

# THE GHOST

By F. J. Goodman.

"Will I tell ye the story of the Ballykillin ghost?" Faith, will I, your honor, but it's a mighty small matter, after all. He was a poor creature, was that same, and so's the lave o' them when you come to reckon 'em up. Sure, ghosts is nothing but shadows at all, and what harm is there in a shadow? None that I ever heard of, barrin' Pat Donovan's, that he struck with his blackthorn when he was coming home from Carrickmahon Fair, thinking that it was some rascal that was following of him, and just sent his stick through Widow Mahoney's window, which cost him five shillings, worse luck, for mending the broken glass and frame.

Well, this is the truth of it, your honor. Ballykillin Castle was haunted by a ghost. Faith, it was, for I've seen it with nobody's eyes but my own. Ock! he was the ghost of a big scoundrel, he was—the "bad baronet" they called him, who betrayed his country in the time o' William of Orange, and was found dead one fine morning in his own court-yard with a bullet through his wicked heart. Not a soul ever knew who did it, but, whoever it was, he had the blessings of all the country round; for he was a mighty great rascal, was Sir Roderick Shane.

There never was a Shane like him before or since; for they've all been gentlemen, every baronet of them. And there was no finer gentleman in Ireland than my own colonel, Sir Peter Shane, who commanded the regiment I was out with in India, before I got my discharge for being crippled in the left leg in a scrimmage with the Indians.

Bless the dear old colonel! There wasn't a boy in the regiment who wouldn't have died for him; and when he asked if there was ever a man with pluck enough to go up to the castle and see whether there was a ghost in it or not, it was ashamed of myself that I would have been if I hadn't been the first to volunteer for the job.

But I'm hurrying on a bit too fast. For you must know that Ballykillin Castle had been shut up and left to go to waste for years upon years, all because of that murdering, thieving old ghost. And so was the lovely demesne all around it, with its oak and beech trees and shady walks all grown over with weeds and rubbish, and its pretty gardens running wild for want of a gardener. For never a soul would go near the place, and the boys would walk miles out of their way of nights to give it a wide berth. Ock! it was a pity, so it was entire.

So Sir Peter, he says: "Here's this fine old house of mine all run to wrack and ruin because of a bit of stupid superstition!" and the brave old man would have gone himself to pass a night in the castle, to prove there was no ghost at all, only his good lady and the Miss Shanes wouldn't let him.

Well, then, when I said I would go into the castle after dark and see if there was a ghost or not, he just shook his head with me and said I was a bold lad, and if I did it he would give me and Bridget 500 to start housekeeping out when we were married. But I said I would do it for the love of him and the family, not for the money, though sure that same would come in handy for the wedding.

But Biddy, when she heard what I was after, threw her arms round my neck and held me fast, saying:

"Ock! Timothy darling, sure you'll never go and do such a thing. You'll be kilt and murdered, that's what you'll be, and leave me a widow before we are married."

"Faith, no," says I; "the ghost won't hurt me, if there is one; and if there isn't, the colonel can get into the castle and live among us, and needn't be an absentee any more at all."

"But, ock!" says Biddy; "if the ghost doesn't kilt you, sure he'll frighten you out of your blessed wits, and it's a poor deluded lunatic that I'll have for a husband all my days."

Well, your honor, it was mighty hard work that I had to quiet the colliers, and persuade her to let me go without any more howling. And all the folks in Ballykillin, when they saw me march off to the castle with my stick and my bag of victuals over my shoulder, swore I'd never come back with my wits about me, even if I didn't leave my corpse behind.

But I'd faced the black niggers out in India, and I didn't believe there was a ghost half as ugly or vicious as the best of them. I'd heard ghost stories galore in my time, and never know of one where anything worse happened than a bit of a fright; and sure, thinks I, if you're not frightened what harm can come to you at all?

So I marched up to the castle with never a twither of the heart, whistling "Finnegans Wake" just for company's sake, and ready to face all the ghosts in the bad place or out of it. The rusty iron gates at the entrance of the demesne were hanging loose on their hinges, and the pretty lodge was all in ruins, with the creeping ivy growing over it. The road under the big trees up the avenue was all covered with weeds, and a mighty big pond that you passed lay under a sheet of nasty green stuff that had gathered on it for years.

And the castle stood out grim and gray against the blood-red sunset behind, just like the haunted house that you see in the picture-book. But it didn't daunt me with all its queer looks; so I marched straight up to the old door, and put in the key. It wanted a twist, I tell you, to turn the key in the lock; but I soon got the door open, and then I was in the dark old hall, all

as quiet as a church-yard, barring the scuttering of the rats and bats which I set flying, without "by your leave."

Then I stepped up the old staircase and, ock! how it cracked and creaked under my feet, and little wonder, for it hadn't been trodden on by mortal feet for maybe a hundred years or more. And so I went on through the old rooms and galleries with never a bit of furniture in them, barring a rickety chair and a table here and there, and ragged tapestry and rusty armor on the walls. Faith! it was a pity to see such a fine place all full of nothing at all, and the sight of it put the courage into my heart to try and get the ghost out.

I went into one room after the other, illigant places with chimney-pieces all covered with figures, and ceiling painted and divided off into squares, just like a palace. But never a one had a sound window in it, for all the glass was broken and smashed as though there had been an election or a pattern fair outside. At last I came to one that was pretty weather-tight, and there I made myself snug for the night. I got in some old furniture, and broke it up for a fire in the grate, keeping a table and chair for myself to have my supper; and then I sat down and lighted my pipe and waited for the ghost.



HE STOOD THERE AND GLARED AT ME.

Ock! it was all nice and quiet, and the moon came out and peeped through the window as much as to say, "Tim Macarty, my boy, sure I've come to keep you company." I knew I would see nothing of the ghost, if he came at all, till midnight, as that was his time to appear; so the folks said. He was as regular as the rent-collector, was that ghost, if you was to believe all you heard, and never stayed a minute after sunrise; so I thought I knew when to expect him.

Sure enough, just as the clock far off, struck the last stroke of midnight, I heard a queer noise.

"What's that, anyhow?" I says to myself.

For it was such a sound as I never before heard in my life. It was like some poor creature groaning, worse than any of the wounded on the battle-field, with just a touch of a wail now and then like a howl at a wake, but more dismal.

"Faith!" thinks I, "the ghost is coming."

So I put myself in a genteel position, with one leg crossed over my knee, and kept my pipe in my mouth, and held my head up, so as to look becoming when the ghost appeared. There I sat and listened, and presently I heard a creaking of the boards, such as I made myself when I was coming up the old stairs.

Well, your honor, the sounds of the groaning and the creaking came nearer and nearer, and got louder and louder every minute; and if I said my heart wasn't beginning to beat a bit, sure I would be telling ye a lie. But I kept up my courage as well I could, telling myself there was nothing to be afraid of, and that as I had come to do this job I must go through with it.

So I was as cool as the process-server when they introduced him into the river; and by my soul, I needed to be that, when I tell you what happened next. As I live, the door just in front of me swung slowly open, hit by bit, with never a hand that I could see to set it moving; and when it was wide open, there, in the full light of the moon, stood a figure that looked just awful.

It was the ghost, sure enough. It was the shadow of the "bad baronet," Sir Roderick Shane, dressed as he was two hundred years ago, when they put a bullet into him for his behavior. He had on an elegant green coat slashed with gold lace, and under it a white frilled shirt with an ugly red stain over the left breast. There was a long wig on his head, reaching down over his shoulders, and he had knee-boots, with spurs on his legs, and a sword by his side.

But, faith! it was not his figure, nor yet his dress, that looked so queer. It was his face, white and pasty, like that of a corpse, and his horrible dead eyes with never a bit of light in them, his bloodless lips parted and showing a row of ugly black teeth, that sent a shiver through me in spite of myself. I wasn't afraid, though—never a bit! and I hadn't looked at him for above a minute or two before I got used to him entirely.

Well, he stood and glared at me, as I sat and looked at him, with my leg crossed over my knee, and

my pipe in my mouth. I took out that last, so as I could say something civil to him; but never a limb did I move.

"Good-evening, your honor!" says I. "Sure, you must be the ghost of the bad—beg your honor's pardon—of Sir Roderick Shane, I mean."

"Man," cried the ghost in a hollow voice, "do you dare sit there in my presence?"

"Faith," says I, "I do. Why wouldn't I?"

"Do you not know," says he, "what fearful risks you run?"

"No," says I, "I don't; and would be much obliged for particulars of the same."

"Your reason," says he, "your very life is in danger."

"Well, now," says I, "you don't say that? Sure I'd like to know how you make it out?"

"At a word from me," says the ghost, "you might be driven into raving madness or drivelling idiocy. I could blast you as by a lightning-stroke, or crush you into dust."

"Indeed, then," says I, "it's lucky for me you don't."

"But," says he, "I cannot long forbear."

"Can't you?" says I. "Well, then, if I may ask without offence, how long will you be forbearing?"

"Until to-morrow night," says he. "You have intruded here, no doubt, in ignorance. Begone at once, and I will spare you; but never again presume to trespass on my domain."

Well, the ghost talking in this way of the old colonel's property as his domain, began to get my blood up. But I kept as cool as I could, and said: "Sure it's very good of your honor to let me off so easy; but I ask your pardon if I say that this is not your domain at all. It used to be, I allow; but it belongs now to my old colonel Sir Peter

Shane. God bless him!—and as I am here under his orders, here I mean to stay."

"Fool!" cried the ghost, and then he gave one of his dismal groans.

This was more than I could put up with, even from the ghost of one of the quality.

"Now, look here, ghost," says I. "Don't you begin of calling names, because two can play at that game, and I know the trick of it. Sure, I've as good a right to be here as you have, and better. Indeed, you've no business to be here at all. The castle don't belong to you now, and you've kept all decent folk out of it ever since you got that piece of lead between your ribs. Why don't you keep quiet and easy in your comfortable grave, and leave the old place alone?"

"How dare you address me thus?" says the ghost. "You—a mean, common soldier! dare you speak to me like this—to me, a gentleman, the head of an ancient house, to whom you might, in days gone by, have been the basest menial in his service?"

This wasn't civil, but I kept my temper.

"Yes, ghost," says I, "that's right enough. All that might have been long ago, before you was done for; but sure, times has changed since then, and I dare do a deal now that would have been a liberty case."

"Vile dog!" said the ghost, "I will parley with you no longer. But, once more, beware how you trespass here again. If I discover you within these walls to-morrow night your doom is death. Farewell!"

"A good-night to your honor," says I, getting up for the first time, so as to be a bit civil now he was departing. Then I heard him go creaking and groaning along the passage till the sound of him was lost in the distance.

I couldn't help bursting out laughing. I slapped my thigh and says to myself: "Faith! I've had the best of him this time, anyhow."

Well, I thought I would see no more of him that night, so I just curled myself up on the big seat in the window, and soon was fast asleep.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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