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opening extract from

Araminta Spook 1:

My Haunted House

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It all began when I was in my Thursday bedroom doing my ghost practice. I have always done regular ghost practice, as I was sure it would be much easier to find a ghost if the ghost thought that I was one too. I have always wanted to find a ghost, but you know, even though our house is called Spook House, I have never, ever seen a single ghost, not even a very small one. I thought that Aunt

Tabby had scared them off—she would scare me off if I were a ghost.

Anyway, I was busy doing my practice and I had my ghost sheet over my head, which is why I tripped over Sir Horace's left foot. Stupid thing. And then his left foot fell off, and Sir Horace collapsed into hundreds of



pieces. Stupid Sir Horace. And then all the bits of stupid Sir Horace rolled all over the floor, and I stepped on his head and got my foot stuck inside it. Don't worry, it wasn't a *real* head. Sir Horace is just a boring old suit of armour that's always hanging around here, lurking in various dark corners.

I was yelling at it to get *off* and hopping around shaking my foot like mad, but Sir Horace's stupid head was totally stuck. Then, with really great timing, Aunt Tabby shouted, "Breakfast!" in that if-you-don't-come-down-right-now-and-get-it-I-shall-give-it-to-the-cat voice—not that we have a cat, but she would if we did have one, I know she would.

So I gave my foot the biggest shake ever—in fact, I am surprised my whole leg didn't come off—and Sir Horace's helmet flew off,

shot out of the bedroom door, and hurtled down the attic stairs. It made a fantastic noise. I could hear it all the way down to the basement. Sound travels really well in this house, so I could easily hear Aunt Tabby's scream, too.

I thought I'd better get going, so I slid down the banister and hopped off at the landing. I wanted to see if Uncle Drac had gone to sleep yet—he works nights—because if he had, I was going to wake him up and make him come downstairs with me just in case Aunt Tabby was going to throw a wobbly. His bedroom door is the little red one at the end of the top corridor, the one that goes to the turret.

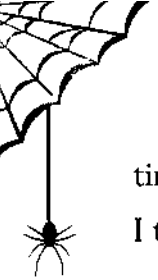
I was very careful pushing the door open, as it's a sheer drop down for miles. Uncle Drac took all the floors out of the turret so

that his bats could fly wherever they wanted. Uncle Drac loves his bats; he'd do anything for them. I love bats too. They are *so* sweet.

I pushed Big Bat out of the way, and he fell all the way down to the bottom of the turret. It didn't matter, though, as the floor of the turret is about ten feet deep in bat poo, so it's very soft.

Without Big Bat clogging up the door, I could easily see Uncle Drac's sleeping bag. It was hanging from one of the joists like a great big flowery bat—and it was empty. Great, I thought, he's still downstairs with Aunt Tabby. So, to save time, I slid down the big stairs' banister and the basement stairs' banister too—which I'm not meant to do as it keeps falling over—and I was outside the second-kitchen-on-the-left-just-past-the-larder in no





time. It was suspiciously quiet in there. Oops, I thought, trouble.

I pushed open the door really considerately, and I was glad I did as Aunt Tabby was sitting at the end of the long table, buttering some toast in a way that made you think the toast had said something really personal and rude. It didn't look like a fun breakfast time, I thought. The signs were not good.

First not-good sign: sitting in the middle of the table was Sir Horace's helmet. It had a lot more dents in it than when I last saw it, but that was obviously not *my* fault as it was OK when it left my foot.

Second, third, fourth and fifth not-good signs: Aunt Tabby was covered in soot—apart from two little windows in her glasses which she had wiped clear so that she could attack

the toast. Aunt Tabby being covered in soot is one of the worst signs. It means she has had a fight with the boiler and the boiler has won.

I sat down in my seat in a thoughtful and caring way. Uncle Drac looked really relieved to see me. You see, I live with my aunt and uncle because my parents went vampire hunting in Transylvania when I was little and they never came back.

Uncle Drac was busy scraping out the last bit of his boiled egg. He had soot all around his mouth from the sooty toast that Aunt Tabby had buttered for him.

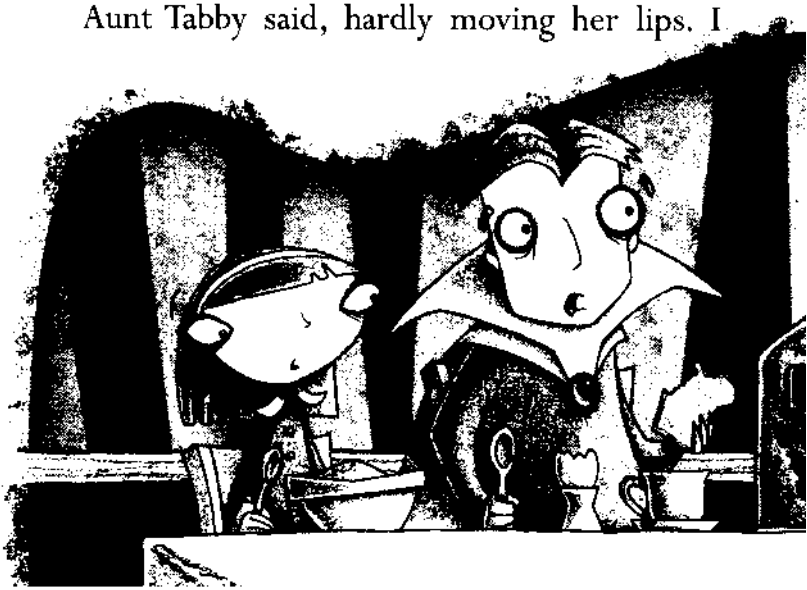
"Hello, Minty," he said.

"Hello, Uncle Drac," I said. I tried to think of something nice to say to Aunt Tabby, but it was difficult to think of anything at all with Sir Horace's helmet staring at me with its

little beady eyes. It doesn't really have eyes, of course, but I often used to think it was looking at me, even though I was sure it was nothing more than an empty tin can.

Aunt Tabby plonked my bowl of porridge down in front of me, so I said, "Thank you, Aunt Tabby." And then, because Aunt Tabby likes polite conversation at breakfast, I said, "Have you been having trouble with the boiler again, Aunt Tabby?"

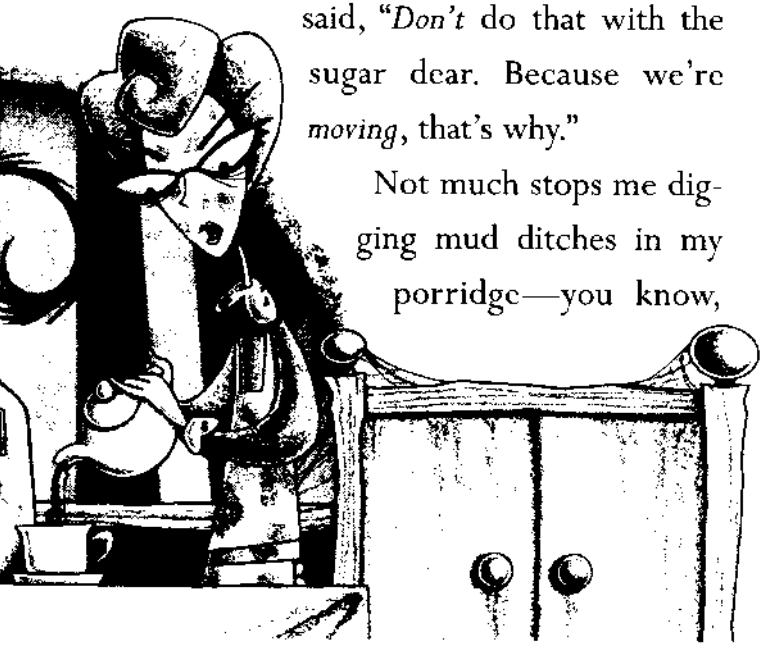
"Yes, dear—but *not* for very much longer," Aunt Tabby said, hardly moving her lips. I



used to think that when Aunt Tabby spoke like that she was practising to be a ventriloquist, but now I know it means she has made her mind up about something and she doesn't care whether you agree with her or not.

"Oh, why is that, Aunt Tabby?" I asked especially nicely, while I covered my porridge with brown sugar and stirred it all in really fast so that the porridge went a nice muddy colour.

Aunt Tabby sort of gritted her teeth and said, "*Don't* do that with the sugar dear. Because we're *moving*, that's why."



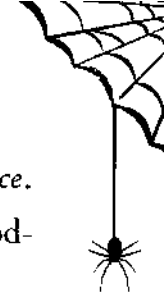
Not much stops me digging mud ditches in my porridge—you know,

the ones where you scrape a channel through it and it fills up with runny brown sugar, which I think looks just like mud—but that did.

Moving? What was she talking about? We couldn't possibly move, not before I'd found at least one ghost. And I wanted to find a vampire and a werewolf, too. I was sure there must be some in the cellar.

"Don't leave your mouth open when it is full, dear," said Aunt Tabby, which I didn't think was fair as Uncle Drac had *his* mouth open too, and it was full of sooty toast, which looked disgusting.

Then Aunt Tabby fixed Uncle Drac with her Fiendish Stare (which is nearly as good as mine) and said, "Drac, this house is far too big for us. It is *dusty* and it is *dirty*, it is *freezing*



cold and *full* of *spiders*. The boiler is a *menace*. We are moving to a nice, small, clean, modern flat *without a boiler*."

"*But*—" I tried to interrupt, but it was no use. Aunt Tabby just kept on going.

"And when we have moved to a flat, helmets from rusty old suits of armour won't keep landing on my toes, because we won't *have* any rusty old suits of armour. Sir Horace can go to the recycling bin. You can take him, Drac."

"What?" said Uncle Drac, looking a bit like one of my old goldfish used to look when the water in the fish bowl got very low.

At last I got a word in, even though I still had a mouthful of porridge, which I had been too shocked to swallow. "But we *can't* leave this house," I told Aunt Tabby. "*Nowhere* would ever be the same as this!"

"Exactly," said Aunt Tabby, like I'd agreed with her or something. "Nowhere could possibly be like this."

I looked at Uncle Drac—I needed some help here. Uncle Drac took the hint.

"Now, now, Tabby dear," he murmured in his calm-down-Aunt-Tabby voice, "you know you don't mean it."

"I *do* mean it, Drac," Aunt Tabby told him. Then she tried to get me on her side. "And, Araminta dear, you often say you're lonely here. Just think, you would have lots of friends in a nice block of flats."

She didn't succeed. "I don't care," I told her. "I'd rather stay here than have a lot of stupid friends anyway."

"Well, we will see about that," said Aunt Tabby, with her mad ventriloquist look.