



The School Magazine

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TOUCHDOWN

SCARY
issue!

Bwahahahah!

Ghosts, ghouls
and gruesomeness

unlock the chills if you dare!



Ghost game

story by Marian McGuinness
illustrated by Lesley Vamos

"LAST CHANCE, ALI. Mum said you can still change your mind. She's got your costume in her bedroom, just in case."

Alyssa looked up from her book and groaned. Her brother was practising karate chops in front of her bed and making all the *hoi hoi* noises to go with it. His white uniform was covered with black stick-on arrows and his face was smeared with dirt.

She closed her eyes and shook her head. "One dork in this family is enough! I'm not dressing up like a convict and I'm not going to some silly party with old people. I'm just going to stay in bed and read. I don't know why I wasn't allowed to stay at home."

"That's not fair, Ali. I'm going to be the only kid there. Who am I going to talk to?"

"Exactly *why* I don't want to go! I guess you're just going to have to hang around with the oldies. Tell Mum I'll be fine. Anyway, you're only in the other wing. And that crazy old caretaker is around if I need anything."

"What crazy old caretaker?" Jeremy was swinging his plastic leg-irons around his head when he accidentally let them go. They hit Ali on the head.

"Just GO AWAY!" she said, throwing them back at him.



"You're making it up. Like always! How come I never saw any caretaker?"

"You're such an idiot! Don't you remember when we got here, there was this freaky old guy dressed in olden-day clothes? We were in the front room next to the fireplace. I thought he was going to the convict party, but he wasn't. He said to call him Mr O'Brien and that he was the caretaker. And he told us we could go anywhere in the house, but we weren't allowed in the cellar. Don't you remember anything?"

"Nooo!"

"Well then, like I said, you're an idiot!"

Alyssa touched the cold sandstone wall next to her bed and shivered. Small beads of moisture seeped from the mortar between the blocks and dripped down the stone.

"This place is freaky. Now the walls are leaking."

Jeremy touched the stone. "I think *you're* the one who's freaky. Nothing's leaking!"

Alyssa looked up at the deer's head hanging over her foldout bed; its glassy eyes stared at her and creeped her out. "Eww!" she shuddered. "I don't know why we have to stay in this dumb convict house. It smells of dead people. Jem, go to the party and hang around the oldies. I just want to finish my book. I'm not a baby ... I'll be OK ... really."

Jeremy shrugged his shoulders and closed the door. Now everything was quiet, and that's how Alyssa liked it. No interruptions, no annoying little brother and no parents telling her to turn off the light and go to sleep.

She snuggled back under the quilt.

She drew her knees up to her chest, freeing her legs from the bedsprings that were digging into them, and turned the page.

Carrie searched the muddy bank for a way to cross the river. It was her only chance to escape from Count Carlos. She could hear his wolves howling for her blood. Icy rain blew over the water and needled her eyes until she could barely see. Her clothes stuck to her body and her hair veiled her face like a grotesque mask. Carrie pushed into the storm; each dragging step of mud sucked her down ...

The light in Alyssa's room flickered and died.

"Ohh!" She dropped her book. She slid out of bed and tiptoed to the window. The lights in the other wing were out too.

Everything was in darkness. Her skin crawled, as if a thousand spiderlings had hatched under her pyjamas. She looked across the row of shadowy paddocks that rolled to the river, and saw a wall of rain racing towards the house. It hit the window like a battering ram. She toppled backwards, landing on the bed under the deer's head.

She groped for her torch. "Far out!" she whimpered as she twisted it on. The battery was almost flat. The rain hammered against the old convict glass as water leaked from its edges. She looked around. All the walls were leaking. She crossed her legs so that she didn't wet herself. She needed to find the toilet.

In the dim halo of torch light, Alyssa crept barefooted across the sticky floorboards into the hallway. She felt the eyes of dark-framed, long-dead people following her. Her left hand patted along the walls and across the hallstands that smelt of dust and wax.

Rain pelted the slate roof. Branches scratched against the windows. Through the noise of the storm, Alyssa heard something strange. Voices. And they weren't coming from the convict party.

Goosebumps fingered up her neck and into her hair. She fumbled for the bathroom door. Her shaking hand turned the brass handle. Even though it was Dracula-dark inside, she locked the door behind her and just made it to the toilet.

When she flushed, the pipes banged behind the wall like they did at home.

But here, the banging didn't stop. It changed into scraping.

Back out in the windowless hallway, it was eerily dark. She felt the walls to find her way back to her bedroom door, but was disoriented. Someone rushed past her. She could hear footsteps pattering down stone stairs. But the staircase near her was not stone. It smelt of timber.

"Mr Caretaker?"

Alyssa could hardly breathe. And then she thought: *what if he wasn't really the caretaker?*

"Mr O'Brien?"

Nothing but the whirring rain and rattling shutters answered.

She felt a handle. Her breathing slowed to normal. Finally safe. She wiggled it open, and slipped inside.

But it wasn't her bedroom.



The door clicked behind her. She rattled the handle. It was locked. She was shaking so much that she dropped her torch. Its fading light bounced, bounced and disappeared. As she squinted, she saw that she was standing at the top of a narrow, stone staircase.

"Hello?" she whispered, hoping that nobody replied.

The scratching echoed louder, more urgently. And then she heard them. Muffled, choking voices.

Alyssa wanted to escape, but a strange force was drawing her down the stone stairs until her bare feet squished on cold moss.

Her right foot slipped into icy water. She was in the forbidden cellar. And then she saw the source of the voices. Clawing the stone walls. Scratching chain against chain. Their orbs of light circled her.

"Unchain us, lassie!"

Alyssa shook her head. She was hearing things. The orbs flitted by her face.

Voices bounced off the walls and the flooding floor. They circled her, calling out, one after the other.

"We built this house, stone by stone."

"I'm not much older than you! I'm only fifteen!"

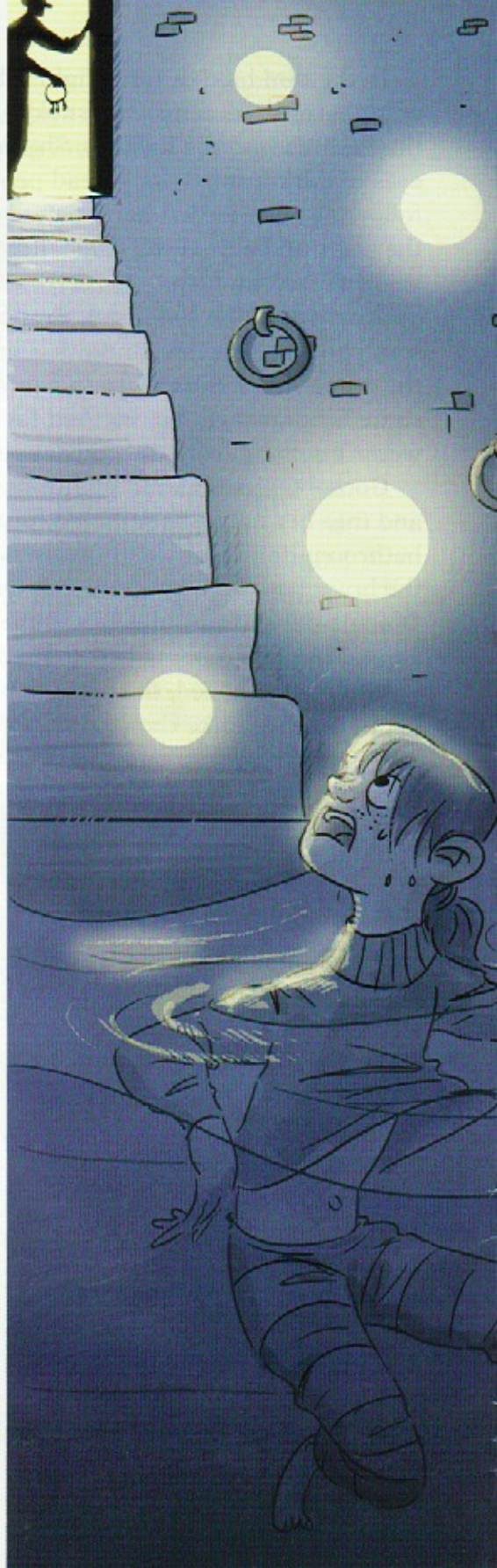
"I only stole a coat to keep me warm."

"Our crimes were not great. We don't deserve to drown!"

"Help us, lassie! The river is rising. We cannot escape!"

The orbs surrounded Alyssa. They dragged her down into the freezing water until her pyjamas stuck to her shivering body. She turned to claw up the flooding stairs, but the foul water rose and slowly sucked her down.

"It's the spirits of the convicts, lassie. They were chained to the walls when the Great Flood came."



Alyssa looked up. The caretaker was standing at the top of the stairs. He was looking at his fob watch. He was counting out the seconds and shaking his head. She reached out to him, but all she touched was the wet darkness.

"They built this house, stone by stone. They're part of it now. I could do nought for them then; I can do nought for you now."

"You can't leave me to drown! Mr O'Brien! Help me!"

"I cannae help you, lass. They dinnae leave me the key for the chains. I cannae help anyone."

And he faded away.

Alyssa scraped her fingernails across the last step. She gulped for air as she was dragged down, down, down ...

Through the shroud of water now covering her eyes, she looked up one last time. A thin line of light was glimmering beneath the door at the top of the stairs. She raised her arm as a drowning person does.

"She's down here!"

It was Jeremy.

"Mum, Dad! Ali's fallen down the stairs! What are you doing in the cellar? You told me it was out of bounds!"

Ali spluttered. She gulped and began hyperventilating. Her whole family, and the caretaker, were standing at the top of the stairs.

"Jeremy had a hunch you might be down here," her dad said as he picked her up. "Did you fall? Are you hurt?" he asked worriedly.

She collapsed into his arms.

"I didn't fall," she gasped in between sobs. "But I nearly drowned! We have to

get out of here. The house is flooding! We have to unchain the convicts. They're all going to die. Mr O'Brien, please tell them!"

"I think she hit her head when she fell," said Jeremy. "She keeps talking about some crazy caretaker guy!"

"You always did have a wild imagination, Ali," said her dad as he helped her into the hall. "You read too many horror stories for my liking. We did have a bit of a rainstorm and a blackout for a little while, but we're perfectly fine inside. And nothing is flooding. This old convict house is as solid as a rock; there's not a drip to be found."

"But Dad! You don't understand!"

"We'll talk about it tomorrow," said her mum as she herded them off to their bedrooms. "We all need a good rest, and most of all you, Ali. Convicts and drowning! I just don't understand."

"Neither do I," Ali said as she squelched along the hallway. "But I'll have to get changed. I can't go to bed in wet pyjamas."

"There's nothing wrong with your pyjamas," said her mum. "Honestly, Alyssa. We're not going to leave you on your own again for a long time. I don't care how much you protest. And no more horror books. How about Romance from now on!"

Alyssa sighed. "You believe me, Mr O'Brien, don't you?" she said, turning back.

"Mr O'Brien?" Alyssa whispered into the empty hallway. ■

*I'm shuddering ...
Beyonce H*

