

It was cold, winter's night, a light frost of snow all over the town, but all the houses were alight with Christmas cheer. The bare, naked oaks were draped in multicoloured light, and were, like everything else, dusted with snow. The fresh, chilly air was kept out of the houses, windows fastened shut, doors hurriedly closed after they opened, keeping the heat trapped inside. But there was one house rather unlike the rest...

I like this setting - you create the idea of people celebrating despite hardship, keeping themselves safe at home

Sitting just outside of the town, there was a looming structure that was thickly coated in snow, moss creeping up around the edges, and the doors and windows were usually open, the wind howling through them and slamming them shut every now and then. The house creaked and moaned, the foundations crumbling, and, standing where the moonlight couldn't reach them, blocked by the house's great shadow, there were four children.

Nice! You create the sense of danger and neglect here

'Go on!' his friend hissed, eager to get it over with. He himself, Ethan, was unaware of this, knowing only one thing, and that was that he was scared out of his mind. As a Christmas dare, his friends had asked him to go inside the 'haunted house' and bring them a souvenir. Just because. He felt his friend's hands on his back, and he turned towards them. 'You're- you're not going to abandon me, r-right guys?' he asked. Even his voice was shaky. They laughed and waved it off, as if it were a silly suggestion, but he saw the doubt in their eyes. Better get it over with, he thought, and, taking a deep breath, he jogged forward, pushed open the door, and dove in.

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so is it safe?

There was plenty of natural light, but that didn't stop him from whipping his torch out and shine it at everything he could see on max strength. He looked around what clearly used to be a kitchen for anything to grab that was small, but he couldn't see anything. The room was sparse. Dismayed, he moved on. The living room, with sofas covered in plastic, cobwebs dusting the corners, high and low also had a tv, cracks snaking through it. Not even a remote more annoyed now, trying to push the fear away, he crept up the winding stairs, jumping at every creak, at the rustle of the leaves outside. Second floor. Nothing. Third floor. Nothing. Fourth floor. Nothing. Fear overwhelming him, he slowly opened the door at the top of the stairs. Inside, there was a...

what is the torch-light like? Think about the feeling you want to convey

The emptiness of the place creates an increasing sense of isolation, lifelessness and dread - what? good!

A man lay on the bed, and it took everything in himself not to bolt. The man didn't seem to be breathing, and he stole through the room, grabbing the first thing he saw. A candle. Wax becoming soft at his tight grip and heated palms, he turned around, and was about to leave when he felt a hand on his shoulder. A deep, gravelly voice. 'And where do you think you're going?' he turned.

The man had shoulder long hair, and a closely cropped beard. He had sharp, electric blue eyes, slightly faded with age. His clothes were shabby, but Ethan imagined they would have been nice a long time ago. He felt the man examining him. That gruff voice again. 'You'll do.' and he started pulling him towards the bed, where, before Ethan could protest or cry out, he flung him against the wall. Ethan fell back, but didn't hit the wall. Instead, his back thudded onto something that felt a lot like... Gravel? He looked around. He was in a town, almost identical to his one. It was

dark, and when he stood up, he felt that same man's hand on his shoulder. Before he could say anything, Ethan ran.

nice

He ran home, taking his usual twists and turns, backtracking every now and then when he met the random wall that wasn't there usually. When he was home, he stopped outside the front door, panting heavily, and raised his fist to knock. He raised his hand to knock, and, just before, his hand hit the door the third time, the door opened, and a hand hit him right in the chest, pushing him on the road. 'What are you doing? The voice hissed, 'They'll be here any second!' and he looked up just in time to see sharp claws descending down on him.

Just before they ripped him open, he was yanked to the side by some unknown force, and, stupidly, he whispered, 'God?' Then, he felt that same dreaded grip on his shoulder again and his hope died in his chest. 'Not god, you idiot. Just me. Now get up before it comes back.' As the world came back online, he registered how he was blindly following the man, and how he was still clutching that candle. That god forsaken, half squished candle that had got him in this mess. He was dimly aware of being pulled inside the old man's house, and hauled all the way upstairs. The man's voice again 'Child, I need you to focus.' he continued at Etahn's nod. 'no more running away. This is serious. That ol' beast that nearly killed you. That came from a prophecy by El Toro the Mad. This is no joke, the man was crazy. The man's real name, no one knows, but he did give out prophecies, and for the most part they were accurate. They were all benign, except this one, which prophesied this monster would come, and only a child could kill it. Naturally, the monster somehow knew about this and proceeded to kill all the children as soon as he arrived. You're a kid. You can kill him.' The insanity of the man's words finally registered in Ethan and he laughed. 'You want me to kill that monster.' at the man's serious nod, he remembered how he had been thrown against the wall to travel here. Wherever here was. He charged past the old man, pushing past him, and hurled himself at the wall head first. He bounced off it. The old man laughed. 'Only I can let you back through. You kill that monster, or you stay here.'

How can you use setting to reflect these events?

As he swallowed the news the man bent over and grabbed something from under the bed. Etahn nearly fainted when he saw what it was. A sword. A real, god forsaken sword. The man bent down on one knee, hand presented to him. Reaching out a shaky hand, he took it from the man. It was heavy, and he felt as though he would drop it as his and was dripping with perspiration. The man took him downstairs and thrust open the door. Before Etahn could protest, he was thrust out by the man into the biting cold. Just before the door closed, the man gave a nasty smile. 'Better get it done with then, shouldn't you?'. Ethan turned away to face his fate.

He walked, a strange calmness settling over him as he walked to where he first saw the monster. The calm before the storm he supposed. And, judging by the howling wind and the small, stinging droplets of rain, it was the calm before the storm in a literal sense. He reached where he first saw it. And... the storm had arrived. In the horizon, thunder boomed. Lightning crackled, and rain hammered down on them. Soon his medium length hair was matted across

good

his forehead, and he had to push it out of his eyes. Thunder boomed, momentary darkness, and lightning flashed, illuminating everything, and it appeared.

A body of translucent grey, light reflecting through its body, bending, warping as it travelled through this beast. It left a trail of slime behind it, and Ethan wondered how it appeared. Soon though, those voices were banished from his head, as he became preoccupied with how on earth he would survive this encounter.

It leap-frogged forward, short, pudgy arms appearing in its sides, tipped with sharp talons that glinted as the lightning flashed on the horizon, heavy rain slipping off of them. He gazed at its underbelly as it leaped over him, dripping rain and slime, and he didn't even realise that he monsters claws were cascading down on him until the last second, in which he flattened down, face pressed against the hard, cold, gravel pavement, the monsters claws sweeping over him, cutting through the air, slicing through the soft flesh of his back ever so slightly. Pain burst through him, fading and coming back every time a droplet of rain hit him. Staggering forward, blinded by his pain and the rain, he threw his sword at the monster, in a last, pain ridden try to save himself from this horror town. At the same time, the monster flicked out both claws, and brought them down upon him.

Ethan had braced for the last moments of his life to hurt an awful lot, but instead, no sharp pain came. He was lying face down on the pavement, sun rays hitting his face, as slow warmth seeped through him. His back ached with pain, and when he brought his fingers to it they came out wet and bloodied. However, he had done it. He picked himself up, unsteady on his feet, sloshing through puddles, and he found himself outside the door of the old man's house. The door was thrust open, but no one was there. He staggered up the stairs, which seemed to take millenia, and when he finally reached the old man's room, he fell on the door handle, and pushed it open. The old man was sitting there, and he congratulated Ethan, showering him with thanks. Despite everything, it made him feel good. Then the man said 'Go on then. Go home. and , once again, many thanks.' Ethan turned away, ready to leave, but something struck him. He turned back, looking at that haggled, wrinkled face once again. He felt a deep pity for the man. 'What's your name?' the old man's face lit up, and he laughed long and hard. Ethan started to feel dumb, but the man then spoke. 'Why, the townspeople knew me as El Toro the Mad.' he said with a wink. 'Don't tell me you hadn't guessed?'

Ethan tumbled out of the house, right into the arms of his friends. When they saw the tortured, open, swollen flesh they gasped, but before they could say anything, he reached into his pocket and pulled the candle out, weakly smiling. 'Is that good enough for you?' Later he would wonder how barely five minutes had passed in his world when he had spent a whole day in El Toro's world. Just another mystery to be solved!

You write well and use setting nicely to create atmosphere - particularly at the start. your plot is so complex that it feels like you ran out of steam to do that a little in the second part.