

STAY OUT OF THE ATTIC

CHAPTER 1

“This is going to be so boring. Look at this neighborhood. All the streets are the same. All the houses look the same. All the yards and trees look the same. Boring streets with boring houses and boring yards. Borrrring.” I mutter, looking out the car window.

“You know, I got so bored when I was your age that I decided to take up fencing. But the neighbors said they would call the police unless I put it back.” Dad says with a chuckle.

“And if you really get bored, we can drive to the mall, find a great parking spot, and just sit parked there with the back-up lights on. Imagine how much fun we’d have.”

I groan and roll my eyes.

My mother responds immediately. “Don’t go rolling your eyes at your father’s jokes, Doug. You better not forget that I can see you back there. You know I’ve got eyes in the back of my head.”

We pull up in front of the house that we’ll be staying at for a while. It’s Grandma Miriam’s house but Mom says Grandma’s going to be gone for the summer. Visiting her sister or cousin or something like that. And we’re housesitting.

Just great. Stuck here all summer with my parents. In a town where I don’t know anybody. Are there any other twelve-year-old kids here? I haven’t seen any yet. So, yeah, this’ll be just a perfect way to spend my summer. Boring!

“Well, here we are.” Mom says, smiling. Everybody says that I look like her. They say that we have the same wavy brown hair, the same brown eyes, the same shape of our noses, and the same smile. I don’t see that at all. I think I look more like my dad.

Dad parks and turns off the car. The houses in the neighborhood are big with trees in the backyards. The trees are taller than the houses. Grandma Miriam’s is two stories tall, painted blue, and it has a covered porch that wraps around the side of the house. The two windows upstairs that face the road have shades that are pulled down halfway.

“It looks like a face and it’s falling asleep.” I said as we got out of the car. “It’s like the windows are eyes and the porch is the mouth.”

But nobody hears me. Mom is heading toward the house, pushing stuff around in her purse. Looking for keys, I guess. Suddenly, she shouts “Scat!” and a big black cat comes shooting

off the porch, down the steps, around the side of the house, and disappears in the shadows and bushes.

“I forgot about Houdini. I almost tripped over her.” Mom says, turning back to look at us while she’s trying different keys in the front door.

“Here we go! Finally found the right key.” she says as she pushes the door open.

Dad is already taking suitcases out of the trunk. He pops his head out around the side of the car. “Come back here and give me a hand, Doug.” he says. *Yep, I look like him. Big brown eyes, dark brown hair, and tall. Not short like mom. What are people thinking?*

I go back to the trunk and grab two suitcases. One is really heavy. *Wow! What’s in this thing? Who brought a bowling ball? Or bricks?* I lug it across the yard, up the stairs, and into the house.

The house is big inside too. There’s room for big couches, big tables, and bookshelves everywhere. The living room was like a library, with hundreds of books wrapping around the walls. It smells like leather and old newspaper. I like the way it looks and smells. It’s comfortable.

“Wow! Grandma Miriam reads a lot, huh?” I say.

“She sure does. You remember that she used to be a librarian, right?” Mom answers.

“I know. You told me that she ran the library for years. Looks like she brought some of it home.” I say with a grin. “I hope she has some video games too.”

“I kind of doubt it, Doug. She’s a little too old for that, don’t you think?”

“I guess so. But can I look around to see if she does have any? I promise I’ll be careful with all her things, Mom.”

“Well, okay. But help your dad get the rest of the stuff out of the car first.”

“No problem.” I went out the door, jumped down the stairs, and finished unloading the car with Dad.

After we bring everything into the house, Mom and Dad start deciding what boxes and suitcases go to which room. I begin my treasure hunt for video games or something just as fun. I look in the kitchen and bathroom first.

Don’t really expect to find anything stashed away in there but you never know. I’m right. No treasure.

I walk back into the hallway. Mom and Dad are still talking while they’re shuffling boxes around to read the names that they put on them. The boxes are marked with big, blue and

white labels. 'Doug's stuff.' 'Dad's stuff.' 'Mom's stuff.' And stuff like 'Hair Dryer and Bathroom Goodies.'

They'll call me when they figure out what goes where. In the meantime, the hunt continues.

I head upstairs and check out the rooms. Two bedrooms. Each one had a dresser and a closet. I open the dresser drawers and closet doors. No treasure.

I walk into the den. It's filled with more books. There are dark wooden bookshelves lining two of the walls. A big desk with a dark red leather chair sits in front of the heavy purple curtains. Rays of golden light peek through the curtains. I can see the dust floating in the streams of sunshine.

I look around the room for anything that isn't a book. No such luck. I turn to head back to the hallway and I see a picture of Grandma Miriam on the wall.

It's not a small picture. But neither is Grandma Miriam.

She's sitting in a plush yellow velvet chair. Holding a black cat that looks a lot like Houdini. Grandma fills the chair. She's short and chubby. Like a lot of grandmas. Her long white hair flows down over her shoulders. There's a row of seven black starbursts in a zigzag pattern over her right ear. She's wearing a dark purple dress with long sleeves. There's a little row of silver symbols running along the bottom of the dress. On the hand that's petting the cat, she's wearing a large purple ring. It's a big amethyst held in place by two silver claws.

Cool ring. But no treasure yet.

Back out in the hallway, I look up and see a door in the ceiling with a cord hanging down with a wooden ball at the end.

Where does that go?

I walk over to the cord and reach up to pull it. I can't reach it. Even on my tiptoes. I jump up, grab the cord, and the door drops slowly down from the ceiling.

It's creaking like a door in a haunted house movie. *That's kinda creepy.* I can see some light showing on the left side of the opening but most of the space is dark. *And that's kinda spooky.*

There's a ladder folded on the door, so I flip it down and start to climb up. I slowly stick my head up through the opening and look around. I squint my eyes to help me see if there's anything hiding in the shadows before I climb all the way in.

The light is coming through a small window at the back of the house. *No vampires. No werewolves. No ghosts. No zombies. Okay, it's safe to go ahead.* I climb up into the room.

I'm alone in the dark attic of the house. Standing surrounded by old boxes, old chairs, old lamps, an old sewing machine, an old mirror, and a bunch of other old stuff. And everything's dusty.

It smells like mothballs and rotten wood. Yuck!

With all this old stuff, I know there's gotta be something cool tucked away up here. You know, like a hidden treasure. I walk to the back of the room, searching as I go.

But it feels so muggy and hot. I've only been up here a couple of minutes and I'm sweating. I feel it running down my back. My shirt is sticking to me. *Gross. This place needs a fan or something. I can't stay up here treasure hunting for much longer. The treasure better pop out soon.*

Nothing pops out. Heading back towards the folding staircase that leads back downstairs, I hear CREEEEEEAK.

It's coming from the floor on the far side of the attic. I stop in my tracks. *Is something moving?*

I look back in the shadows at the dark outlines of boxes and furniture. No noises. Nothing moving. I take a step forward.

CREEEEEEAK. The floor is squeaking again. My heart starts beating faster. I freeze and try to figure out where the noise came from. But it's stopped.

Is something just waiting to attack? Taking a deep breath, I try another step.

CREEEEEEAK. I feel my chest pounding, the sweat rolling down my face. *How can I get back to the folding staircase?*

I take another deep breath. There isn't any creaking sound. *Did whatever it was go away?*

Moving slowly, I take a step toward the staircase. CREEEEEEAK.

I rock back and forth. CREEEEEEAK.

Listening to the floor creak. I know what's happening.

It's me! I'm making the noise, walking on these old boards.

Then I see the body on the couch at the back of the attic. And it doesn't have a head!