

Ghosts of the Past

An Autumn chill filled the air. The trees were stripped almost bare, the remnants of their leaves scattering the pavement.

Halloween was here.

Children were nearly bursting with excitement, unable to sit still in class, daydreaming of the warm, delicious candy soon about to melt in their tongues.

The joy clogging the atmosphere seemed an almost *cruel* contrast to the house of Jack Monroe. The wooden walls and floorboards were rotting away, the garden was usurped by weeds, and a hound dog often patrolled the front door, barking at any passerby so loud that their eyes rattled.

In a remote corner of this house sat Monroe himself, shivering. The trick-or-treating had begun. The noise outside seemed distant and faraway. Jack dreaded Halloween, and for a good reason. Memories flooded his mind – 5 years ago, the Monroe family, bundled up in their tiny little car – off on a road trip. The busy intersection, and the shining yellow light that turned red just a few seconds too early, the midnight black truck that for an instant loomed over them like an inevitable darkness – and then nothing. Ten entire people had been killed, including all of Jack’s family. He had been the only survivor of the fatal car crash. And it was all his fault. Every Halloween marked a gruesome anniversary of the life-changing incident.

The time passed excruciatingly slowly. Jack could not sleep. The hours went by, until it was midnight.

Suddenly, the lights went out. Even the crimson hue from the candles were swept out immediately, as if a sudden wind had blown right through them. The temperature dropped.

A face appeared from the ceiling. The skin was ashen gray, as if the spirit was void of any color. There were bottomless pits in the sockets where the eyes should have been. The gaping maw opened to reveal rows of cracked, yellowed teeth. It was a direful scene. Jack recognized this face at once. It was his own wife. “*WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!*” She screamed, in a frighteningly distorted voice.

Another face materialized to join the first. And then another. Two more. Three more. “*MURDERER!*” They shrieked. “*KILLER!*” They bombarded him with accusations and bit into his skin, taking out chunks of flesh at a time. Jack screamed, but his voice was gone. It was as if he was a doll whose voice box had been removed.

As if they had taken his scream as a signal, the ghosts began to wail. It was perfectly in unison – a savage, noisome choir of the dead. On cue, hundreds of grotesque hands began to tear out of the ground. The air suddenly reeked of rotting flesh and an unexpected wave of unbearable heat singed Jack’s hair. The ground began to open, revealing a large, tenebrous stairwell – the

entrance to Hell itself. The man's face contorted into a final scream as his soul was wrenched out of his body and into the underground, leaving nothing but the shell of a body behind.