

Chapter 7

Ill take a look at the window. There must be a draft or a leak or something, Dad said at breakfast. He shoveled in another mouthful of scrambled eggs and ham. But, Dad its so weird! I insisted, still feeling scared. The curtains were blowing like crazy, and the window was closed! There might be a pane missing, Dad suggested. Amanda is a pain! Josh cracked. His idea of a really witty joke. Dont start with your sister, Mom said, putting her plate down on the table and dropping into her chair. She looked tired. Her black hair, usually carefully pulled back, was disheveled. She tugged at the belt on her bathrobe. Whew. I dont think I slept two hours last night. Neither did I, I said, sighing. I kept thinking that boy would show up in my room again. Amandayouve really got to stop this, Mom said sharply. Boys in your room. Curtains blowing. You have to realize that youre nervous, and your imagination is working overtime. But, Mom I started. Maybe a ghost was behind the curtains, Josh said, teasing. He raised up his hands and made a ghostly oooooooh wail. Whoa. Mom put a hand on Joshs shoulder. Remember what you promised about scaring each other? Its going to be hard for all of us to adjust to this place, Dad said. You may have dreamed about the curtains blowing, Amanda. You said you had bad dreams, right? The terrifying nightmare flashed back into my mind. Once again I saw the big platter of bones on the table. I shivered. Its so damp in here, Mom said. A little sunshine will help dry the place out, Dad said. I peered out the window. The sky had turned solid gray. Trees seemed to spread darkness over our backyard. Wheres Petey? I asked. Out back, Mom replied, swallowing a mouthful of eggs. He got up early, too. Couldnt sleep, I guess. So I let him out. What are we doing today? Josh asked. He always needed to know the plan for the day. Every detail. Mainly so he could argue about it. Your father and I still have a lot of unpacking to do, Mom said, glancing to the back hallway, which was cluttered with unopened cartons. You two can explore the neighborhood. See what you can find out. See if there are any other kids your age around. In other words, you want us to get lost! I said. Mom and

Dad both laughed. Youre very smart, Amanda. But I want to help unpack my stuff, Josh whined. I knew hed argue with the plan, just like always. Go get dressed and take a long walk, Dad said. Take Petey with you, okay? And take a leash for him. I left one by the front stairs. What about our bikes? Why cant we ride our bikes? Josh asked. Theyre buried in the back of the garage, Dad told him. Youll never be able to get to them. Besides, you have a flat tire. If I cant ride my bike, Im not going out, Josh insisted, crossing his arms in front of his chest. Mom and Dad had to argue with him. Then threaten him. Finally, he agreed to go for a short walk. I finished my breakfast, thinking about Kathy and my other friends back home. I wondered what the kids were like in Dark Falls. I wondered if Id be able to find new friends, real friends. I volunteered to do the breakfast dishes since Mom and Dad had so much work to do. The warm water felt soothing on my hands as I sponged the dishes clean. I guess maybe Im weird. I like washing dishes. Behind me, from somewhere in the front of the house, I could hear Josh arguing with Dad. I could just barely make out the words over the trickle of the tap water. Your basketball is packed in one of these cartons, Dad was saying. Then Josh said something. Then Dad said, How should I know which one? Then Josh said something. Then Dad said, No, I dont have time to look now. Believe it or not, your basketball isnt at the top of my list. I stacked the last dish onto the counter to drain, and looked for a dish towel to dry my hands. There was none in sight. I guess they hadnt been unpacked yet. Wiping off my hands on the front of my robe, I headed for the stairs. Ill be dressed in five minutes, I called to Josh, who was still arguing with Dad in the living room. Then we can go out. I started up the front stairs, and then stopped. Above me on the landing stood a strange girl, about my age, with short black hair. She was smiling down at me, not a warm smile, not a friendly smile, but the coldest, most frightening smile I had ever seen.