

Ms. Jeffers
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647 Words

CRUNCH

Crunch. Crunch.

Smashing the fallen leaves on the gravel path, my shoes trampled on through the night, so dark I felt I was walking through black ink. An icy breeze bit at my cheeks as I examined my phone. The battery icon was red. Four percent. I had to find Andrew.

"I give up!" I yelled. "Everyone else left. You're the king of ghost in the graveyard!" I hoped this would stroke his ego enough that he would emerge, laughing wildly and explaining how we walked by him at least three times. My brother was the master of hiding in plain sight.

But my words were met with silence. Complete silence. With the exception of the angry wind.

I continued on the path.

Crunch. Crunch.

The trees seemed to stretch deeper and deeper into the cloudy sky. Their branches, like the knotted fingers of an old man, scraped at the fog, but the mist hovered above, dripping down to the forest floor like an octopus, wrapping its tendrils along the rough stumps. Rustling the brittle leaves, the wind scratched my cheeks and gnawed at the tip of my nose. Ahead, I watched the road, a winding, venomous snake, curve out of sight and jut deeper into the thick woods.

"This isn't funny, man!" I yelled, trying to hide my frustration.

Nothing but silence answered my call.

Fishing my phone out once more, I decided I'd had enough. When it came to this activity, we took things seriously. There were many rules in order to preserve the sanctity of the game, and rule number one was that you were never to use Find My iPhone to cheat, but my brother had gone too far. It was dark and cold and everyone else had gone home, and I had had enough.

I stopped on the path, and unlocked my phone. Three percent. I opened the app. His phone was supposedly right near me. Straight ahead. Just a few feet.

"I know you're right here, loser!" I called.

Silence.

Turning my phone's flashlight on, I held it out, shining the phone into the blackness, and that's when, down the path about 20 feet, I saw the shadowy outline of a figure.

Barely visible from the glow of the phone was something that seemed the size of the trees that surrounded it. Its head looked oddly stretched, and its long arms hung motionless at its sides. Like razor blades, spindly fingers protruded from the figure's endless limbs. And it just stood there. Unmoving. Staring back at me.

Shaking slightly, my hand slipped and my phone fell to the ground. It took but a few seconds for me to find it on the stones, but when I held it out to illuminate the path once more, there was nothing there.

No figure. Just darkness.

Maybe it was the shadow of a tree, I thought, pushing any other impossible ideas out of my mind, but then...

Crunch.

A footstep behind me.

"Who's there?" I yelled, whirling around and pressing my phone into the night.

The outline. Shadowy. Tall. Sharp. Closer. Fifteen feet away.

My hand shook, but I made sure not to lose a grip on the phone this time. The figure didn't move. Its neck was stiff, and its limbs still. *Maybe it is just a shadow*, I thought, but in that moment its long fingers began to curl, and I felt a sharp scratch on the back of my neck.

Flailing my arms and ready to fight, I whipped around as my heart beat drums inside my heaving chest.

A hanging tree branch.

It was just a tree branch. I had backed into it.

I turned back, shined my phone into the darkness where the figure had been moments before, but there was nothing there. I was alone again.

But then I felt a presence behind me.

My phone died.

Crunch.