

"THERE IS A LAND---"

by
Ruth Lewis Holman

The writer of this true incident knew Ella personally and has a letter from her in which she wrote a full account of her marvelous experience and testimony of the land beyond. This letter has been preserved and its contents given to you in story form.

"Poor child! I fear she will grieve herself to death. Just what we can do to help her carry this burden or to fill the terrible void I do not know."

Mrs. Mary Hoffman brushed the tears from her eyes and laid down her sewing.

Her very dear friend, Mrs. Jennie Allen, had stopped in for a few minutes on her way home from market. These two women, born and reared in Boston, had been girlhood friends. Middle-aged women they were now, but this friendship had never been allowed to diminish. When Mrs. Hoffman's son, Johnny, had died a month previously, Jennie Allen had been a tower of strength, a real friend in the hour of need.

Just now they were discussing the condition of Ella, Johnny's sister, who had almost collapsed with grief over his going and seemed unable to recover strength or the desire to live. Ella was about eighteen, the brother a year and a half older.

"Do you really feel that Ella's grief is wearing her down, Mary?"
"Yes, I do, Jennie. She hasn't eaten a bite today. She says over and over: 'Mother, oh, mother, why did Johnny die? Surely if God is so wonderful, so kind, and good as our minister tells us, he would not have taken our Johnny away.' And while my own heart is sorely grieved, still I am trying to say, 'God's will be done.' But I cannot seem to convince Ella that she, too, must try to be reconciled." And tears again blinded the worried mother's eyes. "What more can I do, Jennie?"

Mrs. Allen was so overcome by her friend's distress that she could think of no comforting words to offer. A few moments passed while the two women wept together. Sorrow had bound them even closer.

"Ella was so attached to Johnny. I'm sure a brother and sister were never closer than they," Mrs. Hoffman said finally. "Johnny always took such good care of her, and was unusually thoughtful of her every need. He loved his youngest sister, Martha, dearly, but never seemed to be as concerned about her needs as he was over Ella's. He and Ella were always together when possible; she looked up to him as a real hero and a wonderful companion. The only time I can recall that she was really vexed with him was when he refused to join the Methodist Church with her. He told her he wasn't ready yet, but would join some day. And now she says that Johnny will be lost forever and ever, and she doesn't want to go on living without him."

"Have you ever talked to Reverend White about her?" Mrs. Allen inquired.

"Yes, I have, and he has tried to show her why we must be submissive to God's will; but it only seems to make her more bitter and resentful. He told me he would make her case a special subject of prayer. I am sure God has listened to this good man, for I have received comfort, and I know now that God does all things for the best."

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"Well, dear, I am glad that you are becoming reconciled anyway, and now I must be going on home. I'll come over tomorrow, and in the meantime let us pray that Ella's attitude will change and that she will improve physically. Bye. I'll see you tomorrow sure," and with a hasty kiss and a pat on Mary's cheek, Jennie Allen quietly slipped out of the door.

After her friend's departure, Mary Hoffman finished her hand sewing, then with bowed head she sat meditating for a little while, recalling many scenes in the lives of her children. Her mind went back to the time when Johnny was a little boy--even just a baby. Ella had arrived when he was eighteen months old, and Johnny had always loved the little sister so dearly, and Ella had reciprocated. The little boy and girl had been a source of great pleasure to their parents. Ella was especially religious, and while Johnny was a good boy, he had not been able to grasp the truth of the religion accepted by Ella. This fact worried the adoring sister.

Then, only a month ago when Johnny, after an illness, passed away, the girl's anguish was great, and no one was able to console her. And so while the mother herself was suffering from the great loss of a darling son, a still heavier burden was fastening itself upon her. She realized that if Ella did not try to become reconciled and take an interest in other things that she, too, would pass from this life. Horrified by this fearful thought, she cried aloud: "Oh, no, no! Please, Lord--not that!"

Getting up from her chair, Mrs. Hoffman went quietly into Ella's room and across to the bed where her daughter was sleeping. The last few days the girl had refused to leave her room, complaining that her head ached so dreadfully she did not want to be disturbed. The doctor had come to see her the afternoon before. He had talked with her and prescribed. Then going into the outer room he told Mrs. Hoffman there was very little he could do.

"Your daughter is suffering intensely," he said, "but there is not much any doctor can do. She is grieving for her brother, and only time will heal that wound. Try to get her to take an interest in others, and be patient with her."

Later in the afternoon the minister had called. He, too, talked with Ella and also prayed for her. Then he told Mrs. Hoffman, "I'm sure God will take a hand in this, and will not allow your burden to be heavier than you can bear. So cheer up, and all will soon be well."

The next day Ella seemed to be even more despondent than before. She made no effort to speak, and seldom answered her mother's questions. As the days passed, her condition grew worse, and she became weaker and weaker. They were trying days for the mother and the younger sister, Martha. To see their loved one lying there so frail and white and knowing they were unable to help her was almost more than they could endure.

Then, too, Martha and their friend, Mrs. Allen, became much concerned about Mrs. Hoffman, for they were now well aware that Ella was past human aid. This double blow, which was imminent, might prove too much for the mother's heart and cause her to collapse also. So Martha and Mrs. Allen very cautiously answered the interested inquiries of friends and neighbors and did all they could to comfort the distressed mother.

Then one evening, in spite of all the loving care that was given her, a kind and good doctor's interest and attention, and a devout minister's prayers, Ella seemingly passed away. But did she really?

At least she was permitted to have a strange and wonderful experience.

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"Ella, Ella, wake up! God has permitted me to come to show you where I am! You must not worry, for I am very happy."

Ella, rubbing her eyes, hurriedly arose from her bed, took the arm of this beloved brother, Johnny, and walked with him up a hill.

"Oh, what a wonderful thing has happened to me, Johnny!" she exclaimed joyfully. "I thought you were dead--and here you are walking up this hill with me! What a broad and beautiful street! The pavement is so white--and such wonderful lights!"

Johnny smiled as he always had done on earth when Ella was really pleased with something he had accomplished. "Yes, dear sister," he answered, "and now I want you to pay particular attention to all the things I am going to show you. See this very large house we are approaching? Notice the beautiful granite steps and very large door."

As he talked they walked briskly up the steps of the beautiful house, and entering through a wide doorway, the door closed behind them, and they stopped in the entrance of a very spacious hall.

Ella was so excited and thrilled to be with Johnny that he again reminded her to look at everything closely.

"See, Ella," he said, "see the raised platform at the far end of this large hall. Notice that on this platform is a stand with three large books."

"Oh, yes, dear Johnny. I do see everything. And I see some heavy, beautiful lace curtains behind that platform. And--yes--oh, there is a Personage back of those curtains! But why can't I see his face plainly? I can only see his hands at his right side. Why?" and Ella turned to her brother.

His face was beaming, but he only shook his head in reply.

"Ella," he said next, "notice carefully the six open doors on the left side of the hall. If you will look closely you will be able to see inside those open doors," and Johnny touched her arm ever so lightly, urging her on.

The door nearest to them was wide open, and the room was full of little children.

"Oh, how happy they are!" exclaimed the girl. "My, they are having such a good time! Some of them are only tiny babies, while others are--oh--all the way up to eight years of age. Oh, yes," she added, "there are a few grown people caring for them. Aren't the infants and children beautiful in their pure, white clothes? Oh, such wonderful, wonderful lights! Even the sunlight on earth cannot compare with this! I cannot describe it! They certainly are enjoying themselves."

Happy laughter echoed through the hallway as she and Johnny walked slowly along.

"I am so eager to see what is in the next room. Hurry, Johnny, I must see everything." It was she who urged Johnny forward now.

In the next room they saw young people, and they were happy, too.

"They are beautiful, really. Their dresses and suits are of silver gray!" Ella was so interested in watching them she almost forgot she could not linger long, but must go on to the next door.

"Oh, this room is filled with grown people! They, too, are enjoying themselves. The men are wearing purple neckties, but it's rather hard to describe their entire dress."

"No need to do that, Ella. It isn't important," was Johnny's response. "Now come quickly and I will show you where I stay," was his next surprising remark.

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As they walked on down the hall, Ella looked again toward the Personage back of the lace curtain. She noticed that also on the left of this Personage were six more doors but they were shut and apparently locked. She wondered why. Stopping for a moment so she could get a better view of the entire hall, she felt so very, very happy. Could this really be happening to her? Was she truly with Johnny? But before she had time to meditate further, Johnny said, "Come, dear, we must hasten."

As they walked on, a man came out of the second doorway where the young people were grouped.

"Oh, he's coming near us," was Ella's quick thought. "Oh, no; he's crossing the hall! He looks so neat in his black suit and carrying a black, soft hat in one hand. Wonder what book he's carrying under his arm?"

As she watched, he stopped in front of the second door on the opposite side of the hall. Taking a large key from his pocket, he unlocked the door and went in.

"Why has he gone in there, Johnny?"

Immediately came the reply: "He has gone to carry the gospel to those shut up in prison."

"What an amazing statement!" thought the girl.

The doors on that side of the hall took on a new significance.

"Notice again carefully, Ella."

As she looked she noticed that half of the doors were glass, various shades of red, the darkest one being the last in the row, and the lightest one was nearest this large Personage.

Immediately Ella asked: "Does that mean that the various shades of red represent different degrees of punishment?"

But to this she received no answer. Johnny surprised her by saying, "Ella, don't look on that side where all is dark and gloomy; but look on the bright side where all is happiness."

"How thoughtful you are, dear--just as you always were, and I'll try."

As she turned to look at the bright open doorways, she found herself standing near the fourth door on the right of the Personage. As she looked she saw another man come out, and he went directly across to the fourth door on the opposite side of the hall. He, too, was dressed in black similarly to the first man, with a book under his arm, and she remarked, "He must be going to preach to those in prison."

Standing there for a few seconds, or until her mind was satisfied--as she afterwards described it--Johnny said, "Now, Ella, this is where I stay."

"Why, Johnny dear, this is the fourth door. What a happy group of young people! What ages are they, Johnny?"

"From twelve to twenty. Yes, they are indeed happy! Notice they are all dressed in light colors."

As she looked, she saw that even Johnny was wearing a necktie of pale blue.

He was conscious of her very thought and smilingly hastened to explain: "You see we are happy here. I have all I am capable of enjoying at present. But as I progress, I go up higher," pointing to where the little children were.

As Ella thoughtfully watched, she noticed that the light in each of these rooms on the right was beautifully bright--but that it grew more beautiful and brilliant as they neared the room where the chil-

dren were grouped. She did not have time to see particularly the dress of all, but she did note the ties of the men. Those in the room next to the Personage wore green, next pink, next blue, then the fourth, purple, and the fifth gray and the sixth pure white. "Oh-o-o! Some of them are coming out into the hall! Wonder if they will see me? No, they do not appear to notice me at all. They seem to be permitted to associate with each other in the hall, but strangely enough, they do not go into each other's rooms. All are so very happy!"

Ella's quiet remarks, or what might be called audible musings, were seemingly heard by her brother, but he only nodded his head in reply.

By this time the girl was quite convinced of the happiness of her brother and all these friends of his, and scrutinizing his face more than she had done before, she saw that it was exceedingly bright and happy. "Johnny, IT IS ENOUGH," she said. "I will go back to earth and do the best I can to make ready to meet you."

"My, how happy you make me, sister, dear!" And with those words ringing in her ears, Ella found herself back in her own home and room! She was not lying on the bed where she had been, but seemed to be hovering over her body; in fact, she was just a few feet above in the air. She looked down and could see her form lying so still. Her mother and sister Martha were standing by the bed. A few dear neighbors and Mrs. Allen were in the room.

"Poor dear child! She has died from grief!" was Mrs. Allen's sorrowful statement as she leaned down to turn Ella's body over.

It was then that something happened which none of them could ever forget. A happening which we read about sometimes but which very few people have experienced.

Ella never knew just how she returned to her body, but as Mrs. Allen turned her over, she suddenly sat up and opening her eyes, reached out her hands to her mother and sister, and, smilingly although weakly, said: "Oh, Mother, dear, and Martha, I'm not dead! I have come back, and I have so much to tell you." And she immediately began to tell them of her marvelous experiences with Johnny.

More than human strength was given Ella. Her story of the trip into the Unknown and her meeting with Johnny was received by these loved ones and friends with tears of joy and thanksgiving coursing down their cheeks. As she calmly related her wonderful vision, all were given the assurance of its truthfulness. Ella's recovery from her long illness was rapid and complete.

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A few years after this remarkable event, Ella married. Fifteen years later she and her husband moved to a midwestern city in the state of Missouri. One day, while visiting in the home of friends whom they had met in their new surroundings, Ella saw a picture on the wall which interested her very much. It was a photograph of two men.

"Those men look strangely familiar to me," she remarked to Mrs. Lake, her hostess.

"Probably you have seen some who resemble them," Mrs. Lake answered.

"Oh, no, I'm sure I have seen them somewhere, sometime."

"You have only seen pictures of them, I'm sure," Mrs. Lake again replied, and still did not tell Ella who the men were.

But Ella insisted she had seen those two men. She became very, very serious as she puzzled her brain for some moments trying to re-

call. Memory finally came to her rescue, and before her mind's eye she saw a man neatly dressed in a black suit, a hat in one hand, a book under his arm. He had come out of one door, crossed a spacious hall, and taking a key out of his pocket opened the door on the opposite side. Then a second man followed from another room!

In only a few second's time Ella was reliving her wonderful vision while Mrs. Lake sat and stared at her, for her face was radiant.

"Oh, Mrs. Lake, I have seen those men, but not on this earth. I do know them, although I cannot tell you their names. They were going to preach to those in prison."

Mrs. Lake looked at Ella searchingly, then in almost a reverential manner said: "Suppose you tell me about the experience to which you refer."

In her calm and quiet way, Ella then related the remarkable circumstance. Mrs. Lake could not keep back the tears, and when Ella had finished she said: "What a wonderful testimony you have had! It confirms me in my belief. Those men you saw going to preach to the spirits in prison were Joseph and Hyrum Smith, the martyrs."

The names meant nothing to Ella, for she had never heard of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and she asked many questions. Mrs. Lake then explained the story of the great Restoration to her, and the very important part Joseph and Hyrum Smith had had in it.

"How wonderful!" was her comment when Mrs. Lake finished.

It was not very long after that before Ella and her husband were consistently working in this same wonderful "Restoration."

Ella often thought of her marvelous visit to the Other Side, and the one thing she referred to more than anything else was the fact that the glory of the little children was superior to all others, for as Christ said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Stepping Stone, February 23, 1947.