

Aberrant Earth.

Ghost Hunting, Camden, NJ

2008

This story is told from the point of view of the featured character. This work does not claim to be a definitive history, but stands as an account of events from one character's perspective. Some names have been changed -Editor

Under the late evening sky, the abandoned factory loomed ahead rising up into the red and orange-tinged clouds. The building was three stories high and constructed entirely of brick and mortar. In the twilight, the bricks appeared the color of dried blood. They were stained by years of dirt and decay. The mortar was grey and crumbling to dust, and more than a few bricks had fallen away from the wall. They lay in broken piles half hidden by the overgrown tangle of weeds, torn bushes and brown grasses that grew around the building's foundation.

A cracked concrete walkway led up to the factory entrance. The sidewalk bisected a sickly, bramble-filled lawn. A row of ancient trees, gnarled oaks, long dead and filled with worms and insects vitiated the lawn in front of the building. The branches of the old trees were black with rot and covered with sickly green-yellow moss. They rattled against each other when the wind blew.

The entrance to the factory was a gaping black hole into darkness. The doors no longer sealed the entrance, and their broken planks were lying in the lawn to either side of the concrete path. The first floor of the factory had small windows that were hidden by creeping vines that grew up from the lawn. The twining creepers had black stems, wicked curved thorns and purplish-green leaves. The vines climbed the outer walls, clinging to the mortar, as they grew toward the roof.

The windows of the second and third stories were wide expanses of shattered glass panes and rusting metal frames. The breadth of the windows on the upper stories forced the vines to grow around the windows, so only a few wayward stems dangled over the jagged black openings.

The roof was peaked and covered with slate, except where portions had collapsed to leave

huge yawning holes. A pair of tall grey smoke stacks rose out the factory's roof. The stacks reached up into the sky and were silhouetted against the darkening twilight. Rusty ladders led up from the roofs to the tops of the smoke stack where little platforms with railings ringed the soot covered openings.

Elizabeth Tunney was overcome with a feeling of dread. The sky above the massive factory seemed to blaze like the unholy fires of Hell. Shafts of light, breaking through the fiery clouds streaked across the sky, but their glowing beams landed nowhere near the factory. The dilapidated structure seemed to sit in perpetual shadow. In all her eighteen years, she had never been so nervous. The foreboding look of the building seemed to freeze her heart. She hugged herself by crossing her arms and rubbed her biceps.

Next to Elizabeth, in the driver's seat of his brand new sport utility vehicle, her boyfriend Danny's face was flush with excitement. He was twenty years old and a junior in the college she attended. He had brown hair, almond-colored eyes, and a cute little smirk that Elizabeth adored. She watched him stare through the windshield at the abandoned factory and heard him say, "This is going to be awesome!"

Elizabeth, seated in the passenger seat was not convinced. She wondered what she had gotten herself into. "Danny, are you sure ghost hunting here is a good idea?" she asked.

"It's going to be awesome," Danny repeated. His voice was little more than a whisper, but his words conveyed such emotion. Elizabeth shuddered. The only emotion she felt was fear. The kind that gnawed on your gut.

Elizabeth was suddenly queasy. "I don't feel well," she gasped. The sport utility vehicle felt stifling. She pressed the window button. The glass slid down and Elizabeth breathed in, trying to get some fresh air. The smell of decay filled her nostrils and she cringed away from the window. She hugged her stomach, closed her eyes and bent over in the seat.

Danny was concerned. He reached over and patted her back. "You okay?" he asked.

"Is she going to puke?" asked Jamie from the back seat.

Elizabeth did not respond.

"No, not in the car!" groaned Steve who was sitting next to Jamie.

“Quiet. Both of you,” Danny shushed his friends and leaned over to Elizabeth. He lifted her shoulder-length blond hair pushing it over to the opposite side so he could see her face. Elizabeth was a pretty girl, with deep blue eyes. They were scrunched tightly closed, but he’d looked into the many times and lost himself in their depth. He often wondered how a nerd like him could have attracted such a beautiful girl. She was smart, athletic and thoughtful. He was willing to leave right now if Elizabeth needed to.

“Elizabeth?”

“I feel sick,” she gasped. “Give me a moment.”

Elizabeth focused on breathing and then willed her stomach to settle. Slowly the feeling of nausea subsided and she sat up.

“Better?” asked Danny.

“Not much,” admitted Elizabeth. “This place smells terrible.”

“It smells like Camden,” laughed Jamie.

“Do we need to go home?” asked Danny.

Elizabeth smiled weakly. She wanted to leave, but told him, “Let’s see how it goes. I know you’ve been looking forward to this hunt for a long time.”

Danny brightened. “You’ll be fine, Elizabeth,” Danny assured her. “You’re going to be amazed. This place has a great reputation for producing measurable paranormal phenomena.”

“Yeah. You’ll be fine!” echoed Steve. “Once we get started.”

Elizabeth turned around to look at Danny’s best friend, Steve, and Steve’s girlfriend Jamie. Steve had sandy blonde hair which he combed to the side and wore silver framed glasses. Jamie was a brunette, who bleached her hair blonde, wore too much make-up, and talked a lot of trash. She was wearing a T-shirt that said “up yours,” and a pair of jeans a size too small for her broad hips.

“Are you sure it is safe?” asked Elizabeth. “This does feel . . . wrong.”

“There is nothing to worry about,” insisted Danny. “Most paranormal activity is just reflections of the past. Nothing to fear.”

“And what about the other stuff?”

“Other stuff?”

“You said ‘most’ activity,” clarified Elizabeth. “That implies there are other kinds of paranormal activities.”

“Well there are ghosts,” explained Danny. “But they don’t have physical form, so they can’t hurt us. They’re spirits that cannot leave this world. Sometimes they can speak and move objects, but they’re nothing to be afraid of.”

“Tell her she needs to be afraid of Vampyres, shape-shifters, zombie, demons . . .” warned Jamie from the back seat. “Other things with physical forms.”

“Don’t listen to her,” said Danny. “She’s trying to scarey you.”

“Their existence has never been scientifically proven,” added Steve, trying to be helpful.

Elizabeth looked pointedly at Jamie and said, “Don’t worry guys, everyone knows that kind of stuff’s not real.”

“You’re right,” said Danny. “There’s really nothing to be afraid of,” he added. “Hauntings are just reflections of the past recorded on ectoplasm. It’s like watching TV, but cooler because the stuff really happened. Its like getting a glimpse back into time.”

“It’s perfectly safe,” agreed Steve. “Ghosts can’t hurt anyone.”

Elizabeth was feeling better. The placed looked scary, but she was not a coward. And more importantly she didn’t want to look like a coward in front of Jamie. Danny and Steve would understand if she asked to go home. Danny was really patient, Steve was always trying to be nice, but Jamie on the other hand, was anything but nice. She was mean and raunchy. Elizabeth glanced back at Jamie who was smiling with a lop-sided grind. When their eyes met, Jamie, true to her form, said something crude.

“I hear the soup factory is a great place to lose your virginity!” spoke Jamie from the back seat. Elizabeth was momentarily confused.

Jamie provided more explanation. “You know,” she said coyly. “Your first time . . . ghost hunting! I lost my cherry in the Bastow Cemetery with only two little blips on the EMF. A whole night spent searching and all I had to show for it was an orb floating in an overexposed photo. Everyone’s

first hunt should be in a place like this. Sweetie, you should feel lucky tonight.”

“You always remember your first ghost hunt,” spoke Steve. In his awkward way, he was trying to smooth things over. “The factory has been closed down for more than three decades. They’ve been all kinds of murders, suicides, and accidents on the property. It’s a ghost hunters dream!”

Elizabeth continued to be amazed at how Steve and Jamie remained a couple. He was quiet and she was loud. He was considerate and, well, she spoke her mind. They were like night and day, but they’d been dating for a stormy six months and Elizabeth had to be patient, because Danny had asked her to put up with the girl’s insulting manner.

“You should be scared of monsters?” taunted Jamie. “There are wanton things lurking out there in the darkness on the edges of believability . . .”

“Stop it,” said Danny sharply. “You’re here because you’re Steve’s girl friend. Please don’t harass Elizabeth.”

Elizabeth looked from Danny to Jamie. There was tension between them. Elizabeth and Jamie did not get along. Elizabeth was in a difficult position. She knew that Jamie often disparaged her to anyone who would listen, but Elizabeth kept the peace because Steve was really into Jamie and Elizabeth liked Steve, but even Elizabeth had her limits. She took a deep breath and promised herself she would not dampen Steve’s excitement by fighting with Jamie.

Elizabeth responded politely, “I’m not scared of imaginary monsters. Any hesitation you see is only because I’m worried the police may arrest us for trespassing.”

“The police never come to the factory,” Danny assured her. “Did you see the neighborhood we had to drive through to get here? This place hasn’t seen a cop in twenty years.”

“What about dangerous homeless people?” asked Elizabeth.

“Homeless people live close to trash cans and dumpsters,” said Steve, as if he knew it for a fact. “The homeless don’t live all the way out here. There’s no food for them to eat or corners to beg on. They all live in the abandoned warehouse district we drove through. There’s no one around to bother us.”

Elizabeth stifled any more objections. She had agreed to go and now that she was here, she

couldn't allow herself to be frightened off by the look of the building. In the evening light, the building was scary. She could not imagine what it would be like after dark.

"Come on, Lizzy, get with the program," added Jamie. "Why did you come if all you're going to do is whine?"

Elizabeth cringed. She hated when Jamie called her Lizzy. Again, she stifled the urge to tell her off. She wouldn't be the one to ruin Danny's big night or put Steve in a bad position. Danny squeezed her thigh, an act she interpreted as a subtle offer of his support. She smiled at him and he whispered a silent, "Thanks."

Danny had been planning this hunt for months. He was an avid ghost hunter. She wasn't into hunting ghosts, but as his girlfriend she knew she had to indulge his hobbies. And she knew other girls who had it worse; their boyfriends were into booze, cars, sports or the worst, computer video games. She knew one girl who had to wait hours for her boyfriend to finish a quest on some on-line game before he would even kiss her. What a loser!

Elizabeth counted herself lucky. Danny was gone a few nights every month poking around abandoned buildings and old cemeteries, but it didn't bother her to have a few nights alone. She'd do some reading and take a bubble bath. As of late though, Danny was attempting to include her in his hobby. She would have preferred just to stay home, but he was persistent, and she agreed to come. He tried to explain some of their procedures and even showed her how to operate most of their equipment. He was a good teacher, but she was only half interested. What she did learn from his instruction was that ghost hunting was a detailed science with lots of instruments.

"Let's get to it," said Jamie from the back seat. "The sun's going down and we have to get all set up before dark." Her nasally voice grated on Elizabeth's nerves. "Miss Trepidation is going to have to suck it up. We got work to do."

Elizabeth could see Danny was becoming more irritated with Jamie. He tried not to show his frustration, but he poked at the truck release with an exaggerated flare. The trunk popped open with a click.

"Okay, let's get the gear," he said, as he opened his door and got out. He shut the door just a

little harder than usual and went around to the back of the car. The others joined him there and he passed out plastic carrying cases to everyone. The cases contained all of their instruments.

With the case resting at her feet, Elizabeth looked around one more time, hoping the factory would appear less imposing after a second look. It did not. In fact, the old brick building crept her out even more.

The factory was located in Camden on the banks of the Delaware River. They were standing in a wide parking lot with trees on all sides. On the west side of the lot, she could see the Delaware through the trees. The waters were black under the fading. The sky was turning grey with only small swaths of red-orange.

Elizabeth could still smell mustiness, but there was also an odor of fish.

The woods on the east side contained a tangle of thorny vines and stunted trees. She knew the woods went on for quite some distance. The road they had driven on ran along the river bank to the south and then turned east into a larger expanse of trees and scrub vegetation. Beyond the woods was a warehouse district that was mostly abandoned as well. They were as far from civilization as was possible in the heart of a city as large as Camden.

Danny's voice interrupted her thoughts. "The first thing we do in every ghost hunt is to create a time line," Danny was telling her. Danny took out his notepad and pen. "Everyone should have their own log book. You'll write down everything that you do and even how you feel. Make notes about everything that happens. Even if you sneeze, write it down, because a sneeze could be picked up by one of the recorders and be misinterpreted later. We have to rule out human error."

"Dammit. I forgot my pad," mumbled Jamie.

Danny shook his head.

"I'll keep her log with mine," said Steve. "She'll be with me the whole time anyway."

"All right," agreed Danny. "What about you? Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth was prepared. Danny had given her a list of things to bring on the ghost hunt that included a red lens flashlight, a bottle of water, a candle, waterproof matches, a notepad and two pens, in case you lost one. She took out her pad out of her small nap sack and showed it at Danny, flashing

him a small smile to let him know he'd paid attention to his list.

"Don't forget to write down every little thing," chided Jamie. "If you crack ass . . . write it down."

Elizabeth wrote down the time they arrived and then made a short note, 'Jamie acting like a bitch'. She knew Danny would read her book later and find the note amusing. She wondered briefly if Jamie would see the note, but then decided not to care.

"Okay, let's begin the investigation. Please follow me," said Danny as he led them to the steps of the factory and then stopped on a concrete walkway leading up to the entrance.

"We need to say the prayer," spoke Danny.

"I hate this part," complained Jamie. "I don't believe in a god. There's no such thing as an all power deity. We need to cut this part out of the investigation."

"It's not really a prayer to god," said Danny. His tone indicated that he had debated this with Jamie before. "I'm the team leader and we need to say a few words before beginning the hunt. It helps center us and the words will ward off evil thoughts when we are inside."

Jamie snorted.

"We will also say a few words at the end of the hunt," added Danny, mostly for Elizabeth's benefit. "And that prayer is to protect us from ill feelings and to ensure that no ghost follows us home." Then he turned directly to Jamie and said, "You may not like it, but as long as I'm running this group and arranging the hunts we'll say the safety prayers."

He put the boxes down and spoke to everyone. "Please form a circle and hold hands."

The four ghost hunters held hands and Danny spoke, "We pray to be safe as we journey into the unknown. May the blessings of peace and love be our shield against any Evil encountered. May all the spirits be at peace with our presence. May no harm come to us or the spirits. And may Good always prevail."

Danny let his hands drop and picked up the cases. "Now let's go find some ghosts!"

He led them up to the entrance. The fading sunlight shined into the opening barely illuminating the graffiti inscribed walls of the hall beyond. Curses and gang symbols predominated the writing, but

Elizabeth saw the phrase “blighted node” close to the entrance as if written as a warning. The words meant nothing Elizabeth and her eyes passed them without a second thought.

Danny led them into the building. Steve followed, him holding onto Jamie’s hand. She giggled gleefully as she passed the threshold.

Elizabeth hanging back, noticed that the door frame was still connected to the building, but its steel supports were twisted and bent away from the brick walls as if some powerful force had torn the doors from their hinges. The wooden planks of the door were shattered and the steel cross braces that held the planks together were crumpled like tin foil. Elizabeth could not repress a shudder. She wondered what sort of force could have burst those doors outward.

Gathering her courage, Elizabeth followed Jamie into the factory. The entrance corridor ended in an arch that once supported a pair of double doors, but the doors were gone and only hinges remained with a few pieces of shattered wood still screwed to the hinges. There was an intersection beyond the arch that was barely lit by the sunlight.

“Cool!” exclaimed Steve as he pointed to some graffiti above the arch. A vandal with a sense of humor wrote, “Abandon Life All Ye Who Enter Here.”

Jamie passed the group and went through the intersection moving to the left. Moments later she reappeared in the little receptionist’s window that was to their right. She rested her elbows on the little shelf and announced, “Welcome to the spook factory. . . . I mean . . . soup factory,” She laughed, but no one else did. “Can I help you?” she asked imitating a secretary.

Danny frowned and Steve said, “Come on, Jamie, this is a serious hunt. You promised me you would listen to Danny.”

Jamie sat down in the wooden chair and picked up the receiver of an old style rotary phone that sat on the receptionist’s desk. “Hello,” she spoke into the receiver. “No. I’m sorry, but Steve is busy right now. He’s being a poop.” She put the receiver down on the desk top causing a cloud of dust to rise in the air.

Elizabeth looked through the window and saw that the wood on the desk was marred by water damage and half-eaten by wood worms. The chair in which Jamie was sitting creaked and a few

worms fell out from beneath the seat.

Jamie leaned back in the chair and proper her feet up on the desk, producing another dust cloud. She looked at Steve smugly and gave him a look that said, "I dare you to complain." Suddenly, the chair shattered. The wood just flew apart, pieces clattered onto the floor and the backrest bounced off in the corner of the room. Jamie landed on the ground with a loud thud and an even larger cloud of dust. She groaned pitifully.

Steve ran under the arch, through the intersection and into the small receptionist's room.

"Are you okay?" he asked as soon as he reached her.

At first, Jamie could not speak. Steve helped her sit up. When she had recovered, she said, "I'm fine," as she got up and dusted herself off. "Hug me!" she demanded.

Steve gave her a loving embrace.

Elizabeth had watched this whole exchange through the receptionist's window. She felt sorry for Steve. Jamie was always making trouble. Elizabeth noticed that Danny had ignored the whole scene. In the intersection, Danny had opened up his case and took out one of his many meters. He was busy taking readings when Steve and Jamie joined him.

"Is everything okay?" Danny asked Steve.

"It's alright," said Steve.

"Good," Danny motioned Elizabeth over and showed her the instrument. "This is the most important piece of modern day ghost hunting equipment," he explained. "This is an electromagnetic field meter. We call it an EMF meter. It measures fluctuations in the earth's electromagnetic field. All ghosts radiate electromagnetic fields that can be detected by the EMF meter."

Danny handed the meter to Elizabeth, and then continued, "The EMF meter is sometimes difficult to use because people radiate slight electromagnetic fields, as do other things, such as household electrical wiring, cell phones, appliances and so forth. You have to be very careful not to achieve readings from non-paranormal sources. We call these false positives. Only the trained observer can separate abnormal patterns which are tied to ghost activity from mundane fields."

He directed Elizabeth's attention to the gauge and the needle. "This needle rises when there is

a change in the electromagnetic fields. A background magnetic field is generally 0-1.5 milliGauss. Low-level field 1.5-2.5 milliGauss. We are interested in anything in the mid to high range which are readings of 2.5-20 milliGauss. Anything higher than 20 milliGauss is generally some kind of man-made electrical device or solar phenomenon.”

“How do you turn it on?” asked Elizabeth, who despite her initial feelings of dread found herself getting into the hunt and was genuinely eager to test out the machine.

Danny showed Elizabeth the on-off switch. Elizabeth pressed the button and the machine beeped.

Jamie giggled. “It’s like a Star Trek tri-corder.” Jamie knew that Elizabeth like to watch old episodes of Star Trek Enterprise and often teased her. Elizabeth ignored the comment.

The machine beeped again and the needle began to rise. “It’s not supposed to be that high?” asked Elizabeth.

Danny took the meter back. He turned it off and turned it back on again. “We’ve got some serious fluctuations already,” he told Steve. “And the sun is not even down.” He looked at the meter and moved around the intersection. “The fluctuations seem to be greater in this direction.”

Danny took out his pad and made a few notes, then he started leading them down the hall. Steve picked up the case Danny had left and they all followed Danny into the main room of the factory.

“Let’s put the stuff here for now,” said Steve. Elizabeth and Jamie laid their cases down next to the ones Steve had placed. Steve opened a case and retrieved a second EMF meter. Steve and Jamie conversed amongst themselves over the readings they were receiving.

Danny walked between the large pieces of machinery that dominated the floor of the factory. He passed huge conveyors and metal presses. Elizabeth watched his progress. The cavernous manufacturing area was the heart of the factory. The room was the whole width and length of the building, and was open all the way to the peaked roof. The setting sun shined through the holes in the roof, and Elizabeth saw the blood red sky beyond.

The red light filtered down the holes in the roof providing illumination. Two stories above her head catwalks hung from the roof by steel hangers attached to the massive beams that supported the

roof. Beneath the catwalks, along the outer wall of the room were large metal machines that were connected to each other by conveyor belts. The center of the factory floor was dominated by a pair of brick furnaces. Each had a smooth concrete smoke stack nearly twenty feet in diameter.

Danny stopped walking and announced, "Here it is . . . the strongest fluctuation. We will set up right here." The space he marked was an open area between the two furnaces near the center of the room

"Okay," said Steve. "I'll get the chairs and the rest of the stuff."

Danny just nodded. He was opening crates and taking out various pieces of ghost hunting equipment.

Elizabeth watched Steve and Jamie head back to the car.

Danny opened another case and looked up at Elizabeth. He was so excited, like a kid in a candy store, thought Elizabeth.

"I have not shown you my newest piece of equipment," Danny told her. "It only came in the mail today. Steve's going to be really excited."

Elizabeth was enjoying watching him. He lifted from the plastic case an orange device about ten inches long and five inches in diameter. On its side was the symbol for hazardous waste. "A Geiger counter," he explained.

"Are you expecting nuclear-powered ghosts?" teased Elizabeth.

"No," laughed Danny. "Low levels of radiation often correlate to particular types of paranormal activity. Approximately 11 pulses per minute are considered to be normal background radiation, anything more could indicate a genuine haunting."

Danny turned on his meter. The clicking started immediately. "Wow. That's a lot of radiation. More than I've ever heard."

"Is it dangerous?" asked Elizabeth, suddenly concerned.

"No, the levels are well below what's safe for a human," said Danny. "We've got high EMF and elevated radiation levels. This is going to be a great site."

"Or a deposit of radioactive waste," replied Elizabeth looking around.

If Danny heard her, he did not comment. He began opening cases and readying their equipment. After some time, he asked, "Will you help me rig the cameras?"

"Sure."

Danny handed her a small video camera, three other devices and a tangle of wires to connect them all.

As Elizabeth followed Danny through the cavernous room she marveled at the size of the canning machines. Some were more than twenty feet high. They were all rusty and covered with grime. Some even had plants growing out of them, but they were still impressive. Conveyers and catwalks criss-crossed above her head.

Danny stopped at the base of the closest furnace. There were some steps that allowed access to a conveyor that came out of the furnace.

"I want to set the cameras on the furnaces so I can get the widest possible shot," Danny said as he climbed up onto the first furnace. Elizabeth passed him a camera, which he secured onto the conveyor.

Next to the camera, Danny placed an external microphone. "This will record ambient sounds." He plugged the microphone into the camera.

Elizabeth passed him the next piece of equipment he asked for. "This is a digital thermometer and barometer." Danny hung it on the conveyor coming from the furnace. "The digital thermometer allows us to record temperature changes which often accompany a haunting. The barometer tracks air pressure."

Danny asked for the box-like device and placed it on the conveyor. He plugged the wires that hung from this device into the camera, microphone and thermometer. "This is a wireless unit that will transmit the signals from these three devices to the central computer. We'll have a definite record of everything that occurs."

Elizabeth followed Danny back to the cases, where he gave her another set of the same devices to carry. He led her over to the other furnace. Elizabeth watched as he placed this set of equipment in the same manner. Then she followed him back to the center of the room, where he erected a folding

table.

Danny opened up the equipment case holding the laptop and put the computer on the table and turned it on. He plugged in various cords and checked the system. The split screen showed the two video camera angles and a vacillating bar of ambient sound beneath each video display.

“I got video and audio,” he announced.

“We’re back!” exclaimed Steve as he and Jamie entered the room.

Jamie’s face was flush and not from carrying the bag of snack foods. Elizabeth understood the reason they had been gone so long. She shook her head in dismay and wondered who could be turned on in this place.

Steve put down four cloth folding chairs, a small cooler and a blanket. Jamie dropped the sack of snacks and opened a chair for herself to sit. She pulled a bag of chocolate chip cookies from the sack and got a coke from the cooler. She leaned back in her chair and started munching cookies. “I love ghost hunting,” she said with her mouth full.

Elizabeth opened the rest of the chairs. She didn’t touch the blanket.

Danny plugged in a pair of head phones. They were connected to the lap top with a splitter.

“Do you want to listen for EVPs” Danny asked Elizabeth.

“What’s EVP?” asked Elizabeth

“EVP stands for Electronic Voice Phenomena,” explained Danny. “Recording sound is very important to our investigation. We’ve used various kinds of sound recording devices over the years. I started by using a basic tape recorder with an external microphone and high grade tapes. Then, I got a parabolic microphone because they amplify sounds that are a great distance away or below the range of hearing. But now I use wireless parabolic microphones and connect them directly to the computer which we can use to filter the sounds.”

“What kind of sounds?” she asked.

“Our goal is to capture EVP because spirits often talk at a lower frequency than humans can hear or at a slower or faster speed. Manipulating the recordings, often with computers, will reveal the messages of spirits and other entities.”

“It’s friggin’ cool,” interjected Jamie. “We hear all kinds of voices. I once heard a child’s voice calling, ‘mommy.’ Another time this voice kept saying, ‘murderer,’ over and over again. It was scary shit!”

“You hear that kind of stuff a lot?” asked Elizabeth

“Sometimes,” said Danny. “But most often we hear spirits calling names or giving warnings.”

“I’ll listen,” said Elizabeth surprised at her own eagerness.

“Sure.” Danny checked to make sure both sets of head phones were plugged into the computer. “You can sit right here. Don’t be surprised if you don’t hear anything. Like I said, we often have to manipulate the sound files to extract the message.”

Elizabeth sat down on a plastic crate next to the computer and put on the head phones.

The sky was darkening and Danny set up a pair of lanterns. He turned them on and they cast their red light over the team. Elizabeth remembered Danny explaining that ghost hunters always used red lenses on their flashlights and lanterns so that the night vision was not disrupted.

Danny and Steve worked to set up the last of the equipment. Three motion sensitive digital camera were set up around the room. Any motion would cause them to take a digital photograph. Danny issued two-way radios to everyone and they conducted a radio check.

The ghost hunters settled in to wait for the ghosts to come. Danny sat down next to Elizabeth and whispered, “Thanks for coming. I know you’d rather be reading a good book in a bubble bath, but thanks.”

Elizabeth squeezed his hand.

Danny lift up a hand held video camera and panned it across the room. “Look at this!”

Steve and Elizabeth came to look at the LCD screen of the camera over Danny’s shoulder. “I got orbs everywhere.” Danny pointed to the floating circle on the screen.

“What are orbs?” asked Elizabeth from where she was sitting.

“Orbs are spheres that show up on video and film,” explained Steve. “They are indications of paranormal activity.”

“I’ve never seen so many orbs,” gasped Danny. “The screen is filled with them. Look over

here.” He continued panning the camera. “Oh, man! We’re going see some good stuff tonight!”

“I’m on the EVP,” said Jamie as she picked up the other headphones. “We need someone with experience.”

The shadows lengthened as the sun went down behind the horizon and the room got really dark. The moon was not yet up and the only light was from the two red light lanterns. Suddenly, the room got very cold. One of the cameras set up on the furnace snapped a picture. The Geiger counter began to click louder.

Steve checked the EMF meter. “EMF is more than 20 milliGauss!” he whispered.

“I see orbs all over the camcorder!” spoke Danny.

“There’s orbs on split screen too,” said Steve.

Jamie screamed, stood up and pulled the earphones off her head. The computer slid across the table and only Danny’s quick reaction stopped it from falling onto the floor.

“What’s wrong?” asked Steve.

“We have to leave!” she cried

“Why?”

“I heard a voice,” she cried. ‘A really evil voice.’”

“It’s just EVP,” said Steve.

“No,” cried Jamie. “I’ve heard EVP. This was different.”

“What did it say?” asked Danny.

“It said, ‘You have Abandoned your life!’”

“Did you hear it?” Danny asked Elizabeth.

Elizabeth took off the headphones. “I don’t know. I thought I heard something, but it was garbled.”

“You’re not going to trust her,” whined Jamie. ‘I’ve got the experience. I know what I heard. There is something here that wants to kill us!’”

Elizabeth was alarmed by Jamie. “Should we leave?”

“There is nothing to worry about,” spoke Danny. “Jamie stop joking around.”

“I’m not joking,” she insisted. “I heard it clearly!”

“You know EVPs don’t work like that,” said Danny. “We’ll need to play it slower or speed it up to understand the voice. You just don’t hear voices.”

“I heard it, clearly” she complained.

“But Elizabeth didn’t hear anything.”

“So what!”

“It’s more likely that you fell asleep and dreamed it,” Danny explained.

“No,” she insisted.

“You never hear actual voices on EVPs,” said Danny.

“That’s not true,” said Steve. “A powerful ghost can bring its voice into our range of hearing.”

“Listen to the tape if you don’t believe me,” sulked Jamie.

The other meters had all returned to normal, so Danny played back the computer recording on the computer. He pulled out the head phones so everyone could listen. After a few minutes of static, they heard a very garbled voice say, “You have abandoned your life.” Danny replayed it again. He played it is third time.

“It’s clear!” admitted Danny.

“There’s a powerful spirit here,” said Steve.

“I want to go,” said Elizabeth.

“We can’t walk away from something like this,” said Steve. His eyes were wide as he looked around the room.

“Maybe someone else is here?” said Danny suspiciously. “It could be a prank.”

“Who could it be? There’s no cars around. It has to be a ghost,” said Steve “I knew this place was going to be awesome. We got a bonafide, unmanipulated EVP.”

“Someone is fucking with us,” said Jamie.

Elizabeth realized that for the first time Danny and Jamie had actually agreed on the same point. She smiled, feeling a little better. “You think someone else is here?” Then she got really afraid. “It’s not some gang people?”

“Everyone, stop panicking,” said Danny. “It’s not gang people. If anything its probably some kids like us.”

“The temperature drop, the Geiger counter and the EMF all went off at once,” insisted Steve as he checked the readouts. “How could a prankster do all that?”

Danny nodded. “I’ll check the video from the wireless camera. It as recorded on the computer,” he said as he put down the camera he was holding. “The microphone on which the EVP was recorded is connected to the camera. If someone’s paying a prank, we’ll see them on the screen.”

“Prank or not, we should go now,” suggested Elizabeth.

“Please stop worrying,” repeated Danny. “I’m checking the video now.” He moved the mouse and clicked on the camera icon. The file name came up and he selected to view the image.

They all gasped at once.

“It’s an apparition!”” shouted Steve.

Danny paused the video and they all stared at the image. To Elizabeth the figure was terrifying. It was a spectral, quasi-corporal thing. . . A transparent- seeming man dressed in an old-fashioned suit coat, pleated pants and buckle shoes. She could not tell the color of the suit as the thing was pure, ghostly white. Her attention was drawn to its face. Its visage was full of anger and its eyes seemed to burn red with hate. She studied the image and saw with increasing horror that the spectral-thing possessed wicked curved talons extending from its finger-tips.

“A friggin’ ghost with the power to materialize!” said Steve. “And we caught on film! We got an EVP, confirming temp and EMF fluctuations. We’re going to be famous! We’ll get our own TV show!”

Jamie looked unsure, but Elizabeth was filled with dread. Those talons looked dangerous. She was a pragmatic girl and she wondered why would the ghost had those wicked looking claws if ghosts could not hurt people. She shuddered. What if Danny was mistaken? What if that ghost could hurt people.

“We should leave,” Elizabeth urged said. “We should leave now.”

“We can’t leave,” said Steve. To Elizabeth, it appeared as if the possibility of fame and fortune

had overcome any sensible thought in Steve's mind. Elizabeth could see that he was completely caught up in the moment. "This is exactly what we've been looking for!" Steve assured her.

"We need to get the hell out of here!" insisted Elizabeth. "Danny?" she turned to her boyfriend for support.

"I am sorry Elizabeth, but Steve's right," Danny's face was flush with excitement. "We really need to stay. This is cutting edge research."

"Cutting edge?" Gasp'd Elizabeth. "Look at those claws," she warned.

"Those can't be claws," said Steve. "They must be fingernails. You know that fingernails keep growing for weeks after death."

Elizabeth stared at him with an incredulous expression on her face. Before she could respond to his absurd comment, they all heard a noise from behind them. The wall seemed to open up and a yellow-green glow emanated from behind the crack. White mists of ectoplasm rolled out onto the factory floor.

"Hand me the camera," said Danny.

Steve grabbed the camera passed it to Danny who held the camera up and started shooting the video. The screen was filled with floating orbs. Danny narrated. "About five seconds ago the wall behind us opened up. We can see a glowing light behind the wall and ectoplasm leaking out."

Steve was picking up the infrared thermometer and the EMF meter.

"What's the temp?" asked Danny as he held the camera on the opening.

Steve held up the infrared thermometer and pointed it at the door. He pressed the button on its back and the digital display revealed the temperature. "Sixty-nine degrees . . . no sixty-five degrees. It's still dropping." Steve continued to hold the thermometer on the door and then he announced, "It's holding steady at fifty-four degrees."

"How about EMF?"

Steve had the EMF in his left hand and was already taking a reading. He glanced down at the display and announced, "Thirty three milliGauss."

"We have corroboration of paranormal activity by EMF and temperature drop. We are going

to go into the opening.”

“No way!” said Jamie. Danny panned the camera to her and she continued speaking directly into the lense, “I am not going in there. I want to leave right now.”

“Listen, Jamie,” said Danny. “You need to calm down. You’re scaring Elizabeth. We are the professionals, right? This is a legitimate haunting and we cannot leave now. We have to document it for science. There is nothing that can hurt you. We said the prayer and we are protected from all bad spirits. Stay calm and follow us and you’ll be safe.”

Jamie sniffled.

Elizabeth moved next to Jamie and patted her arm. They had finally found something in common. Fear.

Danny turned the camera around and started walking to the crack in the wall. Steve grabbed the flashlight and the EMF meter. Jamie followed behind. Elizabeth hesitated.

“Hey Jamie,” called Elizabeth. “We can go outside and wait by the car.” she suggested.

Jamie paused.

“Come on, Jamie,” said Steve. “It will be the experience of a life time.”

Elizabeth shook her head. “Let’s wait in the car.”

“Fuck it,” said Jamie. “Steve’s right.” She looked at Elizabeth and said snidely, “Honey, grow a set.” She turned away and hurried after Steve.

Elizabeth really wanted to leave the building and wait by the car, but she did not want to go outside by herself. Being alone had its own set of terrors. And honestly, she did not want to let Danny down. This was his big investigation. She was supposed to be coming along to support him, she didn’t want to dampen his enthusiasm or be the whiny girlfriend that ruined his ghost hunt.

This was not so bad, she told herself. She could be spending the night at some boring car show looking at engines and talking about tires. Or she could be watching her boyfriend play video games all night long. At least this was exciting, she thought, but perhaps too much so.

She picked up a red lens flashlight and followed Jamie. She reminded herself that there was no reason to be afraid. Danny had assured her that there was no danger. The movie monsters of

Hollywood were all make-believe. Vampires, werewolves and monsters with physical forms were all convictions of fantasy. The worst thing they could find would be a poltergeist that moved furniture or a wailing spirit trying to provoke fear. Danny was an expert in ghost hunting. Despite her misgivings, she convinced herself to trust him.

The crack in the wall, was more like a secret passage. The fake wall was on hinges and could be opened and closed by someone standing in the staircase. Elizabeth wondered if someone opened the passage for them, or if perhaps it was just the wind?

Beyond the false wall, there was a staircase leading down into a basement. The walls, ceiling and stairs were all made of brick held in place by mortar. Elizabeth touched the bricks and realized they were damp and slippery with muck. She wiped her hands on her jeans and suppressed a shudder.

Danny was already on the steps with camera in hand. "This staircase is made of red bricks and appears to lead down to a landing. The landing area is lit by strange, mossy plants that seem to glow with a bio-luminesce." Danny zoomed in on the plants. They shined with a yellow-green glow. "I have never seen anything like these plants before. The plants appear to provide sufficient ambient light for us to walk down the staircase."

"Do you think we have discovered a new species of plants?" asked Steve.

"May be," replied Danny.

"They look like lichens!" said Steve as he touched one of them. He pulled the plant off the wall and squeezed it. Glowing goo dripped down his hand. "Yuck," he said and tossed the plant away. He wiped his hand on his pants, which glowed yellow-green until a few moments had passed and then the light from the plant slowly faded, leaving behind a sickly yellow stain.

"Double yuck," said Steve when he looked at the stain.

Danny reached the landing and zoomed in on a bronze plaque. He read the words to the camera, "Munitions Storage Area."

"This is great!" whispered Steve.

"The stairs from the landing are leading down under the factory. We are proceeding forward," Danny was narrating for the camera. "Temperature?"

Fifty-four degrees,” responded Steve.

“EMF?”

“36 milliGauss”

Elizabeth followed Jamie down the lengthy stairs, when Danny reached the bottom she heard him say, “I think we have found a basement. There’s three tunnels leading off into the darkness. Oh man, this is awesome. I’m getting great orbs.”

Steve joined him in the large round room at the base of the stairs. “The EMF’s going crazy! I read forty milliGauss.”

Jamie, who seemed to have regained her composure, entered the chamber and moved along the outer wall. She was using another infrared thermometer to take readings in different sections of the room.

“The temperature’s fluctuating on the average of ten degrees,” added Jamie.

Elizabeth stood on the last step, not wanting to go into the room and feeling a little useless. The others were walking around the room shining their flashlights in every direction, taking readings and making notes. Dust swirled up from their footsteps and the red flashlight beams showed as they lanced through the particles.

The room had a high domed ceiling. The apex of the dome was twenty feet above their heads and covered with glowing lichens. The brick floor was covered with shallow puddles and water leaked from the walls. A few phosphorescent lichens grew on the walls where their roots clung to the red bricks and soaked up the moisture draining through the mortar.

From her position, Elizabeth saw there were three brick tunnels leading from the room. The tunnels had arched roofs and they were labeled ‘East,’ ‘West.’ and ‘South.’ The southern tunnel was directly opposite her as she stood on the stairs.

Steve checked his meter while standing in the center of the room, directly under the apex of the dome. Danny videoed as Steve explained, “There’s a strong electromagnetic source under the center of the room, but there’s a secondary source to the south. We’ve got readings over 15 milliGause. There is no man-made power source in the factory so this can only be spirit energy.”

“Let’s go south,” said Danny.

The ghost hunters gathered at the entrance to the southern tunnel. As Elizabeth joined them, Steve led the way with his meter held in front of him at his waist. Danny followed next to video Steve’s progress. Jamie came after Danny and was making notes in Steve’s note book. Elizabeth trailed behind, worried that the tunnel may collapse or that they would become lost.

A short way down the tunnel Steve fell. He was so engrossed with reading the EMF meter that he tripped over a knee high pile of debris. He landed in a small puddle of water. He kept the meter out of the mud, but he was soaked to the skin and smelled of swamp. He cursed and looked at Danny who was holding the camera on him.

“I hope we can edit this,” he said as he got up. “I hate looking stupid on video.”

“Are you okay?” asked Jamie, pushing past Danny. She went to hug Steve, but stopped herself. “Yuck,” she whined. “You’re all wet.” She stepped back.

Steve pulled at his shirt. “I’m soaked!” he whined back. “This sucks!”

“You’ll dry out,” said Danny.

Steve examined the pile of debris that caused him to his fall. “What the hell is a pile of dirt doing in the hall.” He looked up at the ceiling and saw a large space of soil behind an opening in the bricks. The ceiling had collapsed forming the pile of bricks and dirt.

“Great,” said Steve, shining his flashlight on the dirt. “This tunnel looks unstable.” The beam was mottled as the lens was covered with mud from his fall.

“Ghost hunting is dangerous,” explained Danny to the camera. “The intrepid hunters press on despite the dangers of tunnel collapse.”

Steve cleaned the mud off the red lense of his flashlight and shined it ahead of him. He held the EMF meter in the other hand and bolstered by Danny’s words, said to the camera in a serious voice, “It’s time to move on.”

A short while later his beam fell on a smashed wooden barricade. In front of the barricade were piles of broken bricks and rocks.

“Someone’s been excavating,” announced Steve.

“Maybe it was another group of ghost hunters trying to find the source of the electromagnetic fluctuations,” suggested Danny. Elizabeth knew him well enough to know he sounded depressed, because that meant they were not the first ones to explore this corridor.

Steve shined his red beam on the sign on the barricade, “Keep Out. Danger.” He played the beam over the brick walls next to the barricade and saw a small plaque that read, “1944. To the women who lost their lives in the munitions accident . . .” the rest of the writing was too faded to read.

“Hey someone died up ahead,” said Steve. “In an accident during the war. That must be why we’re getting these readings. Maybe we will get to see a residual haunting. There’s more than enough energy for one to occur.”

“What’s a residual haunting?” asked Elizabeth.

“Residual hauntings are spectral sightings that play like video presentations,” explained Danny. “The past replays over and over again. The hauntings begin with a burst of ectoplasm, which is like a white mist and then apparitions appear and replay a moment from history.”

“Real ghosts,” gasped Elizabeth.

“No,” corrected Danny. “Apparitions are not ghosts. They are not spirits; they are simply reflections of history embedded in an area. They have no real existence in the material world. They can’t hurt anyone and can’t interact. Spirits of dead people have an awareness and you can communicate with spirits. You can’t do that with residual hauntings.”

Steve led them past the barricade, keeping a close eye on his meter, but watching the floor in front of him. Jamie was right behind him. She was taking temperature readings and noting them in the book. She was completely caught up in the excitement of the hunt.

The corridor was filled with rubble, broken bricks, stones and loose earth and Elizabeth was more worried about tripping. Elizabeth noticed that the brick ceiling had gaping holes in it and she could see dirt above them in the holes. She felt queasy, suspecting that the ceiling could collapse at any moment. She wished that she had waited in the car.

“Up ahead the temperature is dropping twelve degrees!” whispered Jamie.

“Oh man! This is great,” Steve practically shouted. “I’ve never seen readings like this! Forty

milliGuass.” He took another few steps and announced, “Forty-one milliGauss, forty-four milliGuase, forty-six milliGuass!” He was walking quickly down the corridor, looking at his meter. “Forty-eight milliGuass!” he shouted.

“We’re down another four degrees,” said Jamie.

Danny was following them with the video camera. “I’ve got orbs all around you,” he said. “Let’s keep going!”

Suddenly Steve stopped. Jamie walked into his back. They both looked shocked and Steve said “Oh shit!”

All four ghost hunters saw the glowing red eyes watching them from the darkness beyond light of Steve’s flashlight. Steve slowly lifted the beam of his flashlight up from the floor. The red light fell on scuffed black shoes, worn green pants with haggard cuffs and holes torn in the knees, a military dress jacket from World War II. The breast of the coat was filled with medals. The flashlight shook in Steve’s hand and the beam wobbled on the figure. Steve could barely move. He inched the light up and the beam fell on a skeletal face with glowing red eyes.

Steve screamed in terror. He felt warm liquid running down his legs and realized he’d pissed himself as the skeletal creature started walking toward him. Steve wanted to run, but he was transfixed, paralyzed by fear. The skeletal creature reached out and grabbed him by the arm. Jamie had hold of his other arm, but as the creature pulled him Jamie let go. The creature tossed Steve back into the shadows.

Jamie let go of Steve’s hand. She saw movement in the shadows behind the skeletal creature. Steve screamed She heard him struggling. She shined the red beam of her flashlight to where the sound of his screamed arose. In the red light, she saw a group of white-faced undead beings. Their nails had grown out, extending more than three inches from the finger-tips. Their hands looked more like claws. Pale flesh hung placidly from lifeless cheeks. Two of them were holding Steve’s arms while a third came up from behind Steve. The creature opened its mouth revealing sharply, broken teeth. Steve screamed as the thing grabbed him and bite deeply into his shoulder.

Elizabeth saw the blood running down from the jagged wound in Steve’s shoulder. She

watched, transfixed in horror, as the creature chewed and swallowed the flesh, then wiped its blood chin with a tattered shirt sleeve.

“Zombies?” gasped Elizabeth. “Are they zombies?!” She had seen enough movies to recognize zombies. “Is this real?”

The pair of zombies held Steve in their claw like hands. A zombie woman with straggly blond hair pushed the other zombie aside and pulled Steve’s forearm into her mouth. She bit out a large chunk of his flesh. Steve screamed in pain and struggled. The first zombie pushed back in and began chewing on his shoulder. Steve screamed and sobbed and shouted, “God help me!”

“Do not gorge yourselves, drink slow, lest his life end too soon,” spoke the skeletal creature with the glowing red eyes with a voice that never rose above a hoarse whisper. “These must feed us for many weeks.”

The skeletal undead in the uniform pushed the two zombies who had eaten away. “Capture the rest,” it ordered.

“Run,” shouted Danny. His voice was shrill. He turned and ran past Jamie.

Jamie moved to follow, but she tripped over a brick and fell heavily to the ground. She struggled to her feet, but only staggered a few steps, before the zombies reached her. They zombies dragged Jamie backwards. One of them grabbed her arm the other, just pulled her roughly by the hair. She was kicking, screaming, and cursing.

Elizabeth was still in shock. Her muscles would not move.

Danny grabbed her and pulled her along. “We have to get away!” he shouted.

Elizabeth’s mind was numb. “We have to help them,” she stammered.

Danny shoved Elizabeth roughly. “Run!” he shouted.

They retreated back down the tunneled stumbling over debris and half crawling through the mud and the muck.

“Come on,” yelled Danny.

Danny dropped his camera and was pulling Elizabeth along with both hands. “I’m so sorry,” he cried. “So sorry!”

“Zombies can’t be real,” said Elizabeth, but as she looked over her shoulder she saw a group of zombies pursuing them.

“Run quicker,” he pleaded.

She could see the zombies were chasing them, but her mind was having trouble processing what was actually going on. The zombies were running. Zombies were supposed to walk. In all the movies the zombies always walked. She wanted to scream at zombies and tell them not to run, but then she remembered seeing a recent zombie movie. She could not remember the name of the movie. She hated horror movies, but she did remember that in the new movie zombies could run. She liked the slow-moving zombies much better. Dammit these zombies were running!

Finally, the mush in her brain seemed to clear. She began running faster.

“Run for the stairs!” Danny yelled.

Side by side, the two ghost hunters reached the stairs and bounded up them. After they passed through the secret door, Danny pushed it closed and dragged a large metal drum in place to block the door. They could hear fists pounding on the heavy wood. Danny moved another drum into place.

Elizabeth took out her cell phone and dial 9-1-1.

“What is the nature of your emergency?” asked the operator.

“Help us! We’re being attacked.”

“What is your name?”

“Elizabeth Tunney.”

“What is your location?” asked the operator calmly.

“We’re in an abandoned factory next to the Delaware River. North Camden.”

“What is the street address?”

“Danny, where are we?” shouted Elizabeth. She was crying.

“River Road. The old soup can factory,” grunted Danny as he pushed another drum into place.

Elizabeth repeated the location and the emergency operator said, “Units are responding. Are you in a safe area?”

“I think so,” she stammered. “Danny has blocked up the door.”

“Who is Danny?”

“My boyfriend.”

“What is his full name?”

The drums burst away from the door and the skeleton with glowing eyes pushed into the room. It kicked one of the metal cans and the steel crumpled beneath the blow.

“Oh my god! It’s getting through the door!”

“Miss please remain calm and state who is attacking you?”

“Zombies,” she shouted. “A skeleton! A skeleton with glowing red eyes!”

“Did you say zombies?” asked the emergency operator becoming annoyed. “Is this a prank?”

“No, no!” sobbed Elizabeth. She said the first thing that came to mind. “Homeless people. They must be homeless people. Please help us.”

The skeleton walked forward. The zombies were pouring out of the stairs behind the skeleton.

Danny pulled her arm and they started to run again. They passed between the furnaces and Danny did not even stop to consider picking up his equipment. They reached the other side of the factory and sprinted down the short corridor and into the graffiti-filled intersection.

Standing in front of the way out was the quasi-corporeal creature captured on the motion sensor camera. Their escape was blocked.

“This way!” shouted Danny.

“What is happening?” asked the emergency operator.

He pulled Elizabeth to the left and they ran down the corridor. Elizabeth glanced behind her and saw the spectral being was in pursuit. The specter made no sound as it stalked them, walking patiently, with long purposeful steps.

The terrified pair ran down the corridor and Danny opened a door. They ran into the room. Danny slammed the door behind them and wedged a rusty metal folding chair against the door knob. They were in some kind of old meeting room. The ceiling of the room was high and the windows along the wall were set five feet from the floor. The faint glow of the moon shining through the windows illuminated a long oak table. Danny grabbed the table and tried to pull it over to the windows, but the

legs collapsed as he moved it. Most of the leather chairs had collapsed into barely recognizable heaps around the room, but another metal folding chair was on the other side of the room.

“Please tell me what is happening?” asked the emergency operator. “Are you able to speak?”

“I’m here,” sobbed Elizabeth. “Something else is chasing us now!”

“Go get the chair,” Danny yelled to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth ran across the room and grabbed the chair with one hand. She kept the phone to her ear with the other. “Please hurry,” she pleaded into the receiver.

For some reason, Elizabeth noticed a large oil painting on the wall above the metal chair. The plate on the picture frame gave the man’s name as, Samuel Haste, and the phrase, “A dreamer, a builder and a business man.” The face looked very familiar. She lifted the chair and started toward Danny.

The door shook and the knob turned, but the chair wedged into it helped keep it closed. She thought they were safe, until a spectral hand passed through the center of the door. The hand was followed by an arm and then the spectral face peered into the room. Elizabeth recognized the face.

“Samuel Haste,” she gasped.

The specter looked at her. “It’s been so long since a living woman whispered my name. Abandon Life! I hunger for you.”

Elizabeth recognized the voice on the tape.

“Who is Samuel Haste?” asked the emergency operator. “Is he the one attacking you?”

Elizabeth reached Danny at the window. He opened the chair and motioned for her to climb up on it.

“You first,” he shouted.

She did not argue. She was shorter than he and needed a boost up. She climbed through the window and balanced on the sill. She pushed through the vines and her hands were cut by the thorns. Despite the pain she held onto the plants, she wanted to turn around and climb down, but she slipped, falling outward. She landed hard and the breath was knocked out of her. Her cell phone bounced away. Vaguely she heard the emergency operator asking, “Are you all right?” Then the operator said,

“Hold on honey, the police are almost there!”

Moments later Danny dropped down next to her. He helped her to stand.

“Come on,” he practically carried her toward the car.

They reached the car and Danny fumbled with the keys. He put the key into the lock and then suddenly he was gone. The keys swung from the locks.

Danny had been jerked away from the car and was flying through the air. He landed some distance away and did not move.

Elizabeth pulled her eyes away from Danny’s crumpled form and saw the skeleton with the glowing eyes was moving toward her. The undead had just thrown Danny across the lot like a rag doll. He reached down for Elizabeth, but she twisted out of his reach. She ran around the back of the car. The skeleton followed with an unhurried pace.

Danny still had not moved. Elizabeth reached Danny’s side and screamed. His head had struck the edge of the crumbling curb and his skull was dented in. She picked up a piece of the curb and threw it at the skeleton. The piece of broken concrete bounced off its shoulder without any effect. She grabbed another piece of concrete and threw that, but missed widely.

“I’ll kill you!” she screamed.

The undead started toward her. She sprinted away and picked up a length of metal rebar about three feet long. Elizabeth spun to face the skeleton who had closed the distance quickly.

The skeleton reached out to grab her, but she wacked the skeleton on the forearm and it withdrew its hand. Her confidence bolstered by her success, she struck the skeleton on the jaw with a mighty two handed blow. The skeleton staggered back. She swung again and the skeleton stepped away.

“I’ll kill you!” she shouted.

“Hardly,” hissed the skeleton as it circled her like a predator looking for an opening to pounce. “The dead do not die.”

Elizabeth swung and missed. She stepped forward and thrust the rebar ahead of her striking the skeleton in its breast bone. The skeleton staggered back, again.

“There is nothing more dangerous than an untrained opponent,” said the skeleton.

Elizabeth heard the police sirens and then saw the flashing lights on the building. The police were coming to help her. She held the rebar out in front of her threatening the skeleton.

The skeletal being looked down the road at the approaching lights. It hesitated, as if making a decision. “You have earned your life for I have not the time to take it.”

The skeletal being withdrew into the building leaving Elizabeth standing in the parking lot. Elizabeth ran over to Danny, still holding the rebar. She moved his head with her left hand and saw that one side of his head was caved in. In shock she staggered away from the body.

Two police cars pulled in. The police got out with their guns drawn.

“Put down the metal rod,” shouted one of the officers.

Elizabeth dropped the piece of rebar and it clattered to the ground. She looked down and realized she was standing in a pool of Danny’s blood. She saw that her hands were covered with his blood. How could a person bleed so much and still be alive, she wondered. The answer to her musings was a thought to horrible to accept. Was Danny dead? She dropped to her knees and lifted Danny’s body. She cradled his head in her lap.

“Danny,” she cried. “Danny, please be alive.”

The officers reached her. Two officers pulled her away from Danny. A third officer kicked the bloody piece of rebar out of her reach. One officer held her, while the other put handcuffs on her wrists. The third officer checked Danny and said to the fourth who was still standing by the patrol car, “We got one here with a head injury,” spoke the cop. “He’s still alive. Better call the ambulance quick or we’ll be needing a meat wagon.”

“Why did you do it?” asked the officers holding her.

Elizabeth pulled at the handcuffs on her wrists. She was in a daze, “I didn’t do anything,” she stammered. The police lights were blinding her. She could not think. “It was the skeleton with the glowing eyes . . . The zombies got Steve and Jamie.”

“Sure,” said the sergeant. “And the specter of old Samuel Haste is still walking around.” The officer’s laughed. “We’ve heard that joke before. Put her in the car and take her downtown. Maybe

the detective will want the shrink to have a go at her.”

Elizabeth felt herself lifted into the back of the police car and then she sank into a haunted delirium.