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# THE HAUNTED PARCHMENT

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## Unleash Your Story Contest Entry

### The Haunted Parchment

There's the paper.

Here's the pen.

It's in my hands, and I feel a deep sense of dread sink into me. I look around at the other five people in the dingy library, all of us with our backs to the claustrophobic walls lined with moldy books, surrounding an empty table that nearly touches the walls itself. There is a piece of paper in the center of the table. It's just paper, but I feel it watching, staring, waiting, but most of all, mocking.

"Come on, Abby," said Scottie. I glance at Scottie across the dirty tabletop, noticing the mud permanently stained on the slab. He is pressed against the book-lined wall like he's trying to keep something from bursting in. A smile is plastered on his sweaty face, and perspiration drips off him and to the floor, washing away a fraction of the dirt that decorates the library. "It's your turn. Do it."

I turn my gaze back to the paper. It hasn't moved. The room is cramped and everyone has pushed themselves further away from me, as if I have some horrible disease they'll catch if they even think about touching me. In a way, I don't blame them. My hand is shaking as I reach across the table. It's an old piece of paper, threatening to break apart the moment my hand makes contact with it. Everyone seems to be holding their breath as I place my hand on it, feeling its fibrous texture with the tips of my fingers. I pull it over, feeling ridiculous for being so afraid of some old, fragile sliver of tree that was shaved off long ago.

But, I am scared. I'm terrified. I peek down at it, noticing it was just as dirty and crumbly as the rest of this place. It looks like someone poured their morning coffee over it years ago staining it brown and yellow. My hand is shaking so bad that I threaten to drop the fancy, old-fashioned

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pen. I eyeball the other kids, observing their staring eyes immediately divert from my gaze. I face the paper, feeling their prying eyes trying to see the words I write.

Everything is ready. Everything, except for me. I click the pen, the felt tip ready. I can feel the anticipation in the room. I hesitate and then let the pen lead my hand down to the brittle fibers of the parchment. A blob of ink leaks out and I realize I need to write something, and fast.

“Abby, come on!” I hear Dean whisper fiercely from the other side of the room.

“Write *something!*” Susie shouts.

My mind is blank. My pen just sits there on the paper and I can feel it complaining. The only noise in the room is the gasping sounds of the other kids as they snatch their breaths, and then I hear *it*. The paper. It’s screaming at me. I feel my hand freeze up as the table starts to shake, bouncing up and down, the whole room beginning to tremble.

“Abby!” Jake cries.

Giving a small yelp, I write the only thing I can think of.

*Hi.*

I drop the pen, forgetting to unclick it. The shaking in the room stops, and the only thing left is silence. I let go of the air I forgot I had been holding in my lungs, steady breaths rolling off my chest. No one says anything for a long time, and then, of course, Scottie speaks.

“What did you write?” he asks.

I shrug. I know what I wrote was bad, but I don’t want them to know how bad. A simple phrase like ‘hi’ isn’t good enough to appease any magical piece of paper. It’s pathetic. I look back down at the haunted parchment, waiting. The paper flutters above the table’s surface, making me back further into the unforgiving books lining the walls. It quivers and I wince as the

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ink flies off, splattering small drops of black onto the table and the floor. I open my eyes, examining the now silent paper, seeing my word is gone, like I had never written anything.

“You weren’t writing long enough to put a story down there,” Scottie points out.

I glare at him. “I know that,” I answer.

“What did you write?” he asked again.

“The room stopped shaking, didn’t it?” I question in return. I grab the paper, pushing it back to the middle of the table, unclick the pen, and rest it on top. I could see the concern on everyone’s face. I was sure I wore the same expression.

I look around the room at the other kids and all the books. Nothing has changed. I keep expecting a door to mysteriously appear from within the books, but nothing comes. Instead, I hear the table rumble again. I gulp and stare, seeing the paper shift its position, moving the pen around its surface.

“But, everyone’s written something,” Susie says. “Why’s it still moving?”

The paper slowly spins in a circle and we all press ourselves further into the books that line the walls. The pen spins off the paper, just like it had done for all of us. But, the pen inches back across the table, rolling right in front of me.

Murmurs pass around the room. I gape, gulping down the nervous saliva that was forming in my mouth as the pen waits for me.

“Abby!” Matthew says.

“I forgot what I was supposed to write,” I hurriedly admit, hearing the groans from all the other kids around me.

“Abby,” Scottie said, speaking to me through gritted teeth. “It doesn’t matter what you write. Just write something.”

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“And that worked well,” I huff.

“It has to be a story,” Dean spoke. “Not a long one. You just have to appease the paper.”

“But—”

“Don’t let it unleash itself upon us,” Scottie said, his voice even quieter than before. “You have to unleash your own story, or its going to unleash *its* own story on *us*.”

I don’t say anything. I don’t dare. I see the desperation in everyone’s eyes, how dependent they are on my dumb story. I’m not creative; I have no good stories to tell. Certainly nothing that would pacify the haunted piece of paper. But, if I don’t write something, what’s going to happen to us? I’m sure that none of us want to know what the paper has in mind, not one bit.

I can feel myself trembling again, just like before, as I snatch the paper from the center of the table. I place it in front of me, but I don’t dare set the pen down on it yet. I fiddle with it in my hand, as if to calm the nervous tension building up inside me although I know my nervousness won’t go away. I think quickly trying to come up with some story that’s good enough, but I know I can’t wait too long.

I take a deep breath, letting the pen fall to the paper once again. I start writing.

*Once upon a time.*

I cringe. That is an awful way to start any story.

*There was a girl who made some bad decisions. She hung out with the wrong crowd and got herself into a horrible situation. Her friends convinced her to sneak into an old, dilapidated house where they got trapped in the library by a haunted piece of paper that dared them to a challenge. They had to write a better story than the paper could, or else they would never be able to leave the library.*

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My mind drew another blank, unsure of what to write next. It's not a complete story, but that doesn't matter, right? There is silence in the room. I wait for the paper to shudder away my words, but nothing happens. I raise my eyes, seeing everyone staring at me. Nothing is happening. Why isn't anything happening?

That thought comes too soon and I feel my heart sink. Even though there was no pen on the paper, words began to form in a bizarre font, almost too elegant for me to read.

*Did she write a better story?*

My throat goes dry. I want nothing more than to get out of this room, throw the books off the shelves and see if I can crawl out of this tiny space, but I know I can't. The paper is talking to me and I can't quit now.

*Yes, I write.*

*What was it about?* The paper writes in response.

I try to think of an answer and I sense the room beginning to shake again. I force the pen on the paper and write the first thing that comes to mind.

*Defeating the paper.*

*And, how did she do that?*

*By writing a better story.*

Now, it is the paper that doesn't respond. I again wait for the words to shake away, to disappear like they had never been there. I feel my chest fall when the paper began to write on itself again. I stare at the response.

*I like it.*

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I look around the room once more, but still, nothing has changed. The words are still in front of me, no hidden doorway opens, and I am still stuck here with my friends. The paper writes one more thing.

*Write it better.*

The words instantly vanish, moving so fast that the paper almost bounces off the table. As it flutters around, the shaking starts once more, but subtly. The paper begins to flap above the table as it shakes. I slam my hand down on the paper, noticing everyone else in the room holding to each other as the room shudders. A solitary book falls from the top shelf, collapsing onto the table. More books fall, one banging on my head. Screams echo from all around the room as books rain down, smacking onto the table and floor, an earthquake pulsating beneath our feet.

“Abby, what did it say?” Scottie yells over the rocking of the room.

“It said to write it better!” I cry.

“Then do what it says!” he yells back. “Quick, before the books drown us!”

I hold the pen, trembling in my hand. I face the piece of paper, holding it still. My hand jumps back as a book tumbles near me, the paper slipping off the tabletop. I screech, barely managing to grab it before it falls. I pound it back on the table, force my shuddering hand to move, starting the story the only way I can think of.

*There's the paper.*

*Here's the pen.*