Pollygeist

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

It is a strange story, but like many such stories, its effects changed lives. There are two essential characters in this story. I will call one of them Kevin, and one of them Polly. The third character in this story is 456 Masefield Road, one of those grand old homes in the small but once wealthy town of Hambleton, sadly well beyond an easy commute to the city.

Kevin was one of three children due to inherit something on the death of his uncle Michael, and he was the only one to elect to take the property at 456 Masefield Road. The reason was obvious and too obvious to his brother and sister. They both agreed – “This house is a nightmare. You couldn’t give it away in this condition, but if you want to take it on, you can have it, and everything in it, we’ll split the cash that is left from the estate.”

Which is how Kevin ended up being the owner of 456 Masefield Road and how he began his labor of love to make it a home once again, with limited resources.

456 Masefield Road had been a home when Kevin’s uncle Michael Mullin lived there with his beautiful wife, Patricia. But tragically, Patricia died. Uncle Michael continued to live in the house for years but never changed anything. Kevin was surprised to find Patricia’s clothes were still in the wardrobe and in surprisingly good order. In fact, that room (which he had not slept in since her death, preferring the small room downstairs) was in excellent condition compared to the rest of the house. Kevin would leave that until last.

Downstairs there were problems with the plumbing, and the wallpaper was literally falling off the walls. The small bedroom on the first level was the first room to be stripped and cleaned, so he could move in.

That very night he first heard the noises. First, there was a creaking noise coming from the walls. It sounded like the boards of a staircase, but the only staircase in the house was the main stair at the front of the house, and it was very solid. Then sometime later, he could hear the sounds of footsteps in the preserved bedroom upstairs – high-heeled shoes on hardwood floors. He sat up and listened.

He had only been in Hambleton for a short while, but it was long enough to hear the rumors about 456 Masefield Road being haunted. People had said that a female figure would appear in the window of the upstairs bedroom when Michael was the only occupant and could be seen downstairs. It was said to be the ghost of Patricia.

Kevin was not one to believe such things. Ghosts and goblins had gone the way of Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy as far as he was concerned. But the noise was real and had to be investigated. He put on one of Michael's old robes and his slippers and went upstairs to the room full of Patricia’s things. He could see under the door that there was a light on.

He opened the door, but It seemed to be jammed by something. He pushed harder, and the light went off, but he was able to look around the door and see a ghostly figure in white float across the wall on the other side of the room. It was a woman, tall, slim and blonde, and then she simply disappeared.

He found the light switch. It was a pull-down cord that had somehow been tripped by the door. He switched it on and surveyed the room. He walked in and looked behind the curtains and then into each of the wardrobes. There was nothing. The room was empty. The ghostly figure was gone.

Although he was a skeptic, Kevin noticed that the hairs on the back of his neck bristled involuntarily. This was very strange. How had this happened? But do ghosts need electric lighting? And why was there a doorstop? The doors all had locks, but these he had removed to replace them. The original locks had value, and selling them would help fund his work. Do ghosts place wedges to delay entry?

The event was so unsettling that he decided to wait for daylight to investigate further, simply on the basis that ghosts prefer the night. He went back to bed but slept fitfully.

The ghostly woman was young. It was true that all photos of Patricia that he had seen were of her young, so he assumed that she had died early in her life. Still, in the wedding photo and some others, she appeared older than the ghost but still pretty and very stylish. Clothes like hers do not go out of fashion. He might even be able to sell them to a retro shop.

But she had not been wearing any of those clothes. It was a nightie or some undergarment. It was white and silky and flowed behind her as she rushed to the back of the room. In his dreams, his unease was replaced with erotic thoughts – the ghost as a scantily dressed ingenue, perhaps before she had met Michael. He needed to take a shower in the morning to settle his excitement.

But after breakfast, he returned upstairs to trace her escape. On the assumption that this was no specter, then this vision was a trick, perhaps even a practical joke being played on him … by the neighbors? By his brother and sister? But where did she go?

The wardrobes took up most of the back wall and were in shadow at night. It seemed the best place to start. He pushed aside some clothes and took others out, and lay them on the bed. Many were in bags and in excellent condition, and there was no dust at all. He looked at the back walls of the wardrobes, and noticed that the middle one had no back – there was simply the wallpaper. It was by sheer chance that he happened upon the bump and that his hand depressed it, opening the panel.

He had been in this house before, but he never knew that it had a back stair. It was a maid’s stair – a spiral staircase with a small landing and three concealed doors – one to the hallway and one on either side to the two main bedrooms. The stair dropped down to the first floor, and a door hidden behind the bookcase next to the pantry. It was the kind of facility that would have been closed-up when the house ceased to have servants.

It was his house now, and he like the fact that it had secrets. There was a hidden stair and doors, and there was an intruder who knew the house better than he did. It struck him as very interesting – more exciting than threatening.

He wanted to meet this ghostly apparition. Would she return? Would she know that he had uncovered her secret accessway? He decided that the best approach was to open communications. He would then leave it to her, and he would get on with the work he had to do downstairs.

He left a note for her. He put it on the dressing table. It simply read:

*“Madam,*

*I am the new owner of 456 Masefield Road, but I am clearly sharing part of the property with you.*

*I would be grateful if you could join me for a nightcap tonight so we can discuss my plans and their effect on you.*

*Yours truly,*

*Kevin Mullin”*

There was no visit that night, but there was the night after. Kevin could imagine her reading the note. Would she scribble a reply, or should he go to the living room and wait beside Uncle Michael’s liquor cabinet? He decided to stay in bed. He could hear activity upstairs, but it did not worry him. He imagined her trying on clothes, and then standing naked in front of the full-length mirror, breasts exposed. It was a sensual thought.

There were moments when he thought about rushing upstairs. She was an intruder. He could deal with her as he liked. But he preferred to think of her as a lady, like the person he sent his note to – somebody refined, stylish, old-fashioned, feminine.

Instead, he slept, dreaming of her. When he woke, he went upstairs. There was his note back on the dressing table. Everything was in its place except that the room smelled of perfumes, and on the note, beside his name, was a lipstick kiss.

Kevin smiled. It was perfect. It was not a yes, and it was definitely not a no. He took the note and smelt it. It smelt of her. Ghosts don’t use perfume. She was real, and this was her kiss.

He decided to write her a new note:

*“Madam,*

*I received your message and I am encouraged.*

*I hope that we can meet soon – perhaps tonight.*

*I will be waiting downstairs at 10pm*

*Please wear something nice.*

*I am sure that I will not be disappointed.*

*Yours ardently,*

*Kevin Mullin”*

He went to work with a smile and achieved a good deal. He had decided that he would not sell Patricia’s clothes, not without her permission. But he needed money for the electrician he would need to take on.

He heard her that night, and in the morning, there was no kiss on his note, just a few words scrawled below his:

*“Kevin,*

*Sadly. I am sure to disappoint you.*

*I am only the spirit of a woman, not made real.*

*Polly”*

She had a name. She had a name and perhaps low self-esteem, although it baffled Kevin as to why. He had only the memory of the glimpse of her in the shadows the first night, but it was an image that refused to fade and seemed to just gather beauty every time it entered his mind.

*“Polly, if you will permit me to be familiar,*

*Please allow me to entertain the spirit and judge my own reality.*

*I do not believe that you could disappoint me – not ever.*

*Yours fervently,*

*Kevin Mullin”*

That night he wore a suit. He had one that he wore to weddings and funerals and some formal engagements. It seemed that if he could ask her to dress, then he should do the same. He bought a French Cremant to save money, but he put it on ice in one of Uncle Michael’s silver ice buckets, cleaned to a gleam for the occasion. He waited.

Could she see him, waiting for her? It seemed to Kevin that she could. He had to wait, but he could feel her presence in the bedroom where she was dressing.

He had planned to rise for her as she descended the stairs he could see through the open door, as a gentleman should, but the sight of her found him standing involuntary, brought to his feet by her loveliness. She wore a powder blue evening dress – something old fashion with bare arms, but cuffs connected to the bodice by tulle and with skirts of the same fabric. Her blond hair was brought up into a bun. Her makeup was just a little modern and showed off her bright blue eyes.

Kevin was speechless, but as she stopped and waited for him to say something, he had to.

“Good evening,” he said.

“Good evening,” the husky voice surprised him a little, but it seemed perfect.

“A glass of Champ’ … Cremant?” She had looked uncertain, even afraid, but now her smile was like a perfect rosebud opening to be a perfect bloom. She drew closer and took the offered glass. Her nails were not long and painted as he might have expected, but they were cared for.

“Thank you.” The words on her pretty lips were like sugar drops, even if only two. Her eyes sparkled. She was close enough to smell, and she smelt good.

“I am not disappointed,” he said.

Her shoulders seemed to drop with her smile. She looked at him dolefully.

“Well, you will be,” she said. “I might as well get this over and done with. I need to explain myself. I have been skulking around your house. It is just that I am driven by forces that are much stronger than me.”

“Are you going to really tell me that you are some poltergeist, bound to this house, bound to haunt the occupants?”

“Actually, I am a neighbor, from Number 458. I live with my parents. I just can’t be myself with them, so I come here. I have been coming here for a while … and being Polly.”

“So you came here when Michael was alive?”

“And Patricia,” she said.

‘That can’t be,” said Kevin. “My Aunt Patricia has been dead for years.”

“Oh no, she died only a few years before, Michael,” she said. “I think that he could not live without her. It was just that she became totally dependent on him. She could not stand getting old, you see. She just stayed here in the house. She got fat too. Too obese to go out. She told Michael to tell everyone that she was dead. She destroyed all the photos of herself above the age of 33. That all happened long ago. I only started coming here as a child – just by accident at first. She saw something in me … and let me say that I am glad she did.”

“So, what is it that you can’t do at home?” She was referring to something, but Kevin had no idea what it was.

“Dress like this. Dress like she once did. Dress like a woman,” she said, “I can’t do that at home because I am not a woman, you see. I am a man.”

Kevin spilled his wine and was close to dropping the crystal coupe with it. He stared at her in disbelief.

“I told you I would disappoint you,” she said.

He looked at her for signs that it was not so. It was her hair, soft and blond and long enough to be worn in a feminine style. Her skin was smooth and soft. Her nose was small, and her lips full. There was a square line to her jaw that seemed to make her even more beautiful, and then she had breasts – full and soft and trembling ever so slightly as her painted eyes started to fill with tears.

“You have just surprised me, that’s all,” said Kevin. “I am having trouble believing you.”

“If I have to raise my skirts to prove it, I can do that,” she said. “Please don’t ask me to. I hate what I am. I live to come here and be Polly. But now I suppose that is all over?”

She was holding back the tears, but in a way that made her seem all the more fragile and in need of protection, no matter who or what she was.

“Perhaps it doesn’t have to be,” said Kevin. “How old are you?”

“I am 18,” she said. “I have been coming here since I was 10. If you are wondering about these, I have been on hormones for two years. They will not accept what I am, but they don’t know how far I have gone already. I can’t afford to leave home. I am saving for … I am saving.”

“I think that it is a crime that you cannot be Polly every moment that you are alive,” said Kevin. “I can’t imagine you as a man. I never want to. I would love to see you in one of those outfits of Aunt Patricia’s, perhaps with your hair styled to match.”

“I would love that too,” said Polly. “Hers were times when a woman could live as a woman.”

“A woman like that just needs a wealthy or hardworking husband to keep her,” said Kevin. “I can’t offer you that.”

“But you’re wealthy,” said Polly. Just in this room, you have cabinets full of stuff worth a fortune. Patricia came from a wealthy family. They helped Michael buy this house, and when they died they gave her all this stuff, so I guess it is yours now.”

“All the contents – yeah, that’s the deal,” said Kevin. He looked at the cabinets. There were several. It all looked like junk to him.

“Just that stuff on the mantelpiece could be worth a million dollars,” said Patricia.

“Why don’t you move in,” said Kevin. “Move in and keep me company, and maybe give me a hand - it’s a big job. After all, you have a room upstairs which Polly has made her own.”

They were sharing that room and its bed within a week.

And so the third character in this story, 456 Masefield Road, became a home again, for Kevin and Polly.

The End

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Erin’s seed: “A guy inherits a house finds out his uncle gave it to him because no one else wants it, it needs repairs and is rumored to be haunted. He keeps seeing a mysterious female figure in dim light that disappears when he tries to investigate so he sets a trap and catches the "ghost" … he has built up a fantasy about catching the ghost and finding out it was a living person, a beautiful and sad woman, but it turns out to be a young man from the neighborhood who is a secret crossdresser using the old and supposedly abandoned house as a place to dress as he liked. Somehow their fantasies align ..”