The bright invitation shimmered in the afternoon light, the bejeweled gems around the words *“Welcome to Casey’s Sleepover Party!”* catching my eye. I clutched my overnight bag, my palms damp as they brushed the folded clothes inside. I raised my hand to knock, hesitated, then took a deep breath and tapped the door.

Footsteps approached, and Casey’s smiling face appeared.
“Fifi! Come in! I’m so excited! Are you?” she said, already running off. “Come see my figurines!”

“Go. I’ll pick you up tomorrow at 10 in the morning okay?” she said, kissing my forehead, “You're going to have a great time, Fifi.”

I waved and followed Casey upstairs.

The afternoon passed quickly, full of games, cards, and plenty of talking. For dinner, we had pasta with creamy napoleon sauce.

By ten o’clock, the house felt different. It was dim and shadowy, and the quiet seemed deeper.
“Time for bed!” Casey called, sliding under her quilt. “You’ll be sleeping next to me.”

I crawled into my sleeping bag, feeling its cool fabric on my legs. Soon Casey’s breathing was soft and steady, but I lay awake, thinking of the Mr. Snuggles I’d left at home, embarrassed of him until I saw Casey with her own stuffed rabbit. I thought of my princess blankets, my own room. The clock ticked toward eleven, each click loud in my ears.

A faint *drip… drip… drip* came from downstairs. A fly buzzed somewhere in the dark. The floor in the hallway creaked.

Suddenly, there was a burst of noise from below - thuds, a clatter, a muffled voice. My heart raced.

I slid out of my sleeping bag and crept to the stairs, each step groaning. At the bottom, I stopped.

In the shadows, I saw something horrible. Something I never should have witnessed.