LUCY STRANGE



The BOY AT THE WINDOW

A Ghost Story

Illustrated by Rohan Eason

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Rohan Eason

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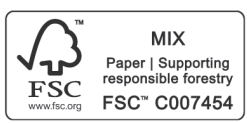
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For Rossanne

Contents

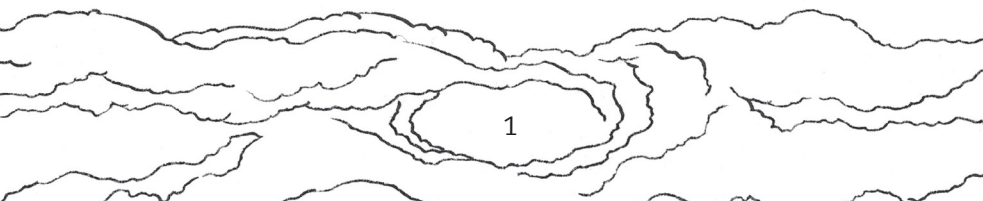
1.	The Fog	1
2.	The Piano Lesson	7
3.	The Face	17
4.	The Telegram	26
5.	The Bonfire	31
6.	The Ghost	38
7.	The Guest	45
8.	The Trick	49
9.	The Music	56
10.	The Boy at the Window	61

1
The Fog

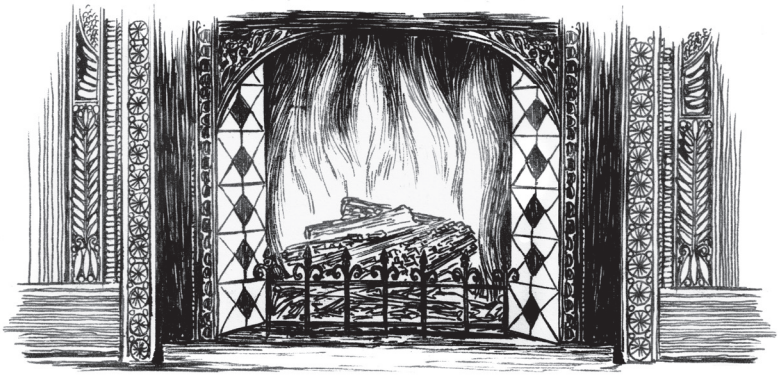
I first saw the ghost on a cold autumn night.

Fog had settled in the valley: a thick, damp curtain of grey. It wrapped itself around our old house and shut out the feeble sunlight. It shut out the stars at night. It shut out the whole world.

Mother and I were having supper in the dining room, in silence as usual. I tried to eat my soup without slurping. I tried to set my spoon down without a clatter. In the fireplace, a single log glowed and crackled.



"How are you today, Mother?" I asked. I knew the fog always made her feel worse. She looked pale, and the circles under her eyes were as dark as bruises.



"Hmm?" Mother replied, in that blank way of hers. She blinked as if she had only just noticed I was there. "Oh, I'm all right, my darling. How are you? How is your cough?"

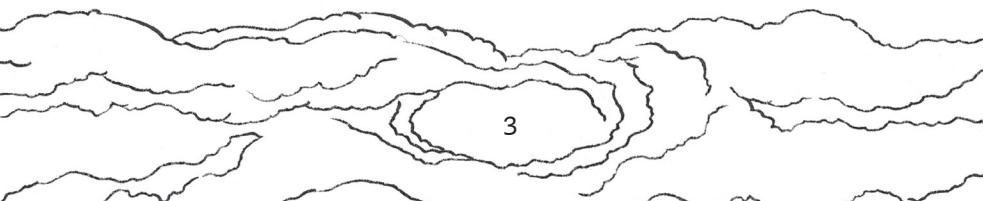
"A little better, I think," I said. My voice seemed to boom in the silence of the room. "But I did not sleep well last night."

"That's good, my dear," Mother said, only hearing half of my reply. She was gazing at the photograph of Father. It stood in his place at the head of the table, as it always did. "I do hope this fog clears soon. They've cancelled all the trains, you know. Your father will not be able to get home to us when he returns."

I nodded and had another spoon of soup. Mother always spoke like this – as if she were expecting Father to arrive home at any moment. But the truth was, Father had been missing now for over a year. The war had ended, and everyone had returned. Everyone who was still alive.

Mrs Stubbs appeared by my side to take my empty soup dish. "Thank you," I said. "That was very nice."

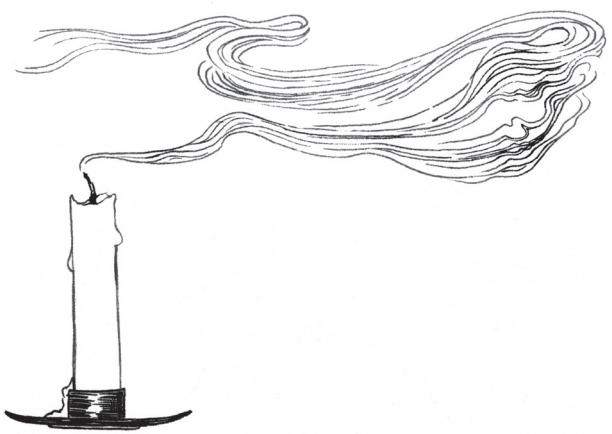
"You're welcome, young sir," Mrs Stubbs said. She placed a plate of steaming mutton and



potatoes in front of me. "Eat that up now – it'll do you good. You need a bit of colour back in those cheeks of yours. I've never seen a lad so bony and pale. Can't have you wasting away now, can we?"

"Thank you," I murmured again. Our housekeeper was always trying to feed me up.

On the table, a candle burned low and sputtered out. A thin spectre of smoke drifted up towards the high ceiling. That was when I saw him.

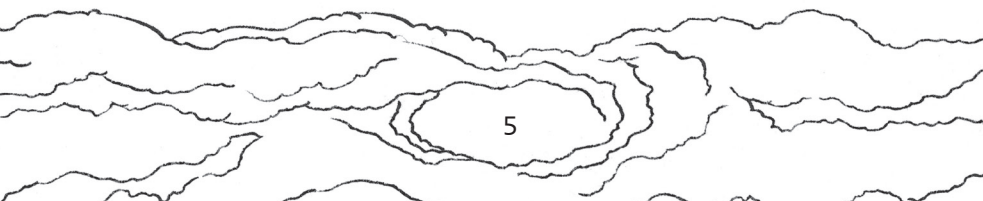


He was outside the window, in the foggy gloom of the garden – a small human shape that seemed to be made of moonlight. He moved slowly at first and then fast. He rushed at the window in a sweeping, feathery way – like the sudden swoop of an owl. It was a boy – the ghost of a boy. I think I gasped – or made some sort of noise.

"What is it, my darling?" Mother said.

I glanced at her and looked back to the window. But the ghost had gone. "Nothing," I replied. "I ... I thought I saw someone. In the garden."

"Hmm?" Mother looked round sharply. Her reflection in the window looked round too. For a moment, a hopeful smile flickered on Mother's face, but it soon faded. "I see nobody," she said, in a strange, sad sort of voice.



Mrs Stubbs came back to take our plates away, and Mother asked her to draw the curtains. "It is so miserable out there," Mother complained. "And that dreadful fog. It plays tricks ..."

