

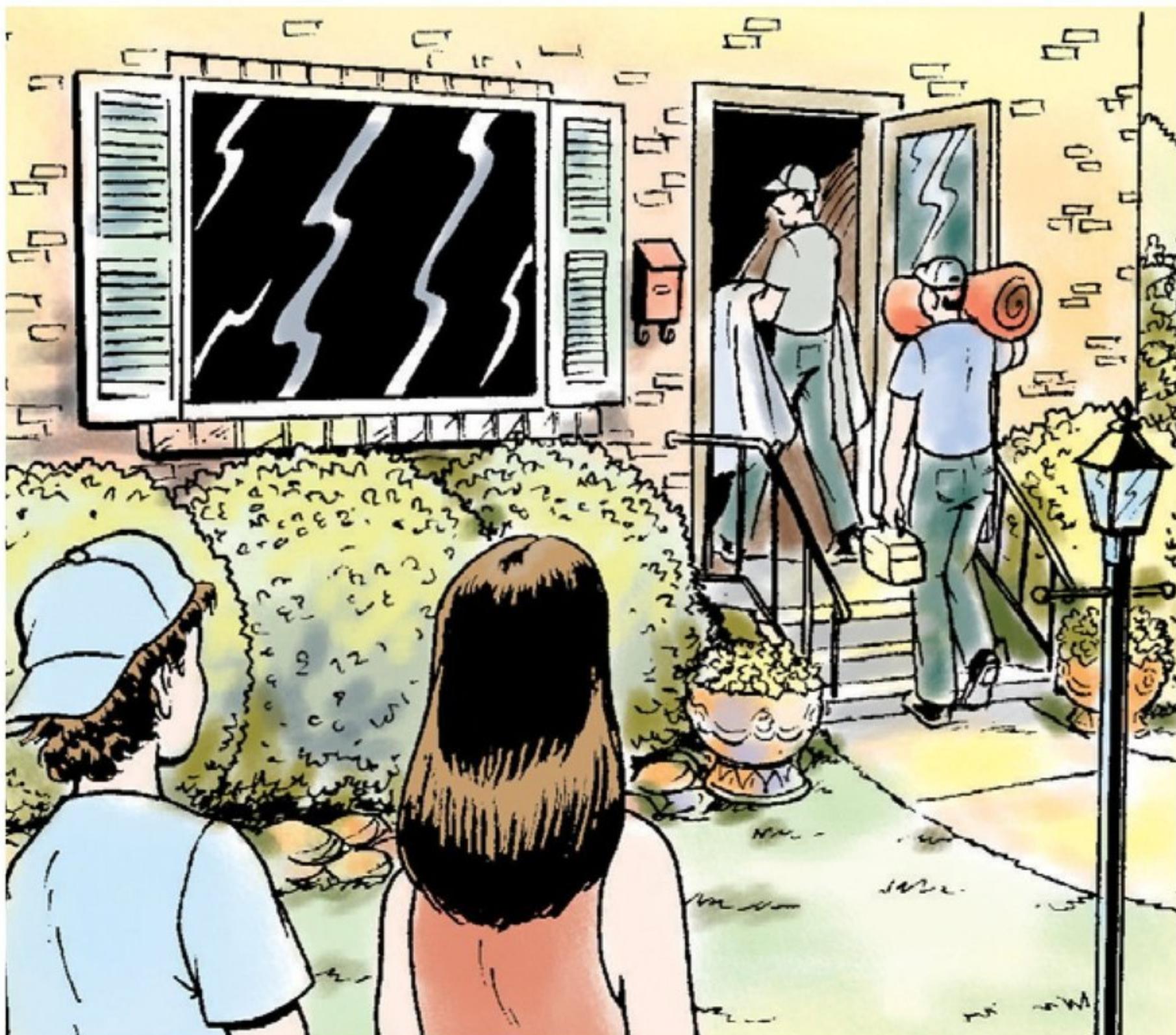
LEVELED BOOK • U

Mystery in the Moonlight



Written by Abigail LaMarine
Illustrated by Tad Butler

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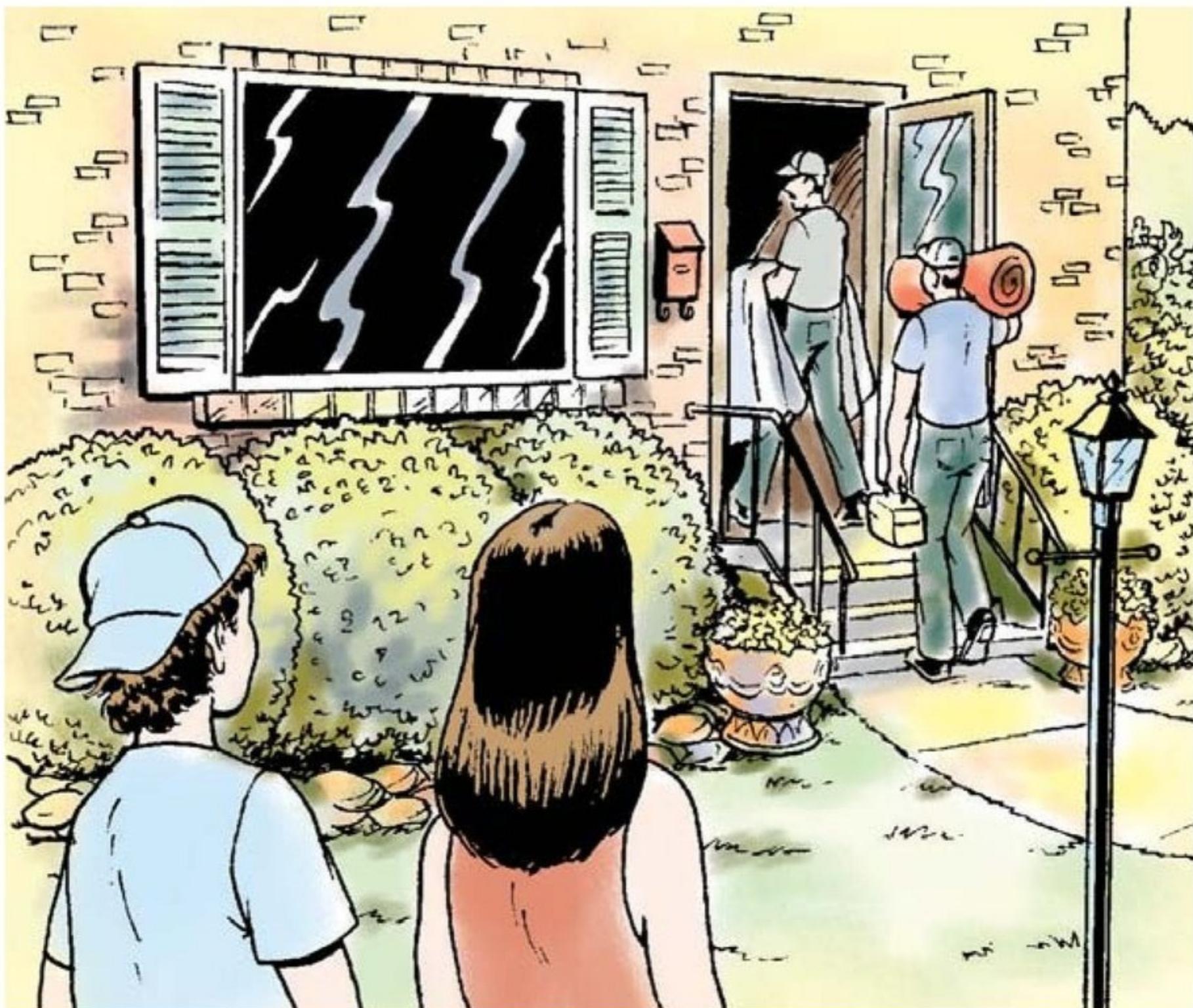
Chapter 1

Nico and Isabel Lopez were twins, but other than being born on the same day, they were almost nothing alike. They were **fraternal twins**, not **identical twins**. Nico was solidly built and darkly handsome, with a wild mane of unruly hair like his father's. Isabel was lighter, with flashing green eyes, a sprinkle of freckles on her nose, and long, silky hair like her mother's. Since the day they were born, Nico had been the thoughtful, quiet one, while Isabel spun their world with adventure and mischief. They were as different as night and day, but their personalities complemented each other's perfectly. They made friends easily, but—like most twins—they remained closest to each other.

It had been a long, full summer in their neighborhood. Grady and Jessica Peterson, the twins' good friends who lived up the street, had built a huge tree house in their yard. Most everyone on the block had slept over at least once, eating Mrs. Peterson's s'mores and telling stories late into the warm night—the scarier, the better, of course. With their tree house, Grady and Jessica had been the center of attention that summer for sure. Most kids, Nico and Isabel included, were now hatching **plots** to get their parents to build tree houses, too.

The only other big news was that the house across the street, the one that had been vacant since last spring, had finally sold. A new family had moved in, and Mr. Lopez had heard from the real estate agency that they were named Bradford, and that they had a ten-year-old son named Andrew. This was great, except that no one had gotten so much as a glimpse of him.

In fact, the whole Bradford family seemed absolutely invisible. One afternoon, Isabel and Nico were playing in their front yard when an enormous truck from "Draperies, Etc." pulled up in front of the Bradfords' house. The twins tried to be **casual** about glancing over at the house while men redid every window treatment,



putting up both blinds and drapes. Once they were done, not a thing could be seen inside.

"I guess they like their privacy," Nico said.

"That's strange," Isabel said. "I was hoping to meet the boy who lives there—maybe play some kickball, but I've never seen him at all." Isabel was good at kickball and never missed an opportunity to **recruit** fresh players. Nico chuckled, knowing how frustrating it must be for Isabel not to be able to make friends right away.

"I think there's something odd about that family," she said.

Chapter 2

Another night, when the moon was full, Isabel quietly, but urgently, knocked at Nico's bedroom door.

"Isabel, it's late. What's up with you?" Nico asked. Isabel had her binoculars in her hand, and she climbed on Nico's bed to peek out his window.

"Shh! Andrew Bradford is outside," Isabel whispered. Nico peered through the binoculars and saw Andrew Bradford climbing the old oak tree in the Bradfords' yard.

"This certainly seems like a funny time to be out climbing trees, if you ask me," Isabel said. Nico looked around the yard and saw Andrew's parents sitting at the patio table, happily playing cards by moonlight.

Isabel looked very **intent** and a little mysterious. "Don't you think it's strange that the Bradfords are never outside during the daytime, and that all their windows are covered? You've seen those creepy horror movies just like I have. Don't all these **coincidences** sound familiar?"

Nico rolled his eyes. "Maybe they work at night, Isabel. I don't know . . . I'm sure there's a logical explanation."



"Nico, that kid hasn't come out in the daylight even once since they moved in almost a month ago. Remember when we moved here? The first thing we did

was check out the neighborhood for kids our age. You and Grady were best friends by the end of our first week, remember?" Isabel asked.

"Yeah, I do remember that, but some kids are just shy, and that doesn't make them monsters. You know, we could go over there and introduce ourselves, but . . . let's just wait a day or so and see what happens."

"Okay, but I think something very weird is happening here." She leaned in to whisper in Nico's ear, "Maybe it's even something spooky, and I think you've forgotten how to use your imagination."

"That's okay, Is. You've got enough imagination for both of us," Nico said. Isabel looked annoyed and a little hurt. She sighed and went back to her room.

Chapter 3

The next few days were a blur of activity as school began, and everyone was busy settling into their new routines. That first morning at the bus stop, all the kids watched the Bradford house to see if Andrew would show. He didn't, and the "Andrew mystery" was soon lost in the shuffle of first-day jitters and finding out who everyone's teacher was going to be. The days were still long, however, so there was some evening playtime left for the tree house and for lazing around, time for finishing off the last of the wild blackberries. Talk turned once again to the mysterious Andrew Bradford and the latest sighting of his moonlight **escapades**. Theories were many and wild, but most focused on bloodsucking monsters of one kind or another.



Chapter 4

One particular night, Nico, Isabel, Grady, and Jessica were playing a little twilight kickball with other kids from the neighborhood. Isabel nailed one—straight over their heads and into the Bradfords' yard. Everyone looked toward the house in stunned silence.

"Well," whispered Isabel bravely, "I guess I'll have to climb over there and get it. We'll find out once and for all if he's really a werewolf, a vampire, or what . . ."

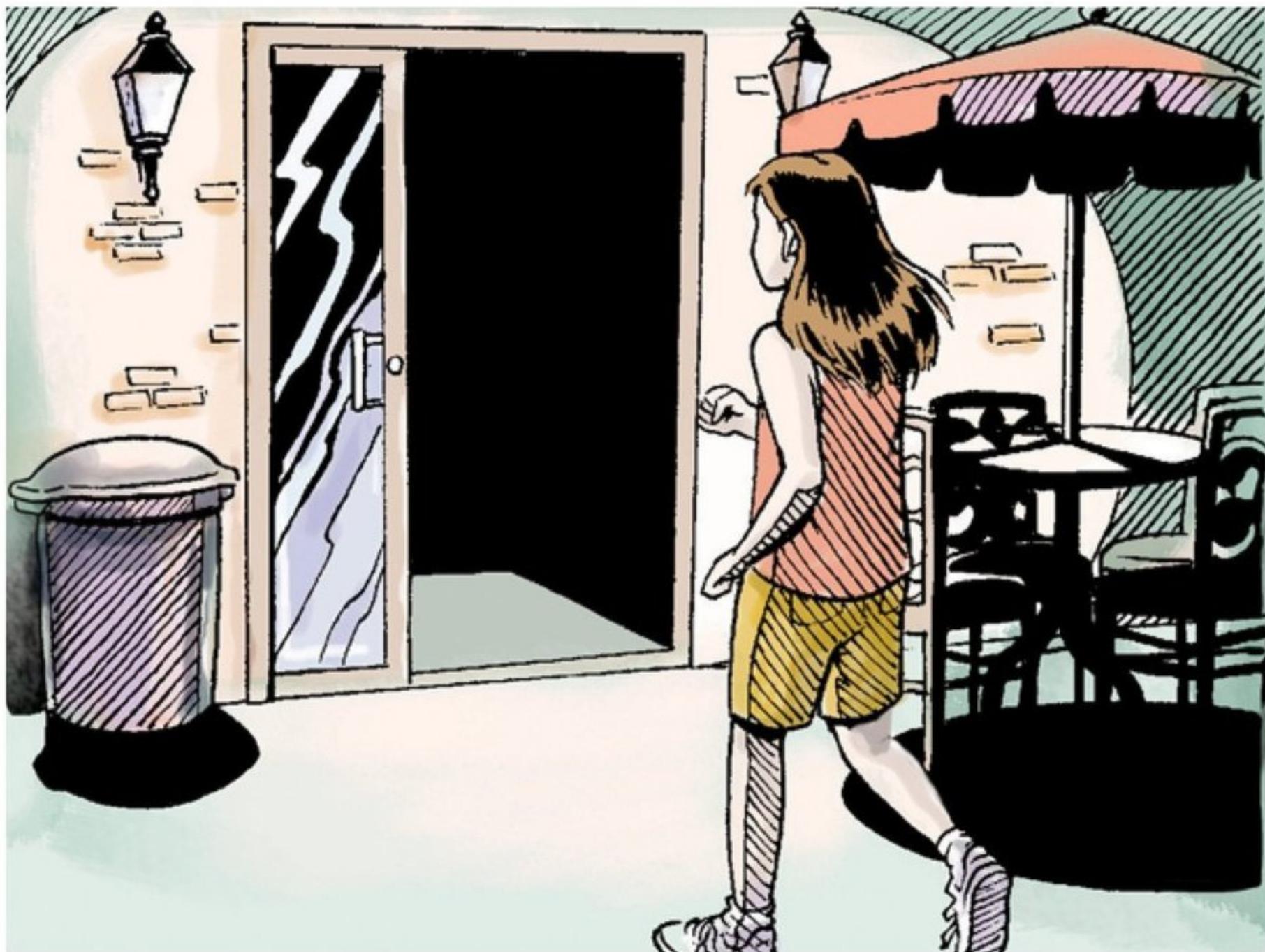
"Um, that's okay, Is. It's getting dark. Let's wait until tomorrow," suggested Grady, kicking the toe of his sneaker into the ground and looking nervous.

Jessica nodded, taking a step backward and looking at her watch. "It's late," she mumbled.

"No, Isabel is right," Nico said, walking over and taking his sister's hand. "I'll go with her, and we'll see what's going on."

Nico and Isabel shared a glance they'd shared many times before. They would always be there for each other—no matter what.

The last of the evening light was fading fast. As they cleared the fence that surrounded the



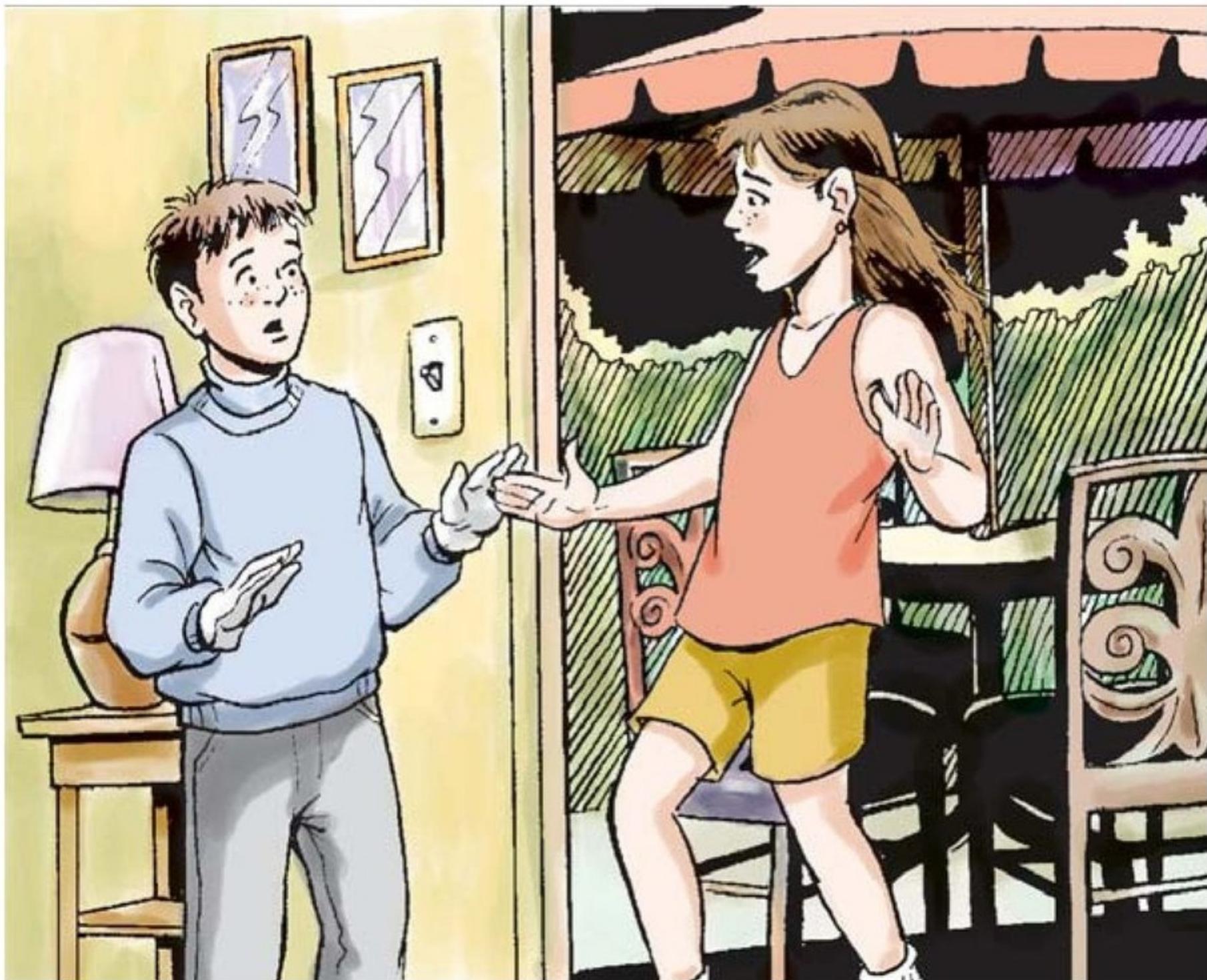
Bradfords' yard, they heard the familiar, high-pitched clattering of bats beyond the trees. The bats had begun their nightly hunt for food.

They shared another glance. Was this a sign?

They clutched each other's hands tightly and headed for the far side of the Bradfords' property.

"There it is." Nico bent to retrieve the ball from between some shrubs. Then he turned and stared. Isabel was quickly walking away from him toward the open sliding door on the patio.
"Isabel, come back!"

Just as she reached the **threshold**, a young boy appeared. He looked a bit small for ten.



"Hi there," squeaked Isabel, and then she drew herself up straight and said firmly, "You must be Andrew. I'm Isabel Lopez, and that chicken over there is my twin brother, Nico."

"So much for loyalty," grumbled Nico.

Andrew seemed at a loss for words, but he finally managed a small "Hello." He didn't look like a werewolf or a vampire, or any kind of monster at all. He did have a whole lot of freckles, and he was covered with clothing from head to toe on one of the warmest nights of the year. But there was no fur or bloody fangs anywhere.

"Sorry to bust into your yard like this, but our ball went over the fence, and . . ." Isabel's voice trailed off.

Nico yelled from where he stood, "My sister wanted to see if you were some kind of monster, since you never come out in the daytime."

Isabel threw her hands over her face with embarrassment, but Andrew just started to chuckle. Then the chuckle turned into a very loud, long laugh.



"Well, you're honest, aren't you? Let me go get my mom and dad. They're probably wondering who I'm talking to. Then we can tell you all about the big mystery."

Mr. and Mrs. Bradford appeared a moment later. After introductions, the Bradfords explained the reason for their family's odd behavior.

"Andrew has a condition called XP. The XP stands for **Xeroderma Pigmentosum** (ZE-ro-DER-ma PIG-men-TOH-sum). His skin and eyes just can't **tolerate** light from the sun. He gets sunburned almost immediately, and it takes a long time to heal. Other than that, he is just like you in every way. As much as we'd love to live lives like yours, it's pretty tough to do without sunlight," Mr. Bradford said.

"Andrew's playtime is limited to moonlight only, so we've adjusted our lives to his. It makes finding friends in a new place a bit of a challenge, I'm afraid," Mrs. Bradford added.

Isabel and Nico tried not to stare. This was a lot to swallow all at once, but suddenly, Isabel's face lit up.

"Hey, Andrew, since it's dark now, would you like to meet some more of the neighbors? There's this really cool tree house, and we play kickball, and . . ." Isabel babbled excitedly while Andrew's parents nodded with approval. She and Nico led Andrew toward his new friends.

The annual Halloween block party was never better. Under a full moon, the neighborhood celebrated the night with its newest members. Isabel came as a fairy princess, and Nico was a wise old wizard. Grady and Jessica Peterson were pirates. And, to everyone's surprise, Andrew Bradford came as the most convincing vampire anyone had ever seen.



Glossary

casual (<i>adj.</i>)	relaxed, easygoing (p. 5)
coincidences (<i>n.</i>)	similar or related things that happen at the same time by accident (p. 7)
escapades (<i>n.</i>)	adventures (p. 9)
fraternal twins (<i>n.</i>)	twins who are born at the same time but are not identical (p. 4)
identical twins (<i>n.</i>)	twins who look exactly alike (p. 4)
intent (<i>adj.</i>)	intense, focused, and determined (p. 7)
plots (<i>n.</i>)	plans; schemes (p. 5)
recruit (<i>v.</i>)	to bring someone in to join (p. 6)
threshold (<i>n.</i>)	part of a door that sits on the ground; any place that marks the entrance to a building or room (p. 11)
tolerate (<i>v.</i>)	to endure or bear (p. 14)
Xeroderma Pigmentosum (<i>n.</i>)	a disorder that causes someone to have strong, painful reactions to sunlight (p. 14)

Mystery in the Moonlight
Level U Leveled Book
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