

Northern Michigan

Thursday, September 22, 1966

3:43 p.m.

Chapter 1

Red and black plaid thermos still in hand, twelve- year-old Lucas scrambled out the back door, allowing the wooden screen door a fatal slam behind him.

“If you come back, I’ll kill her,” his Aunt Ramona yelled out the door.

Lucas scampered towards a persimmon horizon and across the patchy brown grass of Billing’s meadow before climbing through freshly stained fence rails. Clambering up the hill and into the woods, his lungs burned like ants under a sun-drenched magnifying glass.

Lucas hadn’t planned on running away that afternoon. He definitely had not planned on rattling Wretched’s cage today. Tomorrow was Friday– the night of his great overnight escape to Tommy’s for Oreos, watching Wild Wild West where undercover government agent James West battled crime in the 1870s old West, and Man from U.N.C.L.E where American spies Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin fought evil T.H.R.U.S.H agents. Tommy had walkie-talkies they used to communicate, whispering ‘open Channel D’ like the TV spies.

It was unfettered freedom.

It was what got him through each week. He started the count down on Saturday mornings. He wouldn’t risk his Friday nights at Tommy’s for anything.

The tuna fish sandwich deal wasn't by far the worst thing Wretched had done to Lacy or him—more than once he'd been surprised to wake up in the morning. But the violence surprised him. It was as though he could see himself doing it, right before he did it. Like a preview of a coming movie event at the theater. And suddenly, there he was, in the middle of the event.

This wasn't the first time Ramona the Wicked had plopped a tuna fish sandwich in front of Lacy under threat of punishment if she refused to eat it. Lucas tried to switch plates when Ramona turned her back.

Tuna fish wasn't his favorite, but at least it wouldn't make his throat close so that he couldn't breathe like it did Lacy.

Ramona had switched the plates back that afternoon without saying a word. She'd just smiled the smile that had been visited upon them daily for the past four years. The smile that boasted, I am pure evil and there's nothing you can do about it.

But he did it. Threw his Math book at her. Looking back, he could hardly believe it. Why he ended up going ape shit on her now he had no idea.

On a Thursday no less.

He'd been shaking with fear, his left eye blinking uncontrollably. He'd only attacked Ramona the Wartbreath in his fondest of dreams.

It had taken his aunt by surprise, thrown her off balance enough so that he could snatch the toaster and nail her in her naked broad forehead. Spying his father's black and red plaid Aladdin thermos on the counter, Lucas had snagged it as his next round of ammunition.

She had inched herself up along the kitchen counter, bloody tributaries pouring through her frizzled dark hair, down her forehead, onto her orange and black checked shirt. Garnering enough strength to block the back doorway with her substantial girth, disrupting hundreds of tiny Kamikaze sun motes that September afternoon. The spittle dribbling down her almost chin spoke to her sincerity before she'd stepped aside, indicating the door to Lucas.

“If you come back, I’ll kill her.”