



A chill rolled down my back as my friend Ivy and I gazed up at my new house. The house was dark gray with peeling paint. Black shutters tilted at the dust-smearred windows.

Under the sloping roof, one attic window was broken and covered with cardboard. The wind whistled into the window, high above our heads. It sounded like someone screaming.

I wanted to scream.

“It’s a haunted house,” I said. “It belongs in a horror movie.”

“Your mom will get it cleaned up, Mario,” Ivy said.

I knew Ivy for only a couple of weeks. She was the first friend I made since we moved to Franklin Village. She was cheerful Miss Sunshine all the time.

I told her that. She said, “I’d rather be Miss Sunshine than someone howling at the full moon.”

*Does that make any sense?*

Ivy was always saying things like that. But I liked her anyway. She was cute. She was twelve, like me. Tiny, with a pointed chin and pointed little nose. Like an elf in the picture books my mom used to read me when I was little.

She had short blond hair and green eyes. And she usually wore the same green sweater with a lacy white collar. I guess because it matched her eyes.

“I couldn’t get to sleep last night,” I said. “I kept hearing a tap-tap-tap above me. I knew what it was. It was mice running across my ceiling.”

“Tap-tap-tap is better than thump-thump-thump,” Ivy said.

That made me laugh.

I turned away from the house. It made me sad that Mom and I had to live in such a creepy old wreck of a place. But we really had no choice.

My dad was in Germany fighting the war. And Mom was working two factory jobs to earn enough money for us to get by. I almost never saw her.

“You’re the man of the house now, Mario,” Mom told me the day we moved into this horrible place. “It’s a tough time for everyone. And being gloomy isn’t going to help.”

“But Gloomy is my middle name,” I said. “Mario Gloomy Manzetti.”

I was trying to make her laugh. She hardly ever smiled these days, and she had these lines under her eyes she never had before.

She swept her black hair behind her shoulder. "Promise me you'll do your best," she said.

I raised my right hand and swore I'd do my best.

"We are lucky to have a house," Mom said.

"Lucky," I repeated.

She tugged at the brown leather bomber jacket I liked to wear because it made me look tough. "Mario, that jacket is getting small on you," she said.

"I'll try not to grow anymore," I told her. I tightened my stomach and hunched down to my knees.

That made her laugh.

Now, Ivy and I stood in front of the house with the October wind gusting around us. Fat brown leaves danced around our legs.

"I guess the worst part is living across the street from a graveyard," I said.

Ivy poked me in the ribs. "Are you scared?" she asked in a singsong voice. "Is little Mario scared of a graveyard?"

"I'm not scared," I said, poking her back. "It's just . . . depressing."

"Ooh. Big word," she said. "So? You live in a haunted house across the street from a graveyard. What is the big deal?"

The truth is, maybe I *was* a little scared. I'm not a tough guy. Sometimes I have nightmares that make me wake up all sweaty and shaky.

And I've never been in a fight with another kid. I always find a way to talk my way out of fights.

When I was little, I pretended to be Superman or Captain Marvel, the new comic book heroes. I wore a towel for a cape and had my underpants over my pajama pants. And I ran around, pretending to "leap tall buildings in a single bound."

I think I really believed there were these powerful guys in capes and tights who were around to fight bad guys and protect everyone else. But then my dad went off to war, and I had to grow up a little and forget that comic book stuff.

Ivy leaned into the wind and trotted across the street, her blond hair bouncing behind her.

"Hey, wait up!" I shouted. "Where are you going?"

I could see where she was headed. Into the graveyard.

Our shoes crackled over the brown leaves as we followed a path through the tilted stone graves. Wind gusts made the old gravestones creak and groan.

"Why don't we go to the candy store instead?" I asked. I pointed to the little store on the corner past the graveyard. "I have a nickel. We could load up on root beer barrels and licorice sticks."

"Mom said not to ruin my appetite for dinner," Ivy said. "Don't you like walking in this place? Some of the graves are so old —"

"It's . . . my first time," I said.

The sky darkened. I looked up and saw storm clouds rolling overhead. The wind rattled the limbs of the old tree beside us.

I shivered. I raised the collar of my bomber jacket. My eyes gazed all around. The blowing, crackling leaves made the whole place seem *alive*.

Ivy pointed. “That grave is so tiny. Do you think a child is buried there?”

Before I could answer, I saw something that made me gasp.

I grabbed Ivy’s arm. “Look. Ivy. Something just moved — by that tombstone.”

We both stared into the gray light.

“Oh, nooooo,” I moaned.

I watched, trembling in horror as someone climbed out of a grave.