

Chapter 8

A hand touched my shoulder. I spun around. It was Josh. Im not going for a walk unless I can take my basketball, he said. Joshplease! I looked back up to the landing, and the girl was gone. I felt cold all over. My legs were all trembly. I grabbed the banister. Dad! Come hereplease! I called. Joshs face filled with alarm. Hey, I didnt do anything! he shouted. Noitsits not you, I said, and called Dad again. Amanda, Im kind of busy, Dad said, appearing below at the foot of the stairs, already perspiring from uncrating living room stuff. Dad, I saw somebody, I told him. Up there. A girl. I pointed. Amanda, please, he replied, making a face. Stop seeing things okay? Theres no one in this house except the four of us. and maybe a few mice. Mice? Josh asked with sudden interest. Really? Where? Dad, I didnt imagine it, I said, my voice cracking. I was really hurt that he didnt believe me. Amanda, look up there, Dad said, gazing up to the landing. What do you see? I followed his gaze. There was a pile of my clothes on the landing. Mom must have just unpacked them. Its just clothes, Dad said impatiently. Its not a girl. Its clothes. He rolled his eyes. Sorry, I said quietly. I repeated it as I started up the stairs. Sorry. But I didnt really feel sorry. I felt confused. And still scared. Was it possible that I thought a pile of clothes was a smiling girl? No. I didnt think so. Im not crazy. And I have really good eyesight. So then, what was going on? I opened the door to my room, turned on the ceiling light, and saw the curtains billowing in front of the bay window. Oh, no. Not again, I thought. I hurried over to them. This time, the window was open. Who opened it? Mom, I guessed. Warm, wet air blew into the room. The sky was heavy and gray. It smelled like rain. Turning to my bed, I had another shock. Someone had laid out an outfit for me. A pair of faded jeans and a pale blue, sleeveless T-shirt. They were spread out side by side at the foot of the bed. Who had put them there? Mom? I stood at the doorway and called to her. Mom? Mom? Did you pick out clothes for me? I could hear her shout something from downstairs, but I couldnt make out the words. Calm down, Amanda, I told myself. Calm down. Of course Mom pulled the clothes out. Of course Mom put them there. From the doorway, I heard whispering in my closet. Whispering and hushed giggling behind the closet door. This was the last straw.

Whats going on here? I yelled at the top of my lungs. I stormed over to the closet and pulled open the door. Frantically, I pushed clothes out of the way. No one in there. Mice? I thought. Had I heard the mice that Dad was talking about? Ive got to get out of here, I said aloud. The room, I realized, was driving me crazy. No. I was driving myself crazy. Imagining all of these weird things. There was a logical explanation for everything. Everything. As I pulled up my jeans and fastened them, I said the word logical over and over in my mind. I said it so many times that it didnt sound like a real word anymore. Calm down, Amanda. Calm down. I took a deep breath and held it to ten. Boo! Joshcut it out. You didnt scare me, I told him, sounding more cross than I had meant to. Lets get out of here, he said, staring at me from the doorway. This place gives me the creeps. Huh? You, too? I exclaimed. Whats your problem? He started to say something, then stopped. He suddenly looked embarrassed. Forget it, he muttered. No, tell me, I insisted. What were you going to say? He kicked at the floor molding. I had a really creepy dream last night, he finally admitted, looking past me to the fluttering curtains at the window. A dream? I remembered my horrible dream. Yeah. There were these two boys in my room. And they were mean. What did they do? I asked. I dont remember, Josh said, avoiding my eyes. I just remember they were scary. And what happened? I asked, turning to the mirror to brush my hair. I woke up, he said. And then added impatiently, Come on. Lets go. Did the boys say anything to you? I asked. No. I dont think so, he answered thoughtfully. They just laughed. Laughed? Well, giggled, sort of, Josh said. I dont want to talk about it anymore, he snapped. Are we going for this dumb walk, or not? Okay. Im ready, I said, putting down my brush, taking one last look in the mirror. Lets go on this dumb walk. I followed him down the hall. As we passed the stack of clothes on the landing, I thought about the girl I had seen standing there. And I thought about the boy in the window when we first arrived. And the two boys Josh had seen in his dream. I decided it proved that Josh and I were both really nervous about moving to this new place. Maybe Mom and Dad were right. We were letting our imaginations run away with us. It had to be our imaginations. I mean, what else could it be?