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"A VASTER EMPIRE THAN HAS BEEN"

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Some Fools and a Saint

L. M. Montgomery

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Published, in a slightly modified version which adds references to the Blythes to make it seem more like a book, in *The Blythes are Quotes* (2009).

Illustrations by Jordanus, believed to be a pseudonym.

Editor's Note.—Anne of Green Gables is to most Canadians as real a person as Laura Secord, or any of the other heroines of our history. Miss L. M. Montgomery drew her portrait so skillfully that she lives in the memories of all those who read that beautiful story and those which followed from the same gifted pen. Readers of the Family Herald watched eagerly each week for the paper so that they could see the latest development of that entrancing story of the Prince Edward Island girl. It is some years since we have published a tale by Miss Montgomery. We have now secured her latest work, a thrilling ghost story.

CHAPTER 1

“You are going to board at Long Alec’s!” exclaimed Mr. Sheldon in amazement.

The old minister of the Glen Donald congregation and the new minister were in the little church vestry. The old minister had looked kindly at the new minister . . . kindly and rather wistfully. This boy was so like what he himself had been fifty years before . . . young, enthusiastic, full of hope, energy and high purpose. Goodlooking, too. Mr. Sheldon smiled a bit in the back of his mind and wondered if Curtis Burns were engaged. Probably. Most young ministers were. If not, there would be some fluttering in the girlish hearts of Glen Donald. And small blame to them.

The induction service had been held in the afternoon and had been followed by a supper in the basement. Curtis Burns had met all his people and shaken hands with them. He was feeling a little confused and bewildered, and rather glad to find himself in the quiet, elm-shaded vestry with old Mr. Sheldon, his saintly predecessor who had ministered to this congregation for over thirty years and whose resignation in the preceding autumn had seemed cataclysmic to his adoring parish.

“You have a good church and a loyal people here, Mr. Burns,” said Mr. Sheldon. “I hope your ministry among them will be happy and blessed.”

Curtis Burns smiled. When he smiled his cheeks dimpled which gave him a boyish, irresponsible look. Mr. Sheldon felt a momentary doubt. He could not recall any minister of his acquaintance who had dimples. Was it fitting? But Curtis Burns was saying, with just the right shade of diffidence and modesty:

“I am sure it will be my own fault, sir, if it is not. I feel my lack of experience. May I draw on yours occasionally for advice and help?”

“I shall be very glad to give you any assistance in my power,” said Mr. Sheldon, his doubts disappearing promptly. “As for advice . . . bushels of it are at your disposal. I shall hand you out a piece at once. Go in the manse . . . don’t board.”

Curtis shook his brown head ruefully.

“I can’t, Mr. Sheldon . . . not right away. I haven’t a cent. It took my last penny to buy a suit for my ordination. I’ll have to wait until I’ve saved enough out of my salary to put a few sticks of furniture in the manse.”

“Oh, well . . . of course if you can’t you can’t. But do it as soon as you can. There is no place like his own home for a minister. The Glen Donald manse is a nice old house. It was a very happy home to me for many years . . . until the death of my dear wife five years ago. Since then I have been very lonely. However, you will have a good boarding place with Mrs. Richards. She will make you very comfortable.”

“Unfortunately Mrs. Richards can’t have me after all. She has to go to the hospital for a rather serious operation. I am going to board at Mr. Field’s . . . Long Alec, I believe he is called. You seem to have odd nicknames in Glen Donald . . . I’ve heard a few already.”

And then Mr. Sheldon had exclaimed.

“Long Alec’s!”

“Yes, I prevailed on him and his sister today to take me in for a few weeks on promise of good behavior. I’m in luck. It’s the only other place near the church. I had hard work to get them to consent.”

“But . . . Long Alec’s!” said Mr. Sheldon again.

It struck Curtis that Mr. Sheldon’s surprise was rather surprising. Why shouldn’t he board at Long Alec’s?

Long Alec seemed a most respectable and rather attractive youngish man, with his fine-cut aquiline features, his high white forehead, and soft dreamy gray eyes. And the sister . . . a sweet, little, brown thing, rather tired-looking, with a flute-like voice. Her face was as brown as a nut, her hair and eyes were brown, her lips scarlet. Of all the girls that had clustered, flower-like, about the basement that day, casting shy glances of admiration at the handsome young minister, he remembered nothing. But he remembered Lucia Field.

“Why not Long Alec’s?” he said. Recalling, too, that a few other people had seemed taken aback when he had mentioned his change of boarding house. Mr. Sheldon looked embarrassed.

“Oh, it’s all right I suppose. Only . . . I shouldn’t have thought them likely to take a boarder. Lucia has her hands full as it is. You know there’s an invalid cousin there.”

“Yes. I called to see her when I preached here in February. What a tragedy . . . that sweet, beautiful woman!”



Elder North went on a rampage because Lucia Field played a sacred violin solo for a collection piece one day.

“A beautiful woman indeed,” said Mr. Sheldon emphatically. “And a wonderful woman. She is one of the greatest powers for good in this community. They call her the angel of Glen Donald. I tell you, Mr. Burns, the influence that Alice Harper wields from that bed of helplessness is amazing. I cannot tell you what she has been to me during these past ten years. Her wonderful life is an inspiration. The young girls of the congregation worship her. Do you know that for eight years she has taught a

class of teen age girls? They go over to her room after the opening exercises of the Sunday school here. She enters into their lives . . . they take all their problems and perplexities to her. And it was entirely due to her that the church here was not hopelessly disrupted when Elder North went on a rampage because Lucia Field played a sacred violin solo for a collection piece one day. Alice sent for the Elder and talked him into sanity. She told me the whole interview later in confidence, with her own inimitable little humorous touches. It was rich. She is full of fun. She suffers indescribably at times but no one ever heard her utter a word of complaint.”

“Has she always been so?”

“Oh, no. She fell from the barn loft ten years ago . . . hunting for eggs or something. She was unconscious for twenty-four hours . . . and has been paralyzed from the hips down ever since.”

“Have they had good medical advice?”

“The best. Winthrop Field . . . Long Alec’s father . . . had specialists from everywhere. They could do nothing for her. She is a daughter of Winthrop’s sister. Her father and mother died when she was a baby . . . her father was a clever scamp who died a dipsomaniac like his father before him . . . and the Fields brought her up. Before her accident I really knew little of her . . . she was a slim, pretty, shy girl who liked to keep in the background and seldom went about with the other young people. I don’t know that her existence on her uncle’s charity was altogether easy. She feels her helplessness keenly . . . she can’t even turn herself in bed, Mr. Burns . . . feels that she is a burden on Alec and Lucia. They are very good to her . . . but young and healthy people can’t understand fully. Winthrop Field died seven years ago and his wife the next year. Then Lucia gave up her work in the city . . . she was a teacher in the High School . . . and came home to keep house for Alec and wait on Alice . . . who can’t bear to have strangers handling her, poor soul. Lucia is a good girl . . . I think . . . and Alec’s a fine fellow in many ways . . . a little stubborn perhaps. I’ve heard some talk of his being engaged to Edna Pollock . . . but it never comes to anything. Well, it’s a fine old place . . . the Field farm is the best in Glen Donald . . . and Lucia is a good housekeeper. I hope you’ll be comfortable . . . but . . .”

Mr. Sheldon stopped abruptly and stood up.

“Mr. Sheldon, what do you mean by that ‘but’?” said Curtis resolutely. “Some of the rest looked ‘but’ too, though they didn’t say it. I want to understand . . . I don’t like mysteries.”

“Then you shouldn’t go to Long Alec’s,” said Mr. Sheldon, drily.

“Why not?”

"I suppose I'd better tell you. I suppose I ought to. Yet it always makes me feel like a fool. Mr. Burns, there is something very strange about the old Field place. Glen Donald people will tell you it is . . . haunted."

"Haunted!" Curtis almost laughed. His dimples ran riot. "Mr. Sheldon, you don't tell me that."

"I once said 'haunted' in just the same tone," said Mr. Sheldon a little sharply. Even if he were a saint he did not care to be laughed at by boys just out of college. "I never said it so after I spent a night there."

"But you don't . . . seriously, you don't believe it, Mr. Sheldon?"

"Of course I don't. That is, I don't believe the strange things that have happened there during the last five or six years are supernatural or caused by supernatural agency. But the things have happened . . . there is no doubt whatever about that."

"What things?"

Mr. Sheldon coughed.

"I . . . I . . . some of them sound a little ridiculous when put into words. But the cumulative effect is not ridiculous . . . at least, to those who have to live in the house and who cannot find the explanation of them . . . cannot, Mr. Burns. Rooms are turned upside down . . . a cradle is rocked in the garret where no cradle is . . . violins are played . . . there are no violins in the house except Lucia's which is always kept in her room . . . cold water is poured over people in bed . . . clothes pulled off them . . . shrieks ring through the garret . . . dead peoples' voices are heard talking in empty rooms . . . bloody footprints are found on the floors . . . white figures have been seen walking on the barn roof. Oh, smile, Mr. Burns . . . I have smiled too. And I laughed when I heard that all the eggs under their setting hens last spring were discovered to be hard-boiled. But it was no laughing matter when Long Alec's binder-house was burned last fall with his new binder in it. It was off by itself . . . nobody had been near it for weeks."

"But . . . Mr. Sheldon . . . if anybody but you had told me those things . . ."

"You wouldn't have believed them? And you don't . . . quite . . . believe me. I don't blame you. I didn't believe the yarns until I spent a night there."

"And did anything . . . what happened?"

"Well, I heard the cradle . . . it rocked all night in the garret over my head. The dinner bell rang at midnight. I heard a devilish sort of laugh . . . I can't say whether it was in my room or out of it. There was a quality in it that filled me with a sickening sort of horror . . . I admit it. Mr. Burns, that laughter was not human. And just before dawn every dish on one of the cupboard shelves was thrown to the floor and smashed. Moreover . . ." Mr. Sheldon's gentle old mouth twitched . . . "the porridge

at breakfast, was literally half salt.”

“Somebody was playing tricks.”

“Of course I believe that as firmly as you do. But what somebody? And how is it the somebody can’t be caught? You don’t suppose Lucia and Long Alec haven’t tried?”

“Do these performances go on every night?”

“No. Weeks will sometimes pass without incident. Then, there is an orgy. Moonlight nights are generally . . . not always . . . quiet.”

“Who lives in the house besides Miss Field and her brother and Miss Harper?”

“Two people. Jack MacCree, a half-witted fellow who has made his home with the Fields for thirty years . . . he must be close on fifty . . . and Julia Marsh, the servant girl. A lumpish, sulky sort of creature . . . one of the Glen Donald Road Marshes. Perhaps you’ve heard of them?”

“A half-wit . . . and a girl from a degenerate family! I don’t think your ghosts should be very hard to locate, Mr. Sheldon.”

“It’s not so simple as that. Of course they were suspected at once. But the things go on when Jock is locked in his room. Julia would never have her door locked I admit. But someone stood guard outside of it. Besides, these things happen nights she is away.”

“Have you ever heard either of them laugh?”

“Yes. Jack giggles foolishly. Julia snorts. I cannot believe that either of them produced the sound I heard. Glen Donald people at first thought it was Jock. Now they believe it is ghosts . . . they really do, even those who won’t admit they believe it.”

“What reason do they have for supposing the house is haunted?”

“Well, there’s a pitiful tale. Julia Marsh’s sister Anna used to work there before Julia. Help is hard to get in Glen Donald, Mr. Burns. And Lucia must have help . . . she cannot do the work of that place and wait on Alice alone. Anna Marsh had had an illegitimate baby. It was about three years old and she used to have it there with her. It was a pretty little thing . . . they all liked the child. One day it was drowned in the barn cistern . . . Jock had left the top off. Anna seemed to take it coolly . . . didn’t make a fuss . . . didn’t even cry, I’m told. People said, ‘Oh, she’s glad to be rid of it. A bad lot, those Marshes.’ But two weeks after the child was buried Anna hanged herself in the garret.”

Curtis gave a horrified exclamation.

“So you see there is a magnificent foundation for a ghost story. That’s the reason Edna Pollock won’t marry Long Alec. The Pollocks are well off and Edna is a smart capable girl . . . but a bit below the Fields socially and mentally. She wants Alec to sell and move. She insists that the place is under a curse. Well, as for that, a note was found one morning, written in blood . . . badly written and badly spelled . . . Anna Marsh was very illiterate . . . ‘If ever children are born in this house they will be born accursed.’ Alec won’t sell. The place has been in his family since 1770 and he says he’s not going to be driven out of it by spooks. A few weeks after Anna’s death these performances began. The cradle was heard rocking in the garret . . . there was a cradle there then. They took it away but the rocking went on just the same. Oh, everything has been done to solve the mystery. Neighbors have watched night after night. Sometimes nothing happened. Sometimes things happened but they couldn’t find out why. Three years ago, Julia took a sulky fit and left . . . said people were saying things about her. Also I believe she said a vase in the parlor made a face at her when she was dusting it! Lucia got Min Deacon from over Bainton way. Min stayed three weeks and left because she was wakened by an icy hand on her face . . . though she had locked her door on the inside. Then they got Maggie Elgon . . . a young girl with splendid hair and no nerves. Maggie stood it for five weeks . . . icy hands and weird laughter and ghostly cradles couldn’t bother her. But when she woke up one morning and found that her beautiful braid of black hair had been cut off in the night . . . well, that was too much for Maggie. Bobbed hair had not come in in Glen Donald then and Maggie was proud of her hair. Anna Marsh, people will tell you, had very poor hair and was always bitterly jealous of girls with nice hair. Lucia prevailed on Julia to come back then, having disposed of the offending vase, and she’s been there ever since. Personally I feel sure Julia hasn’t anything to do with it.”

“Then . . . who has?”

“Oh, Mr. Burns, we can’t answer that. And . . . who knows what the powers of evil can or cannot do? Some very strange things happened at Epworth Rectory we are told. I don’t think the mystery of them has ever been solved. And yet . . . I hardly think the devil . . . or even a malicious ghost . . . would empty out a dozen bottles of raspberry vinegar and fill them up with red ink, salt and water.”

Mr. Sheldon laughed in spite of himself. Curtis didn’t laugh . . . he frowned.

“It is intolerable that such things can go on for five years and the perpetrator escape. It must be a dreadful life for Miss Field.”

“Lucia takes it coolly. Some people think a little too coolly. Of course, we have malicious people in Glen Donald as well as everywhere else and some have hinted

that she does the things herself. Of course, I cannot believe that.”

“I should think not. What earthly motive could she have?”

“To prevent Long Alec’s marriage with Edna Pollock. Lucia was never particularly fond of Edna. And the Field pride finds it hard to swallow a Pollock alliance. Besides . . . Lucia can play on the violin.”

“I could never believe such a thing of Miss Field.”

“No? I don’t think I could either. Though I really don’t know much about her. She hasn’t taken any part in the church work . . . well, I suppose she couldn’t. But it is hard to kill an insinuation. I have fought and ousted many a lie, Mr. Burns, but some insinuations have beaten me. Lucia is a reserved little thing . . . perhaps I am too old to get well acquainted with her. Well, I’ve told you all I know about our mystery. If you can put up with Long Alec’s spooks for a few weeks there is no reason why you shouldn’t be very comfortable. I know Alice will be glad to have you there. She worries over the mystery . . . she thinks it keeps people away . . . well, of course, it does, more or less . . . and she’s fond of company, poor girl. Besides, she’s very nervous about the goings on. I hope I haven’t made you nervous.”

“No. You’ve interested me. I believe there’s some quite simple solution.”

“And you also believe that everything has been greatly exaggerated. Oh, not by me . . . I acquit you of that . . . but by my gossiping parishioners. Well, I daresay there has been a good deal of exaggeration. Stories can grow to huge proportions in five years and we country folks are very fond of a spice of the dramatic. Twice two making four is dull . . . twice two making five is exciting. But my hard-headed ruling elder, old Malcolm Dinwoodie, heard Winthrop Field talking in the parlor there one night . . . years after he had been buried. Nobody who had once heard Winthrop Field’s peculiar voice could mistake it . . . or the little nervous laugh he always ended up with.”

“But I thought it was Anna Marsh’s ghost that was supposed to walk?”

“Well, her voice has been heard too, Mr. Burns. I’m not going to talk any more about this. You’ll think me a doddering idiot. Perhaps you won’t be so sure when you’ve lived in that house for awhile. And perhaps the spook will respect the cloth and behave while you are there. Perhaps you may even find out the truth.”

“Mr. Sheldon is a saint and a better man and minister than I’ll ever be,” mused Curtis as he walked across the road to his boarding place, “but the old fellow believes Long Alec’s house is haunted . . . in spite of the raspberry vinegar. Well,

here's for a bout with the ghosts. And twice two is four."

He looked behind him at his church . . . a tranquil gray old building among sunken graves and mossy gravestones under the sharp silvery sky of the late spring evening. Beside it was the manse, a nice chubby old house of cream brick, looking lonely, and appealing with its blindless windows. Directly opposite it across the road was "the Old Field place." The wide, rather low house, with its many porches, had an odd resemblance to a motherly old hen with little chickens peeping out from under her breast and wings. There was a peculiar arrangement of dormer windows in the roof. The window of a room in the main house was at right angles to one in the el and was so close to it that people could have shaken hands from window to window. There was something about this architectural trick that pleased Curtis. It gave the roof an individuality. Some great pine trees grew about it, stretching their boughs over it lovingly. The whole place had atmosphere, charm, suggestion. An old aunt of Curtis Burns' would have said,

"There's family behind that."

Virginia creeper rioted over the porches. Gnarled apple trees, from which sounded faint, delicate notes of birds, bent over plots of old-fashioned flowers . . . thickets of white and fragrant sweet-clover, beds of mint and southernwood, pansies, honeysuckles and blush roses. There was an old mossy path, bordered by clam-shells, running up to the front door. Beyond were comfortable barns and a pasture field lying in the coolness of evening shadows, sprinkled over with the phantom-like globes of dandelions. A wholesome friendly old place. Nothing spookish about it. Mr. Sheldon was a saint but he was very old. Old people believed things too easily.

THE OPENING CHAPTER

Transcriber's Note: As this story was printed in multiple issues of the magazine, a summary of the previous issue was printed. It is not known if the summary was written by the author, or the magazine editor.

Mr. Sheldon, the retiring minister and Curtis Burns, the new minister of the parish of Glen Donald are talking in the vestry after the induction service. Sheldon expresses surprise at Burns' intention of boarding at "the old Field Place" with Long Alec, his sister Lucia and a bed-ridden cousin, Alice Harper. He explains that the country folk believe the place to be haunted and he, himself, has heard queer noises that were quite inexplicable. Rooms are turned upside down a cradle is rocked in the garret where no cradle is violins are played there are no violins in the house except Lucia's which is always kept in her room . . . cold water is poured over people in bed clothes pulled off them . . . shrieks ring through the garret dead people's voices are heard talking in empty rooms bloody footprints are found on the floors white figures have been seen walking on the barn roof. All the eggs under their setting hens last spring were discovered to be hard-boiled. The only other members of the household, Jock MacCree and Julia Marsh, servants, have been so closely watched that the strange happenings would not be attributed to them. The belief that the place is haunted arose from the suicide on it of Anna Marsh after the drowning of her illegitimate child. Edna Pollock won't marry Long Alec because of a note found after Anna's suicide reading "If ever children are born in this house they will be born accursed." She wants Alec to sell the place. The ministers part. The younger man strolls through the churchyard and over to the "old Field Place." There was a peculiar arrangement of dormer windows in the roof. The window of a room in the main house was at right angles to one in the el and was so close to it that people could have shaken hands from window to window. There was something about this architectural trick that pleased Curtis. It gave the roof an individuality. Nothing spookish about the place, thought he. Old people believed things too easily.

CHAPTER 2.

Curtis Burns had been boarding at the old Field place for five weeks and nothing had happened . . . except that he had fallen fathoms deep in love with Lucia Fields. And he did not yet know that this had happened. Nobody knew it . . . except perhaps Alice Harper who seemed to see things invisible to others with those clear beautiful blue eyes of hers. She and Curtis were close friends. Like everyone else he was racked alternately with inexpressible admiration for her spirit and courage and fierce pity for her helplessness and sufferings. There was a pale, almost unearthly beauty about Alice Harper. In spite of her thin, lined face she had a strange look of youth partly owing to her bobbed golden hair, kept cut to avoid tangles, partly to the splendor of her large eyes which always seemed to have a laugh at the back of them . . . though she never laughed. She had a sweet smile with a hint of roguishness in it . . . especially when Curtis told her a joke. He was good at telling jokes and he carried every new one to her. She never complained, though there were occasional days when she moaned ceaselessly in almost unendurable agony and could see no one except Alec and Lucia. Some heart weakness made drugs dangerous and little could be done to relieve her but in such attacks she could not endure to be alone. On such days Curtis was left largely to the tender mercies of Julia Marsh . . . who served his meals properly but whom he could not bear. She was a rather handsome creature, though her clear red-and-white face was marred and rendered sinister by a birthmark . . . a deep red band across one cheek. Her eyes were small and amber-hued, her reddish-brown hair was splendid and untidy, and she moved with a graceful stealthiness of motion and limb like a cat in twilight. She was a great talker save on days when she took tantrums and became possessed with a silent devil. Then not a word could be got out of her and she glowered and lowered like a thunderstorm. Lucia did not seem to mind these moods . . . Lucia took everything that came with her sweet undisturbed serenity . . . but Curtis seemed to feel them all over the house. At such times Julia was a baffling, inhuman creature who might do anything. Sometimes Curtis was sure that she was at the bottom of the spook business; at other times he was just as sure it was Jock MacCree. He had even less use for Jock than Julia and could not understand why Lucia and Long Alec seemed actually to have an affection for the uncanny fellow.

Jock was fifty and looked a hundred in some ways. He had staring filmy gray eyes, a skinny, sallow face, lank black hair, and a curiously protruding lower lip that made his profile singularly disagreeable. He was always arrayed in a motley

collection of garments . . . of his own choice it seemed, not of necessity . . . and spent most of his time carrying food to and looking after Long Alec's innumerable pigs. He made money for Long Alec out of the pigs but of other work he could be trusted with nothing. When alone by himself he sang old Scotch songs in a surprisingly sweet true voice but with something peculiar in its timbre. So Jock was musical, noted Curtis, remembering the violin. Jock's speaking voice was high-pitched and childish, and occasionally his expressionless face was shot through with gleams of Puck-like malice. When he smiled . . . which was rarely . . . he looked incredibly cunning. From the beginning he seemed to have an awe of the black-coated minister and kept out of his way as much as possible, though Curtis sought him out, determined to solve, if possible, the mystery of the place.



He examined the manse, but found no traces of any intruder. The doors were locked, the windows closed. No one had a key except himself and Mr. Sheldon.

He had come to think lightly of the mystery. Everything had been normal and commonplace since his coming . . . except that one night, when he sat up late in his dormer-windowed room to study, he had a curious, persistent feeling that he was being watched . . . by some inimical personality at that. He put it down to nerves. It

was never repeated. Once, too, when he had risen in the night to lower his window against a high wind, he had looked across the road at the moonlight manse and for a moment thought he saw someone looking out of the study window. He examined the manse next day but found no traces of any intruder. The doors were locked, the windows securely closed. No one had a key except himself and Mr. Sheldon, who still kept most of his books and some other things in the manse, though he was boarding with Mrs. Carter at Glen Donald Station a mile away. Curtis concluded that some odd effect of moonlight and tree shadows had tricked him.

Evidently the perpetrator of the tricks knew when it was wise to lie low. A resident boarder, young and shrewd, was a different proposition from a transient guest, an old man, or a sleepy, superstitious neighbor. So Curtis concluded in his youthful complacency. He was sorry nothing had happened. He wanted to have a chance at the spooks.

Neither Lucia nor Long Alec ever referred to their “ha’nts,” nor did he. But he had talked the matter over thoroughly with Alice, who had mentioned it when he went in to see her on the evening of his arrival.

“So you are not afraid of our who-whows? You know our garret is full of them,” she said whimsically, as she gave him her very long, very slender, and very beautiful hand.

Curtis noticed that Lucia, who had just finished giving Alice’s back and shoulders the half-hour’s rub that was necessary every night, flushed suddenly and deeply.

“I’m afraid I don’t take your who-whows very seriously, Miss Harper,” he said.

“Is there anything more you would like, Alice?” asked Lucia in a low voice.

“No, dear. I feel very comfortable. Run away and rest. I know you’re tired. And I want to get really acquainted with my new minister.”

Lucia went out, her face still flushed. Curtis felt a sudden upsetting thrill at his heart as he watched her. He wanted to comfort her . . . help her . . . wipe that tired patience from her sweet, brown little face . . . make her smile . . . make her laugh. . . .

“Mr. Burns, you are so nice and young,” Alice was saying. “I’ve never known any but an old minister. I like youth. And so you don’t believe in our family ghosts?”

“I can’t believe all the things I’ve heard.”

“And yet they’re all true. More things, too, than anyone has heard. Mr. Burns, may we have a frank talk about it? I’ve never been able to talk frankly to anyone about it. Lucia and Alec can’t bear to talk of it . . . it made Mr. Sheldon nervous . . . and one can’t talk to outsiders about such a matter . . . at least I can’t. When I heard

you were coming here for a few weeks I was glad. Mr. Burns, I can't help hoping that you will solve the mystery . . . especially for the sake of Lucia and Alec. It's ruining their lives. It's bad enough to have me on their hands . . . but ghosts and devilry plus me are really too much. And they writhe with humiliation over it . . . you know it's considered a kind of disgraceful thing to have ghosts in the family."

"What is your idea about the matter, Miss Harper?"

"Oh, I suppose Jock does it . . . though no one can understand how. Jock, you know, isn't really half such a fool as he looks. And Jock used to prowl about the house after night long ago . . . Uncle Winthrop often caught him. But he never did anything but prowl then."

"How does he come to be here at all?"

"His father, Dave MacCree, was a hired man here years ago. He saved Henry Kildare's life when the black stallion attacked him."

"Henry Kildare?"

"A young boy of eighteen who also worked here. He went to the Klondike when the gold rush began. He isn't in the picture at all . . . but Uncle Winthrop was so grateful to Jock's father for preventing such a thing happening that when Dave died the next year Uncle Winthrop promised him that Jock should always have a home here. Lucia and Alec promised it in their turn. We Fields are a clannish crew, Mr. Burns, and always back each other up and keep fast hold of our traditions. Jock has become one of our long-established customs."

"Is it possible Julia Marsh is guilty?"

"I can't believe it's Julia. The things go on when she's away. The only time I've really suspected Julia was when the church supper money vanished the night after Alec brought it home. He was treasurer of the committee. A hundred dollars disappeared out of his desk. Jock wouldn't have taken it. Nobody in Lancaster knows about that. Of course Alec made it good. I heard there was an eruption of new dresses in the Marsh gang all that year. Julia herself came out resplendent in a purple silk. That is the only time money has been taken. Mr. Burns, did anyone ever hint to you that Lucia does the things?"

"Mr. Sheldon told me people have hinted it."

"Mr. Sheldon! Why should he have told you that? It is a cruel, malicious falsehood," exclaimed Alice emphatically . . . almost too emphatically, Curtis thought. "Lucia never could do such things . . . never. She is entirely incapable of it. Nobody knows that child as I do, Mr. Burns. Her sweetness . . . her patience . . . her . . . her Fieldness. Think of what it must have meant to her to give up her life and work in the city and bury herself in Glen Donald. When I think that it was because of

me it almost drives me crazy. Never for one moment, Mr. Burns, let yourself believe that Lucia does the things that are done here.”

“I don’t believe it. But if it isn’t Jock or Julia, who is it?”

“That is the question. Once an idea occurred to me . . . but it was so wild . . . so incredible . . . I won’t even put it into words.”

“Has anything happened lately?”

“The telephone has rung our call at midnight and three o’clock every night for a week. Alec found another curse . . . written in blood . . . written backward so that it could be read only in the mirror . . . slipped under his bedroom door. Our ghost is strong on curses, Mr. Burns. This one was a peculiarly nasty one. You’ll find it in that little table drawer. I made Lucia give it to me . . . I wanted to show it to you. Yes, that’s it . . . hold it up to my little hand mirror.”

“Heaven and hell shall blast your happiness. You shall be smitten in the persons of those you love. Your life shall be recked and your house left unto you desolate.’ M——m. The ghost has a poor taste in stationery,” concluded Curtis, looking at the cheap, blue-lined sheet on which the words were scrawled. “Can Jock write?”

“Yes . . . a little. You notice the spelling is bad. But even so, the whole composition seems to me to be beyond Jock. The coal oil that was poured into the cold chicken broth in the pantry night before last was more in his line. Also the delicate humor of a jug of molasses spilled all over the parlor carpet. It cost poor Lucia a hard day’s work to get it all cleaned up.”

“But surely the doer of a trick like that could be easily caught.”

“If we know when it was going to be done . . . oh, yes. But we can’t watch every night. And generally when anyone is watching nothing like that happens.”

“That proves that it must be someone in the house. An outsider wouldn’t know when there was a watch.”

“I suppose so. And yet, Mr. Burns, the cradle was rocked and the violin played weirdly all night in the garret two weeks ago when Julia was away and Jock was out in the stable with Alec, working over a sick cow.”

“Is it true that the voices of dead people have been heard?”

“Yes.” Alice shivered. “It doesn’t happen often, but it has happened. I don’t like to talk of that. I heard Uncle Winthrop outside my door one night saying, ‘Alice, would you like anything? Have they done everything you want?’ He used to do that when he was alive . . . very gently, so as not to disturb me if I were really asleep. You see,” she added, with a return of her whimsicality “our ghost is so extremely versatile. If it would stick to one line . . . but eeriness and roguery together is a hard

combination to solve. This ‘curse’ has worried Alec, Lucia tells me. His nerves are not good lately . . . things ‘get on’ them. And there have been so many curses . . . mostly Bible verses. Our spooks know their Bible, Mr. Burns . . . which is another count against the Jock and Julia theories.”

“But it is intolerable . . . this persecution . . .”

“Oh, we’re all used to it more or less. At least Lucia and Alec are. I didn’t mind so much until the binder house was burned last fall. Since then I’ve been haunted by the fear that the house will go next . . . and me locked in here.”

“Locked!”

“Why, yes. I make Lucia lock my door every night. I could never sleep . . . I’m a wretched sleeper at any time except in the early morning. But I couldn’t sleep at all with that door unlocked and goodness knows what prowling round the house.”

“But the goodness-knows—what isn’t baffled by locked doors if the Min Deacon and Maggie Elson tales are to be believed.”

“Oh, I don’t believe Min or Maggie had their doors locked when the things happened to them. They thought they had, of course, but they must have been mistaken. At any rate, I am sure mine is always locked. Well, we won’t talk of it any more just now. But I want you to keep your eyes open and we’ll see what we can do together. And you’ll let me help you as much as I can in the church work, won’t you? Mr. Sheldon did.”

“I’ll be very glad to have your help and counsel, Miss Harper.”

“I want to do what I can while I’m here. Some of these days I’ll just go out . . . pouf! . . . as a candle flickers and dies. My heart won’t behave. Now never mind hunting in your mind, Mr. Burns, for the proper and tactful thing to say. I’ve looked death too long in the face to be afraid of it. Only sometimes in the long, wakeful hours I shrink a little from it . . . even though life holds nothing for me.”

“Miss Harper, is it certain nothing can be done for you?”

“Absolutely. Uncle Winthrop had a dozen specialists here. The last was Dr. Clifford . . . you know him. When he could do me no good I simply told him I would have no more doctors. I would not have them spending money on me when they might as well burn it. Oh, I’m not so badly off as hundreds of others. Everyone is so good to me . . . I’m not altogether useless . . . and it’s only once a week or so that I suffer much. So we’ll let it go at that and never talk of it any more, Mr. Burns. I’m more interested in the church work and you. I want you to get along well.”

“So do I,” laughed Curtis.

“Don’t be too good-tempered,” said Alice solemnly, but with mischief in her eyes. “Mr. Sheldon was never put out about anything and he was scandalously

imposed on. Saints generally are. Poor old man, he hated to give up his work, but it was really time. He has never been the same since the death of his wife. He took it terribly hard. Indeed, for a year after her death people thought his mind was affected. He would do and say such odd things with apparently no recollection of them afterwards. And he took such a spite to Alec . . . thought he wasn't orthodox. But that passed. Will you draw up my blind and lower my light, please? Thank you. What a majestic sweep of wind there is in those old pines tonight! And no moonlight. I don't like moonlight. It always reminds me of things I want to forget. Good-night. Don't dream . . . and don't see or hear any 'ha'nts'."

Curtis neither dreamed nor saw "ha'nts" though he lay awake for a long time thinking of many things. He was a little disappointed that he did not. But as the weeks passed he almost forgot that he was living in a supposedly haunted house. He was very busy getting acquainted with his parish and organizing his church work. In this he found Alice Harper's assistance invaluable. He could never have reorganized the choir without her. She smoothed irritations and talked away jealousies. It was she who managed Elder Kirk when he tried to put his foot down on the Boy Scout business; it was she who smoothed Curtis out of his consequent bitterness and annoyance.

"You mustn't mind Mr. Kirk. He was born a nincompoop, you know. And he has his good points. He is a good man and would be quite a nice one if he didn't really think it was his Christian duty to be a little miserable and cantankerous all the time."

"I wish I could be as tolerant as you, Miss Harper."

"I've learned tolerance in a hard school. I wasn't always tolerant. But, Mr. Kirk is funny . . . you should have heard him."

Her mimicry of the elder sent Curtis into howls of laughter. Alice smiled over her success. Curtis got into the habit of talking all his problems over with her. He made a sort of idol of her and worshipped her like a Madonna in a shrine. Yet she had her small foibles. She must know everything that went on in house and community. It hurt her to be shut out of anything. He told her all his goings and comings, finding her oddly jealous about his little secrets. She must even know what he had to eat when he went out to tea. She was avid about the details of his June weddings.

"All weddings are interesting," she averred, "even the weddings of people I don't know."

She liked to talk over his sermons with him while he was preparing them and was childishly pleased when now and then he preached from a text of her choosing.

He was very happy. He loved his work. His boarding house was most agreeable. Long Alec was an intelligent, well-read fellow and Curtis had interesting conversations with him. When Mrs. Richards died in the hospital it was taken for granted that Curtis should go on living at the Field place as long as he wanted to. Glen Donald people were resigned to it, although they did not approve of his falling in love with Lucia. Everybody in the congregation knew that he was in love with Lucia long before he knew it himself. He only knew that Lucia's silences were quite as enchanting as Long Alec's eloquence or Alice's trick of sly, humourous sayings. He only knew that other girls' faces seemed futile and insipid compared with her brown beauty. He only knew that the sight of her stepping about the neat, dignified old rooms, coming down the dark, shining staircase, cutting flowers in the garden, making salads and cakes in the pantry, affected him like a perfect chord of music and seemed to waken echoes in his soul that repeated the enchantment as he went to and fro among his people. Once he trembled on the verge of discovering his own secret . . . when Lucia brought Alice in some early roses one day. Mr. Sheldon was there, too, having just returned to Glen Donald from a visit to some distant friends. He had been away ever since the day following Curtis' ordination.

Lucia had evidently been crying. Lucia was not a girl who cried easily. Curtis was suddenly seized with a desire to draw her head down on his shoulder and comfort her. He was following her rather blindly from the room when a spasm of pain twisted Alice's face.

"Lucia, come back . . . quick, please. I'm going to have . . . one of . . . my spells."

Curtis did not see Lucia again for twenty-four hours. Most of the time she was in Alice's darkened room, vainly trying to relieve the sufferer. So he went a little longer in ignorance.

As he returned from the garden after seeing Mr. Sheldon off, he noticed that a beautiful young white birch, which had been growing exquisitely among the pines in a corner, had been cut down. It was Lucia's favorite tree . . . she had spoken of her love for it on the preceding evening. It was lying on the ground, its limp leaves quivering pitifully. He spoke of it rather indignantly to Long Alec.

"The tree was all right last night," said Long Alec.

Curtis stared.

"Didn't you cut it down . . . or order it cut?"

"No. It was like this when we got up this morning."

"Then . . . who cut it?"

"Our dear ghost I suppose," said Long Alec bitterly, turning away. Alec would

never discuss the ghost. Curtis saw Julia's queer little amber eyes watching him from the back verandah. He remembered hearing her ask Jock the previous day to sharpen the axe kept sacred to the splitting of kindling.

For the next three weeks Curtis had plenty to think about. One night he was awakened by the telephone ringing the Field call. He sat up in bed. Over his head in the garret a cradle was rocking distinctly. Curtis rose, flung on a dressing gown, snatched up his flashlight, went down the hall, opened the door into the little recess at its end and went up the garret stair. The cradle had stopped. The long room was bare and quiet under its rafters, hung with bunches of herbs, bags of feathers and a few discarded garments. There was little in the garret . . . two big wooden chests, a spinning wheel, some bags of wool. A rat could easily have hidden in it. Curtis went down and as he reached the foot of the stair the weird strains of a violin floated down after him. He was conscious of a nasty crinkling of his nerves but he dashed up again. Nothing . . . nobody was there. The garret was as still and innocent as before. Yet as he went down the music recommenced.

The telephone rang again in the dining room. Curtis went down and answered it. There was no response. It was of no use to call up central. The line was a rural party one with twenty subscribers on it.

Curtis deliberately listened at the door of Long Alec's bedroom off the dining room. He could hear Long Alec's breathing. He tiptoed up the kitchen stair to Jock's door. Jock was snoring. He went back through the house and up the front stair. The telephone rang again. The house was very still. Opposite the stair was Alice's door. Her light as usual was burning and she was repeating the twenty-third Psalm to herself in her soft, clear voice. A few steps further down the hall was Julia's room, opposite his own. Curtis listened at the door but heard nothing. Lucia's room was beyond the stair railing. He did not listen there. But he could not help the thought that everyone in the house was accounted for but Julia . . . and Lucia. He went back to his own room, shut the door, stood for a minute in scowling reflection and got into bed. As he did so an eerie, derisive laugh sounded distinctly just outside his door. For the first time in his life Curtis knew sickening fear and the peculiar clammy perspiration it induces. He remembered what Mr. Sheldon had said . . . "there was something not human in it."

For a minute he went down before his horror. Then he set his teeth, sprang out of bed and flung open his door.

There was nothing in the great empty hall. Julia's tight-shut door opposite him seemed to wear an air of stealthy triumph.

Lucia looked worried at the breakfast table.

“Were . . . were you disturbed last night?” she asked hesitatingly.

“Rather,” said Curtis. “I spent considerable time prowling about your house and eavesdropping shamelessly. Wasn’t a bit the wiser.”

Lucia produced the forlorn little spectre of a smile.

“If prowling and eavesdropping could have solved our mystery it would have been solved long ago. Alec and I have given up taking any notice of . . . of . . . the manifestations. Generally we sleep through them now unless something very startling occurs. I had . . . hoped . . . there wouldn’t be any more . . . at least while you were here. We have never had such a long interval of freedom.”

“Will you give me carte blanche for investigation?” said Curtis.

Lucia hesitated perceptibly.

“Oh, yes,” she said at last. “Only . . . please don’t talk to me about it. I can’t endure to hear it mentioned. It’s weak and foolish of me I suppose. But it has got to be such a sore subject . . . and so many people have ‘investigated.’”

“I understand,” said Curtis. “But I’m going to nab your ghost, Miss Field. This thing has got to be cleared up. It’s intolerable in this country. It will completely ruin your life and your brother’s if you stay here.”

“And we must stay here,” said Lucia with a rueful smile. “We love this old place too much to leave it.”

“Is it true,” Curtis asked hesitatingly, “that Miss Pollock won’t marry Alec because of this? Don’t answer me if you think me impertinent.”

Lucia’s face changed a little. Her scarlet lips seemed to thin a trifle. People who had known old Winthrop Field would have said she was looking like her father.

“If it is . . . I don’t think Alec is to be pitted on that score. Edna Pollock is his inferior in every way. The Pollock’s are nobodies.”

Curtis thought her little foible of family pride quite enchanting. She was so very human, this brown sweet lovable thing.

CHAPTER 3

During the weeks that followed, Curtis Burns sometimes thought that he would go crazy. Sometimes he thought that they were all crazy together. He prowled, he investigated, he passed sleepless hours on guard, he spent whole nights in the garret, and he got nowhere. Things happened almost continually—ridiculous and horrible things all jumbled up together in a very orgy of impish devilment. Twelve dozen eggs packed for market were found broken all over the kitchen floor; Lucia's new georgette dress was found ruined with bloodstains in the closet of her bedroom; the violin played and the cradle rocked. The place seemed possessed by diabolical laughter. Several times everything in the parlour and dining-room was piled in the middle of the floor, involving a day's work of restoration for Lucia. Outer doors, locked at night, were found wide open in the morning; the spigot was pulled out of the churn in the dairy and a week's cream spilled on the floor; the spare-room bed was tumbled and dented as if slept in overnight; pigs and calves were let out to riot in the garden; ink was spattered all over the walls of the newly papered hall; plentiful curses were scattered about; voices sounded in that exasperating, commonplace garret. Finally Lucia's pet kitten, a beautiful little Persian Curtis had brought her from the city, was found hung on the back verandah, its poor limp little body dangling pitifully from the fretwork.

"I knew this would happen when you gave it to me," said Lucia. "I've never tried to have a pet since my dog was strangled four years ago. Everything I dare to love dies or is destroyed. My white calf, my dog, my birch tree, now my kitten."

For the most part Curtis carried on his investigations alone. Long Alec bluntly stated that he was fed up with spook stalking. He had had five years of it and had given it up. As long as the ghosts left his roof over his head, he would leave them alone. Once or twice Curtis got Mr. Sheldon to watch with him. Nothing at all happened those nights. Another night he had Henry Kildare. Henry was quite confident at first.

"I'll have that spook's hide nailed to the barn door by morning, preacher," he boasted.

But Henry capitulated in blind terror when he heard Winthrop Field's voice talking in the garret.

"I'll go ghosting no more, preacher. Don't tell me . . . I know old Winthrop's voice well enough—I worked here for three years. That's him, sure as sin. Preacher, you'd better get out of this house. Believe me, it ain't healthy."

Henry Kildare's reappearance in Glen Donald had created quite a sensation. He

had made a fortune in the Klondike and announced that he could live on millionaire's row for the rest of his life. He stopped with a cousin but spent a good deal of his time at the old Field place. They liked him there. He was a big, bluff, hearty man, not over-refined, rather handsome, generous, boastful. Alice was never tired of hearing his tales of the Klondike and the days of the gold rush. To her, imprisoned within four walls for years, it was as if she could look out into a wonderful freedom of adventure and peril. But Henry, who had fronted the northern silences, cold and terrors undauntedly, could not front the Field spooks. He flatly refused to stay another night in the house.

"Preacher, this place is full of devils, not a doubt of it. That Anna Marsh doesn't stay proper in her grave—she never would behave herself, and she drags old Winthrop out with her. Alec'd better give the place away if anyone will take it. I wish I could get Alice and Lucia out of it. They'll be found strangled like the kitten some night."

Curtis was thoroughly exasperated. He had long ago given up theorizing about the matter. It seemed just as impossible that any one person in the house could have done all the things as that any person out of the house could have done them. Sometimes, so befuddled and bamboozled did he feel, he was almost tempted to believe that the place was haunted. If not, he was being made a fool of. Either conclusion was intolerable. It was tacitly understood in the household that the occurrences were not to be talked of outside. Curtis discussed the matter only with Mr. Sheldon, who spent a good deal of time with his books in the manse, sometimes reading there till late at night. But all his talks and guesses and researches left him just exactly where he was at first. He developed insomnia and couldn't sleep even when the house was quiet. He was under an obsession. Mr. Sheldon noticed it and advised him to find another boarding place. Curtis knew he could not do this. He could not leave Lucia. For by now he knew that he loved Lucia.

He had realized this one night when the banging of the big front door had aroused him from some late studies. He put his book aside and went downstairs. The door was shut but not locked as it had been when the household retired. As he tried the knob Lucia came out of the dining-room carrying a small candle. She was crying; he had never seen Lucia cry before, although once or twice he had suspected tears. Her hair hung over her shoulder in a thick braid. It made her look like a child—a tired, broken-hearted child. All at once he knew what she meant to him.

"What is the matter, Lucia?" he asked gently, unconscious that for the first time he had used her Christian name.

"Look," sobbed Lucia, holding the candle up in the dining-room doorway.

At first Curtis could not exactly understand what had happened. The room seemed to be a perfect maze of . . . of . . . what was it? Coloured yarns! They crossed and recrossed it. They were wound in and out of the furniture, around the chair rungs, about the table legs. The room looked like a huge spider's web.

"My afghan," said Lucia. "My new afghan! I finished it yesterday. It's completely unravelled out. I've been working at it since New Year's. Oh, I'm a fool to mind this, so many worse things have happened. But I have so little time to do anything like that. And the malice of it! What is it that hates me so?"

She broke away from Curtis' outstretched hand and ran upstairs, still sobbing. Curtis stood rather dazedly in the hall, looking after her until she disappeared. He knew now that he had loved her from their first meeting. He could have laughed at himself for his long blindness. Love her . . . of course he loved her . . . he had known it the moment he had seen tears in her brave, sweet eyes. Lucia in tears—tears that he had no right or power to wipe away. The thought was unbearable.

Alice called to him as he passed her door. He unlocked it and went in. A fresh, sweet wind of dawn was blowing through her window and a faint light was breaking behind the church.

"I've had a bad night," said Alice, "but it has been quiet, hasn't it, except for that door?"

"Quiet enough," said Curtis grimly. "Our ghost has amused itself with a nice quiet job—ravelling out Lucia's afghan. Miss Harper, I am at my wit's end."

"It must be Julia who has done this. She was very sulky all day yesterday. Lucia had scolded her about something. This is her revenge."

"I don't believe it is Julia. But I'm going to make one last effort. You said once, I remember, that an idea had occurred to you. What idea?"

Alice made a restless gesture with her beautiful hands.

"And I also said that it was too incredible to be put in words. I repeat that. If it has never occurred to you yourself, I will not utter it."

He could not move her and he went back to his own room with his head in a whirl.

"There are only two things I am sure of," he said as he watched the sun rise. "Twice two are four. And I'm going to marry Lucia."

Lucia, it developed, had a different opinion. When Curtis asked her to be his wife, she told him that it was impossible.

"Why? Don't you . . . can't you care for me?"

Lucia looked at him with a deepening of colour.

"I could—yes, I could. There is no use in denying that. One should not deny the

truth. But as things are, I cannot marry. I cannot leave Alice and Alec.”

“Alice could come with us. I would be very glad to have such a woman in our home. She is a constant inspiration to me.”

“No. Such an arrangement would not be fair to you.”

It was useless to plead or argue, though Curtis did both. Lucia was a Field. So Alice told him when he carried his woes to her.

“And to think . . . if it were not for me!” she said bitterly.

“It isn’t only you. I’ve told her how glad I would be to have you with us. It’s just as much Alec . . . and those infernal spooks!”

“S’sh . . . don’t let Elder Kirk hear you,” said Alice whimsically. “I’m sorry, Mr. Burns . . . sorry for you and Lucia. I’m afraid she won’t change her mind. We Fields do not when we’ve once made it up. Your only hope is to run the ghost to earth.”

Nobody, it seemed, could do that. Curtis bitterly owned himself defeated. Two weeks of moonlit and peaceful nights followed. When the dark nights returned, the manifestations began anew. This time Curtis seemed to have become the object of the “ha’nts”’ hatred. Repeatedly he found his sheets wet or well sanded when he got in between them at night; twice on going to don his ministerial suit on Sunday mornings he found all the buttons cut off; and the special anniversary service he had prepared with such care vanished from his desk Saturday night before he had time to memorize it. As a result he made rather a mess of things before a crowded church next day and was young and human enough to feel bitterly about it.

“You’d better go away, Mr. Burns,” said Alice. “That is unselfish advice if any ever was given, for I shall miss you more than I can say. But you must. You haven’t Lucia’s phlegm or Alec’s stubbornness, or even my faith in a locked door. They won’t leave you alone now they’ve begun. Look how they’ve persecuted Lucia for years.”

“I can’t go away and leave her in this predicament,” said Curtis stubbornly.

“What good can you do? You’ve tried . . . failed. I really think you’d have a better chance with Lucia if you went away. She’d find out what you really meant to her then—if you mean anything.”

“Sometimes I think I don’t,” said Curtis passionately.

“Oh, yes, you do. But, Mr. Burns, don’t expect Lucia to love you as you love her. The Fields don’t. They’re rather cool-blooded, you know. Look at Alec. He’s fond of Edna, he’d like to marry her, but he doesn’t lose sleep or appetite over it. Neither would Lucia. She’d make a dear little wife for you, faithful and devoted, but she won’t break her heart over it if she can’t marry you. You don’t like to hear that. You want to be loved more romantically and passionately. But it’s true.”

There were times when Curtis thought that Alice was about right in her summing up of Lucia. To his ardent nature Lucia did seem too composed and resigned. But the thought of giving her up was torture.

She's like little red rose just out of reach. I must reach her, he thought.

He could not bear the thought of going away. He would see her so seldom then, for he knew she would elude his visits. Gossip was already busy with their names, and Mr. Sheldon had hinted disapprobation. Curtis ignored his hints and was a trifle brusque with the old man. He knew Mr. Sheldon had never approved of his boarding at Long Alec's.

His perplexity suddenly received a new twist. One night, returning home late from a meeting in a distant section, he stood for a long time at his dormer window before going to bed. He had found a treasured volume on his desk—a book his dead mother had given him on a boyish birthday—with half its leaves cut to pieces and ink spilled over the rest. He was angry with the impatient anger of a man who is buffeted by the blows of an unseen antagonist. The situation was growing more intolerable every day. Perhaps he had better go, although he hated to admit defeat. Lucia didn't care for him; she avoided him; he hadn't been able to exchange a word with her for days except at the table. From something Long Alec had said, Curtis knew that Lucia wished him to find another domicile.

"It would be a bit easier for her, I guess," said Long Alec. "She worries over things so."

Well, if she wanted to get rid of him! Curtis was petulant just then. He was a failure in everything; his sermons were beginning to be flat; he was losing interest in his work; he wished he had never come to Lancaster.

He leaned out of his window to inhale the scented summer air. The night was rather ghostly. The trees about the lawn put on the weird shapes trees can assume in dim, uncertain light such as clouded moonlight. Cool, elusive night smells came up from the garden. He felt soothed, cheered. After all, there must be some way out. He was young; the world was good just because Lucia was in it. He wouldn't give up yet a while.

The moon suddenly broke out between the parting clouds. Curtis found himself looking through the opposite dormer window into the spare-room, the blind of which happened to be up. The room was quite clear to him in the sudden radiance, and in the mirror on the wall Curtis saw a face looking at him—sharply outlined against the darkness of the doorway which framed it. He saw it only for a moment before the clouds again swallowed up the moon, but he recognized it. The face was Lucia's. He thought nothing of it . . . then. Doubtless she had heard some noise and had gone to

the spare-room to investigate. But when at breakfast the next morning he asked her what had disturbed her she looked at him blankly.

“When you went to the spare-room door last night,” he explained.

“I wasn’t near the spare-room last night,” she said. “I went to bed very early—I was tired—and slept soundly all night.”

She rose as she spoke and went out. She did not return, nor did she make any further reference to the matter. Why had she . . . lied? An ugly word, but Curtis could not soften it. He had seen her. True, it was but for a moment in the moonlit mirror, but he could not be mistaken. It was Lucia’s face . . . and she had lied to him!

Curtis decided to leave Long Alec’s. He would board at the station, which would be inconvenient, but go he must. He was sick at heart. He no longer wanted to find out who or what the Field ghost was. He was afraid to find out.

Lucia turned a little pale when he told her, but said nothing. Long Alec, in his usual easy-going fashion, agreed that it would be best. Alice approved with tear-filled eyes.

“Of course you must go. The situation here is impossible for you. But oh, what shall I do?”

“I’ll come to see you often, dear.”

“It won’t be the same. You don’t know what you’ve meant to me, Curtis. You don’t mind my calling you Curtis, do you? You seem like a young cousin or nephew or something like that. You’re a dear boy. I ought to be glad you’re going. This accursed house is no place for you. When do you go?”

“In four days, after I come back from Presbytery.”

Curtis missed his regular train after the meeting of Presbytery—missed it hunting in the bookstores for a book Alice wanted to see—and came back on the owl train that dumped him off at Glen Donald at one o’clock. It did not stop as a rule, but he knew the conductor, who was an obliging man. Henry Kildare got off too. He had expected to have to go on to Rexbridge, not having the advantage of a pull with the conductor.

“It’s only three miles, I can hoof it easy,” he said as they left the platform.

“Might as well come to Long Alec’s for the rest of the night,” suggested Curtis.

“Not me,” said Henry emphatically. “I wouldn’t stay another night in that house for half my pile. I hear you’re getting out, preacher. Wise boy!”

Curtis did not answer. He was not desirous of any company on his walk, much less Henry Kildare’s. He strode along in moody silence, unheeding Henry’s stream of conversation. It was a night of high winds and heavy clouds, with outbursts of

brilliant moonlight between them. Curtis felt wretched, hopeless, discouraged. He had failed to solve the mystery he had tackled so cocksurely; he had failed to win his love or rescue her; he had . . .

“Yes, I’m going to get out of this and hike back to the coast,” Henry was saying. “Ain’t no sense in my hanging round Glen Donald any longer. I can’t get the girl I want.”

So Henry had love troubles of his own.

“Sorry,” said Curtis automatically.

“Sorry! It’s a case to be sorry. Preacher, I don’t mind talking to you about it. You seem like a human being and you’re a mighty good friend to Alice.”

“Alice!” Curtis was amazed. “Do you mean . . . is it Miss Harper?”

“Sure thing. Never was anyone else. Preacher, I’ve always worshipped the ground that girl walked on. Years ago when I was working for old Winthrop, I was crazy mad about her. She never knew it. Didn’t think I could ever get her, of course. She was one of the aristocratic Fields and I was a hired boy. But I never forgot her, never could get interested in anybody else. When I struck luck in the Yukon, I says to myself, ‘Now I’m going straight back to Glen Donald and if Alice Harper isn’t married yet, I’ll see if she’ll have me.’ You see, I’d never heard from the place for years, never heard of Alice’s accident. Preacher, it was an awful jolt when I came home and found her like she is. And the worst of it is, I’m just as fond of her as ever—too fond of her to take up with anyone else. Since I can’t get Alice, I don’t want anyone. And me wanting to marry, with lots of cash to give my woman the dandiest house at the coast! Hard luck, ain’t it?”

Curtis agreed that it was. Privately he thought it did not matter much, as far as Henry Kildare was concerned, whether Alice could or could not marry. Surely she could never care for this brusque, boastful man. But there was real feeling in Kildare’s voice, and Curtis felt very sympathetic just then with anyone who loved in vain.

“What’s that in the Field orchard?” demanded Henry in a startled tone.

Curtis saw it at the same moment. The moon had burst out and the orchard was day-clear in its radiance. A slender light-clad figure stood among the trees.

“Good Lord, it’s the spook,” said Henry.

As he spoke, the figure began to run. Curtis voicelessly bounded over the fence in pursuit. After a second’s hesitation Henry followed him.

“No preacher is going where I dassn’t follow him,” he muttered.

He caught up with Curtis just as the other rounded the corner of the house and the object of their pursuit darted through the front door. Curtis had a sickening flash

of conviction that the solution of the mystery which had seemed within his grasp had again evaded him. Then a wild gust of wind swept through the hall of the house; the heavy door clanged shut with a bang; and caught in it hard and fast was the skirt of the fleeing figure's garment.

Curtis bounded up the steps, clutched the dress, flung open the door, confronted the woman inside.

"You! You!" he cried in a terrible voice. "You!"

CHAPTER 4

Alice Harper looked at him, her white face distorted with rage and hatred.

"You dog," she hissed venomously.

"It's been you . . . you?" gasped Curtis. "You . . . devil!"



"It's been you . . . you?" gasped Curtis.

"Easy on, preacher," Henry Kildare closed the door softly. "Remember you're speaking to a lady. Don't let's have too much of a fuss. It might disturb the folks. Let's go in the parlor here and talk it over quiet like."

Curtis did as he was told. In the daze of the moment he would probably have done anything he was told. Henry followed and closed the door. Alice confronted them defiantly. Amid all Curtis' bewilderment one idea came out clearly in his confusion of thought. How much she looked like Lucia! In daylight the difference in coloring kept the resemblance hidden; in the moonlit room it was clearly seen.

Curtis was shaken with the soul-sickness of a horrible disillusionment. He tried to say something but Henry Kildare interrupted.

"Preacher, you'd better let me handle this. You've had a bit of a shock. Sit down there."

Curtis sat down. Kildare seemed suddenly changed into a quiet powerful fellow whom it would be well to obey.

"Now, Alice, you sit down, too," he wheeled an easy chair out from the wall and put her gently in it. She sat gazing at the both of them, a beautiful woman in the moonlight, the pale blue silk wrapper she wore falling about her slim form in graceful folds. Curtis wished he might wake up. This was the worst nightmare he had ever had.

Henry leaned forward from the sofa.

"Now, Alice, tell us all about it. You have to, you know. Then we'll see what can be done. The game's up, you know."

"Yes, I know," Alice laughed hysterically. "But I've had five glorious years. Oh, I've ruled them . . . from my sickbed I've ruled them. I pulled the strings and they danced—my puppets. Black Lucia and condescending Alec . . . and that love-sick boy there."

"Yes, it must have been fun," agreed Henry. "But why, Alice?"

"I was sick of being patronized and snubbed and condescended to," said Alice bitterly. "That's what my youth was. I was just the poor relation. Why, when they had company I had to wait and eat afterwards. I was not good enough to talk to their company. No, I was only good enough to lay their table and cook their food. I hated every one of them . . . Lucia most of all. She was their petted darling. Her father wouldn't let the winds of heaven visit her too roughly. I slept in a dark, stuffy back room. She had the sunny look-out. She was four years younger than I was but she thought she was my superior in everything. They sent her away to school. No one ever thought of educating me, though I was far cleverer than she was."

"Clever, yes," agreed Henry with curious emphasis. Curtis felt that he should not let Alice Harper say such things of Lucia but a temporary paralysis seemed to have descended upon him. It was a dream . . . a nightmare . . . one couldn't . . . Alice

went on.

“Uncle Winthrop was always saying sarcastic things to me. I remember them every one. Do you remember them, Henry?”

“Yes. The old chap had a habit that way. Didn’t mean much by it. I did think he wasn’t as nice to you as he might have been. But your aunt was good to you.”

“She slapped me one day before company. I hated her after that. I never spoke a word to her for ten weeks. And she never noticed it. One day when I was nineteen she said, ‘I was married at your age.’ Whose fault was it I was not married? I hated going about with the young people. I knew they looked down on me.”

“Nonsense,” said Henry. “You just imagined that.”

“Laura Gregor taunted me once with living on charity,” retorted Alice, her voice shaking. “If I had been dressed like Lucia, Roy Major would have noticed me. But I was shabby . . . dowdy. I . . . I loved him . . . I would have done anything to win him.”

“I remember how jealous I was of him,” said Henry reflectively.

Alice swept on as if she had not heard him.

“When Marian Lister told me she and Roy were going to be married and asked me to be her bridesmaid I could have killed her. But I consented. She should not suspect and triumph over me. I thought my heart would break the day of the wedding. I prayed that God would give me the power to avenge my suffering on somebody.”

“Your poor kid,” said Henry.

“That was my life for twenty years. Then I fell from the loft. I was paralyzed at first. For months I couldn’t move. Then I found that I could. But I wouldn’t. An idea came to me. I had found a way to punish them . . . rule them. Oh, I laughed when I thought of it.”

Alice laughed again. Curtis remembered he had never heard her laugh before. There was an unpleasant something in it which reminded him of the haunted nights.

“My idea worked well. I was afraid I could not deceive the doctors. But it was easy . . . so easy. I could never have believed it would be so easy to fool supposedly intelligent people. How I laughed to myself as they consulted over me with solemn faces! I never complained. I must be patient, saintly, heroic. Uncle Winthrop had several specialists. He had to spend some money at last on his despised niece. They were all easy to hoodwink except Dr. Clifford. I felt that he was vaguely suspicious. So I would have no more doctors. The household waited on me hand and foot. Oh, how I gloried in feeling such power over them . . . I, whom they had disdained. I had

never been of any importance to them. I was the most important person in the house now. Lucia came home to wait on me. She thought it her 'duty.' Lucia always took herself very seriously."

Alice shot a malicious glance at Curtis.

"People said my patience was angelic. Mr. Sheldon said I was a saint. They began to call me the angel of Glen Donald. Once I did not speak a word for four days. The household was terribly alarmed. And I made Lucia rub my back and shoulders every night for half an hour. It was excellent exercise for her and amused me. Some days I pretended to suffer horribly. Had the room darkened, moaned occasionally for hours. I had those attacks whenever I thought Lucia needed a little discipline. Then I discovered that Alec wanted to marry Edna Pollock. This didn't suit me. Lucia would be free to go then and Edna would not wait on me properly. Besides, a Pollock was not good enough for a Field. Then the idea of playing spook came to me."

"Now we're coming to the interesting part," said Henry. "How did you manage those stunts . . . locked in your room?"

"There's a closet in my room . . . and its back wall is not plastered. It's merely a partition of boards between the closet and the alcove where the garret stairs are. When I was a child I discovered that two of those boards could be easily and noiselessly slipped back. I kept it a secret, liking to know something nobody else of all the Wise Fields knew. It was very easy to slip out and in through that space. Nobody ever suspected me with my locked door."

"But how could you get out of the garret? There's only one way up and down."

"Haven't I told you people were easy to fool? There's a big chest up there supposed to be packed full of quilts . . . my quilts. Old Grandmother Field left them to me . . . so nobody ever disturbed them. The chest isn't really full. There's quite a space between the quilts and the back. I used to slip in there. Nobody could ever get up the garret stairs without my hearing them. Two of the steps creaked. I never stepped on those. When I heard anyone coming I shut the lid and pulled one of those thick folded quilts over my head. Dozens of people lifted the lid of that chest . . . saw it apparently full of woollen quilts . . . and put the lid down again. Mr. Burns there did it twice. I was in it laughing at him. Oh, they were all such fools. But I was clever . . . you can't deny that I was a good actress. When I was a girl I wanted to go on the stage and Uncle Winthrop put his foot down on it contemptuously. 'Do you suppose you could act, girl?' he jeered. I wonder what he would think now. It was amusing to terrify people with his laugh. I could mimic it and his voice to the life . . . his and Anna Marsh's."

"You were always a good mimic," agreed Henry. "But how did you rock the cradle after it was taken out?"

"I never touched the cradle. I made a rocking noise by wriggling a loose board on the floor. I could easily manipulate it without getting out of the chest. Of course I took chances. Dozens of times I was almost caught . . . but never quite. I didn't often play tricks on moonlight nights. Once for fun I climbed a ladder and walked along the flat ridge-roof of the barn. But that was too dangerous. I was seen by some passer-by. Sometimes when people watched I did nothing. At other times it amused me to outwit them. Generally I slid down the bannister. It was quieter and quicker. I never made any noise below stairs until I was through for the night. I never did anything without planning out a way of escape beforehand. There were plenty of hiding places if I could not get back to the closet in time. It was your old fiddle I played on, Henry. I hid it behind the closet boards when you went away. When people began to suspect Lucia I raved so vehemently that they thought I protested too much."

"What about those bloody footprints and the curses?" asked Henry.

"Oh, the Fields kept so many hens they never counted them. The curses cost me some pains of composition. I found some very effective ones in the Bible. 'There shall not be an old man in thine house.' That made Alec think he was going to die young."

"Was it you cut Maggie Elsen's hair?"

"Of course. For once she forgot to lock her door. I wanted Julia back. One night I thought I was caught at last. I thought you saw the reflection of my face in the spare room window."

She gestured towards Curtis but he did not look up. A spark of malice came into her face.

"My greatest amusement was to worry Lucia. One morning I pretended to feel feverish and Lucia put a thermometer under my tongue. When she went out I stuck it into a cup of tea on my tray and slipped it back when I heard her coming. My temperature was a hundred and six. Lucia rushed in great alarm to phone for the doctor. When he came he declared my temperature was normal. Lucia believed she had made a foolish mistake and her face burned. Oh, the Field pride got a bit of a humbling then. When I cut down the birch tree she loved every blow was a delight to me."

Still Curtis made no sign. Alice continued to address him.

"I was glad when you came here to board. I liked a young minister. I was so

tired of old Mr. Sheldon. As long as his wife lived there was some amusement in making him worship at my shrine, for old as they were she was jealous of his devotion to me. When nobody cared how much he revered my saintliness I didn't want his reverence. And I was not afraid of you. I knew you would be just as easily fooled as the rest. But I decided that I would keep quiet for awhile so that you would not become disgusted and leave us. It was very amusing to talk seriously to you about our ghosts. And then you fell in love with my lady-cousin and I decided that you must go. I knew Lucia was secretly crazy about you, though, like all the Fields, she can hide her feelings very successfully. And yet, do you know, when you told me you were going my tears of regret were very real ones. You have no idea how much I really liked you."

Alice laughed again. Her eyes were sparkling in the moonlight.

"How did you manage the telephone business?" asked Henry. "I was in the hall when it was ringing. There was no one near it."

"Oh I had nothing to do with that. Some boys along the line must have been playing a trick for the fun of it. They often do . . . but it's never noticed in a house that isn't supposed to be haunted. It helped things on nicely. And I didn't take Alec's money. Some of the Marsh gang did that without a doubt. Not Julia perhaps, but some of them. Neither did I set fire to the binder-house. Likely it was some prowling tramp . . . anyway I know nothing of it."

"Come now, I'm glad to hear that," said Henry in a tone of relief. "Somehow, that kinder stuck in my crop. Now I see my way. And you really can walk as well as anyone?"

"Of course I can. I've had enough exercise at nights to keep well in practice walking. Well, what are you going to do, gentlemen, my judges? Tell silly Alec and little black Lucia, I suppose, and have me turned out on the road. I wouldn't live here now even if they'd let me. I'd starve first."

"Why, no, you ain't going to starve," said Henry soothingly. "The preacher here can tell Alec and Lucia . . . I'm not hankering for that job. It's you I'm concerned with. I'm going to marry you and take you away. That's what I came home to do. I s'posed I couldn't when I found you were bed-ridden. But since you ain't what's to hinder?"

"Do you . . . want me . . . now?" said Alice slowly.

"By the nine gods I do," said Henry emphatically. "I don't care what you've done . . . you're the girl I've wanted all my life. I'm going to have you. I'll take you out to the coast . . . you need never see any of the folks round here again."

“Will you take me away from here tonight . . . now?” demanded Alice.

“Sure,” said Henry. “We’ll go right to the station. It’ll be time for the early train when we get there. We’ll go into Rexbridge and be married. That’s all right, preacher, ain’t it?”

“I . . . suppose so,” said poor Curtis.

Henry bent forward and tapped Alice gently on the arm.

“It’s settled. Come along. I’ll house and dress you like a queen, but listen, my girl, listen. There’s to be no more tricks . . . no more tricks with Henry Kildare. Understand?”

“I . . . understand,” said Alice.

“Go upstairs and get ready. Got anything to wear besides that wrapper?”

“I have my old navy blue suit and hat,” said Alice meekly.

“Well, preacher, what have you got to say?” demanded Henry when she had gone.

“Nothing,” said Curtis. Henry nodded.

“Best line to take I guess. This is one of the things there don’t seem to be any language to fit and that’s a fact.”

The door closed upon Henry Kildare and Alice Harper. Curtis had not spoken a word even when Alice halted for a moment as she passed him in the hall.

“Hate me . . . hate me,” she said passionately. “I don’t mind your hate but I won’t have your tolerance.”

Mr. Sheldon came up the next night, having heard the incredible rumor that flew like flame through Glen Donald. He listened to Curtis’ story and shook his head.

“Well, I suppose after a time I’ll get this through my noodle and accept it. Just at present I can’t believe it, that’s all. We’ve dreamed it.”

“I think we all feel like that,” said Curtis. “Alec and Lucia have gone about in a helpless daze all day.”

“What hurts me worst,” said Mr. Sheldon tremulously, “is her . . . her hypocrisy. She pretended to be so interested in our work.”

“That may not have been hypocrisy, Mr. Sheldon. It may have been a real side of her nature.”

“That is incredible.”

“Nothing is incredible with abnormality. Remember you cannot judge her as you would a normal person. She has never been normal . . . her story proves that. She was hampered by heredity. Her father and grandfather were dipsomaniacs. You can’t reform your ancestors. The shock of repressed feeling at the wedding of the

man she loved evidently played havoc with her soul.”

“Poor Henry Kildare.”

Curtis grinned boyishly.

“Not so poor. He’s got the woman he always wanted and, take my word for it, Mr. Sheldon, he’ll manage her. Besides, marriage and a home and wealth . . . all she craved . . . may have a very salutary effect on her mind. But she’ll never come back to show off her diamonds in Glen Donald.”

When Curtis came back from the gate in the twilight he met Lucia in the porch. She would have slipped away but he caught her exultantly.

“Sweetheart, you’ll listen to me now . . . you will . . . you will.”

Jock was coming across the lawn. Lucia twisted herself from Curtis’ grasp and ran. But before she ran Curtis heard the most charming sound in the world . . . the little yielding laugh of a woman caught by her lover.

(THE END).

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Maggie's last name is spelt: Elsen, Elson, and Elgon. This is not fixed.

[The end of *Some Fools and a Saint* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]