

Dead Scary:

The Ghost who refused to leave

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‘Woodlands’ was vintage red brick with big windows and lots of stained glass. The comfy chairs on the front veranda and the garden full of flowers made the house seem more friendly than grand. None of us spoke; we just stared out the car windows as Dad parked out the front. I reckon we still couldn’t believe how our lives had changed. Mom’s childless-super-rich-computer-software-whiz uncle had died in a plane crash and Mom inherited his whole fortune. For the first time I was happy we didn’t have many relatives.

We’d only ever lived in a shoebox stuck in between two other shoeboxes, surrounded by asphalt, with barely a tree in sight. Now we were moving into the home from heaven. Lucky I knew who my friends were; I wouldn’t want kids being my friend just so they could swim in my twenty-metre pool, soak in the spa, play tennis and hang out in the games room. I couldn’t wait to invite my friends over. They’d probably want to move into one of the spare bedrooms.

Caesar barked when the removals truck beeped as it reversed into our driveway. I opened the car door and turned to Emily. Her pale blue eyes were wide open and she bounced on her seat. Usually she only got this excited the night before Christmas. ‘Ready?’

She clung on to her favorite doll and followed me and Caesar to the front door. Emily liked our old shoebox and hadn’t wanted to move at first. When she announced at dinner one night that she wasn’t moving, Mom looked horrified. So I saved the day by telling her that living in a house with a big backyard would be better when she had her own dog. After that she couldn’t wait to move. Problem solved, except Mom didn’t want another dog. Mom wasn’t impressed.

Dad unlocked the front door and Emily squealed. We raced down the wide hallway to our bedrooms. We’d chosen our rooms, the first time we got to see inside. When I saw it was a choice between unreal and unreal, I let Emily choose. All my clothes would fit into a quarter of the closet space and

all my books would take up about ten per cent of the bookcase. I'd have to spread everything out. The desk went the whole way along one wall – who needed a desk that long?

Caesar began to bark like crazy in a room at the front of the house.

Mom called out from the kitchen, 'Adam, find out what's bothering Caesar.'

As soon as I'd sprinted back up the hallway to the study, I could see what was bothering Caesar. I patted him and whispered, 'It's okay.' He stopped barking and began to sniff around the room.

'Hello,' I said to the boy sitting on the bay window seat. He looked about the same age as me.

The boy looked round as if I were talking to someone else. Then, he said, 'Are you talking to me?'

'Who else would I be talking to?' I said telepathically. I communicate with ghosts by thinking the words, instead of saying them aloud. When I was little, I assumed everyone saw and talked to ghosts. Luckily, I worked out before I started school that 'normal' people couldn't see them.

The boy raised his eyebrows and I wondered whether he'd had a conversation with a living person since he died. He whispered, 'Can you see me?'

I nodded. 'My family won't be able to see you. Only me and my Grandpa George see ghosts.' His aura turned orange, which meant I'd irritated him. I see the auras of ghosts too. That's the energy surrounding the ghost, which changes color depending on the ghost's mood. Even my Grandpa George can't see auras; it's pretty unusual. He reckons for every one hundred people who can see and talk to ghosts, only one of them can see their auras. Grandpa George helped me to work out what the colors meant. What I couldn't work out with this ghost was what I'd said to irritate him.

He let out a big sigh. 'Only my Grandpa George and I can see ghosts. And, actually, Earthbound Spirits is the correct term.' His voice was as posh as.

'Yeah, Earthbound Spirits, ghosts – same thing. You weren't here the first time I came to the house.'

The boy shrugged. 'I must've been out.'

'What's your name?'

'Edward Lawrence. And you are Adam ...?'

'Castle.'

'Pleased to meet you, Adam. Your gift of sight is extraordinarily good. It's a privilege to meet a member of the Living who can tune in to our frequency.'

I don't like being called a 'member of the Living' – as though we're the weird ones.

'Who knows you have the gift of sight?'

‘Only my Grandpa George. He reckons if we told my parents they’d send us to the nut house,’ I said as Caesar sniffed Edward’s shoe. He shrank back – he obviously didn’t like dogs. I asked, ‘Why are you wearing a blazer and tie?’ I didn’t mention his ridiculous-looking shorts.

‘Why are you wearing jeans and a dirty T-shirt?’ he replied.

When I didn’t answer, he said, ‘I died in my school uniform. I always remove my cap before teleporting inside.’

Ghosts move from place to place by thinking where they want to be. ‘Lucky,’ I said. ‘My parents wouldn’t be happy if the ghost of the house wore a cap inside.’

He rolled his eyes, but I could tell he liked my joke by the pinkish tinge of his aura.

‘What’s that on the inside of your hands?’ I asked.

‘Ink. Newspaper ink stained my hands. I used to help out at my father’s newspaper office after school.’

‘Was this your home when you died?’

‘Yes.’

‘When did you die?’

‘1945.’

‘How old were you then?’ I asked.

‘Fourteen.’

The look of pain on his face told me he was still upset about dying when he did. Ghosts were all the same. Most people go into the Light as soon as they die. Well, their bodies don’t, just their spirits. That’s what Grandpa George said spirits should do. Some spirits go to their own funerals, which is okay because they still have some time after the funeral before the Light disappears. Grandpa George reckons when a spirit goes into the Light it meets up with the spirits of the people they loved who have already crossed over. ‘Why didn’t you go into the Light?’ I said.

He frowned. ‘It was my choice. When you die, you have the choice to stay or to go into the Light.’

I took a step towards him. ‘Okay, but don’t suck out any of our energy. You have to get your energy from people outside.’ Ghosts are pure energy and can only exist by taking energy from people. If they take too much energy, the person gets sick. But most ghosts don’t do that (so they reckon) and, usually, it’s just a bit draining for people who live with a ghost, like being around someone who whines all the time. Ghosts can’t give a person their energy, like a happy fun person does when you hang round them.

‘Adam, I always obey the rules that Earthbound Spirits are supposed to obey. Every morning, I go out and I extract small amounts of energy from many people.’

‘Good,’ I said. ‘You keep doing that. If anyone in our house gets sick, I’ll have to tell my Grandpa George.’

‘That won’t be necessary.’ He folded his arms. ‘Now, there are two urgent matters concerning the house that must be fixed. The chime of the new doorbell gets on my nerves—’

‘You don’t have nerves!’

‘And there is a water pipe that knocks when the tap over the laundry sink is turned on too hard.’

‘Call a plumber,’ I politely suggested. Soon Mom and Dad would wonder what I was doing.

He huffed before he continued in a strict tone, ‘Now, Adam, these are The Rules of my house.’

I went to argue, but he talked over me.

- ‘1. The dog must stay outside, because it smells.
- ‘2. The dog must not bark. A barking dog is most unpleasant.
- ‘3. No running up and down the hallway. You may run outside.
- ‘4. No banging doors. It’s easier to close a door than to bang it.
- ‘5. No yelling, screaming or squealing.

‘Loud noise goes right through me and upsets my vibration. Those are The Rules, and you must obey them.’

‘What?’ I stared straight into his eyes and took another step closer, which forced him to float back. ‘Look, Edward Lawrence, this is our house now. If you don’t like dogs or noise, you should move into a museum.’

‘Adam, I was born in this house. I might not own Woodlands, but I am the spiritual guardian.’

I gasped, unable to believe what he’d said. ‘Spiritual guardian!’
‘Yes.’

I could hear the removal guys bringing stuff in. I couldn’t talk to this ghost for much longer. ‘I bet our house has changed since you were alive.’

‘Yes, actually, it has changed.’ He pointed to the front of the house. ‘The outside is original, but the inside has been renovated many times. In my day there was only one bathroom, the kitchen had a wood stove and the laundry had a copper for washing and a hand wringer. The room adjoining the dining room was the drawing room. My father held informal meetings in there. The room opposite, where the morning sun comes in, was my mother’s reading and sewing room.’

‘Ancient history,’ I declared as I realised this ghost was so attached to Woodlands he was practically super glued to the bricks. Child ghosts weren’t usually attached to their houses, but for some reason this ghost was different. He’d be tough to get rid of. Grandpa George had gone back to Ireland for good, so he couldn’t help me.

As if he could read my mind, he leant forward and said to me, ‘Adam, already I can see that it’d be difficult for me to put up with someone who can see me in my own home. I’ll give you and your family time to find another house to move into. You can stay here for now ... as long as you follow my Rules.’

I began to argue but Dad called out from the other end of the house. 'Adam, come and help!'

'Not in a million years,' I said to the ghost of Edward Lawrence before I turned my back on him and left the room.

As I headed down the hallway, I realised the home from heaven had been too good to be true. I'd have to get rid of this stubborn ghost all by myself. But an uneasy feeling swept through me. I'd never got rid of a ghost, because Grandpa George had always been there to do it for me. At least Grandpa George had left me with the things I'd need. Still, I felt unsure. Never could I remember Grandpa George getting rid of a ghost like him. One who was so confident and sure of himself, like a person who knew exactly what he wanted and how to get it. A chill went up my spine as I noticed Emily on the grass out the back. She was squealing at the top of her voice while she ran around in circles taking in all that space.