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AMERICAN chillers



BREGE
THOMPSON

12: Dangerous Dolls of Delaware

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1

“Find anything?” I asked as I plunged the shovel into the dirt. My brother, Spencer, was kneeling on the ground near my feet, his hands sifting through the dark, wet ground.

“Nothing yet,” he said. “But I’m sure we will. Try digging deeper, Serena.”

That’s me. Serena Boardman. I’m twelve, and my brother, Spencer, is eleven. He was planning on going fishing in a few hours, and I was helping him dig for worms in the woods not far from our house.

And so far, we hadn't had much luck . . . but that was about to change.

Only, it wasn't worms that we would be finding.

Not today.

I'd already dug a good-sized hole. Now, I stood over it and plunged the shovel blade into the ground again, digging the hole deeper.

There was a dull thud, and the shovel stopped abruptly.

"Uh oh," I said. "We're not going any deeper here. I think I hit a root."

I pulled the shovel out of the hole. Spencer reached down, grabbed a handful of dirt, and pulled it out.

Then he stopped.

"Hey," he said, peering down into the hole. "That doesn't look like a root. Check it out."

I dropped the shovel and knelt down. Spencer and I dug with our hands, heaping the dirt beside us.

"You're right!" I exclaimed. "This isn't a root at all!"

And it wasn't. Whatever was in the ground was made of wood, but it was too smooth and flat to be a root.

Birds chirruped from the trees. The air was cool and damp, and the gray sky hinted of a coming rainstorm.

“Keep digging around the sides,” Spencer said. “I think it’s some kind of box.”

“Like a treasure chest!” I said.

“Yeah!” Spencer exclaimed. “Maybe it’s a chest full of buried treasure!”

That would be cool!

“What’s a box doing way out here in the woods, buried in the ground?” I asked, pulling out another clump of dark dirt. My hands were caked with the black, clammy soil.

“You got me,” Spencer replied. He reached down, grabbed a corner of the box, and pulled. The box shifted a tiny bit.

I reached down and grabbed the other side of the box.

“On three,” I said. “One, two, three!”

We lifted, and the wooden box came up. It wasn’t really heavy, but it sure looked old. There was no doubt that it had been in the ground for a long, long time.

“It feels empty,” Spencer said as we placed the box on the ground.

“So much for buried treasure,” I said.

There weren't any handles on the box, and the lid was nailed shut.

"I think I can get the blade of the shovel between the lid and the box," Spencer said, reaching for the shovel. "Then we can pry it off."

He wedged the metal blade into the thin crack and pumped the shovel up and down. The nails gave way easily, and the lid lifted.

And inside the box—

Two dolls.

Two ordinary dolls: one boy, one girl. They were old, and their clothing was faded. The girl doll's hair was falling out just above her forehead. The boy doll didn't have any hair at all. . . . just plastic that was colored brown to *look* like wavy hair.

As you can imagine, we were disappointed. Spencer was, too. I think that we both were hoping that the box would have been filled with money or something.

And I don't know why I decided to take the dolls home. Maybe I was just curious. Maybe I thought the dolls might be valuable.

But something happened as soon as I got the dolls home.

Something strange.

Soon . . . *very* soon . . . Spencer and I would both
be wishing that we'd *never* found those dolls!

2

It started to rain on the way home.

“Great,” Spencer groaned as he gazed up at the ash-gray sky. “There goes my day of fishing.”

“Well, we didn’t find very many worms in the first place,” I said.

“Yeah. Too bad I can’t fish with dolls.”

It didn’t rain very hard, but by the time we got home, Spencer and I were soaked. I’d held the dolls close to me, and bent forward to shield them with my body, so they didn’t get very wet at all.

Mom was in the kitchen when we walked in the door. Rufus, our brown and white cocker spaniel, ran around our feet. Rufus is a great dog, and he's really friendly.

"Look what we found buried in the ground!" I exclaimed, holding up the dolls for Mom to see.

"Make sure you both take your shoes off," Mom said, ignoring the dolls. "They're full of mud."

I kicked off my shoes and pulled my wet hair back away from my face.

"But look at these *dolls*," I said, as I walked into the kitchen. "We found them buried in the ground in an old box."

Mom looked at the dolls. "Are you sure you weren't digging in some old garbage dump?" she asked.

"No," I replied, shaking my head. "We were out in the woods digging for worms. We found an old box in the ground. When we opened it up, these two dolls were inside."

"Well, someone probably threw them away," Mom said. She looked me up and down. "Good grief, Serena! You're soaked! Get out of those wet clothes before you catch a cold!"

I walked through the kitchen and into the living room, and placed the dolls on the couch. I turned and

walked down the hall and into my bedroom, changed into dry pants and a shirt, then carried my wet clothing into the bathroom to hang them over the shower curtain rod to dry.

I went back to the living room to get the dolls, intending to take them into the garage and clean them up.

But when I went to the couch, one of the dolls was missing!

“Spencer!” I called down the hall. He’s always playing tricks on me and trying to scare me. I thought that maybe he hid the doll just to make me mad.

Spencer’s head appeared from his bedroom door.

“What?”

“Did you do something with the boy doll?”

He shook his head. “No. I’ve been in my bedroom. Ask Mom.” He disappeared back into his room.

I walked into the kitchen.

“Mom . . . have you seen my doll? The boy doll is missing.”

“I’ve been in the kitchen,” she said. “Didn’t you just have it?”

“Yeah,” I said. “But I put both of them on the couch. One of them is missing.”

“I haven’t seen it,” Mom said.

This is too weird, I thought. How can a doll just disappear? It couldn't have just got up and walked away!

Well, I was about to find the doll, all right.
And I was also about to find out something else.
The dolls we had found weren't just ordinary dolls.
In fact, they were terrifying.
Terrifying . . . and *dangerous*.
Something caught my eye outside the livingroom window.
Something that moved.
And when I saw what it was, I gasped.

3

The doll was outside . . . *and it was being carried by our cocker spaniel, Rufus!* He must have picked it up off the couch and took it outside.

“Oh, no!” I cried, and ran for the back door. Rufus chews things up sometimes, and I didn’t want him ruining the doll.

I threw open the back door.

“*Rufus!*” I shouted. “*Get in here! Right now!*”

Rufus looked at me sheepishly. He knew that he’d been caught, and he hung his head as he slowly

walked toward me. When he reached the door, he dropped the doll on the porch.

“Good boy,” I said smiling, as I petted him on the head. It’s hard to stay mad at Rufus. He really *is* a good dog. Rufus wagged his tail and scampered out into the yard. I noticed that it had finally stopped raining, which was a good thing. The doll would have been soaked by now.

I picked it up. Thankfully, Rufus hadn’t started chewing on it, and the doll wasn’t damaged.

It was then that I really took a good look at the doll’s face.

And the first word that came to my mind was . . . *creepy*.

I don’t know why. The doll just looked weird. Like it was almost alive or something. It didn’t look like any other doll I had ever seen before in my life.

I carried it back through the kitchen where Mom was busy making a cake for the church bake sale. In the living room, the girl doll was right where I had left her on the couch.

I put down the smaller doll and picked up the girl doll. Again, I was struck by how eerie the face looked. There was something about these dolls that wasn’t right . . . but I didn’t know what it was.

Then, something happened that was more than
creepy.

It was more than terrifying.

While I was holding up the girl doll, examining her
face . . . *she winked at me!*

4

I dropped the doll onto the couch and screamed. Instantly, Mom was at my side.

“What’s wrong?!” she asked.

“The doll!” I replied in shock. “It . . . it winked at me!”

“Don’t be silly,” Mom said. She reached down and picked up the doll. I took a step back.

“There’s the reason it winked at you,” she said. “The eyes move by themselves.”

I peered closer and looked. Sure enough, the doll's eyelids closed when she was leaned backward.

"But . . . but she didn't have those kind of eyelids before!" I stammered. "She didn't!"

"Of course she did," Mom said. She handed me the doll. "I tell you, Serena. You have quite an imagination."

Mom didn't believe me!

I stared at the doll. Now it creeped me out even more. I just knew that something wasn't right about these dolls.

Why would someone go through the trouble to put the dolls in a box and bury them in ground? I wondered. It just didn't make sense.

Unless, of course, someone was trying to get rid of the dolls for some reason. They wanted to put them some place where no one would find them.

Or perhaps in a place where the dolls couldn't get out.

Don't be goofy, I told myself. Dolls are dolls. Besides . . . they might be worth a lot of money.

We live in Camden, Delaware, which isn't far from Dover, the state capitol. There's a really cool collectible store that has all kinds of different things like coins, stamps, old bottles . . . stuff like that. I wanted to take the dolls there to show the store

owner. Maybe they would know something more about them.

However, that wasn't going to happen. Not today, anyway. Mom asked me to help her in the kitchen, and I spent the rest of the day cooking and baking with her. Spencer went fishing, but he didn't catch anything.

All in all, the day was pretty normal.

The night, however, was going to be anything but normal.

And it was all because of—you guessed it—those two dolls.

You see, I was about to find out that I was right.

Those two dolls weren't ordinary dolls at all. And if you get spooked easily, you're probably not going to want to go any farther.

Stop reading. NOW. I mean it.

Because what was about to happen that night still freaks me out to this very day . . .

5

Dad came home from work with pizza, which was totally cool. Mom had called Dad at work and said she was tired from baking and cooking all day, and asked him to pick up something for supper. We all munched on pizza while watching a movie on television.

Finally, it was time for bed. I had just pulled the covers back when Mom called out to me.

“Serena . . . come get your dolls and put them away.”

To tell you the truth, I had forgotten about the dolls. I'd put them on a bookshelf in the living room where Rufus couldn't get at them.

I went out and took them from the shelf. Then I walked back into my bedroom and put the dolls on my dresser and climbed into bed. A few minutes later, Mom came in, kissed me on the forehead, turned my bedroom light off, and left. Sometimes Mom lets me read in bed before I go to sleep, but tonight I was too tired.

However, as soon as all of the lights in the house went out, I realized that I would never get to sleep with those creepy dolls in my room. The moonlight shone through the window, and reflected off their faces. They looked even spookier than before.

I felt as if they were staring at me. Watching me.

I closed my eyes and tried to forget about the dolls, but it was impossible. Have you ever felt like someone was watching you? That's exactly what I felt like. I felt like I was being spied on.

Finally, after a few more minutes of trying to get to sleep, I slipped out of bed and walked to the dresser. I picked up both dolls, opened up my closet door, and tossed them inside. I couldn't see inside the closet, and I didn't care. I just wanted those dolls out of my sight.

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I closed the door and climbed back into bed.
And fell asleep.
But not for long.
I must have just fallen asleep when I was
awakened by a sound.
A scraping noise.
I pulled the sheets up to my chin, trembling with
fear. Because I knew where the sounds were coming
from.
My closet.
Then—
A voice!
A child's voice began speaking! And as I listened,
my horror ballooned into all-out terror.
*"We're coming for you, Serena! We're coming for
you . . ."*