

FRIGHT TIME

3 Spine-tingling Tales
for Young Readers



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MADMAN ON MAIN STREET

by Elaine A. Kule

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I, Michael Dane, age 12, am not the world's best student. I'm not even Centerville Junior High's best student. Far from it. Okay, I don't try all that hard. What I have, according to my teachers, is potential. But if I hear "You don't make the slightest effort to reach your maximum potential" once more, I'm going to scream. Which is what my parents did when they saw my last report card.

You're probably thinking I should just do the work so everyone will quit nagging me. But here's

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the way I see it: Books will always be around. So will math, science, and history. On the other hand, playing JV basketball, or watching a really great game on TV, well, this stuff *won't* keep. Last Friday, though, Coach Nelson said that my grades have to improve or I'll get thrown off the team. And I wouldn't be surprised if my folks made me give up TV for the next 30 years.

One thing I'll never give up is my paper route. It's my only source of income. Dad's always saying, "There's no such thing as a free lunch in this world. You want something, you have to earn it." Well, I want—no, make that need—baseball cards, a small amount of junk food (my mother won't buy it), and other essentials too numerous to mention. So, I'm up before dawn every day, making sure the good citizens of Centerville—those on my route, that is—have the news to digest with their breakfasts.

Yesterday morning I noticed another customer on my distribution list: Abner Hilks. I'd never heard that name before, but the address, 200 Main Street, sounded familiar. Could it be the spooky old place that's been deserted ever since I can remember? Nah. Who'd want to live there?

I hopped on my bike and began my rounds.

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But as I neared the last stop, my heart sank a bit. There it was, the old sorry-looking house. Whatever paint there was had chipped and faded. The front yard had weeds a foot high. This place, sitting at the end of Main Street, was the one kids used to think was haunted. Me included. It got so bad that Billy Smith's father once took a bunch of us inside to explore the place, just to prove we were wrong. Nothing happened, but even so I walked home unconvinced. I mean, no ghost or goblin would pull a stunt in broad daylight. Not with Mr. Smith around. The man is almost seven feet tall. He's a great guy and everything, but you don't mess with Billy's dad. Even if you're an evil spirit.

I'm not saying I believe in haunted houses. Still, as I got to 200 Main, I had a rolled newspaper in my hand, ready to throw on the rickety front porch. But I stopped mid-toss. Sitting in a weather-beaten rocking chair was a gray-haired man with a longish beard. No introductions were necessary. This had to be Abner Hilks.

"Good morning, Michael," he said.

I froze. It wasn't so much that he knew my name; the newspaper's subscription department could have told him. What got me was his voice.

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It was the creepiest thing I'd ever heard, so scary it gave me chills. Trust me, I've seen tons of horror movies, but just the sound of this guy beat them all. Besides, seeing a movie is one thing. Being so close to the real thing is another. I decided that I'd better shove off. But Abner's next comment had me glued to the spot.

"Having trouble in school, eh? A shame. Knowledge is power. Don't you forget it."

I was too stunned to talk. How could he possibly know about my low grades? Just when I calmed down enough to ask him, Abner got up from the chair, opened the front door, and went inside. He was holding a rolled newspaper. I suddenly realized that I had never given him one. I peddled to school as fast as I could. For the first time in a long time, I was glad to get there.

But the rest of the day grew even stranger.

For starters, math was a disaster. Ms. Reynolds made a sarcastic comment after I told her that I'd forgotten my homework—again. Some of the kids laughed. I really hate that. First of all, I don't think teachers should embarrass a kid in front of everyone. And if that sort of thing does happen, I think the class should stick together; in other words, don't make the