

Sample Chapter From

Marshall Academy

by Christopher Aldo Costantino

Halloween was three days away and the kids were excited about the big costume party. After a month of classes, they were all ready for a break. During lunch, Cedric, one of the C-block students sat down with the lower classmen.

“Did you guys hear about the ghost?”

The students looked at him. “No,” Chris said, sheepishly. “What ghost?”

“The ghost of Michael Spenser,” he said.

“Who’s Michael Spenser?” Samuel asked.

“He was a student here, about a hundred years ago.”

“What happened to him?” Ryan asked.

“He was killed in a freak accident at the Halloween party. Some bullies were picking on him and went too far. In his dying breath, he vowed to return one hundred years later to take his revenge. Every Halloween, he haunts Obsidian House, dragging an F-blocker back to the underworld with him. The administration tries to hush it up, but we all know.”

The assembled F-blockers gulped and turned white as a sheet.

He stopped to think for a second. “In fact, it was exactly one hundred years ago this year. I guess this year’s Halloween ball is in for quite a scare.”

They sat in terrified silence for a minute.

“Although he’s been seen in other places, he likes to hang out in the music classroom.”

He paused a moment for his words to set in.

“Well, have fun tonight, guys,” he said as he got up. “I’ll see all but one of you next week. Good luck!” With that, he walked away.

After supper, Ryan headed back to the house to get dressed for the party. There was much apprehension among the F-blockers, but, as attendance was mandatory, everyone went. Ryan had thought about bringing his James Bond costume that he took to camp last summer. However, he decided on one that he saw in a catalog - The Phantom of the Opera. He had a white shirt, black pants and a long black cloak. He also had the requisite mask, covering half his face. As he was admiring himself in the mirror, there was a knock at the door. He opened to door to admit a pirate to the room.

“Cool costume, Chris.” Ryan said, admiring the outfit.

Together, they made their way to Corey and Curtis’s rooms, where they were dressed, surprisingly, the same - they both wore clown costumes.

“Great, now we’ll never be able to tell you two apart,” Ryan complained.

“Sorry, man. That’s part of our intrigue,” Corey stated.

They made their way to the party, ready to expect anything. They arrived and began to mingle. Several games were set up as well as music. They were unable to have any fun as they kept looking over their shoulder, waiting for the ghost to arrive and claim its prey. As they were getting some punch, one of the balloons popped, causing them all to jump a mile. Once they calmed down, they laughed about the fact that it was just a balloon. The last hour of the party was beginning and they were more apprehensive than ever.

Cedric carne up to them. "About twenty minutes left."

"What are you talking about?" Curtis asked.

"Michael died at exactly 9:22 pm," he said, looking at his watch. "That's twenty minutes from now." The twenty minutes came and the foursome was really scared, waiting for the inevitable. Next thing they knew, the party was over and they had been too scared to partake in any of the games. Relieved that nothing bad had happened, they returned to the house. They sat in the common room, talking.

"Thank goodness the ghost didn't come out during the party," Curtis said.

"Ya, it's kind of disappointing. I wanted to see it. Let's go find him," said Corey. Ryan had discovered over the past week that Corey was the adventurous, albeit risky one, while Curtis was intelligent, but a little more reserved. They were both always willing to have a little fun, however.

"What are you nuts?" Curtis stated, looking at his brother incredulously.

"Ah, come on. You don't really believe all that 'drag into the underworld' stuff, do you?"

"Let me get this straight. There's a maniac on the loose that wants to drag F-blockers into the underworld and, rather than avoid him like the plague, you want to go search him out?"

"Ya, pretty much."

"That's insane! Besides, we're not allowed to leave the house after dark."

"Oh, please. You're such a chicken!"

"I am not a chicken. I'm just not as big of an idiot as you are."

"I'm in," Ryan said, out of the blue, halting the brotherly argument. Corey smiled, while Chris looked at him, questioningly.

"Really?"

"Sure, I'm game."

Corey put his arm around Ryan. "Good man. Anyone else?" he asked, looking at Chris and Curtis.

"Why not," Curtis said. "It's only my life at stake. I've put up with you for thirteen years - how much worse can the underworld really be?"

"What about you," Ryan asked, looking at Chris.

"I'm not going out there," Chris protested. "Fine," Corey said. "Stay here then."

"I'm not staying in here."

"You're going to have to choose one or the other," Ryan said.

"Fine, I'll go with you. But if I get dragged into the underworld, I'm coming back to haunt you."

"I look forward to it," Ryan joked. They all grabbed flashlights and crept out into the hall. Slowly, they made their way to the music classroom. Cautiously, they entered the room and looked around. It was dark and, when they tried the light switch, there was no response.

"Maybe this isn't such a good idea," Curtis stated.

"Get in there," Corey ordered, pushing his brother further into the room.

They all moved further into the room, when the door behind them slammed shut. They screamed and grabbed at the door handle only to find it locked. They slowly turned around to face the room. Suddenly, they heard a rustling sound coming from the corner, followed by ghoulish sounds. Just then, a white sheet popped up from behind the piano, causing the boys to scream. Suddenly, a skeleton jumped out of a cabinet and grabbed Chris, causing them to

scream even louder.

When the screaming subsided, they heard laughter. The sheet fell away, revealing Cedric, laughing. His friends stood up from behind the desk, holding various gadgets, such as a remote control and a tape player. "You guys are so gullible," Cedric chided. "We knew you couldn't resist the urge to see a ghost."

"You suck, you know that. You nearly scared us to death," Curtis said.

"Hello?? That was the point," he said, still laughing.

"I wasn't scared," Corey claimed.

"Ya, right," Curtis said. "You should have seen your face... Oh, wait - it looked something like this." ~ "He made a horrified look.

The others laughed, but Corey didn't think it was very funny. He chased his brother all the way back to the dorm room, with Chris and Ryan close behind. When they arrived at the common room, waiting for them was Dame Magee.

"Well, well, well. Out after curfew. What do you boys have to say for yourselves?" They looked at each other, then back at her, none of them saying anything.

"Well, we'll see what Headmaster Little has to say about this." She escorted them to his office and explained that they had been out after curfew.

He looked them over. "Explain." Again, they kept silent.

"It cannot possibly be as bad as what I will blame you for if you don't tell me the truth."

Curtis was the first to speak. "Cedric told us about a ghost that hangs out in the music room. We went to see it for ourselves."

"And, did you see it?"

"No, it was all a hoax. Cedric and his friends set the whole thing up to scare us."

"And scare us he did," Chris added.

"Well, it seems like you've been through a lot tonight. I guess the scaring is punishment enough."

"Really?" Corey asked.

"No, not really. It is strictly forbidden for students to be out after curfew. Therefore, you must be punished. You will each be given one demerit and detention tomorrow afternoon. Now, Dame Magee will take you back to the dorms. Don't make me lock you into your rooms."

The next morning, they ate breakfast, and plotted their revenge.

"We have to get those jerks back. Any ideas?" Curtis said.

"Well, there are the classics - snakes in the bed, itching powder in the jock strap, filling their rooms with manure, etcetera," Corey offered.

Ryan shook his head. "Na, we need something that's never been done before. Something that will go down in the prank hall of fame. Something very subtle."

"What did you have in mind?" Corey asked.

He leaned in and whispered his plan to them. The more he explained, the larger the smiles on their faces grew.

"That's perfect!" Chris said. "Let's do it!"

With Chris acting as lookout, the rest broke into Cedric's room. Their first step was to raise all Cedric's posters and his mirror. Then, they lengthened all his pant legs. "The first phase of Operation: Shrinking is now complete."

During supper, they put phase two of their plan in place. Ryan walked up to Cedric as he was standing in line and looked at him funny.

“What are you looking at, loser?” Cedric snapped .

With a strange look on his face, Ryan set the trap. “You seem a little shorter than you did yesterday.”

“What are you talking about? I’m just as tall as I’ve ever been.”

“Okay, whatever you say,” Ryan said, walking away.

The rest of the group saw Cedric looking at his ankles, realizing that his pants were too long. Ryan had explained to Lance what Cedric had done to them. He also explained their plan and Lance agreed to play along with the prank. They watched as he walked up to Cedric and assisted in the prank.

“Dude - are you getting shorter?”

“Why does everyone keep saying that? I am the same height I was last week.”

“Oh, yea?” he said, pointing. “Why are your pants too long?”

He fought for an explanation. “They must have stretched them in the laundry.”

“Are you serious? The laundry shrinks clothes; it doesn’t stretch them.”

“Well, there has to be an explanation.”

“You’ve probably caught that shrinking virus that’s going around.”

“Shrinking virus? You’re kidding me, right?”

“No, I’m totally serious. It’s an epidemic. That’s what happened to Charles last week.”

“I thought he got sick and had to go home.”

“That’s the official word. As a prefect, we are subject to privileged information. The true reason he’s no longer here is that he shrunk down to nothingness.”

They could tell from the look on Cedric’s face that he was indeed scared.

“Nothingness?” “Yep. He kept shrinking and shrinking and, before we knew it, he was gone.”

Cedric gulped. “How long did it take?”

“It was really quick. Once he became infected, it was only a couple days before he was gone.” He paused for a few minutes. “Wow, Cedric. We’re really gonna miss you around here.” He patted him on the back. “It’s been a pleasure having you in our house.” With that, he walked away.

Ryan, Chris and the twins had to leave the room so they could expel the laughter that was building up inside of them.

“Did you see the look on his face?” Corey asked.

“That was priceless,” Curtis agreed. “We owe Lance big time!”

“All right - phase three,” Ryan schemed.

Chris walked up to Cedric in the hall. They had built him some lifts in the woodshop so he looked much taller. “Hey, I hear you have the shrinking virus.”

“So, what’s it to you?”

“Well, my father is a chemist. He developed a cure.”

“You’re kidding. I have got to get some of that,” he said, with panic in his voice. “Can you get me some?”

“Sure ... for a price,” he said, with a smirk on his face.

“What price?”

Chris handed him a piece of paper. “I want you to read this over the house PA system.”

He grabbed it and read it silently to himself. “Forget it. I’m not saying that.”

Chris turned to walk away. "Fine. Been nice knowing you."

"Wait a minute. If I read this, can you guarantee me the cure?"

"Absolutely. "

"Fine," Cedric agreed. "When?"

"Tonight during announcements."

Right after the house team announcements, Cedric's voice came over the intercom. "I would like to humbly apologize for scaring the F-blockers with the ghost thing. I am not worthy of being in their presence and promise to salute each and every one of them whenever I pass them in the halls. Should any of them need a favor, they shouldn't hesitate to come to me. I am a worm and a loser and I am sorry."

As he made his announcement, Ryan, Chris and the twins were rolling on the floor. "Checkmate!" Ryan said.