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Empathetic Reasoning and Professional Writing

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The Haunting of Blackthorn Hollow

Chapter One

It was November 19th when I got the call. I'll never forget walking down Main Street with the autumn breeze in my hair and the most beautiful tree foliage I have ever seen. Bangor, Maine was my peace away from my crazy family. This is where I felt safe and unafraid of who and what was happening in my hometown. I about choked when that voice went through my phone. My mothers raspy voice, you can tell she had been crying from the gasps she was giving off, "Willow, your grandparents are not here. Their house is destroyed. You need to come back home. Come back home to Blackthorn Hollow." I didn't even get the chance to respond before my phone slipped out of my hands. That small town in Massachusetts was the last place I ever expected to return to.

I grew up in Blackthorn Hollow. It once had a vibrant community with bustling streets and lively homes. Time has not been kind to this forsaken place. Its ghostly, just a relic of the past that I have been fighting to forget. All houses were weathered and windows were shattered. Nothing more than unusable waste being held in to place by gravity. I pull up in front of their house, I mean my house, no their house. This is where I walked away from; the miserable life I couldn't stand years ago. I take one deep breath and hop out of my 2005 blue Mini Cooper. The

lawns in this neighborhood are all overgrown and have turned into wild thickets, reclaiming the land with an eerie persistence. The air is thick with the scent of damp decay and the distance, mournful whispers of a bygone era. The towns emptiness is palpable, an unsettling quiet that seems to press against my senses, making the absence of life all the more pronounced. I walk up the path and put my hand on the door knob but before I even have the chance to turn the handle, it opens and there stands my mother. I about peed my pants and yelled “Mom what the Hell!” Before she even had a chance to say anything, that’s when I see the inside of the house. The couch was over-turned. Chairs were flipped over. Nothing was where it was supposed to be. I don’t know why this upsets me considering I couldn’t wait to leave here 10 years ago. But something feels off. I can feel the eerie chill in this room like a story that needs to be told is unfolding before me. Where did my grandparents go? Why is the house a mess? I know there is more to this. Why are the neighbors falling apart? And lastly, where is everyone?

I know now that I will not leave Blackthorn Hollow without finding the truth of what happened here and what happened to the town. I call my boss and tell him that I might have a great story for the paper. I work as a journalist for 535, this is just the local newspaper. My boss wished me luck and said “bring me back a story.” Now the pressure is on.

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I wake up and realize that I am in my old room in my grandparents’ house. My mother is on the chair across from me. Realization hits me that I have to learn what happened. I have an eerie feeling that they aren’t really gone, they just are in another dimension. But maybe that is just me needing coffee.

The sun barely rises when I reach the local coffee shop. I notice that this part of town, the houses are still how they should be. Nothing is falling down and there are cars in the drive way. Very odd, I think to myself. Something happened in my neighborhood and I need to figure out what. I get back in my car and drive through the dense fog swirling around my car. Back towards the skeletal remains of what was once the liveliest community that now feels like a death trap. Each turn of the wheel brought me closer to the heart of the mystery that is now haunting my family, that is now going to be my investigative journey. The hollow was cloaked in an oppressive silence, broken only by the occasional rustling of leaves and the creak of weathered wood under the weight of neglect. I pull up front of my first stop, Mrs. Franklins. She owns the house that I have dreamed of buying since I was a little girl, an old Victorian-style home with a porch that wraps around the front, ivy that clings to the marred peeling paint, like a memory waiting to be released. Mrs. Franklin is one of the original settlers in this falling down neighborhood. If something weird was happening, she would know about it.

I lift the knocker and strike the door behind it. Landing three whacks in a row. The door opens slowly leading me to the inside of her house. “Mrs. Franklin?” I called out, not wanting to startle the elderly women. I’m Willow Lewis. I’m here to investigate the stories behind Blackthorn Hollow. May I ask you a few questions?

Mrs. Franklin steps out of the dark hallway and she slowly gazed at my face with a mixture of curiosity and wariness. “Well why don’t you come in here dear girl. Not much to see around here these days, but I suppose you are part of this now. Considering you are staying in the house where the last incident had happened.”

Inside, the house was a mix of old-world charm and disarray, with faded floral wallpaper and antique furniture cloaked in dust. Mrs. Franklin settled into an armchair, her hands resting in

her lap as she began to recount the tales that had become to recount the tales that had become the stuff of local current legend. “They say the town’s curse started when a shadowy figure appeared,” Mrs. Franklin began, her voice trembling slightly. “The Shadow of Blackthorn Hollow, they call it. It’s supposed to be a spirit seeking vengeance or justice—nobody’s quite sure which. It’s the reason for all the disappearances.” I listened intently, scribbling in my notebook furiously as Mrs. Franklin spoke of the eerie happenings: flickering lights in abandoned homes, whispers carried by the wind, and shadows that seemed to move of their own accord. According to Mrs. Franklin, those occurrences had plagued the town long before the first disappearances happened.

I thanked Mrs. Franklin for her time and set out to explore the abandoned homes, hoping to gather more evidence of these supernatural claims. The houses I visited were in various states of decay, their interiors were a testament to the hasty departure of their former occupants. Yet, amidst the rot and dust, I felt an unnerving presence, as though the walls of the homes were watching my every move. That’s when I heard it. A whimpering sound as if a person was crying begging for someone to notice.

“Willowowowowow...” was said in a whiney voice.

I call out, who’s there. I felt it grab my hand and that’s when I felt the pain. I was stuck in my tracks. I couldn’t move or scream. This spirit is inside my head. I can see her. Her make up smeared across her sunken face. A dress that looks like it was made in the 1600s. And her hair wrapped up in a bun. I can feel her pain, and her sorrow. I ask the spirit to talk to me. And she obeyed. “It’s been centuries before I was about to talk to the living. Every time I try, they disappear. You are the first to be able to see me and still be standing here. I am stuck between

life and death.” Finally, my mind became my own. This investigation just took a very inexplicable turn. The lights started flickering and I grabbed my flashlight. Jittery shadows danced on the walls as I cry out for the saddest spirit to come back to me. I know she is in pain. I can’t imagine being stuck between life and death and watching the towns people disappear whenever I decided to turn for help. I need to know where these people vanish to when she touches them. And why didn’t I disappear? What makes me so special?

My breath gets caught in my throat when I heard more faint cries, like fragmented conversations carried by a distant breeze. That’s when I realized she was no longer in this house. In another house, I encounter a series of brief, fleeting shadows that darted just out of the corner of my eye as if this spirit was playing with me. Each shadow seemed to disappear as quickly as it appeared, leaving me with an uneasy feeling that I am still not alone. My curiosity was piqued, but so was my fear. These phenomena, combined with the stories that were told, made me question the very fabric of reality in Blackthorn Hollow.

I returned to my grandparents’ house when I noticed there was an old side table that was covered in dust. I started wiping it down with my hand when I came across a small tab, I pulled it down and found a hidden compartment. Inside was a weathered journal, its pages yellowed with age and the ink smudged. The journal belonged to one of the missing residents that disappeared in 1692. I flipped through the pages, and then discovered references to a secret society—a group that had sought to protect the town from an unknown threat. The journal hinted at a dark secret that the townspeople had tried to bury, but it did not provide complete answers.