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The Ghost at Brixley's

L. M. Montgomery

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"It's a shame the way Alf Logan and all those Cornertown Road boys persecute Lige Vondy," said Frank Sheraton as he sat down on the back porch steps beside his cousin Fred. "I was down at the blacksmith's forge this evening and Alf was there with a crowd of his satellites, bullying and bragging as usual. Lige came along and they geyed him in every way they could. He feels so badly over it, too. He almost cried to-day. Alf jeered at him and the other boys laughed and applauded. I told Alf it was a shame, but I was only one against a dozen. Lige was on his way to the brook for a pail of water, and on his return Tom Clark pretended to run into him and tripped him up. The water was all spilled and it is no easy job for Lige, with his weak back, to carry it up that hill. I carried the second one for him and the Cornertown bullies didn't dare molest me. The rest of the boys wouldn't be so bad if it were not for Alf Logan. He has a kind of chieftainship over them—what with his bluster and his boasting, they think him a regular hero and follow his example in everything."

"I believe Alf Logan is really a bigger coward than Lige Vondy," said Fred, indignantly.

"Of course he is. Do you suppose a boy who wasn't a coward would take pleasure in tormenting a poor, simple chap like Lige? Alf likes to bully boys who can't defend themselves, but he is very careful to keep clear of those who can. I'd like to take him down a little. If we could only make him ridiculous in the eyes of his admirers it would destroy his influence over them, and perhaps they would then leave Lige in peace."

Lige Vondy was a simple-minded fellow of about eighteen, who lived with his widowed mother in a little house at the fork of the Cornertown and Jersey roads. Lige was weak, physically and mentally; normally he was harmless and inoffensive, but was very angry if laughed at.

About a week after the conversation recorded above, Frank came to Fred with another story concerning both Alf and Lige.

"We had some fun at the forge to-day, Fred. I took 'Bonny Belle' down to be shod, and while I was waiting my turn Lige came shambling along and began to spin a yarn. You know that tumbledown old shanty in the hollow of the Jersey road, where the Brixleys used to live? Folks says it is haunted. Goodness knows by what, for I'm sure the Brixleys were harmless and peaceable enough, though mortally lazy. But that is the story, and lots of folks hereabouts give that house a wide berth after dark. Well, it appears that Lige was passing it about nine o'clock last night, and just as he got opposite the door a great, tall, white figure popped out and flew at him. I suppose he really did see something strange—Lige doesn't make up things like that

—a white cow or sheep or perhaps an owl or even an old newspaper in the wind—but, anyway, he took to his heels and ran for dear life, with the ghost chasing him, so he avers, as far as Stanley's hill, where it suddenly disappeared. Lige reeled all this rigmarole off in his own peculiar fashion and dilated on the scare he had had quite proudly. Of course the boys hooted him. They pretended they didn't believe a word and badgered him until he got mad. Alf Logan had the most to say, as usual. He didn't believe in ghosts, not he! And if he were to meet one he wouldn't be scared, not much! He'd march right up and ask what it wanted! Lige is simple-witted, but he has gleams of sense now and then. He spoke right up and told Alf Logan that he wouldn't go past the old Brixley house himself after dark. Alf said he'd just as soon go past it, or through it, for that matter, on the darkest night that ever was, as not. Then Lige dared him to do it. I couldn't help chuckling. Alf looked so flat. But he couldn't back out after all his bragging, especially when the men around applauded Lige.

"Of course I'll go," he said, very loftily. "Don't some of you fellows want to come, too, for the fun of it?"

"I thought that a pretty bare-faced dodge to get company, but the rest let it pass. Most of the boys hung back, but Tom Clark, Ned and Jim Bowley and Chad Morrison said they would go. Chad is a bit jealous of Alf and he'll see that there is no shirking. They are to go to-morrow night if it is fine. What are you laughing at, Fred?"

"I've just thought of something," said Fred.

The following night was just such a one as a ghost, if at all particular in his choice of scenic effects, would have selected to walk abroad in. It was cloudy, but a full moon behind the clouds gave a weird, dim light and a chilly east wind moaned and shivered among the trees. Alf Logan and his cronies, walking up the Jersey road, shivered, too.

"There isn't any such thing as a ghost, anyway," said Tom Clark, breaking a disagreeable silence.

"Course there's not," said Alf loftily. "Nobody believes in them nowadays except fools!"

"Then what was it that Lige saw?" whispered Ned Bowley, nervously.

"Lige'd be scared of his shadow," growled Alf. "I don't believe he saw anything at all. I think he was just yarning."

"S'posing we do see—something?" suggested Chad Morrison. "What will you do, Alf?"

"You heard me say what I'd do, didn't you?" retorted Alf, angrily. "Shut up your

talk about ghosts. You'll scare yourselves and be sneaking off and leaving me first thing."

The other boys resented this slur upon their courage and relapsed into sulkily silence. As they neared the dreaded hollow, dark and mysterious in the shadow of the firs that surrounded it, they drew closer together.

The old Brixley house had almost fallen into ruin. Doors and windows were gone and the walls were decayed and shaky. With hesitating steps Alf and his comrades shuffled through the weeds in the yard and reached the door.

"Well, ain't you going in?" asked Chad, rather tauntingly, as Alf paused.

"Yes, I am," said Alf, desperately. "Come on, you fellows! What's here to be scared of?"

They stumbled in. The small room was quiet and dark. Something scurried overhead—a rat or squirrel. The sound made Alf break out into a cold perspiration.

"No ghost yet, boys," he said, but his voice trembled.

"You've got to go through all the rooms, you know," said the merciless Chad. "There's a bedroom off this and there's the loft. That was the bargain."

With a forlorn attempt at a whistle Alf started across the creaking floor. He had almost reached the inner room when a dreadful thing happened.

In the empty doorway appeared a tall white figure whose head reached to the ceiling. Huge, shadowy wings flapped and waved about it, while, apparently in the middle of this terrible apparition, was a flaming face, with hollow, cavernous eyes. At the same moment a wail of the most discordant agony that ever fell on human ears resounded through the house.

With a yell of terror Alf Logan wheeled about and made a blind dash for the entrance, followed by his comrades. Across the yard, over the hollow, and up the hill they flew with frantic speed, never daring to glance behind, although the dismal wails still followed them on the wind.

When the last echo of their flying feet had died away the ghost burst into a shout of very human laughter and proceeded to divest himself of the pillowcase, stuffed with shavings, which surmounted his head.

"Come here, Fred, and unpin a fellow," he called. "I'll never get these sheets off by myself."

Fred popped out of the inner room and laid an old fiddle down on the window ledge.

"Did you ever see such a complete rout?" he laughed. "How they did run!"

"They're running yet, I'll bet," said Frank, with a grin, as Fred unpinning the sheets from his shoulders. "That dreadful noise you made on the fiddle scared them

worse than I did. Alf will never hear the last of this, and he'll leave Lige Vondy alone for a spell or I'm much mistaken. There, that will do. The phosphorus will have to stay on my face until I get home. Now, let's go."

If Alf Logan cherished any hope that his ghostly adventure might yet remain a secret, that hope was dispelled when he went to the forge next day. He was greeted with derisive laughter and shouts from the men and boys, while Lige Vondy for once was able to turn the tables on his old enemy. Chad Morrison, who had not made any pretensions to valor in the matter and so did not mind owing to his scare, had told the whole story.

To make matters worse, the truth soon leaked out and Alf had not even the sorry compensation of believing that he had seen a real ghost. "Alf Logan's home-made ghost" passed into a mocking by-word along the Cornertown road and Alf's supremacy over the boys was gone forever, since he had shown himself to be a braggart and a coward. Lige Vondy was henceforth left in peace, and as Frank said to Fred:

"Our grand ghost act was a decided success, wasn't it, old fellow?"

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Ghost at Brixley's* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]