

**Threads**

by

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## Prologue

### **Halloween, 11:47 PM**

Elminster the Large knew that he would bite the big one someday, but never in a million years had he imagined that it would end quite like this.

Skittering around the corner of a deserted convenience store, his robe flowing behind him, he ran down the length of the dark alley and straight into a metal trashcan. He spun on the balls of his feet as the hem of the robe caught the edge of the can, pulling it over with a thunderous clang that echoed through the street. He stumbled, his feet going out from under him, landing with another loud crash against the corrugated tin container. He watched helplessly as his glasses tumbled from his face to land in the darkness somewhere beyond.

It was all supposed to be a joke, just something to impress the Goth girl from their D&D group and get Jason laid. How could any of this be real? Now they were both dead, their blood spattered all through Jason's apartment, and he was going to be next.

Elminster wasn't his real name, of course, just the name of the half-troll wizard he'd been playing for nearly three years in his weekly gaming group. If he were really Elminster the Large, he would call lightning down from the heavens and burn the demon alive. And then he'd use his powers to raise Jason and the girl from the dead, and everything would be normal again.

He rose from the ground on shaking legs, his heart hammering in his chest, squinting, looking for a way out. But there was nowhere to go. He was trapped. He'd run through the streets of Chicago like a madman, yelling at the top of his lungs, screaming for help – but tonight was Halloween, and no one took him seriously. Nothing was chasing him, they said. He must be drunk or stoned or worse.

He ran until his sides were in stitches and he thought his lungs would burst, but still the thing pursued him. It was always there, its fetid breath hot on his neck, mocking him, toying with him. The thing was seven feet tall and covered in yellow, oozing lesions, its face an open maw of needle-sharp teeth that dripped green venom and blood.

"For the love of God, somebody fucking help me!" he rasped, his throat raw from screaming. But still no one came. Every muscle in his body ached, and his hands and feet felt frozen from the bitter Chicago wind. He was sure he'd been running for hours, though some rational part of his brain told him it had only been fifteen minutes at best.

He heard the demon's footsteps, echoing against the building. If he could just – there! He wedged himself behind the rusty dumpster at the back of the store. If he held his breath, held on for a few more minutes, maybe the thing would think he'd escaped and let him live.

All the street lights in a three block radius suddenly went out with a loud pop, and that was when he knew that it was over. The night turned pitch black, but he could make out an unearthly red glow coming from the other side of the dumpster. The light grew closer, throwing dancing shadows against the side of the building. And then the dumpster was gone, thrown aside like a child's toy, and he stood face-to-face with the demon he had inadvertently called up from hell.

“You know what they say,” a voice bubbled from somewhere within the oozing monstrosity. “Play with fire...”

“Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck,” he screamed, biting down hard on his tongue. Blood was everywhere. He turned to the wall, frantically clawing and scratching, trying to scale the smooth tin siding. Something touched his shoulder...

The tall, blonde man in the black robes turned around, licking the tangy red blood from his lips. He smiled. He was alone in the alley. He looked up into the night and could just make out the outline of the full moon behind the clouds, reflecting the sun’s light down upon him.

“...and you get burned,” he said, marveling at the way his breath turned to frost as it hit the cold night air. He stripped off the robes, finding a faded pair of blue jeans and a University of Chicago sweatshirt beneath. He crumpled the costume into a ball and casually tossed it into the shadows.

He took a deep breath, filling his nostrils, enjoying the feel of the frigid night air pouring into his lungs. He stared up into the sky, watching as the moon finally found its way out from behind the clouds. Truly, it was going to be a beautiful night.

Reaching a hand under his sweatshirt, he pulled a silver pentagram up and over his head, the silver chain wrapping around his wrist as he freed it from his long blonde hair. He held the star tight in his fist, moved his hand to his mouth, and whispered something into the silver. Brilliant blue sparks shot out from between his fingers, brightening the alley for an instant in a blinding display of fireworks, and then all was dark again.

He dropped to his knees, placing the object on the dirty cement pavement. Touching a finger to his bleeding mouth, he used the red fluid to draw a large pentagram around the necklace, enclosing it with a perfect circle. He rose to his feet and waved a hand over the drawing, moving his fingers in an intricate pattern as he whispered indecipherable words of power into the night. The necklace began to glow, blinked once, faded, and then was gone.

“And so it begins,” he smiled, breaking the circle with his foot, walking through the alley and out into the night without so much as a glance behind him.

## Chapter 1

### Three Days Later

Katy Ruskin awoke tangled in covers, bathed in sweat, breathing hard and on the verge of screaming. She'd had another one of the dreams, this one worse than the last. She was in the house again, the house that Henry Spencer had turned into apartments before she was even born, and was running, running, running for her life. Running from some unseen force, constantly looking over her shoulder, hiding in the shadows, scurrying away from God only knows what.

She'd been having the dreams since she was thirteen and, though they varied from time to time, the theme was always the same. Something she couldn't see – had never managed to see, despite her abilities – was chasing her, mocking her, calling to her, wanting her dead. She'd been having the dreams for over half her life, usually at least once a week, sometimes more but rarely less, and she wanted them to stop. She needed them to stop. But instead of stopping, they seemed to be getting worse.

Rarely had she had the dreams two nights in a row, but last night was the third time in as many days that she'd found herself trapped in the house. She'd been terrified out of her mind, unable to escape, with whatever chased her hot on her heels and closing in fast. And it was getting closer.

The dreams had started when she was thirteen, two days after she had her first period. At first, she'd just had the sense that something dangerous was following her. Later, she heard fragments of a voice, and lately she'd almost been able to see the thing. The dreams were progressing, and she felt powerless to do anything about it. Worse still, she feared what would happen when her pursuer finally caught her.

The house in her nightmares was different than the real house, but, apparently, that hadn't always been the case. She'd surreptitiously asked questions about the building and had long ago confirmed that, without the partitions and remodeling that had turned it into an apartment building in the late seventies, it had once looked exactly like the house that she so feared.

Sighing, shaking her head, Katy rose from her bed and padded to the bathroom. Running a brush through the tangles in her straight brown hair, she blanched as she caught her reflection in the mirror. The night had not been kind to her. Puffy bags hung from under her deep brown eyes and she looked as if she hadn't slept in days. In fact, if she didn't know better, she'd almost think she had aged a good ten years overnight. Katy was only twenty-four, but, this morning at least, she looked to be in her mid-thirties, if not older. This definitely did not bode well for her date tonight.

"Are you okay?" asked a tentative voice from outside the bathroom. "The way you ran in there..."

"I'm fine, Mel. Just a bad dream, that's all. Give me a sec and I'll be right out."

"No rush. Go ahead and take a shower, my first class isn't until ten today."

"Cool," Katy answered, picking up her toothbrush with one hand and a half-used tube of Crest with the other. "Ten minutes and the bathroom's all yours."

Melissa Fleming was Katy's best friend and roommate. They'd been paired up in their first year of college at Western Illinois University in Macomb, and, discovering to their amazement that they had a lot more in common than their incredibly good fashion sense, had quickly become friends. After earning their bachelor degrees - Mel's in journalism, Katy's in art history - they'd decided to move to Chicago, where Mel was from, to pursue their Master's and find their fortunes. That was nearly two years ago, and they'd remained roommates ever since.

They'd been close since that first year of college, but Mel had really become her touchstone when Katy's father died shortly after graduation. Sure, she was close to her mother, but her Mom had been too torn up by the loss of her husband to even breathe. And she and Sam, who was eighteen years her senior and the product of her mother's first marriage, had never really been as close as she would have liked. But Mel had really come through for her, even going so far as to drive with her to Carthage for the funeral. That, more than anything, had cemented their friendship.

Katy stripped off her faded WIU nightshirt, finally ready to shower before schlepping off for another day of work at the gallery. She chanced a second look in the mirror and frowned at her disheveled appearance. She'd never been what anyone would call beautiful, but at five-seven and one-hundred-thirty-five pounds she wasn't ugly either. Her B-cup size breasts had yet to start their inevitable journey southward, and she had reasonably firm, muscular legs with an ass to match, honed to perfection -or at least as close to perfection as she was going to get - by years of track in high school and college. She had pale, porcelain-like skin, and her straight brown hair was cut in a classic page boy bob. She was definitely presentable.

She was intelligent, had a good sense of humor, and knew a lot about a wide variety of subjects. And while she wasn't a knockout, she knew that she was definitely cute, maybe even approaching pretty in an abstract sort of way. Her brown eyes matched her hair, both inherited from her father, while her delicate features and bone structure she had managed to acquire from her mother. All in all, not a bad package: so why weren't more guys interested in her?

Mel had told her on more than one occasion that she was simply unapproachable. Guys were interested, Mel insisted, but they couldn't get past the barriers she had built. She had to be more open, more willing to give people a chance.

"You'd have barriers, too, if you spent your nights running from monsters," Katy muttered to herself, stepping through the stream and into the shower.

## Chapter 2

Emily Spencer was in a bad mood. She lay on her little bed in the tiny room that barely had space for all her stuff, fuming. It was bad enough that her brother had the big bedroom, had a driver's license, got all the attention, and was richer than Donald Trump – she could deal with that. What she couldn't stand was him breaking promises.

Ben had promised to drive her to the library after school and here she was, ready to go, but he still wasn't home yet. And it's not even like he had school as an excuse anymore. Lazy bum that he was, he'd decided to take off a year between high school and college. Big brothers sucked. Worse yet, being thirteen sucked. She flopped herself down on the bed, long red hair fanning out behind her.

She was supposed to meet Brandon behind the library at four-thirty, so it's not like she was only going there to study. But Ben didn't know that, and he was going to ruin everything. Maybe he was content to live his life pining away for someone who didn't even know he existed, but she wasn't. Brandon liked her, and she wasn't about to let Ben screw things up.

She wanted him out of the house, out of the big bedroom, and out of her life. Ever since she could remember, he'd been given everything on a silver platter while she had to work her ass off for whatever scraps were left over. He got good grades without even trying, while she actually had to work at it. And he thought he was so *special* with his abilities, so unique. Sure, he could always win at Monopoly, and he definitely kicked ass at video games, but so what? Being lucky wasn't everything.

Wait until he saw what *she* could do. Then he'd be sorry. They'd all be sorry, from her freakishly forever-young parents to her self-absorbed brother, and even Katy. Everyone would know just how special she really was.

She'd kept her own abilities secret for the six months while she learned how to control them. Once she was ready, she'd show up her brother and laugh as he fell flat on his face. And then she'd be the special one, while he –

The room suddenly began to spin and she felt like she was going to throw up. She tried to sit up but tumbled off the bed instead, her red wool skirt flipping up around her hips as she landed. She rocketed up off the floor and into the bathroom that connected her room to Ben's, stumbling the last few feet to the sink. What was happening?

She caught her reflection in the mirror. Her big green eyes were wide in alarm, her pixie-like face white as a sheet. She looked like – someone she didn't know. What was she doing here? She'd been waiting for her brother, and then...

She stared at her face in the mirror, feeling everything around her slipping away. The face stared back, and she wondered who was looking at her.

"Help me," she whispered, but then she was gone.

###

Ben pulled his candy-apple red PT Cruiser into the driveway. Glancing down at his Rolex, he felt a sense of dread settle over his lanky frame. He'd promised Emily he'd be home at four to give her a ride to the library, and he was nearly an hour late. He wished he could blame it on the weather, but though it was cold and windy Chicago had yet to produce the season's promised first snow.

He stared at his parent's white four-bedroom, ranch-style house. Something seemed different, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. And then he realized – Emily had finally got around to putting her ten-speed in the garage. Maybe she intended to run him over with it.

Steeling himself to face the wrath of his sister, the blonde-haired, green-eyed teenager rolled out of the driver's seat, pulling his leather bomber jacket tight around his chest as he readied to brace the Chicago cold. The library didn't close until six. There was still plenty of time.

"Hey, sis, sorry I'm late," Ben shivered as he pushed through the front door, "Come on, we need to get going." He watched as a peach-colored postal slip fluttered to the ground. He stooped to pick it up, wondering why Emily hadn't answered the door. The postman rarely arrived before three-thirty, and she was almost always home by then.

He looked at the slip; something for his father, from an address in North Carolina. Probably that doll he'd won off eBay. He slipped the paper into his back pocket and shrugged off his jacket as the heat from the house finally hit him.

"Emily?" he called a second time, stepping inside. He'd half-expected to see her standing at the front door when he drove up, impatiently tapping her watch. But she hadn't been there, and nor was she in the living room.

"Look, I'm sorry I was late, okay? I just got tied up at the bookstore." It wasn't a total lie. He did have a part-time job at Border's Books, something his dad had insisted upon when he decided to put college off for a year, but his shift had been over at three. He'd been shooting hoops at Will's house and lost track of the time.

He moved toward Emily's room. "Em, we still have time..." The words stuck in his throat as he pushed open the door to his sister's room. The room, painted blue three years ago, was white again, and filled with filing cabinets and storage boxes. Not only was Emily not there, but her bed and dresser, her stereo, all of it – everything was gone.



### Chapter 3

It was nearly five o'clock before Katy found another chance to reflect on her love life. The first part of her day had quickly gone by in a whirlwind of activity – for whatever reason, the gallery always did its best business Thursday and Friday mornings. She'd managed to sell nearly \$3,000 worth of paintings and sculptures this morning, which meant a \$150 commission on her paycheck at the end of the week. Not too shabby for a part-time working-your-way-through-grad-school type of job.

Katy sat by herself at a table in the corner of Starbuck's, nursing a tall caramel frappuccino. The restaurant was just across the street from the gallery where she worked, on Miracle Mile, so she came here often. In fact, this is where she and Mel had run into Tom Logan.

She thought about Tom and the date they'd made for tomorrow night. She regretted saying yes almost from the moment that he asked her out, but matchmaker Mel had practically pushed her into it.

They knew each other from school, had been in a lot of the same classes, but didn't seem to have much in common beyond that. Still, he was cute, and seemed intelligent, so she might as well give it a shot. It'd been so long since she'd been with a guy that she was tempted to just jump him in the car and get it over with it, though she knew that she probably wouldn't.

She sighed, for a moment forgetting her troubles and just letting herself enjoy the sweet smells of cinnamon and chocolate that lingered in the air. She sometimes wondered if she might not enjoy the smell of the café as much if not more so than the drinks. She allowed herself to relax, pushing back her hectic day for just a few more seconds.

And then the world caught up to her. Katy glanced at her watch – ten more minutes until the end of her break, and another three hours before she could go home. Between school and work she was exhausted, but she wouldn't have it any other way. She was this close to finishing her degree, and the sooner she got her papers the sooner she could get a real job and begin to carve a niche for herself in the real world.

"Excuse me, are you using that?" asked an older woman at the next table, gesturing at the old-fashioned sugar bowl. Katy smiled, wordlessly passing the bowl across the aisle, noticing that the woman's dress looked a lot like the dress her sister had been wearing when she'd visited Carthage last Christmas.

She suddenly felt herself gasping for air, as if she'd momentarily forgotten how to breathe. She rocked back in her chair and nearly fell over, then slumped against the green-covered table. The bowl fell from her fingers, shattering at her feet, broken glass scattering everywhere.

"...are you okay? Miss, are you okay?" It was the woman who'd asked for the sugar.

"I think so," Katy looked up at her, confused. What happened? She was thinking about her sister Samantha, who had died the same year Katy was born, and then – nothing. It was like her mind had gone completely blank. She blinked, staring at the woman in the pretty floral dress.

"Are you sure you're okay? Do you need me to call someone?"

“No, I think I just swallowed funny,” said Katy, gesturing toward her half-finished drink. “Caffeine rush, you know. I’m okay now.”

“Ma’am, is there a problem?” said a voice from behind her. It was the girl from the counter, a pretty blonde who couldn’t be a day over twenty. “Is there something wrong with your drink? Do you need me to get you another one?”

“No, no, I’m fine,” her cheeks reddened, “Just went down the wrong pipe, I think. I’m okay.”

The woman in the floral dress sat back down, concern still evident on her face. She smiled at the counter girl, who looked back at Katy.

“Are you sure?” she asked, kneeling to clean up what remained of the sugar bowl.

“I’m fine, I promise,” she answered, rising to her feet on shaky legs. “I’m sorry about the sugar. I should have been more careful.” The words sounded lame even to her. She needed to get out of here, get back to work. She pulled her green Bernardo nylon jacket from the back of the chair and slung it over her shoulder.

“Well, if you’re sure...” the woman trailed off, her eyes darting toward the counter and the ever-increasing line of customers.

“I’m sure. Thanks, though,” Katy mumbled, her face a crimson red. The whole café was looking at her. She dropped a twenty dollar bill on the table, said it was for the sugar bowl, and started toward the door.

“Ma’am, that’s really not necessary,” said the girl, but Katy was already gone.

## Chapter 4

Ben knew that something was wrong. It had been almost five hours since Emily disappeared, and no one else in the house seemed to notice. At first he thought it was an elaborate joke, but now he wasn't so sure. He'd considered the fact that he might be going insane, but, damn it, for all he'd cursed Emily, he'd never wanted her to disappear. If he was crazy, why would his psychosis take the form of wishing away his sister?

Other things had changed as well. His best friend Sam had pretended not to know him when he'd tried to IM him this afternoon, and his high school diploma now listed him as "Benjamin Paul Spencer" when his real middle name was Matthew. If this was a scam, someone had gone to an incredible amount of trouble to pull it off.

He flipped through one of the family photo albums he'd grabbed from the den. Emily was missing, of course, and there were some other discrepancies as well; Grandpa Paul was nowhere to be found, the family vacation to the Grand Canyon in '96 had apparently never happened, and, in all the shots featuring the Ruskins, it was usually just a very young Katy and her dad, occasionally Katy and her mother, but never the three together, and he couldn't find Sam anywhere.

He shuddered, closing the album. What in the hell was going on? He sat cross-legged on his bed and booted up his laptop PC, waited for it to connect to the wireless network in the den before tapping in a series of addresses he knew by heart. His Dad's website was gone, and none of his books were listed on Amazon. Apparently, he'd never written *Small Things* or any of the other novels that had made him famous. As Katy would say, this was definitely descending into "weirdness," and he knew that it wasn't him that had gone crazy.

He casually mentioned something about Emily to his Dad, and he looked at him like he was nuts. He considered confiding in his parents, but wasn't sure if he could convince them. After all, if his father had never written any novels and together they hadn't produced a thirteen-year-old daughter named Emily, what else might have changed? He felt bad keeping this from them, but, until he knew more about what was going on, he didn't want to confide in anyone other than Katy. He hoped she'd return his call soon.

His family had long been touched by magic – real, live magic, the kind you read about in books – and he knew full well about his parents' involvement with a magical talisman some ten years before he was born, and the resulting deaths that had followed. His father had chronicled all of it in his first novel, the one that didn't seem to exist anymore. Could there be magic involved?

On a whim, he Googled the terms "Paul McGee" and "Carthage," followed the results to the Carthage Journal-Pilot, and nearly fell over when he read the article the link provided:

### **From the Carthage Journal Pilot, Wednesday October 28, 1987**

The Halloween Murders: A Retrospective  
By Ashley Allen, Managing Editor

It was ten years ago this week that the first of what would come to be known as the Halloween Murders took place in Carthage. Four years later, no one was ever arrested for the crimes. Many theories as to motive have been developed during the last ten years, but none have shed any real light on the spree or the culprit behind it.

The following is a timeline of the events in the Halloween Murders case:

October 31, 1977 - Paul McGee, a security guard at the Marine Trust bank in Carthage, was found murdered in his garage at approximately 8:15 p.m. He was bludgeoned repeatedly with a crowbar before his throat was slit. McGee was found by his eighteen-year-old daughter Jennifer.

McGee was survived by his wife Abigail West McGee and their daughter Jennifer, both of Carthage. This was the third time that tragedy had struck the McGee family; McGee lost a sister, Margaret McGee Ruskin, to a 1963 murder in Chicago; and McGee's son, William Tanner, drowned in 1975.

Jeremiah Watson was arrested on suspicion of murder three days later but was never formally charged with a crime and was released the next day. Watson, a drifter, had sought work on the crew remodeling the Spencer Heights apartments (later renamed Huffman Heights in honor of decorated Korean War veteran Bruce "Brody" Huffman, who had worked on the crew and was killed in a construction accident on September 3, 1981) of which McGee was the foreman. Watson had applied for work and allegedly argued with McGee over not getting the job.

"He was the only suspect we had," said then-Sheriff Frank Reynolds of Carthage. "Once we eliminated him, we were never able to develop a solid lead. There just wasn't any evidence."

October 31, 1978 - Ellen Jones Spencer, a schoolteacher at Ferris Elementary, was found by a patrolman at 4:38 a.m. hanging by her feet from a tree in the county courthouse courtyard, on the north side of the square. Her mouth was covered in duct tape and her throat had been cut. She bled to death.

Spencer was survived by husband Henry Benjamin Spencer and their son Shawn, both of Carthage.

"It was the cleanest crime scene I've ever witnessed," said Reynolds. "We never did find the murder weapon. There was absolutely nothing to go on."

Special agent John Aiken was brought in to consult on the case. Aiken, a fifteen-year FBI veteran, put together a task force and worked on the case for three months but was never able to put together a strategy for finding the killer. Aiken, convinced that the two murders were related, referred to the culprit as "The Halloween Killer" in an interview with Journal-Pilot reporter Michelle Owings and the name stuck.

October 31, 1979 – Aiken was once again brought in. Together with Reynolds, they set up a 24-hour patrol of the city from October 30 through November 1. Halloween was cancelled that year, as it was every year until 1985. Twenty-five uniformed police and ten undercover FBI agents were assigned to cover the city, and Reynolds claimed, “This time, we’ll be ready.”

Despite the patrols, Candace “Candy” Martin Ruskin was attacked at 2:45 p.m. behind Ruskin's Pizzeria, the restaurant she owned with her husband. This was the first attack to happen during daylight hours. Ruskin had been emptying the trash in a dumpster behind the restaurant when an unknown assailant slipped a burlap sack over her head and began punching her repeatedly in the ribs.

Her husband, Frederick James Ruskin of Carthage, had left the restaurant to make a supply run and was in his vehicle when he “felt something was wrong.” Ruskin, a former Chicago detective and Sheriff of Hancock County from 1965 to 1975, later said he had learned to trust his instincts. (His first wife, Margaret, mentioned earlier in this article, was murdered in 1963.)

Ruskin ran into the restaurant, asking his wait-staff the whereabouts of his wife. An employee indicated that he had seen her take out the trash. Ruskin immediately ran through the kitchen and out the back door, coming face-to-face with his wife’s attacker. The assailant, wearing a Frankenstein mask and dressed entirely in black, had Candy Ruskin on his shoulder and was carrying her away from the restaurant.

Ruskin ran at the assailant, tackling him, pulling the mask from his face. The unconscious woman fell from the assailant’s arms as he and Ruskin stumbled to the ground in the struggle. Afraid for his wife’s life, Ruskin rolled away from the attacker to verify her condition. After checking her pulse and breathing, he pursued the assailant on foot but was unable to catch him.

Candy Ruskin suffered multiple broken ribs and a concussion but was otherwise unhurt.

Ruskin stated that, “I must have hurt him, because he was limping after he got up, but I still couldn’t catch him.” According to Ruskin, the killer had a black ski-mask on beneath the Frankenstein mask. The mask was the first tangible piece of evidence that the police had, but ultimately didn’t serve to help bring the killer to justice.

October 31, 1980 - Aiken and Reynolds doubled the patrols and renewed the Halloween ban. Everyone was to stay in their homes after dark. Samantha Ruskin, 17, and Arthur Cook, 19, were found murdered at the Jaycee Park on Halloween morning at approximately 8:30 a.m. Time of death was estimated to be between 12:00 a.m. and 1:00 a.m. that morning. Both teenagers were beaten and strangled. Ruskin was survived by her then-pregnant mother Candy Ruskin and step-father Fred Ruskin. Cook was survived by his mother Janice Cook of Carthage.

“They weren’t supposed to be there,” said Reynolds. “If they hadn’t ignored the curfew, they might still be alive.” Reynolds was terminated from his position on January 13, 1981, and Fred Ruskin was re-hired as Sheriff two weeks later.

October 31, 1981 – Sheriff Ruskin, working with FBI investigator Aiken, canvases Carthage with nearly eight dozen FBI agents, local police, and state troopers. Curfew is maintained, and Halloween passes into November 1 without incident.

“The killer took my step-daughter as well as my marriage,” Ruskin said in a town hall meeting the next day. “He took four innocent lives, and we will not rest until he is brought to justice.” Ruskin and his wife had filed for divorce later that year; Ruskin was awarded full custody of his then-one-year-old daughter Katherine Grace.

It was only recently revealed, nearly seven years after the fact, that, in each of the murders, a hole was sawed into the victim’s chest and their heart was removed from their body. This information was held back by the police in an attempt to draw out the murderer. The hearts were never recovered.

As of Halloween 1987, Carthage has remained free of the “Halloween Murdered.” Ruskin, however, was never able to fulfill his pledge; he died from cirrhosis of the liver earlier this year. Ruskin was survived by his wife Candy Martin and their daughter Katherine.

None of this had ever happened! Both sets of his grandparents were still alive, and he’d seen Sam Ruskin just last year, during Christmas. Everything was changing around him, but he was the only one who knew it.

But why did he know it? Was it because of his abilities? His parents were convinced that he and Katy’s abilities were a result of what had happened years ago, that using the magic had altered their DNA and when they had children the magic had passed on to them. If so, maybe Katy had also noticed the changes. He’d already left her a message at home, so he picked up the phone to try her at work.