

It Was Cold Outside

by Katherine Jackson



I was walking through the woods. It was cold outside. I zipped my yellow parka all the way up to my neck. I kept walking on the icy earth. Then I saw Mr. Bernie, my next door neighbor who never socialized or became associated with anything in the small town.

"Hey Fran," he said so mellow it was somewhat unsettling. I didn't know how he knew my name; my family had introduced me to him, but that was so long ago.

"Um, hello, Mr. Bernie," I said startled that he would be here in the middle of the woods. The only reason I was out there was because my dad and I had made a shortcut to get to school. I didn't think any other grown up knew about it.

"I built a really cool shack out here. Do you want to see it?" he asked me.

"No, I'm sorry," I said, becoming disturbed. "I have to get to school, and it is very cold."

"Well, if you come in, you will get a lot warmer," he said, trying to persuade me. "I can give you some hot chocolate, light a fire, and—"

"No sir," I said abruptly.

"I don't think I can take no for an answer, Franny," he replied, walking closer to me. His voice made my skin itch. I took a couple of steps back, but slipped and fell on the icy path. I was scared. My heart was beating so fast I could hear it. I started to scoot back farther into the woods. He was following me. I closed my eyes. I thought about my life, my family and friends. I thought about everything that I had done during the past fifteen years...and then everything I hadn't done. I opened my eyes and he was closer. I tried to take a deep breath and relax, but I couldn't. My bones felt too weak to lock together and get up. The harder I forced myself to get up, the closer Mr. Bernie would get to me.

Mr. Bernie now had me. He slung me around his shoulder and he turned around and started walking out of the woods toward his house. I tried to scream, but I couldn't.

We finally entered the house. Mr. Bernie was out of breath due to the cold and having carried one hundred and ten pounds of helpless limbs over his shoulder. He sat me down. I gasped for air.

"Stand up!" he yelled. I tried to stand up, and tripped over the chair leg. Falling to the ground I could hear Mr. Bernie laughing, and not just laughing, but laughing with joy and contempt. I sniffled and wiped my rose chapped cheeks. I looked up at the rafters before I moved my feet to get up. There I saw a thick rope. I wanted to scream and run away but I couldn't.

"Stand up!" he yelled again. I quickly stood up. "On the chair," he growled at me. I stood on the chair and he pulled down the rope. Knowing what was going to happen, I prayed.

Specter

by Kat Gramm-Zlotnick

The darkness surrounded him like a soft, warm blanket. As the muggy hot air choked his throat, the sweat on his brow slowly slipped into his eyes, stinging them. He blinked and wiped his eyes, continuing onward. Trees' limbs cut at his torso; massive tree roots trapped his feet in an endless maze. He knew the way out of the treacherous forest, but the night blocked his freedom.

He had been running; and the scratches on his skin and shredded clothing were evidence enough. Out of breath, he continued on, the danger behind him. It was coming, though, faster and faster with each step. Turning his head to see behind him, his foot caught in a tree root and he fell. His head smacked against the leaf-covered ground, and, as his hands landed with force upon the underbrush, his skin was cut again. Blood seeped into the soil. Crying out, he slowly rose, and stood unsteadily, his mind not sure where the ground was.

Quickly, he walked forward, his only goal being to reach the end. Danger's feet were padding against the ground. Gasping and huffing, his hands bled more. Often wounds burst open. He gritted his teeth. The light of the full moon cast itself in tiny patches through the thick canopy. He began to jog, then run, then sprint as the danger moved faster. A screech pierced the silence. He pushed himself to the limit.

The pasture at the edge of the forest came into view. A quaint, dimly lighted house waited for him. His face bloomed into a smile. A laugh escaped his lips. His feet crushed the dead, brown leaves for the last time as he escaped the forest. Hysterical laughs jumped from his throat. Falling to his knees, his cries of joy echoed into the mid-night sky.

Then a cold hand gripped his shoulder. Eyes filled with horror, he turned his head and saw the danger behind him. He had not escaped just yet! Behind him, a strange, transparent creature stood still. With blank eyes it stared. A smile crept upon its pale face; sharp teeth glared in the moonlight.

One last scream resonated through the night.

