



## Jay Palmer – Barnsley College

Andi woke to a bloodcurdling scream. Their eyes flew open, and their heart raced with a mixture of fear and adrenaline. As the echoes of the scream faded away, Andi reached for the nearest object they could find for protection. Their hand closed around the cool metal of a hockey stick that had been resting against their chest of drawers. It was a familiar weight in their hand, but this time it wasn't just sports equipment, now it was the only weapon they had. Andi's stomach churned as they realised that the scream had come from within the house. They tried to steady their breathing, but their heart rate continued to soar. The feeling of dread intensified, like the sensation of being on a rollercoaster with no control, but this wasn't a moment of excitement or thrill. This was pure, unadulterated fear. Andi had never heard a noise like that before, and they tried to control their thoughts, fearing the worst. They hoped it was just their mum being clumsy, dropping the frying pan as she tried to make Andi's birthday pancakes. Though Andi knew in their heart it wasn't the sound of a clumsy mistake.

With trembling hands, Andi gripped their hockey stick tightly. Their senses were on high alert, every nerve in their body primed for action. As they crept forward, their breathing shallow and quick, Andi's mind raced with the possibilities of what might be waiting for them. Whatever it was, Andi was about to face it head-on, with an ice hockey stick as their only defence. Andi was either being very brave or very stupid.

The door to the living room was ajar, and from the gap, Andi could see that something was wrong. A vine of green leaves and thorns had snaked its way through the window, breaking the glass and tearing the frame to pieces. The vine was thick and seemed to be pulsing with energy, as if it had a life of its own, winding and twisting like a serpent. Its thorns were sharp and menacing, ready to strike at any moment. It had made its way deep into the living room, coiling around the furniture and tearing it apart. The curtains hung in tatters, and the carpet was ripped up in places.

Andi's eyes swept across the room, trying to assess the damage that had been done. But their heart stopped when they saw the lifeless body of their mother lying on the ground. One of the vines had erupted through her chest, leaving a gaping hole where her heart should have been. They felt as though they were in a nightmare, a cruel and twisted dream that they couldn't wake up from. Eventually, Andi's legs gave out from under them, and they crumpled to the ground beside their mother's body. They clutched at her shirt, burying their face in the fabric as sobs wracked their body. In that moment, all they could do was mourn the loss of their mother.