

Chapter 5

In the West End neighborhood, at 803 Oriole Street, the infamous Finsterwald's backyard was a place shunned by the local kids. The lore surrounding this house warned that any child who dared to stray onto its property risked grave consequences, perpetuated by tales of former children who had mysteriously disappeared after encountering Finsterwald. Consequently, tennis balls, baseballs, and other toys littered the yard, adding a sense of eerie desolation. It was a no-go zone for paperboys and snow shovelers alike.

That particular late afternoon, commotion erupted as screams pierced the air. A young boy, whom we refer to as Arnold Jones, found himself hoisted above the backyard fence by several high schoolers. This was a misstep in survival tactics—being near both Finsterwald's and older kids was a recipe for trouble. As he flailed and pleaded for mercy, the teens amused themselves by tossing him into the yard. As soon as Arnold landed, an enveloping silence blanketed the scene; upon hitting the ground, all bravado left him, leaving him paralyzed with fear, watching the ominous back door.

A tense stillness followed, during which the older boys thought they heard an unusual noise—a rattling sound that crescendoed into the distinct chattering of Arnold's teeth. The high schoolers recognized this as Arnold suffering from the "finsterwallies," a colloquial term for petrified fear. They egged him on, relishing in his plight.

Suddenly, a mysterious figure appeared, described variably by the high schoolers as a phantom child, inconspicuous yet resilient, who approached Arnold. In an almost magical occurrence, he whisked Arnold over his shoulder and carried him away. However, the rescuer made a critical error by placing Arnold on Finsterwald's front steps, another forbidden area. Upon regaining consciousness, Arnold bolted away in terror.

The high schoolers, now bewildered, couldn't believe what they had witnessed: this audacious newcomer coolly laid back on the steps and cracked open a book, an act of defiance in a place steeped in fear. This incident not only emphasized the legend of Finsterwald but also heralded the arrival of someone unafraid of the town's most tacit fears.