

ONE

THE HAUNTED MIRROR



It was late night, and all was dark and still in the old house. The cooling night brought faint creaks and groans from old floorboards and timbers. Behind the wainscot, mice scuttled and the old clock in the hall below beat a loud, regular *clack*. It was a comfortable sound in daytime, but a slightly sinister one in the dark, silent night. The long stairway led down into a deeper darkness broken halfway by the faintly

glimmering moonlight on the half landing. The hallway was dark and the clock all but invisible, but at the far end a flickering light could be seen. The study door was ajar and the sounds of movement within could be heard. Then voices.

“Charley, what did you do with the matches, you donkey?”

Charley stuck her tongue out at her older cousin. Then, brushing her fringe from her forehead, she told him, “I put them in the box with the Ouija board on the table, so they wouldn’t get lost.”

Robbie swung his torch around the room, briefly blinding Tom, his brother. Tom was dark haired like his brother, unlike Charley, who had pale yellow hair and unusual emerald-green eyes. Her hair had two odd streaks of a paler colour, so pale they looked almost silver in the dim light. The torch continued its sweep, flashing past the old desk, the bookshelves, and he blinded himself briefly as it shone into the full-length, antique mirror standing against the nearest wall.

“Bother! Why do you have that thing there?”

“It’s one of Dad’s antiques, like these coins over there.” Charley pointed to an area that was outside the torch’s beam.

Robbie ignored her – he had found the table. On it lay a long, oblong box and a quartet of candlesticks, each of which held a long, red candle. They had been expensive to buy but Robbie had thought they would add to the atmosphere. Plain white candles just

didn't have that feeling of... what? Magic? Mystery? Anyway, red candles were better and besides, they had not had to pay for the Ouija board. They had found it in an old, unused cupboard in the house, its thick coating of dust showing it had not been touched for years.

That was what had given Robbie the idea. Although this was Charley's home, he and Tom were regular visitors and had often heard the old stories about the ghost that was said to have haunted the house. Alice, the maid, claimed to have seen the ghost once when she was in alone. She had nearly lost her job because she had run out of the house in terror, leaving the back door open. Money and food had been stolen but, as it was her own money that was lost, she wasn't fired.

Robbie lit the candles, then switched his torch off, leaving the room lit only by their flickering, eerie light.

"Now, everyone, gather round," he said. He took out the Ouija board and laid it out flat on the table.

"That's no good," exclaimed Charley. "We'll never all be able to reach over this. The table's much too big."

Robbie tightened the belt of his robe, which had come loose. It was October and too cool this night to be wearing only pyjamas.

"We'll bring the card table over and make the circle round it. Leave the candles where they are."

A few minutes later, the children were all seated round the little card table.

“What’s that ugly thing you’re wearing?” asked Tom.

Charley grasped the pendant she was wearing. The hanging jewel was carved with an impish face.

“Aunt Ammy gave it to me years ago. I thought it was the kind of thing to wear for a séance.”

“I should think it is,” said Robbie. “It’s pretty gruesome. Maybe it will attract a ghost.”

They held hands and all three took a deep breath. They were silent for a minute, then Charley said, “You don’t think... you don’t think we might make contact with my mother or father?”

“Your mum and dad aren’t dead,” said Robbie. “They’re just away on one of their digs. They can’t be contacted at a séance – that’s a silly idea!”

“Did you mean your real parents?” asked Tom. “From before you were adopted by Uncle Ewan and Aunt Mairi?”

Charley’s cheeks burned a bright red. “No. I – I’ve always thought of my foster parents as my real parents. I just thought we might be able to find out how they are – like the lady at the fair who could tell your fate by looking in a crystal ball.”

“Oh, Charley!” Robbie would have followed this with a rude comment, but he saw her serious, anxious expression. “I’m sorry, I didn’t realise you were so worried about your parents.”

Charley threw her glum mood off and forced a weak smile onto her face. Robbie was a little annoyed with his cousin. She had spoiled the atmosphere. He knew, however, that she did have reason to worry, at least a little bit. Charley's foster parents were archaeologists who sometimes left their home in the Albany borders to go on archaeological expeditions. They were on the ancient isle known as Lyonesse, to the west of Kernow. Lyonesse long ago sank beneath the seas, but rose again every ten years or so. Some said this was due to freak geological and tidal effects, others suggested more mysterious, mystical reasons. The worry was that the island usually only remained on the surface for two or three weeks before it sank back to the depths once more. Her parents ought to have left by now but had found something new and fascinating and had decided to wait another few days. Weather down there was calm, they said. Her fear was that the weather might change suddenly because bad weather could cause the seas to rise quickly and cover the island.

"Look," said Charley, trying to change the subject, "everyone says this house has had ghosts for ages and ages – it stands to reason if we have a séance, one ought to turn up."

Tom shivered. "I don't know if I want to actually *see* a ghost! I thought it was just messages spelled out on the board."

"Shush!" Robbie told him.

“Don’t worry,” Charley said. She seemed to have regained her enthusiasm. “As long as we keep in a circle, we can’t be harmed.”

Robbie wasn’t sure whether this was really true. But he thought he didn’t really believe in ghosts anyway, and besides, he was sure that if they *were* real, ghosts only scared people. They didn’t actually hurt anyone.

“Come on! Everyone hold hands again.”

“Aren’t we supposed to touch the glass?” asked Tom.

“When we feel a *presence*,” replied Charley in a spooky voice. “Then we’ll all touch the glass, and it will spell out a message from *beyond the grave*.”

“Quiet!” hissed Robbie. “Everybody concentrate.”

They all held hands and stared at the board. Of course, it wasn’t what you were supposed to do with a Ouija board, but Robbie had been reading about séances and thought they might as well combine different things together. Double their chances, so to speak. The candlelight flickered eerily and seemed to dim. The dark room felt as mysterious and spooky as they could have wished. It felt like the very witching hour of night. It was a delicious, exciting sensation. After a while, Charley felt a tingling sensation at her chest, where she wore the pendant.

“I think I feel a presence!” she whispered. “Does anyone else?”

Robbie shushed her, but Charley *did* feel something. She had a strange sensation coming over her – not

a bad one, but a kind of feeling that something was really about to happen. It was the same kind of feeling she'd felt in the past when she made a guess about something – like where a lost ring was to be found – and so often found she was right. *You must have been a seventh daughter*, her mother had often told her. Charley sometimes wondered if it were true: she knew nothing of her natural parents; she had been a foundling, left at her foster parents' doorstep, like in a story.

"I'm not sure," said Robbie, "but let's try the glass now anyway. Everyone put a finger on it and see what happens!"

They put the glass on the board and each put a finger on it. They waited. Would it move? Would it spell out a message from *beyond the grave*? Or would nothing happen? They were so concentrated on the glass that they didn't notice the candlelight begin to dim again and the air becoming colder. All the little noises outside, the *hrush-hrush* of the wind in the trees, the faint but sharp calls of night creatures, even the distant, occasional sounds of traffic beyond the nearby village of Kirtle where a main road ran, all went dead, and a heavy silence fell on the room.

"Look," said Charley, "there's a light from somewhere. I can see it reflected in the glass."

They all peered at the glass, and it was true. There was a light, faint but clear. It was not from the candles for they were in another part of the room and the children's bodies shielded their light from the glass.

But they didn't turn around to see what it was. They were all a little afraid. Suddenly, they were startled by a voice that seemed to be inside the room, though there was no one else there. It had an odd, distant quality.

"Who are you? I c-can see you..." It spoke in English, which the others spoke fluently, as fluently as their own native language.

Tom yelled. The others turned around sharply, and the glass tumbler went clattering across the floor. The voice continued.

"...C-can't you see me? C-can't you hear me?"

For a moment they thought the voice was coming out of nowhere for there was nothing – and no one else – to be seen. Then they noticed where the eerie light was coming from. Deep within the antique mirror, a strange glow was emerging and within the glow was the reflection of their room. Only, there were some things wrong with the reflection. The room in the mirror was like their room, but subtly different, with things missing or out of place. The table they were sitting at was there – but *they weren't*. They weren't reflected in the mirror! A boy suddenly appeared in the front of the mirror-room and peered at them like someone peering through a window. Charley gasped and in a harsh whisper, said, "It's our mirror – that room in there must have a mirror just where ours is and he's looking through it."

"You mean he can see us?" Tom's voice almost

squeaked he was so nervous. Who would have expected that a ghost would appear this way?

They stared back at the boy. He was dressed in what appeared to be old-fashioned knickerbockers, shirt and a waistcoat, although they looked rather dishevelled.

“The mirror’s showing the past,” said Charley, “it must be haunted. The ghost is in the mirror!”

“Oh, gosh,” said Tom, “I hope it can’t come out. What’ll we do if it does?”

“Oh, shush!” said Robbie. “Don’t be such a baby.”

He had been a little frightened at first by this apparition, but his annoyance at his brother put his fear out of his mind. It also helped, now he looked more closely, that the boy – ghost or not – looked quite ordinary. He had a puzzled, slightly curious look on his face. No clanking of chains, horrible grimaces, or shaking of gory locks here. In fact, the only thing that made him seem to be a ghost was the strange glow that came from the mirror and made the whole scene within it appear pale and transparent.

“Who-who is it, do you think?” asked Tom.

“Oh, I’m Ch-Charles.” The mirror-boy’s voice sounded odd – as if they were hearing an echo of an echo, not the real voice itself. “Who are you p-people? And where are you? What p-part of the world do you c-come from?”

This question seemed very odd to the children.

“The poor thing doesn’t know he’s a ghost,” said Charley.

“That happens sometimes,” added Robbie. “I read it somewhere.”

The boy in the mirror became annoyed at this. “I’m not a g-ghost!!” he yelled. The yell reverberated like a bell. “G-ghosts aren’t real. You’re not real!”

Then he stopped and stared at them. He seemed to focus on Charley and a look of astonishment spread over his face. They got up and went over to the mirror to see him better. They were not in the least bit frightened now, not even Tom (well, not too much). It was all very, very weird and gave them a very peculiar feeling, but they were no longer scared.

“Charley!” Robbie almost shouted.

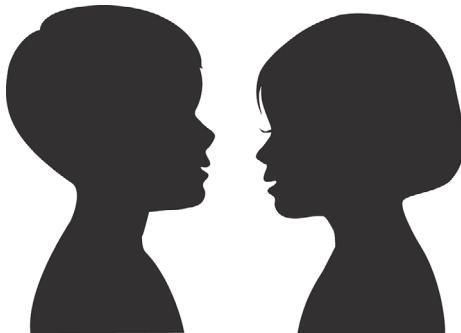
“What?”

Robbie’s head spun quickly, peering first at his cousin then at the boy in the mirror. She turned and stared into the mirror, wondering what it was he saw – and stepped back in surprise. The boy in the mirror smiled, seemingly amused at this. Before, the light in that other room had been too faint to see him very clearly from where they’d been sitting. Now they were up close to the mirror, she could see the boy’s face as plain as anything. It was a face she was very familiar with. It was the face she saw every day in the bathroom mirror when she washed, and her dressing-table mirror when she brushed her hair. She was looking at her own self... or rather, herself if she cut her hair like a boy and wore a waistcoat and knickerbockers. She was looking at her twin, but a

boy twin. It was weird: it was like looking at your own reflection, but a reflection which showed a different version of yourself.

TWO

HE'S NOT A GHOST!



“He must be an ancestor of yours, Charley,” said Robbie. “We’re looking at the past.”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” said the boy, “this is the p-present.”

“Of course,” said Robbie, “his time seems like the present to him.”

“Stop t-talking about me like I wasn’t really here!” said the boy, looking and sounding peeved.

“Anyway,” said Charley, “he can’t be my ancestor.

I was adopted, remember – I don't have family from this place."

"That's funny," said Charley's twin, looking suddenly quite sad, "I'm an orphan too."

Now Charley felt the most peculiar emotion tremble through her. What was happening was much more exciting than a séance or even actually seeing a ghost. It was much more wonderful and although she didn't quite understand why, she knew it was much more important. She was speaking more to herself than to the others when she said, "It's like *Anna in Mirror Land!*"

"This isn't a fairy tale," said Robbie peevishly.

"*Anna* isn't a fairy tale. It's a – what's the word – fantasy. In the book, Anna goes through the mirror into another world like her own, but where everything is topsy-turvy and back to front. That's what this is like, only it's real."

"Anna?" said Charley's mirror-twin. "I've never heard of that book. Wait a minute – that sounds like *Alice Through the Looking G-Glass.*"

Now, Charley pressed close to the mirror and without thinking, placed her hands on it... and so did Charles. For a moment, the mirror was smooth and solid. She stared into the boy's eyes. As she did, she felt sympathy for this boy who was so strange, yet like her in many ways. Her pendant tingled at her chest and the glass seemed to melt away. Their hands touched. She pushed against his hands, not quite

believing they were real. Then she felt a sudden shock. Charles must have felt it too for he pulled back and Charley, pushing against him, found herself falling into the mirror – really falling, for the next moment she found herself staggering into the other room. She had gone through the mirror, feeling no resistance except a sensation like a sudden rush of freezing wind. Charles stared at her with an expression that astonishment was too weak a word for.

“Oh, my goodness! It’s all real!” Charley’s feeling matched her twin’s expression. “You’re real, too.”

“Yes... I c-can hardly b-believe it. Until today I thought the things I saw in the mirror were just... some k-kinds of illusion, like a magic lantern show. I never thought they were real p-places with real p-people. Even when you talked to me, it didn’t seem quite real.”

“You’ve seen other places in your mirror? But how? I mean, we held a séance. What do you do?”

“D-do? N-nothing. It’s my uncle.” Charles glanced over his shoulder, as if afraid he might suddenly appear. “He... he d-dabbles in magic. It was him that b-brought the mirror here. I’m not supposed to come in here b-but...”

There was a loud, sharp tapping. Charley turned to the mirror, where Robbie and Tom were staring in, a look of mixed annoyance and astonishment on their faces.

“Come and see!” she called to them.

“Don’t you think we’ve been trying?!”

Robbie pushed forward – and was stuck. The glass did not part for him.

“See what I mean?”

“Oh!” Charley cried out in alarm. “I’ll be stuck here. I can’t get home!”

In desperation, she rushed forward to bang her fists against the glass. They went through! Robbie and Tom jumped back, wide-eyed with surprise. She pulled her hands back and stared at them in astonishment.

“What’s going on?”

Robbie leant his head against the mirror glass to see better. “You must be magic, Charley. It must be you that made the magic happen.”

Charley’s hand instinctively clutched her pendant. She felt the magic must have come from this. Charles had another idea, however.

“It happened when we p-put our hands together. Maybe it’s b-because we’re so much alike – one of us was able to b-bring the other over to their own world.”

“You believe it, then? That we live in different worlds?”

“Yes – like you said about *Anna*, like *Alice*; similar, b-but d-different. Not all are quite the same though – some are very d-different. Nothing came through before though. I thought they couldn’t be real.”

“Well, I’m real and this place is real. We’ve got a few bits of furniture in this old-fashioned style, but its

old, really old. Some of this stuff is brand new – and you don't have anything like the wireless in our room.”

“Wireless?”

“Yes. Wireless, radio... you know... oh! I suppose you don't. It's quite a recent invention in our world. It's a kind of...” Charley would have tried to explain about radios but Charles, who had been staring at her while she talked, suddenly cried out.

“You're a g-girl!”

“You've just noticed? You're not very observant.”

“You're wearing these strange p-pantaloons like the other b-boys and...”

“Pantaloons? Oh, you mean pyjamas.”

“...Your hair is a b-bit longer than b-boys here b-but it's shorter than our g-girls wear it. Now I c-can see you properly, I see you *are* a g-girl.”

Charley shook her head and was about to make a sarcastic remark, when a small, grey figure flashed across the room. It ran up to them and then stopped, peering up at the children, as if puzzled to see two of them. It was a cat with silver-grey fur and white paws and a white crescent mark on its forehead. Then, with an almost querying meow, the cat padded forward and rubbed itself against Charley's ankles.

“Selena!” cried Charles. “You faithless c-creature!”

Charley leant over and picked up the cat, who happily snuggled into her arms. She stroked her and tickled her ear.

“She’s lovely! Selena? That’s a goddess of the moon, isn’t it? I suppose it’s the crescent on her head that made you call her that.”

“My mother named her when she was a k-kitten, not long b-before she... she...”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to remind you.”

The sad expression she had seen before covered Charles’s face. Then, instantly, it was replaced by an anxious, fearful expression as he turned at a sharp noise from inside his house.

“That must b-be my uncle. He mustn’t find you here or know that I know about the mirror. Hurry! You have to g-go.”

“But...”

“You c-can’t stay. And b-besides, the mirror only shows other places for a short while, then it goes b-back to b-being an ordinary mirror again. You have to g-go or you’ll be trapped here!”

His voice was strained with fear, but Charley also saw a kind of longing in his eyes, as if he wished she didn’t have to leave. She thought he must be a very lonely boy.

“Look,” she said. “We must meet up again. Be here again tomorrow night and we’ll be here – *our* here, I mean – too. We’ll have another séance and...”

Charles was already pushing her towards the mirror as she spoke and Charley, still a little dazed at these amazing happenings, allowed herself to be shoved right into it. She emerged seconds later, shivering,

in her own study, with Tom and Robbie gabbling so excitedly she couldn't make out a word they were saying. Then suddenly there was a loud noise – or what would have been a very loud noise if it hadn't come from somewhere in the mirror-room. They all turned to look. They saw Charles look round as if expecting someone to appear and then move about, trying to find somewhere to hide. All the time, the scene in the mirror was getting fainter and fainter until it finally became featureless glass, like still water under a cloud-filled sky. Then, like a scene shift in a film, the mirror cleared to show the normal reflection of their room. Charley was now looking at her true reflection: a pale, fair-haired girl, looking bright-eyed and excited – and a little tired. But there was another, new figure there too. Still nestled in her arms was Selena, looking far from pleased to be in a strange new world.

Tom was first to notice their new visitor. He stared at it for a moment, then put out a cautious hand to stroke her.

“You brought a cat back! She's lovely. Do you think she's magic too?”

Robbie scoffed. “Don't be daft. I heard what you and Charles said, Charley. His uncle's a kind of wizard and their mirror must be magic. Perhaps ours is too – it's an ancient thing from who knows where.”

“Yes, but we couldn't go through like Charley.”

“Charley has a double there and they touched – one pulled the other through. That's what that boy

said, and I think he must be right. Charley, what was the other mirror like?"

Charley thought for a moment. "Why, it was like ours... not exactly the same but very like it. You know, like it was made in the same place and the same period."

"There you are. Two mirrors almost the same and two children almost the same."

"I think you're right. Charles said he'd seen other places, but nothing came through before. Whatever the magic is that works it, you can see the other world but maybe you can only go through if there's a version of yourself to help you."

"How did the cat get through, then?" asked Tom, pointing out the flaw in their theory.

Robbie groaned and Charley looked flummoxed. Tom, however, suggested an answer to his own question.

"I know! You had it wrapped up in your arms and when you came through, it had to come with you."

Robbie frowned, as he often did when thinking hard.

"Well, it's a very small animal and you've been through the mirror twice. Maybe that's why you could bring it through – but I don't think you could have brought anything bigger back."

"Except for Charles. If he helped me through to his world, then I could bring him through here. *I think we should*. He's an orphan and he seemed really sad. I think he could be happy here with us."

Robbie had a huge grin on his face now. “Bring him here? That’s a terrific idea! We could ask him all about his world. I suppose it will be like our nineteenth century but with some things different. Maybe Armorica is still part of the Brytonic Federation or Australia wasn’t colonised by Spain.”

“Don’t get carried away. He’s a real person. If he can come here, we need to look after him, not treat him like a... a stray cat or dog we found in the street.”

“Umm... of course.” Robbie felt a little sheepish. “But it *is* quite wonderful, isn’t it? We really have to do it again – as soon as we can.”

“Tomorrow night... I told him to be there again tomorrow night.”

Tom sat down and yawned. It was well past their bedtime – and well past midnight. Robbie and Charley looked again at the mirror, now dully reflecting the room and – dimly – themselves. And they could see Tom’s reflection, slumped in a chair and nodding off.

“Oh, we’d better get him off to bed,” said Charley, shaking her young cousin.

The door suddenly opened, letting light stream in from the hallway.

“We’d better get you all off to bed!” said a loud voice. “What is going on here?”