

# Odditorium

The old house over the road was his worst mistake to this day.

Alex was a clever boy, intelligent, but timid. His appearance was mediocre, normal brown hair, and normal brown eyes. Nothing special, just as he believed himself to be. Nothing special. The other children in the orphanage didn't seem to think so either. If he wasn't being teased, then he was often being ignored, which Alex preferred. He didn't want to stand out too much in a crowd. In fact, he did this rather well, his only friend being Natalie, a more adventurous and curious girl with unruly brown hair and bright green eyes. She was always looking for adventure, always active and energetic. Alex found that they worked quite well together, after all, they had known each other since they were four. They were happy and content and Alex wanted nothing more. That is, until the day that he took it too far.

It was a normal Saturday just like any other Saturday when all the children were free to roam and fool about, for they didn't have lessons. Natalie got an early start to the day and Alex found her at his door at a quite unusual time for a Saturday. "Guess what we're going to do today?" she exclaimed.

"What?" replied Alex groggily. "It's a little early for adventure right now, isn't it?"

"It's never too early for adventure!" she replied cheerily. "We're going to investigate that abandoned house over the road!" Alex stopped. No one had ever been to the old house down the street. It was a big, old, creepy, crumbling building and everyone thought it was best just to leave

it alone. No one knows how it got there and even though Alex didn't believe all those ghost stories about it, it had been abandoned forever, perhaps for a good reason.

"I don't know Nat," Alex started.

"You're not scared, are you? It'll be fine, we'll just have a quick look and leave. There have been all these reports about it, people disappearing and stuff and I want to find out what's going on." argued Natalie. This made Alex like the idea even less but he knew there was no way to argue with Natalie so he reluctantly agreed.

*This is it.* Thought Alex, as he stepped through the decaying arch. They had agreed to explore the building for one hour, and no more, and Alex was more than happy to keep this promise. The building was cracked in more places than he could count and most of it was overgrown with ivy. The paint peeled away from the building like old sticky notes. It was as if even the appearance of the building was warning them, "*Keep out!*" Alex stepped in nonetheless.

Suddenly, his attention was drawn to a small chair in the middle of the courtyard. Sitting upon it was a file, papers falling out of it. Alex opened the file. The first page read, "*November 18, 2000,*" It was some sort of journal. Alex kept reading. "*Today we explored the Odditorium. Seemingly harmless from the outside, but once you step in, it's a different story. If you are reading this, I strongly advise you to stop and leave at once.*" If Alex wasn't uneasy before, he was now. "*Today there were no signs of life in the building, supernatural, or otherwise. We will return tomorrow for further investigation. Only thing interesting was cryptic warning. I have enclosed it here for further reference.*" The author was true to his word. below, there was what resembled a poem, but once Alex read it, it did seem more like a warning.

*From rags to riches,  
like diamonds from dust,  
you may find great treasures,  
but beware, you must.*

*To travel here,  
you must learn what isn't shown,  
for sometimes it's best,  
for somethings to be unknown.*

*You may take,  
but you will learn,  
what is taken,  
must always be returned.*

*For at the day's last hour,  
a great price, you will pay,  
that will follow you forever,  
even if you run away.*

*So wanderer, please heed this warning,  
wanderer beware,  
beware the Odditorium,  
and what may be found there.*

Alex didn't like this. "Nat," he started but before he could finish, Natalie called "What are you waiting for?" and Alex was pulled inside.

The room was poorly lit, so dim that Alex had to squint to see anything at all. They were in a small room, with a large, old mirror at one end and what looked like pedestals everywhere.

All of a sudden the lights flickered on and Alex saw what had been hidden by the dark. *Things*. The room was filled with *things*. Atop every pedestal was *something*. The room was filled with things that Alex didn't even have a name for, things that changed color, things that floated, things that made sound, things that didn't resemble anything that Alex had ever seen before. Never before had Alex been in a place of such magic, such wonder, such mystery. He didn't know what to look at first.

Suddenly his attention was drawn to a flower that looked oddly carnivorous. He touched it, and the flower started singing the most beautiful music that Alex had heard in his life. Then, he picked the flower up. The flower went silent and retracted its fangs, so that it no longer resembled anything special and looked more like an ordinary flower. Alex put the flower down and then felt a sharp pain dart across his wrist. He went to the mirror to examine it. Alex saw nothing unusual at first but as if by magic there was a long scar running across his wrist. Alex's eyes widened in surprise. His surprise was met by a shriek from Natalie who jumped back and pointed at the mirror. Instead of showing Alex's face, the mirror now bore the cryptic warning that Alex had read in the journal. Alex was a little surprised too, but at this point, there wasn't much that could surprise him.

“Oh, that’s nothing.” he said calmly, but Natalie’s attention was now elsewhere, on a small crystal sphere that seemed to radiate light. As he got closer to her, he realized that Natalie was crying.

“Are you okay?” asked Alex. Natalie ignored the question and instead replied,

“Look, it’s so beautiful. Alex it’s calling me. Can’t you hear it? It’s calling my name.” Then,

Natalie picked up the glass ball. She had obviously felt the pain in her wrist as well, and was so shocked, she dropped the sphere. It landed on the floor with a crash, and shattered. Scars started to appear everywhere on Natalie, as she gasped and fell to the floor alongside the sphere. She was bleeding everywhere. Alex was frozen. His veins felt like ice and fire and at some point he stopped breathing. He couldn’t lose his only friend. Alex finally gained the strength to shout,

“Stop! Please, stop, I’ll do anything.” The mirror flashed, then writing started to appear.

*“You have damaged the property of the Odditorium. You must now give in return, or pay in blood. She is ours to take.”* Alex had enough.

“No.” he said. He picked up a fragment of glass from the floor and in one swift motion, plunged it into the mirror.

At this moment the lights went out. When they came back on all of it was gone. Alex was left standing in a room with no objects, no mirror, no Natalie.

The old house over the road was his worst mistake to this day. Years later, there wasn’t a day that Alex didn’t think of Natalie, and how foolish he’d been. From that day he regretted his actions and knew that he would never forgive himself for what had happened. And despite how many times he had told himself not to, Alex knew there was no way he would resist the urge to return to the Odditorium. He would get Natalie back. That, was a promise.