

# GHOST in the HOUSE

by Bradford H. Robie

**BY THE TIME** Asher heard the piano playing, he was already freaked out. So many creepy things had happened the last few days that he didn't need any more convincing the house was haunted. But why *him*? Why did it seem he was being singled out, and not his parents?

It started soon after they moved in. Asher's parents had always dreamed of owning an old house. "They have so much character," his mother would say. And so, after endless hunting with a real estate agent, they found one: a five-bedroom Victorian built nearly ninety years ago by a woman who once ran a candy company.

It had everything people love about old houses, like a big staircase, fancy woodwork, and lots of fireplaces. It was a short walk to school, the library, and even a small general store. A couple of Asher's friends said it was haunted, but he laughed this off. His parents even joked about it, saying they'd always wanted a haunted house. That was before the first "incident."

Asher had finished setting up his room: posters mounted, computer on the desk, books in the bookshelf. To celebrate, he cracked open the large tub of bubblegum his grandmother had given him. It came with 225 pieces of Gadzooka—his favorite brand—and he had about twenty left. He dumped a handful on his desk, unwrapped one, and started chewing.

A VICTORIAN IS A STYLE OF WOODEN HOUSE WITH PITCHED ROOFS AND TURRETS.



YOUR BASIC HAUNTED HOUSE! (SHIVER)  
MEW!



Illustrated by Kris Easler

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“Mmm,” Asher murmured. He loved Gadzooka, from its sweet and sour lemon-lime flavor to its crazy bright, neon green color.

When he woke up the next morning, he looked at his desk in alarm. The pieces of gum he’d left there were arranged in a distinct frowny face.

A chill ran down his spine. His first instinct was to bolt out the door. But then he stopped and laughed at himself. This had to be one of his mom’s practical jokes, like the time she faked him out with an ice-cream sundae that was actually mashed potatoes and gravy, or when she stuffed the toes of his sneakers with toilet paper. (Of course, Asher had just as much fun pranking her back,

like the time he left a rubber snake in the mailbox.)

Confident this was another of her practical jokes, he hurried downstairs to breakfast. “Very funny, Mom,” he said, barely suppressing his grin.

She looked at him quizzically. “What’s very funny?”

“You know,” Asher said, “putting the gum in a face like that. So creepy.” When his mom cocked her head as if not understanding a word he’d said, Asher insisted on showing her. But when they got to his room, the same pieces of gum were now standing on their ends and arranged in a circle—like a miniature Stonehenge.

“How’d you do that?” Asher exclaimed. “They weren’t like that a minute ago!”

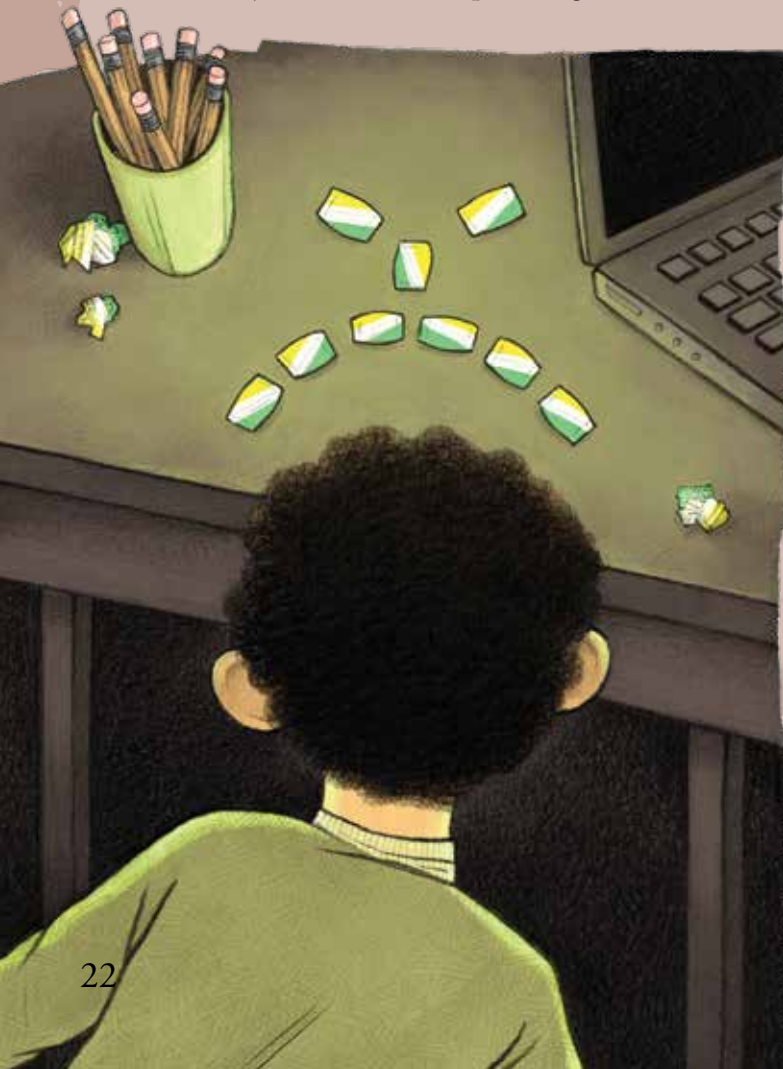
Now it was his mom who was grinning. “Very mysterious! And it’s not even April Fools’ Day! But it would have been more effective if you’d done it to something of mine, like my china figurines, or the jars in my spice rack.”

“But—” Asher protested.

“No buts. We’re running late, better get ready for school!”

That was just the beginning. That afternoon, Asher’s mom called upstairs as soon as she got home, and she didn’t sound happy. “I want to show you something,” she said. There, on her favorite couch, was a lump of green bubblegum. Eyebrows raised, she waited for an explanation.

Asher was dumbfounded. “I didn’t put that there!”



 **STONEHENGE** IS A CIRCULAR FORMATION OF HUGE STONES IN ENGLAND BUILT BY PREHISTORIC PEOPLE.



“You’re the only one in this house who chews gum.”

Asher was totally baffled. Could he have done these things in his sleep? he wondered. Feeling unfairly accused, but unable to explain it, he cleaned up the gum. The next morning, his mom found a piece stuck to the kitchen table. “If this is your idea of a joke, it’s not funny,” she scolded.

“But it wasn’t me!” Asher protested.

His mom folded her arms across her chest. “Right. The next thing you’re going to tell me is a ghost did it!”

For the first time, Asher considered the possibility. “Maybe it *is* a ghost!” he said in desperation, but his mom wouldn’t listen. She nodded toward the gum. “Please dispose of it properly.”

From there, things only got even weirder. The next afternoon while doing his homework, Asher heard someone playing the piano downstairs. But that couldn’t be. His mom was still at work.

He stood at the top of the stairs, listening. It was a simple melody, but one he hadn’t heard his mom play before. “Mom?” he called. When she didn’t answer, he descended



the stairs to the living room, where they kept the piano.

But there was no one there. Asher’s eyes were drawn to a scrap of paper lying underneath the piano, which he picked up to examine. It was a wrinkled and faded bubble-gum wrapper, and by the looks of it, quite old. Just then, he felt a rush of cold air as if someone had just walked by, and the stairs creaked mysteriously.

Asher froze in place. “Is someone there?” he called, feeling his voice tremble. He was beginning to think there really *was* a ghost. He closed himself in the kitchen and didn’t move until his parents got home.

“Guys, I’m telling you, I think the house is haunted!” he said excitedly, recounting what had happened.

YOU DON'T THINK THERE  
REALLY IS A GHOST, DO YOU?



GHOSTS AREN'T  
REAL! THERE'S  
NO SUCH  
THING!



THAT'S WHAT YOU  
SAID ABOUT WITCHES,  
HA HA HA!

His mom and dad exchanged glances. “Look,” his mom said, “I know we joked about buying a haunted house, but we haven’t seen anything unusual.”

“You know,” his dad said, “old houses make all sorts of strange noises.”

“But the piano . . . the *footsteps!* Don’t you think that’s even a *tiny* bit strange?”

No. There was a perfectly logical explanation for everything, they insisted. The piano was merely a car with its radio on. The creaking stairs were caused by the house “shifting”—whatever that meant.

Asher showed them the gum wrapper. “Then how do you explain *this?*”

His mom shrugged. “Maybe it was under the radiator, and I dislodged it while vacuuming.” She gave Asher a concerned look. “Are you trying to scare us? Is it because you don’t like the house?”

“No!” Asher said. “I love the house! It’s just that all these weird things keep happening . . . to *me!*” But it was of no use. His parents didn’t believe in ghosts.

Just after midnight, Asher woke up with a start. He must have kicked off his covers and blanket, and his room was freezing. He became aware of a noise, like someone chewing. He searched his room, but it was impossible to tell where it was coming from.

He was about to run into his parents’ bedroom, but decided not to. They would just offer more annoyingly rational excuses: *It’s a drafty house. It’s the mice. It’s your imagination.*

Shivering, he lay on his back, eyes wide open. He needed help. And he knew who he

would turn to: his friend Corby. He believed in UFOs and Bigfoot, so ghosts wouldn’t be a stretch. Tomorrow, he would tell Corby everything.

**THEY’D FINISHED CROSS-COUNTRY** practice and were walking home to Asher’s house while Asher gave Corby a play-by-play of the ghostly happenings.

“That’s pretty creepy,” Corby admitted. “But at least they’re harmless pranks. It’s not like the ghost is doing anything evil. If it really *is* a ghost, that is.”

“It *has* to be,” Asher insisted. “But why am *I* being haunted, and no one else?”

Corby stopped to read the historical plaque that was mounted on the front of Asher’s house. **THEODORA FLEERSON HOUSE** 1934, it said.

He turned to Asher. “What do you know about this Theodora person?”

Asher shrugged. “Not much. “But on the real estate website, it said she was the heiress of a candy company.”

“Hmm,” Corby said, nodding thoughtfully. “Let’s Google her.” A few minutes later they found a Wikipedia page:

*Daniel Fleerson and his wife, Theodora McTopps Fleerson, founded the Pinesap Confectionary Company in 1910. From their factory in Pinesap, New Hampshire, the company manufactured chocolates and hard candy. Following Daniel’s death in 1929, Theodora took over the company, introducing “Jumbo Bubble” bubblegum in 1930. Individually wrapped in wax paper with a distinctive red,*

yellow, and blue design, the gum came in one color, pink, and sold for a penny apiece. After being featured at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, Jumbo Bubble exploded in popularity. Shortly after, Fleerson built a sprawling Victorian home on Pinesap's Main Street, where she lived until her death in 1975, at age 85. Admired for its architectural details, she called it "the house that Jumbo Bubble built."

A series of photographs showed how the Jumbo Bubble's gum wrapper had evolved over the years. Asher pointed to the oldest wrapper. "That's just like the one I found!"

Then Corby clicked a link, and an old advertising jingle began to play:

*Jumbo Bubble, that's the one  
Sweet and juicy, tons of fun  
Bigger bubbles and longer chew  
Jumbo Bubble is the gum for you!*

Asher's face turned white.

"What's the matter," Corby said. "You look like you've seen a ghost. Ha."

Asher had to swallow before he could speak. "That's the song I heard playing on the piano!"

Corby's eyes grew wide. "That's it!" he said. "Theodora Fleerson is messing with



you because she doesn't like you chewing Gadzooka bubblegum!"

Asher nodded rapidly. "Right! Because her brand was Jumbo Bubble! That explains why she was trying to scare me and get me in trouble . . . and why she didn't bother my mom or dad, because they don't even chew gum!"

"Exactly!" Corby agreed. "So all you have to do is stop chewing gum, and Theodora will stop haunting you!"

"Yeah!" Asher said, still nodding. "And then . . ." He stopped and made a face. "No. Wait. I'll just switch brands! I'll throw out my Gadzooka and buy some Jumbo Bubble and see what happens!"

"I've got an even better idea," Corby said. "Give *me* your old bubblegum."



It seemed reasonable, and not having a better plan, they walked the two blocks to the general store, where Asher purchased ten pieces of Jumbo Bubble.

Back at the house, Asher handed his remaining supply of Gadzooka to Corby. Then he dumped the pieces of Jumbo Bubble onto his desk, unwrapped a piece, and began chewing. "Mmm, Jumbo Bubble," he said, chomping loudly. "Jumbo Bubble good." It actually *was* good. *Really* good.

Corby made a face. "Why are you taking like that? It's not like Theodora is a two-year-old or something. She's an old *ghost*."

"Well, I don't know," Asher replied defensively. "I've never talked to a ghost before. I just want to make sure she gets the message." After dinner he chewed two more pieces for good measure. Then he went to bed.

**IT WAS COLD** that night. Just after midnight, Asher became partially aware of someone pulling the covers up, presumably his mom. "Thanks," he murmured drowsily, and fell back to sleep.

When he woke up the next morning, Asher looked at his desk in amazement. His gum had been arranged in a pattern again. Only this time, it was a smiley face.

"Did you come into my room last night?" he asked his

parents at breakfast. But he already knew the answer.

"No," his mom said.

"Me neither," his dad answered. "Why? Is something wrong?"

Asher grinned and shook his head. "Nah," he said. "Everything's good." Because Theodora was happy now. And though Asher's parents maintained there was no ghost in the house, every now and then they would find an old Jumbo Bubble wrapper under the piano, which even they gave up trying to explain.

But Asher knew. It was just Theodora, having a bit of fun. 