

All the Bad Things About Hill House

by Michael Seidel

The kid had a bad leg. Other than that, we didn't really know what was wrong with him, but it was something. He lead us up the steep hill eagerly, covering impressive distance fast.

"I want to show you the house my dad owns," he said.

"It's where he lives?" A— responded.

"He doesn't live there, but he owns it. He may live there someday. We're not sure."

From the outside, the house tilted steeply toward the down slope of hill. Its exterior—sandy and dark like roof tile—was worn away in spots by the brutality of storms and neglect.

I always wonder if people are afraid of creepy looking places because they've watched too many horror movies. Or maybe because they've had other people spook them when they've entered old places together, regaling old haunts that came to them secondhand from some friend of a friend of a friend. Is fright ever really genuine? Can it be validated?

All I know is that the house on the hill weirded me out. It was dark inside despite the sun outside and everything was falling apart—the old dark maroon wallpaper with beige shapes and the tarnished, askew chandeliers. It felt like the gutwork of scary movie trope. But it was real and I was there and I needed to take photos of what I was seeing. It's something I always do, embed myself into whatever I'm doing using a camera lens as my stinger.

The kid pulled A— aside, wanting to show her an upturned bunk bed.

I looked through the viewfinder and found a good subject and angle and as I did, I felt the most afraid I've ever felt in my life, like all the unknowns in the universe were rushing through me at once.

I fainted for a few seconds. When I came to, I began to shake hard. Then—I'm not kidding—I began to levitate. Not very high, just a foot or two off the ground. But my body continued to tremble as I hovered there.

When I heard A— and the kid's footsteps coming back into the living room, I was released from the air and felt normal again. I stood up.

“Like I said,” the kid was saying, “My dad may live here, but he also may want to sell it. If you know anyone who is interested...”

I knew Chris and Dan would be interested because they needed a new house and liked to feel scared, so I called them, told them what happened, and said we should set up a viewing.

On Sunday, we met the kid back at the house. We inspected the entry, the kitchen, headed down to the basement, came back up. “I can show you the rest,” the kid said.

“Not sure why,” I told them, “But I kind of want to go into the livingroom again. Alone. I'm terrified, but I want to see if I was just letting my imagination bowl over my common sense.”

They continued on. I looked into the living room from the perimeter, not feeling fully confident about entering yet. As I debated, I saw a chair lift off the ground and stick a good two feet in the air.

I yelled and yelled and yelled.

Dan and Chris and the kid came running.

“What is it?” Chris asked.

“That chair!” I pointed. “It totally lifted off the ground.”

“Serious?” Dan responded.

“I'm serious.”

“What could it have been?” the kid asked.

“A ghost? Ghosts? Or poltergeist? Spirits? I don't know.”

“Could it have been this?” Dan asked, holding up his hand, which held a thin rope. He tugged on the rope. I followed the length of it, up to the pulley on the ceiling, and then to where it ended at the chair. I saw the chair lower back down.

They all started laughing at me, raising and lowering the chair.

“Let's go. This place is such a dump,” Chris said.

“That's why my dad wants to sell it,” the kid said. “But I don't think he ever will.”

