

DEMONS

Agnes made her coffee, took it into the living room then stared blankly at the television set. On the screen, two men were in a noisy bar having a heated argument ...in French. She had never learned French, never had any interest in the language. So why was it on? When she'd left the room, the news had been on. In English?

Maybe Lily (her daughter) had changed the channel before she left. But why would she? Agnes could call and ask but it seemed such a trivial thing to do. On the other hand, before Lily left she had said "Call me if you need anything. Anything at all. Even if you just want to talk or ask me about something. It doesn't matter. I'm just a phone call away, and you know how close I live."

Agnes muted the TV, then turned her head to listen. Music was coming from her bedroom. She grabbed her walker and shuffled down the hall and into the room. The radio was on. Who had put the radio on?

She went over to the nightstand and turned the switch, then stood for several minutes absorbing the silence. She lived in a small bungalow and rarely heard her neighbours, or even people in the street. It was a very quiet

neighbourhood. Too quiet, sometimes. Lily had told her it was good for her to have the radio on for a bit of noise. To keep her company since she lived alone. But she had had the TV on. No need for the radio as well. And Lily wouldn't have put the radio on.

Suddenly a loud thud came from the direction of the bathroom. Anxiously, Agnes quietly wheeled herself to the bedroom doorway, cautiously peering down the hall toward the bathroom. The door was half open and the light was on. Was Lily still here? No she had said goodbye and Agnes had heard the door close behind her.

"Hello?" she asked with a slight tremor in her voice.

No answer.

"Is anyone there?"

Again there was nothing but silence. Had Lily locked the door behind her when she left? Agnes couldn't check. She couldn't get down the few steps to the door by herself. But she could see if there was anyone in the bathroom. After all, it was very unlikely. And if someone had broken in somehow, why would they be in the bathroom? Well, they could be hiding until she was in bed or preoccupied elsewhere. Still, for someone to have snuck in in broad daylight, right after her

daughter had left was highly unlikely. There was probably another simple, plausible explanation. Perhaps the noise had come from outside? Better to check and put her mind at ease.

Then another thought struck her. Recently she'd seen a TV show about poltergeists. Mischievous spirits that seemed to enjoy torturing the living by slamming doors, moving large objects around and making sudden loud noises. Was there any validity to such things? The show had suggested there was, providing numerous testimonies from respectable mature people who claimed to have had such experiences. Most occurrences had been at night but there had been cases of spiritual activity in the afternoon. The thought chilled her.

Agnes checked her watch. 4:45 PM.

She stared at the bathroom door trying to get up the courage to investigate. Then she had an idea of throwing an object into the room. If "something" was there, that action would startle it. Then she would know. If someone was hiding there, there would be some kind of reaction.

Agnes looked around for a suitable item to throw and settled on a hairbrush sitting on her bedroom dresser. It was heavy enough to make a

significant noise but not damaging enough to leave a mark on the floor or the bathroom door.

She picked up the brush and slid her walker silently into the hall. Stepping a little closer to the bathroom, she lobbed the brush into the small lit room and listened carefully as it banged against the door then clattered on the floor tiles. The sounds echoed for a moment but nothing followed. There was no reaction.

Assured it was safe, she shuffled along the hall the rest of the way to the bathroom, gingerly pushed the door open and peered inside. As she truly suspected, there was no one there. Everything was where she'd left it. Nothing out of place.

She was about to turn off the light and leave the room when she saw it. A mop. There was a mop lying flat in the bathtub. What was that doing there? Even stranger, she realized when she touched it, it was still wet. Lily usually did her floors for her but she hadn't done it since last Sunday. So how did it get there?

As she thought again about poltergeists, she heard a sudden gust of wind and a metallic rattling. The wind was obviously outside (she assured herself) but wasn't the rattling coming from the front of the house? Inside?

She made her way back down the hall and into the living room with the dual purpose of checking on this new sound and getting the cup of coffee she'd left there.

As suddenly as it started, the rattling stopped and the wind subsided.

Back in the living room, she stared transfixed at the television set. Before she'd left the room, she had muted the volume, but now the set was off! Almost at the same instant, she realized something else. Her coffee cup was gone!

She looked behind her, half expecting to see an impish ghost laughing at her. Then the rattling began again, louder than before.

"It's closer," she murmured.

Agnes reached for the converter, turned on the TV and raised the volume to cover the sound.

"I'll just find a good mystery to watch," she told herself. Reaching for the TV Guide on the coffee table, she peered closely at the listings only to realize she needed her reading glasses.

"I left them in the bedroom," she remembered.

Returning to the room, she found the glasses and put them on. Then, leaving the room, she noticed the hairbrush on the dresser where it had originally been. How did it get back there?

Again, she peered anxiously at the bathroom as she stood in the bedroom doorway. The light was back on!

She turned away and headed back to the living room. The loud volume of the TV assaulted her but when she went to turn the sound down, she saw the converter was gone.

She headed back to the bedroom to look for it when suddenly an intense beeping came from the kitchen, followed immediately by a return of the metallic clanging, louder than ever. Agnes stared into the kitchen unsure what she would see, but nothing was amiss. Except, there on the kitchen table was her coffee cup! She eased her walker over to the table, picked it up and took a drink. Then as she made her way back out of the kitchen, she felt a wave of heat as she passed the oven. Turning, she peered at the display panel. The oven was on, at 350 degrees F! Quickly, she shut it off and returned to the living room.

She had to call Lily. As she reached for the phone, there was a loud thump. Inside the house. This time she was sure the sound was inside. Lily's number was

on the autodial, but was it 'one' or 'two'? There was a card beside the phone, listing important contacts. Family, friends, emergency numbers. There was Lily's name. Agnes was about to press the number when she realized that with the TV blaring, Lily would not be able to hear her. She scurried into the kitchen with the phone, listening carefully for other intrusive sounds. Was that another thump?

She was just about to press the number when a voice called out, "Mom!"

"Lily?" she asked, although she knew her daughter could not hear her over the TV.

Agnes heard loud steps on the stairway as if her daughter was running, then Lily burst into the room.

"Why is the TV so loud?" she shouted.

Agnes followed her into the living room. Lily searched the area then asked, "Where's the clicker?"

Agnes shook her head helplessly.

Lily dropped her parcels, returned to the kitchen, then hurried to the bedroom, soon returning with the TV control and pressing 'Mute' as quickly as possible.

“What’s going on? Mom. You’re pale. You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“I – I heard noises.”

“Voices?”

“A loud rattling. Like someone shaking a key chain. Only louder.”

“Mom. That’s the exhaust fan over the stove. Remember? I told you about that before. It rattles during strong winds.”

“Oh, yes.”

Lily brought one of her bags into the kitchen, with Agnes following.

“Everything else okay?”

“Sure.” Agnes pointed to the oven. “That was on.”

Lily looked at the settings and sighed. “You turned off the oven. I said I was going out to get something for supper. Something we could just warm up. I told you I’d be back in fifteen minutes. We were pre-heating the oven.”

“I forgot.”

“Anyway, I got a premade shepherd’s pie. You like that.”

She re-set the oven then took the meal out of the grocery bag and put it on top of the stove.

“It still feels hot. It won’t take long to re-heat.”

Lily gazed about the room. “The floor looks nice and clean. Doesn’t it, ma?”

Without waiting for an answer, she got out plates and cutlery and set the table for dinner. Then she bustled down the hall into the bathroom.

“Oh, the mop fell.”

She stood it up to allow it to dry, then closed the door as she washed her hands.

Back in the living room, Agnes sat and mused.

“I wonder when Lily’s coming back. She’s late.”