

# Little Ghosts

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Twenty four innocent people dead. A childhood that never was. The girl who is nothing more to the residents of the town than a schizophrenic enigma. The horrific reality of being that soon steals away the happy ignorance she once lived in. And the boy, Oliver, who oversees it all. [I suck at summaries]



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It was such a very normal day. That was the surprising thing about it all.

However, that very normal day became a very extraordinary kind of day, and that very extraordinary kind of day led to some very extraordinary kind of nights. Time became a word rather than a state of mind, and life became that journey you hear of in adventure movies and silly rom-coms- however, it didn't end with any great deal of satisfaction. My life continued for while, but something, something huge inside of me, had ended.

I had been such a very normal person, until that day.  
Until that day, I hadn't lived.

It began with my everyday breakfast of burnt and buttered toast in our old Jeep as my mother, a fretty old woman, scatted around the neighbourhood to collect the other kids of St. Andrew's for the carpool. An awkward ride-a-long, some would say- I knew for a fact that at least a third of them disliked me and that the tall, gangling one, Stephen, he had it in for me for sure. I had this awkward stumble-through-life quality that grated upon them and company had never been a friend of mine. I was rather incisive on the matter that my mother had arranged the carpool to elbow me into friendship rather than to help out the parents that actually had careers. As for her, she was a stay at home mum, ever grieving over my brother George (he had left for the navy three years ago and she still wasn't quite over his absence), my father a gynecologist, which was not an occupation I liked to share with my classmates. I sensed it would provoke ridicule and perhaps a level of perversion.

My mother seemed to think that all of the St. Andrew's boys fancied after her, but they didn't. Perhaps they would have, once.

"You bring out these little blighters, Oliver," she had griped at me after finding her sixth grey hair and pulling it out, "You and your navy seal brother worry me sick."

She liked to drop in the fact that he was in the navy, even if only I was listening- it was a winning line at parties. For countless years I had been labelled as 'the other brother' in the shadow of his brilliance.

"All I do is stay in my room, Mum. Hardly a dangerous lifestyle choice," I deadpanned.

"Staying up all night on that silly console of yours. I don't know what to do with you!"

The school was set out in such a funny little manner. St. Andrew's took proud ownership of the left side of the grounds and the sister school, St. Bernadette's, stood a little limply to its right. Limp being the appropriate word- development of the property was hardly underway due to the low staff to student ratio and funding had never been great. The buildings were just as old as each other (in fact, at one time it had been a mixed school) but it was almost as if they were two different places altogether. You couldn't see over the gate that separated them but a year twelve had told me that if you found the right spot in the little staff-only connection bridge between the two buildings, you could see into the girls' changing rooms. I had laughed nervously but shrugged away his perverted lies.

To me, there was only one girl worth half the effort of leering at, and her name was Elizabeth Barrett.

Elizabeth wasn't like the others, and not in a desirable way. She was partially the reason as to why the sister school had flopped and the staff resented her for it, but it would be cruel to turn her away after eight years of teaching, especially with GCSEs set to begin for her.

One thing about the St. Andrew's/St. Bernadette's union was that education began from primary rather than secondary, and as a society they housed over 1500 students from the ages of seven to eighteen- approximately three boys to every two girls. Elizabeth hadn't been 'just another seven year old' in the year below, dwarfed by my whole extra year of obvious experience. I knew my way around the school about as much as the ofsted,

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who had been driven away by disinterest.

Elizabeth had been violent, and that had troubled the ignorant lake of innocence within the mothers of the St. Bernadette's clan. She had told their children secrets and showed them how to crucify insects and pulled the hair of anybody who told her different than her own law- her quiet, whimsical presence would suddenly escalate into a horrific display of childhood cruelty, all at the snap of a finger. That was word of the horse's mouth, anyways. I didn't believe it, although I had every reason to with our given history.

See, I had known Elizabeth, once. She wasn't what the mothers thought- she was schizophrenic. Not that her father had cared for a moment. I had helped her take her pills with imaginary tea (hot blackcurrant- although not too hot, in case it burned her tongue) and put up with hours of imaginary friends and imaginary stories spouting out of that pretty little mouth of hers- in her world, everything was nothing more than a game. I put up with it because she was alone, and the friends we couldn't see were the only things real to her.

Jane was her favourite friend because she read her stories and told her things that made her feel powerful. She also told me that Jane hated me for telling her to be cautious with the knowledge she was given.

Nines was her least favourite. He made her hit, and mothers no longer wanted to send their children to St. Bernadette's.

I didn't know how many other friends she had, but the odd name popped up here and there. There could have been thousands, all in her mysterious little world of Galna Hus. That was what I had heard her call it a few times. A fantasy land with an eerily childlike feel to it.

I stopped playing with Elizabeth after she had hit me on her eighth birthday. She had eaten too much cake for her tiny little belly, I had warned her not to be greedy and she had pounced on me, her fingers clawing at my hair and eyes and mouth until I was bleeding and she was crying. Her father had batted his hand dismissively and sent everybody home from the tea party.

"Stupid idea anyway," he had grunted, paying the caterer what he owed.

"I don't play with girls who hit!" I had shouted at her from the car, and she had folded her arms and scowled at me.

The news of Elizabeth and her temper had spread to St. Andrew's like wildfire, and now, she was truly alone. Her friendship was wasted upon reckless idiots who wore too much make up and people who liked to poke fun at her for being such an insolent little year 10 air head.

I had thought of her as fragile, all up until that very extraordinary day.

Due to my late arrival at school, I had been put into lunch detention for tardiness. I hadn't originally been late, of course, but after almost ten minutes of debating what to do due to my missing school bag, my mother had eventually settled upon driving me home to pick it up before rushing back with me before the bell. I had missed the bell, evidently, which Mr Hewitt had fervently reminded me throughout the entire day. One thing about detention at St. Andrew's was that unlike the usual routine, we were meshed with the students of St. Bernadette's, just to remind us that we couldn't blame our gender or age for our bad behaviour. The isolation room lay directly within the heart of the all boy's side of the school, and so female students were allowed to pass over the staff-only corridor for that purpose alone.

Eight other students resided with me there, but only one had been killed that day. Her name was Hannah Fields.

"I need the register."

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Elizabeth. It was the first time I had seen her in almost a month- she was as radiant as ever, of course, with a forest of brown waves down to her waist and sea green eyes that were currently in a state of tired pleasantries. Her vision flickered to me once, twice, before returning to Mr Hewitt and attempting a friendly smile.

"Elizabeth. I see you found your way here," he greeted her gently, before rising from his seat at the computer desk and approaching her with the register in hand, "How come you're on duty at lunchtime?"  
"I'm all too familiar with this place. It doesn't help anything. They say they'd rather have me doing something productive.. I'm quite good at errands, you know. Unless I get lost."  
"I don't doubt it," he nodded with a tight lipped smile, handing the black file over before turning his back to her and facing us all, "Hey, you lot. Take this little rascal as an example. You'll be working every lunchtime if you don't start getting your act together."  
"Don't worry, sir. I'm not going to be here all the time. I'm going on an adventure one day."

I didn't have time to wonder what her adventure was because the quiet was broken with a bang and then a scream and then a commanding voice. I recognised it.

"What the hell.." Mr Hewitt began, jogging to the door before poking his head around the frame of it, "Stay here. All of you."

And so, we stayed there, all of us.

Four bangs and screams later, we heard a message on the tannoids from the head of the Andrew/Bernadette union, telling us to get under the desks and stay there. To lock the doors if we could, or to barricade them. To keep very quiet and hide. To surrender.

"I'm kind of scared, Oliver", she whispered under the table we had accepted as our protection. She held my hand very tightly, her eyes ghosting with fluid, "I wonder who's doing this. I wonder who's dead."  
"It'll be okay," I kept saying- although I wasn't sure whether I was saying it to comfort her or my own palpable nerve, "It's all going to be okay."  
"This is stupid!" a brunette girl had piped up, "Why are we staying here when we could be running away?! We've been here for almost an half an hour. Nobody's coming for us. I've heard at least fifty gunshots and if we don't move, we'll be dead next."  
"What's even happening?" another kid wept- Stephen, the gangly guy from our carpool. He was in on account of bullying. It wasn't like him to cry. "Why are they doing this?"  
"My life's been pretty boring. I deserve this shit," a girl named Jade complained ardently through tears, "A school shootout. That's what this is. I assumed they only happened in America- funny that."  
"I'm moving. I don't care."  
"Hannah, no!"  
I slowly released Elizabeth's hand before crawling over to the year eight girl they called Hannah, my eyes desperate, "Don't do this."

She ignored me, and after unblocking the door and storming out of the room, a bang ended her complaints.

"I'm looking for a girl," the masked boy who entered had chided, "Barrett. Where is she?!"  
Elizabeth backed into the shadows in response, tightly shutting her eyes and muttering some form of prayer under her breath. However, I patted her palm lamely, and edged out from under the table a little to stare into his hard eyes- familiar eyes.  
"You just killed her," I said gravely, and he frowned a little before sending a satisfactory gunshot into the air and swaggering out again. He stepped on Hannah's head as he left, and we all winced before the girls (and Stephen) collapsed into tears again. Hannah's detention friend got up from the ground and went to her,

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weeping into her lifeless body and cursing tearful obscenities under her breath.

Elizabeth was still praying, but opened her eyes for a moment to break the silence, "Jane told me this would happen. She told me that I would cheat death one day."

"Shh, shh."

Nathan Russo. He had killed them before killing himself just outside of the school grounds. Twenty-two innocent school kids and two teachers. He had been in my year- my pastoral, even. I had helped him revise for that calculus exam back in year ten.

Blake Roberts, 13.

Ashley Hammond, 14.

Beth Wilde, 17.

Hannah Fields, 13.

Craig Matthews, 15.

Alison Smith, 34.

Gregg Hewitt, 28.

Louisa Matthewson, 7.

Grace Matthewson, 9.

Toby Warnes, 15.

Jessica Jacobs, 16.

Lisa Wong, 12.

Constance Morgan, 17.

Hannah Montgomery, 10.

Rebecca Lye, 13.

Adam Hobart, 18.

Megan Pritchard, 14.

Adam Cowell, 7.

Paul Veitch, 11.

Craig Veitch, 11.

Jennifer DiLaurentis, 15.

Lisa Partridge, 14.

Daniel Lyons, 16.

Eden Smith, 12.

They were all just names, now. Lost. They had once been brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces and daughters and grandsons and fathers and mothers. Now what? Their adventures had ended.

As for me, they were just about to begin.

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