

National Novel Month Write-In

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[Untitled]

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PROMPT: It's your first night at the haunted house and your door shuts and locks itself. There's a ghost in the room with you, and it's trying to keep something else out.

As the heavy wrought-iron gates swung open, revealing the long and narrow drive leading to the house, Kate couldn't help the sinking feeling in her stomach.

"How did you get yourself into this? You should've said no," she thought as Jeremy began the journey forward. When he had suggested a fun adventure together she imagined going skydiving or a spontaneous road trip—not a sleepover in a worn-down, abandoned house just outside of the city limits. It took him forty minutes to convince her, but Kate conceded to the guilt he pressured on her. She didn't want to anger him.

"Stop shaking your leg. This is going to be fun," Jeremy snapped, placing his hand across the console and onto her jittering knee. Kate hadn't even noticed and smiled apologetically. As she opened her mouth to respond, she stopped short at the sight of the looming mansion before them. The old Victorian had been standing for almost 172 years and vacant for the last 117. The whole county had heard tales of the fire in the west wing and the demise of the Voss family line.

Some rich benefactor finally purchased the land, deciding to rebuild the lost wing. In doing so, Jeremy and his team had been hired to oversee the project. Now, two years later and almost completely rebuilt, he thought it romantic to bring his fiancée on an "adventure."

As soon as the car was in park, Jeremy turned to Kate before calmly reminding her, "Now babe. Please remember this is also my work, so be good...yeah? I trust you can entertain yourself for the next three hours while I work."

He disapproved leaving her with the bags and the gloomy house. Upon her entrance Kate was intrigued to find the original decor still hanging in the foyer. "Odd to keep," she thought before proceeding up the winding staircase to a room Jeremy's assistant pointed her to.

The first thing she noticed was the large window across the door. It overlooked the west garden—probably Jeremy's idea of a view. Moving to the bed, she plopped herself onto the soft canopy bed.

“This is such a waste of my time,” Kate muttered before drifting asleep.

She woke to Jeremy shaking her shoulder, informing her to come downstairs for dinner.

The team had set up pizzas and beer in the dining hall. The group looked out of place under the giant crystal chandelier lighting the room. Despite the ornate decorations surrounding them, the portrait above the far end of the table stole everyone’s attention.

The Voss family sat in carefully arranged positions with stoic expressions. Michel Voss stood in the center with Katharin to his left. Their two children, Max and Amelia, sat in front of their parents, almost identical with red hair, fair skin, and green eyes. Those dead eyes seemed to follow Kate as she traveled through the room to her seat. She couldn’t tear her eyes from the painting for the remainder of dinner. While getting ready for bed Kate couldn’t help but think about the Voss children. Something about the painting creeped her out.

“I’m going downstairs for drinks with the guys. Don’t wait up,” Jeremy said walking out before she could respond.

Left sitting there, annoyed at him, Kate laid back scoffing, “I love him so much.”

An intense bang woke her from her sleep. Startled, Kate clicked the lamp on, peering around the room in alarm. Jeremy wasn’t in bed next to her. Reaching over, her phone read 1:36am. “He must still be downstairs,” she thought, pulling the covers back and drifting to the door. She grabbed the brass knob only to find the door unmoving. Confused, she pulled harder before realizing the door was locked. Kate began nervously banging on the door and calling out. Figuring they couldn’t hear her over the music, she could hear drifting upstairs, she turned to grab her phone from the nightstand. What she wasn’t expecting was the redheaded boy and girl standing at the foot of the bed staring at her.

Kate’s scream stuck in her throat as her body backed into the door out of shock. Heart hammering she stared right back and blinked a few times to make sure she was really seeing Amelia and Max Voss.

“I -- you -- but -- you’re dead,” she stuttered unable to form a complete sentence. There was no response. Kate knew the folktale of the twins who died in the fire alongside their parents. There were rumors that the house was haunted, but she never believed it. Until now.

Panic rose and adrenaline coursed through her veins while she processed how she was seeing the 117 year-old ghosts of dead children. Slowly moving around them, their eyes followed her. Grabbing her phone she cautiously called Jeremy. The call dropped.

“There’s no service. Oh my God, I’m going to die,” she whispered. Upon her voice the children rushed forward fingers rising over their mouths. Kate screamed backing away into the wall. The children and Kate stood staring, all three seemingly terrified.

“Why are they scared,” she thought. “They’re the dead ones.” Suddenly the door began shaking viciously as if someone were attempting to enter. Max curled into a ball on the floor while Amelia began crying. Kate would remember her hollow gasps for breath for years to follow.

The door rattling stopped and Kate, frozen in terror, realized Amelia had hidden behind her almost using her like a shield. Normal people would have jerked away, but she felt like she needed to protect the small children from whatever was on the other side of the door. Dead or not.

Slowly moving to the door, Kate reached out to try the door again. As her hand twisted the knob, the door flew open, knocking her onto the floor.

Dazily looking up, she was surprised to see Michel Voss standing above her, angry and fuming. He passed through her, a chill running up her spine, walking toward his kids. Kate watched horrified as he removed the belt from his pants advancing on the children.

Kate rushed forward, arm raised to block the blow headed for Max’s cowering body. The belt passed through her arm and onto the young boy.

“I can’t help! I...” she cried unable to stop the events from unfolding. Mr. Voss couldn’t see her, she realized. The cries of the children echoed through the room when she saw her. Katharin Voss standing behind her husband holding a bottle of whiskey and a candle.

As Katharin tried to save the twins from burning, Michel dragged her down into the flames that engulfed him. In slow motion Kate saw the burning of the Voss family unable to leave the room. As she caught fire Kate woke again with a start—standing in the middle of the room, sweating.

Jeremy never believed what she claimed she saw, accusing her of making up stories as a way to get him in trouble. After he “gave her a lesson” on storytelling, Kate never spoke of it again.

It was a year later at the grand opening of the Voss Estate Hotel, as she was explaining to her mother-in-law that the bruise on her arm was because she fell, that she saw them. Two little red-headed, green-eyed children staring at her from across the room.