

# Lizardville

*Jimmy's Curse*

***Steve Altier***



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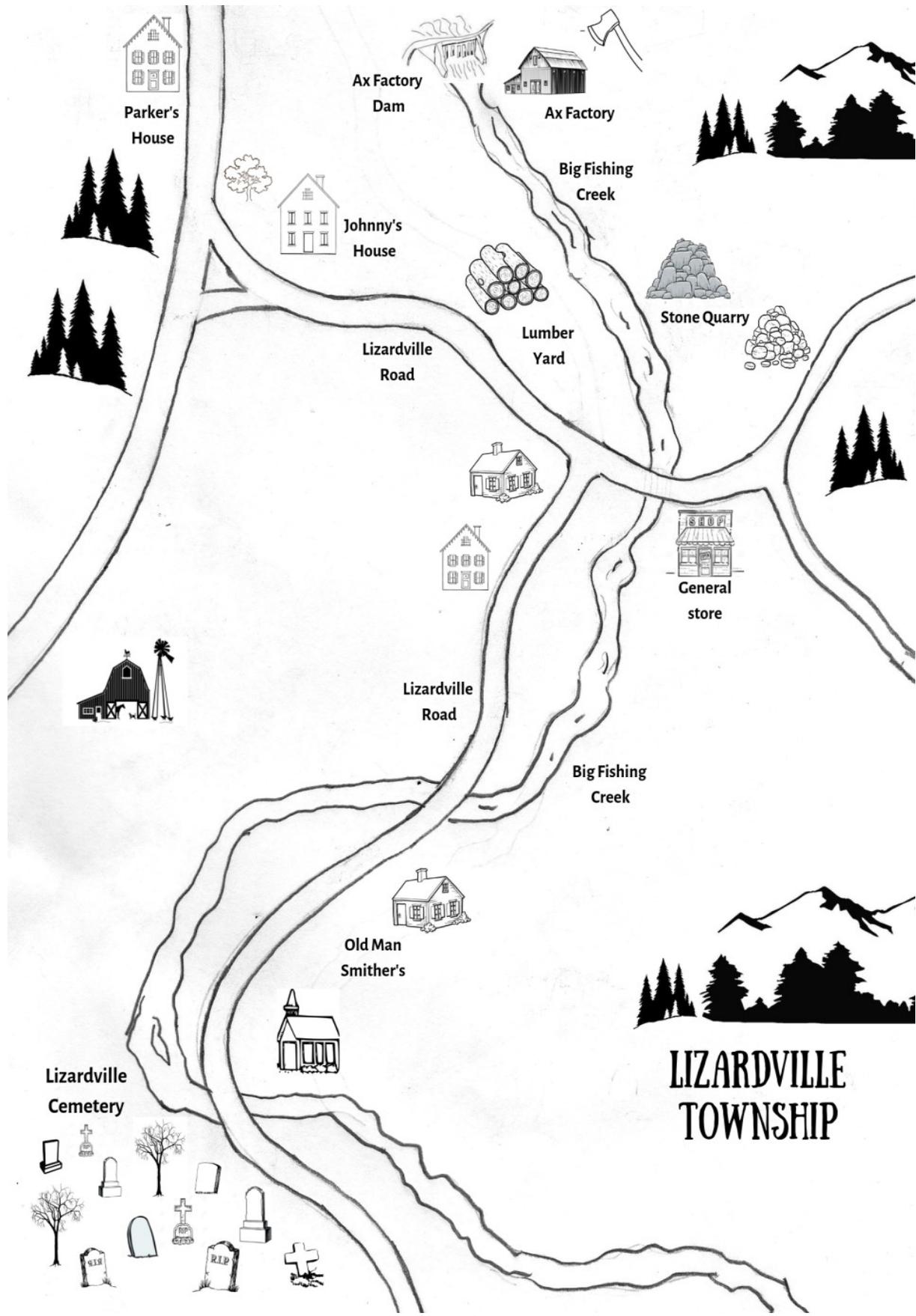
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## Chapter One

The storm raged on with a brilliant flash of light and a loud crack of thunder. Zack and Daniel sat quietly in the family room watching the candle flicker. Sara and I prepared sandwiches in the kitchen, which was all we could muster since the electricity was out and her time was short. It wouldn't be long before the boys' mother would have to return to the hospital.

Her smile could brighten any room, even on the dreariest of days like this one. Sara and I entered the room carrying drinks and a tray of sandwiches. The boys smiled, and I'm sure they were hungry since I had overlooked fixing something for them to eat earlier. I'd lost track of time while telling them about my childhood. Each of the boys grabbed a sandwich and then proceeded to wolf it down.

"Slow down," Sara requested. She watched her boys frown, yet they did what she asked and began to eat at a slower pace. We mostly sat in silence, exchanging glances at one another, eating and watching flashes of lightning race across the walls. Thunder shook the room, boom after boom. The sandwiches didn't last long. Daniel laid his napkin on his plate, then bounced to his feet and motioned to take his mother's plate to the kitchen.

"Suck up," Zack barked, shooting his younger brother a nasty glance as he grabbed my plate and followed closely behind.

"I wish you didn't have to hurry back to work." I frowned. "At least wait until the weather lets up a little."

Sara gave me a long face, and I could tell she didn't want to leave us. I smiled back and gazed into her eyes, trying to convince her that we would be fine. To be honest, I was more worried about her driving around in the storm. She wrapped her arms around me and gave me a big hug and a soft kiss. "Drive safe," I whispered. That was the last thing I said before she stood and turned to face the boys as they reentered the room.

"Come here and give your momma a big hug. I need to get back to work," she said as she stretched out her arms waiting for their embrace. Daniel wasted no time diving into her arms. I smiled with joy watching the boys with their mother. My mind wandered a bit. *What a wonderful life I have. I married my high school sweetheart and raised two awesome boys. What more could I ask for?*

"I wish you didn't have to go back to work," Daniel said softly, giving her his pouty face.

"You'll be fine," she reassured him.

I watched Zack hesitate, acting like he was too old for all this mushy stuff. But he was too late as Sara scooped him up in her arms, then gave him one of her giant hugs before planting a huge kiss on his blushed cheeks.

He smirked, trying to pull away. "I'll take care of Dad and Daniel, you have nothing to worry about, Mom."

Sara lowered him to the floor then turned to me and smiled. I stood and walked her to the front door. She placed her hand on the knob and then slowly turned it. Just as the door opened, she glanced back, giving me that saucy little smile of hers. "No more ghost stories, John, promise me?"

Shocked, my mouth fell open and she could see it written all over my face. Why would she think I would tell the boys another ghost story? Okay . . . I guess she had a point, after all, she's known me all her life. "Alright," I nodded, "we'll play a board game or work on a puzzle, or something like that." I grinned. I never said I wouldn't tell the boys another story about Lizardville, and to be honest, I hadn't finished the first story.

How pathetic am I? I teach my boys to be honest and that your word is all you have. And here I am showing my boys it was okay to skirt around the truth when you need to. On the flip side, the boys and I were bonding, and I think that outweighed the other. *At least that's my story, and I was sticking to it.*

Sara gave me that look—the look that said she meant it. I watched as she turned and closed the door, which slammed behind her, making a loud crash. *I don't think she meant to slam the door; it must have been the wind.*

The boys made a beeline for their chairs, and I sat back down in my spot the minute I noticed the headlights roll out of the driveway. The boys stared at me, anxious for me to continue my story. I raised my finger to my chin and took in a deep breath. "So where was I," I mumbled.

"You were telling us that everyone had left the cave and you never saw the ghost again or did you?" Zack quizzed me.

"I think you're right . . ."



I watched Tom go back into the small cavern to bury the puzzle box. Shortly after that, we all exited the cave. Buck, Parker, and Todd made sure they covered the entrance so no one would notice or stumble upon the opening by accident. We wanted to honor Annabelle's wishes and keep Jacob's remains safe. After all, I didn't want to upset Annabelle. She had threatened all of us, and she looked like the type of ghost who would honor her word. I think we were all a little surprised when Jimmy showed up as a ghost. I would have never guessed that, and I wondered

why he never showed himself to us before that day. I guess it made sense though, that he would be a ghost and all, since his death was an accident.

Lexi expressed over and over that this whole experience was super cool. For me, the jury was still out on that subject. I wasn't one-hundred percent sure this would be the last time we would see any of them. I often wondered if Jimmy watched over us because every now and then, I would see a door close or a flash out of the corner of my eye, only to look and find there was no one there. I swear that from time to time, I would notice things move, too. Maybe Jimmy was having a little fun with me. I could never prove any of that, but it kept me on my toes.

*Even now, my mind wanders back to that day in the cave. Are any of the ghost still around? If they are, what might they be up to these days? I often ask myself, Do ghosts feel the hot and cold temperatures? Do they sleep? What would it be like to be a ghost? No, I don't want to find out . . . I only wish I had the answers.*



"Earth to Dad, are you going to tell us more or not?" Zack's words broke my thoughts.

I looked at the boys sitting wide-eyed in their chairs, just waiting to learn more about my childhood. Okay, maybe not so much about my childhood, maybe more about the ghosts that I had been telling them about.

"Sorry, I'd lost my train of thought . . ." Another bright flash of lightning was followed by yet another loud crack of thunder which rocked the house. This strike was too close for comfort, sending myself and the boys bouncing from our chairs. I settled back down and looked over at the boys and thought back to the last time I saw Jimmy.

"A year had passed . . ." I began.



It was 1976, the bicentennial year, two hundred years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a special year for our country. The summer was full of events, parades, carnivals, even a mid-summer dance at the volunteer fire station. The town water tower and fire hydrants were painted red, white, and blue by the township. The United States government had even changed the design on the quarter in celebration of the event. I thought the new look was fascinating, and that was the day I started to collect coins. Of course, it didn't last long before I found myself spending them when I was short on cash. Who knew that the more money you made, the more you would spend? I still worked several days a week at the general store for Tom Evans, but school and work were my main focus.

Parker got his driver's license and was driving while my brother, Buck, had received his learner's permit. They both worked at the same gas station in Mill Hall. I thought it was a bit funny how they both worked at the same place and did everything together. The two seemed glued together like a married couple.

Scooter took a job at one of the local restaurants, The Dutch Inn. He washed dishes in the evening and was learning all about the food service business. He was fascinated with food, and I knew he would become a great chef one day. I remember they made the best, mouth-watering cinnamon-flavored sticky buns you could sink your teeth into. Scooter would bring a few by the house and drop them off on his way home from time to time.

Todd had turned to sports and spent a lot of time at school with football practice and working out in the gym. He was good and had picked up the nickname Hammer—I guess because he hit the other players so hard.

Lexi was still working at Burger King. She was saving money for a car and possibly college. She often talked about getting her degree in paranormal studies—I didn't even know you could get a degree in that. Her and Buck had dated a few times—it was an off-and-on-again type of friendship.

Sara was the youngest and spent most of her time that summer helping her mother around the house while the rest of us were earning money and getting on with our lives. I'm not sure what she did all day, though I imagined her reading in a sunny spot because she loved a good book. I would stop over to visit on days I didn't have chores or work, just not as much as I would have liked because of my busy schedule. The summer was over quickly, and the daily life of going back to school hit us full force.

I found out they had a back to school dance the following Friday at the local fire hall. The Mill Hall volunteer fire department held several dances a year—it was one of the ways they raised money for new equipment. It wasn't anything fancy, just a DJ, but it would give me a chance to spend some time with Sara . . . that's if she wanted to go. No, I didn't care that much for dancing. Who would want to get up there in front of everyone and make a fool of themselves? I always thought it was a little odd that the boys would line up along the wall and watch the girls dance. Come to think about it, I guess we were a little strange.

The first day of school came to a close. I stopped by the house to grab a quick bite to eat, and then made my way to the general store. I rode my bike as fast as I could. I still took the trails through the woods that wended along the banks of Big Fishing Creek. It reminded me of the times when Jimmy and I would ride them. I guess that was my way of keeping his memory alive.

I pulled up next to the store like I had done a hundred times before. I stashed my bike around back when I noticed a very large crow sitting in the tree at the edge of the forest. Taking a few steps toward the bird, I called out, "Is that you Annabelle?" I received no response. "Jacob?"

Nothing, not even a chirp or squawk. I wandered for a minute. "Jimmy?" Honestly, I hoped it was him, but still, no answer. The crow seemed to follow my every move with his beady eyes. I grew a little frustrated, and I realized it was probably just a crow.

I turned and started to walk toward the front of the store. I needed to remember to ask Tom Evans if I could have next Friday night off so I could take Sara to the dance. I took a few steps forward before I heard the rustling of the branches behind me and the flapping of wings. I felt a cold chill run down my spine. I turned and spotted the large crow heading toward me. I quickly dropped to the ground and lay as flat as I could to avoid being struck. I covered my head with my hands as the crow swooped down, just brushing my back and head. I looked up and watched in disbelief as the crow flew away. *It gave no warning it was going to attack. Why would Annabelle, Jacob, or even Jimmy do that?* Two other crows burst out of the woods and flew in the same direction the other crow had taken; they appeared to be giving chase to the one that attacked me.

I bounced to my feet and brushed off my pants before I quickly made my way to the front of the store. I paused for a second to catch my breath. I couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong.

I pushed the door open to the clanging of the bells that hung over it. "Tom," I yelled, "it's just me . . . Johnny." I didn't want to interrupt whatever he was doing by thinking I was a customer. I walked to the closet and grabbed my broom and dustpan just as the office door swung open, startling me for a second.

"Hi, Tom," I blurted out, but he walked past me without saying a word. I thought it was a little odd that he didn't respond. I turned to look, and that's when I noticed he had that look in his eyes—the glazed over look. His eyes were black and his face was pale. I had seen this look before when Annabelle stepped into his body. I wasn't sure what to do.

"Are you okay, Mr. Evans?" I asked in a pathetic soft voice.

I didn't know why, but I was trembling. It wasn't the first time I had seen this look, and the last time Tom didn't attempt to hurt me. Somehow, something appeared different or odd. Tom turned to me. "Get out!" he yelled in a deep voice.

Just then, the bells rang as someone had pulled up outside at the gas pumps, triggering the bells to ring. The sound seemed to snap Tom out of his trance. The color in his eyes slowly returned, and he shook his head slightly from side to side. He glanced at me. "Oh, hey, Johnny." He paused for a second. "How long have you been here?"

"I-I just got here," I said.

Tom glanced toward the pumps. "Oh, excuse me, I have a customer," he calmly replied as he strode toward the door. The bells clanged again, and he closed the door behind him as he exited.

Just another weird thing that happened today—first the crow and now Tom looked possessed. Could the two be related? I wondered what was going to happen next. I glanced out the front window and saw old man Smithers, who stopped at the store quite a bit since he was friends with Tom. You would think that after a year of working at the store, he would have warmed up to me by now, but he hadn't. I shrugged it off; I guess some things will never change.

I watched Tom finish pumping the gas and wash Mr. Smithers' windshield. He collected the money and waved as the old man drove off. The bells clanged as Tom came back inside. "I think someone stepped into my body again," he said frustrated.

"Why and who?" I asked.

"I wish I knew. I feel helpless when this happens." He paused and shook his head again. "So how was your day?"

"It was great, thanks. I just finished reading *A Tale of Two Cities*. It's a novel by Charles Dickens, set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution." Tom loved to read as much as I did, and I thought he would like to know about the story; however, Tom cut me off before I could finish telling him more about the book.

"That's nice." He smiled. "We had a new shipment of canned goods arrive, can you put them on the shelves please? I'll be in the back room if you need my help." Tom turned and left.

I felt that was a little odd. He's never that short with me. He was always cheerful and talkative. Maybe something was weighing on his mind. I put the thought on the back burner for now and turned my attention to unpacking the boxes and placing the cans on the shelf. When I finished restocking, I swept the floors and took out the trash. All I did was clean-up work and odd jobs around his place as Tom never let me help the customers or handle money. Deep down, it made me wonder if he trusted me.

Soon my work was complete, and I found myself back on my bike and almost home when I realized I'd never asked for next Friday off. *I'll have to remember to ask him tomorrow . . . Hopefully, Tom will be back to his normal self by then.*