

Where's Howard?

*By Kenita Gibbins*

We were happy and excited after moving into our first "new" house. We crawled into sleeping bags since we were too exhausted to set up our bed. I immediately fell asleep. The light in the bedroom woke me. I nudged snoring David. "Why did you turn on the light?"

"I didn't. I thought you left it on?"

We fell asleep again and slept until the sun appeared through our curtain-less windows. The light was on!

We spent the day unpacking. Around dinnertime Mother arrived with supper, our nine-month-old daughter Brittney, and the two dogs Greta and Minta. "Mom, Brittney's room is set up; come and see."

"Oh Bridget, it is just darling. Let's see how she likes her room."

"Let me put up her door gate. We can go see the rest of the house. Obviously Brittney is happy using her new crawling skills. The room is totally childproofed."

I gave Mother a fast grand tour. She oohed and awed in all the right places. The dogs had been following us everywhere, but when we went to the basement I noticed they didn't follow. I called to them, but they just stood at the top of the stairs barking. I said to Mother, "That's strange – they followed me to the basement of our rental house. The stuff looks like the former owner left everything that belonged to her husband and son. I don't know if I should try to contact her or if I should pack up everything and call Goodwill. David has his eyes on the tools."

The next day David went back to work. I left Brittney in her room while I tried to get some things in order. I went to check on her every few minutes. She made happy sounds like she was cooing back to someone?

"Honey, I feel like someone is watching!"

"Now just who do you think is watching – a ghost?" my husband asked.

The next morning we were invited to have coffee with a neighbor. "Bridget, we are so glad to have you and your family in the Mitchell house. It sat empty a long time."

I asked, "Why do you think it sat empty?"

"Janet Mitchell moved shortly after Howard was killed by a car. I don't think she could stand being in the house after losing them both."

"Both?"

"Yes, their son died of leukemia. I heard she recently remarried her high school sweetheart. I hope things work out for her. It has been almost two years."

"I'm surprised she didn't give all of Howard and Michael's things away," said David.

"Maybe she didn't feel like severing all of her ties at once. My new friend told me where she

lives.”

My little girl continued to love being in her room while I worked. I panicked when I saw she was chewing on a cute rubber doll. I tried to take it away and she cried. It looked harmless so I let her keep it.

I immediately called Roberta and asked her to take Brittney. I marched downstairs. “Howard, Howard can you hear me?” I heard nothing. “You don’t frighten us, but you are not wanted here. Your family doesn’t live here anymore. Janet moved to 2020 S. Jefferson Way. Howard, please leave.”

Tears rolled down my face. I was trying to send this poor lost man into oblivion. He was my daughter’s first friend. “Greta, Minta, what are you doing down here? You are a pleasant surprise.” I thought to myself. “We like your home, thank you for letting us have it. Where are you Howard?”