

HAUNTING IN OLD TAILEM

by Janice Tremayne

EXCERPT

She heard a flurry of steps run across the graveyard as stones flicked off the ground and crushed, dried-out weeds propelled into the air. Tiny steps that she had encountered once before—in Hartley. Was it Little Charlie?

Then another ominous sound. Children laughing and giggling while the faint sound of a circus tune played in the background. Da, da, da, da . . .

She immediately turned around to find four children, each one standing next to an unmarked grave.

One little girl, no more than ten years old, with a black ponytail, knee-high cotton socks, and a white frilled dress, played with her hula hoop. She swung it around in motion and with the equilibrium of an expert. She smiled as her, dark eyes with thick, black eyeliner resonating toward Clarisse.

Next to her was a young boy, no more than eight years old, playing hopscotch between two graves. His knee-length shorts, long socks, and blood-stained shirt, held up by suspenders, were ragged and worn out. He looked like he had been in a terrible accident and dragged across the ground, oblivious to any pain. While playing hopscotch, he balanced three small balls in the air like a juggler, quite a trick and well-coordinated.

Next to him was Little Charlie, sitting on a gravestone with his rope lassoed and legs crossed. He swung his lasso repeatedly and flung it toward an empty can as his target. He liked showing off his prowess to Clarisse, even though he couldn't say any words, throwing his hands up in the air each time he conquered his target.

Another girl, albeit younger than the first, stood behind Little Charlie on an unmarked grave. She was wearing a crimson dress with frills and brown, country-style boots. Her dress was tainted red in parts from bloodstains, and her face was white as snow. It accentuated the eyeliner around her black eyes and sculptured face. She tilted her head slightly to the side as her red hair was tossed around in the slight breeze while holding a Raggedy Ann doll next to her face. She looked directly at Clarisse, smiling while caressing the doll.

The Raggedy Ann doll smiled one thoughtful expression, blinked its right eye two times rapidly, and then nodded before going back to its original posture.