

the club

The image is a promotional poster for the TV show 'The Club'. It features a green-tinted photograph of a school hallway. In the foreground, the silhouette of a person is seen from behind, walking away from the viewer. The hallway is lined with lockers on both sides. In the background, a large, faint, and slightly distorted face of a man is superimposed over the scene, looking directly at the camera. The overall mood is mysterious and unsettling.

Stephanie Watson

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THE CLUB

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THE CLUB

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darkcreek

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To my son, Jake.

**No matter how many books I
write, you will always be my
greatest creation.**

*Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there
wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared
to dream before*

—Edgar Allan Poe, The Raven



Josh took a deep breath. It was the Bridgewater High championship football game. The bright stadium lights shone all around him. He could hear his classmates cheering in the stands. All he had to do was kick a field goal and they would win the championship. But as he readied himself for the kick, he felt a firm tap on his shoulder.

Josh turned. Standing next to him was his teammate Ned. Josh gasped at the sight. Ned was bruised and covered with blood. His football uniform was just a shred of cloth. His left arm hung from his

body as if it were coming off. Deep gashes cut into his arms. He stared at Josh with bulging, bloodshot eyes.

“Oh my God,” Josh whispered. On the left side of Ned’s chest, blood oozed from a gaping hole. Ned smiled, and blood rushed from his mouth, spilling down his neck and onto his marred chest. He choked on the blood, laughing.

“Josh . . .” Ned moaned like an animal. “I have something for you, pal.” Ned reached out his right hand to Josh. In it was Ned’s beating heart. He pressed the slimy organ into Josh’s palm.

Josh screamed as he watched the heart writhe in his hand.



Josh woke up. He was screaming into the hot air. His heart was pounding furiously. *It was just a dream. It was just a dream*, he told himself over and over as he tried to catch his breath. But Josh knew that it wasn’t just any dream. He had to do something to stop the nightmares. He had to stop the chain of innocent

deaths. He couldn't believe that only two short weeks had passed since he first joined the Club. . . .



Hey New Yawk! Your Giants suck! Up here we know how to play football.” Ned Onger punctuated that brilliant statement by smacking Josh hard on one shoulder.

Josh tried to edge past Ned, but the linebacker’s massive frame blocked his path. Josh had been going to Bridgewater High for just a week, and already he was being picked on. He didn’t understand it. No one at his old high school had picked on him. What was the big deal with being from New York anyway?

Josh was used to moving a lot. His father was

relocated often because of his job. But Josh had been at his last school almost two years. That was the longest he had ever stayed at one school. He'd had a lot of friends and even a girlfriend for a little while. He had wanted so badly to finish high school there. Then, just two weeks into his senior year, it was time to pack up again. And so far, Bridgewater High was a far cry from his old school.

"Are you ready to humiliate yourself at Friday's football tryouts?" Ned asked, still blocking Josh's path.

"Can't wait," Josh said sarcastically. Josh knew it was stupid to even try out. He had really liked playing football at his old school, even though he wasn't a star like Ned. But with the competition at Bridgewater, it was a long shot that Josh would even make the team.

Ned just laughed as he shoved Josh into the lockers. Josh's books spilled everywhere.

"Gonna have to block better if you want to be on *our* team!" Ned yelled over his shoulder as he went to join his friends. They were all laughing.

Josh groaned as he leaned over to retrieve his

books. Life was so unfair. How come someone so mean and stupid was the one who had so much talent on the football field?

Josh sighed as he walked to his next class. It was only Monday. How would he ever survive another week at this stupid school?



Later that day, Josh was walking through the cafeteria when someone slammed hard against his right side.

“Watch it!” someone yelled. Josh steadied his tray of spaghetti and turned to see who had run into him.

It was Sabina Lawston. Josh had noticed Sabina on his first day at Bridgewater High. It was hard not to. Sabina always wore black clothes, and her hair was dyed bright pink. Sabina was also one of the smartest girls in the school. Everyone tried to get her to do their homework, but Sabina always refused.

“Sorry, Sabina,” Josh said. “Are you okay?”

Sabina brushed off her black sweatshirt. She looked up at him, “Oh hey, you’re the new guy. The New Yorker? Joe, right?”

Josh frowned. “Yeah. It’s Josh, actually.” He turned to find a table to eat lunch at, expecting to sit by himself. His first day at Bridgewater, he’d made the fatal mistake of sitting at Ned Onger’s table. Ned had looked pretty pleased with himself as he spilled Josh’s tray onto his lap. After that, Josh had tried to sit with a few of the other groups. They hadn’t been especially welcoming either.

“Hey.” Sabina was still behind him. “Why don’t you sit with me and my friends today?”

“Really?” asked Josh.

Sabina led him to a table where two guys were already sitting. “This is Dan Chissolm.” Sabina gestured to the guy to her right. He was very tall and extremely thin, with dark, wavy hair and bad skin. At the moment, Dan had his head buried in a PlayStation Portable. He briefly lifted his head and one hand in greeting before going back to his game.

“And this is Jackson Winder,” Sabina said, pointing across from her.

“Hey,” Jackson said in a whispering voice. Jackson was short with blond hair and large blue eyes—or maybe his out-of-date glasses just made them look that way. He gave Josh a warm smile.

“Hi, guys,” Josh said. “Thanks for letting me sit with you. It’s been a lonely week since I started here.”

“Get used to it. Don’t expect the vipers at this school to roll out the red carpet for you,” Dan grumbled without lifting his head from his game.

“Don’t be such a cynic, Dan. There are some nice kids here.” Jackson was obviously one of those glass-half-full kind of guys.

“Like us,” Sabina said, smiling.

“Like you,” Josh agreed. Josh was starting to like Sabina. She was nicer to him than anyone else at Bridgewater had been. He realized he was staring at her when she blushed.

“Oh my God,” Sabina said after a minute. “I have such a headache. Lindsey is driving me crazy!”

“Uh-oh,” Dan said, putting his video game aside. “Trouble in chemistry?”

Sabina turned to Josh. “Lindsey Steele is my lab partner in chemistry. She is not doing *any* of the

work. I have to get an A in that class. It's the only way I'll get a scholarship to Harvard." Sabina stabbed at her spaghetti with her fork. "My mom could never afford Harvard."

"Oh, that sucks," said Josh. He was impressed that Sabina was even thinking about Harvard. "Which one is Lindsey Steele?"

Jackson pointed to the table where most of the football players and dance-team girls ate lunch. Lindsey was tall and had dark, wavy hair. She was laughing at one of the guys who was throwing peanuts at another table. Lindsey looked like she could be a swimsuit model.

"She's a pain," Sabina said. "Her family has tons of money. She doesn't have to worry about scholarships. But no way she's gonna cost me my A in chemistry! I stayed late yesterday to finish *our* lab assignment myself."

"Oh, was that why I saw you leaving at four?" said Jackson. He talked so quietly Josh could barely hear him.

"Yeah," said Sabina. "How did debate practice go for you?"

Josh was surprised. He couldn't imagine Jackson performing a debate speech with that voice.

Jackson shrugged. "Okay. I still can't match up with Miles Danforth."

"Ugh," Dan groaned. "Stop comparing yourself to that dude. He's a jerk, anyway."

"Yeah," Jackson murmured. "But he rocks at debate." Jackson's eyes lowered to the carton of milk in front of him.

"So, are you going to stay after school again today?" Dan asked Sabina.

"No," said Sabina. "I need a break. Do you guys want to come over to my house?"

"I have to be home by five. Mark—" Dan turned to Josh. "That's my loser stepfather. He wants to have dinner before he goes to work, assuming he isn't drunk again. But I can come over for a while." He didn't sound enthusiastic. Jackson just nodded.

"Cool," Sabina said. "I found this really cool-looking old game in my basement this weekend. I thought we might play it."

"Is it Tetris?" Dan asked, looking up at her.

"No. . . ."

“Ms. Pac-Man? Asteroids?”

“No, Dan. It’s not a video game. It’s a board game. It looks almost like a Ouija board, but it has something to do with witchcraft.”

“Sounds spooky!” said Jackson with a smile.

“You should come too, Josh,” said Sabina.

“Sure!” Josh agreed. By now, he would have walked over a cliff if Sabina had asked him to.