

Old Applejoy's Ghost

By Frank R. Stockton

The large and commodious apartments in the upper part of the old Applejoy mansion were occupied exclusively, at the time of our story, by the ghost of the grandfather of the present owner of the estate.

For many, many years old Applejoy's ghost had been in the habit of wandering freely about the grand old house and the fine estate of which he had once been the lord and master, but early in that spring a change had come over the household of his grandson, John Applejoy, an elderly man and a bachelor, a lover of books, and—for the later portion of his life—almost a recluse. A young girl, his niece Bertha, had come to live with him, and make part of his very small family, and it was since the arrival of this newcomer that old Applejoy's ghost had confined himself almost exclusively to the upper portions of the house.

This secluded existence, so different from his ordinary habits, was adopted entirely on account of the kindness of his heart. During the lives of two generations of his descendants he knew that he had frequently been seen by members of the family and others, but this did not disturb him, for in life he had been a man who had liked to assert his position, and the disposition to do so had not left him now. His grandson John had seen him, and two or three times had spoken with him, but as old Applejoy's ghost had heard his skeptical descendant declare that these ghostly interviews were only dreams or hallucinations, he cared very little whether John saw him or not. As to other people, it might be a very good thing if they believed that the house was haunted. People with uneasy consciences would not care to live in such a place.

But when this fresh young girl came upon the scene the case was entirely different. She might be timorous and she might not, but old Applejoy's ghost did not want to take any risks. There was nothing the matter with her conscience, he was quite sure, but she was not twenty yet, her character was not formed, and if anything should happen which would lead her to suspect that the house was haunted she might not be willing to live there, and if that should come to pass it would be a great shock to the ghost.

For a long time the venerable mansion had been a quiet, darkened, melancholy house. A few rooms only were opened and occupied, for John Applejoy and his housekeeper, Mrs. Dipperton, who for years had composed the family, needed but little space in which to pass the monotonous days of their lives. Bertha sang, she played on the old piano; she danced by herself on the broad piazza; she wandered through the gardens and brought flowers into the house, and, sometimes, it almost might have been imagined that the days which were gone had come back again.

One winter evening, when the light of the full moon entered softly through every unshaded window of the house, old Applejoy's ghost sat in a stiff, high-backed chair, which on account of an accident to one of its legs had been banished to the garret. It was not at all necessary either for rest or comfort that this kind old ghost should seat himself in a chair, for he would have been quite as much at his ease upon a clothes-line, but in other days he had been in the habit of sitting in chairs, and it pleased him to do so now. Throwing one shadowy leg over the other, he clasped the long fingers of his hazy hand, and gazed thoughtfully out into the moonlight.

"Winter has come," he said to himself. "All is hard and cold, and soon it will be Christmas. Yes, in two days it will be Christmas!"

For a few minutes he sat reflecting, and then he suddenly started to his feet.

“Can it be!” he exclaimed. “Can it possibly be that that closed-fisted old John, that degenerate son of my noble George, does not intend to celebrate Christmas! It has been years since he has done so, but now that Bertha is in the house, since it is her home, will he dare to pass over Christmas as though it were but a common day? It is almost incredible that such a thing could happen, but so far there have been no signs of any preparations. I have seen nothing, heard nothing, smelt nothing, but this moment will I go and investigate the state of affairs.

Clapping his misty old cocked hat on his head, and tucking under his arm the shade of his faithful cane, he descended to the lower part of the house. Glancing into the great parlors dimly lighted by the streaks of moon-light which came between the cracks of the shutters, he saw that all the furniture was shrouded in ancient linen covers, and that the pictures were veiled with gauzy hangings.

“Humph!” ejaculated old Applejoy’s ghost, “he expects no company here!” and forthwith he passed through the dining room—where in the middle of the wide floor was a little round table large enough for three—and entered the kitchen and pantry. There were no signs in the one that anything extraordinary in the way of cooking had been done, or was contemplated, and when he gazed upon the pantry shelves, lighted well enough from without for his keen gaze, he groaned. “Two days before Christmas,” he said to himself, “and a pantry furnished thus! How widely different from the olden time when I gave orders for the holidays! Let me see what the old curmudgeon has provided for Christmas.”

So saying, old Applejoy’s ghost went around the spacious pantry, looking upon shelves and tables, and peering through the doors of a closed closet. “Emptiness! Emptiness! Emptiness!” he ejaculated. “A cold leg of mutton with, I should say, three slices cut out of it; a ham half gone, and the rest of it hardened by exposure to the air; a piece of steak left over from yesterday, or nobody knows when, to be made into hash, no doubt! Cold boiled potatoes—it makes me shiver to look at them!—to be cut up and fried! Pies? There ought to be rows and—rows of them, and there is not one! Cake? Upon my word, there is no sign of any! And Christmas two days off!

“What is this? Is it possible? A fowl! Yes, it is a chicken not full grown, enough for three, no doubt, and the servants can pick the bones. Oh, John, John! How have you fallen! A small-sized fowl for Christmas day!

“And what more now! Cider? No trace of it! Here is vinegar—that suits John, no doubt,” and then forgetting the present condition of his organism, he said to himself, “It makes my very blood run cold to look upon a pantry furnished out like this! I must think about it! I must think about it!” And with bowed head he passed out into the great hall.

If it were possible to do anything to prevent the desecration of his old home during the sojourn therein of the young and joyous Bertha, the ghost of old Applejoy was determined to do it, but in order to do anything he must put himself into communication with some living being, and who that being should be he did not know. Still rapt in reverie he passed up the stairs and into the great chamber where his grandson slept. There lay the old man, his hard features tinged by the moonlight, his eyelids as tightly closed as if there had been money underneath them. The ghost of old Applejoy stood by his bedside.

“I can make him wake up and look at me,” he thought, “for very few persons can remain asleep when anyone is standing gazing down upon them—even if the gazer be a ghost—and I might induce him to speak to me so that I might open my mind to him and tell him what I think of him, but what impression could I expect my words to make upon the soul of a one-chicken man like John? I am afraid his heart is harder than that dried-up ham. Moreover, if I should be able to speak to him and tell him his duty, he would persuade himself that he had been dreaming, and

my words would be of no avail. I am afraid it would be lost time to try to do anything with John!”

Old Applejoy’s ghost turned away from the bedside of his sordid descendant, crossed the hail, and passed into the room of Mrs. Dipperton, the elderly housekeeper. There she lay fast asleep, her round face glimmering like a transparent bag filled with milk, and from her slightly parted lips there came at regular intervals a feeble little snore, as if even in her hours of repose she was afraid of disturbing somebody.

The kind-hearted ghost shook his head as he looked down upon her. “It would be of no use,” he said, “she hasn’t any backbone, and she would never be able to induce old John to turn one inch aside from his parsimonious path. More than that, if she were to see me she would probably scream and go into a spasm—die, for all I know—and that would be a pretty preparation for Christmas!”

Out he went, and into the dreams of the good woman there came no suspicion that the ghost had been standing by her considering her character with a pitying contempt.

Now the kind ghost, getting more and more anxious in his mind, passed to the front of the house and entered the chamber occupied by young Bertha. Once inside the door, he stopped reverently and removed his cocked hat. The head of the little bed was near the uncurtained window, and the bright light of the moon shone upon a face more beautiful in slumber than in the sunny hours of day.

She was not under the influence of the sound, hard sleep which lay upon the master of the house and the mild Mrs. Dipperton. She slept lightly, her delicate lids, through which might almost be seen the deep blue of her eyes, trembled now and then as if they would open, and sometimes her lips moved, as if she would whisper something about her dreams.

Old Applejoy’s ghost drew nearer to the maiden, and bent slightly over her. He knew very well that it was mean to be eavesdropping like this, but it was really necessary that he should know this young girl better than he did. If he could hear a few words from that little mouth he might find out what she thought about, where her mind wandered, what she would like him to do for her.

At last, faintly whispered, scarcely more audible than her breathing, he heard one word, and that was “Tom!”

“Oh,” said old Applejoy’s ghost, as he stepped back from the bedside, “she wants Tom! I like that! I do not know anything about Tom, but she ought to want him.

It is natural, it is true, it is humans and it is long since there has been anything natural, true, or human in this house! But I wish she would say something else. She can’t have Tom for Christmas—at least, not Tom alone. There is a great deal else necessary before this can be made a place suitable for Tom!”

Again he drew near to Bertha and listened, but instead of speaking, suddenly the maiden opened wide her eyes. The ghost of old Applejoy drew back, and made a low, respectful bow. The maiden did not move, but her lovely eyes opened wider and wider, and she fixed them upon the apparition, who trembled as he stood, for fear that she might scream, or faint, or in some ways foil his generous purpose. If she did not first address him he could not speak to her.

“Am I asleep?” she murmured, and then, after slightly turning her head from side to side, as if to assure herself that she was in her own room and surrounded by familiar objects, she looked full into the face of old Applejoy’s ghost, and boldly spoke to him. “Are you a spirit?” said she.

If a flush of joy could redden the countenance of a filmy shade, the face of old Applejoy’s ghost would have glowed like a sunlit rose.

“Dear child,” he exclaimed, “I am a spirit! I am the ghost of your uncle’s grandfather. His sister Maria, the youngest of the family, and much the most charming, I assure you, was your mother, and, of course, I was her grandfather, and just as much, of course, I am the ghost of your great-grandfather, but I declare to you I never felt prouder at any moment of my existences, previous or present!”

“Then you must be the original Applejoy,” said Bertha; “and I think it very wonderful that I am not afraid of you, but I am not. You look as if you would not hurt anybody in this world, especially me!”

“There you have it,” he exclaimed, bringing his cane down upon the floor with a violence which had it been the cane it used to be would have wakened everybody in the house. “There you have it, my dear! I vow to you there is not a person in this world for whom I have such an affection as I feel for you. You remind me of my dear son George. You are the picture of Maria when she was about your age. Your coming to this house has given me the greatest pleasure; you have brought into it something of the old life. I wish I could tell you how happy I have been since the bright spring day that brought you here.”

“I did not suppose I would make anyone happy by coming here,” said Bertha. “Uncle John does not seem to care much about me, and I suppose I ought to be satisfied with Mrs. Dipperton if she does not object to me—but now the case is different. I did not know about you.”

“No, indeed,” exclaimed the good ghost, “you did not know about me, but I intend you to know about me. But now we must waste no more words—we must get down to business. I came here tonight with a special object.”

“Business?” said Bertha, inquiringly.

“Yes,” said the ghost, “it is business, and it is important, and it is about Christmas. Your uncle does not mean to have any Christmas in this house, but I intend, if I can possibly do so, to prevent him from disgracing himself, but I cannot do anything without somebody’s help, and there is nobody to help me but you. Will you do it?”

Bertha could not refrain from a smile. “It would be funny to help a ghost to do anything,” she said; “but if I can assist you I shall be very glad.”

“I want you to go into the lower part of the house,” said he. “I have something to show you that I am sure will interest you very much. I shall now go down into the hall, where I shall wait for you, and I should like you to dress yourself as warmly and comfortably as you can. It would be well to put a shawl around your head and shoulders. Have you some warm, soft slippers that will make no noise?”

“Oh, yes,” said Bertha, her eyes twinkling with delight at the idea of this novel expedition, “I shall be dressed and with you in no time.”

“Do not hurry yourself,” said the good ghost, as he left the room, “we have most of the night before us.”

When the young girl had descended the great staircase almost as noiselessly as the ghost, who had preceded her, she found her venerable companion waiting for her.

“Do you see the lantern on the table?” said he. “John uses it when he goes his round of the house at bedtime. There are matches hanging above it. Please light it. You may be sure I would not put you to this trouble if I were able to do it myself.”

She dimly perceived the brass lantern, and when she had lighted it the ghost invited her to enter the study.

“Now,” said he, as he led the way to the large desk with the cabinet above it, “will you be so good as to open that glass door? It is not locked.”

Bertha hesitated a little, but she opened the door.

“Now, please put your hand into the front cover of that middle shelf. You cannot see anything, but you will feel a key hanging upon a little hook.”

But Bertha did not obey. “This is my uncle’s cabinet,” she said, “and I have no right to meddle with his keys and things!”

Now the ghost of old Applejoy drew himself up to the six feet two inches which had been his stature in life; he slightly frowned, his expression was almost severe—but he controlled himself, and spoke calmly to the, girl. “This was my cabinet,” he said, “and I have never surrendered it to your Uncle John! With my own hands I screwed the little hook into that dark corner and hung the key upon it! Now I beg that you will take down that key. You have the authority of your great-grandfather.”

Without a moment’s hesitation Bertha put her hand into the dark corner of the shelf and took the key from the hook.

“Thank you very much,” said the ghost of old Applejoy. “And now please unlock that little drawer—the one at the bottom.”

Bertha unlocked and opened the drawer. “It is full of old keys!” she said.

“Yes,” said the ghost, “and you will find that they are all tied together in a bunch. Those keys are what we came for! Now, my dear,” said he, standing in front of her and looking down upon her very earnestly, but so kindly that she was not in the least afraid of him, “I want you to understand that what we are going to do is strictly correct and proper, without a trace of inquisitive meanness about it. This was once my house—everything in it I planned and arranged. I am now going to take you into the cellars of my old mansion. They are wonderful cellars; they were my pride and glory! I often used to take my visitors to see them, and wide and commodious stairs lead down to them. Are you afraid,” he said, “to descend with me into these subterranean regions?”

“Not a bit of it!” exclaimed Bertha, almost too loud for prudence. “I have heard of the cellars and wanted to see them, though Mrs. Dipperton told me that my uncle never allowed anyone to enter them; but I think it will be the jolliest thing in the world to go with my great-grandfather into the cellars which he built himself, and of which he was so proud!”

This speech so charmed the ghost of old Applejoy that he would instantly have kissed his great-granddaughter had it not been that he was afraid of giving her a cold.

“You are a girl to my liking!” he exclaimed, “and I wish with all my heart that you had been living at the time I was alive and master of this house. We should have had gay times together—you may believe that!”

“I wish you were alive now, dear great-grandpapa,” said she, “and that would be better than the other way! And now let us go on—I am all impatience!”

They then descended into the cellars, which, until the present owner came into possession of the estate, had been famous throughout the neighborhood. “This way,” said old Applejoy’s ghost. “You will find the floor perfectly dry, and if we keep moving you will not be chilled.

“Do you see that row of old casks nearly covered with cobwebs and dust? Now, my dear, those casks contain some of the choicest spirits ever brought into this country, and most of them are more than half full! The finest rum from Jamaica, brandy from France, and gin from Holland—gin with such a flavor, my dear, that if you were to take out the bung the delightful aroma would fill the whole house! There is port there, too, and if it is not too old it must be the rarest wine in the country! And Madeira, a little glass of which, my dear, is a beverage worthy even of you!

“These things were not stowed away by me, but by my dear son George, who knew their value; but as for John—he drinks water and tea! He is a one-chicken man, and if he has allowed any of these rare spirits to become worthless, simply on account of age, he ought to be sent to the county prison!

“But we must move on! Do you see all these bottles—dingy looking enough, but filled with the choicest wines? Many of these are better than ever they were, although some of them may have spoiled. John would let everything spoil. He is a dog in the manger!

“Come into this little room. Now, then, hold up your lantern, and look all around you. Notice that row of glass jars on the shelf. They are filled with the finest mincemeat ever made by mortal man—or woman! It is the same kind of mincemeat I used to eat. George had it put up so that he might have the sort of pies at Christmas which I gave him when he was a boy. That mincemeat is just as good as ever it was! John is a dyspeptic; he wouldn’t eat mince-pie! But he will eat fried potatoes, and they are ten times worse for him, if he did but know it!

“There are a lot more jars and cans, all sealed up tightly. I do not know what good things are in them, but I am sure their contents are just what will be wanted to fill out a Christmas table. If Mrs. Dipperton were to come down here and open those jars and bottles she would think she was in Heaven!

“But now, my dear, I want to show you the grandest thing in these cellars, the diamond of the collection! Behold that wooden box! Inside of it is another box made of tin, soldered up tightly, so that it is perfectly airtight. Inside of that tin box is a great plum-cake! And now listen to me, Bertha! That cake was put into that box by me. I intended it to stay there for a long time, for plum-cake gets better the longer it is kept, but I did not suppose that the box would not be opened for three generations! The people who eat that cake, my dear Bertha, will be blessed above all their fellow mortals! That is to say, as far as cake-eating goes.

“And now I think you have seen enough to understand thoroughly that these cellars are the abode of many good things to eat and to drink. It is their abode, but if John could have his way it would be their sepulchre! I was fond of good living, as you may well imagine, and so was my dear son George, but John is a degenerate!”

“But why did you bring me here, great-grandpapa?” said Bertha. “Do you want me to come down here, and have my Christmas dinner with you?” And as she said this she unselfishly hoped that when the tin box should be opened it might contain the ghost of a cake, for it was quite plain that her great-grandfather had been an enthusiast in the matter of plum-cake.

“No, indeed,” said old Applejoy’s ghost “Come upstairs, and let us go into the study. There are some coals left on the hearth, and you will not be chilled while we talk”

When the great cellar-door had been locked, the keys replaced in the drawer, the little key hung upon its hook, and the cabinet closed, Bertha sat down before the fireplace and warmed her fingers over the few embers it contained, while the spirit of her great-grandfather stood by her and talked to her.

“Bertha,” said he, “it is wicked not to celebrate Christmas—especially when one is able to do so—in the most hospitable and generous way. For years John has taken no notice of Christmas, and it is full time that he should reform, and it is your duty and my duty to reform him if we can! You have seen what he has in the cellars; there are turkeys in the poultry-yard—for I know he has not sold them all—and if there is anything wanting for a grand Christmas celebration he has an abundance of money with which to buy it. There is not much time before Christmas Day, but there is time enough to do everything that has to be done, if you and I go to work and set other people to work.”

“And how are we to do that?” asked Bertha.

“We haven’t an easy task before us,” said the ghost, “but I have been thinking a great deal about it, and I believe we can accomplish it. The straightforward thing to do is for me to appear to your uncle, tell him his duty, and urge him to perform it, but I know what will be the result. He would call the interview a dream, and attribute it to too much hash and fried potatoes, and the result would be that he would have a plainer table for awhile and half starve you and Mrs. Dipperton. But there is nothing dreamlike about you, my dear. If anyone hears you talking he will know he is awake.”

“I think that is very true,” said Bertha, smiling. “Do you want me to talk to Uncle?”

“Yes,” said old Applejoy’s ghost, “I do want you to talk to him. I want you to go to him immediately after breakfast to-morrow morning, and tell him exactly what has happened this night. He cannot believe dreams are fried potatoes when you tell him about the little key in the corner of the shelf, the big keys in the drawer, the casks of spirits (and you can tell him what is in each one), the jars of mincemeat, and the wooden box nailed fast and tight with the tin box inside holding the cake. John knows all about that cake, for his father told him, and he knows all about me, too, although he tried not to believe in me, and when you have told him all you have seen, and when you give him my message, I think it will make him feel that you and I are awake, and that he would better keep awake, too, if he knows what’s good for him.”

“And what is the message?” asked Bertha.

“It is simply this,” said old Applejoy’s ghost. “When you have told him all the events of this night, and when he sees that they must have happened, for you could not have imagined them, I want you to tell him that it is my wish and desire, the wish and desire of his grandfather, to whom he owes everything he possesses, that there shall be worthy festivities in this house on Christmas Day and Night—I would say something about Christmas Eve, but I am afraid there is not time enough for that. Tell him to kill his turkeys, open his cellars, and spend his money. Tell him to send for at least a dozen good friends and relatives, for they will gladly give up their own Christmas dinner when they know that the great holiday is to be celebrated in this house. There is time enough, messengers and horses can be hired, and you can attend to the invitations. Mrs. Dipperton is a good manager when she has a chance, and I know she will do herself honor this time if John will give her the range.

“Now, my dear,” said old Applejoy’s ghost, drawing near to the young girl, “I want to ask you a question—a private, personal question. Who is Tom?”

At these words a sudden blush rushed into the cheeks of Bertha.

“Tom?” she said, “what Tom?”

“Now, don’t beat about the bush with me,” said old Applejoy’s ghost “I am sure you know a young man named Tom, and I want you to tell me who he is. My name was Tom, and for the sake of my past life I am very fond of Toms. But you must tell me about your Tom—is he a nice young fellow? Do you like him very much?”

“Yes,” said Bertha, meaning the answer to cover both questions.

“And does he like you?”

“I think so,” said Bertha.

“That means you are in love with each other!” exclaimed old Applejoy’s ghost. “And now, my dear, tell me his name? Out with it! You can’t help yourself.”

“Mr. Burcham,” said Bertha, her cheeks now a little pale, for it seemed to her a very bold thing for her to talk in this way even in the company of only a spirit

“Son of Thomas Burcham of the Meadows? Grandson of old General Burcham?”

“Yes, sir,” said Bertha.

The ghost of old Applejoy gazed down upon his great-granddaughter with pride and admiration.

“My dear Bertha,” he exclaimed, “I congratulate you! I knew the old general well, and I have seen young Tom. He is a fine-looking fellow, and if you love him I know he is a good one. Now, I’ll tell you what we will do, Bertha. We will have Tom here on Christmas.”

“Oh, great-grandfather,” exclaimed the girl, “I can’t ask Uncle to invite him.”

“We will make it all right,” said the beaming ghost “We will have a bigger party than we thought we would. All the guests when they are invited will be asked to bring their families. When a big dinner is given at this house Thomas Burcham, Esq., must not be left out, and don’t you see, Bertha, he is bound to bring Tom. And now you must not stay here a minute longer. Skip back to your bed, and immediately after breakfast come here to your uncle and tell him everything I have told you to tell him.”

Bertha rose to obey, but she hesitated.

“Great-grandfather,” she said, “if uncle does allow us to celebrate Christmas, will you be with us?”

“Yes, indeed, my dear,” said he. “And you need not be afraid of my frightening anybody. When I choose I can be visible to some and invisible to others. I shall be everywhere and I shall hear everything, but I shall appear only to the loveliest woman who ever graced this mansion. And now be off to bed without another word.”

“If she hadn’t gone,” said old Applejoy’s ghost to himself, “I couldn’t have helped giving her a good-night kiss.”

The next morning, as Bertha told the story of her night’s adventures to her uncle, the face of John Applejoy grew paler and paler. He was a hard-headed man, but a superstitious one, and when the story began he wondered if it were a family failing to have dreams about ghosts; but when he heard of the visit to the cellars, and especially when Bertha told him of his grandfather’s plum-cake, the existence of which he had believed was not known to anyone but himself, he felt it was impossible for the girl to have dreamed these things. When Bertha had finished he actually believed that she had seen and talked with the ghost of her great-grandfather. With all the power of his will he opposed this belief, but it was too much for him, and he surrendered. But he was a proud man and would not admit to his niece that he put any faith in the existence of ghosts.

“My dear,” said he, rising and standing before the fire, his face still pale, but his expression under good control, “you have had a very strange dream. Now, don’t declare that it wasn’t a dream—people always do that—but hear me out. Although there is nothing of weight in what you have told me—for traditions about my cellars have been afloat in the family—still your pretty little story suggests something to me. This is Christmas-time and I had almost overlooked it. You are young and lively and accustomed to the celebration of holidays. Therefore, I have determined, my dear, to consider your dream just as if it had been a real happening, and we will have a grand Christmas dinner, and invite our friends and their families. I know there must be good things in the cellars, although I had almost forgotten them, and they shall be brought up and spread out and enjoyed. Now go and send Mrs. Dipperton to me, and when we have finished our consultation, you and I will make out a list of guests and send off the invitations.”

When she had gone, John Applejoy sat down in his big chair and looked fixedly into the fire. He would not have dared to go to bed that night if he had disregarded the message from his grandfather.

Never since the old house had begun to stand upon its foundations had there been such glorious Christmas-time within its walls. The news that old Mr. Applejoy was sending out invitations to a Christmas dinner spread like wildfire through the neighborhood, and those who were not invited were almost as much excited as those who were asked to be guests. The idea of inviting people by families was considered a grand one, worthy indeed of the times of old Mr. Tom Applejoy, the grandfather of the present owner, who had been the most hospitable man in the whole country.

For the first time in nearly a century all the leaves of the great dining-table were put into use, and chairs for the company were brought from every part of the house. All the pent-up domestic enthusiasm in the soul of Mrs. Dipperton, the existence of which no one had suspected, now burst out in one grand volcanic eruption, and the great table had as much as it could do to stand up under its burdens brought from cellar, barn, and surrounding country.

In the very middle of everything was the great and wonderful plum-cake which had been put away by the famous grandfather of the host.

But the cake was not cut. "My friends," said Mr. John Applejoy, "we may all look at this cake but we will not eat it! We will keep it just as it is until a marriage shall occur in this family. Then you are all invited to come and enjoy it!"

At the conclusion of this little speech old Applejoy's ghost patted his degenerate grandson upon the head. "You don't feel that, John," he said to himself, "but it is approbation, and this is the first time I have ever approved of you! You must know of the existence of young Tom! You may turn out to be a good fellow yet, and if you will drink some of that rare old Madeira every day, I am sure you will!"

Late in the evening there was a grand dance in the great hall, which opened with an old-fashioned minuet, and when the merry guests were forming on the floor, a young man named Tom came forward and asked the hand of Bertha.

"No," said she, "not this time. I am going to dance this first dance with—well, we will say by myself!"

At these words the most thoroughly gratified ghost in all space stepped up to the side of the lovely girl, and with his cocked hat folded flat under his left arm, he made a low bow and held out his hand. With his neatly tied cue, his wide-skirted coat, his long waistcoat trimmed with lace, his tightly drawn stockings and his buckled shoes, there was not such a gallant figure in the whole company.

Bertha put out her hand and touched the shadowy fingers of her partner, and then, side by side, she and the ghost of her great-grandfather opened the ball. Together they made the coupé, the high step, and the balance. They advanced, they retired, they came together. With all the grace of fresh young beauty and ancient courtliness they danced the minuet.

"What a strange young girl," said some of the guests, "and what a queer fancy to go through that dance all by herself, but how beautifully she did it!"

"Very eccentric, my dear!" said Mr. John Applejoy, when the dance was over. "But you danced most charmingly. I could not help thinking as I looked at you that there was nobody in this room that was worthy to be your partner."

"You are wrong there, old fellow!" was the simultaneous mental ejaculation of young Tom Burcham and of old Applejoy's ghost.