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1

On a particular day in October, my family traveled from our home in Grand Blanc, Michigan, to Cheboygan. Cheboygan is a small town in northern lower Michigan, not far from the Mackinaw Bridge.

I remember the day so well because something really weird happened. When we left Grand Blanc, it was raining. However, by the time we arrived in Cheboygan, the rain had stopped. The sun was setting, and the air was actually kind of warm—for October, anyway. October is when the temperatures start to get pretty chilly in our state.

But that wasn't the weird part.

The weird part was that as soon as I got out of the car, I got this really creepy feeling, like something just wasn't right. I didn't know what it was. My brother, Brian, felt it, too.

After we unpacked and went inside to say hello to Grandma and Grandpa, we walked back outside.

"Did you feel that, Emilee?" Brian asked. "When we first got here? Did you get a real creepy feeling?"

"Yeah," I said, looking around. "It felt like all of the hair on my head was going to stand on end."

We stood in the final rays of daylight, looking around. Our grandparents live just outside of town in a quiet neighborhood. Other houses lined the street, and big trees with spiny, bare branches reached up into the sky. Most of the leaves had already turned brown and fallen off, but there were a few that still remained. The air was heavy and damp. It was still kind of warm, but I knew

that the coming night would bring colder temperatures.

“Maybe we just imagined it,” I finally said.

“Maybe,” Brian agreed. He looked around. “Come on. Let’s see if we can find Gavin before it gets dark.”

We met Gavin Stewart a long time ago, when I was only four or five years old. He lives in Cheboygan, and whenever we visit our grandparents, we always go to his house, which is only a few blocks away. Although we only see him a few times a year, he’s a really good friend. He’s eleven—which is how old I am. Brian is a year younger.

We walked down the street toward his house. When we got there, his home was dark. It was obvious that the Stewart family was gone.

But there was more to it than that.

“Well, maybe we’ll see him tomorrow,” I said, looking at the dark house. “Tomorrow is Saturday, and we’ll have all day to hang out.”

Suddenly, that same creepy feeling—the one I'd felt when we'd first arrived—fell over me.

I looked around, and that's when I noticed something odd.

"*Brian . . . look,*" I said quietly, pointing at other houses along the same side of street.

"What is it?" he replied, his voice barely a whisper.

"None of the lights are on in any of those houses," I said. "On the other side of the street, there are lights on. It's getting dark fast . . . but nobody has their lights on over on that side."

"That's weird," Brian said. He scratched his head.

I looked at the row of dark houses.

So did Brian.

And when I looked into an empty, dark window, that's when I saw it.

A ghost.



I gasped, and I think I jumped a foot into the air. Brian saw the ghost at the same time I did. He shrieked and covered his mouth with his hands.

In the window was the ghostly figure of a man. He was staring back at us in the dim evening. His face was expressionless.

I wanted to run, but my legs felt all rubbery. Brian grabbed my arm so hard that it hurt.

Suddenly, the ghost opened the window. “Is everything all right?” he asked.

I breathed a sigh. It wasn't a ghost, after all. It was just a man. From behind the dark window, he only *looked* like a ghost.

"We thought you were a ghost," I said sheepishly. "I guess we were scared for a minute."

The man laughed. "No ghosts here," he said, looking around the yard. "Not yet, anyway." Then he laughed again, but it was a nervous laugh.

"How come there are no lights on this side of the street?" Brian asked.

"Power failure," the man replied. He pointed toward the end of the block. "We had a storm earlier today, and a tree fell on the power lines a few blocks away. The power is supposed to be back on in a little while."

That made sense. We had the same thing happen to us last summer at our home in Grand Blanc.

"We were looking for our friend, Gavin Stewart," Brian said, pointing to the house next door.

“The Stewart’s went to Traverse City,” the man replied. “I think they’ll be back later tonight.”

Cool!

“Thanks,” I said to the man. He nodded and closed the window.

The sun had set, but there was an amber-colored glow in the western sky. The air was getting chillier fast.

“Come on, Brian,” I said. “Let’s go home.”

We started walking back toward our grandparents’ house.

“I’m glad that Grandma and Grandpa still have electricity,” I said. “That would be a bummer to have driven all the way up here, only to find out that they had no power.”

Brian didn’t say anything, and we walked along in silence. Our sneakers whispered on the concrete sidewalk. There were no other sounds, except for the hum of a few cars several blocks away.

Finally, Brian stopped.

“What do you think that man meant, Emilee?”
he asked.

I stopped, turned around, and looked at him.
“What do you mean?” I replied.

“I mean . . . did you hear what he said when
you told him that we thought he was a ghost?”

“Yeah,” I said. “He said that there were no
ghosts around here.”

“Yeah, but did you see what he did next? He
looked around and then said ‘not yet, anyway’.
And he looked kind of nervous. What do you
suppose he meant by that?”

I guess I hadn’t thought about it. But the more
I recalled what the man had said, the stranger his
behavior seemed. The man had looked around,
like he actually *might* see a ghost.

Not yet, anyway.

That’s exactly what he had said.

Not yet, anyway.

What did he mean by that?

We would find out, all right . . . a lot sooner
than we had expected.

3

By the next morning, the rain had started again. Brian and I ate breakfast with Mom, Dad, Grandpa, and Grandma. We talked and laughed a lot. Grandpa and Grandma wanted to know how school was going for us, how my Girl Scout troop was doing, and what we'd been up to.

After breakfast, Brian and I borrowed an umbrella and went outside. It was raining, and the air was cool and damp. Puddles of water pooled in the yard and in the road, and rain thrummed on

the umbrella. The bare trees were black and shiny, and rain dripped from their branches.

“I hope it doesn’t rain all weekend,” I said as we walked along the wet sidewalk.

“Me too,” Brian said. “If it stops, we can go to the park and the marina.”

We arrived at Gavin’s house and knocked on the door. His mom answered.

“Why, hello, Emilee! Hello, Brian!” she exclaimed, opening the door wider. “Come in! Gavin will be so happy to see you!”

We stepped inside.

“Gavin!” Mrs. Stewart called out. “Brian and Emilee are here!”

Upstairs, we heard a shuffling noise. Then footsteps pounded the stairs. Gavin came through the kitchen and into the living room.

“Hey, guys!” he exclaimed. His blue eyes were wide, and his blond hair was longer than I remembered. “I didn’t know you were coming up this weekend!”

“We didn’t, either,” I said. “Our grandparents invited us to come, and Dad had the weekend off.”

We talked for a while, and he told us about some of the fun things he’d done since we’d seen each other last. I told him about the science project that we did at school that almost started a fire.

It was still raining outside, so we played checkers for a while. I won . . . but that was nothing new. I always beat Brian at checkers.

After an hour or so, the rain finally quit. Which was a good thing, because Brian and I were both getting tired of being cooped up inside.

“Let’s walk down to Gordon Turner Park,” Gavin suggested. “We can stop at the store on the way and get a candy bar or something.”

“That sounds cool,” I said. Gordon Turner Park is near the mouth of the Cheboygan river, where it flows into Lake Huron. It’s a pretty popular park.

I left the umbrella on Gavin’s porch, and the three of us hopscotched around puddles in the

driveway. When we reached the sidewalk, we turned and headed toward town.

“Hey, there’s where the tree fell on the power line,” I said, after we’d walked several blocks.

We stopped and stared. Actually, it wasn’t a tree that had fallen, but a huge branch. It had broken off a tree and fallen on the power lines. It was in pieces on the wet grass. There were several small piles of sawdust where the giant limb had been cut.

“Looks like it’s all fixed now,” Brian said.

“They had it fixed last night,” Gavin said. “When we got back from Traverse City, the power was still off. But it came back on a few minutes later.”

Then I remembered the man we’d seen in the house next to Gavin’s, and how we’d thought he was a ghost.

But I also remembered what he’d said.

Not yet, anyway.

No ghosts around.

Not yet, anyway.

I decided to ask Gavin about it.

“You know,” I began, “the man that lives next to you said something kind of strange.” I explained how we thought that we’d seen a ghost, because there were no lights on in his house, and we could only see shadows. I also explained how he had looked around the yard and said that there weren’t any ghosts around . . . *not yet, anyway.*

“What did he mean by that?” I asked.

Gavin stopped walking and looked at me.

Then he looked at Brian.

Then he looked away.

“Well, it *is* October,” Gavin said quietly. “Some people believe that it’s true.”

“Believe *what* is true?” Brian asked.

“The legend about the Great Lakes Ghost Ship,” Brian said. “Of course, it’s only a legend. It’s not really true.”

As soon as he said those words, a cool breeze caused the trees to shudder. Several leaves, brown and brittle, fell around us like large paper snowflakes.

And, yet again, that strange, spooky feeling fell over me.

But when Gavin explained the legend of the Great Lakes Ghost Ship to us, I realized that I had good reason to be spooked.

And soon, I would be more than spooked.

I would be more than just scared.

I would be terrified . . . as Brian, Gavin and I were about to have the most horrifying experience of our lives.

4

Here's what Gavin told us:

In Cheboygan, the US Coast Guard Cutter Mackinaw is stationed. The boat is big: two hundred ninety feet long and seventy-five feet wide. It has a crew of about ninety men and women, and the boat is used to break ice and keep the shipping lanes on the Great Lakes open during the cold winter months. There are other things that the cutter is used for, like emergency rescues and things like that. But mostly, its used to break ice to allow big freighters to navigate the waters.

Well, there is a legend that every October, an old sea captain sometimes appears around Cheboygan, inviting people to come aboard his ship. He walks the streets at night, and can appear anywhere. If you follow him, he'll take you aboard the cutter *Mackinaw* . . . which turns into a ghost ship.

"They say it's really creepy," Gavin said, "with all kinds of strange zombie sailors wandering around on board. My uncle is stationed aboard the cutter, and he says that some of the crew have claimed to have seen some of the zombies."

"Wow," Brian gasped.

"Of course," Gavin continued, "that's just a legend. It's not really true. Some people believe it, though."

"What about you?" Brian asked. "Do you believe it?"

Brian shook his head. "Naw," he said. "There's no such thing. Someone just made that story up."

"Where is the Coast Guard cutter?" I asked.

“It’s moored at the mouth of the Cheboygan river,” Gavin answered. He pointed. “Over that way. It’s not far from the park.”

“Could we go see it?” Brian asked.

Gavin shrugged. “I guess so. My uncle gave me a tour once. It’s pretty cool inside. I mean . . . it’s a lot bigger than you think. It’s like walking through a big apartment building, up and down stairs and everything.”

“That sounds cool,” I said. I’ve only seen smaller boats, and a big ship like the *Mackinaw* sounded like it would be fun to explore.

We turned down the next block, crossed a main street, and headed down a long drive. At the end of the drive we turned left.

Suddenly, there it was.

The *Mackinaw*.

It was mostly red, with big white lettering on the side.

And, like Gavin said, it was huge. I had never seen a ship so big in my life.

Not this close, anyway.

“Can we get closer?” Brian asked.

“Yeah,” Gavin said. “But we won’t be allowed to go on board.”

“That’s okay,” I said. “I think it’ll be cool just getting a better look at it.”

We walked through a large parking lot. With every step, the enormous red vessel loomed larger and larger.

Finally, we stopped. We were only about thirty feet from the massive cutter.

“Wow,” Brian breathed. “This thing is super-gargantuan!”

We didn’t see anybody on board, but Gavin explained that most of the time the crew stayed within the ship.

Until one of the doors opened up.

A man wearing a blue uniform stepped out.

“Gavin? Is that you?”

“Uncle Pete!” Gavin exclaimed. He waved his hand.

“I thought that was you,” Gavin’s uncle replied. “I saw you and your friends through the window.”

“This is Emilee and Brian,” Gavin said. “They’re my friends from Grand Blanc. They’re here for the weekend.”

“That’s super,” Gavin’s uncle said. “I’ve got a few minutes. Maybe you and your friends would like to tour the ship.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing! Not only did I get to see the outside of the ship . . . but now, we had the chance to go inside and look around!

“Yeah!” Gavin said. “That would be great!”

“Come aboard,” Gavin’s uncle said, motioning with his arm. We raced to the edge of the dock and carefully followed the narrow gangplank onto the boat.

This is so cool! I thought. Wait until I tell me friends back home about this!

Well, I would have more to tell my friends than I could have ever imagined. I would be able to tell them not only about the tour . . . but about all of the horrifying things that were about to happen.

5

The inside of the Mackinaw was incredible. We went down steep stairs, climbed ladders, and descended into the depths of the ship. Sometimes the rooms were cozy and big, but other places were cold and dark and gray. The smell of diesel fumes was really strong in some places, not so much so in others. Cables and wires ran along the ceilings and stretched down walls.

And it was noisy! There were all kinds of sounds: rumblings, gratings, electrical sounds, drumming sounds . . . all different kinds of sounds.

“And it’s ten times louder when the ship sets sail,” Gavin’s uncle explained. “When the big engines are fired up, you can hear them all through the ship.”

It was really a fascinating experience, and I realized that if you didn’t know where you were going, you could get lost really easy.

We didn’t see any other crew members, which I thought was strange.

“Where is everybody?” I asked.

“Today is a busy day for everyone,” Gavin’s uncle explained. “There are lots of things going on, and most of the crew are in last-minute preparations. I’m pretty busy, too, but I’ve got a few minutes to—”

He was interrupted by a sharp, shrill ringing sound that came from a pager that was clipped to his belt. He unsnapped it and looked at it closely.

“I’ve got to run to the bridge for a moment,” he said. Then he replaced his pager and looked at us. “I’ll need you three to stay right here. Don’t go anywhere until I come back. Understand?”

We all nodded. Gavin's uncle spun and vanished up a ladder that lead into the ceiling. In seconds he was gone, and again I was amazed at how fast he could maneuver around the ship in such tight places.

"This is so cool!" Brian said to Gavin. "I never thought I'd ever get a chance to be on a ship like this!"

"Yeah," I said. "Thanks, Gavin!"

"Don't thank me," he said. "I didn't even think we'd see my uncle. You can thank him when he comes back."

But Gavin's uncle Pete didn't come back.

We waited.

And we waited some more.

And we waited even more, listening to the sounds of the ship all around us. We talked for a few minutes, but when Gavin's uncle still hadn't returned, we grew silent.

Once again, I had that nervous, odd feeling creep through my body.

Something's not right, I thought. *Gavin's uncle should have been back by now.*

And another thing that bothered me:

I kept thinking about the legend of the Great Lakes Ghost Ship. Sure, I knew it was only a legend, and the story of the old sea captain was only make-believe. There wasn't *really* a ghost ship, and there were no monsters inside of it.

But still—

Finally, I heard footsteps on metal. Gavin's uncle was coming back.

"Sheesh," Gavin said. "It's about time. He's been gone for half an hour!"

A door opened, but what came through it wasn't Gavin's uncle.

It wasn't even another Coast Guard officer.

I gasped.

Brian drew a breath and made a choking sound.

Gavin didn't say anything, but I knew that he was just as freaked out as I was.

What came through the door was the most hideous, ugly creature I had ever seen.

A zombie sailor.

And that's when I realized that the legend of the Great Lakes ghost ship wasn't just a legend.

It was real.

Not only was it real . . . but we were on board.

We were on board . . . and if the legend was true—

We might be here forever!

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