




An Edwardian Ghost Story

Zoë A. Porter

Published under 

Rothbury, August 19th, 1911

Dear father,

I am pleased to hear that your journey to London has been safe and without incidents. Mother was very relieved when she received your cable. Will has sent note about his progress in Newcastle. He is very eager to follow his father's footsteps. He will make you proud, I am sure.

As for myself, I had caught a cold while I was out riding, but my condition is improving by the day. I had to stay inside for the past few days, so leaving the house and breathing the fresh air outside is a wonderful experience, and it strengthens my body and my soul. If God wills it, I will be fully restored before autumn.

It was on one of my small walks, were I had the strangest encounter. I had ventured above the basin, for Ms. Cowx had forbidden me to walk up to Nelly's Moss. I would love to have a picnic at Nelly's Moss once more this summer, but she warned me the path is too steep and too far for me to walk. So I used the small footpath that leads down to the house through the pines. I always loved this path, because it feels like walking through a wild forest, but you can walk up and down the steps with ease. Also, it cannot be seen from the carriageway below.

I was almost at the foot of the hill when I first saw the stranger. She was a girl, about my own age, and she seemed to be lost. She was walking away from the house and occasionally looked into a small mirror in her hand.

From my vantage point, she could not see me, even if she hadn't been so busy with her mirror. So I had the chance to get a longer look at her appearance. At first glance I thought she might be a gypsy, because of her weird clothes. She was practically half-naked, wearing only some sort of camisole that left her arms and shoulders bare, and a pair of man's trousers of the likes boys use to wear on horseback. I had never seen anything like it before, so I thought about running back to the house and fetch some help.

On the other hand, she was only one girl, and she did not look threatening at all! If she really was lost, it would be rude to let her stray around the estate without offering help. Maybe she had even fallen victim to some thug, which might explain her lack of clothes?

I decided to help her, and stepped down the last of the stony steps.

"Are you lost?" I asked.

The girl nearly jumped out of her skin, for she did not see me approach; a fact that I had not kept in mind.

"Good Lord, you scared the living daylights out of me!" She cried. "Can't you knock, or whistle or something?"

She used a more figurative term in spite of daylights, but it doesn't seem fit to repeat that one to you.

"Are you lost?" I asked again.

"Kind of," she answered, "I should be meeting up with my group at the car park, but I can't find it!"

"A group?" I repeated. "There are no visitors announced today, and my father isn't at home, if you were looking for an appointment with him."

"Your father?" She asked. "Does he work here?"

"No." I answered. "He's working in London today. He owns the estate."

The girl looked at me puzzled. "Are you kidding me?"

"No." I was a little hurt now, because she didn't seem to take me serious. Did I look as if I was some servant girl?

"I am Winifreda Margaret Watson-Armstrong, daughter of Lord William Fitzpatrick Watson-Armstrong!" I explained.

She looked at me wide-eyed. "Winifreda, really? You should think about suing your parents for giving you a name like that!"

How rude she was! "And what is your name?" I demanded to know.

"Emerson. Emerson Reed."

I have to confess, after such impertinence, I couldn't stop myself from getting back to her. I know it is impolite, but she was the interuder and she had been very rude indeed, had she not?

"You should probably be a little more careful with mocking people for their names, with your own name being Emerson!" I shot at her.

That seemed to bring her to her senses. "Mmh, point taken." She stated. "No hard feelings?" And she reached out her hand.

I hesitated a moment, but then took it. She had a firm handshake, much more like a boy's than a girls.

At that moment I began to feel more comfortable around her. She was certainly not a gypsy, and undoubtedly not a thug. However she was very weird indeed.

"Maybe you can tell me where the car-park is?" She asked cautiously.

"What's a car-park?" I asked her.

"Erm, where the coaches come in?" She looked at me, as if I was some curious oddity.

"Oh, you mean the main gates?" I hoped I began to make sense of her ramblings. "You are walking in the wrong direction. It's down past the house."

"I thought I've been there already, and didn't find it." She looked at me skeptically. "Can you show me?"

"Yes, of course!" Finally something I did understand. "Follow me!"

"Thanks, that's rad!" She beamed.

"Whatever that means, again." I murmured more to myself than to her.

When we reached the house, I saw Ms. Cowx talking to one of the servants in the archway. I took Ermersons hand and led her quickly to the main entrance.

"Quick, this way!" I ushered her. "I don't want Ms. Cowx to see you.

"Who?" She asked, while we were entering the house.

"My governess. She surly wouldn't approve of you." I explained.

"Why not?"

"Have you looked in a mirror lately?" I asked her. "You're walking around in boys trousers and undergarments! Can you think of any governess who'd approve of that?"

"I never even met one." Emerson replied.

“Obviously.” Her lack of manners allowed no other conclusion.

On our way out the house, we came past the kitchen, where I heard people handling glasses. The sound of it gave me an idea, surly they had prepared some freshly made lemonade for the afternoon tea.

“It’s a long way down to the gates, and it’s a warm day. I’ll fetch us some lemonade! Wait here, because Ms. Cowx is still outside. I’ll get it!”

What happened next, I swear is true! I sneaked into the kitchen and grabbed two glasses from the tray -yes, I know that it is not suitable for a girl my age, but you know how I always did that, and you cannot really be upset with your little girl for such a folly, can you?

However, when I came back from the kitchen, only moments later, Emerson was gone! She could not have gone outside without be seen by Ms. Cowx and the butler, and she was not in the house anymore.

I searched high and low for her that afternoon, but neither did I find her, nor did anyone I encountered see her enter or leave the house!

Ms. Cowx said, I have too vivid an imagination, but it did happen!

What kind of spectre was it then? Maybe our house might be haunted? That would be wonderful, don’t you think?

Well, that is the end of my strange encounter. I am looking forward to see you again soon.

I love you very much!

*Yours truly,
Winnie*

Emerson Reed stared at the pages of the book in her lap. The letters blurred before her eyes. Left of the text was a black-and-white picture of a young girl with fringe hair holding a horse. She was the spitting image of the girl Emerson had talked to not half an our ago.

Mrs. Chadwick, who sat in the front row and had a sharp eye on the flock of adolescent holiday-campers behind her, turned around.

“Emerson, are you feeling alright? I don’t want another dissaster in the the bus!” And she held up a package of sick-bags.

“No, I’m OK.” Emerson waved her aside. “But I think I’ve just seen a ghost.”

She closed the book on her lap. It’s covers showed an old picture of Cragside and the titles *Northumberland in Letters and Documents. A history of the North* were engraved in gold letters.