

House on the Hill

The old house sat atop the hill, the moon casting its shadow on the forest below. The place was old and wooden, its shutters banging against the walls when the wind picked up. From the second story window, a horrible scream pierced the wind's howls of laughter, and a figure fell to the floor. Then all was silent.

The next morning, Bob Turner arrived at the headquarters of the police department. He held a donut in one hand, and the other was running up and down the pistol in his holster. He licked his chubby fingers as he finished the donut and walked up the staircase to his office. His belt was barely able to sustain his circular figure as he walked, his gut bouncing up and down with each step. He grunted and opened the glass door at the top of the staircase, then slowly walked through the door.

Once inside, Turner was greeted with a tense scene. The Chief of Police sat in an office chair listening on the phone, his face hardened and serious. Other officers stood around him, their faces equally serious and stern.

"Okay," he muttered. "I'll see what I can do." He paused. "Yes ma'am. We'll do whatever we can." He hung up. "That was Mrs. Bennington. Her son is missing. She last saw him up at the McMarri Manor. We'd better get over there and begin a search."

"I'll get the donuts," grumbled Turner, backing out of the room.

"Oh no you won't," the Chief shot back, "you are going to oversee the search."

"But Chief, I..."

"You are going to oversee the search."

Turner muttered something under his breath and walked out of the office.

A few hours later, the sun was setting and the search at the McMarri Manor was still underway. Joseph Bennington had yet to be found. Bob Turner walked about the eerie halls of the McMarri Manor. His flashlight illuminated the dusty, cobwebbed doorknob of an old oak door, scaring away a rogue spider. The door was red, but dulled and rotten from age and rot. Turner stopped at the door, grunted, and bit into another donut. He reached out towards the door with his chubby fingers and slowly turned the knob.

A bloodcurdling scream echoed throughout the halls, and Bob Turner was never seen again.

Twelve years later, Steven Longsworth and his friends stood outside the mansion. Steven was fairly tall, with dirty blonde hair and dark green eyes. He was about fifteen, and he wore a thick green hoodie, his hands thrust into its pouch to avoid the chill night air of winter.

"And Bob Turner was never seen again." Steven trailed off, his voice quiet and suspenseful.

“That story was *so* not true,” groaned Milly Mendelston. Milly was tall and fair-skinned, with long brown hair flowing down her shoulders and back. She wore a headband and thick wool gloves to protect her from the frigid air. “Everyone knows that’s just a stupid story.”

“No. It isn’t,” came a cold reply from under a dark hooded figure standing by a tree. The hood belonged to ‘Grim’ Grennaldi, whose real first name nobody seemed to know. Grim wore a dark black hood with stickers of almost every punk band in existence pasted all over it. She had four earrings, two eyebrow rings, and a nose piercing. “The story is true. I have talked to the spirits of Bob Turner and Joseph Bennington in many of my séances.”

Everyone else sighed and rolled their eyes. “Come on,” said Milly, “don’t give us that crap. We all know you make it up.” Grim’s face remained expressionless and cold.

“Well, my dad told me the story,” sighed Steven, “and he seemed to think it was true.”

“And we all know how serious *your* dad is,” Milly said sarcastically.

Suddenly, a boy named Edward Hughes, a short, quiet boy, stood up and yelled, “What is that!?”

Everyone spun around and stared up at the decrepit old manor. A curtain fluttered from inside a window as if something had just brushed by it. “I saw something walk past there,” stuttered Edward.

“Really,” puffed Milly, “it was probably just the wind or something. Get over it.”

“No,” said Edward, his eyes darting back and forth behind his glasses, “I saw something up there. I don’t know what.”

“Who cares? Let’s just leave. It’s getting dark anyway,” urged Steven.

“Nobody’s leaving. Not until I prove once and for all that there is nothing in there but dusty furniture and creaky floorboards,” Milly insisted. “I will prove it even if I have to show you myself.” Milly stomped off toward the mansion, briskly pushing her hair aside as she walked.

“The spirits do not like to be disturbed,” Grim said darkly.

Milly ignored her and stepped up onto the front staircase. She stormed onto the veranda and grabbed the old iron doorknob on the ancient door that stood rotting on its hinges. Milly flung the door open with such force that it slammed against the opposite wall and promptly snapped off its hinges.

“Way to go!” laughed Steven.

“*You* shut up,” protested Milly, whipping around to face him. Steven looked up at Milly with a mockingly apologetic face and then broke into more fits of laughter. Milly rolled her eyes and stepped into the mansion. Edward sat down and leaned against a tree, eyeing the windows of the mansion with an intense focus.

Milly strolled into the mansion’s parlor. It was very dark, but she could see a long, narrow hallway extending out from the parlor in front of her, its dull red rug

stretching toward infinity. Doors lined the hallway walls, most of them rotting and covered with dust and grime. She turned to the eastern wall of the room, the wooden floorboards of the house creaking beneath her feet. Then she faced the entrance to the mansion's kitchen with its floors of gray stone tile. The kitchen had a long countertop littered with pots and pans. A dining table with a yellowed tablecloth draped over it stood in the center of the kitchen. Milly's gaze turned to the parlor's western wall, which housed multiple old china cabinets. She crept over to investigate, her shoes kicking up years' worth of dust as she walked. Once she reached the cabinets, Milly opened them one at a time. She found nothing in them but large amounts of dust, and she was now contented with her search. Milly leaned out the mansion's entrance and called, "There's nothing in here but dirt, grime, and cobwebs!" No reply came. Steven and the others were nowhere to be found.

Milly stepped outside onto the veranda. Leaning forward on the wooden railing, she looked around for any sign of her friends. Suddenly, a shiver ran down her spine as she felt something sweep past her. Milly spun around to face...Steven.

"STEVEN!" she roared. "You little sneak!" Milly slapped him in the face, and he stumbled backwards into the wall.

"Sorry," he moaned, "I was only joking."

"Where are Edward and Grim?" Milly steamed.

"Edward was just standing there, looking up at that place where he had seen something, when he suddenly got up and ran into that cellar over there." Steven pointed to a set of doors swaying in the wind, revealing a dark staircase leading down into mansion's basement. "Grim went after him."

"Why didn't you try to stop them? You moron!"

"I ran after them, but Grim reminded me that I should stay behind to explain things to you. She said she would go after Ed."

"Great. Now we have to go into that awful place and find them...or wait, YOU have to go in and find them."

"Me? Whose fault is it that we're still here anyway, huh? Who was it that wanted to prove everyone else wrong?"

"You had better shut your mouth, or I'll..." Milly growled.

"You'll what, slap me again? Oh no! Please don't!" mocked Steven.

"That's it!" Milly raged. "You are *so* going down!"

Milly lunged at Steven, who immediately stopped laughing and started sprinting. Steven ran into the house at full speed, with Milly hot on his heels. Steven dove underneath a table in the kitchen, and Milly ran past him and deeper into the house.

As Steven lie curled up under the table, he breathed heavily with exhaustion. His eyes scanned the area underneath the shroud of the yellowed tablecloth. The dull gray stone of the floor was dusty and old, just like the rest of the manor's interior. The underside of the table he hid under was strung with cobwebs, some

which still housed large black spiders. As Steven calmed himself, he began to notice the haunting silence that surrounded him. It was quieter than death inside of that house, a silence that was deeper and more piercing than anything else Steven had ever heard. The silence seemed to awaken the house's history, the voices of those long past whispering to each other about the four young intruders, as if deciding what to do with them. Steven shivered with fear.

Meanwhile, Milly had become lost deep within the halls of the mansion. Her breath could be seen as she walked, partly because of the cold air of winter and partly because her breath blew away the clouds of dust that floated about the halls. Milly happened to inhale a cloud of dust, which caused her to sneeze. The blast kicked up an immense shroud of dirt and grime from the floor, which hovered around Milly's face. "Eew," she sniffed, and she backed into a door that stood along the side of the hallway.

The room Milly now stood in was dimly lit by the moonlight coming in through a filthy window. A mobile hung in the middle of the room, its fragile glass ornaments glistening in the moon's glowing light. A small table sat in a corner of the room, a small four-post bed resting beside it. Childlike patterns covered the light blue sheets of the tiny bed, and a figure lie curled up inside the bed's covers. Milly slowly edged toward the bed, her eyes focused on the figure that lie breathing under the sheets. As Milly reached out to pull the covers off of the bed to reveal the figure, the thing stood up and began to approach Milly.

A scream rang out through the mansion's halls. Steven heard the piercing cry as he lie in a fetal position under the table. "Milly!" he gasped, and he bolted out from under the tablecloth. Ignoring his fears, he ran towards the scream's source.

Milly was backed into a corner. The figure under the sheets slowly moved toward her, and Milly clamored for a way out. "STEVEN! HELP!" she screeched. The thing stopped, and Milly watched in horror as it tore the sheets off of itself.

Steven ran frantically through the halls, his eyes feverishly sweeping back and forth and sweat glistening on his forehead. "Milly! Milly, where are you!?" he called. He dropped to the floor and began to cry. "We'll never get out of here!" he sobbed.

"Come *on*, Steven. You're such a baby," came a voice. Steven looked up to see Milly and Edward standing above him.

"Milly! Ed! What happened?" Steven cried, wiping the tears from his face.

"I found Edward sleeping on a bed in that room over there. I didn't know it was him at first," Milly explained.

"Why was Ed sleeping?" asked Steven.

"I...I don't know..." stammered Edward.

"You don't know? Well, what *do* you know?"

“Well...I saw that thing in the window again. It...called out to me or something, and I ran into the basement...and it was dark...I couldn't see....then I don't know what happened after that.”

“That's really weird,” Milly mused.

“Ed, try to remember what happened! Try! What happened to Grim?” pressed Steven.

“I didn't see Grim...wasn't she with you? Anyway, I remember something about...playing. For some reason all I could think about was playing kiddy-type games. And that's all I remember.”

“Okay...why do you think you came to that specific room then?”

“I dunno...I think it was the same room I saw through the window out there.”

“Yeah, come to think of it, it is. Maybe you just...” Steven was cut short when Edward fell to the floor, and his eyes rolled up into the back of his head.

“That can't be good,” Milly whimpered.

“Uh...Ed? You okay?”

Edward remained silent.

“Come on, Edward! Stop joking.” Milly knelt down and put her hand on his forehead. “He seems okay...” Milly stood up. “This is just too weird.”

“Look!” Steven gasped in horror. “What is it!?”

Milly slowly turned around to see a strange white trail of smoke rise from Edward's lips. The ghostly substance hung in the air above Edward for a few seconds, and then slowly curved towards Steven.

“Get it away!” he yelled, and backed off slowly.

The ghastly smoke swung towards Steven, chuckling cheerfully like a child. Steven ducked just in time, the white mist barely missing him. “It's some sort of ghost.”

“Ghost? I'm out of here.” Milly trembled.

The specter giggled with amusement as it zipped in front of Milly's face. Milly choked, and her face drained of all color.

“STEVEN! GET IT AWAY!” she screamed.

Steven lunged at the ghoulish white cloud. It zipped aside and happily cooed at his futile attempt. Steven crashed onto the floor.

“How do we get rid of it?” Milly sputtered, still terrified and pale.

“How should I know?” Steven grumbled, his face embedded in the floorboards.

“It seems to be a child's ghost,” Milly observed as the ghoul hovered around her head playfully. “Maybe something it once owned would exorcise it.”

“Brilliant idea. Excellent. Foolproof,” Steven mocked as he stood up and dusted himself off. “Except for one thing. Where are we supposed to find something like that?”

“Duh. The kid’s room,” Milly sighed as she pushed open the door to the moonlit nursery. “This is where Edward was sleeping, so it must be where the kid slept at least.”

Milly led Steven into the middle of the room. Steven dragged a comatose Edward up onto the bed. The spirit zipped about the room, giggling with glee.

“Okay,” Milly said as she picked up a toy, “you open that window and stand beside it, then hold the toy up to it. Hopefully the ghost will go for it and zip right out the window. Then you slam the window shut.”

Steven grabbed the toy from Milly and held it up to the dusty window. “This is so stupid,” he groaned.

The spirit suddenly caught sight of the toy Steven held. It zoomed towards it, leaving behind a trail of white smoke. Steven yanked the toy away just as the spirit charged past. Steven slammed the window shut behind it.

“Ha! It worked,” gloated Milly. “I knew it would.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” moaned Steven.

The specter hovered up to the window, red with fury. It let loose a horrid cry and smashed through the window straight towards Milly’s head. It puffed madly and charged into the hanging mobile. Milly ducked down, expecting the ghostly spirit to hit her at any moment. It didn’t happen. Milly looked up at the mobile.

The mobile now glowed a fierce red, and the ghost was trapped within the shining glass ornaments. It rocked back and forth violently, the spirit attempting to break free.

“Ha!” Steven laughed. “So the mobile is its weakness. Who’d have thought?”

Milly walked towards the mobile, which still rocked back and forth angrily. She reached up and softly tapped one of the ornaments.

“Hey! Milly! Don’t!”

The mobile came crashing to the ground.

“Now you’ve done it!”

The angry red mist rose from the shattered remains of the mobile. It floated in the air for a few seconds, and then swept towards Milly once more. It began to flow into her gaping mouth when, suddenly, the door to the nursery swung open. Grim slowly approached the stunned Milly from the entrance, and began to chant something. The spirit began to withdraw from Milly’s body.

“Way to go Grim!” Steven cheered.

Grim gave him an awkward glance then continued chanting. The spirit evaporated.

“Awesome!” Milly said. “I guess you really weren’t lying about all that stuff about you and spirits.”

“Actually, I was,” Grim explained to a dumbstruck Steven and Milly. “I just chanted an incantation in this book.” She held up a book entitled *Fake Spells to Amuse Your Friends*.

“I had no idea any of them worked.”

“Oh.”

In the corner, Edward stirred. He stood up, stretched and yawned, and said, “What’d I miss?”

A moment later the group stepped into the hallway. They walked around for a while, but could not find any sign of an exit. “Now what do we do?” Steven asked.

“Hey,” Edward whispered. “What’s that?”

They all turned around to see a large red door. It was rotten with age, and the doorknob was cobweb covered. They walked over to it.

“Should we open it?” Grim asked forebodingly.

THE END?

[2016 note: The end.]