

Hunted by Hunter

The tall, black, metal gates had the initials S.H. welded onto the existing vertical bars. Someone rich and important had definitely lived at the house in previous years. The light breeze blew my hair about and I put my phone camera on to make sure it wasn't messed up. My pale, cold face appeared on the screen as my breath clouded before me. Was my hair alright? It always looked lighter on camera. I ran my fingers through it and fluffed the fringe up to try and get the camera to pick up its usual brown colour. Why did it always look so washed out?

Springham House was a three-storey monster of a house, with dirty bricks poking through the ivy and moss that had decided to call it home. It had broken windows with rotting shutters either hanging on by a hinge, or on the ground below, and the front garden had become a jungle of weeds. Luckily the front door seemed to be made of something stronger as that was still in place. The house had been abandoned due to the Springham family drowning in debt years ago. My fans, The Stormers, were going to love this house. Storm's Ghost Investigations, my channel, was going to be raking it in when the video went live.

I gripped the top of the gates and put my feet on the metal initials to get some leverage. They clanged and rattled against the chain that held them shut as I swung my tall frame over, before landing. I let the rattling calm down before getting my phone out to film. I made sure my hair was right again and tapped the record button.

'Hey Stormers, so I just climbed over the gate of Springham house, and now I'm in the front garden. Time to have a look around. This place has such a history. I'm getting a bad feeling, like a bad energy has just engulfed me. I'm getting goosebumps, the hair on the back of my neck is standing on end.'

'Hey, loser,' a voice said behind me.

I gasped and spun to see a man dressed in a blue hoodie and black jeans. His blond hair draped over one of his brown eyes and his sleeves were pulled over his hands to protect him against the cold. My stomach sank. How had Hunter found me? I picked my locations randomly and no-one knew where I would be filming until the night before, not even me.

‘Still scamming people then?’ he asked, leaning against the gates, which rattled against the chain again.

‘It’s not a scam, it’s real.’

Hunter scoffed. ‘Sure it is. I’m gonna get you, James. I’ll expose you and your pathetic channel.’

He walked away, leaving me alone in the overgrown garden. The goosebumps erupted all over my body again. Something caught my eye, and I jerked my head to see a small brown-haired child standing by the side of the house. He looked at me for ages. I raised my phone slowly as if he might be an easily startled deer, but the moment I pressed record, he had suddenly gone. I lowered my phone and looked at the corner of the house to make sure my phone hadn’t just missed him. Sure, enough there was no-one there. A shiver ran through me, but it was cold so what did I expect? My yellow and black puffer jacket did its best to keep me warm, but the wind froze my unprotected head.

Of course, there was nothing there, obviously. What would a small child be doing in the front garden of an abandoned house? I continued along the gravel driveway, with my footsteps crunching along the ground and approached the house. The door creaked as I easily pushed it open and I walked in with the pungent smell of decay making me cough. There were three rooms, one either side of me and the other underneath the staircase. The room on my left had been gutted. I grimaced at the patches of furry mould and black damp on the wall and floor. There was no way I was sleeping

near that all night. There had to be a cleaner room. I got the phone again and pressed record, panning around the empty room. Walking out of the room, I stopped by the stairs.

‘Dougie?’ I asked. What good was a ghost hunt without my best mate to provide the ghostly sounds?

The sound of footsteps above me followed and my right-hand man leaned over the upstairs railings. He was also dressed for the temperature with a blue puffer jacket and a yellow beanie hat.

‘James! You took your time.’

I held up my phone. ‘Had to film the intro, didn’t I?’

‘What are we doing then? I have sound effects, heavy shoes, mini fans for the unexplained wind...’

‘Everything, Doug. We’re gonna proper freak ‘em tonight.’ We shared the same mischievous grin, and Dougie went back to one of the upstairs rooms he had set himself up in.

I left to find a cleaner room. The room underneath the stairs had rotten floorboards, peeling wallpaper and mould. Water dripped down from a crack in the ceiling. The smell of damp and rot assaulted my senses everywhere I went.

As the evening drew in, the old house grew darker. I held a torch to light up my way in the absence of any electricity. I needed to sleep somewhere and the room at the far right of the house seemed cleaner than the other rooms, so I put my sleeping bag down in there. Dougie set up different angled night vision cameras around my sleeping bag, some on the ground and some mounted upon tripods.

I got my phone out for the final time before I was going to go to sleep. ‘Okay guys, so I’ve set up all the cameras. Hopefully we’ll catch some ghost action.’ I switched it off and settled in my sleeping bag, the warmth combatting the cold air and the damp floorboards underneath me.

The child's laughter and footsteps echoed above me as Dougie started with the sound effects. The thumps and bangs vibrated the floor as he hit the walls and dropped things on the floor. Somehow, I settled to sleep.

'James?'

Groggily, I opened my eyes to see Dougie at the foot of the stairs with a head torch on. His teeth chattered together, and he had his arms folded tight against him. Well, if he did insist on walking around in his pyjamas in autumn...

'What'chu doing?' I asked.

He scurried to me and knelt while putting one of my spare blankets around his shoulders. I got a thicker fleecy one out of my bag and laid it on his lap. It lessened the shivering as he pulled it up.

'Fancy telling me what's up?' I pressed.

'I...I thought I saw something.' He glanced back at the stairs.

Goosebumps erupted over my body. 'What sort of thing?'

'There was someone...'

I rubbed his back, which was calming me down as well. There was no point being fake ghost investigators if we were as spooked as our audience. He pulled the blanket tighter around him. Two loud thumps made us jolt and we looked towards the door. Who would be knocking at an abandoned house in the middle of the night? Every bone in my body was frozen on the spot and Dougie showed no signs of answering it. The knocking happened again. Whoever it was wasn't going away. I got out of my sleeping bag and pulled on a hoodie, before going to answer it.

Unlocking the door, I opened it to see a man around my age standing there, dressed in jeans and a coat, which was zipped up over his mouth. His woolly hat covered his head down to his eyes. Without invitation, he stepped in and looked around. I glanced at Dougie, who hadn't taken his eyes off the person.

The intruder took his phone out of his pocket and put the camera on while unzipping his coat. I could see who it was, as could Dougie.

'Hunter!' we cried at the same time.

Hunter grinned at me and pressed record on his phone. 'Hey Hunter fans, I've got a right treat for you tonight. Finally exposing the fraud that is...Storm's Ghost Investigations.'

My blood boiled as he turned the camera on me.

'Anything you want to say, Storm...or should I say...James?'

In the corner of my eye, I saw Dougie retreat to the shadows, but Hunter obviously saw him and pointed the phone his way.

'And what do we have here? An accomplice?' He ran at Dougie, grabbing his arm and yanking him up. 'Now, why would Storm need an accomplice? Why do we think, Hunter fans?'

This was it. I was done for. I'd become just another channel exposed for the fraud it was. Hunter had hunted us along with all the other channels he'd cancelled. I needed to think of an excuse as to why I had kept Dougie a secret. I scowled at how smug Hunter's expression had become.

'Why aren't you livestreaming?' Dougie suddenly asked.

Hunter scoffed. 'There's no signal around here, duh.'

He wasn't livestreaming. Everything that had just happened was on his phone. No-one else had seen it yet. All I had to do was get his phone off him and delete the video. A gust of wind blew through the open door picking up dried up leaves and scattering them around. Hunter pushed it

shut, but it retaliated and smacked him square in the face. I stifled a laugh as Hunter's nose started to drip blood. He looked up at the ceiling and pinched his nose.

Dougie snatched his phone and ran over to me. 'Livestream him. Expose him.'

I couldn't livestream any more than Hunter could. I didn't suddenly have Wi-Fi or a signal. But how would he know? Maybe I was using all my mobile data to do it? I could still film it and pretend I was livestreaming. I pressed record.

'Hi Stormers! I know it's late, but I have a special visitor tonight.' I flipped the camera so it was on Hunter, still dabbing his bloodied nose. 'Look who turned up in the middle of my investigation to try and expose me.' I walked closer to Hunter and pushed the camera in his face. 'Anything you wanna say, Hunter?'

He scowled tried to grab my phone, but I whipped it away from him.

'You Stormers are stupid! Ghosts don't exist. He's got a little friend helping him.'

I panned the camera around the empty hallway. 'What little friend? It's just me. And no guys, I didn't punch him. The door blew back and hit him.'

'He's got an accomplice,' Hunter cried, pointing at the empty space behind me. 'He's the one that stole my phone.'

'Guys, I think Hunter's gone mad,' I muttered into the phone.

Heavy footsteps stomped upstairs making dust fall from the ceiling and a sudden gust of wind slammed the door shut. Hunter stood with his mouth open in protest.

'That's just your friend stomping around.'

'What friend?'

Another gust of wind blew and one of the pictures on the wall fell, shattering on the steps. The stomping started up again, followed by a child's laughter. Dougie was really going for it. Then a booming voice screamed, 'Get out! Get out!'

Hunter's face was a picture of terror as he ran to the door, tugging at the handle. The wind pushed it shut every time he opened it and I tried not to laugh on camera. Eventually, he managed to slip out through the crack he had opened and the door slammed behind him. More thumps and bangs came from upstairs.

'Okay guys, things are getting crazy here. Hopefully I'll survive the night. Night guys.' I stopped the recording and put my phone back in my pocket as more footsteps poured dust down on top of me. I brushed it off and went to the bottom of the stairs. 'Dougie, you can stop now. You'll tear the house down.'

Someone timidly cleared their throat from the living room and I turned to see Dougie standing there, white as a sheet. My eyes widened as the sounds continued from upstairs. He visibly gulped. I tried a smile.

'There's someone else up there, right?'

He slowly shook his head 'No one else. Just me and you.'

Goosebumps formed all over my body as we both stared up the stairs. The footsteps started again, stomping down dust and getting louder and louder. The picture frames swung and shattered as the walls shook. Plaster cracked in little lines before smashing onto the floor. The wooden floorboards gave way to form holes as the entity screamed, 'Get out! Get out!'

Grabbing Dougie, I ran for the door, narrowly avoiding a newly formed hole. He slipped from my grasp as he fell down it. Turning, I could just see his fingertips gripping the edge.

'James! Help!'

I got down and looked down the hole. It was a dark abyss with no bottom in sight. I grabbed his wrist and tried to pull him up. The walls shook and the floor vibrated as the screaming and wind shook the house. The floor broke where Dougie's other hand was. He was hanging by my hand and that was slipping. My other hand gripped his wrist alongside my original hand and tried to haul him up. My socks slipped against the wood as I felt myself heading down the hole with him. A crack snaked its way towards the hole. The entire floor was going to go.

I watched in horror as the crack reached the hole and half the flooring dipped, spitting up dust with every creak. Dougie's hand slipped. The floor lowered again. Sweat poured down my face as I dug my feet into whatever traction they could find and tugged at Dougie. I wasn't leaving him behind.

To my surprise, another pair of hands grabbed Dougie's other wrist and pulled as well. I glanced beside me to see Hunter. He must've got back in through the window. Dougie slowly came up out of the hole, just as the floor dipped again. I scrambled to my feet and raced out of the house, dragging him behind me.

Just as we got to the gates, the creaking, decaying house broke down, storey by storey crashing down on each other in one big dust cloud. I sank to the ground, panting. The street behind us was suddenly full of interested people.

'I thought I was a goner,' Dougie muttered as he stared at the rubble.

I got up and wrapped my arms around him. 'I thought I was gonna lose you.' I let go and turned to the gates. 'I guess I owe...'

Hunter had gone. Where had he gone? Dougie stared at the ground, probably in shock. As the dust cleared, a skin-coloured shape stuck out from the rubble. What was that? A deep pit of dread formed in my stomach as I ventured closer. It was a hand. A human hand.

'Dougie, come help me shift this!' I called back.

My best mate obligingly came to help, and we pushed and pulled at bits of the wreckage. As we moved a bit of wood, a head became visible. I gasped and stared in shock as I processed what I was seeing.

It was Hunter.

Commentary

My story is about two fraudulent ghost hunters who make a living off a video channel, where they do investigations of empty or abandoned places to search for ghosts. James owns the channel and the audience think he does it alone, otherwise they would make the connection that Dougie is the one making the noises. Originally, I had a story about two undercover vampires, who were collecting mortals in preparation for a celebration, but it was too short and not enough happened. There also needed to be a lot of backstory and there wasn't room within the word count.

The idea of ghost hunters came from books. The two books that influenced me the most were 'The Woman in Black: Angel of Death', and 'The House on Cold Hill'. These two books are ghost stories and the descriptions of each gave me a good idea to start. I used quotation marks around the dialogue instead of speech marks as per my tutor's advice and I made sure the story made sense and there were no plot holes or unbelievable scenes, within reason as it is a ghost story. I introduced Hunter earlier in the story so he wasn't a random character halfway through and there wasn't a lot of description and information being crammed into a paragraph.

Hunter was a character I thought of later on in the planning process. Hunter became an influencer who cancels other people's channels, which I thought would add a conflict for the characters halfway through the story. Originally, I decided at the end to reveal that Hunter was a ghost, but it threw up too many problems further up in the story that would have been major plot holes if I had stuck with

the original ending. However, I changed it to Hunter dying under the fallen house. I liked the idea of setting the story in a clichéd spooky house because it sets the atmosphere from the start. I also like the idea of redemption and a character saving someone else even if they don't agree with their actions.

There is a child at the start of the story and when it is revealed at the end that the noises were not Dougie, the reader is supposed to speculate whether the child is a ghost and he did it, or whether the child is just a little boy and it was another ghost. I used first person point of view because I could get inside James's head and describe things better from what he is seeing. The story is told from James's point of view because he is the owner of the ghost investigation channel. If it was told from Dougie's perspective, the reader would know the moment the ghostly noises started that he was downstairs and therefore was not him. It would spoil the plot twist of the house actually being haunted. James's channel name was going to have a big backstory, but I did not have room in the word count to put meaningless exposure into a channel name. Instead, the channel name is mentioned in the first few lines, with the information that his fans are referred to as The Stormers.

In previous versions, James did not have a description as there did not seem to be a good time for it. In revised versions, like this one, I managed to squeeze in some description of all three characters which gives the reader an image to work with when they envision the scene. I described the house more and the surrounding areas such as the garden. I also made the house older in later versions as it was originally a few years old. It was pointed out to me by my family that a fairly new house would not crash to the ground, so I added a few years onto it to make the destruction believable. I had to make another revision to the story as in an earlier version, Hunter didn't livestream because he didn't want to use up all his mobile phone data. I changed it so neither James nor Hunter were livestreaming, just recording because they didn't want to use their mobile data.