Emma had spent a considerable amount of time that afternoon—and many afternoons to follow—combing through the stacks of the Willoughby Library.

It went without saying that the vibe during the day couldn’t have been more different than at night.

Between the groups of people murmuring to one another and the rambunctious children pulling out every book they touched, the once-mysterious rooms seemed ordinary—almost theatrical.

In the daylight, the corn maze looked more like a painted backdrop than real stalks of corn. The splattered blood resembled ketchup more than the metallic goo that oozes from our skin. And the scholastic statues in the nonfiction section—well, those were still just as boring.

Emma still hadn’t been able to bring herself back to the Nurturing Tree, even though, from a distance, it somehow managed to hold on to its mystical charm.

Anytime she neared the looming trunk, her skin would tingle, and she’d turn right back around. Which was fine by her. That was where most of her classmates hung out anyway—and most of those books were the fictional kind.

Although, maybe those fictitious, fantastical worlds beneath their covers would’ve been more fruitful than anything else Emma had managed to find in the library.

After a week of research, Emma had compiled a whole lot of diddly-squat.

Oh, there were *plenty* of books claiming to know all about the spirit world, but most of them contradicted one another—and sometimes even themselves. The internet was, unsurprisingly, even worse. Too much information, and most of it swarming with clickbait.