
Phil Hickes
The LAST DAY of October
ILLUSTRATED BY ORIOL VIDAL

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Dedicated to all the horror readers who are brave enough to walk down the darker paths!

CHAPTER 1

It was the end of October. Just one day until Halloween. Nothing much ever happened in the small town of Column Falls, Oregon, so Halloween was cause for great excitement. It was one of those days that everybody looked forward to.

The neat lawns of the houses were transformed into spooky graveyards. Huge robotic werewolves with flashing green eyes howled at the moon. Raggedy ghosts hung from the porches, swaying in the chill autumn breeze. Carved pumpkins with eerie grins and shining eyes sat watching everything.

On the outskirts of the town, three friends were hatching plans. They were crouching beneath towering trees – trees that had overheard many whispered secrets during their long lives. A small bonfire burned in front of the friends, but not very well. Wisps of thin smoke made the air smell sour. Green twigs sputtered and spat but were too wet to catch alight. It had stopped raining, but the sky was grey, and the cold wind made the friends hunch over and dig their hands deep into their pockets.

"So what are we going to do this year?" Cody asked.

Cody had straggly, long brown hair that hung out from underneath his orange beanie. His face was scrunched up in a frown, and he always looked a little annoyed, as if everything got on his nerves. His eyes were small and never totally at rest, as if he was always on the lookout for the next thing that might be heading his way.

For Cody, Halloween was a very serious business. Not because of the candy or costumes. Of course they were a bonus. But in Cody's opinion, Halloween was cool because it was the one day of the year you could scare yourself silly.

Last year, he'd gone to a haunted-house event. Inside, people were dressed up as zombies and skeletons and jumped out at you when you weren't expecting it. It had been pretty good. At one point, a man covered in blood had burst out of a door carrying a chainsaw, and Cody's hair had stood on end.

This year, there weren't any haunted-house events nearby. Cody had looked online, but the closest one was thirty miles away. His dad said he couldn't be bothered driving that far on a Saturday. Weekends were for baseball and pizza in front of the TV.

So Cody had decided that if the scares weren't going to come to him, he would go

looking for them. He knew exactly where to go too. The McBride House. This would be a *real* Halloween experience – not just a load of dudes dressed up in costumes with fake fangs and rubber bats. The only problem was, Cody was too nervous to go on his own.

"I'm going to go trick or treating," replied Sean. He had the same hairstyle as Cody, but he wasn't wearing a beanie, so his fringe blew up and down in the wind like it was waving hello. He had cheeks that were rosy and plump like pillows. Cody always thought Sean looked like a chipmunk. "Why, what else would we do?"

"Have you ever heard of the McBride House?" Cody asked.

"I have," Duri replied. Duri had short, black hair and deep, brown eyes that glinted with mischief. She wore a red hoodie and huge knitted gloves – a present from her grandma, who always worried about Duri's fingers getting too cold.

Duri's parents owned the Korean restaurant in town, and Duri had brought them all leftover spicy chicken wings, which made their mouths burn. "The house caught fire, didn't it?" she asked now.

"Yeah, it burned down," Cody said. He pointed the end of a sharpened stick towards the trees. "But the ruins are still in there somewhere. We could try to find them. You know, for Halloween."

"Why would we go and look at a pile of stones?" Sean said with a frown on his face. All Sean wanted to do was eat as much candy as possible. Plus, this idea was already making him feel nervous – not that he would ever admit it to the other two.

"I want to go because the ruins are haunted," Cody said. "My brother told me all about it. Apparently, a family lived there, and when the fire started, a boy and his younger

sister tried to escape. But their parents had gone out and locked all the doors."

"Why didn't they just smash a window?" Sean asked.

"This was in the old days," Cody said. "All the houses had shutters on the windows. They were locked."

"And so the brother and sister died?" Duri asked. "I didn't know that bit."

Suddenly, she didn't like the sound of going to find the ruins either.

"Yep, both of them," Cody said with a grim nod. "They were trapped. The locals who lived nearby came to help, but the fire was too fierce by then. They couldn't get near."

The three friends fell silent. All of them were thinking the same thing – how horrible it would be to get trapped in a burning house.

"When did it happen?" Sean said.

"Not sure exactly," Cody said. "Probably a hundred years ago or something. But it was Halloween night. Tomorrow is the anniversary." He paused before explaining the best part of his plan. "That's when you're supposed to see the ghosts."

