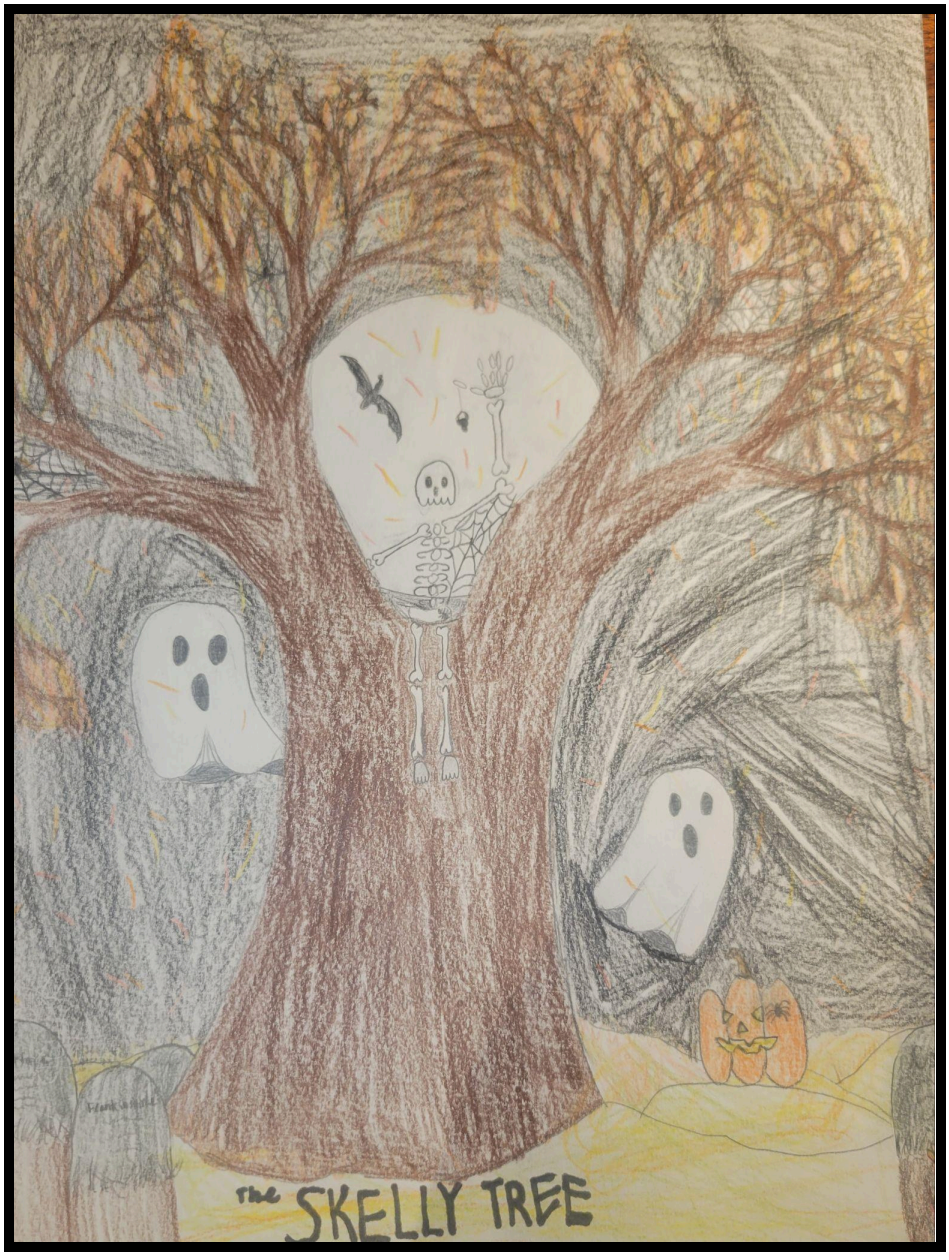
The Prowling Pen

October



Cover art by Lyla Tonnies

Issue

Dear Reader,

In the October issue of The Prowling Pen we feature writing from NBC middle school and high school NBC students and Mr. Fangman, a new teacher in the English department. It is wonderful to see the talent and interest in sharing writing with others. Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein* said "The beginning is always today." So what began as our scary story issue morphed into featuring poetry and memoirs as well as some scary stories, 'tis the season. This issue is our 2026-2027 starting point, the beginning of a journey into writing and creativity. Enjoy! —The Prowling Pen Literary Society

---

Contributors:

Lauren Beckman

Sam Beebe

Camaro Bryant

Mr. Fangman

Madison Hampl

Katerin Lopez (photograph)

Blaine Mears

Safia Petersen

Lyla Tonnies (cover art)

Advisor:

Mr. Lafleur

“An Iowan with a Good Education
Moves to Nebraska” by Larry Fangman

Robert James Waller said, “If you care
about your college football team,
five years after you graduated,
then you didn’t get a good education.”
Fifteen years after my graduation,
a red Nebraska flag flaps from my pole,
Herbie Husker T-shirts stuff my dresser,
a Lil’ Red doll sleeps in the crib next to my daughter,
and I bawled like a baby the day Coach Osborne retired,
but I can’t tell you who coaches at my alma mater,
The University of Northern Iowa,
if the team won or lost last week,
or who is their QB,
so if you’re looking to get a good education,
I recommend Northern Iowa highly,
and I’d be glad to talk about it,
so drop by my house anytime—
except for Saturday afternoons in the fall—GO HUSKERS!

(published Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature XVII Fall 1999)

“The Future is a Mystery” by Sam Beebe

The underside of my cleats were tinted a greenish yellow; the tops damp with sweat. The night following my last Tuesday night, Junior High football game felt like the end of a movie series. Football had always been something I enjoyed, but I was never able to fully get the hang of it. As an athlete, I was always doing sports, and football was something I did to pass the time. In my mind, it was just another season, like a book that I would put on the shelf and never reach for again. Thankfully, this wasn’t the case.

Football was hard for me. I started late compared to the rest of the people on my team, as they had been playing since 1st grade. The first time I played tackle football was when I was in 6th grade. If I wanted to keep up with everyone else, some serious work would have to be done in order to get to their level. My first day of football practice was harder than anything I had ever done. I was new to the team, so getting comfortable on the field was gonna be difficult in itself. Our first drill was called the Oklahoma Drill, and it showed who knew what they were doing and who didn’t. This drill includes two players, one carrying the ball, and one tackling. For me, it really showed everyone else how much I didn’t know. I was the first in line for this drill and I had the biggest kid on the team across from me. Without any knowledge of how to tackle someone almost double my size, our coach blew the whistle. The next thing I knew I was facing the sky with a throbbing pain in my neck from his helmet. After this I knew this season was going to be a long one. However, this experience did not stop me from falling in love with football.

Eventually Junior High football had started. I finally understood what all of the positions were and where I fit in on the team. We had a small team of 20 kids, and I was fortunate enough to play early in my 7th grade season. Being able to be a starter going into my first year of middle

school football, caused me to have a little bit of an ego. I felt like I had my future totally figured out. However, I was humbled very quickly. Our first game was against the Bergan Knights; I was not ready. I was a skinny kid in middle school, and I was going against kids that weighed 50 pounds more than me. First play, the ball is snapped, and before I even realize it I'm on the ground.

“Did you even try to block him?” my quarterback asked as he was getting off of the ground from being tackled.

“I tried, but he’s way bigger than I am,” I replied

“Well, you better figure it out or you’re gonna be sitting on the bench.”

Just like that my future crumbled. I had to be honest with myself, did I have any idea of how the future would play out for me? The answer that I came up with at that moment was brutally honest.

People had always told me that I was skinny in middle school; playing on the offensive line didn’t help. At 6 '2 170 pounds, I was clearly one of the skinniest people on the field. However, I never let this stop me from doing what I loved. Although I loved sports as a whole, the only two things I truly wanted to be a professional athlete in were football and baseball. I loved the offensive line because it was what I was best at. It was what I had always wanted to be since a little kid watching the pros. The big offensive linemen that pushed people on to the ground for the small guys behind them was what I wanted to be doing. There was only one issue; I was too small. If there was any chance that I would play there, it was very slim. So, unknowing of what lies in my future, I slowly let the dream of being an offensive lineman die.

The following week after my last junior high game in September of 2024, I had almost forgotten about football completely. For me and like other athletes, I had already had myself down for the count in the football department. So, I did what a lot of other football players did; I moved on without any hope of being a great football player. Now, this did not mean quitting athletics entirely, even though it might've felt like it after the season. After all, I was a year round athlete in sports like basketball, track, and baseball. Rather than letting the end of my football season direct how I would continue on, I continued into other sports throughout the year. Football was gone, even though I never gave it a chance.

Now that football was gone, I was going to be a professional baseball player. But unlike football, I was ready to give it my all in every way I could. I was mentally and physically preparing for my next baseball season. I was lifting weights in the morning everyday before school at seven in the morning, getting to bed before ten every night to get the right amount of sleep, and eating lots of protein. Even though I did this all for baseball, the drive for greatness naturally carried into other sports like basketball and track. So I gave it my all, and I wasn't going to let anything get in my way.

"Can you schedule me some baseball lessons this month? I want to get started before anyone else," I explained to my mom.

"Well, I suppose. Why do you want to get started so early?" She replied.

"I really want to be a great baseball player, and if I want to be great I better get started now!"

"What about football? I thought you really enjoyed playing?"

"Mom, you could see I wasn't very good. I'd be better off without it anyway."

"Very well," she said "But you never know where the Lord might take you!"

“You’re right, but it doesn’t seem like I’ll have much of a future in football,” I replied.

Eventually baseball season started; it was the heat of June, and I was excited to finally get started. I was one of the best hitters on the team before the season started, and I was ready to keep up my performance. However, in the first 4 games of the season, I went 0-4 with 4 strikeouts in each game. I was torn apart; I had never performed like this before. Unfortunately, the rest of the season continued on this path. At the end of it all I was batting the 2nd to last on the entire team.

“Mom, I don’t know what's going on. Maybe this baseball thing isn’t for me,” I explained.

“Oh, don’t be so hard on yourself, maybe you should try football again,” she mentioned.

“Don’t be silly, I’ll never have a future in football.

I thought I had it all figured out. My plan was to have a great couple baseball seasons, play division 1 baseball, and play in the major leagues. Truth was I had no idea what I was doing. Baseball is what I had been doing the whole year and all of it seemed to go down the drain. Now I was lost and without a clue of where to go.

Then, Coach Schluter, the coach of the football team, came to see me.

Schluter was tall, 6 '4’’ , maybe even 6 '5’’. At the age of 32, he had all black hair that was almost shaved on the sides into a fade. He was wearing a black, zip up Nike tech with grey athletic Nike sweatpants. All of this was accompanied by bright, almost neon green adidas running shoes with the laces untied. I was in the weightroom at 4:30 PM; I was finishing a lift after school.

“Are you gonna be playing football next season Sam?” he asked me, full of hope.

“I don’t know, haven’t really thought about it,” I replied in avoidance.

“Why haven’t you?” he persisted

“I just don’t see myself as a football player, and I've pretty much given up on it now.”

The weightroom felt a little warmer than usual.

“We could really use you on the field. You could be one of our biggest guys and start as a freshman.”

“Is that actually true?” I asked in excitement.

“You bet it is. Have you ever thought about the success you could have in this game?”

“A little bit. Do you think I could play at the division 1 level?”

“With hard work and growth, you could go to about any school you wanted.”

From that day on I gave it my all. Coach Schluter had opened my eyes when I didn’t even know they were closed. I am now a sophomore in high school; I have grown 4 inches and 80 pounds in 2 years. All of this I did from being motivated to be something great that I once had the drive for. I had been in a cycle of trying to figure out how my future was going to go. Now, instead of trying so hard, I accept that the future is a mystery.

“The Final Attempt” by Safia Petersen

“In the hole,” the announcer yells at the triple jump pit. I walk over to the track and start warming up. Tension builds in my head, worried I'm going to scratch my last attempt. “On deck,” the announcer exclaims. I stand by the runway waiting for my turn. My mind is going 100 mph wondering how I'm going to do. “Up next,” the announcer tells me and gives me the okay to go. As I start running, I stay too focused on my steps and not the jump. I jump into the pit and the announcer says “Scratch.”

The next day at practice I am devastated. I have been thinking about what I can do to be better. I only have one more chance to beat my PR before my freshman season is over. I was so happy when I was put on varsity as a freshman but didn't realize the toll it would take on me. For the next week I stayed at the pit for extra practice while everyone else left. I worked on getting my steps down so I don't step over the board. I also worked on reaching so I can get further into the pit. “Only one week until districts," my coach says. This puts pressure on me realizing that I don't have much time to get better. I say to myself “You have one week to prove yourself; you're not going to make it.”

For the next week I work as hard as I can with my form and steps. I stay as late as I can when my coach is ready to leave. I do this until everything about my jump is perfect. I keep thinking to myself that I need to try harder. This is where I realize it is all mental. I need to get it in my head that I am good enough because I know I have the potential. As I am practicing, I work on thinking about all of the good things I have accomplished and that I don't need to be the best. “I’m only a freshman. I have three more years to prove myself” I think to myself. I try to stay positive and keep thinking I am good enough so that whatever happens will not matter.

The last day of practice has me stressing out of my mind. I start to believe that maybe all of my practice has paid off and I am good enough. “You have improved a lot this year” my coach says.

“Thanks, but I feel as if I haven't reached my full potential. Who is our competition tomorrow?” I ask.

“All of the teams are going to be hard. Most jumps are in the thirties.” This makes me stressed even more. I think to myself that even if I don't place, it is all about personal accomplishments. “If I beat my PR, I will be just as happy as if I placed,”

I wake up in the morning of districts trying to prepare myself while I get ready for the meet. As I ride the bus, I stay silent in my emotions, thinking of all the possibilities. Once I get there, I set my bag down and start tying on my spikes. I walk over to the runway and check in with the announcer. “First heat,” she says. I realize that I have to be ready for what happens no matter what. I think to myself how I need to be fully concentrated because this is my last chance.

As I am doing runthroughs, I can't seem to keep my steps consistent. Tension builds in my chest, and I start to doubt myself again. I went up for my first attempt without any confidence. “29 feet even,” the announcer says. I walk over to my coach, and she tells me I am a foot behind. So for the next jump, I move my mark up a foot. I walk up to my second attempt with more confidence than before because I think my mark might finally be right. “Scratch,” she yells. My smile drops from my face. “How could I have failed? I thought my marking was good.” I move my mark back to its original. I only have one more chance to make it right.

The warmup feels as if my heart's beating out of my chest. I get called up next. As I step onto the runway, it feels harder than usual. My legs feel like jelly and my head feels lighter than usual. I complete my jump and look back at the pit, and it looks like I jumped further than I have

before. “20 feet 4 inches,” the announcer says. I ran over to my coach with excitement written all over my face. She congratulates me and is almost as excited as I am. My work had finally paid off.

At the team meeting to receive our awards, all I can think about is that moment. Even if I didn't win the meet, I won in my head. Everything is mental and I have to put my mind to it to get it done. I realize that all of the work I put in will pay off. If I didn't give all of that extra effort and extra practice, then I wouldn't have succeeded at all. I learned a huge lesson that day, and I will never forget it.

“The 500 Club” by Madison Hampl

When I first saw the 500 Club wall in the library, I knew I had to find a way to get my name on there. It was a wall that showed everyone in the elementary school's history to get a total of five hundred AR points from taking online tests about books that they have read. There were only a few names on there when I first saw it, and I knew that meant it was going to be difficult to accomplish, but I was willing to do whatever it took to get my name on there. There was just one small problem.

I was never good at reading. A book that would take most kids my age five minutes to read would take me an hour to read. Both my kindergarten and first grade teachers said that this was because I had a slow processing speed. This just meant that it took me a lot longer to understand what the information that was given to me meant than most kids. My mom decided to help me learn to read so that I was at the same reading level as everyone else in my grade, which also meant that she would end up helping me achieve making it into the 500 Club.

My teachers had told my mom during Parent-Teacher Conferences that if she wanted to help me learn to read, she should have me practice reading out loud every day, and she should also read to me out loud. Mom decided to work on their first suggestion with me more since she already read to me every night before bed. She would give me books like *Go, OTTO! Go!* and *See Santa Nap* to read out loud to her.

She always had me read the title on the cover first, but I didn’t really care about what the cover said. I was always a lot more interested in the art on the cover than trying to learn to read the title. I would read at my own pace, which means that I would take five minutes to read a page that only had three words on it.

Mom always seemed like she would rather take the book out of my hands and read it to me herself than sit there listening to me slowly read a book that should have already been read through, but she didn't. She let me take as much time as I needed to in order to finish reading. She would even take me to the library to pick out new books to read, and I would get to do the reading challenges that the library came up with. Mom even made her own fun reading challenges for me to help encourage me to read more. She worked with me every day over the summer to help me improve my reading skills. I never saw any of this as me learning to read. I just saw that I was having fun reading with my mom.

I slowly got better at reading, and I was even able to read a lot faster than I could before. By the time I had to go back to school, I had improved my skills a lot. I remember how proud my mom was to hear that I was at the same reading level as my class. It inspired me to keep reading and improving my reading skills so that I could make it into the 500 Club.

I spent the next summer reading just as much as I had the year before. I continued to go to the library to pick out new books to read and participate in the reading challenges. Reading had become a hobby of mine that I loved. I knew that if reading a lot over the summer helped me get better at reading the year before, it could surely help me get better again this year.

When the next school year came around, I wasn't behind or at the same reading level of my class, but I was ahead of everyone else. My parents were shocked when they found out because they never expected me, the girl who was always behind her grade's reading level, to not only catch up with everyone else, but to also get so good at reading that I was ahead of my class. This, however, was just the beginning.

I kept reading more and more, which allowed me to take a lot more AR tests. I remember the very first time that I took an AR test that Mom was very nervous for me. She was worried

that I wouldn't be able to remember what had happened in the books when I took the test, especially the novels. She would have me give them to her so that she could reread them to me so that I was prepared to take a test over it. I didn't mind that she did this. I really enjoyed reading with her, but I did think it was a little silly that she would reread every story to me. I already knew what the whole story was about from reading it once, so the extra reading just seemed kind of pointless.

One day, Mom didn't have time to reread the story to me before I took the AR test over it. She was physically panicking over it. I would have rolled my eyes at her, but I didn't know how to. When I climbed into her old, rusty Jeep when she picked me up after school that day, she waited for me to shut the door before she bombarded me with questions about the AR test. "How did it go? Did you pass? Did you fail?"

I nodded my head even though she couldn't see me while I was sitting behind her. "I passed the test."

Ever since that day, Mom had stopped reading my books to me a second time because she also realized that I was able to memorize the story from reading it just once. I continued reading books day after day every year at the elementary school. I continued to get more and more AR points that brought me closer and closer to getting my name put up there on the library wall with all of the other members of the 500 Club. By the time I was in Fifth grade, I had almost achieved my goal.

I don't know why, but for some reason, fifth grade made me start to freak out a bit and wonder if I really could reach my goal. Maybe it was because after that year, I would be in sixth grade, which was all the way at the high school. This would be my last year at the elementary school, and it was also my last chance to get into the 500 Club. If I didn't get into it this year, I

would never be in the 500 Club. I started to panic. I didn't want to have worked so hard to make what felt like the biggest achievement in history, only to get nothing out of it.

I started reading even more than I had during previous years. I was determined to get my name up there whether it wanted to be or not. I wasn't going to let my goal out of my sight. I found as many AR books as I could that were worth a lot of points. I took lots of AR tests to ensure that I would get into that 500 Club.

After taking all of those AR tests, I had done it. I had gotten a total of five hundred AR points while in elementary school. This meant that I was finally in the 500 Club. I was so proud of myself, and my parents were super proud of me, too. They claimed that if someone would have told them that I was going to make it into the 500 Club back when I was in Kindergarten or First grade, they would have thought that person was joking because it seemed impossible for me to get anywhere near five hundred AR points. I didn't realize it then, but this experience taught me something. It taught me that if I work hard, I can accomplish anything, even when others think that it's impossible to do.

“The Night Of Black” by Camaro Bryant

The clock chimes thrice, and a chill creeps up my spine. Something is happening tonight, I can feel it. But who would believe me? No one, it doesn’t matter to anyone else, but I know I can prove it. Grab the gear, hurry.

RUN
RUN
RUN

Something is wrong, the night is colder than usual. Or is it in my head? Doesn’t matter, must not stop. Something creaks, a board. *Where*? I stop dead. Something's slumped in the corner, and it's moving. Barely, but it's twitching. What do I do? *Don’t Panic.* Should I help it? *Don’t panic.*

Worry
Questions
Fear ***Terror*** ***Dread***
Anxiety
Hope ***Despair***
Anguish ***Pity***
Horror
Alarm

My mind is scattered, and I can’t think straight. I approach-slowly-very, very slowly. Don't scare it. Whatever *it* is. I blink, and my blood runs cold. So, so cold. The… Thing, is gone. Where could it have gone? This is my home, something is in it, don’t panic no matter what.

SaGe
SsssagE.

Where is that coming from? Something is clenching my shoulder. I don’t want to turn around. NO. I won’t until I know what that thing was.
“*Sage*?” A familiar voice taunts.

No go away, I will not listen to you further. Not until I learn the truth! A jerk on my shoulder whirls me around. A face I know all too well. In this hell of a place. Something I wish was not in front of me, is looming above me with a concerned look on their face. It is my psychiatrist. I stare in dismay, looking at her concerned stare. I don’t care. It’s not my fault I'm here instead of at my- Wait, I was just at home. My face flushes pale as the cruel reality sharpens my gaze. She notices, like she always does. Her stare softened. She guides me back to my room. I still wonder

what that thing was. But now I know it was never real. I sit there realizing the extent of my hallucination, my mind has built for me. To finally escape this prison I've been trapped in for far too long, I'd have to fix more than my actions. I would have to fix my mind. She walks in, I read her nametag like I do every morning. *Jade,* my very own flesh and blood. My little sister. I failed her when I came here. So very, very badly.

Schizophrenia

So when I see her, every hellish day. I'm reminded of how much I've failed. How much I failed **her.** So I spend everyday, feeling that I don't deserve her.

End

Into the Deep Woods by Katerin Lopez

“The Last Laugh” by Lauren Beckman

Chapter 1: The Move

It was September 30, 1993. We live in Denver Colorado, we are currently in the situation of moving to San Francisco, California. An 18 hour drive I know! My parents are refusing to buy plane tickets because they say they're “too expensive,” well I guess not my parents, I should say my mom and her new boyfriend, Kyle. My dad died a couple years ago in a car crash. Also I don't really like Kyle very much. He's nothing like dad, and he’s kinda the whole reason we are moving because he lives there. Anyway I have a stepsister now, her name is Heather, she’s really weird and does not act like a normal kid should. She’s literally only 8! “Jordan!” my mom yelled, "It's time to go! Are you ready?!” “Yes mom, coming!” I say. I stumble downstairs with 2 suitcases in both my hands. “There she is!” Kyle yells, “you finally ready?” he says. “Yes.” I mumble as I make my way to the car. “Okay!” mom yells, “does everyone have what they need and ready to go?” “Yes” everyone says except Heather, her head buried in her book. “Alright then lets go!” Mom yells.

Chapter 2: Almost There

We were already 16 hours in, last night about 7 hours in, we stopped at a hotel to rest and went on today. I was just listening to some music, when Heather started staring mysteriously out the window. “Um Heather?” I said with genuine confusion, “are you okay….?” but she just completely ignored me and went back to her book. It was really strange. Anyway I tried to look at what kind of book she was reading, but every time I tried to look she just turned away in a different position. I tried not to be so worried about it but maybe when we got to our new house,(well for me and mom not for Heather or Kyle) then I could investigate. Heather was not a

talker that was for sure. I don't think I have heard her voice since yesterday, when a random little kid called her little clown doll ugly. She can get…..lets just say violent. She kinda screamed at the kid and punched him right in the face. Yeah no one's doing that again. But also at the same time she's not only weird. I kinda feel bad for her because she is not really liked in school I heard.

Chapter 3: The New House

After a couple more hours we were finally there! Heather still seemed off, but I tried not to worry about it because she's like that I guess. It was still weird though because this was literally her house. Anyway, once I got out of the car my jaw dropped. It was huge. It was a big white house with black window shutters and an old screen door, there was a lot of outgrown grass and trees in the back, there was also a little porch in the front with two beige rusty chairs. I gotta say, something about it gave me a bad feeling but I just went inside like the rest of them. To be honest, my mom didn't really seem to care. Or maybe she was just hiding not liking it so no one felt bad. Anyway I went upstairs to my room, Man…… it looked very bad. It literally smelled like cigarette smoke and mold. I could hear Heather coming up the stairs. She stopped in my room, looked at me for a sec, and set her little clown doll on my floor, and disappeared into her room. "Heather!" I yell, "I don't want this, why did you bring this to me?!", nothing but silence except my mom and Kyle's chattering downstairs. "Um…. ok?" I mutter to myself. I set the doll on my dresser for now.

Chapter 4: Nighttime

I come back upstairs right after dinner. Strangely the doll has moved a little. I did not think anything of it, it was just a doll, I should not be scared. “Time for bed!” mom yells. “Okay!” I yell back. Still nothing but silence from Heather. I went to brush my teeth, Heather was in there too. It was an awkward silence between us. She just kept staring at me with her beady little green eyes. I left the bathroom because I felt extremely uncomfortable. After that I went to go put my pajamas on and tuck myself in. I could hear Kyle already tucking Heather in. My mom came upstairs as well and stopped in my room and checked If I was all set. “Need anything?” she said “no im good” I told her. “Alright I love you” she told me, “Love you mom!” I said back, she gave me a kiss on my forehead and left. Silence after that. It's really weird, like super weird. It was never usually this quiet……

Chapter 5: The Clown

I actually fell asleep very well until this time. I woke up at about 2 in the morning needing to go to the bathroom. I made sure to go really quickly because something about this house is off. Once I got back to my room the clown doll was on my bed. “Hi!,” It said, "I'm Ronny! Let's play hide and seek, I’ll count you seek!” “OH MY GOD” I yelled “MOM, MOM, MOM!!!” I yelled “oh, she’s not here to help you!, but I can!” I sprint downstairs, I almost fainted right there……..she was dead. And Kyle was nowhere to be found, I started sobbing and I sprint back upstairs to Heather’s room. She was not there either. I go back to my room, heather standing right there in her white nightgown, staring right at me. “Um…. h-heather p-please…w-what are you doing?? Little did I know this was the end for me…. Heather let out a small giggle, and threw a little clown at me then Heather pushed out of the glass window. I was gone.

“The Wrong Friend” by Blaine Mears

Chapter 1: The Weird Neighbor

Last year we lived in Tampa Bay, Florida but my mom made us move because she got “a new job” but I know it's because of dad. They just recently divorced since they were disagreeing too much as well as fighting and now he doesn't have custody of my brother and me anymore. Now we live in St. Joseph, Missouri and we moved into a creepy old Victorian house right on the corner of town with my brother Hunter, my mom Jess, and me. It's a four bedroom house with this creepy old spare bedroom with nothing in it but cobwebs and a closet. We moved into our bedrooms and got ready for bed. My mom made the spare bedroom into her office and I put some of my art supplies in the room too. Right when I was gonna check out the closet in her office there was a knock at the door. My mind immediately thought who was knocking at almost 10:00 PM? I went to open the door and an old guy that looked about 80 was standing there consistently knocking even after I yelled im coming. When I opened the door he screamed in my face, “Do you know what you're getting yourself into?!” I asked what he was talking about but he yelled it again even louder. “Do you know what you're getting yourself into?!” My mom came downstairs in her pajamas because of the noise and the guy yelled again way louder this time. My mom finally screamed, “Who are you!” The old man looked stunned like we were the ones screaming for 5 minutes straight and said, “Do you know who owned this house before you?” We later found out the mistake we made moving in this house.

Chapter 2: The Closet

The old man said, “Maribeth Stewart lived here..” Me and my mom both asked in unison, “Who is Maribeth Stewart?” I started to get very creeped out. I didn’t know if it was because the

old man was tiny and wrinkly and looked straight out of a horror movie or how by now it was almost 11:00 PM and we have been standing here at our door trying to understand what this guy was talking about for an hour. He started to explain the woman that he mentioned and said, “Maribeth Stewart was the girlfriend of Joe Stewart and mother of Ophelia and Steven. One night Joe, Ophelia, and Steven went missing without a trace. Many people thought she did something to them but many people thought someone broke in because there were signs of forced entry.” The old man then added, “I saw Mary Beth running out of her house that night screaming they told me to! They told me to do it!” At this point me and my mom had goosebumps all up our arms and legs and to make it even worse the old guy didn’t say anything else and walked back to his house and I swear I heard laughing. I was horrified, my mom looked at me and said, “go to bed. Now!” I ran upstairs and when I got to my room I looked down at my mom and she was standing staring out the door at the old guys house. Since I wasn’t thinking right, I decided to go look in the spare bedroom since I haven’t looked inside yet and I opened the closet and there was a big blue tote. The tote lid had scratches all over it. I opened the lid to the tote and there were even more scratches inside with a teddy bear. The teddy bear had one eye ripped out and had a purple bow around the neck of it. I closed the tote and kept the teddy bear in my hand and walked to my room. I set the teddy bear on my vanity and went to sleep.

Chapter 3: A New Friend

I woke up in the morning at around 6:00 AM and I got ready for school. My mom made Hunter and me stand in front of our door and hold signs for the first day. Mine said, “Maggie Anderson's Last first day of high school, First day as a senior!” I got in my car and started driving to school and this black Toyota Corolla kept following behind me for a couple miles and

almost hit my back bumper a couple times. When I finally got to school I parked and walked in the main door. I stood by my locker and waited for the bell to ring. While I was waiting for the first period bell to ring some girl came up to me and grabbed my shoulder. She told me, “Hey! I'm Meg Stewart, wanna be friends? I told her, “Sure, I'm Maggie Anderson.” She asked me where I lived and I told her, “I live in Maribeth Stewart's old house.” Meg said, “Oh, that's cool I guess.” Telling a random girl with the same last name as an alleged killer probably wasn’t the best idea. Later when the bell rang I went to history class and we learned a little about the town’s history and we learned about Meribeth Stewart. My teacher taught us how she was a teen mom and how she's probably still in high school. At the end of the day when I was cleaning out my locker Meg came up to me and said, “wanna hang out at my house?” I was confused why she asked that when I just met her but I said yes and we walked to her car. When we got to her car I remembered it from earlier. It was the same car that was following me on the way to school. I thought of it as a coincidence and didn’t think anymore about it and got in her car.

Chapter 4: The Wrong Wemail

We made it to her house and it was this really old house that looked honestly abandoned, like no one was living in it. When we walked inside I asked where her parents were and she said, “Oh, they are on a business trip” She didn’t sound honest but I just kept looking around her house. Her house smelled like old people and had a little more cobwebs than usual. She said, “I'm gonna go get pizza from the store next door so you stay here I will be back.” I agreed and kept looking around. I walked downstairs into the basement and found an old computer. There was a sticky note on the desk next to the computer that said, “6824” I typed in the numbers on the passcode bar and the computer turned on. There was a default wallpaper and I clicked on the

Wemail app and the Wemail, MaryStewart088@Wemail came up which is weird because she told me her name was Meg Stewart. Then I heard the front door open and I started to walk upstairs and I walked past a for sale sign leaned against the stairs. The sign looked like it was dug up from the front yard. I kept walking and that's when questions started rushing through my mind, Why does the house look abandoned?, Why is her Wemail Mary?, Why is there a for sale sign?, and finally, is Meg really Meribeth? I need to get out of this house fast. I ran upstairs and "Meg" was standing at the top of the stairs and asked what I was doing. I told her I needed to leave and I started for the door. She kept saying no come back and I turned around and she was chasing me with a knife. I started screaming and I finally got home. I ran upstairs and noticed the teddy bear on my vanity had a red light flashing in its eye. I walked over to it and saw…the eye was recording.

What makes a book Gothic literature?

Like any genre, Gothic fiction is constantly evolving, but most Gothic novels share a few defining characteristics:

An atmospheric setting

Whether it's a crumbling castle, an isolated manor house, a mist-covered moor or even a modern university, the setting is more than just a backdrop. Gothic locations create a sense of unease and often reflect the emotional state of the characters.

Mystery and suspense

Rather than relying on sudden scares, Gothic novels slowly build tension through hidden secrets, unexplained events and the constant feeling that danger is just around the corner.

Morally complex characters

Gothic protagonists and villains are rarely entirely good or evil. They're often driven by obsession, grief, guilt or ambition, making them psychologically compelling and unpredictable.

The supernatural – or the suggestion of it

Ghosts, curses and mysterious happenings are common, but Gothic fiction doesn't always provide clear answers. Sometimes the greatest mystery is whether the threat is truly supernatural or simply exists in the minds of the characters.

Carlick, Stephen, and Eppie Shepherd. “What is Gothic Literature? A Beginner's Guide to the Genre.” *Penguin Books*, 17 August 2026, https://www.penguin.co.uk/discover/articles/what-is-gothic-literature. Accessed 27 October 2026

.