

the *Haunted* HALL

By Nancy McGregor.

In the decades before the Civil War, when the Lowcountry had her halcyon days of prosperity, a wealthy plantation owner was wed to the daughter of a neighboring property owner. The marriage would join their properties, and the daughter would live well and comfortably for the rest of her life.

She was a young girl of 16 when the nuptials were spoken. Her groom, however, was much older. Widely known as a kind and joyful man, he ran his plantation with never a hint of mistreatment for man or beast.

At night, the low voices of his workers rose in soft songs that lifted on the breeze, and made twilight on the plantation for her beautiful in sight and sound.

The girl bride, who came from a less cheerful home where anger and unhappiness ruled, was a shy and timid young lady. In her new home, though, she slowly blossomed under the reign of marital bliss.

Her husband, smitten with her beauty and gentle ways, fell deeper and deeper in love. At Christmas, he would shower her with silks and satins, fans, bonnets, and gloves he had brought from Savannah and Charleston. Her birthday he reserved for gifts of jewels that sparkled and glowed like the gem she was in his life.

As those happy years passed, her youthful beauty was hardly touched, but the husband's age showed more and more upon his countenance, and infirmities walked beside him.

He began to realize that he would die many years before her, leaving his beloved to seek happiness in the arms of a younger man. He feared that the considerable fortune he would leave behind would be an added magnet to men of all ages. He couldn't bear the thought of her biding in the arms of another man, especially those of a fortune hunter.

Little known to him, however, over the years, his bride had fallen in deeply love with her husband. She knew she would want no other man and once her husband left her side, she would remain alone all the rest of her days. Alas, she was too nervous and bashful to confess her love. Many times, she had tried to summon the courage to tell him what was in her heart, but she was too self-conscious.

In the seventh year of their marriage, sadly, many things had changed. The husband had fallen ill with his jealousy. He kept it from his wife, but it ate at him. She

was concerned for his ill health and tried not to burden him with her youthful manner. Disconsolately, he only took it to mean that she was anxious for him to soon die, so she could get on with a new life.

Finally, on a summer night when the moon was bright and the sounds of the plantation were still, the pair came to a bitter end. The young wife had, at last, built up the courage to tell her husband of her undying love, but unbeknownst to her, his jealousy had tipped him over the edge of insanity.

That night she dressed with care in her finest gown and descended the stairs to go to him in his library. There she would tell him of a love that ran deep and pure in a heart that had once suffered so unkindly in fear. But her husband wasn't in the library. He was lurking in the shadows of the hallway, beset with a secret fury, believing in his twisted heart that she had come to say good-bye. As his unsuspecting wife reached for the door, he lunged from his hiding place and, with his hands clutching her neck, he began to throttle her so he would never hear her farewell. She was no match for his rage and soon the panicked light in her eyes dimmed. Her lips never spoke the words they had waited so long to utter.

Then, in his anguish over what he had done, the husband burned his magnificent home to the ground that night and himself with it.

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A century later, a new home was built on the former site of the old plantation and it was then that an apparition began appearing in the entry hall.

At first, she was just a flicker of light, but as time passed she became more solid, almost as if she were becoming more determined. Always looking over her shoulder in foreboding, she reaches for a door. She is believed to be the young bride, endlessly replaying her last moments. She is still on her mission of love...still trying to speak the words she never had a chance to say.

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Photograph by Nancy McGregor



the *Haunting* of the ISLAND'S EDGE

Story and photography by Nancy McGregor.

A FABLE

The coast of South Carolina is dotted with islands rich in pirate lore. There were times in history when these many islands were host to countless pirates and privateers. Privateers differed from pirates for they traveled under a *Letter of Marque* from a King, or other government, including the United States. Privateers were sanctioned to attack and disable enemy ships of their sponsoring government but earned their pay from looting ships they targeted. Nevertheless, despite their letters, they were often considered the same thing as a pirate and as such, were often hanged.

At dusk, when conditions are precise, one of the Lowcountry islands hosts the endlessly repeating tale of such a privateer. The story behind this glimpse into another time, tells of a gentleman pirate, a businessman, who hailed from the Mediterranean Ocean but fell in love with the waters off the coast of South Carolina. The tales say he was swarthy with olive skin and dark hair, perhaps of Italian decent, but his family lines have been lost to history. He was reportedly a handsome man, always well dressed with a charismatic façade and a ready laugh. The mercilessness that lurked behind his merry veneer, however, was legendary. His wordplay could make his foes cry like children, and his wit was rapier sharp. It was in business, however, where his ruthless skills became the stuff of legends. It was whispered that he never killed his foes and that he had a noble and gentle spirit beneath the swagger.

So it was that the life of a privateer was made for those such as he. He was said to have been slightly uneasy and not at home when on the land. The motion of the waves and pitch of the deck were where his heart was truly free. There, happiness and joy made his laughter ring out. While he had plenty of "Lightskirts" on land, it was the sea that was the lady of his heart. His ship is thought to have been a graceful brigantine, a favorite of Mediterranean pirates, he called *The Lady Mirth*. The word, brigantine in fact, came from an Italian word *Brigatino*, meaning brigand's or bandit's ship.

The folklore says he had gone ashore to transact what he believed was, for once, an honest arrangement for indigo. But there, unbeknownst to him, an attack most foul awaited him. An assault authored by woman who had once loved him but realized too late she would never take him from the sea. In truth,

though he had loved her, she would always be second to his ship and the sea. Bitterness burned deeply and so, it was a scorned woman - the worst kind - who betrayed him in the end. Her scheme was to steal and then sell his ship, thus taking from him the very thing that took his love from her.

That evening, when the privateer came on shore, the trap was sprung. The woman had the buyer ready, so it was just a matter of obtaining the vessel and her revenge would be complete.

She had convinced the town magistrates to trade his ship for her information, telling them that he was a murderous corsair who was nothing more than a thief and raider. They were waiting with a noose.

Now, forever landlocked, our once merry pirate can be seen haunting the edge of the island where he lost his life. It is said that at dusk, when the wind is becalmed and the clouds are lowering, you can still catch a glimpse of the pirate's charm and swagger as he tries to talk his way into an escape, showing no fear of a noose. Then apparition goes still and that is when the treacherous woman must have sauntered into his view. Her triumphant laughter seems to linger in the air but no words can be heard. Awareness surely clicked into his mind for a moment later he begins shadowboxing furiously with the long dead foes. To die on land where his heart was so uneasy would have been an end worse than death. In anguish, he fought valiantly for the chance to live and to right this betrayal of love - for true love, though often dwelling in sorrow, never seeks to destroy. Yet, he was overpowered and thence was lost a man's love of beauty, born from the call of the sea.

There, at sundown, from the beautiful, spreading branches of a live oak, in full view of *The Lady Mirth*, they hung the Gentleman Pirate. As twilight fell it was as if the sun had died with him and a soft rain began to weep

with the fading light. To this day, it is said that when he appears, clouds roll in and a gentle shower again cries in loss - sent in mourning from the sea herself.

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A Southern Matriarch

She stands there for a few brief seconds, a glimmer of white. Each Thanksgiving night, late after the turkey has been dispatched and the china has been carefully put away, she appears. Her eyes are dark, her skin pale. She is dressed in a high-necked frock that is beruffled and frosted with exquisite lace. With her is an aura of mist that is unearthly, perhaps lit with moonlight from another place or time. Her glance seems to skate over the room, seeking something that must be only visible to her. When, once again, the person or object she seeks isn't there, then, the candles flicker, once... twice... and she winks out until next year's visit.

Who is she? And what does she seek?

This is a Southern Matriarch whose watchful spirit has never left an old family home in the Lowcountry. To understand, one must first understand the historical figure of a Southern Woman. This, in and of itself, is no easy feat for they have been written about in literature, lore, and legend until they've obtained an almost mythic stature.

In those legends, however, none emerges more strongly than the Southern Matriarchs. Southern Belles may have caught our attention, but it was their mothers who gave structure and meaning to the once magical southern way of life.

In the land of bygone days, a mother ruled her home and, as a matter of course, the entire family. As her children grew and married, the Southern mother became the matriarch of an entire brood.

If she were lucky, there would be one girl child who would become her special project. This child would have been trained, and tutored as the matriarch's replacement.

A daughter who was to fill such shoes must show the organizational skills of COO, the tenderness of a pastor, the thriftiness of a banker, and the grace of a royal hostess. She would become the keeper of the Family Bible that recorded the births, marriages, and deaths. She would be told the secret recipes, the skeletons in the closet, and which mattress or apple tree held the emergency cash.

Of course, in a southern home, mealtimes were one of the most important times of the day. The meals for celebrations and holidays were taken to extraordinary elevations and the

finest foods the house could prepare were served. When it was all over, however, Momma might be seen gliding through the dining room, picking up a crumb here or straightening a curtain there.

It is believed this is, in part, what the yearly Thanksgiving Ghost is seeking. That moment when the world has gone away and the dinner is over. Yet, this is only part of her purpose. She isn't on a quest to fulfill her own requirements but one she believes her daughter must still await.

The family lore believes this ghost is that of an ancestor who died the summer before her daughter first took over the preparation for her first thanksgiving dinner.

She had worked and trained her child to carry on all the traditions, knowing she herself would not live to a ripe old age. She knew her daughter was could go on without her. Her daughter was perfectly capable and poised to do and be all that her role had trained her to be.

Like any mother, however, she knew her daughter experience some insecurity, doubt, and even a sense of loss that she could no longer call upon her momma when something went wrong. Perhaps a fear she'd get it all wrong.

So the Southern Matriarch has remained behind. She is still seeking to provide that one last thing she believes she must give to a hard working, and uncomplaining daughter. A gift she is still waiting to give. It's the one thing every child's eyes turn to find when they embark into their own adulthood... an answering smile, warm and aglow, with their mother's smile of approval at a job well done.

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