

The Haunted Family

Single Issue

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Synopsis:

Carson Caldwell and his parents, Yan and Briona Caldwell, have recently moved into their new home. Carson is 9 years old with autism, and is overwhelmed by the lack of emotional support he has from his family, often resulting in physical and verbal outbursts. Frustrated with Carson, his parents attempt to ship him off to a specialized autism school. Feeling alone and vilified for his autism, Carson's emotional state attracts the attention of John and Joan, who are two ghosts that have resided in Carson's new home for centuries. Feeling pity for Carson, as well as wanting a son to replace their lost autistic son from the 17th century, John and Joan convince Carson that his family is not with Yan and Briona, but with them.

Cast:

Carson Caldwell- Carson is a 9 year old boy with autism. He is tall for his age (5'9) and has a stocky build. He has blond hair, and Caucasian skin. He has bright blue eyes, which reflects his emotions clearly. His body posture is slouched when around his family, which shows his lack of confidence due to their influence. Despite being wealthy, his parents give him worn-down clothes (with small holes in them, or older stains). His autism is sensory-based; when he is emotionally overwhelmed, his sight and hearing becomes painful (lights become blinding, the moon becomes as bright as the sun, faint sounds become excruciatingly loud and painful to the ears, almost like knives piercing his eardrums— all of which causes him intense headaches and panic). This causes Carson to physically “lash out” in an attempt to process his emotions and senses in the only way he knows, which is smashing items or screaming out verbally. However, this causes him further panic, because he realizes he will be in trouble with his parents after his sensory overload (and his parents and previous schools have failed in teaching him proper processing techniques). His parents view these events (and Carson as an extension) as a “nuisance” and “ruining” their lives, which makes Carson feel isolated, unloved, and extremely bitter towards his family.

Yan Caldwell- Yan is the father of Carson, and a wealthy, successful business owner. Yan is tall (6'3), has brown hair, and never smiles. He has a perpetual scowl on his face, and he exudes negativity around him. Yan is always dressed in business-attire clothing. Yan views Carson negatively, and despises Carson's autistic needs. Essentially, Yan is a metaphor for wealthy parents who send their children away to avoid the work that comes with autism. Yan believes

that Carson is “babied” and has fundamentally lacking character, despite not realizing that he has done nothing in terms of building a positive relationship with his son, nor teaching Carson calming techniques to calm his sensory overload. To avoid this “extra effort”, Yan sends Carson away to other autism schools and is infuriated when Carson is kicked out of those schools for his needs. Yan views his life as successful, and Carson as a “threat” to all of his hard work, thus shunning Carson. Yan views that life has “punished” him with Carson, and takes his anger and bitterness out on Carson. Yan wishes his son did not have autism, and unfortunately, Carson feels this daily. Yan is also a metaphor for environments around children with autism– if you create a positive, nurturing environment, the children will grow and succeed. However, if you fail to create that strong environment, the children will suffer.

Briona Caldwell- Briona is the mother of Carson. She is 5’8 in height, and extremely thin. She has blond hair and blue eyes, and always wears dresses like she is going to a fashion gala. Unlike Yan, Briona is fearful of Carson due to his sensory overload. As such, she constantly views Carson as a “ticking time bomb”. She serves as a metaphor for viewing autism– while blatant disrespect is cruel and inhumane, viewing those with autism as “caged animals” ready to strike is also unhelpful, as that only invalidates Carson’s daily struggles. While she attempts to make Yan see Carson’s struggles, she never attempts to actively help Carson.

John- John is a ghost from the 17th century who resides in the Caldwell’s new home. He is tall, has shoulder-length brown hair, and has a beard. John is a transparent spirit with a tinge of white lighting around him, to signify his paranormal nature. John feels pity for how the Caldwell’s treat Carson, and is reminded of how he treated his own autistic child back in the 17th century. As such, John is motivated to help calm Carson down and have Carson join him and his ghostly wife, Joan, in their new “family”. John is a metaphor for how the environments around autistic individuals are driven by their personal agendas, rather than the complete well-being of the children.

Joan- Joan is John’s wife and a ghost from the 17th century who also resides in the Caldwell’s new home. Joan is short, wears a bonnet, and is transparent (similarly to John). Joan also has a tinge of white lighting around her, signifying her paranormal nature. Like John, Joan also feels compassion for Carson’s struggles and wants to “adopt” him into her and John’s “family”– based in her guilt of John and Joan’s past treatment of their lost son back in the 17th century, who also had autism. Joan is a metaphor for how the environments (schools/clinics) around autistic individuals are driven by their personal agendas, rather than the complete well-being of the children. As such, Joan and John’s actions result in dire consequences for Carson, rather than Carson’s positive growth.

PAGE ONE - 6 PANELS

PANEL 1: Interior establishing shot – we open to a bedroom during nighttime. The moon shines into the room and illuminates the entire room with its soft glow. Carson is on his floor, covering his ears and closing his eyes. The walls do a poor job of noise insulation, and Carson can overhear Yan and Briona arguing. His head is angled as if the words physically “hit” him. To show this, speech bubble 1 will be the farthest away from Carson’s head, followed by speech bubble 2. Speech bubble 3 should be illustrated as if it “strikes” Carson on the head, serving as a metaphor for Yan’s words and their hurtful impact on him. Speech bubble 3 should be bolded, to illustrate its harmful nature.

1. YAN (OP): He must go. That’s why he has those outbursts-
2. BRIONA (OP): Let him stay home. He has needs-
3. YAN (OP): I’ll go bankrupt because of him. We just moved into this mansion, and I won’t let him destroy it. This isn’t those useless schools.

PANEL 2: Carson’s eyes are closed, but tears fall down his face. He is also clenching his ears, and you can see his knuckles strain under the effort. Speech bubble 4 (SB4) strikes Carson on the head, and the words inside are bolded and in a distinct, bright color (the artist’s choice). The area of the panel to the right of SB4 has extremely bright and saturated colors (for convenience sake, let’s call this the “amplified” background), which is shown to signify Carson’s sensory overload (so maybe half of Carson’s face is normally inked and colored, and the other half is extremely saturated and bright).

4. YAN (OP): This isn’t the life I wanted. This isn’t fair to us.

PANEL 3: Carson strikes himself on the head with his hands open. His eyes are still closed. The entire panel is now extremely bright and saturated. His tears continue to fall down his face.

5. CARSON: I’M SORRY! I’M SORRY! I’M SORRY!

PANEL 4: Carson is in a fetal position on the floor. He continues to cry. The amplified background remains the same until Panel 6. A blanket is at his feet. He faces the panel.

PANEL 5: The same shot is repeated as Panel 4, but now his blanket is hovering over him.

PANEL 6: The same shot is repeated as Panel 5, but now the blanket lands and covers Carson. The amplified background slightly “dims”. He has a surprised look on his face.

PAGE TWO– SEVEN PANELS

PANEL 1: A wide shot of John and Joan are standing by the window, physically transparent and glistening in the moonlight. They both wear 17th century clothing. They both smile at Carson.

1. JOHN: I'm John.
2. JOAN: I'm Joan. And we want you to smile.

PANEL 2: A close-up shot of the two ghosts' hands is utilized. They snap their fingers.

3. SFX: SNAP.

PANEL 3: Carson's room has "transformed". It is morning time, and the sun lightly shines from the windows. His furniture is replaced by 17th-century furniture. John and Joan sit in the center of the room, both playing two violins. Carson is shocked.

4. CARSON: Whoa... that sounds nice.

PANEL 4: Both ghosts extend their arms to Carson.

5. JOHN AND JOAN: Would you like to join us?

PANEL 5: Carson stands up, dropping his blanket behind him.

6. CARSON: I can't play... but I can dance...

PANEL 6: Carson awkwardly dances in front of his mirror (his back is toward the mirror), and has a slight smile on his face. The ghosts smile in the reflection.

PANEL 7: A close-up shot of his foot tripping on the blanket is utilized here.

PAGE FOUR – 5 PANELS

PANEL 1: It is the next day, during the morning. Carson eats his cereal while Briona speaks to him.

1. BRIONA: Your father has a Zoom with your new school. Be quiet. They'll say "no" otherwise.

PANEL 2: Let's utilize a close-up shot here. Carson has a glum expression on his face. He ignores Briona while he continues his breakfast. Briona's speech bubbles are illustrated to "hit" Carson's head.

2. BRIONA: This school will teach you to behave. They'll make you normal.

PANEL 3: Carson glares at Briona (off-panel) as his eyes glisten.

3. BRIONA (OP): Treasure Academy is designed to fix people like–

PANEL 4: A close-up shot of Carson's chair is shown. The chair scrapes against the floor quickly.

4. SFX: SSSSKKKKKKKRRRRRRRFFFF.
5. BRIONA (OP): CARSON! Calm DOWN!

PANEL 5: Carson walks away from the table, leaving Briona behind him. Carson has an angry expression on his face. SB8 strikes him on the head, and the area of the panel to the right/left (at artist's discretion) should have the "amplified" coloring to the background, but shouldn't encapsulate the entire panel (because Carson's anger is building, but hasn't overtaken him yet. Briona's words are antagonizing him).

6. BRIONA: Don't you dare hit me! Go upstairs.
7. CARSON: I am not doing a-
8. BRIONA: I know you! Stop LYING!

PAGE FIVE - 5 PANELS

PANEL 1: Carson walks into his room. He is breathing heavily. The first “hmmph” is normally illustrated. The second “hmmph” is capitalized. The third “hmmph” is illustrated to “bump” Carson’s head, showing his rising frustration. The area of the panel to the left/right (artist’s choice) will have a red “tint”/lighting in his room, while the areas on the opposite of the third “hmmph” have normal, morning lighting.

1. SFX: HMMPH. HMMPH. HMMPH.

PANEL 2: A close-up shot of Carson’s shaking hands is utilized here. Three more “hmmphs” are “striking” Carson’s hands. All “hmmphs” are capitalized, bolded, and the color red. The entire panel has red-tinting to it, except for Carson’s hands (which have normal lighting). The ghostly couple is behind him (off-panel) and talks to him.

2. CARSON (OP): I... can’t... gotta be... quiet.
3. JOHN (OP): Can’t they?
4. JOAN (OP): Children are meant to be seen and heard.

PANEL 3: Carson turns around to face the ghostly couple. They stand by his bed. The entire room has a red tint, except for the ghosts and Carson. Three small “hmmphs” bounce off Carson’s head.

5. CARSON: I’m... broken... always... causing... problems...
6. JOHN: Because of them.
7. JOAN: They hurt you. Shouldn’t you fight back?
8. CARSON: I don’t... I don’t want to hurt anyone.
9. JOHN: I know that, son.

PANEL 4: A close-up shot of Carson’s family portrait is shown. It is hung up on the wall. The entire panel has red tint/lighting to it, except for the portrait, which shows John reflecting over Yan, Joan reflecting over Briona, and Carson reflecting over his infant self. Carson has tears falling from his eyes.

10. JOHN: When’s the last time they called you that? “Son”?

PANEL 5: The same shot and illustration is used as before, but now the portrait has a red tint as well.

PAGE SIX – 6 PANELS

PANEL 1: A close-up shot of Carson's fist punching the portrait is utilized. The glass cracks as Carson screams. **The entire panel is covered with red tint, but decreases with each panel.** His fist is covered in blood.

1. CARSON (OP): YEEAAAAARGH!!!
2. SFX: WHOOOPSH!

PANEL 2: A close-up shot of Carson's foot is used here. He is kicking a hole into the wall, and a he has dented the wall. Dust falls from the circular hole that is made from Carson's kicks.

3. CARSON: HEH-HEH-HAAAAA!
4. SFX: KKKKKRRRRRRRRRRKKKKK.

PANEL 3: A medium shot of the mirror behind Carson's bedroom door is used here. The reflection from the mirror shows Carson's hands above his head, holding a metal rod/pipe of sorts. The ghostly couple is behind Carson, quietly watching.

PANEL 4: The same image as Panel 4 is used here, but now Carson has flung the rod at the mirror. The ghostly couple remain behind Carson.

5. CARSON: AAAAAAARRRRRRRGGGGGGHH!!!!
6. SFX: WHOOOOOOSH.

PANEL 5: The reflection is moved to the right (the door is being opened by Yan who is off-panel). The reflection catches Carson's surprised facial expression. The ghostly couple is gone. By this point, the red tinting is completely gone and is normally lighted to that of the morning. Yan speaks to Carson.

7. YAN (OP): WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
8. CARSON: WAIT!

PANEL 6: The panel is completely black, representing that Yan has been struck with the rod, and has lost consciousness.

9. SFX: THUK.

PAGE SEVEN – FIVE PANELS

PANEL 1: A wide shot is utilized here. It is nighttime now. Carson sits on the floor of his bedroom. The ghostly couple sits with him. They all overhear Yan and Briona's (off-panel) conversation, which is in another room.

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| 1. BRIONA (OP): | He didn't mean it. Think about it, Yan. |
| 2. YAN (OP): | Like I told you to 'think about' about adoption? Let someone else deal with him. I have a business to run. |
| 3. JOHN: | We had a son, years before. He was... similar to you. |
| 4. JOAN: | ... And we were similar to them. |
| 5. CARSON: | Then why do you care about me? |
| 6. JOHN AND JOAN: | ... |

PANEL 2: A close-up shot of Carson's ripped-up family portrait picture is used. Blood is stained on Carson's (portrait) face.

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| 7. JOHN (OP): | To fix our family. |
| 8. JOAN (OP): | And to save you from yours. |

PANEL 3: A close-up shot of Carson's eyes is utilized here. Carson's eyes glisten in the moonlight. Each ghost is reflected in each of his eyes.

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| 9. CARSON: | How do we do it? |
| 10. JOAN: | Reach the bottom of the lake in your backyard.
We... we are there. |
| 11. JOHN: | Reach us, and we'll be together. As a family.
A loving one. |

PANEL 4: Carson sneaks past the living room. The silhouettes of Yan and Briona are in the living room.

PANEL 5: Carson sneaks out the open front door. In the door's windows, the ghostly couple is shown, smiles on their faces.

PANEL 6: Carson dives headfirst into the lake. The silhouettes of his parents are shown in the doorway.

PAGE EIGHT – SIX PANELS

PANEL 1: A wide shot is utilized here, which is Carson's first-person perspective. The first person perspective is utilized in this entire page, on each panel. He swims underwater, the only light from the moonlight above.

1. CARSON (CAPTION): Can't breathe... can't quit... a new family...

PANEL 2: Another wide shot is utilized here. The artwork is the same as the previous panel, but the art is blurry— Carson is having a hard time seeing and keeping his consciousness.

2. CARSON (CAPTION): Getting... dark... must... be... close...

PANEL 3: Another wide shot is used. The artwork is brighter; Carson can see clearer. The moonlight from above is brighter.

3. CARSON (CAPTION): What? Who's pulling me...

PANEL 4: Another wide shot is used. Carson breaks through the surface of the lake. His hands flail, attempting to grab the lake's water, as Yan pulls Carson away from the lake. The reflections of John and Joan are in the surface of the lake, solemnly staring at Carson.

4. CARSON (OP): NO!
5. YAN (OP): Call 911! Stupid kid tried to kill himself!

PANEL 5: Another wide shot is used. Carson is pulled backwards away from the lake. The reflections of John and Joan are still in the surface of the lake.

6. CARSON (OP): LET ME GO!
7. YAN (OP): SHUT UP!

PANEL 6: Another wide shot is used. Carson is pulled farther away from the lake. The reflections of John and Joan are now gone. The entire panel is tinted red.

8. CARSON (OP): DON'T LEAVE ME! PLEASE!
9. YAN (OP): This kid's crazy! Call the psych ward!