



Mommy Doesn't See Me

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

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Books by Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

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Running from the house, seeking out adventures again with my brother and sister! This is my favorite thing to do in the summer. We're running for the beach. Dustin has the little shovels, and Lydia has the buckets. We're going to make sand castles! Bigger even than the ones we made yesterday. Mommy won't let us go in the ocean without her. Not even Dustin, and he's nine. Lydia has to be carried into the ocean, because she's only seven. I can't ever remember how old I am, but I am the youngest. I have to watch from the beach, as Dustin

splashes around, looking for sharks to fight, and Mommy carries Lydia into the waves in her arms.

Today, though, we are going to spend all our time in the sand. I hear Voldemort running to catch up. Mommy has let him come after us. I would have named him Spot, of course, but the name Dustin picked got pulled from the hat first. He named him after the bad guy in our favorite books. Poor little Scotty dog! But he does not live up to his name. In fact, he's my very best friend in the whole wide world.

Voldemort barks up at me happily, then circles me. I giggle. He runs past and does the same for Dustin and Lydia. He runs ahead, searching for the perfect spot to dig.

We follow him, stopping where he stops. Dustin helps him dig with a shovel and hands one to Lydia, bossing her around as usual. He never bosses me around. They really don't say anything to me most of the time. I think Dustin asked if I wanted a sandwich once, but I wasn't hungry. Of course, Lydia was standing right behind me. He could have been talking to her. But then, why would he have looked right at me? I know it's because I'm so young. No one ever seems to notice me. No one ever pays attention to me at all. Not unless I'm doing tricks with Voldemort. I think I want to be a dog trainer when I grow up. That's my greatest talent. And it's one reason I love Voldemort so very much. He helps me get my family's attention, and he pays more attention to me than anyone.

But I know they don't mean to exclude me so much. Maybe it's just in my head, being the youngest. I'm not as interesting as Dustin and Lydia. Not yet anyway. But I'm a growing boy, just like Dustin. Mommy reminds Dustin that he's growing all the time, so I must be growing too, since I'm the youngest. She makes marks on the wall by the kitchen when she measures them from time to time. I don't have any marks yet. I stood against the wall, waiting to be measured after Lydia last time, but Mommy just took the yard stick and walked away like I wasn't even there. I suppose I'm just too small to be measured yet. But I *am* a growing boy! I will be measured one day, just like Dustin and Lydia. I know Mommy doesn't mean to make me feel sad. She loves me very much. She loves all of us. In fact, the house is *filled* with love! That's why I like it so much, even when we have to stay indoors on rainy days; even when it's bed time, and we have to put away all of the toys and go to sleep. The house is always filled with love. Mommy's love is biggest of all, and I know she loves me too. I just have to get bigger before she will pay as much attention to me. I understand. I'm not mad at Mommy. I could never be. She loves me too much, and I love her even more just for *being* my Mommy.

Our sand castle towered over the beach today! But the sun is going down, and Mommy is calling us for dinner. Voldemort

barks and barks as he races us to the house. He wins every time, because he has so many feet!

Dinner is served, and it is spaghetti, Dustin's favorite! Dustin and Lydia both start slurping it down. I'm not hungry, so I watch them with amusement. Mommy rolls her eyes. "Eat like human beings!" she says playfully.

I giggle at this. They eat like beasts! I wonder if Mommy is thankful that I didn't want any spaghetti, so that she doesn't have to wash more dishes than she already does. I hope she is. I think she notices me not eating and knows I want to help. That's why she never even sets me a plate. She knows I won't be hungry.

I leave the table and call Voldemort. He looks over at me, then back to the spaghetti. Silly dog. I try again, when Dustin and Lydia have finished. He comes, looks up to me, and barks, wagging his tail.

"Look, Mom!" Dustin shouts with laughter. "He's doing it again!"

They love it when I show off my dog training skills. I raise my hand in the air, pretending to have food. "Up, Voldemort! Up!"

He stands on his hind legs, walking back and forth just a little bit.

"Good boy, Voldemort! Good boy! Now flip!" I toss the imaginary food over his head, and Voldemort does a little flip

then goes looking for the food, only to come back and wait for more commands from me, hoping to get some reward.

Dustin and Lydia laugh hysterically.

Mommy looks over at us. “That is the strangest thing I’ve ever seen. Where did you ever learn to do that?”

I shrug. “I just tried it one day, and it worked.” She always notices me when I make Voldemort do tricks.

She smiles at me. “Good boy.” I feel very proud of myself, and her praise makes me feel warm all over.

At bed time, Mommy tucks us in. Lydia is in her bed, and Dustin and I are in ours. I’m too little to have my own bed, so I have to share with my brother for now. Even when Lydia was a little baby, and I was even littler. I remember it though, as if I were just as big as I am now. I have a good memory. When I’m old enough, I’ll tell them so. I’ll tell them everything I remember, and they will listen to me much better than they do while I’m so much smaller. They don’t really listen to me very much at all. They think the things I say don’t matter, and I guess they don’t. At least not to them. But they matter to me.

Mommy tucks Dustin in, and I snuggle next to him, on top of the covers. Mommy knows I don’t mind sleeping without them. She kisses him on the forehead, just as she kissed Lydia. I close my eyes and wait for my kiss, but she stands up and goes to

sit in the rocker between our beds. How old will I have to be, before Mommy will kiss me goodnight? Every night, I feel sad when Mommy forgets about me, but then she starts to read. Tonight she's reading Dr. Seuss. I forget about feeling sad and laugh at the story Mommy reads. Voldemort runs in and snuggles up on Lydia's bed to listen. I feel all of the love in the room, and I am happy again.

School, started today. Dustin and Lydia are going to be gone all morning. I hate it when school starts, because I have no one to play with aside from Voldemort, and Mommy is so busy that she doesn't even watch me do tricks with him. I don't mind Voldemort. He is my very best friend, after all. But he is also a dog. When school starts, I feel lonely for my brother and sister all day. I can't wait until I am old enough to go to school. Maybe *that's* how old I have to be before they will start taking me seriously. I hate being the littlest.

I walk over to the wall by the kitchen, with the marks. Mommy is in the kitchen making cookies and singing a song. She has the most beautiful voice on earth. I look at the marks. I never noticed it before, but I think I am just as tall as Lydia. Maybe even taller. I can't wait to find out!

I run into the kitchen. "Mommy! I'm big! You have to measure me!"

Mommy says nothing. She acts as though I'm not even there. But I'm big enough now! Maybe I've *been* big enough, but they just hadn't measured me yet.

"I'm big enough now for you to measure," I say. I go to the wall to get the yard stick for her. I'm so excited that I knock it down when I try to grab it, and it smacks the floor with a loud clap.

Mommy looks over at the yard stick. I think it surprised her. "Not again. Please not again. Voldie!"

Voldemort scampers in and comes right up beside me.

"Let's go watch TV," Mommy says, looking at me finally. "I think I need a break, how 'bout you?"

Voldemort barks and wags his tail.

Feeling ashamed, I nod my head. "Yes, Mommy. We can take a break. Maybe *then* you can measure me? I'm sorry I knocked down the stick."

Mommy only sighs as she goes to the couch. "It's just in my head," she says.

"I think so too," I answer. Mommy is actually talking to me! That's the one *good* thing about school starting. When Dustin and Lydia are at school, Mommy only has me and Voldemort, and she talks to me sometimes. It feels so good to *know* that she loves me too. "After all," I continue, "if you would at least *look* at me standing by Lydia's marks, you'll see I'm big enough now to be measured."

“All summer long, things were fine,” she says. “Nothing like that. Not since Dustin’s Star Wars mug.”

I feel a wave of guilt. That’s why Mommy won’t measure me. I’m in trouble again, like when I broke Dustin’s favorite mug. I was just trying to get it down for him before he got home from school. I thought I would get things ready for him all by myself to prove how grown up I was getting, but it didn’t work. I dropped it, and it broke. And Mommy started to cry. I guess it wasn’t the first thing I had broken or knocked over by mistake. Mommy hates when I do that, even if it’s just the yard stick and nothing is broken.

Mommy will not measure me today, because I’m bad. I feel so, so sad I could cry. I think I must.

Voldemort comes over to comfort me. Mommy turns on the TV and pretends not to see me, pretends not to hear me. She always wipes away Dustin and Lydia’s tears. Why not mine? Why doesn’t Mommy care about me as much as she does them? Is it just because I’m small? But she must care about me. She must! The house is always full of love. Her love!

Well, not always. Right now, Mommy feels scared. I wonder what she gets so scared of. It only happens when it’s just the two of us here with Voldemort. She always feels so afraid. Surely she’s not afraid of *me*.

MOMMY DOESN'T SEE ME

It's Christmas time. I love the tree, the warm glow of the colorful lights. I love the stockings and the stories of Santa coming to bring presents to good little boys and girls. Even Voldemort has a stocking.

I have no stocking though, because, I think, I have been so bad that Mommy knows Santa will not leave anything for me. She loves me, and she is trying to keep me from having my feelings hurt by finding an empty stocking on Christmas morning. But I wouldn't mind. I really wouldn't mind an empty stocking, if it meant I could have one hanging there with my name on it, just like my brother and sister and Voldemort. I tried to tell her so earlier, and I told her again that I was sorry I was bad. Then I broke the baby from the manger scene. I didn't mean to do it. I was just trying to help. But Mommy screamed and left the room. She didn't even finish decorating until Dustin and Lydia came home from school.

I went to my bed, and I cried. I just want to be good. I just want to be good enough for Mommy to hug me and kiss me, and maybe even set out a stocking, even though I'm too bad for Santa, and set out a plate for me at dinner time, even though I'm not hungry.

I go back to the den, and I look at the ornaments on the tree. Dustin and Lydia both have special ornaments with their baby pictures on the outside. I smile, and I look for mine. I can never find mine.

I look around at the pictures in the room. Why am I not in any of the pictures? Dustin and Lydia are in so many, with Mommy, with Grandma and Nanna and Grandpa and Pawpaw. I even see a big framed picture of Voldemort, and a smaller one with Dustin and Lydia making sand castles with Voldemort. I was there too. Why did Mommy leave me out of the picture? Why did she leave me out of *all* of the pictures?

I feel like crying again.

“Okay,” Mommy says. “Let’s take a group selfie in front of the tree!”

Dustin and Lydia run up beside Mommy. Dustin grabs Voldemort. Mommy holds the camera out in front of them.

“Me too!” I shout. I had hesitated, wondering if I should even bother. But no, I *will* be in this Christmas selfie. I *will*.

“Smile!” Mommy takes the picture. Then another two, just to be sure.

“Lemme see!” Dustin says.

“No me!” Lydia argues.

“Me first! Me first!” I am so eager to see my first family picture! I am jumping up and down with excitement.

“Hold on, stop crowding me.” Mommy laughs. She holds the camera out, so that we can all see the screen.

I look at the first picture, but I don't see me. Wasn't I standing right there, between my brother and sister? Where *am* I?

“What is *that*?” Dustin asks, pointing to the screen.

“It's just a light reflection,” Mommy says.

“It looks like a big ball,” Lydia adds with a giggle.

Mommy goes to the next one.

“There it is again!” Dustin shouts.

Mommy looks at the third picture.

“And there!” Lydia shouts. She laughs. “It looks like it's smiling!”

“Zoom in, Mom,” Dustin says.

Mommy looks closer at the ball, and she gasps.

“It's a face!” Dustin shouts.

I look closer. “It's me! It's me! I'm in the picture! I look like a ball!” I laugh and jump and dance around triumphantly.

Mommy stands up, turning off the camera. “All right. It's time for bed.” She seems troubled, but I'm too happy to worry about it.

When we get in bed, I am so happy that I finally have a picture of me in the house that I don't know how I'll lie here all night, watching Dustin breathe in and out like I usually do. It normally relaxes me to watch him sleep. Tonight, I'm just too happy!

Mommy tucks us in, kisses Lydia, then Dustin. I close my eyes and wait, thinking this will be the night. Mommy finally took a picture of me too. She will treat me just like Dustin and Lydia from now on. She *will*.

But she stands up and goes to the chair. She picks up a book.

“But...” I don’t know what to say. I sit up. “Mommy! What about my kiss?”

She begins to read. It’s Amelia Bedelia. I usually laugh at the stories, but tonight I just want it to be over. I want Mommy to remember me!

She closes the book when she’s through and turns out the light. “Good night, Lydia.”

“Good night, Mommy.”

“Good night, Dustin,”

“Night, Mom.”

Frantic, I shout, “Me too, Mommy! Say good night to me too!”

She starts to turn.

She *will* remember me! “Where’s *my* kiss?”

Mommy gasps again, like she had when she saw my picture. Of course, she is surprised she forgot me!

Dustin jumps out of our bed for some reason. His heart is beating really fast.

“What’s wrong?” Lydia asks.

Dustin looks away from me. “Mommy? Did you—”

“Come on, kids,” she says, with that terrible fear sound in her voice again. “Why don’t we all sleep in my room tonight?”

Heartbroken, I say. “All right.” No kiss for me. But at least we all get to sleep in the big bed tonight.

I linger behind, feeling sorry for myself, as my brother and sister get their pillows and Teddy bears and follow Mommy to her room. Voldemort comes over to try and cheer me up. “I don’t understand, Voldemort. Sometimes, it’s like she doesn’t even *see* me. I guess I made her mad. I shouldn’t have asked for a kiss like I was supposed to get one. I should have looked *better* in my first picture. Why did I have to look so weird in them? I looked like a ball!” I feel tears welling up, but then I remember, “I was in it though.” I look down to Voldemort, happy again. “I was in a *picture!*”

“Mommy!” It’s been days. Days since the pictures. “Mommy, I’m right here! Stop pretending you can’t see me!” Mommy has been trying hard to ignore me. She must be *really* mad, but I couldn’t have been *that* bad. I’ve seen Dustin and Lydia do way worse things, and she didn’t ignore them. Sometimes she even spansks them when they’re bad. I’d so much rather be hurt by Mommy for being bad than have her pretend that I’m not here. A hug, a

kiss, even a spanking would be *something*. Sometimes it feels almost like I'm not even real.

"Mommy, please!" I go into the kitchen, try to bring her the yard stick again, accidentally knock it down again instead. "Measure me! I'm a growing boy, just like Dustin!"

She jumps in her seat when the stick hits the ground. But she tries to act like she didn't even hear it. She just stares at the TV, feeling scared again.

I see the camera on the little table by the lamp, next to the couch. I walk right up to it, right next to Mommy, and she still acts like I'm not there at all. "Take another picture, Mommy! I *promise* I won't look like a ball this time! I promise!" I start to cry. "I promise!" I try to lift the camera, but knock it off of the table by mistake.

Mommy jumps up. "That's it!" she says, filled with that terrible, confusing fear. "That is *it!*"

"Mommy! Look at me! I'm right *here!*"

It's as though I'd said nothing. Mommy just breathes, really hard. She is looking for her keys.

"Mommy!" I say, and it's the sternest tone I've ever had to take with her. "I am so *mad at you!*" I punch the glass Santa with my fist, and it flies off of the table. I push the manger scene, with its glued-together baby Jesus, over onto the ground. I start tearing the stockings down from the mantle. "Spank me! Hurt me! I'm here! I'm here! And I'm being bad! Mommy! *See me!*"

I hear Mommy screaming, and the door slams. She has left me all alone. I look out the window. She's even taken Voldemort. I am in so much trouble.

I go back into the den, and I look at the bad things I've done. I start to cry. I cry so hard.

"There now," someone says to me. "What's the matter, my little one?"

I look up. There's a man standing there behind the couch. He looks like a toy soldier. "My Mommy doesn't see me!" I blubber after saying it. It's the only truth there can be. "My Mommy doesn't know I'm real."

The man comes over to me and sits on the couch. "Now, now." He puts a hand on my shoulder, and I feel it. I *feel* it! "It looks like we have a lot to discuss, mon petit."

He has a funny way of saying things. I like the sound of his voice.

"Well, that's because I'm a Frenchman, petit. I can speak French, Spanish, and English very well, but I suppose I do have a little bit of an accent." He lifts me up and sits me on his leg.

I give him a questioning look.

"All right, mon petit garçon! You have me there. I have an *extraordinary* accent." He laughs, and it is a wonderful sound. A friendly sound.

"You can see me!"

“Well, of course I can see you, my friend. You are right there.”

“Are you a tin soldier?”

“Well, I certainly hope not. I was a *real* soldier once.”

“But you look just like one of my tin soldiers. I have a set of them. Of the French ones, the British ones, the Colonials too.”

“Well, now. That brings us to it, doesn’t it? Where are these toy soldiers of yours, *petit*?”

I am startled to realize that I can’t think of where they are. I realize I haven’t seen them anywhere in the house. Not since ... well ... I don’t remember *ever* playing with them in the house. Not in *this* house. But, there was a house. Another house.

“Ah, yes,” the Frenchman says. “But that was your *before* house, yes?”

“My before house?”

“Yes, well. I can see we are going to be learning much about one another, *petit*.” He offers me a hand. “I am called Jean-Claude.”

I take his hand. Shake it firmly. I am rewarded with a lovely wink. “I am ...” What *am* I called? Mommy never calls me anything. Neither do Dustin and Lydia. Voldemort barks at me. “Arf!” I say to Jean-Claude. “I am called *Arf!*”

“Did you say ... *Arf!*”

I nod.

"I see," he says kindly, a laugh in his voice. "And tell me, petit, does anyone call you Arf other than the little dog?"

Sadly, I shake my head. "No one else calls me anything."

"Well," he says, matter-of-factly, "there is a good reason for that. First of all, I must point out that you are not actually called *Arf*. Think about it now. Remember your toy soldiers. You liked them didn't you? Loved to make battles? Make a big mess on the floor?"

I laugh at the recollection. "Yes, I did!"

"Of course you did! I did too, when I was a boy. But wasn't there someone who would come in the room and say to you that it was time to pick them up? Perhaps even a bit crossly, but always with love in her voice?"

"Yes," I say. "I remember her now. She was in the other house. The *before* house."

"And what would she say, exactly, when it was time to put away your little men?"

"She would say, 'Timothy, put those back in the chest before I melt them down! It's time to go to your chores!' " I laugh out loud. Then I realize, "My name is Timothy! Timothy Awbrey! But what happened? What happened to that woman and that other house? What happened to those toy soldiers?"

A serious look comes over Jean-Claude. "Timothy, I am here to *help* you, so you must not be afraid."

He hugs me then. Pulls me to his chest. It feels so wonderful. To be touched. To be recognized. To be loved. He lets me go. Smiles warmly at me. "I'm afraid something *bad* happened to you."

I look at him, puzzled by the idea.

He nods, seeming to see things so much more clearly than I do. "Try to remember, Timothy. Where were you before you were in this house?"

I think, very hard. I remember my first memory in this house. All of us gathered around the baby. Around Lydia. There is so much love. So *much* love! I feel like I'm at home.

"Yes, yes. That is what drew you here, petit. The love, the kindness. The family. But where were you before that?"

"I was ... lost."

Sadly, Jean-Claude asks, "And what had happened, before you got lost?"

"Something ... hit me. A car. I was running across the street to get my brother's ball. But not Dustin. It was Frank's ball. And I looked up, but there were horses on one side of me, a car coming right in front of me, a trolley on the other side. There was nowhere to go, and the car ... the car *hit* me!"

Jean-Claude hugs me again.

I start to cry. "I don't want to be dead!"

"Shh-shh." He holds me close, and I cry. "It's all right. You are not dead. But the time has come to perhaps have a new life."

He sits me back up and asks, “After the car hit you, there was a light, no? A very bright, warm light? And someone—?”

“Calling to me!” I remember. “I ran away! I didn’t want to go. I wasn’t finished. I wasn’t finished with being a little boy ... and growing into a man. I wanted to grow up! I wanted to do all of the things that I was supposed to do!”

“So, you refused to go with your angel?”

I nod, tears streaming down my face. “Yes. Am I in trouble?”

He laughs again, that friendly laugh. Even his laughter seems to have an accent. “No, petit! Not at all. We are in this together now, and I am here to help you. You see, I also ran from my angel.”

“Why? You seem so ... grown up.”

More merry laughter from the Frenchman. “Ah, but I was *too* grown up, petit. I was in a war. A real war. And it was terrible. I did many, many bad things, though I did not think of myself as a bad person. I did what I was told to do, even when it was brutal, even when it was so atrocious that I thought I might never sleep again. So, when a Redcoat killed me and several of my Indian friends, and it was ever so brutal, I was afraid. I was afraid of my angel. Afraid that he might take me to some punishment. So I refused to go. I ran away. But somehow, I made things work here. I am, as you say, so grown up. I knew what had happened, and I decided to wander all over the world. And I

realized that I might help others, others like you, who are lost, who do not know what has happened to them. Perhaps, you might put in a good word for me, Timothy. Perhaps, I can make amends for the terrible deeds of my mortal life.”

“Put in a good word with who?”

“With the angels, petit. With God. You see, the angels do not want to deprive you of what you want to do. You want to finish being a little boy. So, you tried to do that here, but as much love as there is in this house, these people cannot see you. They cannot hear you. Not usually anyway. And when they do see you or hear you, it frightens them, because they do not understand. And worst of all, you cannot grow. Did you not say that, when you were finished being a little boy, you wanted to grow up and become a man?”

“Yes.”

“Well, there is a way. But you must let your angel help you. You may start again, as a little boy, with a new mother and father. If you choose to, the angels will help you. You may still finish all that you had hoped to do.”

“But how do I get them to come back?”

“Just call to them, Timothy. The light will return. And it has been so long, I can tell from your clothes. More than a hundred years have gone past, so your mother and father, and even that rascal Frank who should have know better than to kick a ball into the street, are probably there now, wondering where you

have been. Call your angel; join your family in the light. They will understand if you choose to be born again. But you must call. No little boy should stay here in this way. There is too much love to be had by those who can actually see you, and hug you, and kiss you goodnight.”

I nod my head, filled with hope, loving this French soldier for rescuing me, for seeing me and hearing me. “Angels!” I cry out. “I’m ready to go with you!”

The light is there, just like that. An angel is there, and my mother and father, and Frank. They are so happy to see me. “Thank you.” I hug Jean-Claude, and he laughs with delight.

I go into the light.

Four years later ...

“I don’t understand why the f—”

“Dario,” Luke Anderson cut the cameraman off, “you hit record, you shut up. Remember?”

Beside him, Luke’s younger brother Jasper held a roll of duct tape, which he pulled a strip from menacingly. “Or else, we do it this way again.”

Dario stomped his feet, breathed out with exasperation, but made a motion like locking his lips with a key and nodded.

Luke knocked on the door.

They were greeted by a woman who spoke with an accent that left no doubt that she had been born and raised in Mesquite, Texas. “Oh, hey Luke, Jasper,” she regarded the cameraman and added with a less friendly tone, “Dario.” Her smile returned, as she addressed the team’s leader. “So, camera’s on? That means progress. What have you got for me?”

The three young men sat down in the living room with the woman. Luke put a binder down on the coffee table. “Well, Ms. Malloy, we managed to track down the family who lived in the house before, with the matching names. We told them a little bit about Jason’s story, and they were willing to humor us.” He laughed. “You know, crazy paranormal investigators with a Web site. We never know if people are going to indulge us or not. But we spoke with the family. The mother’s name is Rita, which we didn’t know before.”

Ms. Malloy nodded. “Mm-hm. Jason only ever called her his ‘other Mommy.’ What about the kids?”

“The names match,” Luke said. “There’s a thirteen-year-old boy named Dustin and an eleven-year-old girl named Lydia. They even have an old dog named—”

“The-Dog-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named,” Dario said.

Jasper pulled on the duct tape, the sound of which cut off any further outbursts from the videographer.

“Voldemort,” Luke said.”

“Well,” Ms. Malloy said, “I just knew it would have to match up. After everything else. I mean, when you boys found that house in Corpus Christi, and it looked *just* like the house he drew? And when we went there, and he knew the layout like he’d lived there for years? Well, I had no doubt my son was telling the truth. He was reincarnated. So what did they say?” She lowered her voice, “What did they tell you about the little boy who died there?”

Luke and Jasper exchanged a look.

“Well,” Luke said, “We want to test Jason’s reactions to some photos first.”

“What kinda photos?”

“It’s one of those tests that drive you crazy, Ms. Malloy,” Jasper said. “But you know we have to do them to prove the case either valid or invalid.”

“Well, it’s *obviously* the real deal, Jasper. *Everything’s* checked out! Next thing you’ll be tryin’ to find proof that I even live in this house.”

“We did run a background check.”

“You mean to say that you didn’t think *I* lived in this—”

“No, no, Ms. Malloy.” Luke waved his hand to get her attention away from his brother, laughing. “We just needed documentation to prove that you and the Corpus family had never lived in the same area. To show that Jason wasn’t describing people he

may have met and remembered in *this* life, rather than in a past one.”

“Oh,” she said, appeased. “Well that makes sense.” She called in a loud voice that made the paranormal investigators jump, “Jason honey! Come on down here! The kids from YouTube want to talk to ya!”

Three-year-old Jason Malloy bounded into the room and joined his mother on the couch. “Hello, Luke,” he said. “Hello Jasper.” He looked directly into the camera, laughing as he spoke, “Hi, Dario!” He rasberried Dario loudly with his tongue.

Dario held his middle finger up to his mouth, in pretense of shushing the child.

Jasper quickly smacked the cameraman in the head before Ms. Malloy could see the jocose gesture. Dario, startled at first, suddenly realized, and mouthed the words silently to Jasper, “Oh, right. Kid.”

“Hey, Jason,” Luke said. “How are you today?”

“I’m good,” the boy said. “I’m free years old. Want me to show you?” He held out his hand and released a finger per beat, “One. Two. Free.”

“Good job, buddy.”

“Yeah,” Ms. Malloy said proudly. “He watches a lot of *Sesame Street*.”

“Jason,” Luke said, opening the binder. “Can you look at these pictures for me and tell me which family is the one you used to live with?”

“Yes.”

“Thanks, man. We’ll start with this one.” Luke turned the page to a family portrait with a mother, a son, and a daughter.

“No,” Jason said. “That’s not them.”

Luke turned the page, to another, similar family.

“Nope.”

“Jason,” his mother corrected him. “You say ‘No, sir.’ ”

“No, sir.”

Luke turned another page.

“No, sir.”

Another page.

Jason gasped and jumped to his feet, touching the image excitedly with his index finger. “There! There! That’s my *udder* mommy! And my brudder and sister!”

Again, Luke and Jasper exchanged a perplexed look.

Ms. Malloy breathed in, putting a hand to her mouth. “Is that them?”

Luke nodded. “That’s ... the family.”

“So what did they say? What did they say about Jason?”

Luke looked to the little boy, then asked the child’s mother, “Could we maybe talk to just you for a minute?”

“Oh! Of course!” She covered Jason’s ears. “He doesn’t need to hear any of the grizzly details.” Uncovering his ears then, she said, “Jason, why don’t you go play with the cat? You can chase him around with that mop.”

“Oh, okay! I’ll be back here though.” He looked seriously to the Anderson brothers. “I want to know.”

Luke nodded. “We just need to talk to your mom first, buddy. Then we’re all yours.”

Satisfied, Jason turned and ran from the room. “Tiger! I’m coming to get you!”

An agitated cat could be heard moaning in irritation as the child’s feet pattered to the back of the house.

“So?” Ms. Malloy asked quietly. “What is it? What was his name? Do you think taking him to his grave would bring him some ... you know,” she rolled her arms in front of her, “closure?”

“Well, Ms. Malloy, that’s the strangest thing about this whole case,” Luke began cautiously. “*Everything* matches up. Everything from the descriptions of the house along the beach, to the dog, the names and ages of the brother and sister. Everything, except for the one crucial thing that seems pretty standard for a reincarnation case.”

“What’s that?”

“His previous life,” Luke answered. “Rita McAlister never *had* a third child.”

“What?” Ms. Malloy was beside herself. “How can that be? *Everything* matches up! You said so yourself. Jason talks about his *other* Mommy all the time, how much he misses her. Talks about the house by the beach, draws it, knows the layout when we go there in person. He even knows the names of the people he lived with there *and* their dog! And just now he pointed to the right picture, didn’t he?”

Luke nodded. “He did.”

“Then that *other* Mommy woman is lyin’ through her teeth! There’s something fishy about that. Maybe she’s the one who did it? Maybe she’s the one who ran him over, and she just doesn’t want to admit it.”

Luke spread his hands, letting out an exasperated sigh. “I know, Ms. Malloy. I know. It’s *crazy*, but we checked out her story. Got our hands on all the public records. There was no third child. Rita never had a third child. No child *ever* died in that house. Believe me, we checked *every* record we could get our hands on.”

“Five times,” Jasper added.

“Five times.” Luke nodded. “No third child. No deaths *at all* in the area and the time, matching what Jason says happened.”

“But he remembers it so clearly. He says he got hit by a car. He’s been right about *everything* else. He can’t possibly be imagining all this.”

“No,” Luke agreed. “He can’t. But I’m at a complete loss. We’ll keep looking into this, if anything comes up. Meanwhile, I can give you all of the records we looked into. If you think we’ve missed something, we’ll check it out. For now, we’re gonna run this video on our channel as one of those *amazing* mysteries that just ... remain mysteries.”

“So what do I do now? How do we get Jason *normal*?”

Luke picked up his binder and stood. “With most reincarnation cases like this, kids start forgetting when they get into other things. Between three and six years old. This will pass, Ms. Malloy. Meanwhile, just let him know that his *current* Mommy loves him and believes in him. If you can figure out the most important thing to him from these strange memories he has, maybe that’s all it will take to give him the closure he seems to need.”

Jason Malloy ran into the room, dropping the mop. “Tiger’s locked himself in the bathroom again.”

Ms. Malloy picked him up and hugged him in her arms. “You little rascal, you.”

Jason giggled. “I love you, Mommy.”

She hugged him as tight as she could and kissed him on the forehead. “I love you too, partner. I love you more than anything.”

About the Author

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of ten books, including the novel *Cry, Wolf: Shadow of the Werewolf*, the short fiction anthology *The Great Debate*, the Gothic horror series *The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas*, and two fantasy series: *Metrognomes* and *The Legends of Nod*. He lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is currently hard at work on his next book.

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