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Marta's Ghost

CARA TRIEBOLD

Mom decided to sleep on the couch again. She swore she could hear rustling by her window and dragged her comforter and pillow over to the couch. I watched her shaky little body under the covers, barely making an indent in the soft cushions. She was just scared of sleeping alone in the room Dad had deserted. Maybe she felt guilty. Maybe she should.

She called to me, her voice small and scared.

“Marta, check by the window. There’s something... or someone.”

I crossed my arms.

“Mom, seriously, what do you think you saw?”

A ghost?”

She didn’t respond. Only sank deeper into the couch until I couldn’t see the outline of her body at all.

There was nothing to do in the house. Dad’s things were packed in old cardboard boxes, crowded in a heap by the door. It was raining out and I didn’t feel like moving them out to the dumpster yet. I imagined how it would be if it was Dad who had stayed and Mom who had gone. Maybe that would have made more sense. And then I imagined if I left. I knew I never would. But sometimes I liked to imagine what I would do if I was as tired and old and fed-up as Dad had been. I liked to imagine what I would do with no one to take care of. No one’s paranoia to wrestle with every moment of every day.

Mom called to me again from her nest.

“Marta, there’s someone there. Please check. By the window.”

“No, Mom,” I said. I watched the stain on the ceiling drip silently into the bowl on our kitchen counter. It annoyed me, like everything else. Mom called to me again. I am sure as hell not going to feel guilty, I thought.

I sat silently using my reading light, flipping the pages of



Fill My Soul | Abigail Baker | Charcoal

my book quietly. She would be asleep soon. By the time she was really asleep, I wasn't tired anymore. The full moon shone through the front window like a giant yellow eye, wide awake. I wandered around the house. There wasn't really much room to wander. I ended up in my mother's room, half bare now with Dad's bookshelves gone. Moonlight lit the room in a dirty yellow glow. The curtains blew back from the window as the air vent started to hum. Across the street, Mrs. Hamm's porch light was flickering as it always did. She'd forgotten to take in her trash cans again. My eyes followed the shape of a raccoon as it passed across her garage door. As I leaned against the window sill, a pale woman stepped in front of the window. Her nearness made me jump. Stupid, I thought. Mom was making me jumpy now. It was ridiculous.

The woman was in our yard, looking, as I was, at Mrs. Hamm's porch light. There was obviously a normal explanation to this. The woman turned, her face filling the window. It was heart-shaped with huge, perfectly round eyes. She reached her hand to the glass. She had my mother's thin lips and pointy chin. She had my father's long nose. Her messy hair was like mine. I recognized the look of guilt in her eyes, the one I pretended not to see in the mirror. She shook her head, her hand was splayed across the glass.

The bushes rustled as she disappeared.

"Marta," my mom called from the next room. "I heard something again. Can you please check?"

