

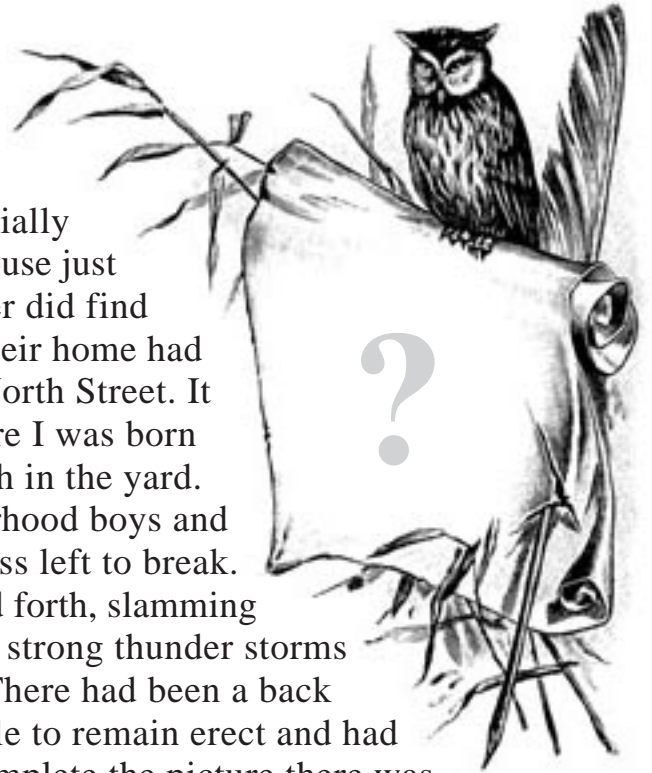
The Curtis Place

North Street Tales

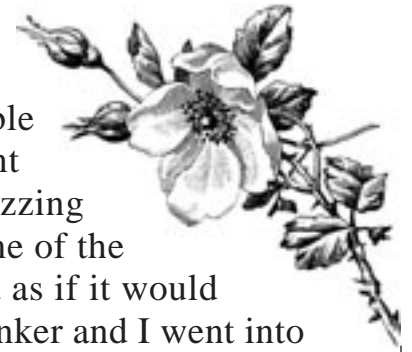
I didn't like to walk by the Curtis Place, especially at night. The Curtis Place was an abandoned house just two doors up the street from our house. I never did find out anything about the Curtis family or why their home had been left to become the derelict property on North Street. It must have been left to the elements long before I was born given the condition it was in. Weeds grew high in the yard. The windows had been the targets of neighborhood boys and girls to the point where there was no more glass left to break. The doors, both front and back swung back and forth, slamming shut in the strong winds that accompanied the strong thunder storms that roared through our village that summer. There had been a back porch, but it had long ago given up the struggle to remain erect and had collapsed into a heap of rotting lumber. To complete the picture there was a big tree in the back with its limbs stretching over the house, almost as if it were protecting it from further harm.

Walking by the house during the day wasn't too bad. In fact some of my friends and I would summon up enough courage to go around back and climb that big tree, carefully avoiding the black hole in the foundation that was the outside entrance to the cellar. After all, we didn't know what lurked in the darkness. However, at night the Curtis Place was to be avoided at all costs. It was better to make a detour to the opposite side of the street rather than risk being taken captive by the ghastly things that inhabited the house. I had a friend who lived on North Street. His name was Tinker. He was in my class at the elementary school so we often walked home together. During the summer we played baseball in the empty lot across the street, made forts in the little forest that grew back of his house, and read comic and Little Big books on our front porch. Tired of reading one rather warm afternoon, we decided to find out once and for all what was in the Curtis house. Summoning up our courage we walked up the street, paused for a while in front of the house and timidly walked up to the front door. The steps had long since vanished, so we had to climb up to get through the door. I remember vividly my first glimpse of what was the front hallway. There was an old rusty chandelier dangling from the ceiling. Shreds of wallpaper, the pattern no longer discernable, hung in bits and pieces from the plaster walls. We were somewhat reassured that we were safe when we saw the names of those who had explored before us written on the walls.

The first door to our right was the entrance to what had been the living room. It was in even worse condition than the hall. The center ceiling light had disappeared entirely. There were just a wire or two hanging from a hole in the ceiling. Large



chunks of plaster had fallen from both the ceiling the walls. Generations of spiders had woven their webs in every possible place. Those spiders certainly knew that this was an excellent place to make their home because there were cluster flies buzzing around throughout the house. The room reminded me of some of the horror movies that we had seen at the Rex Theater. It looked as if it would be a good place for a Frankenstein or a Dracula to live. As Tinker and I went into the next room, which turned out to be the dining room, we both stopped in our tracks because we thought we heard a noise. It sounded like someone walking in one of the rooms upstairs. Being the brave lads that we thought we were, we decided to ignore it because the noise wasn't repeated.



There was nothing to attract our interest in the dining room; it was in about the same shape as the living room. We knew it was the dining room because there was a big round table setting lopsided in the middle of the room. One of its legs lay on the floor beside it.

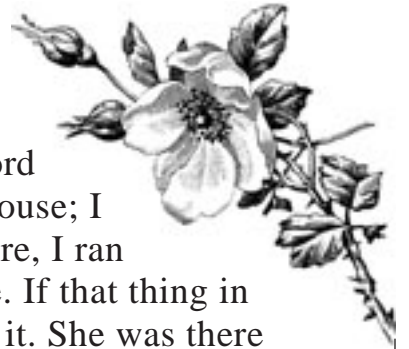
There were two doors leading from the dining room. One we found out was a closet; the other led us into the kitchen. The old soapstone sink was still there as were a couple of broken chairs. We looked into the pantry. Nothing of interest caught our attention. Just then we heard the sound of those footsteps coming from upstairs. The shivers went up and down our spines. What could it be? Were all those stories about this place being haunted really true? George, who was in high school, has told us that he had seen an eerie light coming from the house one night when he was on his way home from setting pins at the bowling alley. We were torn between running from the house or staying and finding out what really was upstairs. If we ran one of our friends might see us and then tell someone where we had been. Then the word we get back to our parents and we would get "it" after they found out.

We decided to sneak into the front hall, carefully avoiding the closed door that might lead to the "thing's" lair in the cellar.

We got to the hall without incident. Now again we were faced with a dilemma. The open front door beckoned us, as did the stairs leading to the second floor. We took the risk. Tinker said, "You go first." I said, "No, you go." We probably could have argued this back and forth but we eventually decided to go up side by side because the staircase was wide enough. There were some places where the boards had rotted and left holes. We carefully avoided those. We paused every time our weight caused a step to loudly creak. So step, by step we went on.

About three fourths of the way up we heard a howl! It flashed through my mind that it sounded like the banshees that my Grandma described in her stories about these creatures. She said that if my brother and I were doing something wrong then a banshee would certainly grab us and carry us away. (She never did say where that beastly thing would take us) Those stories flashed through my mind.

Then we heard another howl. This time louder. Well, Tinker and I weren't about to wait around to find out what this was. We got down those stairs, hopping over the bad places, in record time. We jumped out the front door. Tinker took off for his house; I ran down the street to the safety of my home. When I got there, I ran into the house and into the kitchen to see if mother was there. If that thing in the haunted house was behind me mother would take care of it. She was there and asked me what was wrong. I quickly looked out the side door to see if anything was there and then replied, "nothing, mother." I think she knew that I wasn't being truthful but she didn't say anything then.



That evening, just after supper, Tinker's mother appeared at our door with Tinker in tow. Mother told Morry and Hope to go in the other room because she knew something was up. Thankfully, Dad was out working in his garden. Tinker had told his mother what we had done and who was his accomplice. Mother asked me if this was true. I bowed my head and said that it was.

I don't remember what Tinker's punishment was but I do remember what happened to me. For not obeying my parent's instructions and going into that house and for not telling the truth, I had to pick those awful potato bugs off the leaves of three long rows of potato plants. We depended on those potatoes for our winter supply. Those bugs would destroy the plants if left to eat the leaves. I picked the bugs and dropped them into a can with kerosene in the bottom. I hated that job, but I learned my lesson which was, obey my parents and tell the truth.

Later that summer I saw the police at the Curtis house. They went in and in a few minutes came out with a man we called "Topsy Tom." (I never did find out his real name.) He was the town drunk. He was the one who has made that awful howl. He had done it to other kids in the neighborhood to scare them off. He didn't want anybody to know that that old, falling down house was his favorite spot to drink and then sleep after he became inebriated. Two or three years later the Curtis house was torn down. The man who bought the place built a home there for his family. It certainly improved the looks of our street, but future generations of young boys and girls would never know the thrill of what it meant to have a haunted house almost next door.



Edward Barkley