

Some Fools and a Saint

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

The old minister of the Methodist Mowbray Narrows congregation and the new minister were in the little church classroom. The old minister ... who was retiring ... had looked kindly at the new minister ... kindly and rather wistfully. This boy was so like what he had been himself forty years before ... young, enthusiastic, full of hope, energy and high purpose. Good-looking, 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 Mowbray Narrows. And small blame to them.

The reception had been held in the afternoon and had been followed by a supper in the basement. Curtis Burns had met the most of his people and shaken hands with them. He was feeling a little confused and bewildered and rather glad to find himself in the vine-shaded classroom with old Mr. Sheldon, his saintly predecessor, who had decided to spend the rest of his days in Glen St. Mary, the neighbouring settlement. People said it was because he felt he could not get along without Dr. Gilbert Blythe of Ingleside. Some of the older Methodists said it disapprovingly. They had always thought he ought to patronize the Methodist doctor of Lowbridge.

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“You have a good church and a loyal people here, Mr. Burns,” Mr. Sheldon was saying. “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 with dimples, not even a Presbyterian one. 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, Mr. Sheldon, if it is not. I feel my lack of experience. May I draw on you occasionally for advice and help?”

“I shall be very glad to give you any assistance in my power,” said Mr. Sheldon, his doubts promptly disappearing. “As for advice bushels of it are at your disposal. I shall hand you out a piece at once. If you need a doctor always send for the Methodist one. *I* got in very wrong through my friendship with Dr. Blythe. And go into the parsonage ... don’t board.”

Curtis shook his brown head ruefully.

“I can’t ... Mr. Sheldon ... not right away. I haven’t a cent ... and I have some borrowed money to repay. I’ll have to wait until I have paid my debts and saved enough money to pay for a housekeeper.”

So he was not contemplating matrimony.

“Oh, well, of course if you can’t, you can’t. But do it as soon as you can. There is no place for a minister like his own home. The Mowbray Narrows parsonage is a nice house although it is old. It was a very happy home for me ... at first ... until the death of my dear wife two years ago. Since then I have been very lonely. If it had not been for my friendship with the Blythes ... but a good many people disapproved of that because they were Presbyterians. However, you will have a

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good boarding place with Mrs. Richards. She will make you very comfortable.”

“Unfortunately Mrs. Richards cannot take 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 Mowbray Narrows ... I’ve heard a few already.”

And then Mr. Sheldon had exclaimed, with something more than surprise in his tone,

“Long Alec’s!”

“Yes, I prevailed on him and his sister to take me in for a few weeks, at least, on promise of good behaviour. 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. And there had been the same note in Dr. Blythe’s voice when he had told him.

Why shouldn’t he board at Long Alec’s?

Long Alec seemed a most respectable and a rather attractive youngish man, with his fine-cut aquiline features and soft, dreamy grey 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, flowerlike, about the basement that day, casting shy glances of admiration at the handsome young minister, he remembered nothing. But somehow he remembered Lucia Field.

“Why not Long Alec’s?” he said.

Recalling, too, that a few other people besides Dr. Blythe had seemed taken aback when he had mentioned his change

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of boarding house. Why ... why? Long Alec was on the board of managers. He must be respectable.

Mr. Sheldon looked embarrassed.

“Oh, it is 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 may have heard there is an invalid cousin there?”

“Yes, Dr. Blythe mentioned her. And I called to see her. What a tragedy ... that sweet, beautiful woman!”

“A beautiful woman indeed,” said Mr. Sheldon emphatically. “She is a wonderful woman, one of the greatest powers for good in Mowbray Narrows. They call her the angel of the community. 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 my pastorate here. And every other minister will tell you the same. 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 teenage class of 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. They say she has made more matches than Mrs. Blythe ... and *that* is saying something. And it was entirely due to her that the church here was not hopelessly disrupted when Deacon North went on a rampage because Lucia Field played a sacred violin solo for a collection piece one day. Alice sent for the deacon and talked him into sanity. She told me the whole interview in confidence later, with her own inimitable little humorous touches. It was rich. If the deacon could have heard her! She is full of fun. She suffers indescribably at times but no one has ever heard her utter a word of complaint.”

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“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 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 was the 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 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. And she feels that she is a burden on Alec and Lucia. They are very good to her ... I feel sure of that ... but young and healthy people cannot understand fully. Winthrop Field died seven years ago and his wife the next year. Then Lucia gave up her work in Charlottetown ... 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.”

“Rather hard on Lucia,” commented Curtis.

“Well, yes, of course. She is a good girl, I think ... the Blythes think there is no one like her ... and Alec is a fine fellow in many ways. A little stubborn, perhaps. I’ve heard some talk of his being engaged to Edna Pollock ... I know Mrs. Dr. Blythe favours that match ... but it never comes to anything. Well, it’s a fine old place ... the Field farm is the best

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in Mowbray Narrows ... 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 ... especially Dr. Blythe ... though they didn't say it. I want to understand. I don't like mysteries."

"Then you shouldn't go to board at Long Alec's," said Mr. Sheldon dryly.

"Why not? Surely there's no great mystery connected with the family on a farm in Mowbray Narrows?"

"I suppose I'd better tell you. I'd rather you asked Dr. Blythe, though. It always makes me feel like a fool. As you say a plain farm in Mowbray Narrows is no place for any insoluble mystery. Yet there it is. Mr. Burns, there is something very strange about the old Field place. Mowbray Narrows people will tell you that it is ... haunted."

"Haunted!" Curtis could not help laughing. "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 certain night there."

"Of course, you don't seriously believe in ghosts, Mr. Sheldon." Privately, Curtis thought the old man was getting a little childish.

"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 of that ... and remember John Wesley ..."

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“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 cannot find any 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 locked up in her own 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 floors ... white figures have been seen walking on the barn roof. Oh, smile, Mr. Burns ... I smiled once, too. And I laughed when I heard that all the eggs under the setting hens last spring were discovered to be hard-boiled.”

“The Field ghost seems to have a sense of humour,” commented Curtis.

“It was no laughing matter when Long Alec’s binder house was burned last fall with his new binder in it. Every building might have gone if the wind had been west instead of east. It was off by itself. Nobody had been near it for weeks.”

“But ... Mr. Sheldon ... if anybody but you had told me these things ...”

“You wouldn’t have believed them. I don’t blame you. But ask Dr. Blythe. 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 overhead. 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

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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 in spite of himself. “... the porridge at breakfast, which had been cooked the night before, 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 Long Alec and Lucia haven’t tried?”

“Do these performances go on every night?”

“Oh, no. Weeks will sometimes pass without an incident. And when people come in to watch generally nothing happens. They even had Dr. Blythe and Dr. Parker one night ... much against their will. The house was as quiet as the dead. But after a quiet interval there is generally an orgy. Moonlight nights are generally ... not always ... quiet.”

“Miss Field must have help. Who lives in the house besides her brother and her and Miss Harper?”

“Two people as a rule. Jock MacCree, a half-witted fellow who has made his home with the Fields for thirty years ... he must be close on fifty and has always been quiet and well behaved. And Julia Marsh, the servant girl. She is a lumpish, sulky sort of creature, one of the Upper Glen Marshes.”

“A half-wit ... and a girl with a grudge likely. I don’t think your ghost should be very hard to locate, Mr. Sheldon.”

“It’s not so simple as that, Mr. Burns. Of course, they were suspected at once. But the things go on when Jock is in the room with you. Julia would never have her door locked, I admit, or stay with the watchers. But the same things happen when she is away.”

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“Have you ever heard either of them laugh?”

“Yes. Jock giggles foolishly. Julia snorts. I cannot believe that either of them produced the sound I heard. Neither does Dr. Blythe. Mowbray Narrows 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 Mowbray Narrows, Mr. Curtis. And of course 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. Too bad Lucia Field couldn't get better help. Perhaps if they paid better wages ...' and so on. But two weeks after the child was buried Anna hanged herself in the garret.”

Curtis gave a horrified exclamation.

“I have heard that Dr. Blythe warned them to watch her. But you see there is a magnificent foundation for a ghost story. They say that's the true 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.' Dr. Blythe

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insisted it wasn't Anna's writing but ... well, there you are. Alec won't sell ... even if he could find a purchaser, which is doubtful. The place has been in his family since 1770 and he says he is 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. Neighbours have watched night after night. Sometimes nothing happened. Sometimes things happened but they couldn't tell why. Three years ago Julia took a sulky fit and left ... said people were saying things about her and she wasn't going to stand for it. Lucia got Min Deacon from the Upper Glen. Min stayed three weeks ... she was a smart, capable girl ... and left because she was awakened by an icy hand on her face ... though she had locked her door before going to sleep. Then they got Maggie Eldon ... a young girl with no nerves. She had splendid black hair and was very proud of it. Never would have it bobbed. Icy hands and weird laughter and ghostly cradles didn't bother *her*. She was there for five weeks. But when she woke up one morning she found her beautiful braid of black hair had been cut off in the night. Well, that was too much for Maggie. Her young man didn't approve of bobbed hair. People will tell you that Anna Marsh had very poor hair and was very jealous of those who had nice hair.

"Lucia prevailed on Julia to come back and she's been there ever since. Personally I feel sure Julia hasn't anything to do with it and Dr. Blythe agrees with me. Have a talk with him sometime ... he's a very intelligent man, even if he is a Presbyterian."

"But if Julia has nothing to do with it, who has?"

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“Oh, Mr. Burns, we can’t answer that. And ... who knows what the powers of evil can or cannot do? Again I say remember Epworth Rectory. I don’t think *that* mystery 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 did not laugh ... he frowned.

“It is intolerable that such things should 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 Mowbray Narrows as well as everywhere else and some have hinted that she does the things herself. Only you’d better not say so to Mrs. Dr. Blythe. She is a special friend of Lucia’s. Of course I never suspected her for a moment.”

“I should think not. Apart from her personality, what earthly reason could she have?”

“To prevent Long Alec’s marriage with Edna Pollock. Lucia was never particularly fond of Edna. And the Field pride might find it too 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. And what Mrs. Blythe would do to me, old as I am, if I hinted such a thing to her, I don’t really know. And I don’t really know much about Miss Field. 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 ... I really think Mrs. Blythe is the only intimate friend she

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has ... perhaps I am too old to get acquainted with her. Well, I've told you all I know about our mystery. No doubt there are others who could tell you much more. If you can put up with Long Alec's spooks until Mrs. Richards' recovery 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 have interested me. I believe there is 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 but twice two making five is exciting ... as Mrs. Blythe says. But my hard-headed deacon, old Malcolm Dinwoodie, heard Winthrop Field talking in the parlour 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. I am not going to talk any more about this! You will think me a doddering idiot. Perhaps you won't be so sure when you have lived in that house for a while. And perhaps the spook will respect the cloth and behave while you are there. Perhaps you may even find out the truth."

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“Mr. Sheldon is a saint and a better man and minister than I will 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 ... he couldn’t hide that in spite of the raspberry vinegar. Well, here’s for a bout with the ghosts. I *will* have a talk with Dr. Blythe about it. And twice two *is* four.”

He looked behind him at his little church ... a tranquil old grey building among sunken graves and mossy gravestones under the sharp silvery sky of late evening. Beside it was the parsonage, a nice chubby old house built when stone was cheaper than lumber or brick. It looked lonely and appealing. Directly across the road from it 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 spruce trees grew about it, stretching their boughs around it lovingly. The whole place had atmosphere, charm, suggestion. As 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 clamshells running up to the front door. Beyond were comfortable barns and a pasture field

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lying in the coolness of the evening, sprinkled over with the ghosts 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.

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 Field. And he did not know that this had happened. Nobody knew it except Mrs. Dr. Blythe ... and perhaps Alice Harper, who seemed to see things invisible to others with those clear, beautiful eyes of hers.

She and Curtis were close friends. Like everyone else he was racked alternately with inexpressible admiration for her courage and spirit and fierce pity for her sufferings and helplessness. In spite of her thin, lined face she had a strange look of youth, partly owing to her short golden hair, which everyone admired, and partly to the splendour 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 a joke ... better than a minister should be, some of his Mowbray Narrows parishioners thought ... but he carried a new one to Alice every day.

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 bear 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

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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 the twilight. She was a great talker, save on days when she took tantrums and became possessed of 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 to her with a sweet undisturbed serenity ... but Curtis seemed to feel them all over the house. At such times Julia seemed to him a baffling, inhuman creature who might do anything. Sometimes Curtis was sure 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 grey eyes, lank black hair and a curiously protruding lip, with a skinny sallow face. The lip gave his face a singularly disagreeable profile. He was always arrayed in a motley collection of garments ... of his own choice it would seem, not of necessity or Long Alec's decree ... 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, Curtis noted, remembering the violin. But he had never heard of him being able to play it.

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Jock's speaking voice was high-pitched and childish and occasionally his expressionless face was shot through with gleams of malice, especially when Julia, whom he hated, spoke to him. 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, if possible, to solve the mystery of the place.

He had come to think lightly of this mystery. Dr. Blythe would not discuss it and he put little faith in Mr. Sheldon's reminiscences. Everything had been normal and natural 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 room at the moonlit parsonage and for a moment thought he saw someone looking out of the study window. He examined the parsonage 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 parsonage, though he was boarding with Mrs. Knapp at Glen St. Mary. Moreover, he would never have been in the parsonage so late. 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 ... well ... shrewd ... was a different proposition from a transient guest, an old man, or a sleepy, superstitious neighbour. So Curtis concluded, in his youthful complacency ... deliberately forcing

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himself not to think of the doctors. He was really 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 whow-whows? You know our garret is full of them,” she said whimsically, as she gave him her 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 deeply and suddenly. The flush became her, transforming her into beauty.

“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 must be tired. And I want to get really acquainted with my new minister.”

Lucia went out, her face still flushed. Evidently she did not like any reference to the spooks. 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.

“I’m afraid I don’t take your whow-whows very seriously, Miss Harper,” he said, before Lucia was out of hearing.

“Ah, you are so nice and young,” Alice was saying. “I’ve never known any but an old minister. This is not the most desirable circuit in the world, you know. They generally send the worn-outs here. I don’t know how they came to send you. I like youth. And so you don’t believe in our family ghosts?”

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“I can’t believe all the things I’ve heard, Miss Harper. They are too preposterous.”

“And yet they are true ... well, most of them. I daresay they don’t lose anything by telling. And there are things nobody 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 naturally can’t bear to talk of it ... it makes Mr. Sheldon nervous ... and one can’t talk about such things to an outsider ... at least, I can’t. I tried once with Dr. Blythe ... I have great confidence in him ... but he refused to discuss it. 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. Because it is 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 is 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 ... or he and Julia between them ... though no one can understand how or why. Jock, you know, isn’t really half such a fool as he looks. Dr. Blythe says he has more sense than many a supposedly wise man. And he used to prowl about the house after night long ago ... Uncle Winthrop often caught him. But he never did anything but prowl then ... at least that we ever discovered.”

“How does he come to be here at all?”

“His father, Dave MacCree, was hired man here years ago. He saved Henry Kildare’s life when Uncle Winthrop’s black stallion attacked him.”

“Henry Kildare?” Here was another complication. And was it possible that there was a slight blush on Alice’s face?

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“A young boy who also worked here. He went west years ago. He isn’t in the picture at all ...” Curtis was sure of the blush this time. Some childish romance probably ... “Uncle Winthrop was so grateful to Jock’s father for preventing such a thing happening that when Dave died the next year ... he was a widower with no relatives ... 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. Not that I don’t say he earns his keep.”

“Is it possible Julia Marsh is guilty?”

“I can’t believe such a thing of Julia. The things go on when she is away. The only time I’ve really suspected her 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. He has no sense of the value of money. 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. They declared an uncle of theirs had died out west and left them the money. That is the only time money has been taken.”

“I am sure that was Julia, Miss Harper.”

“I think so, too, Mr. Burns ... did anyone ever hint to you that Lucia does the things?”

“Well ... Mr. Sheldon told me people have hinted it.”

“Mr. Sheldon! Why should he have told you that? It’s a cruel, malicious falsehood,” Alice exclaimed emphatically ... almost too emphatically, Curtis thought, as if she were trying to convince herself as much as him. “Lucia could never do such things ... never. She is entirely incapable of it. Nobody

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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 town and bury herself in Mowbray Narrows! 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 has done the things that are done here, no matter what Mr. Sheldon or Dr. Blythe ... oh, yes, he has his suspicions, too ...”

“Of course I don’t believe it. And Dr. Blythe has never hinted such a thing to me, while Mr. Sheldon only told me what other people have said. 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 couldn’t even put it into words. I hinted it to Dr. Blythe ... and such a snub as he gave me! And Dr. Blythe *can* give snubs when he wants to, I can assure you.”

“Has anything happened lately?”

“Well, the telephone has rung our call at midnight and three o’clock every night for a week. And I believe Alec found another curse ... written in blood ... written backward so that it could be read only in the mirror. 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 ... it was she who found it. I wanted to show it to you ... and Dr. Blythe. Yes, that is 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.’ Mmm ... the ghost has a poor taste in stationery,” said Curtis, looking at the blue-lined sheet of paper on which the words were scribbled.

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“Yes ... rather. You notice the spelling of ‘wrecked.’ But even so the whole composition seems to me beyond Jock ... or even Julia. So far I agree with Mr. Sheldon and Dr. Blythe. 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 humour of a jug of molasses spilled all over the parlour carpet. It cost poor Lucia a hard day’s work to get it cleaned up. Of course that might have been Julia. She really hates poor Lucia because she is mistress here.”

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

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

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

“In a gossipy neighbourhood like Mowbray Narrows that proves nothing. 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. They were never parted for a minute. When I told Dr. Blythe that he merely shrugged his shoulders.”

“You quote Dr. Blythe very often. What about Mrs. Blythe?”

“The doctor often comes here to talk with Alec. I don’t know Mrs. Blythe so well. Some people don’t like her ... but from the little I’ve seen of her I should judge her a very charming woman.”

“Is it true that the voices of ... supposedly 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.”

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“Nevertheless, I must learn all about this if I am to be of any help in solving the mystery.”

“Well, 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 was really asleep. Of course it couldn’t have really been his voice ... someone was imitating him. 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.”

“Which proves that there is more than one person concerned in this.”

“So I’ve often said ... but ... well, never mind, let it go. The 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 this is intolerable ... this persecution. Someone must hate your family very bitterly.”

“In Mowbray Narrows? Oh, no. And we are all used to it, more or less. At least, Lucia and Alec are. Or seem to be. I didn’t mind so much until the binder house was burned last fall. I admit that got me down. 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 ... though she hates to do it. 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 around the house.”

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

“Oh, I don’t believe Min or Maggie really had their doors locked when the things happened to them. Of course, they thought they had. But they must have forgotten for once. At any rate I make sure mine is always locked.”

“I don’t think that is wise, Miss Harper, I really don’t.”

“Oh, the door is old and thin and could easily be broken in if there was any serious need for it. Well, we won’t talk any more about it just now. But I want you to keep your eyes open ... metaphorically ... as far as everybody is concerned ... everybody ... and we’ll see what we can do together. And you’ll let me help you in the church work as much as I can, won’t you? Mr. Sheldon did ... though I never thought he really wanted me to.”

“I will be very glad to have your help and counsel, Miss Harper. And I assure you Mr. Sheldon spoke to me most highly of your influence and work.”

“Well, I want to do what I can while I’m here. Some of these days I’ll just go out ... poof! ... 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 wasn’t,” protested Curtis, perhaps not altogether truthfully. “But surely a doctor ...”

“Dr. Blythe says there is nothing really wrong with my heart except nerves and other doctors say different things. I *know*. And 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. It seems to me that I’ve been cheated. Well, my lot is easier than that of hundreds of others after all.”

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

“Absolutely. Uncle Winthrop didn’t leave it to Dr. Blythe’s opinion, you know. He had a dozen specialists here. The last was Dr. Clifford of Halifax ... you know him? When he could do me no good I simply told Uncle Winthrop I would have no more doctors. I would not have them spending money on me when they could not afford it and might just as well burn it. So you see Dr. Blythe’s opinion was fully justified in this instance at least.”

“But new things are being discovered every day ...”

“Nothing that would help me. Oh, I’m not so badly off as hundreds of others. Everyone is so good to me ... and I flatter myself I am not altogether useless. It’s only once a week or so that I suffer much. So we’ll let it go at that, Mr. Burns. I’m more interested in the church work and your success here. I want you to get along well.”

“So do I,” laughed Curtis ... although he did not feel like laughing.

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

“Saints generally are,” said Curtis.

“Poor old man, he hated to retire but it was really time. The Conference never knows what to do with old men. 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 ... said he wasn’t orthodox. But that all passed. Will you draw up my blind and lower my light, please? Thank you. What a majestic sweep of wind there is in the trees tonight! And no moonlight. I don’t like

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moonlight. It always reminds me of things I want to forget. Good-night. Don't dream or see any 'ha'nts.'"

Curtis neither dreamed nor saw "ha'nts," though he lay awake for a long time, thinking of the tragedy that had met him on the very threshold of his pastorate in Mowbray Narrows ... quiet Mowbray Narrows with its seemingly commonplace inhabitants.

He was a little disappointed that he did not see or hear anything uncommon. 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 people and organizing his church work ... which old Mr. Sheldon had undoubtedly allowed to lapse. 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 Deacon 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.

"And even Mr. Sheldon didn't really approve of it," he exclaimed bitterly.

"Old people don't usually take to new ideas," she said mildly, "and you mustn't mind Mr. Kirk. He was born a nin-compoop, you know. Susan Baker would tell you that. And 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. You make me feel ashamed of myself."

"I have learned tolerance in a hard school. I wasn't always tolerant. But Deacon Kirk was funny ... I wish you could have heard him."

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Her mimicry of the deacon sent Curtis into howls of laughter. Alice smiled over her success. Curtis had got into the habit of talking over all his problems with her. Some people said Mr. Sheldon didn't like it. 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 the house and church and community. It hurt her to be shut out of anything. Curtis thought that was probably one reason she did not seem to care much for Dr. Blythe or his wife, whom everybody else in Glen St. Mary and Mowbray Narrows seemed to love.

Curtis told her all his comings and goings, finding her oddly jealous about his little secrets. She must even know what he had to eat when he went out to supper. And she was avid about the details of all his 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 and found his boarding house most agreeable. Long Alec was an intelligent, well-read fellow. Dr. Blythe dropped in occasionally, and they had long, interesting conversations. When Mrs. Richards died in the hospital it was taken for granted that Curtis should go on boarding at the Field place as long as he wanted to. Mowbray Narrows people seemed 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, humorous sayings. He only

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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 blush roses one day. Mr. Sheldon was there, too, having just returned from a visit to some friends in Montreal. He had been away ever since the squabble over the organization of the Boy Scouts.

Lucia had evidently been crying. And Lucia was not a girl who cried easily or readily. Curtis was suddenly seized with a desire to draw her head down on his shoulder and comfort her. Anyone could have read the desire in his face.

He was even following her from the room when a spasm of pain twisted Alice's face and she gave a gasping cry.

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

Mr. Sheldon decamped quickly. 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, though even old Mr. Sheldon was shaking his head and saying it wouldn't do ... no, it wouldn't do at all.

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 spruces in a corner, had been cut down. It was Lucia's favourite tree ... she had spoken

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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. “Mr. Sheldon remarked on its beauty when he called for a moment on his way to the station.”

Curtis stared.

“Didn’t you cut it down ... or order it cut? I’ve heard you say the trees were growing too thick around the house.”

“I wouldn’t be likely to cut down a white birch. It was like this when we got up this morning.”

“Then ... who cut it down?”

“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 veranda. He remembered hearing her ask Jock the preceding 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 but no bigger thing. 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 ...

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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. Opposite the stair was the door of Alice's room. He did not listen there. 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 seemed accounted for except Julia ... and Lucia. He went back to his own room, stood for a moment 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 moment he went down before his horror. Then he set his teeth, sprang out of bed and flung open the door.

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

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“I wonder if Dr. Blythe ever heard that laugh,” he thought, as he reluctantly returned to bed.

He did not sleep the remainder of the night. Lucia looked worried at the breakfast table.

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

“Rather,” said Curtis. “I spent considerable time prowling about your house and eavesdropping shamelessly ... all to no effect. I was not a bit the wiser.”

Lucia produced the forlorn little spectre of a smile.

“If prowling and eavesdropping could have solved our problem it would have been solved long ago. Alec and I have given up taking any notice of the ... 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?” asked Curtis.

He could not help noticing that 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. Once I could talk to Dr. or Mrs. Gilbert Blythe about it ... but now I can't even bear to discuss it with them. You've met them, of course ... they are lovely people, aren't they?”

“I like Mrs. Blythe very much ... but the doctor seems a bit sarcastic ...”

“Only when you try to talk about our ... our 'ghost' with him. For some reason I have never been able to understand he doesn't believe in ... it ... at all. Oh, of course he 'investigated' ...”

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but so many people have done that. And nobody ever finds out anything.”

“I understand,” said Curtis, who understood nothing at all about it. “But I’m going to nab your ‘ghost,’ Miss Field. This thing has got to be cleared up. It is intolerable in this country ... and this century. 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. “Alec would never hear of selling. Besides, who would buy it? And we love this old place.”

“Is it true,” asked Curtis hesitatingly ... “and forgive me if I ask a question I shouldn’t. Believe me, it is not out of idle curiosity. Is it true that Miss Pollock won’t marry your brother because of this?”

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.

“Don’t answer if you think me impertinent,” said Curtis apologetically.

“If it is ... and I do not know anything about Miss Pollock’s motives ... I don’t think Alec is to be pitied on that score. The Pollocks are nobodies. One of Edna’s uncles died in jail.”

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

During the weeks that followed Curtis Burns sometimes thought he would go crazy. Sometimes he thought they were all crazy together. Dr. Blythe was away at some medical congress and Mr. Sheldon was laid up with bronchitis ... though his nurse had been heard to say that it was more imagination with him than anything else. But Emma Mowbray was noted for her impatience. She said he would not stay in bed and that was the main cause of his illness.

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Curtis prowled ... he investigated ... he passed sleepless hours on guard ... he spent whole nights in the garret ... and he got nowhere. He knew, too, that his people were growing critical ... he should change his boarding place, they said, or move into the parsonage.

Things happened almost continually ... ridiculous and horrible things all jumbled up together. Twelve dozen eggs packed for market were found broken all over the kitchen floor. Lucia's new sheer dress was found ruined in the closet of the guest room. She took it coolly ... she had never liked the dress, it seemed. The violin played and the cradle rocked. And at times the house seemed possessed by diabolical laughter. Several times all the furniture in the lower rooms was found piled in the middle of the floor ... involving a day's work of restoration for Lucia, for Julia refused to have anything to do with "spook doings." Outer doors, locked at night, were found wide open in the morning, although Long Alec slept with the keys under his pillow. The spigot was pulled out of the churn in the dairy and a week's cream spilled on the floor. The guest room bed was tossed and tumbled 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 Charlottetown ... was found hung on the back veranda, its poor little body dangling limply from the fretwork.

"I knew this would happen when you gave it to me," said Lucia bitterly. "Four years ago Mrs. Blythe gave me a lovely pup. It was strangled. I've never dared to have a pet since. Everything I love dies or is destroyed. My white calf ... my dog ... my birch tree ... and now my kitten."

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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 too many 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, who had recovered from his illness, to watch with him. Nothing at all happened those nights ... except that a large key, very much resembling Long Alec's kitchen key, fell out of the old man's pocket once. Mr. Sheldon had picked it up rather hurriedly and said it was the old key of the parsonage door. He asked Dr. Blythe, who had returned, to share a vigil, but the doctor bluntly refused. The spooks, he said, were too clever for him.

Finally 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.

"No more ghosting for me, preacher. Don't tell *me* ... I know old Winthrop's voice well enough ... I worked here for three years. That's him, as sure as sin. Preacher, you'd better get out of this house as soon as you can if you have to live in a tent. Believe me, it ain't healthy."

Henry Kildare's reappearance in Mowbray Narrows had created quite a sensation. He was said to have made a fortune lumbering in British Columbia and announced that he could live on millionaire row for the rest of his life. He certainly threw money about freely enough. He stayed with a cousin but spent a good deal of 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 Coast. To her, imprisoned

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within 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 spend another night in the house.

“Preacher, this place is full of devils ... not a doubt of it. That Anna Marsh doesn’t stay in her proper grave. Dr. Blythe can laugh all he likes ... but she never *would* behave herself ... and she drags old Winthrop out with her. Alec’d better give the place away if anyone would take it. I know I wouldn’t. 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. 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, that 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 that the occurrences were not to be talked of outside, except with Dr. Blythe or Mr. Sheldon. He could never get any satisfaction out of the former and little out of Mr. Sheldon, who spent a good deal of his time with his books in the parsonage, sometimes reading there till late at night. But all his talks and guesses and researches left him exactly where he was at first ... except that he decided that Mr. Sheldon, recalling Epworth Rectory, *did* believe in the ghosts and that Dr. Blythe, for some undiscoverable reason, seemed to look upon the whole thing as a sort of joke ... heaven knew why.

Curtis developed insomnia and couldn’t sleep even when the house was quiet. He lost his keen interest in his work ... he was under an obsession. Both Dr. Blythe and Mr. Sheldon

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noticed it and advised him to find another boarding house. By this time Curtis knew he could not do this. For by now he knew he loved Lucia.

He 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 lamp. 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. And then 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 lamp 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! Who is it that hates me so? Don’t tell me a ghost would do anything like this!”

She broke away from Curtis’ outstretched hand and ran upstairs still sobbing. Curtis stood rather dazedly in the hall.

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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 the 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. The fresh, sweet wind of night was blowing through her window and a faint light was breaking behind the church.

"I've had a rather bad night," said Alice. "But it has been quiet, hasn't it? Except for the door, of course."

"Quiet enough," said Curtis grimly. "Our ghost has amused himself 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."

"It couldn't be Julia. She went home for the night. But I'm going to make one last effort. You said once, I remember, that an idea had occurred to you. What was the idea?"

Alice made a restless gesture with her hands.

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

"It ... it is not Long Alec?"

"Long Alec? Absurd."

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 beginnings of sunrise. "Twice two are four ... and I'm going to marry Lucia."

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

“Why? Don’t you ... can’t you care for me? I am sure I could make you happy.”

Lucia looked at him with a deepening colour.

“I could ... yes, I could. I owe it to you to tell you that. And there is no use denying it ... one should never deny the truth. But as things are I cannot marry ... you must see that for yourself. I cannot leave Alec and Alice.”

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

Which was, perhaps, not the most tactful thing in the world for a wooer to say!

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

It was useless to plead or argue, although Curtis did both. Lucia was a Field, Mrs. Blythe told him, when he carried his woes to her.

“And to think ... if it were not for me,” said Alice bitterly.

“It isn’t only you ... I have told you how glad I would be to have you with us. No, it is just as much Alec ... and those infernal spooks.”

“S-sh ... don’t let Deacon Kirk ... or Mr. Sheldon hear you,” said Alice whimsically. “They would both think ‘infernal’ a most improper word for a minister to use outside of the pulpit. I’m sorry, Mr. Burns ... sorry for you and sorrier for Lucia. I’m afraid she won’t change her mind. We Fields do not, when we have once made it up. Your only hope is to run the ghost to earth.”

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Nobody, it seemed, could do that. Curtis bitterly owned himself defeated. Two weeks of moonlit and peaceful nights followed. Mr. Sheldon was again away. When the dark nights returned the manifestations began anew.

This time Curtis seemed to have become the special object of the “ha’nt’s” hatred. Repeatedly he found his sheets wet or well sanded when he got into bed at night. Twice on going to don his ministerial suit on Sunday mornings he found all the buttons cut off. And the special anniversary sermon 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,” advised Alice. “That is unselfish advice if ever any was given, for I shall miss you more than words can say. But you must. Mr. Sheldon told me so and I have heard that Dr. Blythe says it is your only chance. 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 have begun on you. Look how they have persecuted Lucia for years.”

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

“I believe you are as obstinate as the Fields themselves,” said Alice, with a faint smile. “What good can you do? I really think you’d have a better chance with Lucia if you did go away. She would find out what you really meant to her then ... if you mean anything.”

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

“Oh, I don’t know. I’ve heard Mrs. Blythe say ...”

“I wish Mrs. Blythe would mind her own business,” said Curtis angrily.

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“Well, she won’t ... it isn’t in her. But I mustn’t talk scandal. I seem to be the only person in Mowbray Narrows or Glen St. Mary who doesn’t like Mrs. Blythe ... or any of the Ingleside people. Perhaps I’ve always heard them praised too highly. That sometimes has the effect of turning you against people, don’t you think, Mr. Burns?”

“Yes, very often. But as for Lucia ...”

“Oh, I know you care a great deal for her. But Mr. Burns, don’t expect Lucia to love you as you love her. The Fields don’t. They are rather cool-blooded, you know. Mrs. Blythe is perfectly right there. And I’ve heard Dr. Blythe said Long Alec had really no more feeling than one of his turnips. Perhaps he never said it ... you know what gossip is, as I’ve said before. Look at Alec ... he’s fond of Edna Pollock ... he’d like to marry her ... but he doesn’t lose sleep or appetite over it.”

“Wise man!”

“Now you sound like Dr. Blythe. But Lucia is like that, too. She’d make a dear little wife for you ... Mrs. Blythe has been saying that ever since you came here, I’m told ... she’d be faithful and devoted ... who knows that better than I? ... but she won’t break her heart over it if she can’t marry you.”

Curtis scowled.

“You don’t like to hear that ... you want to be loved more romantically and passionately. But it’s true. Why, they tell me even Dr. Blythe was a second choice. But they are said to be very happy, though once in a while ... but I’m verging on gossip again. But what I’ve said about the Fields is true. I shouldn’t have said it ... they’ve been kindness itself to me. But I know I can trust you, Mr. Curtis.”

There were times when Curtis was compelled to think that Alice was right in her summing up of Lucia. To his ardent

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nature Lucia did seem too composed and resigned. But the thought of giving her up was torture.

“She’s like a little red rose just out of reach ... I *must* reach her,” he thought.

He could not bear the thought of seeking another boarding place, although both old Mr. Sheldon and Dr. Blythe strongly advised it. He would see her so seldom then for he knew she would elude his visits. Gossip was already far too busy with their names and Mr. Sheldon was always hinting disapprobation. Curtis ignored his hints and grew 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 of his circuit, 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 all 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 ... “This is killing you, Mr. Burns,” Dr. Blythe had told him not so long ago. Everybody seemed in a plot to get him away from the old Field place. Yet he hated to admit defeat. Lucia didn’t care for him ... in spite of Mrs. Blythe’s assurance ... 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 suspected they wished him to find another domicile.

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

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Well, if she wanted to get rid of him! Curtis was petulant just then. Dr. Blythe had said to him a few days before, "Just pick her up and carry her off. Everything will come right then."

As if the doctor knew anything of the real situation! He did not even sympathize with Alice.

He, Curtis, was a failure in everything ... his sermons were beginning to be flat ... Mr. Sheldon had hinted that and he knew it himself ... he was losing interest in his work. Dr. Blythe had told him so bluntly ... he wished he had never come to Mowbray Narrows.

He leaned out of his window to inhale the scented summer air. The night was rather ghostly. The trees about the farmyard could assume weird, uncertain shapes in such clouded moonlight. Cool, elusive night smells came up from the garden. A car went by ... the Ingleside car ... the doctor had evidently been summoned out on a night call. What a life a doctor's was! Worse than a minister's. Never sure of a decent night's sleep. Yet Dr. Blythe seemed a happy man and his wife was worshipped in Glen St. Mary. They often came to the Mowbray Narrows church, probably out of their friendship for Curtis, as they were ardent Presbyterians.

Curtis felt soothed ... cheered. After all, there must be some way out. In spite of the Epworth Rectory, Curtis had no belief in such manifestations of the supernatural. He was young ... the world was good, just because Lucia and Alice were in it. He wouldn't give up yet awhile. The "ha'nt" would make a mistake sometime and be caught.

The moon suddenly broke out between the parting clouds. Curtis found himself looking through the opposite dormer window into the guest room, the blind of which happened to be up. The room was quite clear to him in the sudden

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radiance and in the mirror on the wall near the window Curtis saw a face looking at him ... sharply outlined against the darkness which surrounded it. He saw it only for a moment before the clouds swallowed up the moon but he recognized it. The face was the face of Lucia!

He thought nothing of it then. Doubtless she had heard some noise and had gone to the guest room to investigate.

But when at breakfast the next morning he asked her what had disturbed her she met his gaze with a cool blankness.

"I was not disturbed last night," she said.

"When you went to the guest room window," he explained.

"I wasn't near the guest room last night," she said coolly. "I went to bed very early ... I was very tired ... it was one of Alice's bad days, you know ... 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 did not soften it. He had seen her. True, it was but for a moment, in a moonlit mirror, but he knew he was not mistaken. It was Lucia's face ... and she had lied to him! True, it was none of his business why she was there ... but a lie was a lie. Did she walk in her sleep? No, he would have been sure to have been told if she did. There was nothing he had not been told about the Fields, true and untrue, he thought.

Curtis decided to leave Long Alec's. He would board at the station which would be very inconvenient but go he must. He was sick at heart. He no longer wanted to find out who the Field ghost was. He was afraid to find out ... he was afraid he knew, although motive and means were still foggy.

Lucia turned a little pale when he told her but said nothing. Long Alec, in his usual easygoing fashion, agreed that it would

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be best. He stared a little when Curtis bluntly asked him if his sister had ever been a sleepwalker.

“No,” he said, a trifle stiffly. “We’ve had a lot of things said about us, but never that, as far as I know.”

Alice approved with tear-filled eyes.

“Of course you must go,” she agreed. “The situation here is impossible for you. I hear that Dr. Blythe says it will drive you out of your mind. For once I agree with him. But oh, what will I do? There’s a selfish question for you.”

“I’ll come to see you often, my dear.”

“It won’t be the same. You don’t know what you have 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.”

“I’m glad to have you call me Curtis.”

“You are a dear boy. I ought to be glad you are going. This accursed house is no place for you. When do you go?”

“In a week ... after I come back from District Meeting.”

Curtis missed his regular train after the meeting ... missed it hunting for a book in the bookstore Alice wanted to see. He fell in with Dr. Blythe who, it happened, had the book, and promised to lend it to Miss Harper.

“I hear you are changing your boarding place,” he said. “A wise move, in my opinion.”

“I leave it with its mystery still unsolved,” said Curtis bitterly.

Dr. Blythe smiled ... that smile that Curtis had never liked.

“Saints are often too wise for us common folk,” he said.

“But I think it will be solved some day.”

Curtis came back on the owl train that dumped him off at Glen St. Mary at one o’clock. It did not stop as a rule but Curtis knew the conductor, who was an obliging man.

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Henry Kildare got off, too. He had expected to go on to Lowbridge, not having the advantage of a pull with the conductor.

“What a thing it is to be a minister!” he said, laughing. “Well, it is only three miles to Cousin Ellen’s. I can hoof it easily,” he said as they left the platform.

“Might as well come along 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 unending stream of conversation ... if conversation it could be called. Henry liked to hear himself talk.

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. “There ain’t any sense in hanging around Mowbray Narrows 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’ve been a mighty good friend to Alice.”

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

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“Sure thing. Never was anyone else in my life ... well, not really. Preacher, I’ve always worshipped the ground she walked on. Years ago, when I was working for old Winthrop Field, I was crazy mad about her. She never knew it. I 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 really interested in anybody else. When I made my pile I says to myself, ‘Now I’m going straight back to P.E. Island and if Alice Harper isn’t married yet I’ll see if she’ll have me.’ You see, I’d never heard from Mowbray Narrows for years ... never heard of Alice’s accident. I thought it likely she’d be married but there was a chance. 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 anybody else ... though there’s a girl at the Glen ... but never mind about that. Since I can’t get Alice I don’t want to marry anyone else ... though Mrs. Blythe says ... but never mind that. And me wanting to marry, with lots of cash to give my woman the dandiest house at the Coast. Deuced hard luck, ain’t it? Excuse me. I always forget I’m talking to a minister when I’m with you. Never forgot it with old Mr. Sheldon. But then he is a saint.”

Curtis agreed that it was hard luck. 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.

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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, maybe 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 and Henry bounded up the steps ... clutched the dress ... flung open the door ... confronted the woman inside.

“Good God!” cried Henry.

“You! You!” said Curtis in a terrible voice. “You!”

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

“You dog!” she hissed venomously.

“It’s been you ...” gasped Curtis. “*You* all the time ... you ... you devil ... you ...”

“Easy on, preacher.” Henry Kildare closed the door softly. “Remember you’re speaking to a lady ...”

“A ...”

“A lady,” repeated Henry firmly. “Don’t let us have too much of a fuss. We don’t want to disturb the rest of the

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folks. Let's go in the parlour here and talk this matter 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 with his hand on Alice's arm and closed the door.

Alice confronted them defiantly. Amid all Curtis' bewilderment one idea came out clearly in his confusion of thought.

How much Alice looked like Lucia! In daylight the difference of colouring 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."

A bit of a shock!

"Sit down there," said Henry kindly. "Alice, you take the rocking chair."

Both obeyed. Kildare seemed suddenly changed into a quiet, powerful fellow whom it would be well to obey.

"Here, Alice, my dear." He wheeled a rocking chair out from the corner and put her gently into it.

She sat gazing at the both of them, a beautiful woman in the kind moonlight, the pale blue silk of her wrapper falling about her slender form in graceful folds.

Curtis wished he might wake up. This was the worst nightmare he had ever had ... it *must* be a nightmare. Nothing like this could be true.

Henry seated himself calmly on the sofa and leaned forward.

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“Now, Alice, my dear, tell us all about it. You have to, you know. Then we’ll see what can be done. The game’s up, you know. You can’t expect us to keep this a secret.”

“Oh, I know. But I’ve had five glorious years. Nothing can rob me of that. 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 lovesick boy there! All but the Blythes. I knew they had suspicions but they couldn’t prove them ... they didn’t even dare voice them.”

“Yes, it must have been fun,” agreed Henry. “But why, Alice, my dear?”

“I was sick of being patronized and snubbed and condescended to,” said Alice bitterly. “That is what my youth was. You know that well enough, Henry Kildare.”

“Yes, I had a good idea of it,” agreed Henry.

“I was just the poor relation,” said Alice. “Why, when they had company I often had to wait and eat afterwards.”

“Only when the table wasn’t big enough,” said Henry.

“No! It was because I wasn’t thought good enough to talk to their company! I was only good enough to lay the table and cook the food. I hated every one of them ... but Lucia most of all.”

“Come, come, now, I used to think Lucia was uncommon nice to you.”

“Like a man! *She* was the 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.”

“Come, come, now, didn’t you imagine a good deal of that?” asked Henry mildly.

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“No, I did not! When she was invited to Ingleside, was I ever asked, too?”

“But people all thought you hated them.”

“I did, too. And Lucia was sent away to school. No one ever thought of educating me. Yet I was far cleverer than she was.”

“Clever, yes,” agreed Henry, with a curious emphasis. “But the teachers always said you wouldn’t try to learn.”

Curtis felt that he should not let Alice say such things of Lucia but a temporary paralysis seemed to have descended upon him. It *was* a dream ... a nightmare ... one couldn’t ...

“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. He was the same with everybody. He didn’t mean much by it. But I did think the old chap 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.”

“Yes ... but you had sassed her.”

“I hated her after that,” said Alice, ignoring his words. “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.’”

“I heard her say the same thing to Nan Blythe.”

“Whose fault was it that I was not married?” said Alice, who seemed determined not to hear anything Henry said.

“You seemed to hate going about with other young people,” he protested.

“I wasn’t as well dressed as they were. I knew they looked down on me for it.”

“Nonsense! That was just your imagination.”

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“Laura Gregor taunted me once with living on charity,” retorted Alice, her voice shaking with passion. “If I had been dressed like Lucia Roy Major would have noticed me.”

“I remember the Carman girls had old gingham dresses on that night,” reflected Henry.

“I was shabby ... dowdy ... he didn’t want to be seen with me. I ... I loved him ... I would have done anything to win him.”

“I remember how jealous I was of him,” said Henry reflectively. “And there wasn’t any real need. He was crazy mad about Amy Carr ... and a dozen other girls afterwards. What fools young people can be!”

Alice swooned as if she had not heard him.

“When Marian Lister told me that she and Roy were going to be married and asked me to be her bridesmaid I could have killed her. She did it on purpose to hurt me.”

“Nonsense again. She had no other girl friends. And if you felt like that why did you consent?”

“Because I was determined 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.”

“You poor kid,” said Henry pityingly. Curtis felt only sickening aversion.

“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 I could. But I wouldn’t. An idea had come to me. I had found a way to punish ... and rule them. Oh, how I laughed when I thought of it!”

Alice laughed again. Curtis remembered that he had never heard her laugh before. There was something unpleasant in it which reminded him of the haunted nights. And yet it vaguely resembled Lucia’s laughter. The thought was hateful to him.

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“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 was so easy to fool supposedly intelligent and educated 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 on his despised niece at last ... as much as would have sufficed to send me to Queen’s. They were all easy to hoodwink except Dr. Blythe. I always felt that he ... a plain country doctor in consultation with men from Montreal and New York ... was vaguely suspicious. He always has been. So I said 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.”

“You were of importance to me,” said Henry.

“Was I really? You hid it well.”

“I suppose you would never have thought of a hired boy presuming to fall in love with a Field!”

“I wish Uncle Winthrop had known. He would have taken the hide off you.”

“Oh, no, he wouldn’t. I could fight then as well as now. But of course he would have sent me away. And I couldn’t bear the thought of being parted from you.”

“Really, I was of more importance than I knew,” said Alice sarcastically. “It was rather a pity you didn’t tell me. I might have ... recovered ... and married you to humiliate them. Well, at any rate, 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.”

Curtis made a quick movement but Henry put out a restraining hand. Alice shot a malicious glance at him.

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“People said my patience was angelic. They began to call me the angel of Mowbray Narrows. I never heard that Dr. Blythe did so, though. 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.”

“Why should you have cared if he did?”

“Why, it wouldn’t have suited me at all. Lucia would be free to go then ... and Edna Pollock would not have waited on me properly. Besides, a Pollock was not good enough for a Field. I have my share of the family pride, after all, you see, my dear Mr. Burns. Then the idea of playing spook came to me.”

“Ah, now we’re coming to the interesting part,” said Henry. “How in the name of the Old Nick did you manage those stunts, locked in your room?”

“There is a closet in my room ... and its back wall is not plastered. It is 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 ... I liked to know something nobody else of all the wise Fields knew.”

“Fancy, now,” said Henry, as if he rather admired her cleverness in keeping a secret.

“It was very easy to slip in and out through that space. Nobody ever suspected me with my locked door.”

Again Curtis felt a sickening sensation. How easily they had all been fooled!

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“But how could you get out of the garret?” asked Henry.
“There is only one way up and down.”

“Haven’t I told you people are easy to fool? Yes, even the astute Dr. Blythe.”

“Let’s leave Dr. Blythe out of it. Just answer my questions.”

“There’s a big chest up there supposed to be packed full of quilts. Old Grandmother Field left them to me ... so nobody ever disturbed them. But it isn’t really full. There is quite a space between the quilts and the back of the chest. I used to slip in there. Nobody could ever get up the garret stairs without my hearing them. Two of the steps creaked.”

“Do they do that yet? I remember they did in my time. I had to sleep up there, you remember.”

“I never stepped on those creaky steps. When I heard anyone coming I slipped into the chest, shut the lid, and pulled one of those thick woollen quilts over my head. Dozens of people lifted the lid of that chest ... saw it apparently full of woollen quilts ... and shut the lid again. Dr. Blythe did it several times ... dear Mr. Burns here did it twice, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” said Curtis miserably.

“And I was in it laughing at him! Oh, they were all such fools! But I was clever ... you can’t deny that.”

“A durn sight too clever,” said Henry.

“And I was a good actress. When I was a girl my ambition was to go on the stage. I could have managed it somehow. But you know what the idea of the stage was to a good Methodist. Perhaps it still is. I suppose Mr. Burns could tell you ... though he has almost lost the power of speech, it seems.”

“I understand how old Winthrop Field would look at it,” said Henry. “But you always were a good actress.”

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“Ah, you admit that. And I could have been a great one. Don’t you admit that, Mr. Burns? But how contemptuous everyone was! ‘Do you suppose you could act, girl?’ a school-teacher jeered at me once. I wonder what he would think now. It *was* amusing to terrify people with an imitation of Uncle Winthrop’s laugh. I could mimic it and his voice to the life ... his and Anna Marsh’s ... anybody’s.”

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

“I never touched the cradle ... even when it was there. I made a rocking noise by wriggling a loose board in the floor. I could easily manipulate it without getting out of the chest.”

“But you must have taken a lot of chances.”

“Of course I did. That was part of the fun. Dozens of times I was almost caught ... especially the nights when Dr. Blythe watched. He was the only one I really feared. But even he wasn’t a match for me. 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 banister. It was quicker and quieter.”

“I remember seeing you do that when you were a kid,” mused Henry. “You used to go like greased lightning. But old Winthrop didn’t think it ladylike, did he?”

“Lucia would never have done such a thing,” sneered Alice. “I never made any noise below stairs till I was through for the night,” continued Alice, who was plainly enjoying her confession. What fun it was to shock Curtis Burns! It seemed to surprise her that Henry Kildare took it all so coolly.

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“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.”

“What about the violin? How did you get it without Lucia’s knowing?”

“Oh, it wasn’t Lucia’s. Don’t you remember that old fiddle of yours you left here when you went away?”

“By the nine gods I’d forgotten all about that!”

“I hid it behind the closet boards. When people began to suspect Lucia ... or rather hint things ... I raved so vehemently that they thought I protested too much. And yet every word I said was true.”

Alice laughed again.

“What about those bloody footprints and the curses?” demanded Henry. Curtis wished he would stop asking questions and go away.

“Oh, the Fields kept so many hens they never counted them. The curses cost me some pains of composition. But I found some very effective ones in the Bible. ‘There shall not be an old man in thine house.’ Can you tell me where that is found, Mr. Burns? I believe I really know my Bible better than you do. That especial curse made Alec think he was going to die young. Some of the Fields have always been a little superstitious.”

“Was it you cut Maggie Eldon’s hair?”

“Of course. For once she forgot to lock her door. So excited over George MacPherson driving her home from class meeting, I suppose. I wanted Julia back. She did not keep the late hours Maggie did.”

“And to think you were never caught!” marvelled Henry ... still admiringly.

“One night I thought I was caught at last,” said Alice, with another malicious glance at the stunned Curtis. “I

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thought you saw the reflection of my face in the guest room window.”

Curtis made no reply.

“Of course my greatest amusement was to torment Lucia,” said Alice. “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, however.

“I was really glad when you came here to board. I liked a young minister. Old Mr. Sheldon bored me to tears. It seemed as if the Conference always sent us old ministers. 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.”

“Is a woman ever too old to be jealous?” murmured Henry reflectively.

“Never,” said Alice decisively. “Nor a man either. But when she died and 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.”

Curtis did flinch at this. It was so disgustingly true.

“I decided that I would keep quiet for a while so that you would not become disgusted and leave us. I never supposed you would fall in love with Lucia. Men, as a rule, never cared for her. And gossip engaged you to somebody else. It was very amusing to talk seriously to you about our ghosts.”

Her laughter made Curtis flinch again. The power of feeling was returning to him.

“And then you went and spoiled everything by going and falling in love with my lady cousin ... who had set her cap for you ever since you came here. Oh, yes, she did ...” as an impatient sound came from Henry. “So I decided you must

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go. I knew Lucia was secretly crazy about you ... though, like all the Fields, she can hide her feelings very successfully when she wants to.”

“Miss Field cares nothing for me,” cried Curtis, stung into speech.

“Oh, yes, she does. And I was afraid her feelings would win out at last. 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 the persistent Henry.

“Oh, that! 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 nobody takes any account of it in a house that isn’t supposed to be haunted. But it helped matters on nicely.”

“And ... and ... the money ...” hesitated Henry.

“I didn’t take it either. What good would it have been to me? ... and the Fields are not thieves. Without a doubt some of the Marsh gang did it ... not Julia perhaps. I don’t think she is a thief. But she has a brother.”

“The ... the binder house?”

“I didn’t set fire to it, you goose. Do you think I’d have no more sense than to risk burning my own home down? Most 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* kind of stuck in my crop. Now I see my way. And you really can walk as well as anyone?”

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“Of course I can. I’ve had enough exercise at nights to keep well in practice in walking. Well, what are you going to do, gentlemen, my judges?”

“I guess we don’t set up as judges,” said Henry. “What do you say, preacher?”

“I ... I have nothing to do with the matter,” stammered Curtis.

“You’ll tell silly Alec and little black Lucia anyway, I suppose, and have me turned out on the road.”

“You know they wouldn’t do that.”

“Do you suppose I’d live here now, even if they’d let me?” flashed Alice. “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. Do you know what I’m going to do?”

“No,” said Alice indifferently.

“I’m going to marry you and take you away. That’s what I came home to do.”

Alice sat up in amazement and even Curtis was stirred out of his stupor.

“Do you ... mean that?” said Alice slowly.

“I do. When I came home I supposed I couldn’t since you were bedrid. But since you ain’t, what’s to hinder?”

“But ... how can you want me now?” said Alice, with a sparkle rising in her eyes.

“I don’t know, but I do ... by the nine gods I do,” said Henry emphatically. “I don’t care what you’ve done. Even if you’d taken the money and burned the binder house I’d have wanted you ... though it *would* have made a difference. You’re the girl I’ve wanted all my life and 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.”

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“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 train when we get there. We’ll go into Charlottetown and be married as soon as I can get the licence. Some of the town preachers will do it. I reckon you ain’t hankering for the job, preacher?”

“No ... no,” said Curtis with a shudder. Alice looked at him with contempt.

“And you’ll tell the folks here what is necessary?”

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

Henry bent forward and tapped Alice gently on the shoulder.

“Well, that’s settled. I’ll house and dress you like a queen ... but listen, my girl, listen.”

“Now for the conditions,” said Alice.

“The conditions don’t amount to much. It’s just that there’s to be no more tricks ... no tricks with Henry Kildare. Understand?”

“I ... understand,” said Alice.

“Go upstairs and get ready.”

Alice looked down at her wrapper.

“Got anything to wear besides that?”

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

“They’re horribly out of style but ...”

“That don’t matter. We can get something as soon as the stores open.”

Alice rose and left the room.

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

“Nothing,” said Curtis.

Henry nodded.

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“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. But gosh, wasn’t she clever! Mowbray Narrows will have something to talk about for years. I knew Dr. Blythe thought there was something screwy about it all but even he didn’t suspect the whole truth.”

Alice came down. Her suit fitted her as if made yesterday, her face was flushed with triumph.

Curtis did not speak a word when she passed him in the hall.

“Hate me ... despise me,” she said passionately. “I don’t mind your hate ... but I won’t have your tolerance. And when you marry Lucia remember there is one person in the world who hopes you’ll rue it to your dying day. Lucia isn’t the paragon you imagine her by any means. She’ll rule you ... you’ll always dance to her piping. Good-bye, my dear Mr. Curtis Burns. It may be some comfort to you to know that you have solved the Field mystery after all, though it was only by accident.”

“Come on,” said Henry. “We haven’t too much time as it is. And from this day, Alice Harper, I forbid you to mention this matter to me or anyone. It’s dead ... and we’ll bury it. In a few years it will all be forgotten. And don’t let me hear any sneers at Mr. Burns. He’s one of the best. Good-bye, preacher. It was a lucky chance we missed that train. And don’t be too hard in your judgments of folks you don’t know much about.”

Mr. Sheldon came up to the old Field place the next night, having heard the incredible rumour that flew like a flame through Mowbray Narrows and Glen St. Mary.

Dr. Blythe had been the one to tell him and had said,

“I always thought she had something to do with the goings-on but I confess my imagination didn’t stretch so

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far. I never believed she was quite so helpless as she pretended but I admit I thought she was in league with Jock or Julia.”

“I never could endure her,” said Anne Blythe emphatically. “There was something in her eyes ... and I knew she hated Lucia.”

“These women!” said the doctor, shaking his head.

Mr. Sheldon listened to Curtis’ story and shook his silvery head, too.

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

“I think we all feel like that,” said Curtis. “Alec and Lucia have gone about in a helpless daze all day. They are too stunned to be even angry.”

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

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

“So Dr. Blythe says. But to me it is incredible.”

“Nothing is incredible with abnormality. Dr. Blythe would tell you that, too. Remember you cannot judge her as you would a normal person.”

“She always seemed normal enough.”

“She has never been normal. Her own story proves that. She was hampered by heredity. Her father and grandfather were dipsomaniacs. You can’t reform your ancestors. And the shock of repressed feeling at the wedding of the man she loved evidently played havoc in her soul.”

“So Dr. Blythe says. But poor Henry Kildare!”

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“Oh, not so poor. We’ve always misjudged Henry. A man doesn’t amass a fortune on the Coast without brains. He’s got the woman he always wanted.”

“But what a life ...”

“Not a bit of it. Alice can be very charming when she wants to be. You and I ought to realize that, Mr. Sheldon. Take my word for it, he’ll manage her. Besides, marriage and a home and wealth ... all she always craved ... may have a very salutary effect on her mind ...”

Mr. Sheldon shook his head. The whole thing was beyond him.

“However,” said Curtis, “we may be sure of one thing. She’ll never come back to show off her diamonds in Mowbray Narrows.”

“Mrs. Blythe says she is quite capable of that.”

“Mrs. Blythe is mistaken. No, we’ve seen the last of Alice Harper and Henry Kildare. Don’t think this hasn’t been a shock to me, Mr. Sheldon. It’s the worst I ever had.”

“I fancy there will be compensations,” said Mr. Sheldon slyly. “Mrs. Blythe says ...”

“I’ve heard the Blythes quoted in this matter until I’m tired of it,” said Curtis, a little rudely. “After all, they were only suspicious. They didn’t really know any more than the rest of us. But now I suppose people will say they knew all about it all the time.”

“Well, you know how legends grow. And really Mrs. Blythe has a wonderful insight into character.”

“Well, we’ll leave it at that. And, Mr. Sheldon, let us make a compact. Let us agree never to mention this matter to each other again.”

Mr. Sheldon agreed, a little disappointedly. There were so many things he wanted to know. But he was not without tact and he saw Lucia Field coming up the lane.

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When Curtis came back from the gate in the twilight he came face to face with Lucia in the porch. He had hardly seen her all day, since he had stammered forth his tale in the morning twilight. But now he caught her exultantly.

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

Jock was coming across the yard and Lucia twisted herself from his grasp and ran. But before she ran Curtis caught a look in her eyes. He was suddenly a very happy man.

“What will Dr. Blythe say?” he wondered. He knew quite well what Mrs. Blythe would say.