

*To the folks in the Virginia foothills Hank Garvey was a fun-figure, up there on Hornblower Mountain. They didn't quite realize what it meant to come of stock so stubborn that a man would rather go through a stone wall than over or around it.*

## GARVEY'S GHOST

by Robert Arthur

THE BOY WENT CAUTIOUSLY down the path that wound along the slope of the hill, and the moon was dead above him. It filled the night with light, liquid and unreal, and peopled it with curious shadows. The silence was broken only by the boy's breathing, and sudden small sounds as animals broke cover ahead of him and scurried away into the protecting darkness.

The boy gripped his stick tightly and pushed through a tangle of wild honeysuckle to come out at the head of an open slope down which the moon-cast shadows tumbled in dark, irregular array. At the bottom of the slope was a larger blotch of shadow discernible as a ramshackle cabin, walls leaning and roof sagging.

He gave a little sigh of relief. He hadn't been afraid, exactly, but still the night was queer and the path strange, and he'd come a mat-

ter of an hour through the dark just to find this place, and old Hank Garvey, to ask him a question. A question about a ghost.

It was a queerish question to come asking on a summer night, but it was a queerish ghost, what he'd heard of it, and he wanted to hear more. His Uncle Radex, big and square-boned, had told him some, and his Aunt Susan more, quivering and shaking with the giggles.

But neither of them had made it very clear to him, maybe because they had laughed so much, so he'd come to ask Hank Garvey about it directly. It was Hank Garvey's ghost—not the ghost of Hank Garvey, that was, but the ghost that haunted Hank Garvey—so if anybody ought to know, he ought.

To learn about a ghost was an uneasy sort of errand for the nighttime, but he had an inquir-

ing turn of mind. And though he was from the city, so that these Virginia foothills were new to him, he'd already become acquainted with the country and knew there was nothing to be fearful of, save getting lost, which he didn't intend to do. And besides, Uncle Radex' and Aunt Susan's mirth had been a challenge to prove he was man enough to do it.

So here he was, and at the bottom of the slope was Hank Garvey's tumbledown house, dark and silent. But faintly in the distance the boy thought he could catch the sound of a voice uplifted in cracked song. And straining his eyes, he made out two shadows far up the opposite slope—shadows that moved, a large one followed by a smaller one. The large one he decided was a horse, so the smaller must be Hank Garvey, plowing as Aunt Susan had predicted, and singing to himself as he turned the furrows by moonlight.

The boy hurried down the slope, passing the cabin, and clambered up the hill beyond, Hornblower's Hill. Near the top, in the middle of a level field, half turned, he found a plow. But Hank Garvey and his horse had vanished.

The boy paused for a moment, breathing hard. Then once more he heard Hank Garvey's voice, off to one side where the incline gentled to the top of the hill. And after a moment he caught sight of the

man himself silhouetted against the sky and the moonlight—him and his horse.

Hank Garvey was sitting his horse backward, riding the stolid animal bareback, and the beast was carrying him to the hilltop. The man's legs were drawn up under him on the horse's broad rump, and alternately he was singing a tuneless song and blowing tuneless notes upon a mouth organ.

For a moment the boy stared. Then he followed. When he got to the crest he saw them again close at hand. The heavy animal walked stolidly in a circle, loose harness straps flying, with Hank Harvey squatted like a Turk upon his back, rolling a little to the stride and drawing an ecstatic tune out of his unreliable instrument. After a moment the boy hailed him hesitantly, and instantly Hank Garvey leaped down, peering toward the boy as if poised for flight.

"Who is it?" he called, voice shrill, as the boy approached.

"I'm Johnny, Radex Anson's nephew from the city," the boy called back, his confidence returning as he came closer. Hank Garvey waited for him, head half cocked, harmonica upraised. He was a little man, and his face was round, unlined, and very merry. Eyes round as quarters in the childish face gave him an elfin quality, and all the boy's strangeness was gone when Hank Garvey chuckled and answered him back.

"Hello, Johnny, Radex Anson's nephew," he called. "I'm Hank Garvey. Did your Uncle Radex Anson send you, now, to buy a jug off me?"

The boy shook his head.

"I came for myself," he answered. "To ask about your ghost. If you don't mind, that is," he added quickly.

Hank Garvey chuckled. Behind him the old plough horse had stopped and was munching the long, lush grass.

"Well, Johnny Nephew from the city," the little man said, merriment in his voice, "it's a pert night and I'm feeling spry and I don't mind a little company. If you've come all this walk in the night to hear about my ghost I don't mind telling you. But ain't your Uncle Radex told you about it before this?"

"Some," the boy admitted. "But he always laughed when he told it. I never did get it straight because of the laughing, Mr. Garvey. And I sort of wanted to know, I guess."

Hank Garvey clapped his harmonica to his mouth and emitted a series of discordant notes, jumped in the air and clicked his heels twice, and did a grotesque pirouette as he came down.

"You sort of wanted to know about my ghost?" he asked, seeming vastly pleased. "Well, Johnny, it kind of seems to be dinner time and I've got a cold dinner hid under a rock here. Maybe you'll eat a

bite with me while the moon looks over our shoulders?"

"Why—why yes," the boy said. "I'd like to, Mr. Garvey."

"And I'll tell you about my ghost," the little man promised, turning over a flat rock and getting a tin box from beneath it. Then from the crevice of a split boulder he drew out a jug. He grabbed the cork in his teeth and twisted it free. Then he spat out the cork, caught it deftly, raised the jug, and drank long and deep. When he had finished he lowered the jug, slapped the cork back into place, and drew a ragged sleeve across his mouth.

"Aha," he said, smacking his lips with great satisfaction. "Hank Garvey's own corn whiskey. And it's why the path across the hill is so easy to follow—because of Hank Garvey's corn whiskey."

He chuckled and squatted beside the rock, opened the tin box and handed half a ragged sandwich to the boy, who sat down upon a stone close by feeling well at ease. The little man wolfed the other half of the sandwich, eating with loudness and gusto, finishing the last crumb before the boy had hardly begun.

"Now I'll tell you about my ghost," he said, leaning forward and peering at the boy. "But you tell me first, Johnny from the city, what your Uncle Radex has told you about me."

"He says that you've got a ghost

that haunts you, and that you sleep all day and only come out at night to do all the things other men do in the daytime."

"That's right," Hank Garvey chuckled. He was squatting on his heels and he teetered back and forth. "That's absolutely right. I've got a ghost that haunts me, and I sleep all day and work at night. Your Uncle Radex told the truth. I get up at six in the evening and I milk my cow and cook my breakfast and do the chores, and then I plow, if the season's right and there's moon enough—but only if there's moon enough.

"And I plow and I sow, and other times I make a little whiskey at a certain place down among the rocks, and sometimes somebody comes at night to buy and so I have some money in my pockets. And when that happens I don't plow and I don't sow, but instead I climb the hill to look at the moon, and maybe I dance and sing in the moonlight. And then maybe I go swimming in the duck-pond, or just run—run up and down hills singing to myself because I like to. And then along about daybreak I go back home and milk my cow and cook my supper and I go to bed and I stay there snug and sound till it's six o'clock again. And everybody says I'm crazy. Did you ever hear the like of anybody living such a way, Johnny Nephew?"

"I never did," the boy told him,

interested. "Is that why you're crazy, Mr. Garvey?"

"Of course not!" the little man protested indignantly, and looked at the boy with solemn injury in his eyes—or perhaps the moonlight only made it seem so. "Of course not. I do all that because I've got a ghost. Nobody could call me crazy for doing that because I've got a ghost. It's only because I've got a ghost that I'm crazy. You see, Johnny from the city?"

"Well, I don't know if I do or not," the boy answered, his high, pale brow wrinkling. "You mean it's because of your ghost that you sleep all day and work all night, when other men are sleeping?"

"That's right, Johnny, absolutely right," Hank Garvey said, bobbing his head. "It's the ghost of my granddaddy who came over from Ireland and was killed by his neighbors one day—but killed all by accident. Oh, yes indeed, by accident, for they never set out to do it."

As he talked he had finished off another pair of thick sandwiches, and now he munched a great, raw turnip.

"You see, Johnny Nephew," he said as he ate, "my granddaddy was a contrary man—a *very* contrary man. He didn't get along with anybody, and he didn't care to do what anybody else did. When other men chewed he smoked, and when they smoked he chewed. When they went to church

he went fishing, and when they went fishing he went to church. Naturally he got talked about.

"But he was a very contrary man, was my granddaddy, and he paid no attention to what the neighbors whispered about him. He went his own way and enjoyed himself his own way and those who didn't like it didn't say so out loud—not to him they didn't.

"But then it happened my pa was kicked by a mule and died of it, and my mother died presently too, and it was along about that time my granddaddy decided that he'd rather work at night and sleep in the day, and he did.

"Now naturally that made him more talked about than ever, him already having the reputation for being a contrary man, and folks began to whisper he was more than that—they said he was crazy. He wasn't, of course—he just didn't care to do like other men did—but that's what they said. And of course he took no notice of it, but went right ahead plowing and milking and hoeing and fishing by moonlight and making me do the same.

"So pretty soon the talk became louder that I was a very little boy and shouldn't be allowed in the hands of a crazy granddaddy, but ought to be taken away because he might do me a damage. So one day the men got together and came over while he was asleep in order to take me away and get me brought

up by somebody who wasn't crazy. And that was when they killed him. They didn't go for to do it, but he sort of forced it on them by waking up while they were taking me. So they killed him, before he'd done more than break the jaws of two of them, and the ribs of a third, and kick the eye out of another who fell down and got under his feet. Then they took me away and I was brought up by people who weren't crazy. And that was the last I ever heard of my granddaddy until ten years ago when he came back from wherever he'd been and began to haunt me. Have you followed all that, Radex Anson's nephew?"

"I guess I have," the boy told him, never taking his eyes off the round, merry face over which the little man's hair tumbled from time to time like a shock of ancient straw. "And then what happened, Mr. Garvey?"

"Well, Johnny, I had worked here and around as a farmer for maybe fifteen years, or maybe more, or maybe less, and never cared much for it. But I did it, and did everything everybody else did, though I could never figure much reason for it except that I remembered granddaddy and how the neighbors killed him all by accident. So I worked all day and slept all night and went to church Sundays and I voted Democratic too. And then, just when I was getting most awful tired of doing

everything like everybody else did, my granddaddy's ghost came back and began haunting me. And then I didn't have any choice."

"You mean your granddaddy's ghost *made* you work nights and sleep daytimes, Mr. Garvey?" the boy asked, trying to be sure he understood.

"Bless me, yes," Hank Garvey said, and chuckled cheerfully. "I had to do it. It was forced on me. Everybody understood that when I told them about it."

"That's what I wanted to know," the boy confessed. "Just how it was your granddaddy's ghost made you give up working in the day and take to working in the night."

Hank Garvey stared at him, round eyes wide.

"Why, by haunting me, of course," he said. "I thought I told you that. The only way I can get away from his haunting is by working nights and sleeping days. I thought I told you that."

"Yes," the boy persisted, "but I mean, how did he haunt you? Did he come to you at night, all pale and misty, and keep you awake and talk to you, or did he walk across your room while you were sleeping and moan until you guessed what he wanted you to do, or what?"

Hank Garvey teetered back and forth on his heels several times and then fell over on his back in the grass, where he lay laughing softly for the better part of a minute.

Then he sat up again and every trace of laughter was gone from his face.

"Bless me, no, Johnny Nephew," he said. "I told you my granddaddy was a very contrary man. Do you suppose he would have an ordinary ghost? Not my granddaddy! His ghost is just as contrary as he ever was. Do you know what he does, that ghost?"

Hank Garvey leaned forward, close to the boy, and dropped his tone to a confidential whisper.

"That ghost haunts me *daytimes!*"

"Daytimes!" the boy cried in astonishment.

Solemnly the little man nodded.

"Instead of being pale and misty white, like an ordinary ghost," he whispered, "this ghost of mine that used to be my granddaddy is black, like an inky shadow. And he haunts me by daylight. He used to dog my footsteps all day long, a hideous black shadow, lurking in corners, creeping along beside me, sitting across from me at the table, gliding along beside the plow, crouching beside me when I ate lunch. It made me feel pretty bad. How would *you* feel if you had a black ghost haunting you daytimes?" he cried at the boy suddenly.

"I don't know," the boy answered, eyes wide.

Hank Garvey leaped straight up in the air, clicked his heels, and came down on the balls of his feet.

Nimble he darted over to the split rock, drew forth the jug, twisted out the cork, spat it into his hand, raised the jug, and drank. Then he slapped the cork back into place, hid the jug, and raced over to vault to the back of the plow horse, startling the creature from its browsing.

"Well, it isn't a nice feeling," Hank Garvey said then, warmly, peering down into the boy's face as the boy got to his feet and stood close beside the horse, looking up. "An ordinary white ghost at night is bad enough, but a black ghost haunting you all day long is altogether different, and worse—much worse. That's how I knew it was my granddaddy—by its contrariness. And that's why I have to sleep all day and work all night.

Because when I sleep daytimes he can't haunt me—and at night I can't see him!"

He gathered his heels up under him and beamed down at the boy.

"Now you understand about my ghost," he said. "So come again some night when the moon's up and we'll talk more. But don't come daytimes. Daytimes I'm snug in bed, sleeping sound."

He laughed and kicked his heels. The horse broke into a trot. Hank Garvey snatched out his harmonica and began to play, then they were gone over the crest of the hill, leaving the boy alone knee-deep in fresh smelling grass, with the moonlight pouring over everything and only the sound of the little man's music drifting back to him.

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### **Vintage Wine**

My vampire thirst,  
 learning more subtle tastes  
 than tang of blood,  
 sucks up fear's chilly pulsing.  
 My lips have reddened  
 with distillate of love  
 from a more secret source  
 than any in the breast.  
 I can forego  
 the currents of your body,  
 being more choicely tabled  
 at your soul.

DORIS PITKIN BUCK