

HAUNTED CANADA 8

MORE CHILLING TRUE TALES

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SOMETHING IN THE WALLS OF VENGEANCE HOUSE

Yarmouth, Nova Scotia

Early morning sunlight filtered into the bedroom and gently woke teenagers Lydia and Maria. Maria had spent the night at Lydia's house — as she often did, since they were best friends and nearly inseparable. Lydia's father, Captain Richan, had served as midshipman on a battleship called *Vengeance*, and he'd named his home and inn after the ship. Vengeance House, later known as Richan's Tavern, was built in the late 1700s and was the first inn in Yarmouth. It also served as the original courthouse, jail and council chambers. The large wooden building was therefore always filled with interesting characters with news from afar, which made it an ideal location for Lydia and Maria to spend time together and try to overhear

anything exciting that was being discussed. And so it wasn't unusual that the girls' sleepovers were most often in Vengeance House, instead of Maria's nearby home.

As they slowly woke and sat up in bed, rubbing sleep out of their eyes and stretching with a yawn, the girls began discussing what they'd seen and heard in the inn the night before. But their conversation was soon interrupted by a *tap-tap-tap* on the wall above the headboard. A short period of silence followed as the girls stopped talking and listened, but soon it happened again. *Tap-tap-tap*. They assumed it was someone in the inn tapping on the opposite side of the wall, so they paid it little attention and continued talking about the previous night.

But the tapping followed them throughout Vengeance House. Oddly this only occurred when Maria was visiting; when she left, so too did the tapping. When she returned, the *tap-tap-tap* trailed the girls like a wolf tracking prey. While it began to concern and frighten the girls, others in the inn attributed the sound to rats in the walls.

Two weeks later, Captain Richan was in bed while his wife, children and Maria were moving about the house. Although Lydia knew her father was trying to rest, she and Maria were having a lot of fun and had trouble keeping their voices down, laughing and shouting happily. Mrs. Richan yelled at the girls to be quiet, so Lydia suggested to her friend that they go up to her room where they could listen for the tapping again. It sounded like a simple bit of harmless fun, so Maria eagerly agreed and the two of them went upstairs.

They took a candle to light their way and blew it out

once they had both slipped into bed. The tapping began immediately, but it was much faster and louder than ever before. It sounded angry and threatening. *Tap-tap-tap! Tap-tap-tap! Tap-tap-tap!* Not only that, but the sound came from the walls, floor and ceiling — it was all around them, surrounding them, closing in on them. *Tap-tap-tap! Tap-tap-tap! Tap-tap-tap!*

In a blind panic, the girls huddled together in the dark and shouted for Mrs. Richan to bring a light. Suspecting the girls were still horsing around, she shouted up from downstairs for them to stop it immediately or else suffer the consequences. But Lydia and Maria continued to scream for help, and Mrs. Richan realized they were serious — deadly serious. She ran to the room and found her daughter and her friend in hysterics, crying and screaming for their lives, so she called her husband. Captain Richan rushed down the hall, barged into the room and, after being brought up to speed on what had frightened the girls so much, listened intently.

After a moment, he and Mrs. Richan both heard the sinister sound too.

Tap-tap-tap.

It was rats in the walls. It must have been. Without pausing to think of a more sensible way to deal with the rodents he was certain were the cause of the sound, he tracked the tapping to the ceiling and tore a hole in it, exposing the space above. But there were no rats. Worse yet, the tapping continued.

Shortly after, word spread that Vengeance House was haunted by ghosts that went *tap-tap-tap* on the walls.

Curiosity seekers came to Yarmouth from far and wide to listen to the phantoms that lived between rooms in the inn. But a guest who was living in the inn at the time, Captain Neale from Salem, Massachusetts, believed Maria and Lydia had created some sort of elaborate hoax for some unknown reason, and he was determined to uncover what that reason was. Captain Neale was an elderly, religious, intelligent man and he wasn't willing to accept that the tapping was caused by rats or that the girls weren't somehow behind the disturbance. Captain Neale offered a \$500 reward — a small fortune in those days — to anyone who could prove how the trick was being done.

Eager to claim the money, many tried to find the cause of the tapping, which still continued whenever Maria visited Lydia. A crowd assembled and sought ways to prove that the girls were creating it. They were instructed to sit on a bench in the middle of the room so that neither their feet nor hands were touching the floor or the walls. After a moment, the tapping began, more loudly and fiercely than the day Captain Richan had torn a hole in the ceiling — it was so loud that everyone present was concerned the walls and ceiling might crack in half. Someone suggested the girls might be knocking on the bench somehow, so they were placed on a pile of feather beds. It had no effect on the tapping, which continued without pause.

Someone else suggested that they try to communicate with the ghosts, so the crowd devised a code that would allow the ghosts to answer some questions. Sensible questions were answered by the ghosts with more tapping, but foolish questions meant to trip up the ghosts were

answered with a new sound: ear-splitting scratching, like nails on a chalkboard, that forced everyone to cover their ears. Next, doctors, ministers and lawyers were brought to Vengeance House to ask the ghosts challenging questions that non-professionals would have no way of answering, but the ghosts responded to every single one without making a mistake. There was no explanation for the phenomenon.

A foreign captain was in town waiting for fair weather before setting sail.

“When can I leave?” he asked the ghosts.

No answer.

“Am I going to die?” the captain asked.

There was still no answer.

Growing agitated that the ghosts had hitherto answered — correctly, no less — every single sensible question that had been asked of them but were refusing to answer his, the captain desperately spurted out a series of requests. “How many years will I live? How many months? How many weeks?”

Silence.

With a tremble in his voice, the captain quietly asked, “How many days?”

Tap. Tap. Tap.

The captain chuckled nervously. Surely it was some sort of joke, he thought. But three days later, still waiting to sail, he died suddenly from unknown causes on a Yarmouth street.

The stress caused by the ghosts began to take a grave toll on Maria’s physical and mental health. She stopped

eating and lost weight rapidly, causing her to fall ill. Her family forbade her to visit Vengeance House again, fearful that spending any more time there would soon kill her. Maria stayed home, and the tapping was never heard again. With time, Maria's health rebounded and she was soon her old self again.

But six months later, Maria was at home talking with her family when she suddenly screamed in fright. Her family panicked and asked what was wrong. Maria jumped off her chair — a snake had twisted around her leg and was slithering along her skin. Maria fainted with terror and the snake uncoiled itself, then slithered to the floor. As it sped across the room, Maria's family heard it make a peculiar sound, a sound they'd never heard a snake make before.

Tap-tap-tap!

And then the tapping snake disappeared beneath an old desk. In an attempt to catch it, the family moved every piece of furniture in the room, but the snake was gone.

Maria eventually recovered, and from that day forward she never heard tapping — not from ghosts or snakes — again.