

Chapter 6

That night, I was smiling to myself as I fluffed up my pillow and slid into bed. I was thinking about how terrified Josh had been that afternoon, how frightened he looked even after I came prancing down the stairs, perfectly okay. How angry he was that I'd fooled him. Of course, Mom and Dad didn't think it was funny. They were both nervous and upset because the moving van had just arrived, an hour late. They forced Josh and me to call a truce. No more scaring each other. It's hard not to get scared in this creepy old place, Josh muttered. But we reluctantly agreed not to play any more jokes on each other, if we could possibly help it. The men, complaining about the rain, started carrying in all of our furniture. Josh and I helped show them where we wanted stuff in our rooms. They dropped my dresser on the stairs, but it only got a small scratch. The furniture looked strange and small in this big house. Josh and I tried to stay out of the way while Mom and Dad worked all day, arranging things, emptying cartons, putting clothes away. Mom even managed to get the curtains hung in my room. What a day! Now, a little after ten o'clock, trying to get to sleep for the first time in my new room, I turned onto my side, then onto my back. Even though this was my old bed, I couldn't get comfortable. Everything seemed so different, so wrong. The bed didn't face the same direction as in my old bedroom. The walls were bare. I hadn't had time to hang any of my posters. The room seemed so large and empty. The shadows seemed so much darker. My back started to itch, and then I suddenly felt itchy all over. The bed is filled with bugs! I thought, sitting up. But of course that was ridiculous. It was my same old bed with clean sheets. I forced myself to settle back down and closed my eyes. Sometimes when I can't get to sleep, I count silently by twos, picturing each number in my mind as I think it. It usually helps to clear my mind so that I can drift off to sleep. I tried it now, burying my face in the pillow, picturing the numbers rolling past 4 6 8 I yawned loudly, still wide awake at two-twenty. I'm going to be awake forever, I thought. I'm never going to be able to sleep in this new room. But then I must have drifted off without realizing it. I don't know how long I slept. An hour or two at the most. It was a light, uncomfortable sleep. Then something woke me. I sat straight up, startled. Despite the heat of the room, I felt cold all over. Looking down to the end of the bed, I saw that I had kicked off the sheet and light blanket. With a groan, I reached down for them, but then froze. I heard whispers. Someone was whispering across the room. Whowhos there? My voice was a whisper, too, tiny and frightened. I grabbed my covers and pulled them up to my chin. I heard more whispers. The room came into focus as my eyes adjusted to the dim light. The curtains. The long, sheer curtains from my old room

that my mother had hung that afternoon were fluttering at the window. So. That explained the whispers. The billowing curtains must have woken me up. A soft, gray light floated in from outside. The curtains cast moving shadows onto the foot of my bed. Yawning, I stretched and climbed out of bed. I felt chilled all over as I crept across the wooden floor to close the window. As I came near, the curtains stopped billowing and floated back into place. I pushed them aside and reached out to close the window. Oh! I uttered a soft cry when I realized that the window was closed. But how could the curtains flutter like that with the window closed? I stood there for a while, staring out at the grays of the night. There wasn't much of a draft. The window seemed pretty airtight. Had I imagined the curtains billowing? Were my eyes playing tricks on me? Yawning, I hurried back through the strange shadows to my bed and pulled the covers up as high as they would go. Amanda, stop scaring yourself, I scolded. When I fell back to sleep a few minutes later, I had the ugliest, most terrifying dream. I dreamed that we were all dead. Mom, Dad, Josh, and me. At first, I saw us sitting around the dinner table in the new dining room. The room was very bright, so bright I couldn't see our faces very well. They were just a bright, white blur. But, then, slowly, slowly, everything came into focus, and I could see that beneath our hair, we had no faces. Our skin was gone, and only our gray-green skulls were left. Bits of flesh clung to my bony cheeks. There were only deep, black sockets where my eyes had been. The four of us, all dead, sat eating in silence. Our dinner plates, I saw, were filled with small bones. A big platter in the center of the table was piled high with gray-green bones, human-looking bones. And then, in this dream, our disgusting meal was interrupted by a loud knocking on the door, an insistent pounding that grew louder and louder. It was Kathy, my friend from back home. I could see her at our front door, pounding on it with both fists. I wanted to go answer the door. I wanted to run from the dining room and pull open the door and greet Kathy. I wanted to talk to Kathy. I wanted to tell her what had happened to me, to explain that I was dead and that my face had fallen away. I wanted to see Kathy so badly. But I couldn't get up from the table. I tried and tried, but I couldn't get up. The pounding on the door grew louder and louder, until it was deafening. But I just sat there with my gruesome family, picking up bones from my dinner plate and eating them. I woke up with a start, the horror of the dream still with me. I could still hear the pounding in my ears. I shook my head, trying to chase the dream away. It was morning. I could tell from the blue of the sky outside the window. Oh, no. The curtains. They were billowing again, flapping noisily as they blew into the room. I sat up and stared. The window was still closed.