

Black Balloons  
By, Emily H.

Chapter 1

Strangers in the park . . .  
I never really thought of how little I listened to her . . .  
How big of a mistake that was . . .

“Earth to Piper!” Courtney cried. “We can’t be late!”

“We have two more hours till 1<sup>st</sup> period.”

I don’t know why I bother to practically kill myself just so she can get that ‘extra gym credit’ by walking to school! She should know that there is something that I call extra sleep time but she calls it get ahead while you still can time. Mine is way more fun to say and to do. She also likes to brag about the fact that there is no possible way she could ever be late or miss a class! One day she had the flu and she came to school wearing a gas mask, and oddly the teachers didn’t complain! It took me the longest time to realize I was staring at a random guy who doesn’t go to our school. He stared back and before I knew what I was doing, I was dragging Courtney towards him. A gentle smile cut across his face as we got closer. My head would normally be screaming at me to turn back, but Courtney beat me to it, and she was all I could hear. No sounds of cars on the road making screech noises every time they stopped. It was the same thing over and over.

“Piper, why are you going there? Why am I coming too? Who is that? Is that your BOYFRIEND???”

None of the questions were answered. All I could do was walk when I finally got to the other side of the street where he stood. He seemed 15 feet tall! He smiled and began to say something, but on the next street there was a OH-NO!

“Is that a CLOTHES STORE?” Courtney screamed.

Before I could protest, we were flying down the street headed straight for the store. When we got to the store, Courtney was celebrating her find, and in the broad moment I glanced back at the man who now seemed as if he was horrified and furious at the same time. And it was all directed at Courtney. When he saw me looking, he softened his gaze and almost

looked as if he was pleading. When I turned to Courtney, she was no longer celebrating her victory. Instead she was returning only more of a deep and dark scowl. It didn't look like something that Courtney would do. She always looked clueless but not now. She looked furious with the man and after about 2 minutes of just standing and staring, she turned to me and said, "How about we stay away from creepy strangers, ok"

The way she looked at me confused me. This was not Courtney. This was not my BFF that had been by my side my whole life. Courtney was too happy to act like this.

"When someone asks a question, it's polite to answer, and I have asked a question, so you will now answer the question to be polite!"

A fake smile almost like the crazy man's smile was starting to show on her face. "Y-yeah no more creeps for me."

Darn that stutter. I was just trying to mask the pure terror that obviously was very visible! "OK, then!"

The dumbness flowed back into her expression. "now how about a new outfit to with these boots?"

## Chapter 2 Giggles, Laughs and Lies

"What about this dress?" asked Courtney. "I can't tell if it will make me look fat or like a bat." A pitiful chuckle fell out.

I couldn't even stay scared or mad or just plain frustrated with her, and she knew it too. She smiled and sat down next to me and hugged my arm.

"Hey sorry I freaked out like that," Courtney said with a hint of desperation. "Stranger danger, right?" A fake giggle erupted from her, and she must have noticed it too because she pounced from the bench and cleared her throat. "I think I'll go try on another dress," she announced as she skipped out of the room.

"Hey!" I called after her. She turned and peered back at me. "Yes," I announced with an intended giggle that sounded like a squirrel. It does make you look like a bat."

A big sarcastic frown molded its way onto her face, and she jokingly said, “Boy, aren’t I lucky to have such a truthful friend!”

### Chapter 3 Lies and Final Friends . . .

The final exam was 5 months away and Courtney was already freaked. “It’s never wrong to be prepared early.” She would chant as she pranced around the room like she had finally lost her mind. “We will see that your cute face is so much better than a month ago, and I have to go back and forth to be able to see my tweets from the beginning of the year of my favorite song.” She would chant over and over again and again and again.

“What does that even mean?” The words spilling out like a river. I didn’t even once think of the response I should even expect.

My morning vocals that are vital for my day of talking all the time,” she said with an offensive grin. “You think it’s easy to be the talkative one. Newsflash. It’s not. You won’t understand until you try to come up with something quirky and cute to say all the time,” she said with distinctive pride.

“As if it actually matters,” I said with an oddly awkward expression on my face, and with that came a loud smash like someone had shot a gun. When I turned back to Courtney, she had a dumbfounded look on her face. It was as if she was the most confused and pained she could possibly be. When she saw me looking, she tried to say something but even a sound came from her. All I could make out of what she said was, “I lost track of time . . .” She collapsed, and the world started spinning as I watched my best friend take her last breath and fall limp as blood pooled around her head and everything went black.

### Chapter 4 Burns . . .

My head hurt from the sensation of trying to pry away the truth. Courtney was dead. The thought made my heart plummet into my stomach. The feeling of losing my best friend in about one second made me want to shrink away. When I finally managed to pry open my eyes,

what I saw nearly killed me. Blood. Blood was everywhere. I couldn't stop the tears. It was like a broken fountain never to stop spraying water. And fire. Oh please not the fire. Screams could be heard from outside. Sirens could be heard from a distance. I had to get out. I was supposed to get out, but there was Courtney on the ground. I couldn't leave her, right? All of a sudden, hands wrapped around my neck. A loud choke erupted from my throat causing all the air in my lungs to be released. I struggled to free myself from the strangling grip, but it was useless and hopeless. I would end up just like Courtney.

Cold.

Alone.

Dead.

No! I can't die. Not like this. Not right now. Not while Courtney is in this condition. She always told me to push on, and that's exactly what I had to do. I had no other choice but to grasp the hands that choked me and dig my nails into their skin. And I didn't stop until I was released. I took in a choked breath that was relieving. One last look at Courtney's lifeless body that lay perfectly still like she never could. Then I heard the snap of the safety lock on a gun unlatch. As I turned to the noise, there was the man from the park, and he had the gun pointed at my head. Before he pulled the trigger, he said, "I always knew this would make for a fun game." A psychotic grin drew itself on his face. He pulled the trigger. All I saw were black balloons.