

What Different Houses Have

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When we were just old enough that we weren't real young anymore, we moved from our old home in the country to a new house closer to town. It took months to pack up all our belongings. It was a special house. I'd been born in that house. My sister, too. Though my other sister, the older one, was born in a different town altogether, and thus, knew a thing or two more than either my sister—the younger one—or me knew about what different houses had.

Our home in the country had, for instance, coyotes calling at night. They woke you up and made your heart leap out of your chest. For those who haven't heard a real pack of coyotes erupting out of the silence of the night, the sound is bound to unsettle you. Even for us who grew up in that house, which was a house that simply had coyotes around it every now and then, the sound was liable to make us tremble. But eventually we'd remember: it's only coyotes calling, not a gaggle of high-pitched witches cackling coldly in the night.

That house in the country had many things like that, things my sister—the younger one—and I just assumed houses had. We didn't think there was anything unusual about the faces in the ceiling. We figured all houses had ceilings that would start to have faces in them if you stared at them long enough. Those ceilings had big, wood logs that went all the way across. In that wood, there were patterns in the grain and knots in the wood that would become eyes and mouths and noses if you stared at them long enough. That was simply just another thing the house had.

Well, what my sister—the younger one—and I didn't know was that other houses didn't have things like that, things like coyotes calling in the night, or faces in the ceiling, or winds outside that swirled up a bunch of dust and spun it around. (We called them dust devils.) But that other houses didn't have things like that was something we learned fairly quickly once we moved to the newer house. You could stare at those white ceilings as long as you liked, and there wouldn't be any faces in them. But the other thing about different houses took us longer to learn.

It was in that first week after we'd moved all our belongings to that new house—during the week we started going to a new school in town, a school with bigger classes and bigger kids in those classes. It was during that week, that my sister started saying she was seeing things, things she wasn't used to seeing.

“Like what?” I’d asked her, though I didn’t really want to know. She had a way of describing things that made it hard to get to sleep.

“Things in the picture frames in the halls,” she said. “Things reflected off the glass. Things that aren’t there.”

Well, that unsettled me, and for many nights after, my mind would go bounding off, chasing all sorts of frightening thoughts. And I’d try to bound off in another direction, but those things she saw would already be there, reflecting off whatever I was trying to go after. And all the while my heart was going *puttump-huttump puttump-huttump puttump-huttump* like a scared jackrabbit trapped in a cold, white corner. It seemed darker in that house than it ever was in the old one.

And it was on a night like that, when I’d finally fallen into some sort of sleep, a noise outside my bedroom door woke me right out of that uneasy slumber. It was the sound of whooshing wind, not wind outside, but wind right in the hallway outside my bedroom door. It sounded like the front door had opened right up and let in some sort of a dust devil that was now swirling madly through the hallway. And my bedroom door is going *puttump-huttump puttump-huttump puttump-huttump*, as if the dust devil was banging it back and forth. And I can’t even tell you what my heart was up to, because it leapt right out of my sternum and was bounding off like an out-of-its-mind jackrabbit. And it was darker than ever, and then all at once it was over. Silence. No sound of the front door closing, no nothing. All was as peaceful as could be.

The next morning, I asked my sister if she had heard it. Hadn’t heard a thing. Slept the whole night through.

“Maybe the door hadn’t been properly closed,” she said, “and the wind blew it open. Maybe Mom or Dad got up and closed it?”

It seemed plausible enough, so I asked them. They hadn’t heard a thing. Slept the whole night through.

“Must be just one of those things,” my sister—the older one—told me. “Every house has them, only they’re different for every house. You’ll get used to the ones here. You’ll see.”

And I did, and later I moved here and there, and I’ve lived in all sorts of houses, and I know now that every house has something, especially if it’s special.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. At the beginning of the story, where does the narrator move to?

2. The climax of a story is the most exciting or intense part of the story. What is the climax of this story?

3. Read the following sentences from the text.

"The next morning, I asked my sister if she had heard it. Hadn't heard a thing. Slept the whole night through.
"Maybe the door hadn't been properly closed,' she said, 'and the wind blew it open. Maybe Mom or Dad got up and closed it?'
"It seemed plausible enough, so I asked them. They hadn't heard a thing. Slept the whole night through."

What does this evidence suggest about the source of the wind that woke up the narrator?

4. Read the following sentences from the text.

"That house in the country had many things like that, things my sister—the younger one—and I just assumed houses had. We didn't think there was anything unusual about the faces in the ceiling. We figured all houses had ceilings that would start to have faces in them if you stared at them long enough."

Why did the narrator assume all houses had the same things the narrator's house in the country had?

5. What is this story mainly about?

6. Read the sentences and answer the question.

"And all the while my heart was going puttump-huttump puttump-huttump puttump-huttump like a scared jackrabbit trapped in a cold, white corner. It seemed darker in that house than it ever was in the old one."

Why does the narrator compare his heart to a "scared jackrabbit"?

7. What word or phrase best completes the sentence?

The narrator's sister sees strange things in the new house, _____ things in the picture frames and things reflected off the glass.

8. What wakes up the narrator one night in the new house?

9. The narrator's new house is haunted.

Use evidence from the story to support this conclusion.

10. At the end of the story, the narrator states, "I know that every house has something." What does the narrator mean by this? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

