

It Started with Halloween

A Chloe and Theo adventure

by

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Chapter One

Okay. Here's the thing. I hate Halloween. I always have. Ever since I was a child and my uncle scared the crap out of me when he dressed up as a ghost. Sure, now I knew he had just put a sheet over his head and ran around the house shouting whoo, but any normal child would be scared, of course they would. I'll admit that I was eleven at the time, but hey I was a bit of a nervous child okay? Anyway, not much had changed apparently. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Chloe McDermott. I'm average height, average weight and have an average IQ. At the moment my hair is light brown with gold highlights and I accentuate my light blue eyes with lots of mascara. There's nothing unusual about me other than my boyfriend Brody. He's completely gorgeous and I often wonder how the hell I managed to catch him. But hey, I'm not going to point that out to him.

Anyway, tonight's Halloween, and my best friend and neighbor Isaac had somehow talked me into house sitting with him. The house belonged to his in-laws but they're on a cruise at the moment so they needed someone to look after it. Isaac's partner Adam had been staying there with him but he'd been called away to work, and Isaac was too chicken to stay in the house alone. So he asked me. Now Isaac's not normally scared to stay on his own so what was different now? Ten seconds after arriving on his temporary doorstep I figured out what that difference was.

I rang the doorbell and looked up at the house, waiting. To be honest this house would have scared me even if it weren't Halloween. Isaac had done his best decorating the doorstep with pumpkins and candles, but none of that counteracted the fact that this monstrosity of a house was downright scary. Add to that it was sitting in the middle of nowhere, no neighbors in sight, with a massive storm was brewing and I could feel the panic attack start already.

I looked up at the three stories of dark brick, the windows frowning down at me, and shuddered. I tucked my little Chihuahua Theo under my arm a little bit tighter.

"It's okay dude. It's only for one night," I said, snuggling the soft fur of his ear. He turned his little nose towards me and gave me a little Theo kiss. He was far braver than I was. Then again maybe he just hadn't had a good look at this house.

The door locked clunked and as the door swung open, I looked at Isaac and smiled.

"Why didn't we just spend the night at home?" I asked him.

"Because I can't leave the six cats alone," he answered. Isaac is six foot three, has big brown eyes and has soft brown hair that covers just about his entire body. In short, he's a real life teddy bear.

"Oh. Will they mind if Theo's here then?"

Isaac shrugged. "I guess we'll find out." He stepped aside and allowed me to enter, kissing my cheek as I passed. The hallway was dark with high ceilings, dark timber floors and lots of oppressing family portraits.

"Geez," I whispered, passing a painting of a stern looking gentleman wearing a top hat and tailcoat, a sour expression set firmly on his face. Under it the plaque read *Henry Hopwood*. "He's a scary looking man," I said, handing my overnight bag to Isaac.

"That's Adam's great grandfather. He's one of the Henry's." I raised my eyebrow, questioning. "All of the men in Adam's family are named Henry," explained Isaac.

"Except Adam."

"No. Even Adam."

"What?"

"Adam's real name is Henry, but his mum hated it so she would only call him by his middle name. Much to his grandfathers disgust."

Geez, you think you know someone.

Isaac dropped my bag on the floor and moved down the hallway. I looked into what I assumed was a lounge room. It was a large room made to look smaller by the over stuffed furniture and dark walls. Two black cats slept on a leather wing backed chair.

“How old is this house?” I asked following him.

“I don’t know exactly, but I know it’s the oldest house in the area. It’s probably a few hundred years old.”

“I’ve lived in Westport my whole life and I never even knew about this place.”

“It’s pretty secluded. And I would have felt a whole lot better about staying here if Adam hadn’t told me the stupid ghost stories that went with it.” Isaac pushed open a door and we entered the kitchen. It was quite a large room with an island bench in the centre. All the cabinets were dark wood, which should have been brightened by the white walls, but in all honesty, it didn’t alleviate the feeling of oppression at all. I stood back and watched as Isaac pulled out a chair and sat down heavily on the dark timber.

“Did Adam grow up here?” I asked, hoping to distract him from telling me the ghost stories.

“No he grew up down the road, but his parents moved here last year when his grandfather died. Adam’s mother’s not happy about it.”

“Yeah. I can see why. No wonder you didn’t want to stay here alone.”

“I couldn’t believe it when Adam got called in to work. I told him that I would never speak to him again if he left me here alone. That’s when he told me to call you.”

Humph. I’d be remembering that when I bought Adam’s Christmas present in a few weeks time. “Where’s he gone anyway?” I asked.

“Los Angeles.” Adam’s a pilot and often got called in on his days off to cover a shift for someone else. Looking at the storm brewing in Isaac’s eyes I thought next time he might think twice before accepting though.

“Well, the upside is we won’t have any annoying kids knocking on our door trick or treating.” I smiled.

“Actually that’s the bit I quite like that about Halloween,” said Isaac, sulking. Me too, if I was being honest.

“Well, what are we going to do tonight instead?”

“I brought some movies to watch.”

I looked at the time. It was already four thirty. It would be getting dark in another couple of hours.

“Maybe you should show me where I’m sleeping. I’ll change into my pajamas while you cook dinner and we’ll curl up on the couch for a fun night of movie watching. What movies did you bring?” I asked.

“While You Were Sleeping, The Holiday and The Avengers.”

“Oh good. I vote for The Avengers first. I always enjoy a bit of eye candy.” I smiled, my mood much brighter at the thought of Thor and Captain America being on the same screen at the same time.

It took about five minutes to follow Isaac through the large house, up the first flight of stairs, passing two closed doors as we went. The hallway was dark, the only light coming from the dim overhead bulb.

“What’s in there?” I asked, nodding to the heavy oak doors.

“Bedrooms,” replied Isaac.

“Which one is mine?” I shivered at the cold and noticed a picture of Jesus pinned to the wall outside the front bedroom door, and hoped that was the one.

“None of those. You’re sleeping with me,” said Isaac, running up a second set of stairs. I looked up the darkened staircase, tucked Theo tighter under my arm, and ran after Isaac. About halfway up I saw a massive hole in the wall, leading into the black attic space. The hair on my arms stood up as the goosebumps broke out all over me. Isaac didn’t stop running until he reached the top, switched on the light and ran directly into the only room up there. I ran in after him and instantly felt calmer. This room was unlike any other that I’d seen in the house. It was decorated with pale blue wallpaper with delicate white lace at the window and had a pretty floral bedspread making the room feel cheerful and safe.

“Shame there’s no TV in here,” I said, looking around the small room.

“I think I would have just stayed here until the morning.”

“That’s what I said to Adam! It’s like we’ve walked into a different house. This room actually feels happy.”

“Also if we stay here we won’t have to walk past that hole in the wall either.”

“I know! Isn’t it creepy? Before Adam left I made him come with me every time I needed to come up here. Apparently when he was a kid he

stayed for holidays and this was his room. He told me that when he used to walk passed that hole, he could hear a voice.”

“Really? What kind of voice? What did it say?” I knew I shouldn’t have asked, but sometimes curiosity got the better of me.

“He said it would make bets with him to see who could get up the stairs the fastest.”

“Really? Wasn’t he scared?” I knew I was.

“No, he said he was just a kid and didn’t think anything of it at the time.”

“What about now? Has he heard it since?”

“I didn’t ask. I was too afraid of the answer.”

I thought about Adam as a kid running up those stairs, racing a ghost. Just as I felt the hairs on my arms stand up again, Theo started to growl low in his throat, jumping out of my arms and running to the stairs, barking as he went. My heart rate instantly picked up as my breath came out in short sharp spurts. I stood to follow Theo. Isaac followed me. As I ran down the stairs I kept my eyes directly ahead and never once looked into that hole, Theo’s bark drowning any imaginary voices out of my head. He stopped on the second floor, outside the back bedroom. As I stopped in front of him, Isaac slammed into my back.

“What’s in that room?” I asked, not really wanting the answer.

“It’s a bedroom but I haven’t been in there so I don’t know for sure,” squeaked Isaac.

“Should we look?” I asked, picking Theo up and rubbing his paw. He loved his paw being rubbed and instantly he settled down.

“No. Lets just go downstairs and have a cup of tea.” Isaac grabbed my arm and dragged me downstairs, where he promptly put the kettle on.

“Isaac I really don’t like it here.” I shivered and pulled my jumper tighter around my body. “Do we have to stay? I mean, how important are these cats?”

“Very. The one sleeping on that horrible old chair,” he said, nodding towards the front lounge room, “it’s been in shows. It’s worth a lot of money.”

“Would Adam’s parents know if we put it in a cattery for the night and slept at our own place? I think the Trick or Treaters’ would be happy about that don’t you?”

“They tried to put it in a cattery, but when they rounded it up to put it in a cat box it went berserk.”

“What? Surely it’s used to a cat box? I mean if it’s a show cat then it would have been in one loads of times.”

“You’d think so wouldn’t you? But that was when Grandpa was alive. Since he’s been dead the cats’ have been very territorial. You should see the scratches on Adam’s mum’s arms. One of them even needed stitching.”

I looked at the ginger tomcat sitting on the window ledge, eyeing me suspiciously. It looked like it wanted to rip my eyes out.

“Then how about we just leave them loads of water and food and come back tomorrow to see how they went.” Haunted or not, I didn’t want to spend the night here.

“Hmm. I thought about that. But what if one of them died?”

“You could just say it was old age.”

“Maybe.”

“I’m sure they’re not going to die anyway.” I could see that I was convincing Isaac that this was a good idea.

“You think we could? What if Adam phoned? How would I explain that I’d left them alone?”

“Well Adam will call your mobile phone anyway. He’d never have to know.” Now lying isn’t something I would usually condone, but this felt like extenuating circumstances.

“Okay. If he finds out I’ll blame you anyway.”

I could live with that.

Isaac flipped off the kettle and we moved to the front door. I grabbed my overnight bag, and took it and Theo out to my car, Isaac slamming the front door closed as we went. I beeped the doors open, threw my bag in the back and buckled Theo into his seat. I did all this in record time, silently grateful I was getting out of here. As Isaac got into the passenger seat and wrestled with his seatbelt, I put the key into the ignition and turned it. Nothing happened. I turned it again. Nothing. Not a sound, not a cough, nothing. Shit.

I turned to Isaac. “Where’s your car?” I asked.

“Around the back, parked outside the garage.” We simultaneously opened our doors and got out. I unbuckled Theo, grabbed my bag and hotfooted it after Isaac. Thank god his car was new.

As we rounded the corner, ready to repeat the process, we stopped dead in our tracks.

Sitting on the car bonnet were all six cats – five black ones and the ginger tom. I saw Isaac’s Adams Apple bob up and down rapidly. The ginger cat started to howl. Theo’s hackles raised.

“Shoo,” I said moving closer to the car.

“Chloe! Stop.”

“What? Why?” I asked, turning to look at Isaac. He looked pale as he pointed to his windscreen. My eyes followed him.

There, stamped in blood, were the shapes of about thirty paw prints. I felt the world sway slightly as the black cats started to hiss at me.

“Oh shut up!” I said to the cats, sounding much braver than I actually felt. But what could a cat do to me? And I was sure there was a good explanation as to why there was blood on the windscreen. Wasn’t there? I moved to the passenger door, ignoring the hissing as I went and tried to open it.

“Isaac, open the bloody door will you?” I heard the beeping of the doors as the ginger tom leapt at me. I raised my free arm, doing my best to protect Theo, as it’s claws dug into my flesh. I screamed as the second cat got airborne. I turned away but not before it’s claws dug into my shoulder, scraping flesh away as it fell to the ground. The first cat held on tight as I screamed again and tried to flick it away, dropping Theo as I went. I turned and ran towards the house, hoping that he would lose his hold, but it was no good. He held on tight. I spun in a circle, it’s back legs flying out behind him, but still he hung on. I threw my shoulder forwards, hoping that would help, but no. There I went, screaming and running around the garden trying to lose the cat that was hanging onto my shoulder for dear life, and all Isaac could do was stare.

“Help!” I screamed.

Finally Isaac seemed to snap to it and came to help.

“*Stand still,*” he yelled. “I can’t get hold of it!”

But I couldn't stand still, my fight or flight instinct was over riding my brain. Isaac finally managed to grab the cat by the back legs and pulled, but all the cat did was dig it's claws in harder.

"Ow!" I yelled. "Stop it!" Thankfully Isaac let go. But the cat didn't. It hissed in my ear and its teeth lunged for my neck. As I ran back passed the car I could see the other cats all sitting in a row, watching their mate put on a show.

"Chloe stop moving!" yelled Isaac. My brain kicked into gear and I immediately did as asked, stopping to face him. As I did, Isaac raised the hosepipe and turned on the tap. Water shot out of the end of the hose drenching me from head to toe. As I spluttered and death stared Isaac, the ginger cat let go, dropped to the ground and sauntered off. Not a drop of water on him.

Chapter Two

After I'd had a shower and dressed in dry clothes, I thought we'd make a second attempt at leaving, but as I entered the kitchen I found Isaac on the phone.

"So can you come out here this afternoon?" he asked. I saw the disappointment on his face, as the answer was obviously no. "Well, of course I know it's six o'clock and it's Halloween. And I do understand that your children want to go Trick or Treating, but isn't there someone who could come?" I could hear a voice on the other end of the phone but couldn't make out any words. Not that I needed to. The look on Isaac's face said it all. "Fine. But I expect someone here first thing in the morning," he snapped, slamming the phone back into its cradle.

"What was that about?" I asked.

"Well, it appears that *neither* of our cars will start and nobody will come out here to help."

"Both our cars?" I asked, amazed. "How could both our cars not be starting?"

"Chloe, do I look like a mechanic to you?"

I looked at Isaac with his perfectly manicured nails. "I have breakdown service," I said.

"Do you have their number?"

I reached into my pocket and pulled out my mobile phone. I swiped at the screen and looked up my contact. Pressing dial I waited for it to connect. Nothing. I looked at the screen and sighed.

"No signal," I said. "But dial this number will you." I read out the phone number for the breakdown service as Isaac dialed the numbers into the landline phone. After a few seconds he put the receiver down and tried again.

“The lines’ gone dead,” he said, looking at me, a shocked expression on his face.

“But you were just on it! Here let me try,” I said, pushing him aside. He glared at me and handed me the phone

But he was right. The line was dead. Shit.

“Well, I guess we’re staying here the night then,” I muttered, a sinking feeling hitting the pit of my stomach. I handed the phone back to Isaac as the ginger tomcat brushed passed my leg, a look of victory in its eyes. Bloody cat.

“How about I make us something to eat and we’ll put the movie on like we originally planned?” said Isaac.

“Sure.”

Over dinner, I plucked up the courage to ask Isaac about what we had seen on his car.

“Do you really think that was blood on your windscreen?”

Isaac looked at me thoughtfully. “It looked like blood, but I don’t know where it would have come from,” he said, stabbing a piece of pasta onto his fork.

“Maybe one of the cats cut its paw.”

“Maybe. But I for one am not checking them.”

I looked over at the six cats, all sitting on the window ledge, watching us.

“They’re creepy,” I said.

“The ginger one’s possessed.”

“You think so?”

“You should have seen its eyes when it was clinging to your shoulder earlier. I swear they were glowing.”

“There was no way I was letting it get Theo,” I said, bending down to pick Theo up and putting him on my lap.

“I don’t think it was after Theo.”

I stopped at stared at Isaac. “What are you talking about?”

“It was staring at you the whole time. If I hadn’t turned the hose on you who knows what it would have done.”

“Yeah. About that....”

“Oh look. It’s raining,” said Isaac, quickly changing the subject. He slid his chair backwards, stood and moved to close the window as the wind picked up and the rain started to blow in. “Actually there’s lightning out there as well.”

“They did forecast a storm,” I said, making a note to myself to talk to Isaac about the whole hose-drenching thing later. “I hope it’s not going to get too wet though. Does that creek I crossed on the way in flood?” I’d been stuck on the wrong side of a flooded river once before. “I don’t want to be here any longer than necessary.” Sure last time I’d been stranded with Brody, which turned out not so bad. I didn’t think this time would be quite so much fun.

“I hope not,” said Isaac as cat number two jumped down and wound it’s way around his legs. The lights dimmed as the lightning flashed a second time. “I’ll look for a torch. I don’t really want to be left in the dark.”

I shivered at the thought, stood and found my handbag. I pulled my mobile phone from inside it, checked the battery status and put it in my pocket. It may not have a signal but it could still light up a path.

After dinner the rain get heavier. We made sure all windows were shut and moved into the lounge room. As Isaac switched on the TV, I had a proper look around the room. I was correct in my first observation in that fact that the room was dark and overbearing. The furniture was too big for the room and the dark rug on the floor added to the creepy feeling running down my spine. The six cats followed us in, sitting in formation near the doorway. I shivered.

“Isaac, does it look to you like those cats are guarding that doorway?”

Isaac turned and looked over his shoulder. “I hate those cats already,” he said, pushing the DVD into the player. I couldn’t argue there.

I moved to the bookcase running against the back wall and had a closer look at what Mr. Hopwood used to read. I saw a few of the classics mixed in with a few more recent Dan Brown novels, but I stopped when I saw a large red, leather bound book with *Hopwood* written in gold print down the spine. I pulled it off the shelf and flipped the pages open.

“Oh look. This book has Adam’s family tree in it,” I said, turning towards Isaac. He’d finished getting the DVD ready and had moved to sit on the couch, the six cats still all in position, watching carefully.

“Really? Let me look,” replied Isaac. I moved to sit next to him as he took the book from me and placed it on his lap. Theo instantly jumped onto my knee, turned in three clockwise circles and curled into a ball. His sigh told me he didn’t really like it here anymore than I did.

The book dated back over the last two hundred years, listing every relative who entered the Hopwood family, either by birth or marriage, and every relative the died, showing the dates that all of this happened. Isaac flipped the pages quickly until he found Adam. Directly on the branch above him was Adam’s father Henry John right next his mother Deidre Anne. Isaac sighed.

“You’ll never see my name next to Adam’s,” he said quietly, his eyes showing his sadness. I wrapped my arms around his and squeezed. Sometimes life sucked. Isaac ran his fingers over Adam’s name as he fell silent. As the clock ticked off the minutes I allowed him the time lost in his thoughts. “Maybe I could write it in,” he said cheekily.

“Won’t his relatives be mad if you write in the book?”

“Who’s going to know? Adam’s dad is the only one left.”

“What about Henry’s brother Joseph?” I said, pointing to the name on the same branch as Adam’s father.

“He’s dead so I’m sure he won’t care.”

“Oh really? That’s sad. What happened to him?”

“Well he’s the ghost story that I was going to tell you about earlier,” said Isaac, turning to me. Two of the cats moved closer.

“Do I really want to hear this?” I asked.

“Yes. It freaked me out but it’s kind of interesting. Apparently Adam’s uncle Joseph died long before Adam was born. The story goes that there was an ‘accident,’” said Isaac, doing air quotes with his fingers, “and Joseph died in the kitchen. Adam didn’t tell me the specifics of the accident. I don’t think he really knows them. His dad never talks about it much. Anyway, the story goes that Joseph would come home at the same time everyday. Seven o’clock. He’d leave the pub, walk home and be here just in time for dinner.

After the funeral it's reported that their mother used to say she saw Joseph walking into the house at the same time every day." I looked at the clock on the mantle. It was five to seven.

"But Joseph's dead."

"Yes I know. Didn't stop him coming home every night though. But that's not the creepy bit. One night she looked out of the kitchen window, waiting for Joseph to return when she saw him walking up the path with his cousin. She knew that his cousin was returning home after being overseas for a long time, but she hadn't been expecting him for a visit. She was going to open the door to him when the phone rang. It was her sister telling her that the cousin, the one walking up the path, had been killed earlier that day on his way home." Isaac's eyes were huge.

"So the man that had been walking up the path with the ghost of Joseph was also dead?"

"Yes. And as far as I know they still walk in together every night at seven o'clock." I felt the hair on my arms stand up.

We both screamed as the clock on the mantle struck seven and the front door simultaneously slammed shut. I'd been so consumed with Isaac's story that I hadn't even heard it open. Isaac jumped off the couch and spun around, me right behind him. I jumped up so fast that poor little Theo rolled onto the floor.

"What the hell..." I screamed. Adam was standing in the doorway, his hair wet from the rain.

"Ahhh, you nearly gave me a heart attack!" Isaac screamed, his hand on his heart.

"Sorry I didn't mean to scare anyone," said Adam quietly.

It took Isaac a second but finally he seemed to recover from his scare.

"What are you doing here anyway?"

"I got half way to work and they rang to tell me the flight had been cancelled due to the severe weather warning. I turned the car around and came straight back here." Adam smiled and moved in to give Isaac a hug. Adam is about five feet nine, has the sweetest, most innocent face you have ever seen and dresses like an old man. But right now dressed in his uniform,

his hair wet and messed, I could see what Isaac saw in him. He looked quite sexy. If you were in to that kind of thing, that is.

“Hi Chloe. How are you?” he asked giving me a kiss on the cheek.

“Hi Adam,” I responded, my heart rate decreasing by the second. “I didn’t hear your car.”

“It’s on the other side of the creek. I used the foot bridge to cross and walked the last ten minutes.”

“You’re soaking wet,” exclaimed Isaac. Always perceptive was Isaac.

Hang on did he say footbridge? “Hey Adam can we get out that way?” I was actually already thinking that we could all leave via the footbridge, get in Adam’s car and go home. I’d come back in the daylight to get my car tomorrow.

“No. I think it’ll be under water by now. The creek was flowing pretty quickly.”

“Where the hell did a storm like this come from?” asked Isaac.

“Lots of little storm cells have unexpectedly joined to make a massive one. It’s here for the night. Honestly I was lucky to get here,” said Adam.

“Too bad.” I sighed. Theo scratched at my leg. I looked at him sitting on the floor, the ginger tomcat circling him. “Come on little man. Let’s get you a treat,” I said and stepped towards the kitchen. I felt a bit bad for dropping him on the floor. “Do you guys want a cuppa?” I asked, looking at Isaac and Adam.

“No. But I know where the alcohol is kept.” Adam smiled and followed me to the kitchen, Isaac hot on his heels. I guess he didn’t like the idea of being left alone with the creepy cats.

Chapter Three

Damn it. I'd left Theo's treats in my bag. And my bag was in the bedroom two floors up. Shit.

"You don't need a treat tonight," I said looking at Theo. But it was too late. He'd heard the word 'treat', his ears had pricked up and his eyes shone bright. And if I ignored him he would just tap at me for hours until I eventually gave up and got him one. "Isaac, do you want to have a walk with me?" I asked. I hoped he said yes. I definitely didn't want to walk up there on my own.

"No. But I just found Adam's mums Midori. I'll make you one."

I sighed and looked at Theo. He stood up against my leg and tapped me. "I think I'll have the Midori first. It might relax me."

Isaac found a glass and poured the green liquid into it. Opening the refrigerator, he grabbed the bottle of lemonade and was about to top up the glass.

"Don't worry about the lemonade. I'll drink it straight," I said, picking up the glass and downing it in one go. I tasted the overly sweet liquid and instantly knew I should have added the lemonade. The up side though was that it would work a whole lot faster undiluted. I took a deep breath and contemplated what I had to do. The storm outside raged stronger as the wind blew the tress against the house and the lightning flashed. Seconds later the thunder rolled and the windows rattled. I was almost positive that I heard a voice in my ear say *'I bet you can't do it'*. I jumped. "Did you hear that?" I asked, my hand shaking as I put the glass on the table.

"Hear what?" replied Isaac.

"The voice."

"It was probably the TV," said Adam, calmly pouring himself a scotch.

“Adam, does this house not freak you out?” I asked, my voice several octaves higher than normal.

“Well, a few things do bother me.”

“Really? Like what?” asked Isaac.

“That cat,” said Adam nodding towards one of the black cats that had walked in behind us, “it’s been here as long as I can remember and I’m thirty five. I’ve never known a cat to live that long.”

“My Nan’s cat lived to see it’s twenty eighth birthday,” I said, giving into Theo and picking him up. I started to rub his paw hoping that would satisfy him for a few minutes.

“See that other cat over there,” said Adam, now nodding towards another black cat sitting back on the window ledge. “She’s its mother.”

Okay, that was a bit creepy. I would have guessed their age to be about five. But then what did I know about cats?

“The ginger tom cat saved my life once though,” he added.

“You never told me this,” said Isaac. “What happened?”

Adam took a swig of the scotch that he had just poured, and sat down at the table. “Well I was about eight years old and I came to stay here with my Grandparents for a weeks holiday. It was Halloween and my dad thought I’d enjoy spending it out here with them. Mum didn’t want me to stay here, but dad insisted. Dad always gets his way,” added Adam quietly. “Anyway, the story goes that at seven o’clock every night two men would walk up the front path and disappear as they walked in the front door. One of the men is my uncle Joseph and the other was his cousin Angus. Both were dead. My grandmother would sit and watch for them every evening and only when she knew they were safe would she retire for the night. I remember sitting at the front window with her that night, waiting. Like tonight there was a really bad storm raging and I remember my grandmother getting quite agitated the further past seven o’clock it got. She got up and went outside to see if she could see them. She told me to wait inside the door but I didn’t. I followed her wanting to see the ghosts. But as I walked down the path, lightning struck the tree and a branch fell. That ginger cat leapt out of nowhere pushing me out of the way. If it hadn’t, the branch would have hit me.”

Isaac and I both gave appropriate gasps and looked at the ginger cat.

“So that cat’s a hero?” asked Isaac, unbelievably. I was with him on that one.

“Did the ghosts ever turn up?” I asked, really hoping he would say *‘there’s no such things a ghosts Chloe’*.

“Well, here’s the twist. My grandmother couldn’t settle knowing that they hadn’t turned up safe. So after picking me up and putting me back inside, she continued on in the storm. My grandfather went after her but she got ahead of him. He looked for ages for her but it was only after the ginger cat led him to the swollen creek that he found her body. She must have slipped and drowned. Years later my grandfather told me that the ghosts never appeared again after that night.” Adam went silent, lost in thought.

“Is that a true story?” asked Isaac.

“Yes. Every bit of it that I remember anyway. The ghost story was told to me by my grandfather, but I had no reason to not believe him.” Adam refilled his scotch and took another swig.

“Why have you never told me that before now?”

“Because it’s not a memory I like to recall. It was scary being an eight year old boy, sitting on the bottom stair during a thunder storm and waiting for my grandfather to find my grandmother,” Adam added quietly.

Isaac walked over and gave him a hug, both lost in their own thoughts. I felt a tug on my heartstrings and looked away, through the windows and into the back yard. The lightning flashed again causing the backyard to illuminate and in that instance I saw a man standing on the path looking in on us. I strangled a scream as thunder shook the house, my voice stuck in my throat. An instant later the lightning flashed again, this time striking the power pole standing next to the garage. The explosion caused the power to surge, blowing the switches off the walls in the kitchen, and plunging the house into darkness. I don’t know who screamed the loudest – me, Isaac or Adam. My heart beat loud in my chest as adrenalin surged through me, my thoughts jumbled. Theo barked and the cats hissed. The lightning flashed again and in that moment I saw Isaac and Adam cling to each other.

“*Ahhhhhhh!*” screamed Isaac.

“*Ahhhhhhh!*” scream Adam.

"Ahhhhhhh!" I screamed with them. With the next flash I used the light and moved to them, tucking myself under Isaac's arm. It took us a minute to regain our composure, but just as we were getting our breathing back under control, the back door swung open and a hooded figure stepped into the kitchen.

"Ahhhhhhh!" screamed Isaac.

"Ahhhhhhh!" screamed Adam.

"Ahhhhhhh!" I screamed with them. Theo however, took the opportunity to jump out of my arms and ran towards the hooded figure. Fear ran through me and jumbled my thoughts once again. I didn't know what I wanted to do the most. Run after Theo, run for the door or wet myself. Actually scratch that last one. I think a little bit of wee had already come out.

Lightning flashed again and I saw the hooded figure bend down and pick Theo up. *"No!"* I screamed lunging for the figure, all rational thoughts long forgotten. I went to grab Theo, but instead a hand reached out and grabbed my arm.

"Chloe! It's me." I recognized the voice but my frightened brain couldn't put the pieces together. The hand let go of me and reached up to lower the hood. The lightning continued to flash quickly, causing all movements to look like they were happening in slow motion. I heard Isaac's voice.

"Brody is that you?" he asked, doing his best Mickey Mouse impression. Obviously his testicles had ducked for cover.

"Yes. It's me."

"Brody?" I asked. "But...but...how...?" The adrenalin had caused my body to shake and in the darkness Brody reached out and pulled me in close. As his smell filled my senses I felt myself instantly relax and tears prick my eyes.

"Adam there's a torch on the bench," said Isaac. Using the next flash of lightning Adam moved towards the bench, grabbed the torch and flipped the switch. Constant light illuminated the room, making the world seem like a safer place. Or maybe that was the warmth I was feeling from Brody. I knew the sound of his heart beating in my ear was definitely helping to settle my nerves.

“How did you get here?” asked Adam, pulling out a chair and sitting down. I think his legs were feeling just as much like jelly as mine were.

“I got the four wheel drive from work and drove it here. I knew there was a creek and thought I’d be able to get across with it.”

“You mean we can get out of here?” I asked, hope moving in and knocking the fear aside.

“Yes but we should stay here until the storm passes at least.” I was so happy to hear those words that I reached up and kissed him.

Isaac took the scotch bottle, pulled four clean glasses out of the cupboard and sat down next to Adam. I reluctantly let go of Brody and joined him. I’d never drunk scotch before but this seemed like a good time to start.

“I vote that we brave the weather, go home and come back tomorrow to check on the cats,” I said.

“I second that vote,” said Isaac. Brody chuckled low in his throat. He had no idea what our evening had been like. Even though, thinking back on it, most of the fear had been caused by our imaginations. Sure the cats were weird but they were just cats. And I’m sure the voice I heard was also in my head. I looked at Brody’s face. Even in the weird light cast from the torch he still looked gorgeous. I sighed.

“I still have to go upstairs and get my bag. It’s got bunny in it. Theo loves Bunny.” It may have all been in my imagination but I still didn’t want to walk passed that gaping big hole in the wall.

“I’ll go and get it for you,” offered Adam. “If I can take the torch.”

I pulled my mobile phone from my jeans pocket, swiped at the screen and pressed the flash light button. “Go for it.” I smiled and handed him the torch, grateful that I could sit here holding Brody’s hand, with Theo on my lap.

“Thanks,” said Adam. As he walked from the room, I looked to Isaac and smiled. We’re such idiots, I thought.

I was about to open my mouth and say this to Isaac when I heard a voice say, *‘I bet I can beat you’*. My heart stuttered as I heard Adam reply, “I bet you can’t.”