

Hello,

Thank you for downloading the Unbreakable Curse. This story will be the first of 10 or more short stories to be included in my next book titled, You'd Be Surprised! This particular story was actually the very first concept I came up with for anything. From that lead to the other books and comics I have written and the other projects I have in different stages of production. If you enjoy this story please do find me, or rather my company, Cutthroat Comics & Publishing on the various social media sties. Also please do share this story with others. Word of mouth is powerful and will greatly help as I try to build something from nothing. Again, thank you and enjoy!

Josh Nealis

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The Unbreakable Curse

By

Josh Nealis

Once upon a time there was a village that nestled up against a dark and mysterious forest. In this village there was a general store, and in that store is where we will meet the hero of our tale, but we'll get to that. This particular store was owned by a gentle man named Thomas. Thomas has had a mediocre life. Nothing great, but nothing bad really either. He has a kind and caring wife and a few boys to continue on his family's name. The store has fallen on some hard times recently due to a crusty angry old witch that has made her home near the only road that leads through the dark and mysterious forest. Thomas at one point had a few employees to help him around the store. There was an old man whose name has been forgotten. He always wore a blue vest and mostly just hung around the front of the store. There was also another employee that helped with mostly the hunting supplies. Strangely, every time she was needed, she was nowhere to be found. But, all of this is moot because since the arrival of the witch, Thomas has had to downsize his staff. The Witch terrorizes anyone who tries to pass through the forest and in turn has caused the town to become a little desolate. Plus she keeps being all witchy, which is never a good thing.

This brings us to Sam, who is Thomas' middle son. Sam is almost eighteen and almost ready to leave his family behind and figure out what he wants to do with his life. Sam takes much pride in being clever, and the townsfolk have taken notice. Whenever he walks by Sam always hears them muttering, "There goes Sam, such a clever boy" or "There's that clever boy Sam." Unfortunately, being clever isn't an actual job so Sam helps his father out at his store most days. Unbeknownst to Sam, his life is about to change forever.

It's Tuesday in the village, it's also Tuesday everywhere else, and Sam is busy sweeping out the store. He starts at the back of the store and sweeps all of the dust out to the front porch. Once on the porch, Sam sweeps all the dust right off onto the walkways that line the dirty streets of the village. Turning to walk back into the store Thomas yells to Sam, "Don't forget to knock the dust off your apron, black sure does like to show dirt." Sam obliges his father then enters the store to begin his next task.

Just as he's about to start stacking the molasses, he hears the delightful ring of the bell on the front door. "Good afternoon Mrs. Meyer!" Shouts Thomas from behind the counter. "Well hello, Thomas...Sam, how are we today?" She replies. Mrs. Meyer always dresses in red and for some reason smells like fresh fish. She's a pretty nice lady and people seem to like her. Not quite as much as Sam and his family but then again she doesn't have as much family in the area. Especially after her husband's tragic accident. Sam never got the full story but it had something to do with target shooting. "We're doing great." Thomas answers. "What brings you in Mrs. Meyer?" Mrs. Meyer thumbs through her pocketbook and pulls out a folded up piece of paper. "It's my grandson's birthday tomorrow and I need the ingredients to bake him a cake." Mrs. Meyer's grandson is a tubby spoiled know-it-all named Percy, but all of the kids call him Piggly. Sam is not fond of Piggly. A year or so ago they were all down at the stream catching crawdads. Piggly threw a rock trying to scare the crawdads out from their hiding spots. Sam just happened to be bending down right when Piggly threw the rock and it hit Sam right in the back of the head. Sam fell and got covered with mud, and when he looked back to see what happened all he could see was three Pigglys staring back at him. Since then, Piggly seems to steer clear when Sam is around, and Sam is okay with that.

Suddenly, Sam snaps out of his angry memory as Thomas calls to him. "Sam, help Mrs. Meyer load up her buggy please." Sam quickly puts down the jars of molasses, grabs all of Mrs. Meyer's items by stacking them neatly by size on top of one another, takes them out the door, and places them gently

in the back of her buggy. "Got it all in one trip! Thank you Sam, you're such a clever boy." Says Mrs. Meyer, as she climbs up to her seat. "No problem, have a good day Mrs. Meyer!" Yells Sam as her horse takes off suddenly. Boy, she didn't even wait for me to back away. Sam thinks to himself. I'll have to remember that next time. Last thing I need is to get my foot ran over.

Later that night as Sam was trying to fall asleep he overheard his father speaking softly to his mother. "I just don't know how long we can stay afloat. If the store closes, what will we do? The Witch won't let people through the forest, and to top that off if we tried to leave, she'd try to kill us...or worse." Sam rolls over and continues to try to sleep, but to no avail. He tosses and turns almost all night until his candle burns so low that it extinguishes itself. Only a few people have claimed to see this witch and somehow she has managed to choke the village into desolation. I must do something. I have to do something. But what...

The next morning Sam woke up a little late, everyone else had been up for hours. "Well good morning Sam." His mother said. "You're lucky your father was in a good mood before he left or he would have yanked you out of bed for sleeping so late." Sam had an embarrassed look on his face while his brothers just giggled at the thought of their father throwing Sam and his blankets onto the floor. "Sorry, I had a hard time sleeping last night." That's not what Sam wanted to say. What he wanted to do, is ask if what Father said was true. But, he knew his father, more than likely, didn't want him or his brothers to be worried. Just then, Sam had an idea. How had he not thought of this last night. He quickly threw on his shoes and ran out of the house and down the dirt road towards the village. "Wait...Sam! You need to eat something!" His Mother yelled to him, but it was too late and wouldn't have mattered had he heard her anyway.

Once in town he went to his friend's house, but she wasn't there. He went to the creek, and to the pasture where they normally sit and watch horses and cows go about their not so busy day. Where

is she? Sam thought to himself. Then it hit him. Piggly's birthday. That's where she must be. Heck, that's probably where every kid in town is right now. Except me, why would I want to go to that pudgy jerk's birthday, even if I had been invited.

Outside of Piggly's house, Sam sneaks around to the dining room window. Sure enough, basically every kid is here. Sam steps up to the window, which is cracked a little, probably because it's a mildly hot day and there are so many people inside. "Kay" He whispers. "Kay Rogers..." Luckily she is standing just a few feet from the window with her back to it. "Kay..." He whispers again.

Kay is the youngest daughter of the town soothsayer. To top that off, her father is the town preacher. That probably makes for interesting dinner conversations. Sam figures if anyone will know how to defeat a witch it will be her. "Psst! Kay!" He whispers yet again. Finally she turns and sees him outside the window. He waves his hand, motioning for her to meet him near the kitchen door. She politely and inconspicuously funnels through the crowd of sweaty kids, while Sam trips over rose bushes and dodges dog droppings. The kitchen door swings open and creaks all the way until it bangs into the side of the house. Sam and Kay both tuck their necks in like a turtle at the sound of it. Sam puts his finger to his mouth to make sure Kay knows that what he is about to say is not to be overheard. "What is it Sam? What are you doing here? I thought you hated Pigg...er...Percy?" She almost whispers, but not exactly. "I'm going to kill the Witch." Sam announces in a quieted but stern tone. "Well, that's the dumbest thing I've heard all day. Why would you want to go and do a thing like that?" Kay asks. "That witch is killing this town, figuratively and literally, she must be stopped. I know your parents deal with...supernatural things. That's why I'm asking you if you know of anything that might help me. Can you leave and talk?" Kay now has a very worried expression on her face. In her mind she knows that Sam is right, but if she helps him, it might make things worse. If she doesn't help then he may end up

dead...and then things will automatically be worse. "My parents are here, I can't leave just yet. Meet me by the creek in an hour." Kay says as she quietly opens the kitchen door and closes it behind her.

Sam tiptoes back past the roses and dog droppings as he heads off towards the creek. As Kay turns to rejoin the party she bumps right into Piggly, who had been lurking there, listening the whole time. "Percy...uh...hey! Good party huh?" Kay says, hoping he had just arrived. "I want to help." Whispers Percy. "That witch killed my grandpa. I want to help." Kay can tell that Piggly is serious. She knows, if she doesn't let him, then he'll just rat them out. "Fine, but It's not me you have to convince...it's Sam."

A little over an hour later Kay and Piggly arrive at the creek. Sam has a stick and is practicing his swordsmanship. "What is he doing here? I should bash you with this stick, I don't care if it is your birthday." Sam yells while Kay and Piggly extend their arms, as one would do when trying to calm another person down. "He just wants to help." Kay says. "He'll just get in the way, just like always. He doesn't think, he just acts." Sam announces forcefully. "Look Sam, I know you're still mad about the rock, but that was an accident. I tried to apologize but you just ran off." Sam throws the stick into the creek. "You're lucky I ran off. If I had regained my bearings I would have drowned you in a puddle." Piggly steps back a bit. "I said I was sorry, I don't know what else I can do. I know you don't want me here, but I want to help. That witch killed my grandfather, and now that I'm a man, I will do whatever it takes to get revenge." Piggly remembers that he turned 18 just today and stands up as tall as he can. "I thought your grandfather died in some target shooting accident?" Says Sam as his mood switches from angry to interested. "That's just the story the great Mayor Scott wants everyone to hear." Piggly says sarcastically. "My grandfather and the Mayor were in the woods hunting turkey and squirrels. Then the Witch appeared and told them to leave. My grandpa was never one to let people tell him what to do, so he fired an arrow right at the Witch's heart. He got her too. Then my grandpa walked over to retrieve his

arrow, as soon as he was close the Witch turned into a giant eagle. She grabbed him up and squeezed him with her talons. She killed my grandfather, while Mayor Scott just stood there. I'm certain Mayor Scott made some political deal with her. That's how he was allowed to live." Sam and Kay looked on in disbelief. "Wait! How do you know all of this if the Mayor isn't telling anyone?" Asks Sam. "The same way I ended up here. I'm like to stick my nose where it doesn't belong."

Without having to say a word, the three of them were in agreeance. They would take down the Witch, or die trying. "So, what do we Kay? Any ideas?" Asks Sam. "It's strange but, I think I do know what to do." As she gathers herself and prepares to speak of things she's never told anyone. She faces the creek and looks out into the wide open world "My Mom suffered from night terrors when I was little. She would wake up screaming. Night after night for months. Until finally she started drinking this herbal tea before bed. Every night though, she would wake up screaming the same thing. None of us ever knew what it meant. But, now I think I do. It makes sense, I think." Sam and Piggly look at each other with a puzzled look. Both wondering why Kay doesn't just get to the point and stop being so dramatic. Piggly breaks the tension and bluntly says "C'mon, so what was she screaming?" Kay turns to face the boys, her eyes black and face pale. "The magic club Sam. Make the choice. Make the choice, make the choice, make the choice." She falls to her knees and screams as both boys run to comfort her. "Kay! Kay!" They both yell as they pick her up off of the ground. She stumbles a little but quickly shakes off the dizziness. "We need to find Joe." She says as she regains her balance. "Joe?" Sam asks. "Yes, we need to trade with Joe." Kay says and starts walking back towards town.

Once in town they stop in front of the town pub. "He must be in there, he's always in there. Getting drunk and feeling sorry for himself probably." Kay says as she heads through the front door. Sure enough, back in a dark corner sits Joe. Piss drunk with his scruffy grey dog by his side. "Excuse me Joe..." Kay begins. "...I'm Kay Rogers, and this is..." Joe interrupts. "Oye know who you ahh, there's only

a few undred people in dis town.” He says in his grizzly piratey sounding voice. Kay looks to Sam as to what she should do next, but he just motions for her to continue. “Um...you have a club for sale, do you not?” She asks. “Oye’ve got a lot of tings.” He says as he pours some ale on the ground for his dog to slurp up. “Okay, well if you have a club, we’d like to purchase it form you.” She says, clearly getting tired of his half answers. “Ow much money you keeds got? Times are tough, an’ clubs ain’t comin’ cheap dees days.” The trio look to one another and quickly realize that they don’t have much to barter with. “What is your price?” Sam asks. “Thurey shillings, that sounds fair to me.” The kids look at each other, not a word is spoken, but Sam is always listening to his father making deals with traders. “We don’t have shillings to offer, what can we do in return?” Joe slams his empty cup on the table. “Get me anothah drink, then we’ll talk.” Piggly pulls a few coins from his pocket, birthday money undoubtedly, and heads to the bar to get Joe another ale.

Moments later Piggly returns with a fresh ale and sits it in front of the disoriented trader. “Now you have your ale. How much for the club?” Sam asks. “Oye tol’ you, thurey.” Joe says while slopping down his fresh ale. “Like the rest of the village, times are tough. You need to make this sale. Surely there is a better price. You must sell it for less.” Sam says like he’s some swanky salesman from a larger more populated, and less witchy, village. “Do you know wuh oye ‘ad to do to get dis club. Oye ‘ad to race Albertson, through the forest an’ over the green wall an’ back. Fortunate for me, the Witch saw us an’ made lion food out of poor old Albertson.” Piggly swallows hard in fear. “Well, you’re in luck.” Says Sam. “If you give me that club, I will use it to kill the Witch. Then you and all of your trader friends can have the forest back.” Joe pours some more ale on the floor for his dog. “Yeah, but if dat witch kills you, then oim out a perfectly good club. So, ears what oye’ll do.” He points to Kay. “Your family gots a pretty noice gahden. Bring me ten tings from it. We’ll count that as ten shillings. Ten for ten.” Kay shakes her head as to agree. Joe’s finger moves to Sam. “Your family has dat store. Same ting. Ten tings to replace ten shillings.” Sam shakes his head but ads, “I’ll see what I can do. We’ve run into hard times too you know.”

Joe then points to Piggly. "You bought the ale, that'll count for something. But you just come back with your friends, I know what I want from you." Joe slurps down the rest of his drink and lays his head on the table. "Bring me all dees tings, den we'll see."

The kids all go their separate ways after agreeing to meet back in front of the pub as soon as they can. Sam heads to his father's store, Kay to her house, and Piggly heads to his house to eat some lunch. Kay has no problem grabbing ten vegetables from her mother's garden and heads back towards the pub. While, Piggly gobbles down a sandwich, or two, and also heads back towards the pub.

Meanwhile, outside of Sam's father's store, Sam is cautiously peeking in one of the back windows. He can't just walk in and ask his father for ten things. His father would surely ask why, and Sam knows that the outcome of that conversation would not go in his favor. After all, any reasonable parent wouldn't be too keen on their child racing off to kill a witch. Even with a magic club and two willing compatriots.

Thomas is behind the counter, filling out the stock books. Sam knows this is as good a time as any. He cracks open the back door and sneaks in, staying as low as he can. Near the back of the store are a lot of the larger items. Sam will have to sneak up towards the front of the store, which is where Thomas happens to be. The floor creaks and Thomas looks up. He notices that the back door is open and walks around the counter and down the aisle to close it. Sam now hurries to the front, grabs what he can and sneaks back down the same aisle. He hears the back door shut and then hears Thomas' footsteps returning to the front of the store. Once the footsteps stop, Sam peeks above the shelves and sees that Thomas is back to his books. Sam sneaks back to the door, sets a few things down, and reopens the door. Just then he hears Thomas. "Open again? What is going on with that door!" Soon followed by footsteps. Sam quickly picks up the items and sneaks out the open door, just as Thomas slams it behind him.

Soon after, the children reconvene outside the pub. "You get your veggies Kay?" Sam asks while he tries to regain his breath. "I did, but you look a little short." Kay says while clinging onto her armful of produce. "Yeah, this is all I could get. Don't worry, I think we'll be fine." Finally, Piggly comes strolling down the dirt road. "Nice of you to show up." Sam says. "C'mon, let's get this over with."

The kids enter the pub to find Joe, and his dog, fast asleep right where they left them. "Hey!" Sam says while nudging Joe with his foot. "Wake, up. Here are the things you wanted, now gives us the club." Joe jumps and looks around. "Club, what club? Ah, yeah. That club." Joe scoures the items on the table. "You're a little light here mate." He says as he holds his empty cup up and tries to get the very last drop of ale from it. "We brought you ten vegetables, Percy bought you an ale, and I brought four things from my shop. Plus we are going to kill that witch. All these things combined absolutely equal thirty shillings." Sam says in a forceful tone. "Oye like your spirit mate. Looking at this stuff, Oye'd call it twenee-noyne shillings." Joe grabs his satchel, loads the veggies and goods from the store into it, and pulls out the club. Joe smiles and sets it on the table in front of him. "You owe me one shilling. So 'ear's what I want. I know fat boy 'as a shilling in 'is pocket. Pay the piano guy to play my favorite song, 'e knows what it is. Tell 'im to wait until oye give 'im the signal to staht."

Sam motions for Piggly to go ahead and pay the piano guy. Once paid, Piggly returns to the group noticeably upset with having to spend his last shilling. "So 'ear's what I want. Listen chubby, morale's a little down around here nowadays. So, I want you to entertain dees poor chaps. When 'e stahts playing, you staht dancing. Got it? Then you'll get this club."

"I'm not doing that!" Piggly whines while a single tear begins to form in his right eye. Sam grabs him quickly by the arm and whispers loud enough for only Kay and Piggly to hear. "Listen. You wanted to help, so help. We had to steal from our parents. All you've had to do is buy an ale. Just pretend you're

alone in your room. Pretend we just killed the Witch and your grandfather is vindicated.” Piggly wipes his cheek. “Fine. But, next time, you do the dancing and I’ll do the stealing.”

Sam turns to Joe and nods in approval. Joe waves to the piano guy and the music starts. For a moment Piggly stands there, motionless. Like a mouse trying to hide from a cat. “Percy...” Kay whispers. Joe pulls out his knife and stabs it into the table. This quickly gets the message to Piggly as he begins to wiggle. A few of the pub patrons have noticed something is up and have begun to whisper amongst themselves. “Your boy bettah pick it up, oye’m not gettin’ my shillings wurth.” Joe says to Sam. Sam then motions to Piggly, as if to say what are you doing. Piggly gets the point and decides that if he’s going to do this, then he’s going to do it right. The piano guy begins to play louder as the song gets to the chorus. It’s a silly song that sounds as if it belongs in a circus. Piggly hops on one foot and skips to the rhythm. He claps his hands and waves his arms above his head. The patrons laugh and point and clink their cups together, spilling ale everywhere. Behind the bar is a full figured waitress with red hair. All she can do is put her hands on her hips and shake her head. Piggly jumps on a table, but slips and falls to the ground. He quickly pops up, as the crowd laughs and cheers.

The song fades and Piggly is gasping for air. The patrons cheer one last time and then quickly go back to sulking in their hopelessness. Joe smiles and hugs his dog. “That was pretty good boy. ‘Ear’s the club, go kill that witch, but don’t tell ‘er who gave ya’ dis club. Actually if she asks, tell ‘er it was old man Anderson. ‘ee’s a prick anyways.”

Outside the pub, Sam and Kay stand staring at Piggly. “What?” He says as they all begin to laugh. “Nice work Percy.” Sam says. “Now the games are over though. We have the club. Let’s go bag us a witch.” The three head towards the edge of the woods. We need to hop over the green wall” Says Sam. “That will save a lot of time.” Sam and Kay help Piggly over first, then they each easily hop over the wall.

Once over the wall, the landscape changes drastically. In the distance a wolf howls. Above them an owl hoots. Near their feet a mouse scampers about and then darts down a hole in an old log. "How do we find the Witch?" Piggly asks. "I don't know...hadn't really thought about that." Says Sam. Kay then chimes in. "We have a magic club. Maybe try the...magic...club." Sam holds up the club, high in the air. "Magic Club. Find the Witch so I can fulfill my destiny." A bird flies over. "Aw, right in my hair! Byuck!" Screams Piggly. "Shhh..." Kay and Sam both shush Piggly. "Try again Sam." Kay says. Sam holds the club out in front of him and takes a deep breath. "I think I can feel it. Pulling me. This way." Sam says as he takes off through the woods. Dashing through overgrown plants and jumping over downed logs.

Moments later, Kay and Piggly catch up to Sam as he ducks behind a rock. In front of them is a crystal clear stream, on the other side of that stream is a small cottage. "Something smells like cheese." Says Piggly as Sam and Kay shush him again. "This has to be where she lives." Sam whispers. "No one lives in the woods on account of that Witch, so this must be her home." The three peek over the rock and see that there is a smoke coming from the chimney. "She must be in there, probably brewing some newt eye stew or baking salamander toe bread or something. We need to get closer."

Carefully, they sneak up the path to the cottage. Sam leads, while Piggly brings up the rear. Once closer they can hear some banging around inside the cottage. "Someone's in there." Sam whispers. "I thought I saw a window around the side, let's see if we can look through it." The vegetation is grown up all around the clearing, the worn down dirt paths are the only easily managed way around. As they approach the front door, the path forks and circles around each corner of the cottage. Crouching, Sam leads them to the left where he thinks he saw a window. Once around the side, his observation is confirmed. They can see an open window just about shoulder high. "Okay, I'm going to look in." Sam says quietly. "...Percy...where's Piggly?" Kay looks behind her to find that Piggly has not come around the corner yet.

Kay and Sam peek back around the corner to see that Piggly has gone the other way and is sorting through a bushel of apples. Kay waves her hands trying to get his attention. Piggly now has three apples in his hands and a huge grin on his face. He takes a bite of one and starts sneaking back towards the others. Not watching where he's walking he trips over a root and lands with a clump on the first step by the front stoop.

As quickly as he fell the front door flies open. "What's going on out here!" The Witch surrounded by a cloud of grey smoke stands atop of Piggly as he struggles to back away. "An apple thief! Well, I know just what to do with apple thieves!" The Witch throws her arms in the air and back down, the grey smoke expands with a poof. Sam and Kay can't see and they can't breathe. It's dark.

Sam and Kay awaken, right where they were when the Witch found Piggly stealing her apples. It's night now, they've been passed out for a few hours. "What happened, where's Piggly?" Kay asks. "I...don't know. The Witch must have taken him inside. Let's look and see." Luckily the window is still open, so Sam and Kay sneak back to it and stand just tall enough to see through.

Inside they can see pots and pans hanging over a large stove. Spider webs hang down all over the place, and a plucked chicken hangs from the ceiling. At the table sits Piggly, he's just waking up. "What's going on? What happened? Why am I bound to this chair? Help!" Piggly begins to stir in fright. Just then the front door swings open and the Witch enters. "Awake are ya! Hope you're good and rested, because we have a busy night ahead of us." Piggly wiggles and squirms and tries to free himself. "No need struggling boy, you can't get out of those ropes I assure you. Those are magic ropes you see. They came at great value from their former owner." The Witch swoops quickly around the table followed by a trail of grey smoke. She waves her hands and a large assortment of fruits and meats and vegetables appear on the table. "You like to steal apples. Well, that means you must be hungry. Here, eat boy." She waves her hands again and the ropes loosen enough for Piggly to free his arms then

tighten back up. "No thanks, I'd rather just be getting back home if that's alright. My Granny will be getting worried..." The Witch slams her hands on the table and peers directly into Piggly's eyes. "NO! You will eat." Piggly cowers back in the chair. "But...I...I don't have any utensils." The Witch relaxes and crosses her arms. "You will eat these foods whole. And when they are all gone, I will eat you whole." She then cackles and waves her hands as smoke slips out from her long sleeves and dances over into Piggly's nostrils.

Piggly grabs a pineapple and starts trying his best to eat it. Between attempts he snatches bread and other goodies with his free hand and shoves them in his face. "She's gonna fatten him up." Says Kay. "...well even more than he already is." Sam and Kay duck back down. "Okay, you go to the front door and maybe throw some stones at it gently. Hide in the tall grass so she can't see you. When she opens the front door, I'll sneak in the window and hide until I have an opportunity. Just keep throwing stones every now and again to keep her distracted. That'll give me time to maneuver around and form a better less sporadic plan." Kay sneaks off around the corner and Sam gets ready to make his move.

The Witch is cackling and cackling, having a ball watching Piggly gorge his face. "That's right boy, eat up. Eat it all up!" She pulls out a chair and sits, still cackling and having the best time she's ever had. "Remember about that magic rope. Well, it's former owner is still hanging around...He! He! He!" She cackles while pointing at the plucked chicken hanging near the stove. "My former friend, the demented Madame Roebuck, thought she could sneak off with some of my spells and ingredients. When I caught her she ran like a chicken. So that's what I made her. Do you like chicken boy?" Piggly still stuffing his face, roll after muffin, and bite after bite. "Oh yes I love chicken." He says through his food filled cheeks. "Well let's fry her up!" The Witch waves her hands and the stove ignites and flames shoot to the ceiling. The rope that the former Madame Roebuck hangs from burns, and her now lifeless chicken body plops into a frying pan and sears as the aroma fills the air.

Just then Kay tosses her first batch of stones at the door. As quickly as the sound resonates the Witch is on the front stoop. "Who's out there! Don't be afraid, I'm just an old woman who could never defend herself." The Witch says while sounding like a terrible liar. Sam quickly and quietly sneaks in the window, careful not to disturb anything around him. Once inside he ducks under a wash basin that rests on a table with a long drape covering it.

The Witch returns to the table and sits down once again. "Tell me boy, did you come here just to steal my apples? It seems odd a single young boy would be brave enough to enter my woods." Just then Kay tosses another handful of stones, and again The Witch wisks herself to the front stoop. "If you're out there you had better show yourself." The Witch says as she raises her hands. "No? Okay then!" She drops her hands and a great wind blows all of the grass away, leaving Kay crouching in the now extremely open front yard. The Witch turns to smoke and engulfs Kay. The smoke cloud recoils into the cottage and disappears, leaving Kay tied to the chair next to Piggly. Back in her own chair the Witch twiddles her fingers. "Looks like I'll be having leftovers." She waves her hand and more grey smoke dances towards Kay's nostrils. CLUNK!

Moments later the Witch awakens. The tables have turned and she is now tied to her chair. Piggly is in the corner puking up all of the food he just ate, while Sam and Kay stand in front of the Witch, each with a scornful scowl on their face. "Your days of terrorizing our village are over Witch." Says Sam as he raises the club high in the air ready to strike. "Hold it there Sam. I know you. You're the grocer's son." The Witch Says in a delightfully delicate tone. "Don't do anything rash, this is just a misunderstanding. I'll tell you what, let me go and I'll leave. I'll find a new village." The Witch smiles. Suddenly Kay sneezes. Sam turns to see smoke beginning to surround them. "Stop now or die." He says. The smoke retracts. "Fine boy! Have it your way. Strike me down. But know this. With my death I curse your family and your beloved store. May any patron who enters be transformed into a misshapen,

poorly dressed, hideous slob. To top it off, no one will know they are hideous. They will only see it in the others around them. No matter how many stores you open, this curse will last forever. Sadly, for some, it will be part of the appeal of shopping at your stores, but don't take this curse lightly!" Her palms flash and the roof of the cottage flies off. "It is done boy! Release me, or suffer the fate."

Sam grips the club, rolls back on his heels, and prepares to strike. Momentarily he becomes confused. Should he destroy the Witch knowing his family's store's fate. Sam looks to Kay. "Make the choice Sam. Make the choice." She says softly. Sam swings and strikes the Witch who screams and swirls into a red tornado that shoots up into the sky and incinerates like a thousand campfires being thrown into the heavens. In the distance lightning strikes the mountains, then as quickly as it happened, the night is quiet and still.

Piggly, wiping his mouth, stands up and takes a deep breath. "I don't think I'll be hungry ever again. Tough luck being cursed Sam." Kay looks to Sam and nearly tackles him with a forceful hug. "You did it! Just like everyone says, you really are a clever boy." Kay kisses Sam and his eyes light up. "Aww, I think I'm gonna puke again." Piggly says as he walks through the broken wall where the front door once resided.

Back at the green wall, Sam and Kay once again help Piggly over and then easily hop over themselves. Upon hitting the ground they look up to find the entire village there to greet them. A loud roar overwhelms them as the townsfolk cheer at what they have done. "Kay! Kay Martha Rogers!" Kay's mom yells as she runs up to hug her daughter. "Joe got even more drunk and ran around telling everyone what you three were up to. We were so worried, why would you do that?" Thomas grabs Sam by the arm. "That was foolish son, you could have been killed or worse." Piggly's grandma squeezes his cheeks. "You must be starving, being in those woods all day killing witches and stuff. Let's get you home.

I made some pineapple upside down cake.” She says as Piggly turns and pukes up what’s left in his still overfilled stomach.

The next day Sam wakes to find his family eating breakfast. He sits down with them and is noticeably distraught. “What’s the matter son?” Asks Thomas. “Sad that there aren’t any more witches to slay?” The entire family chuckles as Sam begins to break the bad news. He tells them the entire story, from trading Joe for the club, to making his choice and killing the Witch. Thomas stands and raises his cup. “Sam, do not worry. What you have done is the right thing. We will find a way. We’ll just have to be smarter. We’ll have to open more stores, and buy things for less so we can then sell them at a great value to our customers. We’ll have so many customers and so little staff, that our customers will complain. But, because of our low prices, they’ll keep coming back.” The family raises their glasses and toasts. “To Sam! Such a clever boy!”

The End