

CHAPTER ONE

Wind whipped through the ancient live oaks that hung low over Bayou Lafourche. The sky turned a deep purple as ominous clouds swept over the parish. The weatherman had predicted thunderstorms around four p.m., and his forecast was right on the money. Fat drops fell, slowly at first, then increasing in speed and intensity until the heavens opened up.

Marguey Slattery poled her pirogue toward the bank. Two hours ago when she put in, the weather had been perfect. Her dad had warned her to be back by three, but she'd lost track of time as she floated past the old plantation homes that fronted the bayou. Now it was too late — she'd have to ride out the storm under one of the massive old oaks.

She dug the pole into the bottom, turning the pirogue to reach a branch and tie off. Marguey wasn't certain where she was. Some distance from the river stood a house she hadn't seen before. Even in the gloom, no lights shone in the windows. The house looked abandoned.

Daddy's gonna be mad. I'm gonna get the lecture of my life. Maybe even a whipping.

Just a few miles from home she might have tried going back, but she couldn't risk it in the powerful rainstorm.

Better for Daddy to be mad than for me to drown in the bayou.

More drenched by the minute, Marguey sat in the pirogue and pulled her straw hat down low. It did little more than filter the raindrops, but that helped. She looked at the old house again and thought she saw something. Was someone standing on the lawn? She dug out the binoculars she'd brought along for bird-watching, wiped down the lenses, and looked.

She did see someone. A child younger than Marguey in a black dress stood in the yard. There was a hood over her head so she wouldn't get wet. She raised her hand.

She's — she's waving at me! How does she know I'm here, as dark as it is here in these trees? Is someone really there?

Marguey stopped to clear the lenses again and looked. Now the girl stood halfway down the yard, standing between the house and the pirogue.

How did she move that quickly?

Her face was hidden by the hood, but the howling wind made a sound like words. She beckoned to Marguey, and the wind said, "Come play with me."

This is crazy! She's out in the pouring rain but doesn't seem to notice. Who is she? What's going on?

Marguey shouted, "I can't come up there. It's storming!"

The binoculars fell onto the floor of the pirogue. Marguey strained to get them, and when she sat upright again, she cried out.

The girl stood on the bank not three feet away, her face dark inside the hood. She — or perhaps the wind — said, “Come play with me.”

Marguey fumbled with the rope, trying to untie it. Being out on the bayou in a storm was a lot less scary than being right here. As she fumbled with the knot, the girl moved again. Now they were close enough to touch each other. A sudden, powerful gust of wind blew the girl’s hood back, and Marguey realized that tying off here had been a huge mistake.

The figure standing in front of her had no head.

The wind spoke. “Don’t leave. I want you to play with me.”

- Excerpt From: Bill Thompson. “The Proctor Hall Horror