



WWW.AMERICANCHILLERS.COM



Before I even start to tell you this story, you have to realize something:

Florida is a cool state.

I love Florida. It's my home. I've lived here my entire twelve years.

My little sister, Maria, loves Florida.

And my Mom and Dad. We *all* love Florida.

So, when I tell you what happened to me, I'm

not doing it to scare you.

I don't want you to be frightened or afraid.

But I think you will be.

Matter of fact . . . I *know* you will.

And if you ever get a chance to come to Florida, you'll have fun. You'll have an *awesome* time.

Just beware of the fog.

Beware of the fog phantoms.

I'm not sure . . . but they *could* come back.

They might even be here now. Waiting.

Waiting . . . *for you*.

I suppose I should start at the beginning. Last summer. Right after the hurricane.

That's when weird things started to happen.

[[[[

We all knew there was a storm coming. We heard about it on the radio. The TV weatherman told us all about it.

It was a hurricane. You may have even heard about it or read about it, because it was the strangest storm of the year.

Not the biggest.

Not the worst.

The *strangest*.

My name is Justin Martinez, and I live in a city called Tampa. It's a city on the western side of Florida, right next to the ocean. A lot of people come here to visit, because there are a lot of things to see and do. We even have a professional football team called the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

And Tampa happened to be in the direct path of Hurricane Alice. That's right. They give names to all of the hurricanes and tropical storms that we have, and this one they called Alice.

In 1992, a hurricane named Andrew caused twenty *billion* dollars in damage.

Hurricanes aren't anything to mess around with.

Two days before Hurricane Alice arrived, everyone in the city began boarding up their houses. Stores, shops, buildings . . . everyone boarded up their windows to protect against the high winds and heavy rains. Many people . . . including our family . . . stayed at a hotel in another city until the storm passed.

Tuesday, the storm hit just as expected. However, we were a long ways away, so we didn't have any problems.

On Wednesday, we went home. The storm hadn't damaged much, after all. It had been listed as a category 3 hurricane, which is pretty severe. However, by the time it reached land, it had dropped to a category 1, which is the lowest ranking. A category 1 can still be dangerous, though. Some of the streets around our neighborhood had been flooded, but by the time we made it home, most of the water was gone.

Everyone was thankful. A hurricane can do a lot of damage, but this time, the city was spared.

Or so I thought.

Because that night, a strange fog settled in all over the city. It was as thick as cream, and just as white. It was so thick, I could barely see the streetlight in front of our house. I had never seen fog so thick. It was kind of—

eerie.

Now, I'm twelve, and I'm not afraid of the fog.

But later that night, after I went to bed, something happened that made every single hair

on my head stand straight up on end.



I was just about to go to bed when the phone rang. It was Caitlin McCalla, my neighbor across the street. Not only is she my neighbor, but she's also a good friend. She's really smart, too, and she helps me with my math homework.

"Have you seen Princess?" she asked. She sounded worried.

"No, I haven't," I replied. Princess is her dog.

She's a Great Dane, and she's huge.

"She ran off a little while ago. She's never done that."

"I haven't seen her," I said. "But I'm sure she'll come back."

"I hope so. I'm kind of worried about her. Can you believe this fog?"

I kept the phone pressed to my ear and looked out the window. The fog was as thick as ever. I couldn't even see any lights on in Caitlin's house across the street!

"It's really weird," I replied. "The weather guy on TV said that it was because of the storm. He says that people shouldn't drive their cars until the fog lifts."

"I'm glad the storm wasn't a real bad one," she said. "This fog is bad enough. I hope that Princess isn't—"

All of a sudden, there was a loud *click* on the line, followed by crackling static.

Caitlin was gone.

"Hello?" I spoke into the telephone. "Caitlin? Caitlin?"

No answer.

I hung up the phone and picked it back up.
There was no dial tone.

I hung up the phone again and went into the living room. Mom and Dad were watching television.

"The phone isn't working right," I said.

Dad turned. "I think it's because of the screwy weather," he replied. "It's doing some strange things all over the city."

I walked down the hall and into my bedroom. I left the light off and walked to the window.

Outside, the fog covered everything like a blanket. I tried really hard to see Caitlin's house across the street, but I couldn't. The only thing I could make out was the haunting, dim glow of the streetlight.

I yawned and climbed into bed, then I turned on the light on my nightstand. I like to read before I go to sleep. I'd been reading a ghost story, and I was almost finished with it.

I opened up the book and started to read.

The next thing I knew, the book was face down on the covers.

I had fallen asleep reading!

I closed the book and placed it on the table next to my bed, then reached up to turn the light off.

It was then that I heard a faint creaking sound.

Creeeeeeeeek

I froze. The sound was faint, but it had been close.

Real close.

There were no other sounds in the house. It must have been late, because I didn't hear the sound of the TV on. Mom and Dad must've gone to bed.

And suddenly –

Creeeeeeeeek

The noise sent a shiver down my spine.

Slowly, very slowly, I turned in the direction of my bedroom door. My hand still grasped the switch on the lamp, ready to turn it off.

But I wasn't turning the light off until I found out what had made that noise!

Without moving my head, I looked out the window. The fog was as thick as ever.

I looked back toward my bedroom door, and my entire body went stiff.

Creeeeeeeeak

The sound was coming from the door! My
bedroom door was opening . . . *all by itself!*



I couldn't breathe.

I couldn't move.

My heart clanged in my chest.

Creeeeeeeeak

The door kept swinging open, slowly, slowly,
ever so slowly

Creeeeak

I just knew that there would be some hideous

form behind my door pushing it open. It would have long fangs and claws and beady eyes.

And it was coming for me.

I knew it.

Creeeeeeeeak

And suddenly

I could see it! I could see a small piece of something white, standing in the hall!

It was a ghost!

It was . . . it was

"Justin? Are you awake?"

My sister?!?!?!?!

I heaved a giant sigh of relief. It was only Maria. She stood in the doorway in her nightgown.

"Sorry I scared you," she said.

"Who? Me?" I replied. "I wasn't scared. Not at all."

"I am," she said, her voice quivering. "I'm scared a lot."

I looked at her. She was trembling.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"There's . . . there's something in the fog," she said.

She glanced out my bedroom window, and I did the same.

Heavy, white mist swirled just beyond the glass. The streetlight glowed, illuminating the fog like a giant, wispy ghost.

"There's nothing in the fog," I replied. "You were having a nightmare. Go back to bed."

And with that, I turned the light off, rolled over in bed, and closed my eyes.

I heard footsteps on my bedroom floor, and then I felt Maria's hand on my shoulder. She shook me gently.

"Justin," she said, "I saw something out there in the fog. It was moving. Some kind of creature. I'm scared. I really, really am."

I rolled over and turned toward her.

"There's nothing in the fog," I insisted angrily. "Go back to bed and quit bugging me!"

She drew her hand back from my shoulder, but she didn't move. She just stood there and sniffled.

Great, I thought. I'm going to make her cry.

Maria is a few years younger than I am. She can be a pest sometimes, but she's pretty sweet. I

guess I kind of felt bad that she was scared.

And I was making it worse for her.

I sat up, swung my legs to the floor, and stood up. I took her hand in mine.

“Listen, Maria,” I said. “There’s nothing in the fog. You were dreaming. I’m sure you were. Come on.”

I led her by the hand, and we walked down the dark hall and into her bedroom. She climbed into bed, and I pulled the covers up to her neck. I could see the dark form of her face in the gloom.

“You’re fine now,” I said, and I began to walk out the door.

“Justin?” she peeped.

I stopped and turned. “What?” I asked.

“I’m thirsty,” she said.

Oh, for crying out loud, I thought.

I walked down the hall, turned the corner, and went into the kitchen. The kitchen was dark, but a clock on the stove gave enough light to see.

I pulled out a plastic cup from the cupboard and filled it almost to the top, then I walked back to Maria’s bedroom.

“Here’s your –”

I stopped speaking.

Maria wasn't in her bed. She was standing by her window, looking out into the fog.

"I told you," she whispered, her face pressed against the glass. *"I told you there was something in the fog."*

And when I saw what it was, I gasped. I dropped the cup and it tumbled to the floor, spilling water all over the carpet and my feet.

But I didn't notice it. I just kept staring, horrified at what was in the fog beyond the bedroom window.

We hope you enjoyed this
preview! To order this
book, call toll-free:
1-888-420-4244
or visit
www.americanchillers.com

WWW.AMERICANCHILLERS.COM