

# Haunted

The moonlight streamed across the leaf-covered ground. Illuminated in the silvery glow, three hooded figures crept through the shadows, their footsteps falling softly on the dry leaves. Slipping between the dense trees, the oldest and tallest of the three hissed, “We’re almost there,” to his trailing companions.

Emerging from a patch of brambles, the figures stepped into a clearing. A huge, rickety abandoned house loomed in the center of the clearing. It was made out of moldy, rotten wooden planks and its windows were covered in cracks. The whole thing looked as though it were on the verge of collapsing.

“Chris, *that’s* it?” the shortest gasped nervously.

“Yes, Bethany,” the tallest, named Chris, replied evenly. “I’ll pay you each two dollars for every minute you stay inside. Deal?”

The third figure nodded confidently. “Oh, come *on*, Bethany,” she snorted, dragging her reluctant younger sister with her. She shoved the door hard and with a protesting groan, it swung open, revealing the musty blackness inside the house. They stepped inside, leaving Chris outside in the clearing with a stopwatch in his hand. Old, threadbare furniture slouched in the dusty room, covering in cobwebs. “Taylor, I don’t know about this,” Bethany pleaded to her older sister. Ignoring her, Taylor grabbed her hand and dragged her up the stairs.

They arrived at a moth-eaten corridor at the top of the stairs. The dark hallway, shrouded in dusty blackness, branched off to several dark bedrooms. Curious, Taylor poked her head inside one of the bedrooms, leaving Bethany huddled in the hallway, terrified. Taylor was just inspecting one of the beds when a blood-curdling scream from Bethany made her

rush back to her younger sister. “What is it?” she demanded. But she needn’t have asked. For at that moment, a tall, hunched figure emerged from the shadows. Its hair hung limp around its pale, distorted face and its clothes were splattered with scarlet blood. Both Bethany and Taylor shrieked, “*Zombie!*” And they ran for their lives. Sprinting down the stairs, Bethany and Taylor glanced around frantically for somewhere to hide. There was nothing, only a few worn sofas here and there. The zombie hobbled down after them. Bethany shrieked as the zombie placed a cold, waxy hand on her shoulder. She was going to die. . . . Suddenly, the zombie reached up and tugged off its face. Its monstrous features peeled away, revealing Chris’s laughing face.

“It was *you!*” Taylor gasped furiously.

“Yeah, I dressed up as a zombie to scare you guys!” he sputtered through his laughter. He glanced at his stopwatch and snorted. “You guys lasted twelve minutes. That’s twenty-four dollars each. Not bad.”

“Don’t *ever* do that again,” Taylor said, but she was laughing. “Come on, let’s head back home.”

But as they turned to leave, a shadow shifted. All three of them froze. A hunched, bloodstained figure loomed out of the darkness: another zombie. Taylor snorted irritably. “Oh, ha, ha. Very funny, Chris,” she grumbled.

But Chris’s face was truly bewildered. “That’s not me!” he protested.

Horror dawned on all three of their faces. “*Run!*” shrieked Bethany. And they ran, out of the abandoned house, through the woods, and they didn’t stop running until they were safely inside their home.

“Was that a *real* zombie?” Bethany squeaked fearfully, clutching at a stitch in her side.

“Y-yes,” Chris replied, his face pale.

Bethany glared at him. “Well,” she pointed out firmly, “in that case, you owe us *double* the amount of money!”