

## **Thorns**

Written by Ashlee

It was a snowy winter night, and I was lying on my floor staring at the ceiling. I combed my hand through the shaggy green carpet that was stapled to all the floors in my grandma's house while impatiently waiting for my friend, Elliot. He's two years older than me and always comes over around dinner time to eat and listen to a bedtime story read from mom, then he goes home or falls asleep here.

Although he came almost every night, there were a few times when he didn't show up. I guessed tonight was one of those nights. I rolled over with a disappointed sigh and sat up to face my large window that was frosted over with a thin layer of ice. Nothing in my room held my interest, so I crawled to my door and opened it. I laid on my side with half my body out of the frame and watched the stairs.

"Mom," I said. I didn't get a reply, so I took a big inhale so it could reach her through her selective hearing. "Mom."

"Yes?" she asked. Her voice traveled from the kitchen and up the stairs with the scent of Italian soup.

"I'm bored," I said.

"Then do a puzzle with Grammy."

"But that's so boring," I said, as I scrunch my face up and flopped on my back.

"Would you like to help me in the kitchen?" she asked.

"No, I want to go outside. Can I go to the park?"

"It's too late to go to the park. Besides, it's icy out."

"I can go by myself."

"You're eleven years old. You're not going out by yourself at this hour."

"Please, eleven is old enough."

"No, Cecelia."

"Please," I asked, testing my luck. She tapped a spoon on a dish, then left the kitchen, and her head poked out at the end of the stairs.

"You know the rule," she said. "No going out-"

"Outside alone at night," I finished.

"I'm guessing Elliot's not coming tonight?" she asked. I threw my hands then turned onto my stomach and wormed my way back into my bedroom.

"Sorry, honey," she said. "We'll go another time, I promise."

My mom went back downstairs, and I felt deprived of the lack of adventures I hadn't had. I looked back to my window to see my snow boots knocked over under it. If she doesn't see me leave or notice me come back, I'll be okay. I can prove to her I can go outside on my own. I grabbed my boots and looked for my heavy coat. It was covered by unfolded pillowcases Elliot and I used to slide down the stairs in. I pushed them aside and slipped my jacket on.

When I went down the stairs, I placed my feet on all the right spots to keep them from creaking, and I peeked my head into the living room. Grandma was passed out in her rocking

chair while Family Feud played on TV. I took her loud snore as an opportunity to open the front door and step outside.

My feet nearly froze when I stepped into a pile of snow. It was like thorns pricking into my feet telling me to stay. However once the door was closed, I put my boots on, pulled my hood up, and started my walk to the park a couple of blocks away.

"I'll be back when the sun sets," I said.

I listened to the crunch of the snow when I walked to the park while the smells of burning wood and smoke from people's chimneys gave a sense of warmth I no longer felt. When I arrived at the park, I dove to the ground to create snow monsters and balls of ammo for the armies I made. I ran around conquering the lumped creatures while ignoring my nimble figures turning red with numbness.

"To your left! To your right," I shouted. "Ammo, we need more ammo, Lump!"

"We're all out, Sarge," I said, changing the tone of my voice. I turned to the tall snow lump beside me.

"Go home to your kids. Survive Lump," I said, then dramatically tackled the snowman on the other side. I giggled while starting a snow angel.

I imagined what my mom would say when I went back and was caught. *"Young lady, you're grounded,"* she'd shout. Maybe she'll lock me in my room as if it were a dungeon, stone walls, and chains adorning it.

"Cecelia!" Mom shouted. I whip my head in the direction her voice echoed from.

"Mom," I said, shocked. I hadn't realized the only thing lighting up my surroundings was the park's lights and along the street.

I saw her across the street in the thin red cardigan she had always worn, dancing with the thick snowflakes falling diagonally from the sky. I abandoned my crooked snow angel and started walking in her direction.

When I looked at mom, she was already in the middle of the street with worry and anger etched on her face. Then out of nowhere, a car that went unnoticed sounded its horn, and its tires skidded on black ice, giving a warning of its presence too late. Within that blink of an eye, mom was lying a few feet from the car with a broken windshield.

"Mom!" I shouted. I struggled to keep my balance while I ran toward her. I dropped to her side, and a gash going into her hairline caused tears to instantly flow.

"It's okay. Everything's going to be okay," I said through choked sobs. I took off my jacket and lay it on top of her, hoping it gave her warmth. "Somebody, help!"

I felt my tears freezing on my face while I continued to shout. When someone came to help, I stopped yelling, but all I could do was think of what I could've done to stop this. I should've listened, followed the rules, and stayed in the house. I should have sat in front of grandma on her rocking chair and done the tedious puzzle. The ugly green carpet around the house should've grown into vines. No, thorns. It should have been thorns three inches long to keep me still.

The sickening break of the windshield could've been a plate slipping from fingertips when grabbed out of a cabinet. The thud of my mom could've been me sliding down the stairs in a pillowcase with Elliot again. I was too stupid to consider this was what the word dangerous meant when my mom said it. I should've acted as a good kid.

If Elliot just showed up on time, if I wasn't so impatient. If only the thorns were real.

End