

“Ghost” – Written 09/11/13

In evenfall there was a ghost, one who took kindly to others but found all his company alone. Children share their tales, as children do, about when they met the ghost and what they'd done together. About what they might do, should they ever again meet this apparition. But while their stories were only by the fond side of the heart and meant no ill, they were also the sorts of false expression expected of children. Unlike their tales, the ghost never housed a guest, as guests never made it so far into the woods without turning back. More than that, it had been a long age since the ghost last knew anything of friendship. But should any wandering souls find themselves lost in that wood, and if perchance they stumbled upon the ghost's home, they would find something lovely. Lovely, maybe, but terribly austere and lonesome in all the gentlest ways.

The ghost made its days cultivating a modest cabbage patch, with rough carrots intermixed. This gave credence to the white-washed stone gardening walls, put up only a few years earlier. It was all that could be done to keep out intruding hare and all manner of invasive critter. A rickety sign clicked overtop the doorframe of a home that the innocent and friendly might envy. Scrawled in black ran across its face a single word: '*Ghost*'. This was its home, the only place it knew. Perhaps a mystery to the ghost, but this was also a prison. Thoughts and memories of its life were all trapped here, and for that reason, it could never leave. And because it would never leave, it would never find something new.

Still it stayed, and it was happy. Lonely on bad days, but it was a cheerful ghost with the knowledge that bad days couldn't last. So it remained inside when the rains came and made its home well, so that when somebody might finally brave the wood and find the gentle cottage beyond, it would be ready for them. There would be festivities of the sort only a ghost could satisfy. It would be a celebration with warm, butter-baked bread and the ghost's favorite kind of chocolate. Pumpkins might be carved with the ghost's perfectly polished tools and marshmallows would be roasted in a quiet fire. There would be music, because of course the stranger would have a spirit for song and dance. Maybe ghosts struggle to dance, but this ghost would try. It practiced often, when nobody was looking.

But this was all just a dream, one of the happy dreams meant for a good day. Today was a laundry day, which meant it was neither good, nor bad. The ghost was thankful that it was cloudless outside. It preferred its labors at night, and night was awfully solemn without any stars. You'd think a ghost would have no need for laundry, but you would be wrong. This ghost loved each of its four sheets more than anything else in the home. They were simple, often just as dirty as they were now. Everlasting fingers of mud had saturated deep into their white. A light tattering could be felt in the surface of each and along their edges. These made them imperfect. But imperfect was most usually the best way to have something. The ghost knew this and liked them all the same.

Sometime long ago the ghost cut little circles in the sheets. The circles were cut in pairs and, because ghosts aren't very coordinated, they were laughably asymmetrical. Some were too high, others too low. Nearly all of them too close or too far. But the sheets were already imperfect, and so surely they understood how difficult it was for a ghost to cut proper eye holes. This only made the ghost love and nurture them that much more. So as it was, the ghost would wash them, grinning as it churned

through popping bubbles and suds. The companionship of the moon made these evenings warm and before long the ghost would finish bathing its sheets.

A slash of string was spread across the yard, suspended between two rods of timber. Since the sheets would need a chance to dry, the ghost used this line to hang them and let the night air have its way. During this period it sank into a deep patience. Sometimes the ghost would sit in silence and wait, other times it might hum the progression to a sweet autumn song. You know, something red and yellow, but mostly orange. A song that smells of nutmeg and cinnamon. One of these days somebody would be sitting nearby and humming along. You don't have to be a ghost to appreciate the small things like a humming comrade.

When finally the sheets were cured of their wetness, the ghost would pull them off the line and smile. It would smile a tender, forgiving smile. Something it learned from children's books. Armed with that smile, it would carry the sheets over and drape them on four posts, standing no more than three heads from the ground. If assorted properly, the eye-pockets would look straight back at him. Or as straight as possible, with the ghost's handiwork. In that moment, the ghost would fondly share its musings and happenings with the sheets. They were usually a kind audience, with a generous ear. On bad days, they never said anything. But that was alright, because usually it was a good day, and on good days the laundry would talk back. None of them bore scars of rudeness or malign gestures. Instead they were friendly, and often times their stories were better than any the ghost could tell. Together they would reminisce of young life games, younger sweetheart loves, and the adventures known to dwell in far lands and amidst the sea. Naturally there was laughter, and even though there may not have been music, they always sang.

In time a wind would come and snatch the sheets up as a futile attempt to steal them away. But the ghost had a big yard, and though the sheets might tumble and mar with dirt, it would always catch them. There would be a pang of sadness in its heart as the conversation drew to a sudden close. For a moment the ghost believed the sheet might not ever talk again. If anybody has ever lost a friend, or said goodbye for what they knew could be the final time, then they understand much of how the ghost felt during these moments. But it was a hopeful ghost, with a big heart and keen understanding. The sheets could get dirty over and over, and the ghost would always be ready to clean them anew. So it would, so it would.

Because today might be a good day. Maybe. This ghost was an ambitious ghost and not taken to long-suffering or hardship. Strangers never came to visit, so it had time to do the laundry. And once it had begun, it could sit alone and wait according to its custom. Though strangers never said hello and children never ventured near its home, if the ghost waited long enough it would always have someone that might listen. Some sheets with little holes for eyes. Some sheets that fluttered upon a post. Friends with which it could sing and not be disheartened. Because at evenfall there was a ghost with homemade friends, and nobody knew their stories but him.