

SOMETHING'S HAUNTING HIS APARTMENT . . . BUT WILL ANYONE BELIEVE HIM?

“DANNY, WHAT IF THIS HADN'T HAPPENED TO YOU?”

Nat says. “What if you had heard about someone who really didn't want his parents to rent out his brother's room, and he passes a film crew on the street shooting some ghost story, and then some totally normal things happened that seemed weird because life is sometimes weird, you know.”

“My uncle Vince once saw the Virgin Mary on a piece of veal,” offers Gus.

“Which applies to this how?” I ask.

“Nat just said life is weird,” he answers.

“And sometimes we see things we want to see,” Nat adds.

“So you think it's all in my head,” I mutter.

“I'm just saying there's an explanation for it, that's all.”

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THE
GHOST
IN
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CHAPTER 1



THE GREAT INJUSTICE THAT IS HAPPENING TO ME

Okay, in the Grand Scheme of Things, as my favorite history teacher, Mr. Nordstrom, likes to say, maybe it's not a *great* injustice.

Or as my dad likes to remind me, "Do you know how many kids would kill to be in your situation?"

Because this is really just about a closet.

Which wouldn't be such a big deal, except it's where I sleep.

So, yes, there are kids much worse off than I am, and I totally get that. But for a normal thirteen-year-old kid living in Brooklyn, what happened to me is, I think anyone would agree, a pretty big miscarriage of justice. Not like being enslaved, or made to feel like a second-class citizen or anything . . . Well, that's not true. I *do* feel like a second-class citizen. At least in my family nest.

We live in what is referred to as a two-bedroom apartment, since there are two bedrooms.

Which seems like a stupid detail but is actually a major part of this story.

Because I have an older brother and a set of parents (one of each sex—I only mention this because my friend Kyle has two moms and I want to be fair), that means two bedrooms for four people.

Now, in a typical family, I would share the bedroom with Jake (that's my brother's name), but since we're six years apart, it was decided when I was a whining little kid that me being in there would be a distraction from Jake studying.

And then he was a teenager, and then it was *really important* that he have his own room because, well, "You'll understand when you're older."

Well, I am older now, and a brand-new teenager myself, and nobody is saying I need to have my own room.

Okay, I do have a room.

Kind of.

Once I was too old to stay in my parents' room, they took the closet near the front door and turned it into a room.

I mean, it's a nice closet, as closets go, with a sliding door and shelves and room for a small futon. So that's my room.

And please do not make any Harry Potter jokes, because I've heard them all. I remember when I was in like first grade

and friends would come over and think it was neat, because they would have normal rooms and mine was so different. Or they had normal families and shared a room with a sibling. “You’re so lucky!” they would say.

Yeah, lucky me. Sleeping in a closet.

You might think that this is the injustice I’m talking about, but honestly, I didn’t mind it, because of a promise my father and mother made to me when I got big enough to start complaining about the situation.

The promise was that I would get Jake’s room right after he went to college. Which seemed totally fair. And Jake was cool with it, too. It’s our parents who made the decision that totally ruined my life and changed everything.

Because in my moral universe a promise is a promise. Not something you can take back because it’s not convenient. My dad says that there’s a difference between “never” and “not right now,” but I think that’s garbage.

Basically, what happened was that Jake got into Cornell University. Which is an amazing thing, and was his first-choice school, and he totally deserves to go. But Cornell, I found out, is unbelievably expensive. And we just don’t have that kind of money. Jake got a scholarship (I guess all that studying paid off), so I thought everything was fine, until the day after we dropped him off at school. It was late August, and I still couldn’t believe I was finally going to have a real

room to myself. I was thinking about how weird it would be to not have Jake around, when my parents knocked on my closet door.

I hear my dad clearing his throat. Then: “We need to talk to you.”

CHAPTER 2



LIFE IS NOT FAIR (LIKE I DON'T KNOW THAT)

I am willing to bet that in the life of any thirteen-year-old boy (and girl too, probably, but I wouldn't know because I am not a girl), there are few words as chilling as “We need to talk to you” when it's said by your parents.

Immediately you start going down the checklist in your head of all the things you might have done (or not done):

Okay, school hasn't started, so it's not about grades.

And I haven't shoplifted anything, or broken anything, or left the top of the peanut butter jar not screwed on so the next person who picks it up will drop it on the floor, making a mess (I ask you, who picks up a jar from the lid? Is that really my fault?).

But from the expression on their faces, it's not a “you did something wrong” situation, it's a “we've got bad news” one.

They usher me into the living room and sit me on the couch between them. This is bad. Somebody has died. Or they're getting a divorce. My armpits are pretty drenched by now, and I don't even know how bad it is.

"First of all," my dad says, "nobody's died."

"And we're not getting a divorce or anything," my mom adds. "It's nothing like that."

They hug me. Already with the hugging. Whatever it is, it is *not going to be good*.

"So what's the problem?" I ask.

My mom is a social worker, and she has this way of talking. Like just now, when she says, "Well, it's not really a problem if you look at it the right way. . . ."

At this point she stops talking and seems to take a great interest in a stain on the couch. "Um . . ." She doesn't even look at my dad when she says, "Martin, please."

"Okay," my dad begins. "You remember when your mom and Jake went on that tour of colleges?"

"Sure," I say. Mom and Jake took a bus through Massachusetts and Connecticut and upstate New York.

"Do you know how we were able to afford that trip?"

"Sure. It was going to cost too much money to stay in hotels, and then one of Jake's friends' moms told Mom about AirHotel. Where people rent out rooms and sometimes whole apartments to people visiting their city or town."

My mom jumps back in. “It was cool. And you know what? AirHotel is in Brooklyn too.”

My mouth dries up. I can see where this conversation is going, and I really don’t like it.

Dad quickly adds, “You know how expensive it’s going to be to send Jake to Cornell.”

“But he has a scholarship!” I protest.

“That’s a huge help,” Mom says. “But it doesn’t take care of everything. Plus it gets really cold up there, so he’s going to need a good parka.”

My dad shoots her a look. “This isn’t about the parka, Maureen. Please.”

“I was just saying—”

“What are you *just* saying?” I ask, knowing perfectly well what they are just saying, but I want to force them to actually just say it.

“This is something we want to try. It might not work out, but it could help bring in some really needed extra money,” my dad says.

Okay, nobody else wants to say it out loud. “What you’re saying is you want to rent out Jake’s room instead of giving it to me *like you promised.*”

I am very proud of myself that I got all that out without yelling.

My mom puts her arms around me, which only makes it

worse. My world is completely ruined. “We don’t want to, sweetheart. We have to.”

“Hopefully, it’s temporary,” my dad says. “I have that grant money coming, and then I can finish the film and—”

“That’s going to take forever!” I moan.

My mother stiffens. “That’s not nice, Danny.”

My dad bites his lip. It was a low blow. He’s been trying to finish his film for four years now. He didn’t exactly see himself working as a freelance video editor when he finished film school all those years ago.

I turn to him. “I’m so sorry, Dad. I didn’t mean it. It’s just that a promise is a promise, and you promised me. I’ve waited years and years. Now I’ll NEVER get my room!”

Okay, this time I can’t get the whole sentence out without yelling.

I stomp off into my closet and try to slam the sliding door.

“You know, there are kids who have it a whole lot worse than you,” my dad calls out.

“Not now, Marty,” my mom says, and even though I can’t see her, I’m sure she’s rolling her eyes.