

## The Scary Thing

Isaac doesn't like the scary thing. He doesn't like its poppy eyes crudely painted on and the way they seem to follow him wherever he goes. He doesn't like the exaggerated cheekbones that resulted from its seemingly 40s-esque design style and its terracotta clay make. And he *hates* the house perfectly centered at the end of his hometown's one cul-de-sac that this gnome-sized statue belongs to, situated ominously on the stone retaining wall of its driveway.

Isaac has never *once* witnessed anyone enter or leave that house, nor have any of his friends. No lights are ever on during the day or at night and all the window curtains remain closed. There's a one-door garage at the end of the driveway wide enough for a single car to enter through, but the door never opens or closes, nor does a car ever arrive at or depart from the house. The property remains utterly silent at all times.

Someone must be home...but are they? Does anyone even live in that house? One would think that some old geezer would barge out the front door, fist shaking in the hair, yelling with one eye twitching when he sees John rapping at the unflinching statue, or Ben about to hit it with his bat before everyone yanks him away, or Tyler unzipping his pants about to piss on it before also needing to be pulled back, or Craig sniffing the grass on the front lawn. But no one ever emerges, so why do they even hold each other back?

Maybe the old man, if it is an old man, is peeking at them from the curtains, just waiting for them to actually defile his property before reporting them. Or maybe he's asleep. Or dead. Either way, they don't need that on their records, especially when they're about to start college so soon. What they need is to play some baseball together while they still can.

Since they were little, they've always played at the sandy Cricket Fields just off Lakeview Drive North. Sometimes there would be some other kids there already. Sometimes

those kids would be friendly and offer to have everyone play one big game. Sometimes they would tell Isaac and the boys to leave, claiming that this is “their turf”. Sometimes they would get a bloody nose when Ben punched them in the face.

That was more common during elementary and middle school, though. There haven’t been too many instances of other kids at the field these past four years of high school. Maybe the culture just changed. Whatever it may be, the boys get the field to themselves.

Isaac is the best pitcher of the five; he can throw a baseball through a brick wall with his speed if he wanted to. Ben is the best batter. They wouldn’t have to bring so many spares if he didn’t hit every damn ball into the next town. John is the best outfielder and the only one capable of catching anything that Ben whacks. Tyler is usually the catcher, a position he refuses to let anyone else have for whatever reason, not that anyone wanted it anyway. Craig is...Craig. The boys don’t normally assign him a position, he just kinda wanders around the field and plays from time-to-time, though usually in the sand and not in the game.

As strange as the setup is, it’s their tradition every spring and summer. And it’s tradition to head the street to the old Masso’s ice cream shop for some water ice after they’re done playing. But this summer, this final hoo-rah before college, things got weird. It all started about halfway through July when they finished their game as normal, and then Tyler said he couldn’t make it to Masso’s today, but he’ll be free next time. He wasn’t. Or the time after that. Eventually, he stopped showing up to the games altogether. He still texts in the groupchat everyday, but he claims he’s too busy to hang right now.

The four of them were playing a game in early August when Ben said he had to go in the middle of the game. No explanation. Just hopped in his car and drove off. He came to a few more

games after that, but stopped around the same time Craig stopped showing up. Craig hardly texted in the groupchat as it was, but now they weren't hearing a word from him.

That left just Isaac and John for a while. As painful as it was for them to just do simple practices, pitching and hitting and, hopefully, catching, John had still been Isaac's best friend since the 1st grade, and there was no one he'd rather finish off the summer with. Of course, eventually John too had to move into his dorm, with about a week left before semester starts.

Isaac has always felt excitement, elation, an overwhelming sense of ecstasy upon seeing Cricket Fields in the distance whether that be when his mom drove him by it, or when he began riding his bike by it, or when he drove his own car by it. It was always a bastion. Now, everytime he moves by, he feels a sense of dread, an aura of lost times and broken promises. Isaac looks to see that one kid getting his face kicked in by Ben, but he sees nothing but a graveyard of memories, tombstones of the past.

It isn't fair. The final days before beginning college are supposed to be a time of great reminiscence, a time to say goodbye (at least, for the time) to your friends and family. To the simplicity of childhood. A time to celebrate the memories you've made and the ones that are yet to come.

And yet, sitting in his silent bedroom with his head at the bottom of the computer chair, he thinks not of Cricket Fields, or the baseball games, or the boys' faces, or Masso's water ice, or all of them riding their bikes together. He thinks of the scary thing: its contemptuous smile and bulbous pupils, its baseball bat and forward-facing cap that serve as an abhorrent reminder of days long past and loneliness to come, and the fear they all felt around it and around the house. He thought of it and thought of it and thought of it. He can't get its stupid smile out of his head. It seethes inside him. He thinks of its pupils quickly darting up to make eye contact with him,

and his blood boils even hotter. Isaac, about to slip off of his chair, shoots up and grabs his baseball bat as well as his windbreaker before stepping out of his front door and into the midnight darkness.

The wind screeches through the suburbs, constantly pushing against Isaac no matter what direction he walks in. It only takes him a few minutes to reach the cul-de-sac. Stopped about 30 feet away from the house, Isaac stares at the windows, hoping for the slightest glimmer of movement in the curtains, something to indicate a presence. Nothing moves except for the leaves of the trees and the debris on the ground. Isaac's face goes red and his eyebrows pierce into his face as he trots aggressively towards the home. He moves up to the scary thing, bat in hand and wrinkles under his livid eyes. He looks into the dark of its pupils one more time before he lifts the bat into the air and prepares to swing.

As if compelled by Isaac's intent, the house's front door swings open at alarming speed. Isaac looks up with widened eyes and furrowed brows as he glared into the house's indiscernible black. The world grows eerily silent, the wind stops brushing him and the trees grow still, then he hears what sounds like cinder blocks grinding against the floor echoing into the outdoor world, the sound stopping and starting every couple seconds, growing closer and closer with each instance. The grinding sound stops long enough only for Isaac to notice the tears in his eyes before a gigantic terracotta hand shoots out at lightning speed. The arm has to be the girth of a tree trunk, barely able to fit inside the door frame, and the hand the size of a golf cart. It wraps its man-sized fingers around the completely petrified Isaac. The immense force of its sudden grasp knocks the wind out of Isaac and he hears a few ribs shatter before the broken pain traces through his insides. His voice tries to scream but finds itself only gasping for air as his lungs struggle to intake any oxygen through the mess inside his torso. He tries moving his legs to kick

the side of the massive hand as hard as he can, but as soon as he makes contact with the dense skin, his toes get jammed into his foot. His movements are getting slower now and he stops resisting.

Once the hand has a secure grip, it retracts straight back into the house's darkness in the blink of an eye, pulling Isaac into its contemptuous void as the door slams shut behind them, leaving the scary thing as the sole witness to the scene of madness.