

The House in the Desert

Somewhere between Southern California and the Arizona border, there is a stretch of Nothingness. Sixty miles of no civilization, nothing but road and occasionally an emergency phone. There was nothing but desert for sixty miles. No unnatural lights, no cell service, no shade, and certainly no houses. Yet there it was: a house. It was something where there was supposed to be nothing. It had just appeared one day, not even a mile off the road. There were no windows, no doors, and no furniture, yet you couldn't see inside it, even if you were standing right in the doorframe. It was as if a thick, black fog shrouded the inside of the house, masking its secrets. It was made of creaky wooden planks and crumbly bricks. It looked as if it was about to be blown away by the desert wind, abandoned.

Four college students were racing down the road when the house, previously just a speck on the windshield, was noticed. The driver, Austin, pulled over the car and got out to look at it.

“That wasn't here last time, right?” he asked, not looking away from the house.

“Not that I remember,” His sister, Odessa, squinted as she climbed out of the passenger seat. “Sure is weird-looking, isn't it.” It sounded more like a statement than a question.

Another young man named Tomeo carefully stepped out of the car, quietly shutting the door behind him. “Bella's still asleep, no thanks to your horrible driving. Why are you bothering with that house?” Tomeo glanced at his watch and continued, “We gotta hit the road if we wanna get to Bella's house on time.” Abellona was the one who recommended the road trip. She said she wanted to show them her hometown, and the trio had gladly agreed.

Odessa smacked Tomeo's arm. "Tom, you need to chill. We'll be fine, we just wanna look at the weird house." Austin, who had been staring out at the house as if in a trance, spoke up.

"I bet it's a tourist thing." He nodded with certainty. "That's why it looks so crappy."

"Austin, we're tourists."

"Hush. Anyways, it's probably some fake haunted house thing they haven't finished building. Nothing interesting." Austin shrugged and moved to get back in the car.

Odessa snatched her brother's hand. "Let's check it out," she grinned.

Tomeo shook his head. "No, we can't leave the car, or more importantly, Bella, alone. Let's just go, I'm starving."

Austin seemed to have changed his mind regarding the house when Tomeo mentioned how hungry he was. The two of them were always going out of their way to bother others, and each other. Him and Odessa turned to give their friend a shared pleading look. "C'mon, Tom. We just wanna see what's inside," the siblings whined. "It'll only take a minute."

Tomeo looked at them, exasperated. "Go ahead, I'll hang out here." They were gone before he even finished his sentence.

Some time passed, and Tomeo saw no sign of Austin or Odessa. He waited a bit longer to be sure, before groaning and turning off the radio. "I swear if this is a prank, I'm gonna punch them." He looked into the backseat, seeing that Abellona was still asleep. He left the windows cracked open so she wouldn't burn up or suffocate, hid the keys in the glovebox, and then left for the house.

When he stepped inside, he felt like he stepped into an episode of the Twilight Zone. The interior of the house was literally black and white. The furniture was old-timey, and the windows and doors had suddenly appeared, as if they were always there. The dark fog he saw outside had vanished. The air felt wrong. There was no other way to describe it. All of it, the house, the lights, the whole thing was just so horribly, completely wrong. It was devoid of life, besides himself. Not just human life - all life. No flies, no spiderwebs, no stray animals, nothing. Absolutely nothing, and no sign of Austin or Odessa, yet it looked lived in.

Tomeo cautiously climbed the stairs, listening for any notification that his friends were around, but he heard nothing. He realized another thing wrong about the house: there was no noise. At all. By “no noise” he meant literally no noise. He couldn’t hear his footsteps, or his breathing. Tomeo felt the wood bend under his weight, but it didn’t creak. There was no hum of AC, no static of a TV or radio, no clocks ticking, he could barely hear himself think it was so silent. There was no noise and it was wrong.

It took much too long to get upstairs - Tomeo blamed the silence - but when he did, he found nothing. It was the same as the first floor. Almost identical to the first floor. There was even another staircase. Tomeo called out to Austin and Odessa, now praying they were playing a trick on him. He was hopeful when his voice wasn’t muted in the cursed house, but that hope didn’t last long. Not only did his voice not echo off the walls of the old, mostly empty, and wrongly quiet house, but there was no response. He searched around the rooms once, twice, three times and even went up another flight of stairs but still found nothing. His watch claimed he hadn’t been in the house very long. Not even five minutes, yet it had felt like it had been an eternity.

Tomeo figured the best course of action would be to call the police. He ran down the stairs as he dialled 911, only to find he had no service. Tomeo figured that made sense. There was barely any service on the road, why would there be service inside a creepy house? He would just have to go back to the car, where Abellona was.

Tomeo realized he was still going down the stairs.

He ignored it for the time being; there were more important things to worry about. He reached what he figured was the first floor - after all it certainly looked like the first floor - and ran to the door. But there was no door. There was a window, looking out onto the Nothingness and the road.

“This...this can’t be right,” Tomeo thought aloud, “This is the first floor. The-There’s supposed to be a door here.” He sat down at a table and breathed. “I just-I just need to think rationally. If there’s no door here...then it’s not the first floor. It’s fine.” He got up and continued down the stairs. From the table, there appeared to be twelve stairs, give or take. It should only take a moment to climb up or down. Yet he counted six minutes of him walking down stairs. Six minutes for not even twelve stairs.

There was no door on this floor either. Tomeo did the same as he did on the previous floor: freak out, then calm down, then move on.

He continued, and continued, and continued, until the wrongness of the house stopped feeling so wrong. Elsewhere, Austin and Odessa were doing the exact same thing. They continued exploring, searching for each other and an exit they will never find. They won’t suffer forever, though. One day they will become a part of the Nothingness, and they can finally be free of the house, the loop, the wrong.

And Abellona will soon yawn, and stretch, and rub her eyes, and see the house in the distance. And she will smile knowingly.

“I told you we were going to my house,” she’ll say. Then she will turn the keys that Tomeo left, and drive off to find new friends to introduce to her house, to her world.