

Tommy was a normal boy who loved hanging out with friends and going to movies, just like any other kid. He enjoyed his youth to the fullest.

Everything changed when World War Three broke out. Everyone who was too young to join the fight, mainly children, was evacuated from the big cities. Since the army decided who went where, Tommy was separated from his brothers and sister, and even though he was separated from his family, there was some good news! He was sent somewhere with his best friend Steve. During the long train ride, the boys had a hard time thinking about their families who they'd left behind at home, not knowing if they would ever see them again.

It was a long train ride but luckily they could find some comfort in each other. The train kept getting emptier, little by little, until the two friends were dropped off on the last platform. A platform that looked like no one had been there in ages. There were cobwebs everywhere and inside of the train station there was such a thick layer of dust that the items under it were almost unrecognisable. The boys started making their way off the platform, making sure to be careful so they could explore the area surrounding it. There were big clusters of trees all around them and there wasn't a single building in sight. They couldn't hear the sound of a single car, they really were in the middle of nowhere. All the roads they could see were all small dirt roads.

After about half an hour of waiting they could hear the noise of wooden wheels rolling on one of the makeshift roads. To their surprise, they saw how an old strict-looking woman was starting to approach the platform in an old wooden carriage pulled by two strong black horses. The carriage stopped next to the boys and the strict-looking woman asked them for their names. Both of the boys introduced themselves as Tommy and Steve while making sure they got a good look at the woman. She was wearing a long black dress, a big hat and a pair of black heels. Her wrinkles only added to the strict look on her face. After she seemed to confirm that they were indeed the boys she was sent to pick up, she invited them to get on the carriage. When the boys got on and found a seat in the carriage it started to move towards their new, temporary home. They rode past hills and rivers, bushes and trees. Everywhere they looked they saw a beautiful natural landscape.

After a long and bumpy ride in the carriage, they arrived at a huge mansion. Steve said, "This isn't a house, it's a whole-ass castle!" The woman pulled up the corner of her mouth not more than a millimetre, something Tommy thought had to pass as a smile. When the carriage came to a stop the woman asked the boys to get out of the carriage, which they did. Together all of them entered the mansion. The woman turned to the boys and spoke, "I want you two to be on your best behaviour, the professor is not used to having children around."

## THE PROFESSOR

The entrance hall was absolutely massive. Along all of the walls, there were rows of medieval-looking armour that all pointed to the middle of the room. A big dark oak wooden staircase went up to the first floor. Up there the boys saw what had to be at least ten doors and a couple of passages that looked like they led the way to a maze of even more confusing halls. Downstairs there was a big red carpet that looked so worn down it must have been there for ages. On the ground floor, the boys saw another maze of passage-ways and dozens of doors.

The woman gave them a tour of the mansion, telling the boys which rooms they could and couldn't enter. The halls were lit by a mix of candles and lamps. The walls were dark, and every now and then there was a painting of an old person they didn't recognise.

When they got to the door that led to the kitchen, they could smell the sweet scent of hot chocolate. The woman opened the door and they saw an old man stirring something in a huge pot. The man had a long grey beard and was wearing a pair of small, round glasses. His beard was stained with what must have been dried-up hot chocolate, just like his apron.

The man looked at the boys and said excitedly, "Who wants hot cocoa?"

Both of the boys replied enthusiastically, "Me!"

The woman spoke but she sounded rather embarrassed when she did, "This" she paused, "is the professor."