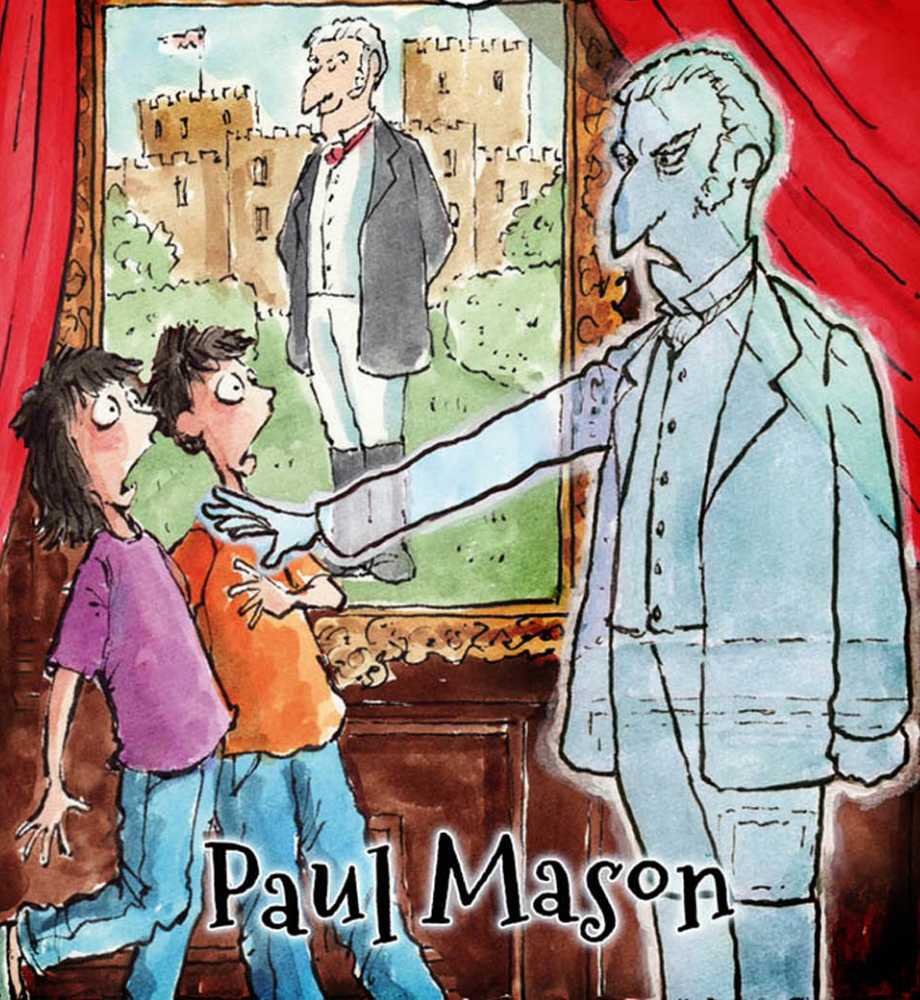


The ^{the} Twins, Ghost and the Castle



Paul Mason

The
Twins,
the
Ghost
and the
Castle

Paul Mason

Illustrated by Mike Phillips



A & C BLACK
AN IMPRINT OF BLOOMSBURY
LONDON NEW DELHI NEW YORK SYDNEY

For Joan and David

First published 2013 by A & C Black,
an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square
London WC1B 3DP

www.bloomsbury.com

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ISBN 978-1-4081-7626-9

UPDF ISBN 978-1-4081-8077-8

A CIP catalogue for this book is available from the British Library.

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Printed and Bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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CHAPTER ONE

The castle

On the outskirts of a seaside town, right next to the beach, there is a mighty castle facing the sea. On a clear day if you stand at the water's edge, you can see the shadow of the continent in the distance. It really is that close, which is probably why Henry the Eighth built the castle there in the first place – to keep out any nasty invaders. (If there was anyone being nasty in England, thought Henry, then it was going to be him alone.)

So, for nearly five hundred years the castle has been guarding the beach, and its grey stone ramparts are as strong and solid as the day it was first built. It has a deep moat lined with high, mossy walls, cannons bristling in all sorts of directions, and a tall white pole on which flutters a proud flag. Around the castle there are acres and acres of the

most wonderful gardens and woods. If you hover above the fortress in a helicopter (and you won't catch me in one of those things), it looks like a Tudor rose: made up of four half-circle towers around a circular keep in the middle. (A keep is the stronghold of the castle, right in the centre. And in the bottom of the keep is the castle well – which gives you some idea just how important it is to have water to drink.) To get in you have to clomp across a heavy, wooden drawbridge and pass through the gatehouse.

The heroes of this story, however, weren't anywhere near the drawbridge. They were hiding in the bushes by the gardens looking for a way to sneak in. To buy an entrance ticket costs money, and Stella and Tom didn't have any money. In fact the twins had nothing at all to their name except the clothes on their backs, and those were grey and scratchy and joyless.

Stella and Tom were totally alone in the world without anyone to look after them. We shan't discuss how they came to be so alone and without their parents, and why they were running away, as that would be completely grim, and this is meant to be a happy story.

Perhaps...

The castle towered above them, immense and cold, and, peeking through the bushes, they both felt very small and insignificant.

‘Do you really think we ought to?’ asked Stella. ‘I mean, sneak in round the back.’ She looked worried.

Tom gave his sister a hug. Stella was a bright and clever girl, who drew the most amazing pictures of imaginary underground kingdoms, and Tom loved her more than anything else in the world. It broke his heart to see her unhappy.

He smiled at her. ‘It is a bit naughty, but we shan’t cause any trouble, and perhaps we could help by picking up some litter or something. Besides we won’t be staying for long.’

‘I can’t wait to see what it looks like inside. Do you think there’s a dungeon?’

‘Probably loads,’ said Tom. ‘You know what kings are like, always clapping prisoners in irons and throwing them into jail.’

‘If we get found out, do you reckon we’d get thrown in the dungeon?’

‘Nah,’ Tom chuckled. ‘Anyway, they’ll have to catch us first.’

He lifted up a bit of the thin wire fence, making a gap. ‘Come on, in you go.’

The twins managed to get through the fence, and found themselves on the edge of the kitchen gardens, between the greenhouse and the cabbage patch. Not far away was a little cottage, probably the caretaker’s.

The twins hid inside the greenhouse amongst the palm trees and waited to see if anyone was coming. When they were sure they were alone, they crept out and headed down the path towards the castle.

‘We should walk slowly,’ said Stella with a smile, ‘that way we don’t look suspicious. And if anyone asks, we just tell them our parents are in the garden.’

Tom grinned at her. Was Stella getting her spark back?

They walked down the garden path and over the bridge that crossed the moat at the back of the castle. There was a courtyard in the middle of the fortress and they found some stairs leading up to the battlements.

‘Let’s go up there,’ said Stella. ‘I have to climb on one of those cannons! And from up high we can get a good look.’

