The Face in the Dark

3rd Place by Paige Palatchie

Crunch, creak, croak, the night howls outside the window, creating an eerie scene for anyone unfortunate enough to pass by. To most people, squatters are illegal trespassers or criminals. But from a squatter's point of view, things look very different.

August 17th, 1978, Manila, Philippines, 5:24 am.

I jolt awake to a sharp scrape against the chipped, jagged edge of the window and quickly duck behind an old cabinet. The floorboards creak softly beneath my feet. I hear the rusted front door creak open as a flashlight starts wandering the halls, bouncing from wall to wall, ceiling to floor. It finally stops, freezing in place, as whoever is holding it bends down to pick something up off the floor before continuing down the hall.

I slide out from my hiding spot, slowly making my way through the abandoned house. I take another step. Then another. Suddenly, something cold rests against my shoulder. A hand. But it doesn't feel human…

I don't turn around. For a while the whole place is silent, not a peaceful silence – a bone-chilling silence that washes over you when you realise you aren't alone anymore.

A ghostly shiver surges down my spine. I can feel something standing directly behind me, yet I can't bring myself to look. Not even a peek. Then I hear it, an unmistakable word.

My name.

“Asteria,” it mutters, tightening its grip on my shoulder.

I muster up the courage to look back. I freeze. Horror and shock wash over me as I stare into my own eyes.

It's *me*.