

Chapter 5

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. Whowhos 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. Whos 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. Whos 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. Ohhhhhh, I moaned loudly. I knew when he saw me sprawled on the floor like this, he'd totally freak out! Amandawhats 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.