

-Josh! Josh!-

First I called Josh. Then I called Petey. But there was no sign of either of them.

I ran down to the bottom of the driveway and peered into the car, but they weren't there. Mom and Dad were still inside talking with Mr. Dawes. I looked along the street in both directions, but there was no sign of them.

-Josh! Hey, Josh!-

Finally, Mom and Dad came hurrying out the front door, looking alarmed. I guess they heard my shouts. -I can't find Josh or Petey!- I yelled up to them from the street.

-Maybe they're around back,- Dad shouted down to me.

I headed up the driveway, kicking away dead leaves as I ran. It was sunny down on the street, but as soon as I entered our yard, I was back in the shade, and it was immediately cool again.

-Hey, Josh! Josh-where are you?-

Why did I feel so scared? It was perfectly natural for Josh to wander off. He did it all the time.

I ran full speed along the side of the house. Tall trees leaned over the house on this side, blocking out nearly all of the sunlight.

The backyard was bigger than I'd expected, a long rectangle that sloped gradually down to a wooden fence at the back. Just like the front, this yard was a mass of tall weeds, poking up through a thick covering of brown leaves. A stone birdbath had toppled onto its side. Beyond it, I could see the side of the garage, a dark, brick building that matched the house.

-Hey-Josh!-

He wasn't back here. I stopped and searched the ground for footprints or a sign that he had run through the thick leaves.

-Well?-. Out of breath, Dad came jogging up to me.

-No sign of him,- I said, surprised at how worried I felt.

-Did you check the car?-. He sounded more angry than worried.

-Yes. It's the first place I looked.- I gave the backyard a last quick search. -I don't believe Josh would just take off.-

-I do,- Dad said, rolling his eyes. -You know your brother when he doesn't get his way. Maybe he wants us to think he's run away from home.- He frowned.

-Where is he?-. Mom asked as we returned to the front of the house.

Dad and I both shrugged. -Maybe he made a friend and wandered off.-

Dad said. He raised a hand and scratched his curly brown hair. I could tell that he was starting to worry, too.

-We've got to find him,- Mom said, gazing down to the street. -He doesn't know this neighborhood at all. He probably wandered off and got lost.-

Mr. Dawes locked the front door and stepped down off the porch, pocketing the keys. -He couldn't have gotten far,- he said, giving Mom a reassuring smile. -Let's drive around the block. I'm sure we'll find him.- Mom shook her head and glanced nervously at Dad. -I'll kill him,- she muttered. Dad patted her on the shoulder.

Mr. Dawes opened the trunk of the small Honda, pulled off his dark blazer, and tossed it inside. Then he took out a wide-brimmed, black cowboy hat and put it on his head.

-Hey-that's quite a hat,- Dad said, climbing into the front passenger seat.

-Keeps the sun away,- Mr. Dawes said, sliding behind the wheel and slamming the car door.

Mom and I got in back. Glancing over at her, I saw that Mom was as worried as I was.

We headed down the block in silence, all four of us staring out the car windows. The houses we passed all seemed old. Most of them were even bigger than our house. All of them seemed to be in better condition, nicely painted with neat, well-trimmed lawns.

I didn't see any people in the houses or yards, and there was no one on the street.

It certainly is a quiet neighborhood, I thought. And shady. The houses all seemed to be surrounded by tall, leafy trees. The front yards we drove slowly past all seemed to be bathed in shade. The street was the only sunny place, a narrow gold ribbon that ran through the shadows on both sides. Maybe that's why it's called Dark Falls, I thought.

-Where is that son of mine?-. Dad asked, staring hard out the windshield.

-I'll kill him. I really will,- Mom muttered. It wasn't the first time she had said that about Josh.

We had gone around the block twice. No sign of him.

Mr. Dawes suggested we drive around the next few blocks, and Dad quickly agreed. -Hope I don't get lost. I'm new here, too,- Mr. Dawes said, turning a corner. -Hey, there's the school,- he announced, pointing out the window at a tall redbrick building. It looked very old-fashioned, with white columns on both sides of the double front doors. -Of course, it's closed now,- Mr. Dawes added.

My eyes searched the fenced-in playground behind the school. It was empty. No one there.

-Could Josh have walked this far?-. Mom asked, her voice tight and higher than usual.

-Josh doesn't walk,- Dad said, rolling his eyes. -He runs.-

-We'll find him,- Mr. Dawes said confidently, tapping his fingers on the wheel as he steered.

We turned a corner onto another shady block. A street sign read

-Cemetery Drive-, and sure enough, a large cemetery rose up in front of us. Granite gravestones rolled along a low hill, which sloped down and then up again onto a large flat stretch, also marked with rows of low grave markers and monuments.

A few shrubs dotted the cemetery, but there weren't many trees. As we drove slowly past, the gravestones passing by in a blur on the left, I realized that this was the sunniest spot I had seen in the whole town.

-There's your son,- Mr. Dawes, pointing out the window, stopped the car suddenly.

-Oh, thank goodness!-. Mom exclaimed, leaning down to see out the window on my side of the car.

Sure enough, there was Josh, running wildly along a crooked row of low, white gravestones. -What's he doing here?-. I asked, pushing open my car door.

I stepped down from the car, took a few steps onto the grass, and called to him. At first, he didn't react to my shouts. He seemed to be ducking and dodging through the tombstones. He would run in one direction, then cut to the side, then head in another direction.

Why was he doing that?

I took another few steps and then stopped, gripped with fear.

I suddenly realized why Josh was darting and ducking like that, running so wildly through the tombstones. He was being chased.

Someone-or something-was after him.