

As Kailey and I got ready, we sang to the Paramore song that came from the stereo. Kailey didn't have to do much to look beautiful. She had auburn hair and bright blue eyes. Her fair skin contrasted well with the dark freckles that sprinkled across her cheeks. I sat at my vanity with my hair in curlers and completed my makeup. Kailey sat on my bed and talked my ear off, which was typical for her. My bedroom lights were bright compared to the dark clouds that covered the sky outside of my window. The rain outside was so loud I could barely make out the words to the song.

"Royce should be here in a couple of minutes," I said.

I grabbed my costume off the hanger and draped the Hogwarts robe over my green sweater and jeans. I was a proud Slytherin, Kailey a witty Ravenclaw, and my boyfriend Royce was a loyal Hufflepuff.

"I can't believe Royce is taking us to the famous haunted house on Elm Street," Kailey said. "Nobody can ever get a reservation there on Halloween."

She slipped into her robe and we both officially looked like Hogwarts students.

I laughed. "I'm sure you both will have a great time. On the other hand, I will have a hard time not shitting my pants."

Kailey and I laughed and slipped our shoes on. Someone knocked on the front door. I opened it to Royce's bright eyes and big smile.

"Happy Halloween, gorgeous," he said.

He leaned in and kissed my cheek. He carried a bouquet of beautiful blue flowers. I took them from him and walked over to my kitchen table so I could put them in a vase.

Royce wore his matching Hogwarts robe over his yellow sweater. He and Kailey giggled behind me. It was a privilege to have two best friends who loved each other as much as I loved them.

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We stood outside the haunted house in the cold air, and sprinkles spattered our clothes. It wasn't raining hard, but the ground was wet enough to leave our shoes covered in mud.

Thick layers of trees and fog surrounded the haunted house and made it hard to see. In the distance, the screams from the kids running out of the house in fear sounded faint. As we got closer to the front of the line, the clanking of machines and whirring of chainsaws joined in.

"How does this place take reservations and there's still a line?" I asked.

"They only allow a small amount of people to go in at once," Kailey said. "That's so it doesn't become overcrowded, and people don't get hurt."

I shivered in fear. More goose bumps covered my body with every step we took toward the entrance.

"Are the scare actors allowed to touch you?" I asked. "If they are, I might have to stay outside and let you guys do this one alone."

"No, they're not allowed to touch you," Royce said. "If they touch you, they can get fired."

As we crept toward the entrance, the screams grew louder, and the fog got thicker.

"How are you guys feeling?" Royce asked. "I know today is probably hard for both of you."

My heartrate quickened. For a moment, I had forgotten what day it was. I had forgotten its significance.

"I'm okay," Kailey said. "I miss her. It's easier because I'm distracted, and I know that she would want me to have fun."

As I spoke, my voice cracked. "Teigen and I were friends since we were five. It's never going to be easy. Last night I had a nightmare, and it was like it was happening all over again. She lay there in the park with the knife sticking out of her chest. I will never get that image out of my head."

The air went quiet except for the rasp of my own breathing. Before either of them answered, we reached the front of the line. The employee at the entrance wore a zombie costume and was likely the least scary employee at the house. He pointed to Kailey and me with a smile on his face.

"All right, you two can go in next," he said. "If you run into trouble, find an employee. We all wear these stickers on our chest."

The employee pointed at his sticker on his chest. It was just a bright yellow sticker with the haunted house logo. It was easy to see in the dark, which eased my nerves the smallest amount.

I nodded and grabbed Royce's arm. "Okay, but we made reservations for three. We're together."

The employee pointed to the sign next to his head that read *Two guests at a time. NO EXCEPTIONS.*

My shoulders tensed, and any relief I had felt before had disappeared.

"Um, okay," I said. "Royce, just make sure you're behind me and Kailey."

Royce gave me a thumbs up, and we crossed the threshold into the

haunted house. Fog filled the air, and around every corner a scare actor jumped into the path. Screams, chainsaws, and music filled the air and made it hard to fully grasp what was going on around me.

Kailey and I linked arms, and I held on tight. She had a great time, and she laughed at the actors who came at us with fake weapons. As actors popped out at my feet and into my personal space, I contributed to the screaming.

For a moment, some of the screams around us turned into true terror. I stopped and looked around frantically.

“What the hell is going on?” I asked.

Kailey shrugged. “Don’t worry. I’m sure they’re just young girls. We’re almost to the end.”

We continued through the house. Everything appeared normal, so I relaxed. As we turned a corner, a few people behind us screamed and sprinted for their lives. I looked at Kailey and her eyes were wide. We held on to each other and sprinted toward the exit.

“Royce!” I screamed. “Royce, where are you?”

I stopped for one second, just to see if I could find Royce. Instead, a person in a mask with a knife in their hand walked toward us. They didn’t scream with fear. Their demeanor was composed and calculated.

The person’s clothes were completely clean, and when I looked at their chest there was no sticker. I screamed and pulled Kailey’s arm.

We ran for our lives, and once we were out of the house, we continued to run. When we finally stopped, we were surrounded by trees, but the man in the mask was nowhere in sight. The rain was coming down harder and our clothes

were soaked.

I screamed and hoped Royce could hear me. "Royce? Are you there?"

Royce ran through the trees toward us.

"Thank God!" he said. I was worried something happened to you guys."

"What happened?" Kailey asked.

Royce shook his head. "I have no idea. Once everyone ran out, I figured it was in my best interest to run too. Someone said that they saw a man stab someone with a knife."

We sat there silently. My gaze drifted toward a log on the ground a few yards away from us. I noticed a shadowy figure in the mud. I squinted to try and make out what it was. The moonlight glistened off something shiny. As my eyes focused, I realized I was looking at a body.

"Ashlyn, are you okay?" Royce asked me, but everything was so distant. I had to be dreaming. This couldn't be real. There was no way this was happening to me again.

"There's a body," I cried. "Over there next to that log. She has a knife right through her chest. Just like her."

I fell to my knees with my head in my hands. Royce's arms wrapped around me and lifted me off the ground. Kailey talked frantically on her phone and explained what happened.

My eyes were closed, and I continued to sob. Royce held me tight, and he walked me away from the body. The rain hit me hard, and as the cold wind blew through my wet hair, I shivered.

Sirens filled the air, along with the red and blue lights of the emergency

vehicles. They came to help, but I knew they wouldn't succeed. The same way they failed when they tried to find Teigen's killer. If I wanted an answer, I was going to have to figure it out myself.