

WELCOME TO THE WORLD
OF WIL MARA'S

TWISTED

"Wil Mara's 'Twisted' series engages students from the opening pages. Even the most reluctant readers stick with these stories—they are just the right blend of eerie and mysterious. The pacing and structure make them accessible for my upper elementary readers and for my hi/lo readers, while remaining gripping enough to keep them turning the pages."

Jill Mills, School Librarian, Chatham, NJ / President, New Jersey Association of School Librarians

"Great for my students who are not interested in reading. Relates to 6th to 8th grade students. Good morals included."

Lindy Santellan, Media Specialist, Sylvan Union School District, Modesto, CA

"What librarians want are books that kids not only pick up, but finish. The 'Twisted' series does that for reluctant readers. They are drawn in and held in. The stories are that good."

Valerie Munro, 2016 Statewide Media Specialist of the Year, Hillview Elementary School, Pequannock, NJ

"If you have students who love creepy stories, the Twisted' series is for them. They are quick reads and the kids will love them."

Laurie D. Evans, Media Specialist, Fultondale Elementary School, Fultondale, AL

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORIES

Wil Mara, the bestselling and award-winning author you may recognize from numerous nonfiction titles in nearly every school-library collection across the United States, first had the idea for the middle-grade 'Twisted' series in the early '90s. It was conceived as a kind of 'Twilight Zones for kids', with an emphasis on intriguing premises, life-lesson thematics, and easy readability, the latter featuring text that was particularly accessible to reluctant and hi-lo readers.

Fast forward to 2019, when Rosen Publishing decided to take a chance on the series. The response among kids was immediate and overwhelming. In Wil's first school visit after the publication of the flagship title, *The Videomaniac*, orders from students totaled over 250 copies. Just one month later, Wil was invited to Los Angeles to begin developing the 'Twisted' series for television. While he was there, the Junior Library Guild designated the second 'Twisted' story, *House of a Million Rooms*, as one of their Main Selection picks. As an interesting aside, *House of a Million Rooms* was the first story Wil came up with for the series, and it was also the one the producers eventually chose for the show's pilot episode. He also has fully outlined ideas for over thirty more stories and continues to write new manuscripts.

WHAT'S IN THIS INTRODUCTORY PACKAGE

Today the 'Twisted' series marches proudly forward, with the first five titles now available, and more completed and waiting their turn in the publication schedule for 2021. In this introductory package, you will find (in the following order), a detailed bio of Wil along with information about his author appearances (which are being conducted via video for the time being), online information, and then the covers of each of the aforementioned five books along with a brief story summary plus their opening chapters. At the very end is a publisher's order form (two pages).

If you have any questions that aren't covered here, you are welcome to send an email to general@wilmara.com or contact the publisher directly. We are always happy to hear from you!

ABOUT WIL

Wil Mara has been a published author for 34 years and currently has more than 300 books to his credit. He has written both fiction and nonfiction, for children and adults. His books have won multiple awards, reached bestseller lists (e.g., his 2013 novel *Frame 232*, reached the *NYT* list and the # 1 spot on Amazon.com while also winning the Lime Award for Excellence in Fiction), earned excellent reviews, and been translated into more than a dozen languages. 2005's *Wave* won the New Jersey Notable Book Award, and 2012's *The Gemini Virus* remained on Amazon's list of 'Ten Bestseller Medical Thrillers' for 14 consecutive weeks. His 2006 football novel *The Draft* was the basis for the 2014 feature film *Draft Day* starring Kevin Costner. His last adult novel, *Fallout*, was nominated for the Edgar Award for Novel of the Year. He also released a short suspense novel about the coronavirus, *Covid Patient Zero*, in 2020.

Much of his work for children has been nonfiction for the school-library market. He also ghostwrote five of the popular 'Boxcar Children' mysteries. And starting in 2019, Rosen Publishing released the first of his bestselling 'Twisted' books. These stories have been described as "Twilight Zone stories for kids" and became an instant hit with middle-grade readers, including the particularly challenging reluctant / hi-lo kids. The second book in the 'Twisted' series, *House of a Million Rooms*, was chosen as a Main Selection title by the Junior Library Guild and also received the JLG's Gold Standard Award. The 'Twisted' stories are now being developed for television through an Emmy Award-winning production company in Hollywood, and new titles are being released in 2021. Wil has two other series releasing later in 2021 as well. Those will be chapter books for grades 2 thru 4.

Wil was also an editor, administrator, and executive inside the industry for over 20 years, working for such houses as Scholastic, McGraw-Hill, Macmillan, and Prentice-Hall until turning to fulltime writing in 2005. He is an associate member of the NJASL and an executive member of the Board of Directors for the New Jersey Center for the Book, which is an affiliate of the US Library of Congress. He is also a charter member of the Literacy Alliance of New Jersey, the host of the 'Voice of American Libraries' podcast, and a recipient of the Literary Lion Award, whose past winners include Gus Friedrich, Dean Emeritus of Rutgers University, and Joyce Carol Oates, National Book Award winner and Pulitzer Prize finalist.

VIDEO VISITS FROM WIL MARA

Wil Mara has done more than 200 school visits during his career, both in-person and via video, and continues to maintain an active appearance schedule. He is one of the few authors in this regard who has a broad background in both fiction and nonfiction. He offers educational presentations for all grades—K through 12—on everything from how books get made (for younger kids) to his now-famous 'Seven Tips for Better Writing' (for older kids). Additionally, he has formally taught classes in creative writing (including specific genres) and screenwriting. His appearances have been noted for their educational value, emphasis on core curriculum, and high-spirited interaction. They are also *very affordable!* If you'd be interested in having Wil at your school, please contact us at appearances@wilmara.com. Full references are available, and appearances will be customized to your school's needs



School visit April 2018



School visit October 2019



Introducing Jacqueline Woodson
at the College of New Jersey



Promoting *The Gemini Virus* on
The Late Show with David Letterman



With Henry Winkler
on the set of *Medical Police*

TWISTED

TO ORDER ONLINE:

www.enslow.com/series/twisted

TO VISIT WIL ON THE 'NET:

www.wilmara.com

(This site also has links to all of Wil's social-media pages.)

TWISTED

THE VIDEOMANIAC



The Videomaniac

Released January 2019

At a local flea market, thirteen-year-old Brian Hart meets a creepy old man who gives him computer software that can predict future football NFL games. But is the power to see the future really as beneficial as Brian believes?

TWISTED

**THE
VIDEOMANIAC**

Wil Mara

An imprint of Enslow Publishing

WEST 44 BOOKS™



The town of Kennisek held a flea market twice a year: once in the spring and once in the fall. To Brian Hart, it meant just one thing—*video game stuff*. No one around liked video games more than Brian. No one had a cooler collection. No one was better at playing them.

Brian and Elijah started at the first table. They looked over everything carefully. Then they went to the next table. Brian wanted to do it slowly. Elijah went along because that's what best friends did.

“Whoa,” Brian said. “Hang on . . .”

The fourth table was mostly covered with junk. There were plates, dirty silverware, and an

old toaster. But he saw a box tucked underneath. **“MISCELLANEOUS”** was written in marker across the front. There were all sorts of things inside: toy cars, pool balls, some broken jewelry, and a couple of Christmas ornaments.

Brian didn't really think there would be any video game stuff here. But he kept digging anyway. Two years ago, he'd found a Nintendo Game Boy at this very flea market. It was at the bottom of a box of old sheets and blankets. He realized then that he should always look. You just never knew. This time though, he found nothing.

Halfway down the second row, Brian saw a PlayStation 4 with a bunch of games. *First released in 2013*, he thought. He didn't mind older games. But the salesman said he wouldn't take it back if it didn't work. Brian wasn't willing to chance it.

In the third row, he found an old Mario Kart poster. Mario Kart was one of his favorite games. He talked the seller down to three bucks. But by

the time they reached the end of the last row, he'd found nothing else.

“One poster,” he said. “One lousy poster. And I have to wait six months until the *next* flea market!”

“Maybe some of the car people will have stuff,” Elijah said.

The car people were sellers who came too late to get a table. They sold things out of their cars instead. They were always in the back of the lot.

“I doubt it,” Brian said, “but I’ll check it out . . .”

Elijah said he was going to go back to a table they had passed. It had kitchen stuff and he wanted something for his mom. Brian nodded and walked away. He was still whining under his breath.

The first car person had a bunch of wooden signs. He had carved and painted them himself.

The second car had the biggest collection of sunglasses Brian had ever seen.

The next few spaces were empty. Then Brian came to the very last spot. An old station wagon was parked in the farthest corner of the lot. Its back door was open. The seller's table was covered with all sorts of computer junk—monitors, keyboards, cables, and disc drives. But it wasn't the computer stuff that caught Brian's attention. It was the person selling it.



The man looked about a hundred years old. He was thin and bony. A stubbly beard grew on his saggy cheeks. Wispy white hair blew around his bony head. He smiled at Brian. His teeth were as yellow as old piano keys. And his eyes were the darkest green Brian had ever seen. Like two perfect gems.

Creepy, Brian thought. *Really creepy*.

“Good afternoon, my young friend,” the man said. His voice was deep and powerful.

“Umm, yeah . . . good afternoon.”

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am Mr. Odium, at your service. And you are . . . ?”

“I’m Brian.”

“It is nice to make your acquaintance.”

“Sure, you too.”

Odium spread his hands out like a showman in a circus.

“Are you admiring my wares?”

“Your what?”

“My *wares*. That is the term for the things a humble vendor, such as myself, would sell to an interested buyer. Such as yourself.”

Brian could feel his brain spinning. He tried to keep up with the man’s strange speech.

“Umm, yeah . . .” he said again. “Sure.”

“Of course you are. You are a wise young man. I can always spot a sharp mind at work!”

“Thanks,” Brian said with a laugh. This guy must’ve spent some time in a nuthouse.

“You are welcome! And what might I have that would interest you today? Blessed, as you are, with the gift of youth, you are likely knowledgeable of the joys of technology, yes?”

Brian nodded. He was already back to

thinking about the Question of the Day—*Is there any gaming stuff?*

“I’m pretty good with computers, yeah,” he said as he started looking through the piles. “But I’m really interested in video games.”

“Ah!” Odium said. “A gamesman!”

Brian laughed again. “I like them a lot. Doesn’t matter if they’re action, role-playing, sports, whatever.”

“Some parents don’t approve of such things. But they can be very good for the mind.” Odium tapped the side of his head.

“That’s true,” Brian said.

“And do you think you’ll find something of value among the many treasures I’ve brought here today?”

Brian was hoping the guy wouldn’t ask this. All the computer stuff he had was just too old. Most of it seemed to be from the 1980s and 1990s.

“I . . . I don’t think so,” he said carefully.

“I’m sorry. I don’t see anything I can use here.”

“Wait, wait!” Odium turned back to his station wagon and took out another box. “I have some things you might like. Some games!”

“Umm, okay . . .”

“I have *Crash Bandicoot*,” he said, walking through the CDs in the box with his fingers.

“No thanks,” Brian said. *I think my dad used to play that.*

“*NBA Jam?*”

“No, sorry.”

“*Quake?*”

“Nope.”

“What about *Mortal Kombat?*”

“That’s from, like, 1992,” Brian said more angrily than he meant to.

Odium looked up from the box. A smile spread across his face. It showed off every one of his horrible mummy teeth. Even worse, Brian thought he saw Odium’s green eyes *swirling* for

just a moment. Like the color was liquid churning around and around.

“Ah, you’re looking for something modern!” Odium said. “Something *new*!”

“Well . . . yeah, sure.”

“I have just the thing for you, Master Brian.” He held up one bony finger. “I ask for your patience, please.”

He dug through the back of the station wagon again. This time he came out with a CD in a plain envelope.

“I believe,” he said, “you will find this very much to your liking.”

As Brian took it, their fingers touched. Odium’s were freezing even though it was a warm day. And the skin didn’t feel real, either. It didn’t feel *alive*. It was more like the hard leather of an old baseball mitt.

Brian couldn’t stop himself from pulling away. Odium didn’t seem to mind, though. He just

kept on smiling.

“Take a look,” he said, “please.”

Brian pulled the CD out of the little envelope. One side of it was shiny. That was the side the computer would read. The other side had two words in a scrawled handwriting—

ULTIMATE FOOTBALL

“What’s this?” Brian asked.

“Is that not obvious?” Odium said. “It’s a football video game. The *ultimate* football game, just as it says there. It has amazing graphics and sound. Also, it has unbelievable gameplay. And it’s very easy to use!”

“I’ve never heard of it.”

“No one has. You, my young friend, are the very first!”

Now Brian smiled back at him. “You made this?”

“I did indeed.”

“You *programmed* this? Wrote the code and everything?”

The old man nodded. “That is correct, my friend.”

Brian looked over the piles of out-of-date computer junk. Then he shook his head. He couldn’t think of a thing to say.

“Before you decide my game is not worth your time,” Odium went on, “I ask that you at least give it a try. If you still don’t like it, then that’s that.”

Brian laughed and looked at the disc again. “Well, okay. I guess I’ve got nothing to lose. Wait, hang on. How much do you want for it?”

“Let’s not discuss price just yet,” Odium said. “I want all my customers to walk away happy. So as I say, go home and try it first. We will consider it a kind of test. And if you think it’s good, then we can decide the price next time I see

you.”

“You mean six months from now? In the spring?”

“Yes. Does that sound fair?”

Brian shrugged. “Sure.”

“Good, then we are in accord.”

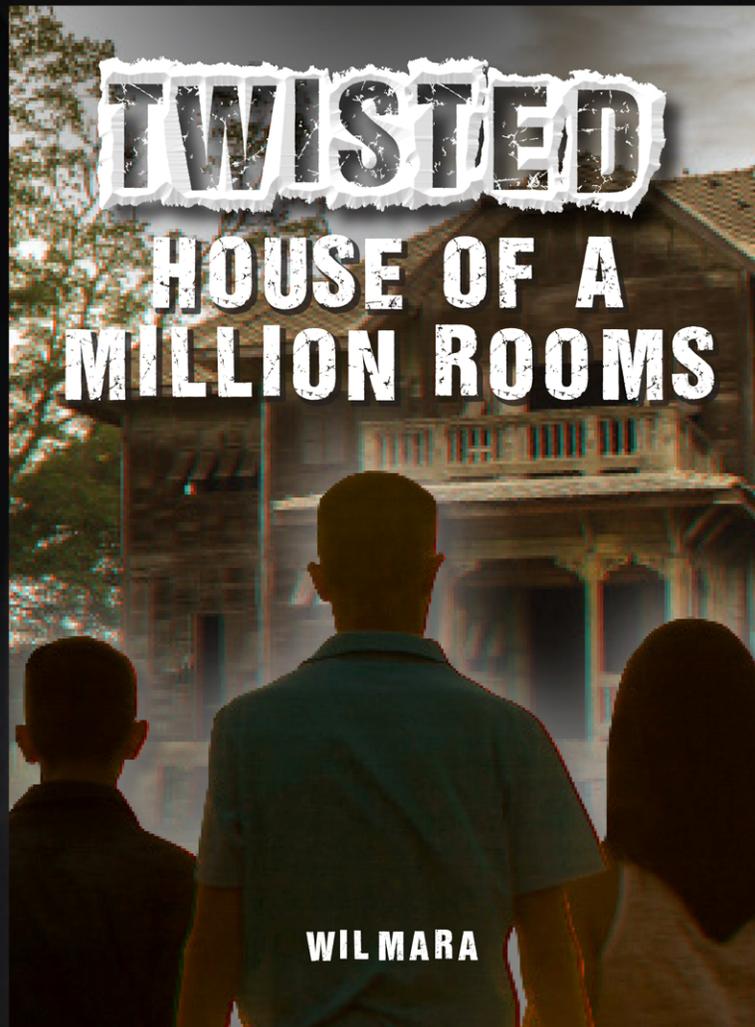
“Right—we are in accord.” Brian didn’t even know what “accord” meant.

Odium leaned his head back and laughed. Brian thought again that he was one of the weirdest people he’d ever met. Then he heard his name being called. He turned and saw Elijah waving at him from the tables.

“I have to get going,” Brian said. “But thanks for this. I’ll try it out as soon as I get home.”

“I hope you enjoy it,” Odium replied. Then he bowed grandly. “It was a very great pleasure to meet you today.”

“Uh, thanks . . . you too.”



House of a Million Rooms
Released March 2019

Three friends go against their parents' wishes and enter the old house that's been sitting abandoned on the edge of town for over a hundred years, and quickly realize getting back out isn't simply a matter of turning around.

A JUNIOR LIBRARY GUILD MAIN SELECTION
AND WINNER OF THE
GOLD STANDARD AWARD

TWISTED

**HOUSE OF
A MILLION
ROOMS**

Wil Mara

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WEST 44 BOOKS™



*For McKinli and Genevieve, who can light up my
day no matter how hard the rain.*



1

“Wow,” Ryan whispered, “it’s really there.”

“I . . . I can’t believe it,” Samantha added.

“It’s *so* cool,” Josh said excitedly.

They stood along the edge of the forest.

There was a long, open field in front of them.

And in the middle of the field was a house. It was very old and very big. There was no paint on the outside. Just bare wood that had turned gray from years in the sun. Other than that, it looked to be in good shape. An old house, but a *strong* house.

They couldn’t take their eyes off it. They just stood there getting soaked as the rain drove through the trees. It sounded like popcorn in the microwave.

“It’s really been here all this time?”

Samantha asked. Her long, dark hair was stuck to the sides of her face.

Ryan shrugged. He was the smallest of the three. He was also the only one who wore glasses. “I guess so,” he said. “The note was from 1953.”

Ryan found the note in an old book. He had been in the school library earlier that day. He was working on a report about colonial America. The library had six different books on the subject. Most of them were pretty new. One, however, looked like it was about to fall apart. Ryan loved books. Sure, the Internet was great. But there was nothing like a real book.

He took the old one off the shelf. The first thing he did was open it up and smell it. *Old books have the greatest smell in the world*, he thought. Then he started going through the pages. The pictures were all black and white. And they were drawings, not photographs. Ryan didn’t think a book this old

could help with the report. But he liked looking through it anyway.

Somewhere around the middle, he found a folded sheet of paper. It was caught between two pages. When he unfolded it, he saw writing from top to bottom. The ink wasn't black anymore. It had turned brown over time. Then he noticed the date at the top—June 7, 1953. *Wow*, he thought. *It's been here THAT long . . .*

There were two different types of handwriting. He read the first few lines—

Are you going to Alan's party on Saturday?

I'm not sure. My mom and dad probably won't let me. Are you?

Yeah.

It sounds like it'll be swell.

It will be! You have to go!

This was some kind of a secret note, he

realized. Someone left it in a book. Then another person found it and wrote a reply. It went back and forth like that until whenever. *Today we just send text messages*, Ryan thought. But they didn't have cell phones in 1953.

He was pretty sure it was between a boy and a girl. The boy really wanted the girl to go to this party. He kept asking, and she kept giving reasons why she couldn't. *Bo-ring!* Ryan thought.

Then he turned the note over. There was more writing on the other side. At first it was just the same stuff. Then it wasn't so boring after all. In fact, it was anything *but*—

Greg and I are going to check out that old house.

What old house?

The one out on the west side of town. Through the woods.

You know you can't do that!

Why not?

*Carl, that place is bad news! And if you get caught,
you'll get in SO much trouble!*

I hear it's haunted! Who wouldn't want to check out a house that's haunted? It'll be a blast!

It doesn't matter! You know no one is allowed to go near it! NOBODY!

That's what my mom said when I asked her about it.

My parents have told me over and over never to go near it! They bug me about it at least once a year! One time I asked them why, and they grounded me for a week!

My mom told me never to ask about it again. Boy, was she mad!

*Carl, PLEASE promise me you won't go near it!
PLEASE???*

Will you go to Alan's with me on Saturday?

Yes, yes, I'll figure something out. But please promise me!

Okay, I promise.

Ryan showed Josh the note. Then Josh

showed Samantha. A few hours later, here they were.

“Have you ever even *heard* anyone talk about it?” Ryan asked.

Samantha shook her head. “Not me.”

“I haven’t either,” Josh said. He was tall for his age and very athletic. He had brown hair that was thick up top but short around the sides. “But I’ve heard stories about things that have happened in this area.”

“I heard the ground around here has poison in it or something,” Samantha said.

“Right,” Josh went on. “Some kind of government testing, years and years ago.”

“Yeah.”

“Can you imagine it?” Josh wondered. “Government testing here in the little town of Fairmont.”

Ryan was nodding. “I heard the same thing. But . . .” He took out his iPhone and held it up.

He used his other hand to cover it from the rain. “I’ve got an app on here that detects dangerous radiation. Y’know—electromagnetic waves.”

Josh rolled his eyes and smiled. “Of course you do.”

Ryan looked closely at the screen. “And there doesn’t seem to be any. Not even a tiny bit.”

Josh turned back to the house and put his hands on his hips. The rain had matted his brown hair flat to his head.

“So what’s the big deal, then?”

“No idea.”

“And the fence, too,” Josh went on. “With all those signs.”

When they were walking through the woods to get there, they came to a fence. It was the metal kind with all the diamond-shaped holes. And there were signs on it that said **DANGER—DO NOT ENTER**. Josh had to bend the fence up at the bottom so they could crawl through.

“I’ll bet there’s more to this,” he said. “We should check it out.”

At that moment, a roll of thunder boomed in the distance. Then came a flash of lightning.

“Not now,” Samantha said. “The storm’s getting worse.”

“We should get out of here,” Ryan added. “Being near trees when there’s lightning is a really bad idea.”

Josh didn’t seem to hear them. He was still staring at the house.

“I wonder what’s in there . . .” he said finally. It sounded like he was talking mostly to himself.

Lightning cracked again. This time it was very close.

“Josh, come on,” Samantha said, grabbing his hand.

“Huh?” He seemed like he’d been in a trance. “Oh, yeah. Okay. But I’m coming back.”

“That’s probably a bad idea,” Samantha

replied. “But either way—not today. Let’s go.”

“Before the lightning fries us,” Ryan said.
“Like three eggs.”

“Okay, okay,” Josh told them. He kept looking back, though. It was as if the house held some kind of power over him.

After they were gone, lightning struck one more time. It hit so close that the whole house seemed to light up. And at that moment, a shape appeared in one of the upstairs windows.

The shape of a person.

2

An hour later, Josh Harper was sitting at his parents' dinner table. His mom had made a nice meatloaf. Meatloaf was one of his favorites. She also made the buttered noodles that he loved.

"Everyone dig in!" she said as she sat down. She had that little smile on her face. It was the smile she *always* had, no matter what mood she was really in. Josh thought she was the greatest mom in the world.

"A little dry," his dad grumbled. Josh loved him, too. But they didn't get along as well as Josh would've liked.

Josh looked to his mom. Her smile seemed to fade for just a moment. It was like a candle that

was flickering and about to go out. Then it came back when she said, “How was your day, guys?”

“I got another A in math,” Ethan piped up. He was wearing a big smile, too. But it wasn’t kind like his mom’s. *It’s the smug smile of a snotty little brat,* Josh thought.

Their dad finally looked up from his plate. “You did? Atta boy! I’m proud of you!”

Of course he’s proud, Josh thought. *Dad’s an accountant. He works all day with numbers. Numbers are his life.*

“Fourth A in a row,” Ethan added. Because, of course, he was keeping count.

“You’re the *man!*” his dad said, pointing at him. Josh felt like he wasn’t even in the room. But that feeling wouldn’t last long.

Ethan turned to him. That snotty smile was still in place. “When was the last time *you* got an A in math, Joshie?”

Josh could feel his cheeks turning red. And

he knew everyone else could see it, too. Everyone except his dad, that is. He had already gone back to his meatloaf. His *dry* meatloaf.

“I don’t know,” Josh said. He kept his voice calm. He knew it would drive Ethan crazy. Ethan was trying to get under his skin. But if Josh didn’t show any anger, Ethan would lose.

Then Josh said, “It’s probably been as long as the last time you got an A in English.”

Ethan’s smile fell. It looked like it had been held up by wires that had suddenly been cut.

“Josh, that’s enough,” his dad said quietly.

Josh looked at him in shock. He was unable to believe what he’d just heard. *You want ME to leave him alone? How about telling HIM the same thing? And HE STARTED IT!*

But Josh knew that wouldn’t happen. Ethan could do no wrong in their dad’s eyes. He was the perfect child.

When Josh turned back, he saw that Ethan

was smiling again. Josh would've done anything to wipe that smile off his face. *Like smack it off*, Josh thought.

They ate in silence for a few minutes. Then Josh said, "Hey, something really interesting happened today."

"What's that?" his mom asked. She looked happy to be talking about something else now.

"Well, Ryan found this old note between the pages of a library book."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, it was really cool. From 1953."

His mom's eyes widened. "Really?" She touched her husband's hand. "Jack, did you hear that?"

He nodded but never looked up from his food. "Yeah."

"What did it say?" she asked.

"Well, it was like two people talking. One wrote something, then the other wrote something

back. I think it was a boy and a girl. At first they were talking about going to this party.”

His mom smiled while she cut off another piece of meatloaf. “As young boys and girls will do,” she said.

“Right. But then they talked about something else. This old house on the other side of Fairmont. You have to walk through the woods to get there, and—”

Josh stopped because everyone else did, too. His dad was just about to take a sip of milk from his glass. He froze with the glass halfway up. His mom had that last piece of meatloaf almost to her mouth. She froze that way, too. And Ethan froze simply because his parents froze. They all looked like people in a photograph.

Finally, his dad turned to him. He looked more interested in Josh than he ever had before.

“Where did you say it was?”

“On the far side of town,” Josh said. Then

he pointed over his back, as if that actually helped.
“I think it’s west from here.”

His dad and mom looked at each other. Words seemed to flow silently between them. Josh didn’t know what those words were. But he knew one thing for certain. *They know which house I’m talking about.*

“Did you . . . did you *go up* to the house?” his mom asked. There was real fear in her voice. There was quite a bit in her eyes, too.

“No,” Josh replied. “The storm from before was getting bad. Lightning and everything. So we were thinking—”

“No, Josh. Let me tell you what you’re thinking,” his dad said, cutting him off. He set his glass back down. Then he used his finger to point again, just like he had with Ethan. But there was no happiness in his face this time. In fact, he looked more than just angry. He looked like he could explode at any minute.

“You’re thinking,” he went on, “that you will never go near that house again. *That’s* what you’re thinking. Do you understand me?”

“Dad—”

“No, you listen close. You will *never* go near it again. You won’t go near it. You won’t talk about it. You won’t think about it. You won’t *anything* it. You got that?”

Josh didn’t know what to say. He looked to his mom. The fear was still swimming in her eyes. Then he turned to Ethan. Josh thought he’d be all happy. He was always happy when Josh got in trouble. But Ethan looked frightened, too. Very frightened.

Then Josh felt something touch his shoulder. He looked back and saw that his dad had poked him. *With his finger . . . he actually reached over and poked me with it!* His dad could be pretty mean when he wanted to be. But he *never* touched either of his boys.

“Hey,” his dad said. “Are you hearing me?”

“Yes.”

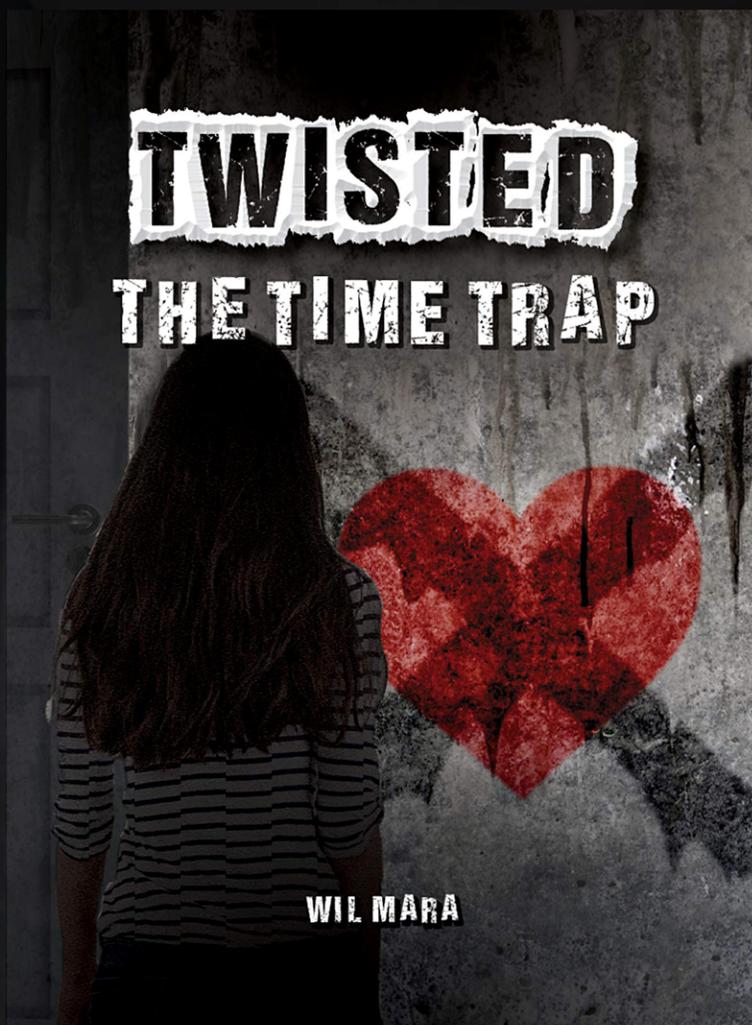
Now the finger was pointing at him again. It looked like his dad was tapping something in the air.

“If you go to that house again and I find out . . . you’ll be one sorry kid. I promise you that. Am I completely clear?”

“Yes, completely.”

His dad kept watching him for another few seconds. They were the longest seconds of Josh’s life. Then, finally, his dad got out of his chair and left the room. There was still plenty of food on his plate. But that didn’t matter.

Dinner was over.



The Time Trap
Released August 2019

Delilah Bremmer wants to return to the happier times before her parents divorced. Then, through an incredible set of circumstances, she discovers a gateway to those perfect days. But are they as perfect as she remembers?

TWISTED

**THE
TIME TRAP**

Wil Mara

An imprint of Enslow Publishing

WEST 44 BOOKS™



The door swung back and clunked against the wall. Then Delilah came in dragging the little couch. She was huffing and puffing. She brought the couch to the center of the room and put it down. It was light green with flowers all over it.

She sat on it to catch her breath. The pain in her arms was terrible. So was the pain in her back, her shoulders, her legs . . . *everything* seemed to hurt. But she was happy. It took forever to get the couch down the basement steps. *But it was worth it*, she thought. *Totally worth it.*

Delilah Bremmer was thirteen. She was very skinny, and she had long hair that was as black as hair could be. Her eyes were ocean blue like her

mom's. She also had her tan skin. Her mom had been born in Mexico. Delilah had gone there twice to visit family with her mom. Her dad went with them. Those were good times. The best, in fact.

Delilah thought about one of those trips to Mexico as she sat on the green couch. She remembered this restaurant they'd visited. The power kept going out because there was a big storm. The lights flickered every time thunder boomed. But the cook somehow made their food anyway. Her parents didn't care that it took so long, either. They were laughing until they could barely breathe. What a crazy, fun night that was.

Then she shoved these thoughts out of her mind. *Too busy right now*, she thought. *Way too busy*. And too busy to think about school, too. About how much she hated it these days. And how much trouble she'd been getting into lately. And how angry this made her mom . . .

Way too busy to think about it, she thought

again.

She got up and went to the other couch in the room. It was a nice couch—but it wasn't the *right* one.

She leaned down to get her fingers under it. Then she dragged it out. When she came back, she put the new couch in its place. She stepped back and gave it a good looking-over. She smiled, and a warm feeling washed through her.

It's perfect, she told herself. At last . . . everything is RIGHT.

She lay on the new couch and tucked her hands behind her head. Then she looked at everything else in the room—the flat-screen TV, the cordless telephone, the PlayStation . . . It really was right, all of it. Because it was all four years old. *Exactly* four.



Delilah got the idea from a message someone sent her on AllMyFriends. At first it looked like just another junky, irritating ad. The person who sent it had no profile picture and no real name. Then she saw this at the top—

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO BACK TO THE BEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE?

Below that was a link to an article. The article was about putting together a room from another time. It was called a “retro room.” She looked up “retro” in a dictionary. It meant: “Having to do with an earlier time.” The article said you needed to fill a room with things from that time. The more “time-correct” the things were, the better the room would be.

At the bottom of the article was the comments section. One guy from Canada said he made a retro room from 1966. That was his

senior year in high school. A married couple from Arizona said they had a retro room from 1993. That was the year they met.

Then Delilah saw a comment that really caught her attention. The person's screen name was LonelyGirl99. She lived in Florida, and her parents were no longer married. LonelyGirl99 wanted to go back to the time when her mom and dad were still together. When they all lived in the same house. And they did things as a family. And there was no yelling. Or slamming doors. Or sadness.

Or sadness . . .

Those last two words shot through Delilah like an arrow. *I'd give anything to go back to the days when there was no sadness. Anything in the world.*

Her parents had split up last year. She begged them to get back together. But they wouldn't. She couldn't understand why. They had been so in love at one time. What had changed?

How had it changed? And *why* did her parents have to be so stupid about everything? Couldn't they see what it was doing to her? Didn't they know how ripped-apart she felt? Didn't they *CARE*?

No, Delilah thought. *They don't.*

So she decided to make a retro room just like LonelyGirl99. A room from back when everything was perfect. And she'd visit it as much as possible. Even if her parents didn't like the idea—and they didn't. But that was too bad. She was going to do this.

Delilah had to look through old pictures her mom had taken with her phone. She'd cried a lot when she went through those pictures. But she had to do it. She made a list of the things that reminded her of those great days. Many of them weren't in the house anymore. Her dad had taken some when he moved out. Other things had been sold or thrown away.

Delilah went to yard sales. She went to the

thrift store in town. And she found some things on eBay. Her grandma gave her the money she needed. Delilah called her “G-ma.” G-ma was like her best friend. She seemed to know exactly how Delilah felt. She was perfectly okay with Delilah’s idea for the room. She even helped her carry some things downstairs and set them up.

And now, more than a year later, it was done. Every single thing was the same as in the house four years ago. The chairs, the lamps, the pictures . . . everything. It was all “time-correct,” like the article said.

Just one last thing, Delilah thought. And I’ll get that on the way home from school tomorrow.

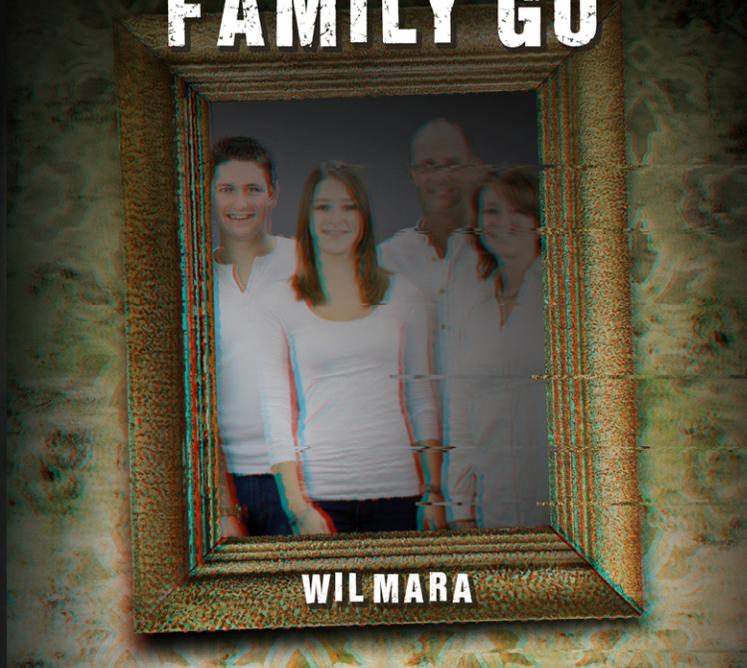
Smiling, she got up and started to leave. Then, from the corner of her eye, she thought she saw something on the wall next to the picture of her parents’ honeymoon. It was tall and rectangular, much like a door. And it was made of a faint, shimmering haze. When she looked back,

however, it was gone. In fact, she wasn't even sure it had really been there at all.

She left the room and thought of it no more.

TWISTED

WHERE DID MY FAMILY GO



Where Did My Family Go

Released October 2019

Michael Cooper wakes one morning to a horrifying reality...his family isn't the same as when he went to sleep the night before. For that matter, neither is anything else. What's worse, everyone thinks he's lost his mind and that everything's just fine.

TWISTED

**WHERE DID MY
FAMILY GO?**

Wil Mara

An imprint of Enslow Publishing

WEST 44 BOOKS™



Michael Cooper was sick. Like, *really* sick. He lay in his bed all hot and sweaty. It was about the grossest feeling in the world. His pajamas stuck to his body. And it felt like there was a layer of slime on his skin. If he had to get up, the sheets felt like they were being peeled off of him. And he *reeked*. He couldn't stand anyone who reeked—and now *he* reeked. But he couldn't do much about it. If he took a shower, he'd just start sweating again afterward. So what was the point?

There was nothing he hated more than being sick. He had a very busy life. Far too busy to be lying in bed all day. He went to school like

any other kid. He didn't love school, but he didn't hate it, either. He liked his teachers (most of them). And he liked his classes (most of them). He liked seeing his friends. He liked gym and recess. And his grades were pretty good (most of them).

When he wasn't in school, he did all sorts of fun stuff. He played baseball a lot. Football and basketball, too. He rode his bike or his skateboard. He went swimming every summer, usually in someone's pool. There was also a big lake on the other side of town. It had a rope hanging from a tree and everything. You could swing on it and then drop into the water. That was fantastic. And in the winter, there was sleigh riding and fort building and snowball fighting.

There were a lot of fun things to do at home, too. He had both an Xbox and a PlayStation. There was a huge TV in the living room. And he had a pretty big one in his room,

too. He also had a laptop, an iPad, and an iPhone. His dad even had some cool stuff in the basement. There was a pool table, some vintage video games, and two vintage pinball machines. His dad was always asking him to come and play with him. Michael pretended like he wasn't interested. But he really was. He just couldn't *tell* his dad he was interested. It was, like, one of the most important rules of being a kid. You just couldn't.

With all this stuff in his life, how could he lay in bed all day? Getting sick just wasn't fair. His head ached so much he thought it might crack open. His stomach felt like it had an ocean rolling around inside. And he had no idea his nose could make so much snot. He would've given anything to feel better. *Anything*.

But there was no magical cure. He'd been told this over and over. His dad said it, his mom

said it, even his sister said it. Time—that's what it took. Time and rest and medicine. Michael knew this, but he was still unhappy about it. And because he was unhappy, he was making everybody else unhappy.

It wasn't like this was the first time he'd ever been sick. He had a bad throat infection when he was five. And chicken pox when he was ten. But back then, he liked everyone taking care of him. It was nice to be fussed over. It made him feel like a prince or something. But now he just found everything annoying.

Which was really too bad. If he hadn't been so busy acting like a grouch, he might have noticed some of the strange things that had started happening. Like with his Converse sneakers, which were lying on the floor. When he took them off two days ago, they were white.

Now they were blue.



“Mom!” Michael yelled from his bed.
“*MOM!!!*”

She opened the door a moment later. “Yes, my darling child?” she said, sounding tired. He knew she was being sarcastic.

“I want soup!”

His mom was wearing a plain T-shirt, faded jeans, and flip-flops. Her flame-orange hair was fairly short all around. But she also used gel to make a little point near the front. Michael called this “Mom’s horn.”

“And how do nice kids ask their mothers for soup?” she asked.

“Chicken noodle,” Michael replied, wiping his nose with a tissue. Then he tossed it into the garbage can next to the bed. The can was already

overloaded with about a million others. “And not so hot this time. That last bowl was way too hot.”

His mom put on a smile, but there was nothing cheerful about it.

“Whatever you wish, Prince Michael,” she said. Then she sighed. “Anything else?”

“Yeah, tell Corinne to come in here.”

“Since you’re asking so nicely, sure...”

She rolled her eyes and went out. A few minutes later, Michael’s sister came in. She was skinny like their mom. Her eyes were a beautiful green, and her brown hair was long and straight. She also had a little cluster of freckles on either side of her nose.

She put her hands on her hips.

“What do you want now?”

After she said this, she pressed her lips together hard. This turned them into a short, straight line.

“My tablet,” he said. “You have it in your room.”

“I’m using it to do summer school homework right now!”

“I want to watch a movie online.”

Corinne pointed to the TV. “Watch a movie on *that!*”

“I don’t want to watch on that. I want to watch on my tablet, with my earbuds.”

“Michael, come on...”

“Use your laptop for your homework.”

“It’s at school!” Corinne said. “I forgot it!”

“Then I guess you’re outta luck,” Michael told her. He took a sip of water from a *Star Wars* cup that was on his nightstand.

“You’re such a brat!” she shot back. “Ever since you’ve been sick, you’ve been *impossible!*”

She turned and stomped out before Michael could say anything further. When she

returned, she just about threw the tablet at him. Then she stormed out again, mumbling something under her breath.

His dad came in about ten minutes after that. Neil Cooper was tall like his son. They both also had very dark hair. His, however, was starting to show some silver streaks these days.

“Hey, sport.”

Michael was holding the buds next to his ears. “I’m just about to watch a movie,” he said. “Can you come back later?”

His dad crossed his arms and smiled. Then he leaned against the doorway.

“I understand you’re being quite the grump.”

“I feel terrible.”

“I’m sure you do. I’ve been sick before, so I know how you feel.”

Michael shook his head. “No you don’t.

Not like this. I feel like I'm gonna die."

"You're not going to die, Mike."

"I *feel* like I am."

"Yeah, well, you're not. You'll get better, and everything will be fine. You'll see."

Then his dad came into the room and started cleaning up. He was the kind of person who couldn't help doing stuff like this. If a picture was hanging just a little crooked, he'd straighten it. If someone left a cup or a bowl in the sink, he'd put it in the dishwasher.

He gathered up Michael's dirty clothes, opened the closet door, and threw them in the hamper. Then he took out the garbage can with all the tissues. When he came back, it was empty. Finally, he picked up the Converse sneakers and headed for the closet again.

"Hey, wait a second," Michael said.

"Huh?"

“Those sneakers...” He pointed at them.
“They’re not mine.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Mine are *white*.”

His dad held them up. They were a dark navy with white soles.

“Michael, they’re blue.”

“I know they’re blue. But mine are *white*, so they’re not mine!”

“Mike, you own a half dozen different pairs of Converse.” His dad opened the closet door again. Then he pointed toward the closet floor.
“See?”

“Yeah, but I don’t have any that are *blue*. And I remember taking off the white ones last night.”

His dad shrugged. “I don’t know what to tell you, sport. These are your size. And I saw you wearing them yesterday, not the white ones.”

Michael was about to argue the point further. Then he paused.

“Wait...no. I remember picking out...hang on. Are you sure?”

“Yes, Mike, I’m sure.” He gave Michael a look. Then he added, “And I know these are yours because your mom and I got them for your birthday.”

“You did?”

“We did.”

His dad tossed them into the closet with the others and closed the door again.

“Anyway, I just came in to, um...well, to tell you you’re being a real pain in the butt to everybody.”

“I...feel...*awful*,” Michael reminded him.

“And we’re all trying to help you get better. Just remember that, okay?”

Michael put in his earbuds. “I’m watching

my movie now.”

His dad looked like he was going to say something more. Instead, he just shook his head and went out.

2

Michael got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. This was around three o'clock.

He turned himself in the bed and threw his legs over. His toes touched the carpet, and that was good. He loved the feel of carpet under his bare feet. His mom always kept the carpet in their house nicely vacuumed. That was also good. He had a friend, Baker, who lived in a house that was beyond disgusting. It didn't look like anyone *ever* vacuumed his carpet. Michael couldn't imagine letting his bare feet anywhere near it.

He shuffled out of the room and turned

left. His head was still aching like crazy. And his nose still felt about ten pounds heavier than usual. But at least his stomach had stopped churning and turning.

The hallway was quiet and dark except for a small night-light. Michael's eyes were half closed because he was still half asleep. He always thought the same thing during these middle-of-the-night pit stops. *I gotta get back to bed as soon as possible.* He needed sleep. He loved sleep.

About halfway down the hall, he turned left again.

BAM!!!

He bounced away and went down with his arms flying.

“What the *heck?!?*”

His eyes sprung open all the way now. He still wasn't completely awake. But he was getting there fast.

He looked up and saw nothing but a solid wall. It had tan-and-blue wallpaper with lots of flowers. His mom picked it out. His dad hated it. Michael could tell at the time, but his dad never said so. There were also two framed pictures of his Aunt Jennie. In one, she was at the top of a mountain she'd just hiked. There was a huge smile on her face. In the other, she was canoeing down a white-water river. Same smile, like she'd just scored a goal at the World Cup or something.

But none of that's supposed to be there, Michael thought. He felt more confused than he ever had in his life. *It's supposed to be on the OTHER side of the hall! And the bathroom door is supposed to be on—*

He turned and saw that the door was right next to him.

“Wait...what?!” He jumped to his feet. “How is this *HERE*?!” he whispered sharply.

He reached out and touched the door. He did this gently, as if it might explode. Then he pushed it a little. It drifted back an inch or two, its hinges groaning.

He looked to the pictures of Aunt Jennie again. Then to the door. Then the pictures. Then the door.

No, this isn't right...this isn't right at ALL.

Michael pushed the door back all the way and stepped inside. There was another night-light in here. It was a plain one, although it used to be a Mickey Mouse light. His mom changed it one day. She said he was getting too old for a Mickey Mouse light. Michael went along with this and didn't say anything. But

he would've been okay if Mickey had stayed.
Mickey was *classic*.

He looked all around the bathroom. Everything seemed to be where it should—shower, toilet, towel rack, toothbrushes. He opened the cabinet under the sink. Everything in there seemed right, too. A hair dryer was lying with its cord wrapped around it. Extra rolls of toilet paper were stacked in one corner. Next to that was his dad's shaving kit in a worn leather bag.

He looked at himself in the mirror. His dark hair was as tough as the bristles on a brush. And it usually stood straight up. But it spiked ridiculously in every direction now. And he could see how tired he still was. His eyes were red and puffy. They stung a little bit, too.

Have to go back to bed...have to go back to bed...

He decided that he'd been wrong about

the door. It *was* supposed to be on the right side of the hall. A part of him still didn't believe this. But he was in no mood to argue with himself at the moment. So he did what he came to do. Then he flushed and washed his hands.

He shuffled back to his room and fell into bed. As he spun down into darkness, a voice spoke out in his mind.

The door is not supposed to be on that side. And you know it. It's NOT...

He ignored this. Just a wacky part of his brain trying to scare him. It was funny, really—the idea that a door could change places.

Crazy, he told himself.

Then he was snoring away.



The Girl Who Grew Nasty Things

Released January 2020

Maddie Dragonette doesn't like people. A loner, she prefers to be among the rare plants she grows in her greenhouse, plants that can cause great pain. When Maddie doesn't get a part in the school play, her anger grows as wild as her nasty plants. What happens when anger and hate grow out of control?

TWISTED

**THE GIRL WHO
CREW NASTY
THINGS**

Wil Mara

An imprint of Enslow Publishing

WEST 44 BOOKS™



Maddie Dragonette sat by herself in a quiet corner of the school cafeteria. She sat at this same table every day. It was a small table with just one chair. It was used sometimes by the cafeteria's workers. Someone might sit and wrap sets of silverware into fresh napkins. Or write out the menu that would go on the school bulletin board. But during lunch period, the table was left open for Maddie. This wasn't an official rule or anything. It was just kind of understood.

Maddie sat by herself because she wanted to. She couldn't stand her classmates. For that matter, she really couldn't stand *anyone*. Other

people made her angry. In fact, whenever she thought about them, she didn't even use the word "other." She just used the word "people," like she wasn't a person herself. And that's because, deep down, she *didn't* think of herself as a person. She wasn't sure what she was exactly. But she was absolutely certain that she wasn't one of *them*. She was better.

People made her angry. She didn't like the way they walked. She didn't like the way they talked. She didn't like their clothes, their shoes, or their hair. She didn't like that some girls played on the school's softball team. She hated softball. And because she hated it, she thought everyone else should hate it, too. And anyone who didn't hate it—well, she hated them for *not* hating it.

She hated social studies, too. So she hated everyone who liked it. One of the boys

in her social studies class was named Jordan. He was the smartest kid in the school. Maddie *really* hated that. She hated all the kids who were smart. And that's because, deep down, she knew she really wasn't too bright. She would never be as smart as Jordan. Or Billy Palmer. Or Allie Moskowitz. Or any of the smart kids. So she hated them, and that took care of that.

She had decided long ago that hating people was the answer to all of her problems.



Maddie unpacked her lunch from the brown paper bag. Then she unwrapped her sandwich and took a bite. It was chicken with lettuce, tomato, and mayo. As she chewed, she looked at the sandwich carefully. Her mother had made it that morning. The chicken looked

good. All white meat, shredded into little pieces. There was the right amount of mayo. And the lettuce was nice and crisp.

But the tomato...that was a problem.

There was a spot in the middle where it was orange instead of red. And it was hard, too. Maddie didn't like that one bit. She liked having the best of everything. She felt she deserved it. And this wasn't the best sandwich it could have been. So she made a note in her mind. She was going to talk to her mother about the tomato when she got home. She might even do more than talk. She might have to yell a little. That was okay, though. Yelling at people was one thing Maddie Dragonette did love. It made her feel great.

She took another bite and looked around the cafeteria. It was really crowded at the moment. Some of the other kids were

classmates of hers. They paid no attention to her. They never did. It was like she wasn't even there. They all talked and laughed and had a good time. Something about this really bothered her. Seeing people happy...it just *bothered* her.

She made a point of looking at Olivia Robinson. Olivia was sitting with three other friends. They looked like they were having the greatest day ever. Maddie knew all about Olivia. She was a straight-A student. She played field hockey, basketball, and—so gross—softball. She was a cheerleader. She had beautiful golden hair. She never said a bad word about anyone. And she was always cheerful. Sometimes Olivia sat and talked to people who *weren't* feeling cheerful. She was the type of person who really cared about others. Everyone loved her, and Maddie *really* hated that. She hated people who

everyone else loved.

But none of that was important to Maddie right now. The important thing was what Olivia was holding. It was a beautiful necklace. It had a gold chain and a flower-shaped pendant. Maddie did like flowers. That's because she liked to grow things. Back home, she grew lots of things. Some were pretty. Some were not. A few were downright nasty. But that was okay. Nasty things could be useful sometimes.

Olivia held up the necklace so her friends could see it. Maddie had heard her talking about it in gym class. It was a gift from her aunt. Olivia had helped her clean out her basement last weekend. She also had the necklace's box, which had a little bow on top.

Maddie pretended she wasn't watching Olivia. But she was, very carefully. She was

waiting, and she was getting tired of it. Olivia had her own sandwich out. She had put it on the table and unwrapped it. But she hadn't taken a bite yet. All she was doing was yapping about her precious necklace.

Olivia set it back in its box. Then she picked up the sandwich. She was about to take a bite. But she started laughing instead. One of her friends had said something funny. Maddie couldn't hear what it was, and she really didn't care.

Come on...she thought. Come ON...

Finally, Olivia took a bite. It was a big one. She chewed it around for a moment. It made her cheeks bulge, first on one side and then the other. Then she swallowed it. Maddie got a warm feeling in her own stomach. She had to fight back a smile.

Olivia started laughing again. Then

everything changed. Her eyes grew wide, and her face began turning red. She started coughing. First only a little, then a lot. Her hands went to her throat. She tried to say something, but Maddie couldn't hear it. Now she looked really scared. All her friends did, too.

The one sitting next to her started rubbing her back. She asked Olivia what was wrong. Olivia said something about her sandwich being hot. Not *hot* hot, she said, but spicy hot. Other people began to notice what was happening. They came over to see. Then one of the women who worked in the cafeteria appeared. The name on her tag read "Ms. Patterson."

Ms. Patterson looked more scared than even Olivia did. By this time, Olivia was looking a little better. She had taken a few sips

from her water bottle. But her face was still red. It was kind of shiny, too. She was so scared that she started sweating.

Ms. Patterson asked Olivia if she was okay. Olivia said her throat was still burning really bad. Ms. Patterson said she should go to the nurse. Olivia nodded and got up. Ms. Patterson led her away. Her friends all went along.

Just as they got to the door, however, one of Olivia's friends stopped. This was Hannah Kim. Thin, athletic, dark hair, very pretty. She wasn't in any of Maddie's classes this year. Maddie was happy about that. Hannah was the kind of girl who raised her hand at every question. And she always got the answers right. Maddie often wished terrible things would happen to her.

Hannah came back to the table to get

everyone's stuff. Then she noticed the box with the necklace was gone. She looked around for it, but it was nowhere in sight. She asked if anyone saw what happened to it. No one had.

Hannah looked very upset now. Maddie liked that.

A lot.



Maddie lay on her bed a few hours later. Her room was kind of like the rooms of other kids. There were a few stuffed animals on the dresser, and some posters on the walls. A big TV was tucked in one corner. Next to that was a shelf loaded with books. The closet had a pair of sliding doors. One door was open, and dirty clothes were piled on the floor inside.

What made the room different, though, were all the plants and flowers. They were everywhere. There were two in small pots on the dresser. Three others were in much bigger pots on the floor. And there was a cactus on Maddie's nightstand. It looked like a fuzzy

cucumber half buried in the dirt. But most of them were in the windows. Maddie didn't have normal windows. Instead, they were like big glass boxes that stuck out from the house. Each one had three shelves. Some had plants that were long and flowing, almost like hair. Others were tall and spiky. Some were green, others were brown or red or pink. Some had big, floppy leaves. Others had very tiny leaves.

Maddie didn't think of them as plants or flowers or whatever. She thought of them kind of like children. *Her* children. She loved looking at them and taking care of them. She also loved talking to them. She imagined that they talked back to her, too. And they always said what she wanted to hear. They said what she wanted, and they *did* what she wanted. That's what she liked best about them. Whatever she wanted them to do, they did it. She was the

boss here. Always.

She reached over and got her backpack from the floor. It was pretty heavy because of all the schoolbooks. She unzipped it and dug around inside. Then she pulled out a box. It had a small red bow on top. She opened the box and took out Olivia's necklace. She lay back again and held it high. It swung back and forth a little. The flower pendant had a perfect sparkle to it.

All mine, she thought with a smile. Then she remembered how upset Hannah had been when she came back to the table and couldn't find the box. Maddie's smile grew even bigger. And Hannah hadn't been half as upset as Olivia when she found out what happened. Olivia had been crying, and all her friends tried to comfort her. Maddie saw them walking through the hall. Tears were running down

Olivia's face, and everyone was around her. They were treating her like she was a celebrity or something. Maddie didn't say anything. But she couldn't help standing there and watching. Something about seeing Olivia cry made her feel great.

Tough luck, Olivia, Maddie told herself. *I wanted it.* She had stolen things from other kids before. And this is what she always thought afterward. If she wanted something, that was a good enough reason to take it. Was it unfair? Was it mean? Maybe. *But that's their problem,* Maddie always believed. *They'll get over it.*

The door to her room opened slowly. Then Maddie's mom stuck her head in. She looked kind of like Maddie. Same reddish hair, same freckles. But she was much older. And she *seemed* even older than she was. There were dark half-moons under her eyes. Her skin kind

of sagged a bit. And her hair was starting to go gray in some places. She certainly wasn't old enough for gray hair—yet there it was.

“Hey, sweetie,” her mom said. Her voice was very soft and quiet. “How was school today?”

Maddie never stopped looking at the necklace. “Fine,” she replied.

“How did your math test go?”

“Good,” Maddie told her. She knew what her mom really wanted to know. She wanted to know if Maddie got a good grade on the test. She had gotten a C. She knew this because Mr. Oldham had graded the tests right away. But she didn't feel like talking about it. Besides, her mom could always go online and find out. The school had a site now where parents could follow their kids' grades. But her mom had a strange fear of computers. She had a strange

fear of a lot of things. And Maddie used it against her.

“Do you know if you got a—”

“The sandwich was wrong,” Maddie said.

“What, honey?”

“The chicken sandwich. It wasn’t right.”

“What...what was wrong about it?”

“The tomato wasn’t ripe. It was hard in the middle. It was orange, too. That means it wasn’t ripe. It was disgusting. I had to take it off and throw it away. Then I had to eat the sandwich without it. I *hate* chicken sandwiches without tomatoes.”

“Oh, Maddie, I’m so sorry. If you want, I could make you another one right n—”

“I don’t want one now,” Maddie replied.

“I wanted one at lunch.”

“I was sure I used a good tomato when I made—”

“You didn’t. You used a bad tomato. You used one from your garden, not from mine.” Maddie looked to her at last. “Is that right? You used one from *your* garden?”

Her mom froze, her eyes wide. “Yes,” she said, nodding very slowly.

“I told you never to do that. You don’t know anything about gardening.”

“That’s not true.”

“You couldn’t grow something right if your life depended on it.”

“Now, Maddie, that’s no way to talk to your mother.”

Maddie’s smile from before had disappeared. Now it was back.

“You want to argue with me about growing things?”

Now her mom looked positively terrified.

“No, no...I’m sorry I brought it up.”

Maddie laughed just a little. Then she went back to admiring the necklace.

“What...what’s that you have there?” her mom asked.

“I found it on the playground,” Maddie replied. She had some idea of what her mom wanted to say next. Something like, *Well, why don’t you bring it to the office? Or the lost and found?* Her mom was a big believer in Doing The Right Thing.

Maddie found this incredibly annoying. Doing the right thing was for suckers, she thought. It didn’t get you anything. Maybe people liked you more. But Maddie didn’t care if anyone liked her. She just wanted people to be afraid of her. Maddie knew her mom was afraid of her. She loved this. Like right now, for example. There was just something great about seeing her standing there, scared half to death.

“You...you found it on the playground?”
her mom asked.

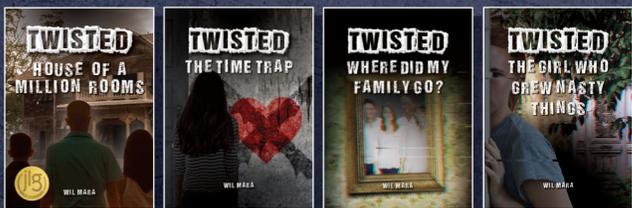
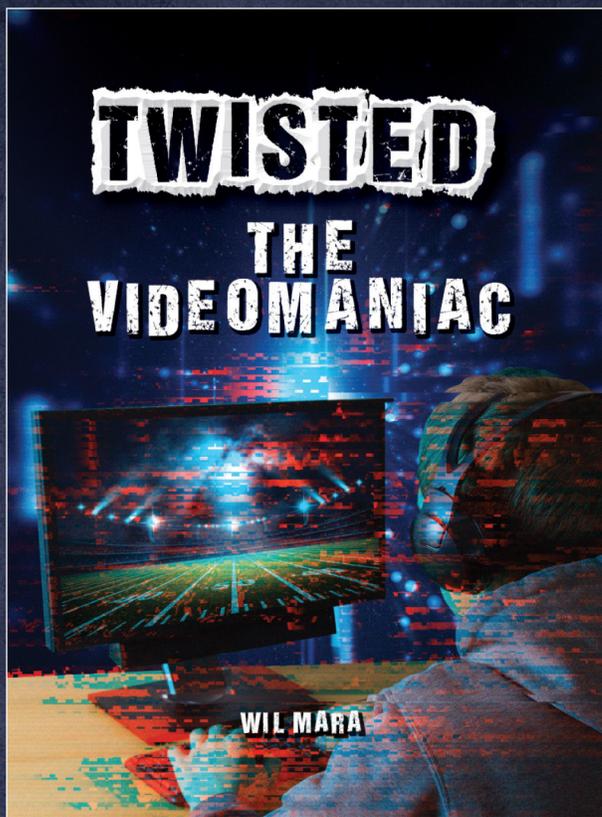
“Yeah,” Maddie replied. She knew more questions would follow. So she faked a big yawn. Then she said, “I’m feeling a little tired, so I want to take a nap. Could you close the door, please?”

Her mom hung there for a moment, saying nothing. She looked more frightened than ever. Then she did as Maddie asked.

Maddie enjoyed listening to her footsteps as she walked away.

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4

Brian was still in shock the next day. But at least it was Sunday. That meant real football games.

Elijah came over at 12:30, like always.

"Here," he said to Elijah, who was sitting on one of the living room chairs. "One can of Dr. Pepper, and one bag of Munchos." He tossed the can first. Elijah caught it with both hands. He didn't bother catching the bag of chips. He just let them land in his lap.

"Thanks."

"I wouldn't open that can just yet," Brian told him.

"Why not?"

"I dropped it when I took it out of the

fridge."

Elijah made a face and set the can down.

"Good job, genius."

"I know."

"Speaking of genius, remember we have to do our report on Ben Franklin after this."

Brian nodded. "Right."

"Keep our perfect grades going."

"Right."

"And then we can—"

"Elijah?"

"Yes?"

"Shut up."

Elijah nodded. "Right."

A logo for the National Football League appeared on the giant TV screen. Then a deep voice said, "This is the NFL on CBS."

Brian turned the sound up. "Okay, here we go."

About the author:



Wil Mara is a veteran author with more than 300 books to his credit, both fiction and nonfiction, for children and adults. His work for children includes more than 150 educational titles for the school and library markets, and he has also ghostwritten five of the popular *Boxcar Children* mysteries. His titles have received excellent reviews not only from consumers but also in all respected journals, such as *SLJ*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Horn Book*, *Children's Literature*, and others. His first novel for adults, 2005's *Wave*, won the New Jersey Notable Book Award. More recently, his thriller *Frame 232* reached the #1 spot in its category on Amazon, won the Lime Award for Excellence in Fiction, and was a finalist for the Christy Award. The hit 2014 feature film *'Draft Day,'* starring Kevin Costner and Jennifer Garner, was based on his novel *The Draft*, published by St. Martin's Press in 2006. He is also an associate member of the NJASL, and an executive member of the Board of Directors for the New Jersey Center for the Book; an affiliate of the US Library of Congress.

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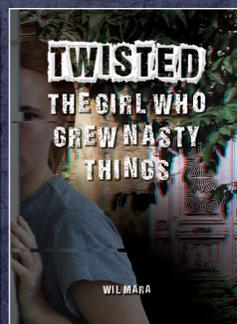
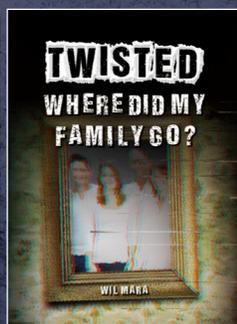
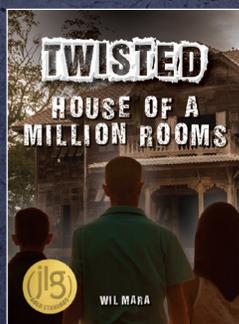
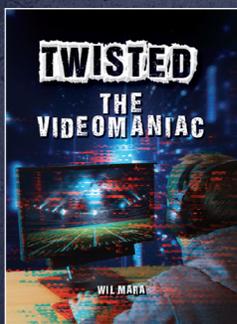
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