



“MY HOMETOWN”

by Spencer Kassimir

My name is Spencer Kassimir and I live in a town called Highgrave.

If you lived in Highgrave, you’d know how it got its name. You see, an old graveyard stands high on the hill that overlooks the whole town.

You can see the graveyard from just about anywhere. From Main Street. From my classroom. I can even see it from my bedroom window.

If you live in Highgrave, you can’t escape the graveyard.

Even the sunniest days aren’t really sunny here. Highgrave Hill casts a deep shadow over the roads, the buildings, the treetops down below.

On clear days, you can look up and see the old gravestones on top of the hill. They gleam like crooked teeth in the tall green grass.

At night, when a moon hangs low over the hill, the graveyard becomes a frightening place. An eerie gray mist clings to the hill. And the gravestones appear to float free.

Yes. The old tombstones seem to float by themselves. To float over the shimmering mist. To float over the town. Over my house at the bottom of Highgrave Hill.

I guess that's why I have the nightmares. . . .

I cleared my throat and lowered the pages of my essay to my side. Reading a paper in front of the whole class makes me really nervous.

My throat felt as dry as sandpaper. And my hands were so wet, they smeared the ink on the pages.

"Very good writing," Mrs. Webster said, nodding. She had her hands clasped tightly on her desk. "Good description, Spencer. Don't you agree, class?"

A few kids muttered yes. My friend Audra Rusinas smiled and flashed me a thumbs-up. Behind her, Frank Foreman yawned really loudly. That caused his pal Buddy Tanner to burst out laughing. A few other kids laughed, too.

Mrs. Webster narrowed her eyes at Frank. Then she turned back to me. "Go on. Read the rest, Spencer."

I glanced up at the big clock, above the chalkboard behind her. "Are you sure there's time?"

The next part of the paper was kind of personal, kind of embarrassing. I knew it would probably give Frank and Buddy a good laugh.

Like the last paper I had to read to the class. I wrote about the only thing in the world that terrifies me — spiders.

Frank and Buddy never let me forget that paper. After I read it, I found a spider in my desk every morning for a month!

“Read until the bell,” Mrs. Webster insisted.

I cleared my throat again and started reading. . . .

Some nights I dream about the graveyard ghouls. Everyone in my family dreams about them.

One night, my eight-year-old brother, Jason, woke up screaming. “They’re coming to get me! They’re coming to get me!” It took a long time to convince Jason it was just a dream.

My little brother and sister, Remy and Charlotte, also have nightmares about the graveyard ghouls.

And I dream that the ghouls rise up from their old graves and float down the hill. They float into the foggy mist on the side of the hill and wait there. Hiding. Waiting for innocent victims to come by.

And then the ghouls swarm around their victims. Sweep around them, wispy as the fog. And pull them up . . . up into the old graves at the top of the hill.

Everyone in Highgrave knows about —

“Very good!” Mrs. Webster interrupted. She clapped her hands enthusiastically. “Very good writing, Spencer!”

Audra shot me a big smile. Behind her, Frank and Buddy were giggling about something. They slapped each other a high five.

“Do you think you might want to be a writer when you grow up?” Mrs. Webster asked me.

I could feel my face turn hot. “I . . . I don’t know,” I stammered. “Maybe.”

“*Maybe.*” I heard Frank mimic me in a high, shrill voice. Buddy burst out laughing again.

“Frank, would you like to read your paper next?” Mrs. Webster demanded.

Frank’s mouth dropped open. “Well . . . it isn’t quite finished.”

Mrs. Webster leaned over her desk. “What is your essay about?” she asked.

Frank hesitated. Then he finally replied, “I’m not sure.”

The whole class broke up laughing. Frank tried to keep a straight face, but he laughed, too.

Mrs. Webster shook her head. “I don’t think it’s funny,” she murmured. She turned back to me. “Finish reading your piece, Spencer. Maybe you will inspire Frank.”

Frank let out a loud groan.

Mrs. Webster ignored him and motioned for me to read.

Why can't I be cool like Frank and Buddy? I asked myself.

They are total goofs. They never do any work at all. They spend the whole day laughing and talking and messing around.

And everyone likes them. Everyone thinks they are the coolest guys in school.

I want to be cool, too. I want to make kids laugh. I don't want to be standing up here, having the teacher tell me what a goody-goody I am. Asking me in front of everybody if I want to be a writer.

How totally uncool can you be?

I glanced at Frank. Even though he sat toward the back of the room, I could see him clearly. His head towered over all the others.

Frank is a big, strong, muscular guy.

I'm short and kind of scrawny and I wear glasses.

That's what I am, I thought, *a scrawny goody-goody.*

I could feel my face growing hot again. I raised the pages in front of my face and continued reading. . . .

Everyone in Highgrave knows about the graveyard ghouls. Some kids told me about them on the day my family moved here.

They said that the dead people buried in the Highgrave graveyard can't rest. They can't rest because the graveyard is up too high.

The dead have become restless, angry ghouls. Rotting and decayed, they climb out of their graves. They cannot sleep. They can only pace the graveyard and look down on the houses below.

At night, their howls and moans float over the town. If you look really closely, you can see the ghouls. You can see them shuffling through the fog that rolls low over the hill.

And if you go up there at night, the ghouls —

The bell rang.

Books slammed shut. Kids cheered.

“Thank you, Spencer. Sorry we couldn’t finish. But that was excellent.” Mrs. Webster jumped to her feet. “Okay, everyone. That’s all for today.” She had to shout over the loud voices and scraping chairs.

“But Spencer has given me a really good idea,” Mrs. Webster called out.

The room grew quieter.

“Tomorrow, pack a lunch and wear your hiking boots,” Mrs. Webster instructed. “Tomorrow, we will all climb up to the graveyard.”

“Huh? Why?” someone called out.

The teacher’s eyes flashed. “To summon the ghouls,” she replied.