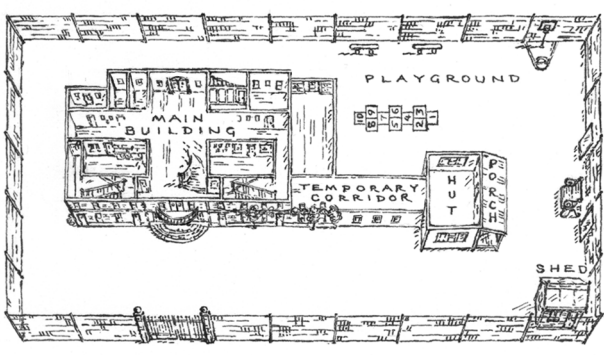
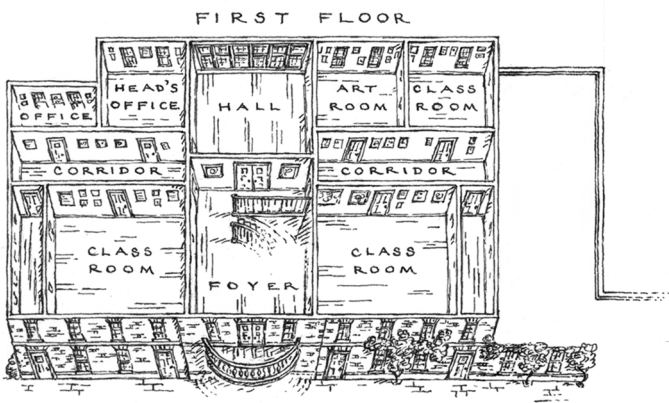
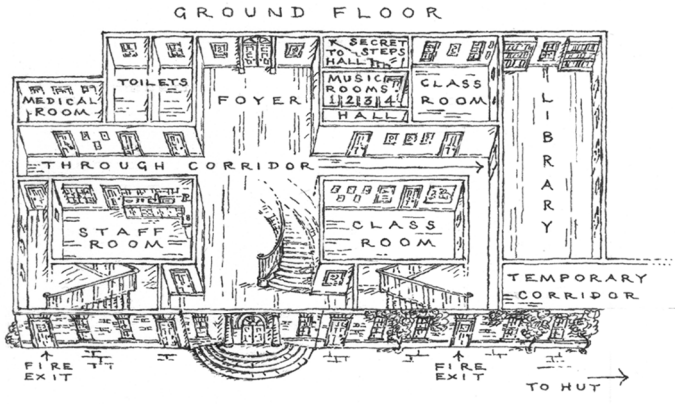


St. Martin's Roman Catholic Primary School





CYNTHIA MURPHY

THE MIDNIGHT GAME

 SCHOLASTIC

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Please be aware that some of the material in this story contains themes or events of death/dying, body horror, violence, murder and mentions of suicide.

*For my little sister, Donna.
Thank you for being so proud of me.*

SUNDAY 3RD JULY, 3:34 A.M.

The figure emerged from the shadows. It slunk past the playground gates, slow, almost melting into the night. Its progress was deliberate but painful. One leg dragging, a harsh, hollow wheezing emanating from its chest.

It did not look back.

Slowly, like blood trickling from a puncture wound, the figure stopped. Rested. A jangle of keys cleared the air, somehow chasing away the encroaching darkness, the horror of the night.

The figure pulled open the car door and climbed inside.

It did not look back.

It was cold in the car, and numb fingers fumbled as if on automatic, sliding the keys into the ignition and twisting until the engine reluctantly roared to life. The doors locked, a comforting click that promised safety, then the heater came on. The figure twisted the dial all the way

round, relishing the white noise in its ears, and burrowed down, waiting for the air to lose its chill.

It did not look back. Instead, it pulled down the sun visor. There was no sun, of course, at almost 3:40 a.m., but there was a picture, a photograph stashed up there. In it there were two figures.

Though one of them was very definitely dead.



PART ONE



New thread: THE MIDNIGHT GAME

(Filters: Local area users only; Users I follow; Users who follow me)

30/06/2022 23:49

FrenchBanana: Hey, creeps. Been down a rabbit hole and came across this game, anyone ever heard of it?

Donttalktome12: Don't think so. Lemme Google real quick.

Donttalktome12: Looks sick.

YeahBoi_121: I have! Played all that stuff when I was younger – never actually played this one but totally would.

Donttalktome12: Me too.

FrenchBanana: Dunno if I would. Way too intense. And what if it was real?

HotDog45: I'm pretty sure I've heard of this or watched the movie, maybe? It's like Candyman, right?

FrenchBanana: Er, not quite.

HotDog45: Oh.

User3678: I've played this one! Utter rubbish. Don't bother.
Gave up after half an hour.

FrenchBanana: Really? Would love to chat to you about
your experience?

User3678: Lol, no. So boring.

FrenchBanana: OK then. Anyone else?

CreepyTeepee: I've heard of it.

FrenchBanana: Oh, yeah? Anything more to add?

01/07/2022 00:00

FrenchBanana: @CreepyTeepee?

CreepyTeepee: Sorry – just looking for something.
One sec.

CreepyTeepee: This is the one, right?

Rules of the Midnight Game:

1. Do not turn on the lights

2. *Do not go to sleep*
3. *Do not leave the building*

FrenchBanana: That's the one! Question is...

Hotdog45: Who wants to play?

SATURDAY 2ND JULY, 11:20 P.M.

ELLIE

The participants approached cautiously one by one. Some arrived in cars, others on foot, but all of them were alone.

That was part of the game.

Ellie watched each of the newcomers hesitate when they arrived at the playground gate and smiled wryly because she had done the same. She had been there since eleven that evening, sitting cross-legged in a dark little alcove next to a small wooden shed. She hated being late and when she realized she was the first one there, she had thought it would be worth weighing everyone up as they arrived, see if she could try to match some faces with usernames before the game began.

A short figure pushed the gate tentatively. It swung

open with a soft squeak, and the girl smiled and took a step inside. She paused, pulled a notebook from her small messenger bag and scribbled something in it. Then she took something else out – an old-school wind-up camera, Ellie realized – and took a few snaps of the school and its compact grounds. The school building was an old one, though somehow still in use, and its presence loomed over the narrow street it was set back from. Large dark windows stared soullessly out. It was secluded here too, Ellie mused as she watched the petite girl walk around to the squat temporary classroom that sat outside the main building – “the hut”, *Donttalktome12* had called it. Ellie weighed up the area once more. There were houses in running distance if she needed them, but no one close enough to hear them goofing around in there, which was good. She really didn’t need a criminal record over this stupid game.

The girl and her bag disappeared into the hut as Ellie waited for the next player. She avoided looking at the vacant windows of the main building. Why were schools so much creepier when they were empty? Was this one particularly sinister because it was so old? It must be. She scanned the walls for a plaque that might give her a date but couldn’t see anything in the dark. She should have brought a torch but ... you know.

Rules.

Ellie sat up straight as the next two people arrived, almost meeting at the gate simultaneously. She squinted

to see a little better. A tall, blonde-haired boy dressed in a preppy shirt and jumper combo stepped back, gesturing to the gate in what he clearly thought was a gentlemanly way. The girl to his right dragged her upper lip into a sneer, her lips dark and glossy, and imitated the gesture in such a mocking way that Ellie had to hold in a laugh. A look of bewilderment creased his face as he crossed the threshold and moved closer to Ellie's hiding place. He was wearing stiff jeans and brown shoes and something about him screamed *money*. Ellie decided she would put her life on him being a private school boy. He also disappeared into the hut as the new girl lingered outside, finishing a cigarette. The end of it drooped from her lips, glued in place with gloss as she eyed up the school buildings. She dropped the butt and stretched, lithe, like a cat, before smashing the burning embers into the playground floor and marching over to the hut, her Doc Martens echoing on the asphalt.

Ellie checked her watch and hesitated – she wanted to be the last one to go in, but it was almost half past, and that was when they were supposed to be inside. She ticked people off on one hand as she kept her eyes on the gate. One – camera girl, two – preppy guy, three – goth girl. That meant there were two players left. She flicked at a hangnail as she waited and realization dawned on her – someone had to have been there before her to open the gates and the hut. Dammit. So, there was only one player left, unless they had chickened out.

No sooner had she thought it than a figure in red appeared at the gate, or rather bounced through it. This kid had way too much energy for Ellie's liking already. He tore through the playground and towards the hut, not pausing to look around first. *Impulsive*, Ellie thought. That might not end well.

Once she was sure they were all inside, Ellie stood up. Her legs were stiff from sitting on the cold, hard ground, and she brushed little pieces of gravel from the backs of her legs and denim shorts. She collected her tote bag, took stock of its contents one last time and swung it on to her shoulder, approaching the hut where they were supposed to meet. Just as she reached the bottom of the ramp that led inside, a silver glimmer caught her eye. On the playground wall, opposite the entrance, was a mirror. She walked over to it, her eyes following the lines of her reflection as it warped, swelling in odd places. She shook her head and laughed, feeling like the kids who must play here. She flipped her immaculately blow-dried hair behind one shoulder and headed up the ramp, turning back for a final glance once she reached the door.

Her reflection was back to normal.

Satisfied, Ellie threw her shoulders back, pushed open the door with her mint-green fingernails and walked into the building.

She had a game to play.



01/07/2022 00:01

FrenchBanana: Er, no, as it happens. I was going to say, *"the question is – is any of it real, or is it just creepy pasta?"* I am NOT down to play this stuff.

YeahBoi_121: I'm in! This chat is set to local peeps only, right?

HotDog45: Hell yeah! When and where?

FrenchBanana: Number 1 – no. I am not stupid enough to meet strangers off the internet. Number 2 – yes, I set the chat to local users, but only because I wanted local info on this so-called legend. Number 3 – repeat number 1. NO.

User3678: But you started this thread, right? And we're on the *d/makemebelieve* subreddit. You MUST be a bit curious?

FrenchBanana: What? You said it was a load of rubbish a minute ago!

User3678: Nah, ignore me. I was just having you on. I've never played.

Donttalktome12: I know somewhere we can do it. Somewhere we won't be disturbed.

FrenchBanana: God, I wish my laptop had a red flag emoji for *that* comment, @Donttalktome12...

CreepyTeepee: Screw it. I'm in too. Can't be real, right?

HotDog45: Sweeeeeet!

YeahBoi_121: So, where we going @Donttalktome12?

Donttalktome12: I'll tell you when @FrenchBanana commits. Then they can lock the chat so it's just us.

00:07

HotDog45: They've chickened out, I reckon...

00:09

YeahBoi_121: Hellllllooooooo?

FrenchBanana: You all have to let me interview you after.

HotDog45: No worries.

YeahBoi_121: Same here.

Donttalktome12: Fine by me.

User3678: Sure, if we're stiiiiiiiiill aliiiiiiiiive...

FrenchBanana: What about you @CreepyTeepee?

CreepyTeepee: Yeah, whatever.

HotDog45: So? You in?

FrenchBanana: Fine.

User3678: Yay!

FrenchBanana: I'm going to regret this, aren't I?