

H A U N T E D



# NIGHT OF THE LIVING DOLLS

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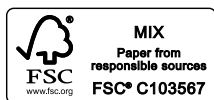
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## CHAPTER ONE

“Wouldn’t it be fun if you were a doll like me?”

“Zelda, your creepy doll is weirding me out,” Camryn said.

It was a rainy Sunday afternoon and we were stuck inside, hanging out in my bedroom. We’d pretty much exhausted conversation topics — school, parents, boys, sports, movies — when Camryn, my best friend, found my doll, Sadie Sees, tucked behind the pillows on my bed. Camryn had pulled the string on Sadie’s back that made her talk, and the doll had uttered one of her three phrases.

“Like, why would she want *me* to be a doll?” Camryn continued. She tossed Sadie to the foot of the bed as if holding the doll physically repulsed her. “Given the choice, wouldn’t — what’s her name?”

“Sadie,” I said casually, trying to make it sound like Sadie didn’t really matter much to me.

“Right. Wouldn’t Sadie think it would be more fun to be a human . . . like me?”

“I don’t know,” I said with a shrug. I really wished Camryn hadn’t found Sadie. From then on I wouldn’t be able to keep her on my bed, even hidden under pillows. “She’s just an old toy my grandma gave me.”

“Why do you even still have her in your room? You’re thirteen! I would totally die if someone found something like that in my bedroom.”

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I was sitting at my computer desk, thankful that Camryn couldn’t see my face. She was my best friend — we’d known each other since kindergarten — but lately we’d been growing apart. It was like she was purposefully trying to push my buttons and get under my skin on a nearly daily basis.

Once I had reset my expression with a smile, I turned and faced her. “I keep it for the nights when Lucy has a nightmare and wants to sleep in here. Sadie calms her down.”

“If I were you, I’d tell Lucy to keep the freaky doll in her room,” Camryn said.

*Yeah, well, you’re not me, are you?* The thought was loud and clear in my head, but I was relieved I hadn’t said it aloud. Instead, I stood and crossed



the room to pick up Sadie — I didn't want to talk about her anymore — but Camryn quickly scooped her back up before I reached the bed.

“I want to see what else Sadie sees and says,” Camryn said.

She looped her finger through the ring on Sadie's back and pulled the string. It slowly wound its way back into Sadie's body. Her large eyes moved from side to side and her mouth opened and closed, completely out of sync with her words.

“I wish you and I were twins,” Sadie said in a high-pitched, warbling voice.

“You are so weird!” Camryn shrieked in the doll's face with a laugh. She looked at me with a wide grin. “Come on, Zelda. You have to admit that she's weird.”

I looked at Sadie, unsure how to respond. She looked so helpless in Camryn's hands. Her pink dress was bunched up and I wanted to fix her short brown hair — it had gotten royally messed up when Camryn had tossed her and picked her back up.

“Sure. She's a little weird,” I said even though it pained me a little to say it. I reached for the doll but Camryn pulled her back.

“Oh, no, no, no, no, no,” Camryn said with a

shake of her head. "I'm not done with her yet." She pulled the string again.

"I can see through anything," Sadie said.

But something was wrong. Her voice slowed down and deepened as she spoke. Her mouth stopped moving and her eyes locked in place, staring straight ahead — straight at Camryn.

"Nope!" Camryn shouted. "Not cool. Not cool at all." This time, instead of simply throwing Sadie to the foot of the bed, she pitched the doll off the bed. I heard Sadie thump on the floor.

"Can we talk about how your doll just became possessed by an evil demon or something and tried to kill me?" Camryn said.

"Settle down. Sadie didn't try to kill you. She probably just needs new batteries." Even as I said it I knew that couldn't be right; Sadie didn't run on batteries.

I stood to retrieve the doll but Camryn raised her hand, stopping me.

"How about we just leave her down there?" she said.

"Sure. If it will make you feel better, we can leave my possessed doll on the floor beside the bed, you big baby," I teased.

Camryn smiled and gave me a playful shove.



“I’m the big baby? I’m not the one who sleeps with a dolly. Where’s your pacifier, Zelda? Where’s your blankie?”

“Like I said before, I keep the doll in here for—”

I didn’t finish the sentence.

Sadie Sees interrupted me.

She skittered across my bedroom floor — from the side of the bed to my computer desk — like a giant insect.



Downstairs the telephone rang, loud and piercing in the silence. Camryn screamed.

Sadie lay on her side silently staring at us from across the room. But a new shuffling sound came from directly under my bed.

And whatever was under there sounded *big*.





## CHAPTER TWO

Camryn pulled the bed sheets over her head. Without waiting for an invitation I joined her underneath. It wasn't a particularly brave reaction but I wasn't feeling particularly brave.

Camryn's whole body shook and her eyes were wide. "What was that?" she mouthed silently.

I shrugged and wondered what was going to happen next. Would Sadie attack us — as crazy as that sounded — or would the thing under the bed be the first to strike?

With nothing but a thin sheet protecting me from the horrors in my room, I felt incredibly helpless.

"Zelda." A small voice in the room called my name.

"Hear that?" Camryn placed a hand on my shoulder and gently shoved me to the edge of the bed. "Whatever's out there wants you."

I couldn't tell if she was joking or serious. I swatted her hand off me and, luckily, she didn't put up a fight.

"Zelda," the voice said again. This time I recognized it.

I pulled the sheet off my head and saw my sister standing right in front of me.

"Lucy?" I said. "What are you doing in my room?"

"Hiding under your bed," Lucy said plainly, as if there was nothing odd about that at all.

Camryn pulled the sheet off her head. Her hair was frizzy with static electricity. "Wait. What? Lucy? Have you been in here, like, the entire time?"

"No, not the entire time," Lucy said defensively. "Just since . . . um . . . a little before you two came in."

"Could you hear us?"

Lucy nodded.

Camryn sighed, buried her face in her hands dramatically, and said, "Great, just great. Now a nine-year-old kid knows all of my deepest, darkest secrets."

"Don't worry. I didn't hear all of your secrets," Lucy said. "Just that you have a crush on Derek McCreary and your mom is taking you to buy your first bra this weekend."

Camryn threw back her head as if she'd been



slapped, and opened and closed her mouth rapidly. She looked a little like a fish trying to breathe out of water, and I took the smallest shred of satisfaction in seeing the shade of red that spread across her cheeks. For the first time in ages she was at a loss for words.

“Did you slide Sadie Sees across the floor?” I asked Lucy. The doll was in the exact same spot as before — I kept stealing glances at her just to make sure she hadn’t moved again.

Lucy nodded.

“Why?” I asked.

“I don’t like her. She should be called Sadie Scares.”

Camryn laughed once loudly, more of a bark. “Busted! I thought you said you kept Sadie in your room for Lucy when she has bad dreams.”

“I don’t have bad dreams,” Lucy said quietly, her face scrunched up in confusion.

I ignored that and steered the conversation back to the fact that Lucy had been in my room since before Camryn and I came in. “Why were you hiding under my bed? You should’ve come out ages ago. We’ve been in here nearly an hour.”

She laced her fingers together and held her hands low, then cast her eyes down to the floor. “I

don't know. I was bored, I guess."

"All right, well, you know what?" Camryn said, slipping off the bed. "As much as I love being spied on by your little sister, I think I'm going to go."

"You sure?" I said, looking out the window. It was dark, grey and very, very wet. "It's still coming down pretty hard out there. I can ask my parents if you can stay over for dinner."

"Thanks but I'm good." Camryn crossed the room quickly, eager to leave. She paused with her hand on the doorknob. "Just, do us both a favour and get rid of that creepy doll." She eyed Sadie briefly, then ripped her gaze away from the doll and glanced back at me. "Especially since you're not fooling anyone when you say you're hanging onto it for her." She cast her eyes at Lucy, then turned and left the room.

I walked to the door to follow her, then decided she'd be fine seeing herself out.

The sound of her footsteps on the stairs was followed by the opening creak of the front door, the pitter-patter of rain hitting the front porch, and the slam of the door.

"Sorry if I made her leave," Lucy said.

"Don't worry about it," I replied, and I meant it. A year ago there was no way Camryn would've



cared whether or not I had a doll on my bed. In fact, until recently she'd had a stuffed unicorn that she brought to every sleepover. But in the past few months it was like she had purposefully set out to grow up in a hurry.

I shoved my concerns out of my head and smiled at Lucy. "C'mon, let's go downstairs and see what's for dinner."

Lucy nodded eagerly. "I'm starving!"

We walked downstairs and found the house to be oddly silent. An unsettling and unexpected feeling of apprehension suddenly came over me, a feeling I couldn't explain.

I led Lucy down the hall, popping my head into the family room, living room and dining room along the way. All empty.

The kitchen was empty too, and dinner hadn't been started. Nothing on the stove, nothing in the slow cooker, and no veggies chopped up on the cutting board or meat thawing on the counter.

"Where are Mom and Dad?" Lucy asked.

"I don't know. Maybe they went out?"

"Check the fridge," Lucy suggested. "They always leave a note when they have to run out."

But when I checked I found the refrigerator door bare.

I checked my phone in case I had missed a message. I hadn't.

The feeling of apprehension exploded inside me, adding anxiety, fear and panic to the mix.

*Calm down, I told myself, and think back.*

I remembered something. While Camryn and I were in my room, Lucy slid Sadie Sees across the floor, and then . . .

"The phone rang just once," I told Lucy. "Back when Camryn was still here. And when she went home, I didn't hear Mom and Dad say goodbye to her. Maybe they got a call and had to leave."

I noticed that the red light on the wall phone in the kitchen was lit, indicating someone in the house was on the line.

A loud and pain-stricken moan suddenly came from the screened-in porch.

It was Mom.

It sounded like she was being murdered.