

























Miles stared at the old man lying where Gilded was only moments before. The battle against the creature had killed him. But how? Gilded couldn't be killed. In all the years that he'd battled crooks and fires and floods, he'd never even been hurt.

Miles picked up the golden cape. The fabric—or whatever it was made of—vibrated lightly in his hands. Even with the garage cloaked in late-afternoon shadow, the cape glinted as though it was in the noon-day sun. It didn't reflect light; it emitted its own.

That's when it dawned on Miles: Gilded wasn't an experiment or an angel. He wasn't even an alien, though today's events were sure to convince people otherwise. He was human, and he always had been. He didn't have powers. The cape did. And that meant—

“Hollis! Kid! You in here?”

Cliff's voice snapped Miles out of his daydream. He was shaking with adrenaline. He threw off his backpack and tried putting the cape inside, but it was as long as a grown-up's raincoat. It wouldn't fit.

Cliff's footsteps were getting closer. Any second he was going to discover Miles holding a supercharged poncho.

Miles didn't have time to think. He flipped the backpack upside down and dumped his books on the ground. He crammed the cape inside and zipped the backpack closed.

“Hello?” Cliff called out again. “Anybody hear me?”

“Over here!” Miles shouted back.

Cliff hustled over. “Dang, kid. You coulda been killed.” He surveyed the pile of rubble, and when he saw the old man, his face went pale. When he saw the creature, it went paler. “You didn’t touch that thing, did you?”

Miles shook his head emphatically. “No way.”

Cliff fumbled at a small holster on his belt. He took out a canister of pepper spray and pointed it at the creature with a shaky hand. “Is it . . . dead?”

“I think so. It hasn’t moved.” Miles noticed dark green blood pooling around the creature, and his stomach rolled over. Apparently, the sight of monster blood made him queasy. “What is it?”

“It ain’t good. I can tell you that. Where’s your old man?”

“Trapped in the circuit breaker room. The door is blocked.”

Cliff started to return the pepper spray to its holster, glanced at the creature again, and then thought better of it. “Follow me,” he said, backing away. “Let’s go get him.”

Miles was frozen in place. Something about the creature’s dying expression filled him with dread. Its mouth hung open in a grotesque, jagged snarl that displayed its sharp, yellow fangs. He couldn’t



tell if the expression was a grimace, or a grin.

“Come on, kid,” Cliff admonished. “Your dad wouldn’t like you near that thing.”

Fear sent a shiver down Miles’s backbone. He didn’t want to look at the creature anymore—he wanted to get as far away from it as possible—but he couldn’t stop staring. It was dead—Miles was sure of it—but it was as though he was worried it was only playing possum and would come back to life as soon as he turned away.

Miles took one last, lingering look. Then he hurried after Cliff, unable to shake the feeling that he’d come face-to-face with that snarl again.