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One

Wylie Westerhouse Boston, Massachusetts

I had been inside of my parents' house in Boston for less than an hour. Legally, it's now just my Mom's house, but my dad is staying there. Dad's second wife asked him to leave. Her first husband and father to their six kids came home one day—like the Prodigal Son.

I know. It's confusing.

Anyway, I had been there less than an hour, and things were already going nuts. This happens to me a lot since I met Holly McFadden. She has changed my life in a huge way. That is not just some colorful language, because, you see, Holly McFadden sees ghosts. And because of her—

So do I.

I am in love with Holly McFadden. I love holding her hand and putting my arms around her. I love her unbridled laugh and her thick Scottish accent. I love her energy and her feisty nature. I love the smell of her hair, and her skin that glows like no one's skin that I've ever seen. I love that when we touch, a magic passes between us, unlike anything I've ever known.

I didn't hear the front door open, or my mother and Aunt Jessie come to the door of the den.

They stared at my father, who was standing in the middle of the room with his arms around himself. He was sobbing loudly.

"Johnny?" my mother whispered as she moved quickly toward him. I jumped in to block her and Jessie's view of my dad.

"No, Mom. Not yet. I need to explain something first."

Mom grabbed my arm and tried to move me out of her way.

"What are you—? What's the matter with your father? *Johnny?*"

What my mother and Jessie could not see was that my dad had his arms around my brother, Duncan.

Duncan Spiderman Westerhouse died in this very room; ten years ago.

They also could not see that in the midst of my father's tears, he was laughing.

"*Duncan is here,*" Jessie whispered. She teetered on wobbly legs.

My mother was terrified. She pushed away from me and put her arm around Jessie's shoulder.

"Oh, *Jessie,*" Mom pushed a lock of hair away from her sister's eyes.

"Come. Let's sit down."

Jessie wouldn't move. Her glazed expression cleared. She looked straight into my eyes.

"Wylie brought him. There's something...*different* about him *Look* at him, Patty."

My mother looked weary.

"Please, Jessie."

"*Look at him!*" Jessie said sternly.

Mom looked shocked. Jessie didn't talk to anyone like that—especially *her*.

"I told you that something *very special* was going to happen to this boy," Jessie said. "I told you that before he could even *talk*."

"I remember, Jessie," Mom whispered. She pulled on Jessie again—trying to steer her to the sofa.

"I remember what you said. And then you had the operation and you stopped having all those strange dreams. You *also* stopped having all of those horrible headaches. *Please* sit down, Jessie. You must be very tired."

"She's telling the truth, Mom," I said.

I saw anger flash across Mom's face. She turned her attention back to Jessie. She was obviously worried about Jessie's mental state.

"Wylie," Mom whispered. She closed her eyes. "That isn't helping me."

"Jessie is telling the truth."

"What are you *talking* about?" Mom snapped.

"This may not be the right thing to do, but I'm doing it anyway. Aunt Jessie,

I need for you to be strong.”

Jessie pushed my mother’s hand away.

“I feel stronger today than I have in a long, long, time,” she said.

I held my hands out to them.

“I hope so.”

Two

Tara Jamison
London, England

Tara Jamison lagged behind the rest of her classmates. As always, they divided themselves into their respective cliques. The giggling pretty girls led the pack. The sexually frustrated athletic boys vied for the girls' attention by roughhousing with each other.

If Tara identified with any of the students, it would be the small group of bookish nerds. They were the only ones excited about that day's field trip to the London Zoo.

Tara found herself friendless again after her father's eleventh military transfer. She was accustomed to being ignored, teased, and even bullied by her fellow students. No one ever trusted "the new girl".

Tara's longest stint at any school had come just two years ago in Prague, Czechoslovakia. That was where she made her last real friends. An intelligent and witty pair of twin sisters lived just down the lane and attended the same school. Tara was devastated when her family had to move away again.

She gave up.

Since relocating to London, one or two girls had made an effort to be nice to her. Tara distanced herself from them.

"Hurry it along, Miss Jamison," one of the class chaperones prodded her. "If you are separated from the other students, you could be left behind. What a scary place this would be at night—all alone with wild animals."

"I think I would prefer that to this," Tara said.

"I beg your pardon, Miss? What was that, Miss Jamison?"

"Nothing."

"Nothin, *Ma'am*, if you please."

Tara hurried to catch up with her classmates while pretending not to hear.

Tara caught up with the others outside of a large cage with a tree in its center. Several ropes hung from the ceiling along with two tire swings. The cage was home to twenty monkeys. Half of these were either eating or lounging while the others swung from ropes or tree branches. A solitary monkey stood alone in a bare corner.

“What do you suppose is wrong with *that* one?” a girl asked. She giggled and pointed.

“That must be the *new girl!*” the tallest of the boys said loudly. The children laughed. Even the two adult chaperones could not hide their smiles.

The tall boy’s name was Cedric Johnson. Cedric was quick to make fun of Tara because it made his friends laugh. That was not the only reason that Cedric paid attention to Tara. In spite of her awkwardness and lack of social standing, Tara was very pretty.

On every occasion that Cedric teased Tara in front of their classmates, his eyes lingered on her. This left Tara confused and more than a little afraid.

“Look! Bears!” cried one of the boys. The children ran to the barrier fence in front of the Black Bear enclosure, which was just past the monkey cage.

“Roar!”

Some of the boys leaned over the railing and shouted down at the two bears in their sunken habitat. Some of the girls joined in with their own noise-making. The bears remained passive. They looked bored.

Splat!

Two girls screamed when something warm and wet bounced off of their bare arms. These girls were standing the closest to Tara. The girls looked up and saw one of the monkeys clinging to the cage behind them. He chattered and gnashed his teeth. One of his arms extended through the bars.

The girls cried out in disgust when they realized what had hit them.

But the majority of it hit Tara Jamison on the back of her head.

Monkey dung.

The other children laughed hysterically for about three seconds.
What happened next was something that Tara would barely remember.
What happened next was something that Tara's classmates would never forget.

In fact, it would haunt their every waking hour.
For some, it would haunt their dreams.

The laughing children did not hear Cedric when he began to yell.

"Hey! *HEY!*"

They did not notice that Cedric's feet were no longer touching the ground.
No one paid Cedric any attention until his body tilted toward horizontal.
He floated over the railing—over the railing and above two fully-grown black bears.

Cedric's confusion turned into terror. He kicked his feet, his arms became windmills, and his screams filled the air. His screams were joined by those of the other children.

Cedric's cell phone slipped from his pocket and hit the floor of the bears' enclosure. It shattered. The sound brought the bears to their feet. Cedric's wallet fell and bounced off of a bear's head. The bear gripped the wallet in its jaws and shook its head back and forth. Bits of leather and plastic and pieces of currency filled the air.

The huddled children were terrified but unable to look away. As they pushed against each other, one of the girls lost her balance. She fell hard on her backside. She was facing *away* from the bears—and directly *at* Tara Jamison. The girl screamed.

Tara's eyes rolled up in the back of her head. Her entire body glowed with heat from an unknown source. The monkey dung slid from her hair and landed on the concrete with a sizzle and a wisp of smoke. Tara's hands were at her side but held away from her body. Her fingers were splayed and trembling.

The screaming brought people running from every direction. A man with a video camera recorded the entire event. Seconds after he pointed his camera at Tara, a teen-aged boy fell against his side. The man lost his grip on the camera and it clattered to the ground. The lens shattered against the concrete.

In an instant, Tara returned to normal. Her head lolled on her shoulders. In that same instant—Cedric Johnson fell to the floor between two angry black bears.

The fall broke Cedric's collarbone. He rolled onto his side, screaming. One of the bears roared and raised a huge paw. Cedric covered his head with his hands just before the bear struck the top of his head. Cedric's head hit the floor face-first—breaking out two of his teeth. The bear's claw tore out a patch of Cedric's hair along with a patch of his scalp.

Two policemen sliced their way through the crowd. A zoo employee hurried behind them, carrying a rifle loaded with a tranquilizer dart. One of the policemen drew his pistol and fired it once into the air.

The bears retreated to their cave.

The policemen and three zoo employees entered the exhibit and carried Cedric to safety. Paramedics arrived. They quickly checked out Cedric's injuries and hurried him to an ambulance.

The police, zoo employees, and several other adults hugged and comforted the children. The screaming subsided and turned into sounds of anguish and weeping. A wash of different voices buzzed from dozens of people who had no idea what had just happened.

A solitary scream sounded and quieted the crowd.

A trembling girl pointed at Tara.

"It was her! I saw her! She did it! She did this to Cedric! She's a....she's a witch!"

More police arrived. Two officers escorted the screaming girl away. Everyone in the crowd stared at Tara. All they saw was a pretty little girl who was not acting hysterically at all—unlike the other children.

Those same people thought differently four hours later—when the video went live on the internet.

The video captured Tara Jamison from a considerable distance. She appeared for only a few brief seconds. But there was no mistaking that something unusual had occurred.

An aura of light surrounded Tara's head. Her hair stood out from her head. Visible bursts of electricity crackled around her. The whites of her eyes blazed with energy.

The video popped up on the internet, but each copy disappeared after pressure came from a powerful and unknown source.

But it was too little, too late. Duplicates appeared and the video resurfaced like tiny grass fires. Some of the parents of the children from the field trip were able to view the video before they were all eliminated.

The following morning, Tara turned down the hallway to her first class. Four school faculty members blocked her way. They escorted Tara to the office.

"What is this about?" Tara asked.

"Your parents will join us shortly, Miss Jamison," an administrator answered. "I'm afraid that there are some concerns about the incident during Friday's field trip."

"What does that have to do with me?"

The three men and one woman looked to each other for support but found none.

"Let's just wait until your parents arrive, dear," the woman said. "I believe we can clear up this matter without much ado."

Anger flashed across Tara's face.

"I had *nothing to do* with what happened!"

A large framed picture of a championship football team fell from the wall. The glass shattered and the frame broke into pieces.

The four school officials jumped. They stepped away from Tara.

"Y-y-your parents should be arriving any moment," the woman struggled to say.

It was early in the day, but Tara's school day was over. She stared out of the back window of her parents' car.

Robert and Emily Jamison had little to say. They also had little to say when

the school administrators issued them an ultimatum. Due to pressure from concerned parents, Tara would not be allowed to return to school until she received a psychiatric evaluation.

“Tara,” Robert began,

“You don’t have to say it. We’re moving again.”

Robert looked at Tara in the rear-view mirror.

“Not this time, Baby.”

“You’re *not* going to allow them to blame *me* for what happened!” Tara shrieked.

“They’re not *blaming* you,” Emily said. “They are only asking—”

“They’re not *asking anything!* They think I’m *insane!*”

“They have a school full of children to think about, Tara,” Robert said.

“Why can’t we just *leave*? We certainly have no problem jumping whenever the *army* says so!”

“It’s not the same thing, Honey,” Emily said.

“You’re right, Mother. And you won’t have to worry about moving me again.”

“What are you talking about?” Robert asked.

Tara stared out of the window again.

“They’re going to put me away.”

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