

Newcomer

Every year my parents and I had to move to another town for their work. Every year they told me it would be good to have new experiences. It was the third week living in Old Evergreene, but it was different. People looked at my family like we were deranged for living in the house at the end of the block, but no one would tell us why. Even though our house was a little older, it was what I had to call home for the summer.

I got home and went to my third-floor bedroom and opened the window to let out the stuffy air. I found a book that was left in the house when we moved in and decided to read it. The title of the book was "The Newcomer." As I flipped through the pages, the words started to form sentences.

The message read: *Dear newcomer, we are excited that you have chosen to take this opportunity to begin the tasks that will be given to you. They might be difficult, but we promise your experience will be like no other. Once all the birds on the walls are gone, you will be freed from this trial.*

I looked around counting how many birds were on the walls. I counted four birds. I flipped the page to find my first task.

It read: *Say yes to the first thing you are asked to do.*

This task seemed easy. Later that evening my mother asked me to take the trash out. I replied, "Yes." Before I went outside, I went upstairs and grabbed the book. I put the trash at the end of the driveway and looked at the next page.

The page read: *You have completed Task One. Look towards the other houses on the street.* I thought this was a weird task, but I listened to the book. To my surprise, I saw Lucas, a boy from my new school. I turned around to go back to the house, and I heard him ask what I was holding. I walked over, and he was trying to fix an old hose to water their garden.

I told him, "I found it in my house." He adjusted the hose and water started spraying everywhere. As I backed up, I could feel the book get heavier as it absorbed the water. He apologized as I looked at the wet book in my hands. I put the book in the trash, seeing no more use for it. When I got to my bedroom, I looked at the birds on my wall, and they were alive. They peeled off my walls and flew out my window. They glided into the sunset.

A month or two had passed, and I had become good friends with Lucas. We would stay after school with a few other kids and play basketball. He was like the brother I never had. One night I went to my bedroom and noticed a box. As I opened it, I realized it was the book that gave me tasks. I flipped through the pages and saw my old tasks, but on the third page, there was a message.

It read: *Dear Evelyn, you have crossed protocols for completing your tasks. You will now be given a punishment. Your third task is to murder your closest friend. If you do not complete the task, you will be granted death.* My skin turned cold; every emotion had been wiped from me, except fear. Lucas hadn't done anything. I wonder how long I had. I wished I had never found this book.

The next day I had decided I couldn't do the task. All day I was pale and emotionless. I went to the basketball courts and told everyone I couldn't stay. He could tell something was wrong. I left before anyone could say anything and went home. I grabbed the book and headed

for the woods. I dug a hole deep in the ground. I placed the book in the hole and covered it. I was almost done when I heard Lucas coming to see what I was doing. I quickly put the last pile of dirt on top of the book. I closed my eyes as I fell to the ground. To my surprise I woke up to find four birds circling above me. The forest was quiet. I moved to the spot where I had buried the book. There was a note.

It read: *Dear Evelyn, you have put your life on the line for people you love. You have finished the real trial of the House of Evergreene because you have put others in front of yourself.* I held the paper in my hands. It was all over now, I was free from the book.