

Monster
Mosquitoes
Of
Maine



I might as well admit it now: much of what happened to me and my friend, Abby McClure, was all my fault. Our friends dared us to go to the haunted house at the end of Mulberry Street, stand on the porch, and take a picture for proof. We weren't scared, because Abby and I don't believe in ghosts. We didn't believe anything we heard about all the strange things that people say happened there over the years. Actually, I don't think there's any such thing as a haunted house, which is why I decided to take the dare. So did Abby.

But this story, of course, isn't about a haunted house. It's about insects—ordinary mosquitoes—and the horrifying thing that happened to us.

But I know what you're wondering, and you're probably snickering as you read this. You're probably wondering what could be so horrifying about itty-bitty mosquitoes.

Well, I'll tell you.

Nothing.

There's nothing horrifying about itty-bitty mosquitoes.

It's the *monster* mosquitoes I'm talking about. Just how big are they? Spread your arms as wide as you can. More.

Even *more*.

That's how big they are. Monster mosquitoes bigger than eagles and vultures. Some of them have razor-sharp stingers that are over two feet long.

Those are the mosquitoes I'm talking about. When they're wings flap and they're buzzing in the

air, they sound like airplanes. Their bellies are big enough to hold gallons and gallons of blood that they've sucked from their helpless victims.

These are mosquitoes you can't simply swat at. You can't swish them away with a quick sweep of your arm. Bug spray? Won't work. They don't go away if you happen to hit one with the back of your hand. Matter of fact, if one of these monster mosquitoes gets close enough for you to swat it, it's already too late. Not for them . . . for *you*.

But if Abby and I hadn't accepted that silly dare, if we hadn't gone to the supposed 'haunted' house at the end of Mulberry Street, you wouldn't be reading this story. And Abby wouldn't be plagued by the nightmares she has just about every night.

And I would probably be a normal kid that went outside, went camping and hiking in the woods like other kid my age, without the slightest worry about something so pesky as a tiny mosquito.

But I know better.

My name is Ray Carter. This is my story.
This is how Abby and I discovered the Monster
Mosquitoes of Maine, and how we had to fight the
toughest battle we'd ever faced . . . just to stay
alive.

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“You’re a chicken, Ray, and that’s all there is to it.”

I rolled my eyes. “Hardly,” I said. “There’s just no such thing as ghosts, and that old house at the end of Mulberry Lane isn’t haunted. Everyone just *says* that.”

There were four of us that afternoon: me, my best friend Abby, Doug Palmer, and Eddie Grimes. Doug and Eddie live a few blocks away.

We were seated on our bikes in the shade of

a huge tree in the park, which isn't far from where we all live. We'd been talking about the house at the end of Mulberry Street, which is about a mile away. For years, stories have been told about the old house being haunted. It's been for sale for as long as I can remember. Most of the paint has chipped away, the grass in the front yard is overgrown, and I have to admit: it really *does* look creepy.

But that doesn't mean it's haunted, and it doesn't prove there are any ghosts there. As I've already said: I don't believe in ghosts, and neither does Abby.

And that's why Doug and Eddie dared us to go to the house and stand on the porch.

"Let's do it, Ray," Abby said. "Let's go stand on the porch. Nothing's going to happen."

"Fine with me," I said. "I'm not afraid of that old place."

"We'll follow you and watch," Eddie said.

"Why don't *you* guys join us on the porch?" Abby asked.

Doug and Eddie shook their heads.

“No way,” Doug said. “That place gives me the creeps.”

“Me, too,” Eddie agreed. “Why, I heard . . .” And he spent the next five minutes telling us all about the horrible things that had happened there, about all of the ghosts that haunt the house. Abby and I listened, and every once in a while we would glance at each other and roll our eyes.

After Eddie finished, we began pedaling down the street, heading for Mulberry Lane. Abby and I were certain that we would prove Doug and Eddie wrong. We were certain there was nothing at that old house that could possibly freak us out.

Man, were we in for a surprise.

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It took us less than ten minutes to reach the house. We turned into the driveway and rolled to a stop. Doug and Eddie stayed behind us; they didn't want to get too close to the house.

If someone were to pull up right behind us at that moment, they would have seen a curious sight: two rows of four bikes with me and Abby in the front, Doug and Eddie behind us, all peering up at the aging, two story home with the un-

mowed lawn and the blue and white 'for sale' sign planted in the front yard. The grass was so tall that the sign was barely readable.

Without a word, Abby and I slid off our bikes and gently laid them down on the cracked cement driveway.

Abby turned and looked at Doug and Eddie.

"Wanna join us?" she asked with a dry smile.

"Are you kidding?" Doug replied as he shook his head from side to side. "That place is haunted. I'm not getting near it."

"I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole, Eddie said.

"Hey," I said, "you were the one calling me and Abby 'chickens.'"

"We've already been on the porch," Eddie said. "Last summer. That's when we saw the ghost in the window."

"He came after us," Doug said with a nod.

I rolled my eyes. "It was probably the reflection of a bird," I said.

"Believe what you want," Doug said. "The

place is haunted. And I bet you can't stay sixty seconds on the porch before you both run away, screaming your heads off."

"Or maybe the ghost will get you," Eddie said.

"Come on, Abby," I said with a grin.

Abby smiled, and together we walked up the driveway to the house, turning onto the narrow cement walkway that led to the porch. Here, the weeds and grass had grown so tall that it bent over the path like thin, green tongues, and the vegetation licked at our jeans.

"This place really needs a good mowing," I said. "Nobody's going to buy a place that looks this ugly."

"Maybe that's why it's been for sale for so long," Abby said.

I turned to see Doug and Eddie, watching us from their bicycles in the driveway.

Goofballs, I thought. *They actually believe in ghosts.*

We reached the porch and stopped. I had to

admit, the house *did* look a little spooky, with its paint-chipped siding and dirty, smudged windows. I stared into the living room window and imagined the image of a ghost staring back at me, waiting for me to get closer

“Well?” Doug shouted. “Are you going to step onto the porch or just stand there staring?”

“Maybe you’re scared,” Eddie sang.

I frowned, and stepped up onto the porch. Abby followed. Then, we turned to face Doug and Eddie.

“Start counting out loud,” I said loudly.

“One,” Doug began, “two, three”

“This is so silly,” Abby said. “They actually think this place is haunted. Too funny.”

Then, Doug suddenly stopped counting. He was supposed to count to sixty, but he stopped at twenty-two. His jaw fell, and Eddie’s expression was identical.

Without a word, Doug and Eddie spun on their bikes and began pedaling faster than I have ever seen them pedal in their lives. Soon, they’d

crested the hill and were gone.

“What was that all about?” Abby asked.

I shrugged. “I have no idea,” I said.

Then, we heard a slight squeak behind us. Abby and I turned and could only watch in horror as the old, decaying front door began opening all by itself!

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Abby and I stood, our bodies immobilized by fear. While we watched, the front door slowly opened. Ancient hinges groaned and squeaked, and it sounded like the door was going to fall over . . . or fall apart right before our very eyes.

I was barely aware that Abby had grabbed my arm until her nails were pinching my skin. Even then, I couldn't do anything about it. I was so terrified by the opening door that I couldn't move.

Then, a ghostly figure appeared. The dark silhouette of a man.

I had seen enough. I wasn't hanging around anymore, and I was just about to turn and run from the house when a voice spoke my name.

"Ray? Ray Carter? Is that you?"

I paused, looking at the man who emerged through the doorway. He looked a little familiar, but I couldn't be sure.

And he most definitely *wasn't* a ghost.

"Aren't you Ray Carter, Tony Carter's boy?"

"Yeah," I said, still a bit confused.

Abby was still squeezing my arm, and I shook it so she would release her grip. Her nails left red welts on my skin.

"I'm Mr. Henderson," the man said. "I'm the realtor who's selling your house."

Suddenly, I remembered him. My parents had put our house up for sale, and Mr. Henderson was the realtor who was helping. Mom and Dad said we were going to move to a bigger home after it sold.

“Oh, yeah,” I replied. “Wow! You sure scared us!”

“Sorry about that,” he said as he closed the door behind him. “I have several listings on this street, and this is one of them. I come by once in a while to check on the vacant houses.”

Abby spoke. “But where’s your car?” she asked.

Mr. Henderson pointed down the street. “A few blocks away, parked at the Anderson house. I just left it there and walked here. By the way,” he continued, glancing at each of us, “what are *you* two doing here?”

“It was a dare,” I replied truthfully. “Our friends say the place is haunted, and they dared us to stay on the porch for sixty seconds.”

“Hahahaha!” Mr. Henderson said, throwing his head back. “You know, that old rumor about this house has been going on since I was a kid like you two. No truth to it at all. Fun to make up stories, though.”

“We don’t believe in ghosts,” Abby said.

Mr. Henderson looked at Abby.

“Well, now,” he said, frowning, “not so fast, not so fast. Don’t be too sure of yourself. I used to think the same thing. But then, some friends and I found the old abandoned Hooper farm a few miles from here. Saw some things there that curled our hair.”

“Like what?” I asked.

“Oh, scary stuff,” Mr. Henderson replied. “Ghosts, I guess. Not sure. But we saw things move on their own and heard strange noises, even during the day. We even went inside, once. Me and my friends, we got so scared we never went back. Ever.”

I looked at Abby, and she looked at me. I knew she was thinking the same thing I was.

“Just where is this place?” she said, stealing the question from my lips.

“Oh, about three, maybe four miles up the old power line trail. When you get to a big pond, you gotta turn right and head another mile. Can’t miss the farm.”

After a few minutes of chatting, Mr. Henderson left. Seated on our bikes, Abby and I watched him walk along the side of the road until he disappeared over the hill.

“I still don’t believe in ghosts or haunted houses,” Abby said.

“Me neither,” I replied. “But I think it would be fun to check out that old farmhouse.”

“Do you think he was just making it up?” Abby asked. “My uncle likes to make things up like that, just to fool kids.”

“I know how we can find out,” I said. “Let’s go check it out ourselves.”

That little decision was about to get us into big, big trouble. Trouble . . . with a capital ‘M.’