

PHANTOM WRITER

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Phantom Writer

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CHAPTER 1

☺ Bryce ☺

Everybody has a secret. Mine is Jake Konig.

Jake makes money from nightmares and screams. Lots of money. For the past few years he's kept millions of kids and adults up all hours of the night with his creepy books. I'm one of them, but only my family knows.

I know what Jake looks like from the pictures on his books. Leather jacket pulled up around his neck. Tight jeans that make his lanky legs look like pythons. Little kids get out of the way when they see him coming, and those who don't, he pushes out of the way.

My twin sister, Ashley, doesn't read the books. She says they're

too scary. She won't even look at the covers, with their 3-D faces and spooky houses. At Halloween, kids dress up as characters from the books. Ashley thinks it's disgusting, but I think it's cool.

My favorite is the one about the kid who gets trapped in a dungeon and has to figure his way out. There are several tunnels, and if he chooses the wrong one, a gigantic spider will chase him or a boulder the size of our house will crush him. Only one path leads outside. That's like what the Bible says about finding God, that there's only one path, but Ashley said I was just saying that so Mom would let me keep reading the books.

I started reading Jake Konig's books after my dad died in a plane crash caused by terrorists, which is a lot scarier than anything Konig has ever dreamed up. For some reason I feel connected to the characters and the stories. Maybe I like to be frightened about something other than my dad not coming home. Maybe it takes my mind to a different place. All I know is, I can't wait to read the latest book in his Dead End series every time one comes out.

After Mom became a Christian, she wasn't so sure about those books, even though she had once been a friend of Jake's. A lot of parents won't let their kids read them, but Mom said at least I was reading something. She decided I was old enough to understand the difference between what was real and what was made up, and I think she knew the stories helped me in some strange way.

When I heard that Jake Konig was not just coming to our town, but also to our house, I couldn't believe it. I knew he lived somewhere in Colorado, but I never thought I'd get the chance to actually meet him.

The week Mr. Konig was supposed to come I could hardly sit still. I asked Mom why he was coming so many times that she actually growled.

“Bryce, I’ve told you. I knew him in Chicago when we were both beginners, before either of us had written any books. We were in a writing group together.”

“Is he weird like his books?” Ashley said.

Mom smiled. “When I knew him, he was so shy he wouldn’t even look girls in the eye.”

“Could you tell he was going to be a good writer?” I said.

“We all read each other’s stories,” she said. “His were pretty strange, about human monsters, puppets that came to life, ghosts, things like that. I knew he’d probably succeed because he always worked so hard at it.”

A magazine article said Jake was so rich he owned several houses in different states. His favorite thing to do was ride his huge Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

“But why is he coming here?” Ashley said.

“He’s working on a new book and has some questions for me,” Mom said. “I’ve been praying that God will give me the right words to tell him about my faith.”

Now there was a thought. I have to admit, it sounded impossible.