

Then, as I took a few reluctant steps toward Josh, watching him bend low, then change directions, his arms outstretched as he ran, I realized I had it completely backward.

Josh wasn't being chased. Josh was chasing.

He was chasing after Petey.

Okay, okay. So sometimes my imagination runs away with me.

Running through an old graveyard like this even in bright daylight is only natural that a person might start to have weird thoughts.

I called to Josh again, and this time he heard me and turned around. He looked worried. "Amanda come help me!" he cried.

Josh, what's the matter? I ran as fast as I could to catch up with him, but he kept darting through the gravestones, moving from row to row.

Help!

Josh-what's wrong? I turned and saw that Mom and Dad were right behind me.

It's Petey. Josh explained, out of breath. I can't get him to stop. I caught him once, but he pulled away from me.

Petey! Petey! Dad started calling the dog. But Petey was moving

from stone to stone, snuffing each one, then running to the next.

How did you get all the way over here? Dad asked as he caught up

with my brother.

I had to follow Petey. Josh explained, still looking very worried. He just took off. One second he was snuffing around that dead flower bed in our front yard. The next second, he just started to run. He wouldn't stop when I called. Wouldn't even look back. He kept running till he got here. I had to follow. I was afraid he'd get lost.

Josh stopped and gratefully let Dad take over the chase. I don't know what that damn dog's problem is, he said to me. He's just weird.

It took Dad a few tries, but he finally managed to grab Petey and pick him up off the ground. Our little sister gave a halfhearted yelp of protest, then allowed himself to be carried away.

We all trooped back to the car on the side of the road. Mr. Dawes was waiting by the car. Maybe you'd better get a leash for that dog, he said, looking very concerned.

Petey's never been on a leash. Josh protested, wearily climbing into the backseat.

Well, we might have to try one for a while. Dad said quietly, desperately if he keeps running away. Dad tossed Petey into the backseat. The dog eagerly curled up in Josh's arms.

The rest of us piled into the car, and Mr. Dawes drove us back to his office, a tiny, white, flat-roofed building at the end of a row of small offices.

As we rode, I reached over and stroked the back of Petey's head. Why did the dog run away like that? I wondered. Petey had never done that before.

I guessed that Petey was also upset about our moving. After all, Petey had spent his whole life in our old house. He probably felt a lot like Josh and I did about having to pack up and move and never see the old neighborhood again.

The new house, the new streets, and all the new smells must have freaked the poor dog out. Josh wanted to run away from the whole idea. And so did Petey.

Anyway, that was my theory.

Mr. Dawes parked the car in front of his tiny office, shook Dad's hand, and gave him a business card. You can come by next week, he told Mom and Dad. I'll have all the legal work done by then. After you sign the papers, you can move in anytime.

He poked open the car door and, giving us all a final smile, prepared to climb out.

Cumpton Dawes, Mom said, reading the white business card over Dad's shoulder. That's an unusual name. Is Cumpton an old family name?

Mr. Dawes shook his head. No, he said. I'm the only Cumpton in my family. I have no idea where the name comes from. No idea at all. Maybe my parents didn't know how to spell Charles?

Chuckling at his terrible joke, he climbed out of the car, lowered the wide black Stetson hat on his head, pulled his blazer from the trunk, and disappeared into the small white building.

Dad climbed behind the wheel, moving the seat back to make room for his big stomach. Mom got up front, and we started the long drive home. I guess you and Petey had quite an adventure today, Mom said to Josh, rolling up her window because Dad had turned on the air conditioner.

I guess, Josh said without enthusiasm. Petey was sound asleep in his lap, snoring quietly.

You're going to love your room, I told Josh. The whole house is great. Really.

Josh stared at me thoughtfully, but didn't answer.

I poked him in the ribs with my elbow. Say something. Did you hear what I said?

But the worst, thoughtful look didn't fade from Josh's face. The next couple of weeks seemed to crawl by. I walked around the house thinking about how I'd never see my room again, how I'd never eat breakfast in this kitchen again, how I'd never watch TV in the living room again. Morbid stuff like that.

I had this sick feeling when the movers came one afternoon and delivered a tall stack of cartons. Time to pack up. It was really happening. Even though it was the middle of the afternoon, I went up to my room and flopped down on my bed. I didn't nap or anything. I just stared at the ceiling for more than an hour, and all these wild, unconnected thoughts ran through my head, like a dream, only I was awake.

I wasn't the only one who was nervous about the move. Mom and Dad were snapping at each other over nothing at all. One morning they had a big fight over whether the bacon was too crispy or not.

In a way, it was funny to see them being so childish. Josh was acting really sulky all the time. He hardly spoke a word to anyone. And Petey sulked, too. That dumb dog wouldn't even pick himself up and come over to me when I had some table scraps for him.

I guess the hardest part about moving was saying good-bye to my friends. Carol and Amy were away at camp, so I had to write to them. But Kathy was home, and she was my oldest and best friend, and the hardest to say good-bye to.

I think some people were surprised that Kathy and I had stayed such good friends. For one thing, we look so different. I'm tall and thin and dark, and she's fair-skinned, with long blonde hair, and a little chubby. But we've been friends since preschool, and best friends since fourth grade.

When she came over the night before the move, we were both terribly awkward. Kathy, you shouldn't be nervous, I told her. You're not the one who's moving away forever.

It's not like you're moving to China or something, she answered, chewing hard on her bubble gum. Dad Falls is only four hours away, Amanda. We'll see each other a lot.

Yeah, I guess. I said. But I didn't believe it. Four hours away was as bad as being in China, as far as I was concerned. I guess we can still talk on the phone, I said glumly.

She blew a small green bubble, then sucked it back into her mouth. Yeah. Sure, she said, pretending to be enthusiastic. You're lucky, you know. Moving out of this creepy neighborhood to a big house.

It's not a creepy neighborhood, I insisted. I don't know why I was defending the neighborhood. I never had before. One of our favorite pastimes was thinking of places we'd rather be growing up.

School won't be the same without you, she sighed, curling her legs under her on the chair. Who's going to slip me the answers in math?

I laughed. I always slipped you the wrong answers.

But it was the thoughts that counted, Kathy said. And then she grinned. Ugh. Junior high. Is your new junior high part of the high school or part of the elementary school?

I made a disgusted face. Everything in one building. It's a small town, remember? There's no separate high school. At least, I didn't see one.

Bummer, she said.

Bummer was right.

We chatted for hours. Until Kathy's mom called and said it was time for her to come home.

Then we hugged. I had made up my mind that I wouldn't cry, but I could feel the big, hot tears forming in the corners of my eyes. And then they were running down my cheeks.

I'm so miserable! I wailed.

I had planned to be really controlled and mature. But Kathy was my best friend, after all, and what could I do?

We made a promise that we'd always be together on our birthdays no matter what. We'd force our parents to make sure we didn't miss each other's birthdays.

And then we hugged again. And Kathy said, Don't worry. We'll see each other a lot. Really. And she had tears in her eyes, too.

She turned and ran out the door. The screen door slammed hard behind her. I stood there staring out into the darkness until Petey came scampering in, his toenails clicking across the linoleum, and started to lick my hand.

The next morning, moving day, was a rainy Saturday. Not a downpour. No thunder or lightning. But just enough rain and wind to make the long drive slow and unpleasant.

The sky seemed to get darker as we neared the new neighborhood. The heavy trees bent low over the street. Slow down, Jack, Mom warned shrilly. The street is really slick.

But Dad was in a hurry to get to the house before the moving van did. They'll just put the stuff anywhere if we're not there to supervise, he explained.

Josh, beside me in the backseat, was being a real pain, as usual. He kept complaining that he was thirsty. When that didn't get results, he started whining that he was starving. But we had all had a big breakfast, so that didn't get any reaction, either.

He just wanted attention, of course. I kept trying to cheer him up by telling him how great the house was inside and how big his room was. He still hadn't seen it.

But he didn't want to be cheered up. He started wrestling with Petey, getting the poor dog all worked up, until Dad had to shout at him to stop. Let's all try really hard not to get on each other's nerves, Mom suggested.

Dad laughed. Good idea, dear.

Don't make fun of me, she snapped.

They started to argue about who was more exhausted from all the packing. Petey stood up on his hind legs and started to howl at the back window.

Can't you shut him up? Mom screamed.

I pulled Petey down, but he struggled back up and started howling again. He's never done this before, I said.

Just get him quiet! Mom insisted.

I pulled Petey down by his hind legs, and Josh started to howl. Mom turned around and gave him a dirty look. Josh didn't stop howling, though. He thought he was a riot.

Finally, Dad pulled the car up the driveway of the new house. The tires crunched over the wet gravel. Rain pounded on the roof.

Home sweet home, Mom said. I couldn't tell if she was being sarcastic or not. I think she was really glad the long car ride was over.

At least we beat the movers. Dad said, glancing at his watch. Then his expression changed. Hope they're not lost.

It is so dark as night out there, Josh complained.

Petey was jumping up and down in my lap, desperate to get out of the car. He was usually a good traveler. But once the car stopped, he wanted out immediately.

I opened my car door and he leaped onto the driveway with a splash and started to run in a wild zigzag across the front yard.

At least someone's glad to be here, Josh said quietly.

Dad ran up to the porch and, fumbling with the unfamiliar keys, managed to get the front door open. Then he motioned for us to come into the house.

Mom and Josh ran across the walk, eager to get in out of the rain. I closed the car door behind me and started to jog after them.

But something caught my eye. I stopped and looked up to the twin bay windows above the porch.

I held a hand over my eyebrows to shield my eyes and squinted

through the rain.

Yes, I saw it.

A face. In the window on the left.

The boy.

The same boy was up there, staring down at me.

·Wipe your feet! Don't track mud on the nice clean floors!· Mom called. Her voice echoed against the bare walls of the empty living room. I stepped into the hallway. The house smelled of paint. The painters had just finished on Thursday. It was hot in the house, much hotter than outside.

·This kitchen light won't go on,· Dad called from the back. ·Did the painters turn off the electricity or something?·

·How should I know?· Mom shouted back.

Their voices sounded so loud in the big, empty house.

·Mom-there-s someone upstairs!· I cried, wiping my feet on the new welcome mat and hurrying into the living room.

She was at the window, staring out at the rain, looking for the movers probably. She spun around as I came in. ·What?·

·There-s a boy upstairs. I saw him in the window,· I said, struggling to catch my breath.

Josh entered the room from the back hallway. He-d probably been with Dad. He laughed. ·Is someone already living here?·

·There-s no one upstairs,· Mom said, rolling her eyes. ·Are you two going to give me a break today, or what?·

·What did I do?· Josh whined.

·Listen, Amanda, we-re all a little on edge today-· Mom started.

But I interrupted her. ·I saw his face, Mom. In the window. I-m not crazy, you know.·

·Says who?· Josh cracked.

·Amanda!· Mom bit her lower lip, the way she always did when she was really exasperated. ·You saw a reflection of something. Of a tree probably.· She turned back to the window. The rain was coming down in sheets now, the wind driving it noisily against the large picture window. I ran to the stairway, cupped my hands over my mouth, and shouted up to the second floor, ·Who-s up there?·

No answer.

·Who-s up there?· I called, a little louder.

Mom had her hands over her ears. ·Amanda-please!·

Josh had disappeared through the dining room. He was finally exploring the house.

·There-s someone up there,· I insisted and, impulsively, I started up the wooden stairway, my sneakers thudding loudly on the bare steps.

·Amanda-· I heard Mom call after me.

But I was too angry to stop. Why didn't she believe me? Why did she have to say it was a reflection of a tree I saw up there?

I was curious. I had to know who was upstairs. I had to prove Mom wrong. I had to show her I hadn't seen a stupid reflection. I guess I can be pretty stubborn, too. Maybe it-s a family trait.

The stairs squeaked and creaked under me as I climbed. I didn't feel at all scared until I reached the second-floor landing. Then I suddenly had this heavy feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I stopped, breathing hard, leaning on the banister.

Who could it be? A burglar? A bored neighborhood kid who had broken into an empty house for a thrill?

Maybe I shouldn't be up here alone, I realized.

Maybe the boy in the window was dangerous.

·Anybody up here?· I called, my voice suddenly trembly and weak.

Still leaning against the banister, I listened.

And I could hear footsteps scampering across the hallway.

No.

Not footsteps.

The rain. That-s what it was. The patter of rain against the slate-shingled roof.

For some reason, the sound made me feel a little calmer. I let go of the banister and stepped into the long, narrow hallway. It was dark up here, except for a rectangle of gray light from a small window at the other end.

I took a few steps, the old wooden floorboards creaking noisily beneath me. ·Anybody up here?·

Again no answer.

I stepped up to the first doorway on my left. The door was closed. The smell of fresh paint was suffocating. There was a light switch on the wall near the door. Maybe it-s for the hall light, I thought. I clicked it on. But nothing happened.

·Anybody here?·

My hand was trembling as I grabbed the doorknob. It felt warm in my hand. And damp.

I turned it and, taking a deep breath, pushed open the door.

I peered into the room. Gray light filtered in through the bay window.

A flash of lightning made me jump back. The thunder that followed was a dull, distant roar.

Slowly, carefully, I took a step into the room. Then another.

No sign of anyone.

This was a guest bedroom. Or it could be Josh-s room if he decided he liked it.

Another flash of lightning. The sky seemed to be darkening. It was pitch-black out there even though it was just after lunchtime.

I backed into the hall. The next room down was going to be mine. It also had a bay window that looked down on the front yard.

Was the boy I saw staring down at me in my room?

I crept down the hall, letting my hand run along the wall for some reason, and stopped outside my door, which was also closed.

Taking a deep breath, I knocked on the door. ·Who-s in there?· I called.

I listened.

Silence.

Then a clap of thunder, closer than the last. I froze as if I were paralyzed, holding my breath. It was so hot up here, hot and damp. And the smell of paint was making me dizzy.

I grabbed the doorknob. ·Anybody in there?·

I started to turn the knob-when the boy crept up from behind and grabbed my shoulder.

I couldn't breathe. I couldn't cry out.

My heart seemed to stop. My chest felt as if it were about to explode.

With a desperate, terrified effort, I spun around.

·Josh!· I shrieked. ·You scared me to death! I thought·

He let go of me and took a step back. ·Gotcha!· he declared, and then started to laugh, a high-pitched laugh that echoed down the long, bare hallway.

My heart was pounding hard now. My forehead throbbed. ·You're not funny,· I said angrily. I shoved him against the wall. ·You really scared me·

He laughed and rolled around on the floor. He's really a sicko. I tried

to shove him again but missed.

Angrily, I turned away from him just in time to see my bedroom door slowly swinging open.

I gasped in disbelief. And froze, gaping at the moving door.

Josh stopped laughing and stood up, immediately serious, his dark eyes wide with fright.

I could hear someone moving inside the room.

I could hear whispering.

Excited giggles.

·Who-who-s there?· I managed to stammer in a high little voice I didn't recognize.

The door, creaking loudly, opened a bit more, then started to close.

·Who-s there?· I demanded, a bit more forcefully.

Again, I could hear whispering, someone moving about.

Josh had backed up against the wall and was edging away, toward the stairs. He had an expression on his face I'd never seen before-sheer terror.

The door, creaking like a door in a movie haunted house, closed a little more.

Josh was nearly to the stairway. He was staring at me, violently motioning with his hand for me to follow.

But instead, I stepped forward, grabbed the doorknob, and pushed the door open hard.

It didn't resist.

I let go of the doorknob and stood blocking the doorway. ·Who-s there?·

The room was empty.

Thunder crashed.

It took me a few seconds to realize what was making the door move.

The window on the opposite wall had been left open several inches. The gusting wind through the open window must have been opening and closing the door. I guessed that also explained the other sounds I heard inside the room, the sounds I thought were whispers.

Who had left the window open? The painters, probably.

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly, waiting for my pounding heart to settle down to normal.

Feeling a little foolish, I walked quickly to the window and pushed it shut.

·Amanda-are you all right?· Josh whispered from the hallway.

I started to answer him. But then I had a better idea.

He had practically scared me to death a few minutes before. Why not give him a little scare? He deserved it.

So I didn't answer him.

I could hear him take a few timid steps closer to my room. ·Amanda? Amanda? You okay?·

I tiptoed over to my closet, pulled the door open a third of the way.

Then I laid down flat on the floor, on my back, with my head and shoulders hidden inside the closet and the rest of me out in the room.

·Amanda?· Josh sounded very scared.

·Ohhhhh,· I moaned loudly.

I knew when he saw me sprawled on the floor like this, he'd totally freak out!

·Amanda-what-s happening?·

He was in the doorway now. He'd see me any second now, lying in the dark room, my head hidden from view, the lightning flashing impressively and the thunder cracking outside the old window.

I took a deep breath and held it to keep from giggling.

·Amanda?· he whispered. And then he must have seen me, because he uttered a loud ·Huh?!· And I heard him gasp.

And then he screamed at the top of his lungs. I heard him running down the hall to the stairway, shrieking. ·Mom! Dad!· And I heard his sneakers thudding down the wooden stairs, with him screaming and calling all the way down.

I snickered to myself. Then, before I could pull myself up, I felt a rough, warm tongue licking my face.

·Petey!·

He was licking my cheeks, licking my eyelids, licking me frantically, as if he were trying to revive me, or as if to let me know that everything was okay.

·Oh, Petey! Petey!· I cried, laughing and throwing my arms around the sweet dog. ·Stop! You're getting me all sticky!·

But he wouldn't stop. He kept on licking fiercely.

The poor dog is nervous, too, I thought.

·Come on, Petey, shape up,· I told him, holding his panting face away with both my hands. ·There-s nothing to be nervous about. This new place is going to be fun. You'll see·