

The Ghost

Carol liked things neat. Not, like, SUPER neat, like Aunt Mildred who made you take your shoes off before you even got in the front door. But neat-ish. A place for everything, and everything mostly in its place. That's why she liked her new house in Bacchus Marsh. It was old, sure, like maybe even older than Grandma, but it had good bones. And lots of shelves.

She'd moved in just last week. Packing her things in boxes, trying to figure out what to throw away and what to keep, but in the end, it was all here!

Dad said it was a fixer-upper. He said that about everything that wasn't brand new. But Carol didn't mind. She'd seen the pictures online, imagining herself painting the walls a nice, soft blue, putting colorful rugs on the creaky wooden floors, and finally, finally, having her own reading nook with a comfy armchair. And she loved to read!

The first night was a little spooky. Everything creaked. The wind whistled through gaps in the window frames, even though it wasn't even that windy outside. She'd jumped at every little sound. But she told herself it was just new house jitters. Like when you sleep in a new bed at a sleepover and everything feels weird.

But the second night, things got weirder.

Carol was in the kitchen, making a cup of tea, when she heard a sigh. A big, gusty sigh, like someone was really, really tired. She turned around, thinking maybe the TV was on downstairs, but the house was silent, except for the whistling wind.

"Hello?" she called out. Her voice sounded small and squeaky in the big kitchen.

Silence.

She shrugged and went back to her tea. 'Probably just pipes,' she thought. Pipes could be weird. But her tea tasted kind of funny.

The next day, Carol started unpacking her books. She had boxes and boxes of them, everything from mystery stories to books about ancient Egypt to cookbooks with pictures of yummy desserts. She was setting up her reading nook in the little room off the living room, the one with the big, sunny window.

She loved unpacking her books! Carol carefully placed each book on the new bookshelf, putting her favorites right at eye level.

She set about putting the books on the shelves, but as she reached for the last box, she heard it again. The sigh.

This time, it was right behind her.

Carol spun around, her heart thumping like a drum. There was nothing there. Just the empty space where the last box had been.

“Okay,” she said out loud to herself. “This is officially weird.”

That night, Carol decided to do some investigating. She got out her flashlight - a really bright one that Dad gave her for camping – and started exploring.

She checked the basement. It was dark and damp and smelled like dirt. She shined the flashlight into all the corners. Nothing but dust bunnies and spiderwebs.

She checked the attic. It was even creepier than the basement. Old trunks sat in the shadows, filled with who-knew-what. A family of mice scurried across the rafters when she turned on the flashlight. Carol shivered. Definitely no sighing ghosts up here.

She was just about to give up when she heard it again.

This time, the sigh seemed to be coming from the living room.

Carol tiptoed downstairs, her flashlight beam dancing across the walls. She peeked into the living room.

And there it was.

Floating in the middle of the room, right in front of the fireplace, was a ghost.

It wasn't a scary ghost, like the ones in movies with chains and spooky faces. This ghost looked...sad. It was a see-through lady, wearing a long, old-fashioned dress with puffy sleeves. She had long, wavy hair and big, watery eyes. She looked like she was about to cry.

Carol froze. She'd never seen a ghost before. She didn't even know if she believed in ghosts. But there it was, plain as day.

The ghost lady sighed again, a long, mournful sound that made Carol's hair stand on end.

Carol gulped. Okay, Carol, she thought. Be brave. Like in the books!

“H-hello?” she stammered.

The ghost lady looked up, startled. Her eyes widened.

“Can...can you see me?” she whispered. Her voice was as wispy as smoke.

“Y-yes,” Carol said. “Are...are you a ghost?”

The ghost lady nodded. A single tear rolled down her cheek, though it looked like the tear disappeared before it hit the floor but she might have just imagined it.

“My name is Elizabeth,” she said. “And I've been stuck here for a very, very long time.”

Carol shuffled slightly in place, “I'm Carol,” she said quietly.

Carol didn't know what to say. She'd read about ghosts in books, but she never thought she'd actually meet one.

"Why are you stuck here?" Carol asks, the question popping into her head.

Elizabeth looked down at the floor, or where the floor would be if she were solid. "I...I don't know," she said sadly. "I just woke up here one day, and I couldn't leave. I've been waiting for someone to see me."

Carol felt a pang of sympathy for the ghost lady. Being stuck somewhere for a long time sounded awful. Like being grounded forever.

"Maybe I can help you," Carol said. She wasn't sure how she could help a ghost, but she wanted to try.

Eliza looked up, her eyes filled with hope. "Really? You would do that?"

"Yeah," Carol said. "I'm good at solving problems. And I read a lot of books. Maybe I can find something in one of them that tells me how to help a ghost."

Elizabeth smiled, a faint, watery smile. "Thank you," she said. "That means...more than you know."

And so, Carol started her ghost-helping adventure. She spent hours reading her books, searching for clues about how to help Elizabeth move on. She read about hauntings and spirits and all sorts of spooky things.

She found a book about old houses in the area, thinking maybe it would tell her something about Elizabeth's past. She found a picture of the house from a long time ago, when it was brand new. And there, standing on the porch, was a woman who looked exactly like Elizabeth.

The caption under the picture said: "Elizabeth Hawthorne, beloved wife and mother, tragically passed away in this house in 1890."

Carol gasped. Now she knew why Elizabeth was stuck. She was still attached to the house where she died.

Carol felt awful for Elizabeth. She imagined being taken away from her family like that.

Carol showed the picture to Elizabeth. Elizabeth stared at it, her eyes filled with tears.

"That's me," she whispered. "I remember now...I was sick...and then..." She trailed off, her voice choked with emotion.

"I'm so sorry," Carol said, giving Elizabeth a hug, even though she knew she couldn't actually touch her.

"Now that I know what happened, maybe I can help you move on," Carol said. "Maybe you need to say goodbye to something."

Elizabeth looked around the living room, her gaze lingering on the fireplace. "This was my favourite room," she said. "I used to sit by the fire and read stories to my children."

Carol had an idea. She went upstairs and found her old picture books. She brought them down to the living room and sat by the fireplace.

"I'm going to read to you," she said to Elizabeth. "Maybe it will help you remember the good times."

Carol started reading, her voice clear and strong. She read about princesses and dragons and talking animals. As she read, she could feel Elizabeth's presence beside her, listening intently.

When she finished reading, Elizabeth smiled. A real smile, not a sad, watery one.

"Thank you, Carol," she said. "That was...lovely."

Carol kept reading to Elizabeth every night. She read her favorite stories, the ones that made her laugh and the ones that made her cry. And slowly, Elizabeth started to remember more about her life. She remembered her husband, her children, her friends.

One night, after Carol finished reading, Elizabeth said, "I think...I think I'm ready to go."

Carol's heart squeezed, she didn't want Elizabeth to but she could see the faint lady needed to go. "Really?" she said sadly.

Elizabeth nodded. "I remember everything now. And I know that my family is waiting for me."

Carol smiled. "I'm so happy for you," she said.

Elizabeth reached out and took Carol's hand, her touch as light as a feather. "Thank you, Carol," she said. "You helped me find my way home."

And then, with a final, gentle sigh, Elizabeth faded away.

The living room was silent. Carol sat by the fireplace, feeling a little bit sad, but also a little bit happy. She'd helped a ghost move on. That was pretty cool.

The next day, the house felt different. Lighter. Brighter. The creaks and groans seemed less spooky, more...friendly.

Carol knew that Eliza was gone, but she also knew that she would never forget her. She'd made a friend, even if she was a ghost.

And that night, as she sat in her reading nook with a book in her lap, Carol didn't hear any sighs. Just the quiet rustle of the wind and the gentle creaking of the house on Stonehill drive.

It was a good house, she thought. A house with good bones. And maybe, just maybe, a little bit of magic.