

BY EVAN JACOBS



# CARNIVAL OF FEAR

## CHAPTER 1

## READY

Tom!” Jake calls to me. I’m sitting at our normal table in the lunchroom. He walks over and sets his tray down. There’s a big grin on his face. “Tonight is going to be epic! Are you ready?”

“Yeah!” I grin too. “Are you?”

Jake and I high-five. The annual Scarecrow Carnival opens tonight. This is our favorite event of the year. It runs for the next week. For months, we’ve saved our allowances. We can’t wait to blow all our cash at the carnival.

Scarecrow, California, is our home. The town was founded in the early 1900s. It isn’t very big. There are only about 25,000 residents. Early on, Scarecrow was just a bunch of strawberry fields and swamps. Farmers put up scarecrows everywhere because birds kept eating their seed. That’s how the town got its name. Most of the fields are gone now.

Some people think Scarecrow is boring. I just think it's a normal town. There are strip malls and parks. Many houses are old, but people keep them up. The weather is a little strange. It's always overcast, so it feels like fall year-round. That's one of my favorite things about living here.

"You want to make a list?" I ask Jake. "Of which rides to go on? And the games we're going to play?" I take out my phone and open the Notes app.

"Take it easy," Jake says, laughing. "It's a carnival. We're supposed to have fun. Let's not try to plan everything."

I nod and put my phone away. "At least Isa is taking us and not my parents."

My older sister, Isa, is driving us to the carnival. She's going to hang out there too. But she won't stay with us. That would be way too embarrassing for her.

"Is Isa still grounded?" Jake asks.

I laugh. "No. But her curfew on weekends is 10:00 now."

Isa is a junior in high school. All she cares about is her new boyfriend and her phone. That's why she got a *D* on a history test last week. Her teacher emailed our parents about it. They grounded Isa for a week. Then they changed her curfew. It used to be 11:00.

“Harsh!” Jake says.

“Yeah. She cried in her room for like three hours. Hey, what do you think about costumes?”

Some people wear costumes to the carnival. There’s even a contest. Mostly younger kids enter. The carnival is like a second Halloween for them.

“No, that’s for babies. We’re in eighth grade now, Tom.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I just thought maybe one more time might be fun. You know, before high school.”

The bell rings. Jake and I throw away our trash. Then we start walking to class. In the hallway, we pass a wall of photos. They show people important to the school. A guy named Ervin Legend is in one of them. He donated money to build Scarecrow Middle School a long time ago. Our principal is his grandson. There’s a photo of him too. Thankfully, I haven’t had any run-ins with Principal Legend. He seems nice enough though.

I look at the photos as we walk by. Both Ervin and Principal Legend have bushy mustaches. Their hands seem really big too. But something catches my eye in the photo of Ervin. He’s wearing some kind of jewel around his neck. The photo is black and white. But the jewel almost seems to glow.

“Come on, Tom!” Jake grabs my arm. “Are you going to stare at that picture all day? We’re going to be late for class.”

## CHAPTER 2

## OPENING NIGHT

I'm serious," Isa says from the driver's seat. We're sitting at a red light. She looks at her phone. "It's 5:00 now. You have three hours at the carnival. We're leaving at 8:00. Don't be late. Matt and I are meeting at 8:30."

"You shouldn't be checking your phone while driving," Jake says.

"Would you rather walk?" Isa snaps. She glares at Jake and me in the backseat. "The car is stopped. It's fine."

Isa goes back to reading her texts. She spent a lot of time getting ready this afternoon. There's a layer of makeup over her whole face. Her long, curly, brown hair is done just right.

Jake and I are in the same clothes we wore to school. I have on my favorite T-shirt. It's green with a cartoon T. rex on it. We're only going to a carnival. Nobody will care what we're wearing.

I eye my phone. It's a little after 5:00. Jake and I can't wait to get to the carnival. We've already talked about going back another night this week too.

"So where do we meet at 8:00?" Isa asks. It feels like she has already asked us this ten times.

"At the entrance," I say, rolling my eyes. Isa glares at me.

"Can we meet near the food booths instead?" Jake asks. "I might want to get a snack for the road."

I shoot Jake a look. He laughs. Then I shake my head. Isa is already annoyed at having to drive us. Jake is testing her patience.

The light has turned green. Isa puts her phone down. "Okay, we're meeting at 7:45 now."

"What?" Jake and I cry.

"Isa," I plead. "Come on!"

"Yeah!" Jake says. "I was just messing around."

"Well," Isa says, smiling. "I guess you won't be doing that anymore. Will you?"

Jake and I look at each other.

Isa drives into the carnival parking lot. I don't care where she parks. Jake and I need to get inside. But Isa takes her time. She always likes to park as close as possible.

“Can we just go in?” I ask. “We’ll meet you out front in three hours. I promise.”

“Go,” Isa says, stopping the car.

Jake and I open our doors and jump out.

“Bye!” Jake says. “See you at 8:00!”

“Seven forty—”

We both slam the doors before Isa can finish. Then we break into a run across the parking lot. It’s finally carnival time!