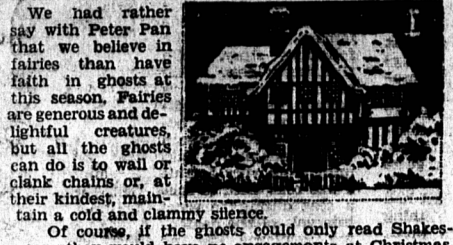


Where Ghosts Are Expected

Christmas Visitors Who Rarely Disappoint

By BYRON BELLINGHAM



We had rather say with Peter Pan that we believe in fairies than have faith in ghosts at this season. Fairies are generous and delightful creatures, but all the ghosts can do is to wall or clank chains or, at their kindest, make a cold and clammy silence.

Of course, if the ghosts could only read Shakespeare they would have no engagements at Christmas. The poet records a belief that:— "No spirit dare stir abroad. The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike, No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm."

The White Lady happens to be the most dependable, and the most popular. In nearly a dozen country houses there will be confident anticipations of such a mysterious visitant. At midnight in a mansion near Midsalham, in Suffolk, a White Lady will, if she keeps her appointment, appear and glide, silent and graceful, through a large drawing room, casting, just a sad, sweet glance around her as she vanishes through the richly carved closed doors.

A more particular White Lady makes a Christmas appearance in a home in the Cornish country. She chooses to be seen only by such guests as were born in December. Her favourite bedroom suddenly glows with a beautiful soft white light and this is the herald of her approach.

She comes dressed in a gown which has the lustre of rich, white silk but her face is unfortunately pathetic. It suggests a hidden, deep and abiding pain. One tradition runs that this White Lady mourns a fickle lover who failed to keep a Christmas tryst and broke her heart.

What is the most appropriate ghost for Christmas? My personal vote would be given to the miser. Surely it is simply poetic justice that such niggards in the good things of life should be forced to revisit the pale glimpses of the moon and see how we can "be merry in hall" in the twentieth century.

TOGETHER AT CHRISTMAS

HOW GAIN FOUGHT LOVE—AND LOST

By Marjorie Bell

"To my niece, Gloria Thompson, the sum of ten thousand pounds, providing that she attains to the holy estate of matrimony within two years of my decease."

Mr. Rawlings refolded the will. "That, my dear child, means that your time is up on Christmas Day."

Gloria, perched on the edge of the lawyer's desk, swung her silk-stockinged leg reflectively. The will was no news to her. She was here to-day to discuss it again in response to an urgent summons from Mr. Rawlings.

"I think it was a mean will for Uncle Henry to make," she exploded at last. "I don't want to get married."

"My dear young lady," the venerable lawyer's brow contracted at this scathing denunciation of his dead client. Doctor Thompson, your uncle, was my esteemed friend for many years, and I know that he had very sane and definite reasons for making such a will."

Gloria got off the table and fell to pacing the room. "Uncle Henry was always grumbling about my love-affairs—trifling with peoples' affections, he called it. I suppose he thought if I got married I'd settle down."

"There was the case of my young nephew," the lawyer remarked.

"Peter Dawson? Well, if Peter chose to make a fool of himself just because I refused him I can't be blamed."

"You encouraged him, and ruined his life."

"Quite. Also, there was Pat Somersby and the Tinkler boy and that weird youth named Angus Williamson."

Mr. Rawlings curtailed this flippancy. "Your uncle, who adored you, and spoilt you from the time he adopted you as a tiny child, was deeply grieved at these heartless flirtations of yours. You have caused an infinite amount of unhappiness. It was because of that I was instructed to draw up this will."

"And if I'm not married by the time specified, I get nothing?"

"Not a penny."

Gloria drew her brows together in anxious thought. There was but one short week left to Christmas Day—one week between her and absolute penury, unless—

"I have it!" she cried excitedly. "The will simply states that I must be married by that date. It says nothing about living with my husband, or remaining married, does it? So I'll get myself a husband to conform with the regulations, and divorce him directly afterwards."

The aged lawyer rose to his feet with agitation. "My dear young lady, what a dreadful idea! There is nothing to prevent your taking such a step, but I do implore you not to do anything so rash. It is the last thing your uncle would have wished."

"Nevertheless, I shall do it," said Gloria decisively. "I wonder I didn't think of it months ago. Now, when I get to marry me under such conditions!"

She looked at the portly, sedate form of the little lawyer and her eyes twinkled. "Mr. Rawlings, will you marry me?"

"Bless my soul, no, Gloria!" exploded the astonished man. "I can only hope that you did not ask that question seriously."

"I most certainly did," she returned, laughing up at him gaily. "But, perhaps, after all, I'm glad you refused. Now, who can I ask?"

He took her slim young hands in his. "My dear child, be sensible."

"How can I help myself? I won't marry anyone properly, and I won't lose uncle's money, either, through one of his silly whims. I must make a business proposition of it. In return for services rendered I'll agree to pay my future husband a certain sum of money on the day that the decree is made absolute."

It was in vain that the lawyer pleaded and argued. Nothing would turn her from her purpose.

"Then may heaven send you the right sort of man," he cried fervently, as she blew him a kiss and danced out of the doorway.

THE PROBLEM:

That was exactly Gloria's problem—to find the right sort of man. Those who were eager to marry her would not accept the conditions she insisted; by lay down and, as most of them had money of their own, the reward she offered would be no inducement whatever. On the other hand, the chosen husband must be someone whom she knew. It would be silly to risk unnecessary complications.

After several hours of anxious thought she decided on Paul Hilleray. In her opinion, he exactly suited the position. Paul, the son of a farmer long since dead, had been her subject slave ever since she could remember, although her position as the adopted daughter of the wealthy doctor had made it impossible that a working class farmer should ever aspire to her hand. He had left the village several years previously, but was at present on a visit to his mother.

Gloria's eyes shone with excitement and, getting out her car, she drove to his mother's cottage. She found Paul in the kitchen, packing.

"Going away?" she cried, and he was surprised at the regret in her voice.

"My mother has gone to see a sick sister and, as I'm not particularly keen on spending Christmas alone, I'm joining her."

He looked at the girlish figure in its expensive fur coat and, pert, tight-fitting hat.

"It's wonderful to see you, Miss Thompson. I had not hoped to be so lucky during my short holiday here."

She seated herself on the edge of the table and regarded him with a calculating air.

"Paul, I want you to do something for me."

"For you? There was eagerness in his tone. "I'd do anything on earth for you, that goes without saying."

She humored him with a look that made his heart miss a beat and laid an impulsive hand on his arm.

"You do like me, Paul, don't you—I mean, is there another girl?"

Startled, his clear grey eyes met hers with a directness that seemed to pass straight through her. He said hoarsely, "You know I do—like you. There can never be anyone else."

A pause followed. For a moment Gloria experienced a wild sense of panic. Then, with a laugh and a shrug she got down from the table.

"It's just this Paul—I want you to marry me."

"An incredulous stare answered her."

"Do you mean private theatricals?" he asked at length.

"No, I mean a real marriage. Don't look so solemn, Paul."

"Are you crazy?" His voice shook. Very shortly and concisely she outlined her plan to him.

When she had finished he looked into her eyes for one long, aching moment, and then turned away without a word. She thrust her arm into his with the wistful gesture of a child.

All things and few of us could stand the strain of living in a mansion with a ghost who respected not this platitudes and had the trying habit of appearing when least expected. The spirit who appears at Christmas is reasonable. The most materialistic and grumpy among us would grant that the fair vision of a White Lady, for instance, would complete all our dreams of a "real, old-fashioned yuletide."

"You will, Paul, won't you?"

"Does money mean so much to you, Gloria?"

"The lack of it does," she returned shortly. "After all, Paul, it won't hurt you to do what I ask, and I'll pay you well—"

"Don't! That hurts!" He stopped her with a peremptory hand.

"Oh, all right. We'll leave that part for a bit, then."

He took a short turn up and down the room. "Very well, Gloria. I will marry you."

"You darling old sport. When shall it be? My time is up on Christmas Day."

"Then we will be married on Christmas Eve. He tried not to let her see the hurt in his eyes. Slowly he pulled out the things from his suitcase on the table. "I shall be alone for Christmas, after all," he said whimsically. "I must wire to my mother and tell her not to expect me."

They met at the door of the register office and the ceremony was performed with startling rapidity. Gloria's glittering car awaited her outside, and Paul settled her into it.

"Are you, too, spending Christmas alone?" There was a wistful note in his voice.

"You bet I am not!" she answered with emphasis. "I'm going to the Jarwins'. They live about ten miles from here. I'm driving over in time for dinner to-night. A whole crowd's there. It'll be a tremendous rag."

He stood alone in the street, hat in hand, and watched the red car glide out of sight.

A LETTER

"Miss Gloria, there's a letter just come for you."

The maid stood, salver in hand, beside the dressing table where her young mistress was putting the finishing touches to her toilette.

"Thank you, Olive." Hastily she scanned the few written lines. "Who brought this? Is anyone waiting?"

"A little village lad, miss. He said there was no answer, and went off."

"Very well." The maid withdrew and Gloria read again the note.

"Dear Gloria, (it ran) Can you possibly call to see me for a few minutes on your way to the Jarwins'?"

The matter is urgent. Yours, Paul."

The girl frowned thoughtfully. How tiresome of Paul. If some complication had arisen, why couldn't he have come to see her? Slipping on her wrap, she crumpled the note and hurried into her suitcase and went down.

"I don't know when I shall return, Olive. Have a good time this Christmas, as you can."

"Thank you, miss, and a happy Christmas to you."

The car purred gently down the drive and out on to the road. A few feathery flakes of snow were falling and the trees gleamed bright in the moonlight, but white, piled-up clouds promised more snow shortly.

"I mustn't stay long with Paul in case there's a heavy fall coming, and the road gets blocked," she told herself as she sped down the narrow lane leading to the hollow in which the cottage stood. Paul heard the car and came to the door. Gloria followed him into the tiny parlour, impatience in her every movement.

"What on earth's the trouble?" she began, petulantly. "You'll make me horribly late."

"I'm sorry." His eyes travelled down the white-cloaked figure. "Gloria—as a very special favour—won't you let me see your frock?"

The cloak slipped from her, and she stood before him, lovely and fragrant, in a frock of shimmering blue. He drew his breath sharply.

"You are wonderful—wonderful, Gloria."

His laughing eyes mocked her.

"Thank you, gallant knight. Meanwhile, why did you ask me to call? I'm in a hurry."

For answer he took her hands in his.

"Gloria, to-day the law made you my wife. Won't you let me kiss you—just once?"

Angrily she stooped and plucked up the discarded cloak.

"Did you ask me to come here for that?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then you might have saved yourself the trouble."

Before she could get past him he sprang to the door and locked it, pocketing the key. Her lip curled with scorn.

"For heaven's sake, don't behave like a page from a penny novelette. Let me go at once!"

"Not until I have kissed you."

"So that's the sort of beastly cad you are! I was a fool to trust you."

"There is nothing caddish in wanting to kiss one's wife."

"Oh, don't keep harping on that. You know well enough that our marriage is one in name only."

"You said so, yes."

"And you promised it should be so."

"I did not. I merely said I would marry you."

Slowly the colour drained from her face.

"What exactly do you mean?"

"Simply this. You made me marry you and now I cannot let you go. Stay with me, Gloria, if only just for this one night. I need you so!"

There was a strange look in his clean-shaven, weather-beaten face, and his mouth set into a rugged line. He came towards her, his arms outstretched. Gloria strained back, but his arms were hard around her.

"Gloria, stay with me!" he pleaded.

"Let me go, I tell you, let me go!"

With one arm still holding her he lifted her face until her blazing eyes met his.

"For the last time I ask you, will you stay with me?"

"No, no, no!" she rasped, pushing him from her. He gathered her again in his arms and crushed his lips to hers. Before she knew what she was doing her nails were tearing at his hair and her teeth descended with a snap into the thick part of his wrist.

(Continued on Page 8)

WHO'S HAPPY?

Those Who Seek Joy in Vain, and Those Who Find It

By ROBERT POWER

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride. Yes, wishes are cheap.

This is the season when wishes are at their gain prices. There is a glut of them.

We are, all of us, very careful to wish each other a happy Christmas. There is mass production of greetings in progress.

Is this custom, then, all nonsense? Are all these wishes cheap, bundles of insincere words?

By no means.

But let us get this point clear—the wishes of our friends will not, of themselves, make us happy. Unless they spur us to make ourselves happy, they are worthless.

To give is better than to receive. Who takes care to give a heartfelt wish for happiness to all his (or her) friends, is cultivating a neighbourly feeling, and that undoubtedly contributes to happiness.

THE POOR RICH

But happiness is no matter of Christmas cards and presents and greetings, and the ability to indulge our desires, or all those poor people who rush off to Riviera and to Paris for Christmas would be happy. They have money to satisfy their whims; they receive plenty of presents and wishes.

They have every material thing they desire; but they stroll the opulent Promenade des Anglais, and haunt the luxurious hotels of the Place Vendôme in search of something that is possessed of a ragged little boy in a city slum, and which they could not buy from him even if he were willing to sell.

Are they happy who assemble at family gatherings in substantial homes in the most desirable nooks of our country, in houses where stint is unknown, and where no son or daughter lacks an inheritance?

Not always.

The smiles seen at the family reunion are often forced smiles, the gaiety is laboriously manufactured. Among the grown-up sons and daughters, there are sneers at the strange, out-of-date sentiment which makes the old people bring the family together at Christmas-time.

The men curse the boredom of it. The women vie with each other in silly displays of extravagance. The whole proceeding, too often, is a tragic farce, but its players recall that the "governor" has made his will, and it is wise "to keep on the right side of him."

WHAT IS THE SECRET?

It is not always so, of course, and one rejoices that, in some instances, these family gatherings are truly happy, for the sons and daughters are sincerely pleased to give their parents their company, and to manifest their love. But by no means is that true of every such reunion.

Who, then, is happy?

What is the secret of Christmas happiness?

I can write only of my own experience. I have spent Christmas in many ways and in divers places, but the memory of the happiest Christmases, apart from those of childhood, belong to a period when I lived in a poor district, close to one that was still poorer.

In those days, I would be out and about as early as seven o'clock on Christmas morning, making my way through endless streets of little houses, along which heavily-laden postmen picked their way in a silence broken only by the occasional laugh of children inspecting the contents of their stockings, testing the tin trumpet and the doll that would say "Mamma," if you squeezed it hard enough.

I had to walk about two miles, for there were no tramcars running so early on Christmas Day, and sometimes the walk was through snow and slush, or through heavy rain and a biting wind.

At the end of the journey was a big hall in which hundreds of children were gathered, children so poor that hardly any of them had unpatched clothes.

HAPPINESS HALL:

The hall was gay with flags and paper decorations, and here and there, bits of holly and mistletoe, but only small pieces, for holly and mistletoe was hard to come by. Some of the children might know that holly and mistletoe grew somewhere in the country, to which once a year they went for a glorious half-day; but the majority, if you asked them, would say these red and white berries came from "market."

They thought much more of the paper decorations, because paper was the only stuff with which their homes were decorated, if, indeed, they had decorations, or any homes in the real sense of the word.

As soon as the door had opened, the children streamed in and thereafter, for two hours, the din was deafening. In intervals between eating the good things provided for them, they might, by much shouting and banging, be brought to silence, to sing a carol, or a popular song.

Apart from its gaudy paper garlands, this was a drab hall. It was badly lighted, and badly ventilated, so that by the time the hundreds of children had been packed around the long tables, the room was stuffy with the odour of unwashed humanity.

Physically, it was all uncomfortable, the more so because one set out before breakfast, and there was no time to eat until the children were homeward bound with the remains of their meal in paper bags, and their cheap little presents tucked under their arms.

Nevertheless, for all the discomfort, no two hours of the Christmas holiday ever passed more rapidly or more joyously for me than those devoted to the children's breakfast. I would return to find the family celebrations dull and unamusing after such exuberance and such a display of genuine, unaffected gratitude on the part of the children, for the trivial things and frugal meal which had been bestowed upon them.

THE CERTAIN WAY:

One man's meat is another's poison, and all of us do not find happiness along the same road. But of this I am sure, one certain way to be happy in adult life, is to make others happy—for most, it is, I think, the only certain way.

Further, you will find it difficult to convey happiness to those who have everything that money can command. They are not happy, nor will they be, while they seek to buy joy with money.

If the Christmas season be spent in idleness and ease, amid the results of lavish expenditure of a selfish hand, all the goodwill in the world, all the Christmas cards and presents that ever made a shopman's fortune, will contribute nothing to our happiness.

Rather let us look upon Christmas as a season affording wonderful opportunities for extending.

That best portion of a good man's life, His little, nameless, unremembered acts Of kindness and of love.

CHRISTMAS CACKLERS



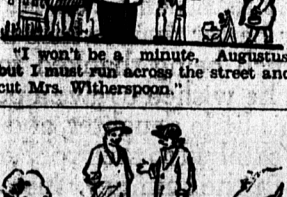
"Nice weather for Christmas, ain't it Joe?"



MOTHER: "If you wished to go to the football match why didn't you ask me first?"



He went to the fancy dress ball as Dick Whittington's cat, and the only thing they give him to drink all the evening was a saucer of milk.



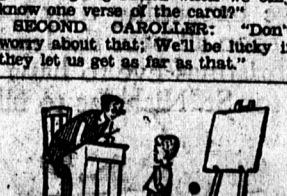
"I won't be a minute, Augustus, but I must run across the street and cut Mrs. Witherspoon."



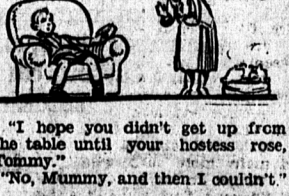
RICH UNCLE (a Christmas visitor): "And remember, dear, when I die all that I have goes to you."



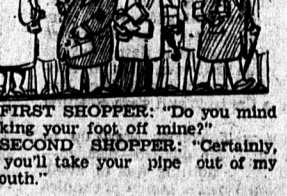
CALLER: "I find that house I've just rented from you is full of black beetles."



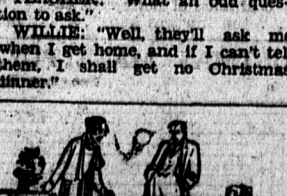
FIRST CAROLLER: "Wot's the good of going round when we only know one verse of the carol?"



LANDLORD: "Well, at the rent you are paying, what did you expect to find it full of—white mice?"



FIRST SHOPPER: "Do you mind taking your foot off mine?"



WILLIE (on eve of breaking up): Please teacher, what did I learn to-day?"



TEACHER: "What an odd question to ask."



WILLIE: "Well, there'll ask me when I get home, and if I can't tell them, I shall get no Christmas dinner."



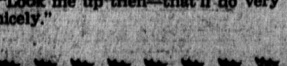
WIFE (after the party): "Do you realize what you did?"



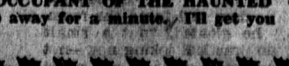
HUSBAND: "No, but I'll admit that it was wrong. What was it?"



"Remember the walls, sir."



"Finish up to-day, sir. Won't be round again until next Christmas."



"Look me up then—that'll do very nicely."



SPOOK—Cringe, Varlet; behold Sir Geoffrey of the Dagger! OCCUPANT OF THE HAUNTED CHAMBER:—What! Not the OLD Sir Geoffrey!

