

# **Devious**

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## An Evil Prophecy

You could say that prophecies are things that belong to *good* people. Average, everyday good people. You know, like heroes, knights, schoolboys, orphaned children, magic pigs, common farmers, etc., etc., etc., blah, blah, blah. *These* are things that are normally in prophecies. *Good* people doing *good* things because they were born to.

But devious, evil people can also have prophecies.<sup>1</sup> Mysterious, terrible, awful prophecies, and the poor devious children born into these things are stuck with their fate just like the good children are.

Dakota was one such child. He wasn't an orphan. He wasn't a knight. Dakota lived in a world just ours, except a little bit different here and there. These details aside, however, Dakota was still stuck with a mysterious evil prophecy. His wicked parents reinforced it regularly at the dinner table. "*Dakota,*" they often said, "*you are meant to be the greatest evil. That is your fate, according to the prophecy. You can't escape it.*" What a way to ruin your supper.

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<sup>1</sup>I'd mention how diabolical these prophecies are, but this isn't that sort of book. *What's that?* All right, if you insist... How about plagues of leeches? Legions of killer robots with fleshy heads? Disgruntled clowns with fiendish sock-puppets named Betty-Lou? How does *that* starch your sheets? Next time, mind your own business.

Dakota's life was lonely, save for his friend Stamp. Stamp was a goblin. Being a goblin, this naturally meant he was short and ugly: Large veiny feet. Yellowed, claw-like nails. Giant arms. A fuzzy tail like a monkey. Awful garlic-smelling breath... you get the picture. Neither of Stamp's eyes ever focused in the same direction, and one of them even popped out from time to time, going on adventures of its own! Dakota and Stamp were partners in crime, except those crimes were never anything all that criminal.

This made Dakota's life complicated. On the occasions his evil parents forced him to do mischief, Dakota failed. Miserably. A typical day in the impressively *undevious* Life of Dakota often began something like this:

*"The prophesy states, you are the greatest evil,"* his parents would say at breakfast.

*"But what does that **mean**?"* Dakota would ask.

*"Stop asking questions! You'll figure something out! Sneak into someone's home, steal their jewelry, sour their milk, and let their dog out without a leash."*

But this never, ever, *ever* went well. Instead, Dakota would get about as far as the driveway before his stomach churned, his heart twisted, and he'd have a sudden, maddening urge to go to the bathroom. He *tried* to be bad. He wanted to do what his parents asked. He wanted so much to feel like he belonged in his family, truly belonged. But when it came to being evil – Dakota was a complete and total failure.

One evening, after Dakota had finished cooking dinner, his parents ordered him outside.

*"Dakota... The prophesy states, you are the greatest evil."*

*"...not again..."*

*"You **know** what to do."*

“But I don't. I really, really don't.”

But that was that. His parents' burly goons grabbed Dakota by his suit collar, yanked him through the doorway and dumped him into the mansion's shrubbery. The front door's peep-slot slid open, and Dakota felt his mother's icy blue eyes staring him down from the other side. It was cold. It was dark. It was even starting to rain.

“Perfect. Looks like it will be a dark and stormy night. You could use some fresh air. Now march down the hill and don't come back,” she hissed, “until you've done something devious to prove your depravity!” *Clank.* The peep-slot slammed shut.

*Something devious.* It was always devious. And if not something devious, then *deplorable*, *destructive*, or *delinquent*. Dakota sat in the shrubs, shivering. He twisted and turned, crunching the fallen autumn leaves. Rainwater trickled off the gargoyles perched high above the gutters. It dripped onto Dakota's head as he crawled out of the bushes. Dakota rubbed his hands for warmth, tried keeping his mind off the cold. He cupped his face in his hands, sat on the porch stoop, and rocked back and forth.

A deep, yet pleasant, voice split the darkness. “They forced you outside again?”

“Yes.” Dakota glanced towards the garage, an enormous garage bigger than most of the houses in the rest of Dakota's neighborhood. A short, stubby silhouette waddled over. It was Stamp.

The old green goblin checked about for stray goons. He decided the coast was clear, wobbled up to the front door, and plopped himself down onto the steps next to his friend. “Don't they care that it's miserable outside? Why do they keep doing this?”

“You know. The prophesy.”

“Right. That silly thing about you being inscrutably evil or some other such nonsense.”

“Can’t they just let me be normal? Normal for *me*?” Dakota scuffed his shoes against the steps. Why did it matter if he wasn’t bad?

Stampt tried getting a glimpse of Dakota’s hidden face, squinting with his lone goblin eye. He’d seen his friend like this dozens of times before. Maybe dozens of dozens. Each time hurt Stampt almost as much as Dakota. Stampt didn’t have family of his own – not one that he could remember, anyway – but seeing him treated like this saddened him. He popped out his only eyeball and spun it across his palm, hoping to cheer Dakota up.

“Where’s your other one?”

“It got bored and went for a roll,” Stampt said. “Who am I to argue? As long as it returns sooner rather than later there’s no complications. So what’s your punishment for *this* time?”

Dakota mumbled through his hands. “My mother is just trying to make me live up to my potential. You know. The usual.”

“*Pfft*. Potential, indeed.” Stampt stuck out his tongue. “Ludicrous. Absolutely deplorable.”

“Stampt, does *deplorable* and *depravity* mean the same thing? The both begin with D-E.”

“Pretty much. Let’s just say that both words imply a detestable undercurrent of badness.”

“Hmm.” Dakota’s foot tapped as he thought. He thought about what his parents said. He thought about how good it would be for him to do something truly bad. His parents would welcome him back inside with open arms. He could eat a warm dinner for once. And maybe – just maybe – his parents would realize he was fine just being himself rather than the Dakota they wanted him to be.

Dakota stood up and marched across the driveway, down the long hill, and into the street with sudden purpose. He had an idea. Something that would prove to his parents he *was* devious and evil after all. Just like the prophesy said... *whatever* that meant.

Stampt bounded down the street after him, pumping his furry arms, trying to catch up. He stuck to the shadows as he always did, ducking out of sight whenever a car passed. Being a goblin meant staying hidden to most of the world, and since Stampt had many years under his wide belt, keeping a low profile was something he was exceptionally good at.

“Dakota, where are you going?”

“I’m going to go do something bad, then bring back proof. That’ll shut them up.”

Stampt's lone eye went wide. “Surely, you don’t mean that.”

“I do. I’m sick of being treated like this!” Dakota charged further down the street, leaving his neighborhood and heading three, six, then nine blocks down. He’d show his parents! He’d do something so maniacally clever and deplorable his family would never kick him out again!

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## The Scheme

The more he walked, the more he stewed. His parents wanted evil? He'd show them! He was going to do something icky. Something truly awful that would make his parents proud. Dakota stopped in front of a house. There was nothing special about the house, except the lights were off. No one was home. "There," he said, mostly to himself. "This will work."

"*What* will work?" Stampt caught up, panting.

"You'll see." Dakota smirked.

Dakota and Stampt snuck around back. The house Dakota had picked was a rickety number, a quiet city bungalow with white, flaking paint and lovely purple shutters. Dakota considered crawling through one of the basement windows before discovering the side door had been left unlocked.

But when they crept inside, something happened. Dakota felt his stomach twist and churn. Soon, the twists turned to knots, and the knots burst into butterflies. The butterflies made him feel sick, and Dakota was having trouble keeping down his dinner. Dakota looked green. An olive green. A moldy green. Greener than Stampt.

Stampt watched his friend with concern, but he knew what the problem was. He'd seen this happen many times before. "What's wrong?"

"I... don't feel so good." Dakota stumbled around the house, clicking on lights and trying to find something worthwhile to steal, break, or hide. The whole time, he clutched his stomach, moaning to himself. Every time Dakota picked up something or snuck into a new room, a nagging voice in the back of his head told him it wasn't the right thing to do.

"The prophesy says I'm the greatest evil!" Dakota moaned to Stampt, slumping to the kitchen floor. "So how come I feel sick whenever I try to do bad things?"

"Because *you're* not bad. You know when something you're doing is wrong, and unlike those miscreant parents of yours, your conscience actually bothers you."

Dakota knew what Stampt said made perfect sense. After all, he had tried for eleven agonizing years to be evil. Dakota couldn't even cheat on a math quiz without feeling lousy, how could he possibly steal or destroy something?

The butterflies went away. The nagging voice in his head stopped. Dakota examined the kitchen and came up with a new idea. It wasn't something his parents would have wanted... but it was something that felt right. "Let's bake cookies instead."

Stampt found an apron and tied it around his thick goblin neck. He licked his chops and rummaged through the stranger's kitchen for the things they needed.<sup>2</sup>

When they finished baking, they each folded one cookie into a paper towel. Dakota dropped the towel into his pocket, saving his cookie for later. Stampt waited an impressive total of

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<sup>2</sup> INGREDIENTS: \*1/2 cup butter, softened \* 3 oz. pkg. cream cheese, softened \*2 tablespoons peanut butter, softened \*1 egg \*1 pkg. two-layer devil's food cake mix \*1 cup semisweet chocolate chips. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. In a medium bowl, mix the butter, cream cheese, and peanut butter together. Add egg and mix again until smooth. Add cake mix and chocolate chips and beat until everything is well mixed. Roll into balls and place them on a greased cookie sheet. Flatten each cookie. Bake at 375 degrees for 7-9 minutes until edges of cookies appear baked. Cool utterly and completely. Eat.



twenty-two seconds before devouring his cookie in one bite. Goblins can never pass up fresh cookies for long.

After cleaning the dishes, they took the remaining cookies and piled them high on a plate. Placing the plate in the center of the dining room table, Dakota left a note next to it, written in Stampt's perfect penmanship:

*We hope you like our sinfully delicious cookies. P.S. Next time, please remember to lock your doors.*

With the stranger's house smelling like fresh-baked cookies, Dakota and Stampt walked home. It was late. The rain had soaked everything, turning the fall leaves to mush. As usual, Dakota's parents had left for the night, up to their own secret, shady schemes. The guarding goons were mostly gone too, save for a couple preoccupied with a mean game of Go Fish on the front stoop.

Dakota and Stampt stayed close to the bushes and tip-toed around to the back door, shuffling along his parents' perfectly kept driveway.

Dakota scowled. "Stupid prophesy! I wonder if anyone else gets stuck with these things. Doesn't seem like it's good for much."

"Well," Stampt whispered, "I don't know about evil prophesies, but a *good* prophesy goes something like this..." Stampt cleared his throat. "*ahem...* Once upon a time there was a horrible king in a horrible land who wouldn't go away. One day, an old gypsy farmer made a *prophesy*:

The horrible king would eventually be killed by a good knight with a magic pig who was once an orphaned schoolboy. Then everyone lived happily ever after.”

“Knight?” Dakota’s eyebrow went up and he rolled his eyes. “I’m not a knight.”

“No.”

“I’m not an orphan either.”

“Not that I’m aware of.” Stampt nodded his ugly head, and his long ears wiggled. “I guess what I mean to say, Dakota, is that prophesies can be many things. Even evil ones. But what I’m certain of, is that *you’re* not evil. What this has to do with that evil prophesy of yours, well, I don’t know. But perhaps it’s a *good* thing.”

A marble-like object about the size of a large gumball weaved about the driveway, rolling along the wet pavement. It bounced over the storm grate, hopped into the orchids, then spun across the wet leaves before finally making it towards the garage. It rolled up to Stampt’s foot and bumped against his yellowed toenails once, twice, three times before stopping to twirl at his feet.

“Ah! My eyeball has *finally* returned. And just as I was starting to feel out of sorts.” Stampt leaned down to scoop up the stray green orb. It twinkled with reflected light, despite the dirt and dust clinging on. “You said you were going for a short stroll. *Short*. Mind the hours next time. You know I can’t think straight if you’re gone too long!” He brushed off the gunk and popped his eyeball back into his head.

Stampt said goodnight, waddling back towards his secret goblin-hole in the gigantic garage. Dakota pried open one of the back door’s windows and hoisted himself through. He stuck his

hand outside to wave goodbye to Stampt, but could already hear snoring from deep inside.

Stampt was fast asleep.

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### A Horrible Note

The next day? A disaster.

Dakota hadn't seen his parents since his mother kicked him outside the previous night. He raced about finishing his chores and duties, hoping to grab Stampt and make up some "proof of evil" to show his parents. If he could just conjure up some fancy story, that would probably work well enough. His parents would see that Dakota was at least *trying* to be bad. That could be a start, a first step on the path to deviousness they longed to see.

Despite the chilly autumn breeze, by the time he finished raking the leaves, Dakota was drenched with sweat. He took off his suit jacket to cool down, throwing it over his shoulder and unbuttoning his collar for air. He walked into the garage, squinting in the darkness and fumbling around for the light switch.

"Stampt? You in here?"

Hearing nothing, Dakota shut the heavy doors. The damp wood groaned and creaked like old goblin bones, making Dakota think for a moment that Stampt was playing hide and seek. But the goblin didn't come out, and if Stampt was asleep in his goblin-hole, Dakota was sure he would have heard his friend's snoring.

Dakota plodded into his house. His head hung low. He climbed the spiral staircase up five floors to his bedroom, a tiny closet-sized room at the end of a winding hallway. He opened the door, kicked off his shoes, and flung himself onto the bed.

Snap. Crackle. *Crunch*. Dakota felt something under the sheets. At first, he thought it was the same rusty spring that poked him in the back when he was trying to sleep. But as Dakota turned around and heard the crunching and crinkling, he realized it wasn't a metal spring, but a crumpled ball of paper.

Dakota smoothed it out. The paper was dingy and brown. Dark stains of dirt and rings of smudges caked the back. On the front, long strokes of scratchy handwriting drew out an uneven, messy message. Dakota hopped off his bed and flicked on the bulb in the center of the ceiling. He held the note close and read. It said:

*“Dear Dakota, Excuze me, but I needs to go away becuz your not evil enuff. Good ridance... I'm outta here! You're hateful pal, Stampy.”*

Dakota read it again. And again. His jaw dropped in disbelief. He was reasonably certain Stampy hadn't even written it. The handwriting was all wrong! Instead of nice, neat penmanship, Dakota was confronted by scratches of ink more suitable from a chicken.

“Not bad enough?” Dakota said in shock. “Hateful pal?!” He read the note again.  
*“Stampy!?!?!”*

His heart thumped. Dakota's breaths became quicker, more shallow. He could feel his pulse throb in his neck, nearly bursting his veins. Stampy was it. The one. The only real friend he had,

the only person who understood who Dakota really was. The only one he could talk to his family about. He'd known his friend forever, and friends never *ever* just leave with nothing but a stupid note!

Slightly dizzy, very confused, Dakota wandered down to the kitchen where he found one of his parents' goons playing solitaire. "Have you seen Stampt?"

"Wha? You means that old goblin the mister and misses don't like?"

"Yes. Stampt. Have you seen him?"

"Nope." The goon scraped his teeth with a toothpick before flicking it into the trash. "Maybe he went to the store or somethin.' Got lost on the way back. Whatever. I ain't seen him 'round, kid. Good luck with that. P.S. Don't forget about dinner tonight."

Dinner? Dakota had enough to worry about, already. He pushed the goon's comments to the back of his mind and focused on his missing friend. Ideas started creeping into Dakota's head. Horrible ideas. What happened to Stampt? Did his eyeball go bad and make him nuts? Or was it something much worse?

Dakota's house was a big one. A mansion built long ago under shady circumstances by shady people. There were countless floors and rooms, some of which hadn't been used in many, many years. Dakota checked all of them. He found nothing.

Frantic, furious, and frazzled, Dakota looked through all the rooms again. His first pass revealed nothing, but his second investigation led to a remarkable discovery: There was a small girl in the basement. One he had never seen before.

## Ghostly Girls and Cooking Conundrums

The girl was not a goblin. She was pale and ghostly. Her eyes were big like the saucers under his parents' teacups. A tangled rat's nest of hair topped her head. Dakota was certain she hadn't even been there the first time, but somehow she appeared during his second pass.

"Who are *you?!?*" Dakota asked. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm Miranda. I'm your imaginary friend."

Dakota stared. Should he call the goons? Was this someone *else* he would have to cook dinner for? His eyes narrowed, and his teeth ground against each other. "Imaginary friend? No. No, you're not."

"Yes, I am."

"No, um, *Miranda... No* you're not. I had an imaginary friend once. His name was *Gary*. And *he* didn't look anything like *you*."

"Times change," she replied. "Gary had other things to do."

"I have a *real* friend. I don't need an imaginary friend." Dakota paced the basement floor, hands behind his back. "And shouldn't I get some say what my imaginary friend looks like?"

"It doesn't work like that. You take what you get. That's how it is."

Dakota rolled his eyes.

“You don’t believe me?”

“It’s not that. It’s just that if you’re imaginary, it means you’re just in my head. If you’re in my *head* that means you’re really just part of *me*.” Dakota’s foot tapped the floor. “How come I’ve never seen you before?”

“How come the sky is blue? How come we stick to the ground instead of float around? Some things just *are*.” Miranda stuck out her arms and twirled around. “*La dee da dee da!* Maybe you’ve never seen me around before because you never noticed. Maybe you weren’t paying attention.” She stopped twirling and leaned in close, lowering her voice. “Maybe I’ve been here the whole time, spying on you while you’re asleep.” Miranda smiled and stepped back.

“Anyway, aren’t you looking for Stamp?”

“How did you know that?”

“I’m your imaginary friend. Your conscience. It’s my job to know this stuff.”

Dakota was bewitched, bothered and bewildered. Had he been given a list of things to ask for in an imaginary friend... well, nothing about Miranda would have been on it. Besides, once Stamp was found, Miranda would be pointless anyway.

“C’mon, Dakota! I can help. My ears might be imaginary, but I could hear a termite gnawing through a wooden leg.”

As mentioned before, Dakota's mansion was big. Ridiculously big. Humongous. You have no idea how big because *you* aren’t evil, but let me tell you, if there’s one thing evil people like to do, it’s to do things B-I-G. You won’t see any evil masterminds living in a tiny shack, that’s for sure.



So although Dakota searched earlier as best he could, his house was so large and the rooms were so many, all he had been able to do was poke his head into each of them. This time, with Miranda's help, the two of them were able to get the job done with *twice* as much effort in *half* the time. But half of nothing is still nothing. They found no goblins in the house, ugly or otherwise.

Dakota glanced at the clock, a demented clock with twelve extra hours and hands that looked like tiny rotating swords. The clock said "1900," and it chimed nineteen times, reminding everyone in the house of that precise moment. It did so every day at the same time.

Dakota's heart beat so hard, he could hear it pounding in his ears. *Thump. Thump. Thump.* Sweat poured from his forehead. His skin felt cold and clammy. He was certain his feet stank.

"Dakota, what's the problem?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, I think there's a problem." Miranda's saucer-like eyes widened further. "You look pale and pasty. Like me! Except you're not supposed to look that way."

"It's seven o'clock!" Dakota gasped, suddenly finding it hard to breathe.

"What happens now?" Miranda asked.

"My parents expect dinner to be ready at seven-thirty!"

Miranda looked at him, raising an eyebrow. "That's not a lot of time. You better tell the cook to get moving."

"I *am* the cook!"

"Oh," she said.

"I need to get the table set and dinner made and everything all together in thirty minutes!"

“Can't you just call out for pizza?”

“No.”

“Subs?”

“No.”

“...General Tso's tofu?”

“No! No! No!” Dakota slapped his palm against his forehead. “You don't understand! My parents creep everybody out! *No* one will deliver here!” He slumped to the floor and mumbled under his breath. “I am *so* going to get it.”

“Get what?” Miranda asked.

“Arrrgh! For an imaginary friend, you're not that friendly!”

“Hey, that's your imagination's problem, not mine.”

“Well, let's go... I need to cook *something*.”

“*We* need to cook something,” Miranda stated.

“Whatever. What are you going to do, move stuff? You're imaginary! Gary couldn't touch *anything*. That's the problem with you imaginary people.”

“Not me.” Miranda grabbed Dakota's hand and yanked him toward the kitchen.

Together, they seized every ingredient, cookbook, bowl and plate they could get their hands on. By the time they had gathered their cooking gear, there was only ten minutes left to spare. Food can be a dangerous thing if you don't know what goes with what. For example, chocolate goes with peanut butter and peanut butter goes with jelly, but you would never, ever, *ever* mix chocolate and jelly. That's just asking for trouble. Dakota had spent enough years in the kitchen

to know that you don't mix pickles with marshmallows, but with few minutes left to cook, there wasn't a lot of time to think. Dinner had to be made.

Dakota was a frenzy of cooking craziness. His arms moved at blinding speed as he boiled, toasted and scooped. Miranda stood close by, watching over his shoulder and handing him the tools he needed to get the job done.

“Water. Full boil.”

“Check.”

“Two dozen eggs.”

“Check. Check.”

“Bread.”

“Check.”

“Pepper, salt and garlic.”

“Check. Check. Check.”

“Potassium sorbate.”

“Huh?”

“To preserve freshness.”

“Oh... Check.”

The meal was prepared just in time. Poached eggs on toast. It wasn't glamorous, but it was ready. Dakota raced to the dining room carrying his stack of plates, dropping them on the table with a piercing *clank*. Miranda grabbed the plates and set everything in its proper place while Dakota sprinted back for the food. Both finished just as Dakota's parents crept into the dining room.

## Evil Parents and Unexpected Expected Guests

Evil people come in all sizes and shapes, just like everyone else. Sometimes you'll get an evil person who is outrageously large or impossibly skinny. But these evil people are rare, and the fact is that if most evil people stood out from the rest of us, they wouldn't do a very good job at being evil at all.

Dakota's parents were no different. His mother, if anything, was merely very, very pretty. Hardly a sin in the worlds of good or evil. In fact, about the only thing sinister in her appearance was her obsession with shoes. Dakota's mother had a personal collection greater than the queen of England, as well as an undying thirst to constantly add to it. Crocodile, deer, sheep, rhinoceros; no type of hide was overlooked. It was her mission to possess shoes made from every species in the animal kingdom.

Dakota's father? Very, very handsome. Some would say devilishly handsome, but really he was more of a *blandishly* handsome. The kind of face that you see in fashion magazines that everyone *thinks* is attractive, but has no memorable character to it. This worked fine for Dakota's mother, who sometimes thought of her husband more as a fashion accessory anyway.

Together, they were a perfect couple. Perfectly, totally, utterly, stupendously, insanely, *evil*. Yes - that's a lot of words to describe "evil," but let me tell you, if any word needed a lot of adverbs to describe it, it was this particular "evil." Because, like chocolate and peanut butter, Dakota's parents went together beautifully. The two could enter any room and suck the joy out of it in seconds.

As Dakota's parents seated themselves at the table, more goons arrived, filing into the immense dining room and lining up in nice, neat rows. It happened this way most every night before dinner began, and Dakota rushed to the head of the formation, straightening his suit jacket and combing his hair to look presentable.

But then something different happened. Something *unlike* most every other night.

*Dong!* The doorbell squawked. Dakota was unsure whether he should break formation or answer it. If only his parents had a butler... But no, evil people don't cavort with the likes of butlers. Only goons. The problem with goons is that they're not interested in doing things like making dinner or answering doors.

*Dong!* The doorbell screeched again, vibrating Dakota's clenched teeth.

His mother sneered. Soft wrinkles formed on her porcelain-white face as her expression melted to a frown. She glared at Dakota, licked the lipstick from her teeth and sighed. Loudly. Actually, it was more like a hiss.

*Dong!*

"Are you going to answer that, my rotten little pumpkin, or are our guests undeserving of your attention?"

Dakota gulped. *Guests?! He dashed from the dining room, scrambling for the front door before the bell rang again. He unbolted the ten different locks and cracked the door open, gasping for breath. He knew who it was before he looked outside. The smoky smell gave her away.*

“Dakota,” his aunt said in a raspy, deep voice.

Dakota nodded and heaved the door aside. Heavy breaths accompanied the sweat beading on his forehead.

His aunt scowled and poked his stomach. “What are you feeding yourself?” She swiped her thumb across his sweaty forehead. “You look sick. Malnourished. You’ve been eating nothing but breakfast cereal again, haven’t you? I’ve warned you about that. Now look what’s happened! You’re weak and dying for air. You can’t even open the front door without breaking a sweat! Pathetic.”

Dakota bit his tongue and said nothing. He slumped his shoulders and shoved the door back into place.

“Stand up straight,” his aunt said. “Mind your posture. Do you want to end up looking pitiful like that lumbering goblin you fraternize with? Good heavens. Have some respect for your family.” Dakota’s aunt strolled into the foyer, pushing past her nephew and gliding across the runner carpet toward the dining room.

*Dong!*

And so it continued. She wasn’t the last guest of the evening. Next, it was Dakota’s grandfather. Then Duke VonTart. Followed by Doctor Sabbathius, Professor Nimblefingers, Madame D’Angerville, Vladamir Jones, so on, so forth, etc., etc. The entire Council of Evil had

convened... in Dakota's dining room. By eight o'clock, the house was packed with vile, miserable, hungry people.