

Years 5 & 6

1st Place: Sesandi Thebuwana

Year 5, Roleystone Community College

### **The Inheritance of Monsters**

When Avery Lockwood received the letter, she didn't recognise the name at the top. Executor of The Lockwood Estate, Gryphon Country.

Avery racked her brains hoping the name would ring a bell, she had no such memory of where she had grown up or to where her parents had lived. Her mother had only referred to the past as "Ash in the lungs". Now her mother was gone and the key to her family's estate arrived in the mail. Heavy. Cold. Disturbing.

Avery drove to Lockwood Manor in her bug-faced Volkswagen Beetle, the only thing her father had left her before vanishing off the face of earth. The engines churned loudly as she drove across the deserted roads to her family home. The drive up to Lockwood Manor was a twisting, wind-scarred nightmare. Trees hunched over the road like monks in prayer, the house itself rose from the mist like a half sunken cathedral, chimneys like spires, windows like watching eyes. She stepped out of her car and shivered in the thick fog that completely shrouded her surroundings. Avery walked along the gravel foot path jumping cautiously over the stray thick ivy vines that had snaked their way onto the path. The tall trees mangled trunks made them look like ugly faces guarding the manor . . .

She walked through the dark and narrow hallway. The house was ancient but still oddly preserved. Avery tentatively flicked on the grimy light switch. The lights slowly flickered on like they had been turned on for the first time. The rooms were filled with antiques, moth eaten books, and portraits of sharp-eyed ancestors who seemed to watch her as she moved . . .

There really was something wrong with the manor. It was a feeling that made Avery's stomach churn in anxiety. Footsteps where no one walked. Whispers behind locked doors. A strange black sap oozing from the cracks in the basement. The mirrors warped her reflection, showing her older, feral, with glowing eyes. And the cellar . . . the cellar was always cold.

Then she found the door in the basement.

It was stone, sealed with seven iron bolts. Avery undid her fist. The cold key that had been clenched in her hands, had imprinted a jagged pattern on her soft, tender flesh. Trembling, she inserted the key. Avery slowly walked in, her eyes closed tightly like whatever was in there would burn them out. Timidly, she opened them up. It was a study. The air was stale with incense and old paper. On the study desk, encompassed with a thick layer of dust, was a small letter written in delicate cursive writing.

*Dearest Avery,*

*If you are reading this, it means that I am dead. I hope that you have lived a full life without the need of your parents' overprotective shadows. Fate has its unusual way of pulling strings in bloodlines, which is why you are now the heir to the Lockwood legacy, a legacy that cannot be denied, though it might terrify you.*

*The inheritance of Lockwood Manor is no common, simple inheritance of wealth or land. It is something far, far darker. It is an inheritance of monsters. You have been chosen to inherit these untamed creatures because of your unique soul. The monsters that have been hidden under Lockwood Manor for centuries have been created by unspoken fears, anger and grief. They are now living things, as twisted and disturbing as our emotions alone. They have been born from the darkest of us and for millennia, we have been their keepers.*

*The Beast of Forgotten Regrets: A looming creature created by the wracking guilt from past decisions. It now roams in the deserted corridors beneath Lockwood Manor.*  
*The Screaming Hound: Formed by fear, it lives in the eerily silent dark hallways beneath the manor. Their stomach-churning howls echo through the corridors and it feeds off terror from the weak venturing nearby.*  
*The Hungering Thing: The last and most powerful of them all. This thing was born from longing, endless desire that can never be satisfied.*

Avery didn't know whether to believe it. Monsters, Beasts. She wanted to laugh at the absurdity of this. Yet, a gut-wrenching feeling had settled into her stomach. She looked at the letter in her hand, once again comprehending what was yet incomprehensible. Avery slowly folded up the letter, the pace of her heart increasing by the second. By now, Avery understood, the monsters of Lockwood Manor were not just physical horrors. They were makings of what the human mind tries hardest to bury fear, guilt, shame, hunger.

Avery didn't just have to fight them. She had to survive herself in the process.

***“Born from Fear. Fed by Silence.”***

The house grew too quiet.

The halls were also unnaturally silent. That's when the scratching began. Low at first, at the edge of hearing. Then louder. Closer. It came from all directions at once. In the crumbling hallways, once a ballroom, Avery found claw marks gouged into the marble floor. The windows had shattered. No tracks. No blood. Only a sheet of metal nailed to the wall with a word etched in rust . . . **“TERROR . . .”**

When it finally came, it crashed into the world like a bomb of sound.

The Screaming Hound was massive, black as coal, with a mouth that stretched wide and rows of exposed ribs that pulsed with each howl. It didn't bark. It screamed, a sound that turned Avery's legs to jelly, it pierced through her heart. The scream was so powerful, it shattered glass and peeled the wallpaper. Avery dropped to her knees, blood leaking from her ears. For a moment, she nearly gave in, but something stopped her in her tracks. *Silence feeds it*, she thought . . . *Noise wounds it!* With trembling hands, Avery crawled to an old phonograph in the corner cabinet. She smashed the glass open and wound the crank. A war march from 1917 roared into the silence.

The Hound shrieked, not with power, but with pain. Pure, agonising pain. Avery staggered to her feet and yelled, at the top of her lungs about her fears, her memories,

her losses. Each word was a wound. "I'm afraid of dying alone!" "I'm afraid I'll end up like my parents!" "I'm afraid this house is part of me!" With each confession, the Hound recoiled. Its flesh unraveled. Its howls grew thinner.

When Avery finally whispered, "But I'm not afraid of you anymore," it vanished, leaving behind a trail of burned claw marks and a whisper of breath like wind. Avery took a deep shuddering breath, trembling. Yet the tears didn't come. A part in her that refused to be knocked down.

***"Guilt is a grave we dig and lie in."***

This one didn't attack.

It waited.

Shaking, Avery slowly walked through the dark deserted corridors beneath Lockwood Manor, passing by many cracked mirrors hanging on the walls, encrusted with gold lining. There she found the Beast, just lurking behind the looming shadows. The Beast of Forgotten Regrets was barely formed, it was a mass of human limbs, weeping eyes, and hands clinging to itself. It didn't speak with a mouth. It showed her things.

Visions. Memories she had buried.

Leaving a foster sibling to take the blame for a theft.

Ignoring her mother's final letter from the asylum.

Not picking up the phone at camp, the night her best friend had gotten lost.

Each memory hit like a wave. The Beast grew larger with every pang of regret. Each regret fed the creature. It grew, becoming more human.

Avery learnt that the beast didn't feed itself on death, but shame. Avery collapsed to her knees, sobbing, trying desperately to look away.

But then she saw something deeper, beneath the guilt, in a corner of her mind, a small, trembling part of her that refused to be defined by mistakes. Trembling she stood up.

"You want me to rot in the past," Avery whispered. "But I'm not a grave."

Avery pulled one of the mirrors from the wall and faced it towards the Beast.

"Look at yourself. Look what guilt makes you."

The Beast screamed, recoiling from its own reflection. This was Avery's final chance to end this beast once and forever. Digging through her mind she found a line from her favourite book:

"We are not what we did. We are what we do now."

The attic shook. The Beast howled and broke apart into ash.

Overcome with emotions, Avery collapsed onto the floor. Tears furiously began running down her face before she could stop them. She held her face in her hands and sobbed.

*This was how her parents had died*, she thought. They risked their lives for her. Avery's heart filled with gratitude, sadness and fury. *She would do this for them*, Avery thought.

All her ancestors who had battled their lives against these merciless monsters, she would do this for them.

***"It is the craving that cannot be fed."***

This one came through the walls.

Avery had stopped eating days ago. Food spoiled within hours in Lockwood Manor. The canned tin foods were stale and rotten and emitted a strong stench of putrid flesh. Her body ached, and Hunger continued to gnaw at her. Avery thought it was just deprivation, until she found the scratches on the grimy pantry walls.

Then the voices came.

"You're starving, let us fill you," the shadows whispered.

In the kitchen, Avery found the Hungering Thing, shape undecipherable. Its skin rippled with mouths. Arms grew, then vanished. It smelled like pus and rot and mould and . . . death. It crooned promises, satisfaction, fullness, peace. She saw illusions, roast dinners, childhood meals, her mother's delicate hands feeding her hearty spoonful's of soup.

Avery nearly gave in. But then she remembered the truth, her hunger wasn't just physical. It was emotional. She wanted warmth. Love. Belonging.

She grabbed a kitchen knife and racked her brains. An idea popped into her head. She remembered studying Edred Thorssons, Book of Runes at her school. She carved the Bindrune into the wall. The rune of choosing desire over control.

The Hungering Thing howled.

Hastily she lit the stove burners and threw in the spoiled food. It ignited into a tall, towering flame.

"I'm not empty," Avery screamed over the roar of the flame. "You are."

The Thing thrashed, slowly melting into bile and smoke. Avery watched the thing dissolve slowly, into the air. Trembling, a small tear ran slowly down her face. "I did it," she breathed. She sank to the floor slowly. "I did it."

The house was quieter now.

It wasn't peace, instead it was the silence you'd find after a sickening scream. It was almost like the manor was holding its breath.

Avery walked across the house barefoot, shuddering, leaving ash in her wake. The rooms now bore scars, claw marks, shattered mirrors and torn plaster. But neither had it completely fallen yet.

The monsters she'd faced Terror, Regret, Hunger were gone or at least driven back to where they belonged.

But Avery wasn't the same girl who'd first stepped into Lockwood Manor. She was older, gaunter. She had seen things no one her age would even dare to think about. Avery hadn't even eaten real food in days. She didn't crave it anymore.

All the creatures she'd faced had taken something from her. Avery knew deep down that they were defeated, not gone. The monsters had left deep imprints on her soul. Echoes. Lockwood Manor wasn't just haunted with monsters. It remembered them. You could see it in the house. The grief in the wallpapers. The hollow-cheeked, haggard faces of her early ancestors. And the constant eerie whispering in the vents. Every day Avery would sit on the dog-eared La-Z-Boy and inspect every picture of her late and early relatives. She spent the most time on her parents, inspecting every inch of their gaunt, haunted faces. Gratitude would flush through Avery at these moments.

"For them," Avery would whisper to herself.