**Haunted Nursery Ward**

**By Elfy**

It was a cold winter’s morning as Thomas Jackson left his college and walked down the street towards an independent local coffee shop. Thomas was no coffee connoisseur but they gave out free water and cheap food which for a college student with no money to his name that was a big selling point. It was lunchtime and Thomas pulled his collar up against the bitter wind.

The door to the coffee shop opened with the tinkling of a bell. It was quiet inside and combined with the smell of brewing coffee it felt very homely. There was a group of students at a table talking as Thomas walked past and up to the counter.

“Hello, what can I get you?” The smiling girl behind the counter asked as Thomas approached.

“Could I get a bagel and some of the free water?” Thomas asked as he looked at the display of delicious looking foods on and under the counter. The smell of this shop was enough to make his mouth water.

“Of course.” The assistant said. She took a small plate and placed a bagel on it before filling a glass with cold water. She walked over to one of the few tables and placed the lunch down.

“Thank you.” Thomas said as he sat down and took his bag off.

It had been a tricky morning for the college freshman. His classes were really tough and he was having to work very hard just to keep up. It could be very stressful but this little lunch spot was a great place to unwind.

“You are such a baby!” Came a loud male voice from a table nearby.

Thomas looked up to see the group of students sitting at the nearby table. They were talking excitedly about something and Thomas couldn’t help but overhear their conversation, they were quite a rowdy group or at least a couple of them were.

“Baby? I’m telling you that place is haunted!” Came another of the voices as the group laughed, “It’s creepy as fuck!”

“He thinks it’s haunted!” One of the students loudly laughed, “There’s no such thing as ghosts.”

“You spend the night there then!” The defensive guy said with a smile, “Sorry if I don’t want to get involved in some freaky shit.”

“I’ve already spent a night in there.” The first guy said with some bravado.

“Bullshit!” Another of the group replied loudly before they all started laughing again.

Thomas was frankly a little annoyed that his quiet lunch spot had been taken over by the rowdy students that he hadn’t met before. He came to this little coffee shop to avoid crowds and noise. If he wasn’t so shy he would have asked them all to keep it down a little bit but he sat quietly and ate his bagel in silence.

“Alright, so I haven’t spent the night there but so what?” The guy conceded, “I bet I could offer you $100 and you would still be too scared. In fact, I’ll do just that.”

The mention of money got Thomas more interested and he looked up from his food to see one of the group pulling out his wallet. The guy was clearly quite well off since he pulled out $100 in cash and slammed it on the table.

“I don’t know…” The scared guy seemed to be swayed a little by the money but he eventually shook his head, “No way, it’s not worth the risk.”

“Risk!?” The guy scooped his money up again, “What risk? There’s no such thing as haunted houses!”

“I’ll do it.” Thomas had spoken before he even thought about what he was doing.

Thomas smiled shyly as all the heads at the table swivelled in his direction. They seemed to be looking at him with interest and Thomas felt even more uncomfortable than usual.

“You’ll do it?” The guy holding the money asked.

“Sure…” Thomas replied slowly and with a shrug, “I could use the money and like you said, it’ll prove it’s not haunted, right?”

The person holding the money looked around at his friends with a smirk on his face. He seemed to be sizing Thomas up a little before nodding his head.

“Sure. My name’s Sam by the way.” Sam said as he started scribbling something down on some paper, “Meet us at this address a little before eight this evening, OK?”

“I’ll see you there… Oh, and I’m Thomas.” Thomas took the paper with the address and gathered up his things. He had finished his bagel so he drained his water and started making his way towards the exit of the café.

“See you tonight.” Sam called after him.

Thomas smiled and waved back as he walked away and back towards college. He would have to stop at the library after his classes had finished so that he could search the address and find out where he was supposed to go.

This could be two strokes of good fortune for Thomas. This seemed like an easy way to make a little extra money which was something that he always struggled with and he may come out of it with something else he was sorely lacking in. Thomas had never made friends easily but with this group of people he had a chance to make a lot of friends at once. This was an opportunity that Thomas couldn’t afford to give up.

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When Thomas turned up at the address he saw the people from the café already there. He felt butterflies in his tummy but was unsure exactly why. He could see building he would be going into already, through the fence he could see an old and half-dilapidated one storey building that was at the end of quite a long path. The grass either side was overgrown and the old trees were without leaves.

To the side of the building was a child’s play area. Once used by happy children it now appeared twisted and rusted. It was undeniably creepy in the darkness but Thomas had to remember that he had money waiting for him. Thomas kept repeating to himself that there was no such thing as ghosts and that it was just an old and empty building.

“Thomas?” Sam called when he saw Thomas getting close.

“Hi.” Thomas replied with a nervous smile.

“All ready to go in?” Sam asked. He pulled the collar of his jacket up, it was starting to get cold now that night was descending.

“I think so. When do I get the money?” Thomas asked. He saw Sam chuckle at his question.

“Right down to business, eh?” Sam smiled, “How about I give you half now and half in the morning?”

“Sure.” Thomas replied as he took fifty dollars from his possible friend.

“Cool. Well, this is the building. It’s supposed to be an old nursery or children’s ward. I found some newspaper articles about it that you can read, it’ll be a boring night after all.” Sam chuckled, “Everyone around this area says it’s haunted but that’s bullshit. I want you to prove to everyone that there is nothing over there except an empty and abandoned house.”

Thomas nodded and looked through the gate again. He started feeling increasingly nervous of what he was supposed to do and started wondering if he should back out. Maybe this hadn’t been such a good idea after all, it was cold out here, he couldn’t imagine it would be any warmer inside the broken down building.

“I’ve got some things for you to take in.” Sam said as he reached into his bag.

Thomas turned back and looked at Sam again. He wondered if his increasingly frightful feelings were showing on his face. He looked at the other people in the group and saw their smiling faces, were they just being friendly or did they know something that Thomas didn’t?

“This is a wristwatch that doubles as a camera.” Sam said as he handed a small metal watch to Thomas, “It’s so you can record your whole time in there.”

Thomas let Sam place the watch around his wrist and saw little holes on the side of the timepiece. He had no idea how a camera was fit in there but it must have been an expensive piece of equipment.

“We’ve also got some bottles of water, some snacks and a flashlight.” Sam placed these items into Thomas’ backpack, “Do you have a cell phone?”

Thomas reached into his pocket and pulled out an old cell phone. It was so old that it wasn’t even a touchscreen, it was as far from a smart phone as you could find. The sight of it made the group giggle a little bit.

“Did you find that in a museum?” Sam asked with a little shake of the head and a laugh, “Can it make calls?”

“It receives them but it doesn’t make them.” Thomas blushed as he admitted his own poorness.

“That’s perfect.” Sam said. His tone worried Thomas a little.

“Maybe this isn’t such a good idea…” Thomas said slowly as he looked at the building, “It might be private property or something.”

“You’re not chickening out are you?” Sam’s voice was suddenly much harsher in tone.

“N-No…” Thomas slowly stuttered.

“Good, because if you’ve wasted our time tonight we won’t be happy about it.” Sam sounded threatening now. The whole feeling in the air was suddenly a lot more hostile, it was like a switch had been flicked.

“I-It’s fine.” Thomas said, “It’s just an old building, right?”

“Exactly.” Sam replied, “So, in you go and we will see you in twelve hours with the other half of your money.”

Sam pushed the gate open and Thomas looked up the dark path with a gulp. Sam gave Thomas some old newspaper clippings and articles and then a little push to send him on his way. Thomas took a couple of steps into the darkened front yard and heard the gate creaking close behind him. He turned to see Sam looking at him.

“See you in the morning.” Sam said. He waved and then walked away.

Thomas flicked on the flashlight and pointed it up the path in front of him. He started walking slowly towards the old building and every step seemed to send a further shiver down his spine. To distract himself from his fears he held up the newspaper clippings in front of him and scanned the headlines. None of the headlines were very reassuring and Thomas had wished he had seen these before the gate had been closed.

“People Missing in Strange Ward”, “Strange Noises Coming From East Wing, Experts Baffled”, “Things That Go Bump in the Night – Is Mystery Nursery Haunted?”

The oldest clipping was about how the building had been shut down decades ago when it was found to be unfit to leave children at. It looked like there had been a lot of scandals surrounding what happened in there. Issues of staff cruelty and unfit living conditions.

Those were just some of the headlines that Thomas scanned over as he walked up the path and towards the main building. He didn’t like what he read and each article only made him more fearful of what was to come, the building seemed more foreboding the closer he got.

Thomas shivered as he reached the front door and gently pushed against it. He hoped that the door would be locked so he would have an excuse to turn back but the old wooden door creaked open on its rusted hinges. It almost felt like a relief to leave the outside behind but it was very much a case of out of the frying pan and into the fire.

The inside of the building was a complete wreck. The main foyer had been torn apart over time and graffiti was etched all over the walls. Glass was strewn everywhere and plants had started taking over the building, it was dark but not pitch black and moonlight came in through several holes in the roof.

Old plastic seats were cracked and faded, none of them seemed to have been saved from the ravages of time. Insects and spiders seemed to have taken over and there were webs in every corner. Thomas wasn’t fond of spiders but when he shined the flashlight around the room he didn’t see any creepy-crawlies.

Thomas walked into the room and shone the light around but there was nothing there that shouldn’t have been. Thomas walked into the centre of the middle of the reception area and saw a hallway to the side, knowing that he was there for twelve hours he decided he should probably have a look around if for no other reason than to make sure there were no homeless people or anything around.

“There’s no such thing as ghosts… There’s no such thing as ghosts…” Thomas repeated to himself out loud as he walked down the hallway. Vines twisted overhead and across the walls it partially obscured the hallway but Thomas still saw something interesting.

On the walls, in between the vines, Thomas could see pictures that looked like they had been drawn by children. Crayons and bright colours covered white paper haphazardly and were signed by names of the children who had drawn them. Even though the pictures were entirely innocent in their subjects it somehow made the scary building even more foreboding. It was a scary juxtaposition between the spooky building and the seemingly happy drawings.

Floorboards were creaking with every step and Thomas stopped a couple of times when he thought he had heard noises from the other end of the building. He spun around and scanned the area with his flashlight but saw nothing untoward.

Thomas peered through the windows in the doors and saw old abandoned classrooms offices against one side of the corridor. Blackboards were still against the walls and encircled by vines that now framed them, the chalk writing was cracked and eerie. Desks sat in position as if waiting for the next day’s classes that Thomas knew would never come. It was actually quite sad.

Along the other side of the hallway were a different set of doors. There doors had no windows and despite everything else in the building being broken they were still locked. There were clear spaces where signs had obviously been until somewhat recently. They were nowhere to be seen.

Just as Thomas was starting to feel a little easier about where he was there was suddenly a loud crashing noise from further down the hallway. Thomas jumped almost out of his shoes and dropped his flashlight. He quickly bent over to pick it up and shone the light to the end of the hallway. Right at the end, the final door seemed to have a light shining out from under it. Thomas frowned, had the light always been there or did it just appear?

“H-Hello?” Thomas called out nervously.

There was no answer and Thomas wasn’t sure where he should go. Half of him wanted to go and see what was happening and the other half wanted to run away. He remembered the money and how much he needed it, it was the only thing stopping him from turning back and leaving immediately.

“There’s no such thing as ghosts… There’s no such thing as ghosts…” Thomas continued to repeat to himself as he felt adrenaline flooding his body.

Thomas was about to turn and head back into the main foyer when he suddenly realised what must be happening. Sam and his group of friends must have snuck in behind Thomas to play a prank on him. The crash must have been one of them knocking something over.

“I know you’re there.” Thomas called out as he shined his flashlight on the door at the end of the hallway. He was hoping they would give themselves away by laughing or something.

There was still no response so Thomas started walking down the corridor towards the mysterious light. As he reached the door he could see the glass was intact and had the words “Nursery – East Wing” stencilled on to it in old black paint.

Unlike every other part of the building this door seemed to be functioning and clean. It almost looked new when compared with everything else around it, Thomas wondered how it had escaped the ravages of time when the rest of the building looked on the brink of collapse.

Thomas slowly put his ear to the door but could hear nothing from inside. He slowly pulled on the handle and was surprised when the door opened quite freely, the light inside the room flooded the dark hallway and Thomas was left momentarily blinded.