

A GHOST IN SILENCE



Other Books by Clayton Bess

Story for a Black Night

**Best First Novel, Commonwealth Club of CA, 1982
Phoenix Honor Award, 2002**

"A riveting meditation on the moral choices that must be made in living..."(*starred *Booklist*); "An unabashed moral tale and a crowd-holding story." (*starred *Kirkus*)

Big Man and the Burn-Out

Sequoyah Award Finalist, 1985

"...a gem of a book that is incandescent and fragile with its loving, caring people." (*VOYA*)

Tracks

A.L.A. Best Book for Young Adults, 1986

"...a glorious adventure." (*Booklist*); "...at once sweet and gripping, sad and strong...its pace fast and its philosophy rich." (*Bestsellers*); "The acclaimed author's new novel is... indelibly etched in the reader's mind." (*Publishers Weekly*)

The Mayday Rampage

A.L.A. Best Book for Young Adults Finalist, 1993

"Clayton Bess is a master at capturing the way teens talk... the storyline is riveting from start to finish... It will grab teens and move them profoundly. A definite must-purchase." (*starred *Kliatt*); "In no other young adult novel to date has AIDS been dealt with as graphically and thoroughly as in this timely book..." (*starred *Publishers Weekly*)

A GHOST IN SILENCE

by
Clayton Bess

Illustrations by
David Rauscher



LOOKOUT
P R E S S

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

Text copyright © 2008 by Robert Locke
Illustrations copyright © 2008 by David Rauscher

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, or otherwise, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, contact:



900 53rd Street, Sacramento CA 95819
boblocke@csus.edu

Cataloging Data

Summary: When ten-year-old Dillon's beloved big brother Chazz makes his quiet announcement, it is a bombshell for his family. Their parents first explode into uproar then implode into silence, a silence through which Dillon wanders like a ghost.

- [1. Family Problems—Juvenile Fiction. 2. Brothers—Juvenile Fiction.
3. Coming Out (Sexual Orientation)—Juvenile Fiction.
4. Child Authors—Juvenile Fiction.] I. Title.
PZ7.B4654Gh 2008 [Fic]

ISBN 1-882405-04-8 Hardcover
ISBN 1-882405-05-6 Paperback

Printed in the United States of America

V 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

**To loving, understanding
families around the world.**

Thanks for being there,

~C.B.

**Rumble says,
“Share the message.”**

~D.R.



Chapter

1

I felt like a ghost today. All day, walking around school, I felt just like a ghost. No one looked at me. Or if they looked, they didn't see me. Nobody knew who I was. Or if they knew me, they didn't call me by name. Or if they called me by name, they didn't know it was me, a ghost, and not Dillon.

Yesterday I didn't even know myself. What I mean is that yesterday I knew my name was Dillon Moore, but I didn't know who Dillon Moore was. I knew I was the son of Chaswick Moore and Linda Dillon Moore and the brother to Chazz Moore, "the baseball legend of Hanover High." But I didn't know I was a ghost.



This is a picture I drew of the way my mom drives. And talks. Well, Chazz helped on this picture a little. He said he wanted to get my mom's physiognomy just right. By that I think he meant the crazed look in her eyes when she gets behind the wheel.

That's Broder High School. That's me in the back seat and that's me, too, in the mirror. Chazz says that's impossible, but I call it "artistic freedom" which is what an artist like me is free to do.

Hanover High is where I'll go, but only after I go to Hanover Middle School, and I'm not going there until almost a year from now. Or maybe not even then, because maybe they don't let ghosts in.

That would be terrible for my mom because every time we drive past Hanover High she has to point at it and tell me that that is where I'll be going. "Hanover High, Dillon, that's where you're going." And whenever my dad hears my mom say that, he has to say, "And you're going to be as big a baseball star as your big brother." And if Chazz is there, and hears all that, then Chazz just looks at me and raises his eyebrows and grins at me. Chazz always tells me that I can be anything that I want, even a world famous artist.

But I'm not so sure. Especially after last night.

Last night was Sunday night, and Sunday night is usually the best night of the week, the night that Chazz comes home for dinner, the night my mom's eyes have got a zillion stars in them, and my dad can't stop laughing.

Then, after dinner, when Chazz gets up to leave, and my mom and dad load him down with leftovers, and I stand at the front door and watch Chazz go down the walk and get into his car and drive away, my heart pinches up until it hurts. That's because we all love Chazz so much.

Or we used to love him. Until awful last night.

Grammy Rose is always saying about Chazz, "Chazzy has a face that women dream about, a physique that men would die for, and a heart and soul that is the envy of the angels."

When my dad and my brother hear this, they start doing this winking thing at me to let me know that I'm not supposed to believe everything I hear. And if Grandma Moore is around and hears Grammy Rose say that, then Grandma Moore starts with this clucking noise, but she doesn't say anything out loud until after



Grammy Rose goes home. Then Grandma Moore tells my dad that his “wife's mother” shouldn't be lording it over the angels because the angels have “ways mysterious” of reeking revenge. And Grandpa Moore says that Chazz is “no better nor no worse” than any of God's beans, and that my dad better tell his “wife's mother” that.



I have never heard my Grandpa or Grandma Moore call my Grammy Rose by her name, but only “your wife's mother” if they're talking to my dad, or “your mother's mother” if they're talking to me and Chazz. Chazz pointed that out to me, and I've paid attention, and he's right.

Chazz is always right about everything. Chazz doesn't say anything unless he already knows he's right about it. Chazz goes to night classes at night and to day classes during the day over at the college, when he can get away from work. But he has to work a lot because he has to make his ends meet, and since he moved into his apartment he has a lot more ends to make meet. Like furniture, and gas and electricity. Those are what they call “ends” and you have to make money to make them meet. Chazz bought this cool laptop computer, and he lets me use it, like how I'm finishing up this story now. I like to type my stories into Chazz's computer because you can polish the words you want to say and check your spelling, because mine is awful.

In Chazz's classes they're always teaching him about what they call “applications” on the computer, and then Chazz teaches me all the things that he learns. He's also got a lot of cool books in his backpack, and he doesn't mind if I go through his backpack to find a book, or whatever. He keeps gum in there for me, too. Chazz used to let me use his computer any night of the week, but since he moved into his apartment, now I can only

do it on Sunday nights. And that's the main reason that Sunday nights are so cool. Except, like I say, last night, when it all happened.

Last night at the dinner table Chazz seemed to be the same old Chazz. Maybe he was a little weird, now that I think back about it. Maybe he was a little quiet. Yeah, and Mom was way weird, now that I think back about it. She was doing what my dad always calls “chattering” because you can almost hear my mom's teeth clacking. Only last night her chattering was way more than usual, non-stop and about nothing at all, like she was really nervous and didn't want anyone to say anything. Like, just because we were eating corn with the roast beef and potatoes, she started talking fast about corn and Nebraska and gasoline and this woman on TV that she can't stand, and she kept saying, “Chaswick? Chaswick?” like she was asking my dad for help, but he just kept shoveling it in. And then, right at the end of the meal, just as my dad was about to push his chair back from the table, and just as my mom stopped her chattering, Chazz started to say something.

He said, “Mom. Dad. Dillon.” And he looked at each one of us when he said our names. Then he said, “I’ve got something I’ve got to tell you.”



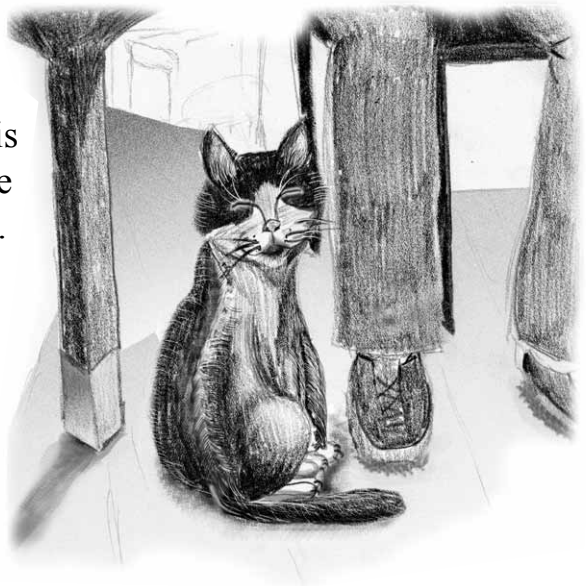
My mom looked down at the plate of leftover roast beef, and she put her finger over a nick in the edge, like she thought she could hide it.



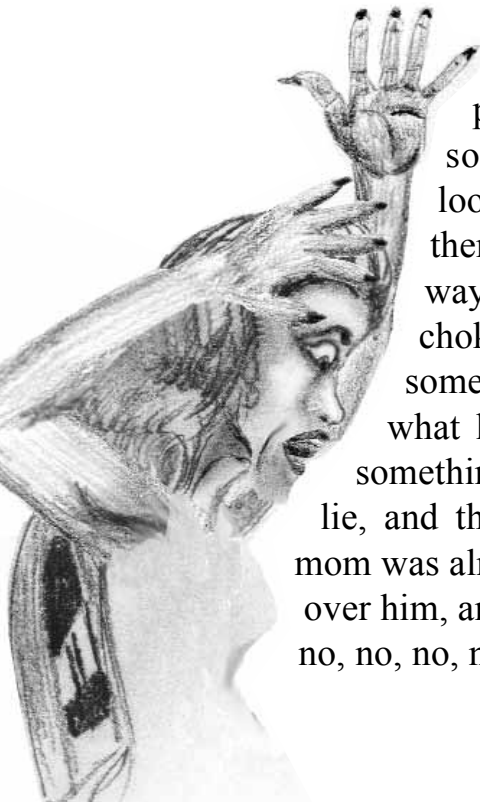
My dad folded his napkin. I looked down at Rumble, my cat, who was sitting at my feet.



Rumble had his eyes curved down in a squint and his lips curved up, the way that he grins. Chazz kept talking.



I know that when you write a story, or whatever, you're supposed to use what they call "quotation marks" for the things people say, and you're supposed to use what they call "italics" to give certain words punch. Italics are those slanty letters, and when you see them you're supposed to punch those words. So like you're supposed to write, "Grammy Rose said, 'Blah-dee-blah,' but Grandpa Moore corrected her, like always, saying, 'Oh, *no!* Blah-dee-*blah!*' back at her."

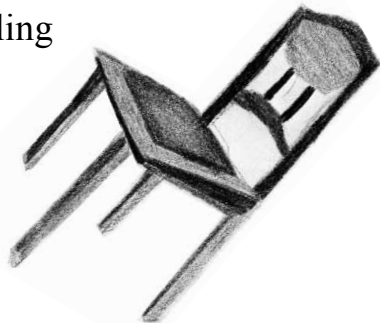
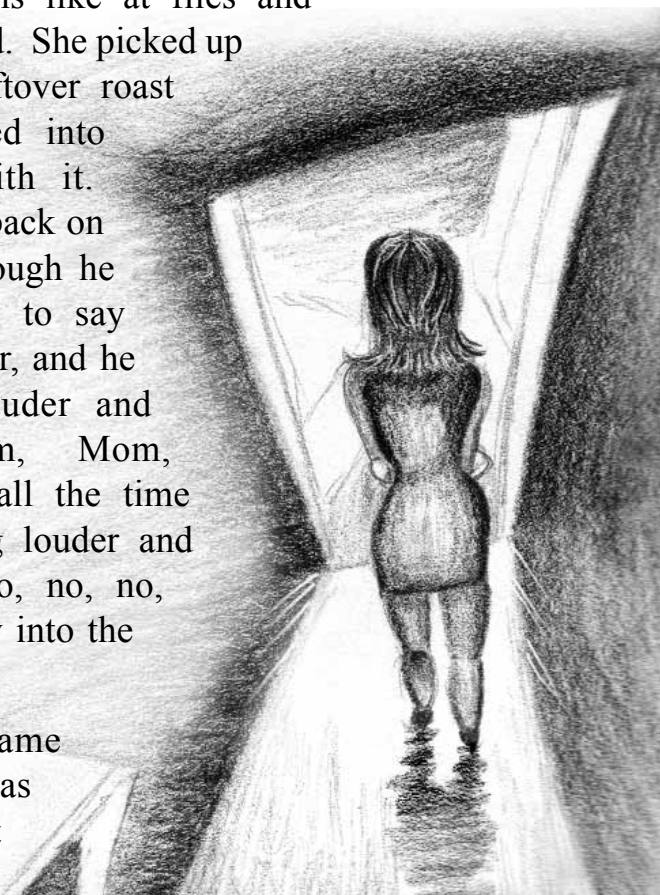


But the thing was that with Chazz, it didn't happen just like that. Chazz said something, yes, but I was looking down at Rumble, and there was something about the way Chazz said it, like he was choking on his roast beef or something, that I didn't get all of what he was saying. He told us something about how he was living a lie, and then something else, but my mom was already on her feet and talking over him, and she kept saying just, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no," like that, and

waving her arms like at flies and shaking her head. She picked up the plate of leftover roast beef and started into the kitchen with it. She turned her back on Chazz, even though he was still trying to say something to her, and he was getting louder and saying, “Mom, Mom, Mom, Mom, Mom!” all the time she was getting louder and saying, “No, no, no, no, no!” all the way into the kitchen.

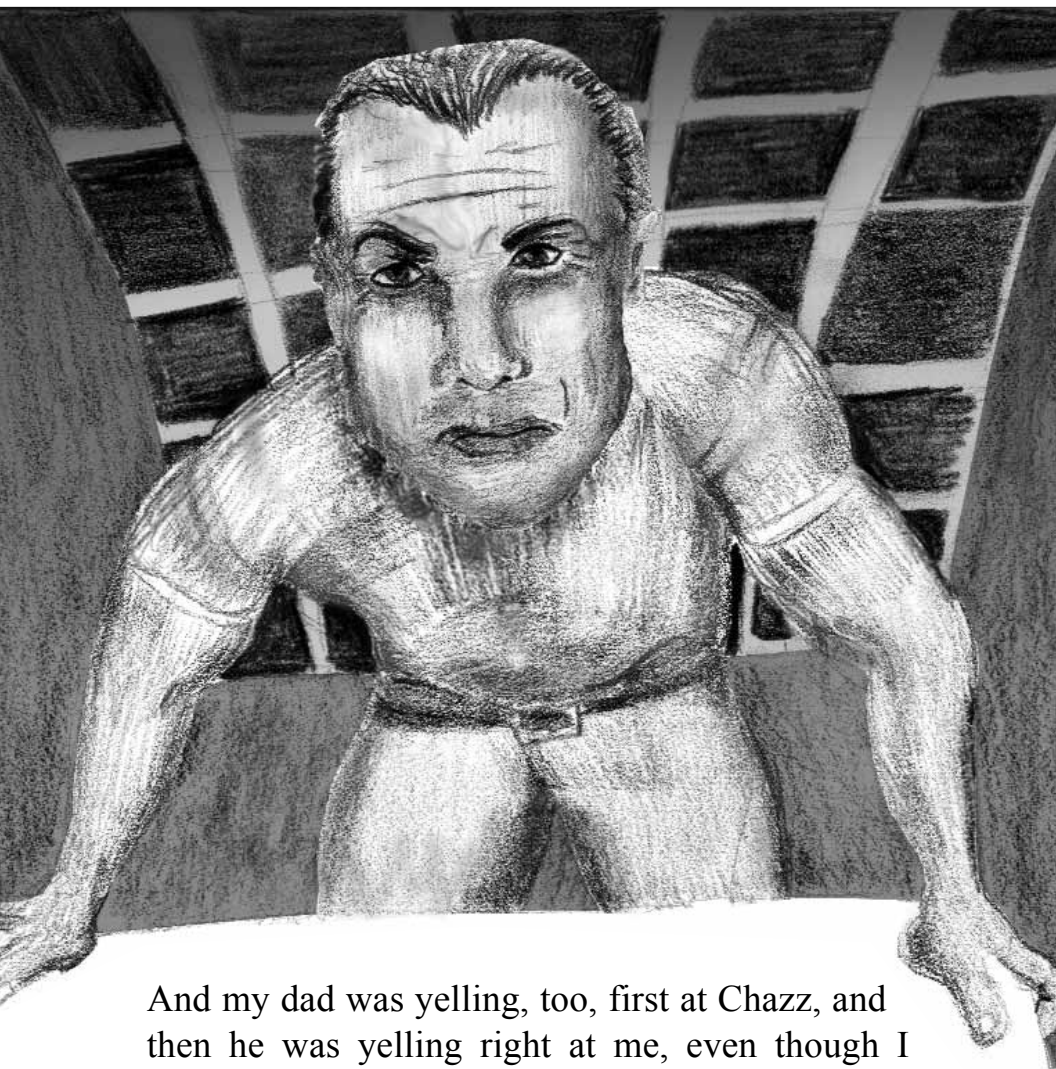
At the same time, my dad was starting to get up from the table, too. But he was so mad that when he stood up, his chair went falling backwards onto the floor.

It made this big crash, and that made Rumble start trying to run away,





but his claws on all four paws were just scratching on the wood of the floor, and he couldn't get a grip to go. But then he did start running, and he ran up the stairs, meowing really loud because he was so scared by my dad.



And my dad was yelling, too, first at Chazz, and then he was yelling right at me, even though I didn't do anything. I never saw my dad so mad as this, with veins sticking out of his head and neck. He was yelling at me to go upstairs to my room.

I really wanted to get out of there, like Rumble, but Chazz grabbed onto my arm and told me that he wanted me to stay. Chazz was the only one who was still sitting. He was just sitting there and holding onto the table with one hand and holding onto me with the other and looking right into my eyes. But my dad yelled at me again to go up to my room, and this time he started for me, and that was really scary. My dad has never ever hit me, but he looked like he was going to hit me now, or shove me up the stairs.

I pulled my arm away from Chazz and ran for the stairs but then I heard this crash in the kitchen like Mom dropped the plate of roast beef, and I stopped on the stairs.

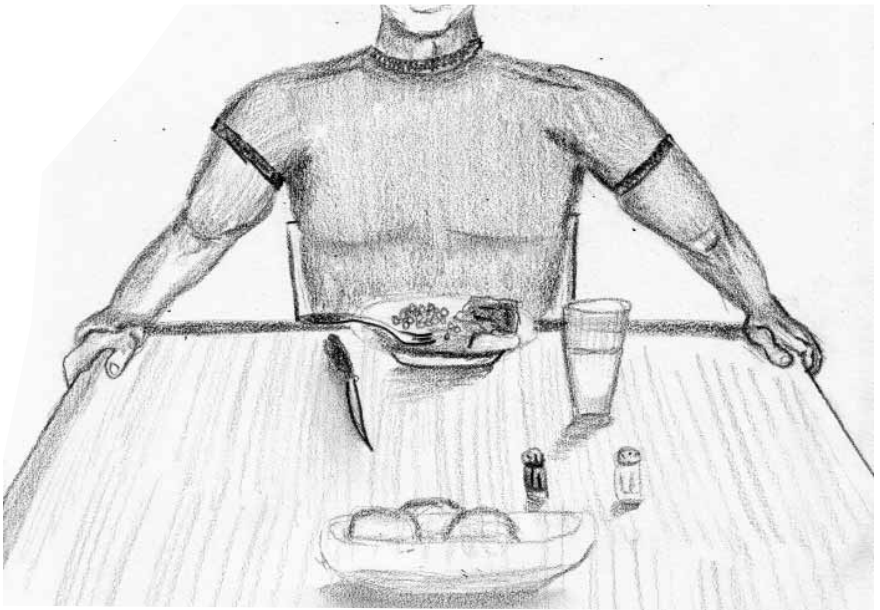


My dad stopped yelling and turned to the kitchen. Chazz was silent now, too. Then there were more crashes. No sound anywhere else, just crashes in the kitchen. Then Dad went to the door and looked into the kitchen, and the crashes stopped.

My dad stood there a couple of seconds, then he talked through the doorway in a voice so quiet that I couldn't hear what he said. I couldn't hear anything from my mom either. But in a second my dad turned fast back to Chazz and started yelling at him all this stuff about look what Chazz did now, and how could Chazz do that to his mother, and telling Chazz to get out of the house and don't come back. That's what he said. I remember this because there was nobody else talking or yelling or crying, and I could hear every word, to remember them.

“Don't come back! You go think about this, and you get it out of your head. And don't come back until you do. And then you come back, and you say you're sorry to your mother, and you tell us it's not true.”

But Chazz didn't get up to leave. He stayed like he was, holding onto the edge of the table with both hands and talking really slow, and low, and he said, "It *is* true. And you've got to get used to it."





This made my dad madder than ever, and then he looked up and saw that I was still on the stairs, and I didn't wait to get yelled at again but



ran upstairs and into my room and locked the door. Rumble was on the bed, squeezed up in the corner against the pillows, and hissing.

I got on the bed with him and squeezed up into the corner, too, and stacked the pillows between us and the door.

I took Rumble in my arms. He was all shaky. Everyone says that Rumble is an old cat, but Chazz told me that Rumble is exactly the same age I am, even though I'm just a kid. Our Grammy Rose gave Rumble to Chazz as a kitten the day I was born because Rumble was supposed to make Chazz feel better. Grammy Rose is always telling me, about Rumble, "Well, your mom and dad got a new baby in the house, and why shouldn't Chazzy have a new baby, too?" When Chazz moved out of the house last year, he told me that Rumble was too old to move to his apartment, which is downtown and with a lot of traffic. Now I'm the one who takes care of Rumble. That's why I was taking care of Rumble last night, because he's an old cat and could have a heart attack. But I'm still just a kid.

Then I heard Chazz coming up the stairs, the way he comes up them, two at a time. He tried to get in my door, but I had locked it. So Chazz started yelling on the other side of the door, something about the kids at school, but it didn't make any sense. My dad came up the stairs, too, yelling, too.

They were both yelling about the kids at school, and Chazz was yelling about how I was supposed to do something about the kids at school, but my dad kept yelling, “They’re just kids! They’re just kids!” And there was more, but I didn’t get any of it because Rumble started trying to get away from me as soon as Chazz came up and started pounding on the door. But I was stupid and was trying to calm Rumble down, and finally he had to claw at me to get away, and he jumped down and hid under the bed. He clawed me pretty bad, and I was bleeding on my arms, but he didn’t mean it.

I crawled under the bed with Rumble. I took a pillow with me, and I covered my head with the pillow. But I could still hear the yelling and the pounding on the door. Then the yelling went back down the stairs. Then the front door slammed. It shook the house, and I felt it in the floor where I was under the bed with Rumble. And then there was silence.

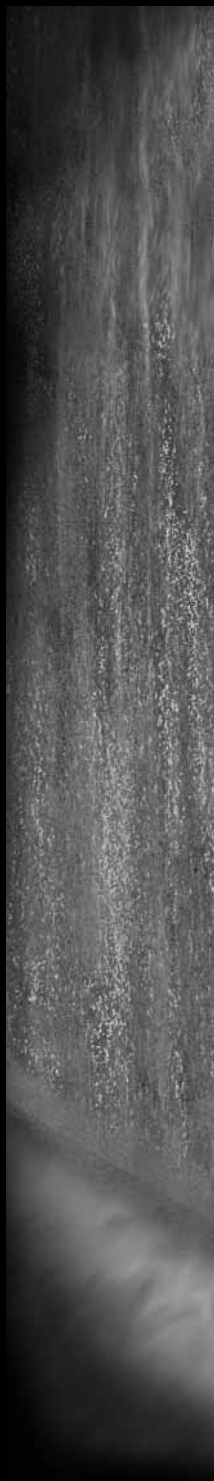
There was this awful silence.

For I don't know how long, silence.



A long time later, I got out from under the bed and went to the door and opened it, and looked to see.

Rumble came, too, and looked
to see.

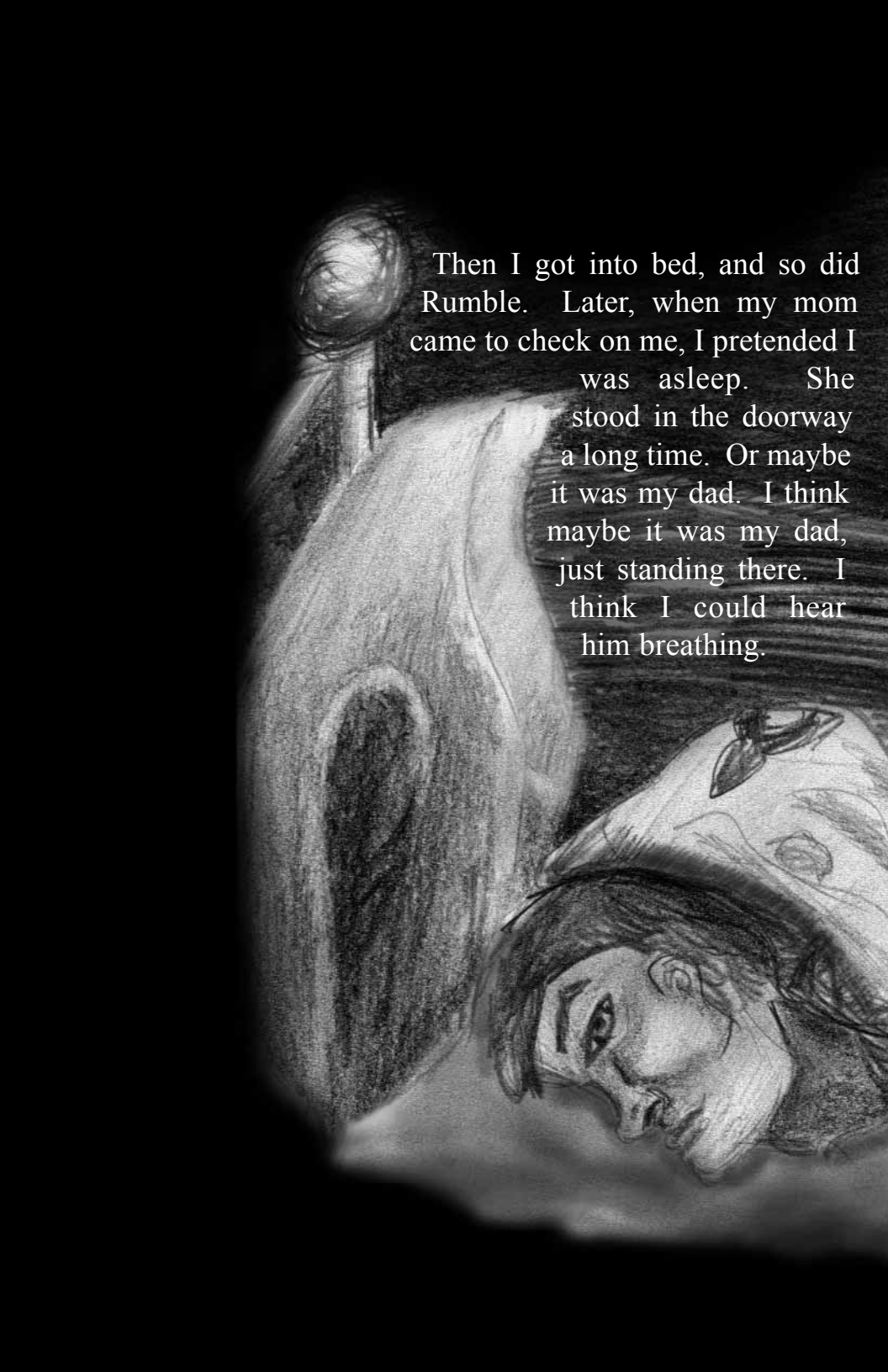




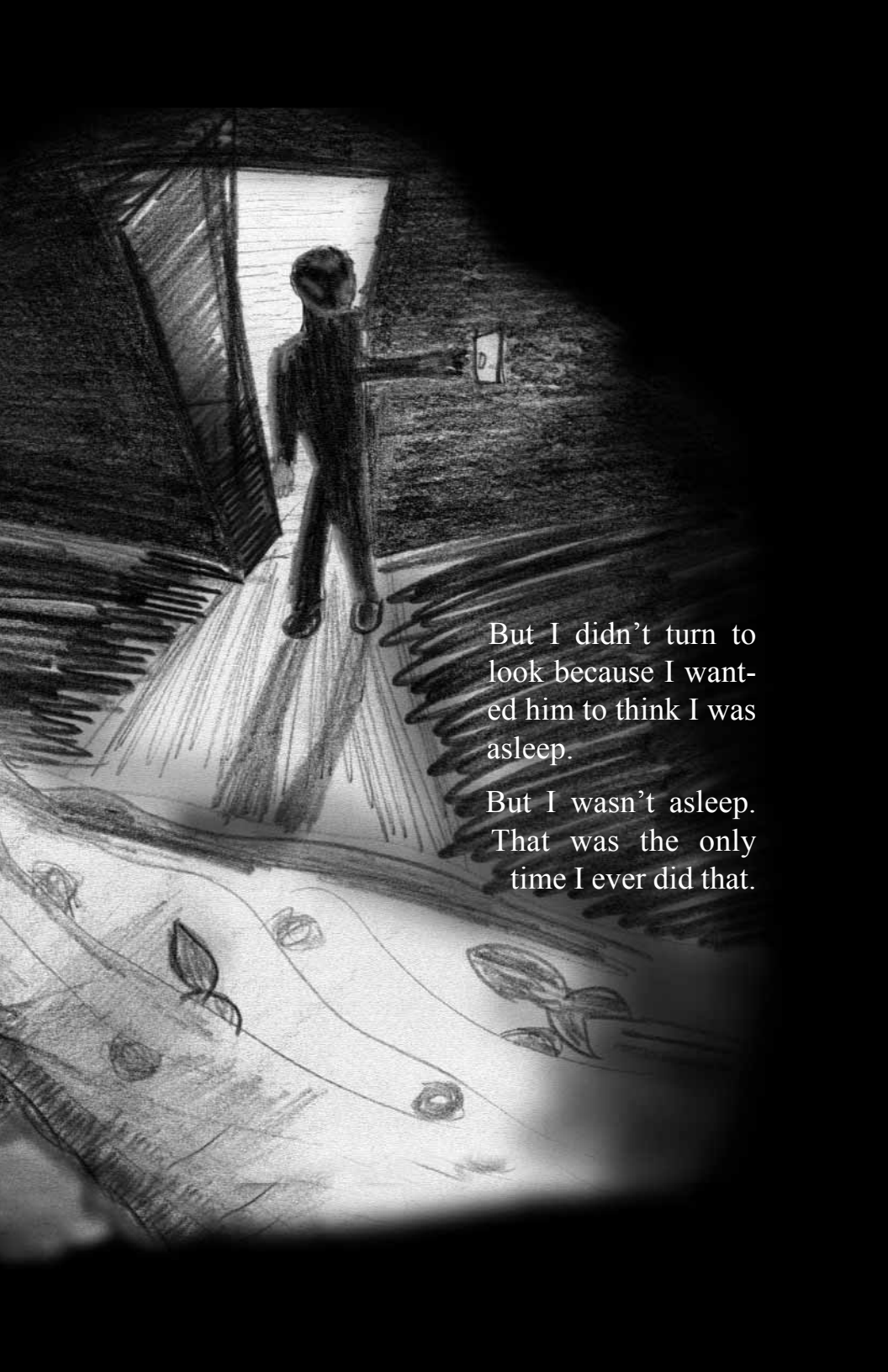


And we listened to the silence.





Then I got into bed, and so did Rumble. Later, when my mom came to check on me, I pretended I was asleep. She stood in the doorway a long time. Or maybe it was my dad. I think maybe it was my dad, just standing there. I think I could hear him breathing.



But I didn't turn to look because I wanted him to think I was asleep.

But I wasn't asleep. That was the only time I ever did that.

