

# SHELDON *the* SLEEP MONSTER®

**Dedicated my wife,  
children and friends.**

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Based on an original  
story by David Jablonski  
Written by David Jablonski  
and Michael Besly  
Illustrations by David  
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SHELDON *the* SLEEP  
MONSTER<sup>®</sup>





# The BEGINNING

For many years, a house deep in the woods of a sleepy little town called New Hollow, was believed to be abandoned. A local businessman named Owen took a special interest in the home as he suspected it was brimming with valuable antique furniture.

A happy new family, mother, father, and daughter, were planning to move in and Owen hoped to profit from clearing the place out. One Saturday morning he dispatched two of his delivery drivers. The lumbering oaf Phil and the arrogant, inattentive, Max. As the drivers entered the long forgotten abode, they could scarcely have imagined the life that wait inside.

A life whose origins go as far back as mankind itself.



A photograph of a bedroom with green walls and a window with a view of trees. A bed with a tufted mattress is in the foreground, and a desk with a rotary phone is on the right. The text "Chapter One" is overlaid on the image.

## Chapter One

# MOVERS

The roaring sound of truck engines, squeaky breaks, and clattering furniture filled the air on this late summer day in the quiet mountainside town of New Hollow. A small house was the source of all this commotion as a young couple had just decided to clear out some space for their young daughter. They thought nothing of what they might be disturbing and stood patiently in the yard waiting for the movers to finish.

“Can you be careful with those things!” Owen yelled from a distance.

“Boss! Max and I are trying our best, it’s heavy!” Phil griped while dragging an arm across his sweat drenched forehead. Owen shook his head in shame.

Max came marching across the lawn, “If it weren’t for this big, worthless beast we’d have everything taken care of!” Max shoved a finger in Phil’s face.

“Get out of my face!”

“Why what are you going to do about it?” Max scoffed and then jabbed his finger back. Phil grabbed Max and tackled him to the ground.

“What are you two doing!” Owen tried to break up their fighting but found himself getting roped right in. Dirt flew and the young couple stared in awe as they watched the three continue to brawl. Phil finally laid flat on top of Max and Owen. He looked up at the couple, and blinked twice, “Oh, did you just see that?” The woman was too shocked to reply, and she and her husband both nodded their heads in slow agreement. Owen clawed his way out from underneath Phil’s heavy body.

“I am so sorry.” Owen stammered as the couple gawked. “They don’t exactly know how to act around people.”

“Oh...no, of course not” The young man said blankly. “Did you get the bed from the spare room?”

“My two esteemed colleagues were just on their way to do so.” Owen menacingly put his hands on Phil and Max’s shoulders. “Isn’t that right boys?”

Phil and Max give each other a worried look and replied in unison, “Yes sir.” The couple walked away and just as Phil and Max were about to follow suit Owen pulled them back.

“I want you two to know that I will not have two lowly truck drivers disparaging my great reputation.” He said with a hiss.

“Oh and don’t let the monsters get you.” The young man joked.

Phil’s eyes became extremely wide and he stared in horror. “You... you...you can’t be serious?!” “No of course I’m not serious, settle down!” Owen shoved the men forward and walked away while the pair stumbled across the yard to the front the door. Phil threw the door wildly open and stepped inside with Max close on his heels. They did not see but as the door shut shadowy figures stealthily moved across the hall upstairs.

“Sheldon be quiet,” his mother hissed.

“I think they want to play with us!” He exclaimed as he walked over to the edge of the stair railing.



“Son they don’t want to play, we can’t be seen.” His father said sternly.

Sheldon’s father gathered his family and ushered them away from the stairs. Furniture crashed to the floor from clumsy deliverymen and grunts could be heard as they strained their muscles. With each nerve wracking crash Sheldon’s parents became more and more on edge. Who are these people? What if we are seen? They thought to themselves. Though the day’s activities had failed to raise any kind of alarm in Sheldon’s mind.

“That looks like fun! Crash, boom, crash!” Sheldon yelled before his father covered his mouth and pulled him in close.

The noise of the house was currently a safeguard. Sheldon’s father guided Sheldon and his mother into a back corner of the house and into the spare bedroom. Sheldon’s mother wrapped her arms tightly around her son and begged for him to remain quiet. Cobwebs hung from every wall and flakes of dust danced through the sunlight in this forgotten room. Sheldon’s father closed the door slowly and motioned for his family to press themselves against the wall. He quietly pulled the curtains together and softly shut the door. There was nothing that the family could do now but wait.

“Phil can you stop watching everyone else work and do something?” Max scorned.

“Hey Maxy, we gotta go upstairs remember?” “Oh dang, that’s right, well get out of the way and move!” “One of these days I’m going to sit on you.” Phil stated blankly. Max stared back and shoved Phil to the side and trotted angrily up the stairs. “Max wait!” Phil yelled. “What could you possibly want?” “I don’t want the monsters to take you!” “The monsters aren’t going to take me, didn’t you hear him? He said he was kidding!” Max ran up the stairs and marched towards the spare bedroom door. Phil jumped in front of him and thrust his stomach out to stop him. “I don’t want to let you in!”

“Well you don’t have a choice, we need to get this stuff out of here.” They both stared at each other. “Today!” Max shouted firmly.

Max barreled into Phil but it was no use, Phil’s girth was too great. “Come on Phil I don’t have time for this!” “Just let me open it, someone scrawny like you would definitely get eaten.” “Hey I’m not scrawny!” On the other side of the door Sheldon was restless. The argument between the two men had only bolstered his excitement and with each passing second Sheldon was slipping from his mother’s grasp. Phil placed his hand nervously on the door. As the knob began to rattle Sheldon finally wriggled out from his mother’s arms and rushed to the center of the room. Before the door could open, as if she were saving him from an oncoming truck, Sheldon’s mother shoved him out of the way and under the bed. Phil threw open the door to the room and looked around. Nothing.

“See Phil there’s no one here, I bet you feel foolish.” “Better safe than sorry I always say!” “Is it you who always says that? Max retorted. Phil walked across the room and casually sat on top of the mattress. The pressure of his enormous weight pushed the mattress down and smushed Sheldon’s face into the floor.

“Do you think anyone would even want this thing Maxy?” Phil puzzled.

“Well you know Owen, he thinks all junk is treasure. Now hurry up let’s move this thing.”

Phil got up from the bed and the two men positioned themselves along each end.

“We doing this thing frame and all Phil?”

“Sure Maxy! If we can get it through the door.” They gripped the bed as tight as they both could and Sheldon panicked. He climbed up into the frame of the bed just below the springs. He held on as tightly as his little hands could bear and felt himself rise from the floor. The two men grunted and heaved as they carried Sheldon out of the room, down the stairs, and onto a delivery truck. His parents could do nothing but watch in horror as their child was taken from them. On that fateful day Sheldon hid in the belly of that bed with not a clue as to where he was, where he was going, or how to escape. Trapped in the dark and entirely alone, Sheldon’s journey had only just begun.

## Chapter Two

# DELIVERY

The truck came to a screeching halt after what seemed like an eternity. Sheldon had dozed off in his misery and now groggily awoke in the darkness. Sheldon rubbed his eyes and strained his ears to hear two voices walking toward the rear.

“Maxy did you think that bed was a little heavy?”

“Not nearly as heavy as youOpen this thing up.”

“I always do it!” Phil pouted.

“Ugh, get out of my way!” Max shoved Phil out of the way and tried to open the truck door himself. Max struggled and Phil stared at him in amusement. Max pushed with all his strength, straining his back and legs. This pathetic scene continued for some time until Phil stepped in, placed a hand gently on the door handle, and lifted it up with ease. Light filtered in from the outside and Sheldon tried to recall what day it might be.

“Maxy I’m tired of working weekends,” Phil said glumly.

“Well you know how Owen sees us.” Max pretended to crack a whip in the air.

“I can’t believe it’s Monday tomorrow.”

“YeahOh well nothing we can do about it, let’s get this junk inside.”

Sheldon felt their hands take hold of the bedposts and not long after he was hoisted into the air. The bed rocked and bounced as it left the back of the truck and Sheldon could feel the heat rise from the asphalt below.

“Where are they taking me?” He thought to himself.

The deliverymen crossed the pavement and entered a room with the strong smell of old wood and dust. The smell filled Sheldon's nostrils and a grey glow emanated from the concrete floor. They seemed to be in a sort of storage room.

"Phil take it over there next to the rest of the beds."

"Honestly, who would want to buy a used bed?"

"If Owen thinks he can sell it he'll take it."

"Disgusting!" Max exclaimed.

"What is it?"

"Cat hair Owen needs to take care of that fur-ball he calls a pet, it makes a mess of everything!"

"ACHOO!" Phil sneezed forcefully. "I'm allergic! Get that away from me!"

Max grabbed a fistful of hair from the bed and stuck his hand right under Phil's nose.

"Maxy don't do th—ACHOO!" Phil was knocked backward off of his feet and fell back on a fragile bed, shattering it into a thousand pieces.

"Look what you did you big dumb ogre!" Max Shouted

"Let's get out of here Maxy."

The two bolted out of the storage room and locked the door behind them. With the door clicking shut Sheldon was once again left in the dark. A musty smell filled the air and the jaws of the dark sought to overtake him. Anxiety reared its ugly head and Sheldon's thoughts raced. All that awaited him was more darkness and more time.

Later that evening Sheldon remained quiet and still inside the frame of the mattress. He was overcome with emotions from the day; fear, nervousness, and excitement. As his mind wandered a noise nestled itself into his ears. Sheldon woke up from his gloom and focused his mind to make sense of what he was hearing. A light whistle caressed its way gently throughout the room. Sheldon's ears perked up and a small glow of curiosity began to well within him. The noise floated closer and closer as the seconds passed. Suddenly the whistling stopped and Sheldon heard a young voice rise from across the room.

"What is this, a new bed?" The voice pondered. Feet tread lightly across the ground and whatever had entered the room was now just inches from the bed. "We know how to deal with new beds, don't we?" It said as it grazed the top of the bed with its hand. "A few abrasions here" The voice muttered as Sheldon heard the tearing of fabric just above his head. "A laceration there." A painful screech tore through the air from what sounded like claws being dragged against the posts. "Yes that'll do just fine. Now for the final touch, all beds deserve a

catnap!” Sheldon felt something fling itself on top of the bed. The creature landed right on top of Sheldon’s head and in a frightened jolt it tumbled to the ground.

“What was that? Show yourself!” It demanded. A tense silence settled around the room as Sheldon remained still. His breathing picked up and his heart began to race. Sheldon slowly reached his foot out to touch the ground below. “Hello?” The voice called out as it watched Sheldon moving out from under the bed. Sheldon emerged and stared directly into the eyes what appeared to be a kitten.

After a few moments of intense staring the cat jumped back in fright. “What are you?” He yelped.

“What are YOU?” Sheldon retorted.

The cat looked at Sheldon, widened his eyes, puffed up his chest and began making attempts to roar. “Ahem, roooooaaa—hold on, I have something in my throat. Eck, hack, bleh. Sorry, hairball.”

Sheldon stared in amazement at the cat.

He cleared his throat, “Why I’m Digs the cat and pet, slash best friend, of the owner Owen. I guess you could say that makes me second in command. Now what’s your name?”

“My namels Sheldon.”



“Hmmodd name, why are you here?”

“I wasn’t trying to it was an accident. Those two deliverymen brought me.”

“Oh Phil and Max Yea not exactly the brightest stars in the sky, how are you getting home?”

“I don’t know where home is. I’m waiting for my parents to come get me.”

“Oh are you? Do they know where you are?”

“No, but they’ll find me. They wouldn’t forget about me.”

Digs had a concerned look on his face, “Well Sheldon you can stay here until your parents come and find you.”

“Really?”

“Sure, why not. Owen’s usually busy anyway. Mattress stores are never exciting.”

Digs puts his arm around Sheldon’s shoulder and smiled warmly. “If you keep hiding under beds people are going to think you are some kind of monster.” Digs joked.

“I have a feeling that they already do,” Sheldon replied.

## Chapter Three

# TIME

As the years passed Sheldon and Digs not only built their friendship but Digs helped Sheldon stay out of sight from humanity. He quickly learned that people were not likely to accept something they didn't understand and Digs warned Sheldon that the consequences of him being seen could be catastrophic. Sheldon could dip and dive through customers and remain in the shadows under the beds always just out of view. Even with all this, a “relatively” safe place to live, friendship, and comfortable mattresses, something was missing.



“Sheldon where are you?” Digs hissed.

“I’m right here!”

“Where? I can’t see you?” Digs looked under every mattress, but failed to find Sheldon anywhere. Digs went under the oldest mattress in the darkest corner and scanned it with his keen feline eyes. He still found nothing. As he backed up underneath he heard the faint sound of breathing.

“Hello Digs.” Sheldon said slyly.

“Ha, I knew you were here!” As Digs turned around to face Sheldon there was nothing, but darkness. “Where’d you go!” A hand reached out from the darkness and tapped Digs on the shoulder. Digs leaped backward hissing and bearing his claws.

“Relax Digs!” Sheldon exclaimed.

“You know I have anxiety!”

“No kidding.”

“What are our plans for today Sheldon?”

“I’m not sure, Owen seems a bit more on edge than usual.”

“I think it’s all about the new mattress that’s coming in.”

“What new mattress?” Sheldon said excitedly.

“Hey man keep your voice down, but from what I’ve been hearing in the alley, it’s the best mattress the world has ever seen.”

“The best in the world? From this store? Unlikely” Sheldon scoffed.

“You’d be surprised. I’ve heard it has everything you could ever want. Soft gel top with a foam body that fits perfectly to your needs. Long horse hair fibers embroidering the bed and reinforcing it’s frame. The bed is so comfortable that a warning is given, you should only lay down if you have eight hours.”

“Hmm...Well...I want to be the first one to sleep on this bed. Can you just imagine the dreams!”

“I don’t dream. I sleep. Well OK, sometimes I dream about catnip, but that’s it.”

“Pfft, cats. So simple, I’m going to be the first one on that bed when it gets here.”

“You do know thousands of scientists have already tried the bed?”

“That...that’s besides the point. I’ll try it before you do.”

“Well it’s time for lunch Sheldon so I’m gonna go grab some mice from the alley. You want anything?”

“Ugh no.” Sheldon laughed.

“Suit yourself!” With that Digs shot into the loading dock and out

into the alley. Sheldon stayed underneath the bed for some time. He gazed out at the customers walking around. A mother with her hand tightly clasped to her daughter's. A young man with his grandfather laughing as they spoke with one another. A group of friends sitting on each bed judging how comfortable they are. There were even people arguing and debating on what they wanted, but with such passion. Maybe that's the key word, passion. They could debate if they wanted, they could love if they wanted, they could be what they wanted. Sheldon had always wondered if humanity would really...hate him...as much as Digs claims they would. How could people with such a spirit deny it to someone or something else? He wondered.

The air smelled of sweet earth and the sun spilled amber rays through the leaves. A breeze brushed the back of his neck and warmly stilled itself on his shoulders. He sat on a park bench in the beauty of mid-autumn, Sheldon was watching all the people walk by. They saw him, they smiled at him, and not a thought seemed to be given as to what he was. Man after man, woman after woman, and child after child all wearing the same pleasant smile. Sheldon always smiled back and felt in such harmony with the world.

As time passed smiling faces continued and it felt as if nothing could break Sheldon's joy. A small cloud in the distance was much grayer than the others. Sheldon did not want to look at it, but it drew

nearer and he could not turn his head. The cloud went from a speck to a monstrosity in the blink of an eye. It swallowed the sun and drove all the color out of the world. Lightning jolted, thunder rumbled, and surrounding air swirled in a violent motion. He felt rain begin to pelt his fur and looked around.

The faces of people had changed. They were twisted with anger. Parents sheltered their children from Sheldon and retreated. A crowd began to gather in the distance. Malicious shouts paraded across Sheldon's ears. He began to fidget where he was sitting. He could see a large mass of people marching towards him. Chanting, spitting, and moving quicker with each step. Sheldon finally decided there was no way he could stay any longer. He quickly launched himself from the bench and onto the pavement. He turned to take one last look at all the people who had turned on him. All those smiling faces were now gone, as they turned to disgust and admonishment in a split second.

The mob began to run and they were running fast. They stormed at Sheldon like an angry herd of elephants and only the immense fear of being hurt helped Sheldon managed to stay ahead. The road before Sheldon was winding and bare. As he barreled down its length it became increasingly cracked and now draping trees hung with low branches scraping against Sheldon's face. The crowd was gaining on him and with every passing moment he knew that he would soon be caught. The road was getting increasingly narrow and sheldon was

hardly able to run any longer. Darkness had almost entirely swallowed his vision. He could no longer stay in front of the crowd. Their hands reached out with all their might to grab him. They were within inches. The darkness became whole. It took the ground, the sky, and everything around him. He fell through the black void and he was awake.

Sheldon sat up in the darkness of the store. It was late into the night; meaning the store had been locked up for some time. Sheldon was on top of one of the mattresses in the main floor room. He looked around and found Digs laying on the bed next to him licking himself.

“Hey what are you doing?” Sheldon yelled.

“Oh...um...sorry I thought you were asleep.” Digs chuckled.

“Yea I bet.”

“What was going on, a bad dream?”

“I guess you could call it that.”

“Don’t want to talk about it?”

“Not really.”

“Alright then. I have something I want to show you.”

“What’s up”

Digs lead Sheldon out from the main showroom and into Owen's office. At a small round table he smacked down a large magazine.

"What is this?" Sheldon inquired.

"This...is the new edition of Bed & Sleep monthly. It has the new mattress in it. It's called the XP-3000."

Sheldon began to flip through the pages until he came across the picture of the XP-3000. It was beautiful. Just looking at it seemed to make Sheldon tired.

"Are you excited or what?" Digs jabbed. "This is going to be the greatest mattress ever!"



## Chapter Four

# MYSTERY

People were running back and forth between office doors carrying stacks of overbearing papers. Feet clattered against the ground as hurried voices commanded one another. Such was the case for any local television studio and this particular one was no exception. Down the winding corridors, past the bare carpet, past the steel walls, and through a pair of burly double doors, sat a man with a peculiar disposition.

His name was Ivan Roswell. He sat with his nose in his desk searching through hundreds of reports to find something impossible. Ivan Roswell was a mystery hunter. A hunter of all things unexplored, strange, and mysterious. For these he was New hollow's go to man. He had spent years chasing ghosts, Bigfoot, unicorns, mermaids, and all manor of mysterious creatures. It was sad to say that up until this point he had been utterly unsuccessful. Ivan was always showered with a slew of new claims all of which ended up inconclusive or false.

A young assistant came bustling through the door. He balanced hot coffee on a stack of fresh new claims.

"Good morning sir!" The assistant chattered.

"Good morning Toby" Ivan grumbled.

"I've got a fresh batch. Hot off the press!"

"Wonderful." Ivan said sarcastically.

Toby stumbled over to Ivan's desk and attempted to place the papers and coffee gracefully on Ivan's desk. He set the coffee down with a shaking hand.

"Two cream, one sugar, correct?"

"Two sugar, one cream, but what's the point in listening?"

Toby set down the papers nervously realizing that he'd made a big mistake.

"I'm so sorry sir, I can get you a new one if you'd like?"

He stuttered.

"No it's fine, it doesn't matter."

Toby cautiously backed up from Ivan's desk but as he turned around his hand smacked the coffee cup and sent its contents pouring over the new reports.

"Oh my God! I'm so sorry, I'll clean this up right away." Toby bent over the papers trying to wipe the coffee from their surface. In this process he knocked all the papers onto the floor and began trying to lap up the coffee with his mouth.

"My, this is a sight to behold" Ivan said astonished.

"It'll be all cleaned up soon...so...sorry about all this."

"Get up! You're making a fool of yourself." Ivan stood up from his desk and walked towards the window. Ivan heaved a great sigh.

"Do you think I'll ever find what I'm looking for Toby?"

"I don't know Ivan...maybe?"

"I just need one claim, one thing that turns out to be true."

Can you imagine what it would be like if I made a real discovery? If there was a real mystery to be solved?”

“I’m sure you’ll find one,” said Toby.

Ivan shifts near the window deep in thought. “I guess so. Oh and Toby?”

“Yes?”

“You’re fired.”

## Chapter Five

# ARRIVAL

The day had come. The XP-3000 had arrived available for pre-order and a flood of people came bursting through the door. Sheldon hid beneath a mattress at the back of the store with Digs at his side. Sheldon was filled with excitement.



“A lot of people in here today eh Sheldon?”

“That would be an understatement.”

“I don’t see how you’ll be the first one who sleeps on the bed.”

“I’ll just wait until they take a bed into the back of the store, these are just the pre-orders.”

“You’re gonna get caught man. I don’t think this is a good idea”

“You’re worrying way too much. I’ll be fine, I know what I’m doing.”

“Suit yourself. I’ll be back in a little bit to check on you.” Digs scampered off out into the alley.

“You’re not my mother!” Sheldon shouted after him. Sheldon lay on his belly and stared at the line of customers shuffling to get their pre-orders in.

Owen came rushing back into the delivery room. Through the walls Sheldon could hear him speaking urgently with the deliverymen.

“We need to get out the beds for delivery today!”

“We’re trying our best boss, there’s a lot of beds!” Phil griped.

“Today!” Owen came storming out of the loading dock and back onto the floor. He took a deep breath and sported a large smile, “How can I help all you wonderful folks today?” He said before a crowd at the front of the store.

“Get out of the way! I was here first.” A young woman said to an old man.

“You don’t deserve to be here first.” The old man scowled.

“And why is that?”

“My gran-pappy fought in the War of the Roses”

“That was over five hundred years ago!”

“Time don’t matter much to me. Let me in first!”

“Never!” The woman and the old man started to shove each other until Owen intervened.

“People! Please! I’m just as excited as you are, but if we can take these pre-orders in a calm and peaceful fashion the process will go much faster.” Owen cried while holding the two customers apart from each other. The old man took Owen’s hand that was pressed against his chest and thrust it away.

“I don’t need to take this!” The old man stormed out of the store.

“Finally, I get my spot back.” The woman stated joyously.

Owen wearily pulled out a pen and a large stack of order forms. He had other employees usher everyone into a straight line that streamed out the door and tangled itself a block away.

Sheldon watched in amusement as dramatics continued in line. He peered up at the clock on the wall. It was ten minutes until noon which meant that the delivery men would soon go into the break room for lunch. He could go check the loading dock at this time to see if a bed was waiting on delivery. The minutes ticked by painfully. Time lengthen with each passing moment as Sheldon stared at the hands on the clock. Sheldon had lost his focus when the clock ticked noon and an ear piercing ring echoed throughout the store.

Sheldon slithered out from under the bed keeping to the shadows trying to blend into the wall. As the last deliveryman filed into the break room and the door swung shut he pressed his body against the wall while moving around the corner. As he crept into the loading dock he looked around. Nothing. There weren't any of the XP-3000's anywhere. It looked as if he was out of luck for now. As he stepped to the left to get one last glance a light seared into his eyes. Sheldon covered his face and after a few seconds peered back into the light squinting. It looked as if someone had accidentally left the dock door open.

Sheldon looked from side to side and moved towards the door. Workers would return soon and time was moving fast. He ran over to the door. It was open just enough for him to squeeze through. He looked at the asphalt that lay beyond the door as it smoldered in the heat of the sun and lead into a world that had no place for him. He



looked for so long, he almost forgot that the workers were about to finish their break. He heard the shrill ring of the bell. He heard the footsteps of men start to come out of the break room as they walked Sheldon dived underneath the dock door and out into the open.

By mid-afternoon the parking lot was bare and empty. Sheldon could hear the worker's voices and desperately looked around for a place to hide. In parking space #47 Sheldon saw his opportunity. The bed of the truck in that space had its door wide open. Sheldon scrambled across the parking lot as voices echoed from the loading dock. He climbed up into the bed of the truck and moved towards the back. As he bumped through boxes and stepped through a mess of frames Sheldon felt an incredibly soft material. He stopped dead in his tracks and placed his hand gently on the surface of the new material. It was a bed.

The light that came into the truck barely illuminated this object, but Sheldon had an idea. This, was an XP-3000. A few moments of searching proved that his assumption was correct. He found a tag with the product information on it. It read The XP-3000 the Best Mattress in Sleep (WARNING: Do not attempt to sleep on this product if you do not have a minimum of 8 hours to rest.) Sheldon chuckled as he read the label. He didn't believe that was true. It was probably just some kind of marketing gimmick he thought. Though he had to admit that he felt a strange attraction to the bed. It was as if the fiber was dragging

him down to the mattress. It called to him, soothed his body, and he felt his eyes flitting. He put one arm down on the bed and then the other. The gentle pull of the fabric and the light breeze rolling in was too overwhelming to Sheldon. His body dropped like a sack of potatoes and he was fast asleep.

Digs was frantic. He couldn't find Sheldon anywhere. Where could he be? Digs wondered. He searched all throughout the store once, but still...Nothing. He saw that the deliverymen had just gotten off their break. The loading dock door was open and Digs was horrified. Had Sheldon left the store?

Digs could only assume the worst. He hurried out into the parking lot and looked around. Rows and rows of trucks filled the parking lot, all the same, one after the other. Digs was at a dead end. As he peered through the sunlight he saw one of the truck's had its backdoor open. He rushed over to the truck and found a sleeping Sheldon.

"Get up!" Digs yelled. Digs ran over to Sheldon and tried to shove him off the bed but it was no use. Sheldon was completely conked out and there was no waking him up! He snored loudly and directly into Digs' face.

"I'll save you princess." Sheldon said dreamily. Sheldon rolled over onto his stomach. This knocked Digs backwards and onto the floor. All of a sudden voices came ringing through the parking lot as the

deliverymen got ready to drive.

“Phil did you leave our truck open!” Max screamed.

“Uhhno I don’t think so.”

“Then why is it open!”

“Must have been a ghost.”

“I can’t deal with you today we need to get these deliveries out.”  
Max walked over to the truck and slammed the door without looking inside.

“Sheldon wake up!” Digs exclaimed.

“Wha...What, what’s going on?” Sheldon said groggily.

Sheldon awoke in the darkness of the truck.

“You got us stuck here, you fell asleep!”

“Oh, I guess that warning was right. Such a great sleep I think I might just...fall..back”

“No don’t you fall asleep on me.” Digs said as he tried to shake Sheldon back awake.

The truck roared to life and they left United Mattress.

## Chapter Six

# JOURNEY

Digs sat on the ground and looked up to see Sheldon still snoring softly on the bed. As they tumbled down the road Digs was furious. He felt betrayed. How could he have fallen asleep like that? Digs couldn't help but think Sheldon knew what would happen. Digs believed that Sheldon secretly wanted and needed to leave the store. As Digs watched Sheldon's chest rise and fall and felt the anger reach a breaking point. He reared back his arm and landed a paw right into Sheldon's side.

“Get up ya bum!” he yelled.



Sheldon awoke wheezing from the blow. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“It’s time for you to get up! We’re stuck on this truck and I have no idea where we’re going!”

“How did we get here?”

“You tell me! Why were you here!” Digs said in astonishment.

“I wanted to be the first one to sleep on the XP-3000, I told you that.”

Digs was in disbelief. “I didn’t think you would leave the store! Especially just to sleep on a mattress. You knew what would happen!”

“Why would I ever want to leave? United Mattress is my home.” Sheldon lied.

“Well we need to find a way out of here.”

“I don’t even know where we are.”

“And you think I do?” scoffed Digs.

Just as Digs was about to continue his tirade, the truck lurched to a halt.

“Why did we stop?” Digs puzzled. He put his face against the back of the truck and tried to listen. He could hear the voices of Phil and Max.

“Is this the last house for the day Maxy?” Phil asked.

“Yep, the last one, then we’re done for the weekend.”

“This delivery is pretty far out of the way, who lives here?”

“Some old woman and her granddaughter. I’ve never seen them in town though.”

“Hmm, that’s weird.”

“It is very weird. Now come on let’s get this bed and these pillows out.”

Phil walked over to open the truck door, but realized his shoe was untied. He bent down and fumbled with the laces.

“Seriously Phil? You waste so much time!”

As Phil was tying his shoe Digs had an opportunity to avoid being seen.

“Sheldon we need to find somewhere to hide now!” Digs hissed.

“Ok, ok, let me see.”

Sheldon and Digs began rummaging quietly in the dark searching for something to hide in or behind. At the side of the XP-3000 there was a half empty box of pillows. Sheldon and Digs jumped inside pulling the top over themselves.

“Shoe’s all tied up Maxy!” announced Phil.

“I bet you’re proud of yourself...Now open the truck!”

Phil opened the door and looked inside. Sheldon and Digs could not be seen.

“What are we taking in again?” Phil asked.

“The pillows and the mattress, not complicated.”

Phil lumbered up into the bed of the truck and stood heaving for a second. He looked around and lumbered over to the box of pillows. He wrapped his sweaty arms around it and lifted it into the air.

“This box seems heavy for having pillows in it Maxy.” wheezed Phil.

“Maybe you’re just getting weaker?”

Phil slammed down Sheldon and Digs with a thud.

“Sheldon where are we going?”

“Digs shh, they’ll hear you.”

Max hopped into the back of the truck and began pushing the mattress to Phil. Once they had pulled the bed off the truck they put the box on top. As Phil and Max walked up to the house Sheldon and Digs were hoisted up a steep incline above a long winding path of stone steps. Soon they heard the sound of Phil’s large fist pounding on the

surface of a door. The door creaked open and an old woman's voice floated through the air, "Who's there?"

"Ma'am your mattresses are here." Max said.

"What about my pillows?" She retorted.

"They're here as well." Phil stated as he gave the box a hearty smack.

Phil and Max stepped inside the house and a peculiar scent filled the box. It was of old soap and grapes. Almost as if the fruit had aged without rotting and that the smell, was shall we say, tired? Sheldon and Digs were hauled into the center of the room and set down while Max and Phil talked to the old woman in the other room.

"So, are we going to get out of here Digs?" Sheldon whispered.

"And go where?"

"Anywhere but here works for me."

Digs poked his head out of the box and looked around the room. It was your standard living arrangement for an elderly woman. Everything was old fashioned and ornate. There was floral wallpaper and rough wood floors covered by stale rugs. Sheldon moved up next to his friend to get a look.

"Let's go for the door."



“Alright but we’re gonna have to be quiet, and you cannot be seen. Do you understand me?”

Sheldon sighed reluctantly, “Yeah, yeah I get it.”

They crept out of the box but as they got their arms out of the box they heard footsteps come swooping down the hallway. They shot back into the box and waited.

“Well Miss--”

“Please call me Grandma Win” She said as she cut Phil off.

“But you’re not my Grandma.”

“Oh Dear, that’s just what everyone calls me.”

“Um...ok.” Said Phil scratching his head.

“You have a wonderful day Ma’am.” Max said stepping out of the door.

“You boys have a good weekend.”

And with that Grandma Win ushered them out of the house. When she closed the door there were several loud clicks and she walked out of the room. Digs burst out of the box and bolted to the door. He started tugging on the handle as hard as he could. He looked up in horror and saw that the door had a great many locks and chains on

it. The door would not budge and outside he could hear the slam of the truck doors and the engine coming to life as Phil and Max puttered away. That was it. That was their only chance of getting back to United Mattress.

“Sheldon what are we supposed to do now?” Digs yelled.

“I don’t know...Honestly I don’t.”

“We are so done. This is it. You’re discovered and I get to be here to watch the show.”

“No one’s found me yet, but be quiet I think I hear someone coming.”

Grandma Win could be heard walking down the hallway whistling an old tune and speaking to herself.

“Ah a new mattress how nice it’ll be, my back is getting old, but it’s no big deal! I wonder how she’s doing maybe I should check on her? Is she even in her room? Where is she?”

“Digs I think we need to head up the stairs.” Sheldon said nervously.

“And why exactly would we do that?”

“Maybe there is a window we can jump out of. That’s going to be our only way out.”

“At least I can land on my feet.”

The two began to walk from the door and over to the stairs. They went as quietly as they could foot after paw after foot. The floorboards were old, dusty, and creaky. They could only hope that the clutter of this house and Grandma Win's absent mindedness would help them hide. Sheldon and Digs pressed themselves up against the wall and moved carefully up the stairs. They moved up past the cracked landing and into a dark hall way. The pictures were coated in dust and the wood had a strange smell to it.

“What room?” Digs demanded.

“I'm not sure.” Sheldon looked around the hallway and picked a door ahead of them to the right. “Here let's try this one.”

The two moved slowly. The hallway was dead silent and each step seemed as if it would echo a hundred miles away. They snuck over to the door and pushed it open. There was nothing but darkness. The room was small and resembled that of a child's. There were blankets strewn across the floor and books hidden in their crevices. They waded through the messy floor and over to the shadow of a bed. There was a window just above the bed.

Sheldon looked thoughtfully around the room. “Digs let me stand on your head.”

“No way, I get to stand on yours!” Shouted Digs.

Sheldon ignored Digs and pushed him onto the bed and stood on top of his head.

“I hate you.” Digs grumbled.

“Well if we can get out of this window you’ll love me.”

Digs awkwardly attempted to balance Sheldon on his shoulders and head.

Digs was barely keeping steady, “Can you stop kicking me in the face please!”

“Oh, oops my bad!”

Digs shook his head and thrust Sheldon toward the window. Sheldon reached out into the darkness with his hands, only to grab a hold of something cold. He grasped a pair of metal poles and began to shake. Then to his horror he realized...The window was barred.

## Chapter Seven

# CALL

Owen scratched his head and went back to closing the store.

He reset all the comforters, kneaded all the pillows, and searched through the carpets to make sure they were spotless.

He breathed a sigh of relief as he turned the last corner in the showroom finishing his nightly duties. His eyes flickered from one side of the room to the other, he noticed something.



Through the dim light of the store there was something hanging from a comforter. He walked over to the bed and ran his fingers over the cover. What was dangling from the bed was a single hair.

He grabbed the hair and held it up to the light. It was...interesting. Green with a purple tinge. It must be from some crazy teenage girl's hair. There wasn't a better idea and strangely enough it felt different than a person's hair. Too soft. Much more like...fur. This peaked Owen's interest even more. Did he have an animal in his store? What kind of animal would have purple and green fur? He wound the hair tightly around his finger and walked into the back office. The television was on and a voice came crackling from the screen.

"Do you have a mystery that needs solved? Are you scared, paranoid, or completely detached from reality? Ivan Roswell the amazing mystery hunter from New Hollow is looking to help you! He'll find the ghosts, he'll catch big foot, he'll do anything you want (well not anything, but you know what we mean) Call 555-555-5555 today to get a free consultation!"

Owen stared at the television for some time. The commercial repeated itself over and over but Owen remained in quiet contemplation. He pulled out a small box and placed the hair inside. He quickly searched his desk looking for a pen and a small piece of scratch paper. He listened to the commercial once more and wrote down the phone number. He put both items in the box and grabbed

his coat while gently closing the back office door. He walked out into the showroom took a last look around and as he did he remembered something. A particular day long ago when he had noticed something strange. The day went something like this.

(Author's note, This is a flashback of what happened on that day.  
It resumes when Owen dials Ivan's number)

Owen had just pulled into his driveway, or his mother's driveway more precisely, and sat for a minute. The trees were swaying from side to side; the wind was picking up. It seemed as if a storm was coming and not just from the weather outside. As Owen sat in his dismal car his mother came outside.

"Owen why are you sitting in the car! It's going to storm and you're going to catch a cold! I don't want to have to take you to the hospital."

"Mom please be quiet I just got home from work." Owen pleaded.

"Well if you would spend less time at work and more time with your mother, you wouldn't be so unhappy all the time." She scolded.

"Mom I'm not unhappy!"

"Then why don't you have a girlfriend!"

"Because I spend all my time with you!" Owen shouted.

Owen stormed into the house and his mother called to him, "Honey it's time to read to your mother before she goes to bed."

“Do I have to?” Owen griped.

“Of course you have to!” His mother replied. She walked over to the center of the living room and dusted off a book. She tucked it underneath her arm and began to walk up the stairs.

She noticed Owen wasn't following, “Are you coming?” Owen patted himself up and down looking for his reading glasses but he couldn't find them. After checking himself he walked to his car and started searching between the seats, through the glove box, and found nothing.

“Mom I can't find my glasses!” Owen yelled up to the house. His mother walked over to the window.

“What?”

“I can't find my glasses!”

“What?”

Owen shook his head in frustration. “I'm leaving.” He said as he slammed his car door. He turned the car on and drove back towards the store. The rain pelted his windshield and making it almost impossible to see. He swerved all across the road becoming more frustrated and agitated with each turn. He sat impatiently flipping through the radio stations at each red light. One of the commercials happened to be for Ivan's services but Owen paid no attention.



He slid into the parking lot eager to get his glasses and reluctant to go back home to his mother. Owen leaned back in his seat and heaved a great sigh. He turned off the car and stepped out into the rain. It swiped at his face and soaked through his jacket and shoes. The water was up to his ankles in the United Mattress parking lot as he waded begrudgingly to the door. The torrential downpour continued.

Owen stormed into the store with his arm above his face. As he wiped the water from his eyes he stared into the darkness of the showroom. He couldn't help but notice the most alarming thing. As the sky flashed and shadows fell across the store there stood a figure at the center. Owen stood still for a moment and waited for the light to flash over this shadow so he could see what it was. He waited and when the light came shone he reached out his hands to grasp the air butbut there was nothing.

“Who's there!” Owen shouted into the darkness. He ran next to every bed and threw over the mattress. He pulled posters off the walls, pillows from the shelves, and scattered them across the floor. Owen looked around wildly. Where could it have gone? His mind was racing trying to come up with a logical explanation for the figure, but he couldn't.

Owen sat on the ground breathing heavily. He reached into his jacket and felt something protruding. The glasses had been in his jacket the whole time. He stood and began to clean the mess he'd made.

He kept looking over his shoulder as he cleaned up making sure he wasn't missing something. By the time every blanket, bed, and pillow had been put back in its proper place Owen had still seen nothing. He walked over to the door and took a last look around. Nothing. He closed the door, locked it, and shook his head.

As Owen got into his car he couldn't get the image out of his head. It would bother him for a long time. Though as time passed it slipped out of his mind until...today. Owen walked back into the office and pulled out his cellphone. He dialed the number to Ivan's show. The phone rang three times then went to voicemail.

"Our current office hours are Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Please call back during those times or state your name, concern, and contact number. We will get back to you promptly."

"Hi my name is Owen. I manage the local mattress store United Mattress. You might have heard of us. I think...or I know or I'm not sure but something might be living in my store. I was wondering if I could set up an appointment or a consultation to get things solved and taken care of. You can reach me at 555-555-5555." Owen hung up the phone and stood for a moment. He wondered if this was the right decision. Was he making something out of nothing? He left the store and prepared himself for another restless night.

## Chapter Eight

# ESCAPE

The dark was unsettling as faint noises drifted up the stairs from below. Grandma Win was talking to someone while Sheldon and Digs hid under the bed. They lay on their stomachs breathing against the dusty floor and wracked their brains trying to think of some way to get out of the house.

“I can’t believe you got me into this Sheldon” Digs griped.

“What can I do? I didn’t ask you to come looking for me.” Sheldon said as he shifted onto his back.

Digs shoved a paw into Sheldon’s chest, “What you need to do, is find us a way out of here, this one is on you. Was I supposed to just let you get carried away?”

“All right all right, I get it. You’re right, but I have no idea how to get out Digs.” Sheldon shifted back onto his stomach and accidentally moved on top of Digs’ paw.

“Watch where you’re going!” Digs jerked his paw out from underneath Sheldon and smacked him across the face.

“Oh you’re going to pay for that!” Sheldon yelled. The two started brawling under the bed when all of a sudden they heard feet pattering up the stairs.

“Sheldon what is that?”

“I don’t know, it sounds like someone’s coming, so be quiet.”

Sheldon and Digs lurched back further under the bed, the footsteps were getting closer every second. A humming noise floated under the door as it gently swung open and a young girl walked through the door galloping to the center of the room. She stood there for what seemed like an eternity and then abruptly began moving erratically around. She was looking for something.

“Where is my book?” She said aloud. As she said this Digs stretched out his back leg. He felt his feet smack an object on the side. Sheldon grabbed his shoulder and motioned for Digs to look down. Digs looked and saw that a book was at his feet. He rolled his eyes and pulled up the book. Digs tried to nudge the book out from under the bed without the girl noticing, but it was no use.

“What’s this?” The girl puzzled as the book came out from under the bed. The girl bent down and picked up the book looking at it suspiciously. She dusted it off and hopped on top of her mattress. She laid back, turned on her light, and attempted to read. She furrowed her brow and tried to concentrate, but couldn’t help but feeling that something wasn’t right. She thought of other items that were under the bed.

“Boy, it sure is chilly in here. I wish I had my sweater.” She said as casually as possible. Digs looked at Sheldon this time and made him to look to his left. Sheldon looked to his left and saw an old hoodie laying on the ground. He could barely reach it but he managed to snag the sweater with the tips of his fingers. The girl reached down and Sheldon gave her the sweater. When the hoodie exchanged between the two of them she grabbed Sheldon’s arm.

“Ahh!!!” Sheldon screamed. He tried to free himself from the girl’s grasp but she wouldn’t let go. She pulled and dragged Sheldon out from underneath the bed with a great heave. Digs grappled with

Sheldon's feet to try and keep him hidden, but it was no use. They both were drug out from under the bed and faced the awestruck girl. She stared blankly at them not knowing what to say. The tension was rising and as she opened her mouth to scream, Digs lunged forward.

"You can't scream. We're not here to hurt you." Digs said softly trying to control the girl. "I'm going to let you go, I need to be able to know you won't call for help." Riley nodded. Digs let her go and she gasped for breath and crawled to the other side of the room.

"Who are you guys!?" She demanded.

"My name is Sheldon and--"

"Don't tell her your name!" Digs hissed.

Sheldon looked at Digs wearily, "No one knows who I am anyway Digs, it's fine."

"Sheldon you don't even know what she's going to--"

"My name is Riley." The girl interrupted.

"It's nice to meet you Riley." Sheldon said warmly.

"So, Riley, why have you locked us inside your house? What's the point of this imprisonment?" Digs asked as he paced back and forth through the room.

“I’m not the reason you’re locked in here, I swear!” Riley closed the door to the room. “It’s my grandma. She doesn’t like me to have contact with the outside world much. She’s worried I’ll get hurt.”

“Man, Sheldon can you imagine being cooped up like that?” Digs said astonished.

Sheldon looked blankly at Digs, “Digs...what are you talking about?”

“Oh yeah right...I forgot. Looks like we can’t do anything, we’re gonna die here!”

“Stop being so melodramatic!” Riley snapped at Digs. “Every one’s going to be fine. But as far as escaping, there is only one time when you guys would be able to leave.”

“When is that?” Asked Sheldon and Digs together.

“In the morning my grandma goes out to get the newspaper and she’s so tired that she usually forgets the door is wide open. You can sneak out of the house while her back is turned. Grandma Win will be complete oblivious.”

“If this isn’t possible until the morning, then that means we have to stay here for the night?” Digs asked with a concerned look on his face.

“Digs I don’t think we have any other choice right now.” Sheldon said reassuringly.

“You don’t. That’s the end of the conversation though, you can stay in here. But you need to stay under the bed. We can’t risk Grandma Win seeing you guys.”

“Gee what’s new?” quipped Sheldon.

Riley slid out of the room to the landing and peered down the stairs. Grandma Win had dozed off in her chair in the living room. They were safe for the night. Riley tiptoed back into the room, turned off the light, Sheldon and Digs crawled underneath the bed.



# Chapter Nine

# VISIT

A morning breeze sailed into United Mattress carrying with it not only the vigor of the early hours but the warm feeling of fall. Owen proudly stood at the double doors greeting customers as they entered the store, and one after the other, on this beautiful day. They came hoping to get the XP-3000.



Owen could not be happier; Well except for one thing. The phone call that he had made just a few days ago was still in the back of his mind. He wondered if he was ever going to get a response and, if he did, what then? Would he really go out of his way to find an answer?

Owen didn't have anymore time to ponder the matter, the floor was filling fast with customers and his phone started ringing loudly. He jumbled the phone in his hands and scurried into the back room so that he could answer the call.

"Hello?" Owen said.

"Hello, my name is Ivan Roswell, I just got your message."  
Crackled the voice on the other end.

"Oh well...Well what do you think?"

"I'll be over soon." The phone clicked and Owen took a step back in shock. What did he mean he'd be over soon? It wasn't long after Ivan and Owen's conversation that the squeal of tires could be heard outside the door. As Owen ran to the front he could see a group of large black vans filling the parking lot. A man in a tight black suit approached the door with one foot falling perfectly in front of the other. He had neatly aligned facial hair that hung on the tip of his chin and just under his lip. He hardly showed a sign of emotion as he marched forward with his team of small men following him at every angle.

The team squabbled in scientific terms and Ivan silenced them as they entered the store. Owen puffed up his chest and walked up to the mystery hunter.

“Can I help you sir” Said Owen confidently.

“Well yes...Yes you can help me.” Ivan said slyly. “You see I am responding to a call from an Owen, is that you?”

“Yes that is me.”

“Ah, well good. It seems you have a mystery for me to solve?”

Owen shifted nervously on his heels and pressed his tongue to the roof of his mouth. He pulled at his tie and thought for a moment.

Ivan grew impatient, “Well? What will it be?”

“Well ok...I do have something for you to look into, but I’m not exactly sure what it is.”

“Ahh, a mysterious mystery. That is my favorite kind. Do you have any evidence?”

“Well not really Just one thing. Follow me.” Owen motioned for Ivan to follow him to the back of the store.

As Owen walked into his office Ivan signaled his men to get all the people out of the store. They began arranging an assortment of

different gadgets on the floor. Scanning equipment hummed at every corner and disgruntled customers tried to fight their way back into the store. The team of men pulled vacuum like objects out from under their coats and began ripping apart the show room. They wedged the tools between every mattress and over every counter top. Nothing was being found at the moment.

“So, I have this small box that I keep things in that I find...Interesting” Owen rummaged through the drawers in the back until he found the little box. He produced a hair and gave it to Ivan. Ivan held the hair between his thumb and forefinger gazing at it longingly.

“I would agree with you...Owen.”

“About what?”

“This is interesting.” In a foreign tongue Ivan called to one of his men. Ivan handed them the hair and they put it in one of their vacuum machines. A light whirred on the side of the machine and puffs of blue smoke coughed their way out. A screen flashed and swirled showing that the hair was being analyzed against a database of all living things. After a few moments of anticipation an alarm rang from the device signaling that a match could not be found. Glee spread across Ivan’s face.

Ivan jumped in the air, “Do you know what this means?” he shouted at Owen.

“You’re going to charge me a lot more money now?” Owen quipped.

“Well, not only that, but we have a real mystery on our hands! We actually have no idea what this is; isn’t that amazing?” Ivan said with joy.

Owen breathed a heavy sigh, “But I needed you to know what it is so we could get rid of it.”

Ivan paced to the other side of the room and mumbled to himself thoughtfully. “That’s the best part of this whole thing. We get to make a discovery, we get to go into uncharted territory. That is exactly why I got into this business.”

Owen shifted nervously. “Look I just can’t have anyone find out about this, it could hurt my business.”

“Oh don’t worry about that we won’t talk to anyone in the media...for now”

“What do you mean for now?”

“You’re worrying too much Owen, I can take care of everything!”  
Smiled Ivan.

“If you say so.”

Ivan shuttled Owen out of the back room and called for his men to clean up. They packed up all their machines and in almost an instant seemed to put everything perfectly back in it's place. Ivan left the store in the blink of an eye while the customers looked perplexed. The customers filed back into the store as if nothing had happened.

## Chapter Ten

# KNOCK

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK! Grandma Win pounded on Riley's bedroom door. "Honey it's time to get up!" She shrilled.

Riley groaned and wrapped her blankets even more tightly around her body. Grandma Win opened the door just a crack to make sure Riley had heard her. "Riley, get up!" Riley finally lifted herself from the bed. Digs rolled over into Sheldon and they both awoke startled. Sheldon made sure to cover Digs' mouth, because, well you know how cats are. They began to set up, hoping that Grandma Win would not hear them. She closed the door as Riley grouchy walked around her room getting ready.

It wasn't long before Riley realized what she had to do. She had almost completely forgotten about Sheldon and Digs. She panicked. She reached underneath the bed and pulled both of them out. "We need to hurry." She said.

"How do you know she won't see us?" Digs asked nervously.

"I don't Sheldon I need you to stay right behind me the whole time and Digs behind him."

"Ok, I can do that." Said Sheldon.

"Why am I last?"

"Because you scare the easiest." Said Riley sharply to Digs.

"I think I should go first!" Digs said triumphantly.

"No. Now let's go."

Digs heaved a defeated sigh and the group followed Riley to the landing. They stood there for a moment listening intently. At first nothing could be heard. Then a faint humming drifted up the stairwell. Grandma Win was looking in the mirror at the bottom of the stairs while casually applying make-up completely unaware of the group above. "You look so pretty!" She exclaimed when she finished.

"Alright I think she's going outside soon." Riley stated.



“This is taking forever.” Digs said.

“Just be quiet.” Sheldon snapped.

They walked further down the steps as Grandma Win made her way into the living room. She continued to hum and walked gaily over to a small closet where she pulled out a broom. She began sweeping in sync with the song she was humming making the group anxious.

“Who cleans this early in the morning?” Stated Digs annoyed.

“She’s an old woman, they love cleaning.” Laughed Riley.

“I guess so.”

They sat for another fifteen minutes or so as Grandma Win gave a dazzling rendition of the song singing, dancing and showing the group that cleaning could be much more colorful than they thought. She finally finished with a swing of her hips and put the broom back in the closet with the room sparkling clean. She walked over to the door and began making the long track down her front drive to where the newspaper was. The group followed closely peering out the open door. She walked slowly, but sure enough she was paying no attention to the fact that the house was wide-open and vulnerable.

“Ok the cleaning was weird, but who reads the newspaper anymore?” Digs said astonished.

“I’m assuming again it’s because she’s old.” Sheldon chuckled.

Riley was getting more and more tense with each passing second. She knew that they had to time things just right so that Grandma Win was far enough away so she couldn’t hear them or see them. Riley figured the best time to move would be when Grandma Win would bend down to pick up the paper.

“Ok guys so here’s what were going to do.” Riley grabbed both Sheldon and Digs heads to make sure they were paying attention.

“As soon as Grandma Win bends down to pick up the newspaper. We are going to make a break for it. Run along the side of the house pressed up against the wall. Then go out into the yard and run towards the forest. Got it?” Sheldon and Digs nodded their heads in agreement. “Good.”

They watched fervently as Grandma Win got closer to the paper. She stood for a split second and before they could think she had bent down.

“Go.” Riley hissed and with that the group shot off like a rocket. They ran across the long front porch trying to keep out of sight from Grandma Win. She was still fumbling with the newspaper trying to pick it up as they scaled down the creaky steps and into the yard. All of a sudden a booming voice rang through the air.

“Hey!” Grandma Win yelled. The group froze dead in their tracks fearing they’d been spotted.

“It’s going to rain on Saturday.” Grandma Win said this as she buried her face in the paper. She hadn’t seen any of them. She didn’t move her eyes the entire time she walked up to the front door. She closed it behind her with a slam and the group remained still.

“Is that it?” Dig said cautiously. “Did we get away?”

“I...I think so.” Stammered Sheldon

Digs looked around, “So, what now?”

“Well, I guess we should go into the woods.” Riley chimed.

“What do you mean we” Digs asked.

Riley stood still in the bright morning sun. A breeze blew across her face pushing hair into her eyes. At this moment she looked especially vulnerable. Sheldon and Digs could sense she was going to tell them something.

“I was...I was thinking that I could come with you guys.” Riley said almost whispering.

“That’s a great idea!” Sheldon exclaimed.

“No that’s a terrible idea.” Digs interjected. The frustration in Digs eyes was all too apparent. “How exactly are we supposed to take care of her, we need to get home Sheldon.”

Sheldon was getting upset, “What is home exactly?”

“What is home? You know exactly what home is. Home is at United Mattress.”

“Just because it’s home for you does not mean it’s home for me.”

Digs pulled back on his ears and closed his eyes. “Then where exactly do you plan to go?”

“Well, as you know, I was taken away from my parents in a house on the outskirts of New Hollow.”

“Yes, but that was a long time ago. The house doesn’t exist anymore.”

Sheldon’s voice started to rise, “And how do you know that?”

“Well...I don’t, but Sheldon we need to go. Now.”

“No we don’t.” Sheldon said defiantly. “I’m going to look...look for that house. If Riley wants to come with me, I have no problem with it.” Riley ran over and hugged Sheldon.

“Sheldon I’ll help you look for that house. I used to live on the edge of town too.” Said Riley enthusiastically.

“You can’t be serious?” Digs said shocked. “I swear you wanted this all to happen.” Digs got up close to Sheldon’s face getting angrier.

“I didn’t want any of this to happen.” defended Sheldon. “Maybe there is a reason all of this happened, maybe it’s a sign. I just need to do this Digs and I need your help.”

Digs paced back and forth overcome with anxiety. “Sheldon you know I can’t do that. I barely go out into the alley. My only home is at the store, with Owen.”

“Well it seems that neither of us have a choice then.”

“No I suppose not.”

Sheldon was saddened that his friend didn’t support him. There was nothing left for him at the store. Nothing but more hiding and he couldn’t bare to waste away anymore hours of his life. Sheldon knew in his heart that he needed to go on this search. Not just because it was something new and exciting, but that it was a way for him to discover who he was. If his parents were still hiding away in the shadows of that house then, maybe, they could reconnect. It was far-fetched, a long shot, but Sheldon knew he had to do it.

“So, I guess we’re saying goodbye then Sheldon.” Sighed Digs.

Sheldon couldn’t look Digs in the eye, “It seems that way.”

Sheldon turned away from Digs. Riley still held on waiting for the two to decide what they were going to do.

“Are you ready Sheldon?” She asked.

“I’m ready.”

Sheldon grabbed Riley’s hand and started walking towards the woods. Digs watched them feeling guilty for abandoning his friend.

“Wait Sheldon!” Digs yelled. Sheldon turned around with a surprised look on his face.

“I’ll come with you.” Digs said reluctantly.

“You don’t have to Digs, no one is forcing you.”

“I can’t leave you like this. If we do this though you have to promise me something.”

“What.”

“If we go to this house, or whatever, you have to promise that if nothing is there you’ll drop this whole thing.”

“All right I promise.”

And with that a nervous smile grew upon Digs' face. The group walked off into the forest, Sheldon, Digs, and Riley. Birds flew above their heads and a gentle breeze ruffled their hair. The adventure had just begun and for now they were safe.

# Chapter Eleven

# CAMP

The sun rose warmly that morning and was gently pushing away the night chill. Hours had dragged on and on with constant nagging from Digs.

“Where are we going?” He asked.

“We’re going to look for my old house as I’ve mentioned a hundred times.” Said Sheldon. He tossed Riley a sly smile as they were both well aware Sheldon was wandering. Digs kicked at the leaves on the ground and swatted at the bugs flying through the air as he mumbled to himself.



“This is just horrible! I have cousins who spend all day outside. Wasn’t good for them. They turned into monsters with long hairs growing out of their necks and the most obnoxious yowl.”

“I can only imagine what they’d be like if they spent all day inside.”  
Laughed Riley.

Sheldon chuckled, “I bet they’d have terrible morning breath and a constant urge to complain.” Digs looked at them both half annoyed and half amused.

The grey sky had almost turned to black and the group realized that they needed to set up camp. The wind began to sing through the trees with greater intensity and the warm air that had blessed them so far began to chill. Riley moved closer to Sheldon and clasped both her hands over his as tightly as she could.

“Sheldon I’m scared.” She whispered. Sheldon rubbed Riley’s arm reassuringly.

“Don’t worry, we’ll find a space to set up soon enough.”

The group looked around urgently for a place to stop for the night. The trees around them were merely shadows in the last veins of light seeping through the sky. Finally Sheldon saw a small opening in the trees. In the clearing the ground was strewn with leaves.

“We’ll set up camp here!” Sheldon said proudly.

“Doesn’t offer much in the way of protection. We’re right out in the open” Digs griped.

Riley chimed in agreement, “I think Digs is right Sheldon. Who knows what’s in the woods.

“We’ll be fine, it’s just New Hollow.” Sheldon said. Though, as he spoke a bird cawed ominously in the distance and the rustles of the forest began to increase in frequency. It took them about another hour to finish setting up the camp. With small beds of soft leaves made for all of them and a small fire that would keep their spirits up.

Digs stared into the fire, lost in thought. “Won’t attract more things to us?”

Sheldon didn’t have a good response, “HmmMaybe, doesn’t fire keep bugs away?”

Riley swatted at herself, itching her arms. “If it does, it isn’t working!”

“Look guys, it’s been a long day, we’re fine. Can we stop with the complaining?”

Digs was too tired to even retort. The group all retreated to their





beds and a few hours later the fire was only embers.

Eyes began appearing in the night. The group did not take notice. Red eyes the fluttered from one side of the encampment to the other. First it was just one pair. Then came a dozen pairs of those red eyes. Panting could be heard as they moved among the forest trees. Sheldon was snoring loudly, Riley was silently dreaming away, but as the red eyes grew in number Digs awoke from an already fitful sleep. Whatever it was that in the forest noticed Digs awakening. As Digs rubbed his eyes and looked around he only caught the faintest glimpse of the red eyes before they had completely disappeared. I must be going insane he thought. He got up for a moment and began to stretch his legs out as he walked around the low-burning fire. His ears twitched each time the bushes moved, but he paid no mind. Digs went over to Sheldon and gently tapped him on the shoulder to see if he was at all awake. Sure enough, he was out like a log. Digs then went over to Riley. When he reached out to touch her arm she instinctively swatted away his paw.

“Go away!” She groaned.

“Finefineit’s just dark out here.” Digs rubbed his paws together. It was at this moment that he saw his first pair of eyes. Piercing red and looking right at him. Digs froze still. “sh-sh-Sheldon I think there’s something out there in the woods!” Sheldon groaned and rolled over

to his other side. Digs ran over and kneeled next to Sheldon. Eyes were popping up all around the encampment now, all looking directly at Digs. “Sheldon wake up!” Digs hissed.

Sheldon shot up and shouted in Digs’ face, “What do you want?” But before he could get a reply he too had noticed the many red eyes that were now all around them. Both he and Digs bolted over to Riley and began shaking her vigorously to wake up.

“Get up!” They shouted in unison.



Riley awoke rubbing her eyes and coming to the same horrible realization. They all stood up and put their backs to the dismal fire.

“Sheldon I’m scared.” Riley cried as she clung to his arm.

The red eyes began advancing from the forest. As they moved into the dim light the group could see that these red eyes belonged to a pack of monstrous looking wolves.

“Don’t worry guys. I can handle this. My ancestors would often fend off such attacks with a loud roar.” Digs puffed up his chest and let out a pathetic squeak. In a panic the group began shouting and stomping on the ground in order to try and stop the wolves from getting any closer. But it was no use. With every second the wolves were getting closer and closer. Snarling and bearing their yellow teeth as they waited for the perfect moment to pounce. All hope seemed to be lost. Sheldon

closed his eyes and waited for the inevitable. When he opened them he came upon a sight he did not expect to see.

The wolves were now looking wide eyed with mouths closed at something behind the group. An enormous shadow had covered them all and Sheldon could barely pull himself together to look around. Riley turned her head for a moment and quickly snapped it back towards the wolves. She tugged at Sheldon's arm.

"Sheldon there's a bear behind us."

"What?" He whispered. He turned his head for a split second and sure enough an enormous grizzly bear, partially shrouded in darkness, was standing ominously behind the group. He turned back towards the wolves.

"What are we going to do?" Sheldon wondered out loud.

"We're all going to die!" Cried Digs.

"RAWRRRRRRRRR!!!!!" Bellowed the bear from behind the group. The roar shook the trees and nearly made all of them deaf. They all fell to the ground in fear hoping that it would all soon be over. The wolves shrunk back in terror and yelped as they retreated back into the forest. The bear lurched over the group and faced them. He lifted himself off of all fours and stood upright. Sheldon lifted his gaze and stared into eyes that were surprisingly friendly?

“Hello my friends! Do not be afraid. In fact, I’ve just saved your lives from the looks of it.” The bear said.

“What do you want? We don’t have anything I swear, just make it quick!” Digs shouted.

“What? I don’t want anything at all.” The bear said indignantly.

“Who are you?” Digs asked cautiously.

“My name is Theodore Ursias Wellington the third. Teddy for short.”

The group stared at Teddy totally perplexed.

Teddy stammered for a moment trying to think of how to ease the group, “So, yes, well, my name is Teddy and I’m here to help.”



## Chapter Twelve

# CAVE

The group walked along slowly. Still cautiously following their new acquaintance. Teddy's large body moved gracefully through the dark forest and despite his size, he had not once banged or collided with a tree or bush.

“Sheldon, we need to be careful.  
He's a bear!” Digs hissed.

“Digs, we would have been Dog food if Teddy hadn’t showed up.”

Teddy looked over his shoulder, slightly smirking, as he eaves-dropped on their conversation. Riley caught Teddy’s eye, “Don’t worry, if you eat Digs we won’t mind.” She giggled. Digs snapped his head in their direction sheepishly offering a grin to Teddy.

“Don’t say that, he might actually do it!” Digs spat at Riley. She laughed even harder, to his dismay, and continued to follow Teddy. The forest was growing denser now as the group was led deeper into the woods. A soft hill began to rise out of the ground on their right side. Not far ahead the mouth of small cave opened itself outward from the hill.

“We’re almost there!” Teddy said with excitement. “My cave is the coziest place in the forest.” Digs rolled his eyes. As they approached the cave tree branches curled over head blocking out the last of the moon-light. Teddy took the first step inside, into the pitch black. In the darkness he handed Sheldon a sturdy piece of wood with some dry leaves and twigs nestled at its top. Teddy reached into his knapsack and with a flick of his wrist scraped a match along the cave wall and lit the torch in Sheldon’s hand ablaze. Much to the group’s disappointment, there was nothing but a barren cave where the torch light tapered against a wall of solid rock at the back. Everyone looked at each other with puzzled looks. Everyone except Teddy that is. Who beamed with



pride. “Home sweet home.” Teddy sighed.

“Teddy, there’s nothing here.” Sheldon stated.

Digs scoffed, “Of course there’s nothing here. We just found some crazy old bear in the woods. Joy.”

Teddy raised his paw to quiet the group. “Not so fast now, there is more than meets the eye.” Teddy walked to the back of the cave feeling along the wall, in stern concentration, while muttering to himself. “I know I can find it...Every time I leave for more than a few hours...I must be getting old...Ahh there it is!” Teddy stood back and slammed both his hands into the back wall pushing in two seemingly invisible stone buttons. The wall creaked, and the entire cave began to heave. The group looked around nervously, fearing they would soon be collapsed on. Dust trembled from the ceiling and the wall groaned as it receded into the right side of the wall. As it inched it’s way out of view a soft warm firelight filtered into to the empty cave. Teddy stood back smiling and once the wall had completely vanished he bounded into a large room.

A surprise to everyone was just how large this room actually was. At the forefront there was a thick rug laced with forest greens and soft grass. This lay over an oak floor that covered the entire room. On the right side a grand fire crackled and popped. Heavy, ornate, iron plates lined its edges the hearth was made of marble and quartz. Off to the

left hand side, just out of view, there was a small study room, dimly lit by a lamp. This study was filled with hundreds of scrolls, and books across a wall covered in shelves. These shelves ran the length of the wall and stood a dozen feet high. It was quite clear that Teddy was an avid reader. In the back was a large wooden table with chairs all around. In the midst of their awe Teddy ushered the group into the back and had them each pull up a chair. Teddy plopped down into a chair opposite Sheldon and rested his great arms wearily onto the table. Before he could think Riley piped up.

“What’s with all those books?” She asked.

“Well, like I said before my dear, I am keeper of the woods. In those books is the history of the area that goes as far back as my great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great-”

“We get it, a long time.” Interrupted Digs.

“Great, great, great, great, grandfather.” Teddy finished, giving Digs a loathsome glare. In the midst of their exchange Sheldon had become fixated on what Teddy just said.

“What about houses?” Sheldon asked.

Teddy was perplexed, “What do you mean?”

“Do you keep track of the places where people have lived, here in the woods?”

“Of course, every house that has been occupied or ever built has been kept in my records.”

Sheldon’s heart began to beat faster and faster. “So, then you can find it?”

“Well, yes I suppose so.” Teddy said wearily. “But we should wait until the morning.”

“No.” Sheldon wasn’t having any of it. He reached out across the table and grasped Teddy’s paw. “I can’t wait any longer.” Teddy looked deep into Sheldon’s eyes and could see how serious he was. He got up from the table slowly and wandered over to his study. He began sifting through scrolls muttering to himself.

“So many different! should really organizeah! Here it is.” Teddy pulled a long scroll of worn parchment out. He shook it gently to let some of the dust fall out. He lumbered back over to the table as Sheldon stared at the map in his hand. Teddy spread it carefully across the table and peered through his spectacles. “HmWhere is it? Where is it?” Sheldon sat impatiently as Teddy scanned for what seemed like an eternity. Just when Sheldon could bear the wait no more, Teddy landed a large paw right on the top left corner of the map. “Right here.” Teddy said. “The mark was a bit worn, that’s why it took me so long to find it, but here it is.”

“Where are we?” Sheldon asked shaking.

“We are all the way overhere.” Teddy said as he drew his paw almost all the way across the map. He pointed to a small cave. The group looked defeated as they realized how far away they were. Not only was the distance long, but on the map a large river divided the space between them and Sheldon’s old house.

“How in the world are we going to make it across that river?” Digs exclaimed.

“Well, I suppose you could swim?” Teddy said sarcastically. Digs was not pleased with Teddy’s tongue-in-cheek attitude.

Riley laughed, “He’s a cat. Cats can’t swim.”

“Yes we can! We just don’t like to.” Digs said as he shot a harsh glance back at Riley.

“I don’t care how we get there, just that we do get there. This river’s not going to stop me.” Sheldon said defiantly. Everyone in the room stared at Sheldon. Digs with a grimace, Riley with a smile, and Teddy with a mixture of both.

“And how exactly do you plan on getting there?”

Blurted Digs.

“How else? We walk.”

Teddy heaved a concerned sigh, “Sheldon I think you need to be careful out there, things aren’t always what they seem. With that being said, I can give you guys the supplies you need in the morning. I can also show you how to get there, that’s what you want?”

Before Digs could protest Sheldon cut him off, “Yes! We need all the help we can get.”

“Very well then, I’ll get you all set up in the morning.” Teddy picked the map up off the table. Teddy could see the look in Sheldon’s eyes and how important this was to him. He opened the door to the back room of the cave where three beds covered in thick grass blankets lay. The group shuffled wearily in and fell asleep for the night.

## Chapter Thirteen

# SEARCH

Ivan's sleek black car moved quietly through the winding streets that carved through New Hollow. In the car there were two unlikely companions. Ivan had convinced Owen to come along with him as he staked out the previous day's delivery routes, looking for a sign. As Ivan drove he day dreamed of the day before at the lab. He remembered taking back the hair to his laboratory and running it through many many more tests. All of them confirmed what he already suspected, that this substance, this hair, was of a creature no one had yet discovered.

Owen sat in the passenger seat, looking quite uncomfortable, as he thought about the interrogation of Phil and Max that Ivan had coerced him into doing.

“Look guys I just need to know if you saw something in the back of your truck. We looked in the back and we found even more hair from... whatever it is”

Phil and Max sat suspiciously in Owen’s dimly lit office, “Owen I swear, if anything that wasn’t supposed to be on the truck got inside then it is sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, all Phil’s fault. He forgot to close the door!”

Phil looked stunned by the accusation, “What no I didn’t you did!”

“Phil, you unbearable oaf, don’t blame me in front of the boss!”

“You’re...uh...doing the same thing to me! So you’re the oaf Max.”

Owen tightened his grip on the chair in front of him, “Look guys! I need you to focus. You have got to give me some help. Are you telling me you didn’t see anything? Didn’t hear anything?”

Phil furrowed his brow in deep thought, “Boss maybe it was a furry, green...uh...ghost!”

Max buried his face in his hands, “Phil, why would a ghost have fur?”

“Ghosts need to keep warm too Max.”

“That’s ridiculous Phil it’s obviously alien from outer space.”

Owen closed his eyes, “Will you both be quiet! I get it, you both have absolutely no clue what happened. And that’s not the only thing you don’t have a clue on. You can go home now, I’m going to check your delivery routes to see if I can find anything.”

Phil and Max shuffled out of the room, “You better hope he doesn’t speak with the Jones’. The hole you ripped in their mattress was huge.”

“Shh Max! Owen will hear you.”

The car took a sharp turn all of a sudden and jarred Owen from his thoughts.

“Are we almost there?” Owen griped.

“Another thirty seconds and we’ll be at the last stop of the day. I know we’ll find more clues here I can just feel it.”

The pair had finally reached the end of a long road that extended to the edges of the city limits. The car came to a gentle stop and the two got out of the car stretching and yawning. Sitting far from the road was a lonely house with a long driveway and wide porch.

“So this is it huh?” Owen said.

“Yeah this is it.”



“Couldn’t the creature have just run into the woods...where we’d never find it?”

Ivan shot Owen a tired glance, “Look stop being such a pessimist. This is all part of the fun. Now let’s go!”

Ivan gathered his equipment and closed the car doors.

“The fun that I’m paying for.” Owen grumbled.

Ivan ignored Owen and briskly walked up the long driveway and to the front door. Owen gasped behind him trying to keep up. Once they were both on the porch Ivan raised his hand and knocked three times on the door. They waited. Nothing happened. Ivan looked distraught. He raised his hand and knocked three more times. Again nothing happened.

Owen rubbed his eyes, “Maybe no one’s home?”

“Nonsense. Your notes on this stop say an old woman lives here. They’re always home. Trust me.” Just as Ivan was about to knock again the door inched open slightly.

“What do you want?” A small voice whispered.

Without wasting a second Ivan laid forth his pitch, “Madame it has come to our attention that you recently had a mattress delivered to this house. The house of Grandmother Winefred. Is that correct?”

“Well yes, Grandma Win for short. I did have a mattress delivered

here but I don't see how that's any of your business?"

"My name is Ivan Roswell, local mystery extraordinaire, you may have heard of me?"

"No I don't think I have."

"Well, my colleague Owen and I believe that your delivery could have come with a rabid creature. The likes of which this world has never seen!"

Owen grimaced as Ivan included him in their conversation.

"What do you mean a rabid creature?" Grandma Win squealed.

Ivan felt that he was getting the reaction he wanted, "Well if you'd just let me in for a moment I'd be able to make sure everything is safe."

Grandma Win had pulled the door open wide enough now to show her face and she looked concerned, "I guess that would be alright. Just give me a minute to straighten things up."

Ivan was about to protest, but she closed the door with a loud thud. Time passed and a few minutes quickly turned into half an hour. Owen was losing his patience. As he was turning around to go back to the car Grandma Win opened the door slightly out of breath.

"Ok you guys can come in now."

“Finally, I bet she got rid of all the evidence.” Owen whispered to Ivan.

Ivan began moving his scanner through the rooms of the house. Looking under every couch cushion and in every corner. Every time he would check the scan it was coming back negative. He was becoming visibly frustrated. Also, it didn't help that Grandma Win was hounding him with each step.

“Are you sure you're looking the right spot?” She wailed. “I don't want to be eaten in my sleep. And if I am, I blame you.” She said pointing at Owen.

“Madame, I've been in this business for almost two decades.” Ivan retorted, “Oh really and how many mysteries have you solved?” Grandma Win questioned.

Owen snorted with laughter when she said that. Ivan continued through the first floor completely unsuccessful. Discouraged he moved up the stairs began his search on the second floor. He went through Grandma Win's room scanning all over her new mattress, but still, nothing. There was one last room that he had not checked yet. Riley's room.

“Alright, this is the last room I have to look into before I call it quits.” Ivan yelled downstairs to Grandma Win.

“Oh that's fine. Make sure you knock first that's my Granddaughter's room. Ivan knocked a few times and the door swung open.

“Hello?” Ivan asked as he ushered Owen into the room with him. There was no one in here. Ivan picked apart the dresser and went through all the blankets and through the entire closet. Nothing. He sat defeated on Riley’s bed.

Owen scratched his head, “Have you looked under the bed?”

“What? No...I haven’t” Ivan hopped off the bed and lay flat against the floor. He pulled a small light out from his pocket and turned it on. He pointed the light underneath the bed and squinted so that he didn’t miss a thing. Sure enough right there in front of his eyes was another long green hair. He reached out his hand and pinched the hair between his thumb and forefinger. He slowly stood up and scanned the specimen. The light on his machine flashed green and showed a match. Ivan smiled and turned his gaze towards Owen.

“Don’t be getting any more crazy ideas.” Owen said nervously.

“Ahhhhhh!!!” Grandma Win shrieked as she entered the room.

Both men jumped where they were standing, caught completely off guard.

“What’s wrong?” Asked Ivan.

Grandma Win was shaking uncontrollably, “It’s my granddaughter Riley. She’s...she’s gone!



## Chapter Fourteen

# RIVER

They had been shuffled out of Teddy's home earlier that morning. He had given them supplies that should last more than long enough to get them to Sheldon's old house and back. Nothing was particularly concerning about the journey that lay before them. Well, except for one thing. An enormous, roaring, river lay between the group and their destination.

Teddy had suggested going back into town in order to find a crossing. Digs was in favor of the idea, but Sheldon couldn't risk it. He had no idea what people would do if they saw him. Riley, had agreed with Sheldon, much to Digs' dismay.

Teddy had said, "Be careful Sheldon. You never know what's out in the woods, and you might not like it." There was an ominous tone to Teddy's voice that seemed like he was holding back something from Sheldon. Sheldon did his best to keep the thought out of his mind. The morning that they left was a cold pale morning. Autumn was truly wrapping its fingers around New Hollow and fresh fallen leaves crunched under the group's feet.

"Sheldon what are we going to do about this river?" Digs pestered, for what seemed like the millionth time.

"I'm sure it's not that bad. You know how to swim don't you?" Sheldon quipped with a chuckle. Sheldon spent the next hour or so brushing off more of Dig's criticisms, all the while Riley kept silent and walked behind Sheldon deep in thought. The sound of something close to wind came rushing through the trees. With each step that the group took forward the noise grew louder and louder.

It wasn't long before they were standing near the edge of a small hill that sloped into the mouth of the New Hollow river. The group stared in awe. The water rushed ferociously through a channel that was

at least one hundred yards across. The water turned and frothed as converging currents slammed into one another. Sheldon could see the hairs rising on his own body and Digs. Digs slowly turned towards Sheldon with his teeth clenched tightly together.

Through his teeth Digs hissed at Sheldon, “Teddy told us this was going to be impossible!” Digs’ voice was growing louder, “But you don’t listen to anybody do you! I’m a cat. You know I hate water and yet you still are going to make us drown.” Digs was breathing heavy and needed to sit down to calm himself. “We’d have had better luck trying to hitch a cab in town.” He said sarcastically. Sheldon didn’t have time to argue with Digs. They were here at the river and he needed to figure out a way across. He motioned for Riley to follow him and they slid slowly down to the muddy bank. The mud was seeping in between their toes and they scoured the ground for something to help them cross the river. As they moved along they saw a small patch of shrubbery with an object protruding from it. Riley walked over to the bush and pulled on the object. She stumbled backward slightly and they saw that the object was actually a small wooden raft. They could use this to get across the river.

The group spent another hour debating whether or not the raft would be sturdy enough to handle the current and carry them safely across. Digs was the most opposed.

“We’ll never survive. Do you want your best friend to die?” He yelled.

“Of course I don’t want you to die. Do you want me to get captured? Which is exactly what will happen if we go into town. This is the only way.” Sheldon retorted. “Riley what do you think?” Sheldon asked hoping that she would help persuade Digs.

“I don’t know Sheldon. I’m scared. But I know that if we go into town the people might...might not treat you so well.”

Digs pleaded with her, “Please Riley. I don’t want to die.”

“Look Digs I get it. You’re a cat and you’re terrified of water. But, I agree with Sheldon. This is the only way.” Digs shoulders slumped backward and he plopped himself face first into the mud. He believed that his peril was imminent and there was nothing he could do. While Digs continued to grumble and moan in the mud, Sheldon and Riley wove rails out of branches and leaves into the raft so that they could have something to hold onto. They also found a sizable log that they could use to paddle themselves against the current. Soon the raft was ready.

Sheldon and Riley shoved the raft to the edge of the water where the river broke lightly against its sides.

“Digs come on we have to go!” Sheldon said impatiently.



“I refuse. I want to live. We have to find another way.” Digs said glumly.

Riley interjected, “ We don’t have another way and you’re coming with us.” Riley and Sheldon then leaped over to Digs and hoisted him onto the raft.

“No I hate the water! Let me go!” Digs yelled. He tried to break their grasp but he couldn’t and eventually resumed his melancholy posture on the raft. The group used their log to push them away from the bank and out into the water. At first the current wasn’t so strong. But as they moved closer to the center of the river they could see the water was moving at great speeds. Frothing, turning, and bubbling with enormous strength. They parted into the center current and felt themselves immediately lose control of the boat. They began to be whirled around in dizzying circles with water heaving over the deck of the raft.

“Hold on tight!” Sheldon yelled to the group as he wrapped his arm around the railing. Digs clung for his life onto Sheldon’s leg and Riley wrapped herself in Sheldon’s free arm. Pieces of the raft began to break off and zoom off in every direction. Water sprayed the group until they were soaked to the bone and they felt like they wouldn’t be able to stay conscious if the boat kept spinning. Eventually just as it looked like the river might swallow them while they were thrust up onto the shore

on the other side of the river.

Their raft was shattered into pieces that were splintered all over the ground. Sheldon dizzily walked over to Riley and Digs who lay groaning on the shore.

“Are you guys ok? We made it!” Sheldon exclaimed. Riley and Digs shook off their daze and stood up.

“Look Digs we’re all alive.” Riley said trying to add some light to what had just happened.

“Guys I’m done. I’m going home.” Digs said bluntly.

Sheldon looked at Digs wild eyed, “What do you mean you’re going home?”

“I’m tired of this Sheldon. I don’t want to get hurt and you don’t seem to care. I’m going back to the store, to Owen, to my home.” There was a long pause between them, with Riley standing off to the side silently.

Sheldon was breathing heavily, “You know what Digs? You’ve been complaining the whole time and you’ve been nothing but a burden. All you’ve ever wanted for me was to hide away in that store. It’s easy for you to go home when you have a home.”

“The mattress store is your home too Sheldon!”

“No it’s not. It’s a prison and I’m glad I left. And if you want to leave now...then so be it.” Digs and Sheldon looked at each other with strained eyes. They had never had such a low point in their relationship. Digs didn’t want to abandon his friend, but he felt there was no other choice. Sheldon didn’t want to hurt his friend, but he needed to know more about his past, or at least try. Digs gave Riley a strong hug as she cried softly. He gave Sheldon one last look, and began walking back towards New Hollow.

## Chapter Fifteen

# DEPARTURE

A few days had passed since Digs' departure. Sheldon and Riley tried their best not to talk about it. Sheldon still couldn't come to grips with the fact that his friend had abandoned him and on top of these concerns about Digs, the weather had taken a turn for the worse.

Even though it was early Autumn, the normally mild air had suddenly turned frigid.

The sun remained in hiding throughout the days and nights all the while snow slowly blanketed the ground with each passing day. It crunched under their feet and left them constantly cold. Riley stood close to Sheldon so his fur would keep her warm.

They hadn't seen any sign of civilization for days. Their only company was the sounds of birds, insects, and the rustling of leaves that echoed through the forest. Sheldon couldn't tell whether he missed the sounds of people; car engines humming, doors closing, and the constant chatter of customers in the store. Despite all of his excitement the journey was making him tired and he could tell that it was having an affect on Riley as well.

“How do you feel Riley?” He asked.

“What do you mean? I feel fine.” She replied.

Sheldon stammered for a moment. “I don't know. I just...I feel like I've taken you away from your home and forced you out into this wilderness. It's been such a dangerous journey. You know you can leave whenever you want, right?”

Riley gave Sheldon a rub on the shoulder. “Sheldon I'm fine, I told you that I'd stick it out with you and I meant it. Besides, it was lonely at my house.”

Sheldon nodded and said; “When I was at the mattress store I had

to hide all day. Digs is the only friend I've ever had and he's the one who showed me how to avoid being seen. We always figured people wouldn't accept me."

Riley gave Sheldon a look that showed she understood how he felt. "My grandma was so scared, because when I was younger I lost my parents. She'd never forgive herself if something happened to me. I didn't get to have any friends so I had to stay inside all day too. That's why I wanted to come with you."

Sheldon and Riley smiled at one another. The evening was settling in and Sheldon knew that he and Riley were going to have to find somewhere to stay for the night. The forest was extremely dense at this point and as time went on a clearing would be harder to find. In the distance they could hear a strange sound. It sounded like the laughing of people and even music. Sheldon and Riley hunched a little lower and they crept towards the source of the noise.

As they got closer they could see that there was a barn in the middle of the forest with a soft light emanating from its large front doors. They snuck up to the door and peered through the crack. They could see a circle of smiling people young and old. They were all stomping their feet and clapping their hands as they took turns going to the center of the group to show off their dancing skills. Sheldon and Riley laughed at the way the people danced. Inside Sheldon could see that

there was a dark loft above the group and if they could get there, it would be a safe place to stay for the night.

Fortunately when they walked around the side of the barn there was a ladder leading up to a small opening into the loft. They quietly climbed up the ladder and found that it was even cozier than it had looked. The light from below put a warm glow on the space so that they could see but wouldn't be seen. There was hay strewn all over the floor and it would provide soft bedding for their rest. Once Sheldon and Riley had gotten settled in they crawled over to the ledge to get a better look at the people. They were still laughing, smiling, and moving to the beat of the music. A man sat in the corner playing his guitar while another man, at his side, beat a large drum.

People young and old, men and women, were all having the time of their lives. Sheldon and Riley couldn't stop laughing at what these people were doing. Riley stood up in the small space and reached out her hand to Sheldon.

"Come on Sheldon dance with me!" She whispered.

Sheldon was embarrassed at first. He had never been very good at dancing.

"I'll probably step on your toes." He said as he laughed nervously. Riley wasn't having any of it. She kept her hand outstretched until he

finally grabbed it and stood up. They started spinning in a circle and moving to the beat of the drum. They were laughing and smiling, and soon Sheldon's fear of embarrassing himself was swept away. They were enjoying themselves just as much as the people down below were, when all of a sudden a thunderous crash roared through the barn.

Sheldon and Riley were jarred out of their happiness and they crawled back to the ledge so that they could see what had happened. A man burst through the door with a group of small bodyguards at his side. They began tearing everything in the barn apart and knocked over the musical instruments. The people cowered in fear not having a clue what was going on. The man stood at the center of the barn where they had been dancing and began to speak.

“My name is Ivan Roswell. I am not here to hurt anyone but I am on a very important mission. I am looking for a little girl named Riley. She's been kidnapped by a monster.”

One of the men walked up to Ivan. “What do you mean she's been kidnapped by a monster?”

Ivan gave the man a stern look. “Despite what some of you may believe there are things out there beyond our understanding. They don't care about life and they only want to take. We have come into conflict with one of these things and I need to find it. This place seems clear



for now, but if you should see anything unusual then give me a call.” Ivan then reached into his pocket and handed the man his business card. Ivan’s men looked in a few more corners of the barn but came up empty handed. Then, they left.

The people looked confused and they all whispered worriedly to one another. They filtered out of the barn and put out the lamps that had recently made the place so friendly.

“Sheldon, someone’s looking for me? Who is that man? They think you took me!” Riley rattled.

“I know, I have no idea who that is. We need to stay out of the way of people and leave this place first thing in the morning.” Sheldon stated. Riley nodded in agreement as they both stayed in the darkest part of the loft hoping they wouldn’t be bothered, at least, for the rest of the night.

## Chapter Sixteen

# WORRY

Things hadn't been quite the same since Sheldon and Riley left the barn. They were overwhelmed with the feeling of always being watched. Although they were getting closer to Sheldon's old home, they constantly felt as if all their progress would be canceled out. Riley understood how it must seem to her Grandma Win. She had just disappeared without a word. She also knew how they would treat Sheldon if they ever found him. She couldn't let anything bad happen to him. Now, they were once again trudging through the forest, in the cold, searching for something that might not even be there.

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"Sheldon are we getting close yet?" Riley asked. Sheldon pulled out his map and looked to see where they were. It was fortunate for him that Teddy had kept such good records. Every tree and rock was neatly placed so that you couldn't get lost in the daunting New Hollow woods. He could see that they were now just a few miles southwest of the old house that he used to live in. His heart was racing. What if his parents were still there? He wanted to know who he was so badly.

They tried to quicken their pace as the day was coming to an end. The sun was slipping below the horizon and the wind was eerily howling through the trees. The temperature dropped even further than the sun with the breath in front of their faces now white as snow. Sheldon tried to hurry them along. He didn't want to get caught in the middle of these woods in the dark.

“Sheldon, what do you think you’re going to find at this house?” Riley asked.

“I honestly have no idea. It’s been so long since I was taken away. Maybe someone’s still there?”

“What if no one’s there?” Riley said doubtfully. This was the first time she had shown any lack of faith in their journey.

“What do you mean?” Sheldon asked. He was genuinely confused and couldn’t afford to lose more support.

“Well, like you said it’s been a long time. People don’t always stay in the same place. You know that.”

“I know, but let’s just say I have a feeling.” Sheldon said with half-hearted enthusiasm. He could tell Riley wasn’t convinced.

The hours were passing by and now Sheldon and Riley were less than half a mile from the house. The night had fully enveloped them and the wind was freezing them to the bone. Sheldon could barely concentrate as they got closer and closer. He kept encouraging Riley onward because he could see that the cold was getting to her. She couldn’t stop shivering and her words were coming out stuttered, almost rendered inaudible by the wind.

Sheldon was looking for one sign in particular that they were in the right spot. A sign that wasn’t on the map. Something that he remem-

bered from a long time ago. As he was being carried out of his home, under the mattress he saw a stone path leading outside that was lined with white lilies. In this weather it was unlikely that he would find the lilies but if he could find that stone path then he would know he was home.

The cold was bringing them to their knees. Sheldon felt that he could barely take another step. He hugged Riley as tightly to his body as he could while they were crawling and looking for a place to find cover. They plodded through the snow on all fours. Trying their best to take breaks and breathe on their hands for warmth.

“Sheldon I can’t do this anymore.” Riley cried. Her hands were red with the cold and Sheldon knew that they needed to find some place inside soon.

“Don’t worry we’re almost there.” He reassured her. Honestly, he didn’t know. He just knew that they needed to keep moving. Sheldon kept placing his hands & feet into the snow covered ground. One after the other. He reached for his map once again. As he tried to grab it from the backpack that Teddy had given him it slipped through his fingers and was whisked away by the wind into the forest. He buried his face in his hands. All hope was lost. There was no way he would be able to find his home now. Riley knew it was her turn to give Sheldon encouragement.

“Sheldon! We need to keep moving!” She shouted over the wind.

“I can’t. We’ve lost the map. It’s all over now!”

“No it’s not.” Just then, Riley grabbed Sheldon’s arm and urged him forward. She still couldn’t stand, but she was using all her might to keep him going. He kept moving forward until, all of the sudden, he felt something in the snow.

“Riley wait! I think I’ve found something.” Sheldon took both his hands and brushed away the snow that covered, what appeared to be, a stone. It was a circular stone. Similar to one that might be on a....a path...that was it! Sheldon leaped forward and began kicking away the snow in front of him. He could hardly see twenty feet in front of him, but every time the snow was removed a new stone would appear.

“Riley hurry up. I’ve found the house!” Sheldon said as he approached the end of the stone path. He could also see the lilies. This was it. The final sign that he was in the right place. He stood before the flowers and raised his gaze in the darkness. He took a few more steps forward and...There it was. Through the howling wind and night he could see the outline of a house. Riley was running to catch up with him, but before Sheldon knew what he was doing he had bolted towards the house. He ran onto the porch and pushed on an old creaking door. He threw it open and burst inside. The first thing that hit him was the smell of old wood. He looked around and not a single light was on

anywhere. He looked all around him and parts of the house looked... burned. Dust covered old rotting furniture and it looked as if no one had been here for years.

“Mom! Dad!” He yelled as he zoomed around the first floor. Sadly enough, no one was there. He headed back to the front door and turned so that he could go upstairs. The upper portion of the house was no better. It was extremely dark except for the pale light of the moon filtering in from outside. He turned to the left and saw his old room. He walked slowly down the hallway, tracing his hand along the wall as he went. There was dust everywhere and parts of the ceiling looked to be caving in from rot. As he came to his old room he looked around. It was empty. There was nothing here for him. Sheldon fell to his knees heartbroken and fighting back tears. After all the hoping and searching he was left with still no answers.

Sheldon looked closer at the dust covering the floor and noticed something. There, on the floor, was a small handprint. Gently ingrained within the sea of dust. It was much smaller, but it was clearly Sheldon's. He closed his eyes and tried to fight back all of his feelings. He didn't want to feel anything right now. He hadn't thought about what he'd do if no one was here and had kept it out of his mind for too long.

Sheldon thoughts were interrupted when heard a scream from Riley.

“Sheldon help me!” She yelled. He heard the sound of a door slamming at the front of the house and bright lights began to pour inside from every direction. Sheldon heard the voices of people outside and the bellowing of engines. He panicked. His breathing became heavy and he ran to the window inside the room so that he could peer out. But, he couldn’t see anything. Slowly he walked out into the hallway. He inched step by step toward the stairs. Outside was abuzz with energy, but the house was still silent.

Sheldon thought, maybe, he could sneak around the back and escape. But, he still needed to find out what had happened to Riley and he couldn’t risk being seen. So many things were all happening at once and he had no idea what to do. He crept down the stairs and turned to the left, down the hall, where he could see the back door’s window, frosted, and illuminated. As he snuck down the hallway though, he realized something. He could hear soft breathing in the other room. He halted. He looked through the darkness and saw a small end table that he could hide underneath. He dove under the end table and kept as silent as he could.

The floor boards began to creak as the person in the house started moving. His slow and calm breathing rang eerily off of the walls. A tall dark figure emerged and walked towards Sheldon. The figure didn’t look down and it kept moving forward. The figure kept mocking Sheldon with his march until it was in front of him. It stopped. Sheldon



knew that he'd been caught. This was it. He closed his eyes and tried to control his emotions. When he opened them, to his surprise, the figure was gone.

Sheldon stepped out from underneath the table. In an instant he was scooped up from behind and thrown into a bag. Sheldon thrashed and fought but it was no use, he could not escape.

The figure opened the top of the bag and whispered, "Hello, I'm Ivan."



The background of the page is a stage with red curtains. Three spotlights are shining down from above, creating a bright area in the center. The text is overlaid on this scene.

## Chapter Seventeen

# SHOWTIME

This was it. He'd been caught. Riley had been returned to her grandmother and now, Sheldon was locked up in a cage at the hands of Ivan. Sheldon was horrified. He couldn't believe this had happened to him. Not only was no one at his old home, he was now held prisoner. He had no idea what was going to happen to him. As he sat in his cage he noticed he was in a strange room. It almost looked like the back room to a stage. There were different props all around and a preparation mirror over to one side. As Sheldon was scanning the room Ivan burst through the doors.

“Well hello my dear friend!” He said with a dark smile. “I finally have you in my custody and you weren’t easy to find.” Sheldon said nothing. He just glared at Ivan as Ivan strutted around the room. “You know ever since I was a little boy people have always doubted me. I was always interested in mysteries. But I could never ‘prove’ any of them. Well now I have my proof and I’m going to give the world the greatest show it’s ever seen.” Ivan finished his words with a great sigh of satisfaction. Sheldon had no idea what he was talking about, but he was worried. Ivan’s tone was greedy and ominous.

Meanwhile, Digs was back at the mattress store. He couldn’t get his mind off of what might of happened to Sheldon. Digs was sure that he would have come back by now and that since he hadn’t, Sheldon was certainly in trouble. Even though he couldn’t know for sure, Digs wasn’t able to shake the feeling that something had, in fact, happened to Sheldon. He paced around the mattress store that evening wondering if there was some way he could get into contact.

Digs had also thought that it was strange that lately Owen was seldom in the store. Throughout the last few days he had barely been there to assist customers. He had seemed occupied with other plans. Digs didn’t have time to worry about Owen’s business though, he needed to find Sheldon.

Digs went into Owen’s office and flipped on the television hoping

to clear his mind for a few minutes. When it turned on, a peculiar commercial was playing. This commercial was for the infamous, local mystery hunter, Ivan. Digs had heard some rumors in the alley that Ivan made a new discovery but Digs had paid little attention to it. As the commercial played Ivan's face appeared on screen.

Hello friends! Come one come all to the greatest show on Earth! In all my years of solving great mysteries, and discovering magnificent things, I have never found something as amazing as what I am about to unveil at the end of the week. Come and join me, Ivan Roswell, at the New Hollow theater for an evening that won't be anything less than... spectacular!

At the end of the commercial something horrible struck Digs. A shadow of what appeared to be Sheldon's head floated to the front of the screen. He knew what this meant. Ivan was going to reveal him to the world and paint him as a monster. Something needed to be done.

Digs chewed on his lower lip for a moment while he thought. He knew he needed to break Sheldon out of the New Hollow theater, but he wasn't sure how. There was only one thing he could do. He needed to speak to the animals from the pet store.

A peculiar group of hamsters ran the pet store and Digs hadn't always been on the friendliest of terms with them. There were always turf disputes on who really owned the alley between the two buildings.

Of course, Digs always considered himself the true owner.

Digs walked out into the alley and cautiously approached the Pet Store's side exit where a soft, buzzing, red light was a glow. He stood before its sturdy steel door and knocked a few times. He waited for a moment and nothing happened. He lifted up his paw and knocked again. He waited a few more seconds. When he was about to turn around the door opened. The hallway leading into the Pet Store was dark and a gruff voice hissed at Digs.

“What do you want?”

“I...I need some help from Coconut.” Digs stammered.

“The boss doesn't want to see anyone right now.”

“Tell him I'll give him the back half of the alleyway, no fuss.”

The door immediately swung open and a small group of hamsters blindfolded Digs and lead him down the hall.

Although he couldn't see, Digs could hear the sounds of other animals barking and cawing. As they continued walking he went through another string of rooms before finally coming to a dimly lit closet. His blindfold was removed and there sat Coconut. A short and stout hamster who had no time for funny business. A chair was thrust underneath his rear and Coconut spoke.

“Hey Digs, nice to see you again. My crew has been telling me that you want to speak about the alleyway territory. Well, I’m here to listen.”

“Coconut, I want to give you the back half of the alleyway, but-”  
Coconut then cut him off.

“Only my mother can call me Coconut, it’s Coco!”

Digs rolled his eyes and continued with his proposal. “Look, I have a friend who is in trouble. If I give you guys the part of the alley that I promised I’m going to need your help rescuing him from The New Hollow Theater. If you can do that we have a deal.” Coco looked around at his crew and stared at his table for a moment.

“You still need to keep it clean and take out the trash.” Coco stated. Digs swallowed hard. This was quite an insult to him.

“Fine.” He said sternly. Digs reached out his paw and waited for Coco to shake on the deal. He eventually did and they both gave each other a satisfied grin.

On the evening that Sheldon was going to be exposed to the inhabitants of New Hollow, Digs and Coco’s gang snuck around the New Hollow Theater and ended up at one of the back exits. With some skillful maneuvering they dodged the security at the front gate and so far no one had seen them. The door into the theater was locked so two

of Coco's men squeezed themselves underneath the door. There was some noise on the other side and then after a few seconds it clicked open.

Coco's men led the way down the first hall. They heard the sound of voices coming and they quickly dove into the shadows of an open room. The workers passed by and then the group was back out into the hall. They kept going as silently as they could. After several more turns they could see the doors leading to the back stage. It was two thick double doors. They needed to get past them. The group walked up to the doors and once again Coco's men slipped underneath and tried to unlock the doors.

At that moment they could hear the voices of those same workers coming back down the hallway.

"Tell your men to hurry up." Digs hissed at Coco.

"They're going as fast as they can!" Coco looked indignant, but the voices were getting closer and closer. The final click came from the lock, Coco's gang bolted back to the other side, and the heavy doors groaned open.

"Alright, our deal is done. You have to go get your friend now." Coco shot at Digs.

“I still need to get him out of here!” Digs said raising his voice. Coco gave him a shrug and he and his gang scurried down the hall, underneath the feet of the two workers, and out the door. The workers shrieked and chased after them, so at least there was one benefit of them leaving.

Digs crept into the dim backstage area and saw Sheldon sitting in a small cage.

“Sheldon, I’m here!” Digs whispered as he ran over to Sheldon.

“Digs! What are you doing here?” Sheldon was startled.

“I came to break you out. The theater is filling up quickly and we can’t let Ivan do this to you.” Sheldon pointed to a set of keys that were sitting on a small dresser. Digs could hear the murmuring of the crowd beyond the curtain quiet down. And a loudspeaker came on.



# Chapter Eighteen

# TRUTH

People were filing in from all over town. Everyone came to see Sheldon. After some convincing, Riley had managed to get Grandma Win to take her to the show. Ever since the night in the woods, things had been horrible. Riley had hardly spoken to her grandmother and Grandma Win had hardly said anything back. They had been watching the commercial for Ivan's show and when the tension reached a climax they argued about Sheldon.

“Why would you ever want to see that monster who took you away?” Grandma Win scolded.

“He’s not a monster! He’s my friend!” Riley had said before she ran upstairs.

But, they were here, and Riley was scared. She had no idea what Ivan was doing to Sheldon. She shuddered at the thought. The building was finally packed full and everyone was seated. The loud chatter of excited guests quickly changed to low whispers. A loud trumpet sounded and the lights dimmed. A voice rang throughout the theater.

Attention ladies and gentlemen! Thank you for joining us tonight. We have quite a special presentation and we know you will not be disappointed. We have found this creature in the woods of our very town. Lurking, and hunting, and stalking his victims. None of us were safe! Until Ivan Roswell saved us from an uncertain fate. Through his cunning and through his wit he was able to capture the monster. Now, he has brought it before all of us, so that we may face our darkest fears. Without further ado. I give you, our monster!

With those final words from the announcer the curtains pulled back and the entire audience gasped. There was a cage at the center of the stage. To their surprise, it was empty. The door was slightly ajar and creaked as it swayed back and forth. Silence fell over the room like a thick blanket and the people were all wondering if this was part of the

show. The loudspeaker turned back on.

It seems that we are currently having some technical difficulties. We would like everyone to be aware that the monster has escaped. We have the situation under control, so please, remain calm.

Despite the call for calm the theater erupted into chaos. People began toppling over one another and Grandma Win screamed. She tried to grab Riley's arm and drag her toward the aisle but Riley pulled herself free.

Riley knew this was her one chance to get away and catch up to Sheldon. She climbed over a few rows of seats and made her way to the stage. She jumped up and grabbed on to the edge of the platform. She pulled herself over the ledge and she could see that a door was left open. She barged through it and saw a faint glimpse of Sheldon, with Digs, flying down the hall.

"Sheldon wait!" She hollered after him. The sound of footsteps that she had heard ringing off into the distance now came to a halt. She quickened her pace. As she turned the corner she ran smack dab into Sheldon and Digs. She knocked them over and they began laughing and hugging.

"Sheldon I missed you so much! I never thought I'd see you again." Riley exclaimed.

“I missed you too!” Sheldon said joyously. Digs gave them both an awkward look.

“Hi Riley.” He whispered. They stared at each other for a long time and then Riley walked over and embraced him too.

“We need to get going guys.” Digs whispered worriedly. With that, the group began running out of the building once more. They could hear the sounds of sirens in the distance and marching feet. They came to the final exit and peered out the small window in the door. People were running in all directions and police vehicles were flooding the streets with their lights shining everywhere.

Digs put his head down, “We can’t get out. They’ve got you Sheldon.” Riley grabbed on to Sheldon.

Sheldon embraced Riley and said, “Guys we only have one choice. We need to run.” Sheldon burst through the door and out into the sea of people. Riley and Digs were hot on his heels as he wove his way through the crowd. He couldn’t tell where he was going but he knew that he needed to get back out into the woods. He began running alongside the main road.

“Sheldon wait!” Riley and Digs yelled in unison. A man then bumped into Digs pushing him to the ground. Sheldon stopped for a moment to look for Digs but he had been swept away in the crowd. He pulled Riley close to him and then they both kept on running.

Sheldon couldn't tell where they were going but he started to notice that the road was rising in elevation. As Sheldon and Riley kept moving people started to notice them. A group was forming, that began to chase them up the street. They were shouting at them.

"Quick he's stealing that little girl! Somebody help her!" The mob grew at a rapid pace. The police vehicles turned their lights on Sheldon and Riley.

"Sheldon we have to move faster they're gaining on us!" Riley yelled. Sheldon was now running with all of his might. The incline of the road was getting steeper and steeper. Sheldon realized they were running up a large hill in the center of New Hollow. Over the sides he could see the entire town buzzing. People were swarming at its base hoping to catch a glimpse of him and he could do nothing but keep going.

Riley was ahead of him now and he was trying his best to keep up. The road was narrowing and he could see that ahead there was only a cliff. They were trapped but he couldn't let the crowd get a hold of him. The evening sky was darkening and snow began to fall on the already slick ground. He was slowly losing his view of Riley. He was trying so hard to keep up with her. His lungs were filling with icy air and his legs were aching.

As they reached the edge of the cliff the ground was so slick Sheldon could barely keep himself standing up. The crowd was roaring behind him and to his horror as Riley reached the edge of the cliff... she slipped. As she fell over the edge Sheldon leaped and skidded across the ground. He reached out his hand and grabbed the collar of her shirt. Riley reached up and grasped his forearm with both of her hands.

“Sheldon help me!” She pleaded. “Please.”

“Don’t let go Riley I’ll pull you up!” Sheldon shouted. Sheldon had anchored himself with one arm clutching to the ground, but he was slowly being pulled off of the edge. Everyone in town had now made it to the top of the cliff and they were frozen in horror as they watched Sheldon struggle. Sheldon stared at them wide eyed.

“Help!” He shouted as his body slowly inched forward. No one moved but they all stared. Ivan emerged from the crowd and began screaming at everyone. He seemed too scared to go near the ledge.

“Grab him you fools! Can’t you see what a dangerous monster this is! He’s trying to toss that little girl off a cliff.”

The crowd looked nervously at one another, none of them knowing quite what to do. At that moment just as Sheldon was losing his grip Phil, one of the delivery truck drivers, shoved Ivan out of the way and grabbed Sheldon’s arm.

“Come on everyone we need to pull them up!” Phil shouted. The crowd rushed past Ivan and formed a long line helping pull Sheldon and Riley back from the brink. When the crowd had finally pulled them up Sheldon and Riley embraced.

“Riley I thought I’d never see you again.” Sheldon whispered. Digs walked from the front of the crowd right next to both of them.

“We’d never leave you Sheldon.” He said with a smile on his face. Ivan was still running around screaming.

“Grab them! How dare you let this monster escape! He’ll wreak havoc. I tried to save you all.” Before Ivan could say another word Phil shoved Ivan down the hill. The crowd parted and he tumbled all the way back down. Digs, Sheldon, and Riley embraced and the crowd began cheering. The police turned off their lights and Sheldon had truly come out of the shadows.

## Several months later

A lot of things have changed since Sheldon came out into the open. He moved from United Mattress to Riley's house. Her grandmother was finally giving her more freedom to go out and have friends. Owen's mattress store was doing phenomenally well, with the help of Sheldon as his new spokesperson on all things sleep. Digs had patched things up entirely with Coconut and the gang from the Pet store. The alley way had been returned to full harmony, for now. Ivan lost his job and now worked out of his home on a late night radio show that no one listened to. Owen moved out of his mother's home and was finally finding his own way in the world. Things were going great.

Sheldon and Riley sat in her room one night and turned on the radio to listen to some music before they fell asleep. A familiar voice came on and was sputtering uncontrollably.

They've tried to silence me, but it will never work. I will always be fighting against that monster! How dare you let him into our society. He can't be trusted. I wasn't wrong, I tried to save you all!

Sheldon and Riley's sides ached with laughter and tears were rolling down their faces as they shut off Ivan's program. Sheldon was safe. He had now found a home, and he was no longer a monster under the bed.



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