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Eighth grade

Irvington Community Middle School

The House

“I can’t believe you even thought about going there! Have you lost your mind?”

Behind their mom, Jessie smirks and sticks her tongue out at him. This always happens to him, it isn’t fair! Whenever he tries to do anything fun in his boring town, he gets caught. And it’s all Jessie’s fault! She’s always spying on him and following him around.

He personally thinks she needs to get some friends. But when he told her that, she told Mom and he ended up getting in even more trouble.

“Are you even listening to me right now?”

Jason looks back at his mom from where he was glaring at Jessie and fantasizing about flushing her pet fish down the toilet.

“Dang it, Jason! This is important!” She pauses to take a breath, “I know you think it doesn’t matter, but this is worse than your other trips.”

His mom liked calling him and his friend’s breaking and entering, their “trips.” Not that they ever went to places that actually had people living in it, they only went to uninhabited, dilapidated places. You know, the interesting ones.

Apparently his mom was very upset, because usually she waits until she has tried to get his attention at least three times before she starts yelling. He feels kind of bad now.

“You know the history of The House. You know you shouldn’t mess with that! Don’t you understand?”

He doesn’t actually believe those stories, but the clear desperation in her voice made him freeze. His mom usually gets pretty upset when she finds out he went to or was going to go on one of his trips. But she wasn’t just upset, it wasn’t just about him doing something he wasn’t supposed to. She was genuinely worried about him.

He wouldn’t admit it, but it almost made him scared. It almost made him believe those stories.

“Yeah, okay. Okay, I understand,” Jason barely manages to get out the words.

This seems to make her feel a little better at least, finally getting a response from him. She takes a deep breath, “You know I still have to punish you right?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re grounded. For a month.”

Later that night Jason is tossing and turning in bed. Jason couldn’t sleep. He kept replaying his mom’s voice in his head. He didn’t want to, but it wouldn’t go away. It wasn’t her usual anger and heartbreak, it was genuine concern. Of course she was always worrying about him anyway, it was hard not to when he was always getting in trouble and getting taken home by the police. But, logically, she knew that he would always return home without being altered in a significant way.

She didn’t seem to be so sure of that now. He couldn’t help but think of the stories of The House now. He never believed them before, they must have all been made up, he thought. He didn’t know what to think anymore.

He couldn't tell what he was feeling. Concern? Resentment? Apprehension? Fear? If he wasn't shaking so much he would've laughed. He never got scared, never. It must be cold in his room.

Just then he thought he heard something banging against his window. He freezes and his mind races, thinking about all the things the house will do to him now that it knows he was going to trespass onto its property. If it was going to play with him first, like what all those stories told him would happen if he even thought about going there.

He hears the sound again. He tenses, but nothing happens. He opens his eyes, when he closed them he doesn't know, and he realizes that nothing happened. He feels himself start to relax, it must have been an animal or something.

Then he hears voices.

"Jason! Jason, wake up!"

"Yeah Jason! Open the window! "

Jason breathes a sigh of relief. It's only Johnny and Gary, his friends. Well, he's not actually sure they're friends yet, he just met them.

His old friend, Travis, left last year. So at the beginning of this year, he was completely alone. He knows almost everybody in the school, but they're not friends, the entirety of his relationship with them is because he spends a hundred and eighty days together out of the year in the same building as them for eight hours a day.

Anyway, they weren't his friends, and Jason was alone.

Except this year there were two new kids, twins. Jason thought they were his best bet at not being entirely alone this year. So, he went and sat next to them at every opportunity, volunteered to bring them places whenever they needed, and worked with them for every group project.

Evidently, Jason was more than a little desperate, and the twins caught on. He was a bit scared at first that they would think he was lame and wouldn't be friends with him, but, luckily, they took pity on him and let Jason hang out with them. With one condition.

They said that he had to go with them to the abandoned factory later that night. That was his first trip. And he really did mean for it to stop after that, he even told them he didn't want to go the next time they asked him to go somewhere with them. But then they started talking about him being scared, and how they didn't like wimps.

At the time Jason really thought that it was just one more trip, just to make sure that they weren't going to leave him alone at school.

"Don't tell me you're chickening out!"

"Yeah! We don't like chickens!"

But he just couldn't stop.

"Give me a second!" Jason replies, jumping out of bed and scrambling to get his shoes on.

"I'm still going!"

"We knew you would!" Jason hears Gary pause, "well, I knew you would. Johnny was a bit skeptical though."

"No I wasn't!" another pause, "actually, what does skeptical mean? Maybe I was."

"It means you didn't think Jason would go, dumb dumb."

"Oh okay, then I was really skeptical."

“I think I’m ready to go now. Stop messing around and step back so I can get out of here.”

Jason looks out his window and jumps out, aiming for the fallen leaves on the ground.

“So…” Jason starts as he’s picking up his bike, “are you guys, like, dead set on going to The House? Cause, you know, I heard that the cemetery is closer.”

“You can’t be getting scared already Jason, the fun hasn’t even started yet.”

“I knew it Gary, I told you he would be too scared. We should just leave him behind,” Johnny says.

“Give him a chance, he’s just letting those old stories get to him,” Gary reasons, “but look, once we get to The House, Jason will see that those stories are fake and that he was scared for no reason. I mean, ghosts don’t exist, obviously, so why should a creepy, haunted house be real? It just can’t be,” Gary seems so sure in saying this. It makes Jason feel a little silly for thinking that those stories could be real, even for just a second.

Jason feels himself shiver, he was cold earlier too. He should have brought a jacket.

“Yeah, like Gary said. Why should I be scared? It’s not like The House is actually haunted.”

“See Johnny, he isn’t scared. Now let’s get going.”

The trip there is entirely quiet, almost in anticipation, Jason thinks. He feels calm, like what he imagines being a cloud would feel like, without a single care in the world. He’s just going on a safe trip with his friends to a totally safe location. He’s ready for this.

As they get closer to The House, Jason starts rethinking those thoughts. He’s the closest he has ever been to it, and he knows, logically, that it’s a normal house, but he can’t stop the thoughts telling him that coming here was a mistake.

“Guys, it’s getting late, we’ve seen the house, let’s go back.”

Gary looks annoyed at this, a look of disgust crossing his face. "It's not fun if we don't go inside, Jason. Me and Johnny are trying to have fun. You being scared is not fun," he says meanly.

"I'm not scared, I'm happy to go in there," Jason replies, defensively.

Johnny gets a skeptical look on his face. Gary looks thoughtful, Jason is just glad that Gary isn't annoyed at him anymore.

"I'm sure you are Jason. You're very brave aren't you?" Gary says sweetly, the considering look turning into an empathetic one.

"Of course I am," Jason replies, more confidently this time with Gary's agreement.

"Then you wouldn't mind going inside first while me and Johnny bring the bikes around the back of the house then, right?"

"Why would you need to do that?" Jason asks nervously, "not that I wouldn't be happy to do it. But it's not like someone's going to steal our bikes this late at night, especially at this house."

"Maybe not, but there are other things around here. Dangerous things. We wouldn't want something bad to happen to the bikes."

Jason feels himself getting goosebumps, he's shaking again. It must be really cold tonight. He finds himself regretting, once again, that he didn't bring a jacket.

"Yeah I guess you're right, we wouldn't want a bear or something destroying them. We wouldn't have a way back."

Gary seems pleased, maybe even a bit proud. Jason is happy that he can help Gary out, he's a great friend.

"Alright then. Me and Johnny will bring the bikes around to the back, and you will go inside and look around for a bit, scope it out."

Jason watches as Gary and Johnny walk around the side of the house, feeling more and more uneasy about going inside without Gary around to tell him that he will be fine.

He thinks about turning back now, getting on his bike and going back home. Johnny and Gary carried their own bikes back first, Jason's is still in the driveway.

But then Jason remembers the pleased, proud look Gary had on his face when Jason agreed to go in first, reminding himself that he's doing this for his friends, his best friends.

Jason, thinking that this was as sure as he was going to get about going into The House alone, walks up the porch of The House and looks at the door. It's a usual door, if not a bit run down, but that's to be expected when a house is abandoned for as long as this one has.

Jason feels silly for thinking that the house was scary now, it's obviously just a normal house. He finds himself thankful for Gary once again, for bringing him here. For making him not scared anymore.

He takes one more look behind him, seeing a deserted driveway. Strange, he never heard Johnny or Gary come back to get his bike.

He turns back around and grabs a hold of the doorknob. Taking a glance down, Jason notices that he is shaking again. He didn't even feel it this time, he must be getting used to the cold night air.

He opens the door with his shaking hands, a little surprised that the door opened so easily. He would have thought that the house would be more guarded, or at least with a lock on it, considering how the adults were always telling kids that they were not allowed to go here.

Then he stepped inside the house. And in his last moments, he regrets not listening to those adults, and he thinks about his poor mother.