheese sandwich; simultaneously stuffing his mouth with candy corn. The TV was on and set to the news where he was watching the continuous coverage on the murders. They mentioned Kelly Rodgers’ body missing from the cemetery, school being suspended until further notice, and the murders of Noah Swan, Samantha Weber and Jasper Finch.

Charlotte must be a wreck. Two of her friends – her close friends – were killed. She’s alone now.

Doug pulled his phone from his pocket and scrolled through his contacts list to Charlotte's name. He pressed 'call' and let the phone ring.

"This is Charlotte, leave a message!" Her voicemail said in a cheery voice. Doug smiled.

"Charlotte, it's Doug Roberts. I heard the news. If you want to talk, please call me back. There's..." He stopped for a moment. He didn't mean to continue, but now he had to. "There's something I'd like to tell you."

Doug quickly hung up the phone and thought about the message he just left. *It was time to tell her – especially with the status of the play.* He was going to wait until opening night – Halloween – but it wouldn't hurt to move it up.

KNOCK! KNOCK!

Doug jumped, startled by the knocking at his front door. He jumped up from the couch and dashed to the window. Pulling back the flower-patterned curtains, he saw Libby Hatcher standing on the front porch. He opened the door and was greeted with a pleasant smile.

"Hi." She said.

"Hey." Doug responded, curious about her company.

"I was just going for a walk and thought maybe you'd like to come with me."

Doug thought for a moment. "Uh, I'll pass."

Libby's smile disappeared. "Why?"

"Because, I'm just going to hang out here for today. It's not really safe out there, you know, with a killer picking us off."

Libby stood there for a moment, anxiously shifting her feet. "Then, can I come in?"

She's insistent. Doug smiled. "Sure."

The smile returned to Libby's plump face and she walked in, instantly making herself at home.

"So this whole thing is creepy, huh? The murders I mean." She said, plopping down on the couch, right where Doug had been sitting. He sat down in the chair, which was across from her.

"Yeah."

"What's even more eerie are the similarities between the play and what's actually happening. You know, the whole 'returning from the grave' aspect."

"Yeah, that's really weird."

"Do you think someone read your play, and decided to do this?"

"Why would they? It's just a play." Doug said. "Do you think it's someone involved in the play?"

"Could be. After all, the three people who are dead were connected to it. And poor Charlotte – two of her friends are

dead.” Libby quieted down for a moment, in thought, and then looked up at Doug. “What do you see in her anyway?”

“Uh...” Doug didn’t know how to respond. “She’s popular, beautiful, well respected. She’s every high school guys dream.”

Libby nodded. “What about me?”

Doug’s brow contorted. “What do you mean?”

“Would you date me?”

“I...don’t know.” Doug said, feeling uncomfortable. “We’ve lived next to each other since we were kids. To me, your more like a friend, or, just a girl that’s...just...there.”

Doug knew it came out wrong, but he never expected to see her cry. She stood up and waddled to the front door. She glanced back at him once last time before leaving.

Doug sat alone in the living room, where the news continued to show live shots of Jasper Finch’s house.

Harper Cole looked up from her desk as a young woman in her mid-twenties entered the station. She wore her bleach blonde hair back in a ponytail, and was dressed in a pair of skinny jeans, and wore a dark coat. She smiled at Harper, who was instantly jealous of her beauty.

“Is Sheriff Carter around?” the woman asked with a smile.

“Yeah, sure.” Harper snapped back, picking up the phone. “Sheriff, there’s a girl here to see you.” She covered the speaker with her hand and looked at the girl. “Are you Riley Little?”

Riley nodded.

“Yeah it’s her. Okay.” Harper hung up the phone. “He’ll see you now. Down the hall and to the right.”

“Thank you.” Riley smiled as she headed for Carter’s office. Once inside, she looked around at all of the Beatles memorabilia. A framed Abbey Road poster hung above a small shelf, which displayed John, Paul, Ringo and George bobble heads.

“A Beatles fan? I like it.” Riley said. Carter stood up from his desk and shook her hand.

“Thanks. Are you a fan?” He asked.

“Sure am. That’s all my parents use to listen too, so obviously, it grew on me.”

“Please, Mrs. Little, have a seat.” Carter said. They both sat down. “I’m going to get right to it. You’ve heard about the murders here in town, I’m sure.”

Riley nodded.

“How you came to be involved in quite puzzling to us actually. At each of the crime scenes, the killer left a signature – an autograph. Braxton Summers.”

Riley was confused.

“We looked into your history and found out that your name use to be Summer Braxton. Do you know why a killer would be using a variation of you’re maiden name?”

Riley shook her head. “No, sir.”

“Upon further investigation, we found a website that sells independently published books, and Braxton Summers is a registered author on that site. He wrote a book called ‘*Bloody October*’, which is basically a retelling of the massacre that happened here last October.”

“Oh my God.” Riley was stunned.

“We think the killer is writing a sequel. ‘*Bloody October*’ sold very well, at fifteen dollars a pop. The writer – *the killer* – made a ton of money off of it.”

Riley hung her head, like she had something to say, but didn’t want to.

“Mrs. Little, what is it?” Carter asked.

“I grew up here. I actually use to live on Baker Street. I wrote Halloween themed poetry and short horror stories. I never published them,” she explained with a slight quiver in her voice, “but I did use to perform the poetry at the Halloween Festival each year until I moved after high school.”

Carter looked at her more closely. “Ah, yes. I do remember some of that. It was pretty good if I recall.”

“Thanks.”

Carter proceeded to ask her about her whereabouts the dates and times of the recent murders, and every answer was either “With my husband” or “Taking care of the baby.”

Tentatively satisfied with the questioning, he cut her loose.

Night consumed Stewart Hollow. The streets were empty and silent. A cold wind howled lightly through the neighborhoods, kicking up leaves, and teasing the flames that illuminated inside of freshly carved pumpkins. The night was calm, but unusual.

A dark figure walked down a dimly lit neighborhood street.

His confusion was building and he jerked his head from side to side, trying to pinpoint every little sound that he thought he heard. He blinked rapidly and groaned aggressively at himself; angry with the man he was forced to be.

A flickering pumpkin on a front porch caught his eye and he slowly approached it. He stood on the porch of a home that kept a family warm and safe - for now. He bent over and picked up the crudely carved pumpkin. It was certainly the work of a child.

He remembered the news: the murders, the missing corpse – there was a ghost haunting the October nights. The thought sent a chill down his spine. With his free hand, he frantically felt the inside breast pocket of his long black coat. He sighed in relief when he felt the knife was still there – hopefully still as sharp.

He took the pumpkin in his arms, held it to his chest, and continued to walk alone in the night, hoping to do the old woman proud. The first warning was coming.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

October 21st – 1:15 PM

Doug stared at Kevin from across the table in the food court at the mall. He swallowed the rest of his pizza, and then broke his friend the news.

“I’m not writing the sequel anymore.”

Kevin looked at Doug, glad, but curious. “Why?”

“Well, I’m starting to think it’ll be inappropriate like you said. People we know are being killed. The cops seem to think it has something to do with my play since there are similarities. How’s it going to look if they ever found out I was trying to write another one?”

“Good. I’m glad you’re stopping it. It was starting to creep me out.” Kevin said, gulping his Pepsi.

“I’m sorry I was being such an idiot about it. You know I’ve always liked Charlotte.” Doug said, watching Kevin’s expression change. He hid behind a bite of his pizza. “When she read the play and liked it, I was blown away. I got a high off of it. I might have gone a little too far.”

Kevin chewed his pizza, and nodded. “It’s cool man. It’s over. How are you going to tell Mr. Murdock? He seems to be pretty obsessed too.”

Doug shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Dougjie!” A voiced shouted from behind Kevin. They both looked and saw Levi walking past them, with Charlotte by his side.

“Oh God.” Doug said, tensing up. Levi grabbed Charlotte’s hand and walked over to them.

“What’s going on guys? Has everyone bailed on your play yet, or are you still holding out desperate hope?” Levi sarcastically joked.

“It’s over, Levi. I want nothing to do with it.” Doug said.

“Well, I think you were forced to have nothing to do with it. Man, you really know how to scare people away.” Levi laughed. Charlotte smiled uncomfortably at Levi’s rudeness.

Doug nodded at her. “Hey.”

“Hey, Doug,” Charlotte said, “I’m sorry I didn’t call you back the other day.”

“It’s fine.”

Silence fell between the four, and Levi smiled at the discomfort.

“We should talk soon.” Charlotte said to Doug. He smiled and nodded.

“That’s if she’s not with me, right?” Levi joked.

She didn’t answer.

“See you guys at school – whenever the hell that might be. Thanks for the days off, Doug!” Levi yelled, patting Kevin on the back as he grabbed Charlotte’s hand and they walked away.

Doug watched them leave the food court. His eyes had been focused on Levi the whole way out. “I hate him.”

“Yeah.” Kevin said. “He’s a tool, but what are you going to do. The jocks and the pretty girls are always going to end up with each other. That’s the way it works.”

“Well, it shouldn’t be.”

October 24th

The rest of the week went by fast and uneventful. When Saturday morning came, Sheriff Carter sat at his desk, going through piles of evidence. A single knock at his door caught his attention.

Agent Spencer Holland stood in the doorway, holding a book.

“Can I help you, Agent?” Carter tried to ask politely.

“I know you don’t want my help, Ben, and I appreciate your can-do attitude – that’s how I ended up in my position. But when Hopkins invited me to town to help, that’s what I intended to do. Whether it was to help his career, or just simply bring another serial killer to justice.”

Carter sat the papers down in front of him and smiled. “Your help would be greatly welcomed now.”

Holland pulled up a chair and faced the Sheriff. “Halloween is only a week away. If it’s anything like last year, in a week, the killer will make his final move, and exit the month with a bang.”

Holland slapped the book down on the desk. It was a copy of *‘Bloody October’*.

“Where’d you get that?” Carter asked, stunned at the piece of fouled literature sitting in front of him.

“I had it shipped overnight to me yesterday. I wanted to read it, because being a fan of fiction in general; you can pick up on subtle nuances and character traits that reflect the author. I thought it might tell us a little bit about ‘Braxton Summers’.”

“And?”

“It did. Kelly Rodgers is the main focus in the story – the writer even kept the same name, but changed the victims’ names. You’re actually Detective Ronald Blair.”

Carter nodded, listening. Holland continued:

“The writer broadcasts Kelly in a very authoritative manner – a woman of power. That means the writer could either be a female, trying to make a point, or someone who admires a female greatly. Either way, ‘Braxton Summers’, wanted to tell the story of Kelly Rodgers. However, a lot of the details about the actual murders are off. They’re graphic, of course, but fictional. The writer didn’t have any inside facts or details. So, it has to be someone who doesn’t have access to that kind of information.”

“So, possibly a student at the school?” Carter asked.

“Possibly. Or, it *is* someone who has access to said information, but plays it off like they don’t, eliminating them from a possible list of suspects.”

Holland was starting to think outside the box, and Carter liked it.

“So what do we know for sure?” Carter asked.

“Not much still, but enough to start narrowing down the suspects. He or she is a writer using a variation of Riley Little’s maiden name – possibly an old acquaintance. They are using an urban legend created by the high school students, as a jumping off point for the murders – muddy shoe prints at each crime – and even going to the extreme of stealing Kelly Rodgers’ corpse.”

“It’s obvious the killer wants us to believe that Kelly Rodger’s came back from the dead to kill people, but why?”

“Because when ‘Braxton Summers’ writes his or her next book, the factual aspect of it will be a key selling point. The reason that ‘*Bloody October*’ actually sold so well is because it actually happened.” Holland explained.

The two sat there for a moment in silence, both thinking.

“So, who’s on the list?” Carter asked.

“Any of the students or school staff involved in ‘*October’s Shattered Graves*’, maybe someone who has access to police files, and finally, Riley Little.”

“You think?”

“She seems to play a very intricate role here. Either she knows something, or someone she grew up with does – someone who knew her when she was Summer Braxton.”

“I’ll put a call into Riley, and see when she can get back here. Some more questions couldn’t hurt. In the meantime, we can start with students and staff.”

“Good call.” Holland concluded.

The night became darker than usual. It sheltered an imminent danger.

He sat outside the farmhouse of Theresa and Jack McDowell. *I feel just like that psycho last year that hid in the shadows of the farm down the street, only to slay that poor girl in her parent’s home.*

But this was different – it was a request from the old woman. She’d been dead for days now, but he wouldn’t dare tell a soul about it. It was forbidden.

The inside of the pumpkin he had taken the other night felt cool against his face. It smelled sweet, but was sticky on his skin. It fit perfectly though. He felt silly wearing it, but the old woman said it had to seem like it was the *season* that sends the warnings – not a man.

He would make sure that happened.

Jack McDowell had been sitting on his porch for nearly twenty minutes, drinking hot apple cider, and completely oblivious to the man hiding on his land.

He set the steaming cup of cider down on the table next to him, where an issue of the Hollow Gazette sat. The headlines were becoming annoyingly repetitive. *'Corpse Missing – Bodies Popping Up All Over Town'*, *'No Witnesses in Corpse Disappearance'*, *'Body Count Rises – Is Stewart Hollow Cursed?'*

Jack laughed at it all, even though he knew it wasn't funny. It was the times they were living in. All of the violence and disturbing content on television – it influences people, whether they admit it or not. Greed played a big part – especially in Stewart Hollow's case. A newspaper reporter last year was looking to cash in on a 'legend', and with the recent reveal by the police that a killer this year was profiting from writing about the town's misfortunes, it was pretty clear that people are always out for themselves.

A creek in the wooden porch beside Jack jerked him out of his thoughts. He turned and saw a tall man standing next to him, wearing the crudely carved pumpkin over his head, and dressed in a long black coat, which dragged on the ground collecting dirt and dried leaves.

“Who the hell are you?” Jack said in a voice not as strong as it used to be. He struggled to stand, reaching for his cane, as the menacing presence whispered to him:

“Where is Theresa?”

Jack finally stood up, depending upon his cane for balance. “What do you want with her? Get out of here before I call the police.”

“I can’t let you do that.” The man whispered. “Is your wife home?”

Jack looked his trespasser in the face, trying to identify the man through the eyes and mouth of the pumpkin. “Who are ya?”

“Is your wife home?” The man asked once more, becoming impatient.

Jack refused to answer, protecting his wife of 61 years.

“Jack?” an old woman called out from inside. “Who are you talking to?”

The mysterious man looked in through the screen door, seeing an old woman slowly walking towards them.

“Theresa, call the police!” Jack raised his voice in a very demanding, yet nervous manner.

Theresa saw the tall, shrouded man and let out a blood-curdling scream. The man turned to Jack, reached into his coat and pulled out a large, custom-made knife, with a distinct design on the blade.

Jack gripped his cane with both hands, ready to defend himself, his wife, and his home – but he was no match. The man held the knife in one hand and dashed towards Jack, forcing him against the house. He jabbed the knife into Jack’s stomach and tore it right back out, spilling blood onto the porch. He raised the knife high and slammed it down it Jack’s chest, where it was stopped by bone. The man forced the knife in, and the breaking of the rib cage was heard inside the house, where Theresa continued to scream. She shuffled back to the living room.

The man sliced down Jack’s sternum with power, spilling his innards and blood all over the old porch. Jack dropped to the ground, where he bled out.

The cloaked man then kicked in the screen door and charged Theresa, who was cowering in the dark corner of the room where she continued to yell. The man towered over her, dominant in every way, and raised his knife.

“Why?” Theresa cried out, perplexed as to why she and her husband were targeted.

“You were on the list. It’ll all be clear a year from now.” The man spoke softly and slowly.

Theresa’s mind raced, trying to imagine what he could have been talking about; she had nothing.

The man then slammed the knife down into Theresa’s chest, shattering her rib cage with the initial strength. He tore the

knife back out, spraying blood on the walls. He then plunged the knife back into her three more times, harder with each stab, until she laid in a mess of her own insides.

The first warning had been sent.

On the other side of town, Harper Cole walked into her home – her parent’s home. She dropped her purse on the coffee table and went straight for the kitchen, calling for her parents.

“Mom? Dad?” There was no answer.

She pulled the refrigerator open and grabbed the gallon of whole milk. Next to the fridge was a cabinet where she grabbed a box of cereal with a dumb cartoon frog on the front.

“Hey!” A purposely-loud voice shouted from behind her.

“God!” Harper screamed, startled by the sudden company. She swung around, dropping the box of cereal. Levi sat at the kitchen table with his laptop in front of him.

“What the hell are you doing home? I thought you’d be out with your girlfriend, or whoever, tonight.” Harper said, trying to catch her breath.

“Na, I’m taking the night off. I’m a guy, Harper. I need some ‘me time’.”

“Don’t flatter yourself, Levi. You’re barely a guy. You can’t even grow a mustache.”

“Yeah, well, when it comes,” Levi said, stroking his upper lip, “It’ll be legendary.”

“Whatever. Where’re mom and dad?”

“Date night. Dinner and a movie.”

Harper poured her cereal and joined her brother at the kitchen table. He looked up from his laptop:

“Are you guys any closer to finding the killer?”

“I don’t know. They don’t tell me much.” Harper said, crunching the granola and dried fruit mixture. She finished chewing, and then looked at Levi. She could tell there was a sense of worry hiding behind his arrogant front. “Did you know the kids that were killed very well?”

Levi shrugged. “Not really. But I mean, if the killer is really targeting the people involved in the play, do you think I should be worried?”

“If the killer doesn’t get you, I will.” Harper said, trying to ease the tension. Levi smiled, and then closed his laptop.

“I’m hitting the sack. I think the coach is holding a practice tomorrow morning, even though schools still delayed.”

“Good night, bro.”

“You too.” Levi said, retreating to his room.

He walked down the dark upstairs hallway, to a room where a poster of an almost naked girl was taped to the door. He opened

it and walked into his bedroom, closing the door and flipping the light switch.

The mud was the first thing he noticed – then the open window. Mud dripped from the windowsill, and stained his white curtains. He followed it with his eyes, as it formed shoeprints across his floor, and went straight for the closet.

“Harper!” Levi called out, scared stiff. He slowly backed up to his door, keeping his eye on the closet door. It was opened a crack. Levi pulled his bedroom door open and backed into the hallway, shutting the door in front of him.

“Harper!” He called out again.

“What?” She called from downstairs.

“Someone was in my room! There’s mud every –“ Levi was grabbed from behind, completely off guard. A sudden and sharp pain from the thrust of a butcher’s knife into his back brought him to his knees. The knife was removed and then forced into the back of his neck, severing his nerves, and plummeting him, face first, to the floor.

“Levi!” Harper shouted as she ran up the stairs, hearing the commotion. She stopped at the top of the stairs, looking down a dark – and now quiet – hallway. “Levi?” She called out into the darkness.

There was no answer. She couldn’t see anything. She fumbled her fingers on the wall next to her, feeling for the light

switch. She finally found and it and flipped on the lights. Before her vision could focus, a bloody knife was driven right between her eyes. The blood poured out of her face, and the attacker quickly retracted the blade. Harper's lifeless body wobbled upright for a moment, before going limp and tumbling back down the stairs.

CHAPTER TWEELEVE

His cell phone began to ring on the highest volume, tearing Carter out of a restless sleep. Amber woke up instantly next to him in bed. Carter grabbed the phone and saw an incoming call from his department.

“Who is it?” Amber groggily asked.

“The station.” Carter flipped his phone. “Harper, what is it?”

“Sheriff, it’s Dart. It’s bad. You need to get to Harper’s house right away!” Dart spoke promptly and urgently.

“What happened?” Carter questioned, confused by Dart’s tone.

“Just get here! There’s blood everywhere!”

Carter closed his phone and leapt out of bed, putting on his uniform which had been spread all over the bedroom.

“What is it, Ben?” Amber said, nervously flipping on the light next to her.

“I don’t know. Dart wants me at Harper’s house. He said there’s a lot of blood.”

“Blood? Is she...”

“Don’t even say it, Amber.” Carter finished putting his uniform on and ran out of the room. “I’ll call you when I can!”

Carter arrived at Harper's house on the east side of Stewart Hollow, minutes later. There was already a swarm of police and reporters. The blue and red lights from the cars flickered throughout the normally peaceful neighborhood.

Carter jumped out of his car and rushed up to the quarantined house, dodging reporters.

"Carter!" Dart yelled from the sea of spectators. He ran up, wearing a heavy coat over his uniform. It was the middle of the night, and the temperatures had dropped to the low forties.

"What the hell is going on, Jamie?" Carter asked.

"I just got here. Harper's parents called the station a bit ago. They got home and said Harper was dead, and so was her brother."

"Levi? The jock kid who was in the play?"

"Yeah."

"Jesus Christ." Carter bolted for the front door of the house and Dart was close behind.

It was horrific. Harper's body lay at the bottom of the stairs, where a large gash in her face was still spilling blood onto the floor. A flash from a forensic photographer's camera lit up the upstairs.

"Is that where Levi is?" Carter asked, grabbing the nearest officer.

“Yeah,” the officer said. “He was stabbed up in the hallway and left in his room. There’s more mud up there – everywhere. The killer must have come in from the bedroom window. It was open, and there was mud on the curtains. There were footprints leading to his closet, but stopped there. We think it was a decoy, because like I said, he was attacked in the hallway – no mud. There was no mud near Harper either.”

“Then it’s quiet clear that the killer is planting the prints everywhere, trying to make the Kelly Rodgers’ story come to life.” Dart said.

“We need to locate that missing corpse as soon as possible,” The officer added.

“The killer didn’t expect to off Harper.” Carter said.

“Huh?” Dart muttered.

“If the mud was all over Levi’s rooms, he was the intended target. He *was* in the play after all. Harper was just a potential witness.” Carter hung his head, sickened by the loss of more innocent lives. “We need to step this investigation up.”

As day finally broke, the clean up at the Cole residence was just starting. The bodies had been removed and sent to the coroners’ office, but a large crowd of neighbors and reporters still remained.

Carter entered the station, trying to outrun a bevy of reporters, and rapidly walked by the empty dispatcher's desk without even looking at it. He sat down in his office, and was immediately followed in by Agent Spencer Holland.

"I heard about Harper, Sheriff. I'm so sorry." He said, honestly remorseful.

Carter shook his head, and then realized that the station was quieter than usual. "Where is everyone? We usually have more officers here by now."

"They're at the McDowell farm." Holland said, tightening the tie around his neck.

"The McDowell farm? For what?"

"You...didn't hear?"

"Hear what?" Carter asked, frustrated and overwhelmed.

Carter stood on the front porch of the McDowell house, where a dry and dead farmland sat in the background like a depressing landscape painting.

He looked down at Jack McDowell, who had been stabbed to death, trying to understand. Agent Holland walked up beside him.

"His wife is inside." Holland said, showing Carter into the home. Theresa McDowell sat in the back corner of the living room, with multiple stab wounds all over her body.

“I don’t get it. They weren’t involved in the play.” Carter said, baffled. He glanced around the room, desperately looking for something specific.

“What are you looking for, Sheriff?” Holland asked.

“There’s no mud.” Carter ran to the kitchen and searched, before coming back into the living room. “There’s no mud anywhere.” He looked at Agent Spencer Holland, wide-eyed. “This wasn’t the same killer.”

October 26th

“Dev Liles sat alone in his bedroom, and in the dark. He wondered if they would be back tonight, as they were every night. They would whisper, they would taunt, and they would haunt. He could always feel their eyes on him; sometimes it felt like everyone’s eyes were on him. He belonged in Hell, and he knew it. He deserved it. He wanted it. The demon that devoured his soul so long ago, deserved to finally vanish. Dev wished it would.”

Libby Hatcher sat the script down on the table in front of her, blown away by the haunting nature of ‘*October’s Shattered Graves*’.

She looked at Jude Coffman, who sat next to her on her parents porch swing.

“It really is an amazing play.” Libby said. Jude politely smiled:

“Yeah it is. That’s why I thought it would have been a great opportunity for me. Doug’s a great writer.” Jude said.

“Yeah.” Libby said, looking next door at Doug’s house. It was calm, and there had not been much movement besides his mother leaving for work. Doug was probably still inside.

“I had an idea.” Jude said, grabbing Libby’s attention.

“What is it?”

“What if we were to submit the play to the community theater instead of having the school do it?”

Libby thought for a moment, and then smiled. “Not bad.”

“But we should probably wait until next year,” Jude added. “I mean we’re going to have more people to honor it looks like.”

Doug’s front door opened and he walked out onto his porch in a daze. Libby looked over, as did Jude. He just stood there, looking out into the neighborhood.

“Hey, Doug.” Libby said. Doug slowly turned to her, and saw Jude there as well. He looked scared. “What’s wrong?” Libby asked.

“We’re all going to die.”

Doug’s words sent a cold chill down Libby’s spine.

“What’s he talking about?” Jude whispered. Libby shrugged.

Doug took a step in their direction. “Call everyone that was involved in the play, and tell them to come to my house within the hour.”

“Doug, I-“

“Libby, just do it.” Doug said, interrupting her. He retreated back into his house.

“What’s going on, Libby?” Jude asked.

“I don’t know.” She pulled out her cell phone and began to start making calls.

An hour later, Doug stood in his living room, looking out among the students who were still alive. Libby and Jude sat close to each other on the couch. Kevin stood in the corner, close to the front door, and Charlotte sat in the chair.

“Okay, guys, listen up. Something is wrong.” Doug began, before Charlotte stood up:

“We should wait for Levi.” She said, commanding.

“He’s the only one I couldn’t get a hold of.” Libby said.

“That’s because Levi’s dead!” Doug shouted, his lips trembling uncontrollably.

Shocked and horrified, Charlotte plopped back down onto the chair. “What the hell have you done?” She cried out to Doug.

“I didn’t do anything, Charlotte, I swear to you. For some reason, everyone that was involved in the play is being killed. Jasper, Levi, Mr. Swan, Samantha...”

“Samantha wasn’t involved in the play!” Charlotte yelled, correcting him.

“But she was there; she auditioned,” Doug said.

The room became silent. Everyone’s thoughts were racing.

“Who would want us dead?” Doug calmly continued.

“Besides Kelly Rodgers?” Jude sarcastically asked. “You.”

“Me?” Doug laughed. “You think I would kill everyone involved? Involved in a tribute play, to honor people that have died? You don’t know what you’re talking about, Jude. Shut up.”

“Doug started writing a sequel to *‘October’s Shattered Graves’*.” Kevin said, stepping forward. Doug’s face went red.

“Kevin, why?” Doug asked.

“I’m telling people this so they can also know that you stopped writing it, because of what’s been going on. Doug hasn’t done anything. For some reason, someone is trying to frame him and somehow link this ‘Kelly Rodgers’ myth to the murders. Doug’s a good guy, and shouldn’t be treated like this.”

Doug nodded to his friend, who nodded back. Charlotte stood up again. “What was the sequel about, Doug?” She asked, not sure if she even wanted to know.

He didn't say anything.

"It was probably a tribute play to the people who are going to die this year." Jude said, grabbing Libby by the hand. They stood up and walked for the door.

"Where are you going? It's not safe out there." Doug said. Neither one said a word. "Libby?"

She hinted at a smile, but her trust for Doug was lost. She turned her head and followed Jude out the door.

Charlotte stood up, zipping up her coat. She shook her head and headed for the door.

"Charlotte, wait. Please?" Doug begged. She stopped and looked back at him, tears in her eyes. "Charlotte, can we please talk?"

"Maybe some other time, Doug. I'm sorry." She walked out the front door.

"Charlotte, wait!" He desperately called out, but she kept walking.

Kevin shut the front door, and walked up to his friend, hugging him.

"Doug, it's over man. I know you're innocent, and I'm sorry everyone has these demented thoughts of you right now, but it's over. I think it's better if you lay low until this whole thing blows over. Halloween is coming up, and if last year is any indication, it will all be over by then."

Doug let out a shaky sigh. “Now Charlotte thinks I’m a psycho.”

Kevin backed off, shocked that *that’s* what was on his friends mind.

“Kevin, you don’t get it. I love her. I need to tell her. If she thinks I’m some sort of sick, psycho-slasher, then I’ll never get a chance. You need to help me out, man.”

“I can’t, dude. Just leave it alone, please? You don’t have many people on your side right now.”

Doug didn’t know what to say. Kevin kept quiet, and eventually left.

Carter stood in the Sheriff’s Department lobby with Deputy Dart, Agent Holland and Mayor Hopkins.

“Carter, this is bullshit!” the Mayor shouted. “Tell me every single thing you know right now, who we’re looking into, and what we’re doing about it. And give me the cliff notes, because I don’t want to hear all your whiney excuses.”

Carter stood his ground, although slightly nervously, and spoke:

“Cliff notes? Seven dead bodies, a missing corpse, a killer who also seems to be a writer, possibly acting out his next book, a connection to a young woman who doesn’t even live here anymore, a ghost story, a tribute play gone horribly wrong, and

all the clues we have don't make any sense. Not to mention, two of those dead bodies don't seem to have any earthly connection to the rest.”

Mayor Hopkins stared into Carter's eyes. “I don't like your sarcastic tone, Carter. As a matter of fact, I despise it. Over the past year, you have proven to me that you are incapable of being a respected official in what use to be a very safe town. Starting now, and until further notice, you are on an indefinite, unpaid, suspension.”

“What?” Carter laughed, dumbfounded.

“If you can't keep this town safe, you have no business being the Sheriff. Gun and badge – now.” Hopkins demanded them, holding out his hands. Dart and Holland stood by and watched as Carter torn his badge off from his chest and pulled his gun from his holster, setting them down on the dispatcher's desk instead of the Mayors' hands.

Carter walked out of the station without saying a single word.

“I didn't see that coming.” Dart said.

“Let that be a lesson to you, Deputy. Don't screw with me.” He turned to his old friend. “And Spencer, you came here to do a job. Right now, you haven't done a thing. Help us find the killer.”

Hopkins left the station. Spencer Holland and Deputy Dart stood next to each other, befuddled.

“This can’t possibly get any weirder.” Holland said, shaking his head. Right then, the phone at the desk started to ring. Dart picked it up.

“Stewart Hollow Sheriff’s Department, how can I help you?” Dart listened to a frantic voice on the other line. He looked at Holland, who saw perplexity in the Deputy’s eyes.

Dart hung the phone up, and looked at the Agent. “It just got weirder.”

“What happened?”

“That was Bud Lockwood from the cemetery. Kelly Rodgers’ corpse is back in her grave.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Dart pulled up, along side of the cemetery gates. A black Sedan pulled up behind him, and Agent Holland stepped out. He followed the Deputy through the gated entrance of Hollow's End Cemetery, and walked down a path, crisscrossing through headstones and monuments.

With the dried leaves crunching below their boots and shoes, they arrived at the base of a small hill. Dart called up to the wooden shack at its top:

“Bud! You up there?”

The door to the shack opened, and Bud Lockwood came out, lightly stumbling as he made his way down the hill. With his dirty work clothes and torn conductors hat, he greeted the authorities.

“Good afternoon, gentleman.” Bud nervously spoke. It was obvious he was upset.

“So, she's back, huh?” Dart asked.

“She sure is. It's the damnedest thing, I tell ya! As if this month hasn't been crawling under my skin enough already, her corpse just shows back up in the empty grave.” Bud said, removing his hat. He looked around. “Where's the Sheriff?”

“He’s on his way,” Dart said, seeing Carter’s personal car pull up next to the others. He hopped out and approached the group, still in uniform.

“What’s he doing here?” Holland whispered to Dart.

“I called him. He needs to be here. This is his case.” Dart said, defending his mentor.

“What is it, Bud?” Carter said, standing with his hands on his waist and chest puffed out.

“Sheriff, Kelly Rodgers’ body is back.” Bud said with a shaky voice.

“Show me.”

Carter, Dart and Holland followed Bud Lockwood through the cemetery and to the dug up grave.

“There.” Bud said, pointing to it.

Carter slowly approached it and peered in. A rotting corpse lay at the bottom of the grave, with shredded clothes and a foul stench rising from the brown, deteriorating skin. Flesh hung from her once attractive face, now revealing skull and bones.

“My God.” Carter muttered, covering his mouth and nose. Dart and Holland did the same after viewing the body themselves.

“Did you see the shoes?” Holland asked. Carter quickly looked back down at the corpses feet. There were shoes on them – women’s work shoes – covered in dried mud.

“Dart, you need to get those shoes, and that body, examined for prints, DNA, etc. Call it in. I should go before Hopkins finds out I was here. Let me know what you find, got it?” Carter instructed.

Dart nodded and Holland rolled his eyes.

“Holland, don’t you dare say a word to the Mayor.” Carter said.

Holland kept his mouth shut. Bud Lockwood leaned in, and looked at Carter’s uniform:

“Sheriff, where’s your badge? And gun?”

“I, uh, I’m on suspension, Bud. Don’t worry about it though.”

Carter left in a huff to his car.

“Suspension?” Bud looked at Dart, confused.

Dart didn’t respond. He pulled out his phone and called in the body. Holland stood by, and Bud looked over at Carter who was starting the engine to his car. Carter looked back towards the three men, embarrassed by the position he was in. He saw Bud Lockwood put his conductors hat back on and tip it in his direction.

Carter waved, and drove away.

October 29th

Libby Hatcher sat in her bedroom, in her parent's one floor home, next door to her lifelong crush, Doug Roberts. She looked out her window, and could see the side of Doug's house. On the second floor was Doug's bedroom window. She looked up at it. The room was dark, just as it had been all night. *Where is he?* She thought.

She wanted them to be together so much, but his obsessive nature towards Charlotte Sheldon, the school hottie, was too strong. She was starting to think they'd never be together, especially after she embarrassed herself at his home.

She looked at her watch – it was almost 9:30. *Jude should have been here by now.*

She didn't really have any strong feelings for Jude, but he happened to be the same type of person she was. Quiet, lonely, desperate. With him, she would have someone. With her, he'd be able to 'come out of his shell' for his senior year. Who wants to spend their senior year alone? It's a time to let loose and get ready for college life.

She looked at the calendar above her desk, where a copy of *'October's Shattered Graves'* sat, opened to her highlighted lines. The month was flying by, and she couldn't have been happier. Hopefully the terror would come to an end soon. She wanted to get back to school and get everything back to normal again. With

a black pen, she crossed off the date on the calendar – October 29th - another day gone.

Libby opened her phone. There was still no text response from Jude. Giving up, she turned her light out and laid back in bed, pulling the sheets over herself.

Just as a tear began to roll down her cheek, she heard a squeaking noise. She froze. It happened again. It was coming from her bedroom window. She could feel goose bumps popping up all over her body.

With every bit of courage she had, Libby slowly sat up in bed and looked at the window. There was a dark smear on the window. Her breathing picked up. Was it mud? Was she next?

Libby crawled out of bed and tiptoed to the window. She looked outside into the night, and saw nothing beyond the dark smear. She flipped the light on next to her and stumbled backwards when she saw the smear was dark red – blood on the outside of the window.

“Mom! Dad!” She called out. She backed into the corner of her room when her parents busted in.

“What is it, Libby? What happened?” They screamed. Libby pointed towards the window, and her Dad rushed to it. He opened it and looked outside.

“Good Lord! Who is that?” Her father shouted, turning and running back out of the bedroom for a phone. Libby and her mother rushed for the window and looked out.

Jude Coffman lay in the grass, covered in blood.

October 30th – 10:20 AM

The Stewart Hollow Regional High School had been empty for the better part of two weeks. It wasn't safe for the students to come back – not with a serial killer on the loose.

Thomas Murdock stood on the dimly lit stage in the auditorium, drinking a cup of coffee, and admiring the set pieces his students had created. A door backstage opened, and he heard the sound of high heels clicking across the floor. The curtain to the left of him was pulled back and Molly Bain appeared, surprised to see him.

“Jesus Christ, Thomas. What on Earth are you doing here?” She asked.

“Just getting one more look at these pieces of art.” He sipped he coffee.

“After what you pulled in my office, I should call the police on you. First you pretty much attack me, now you're trespassing. You're on thin ice, Thomas.”

“Don't worry about it, Molly. I'm out of here anyway. I just wanted one more look at this stuff before I head to Las Vegas.”

“What’s in Las Vegas?”

“A new job. I’ll be a producer at the public theater. Ten grand more a year than I’m making here.” He sipped his coffee again.

“Oh.” Molly Bain said, standing there with her arms crossed. It was all she could say.

“You just said that I’m lucky you don’t call the police on me because of my being here and the ‘office incident’. Why didn’t you call the cops to begin with? I mean, I was way out of line.”

Molly thought for a moment, and then eased up. “Because I know you, Thomas. You’re very passionate about your work. If I called the police about your aggressive behavior, they would have thought you were involved in the murders.”

“How do you know I’m not?”

Molly hesitated, off-put by his eerie question, but trusted her gut. “Because we’ve worked together for years. I know you better than that. I didn’t want you involved in something that you’re incapable of.”

Thomas sighed, and took another sip of his coffee. “Thank you.”

“Good luck in Las Vegas. Keep in touch.”

“Will do.”

Molly turned back and left the same way she came in.

Outside, Thomas Murdock got in his car – the only other car in the parking lot aside from Molly Bain’s silver Buick – and started the engine. The ‘door ajar’ light popped on. He backed out of the parking spot while opening his door back up and slamming it shut, and pushed the car into drive, hit the gas, and immediately heard a flapping sound underneath him.

“What the hell?” He said, stopping the car. The ‘door ajar’ light was still on. He jumped out of the car and looked underneath. All four tires were slashed. “Dammit!”

Thomas stood up and looked his car over. He glanced at the rear and saw the trunk was opened slightly, bouncing up and down in the cold winds that were blowing through town.

He walked to the trunk and lifted it open, instantly being stabbed in the throat by a sharp blade. The knife was ripped back out, and blood poured out, splattering on the pavement below. Thomas grabbed his neck, and held it tightly with both hands, but the blood still gushed through his fingers, spitting everywhere. He managed to look down into the trunk at his attacker. His eyes widened in horror, baffled by what he saw. The knife shot right back up at him, sinking into this stomach.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Halloween - 8:03 AM

“The police are baffled, even with the newly announced help from a Portland FBI Agent. A serial killer – posing as the once missing, but now returned, corpse of Kelly Rodgers – has terrorized our quiet town of Stewart Hollow in this month of October, similar to last years Harvest Slasher killings. The police say that clues have been uncovered at each crime scene that somehow connects a former resident of our town to the killings.

“It is, however, a known fact that somehow, a play written by a local high school student – a tribute play to those who died last year – is said to have sparked the massacre this year. For what reasons, we are unclear of.

“But we here at Channel 4 have been doing our own investigating over the past week, and if the released details are correct, the gruesome murders of Jack and Theresa McDowell are *not* connected to the rest, suggesting they were either the targets of a random attack, or something else. Being Stewart Hollow’s oldest, and longest married couple, the murders of Jack and Theresa McDowell immediately bring to question, is the Blood Coven myth coming to life?

“For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Blood Coven myth, it dates back...”

Riley Little turned the television off, stopping Brent Tiles from continuing. Her husband looked over at her from the couch, where he held their sleeping baby.

“What is it?” Jacob asked. “I was watching that.”

“I need to talk to the cops in Stewart Hollow.” She said, trying to remain clam.

“Is everything okay?”

“It won’t be.”

Ben Carter stood in his bathroom, washing the rest of the shaving cream off of his now smooth cheeks.

Amber walked in behind him, wearing a white bathrobe and her hair up in a towel.

“Morning.” She said. Her voice was soothing and comforting, something Carter hadn’t been feeling lately.

“Morning, sweetheart.” Carter forced a smile and kissed his fiancé on the cheek. “Break fast?”

“Sure.”

After they were dressed, they drove to the Oregon Trails Diner, and sat down to a hot breakfast.

“You’re nervous, I can tell.” Amber said.

“Why do you think that?”

“You’ve been quiet all morning and you’re barely touching your bacon. You love bacon.”

Carter nodded, knowing she was right.

“What’s wrong, Ben?”

“I just know something bad is going to happen. It’s Halloween, and this whole thing is going to come crashing down today, and I can’t do a damn thing about it.”

Amber drank her juice and called the waitress over for a refill. She looked back at Ben. “What’s the latest?”

“Dart called me last night. Another teacher was killed yesterday, and another student was killed on the 29th. More muddy footprints, two more Braxton Summers autographs, a lot of blood, and no suspects. Amber, I don’t think I was cut out for this. I keep failing.”

“You’ll rise above eventually, Ben. You’re a young Sheriff, you’re bound to make mistakes.”

“It’s this damn town. It’s so small, and so unfamiliar with crimes like these. We don’t have the technology, or the man power, to handle it.”

“Well,” Amber started, “We’ve discussed moving in the summer. That’s still an option.”

Carter nodded.

“But you like it here?” She asked.

“I love it here. I grew up here. I know the people, I know the stories and I know the area. Aside from Halloween lately, this place is Heaven.”

Amber drank her fresh juice, and ate her eggs, unable to say anything else.

“Now, Doug, stay home today. I’m only working until 3, so I’ll be home early, okay? No funny business. Today is making me nervous.”

“Okay, mom.” Doug said, as his mother stood in front of him, ready for work.

She leaned in and kissed him on the forehead. “Lock the doors, and don’t let anyone in.”

“Okay, mom.” Doug said, slightly aggravated.

“Love you.” His mother said, as she left the house, shutting the door. Doug moved forward and locked it. She stood at the window and watched his mother back the van out of their driveway, and drive away. He zipped up his hooded sweatshirt, flung the hood over his head, unlocked the door and left.

He walked down the sidewalks of his neighborhood, fighting the cold breeze and the falling leaves. He looked at each carved pumpkin on the porches. They were all different, all unique.

Once out of his neighborhood, he crossed the street into the next development. He walked down the main stretch of road, and

took the second left, onto a street he had strangely admired for years.

Five houses down, on the left, was Charlotte's house. He stood in front of the beautiful home, and watched it for a moment. There was a large pickup truck in the driveway, and a minivan in the road. Her parents were home. A shiny yellow Beetle sat in the road, on the other side of the street - Charlotte was home too. Doug smiled.

He walked to the front door and knocked three times. A moment later, the door opened, and Charlotte was there in a pair of blue sweatpants, a white hooded sweatshirt with *Abercrombie* across the chest, and her hair pulled back in a ponytail.

Her eyes widened:

"What the hell are you doing here, Doug?" She asked, fearfully.

"Please, Charlotte, I need to talk to you so bad, but you won't let me."

"I don't think it's a good idea."

"Why?"

"Because I am not sure I trust you. Admit it, Doug; all this weird stuff that's been going on is strangely connected to the play you wrote. Why would all of this stuff be happening?"

"I don't know! I admit, it's weird, but I didn't do anything wrong, I swear."

Doug looked at her with sad eyes. The flame that burned for her was unbearable.

She started to feel bad for him.

“You liked the play, right?” He asked in desperation.

Charlotte was hesitant. “Yeah. It was great. You’re really a great writer, Doug. One day your writing will get out there, but this just isn’t the time.”

“When you said you liked it, that’s the only reason I started writing a sequel. I was inspired. You inspired me.” Doug was starting to get emotional. “I...”

Doug held back his thought as Charlotte’s father appeared behind her. He was big, brooding, and intimidating. Doug took a step back.

“Everything alright here, Charlotte?” he asked in a deep voice as he crossed his arms.

“Yeah, dad, it’s fine.” She said, keeping her eyes on Doug. Her father looked at Doug, then walked back into the house.

“Look, Doug, I don’t...” Charlotte started, but Doug interrupted.

“Come to my house tonight around five o’clock. Please? I just need to tell you something.”

Charlotte finally gave in with a sigh. “You don’t give up, do you? I’ll be there at five, and I am only staying for ten minutes. No more.”

Doug had new life. His smile was big, but he was also surprised. “Okay. Okay, thanks. See you later!”

Doug ran off and Charlotte shut the door.

4:45 PM

Deputy Dart walked through the busy police station. Phones were ringing off their hooks and officers were shouting – the tension was high. It was Halloween, and nobody knew what to expect.

“Deputy!” A voice shouted from the hallway. Dart turned and saw Agent Holland waving him down. Dart fought through the crowd of cops.

“What?”

“Riley Little is in Carter’s office. She says there’s more she needs to discuss.”

“It’s about time.” Dart walked down the hallway to the office, and Holland followed.

Riley sat in a chair with a small shoebox on her lap. Dart walked in behind her, as did Holland, and they closed the door.

“Mrs. Little, we’ve been trying to get a hold of you for days. Some might consider that suspicious.” Dart said, taking a seat in the Sheriff’s chair.

“I apologize, but starting a family is hard work. Plus, I told you everything I wanted to tell you...at the time.” She said, holding on tightly to the shoebox. Agent Holland picked up on this.

“What do you mean, at the time?” Dart pursued.

“I didn’t tell you everything, because I honestly didn’t think it was that important. But now, with the news reports...”

“What news reports?” Dart asked, looking to Holland for a reaction.

“About the Blood Coven.” Riley said, looking from Dart to Holland. Neither seemed to understand. “Have you guys been watching the news today?”

“I try not to – it’s usually filled with assumptions and rumors. I’d like to stick to the facts that I know. What’s the Blood Coven?” Dart asked, intrigued.

“Channel 4 has been doing their own investigation, and they said that those two older people who were killed – the double murder that seemed out of place – were the oldest married couple in Stewart Hollow, right?”

“I believe so. How is that important?”

“You’re not from around here, are you?” Riley asked with a subtle smirk.

“Not originally.”

“Stewart Hollow has a history of witchcraft, dating back to the 1800s. Every fifty years, this old Coven of witches supposedly releases a curse on the town. Now, I know that sounds ridiculous, and obviously the original Coven are long dead, but still, every fifty years, descendents of the Coven carry out the curse. And what’s even more eerie is that the return of the Blood Coven is always preceded by the same events. It happens way too much to be considered a coincidence.”

“What events?” Holland said, stepping in.

Riley addressed them both, probing her memory for the exact words, “The myth says, ‘a plague of unprecedented selfish acts of terror, will craft a direct path for the Lores’ return.’”

“What the hell are the Lores?” Dart asked, holding back a small chuckle.

“The Lores was the family name of the original Coven.” Riley started getting serious, knowing Dart, in particular, wasn’t buying it.

“And these unprecedented selfish acts of terror would be...” Dart waited for her answer.

“The Harvest Slasher’s killing spree last year – it was for money and fame, right? And this year, the Kelly Rodgers murders, you guys think it’s a writer trying to base their next book off a true story. Once again, money would be the motive. These, to me, are selfish acts of terror.”

“How do you know so much about this, Mrs. Little?” Agent Holland calmly asked, seeing her displeasure.

Riley looked down at the shoebox, and opened it up. She pulled out three books with dark covers. She laid them out in front of Deputy Dart on the desk.

Dart looked at each book, each with a different title: *‘Return of the Blood Coven’*, *‘The Tortured Souls’*, and *‘The Crafters of Hollows End’*.

At the bottom of each cover was her name, Summer Braxton.

“You wrote these?” Dart asked.

“Yeah, when I was a teenager. Like I told Sheriff Carter, I use to read my stories and poetry at the Halloween Festival each year. A lot of it had to deal with local myths and folklore, with the occasional horror story.” Riley explained.

“You said you never had anything published.” Dart asked.

“Not back then. I self published these only about a year or so ago. They’re not even for sale – I just wanted copies.”

Dart thought for a moment. It was obvious the killer looked up to Riley, especially at that age, but who?

“So we’re back to, why would someone use a variation of your name from when you were little? You’ve obviously influenced someone. Maybe even inspired them? Come on, Riley, think.” Dart said.

“Well, I did mentor a small group of children, and we did a lot of writing and art projects after school.”

“Do you remember the names of the kids?” Dart rifled through the desk, looking for a pen and paper. They hadn’t been this close, and his heart was beginning to pound.

Doug sat impatiently on his couch, watching the clock like a hawk. It was almost five, and he would finally be able to talk to Charlotte like he’d been dying to. His foot bounced nervously up and down on the coffee table in front of him.

“Doug, do you want me to make spaghetti tonight?” His mother called in from the kitchen.

“No thanks.” He yelled back.

“What about chicken or something?” She called back in.

“No, mom.” Doug was disgusted. How was he going to be able to declare his love for Charlotte with his mom in the house? He thought for a minute, and then called back into her. “What about Chinese food?”

After a moment of silence from the kitchen, she agreed.

“I can run out and pick it up for us,” Doug shouted.

“No, no. I’ll get it. I don’t want you going out of this house tonight.” His mother walked into the living room. “What do you want?”

“Soup and an egg roll.”

“Sounds perfect. I’ll get the same.” She went back into the kitchen, put on her coat and grabbed her purse. Stopping at the front door, she faced him. “Don’t answer the door for anyone, you hear me?”

“I’ll be fine mom.” Doug smiled, knowing his plan worked.

She blew him a kiss and left the house. He could hear her locking the door from the outside. Doug jumped up and looked out the window. The sun was starting to slowly fade in the west, creating a haunting orange glow in the neighborhood. His mother backed the van out of the driveway and left. As her car cleared the end of the street, he noticed a girl walking by herself. She was in a white hooded sweatshirt and blue sweatpants. Doug smiled.

The loud ring tone on Doug’s cell phone ripped him out of his admiring daze. He looked and saw it was Kevin calling.

“Hello?” Doug asked, impatiently.

“Hey, man, what’s up?” Kevin responded.

“Nothing, why?” Doug moved the curtain and saw Charlotte getting closer to his house.

“No reason, just seeing how you’re doing. I heard they’re going to start classes at school again tomorrow. Are you going?”

“Of course, why wouldn’t I?”

“Just asking, dude.” Kevin caught onto Doug’s edgy tone.
“What are you doing, Doug? You sound weird.”

“I’ll have to call you back, Kev, Charlotte’s on her way over.”

“Charlotte? Why?”

“She’s finally going to listen to me.”

“Doug, please don’t. You guys are going to be going your separate ways after high school. There’s no reason to start...”

“Kevin, shut the hell up. I’ll call you later and let you know how it goes.” Doug hung up and glanced outside again. Charlotte was walking up the driveway.

Doug positioned himself behind the door and waited for a knock. It came seconds later. He opened the door and saw Charlotte standing there.

“Come in.” Doug made way and Charlotte cautiously entered his home.

“Okay, Doug, you have ten minutes. What do you want?” She asked assertively.

“Do you want something to drink?” Doug asked, keeping things at his pace.

“No thanks.”

“Okay. Um, can we talk upstairs? There’s something I want to show you.”

Charlotte gave him an uncomfortable look. “You’re not going to try anything, are you?”

“Oh, shit no!” Doug laughed nervously. ”There really is something I have to show you.”

She hesitated, but followed him up to his bedroom anyway.

Upstairs and down the hall, Charlotte sat on his bed. Doug stood, pacing back and forth.

“I like you.” Doug exhaled, having wanted to get that off his chest for years. “Actually, I love you.” He felt even better.

Charlotte started to get uncomfortable again, and put her hands down on the bed in case she had to spring up fast.

“Don’t be freaked out by that, please.” Doug begged.

“I’m not. I just get that a lot. A lot of guys claim to ‘love’ me, Doug. We’re so young though – how could you even know? There’s a whole world out there.”

“I know because of the butterflies in my stomach every time I see you. We’re not supposed to be together, but that’s what makes me want it more. I’m a nerd, I’m quiet, and I’m a writer. Plus, add the way I dress to the mix – like a modern Kurt Cobain – plus my hair, my glasses and my big belly.

“Then look at you. You’re popular, you’re gorgeous, and you’re always dressed so nicely. You’re every guy’s dream. All the popular guys get girls like you, but it’s guys like me – the

one's who would truly make a great companion – that never get a chance.”

Charlotte took in everything Doug said. He was hyper and sweating, and trembled in his voice.

Doug continued, calming down. “That’s why when I wrote *‘October’s Shattered Graves’*, and you liked it so much, I got a big head and wanted to impress you even more. I’m sorry if I scared you, or anyone else.”

“Well,” Charlotte started, “It was a natural reaction I guess. But yeah, you did scare a lot of people. You have to admit, Doug, the similarities between your play and the murders were disturbing.”

“I know, but it was completely coincidental.” Doug said, easing up a bit.

“What was it you wanted to show me?” Charlotte asked, curious to see what else Doug had in store.

Riley Little sat in the office, rummaging deep into her brain for the names of the children she use to mentor. Dart was growing anxious:

“Come on, Riley, you said there were four kids, and we have only one name – Elise Bristle. Think, who else?”

Riley was stressing herself out. “Okay, I know there was definitely two girls. Elise and...Maggie! Maggie Rowland!”

“Great.” Dart said, scribbling the name down. “Who else?”

“Um...”

Holland stood by – there was not much he could do besides wait.

“Jessica Snare! There were three girls...I think,” she said, unsure. “Oh, and a little boy too.”

Dart wrote down the name of Jessica Snare. “What was the boy’s name?”

Doug reached into the bottom drawer of his desk and pulled out a folder. He opened it up and revealed a freshly printed, and laminated, copy of *‘October’s Shattered Graves’*. He handed it to Charlotte as she stood up.

“What’s this?” She asked, running her fingers over the smooth laminated pages. On the cover page, Doug had autographed it with a red marker.

“No matter what you would say to me today, I wanted you to have a copy of the play, since you liked it so much. It’ll probably never get made or preformed, so if you choose to leave my house today and not think twice about me ever again, I just wanted you to have it.”

Charlotte smiled. “Thank you.”

Charlotte and Doug stood there, sharing a special moment with each other. They were both unaware that a set of eyes were locked on them, staring with curiosity, jealousy and fear.

“Come on, Riley! What was the little boy’s name?” Dart shouted, starting to lose his patients.

Riley was flustered. She couldn’t remember. *Was there possibly a fifth child? What were their names? Think!*

“Riley, we don’t have much time. We don’t know what tonight holds.”

“Biff! They called him Biff for some reason. His real name was Billy Sparks. Yeah, that’s it.” Riley said with a sigh of relief.

Dart scribbled the name down, and handed the sheet of paper to Holland. “Find out where these guys live, Spencer. See if they’re even still here, or know the victims, or have any connection or access to them. Maybe an neighbor, or a relative.”

“Neighbor...” Riley muttered quietly.

Dart stopped and looked at her. “What?”

Charlotte flipped through the pages of *‘October’s Shattered Graves’* with a smile. “You’re a terrific writer, Doug.”

“Thanks.” Doug said, desperately trying to not let his ego run away again.

Charlotte froze and turned around. “What was that?”

“What was what?” Doug said, not hearing anything.

“I heard a noise.” Charlotte was serious. Doug looked around.

“My mom might be home. Was it the front door?”

“There it is again!” Charlotte dropped the script to the floor. “It’s upstairs.”

Doug made his way to the doorway and listened out into the hall. It was quiet – very quiet. “What did it sound like?” Doug asked, keeping his voice low.

“It sounded like...”

Doug still didn’t hear anything, except for the sweet girls’ voice behind him.

“It sounded like the final chapter.”

Doug cocked his head. “Huh?” He turned around and Charlotte drove a large butchers knife into his chest, bringing him instantly to his knees. She knelt down in front of him, keeping the two of them at eye level.

Doug’s eyes were wide, and a dribble of blood found its way out of the corner of his mouth. He looked down and saw blood oozing from his chest, where the chrome blade of the knife was still lodged.

* * *

“My neighbor when I was in high school.” Riley said. “She was this little girl that I use to baby sit. Um...Charlotte Sheldon, I think her name was.”

“Charlotte Sheldon?” Dart and Holland exclaimed in unison.

Surprised by their response, Riley stood up, worried.

“She’s a student at the high school! She was going to be in that tribute play for Christ’s sake!” Dart yelled, picking up and dialing the phone.

Holland pulled out his notepad and flipped through it. He stopped when he saw all of the targeted students addresses.

“5577 Baker Street? You lived over there too, right?” Holland asked.

“Yeah...” Riley trembled. “Is it her?”

The other line of the phone was ringing, and Carter picked up.

“Dart, what is it?” Carter asked.

“Sheriff, the killer is Charlotte Sheldon – one of the high school students. Get to 5577 Baker Street ASAP!”

Charlotte tore the butchers knife from Doug’s bleeding chest, and laid it on the floor next to her.

“I inspired you, Doug? I’m honored. I don’t think anyone has ever been inspired by me before - yet.” She stood up. “I’ve been

inspired though. When I was little, I had a babysitter who used to teach me how to write horror stories. I used to write about monsters and goblins, and I'd even do the occasion painting of a dark cemetery or a haunted house. She always pushed us to be creative and successful. When the murders happened last year, I thought it would be perfect to write about. So I did, and I self-published it online. I was shocked when I saw how many people bought it. I made so much money off of it. That's why I always *'look so nice'*," Charlotte said, mocking Doug in a cutesy manner.

Doug watched the blood still dripping out of the wound in his chest. He struggled to try and stand up.

"Of course I was going to write a sequel. But the reason the first one sold so well was because it was based on true events. People want to read real things – especially when the events were so abnormal and crazy like the Harvest Slasher. So, keeping with the Halloween theme, I thought I'd be creative and have the dead come back to life and kill again, haunting the same pathetic town."

"You..." Doug muttered, not able to get much out.

"I stole Kelly Rodgers' corpse, hid it in the woods near the park for a while until the odor got real bad, then I had to return it. I'm going to leave that part out of the book though.

"But you inspired me also, Doug. I'm not lying when I said your play was genius. It was edgy, spine chilling, and haunting. I

might actually steal that title if you don't mind. '*October's Shattered Graves*' – sounds seasonal and menacing.”

Doug stumbled forward and saw the knife on the floor. Charlotte saw that he noticed, and picked it up.

“Don't worry, Doug, I'll make sure you get the credit you deserve somehow. Maybe I'll let your character live in the end. I haven't decided yet.”

She took the knife, and knelt down. With the bloody tip of the blade, she scribbled a sloppy 'Braxton Summers' on the carpet.

“I might have to for-go the muddy prints this time since I don't have the stuff with me, but hey, that'll only add to the mystery.”

Charlotte stood up and held the knife out in front of her in an intimidating stance. “I have to make this quick – before you're mom gets home. Thanks again, Doug. You just helped me complete my next book!”

Charlotte thrust the knife forward, driving it right back into Doug's stomach. He cringed – he could feel it puncturing his organs. Blood started to once again leak from his mouth. She leaned in close to him.

“Oh, and just so I'm not a total bitch, I think I owe you this.” She leaned in and kissed him passionately – he couldn't reciprocate. She pulled away, blood on her face, and smiled. She pulled the knife back out, and threw him to his bed. Doug was

starting to fade in and out of consciousness. Charlotte stood over him and stabbed him repeatedly in the stomach and chest, sending blood all over the walls. She pulled the knife out for the final time, and watched the blood drain from it and form a puddle on the carpet.

Right then, a blood-curdling scream echoed from outside the bedroom window. Charlotte ran over to it and looked out. Libby Hatcher was in her room, next door, watching the entire thing. She was screaming at the top of her lungs.

“Shit!” Charlotte yelled. She turned around and ran out of Doug’s room, down the stairs and out the front door. She ducked to the side of the house and looked at Libby’s window. She couldn’t see her, but her screaming was louder than ever.

“Dad! Dad!” Libby called out in her home. Charlotte’s face went bright red and she felt dizzy. It couldn’t just be over, could it? She turned back around and saw Doug’s mom driving around the corner in her van.

Charlotte dropped the knife and took off running across the street and between the houses.

Police cars swarmed up and down Baker Street – all of them focused on 5577. The cops who were already there stood out in the streets, protected by their cars, and aimed their guns at the Sheldon house.

“Charlotte Sheldon, come out of the house, now!” An officer shouted through a megaphone.

Carter sped through the neighborhood and came to a screeching halt next to the Sheriff’s Jeep, which Dart was using.

“Dart! Are we sure?” Carter said, in his civilian clothes, drawing his personal weapon.

Dart was dressed in a flak jacket, as was Holland, who aimed a rifle at the house. “We’re pretty sure. If nothing else, we can take her into custody. But there is a ton of evidence starting to pile up.”

“You talked to Riley Little again?”

“Sure did. We might be on to something also with the McDowell murders. There’s something else going on with that, but first, let’s bring Charlotte in.”

“Any occupants inside the house come out! This is the Stewart Hollow Sheriff’s Department!” The officer shouted again, getting slight feedback this time.

The front door to the house crept open, and every single officer had his or her fingers on their triggers. Charlotte’s father poked his head out, and eased the rest of his body through the door with his hands raised high. “Charlotte’s not here! It’s just myself and my wife!”

A team of officers, upon command from Deputy Dart, cautiously approached the house, and contained the father to his

knees. He was cuffed. Mrs. Sheldon inched her way out and was also contained.

“Search the house!” The lead officer commanded. They stormed the residence. Dart and Holland shuffled through the front yard and in as well, with Carter right behind him.

The house was clean and organized. It was decorated for autumn – Halloween more specifically. There was nothing out of the ordinary. Upstairs they searched Charlotte’s bedroom and uncovered a box in the closet. Once opened, they saw it contained dozens of copies of *‘Bloody October’*, written by Braxton Summers.

Holland turned on the desktop computer on her desk and searched the files. A folder labeled *‘OSG’* was the first to pop up. He opened the file and skimmed through.

“Sheriff! Deputy! Look!” Holland pointed at certain paragraphs and sentences. Carter and Dart read them as the rest of the officers tore the room apart.

“My God.” Carter said to himself, realizing that Charlotte had been writing the book as she was committing the crimes. “I want this file on the computers at the station within the hour. I’ll call the Mayor.”

Carter stepped away as Dart and Holland scrolled through the document.

From outside, the officer with the megaphone shouted. “Sheriff! Outside, now!”

Carter took off outside and saw a bunch of commotion on the other side of the street. There was a swarm of officers next to a house. When the swarm calmed down, Charlotte Sheldon was escorted out of it in handcuffs. She had blood on her sweatshirt and mouth, and was screaming and crying.

Carter watched from the other side of the street. He looked over at her parents, who were emotionally and physically upset. It was over.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

8:35 PM

Halloween night arrived, and the senseless themed killings had come to an end. Charlotte Sheldon sat in an empty interrogation room, consumed by dread, plagued with regret and lost in confusion.

Carter watched on the security monitors as she sat alone, dazed in a stare. Her left leg bounced up and down rapidly under the table. He focused on the blood on her shirt. A call had come in from Libby Hatcher's father about the murder of Doug Roberts.

Carter shook his head. It was just one more family that had to suffer from Charlotte's madness. Libby Hatcher was a wreck, and Kevin Maida kept pestering the police with questions – he was obviously unstable. His best friend since middle school was dead.

Agent Holland walked up quietly behind Carter, startling him by touching his shoulder.

“God, you scared me.” Carter said.

“Sorry. I just thought you'd like to know what we found out reading Charlotte's latest work.” Holland said, waving a sheet of paper around.

“What do you have?”

“Well,” Holland referenced the paper, “Everything that has happened this month, from the missing corpse, to the muddy footprints, to the murders being connected to the high school play – it’s all in here.”

“Is she the one committing the murders in the book?”

“No. It’s typical supernatural stuff, actually. The play that Doug had written supposedly unleashes Kelly Rodgers from Hell. She comes back to kill those involved in the production, then returns to her grave. The final chapter was not complete though – obviously we didn’t give her that chance.”

“Thank God.”

“However...” Holland began. Carter knew there had to be more. “There is nothing in the book at all about the murders of Jack and Theresa McDowell. It was a separate crime all together. Deputy Dart and I were looking into it with Riley Little some more.”

“Okay...”

“We think it has something to do with the Blood Coven – that local myth you guys have around here.”

“Yeah, what about it? It hasn’t been...” Carter stopped. “Fifty years...”

“Next year will be fifty years.” Holland said. Dart walked over with a bottle of water and joined the conversation:

“A plague of unprecedented selfish acts make way for the myth to return. It’s proceeded by two warnings, and then the following year, the Blood Coven supposedly returns.”

“What are the warnings?” Carter asked.

“We’ll, I’ll have to let you see the book I got from the library about it. It’s a really creepy myth. It goes back to the 1800s – they say the season is responsible.”

“The season?”

“Like I said, it’s really weird stuff. The season warns of the Lores’ return by exhausting the lives of the town’s elders, obviously Jack and Theresa in this case. Then…” Dart was interrupted when he saw the Mayor.

Mayor Bernard Hopkins walked through the station and spotted Carter and Holland. He pointed towards them, and pressed on – his security team following closely behind.

“Carter, I thought I suspended you.” Hopkins said, stopping inches from his face.

“You did. My Deputy called me – he thought I should be there when we brought her to justice.” Carter pointed at the monitors. Hopkins saw Charlotte on the monitors, rocking back and forth.

“It’s hard to tell if she’s afraid, or just nuts. She knows what she did, though.” Carter informed the Mayor.

“Ben,” Hopkins looked the Sheriff in the eye. “This was two years in a row that you were unable to prevent these killings. I’m sorry, but I’m going to have to let you go.”

Carter felt like he was punched in the gut. His mood dropped out from under him.

Hopkins bit his lip and nodded – he knew he’d be losing a good man, but he was an officer who had failed to deliver.

There were no more words spoken between them. Mayor Hopkins turned around and left. Ben Carter stood there, disorientated by his termination.

“He’s got to be joking.” Deputy Dart said, standing by Carter’s side. “Should I say something to him, Sheriff?”

“No. No, it’s alright.” Carter said. “It’s Ben, now, Dart. Ben Carter.”

“You know, Ben,” Agent Holland said, disgusted by the Mayor’s decision, “I can make a couple calls to some friends in Portland. I know we’ve had our misunderstandings here this month, but I know a good cop when I see one. Maybe you’re just cut out for bigger things, and not a small town Sheriff.”

“Thanks, Holland. We’ll see. I have a wedding to plan first.” Carter said, starting to walk away.

“Ben, call me in the morning. We’ll get breakfast or something and discuss that Blood Coven thing some more.” Dart called out.

Carter smiled, and left the station.

The ride home felt long. Carter watched the bright streetlights pass by him one by one. The trees were dead and dried leaves were scattered in yards and in the street, collecting in the gutters. What would he tell Amber? Was it a sign that their life together should be somewhere else? Away from Stewart Hollow and its past? He couldn't leave just yet though. He wanted to learn more about the McDowell killings. And if what Holland and Dart explained was true, would there be more horror next year? And if so, what exactly?

Carter pulled into his driveway and walked up to his front door, using the key remote to lock his car. He opened the front door, unsure of what he was going to say to...

...Amber was lying on the floor in the living room, gushing blood as a tall man in a long black trench coat, wearing a pumpkin on his head, continuously plunged a silver blade into her body. Carter was in shock – frozen by fear. There was blood running down the walls, on the floor, covering the furniture, splattered on the ceiling, and dripping off the knife that the masked man now held out in front of him, facing Carter. Carter focused his attention on the man and scrambled for his gun.

The man charged Carter, forcing him against the wall, and the knife into his stomach. The man ripped the knife out and began to jab it back into Carter, over and over.

Carter dropped to the floor, bleeding out all over the place. He began to gurgle on his own blood – he couldn't catch his breath. The man stood over him and stabbed the knife down several more times, slicing open his legs, arms, chest and puncturing his stomach in multiple places. The maniacal madman stood up and held the blood soaked knife out and hovered it over Carter. Carter – barely conscious – watched each individual drop of blood from the knife fall and splash on his face. He was fading fast.

The man turned and slowly walked for the door. Carter used every functioning muscle in his neck to look over at Amber. Her corpse was ghastly. She had been torn open. Carter turned his head back once more to the front door where the man stood, facing him.

“That was the final warning.” The man spoke in a loud whisper. “Thank you Sheriff.”

He then motioned to Carter, as if he were tipping his hat. The man then walked outside, and into the quiet, dark, Halloween night, where he would retreat to his shack in the hills of Hollows End.