

SCARY

Of course, Jeff knew what to do.

"Where would be the best place to find something old?" he asked rhetorically, "why, a very very old house, that's where!" He smiled the way he usually does when he thinks he is being extra clever, grabbed his bike and jumped on. "And I know just the place." He was off.

Quickly getting on my own bike, I still had to work to catch up with him. It always turned out this way! Every time I had an idea or a plan, he turned it around and made it his own. What made it even worse was that it always seemed to turn out better or more fun his way than any way I would have done it. Still, I often felt oddly left out. This was after all my school project, and I wanted it to stay that way.

"Jeff!" I shouted after him. He slowed down a bit to let me get within shouting distance. "What are you up to? Where are we going?"

"Why, to the haunted house on Ridgemoore of course," he screamed back.

Oh no, I thought. That was the local ruin, and it probably was one of the oldest - if not the oldest - houses in our town. It had been abandoned and nailed shut for as long as anybody could remember, and it was the subject of more ghost stories than any old house had any right to be. I did not want to go there, especially not inside! But of course, I couldn't act scared in front of all-mighty brave Jeff. "Cool!" was all I managed getting out.

The Ridgemoore ruin lay at the end of Ridgemoore Lane, past the old Baptist church, out in the boons. The whole neighborhood was spooky; nobody cared for it anymore. The house, as well as its surroundings, were run down. When we arrived it was already dark, except for the moonlight that now only seemed to heighten the eeriness of the scenery.

After jumping over the stone wall that surrounded the building, we contemplated what our next move should be. Seeing that a window close to the ground had a couple of boards missing, we decided to get in that way. It was a cellar window, which didn't make me feel any better.

Walking toward the house I had a creepy feeling in the pit of my stomach – almost like a foreboding. We shouldn't be doing this. This was bad!

We were both of us small enough to fit through the hole left by the missing boards, so after Jeff had gotten his flash light out of his backpack we were slipping inside the house, Jeff first of course.

"I'm not sure about this," I said as I followed him slowly through the junk piled on the floor of a dark cellar room. "We shouldn't be doing this!"

"Sissy," he threw back at me over his shoulder and kept going. "Just look at all this stuff! There must be hundreds of things for you to choose from, and all of it must be older than hell."

I followed the light from his flashlight, and could see what he was talking about. There were things lying around that seemed like they should have been removed from the house ages ago. Nice things! Jeff started picking things up and stuffing them in his backpack – an old book, a scarf of some sort, what looked like a thick silver bracelet, a picture frame with an ancient family picture...

Suddenly he stopped. In fact, he seemed to freeze. He stared straight ahead, though the flashlight was pointing to the floor.

"Jeff...?"

Then I felt it too! It was a feeling without obvious source, although its intent was all too clear – to scare me senseless! My body suddenly felt out of control. My breathing had stopped - my eyes were wide open and the hairs on my arms were standing on end. And I didn't know why!

A few seconds went by that felt like hours - neither Jeff nor I moved. All was quiet. I could hear the wind behind us through the open window, almost like a low whistling. The feeling didn't go away. It was utter dread! I could clearly sense a presence - or several. It felt like all around me were beings, ghosts, demons, something... watching me, waiting to grab hold of me, kill me, molest me and without any doubt whatsoever scare me until I was dead, dead, dead!

And then I thought I died, or maybe I wished I did. A loud banging noise came from behind us, followed by more. Four, five, six loud bangs before I dared, or could, move my head around. The window was nailed shut; the missing boards were back - our way out was blocked!

Screaming! I turned around and realized that Jeff's mouth and legs were back in his control, or at least in his lower brain-

stem's control. He was running blindly, screaming worse than I had ever heard anybody scream, still holding the picture frame. And of course I followed, not screaming but somehow wishing I could - my vocal cords seemed like they were stunned.

In the corner of my eyes I could see movement. I glanced to the sides but could not make out what it was. It didn't seem to be figures or even objects that were moving, it was more like reality folded in its seams.

Then Jeff was gone! I realized where to when I saw the big hole in the floor and the shattered picture frame in front of it - the rotted wood had let go...

Looking down I couldn't see a thing. His flashlight must have broken - it was utterly dark. "Jeff?" I managed to get out through tight, clenched, lips - it sounded like a bird's chirp. "Jeff?" I tried again, "are..."

Then it was back - the feeling, the presence, the stopping of my heart! The world seemed to swim all around me. It fluctuated in and out of focus. Was I fainting? I wished...

Then, a voice - or was it a voice? I couldn't tell what was real any more. Maybe I was imagining things, maybe there really was a voice, maybe I was dreaming, maybe I was not... It sure didn't feel that way right now. Even though I felt myself slipping into a haze, it felt oh so real. The voice seemed to resonate in the room, in my ears, in my head - "Mansion items will not be removed from grounds! Property will not part from the house!"

And I suddenly knew, I just knew, that taking something away from this house would be a very very bad idea... It would, in a fashion, cripple the structure of the building, and I understood that the house wouldn't have it - that it would prevent this by any means.

I looked at my hands as if to make sure I hadn't picked anything up. I felt like I wanted to wipe the dust from my clothes to make sure I didn't bring any dirt with me out - if I ever got out. Instead, I turned and ran. I ran like I never ran before, with no plan and no direction.

Things were definitely moving around now. Hallways and rooms appeared where a moment before there had been a wall. Looking behind me at one point I saw the house compressed to a point, shifting relentlessly, like a reality store room - lining up new doors, stairs and even whole floors to throw in or out of the void.

Suddenly I could scream, and I screamed!

I don't know for how long I was running. And I don't know how I found my way out. But all of a sudden I found myself on my bike, pedaling like crazy, still screaming my throat sore.

I calmed down enough to stop screaming and noticed the surroundings. I was past the church, could even see some lights up ahead around the corner. My world was back - my real world was back - my world that had always been real, until today, was back!

My knees hurt from bruises and my pants and shirt were torn. My throat hurt from screaming, my head felt heavy and my brain felt oddly warm.

My senses were coming back, but it would take until parking the bike by my house before realizing that what had tickled my calf had not been a leaf, but a worn, edges torn, mid 19th century family portrait.

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