

Illinois, USA

#6

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IF YOU CAN'T SEE THEM ...
YOU CAN'T STOP THEM!



#6: Invisible Iguanas
of Illinois

BY JONATHAN RAND

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When someone tells you a story, they usually start at the beginning.

And that's where I'm going to start. You have to know a couple of things before you can try to understand what has happened and why. And I will say this much:

What you are about to read is going to be pretty frightening at times. Not always, because there were some funny things that happened, too. But, for the most part, what my brother and I went through was pretty scary.

My name is Alyssa Barryton, and I'm eleven. I have a brother named Ryan. He's ten, but sometimes he doesn't act like it. Sometimes he acts like he's two!

We live in Springfield, Illinois. You've probably heard or read about our state, because Illinois is called the 'Land of Lincoln'. Abraham Lincoln called Illinois his home for over 30 years. In fact, if you ever come to Springfield, you can visit Abraham Lincoln's home. You'll see lots of really cool historical places.

But I doubt you'll see what I saw last year. Matter of fact, even I probably won't see it again.

I was walking to a friend's house after school. A group of us were going to meet and go for a bike ride along Lost Bridge Trail. It's a really cool paved path that's about five miles long. A lot of people jog, walk, and even rollerblade along the trail.

I stopped at a market that sells fresh fruits and vegetables and bought a small bag of radishes. That's right – radishes. I *love* radishes. I eat them raw, right out of the bag. I eat them the way most

people eat candy.

I had just walked out the door and was opening the bag when I heard a noise from the alley next to the store. It was a swishing sound.

I turned and looked down the alley. The only thing I saw was a few garbage cans and a single parked car.

I didn't think anything of it, and I started to turn my head away.

And then:

I saw something.

Out of the corner of my eye, something had moved. Something had darted behind the garbage cans.

I stopped walking and scanned the alley to see what was there. The sun was shining, and the day was warm. It was the middle of June, and the summers can be pretty hot here in Springfield.

But I didn't see anything.

I pulled out a radish and popped it into my mouth.

Just an old alley cat, I thought, chewing on my radish.

Again, I turned and started to walk away, but I heard the noise again. It was the sound of something moving, shuffling across papers or leaves.

Once more, I glanced down the alley.

I stopped chewing.

What I saw wasn't a cat.

Or a dog.

Or a pigeon or a rabbit.

It was a tiny creature from outer space!

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I blinked my eyes, and I realized what I was seeing wasn't a creature from outer space.

It was an *iguana!*

A lizard . . . a real, live iguana . . . was staring back at me! He was about a foot tall, and he was standing next to a garbage can! I could see his beady black eyes watching me.

Now, you have to understand something: Iguanas don't live in Illinois.

Period.

Oh, some people have them as pets, of course. And I saw a real big one at the Chicago Zoo.

But iguanas don't live in the wild.

Not in Illinois, they don't.

Which might explain why I thought that it was a creature from outer space!

The lizard turned his head. It was a bright green color, and it stood about as tall as a cat. Its tail made it look longer, though. And it had scales that began at the back of its head and went down the middle of its back. Its claws were long and sharp, like hooked nails.

Now, I didn't know anything about iguanas. I didn't know if they were vicious, or if they bit people. Who knows? Maybe they even *eat* people!

But I didn't think so. I don't think people would have them as pets if they ate humans.

I wanted to get closer so I could see the creature better. I took a real slow step, and then another.

The iguana didn't move. It just stood there, next to the garbage can, flashing his dark eyes at me.

Slowly, very slowly, I made my way down the

alley.

Closer

Closer

The iguana didn't move much. He turned his head a couple of times, but he continued eyeing me cautiously.

And it was really cool looking! I hadn't seen many iguanas before, except the one in the zoo. Now I was only a few feet away from one!

I stopped and held my breath. I kept expecting the creature to suddenly run off, to dart behind the garbage cans.

But it didn't.

It just stared at me.

I knelt down very slowly.

"Hey, buddy," I said sweetly. "Whatcha doin'?"

The lizard remained where he was.

"You're kind of cute," I said.

The iguana responded by opening his mouth.

Uh-oh, I thought. Maybe he's getting mad.

I had just started to stand back up when the lizard reared up, opened his mouth even wider,

and charged!

The iguana was attacking!

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I didn't know what to do! I had never been attacked by an iguana before!

And besides . . . I didn't have time to do anything, anyway. In less than a second the iguana had reached me.

I twisted to get out of the way, and in my haste, I slipped, dropped my bag of radishes – and fell.

I tumbled onto my back, and the lizard seized the opportunity. He scrambled up my leg and onto my stomach.

I was sure that this was the end for me.

Maybe iguanas eat people, after all.

I tried to scream, but no sound came out. My eyes were popping out of my head as the iguana came to a rest on my chest. His mouth was closed, but his black eyes were staring right into mine.

This was a nightmare. It had to be. I kept telling myself to wake up, to shake the dream away, but I couldn't.

And I could feel the lizard's heartbeat. His belly was pressed against my shirt, and I could actually feel his pounding heart going a mile a minute.

I took long, slow breaths. I didn't want the heaving of my chest to disturb the beast. It might make him even more mad.

The lizard turned his head, looking around. He blinked a few times.

"Help," I managed to say. But it was more of a squeak than anything, and besides . . . there was no one around to help, anyway.

"You're . . . you're not going to hurt me, are you," I said to the lizard. I know that it probably

was a silly thing to do, but hey . . . I didn't know what else to do.

When he heard my voice, he cocked his head to the side like a dog listening to a high-pitched sound.

Maybe it's friendly, I thought. Maybe it's not mean, after all.

I was wrong.

The iguana suddenly turned its head and stared directly into my eyes. He opened his mouth, and I could see rows and rows of teeth. They were really tiny—not like fangs or anything—but I knew that they were probably razor sharp.

And without warning, the vicious reptile lurched forward, mouth open and teeth bared. I could only watch in horror as the horrible lizard attacked, searching for the soft, tender flesh of my neck!

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Talk about being freaked!

I was frozen in fear and I closed my eyes, waiting for the razor-sharp teeth to sink into my neck—

But the bite never came.

I had my eyes closed tightly, and I felt the iguana scramble up over my shoulder.

Then I heard a crunch, and I just knew that it was biting my ear.

But I didn't feel any pain!

Then I heard another crunch. And another. And then a chewing sound.

I opened my eyes and slowly turned my head.
The iguana was eating a radish! His jaw was going up and down, up and down, and he looked as happy as a clam!

Suddenly, I felt very foolish. I had been frightened by the creature . . . and all he wanted was a radish!

I scooped sideways and moved away from the lizard. It paid no attention. It just kept chewing on the radish.

“Hey,” I said, “you’re kinda cool.” The iguana stretched out its neck and snared another radish.

Watching the creature and being so close at the same time was really awesome. Its skin was the color of summer leaves, and its eyes were the blackest of black.

And I began to wonder where it had come from. I didn’t know a lot about iguanas, but I knew enough to know that they don’t live in Illinois unless they’re someone’s pet.

That’s it, I thought. This must be someone’s pet. I’ll bet the little guy is friendly.

It was risky, but I reached over and picked up the bag of radishes. The iguana was busy chewing on one, and it didn't do anything but continue chewing.

When it was done, I reached into the bag and pulled out another radish. I held it out.

The lizard took it! It ate right out of my hand!

This was really, really cool.

While he was chewing on the radish, I reached out again, very slowly, and touched the back of its head. The lizard instantly stopped chewing.

The iguana liked it! It liked being petted!

Then I began to wonder . . . just who does this creature belong to? Someone must be looking for it.

Gently . . . ever so gently . . . I picked up the creature and cradled it in my arms like a baby. It didn't seem to mind at all.

I looked around to see if anyone was looking for something.

Nope.

Then, I walked up the alley and looked

around. Cars sped by on the street, and there were a few people out walking around, but no one seemed to be looking for an iguana.

I walked back into the market and asked a woman at the service counter if anyone was missing an iguana.

That was a big mistake.

Now, I kind of figured that if anyone saw me carrying around an iguana in the store, they'd probably look twice. After all, it's not every day that you see a girl carrying a lizard around.

But when the woman at the service counter saw the lizard in my arms, she flipped out!

"Get that thing out of here this instant, young lady!" she ordered. *"This place sells food! We can't have ugly green snakes in here!"*

"It's not a snake," I replied. "It's an iguana."

"I don't care!" she snapped. "Get that disgusting creature out of the store!"

So, I had no choice but to take the lizard home. I figured that I could maybe make some signs and put them up around the neighborhood. Somewhere, someone was looking for their pet

iguana. I just knew it.

Thankfully, Mom and Dad said that I could keep the reptile . . . but only until I found its owner. My brother Ryan thought that it was really cool, but he was a little afraid of it.

I called the pet store to find out how to take care of the iguana. Let me tell you . . . caring for an iguana is *nothing* like caring for a dog or a cat! An iguana takes a lot of hard work. I learned that they could be really great pets, but I also found out that they require a lot of attention. They really have a lot of special needs and require very unique care.

And that is how I came to have Iggy. Yep. You guessed it. I never found the owner. The man at the pet store said that some people don't realize how much work an iguana can be, and they just let them go to fend for themselves.

How horrible! Who could do such a thing?!?!

But if I thought *that* was horrible, it was *nothing* compared to the things that were about to happen.

And I will say this:

Prepare yourself. Because what was about to
happen wasn't just *scary*.
It was *horrifying* . . . with a capital 'H'.

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