

HAUNTED MISADVENTURE

A Halloween Tale by Brandon Pack

On Halloween night, most children dress up in costumes. They go Trick-or-Treating, or to a carnival at their church or school. Year after year, Jack Macy and his friend Hector Alvarez went through this same routine time and time again. This year they decided to do something different.

While sharing ghost stories with Jack's class, his teacher told him and his classmates about a local legend – The Ghost Car of the Old Road. Back in the 1950s, when their city was still more of a town and there was only one elementary school, something tragic happened. Two teenagers – one the quarterback on the football team, and the other the captain of the cheer squad – were killed in a collision with a train while driving across railroad tracks. It was all over the newspapers. After a year or two, people moved on. They no longer talked about it; they tried to forget it. And that's when the sightings happened: a flickering, haunting car would retrace the steps of that fateful night. Jack, being the mischievous middle child that he was, decided to skip the annual festivities and, with his friend Hector, to see if they couldn't catch a glimpse of the legendary automobile themselves.

Jack was in his upstairs bedroom, still applying a bit of watercolor paint to his face, when he heard the unmistakable sound of a half dozen pebbles tapping his window all at once. He darted toward the window and looked down to his front lawn to find a rather unconvincing Kung Fu master glaring up at him.

"Hey Hector!" Jack shouted. "Go to the front door!"

Hector gave him a thumbs up and strafed to the right until Jack could no longer see him. Jack then turned around, looked at himself from head to toe in his mirror, and growled. He was supposed to be a zombie pirate, but he wasn't very good at doing the makeup. So his white button up shirt, black jeans, metal hangar hook and plastic laser sword needed one final piece to make sure that all the cool kids wouldn't think he was a Jerry's Kid. He quickly stretched out the black rubber band, slipped it over the circumference of his head, and then smiled as blackness covered his left eye.

"Now I'm a pirate!" Jack laughed.

The boy then ran out of his room, down the hall, and then sprinted down the stairs so fast it sounded like a machine gun firing. He screeched to a halt in front of the large white door before him. He unlatched it, unbolted it, unlocked it, turned the handle and then gave it a tug. The wannabe Kung Fu master's eyes beamed as he saw Jack up close.

"Nice eye patch!" Hector shouted.

"It'll do," Jack said. "Did you bring it?"

Hector nodded, and then pulled out his older sister's cell phone. It was pretty, pink and sparkly, and not the sort of thing they were proud to carry. But it had a video camera, and that was all that mattered.

"Great! Let's go!" shouted Jack.

The two boys rode their rickety bikes speedily away toward the orange Halloween sun that looked strangely pumpkin-like that twilight. They made a sharp left onto 13th street and nearly crashed into a stroller. Before the angry mother could react properly, they were off and away, too busy to be scolded. For ten blocks they rode past row after row of festive looking houses decorated perfectly for the occasion. Hundreds of moms and tots scampered up and down the sidewalks, carrying brightly colored bags and buckets for their newly acquired sugary treasures. Plastic witches, rubber skeletons, and thousands of feet of artificial spider web could be seen at house after house, each spooky landscape crowned by a collection of freshly carved Jack-O-Lanterns who, by the looks of their faces, approved of Jack and Hector's plans with a certain smug satisfaction. Rather than celebrating the most haunted night of the year by stuffing their faces with sweets, they were setting out to honor the holiday's more primal traditions.

At the end of 13th street was a massive, weed infested field. Posted on an old weather worn sign were the words: "Six Acres for Sale." McDougal Farm was its name when it was occupied. There used to be a farmhouse in the middle, but it burned down in the Old Road Fire of '63. Where once pumpkins, corn and watermelon grew, there were giant rows of brambles, discombobulated hedgehogs, and cautious cottontails who were ever wary of swift shadows overhead. Ravens, hawks and owls often perched in those trees, searching for easy prey.

As Jack and Hector pedaled their bikes down the dirt road that was little more than a path, they came to a fork. On one side was a path leading around the woods. The other was the beginning of a road which began at the end of the McDougal Farm and disappeared into the forest originally known as McDougal's Wood. Now it went by another name, christened by the events of late summer, 1963.

The Old Road Wood.

"Should we go around?" Hector asked nervously.

"What, you afraid of trees now?" asked Jack.

"No," said Hector. "But maybe what's in them."

"The other path will take us an extra hour there, and an extra back. There's nothing in those woods scarier than a zombie pirate or a Kung Fu master!"

Hector chuckled. "Okay, man. Let's do this."

Jack stepped up into his bike and pushed down as hard as he could with his right foot. It took a moment for the wheel to give, but soon he was riding along at a decent pace. Hector let him take the lead as they passed under the first branches of the wall of trees that marked the beginning of the forest. As they left the sunlight, the air around them dropped about fifteen degrees, and Jack breathed in the cold air deep into his lungs. As he exhaled every few seconds, he noticed a white puff leaving his mouth each time.

The Old Road wended left and right through the wood. The deeper into the trees that that they rode, the louder the noises of the forest. The sounds of chirping birds, clicking insects, chattering squirrels, and hooting owls filled Jack's ears.

In the distance he heard a crashing sound through the trees. There was a large thud as something heavy hit the ground. They heard the rumble and growl of a large animal. They picked up the pace on their bicycles. The wheels rattled over rough ground. They veered to the right to dodge a fallen log in the road. They pulled left to avoid an overhanging thorn bush. They ducked to evade the low lying branches of a dead tree that resembled a giant hand

reaching out to pluck them from their seats. And then they came to a bridge running over a babbling brook. It was just wide enough for a car. The forest floor suddenly dropped on either side about six feet, with an opposite slope that looked more like eight. There was no clear path down, and certainly none on the other side. Both boys stood on their feet, straddling their bikes.

Jack studied the bridge, while Hector's eyes searched the surrounding treetops for anything hungry, nasty or awful. That sound they heard before was probably just a bear scratching its back on a tree trunk, or a wild boar digging for mushrooms. Or a cougar. Or a wild dog growling at a cougar. But that was all.

Jack swallowed hard. Maybe the woods weren't a good idea after all.

"Jack, what are we waiting for?" Hector stammered.

"It's an old bridge," Jack explained. "It might not hold."

"Yeah, but there's something out there, Jack," Hector replied. "What's that, a six foot drop? No biggie."

"Yeah, but water below, and no way out of that little ravine for a while." Jack thought to himself for a moment. There was another loud crash in the distance, and a growl. Whatever was out there, it was getting closer. "I'll go first."

Hector nodded anxiously. Jack reluctantly climbed off of his bike, walked to the edge of the rotting bridge, and then paused for another moment. Several of the planks were missing, many of them had termite holes. He reached one foot out onto the first plank. It gave way about half an inch. He reached out his second foot and pulled his bicycle onto the bridge. He paused for a few seconds. He then continued. Inch by inch, he slowly made his way across the bridge. It was only when he was halfway across that he noticed that two planks were missing right along the center. And then three planks after that. He would have put all of his weight onto one plank, with two missing before and three missing after, reach out his left leg, push his bicycle to the other side, and then somehow pull himself across.

He looked back to Hector.

"Hurry up!" Hector demanded. "I've got grass growing around my shoes!"

Jack growled in frustration. Hector simply didn't appreciate the situation that he was in. He decided just to go for it. He reached out his left foot, placed it on the middle plank, and then put all of his weight onto it as he pulled his bike along. This next step would be more difficult. Once again, he reached out his foot. Only this time it was too far.

"I'm stuck!" he shouted.

"Whatcha mean, stuck?" Hector replied.

"I'm gonna fall!" Jack shouted. "Can you help me?"

Hector laughed. "Okay. I told you we should have gone around."

The Kung Fu master walked boldly out onto the bridge.

"Careful! You want the bridge to break!" Jack shouted.

Hector glared at him and then jumped up and down several times.

"It's not gonna break, moron!" said Hector.

And that's when it happened. At first the bridge simply shook. Then there was a large snapping sound. And then, before they knew what was happening, the world around them was a blur and they were falling. A second later they crashed into the creek and were standing

ankle deep in water. And a few seconds after that, Jack's bike came crashing down in the water next to them.

"Dang bridge! I hate bridges!" shouted Hector.

"You shouldn't have pushed so hard!" shouted Jack.

"I didn't! You're too heavy!" said Hector. "And now we're all wet!"

Both boys froze at the sound of rumbling approaching. Before, it sounded like a wild animal eating its dinner. Now, it sounded different – almost mechanical.

"Quick, give me a boost!" said Jack.

Hector put his hands together and hoisted Jack up the side of the bank wall. Jack was just high enough to peer over the blades of grass. In the distance, through the trees, he saw what appeared to be headlights.

"It's a car!" Jack shouted. "A car coming down the road!"

Hector dropped Jack and ran away from the bridge.

"Where you going?!" Jack asked.

"That's the Ghost Car of Highway 23!" Hector shouted.

"No it's not!" Jack shouted.

It was no use. Hector sped away downstream. Jack followed after him for about ten feet, but then turned around to look at the broken bridge. A loud engine roared. Headlights lit up the far bank and the nearby trees. The car was going to plunge right into the stream! Jack didn't know what to do. The sound of the engine grew closer and closer and closer. And then, to his shock, it happened.

A car, glowing in the twilight, hovered right over the creek on the arch that would have been the bridge - suspended only on air!

All of the breath left Jack's lungs. An icy wind blasted through him, ignoring the jacket he was wearing and chilling him right to the bones. Goosebumps sprouted all over his body. His spine shivered. His knees buckled. And then, only then, did the implications of what he saw fully dawn on him.

Ghosts were real. It was Halloween night. And there he stood, cold, wet, tired, stranded in the middle of The Old Road Forest.

Alone.

Jack stood there for ten minutes trying to figure out the best thing to do. He knew that the stream eventually flowed out of the forest and through the fields on the outskirts of town. Once he was out of the trees, he could find his bearings and walk home. But what if he could find a way up the bank? Would he be able to find the Old Road again and walk out that way? And where was Hector?

All of those questions in his mind smacked right into the wall of reality when he heard a loud, human scream coming from about fifty yards away. Jack abandoned his bicycle and ran after the scream. In the water, hopping from rock to rock, occasionally splashing knee deep into water, he made his way toward the sound.

The bank of the stream leveled off. Leading up and to the left were a set of fresh footprints, about the size of Hector's feet. He followed them until they disappeared into the mist. He heard another scream. The tracks continued for another twenty yards, and then they took a sharp right. The mist was getting thicker. He followed them another ten yards until they reached a large patch of pine needles and leaves. He heard a third scream, only louder. He

could only see about five feet in front of him now. He followed the sound until he discovered the source: Hector, lying awkwardly at the bottom of a pit, six feet down.

"Oh thank God!" Hector shouted.

"What happened?" Jack asked.

"I was running," he said, paused for a moment, then continued, "and then all of the sudden the ground disappeared and I fell. Hurt my leg. Can't stand!"

"Who would dig a hole that deep and just leave it there?" asked Jack.

A wind picked up. It blew the leaves. In the distance, there was the howl of a wolf. The mist began to clear, and Jack saw a nearby tree. He walked over to it and tugged on one of the branches. After a brief struggle, he pulled it free. He ran over to the pit where Hector was lying helplessly. He lowered the branch just within Hector's reach.

"Grab onto it!" Jack shouted.

Hector grabbed onto the branch. Jack tugged and tugged as hard as he could. It was no use. He simply wasn't strong enough to pull Hector out of the pit.

"Go get help!" Hector shouted.

"I have no idea how to get back here," said Jack. "I'll never find this spot again."

The mist around Jack continued to clear. More trees materialized from the gray; then tall rocks, standing upright, in neat little rows. More trees appeared, and more rocks. Then Jack realized that they weren't rocks.

"Um, Hector?" Jack asked.

"What!" Hector growled.

"I think we're in the middle of a graveyard!" Jack stammered. "I see something in the distance. Moving. Slowly!"

Hector screamed. Moments later, he somehow managed to claw his way out of the pit he was in. His fingers, covered in dirt, began to bleed. Jack looked back down into the pit and saw the source of Hector's terror: the top of an old, wooden coffin.

"Quiet!" said Jack. "Listen!"

The two spooked boys cupped their icy cold hands to their stinging ears to hear the distant sounds. They slowly crept toward it as quietly as their sad, wet legs could carry them. There was an echo of voices. They walked a few more yards. They neared a yellow patch in the mist.

They found two men digging up a grave. Both of them were wearing blue jeans, white t-shirts, and had greasy, slicked backed hair. Black Converse sneakers were on their feet. They couldn't have been more than 25. Jack remembered from a movie that teenagers used to dress like that back in the 1950s. The greasers' conversation went something like this:

"Jailbird Tony said Old Man McDougal was buried with it, didn't he?" said the first greaser.

"That's what he said," said the second. "Part of his will. He wanted to bribe St. Peter to let him into Heaven if his old lady was right about all that churchy stuff."

"Idiot," said the first. "Probably burning up down there as we speak."

Both of the men stopped digging in the ground, held their shovels at their sides, and glared over at where Jack and Hector were standing. Jack and Hector froze in their places.

"Hey, they're here," said the first.

Jack felt electricity tingle up and down his body. Could the two men see him and Hector through the mist? He heard a noise behind him. He and Hector turned around just in time to see headlights approaching in the distance. The two boys ducked behind a gravestone and watched as the car approached. To Jack's amazement, it was the same car that floated over the broken bridge. The sound of the engine was unmistakable. No engine he had ever heard before sounded quite like that – one part machine, one part beast. The car was amazing. An old 1950s Chevrolet with wings, white sidewall tires. It was electric blue, and glowed in the dark as if under a black light.

The door opened. Out stepped, would you believe it, Frankenstein. A moment later, another green face, but wearing a white formal dress. Frankenstein took off his mask and revealed himself to be a high school aged young man with short, blonde hair. The bride of Frankenstein removed her mask, revealing a beautiful young woman a year or two younger. Her long auburn hair was tied in a knot behind her head, and she had sparkling emerald eyes.

"Did you get the keys, man?" asked the first greaser.

Frankenstein tossed him a paper bag. The greaser opened it and withdrew a ring of large, bronze keys that flashed in the glow of a nearby lantern hanging on tree. Jack didn't know what the greaser was looking at, but from where he and Hector were hiding, he guessed there were numbers or letters on the keys.

"Found it!" shouted the greaser.

The second greaser hopped back into the hole they were digging. Jack saw a few more shovel loads of dirt flying up into the air and onto the pile of dirt behind the hole. After a few seconds, the second greaser shouted in excitement. The other greaser hopped down into the hole with his shovel and more dirt came flying out. For a few minutes, Jack saw nothing but dirt flying in the air and Frankenstein trying to kiss his bride.

"What are they doing?" Hector whispered.

"Grave robbing, like in Egypt," Jack replied.

He remembered reading a story once about Egyptian grave robbers and the Mummy's curse. The thieves always thought they got away, until bad things started happening. People started dying. Ancient Egyptian Pharaoh's walked the earth once again, hunting down the greedy plunderers who dared to disturb their tombs.

The sound of metal screeching on metal rang in their ears. The two greasers lifted something heavy up out of the hole. A coffin. Frankenstein jumped in to help them balance, and together the three of them placed the old wooden coffin onto the ground next to a nearby gravestone. One of the greasers produced a crowbar, and within seconds, was prying the lid off the rotting coffin. Sixty seconds later, the lid came off. The two greasers, Frankenstein and his bride just stared down into the coffin, mouths gaping, eyes wide.

"I'm not touching it," said the first greaser.

"Neither am I," said the second.

They both looked to Frankenstein.

"Don't look at me. This was your guy's idea," said the blonde teenager.

Jack wanted badly to look inside the coffin. He raised his head a few inches; not far enough. He rose a little more; still not far enough. He crawled out from behind the gravestone he and Hector were hiding behind. It was too far.

"Hey, who invited the ankle-biters!" shouted one of the greasers.

Jack and Hector were on their feet in an instant. They ran away from the scene as fast as they could. Poor Hector's ankle was sprained, and he fell down after ten feet. One of the greasers grabbed Hector, while the other chased after Jack.

Jack scuttled across the graveyard, dodging tree after tree, until he reached a wrought iron fence. He heard Hector screaming behind him as he attempted to get a foothold on the iron bars. Five seconds passed, and the second greaser and Frankenstein were on him. The greaser pulled out the handle of a switchblade.

"Look kid, we gonna do this the easy way, or the hard way?" said the greaser.

Jack couldn't take his eyes off the switchblade handle. The greaser chuckled and then flipped the switch. Out popped a little black line.

"What the heck are you guys doing in a graveyard, anyway?" asked Frankenstein. "And what are you supposed to be, a dead pirate or something?"

"A zombie pirate," said Jack.

"What's a zombie?" asked Frankenstein.

"You know, Resident Evil, Night of the Living Dead?" said Jack.

"You playing tricks on us?" asked the greaser.

"Come on, haven't you seen Pirates of the Carribean?" asked Jack.

"Is that a movie?" asked the greaser.

"One of the best movies ever! And definitely the coolest ride at Disneyland."

"What's Disneyland?" asked the greaser.

Jack rolled his eyes. Were these two guys stupid or what? Everyone knew about Pirates of the Carribean. Even if you've never been to Disneyland, it's the most famous ride.

"Hey, I got an idea," said Frankenstein. "Make the kid do it."

The greaser looked curiously to Frankenstein, and then back at Jack.

"Alright kid, I'll tell you what," said the greaser. "You do one thing for us, and we'll let you and your pal hit the road. Got it?"

Jack thought about it for a second. "Depends what it is."

"Don't be a wise guy," said the greaser. "Follow me."

Jack followed the greaser and Frankenstein back across the graveyard. The greaser started styling his hair with the switchblade – Jack realized it was just a comb. He thought about running away, disappearing into the trees. He thought about telling them to take a hike. But he couldn't leave Hector behind. Even if he managed to climb that iron fence before they caught him, he wouldn't have gone far.

All of those thoughts rushed through his mind so fast that he nearly forget where he was, what night it was, and just exactly what he was probably about to do. Reality landed on him like an anvil as the two young men led him to the wooden coffin, where the other greaser had Hector in his clutches while the auburn haired beauty looked upon the scene with disgust.

Old Man McDougal lied in the coffin – or at least what was left of him. A brown skeleton, dressed in a nice Sunday suit held tightly onto a small, wooden chest. Without thinking, Jack reached down into the coffin and grabbed the small chest. He then placed it effortlessly on the ground.

"What's in it?" Jack asked.

"Treasure," said Frankenstein. "Gold, silver, diamonds."

The second greaser released Hector and came over with the keys. He bent down, picked up the chest, and then with one quick motion, unlocked it before Jack's eyes. The young man's nervous fingers unlatched chest. He opened it slowly at first, and then pulled it wide open. Inside was a black and white baseball card, a large ring with ruby in the center, and then a small, almost empty velvet bag. The greaser tossed the bag to Frankenstein. Frankenstein opened it up in his hand. Five golden coins fell out, of a make and variety Jack had never seen before. The greaser took one look at the baseball card and then tossed it onto the ground.

Jack quickly picked up the card. His eyes went wide, and his heart began to pound. The Great Bambino, the Sultan of Swat, the Caliph of Clout: Babe Ruth. Every kid in America knew who Babe Ruth was, because of that movie that their teachers forced them to watch every June before school let out. He wondered how much the card was worth.

"Hey, gimme that!" shouted Frankenstein.

Jack handed him the card. He then walked over to Hector who was sitting helplessly next to the hole in the ground, rubbing his swollen ankle.

"We got what we came for," said the greaser. "Let's get out of here."

"What about them?" asked Frankenstein.

The greaser looked at Jack and Hector.

"You terds want a ride?" said the greaser, extending his hand.

Beyond them was the electric blue classic Chevrolet, still glowing like a lantern in the eerie light of a full Halloween moon. Jack felt himself floating along mindlessly, following the beautiful bride of Frankenstein into the back seat of the car.

The interior of the car was a sight to behold. Plush leather seats. Thick, blue carpet upholstery. Chrome trim everywhere. Every time the moon peeked through as the wind caressed the treetops, little stars twinkled inside the cab, creating a dreamlike picture. The air inside the car was ice cold, and the seats were like blocks of ice. Jack began to shiver, but was comforted by Hector's warmth as he sat down clumsily in the seat next to him. The bench seats in the back of that car were so wide, he and Hector had no problem sitting between the green eyed beauty and one of the slick thugs.

Frankenstein entered the car, took one look at the seating arrangement in the back seat, and thumbed his disapproval. Jack saw the young lady smile, and she traded places with the greaser in the front passenger seat. Now, he was less comfortable, having to breathe the arm pit stench of the greaser, a sharp elbow in his ribs. He much preferred leaning up against the soft, beautiful girl, but anything was better than walking back to town in the dark of night- especially that night.

Frankenstein started the engine again. It roared to life like a lion, and the entire car rattled as the transmission connected. The greasers each lit a cigarette, and then rolled down the windows to let the smoke out. Jack breathed in the smoke and coughed. The smell always made him sick. Didn't those two jerks know they were killing themselves slowly with those death sticks? The two in the front seat didn't seem to mind. Jack couldn't believe they were letting these two goons smoke in such a nice, antique car.

"What do you think those coins are worth?" asked Frankenstein.

"Couple hundred, maybe," said the goon next to Jack. "But that ring. And the Babe Ruth card? I'll have to shop around for a buyer."

“Sounds good, Daddy-O,” said Frankenstein. “After we drop you and the twerps off, we’re gonna go play back seat bingo.”

Jack sighed in disgust. If back seat bingo was anything like tonsil hockey, macking, smacking, smooching, or swapping saliva, he didn’t want to hear anything more about it. He knew that his older brother liked girls, and that his younger brother hated girls. He was in that awkward place where girls started liking boys, but boys still hated girls, and it was all just a disgusting mess. He had even had a girlfriend last month. But when she tried to hold his hand, he freaked out and hid in the boy’s bathroom until lunch recess was over.

“Hey, you got any Mountain Dew?” asked Jack.

“We aren’t in the mountains, kid,” said the greaser next to him.

“No, the drink Nimrod,” Jack replied.

“Never heard of it,” said the greaser.

“How about a bottle of water,” Jack asked.

“Water? In a bottle? Are you kidding me?”

The four young adults in the car started laughing at Jack. Apparently, there was something funny about what he said. He couldn’t quite figure it out. So he decided to ignore them and look around the car. There wasn’t much in it, except a newspaper tucked in a pocket on the back of one of the seats. He pulled it out and opened it to the front page.

October 31st, 1953

Jack was amazed. He had never read a paper from so long ago. Sixty years, to the day. He wondered what was happening in October 1953. He flipped through the pages. A Russian guy named Stalin was dead, and they were trying to find a new leader. Packard Motor Company was going under. Jack wondered what a Packard was. The New York Yankees were celebrating their World Series victory over the Brooklyn Dodgers. Jack laughed to himself – the Dodgers were one of the worst teams in baseball.

Jack looked up from his paper. It was almost pitch black outside as they drove down the Old Road, through the forest, on the way to Highway 23. From inside the luxurious vehicle, sitting in between two strong guys, the spooky woods didn’t seem so bad. He nearly forgot about his close encounter with the ghost car.

His heart skipped a beat.

“How’d you guys get over that bridge?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” asked Frankenstein.

“The bridge,” Jack replied. “I couldn’t even walk across! How’d you get a car over?!”

“I drove it, weirdo,” said Frankenstein.

Nothing was making any sense. Jack had seen the car, with his own eyes, glide right through the air. Or had he? Could his mind be playing tricks on him? Did he hit his head on a rock when he fell?

All of a sudden, the car’s engine gurgled, stuttered, warbled, and died. The car lurched to a stop. Frankenstein growled and then punched the steering wheel several times.

“Out of gas, boys,” said the driver.

The greaser next to Jack took one long puff of his cigarette, exhaled the disgusting smoke out of his nose, and then pointed his hand out the window and up the road.

“I see the highway up there, just beyond the railroad tracks,” said the greaser. “Come on. My brother and I will push.”

With that, the two sweaty, stinky, muscular grease monkeys hopped out of the car, placed a hand on the door and on the roof, and pushed with all of their might.

"Should I put it in neutral?" asked Frankenstein.

"What do you think, knucklehead?!" shouted the greaser next to Jack.

Frankenstein laughed to himself, and then shifted the car into neutral. The two oafs outside pushed with all of their might. Inch by inch the car began to move. Jack leaned into Hector, who was starting to fall asleep.

"You alright, man?" Jack asked.

Hector jerked awake. "Yeah," he whispered.

"Sounds like they're dropping us off in town," Jack continued. "We'll use your sister's cell phone to call somebody. You still have it, right?"

Hector checked his pockets. He sighed in disappointment.

"Must of fallen out somewhere," he said.

"I'm sure one of these dorks has a cell phone," Jack assured him.

"What's a cell phone?" asked the bride of Frankenstein.

Jack blushed as he looked into her deep, green, soothing eyes. She was one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen. He had to remind himself that girls were still gross.

"What country are you from?!" Jack asked.

"Yeah, even starving kids in Sudan have a cell phone!" Hector shouted.

"I think it's past your bedtime, sweetie," said the young woman. "Why don't you close your eyes, and I'll wake you up when we're back in town."

Something about the way she said made Jack feel uneasy. There was a hint of annoyance and disgust in her voice, though she was trying to disguise it. Jack tried to think of something else. Anything. He looked out the window. He saw the railroad tracks up ahead. And then, before he knew it, there was a clunk beneath the car. The whole thing jerked to a stop, as if it hit a brick wall.

"Transmission locked!" said Frankenstein. "You'll have to rock it back and forth."

"It's too heavy!" shouted one of the greasers. "Stupid tires are stuck on the tracks!"

Frankenstein turned around, glared at Jack and Hector, and made a head motion toward Jack's door.

"Scram," he said. "Or get out and help push."

Jack and Hector climbed out of the car. It was surprisingly warmer outside than inside the vehicle. The two smelly, filthy greasers pushed and pushed on the car, and it rocked back and forth. They tried different rhythms, different angles, and even switched sides.

"Me and my brother will walk back to town, get some gas, and we'll be back in two hours," said the greaser next to Jack. "You guys wait here, and stay warm."

"What about the chest?" asked Frankenstein.

"I trust you," said the greaser. "Besides, we know where you live."

"Right," said Frankenstein. "Go get the gas you jerks!"

Jack and Hector climbed back into the car, closed the doors, and sank deep into the plush, leather seats. It was still colder in the car, but they felt safer in there than outside.

"And now we wait," said Frankenstein.

The young lady scooted over on the bench and put her head on her boyfriend's shoulder. Jack and Hector both sat next to the doors and leaned their heads on the windows.

Jack's breath formed a cloud on the glass. He drew a pumpkin. He blew again, formed another cloud, and then wrote his name.

He then fell asleep.

It was a dreamless sleep. The kind that almost doesn't count. He awoke to the sound of a loud horn. His vision was blurry. He was still in the car. He looked over at Hector. His friend was fast asleep. He peered up into the front seat. Frankenstein and his girlfriend were snoozing away. A light shone through his window. He looked out toward it, gazing into the distance. He gasped in horror!

Jack reached over to Hector's door, pulled the handle, pushed it wide open, and then shoved a startled Hector out onto the railroad tracks. He leapt out of the car, slammed the door shut, ran up to the driver's side door and knocked repeatedly on the window.

"Wake up! A train!" he shouted.

The two sleeping teenagers did not stir. Jack tried to open the door. It was locked. He tried the back door, but it was locked as well. He pounded on the window as hard as he could, and as long as he could.

"Jack!" Hector shouted from ten feet away. "Run!"

Jack darted away from the car five seconds before the train plowed into it. There was a loud crash, the screeching of metal on metal, and sparks flew everywhere. Hundreds of metal scraps flew in every direction. Jack and Hector ducked behind a tree, and narrowly avoided being pierced with hundreds of flying metal sprockets, gears, bolts, and the like.

After three minutes, the train had passed. Jack was afraid to run back out to the tracks to see what happened to car and its occupants. He couldn't believe what just happened! It was just like that old story from the 1950s, where two teenagers were killed on that very spot. Jack took Hector's arm over his shoulder and together they bravely crossed the tracks. In the distance they could see what was left of that beautiful car, wrinkled up like a ball of aluminum foil. He nearly vomited, thinking about what must have happened to the teenage boy dressed like Frankenstein and his girlfriend, dressed in a bridal gown. They probably would have grown up and gotten married, had kids, lived a long happy life. All of that gone in an instant.

He hardly knew them, but was filled with sadness. Tears flowed, but he didn't let Hector see him. People always encourage boys to cry, but you just don't do it when there's no mothers or teachers around to give you credit for it. No, this was one of those "can't help myself because it hurts" kind of cries. He swallowed, dried his tears with his left hand, and pushed the horrible memory out of his mind.

Jack and Hector made the long walk back into town. They had to take so many breaks along the way that the one hour walk turned into two and a half. When they finally reached the first gas station on the edge of town, they were relieved to find an empty bench to sit on outside the little shop. Jack reached into his pocket. He had a few dollars left over from his allowance. How he wished it was a pocket full of delicious candy corn, Snickers bars, or even those disgusting orange marshmallows shaped like a peanut.

"Stay here, I'll get us some soda," Jack said.

Hector nodded and stayed on the bench. His ankle was swelling to critical proportions, and for a second Jack thought it might explode like a water balloon. It was getting late.

He walked into the convenient store, grabbed two Mountain Dews out of the cooler, and then walked up to the register. Behind the counter were two very old men with slicked

back hair, white t-shirts, and blue jeans. Their faces were wrinkled, and their teeth had fallen out years before and were replaced by denchers. But something about them looked familiar.

“Two sodas. Is that all, ankle-biter?” said the old man, well into his nineties.

“Are you two brothers?” Jack asked.

The second old man stopped shuffling his deck of cards. He walked over to stand next to the other man. Both of them stared dumbly at Jack as he held out his dollar bills. They then looked over at the wall. Framed on the wall was an old newspaper clipping.

Two teens killed in train crash on Halloween night.

November 1st, 1953.

Jack stared at the article, and then returned his gaze to the old men. They stared at him up and down for what seemed like ages. One of them whispered something into the other man’s ear. The first man nodded. He then opened up the cash register and pulled something out. It was about the size of a business card, wrapped in plastic. He handed it to Jack.

A black and white baseball card. Baby Ruth.

“Sodas are on the house,” said the old greaser. “And stay out of that forest from now on, you hear? You’re lucky you only ran into the Ghost Car, and not into the Headless Horsemen, the Jackelope, the Banshee, and especially not the ghost of Old Man McDougal himself. He’s still looking for his favorite baseball card. We’ve held onto that trinket for far too long. Its your turn to keep it safe.”

The two geezer greasers looked at each other and then laughed at Jack’s expense. Jack took his two sodas, the baseball card, and then walked out of the shop and sat down next to Hector on the bench.

“Next year, let’s go Trick-or-Treating,” he said.

“Yup!” Hector agreed.

And they shook on it.