

Short Story Contest

November 2021



PROMPT: You've been recruited into a shadowy organization that handles paranormal and extraterrestrial encounters across the world. You're not a Field Agent—you're the new Head Archivist.

[Untitled]

by **Catherine Obear**

Alex looked at his watch, mindlessly tapping his foot. *3:03 AM. They're late.* He sighs, leaning back in his chair and looking to Matthew, a shaggy-looking, curly haired red-head who seemed to perpetually live in sweatpants. Matthew also happened to be Alex's lead field agent for the Underground Supernatural Society of West Virginia.

"This is ridiculous. They should have been here 3 minutes ago." Alex frowns.

"They're probably just dodging their RA's, calm down." Matthew reasoned.

Alex shakes his head, brown curls falling into his emerald eyes, "I don't care. They aren't taking this seriously. Isn't it your job to keep them in line?"

Matthew rolls his eyes and scoffs, "Yeah, I just don't act like a hard-ass with them. Maybe you should try it some time?"

Before Alex could snap back at him, there were three small knocks on the locked door. Alex quickly stands and opens the door. James, a blond, short statured, well-dressed eighteen year old, stood there with his partner in crime Seth, who looks much more relaxed than James at the moment. Seth was dressed in his usual garb of a beanie and flannel with brown hair stopping just above his eyes.

"I'm so sorry we're late, our RA stopped us to ask where we were going and--" James rushed.

"Don't do it again. This is your only warning." Alex snapped at him.

James swallowed heavily, and nodded before pushing past Alex to sit at the conference table. Seth smiled at Alex before joining James. Matthew politely greeted the two of them while Alex made his way to the head of the table.

"We're already behind schedule so let's get started." He begins, "I've received two reports in the past 24 hours of a disturbance at the North campus parking garage. Both describe an unknown creature lurking between cars and following students."

"Are they credible sources? I don't want to go all the way out there just for them to be fake reports like last time." Matthew asks.

Alex glares, "We have to take every report seriously, no matter how credible or small. What you may think is a small inconvenience, may actually cost someone's life in the long run." Matthew raised his hands in surrender, a silent apology for disrespecting his head archivist and president.

While Alex's job mostly consists of keeping all records as the head archivist and receiving and researching reports from students on campus, he also still gets to participate in the occasional field work. Matthew keeps their few field agents under control and leads them on missions. Together, they work as a team to help to eradicate all supernatural disturbances on their college campus.

"Anyways, we will be going out to survey the parking lot and check in on the residents who made the original reports. We will take their testimonies, and spend some time searching the garage for the foreign creature. Our intended return time will be 7AM, as I know some of you have tests this week and need rest. Does everyone agree to this?" Alex asks, and the three boys nod in agreement. "Alright, then let's go ahead and make our way over there."

The boys all begin to make their way out of the building. They make their way up the elevator and to the front desk, where they nod to Ashley. She works on the inside for them, helping let their shenanigans slide when she's working her front desk shifts. When she is not

working at the front desk, she's at the group meetings helping to take down supernatural creatures.

It doesn't take long for their crew to get to the aforementioned parking lot. The yellowing lights flicker as they walk in. Waiting at the elevators is a short blond headed boy. He snaps his eyes to them quickly, sizing them up as best as he can despite his short stature. Alex walks straight up to him with a blank face, "Noah?" He asks.

The kid's shoulders relax. "Yeah, that's me." He sighs, "Thanks for getting here on such short notice. I didn't know what to do."

Alex nods as his group surrounds him, "Of course. Now do you know where it is?"

Noah shakes his head, "No. I heard it about 15 minutes ago while running under some cars on the third level. I didn't stick around to see it."

"Okay, do you want to come help us search for it?" Alex has an eyebrow raised to the skittish kid. Noah nods. "Alright, then let's head to the third floor."

The five boys cram themselves into the tiny elevator that rattles an uncomfortable amount as it rises to the third floor. Once out of the elevator, Alex directs everyone to go search a specific side of the building in groups, with Noah acting as Alex's partner. The two begin walking around the full parking lot of cars. Alex makes sure to look all around and underneath each car, wanting to be sure to not miss anything. It is eerily quiet on their side of the parking garage. Noah is across from Alex, searching around the cars across from Alex's side. They search in silence, making sure to listen for even the smallest sign of movement.

There's a small rattle followed by a yelp from Noah, who runs towards Alex's side of cars. Alex's head snaps up at the sound, and he steps out from behind the car he had been searching under. "What?" He asks a startled and pale Noah.

"It's in there," Noah points at a run down blue Honda CRV with a shaky hand, "I heard it move in the backseat."

Alex nods and makes his way to the car, turning back to look at Noah, "Stay right there." Noah suddenly looks frozen to the spot he stands at. Alex creeps up along the side of the vehicle, peeking into the backseat window. He can't see much of anything other than the dark black tint of the windows. A yellow light flickers above him as he pulls a long, folded wire from his back pocket. He wedges the wire into the front door's window, wiggling it until he hears a quiet *click*. He pulls the wire back, folding it again to fit into his pocket. He reaches into his front pocket and pulls out a small silver pocket knife. He gently grips the door handle, making eye contact with Noah as he mouths a countdown to him.

One. Two. Three.

Alex whips the door open and quickly jumps into the driver's seat, leaning over the shoulder to look into the backseat. He's expecting to find a small beast to fight, that he can easily take down with his knife and his night be over quickly. However, what he wasn't expecting to see was a golden retriever puppy sitting in the middle of the backseat. Alex blinked, once, twice, and then the puppy yawned with a high pitched huff at the end.

Alex rolls his eyes and lets his shoulders fall. He reaches into the back and picks the puppy up with his right hand. He maneuvers around in the car to get out from the driver's seat and steps back out into the parking lot. He closes the door and stares at Noah with a slightly ticked off expression.

“There is not a supernatural creature in this parking garage, it was just a dog. Case closed.” He says. Noah’s shoulders visibly loosen and he lets out a deep breath as if he had been holding it the entire time. “Come on, let’s go find the rest of my ‘goons’.”

Noah nods and walks with him to the opposite end of the parking garage, periodically peeking at the puppy in Alex’s arms. It was falling asleep as they walked, leaning in further to Alex’s chest for warmth. Finally, they find the rest of the team. All three of them ducked under different cars looking for any sign of life. “We caught the creature!” Alex shouts for them to hear.

Matthew is the first one to stand up and look at Alex. His face lights up with a smile, “Oh my gosh this is the best beast we’ve ever seen! It’s so cute!!” He runs up to Alex to gently pet the puppy. “What a fun surprise!”

Alex rolls his eyes, “Whatever, our work is done so we can head back now. The pound is closed at this hour so I’ll just have to drop him off in the morning.”

Matthew frowns, “Why can’t we keep him? He’s so cute. Or wait, she?” Alex lifts the dog up under its armpits for Matthew to check, “He!” he shouts. By now James and Seth have both made their way up to Alex, cooing and smiling at the puppy.

“We live in a dorm. We’re not keeping him.” Alex deadpans.

“You’re no fun.” Seth complained.

“Is he staying in your room tonight Alex?” James asked with hopeful eyes.

Alex shrugs, “Yeah, I guess so. Matthew and I will keep an eye on him until we can sneak him out of the building in the morning to go to the pound.” James nods in understanding.

Noah peeks out from behind James’s shoulder, looking sheepish. “I’m sorry you had to come all the way out here for it just to be a dog. I swear a bunch of us thought it was something way bigger.”

“It’s fine, it’s better for us to check it out and it ends up being a puppy instead of us ignoring reports and it ends up being a soul-sucking beast.” Matthew smiles, “Plus, we get to keep a puppy for the night now!”

Noah nods, “Okay, well, I’ll let you guys go, it’s late. Again, I’m really sorry. Thanks for coming to check it out.”

After exchanging a few more goodbyes, the boys are headed back to their dorm. The entire way back Matthew, James, and Seth debate names for the puppy while Alex chooses to ignore them. *They’re going to be really upset when I drop him off at the pound tomorrow*, he thinks to himself. When they walk back into their building, Ashley’s head snaps up to see who it is. Her face quickly makes a lot of different expressions in a short amount of time, ultimately landing on her covering her wide open mouth in excitement.

“Oh my god, where did you find him?” She whisper shouts.

“This is the big bad beast Alex had to fight off for our mission tonight.” Seth jokes. Ashley reaches out her hands and opens and closes her fist in a ‘give me’ motion. Alex sighs and hands the sleeping puppy over to her. The movement wakes him up, and he sleepily yawns before looking up at Ashley’s face. She squeaks in excitement as he stands up in her arms to lick at her chin.

“He’s perfect! What’s his name?”

“We decided on Scout!” Matthew says proudly.

"I love it!" She gives him one more big hug before handing him back to Alex. As soon as he is back in Alex's arms, he promptly falls back asleep. "I hate to be the bearer of bad news though, but you do know it is against policy to have pets in the building, right?"

Alex nods, "Yeah, I'm taking him to the pound in the morning. Will you help me get past security without them noticing him?"

"Of course!" She says. Ashley looks at the watch on her wrist, "You boys need to go get some rest though, it's already 4:30."

"Agreed." James says at the same time as Seth.

The boys all head into the elevator, with Seth and James getting off at the fourth floor to go to their shared room. Alex, Matthew, and Scout all left the elevator on the sixth floor, and Matthew uses his key to get into their shared bedroom. There isn't much exciting about their room. Just two lofted school-issued beds with desks underneath them. A couple of dressers, mirrors and an attached bathroom.

Alex takes some blankets out from his closet and sets them in the bathtub with a few of his extra pillows, making a makeshift bed for Scout. He gently sets the dog down into the tub, careful to not wake him. Matthew and Alex both then climb up into their respective beds to settle in for the night.

A few hours go by before Alex is woken up by a bang from the bathtub. He sits up in his bed, looking to the window and seeing that the sun has just barely started to rise. "Scout?" Matthew calls out sleepily.

"This is ridiculous, if you think I'm going to sleep in a *bathtub* then you are dead wrong. Get me out of this thing!" A furious, male voice snaps from the bathroom. Matthew quickly jolts up out of his half-awake state and looks to Alex, whose eyes are wide open. "Hello!? I said get me out of here assholes!" the voice shouts again.

The second shout jump starts Alex and Matthew into gear. They both clumsily climb down from their beds as fast as humanly possible this early in the morning. Matthew makes it to the bathroom first, flickering on the light. Sitting in the tub is a very pissed off looking Scout. He's sitting upright, head tilted slightly down with angry eyes looking up at the two boys. His mouth opens, "Get me out of here you idiots!" he shouts.

Matthew and Alex are frozen in shock for a moment before Alex pushes past Matthew to quickly grab Scout and pull him out of the tub. He dumps him onto their bedroom floor unceremoniously. Scout shakes out his body and sits back down, huffing at the two boys.

"What the hell is he?" Matthew asks. Before Alex can grab his phone to look through his archives of supernatural creatures, Scout snaps at them.

"I'm a hellhound you idiots!"

"Oh god." Alex moans.

To Be Continued...