

GHOST IN THE HEADLIGHTS

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The black clouds swallowed up the moon. It hadn't been this dark when she'd started out for the evening. In fact, the setting sun had been such a bright, beautiful orange that it looked a bit like her prizewinning pumpkin, which now felt heavy in her arms. But she didn't dare put it down in case it got dirty.

Her father would be so proud of her. A pumpkin she'd grown herself. And it had won first place, too. She hummed her favorite little tune to make the walk home go faster.

The farmer in the dell . . .

The farmer in the dell . . .

Hi-ho, the derry-o,

The farmer in the dell.

The branches rattled overhead, knocking together in the strong October wind. Leaves rolled across the asphalt, while the cries of a crow echoed down the long road. Worried about her pumpkin getting cold, she took off her sweater and wrapped the pumpkin in the light blue knit sweater her grandmother had made for her. It matched the blue ribbon tied around the stem.

With every step, the pumpkin seemed to get heavier. If she had waited for her mother, they could have walked home from the fair together, but she had wanted to show off her first-place ribbon to her father so badly. Her father had left the fair early to go home and make sure the cows were all back in the barn. Why hadn't she been just a bit more patient?

When the bend in the road finally came into view, she started to walk a little faster. Home was just around the corner.

SCREEEECH.

The sound chilled her down to her very bones. Tires screeching on concrete, a loud engine revving to demonic life. She turned to find a pair of glowing yellow orbs. They were so bright and horrifying that they felt more like the eyes of a monster than

the headlights of a car. Too late did she notice that they were headed right for her, coming at her faster than the wind itself.

The monster could not be stopped. VROOOM. The roar shook the trees.

She dropped her pumpkin. Heart in her throat, she tried to get off the road—run for the trees. Her feet pounded across the pavement—fast but not fast enough. Over the sound of her footsteps, she could hear the angry engine, she could feel the heat of the headlights, smell the gasoline, taste the burning rubber of tires—



“Ouch!”

Brianna awoke with a start, her feet kicking out reflexively and hitting something solid.

Shaking off the remnants of the terrifying dream, Brianna brushed her brown hair away from her cheeks. The flight attendant who’d been sitting with her for the last half hour scowled at Brianna and rubbed her shin. Clearly it had been *her* shin that Brianna had accidentally kicked.

“Sorry!” Brianna said hurriedly, sitting up in her

chair and wiping away any drool that had come from her impromptu nap. A nap that had been interrupted by a strange yet very realistic dream. Even though she'd never won a pumpkin contest in her life, or walked down a lone road holding one, it had felt more like a memory than a dream. Lately, many of her dreams had felt that way.

The backpack that Brianna had been using as a pillow fell to the ground, and the flight attendant snatched it up, handing it back to her.

"I was just about to wake you up," the flight attendant said in a snippy tone. "Your uncle is finally here."

Brianna was about to ask, *What uncle?* But then she remembered where she was and why she had fallen asleep in the Philadelphia airport.

Brianna Jenson was to stay with her estranged uncle for two whole months while her mother trained for a new job. Even now, with her suitcase packed and her uncle here to collect her from the airport, Brianna still had a hard time believing that it was actually really happening.