

# **THE WAREHOUSE TOUR**

A Short Read

K.A. CUMMINS

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## **DEDICATION**

To my husband, thank you for your love and support. I love our life together, and I'm grateful we are on this crazy journey together.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This revised third edition would not be possible without the insight and direction of my editor, Janeen Ippolito. She showed me all the ways to craft the best version of this story.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE TOUR

*Why did I let him talk me into this?*

Jill hated anything scary. Movies, music, clothing, decorations— just walking by the Halloween isle the other day made the hair on her arms stand on end. This time of year, she usually just locked herself in her room after school with a stack of books and a pair of headphones, avoiding all the festivities she could.

Jill's aversion to all things horror was exactly why her boyfriend had dumped her last week.

After a week of mopping and being smothered by mom, Jill needed to get out of the apartment and regain her confidence. Her twin brother, Josh, had convinced her that going with him and his friends, Nick, Ian, Lisa, and Christy, to the Warwick Haunted Warehouse Tour was the perfect baby step. He'd heard the tour was cheesy and predictable. Plus, she'd be with a group of people.

Packed between the four-story-high, brick building and the edge of the wide concrete platform, dozens of people, mostly teenagers, eagerly awaited their turn to enter the building. All of the voices blended into a loud buzzing, drowning out the sounds of the surrounding city.

Jill rubbed her palms together, warming them. Josh and his best friend, Nick, stood in front of her, but she could barely hear them talking. She leaned forward, balancing on the balls of her feet.

"Hey, Nick!" Josh shook the shoulder of the lean, dark-haired boy beside him who was smiling at a petite brunette waiting in line several feet back. "Did you know she worked here?"

"Who?"

"Amber." He pointed to the striking redhead standing to the left of the metal door. She was collecting tickets from the group ahead of them. Radiant in a plum, cashmere sweater and fitted jeans with flowering vines stitched down the sides, Amber's translucent skin glimmered in the light of the full moon.

Biting down on her lower lip, Jill tugged on the hem of her navy sweatshirt. *Having expensive clothing must be nice.*

"You don't know what you are getting yourself into with her. She's clearly... high-maintenance." Nick shook his head. "You sure you wanna go there?"

"Don't you?"

Amber had just transferred into J.F.K High School at the beginning of October. Every guy at school wanted her. They were drawn like bees to a flower, enticed by her golden eyes and lush pink lips. Amber always smelled of warm, toasted honey.

*If only she'd fly on to another flower already.*

Brushing her shoulder-length, blonde hair away from her face, Jill straightened and glanced away. She watched the clouds billow out of the storm drain, vanishing into the atmosphere. The musky smell of flesh clung to the rising steam. Jill shivered and stepped closer to Josh.

Why had she come along?

The line shifted again. Their group moved closer to the door. With each step, Jill's heart pounded harder, forming a knot in her chest. What had she been thinking? She should have said no.

Jill tapped her brother on the shoulder. "Josh, I'm not sure I'm up for this."

"You'll be fine, Jill," he snapped, tearing his eyes away from Amber. "Would it kill you to have a good time? Live a little."

Jill stared at him, a dazed expression on her face. *What's gotten into him?*

He huffed. Annoyance flickered in his blue eyes. Then Josh wrapped an arm around her, softening his tone. "Come on, Jill. Do you really wanna hang with Mom all night? Conquering your fear is exactly what you need to get your confidence back." He smiled. "Slay the beast, bookworm!"

"Next!" The large, muscular man standing next to Amber bellowed. His deep voice was barely audible above the crowd.

Jill pulled back as Josh moved forward. His arm dropped to his side.

She shook her head. "I can't, Josh. Not this time."

"Okay, fine." Josh glanced at his friends, the next group in line. He grunted and looked back at Jill. "Look, if you don't want to go, just wait outside for us. The tour shouldn't take more than twenty minutes."

Jill's shoulders relaxed. "Where should I wait? I don't see where people are coming out."

"Next!" The man called again. He motioned for their group to come forward.

"I don't know." Josh held his hands up, his voice firm. "We gotta go. Just wait here, and we'll find you."

Josh and Nick hurried off with the rest of their friends. Jill stepped to the side of the broad sidewalk. She moved into the shadows beyond the edge of the large crowd waiting to get inside. Josh and Nick disappeared into the warehouse. The metal door slammed shut behind them.

Jill wrapped her arms around herself. *It was just for fun. No big deal. So why couldn't I go in?*

An hour later, only a group of adult professionals remained in line. Jill paced as Amber took their tickets and opened the door for them. Josh and his friends had not returned. Surely, it didn't take so long to go through the whole tour and find their way back to the front of the building. Josh had said it would take only twenty minutes.

She pulled out her phone, texting her brother again.

*Where are you?*

Jill waited a few moments, then sent another text.

*Going around the block. Wait out front for me.*

The warehouse loomed over the whole block. Streetlights invaded the dark on every side except one. Jill turned her back on the dark alley and followed the sidewalk around the building. There wasn't much traffic here at night, aside from the crowd drawn to the venue.

Jill rounded the corner. A few blocks to her right, the interstate overpass crossed over the road. The large windows at the top of the brick building continued, but there were no doors. Only a giant sign, its faded lettering indecipherable.

Swallowing hard, she scanned the sidewalk as she made her way to the next corner, looking for a door. Nothing except trash, and most of it the small paper flyers advertising the haunted tour. Each rectangular glossy image featured the lower half of a woman's face licking blood from her finger. Dark, red lettering on the discarded flyers dotted a path among the sea of lips.

*Did the flyers have to be so graphic?*

A piercing sound jolted her. She gasped, then sighed. It was a semi's horn in the distance.

Where was Josh?

Jill continued to the end of the block and then turned the corner again. At the other end of the brick building, near the alleyway, the dim streetlight illuminated a set of metal doors, much larger than the ones in front. The metal hinges screeched as the doors began to open. Her pace quickened as she saw the people exiting. Was it them— Josh and his friends?

Several middle-aged adults wearing business attire walked towards her. Her shoulders slumped. They had been the last group to enter the building.

"That was terrible," said the man in a navy suit and purple tie. "So cheesy."

The attractive brunette beside him laughed and fired back, "You know you enjoyed it."

Jill hurried past them to the metal doors. She yanked at the handles, but they only clattered against the bolts holding them in place. *The doors must lock automatically from*



*the inside*. She checked her phone and looked around. Still no sign of her brother or his friends. She peered down the alley.

A homeless man curled up in a cardboard box called out to her. "Hey!" Clutching something in a paper bag, he raised his hand towards the building. "Oh, you don't want to go in there, missy."

Realization finally dawned. Jill was alone in a place she shouldn't be, especially late at night.

And this wasn't the first time Josh had disappeared on her.

She backed away from the alley and headed towards the front of the building. Stabbing her phone's touch screen with her thumbs, she pulled up the on-demand ride app as she went.

Fifteen minutes later, a yellow muscle car pulled up to the curb. A decal matching the on-demand ride app marked it. She got in the car and sent a final text message.

*Have fun with your friends, Jerk!*