

Adapted from a
story by E. Nesbit

THE SHADOW

Written by Julia Round and illustrated by Cat Laird

THERE WERE THREE OF US — AND
ANOTHER, WHO HAD FAINTED DURING THE
SECOND EXTRA OF THE DANCE AND BEEN PUT
TO BED IN THE DRESSING ROOM NEXT TO OUR
BEDROOM AT THE BIG COUNTRY HOUSE.

WE HAD TALKED
OF OUR PARTNERS,
AS GIRLS WILL, AND
THEN DARED TO
TALK OF GHOSTS...

IN WHICH,
SAID WE ALL,
WE DID NOT
BELIEVE ONE BIT.

WE HAD TOLD THE STORY
OF THE PHANTOM COACH,
AND THE HOUSE IN BERKELEY
SQUARE, WHEN A TAP CAME
AT OUR DOOR.

TAP
TAP

MISS EASTWICH!

I SAW YOUR LIGHT,
AND THOUGHT IT WAS
LATE TO BE UP...

COME IN
AND GET
WARM.

THERE'S
LOTS OF COCOA
LEFT.

THE YOUNGEST DID NOT KNOW
MISS EASTWICH AS WE OTHERS DID.
DID NOT KNOW HOW HER PERSISTENT
SILENCE HAD BUILT A WALL
ROUND HER.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SO EASY TO PUT AN
ARM ROUND HER NECK BEFORE, IF ONLY I
HAD THOUGHT SHE WANTED IT.



WE'VE ALL BEEN TELLING GHOST STORIES, ONLY WE DON'T BELIEVE IN THEM A BIT, AND WHEN YOU GET WARM YOU OUGHT TO TELL ONE TOO.

OUR HOUSEKEEPER, THAT MODEL OF DECORUM AND DECENTLY DONE DUTIES, TELL A GHOST STORY! THE CHILD WAS MAD!

YOU'RE SURE I'M NOT IN YOUR WAY?

NOT A BIT. YOU'RE WELCOME, ALTHOUGH I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D CARE FOR GIRLS' CHATTER.



NO ONE ANYONE KNOWS HAS EVER SEEN A GHOST THEMSELVES.

IT'S ALWAYS WHAT SOMEBODY TOLD SOMEBODY WHO TOLD SOMEBODY, YOU KNOW.

AND ALL SO BEAUTIFULLY ROUNDED OFF.

WITH A MURDER OR A HIDDEN TREASURE OR SOMETHING.

WHICH MAKES THEM HARDER TO BELIEVE.

MISS EASTWICH, YOU OUGHT TO TELL ONE.



THE ONLY THING I EVER KNEW OF WAS HEARSAY... OR AT LEAST HALF OF IT WAS.

I KNEW SHE WOULD TELL HER STORY, AND THAT SHE HAD NEVER BEFORE TOLD IT, AND THAT SHE WAS ONLY TELLING IT NOW BECAUSE SHE FELT IT PAYMENT FOR THE FIRE AND THE COCOA AND THE HUG.

IT CAN'T DO ANY HARM. THEY DON'T BELIEVE IN GHOSTS, AND IT WASN'T EXACTLY A GHOST ANYWAY. AND THEY'RE ALL OVER TWENTY—THEY'RE NOT BABIES.



TWENTY YEARS AGO, I HAD TWO FRIENDS, AND I LOVED THEM MORE THAN ANYTHING IN THE WORLD.

AND THEY MARRIED EACH OTHER.

HOW AWFULLY NICE FOR YOU! DO GO ON.



AFTER THEY MARRIED, I DIDN'T SEE THEM FOR A YEAR OR TWO.

THEN HE WROTE AND ASKED ME TO COME AND STAY, BECAUSE HIS WIFE WAS ILL AND IT WOULD CHEER THEM BOTH UP.

HE HAD SAID THE HOUSE WAS GLOOMY AND I IMAGINED SOMEWHERE OLD AND DARK, BUT WE DREW UP IN FRONT OF A LARGE, SMART VILLA.



HE MET ME AT THE DOOR, AND THANKED ME FOR COMING, AND ASKED ME TO FORGIVE THE PAST.

OH, I SUPPOSE BECAUSE THEY HADN'T INVITED ME BEFORE, OR SOMETHING.

WHAT PAST?

THEY WERE VERY GLAD TO SEE ME, AND I WAS GLAD TO BE THERE.

YOU GIRLS HAVE SUCH TROOPS OF FRIENDS, BUT THESE TWO WERE ALL I HAD.

ALL I EVER HAD.



MABEL WASN'T EXACTLY ILL,
ONLY WEAK AND EXCITABLE.

I THOUGHT HE SEEMED
MORE ILL THAN SHE DID.

SHE WENT TO BED EARLY AND
ASKED ME TO KEEP HIM COMPANY
THROUGH HIS LAST PIPE.



WHAT'S WRONG?

MABEL LOOKS AS
WELL AS CAN BE EXPECTED —
GIVEN SHE'S EXPECTING!

YES, BUT I'M WORRIED
SHE WILL BEGIN TO NOTICE
SOMETHING WRONG.



THAT'S WHY
I WANTED YOU TO COME.
YOU'RE SO SENSIBLE, AND
MABEL'S LIKE A LITTLE
BIRD.



YES, OF COURSE.



THIS IS A VERY PECULIAR HOUSE

IT'S VERY PRETTY.
A LITTLE NEW PERHAPS,
BUT THAT WILL MEND
IN TIME!

IT IS NEW,
THAT'S JUST IT.



IF IT WERE
AN OLD HOUSE, I SHOULD
THINK IT WAS HAUNTED.

HAVE YOU SEEN ANYTHING?

NO. NOT YET.



I'VE SEEN NOTHING
AND I'VE HEARD NOTHING,
BUT I'VE BEEN SO NEAR!

THERE'S
A SORT OF FEELING.

SOMETHING FOLLOWS ME
ABOUT—BUT WHEN I TURN ROUND
THERE'S NEVER ANYTHING BUT
MY SHADOW.

I ALWAYS FEEL
THAT I SHALL SEE THE THING,
OR HEAR IT, NEXT MINUTE; BUT
I NEVER DO, NOT QUITE.

I THOUGHT
YOU MIGHT BE ABLE
TO HELP ME.

YOU'VE BEEN
WORKING HARD...

IT'S JUST
NERVES...

DO YOU THINK
SOMEONE I WRONGED COULD
HAVE LAID A CURSE
ON ME?

DO YOU BELIEVE
IN CURSES?



NO, I DON'T.

AND I KNOW FOR
CERTAIN THAT THE ONLY
PERSON ANYONE COULD HAVE
SAID YOU WRONGED HAS
FORGIVEN YOU FREELY.



YOU SHOULD
TAKE MABEL AWAY.

NO, NO.
SHE'S JUST GOT THE
HOUSE IN ORDER.

SHE MUSTN'T
GUESS THERE IS ANYTHING
WRONG



SO WE SAID GOODNIGHT

IS THAT ALL
THE STORY?



THAT IS ONLY
THE BEGINNING.

WHENEVER I WAS ALONE WITH HIM, HE USED TO TELL ME THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER.

AT FIRST I THOUGHT HIS TALK HAD UPSET MY NERVES.

BUT THE ODD THING WAS THAT IT WASN'T ONLY AT NIGHT—BUT IN BROAD DAYLIGHT. PARTICULARLY ON THE STAIRS AND PASSAGES.

ON THE STAIRCASE THE FEELING USED TO BE SO AWFUL THAT I HAD TO BITE MY LIPS TILL THEY BLED, TO KEEP MYSELF FROM RUNNING UP THE STAIRS AT FULL SPEED.

ONLY I KNEW IF I DID I SHOULD GO MAD AT THE TOP.

THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMETHING BEHIND ME—SOMETHING THAT ONE COULD JUST NOT SEE. AND A SOUND THAT ONE COULD JUST NOT HEAR.

AND IF I TURNED ROUND IT SEEMED AS IF THE THING DROPPED AND MELTED INTO MY SHADOW.

DOWNSTAIRS THERE WAS ANOTHER CORRIDOR, WITH A CUPBOARD AT ONE END AND THE KITCHEN AT THE OTHER.

ONE NIGHT I WENT DOWN INTO THE KITCHEN TO WARM SOME MILK FOR MABEL.

AS I WAITED FOR THE MILK TO BOIL, I GLANCED ALONG THE PASSAGE.

AND AS I LOOKED I KNEW THAT NOW IT WAS NOT GOING TO BE 'ALMOST' ANY MORE.

THE CUPBOARD DOOR WAS PARTLY OPEN.

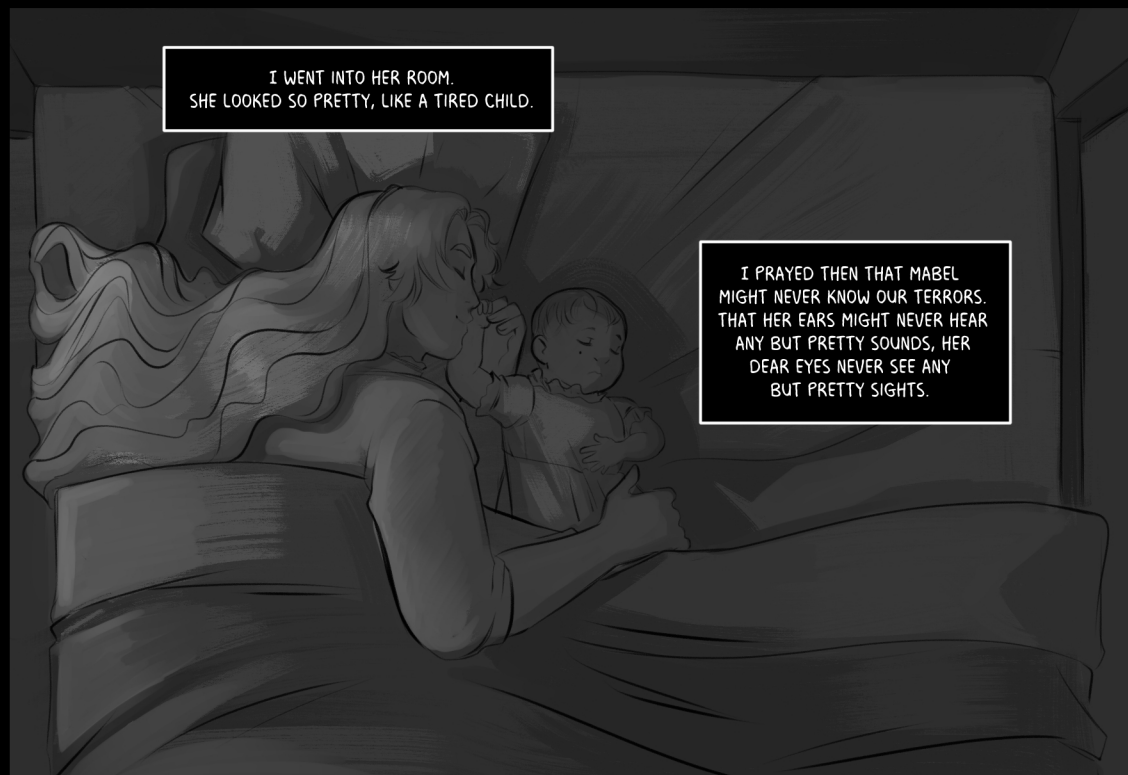
MABEL?

I SAID 'MABEL?' - BUT I DIDN'T THINK IT WAS MABEL CROUCHING DOWN THERE, HALF IN AND HALF OUT OF THE CUPBOARD.

AND WHEN I WHISPERED 'MABEL,' IT SANK DOWN INTO A POOL OF INK ON THE FLOOR, AND THEN ITS EDGES DREW IN, AND IT FLOWED INTO THE CUPBOARD AND GATHERED IN THE SHADOW THERE.

I UPSET THE BOILING MILK, SO THAT WHEN HE RUSHED IN, I HAD AN EXCUSE FOR MY SCREAM.





I WENT INTO HER ROOM.
SHE LOOKED SO PRETTY, LIKE A TIRED CHILD.

I PRAYED THEN THAT MABEL
MIGHT NEVER KNOW OUR TERRORS.
THAT HER EARS MIGHT NEVER HEAR
ANY BUT PRETTY SOUNDS, HER
DEAR EYES NEVER SEE ANY
BUT PRETTY SIGHTS.

I DID NOT PRAY FOR A LONG TIME AFTER THAT.

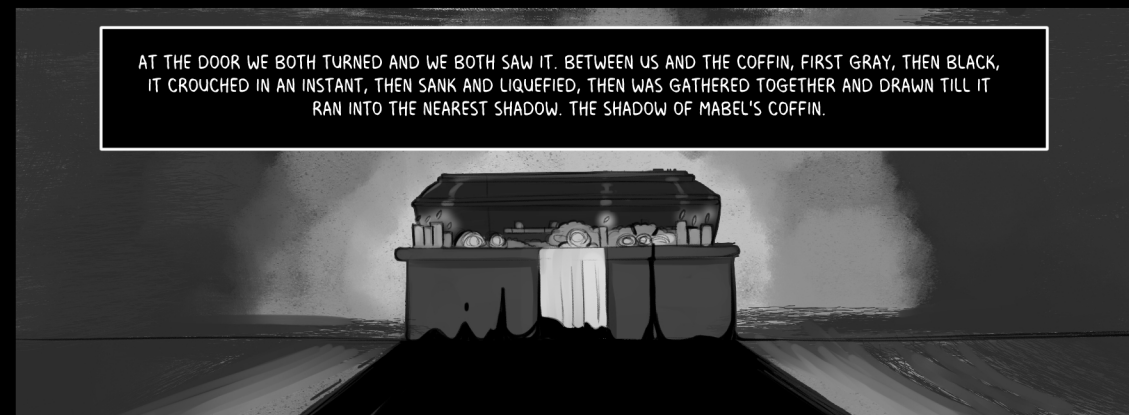


BECAUSE MY PRAYER WAS ANSWERED.

SHE NEVER SAW, NEVER HEARD
ANYTHING MORE IN THIS WORLD.



I LIGHTED WAX CANDLES ROUND HER, AND LAID THE HORRIBLE WHITE
FLOWERS THAT PEOPLE WILL SEND, AND THEN I TOOK HIS HAND TO
LEAD HIM AWAY



AT THE DOOR WE BOTH TURNED AND WE BOTH SAW IT. BETWEEN US AND THE COFFIN, FIRST GRAY, THEN BLACK,
IT CROUCHED IN AN INSTANT, THEN SANK AND LIQUEFIED, THEN WAS GATHERED TOGETHER AND DRAWN TILL IT
RAN INTO THE NEAREST SHADOW. THE SHADOW OF MABEL'S COFFIN.



I LEFT THE
NEXT DAY. HIS MOTHER CAME.
SHE HAD NEVER LIKED ME.

DIDN'T YOU
SEE HIM AGAIN?'



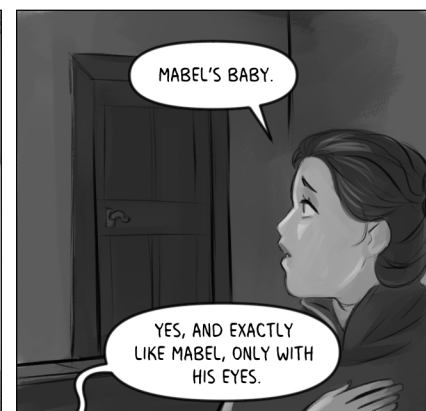
ONLY ONCE,
AND SOMETHING BLACK CROUCHED
THEN BETWEEN HIM AND ME.

BUT IT WAS ONLY
HIS SECOND WIFE CRYING
BESIDE HIS COFFIN.



IT'S NOT A CHEERFUL STORY, IS IT?
AND IT DOESN'T LEAD ANYWHERE.
I'VE NEVER TOLD ANYONE ELSE.

I THINK IT WAS
SEEING HIS DAUGHTER THAT
BROUGHT IT ALL BACK.



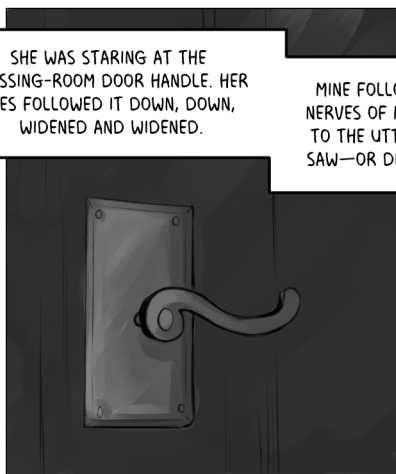
MABEL'S BABY.

YES, AND EXACTLY
LIKE MABEL, ONLY WITH
HIS EYES.





SHE WAS STARING AT THE DRESSING-ROOM DOOR HANDLE. HER EYES FOLLOWED IT DOWN, DOWN, WIDENED AND WIDENED.



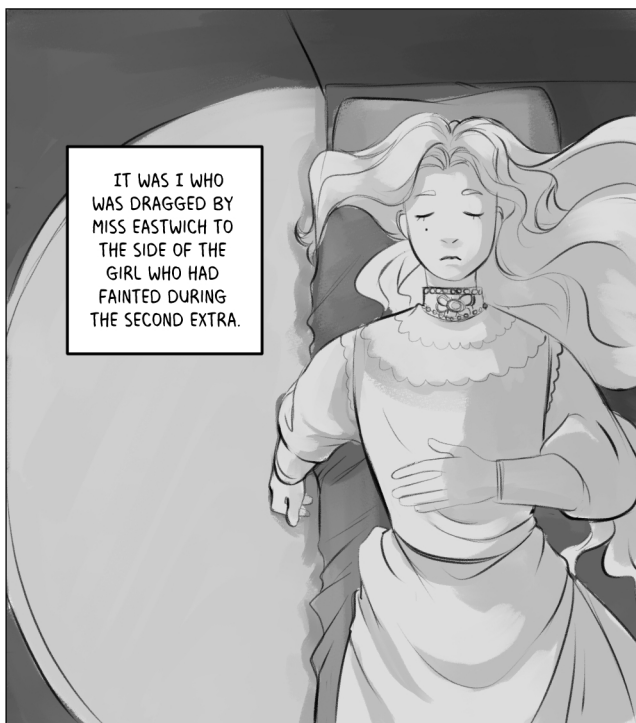
MINE FOLLOWED HERS, AND ALL THE NERVES OF MY EYES SEEMED STRAINED TO THE UTTERMOST—AND I ALMOST SAW—OR DID I? I CAN'T BE CERTAIN.



BUT WE ALL HEARD THE LONG, QUIVERING SIGH, SEEMINGLY BREATHED JUST BEHIND US.



IT WAS I WHO CAUGHT UP THE CANDLE—IT DROPPED WAX ALL OVER MY TREMBLING HANDS



IT WAS I WHO WAS DRAGGED BY MISS EASTWICH TO THE SIDE OF THE GIRL WHO HAD FAINTED DURING THE SECOND EXTRA.



THE DOCTOR CAME IN THE MORNING AND SAID THAT MABEL'S DAUGHTER HAD DIED OF HEART DISEASE INHERITED FROM HER MOTHER. THAT WAS WHAT MADE HER FAINT DURING THE SECOND EXTRA.



BUT I HAVE SOMETIMES WONDERED WHETHER SHE MAY NOT HAVE INHERITED SOMETHING FROM HER FATHER.



I HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO FORGET THE LOOK ON HER DEAD FACE.