

The Green Sheaf

WILL O' THE WISP.



HE cottage stood at the edge of a dreary swamp. Dark rushes grew at the margin, and shivered and trembled as the wind blew through them, seeking to bend them to the cold surface of the water. Heavy mists rose slowly from the swamp, mingling with the twilight, and wreathing themselves into strange, uncouth forms. And through the mists across the swamp moved a pale phantom flame. The child looked through the cottage window and watched it, and shivered as he looked. He hated the swamp and the pale light, and yet it held him with a strange fascination. Night after night, when his mother thought him sleeping, he crept from his bed and sat with his little pale face pressed against the tiny window. The light drew him, and he had to go. He knew what it was though his mother had never told him. The children had whispered it when he went to the School that lay in the bright village right away on the other side of the swamp. And ever since, he had watched night after night the pale light which he now knew was the soul of his little sister who had died unbaptized. He dared not tell his mother for she cried when the little nameless one was mentioned, but he thought the more. It was there to-night, clearer than usual, and the child sat watching. It must be so lonely, the little wandering soul. He sought for it often by day but never found it. If he could have spoken to it, if it could have told him that it knew he watched at the window he might have been happier. He wished he knew. He pushed back the lattice, and leaning his face on his hands stared out into the night. There down away on the swamp was the light. He could see it quite plainly in spite of the mists across the marshy ground.

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“Little baby,” he whispered, “I am watching. Oh! do you hear! I am watching.”

But the wind only moaned gently round him, bringing no answer to the little lonely figure.

“Baby!” he called again, and his voice broke with a sob.

“It’s no use,” he said softly, “she can’t hear, I must go.”

Slipping on his clothes he stole softly down the narrow stairs, and out at the door.

How lonely and dark it was. His lips trembled and the tears filled his eyes, but he went bravely forward. Now he seemed quite near the light, but as he moved it went away.

“Baby!” he called, “don’t go, I am coming, baby!”

But still the light moved on.

“Baby, I won’t hurt you, I only want to have you in my arms. You were so little, and it must be so lonely.”

A little further he went, and stretched out his arms. A cry as the cry of a wounded curlew broke the stillness of the night. Then silence, deep, impenetrable, settled over the lonely marsh.

Leslie Moore.

