
Ghosts

I live in a haunted house. Of all the houses Kiffaney and I have lived in, this one seems the least likely to have a ghost. This is a fairly new house, only about 15 years old, with only one couple having lived there before. The neighbors told us the former owners were a bit strange and that they always kept the curtains closed. Nobody ever got to know them well. We never met them – they didn't come to the closing on the house when we bought it. But none of this would make the house a place where a ghost would dwell as far as we could tell. Yet someone – or something else – shares our house with us.

The visitor has only come twice, both times when Kiffaney was out of town. One visit was enough to change a lifetime of skepticism about those who believe in ghosts. I still don't know what a ghost is, or if the presence in the house is a ghost at all. But I know what happened. Now, if asked if I believe in ghosts, my answer is that I'm not sure, but I know there are some things I can't explain.

The first visit was when Kiffaney was away in South Carolina. I was upstairs reading before going to bed when I heard noises downstairs. Not loud enough to suspect an intruder, but definitely loud enough to catch my attention. I knew the house was locked, so I wasn't concerned. It didn't cross my mind that something, if not someone, might be in the house with me.

I turned off the light and settled down to sleep. That's when the sound downstairs became undeniable. The sound now was as if someone were coming up the stairs. I closed my eyes. I had just turned off the light and my eyes were not adjusted to the dark yet. But I was fully alert when I sensed the visitor come through the bedroom door and walk around the foot of the bed over to the side where Kiffaney usually slept. Imagination, I thought. Then I felt the bed move and the unmistakable presence of something as the mattress inclined toward Kiffaney's side. Whatever had come up the stairs had joined me on her side of the bed. My eyes were still closed. I wondered what was next. I was more curious than afraid. After a few moments, I did open my eyes. I looked beside me and found that I was alone in the bed. I looked at the clock. Only a few minutes had passed since I turned out the light. What had just happened? Who or what had come up the stairs to be with me? If I had the chance again, I thought, I would keep my eyes open.

That second chance came almost a year later. I was working in my computer lab down in the basement. Kiffaney was away, having gone to the mountains with a friend. I knew she would be back late and I had intended to wait for her. Again I heard sounds, and the sounds I heard from upstairs, as if someone were walking, could not be her. There were stairs up to the main floor behind me: a short flight of steps to a small landing, then a right turn and a turn again to more steps up to a door. I had left that door open at the top of the stairs so I could hear the garage door go up when Kiffaney returned.

I had heard sounds in the house off and on when I was alone. I was getting used to them. Maybe the house was just shifting. I worked, continuing at the computer. I noticed that the noises had stopped. Then I started to feel as if someone or something was watching me. The stairs up to the main part of the house were behind me, on the other side of the basement. It was as if someone had come down those stairs and was there, watching silently.

I worked a bit more, but I was distracted. Suddenly I got up from the chair and started to walk quickly toward the stairs. I heard footsteps on the stairs that started before I even got there. As I started up the stairs I felt I was just behind something going up ahead of me, but nothing was there. Had it just turned the corner at the landing halfway up? In another moment, I was on the landing and I quickly looked up the stairs to the open door to see what was ahead of me. The sound of the visitor's footsteps on the stairs had stopped. Imagination, I thought again. But that was when I saw the door I had left open at the top of the stairs start to close.

I made it to the top of the stairs just before the door closed completely and burst through into the house. I had left one light on for Kiffaney when she came in, but in the dim light I could see there was no Kiffaney, and not surprisingly, there was nobody else, either. The house appeared empty, though I know I had not been alone just moments before.

I have no explanation for these events. Perhaps I'll be able to continue this essay with more data in another year. Until then I'll be watching, and especially listening, for my visitor to come again.