

# Q.L. Pearce – Prose

Excerpt from *Spine Chillers*

## Prom Date

The Roller Grille was the real deal. An authentic drive-in restaurant with car hops on roller skates delivering trays of burgers and fries to people parked outside. It had been in business for decades. Other than a fresh coat of paint now and then it hadn't changed from the day it opened.

Tyler, Andy and Jacob threaded around the cars and pushed through the glass doors to the diner. A hostess dressed in a fuzzy sweater and a poodle skirt guided customers to booths covered in red vinyl. A candy-colored jukebox blared from a corner. The laughter and chatter of the crowd was louder than the music. Tyler noticed Shay jammed into a booth with her friends. He raised a hand in greeting but she ignored him.

Andy pointed to the long soda fountain. "There's room over there." Tyler nodded and they each claimed a stool.

"What'll it be?" Randy, the soda jerk adjusted his black bow tie and gave them a toothy grin. The boys ordered shakes.

Andy whirled around once on his stool and stopped to face Jacob. "So do they have any place like this in Phoenix?"

"No. This is pretty cool." He looked around and his eye settled on a wall of photographs. "Who are those people?"

"Those are the prom kings and queens from the high school," Tyler answered.

"Wow there's like a hundred of them. What's the deal with those two?" Jacob pointed to a black and white photo that was larger than the rest.

Tyler slipped into telling the story that everyone in town knew by heart. "That's Johnny Tonnarro and his girlfriend, Samantha. He was like a rock star a long time ago. He got killed in an accident off Yetter Point."

“It was a foggy night. He drove his car off the cliff and got squished like a pancake,” Andy added. “His girlfriend waited for hours in the cold for him to show up. She was all dressed for the prom and crying like a baby.”

Jacob gazed at Samantha’s sweet face. “That’s sad. What happened to her?”

Tyler lowered his voice for effect. “She drowned a year later on the anniversary of the accident. She was down on the jetty throwing flowers out into the ocean, those stinky white ones...gardenias. A wave swept her off the rock. Some people say they’ve seen her.”

“Seen her? What do you mean?”

Andy took up the story again. “Every year around this time her ghost waits out on Thorne Road near Highway One for Johnny to pick her up. Just standing there crying.”

Randy placed the shakes in front of the boys and joined in. “This time of year the evenings are usually foggy,” “They say she waits just off the edge of the road in the mist - lavender gown, white gloves, and gardenias in her long, blonde hair.”

Jacob’s mouth dropped open and his eyes grew wide. “Really? A real ghost? You’ve seen her?”

Taylor and Andy couldn’t hold back their laughter. “Nobody’s seen her,” Andy snickered. “It’s all made up. Not the accident part but the ghost part.”

Jacob frowned. “So Samantha didn’t really die?”

“Oh, yeah. She died alright. She drowned. But only little kids and tourists swallow the ghost story. You have to be a real lamebrain to believe it. Last year the town newspaper offered a ten thousand dollar reward for anybody who could get a photograph of her. There were a lot of fakes but nobody’s earned the money yet.”

Still grinning, Tyler turned to take a sip of his milkshake and caught a glimpse of Shay. She was staring toward the entrance. If looks could kill, her eyes were lethal weapons. Tyler followed her gaze.

“Uh oh,” he whispered and his smile faded. His brother was holding the door open for Anilla Jacoby, Shay’s arch-enemy. Anilla beamed up at Lane and slipped her arm through his. The couple slid into a booth. Shay stood and stormed toward the door without looking at them.

“This isn’t good,” Tyler muttered.

A moment later his phone beeped. He read the text. *Come outside now. We need to talk.* Shay was waiting for him as he pushed open the door.

“I thought I would die of embarrassment. I can’t believe he would show up here in front of everyone with that airhead hanging on him like that. Now I know why he’s been avoiding me.” She turned on Tyler. “How long has this been going on?”

“Don’t ask me. This is the first time I’ve seen him with Anilla.”

“He needs to pay a price for humiliating me like that. I want to embarrass him in front of all of his friends!”

Tyler shifted nervously. “Shay I don’t want to...”

“Think of something!”

“Look, Shay. Maybe you should just let it go. He’s my brother. I can’t ...”

“I’m not going to let this go, Tyler.” She leaned in and growled. “You’re with me or against me. And trust me, if you want to survive high school you don’t want to be against me. I can make your life miserable.” Shay turned and stomped away.

Excerpt from *Spine Chillers*, by Q.L. Pearce

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