



THE CREAKY CEILING

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by Donna M. McDine

Awakened by a steady creak, I sat up in bed and listened. When I heard it again my heart started to pound. As soon as it started, it stopped. I shoved my head under my pillow. I wished it were morning.

After breakfast, my mom and I descended the narrow staircase from our apartment in an old Victorian house. "Mom, did you hear any strange noises last night?"

"No, Leah. I was so tired from unpacking that I was asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow," Mom said.

Surprise, surprise. At the bottom of the stairs, there was Sean, our neighbor. He has annoyed me from the minute we moved in. He seems to be everywhere I turn...it feels like I have a shadow.

"Good morning, Mrs. Brennan and Leah," Sean said as he leaned up against the wall.

"Good morning, Sean," my Mom said.

I brushed past him and mumbled, "Morning."

"Mom, what do you think the noise could be?"

"Old houses sometimes make what is called settling noises. I'm sure it's nothing,"

I glanced over my shoulder at Sean and he had a smirk on his face.

“Leah, next time you see Sean you should try being a little friendlier,” Mom said.

I rolled my eyes. “Why? He’s an annoying boy, and he’s always following me.”

“We’ve only been here a few days. He can’t be that bad. You don’t even really know him. Just give him a chance,” Mom said.

“Oh, please,” I groaned.

“Come on. We need to go to the supermarket and get back quick,” Mom said. “The repairman is coming this afternoon to finally hook up the phone.”

While mom dealt with the telephone, I continued to decorate my room. I began to tape posters on the walls and the creaking started again. I stood very still and listened. There was no doubt that the noise was coming from up above. My throat was so dry that my voice was hardly a whisper when I yelled for my mom. I darted out into the hallway and bumped right into her.

“Leah, what in the world are you doing?” Mom exclaimed.

I grabbed her hands and pulled her into my room. “Sshh. Listen. The creaking noise is back.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t your own footsteps on the hardwood floors?” Mom asked.

“How could that be? When the sound came from over my head,” I said.

“I don’t hear anything. I think your imagination has run wild,” Mom said.

“Whatever,” I said as I crossed my arms across my chest. “I know I’m not crazy. And I’m not imagining it.”

“Leah, I didn’t say you were crazy. It’s just that it takes time to get used to new places. When you finish decorating, please throw your trash out.”

“Mom, can I check out the rest of the house when I’m done?”

“Sure, but only for a little while. Supper will be ready at 6 o’clock,” Mom said.

When I was sure that Sean wasn’t around, I stepped out into the hallway and tiptoed up the stairs to the attic.

“Watcha doing?” Sean asked.

I clenched my hands. How does he always know where I am?

“Um, nothing.”

“It doesn’t look like nothing. Besides no one is allowed up there.”

“Why?” I asked.

“The landlady says so,” Sean said.

I ignored him and continued upstairs. At the top, I opened the attic door. Dusty boxes were everywhere. I squeezed between them, walked towards the window, and tripped over something. I steadied myself and shined the flashlight at the floor. On the floor was a thick rope, I followed it and discovered it tied to a rocking chair. Curious, I felt along to see where the other end went. To my surprise, it went out a hole in the windowsill, down the side of the house and right into the window of Sean’s apartment.

I knew he was up to something. Wait till I get my hands on him!

“Sean!” I yelled as I turned away from the window and came face-to-face to Sean.

“I know it was you who rigged up the rocking chair. Are you happy now that you freaked me out?”

Sean laughed. “Chill out. It was just a joke.”

Tears streamed down my face. “It’s not funny. It’s hard enough moving to a new place. Then strange noises happen.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think you’d be so spooked,” Sean said.

I wiped away the tears with the back of my hand and ran towards the stairs. “Forget it. At least I’m not crazy.”

“Hey, wait up. Let me tell you how I scared the last new kid. You’ll laugh your head off,” Sean said.

Donna is a graduate of the Institute of Children’s Literature and is a member of the SCBWI and The National Writing for Children Center. Her publishing credits include two short stories with Long Story Short and an article with The National Writing for Children Center and two articles with Kid Magazine Writers. Her non-fiction article on jellyfish appeared in the July 2007 issue of Stories for Children Magazine.

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