SCAREDY-CAT by Chris Westfield

A granddad tells his grandson a ghost story.

EXT. OLD FAMILY FARM - DAY

Rows of corn outstretch far beyond the horizon.

Surrounded by mature maple trees, a whitewall dutch colonial serves as the farm's mainstay.

An enormous red barn looms behind the house.

EXT. RED BARN - DAY

A farmer in worn Levi's and tucked in flannel, PAPA JAY (late-60s), approaches the barn. He pulls up a ring of keys from a retractable reel on his belt. Hands trembling from early onset Parkinson's, he has trouble sorting through the keys.

Behind him is his grandson CHARLIE (8). He tries catching the 'helicopter' seed pods twirling down from the maple trees.

Papa Jay unlocks a giant padlock securing the barn door. He removes the lock and pulls a heavy rusty chain through the handles--

CLINK-CLINK-CLINK.

Charlie runs up and tugs at Papa Jay's pants.

CHARLIE

Papa Jay, why is there such a big lock on the barn?

PAPA JAY

So all the ghosts don't escape.

He leaves the boy with a devilish grin then pulls on the sliding door. It slides open with an ominous--

CRE-EEE-EE-EAK!

Charlie's eyes go wide as his jaw drops.

Papa Jay scoots inside, chain dragging along the dirt floor. He leaves his grandson silhouetted in the sunlight outside the entryway. Corn dust wafts around the boy.

INT. RED BARN - DAY

Standard-issue creepy barn. Sunlight bleeds in through cracks between the boards. Straw bales stacked high to the loft above.

In the middle, a 70's era John Deere combine sits like a resting iron goliath.

Papa Jay drops the padlocked chain onto a workbench-- KLUNK!

PAPA JAY (O.S.)

Charlie!

Charlie shudders and looks over.

PAPA JAY (CONT'D)

What's the matter, scaredy-cat, thought you wanted to help out Papa Jay?

Charlie nods.

PAPA JAY (CONT'D)

Well? Come here and help me with my toolbox.

Charlie dashes over to his grandpa.

Papa Jay points his trembling finger at an old metal toolbox underneath the workbench.

Charlie grabs the box, it's heavy. Papa Jay helps Charlie lift it.

PAPA JAY (CONT'D)

Take it over to the combine for me.

Charlie nods and takes it over.

CHARLIE

Papa Jay, why do your hands shake?

PAPA JAY

They shake because I'm afraid of the ghosts that live up in that loft.

Charlie drops the toolbox next to the combine tire.

CHARLIE

No way. There's no such thing as ghosts.

Papa Jay smiles and opens the toolbox and grabs a wrench. He raises it with a trembling hand up towards the loft.

PAPA JAY

Promise, there's six of them. Live right up there. Scared me almost to death and my hands wouldn't quit shaking ever since.

Charlie turns around to see a vertical wood ladder leading up to a loft cloaked in shadows.

PAPA JAY (CONT'D)

They been around far as I can remember.

Charlie remains frozen looking up at the loft. A hint of disbelief in his face.

PAPA JAY (CONT'D)

I leave them alone, they leave me alone.

Papa Jay smirks and leans down to Charlie's ear. He puts his hand gently on Charlie's shoulder and whispers...

PAPA JAY (CONT'D)

Most of the time.

Charlie flinches. He whispers back...

CHARLIE

I don't believe you.

A RUSTLE of straw from the loft cuts the silence. The loft's wood floor CREAKS.

Charlie's eyes grow big.

PAPA JAY

I told you they're up there. If you don't believe me, climb the ladder and see for yourself.

Papa Jay leaves his grandson and goes back to the combine.

Charlie marches towards the ladder and steps on the first rung.

PAPA JAY (CONT'D)

Careful Charlie, they don't much like visitors.

Charlie looks back in a defiant nature then climbs to the next rung.

Then the next rung.

And the next.

Another RUSTLE of straw from the loft.

Charlie freezes, clinging to the ladder. He looks back to the combine.

Papa Jay is no where to be found.

CHARLIE

Papa Jay?

No answer.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Hello? Papa Jay? You're not very funny.

Charlie shakes it off and forges upward.

Charlie's hand shakes as he reaches for the last rung before the loft floor.

From underneath the ladder, a shaky hand slowly reaches in. It grabs hold of Charlie's loose pant leg and yanks.

PAPA JAY (O.S.)

Charlie, don't fall!

Charlie screams at the top his lungs. He scrambles down the ladder and jumps off the bottom rung... landing on his butt.

Tears run down his cheeks. Papa Jay rushes out from behind the ladder, reaches to help Charlie up.

PAPA JAY (CONT'D)

Oh Charlie, are you okay?

Charlie pushes Papa Jay's hand away, gets to his feet and runs out of the barn.

EXT. RED BARN - CONTINUOUS

Charlie runs towards the house, bawling the whole way.

CHARLIE

Mommy! Mommy!

INT. RED BARN - DAY

Papa Jay wipes the grease off his hands on a faded red mechanic's towel. He makes his way over to the workbench.

TRACY (O.S.)

Dad? You in here? Oh there you are.

A woman, TRACY (33), crosses over to the workbench and puts her hand on Papa Jay's shoulder.

TRACY (CONT'D)

Lunch is ready.

Papa Jay removes a metal bowl from a shelf and puts it on the bench.

PAPA JAY

Thanks, be up in just a minute.

He pours cat food into the bowl.

Papa Jay takes the bowl to the ladder and climbs.

Tracy waits at the entryway.

TRACY

Dad be careful.

Papa Jay reaches up from half-way on the ladder. His shaky hand manages to leave the bowl on the floor of the loft above. He climbs back down.

EXT. RED BARN - DAY

Papa Jay emerges from the barn and joins Tracy. They make their way towards the house.

TRACY

Dad, can you tell me why Charlie locked himself in the bathroom for the last hour and won't come out?

PAPA JAY

Oh, I was teasing him about the ghosts that haunt the barn.

TRACY

Dad! He's eight years-old!

Tracy smacks Papa Jay across the shoulder.

Papa Jay smiles and puts his arm around his daughter as they walk shoulder-to-shoulder to the house.

INT. RED BARN - DAY

Meowing...

LOFT

Six BARN CATS appear and surround the bowl. Their fur is as white as a ghost's with eyes as black as night. They all stick their heads into the bowl to eat.