

DIMITRI'S TOYS sample

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This book is dedicated to the toys of our childhood that gave us
laughter, tears ... and *nightmares*.

This sample is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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CHAPTER thr33

U bought the WRONG HOUse

The removal men had been busy transferring the massive crates into the center of town that same night. Most of the townsfolk were out with their families trick or treating and couples picked a night at the drive-in to watch the latest John Carpenter release, *Big Trouble in Little China*, leaving the seniors to dance the night away in the local salsa spots they'd merged in time after few games of bingo. Everyone was gearing up for the Halloween week ahead with the majority of folk putting on costumes early. A lot was going on in the town center, and Fairfax felt electric. The local fun fair extravaganza Fairfax had each year included its yearly carnival, which was in preparation for its Halloween release date and filled with circus shows and family activities, involving face painting and several rounds of Dunk Tank, Can Toss and Bulldozer.

Although this year was to be slightly different since the town's new Mayor had chosen a more affordable carnival than previous years to save Council spending money, it just so happened that a more traditional family entertainment business was passing through to Fairfax that season, while on tour.

Tonight, there was more than enough happening in this quaint Northern Californian town to distract the locals from the new business rivals that had snuck into its east end, slipping right under their very noses. The east side was quiet and derelict at this time of night, hosting a strip of local grocery stores and butcher shops which opened at eight every morning and closed at five sharp.

The chosen place was an abandoned warehouse on the end of a long strip, filled with odd antique, hardware and key making stores – the perfect spot to set up shop on a Friday night. The west end of town hosted the entertainment and came alive every weekend. Once the community businesses had their week of retail on the east side, the weekend trade belonged to the west end businesses. Bowling alleys, diners, bars, and theatres were jam-packed with several skateboarding parks for juniors and Fairfax's own Chuck E. Cheese's.

But there was one junior high school student wasn't as fortunate or anywhere near such fun-filled places that night. He'd been put to work by the time he arrived outside the town, helping the removal men to set up his father's particular brand of arcade machines and burdened with the heavy responsibility of handling a massive wealth of merchandise. They worked hard through the evening until it approached midnight.

"Put the statue over there," the hooded boy ordered. "I want people to see the founder of this place when they come in," he lied. Keeping a strenuous eye between the bronze statue and his watch, the boy delicately cradled an adult shoe box sized and oriental patterned box tight to his chest and subtly raised it to his ear every few seconds as if to hear something going on inside it. He only had ten minutes left.

"You'll have to finish unloading tomorrow," he panicked.

"There's only one more crate left to go," argued the head deliveryman.

"Tomorrow." The response was well prepared. His demeanor was authoritative, almost scarily adult like and a little too confident for the Delivery Man to take seriously at first.

"I've told ya, we're fully booked, kid. We'll have to unload it *now*."

An opposing, defiant stare from the boy's eyes shot out from under the grey hoodie once the man had begun to speak. Shimmering eyes glistened from his shadowed face and caused the Delivery Man to take a step back cautiously.

"Leave the last crate outside," the boy charged.

It was a direct order, and the Delivery Man could tell the boy meant business.

"H-how will you be able-," stammered the man. His voice trailed off the second he noticed the young boy lick at his thumb while he continued to count out several Benjamin dollar bills in his small hands.

"Let my Father worry about that. I'm closing up now."

The answers were blunt. Rude. Final.

Distracted, he held the box up to his ear a second time, and the deliveryman took the payment swiftly, gasping at the directness of the sixth grader.

"You're weird, Kid, you know that?"

"Yes," the boy replied, directly, without taking the slightest bit of offense.

Firing a piercing whistle between his lips to his workmen, the head deliveryman motioned toward them to stop what they were doing and get back to their trucks. "Let's call it a night, boys."

By the time they'd driven off, the clock had read eleven fifty-eight. The hooded boy rushed to lock and bolt the main factory doors up and carried the small box across the large factory floor toward the statue.

"That was cutting it close," he puffed.

"*Too close!*" rasped a voice from inside. "Get me out of this thing. I don't want to miss it," it commanded.

The boy quickly compared the time displayed on his digital Casio watch to the clock on the wall. "Under a minute left," he revealed.

"*Let me out!*"

The boy watched in awe through the warehouse's main grubby windows as storms formed over the town's power station about forty miles away from him.

"It's happening. Just like you said it would," the boy whooped, excitedly.

"I want to see! Let me see!" pressed the voice.

The boy's chapped and bruised fingers struggled to fiddle the rusted key that unloosened each latch and caused a considerable popping from the lid. It flung open fast and hit his chest, pushing him to the ground.

The small figure couldn't wait to break out of its cocoon fast enough as it climbed out from the box with its robust little hands clasping over the edges. It rose in a disorientated state with the back of its head facing the front of its body.

"You did it again," the boy snorted.

"This always happens when I travel," the dummy grumbled, in its broad and thick British accent. It cautiously sat down on the counter top, trying to spin its head back around to face the right way.

"Here, let me help you." The boy scrambled to his feet and went to twist the head the correct way. Without warning, the dummy's head spun round to reveal its creepy features that were hideously worn and eerie. The boy jerked as it callously attempted to snap at his fingers in a sinister tease.

"Mind your fingers," it teased. "I thought I'd be in there all night," it added, growling this time. With its little wooden hands, the smartly dressed dummy began patting the dust off its little burgundy cardigan and bow tie.

"Nice to see you too, Dummy," he replied, sardonically.

The dummy's black and cold eyes intimidated the boy. Its face was worn and chipped and in need of a good refurbishing, mainly its nose. Scrapings and discoloring told its age. Instead of plastic, the dummy had its own well-crafted thick

grey wig woven into its head from long ago, which made it look eerier since its hair was cropped neatly in a severe side shade.

“How many times do I have to tell you, boy? It’s *Mr. Gumble*, not Dummy.”

“The embroidery on your cardigan says differently,” the boy argued.

Mr. Gumble’s lips were tiny, tight and chapped but moved unlike an uninhabited wooden dummy would when it talked. Instead, his facial features ran much like humans did: *organic*.

“Silence, child. Behold, our Father returns,” gulped Mr. Gumble. Their eyes widened and gawked at the bronze statue in front of them. The smell of the air had changed. Electrical currents swarmed and encompassed the warehouse causing the dummy’s hair to stand on end from the thick static. Mr. Gumble lifted his bony arms into the air to welcome the surge of lightning that was roaring in the heavens. But the electricity failed to strike from above as they had expected. Instead, the currents came from below.

“*Look out!*”

The boy dove aside first and just about avoided the first lightning bolt inches away from his feet. The surge of bright energy pierced the basement floorboards and broke through its concrete layering, striking the statue several times and on time, at the stroke of midnight.

A few seconds went by before another bolt of lightning hit the town’s power station, only this time the flash kept surging straight from its factory afar, firing several small charges of electricity into the bronze statue that circulated and rippled into every crate and box inside the store. One bolt penetrated past the doors to the very last container outside, attracting the surge of electricity to it like a magnet. The colossal dance of white light sent one previous shockwave out of the building. Its rapid expulsion of pure power spread fast across the complete map of Fairfax and all the way to its outskirts.

The hazardous blast had short-circuited the power station. Nearly every home and business on the grid were out.

An ember light pulsated in the center of the warehouse, giving off the only radiance on the street. The boy carefully took a few steps closer to the statue of his father, as it throbbed with fiery light, and lifted his hood away from his face. Cautiously, the boy stretched out his hand to touch the statue. A straightforward stroke from his fingers on his father’s frozen hand created a spark of energy. The

statue's hand juddered in reflex then immediately grabbed at the boy's wrist, leaving him with a nasty burn. The mold from his hands and forearms began crackling then broke into pieces, revealing the moving hands of the man trapped inside. Morsels of led crumbled everywhere and spilled over the child's sneakers.

"The prodigal Dad returns," the boy stated. Tears of pain streamed down his face and created lines embedded in the boy's cheeks, but he did not cry. These were tears of joy.

The dummy sat behind them both and marveled at the cursed man, breaking free from his Century old tomb and when he was sure his Master saw him, returned a sly grin that said *welcome home*.

Drunk or sober, the wobbly porch step seemed to catch the tip of his shoe and tip him toward the front door. Friday nights were bar nights. Most of the faculty knew Principal Harvey was fond of the sauce and had grown fonder of it since the recent passing of his dear wife. Sadly, they bore no children so she decided long ago if she couldn't have their own they'd at least use their talents and what they know to teach. Keeping himself busy was the key to life for him now. Retirement would have long killed him, and he wasn't about to throw in the towel just yet, no matter how much pressure the education board cranked up for him to do so. Aside from his late wife, Principal Harvey lived and breathed his work at Parkman and had been there for more than forty-two-years and this old dog wasn't going down without a fight. These days he wished School remained opened for the weekend. If he could have stayed on twenty-four seven, he would have. Every dreaded Friday was the same for Principal Harvey. He'd leave three hours after the last school bell then head to his local dive bar where the jukebox would play his favorite Rat Pack tracks (and devour a twenty for the pleasure). Every Friday evening, Principal Harvey plunked himself in his spot at the end of the bar. He'd order a few Brandy Alexanders for the big game on the bar's T.V. and, when the time came, waltz a mile and a half home. He hoped to be tired enough to pass out by the time his key turned the lock, never to have sobered up enough to stay up or make the stupid decision to drive under the influence. And although the routine felt the same, this night felt different somehow. It was later than usual; he'd lingered longer in the bar than regular and drank more than he was

accustomed to and as he neared the refurbished and infamous Cayskett farmhouse he and his wife outbid in an auction, it appeared darker than the day he'd lost her. After fifty years of marriage, pronouncing his arrival was one habit he found hard to break until he eventually gave up trying to.

"Honey, it's me," he muttered, tiredly.

No reply, of course. But the sound of his voice was always better for him to hear over the solo sounds of his footsteps. The ticking of his grandfather clock felt louder the second he'd shut the door, different somehow, but he instantly tossed it up to his faulty hearing aid playing tricks on him again, never to be one to admit his state of drunkenness maybe the problem nor one to give in to silly superstition. He'd also mistaken the rascally voices for the television he thought had been left on until he slumped himself on the couch to notice its blank, reflective screen in front of him. The drunken man grunted and began heaving himself to his feet once he finally became aware the power was out.

"Damn generator. Waste of Benjamins that was," he mumbled.

Another giggle from the shadows complemented patter of feet and stopped the inebriated man swaying in his tracks. Closing the basement door gently, he shifted through the dark landing to his gun cabinet and strove to load his hunting rifle.

"Okay, who's there? Come out, and I won't shoot." Principal Harvey's voice almost closed over with fright, completely missing his signature tone and authoritative delivery he'd mastered throughout his career. "If you're here to rob me, you've come to the wrong place." His second attempt to sound imposing came off a little garbled and nervy – even doleful.

He blinked once, and the house was no longer shrouded in darkness. The cabinet lights flickered on and unveiled the dead faces that had been staring at him. Their little bodies covered the counters. Some stood, others sat. He would have bet his bottom dollar he was still in the hallway when he found himself inside his kitchen doorway.

"What in the heavens?" he asked. "Where did you lot come from?"

It was a question he didn't expect any reply. But when it came, it made his heart leap in his chest with a pain he'd never felt.

"Here," a voice answered. It was a simple and straightforward reply, like a child's reply, in a child's voice.

Having hundreds of toys suddenly appear meticulously propped inside his kitchen was eerie enough but having one (or someone) reply to him proved too much for an old heart to take. Rushing to the front door uncovered another row of toys blocking his exit. Another power surge left him in darkness again as the tittering grew and suggested more than one person was in that house with him. It sounded close.

Trembling, the old Principal flicked on his hunting light attached to his rifle and gave a warning shot into the ceiling. Dust and pieces of plasterboard fell near his feet as he labored to listen in silence for footsteps or movement, indicating his intruders' whereabouts. Reaching for high ground, the old Principal scampered toward his grand staircase, knocking into a chest of drawers and tipping over several frames, including one holding his wedding day photo, which smashed on contact with the newly refurbished oak wooden floor. Pointing his rifle's flashlight down at the toys by the front door had distracted him from what crept behind.

"Get out of my house!"

The light uncovered the left side of the ground floor then moved to the right, then the middle. But it revealed nothing. No movement, no intruder, just a stack of motionless stuffed toys and dolls that lay blocking the front door. He strained his ears to listen out for another patter of footsteps and could only pick up the ticking of the grandfather clock directly below him. Apart from the blockage of old-fashioned toys, the coast was clear, enough for him to make a run to the door and remove the toys so he could reach his BMW outside. In a situation like this when he was more at a disadvantage, phoning for help would've been too risky or possibly fatal. He sensed a cramp coming on in his left foot when he eventually moved from his spot to take a brave step toward the stairwell. It was here he sensed something he hadn't felt elsewhere, not even in the kitchen. The sense of someone lingering behind him froze him to the spot, yet when the light breath gently tickled the hairs on his neck, announcing its real presence to him, Principal Harvey's instincts flung his body around to protect him as he raised his aim to shoot.

It could've been a tall figure, judging by how its shadow had encompassed his but the look on his face changed from a fearful grimace to sudden bewilderment and surprise. Whoever or whatever he'd seen had greatly relieved him, so much as to let his guard down.

"What are you doing in my house?" he asked, casually.

"You took the words right out of my mouth," replied the shadowy figure.

Unbeknownst to the Principal, the threat was every bit as serious. His late comprehension proved fatal after the sudden and sneaky push tipped his upper body over the banister and sent his skull dropping fast toward the hard wooden floor below from eight feet above.

By then it was too late for Principal Harvey, the shock of it had stopped his heart before his lifeless body landed inches away from an old family picture, depicting him in happier times.

END OF SAMPLE

From the young adult novel *Dimitri's Toys*©.

