

## The Dark Ghost Rising (Sample Text)

The heat had switched off, and my truck was close to going right along with it. It threatened to rattle itself apart, and each clunk of the engine bounced around the walls of the concrete parking structure. So many spots were taken... Why were there so many people here? At this time of night? Outside, the snow continued to fall. Silently, but worryingly fast. The world had an odd pinkish glow to it, and it made everything seem that much more *off*. I managed to park the truck in an open spot, but it died before I could even turn the key. The lights shut off, and the radio (which had been playing static for hours) droned into silence.

I grabbed my bag from the passenger seat and looked for a jacket. Nothing, just my meds in case of an allergic reaction. My breath began fogging the windows, and I realized that it wasn't getting any warmer here. I had no choice... As much as I hated it, I had to go inside. I slid my bag onto my shoulders and got out of the dead truck. My phone screen showed I had no service. It also appeared to be broken, as the time said 0:00, a time I know didn't exist on the clock I had.

"What the hell is wrong with this thing," I muttered, talking to try and give myself some feeling of humanity. I took a peek around the endless lines of parked cars, but no one was around. Some of the cars even had layers of dust, as if they'd been abandoned here. Walking to the railing to look outside, I saw the street lamps were flickering in the cold weather. They stood as motionless gold spikes flashing through the hostile waves of snow. Though they did little to illuminate the place, two large masses stood ahead of me in the semi-dark pink skied world. I could just barely make out the massive front facing windows. The parking lot outside was empty, and snow was piling up fast. I had to move it.

Hood up and hands in my pockets, I fought my way through the blizzard. The world was silent save for the occasional whisper of wind. I slid around the parking lot on unseen sheets of ice but managed to keep my balance. The only thing keeping me from getting turned around was the huge dark shape of the school in front of me. Everything was a blinding white mess, and the angry pinkish sky glared down from above. I found the handle and turned. Surprisingly, it opened. I forced myself through the front doors into a small box like reception room. There was a window revealing a front office to my right, and drab brown metal walls everywhere else. I squinted and saw a door on the wall in front of me. Perhaps this was some sort of area where people had to be buzzed in to get into the school?

“Hello? I-is anyone there? It’s freezing outside and my truck is dead. No cellphone service either. Hello?” I called sheepishly. It was embarrassing to be yelling into the window of a clearly unoperated front office. The lights were off and the computers weren’t making any sounds. The room was dark, but I could still see thanks to a dim emergency light providing illumination from inside the school. I walked forward to the reception window and heard a loud *click* and the door to my left popped open. It didn’t move, but from the sounds I’d heard, I knew the lock had disengaged.

My heart was racing. Something about this all felt *off* but I knew that it was just me being paranoid. There had to be other ways of letting people in. If this place was empty, why were there so many cars in the parking garage? And why had the front doors opened so easily? I spotted a security camera staring down at me from a corner of the room. A little red light told me it was on. *See? Nothing to worry about. They heard me call for help and let me in. It’s just a blizzard you idiot.*

The front lobby was just as desolate as the front office. The only lights were the emergency lights dotted across the ceiling, and their low hum made my skin crawl. The place smelled like it had been recently cleaned with the cheap stuff school janitors tended to be given. A waiting area sat unused and the walls were covered in Eastern Eagle Pride posters. The Eagle must've been the school mascot? I walked around awkwardly, hoping someone would come to meet me. The front windows that looked outside were quickly being covered with snow. It was actually piling up past the windows. Within minutes, there was no natural light coming into the building. Again, my heart raced

Ahead of me, I heard a locker slam. The sound made me jump, and I knocked over a display of school newspapers. I swore under my breath and rushed to pick them up. My hands stopped working as I read the headline.

*1998 School Shooting Cripples the Eastern Eagle Community.*

"Pretty old newspapers," I said. The material smelled *old*, like something you might smell in your grandparent's attic. I noticed that all of the papers were the same, all holding dates from twenty years ago. Maybe this was some sort of tribute? I couldn't remember that particular school shooting, but I was barely older than it, and there were so many tragedies in our time...

Another locker slammed, this time closer to where I was. I jumped again and rushed my stacking. Once the papers were back in (semi) decent shape, I walked towards where I'd heard the lockers. My shoes squeaked nosily against the floor, and the sound reverberated around the empty halls. I walked down the hall that was next to the series of long front facing windows. The emergency lights revealed a wall of purple lockers, some worn with age, others looking brand

new. Locker 1232 was open though, and a red light was flashing inside. I looked around. No one was here right now, but I'd *definitely* heard lockers being shut.

I looked inside of the open locker hoping there might be an event flyer or something to direct me to where the people were in this school. It was empty save for a small digital alarm clock. I picked it up and the numbers flashing across the screen read *0:00*. The clock wasn't plugged into anything, and I couldn't find a place for batteries. How was it on?

Suddenly I heard a low crackling sound. Almost as if someone was crumpling a massive sheet of paper, only louder. I dropped the alarm clock on the floor and its display went dark. Now I was genuinely beginning to worry. Something wasn't right here. Something was telling me to get out. I exited the hall and walked briskly back to the front doors but found that they were stubbornly not opening. I pushed as hard as I could, but nothing happened. Sweat began to form at my brow as my breathing quickened. *The snow. It must be blocking the door from opening.*

"Shit," I breathed. There had to be another exit. A fire escape, or maybe a back door for food delivery. I jogged back through the reception area and into the lobby once more. There were three different paths I could take, and the leftmost one was purple locker hallway. I didn't need to go back that way.

Somewhere in the shadows of the ceiling a loudspeaker turned on. At first it was just white noise, but then a bell went off. I covered my ears at the extremely loud sound until it switched off, just as fast as it had come on. I waited, hoping maybe that someone would come now. Doors opened and closed, and more lockers were slammed shut. I heard kids laughing. Finally, someone was coming!

Yet, the sounds were all that came. I smelled the scent of bad cafeteria food flood the halls, and soon the laughing was replaced by crying and screaming. Something inside of me gave out, and I ran blindly down a hall. It had green walls and smiling pictures of kids and teachers dotted along bulletin boards. The hall was so long. I could barely see the end of it. Lockers lined the left walls and they *opened* themselves at my passing. Figuring I was just panicking, I shrugged the image away, but I couldn't ignore the cacophony that followed me down the hall. I released a groan as the pictures on the boards began rolling their eyes in endless circles. *No, this can't be happening. The truck... Maybe I passed out?*

The bell rang again, and the screams of the children died off. The hallway was silent and still once more, and I found I'd reached the end of it. A board to my right had the pictures of the school soccer team on it. They all had happy smiles, and their eyes were quite still. I saw a room labeled as the computer lab ahead of me. The door was invitingly open. I tried to catch my breath as I stepped inside, hoping one of the computers might be on. The room was a massive square, and the professor's desk was placed dead center. As soon as I crossed the threshold of the room, the door behind shut gently. I turned around and tugged at it, but the knob wouldn't move. When I turned to face the room again, the emergency light flickered. It switched back on, but its bulb glowed red instead of yellow. Something rattled on the wall, and I saw the shadow of a Christian cross on the floor.

"Hello?" I said, my voice hoarse from fear. The word was barely audible, even to me. *Just need to wake up. None of this is really happening. Ghosts aren't real.*

"But aren't they?" a cool male voice asked. I cried out in surprise. No one was here. All the chairs were empty. On the ground, a figure began pacing, his shadow going over the massive

shadow of the cross every now and then. On the center desk, the computer screen flicked on, a digital image of the newspaper I'd seen before flashed across the blindingly bright screen.

*“Reports say that on the morning of January 6, two young boys entered the Eastern Eagle K-8 school armed with rifles and pistols, all with extended magazines. The two wore protective vests under their school clothes.”*

“You see, I am a man of God. I prayed... I PRAY, ever damned day! Those two kids came in, no one knew what was happening. Not a soul knew what to do. NOBODY!” the shadow on the floor approached me. My mouth moved but nothing came out. I was frozen.

*“12 students were killed, and 32 others injured. Some would go on to perish from those injuries. Nothing like this has ever happened in this community. The mayor is asking...”*

“I found out that there is no God that day. No... Nothing. God hasn't abandoned us, no, no, no. He was never here in the first place,” the shadow whispered. The computer began smoking. The screen flickered. I screamed and the lights flashed back to their original color. I blinked several times as a cross fell off the wall. It was splintered badly, and there were bullet casings next to it. I backed up into the door and fell out of the room, running blindly once again.