

# BROKEN SPIRIT



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## Chapter 1

# The Basement

Usually, I pay no attention when objects go missing. They're probably just in a moving box. Small items disappear first. Maybe it's a book, DVD, or my track hoodie. Then bigger things vanish. Mom's datebook is gone without a trace. Dad's tools also pull a disappearing act. Almost every day, something goes missing. It's annoying. Now the air conditioner is broken. That's even worse.

I think our new house is haunted. Maybe the ghost wants to be noticed. The house is more than 100 years old. Most of the houses in this New Jersey town are ancient. That's why my parents like it. It's why I don't.

Mom has been on my back. She wants me to do laundry. I hate laundry. The washer and dryer are in the basement. That place is creepy. It's so dark and damp.

Spiderwebs are everywhere. I don't like going down there. It feels like I'm walking into a horror movie.

My mom has no sympathy for me. Today is Saturday. A basket of dirty laundry waits for me. It sits by the basement door. I flip on the light switch. A dim bulb flickers.

The narrow stairway creaks as I make my way down. A moldy smell makes me gag. My feet move slowly on the steps. All I think of is the last scary movie I saw.

From under the stairs, a hand could reach out. It could grab me. With each step, I wait for it.

The ceiling is too low. I almost bump my head. It feels like spiders are crawling through my hair. The floor is concrete. Bricks make up the walls.

A room in the back corner freaks me out. The door is always closed. I went in there once. This room has a dirt floor. The walls are wooden. It doesn't match the rest of the concrete basement. Lying on the floor is a shovel. Maybe it was used to bury a body. Sometimes I think about digging around to find out.

This spooky house looks like one in a horror movie. The basement just confirms it.

I can't keep my eyes off the door to the back room. Sometimes I swear the knob turns on its own. Sounds come from inside. That can't be possible though. It must be in my head. Still, it's enough to scare me.

I dump the basket of clothes into the washer. Then I pour in more than enough soap. Mom tells me I should separate the colors. But why?

Well, one time I turned Mom's white blouse pink. But that was the fault of my red shorts. Dad's new white socks turned gray once. That was only because I washed them with new jeans. Nothing red or new is in this load. It should all be good. One load is better than three. I'm saving time and money.

I close the washing machine lid. Then I look around. I'm alone. Boxes are stacked everywhere. Nothing stirs. Noises come from above me. Mom is moving around upstairs. Yet my brain tells me something is down here with me. I turn the knob on the washer. Next, I press start.

Slowly, I walk to the stairs. Then I stop. Is something coming out of the dark at me? My eyes dart around. The light flickers again. Now I run for the stairs. I leave whatever is down there in my dust. At the top of the stairs, I throw the door open. It slams shut behind me.

## Chapter 2

# Changing Channels

Mom is washing dishes at the sink. She jumps when I burst into the kitchen. “What’s the matter with you?” she asks.

I prop my hands on my hips. “Why can’t we use the spare room for laundry?”

She sighs. “My office is in the spare room.”

“I wouldn’t mind doing laundry if it were up here.” That’s a lie. I hate laundry.

“Fay, what is the problem? Did the light go out again?”

“Yeah,” I say. “But it’s not just that. The creepy room downstairs freaks me out.”

My mom chuckles. “Maybe you should stop watching scary movies.” She turns back to the dishes. “There’s probably just a short in the wire.”

I roll my eyes. The problem is not a short in the wire. But Mom doesn't believe in ghosts.

"I'll have Dad look at it when he gets home."

*Ugh.* Who knows when that will be? We moved for Dad's new job. He's always at work. Mom spends most of her time in her home office. That means I'm usually alone.

Saturday afternoons used to be the best. Now they are just lonely. This sunny July day would be perfect for playing basketball. But no one my age is around to hang out with.

In my old neighborhood, kids were everywhere. I had many friends.

Now I sometimes take my basketball outside. I dribble it on the sidewalk. My hope is that someone my age will notice me. Maybe this someone will even come outside to shoot hoops with me. Mom says there is a basketball court at the school. Going by myself doesn't sound fun though.

That leaves me here. I'm bored with nothing to do.

In the living room, I flop on the couch. The remote is missing. We always keep it on the coffee table. Yet it's not there. It's not on the floor either. Glancing around, I run my hands in between the couch cushions. Still, I don't find it.

"Mom!" I yell.

She comes to the kitchen door. “What is it now?”

“The remote is gone.”

“You probably set it down somewhere.” Her eyes scan the room. “Use the buttons on the TV.”

Annoyed, I grit my teeth. I want to stomp my foot. But I control my emotions. “I need the remote to watch Netflix.”

Mom heads back to the sink. “Watch regular TV. Maybe go outside.”

“And do what?” I complain. My dirty look is aimed at her back. It’s a good thing she doesn’t see it. She would ground me for sure. But it wouldn’t matter. I don’t have a social life to be grounded from.

Next I jab buttons on the TV. Twenty channels fly by. Finally, it lands on the one I want. I sit back and chill.

“Fay!” Mom calls me from the kitchen. “Get in here right now.” She sounds angry.

My mind races. I can’t think of anything I did wrong.

Mom is standing at the kitchen sink. The remote is in her hands. It’s covered in soap bubbles.

Laughter escapes me. “Well, at least it’s clean.”

“This isn’t funny,” Mom growls. “It might be ruined.”

“Hey, I didn’t put it there. I’m 14, not 2.”

She thrusts the remote at me. Bubbles fly off. “Go see if it still works.”

First, I dry it off. Then I take the remote back into

the living room. I test it. It doesn't work. Drying it out might help. I take it to the front porch. Next I remove the batteries. Then I set the remote in the sun. Maybe it will work again tonight.

Standing there, I look around. Someone is grilling. It smells so good. My stomach growls.

A laugh catches my attention. Kids are playing tag. They're too young for me to hang out with.

This stinks. All my friends are in Boston. I was the point guard on my basketball team. We were state champs two years in a row. There, I was important. Here in Princeton, I feel like a nobody.

When school starts this fall, I'll be the new girl. My new school might not have a basketball team. If it does, I wonder what the team is called. In Boston, we were the Bean Town Barracudas. That's a cool name. I was proud to be a Barracuda. If this school has a team, I bet the name is lame.



## Chapter 3

# Fay the Protector

The curtains are always closed at the house next door. I never see anyone there. But sometimes the curtains move. It feels like someone is watching me. A hermit must live there. Perhaps it's a lonely old lady. She might have 80 cats.

I'm lonely. Maybe I'll start collecting cats.

"Fay!" It's Mom's voice.

I roll my eyes.

"Come here!" she calls.

"Why?"

"Just come in here."

I cross my arms. "What is it?"

"Fay Marie! Get your butt in here now!"

*Ugh. Fine!* I go into the kitchen to see what she wants.

Mom is wiping down the sink. “Check the washing machine. The buzzer went off.”

I just stare at her. “That shouldn’t have happened yet.”

Sighing, she glances my way. “Well, it did. Did you put it on the short cycle?”

“No.” I really don’t know what I put it on. But I do not want to go downstairs again. “Can it wait? I’m busy.”

“Fine.” Mom tosses her sponge into the sink. “I’ll go.”

She’s mad. I can tell. Mom throws open the basement door and stomps down the stairs. Now I’m worried. I don’t feel bad for making her go. But Mom’s *fine* does not mean fine. Her *fine* means she is going to make me pay later.

She must think I’m being a baby. But scary movies have taught me a lot. For example, I know who hangs out in dark basements. Ghosts and monsters do! It’s better to be safe than sorry.

“Fay!” Mom yells.

This startles me. Why is she yelling? Something must be wrong.

*Here we go!* The basement monster has shown itself. Quickly, I look for a weapon. I grab a knife. Then I run downstairs.

Mom turns to me and screams.

“I’ve got your back!” I say, holding the knife high. “Where is it?”

“Where is what?” She sounds annoyed, not scared.

Now I feel stupid. Maybe there’s nothing down here.

“I am seriously thinking about getting you some therapy.” Mom points to the washing machine. “What is this?”

The open machine is full of water. But there are no clothes inside.

“Why are you pulling these pranks?” she asks.

My mouth pops open. “But . . . but I filled that washer.”

She shakes her head. “Where are the clothes, Fay?”

“I put them in the washer. I swear.”

Mom bends down and opens the dryer. Inside is a ball of dirty clothes.

“Really, Fay?”

Now I’m confused. I could have sworn I put them in the washer.

“But I—”

The look in her eyes is sharp. It tells me I need to close my mouth.

# BROKEN SPIRIT

Fay isn't happy about moving to a new town. The old house her family bought is dark and spooky. When items start disappearing, Fay is convinced the place is haunted. Then she notices a shadowy figure lurking in her window. Is it an intruder or a ghost? The answer leads Fay on a journey that teaches her the true meaning of friendship.



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