

BAD GIRLS DON'T DIE

By Katie Alender
April 2009, Disney-Hyperion
All rights reserved.

Excerpt from Chapter 7

The basement door is right down the hall from the kitchen. I stood outside it for a long minute, staring at the doorknob. I really – and I mean *really* – had no desire to open it and go down those stairs.

But if that's where Kasey was...

I turned the knob and pushed the door open, waiting for an enormous, hairy arachnid to swing down and jump onto my face. Didn't happen. Maybe they'd all jumped onto Kasey, and the path was clear for me.

I took a step down, flipping the light on and closing the door behind me. There was a single light bulb glowing pathetically over the stairs, and everything beyond that melted into a smudgy blackness, punctuated by shapes caught in the faint moonlight streaming through one tiny window.

The air was stale and stuffy. It made my head ache the same way a really humid day does. But I didn't see any spiderwebs in my path, so I kept going.

"Kasey?" I whispered. My voice sounded hoarse.

No answer.

The room was shaped like a U, with a center wall dividing the two sides.

I thought I heard something on the other side of the wall.

"Kasey, are you down here?"

Still no answer, but this time I heard a definite sound. I went around the U – as far as I could go and still be standing in a patch of light.

I'm not afraid of the dark, but I wouldn't say I *love* it. I was tempted to turn back. Even if my sister was down here, she clearly wasn't interested in company.

Besides, who's to say the noise was Kasey at all? It was probably gophers. Or huge rabid sewer rats.

I was a nanosecond away from making tracks back upstairs when I heard a muffled snuffle.

Even huge rabid sewer rats don't snuffle to attract their prey.

"Kasey," I said, trying to sound no-nonsense. "Where are you?"

"Down here," she said.

"Down where?"

"Under the card table."

Naturally.

"I have a flashlight," she said, and a weak yellow spot of light illuminated the cement floor ahead of me. I followed its path to the corner. Then Kasey shined the beam on her own face, which was puffy and wet with tears.

"Come on, Kase," I said. "Come back upstairs."

She shook her head furiously. "No," she said. "I'm never going back up there."

"Never?"

Her head bobbed in the darkness.

"Where are you going to go to the bathroom?"

She sighed. "I mean it, Lexi."

"So do I!"

"I'll use the guest bathroom."

"That's upstairs." I reached over and took the flashlight from her, shining it around the room. "Maybe there's a bucket around somewhere."

She sighed a sigh that was way too big for someone who hasn't even started high school yet.

I decided to give her a second to be alone with her thoughts, so I shined the flashlight around, looking for spiders. Just because we'd made it that far without being bitten didn't mean they weren't planning their attack strategy. I kept my eyes out for the shiny, blueberry-like body of a black widow.

I didn't find one. I didn't see any bugs at all.

I *did* find shelf after shelf of everyday items that should have been thrown away long ago. Mom will save anything. She'd even saved the boxes of other people's rubbish that were in the house when we moved here. Dad and I are much neater, but we know better than to try to toss any of Mom's precious garbage—excuse me, stuff.

"Lexi," Kasey whispered, "will you tell me a story?"

A story.

My thirteen-year-old sister wanted to hear a story.

I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach. I didn't know what to say.

She sensed my hesitation. "My brain is stuck. I need to change the channel."

Her hand grabbed my arm.

"Please," she whispered.

"A *story*," I repeated, hoping she would pick up from my tone of voice that it was a kind of a strange request. "Stories are for... little kids."

"I don't care. A short one. About anything."

"Um... there's a girl who lives on a farm in black-and-white and then one day her house gets caught in a tornado and she wakes up surrounded by midgets and everything is in color."

"I've heard that one," she said. Her voice sounded tired and strained. "And you're not supposed to say *midget*. It's mean."

"Oh, Kasey..."

She started to cry again. "Please, Lexi, *please*."

Kasey had been normal once, had done normal kid things. She'd been bold and funny and stood up for herself. And now she was just... coming apart at the seams. Sitting under a card table in the basement. Talking to her dolls. Making a request a six-year-old would make.

Maybe I was an enabler. Instead of coddling her, I should tell her to make more friends at school, to do her own homework or take a failing grade. Not stand up for her anymore.

And definitely, one hundred percent, not tell her a story.

"Once upon a time," I began, surprising both of us, "there was a man and a woman who lived in a little shack in the country next to a river..."

Want to read more? *Bad Girls Don't Die* is available wherever books are sold.

Visit the author online at KatieAlender.com!