

Revenge of the Thirteen

Daphne Fong

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I'd like to dedicate this book to my parents –
Mom, Dad, I couldn't have done this without you.
You were my inspiration for this book.
Thanks for always being there for me!

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About the Author

Daphne Fong was born in 1998 in the east of Hong Kong, but is currently residing in Pudong, Shanghai. She published her first article at the age of 9 in the *Shanghai Daily* and frequently wrote for her primary-school newsletter in the fifth grade. She has won numerous awards for English, including a prize for the Harris Burdick Short Story competition. Daphne is presently studying at Dulwich College, Shanghai.

Revenge of the Thirteen is Daphne's debut novel – written when she was just 11 yrs old.



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Chapter One

He looked down. His shoes were covered in a brown substance that smelt distinctly of horse excrement.

‘Ew!’

The man slowly bent down, produced a small plastic bag from his pocket and gingerly scooped the rest of the faeces into it. He didn’t want the police to stumble upon his footprint, arrest him and lock him up before he had a chance to watch his plan in action. Oh no. Not now. The fun was just about to begin.

Slipping off his dirty shoes, he surveyed his surroundings. He’d just have to complete the rest of his task barefoot. The thunder rumbled menacingly in the vast heavens. Lightning struck, momentarily painting the sky a blinding white, and the wind howled a mournful wail as if sensing that tonight, of all nights, was different. How did it know ...?

The man lurked in the shadows, grasping a box tightly to his chest. It wasn’t the box that was so very vital to the completion of his mission. It was the thing inside it. It was something eerie. Something dangerous. Something that would change the Vasquez children’s lives forever.

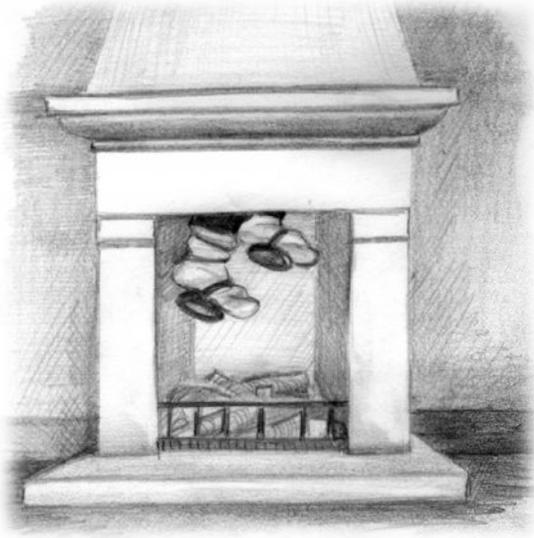
Silently, the figure picked his way through overgrown weeds, thorny shrubbery and the ivy-covered shed in the garden, making his way towards the Vasquez mansion. He was mindful to tread carefully this time. He didn’t want to step in manure again. The mansion stood proudly and stolidly as the rain beat down on its whitewashed walls and four chimneys. Perfect for climbing.

With a practised hand, the person threw a tough rope lasso high up into the air, looping it skilfully around one of the chimneys. He pulled out two more plastic bags and slipped them over his feet, so as not to leave any muddy footprints on the sides of the great house, although the pouring rain would probably wash them away. Whatever. It never hurt to be too cautious.

Carefully, he attached two specially made suction cups to the soles of his feet to get a good grip on the wall. He tugged three times on his lasso, making sure that it was secure. Then he gracefully leapt

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into the air and scaled the wall with ease, the object clamped under his arm. When he finally got onto the roof, he undid the lasso, rolled it into a ball and tucked it under his arm. With a grunt, he stepped into the chimney (which, fortunately, was large enough for a grown man to slip through) and fell feet-first, landing lightly on the balls of his feet in the fireplace. It wasn't lit. Luck was on his side tonight.



Squinting in the darkness, he could just make out the blurry outline of a cupboard, with the door left ajar. Perfect. With a sinister grin plastered across his sooty face, he yanked off the plastic bags and suction cups and stealthily made his way across the floor. Trembling, the man hooked his slender fingers around the knob and pulled open the unlocked door. He placed the mystery object in the hall cupboard and gently closed it again.

Silently, he tiptoed off to the den and shoved a small oval object under the sofa cushion. With a smile, he snook out of the house and into the cold burst of wind and rain that met him outside, grabbing his soiled shoes and the small plastic bag containing the excrement along the way. He'd been successful.

A bolt of lightning struck the roof of the mansion. Nothing spectacular. But then another one struck, in the exact same spot. And again. And again. And again ...

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‘Thirteen times. Lightning struck the Vasquez house thirteen times!’ Cole gleefully cried, leaning forward and kissing the computer screen in elation. He gazed happily at the monitor, which was a feed from one of the secret cameras he had concealed in a tree beside the mansion. His servant bowed. ‘Ah, job well done, mate. The dung-covered shoes ... well, that was an odd touch, but you cleared that up nicely. By the way, I like your choice of victim. I think he’ll be a great addition to our group.’

‘Thank you, sir.’ Earl smiled, straightening up and seating himself in one of the swivel chairs beside Cole. He watched as his master impatiently brushed his blonde hair out of his eyes. He resisted the urge to tell him to get a haircut. ‘I placed the box in the hall cupboard. I also planted the turtle in the den,’ he continued, looking at the computer screen proudly. ‘Both shouldn’t be too hard for them to find. What I don’t get is why the lightning struck so many times. It usually just strikes twice. Tonight it struck thirteen times. Why?’

Cole grinned, revealing his dazzlingly white teeth, and even though Earl was used to his master’s movie-star features, he couldn’t help but stare and was reminded once again of the reason girls kept knocking down their door. ‘It means, my friend, that this is gonna be the biggest challenge yet. Let the games begin!’

His servant smiled uneasily. He could barely handle the victims of the double lightning strike. How was he going to be able to do this? And there were four obstructions, not just one ...

‘Sir, why exactly do we have to do it this way?’ Cole stared back blankly. ‘I mean, why the trouble? Why do we have to screw up their heads with magic and time travel and all the stuff that normal, never-been-touched-by-lightning people call fantasy? Can’t we just tie them down and beat them with rocks until they give in and do what we say?’ Earl waited, wide-eyed, ready to listen to the wise words of wisdom his master was surely to bestow upon him.

Cole shrugged. ‘Cuz, dude, it’s fun!’

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Chapter Two

The next morning, the rain had completely faded away. The only trace of the raging storm from the night before was the dewy grass and the water-soaked shed. All of a sudden, her alarm clock began blasting obnoxiously, shaking Samantha out of her sleep. ‘Shut up!’ she groaned, slapping the clock, which promptly fell off her bedside table and landed with a crash. To her annoyance, it kept on ringing. With a small amount of difficulty, the youngest child in the Vasquez family got out of her tangled duvet and stumbled onto the floor. Samantha opened the flap and wrenched out the batteries. Her mum could wake her up from now on.

Trudging into the bathroom, Samantha washed her face and cleaned her teeth, and then, refreshed, bounded down the stairs two at a time. She plonked herself down on one of the chairs around the kitchen table. ‘Wake up! I want breakfast!’ she yelled, banging her fist on the linen tablecloth and nearly upsetting the jug of orange juice. Her big sister, Zoey, a 13-year old, staggered in sleepily, followed by Zoey’s twin, Zach, and her other brother, Tom.

‘Dude, it’s almost eleven. We’re all up. I’ll go make toast,’ said Zach, yawning. ‘Have some juice while you’re waiting.’ The others seated themselves at the table while their brother busied himself slotting slices of bread into the toaster. ‘Mum and Dad aren’t up, so we can’t go out yet. If you want, you guys can use my laptop ...’

Zoey rolled her eyes. ‘If I wanted to waste my time on something useless, I’d try to find people who are prettier than I am,’ she muttered, finger-combing her dark locks.

Nobody reacted; they were all used to Zoey’s cockiness.

‘Whatever. You guys go ahead,’ sighed Tom, getting up. He glugged the rest of his juice, burped, then snickered at the disgusted look on his sisters’ faces. ‘I’m going to run some drills. You coming, Sam? I’ll get the football.’ He bounded over to the cupboard, motioning for his little sister to follow him.

‘It just rained! Can’t we just play football online? It’s less wet,’ pleaded Zach.

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The toaster chimed and he hurried to grab the four hot slices of toast. Samantha hastily grabbed one of them.

‘Actually, Mum said yesterday that we need to feed the pets now since the housekeeper’s on Christmas leave,’ she said, taking a tiny bite of her breakfast.

Her siblings shrugged and munched into their meal; except for Zoey, who claimed she was on a diet. Samantha was completely unaware of the danger she had just saved her elder brother from. Neither was she aware that the line of fire was now pointing straight at someone else ...

Using a pair of tongs, Tom dropped two dead mice into a bowl and set it gently on the floor. Immediately, his pet snake slid across the floor of the large shed and nudged the bowl with its nose.

‘Good boy,’ he murmured, smiling as the reptile mercilessly attacked his breakfast. ‘Make those mice cry!’

Across the room, Zoey was combing her horse Buttercup’s long silky mane, occasionally shooting dirty looks at the snake. She hated all reptiles and refused to be any closer than 20 feet away from it. She’d even tried to get a restraining order once. Zach was shaking out a bag of dog biscuits while his puppy, Rover, watched hungrily, and Samantha was looking frustrated, anxiously scrabbling through a load of hay from Buttercup’s trough.

Zoey poked her sister indignantly. ‘Hey, stop it! What are you doing?’

‘I’m looking for the hamster food!’ Gazing up into her sister’s blank, slightly irked face, she explained, ‘I can’t find it anywhere in the shed! One of my hamsters has disappeared, too ...’

‘Whatever. You’re annoying my horse. I can’t help you with the missing hamster, but go get a new packet of food and leave me alone,’ said Zoey irritably.

Samantha bit her lip. ‘Um ... can you come with me?’ she asked nervously. ‘I don’t know where Mum keeps it.’

Her sister sighed but agreed to go. ‘It’s in the hall cupboard,’ she said.

Samantha raced off at top speed into the house, while Zoey slowly trotted across the grass, not wanting to mess up her hair.

Not stopping to catch her breath, Samantha opened the cupboard door, puffing and panting. Hurriedly, she pushed away muddy wellington boots, footballs and the rest of the junk crammed in the cupboard. A tiny greenish object fell out, but Samantha ignored it. By this time Zoey had come in as well. She stared at the object on the floor in disgust.

‘Ew!’ she cried, pretending to retch. ‘What is *that*?’

Just then, the boys bounded into the mansion.

‘Why did you guys leave ... what is *that*?’

The four siblings gazed warily at the greenish object lying on the floor.

Cookie was Samantha’s favourite hamster. Actually, to be more precise, Cookie was what *used* to be Samantha’s favourite hamster. Patches of the poor creature’s fur had somehow turned green and it was definitely dead.

‘Gross!’ spat out Zoey, staring at the dead hamster in disgust. She hid behind her twin.

‘Awesome! What could have caused its fur to do that?’ cried Tom, staring delightedly at the hamster, oblivious to Samantha’s glare.

Curious, Zach peered inside the cupboard.

‘Broom; umbrella; ugly doll; shoes, coats; hamster food; books; rubber bands; box; hat ... Wait. I’ve never seen that box before. Have you?’

He pulled the box out and studied it carefully. It was small and heavy, as if made of real gold. The sides were damp and wet, and there were detailed markings on the sides, but Zach had no time to figure out what they meant.

Zoey grabbed the box. ‘It’s kind of pretty ... oh. Never mind. There’s a crack.’

Zach tugged the box away from his sister and lifted it to eye level. He squinted into the tiny hole. All of a sudden, the box glowed fiercely and a small spark of electricity escaped from inside, nipping Zach on the bridge of his nose.

‘Ouch!’ he winced, rubbing the sore area where he had been shocked. He dropped the box.

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‘Oh my God! Are you okay?’ Zoey cried. Swivelling around to face her younger siblings, she said fiercely, ‘Don’t touch it. Seriously, I mean it. Don’t.’ Zoey hated it when her protective instincts kicked in, but there was nothing she could do about it.

‘Well, you touched it and nothing happened to you,’ Tom said cheekily. ‘I guess you’re not supposed to look at what’s inside.’

‘How did Cookie turn green?’ whined Samantha, tugging on Zoey’s sleeve.

Tom flushed. ‘Well, it might have climbed onto one of my old cleats ...’

‘So?’

‘Well, I was sort of doing an experiment,’ admitted Tom reluctantly. ‘I left a piece of bread in there and it went mouldy. It was actually pretty cool, but I wouldn’t touch it if I were you. The mould is green, so ...’

‘First, ew! And secondly, the green on Cookie’s fur is like emerald green, not the colour of mould,’ pointed out Zoey. ‘Probably came from the box or something.’

‘Is my nose green?’ asked Zach.

‘If you look closely, there is a kind of greenish glow ...’ Tom giggled.

Zach groaned.

‘Was the shock from the box large enough to kill a hamster?’ Zoey pressed.

‘Probably,’ admitted Zach, rubbing his nose. ‘Is it coming off?’

The others shook their heads.

Zoey turned away and patted Samantha on the head. ‘You can get another hamster for Christmas or something.’

Samantha nodded but continued to whimper.

‘I don’t feel so good,’ stated Zach with a grimace. ‘I’m going upstairs to bed.’

‘Okay. Should we tell Mum about the box?’ asked Samantha.

‘No!’ everybody hissed.

‘If they find out, there’s going to be a huge fuss. We’ll just have to hide it,’ Tom said.