

The Night of the Escape
By Alex Kelly



“Did you hear that?” Keith turned around to face his cohorts, enabling him to fully present his mockingly shocked face.

“Man don’t *do* that, I’m trying to stay chill.” Jake, oversized navy hoodie slumping with his shoulders out of tired annoyance. He didn’t really hate Keith’s jokes, it was a reprieve from the eerie place they were walking around in, but read the room.

“I know neither of you are actually paying attention, but there was the sound of something knocking against wood.” Victor said, matter of factly.

“Knocking against wood, eh? Doesn’t sound too bad to me” Keith smirked at Victor, expectantly, an eager dog waiting for their owner to make the slightest sign of approval. It never came. Keith rolled his eyes, turned back, and they continued into the living room. They had just entered the house, via the front door and tight entryway, but it was already clear the people who took care of this place didn’t believe in swiffers. The house’s style was as if someone collected newspapers as a job. Stacks filled the floor and gave way to dated, Victorian style furniture.

Jake held Victor’s sister’s camera, panning around the floor and walls to capture the detail. This was his fifth time recording for the guys and one could say he was still getting the hang of it. He wasn’t a professional cinematographer yet so the shakiness added to the realism they were all looking for. Victor researched the facts, directed, and led them through investigations. He was the one who introduced the other two to the world of paranormal mysteries earlier in the semester and Keith was the brains -if you can call it that- who saw the potential in a YouTube series of three college friends investigating ghosts. Enough people are jumping on this bandwagon, why shouldn’t they? Victor thought it would give his research an outlet, and although he’d never admit this, getting to discover a ghost or some paranormal entity with video proof made him excited to get up in the morning. These three boys just happened to attend Fairfield together and were only a twenty-one minute drive to the Warren Occult Museum, they’d be poor ghost hunters if they didn’t investigate this.

“I was simply mentioning that we should be alert. Jake, you’re recording, yes?” Victor looked at Jake who nodded, intent on not making any sounds.

Keith, not known for giving up the last word, replied, “Victor, we’re surrounded by a forest, inside a big old house with a shit ton of windows, and there’s a breeze. Everything is making the sound of something knocking against wood.”

The living room had an open hallway entrance in the back, it glowed red. They naturally gravitated towards it, assuming the destination. The hallway was crammed with large paintings and terrifying sketches of screaming faces and messy, haunted houses. Several reddish-orange light bulbs were attached to the upper part of the wall, an attempt to dress the place up that ended up making everything look stained with fresh blood.

Victor led the way, already in the zone, “Donna was this nursing student who got the doll from her mom as a gift-”

Keith popped in, “That’s a weird gift-”

“-anyways, it started to move around when no one looked. Donna and her roommate started finding strange notes on the ground that they couldn’t explain. When the doll’s hands had what looked like blood on them-”

“-the doll...had blood on them,” Keith said in between laughing.

Victor gave a terse look, “So they called a medium who said that the spirit of a 7-year old girl found her home in the doll, her name was Annabelle. Touched, Donna let her stay in the doll. However,” Victor turned and stared into the camera, “what some might not know, is that demons can supposedly appear as small children to seem unassuming and garner trust from mortals.”

“Mortals? Vic!”

“I’m just trying to get the info out.” Jake remained silent while the two bickered. Victor continued, “and one of Donna’s friends, Lou, had supposedly gotten scratches from the doll. They got in touch with a priest who connected them with Ed and Lorraine Warren, who confirmed the doll was being controlled by a demonic spirit, not a ghost, who was looking for a human host and had the capacity to kill.”

This time, Keith stayed quiet with Jake. Jake kept the camera on Victor as they crept slowly through the hallway.

“The Warrens noticed the doll was dangerous to drive with and brought it home to try to exercise it. The first priest to insult the doll immediately found himself in a car crash later that day, which led to a series of car collisions with people who mocked the doll.”

Keith finally spoke, “So, what I’m hearing, is that I *shouldn’t* make fun of Annabelle?”

Jake swung the camera back and forth from him to Victor. Vic replied, “I can’t control what you say but if you do say something I don’t agree with, we’re driving back separately. We’re about to enter the room.

The hallway spit them out into the room that they had broken in to see. They wouldn’t have broken in normally, they’re not stupid, but the place has been closed for two years and if they didn’t explore it, the place might get torn down and replaced with a parking lot in mere months. Seizing the opportunity and already getting this far, the three of them walked inside. This was the artifact room, the place that held the world’s most dangerous and historically supernatural items. A vampire coffin stood upright on one wall, right next to one of probably fifteen demonic masks that looked like they were probably made of coarse, gritty material and hair.

Victor continued to talk, which Jake was thankful for, “That right there is ‘The Shadow Doll’ that you can make attack people if you try. There’s a doll from the New England Witch Trials, and again don’t touch anything, we’re not here to disturb, only communicate. And here...here’s Annabelle. You see the box she’s kept in? The Devil tarot card was stapled to the wood by Ed Warren, he also soaked the wood in holy water cause that’s what had kept her at bay.” Victor took out a vial of holy water and gave it a brief shake to demonstrate he brought it for emergencies. “We’ll be right back.”

Jake pointed the camera towards Annabelle and Keith and Victor set up two candles on either side of the doll’s box. Annabelle was kept in an arcade-game sized wooden frame with dusty glass windows. The red light washed over everything, and that included the raggedy-ann doll with large, black, empty button eyes. It’s hair was casually tossed around its head and it sat in the middle of the wooden bottom like it was waiting to be served tea, not attempt a murder. The entire case was taller than them and it gave it an edge of intimidation, despite the doll’s small size. A devil’s trap was carved into the floorboards beneath the case and painted in thick black acrylic directly above. Lots of stone chains and sigils surrounded the case, assumedly for extra protection. They lit the candles and

the room somehow gets more unnerving with two flickering lights. Victor's face remained stone-cold with focused intent but there was an eager hopefulness in his eyes. Keith still had one eyebrow raised and arms crossed.

Victor started, "Hello. We've placed two candles on either side of you. If you would like to communicate, turn off the candle to your right."

They waited.

Victor continued, "If you are upset at our presence, turn off the candle to your right."

Flickering.

The left candle flame danced, and then the candle on the right went out.

Jake spoke, "Uh. Guys did you see that?"

Keith looked at him, "Of course we did, the wind unlit our candles because that's how small fires work."

Victor held up a hand to stop Keith, "I'm going to continue. We do not want to upset you, we just want to talk. Do you feel trapped here?"

The flame returned to the candle. Everyone stopped breathing.

Everything just stopped.

"Do you want to kill us?" Keith broke the silence.

Victor instantly turned on him, "What would compel you to say something like that? I know you don't take this seriously but *come on*."

"Guys," Jake mentioned. Both the candles were out, "Should we leave?"

The candle on the right fell to the floor. Both Jake and Victor jumped. Keith would refuse that he jumped. Jake looked at Victor for their next move. He nodded in silent agreement that their time here was complete. Victor said to Keith, "Jake has to wake up early, let's call it," he looked at the camera, "That was our interaction, and the most recent conversation, with Annabelle."

Quiet again, Victor deftly picked up the candles and returned them to his back. His eyes straight ahead, lost in thought. Keith resumed looking around the room at the other strange objects. Jake stopped recording. The three of them started down the hallway but halfway through, a loud sound of breaking glass stopped them all in their tracks.

Jake stuttered, "Oh my god I'm so sorry, I bumped into one of the picture frames with the camera bag, I'm so so sorry." He dropped to the ground and began sweeping up the shards with a rag.

"Jesus, you almost had me going! That was hilarious. How long did you have that planned?" Keith asked.

"It wasn't a prank! I'm really sorry!"

"It's okay," Victor said, "This place is closed so I don't think you'll be in trouble-"

The house creaked again. They sighed.

Victor continued, "You finish cleaning, I forgot to get a picture I wanted. Once second." Before either could refuse, Victor was gone. Keith's attention span had fallen to zero and Jake hurriedly swept the glass as much as he could, only receiving minor scrapes and major shame.

At least two minutes had passed, Keith was playing an app game on his phone, and Jake was ready to not be there anymore. Another two minutes. Keith and Jake made eye contact.

"Do you think-"

"-It *has* been a while" They started at the same time. Keith carried on, "let's go grab our lovable ghost-nut, I want to go home and you still have class."

They returned to the room, walking confidently but their stomachs were not quite so calm. Returning to the room wasn't any easier than the first time for Jake, and Keith went directly to Annabelle's case. Strangely, the side pane of glass to the case was broken and the doll, as well as Victor, were gone.

Jake's eyes had widened to golf balls, "What the fuck-what the fuck-Keith where the fuck is Victor?!"

"Relax, Victor knows this was a useless trip and a dull episode, start recording, he's clearly pranking us. I'm just surprised he broke the glass, that's commitment."

Jake was shaking his head. His heart was pounding. He turned on the camera and started panning over the scene. Footsteps on the wood behind him sounded and grew closer..."AHH!" Jake yelped in alarm as a totally fine, undisturbed Victor emerged from another doorway.

"Oh? Didn't mean to startle you."

Keith smiled, “Su-ure you didn’t and I’m sure this just happened randomly.”

“What do you- WHAT?!” They hadn’t heard Victor’s voice raise above indoor-level, “Where’s the doll Keith? What did you do?”

“Nice try man, I’m not falling for it, ‘Oh let’s go drive to the Warren’s house, the doll that inspired all those movies lives there, oh? The dolls gone? Oh my pearls!’” Keith’s mocking Victor voice wasn’t half-bad.

“This isn’t a prank, not everything is a joke. You messing with the doll and breaking property isn’t a joke either. We’re going to look for the doll and one way or another, it’ll show up. Maybe on its own, maybe you’ll suddenly find it. I have my body cam on me, I’m going to scope out the box, you two spread out to the hallway and the living room. Keep yelling out to each other to stay together.” Victor was dead serious. Also perturbed that Keith wasn’t.

“Fine! Fine, we’ll entertain this thing for you, that’s how good of a friend I am.” Keith walked away and Jake stared at Victor who gave him an intense look, and then he followed Keith.

The two now walked down the hall again.

Victor shouted, “Here.”

Jake shouted, “Here.”

Keith was playing an app game.

Victor shouted, “Keith?”

Keith tuned in, “Yes, I’m here teacher.”

They returned to the living room, Jake still recording, and scanned the room, looking under couches and tables and behind piles of newspaper.

A few minutes had passed and Jake’s camera battery was running low.

Jake shouted, “Here - guys the camera’s almost dead.”

Keith responded, “Here. I’m good to go.”

Victor didn’t respond.

They waited, still nothing.

Keith turned to Jake, “Oh man let’s go back to the room and see what our maestro of tension has cooked up next.” Jake grimaced, and the two returned to the room for a third time. They walked in, both shouting for Victor more. Keith said, “Alright Victor, you are the master of pranks, the prank master, and you got Jake really good with this, but don’t you think it’s time for us to go back to the dorms?” Still no response.

Jake rounded a corner of shelves and faced the Annabelle case. His eyes caught a shine on the ground, a watch. He was relieved for a split second when it wasn’t the doll on the ground, waiting for him, but the relief drained from his body, replaced with an overwhelming amount of dread and numbness. He stared. Victor could not stare back because his body lay lifeless on the ground, arm with watch splayed outward, perhaps trying to grab onto something for purchase before...

Keith noticed Jake unmoving and walked over, the color leaving his face immediately, “He planned this, right?” No response. “He got blood packets and he was tired of me shitting on his ghost shit and this is him getting back at me?” No response. Keith crouched down and moved Victor’s head, his eyes starkly open and tongue lolling out of his mouth. “Fuck!” Keith jumped backwards. Jake somehow mustered the courage to shakily reach down and close his eyelids. Nothing could be done about his torso, Victor’s shirt had been torn to shreds to reveal several long claw marks through his body. Blood was starting to pool wider around the floor. “We gotta go Jake, we gotta get out of here and get the police.”

“...Police?”

“Yeah fucking police, someone’s in this house fucking with us and just murdered our friend.” Keith was whispering now. He grabbed Jake’s arm and the two began running out. They ran past the New England doll, they ran down the hallway, pictures still screaming at them, a few bits of glass still on the ground, they ran to the entry room and Keith reached for the doorknob. It didn’t give. “What the fuck?”

But there wasn’t time for Jake to answer, he turned around and Annabelle the doll was laying in the center of the living room, facing the ceiling. “Keith, break the door.” Jake did not give commands, but Keith listened and took a step back and kicked the door down. It took two kicks. They ran out and started running down the long

driveway, surrounded by tall dead wild grass. They parked on the side of the street but they still had a ways to go. They were both running as fast as they could but the camera was heavy for Jake. He started to slow.

“No no no, Jake we can’t slow down, here give me the camera.” Jake panted heavily, a smaller frame, and figured that Keith would be alright taking on the extra load. Jake hazarded a glance behind him and sure enough the doll lay in the middle of the distance they had just run.

“Keep running.” Jake said. They ran for their life through the biting cold Connecticut night, not a breeze in the air. They finally reached the car and Keith put the camera on the hood of the car and began fishing for his car keys. It was taking longer than either of them wanted.

“Oh come on. Here!” Keith found them and unlocked the car, they were inside faster than they thought possible, camera thrown in too. They started to drive down the street *fast*. The car shook and then it shook again, bigger, but there were no potholes on the road. “What did Victor say about people driving away? He said something, I just didn’t pay attention!”

“He said people who mocked them usually die in a car crash once they leave the place.”

“Oh that’s perfect! Did Victor say anything about killing it? Or keeping it trapped again?”

“He...he-”

“-come on!”

“He had the vial of holy water on him, we didn’t grab it we’d have to go back.”

“Fuck that! I’m not letting a doll stop us.” He pushed his foot down harder on the pedal and the car sped down the street faster, shaking continuing.

Jake chimed in, “I’ve heard, and Victor talked about this too, burning it could work.”

“Burning it! Okay when we get to the dorms we’ll use the lighter, you still have it on you?”

“Yeah.” After a minute, the shaking stopped all at once. They continued to fly street by street, no one out here in this empty farmland.

Jake turned to look out the rear window, and he wished he just hadn’t looked, yet again. Jake had no stomach for scary nonsense, he only came with Victor and Keith cause they were his friends and looked out for him. Now Victor was gone. The doll was in the middle of the backseat, black eyes and permanent smile staring back.

“Jake? Jake you okay?”

“Uh, Annabelle is in the...backseat.”

“WHAT.” The car slightly swerved at Keith’s shock but then he maintained. “Can you throw it out the window?!”

“It’ll just keep following us home,” Jake said under his breath.

“What was that, Jake?”

“Nothing. Give me a second.” Jake unbuckled his seatbelt and climbed into the back seat.

“I don’t think that’s the best idea!” Keith yelled.

“I’m going to fix it. Just keep driving, and don’t look back.”

“Okay?!”

“Thanks.”

“Are you thanking the doll?”

“Thanks for making me less scared.” And with that, Jake grabbed the doll with one arm and the other opened the back right door. He leaped out, the doll held tightly to his body, and together they flung out of the car.

“JAKE, WHAT THE HELL!” Breaking the rule, he looked backwards and saw the lump of Jake on the black top, already getting smaller in the distance with the speed of the car, and then the lump set ablaze. The fire grew and grew until it was taller than the trees. The fire wasn’t just yellow, it was a deep red like the light in the room.

Keith cannot recount how he got home that night, he doesn’t remember.

August 14, 2020, 3 AM. Annabelle escapes the Warren house. Due to sensitivity and the lone survivor’s firm request, the boy’s presence there that night was taken out of the official document.