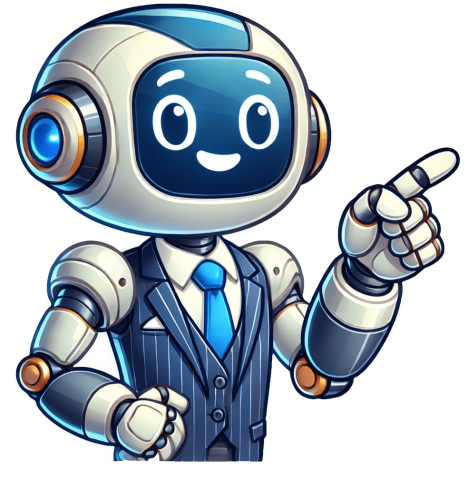


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The thief of always chapter 13

Clive Barker's 1992 horror-adventure novel The Thief of Always follows 10-year-old Harvey Swick as he visits a seemingly idyllic Holiday House. However, beneath its happy facade, the house harbors sinister secrets and manipulates time to create different seasons for each day. After a mysterious man named Rictus brings him there, Harvey discovers that every night is Halloween, with fall, winter, and eventually summer setting in as each new day progresses. During his stay, strange occurrences and eerie settings build unease within Harvey, such as the death of a cat when it accidentally sets its tail on fire. Despite these disturbing events, the house continues to adapt its surroundings to make everything seem pleasant for Harvey's enjoyment. His friends Wendell and Lulu hint at something being off, but Harvey is initially unaware or chooses not to see the truth. As time progresses in the house, so does the changing of seasons. When Christmas arrives, Harvey finds a thoughtful gift - an exact replica of his lost childhood toy ark. However, this festive atmosphere also heightens his sense of unease with the lake and its giant fish. After trying to retrieve his toy ark but falling into the water, Harvey becomes increasingly suspicious about Holiday House's true intentions. Despite these ominous signs, Harvey decides he wants to uncover the secrets behind the house. In response, the house increases its efforts to make him happy, possibly in an attempt to keep him ignorant of its sinister nature. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that nothing at Holiday House is as it seems, especially when Harvey's interactions with the servants and his friends lead him closer to discovering the truth about this mysterious place. Harvey's journey begins as he attempts to scare Wendell, but the magic is too powerful, and Wendell instead tries to bring him as a substitute sacrifice. Despite Jive's urging, Harvey refuses to drink Wendell's blood. The next day, Wendell is frightened by Holiday House and tries to leave, but ultimately decides to escape with Harvey that night. As they flee, Lulu appears and returns some of the lost toys from the ark, thanking Harvey for being a friend before transforming into a fish and diving into the lake. The boys manage to escape through the wall, dodging Carna's attacks, and return home. However, when Harvey reunites with his parents, who are 31 years older than him due to the time spent at Holiday House, his memory is clouded. Wendell becomes upset as he learns about Harvey's life and wants to restore their old relationship. The boys realize they must return to Holiday House to fix things. Once inside, Wendell becomes enchanted again, but this time, he wanders off. Rictus and Jive greet Harvey happily, leading him to the cellar where Mrs. Griffin is imprisoned. Marr attempts to transform Harvey into a worm, but the spell rebounds onto himself. As Harold tries to confront Mr. Hood, Jive tempts him with pie and ice cream made of dust. However, when Jive eats it, he turns into a cloud of ashes. In the attic, Harvey finds Mr. Hood's face on the ceiling, who scolds him for taking the lives of the servants. Mr. Hood declares that both Harvey and himself are Thieves of Always, but Harvey refuses to rejoin him. Carna is called to kill Harvey, but he gently soothes it, causing it to collapse. Rictus then tempts Harvey with riches, but Harvey ignores him. As Wendell disappears into the lake, Harvey demands to speak to Mr. Hood again. In an attempt to exhaust the House's magic, Harvey makes a multitude of complicated requests. The House strains to fulfill them, leading to its downfall. When Harvey asks for all the seasons at once, the resulting storms destroy the House. The children transform back into fish, and the lake begins to drain away in a huge whirlpool. Rictus reveals his plans to steal Hood's magic, restore the House, and enslave Harvey. Just as he makes his move, a hand reaches up from the ruins and grabs Rictus by the throat, but the text ends abruptly here. Harvey's story continues as Mr. Hood, once a servant, returns to his former master Rictus and demands that he restore the magic to its rightful place in the soil. The debris from the ruins surprisingly transforms into Hood's body, which promptly decapitates Rictus before shrinking back into nothingness. Meanwhile, Harvey sprints towards the lake, being hotly pursued by Hood. However, instead of attacking him, Harvey tears away the hanging curtains that conceal Hood's hollow torso. Lulu seizes the opportunity and strikes Hood with a piece of timber, sending him tumbling into the whirlpool below. As the children reenter their respective timelines through the fog wall, each returning home to their family, Harvey finds himself back in his own time. He attempts to share his incredible tale with his still-young parents but is met with skepticism. Undeterred, he takes them to the site where the mysterious House once stood, now transformed into a tranquil neighborhood park devoid of any remnants of the enigmatic structure. A nearby man emerges and corroborates Harvey's account, pointing out his wife, who is revealed to be Lulu as an adult, smiling warmly at Harvey from afar. This of-the-art bicycle that far surpasses the one he lost two years prior. Parrots and monkeys adorn the whimsical treehouse, while the living room's grate animates with flame-like figures reminiscent of battling heroes and dragons. The lawn becomes an arena for mechanized acrobats, creating a surreal atmosphere. Jive, Rictus's brother, suddenly appears on the stairs and engages Harvey in conversation, probing his feelings towards his parents. Although Harvey downplays any sense of homesickness, Jive extends an offer to aid him in exacting revenge against Wendell, who tricked him on Halloween. Jive proposes that they devise a cunning plan for Harvey to attack Wendell like a vampire. The two agree to meet atop the House, where Marr, Jive's large and slovenly sister, joins them. With Marr by their side, she takes hold of Harvey's face as if reshaping it, and he playfully suggests an array of modifications, including fangs, bat ears, "crazy eyes," and wings.