

Macabre Manor by Flo Rowson

“Is this really our new house, mum?” asked Gretel, shivering. “It looks kinda creepy.” As she strolled up the path, her mum turned the rusty key in the lock. The manor was a tall grim-looking dwelling that was covered in cobwebs. The sign, which read Macabre Manor, was coated in a thick sheet of dust. Frankly, the insides were no improvement. The first room which they entered, a sitting room, had a musty sofa that had definitely been chewed; some mothballs; and a coffee table that was so grimy that with one touch you’d need a whole bar of soap to wash it off.

While her mum started setting up the kitchen, Gretel began to walk up the stairs. On the eighth stair, she saw a book. Not just any book, a journal. The journal of a man called Frank Markson. “I wonder what’s written inside?” she thought. Feeling curious and with not much else to do in the nearly-empty house, she decided to read it. The journal was very mundane, there were pages that made Gretel groan - why was his life so perfectly ordinary when hers wasn’t? But about three-quarters of the way through, Frank seemed more and more scared and frantic as he wrote. This made Gretel frightened too but it was the last page that really sent a tingle down her spine. It read only four words: *‘and then I died’*. She dropped the book in fear and ran upstairs.

Now Gretel was really fearful; she was in an odd, creepy house, and if that wasn’t bad enough, it appeared to be haunted. She sank to the floor with her heart pounding. As she trembled, she noticed a small white envelope in the corner of the room. She picked it up and tore it open. The letter bore the hastily-scribbled words *‘She chose me instead of you – F.M.’*

Feeling terribly flustered, Gretel wondered how Frank Markson could be alive but dead. He could be anywhere, even here right now, listening to her frantic breathing. With shaky steps, Gretel walked cautiously down the stairs.

At dinner, nothing much happened. Gretel’s mum just talked about a few things that Gretel’s distracted mind mostly ignored. When she’d finished her tea, she went upstairs and stood looking at her frightened face in the mirror. As she stared at her creased brow, Gretel could see something standing behind her. Then she felt a cold hand on her pale shoulder. She screamed.

“Honey, it’s just me,” her mum said softly, pulling her into a hug. “I came to check on you, you seemed so jumpy at dinner”. “Well, I have been finding some strange things, like journals and stuff...” Gretel’s voice trailed off. “Oh darling, I made the journal, it wasn’t real. I wanted to prank you to show you ghosts aren’t real.” “Mu- um,” groaned Gretel, though she had started to laugh, “the journal and letter really scared me.” Her mum broke the hug and turned to face her. “What letter?”