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C. McArthur

THE GHOST OF LOCHRAIN CASTLE

BY MRS. C. N. WILLIAMSON

Author of "The Princess Passes," "The Lightning Conductor," Etc., Etc.

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portraits, and tapestry, and armor. It did seem a cruel shame. Luckily for him, though, they didn't want the whole estate, only just the park, as pleasure grounds for the hotel guests, and Lord Lochrain was obliged to keep the rest. But, would you believe it, coal has been found now on a distant part of the land, and he'll have a great fortune, after all!"

"Too late to get back the Castle," said Elspeth, interested.

"Yes, but he doesn't care for that. There's another splendid estate in Surrey, not so old as this, yet very fine, and a house in London, both of which have been let for many years; but he'll have them again now. Great luck, isn't it, miss? And the man doesn't deserve it, I'm afraid. Nobody likes him. You'll see for yourself, perhaps, as Mr. McGowan tells me his lordship is running up here from London, to look after his interests, and will stop in the hotel, like an ordinary guest. He inherits from the distaff side, and the relationship is quite distant, as I said. His mother was a Miss Dean, who married beneath her, and she was a third cousin of his old lordship."

"A Miss Dean?"

"Yes. 'Why, to be sure, that's your name isn't it? I forgot for a moment. Are your people Scotch, miss?'"

"My father was Scotch. His people lived in Perthshire."

"Why then, they must be the same Dean, I should think. Only fancy, miss, you're being one of the family. I might say, and coming to the old ancestral house as—"

"As a typewriter!" laughed Elspeth. "I shall begin by feeling quite at home now." She spoke lightly, but in reality she was deeply interested and even excited. Her father had scarcely ever spoken of the relations who had turned their backs upon him on his marriage, but the girl knew they had aristocratic blood in their veins, and she made up her mind that now she would try and trace the connection, if any, between her Deans, and the Deans who were connected with Lochrain.

"I won't mention it to Mr. McGowan," she said to herself; "it would seem boastful and silly, but I shall enjoy feeling like a kind of daughter of the house, and I hope Lord Lochrain will come. I should like to see what he is like, in case he should turn out to be a sort of forty-second cousin, although he will never know."

When at last Mrs. Warden had led the girl up the winding stone stairway of the "haunted tower," to the room which was to be her own, Elspeth thanked the ghosts to whom she owed such delightful quarters. If it had not been for them, surely this must have been one of the most desirable rooms in the whole great house, she thought; and if she could, would have persuaded Mrs. Warden to tell the story of the tower. But, as Mr. Grant had done, the housekeeper grew suddenly reserved when the subject of the haunted tower was mentioned. Elspeth did not wish to insist, but she was becoming very curious.

As the housekeeper was on the point of leaving her alone, having promised that dinner should be sent up at 7.30, the old woman turned on the threshold. "I hope you won't be timid here," she said. "It is a bit lonely, for the room under yours has been turned into a place for storing luggage and odds and ends of furniture that aren't wanted and the one under that is where the carpenter of the hotel does his work. So there's nobody but you in the tower at night. Yet it's all the quieter, and better for sleeping because of that, and you have an electric bell, just like anybody else, which you've only to touch as you lie in bed, if you have a fright, and the night porter would be at your door inside of two minutes. But there, you won't have a fright. Why should you? There's nothing to frighten you here."

"Of course not, and shan't be in the least afraid," answered Elspeth stoutly.

Even when Mrs. Warden had gone, she was still of the same opinion.

"I'm glad I don't believe in ghosts!" she said to herself. "On such a night!" The sentence broke off short in Elspeth's thoughts, and her heart gave a leap. Just behind her head there was a new sound, which neither mice nor rats could have made, a queer, metallic sound, like the clinking of a chain or a jingling of keys one against another. Once and again it came; then, the top of a high heel on a stone stair.

The girl's blood knocked at her temples. She sat up in bed and listened through the thick beating in her ears. The sound was fainter now, as if farther away. With hands that shook a little she found the candle and matches on a small table by the bedside, and struck a light which glowed small and yellow in the white moonhaze.

All was still now, as she waited, and the impression she had had of something strange and horrifying began to fade. She must have imagined the jingling, and the tap, tap of little heels. It was well known that mice could make all kinds of extraordinary noises, scuttling about in the walls of the tower, a glorious playground for the mouse tribe, she stupidly was to have a fright, and who had boasted of her courage, and said that she "hoped the tower was haunted!" Now, she would blow out the candle and force herself to sleep, or she would not be at her best to begin work to-morrow morning.

"Of course not, and I shouldn't be the least afraid."

though even thus early in the evening there was a deathlike silence in the tower, which seemed strange in



a crowded hotel, full from ceiling attics of lively people.

It was a large room, circular in shape, with two extraordinary deep set windows, opposite one another, so retired in the thickness of the tower wall, that each one had the appearance of being at the far end of another and smaller room; but the windows were so wide and so high that despite this peculiarity they gave plenty of light.

Under each was a cushioned seat; and the alcove of the eastern window had doors on each side, in the black oak wainscot. These doors concealed spacious wardrobes, but the west alcove had doors of glass on either side, opening into large recesses. The one on the left was a bathroom, while in the one on the right stood a bed, apparently carved out of one piece, with the oak wall behind it. This bed was, of course, invisible from the outer room, as the wainscoted wall hid it from the alcove, therefore Elspeth was practically in possession of a separate sitting-room. The glass doors were sliding doors therefore they did not interfere in passing to and fro, and could always be left open. The furniture of the big outer room was admirable, Elspeth thought, although it was of many different periods and had perhaps been relegated here, because it had made place for something better elsewhere. There were two or three wonderful old chairs, a charming table with claw feet, an ancient "secretary book-case bureau," with glass doors, behind which the covers of old-fashioned books showed, and a tall screen of beautiful, though faded, embossed leather, which hid a too modern dressing-table from view.

The girl thoroughly enjoyed the task of unpacking and putting away her few modest belongings in the great wall-cupboards, one of which she discovered was lined with cedar; and before she had finished all she had to do in settling in, dinner arrived—quite a little feast, it seemed to her, on a large damask-spread tray, with silver covers for the dishes.

There was a rose silk-shaded lamp on the table, which the servant who brought in the tray obligingly lit; but though the flame within made the thin silk look like a bouquet of roses, the wainscoting drank up the light, and it seemed to Elspeth, sitting at the table with a volume of Scott, chosen from the secretary book-case, that the black walls were falling. She around her as darkness fell. She jumped up, and extravagantly lit the two candles on the dressing-table, but the difference they made was scarcely noticeable. They looked like fire-flies in the gloom, and the girl began to wonder whether, after all, she were quite so lucky as she had thought, in having the haunted tower at Lochrain to herself.

She could not remember having such a dainty and well-served dinner, and it ought to have been delicious to think that she could do as she pleased with her time until to-morrow morning at 9. How nice it would be to read until she was sleepy, and then to dream in that wonderful old bed with the great ruffled linen pillows!

But when the tray had been taken away, there began to be strange, little creeping sounds behind the wainscoting, sounds like light, hurrying footfalls, rustling of stiff silk, tapping of unseen fingers. Only mice, of course, beginning their night revels; Elspeth knew that, and she was not afraid. Still, she had to tell her self again and again that they were companionable, here in this isolated room, where no sound could come, man life save her own could come.

She read, fitfully, until over the big fireplace wall struck a mantle, and by nearly 12 before she had culled into the great bed in the alcove. Lying there between the cool linen sheets, the girl felt very wide-awake, though after the long, exciting day she had passed, sleep ought to have come quickly. She had left the glass doors pushed wide open, and the alcove which she faced as she lay was white with the light of a late-rising moon.

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Down she flung herself among the big pillows again, but scarcely had she begun conscientiously to count sheep jumping over a gate, when a soft, heavy weight brushed against the wall which was one with the head of the bed. A faint cry followed, sounding as if it came from somewhere above, and again the tap, tap, tap of heels.

Elspeth did not sit up in bed this time. She lay still as if frozen; her eyes staring wide, her ears strained to catch a troubled murmur of voices. It was as if a man and woman talked together, and then came footsteps mingled with the metallic clinking in which the girl had tried to disbelieve.

She no longer struggled to be brave. Cold and shaking with terror she sprang out of bed, and ran, patterning on her bare feet, out into the tower room.

There in the moonlight which filtered through the two windows left uncurtained, she could see the objects which had already become familiar to her eyes. Somehow, they did the details of life, soon to be her everyday life.

"Nonsense—nonsense—nonsense!" she repeated angrily, half aloud, glad to hear the sound of her own voice. "It's nothing. What could it be unless I dreamed it? Oh, why can't I get this lamp lighted?"

Soon she had the rosy glow shining through the fleecy silk of the lamp shade, but not satisfied with that, she must have all the candles as were a comfort, suggesting as they well. The light was like a friend. She could think now, ask herself questions, and answer reasonably.

What had the housekeeper told her? That she would be alone in the tower at night. In a room on the ground floor, the hotel carpenter worked by day; in the room above that, furniture and luggage were stored. Next, came her own floor, and over it—what? Mrs. Warden's explanations had gone no further; but Elspeth had noticed that the newly restored, winding staircase ended outside her room. The way beyond was blocked up with brick, therefore there could have been no voices, no footsteps, no tapping of heels. She must have dreamed the sounds. Besides, even if the staircase leading to the floor above were not obstructed, the walls were far too thick for noises such as she had fancied to penetrate to her room; and, at all events that alcove where the bed stood was not a place people would pass in going up the stairs. But—if there were such things as ghosts, after all?

No, she would not let her thoughts turn that way. If she did—if she once indulged herself in such foolishness, there would be an end to the peace and pleasure in this tower room, to which she had looked forward. She would be sensible, but there was no use in going back to bed, until she should feel sleepy. She would grow more and more nervous lying there, imagining stupid things. Just for this one night she would allow herself to sit up and read, and to-morrow she would probably find out some perfectly simple explanation of the sounds which had seemed so ghostly. She would explore a little, and understand her surroundings thoroughly, before another night should fall.

She took up the volume of Scott which she had begun to read at dinner, but, as if to prove that she was not mistress of her nerves, she started so sharply at the noise of a scampering rat behind the wainscot, that the book fell to the floor. It lay open, on its face, and a square bit of blank paper escaped from some hiding place among the yellow, musty-smelling pages.

Elspeth picked up the scrap, and after all it was not blank. Upon the side which had lain next the floor, some one had sketched the face of a young boy. The pencilled lines had faded, the paper was the color of old ivory, and the collar and tie suggested by a few light strokes were of quaint fashion. But the face was strikingly handsome, and so individual as to convince Elspeth that as a likeness the little sketch must have been initials, and a date, but they had been blurred either deliberately or by accident, and Elspeth held the paper close to the light without being able to decipher them. Suddenly as she studied the faint lettering, something seemed to fall from above, past her eyes—something swift and small, from which the light struck a gleam as it from a ruby, and at the same instant the ruby was shattered in a red splash upon the sketch.

With a cry Elspeth sprang to her feet, still mechanically holding the bit of paper. The pictured face of the boy was stained red; there was a red liquid smear on her thumb and finger, and as she stared, horrified, dumfounded, again there was a swift, ruby flash before her eyes.

CHAPTER III.

Instantly the words of the housekeeper leaped into the girl's mind. "The bell!" The bell by which she could summon the night porter—where was it? Ah, she remembered, and almost as quickly as the thought had flashed into her mind her finger was hovering over the electric button.

A second more, and the summons would have gone flashing over the wire; but something seemed to restrain Elspeth's hand, as if it had been seized and forcibly held back. "No!" she said, half aloud, "I won't do it." And with great force of self-control, she turned her back on the bell, which meant help and human companionship, if she chose to have it.

To be continued.

Fever Sores.

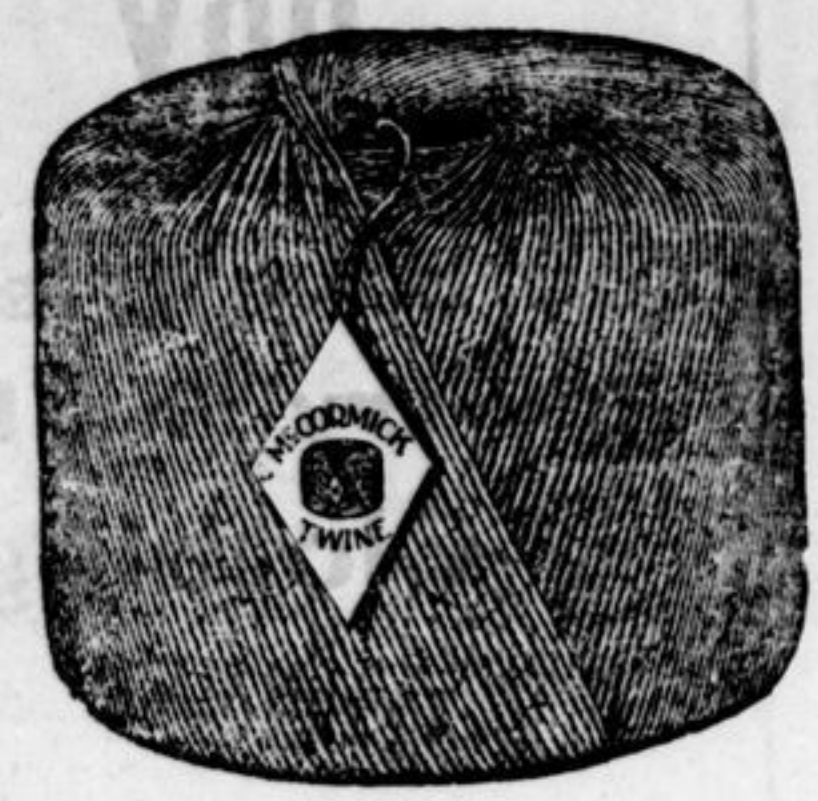
Fever sores and old chronic sores should not be healed entirely but should be kept in healthy condition. This can be done by applying Chamberlain's Salve. This salve has no superior for this purpose. It is also most excellent for chapped hands, sore nipples, burns and diseases of the skin. For sale by all Drug Stores.

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