

Purple was the sound of the victim's gasps and cries. Violent and bruised behind their crushed windpipe. They thrashed desperately for air as the serpent coiled around their neck. Suffocating the victim clawed at their throat, desperately begging for air. Their sharpened nails peels away flesh but still the grip did not lessen.

Blue was the assailant's attack. Cold and cruel as a glacier, unceasingly moving towards it's end. Their cheeks contracted violently against their will, pulling their lips high into a vicious grin. Teeth exposed and eyes wide their face became a horrendous visage. Yellow was the panic that filled their mind as their victim struggled beneath them. The desperate warning that they should stop, that they *had* to stop. Red was the anger that spurred them forward. Their grip tightened.

A last violent kick was failed to dislodge the assailants grip around their neck.

The purple struggling grew pale and weak. The yellow panic in the assailant's eyes grew green and vile. A twisted, sickening glee filled them as their victim slowly grew still.

The macabre artist crafts their own tale of the victim in deceitful paints.

"Your bag Miss Gale." The officer said sliding a large mail bag across the reception desk. There was a moment of sad contemplation before the officer pushed a small pocket knife across the table as well. "And your knife."

The officer had wrinkles at the corners of his eyes and laugh lines marked his age. His eyes were kind and genuine, but his smile was an obvious deception. A hopeless attempt to lighten the mood. His voice was soft but the disappointment was clear. Dorothy was used to hearing that tone.

Dorothy reached forward slowly, hand trembling as she restrained her anger. Her face contorted from a mix of anxiety and anger. She took the pocket knife first, tucking it snugly in her cropped jean pocket. Her bag followed, slung over one shoulder. The contents rattled against one another in a hideous cacophony of noise that alerted everyone in the police station.

"Hey, hey, in again huh?" A greasy young man in handcuffs called from one of the adjacent offices. "What was it this time? You should've invited me." He said with a laugh, his head rolling from side to side. The stench of alcohol was evident even at this distance. An officer promptly closed the door, but it was too late. The damage was done.

A shadow loomed behind Dorothy, antagonistically invaded her space. Dorothy did her best to ignore the presence but Uncle Henry was a vicious fire raging over her shoulder. His once warm eyes were cold and hollow from many tough years. His bushy salt and pepper eye brows furrowed into a devastating scowl.

Dorothy's breathing was shaky and harsh as anxiety built within her. Her hand reached towards the choker on her neck, but stopped part way. Instead she gripped the collar of the blue varsity jacket she wore and pulled it close around her.

Henry's heavy calloused hand fell on Dorothy's shoulder like a guillotine. His thumb cut into her shoulder painfully causing Dorothy to flinch, her shoulder buckling under the pressure. "Thank you Harvey." He said without breaking his gaze from the young girl in his grip.

“Of course Mr. Gale. You.” The officer started but was cut off.

“Stay out of trouble.” Dorothy finished. She had memorized the routine. They had no reason to believe this time was any different from the last.

The thumb pressed harshly into a pressure point forcing her teeth to grit. She glared up at Henry who remained unmoved, a visage of frustration. The two fumed, raging silently against each other, Neither was willing to make the first move in the police station, lest their quarrel start a scene. This was still holy ground to them both.

Dorothy turned and Henry followed pushing her forward. The two walked mechanically towards the glass doors. She pushed through, stopping suddenly on the other side. The door slammed backwards, but Henry caught it before it could reach its target. He shoved the door open roughly and forced his way forward.

The short dozen meter walk through the parking lot to Henry’s rust coated truck felt like a mile in lead shoes. The vehicle looking like a dying dog in the fading evening light. Its body shot with rust and coated with dirt. Its paint was faded from age and peeled in places.

Henry’s grip lessened as he pushed Dorothy towards the passenger side. He stood next to the driver side for a moment. His hairy knuckled hand scratched at his rough beard in his moment of contemplation.

Dorothy walked towards the passenger door. She tugged on the handle which resisted in her grasp. The door remained locked. She knew better than to rush Henry at this point and waited for him to get in and unlock the door.

Uncle Henry fished through his pocket aggressively. Pulling out a set of keys which jangled in his grasp. Thrusting the key into the keyhole like a knife he twisted it. He threw the door open, which creaked in protest. He took a seat and waited for a moment. His lips curled, tongue lashed across his teeth. Dorothy could tell he was about to say something but was finding the words.

This was insane. It wasn’t her fault she thought. No, she knew it wasn’t her fault. She told the truth. Why was she getting blamed for this. She was trying to make a change. “It wasn’t

mine.” She finally blurted out for the dozenth time today.

There was a loud slam as Henry pulled the door shut. His fists slammed on the steering wheel, the sound muffled within the truck. Henry lowered the window screaming the entire time. “You expect me to believe more of your bullshit?! How many times have been through this?” His voice reverberated and filled Dorothy with rage. Their toxic feud growing in intensity.

“Do you know how much time and money I’ve wasted trying to get you help? But it’s never enough for you. It never has been. It’s just wasted effort on someone who won’t appreciate anything.” He continued to rage as Dorothy walked to his side. Venom spilled from his mouth in a torrent that he couldn’t stop.

“Fuck you! It wasn’t mine. I’m not lying to you! I’ve been trying but you won’t believe me! You never do! Just because you were jealous of my dad doesn’t mean you can take it out on me!” The words poured out of her mouth even as her head screamed for her to stop.

“You selfish little brat! I should’ve never taken you in! I could’ve left to rot in foster care. It’s only because of him that you have a roof over your head! It’s because of him that you were given chance after chance after chance! Do you think anyone else would get off with the shit you pull?!” He couldn’t stop. His anger wouldn’t let him. “You drag his memory through the mud! You’re just like your mother!” He didn’t mean that.

“It should’ve been you that died instead! Instead you cowered on your farm and wasted your half-assed life!” She shouldn’t have said it.

Silence fell between them. Henry began rolling up his window, the crank turning painfully slowly. “You can walk.” He said flatly. There was no emotion left. Just emptiness.

“Henry!” Dorothy slammed on the window as the truck’s wheels began to squeal and turn. “Henry! You fuck! Let me in!” She pounded on the side of the truck running with it as Henry’s foot pressed mechanically on the gas pedal.

Dorothy screamed in frustration as the truck pulled away from her. She lashed one last kick at the tail light. The plastic rattled from the

impact. Smoke billowed out of the exhaust pipe as the truck shrank further and further from view.

The teenager girl was left alone on the street cursing violently. "Asshole!" She screamed kicked at the pavement. Her bag rattled on her back violently. There was no way she could walk all the way home. It would take half a day of just walking. The farm was almost sixty kilometres away through open fields. More if she stuck to the roads.

Heaving several heavy breaths she slumped against a telephone pole. She brought a chipped nail to her lips and began to bite anxiously. Her thumb quickly began to bleed and shot a spark of pain through her hand. Snapping her out of her anger induced trance.

Taking a breath Dorothy swung her bag off her shoulder and began digging through it. Cans of half filled spray paint clattered against one another as she dug through the poorly organized collection. Eventually she found her prize, a small flip phone with a simple question mark shaped charm attached.

With a sigh she flipped the device open revealing a small screen and worn down number pad. The poor thing was beaten but had stuck by Dorothy in her roughest times. It wasn't a particularly sentimental thing but it was a small comfort in dark times.

The small screen flashed five o'clock. It wasn't likely but began to dial some numbers in spite of her hesitance. He always told her to call no matter what. If he didn't answer he'd call back as soon as he could.

A sharp ringing blared out of the speaker. The teeth numbing noise cut into her ear loudly and forced her to hold to phone at a distance. Two rings, a hopefully silence and another piercing ring.

"Hey, this is Julian. I can't come to the phone right now. But you know what to do." A voice spoke happily from the receiver. Dorothy's lips moved in sync with the message she'd heard numerous times now. A long beep followed the message.

"Hey... Julian. I just wanted to call and see how you were doing." He mouth moved on it's own.

"Liar" She thought before continuing.

"Anyways, it's five so you're probably at practice. I hope it's going well. I'll be here." The words continued to fall out against her will.

"Just tell him you need help." She thought.

She paused for a long moment. "Love you." She finally said pressing the call end button.

A frustrated sigh escaped her lungs before she taking a deep breath. Dorothy stared at her phone for a moment, staring at the contact list she considered calling Aunt Em. The thought quickly retracted. Em had always been kind and thoughtful. The last thing she wanted to do was put Em in the middle of her fight with Henry.

She resigned herself to dealing with this on her own. She certainly wasn't calling any of her *friends* who'd caused all this. Closing the phone with a snap she placed it into her jacket pocket.

A chill evening breeze cut between the low buildings and city streets. Dorothy walked with the wind, keeping it at her back. The frigid air was dampened by her thick jacket. Like a warm hug it provided a small sense of comfort in her otherwise dismal situation.

Cars screeched and honked at one another as everyone was rushing to get home. Everyone except Dorothy. No one seemed to notice as she walked aimlessly. Those that did would avoid her, think she was bad news. Another troubled child that should be locked up. Maybe they were right to think that.

Her twin braids waved like serpents in the wind. Blonde and pink hair twisted in unique patterns down the braids. She wore a minimal amount of cheap make-up hastily applied. Chipped nail polish coated on her splintered nails.

She wore jean shorts that she'd cut herself from a pair of skinny jeans that were far too long. A pair of mismatched thigh high socks. Her red shoes covered in sharpie drawings. She wore a blue varsity jacket with a large K over the left chest. A mail bag full of spray paint that jangled unmistakably at anyone who walked by her.

She was the textbook definition of a punk. A troubled child that mothers would warn their children about. The kind of person people see on the street and walk to the other side of the road. Her thoughts were growing darker and self-

deprecating. Part of her knew it wasn't true, but the isolation was letting anxiety run wild.

She desperately wanted a drink, or a hit of anything, to numb the chaotic emotions swirling through her head. Pulling the jacket close she shivered, breathing shakily. What she needed was to breath and go home. She knew this deep down. Anger, frustration and anxiety disagreed however and so she continued to walk away.

A sharp honk caused her to jump, startled by the sudden noise. A long greyhound bus had pulled up next to her. She shot an instinctive glare towards the driver.

The drive was a broad shouldered man in a leather jacket. A short brimmed hat obscured his face. "You look lost little lady. You need a lift somewhere?"

Dorothy's face softened, her shoulders slumping. The thoughts drained from her head as she stepped onto the bus. "Yeah. Anywhere but here."

"Well I think I can do that for ya." The driver said with a nod. His voice was soft but had a thick drawl to it. It was an oddly comforting voice.

Dorothy dug into her bag, the cans rattling embarrassingly. "How much do I owe you?" She said fishing out her wallet.

The drive raised a hairy hand. "Don't you worry about it. I can tell you're having a rough go of it. You can get it on your way back from anywhere."

She wanted to protest but the emotional exhaustion was finally starting to set in so she just nodded. "Thanks."

Walking into the bus she saw an old man slumped against the wind, snoring loudly. A large metal box set on the seat next to him. A fishing rod tucked between his thighs to hold it steady. He had a peg leg which struck her as strange for this day and age.

Another girl sat across from the fisherman. She had a bright dress on and was playing a video game on a small handheld device. She didn't even seem to acknowledge that the bus had stopped.

Dorothy moved carefully to the back of the bus not wanting to be disturbed or near anyone. Taking a seat she placed her bag down. She pulled out her phone and glanced at it for

several minutes. Waiting and hoping for it to ring. The phone remained defiantly silent and eventually she stuffed it back into her bag with a noisy clank.

The bus jerked violently forward, pulling away from the curb. Darkness was beginning to set in. Street lights illuminated the bus in streaks as the metal tub trundled towards it's unknown destination.

The rocking was somehow hypnotic and soothing. She stared out the window, watching the streetlamps fade in the distance. The bus had quickly left the city limits, revealing sprawling fields. Her thoughts calmed as she watched the grasses blow gently in the chill night air. Stars formed along the horizon.

Soon her eyes grew heavy, defiant as she was, the need for sleep soon won. The sleep was unkind however, violent and torment dreams kept Dorothy on the edge of dream and reality for hours into the night.

A sudden noise was flickering white, cutting through the blackness of near sleep. The noise was blinding forcing Dorothy to open her eyes against her will. The metal tube was empty except for her and the source of the noise. The bus driver who was calling out to her. The noise was somehow so distant and simultaneously rattling her eardrums.

"Miss. Last stop I'm afraid." The drive called out from under his hat. His tight leather flexed as he twisted back in his seat.

"Okay." Dorothy called, in an aggressive tone she didn't intend. "Where are we?"

There was an awkward pause before the driver replied, "The last stop Miss." The drive said in his pleasant drawl.

Dorothy was quite good at reading people, she had a knack for picking up on subtle cues and tones. This man however baffled her. She couldn't tell if he was being serious or if that was an attempt at a bad joke.

She gathered her bag, slinging it over her shoulder. The weight was grounding and comforting. It did little to relief the intoxicated groggy feeling of being woken from an unrestful sleep however.

Glancing out the window Dorothy saw tall buildings and flickering streetlamps. It was clear they were in a city somewhere, and a larger one. Given the size of the buildings they were probably somewhere vaguely central. It was also extremely dark, must have been just after midnight sometime. The lamps created harsh shadows and high contrast across the concrete bricks.

Staggering between the cramped seating Dorothy made her way towards the front of the bus. Her legs trembled slightly, numb from sitting awkwardly for so long.

The bus driver lifts his head, nodding at her approach. His face is that of a shaggy mutt. A long snout pokes out from behind the brim of his hat. Long fur drapes from his nose like a moustache. A long wide smile of razor sharp canine teeth greet Dorothy's approach.

Startled Dorothy stumbled back gripping the support rail in surprise. The face is far to real, it's not a mask. This is a large dog man. Driving a bus. She struggled for a moment to grasp the reality before her but **this is his real face**. There was a strange moment where she thought she was dreaming. This couldn't be real, but she somehow knew it was. **This is real and it is irrelevant to question it.**

"You have a good night miss. Try not to be alone to long. Wouldn't want something terrible to happen to ya." He said his voice sounded dark, and the drawl made the words cling like cobwebs. His eyes flickered ominously under the brim of his hat. Small points hidden behind matted fur.

Immediately pulled from her internal thoughts Dorothy snapped back, "Is that a threat?" Her sense on high alert.

Startled and taken aback the driver stammered waving his hands in protest. "No, no Miss. Absolutely not. I'd never wish harm on a lovely young lady like yourself. Just a friendly warning. Not a lot nice things been happening lately. Just want to be sure you'll be careful." He says, his large teeth glinting in the city light. He seemed genuinely distressed by the implication, and sincere in his meaning.

Dorothy frowned, watching him carefully. "Alright." She started.

"Sorry" she thought, but the word refused to leave her mouth.

"Thanks for the warning, Mr..?" She finally managed.

"Toto. Just Toto." He said with a wolfish grin. A hairy clawed hand grabbed the brim of his head which he flourished, bring it to his chest. He leaned forward in his chair, a halfhearted attempt at a bow. His hair now on full display is a tangled mess, like a cluster of fines sprouting in every direction.

"Thanks for the warning, Toto." She says silently laughing to herself as a pang of guilt and homesickness. "Since you're such a friendly guy any chance you can take me back?"

"No can do I'm afraid. Got strict schedules to keep and I need to get back to the station." He says remorsefully. "I'm sure I'll be back around soon enough and we can get you back home Miss..?" He says smoothly, his sentence hanging in waiting.

"Dorothy."

"Well Miss Dorothy, I hope we meet again very soon." He says with another bow. He flourishes his hand, placing his hat back upon his messy hair.

With a halfhearted wave Dorothy turns, descending the stairs. The metal creaks with each step as she exits the bus.

"Stay safe Miss Dorothy and..."

"Keep out of trouble." She replies instinctively, the words simply fall out of her mouth. Turning back to the bus she sees a wide sharp smile cutting through Toto's dark fur. His dark fur and jacket make him appear like a grinning silhouette. A bizarre cryptid of a man.

The bus doors creak closed, smoke billows from the exhaust pipe. The wheels squeal as they begin to turn, forcing the tin can of a vehicle forward. It quickly trundles down the street, shaking and rattling the entire way.

It's only when the bus is out of view that Dorothy curses herself "Shit." The dawning realization hits her like a bag of bricks. "He never did tell me where we are."

Tall buildings rose up around Dorothy like prison walls. Cold brick and concrete broken up by claustrophobic alleyways and narrow streets. It was a stark contrast to the golden fields and bright

skies of Kansas. Looking up between the web of buildings Dorothy could see the sky. An empty void, where the stars refused to shine.

Pulling out her cellphone, Dorothy flicked the screen open with a snap. The screen lit up, the time flickered judgmentally, ten minutes after midnight. There were no missed calls or text messages. An exclamation mark blared in the corner of the screen, alerting Dorothy that no signal could be reached.

“No signal?” She muttered, baffled as she looked at the buildings around her. “In the middle of a city? Maybe the buildings are messing with the signal. There’s no way I should be out of reception range.” She thought, trying to find comfort through reason.

The streets were devoid of people, no cars drove down the narrow streets. No voices cut through the dull whistle of the wind. It was late but to see no people or even signs of life was strange and unnerving.

Hastily Dorothy stuffed her phone into her pocket before hurriedly walking down the street. She reasoned that being higher and away from the buildings might allow a clear signal. Finding an opening building with roof access would provide that. It would also get her off the street until morning.

The task seemed simple, but proved far more difficult in practice. She spent near thirty minutes trying any door she could find, but they were all locked tight. She searched alleyways for fire escapes but all were out of reach. She knocked on windows and doors but no one answered.

As the night ticked on and Dorothy continued to wander she eventually noticed a shift in the landscape. Seemingly random yellow bricks were scattered among the monotonous grey sidewalk. They steadily grew more dense the further she walked. The pattern spreading and growing deliberately leading to some unknown location.

With little else to go on, this appeared as a beacon to the lost young woman. It was along this particularly peculiar path that she spotted a small news stand. The box had a heavy metal grate locking the inventory inside. However the dusty streetlamps provided enough light that you could

read the various newspaper headlines that hung just out of reach.

Peering inside Dorothy read the headlines, searching for any clue as to where she was. A headline or newspaper company name could provide some insight she thought.

The headline was printed in bold sans-serif letters and read ‘THE EMERALD CITY CHRONICLES’ The front page article was titled ‘RIPPER STRIKES AGAIN! CLAIMING 2ND VICTIM! HAS THE CHOPPER RETURNED?’

She pulled on the grate gingerly, testing if it would give, but it held fast. The article was too fine to read at this distance with the poor lighting. With a halfhearted sigh she pulled herself away from the quaint newsstand.

“Emerald City?” Dorothy muttered quietly to herself. “I don’t think I’m in Kansas anymore.” Instinctively she rose a thumb to her lips, biting at the already savaged nail. Toto’s warning blared in her mind like a siren.

A wet drop slapped against her nose, causing her to jump embarrassingly. It was this that made her painfully aware of how tense she was. A second cold drop confirmed the encroaching rain. “Just my luck.” She thought bitterly, as she looked for some kind of shelter.

She was quickly relieved when she spotted an open faced parking garage less than a block away. The building was on the across the street from where she stood. It was tucked somewhat deceptively between two much larger buildings which likely made use of the space.

Pulling the puffy varsity jacket round her she hurried toward the structure. Rain beat against the leather, quickly building in rhythm. Dorothy crossed the threshold of the parking garage just in time as the gentle spitting rain evolved into a torrent.

The cold concrete pillars that held aloft the five storeys of parking space. Had suddenly become a sanctuary in the storm. An ominous reprieve, like the calm before a storm. Unfortunately the storm had already come, leaving Dorothy completely stranded.

Several antique cars were parked at the various levels of the garage. They looked to be from the nineteen thirties or forties by Dorothy’s estimate. They had a sleek but boxy quality to

their designs, a strange juxtaposition that was iconic of the time.

Dorothy spotted an old elevator nestled in the crook of an L shaped staircase. The elevator was closed with an old metal gate fashioned out of geometric patterns. The art deco design was contrasted by a thick chain and lock that bound the gate shut.

The staircase was similarly had a chain pulled across it. A 'no entry' sign dangled from the metal links but did little to stop her intrusion. Pull the chain up she was easily able to duck underneath and begin her ascent. Each floor had a similar sign and chain. The ascent was easy, the chains would only prove a nuisance if someone were in a hurry to leave.

The rain was pouring down in heavy sheets now. Water roared as it splattered against concrete, echoing violently throughout the garage.

Dorothy leaned against the barricade, looking out at the city. The city was a dense maze of buildings and bright lights. Pale yellows and emerald greens painted the grey buildings in sickening colours. The entire city appeared ill, as if some disease was ravaging it. Sucking away the life like a festering wound. That was what Dorothy felt as she looked out through the rain.

Pulling out her phone again she found the same disappointing exclamation mark. Still no signal. She decided then that until the rain stopped she would wait things out here.

She began digging through her bag, pulling out a small lighter. Her brow furrowed as she began pulling out spray paint cans, dumping them onto the concrete floor. Her sketchbook was the next to go, followed by her wallet. She flipped the bag inside out, but only a few pencils joined the pile.

Slamming the bag on the ground in frustration Dorothy cursed under her breath. "Of course they took my smokes. Why would they put those back?" She said angrily stuffing her belongings back into the bag.

Giving the heavy bag a swing, she slung it over her shoulder. A low rattle rang out, but not from the letter bag. It was the distinct sound of a chain rattling against itself.

A tense moment passed as Dorothy watched the stairs carefully. She wasn't sure if she

wanted to run into another person at this point or not. Time seem to stretch unnaturally in the moment, but no one came up or down the stairs.

A sharp whistle of wind caught Dorothy's ear, it sounded so close, impossibly close. Before she could even turn to see what it was, a sickening splat cut through the sound of the rain. A vial crunching and snapping sound as something fell just behind her. Crunching into the pavement.

With some apprehension, Dorothy leaned over the barrier. Looking down she saw a horrific sight. A woman's body was mangled on the street. The body at impossible angles, rain water and blood pooling together.

Her legs moved on their own, rushing to the stairs on adrenaline alone. Her bag rattled and bounced with each step. Stumbling over the chain barriers she nearly tripped several times. Reaching the last chain she took a leap, but the tip of her shoe caught the chain. She stumbled forward slamming into one of the supporting pillars. A crunch and clatter echoes across the parking garage.

A bloody scratch split across her forehead. Dorothy barely registered the pain as she pulled away from the pillar. Her heart pounded in her ears as she looked beyond the pillar at the grisly scene.

A woman's body mangled and broken on the pavement. Her hair was long and tangled. Rainwater was already beginning to soak into her skin. Blood seeped from a wound head wound likely caused by the impact. She was wearing a sequined black dress and silver high healed shoes lined with clear gemstones.

Dorothy approached hopelessly. "Hey." She called out, knowing she would receive no response. "Hey." Still only silence returned her call. Stepping out into the rain she saw something strange. At first glance she'd assumed the woman had jumped but on close inspection the woman had a clear wound on her chest. What appeared to be a stab wound, it was round and thin. Which would've almost certainly caused her death, and based on the blood this occurred long before the fall.

A hand suddenly grabbed Dorothy's shoulder. "Get away from there!" A shout rang out over the din of the storm.

Dorothy spun around as the hand attempted to pull her back. She looked up at the face with a mix of surprise and anger. Her brow tensed and teeth bared like an angry dog. "Get the fuck off of me." She shouted slapping the burlap hand away.

A man stood before Dorothy, tall and thin with long arms. His face was burlap that looked like it had been pulled across a skull. Sunken sockets in place of eyes gave him a haunting look. A stitched mouth split wide across his jaw. Straw hair poked out from under a wide brimmed hat. The bizarre scarecrow of a man wore a dry, tattered coat made of patchwork cloth. Thick stitching framed the various fabrics in an intricate pattern.

The man took a step back, "You can't tamper with a crime scene." He said insistently, there was a strange sense of urgency in his voice that Dorothy noted.

"Crime scene?" Dorothy asked, suddenly on alert. Something about this felt wrong. The wound is barely visible, how would he have known about it? Even if he'd only seen the body fall it would be a safer assumption that she'd jumped. Shouldn't he be worried.

He seemed taken aback by the accusation. "Am I wrong?" His voice was raspy but had a deceptive charm. He stepped back again. "She's already dead. There's nothing to be done for her now." He explained looking towards the street. "We should call the police. There's a phone booth just around the corner."

Dorothy took a step forward, confidently, her hand slipping into her pocket. The smooth handle of the pocket knife was a comfort. "How did you know she was dead?"

He paused for a moment as if he'd heard something. "I was waiting out the storm here when I heard the impact. I went to check on her but hid when I heard you coming down the stairs. I assumed you were the murderer." He explained hastily. "But you went to check if she was okay and seemed distressed so it's safe to assume you're not the murderer. But that means the murder is still up those stairs."

He seemed genuinely tense and the explanation was reasonable Dorothy thought. She gave him a skeptical look before advancing a few

more steps. Her fingers still dancing carefully along the handle of the knife. It provided a small comfort in this situation. "Alright." She said after a moment.

The man sighed in relief. "Good, I'm Scarecrow. Did you know her?" He asked, his brow curled up as if he was afraid to ask.

"No, I don't recognize her." Dorothy admitted, glancing back for just a moment. "I just got into town." She paused for a moment, debating with herself if she should continue. Eventually she continued "My name's Dorothy"

He seemed relieved "That's good. Her name's East. She's a real nasty piece of work. I didn't do it or anything." He said waving his hands defensively as he realized the negative light that shone on him in the current circumstance. "She's just a bit a tough character... or was."

Scarecrow was suddenly cut off by the sound of an engine squealing overhead. Tires burned on concrete far above in one of the upper levels. A slam echoed as something large impacted, rattling something heavy. A moment of sudden silence, followed by an enormous impact.

Dorothy stumbled forward covering her ears from the deafening slam that had occurred just a few meters behind her. Scarecrow's long burlap hands reached forward pulling Dorothy away from the scene. The two looked back towards the body in horror to find a large black car had somehow fallen directly on the body. The corpse was almost entirely obscured by bent metal and broken machinery. Only the legs stuck out from beneath the morbid wreck.

Scarecrow looked down at Dorothy releasing her from his gentle grip. Dorothy stepped away, brushing her arms instinctively. Her heart raced from the sudden scare, but she felt some comfort and relief knowing that whoever was responsible was up there and not right in front of her.

"Are there any other ways down from there?" Dorothy asked quietly, stepping away from the staircase.

"I don't know, but I'm sure glad the car didn't hit us. What do you think happened?" Scarecrow answered loudly, much to Dorothy's confusion.

Dorothy shot him a baffled look. Now whoever was up there would certainly know someone was here. "What are you doing?" She hissed under her breath.

"Oh boy we should get out of here." Scarecrow yelled again, before whispering "If they know there are people down here they'll probably try to avoid us. Say something loudly, if they know at least two people are here they probably won't come down."

"You're right, good thing that car didn't hit me. We should go get help." Dorothy said loudly in an unconvincing manner. She understood the reasoning but didn't agree with the method. "How far to the payphone?"

Scarecrow hesitated "It's about three buildings down, towards The Yellow Brick Road." He said, his sunken eyes not breaking from the stairs. A tense moment of anticipation passed but no one descended the stairs or the ramp.

Dorothy took a step back, "Well, what are you waiting for. Let's go." She whispered insistently.

Scarecrow's burlap cheeks pulled into an anxious frown. "Go on, I'll make sure they don't follow you." He carefully pulled open his coat, reaching an object tucked within an inner pocket. Just before his cloth fingers wrapped around the device a distant siren echoed through the streets.

Shocked crossed both Dorothy and Scarecrow's faces. Neither had contacted the police, so who had? Had someone heard the crash or was there another person watching?

"Fuck! We gotta go." Scarecrow said abruptly.

Dorothy nodded and turned to rush back the way she'd come, but Scarecrow ran towards the wreck. "Where are you going?" She said following him, he probably knew the streets better than she did.

Scarecrow reached down towards one of the bent legs. Fingers wrapped around the broken ankle and pulled the diamond studded shoe free. "Sorry doll, I can't afford to leave something like this here." He said sharply.

The sirens grew louder rapidly. The fear of being caught at a crime scene pushed him forward. He got up and ran. His long legs

bounding forward in massive strides down the alley way.

Dorothy rushed after him. "What happened to not tampering with a crime scene?" She yelled after the thief as she ran, trying to keep up.

"Judge all you want, but if you don't want to spend the night a cell you'd better keep up. I've got a friend we can hide out with." He called back a bitter frustration in his voice. His jacket soaking through with rain in moments.

Their voices muffled by the rain that beat against their backs as they ran. A soft chime rings out, barely audible as it joins the tapestry of noise.

Maybe she should have stayed. She hadn't done anything wrong. She could just explain the situation and it would all be fine. A car fell from the sky it was too ridiculous for her to have done. The would have to believe her, but she was a labelled liar. No one believed her anymore. Not her family, or friends. No stranger or cop would believe she wasn't involved. She couldn't possibly stay. They'd arrest her for sure. She didn't even know where she was. How could she possibly do the right thing? Why do the right thing if it would inevitably turn out wrong?

So she ran, and ran, and ran, chasing after this bizarre stranger she'd just met. Her feet ached with each painful step. Using every ounce of energy she had to just get away. Just a little further away.

Two smooth cars, painted in black and whit blocked the northern and southern exits. They sported heavy metal grills and bumpers that gave them a stout appearance. Each had a small can shaped light affixed to their roof. The light inside spun in a quick rhythm casting crimson streaks of light across the gruesome crime scene.

Yellow and black tape was being stretched across the concrete pillars of the parking garage. Another warning to be ignored. The Emerald City Police Department had worked quickly to contain the scene and prevent any further tampering.

A broad shouldered man carefully lays out folded tags with bold number emblazoned on them. He wields a strong flashlight in his free hand, casting a hazy light over the scene. While his noisy yellow poncho crinkles in the rain. He

has a bald head, which is buried under the poncho's plastic hood. Rainwater soaks into his exposed green beard which flops wetly with each step. Most striking of all is the green tint of his skin. He has a round head with deep lines and exaggerated features.

As the green man laid out markers, a tall man with a pumpkin for a head made meticulous measurements of the scene. He wore a dark poncho, which bulged sharply beneath his sternum, poorly concealing a large object. His right leg trembles as he walks, prompting him to lean upon a wooden cane with a curved metal head. Seeking shelter beneath the parking garage, he awkwardly tucks the cane beneath an arm. Fishing out a spiral bound notebook he writes the latest measurements before returning to the rainy alleyway.

A pale skinned older woman in a suit jacket and long skirt scrutinizes the scene. Her eyes are thin and calculating, lined with subtle wrinkles. She also wears a yellow poncho which obscures her hourglass form. The hood is pulled back revealing her greying blonde hair, which swoops up into a dramatic pair of pompadours. Her crimson lips press around a cigarette as she inhales.

She has a small creature which sits next to her like a dog. It's torso is like a wooden log, with spindly legs that jut out from it unnaturally. It has a wooden featureless head with two small sticks for ears. A long stick extends from it's back end and wags stiffly back and forth as he looks up at the woman expectantly.

The squealing sound of tires coming to an abrupt halt alerts the group at the scene. A sleek car with a glossy black finish pulled up next to the northern alley entrance. The driver door swung open wide revealing the dark interior. A sharp black umbrella plunged from the darkness like a sword, before erupting open.

A sharply dressed woman stepped out of the car, swinging the umbrella above her head. She marked her arrival with the loud slam of her door. She had long dark hair that was spun into a bun and held in place by a silver hair clip. The ornament stuck out like a three pronged crown giving her a regal appearance. Her jacket was

clean and fitted giving her a broad shouldered appearance.

She had the appearance of a general come to command an army. Her sharp eyes watched looked over the scene with a bitter coolness, but the bags beneath betrayed her exhaustion. Assessing the scene was surgical and she quickly joined the blonde woman under the parking garage.

The blonde woman gives a knowing smile, she could tell what was coming. "Good morning." she said with biting sarcasm, pulling the cigarette away from her mouth.

"Is it Jack?" The police chief said, shaking her umbrella clean of water.

The rainwater splashed across the wooden dog, who gave a grumpy growl in response. He stood up, stretched his front legs forward before rising. His whole body rotated and shook violently, flinging the water from his back.

"You're going to have to be more specific Chief." The blonde replied dryly tossing the butt of her cigarette to the ground. She stepped on it with the heel of her leather boot, leaving a pile of ash and smoke.

The dark skinned woman gave a cold look, mouth half open. Her tongue flicked across her teeth in agitation. "The Ripper, Glinda. It's too early for this shit. You can explain him next." She said with an angry gesture towards the two men working at the scene.

"I can't say for certain yet. Call me crazy but things just feel off. It's flashy like we'd expect but they didn't leave a message. Maybe they ran off before they could finish but it feels wrong." Glinda explained pulling out another cigarette, which she placed in her mouth gingerly. A snap of a lighter ignites the tip in seconds, a finely honed art.

She takes a long drag, breathing a sigh. "The real issue is the victim. Ozma, we have reason to suspect it's East."

"East?" Ozma reached forward, plucking the cigarette from Glinda's slender fingers. She took a long inhale before sighing loudly, smoke billowing from her mouth. "You sure?"

"Fuck no. You saw the car, maniac drove it off the top of the damned building. There's barely anything left but the legs. I don't think even Dr.

Pipt could make an accurate identification. However, and it's not my area of expertise but from her leg length she seems to be the right height. Skin tone and most importantly she was wearing one of East's shoes." Glinda explained while lighting another cigarette.

"So we've got fuck all is what you're telling me." Ozma said clenching her teeth. Her frustration wasn't towards Glinda but the situation. She felt stuck and at a dead end.

"Not nothing. We're short on manpower and I don't want to go tampering with the scene until Jack gets his photos. But we have the car, the license plate, a bit of a body and Bristle is talking with the locals to see if anyone heard or saw anything." Glinda said with some reassurance.

"And why is Pumpkinhead here?" The police chief said, her mouth full of venom. "He's not on the force, he shouldn't be at a crime scene. He could tamper with the evidence or destroy scene."

Glinda's brow furrowed in a pained expression. She reached out a hand but it slumped back to her side as if she thought better of it. "We're short on staff, most are refusing to involve themselves in this case or have quit. They're scared, Ozma. I need good people on this case." She explained, regretting her choice of words. "I need people. Qualified people. Jack's a fully licensed private detective, a former inspector with years of experience and a friend. He's more than capable of getting accurate measurements and photos."

Ozma's face contorted into a series of unpleasant expressions. Frustration and angry twisted to bitter acceptance at the logic of Glinda's argument. "Fine. He can get the photos. I'm sure he can't fuck that up." She conceded. "As soon as he's done I want every inch of this place swept, and have the remains sent to Dr. Pipt. I want to know exactly who was under that car."

The wooden dog trotted out from behind Glinda's leg and pressed its head against Ozma's calf. Its thin front leg pawed at her insistently, clumsily stepping on her toes several times.

The chief's brow furrows, mouth half open she licked her teeth in frustration. Shaking her head she leaned down, raising a hand. She placed her hand gently on the wooden dog's head,

petting him three times. "You stupid mutt." She said quietly, her brow relaxing slightly.

Jack watched the scene from the corner of his eye. Ozma's glare was cool like the rain that struck his pumpkin cheeks. He carefully pulled a large box from beneath his raincoat. A heavy leather strap held it in place along the back of his thin neck. The clicking of dials echoed over the rain, followed by the snap the box opening. A long accordion lens stuttered out, revealing the large camera. Jack heaved the device up, using the small view finder began to take pictures of the scene.

Blinding flashes of light burst from a bulky round flash on the camera's side. The entire scene took on a more defined appearance in the light. The shadows of the rain storm were banished momentarily revealing the severity of the wreck. Over a thousand kilograms of mangled metal and plastic had completely destroyed the victim's upper body. If they were alive on impact death would've been instantaneous. Shattered glass littered the alley, glinting in the glow of the camera flash.

"I-I'm sorry you can't go in there." A desperate voice cried out.

"You're just trying to cover this up. An officer is involved in this case aren't they? Protecting one of your own?" A strange voice shouted back. It sounded as if they were speaking through an old radio.

"N-no." A soft voice protested but was quickly drowned out.

"What's your name boy? What are you hiding? Hm?" The mechanical voice insisted. "Is this the work of the Ripper? How many victims this time? Is it true that Nick the Chopper escaped prison?"

"Eh, no? We don't know. One?" The soft slightly feminine voice replied incoherently.

The sound of the voices was quickly growing closer. Jack glanced towards Ozma who was already fuming but to his surprise the green bearded man stepped forward. He moved towards the street and the voices with a steady determination.

As he reached the street two individuals rounded the corner and entered the alley. The first was a thin young man wearing a police uniform

and yellow rain poncho. His face was covered in a thin layer of velvet white fur. A pair of buck teeth poked out from the end of a short muzzle with a pink button nose. He had a pair of long rabbit ears that were pressed tightly against the back of his head nervously.

The other man loomed over the rabbit with an imposing sense of self importance. He wore a tailored suit with a black raincoat over top. Leather gloves covered his hands which wielded a notepad and a pen which he stabbed forward like a sword. He seemed to lack a head entirely, instead there was simply a phonograph speaker from which chimed his irritating voice.

The strange phonograph man pressed his pen into the officers chest forcing him back. "Ehnoe is a strange name, and what of Nick the Chopper?" He insisted. "Well out with it boy I haven't got all day. There's papers to sell!"

The bald man stepped up behind the rabbit like a guardian angel. He crossed his arms, tapping his foot. "Police only." Gently moving the younger officer to the side. He placed a hand forcefully on the reporter's chest and pushed him back.

"You can't do this to me. I have a right to know. The people have a right to know who controls their city!" The phonograph insisted, his speaker head waved about in an unnaturally animated way.

"Statements can be taken after our initial investigation." The bearded man explained, giving the reporter a rough shove.

The phonograph staggered backwards, his head swivelling to each of the officers as well as Jack. He seemed frustrated, "This is the last you'll be hearing of me! The people will know what you've been doing Ozma! I swear it!" He said threateningly thrusting his pen in Ozma's direction. "This isn't the last you've heard of Phonograph!" He said looking at the bearded officer who simply crossed his arms and gestured with his head for the man to leave.

With a last look at the scene the reporter began to walk away. He pulled his hood up which stretched awkwardly over his bizarrely shaped head. The officers watched him leave for a moment.

"T-thanks Omby. I'm sorry. I tried to keep him away but he just showed up out of no where." The younger officer said sheepishly, looking at his feet.

The bald man named Omby turned to the small rabbit officer with pitying look. "Don't worry about it. They're parasites. Making money off people's pain." He said reassuringly. "You don't need to give them any attention."

"Bristle!" Ozma barked, sending the wooden dog at her feet back to cowering behind Glinda.

Similarly the rabbit jumped, his spine straightening instinctively. He rose a hand to his brow in salute. "Y-yes ma'am!" He said in a shaky but clear voice.

Ozma sighed in a mix of disappointment, pity and frustration. "Go work with Jack. Help him sweep the area and make he doesn't fuck it up."

"Callous as ever." Jack thought nostalgically.

Bristle on the other hand gave a shaky salute and only barely managed to stammer a, "Y-yes Ma'am." He looked about anxiously. "Miss Ozma, Ma'am. I spoke to a man who was working the night shift across the street. He claims to have seen a, uh a young woman enter the parkade shortly before hearing the crash. Apparently she'd been rattling on doors earlier trying to get inside."

"Did he have a description of this woman." Ozma asked firmly.

"O-only that she had twin braids and he described her clothing as odd a-and inappropriate." Bristle stated back, not lowering his hand from his forehead.

Ozma almost hesitated to ask. "Did you get this person's information?"

"Y-yes Ma'am." Bristle said with a hopeful spring in his voice. He hastily dug into a pocket revealing a pink notepad which he flipped open.

Ozma stepped forward, taking the notepad, she examined it carefully. "Good work." She said after a far too long pause.

"Omby, I want you to finish securing the area. See if you can find anyone else who heard this girl and can confirm the story." Ozma said

firmly, handing the notepad to Omby who quickly tucked it into a breast pocket. "And find out who the fuck called the press at three o'clock in the morning." Ozma continued bitterly.

Omby gave a firm salute and nodded. "Yes Ma'am." He glanced towards Jack giving a subtle nod of acknowledgement. He reached to his belt pulling a large flashlight from it. Flipping it around playfully he thrust it towards Bristle. "You'll need this rookie."

"T-thank you" Bristle replied taking the flashlight before hurrying to Jack's side. Flicking on the flashlight. "H-hello. You must be Jack. I-I'm Bristle."

Jack turned his attention to Bristle and smiled. "Jack Pumpkinhead." He said releasing his camera, allowing it to hang from his neck. He extended a thin hand. Bristle quickly extended a hand as well, shaking Jack's loosely. "You're new to the force?"

"Y-yes, just finished training before the first... incident." Bristle's eyes bounced back and forth, his ears folding back.

"You're in good hands. Ozma's not as hard as she seems. Listen to her and you'll be fine." Jack said reassuringly. "Can you hold the flashlight there." He said quickly shifting the subject.

Bristle and Jack worked quickly. To Jack's surprise Bristle was quite competent when given a clear task, and was very attentive of others. Over the next couple of hours they compiled an extremely detailed account of the scene with a large stock of photos for reference.

"W-what do you make of this Mr. Pumpkinhead?" Bristle asked as Jack took his final photo.

Jack relaxed, pressing the lens of his camera back into its case. He thought for a moment, unsure of how much of his thought he should divulge to the rookie. "It's certainly an odd and elaborate way to kill someone." He said starting with the obvious. "The murder set up ramps on the rooftop allowing the car to drive over the barrier and fall over five stories onto the victim. It would be difficult to predict the impact accurately assuming this was the method of murder. So I suspect the victim was already dead at the time of impact, or somehow incapacitated.

Drugs could have been used to render the victim unconscious but why not use a simpler method. A gun, bat, drowning, dozens of other options are available." Jack said only half answer Bristle question and half trying to process his own reasoning.

Bristle listened with consideration. "It does seem extremely flashy. Perhaps they're leaving a message?"

That was a possibility, but it didn't line up with the Ripper's modus operandi. The previous two cases have involved explicit written message, often displayed in a similarly flashy manner. Perhaps they ran out of time, or were interrupted by something unexpected. It's possible the mystery woman saw something. Jack pondered for a few moments in silence.

"It is possible, perhaps the car has some meaning to either the culprit, victim or even a third party." Jack agreed though he remained unconvinced.

The sound of wood tapping on concrete alerted the duo of an approaching pair. Glinda joined them, followed closely by the small dog who quickly bounded over to Jack's side. He barked happily and trotted around him eagerly.

Jack bent over, leaning on his cane for support and pet the dog's back. Giving a few gentle slaps on its side. "He wasn't too much trouble was he?" Jack said looking up at Glinda who had already begun to fish another cigarette from her breast pocket.

"Not at all." She responded with a smile, flicking her lighter which ignited quickly. Lighting the cigarette she quickly held it to her side. Even in this moment of calm she had a compulsion to busy her hands. "What do you two have for me?"

Jack glanced towards Bristle, giving the rookie an opportunity to shine. The young rabbit was unfortunately far too distressed by the wooden dog's presence to notice. "Here are the measurements, Bristle was going to transcribe some copies. I'll head home and get these photos developed. It'll take a few days to get everything but I can get the wide shots to you by noon."

"Do that, I'm having the remains sent to Dr. Pipt and any photos regarding the wreck could be useful to him, so start with those." Glinda

specified. "Bristle can you have copies of these notes done in an hour?"

"A-ah, Y-yes ma'am!" Bristle said shooting his attention towards Glinda.

Jack gave a nod and handed his notebook to Bristle, who took it shakily before stepping away from the wooden mutt. "No need to worry about Sawhorse. He'd hardly hurt a fly that was biting him." Jack said heartily.

"I-I have no doubt. I've always been a little nervous around dogs." Bristle admitted looking at the ground sheepishly.

Glinda cut in quickly, "Bristle get to the station and get those notes copied. You can leave Jack's notebook with Jellia when she gets in."

The rookie stood straight, giving a shaky salute. "Y-yes ma'am!" He quickly rushed off, heading toward the southern entrance of the alleyway. Glinda and Jack watched him leave, and only continued their conversation once he was well out of earshot.

"You can leave the photos with Jellia when they're ready, and you get your notebook there too." Glinda stated but continued before Jack could respond. "Ozma doesn't want you here. I stuck my neck out for you because honestly I need the help."

"I take it this is off the books." Jack said, his right leg tensed with pain. He winced and leaned on his cane for support.

"Let's go take a seat." Glinda offered, gesturing with her head towards the police cruiser at the north end of the alleyway.

Glinda lead the way to the car while Jack staggered behind. Sawhorse trotted between them excitedly. Deputy Glinda opened the back door for the wooden dog, who immediately jumped into the back seat. Sawhorse whined as the door was shut. He quickly began pawing at metal bars which prevented him from jumping into the front seat.

Glinda took the drivers side and Jack the front passenger side. Jack's face visibly relaxed as he sat down. He'd been busy for a few hours now, the task kept his mind away from the growing discomfort in his leg. Now the task was done and he had little to keep his mind from the cramping muscles in his thigh and knee.

The interior reeked of smoke, which cause Jack's barely perceptible nose to wrinkle. He twisted the window crank which squeaked loudly as the glass descended. Glinda did the same allowing a cool breeze to sweep through the dark interior.

"Leg still bad?" Glinda said, blowing smoke out of her window.

Pumpkinhead rubbed his knee gingerly. "Only when it rains, or when it's sunny, or I work to hard." He said with a biting sarcasm. "But enough about me. If you're going behind Ozma I take it things are serious."

"Maybe I'm being paranoid but this feels like a set up. If that was East there's going to be a war and I think a lot of eyes are going to be on the ECPD. Specifically Ozma." Glinda admitted taking a long drag from her cigarette. "I'm asking a lot of you, I know, but you tell me your rate and I'll pay you double to find out who's behind this."

"You suspect someone on the inside?" Jack asked, his brow curling in surprise.

"I don't know what I suspect." Glinda said pressing the cigarette to her lips again. She inhaled deep, before letting a trail of smoke billow out the corner of her ruby lips. "I'm just saying a lot of the ECPD have a reason to want the victims out of the way, and plenty of people wouldn't mind Ozma taking the fall for it." Glinda admitted bitterly.

She looked to Jack's leg for a moment before continuing. "She hasn't exactly been good at making friends since..." She trailed off, the situation was already understood between them and didn't need to be restated. "She's good at her job, I don't think she'd do it. I'm sure she doesn't mourn any of them but she'd do things by the book. At least that's what I think."

"Why come to me then? I have just as much motivation to frame Ozma as anyone." Jack confessed curiously.

"Well Jackie." Glinda said leaning across the stick shift to place an arm around Jack's neck. "I know, that you know, that if that was true and you were framing Ozma. I'd kill you myself." There was a playfulness in her tone but there was nothing playful about the statement. She was entirely serious and they both knew it. "Besides I know full well it's not in your nature." Glinda

said relaxing her grip. Her tone and demeanor shifted but the dark warning still hung in the air like her smokey breath.

Jack swallowed. "If you want me to find the Ripper I'll need access to the previous case files."

"I'll have them passed to you when you drop off those photos." Glinda said releasing her grip entirely. She returned to leaning out the window. "I'm not saying it's a member of the ECPD, but I want a neutral party in this just in case."

"Neutral is a rather generous term for my position don't you think?" Jack confessed.

"I've always preferred to have as many people in my corner, even if they aren't publicly." She flicked the dying cigarette from the car. "What do you make of the scene, and that thing?"

"The scene is pretty dry as far as evidence goes. Metal ramps were brought to the roof and used to jump the barrier. They're heavy as hell and based on the minimal scraping on the concrete I'd suspect at least two people were needed. Which rules out our mystery girl." Jack mused, looking off through the rain as he continued. "I suspect the victim was already deceased at the time of impact due to the lack of restraints."

"After dumping the body the car was put into drive and a brick was used to keep the gas pedal down. The brick in question is slightly visible when you look through what's left of the driver's window." Jack explained carefully. "After this the culprits left, possibly encountering our mystery girl."

"Someone was running, or there was a fight. Someone dropped that device. Based on the scratches and the gravel embedded in it I'd say it fell from their pocket." He'd considered the strange device for some time now. "When opened it has a screen and the number pad, almost like a phone. The device doesn't seem to connect to any phone cables though so I don't know how such a thing could function."

"I think we may be dealing with an outsider, it could be worth it to talk with the Captain." The detective explained.

Glinda frowned at the explanation, she hadn't wanted to consider it a possibility.

However she had to confess that his reasoning made sense. "Then I think we need to find this girl. She was closest to the scene and could have seen the culprits if they didn't get to her first."

"That's where I would start."

Glinda pulled out a set of keys and started the car. "Let me get you home." She leaned out the window. "OMBY!" She shouted. "Can you keep the scene cleared for 20 minutes?"

The green bearded man leaned over the barrier on the second floor. "Of course." He shouted back with a wave.

Glinda gave a gentle wave of her hand before pulling herself back into the car. A quick twist of the stick shift and the car jerked forward. The sleek police cruiser rocked as it clipped the edge of the sidewalk. The deputy twisted the steering wheel sharply as she pulled into the empty street.

Grey light of the dawn sun cast dull shadows across the Emerald City. The streetlamps were steadily becoming unlit as morning approached rapidly. Rain still drizzled from dense clouds that still hung in the air. The overcast morning marked a depressing end to a depressing night.

A few minutes passed silently between the two before they reach their destination. The car screeched to a rocky stop in front of a squat office building. The wide three storey building was just dull and forgettable as most of the other buildings in the city.

The two continued to sit in silence for a few moments before Jack finally opened his door. He stepped out, leaning on his cane carefully. He shut the front door firmly before opening the back. The small wooden dog immediately leapt out, landing in a puddle which splashed dirty water everywhere.

"Five hundred." Jack said breaking the silence as he leaned in.

"Five hundred?" Glinda questioned confused.

"My fee. Five hundred, and don't forget to double that per our agreement." He said smugly.

"A thousand?! That's insane!" Glinda twisted awkwardly in her seat so she could look Jack in the eye.

“My danger fee is steep. Have a good night Glinda.” The detective said stepping back he slammed the door shut with a sense of finality.

Jack walked up the small staircase to the front door of the office building. He fumbled around his pocket finding a small key which he used to unlock the set of glass double doors. Sawhorse trotted behind him obediently.

A long hallway extended down the building with a staircase on the right. Several offices lined the left wall and the right beyond the staircase. Jack carefully walked up the stairs, wincing with each step. Sawhorse bounded passed him two steps at a time before sitting at the top of the stairs. He watched Jack struggle, cocking his head to the side in concern.

“I never did get used to this.” Jack confessed to his companion.

He eventually reached the top of the stairs, a similar hallway extended out. Small offices lined the hall, each with a wooden door. Frost glass windows looked inside and each was inscribed with gold lettering. To the right just at the top of the stairs was one such door. The words “Pumpkinhead P.I.” were emblazoned. Jack unlocked the door, Sawhorse dashed inside followed by Jack who stumbled in.

A narrow hallway opened up into the main office. The space was cluttered and small. A desk that was far too large for the room took up most of the space. Two simple chairs for clients faced it while a cracked and worn leather chair sat behind it. Several framed documents lined the walls along with a single bookshelf full of medical textbooks.

A small kitchenette extended off the entrance hallway, with a door leading to a humble bathroom across from it. Door more doors lead out of the office area, the left door opened into a small bedroom with a single bed, chair and wardrobe. The right door had been replaced with a tighter seal and lead into a darkroom for developing photography.

Jack staggered to his desk and collapsed into the leather chair, which squeaked in protest. Sawhorse had already leapt onto one of the simple guest chairs where he watched happily, his tail wagging stiffly behind him. Leaning his cane against the desk, Jack pulled open a small drawer

and removed it. Reaching to the back he placed a small key into a hidden lock. With a twist and a small click a hidden drawer opened beneath the desk. Two vials rolled and clinked together loudly.

With a trembling hand he took one of the vials. He removed the cork quickly, which came free with a pop. There was a moment of hesitation as he watched the liquid swish back and forth in the vial. A sharp twinge of pain and that made his face contort violently pushed him forward. The glass vial pressed to his mouth and he ingested the liquid in a single satisfying gulp.

He slumped back in the chair, eyes closed tight. The liquid stung his tongue and filled his mind with regret. It wouldn't be long before he was free from the pain and memories. Taking a deep breath he knew he had to start quickly.

Taking up his cane he staggered towards the darkroom to begin the development process.

Interlude I

You find yourself sitting on a lavish green couch. Brass fitting accent the dyed leather, while a plush back hugs your body comfortably. The sharp smell of freshly brewed tea fill the warm air. Intricately patterned wallpaper covers the walls and leads up to a curved ivy coloured ceiling. An emerald rug sits under a jade table in front of you. Beyond the table is a semi transparent emerald green curtain. The silhouette of a man is visible on the curtains which obscure his features. A low table with a phonograph is visible next to the man.

“Welcome to the Green Room” The man says you in a smooth voice. “I do hope you enjoyed the first act of my little game. The grisly acts of violence have only just begun, so please take this time to prepare yourself.”

He leans over move the phonograph and winds the cranks which rattles quietly behind the curtain. A spindly hand shifts the needle onto the record. Sound begins to echo out from the conical speaker, filling the green room. The soft sound of a saxophone and piano play in a delicate harmony.

The man twists his hands in time with the music, their silhouettes appear like spiders dancing across the curtain. His long fingers curl in grotesque and unnatural ways. “If you’re still here it’s because you wish to play my game.” He says, body swaying like a ghost. “I’ll do you the kindness of explaining the rules of this game. Your opponent is ‘Jack the Ripper’, discover that and you win. Fail to do so and this world will die and I shall simply move on to the next.”

“I am simply the narrator, here to tell the story. I am not your friend, but I will ensure a fair game. One to entertain me.” He says wistfully. “Allow me to establish the first rule. **When I speak in bold text it is the absolute truth. When I speak in bold it cannot be a lie. You need not question the validity of the statement. It simply is true.**”

The man contemplates for a moment. “Yes I believe this will provide an even playing field for you.”

“I shall establish the second rule now. **Magic was not and will not be used as a method of murder. No drugs or scientific**

practices which would be difficult to explain will be used as a part of the murders.”

“I’ll establish one final rule **Each character regardless of their physical appearance should be considered their natural non-magical analogue. Sawhorse is a dog. Everyone else feature up to this point is human. This is not a deception or trickery. Each character is only capable of what their analogue would be capable. No character possess super natural ability. All characters require the logical requirements for life. Air to breath, food to eat and water to drink.**”

“This should suffice for no.” He says reaching a hand to the needle of the phonograph. He removes it with a screech, followed by silence as the music is cut short. “I believe our second act is just about ready. Now go, watch, struggle, test your wits and put on a good show.”

GETTING UP