

# The House

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I must write down everything, to prove that all which happened was not a figment of my besieged mind. I must write the facts and nothing more.

My dread descent into mental chaos began on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August. I had not seen my friend Samuel for some time. There had been terrible storms in the last few days and I feared for Samuel's safety. I resolved to visit his house to make sure that no harm had come to him. On the 6<sup>th</sup> the rain and wind had calmed sufficiently for me to venture outside.

I made the short journey to Samuel's house, with the hope that my fears were unfounded. And that I would find, like me, he had simply been sheltering from the storms.

When I arrived at Samuel's home, to my surprise I found the door unlocked and ajar. Cautiously I entered. I called out for Samuel, by silence was my only reply. I then began a careful search of the house, looking for some clue which would resolve the mystery of my friend's disappearance. In his bedroom I discovered that some of his clothes were missing.

And then I found it. Looking innocent. Lying crumpled on the floor. A gaudy piece of red paper. And like a fool I picked it up. I carefully unfolded it, and read the blurred ink. It was an advert, but for what was not clear. I stuffed it into my pocket and resolved to inform the authorities that Samuel was missing. On the way to the police station the sky darkened and the rain began again.

I told the story, as much as I knew, to the sergeant at the police station. He told me to wait while he fetched one of the detectives. I retold the story to the detective, while he filled in reports and nodded encouragingly. When his reports were completed he said I was not to worry. Samuel would probably turn up in a day or two, with an intriguing story to tell. But this did nothing to reduce my growing fear for my friend's safety.

As I drove back home I realised that I had forgotten to mention the crumpled piece of paper that I had found. I re-examined that advert upon my return, and noticed a smudged telephone number at the bottom. I resolved to call this number and enquire about the advert and discover if they had heard from my friend.

On my first attempt to call the number the phone went dead. I presumed I must have misdialled. I tried again, only to have the phone go silent again. In desperation I tried one final time. There was a sudden ringing and immediately my call was answered by a low rasping voice (I could not determine whether the voice was male or female).

"You have reached the House." It said "State your business."

I asked what the House had to offer.

"Whatever you truly desire." came the immediate reply. I then enquired if they had heard of my friend, almost dreading the reply. "We cannot discuss this on the phone, come to the House" and the phone was silent. It was the coldest, most frightening silence I have ever experienced. I looked at the paper again, which was still in my hand. The printing appeared much clearer now. How I wish it had not. How I wish I could have let my common sense dictate my actions. But Samuel was my friend. The voice on the phone seemed to know something of his situation, and I now truly feared for his safety.

The skies had cleared when I set off for my fateful meeting, but by the time I arrived at the address rain lashed down from a dark and troubled sky.

The street was short, and the House stood at its head. Detached from terraces on either side, its imposing gothic architecture sent a chill through my heart. Three stories and a central spire. All the windows with closed black shutters. The yard in front of the porch was unkempt and wild. The dark skies, and the porch, cast a shadow over the door.

I walked carefully down the broken pathway and climbed the three stairs to the crumbling porch. There was no sign of life from inside the house. No movement. No sound. I knocked, as I could see no bell, and then waited. And waited. I fished the piece of paper, that damned piece of paper, from my coat pocket. The address was correct. This was the house.

If my better judgement had prevailed I would not have entered that forsaken building. But I had real fears for the safety of my friend. Slowly I pulled back the screen and tried the door. It was unlocked, and opened with just the slightest pressure. Two bare bulbs hung from the ceiling, casting a harsh light on the hallway, picking out the fading and peeling wallpaper. A strange smell assailed me. I could not place it at all. But it was strong and seemed to burn at the back of my throat. There was a still silence and all I could hear was the pounding of blood in my ears.

I moved further into the hall. At every moment expecting to meet the owner of the unnatural voice on the phone. But there was no one. I had entered the house not knowing what I was looking for. Now I was inside apart of me hoped I would find nothing. The other part dreaded what I might find.

There was a flight of stairs at the end of the corridor and automatically, I started to climb them. A third of the way up the silence was shattered, and I froze. I wanted to call out, but my voice had deserted me.

A slithering, dragging sound, from the floor above. Was it Samuel? Was he injured? Curiosity and fear wrestled for control of my senses. Yet again the thought of my friend overrode my instincts and I rushed up the remaining steps. As I ran the sound continued. I reached the top and a godless sight greeted me. A Deformed, tortured, body dragged itself forward. Its face twisted in unimaginable agony. Red with blood and covered with wounds. I could see its limbs were broken and with every movement, pain convulsed round its hideous frame.

But its eyes, dear God! its eyes. They looked straight into my soul. Freezing it. Then a realisation hit me, and unhinged my mind.

This was Samuel!

Terror had overtaken me now and I fled. The shame. I ran, screaming. Leaving my friend to that house of pain. I do not know what atrocities were performed there, or for what reasons. Before I could return with the authorities, the blasphemous structure had caught fire. No one could be brought to justice now. Samuel was recorded as missing and then forgotten, for no bodies were found in the buildings charred remains. Without a body there was only my word that any crime had been committed. And few believed that any part of my story was true. I was sent from one psychiatrist to the next, to try and relieve the night terrors that had descended on me. But I knew that none of them could help. For whenever I closed my eyes, I saw Samuel's staring back at me. Accusing me. Why did I run? Why didn't I help? Why didn't I stop his pain?

The pressure, the guilt has now built up so far that I cannot contain it. In a moment, a bullet will end my torment. And that bastard house will have claimed another victim.