

Nevada
Nightmare
Novel

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It was a dark and stormy night in Henderson, Nevada.

In my bedroom, I stared at the words on the computer screen and then read them out loud.

“It was a dark and stormy night in Henderson, Nevada.”

That was how my story was to begin. It was a homework assignment. Everyone in our class had to write a spooky Halloween story, and it had to start with that sentence.

It was a dark and stormy night in Henderson, Nevada.

Why? Because our teacher, Mr. Harper, said that it would help our creativity. He said that all of our stories would be very different and unique, even though each student began the exercise with the same sentence. And Henderson, Nevada is where I live, of course. It's where I go to school. I'm a fifth-grader at Vandenberg Elementary. Henderson is a city about ten miles southeast of Las Vegas, and I think just about everybody's heard of Las Vegas. It's a fun city.

But Henderson is just as much fun. I have a lot of great friends, and there are some great parks nearby, including Discovery Park, which is only a few blocks from where we live. The weather gets really hot in the summer, but it cools off during the winter months. Still, we don't get any snow, because it doesn't get cold enough. Sometimes, I wish we would have a snowstorm. I think it would be fun to build a snowman or have a snowball fight with my friends.

But I couldn't think about that right now. Right now, I had to think about my homework assignment, which was to write a story. I already had the first sentence, of course, but I didn't know what to write about after that.

A ghost story? I thought. A haunted house? A boy wizard? A fantasy world filled with dragons? I had so many options, so many directions I could go, but I found it confusing to even begin. Mr. Harper had told us that writing a book, even a short story, can be difficult. He told us to work hard, but let our imaginations guide us.

Well, my imagination wasn't guiding me anywhere. I just sat at the desk in my bedroom, staring at the computer screen, which was blank except for that single, short phrase. The little black cursor taunted me as it blinked at the end of the sentence.

It was a dark and stormy night in Henderson, Nevada.

But the weird part? It really was a dark and stormy night. It was October, and a chilly wind

was blowing, rain was falling, and lightning had been flashing for the past couple of hours. One thunderclap was so loud that it shook the entire house.

My sister, Hannah, came to my bedroom door. “Devon,” she said, “Mom says to turn off your computer until the storm passes.”

“Tell her I will,” I said.

Using the mouse, I moved the cursor to shut down the computer, but it was too late. A sudden, bright flash lit up my bedroom, and at the exact same time, an enormous thunderclap exploded. Simultaneously, my bedroom light went out, and sparks shot out of the electrical outlets!

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The power came back on several hours later. Lightning had struck an electrical transformer in front of our house, causing a strong power surge and knocking out power for several blocks.

But the really bad news?

The surge of electricity fried a bunch of our household appliances, including the stereo, microwave, television . . . and my computer. Dad said that he was sure our insurance would pay to have everything replaced, but that didn't help me

at the moment. I really needed to get started on my story for school, but now I had nothing to write with. The computer in my bedroom was the only one in the house, except for my dad's laptop, which is only for his job. Even though it was a little old and I couldn't use it to play any games, I could still use it for my homework assignments.

"I guess you're just going to have to write your story the old-fashioned way," Mom said.

"How's that?" I asked.

"With a pen and paper," she replied.

I frowned. I was okay with writing on paper, but I was getting faster and faster on the computer keyboard. I liked the feeling of the keys under my fingers, and I liked the way the letters and words came out all neat and crisp when I printed my story.

But I had two weeks before the story needed to be handed in, so I had plenty of time. I could always use a computer at school or at the public library if I needed to. And besides: the story didn't have to be very long. Mr. Harper had told us to

keep it around three pages.

But I was still stuck.

What am I going to write about? I thought, as I lay back in bed. I wanted my story to be different from everyone else's. I knew that most of my classmates would be writing about ghosts or haunted houses or vampires, and there was nothing wrong with that.

But I really want my story to be different, I thought. What can I write that would be different, and really, really great?

As it would turn out, I wouldn't have to worry about getting an idea for a really great story. What I would have to worry about was a nightmare. Not something in my sleep, but a real, living nightmare that came to me while I was awake.

The most horrifying part? I had no control over the nightmare . . . and that's why things got way out of hand.

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The morning after the storm, Hannah and I rode our bikes around the block to see what other damage had been done. All over the neighborhood, broken branches and limbs littered yards. One enormous branch landed on someone's car. The hood had a big dent in it, and the windshield was smashed. We saw a few trucks that belonged to the power company, their yellow lights flashing.

“We were lucky we didn't get a tornado,” Hannah said. “This is bad enough as it is.”

Looping around the next block, we saw a man tacking an orange cardboard sign to an electrical pole. When he was finished, he backed off, inspected his work, and then walked away.

“Garage sale,” Hannah said, reading the sign out loud. “15897 Bobtail Circle. Saturday and Sunday only.”

“Want to go?” I asked. “It’s only a couple blocks away.”

“Sure,” Hannah replied.

I like going to garage sales. Sometimes, you can find some really cool stuff. Last summer at a garage sale, I found a box of comic books for two dollars! I couldn’t believe it. I looked on the Internet, and some of the older comics were worth as much as ten dollars. I didn’t sell them, though. I figured the longer I kept them, the more valuable they would be. Maybe they would be worth a fortune when I got older.

We continued riding our bikes along the sidewalk. In several places, we had to swerve around tree branches that had fallen.

After rounding a corner, we came to a big tree that had been blown down by the wind. It was blocking our way, so we slowed, and I looked behind us.

“There aren’t any cars coming,” I said. “Let’s go around.”

We carefully rode into the empty street, and I looked over my shoulder again, just to be sure there weren’t any vehicles coming from behind us.

Unfortunately, the tree was blocking our view of the driveway in front of us, and we had no idea there was a truck backing out at that very moment. By the time we did realize it, it was too late for the driver to see us.

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Hannah screamed. We hadn't been traveling very fast, and that's what saved us both from getting hit by the truck. Our brakes shrieked as our bikes came to a halt only inches from the vehicle.

The driver, hearing Hannah scream, stomped on the brakes and his vehicle jerked to a halt. He got out and hurried around to the back of the truck. He looked panicky and scared. His eyes were wide.

“Are you kids all right?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Hannah said. “We didn’t see you.”

“I didn’t see you, either,” the man said. “Not with that big tree in the way. You sure you’re both all right?”

“We’re fine,” Hannah said.

“Yeah, me, too,” I echoed.

“Okay,” the man said with a smile. “That storm sure was a doozy, wasn’t it?”

“It sure was,” I replied.

The man got back into his truck and waited for us to pass.

“That was close,” Hannah said as we rode back onto the sidewalk and continued down the block.

Up ahead, we saw another orange sign for the garage sale. A dark arrow, pointing to the left, was beneath it.

“There it is,” I said, and we coasted to a stop at the edge of the driveway.

A few cars lined the street, and a few people were milling about in the driveway. There was a two-car garage attached to the house, and the door

had been rolled up. Three big folding tables were cluttered with all sorts of things: old compact discs, shoes, clothes, games, lamps, tools, and more.

Hannah leaned close to me. *“These people must’ve been saving this stuff for years,”* she whispered. *“How did they fit all this junk in their house?”*

I snickered. There really was a lot of stuff, and it didn’t look like it would all fit into the garage and the house put together.

“Feel free to look around,” a man said, and I recognized him as the guy who had put up the sign.

“Thanks,” I replied.

Hannah and I wandered around the tables, looking for anything interesting. Most of what we saw seemed like just a lot of old junk. Still, some people found things they thought would be useful, and they carried various items as they wandered around the tables.

Hannah was looking at some collectible dolls. I walked into the garage, where more tables

were set up. On the far wall was a big bookshelf filled with paperbacks. A handwritten sign read: All books: 25¢ each.

Can't beat that, I thought, and I walked to the shelf. I love to read, and I thought I might find a book that I'd like.

There were a lot of westerns, which I didn't really care for. And romance books. Yuck. I found a science fiction book that looked cool, along with another book about fog phantoms in Florida. That one looked pretty creepy.

I was just about to dig into my pocket to find fifty cents to pay for the two books when another book caught my eye. It was hardbound, and it looked old. There was no title on the spine or on the cover.

I picked it up, unaware that I was about to make a terrifying discovery that would turn my world upside down.

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The strange thing about the book was that there was no writing inside. Nothing. No words, no letters, no numbers, nothing. It appeared to be some sort of old notebook that no one had ever used. Still, it looked pretty cool, and I thought it might be fun to use it to write my own stories.

“What did you find?” Hannah asked as she walked up to me. She, too, had a book in her hand, along with a board game that looked brand new.

“It looks like an old notebook,” I said,

handing it to her. She took it in her hands and flipped it over.

“It looks like it’s a thousand years old,” my sister said. Then, raising it to her face, she sniffed and winced. “It smells old, too.”

She handed it back to me, and I, too, sniffed it. It smelled dry and musky, like most old books. Once again, I flipped open the book and turned the pages. Still, I found no writing. The pages were a little yellow from age, but there was nothing written on any of them.

“I think I’m going to buy it,” I said. “I think it would be cool to use as a notebook.”

Hannah wasn’t very interested in the book, and she continued to browse the tables and shelves. I tucked my three books beneath my arm and continued searching the tables and shelves, but I didn’t find anything else I was interested in.

I looked around for a few more minutes, and then I carried the three books to the man seated behind a small card table. I reached into my pocket to get my money.

“Found some treasures, did you?” the man said with a smile.

“Yeah, just these books,” I replied.

“Reading is good for you,” the man said. “Good brain food.” He opened his cashbox containing paper money and a handful of change.

“You even found that old notebook that’s been kicking around here for a few years,” he said.

“How old is it?” I asked.

The man shook his head. “Got no idea,” he answered. “Not even sure where it came from.”

I picked up the old book and held it in my hands. I had to admit: I was strangely fascinated by it. I wondered if it might be valuable. Once, I heard about a woman who bought a painting at a flea market for one dollar, only to find out that it was an authentic portrait painted by some famous artist. It turned out to be worth nearly a half million dollars!

Then again, if the old book I found was worth a lot of money, the man probably wouldn’t be selling it at his garage sale.

“Seventy-five cents?” I asked.

“That’s right,” the man said.

I handed him a dollar, and he dropped a quarter in my palm.

“Enjoy your books,” the man said.

“Oh, I’m sure I will,” I replied. “I love to read.”

I carried the books to my bicycle. Hannah had already paid for her book and game and was waiting for me, staring up at the gray sky.

“It looks like it might rain again,” she said.

“It better not,” I replied. “Not until we get home. I don’t want my books to get wet.”

We left the garage sale and headed for home, riding our bikes along the sidewalk. I held my books under my left arm and steered with my right.

And I wondered about the old book. I wondered why no one had written anything in it. Usually, if someone buys a notebook, they write in it. They keep a diary or journal, or they write a story.

Maybe whoever bought it all those years ago never got around to writing a story, I thought. Maybe they bought it and then forgot about it. Maybe they lost it.

Either way, I was looking forward to using it. I already knew what I was going to write. I was going to use my new notebook to write the story for my school project. Mr. Harper would probably think that it was cool when I turned in my story written in a book that was probably one hundred years old or more.

If I ever come up with a story, I thought. So far, all I had was the very first line.

It was a dark and stormy night in Henderson, Nevada.

I needn't have worried. I'd get an idea for a very creepy story, all right. A creepy story that, within twenty-four hours, would turn into a real, live nightmare.