

Derelict

The house had been empty for as long as Noah could remember. It crouched at the end of Hawthorn Lane, its windows dark and unblinking, its roof sagging as though it were tired of standing. Most people hurried past it without looking, but Noah and Sasha slowed every time.

"I heard someone used to live there," Sasha said, lowering her voice, even though no one else was around.

Noah shrugged. "My dad says it's been abandoned for years."

That afternoon, curiosity finally won.

The gate groaned as Noah pushed it open, its rusted hinges protesting after years of neglect. The garden beyond was a mess of weeds and broken bricks, and the path leading to the front door had cracked into uneven slabs. Sasha hesitated.

"Maybe we shouldn't," she said.

Noah felt a flicker of doubt, but he ignored it. "We'll just look. Five minutes."

The front door was ajar, hanging crookedly in its frame. Inside, the air was stale and cold, carrying the smell of damp wood and dust. Every sound echoed — the scrape of a shoe, the soft thud of a heartbeat.

They stepped into what had once been a living room. Torn wallpaper peeled from the walls like shedding skin, and a broken chair lay on its side. Sunlight crept through a cracked window, casting long, distorted shadows across the floor.

Sasha wrapped her arms around herself. "It feels... wrong."

Noah nodded, though he didn't say anything. He was too busy staring at the far wall, where a child's drawing had been taped in place. The paper was yellowed with age, but the picture was clear: a family holding hands beneath a bright sun.

"This used to be someone's home," Noah murmured.

A sudden crash from upstairs made Sasha gasp. Noah's heart pounded. For a moment, neither of them moved.

"It's probably just the house," Noah said, though his voice sounded uncertain even to himself.

They climbed the staircase slowly, gripping the banister as it creaked beneath their hands. At the top, a door swung gently back and forth, moved by a draught they could not feel.

Inside the bedroom, a wardrobe lay tipped over, its doors hanging open. On the floor beside it was a pile of old photographs, scattered as if they had been dropped in a hurry.

Sasha knelt and picked one up. It showed a boy about their age, smiling proudly beside the same house, only it looked different then — cared for, alive.

“Something bad must have happened,” she whispered.

Noah felt a heavy knot form in his stomach. The house was no longer mysterious or exciting. It felt sad.

Another loud bang echoed through the building, followed by the sound of something collapsing. That was enough.

“We need to go,” Noah said.

They ran, their footsteps thundering down the stairs and out through the open door. They didn’t stop until they reached the safety of the pavement, gasping for breath.

Neither of them spoke for a while.

“I don’t think we should ever go back,” Sasha said finally.

Noah nodded. “Some places aren’t meant to be explored.”

As they walked away, Noah glanced back once more at the derelict house. It stood silently, holding its secrets. For the first time, he didn’t feel curious — only respectful.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Noah describe the house as “crouching”?

- A) It is very small
- B) It looks threatening and uneasy
- C) It is hidden behind trees
- D) It is about to collapse

2. What does the reaction of the gate suggest about the house?

- A) It has recently been repaired
- B) It is unsafe to enter
- C) It has been unused for a long time
- D) It is protected

3. Why does Sasha hesitate before entering the house?

- A) She feels frightened and uncertain
- B) She hears someone inside
- C) She is worried about getting lost
- D) She is tired

4. The description of the wallpaper peeling “like shedding skin” suggests the house is:

- A) Dangerous
- B) Alive
- C) Recently damaged
- D) Decaying

5. Why is the child’s drawing important to the story?

- A) It proves the house is haunted
- B) It shows the house was once loved

- C) It frightens Sasha
- D) It explains the loud noises

6. What does Noah's reaction to the noise upstairs show?

- A) He is brave
- B) He is pretending not to be scared
- C) He is excited
- D) He is confused

7. How does Sasha's attitude change during the story?

- A) From bored to excited
- B) From curious to frightened
- C) From confident to careless
- D) From frightened to curious

8. What do the photographs suggest about the house's past?

- A) It was never lived in
- B) It was owned by strangers
- C) A family once lived there happily
- D) The house was always abandoned

9. Why do the children run from the house?

- A) They see someone
- B) The house begins to collapse
- C) They hear repeated loud noises
- D) They realise it is illegal to be there

10. What is the main moral of the story?

- A) Old houses are dangerous

- B) Curiosity should always be avoided
- C) Some places deserve respect, not exploration
- D) Children should not go out alone

Answers

1. **B**
2. **C**
3. **A**
4. **D**
5. **B**
6. **B**
7. **B**
8. **C**
9. **C**
10. **C**