



THE GHOST WHO COULDN'T FALL ASLEEP

BY

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In an abandoned house on the outskirts of the city, there lived a ghost. He had everything a ghost could need to be happy: dark rooms, creaky stairs, even a cluttered attic. Yet he was unhappy, nonetheless.

2

Earlier, when people had lived in the area, the ghost would visit them at night. He would peer through their windows. He would walk through their front doors. He would turn off the reading lamps of the homeowners that had dozed off over a book. Sometimes the children would break into sobs as he adjusted their blankets. Then the lights in the whole house would flash on and the sleepy parents would soothe the frightened children. This would upset the ghost because he, in fact, loved children very much.

3

Before dawn, after making his rounds of all the neighborhood houses, he would return home tired. And he would sleep the whole, entire day. Eventually, people started calling his

home the Ghost House and steered clear of it at all costs. The people who didn't like such company moved away one by one.

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And so, it came to be that the ghost found himself alone. With not a single person around. And no one to scare. Oh, there was no one to even visit! The ghost grew sad. At night he would wander the neighborhood, lonely. And during the day he couldn't fall asleep.

One day, the ghost was hanging out at home when he suddenly heard a noise outside:

Vrrroooooom-vrrrrrrroom-vrrrrooom

The ghost jumped up, startled. Quietly, he peeked out the window. He couldn't believe his eyes. A yellow Fiat had pulled up outside the house. A guy in a jacquard jacket, a smiling man, and a perplexed woman climbed out of the car with a...—the ghost was so anxious he even wrapped himself in a curtain—...a dark-haired little girl in glasses. With a smile from the tip of one temple to the other. She glanced up, and the ghost jumped back from the window, tearing down the curtain. At least she hadn't seen him!

6

Tangled in the curtain, the ghost slipped into a closet. Below, the door creaked. There was stomping on the stairs. Another minute and the doorknob clicked.

"Look how much room there is here," he heard right alongside him.

For the first time, the ghost felt fear toward people. He hoped that it wouldn't cross anyone's mind to open the closet. Because you can't look at ghosts during the day. If someone else saw him, he'd have to abandon the house.

7

The ghost peered through the keyhole. The guy in the jacquard jacket was still singing the house's praises: "It just needs a good cleaning. And look out the window: There's a garden outside too. Your daughter can play there."

The little girl vanished instantly, like a bolt of lightning. She pattered off down the stairs. The woman peered out the window, the man peered out the window, even the ghost did... Oops, no—he didn't peer out because he already knew that there was a swing there. And every night he swung on it, and it creaked so frighteningly—oops, no, he meant pleasantly. Just as it did now when the little girl sat down on it.

"But why don't we see any neighbors?" the smiling man asked curiously.

"Supposedly," the guy in the jacquard jacket started, then hesitated. "Supposedly, there are ghosts here."

"Ghosts?" the woman repeated, horrified.

"Ghosts? What nonsense!" the man exclaimed and pulled his wife close. "You don't believe in ghosts, darling, do you?"

"It's no nonsense at all! No nonsense at all!" the ghost said indignantly. To himself, of course.

“Ghosts?! Awesome! I saw a cartoon about them!” The little girl had come back and was so excited she was jumping for joy. The ghost was liking her more and more.

Soon the people left, and the ghost finally slipped out of the closet.

9

Time passed. The house and the garden grew covered in snow. The ghost wandered around the garden—without leaving any footprints—then spent a long time sitting alone on the swing, which just barely creaked.

10

Then one day, a yellow spot appeared in the middle of the white landscape. Before long, the man, the woman, and the little girl climbed out of the Fiat into the front yard. The little girl fell onto a mound of snow and began making a snow ghost. Oops, no, he meant a snow angel.

The startled ghost leapt off the swing and scuttled all the way up to the attic. And when he heard that the people had bought the house, for the first time in a long time he smiled.

11

The Ghost House grew more and more cozy. A fire blazed in the fireplace. The smell of baking filled the kitchen. Laughter and music filled the rooms. Every evening the ghost would go

down to the bedroom of the little girl, whose name was Margarita. After making sure that she was asleep, he would take the book out of her hands and turn off the light. Then one evening...

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“I knew you’d come!” Margarita exclaimed, snatching her book from him.

The ghost froze.

“You’re... not scared... of me?” he finally asked.

“You’re not at all scary. In fact, you’re even pretty cute!”

The ghost blushed. No one had ever called him cute before.

“Do you want to be my friend?” the little girl asked. “I’m so lonely. There’s no one here to play with.”

“I do. I’m lonely too,” the ghost admitted.

13

“We’ll make a snowman tomorrow in the yard! But right now, I really want to sle-e-e-ep.” Margarita yawned sleepily and settled back onto her pillow.

“But I can’t fall asleep,” the ghost admitted, perching at the edge of the bed.

“What do you mean—you can’t?” Margarita asked in surprise. “Not at all?”

“Not at all.”

14

Margarita sat up in bed again and opened up her book.

“When I was little and couldn’t fall asleep, my mom always read aloud to me.”

The ghost scooched closer to look at the pictures.

Margarita read. She read and read. Her eyelids were drooping already, but she turned page after page.

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Then suddenly... she heard soft snoring next to her.

The ghost who couldn’t fall asleep had curled up in a ball and was sound asleep.

Margarita covered him with her blanket.

And she turned off the light.