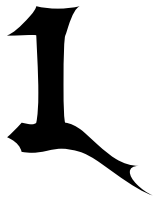


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“Well Danielle . . . what do you think?”

I almost didn’t hear my dad ask the question. I was looking out the rain-streaked car window, staring up at the big, two-story house that was now our home.

“It’s . . . it’s huge,” I replied, trying not to sound nervous.

But I was. I was really nervous. There was something about the house that was just . . .

Creepy.

"I think you'll like it here," Mom said. "The rooms are big, and there is a fireplace on both floors."

Through the rain, the dark house looked cold and uninviting.

"It looks kind of lonely," I said.

"That's because no one has lived here for a while," Dad said, turning the key and shutting off the car engine. "It needs someone like us to take care of it. In a few months from now, we'll have flowers all around. The lawn will be fresh and green, and it will look like a home. *Our* home."

Dad was wrong, of course. The house wouldn't be a home.

It would be a nightmare.

We just didn't know it yet.

Our move from Columbus, Ohio, to Sandusky, Ohio, happened pretty fast. Dad's company transferred him, and we needed to find a new home real quick. I knew I was going to miss my friends in Columbus, but I was pretty excited to move. Sandusky is a city in northern Ohio, and our home was only a few miles from

Lake Erie, one of the Great Lakes.

But best of all, Sandusky is home to a place called Cedar Point. It's a really cool amusement park with awesome roller coasters and rides. We went there once on a class field trip, and when my dad told me that we would be moving to Sandusky, I couldn't believe it! I'd be living only a few miles from Cedar Point!

Too cool.

Walking inside our new home for the first time was like walking into a cave. The windows had been boarded up, so everything was very dark. The floors were wood, and my wet sneakers squeaked as I walked down the hall.

"You can pick any room upstairs," Dad said. "Whichever one you want."

Awesome! My dorky brother was spending the week at Grandma and Grandpa's, so I got to pick the best room first!

I flipped a light switch in the hall and nothing happened. I tried it again.

Still nothing.

"Dad," I called out. "The lights don't work."

“The power is still shut off,” he said. “The electric company will be out later today to turn it on. Hang on a sec.”

His heavy footsteps echoed down the hall, and suddenly he appeared around a corner. He was carrying a flashlight.

“Take this,” he said, handing me the light. “And be careful. All of the windows upstairs are boarded up, so it will be pretty dark.”

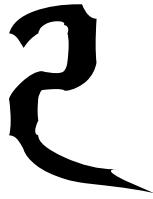
“Don’t stay up there long, Danielle,” Mom called out from the kitchen. “We have a lot of unpacking to do.”

Dad walked away, and his footsteps faded down the hall. I looked up at the dark, winding staircase, sweeping the flashlight beam over the steps. Outside, thunder cracked.

I took one step up, then another. One more.

Another jolt of thunder exploded outside as I took another step. Ten more steps and I would be on the second floor.

I kept going, unaware of the awful things that were going to happen to me.



For the record, I don't get spooked easily. My brother Derek, who is ten, is always trying to freak me out in some way or another, so I'm always on the lookout for his silly pranks.

But Derek was at Grandma and Grandpa's for the rest of the week, and I shouldn't have to worry about his goofy antics.

So when I saw the strip of light coming from beneath one of the bedroom doors, I knew that it wasn't my brother playing a joke on me.

How can that be? I thought, staring at the light coming from beneath the closed door. It glowed brightly, like there was a light on inside.

But that was impossible. Dad said there was no electricity in the house, and we wouldn't have any power until later in the day.

How could a light be on?

Just to be sure, I reached out and flipped a light switch on the wall.

Nothing. The staircase and the hall remained dark.

And the glowing bar below the bedroom door was as bright as ever.

There has to be some reason for the light, I thought. Maybe the bedroom window inside that room isn't boarded up, and it's letting in light from outside.

No, that couldn't be it. It was too cloudy and rainy outside. The light coming from below the bedroom door had a yellow cast to it, like it was coming from a lamp or a ceiling light.

Regardless, there had to be *some* reason.

I walked slowly toward the door, not making a sound. Another crash of thunder boomed, and

a gust of wind howled and groaned like a snarling lion. I could hear rain on the roof, and rain hitting the side of the house.

When I was right in front of the door, I stopped. I clicked off the flashlight.

At my feet, the glowing light from beneath the door was bright enough to illuminate my sneakers.

I leaned toward the door, listening for any movement. I heard nothing.

Slowly, ever so slowly, I reached out and grasped the doorknob. It was metal, and it felt cold in my hand.

I turned it. It jiggled a little bit, and then there was a light *thunk*. I pushed the door.

Instantly, the light went out! I didn't even have time to see where it had come from!

The door squeaked as it swung open, exposing nothing but darkness.

I quickly turned on the flashlight Dad had given me. The beam penetrated the darkness like a laser, and I swept it across the dark room.

There was nothing there.

That was kind of freaky. I knew that I had

seen a light coming from beneath the door.

I *knew* it.

Yet, behind the door, there was nothing but inky blackness.

I moved the beam back and forth through the room. It was totally empty. There was nothing in the room at all.

I reached around the wall and fumbled for the light switch. I found it, and clicked it up and down several times.

No lights came on. Except for the flashlight beam, the room remained cloaked in darkness.

I reached out and grasped the doorknob, slowly pulling the door closed. Its hinges squeaked as the door swung toward me, and made a loud *click* as it shut.

At that point, I was about to turn and leave. Maybe I just *thought* that I had seen a light. Maybe it was just my imagination.

But the moment the door clicked shut, I knew that I hadn't imagined the light.

Because it had returned!

At my feet, a light from beneath the door blinked on, once again illuminating my sneakers.

I immediately took a giant step back.

There was no mistake about it. There was a light on in that room. I was seeing it with my own eyes.

And what made me decide to open that door again, I'll never know. But I'll tell you this: what was about to happen would be the strangest – and scariest – thing that would ever happen to me in my whole entire life.

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I slowly dropped down on my hands and knees,
being careful not to bang the flashlight on the
hard floor. My heart jackhammered in my chest.

Pound-pound-pound-pound-pound

Where was that light coming from?

I leaned over until my cheek touched the cold
floor.

I peered beneath the door.

Now I was *certain* that there was a light on.
Under the crack of the door, I could see the floor

inside the room. I could see a tiny portion of the wall on the other side of the room, too.

There was no mistake. I hadn't been imagining things.

There was a light on in the bedroom.

I remained motionless, staring under the bedroom door through the thin strip of light. My mind raced.

Where could that light be coming from? I thought.

Thunder clapped outside and I jumped. The noise had surprised me.

I stood up slowly, quietly, all the while staring down at the thin strip of light that came from beneath the door.

Grasping the flashlight tightly, I clicked it on and took a step forward. I held my breath, reached out, and grasped the doorknob.

I waited there a moment, nervously looking at the light at my feet. Then I looked at my hand around the knob, then glanced back down at the bottom of the door.

The light was still on.

I took a deep breath, preparing myself. After all, I'm twelve. I'm not afraid of a strange light in

a bedroom.

Am I?

I guess at the time, I wasn't sure. That's why I was hesitating.

I took another breath, held it, turned the knob quickly, and threw the door open. It spun on its hinges and smacked into the wall with a crash.

But the light

What happened next is difficult to describe.

There was a light in the bedroom, alright – *but it didn't seem to be coming from anywhere!* It was like a mist that swarmed around the room. When the door opened, the weird light-mist swirled like smoke and began seeping through the cracks of a boarded-up window, like it was trying to hide!

I did nothing but stare. I had never seen anything like this before in my entire life.

Within seconds, the light had disappeared, seeping through the cracks in the boards like water.

The room was dark once again!

I've seen television shows that investigate strange things that happen to people and places. Most of what I've seen can usually be explained

by one thing or another. But I've read books about really odd things that happen without explanation.

That's how I felt right now. Like this was something out of a book.

Only it was *real*. It had happened to me. I had watched the light slither about the room and vanish like mist.

But . . . *hang on a minute*.

I trained the flashlight beam at the boarded-up window, and for the first time, I realized that I was shaking in my shoes. The flashlight trembled in my hand, and my knees shook.

Alright, Danielle, I ordered myself. Get hold of yourself. There's a simple explanation for this.

I held the light in one place, and the bright white spot lit up the boards that had been affixed to the wall.

Wait a minute, I thought. That's not a window, after all.

It was true. Now that I took a closer look, the boards were nailed from the floor to the ceiling. On the other wall, where more boards were affixed, they covered only enough space to fill the

window.

But here, where I had watched the light disappear, the boards seemed to cover much more than a window.

The boards were covering up a door.

Why would someone board up a door? I wondered. Where did it lead to? Was it a door that led downstairs? Or outside?

I moved the beam of light around, exposing the boards and the far wall.

It was a door, I was certain. Behind those boards was a door.

Why?

I've always been curious. I'm always trying to find out how things work, why things work, and why things do what they do. I guess I just have a curious mind.

A curious mind that gets me into trouble sometimes. It's just the way I am, though. I just need to have answers.

I'm curious, that's all.

There's a saying that my brother is always repeating. He says '*curiosity killed the cat, Danielle. Curiosity killed the cat.*'

But I can't help it. I'm just curious. I like to know things.

And my curiosity about the strange, boarded-up door was about to land me in *big* trouble.



Why I didn't go and get my mom and dad I'll never know. Maybe I just wanted to investigate the door myself.

Whatever the reason, I found myself tip-toeing slowly across the bedroom floor, the white flashlight beam trained on the wall before me.

Outside, the wind cried. Thunder rumbled in the distance, and the rain dripped off the roof. It sounded like the storm might be passing.

I stopped a few inches before the wall. The

flashlight beam lit up the boards, and, sure enough, I was right.

There *was* a door boarded up. I could see the wood through the cracks of the boards.

Why would someone board up a door? I thought once again. *To keep people out? Why?*

I reached out slowly, and my brother's words echoed in my head.

Curiosity killed the cat, Danielle. Curiosity killed the cat.

My finger touched one of the boards. It was old and dry. I felt the edge of it and began to pry it with my fingers. It took some work, but after a minute or two I was able to wiggle the board loose. In another minute I had succeeded in grasping it with my hand and pulling it from the wall.

I pulled the board away, set it aside on the floor, and proceeded to work at another board. It, too, required some work, but after a few minutes I was able to pull it free. The board came away, and I placed it on the floor next to the other one.

Curiosity killed the cat, Danielle. Curiosity killed the cat.

I grasped another board. This one came away easy, and I placed it on the floor next to the other two.

Soon, all of the boards had been pulled away, exposing a large, wooden door. The handle had been broken off. Whoever had closed up the door really wanted to keep people out.

I tried to fit my fingers around the edge of the door to pry it open.

No luck. There wasn't enough room to get my fingers in the crack between the door and the frame. I tried to grab hold of the broken doorknob, but that didn't work, either.

I shined the light all around the door. Besides the fact that it had been boarded-up and had a broken doorknob, it looked like any other wood door.

But in the bright light, I saw something else.

Scratch marks.

On the face of the door were long, thin scratch marks, like someone had carved on the door with a knife.

I leaned closer, bringing the light near the door.

No, not scratch marks, I thought. Letters. There's something written on this door!

I leaned closer still to try and make out the strange markings.

"Danger," I whispered, reading the words quietly. "Do not open door. Or else . . ."

I drew back.

Or else *what*? The warning abruptly stopped with a long scratch that went all the way down the door. It looked like someone had tried to finish writing something, but couldn't.

Now I was *really* curious. Why would someone write such a thing? It was only a door. Maybe it went to a closet or another room. Or maybe it didn't go anywhere. I wondered if Dad and Mom had seen the door when they came to look at the house before they bought it.

I stared at the words carved into the door. It looked like someone had used a small knife to inscribe the warning. The scratches weren't very deep, and if you didn't look close, you wouldn't even be able to see them.

I was standing in front of the door, wondering why someone would go through the trouble to

write something on the door, then board it up . . .
when all of a sudden I knew what had made the
words in the wood.

And I realized it the instant I felt sharp
fingernails clawing into my back

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