

**Anushka Raviprasad**

## **The Tombstone**

My dream started out perfectly ordinary. I was playing outside with my dog Herbert, when suddenly, everything faded, and I was standing somewhere else.

Now, I am in a cemetery, with wind as cold as ice, thunder and lightning brightening the sky. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a peculiar sight. There is a tombstone, a giant compared to the rest, facing me with a mysterious edge, as if it is daring me to read it. But there is something strange about it. It reads, "Samuel Livingston, born September 9, 1867, died December 14, 1880." Then a pale, ghostly hand comes out of the dirt where my grave is, clawing at the dirt as if to pull itself out — no, to pull me in.

Suddenly, I wake up with a start. I am sweating and shaking, not knowing what the nightmare means. I quickly dress and go to the kitchen for breakfast.

"While you're outside, go to the market place and buy some vegetables for me," says my mother from another room.

It is the morning of December 13, 1880. The ground is covered in a soft, white blanket of snow. I try to empty my mind by purchasing vegetables from the market to bring home, but my mind keeps returning to the nightmare. I am so absorbed in my thoughts that I do not notice my best friend, Elizabeth, has walked up to me until I bump into her.

"You should probably watch where you're going, Samuel," she says, looking surprised to see me here.

"I was just coming to the market place to buy some vegetables for my mother," I reply, trying to focus on the present.

"Would you like to come to my house this evening for supper?" she asks.

"No, thank you, but I do need to tell you about something that happened last night," I answer, lowering my voice.

I tell her about my nightmare and the suspicious tombstone with my name on it.

"I don't think it means anything; it's probably just a ridiculous nightmare," says Elizabeth, but it is clear she is as unsure as I am.

I decide to keep my mind on other pursuits, and worry about it later. I go home and play with Herbert for some time, then I feed him and give him water. After eating supper, I go straight to bed.

Again, I am in the cemetery, with the tombstone staring right at me. The decaying hand tries to pull me in. But this time, I hear a voice. At first, it is a whisper, then it becomes louder, and louder, and louder, until I can hear it very clearly. The voice is coming from a thin, corpselike girl. She is moving forward with a menacing look, and her eyes are as black as night.

I jolt upright, only to find I have fallen off my bed. I hastily dress and head out the door. I need to see for myself that the tombstone does not exist, or else it will haunt me for the rest of my life. I start out walking, then I pick up speed until I have broken into a run. I even see Elizabeth waving towards me, but instead I ignore her, running towards the cemetery.

By the time I arrive there, I am sweating, and I am more nervous than I ever have been in my life.

I open the gate and step inside. It is a murky sky with the trees swaying in the wind. It is very eerie and quiet, the perfect setting for a cemetery. The tombstones are all different shapes and sizes, some with many cracks, some with very few.

I look around for my tombstone. Unfortunately, I find it, and it is the biggest, ugliest one of them all. I step toward it — but very cautiously. Everything on it is correct, and I realize it is now December 14th.

I look around to make sure no one is watching, and I take one step closer. But just then, I see the same ghost girl from my dream, looking at me with those pitch black eyes. She shrieks at me, floating towards me with her twig arms stretched out. I try to run away, but it is too late. A pale hand comes out of the dirt and grabs my legs. I fall and try to pull away and call for help, but then another hand shoots out of the dirt. Together, the two hands drag me underground.

I suddenly wake up, only to see I am still in my bed. The morning sun dances on the window. My mother is standing over me with a worried look in her face.

"What happened to you during the night? You are all sweaty, and you were thrashing about in your sleep," she says.

I tell her about my nightmare and assure her that I am fine now. I sigh with relief. It is December 15.