# THE OLD RUIN

Ann and Adam spent their summer vacation with their parents for the first time. Ann asked for years why they did not go south as all other people did. But her dad said, that everything was so beautiful where they were living, so there was no need to go elsewhere.

But this year Ann succeeded in persuading dad to go. Maybe because Ann and Adam got some folders from a tourist office in town. One of these really persuaded Ann's dad. He loved to visit museums, and he loved old castles and ruins. And on the place they were now there were lots of it all.

Ann's dad had been playful and giddy from the day they arrived. He spent most of his time in the museum of arts, and in the evenings they all went out to the old ruin. They could hardly know him. Normally he did not say many words, but these days he talked and talked about all the exciting things he saw.

This evening Ann and Adam were finally alone. There was a big party at the hotel, and the two children did not feel like joining. "Let's take a trip," Ann said.

"Where do you want to go?" her father said.

"To the ruin," Adam said. "It's so exciting."

"I should like to join you," dad said. "But I have to stay. Mom is going to do a performance--I really won't miss it!"

Ann laughed. She took Adam's hand, and they walked along the narrow path towards the ruin. "What is your mom's performance," Adam asked.

"Well, she really has only one act. It's completely crazy, but she uses it when she is with people, she does not know."

"You have a peculiar family," Adam said. In fact, he was a little envious, maybe because his parents had been divorced some years ago. He loved his mom, but missed a man in the house anyway.

"But I do like you," he said.

"Me to?" asked Ann, pressing his hand.

"I did not say anything about that. You might guess!"

Now they were in the dark wood, which surrounded the ruin. It was almost dark, and they felt the tension grow inside, gazing at the old walls towering towards the black sky.

"Don't leave me," Ann said.

"Are you scared?"

"A bit."

"I like to hold your hand," Adam said. "Especially when you are scared."

They tiptoed towards the old gate of the castle. It was almost rotten, and many bricks in the old walls were loose. Adam enjoyed it. He loved the tension and loved to look at ghost films on TV. "I saw a film once . . . ."

Ann stopped him, "No, I don't want any of your stories just now. Don't say anyting!"

"Okay--let's go in."

Carefully they opened the old gate with shoulders and pushed themselves inside. It was completely dark, and there was a mouldy and rotten smell.

"Did you bring the torches?" Ann asked.

"Here," Adam said. He lit the torches and gave Ann one of them. Then they went on.

There were many broken bricks on the floor and it was very dirty. They saw a tree growing directly from the wall and up into the sky.

A little later they found themselves in the banqueting hall. Only the walls were left, but the hall had been marvellous in the old days.

Adam and Ann sat down on a big flat stone, lightening with their torches all around. "Imagine waht has been going on here," Adam said.

"That's a long time ago," Ann said. "Suddenly she pointed--Adam, look!!!"

He looked at the wall. He felt the pressure from Ann's hand. She was really scared, and so was he. On the top of the tallest wall there was a shape in white clothing. He spread his arms and moved them to and fro, while the wind whined through the hall behind them.

"A ghost," Ann said.

"Do you see the same as I do?" asked Adam.

Ann crept quite close to Adam. He felt happy because of Ann's nearness and scared because of what he saw at the wall. The ghost was still moving his arms as if he wanted contact.

Then suddenly Adam got up. He pointed his torch and the light directly towards the ghost. It disappeared immediately and the wind in the halls stopped.

Adam laughed. "There you go--it was fantasy!"

"Thank God," she said relieved. "But tell me, how can the two of us see the same thing, when it is not there?" An she continued, "Why do people believe in ghosts? Why are people superstitious?"

"Because there are a lot of things you cannot explain," Adam said. "If there is something we don't understand, we make stories about them."

"And that ghost--was it superstitious?"

Adam nodded. "Let's switch off the torches," he said and took Ann's hand. It was almost burning, and he enjoyed it.

They sat there for a while, and Ann liked to hold Adam's hand. They could hear their own hearts beat, and everything was beautiful. Then suddenly Ann shouted again, "He is here again!!!"

Adam looked up. "Right!" The white shape was on the wall again. He waved to them and the wind whined, and their hair was flapping. Ann crept close to Adam and he was about to fly to the heaven by joy.

"I'm scared," she said. "Really scared. He's reall--it can't be superstition!"

"Then look," Adam said and sent the light from his torch towards the ghost. It disappeared as quickly as before.

"I don't understand," Ann said. "Let's go down to town--I can't think clearly anymore."

They tiptoed out of the gateway and rushed through the wood until they could see the lights from the town from the valley. They sat down on a bench, breathless.

"Do ghosts belong to reality?" Ann asked.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I don't know."

"I don't know either. Just because there is a word called ghost it doesn't mean that ghosts exist."

"So why does the word exist?"

"It's a word from fairy tales and that stuff. Maybe from dreams. I don't know."

"Are there words for something, that does not exist?"

"Of course," he answered.

"Then give me one."

"Sure, that's easy. Wait a minute--I don't think I can. He mulled for a while. Yeah, I think I have one; flying saucers. They don't exist!"

"So why does the word exist?"

"Love then," Adam tried.

"You say that to make me take your hand."

"Will you?"

Ann took Adam's hand. She put her face close to his, and Adam whispered, "Kiss,

that's something that exists, isn't it?"

"Sure, but only one," Ann said and gave him a kiss.

Suddenly her body shivered, and she screamed, "He is here again!"

Adam turned around and saw the shape quite close to them--he could almost touch him!

He got so scared, that he did not know what he did. He tore Ann from the bench, and they both rushed along the path. Their lungs hammered as machines in their breasts, and they dared not look back. They did not stop until they reached the garden of the hotel.

Here Ann's dad came out saying, "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," Ann said. "We just wanted to see who was the fastest."

"Whom did you compete with?"

"Reality," Adam said. "You can't get away from it."

Ann's dad shook his head and went in. Breathless they sat down on the marblebench in the garden, and Adam said, "Now I wanna see what's real and what's not real. He took her hand and said, "Give me another kiss. If he comes then, everything is different from what I thought."

Ann put her cheek to Adam's. She kissed him softly while her eyes rolled in her face from fear.

"Now," Adam said. "Now!"

"I dare not," Ann whispered. "Not until daylight. Then he can't come forth."

They sat for a while without saying anything. Then Adam said, "Is there another reality than the one, that language describes?"

"I don't know," Ann answered. "It looks like that. What shall we do?"

Sit here quietly and think the whole think over. Is reality outside us or inside us?"

"Are we part of it?"

"You'll get a kiss anyway. That's the only way I can answer you."

And in the old ruin the ghost went around feeling very lonely.

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Courtesy of SK-Forlag, Denmark



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