



# Fear Them & Bones

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# Them Bones

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## 1

The world has seen its share of geniuses come and go. Some have been born that way, others were taught into genius. Those whose minds are shaped by others fall into that latter category. The subject of this awfully true tale was one of these types of people as well. A genius with book smarts that never wanted anything but to pass along her knowledge.

I came to know Becky Ann Farris when I was her guard for several years of her life. We became great friends, unlike any friendship I had ever had. I guess we hit it off because I felt bad for her. She just didn't belong in the situation she was in. I don't really know where she did belong, I just knew she was in the wrong place. Becky Ann told me her life story over countless conversations we shared under confines. I, Barkley Willis a lowly prison guard at the Iowa State Penitentiary psychiatric ward. Becky Ann, prisoner of the state.

Everyone at Iowa State, except for one Becky Ann Farris, belonged exactly where they were. They **were** cold-hearted criminals, just as suspected. I knew that much. But Becky... she wasn't psychotic, she did not need to be kept under lock and key... but who would have really believed me? She was proven guilty by a crack team of jurors in a court of law. Me going around saying that her committed crime was not her fault would be like telling the Warden that the jail cells did not have bars anymore. Warden Killery would put **ME** in the psych ward.

It is a shame that I could do nothing to help my close friend, but the best I *can* offer is to retell her story as best I can. I have checked and rechecked my facts, as horrendous as they are, because that is what Becky Ann would have wanted. It is the least I can do.

## 2

Becky Ann Farris was born and raised by a loving and supportive family. From a young age, she had one goal in life, and that was to become a teacher. Becky Ann didn't want to be just any old teacher, she wanted to be the best – an award winning teacher that was adored and respected by her students. Anything less would have been a waste. That was Becky Ann's goal, and that is precisely what she set out to do as soon as she exited high school. But I am getting a bit ahead of myself now.

Becky Ann didn't just **want** to become a teacher like so many young girls, she was **destined** to lead children on the path to greatness. Little Becky Ann watched her favorite grade school teachers very, very closely. Meticulously, you could say. If the teacher tried a new innovative lesson or group assignment out for the first time, you could bet Becky was taking double the notes. A set of notes about her assignment, and another set altogether detailing her instructors plans and movements!

Becky Ann realized at a very young age that being great at something took extraordinary effort. Every note taken about her professors led to where she ended up after high school. Becky Ann literally had a bustling file cabinet of ideas that chronicled every year of her life in schooling. Becky Ann went to college to take the next steps to becoming a teacher, which were - most importantly, learning the material. Becky Ann was amazed by the mechanics of the human body, and so she decided that she wanted to expand her mind in the field of Health and Anatomy. Becky Ann did just that, and it was

not long before she was searching for the perfect school to teach at.

Becky Ann took great pleasure in knowing that it would not be long before she was going to see those small hands raised in the air just begging to answer a question. “Mrs. Farris! I think I know the answer!” On a completely different note, Becky Ann had never particularly liked her doubly long first name, so at this point in her life she decided that it would be best to shorten it. And, at about this point, silly Becky told me that I was to stop calling her that completely.

*Annie*, as she now wanted to be known, was truly living out her dream. Everything seemed to shift in her favor in every path she took, and Annie could not have been happier. Perfection was always how you could describe the life of Annie Farris.

Up until this point I have thrown fluffy clouds and pink unicorns at you, because sure enough, this was truly how good Annie's life was at this time. So now I have to shift to the role of the **grim reaper**, if you will. The fateful shift I speak of occurred on the day she met the man named Brad Weatherby. I am not going to just come out and say that he was a bad man, or that he even had bad intentions when he met little Annie (The woman is twenty-four years of age, I am going to have to force myself to stop speaking in such a protective, father-figure way about her). I will leave *assumptions* up to you as this story progresses. It is too early for me to say that any one person directly led Annie into her dire situation, but I intend to clear all of that up before my writing is finished.

### 3

Soon after Annie began her search for a school to teach at she happened upon Wrightsburg Middle school. They had openings for the new school year for a health teacher, and Annie fit perfectly into their needs. Annie was so happy to finally be accomplishing her goals, and she was looking forward to meeting her future class, as school was set to start in just one month.

Annie got to know the other teachers at the school very well, and she felt like she fit in nicely. As well as everything was going for her, Annie couldn't help but think that the lucky streak was not going to continue much longer. It was just a gut feeling that was gnawing at her, she couldn't tell anyone about it – for fear of being called crazy! But she was worried nonetheless about her instincts. It just so happened that a spiritual advisor, a psychic, worked out of a little shop about a mile away from Annie's own apartment.

After a long day of working in her soon-to-be classroom, Annie headed off to the neighborhood psychic. Annie had a hard time pinpointing the location of the small shop in a cluttered old strip mall. The mall had thrived in the early 90's – Annie recalled, but a lot of the shop owners had to close when the big department stores moved into town. Annie pulled her SUV into a weathered, oily looking space in line with the front door of “Desiree, The Spiritual Advisor”. The timeless Open/Closed sign suction-cupped to the door read “**OPEN**” in big bold letters.

Annie walked in to Desiree's little room. The token beads that were in every television depiction of a psychic, hung from the one doorway ahead. Annie tried to walk through and got the beads caught in her hair. While Annie struggled with the annoying beads, the smell of several different burning incense shot up Annie's nostrils. The conflicting smells were overpowering to Annie and they nearly made her dizzy. Annie broke free and sneezed twice before she could cover her nose.

“What a pleasant place,” Annie mumbled, nasally. “Thank you,” a hoarse-sounding throat accepted the sarcastic compliment. Annie turned to see a small old woman standing at her side that was presumably Desiree. The psychic seemed very frail to Annie, and her loud clothing – decorated with *fools gold* necklaces – hung loosely from her bony body. “I need to speak with a psychic... Are you Desiree?” Annie noticed the old woman's press on red fingernails resembled fat lady bugs. “Why of course, sweetie.”

The woman took her ladybug fingers and motioned toward a small card table in the corner that was covered by a chintzy tablecloth. “Have a seat there, please,”... Annie took a step before noticing that something was moving at the edge of the bedazzled tablecloth. The stupid shop was so dark, lit only by candles, it was hard to tell **what** exactly was skittering

around down there.

At precisely the perfect moment, a car drove by outside, glaring its headlights into the shop. “Oh my GOD!” The little moving thing under the cloth was a furry **head**.

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“What – What *IS* that?” Annie proceeded to do the universal girly 'Ahh! A mouse!' dance as she stared at the moving thing. But the head was way too big to be a mouse. Startled by all of the yelping and frantic jumping, **IT** came sauntering out from the privacy of the tablecloth. “Not to be alarmed dear, that is just my spoiled kitty, Skittles.” The 'kitty' was in the candlelight now, and it was clear that she was in fact a spoiled one. The cat was morbidly obese, and at the same time, extremely filthy. It had surely been playing in mud puddles all day long.

“May we continue with your reading, Mrs... -” Conveniently enough, the psychic did not have a clue about her customer's name. “Ann Farris. Nice to meet you... I was just a little startled by the cat... but lets just have a seat, can we?” The psychic agreed, and they were soon leaning over the famed crystal orb, hands clasped together.

“Ann, I am going to request that you close your eyes at this time. Try to concentrate on all of your conflicting emotions, good and bad, any of your problems, just focus on **YOU**.” Annie relaxed a bit, or at least tried her best, in the uncomfortable place. She thought about her new job, about what it would be like to expand young minds, like she had heard her own teachers speak of all her life.

“You are doing wonderful,” Desiree complimented, “Let me place your hand on the crystal – continue to concentrate on everything that is of importance to you.” Annie felt a dry, cracked hand grab hers and place it onto the cool-feeling glass ball before her. “Now. I shall try and look into your eminent future...”

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Annie and the psychic sat in *dead* silence for what seemed like ten minutes. The silence was only interrupted one time, when Skittles the cat blundered into an antique vase, nearly breaking it in half. After half an hour of nothing, Annie's forehead was beginning to bead up with sweat, and her lower back ached from the awful hand-carved chair she was hunched in.

Annie's hands were nearly numb, and hadn't moved the entire time, until all of a sudden, Desiree's grip tightened. Annie flicked her eyes open at the sudden movement to see what was the matter, and saw that the psychic was staring intently at her. The psychic's head was glimmering with sweat now. Desiree's face was screwed up into an open-mouthed frown, and she also looked uncomfortable in her own familiar chair.

“Ann... do you have any recollection of an acquaintance by the name of Brian... or another B-name like... Billy?” Desiree waited patiently until Annie replied, “Er... no, I do not... why?” Desiree dropped her head downward and mumbled something at the table. She turned her attention to her cat, as if looking for guidance from it. It offered only a paw-licking.

“If you do not recognize the name, then this means that you simply have yet to cross the persons path. I have no doubt that they are in your future. I... I just need for you to promise me something Ann...” Annie had taken her hands back now, and was becoming more and more frightened as the reading continued.

Seeing that Annie was trembling now, Desiree explained further. “Whatever you choose to do in your life, stay

away from someone, I – I think it is a man... with a name that is close to what I mentioned. This person's face is unknown to me, but I can tell you that in a single moment, this person could potentially destroy everything your life was meant to be. You'll have to believe me on this. *Please.*”

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Annie rushed out of the horrid place with cold chills rushing from her head to her toes. The psychic could just as easily be a crock as she could be for real, but either way, Annie was not happy to hear the news. Annie decided it best to not drive home in her current condition, and a taxicab happened to be parked about a hundred feet away, under a flickering street lamp.

Annie climbed into the filthy cab and saw that the man inside was counting his money in the front seat. He hastily shoved the counted money into a box in the passenger side seat. He questioned Annie, “Where you headed?” Annie had a momentary memory lapse as she tried to focus on why she had gotten into the cab in the first place. “Uh..., Oh – Clairhaven Drive, please Sir..”

The driver looked into the mirror at her and asked, “Excuse my intrusion, but you look like a healthy young lady, you couldn't have walked the eight blocks?” The rude man interrupted Annie's swirling thoughts again with his prying question, and she rushed an answer out to get the driver to bug off... “I'm not feeling well, please just take me home.” The driver grunted, neither a chuckle nor a grunt of disapproval, just an *acid reflux* clearing grunt. Cabbie shook his head knowingly and drove through a sharp curve that he **didn't** seem to know very well.

His wheels began to give a soft squealing noise that resembled a whimper, as he tried to speed his way through the turn. The box full of the driver's cash-take slid off of it's seat and sent showers of money everywhere. The wads of currency became lodged between the driver's pedaling feet. Annie was gripping onto her door handle tightly, and realized she was stroking her lucky rabbit's foot in her other pocket at the same moment.

Annie had taken the treacherous turn on Twilight Court enough times to know not to speed through it. The curve was unfamiliar to the driver, and with the added distraction of money under his grubby shoes, he could not keep control of the little yellow automobile. His right tires left the pavement and veered into the grass as the driver jerked the steering wheel in the opposite direction pointlessly. Annie closed her eyes tightly in anticipation of the **smack**.

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Annie's eyes were clenched as tightly as her fists were as she was sprayed in the face with the manic driver's lukewarm coffee. One of the cab's tires popped violently and made the situation even worse for everyone – sending dancing sparks about the tar. Luck, perhaps a tiny rabbit's foot, was on Annie's side, because the nameless man steering the car managed to bring it to a halt without hitting a single thing.

The car was all of a sudden, deadly quiet – it must have cut off in the midst of the mayhem. Annie flicked her eyelids open to survey the damage. She looked down at her favorite white dress that was now completely ruined with coffee stains. She raised her head to eye the driver, and saw that he was breathing heavily in his seat, fogging up the windows.

Annie said nothing. She simply opened her car door and got out into the middle of the deserted road. She began walking toward the nearest sidewalk when she heard footsteps approaching her from being. As if the night hadn't been

awful enough, she turned to find that the cab driver was following her. His shirt was half tucked in, and was also covered in coffee, as well as some *unmentionable* liquids.

To Annie's disgust, the ugly man was smiling at her... showing his disheveled teeth. "It's a shame, I really tried hard." The punk ran his hand through his greasy hair and shook his head side to side. "You weren't supposed to live. I just tried to kill you, lady." The man had Annie backed into a corner, and she could not run, even if she tried.

"My sister, she's old enough to be my mom ya know, Desiree, she inherited this family gene thing that gave her the gift. I am a bit of a psychic myself, an' I know what's going on with you. So this guy with a "B" name is going to make your life a living Hell. You don't deserve that sweetie... so that is why I wrecked the car on purpose. I was trying to make your death come quicker, and painless, you know?"

The driver glanced back at his wrecked car before continuing, "Tried to aim for that telephone pole. Missed." The guy sighed at the ground before finishing his sentence. "Not gonna miss this time, sweetheart." In the driver's dirty hand was a switchblade knife. In Annie's perfectly manicured hand was a lucky rabbit's foot. Annie couldn't hold back her tears any longer.

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...Thankfully, Annie didn't show that she felt threatened by the imposing man. Because the lucky rabbit's foot that Daddy got little Annie at age Three had once again saved her life. An unmarked police car turned on to Twilight Court and immediately spotted the disturbance.

The red and blue lights strobed through the darkness and scared the cab driver half to death. He whiplashed his head around to see the approaching car, and immediately backed away from the cowering woman before him. The rest of that night was a distant memory to Annie, and she relayed to me that the policeman actually let the cabbie off with a stern warning. The cab driver was obviously thrilled as he walked to his spun car.

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Surprisingly, the rest of that week, the last one before the beginning of the new school semester, went very well for Annie. She was in all of the other teachers' 'good graces', and was quickly forgetting about that one ruined evening at the psychic freak shop. And then something truly wonderful happened to Annie. Two days before the school year, a last minute replacement teacher was called in for Mrs. Wright, the teacher placed next door to Annie. At first, Annie was saddened by this change – because she had become good friends with Mrs. Wright. But then she met the **new** teacher.

They met in that perfect scene from the movies that everyone has witnessed at least once. Annie was carrying a large box of shredded paper out of her classroom, at precisely the same moment that Mr. Alister was rushing to catch the school's principal. Mr. Alister was the replacement for Annie's next door teacher. The two busy teachers collided painfully outside of classroom number A15.

Annie struggled to stand up on the waxed tile floor, slipping on the shredded paper hazard. Davey was the first to stand, and reached out to help Annie to her feet. "I am very, very sorry. Are – are you hurt at all?" Annie brushed off some of the shredded paper stuck to her skirt and looked up at the man standing over her.

Annie grabbed his outstretched hand and tried not to stare into his beautiful eyes for too long. 'Is **THIS** hottie my new neighbor?', she thought. "I am fine, my blood tends to clot well," Annie joked. He didn't catch the sarcasm... "You're bleeding? Oh my God, let me call the nurse, hang on..." Annie laughed and grabbed his muscular arm, "No, I'm kidding,

kidding...”

At that very pleasant moment for Annie, the weirdest thing popped into her head. It was the image of Desiree saying, “Whatever you choose to do in your life, stay away from someone, I – I think it is a man... this person could potentially destroy everything your life WAS meant to be...”

Annie shook the stupid woman's face out of her thoughts and continued conversing with her newest co-worker.

I could very well continue on with the cheery details of how Annie became good friends with Davey, which led to a relationship between the two... but frankly – that information becomes all too unimportant when you look at the bigger picture at hand. Sadly, the cheery life that Annie led up until this point in time was about to be in her past. **For good.**

Six months passed by gracefully, as Annie fell deeper into love with Davey Alister. At the same time in her life, Annie was equally happy with her teaching profession. She felt so lucky to be able to work only one door away from her boyfriend.

On Annie and Davey's six-month anniversary of their first date together, the two decided to have a dinner at the Lone Wolf Steakhouse in downtown. They also decided to purchase gifts for one another. As that Friday afternoon dwindled slowly to a close, Annie's mind was a little preoccupied with anticipation of the night ahead. Somehow she managed to finish up her last class of the school day without completely getting side tracked.

The annoying school bell went into action at exactly 3:01 PM, and Annie's classroom was empty before the bell had even stopped ringing. As Annie gathered up her pocketbook, coat and other belongings, Davey snuck up beside her and tapped on her shoulder. Annie nearly jumped over her desk. “You – you SCARED me Davey!” Davey put his arm around her shoulder and offered condolences. “Sorry baby, you scare way too easy.” Annie was angered by this, because she always considered herself to be a pretty tough girl. “Do *not*!” She whimpered.

“ANYway,” Davey said, “I got you somethin’.” That was all it took to brighten Annie up like a light bulb. “Thank you very much... where is it?” Annie looked down at his empty hands. Davey smiled and held up one finger, signaling Annie to wait just one second. “Close your eyes, Annie!” Davey called from the empty hallway. “They're closed!” Annie indeed closed her eyes tightly, and in a moments time, she heard a squeaky sound approaching her slowly. “Surprise!”, Davey shouted. Annie popped open her eyes, only to be startled again half to death.

Standing in front of her was a fleshless 6 foot tall *skeleton*...

“Oh no, I didn't mean to scare you, Annie!” Davey put his hand on Annie's shoulder again to console her. “I take it you don't like the gift.” Davey pieced this guess together after seeing Annie's mouth gaping at him in horror. Annie was only momentarily frightened, just until she figured out what she was looking at.

“No, no, no, Davey! Not at all! **I LOVE IT!**” Annie threw her arms around Davey and squeezed him tightly. Davey felt relieved that she wasn't mad at him. “I thought that you would really enjoy using this for your students, seeing as how this school gets no funding for stuff like that...” Davey explained. “Davey, I have wanted a Skeleton to teach with

since I was just a little girl! I'll put it right to use!"

Davey scratched his head, "Now, I know it isn't really all that clean, or the best *skeleton* money can buy, but... it's yours now." Annie was making funny gestures with the skeleton's hands while she stood behind it. Mr. Sylva, another teacher, passed by in the hallway and joked, "Annie... you need to eat something!" Annie promptly raised the skeleton's hand up to make an obscene gesture. Davey cracked up and hugged her tightly.

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Annie still had a couple of papers to grade, and realized it right when she was ready to leave for the evening. Davey headed home, and told Annie to call him when she reached the restaurant. Annie sat in her desk chair marking away at her student's papers for a longer time than she originally expected. Annie glanced up at the clock numerous times as her grumpiness grew by the minute.

Annie reached the last five pages of homework to grade, and her headache seemed to ease. The school around her was completely empty. The silence annoyed Annie, and she tried to hum a song she knew to escape it. Mid-hum, Annie stopped. She looked up at her empty classroom, thinking she had heard something. She shrugged it off and continued. Then Annie put down her pen once again. Sure enough, after Annie stopped humming abruptly, another voice **continued** humming along in unison for a split second. "All right, all right. Who is there?! I don't fall for pranks, do you hear me?" Annie announced to the dark hallway.

From directly in front of her desk, a gnarled-sounding voice growled, "It's not a prank".

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Annie was not ashamed to admit to me that she – excuse the language – relinquished her bladder in that moment. An empty school, an empty classroom, a Friday night. All this did not add up to what she had just heard inside her own room. I probably would have peed my pants too... poor girl. "Who is it?" Annie tried to say, but "Who..." was all she managed to croak out at that time.

The voice had been very clear, and Annie's ears did not fail her often. The voice had definitely come from right in front of her desk. Right in front of her desk was standing a skeleton that Davey had given her only one hour before. The skeleton was partially facing the deserted hallway, and seemed to pose for a portrait.

Annie gained more of her vocal cords back and asked again, "Who... said that?" The room's reply was continued silence. Annie thought to herself, 'That's it, I'm going home. I'll finish these papers over the weekend'. Annie once again shuffled and gathered up her belongings.

Annie shut off the classroom lights and headed into the hallway. As she pulled the door closed to lock it, she pretended not to hear the voice again. She convinced herself that it didn't just say "Bye".

Annie was very jumpy for the rest of the night, and un-characteristically frightened by the littlest things. After Annie called Davey to let him know she was at home, she began to change into some more comfortable clothes. Upon opening the closet door, she got chill bumps when a pair of jeans fell out and onto the floor. "Annie, STOP acting like this..." she told herself.

About fifteen minutes later, Davey arrived. Annie grabbed her purse and headed toward his car. He met her in the driveway with a large bag of something in his hands. "Annie, I decided to just bring dinner to your house instead of going to that noisy old steakhouse tonight."

"Is that OK?" Davey asked. "Sure," Annie replied, "What have you got?" Annie pointed at the bag. Davey



walked with her to her door, “Well, I got us some chicken and vegetable plates from Perry's On The Lake.” Annie enjoyed that restaurant's food especially. Before long, Annie and Davey were seated at the dinner table, and now that Annie was eating, she started to feel much better.

“Davey, the weirdest thing happened today.” Davey put down a muffin and listed to Annie intently. “Don't think that I'm crazy, but when I was grading some papers today, I started *hearing* things... voices...” Davey eyebrows raised at this news. “Who was it?” he asked Annie. “I – I don't know, I never **saw** anyone, finally I just got up and left. I was scared...”

“Why didn't you call me then?” Davey sounded worried. Annie shook her head in reply, “...I only heard one voice, it hummed at me or something... and it said some other things, I don't know who it was. The creepy thing about it is, the voice sounded like it was coming from right in front of me. The *skeleton* you gave me was right in front of me, David.”

## 12

Davey took this startling information the wrong way. He accused Annie of hating his gift and trying to make up a reason to get rid of it. “It was hard work getting that, you know?” Davey exclaimed. “I know, I'm sorry Davey, I really DO like it. I was probably just hearing things in my head I guess.”

Anxious to calm Davey down, Annie told him to wait where he was. She went to her bedroom to retrieve her present for him. “Now I know that this is so small compared to what you got ME, but I just hope that you'll still like it.” Annie explained to Davey.

Davey smiled at Annie and took the wrapped present. “Like I could stay mad at you.” He tore away the glittery wrapping paper to reveal a 24 Karat gold money clip. Inside the clip was a gift card to Davey's favorite store, “Music, Movies, and More”. “Oh Annie, this is ten times better than what I got you, I should be the one apologizing.”

“So you do like it?” Annie asked. “Of course I do, I love it.” Davey stood up and kissed Annie before giving her a bear hug. He took some bills out of his pocket and tried the money clip out. “Annie, I do not want you going around scared of anything, I wouldn't be a man if I didn't. So, if you want me to, I can sleepover on the couch tonight and keep guard for you, just until you feel safe again.”

Annie glanced at her poofy couch. It had a clear view of the front door and surrounding windows. Annie was half-afraid that the voices she heard **were** in her head, and not real. But, if Davey wanted to protect her, she wasn't about to stop him. “That is so nice of you, Davey. I would love it if you did... just for tonight?” Davey nodded his head and hugged Annie tightly again.

Annie gave her boyfriend some better pillows and a blanket and she kissed him goodnight. Annie climbed into her own bed only a few minutes later and exhaled loudly in relief. What a bad day it had been. On one hand, Annie loved the gift she received, and Davey seemed to enjoy his as well, but on the other hand, Annie was hearing voices for the first time in her life.

Annie realized that she would have to return to the school one more time over the weekend if she was going to get any work done. She also decided that she would figure out who was playing tricks on her, no matter what she had to do. Annie's last thought before falling asleep that evening was a sad one...

“God I hope I'm not going crazy.”

At this point, Annie was completely sure that she had lost her mind. She began to consider turning herself into a mental health facility. Unfortunately, Annie had no idea how bad it was going to get from that point on.

After a brutal night of tossing, turning, and wrestling with uncomfortable pillows in her bed, Annie finally spotted sunlight squeezing in between her bedroom window's blinds. It was going to take a lot more than sunlight to get Annie out of her bed and walking again. Thoughts of the impending day were enough to keep her planted under the covers. Eventually (As Annie's digital alarm clock flickered to 11:07 A.M.), Davey snuck into her bedroom.

Annie was face down with her head buried in 90% cotton and 10% new materials. Davey sat on the edge of the bed and rubbed on Annie's back, in an attempt to wake her. He didn't need to, she was awake before he even walked in. "I take it you didn't sleep well?" Davey questioned Annie, as she glared at him with her sheet-wrinkled little face. "Hey, I wasn't sleeping on a bed of roses either," Davey offered.

Annie snickered and struggled to sit up amongst the twisted bedsheets. "Sorry about that, I have been meaning to get a guest bed for some time now... hey – at least no bogeymen came to get me last night... or did they?" Davey sighed and looked down at his socks before answering, "I am pleased to report that there were no visits from the bogeyman, nor any of his acquaintances last night."

"Ha ha, real funny... do you want some breakfast Davey?" Davey stood up beside the bed and shook his head 'no'. "I helped myself to a slice of cake you had in the kitchen – but, to be honest Annie – I really need to head home to my own bed – I'm so tired..." Davey scratched his frazzled bed-head, only making it look worse.

"Of course, Davey. I was thinking, I oughta go to work for a few hours since it doesn't look like I'm going to get any sleep today anyway." Davey nodded in agreement and hunched over to kiss Annie on her forehead. "Well, take care then, I will call you in a few hours, OK?" Annie was already standing, combing her own hair, "Got it, and thanks for staying over tonight sweetie." Davey playfully rested his head on Annie's shoulder. "Welcome...", he then proceeded to snore loudly in her ear.

"Get out of here," Annie laughed.

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Within thirty minutes, Annie was sitting at her familiar desk in her classroom. Annie clasped her hand over her warm forehead and began rifling through her students papers. "Let's see, Workbook page 11, page eleven...", Annie mumbled down at the Oak tabletop. At the exact moment she reached Allen Rizzo's page, a familiar voice cut the silence in half. Annie felt chill bumps pop up on her arms at the very tone of the man's voice.

"You know... I have grown deathly tired of performing these parlor tricks for your amusement. Annie stared at the motionless skeleton before her that, somehow, had been granted vocal cords. "So, it is time to get down to business Ann, my dear. Listen carefully..."

"I have a simple task that needs completing, and seeing as how I am nothing but a phantom – I will need a living, breathing person's help. I have chosen you and **only** you, Ann. If you cannot complete my task and follow my orders completely, there will be irreversible consequences. You don't want to know what *those* are, dear."

"But... why me?" Annie couldn't believe she was actually communicating with a ghost. The voice did in fact reply, "Ah, we're on speaking terms now. Good. I chose you because you have the access needed to complete my task. Believe me, I looked around quite a bit before settling on you. Are you ready to hear what I want you to do?"

Annie nodded, her mouth was too dry to open. "Take notes... Annie." The ghost paused to clear his throat rather theatrically. "It's dusty in the afterlife, my dear. No matter, I just need you to pay attention. Let me begin.

"On Sunday of this week, you are going to visit the Blue Point Guns & Ammunition store. When you enter, you will approach the selection of knives. You shall pick one that is seven to ten inches in blade length, and you will purchase it. Once it is in your possession, you are to drive to the address I am about to give you, please note this now." The man spouted out the full address and Annie managed to scribble it down on a scrap of paper.

"This address is a residence. Living at this address is a female named Eliza Taylor. Now, when darkness begins to fall over this woman's residence, you will move in. You will enter through the back door of the home, as I have noticed that she carelessly leaves it unlocked every evening.

"Once you are in, you will probably find Eliza in either the Kitchen, preparing dinner – or in the dining room eating it. She lives alone, so do not worry about anyone getting in your way. Now comes the important part. Once you have successfully found Ms. Taylor, you must sneak up to her and carry out with the task at hand. She mustn't see your face, so you will be forced to do this from behind.

"You will take your dagger and forcefully jab it into her heart. That is all."

"That's ALL?! Are you out of your mind? I can't kill anyone! I'm – I'm leaving now." Annie's mind was racing and her brain pounded in her skull as she began grabbing up her things. "That would not be wise, Ann. If you leave now, I will be forced to find someone else to do my bidding, and I would have them carry it out on you as well."

"**WHO ARE YOU?**" Annie screamed at the blank skeleton's face. "Ah, I am glad you finally decided to ask that question. Ann, you are a school teacher, you might have heard of me at some point in your career. They called me Poe. Mr. Edgar Allen Poe."

Annie froze. She had read many of 'Poe's' writings as a child. "C-come on, you expect me to believe that YOU... you SCUM... were Edgar Poe?" Annie sounded unsure of herself. "Well, Ann, you seem to believe that you are conversing with a dead person, so why is it such a stretch to believe that I am Edgar Allen Poe?"

Annie said nothing at this point. "Truthfully, I am Poe, and I picked you, madame, to help me claim my revenge. As you may know, I was found dead many, many years ago. My death has remained unsolved, but only I

know who killed me, and that is why I sought you out.

"You see, I was jumped and manhandled by three people on a sidewalk in this very town. The three men who did this must have seen my suit and thought I had money. Once they had beaten me to a pulp, they found twelve dollars in my pocket. At that time, I was still a poor man, struggling to pay for everything I purchased.

"That same night I had left a bar that these three men were firmly seated in. They had followed me and of course, they murdered me that evening. But the very best part is, I know who these men were. Many years have passed, but there were many descendants of these men. One of which happens to be living still. One by the name of Eliza Taylor. She knew that her father was involved in my vicious murder. He told her this several years before his own death.

"The problem is, Eliza never did the right thing. She never turned the man in. He should have been executed. Unfortunately he did not die brutally like I did, so his death did not justify or complete me at all. So you see, Eliza Taylor must be killed. You have no choice but to do this for me. If you complete my orders without fail, you will never have to hear from me again."

### ***Sunday, September 15th, 7:54 P.M.***

Ann Farris had managed to ignore Davey's phone calls for more than twelve hours straight. She also cried for most of that time, because she knew that her task was at hand. Ann had an inner struggle between killing a perfect stranger or killing herself. It was the most difficult decision someone would ever have to make.

After purchasing a six inch bowie knife and walking for sixteen blocks, Ann found herself struggling to breathe as she stood in someone else's driveway. Ann gulped, but her throat tightened and cramped up. She looked at the painted plum-colored mailbox at the end of the driveway. Below the house number on the mailbox was a name.

*- Taylor -*

Annie couldn't help but notice the beautifully hand-painted letters on that mailbox. Such care was taken to make it simply perfect. And at that moment, somewhere behind Annie's eyes, she could feel tears trying to creep out for the hundredth time that day. But in a single day, Ann had turned into a cold, hard-hearted woman. She held back the tears and didn't even tremble as she began to slowly walk up the concrete driveway.

It was barely dark at this time, but dark enough so that the solar lamppost in Eliza's yard had kicked into action. Ann didn't care who saw her, she just needed to get the whole thing over with. In a moments time, Annie realized she was standing on a fuzzy green welcome mat.

Annie watched her hand as it reached out and gripped around the cold bronzed door knob. She felt possessed as she turned the handle...

For some reason, Annie had felt compelled to purchase a black trench coat at a nearby thrift store earlier. Annie thought that the trench coat would simply hide her better in the dark. Now, she found herself fumbling with the flaps covering its pockets. Her sweaty hands were no match for the quarter-sized buttons on the coat.

She had become aggravated rather quickly, and was now breathing a little **too** heavily in the main entrance of the home. With one hand, Annie grasped the oversized knife tightly. The other hand manipulated the door handle so that the lock would not “Click” when she pushed it closed. Annie hated herself at this moment, as she came to the realization that she was *thinking* like a murderer.

Once the door was safely shut behind her, Annie looked to the right of the entry way. She saw a strobing television screen. It was tuned to the local evening news. Directly ahead of Annie was another room. The light was on, and it spilled out into the hallway, almost inviting Annie inside. Annie slowly approached the room, and as she stepped closer, she could now see that it was the kitchen.

Just as Annie had begun to approach the room, she came to an abrupt stop. She stopped because someone was in the kitchen. Not just *someone* – it was Eliza who was moving about the tile flooring. Annie was a safe enough distance away so that she could not be seen, but of course, Eliza wouldn't be expecting an intruder in her kitchen anyway. Once Eliza was out of view, Annie decided she would have to cut through the dining room if she were to reach the kitchen quietly.

She stepped into the carpeted dining area and was immediately struck with a pang of guilt. Eliza kept her house impeccably clean. The table she planned to eat at was set for two people, in facing seats. Annie assumed that Eliza was waiting for a special person to come along someday and fill that plush chair.

After staring at the beautifully set table for a minutes time, Annie knew she had to continue her task. Just around the other side of that wall was a woman that Annie had been contracted to kill. At this point, it was either kill or be killed.

Annie took three more steps before she was at the trimmed edge of the doorway that led to the kitchen. She sighed as quietly as one could, and used her empty hand to pull the trench coats hood over her head. The hood covered her forehead completely and the fabric just touched the top of her eyebrows. Annie turned her head ever so slowly and directly into the kitchen doorway.

Annie felt as if her heart had fallen out of place and was now in the pit of her belly. She felt that way not because of what she had come to do to this woman, but rather for a much more frightening reason. There was someone *ELSE* in the kitchen with Eliza...

Annie was trembling as she stared at the back of the person who was in the kitchen with Eliza. Eliza was seated and appeared to be dicing onions or peppers with her own knife. She was facing away from Annie, and she also had her back to the person who was standing in the kitchen already. The worst part of it all – the person standing behind Eliza was twirling a **knife** in HIS right hand as he stared at the back of her head.

Annie was dumbfounded by what she was seeing, and was no longer trying to hide. She was standing in the kitchen doorway now, just watching the menacing figure in front of her. For no particular reason, this man began to pivot his head to the left, while his body remained facing the woman in the chair. He turned his head like an owl until it was almost parallel to his shoulder.

In a disturbing moment, the mans eyes seemed to notice Annie in the doorway. His lips curled up into a horrible grin before he snapped his head back to its original position. In a single step, Annie watched as the knife in his hand darted through the air, and was thrust violently into the womans side. Eliza screamed in pain as Annie felt as though she could vomit at any moment. A sudden pounding filled her brain and ears, even her eyes seemed to pound in a drumming beat, to match.

Between excruciating pulses of pain, Annie could make out the laughter of the man in the kitchen. He was laughing at the fact that he had just killed a woman, while Annie's eyes were streaming with tears. Why – why didn't she TRY and stop him?

A new pain originated on Annie's left shoulder. Annie struggled to see through the waterfall of tears in her eyes and found that it was a hairy hand that was tightly gripping her. As she looked at the hand, it squeezed even tighter. She followed the blurred outline of the mans arm and it led up his shoulder and to his face. She probably did not want to see who this man was, but it soon became very clear, very fast, **who** - exactly he was.

She did not know his real name, for he was known to her only as Cabbie.

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"I'll make this quick," said the cab driver, "I don't want you running off."

"I have no idea who *she* was, but if you'll recall, I am a psychic. I knew you were headed here tonight, I also knew what you were planning to do. But the most important thing I knew was that you would chicken out at the last second.

"You thought you'd do me in that night I wrecked the car, so payback was in order. And as far as those police know..., Cabbie pointed at the window as a faint siren began to approach, "**You** killed this woman."

At that moment, the cabbie shoved the bloody knife into Annie's hand... handle first. The last thing Annie saw was a clenched fist in front of her nose before she was clubbed in the head by the vicious cab driver.

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He pulled it off. The perfect set-up. Annie's eyes forced their way open nearly twenty hours later. After blinking the remnants of sleep away, Annie tried to sit up and get a look around. She didn't move an inch. She was strapped down to a steel observation table.

At that moment, Annie came to her final sad realization. Her life had come to a devastating conclusion. She had been caught in the act, and there was no chance she could talk her way out of this one.

20

Annie spent three full days strapped to that table. It was pure torture. Twice a day, two men wearing surgeons masks and white uniforms would enter the room to feed Annie. They didn't show Annie the respect to feed her the normal way though. At some point while she slept they had set up a feeding tube. Why were they treating her like this?

On the fourth morning that Annie awoke strapped down, the men were in the room already. As Annie struggled to

see them in her peripheral view, she saw that the commotion seemed to be for her. Soon, she felt the table begin to roll, and realized she was being pushed out of the room. They rolled her down a very long silver-colored hallway for what seemed like hours. Finally, they slowed to a stop and Annie could hear one man jingling keys as he tried to open a door. The door creaked open and the table Annie was on was rolled inside the room. It appeared to be a jail cell, by the looks of it. Annie's torture table just barely fit into the cell.

One man began unstrapping Annie's feet and legs as the other worked the locks on her bruised wrists. Annie was overjoyed to be getting out of the contraption, but at the same time, knew that this jail cell was not going to be much more pleasant. The men finished unstrapping Annie, and left the cell. They slammed the door shut behind them as Annie sat up to survey her new home. The cell was maybe 7 feet by 4 feet, and was only big enough for her torture bed, a sink and toilet and herself.

"Home sweet home," Annie mumbled.

## Epilogue

I'll bet you're wondering how all Annie's story relates to me, Barkley. Well, as I said at the beginning of it all, I am... *was* a prison guard for the Iowa State Penitentiary. I was one of the men who visited Annie every day to deliver her food. Once Annie was put in her cell, I was put on a regular schedule for her feeding times. Something intrigued me about her from the beginning. Maybe it was how she looked, or how she spoke, something wasn't right here. Annie was not the type of person that wound up in psych ward.

Gradually, our brief 'hellos' became longer conversations, and Annie and I became friends, you could say. As I began to hear her story, I felt compelled to write it down. When I had free time, I copied it down into a journal, because I felt that someone **had** to hear this woman's story. She *wasn't* supposed to be in this prison. Trying to get someone to believe me on that was the hard part. After I felt confident in my retelling of her story, I took it to the various people in charge of Annie's sentence. They would not hear me out. I was at risk for losing my job, if I persisted.

So, I dropped the point. All my life, the only job I had been able to hold was this one... I was not about to lose it under any circumstance. I did have an insider that told me what the judge was going to sentence Annie with. In less than one month, Annie was to be executed by lethal injection.

One thing that struck me as odd, was that her "boyfriend" never visited her in prison. He knew she was in there, the story about the woman she murdered made it onto all the local news stations. After Annie was sentenced, she asked me if I could call Davey Alister for her, and ask him if he pay a final visit. I told her I would, and I tried to do just that. The problem was, I quickly found that there *was* no Davey Alister. For reasons that I still do not fully understand, he was using that alias everywhere he went. People typically have aliases for criminal use, so I can only assume he was doing the same. Through much research, I found that the man's real name was actually Brad Weatherby.

Strangely enough, the psychic was right when she said that Brad would destroy everything in Annie's life. By simply giving Annie a creaky old skeleton, Brad did just that. He probably had no idea what he was doing when he gave her the present, but he ruined her life all the same.

I couldn't let this go down. I was not going to let this poor woman be executed. I would rather it have been *my* head on the chopping block. I spent three weeks working out a plan for Ann Farris' prison escape. I knew that she could not escape without my help. I was going to sneak this woman right past the other guards.

\*\*\*

We were down to five days left before Annie's scheduled execution date, when I finally decided to share my plan with her. Needless to say, she was ecstatic. After she had gathered up her meager belongings (A bible, a pencil and a notepad), Annie was ready to go. I handed her a prison uniform, including a cap and boots, and turned my back as she

changed into the outfit.

“How do I look?” I turned around to see Annie smiling for the first time in the four months she had spent in the prison. “You look... great.” I smiled back at her before remembering that we were on a time limit. I glanced down at my watch and back up to Annie. “We need to go.” I walked up to the prison door and slid it open as quietly as possible, although it was unnecessary, because I was the only guard patrolling this hall. Annie followed my lead, and stayed in position close behind me. I had told her to keep her head down, cap covering her face, as we made our way through the prison.

We took all of the alternate routes, knowing that they would be longer, but we would pass less people that way. My plan was working perfectly, and it helped that I knew the prison like the back of my hand. As we made our way off of the prison grounds, I reflected on how nice the weather would be in our new home... in beautiful *Australia*.

**= THE END OF THEM BONES =**

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