

She shivered as the boards in the old house creaked and moaned. “It’s telling secrets,” is what her Grandma Essie told her. But as she lay in her bed, alone in the dark room, Amelia decided there weren’t any of the house’s secrets she cared to hear.

She lay as stiff as piece of forgotten chewing gum, not daring to move a muscle. Amelia feared that whatever was in her room would grab her and take her to some strange world. She wouldn’t see her parents again. Perhaps she’d be a servant to a slimy, mucousy king. Maybe he’d make her pick lint from between his toes, and force her to eat horrible things such as spinach ice cream.

Amelia shuddered at the thought and slipped further down in the bed. With only the top of her head and eyes above the covers, she allowed her gaze to wander around the room. The moon shone through the bedroom window, casting eerie shadows that leaped and danced on the walls. Her throat dry from fright, she watched as a bony arm appeared outside the window. It tapped and scratched on the glass with a crooked finger.

Amelia cringed and curled into a tight ball. She thought a witch, with dried raisin-looking teeth, was trying to get in.

Any minute the scary hag would fly into the room. She’d turn Amelia into a mouse, or worse yet, a Brussels sprout.

As a vegetable, Amelia couldn’t play outside with Julia. She’d shrivel and rot in the sunshine. She might become a meal for a hungry caterpillar. She wouldn’t have any friends. No one wants to play with a vegetable. Amelia clenched the bottom sheet in her fists. She wouldn’t let the witch to turn her into anything. But how could a nine year old girl, who sometimes hid behind the couch during thunderstorms, defeat an evil hag?

Maybe garlic would work. When Daddy ate it, his breath smelled like three-day-old gym socks, and Mama never kissed him until he brushed his teeth. Yep, garlic was definitely what Amelia needed.

Amelia inched her way off the bed, freezing as the bedsprings groaned beneath her weight. Gulping, she glanced at the window, expecting to see the bulging eyes of the hag staring back at her. Instead, there was nothing but a few specks of dust dancing in the moonlight.

Amelia picked up a baseball bat from the floor, and then crept down the hall. Walking into the kitchen, she could smell the tomato-basil bread from supper. Her stomach growled like an angry lion.

“Now isn’t the time to be hungry,” Amelia scolded her stomach. “But,” she said, breaking a bite off the loaf, “one tiny piece won’t hurt.”

She’d miss things like homemade bread when she became a Brussels sprout. “Well, there’s no way I can let that happen,” she said stubbornly.

Still clutching the bat in one hand, Amelia opened the refrigerator. “Now what can I use?” she wondered. Ketchup? No, that would only work if she were battling a French fry.

There wasn’t any garlic but she did find a container of crumbled Bleu cheese. Amelia gagged as she sniffed the food. It smelled like stinky armpits.

A floorboard creaked. Amelia’s hair stood up on the back of her neck when she heard footsteps behind her in the dark kitchen.