

LEVELED BOOK • S

# Ghosts in the House



Written by Ann Weil and Rusty Fischer  
Illustrated by Marcy Ramsey

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## Noises in the Night

It was the 1830s in rural New Hampshire. Since no school buses or cars existed back then, Virginia had a long walk to and from school every day. She liked walking through the farm fields because it gave her time to think. Sometimes she'd meet up with friends and they'd pass the time talking.

One day, Caleb told her that he had heard strange sounds while staying at his grandmother's house. His grandfather had died recently and many of his belongings were stored in the attic. Caleb said that anytime he walked past the stairs, he felt a cold chill.

Virginia asked him to stop talking. She was getting scared. She too, lived in an old farmhouse with an attic. She too, heard noises in her attic. She grew worried and wondered if her house was **haunted**.



When Virginia arrived home, she wanted to ask her mother if she believed in ghosts, but decided against it. Instead, she quietly and **feverishly** did her chores. She helped with dinner, washed all the dishes, and swept up afterward.

Later in the evening, she was so exhausted that as she worked on her homework, she fell asleep in her chair. Her mother had to help walk her upstairs to get ready for bed.

“Good night, Virginia. Sleep well.” Virginia’s mother kissed her daughter on the forehead as she climbed under the **quilt**.

“Good night, Mother,” said Virginia with a yawn, but as she drifted off to sleep, she dreamed of ghosts.





*Tip-tap . . . tip-tap . . .*

Virginia popped open her eyes with a burst of fear. *What was that sound?* She sat up and listened carefully, holding her breath.

*Tip-tap . . . tip-tap . . .*

“Mother, is that you?” Virginia whispered **urgently**, but there was no answer, only a strange, mysterious sound. *Was it ghosts?* Her father always preached that there was usually a simple answer to a simple problem, and so she decided to find out.

*Tip-tap . . . tip-tap . . .*

Virginia jumped out of bed and ran over to her bedroom window to see if maybe a tree branch was brushing against the glass. While peering outside, she watched the wind whip up leaves across the grass under a full moon.

*Tip-tap . . .  
tip-tap . . .*



Virginia realized that the mysterious sound was not coming from below her, but from above her. *There were no bedrooms on the top floor, so it must be an animal*, Virginia thought. *Maybe a raccoon snuck into the attic and is clawing its way out.*

Virginia got back in bed, feeling much better that she had convinced herself there were no ghosts, and soon fell into a deep sleep.

## Lies and Lullabies

The next morning at breakfast, Virginia told her parents about the sounds she heard coming from the attic.

"I'll look up there after breakfast," said her father, with a quick glance toward her mother.

"Can I go with you?" asked Virginia. She saw a flash of worry cross her mother's face.

"No, dear," said Mother. "The attic is dusty, and you'll get your dress dirty."

Virginia was disappointed, but she knew better than to argue with her mother.



Later that day, Virginia helped her mother hang meat to smoke behind the fireplace. "I thought we had one ham left," said Virginia with a confused look on her face.

"What happened to it?" she asked.



Her mother looked away without answering, which Virginia thought was strange. Her mother was often short with her, but never ignored her.

That evening, at dinner, Virginia asked her father about the animal in the attic. "Did you find anything?"

Her father shook his head saying only, "Maybe a couple of squirrels got in there, but it's nothing to worry about." Virginia noticed a shared glance between her parents.

That night, Virginia lay in bed waiting to fall asleep but was having trouble because she was thinking about the missing ham. She wondered if the missing ham and the sounds in the attic were somehow connected. *Had a giant raccoon somehow stolen their ham and dragged it upstairs?*



Then Virginia thought she had heard sounds, but she didn't—she heard voices. Virginia sat up and listened but could not hear any words, only the murmur of a whisper. Someone—a woman—was singing very softly, perhaps a **lullaby**, but Virginia did not recognize the words or the melody. She heard from Caleb at school that ghosts made strange sounds, but could they sing, too?



Virginia got out of bed and ran to her parents' room. "Mother! Father!" she called out. "There are people in the attic! I heard someone singing!"

"Hush, child," scolded her mother, "you'll wake your baby sister."

“But I heard someone singing a lullaby,” Virginia insisted.

“It must have been your mother,” said Virginia’s father. “She was singing to the baby.”

Virginia glanced at her mother. She was leaning over the baby’s cradle. “Go back to bed, Virginia,” she said without raising her eyes.

Virginia went back to her bedroom feeling **annoyed** and confused because she knew all her mother’s favorite lullabies. The tune she had heard earlier was not any of them. But why would her father lie to her?

*Maybe our house is haunted after all, thought Virginia. Maybe Mother and Father know about the ghosts and don’t want me to be scared.*

Virginia climbed back into bed, where she strained to hear more singing, but the house was oddly silent. Virginia liked that less than the noises. Something—or someone—was directly above her, but who, or what, was it? She slipped deeper under her quilt.

## Shadows Beyond the Door

The next morning, Virginia went into the pantry to get a jar of peaches for breakfast, but there were none on the shelf. Virginia remembered that there had been three jars left the last time she looked. *Who had eaten all those peaches? Was it the same person or thing that took our ham?*

"Do ghosts eat?" Virginia asked her parents at breakfast.

Virginia's father chuckled, but her mother was not amused. "What nonsense," she said.

Virginia was not sure if she believed in ghosts or not but was tired of being treated like a kid, and so she decided she would sneak up and explore the attic on her own.



That night, Virginia forced herself to stay awake till after her parents were asleep. Then she got out of bed, lit a candle, and tiptoed to the steps that went up to the attic.

Virginia heard soft thumps and bumps and scraping noises along the way. She paused several times, clutching her chest, but always kept going. Her heart was beating so hard she thought that she might faint.

She pushed on the door to the attic, but it didn't move—it was locked.

Virginia peeked through the keyhole and saw shadowy figures moving inside. Ghosts! She was right! Her house was haunted! And there wasn't just one—Virginia counted three ghosts: two big ones and one that was about her size.



Suddenly, her candle blew out, and Virginia was left in darkness. She wanted to scream! The only sound she could hear was the beating of her own heart!

As Virginia stumbled her way back down the stairs in a hurry, her hands touched something soft. She nervously picked it up and scurried back to her bedroom.

Standing next to the window, she let the moonlight show her what she held in her hands: it was a doll made from **cornhusks**.

While Virginia wasn't sure whether ghosts ate or not, she was quite sure they did not play with dolls. She thought about the lullaby she had heard and the missing food and suddenly realized no ghosts were in the attic—real people were, but who? Virginia devised a trap to find out.





The next morning, Virginia quietly put the doll back on the attic stairs. As she waited at the foot of the stairs, the attic door eased open. A little girl crept out and picked up the doll. Then she looked up and spotted Virginia.

The frightened little girl gasped and started to cry. Before Virginia could comfort the girl, a hand whisked her back into the attic and slammed the door.

Now Virginia knew the secret her parents had been keeping from her: the people in the attic were not ghosts; they were **fugitives**—slaves escaping to freedom in the north. Virginia once heard her parents whispering about the **Underground Railroad**, which was not a real railroad, with trains and tracks, but a collection of routes and homes fugitives could use to escape to Canada.

They could find freedom in Canada. Virginia's parents were stationmasters on the Underground Railroad, and now, so was she.

A few days later, Virginia realized the ghosts were gone. One of them had left a gift for her on the attic stairs. It was the small doll made from cornhusks. She kept it, but not for herself. If ever another family should stop at their “station,” she would have something to offer them other than her own fear.



## Epilogue

Around the 1830s, the effort to help slaves escaping from the southern United States was called the Underground Railroad. Although it was against the law, many individuals, both black and white, opened their homes to help these fugitives find freedom. Families like Virginia's often fed, clothed, and hid small groups of fugitives until it was safe for them to move farther north. It could take from several months to an entire year for fugitives to make it north to Canada, one of the only places they could be truly safe and free.

## Glossary

<b>annoyed</b>	upset by some repeated acts (p. 13)
<b>cornhusks</b>	the leafy part of an ear of corn (p. 16)
<b>devised</b>	formed a plan (p. 16)
<b>feverishly</b>	done quickly and with a lot of energy (p. 6)
<b>fugitives</b>	people running and hiding from the law (p. 18)
<b>haunted</b>	visited by ghosts (p. 5)
<b>lullaby</b>	a gentle song to put a child to sleep (p. 11)
<b>quilt</b>	a heavy blanket (p. 6)
<b>scolded</b>	harshly criticized (p. 12)
<b>Underground Railroad</b>	a secret program that moved slaves from the southern United States to Canada, where they could be free (p. 18)
<b>urgently</b>	needing quick action (p. 7)

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Level S Leveled Book  
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