

Once upon a time, in a town where bells chime, on a little green hill there stood a house that possessed a certain chill. “The house is haunted,” the town folk whispered. So there the house lay, outcast, untouched and dilapidated.

Rosary believed the house was haunted for sure. She wasn’t scared of a thing in the world. Nothing bothered her. Well, nothing except the paranormal. Even the slightest mention of a ghost or spirit would send shivers down her spine and down to her knees.

Before I begin to babble,
I’ll tell you this pasquinade of fright.
Without further gabble,
Please listen and sit tight.

Rosary was very egotistical, loud and extremely cocky. Nothing hurt her more than damaged pride. Therefore, when she was dared to spend a night in the supposedly haunted house, she agreed without skipping a beat, despite her deep-rooted fear of ghosts and the paranormal. She had no idea of the horrors lying ahead.

That day, Rosary began the long trek home as the clock struck three. She looked towards the house. It stood on top of a hill in a secluded section of town, dark, ominous and dreary. The trees surrounding it, large mammoths of green foliage bunched over, bent and stopped, obscured the prestigious building. From a distance, only the top of the tallest tower was visible due to vast spread of untrimmed conifers. The mansion itself was made of deep crimson bricks and was overrun with ivy. The lawn itself was a jungle, composed of wild grass and untamed shrubs. The mansion was ancient and looked as if it had been vacant for decades.

Suddenly, through the corner of her eye, Rosary saw the curtains in one of the windows move. She stared at the window. The curtains swung back and forth, once, twice, thrice. Someone or something must have moved them. Rosary’s legs shook as she swallowed an uncomfortably large lump in her throat. She immediately shook off the idea and sprinted home, her companion’s dare still fresh in her mind.

That night, Rosary arrived as promised. She brought the biggest flashlight she could find, which wasn’t very big. Her heart was thumping and perspiration dotted her forehead as she gazed up at the towering mansion. Although it stood innocently above

her on that cloudless night, through Rosary's eyes, lightning flash ominously across the sky and the entire house was washed in shadow.

Rosary stared up at the mansion. She stretched her hands which were cold and clammy. She had never felt so scared before. With shaking steps she walked up the creaking porch steps. Time seemed to halt as she reached for the doorknob, her heart thumping in her ears like a drum. Thump, thump. She ever so subtly turned the doorknob, and opened the door. Nothing happened. Instantly, she relaxed and let out a palpable breath.

Suddenly, she felt a small tug on her ankle. Before she could react, she was swept off her feet and into the dark abyss of the mansion. The door snapped shut behind her and everything went pitch black.

Rosary instinctively grabbed the rope and pulled it off. She quickly straightened up and turned on her flash light. Suddenly, a note fell in front of her. It read:

“Perdition catch my soul! Hath thou no prudence! Hath thou not a paucity of fear!
Hark! Retreat my belligerent comrade for the Red Army is near!”

Despite, her indifference to what the note meant, she grasped the malicious threat it issued. Her body desperately wanted to crawl back towards the door, but Rosary was not about to lose the bet and have her pride wounded.

Glancing around nervously, Rosary saw somber portraits staring at her from behind layers of dust. Cold, hesitant moon light streamed in through a cracked window, casting eerie shadows on the walls. As she deliberately walked forward, she couldn't help but feel that someone following her. Whirling around, Rosary saw nothing but the empty hallway and the faces in the portraits staring at her. Their eyes seem to trace her every step. 'Turn back' they seemed to say. Rosary swallowed a nervous whimper and continued into the dark chasms of the mansion.

That's when she heard a noise. It sounded faintly like grinding bones or teeth. She took a tentative step forward, and she felt a sharp pain on her shin. There was a huge gash on her leg and blood was gushing out. Rosary's heartbeat quickened as she felt her knees go a little weak. She raised her flashlight to illuminate a path through the darkness. There were millions of thin, hard, metal lines stretched across the hall. The house was booby trapped.

Several minutes and a few bruises later, Rosary finally disabled all the booby traps. Suddenly, cryptic baroque cello music drifted to her ears. Rosary gulped and followed the noise. She arrived in a large open area. The place resembled a once-beautiful old fashioned ballroom. There was a huge, chandelier hanging from the lofty ceiling and every millimeter of the room was covered with golden paintings of jubilant cupids. However, their smiles held no comfort for Rosary. Not today.

She walked around warily clutching her flashlight. She could hear her footsteps resounding and echoing. The music had gotten louder now along with her unsettled heart. A chilly wind swept through a broken window and into the room, raising the large draperies on the windows which cast malicious shadows. In a heartbeat, the whole house seemed to come to life. Rosary stood stunned and still. The mansion creaked and groaned and the howling wind only intensified how ominous the music was. Rosary gulped again and she felt a drop of sweat roll down her back like a spider crawling across her bare skin. She shivered and looked left and right.

Suddenly, she found herself staring into the hollow eyes of a skeleton. She stifled a scream as nausea built up in her chest. The skeleton had bones that were red with blood and pieces of raw flesh dangling from it. Rosary looked down to see, to her surprise the cello was being played by the skeleton. The skeleton was moving its arm to pull the bow and fingering along. Before she could take in the atrocious scene, lights flashed on and off as the skeleton started cackling and shaking. It raised its arms around like a mad man as the cello crashed towards the floor with a loud and resounding clang. Its face turned upwards like a mask of joyous horror.

Finally our story has commenced, into a quintessential tale of horror.

Hold on to your senses, and please don't scream in terror.

On instinct, Rosary kicked the skeleton in the ribs and immediately it shut up and stopped vibrating. Rosary noticed that there were strings attached to the arms and legs and there was a recorder in the cello. Immediately, she relaxed. But her joy was short lived. The ballroom started rumbling and four foot long spikes shot out of the floor.

Rosary dropped her flashlight and ran for it. She dodged and swerved, managing to barely avoid each spike. Her heart skipped a beat as an unprecedented spike shot up so close it scratched and left a huge gash in her other leg. She winced but continued running.

Rosary looked back and realized that the spikes were now shooting up in full rows and were coming at me faster and faster. She gasped in terror and ran as fast as she could. Finally she reached a stairwell leading to a door. She raced up the stairs two at a time. Suddenly, she felt her foot being pulled down and the next thing she knew, she was hanging on to the edge of a stair. She was dangling over rows of sharpened spikes.

Rosary let out a yelp and quickly climbed up. She ran even faster up the stairs, tripping and falling many times. It felt like the walls were closing in on her and invisible hands were reaching out to grab her. She ran blindly.

Rosary had lost all sense of direction, all she felt and saw were swirls of darkness. The wind had begun howling again, and the creaking of the house made the adrenaline run through her body even faster. All she could hear was her beating heart. Suddenly, Rosary ran straight into and through a door. She lost her balance and fell to the ground in a dark room. The shadows seemed to swirl around her, sucking her in. Fear settled in and deep down she knew she wasn't alone in the dark. In a burst of panic, she fumbled for a light switch. Before she could flip it, the light turned on. Rosary let out a shaky breath and looked around the poorly lit room. There was a recorder that had begun playing suddenly, and a large bed that seemed to be occupied. Rosary warily stepped towards the bed and ripped of the covers.

Underneath the covers was a skeletal man. He was covered in blood and so skinny he looked like a skeleton. Rosary could see each and every bone. She opened her mouth when it suddenly turned its head all the way around and started shaking and cackling. Rosary grabbed the head and ripped it off. Immediately the vibrating and cackling stopped, along with the recorder. Everything was silent. Rosary saw something sparking and looked into the head of the skeleton. She found a recorder connected to some broken wires and exhaled a sigh of relief.

"So you found me," a voice whispered hoarsely. Rosary gasped and whirled around. In a shady corner of the room sat a withered old man in a large rocking chair. His face was gaunt and hollow with age. Numerous wrinkles creased his taut skin. A fringe of white hair matted his balding, mottled scalp. He lay hunched in his chair, bundled with blankets. He had the resigned look of one who knew his life had stopped giving.

"Are you a ghost?" asked Rosary as she cautiously approached the man.

“Is that how you see me?”

“No. But everyone says the house is haunted. Everyone says nobody lives here.”

“Bah! Everyone loved Stalin. But was he really any different from Hitler? Black always looked better than red on the map!” Rosary took a step back at the man’s sudden raised tone. Despite his weak apparel, she was still doubtful of his identity and intentions.

“But what’s up with all the booby traps?”

The old man turned to look at her through sagging blue eyes. “You think you’re the first to come here?” He chuckled bitterly. “Every night some shenanigans come knocking on my door or vandalize the inside of my house.”

At that moment, Rosary saw him for who he truly was. An old man, withering through the end of his days, alone in a desolate house.

“Why don’t you move out of here? If you move to a different place, I’m sure everyone will leave you alone.”

“Girl, listen to me. Why should I move? I have lived here my whole life. My father died in that room right across the hall. This house is the legacy of my family. If other people whisper about this place and bother me, then that’s their problem. Everyone may say this house is haunted, but it’s not. I know that and that’s all that matters.”

There was an awkward silence that passed between them as Rosary pondered about what he had just told her. “I’m sorry,” she finally said.

The man said nothing.

“I shouldn’t have believed the rumors.”

Again he said nothing.

She waited for a minute. When it became clear he didn’t mean to talk, she shuffled away. A feeling of guilt reached from her chest to her throat, threatening to develop into a loud sob.

“Wait.”

Rosary looked back.

“Why did you come?”

She opened her mouth but no sound came out. She thought back to earlier that day. The other kids had dared her to explore the mansion. She willingly had so they wouldn’t think she was a scaredy-cat. Despite her extreme fear, she had come this far. She had let

her pride get the better of her, and ignored her instincts telling her to steer clear. Rosary attempted to envision what could have happened if she hadn't been more careful. She could have been stabbed by a spike or injured.

“Remember girl. Know who you are. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks or what rumors they spread.”

Rosary nodded once and quickly fled the house, ruminating on all she had heard from the man. When she made it outside, she took one last glance at the house. Despite its old age, it stood on the hill with a certain benevolent majesty. Rosary held no fear for this house now. Slowly, a smile formed on her lips. He was truly a wise, prudent man. A magi she decided.

Haha! So this tale of fear,
Possesses a certain cheer,
I hope you have walked away possessing knowledge of the follies of rumors and the perils of pride. Hark my dear reader! Never let others define you or your opinions! You are a being with the liberty to choose your own path and say what you feel!

A puppet of a party, do not become.
For that is how democracy is undone.
To the views of others, you must not succumb,
After all, how did you think genuine dictators begun?