



Hannah's palms were cold and clammy, and she started to shiver uncontrollably. She quickly slammed the door shut and sat against it, breathing heavily. For a second, she felt as if turning her back to the noise and closing the door would keep whatever was out in the hallway from getting her.

That's ridiculous, Hannah thought. There's nothing out there. I must have just imagined the noise. It was probably part of a dream. She stood up and headed back to her bed.

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

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Chapter One

It was Hannah Malloy's least favorite kind of day — the sky was cloudy and gray but it hadn't started to rain yet. The air in her bedroom was hot and thick. She'd been packing boxes for half an hour, and her tank top was already completely soaked with sweat. It was the beginning of October, but Tarrytown was in the middle of an unseasonable heat wave.

Figures, Hannah thought. It's just my bad luck that it's a million degrees on moving day.

Hannah picked up a framed photo of what looked like a happy family. The image showed a man in a dark suit, a pretty woman wearing a cream-colored gown, and two twelve-year-old girls in matching ruffly lavender dresses. Hannah thought the girls couldn't have looked more different. One appeared confident

and happy, her soft blond curls falling over the shoulders of the purple dress, which contrasted nicely with her tan skin. The other girl looked miserable, her red hair pulled back in a frizzy halo around her head, and the light-colored dress making her pale, freckled skin look almost ghostly.

Hannah sighed as she placed the picture in a box. The junior bridesmaid dress had been just one of a long string of decisions that others had made recently on Hannah's behalf, without asking her opinion. First, her dad had announced that he was getting remarried in July. Then her dad's fiancée, Allison, had chosen the "darling" lavender dress for Hannah to wear to the wedding. And to top it all off, Hannah's new stepsister was Madison Van Meter, one of the prettiest — and meanest — girls in their seventh grade class.

Hannah's mom poked her head into the room.

"How's it going, sweetie?" she asked. Her mom's hair was pulled back in a bandanna, and Hannah knew she had been busily packing boxes all morning. Hannah glanced around her room, which looked almost exactly the way it usually did, minus the two boxes she had filled with books and other knick-knacks from her bookshelf.

“Um, I’m almost done,” Hannah lied. Her mom cocked her head and raised an eyebrow. It was obvious Hannah had barely packed a thing.

Hannah sighed. “I’m packing as fast as I can, Mom, I swear,” she said.

“Well, your dad’s going to be here in an hour and a half, so chop, chop!” her mom said brightly before she popped back out of Hannah’s room and returned to her own boxes.

Hannah had thought things couldn’t get worse than her dad marrying Madison Van Meter’s mom — but then they did. A few weeks before, her mom had been offered a last-minute teaching job at the University of Chicago. Since Hannah’s mom had been a student there, it was her dream job. The position was only as a midterm-leave replacement, though, and Hannah’s mom didn’t know how long it would last — it might be one semester, or it might be four. Since Hannah had already started seventh grade, her mom and dad agreed that it wouldn’t be wise to pull her out of school and move her halfway across the country for an undetermined length of time. So they decided Hannah would move to the next town, Sleepy Hollow, where her dad had recently moved in with Allison and Madison.

Hannah was happy for her mom, and she was glad she wouldn't have to change schools or move to Chicago. But that didn't mean she was excited about moving into the same house as Madison Van Meter.

Hannah's phone rang, and she snapped it up. It was her best friend and neighbor — for the next hour and a half, anyway — Paisley Lingren.

"Hey, Hannah Banana," Paisley chirped. Paisley was the only person in the world who could get away with calling Hannah that. "Are you still packing?"

"Yeah, I've still got a long ways to go," Hannah replied dejectedly. She knew she sounded pathetic.

"Well then, I'm coming over to help," Paisley said brightly. "Be there in a sec."

Less than three minutes later, Paisley appeared in Hannah's doorway. Her brown hair was tied back in a no-nonsense ponytail, and her sleeves were already rolled up. Literally. Hannah almost giggled. Paisley was the most efficient and organized person Hannah had ever met. And she had to be — Paisley was involved in so many hobbies and extracurricular activities it made Hannah's head spin. She never understood how Paisley managed to handle it all.

Hannah was much less organized and way less focused — up until recently, she had rarely stuck

with any hobbies for more than a few months. But that had changed last year when her dad bought her a used guitar for her birthday. Hannah had immediately loved playing, and she looked forward to her weekly lesson more than almost anything.

“Hannah, this is a disaster!” Paisley scolded as she surveyed the messy room. “You’ve barely packed a thing!”

“I know, I’m a complete mess,” Hannah admitted. “I need you, Pais. That’s why you’re my best friend.”

“Okay, hand me a box,” Paisley ordered. “I’ll hold something up, and you tell me ‘yes’ or ‘no.’”

Paisley headed to the closet and grabbed Hannah’s favorite sneakers. Hannah gave her a thumbs-up. Then Paisley pointed to a pair of old ballet shoes.

“Um, no, obviously,” Hannah replied. She hadn’t taken ballet in years.

Paisley picked up Hannah’s hiking boots. Hannah paused. Before the wedding, she had spent every Saturday with her dad. It was part of the custody arrangement after her parents had gotten divorced, when Hannah was four, and it was the one other thing besides guitar that she looked forward to each week. On their “special Saturdays,” Hannah and her

dad would bike, kayak, or go hiking in the summer, and snowshoe or snowboard together in the winter.

But since the wedding, Hannah's dad had barely had time for her, thanks to his two-week honeymoon in Hawaii and all of the renovations he had been helping with at Allison and Madison's house. Hannah knew more than she wanted to about how the master bedroom was being redecorated, and how her dad and Allison were turning the garage into a home office so her dad wouldn't have to drive to the university every day.

Hannah considered the boots. "Okay, yes," she finally told Paisley. Maybe her dad would have more time for hiking now that Hannah was going to be living with him.

She and Paisley managed to pack up most of her room in the next hour. Then Paisley's digital watch beeped.

"Aw, shoot," Paisley said. "Clarinet lesson in fifteen . . . I've gotta run. Sorry, Hannah."

"That's okay; I understand," Hannah said, giving her friend a quick hug. Hannah knew that being friends with Paisley meant putting up with her over-packed schedule. "You were a huge help."

“No problem,” Paisley replied. “I’m gonna miss you, neighbor.”

“I know,” Hannah said sadly. “But we’ll still hang out. See you in school on Monday?”

“Yup, see you then,” Paisley said with a wave. She almost crashed into Hannah’s mom on the way out of the room.

“Whoa, sorry, Ms. M.!” Paisley said. “Gotta dash — clarinet lesson in ten! Have fun in Chicago!”

With that, Paisley flew down the stairs and out the door.

Hannah’s mom shook her head. “That girl certainly keeps herself busy. I don’t know how she does it.”

“Me neither,” Hannah said with a laugh.

“Your dad’s going to be here any minute,” her mom said as she handed Hannah a large plastic pet crate. “Why don’t we find Icky and get him into this thing?”

Icky was short for Ichabod Crane — the cat Hannah’s parents had adopted when she was three. Hannah had been too little to pronounce “Ichabod,” so she had shortened it to Icky, and that had been his name ever since.

Luckily, Icky was going to be moving to Sleepy Hollow with Hannah, which made her feel a little bit better about the move. She might be leaving the only home she'd ever known, but at least she wouldn't be doing it alone.

Hannah knelt down to peek under the bed, which was usually Icky's favorite hiding spot, but she didn't see him anywhere. Next she tried the closet, behind her desk, and finally, the laundry hamper. No Icky.

Hannah heard a car pull up in front of the house, followed by three short beeps. It was her dad's signal. She hurried downstairs with the empty carrier.

"Mom, I can't find him," Hannah called. "And Dad's already here." Hannah knew her father hated waiting.

Her mom emerged from the kitchen holding a bag of cat treats.

"Don't worry about your father. This time, he'll have to practice a little patience," she said. She shook the bag of treats. "Maybe this will tempt that cat. Icky, where are you, boy?"

Hannah and her mom canvassed the first floor of the house, but they couldn't find Icky anywhere. Hannah was sure she'd checked all his favorite hiding places. All except one.

“Behind the china cabinet!” she exclaimed. It had been Icky’s favorite hideout when he was a scared little kitten. Sure enough, when Hannah peered behind the massive piece of furniture, she saw a black ball of fuzz with glowing yellow eyes and two white paws.

“Come on, Icky,” Hannah said gently. “I’ve got a jerky treat just for you.”

Just then, Hannah heard the creak of the screen door. She turned to see her dad stepping into the house, his arm still holding the front door open.

“What’s taking so long, Hannah?” he asked.

Out of the corner of her eye, Hannah saw a streak of black emerge from behind the china cabinet, the white patch on Icky’s tail flashing as he dashed straight out the open front door.

“Icky, no!” Hannah cried as she pushed past her dad and ran after the cat. She raced to the bottom of the driveway and surveyed the block desperately, but there was no sign of Icky anywhere.

In an instant, he had disappeared.

Chapter Two

Hannah ran back into the house, almost knocking her dad down a second time, tears stinging her eyes.

Mr. Malloy grabbed her arm as she flew past him.

“Hannah, slow down a minute!” he admonished her. “I’m sure he’s just outside hiding under a shrub. I’ll go look for him,” he said, and slipped out the door.

Hannah sat down on the stairs with a thud, her shoulders hunched. In just a second, all of her nerves about the move had returned tenfold. Suddenly, Hannah wasn’t sure how she was going to say good-bye to her mom without having Icky with her. Hannah’s mom sat down next to her and put her arm around her, pulling her in for a hug.

“Oh, Mom!” Hannah burst out, tears running down her face. “This is the worst!” She knew she was

being melodramatic, but she couldn't help it. Sure, Icky ran out into the yard every once in a while. Sometimes he even came back in a few minutes, but other times it took him hours. If he didn't get back soon, Hannah was going to have to leave without him. And suddenly, she just couldn't bear the thought of spending the night in a new house without Icky by her side.

"Hannah," her mom said soothingly. "He'll be back soon. You know Icky. He loves to dash out and roam the neighborhood for a bit, but he's always back by nightfall. He doesn't like to miss a meal."

Hannah knew her mom was probably right, but she couldn't help feeling that this time things were different. Icky's sudden disappearance was definitely *not* a good omen.

"Well, I'm not leaving until he comes home, then," Hannah said, crossing her arms decisively.

The screen door squeaked as Mr. Malloy came back inside, empty-handed. He shrugged apologetically at Hannah.

Hannah's mom stood up. "Well, my flight doesn't leave until tomorrow evening. I'm sure Icky will be back tonight, but it may not be for a while. So, Hannah, you go ahead with your dad, and I'll

bring Icky over there tomorrow on my way to the airport.”

“But, Mom —” Hannah tried to protest, but her mother held up her hand, cutting her off.

“There’s no reason for you not to go with your dad now, Hannah,” she said firmly. “That way you’ll have the evening to settle in, and you can unpack all day tomorrow before school on Monday.”

Hannah sighed. There was no use trying to argue when her mom had clearly made up her mind. Ms. Malloy was more stubborn than most parents.

Hannah and her dad loaded her boxes into the trunk and backseat of her dad’s car. By the time they were finished, the sun was just starting to set, and there was still no sign of Icky.

Hannah climbed into the passenger seat reluctantly, keeping an eye out for Icky as she waved good-bye to her mom. Her dad patted her knee gently as he pulled the car out of the driveway, but Hannah turned away from him, crossing her arms across her chest and looking out the window. She knew her dad hadn’t let Icky out on purpose, but she was still angry with him.

“I’m sorry about the cat, Hannah,” he said, as though he was reading her mind. “I didn’t mean to

let him out. I'm sure he'll turn up, though. He always has before, right?"

Hannah could tell he was trying hard to smooth things over. It felt really weird to be mad at him. Since she saw him usually only once a week, Hannah hardly ever fought with her dad. Still, as much as she wanted to forgive him, she wasn't quite ready. She continued to stare sullenly out the window.

"Come on, Hannah," her dad pleaded. "Don't give me the silent treatment. I'm really looking forward to having you come live with Allison and me. Let's not start off on the wrong foot, okay?"

Hannah sighed. Unlike her mom, she wasn't particularly stubborn. It was pretty easy to wear her down. "Okay," she agreed reluctantly.

"That's the spirit!" her dad said. "I just know we're going to have such a great time together — you, me, Allison, and Madison. A real family."

A real *family*? Hannah thought. Isn't that what she and her mom had been? Her parents had gotten divorced so long ago that Hannah barely remembered a time when they'd all been together. Still, her dad's words stung unexpectedly. But he didn't even seem to notice he'd said something insensitive.

"And isn't it great that Madison is in the seventh

grade, too?” he continued cluelessly. “You can share clothes and have sleepovers every weekend, or whatever it is you girls do. And you’ll even have someone to sit with on the bus!”

Hannah glanced over at her dad. Was he kidding? Had he *met* Madison? Clearly he could tell that Hannah and Madison weren’t BFF, right? *Or not*, Hannah thought as she watched her dad fiddle with the radio, completely unaware that Hannah was still upset with him. A cheesy song from the 80s filled the car.

“Oh, I love this one!” her dad shouted before he started to sing along.

Hannah stared gloomily out the window again. Suddenly, she couldn’t wait to get to her dad’s place, where at least she could be alone in her room.

A few minutes later, there was a gravelly *crunch* as the car pulled into the driveway of a pretty Victorian-style house with a tiny front porch, complete with flower boxes and a swing. It looked like a scene out of a magazine. The only things that didn’t quite go with the picturesque setting were the tombstones that bordered the property.

Hannah did a double take. *Wait, tombstones?* she thought, suddenly alarmed. Didn’t terrible things

happen to people who built houses on top of dead people? This was the first time Hannah was even seeing the house she'd be staying in for the next few months, and she couldn't believe her dad hadn't mentioned that it was practically sitting on a heap of ancient bones. Ever since he had moved in at the beginning of the summer, her dad had insisted on picking Hannah up whenever they spent time together. She had figured it was because the house was under construction, but maybe it had been because he was afraid she would freak out when she saw how close the house was to the graveyard.

“Um, Dad? You didn't tell me you live in a cemetery,” Hannah said as she got out of the car. She had meant to sound annoyed, but instead her voice sounded shaky and scared.

“Ha-ha, kiddo,” her dad replied. He walked to the back of the car and popped open the trunk, retrieving a stack of boxes. “You won't be living *in* the cemetery, just next to it. And it's not just any cemetery — it's the one made famous by Washington Irving's 'Legend of Sleepy Hollow.' How's that for a cool literary factoid?”

Hannah groaned inwardly. Sometimes it was incredibly annoying having two English professors

for parents. Her dad in particular had a habit of constantly spouting what he called “cool literary factoids.”

Hannah had grown up on tales of ghosts, witches, bats, and other creatures of the night that lived in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Still, as far as she knew, none of her classmates had ever known anyone who had personally been haunted. The stories always began, “My friend’s cousin Ely’s friend Sam . . .” Logically, Hannah knew she wasn’t going to encounter any ghosts or goblins. But still . . .

“I hope living next to the cemetery won’t make you uncomfortable, Hannah,” her dad said, as though he was reading her mind again. “I know kids in this town love to tell stories, but I think you’re old enough to tell the difference between fact and fiction.”

If there was one thing Hannah hated, it was an implication that she wasn’t mature enough to handle something. So there was no way she was going to admit to her dad that even if she didn’t believe in ghosts, there was still something creepy about living next to an old graveyard.

As she followed him into the house, Hannah wondered what other unpleasant surprises were in store for her that evening.