

## Smee

### 1

‘No,’ said Jackson with a shy little smile. ‘I’m sorry. I won’t play hide and seek.’

It was Christmas Eve, and there were fourteen of us in the house. We had had a good dinner, and we were all in the mood for fun and games – all, that is, except Jackson. When somebody suggested hide and seek, there were loud shouts of agreement. Jackson’s refusal was the only one.

It was not like Jackson to refuse to play a game. ‘Aren’t you feeling well?’ someone asked.

‘I’m perfectly all right, thank you,’ he said. ‘But,’ he added with a smile that softened his refusal but did not change it, ‘I’m still not playing hide and seek.’

‘Why not?’ someone asked. He hesitated for a moment before replying. ‘I sometimes go and stay at a house where a girl was killed. She was playing hide and seek in the dark. She didn’t know the house very well. There was a door that led to the servants’ staircase. When she was chased, she thought the door led to a bedroom. She opened the door and jumped – and landed at the bottom of the stairs. She broke her neck, of course.’

We all looked serious. Mrs Fernley said, ‘How terrible! And were you there when it happened?’

Jackson shook his head sadly. ‘No,’ he said, ‘but I was there when something else happened. Something worse.’

‘What could be worse than that?’

‘This was,’ said Jackson. He hesitated for a moment, then he said, ‘I wonder if any of you have ever played a game called “Smee”. It’s much better than hide and seek. The name comes from “It’s me”, of course. Perhaps you’d like to play it instead of hide and seek. Let me tell you the rules of the game.

‘Every player is given a sheet of paper. All the sheets except one are blank. On the last sheet of paper is written “Smee”. Nobody knows who “Smee” is except “Smee” himself – or herself. You turn out the lights, and “Smee” goes quietly out of the room and hides. After a time the others go off to search for “Smee” – but of course they don’t know who they are looking for. When one player meets another he challenges him by saying, “Smee”. The other player answers “Smee”, and they continue searching.

‘But the real “Smee” doesn’t answer when someone challenges. The second player stays quietly beside him. Presently they will be discovered by a third player. He will challenge and receive no answer, and he will join the first two. This goes on until all the players are in the same place. The last one to find “Smee” has to pay a forfeit. It’s a good, noisy, amusing game. In a big house it often takes a long time for everyone to find “Smee”. Perhaps you’d like to try. I’ll happily pay my forfeit and sit here by the fire while you play.’

‘It sounds a good game,’ I remarked. ‘Have you played it too, Jackson?’

‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘I played it in the house that I was telling you about.’

‘And *she* was there? The girl who broke —.’

## ACTIVITIES

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### *Before Reading*

- 1 How much do you know about ghost stories? Choose the best words to complete this passage.

You usually find ghosts in *old / new* buildings like *supermarkets / castles*, and they seem to prefer places that are *busy / deserted* and *brightly lit / rather dark*. They often appear *at night / during the day*, and they may arrive with a *cold / warm* wind. Ghosts are usually people who died *violently / peacefully*. They are mostly *cheerful / miserable*, they make people feel *uneasy / comfortable*, and they are often *dangerous / helpful* to the living. Meeting a ghost is, for most people, an *amusing / unpleasant* experience.

- 2 Here are the titles of the stories. Can you guess which of the ghosts below you will find in each story?

*Smee / The Judge's House / The Stranger in the Mist /  
The Confession of Charles Linkworth / The Ghost Coach /  
Fullcircle*

- 1 The ghost of a cruel person who takes pleasure in death
- 2 The ghost of someone who died in an accident during a game
- 3 The ghosts of people repeating the journey that took them to their deaths many years ago
- 4 A kind ghost who wants to help people, but instead puts them in danger
- 5 A ghost who wants to make people live calm, happy lives
- 6 The ghost of a murderer who wants to find peace