

The Photograph of a Ghost

I.

"Dare I say
No spirit ever broke the band
That stays him from his native land
Where first he walked when clasped
in clay?"

—Tennyson.

"You mean to tell me this house is really haunted?"

"So they say. We are not the original possessors, you know. They were Catholics and could boast of a priestly apparition—a cowed monk, so I have heard—but I have never been fortunate enough to interview him. Not spiritual enough myself, I suppose!"

And as he spoke Claude Loftus glanced at the girl beside him with a gleam of amusement in his blue eyes.

She looked at him gravely. "Yes, I guess that is the reason."

It was the first time Maisie Moore had ever found herself in the role of guest in an English country house; the first time, indeed, that she had crossed the Atlantic, and her present existence was, as she expressed it, "just like a story book." Everything was so old in one sense and so new in another, and Buckley Manor, where she was staying with the parents of a school friend, was so emphatically a house "with a past" that it was a never-ceasing joy to her.

It was five o'clock and the whole party were assembled in what was known as the oak parlor for afternoon tea. Colonel and Mrs. Loftus, Claude, the only son, Rose and Cecily, the two daughters, Mrs. Beauclerc, the writer of a recent successful play, and Maisie Moore, the American girl.

"Really a ghost," she was now murmuring ecstatically; "how lovely!"

"But you do not believe in them?"

It was Mrs. Beauclerc who put the question, her dark, earnest eyes fixed on the girl's flower-like face. Maisie was quite a new type to her and she found her an interesting study.

"Of course I believe in them. We are so near the spirit world, just a thin veil dividing us, and sometimes there is a rent in the veil and we see those that are beyond." As the girl spoke her eyes brightened and a pink flush rose to her ethereal, almost transparent face.

"If any one sees the monk in this house it will be you," remarked Claude with conviction. "The rest of us are far too material."

"That is a very sweeping assertion Mr. Loftus," retorted Mrs. Beauclerc with a laugh.

"I will tell you what, Maisie," put in Cecily eagerly; "you shall take a photo of the haunted room to-morrow as a souvenir of your visit, and, who knows, perhaps he may appear to you."

"Very well," said Maisie. "That will be just lovely."

"But, Miss Moore," interrupted Mrs. Beauclerc, "tell me—what possible object could a monk have in 'revisiting' the glimpses of the moon' in Buckley Manor? It was never a monastery. What is your theory? I can see you have one."

Maisie raised her limpid eyes to the elder woman's face. She admired her with all an intelligent and cultured girl's enthusiasm for talent and brilliancy, but there were moments when she suspected the existence of a flaw in the crystal.

"I guess he wants prayers," she said simply.

The author of "A Woman's Passion" raised her eyebrows with a little mocking laugh.

"Prayers!" she echoed. "He must be past praying for by now I should imagine. What a fanciful idea!"

"It is not at all fanciful," replied Maisie calmly. An English girl might have thought twice before embarking on an argument with her present opponent, but the American's assurance, founded in this case on the solidity of her own religious convictions, stood to her in this emergency.

"The monk who haunts this house," she went on in the explanatory manner with which one instructs a child, "is very possibly undergoing his Purgatory in this very spot. The Church has never defined exactly where Purgatory is, and sometimes, in order to obtain

prayers, he is allowed to make his presence known and visible. He appeared, you see, to the first owners of this house, who were, as you say, Catholics, and very possibly by this time their prayers have gained him his release from suffering. That I expect is why none of you have ever seen him," she continued, turning to Claude, who was leaning on the back of her chair, a tenderly reverential expression in his usually laughing eyes.

"How nicely you say it all!" exclaimed Mrs. Beauclerc, with just a touch of insolence in her languid tones. "I suppose they put you up to all that sort of thing in your convent school? It is quite a pretty theory, and it does very well for the dear little nuns—just fits in with the whole environment—but it is a little out of date in the present century, and I imagined you Americans always prided yourselves on leading the van. We pay for our pleasures in this world sooner or later, at pretty high rates to some of us—with a little shrug of her shoulders—"and when we die, well—there is an end of us altogether; 'the rest is silence.' That is the modern creed."

"Is that so?" inquired Maisie. "Well, it seems to me that it is not what one would call a satisfying one, and I prefer the ancient and authenticated version. I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

"Bravo!" murmured Claude in an undertone. His own ideas concerning eternal truths were of the vaguest description, but he was, as he would have described it in his vocabulary, thoroughly "fetched" by his sister's friend, and when a man is in that condition of mind he is unusually open to conviction, and—which was also a factor in the case—there was very little love lost between himself and the successful playwright.

"We must agree to differ, then," said Mrs. Beauclerc, an expression of somewhat contemptuous amusement on her face. "The idea of that chit having an opinion of her own!" she was saying to herself mentally.

"Actually, the dressing bell! How quickly time goes when one is interested!" And with a slightly malicious smile on her lips she rose and left the room.

"Routed, by Jove!" exclaimed Claude, gleefully; "horse, foot and artillery. It was your text of Scripture that did the business, Miss Moore. It was Scripture, was it not? I always mix the Bible up with Shakespeare somehow." Then as if struck by a sudden remembrance, "I thought, by the way, that you Papists never read the Bible? How is it you are so well up in the life everlasting and all the rest of it?"

"You know very little about us," said Maisie sagely; "and until you do not understand. You don't hear me laying down the law about wire fencing, or the best way of bringing up fox hound puppies." And with an irrepressible laugh at the sight of his bewildered countenance she left him to his own reflections.

II.

"Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me."—Job.

When Maisie said her prayers that night she included in them a petition for Mrs. Beauclerc. A woman without faith; it seemed to her convent-bred ideas such an anomaly, and then she found herself wishing that the monk would appear to her, if only to prove that the suffering souls in Purgatory were really allowed to revists the earth, and that there was in reality a world beyond the grave.

The next morning was bright and sunny, and after breakfast Rose and Cecily led the way to the haunted room. Claude had gone out shooting and Mrs. Beauclerc was hard at work on a new play, which she intended should take the London world by storm in the coming season; so the three girls were left to their own devices.

"There!" exclaimed Cecily, in a tone of triumph, as she opened the door; "now you are inside the ghost's domain; don't you feel creepy?"

For an instant Maisie made no reply. As she had said to Mrs. Beauclerc, the spirit world was very near to her, and now, as she stood gazing around her at the quaint,

old-fashioned room, it seemed as though at any moment there might be a rent in the thin dividing veil.

"What has come to you?" asked Rose with a laugh. "You look as if you saw him already. You have just the eyes of a ghost-seer, Maisie!"

Maisie roused herself from her reverie, and her gravity relaxed into a smile. "What sort of eyes do they have? Here, give me my camera. I shall take it from here so as to bring in the bed."

"Oh, but why? It is not very ornamental."

"Never mind; I want it," replied Maisie, decisively.

"That was where the altar used to stand in the old days," remarked Cecily. "This used to be a chapel when the Lushingtons had it."

"Really?" exclaimed Maisie eagerly. "Oh, then perhaps—" and she stopped abruptly.

"Perhaps what?" asked Rose curiously.

"Oh! nothing. I was only wondering. I shall take it from here." And she adjusted her camera. Just as she had completed her operations the gong sounded for luncheon and the three girls ran gaily down the broad oak staircase, leaving all the photographic apparatus behind them in the haunted room.

"I shall develop it to-morrow," announced Maisie as they reached the dining-room. "I am so longing to see how it has turned out."

She was also longing for a little solitude, and after luncheon she escaped to her own room on the plea of writing letters. It had seemed to her while she was taking the photograph that an unseen presence was there close beside her—the presence of one suffering. It was an impression which clung to her mind for the next twenty-four hours, and when she said her rosary that night she offered it for the souls of the forgotten dead.

III.

"And some are saved yet so as by fire."

"Rose! Cecily! Come here quickly!"

Maisie was standing before her kodak, her cheeks like white roses and her eyes dilated.

"Look!" she said breathlessly, as the girls rushed into the room and she held out for their inspection the freshly-developed photograph.

"What—what an extraordinary thing!" exclaimed Cecily excitedly.

"Where? Where? Let me see," clamored Rose, pushing her sister unceremoniously aside, and then she, too, broke out into vehement exclamations.

There was the room just as it appeared every day, in a clear, well-developed photograph; but standing facing the bed, with his back to the rest of the apartment, stood the figure of a monk vested as if for saying Mass.

"Maisie, you little wretch," suddenly exclaimed Rose, "you are trying to play a trick on us! You had that figure on one of your plates before and you have arranged so that it shall come into the one of the room. I do call that playing it low down!"

Maisie turned to confront her friend, her face flushed and her eyes sparkling.

"You are talking absolute nonsense, Rose," she said. "I have never had a figure like that on any of my plates, and I am ready to swear to it, if you like."

"Oh, rubbish!" interposed Cecily with conviction. "If Maisie says so it is all right, but it is extraordinary I must say. What do you think about it yourself, Maisie?"

"I think it is a poor suffering soul who is in want of prayers, and that he has been allowed to take this way of letting me know it, as I am the only person of his religion in the house."

The two girls regarded her with a look of mingled curiosity and admiration. If any one else had made a similar remark they would, in their modern vocabulary, have termed it "utter rot." But Maisie was different.

"Let us show it to the others," exclaimed Rose; and seizing the photograph she ran downstairs, followed by Cecily and, somewhat reluctantly, by Maisie Moore.

Mrs. Beauclerc and Claude were playing billiards, and the former raised her eyebrows superciliously at the girls' noisy entrance.

"Look!" said Rose, breathlessly. "Maisie has photographed the ghost!"

Claude Loftus threw down his cue and took the photograph in his hand.

"By Jove!" he remarked, "what an extraordinary thing. What do you make of it, Miss Moore?"

"Oh! we know Miss Moore's theory," interposed Mrs. Beauclerc quickly, as the photograph was passed for her inspection. "The monk is undergoing his Purgatory, in front of the bed, and has most obligingly stood for his portrait on this occasion."

Maisie flushed crimson, but made no reply; and Claude rushed gallantly to the rescue.

"And why not?" he said coldly, his handsome face darkened with anger. "Why should not Miss Moore's theories, as you call them, be as correct as yours? There are a jolly sight more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our shallow philosophy."

"Really, you are quite eloquent," murmured Mrs. Beauclerc, with a somewhat forced smile. Her failure in attracting Claude Loftus was that which lay at the root of her dislike to him, and consequently to the American girl, whom she knew he admired.

"There are so many curious effects in photography nowadays," she continued, turning to Maisie. "But after our conversation yesterday this shadowy figure—it is rather shadowy, by the way—is quite a coincidence, is it not?"

"It appears so to you probably," returned Maisie calmly. She had quite recovered her usual self-possession. "But, as I said before, I see no reason why it should not be a soul in Purgatory seeking prayers."

And having giving evidence of the faith that was in her she took up the photograph and left the room. And Claude followed her.

"I believe it, Miss Moore," he said earnestly. "Never mind that woman. She has not an ounce of faith or religion in her whole composition—or morality, either, judging by her plays,"—he added in a lower tone.

Maisie glanced up at him with a smile in her eyes, though her lips remained grave. "I am so sorry for her," she said simply. "But you—you do not believe in my poor soul either, really? You are only saying so because you think I was hurt by Mrs. Beauclerc's incredulity."

"I swear I do," he said eagerly. "All the more because she scoffed at it. I am not a religious chap myself, but—oh, well, anything you believe in is good enough for me!"

"Some day you will have a better motive," said Maisie. But as she said it she smiled at him again.

Six months later Claude Loftus came into his wife's sitting-room with an open letter in his hand.

"Read this Maisie," he said. "It is a copy of an old document sent me by Lushington's grandson, which he says may throw some light on the photograph business. You see this is evidently an agreement on the part of a Father Cuthbert, O.S.B., to say a certain number of Masses before a given date, and—"

"And he either omitted to say them or died before he could complete the number," exclaimed Maisie excitedly, her eyes dilated in what her sisters-in-law described as the "ghost-seer look." That is it, you may depend, Claude, and we must have the Masses said, must we not?"

"By all means. I owe him something in any case, as he was indirectly the means of my becoming a Catholic. Your influence completed it, but he began it, at any rate—eh, Maisie?"

She looked at him tenderly, intense gratitude in her expressive face. "Yes, thank God!" she murmured softly. And then the corners of her mouth relaxed in a mischievous smile. "This is what Mrs. Beauclerc would call a 'coincidence,' Claude; but you and I know better. Poor woman! how I pity her!"—Grace V. Christmas, in The Catholic World Magazine.

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