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Title

Zaavan

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Journal

The Vernal Pool, 4(2)

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Publication Date

2018

DOI

10.5070/V342038496

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Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

Zaavan

By Jocelyn Hernandez Gomez

Zaavan was a tall, pale, skinny, and constantly shaky fifteen-year-old boy with unruly hair. His ambition was always getting him into trouble, and he was determined to always follow his own rules. Although he was not very popular, he did have two good friends: Roy –a loud, reckless, rebellious fifteen-year-old with brown-hair-- and Mariah – a strange, innocent, short-haired blonde, fourteen-year-old girl-- who was selectively mute to almost everyone. The three met in middle school. At the time, Roy's violent behavior earned him the fear of his peers, instead of their companionship. Zaavan's pale and extremely thin stature caused him to be ridiculed by his classmates; Mariah was in the same situation, her being selectively mute. Mariah would always watch Zaavan from afar, but he had no idea she was there. One day, a group of students decided to beat Zaavan. During this incident, Mariah panicked and went to the nearest person for help, which happened to be Roy. Roy used the fear his peers had for him to scare them off. The three misfits had been friends ever since. Although Roy and Zaavan occasionally have their differences, Mariah always somehow settled them. About two years ago on Halloween (right when school ended) Zaavan, Roy, and Mariah all went straight to Roy's place to discuss their Halloween plans.

"I say we drown ourselves in candy 'till we're diabetic!" Roy suggested, throwing himself on the couch and giving a sigh.

"What are you, five?" Zaavan responded, "Why don't we spend this night TP-ing the houses of people we hate, like our teachers or my therapist."

"No one gives a shit about your therapist spaz", exclaimed Roy

"Fuck off", snapped Zaavan

"Shut up before I make you", shouted Roy

Zaavan stood up suddenly and Roy followed in response. However, upon looking at Mariah's face, sat down slowly. Zaavan calmly turned to Mariah and asked, "What do you think we should do Mariah?" After about a minute of stuttering over the word "I", Zaavan handed her a small, yellow notepad and a matte black gold tipped pen. Mariah smiled at him in thanks and then scribbled a question mark on the notepad.

"What about that old manor everyone talks about?" Roy suggested

"That ancient place? That's just some old house, " Zaavan responded

"I don't know about the whole haunted stuff, but I went on the porch once and... I swear I felt the whole spine-tingling thing and I just ran, " uttered Roy

"I still don't believe that nonsense, I think it's just in everyone's head. You're just over exaggerating. Nobody has even ever been inside the house," declared Zaavan.

"Oh? Watch out! We have a tough guy here! Why don't you go in the house? " joked Roy

"I just might," said Zaavan

"Catch!" Roy said as he threw an old notebook at Zaavan, " I dare you to go in that house and write down everything you see in each room."

Roy looked at Zaavan in a challenging way for a couple seconds waiting for a response.

"Challenge accepted," said Zaavan sarcastically.

The four left Roy's home and walked to The Old Manor for a good thirty minutes. When they finally arrived, the place looked much eerier than it usually did. They walked toward the front gate of the house. As they pushed, the rusty gate opened with a loud screeching noise which made their hearts jump. They walked to the front of the ghoulish house. Roy leaned on a tree and urged, "You know you can still back out. I know I sure as hell would."

"Nah, I'm still doing it," responded Zaavan hesitantly

Zaavan had begun walking when Mariah suddenly grabbed his arm and pulled him to a stop. He could tell by the look on her face that she was worried. He gently pushed back the bangs that were covering her face and said, "I'll be fine Mariah no need to worry." Mariah immediately hugged Zaavan. He couldn't help but smile, then kissed her on the cheek.

"I'll be fine don't worry" he warmly assured.

Mariah smiled and let out a giggle. He continued, stepping forward onto the porch. He immediately felt an uncomfortable chill climbing up his spine. He convinced himself it was nothing and grabbed hold of the doorknob, carefully opening the door. Upon stepping in, he closed the door behind him and took a deep breath. His hands

began to shake a little more than usual. He looked around, finding that the house looked just as creepy on the inside as it was outside. The inside of the house had a gothic Victorian interior; the house probably looked beautiful before it began to collect dust. He stepped in what he believed was the living room, taking notice of an old lopsided chandelier draped in spider webs. He opened the old notebook, set it on the floor and began to take notes on everything in the room.

The first room he went into looked as if it was a living room. It was extremely dusty and looked as if Death himself lived there. Aside from the filth and decay, the room was beautiful. The furniture looked as if it had come out of an Edgar Allen Poe short story. It was classic looking, almost as if an elite family lived there. Though he couldn't help but feel an unsettling chill run down his spine; the kind from the feeling of being chased, fastening his pace. Zaavan examined the room on the first floor, making sure to write down everything that he saw.

He was almost done with the first floor, with only a couple rooms left. He eventually found himself in a music room where a beautiful mahogany brown grand piano was placed. Mesmerized, he began walking up to it. Suddenly the floor broke beneath him and he screamed.

"You okay in there, kid?" yelled Roy from the outside

"I'm fine. I just fell," Zaavan whimpered.

"You know you can still back out," said Roy worryingly

"I wouldn't hear the end of it from you. I'd rather take this ghost than your constant put-downs," Zaavan insisted

"This is coming from the kid as thin as a stick and as shaky as someone from a retirement home," snickered Roy

"Shut up," giggled Zaavan

"Mariah wanted me to tell you to be safe, kid," said Roy

"Got it," stated Zaavan

Zaavan pulled out his foot forcibly, cutting his ankle badly. He ripped off part of his shirt and wrapped it around his ankle. Then decided to go up the stairs and finish what he started. The first few steps of the staircase were missing; they had completely caved in. He jumped across the hollowed steps, once he made it across, the floor made a loud

cracking noise; he stood completely still in a panic. He took a few short breaths and then continued up the stairs. He went into the nearest room to find it was a study. The desk was a mess of book and papers. Papers spread out across the floor, desperately trying to find something. Folders were pulled out as if the person who owned the room was going to return to continue his work.

Zaavan was about to set down the notebook and take notes in the room when something caught his eye. It was a bright red leather journal on the desk. He grabbed the journal, feeling completely calm, but when he was about to open it, he heard something strange. It was a single piano note played quickly. He set down the red journal back on the desk. Remembering the old grand piano downstairs, he quickly tried to think of a logical explanation and said to himself, "Something must have fallen on it like a piece of the ceiling. This place is falling apart anyway." He went back to his notebook and laid it down on the floor, completely forgetting the sound. He began to relax and continue his writing the notes. The same note was struck twice on the piano, but this time a bit louder. "This is clearly being played by someone downstairs," he told himself. He set off downstairs with the notebook, smiling and expecting to see Roy. No one was there; everyone was still outside.

"Hey Roy, were you or anyone else in here?" asked Zaavan loudly

"No, we've been outside the entire time. No one has gone in but you," yelled Roy

"Never mind, it's probably nothing," stuttered Zaavan

"Hey, remember when I saved your ass from those dudes in middle school," said Roy attempting to calm his friend

"Mariah saved me, you just happened to be walking by," laughed Zaavan

"I chased them off, therefore, I saved you. I rest my case," snickered Roy

"Whatever," stuttered Zaavan

"It had to be something that just fell on the key," he muttered to himself.

He went back into the music room. As he looked at the ceiling above the piano, it was not chipping away and was completely fine. He looked at the piano and pressed the key, to prove to himself that he wasn't confusing the sound with another. As he played it, he realized that was the sound he heard. He began to talk to himself, "What the hell is going-," but before he could finish a single loud thump came from the upper floor like

something falling or someone stomping. His mouth went dry. He quickly went upstairs to see what the source of the noise was, but there was nothing. His heart began to race. He entered the study, once again writing in the notebook, waiting for it to happen again; the silence stretched out. A few minutes passed and just when he was beginning to think he imagined it all, the piano note began to play again.

He immediately thought to himself, "I have got to get out of here."

Zaavan took the notebook quickly and ran downstairs toward the front door and began to open it, but the door wouldn't budge. He began to try and kick the door, but it wouldn't budge. His friends quickly noticed his distress and began to try and open the door, but they made as much progress as him.

"What the hell is going on!" shouted Roy

"I don't know! something is going on in here, " yelled Zaavan, "I need you to try and open the door while I try and find another way out."

Roy did all he could to break down the door, but it was almost like the door was pushing back. Roy ran towards the boarded-up window and tried to pry it open. It wouldn't budge in the slightest. Roy's panic began to scare Mariah; she froze, and her eyes began to swell up with tears as she watched Roy's frantic actions. It became harder for her to breathe and Roy began to see her panic. He rushed to her and tried to calm her down. "Hey kid it's gonna be fine. Zaavaan, even though he's scrawny, is pretty tough. He'll be out before you know it," whispered Roy.

He went back to work on the door. He kicked and pushed the door repeatedly until his legs felt like they were going to break. He didn't know what to do. For the first time, he felt helpless.

Zaavan realized something was keeping him inside the house and he went into a panic. On the verge of tears, he sat on the floor and buried his face in his knees not daring to look up. The silence grew and Zaavan began to think it was all in his head. Then he looked up from his knees and got up, surveying his surroundings. However, just like before, when he had finally gotten a hold of himself a loud three thumps came from the upper floor this time as loud as a bass drum. With every thump, the ceiling cracked. He began to knock on the walls of the study to see if there was an animal behind it. As he knocked on the walls, a loud thump was made this time right against his

ears. Terrified, he had fallen on the floor causing a shock of pain in his injured ankle. His friends continued to yell his name and try and find him a way out, but it was impossible. It seemed that every door or window that lead outside wouldn't budge.

"Oh no, " he repeated to himself in terror

He began to bury his face in his knees again and rock back and forth. His heart beating outside of his chest, having no options to escape. All he could do was sit and wait. Wait for whatever was going to happen to him to happen. So, he continued to scribble and write in the notebook in hopes of taking his mind off what was happening.

It is only because of this notebook that we know what happened to Zaavan that night. The police eventually opened the door. When they ran inside, the only thing left of Zaavan was the red notebook on top of the piano. All the pages were his frantic writings of the events all written in his handwriting except for the very last page. It was written quickly as with charcoal and dust.

On that page said four words:

"Beautiful Piano isn't it?"

His friends rushed inside expecting to see their friend. Roy shouted and cried out, "Where is he?" Mariah only cried, looking down at the ground almost as if she was afraid to look up. On the ground she could see the scratch marks, piercing the wood as though to escape. Zaavan was nowhere to be found. Never to be seen again.