

Chapter 1

Bogeyman

When she was three years old, Spryte was positive that the bogeyman lived in the shadows of her closet. Now, ten years later, she was convinced that he was back.

Spryte's room was a packrat's nest of snack bags, derelict clothes, Japanese action figures and a range of half-finished art projects from ice cream stick castles to poster-sized sponge mosaics. One could expect any number of creepy crawlies to emerge from the debris if not a

bogeyman. But no matter what the depth of the mess, Spryte knew where everything was and right now it wasn't.

The collector cards and mismatched socks might look like they were randomly tossed about... because they were, but not the way she tossed them. It was more than a feeling; she had proof. The Fantasy Troll Quest game cartridge might appear to be where she left it but she knew that she had been playing Fantasy Troll Quest Jade last not Fantasy Troll Quest Obsidian because there was a story that continued between the games and no one really likes to know if the butler did it.

It wasn't Mom. Daphne Foxwood was an artist, an illustrator of children's books. Her studio shared the same post-tornado decor. Twice a year she would appear at Spryte's bedroom door like an avenging angel sent by the elder gods of Hoover and Pine Sol. Her long blonde hair tied back with a flowery scarf, her paint spattered flannel shirt rolled to the elbows and her rubber gloves with letters on the knuckles spelling out the words, "spic" and "span." The campaign could not commence without Spryte's reluctant participation. Everything would be picked up, scoured, sorted and put in its proper place. Dust bunnies would be herded out the door, cobwebs sucked into the nether regions of the roaring vacuum and the heel marks

above her headboard scrubbed clean. Tedious discussions would follow, debating paint swatches, wallpaper borders or how the room could be rearranged to improve its feng shui. But the proposals would be forgotten as soon as Mom decided that a bowl of butter pecan ice cream would really hit the spot and the room would be left to settle into its normal state of sedate decomposition because there were paintings to be done and deadlines to meet.

No. Not Mom. Him. He was back and poking around the shadows while she slept.

When she was three he just stayed in the closet. She had heard a rustle in there and quickly retreated under her covers. Very slowly she lifted the edge of grandma's quilt and peeked. The closet had a sliding door and was open, no more than a few inches. Through that narrow gap was the darkest of shadows, in the corner, under her heavy coats. She saw eyes! Glowing. Like a cat's glare, caught in the reflection of a light that wasn't there.

Even as a toddler Spryte was braver than most. She slowly raised the quilt's edge and sat up, never taking her eyes off the twin glows.

The eyes blinked.

Spryte leaned forward, willing herself to see into the shadows. Nothing but the eyes. She had won the staring contest. She asked, "Are you trying to scare me?"

The eyes blinked, seemingly surprised at being addressed. There was a long pause then a raspy whisper said, "No."

"Then go away please."

Another pause. More blinks. Then what she thought was a soft chuckle, although it sounded like gravel going down the drain, "Sure, kid." Then the eyes seemed to turn away and were gone.