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My name is Amber DeBarre, and if you're reading this, there's a pretty good chance that you're a friend of mine.

Because I don't want just *anyone* reading about the things that happened to us. I wrote this down so I would always remember what happened to me . . . and to share what happened with good friends.

I live near in Blue Springs, Missouri. They call Missouri the 'show me' state. And while I can't really 'show you' what happened, I can *tell* you all about it.

And I will tell you right off: what you're about to read isn't just an *ordinary* spooky story. In fact,

if you frighten easily, you may not want to read this at all.

It all started one Friday night last summer. We live outside of the city where there are a lot of farms and old homes. My friend, Courtney Richards, lives about a mile south of us. She and her family just moved to Blue Springs, but we became best friends right away. She's eleven, just like me, and we're both in the same class at school.

On this particular evening, Courtney was coming to my house to spend the night. We switch every few weeks. I'll stay over at her house one time, and she'll stay at mine the next. We always have a lot of fun. We usually stay up late and watch scary movies on television.

Her parents dropped her off at seven o'clock. We ate popcorn and started to watch a scary movie in our basement. That's kind of our 'play' room. We have a big TV, a pool table, and a computer with a bunch of games. Whenever we have guests over, or when Courtney comes to spend the night, we hang out in the play room.

"This movie is *sooooo* boring," Courtney said as she shoved a handful of popcorn into her mouth. "It's not even scary."

"I know," I said. "They sure don't make them like they used to. Remember the last one we saw?"

"You mean '*Revenge at Camp Creepy*'?"

"Yeah," I said with a shudder. "Now *that* was a scary movie!"

We watched for a few more minutes, but the movie just got worse.

"Geez," Courtney said. "This show is just *bad*. I want something that is *really* scary."

"I know of a *place* that's really scary," I said.

"You do? Really?" Courtney's eyes were wide. The television chattered on, but neither of us were paying any attention to it anymore.

"Yeah," I replied. "It's a house not too far from here. Have you ever heard of 'The Madhouse'?"

Courtney thought about it for a moment, then shook her head. "No, I haven't."

"It's not far from here. Nobody goes there anymore."

"Why?" she asked.

"Well . . . they just don't. They're afraid to."

"How about you?" Courtney asked. "Are you afraid to?"

I paused for a moment. I didn't want to tell Courtney the truth.

Because the truth was, I was more than just afraid of the old place everyone called 'The Madhouse'.

I was terrified. But I just couldn't tell Courtney that.

"Oh, it scares *some* people," I said. "But not me."

"Take me there!" she said, her eyes shining with excitement.

I looked at the clock on the wall. It was eight o'clock, and it wouldn't be getting dark for almost two hours.

"Well . . ." I said.

"Unless you're afraid to," Courtney challenged.

"What?" I replied. "Me? Afraid? No way. We can go right now if you want."

“I want!” she said, jumping to her feet. Her blonde hair bounced around her shoulders. “A spooky old home! This is going to be *kew-wool!*” That’s how Courtney pronounces the word *cool*, and when she’s *really* excited, she says it a *lot*.
Unfortunately, it wasn’t going to be cool.
It was going to be terrifying.

2

The place we call 'The Madhouse' isn't far from where we live. It's at the end of an old dirt road. There are no other houses around it, and not many people have a reason to travel the road.

I told Courtney what I knew about the place as we walked.

"It's been there as long as I can remember," I said. "No one has lived there in a long, long time."

"So?" Courtney said. "There are lots of houses like that all over the place. Is it haunted?"

"Well, I don't know if you could say if it was haunted or not," I replied. "It looks really creepy, like a big face."

"The house has a face?!?!" Courtney said.

"Well, sort of," I replied. "When you see it, you'll know what I mean. And strange things have happened there."

"Like what?"

"Well, a long time ago, a boy used to live there with his family. But he never went outside."

"He stayed in the house?" Courtney asked.

I nodded. "That's what everyone says. They say that he never, ever left the house. Not once."

"What happened to him?" Courtney asked.

"Nobody knows," I replied. "But people say that he was really sad. They say that sometimes, if you look really close, you can still see him in the house. All you have to do is look into the windows."

"What do you see in the windows?" Courtney asked.

"Different people see different things, I guess," I replied. "But a lot of people say that they've seen a boy in the window. They say that he waves at them and wants them to come inside."

"That's weird," Courtney said.

"I know," I agreed.

"Have you ever seen anything in the windows?"

Should I tell her? I wondered. *Should I tell her what I saw last year?*

No.

I didn't want to lie to my friend . . . it's just that . . . well . . . I guess I'm not exactly sure *what* I saw.

"Let's just say that there is something weird going on at the house," I said. "*I know* there is."

Courtney shivered and giggled. "Kew-wool!" she said. "A real spookhouse! This will be a lot more fun than watching a dumb movie on television!"

"A *Madhouse*," I corrected her. "Everyone calls it the Madhouse."

The evening air was chilly. Both of us were wearing sweatshirts, and I was glad—because I noticed that as we got closer to the old house, the temperature seemed to drop even further. A cold wind grazed my cheeks.

The sun dipped below the trees and we walked in the shadows of giant oaks and maples. Goldenrod grew thick along the side of the road.

Up ahead, at the end of the street, the Madhouse came into view.

"There it is," I whispered.

"Wow," Courtney said. "It *does* look like a face."

The two-story home sat in the shade of the trees. Its windows were dark and forbidding—cold, empty eyes that seemed to watch your every move. The wooden siding was gray and weathered, like the wrinkled skin of an old hag. The front yard was overgrown with tall, sinewy grass.

"Somebody should fire the groundskeeper," Courtney said. "That guy hasn't done anything."

I laughed. Just the thought of a groundskeeper working at the Madhouse seemed funny.

Suddenly, I felt a chill go through my body. I wondered if it was just the wind. I didn't *feel* cold . . . but I shivered just the same. And as we drew closer to the house, I began to feel more and more uneasy.

I had good reason to, as we were about to find out.

3

We stopped directly in front of the house, standing at the edge of the dirt road. The tall, uncut grass brushed against our legs. A locust sang from a nearby tree, buzzing like a high-tension electrical wire.

Once again, that same chill swept through my body. Suddenly, I didn't want to be there. I didn't want to be there *at all*. I wanted to be home, in our playroom, watching a scary movie on television, even if it *was* goofy. I wanted to turn and run . . . but I didn't.

"Wow," Courtney whispered. "*It looks even spookier from here.*"

I pointed to the windows. "See how dark they are?" I said. "Some people say that those windows are so black, you can't see any reflection."

"No!"

I bobbed my head. "Yep. They say that if you see anything at all, it's going to be something that is so weird that it will make you go mad."

"That's just plain silly," Courtney said. "I mean . . . the house looks creepy and all, but that just seems *silly*."

"Hey, that's what they say," I replied.

"Well, then, let's go see," Courtney said.

All the time we had been walking, I was hoping that Courtney wouldn't ask to get close to the house. I was hoping that she would see it, get spooked, and that would be enough. I didn't think that she would actually want to get close to the house and look into the windows.

Cold fear slithered through my brain as I looked at the house. The tall grass swayed gently, and a soft breeze purred through the trees.

"Well?" Courtney said.

I wanted to turn and run. I wanted to go home. I didn't want to be here.

And so, when I heard myself saying 'okay', I knew right away that I was making a big mistake.

We both were.

Without another word, we began to walk through the waist-high grass.

Toward the Madhouse.



“Wait!”

I grabbed Courtney’s hand. She stopped and turned toward me.

“What is it?” Courtney asked.

“I . . . I just . . . oh, I don’t know,” I said. “It’s silly.”

“What?” Courtney asked. “What’s silly?”

“I just feel . . . *weird*, I guess.”

“You’re right,” Courtney said with a smile. She gave my hand a squeeze and let it go. “You *do* feel weird. Come on.”

I took a breath, and we continued walking through the grass. The sun was dropping fast, but

a few thin blades of light still knifed through the thick trees. It would be dark soon.

More locusts droned from the trees, and their buzzing drowned out all other sounds. The singing insects were so loud that I couldn't even hear our feet crunch through the tall grass.

"What do you think we'll see?" Courtney asked. She sounded excited, like this was just another adventure and she had nothing to fear.

I, however, knew better.

"Oh, I don't know," I replied, my eyes bouncing from one dark window to the next. "Probably nothing."

We were almost to the house. I was glad that it wasn't dark yet.

"See anything?" Courtney asked.

I shook my head. "Nope."

"We probably have to be closer," she said. "I think it would be cool to see something in the windows. Wouldn't that be spooky?"

"Yeah," I replied with a nervous laugh.

We stopped. Four old, rickety steps led up to the porch. The wood was gray and worn. I

reached out and touched the railing. It felt gritty and dry beneath my fingers.

We craned our necks to see into the windows.

"They sure are dark," she said. I didn't respond. We stood there for a moment, looking up at the old home that loomed over us.

The Madhouse.

"Come on," I said after a few moments. "Let's go home before it gets dark."

"Just a minute," Courtney said, and she placed her right foot on the first step. Then she raised her left to the next. I stayed right where I was.

She looked back at me. "You're not coming?" she asked.

"I'm going to stay right here," I said.

"Fine with me," she replied. Then she took two more steps and was on the porch. Cautiously, she walked toward a window.

"I don't see anything," she said. "The window is really dark."

"Can you see inside?" I asked.

Courtney shook her head. "No. It's too dark. I can see my own reflection, though. I guess that means that I'm not a vampire."

I giggled. We watched a movie about vampires once, and we found out that vampires don't have a reflection in mirrors or glass.

Of course, vampires don't *really* exist, but we thought it was kind of funny anyway.

"There are some more windows on the side of the house," I said. "We can go look there."

Courtney shrugged. "Okay," she said. "But I don't see why they call this place the Madhouse. It doesn't look any different than any other old house."

She turned and stepped off the porch, and we waded through the tall grass to the side of the house. Here, the final rays of sun streamed through the trees, and I breathed a sigh of relief. It wasn't as dark on this side of the house.

We approached a window and stared at it. We could see our reflections clearly, but nothing else.

Courtney raised her hands, placed her thumbs in her ears, and wiggled her fingers. She stared at her own reflection in the window.

"Look!" she exclaimed, raising her eyebrows. "I'm a monster! Booga, booga!"

I laughed. She looked really silly.

"Booga, booga!" she said again, wiggling her fingers faster. I laughed at her reflection in the window. "See?" she said. "The Madhouse has made me crazy! Booga, booga!"

She stuck her tongue out and wagged it back and forth while she wiggled her fingers. I laughed so hard that tears came to my eyes.

"Booga, booga!" Courtney giggled, rolling her eyes. "Booga—"

Suddenly, Courtney stopped moving. She stopped speaking.

She had a strange look on her face, and she slowly lowered her hands. She squinted and peered into the window.

Her expression changed from curiosity to shock. Her head jerked back. I looked into the window.

Our faces reflected in the dark glass, but now we could see something else. At first it was fuzzy and murky, but as we watched, the image cleared.

Suddenly, I noticed that the forest around us had become very still and quiet. No locusts buzzed, no breeze whispered through the trees.

That familiar chill swept through me again, only stronger this time. My whole body tensed. I gasped. Courtney's mouth opened to scream, but no sound came out. There was *another* face in the window.

The face of a boy.



“Hey guys! What’s up?”

I jumped nearly out of my skin and shrieked loudly. Courtney spun around. He had been behind us, and we saw his reflection in the window.

“Scott!” I scolded. “You scared us to death!”

He looked at me, then at Courtney. “You look pretty alive to me,” he said.

Scott Palmer has been my friend for a long time. We’re in the same grade, and we used to be in the same class. He lives a few houses away from us. He’s the same height as me, and his brown hair is almost identical to the color of mine . . . except his is a lot shorter.

"I didn't mean to sneak up on you," he said. "I stopped by your house and your mom said that you had gone for a walk down here."

"Yeah, well, you surprised us all right," Courtney said. She'd met Scott a few times, but they didn't know each other real well.

"Checking out the Madhouse, huh?" he said, peering into the window. "See anything?"

"No," I replied, shaking my head.

"Nothing at all," Courtney said.

"Well, a lot of people have," Scott said. "My dad says there are a lot of weird things that happen at this house."

"I want to see something!" Courtney whined. "I really do!"

"You need to stare into the window for a long time," Scott said. "You can't just look into a window and look away. You really have to concentrate."

"Scott," I warned, "I don't think that's a good idea."

"All you have to do is just focus on one place in the glass," Scott continued, ignoring me. "Go ahead, Courtney. Try it."

"Scott!" I pleaded. "Don't—"

"Oh, come on, Amber," he said. "Don't be such a chicken."

"So, all I have to do is stare into the window?" Courtney asked. She glanced at her reflection in the glass, then turned to Scott.

"Yeah," he said. "But you really need to concentrate. Give it a try."

Courtney turned back toward the window. "Okay," she said.

I grabbed Scott by the arm and pulled. He walked with me to the front of the house, leaving Courtney standing before the window. We were far enough away so she couldn't hear us, but we stayed in a spot where we could see her.

"You shouldn't have told her that!" I hissed.

"What's the big deal, Amber?" he hissed back.

"The 'big deal' is that something is going on at this house," I whispered. *"Nobody knows what, but there is something going on here!"*

"Yeah, well, nobody has ever been hurt, have they?"

I glanced over at Courtney. She was a few feet away from the house, gazing into the window.

"No," I replied. *"Not yet."*

"Then quit your worrying," Scott whispered. *"Besides . . . she probably won't see anything, anyway."*

We watched Courtney for a moment. She continued to gaze into the window.

Finally, I walked back to her. "Come on, Court," I said. "Let's go home."

Courtney didn't say anything.

"Hey," I said, waving my hand in front of her face. "Come on. We don't have to watch that dumb scary movie. We can watch something else."

But Courtney didn't even blink. She didn't move or speak.

"Courtney?" I asked. "Courtney?"

Still, there was no response from her.

Suddenly, her eyes grew wide. I turned my head to look into the window, but I only saw my own reflection and Courtney's horrified expression glaring back at me.

Her mouth opened. Slowly, she raised her arm and pointed at the window.

And screamed.

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