

## Pennywise the Dancing Clown

### — Flint water crisis

In the beginning, I didn't care about the clumps of hair falling from my head, or the chunks of rash that slowly crept on my back. When my nanny Claudia inquired, I shrugged and said, "It's probably because I worked too hard. It's normal."

Claudia told me that under the Flint River which flows through our neighborhood, lives Pennywise the Dancing Clown. She was leaving for New Hampshire next month and she had advised my parents to move, but they weren't taking her seriously.

"So we drink the same water as Pennywise?" I asked.

"Haven't you noticed the bitter iron taste in the water?"

"Don't think too much," I said. I saw the unease in her eyes, but I thought she was paranoid. Also, I believed that I was clever enough not to be lured into the sewer by Pennywise.

However, a few days later, my sister and two brothers went missing, until the police found their limbs at the neighborhood's main drain on a rainy day.

The police said they died of pranks that went too far. But a name lingered in my mind: Pennywise, although I hadn't catch a trace of him.

In the following years, I still never met a clown that tempted me into the water.

However, I constantly read phrases like "high levels of lead found in children's blood," "excessive corrosion of the pipes," and "Flint leaders insisted the water is safe" in the Association Press news. Meanwhile, my occasional dizziness and nausea was getting more frequent.

I had an unsettling feeling that I, as well as many children in the city, were poisoned - not by a clown's phantom, but by a government that insisted the steady development of the city's economy benefited from their sense of saving. They were proud that they never spent a cent where it shouldn't.

"Things don't look good in Flint," as the neighbors put it. The government was going to bankrupt themselves because of their lack of funds. Their insistence that using aged, corroded water pipes could protect the city's economy from falling too fast was in turn crushing it. More and more of my capable neighbors began to move out of Michigan, but the unlucky ones had to stay.

I filed several complaints. After one and a half months, finally an officer noticed them and gave me a call. "There aren't any problems, ma'am." He sounded extremely calm. "The water here is clean. It's just normal, colorless water. How can it poison anyone? Don't be ridiculous."

"But people are dying! A lot of schools are shut down! There must be something we can do," I said anxiously. "Don't you care about lives? Why can't you buy actual water filters and extract water from Detroit? Or replace the poisonous service pipes all over the city? It shouldn't be too costly and people will be healthy again."

"It won't be costly?" The officer sneered. "I apologize for your ignorance, ma'am. Installing water filters or implementing new pipes will cost two thirds of our government funds. And as far as I'm concerned, there isn't any problem. People are not dying. You must be delusional, ma'am, I can dial you a shrink if you want."

I hung up the phone furiously. Of course they wouldn't listen to a child and they wouldn't choose to prioritize the environment, but maybe...just maybe...it wasn't as horrible as I thought. Was I just being pessimistic?

On a summer afternoon when I was thirteen, I was unusually moody and kept throwing the blackened dart onto the dartboard in my room. It must've been 87 degrees outside as I shot a quick glance at the lucid window.

Suddenly, a faint odor of bourbon enveloped me. And it became stronger, banging my head and making my thoughts jumbled.

A knife...there was an invisible knife stabbing straight through my stomach like the way I threw my dart. The pain took over me. It felt like my intestines could fall out of my belly any minute.

I was soaked in sweat. Is this what death feel like? My time was close. That was when I thought of Pennywise and Claudia again. I dialed her number, the first time in six years.

"I know you couldn't do much about it," I said. "I just want to say sorry, I should have listened to you. Pennywise is real."

"Pennywise came to find you? Poor baby..." she said.

"It's the polluted water. Pennywise is another name for lead," I replied. I could barely breathe.

"The FDA just approved a breakthrough drug," she sobbed. "If you could wait till..."

"It's too late," I closed my eyes. "I'm about to..."

Die of drinking water."

## Works Cited

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