

# In Came In Through The Bathroom Window

Young Adult

## Chapter 1

Isabelle knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that today was going to be the worst day of her life. She was 19 years old and expected to live to 90, yet she knew this fact would remain a constant. Today was the day her dog was eaten by a carpet snake. Right her, in her bedroom, in front of her eyes. A huge carpet snake just swallowed Cuddles whole, the lump being rhythmically processed as it passed down the snake's body.

Isabelle screamed.

Although frozen to the spot, incapable of moving, she could still scream.

She continued to scream, hoping a neighbor may come to her rescue, slice the snake open and resuscitate her little dog.

No-one did.

The story of her life, really. Her parents were always busy and rarely at home. When they were they would pick on her, like kids at school used to, always. She was the kid everyone liked to bully. That's how Cuddles came into her life. Her dad had been going on, like he always did, about the number of fluffy toys she kept in her bedroom – she had hundreds. Fluffy toys lined up along the bookshelves instead of books. She had baskets and trays and boxes filled with fluffy toys and at least 30 decorate her bed. They were rotated daily so Isabelle could enjoy every one.

The toys infuriated her father who was quite unsympathetic of her fluff fetish, and puzzled her mother who though posters of pop stars were far more appropriate for a female teenager. Yet Isabelle kept buying toys with every spare cent she earned or was given.

One day her father barged into her room and, without a single word, bundled all her toys into three huge garbage bags and drove away.

'You're 17, love,' her mother said, 'far too old for all that fluffy rubbish. Get over it.'

Isabelle was still sobbing hysterically when her father returned, carrying a tiny, white fluffy bundle. 'This is the real thing,' her father said. 'You have to look after him properly, and that means paying all the vet bills. You need to grow up a bit. His name is George.'

Isabelle immediately renamed him Cuddles and doted on her dog. He wasn't a particularly nice dog, she never did manage to house train him, and to others he had no endearing qualities at all. But Isabelle loved her dog to distraction. She covered her bedroom carpet with wall to wall plastic sheeting, kept several unused litter trays under her bed and researched the internet for the nutritional needs of exceptional dogs. She shopped and cooked for little Cuddles, chopping his food finely – he had a very delicate digestion – and fed him gently by hand several times a day. He shared her shower every night where he was massaged carefully with doggy shampoo, and great care was taken that Cuddles didn't get the tiniest bubble in his eyes. Unfortunately the tiniest bubble in Cuddles' poppy little eyes resulted in a nasty nip from Cuddles' sharp little crocodile teeth. In fact any misdemeanor of Isabelle's resulted in a nasty nip from Cuddles' sharp little crocodile teeth.

When Cuddles tried his nipping trick on Isabelle's dad he found himself crumpled at the bottom of the steps with a very sore rear end. Isabelle shrieked in despair, threatening the police, the RSPCA, Sixty Minutes and even murder.

'Grow up,' said her dad.

She received the same response from her mother who had just whacked Cuddles on his nose for peeing on her shoes.

The internet was again researched to provide information on obedience training for exceptional dogs. Unfortunately there was no information about discouraging dogs from attacking and killing the neighbour's chooks, and Isabelle had to replace six laying hens before deciding to muzzle Cuddles. She was supremely happy. And then the snake ate the dog.

Isabelle stopped screaming. She realized the snake had come in through the bathroom window, so she shut it. A strange steely glint appeared in her grey eyes as they fixed on the snake. Her hands suddenly clenched, and a shudder ran through her from head to toe.

Her father hated snakes.

*(Nina Henderson)*

## Chapter 2

The snake watched Isabelle with satisfied, sluggish eyes. Isabelle studied the Cuddles sized bulge a third of the way down the shiny olive and cream body, intricately patterned with light and dark bands, and surmised that the snake would not be in need of a feed for a number of weeks.

She bent down and cautiously fingered the tip of the tail and gave it a tug. It didn't seem to bother the snake in the least, who only seemed to smile contentedly up at her, like her father did after filling his already oversized gut with a Sunday roast. She gripped tighter, and tugged harder. But the reptile didn't seem to even have the energy to coil away. So she pulled, and pulled and pulled, until she had dragged the 3 metre long snake across her bedroom floor and out into the carpeted hallway.

Isabelle eyed her parents' bedroom door. She eyed the entrance to the living room. She eyed the doorway to the kitchen. She eyed the door that led into the laundry and the one that led into the carport – and had an idea.

Draping the tail over her shoulder, she used every muscle to lug the snake down the hall and into the carport.

Of course the Nissan X Trail wasn't there because it was out with her parents, trawling shops for another unnecessary stone carving, or plant pot, or water feature for the recently landscaped garden her parent's had paid megabucks for. Isabelle wanted a swimming pool or even a new outdoor plasma screen TV, but no, they went with fake grass, a gazebo, a cactus the size of the incredible hulk, and a truckload of boulders. How boring was that?

Isabelle walked over to a storage cupboard, lifted out her fathers golf caddy, emptied it of half of the golf sticks and began to stuff the snake inside. If her father hated snakes, then he was definitely going to go out of his freakin' mind when he next played a round of golf and disturbed a slumbering reptile. Isabelle wished she could be there when he got the surprise of his life, but knew that expecting an invitation to accompany her father to the golf course had about the same chance as being asked out on a date by Liam Hemsworth – nil.

Isabelle soon realized that this task was quite a difficult one: (a) because the snake was ever so long and uncooperative, and (b) because the dog sized lump kept getting wedged. Isabelle had to use both hands and a foot to push poor snake-wrapped Cuddles through the opening. In doing so, the snake got either overly excited or extremely stressed and relieved itself of the remainder of its last meal, by poo-ing a disgusting yellow coloured paste all over the cement floor. It looked revolting and smelt even worse.

When she'd stuffed the snake in as best she could, and heaved the caddy back into the cupboard, she thought about cleaning up the sticky, yellow mess and then had another idea.

She raced back into the house, went into her parents' bedroom and returned with the pump bottle of face moisturizer her mother used every night. Pumping out and discarding the rose scented white mixture, Isabelle spooned dollops of stinking snake poo into the bottle and replaced the pump lid.

Payback!

Isabelle was heading back to her room, when she heard a knock on the front door. She frowned. Who could be visiting? One of her parents' boring old friends? She went to the door and opened it slowly.

'Hi Izzy,' said a skinny boy, with wild, black hair. He was about her age and his name was Rhys. He lived next door, and they'd gone to school together – unfortunately.

She grimaced. 'What do you want?'

He scowled. 'I came for my snake.'

Isabelle felt her heart stop beating. 'Your what?'

'My pet python. Sylvester. I know he's here. I heard you screaming.'

'I . . . ah . . . was watching a horror movie.'

He shook his head. 'No you weren't. I saw you put him into your dad's golf bag.'

She squinted. 'How?'

'There's a window in there. If you want to scare your dad, then that's okay with me. On one condition.'

Isabelle folded her arms across her chest. 'And what might that be?'

'Help me get rid of the alien that's squatting in my apartment and refuses to leave.'

*(Vicki Stevens)*

### Chapter 3

Isabelle shrugged coolly. 'I have to get the key.'

Rhys waited until she was outside. She slammed the door shut and they walked across to his apartment. Inwardly, she was fuming. If he hadn't let his snake out, she'd still have Cuddles. Only the determination to get back at her father stopped her from telling Rhys to get lost.

The alien was there, alright, squatting in a corner of Rhys' room. It had hold of the doona from his unmade bed and was clinging to it as if its life depended upon it. It gazed up at Rhys fearfully as he glared at the creature. 'I want it out of here', he demanded fretfully. Isabelle sneered at him 'It won't hurt you, you wuss'.

She bent down for a closer look. It was a funny little creature, very tiny, with big popping eyes and very white skin. She stretched her hand out to touch it and it opened its mouth in a sort of smile, showing a mouth full of sharp little crocodile teeth. Slowly it raised its arm and she felt a rough texture as it slipped its strange little hand into hers.

Isabelle sank down beside the alien and it crawled trustingly into her lap. She stroked its rough little head and it whined contentedly, just like Cuddles in a good moment.

She had an idea! She could replace Cuddles with this alien. Mum and Dad would never know, if she kept it hidden. Anyway they were always too busy to notice what she was doing. She grinned to herself at the thought of her mum massaging her face with snake poo and how her dad would react when he found the snake.

'I'll look after this,' she told Rhys, 'as long as I can keep your snake'. Rhys hesitated but knew he didn't have much choice. 'Good luck', he said mockingly.

Isabelle wrapped the alien in her jacket and made her way to her front door, letting herself in carefully and slipping into her room quickly in case her parents returned. She put the creature in Cuddles' basket and covered it with a towel, before speeding to the kitchen to cook its food. When she returned it was sound asleep with the towel clutched in its hand. It looked cute and Isabelle had a feeling she was going to love it. She would even call it Cuddles.

She heard the purr of the Nissan X trail in the carport and quickly turned out her light. Her parents passed right by her room without opening the door. 'Typical', she thought, but this time she didn't feel neglected. She switched her light back on and gently fed the new Cuddles its dinner.

The next morning there was a puddle in the litter tray and the bright eyed little creature was gazing up at her as she woke. At least it was toilet trained. 'But how can I get away with this?' she muttered. 'Cuddles used to follow me wherever I went but this new Cuddles can't. I'll have to leave it in here and sneak it out for walks'.

Satisfied that this was all going to work she wandered out into the kitchen, closing her bedroom door carefully behind her. Her mother was there, rubbing her face tenderly. Ugly blotches adorned her cheeks and her eyes were swollen into narrow slits. 'I don't understand,' she said, 'I've been using that moisturiser for years and I've never had any trouble with it. Maybe it's gone off. And it's got such a foul smell. Anyway I'm throwing it out. I'll never buy that brand again.'

Isabelle turned her face away so her mother would not see her delighted smile. 'You look awful, Mum', she said gleefully.

'A little bit of sympathy might be in order, Isabelle,' said her mother sharply.

'Oh, Mum, I do feel sorry for you. Your face looks gross.' She filled her bowl with cereal, added milk and headed back to her bedroom.

Cuddles shared her cereal, screwing up its face until it got used to the taste. Isabelle stared at it, wondering for the first time how it had got to be in Rhys' apartment. 'Where had it come from, why was it here, did anyone miss it?' The questions which tumbled about in her mind had no answer.

She turned on her television set, which intrigued Cuddles who looked at the tiny box with inquisitive eyes, turning its head from side to side as it gazed intently at the screen. It responded to the sounds from the tv with tiny squeaks and she hoped they couldn't be heard outside the room.

The program was interrupted with breaking news about a car accident. Isabelle took little notice as she continued to toss her questions about in her head. But when the news reader continued with -

*...little light can be cast on the UFO discovered in Dunstan yesterday. Scientists confirm that a lifeform has been on the UFO but have no information on its whereabouts. A search is being conducted in the parks nearby and people are asked to keep a lookout for anything unusual...*

- she had at least one answer to her questions. However, she didn't care where Cuddles had come from or why it was here. She was keeping it!

She took the empty bowl to the kitchen where her father was eating his breakfast. 'You're going to have to help your mother today, Isabelle. She's not at all well and I won't be here'.

'Where are you going?'

'Golf', he said shortly.

Isabelle thought this was a good time to make herself scarce so she wrapped Cuddles in her jacket and opened the front door. Rhys stood there, about to knock. He clutched her arm and she recoiled in revulsion. 'Did you hear about the UFO?' he whispered.

'Yes. What about it?'

'You've got to hand that alien in, Izzy. We'll get into trouble if you don't.'

'So? Who's gonna know it's here?' she demanded stridently, clutching Cuddles under the jacket possessively.

'The cops will. They know everything.' His voice was shrill. 'You've got two secrets now, Izzy. The alien and the snake in your dad's bag,' he added nastily.

'What's with the raised voices? What's going on, you two?' Dad's voice behind her felt like an icy wind blowing over her shoulders.

*(Helen Goleby)*

## Chapter 4

Before Isabelle knew it, he had caught up to them, blocking their way his eyes menacing and up close in their space, way to close for comfort. Rhys looked sheepishly at Izzy's dad and then quickly diverted his eyes to the ground where he started to kick invisible dirt. But he was not that easily perturbed, he knew for sure that these kids were up to something and he be damned if he was walking away without knowing what they were up to. "Ok what's all the yelling about?" he said. Izzy had seen this steely glaze descend over her father eyes before, he was like a Lion about to pounce on his prey, the smell of their fear heightening his other senses. She had to come up with something and super-fast. "Answer me son, what are you doing here, fighting my daughter, what trouble have you got her into?"

Before Rhys could open his mouth Isabelle said, "We weren't fighting, we just had a difference of opinion that's all," and quickly added "You see we have been paired up to do a science project together Dad, that's all. Geez, I thought you'd be happy," she said indignantly. With a touch of bravado, she stared at him with her chin held high.

"Yeah well what's this so called science project about then?"

Rhys pipped up in an excited higher pitched tone. "ETs Mr Johnson," Then fumbled slightly and said, 'Ummm ... I mean Extra Terrestrials.

"Yes," Izzy said, "because of the UFO discovered at Dunstan, the teacher thought it would make a good assignment.'

Rhys and Izzy exchanged tentative glances as they could see that he was backing down a bit, you could see him churning it over in his what Isabelle like to refer to as his pea brain.

The silence seemed to last for an eternity and was interrupted by cuddles making little squeaky noises in her jacket. Rhys started coughing uncontrollably to divert his attention. Luckily Isabelle's Dad had a short attention span and cuddles stopped making noises, much to their relief.

"We were thinking of going over to the crash site to take some pictures," added Izzy to complete the scenario.

This pushed him over the edge and he conceded defeat. "Yeah, well, no monkey business and I want to see the pictures and be back home by five. Your mother isn't well, so you can make yourself useful for a change." He started to walk away much to their relief, but then stopped turned around and said, "Do you want a lift?"

“No thanks, Dad. I still have to find the camera. Don’t want to make you late for golf. We will just walk.”

“Walk, did you say walk! Well I’ll be bugged, now I’ve heard everything. The girl who can’t walk to the clothesline, is gunna walk 3ks in the stinking heat? First she’s taking an interest in school work, with a boy no less, and then she is taking up walking. Well this has been quite a day,” he bellowed and little did he know, it was only the beginning.

They watched transfixed, as he swung open the door of the Nissan, threw himself in, and roared up the road.

All was going well, and their laboured breathing was just getting back to normal. But just when they thought they were in the clear the Xtrail started jerking slightly, as if the person driving was drunk. But this was no drunk in the car; the only inhabitants of the vehicle were Izzy’s Dad and Sylvester the snake.

Then to their horror it started veering to the other side of the road where an oncoming truck was fast approaching. Everything was happening in slow motion, yet it was only nanoseconds before the truck would crush the vehicle. Not even the Xtrail with its sleek and slender design, superior braking system and stop/start technology could divert the collision. With a blink of Izzy’s eyes the Nissan, with her Dad and Sylvester, was sucked under the truck and loudly dragged a 100 meters before coming to a final, fiery standstill.

Before they could comprehend what had happened. they were interrupted by an ominous sound hovering above them. The air seemed to be filled with electricity and Cuddles started to squirm violently in Isabelle’s arms.

*(Tina Pleschka)*

## Chapter 5

The coroner's finding was death by misadventure. Isabelle's father was killed instantly. The truck driver was unharmed. Apparently, Isabelle's father had been distracted by the Channel 9 helicopter hovering nearby.

Rhys and Isabelle had witnessed the horrific smash. Isabelle had dropped the alien wrapped in her old denim jacket and rushed to the smoking wreck of her father's car. It contained no golf bag, just her father in several pieces.

"Good one, Rhys," she mouthed.

"Thanks," he mouthed back before Isabelle erupted into hysterical weeping and wailing as the Channel 9 helicopter mob arrived.

They were still emotional as they explained to the police their last strange interactions with Isabelle's father; how he was confused and irrational under the misapprehension they were still at school, doing a science assignment together. Rhys was actually in his third year of a mechanical apprenticeship, Isabelle in her second year of a hairdresser's apprenticeship. They both drove cars.

Isabelle's father also told them he was on his way to golf, which he played every Saturday morning, rain, hail or shine. Today was Thursday, a work day. No one played golf on Thursday.

Isabelle was left alone with her distraught mother, Janice.

"One down, one to go," thought Isabelle.

Janice was distraught because she thought her face was falling off. A series of tests had revealed a severe allergic reaction to antibiotics, and not a reaction to her daily moisturiser (or its substitute.) The antibiotics were unused ones Isabelle's father had taken for an ingrown toenail infection. Janice had taken them to avoid a sinus infection, with an extremely unpleasant result.

Her mother was sobbing noisily as Isabelle packed her bag.

"Please don't go, possum. Don't leave me now."

"I'm moving in with Rhys, Mum," said Isabelle. "Don't put a guilt trip on me. I've known you've wanted to get rid of me since I was 10."

"That was your father, not me!"

"You just want me to cook, and wash, and clean," hissed Isabelle. "I'm leaving now."

Which she did. She walked next door to Rhys' place and found him stiff and cold on the kitchen floor with Sylvester still coiled tightly around him. Sylvester was also dead.

An autopsy revealed Rhys had been suffocated, possibly by a python. The python's cause of death was unknown, the probable cause was the ingestion of 17 golf balls.

And so it was that Isabelle lived with her mother for another 7 years. She acquired two white fluffy dogs named Snuggle Pot and Cuddle Pie upon which she lavished care and affection. They were horrid dogs; smelly, yappy and cranky.

She spent many hours exploring possible ways of disposing of her mother. Janice's skin condition had become chronic, and no skin specialist could explain why, or provide a remedy. Janice's disposition matched her skin, and she tried to make Isabelle's life as miserable as possible.

Isabelle's life, however, was amazing. Her father had left her a small gratuity, which she used to enter a partnership with her boss when she completed her apprenticeship. Women, and men, flocked to Isabelle for haircuts, perms, foils and colours and the business expanded. It was almost uncanny. Within 5 years Isabelle had opened four more hair care establishments, was producing an exclusive hair care range, and was taking bookings three months in advance.

She was lucky in business though unlucky in love, her friends frequently told her. Rhys had been special, but he was dead. She had many love affairs, some fun, some very special, but they all ended the same way - abruptly. Steven was transferred to Perth overnight; Jono drowned in a tragic surfing accident; Patrick's father died, forcing Patrick to return to the family property in western Victoria; and lastly there was Chris. She and Chris couldn't keep away from each other and were planning to move in together. All was wonderful until the night he disappeared, leaving behind only one word "sorry" in a text message.

That night Isabelle went home and murdered her mother.

Her two dogs Snuggle Pot and Cuddle Pie were later found dead on her bed, each strangled by a sleeve of an old denim jacket.

Isabelle was never seen again.

*(Nina Henderson)*