

HALLOWEEN

WHITE GHOST



MALEK AKKAD
PRESENTS

WHITE GHOST

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Picture a man's eyes the moment he realizes that everything he ever feared in life has just come to pass. When he fully understands that everything he did to prevent this one moment was all in vain. That precise second when he accepts that he is but a cog in the machine of Fate and that his will, his dreams, his desires mean nothing at all, for this moment would always come – was *meant* to come – and he can only stand and watch it unfold before him, helplessly.

"He's gone. He's gone from here!" Doctor Sam Loomis stood helpless in the torrential downpour, his whole body shaking with unbridled rage and terror. In the distance, twin red taillights, like the retreating eyes of a laughing devil, disappeared on the dark horizon. At Loomis' feet, Nurse Marion Chambers struggled to catch her breath from the most frightening moment she'd ever experienced, as the escaped patients of Smith's Grove/Warren County Sanitarium wandered aimlessly all around, ghosts in the night.

And there Loomis stood in the midst of them, at the very center of Michael Myers' latest Halloween prank.

But not the last, is it, Michael? You're only beginning, aren't you?

Loomis clenched his fist and shouted into the wind.

"The evil is gone!"



Freedom, Chris Hastings sighed inwardly, hunched over the wheel of his tow truck. *What I wouldn't give for a little taste of sweet freedom.*

Glumly, he unscrewed the cap off his flask and took another hit of whiskey, relished the burn, then wiped the liquor off his mustache with the back of his hand. Mr. Phelps would have a fit if he knew one of his tow truck drivers was drinking on the job, but Chris thought "What the hell?" Today was his last day, and by this time tomorrow, he'd be in Chicago.

Yessir, his future was all set. Becky had seen to that.

"Great," he muttered, as the first fat drops of water splattered against his windshield. He'd heard something about rain tonight over in Warren County and now it looked like Woodford County would get a bit wet too.

It was dark out on the highway, with very few houses or shops to break up the quiet night. Chris didn't favor driving after dark these days if he could help it, not after he nearly hit that deer last July. It gave him a good jolt and made him think twice about venturing into nighttime driving on lonely country roads. But tonight was not like most nights. Tonight was his last night as his own man. Tomorrow he'd be hanging sheetrock, working for Becky's dad.

Chris liked being a tow truck driver. It wasn't glamorous and the pay wasn't the best, but it was a respectable job and Mr. Phelps was really good to him. The garage, however, wasn't paying enough to please Chris' bride of seven years and she was threatening to leave him with their baby daughter Maggie in tow if he didn't "pull it together" and work for her daddy.

"Should've told her to take a hike," he slurred under his breath, reaching for his flask once more. Becky was a nag, it was true, but...

Beats being alone. He took another sip.

Some of the boys wanted to celebrate with him tonight. To toast the breaking up of their fellowship and the beginning of a new life for their ole pal Chris Hastings in Chicago. But over the weekend, Mr. Phelps' other driver called in sick for Monday's shift and, while Friday was supposed to have been Chris' last day, the old man offered him a crisp fifty dollar bill if he stayed on until Tuesday afternoon to help keep the garage afloat. Chris was hesitant at first, thinking of his friends guzzling it up and laughing about the good times, but when Becky started in on him again, reminding him how much packing he needed to do before they left, he decided to take Phelps up on the offer. He needed this. Not the money, though that was nice, but he needed one last moment of quiet to clear his head before he was permanently surrounded by Becky's family and the responsibilities of being a husband and father.

Things were getting so out of control at home. Becky was always on his case, badmouthing his friends and bemoaning the fact that, after a hard day's work, he just wanted to come home, flop in his recliner, and drink a few to wash away the burdens of the day. Now he had little Maggie to think about. He'd never wanted kids, at least, not with Becky. But Becky came from a family with five children, and her father, the old goat, kept going on and on about wanting more "grandbabies to spoil". Becky was the last of her siblings to not have children and, soon Chris heard of nothing else. The woman was hell-bent on spawning, and finally Chris relented in that, too, just like he did most things Becky nagged him about.

Maggie was a year old now; unsurprisingly she was a spitting image of Becky - barely out of the womb and the kid was more a part of the family than Chris himself ever felt. At first, Chris thought his life might settle down, now that Becky had her trophy baby to show around. But the baby came with a catch, one he should have

seen coming. Now that they had a child, Becky's family insisted she move back to Chicago. "I won't be a long-distance grandma," her mother complained. Becky was more than happy to return.

But do I have to come? Chris grumbled internally.

All of his friends were in Eureka, and so was Phelps Garage. It wasn't much of a life, as Becky never failed to point out, but it was one that Chris had carved out for himself and he was proud of it. Now he had to throw it away, all because of one night in the sack with Becky.

Monday's shift turned out pretty slow, giving Chris ample time to toast his shiny, new life all by himself. By nightfall, somewhere in the alcohol-addled process of his mind, he decided that, if this were his last night around these parts, he needed to go back home and say good-bye. Not to Eureka and Becky, though the idea of telling her "good-bye" and really meaning it this time was always a pleasurable one.

No, Chris needed to go back home to the place where he was raised. The place that always seemed to call him back when he tossed and turned in fitful sleep.

Haddonfield.

That's where everything started. Where his life became a prison and freedom became a golden, unobtainable dream. He flipped off the CB radio so that Mr. Phelps couldn't call in with more late-night tow jobs, commandeered the company truck, and set out for a nocturnal visit to his old stomping grounds.

Maybe, just maybe, he'd recapture a bit of that old freedom.



"Damnation! Damnation has come fer us all!"

Nurse Ethel Strickland hurried down the halls of Smith's Grove Sanitarium, feeling her fifty-eight years in her stiff knees, her carefully kept short red hair bobbing. A horrible storm warred outside like right out of one of those old Universal monster movies that scared her so much as a child, complete with dramatic lightning flashes, tumultuous thunderclaps, and sheets of unrelenting downpour. As the storm swirled overhead, imposing and violent, the patients of Smith's Grove scurried beneath its fury, like frightened subjects of a dread and terrible king.

"Armageddon is upon us, I tell ya! Satan has come fer his bastard son!"

Tonight, the halls of the sanitarium were filled with the deranged as patients recently – and most mysteriously – released wandered about laughing in their time of unexpected freedom. Alarm Klaxons blared from the speakers mounted at the ceiling and the unprepared staff desperately sought to contain the chaos, fighting against the tides of figures in white hospital gowns, to herd them back into their rooms.

Frazzled, Ethel pushed through the mob, trying to decide where to begin. She hastily checked her watch, noting that it was almost ten o'clock.

"Where are you, Bernardi?" she huffed to herself. Bernardi wasn't much good at anything else as a security guard, but he was good at handling the patients when they started getting loud and... well, she hated to use the word because it wasn't polite, but... "crazy".

And tonight the "madhouse" was just that.

Ethel reached the scraggly man in his mid-sixties, his salt and pepper hair resembling the imagined end result of sticking one's finger in a light socket, his grey whiskered features distorting as he released another apocalyptic proclamation, "He's loose! He's loose!" the old man raved. "I gotta save our souls from Damnation!"

Ethel steadied herself as she approached the raving patient before her and calmly responded as she'd been trained to do, "What is the matter, Mr. Sayer? Come on, it's time to get you back to your room." She looked at his brow – it was smeared with blood where he had apparently been banging his own head repeatedly against the wall of his cell.

Mr. Sayer, otherwise known as 'The Reverend', was a rambling old man, quoting scraps of scripture and spouting other kinds of doomsday prophecies, who was admitted to Smith's Grove after pleading guilty to a number of murders. Sayer, of course, believed he was striking those people down in accordance with God's will.

Normally, Ethel regarded Mr. Sayer as everyone else did, a disturbed religious zealot. Tonight, though, one night before Halloween, with the storm clamoring overhead and all the patients in Smith's Grove suddenly out of their rooms, his talk of "damnation" and "apocalypse" seemed all the more foreboding. Ethel pushed aside her superstitious trepidation and gingerly helped the old man toward his cell, her mind already drifting to the other three dozen patients in this immediate wing, hollering and clamoring about like chimpanzees freed from the zoo.

"The Beast is let loose out of the Pit!" Sayer proclaimed, spittle flying from his mouth. "Fer God's sake, let me go, woman!"

Ethel's face flushed as she struggled against his flailing frame. She'd paged Dr. Wynn as soon as the escape began, but in the meantime, she and the rest of the Smith's Grove skeleton crew did their best to calm the agitated patients.

"Please, Mr. Sayer, you have to control yourself. Doctor Wynn will be here shortly and you can discuss what's bothering you then—"

"It'll be too late, ya damned idiot!"

While Ethel worked to settle Mr. Sayer down, Dr. Loomis entered the building, Nurse Chambers accompanying him. "My God..." Marion gasped, staring dumbfounded at the anarchy in the halls. Ignoring her, Dr. Loomis approached Ethel, his eyes wild.

"What in God's name's happened?"

Ethel relaxed her grip on Mr. Sayer's arm, thankful to see someone of authority finally arriving to take charge of their nightmare.

"Oh, Doctor Loomis, thank God. It's *terrible*."

"Where's Wynn?"

"We're still trying to reach him," Ethel confessed, looking as though she were about to collapse from fatigue. "It's pandemonium in here. We're still trying to figure out what happened. They were just... everywhere all of a sudden."

Shaking her head furiously, still rattled from her run-in outside, Marion dug around in her pocket for a cigarette. After clamping it tight in her pursed lips, she worked at finding—"Damn!" she huffed, the stress taking its toll. "My matches are still in the car."

Automatically, Loomis brought out a lighter that he never used for himself, and lit Marion's cigarette. Normally he carried an old metal model that had been in his possession for well over thirty years, but that very same day it had ceased working – a trivial, yet ominous sign that things were amiss. The force of habit was strong so he carried a disposable instead.

She gratefully took a long, soothing drag, still shaking and unable to calm herself. Loomis was already turning back to Ethel. "I need a car, *immediately*. I have to get to Haddonfield, now."

"A car?" Ethel asked dumbly. "We... all of the hospital's cars are in the shop for a tune-up. It's that time of year, Doctor Loomis, you know that."

Loomis gripped his fist, angrily. “Yes,” he muttered madly to himself. “And you must have known that, too, didn’t you, Michael?” It seemed an unlikely coincidence, yet another fragment of fate that the boy had somehow contorted into his plans. The anger and the panic veiled his inner terror. He hoped that he would be able to convince the relevant authorities of Michael’s danger. *Chance would be a fine thing.* And chance, if it could be manipulated, was not on his side. No, if he couldn’t get assistance over the night, he would have to pursue Michael alone.

Alone on Halloween.

Ethel looked to Marion, who was vigorously smoking her cigarette, detached and absorbed in her own horror, then back to the eccentric psychiatrist. “Doctor, what’s the matter? I don’t understand.”

Marion, as if not even hearing Ethel, tugged on Loomis’ arm. “We can’t go after him tonight, Doctor. All these patients...we have to help get things back in order.”

Loomis regarded the bedlam around him for the first time, and said without the least bit of sincerity. “Of course.” Quickly he added, “We must call the police. Call Doctor Rogers.”

“Is it really that serious, Doctor?” Ethel asked, holding a hand to her chest.

Loomis nodded silently.

“What’s happening, Doctor Loomis?” Ethel pleaded. “Who could have done all of this?”

“He has come,” Mr. Sayer said knowingly, and Ethel jumped, forgetting he’d been in her charge all this time. “Damnation is among us.”

Loomis frowned, his eyes darkening. “Yes, Mr. Sayer. I’m afraid he *is*.”



Headlights illuminated the *Welcome to Haddonfield* sign and Chris felt a heavy weight settle in his stomach.

“Here we are,” he bellowed, then belched. “Home sweet home.”

The incessant rain pelted his car and the wipers on the old Phelps tow truck worked fervently to help Chris see. Though he hadn't set foot in Haddonfield in nearly ten years, the place looked exactly the same and brought about the same old feelings. Haddonfield always reminded him of one of those small towns in a postcard; a frozen picture of simple life tucked away safely, hidden from modern day evils. Oh sure, Haddonfield had its share of tragedies, but they were thankfully rare and easily forgotten by the community.

But there was one tragedy that Chris would never forget.

Shaking his head and taking another shot off his flask, he rounded the corner that housed Nichols Hardware Store. Chris harrumphed. "*Nichols?*" Whatever happened to *Stoddard's* Hardware Store?

Maybe some things do change, Chris thought gloomily, suddenly realizing that as much as he berated his hometown for never catching up with the times, now that changes had been made, he found himself missing the old familiarity. He supposed that was the paradox of growing up.

Abruptly Haddonfield felt alien to him, now, and he became a stranger. This wasn't his town anymore, no matter what golden-hued images he had of it. These were different people, with different lives, and he was no longer a part of them. No, he was shackled to Becky and her family, now, to his empty existence that would be settled tomorrow for him when he moved to his final resting place in Chicago. He hated Haddonfield in that moment. This was supposed to be his refuge tonight, a portal into the innocent past where he could escape the pressures of Today. But it seemed all those portals were closed and sealed, trapping him with his fate.

He drove on down the rain-soaked streets, the houses all-so familiar, but now strangely foreign. What had he hoped to accomplish by coming here, anyway? His parents moved back to Pontiac three years ago and he never had any other family in town. His life was in Eureka, not here. This was just another landmark on the boring roadmap of his life. A dead memory floating in the stagnant waters of his past.

This grim realization, this same "you can't go home again" sensation that the older generation always lamented, only confirmed Chris' deepest fears. Haddonfield had *never* been that bright spot of salvation he thought it was. Maybe it'd *always* been her.

Which meant he was doomed to his prison, never to be set free.



In the summer of 1958, Chris Hastings was thirteen years old and the new kid in town. His father, an electrician in Pontiac, took a new job in the neighboring town and uprooted the family to the picturesque streets of Haddonfield, Illinois. Chris was an only child who'd never had to share his life with anyone, and didn't have many people he considered "friends". He had a lot of people he thought of as "buddies", local boys he'd run around with and cause trouble, but he wasn't one to let people get close or to allow himself to get close to others.

When his father moved him to Haddonfield, he had no love lost for anyone left behind. Haddonfield was just another small Midwestern town, and despite the location change, the people seemed to remain exactly the same. The other boys in Chris' class were a lot like him; simple kids with simple, easily obtainable dreams. Most of them came from a long lineage of factory workers or farmers and didn't expect much more out of their own lives, Chris included. His father was a hard-working man, quiet and reclusive, with little more than his work and off-duty pals to share a few beers with. Chris stayed home alone with his mother on the nights his father went out drinking, and the boy longed to go with the old man. To sit in his presence, hear him tell stories, hear him laugh. Chris' father didn't laugh so much at home, as he spent most of his time asleep in his recliner. The man looked so weighed down and Chris worried it was his fault. He often blamed himself for his father having to work so hard and having the laughter stolen from his life.

In Haddonfield, Chris' father found a different job wiring houses, found a new bar to frequent, and laughed till midnight with the latest group of friends. Still he had that heavy look in his eyes, as if all joy were sapped from him the moment he walked through the door. Oh, Chris tried to play with his father, alright. As most thirteen year old boys do, he tried to play catch, toss the football, or just take a walk with the old man outside, but his father always refused. "Too tired", he'd say. "One day you'll understand."

Now Chris *did* understand. All too well.

With little to do at home, Chris took to the streets of Haddonfield, riding his bike, meeting the other boys, all the while unable to connect with them. Always with them, but never a part of them. It seemed to be his father's curse and one that he inherited. Alongside his new buddies, Chris got into trouble. Minor stuff like rolling houses, egging cars, or the occasional stolen pack of cigarettes. Nothing too terribly criminal, but liberating all the same to Chris and his friends who were otherwise imprisoned in the cage of mundane life.

Yet, on the first day of the new school year, when Chris entered the building for the first time with his summertime rabbleroxing buddies, he saw *her*. She was skinnier than a lot of the other girls, and hid behind a small stack of books pressed to her blouse. Her hair was long and dark and her eyes the color of almonds.

Sylvia Robinson.

Of course, Chris never told his friends about his crush on the girl or how his palms turned moist whenever he was in her general vicinity. In one moment of insanity, he'd almost thought to ask his father for advice on how to talk to a girl you liked, but his father stared numbly at the black and white television screen, shut off from the world, and the question was never voiced.

Chris kept his feelings to himself for the next five years and not much changed in that time. He still ran around with the same goof-off friends, their small town shenanigans never escalating past petty vandalism, though now they'd taken to drinking underneath the football bleachers late at night, lying to each other about the great things they'd do someday. Meanwhile, Sylvia grew in beauty, finally getting her breasts and, soon, all the boys took notice.

But, against all odds, when Chris finally mustered the guts – with a little help from a shot of Jack Daniels – and asked her out, she said “yes”. And she *smiled*. She actually smiled and Chris had never seen anything so bright or wonderful in all his life. Out of all the boys who vied for her attention at school, she actually chose Chris.

She saw something in him. She gave him a chance.

And I blew it.



Chris braced himself on the side of his parked tow truck and heaved out his supper on the side of the road, doing his best to avoid spattering upchuck on his dingy dark blue coveralls. He watched in mild fascination as the rain-created stream that ran along the gutter of the neighborhood street washed away his vomit. Feeling loads better, Chris wiped at his mouth with the back of his sleeve and stood straight on shaky legs, facing the house.

Sylvia's parents' house.

He had no idea who lived here now. Could still be Sylvia's parents for all he knew. Haddonfield wasn't his town anymore. Maybe it never was. Maybe Sylvia was the magic of this place for him, and whatever joy, whatever peace he ever thought he could find here, could only be found in her.

The bad weather intimidated the townspeople and kept them inside, locked in the warmth and comfort of their quiet neighborhoods. Distantly, like a memory from

another life, Chris realized he had a warm and comfortable home waiting on *him*. He could almost see Becky on the phone, with the receiver tucked between her chin and shoulder and her fists in perfect little balls, propped on her hips. No doubt she'd be calling his buddies, angry that he hadn't come home sooner to eat her immaculately prepared meal, finish packing, or spend more time with Maggie. *One of those*. That was the one thing he could count on with Becky: She never ran out of reasons for him to be in trouble. For a second he worried that maybe Mr. Phelps had called the cops on him for not turning up with the truck. The thought of upsetting Mr. Phelps or doing anything to cause his good-natured boss to lose faith in him made Chris' stomach nauseous all over again.

No doubt, Chris would drag himself in tomorrow morning, with his entire world perched on pedestals, glaring down at him and wagging accusing fingers while he was forced to explain his drunken romp down Memory Lane. And he'd give his best excuse, take whatever punishment they wanted to give... but that wouldn't change things. When it was all said and done, he'd still be locked in the car with his crying kid and his irritating missus, headed for the rest of his life hanging sheetrock for "the family".

Tonight, though... tonight he would be free, if only for one moment.

Stumbling back into the truck, he cranked the old engine and drove on, thoughts of Sylvia dancing in his clouded mind.



"What do you think?" Sylvia asked him in August of 1969.

He didn't have any words to describe it then and nine years later he still wouldn't.

She twirled about him, her shining white soon-to-be wedding dress pressed against her. Smiling. Always smiling.

Chris sat back against the edge of the couch in her parents' house, stunned.

"Well?" she asked, laughing nervously. "Is it ugly?"

"No, no!" Chris replied immediately, standing up and coming closer. "It's beautiful. You're beautiful."

Sylvia giggled, pleased, and carefully placed the dress back in its special box to await their wedding day in two months, a day Chris had looked forward to for what felt like a million years.

Chris and Sylvia dated for an entire six years before he asked her to marry him. Not that he was reluctant to. Oh no. Unlike when he'd later propose to Becky out of some innate need to give in to what the world expected of him, he'd known he wanted to marry Sylvia since they were thirteen. She was a beacon of light, breaking through the ordinary, promising a life of unexpected brilliance. He waited so long to propose because he wanted to save up some money first – wanted to give Sylvia the best he could possibly offer. She'd been patient, as she always was, but he knew that beneath her teasing that he'd "never get around to popping the question" she wanted to spend her life with *him* as badly as he wanted to spend it with her. When he finally asked her, the dam broke. They wept and kissed, and he wanted to make love, as they had before, but Sylvia told him "no", beaming with joy. She said that the next time she made love to him, she wanted him to be her husband.

Of course he obliged. He would have given Sylvia anything she wanted, would have waited a thousand years just to hear her laugh one time. But he wouldn't have to wait that long. Only two months. Just two more months.

Why didn't you?

After putting the dress away in her parents' downstairs closet, Sylvia hung her arms around Chris' neck, staring into his eyes with compassion and longing. "We're really doing it," she breathed, intoxicated with excitement.

"I know," he grinned down at her, in that one perfect moment in his life. So what if his father had never wanted him and only saw him as the reason he kept slaving away at work? So what if he never had any real friends who stood beside him? He had Sylvia, and everything was okay. "Hey, don't take this the wrong way, but isn't it unlucky to see the gown before the wedding?"

Sylvia threw back her long dark locks, caught in surprised laughter. "I think we're okay as long as I'm not in it."

"Okay, okay. I just don't want anything to jinx this, that's all."

Sylvia kissed him, deeply and powerfully. "*You don't have anything to worry about.*"



Chris drove on, tearing through the empty Haddonfield streets. The rain had died down now, the storm retreating against the dawn that was soon to come, or at least finding some other town to terrorize for the rest of the dark time hours.

Tears pooled in Chris' swollen eyes, and he fought against their distraction to see. Driving by the old places they used to haunt together, his memories of Sylvia replayed in his mind. As an observer, he watched the story of his time with Sylvia unfold... but as it drew to its inevitable conclusion, Chris found himself batting away the unwanted memories.

He came to Haddonfield to reach out to Sylvia, to brush his fingertips against the freedom that had eluded him for his entire life. But now this deceptively picturesque town had sprung its trap, catching him like a fly in a web.

Furiously, he drove for the city limits, desperate to get away from the memories pursuing him like baying hounds.

Go away! He shouted in his mind. Yet, the damage was done. He had stirred up the hornet's nest, and now the images wouldn't stop. Helplessly he wept and thought of the worst mistake he'd ever made.



Her name was Jenny Reeves. She was tall, lanky, and not at all attractive, with bulging eyes and long, stringy blonde hair. Added to that was the fact that she was one of the "River Folk" who lived along Haddonfield's Lost River. People in town talked about the River Folk like they were lepers when, in truth, they were just backward country folk, too steeped in their ways to join the rest of progressive civilization. Chris never had much to do with River Folk, but he understood their plight, as he, himself, never really fit in with the town, either.

He saw Jenny there, that night, at the Red Rabbit Lounge. It was two days before he and Sylvia were to be married, and he'd gone there with his old buddies, a sort of impromptu bachelor party. At one point in the evening, when they had more alcohol than blood coursing through their veins, his friends started taking pot-shots at Jenny, who quietly minded her business at the counter. Their small town prejudices got the better of them that night and they shouted names at her from across the bar, slurring their speech as they did so. Chris drunkenly stood to the lady's defense and even bought her a drink, just to prove no hard feelings. He'd taken it to her himself, apologizing for his friends and starting some small talk.

Three hours later, they were in the backseat of his Chevy out behind the club, naked and writhing together in animalistic desire.

Why did you do it?

Immediately after he finished, Chris threw Jenny out of the parked car, regarding her as everyone else had: an unwanted plague. But the damage was done.

“Get out!” he screamed in a fit of rage and shame.

Jenny gathered her things and took off, back into the club, her head hung low, her self-respect shattered. Chris cried in his car, banging his head on the steering wheel, suddenly very sober and realizing there was nothing he could do to erase the devastation he had just brought down upon his perfect life.

There was only one thing to do now. He had to tell Sylvia. He’d never be able to live with himself any other way. She’d hate him, he knew. She’d yell and curse and maybe even call off the wedding. But...

But maybe, once she cooled down, she’d realize how perfect they were together. How one night of irresponsible drinking shouldn’t ruin the best thing that had ever happened to either of them.

She’ll take me back... she will.



Haddonfield was an hour behind him, but Chris sped through the silent night as if the Devil were hot on his heels. He wept openly now, his vision blurry and his mustache wet. Once life-giving moments with Sylvia now pierced his heart like a thousand daggers. He wanted to go home, now. He could listen to Becky gripe at him, could hold his daughter and stare helplessly as she cried for needs he knew he could never understand or meet, he could gladly lock himself in his prison...

Just please stop following me! He begged.

But there was one last obstacle in the gauntlet, one more sentinel blocking his path to freedom.

The train tracks. God, why did I come this way? Why did I come back at all?

However, there was nowhere left to turn. He couldn’t go back to Haddonfield. Fate had intervened and fixed him to Highway 24, pulling him onward to his eventual destination.

It all comes back to the train tracks.



Nine years ago, Chris Hastings drove down that same stretch of pavement on Highway 24, desperation in his eyes. Hours earlier, in a tear-stained confession, he'd laid himself bare before Sylvia and held nothing back. Falling on his knees, he clung to her waist, as if drowning at sea. As he wept, though, Sylvia did nothing. The smile seemed permanently erased from her face, the magnificent light forever snuffed out of her eyes. She only stood there, blank-faced and white. A ghost.

When he finished, after the pleas for forgiveness, the promises that he'd never do anything like that again... she only turned her back on him and walked up the stairs, softly closing the door to her room, shutting him out of her life.

That night, as he lay on his bed in his dark house, staring into nothingness and beginning to feel the first bars of his jail cell slinking up out of the ground and surrounding him, he received a phone call.

It was Sylvia.

"Where are you?" he asked, sitting up in a flash.

She was sobbing. "At a... at a phone booth. I went for a drive... I don't know where I am... I'm about an hour outside of town on Highway 24. There's a sign for a Factory Outlet Store..."

"Don't move. I'm coming to get you."

Her crying intensified. "Why did you do it, Chris...? Why...?"

His heart broke and his voice followed suit. "We'll talk it about it later. Just let me come to you."

A pause, then. "Alright. I'll wait for you."

Click.

Chris lit out of his house, hopped in his Chevy, and floored the gas. Less than an hour later, his headlights caught sight of Sylvia's car parked next to a phone booth at a deserted intersection, the driver's side door gaping open.

"No..." he breathed, fearing the worst.

He screeched to a halt on the side of the road, kicking up dust and loose gravel, and raced for the car. Looking inside, he saw no one. Sylvia wasn't there.

"Sylvia!" he shouted into the starless night. "Where are you?"

"I'm here, Chris," a voice loudly called back in the distance.

Startled, he turned around and saw her. She wore her white wedding gown, the bride he'd never have.

"Sylvia," he breathed, relieved. "What are you -?"

Sylvia staggered along the railroad tracks, dangling a half-empty bottle of Scotch in her hand. Her face was numb with grief, her eyes vacant and staring.

"You..." she fought for the words, drunk. "You broke my heart, Chris..."

Down the tracks, Chris heard the sound of the train's whistle.

"Oh, God... Sylvia, get down from there!"

But she only swayed back and forth, shaking her head. "I gave all of me to you and you..."

He started walking faster to get to her, all the way calling out, "Sylvia, come down. Come on, stop fooling around."

She did not listen. Maybe she didn't hear him at all. "I loved you...you know that?"

"I know, sweetheart. You have to come back."

The train sped faster, and Sylvia turned her back to it, her mind filled with nothing but pain. Chris ran for her, then, ready to die if only he'd last long enough to push her out of the way.

"Why did you do it, Chris...?" she mumbled, but he could not hear. He raced after her, screaming and crying, pleading with her to come away from the tracks. When she didn't budge, he knew he would have to tackle her to save her in time, but he could do it. The train was close, but he had just enough time to -

Trip. He tripped.

Now there was only one last awful second to look up and scream himself hoarse as Sylvia took a final swig of her Scotch and was bloodily obliterated by the speeding train. In a fast-forward explosion of red and white, her body contorted as bones were wrenched through flesh and her beauty was yanked beneath the weight of unstoppable iron.

A horrible mess that had stolen Sylvia's place now covered the tracks and a torn fragment of white cloth blew in the wake of the train.

The light was gone. The bars solidified around him, binding him in darkness and cold.



"Becky?" he blubbered, standing in the same phone booth where Sylvia called him to her death so many years ago.

"Where have you been?" she shouted angrily. Not worried. Never worried or concerned or loving or understanding. "Do you know what time it is? Jim Phelps has been calling here for hours! He thought you might have been in a wreck, but I told him you probably just stole his truck to go have a night out on the town! Did you? Are you drunk?"

Chris leaned his throbbing head against the glass pane of the booth, broken and defeated, with Becky's barking ringing in his deaf ears. "I'll be home, soon, honey," he responded hollowly. "Kiss Maggie for me. Tell her daddy loves her."

Becky continued to nip at him, but he no longer cared. He hung the phone back on the receiver and slumped in the booth, rubbing his face with his rough, worn hands, the last vestiges of his past finally relinquishing their torment on his soul, leaving him empty inside.

He was free of one prison, now, but only to enter into another.

"Chicago," he chuckled to himself, the rain suddenly returning outside, pattering softly against the glass, as though it were following him. "Here I come, ole Windy City. Better prepare yourself for another inmate."

He laughed the laugh of a fool who had lost everything and no longer had the energy to care. Trying to will himself sober but failing miserably, he meandered to his red tow truck, briefly catching something out of the corner of his eye. He looked into the rain but saw nothing.

He turned to the railroad tracks a final time. Two lines, veins of inevitability welded into dirt, their direction forever fixed. *Just like us, Sylvia.* In the distance, another train pierced the drape of raining darkness. It was here again, just as it had always been, this spectre of death that would flow down those veins again and again and again.

This time it felt different and the rain seemed almost warm as it painted his skin. As the metal beast passed by, he felt something behind him; a presence, the same one sensed a moment before. He turned to see a figure in white.

Blissful tears welled up in Chris' eyes. "Sylvia?"

The shape came toward him, white gown softly billowing in the breeze, with arms outstretched. Chris dropped to his knees, as if in worship, spreading his arms out, ready to be embraced.

"You waited for me..." he gasped in exultation.

She had forgiven him. He *knew* she would. She just needed time by herself for awhile. Just needed to be reminded of how much she loved him and how perfect they were together.

He closed his eyes in sweet ecstasy, her warm touch wrapping around his neck, and felt the cold darkness give way to bright, wonderful light as the bars of his prison melted away, setting him free.

Free.



On the morning of October 31, 1978, after a long night of dealing with sanitarium politics, Doctor Sam Loomis pulled his car off Highway 24 at a simple phone booth standing erect at an intersection. As far as could be determined, all of the patients of Smith's Grove had been recollectd. His friend and fellow doctor, Terence Wynn had apparently lost a patient but that didn't concern him. There was only one person – one *thing* on his mind.

Michael Myers.

Finally giving up on the local authorities or Smith's Grove administrators to do anything productive, Loomis set out on his own, chasing a trail of breadcrumbs that he hoped would lead him to the witch's house. Here, on Highway 24, he found another crumb.

His telephone call proved to be fruitless, which wasn't surprising at all. However, pushed off in the bushes was an old red tow truck with the words PHELPS GARAGE hand-painted on the side. The door was open, and lying on the ground were Marion's missing matches.

Of all the places he had to stop, it would be here, a place where the monster had passed by. The matches may well have been deliberate, as if his silent foe was already mocking him with glimpses of the pre-ordained night that was about to unfold. He spotted the standard white hospital gown of Smith's Grove Sanitarium strewn about, tangled in the foliage.

So you've shed one skin, Michael. What form will you take now? What will you dress up as for Halloween?

If Loomis had looked further, he would have found clarification – not that it was necessary. A few feet away, a young man's corpse laid face-up in the brush. Its clothes had been removed, and savage bruises decorated its neck and chest. Blood had trickled from its mouth, coagulating in its facial hair and blackening as the trail merged into the grass. It was clear that no real effort was made to hide the body. It was merely discarded without care or concern – no longer a person, just a dead thing.

If Loomis had found the corpse, it wouldn't have been this way. He would have wondered what the man's name was and if he had a family or lived a rich life. Loomis would have hoped that he had on both accounts.

As he resumed his journey, his real, actual thoughts followed a similar theme. He hoped that everyone in Haddonfield had lived their lives to the fullest, that they had known the pleasures of love and the thousand joys of being alive. He smiled mournfully and prayed that they were enjoying their time reveling in the light, because in his heart he knew it was about to go out.



COMING SOON:

“He traveled along many roads, but nobody knew his name or where he came from. Along the way, he found them. The disenfranchised, the lonely and the damned. Broken people looking for something to believe in. He gathered them as his flock...

...and they all bore his mark.”



HALLOWEEN

THE MARK OF THORN

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