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A GHOST-LIGHT
IN THE ATTIC

PAT THOMSON

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Contents

1	The Old Hall	7
2	The Little Ghost	16
3	Invisible	24
4	Spies	33
5	Two Traps	42
6	Bad News	51
7	Terror in the Kitchen	59
8	The Gun	70
9	A Token of Friendship	78
	Glossary	90
	Historical Note	91

The Old Hall

‘Is this the right place?’ asked Tom. ‘There’s no one here.’

‘There must be,’ answered Bridget. ‘Mum said she’d see us at Bridgeford Hall at four o’clock. You’re right, though. It does look empty.’

‘Dark and creepy,’ said her brother.

Bridget looked up at the mullioned windows of the old house. It was large but not the huge, stately home she had been expecting. She opened the iron gate and stared down at the worn flagstone path. The doorstep had worn down, too. She realised that for hundreds of years, real people had worn that step down, coming and going. She walked slowly up to the heavy, wooden

door. Real people had opened and closed it, their hands on that handle. Hesitantly, she knocked, then walked in.

The hallway was quite dark. A clock ticked loudly.

'Mum,' called Bridget.

'They're upstairs,' said Tom.

Faint voices drifted down to them and they hurried up the staircase. All the doors at the top were shut.

'This one,' said Tom as the voices came again. He paused. Behind the door, one of the voices was whispering, 'Hide him, hide him! Quickly!' Tom opened the door slowly. The room was empty.

Downstairs, there was the sound of footsteps, doors banging and shouts.

'Thank goodness,' said Bridget. 'Someone's come.' And they turned and ran down the stairs again. The hall, however, was still empty.

Just then, a thin, high scream came from across the hall where a room led off into the shadows. They turned and dashed for the front door. At that moment, it was flung open and Mum came in, clutching a very

ordinary plastic bag from the supermarket.

'There you are,' she said. 'Just been out for sandwiches. Did you meet Mr Wetherby?'

'Where is he?' asked Bridget. 'Is he in the house?'

'Oh, probably,' Mum said vaguely. 'I really need to stay on for a bit tonight. Ah, here you are, Nick. You've got a job for these two, haven't you?'

A young man walked in. He had been working outside. He shook hands. 'We're going to put you two in the attic to keep you out of mischief,' he said, cheerfully.

'You don't mind, do you?' Mum didn't wait for an answer but led the way to a back room where she started to fill a kettle. Things seemed ordinary again. 'I'm so excited! All this belongs to the Historical Trust now and we can start work. Old Mr Linton has left us everything and as he lived abroad most of his life, like his father did, the house is a kind of time capsule. It's untouched, a treasure house!' She handed out sandwiches and cups of tea. 'This is Mr Wetherby, by the way,' she said, remembering her manners. 'He says you can

work here during the holidays.'

'How kind,' murmured Tom, but Mum just laughed.

'It's fascinating,' she said. 'You'll see.'

Mr Wetherby was looking at them. He seemed amused. 'I can understand that you may be less enthusiastic than your mother, but I would really value your help. It's going to be an enormous task. I'd like you to sort through some things in the old nursery. Just unpack them carefully and line them up. Someone else will be working on them later but the sorting will save us hours. The nursery's in the attic. I'll show you when you're ready.'

The children's room was on the top floor. The door was low but wide. The latch was large and Bridget thought that a child would need both hands to lift it. She also noticed scratch marks at the bottom of the door. They were the kind of scratch marks made by a cat or a small dog.

'Do you mean we'll have to stay up here on our own?' asked Bridget.

'Don't worry,' laughed Mr Wetherby, 'we're only one floor down.' He opened the

door with one hand and they walked into a big attic. Massive beams curved right down to the floor. Bridget went over to the window and looked down on the garden and the wood beyond.

'Look at this rocking horse,' said Tom and touched it gently, setting it moving. There was also a large central table in the room, surrounded by piles of objects in all sorts of containers.

'It's a bit of a mess in here,' said Mr Wetherby. 'When things got a bit worn, I expect they were demoted to the nursery. Then it became a general storage area. The great thing is, hardly anything was ever thrown away.' He gave them a clipboard and a pencil and left them to get on with it.

'How do we start?' asked Tom.

'If Mr Wetherby had seen your bedroom he wouldn't have bothered,' said Bridget. She went over to the window again. 'It's strange. Lots of children must have stood here. They would all have been wearing different clothes from different ages but all of them must have stood here, like me.'

From the high window, she could see a