



## Spooky!!! Kooky!!! Spooky!!!

Fiddlesticks and gumdrop bars! Where was I? Better yet, where's Diane? I've looked everywhere in our room. I ran down the stairs shoutin', "Daddy, I can't find Diane anywhere! She's disappeared! She's gone! She's nowhere to be found. I've checked the closets, behind the doors, under the beds . . ."

"Calm down, Ronda, calm down!" Daddy instructed.

We entered the kitchen to join the family meetin'. Arms crossed, Daddy and Ronald leaned up against the washer and dryer. Ronald was enjoyin' a *Dum Dum* lollipop - candy before breakfast again. Doesn't he remember Grandma's advice? - "You are what you eat!"

Duane was holdin' an ice bag over his black eye - the one I gave him yesterday. Although my black eye that Tilly Winks Tilly gave me yesterday is almost gone, Momma handed me a warm washcloth. I saw a tear drop from Momma's eye.

“Let’s all remember, patience is the best remedy for trouble,” Daddy assured us. “Time and patience helped Duane’s and Ronda’s black eyes heal. Time and patience will help us find Diane! Besides, Diane has a special guardian angel.”

Did he say *guardian angel*? “Where’s Grandma Brombaugh?” I asked.

“I just got off the phone with her,” replied Momma. “The neighbor is changing a flat tire for her. Grandma said even if she had to fly to get here she would.”

I thought, “*Fly?* Grandma *is* an undercover angel.”

Daddy gave us our marchin’ orders. “Duane, head to the hayloft! Ronald, run down to the creek.”

Duane and Ronald bolted out the front door. They forgot to close the screen door! “Boys, were you born in a barn? Please close the door! Do you want birds flying in?” Momma asked.

Ronald returned and accidentally slammed the door shut. “Sorry, Momma,” he hollered.

Momma offered to check the chicken house. Diane loves to collect the green eggs that *Susie Suess* lays. Daddy said, “Don’t worry. We’ll find her. I’ll check the milk house. Diane made a new playhouse for Cotton Ball and her new litter of rabbits. Ronda, have you checked all the nooks and crannies?”

“Nooks ‘n crannies are spooky!”

“My little *Kooky*, you’ve hidden in many of those places yourself. Pretend to be a detective just like on *Dragnet* – one of my favorite radio shows. Help me sing the theme song, ‘Dum ‘d dum dum! Dum ‘d dum dum dum!’ Special detective, Ronda Jean, skedaddle! Double check those nooks and crannies. Let’s find Diane.”

I saluted, “Yes, sir!”

There Daddy goes again - sayin’ that I’m *special*. Duane always says I’m *different*. I guess it’s just another reason Momma spells my name R-O-N-D-A. Most Rhondas, most *normal* Rhondas spell their name with an “h.”

R-H-O-N-D-A. I’m Ronda *without a honda*! I’ll be the first to admit - I am *not* normal. I’m out of the ordinary. I’m Ronda without an “H” because I’m . . .

**KOOKY! KOOKY! KOOKY!**

If I’m *kooky* this old farmhouse is *kooky* too! I’ve never seen another farmhouse like it. It’s not only *kooky* - it’s *spooky*! I ran to our bedroom again to check the attic door. Whew! The attic door was shut, locked, and secured.

I *had* forgotten to check the chest in the window seat. Momma uses it for storage. It would make a great place to hide. I slowly lifted the lid but no Diane. I did find a hat and several other items. I wanted to know more, but I *hafta* find Diane. I plopped the green hat on my head and continued my search.

Not every house has a laundry chute. But we do. It's upstairs outside our bathroom. One just opens the teeny, tiny door in the wall, throws dirty clothes in the chute, and three stories later clothes land in a laundry cart in the cellar. We don't use the laundry chute for laundry. Our washer 'n dryer are in the kitchen.

Duane and I use the laundry chute for fun. When Momma's not watchin', we'll throw paper planes or paper dolls down the chute. I would *never* use Chatty Cathy, but we tried my new Barbie doll. Attached to a parachute, we threw her down the chute. Duane and I raced each other to the cellar. Barbie won!

Maybe Diane decided to hide in the laundry chute. I poked my head in the door but couldn't see a thing. It was as black as burnt toast. *Could she be stuck?* There's one way to find out! I threw my hat down the chute, slid down the banister, charged through the living room, bolted into the kitchen to the back door, and flew down two flights of steps to the cellar.

*Whew!* I picked up the hat from the laundry cart, wiped off the dust, and placed it on my head. There's the proof. Diane's not stuck in the laundry chute. **P.U.!** It stinks down here. The smell reminds me of Duane's dirty, wet socks. I skedaddled out of there.

As I ran up the cellar stairs, I wondered where "*Miss Hawkephant*" was when I needed her. Diane's nowhere to be found. If only I had a memory like an elephant and eyes like a hawk, I could remember where she loves to hide the most, zoom in, and solve this mystery - just like on *Dragnet*. I started singin', "*Dum 'd dum dum! Dum 'd dum dum dum!*"

Daddy told me I was a special detective! If I'm gonna think like a detective, I need to look like one. I put on a pair of Ronald's old black glasses, threw Daddy's overcoat on, grabbed a flashlight, picked up a notepad, stuck a pencil behind my ear, and headed to my favorite room - the parlor.

Accordin' to Noah Webster, a parlor is . . .

<p><b>par·lor / p̄ər-1&amp;r / noun</b> <b>1 : a room used primarily for conversation or the reception of guests: to : a room in a private dwelling for the entertainment of guests</b></p>
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I call the parlor my *practice* parlor. I'm *practicin'* to entertain guests. I practice singin' in the parlor, I practice playin' the piano in the parlor, I practice dancin' in the parlor, and I practice somersaults and backbends in the parlor. Diane and I play games in the parlor too. That's it! Maybe Diane's hidin' in here waitin' on me to play games.

I looked behind the couch. I looked behind the piano. I looked behind the two beautiful glass doors that greet guests as they enter the parlor. That's a silly place to hide. It's see through! Diane wasn't there. Where could she be? Maybe she's hidin' in the fireplace.

In the 1850's the parlor's fireplace was used to heat this house. We don't use it for heat. Daddy says two huge tanks in the cellar, filled with fuel oil, pump heat to registers in every room. He plugged up the hole in the fireplace with a rolled up piece of carpet. That way the cold air in the winter and the hot air from the summer can't come inside.

We use the fireplace once a year for family pictures. Santa uses it once a year for deliveries. On Christmas Eve, a jolly, red giant shoutin', "*Ho, ho, ho,*" slides down our chimney and the carpet gives way, which cushions Santa's fall. He dusts himself off, stuffs our stockin's, plops presents 'round the tree, reads our letters, scribbles a few notes, and gobbles down cookies 'n milk. The snack gives him enough energy to skedaddle up the chimney to repeat the process – only somewhere else!

