

The Free Press Short Story

The Face in the Mirror

By HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH

At the tip of Lella's invitations was a witch riding a broomstick in the direction of a startled moon.

Lella's home made a perfect setting for an old-fashioned party. It had been built when steam heat and telephones were luxuries enjoyed by the few, and though the modern conveniences had been added, it retained an air of belonging to another day.

Barbara Hamilton, a newcomer in the city, had never been in Lella Bennett's home till the night of the Halloween party, which proved a hilarious one. The girls' fortunes were told in every way imaginable, with perplexingly contradictory results.

"Thank you a thousand times," Janet Moore sat without moving. "I'm too modest to crowd before my betters."

"Oh, come along."

"You silly, superstitious thing, I'm ashamed of you. Doris, you go."

"It wouldn't do for me," returned Doris firmly. "I wouldn't mind seeing one face; but I'm to have four husbands and I suppose they'll all be in the mirror. They might start fighting. Don't you see it would never do?"

By the time half a dozen of her guests had refused to go to the garret, Lella became provoked. "Why, do you girls mean to tell me that you're really afraid? I wouldn't have believed it. I was under the impression that this was the twentieth century."

Barbara sprang to her feet. "So it is, and as a twentieth century girl I'm ready for anything any girl anywhere ever dared." She struck a Lady Macbeth attitude. "Give me the dagger, that is to say, the candle."

Lella showed her relief. "Go up to the third landing and the door to the garret is about half way down the hall to your left."

"And for pity's sake, leave it open," urged Cecily Warren, "so if you want to get back in a hurry, you can."

Barbara laughed, and all the girls joined her, and with the gay chorus ringing in her ears, she went lightly up two flights of stairs. She found the door to the garret without difficulty and ascended the third flight. This was different from the others, narrow and unpaneled, each step creaking distinctly under her tread. The garret was the darkest place she had ever imagined.

The flickering candle flame seemed to emphasize the gloom that surrounded her. Barbara groped her way to the table placed, her candle upon it, and sat down facing it. Then she held up the mirror with her left hand, holding in her right the apple essential to so many Halloween charms.

As she began to eat the apple, she was astonished to find what a noisy process chewing really was. Crunch! Crunch! It was fortunate, she reflected, that the average dining-room did not have the delectable stillness of this black space over the eaves. A board creaked; she jumped, before she remembered that something always creaked in old houses. She went on eating her apple. How silly these Halloween charms were! She wondered if any girl out of the thousands who had tried this make-believe magic had ever seen—she saw a face looking back at her. She looked into the mirror which she had been quite forgetting, and her heart stood still.

The candle flame showed dimly her own face, and something more! From the oval glass another face looked back at her. Barbara was so startled to see distinctly, but she had an impression of a thin, boyish face looking as brightly as she felt. It was only for an instant. As she blinked in unbelieving

bewilderment and looked again, the mirror was blank except for her own reflection.

Barbara was physically incapable of finishing the apple. She poked up the candle, her hand shaking in a fashion that awakened her disgust, and made her way to the stairs. She forced herself to walk slowly, though she felt an almost overwhelming desire to run. Of course the face was a hallucination. She said the word aloud, for emphasis, but found it could comfort. The fact remained that she had seen a face where no face had a right to be.

The girls downstairs greeted her with a volley of questions, and Barbara felt that since it was impossible to reply to them all, it was an excuse for making no answer whatever. She blew out the candle and took her seat, reflecting that she must appear more composed than she really was. No one had noticed that her knees were shaking, or that her hands were unsteady. "Whom did you see?" several voices demanded.

"Nobody I ever saw before," replied Barbara, and again the girls shouted over her supposed humor. When Lella exclaimed mysteriously "I believe she's rather pale," this, too, was accepted as a joke instead of a literal statement of fact.

"Bab has said hardly a word since she came down from the garret," laughed Janet. "Come on, Bab, tell us what you saw."

Barbara, playing with her ice cream, answered casually. "What's the use of telling? You wouldn't believe it."

"By morning the impression had partially worn off. The face in the mirror no longer seemed alive. It was possible to believe that the mirror had reflected some object hanging from the rafters, and her vivid fancy had done the rest. She went downstairs with the feeling that a load had been lifted from her mind, but her father's first words revived the mystery with something to spare. Holding the newspaper toward her, he asked, "Do you know that young fellow?"

Barbara stood rooted to the spot. There was a likeness of a young man on the first page, and the preposterous thought crossed her mind that here was the face in the mirror, the same heavy hair, the big dark eyes, the arched eyebrows. She stared at it, incapable of speech.

"His name's Bennett," explained her father. "You were at a Bennett girl's party last night, weren't you?"

"Yes, Lella Bennett's," Barbara spoke mechanically. "They live on Fortlieh Street."

"They're the people. Father's in the insurance business. Looks as if the boy were in pretty serious trouble."

Barbara took the paper automatically. The headlines roused her like the beating of a drum. "Dudley Bennett Disappears. College Man Wanted on Serious Charge."

"Was he bad," Mr. Hamilton was de-claring. "It seems this young Bennett is a sophomore in the State University, and has a room in the men's dormitory. Yesterday morning a classmate was attracted by means and entered Bennett's room. Bennett was not there, but a young fellow from the Freshman class lay unconscious on the floor. He'd been struck over the head and the doctor is afraid his skull is fractured. The boy was taken to the hospital and they tried to keep things quiet till they located Bennett and heard what he had to say. They couldn't find him and now the whole thing's out."

Barbara had little appetite for breakfast. Fortunately it was Saturday and there was no school. When she had finished her meal, she dressed for the street, and went straight to the house, where she had been entertained the night before.

The servant who answered her ring looked at her forbiddingly, and Barbara sensed an air of hostility. "May I see Mr. Bennett?"

"He's out of town."

"Mrs. Bennett, then."

"She's not down yet."

"Then Miss Lella will do."

"She's not down, either. They had company late last night."

"I know. I was here; but I must speak to somebody."

The woman looked at her suspiciously. "Aren't you from one of the newspapers?"

"Indeed I'm not. I'm a friend of Miss Lella's, and I must see her or her mother. Tell her Barbara Hamilton is here, and that I have something very important to tell her."

The woman hesitated. "I'll see what she says," she answered, and closed the door. Barbara waited impatiently, sure that the delay was not for long. In less than five minutes the woman was back.

"Miss Lella will see you upstairs," she said, apologetically. "The reporters have been bothering us to death this morning. I thought you were another of 'em."

Lella was sadly changed from the laughing hostess of the previous night. She looked as if she had not slept at all. "Oh, Bab," she cried, catching her friend's hand. "Have you seen the papers? Don't it terrify? But we know Dad never did it. He's the gentlest boy, too gentle, we often say. He couldn't have done it."

"Have you heard from Mrs. Lella?"

"No. You see it was only late yesterday afternoon that father learned of this. He went over to the university hoping that the thing could be kept quiet till Dudley appeared; but when he found that was impossible, he called up mother. We were just going to bed. Oh! it was dreadful. Father knew it would all be in the papers this morning."

"Lella, you remember I went up into the garret last night with a mirror and a candle?"

It seemed to require an effort for Lella to recall the trivial events of the party the evening before. She looked at Barbara, blankly. "Well?"

"I saw a face in the mirror. It sounds crazy, I know, but I did. And when I saw your brother's picture this morning, I recognized it as the one I'd seen."

Lella only stared. Apparently she had no inkling of Barbara's meaning. After a moment her friend asked, "Don't you see why I came right over to tell you?"

"Why, I can't believe in any of those superstitions."

"Tense as the moment was, Barbara laughed. "Lella, don't you understand. If I saw his face in the mirror, isn't it possible that your brother is up there?"

"In the garret?"

"Yes."

As Lella sat motionless, Barbara continued in a half whisper. "It is not so far to the State University. He could have come home last night. Is there any way he could have gotten into the house without your knowing it?"

"Why, Dudley always has a latchkey. But why should he come home without letting us know?"

"Wherever he is, he hasn't let you know, and you can soon find out whether he is upstairs or not."

Apparently this had not occurred to Lella. She sprang to her feet, dashed into the hall, and ran up the stairs to the third story. Barbara heard her opening the door at the foot of the garret stairs.

The girl waited breathlessly. Would Lella come back without finding her brother, leaving the face in the mirror as much as a mystery as ever? Barbara did not think so. Her anticipation, however, did not prepare her for the incident that followed. Suddenly there was a sharp report overhead, a revolver shot, she was sure, though the composure of the others in the house made it clear that either they had not heard it or else had ascribed it to something taking place in the street. The thought crossed Barbara's mind that the face she had seen in the mirror might not be that of her brother, but that of some other miscreant in hiding who had tried on being discovered. "Have I sent Lella to her death?" Barbara asked herself as she ran up the stairs. When she reached the garret, she saw her fears were groundless. A haggard youth sat on an old chest, his face buried in his hands, his body shaken by convulsive sobs. Lella bent over him, trying to comfort him, while at their feet lay a revolver.

At the sight of Barbara, Lella's composure gave way. "Oh, Bab, you sent me up just in time. He—he was going to shoot himself when I caught his arm." She, too, began sobbing, and the young fellow looked up. Here was the face Barbara had seen in the mirror, only more wan and terrified.

"What else is there for me to do?" he demanded. "If I'd stayed there, I might have cleared things up. I ran away like a coward, and who's going to believe that I didn't do it?"

"Do you mean," asked Barbara, "that you didn't fight with that young man in your room?"

"Indeed, I didn't. I wasn't there. I got in about midnight, and when I saw Dick Payne lying there, hurt, I got my hand. We'd had words and I thought if he died, there wouldn't be any way to prove I hadn't been to blame. I came home, but I couldn't bear to tell the folks about it; so I let myself in with my latchkey and hid up here. When I saw what the paper said this morning—"

"How did you see that?" demanded Barbara.

"I went downstairs early and I could read the headlines as the paper lay on the porch. I saw my picture, too." His face twitched distressingly. "I thought that as long as I'd made such a mistake, the best thing I could do was to put myself out of the way."

"He stopped in father's room and got his revolver," whispered Lella.

"I can't see," said Barbara coldly, "that because you did one cowardly thing, it would help to do another."

The boy winced. "I suppose it was cowardly, but—"

"It was. The way to do is to call your father up, and tell him where you are. He can decide on the best plan to follow."

"But suppose I'm arrested?"

"You're innocent, but the longer you hide, the harder it will be to prove it. If you'd carried out your plan with that," Barbara sternly pointed to the revolver, "it would have been the same as confessing that you were guilty."

Dudley hung his head. Before he could speak, the telephone began ringing. Lella hurried down the stairs, leaving the other two alone.

He looked apologetically at the tall girl who had called him a coward. "I don't understand yet how Lella knew I was up here."

"I saw you last night in the mirror. Till this morning I thought your reflection was just my imagination."

"Oh, were you the girl who came up with the candle? I thought it was somebody looking for me until I remembered it was Halloween."

"Talk halted abruptly. The sound of excited voices reached them from the door below. There was the best of hurrying feet as Lella reeled up the stairs to bring them the news. "It was terrible. She could not wait to reach them, but shrieked her news from the bottom of

FALL MENUS By Barbara B. Brooks

Summer, with its abundance of fruit and vegetables, rather spoils us for the rest of the year. Now that fall is here, more time has to be spent planning meals—which will have variety, either through the use of many different foods or by serving the usual foods in different ways.

One of the most attractive vegetable platters that we have ever seen was revealed by a French housewife. She stuffed peppers, tomatoes and cabbage leaves with a meat and cereal mixture; put them alternately into a kettle, added tomato sauce, covered the pot and let them simmer until tender. The peppers can be parboiled before being stuffed, rolled up and fastened with small wooden skewers.

STUFFED VEGETABLES

- 3 cups left-over meat (ground). 1 onion (finely chopped) 1 cup rice krispies 1/2 teaspoon salt 3 green peppers 1/2 teaspoon pepper 1/2 cup tomato pulp 3 tomatoes 3 cabbage leaves

Mix meat, onion, rice krispies, salt and pepper. Moisten with tomato pulp. Stuff the vegetables, place in kettle, add tomato sauce, cover and cook until tender.

TOMATO SAUCE

- 1 tablespoon onion (finely chopped) 2 tablespoons butter or oil 3 tablespoons celery (finely chopped) 1 tablespoon green pepper (finely chopped) 1 No. 2 can tomatoes (2 cups) 1/2 teaspoon salt 1/2 teaspoon pepper 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce 1/2 teaspoonful sugar

Cook onion, celery and green pepper in butter or oil tender but not brown. Add tomatoes and seasonings. Cook, stirring occasionally until the water from the tomatoes has evaporated and the sauce is slightly thickened.

Some people are afraid to use garlic, but it is a seasoning which raises uninteresting dishes out of the ordinary class. Try it with this spinach recipe.

NOVEL SPINACH

- 1/2 pound mushrooms (sliced) 4 tablespoons butter 2 pounds spinach 2 lemons lemon juice Salt, pepper

Heat the butter and cook the mushrooms and garlic in it for a few minutes. Add the raw spinach which has been washed, thoroughly drained and chopped. Season with salt and pepper and cook for about 10 minutes or until the spinach is tender. Add the lemon juice.

End of the Season Salad means just what its name implies. Vegetables, either raw or cooked, may be mixed with French dressing and served on lettuce or cabbage leaves. Such a salad, bran muffins and fruit form a delicious luncheon at this time of year.

Persian Balm promotes daintiness, charm and beauty. It is unrivaled in its magical effect on the skin. Swiftly absorbed by the tissues, it leaves never a vestige of stickiness. Delightfully cool to the skin. Stimulating and invigorating. Softens and makes the hands flawlessly white. Subtly fragrant. Imparts youth and loveliness to the complexion. Persian Balm is the inevitable choice of the woman who cares.

THE LATEST IN HINTS

Vernon—Grandma, if I was invited out to dinner somewhere, should I eat my plate with a fork?

Grandma—Certainly, Vernon.

Vernon—You haven't got a piece of pie around the house that I could practice on, have you, Grandma?

the stairs. "He says Dick Payne has recovered consciousness and has told you that he had nothing to do with it."

"Dudley glanced to the weapon lying on the floor, then looked at Barbara. "I owe you a lot," he said huskily, "and I hope I'll live long enough to show you that I'm not so much of a coward as you think."

Catarrhal Deafness and Head Noises

TELLS SAFE, SIMPLE WAY TO TREAT AND RELIEVE AT HOME

If you have catarrh, catarrhal deafness or head noises caused by catarrh, or if phlegm drops in your throat and has caused catarrh of the stomach or bowels you will be glad to know that these distressing symptoms may be entirely overcome in many instances by the following treatment which you can easily prepare in your own home at little cost. Secure from your druggist 1 ounce of Parimint (Double Strength). Take this home and add to it 1/2 pint of hot water and a little granulated sugar, stir until dissolved. Take one tablespoonful four times a day. An improvement is sometimes noted after the first day's treatment. Breathing should become easy while the distressing head noises, head-aches, dizziness, cloudy thinking, etc., should gradually disappear under the tonic action of the treatment. Loss of smell, taste, defective hearing and mucus dropping in the back of the throat are other symptoms which suggest the presence of catarrh and which may often be overcome by this efficacious treatment. It is said that nearly ninety per cent. of all ear troubles are caused by catarrh and there must, therefore, be many people whose hearing may be restored by this simple, harmless, home treatment.

ANTS, ALL RIGHT

The American truth teller was in form. "Talking of ants," he said, "we've got 'em as big as crabs out West. I've seen 'em fight with long horns, which they used as lances, charging each other like savages."

"They don't compare with the ants I saw in the East," said an inoffensive individual near by. "The natives have them trained as beasts of burden. One of 'em could trail a ton load for miles with ease. They worked willingly, but occasionally they turned on their attendants and killed them."

"But this was drawing the long bow a little too far."

"I say, old chap," said a shocked voice from the corner, "what sort of ants were they?"

"Elephants," replied the inoffensive individual.

ALMOST CORRECT

Teacher—If one maid can clean a room in two hours, how long does it take two maids working together?

Pupil—Four hours.

DOLEFUL

"Would you—advise me to— marry a beautiful girl or a sensible girl?" "I'm afraid you'll never be able to marry either, old man."

"Why not?"

"Well, a beautiful girl could do better, and a sensible girl would know better."

BATTERED OR DENTED

A new custom of haberdasheries is the naming of current models in men's felt hats after some of the better known London thoroughfares. The one we saw being pursued down the avenue this morning was all too evidently of the Fleet Street variety.

J. Cadesky OPTOMETRIST

WILL VISIT ACTON ON Monday, November 6

Anyone suffering from Kyeastrah, Defective Vision or Headache should not miss the opportunity of consulting this eyesight specialist. Appointments may be made with Mr. A. T. Brown, Druggist.

CONSULTATION FREE Office Hours: 9 a. m. till 4 p. m.



The Town Crier

Who used to give the news in the old days would fall down badly to-day in comparison with the newspapers.

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Just to get New Readers acquainted with THE FREE PRESS, we are making a Special Introductory Offer to New Readers. From now until the end of December, 1933, we will send THE FREE PRESS to any address in Canada for 25c.

We feel that at the end of the Trial Period you will want to continue reading the News from Acton and District. However, if you don't want to continue, just say so, and we will cease sending THE FREE PRESS at the end of the period. This Trial Offer will include all the Christmas issues. Why not start now and get advantage of This Trial Offer?

The Acton Free Press

Specializes in the News of Acton and the District Surrounding. In the centres near the town Fifteen Correspondents contribute the news of the District, and the Neighborhood News Page has filled one page and spread over on other pages of the paper. It has become a Real Feature of THE FREE PRESS Every Week.

Town News — Sports — Meetings of Public Bodies of the Town, Townships and County — Church Functions — and Special Occasions are all recorded in THE FREE PRESS Columns. The Social Events, Visits and Personal Items are all to be found in this weekly visitor.

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