

On *The Brady Bunch*, dinnertime means all six Brady kids, plus Carol and Mike Brady, wolfing down pork chops and applesauce around the dining room table while Alice the housekeeper pours lemonade made from real lemons.

At our house, dinnertime means Gayle and me, alone, with *I Dream of Jeannie* reruns and more Cocoa Pebbles around the kitchen table. Dinnertime is a beautiful concept, but it doesn't work at our house. Not since *Ema*—our mother—left, anyway.

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## chapter one

*it's called the cursed house* because something terrible always happens to anyone who lives there.

It's not a scary or ugly house, like those haunted houses you see in the movies, but it is different. It's the biggest house on the block, and the only one painted bright pink. And the backyard leads to the woods, which are scary. Nobody else's house leads to the woods.

My sister, Gayle, and I are walking home from school when we see the sign:

### *House for Sale*

Contact Appleseed Agency

Neither of us says anything. Finally Gayle asks, “What kind of weird name is Appleseed?”

“I dunno,” I reply. “Maybe it’s . . .” But I trail off, because I can’t think of an explanation. We stare at it for a few more seconds in silence, then finally start for our house.

Gayle walks straight into the kitchen, turns on the TV, and gets out the cereal. “Do you think anyone will buy it, Roxanne?” she asks as she dumps a rushing stream of Cocoa Pebbles into her bowl.

“Yeah, I guess so,” I say. I make sure the TV is tuned to Channel 5, which shows the best reruns after school.

We sit at the kitchen table watching TV and eating cereal, but my mind drifts from *The Brady Bunch* to the Cursed House. I think about all the awful stories we’ve heard about the people who lived there—like the one about Stood-Up Serena. Stood-Up Serena was a high school senior who was stood up by her date on the night of the senior prom. She walked into the woods in her lavender prom gown and never came back.

Then there was the time the FBI swarmed over the house in the middle of the night with flashlights and guns. The family who lived there got busted for something major, but no one ever found out what.

Four months later, the Brinns moved in. They were there only a week when their youngest daughter fell down the stairs and broke her neck. On the way to her funeral, the whole family died when a milk truck plowed into their car on the Staten Island Expressway.

The *Staten Island Advance* splashed the story on its front page, describing the accident scene as “a haunting shade of bright pink”—spilled milk mixing with spilled blood. It also mentioned that the house the family had lived in was bright pink, but it didn’t say it was called the Cursed House. The house has been empty ever since.

“Do you really think it’s Cursed?” Gayle asks.

“Yeah, it seems like it,” I reply.

Gayle stops her spoon in midair. “Do you think it’s pink because of blood?”

“Yeah,” I say again.

“How come the Curse doesn’t come to our house?”

she asks, and although she says this nonchalantly, I can tell the idea makes her anxious.

I pause, because I really don't know. Finally I say, "I guess Curses don't work that way. I guess Curses just stay where they are."

Gayle nods, satisfied with my response.

Truth is, even though the Cursed House has always been right next door, it isn't a big part of my life and I don't worry about it.

This is a list of the things I *do* worry about:

*a. eddie*

*b. gym*

*c. my hair*

*d. being israeli*

I make a lot of lists. They help me think. I sometimes write them down, but mostly I just make them in my head.

After eating a second bowl of cereal, I go upstairs to put away my school things. The first thing to greet me when I walk into my room is my poster of Prince

Charles and Lady Diana on their wedding day. Gayle bought it for me on my thirteenth birthday. Gayle's birthday—she turned nine—is the day before mine.

“Roxanne!” Gayle suddenly screeches. “Come quick!”

“What? What?” I yell as I run down the stairs.

Gayle is standing in front of the window in our living room, pointing outside, her mouth frozen into a giant O.

A blue station wagon is parked in the driveway of the Cursed House. A woman with a fluffy mound of carrot-orange hair, wearing a brown skirt and yellow jacket, is pulling a sign out of the trunk.

Before I can make out what the sign says, I know what it is. I have seen this exact situation in countless commercials. The woman is a real estate agent, and the sign she slides slowly into place reads:

**Sold.**