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Buddy's Ghost

By Walter Joseph Delaney

(Copyright, 1917, Western Newspaper Union.)

"Eight o'clock, Buddy—time for bed," remarked Mr. Holton.

"I don't want to go yet, Pa. Please can't I stay up till Jimmy is ready?"

"No, Buddy; Jimmy has his lessons to get and it may take him two hours."

"Well, can't somebody come up in the hall with a light and wait till I get undressed?" pleaded Buddy.

"Why, Buddy! Whatever is the matter with you this evening? You've fidgeted around for the last hour as if you were on a hot griddle," spoke his mother.

"Huh! Should think I would!" muttered Buddy.

"He can't get his snowhouse in the yard off'n his mind," piped Jimmy.

"He's been going to the window to look out at it every two minutes."

Buddy's eyes expressed a queer glare, for just now he was distinctly edging away from the window. His spinster aunt, Miss Cordelia, spoke up in her kind, patient way:

"Perhaps Buddy is worrying for fear a thaw will come and undo all his hard work on his Esquimaux hut."

"No, I ain't," dissented the lad mumbly.

"Well, Buddy, I'll come and sit in the old lumber room next to yours and



Resembled Some Rugged Laplander.

set the lamp in the hall till you get tucked in and sound asleep."

"I wouldn't humor the boy that way, if I were you, sister," said Buddy's mother.

"Oh, boys have their nervous whims, just like us older ones," replied tolerant and indulgent Aunt Cordelia.

The good soul was right, and Buddy made a confidant of her as they went up the stairs.

"Aunt Cordelia, they'd all tease me but you, and laugh at me, but I saw a ghost out of the window in the yard."

"Oh, Buddy!" rallied his aunt.

"Yes, sir, twice!" asserted Buddy in an awesome way.

"Nonsense, Buddy! What particular shape did this wandering spirit of yours take?"

"He was an Esquimaux," asserted Buddy, solemnly. "He had a big bear-skin robe all over him. First he was dodging behind the ice but we built yesterday. Next time I saw him at the window. He had his face close to the pane and he was looking in. He was looking straight at you, oh, sure he was!"

"Dear me!" fluttered Aunt Cordelia, with a little shiver. She had no belief in ghosts, but Buddy's gressomeness had begun to affect her. "It was probably some of your playmates dressed up in the old buffalo robe your father loaned you," she said. "Come, Buddy, pop into bed now," and she placed the lamp at the head of the stairs so that it shed its rays into Buddy's room.

Then Miss Cordelia went down the hall and entered an old storeroom and went to the window and looked out at the snowhouse, and swept the garden space with her glance.

"What foolish notions children get," she murmured. "Oh, coming in here reminds me I must get another hank of yarn," added this indefatigable knitter.

She fumbled around on the shelf where she supposed a certain box containing the yarn was located, and could not find it in the dark. Going to the door she took a match out of a box tacked to its inside frame, kept always full. Aunt Cordelia flared the match, found the yarn and dropped the match as Buddy called out, in a tone muffled because he probably was hiding his head under the bedclothes:

"All right, Aunt—I'm in."

As the last member of the family went upstairs to bed there crept out through the small semicircular door of the snowhouse a human figure. It was that of a man who was enveloped

in the buffalo robe and resembled some rugged Laplander. He edged to the shelter of some trees and stood there motionless. His eyes were fixed on the window of the only one of the upper rooms which had a light in it. It was that of Aunt Cordelia. She came to the window in full view and pulled down the shade. The watcher uttered a deep sigh. Now he retreated towards the hut and sat down on a snow hummock.

"They have all gone to bed," he soliloquized. "It's safe for me to venture. She has left the window up from the bottom a few inches for ventilation, and the space is big enough to pass the letter through."

The man now removed the robe from his shoulders, thrust it out of view inside the snow hut and took from his pocket a sealed envelope. This he placed between his teeth, approached the house and began a hand-over-hand, careful and noiseless ascent of a broad trellis which very nearly traversed the entire side of the house. Inch by inch he clambered, until his face was opposite the open window space. He freed one hand to remove the letter from his teeth and slipped it through the aperture.

The stranger was about to descend when a sudden glow crossed his face. It died down, then suddenly it flared up more brilliantly than before. Curious, and at the same time somewhat startled, the man threw back his head to obtain a clearer range of vision. It was to discover a heap of rubbish in the storeroom which Aunt Cordelia had visited two hours previous bursting in to a blaze.

The man was deft and agile. He rapidly marked a course sideways towards the window of the lumber room. The smoldering and blazing heaps in the apartment told him that here was no casual problem to deal with. He braced his feet as he got directly opposite the window. He could not lift the sash from the outside.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" he yelled at the top of his voice, intent on arousing the sleeping inmates of the house. Then he gave his body a forcible, forward lurch. It impelled him through the lower frame of the window with a heavy crash, carrying the splintered sash with him.

The man landed on the floor inside amid a shower of putty, glass and wood. He was speedily on his feet. He kept up his shouting, but doubly active the while. Some smoking bits of carpet he lifted and flung through the window out upon the snow-covered ground. A mass of old papers and magazines the stuff had covered burst forth into vivid flame. He was scorched, half blinded, breathless, but he kept on throwing out the blazing rubbish about him.

Now he wavered and uttered choking gasps. He felt that the smoke, cinders and heat were about to overcome him. He was about to abandon the unequal battle when he noticed two tin-jacketed cans, the outside of which were smoking and shooting out spasmodic streaks of flame.

"Kerosene, gasoline!" he panted desperately, and dashed at them. One after the other they hurtled through the window. Then a great blaze of light outside and an echoing explosion. The brave fire-fighter staggered towards the door. He threw the weight of his powerful frame against it. The door gave way. He went with it prostrate in the hall, and over him, attracted to the spot by his warning cries and the accompanying commotion, stumbled Mr. Porter.

Then the calls of the latter brought all hands under the roof to the scene. It was an exciting five minutes, while Mr. Porter beat out the flames and the other members of the household brought water and dashed it on the dying embers.

Mr. Porter carried the insensible man on his shoulders into a vacant bedroom. At a glance he saw that this incidental saver of his property, and probably of life, was seriously burned. Buddy hurried on his clothes and ran for a doctor.

It was daylight when Aunt Cordelia found the letter lying on the floor of her room. She opened it to regard its contents with dilating eyes and a quickly paling face. A romance five years dead, the details of which she had never imparted to a single soul, was revived with a strangeness and force that made her sway to the point of fainting.

"I am all through with the drink," it read. "I am a changed man, have made my way in the world and am driven to see you, if only at a distance, once more. Of course you have long since forgotten me, but if my penitence and my redemption appeal to you in the slightest degree send me a single line to the address I give and I will hasten to see you openly."

What her answer would be, the glowing eyes, the kiss she bestowed upon those cherished written lines, her tears, presaged clearly. She was called by her brother into the hall.

"The doctor says our patient will be all right in a day or two, and is comfortably resting now," Mr. Porter said. "Will you sit by him, Cordelia, until mother gets breakfast over?"

Randolph Waters looked up from the couch upon which he lay as Cordelia entered the room. She made no pretense of affection, or shyness, or aversion.

"Randolph!" she said, and sat down beside him and caressed the bandaged hand. "You were the ghost little Buddy saw at the window? You just in time discovered the fire my carelessness caused?"

He smiled an assent, hope and comfort commingling. She leaned towards him and kissed him on the cheek.

"That is the answer to your letter," said Aunt Cordelia simply.

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