

The Painting

Jackie never wanted to move to the small town of Wormwood, but it was the only place that had offered a nursing job to her mom. So here she was, standing in front of the oldest, most hideous house she had ever seen

“Well, it could use some work but I think it's sweet!” said her mom.

“Mom, most of the windows are boarded up and half the front deck is gone,” Jackie pointed out

“I never said it was perfect!” replied her mom, walking through the slightly crooked door. Jackie was about to follow her when a voice said, “You’ll die in there.”

Jackie turned around to see a girl about her age standing across the street. She was about Jackie's height and had black hair that fell down to her waist. She was wearing black ripped jeans and a black t-shirt with the word Nirvana written across the front. Jackie also noted that her nose was pierced twice.

“Well that's a pleasant thought” Jackie said, thinking that this must be the town nut and hurrying into the house behind her mom.

“Look how big this is!” her mom said, walking into the kitchen.

“Look how big *that* is” said Jackie, watching a spider scuttle into the shadows.

“Imagine this when it's renovated!” her mom said, looking at the sad kitchen.

“Imagine how many mice are in here,” muttered Jackie.

“To the dining room!” her mom said.

“Can't wait” Jackie said, following her mom.

The ‘tour’ of the main floor lasted about twenty minutes, her mom went through every dark cupboard and closet, then she ran up the stairs to the bedrooms. There were three bedrooms in all, the biggest belonged to her mom and the one down the hall was going to be the guest bedroom.

“It can be where your friends stay when they sleepover!” her mom said.

“I don't have any friends in Wormwood, remember?” Jackie said.

“And this is your room!” her mom said, ignoring her friends comment.

Jackie stopped dead, this was the first room that she had seen that was clean, there wasn't even a speck of dust on the huge master bed or the dresser. The thing in the room that took up most of Jackie's attention, though, was a painting of a girl. It was about the size of a computer monitor and had been hung on the wall beside the bed. The wooden frame around it dark and was carved with ornate swirls. The girl in the painting was smiling and had golden locks, rosey cheeks, and was dressed in an old-fashioned frilly white dress. She was standing outside the house, back when the windows were all intact and the deck hadn't collapsed. The

part that freaked her out the most about the painting was that the girl's eyes were black, not just the pupil, but the whole eye was completely black.

"Believe it or not, the former owner left that painting behind, I found it wrapped up in the basement. Isn't it cool?" her mom said.

"Sure, if you're into terrifying, possibly demonic works of art, then yeah, it's cool."

"I'll leave you here to unpack and I'll order supper!"

Once her mom left, Jackie walked over to the painting, took it off the wall, and looked around for somewhere to hide it. That's when she noticed a small door, about the size of a microwave and about waist high, on the opposite wall. She slid the door open and found it was a cubby with a little rope hanging in it. She shoved the painting inside and tugged on the rope. The cubby immediately started down, revealing a dark tunnel that went down to the bottom floor, kind of like a miniature elevator. As she slowly lowered the box, she could almost swear the little girl's happy expression turned to a death glare as the painting disappeared into the darkness.

One week later

"Ok Jackie, my phone number is on the table and then there's the hospital's number if anything goes wrong. If you going out, text me and let me know," her mom said rushing out the door. "Wish me luck on my first nightshift!" she called

"Good luck mom!" Jackie said shutting the door. She slowly walked through the house eating her pizza, looking at the half painted walls, cobwebs, and boarded up windows. In the living room a broken down, old fashioned TV had been stuffed in one corner and it looked like some kind of wild animal had been living in the fireplace at some point.

When she strolled back into her room, finishing off the last bit of crust, she just about fell down. The painting was up again, she had nearly forgotten about it over the past week.

"Okay, that's super-duper weird," she said, taking it down and leaning it up against a wall out in the hall. "But it is possible that mom put it back up before she left."

Then she desperately tried to ignore the fact that it was out there. Blasting some of her favourite songs helped, so did unpacking the remaining boxes in her room.

She'd almost completely forgotten about it when she noticed the corner of a notebook sticking out from under her dresser.

She pulled it out and turned it over in her hands. The outside was soft brown leather, while the pages inside were yellow and wrinkled, as though they'd gotten wet at some point in the distant past.

"I probably shouldn't do this," she said, but opened it anyway.

It was clearly a diary. Every two or three pages there was a date written at the top, and Jackie was amazed to see that each one included the year, 1937. Jackie read the first entry

June 20, 1937

We've moved into the most incredible house! I can't believe my luck! We even have a dumbwaiter that looks great for playing hide and seek! I never want to leave here!

Jackie was amazed! This was probably the diary of the first person to live here. She wondered, *How much would a museum pay for this?* She flipped until there wasn't anymore writing then read the last entry.

August 14th, 1937

I'm going swimming at the lake today! I can't go too deep though because nobody has taken the time to teach me to swim properly! Perhaps, I'll ask Todd to teach me! He seems to know what he's doing.

Jackie had no idea why the person writing the diary would stop so suddenly, unless something had happened to them that prevented them from writing more. Overtaken by curiosity, she pulled out her laptop and tried to search up the date, only to be greeted with the No WiFi symbol.

"We've been living in this house for a week and still no wifi!?" She said to no one in particular.

"I mean come on! Its 2018!" she said, getting up, stuffing the laptop back in its case, and then slinging the case over her shoulder. She looked out her window, there was still enough daylight left for her to run into town and find somewhere with free wifi.

She ran out of her room and past the painting, taking no notice to the fact that the little girl was no longer standing in front of the house.

Jackie stopped at the first cafe she saw with the word **Free wifi** in the window.

"Hello, what can I get you?" asked a blonde lady from behind the counter.

"I think --," Jackie started, but the barista cut her off.

"I'll let you know that our iced coffee is the number one choice of customers," she said, and Jackie thought looked like she'd had too much of the iced coffee.

"I'll just have some tap water, thanks," Jackie said.

Once she got the water she sat down at a table in the corner of the cafe and connected to the wifi. She searched up the date that had been at the top of the page of the diary and the first thing to come up was a picture of an old news story from the date August 20th, 1937 that read:

Girl drowns in Wormwood Lake

The girl, whose name cannot be revealed at this time, was swimming with some other youths at the time of her death.

The police, who have not found any evidence of foul play, say that it was a mere accident and that they have been informed that the girl had no experience swimming.

"Sad, isn't it?" said a voice, and Jackie looked up. It was the girl from the street and she looked the exactly the same as the day she'd told Jackie that she would die inside the house.

"Yeah," Jackie said, trying to decide if she should make a run for it.

"There's a connection, you know," she said, sitting down across from Jackie.

"A connection? Between what?" Jackie asked, priming herself for a quick escape.

"The painting and the journal."

"What?"

"Think about it Jackie, why would your mom put the painting up now? If she really liked it, wouldn't she put it up sooner? And why would it be down in the basement?" the girl asked.

"Wait a minute, I never told you my name and how did you know about the painting anyway?" Jackie asked, getting up and looking at the girl like she was some kind of deadly snake.

"Destroy the painting Jackie, destroy it if you know what's good for you," the girl said.

"Oh, and I think you may find the box under the desk in the basement interesting," she added.

Jackie didn't respond, she just threw the laptop in the case and ran out of the cafe.

She reached the house as the stars were popping out. She ran inside the house and closed the door.

How did the girl know her name? And how could she know about a box under a desk in their basement?

"This is definitely a bad idea," she said, but started down the stairs to the basement anyway. Unfortunately, she didn't notice the small giggle of a girl float through the house like a cold breeze.

Click! The basement lit up with the dim light of a single, bare bulb. The basement was the only part of the house that hadn't been cleared out by her mom and it was filled with junk. Jackie passed by a stack of old books, dusty boxes, and a chest that she would have loved to play pirates with when she was little. But no desk

"Ha! That girl didn't know what she was...," she started, then practically walked straight into a desk, "...talking about."

"This can't be good," Jackie said, looking over the desk. It was old, made out of the same dark wood as the frame of the painting of the house and girl, and it had clawed feet, but other than that it was pretty plain. When Jackie looked underneath it she saw a shallow box labeled 1991.

"No way!" she said picking it up. How did the girl know about this box?

Slowly, she opened the box expecting something weird and creepy, but it was only filled with pictures that Jackie guessed were from 1991. The first one showed the house on the outside and in much better condition. The second one was of the entryway of the house on the inside, the third one was of Jackie's bedroom, but it was empty. When Jackie saw the fourth picture she nearly screamed, instead she made a noise that sounded like a cat being strangled. The photo was of a girl sitting in a chair eating pizza. It was the girl from the cafe! She even had the Nirvana t-shirt on.

"No," Jackie muttered, closing her eyes and then opening them again, hoping the picture was wrong.

"Why didn't you do it?" a voice whispered from behind her.

Jackie screamed and whipped around. The girl from the cafe was standing behind her.

"Wha...how...are you...?" Jackie spluttered, backing away.

"A ghost? Yes," the girl said. "I was killed by the same thing that's going to kill you."

"What..." Jackie started, then reached out to touch the girl, but she disappeared. Jackie jumped back and screamed, falling on her back

"You NEED to destroy the painting," the girl said, appearing at Jackie's side. "Destroy it!"

"Who killed you!?" Jackie asked.

As soon as she said that the light started flickering and it sounded like someone was coming down the stairs.

"She's here,," the girl said, fading away. As she did the footsteps reached the bottom of the stairs and Jackie could see who was coming, it was the girl from the painting and she had a knife. Jackie was frozen with fear, she couldn't do anything, as the girl came one step, two steps, three steps closer. Jackie couldn't feel her legs, she'd gone completely numb. The girl got closer and closer until Jackie was sure that she was done for. Suddenly there was a flash and the girl from the cafe was back. The girl from the painting hissed like an angry cat, and was clearly blinded by the flash.

"Run you idiot!" the girl yelled.

Jackie was broken from her trance of fear and started running up the stairs. She looked back to see the girl from the painting gliding after her, knife in hand. The cafe girl was nowhere to be seen.

Jackie sprinted up the stairs, slamming the basement door behind her. As she raced out of the kitchen and into the entryway, she heard the basement door bang open. She ran upstairs, grabbing the painting as she darted into her room and slammed the door behind her. She turned around just in time to see the door flying open. The girl from the painting glided towards Jackie, grinning.

Jackie suddenly knew what to do. She darted toward the dumbwaiter, making it look like she was trying to escape. The ghost sprang forward, leaping through the air. Jackie forced herself to wait to the last second, and then, just as the girl from the painting was about to land on top of her, Jackie whipped the painting in front of her, using it like a shield. The knife stuck through the canvas inches from Jackie's heart, and the ghost screamed as she disappeared into the painting. Before the girl could escape back into the real world, Jackie pulled out the knife and used it to shred up the canvas, then broke the frame in two over her knee.

"I didn't think you could do it," a voice said from behind her. Jackie turned around to see the girl from the cafe.

"I couldn't have without your help," Jackie said "why would the ghost want to kill me anyway?"

"She thought she was still alive, she thought it was still her house, even after I moved in," the girl said. "Thanks again Jackie, I couldn't have done it without you, ghosts can't destroy things like her, but now the house is all mine again. Well, it will be all mine again once I get rid of you and your mother."

The end