

**The Doorwalkers Book 1:
The Doorway Beneath the Bed**

By Kenneth Allan Rath

Chapter 1

Strange Thumps in the New House

“I don’t like it,” Cassie announced.

She dropped her suitcase onto the floor and looked around their new living room. Their old furniture was there, the red couch and the two chairs, one for each of her parents, and even the entertainment center with the television. But the room was smaller, and nothing fit the way it was supposed to. They’d had to put the chairs at weird angles so they didn’t block the door, and they hadn’t had room for the end table at all, so there was no lamp next to the couch, which had been her favorite reading place. Of course, Dad had said that he’d get a standing lamp soon, but that didn’t help *now*.

And then there were the boxes, piles of boxes, all marked “Living Room” in black marker over the cardboard. Inside were their pictures and music, their movies and decorations. They were hidden now, and when they came out they probably wouldn’t all fit in the tiny room, and they’d have to be put into the basement, maybe, where they’d get forgotten, just like her old toys from when she was little.

“Honey,” her father said, “we’ve been through all this already. We didn’t have a choice. This was the best we could afford. You know that. At least in this house you get your own room, hmm?”

“We should have stayed with Grandma and Grandpa,” Cassie sulked, falling onto the couch. That, at least, felt familiar, even if the throw pillows were still packed away.

“There weren’t any jobs there,” he explained again.

“I know!” she snipped back. “That’s all you’ve been saying for the past few weeks.”

“You can still write to your friends back home,” he said quietly, “and we’ll see them when we go visit Grandma and Grandpa...”

“It’s not the same.”

“I know.” He sighed. “And I don’t like it much either. But we have to do the best we can with what we’ve got. And it really isn’t that bad here. You’ll see. Listen, your Mama’s coming in with Julie. Could you at least try to not be so grumpy? She’s got enough to worry about already.”

Cassie frowned.

Mama came in the door, holding a giant sack full of baby things in one arm and Julie in the other while trying to hold the screen door open with her elbow. For a moment it looked like she had it, but then the sack started to slip from her shoulder.

“I’ll get it,” Dad said quickly, racing over and grabbing the sack before it could fall too far. “You didn’t have to take so much. I can go out again.”

“Julie needs a new diaper again,” Mama said wearily, collapsing on her chair. “Could you...?”

“Sure,” he said softly, dropping the sack to the floor and taking the baby, who was already starting to fuss.

“And then I need to feed her,” Mama added. “And then,” she continued, “I could really use some sleep. Is the bed made up?”

“Yes, honey,” Dad replied. He’d told her that before in the car on the way, but Mama wasn’t as good at remembering things lately. She didn’t sleep enough now, since Julie had been born. And it seemed like the baby cried all the time, at least when she wasn’t eating—she never seemed to sleep. Cassie had asked her mom if she’d been like that, but Mama said *she’d* been easy.

“Cassie,” Dad said as he took the baby upstairs, “why don’t you go put your suitcase up in your room, and then maybe you can unpack a few things before dinner.”

“Okay Dad,” she said. She looked over at Mama, who had already begun to close her eyes, and sighed. Then she grabbed the suitcase, stuffed with all her clothes and the other things she’d needed for the trip from Pennsylvania, and climbed up the stairs.



It did look better than it had when they’d come out in the spring, before Julie was born, back when Mama was so big she could hardly walk, much less risk the drive out to Massachusetts, and she and Dad had had to take the trip out together without her. Since then, Dad and Uncle Steve had taken down the horrible wallpaper, which had been decorated with awful gold and brown flowers and streaked all over with dirt, and they’d painted the walls the bright green she’d picked out. Her dresser, bookcase, and desk were there too, though they were all still empty, and the walls were all bare.

But under the window, instead of her old bed, was the big, built-in bed that Dad had had to find a special mattress and sheets just to cover, since they didn’t make beds that size any more, and even after all that it didn’t fit quite right. The bed had come with the house and was attached to the floor and wall, so there was no way to take it out. And there were drawers under it, three big drawers large enough to store pillows in, or quilts, as Steve had said. But it *was* bigger than her old bed, the bed that Julie would get when she was big enough, in about five years or something like that.

Cassie dropped the suitcase onto the floor and flopped onto the bed. The mattress was soft and springy, and the wooden frame underneath it didn't creak when she moved on it, unlike her old bed. She turned over and looked at the ceiling, where it slanted down to her window. She could put a poster up there, maybe, to make it look nice. Maybe the one with the stars and constellations that her friend Anna had gotten her for her birthday last year.

She wondered if she'd ever see Anna again. After Katie had moved away, she'd never come back. She'd written once, and that was it. Would it be like that with her?

She looked out the window, which still didn't have curtains. Outside, there were rows after rows of houses. Most looked old, like hers, brick houses with stairs leading up to the door and one storey above. Some were newer, with siding instead of brick and not as tall, or as thin. But none looked *nice*. And none had yards like they did back in Pennsylvania in her home town, where you could run around and play croquet or pull out a kiddie-pool in the summer. Here they were just little patches, enough maybe for a flower garden like the people across the street had, but not much more than that.

There was a playground a couple of blocks away, she remembered. But even that hadn't been as nice as the one back home.

If only Dad hadn't lost his job. But so many of the people had when the offices closed own. And a lot of her friends had had to move too. Even home wouldn't have been the same.

But she still missed it.

She sighed and began unpacking her things.

It was raining the next day, so instead of going out to the playground they spent the day unpacking—or she and Dad did, since Mama had to spend most of her time taking care of Julie. She worked on her room first, opening boxes and taking out her clothes, her toys, her books, and her other decorations.

The clothes went into the dresser and the closet, except that the closet was much smaller than the one in her old house so they didn't all fit, and she had to put some in one of the drawers under the bed, though it meant her cool-weather dresses would be all wrinkly when she wanted to put them on. At least her books all fit, and she could put most of the stuffed animals under the bed as well, since there weren't shelves on the wall like there had been at the old house, at least not yet.

After a long time, she was done, and the room was as good as it was going to get. Posters on the walls, curtains on the window—Mama had helped with that the night before—toys in their places, pig clock on the dresser, computer on the desk...

THUMP.

What was that? Dad dropping something in the other room?

THUMP, THUMP.

No, it wasn't Dad. It was coming from the wall.

She looked outside, but saw nothing. Only the houses and the rain, and an orange cat running under a bush as a car drove by. Nothing that could have made the kind of noise she was hearing.

THUMP.

It was *beneath* her, she realized. Under the bed.

But Dad was in the other bedroom, down the hall. And Mama was still downstairs with Julie; she could

hear the baby fussing. She was probably getting her diaper changed.

THUMP.

It was definitely under the bed. Maybe it was old pipes. She'd heard that old pipes sometimes made thumping sounds. They'd mentioned it in one of her books, a ghost story. Or maybe it was an animal, like a rat. They probably had lots of rats in old houses like this. But did rats thump? She didn't think so...

THUMP.

She left the room and ran to the stairs, charging down until she was on the first floor.

"Cassie?" her mom called.

"I heard something," she said back, walking into the hallway. Right below the bed, where would that be?

"What did you hear, dear?"

"I don't know." It would have to be the kitchen, wouldn't it, if it was right under her bed?

"It wasn't mice, was it?" Mama asked, more anxious now.

"Maybe. But it didn't sound like scratching or anything. It was more of a thumping noise."

"I hope it's not mice. Ugh! Steve said he thought he saw what looked like chew marks on some of the wood, though they were old."

She looked around the kitchen and frowned. Was her bed over the stove, or the counter? Either way, there wasn't anything there that could have made the noise, just the appliances, a stack of dirty dishes from breakfast, and other normal kitchen stuff. Nothing had even fallen over.

"See anything?" Mama asked.

She shook her head. "No." What had it been? The harder she thought about it, the more sure she was that

it wasn't rats—thank goodness about that! But it was definitely *something*.

She went back up to her room, but there were no more thumps, only the regular sounds from outside and her dad moving things around in his room.