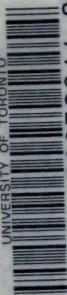
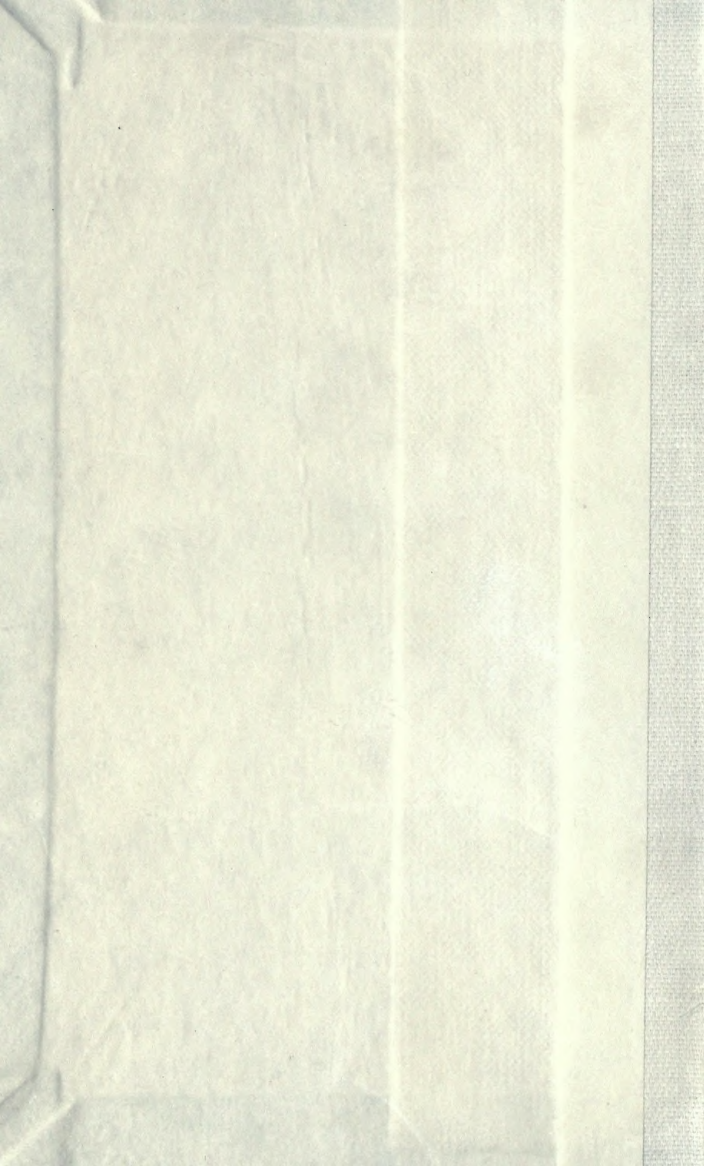
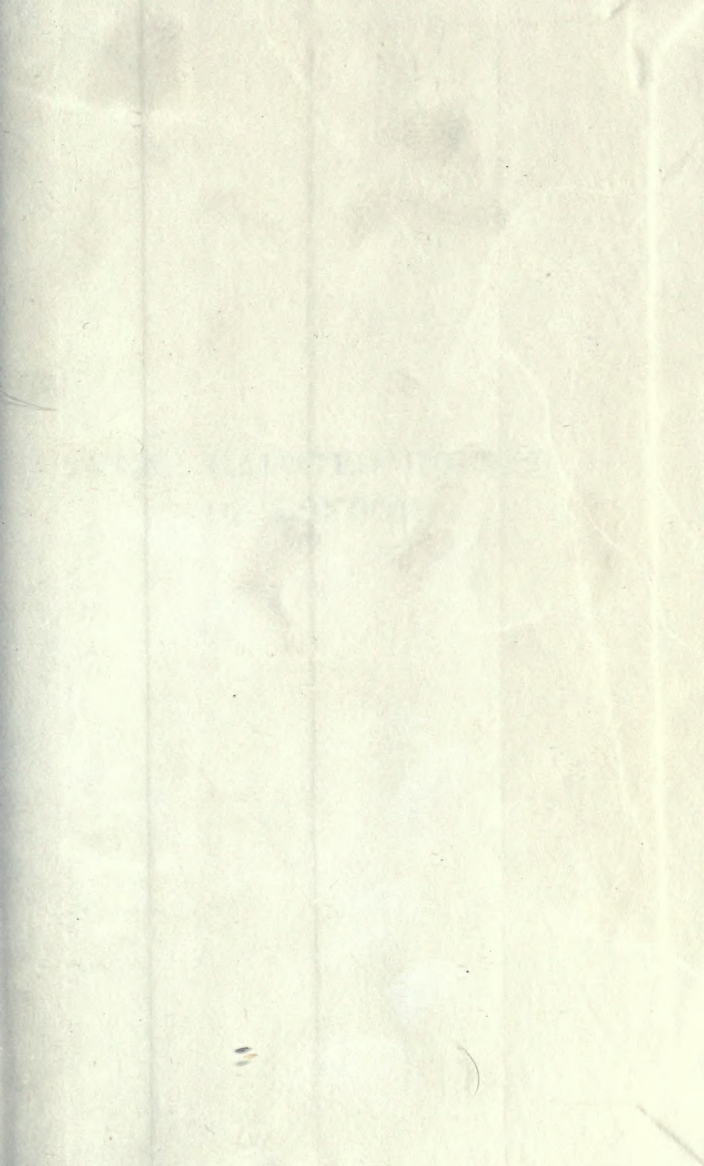


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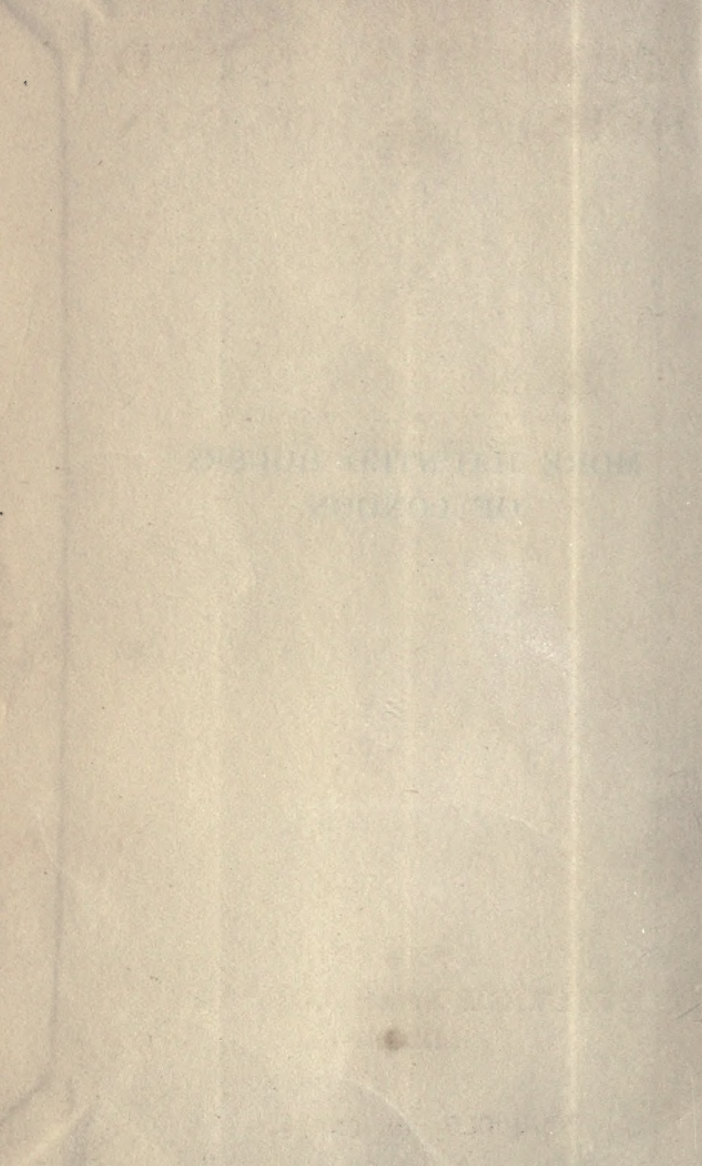




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**MORE HAUNTED HOUSES  
OF LONDON**



# MORE HAUNTED HOUSES OF LONDON

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BY  
ELLIOT O'DONNELL

AUTHOR OF "HAUNTED HOUSES OF LONDON,"  
"HAUNTED PLACES IN ENGLAND," ETC., ETC.

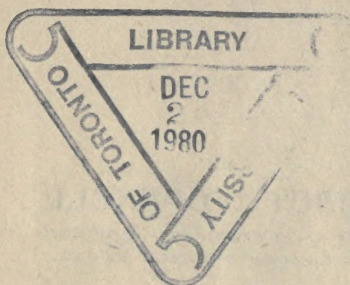


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# More Haunted Houses of London

## I

### THE DOOR THAT WOULD NEVER KEEP SHUT

*Being a Case of a Haunting near Whiteheads Grove, S.W.*

IN a narrow, squalid street, not far from Whiteheads Grove, stands a little house with a room, the door of which, once upon a time, would never keep shut. You might lock it, and put what you liked against it, but after a while you would find it open. Carpenters were called in and all sorts of expert opinion given, but the door still kept up its antics, and, in the end, it was generally recognised that the reason of its strange behaviour must be sought for in something outside the physical and quite apart from the natural.

I believe many versions of the cause are in circulation, but the following is, I think, the most authentic.

One wet August afternoon, a good many years ago, there arrived at this little house, near Whiteheads Grove, a poor, deformed, dwarfish creature named Anna Mikovitch. Whether a Pole, Russian, Bulgarian or Serbian, no one knew, and no one cared. She was

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foreign, that sufficed; and the fact that she was alone, and very poor and ugly, at once made her an object of derision and scorn. She occupied a room in the semi-basement, for which, it was said, she only paid three shillings and sixpence a week, but as it was notoriously damp, and had no blind to the window, whilst its furniture consisted of a broken-down bed, a three-legged chair, and a Tate's sugar cube box (in lieu of a table), it was, probably, extremely dear at the price. Mikovitch took it, of course, for the simple reason that she could not afford anything better, and an army of grubby faced children, climbing on and peeping over the area railings, watched her settling in. Not being used to such publicity, however, for the discomfort of having no blind was a new experience, she asked the landlady if she would kindly give her a curtain or something that she might use to shield her from the gaze of passers by; but her request only elicited a volume of abuse, and, being told that people who could only afford to pay three and sixpence a week for their lodging should be more modest in their demands, she did not dare to expostulate. Besides, she could not give notice to leave, because she had nowhere else to go, so, meekly swallowing the insult, she retired to her room, and, after no little difficulty, succeeded in fastening a piece of brown paper across the window.

The children in the street seeing her do this, and angry at being balked of the amusement they derived from spying on her movements and tormenting her



with their rude remarks, now began to boo and hiss; and the landlady, in a fit of fury at having her house made the object of so much attention, then burst into Anna's room, and, tearing down the piece of paper, told her at the same time that if she put any more such rubbish up, making the room look like a dust bin, she would turn her out.

Anna, too terrified to utter any remonstrance, sank on to the bed crying, and the landlady stamped out of the room amid the loud cheering and clapping of the army of guttersnipes.

The only peace Anna now had was when the children were at school. She could then walk about her miserable dungeon without being incessantly watched and having her every movement commented upon and imitated. Poor Anna, her life was a hell, but her case was only one out of many; there are hundreds of others like her—elderly and infirm people, men and women of decent upbringing and education, who are compelled, through poverty, to live among the lower stratum of the working classes, whose hopelessly spoilt and ill-disciplined children are the most shocking disgrace to any so-called civilized country.

The sights I have myself witnessed in such localities as Red Lion Street, Gipsy Hill, West Norwood, South Lambeth, and elsewhere in and around London, would be surely hard to beat in any part of the world; and, to those who doubt, I have only to say: "Go and see for yourself. Go and dwell among the very poor, and, if you have any eyes in your head, you will find

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enough verification of what I say." The children of this class in London to-day—particularly the boys—for cruelty to the old of their own species, and to animals, for savageness, utter lack of manners and lack of general all-round morality, are unequalled, and this, despite the much-vaunted County Council School education, and the night classes, which, if they have any effect at all upon these young devils' characters, can only tend to make them worse.

The whole system of education in England is rotten to the core. In training the young the brain only is taken into consideration, the character is left to take care of itself. So long as the boy is clever, so long as he succeeds at his lessons, passes a high standard, and takes scholarships and degrees, and is, in a word, in a position to make money, that is all that those responsible for his education require of him. No one teaches him kindness, or gentleness, or humanity, because these are qualities that, under our present system, do not encourage money-making, but tend rather to retard it. Besides, how can we possibly impart to others what we do not possess ourselves. If character—that is to say, really good character—character that is thoroughly humane and charitable—were suddenly made the basis upon which our Cabinet Ministers, our pedagogues, and preachers should hold office, how many of those holding such offices to-day could be re-elected? Very few, if any.

It is small wonder, therefore, the State itself being corrupt, that nothing whatever is done in our Schools

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to urge on moral reform, by which alone it is possible to make a people happy and content, and it is, perhaps, small blame to the children—the children, more sinned against than sinning—of the most vicious and abandoned classes, that they are still—in these days of so-called civilisation—past masters in the art of cruelty and every kind of devilry. My own unfortunate country, Ireland, although she may well blush for shame at some of the outrages perpetrated by certain of her misguided patriots, has reason to congratulate herself that the offspring of her working classes cannot be accused of anything like the same degree of cruelty as that known to be practised by the children of this great metropolis of London, and the children of the great cities and villages throughout the English provinces.

And now to revert to Anna Mikovitch. For her the days passed wearily enough. Imagine her, you who live in the lap of luxury, or, if in somewhat less than that, still have plenty of friends all around you and plenty to amuse yourself with; you who, when you feel tired, can retire to the privacy of your bedroom and there enjoy a nice, undisturbed nap. You, I say, who enjoy all this, just switch on your imagination for a moment and depict Anna. Anna, the poor, forlorn little foreigner, spending all her days and nights in that bare, comfortless room, reeking with damp and swarming with black beetles; with no one to talk to, and nothing to look out upon, saving that dank and foul area, reeking with the stink of the dust bin and

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all the foul refuse thrown into it by passers by. Get this picture—which is no romance but an actual happening—well into your mind, and then you will realise, perhaps, for the first time in your life, what may be the lot of those who are just as sensitive as yourself and less, far less fortunately, placed.

But to return again to Anna. How she dreaded the hour when School came out! The very moment the clock of a neighbouring church struck twelve, out rushed the children into the street, screaming, shouting, and fighting, and getting in the way of everyone and everything. Barging into pedestrians, and making horses pull up so suddenly that the wretched animals often sat on their haunches, away scrambled this mob of grimy-faced young hooligans, some making for home, whilst others aimed for the area railings where Anna lived, to see what the “hump-backed furriner,” as they called her, was doing. Then her martyrdom began. In her old shabby and faded black cotton dress, there she sat crouching on the floor of her room, vainly trying to escape observation; and there they all stood, pressed against the railings—those dirty, cruel-eyed tatterdemalions, mostly boys—jeering and leering at her; now throwing missiles at the window, now making cat calls and shrill whistles, just to see her jump, whereupon they would rock their sides with laughter. Can you wonder then that she counted every second to their meal time and to the hour for school to re-commence; can you wonder that, when they had gone tearing off



with, perhaps, a final shot at her window, or a chorus of yells, she fell on her knees and uttered a prayer of the most heartfelt gratitude for even the most temporary of respites.

Now it so happened that one evening, after Anna Mikovitch had been having a particularly bad time of it with the children and her head ached so much that she hardly knew how to bear the pain, she stole out into the area to try the effects of what she was pleased to term a little fresh air.

As she was standing gazing up into the sky, still faintly aglow with the dying efforts of a more than usually gorgeous summer sunset, and wondering how much longer it would be before she would be free to leave her wretched little earthly body and wander whithersoever she pleased, she was suddenly reminded of her material surroundings by the sound of a faint mew, and, glancing in the direction whence the noise came, she perceived a small and very unlovely tabby cat peering down at her from the pavement. She called to it softly, and down the steps very slowly it came. She then perceived that it was dragging its limbs wearily, as if it had come a long distance, and, as she bent down, it looked up into her face, and she seemed to catch in its big green eyes a reflection of her own misery. Like herself, this strange, unkempt and travel-stained pussy was ugly, and forlorn, and homeless. There was, indeed, much in common between them. Anna thought for a moment, what should she do? Supposing she gave

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this wanderer a home, what would her landlady say? And how could she feed it, when it was just as much as she could do to feed herself.

The cat mewed again, and this time so piteously that Anna, throwing discretion to the winds, picked it up and carried it into her room. That night she went supperless to bed, and Marie Elizabeth, as she named the tabby, enjoyed the first good meal she had had for probably weeks.

The next day all the street knew the little hunchback had a companion, and in the play hours hordes of children clambered on to the area railings to criticise the new arrival.

"I hope you don't mind," Anna said humbly to the landlady. "It seems a very clean animal and I'll see that it keeps quiet and does not in any way annoy you."

"Humph," the landlady snapped, "I don't like cats, and that's the honest truth, but, if you promise to look after it, I won't object, just for this once. But mind you, if she be after having any kittens, you'll have to get rid of 'em, for I won't have the house swarming with cats—that's strite."

"I don't think she will," Anna said, trembling, "at least I will keep her to herself as much as possible."

"You had better," the landlady retorted. "If you don't, and I find hosts of other cats round the house at night, making a pestering noise so that no one can sleep, you'll find someone has put your cat in the cistern."

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Again Anna promised; and, for the time being, the matter was allowed to rest. In the meanwhile the friendship between Anna Mikovitch and Marie Elizabeth steadily increased. Both were of the same sex and both, very obviously, had had more than their share of trouble. Anna, whose tongue had not had such opportunities for many a long day, found much to say to Marie Elizabeth, and, if one may so conclude from continual purrings and mewings, Marie Elizabeth was hardly less talkative than her companion. Side by side they sat together on the bed, and side by side in the cool of the evening, when their mutual enemies the children had at last gone indoors, they took their walk up and down the street. No two comrades could have been more suited to each other; it was as if Nature had specially ordained that this old maid should be the friend—the bosom friend—of her female tabby.

For some days nothing occurred to disturb their newly found happiness, and they pursued the even tenour of their way in blissful ignorance of what was to follow. However, such an unusual state of affairs could not continue for long; it was bound to come to an end sooner, or later; and soon—very soon the blow fell.

Amongst Anna's most bitter persecutors was a boy of about twelve called Pete Phillips. There was not much in his appearance to distinguish him from the other boys in the street, saving that he was, perhaps, a little more ruffianly, a little more savage, and, if

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possible, a little dirtier; but, unfortunately for Anna, he had taken a special dislike to her from the very first, and as he lived in the house immediately opposite, and his mother was particularly friendly with Anna's landlady, he seems to have been in a peculiarly advantageous position for carrying on his persecutions.

The moment he was up in the morning he rushed into the street and threw things at her window, and he hung around the area in the evening, long after the other children had left, in order to prevent her retiring to rest.

Over and over again he declared that he would, one day, kill Marie Elizabeth, and it was the greatest terror of Anna's life that, despite the almost superhuman vigilance which she exercised over her beloved one, he would eventually succeed in fulfilling his threat.

When the weather became excessively hot Anna, obsessed with the idea that Marie Elizabeth needed all the fresh air she could get, used to take her out for a brief walk during school hours in the morning, in addition to the customary constitutional late at night.

Now Pete Phillips got to know of this, and, instead of going to school one morning, he secreted himself in a doorway and waited there till Anna and Marie Elizabeth came out into the street, and then, when the unsuspecting Anna, who, as usual, was walking a few feet in advance of her companion, had passed, he sprang out and, pouncing on the cat, triumphantly carried it off.



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Hearing her pet scream, Anna, of course, turned round and fled to the rescue. For once in her life her temper was thoroughly roused; she hit out with all the strength she could muster, and one of her blows, happening to land full on Pete's face, caused him to howl so loudly—though more, perhaps, with surprise (for, like most of the modern slum children, he was never chastised at home) than actual pain—that his mother, with all the other mothers in the street, at once appeared upon the scene, and seeing Anna half frightened out of her wits, but with Marie Elizabeth held safely in her arms, pursued her right up to the area steps, shouting and gesticulating wildly.

Hearing the uproar, Anna's landlady soon joined the throng now congregated in front of her house. Hot and flurried, and enraged at being disturbed, for she had been busily engaged at the wash tub, she stood on the front doorstep with bare arms and wet apron, and in heated tones asked what was the matter and why they were all making such a d——d row.

"Why, it's like this, Mrs Parkin," a white-faced, shrewish-looking woman with a dirty grey shawl wrapped round her head, shouted, "that furriner hunchback of yours has been knocking Pete Phillips about something shameful. Struck 'im in the face and made 'is nose bleed, and all because he was playing with that ugly cat of hers. It ought to be drowned."

"And her, too," someone else cried out. "It's come

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to something when one's children can't play in the street without some beastly furriner flies into a passion and assaults them."

Mrs Phillips, who up to the present had been so engrossed in lavishing comfort and endearments upon Pete (Pete, by the way, was at least three inches taller than Anna Mikovitch and probably six or seven times as strong) that she hadn't found time to air her opinion, now began to make herself heard. With one arm round her precious offspring, hugging and fondling him, she pushed her way to the front, and, in a voice trembling with passion, cried out:

"You 'ear what they say, Mrs Parkin. That little rat of a furriner of yours has been 'alf killing my boy, and as sure as I stand 'ere I'll summons 'er for assault."

"I never did 'ear anything to equal it," Mrs Parkin replied at last, her eyes almost bulging out of her head with surprise and excitement. "And to think of all the kindness I have shown her. But there, you never can expect gratitude from them there furriners. It only serves me right for taking 'er in and letting her keep that 'ideous old tabby. But who would 'ave thought it!"

Mrs Phillips exclaimed: "Don't think as 'ow any of us are blaming you. You can't be 'eld responsible for all that your lodgers does, but if ever I get 'old of that 'unchback or 'er cat I learn 'em a lesson, the two on 'em."

"Just you wait a moment," Mrs Parkin said, "and

## The Door that would never keep Shut 19

"I'll go and 'ave it out with 'er now. I'll frighten 'er, see if I don't."

This resolve was greeted with loud applause and an excited rush was made to the railings to see what would happen.

Like a dozen tornadoes rolled into one, Mrs Parkin burst in upon poor terrified Anna Mikovitch, who was half sitting, half lying upon the bed with both arms convulsively wound round Marie Elizabeth.

"You little devil," Mrs Parkin shouted, pointing with a huge red fist, to which the soap suds were still clinging, at the window, "do you see that you've done. Brought all them people here and made this 'ouse, which 'as always been respectable, the most talked of one in the whole street. What do you mean by assaulting Mrs Phillips' boy and nearly blinding 'im. 'Is mother talks of 'aving you up and making you appear at the next Assizes. A nice thing—that—for me and the other lodgers; and all because of that dratted cat. 'Ere, give it to me."

"No! No!" Anna shrieked, "leave it alone! Don't touch it."

"'And it over at once," Mrs Parkin said fiercely. "If you don't I'll call in the Police. I'll not have such an animal in my 'ouse a minute longer. Now, come along, don't keep me standing 'ere all day."

"No! No!" Anna pleaded. "It's my cat. You've no right to take it from me."

"No right," Mrs Parkin thundered, her brows darkening, "no right. 'Ow dare you say such a

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thing, after nearly killing poor little Pete Phillips. No right! I'll learn you to say I've no right"; and, bending down, she seized hold of the cat, with her giant hands, and, amidst the tumultuous applause of the spectators at the area railings, tore it out of Anna's arms, and giving the latter a savage push that sent her in a heap on the floor, she rushed triumphantly from the room.

The moment she was gone, Anna staggered up and, racing madly to the door, she turned the handle. It was locked.

"Let me out! Let me out!" she screamed, pounding frantically on the panels. But there was no response, only loud shouts of laughter, which turned into wild huzzas, as Mrs Parkin, holding Marie Elizabeth by the scruff of its neck, suddenly made her appearance in the area.

"'Ere," she shouted, "'ere's the little beast. You may take it and drown it, any one of you, for I'll not 'ave it another day in my 'ouse."

"Give it to Pete," someone cried, "and let him serve it as the furriner served 'im."

"Yes, let Pete 'ave it," came a chorus of voices. "Come along, Pete," Mrs Parkin cried, holding up Marie Elizabeth, and giving it a few playful thumps with her big fist by way of a preliminary, "'ere, take it and do what you like with it. It's yours. Where are you?"

But Pete was not forthcoming. In his excitement to get at the cat he had swallowed a lozenge whole,



## The Door that would never keep Shut 21

and, in his anxiety to dispose of it successfully, beads of perspiration, as well as tears, were streaming from his face.

"'E's crying, the tender 'earted little chicken," Mrs Phillips explained, patting him on the head and all but smothering him against her exceedingly capacious bosom. "Why don't *you* drown the cat, Mrs Parkin. Get a pail of water and a sack. It's easy done, and a thing like that running loose, with a savage fur-riner always ready to 'alf kill you, if you merely looks at it, is a public danger."

"That's right," several other women echoed. "Kill it, Mrs Parkin."

More frenzied screams now issued from the room in which Anna was confined, and more frantic pummelling on the panels of the door, at which everyone was immensely tickled and laughed accordingly. It was so very droll to see that little white-faced hunch-back creature, whom they all despised and hated, dancing about on the floor and behaving as if the house was on fire or somebody was after her with a red-hot poker. "More like a monkey than a human being," as someone facetiously remarked.

What Mrs Parkin might have done, had not the unexpected happened, is difficult to say. She was in fact deliberating, when Marie Elizabeth, who had grown tired of being held up to the public view by her neck and half throttled, made a supreme effort and succeeded in reaching Mrs Parkin's arm with her claws. This was the deciding factor. With a wild

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shriek of "the little devil has scratched me," Mrs Parkin, seizing poor Marie Elizabeth by the tail, whirled her round in the air, and with all the force she could command finally dashed her head-first upon a sharp edge of the stone steps. That done, she quietly wiped her hands, picked up the body, and dropped it in the ash bin. It was only, after all, the fate which befalls hundreds of other cats in the poorer parts of our big English cities every day in the week, and there wasn't a single face in that crowd of spectators, which, by this time, had swelled to a considerable number, that showed the least sign of pity or resentment. On the contrary, one and all cheered and warmly commended Mrs Parkin for what she had done.

. . . . .  
Hours afterwards, when all was still and quiet, and the serenely beautiful summer sky glowed and sparkled with myriads of scintillating stars, the diminutive figure of a woman, all bent and huddled, might have been seen ascending the area steps of a certain squalid and dilapidated house with a queer bulky looking brown paper parcel, which she carried, pressed tightly to her bosom. It was Anna Mikovitch with the mutilated remains of Marie Elizabeth. Whither she went or what became of her no one ever knew, but this much is certain—that as far as the squalid street in the neighbourhood of Whiteheads Grove was concerned—she passed out into the night—for ever.

. . . . .

## The Door that would never keep Shut 23

As soon as Mrs Parkin discovered that Anna Mikovitch had gone—and she was only too thankful she had, so she informed her neighbours—she put up the usual notice “apartment to let” in the window, and within a few days the room was once again occupied, the tenant this time being a young stableman employed by a firm of job masters near Sloane Square.

For the first few days of his sojourn nothing exceptional occurred, and it was not until he awoke one morning and found the door of his room, which he distinctly remembered shutting the night before, wide open, that his suspicions were aroused.

Thinking that someone must have come into rob him, he at once felt in his pockets, but his money was there all right, and nothing that belonged to him, as far as he could see, had been touched. Making a mental note of the incident and determining to prevent its re-occurrence, he hurried off to work, and thought no more of the matter, till he returned in the evening.

It was about ten o'clock, and he had taken off his boots and was beginning to divest himself of some of his other garments, when, feeling a sudden draught, he looked round and was somewhat astonished to see that the door was open.

“D—— the thing,” he said, “what’s wrong with it. I could have sworn I shut it all right.”

He then went to it, and, closing it carefully, placed a chair against it.

“There,” he remarked, “that’ll fix you. If I find

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you open in the morning I shall know it's no draught but someone a-spying on me."

He then blew out the light and, getting into bed, slept soundly till morning. The first thing he did when he awoke was to look at the door—it was wide open.

As soon as he had dressed and had had his breakfast, he sought Mrs Parkin and gave her a bit of his mind.

"Well" she said, "it ain't me, and I can't think as any of the lodgers upstairs would do it neither. The party as 'ad the room afore you never complained. Are you sure you shut it?"

"Certain."

"And that you weren't imagining it open and 'adn't been drinking?"

"Positive," was the somewhat resentful retort.

"Very well then," Mrs Parkin replied, "there must be something wrong with the catch. I'll get Mr Watkins, the carpenter from next door, to see to it."

She was as good as her word; she got Mr Watkins, and, after a close inspection of the catch and much opening and shutting of the door, Mr Watkins expressed his opinion that there was absolutely nothing the matter with it.

That night the young stableman shut it and placed his box and a chair against it, and in the morning it was standing wide open again. Then he grew frightened and told Mrs Parkin there was something



altogether too queer in it for his liking and he must leave.

With her next lodger, a navvy, it was the same. Whatever he placed against the door at night made no difference: on awakening, he invariably found it open. And other things happened, too. He used sometimes to wake with a start and feel something heavy moving about on the bed, like an animal. He would strike a light to see what it was, but there was never anything visible, but, immediately he blew out the candle, he would feel it on the bed again. One night, when he awoke, he heard something crawling across the floor towards him. It sounded like something crippled or wounded, and only able to drag itself along with great difficulty. It came gradually nearer and nearer, until it reached the side of the bed, when he heard it breathing heavily and panting, as if in the last stage of exhaustion; then it seemed to raise itself up and crawl on to the bed, when the navvy, rough and fearless fellow though he was in ordinary circumstances, was so overcome with terror that he hid his head under the bedclothes and lay sweating there, till the weight across his body suddenly ceased and he became conscious that the thing—whatever it was—was no longer in the room. He spoke his mind pretty freely to Mrs Parkin in the morning, and that same day the notice of an apartment to let was once again in the window.

The rumour that the house was haunted, however, now began to spread. The navvy narrated his exper-

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ences to those of his mates who lodged closeby, and, as they, in their turn, told others, Mrs Parkin soon had so many spare rooms on her hands, that she was forced to give up the house and sell her furniture to pay the rent. Poor Anna Mikovitch and Marie Elizabeth were thus to some extent avenged.

## II

### THE PHANTOM TEETH OF KNIGHTSBRIDGE

THERE is a flat in Knightsbridge, not a hundred yards from the tube station, that in pre-War days, and up to the time of the present unprecedented rush on London, was frequently "to let," and, for this reason, was said to be haunted. There are a variety of stories told in connection with the hauntings, but the following, which has never appeared in print before, will, I fancy, come nearest to the truth.

Some years ago an elderly gentleman named Brent, being very hard pressed for ready money, went to a pawnbroker, to whom he had been recommended, in Holborn, and, after transacting business with him in a manner that seemed to give mutual satisfaction, entered into a little friendly conversation.

"Your life," he said, "always strikes me as a very interesting one. I imagine many of the articles around you have strange and sad histories."

"You are right," the pawnbroker replied, "some of them have very strange and sad histories."

"Nothing in the way of ghosts, I suppose"—Brent laughed—"It's a subject I'm specially interested in, and I've often wondered if people in your vocation

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ever have any experiences with the supernatural. The lives of your customers must be so full of tragedy, and their thoughts, as they stand here asking you to take something they value more, perhaps, than anything else in the world and which only the direst poverty would induce them to part with, must be agonizing and heart-rending in the extreme—enough to haunt you and your shop for ever.”

“That is so,” the pawnbroker said, “but it wouldn’t do for us to brood over it. If we did we should do no business. One of the queerest things, I think, that ever happened to me was in connection with a set of artificial teeth, and if you’re interested in ghosts you might like to hear about it.”

“I should,” Brent said; “is it a long story?”

“Too long to tell you now,” the man replied, “but if you care to come to the restaurant over the way I could tell it you there in the dinner hour.”

To this proposal Brent cheerfully agreed; and later on in the day the two men met as arranged.

They had finished their meal and were enjoying a cup of coffee and a smoke when the pawnbroker began his narrative.

“About ten years ago,” he began, “a lady, very much veiled, came to the shop and asked me to buy a crowd of things—rings, a watch, tie-pins—all gentleman’s—and a set of false teeth, of which two in the upper plate were missing and several loose.

“‘I read in your advertisement,’ she said by way of apology, ‘that you bought artificial teeth and as these



belonged to my husband who is dead, and will consequently have no further use for them, I thought I might as well sell them. The plate is gold, is it not?’

“‘Partly, madam,’ I said, eyeing her rather closely, for there was a something in her voice that arrested my attention—I am very susceptible to voices and this one struck me as quite the hardest and least sympathetic I had ever heard. If ever a woman cared little or nothing for her husband, I thought, it is this woman. ‘What price do you want for them?’

“‘What will you give?’ she demanded.

“I told her and, after much haggling, she finally accepted my offer and departed with her money. I put the teeth safely away till I could dispose of them to a dentist who was in the habit of buying such articles from me, and in the hurry and scurry of the day’s work—for in this business something new and unlooked for is constantly happening—the incident, for the time being, passed out of my mind.

“That night, however, when I went to bed—I live on the premises—that woman’s voice came back to me. I kept on hearing it—a curiously hard voice, as metallic and inflexible as steel, and I wondered if the face beneath that heavy impenetrable veil was in keeping with it. When, finally, I did go to sleep, I awoke shrieking out in agony that I had swallowed one of my teeth. Indeed, I had to put my fingers in my mouth and feel my jaws several times before I could assure myself it was only a dream and that

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I was not choking to death. Never was a dream more realistic, and when I again went to sleep, I went through it all for the second time. I merely thought, of course, that it was nightmare, and, on getting up in the morning, dismissed it from my mind; nor did I give another thought to it, till that night, when I again had the same dream and awoke in a paroxysm of terror, gurgling and gasping, and tearing frantically at my throat.

"I now conceived a violent antipathy towards the teeth and, determining to get rid of them as soon as possible, I took them round that evening to my friend the dentist.

"He examined them closely and then remarked:

"'Have you been trying to take them off the plate?'

"'No,' I replied.

"'Well, someone has,' he said. 'See, here are the marks of a pair of pincers or some other instrument. They have had very rough handling.'

"He took them, however, and some weeks later, when I again had occasion to go to his house, he informed me that he was being constantly disturbed by the most abominable nightmare, laughingly declaring that he attributed it to the presence in the house of the teeth I had sold him.

"'I continually wake up at night,' he said, 'imagining I have swallowed several, and the sensation is so realistic—for I can positively feel them go down my throat—that it takes me some minutes to

assure myself it is only a dream. I never experienced anything of the sort before I bought those teeth from you the last time you were here, so that I cannot help thinking that they are the cause of my trouble. Happily, I have a patient who requires a new plate, so I shall fit the unfortunate teeth to it and soon be rid of them.'

"When I saw him again some months afterwards, I asked him if he had heard anything of the patient who was wearing the teeth, but, as he said he had not, I know nothing of their subsequent history.

"I was, however, so interested, that, when the lady from whom I had purchased the teeth came to my shop one day with some other articles, consisting chiefly of a gentleman's jewellery, to dispose of, I left someone else in charge of the premises and followed her. Luck favoured me; I traced her to a flat in Knightsbridge and learned from the hall porter that she was a Mrs Arbuthnot, a widow, who had recently lost her husband and was going away somewhere in the country, almost immediately. I asked the porter—very tactfully of course—if he knew how the husband had died, and was told that, having accidentally swallowed some of his false teeth, he had been obliged to undergo an operation and had died under it. The porter went on to inform me that Mr Arbuthnot had always suffered very much from a weak heart, and that, on several occasions, the doctor had been hastily summoned to attend him.

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"Now all this, added to the experiences of the dentist and myself, made me feel pretty certain that there was some peculiar mystery attached to those teeth, and I determined to try and follow the case up and learn a little more about Mrs Arbuthnot and her past history. I concluded from what the porter told me that he was on rather more than friendly terms with a girl named Raney, who was a maid in Mrs Arbuthnot's employ, but that, as Mrs Arbuthnot hated, or pretended to hate all men, the affair had to be kept strictly secret. Money, however, will always work wonders, and a few discreet tips and the promise of more loosened Raney's tongue, and I learned from her much that would otherwise never have been divulged.

"It seems that the married life of the Arbuthnots had been anything but happy. Mr Arbuthnot, a confirmed invalid and exceptionally irritable, though at the same time really kind hearted and exceedingly generous, was much older than his wife, who was a very strong, energetic woman, and, to quote Raney's words, 'one who was always wanting to be up and about and doing something.' She obviously disliked waiting on her husband and plainly showed that being tied to a sick man was anything but congenial to her. Apparently, however, she bore it all with comparative patience, until she got in with the extreme Feminists, and these women, to quote Raney again, 'hated men, and never lost an opportunity of abusing them to Madam.'



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"It seems that from the time Mrs Arbuthnot took up with these Feminists, she became an altered being; and nothing her husband ever said or did was right. If he asked her to hand him a book or get him a glass of water she would reply:

"'You're imposing on me; that's because I'm a woman; you wouldn't dare do it, if I were a man'; and was continually telling him he was a nuisance and deploring her misfortune in having to live with him.

"Whenever her Feminist friends came—which they did more and more often, it was always to discuss divorce, and if Mr Arbuthnot was in the room, he was either ignored altogether or very pointed remarks were made at him. Raney told me that on one occasion she could not help hearing the conversation between Mrs Arbuthnot and a lady visitor, as they were sitting by the dining-room fire smoking and talking, when she went in to lay the cloth for dinner. Mrs Arbuthnot was railing against certain of the penal laws, which she described as most unfair to women, and the visitor, after agreeing with everything Mrs Arbuthnot said, leaned back in her chair and, sending a wreath of smoke through her nose, exclaimed with a laugh:

"'Anyhow, we do have one pull over the men, Constance—they are hanged for murder and we are not. The last woman executed in this country was Mrs Dyer, the baby farmer, in 1896, and there was such an outcry raised by members of our sex against

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the sentence that no other woman has ever been hanged in the British Isles since.'

" 'Then one may kill with impunity,' Mrs Arbuthnot remarked thoughtfully.

" 'Well, hardly that,' her friend replied, laughing again, 'you would, I suppose, if convicted, get two or three years. Mrs Potterby, for doping her husband in Japan, got about ten, I believe; but that is some time ago.'

" 'I expect it is often done,' Mrs Arbuthnot murmured.

" 'Rather,' her friend exclaimed. 'Why, I could tell you of half a dozen sudden deaths that have been put down to heart failure, or some other natural cause, that were attributable to nothing of the sort, the deceased person, in each case, having been quietly put out of the way. For instance, there is Mr——' (here, Raney said, the visitor suddenly dropped her voice, so that she could not catch the name) 'he was found with his neck broken at the foot of the stairs and the verdict was accidental death. Now I am quite sure it was no such thing. He was always getting drunk, the beast, and Coralie, yielding to the temptation at last, pushed him. She practically admitted it to me, afterwards.'

" 'And nothing came of it?'

" 'Of course not, how could there? There was no proof. Besides, look how strong public opinion would have been in her favour. A disgusting pig of a husband always swilling himself with whisky and

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swearing at her, and she tied for life to him. Why, it's monstrous! Who could endure such a thing! Anyhow she didn't, and that is only what men must expect, until we get the marriage reform bill passed.'

"Raney did not hear any more of the conversation, as she had to leave the room at this juncture, but it all came back to her, she said, next morning, when, getting up rather earlier than usual—for somehow she hadn't been able to sleep at all well—she surprised her mistress in the kitchen doing something to a set of false teeth. She had a pair of pincers in one hand and the teeth in the other, and, appearing not a little disconcerted on hearing someone enter, she hurriedly slipped the pincers and the teeth in her pocket.

"It was at breakfast that very morning, Raney declared, that Mr Arbuthnot swallowed two or three of his teeth; and, when the doctor arrived, Mrs Arbuthnot told him that although she had often warned her husband that his teeth were loose, he had persistently disregarded her warning and refused to have them seen to. But, Raney said, she did not explain what she had been doing that morning in the kitchen with the teeth and a pair of pincers.

"The night after the funeral was one that Raney, so she assured me, would never forget. She was sleeping in the dressing-room leading out of Mrs Arbuthnot's bedroom (at her mistress's request) and in the middle of the night was awakened by a loud

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scream. She immediately ran into Mrs Arbuthnot's room to see what was the matter, and found her mistress sitting up in bed convulsed with terror and clutching at her throat.

"'I'm choking,' she gasped, 'it's a tooth. I've swallowed it and it's sticking in my throat.'

"It seems that Raney, horribly frightened herself, didn't quite know what to do, and was on the point of running downstairs to the hall porter, when Mrs Arbuthnot suddenly grew calm.

"'It's all right,' she exclaimed, feeling her mouth. 'It was only a dream, though a most realistic one at the time. I am sorry to have disturbed you, Raney. I expect I'm a little nervy, which isn't to be wondered at after all I've been through. Goodnight,' and she lay down again, bidding Raney retire to her bed."

. . . . .

"Why, she had exactly the same experience as you and the dentist," Brent observed.

"Precisely the same, and according to Raney," the pawnbroker replied, "she kept on having that dream night after night, always about the same time, till at last it so got on her nerves that she became a complete wreck. She then decided to go into the country to live, and a few days before she intended leaving the flat she gave a farewell dinner party to her friends (all women, of course) at which a curious incident took place.

"Raney, who was helping to wait at table, saw it



all, and this is what she said happened. When the sweets had been handed round, Mrs D——, the lady with whom Mrs Arbuthnot had been conversing on the night prior to Mr Arbuthnot's death, suddenly turned very white and dropped her spoon and fork. Everyone looked at her in consternation.

“‘Whatever is the matter, Lucy!’ Mrs Arbuthnot exclaimed. ‘Are you ill? Will you have some brandy?’

“‘No, No!’ the lady replied, trying to force a smile. ‘It’s nothing. I only fancied I saw a tooth on my plate, and for the moment I got rather a shock, as I wondered where it had come from. But I don’t see it now, so it could only have been my imagination.’

“‘A tooth!’ several of the guests cried. ‘Why, how funny!’

“‘How unpleasant!’ Mrs Arbuthnot exclaimed, quite casually, though she had, Raney noticed, turned deadly white. ‘You must have mistaken something else for a tooth—a piece of pastry, perhaps. If you won’t have brandy, have some wine.’

“She then adroitly turned the conversation and very cunningly prevented any further reference to the subject.

“However, when Mrs Arbuthnot went to bed some few hours later, Raney told me she kept the electric light full on in her room till the morning; and also, instead of leaving the flat on the date she had originally fixed, she hastily collected a few of her personal belongings and quitted that very day.

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"Apparently, before she went, Mrs Arbuthnot paid Raney her wages and dismissed her; for the latter affirms that she has never since that morning either seen or heard anything of her."

"Then you have now no clue to her whereabouts." Brent remarked.

The pawnbroker shook the ashes from his pipe.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "I did manage to find out that she was living at one time in a house near Folkestone, but she only stayed in it for a very short period and then went abroad, where I hope she will go on dreaming of teeth for the rest of her natural life. It's a comfort, anyhow, to know that if the law won't touch women for doing away with their husbands, they can't escape the penalties of the Unknown. I am glad to say there does seem to be a Force outside this world that is free from sex prejudices, a Force that can't be intimidated or 'got at,' and that deals out punishment to women in the same measure as to men."

"And the flat," Brent queried, "is it still haunted?"

"Yes," the pawnbroker replied, "at least so I conclude, for when I made inquiries of the hall porter the other day, he told me it was to let again."

"'No one ever stays in it for long,' he said, 'and it's the same tale over and over again—teeth, everlastingly teeth. Always a-dreaming or fancying they are seeing or swallowing teeth. I've heard so much

## The Phantom Teeth of Knightsbridge 39

about teeth and swallering teeth, for the last ever so long—ever since Mr Arbuthnot died—that I really begin at times to have the same fancy, in fact I' (here a look of awful anticipation crept into his eyes) 'I imagine—my God, I AM—choking.' ”

### III

## THE TWO GHOST HOUSES OF RED LION SQUARE

THEY stand, these two houses in Red Lion Square, in the same row, almost next door to each other. Their exteriors are practically identical, and when you enter the one, were it not for a few slight differences and variations in the way of furniture and fittings, you might well think you were entering the other. This, I admit, is not in itself a very extraordinary circumstance, but at the same time it does seem rather odd that, when one ascends the staircase at dusk or in the stilly hours of the night of either of these two houses, one feels the same peculiar something in the atmosphere. What this something is I cannot say: I have only experienced it in houses that are haunted, and even there not always, but in some cases only periodically, or at certain specific times of the day and night. In these two houses in Red Lion Square it is most marked, and far too subtle and enigmatical to admit of analysis; it can, perhaps, only be described as "the taint of the Unknown." There are certain shadows, too, on the staircases of these two houses that closely resemble



## Two Ghost Houses of Red Lion Square 41

one another, and for which I have tried in vain to find material counterparts.

They seem, indeed, to be generated by that something in the atmosphere to which I have referred, and to be apparent, only, when it is apparent.

In both houses, too, other phenomena occur, namely, strange creaks, and footsteps, and also sounds of a more harrowing description, and these phenomena seem to be indissolubly connected with that same queer something, that I have just now designated "the taint of the Unknown."

My wife and I stayed for some time at No. 001. To be precise, we were there for several months during the hurry and scurry of 1915, when, owing to prospective air raids, house accommodation in Holborn might be had, comparatively speaking, for a mere song.

Most of the rooms being used as offices only the two top floors and the basement of No. 001 were occupied at night; so that, from six o'clock in the evening till nine in the morning, we had the premises pretty well to ourselves, and for some weeks, at least, were not disturbed by any suggestion of ghosts. I began to suspect the house was haunted, when, returning to it one evening after dusk, I clambered up the steep flight of uncarpeted stairs, and suddenly became aware of that enigmatical something in the atmosphere.

It was there hovering around me on every stair; it dodged my feet persistently to my room; and that

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night, when I lay in bed with my door slightly open, I could hear creakings—creakings that, beginning in the distance and getting nearer and nearer, were as if somebody or something was stealing surreptitiously up the staircase and across the landing, up, up, up, till they reached the floor I was on. I peeped furtively out, but there was nothing to be seen—only moonlight and shadows. One evening, some days later, as I was in my bedroom dressing to go out, I heard footsteps slowly ascending the staircase from the lower part of the house. They came steadily up and conveyed with them the impression that they was those of a very old and rather decrepid man. Wondering who it could be, as my wife and I were, with the exception of the caretakers, the only occupants of the building, I hurriedly slipped on my things and listened.

Up and up the steps came, till they reached the foot of the stairs on the landing immediately beneath mine, when, after a brief pause, they began to go down again. I ran out of my room and peered down. The rays of a setting summer sun, pouring through a skylight, flooded the whole house with a subdued yellow glow, and had there been anyone on the stairs, I must have seen them; but there was no one. Yet the steps continued, slow, heavy and deliberate, down, down, down. I followed them, until I crept close behind them, and down we went together, stair by stair, the known and the Unknown, until we arrived on the ground floor. The steps then went on right

## Two Ghost Houses of Red Lion Square 43

up to the front door, where they abruptly ceased, and with their cessation, that same strange enigmatical something in the atmosphere, that had been very apparent during the descent, ceased, too. As my father-in-law was seriously ill at the time, I had fears lest the steps, which bore a very strange likeness to his, might be meant for a prognostication of his death, but as time went on and he neither grew better nor worse—indeed, he survived the incident a little over two years—I concluded that my apprehensions were groundless and that some other spirit agency must be at work. It was then that my wife had an experience, which still further convinced me that the house was actually haunted. I can best describe the experience in my wife's own words:

“One evening, as I was going down stairs, I heard a curious scuffling noise taking place on the landing just behind me, as if two people were engaged in a deadly wrestle. Knowing that I was absolutely alone in the upper part of the house, my husband having gone out some time previously, I was greatly disturbed and alarmed, and, hurrying on, had descended another flight of stairs, when something seemed to fall with a heavy thud close at my heels on the landing below the one upon which I had heard the scuffle. This came as a climax and, without venturing to look round, I flew down the remainder of the stairs into the hall, and called to the caretaker who lived in the basement.

“In response to my summons she came up, and,

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declaring she had heard nothing, assured me that no one was in the house but our two selves and that I must have been mistaken. However, although I persisted in what I had said, she showed no inclination to explore the premises with me, so I waited in the hall till my husband returned, and, when I had told him all about it, we went upstairs together, and, searching in every available spot, were eventually convinced that no one was in hiding.

"There was, indeed, nothing apparently that could in any way account for the noises, saving the supernatural, and, consequently, it was to the supernatural that we were forced to attribute them."

Afterwards my wife and I mentioned our experiences to the lady who had occupied our rooms before us, and learned that she and her maid had frequently heard noises on the staircase—thuds, scuffles, and footsteps, that usually occurred either at dusk or in the still hours of the night. Such corroboration was, of course, intensely interesting, and the sequel, which I will now relate, was just as satisfactory.

After we had left our ghostly quarters, the Duke of——, who has accompanied me on several of my expeditions to haunted houses, and was very anxious to go to another, asked me to interview the present occupants of No.— Red Lion Square, and, if possible, to gain their permission to do an all-night sitting there. Accordingly, I went to the house and found that the rooms were tenanted by two ladies, whom I will designate the Misses B——. Having



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no alternative but to come to the point at once, I told them that I had reason to believe the house was haunted, and that I was hoping very much that they would have no objection to the Duke of—— and myself doing an all-night sitting on one of the staircases, on the chance of experiencing some of the phenomena. To my intense relief, and somewhat to my surprise, for they were not over cordial, they evinced no annoyance, but, on the contrary, showed considerable interest, and, as soon as I finished explaining the purpose of my visit, informed me that they, too, had heard all sorts of queer noises in the house, and had, moreover, obtained, what, in their opinion, was a definite proof that the place was haunted. They said that one evening after dinner, when, some friends having dropped in, they were all sitting round the fire talking, they suddenly heard the same peculiar and heavy footsteps they had so often heard in the night, ascending the staircase. They instantly ceased their conversation and listened, and when the steps, reaching the door of their room, began to retreat, one of their number, a very young man, got up and went outside to look. After a few minutes he returned and told them that he had seen a very old man in the act of descending the staircase, and had asked him who he was and what he wanted, whereupon the old man had replied: "Oh, it's all right," and continued his descent. The youth had then followed him right down to the front door, through which the old man seemed to

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pass, although it was locked and bolted on the inside.

I asked them if the youth, who, they said, was very much upset, had noticed anything peculiar about the old man, and they said from what they could gather that he had not; and that, apart from extreme age and a certain difficulty in walking, the old man had appeared to be quite ordinary and natural. This was all the information I could extract from them, and, after obtaining their permission to hold an all-night sitting on the top landing, I came away. Two days later, to my great annoyance, I received a letter from one of the Misses B——, to say that, after weighing the matter over very carefully, she and her sister had come to the conclusion that it would not be advisable for them to have us there, as, if the landlord got to know of it, he might come down on them for circulating the rumour that the house was haunted. This was extremely disappointing. However, happening to remember that, while we had been living at No. 001, the caretaker had mentioned to my wife that No. 003 was said to be haunted, to No. 003 I next bent my steps. Part of the premises were used for business purposes, and certain of the rooms were let out for concert parties and lectures; and it was ostensibly to see the latter that I asked permission to go upstairs. As I ascended the staircase I experienced the same sensations as at No. 001.

Here, too, was that strange enigmatical something in the atmosphere, and a suggestion of the same

bizarre and wholly inexplicable shadows. I very cautiously sounded the girl, who was showing me over the premises as to whether she had heard that one or two houses in the square were haunted, and she told me that she certainly had heard rumours to that effect, adding, upon my assuring her that I was trustworthy, that, although she had been a strong sceptic with regard to ghosts all her life, a few days after her arrival there, she was fully convinced that they existed.

"I'm telling you the truth," she said, "because I've seen them—at least, I've seen one. I often meet it on this staircase—never anywhere else, and always about this time, or just when it is getting dusk. It is a girl about my own age without a hat, and wearing one of those flounced skirts with panniers that were the fashion about sixty years ago. She has very white cheeks and long, loose flowing dark hair, and she comes creeping down the staircase with a frightened, startled look in her big wide-open, blue eyes, and seems to be making for the front door, where she disappears. I always lose sight of her, when she is about half way across the hall. I shall never forget the first time I saw her. It was in the autumn, about five o'clock, and I was running upstairs to call one of the other assistants down to tea, when I saw what I at first took to be Daisy at the top of the staircase. She began to descend the moment I caught sight of her, and the yellow glow of the fading sun, falling full on her face, showed me it was

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not Daisy but someone quite different. Then I noticed how pale she was and what old-fashioned clothes she had on, and what little noise her feet made on the bare boards, and I went cold all over, and would have run away had I not found myself rooted to the spot, unable to move hand or foot. She came down, as if in a terrible hurry, and fearful of being heard; her eyes peering about in all directions, but never seeming to see me. She passed me so close that I could feel the long stray wisps of her hair flick my cheek, while her dress brushed against my feet; but, when I turned to look for her, she was nowhere to be seen—the hall was quite empty and all the doors, including the one leading into the street, were shut. I spoke to the manageress about it and she said: 'It must have been the ghost my predecessor said she had so often seen.' According to her—and I've heard others say the same thing—a girl was found murdered on the staircase a good many years ago, and the crime—like many more—was never brought home to anyone, although suspicion rested on a certain young man, the son of a wealthy old leather merchant, who lived two doors from here. The young man was supposed to have been 'walking out' with the girl, and it was affirmed that he had been seen with her on the night of the murder, but, as he was able to produce an alibi, several people coming forward to swear that he was out of London all that week, he was discharged, and no one was subsequently arrested. They say the young man's father was so upset to think that any-



one should ever have suspected his son, that he committed suicide, and his ghost, too, haunts this house."

"Why this house?" I queried.

"I don't know," my informant replied, "but that is what the manageress told me, and I believe she is right, because I have, on several occasions, heard the sound of footsteps, just like those of an old, decrepid man, ascending and descending the staircase, and sometimes going right up to the front door, but I have never seen anyone. Now, that is all I can tell you, but please don't breathe a word about it to anyone, or I might lose my post. The manageress told me her predecessor had to leave on that account: she mentioned her experiences to somone and they spoke about them to the management, with the result that she was accused of spreading the rumour the house was haunted—and sacked; and I don't want to share her fate."

I promised, and forthwith abandoning all hope of a night's investigation there—so forlorn did the chances seem of obtaining the necessary permission—I very reluctantly let the matter drop. All the same I was interested. Two houses, close to one another, and haunted by the same ghost! Why, I wondered, did that old man so persistently climb up and down the staircase, first in the one house, and then in the other? And why that scuffle and heavy thud at No. 001, and that white-faced, frightened, stealthily fleeing girl at No. 003? Was it possible that the murder referred to by the manageress had been committed

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at No. 001 and the body conveyed from thence No. 003; could the old man, the father of the supposed murderer, have aided his son—if not in the actual murder—in removing the body? It was quite likely, of course, that the father would not hear of his son being married to this young girl, for the simple reason that she was not in the same station of life, and the youth, finding that he had so far committed himself that he must either marry her or remove her from his path altogether, had, with his father's knowledge and approval, eventually adopted the latter course.

But, on the other hand, it is quite possible that the girl, having heard that her sweetheart was in love with someone else, had gone to his house to upbraid him and, consequently, had been killed by him in a fit of passion and without premeditation; in which case the father might still have helped him to remove the body to No. 003.

Or, on the other hand, very possibly the old man determined at all costs, to prevent his son's marriage with a poor girl, had with his own hands done the deed, after which remorse (and not injured pride) had led to his suicide, and subsequent perpetual hovering around the scenes of the crime? But these are only surmises, a hundred and one things might have happened, and, without getting any forwarder, one might go on speculating thus till Doomsday. However, one thing, at all events, seems certain and that is that the two houses Nos. 001 and 003 Red

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Lion Square possess at least one ghost in common, namely, the ghost of a very old man, and possess also, the one no less than the other, that most ghostly of all ghostly phenomena, grim, and creaking, and shadow haunted stairs.



#### IV

### THE MAN BEHIND THE DOOR, OR NO.— BROCKLEY ROAD, S.E.

SOME years ago, at the house of a friend in Norwood, I met a Mr and Mrs Thorpe who told me of a strange experience they had once had in Brockley.

"We neither believed nor disbelieved in ghosts," they said, "when we went to live at No.— Brockley Road, S.E., but we hadn't been in the house very long before we arrived at the conclusion that it was what is popularly termed 'haunted.' During our stay there we were repeatedly disturbed by the sound of a latchkey being fitted in the lock of the front door and by footsteps running up and down the first flight of stairs, yet, whenever we went to look, we saw no one.

"On other occasions, however, when we were not expecting to see anyone, we both fancied we could detect the somewhat indistinct figure of a man dressed in an old-fashioned high chimney-pot hat and Albert coat, standing, as if in the act of watching and listening, on the mat behind the front door. We spoke to him several times, but never got any re-



sponse, and the moment we tried to touch him, he invariably vanished.

At first, we were very frightened, but as we never saw anything more alarming than this apparently harmless apparition, we gradually got accustomed to it and eventually overcame our fear. At the same time, neither of us at all relished the idea of being left alone in the house, and it was partly on that account that we finally gave it up."

I asked them if they knew its history, and received a rather discouraging reply.

"We have heard certain rumours," they said, "but we very much doubt their authenticity. Mr Johnson, the dairyman, who lives close to it might be able to tell you something, as he occupied the house for three or four years."

They evidently did not wish to be pumped, so I let the matter rest for the time being, and later on, when I had a little time to spare, I paid a visit to Brockley Road and, without much difficulty, found Mr Johnson. But he was by no means inclined to be communicative.

"It is true," he said, "I did hear a lot of queer noises while I was there, and I often used to think I saw someone standing on the mat in the hall, behind the front door, but I prefer not to talk about it, as the landlord has threatened one person I know with an action for slander of title, and I don't want to get let in for anything of that sort."

"Is the house empty," I asked.

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"It was yesterday," Mr Johnson grunted. "Why?"

"Because," I replied, "I should like to spend a night there."

To my surprise, the moment I made this statement Mr Johnson's features visibly relaxed.

"What, to see the ghost," he chuckled. "Now look here, I see you're interested, and so am I but it must be between ourselves. Well, that house has always fascinated me, and it fascinates me more now, oddly enough, than when I lived in it, and often of a night, when the street is still, and everyone has gone to bed, I feel obliged to steal out and have a look at it. Going up to the front door, I lean my head against the panels and listen, and when I hear deep, heavy breathing coming to me from the other side, I know he is there right enough—there, as usual, watching and waiting. Poor devil, he never seems to get any respite. No matter whether it is winter or summer, raining, hailing, or snowing, he invariably keeps his vigil, standing still and listening, God knows why, or for what. I thought of him last Christmas Eve and wondered if the Powers that ordain things behind the scenes would give him a night off.

"I kept on thinking about him to such an extent that, at length, I could bear it no longer; I slipped out of the house, leaving all the warmth and comfort, and jollity behind, and hurried off to Brockley Road, and, sure enough, when I arrived at No.— and laid my head against the door, I could hear him.

There he was as usual, all alone in that dark, cold, empty house, standing still and listening. I called out to him and expressed my sympathy, and I thought I heard a sigh, but it may have been imagination. Anyhow, I got no other sort of reply and I came away feeling very depressed and unhappy. Indeed, it quite spoilt my Christmas, for all the time I was eating my roast turkey and plum pudding, and the kiddies were pulling crackers and talking all kinds of nonsense, the dark, deserted house and that solitary watcher kept rising up before me.

"No matter what sins he had committed, I thought, in his lifetime, no punishment could be more terrible than having to stand there, all alone, night after night, year after year, with no other companion saving the rats, and mice, and shadows. If that isn't hell, I don't know what is?"

"And you don't know the history of the house," I ventured.

"No," Mr Johnson said, his manner changing again. "I know nothing, and, mind, I haven't told you anything—that is to say, if anybody asks," and as he would not say another word, I left him.

I then went to the house and inspected it. It was to let, and apparently there was no caretaker. How I obtained admission, I won't say, as others might be tempted to follow my example; but get in I did, and two nights later found me in the hall, with no other companion saving my faithful canine friend—Ghoul—an Irish terrier.

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My first impression of the place was that it was quite ordinary—there was nothing weird about it, no dark cupboards or gloomy recesses, or anything that in any way suggested the presence of the super-physical. And yet Ghoul did not seem at all at home, nor did I. There was the usual something which I have detected in so many haunted houses, that filled me with a feeling of vague apprehension and indefinite fear.

Being somewhat cold, for the place had obviously been without fires for a long time, I drank some hot tea, which I had brought with me in a thermos flask, and then commenced a thorough exploration of the premises. Bidding Ghoul follow, I slipped on a pair of rubber soles and descended into the basement. Having satisfied myself no one was there, I went upstairs, and finally took up my position for the night, seated on the stairs leading into the hall and facing the front door. Ghoul sat close beside me.

The weather being wet and forbidding there were very few people in the street; at long intervals steps might be heard scurrying past the house—otherwise all was still, save for the gentle pattering of the rain and occasional noises, which obviously came from next door. At last, minute after minute sped by in absolute silence—a silence that seemed to intensify with the passing of every second that brought us nearer midnight, and at about one, the stairs above me gave an ominous creak, Ghoul growled, and my heart went pitter-pat, pitter-pat.



I then fancied I could detect something like soft footsteps stealing very stealthily down, pausing every now and again as if their owner were intent on not being heard. As on all occasions, when I am alone in a haunted house, I now grew horribly afraid and wished to goodness I had never been fool enough to come. Yet being there, and fully realising I had to see the thing through, I determined to try and pull myself together. Overcoming my fear with an effort—and I admit it was a supreme effort—I stood up, shone my pocket flashlight up and down the stairs behind me, and, to my infinite relief, saw—no one.

Then I sat down again and once more resumed my vigil. The silence grew, and intermingling with it now came a feeling that Ghoul and I would shortly be spectators of a drama or incident, which everything around us—walls, stairs, shadows, and the very atmosphere itself were anticipating.

I distinctly felt a tremendous concentration going on all around us, which seemed as if it must very speedily reach a culminating point, when something definite would happen. It came, however—as these kind of things usually do—with the most startling abruptness. The intense silence that reigned supreme throughout the house was suddenly broken by the clear and unmistakable sound of a key being fitted in the lock of the door. Ghoul snarled, the door flew open, and a cool draught of air blowing past me, fanned both cheeks. Still I saw no one. The house

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was once again silent, but only for a while, for, from out of the gloom ahead of me, came a sigh—the sigh of someone in very great distress—and Ghoul this time whined.

I could now no more have moved or shut my eyes than I could have flown. I felt impelled by some wholly invisible force, against which I was absolutely powerless, to sit staring straight ahead of me, vainly endeavouring to pierce the darkness.

Then, quite suddenly, I perceived with a thrill a very faint light or glow which kept on developing, until it finally took the shape of a tall, thin man, dressed in a black frock coat and tall silk hat. He had his back to me at first, and from his attitude I gathered he was expecting someone—watching and listening for them. On Ghoul whining he turned slightly and I saw his face. . . . It was a face that once seen was never forgotten, and, even now, after a lapse of some ten or twelve years, it often comes back to me. It was frightfully colourless, the white brow and cheeks being fringed with hair and whiskers of jet black; but it was the eyes that fascinated me most—they were dark, deep set and luminous and, as they met my gaze, I could read in their depths the most unspeakable suffering and tragedy.

Though the figure seemed somewhat unreal and visionary, the face appeared to me just the reverse; and so certain was I that what I beheld was an objective spirit entity that I made the most desperate

efforts to overcome my terror, which was pitiable in the extreme.

Here I was, confronted with one of the most unusual examples of psychic phenomena I had ever encountered, a phantasm of the non-malignant type, endowed, as it seemed only too obviously, with real human intelligence. Here, within a few feet of me was a genuine clue to the riddle of the ages—not the poor, silly make-belief ghost usually seen at alleged materialising séances, and with which, as witness the famous masked medium case of last year, so many spiritualists are deluded—but a bona fide denizen of the other world, a denizen that held within its knowledge the greatest of all mysteries—that of life and death. If, if only I could prevail upon it to speak—to answer even one question, then I should have obtained all that I had been striving for for years and in one swift bound have advanced further—immeasurably further—than any living mortal.

I tried to speak—God alone knows how hard I tried, or for how long—and at last I succeeded. What I actually said I can not remember. So chaotic was my mind, surging with a thousand and one emotions, that I forgot my words almost as soon as I had uttered them. Again I struggled, and again something passed my lips; but there was no response. The figure still stood there in an attitude of expectancy, the cool wind through the cracks of the door rustling past it, and fanning the hair and whiskers on its white face, but it gave no sign of having heard me.

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Then, quite suddenly, I became calm, wonderfully, supernaturally, calm, with every faculty I possessed extraordinarily active and alert.

I spoke again, and, throwing all my heart and soul into my utterance, implored the figure to speak and satisfy my yearnings as to whether there was a future life for me or not. It made no reply. Then, thinking that, perhaps, it might not be able to make any verbal sounds with those white ethereal lips, I exhorted it, instead, to make use of signs, to give me any indication, however small, that it was capable of hearing and comprehending the living human voice.

Our eyes looked into one another's as I spoke, but in its gaze I could detect no alteration of expression, nothing different from what there had been all along, nothing to show it was in the least degree conscious of what I was saying.

Bitterly disappointed I stood up, and, stepping towards it, put out my hand to touch it on the shoulder. My fingers encountered nothing, and before I could actually realise what was happening, I found myself on the door-mat—alone. The figure had vanished, nor did it appear again.

Nights later, however, when I was again in the neighbourhood, resolving to put to the test the experiment tried by Mr Johnson, I cautiously approached the house, and, putting my ear against the door, listened.

Ghoul, who was with me, growled, for, coming from the other side of the panels, and immeasurably em-



phasised by the utter stillness of the street and night, was the sound of breathing—deep, heavy breathing, that stopped short every now and again, as if the producer of it had had his attention suddenly arrested and was listening—and then went steadily on again.

I have heard several so-called explanations of the haunting, but none more feasible than the following.

Soon after the houses in the Brockley Road were built, No.— was tenanted by a couple whom I will designate Mr and Mrs Mills. Mr Mills was a commercial traveller, and on one occasion, during his absence from home, his wife, who happened to be much younger than he, became acquainted with a handsome foreigner, and so far succumbed to his advances, that, in the end, she decided to elope with him. The husband returned on the day she had taken her departure, and, thinking she had merely gone on a visit to some friends, sat up awaiting her return. Hour after hour passed by but he heard no welcome sound of footsteps, and the morning found him, white and haggard, still standing in the hall—waiting.

Later on in the day he received a telegram. It was terse and to the point:

“I’m not coming back.—Violet.”

He read it through several times, and then, putting on his hat and overcoat, he walked down to the river and drowned himself.

## V

### ATMOSPHERE

#### *Or a Haunting in a Kilburn Studio*

"Do you know, O'Donnell," my friend George Niall suddenly remarked, after he had been puffing away at his briar for some minutes in silence, "what I should be more particular about than anything else when taking a house?"

"Drains!" I responded with alacrity.

"Well, yes; drains, of course," he said, "but that is not what I meant; I was thinking of something else, that is, to my mind, equally important."

"Ghosts!"

"Well, no; not exactly ghosts!"

"What then?" I ejaculated, handing Niall an ash tray, for he has the most woeful habit of scattering his ashes broadcast.

"Atmosphere!" he said solemnly.

"Atmosphere," I repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Why this," he said. "When you think, and think forcibly enough, your thoughts, far from being lost, impress themselves on the ether and are retained by it, in much the same way as sound is retained by

wax. Now, when certain vibrations occur in the air these thoughts are set in motion—or set going, as the music is set going in a gramophone, and, if any-one happens to be present, they must be more or less affected by them. You have often heard people say they don't like the atmosphere of a place. Well, they don't like it because they are susceptible to the hidden thoughts there, the thoughts that the ether holds and, in the conditions I have named, gives out."

"So that it is always safer to take a new house," I commented.

"Generally," Niall responded, "but much depends on the site. A house, for example built on the crest of a hill would not be as likely to have a heavily thought-impregnated atmosphere as a house in a wood or a hollow, because in the former case the atmosphere must to some extent be affected by the freshness of the air, due to continual breezes and currents of wind; whereas in the latter, saving for vibrations, the atmosphere would remain to a certain extent undisturbed.

"I don't know whether you have noticed that there are infinitely more cases of hauntings and crime in low lying localities and thickly wooded districts than on plains and mountains. In the provinces, for example, Bristol, Bath, and Clevedon, all very low lying districts, are full of haunted flats and houses; whilst Clifton, one part of which lies low and the other part of which is very wooded, not only possesses many haunted houses, but is one of the most suicidal towns

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in England. A fact which cannot be said to be altogether due to the suspension bridge. Then, when we come to London, there is Kilburn."

"Oh, don't mention Kilburn," I said. "I haven't got over the night I spent at No.— Mortimer Road yet. It is the most haunted district in London."

Niall laughed. "That is so," he said. "There is no air there, the soil is clay, and the atmosphere is crammed as full as it can hold with stale thoughts—some of them deuced bad ones, too. Let me give an instance. You have heard me speak of Linton Wiseman, haven't you? Well, he is landed in a very awkward predicament, that may well lead to tragedy, and all through taking a studio in Kilburn with, what, I think, I may rightly term, a thought-haunted atmosphere. Would you like to hear about it?"

I nodded.

"All right," he said, "but it is conditionally that, if you ever publish the case, you give fictitious names and are very careful not to let out it was I who told you."

I promised, and this is the gist of what he narrated.

Linton Wiseman, a black and white artist, of more than average ability, had been searching high and low for a studio, when at last he heard of one in a rather mean and dingy row of houses within a couple of minutes' walk of Kilburn Station. It was not at all the sort of studio he wanted, but as there seemed little likelihood that he would get a better one, he took it, and, in due course, "moved in." Well, one



afternoon, after an unusually hard grind in order to complete within a specified time a design for the jacket of a book by an author cousin, he pulled up his chair in front of the fire and determined to enjoy a short smoke and a few minutes' quiet reflection before lighting up and recommencing work. Owing to an unlucky financial speculation, which threatened to delay his marriage—he was engaged to a very charming and well-known film actress—he felt considerably worried, and his thoughts unconsciously reverted to his only near relative, an elderly and very rich bachelor uncle, with regard to whom he entertained great expectations. As he leaned back in his chair and puffed steadily away at his pipe, he kept on wondering why he had not heard from this uncle. He had written to him several times but had had no reply. Could it be that he was ill? He surely could not have offended him in any way. He must write again on the morrow, and, if he did not get any answer, he would go down to Torquay and pay him a surprise visit.

He was not naturally commercially minded; as a matter of fact, like most artists, he had no craving for money; but he had his fiancée's welfare at heart, and the sum he was expecting would not only insure her against poverty, the risk of which she would undoubtedly incur were he to marry her now—for poverty, as is well known, must be reckoned with by all, or mostly all, who depend upon their art for a living—but it would enable him to keep her, if not

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in luxury, in comparative comfort. It was, then, most essential that he should keep in with his uncle, and solve the mystery of the latter's long silence with all expediency. He puffed leisurely on, however, still thinking of his uncle, and still brooding over affairs in general, until the heat from the fire making him sleepy, he put down his pipe, and, resting his head against the back of the chair, gradually began to doze off. Suddenly he sat bolt upright and listened. A knock! And at the door of his studio, too! Who the deuce could it be? His charwoman must surely have gone by now and no one could have gained admittance without ringing the front door bell.

He called out, "Come in," and to his great amazement the door then opened and a young lady dressed in the very latest of fashions—a dark blue tailor-made costume, the skirt very short and the coat lavishly trimmed with braid and buttons, and wearing patent leather shoes, the heels of which were of more than average height—came into the room smiling. He could see that she was smiling, because, at the moment of her entry, the fire had suddenly broken into flame, and focussed on her face. It was a face, too, that having once been seen would not be forgotten in a hurry. It was handsome rather than pretty—the nose being slightly curved, the chin somewhat pronounced and the eyebrows very marked. But it was the eyes—the eyes chiefly—that arrested Linton's attention. They were of a china blue, and had in their depths a curious glitter that he had never seen in eyes before,

and which he could not—though he tried his utmost to do so—analyse. They had, moreover, a peculiarly disquieting effect, and he could not make up his mind whether he liked them or not, although he was by no means insensible to their beauty. He was so absorbed in gazing at them, that he quite forgot to speak, and it was she who eventually began the conversation.

“How lucky I am to find you in,” she said, “and, for a wonder, not at work.”

“Find me in and not at work,” Linton stammered, looking at the hand she held out and noticing how the rings on it and her nails, which were very long and slightly curved at the tips, sparkled as the fire flames caught them. “Why, however did you manage to enter without——”

“Ringing,” the lady laughed. “Oh, that was very easy. I’ll tell you how some day. I’ve come to fetch you.”

“Fetch me!” Linton gasped, rubbing his eyes to make sure he was not still dreaming.

“Yes, fetch you,” the lady mimicked. “Come, make haste. Put on your hat and coat, the car’s waiting for us at the dor.”

To Linton’s astonishment he now found himself obeying this strange woman. Instead of asking her who she was and bidding her begone, he seemed to have succumbed to the extraordinary fascination of her eyes and to have been completely magnetised by them.

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"All right," he said, walking to the peg behind the door and taking his coat down. "I'll come, but where are we going?"

"Why home of course," the woman replied laughing. "As if you didn't know that. Some one wants to see you and wouldn't give me any peace, till I promised I would take out the car and fetch you. It's too bad of you not to be on the 'phone."

"Well, I hope I shall be soon," Linton said lamely, putting on his hat, "in fact, as soon as I can afford it."

"Afford it," the woman repeated, laughing again. "Why you know you're making heaps of money with your painting. Always selling. But make haste, what a slow coach you are."

At the door of the house a private motor was in waiting, and into this Linton unhesitatingly followed his fair companion.

During the drive, though he kept on assuring himself that every thing was real—the fascinating sensation of rapid movement as the motor glided easily and swiftly along, now down one street and now across another; the bright lights from the gas lamps that kept continually illuminating the interior of the vehicle; the dazzling shop windows; and the ceaseless roar of the traffic, as coming to the end of a side street they shot out into the great broad sweep of the Kilburn main thoroughfare—yet, nevertheless, he felt, at times, in a kind of daze. In a measure he could think and take in all that was happening, but



he seemed no longer to have any power either of reasoning or remonstrating. Some power outside himself seemed to be forcing him to accept this extraordinary adventure in perfect good faith without comment and without misgiving. His companion every now and again laying her small white hand on his—not coquettishly, but simply as if they had long been friends and friends only—continued chatting gaily, and he found himself recognising and appreciating all this, not as some sudden revelation, but as something he had known all along, even before she had come to fetch him; and yet he could not even recall her name or recollect ever having seen her till that evening. On and on they went till at last they drew up before a corner house in a large and stately square, obviously in some very select and aristocratic neighbourhood. Here the lady, bidding Linton follow, sprang out of the car, and, running nimbly up the steps to the front door, inserted a latchkey in the lock, turned it deftly and entered the house. Linton entering at the same time at once sensed keenly the air of omnipotent silence that reigned everywhere; it was most pronounced. Each time his companion spoke, each time her heels struck the tiled flooring, there came that hollow reverberating echo one never hears save in empty houses. Yet the place was furnished, and as far as he could see, furnished luxuriously. It was odd, very odd.

“I hope you will forgive me,” the lady suddenly remarked as if divining his thoughts. “The house



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does seem a bit deserted, I know, but the servants wanted so badly to go to a wedding party to-night—cook's sister's—that I hadn't the heart to refuse them."

"So we're alone in the house," Linton said mechanically.

"Alone," the lady mimicked, her blue eyes suffusing with merriment. "Why, what a tone of voice. One would imagine you were thinking me some dangerous, designing madame and that you were terrified out of your life of scandal or blackmail. Instead of which you are—but we won't talk of it, it makes me appear so old. Now, come in here and wait, whilst I change. You won't mind dining alone with me, will you? He has not been very well to-day and I've kept him in bed."

She showed Linton into an ante-room as she spoke, and, after switching on the light, left him and ran upstairs. When she had gone Linton, feeling once more the sense of weariness due to an extra hard day's work, sank into a chair before the faintly glowing gas fire, and closed his eyes. It was true, he argued to himself, he loved adventure, anything in which there was a spice of danger and romance, but only when he was feeling fit and well, and able to cope with it, not when he was dog-tired and feeling anyhow. Besides, there was something in this escapade that did not flavour of the normal, something that struck a note of mystery quite out of his ken, and for that reason, perhaps, he was not at all sure if he altogether relished it. Who was she? Why

had she brought him to that house? What had become of her? And how still everything was! Once a faint noise, a strange isolated noise that sounded almost like a cry of sudden pain or surprise, made him sit bolt upright and glance hurriedly at the door. But as it was not repeated, and the house still seemed wrapt in the same intense and overwhelming silence, he leaned back again and soon forgot all about it. After waiting for what appeared to be an eternity, the door of the room at length opened and the lady stood upon the threshold.

Though wholly devoted and loyal to his fiancée, Linton could not suppress his admiration. He had thought this stranger more than ordinarily good looking when he had seen her in her out-door attire, but now that she was elaborately dressed in one of Madame Verteuilli's latest creations, she appeared positively beautiful. So beautiful in fact, that he could only stand and gape at her.

"Why, Linton," she laughed, glancing at herself in the mirror over the mantleshef and re-adjusting one or two of her curls. "How you stare. Is there anything the matter with me? By the way did you hear a noise a few minutes ago?"

"I thought I did—I thought I fancied I heard some one cry out," Linton said.

"Well that was me," the lady observed. "That wretched cat of ours scratched me, see," and she held out one of her hands, on the back of which there was a long ugly looking red scratch. Linton shivered.

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Anything in the nature of blood always made him feel sick.

"What a brute," he said. "I hope you punished him well."

"I couldn't catch him," was the reply, "but he'll have to be destroyed, for he's always hurting somebody. He tried to bite cook only a day or two ago. But come on, we'll have supper now. I'll lead the way."

Crossing the hall they entered the dining-room, where a table was laid for two. It was a meal Linton never forgot. He rarely, if ever, removed his gaze from the woman—those china blue eyes, with their extraordinary glitter and long curling black lashes, fascinated him beyond measure, and, if he glanced away from them at all, it was to look at her slim delicate hands with their long pointed fingers and rosy, highly polished nails, and that dreadful scar, that showed so red and ominously against the smooth, white skin around it. He was so absorbed in gazing at her, that he paid little attention to what he ate, and, though generally speaking a teetotaller, he drank heedlessly of whatever she passed to him. When the meal was at length over, she leaned forward and, looking at him with a sly, mischievous expression in her lovely eyes, said:

"I've a little surprise in store for you, Linton, would you like to see it?"

"Sure," Linton replied.

"Then come along," she said, and rising from her

chair, she at once led the way, Linton following, and steadying himself with difficulty, as the wine, of which he had drunk far more than he realised at the time, had got into his head and made him a trifle dizzy. Crossing the hall and ascending the staircase, she paused for a moment outside a room on the first landing. "Do you mind waiting here for a minute," she said, "while I go in and see that everything is all right."

She then disappeared and Linton was once again left to himself. A strange foreshadowing of some impending event of a momentous but at the same time wholly unguessable nature now began to impress itself on his somewhat muddled and bewildered brain. He looked around him curiously. It was a big house, and the absolute stillness of it filled him with vague apprehensions. Did this woman live here all alone, and if not where were all the other people? A huge grandfather clock in a highly polished ebony frame, standing in a recess a few feet away from him, alone gave signs of life. As he listened to it—listened to its slow and ponderous tick, tick, tick—there seemed to be more than mere mechanism in its tones. It seemed to be saying something he could not fathom but which he felt intuitively had some deep and subtle meaning. It puzzled him just as much as that peculiar gleam and glitter in the woman's china-blue eyes, and just as much as any of the incidents that had particularly impressed him in the night's adventure. Behind it, as behind them, lay a



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something whose meaning and attitude towards him he could not for the life of him determine.

Otherwise, there was much in his surroundings that was perfectly natural and normal—the lights in the hall and on the landings, for instance, there was nothing in any way unusual or suggestive in them; whilst the scent of flowers, that was wafted every now and again to him from the conservatory, was unquestionably real and ordinary. He was still thinking of it all and eyeing the clock intently, when the door at his elbow opened and the woman bade him enter. As far as he could make out from the feeble, flickering flames of a fire, the room was very large and most luxuriously furnished. More he had not time to notice just then, for the woman came close to him, and, laying her hands on the lappets of his coat, whispered:

“There’s the surprise—in that chair by the fire. Go to it and see for yourself.” Her fair hair brushed against his cheeks as she spoke, and the scent of her breath intoxicated him. Carried away with the passion of the moment he pressed her close to him and smothered her in kisses. For some seconds she lay in his arms quite passively and then, with a sudden effort releasing herself, she patted him playfully on the cheeks, and slipped quickly out of the room, closing the door behind her.

“Look at the chair,” she cried, “be quick; why, how slow you are,” and Linton fancied he heard a click, as if she had locked him in. At that instant the fire gave



big spurt, and he saw, seated in front of it, with his back towards him, a figure, in what looked like a grey flannel dressing-gown. Judging by the bald head, the figure was that of a man who seemed to be reclining in rather a strange attitude, the legs stretched out at full length and the head resting so far back on the chair, which was very low, that almost the entire face was visible from behind; and as Linton looked at it, fancying there was something about it oddly familiar to him, the eyes seemed to blink and the mouth to grin. Yielding to a sudden fit of curiosity Linton went right up to the chair and peered into the face of the recumbent figure. What he saw, however, made him start back in horror. The man was his uncle, and the reason for his peculiarly helpless attitude was at once explained. He was dead—his throat had been cut, or rather hacked, for the firelight showed quite a number of slashes, almost from ear to ear. For several seconds the shock of the discovery was so great that Linton was too stupified even to think, he could only stand rooted to the ground in a kind of trance; but his faculties at last reasserting themselves, he rushed to the door to summon assistance. It was locked, and, on his hammering at the panels and demanding to be let out, the woman who had brought him thither laughed.

“You poor fool,” she jeered. “How do you like my surprise? You counted on your uncle’s money but you’ve been outwitted. It will all be mine now,

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for I made him settle it on me—every penny—when we married. I am now going to give you in charge.

"In charge, you devil," Linton shrieked. "What for?"

"That you'll very soon know," was the mocking reply. "There's no escape. This door is locked and bolted, and the windows are barred. If you take the trouble to look at your clothes you will see I've arranged everything in a manner that does me the greatest credit. While you were kissing my lips and sniffing the wonderful perfume from my hair and clothes, I was covering you with certain tell-tale marks. Laugh! I could die with laughter. I've got rid of that old husband of mine and his poor fool of a nephew with one stroke. Why, it's enough to make me the idol of the Feminist movement for ever. Now I'm going to summon the police."

Linton then heard her go to the telephone, which was close to the door, and ring up the Gerald Road Police.

"I want the Inspector, a Sergeant, or whoever is in charge," she said. "Quick, quick!" Then after a pause. "A murder has been committed at No.—Eaton Square. My husband has been killed by his nephew. I saw the murder take place, and I've locked the murderer in the room with his victim. He's there now. Yes, number—. Send round at once for Heaven's sake." The woman then went downstairs, and Linton, completely overcome, sank on to

he floor. He had 'dim recollections of ringing accompanied by loud raps, of a door opening, and the gruff voice of a man—then heavy, measured footsteps crossing the hall, and the tramp, tramp of what seemed to be a whole army of men ascending the stairs. Up they came, on to the landing, and then to the door. Linton heard the key click and the bolt shoot back, and then, as the handle turned and the door began to open, a feeling of deadly nausea overcame him and he lost consciousness.

He came to with a start, still hearing rapping, but when he opened his eyes and looked round, to his infinite astonishment, he was back in his studio, sitting in just the same position in front of the fire, as he had been when that demon of a woman paid her visit. Wondering who it could be this time, he called out very cheerily, "Come in," and then it suddenly dawned on him that the rapping was not at the door of the studio at all, but at the front door. Hearing it again and again he eventually went downstairs and found a messenger boy at the door with a note for him. Fully awake, he opened the note immediately and read as follows:—

"My Dear Nephew,—You will doubtless be wondering why you have not heard from me for so long, but the truth is I have a confession to make. I'm married! My wife is a charming young American lady who oddly enough once lived where you are now. She is most anxious to make your

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acquaintance, so will you come and dine with me to-night at eight? Don't disappoint.—Your affectionate uncle, Robert.”

*P.S.*—You will see I have changed my quarters. My old rooms were all right for a bachelor but they would hardly do for a married couple.”

Linton glanced at the address, it was No.—Eaton Square. With a grim foreboding he hurried upstairs and dressed, and in good time arrived at his uncle's house.

The moment he entered, he was struck with the strange familiarity of the scene—it was the house he had visited not an hour before in his hideous hellish dream. He remembered all the details most distinctly, and, as he crossed the hall to the drawing-room, he could hear that slow, ponderous tick, tick, tick, intermingled with which was a strange something, that strongly suggested to him that the clock was now laughing at him. His uncle, looking rather shame-faced, arose to greet him as he entered the drawing-room, and Linton glanced involuntarily at his throat, which was, however, perfectly sound and whole.

The conversation not unnaturally reverted to the marriage, and Linton, sick at heart, for he now saw his prospects demolished, was listening to a lengthy description of how his uncle had first met the divine object of his love, when the drawing-room door

opened and in swept a lady, clad in the most wonderful of evening gowns.

"Ah! here she is—this is my wife," Linton's uncle began. But Linton had no need to be told—for the woman that now faced him was the woman he had already seen in that house that evening—the woman with the china-blue eyes—the woman, if you like, of his nightmare.

"There now," Niall concluded, "that is the story. I had it from Linton himself. He is, of course, placed in a dreadful dilemma through this dream—if dream it really were. Ought he to tell his uncle about it—to warn him in fact, or not? What would you suggest, O'Donnell?"

"It is a knotty point," I replied, "and I should like to consider it."



## VI

### THE FIGURE ON THE STAIRS

*Being a Case of Haunting near Sydenham*

SOME years ago there stood a cottage midway between the Crystal Palace Park Road and Sydenham that was alleged to be haunted, and the following is one of the several versions, once current, of what took place there.

Walking late one night in the immediate vicinity of the Crystal Palace Park Road, Charles Vyse was so buried in thought that he did not realise where he was going, until he had plunged into a deep rut; he then awoke to the fact that he had wandered off the main thoroughfare and was in a kind of lane—indeed, from the intense silence and utter desolation of the place he might have been in the backwoods of North America. The night was too dark for him to see very distinctly, but, from what he could make out, the lane was skirted by low hedgerows and threaded its way through a succession of kitchen gardens or allotments and fields. In the latter he could discern, here and there, small buildings that looked like sheds or outhouses, and on either side

of him, huge leafy trees, whose gentle rustling was almost the only sound that disturbed the all-pervading stillness. Vyse was in just the right mood for a walk, close confinement at work—he was a writer—had made his limbs ache and his lungs yearn for a breath of pure air, just such air as this lane afforded, and at each step he drew in a deep breath, so as to inhale to the uttermost the delicious clover-scented ether that brought with it recollections of happy days among the braes and banks of Argyll and on the moors around his ancestral home in County Donegal. With his head thus literally in the air he had progressed a considerable distance, when the sudden booming of a church clock making him wonder what the time was, he stood still and counted. Twelve! Should he return or go on? He felt in his pocket, his latchkey was there all right; and besides, if it were not, everyone would be in bed by this time. He would go on. So on he went—and, after a few minutes' brisk walking, came to a gap in the hedgerow and a cottage, that was obviously uninhabited and apparently on the verge of collapsing. Even from a distance he could see the rafters bare of any thatch, and when he got nearer to it, he perceived that the glass in all the windows was cracked and broken, and that the trellis-work of the porch was, without exaggeration, falling in fragments.

There was, however, a picturesqueness about the place, that particularly appealed to him, and a some-

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thing that caused him to decide on a closer inspection. Advancing up the short, narrow path that separated it from the lane, he pushed open the crazy old door and stepped into a kind of passage.

The place was larger than he imagined, and to his astonishment there was a semi-basement, the ground at the back being on a much lower level than the garden in front. It was, in fact, a very oddly constructed building, unlike any other that Vyse had ever seen. There were rooms and passages galore, and yet, from the front, it had appeared quite tiny. Walking very gingerly, for the boards were loose and rotten, Vyse first of all explored the ground floor, and then, ascending a very rickety and dangerous staircase, he found himself on a miniature landing. Opening one of the doors he stumbled over something that slipped away from under him and went scampering down the stairs. For a moment he was badly scared; then assuring himself that it was only a rat, he laughed, and went on with his work of exploration. At last, having visited all the rooms in the upper part of the house, Vyse was descending the flight of steps leading to the semi-basement, kitchen, when, one of his feet caught in a hole, and he fell backwards with a crash. For several minutes he lay stunned, and, on recovering consciousness, it took him some time to realise where he was and what had happened. He tried, of course, to get up, but finding that he could not extricate his foot from the hole into which he had stepped and

that his ankle, which he feared must be badly sprained, was causing him the most excruciating pain, he gave up the attempt and sank down again feeling utterly helpless and forlorn.

He was, indeed, in an extremely undesirable predicament. No one at home knew—and no one would ever guess—where he was, and as he was just sufficiently far from the road to be out of hearing—shout as loud as he could—he could not attract the attention of anyone that might happen to pass by. Unless, perchance, some other fool should pay the house a visit, as he had done, which was most improbable, his prospects of ever getting away seemed remarkably small, and for all he could see to the contrary he would have to remain where he was indefinitely. Lying on his back and putting one arm through the bannisters he tried to ease himself, but the violent twitchings of his foot gave him little peace, whilst, to add to his discomfort, cold currents of air, continually blowing down the stairs, chilled him to the bone. At times, too, the pain was so great that he shrieked and swore, and when it subsided—and a temporary lull in his sufferings took place—he relapsed into a kind of stupor, in which he lost cognisance of his surroundings and his mind was a mere jumble. It was in this state of alternate pain and respite from pain, that he passed the entire night, every second seeming an eternity. At last the dawn broke and he saw its first pale beams steal into the darkness beneath him and illuminate the white-

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washed walls. He was making another desperate effort to free himself, and had to his infinite joy just succeeded in doing so, when he was startled at the sound of a heavy thud. The next moment two men came tiptoeing stealthily along the passage facing him and halted at the foot of the stairs. The glow from without being focussed on their faces, enabled him to see their features fairly clearly. They were dark browed, sinister-looking ruffians, and their eyes glittered cruelly as they glanced up the staircase. The manner in which they stared, not at him but at something apparently beyond, made him turn round, when he received another shock. Standing on the top of the stairs, with a look of ghastly horror in her white face, was an old woman. She was in her night-clothes, and from her general appearance—her grey hair parted down the middle and brushed smoothly and primly away from her forehead, her plain and somewhat old-fashioned night-cap, and her hands which, besides being rather red and coarse, showed other signs of hard work, Vyse took her to be one of the servant class, perhaps a housekeeper, or a very superior old nurse. She did not look at Vyse, her whole attention being concentrated on the two ruffians, one of whom, unclasping a murderous-looking knife, put his foot on the staircase with the intention of ascending. This produced a climax. The old woman's under-jaw dropped, her eyes grew glassy and her limbs stiffened, just as if the hand of death had suddenly fallen on her.



With a cry of alarm, Vyse, no longer able to control himself, staggered to his feet, and, as he did so, the figures both of the two men and the woman instantly vanished. For the first time since his arrival in the cottage he now felt really terrified, and, limping along as fast as he could, he quitted the building and made for home.

Some few months afterwards a somewhat curious sequel to this incident occurred.

Vyse, who was then living in Earl's Court, put an advertisement in one of the papers for two unfurnished rooms and received a letter from a certain Lady B——, stating that she (Lady B——) had two rooms in her house that might suit his purpose and inviting him to call.

He did so, and, to his astonishment, perceived in the aged domestic who answered the door to him the exact counterpart of the old woman he had seen on the staircase in the tumbledown cottage. Hair, features, height, all was exact, even to the red and swollen knuckles and coarse finger tips. But if his surprise was great, hers was even greater, for no sooner had her eyes alighted on him than she ejaculated "May the saints preserve us, if it isn't he—the man of my dream"; and, on being pressed for an explanation, she at last managed to tell Vyse that for many years she used to dream continually of living in the most peculiarly constructed cottage with a very dark and sinister basement. She dreamed she slept in a room in which there was a cup-

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board full of gold and fancied that every night she awoke sweating with terror to hear someone trying to break into the house. At last, in a dream more frightfully realistic than any she had hitherto experienced, she was absolutely certain that burglars had succeeded in getting into the lower premises, and, believing that her one chance of safety lay in her reaching the hall in time to bolt the door that cut off the basement from the rest of the house before the intruders began to ascend, she scrambled out of bed, pell-mell, and rushed down stairs.

On arriving at the head of the kitchen stairs, however, she found to her horror that the door had been removed. She was now too late to escape. Footsteps were already ascending the stairs, and, impelled by a fearful curiosity she could not resist, she stood on the top step and peered down. Below her were two dreadful looking ruffians with dark evil faces and horrible weapons in their hands, and, as their eyes met hers, she saw them light up with a hideous look of glee. Springing forward they were about to make a rush at her, when a young man—of whom, she declared, Vyse was the living image—suddenly appeared on the stairs and barred their way. At the sight of this totally unlooked for stranger, the burglars turned tail and fled, and she was about to thank her deliverer, when, seized with a sudden sense of giddiness, she sank against the wall in a faint. On recovering consciousness she found, of course, it was only a dream, but all the

same she was thankful to say that she had never since that night dreamed of the cottage again. When she had finished, Vyse narrated his experience, and, on comparing dates, they came to the conclusion that the dream she had dreamed last had occurred on the very night of his ghostly adventure in the cottage at Sydenham.

Naturally interested in such a remarkable coincidence, and wishing to see the cottage near the Crystal Palace Park Road, Lady B—— gladly agreed to Vyse's proposal that she and her old servant should visit the place with him. Accordingly, they arrived there on the morrow, and the old servant, upon entering, declared most emphatically that it was, without question, the cottage she had dreamed about. There was the cupboard—now, alas, with no gold in it—there the kitchen staircase—and there, at the top of it, no door—but only upon the wall on either side certain indications that from thence a door had been removed.

In a vain attempt to solve this mystery Vyse subsequently learned that many years previously a miserly old woman who lived in the cottage and was said to be enormously rich, was found standing at the top of the kitchen staircase one morning—in her night attire—stone dead, having died—so it was believed—from fright.

## VII

### NIGHTS IN HYDE PARK

ONE night, many years ago, after I had been listening to the band, I was strolling across Hyde Park accompanied by a man, a good many years older than myself, and who had been on tour with me in the provinces. Presently, as we were passing by a clump of trees, he suddenly gripped me by the arm and hurriedly dragged me along. I looked at him in astonishment. His face was ghastly white and the muscles in it worked furiously, as if he were suffering from an acute form of St Vitus's dance.

"Quick! quick!" he said, "let us get away from here as soon as possible. You will think me mad of course, but I can never pass by any one of these trees with their huge gnarled trunks and knotted murderous-looking branches without being obsessed with the idea of strangling myself, or someone else. Come, come!" and we simply flew past.

That was the last walk I ever took with him in the Park, but it set me thinking, and I soon began to view trees in an altogether different light from that in which I had hitherto regarded them. All

this, it must be understood, happened in very much pre-war days, when the regulations relating to the parks were nothing like as strict as they are now, and, consequently, all sorts and conditions of people—from well-dressed women off the streets, who would now only be seen in Leicester Square, to the lowest and poorest type of unfortunate from Soho and Lambeth, thieves, imbeciles, monomaniacs, drunkards, tramps, the flotsam and jetsam of humanity,—all resorted en masse to London's great green open, free spaces, where many of them remained, more or less in hiding all night. They were days of real "copy" then—when a few free-lance journalists like myself could fill a notebook a night with first-hand tales of grim and real—horribly real—stories of pathos and tragedy; of human suffering and depravity; and intermingled with it all, with those tales of mundane, sordid interest, were frequently strong flavourings of the supernatural. It was shortly after my walk with the actor that I determined to stay a night in the Park and see what it was really like. It being summer, and the weather warm and settled, I had no fear of taking cold, and armed with a goodly supply of food, I set out to Hyde Park one evening about nine o'clock.

I will reproduce what followed from the notes in my diary of June 1895.

Entering the Park by the Marble Arch, last night at three minutes past nine, I turned off to the left



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down the broad path skirting the main thoroughfare. It was—as usual—packed with people of the type one always sees in that particular part, viz., the lowest class of women, scores of them, who passed me by in one endless procession, leering at me, and addressing me in terms of fond endearment; shabbily dressed, seedy looking men with white, vicious faces, shifty eyes, and soft, surreptitious tread, who kept slipping off the path and stealing stealthily among the trees, as if in the act of spying on someone, or hiding; and soldiers, mainly guardsmen, magnificent upright fellows in scarlet jackets, and caps perched jauntily on one side of their head, who strutted past, brandishing their canes, and saying all kinds of bold, impudent things to the girls. I threaded my way through all this herd, which did not interest me; as it was all so painfully sordid and ordinary, till I at length came to a seat, on which something, that might once have been a man but which was now merely the grimmest caricature of humanity, was sitting, all huddled up, anyhow.

“Here,” said I to myself, “is a chance to probe into the very lowest depths of human failure and human misery. It is an opportunity I must not miss.”

For one hour we sat together on that seat, and the thing at the far end of it never as much as moved a fraction of an inch.

At the end of that time it gave the toe of one foot a gentle kick with the heel of the other, and made a spasmodic hitch up of one of its buttonless

trousers legs; apart from which, however, it gave no signs whatever of life. Feeling a bit cramped I got up and walked to the island, where hundreds of people were crowding round several stump orators, who were gassing away as usual on Atheism, Religion, Socialism, and the badness of mankind in general. I stayed just long enough to see a pick-pocket "hauled off" for being a bit over zealous in the throng around the religionist, and then, retracing my steps to the Marble Arch, I had a cup of hot coffee and a bun at the refreshment stall in the Bayswater Road. Entering the Park again I did a few turns up and down the big road leading from the Marble Arch to Hyde Park Corner, and, at about eleven, I returned to my seat and found the bundle of something just as I had left it.

The shadows of night were now lying thick on the ground and the Park was gradually emptying. The figures that kept stalking past me in the darkness, grew fewer and fewer; some left by one gate and some another, until gradually they all seemed to have vanished, saving a bare handful who loitered on in the desperate hope of still finding some benighted prey. The traffic through the Park was beginning to diminish, too. There was a big rush at what I calculated must be about half-past eleven or theatre closing time, when I could hear an incessant jingling of bells and trample of hoofs from the direction of the Arch and Bayswater Road, after which there was a gradual lull. At about midnight I

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sighted a policeman's lamp coming towards us from the direction of Lancaster Gate. The bundle of rags evidently saw it, too, for there was a sudden stir at the further end of the seat, and the figure of a man all bent and humped like a camel or vulture and so thin that he might easily have passed muster for a skeleton, rose quickly up, and, darting with surprising celerity across the pathway, stepped over a low iron railing on to the grass and made direct for a big tree. Determined not to lose sight of him I followed, and now ensued the most peculiar game I ever indulged in. Waiting till the policeman had passed, my friend in the rags made for another tree, and, then, another, and so on, I following, until he finally arrived at a thick clump of leviathan elms or oaks—I cannot say which, but perhaps both—in the centre of a little hollow. Here I lost sight of him in the intense darkness, and, in trying to find him, I stumbled over innumerable prostrate forms, some of which greeted me with oaths, and some the most harrowing of groanings and moanings. I never saw my particular quarry in the rags again, but I succeeded in getting into conversation with someone who, judging by his voice, for it was far too dark to see his face, was tolerably young and most decidedly educated.

I offered him a sandwich which he accepted so suspiciously that I asked him if he thought it was poisoned.

"It might be," he said. "Only a week or two

ago a woman joined us all here and began offering us chocolates. I didn't take any, but one of my pals did, and was desperately sick afterwards. We all thought he was going to die and from what came up, there is little doubt the chocolate contained arsenic or some other kind of poison. So you see there is reason for me to be cautious. Besides, who are you that can afford to give away?"

"An out-of-elbow journalist," I replied. "One of those rarities who really has to depend on his pen for his bread and butter."

"So you've come here on the chance of making something out of us," he retorted. "I've no doubt if those around us had the power or inclination to speak they could tell something that might interest your readers, though I question if the papers would print it. It might be too lurid. Besides, who wants to hear of the failures in life, it's only the successful, most folk—the readers of the *Morning Post* and *Telegraph* for example—care to read about, the doings of the braceless brigade, such as you see here, wouldn't appeal to them. There's no glamour over us."

"You speak like an educated man," I said. "Tell me, how is it you came to this."

"If I were to tell you, you wouldn't believe it," he replied. "Not one in a million would, so what's the use."

On my pressing him, however, he at length relented and this is what he said.

"It's the trees—the damned trees that did it.



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Listen! Twenty years ago I was at 'E.' I left there with a scholarship for Oxford, took first-class honours in English, and eventually obtained a mastership at £400 a year at a school in Blackheath. For some time all went well. I can't say I liked the work, for I doubt if there is a schoolmaster living who can honestly say he is fond of teaching, but I stuck it and became looked upon as quite a fixture. Then I met a girl—the daughter of a naval officer—fell in love with her, proposed, and was accepted. Well, one evening, on my way home from her house, I turned into Greenwich Park. It was after ten; the band had stopped and the people were leaving. The air was so deliciously soft and fragrant, however, that I felt I could not go in yet, so I rambled on and on, until I finally came to a seat under a big tree, whence I could command a wide and general view of the river, that looked like some great silvery snake in the white rays of the brilliant moon. That night had a glamour about it, such as I had never experienced before, and I have never experienced since. The river, the trees, the grass, the stars, all seemed unreal—they might have been in the transformation scene of a pantomime, or in a dream; there was nothing material in their beauty, it all savoured of fairyland, of the exquisite side of the Unknown, and, as I gazed first up into the sky and then at the panorama stretching far away on either side of me, my whole soul seemed to rise up and bend in adoration before it. So entranced was I that I



forgot all about the time, nor did a thought of it once cross my mind, till I suddenly seemed to hear a distant chime. I then glanced at my watch and perceived that it was one o'clock. 'What matter,' I laughed, 'so long as I am in to breakfast. If I am asked, I can easily say I missed my train. The night is so warm that I can sleep as comfortably out here as in any bed, and dream of fairies.' I had a rain-coat with me, so lying full length upon the bench, I covered myself with it, and soon fell asleep. But it was not of fairies I dreamed, it was of trees. I fancied I heard soft breathing, peculiarly feminine, but which I nevertheless felt did not belong to anything in the least degree human, but to something of an entirely novel and fantastically beautiful nature, coming from just behind me. Presently, I became aware of this strange thing bending over me and fanning my cheeks with its breath. Can I ever forget that breath? It was scented sweeter than anything I've ever smelt; sweeter—ten thousand times sweeter—than the most subtle and delicate perfume one ever inhaled from any woman, or experienced in any scent shop or flower garden. I tried to breathe it in, not only with my mouth and nostrils, but through every pore in my skin. It intoxicated, maddened me. But the climax of my joys had not yet come; soft, deliciously soft arms twined themselves round me and lifted me up, up, up, up, until I felt miles away from the the earth and right among the stars; and then, as I lay quite still and

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calm, drinking in, and drinking in that wonderful, that indescribably wonderful scent, I was kissed. Kissed I tell you. You, no doubt, fancy you've been kissed, too. You will tell me, perhaps, there is nothing in the way of kisses you don't know. That you've tasted cherry lips, and sweet lips, and lips redder than roses, and a dozen and one other kinds of lips—at least that is what most youths I've talked to on the subject have tried to make me believe—but I tell you, fairly and squarely, neither you nor anyone else, who hasn't gone through what I've gone through, knows what kisses really are. No woman—not even the most beautiful and passionate woman in the world—can kiss in the least degree like I was kissed that night. It was a kiss such as one imagines kisses might have been in ancient days, when women were really beautiful and very possibly studied kissing and all such ways of winning men's hearts and bodies, as their prototypes of to-day study dancing and Paris fashions. But if they did so then—then in the days of the Babylonian and Egyptian beauties—the art has long since been lost, and present day kissers are the merest tyros. To attempt to describe my feelings when that exquisite mouth touched mine, so softly and gently that although I knew it was there, I could as yet experience nothing more tangible nor material than the most delicate and hardly perceptible of pressures, would be impossible. And then very, very slowly those satin, perfumed lips sank deeper and deeper into mine, till

happiness completely overcame me, and, weary with too much joy, my mind became a blank and was conscious of nothing but a far-away sense of rocking, externally soothing, sleep-inspiring rocking. I awoke; and—as the vale beneath me was alive and the sound of hooters in the distance proclaimed that the great city would be very shortly in the full swing of another day's work—and slavery—I arose. Had been indulging in the wildest dissipations for a week I could not have felt a more complete wreck. Instead of being refreshed for my night in the open I staggered off home thoroughly weak and exhausted. I got through the day's work somehow and at ten o'clock I went to bed. Yet sleep I could not. Visions of the Park with that moonlit vista of the silvery, continuous river, the silent, shadow-strewn grass, the empty seats, and above all that tree, that single isolated graceful silver birch, kept rising before me to give me no peace. Again I smelt that subtly scented breath fan my nostrils, those cool mother-pearl-like arms wind themselves round me, and those indescribably exquisite lips fasten themselves softly, oh, so softly on mine. Bed, how could I bear even the thought of being incarcerated between hot and stifling sheets, when I might be lying out there in the open and experiencing once again that acme of happiness. Bed! I had never thought of it before, but now I rebelled against the idea. It was preposterous, absurd, slavish. Beds were made for the old and infirm, but for the young and vigorous such

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as I, no better couch was needed than the bosom of old mother earth, or—or the shelter of a tree. For some minutes I wrestled vigorously with my desire to get up and go out; but the impulse became so terrible at last, that I yielded to it, and, stealing stealthily out of my room, I crept downstairs and out into the moonlit road. Twenty minutes later I was again on that seat, stretched out at full length, hungrily anticipating the coming joys, and—I was not disappointed.

“After that I entirely succumbed, and never slept a night indoors, saving when the weather was very wet or cold. For weeks I avoided detection, but a time came at last, when the headmaster, noticing my changed appearance and behaviour—for I had grown white and thin, morose, irritable, and negligent in my teaching—had me secretly watched. Fool too, that I was! Thinking myself secure, because I had hitherto escaped being found out, I grew careless, and, descending from my room one night, no longer on tiptoe, I was heard—and followed.

“What is more awful than being caught. Had I been the most infamous criminal in the world I could not have exhibited more terror or appeared more conscious-stricken and “panicked” than I did when, just as I had stretched myself out on that seat to indulge to my heart’s content in the orgies of my true love, a hand descended on my shoulder, and the stern, uncompromising voice of my employer bid me at once arise. The man had no imagination.



Explanations were useless. I had been doing something that was grossly irregular, utterly unbecoming to the character of one who had charge of children. I must resign my post at once.

"I did so, and that was the beginning of my downward career. Unable to get another post as a pedagogue, I got work on the railway, and eventually found myself booking clerk in a small country town in Sussex. Nothing could have been more unfortunate. Sussex abounds in silver birches, and it was not long before I felt the same old irresistible impulse come over me to spend a night beneath one.

"Being in rooms with no one to supervise my movements out of work hours there was now no obstacle in my path. I could drink of the bitter sweets of this most decadent form of love-making to my heart's content. It is not, of course, every silver birch tree that contains that alluring and sweetly scented feminine something, and it was some days before I succeeded in finding one. I then spent every night that was even tolerably fine beneath it. Nobody saw me, and, if they had, they could not have said anything.

"To those who are not initiated into the occult secrets of trees—and not one in ten thousand people are—sleeping out-of-doors is merely deemed uncomfortable and 'rather risky.' Now that expression 'rather risky' troubles me. Why nothing—absolutely nothing—could be more risky. It is not only a question of danger to health, the extreme prob-

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ability of incurring rheumatism, pleurisy and what is not generally suspected but which those who sleep out here in parks know very well is true—cancer; but it is a question of danger to morality, mentality, and the soul—and no danger is more certain.

“When I came home to breakfast in the mornings I was invariably a wreck—that tree had sapped every atom of vitality out of me. I went to work feeling utterly done up, and, as a result, often gave the wrong change and got all out with the accounts.

“They hauled me over the coals once or twice and then packed me off. I now found it impossible to get regular work of any kind. No one would employ me without a character. Consequently, I became a casual labourer, doing odd jobs now and again in Covent Garden, Billingsgate and the Docks, and gradually sinking lower and lower in the scales of morality.

“At last I practically gave up work altogether and took to the roads, tramping about the provinces all the autumn, spring and winter, and only visiting London during the ‘season’”—here he gave a laugh which was intended for sarcasm.

“You wonder why I’m not dead,” he went on, “well, I wonder, too, considering all I’ve gone through; but I had a very strong constitution to start with and take a lot of killing. There, that’s all I can tell you. Give me a bit of ‘baccy if you can spare it, for I haven’t had a smoke for ages, and I’ll try and get a sleep somewhere.”

Not being a smoker I gave him threepence instead—all I could spare—and, having learned enough for the time being, I wended my way home.

Another night that same year I again went into the Park. It was hot and stifling, and the stale odours that permeated the atmosphere of the Marble Arch end of the Park overpowering me, I wandered towards Lancater Gate, and once again made for a clump of trees. I hadn't been there long before I heard groans—awful heartrending groans—as of someone in the most shocking agony. I searched everywhere but could see no one. Still the groaning went on, until I at last became so unnerved by it that I made for another clump of trees. Here I found several dark forms crouching in various attitudes on the ground.

"Someone is very ill over there in those trees," I remarked, "they are groaning and moaning like anything."

"Why, you—— fool," two or three voices croaked out in answer, "that's where old Sammy died. You must be a newcomer, if you've never heard him there before."

I meekly replied that I was, whereupon one of the recumbent figures with many profane utterances, began to outline "Sammy's" history for my enlightenment.

Sammy, I was told, was one of the true fraternity; he had been on the roads for longer than any of

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them, and knew every barn and chicken roost in England; but like thousands of others he at length got too old to do any more walking, and, hating the idea of dying in the union infirmary, resolved to spend his final moments in the Park and die as he had lived—a free man. Unfortunately for himself and everyone else, however, he suffered from internal cancer, and his pain was so great at times that he would lie awake all night groaning and shrieking, and occasionally vomiting with such force that those who heard him fancied he must be throwing up the whole of his inside.

In the end he died—died choking—but the sounds he used to make still went on nightly, and that is why, my informant added, none but the veriest of green-horns ever tried to sleep yonder in that clump of trees.

I learned much from those men—I learned how they cursed and swore, told profane stories and damned everyone. Yet they were not originally what are termed “common” folk. One, whom they called “the toff,” for the simple reason that he boasted half the proper complement of buttons to his trousers and regularly every morning dipped his face and hands in one of the fountains, was an unfrocked parson; another, who went by the name of “Pimples,” on account of an exceedingly spotted complexion, had once been a solicitor; a third, styled “Dan Leno,” had played repeatedly in West End melodrama; and a fourth, facetiously dubbed “Mary



Langtry" on account of his extraordinary ugliness, was reputed to have once kept a high-class hair-dresser's establishment in Bond Street. Failings in common, however, led them all on to the roads, and there was now nothing to distinguish them from the more ordinary of the all-night frequenters of the Park, but their retention of the "H," and an occasional craving for the old accustomed hot bath.

It was some months after my first meeting with them that I again wandered into the park about the same hour and found "Dan Leno," "Pimples," and "Mary Langtry" standing out in the open, some few yards from the clump of trees that formed their usual rendezvous.

"Hulloa," I said, "what's the matter, and where's 'the toff'?"

"That's what we want to know," "Dan Leno" said solemnly. "Two nights ago, when we were all seated together as usual and enjoying a bit of a smoke, the first any of us had had for more than a week, 'the toff' suddenly remarked: 'I've had enough of it. I'm going.' 'Going where?' we all exclaimed in astonishment. 'That's none of your business,' said he, 'I'm sick of you—of the Park—of everything, and I'm going somewhere else.' He got up and, without saying another word, went away, and the next morning—that's Saturday—blamed if he wasn't found drowned in the Serpentine. Well, just now when we went over yonder to our usual spot, who should we see, staring at us from under

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a tree, but 'the toff.' The moonlight was full on his face, and the whiteness of it scared us all three, badly. Indeed," and here his teeth chattered, "neither of us dare venture there again."

"Are you sure it was he?" I said.

"Sure," "Dan Leno" replied. "With so much light on his face, there was no mistaking it. We could see all his features most distinctly, and his eyes were very wide open and shone like glass."

I tried to persuade them to go back to the trees with me, but they refused, and as I did not care to venture there alone, for the spot looked extraordinarily weird in the moonlight, I accompanied them to another place.

I did not stay with them long that night for they were very silent and unlike themselves, and, after trudging about the Park aimlessly for some time, I eventually made tracks for home.

Just one more incident in connection with this Park before I pass on to St James's. One evening in 1903 I strolled into Hyde Park through Lancaster Gate with the idea of renewing my acquaintance with the three tramps. I hadn't seen "Pimples," "Dan Leno" or "Mary Langtry" for some considerable time, and I was wondering what had happened to them. The night was unusually hot and there were any number of "bottom dogs" of both sexes, though chiefly men, lying under the trees, in hollows, anywhere where they thought they would

be safe from the police. In those days the Park was full of suffering—and God alone knows how many of these poor wretches were not undergoing the tortures of the damned from starvation, cancer, consumption, and a dozen and one other complaints, for which no one gave them any succour—or even pity.

Such scenes were a disgrace to any country and gave the lie direct to England's boast at that time, that she was a Christian and a highly civilised country. As I crossed the turf, groans assailed my ears on all sides, and I was on the verge of turning back and making direct for the street, when a man came up to me and said:

"My wife is ill. I believe she is dying. She is unused to this sort of life—sleeping out-of-doors—and has fearful pains in her inside. If only I had some brandy."

I had a few shillings on me and gave him half-a-crown to go and fetch some. He thanked me, and, before departing on his errand, took me to his wife, who was lying under a bush moaning and groaning, whilst an old tramp, whom I knew by the name of "hook nose," stood close by trying to comfort her.

"It's probably nothing more serious than colic or rheumatics," he was saying. "So long as it ain't cancer you needn't mind. Half the people who die out here die of cancer, and the pain is awful."

I did my best to counteract the effect of these remarks, and in return, between paroxysms of pain, she told me something of her history.

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"My husband," she said in a rather pretty and unaffected voice, "was a master in a country grammar school where we might be now were it not for Bal-four's Educational Act; but as soon as that came into force, like hundreds of others, he lost his job, because he wasn't what they call qualified, although he could teach just as well as (and probably much better than) many of the men who have University degrees.

"He had, moreover, an exceptionally good character, but then character in this country doesn't count; it is so-called knowledge, the kind of knowledge you can't get without money that does count; and, as my husband had no money to spend upon taking a degree, we gradually—thanks to that Act, I say again—came down to this.

"My husband, of course, had had no experience in any work except teaching, and no one would employ a middle-aged novice in a shop or office. And now we're once down, there's no getting up. Everyone hates and despises outcasts. You should see the way we're looked at and avoided in the streets; and when little chits of office girls and servant maids openly and derisively draw away their skirts and hold their noses as they pass us by, it is almost more than human nature can stand.

"I once believed in a God—the God of the Bible—but I don't now. It's a devil, I believe, that rules the Universe, not a Jehovah or God of mercy; and cabinet ministers—especially those who are in office



at the present moment, the Board of Education, University dons, scientists, parsons and lawyers are the devil's policemen; they simply enforce his diabolical laws and bully the masses into silence.

"My husband and I saw what they call a dress parade in this Park on Sunday. We had been lying on the damp grass all night and should have gone without anything to eat or drink, had not a lady off the streets—God bless her, God bless them all—for they are about the only people who have hearts—given us a shilling to get some breakfast with. We got it, and it was the first proper meal we had had for a week. Well, we came back to the Park and watched the parade from behind some trees. We saw all the grand ladies decked out in the latest Paris fashions, their wrists glittering with bracelets, and their patent leather shoes sparkling with buckles. Why, the cost of even one of those costumes would have kept us going for a couple of years or more, and would have saved dozens of lives.

"Earls and countesses, lords and ladies, the aristocracy of the beer barrel and the aristocracy of baking powders, hook-nosed Jews, and gaudily attired Jewesses, those who wanted to look grand and spent every penny they could spare, after supplying themselves with the necessities of life, on their backs—all were there; all passed in front of us. Imagine their look of horror, had we quitted our hiding-place and accosted them! And yet, what would they themselves have looked like had the Parade been a show

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of character instead of a show of fashion—or had the beauty of their clothes depended entirely upon the beauty of their character. I mean, of course, the character Christ exemplified, and not the character which is usually associated with success and respectability.”

She would, perhaps, have said more, had not “hook nose” at that moment exclaimed joyfully: “Here he is,” and with a smack of his lips: “He’s brought the brandy.”

We looked round, and saw, coming towards us in the moonlight, a tall, emaciated figure, hugging close to his breast a bottle.

“Come on,” shouted “hook nose,” who now began to manifest extraordinary interest in the proceedings. “Come on! ’Urry up; your missus ’as been wanting that brandy something dreadful.”

The husband did not reply, but he started running; and then suddenly staggered and fell, and, as he rolled over on the broad expanse of practically level, moon-kissed turf, we all three saw him vanish, as if the earth had purposely opened and swallowed him up. For some seconds we were too astonished to move or speak. Then, accompanied by “hook nose,” I approached the spot where he had fallen and looked around. He was nowhere in sight, and there was no possible place wherein he could be lying.

The woman was in terrible distress. She declared emphatically that the hurry and excitement of trying to get back to her with the brandy had killed him,

as he had long suffered from a weak heart, and that we had of course seen his ghost. She begged me to go and search for him and I went, but the park is a very big place, especially at night, and, although I made inquiries of everyone I met, I could find no traces of him. Finally, I gave up looking, and, suddenly remembering the accident to the brandy, made desperate efforts to get some more, and at last succeeded. I then hastened back to the woman and gave it to her, together with the rest of my money. I never saw her after that night, but I met "hook nose" several days later, and, being in a communicative mood, he discussed the matter with me.

The woman, apparently, after waiting in vain for tidings of her husband, had either drowned herself or gone into the union, "hook nose" could not say which; but what seemed to trouble the latter far more than the fate of either husband or wife was the fate of the brandy that had disappeared.

## VIII

### HAUNTINGS IN OTHER PARKS AND COMMONS

THOUGH the Green Park, or, more correctly speaking, St James's Park, cannot be said to have quite such bitter and tragic associations as Hyde Park, it nevertheless has its ghosts. To picture it in the days when almost every one of its trees at night gave shelter to some poor, starving and often dying outcast, one has to go back at least some fifteen or twenty years. It was then, after dusk, a very pitiable place indeed, and one which witnessed all kinds of grim and harrowing happenings.

Late one night in September, either of the year 1900 or 1901, I was, I remember, crossing the Green Park from the direction of Hyde Park Corner, when I heard, in the distance, the very faint sound of a violin. Wondering who on earth could be playing out there at such an unearthly hour, I struck off in the direction whence I thought the sounds proceeded, and eventually decided that they came from a cluster of trees surmounting a kind of knoll.

I was aiming for the spot, when I met a policeman.



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"It's a curious time for street music," I remarked, "who's the musician?"

"No one," was the reply. "If you were to search high and low and all night you'd find no one—it's a ghost. You may laugh, but s'welp me if it isn't a fact. Some years ago, before I came to this beat, an old fiddler—so it is said—came in here one night and went to sleep under those trees. I suppose there were just as queer customers to be found in the Park then as there are now, for on awaking and looking for his beloved violin, the old fellow found it was gone—stolen. He was dreadfully upset of course—which isn't to be wondered at, seeing it was his one means of making a livelihood, and came running up to the policeman on duty here to tell him; but the thief was far enough off by that time, and was never caught. For three or four days the old man, without touching a morsel of food, hung around here, stopping everyone he saw and asking them if they had seen anyone with a fiddle. At last, worn to a shadow, he went and hanged himself with his braces on one of those trees.

"The night after his death, so I was told, the policeman he had spoken to heard music coming from the knoll, went to see who it was, and there, sitting under the very tree on which his body had been found hanging, was the fiddler, fiddling away as if his very life depended on it.

"It sounds a tall story, and this, I admit, is the only occasion I know of upon which the ghost has been

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seen; but he's been heard often enough, especially at this time of year and when the wind is blowing from the south-west."

My informant must have been transferred very shortly after the above incident to another beat for I have never seen him again nor heard the fiddling although I have wandered past those trees at night, times without number.

One evening in the depths of winter, when during a thaw and after a heavy downfall of rain, the ground was deep in slush and mud, I was accosted as I was crossing the Green Park, by an elderly man with a soft hat, jammed down over his eyes, and a thick beard, who stepped out from under a tree and asked me the time. I told him, and, as he thanked me, he heaved a deep sigh, and once again sought cover of the trees.

The same thing happening the following evening, in the same place and about the same hour, I mentioned the incident to one of the keepsrs and asked him if he knew anything about the man.

"I should think I do know something about the man," he said. "He always comes in here, on the same three successive nights every year, and waits for his wife."

"His wife?" I ejaculated.

"Yes," the keeper replied, "his wife, or rather what he believes to be his wife. He is a public house keeper somewhere down Peckham way and about ten years ago his wife, to whom he was very much

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attached, ran off with another man. He took it to heart very much, and some say it affected him to such an extent that for a time, at least, he went off his head; any way his business all went to pot, and he was reduced in the end to street hawking. Then his wife turned up. It seems the other fellow had got tired of her and thrown her over; but, when she saw the state of poverty her husband was living in, she left him again, and, apparently, went on the streets. Then his luck suddenly changed. He was left enough money to recommence business, and, after he had opened a public house in Hammersmith, he immediately set to work to find his wife. At last he succeeded in discovering her address and, in reply to a letter from him imploring her to return, she wrote asking him to meet her one evening here, in this Park, where they could talk matters over. When he came he found her sitting under a tree dead—poisoned—but whether she had taken her own life or had been murdered there was no evidence to show, and so an open verdict was returned.

“The husband, however, could not tear himself away from the tree against which she had leaned. He paced to and fro and around it all night, and the following morning he declared he had seen the spirit of his dead wife and had walked up and down with her for more than an hour. He came again that night and the next; and every year since then, on the anniversary of her death and the two following nights he has come into the Park and tramped up

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and down the path where you met him for about an hour.

"I have sometimes stood quite close to him and he has passed me by as if he had never seen me, talking aloud to his invisible partner, and with his arm extended as if he were holding her round the waist.

"You might say, of course, that he is mad and that he imagines it all; and so I thought till last night, when I examined the snow after he had gone. I then found footprints alongside his, and altered my opinion. They were the footprints of a woman who was wearing boots with very high heels—in fact they were, without doubt the footprints of his wife."

. . . . .  
It was shortly after this adventure that I discovered a seat in the Park that was well known to be haunted, and I made the discovery in this way.

I was sitting alone on the seat late one Sunday evening deliberating whether I should remain in the Park all night or not, when I distinctly felt someone sit down heavily beside me. I looked round but, although I could see no one, I very soon received the impression that someone or something was staring intently at me; indeed it seemed as if something very bizarre was leaning forward and peering right into my eyes.

I stood the sensation for some seconds but, at



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last, unable to endure it any longer, I yielded to a sudden panic and fled. That seat I discovered subsequently was invariably avoided by habitual frequenters of the Park, and a tramp, who had seen the ghost, told me it was that of an old man with very large mad-looking eyes, and that he was trying to cut his throat with a broken razor.

It must have been, I think, on account of its evil reputation that the seat one day disappeared; anyhow it went and I now pass the spot where it stood without even the slightest inclination to quicken my pace.

I received one of my worst scares, however, under a tree in this same Park. A fox terrier, that I was keeping for a friend, while he was away, accompanied me, and, as we were about to pass this particular tree, he suddenly gave a howl of terror and bolted. Wondering what on earth was the matter with him, I ran after him and found him lying on the grass shivering, nor would any amount of coaxing make him get up and go on with me. Finally, giving him up as hopeless, and desirous of getting at the bottom of the mystery, I went up to the tree, and, just as I got within a few feet of the trunk, something big seemed to drop on to the ground, close beside me, with a soft thud.

I have had many experiences with the extremely unpleasant side of the Unknown, but I do not think anything has ever affected me in quite the same way as this thing. I instinctively felt it was nothing in

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the least degree human, but that it resembled, rather, some very extraordinary and grotesque animal or insect, something that was frightfully repellant and malignant. I could feel it was trying to fascinate me, trying to reduce me to a state of utter helplessness, and it was only by dint of an almost superhuman effort that I managed to overcome its influence and tear myself away from the spot.

I narrated my experience to one of my tramp friends next day and pointed out the tree to him.

"So that's it!" he remarked, looking at the tree critically. "Thought as much. My mates and I call it the pig tree. Listen! Two years ago a fellow called Palin and I slept under it. We lay down at about eleven—you wonder at my being able to tell the hour, but it's surprising how you get to gauge the time after you've done a few years tramping on the road, it seems to come to you by instinct—and at about two something woke us with a kind of shock. I sat up and looked around. Nothing to be seen. Then I peered up at the branches overhead, and what I saw nearly made me jump out of my skin.

"Staring down at me were two eyes—pale eyes that seemed to have no actual colour, but to be wholly animated with spite and hate. The face they belonged to was a curious cross between that of a pig and that of a wolf. The mouth and snout were wolfish, the ears and general contour—piggish. It was quite hairless, and of a startling lurid white. As

I looked up at it, too terrified to utter a sound, or move, it shot out an enormously long red tongue, curled at the end like the tongue of an ant-eater. And with its evil glittering eyes still fixed on mine, it suddenly began to descend. I then saw its body, which was quite nude, and like that of a very unshapely and repulsive woman. Catching hold of a branch with two huge hands it dropped to the ground with a soft thud—just such a noise as you described, and then stole towards me.

“I tell you, boss, it’s a long time since I prayed, but I made use of some kind of prayer then, and jerking myself away from the spot with an effort—just like you did—I made a bolt for it.

“An hour or so later I summed up the courage to steal back and see how Palin was getting on. He was there right enough—lying on the ground, just as I had left him, apparently still asleep. At first, I did not dare venture under the branches of the tree for fear of seeing that cursed thing again, but I halted a few feet away and called out to him. No reply. I called again. Still no reply. Then, growing anxious I went, in spite of my terror of the tree, right up to my mate and shook him by the shoulder. There was no response; his head simply fell limply on one side—he was dead!”

“Dead!” I ejaculated.

“Yes, dead,” the tramp mimicked. “Dead—D-E-A-D. And there was no manner of doubt of what he had died. It was fright—and it was written

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only too clearly in his face. He always had had something wrong with his heart, and the shock of seeing that hellish thing bending over him had, of course, killed him. That was the last straw as far as I was concerned, and for the second time that night I bolted.

“Lord bless you, his was not an exceptional case. I’ve known dozens die of fright in one or other in the Parks at night, and it’s always a supernatural horror of some kind or another that does the trick. But that tree over there has a peculiar attraction for women; I’ve frequently seen them sitting under it and kind of worshipping it with their eyes. No, it never seems to harm them in the same way as it harms men, and I have my opinions on the subject. I believe that the thing I saw drop down—the thing that undoubtedly killed Palin—is a man hater. I believe it inspires all women who come in contact with it with a violent hatred of men; and I’ll tell you why. An old woman—“Molly” as we called her—was all right with me and my mates till she took to sleeping under that tree. Then all of a sudden she turned crusty with us, said she hated men, and finally tried to throttle Micky Smith, when he was taken ill with the cramp, and couldn’t defend himself. It was the same with Mrs Letts. She and her old man used to sleep under the bushes with the rest of us. And no one ever heard them have words, at least to any extent, till one night they slept out here alone, under that tree. The very next morn-



ing they had a fearful quarrel and she left him—left him for good.

I've watched the faces of women, too, while they have been sitting under these branches in the daytime, and I've invariably noticed them change. Their lips have tightened, while a cruel glitter has crept into their eyes whenever they have looked at a passing man or boy. You mark my words, boss, that pig-faced something that haunts that tree is no friend to you or me, or to any of our sex."

But it is not only trees or seats in the Parks that are haunted: occasionally other objects, also, have their ghosts.

On Clapham Common, for example, some twenty or more years ago, there was a big stone lying in a hollow, that was known by the name of the Whistling Stone. I have never heard it whistle myself but I've met several people who say they have, and amongst them an old vagrant whose experience I will now narrate.

One foggy night, he told me, as he was wandering across the Common, looking for some likely spot to sleep in, he suddenly heard someone whistling a very plaintive air.

Thinking the whistler must be an outcast like himself, for it was extremely improbable that anyone else would be out there at such an hour and in such a fog, he promptly turned his steps in the direction of the sounds; but where they seemed loudest he could see no one—nothing but a big white stone—and

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as he leaned forward to listen he was positive the whistling came from it. I also concluded from what he said that he was so enamoured of the tune that from that time forth whenever he crossed the Common he always visited the stone on the chance of hearing the whistling again.

Another tramp—an old woman, locally known as blue-necked Sally, from some bluish-coloured scar on one side of her neck—told me that when she was sleeping on the Common one night she was awakened by the most beautiful whistling imaginable. She said it was soft and sweet, and yet, so sad and melancholy, that it made her cry; and I gathered from her somewhat garrulous description of the incident that, on applying her ear to a stone, near to which she was lying, and from which the music seemed to emanate, she was convinced that the mysterious sounds did in very truth issue from it. She said the whistling went on for some minutes and then suddenly terminated; and that on the following night at about—as far as she could guess—the same hour, she again heard it.

I naturally sought some explanation of this not unpleasant phenomenon, but, although I made endless inquiries, I never heard of anything that I could definitely connect with it.

Some said an aged pedlar had been murdered there; others, that an old crossing sweeper, who used to sell whistles, made from the branches of the trees on the Common, had been found there, frozen to death; but

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I doubt if any reliance can be placed on such statements; and when I last went to search for the stone, in the autumn of 1900, it had been moved.

An equally novel though much less attractive form of haunting occurs periodically, on Wimbledon Common. I was talking, one night, to the proprietor of a portable coffee stall, in the Mile End Road, when, in reply to a question as to whether he had ever seen a ghost, he said: "Well, not exactly what you would call a ghost, but something which certainly savours of the supernatural."

He then related the following:—

"I was strolling across the Common one evening with my young lady when she suddenly said to me: 'Let's go over yonder and play ducks and drakes; I love that piece of water, it reminds me so of good old Ramsgate.'

"She pointed, as she spoke, to a pond sparkling in places with the setting rays of the sun, and as we walked towards it we both became conscious of a gradually increasing sense of sadness, and left off talking. A few minutes before and we should have scoffed at the idea of feeling lonely, but now the whole landscape seemed changed, and in everything around us we could detect the same spirit—a spirit of intense dreariness and isolation. The sense of solitude, in fact, was so supreme, that we might have been miles away from anywhere; on an American prairie or a South African desert.

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"The temperature, too, that had so far been cool—so cool indeed that I had insisted upon my fiancée putting on her sports coat instead of carrying it—now became all at once so hot and stifling, that it might have been midday instead of evening; and this sudden heat was accompanied by a loud buzzing.

"It was then that I broke the silence that had fallen upon us. 'Hulloa!' I said. 'What's this! Flies! Odd time of day for flies to be buzzing about.'

"'They're bluebottles!' my girl cried in tones of the greatest disgust. 'The air is alive with them. One flew right into my face. Oh, come along. Let's get away from here as quickly as possible. I hate flies; the filthy things.'

"She hit out furiously with her parasol, as she spoke, and I did the same with my stick. I never saw such swarms—flies of every description.

"'Why,' I ejaculated, 'anyone would think we were near a slaughter house.'

"My girl, however, made no response—she was too much engrossed in driving the beastly things away from her face. At last we turned back and gave up all idea of 'Ducks and Drakes.'

"Two or three nights later, when we cautiously approached the spot again, although the weather was much warmer, there was not the slightest sign of a bluebottle. However, neither of us thought of the matter again until one evening, just a year later, I reminded my girl of the incident, when we were



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again strolling across the Common in the region of the pond.

“‘Let’s see if they’re there again,’ she said. ‘It was so strange—that tremendous heat and seeing such swarms of flies, just that once. Come on.’

“Well, we went towards the pond and no sooner had we arrived within a certain distance of it, than we again felt all the same sensations—intense loneliness, terrific heat, and, on the top of that, swarms of flies—principally bluebottles.

“The next night, as before, everything was normal, and there was not even one bluebottle to be seen. I made a note of the date, and the next year, on the anniversary of the incident, I again walked in the direction of the pond.

“It was the same thing over again—loneliness, heat and flies; on the following and subsequent nights—nothing. I then became convinced the key to the mystery lay in the supernatural. Anxious to ascertain whether anyone else had had a similar experience there, I made endless inquiries, and, eventually alighted on a party of gypsies who told me that they too had seen the flies, and that they were convinced that the place was haunted. Fifty or sixty years ago, they said, one baking hot day in August, some of their people found the dead body of an old man, close to the pond, under circumstances that strongly suggested foul play; and they believed that ever since, on every anniversary, a terrific heat and flies—swarms of flies, buzzing and hovering

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around, just as they undoubtedly did when the gruesome discovery was made—haunted the spot where the body had lain.”

One more case of haunting in connection with London's large open spaces before I pass on.

There is a glade on Hampstead Heath, where, according to certain people, who vouch for the accuracy of what they affirm, prognostications of future events may, on certain nights in the year, be experienced. The following is but one of the many instances of these hauntings that have been narrated to me.

Two ladies—sisters—were sitting on a bench in the glade one evening, when the elder, observing it was growing chilly, got up to go. She, then, very much alarmed the younger one by suddenly sitting down again, and crying out, as if in great pain:—

“Oh, that fool of a doctor, that silly fool, drat him! He's given me the wrong medicine and I'm poisoned.”

“Anna!” shrieked the younger sister. “Whatever's the matter? What medicine, and what doctor do you mean?”

“Why, Dr Smith, of course, you fool!” was the elder girl's reply, though in a voice strangely unlike her own. “Dr Smith. He's given me poison.” And putting both hands over her stomach, she rocked and writhed as if in the greatest agony.

The younger sister then sprang up and was on the verge of rushing off to summon assistance when

something in the other's face made her pause. It was gradually changing—the features and eyes were undergoing the most startling metamorphosis and becoming those of some one else. Too fascinated to move or utter a sound, the younger sister simply stood and stared, while the Pekinese dog they had with them and which had been sitting on the bench between them, now leaped down and began to bark furiously.

Slowly, very slowly, the change went on, until the younger girl suddenly realised, with a thrill of terror, that the new face she was gazing at was that of her grandmother—a very cross-grained old lady, who had always been most unkind to both her and her sister.

The old-fashioned cap, the corkscrew curls, the innumerable lines and wrinkles all were there; the complexion only was different; it was whiter, and more waxen looking; and this peculiarity, quickly becoming more and more pronounced, reached a climax of ghastliness, when the jaws dropped, and the chin fell back, and every symptom of death set in; the illusion being heightened by the ominous croaking of a night bird as it flew overhead. The younger girl now thinking that she was gazing at a corpse, fainted; and, on coming to, found herself lying on the ground, with her sister, who was now, once again herself, bending anxiously over her.

Two day later they received a telegram saying the grandmother was dead. She had taken some par-

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ticularly virulent poison in mistake for the medicine ordered her by her physician, Dr Smith—who, by the way, neither sister had ever heard of—and had died in the greatest agony, exactly twenty-four hours after the strange physiognomical metamorphosis here narrated had taken place.



## IX

### TWO CHRISTMAS EVES

#### *A Case of a Haunting near Ealing*

BETWEEN Ealing and Windsor there stood, some few years ago, an old country mansion, that looked sorely out of place among the modern villas that the vandal builder of the twentieth century had erected on all sides of it. Of the ghostly happenings there—and very little psychic instinct was needed to tell one the place was haunted, for a grimmer or more ghostly atmosphere than that which hung around it could not easily be found—the following version, told me by an elderly gentleman, who declared it to be absolutely true—is, perhaps, on the whole, the most interesting. I give it as nearly as possible word for word as he narrated it.

One winter about thirty years ago my friend Dicky Mitcham wrote to me asking me to spend Christmas with him, and offering as a bait 'ghosts.' He laid especial stress on the fact that his house was haunted and asked me if I would not like to see a genuine spook. "Not one of

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those make-belief things they show you at séances," he said, "but a bonâ fide spirit—the thing, you've always told me, you longed to come across." Well, I accepted the invitation, and in due course arrived at Ealing Station, where I found a brougham waiting for me.

The drive to my friend's house did not take long; indeed we could barely have traversed half a dozen miles of the flat uninteresting country round about, before we passed through the lodge gates, and entered the wild and romantic grounds of his estate which was then known as "The Pringles." Mitcham was not well enough off to keep the place up properly, and as I looked out of the carriage window, I saw, everywhere, tumble-down gates, and tree trunks and broken off branches left on the ground to rot, and other equally unmistakable signs of neglect and decay. Besides, there hung over everything such a terrible sense of depression and forlornness that a wave of pity for Dick shot through me, even before we arrived at the house which, I must say, came as a climax.

It was a huge, low, rambling building, with bare, inhospitable-looking walls of a curious pinkish yellow colour; and windows which, besides seeming to be innumerable, were placed in all sorts of queer and unexpected places, and gave one the impression that they were eyes watching one quizzically and furtively, and with an expression that could not be definitely defined. However, to continue, on arriv-

ing at the front door, I found Dicky in the hall all ready to greet me, and I was soon in the drawing-room, warming my hands over a fire that roared half-way up the chimney. But it was not until after supper—Dicky was one of those old-fashioned people who couldn't bear late dinner—that the subject that had especially lured me there, was broached. Dicky then gave me a brief sketch of the history of the house.

"Exactly a hundred years ago," he said, "my ancestor, Sir Cobham Mitcham, let this place on a three years' lease to Lady Violet Steadman, who took up her abode here with her companion, Phoebe Nelson, an old school friend.

"As both the ladies were young and marvellously pretty, and Lady Violet was reputed to be enormously rich as well, they speedily attracted attention in the neighbourhood, and society men and women, but especially men—eligible and non-eligible—flocked to the house in herds.

"If there is any truth in tradition, Lady Violet was a most desperate flirt. Not content with one lover she had a score, and no sooner was one engagement broken than another was announced. Of all her suitors, however, three only need occupy our attention. They were Terence O'Flaherty, a rollicking, but penniless lieutenant in—I believe—the Royal Limericks; Lord Corsham, a wealthy local landlord, extremely unpopular with the poor, owing to his forbidding manners and mean and harsh treatment of

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his tenants; and Clarence Rokeby, to whom I will refer bye and bye.

“To onlookers, who are credited with seeing most of the game, it certainly seemed as if Lady Violet was giving preference to the Irishman. He was daily in her company, and everyone was expecting to hear of their engagement when he was suddenly ordered abroad to the West Indies. It was generally supposed that Lord Corsham, who was known to have influence at the War Office, was responsible for the lieutenant's removal, and, when Lady Violet taxed him with it, a violent scene is said to have taken place.

“Six months later, news was received of the death of O'Flaherty—he had succumbed to dysentery within a week of his landing in Jamaica. Lady Violet went into mourning, and was, for some time, inconsolable; then to everyone's amazement she suddenly invited Lord Corsham to the house and was always to be seen with him, in spite of the fact that she had openly denounced him as a murderer, and had often been heard to declare that she hated him.

“Prepared, after this, to expect anything, the public were not surprised when an announcement to the effect that Lady Violet and Lord Corsham were engaged, and that to celebrate the event, Lady Violet intended giving a ball on Christmas Eve, appeared in the London and local papers. To this ball, half the county were invited, and never was there a more brilliant affair, nor one that was destined to linger



so persistently in the memory of all who attended it. Clarence Rokeby, who now, for the first time, appeared upon the scene, came to it, and made such an impression on Lady Violet's supersusceptible heart, that she danced nearly all the evening with him; and the consternation and gossip such conduct caused, was little short of phenomenal. Of course it was the theme of the evening, and much as everyone detested Lord Corsham, they could not help pitying him as he stood, all by himself, leaning against the wall of the ball-room, biting his nails with rage and mortification. Never, perhaps, was there such hatred in any man's face as in his, and if evil glances could have killed, young Rokeby would surely have lain dead at Lady Violet's feet.

"The contrast between the two men was most striking. Lord Corsham big, burly and florid, and of a coarseness not often seen in a country squire: Rokeby, supple and slight, with neat, delicately chiselled features and perfect teeth and eyes. The latter, too—a London actor, so it was said, though no one seemed to know his name or to be able to associate him with any particular theatre—possessing all the grace and charm of a courtier, certainly looked as if he came of good stock; whilst the nobleman, in his fury, looked if possible, even more boorish than usual.

"The trouble came, however, when, following the example of several others, Clarence Rokeby gaily led his partner to a doorway, over which hung

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a bunch of mistletoe, and laughingly tried to kiss her.

"This was the climax. With a shout of fury, Lord Corsham, who had been following the couple as if cognisant of what would happen, rushed at Rokeby and, taking him unawares, with a single blow dashed him to the ground; and had it not been for Lady Violet and others of the spectators, who caught him by the arm, he would doubtless have followed up this blow by plunging his sword into the breast of his recumbent and half-stunned rival.

"The sympathy of all was now with Rokeby, and Lord Corsham, never a favourite, would have come in for very severe treatment had not Lady Violet interceded on his behalf, and succeeding at length in pacifying her indignant guests, persuaded them to go on dancing. All then went merrily and smoothly till the hands of the clock announced that it was time for a general dispersal. The guests then departed, and amongst the last to leave was Lord Corsham accompanied by Rokeby, with whom he had apparently effected a perfect reconciliation. Some minutes after their departure, several of the servants in the house thought they heard pistol shots, but no one dared to venture out, and in the morning when they went to look, the whole countryside was so thickly covered with snow, that had any fracas taken place, all evidences of it were completely obliterated. Two days later the engagement between Lady Violet and Lord Corsham was broken off; and within a week of the

event Lady Violet's tenancy of 'The Pringles' coming to an end, she left the neighbourhood and took up her abode in some other part of the country. Lord Corsham went abroad, some say to India, but what became of Rokeby remained a mystery.

"For some time the house stood empty. It was then taken by a Liverpool merchant—a practical enough person you would think, and one little given to imaginary things; but within six months, he gave up possession, swearing the place was haunted, and from the day he left until we came to live here ourselves, the house was never occupied for more than a few weeks at a time. The ghosts, however, appear to confine themselves chiefly to one wing—the west—and that we have always kept locked, the rest of the house affording us all the room we need."

"What form do the hauntings take?" I asked.

"Don't you think it would be better if I didn't tell you," Dicky said, "until you have done your investigations. We can then compare notes. You would, I suppose, like to do a night in the wing?"

"Alone!" I ejaculated.

"Oh no, I will get someone to sit up with you," Dick observed, "and I would do so myself, only my wife won't hear of it, as my heart is rather groggy and the doctor has forbidden me to do anything that may in any way try it."

"If you can't come I'd rather be by myself," I said. "I'm not afraid of ghosts, but I should be seriously alarmed if anyone with me got panicked or had a fit."

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Dick and his wife both did their best to persuade me not to go alone, but I persisted and in the end they gave way.

The next night being Christmas Eve and the anniversary of Lady Violet's celebrated ball, between which and the hauntings, Dicky hinted there was some strange connecting link, I decided to sit up; and accordingly, after the servants had all gone to bed, I went, escorted by Dicky, to the deserted wing.

I confess that when the great nail-studded door that shut off that part of the house from the rest was opened, I felt a strong thrill of terror run through me. Everywhere was so dark and still, so fearfully suggestive of grim happenings, that, as we crossed the threshold and walked along the bare corridors, and through room after room, peopled with nothing more substantial than cobwebs and shadows, I admit my heart began to fail me. There was, however, no escape. I had pledged my word I would sit up there, alone, and unless I wished to be branded for ever as a coward—a mere braggart—I must do so.

"Well, what do you think?" Dicky laughed. "Do you scent any ghosts?"

"I can well understand there may be some here," I said, "and frankly I shan't be sorry when my vigil is over."

"You don't feel afraid, do you?" Dick said, eyeing me apprehensively, "because, if so, chuck it. Better anything than ruin your nerves for ever."

"No!" I replied, "I'm all right. I'll see the thing



through. I can take your word for it, of course, there's no trickery."

"Trickery!" Dicky ejaculated, "you can rest easy on that score. If anything does happen to you, you may be quite certain it will be absolutely *bonâ fide*. What I want you to do—if you can only sum up the courage—is to speak to whatever you see and try and discover from it the whys and wherefores of the hauntings. Several people assure me they have made the attempt, but I have my doubts. They have certainly never gleaned any information that is of the slightest value or interest. Perhaps you will be more fortunate."

"I hope so," I murmured. "Where would you suggest I sat?"

"In one of the rooms on the top landing," Dicky replied. "That is where you are most likely to get results."

He took me to this room which was large, with a very low ceiling, several deep recesses and a big cupboard; and when he had planted a camp chair in the centre of the floor facing the door, and satisfied himself that I had plenty of rugs, and was as comfortable as the circumstances permitted, he left me, expressing the somewhat disconcerting desire that he would not find me a corpse in the morning.

"There is one thing," he said, "if you can survive till breakfast, I can promise you plenty of good cheer, and that, I guess, will eradicate all memory of ghostly happenings from your mind."

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He then went away and I listened, with an awful sense of loneliness, to his footsteps as they gradually grew fainter and fainter, and, finally, ceased altogether.

Never did I have such a stupendous hankering for company. Anything—a child—a dog—or a cat even, would have been welcome. It was so frightful to be right up there alone, with endless doors and passages between myself and other human beings; and to be stationed amid a silence that was so intense that even the most trifling noise, such, for example, as the slight jarring of a window, or the ticking of an insect, became magnified a thousand times over.

The minutes dragged by with tantalising slowness—every second seemed to last a minute, every minute an hour. Drowsiness at length came to my relief and finding myself both unable and unwilling to cope with it, I fell into a gentle doze. In reality, I must, I think, have slept soundly, for, after a distinct blank, without knowing why, I found myself sitting bolt upright with every fibre in my body strained to the utmost, and my heart beating frantically.

Yet there was silence. Just the same profound, unbroken silence as marked the period before I fell asleep. What made me wake up so abruptly, I asked myself. What could it have been? Then, while I was still wondering, there fell on my ears the faint, the very faint sound of music—and I seemed to hear a spinet and violins playing some quaint and old-world dance tune. Fascinated beyond measure—for

I love those old melodies—I got up from my chair and stole to the door, and thence out into the gloomy sepulchral-looking corridor and down stairs.

Down and down, tiptoeing noiselessly over landings and along passages, peopled with shadows, which I felt, intuitively, were no ordinary shadows, and which I dared not look at twice, I at length came to the big room on the ground floor, in which Dicky told me the memorable ball had been held.

As I approached its threshold, added to the sounds of music, came the light tapping of countless high-heeled shoes and the swishing of silken gowns; but the moment I crossed the threshold all became still. For some moments I stood motionless, peering into the darkness, and conscious that the space in front of me was not void, though I was utterly unable to discern who or what was inhabiting it. Then a noise in my rear made me turn abruptly around, and I saw something on the staircase I had just descended. Now I am not naturally nervous. I have known what it is to sleep all night alone, on a ranch, in the wildest part of Mexico, and in the jungles, along the southern shores of the Amazon; I have watched from sunset to dawn beside the corpses of friends and enemies, and listened to the unearthly howling of the panther and jaguar; but I have never been in such a panic, such a state of absolute "funk," as I was when I caught sight of that something standing there, looming out of the darkness on these frightfully still, and, as I had thought, empty stairs.

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The whole surface of my body was covered with a cold sweat, my knees knocked helplessly together, and my heart pulsated with feeble, sickly throbs. What was it? What should I see? Then, very slowly, the thing took form and to my unmitigated relief I saw nothing horrible but merely the figure of a very slight and fragile-looking youth with beautiful eyes and the neatest and prettiest features imaginable. He was dressed in the picturesque costume of the eighteenth century, and as he caught me staring at his silk stockings and bright shoe buckles he smiled most charmingly, revealing a set of exquisite white teeth. Then, beckoning to me to follow, he tripped noiselessly up the stairs and, to my astonishment, led me to the room where I had been holding my vigil.

Motioning to me to be seated, he now advanced towards the wall on the left hand side of the fireplace and felt gently over the surface with a long white forefinger.

There was presently a click, the wall opened and I perceived, in the recess behind it, a steep wooden staircase, up which the youth mounted, closing the aperture behind him. For some moments I sat staring at the blank wall, half expecting to see it swing back and the gaily attired youth once again appear. No such thing, however, happening, and everything remaining absolutely still, I was beginning to wonder if I had not imagined it all, when I suddenly heard the sound of voices—that of a man and woman—



raised in the most violent altercation, and proceeding, so I fancied, from almost directly overhead.

The man was calling the woman a liar, puppy, popinjay, and the woman was retaliating by telling him he was a bully and a blackguard. The man then stamped his foot and made use of some strange and quaintly old-fashioned oaths. I then heard the woman say in very clear but obviously frightened tones:

"Brute as you are, you dare not do that."


"Daren't I," came the reply in brusque sneering tones. "They'll say it was a duel, whereas it is"—here the words were cut short by the reports of two pistols which sounded almost simultaneously and were succeeded by the most ominous silence.

Suddenly something fell on my face with a splash. I wiped it off with my handkerchief, and, striking a match, looked. It was blood. I think the shock was so great that I fainted—at all events there was a blank—and when I again recovered consciousness, it was to find the room full of sunlight and Dicky bending over me, shaking me gently by the shoulder and telling me breakfast was nearly ready.

"You're a nice fellow to go ghost hunting," he laughed. "Why, you've been sleeping all the time."

"Blood!" I said tragically, pointing at my forehead, "it came splashing down on me. Is any of it still there?"

"No!" he laughed, "not a sign of any. But seriously, did anything happen?"



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"Rather," I said, and I narrated to him my experience. As soon as I came to the part where the phantom touched a spot on the wall he at once grew keenly interested.

"Can you tell me," he said, "exactly where it was?"

I showed him to the best of my recollection and suddenly, as he was pressing first in one place and then another, there was a click, and once again I saw the deep recess and deep wooden staircase. Well, we went up together, and lying on the floor of an extensive garret, full of antique boxes and lumber of all kinds, we found a skeleton, clad in faded garments, that at once recalled to my mind, the picturesque dandified costume I had seen on the youth with the beautiful eyes. As we raised the skull to examine it, something inside it rattled—it was a bullet, and a hole in the centre of the forehead left little doubt as to the cause of death.

"I shrewdly suspect this is young Rokeby," Dicky said. "I always thought he met with foul play, but to think of his being murdered up here instead of out of doors, as everyone supposed he had been at the time! It must have been Rokeby whom you dreamed you saw."

"It was no dream," I observed, "I did see him."

"I won't dispute it," Dicky laughed, "and anyhow you stood the ordeal very well. What puzzles me, however, is the woman whose voice you say you heard. Could she have been Lady Violet? If so,

why didn't she inform against Corsham. She broke off the engagement, of course, but why didn't she do more! I suppose we must give these remains a proper Christian burial. But before we do anything in the matter, I should like Harrison to see them and hear what he has to say. He is our doctor and is coming after breakfast to see one of the servants who isn't very well."

A couple of hours later the doctor arrived and was escorted by Dicky and myself to the secret chamber. Kneeling down he examined the skeleton with great interest.

"Who do you say it is," he asked, extracting from a pocket in the long tail coat a tiny lace handkerchief.

"Clarence Rokeby," Dicky replied, "one of Lady Violet's suitors who, it has always been believed, was killed in a duel by Lord Corsham."

"Well," Doctor Harrison said, "there is only one argument against that, but it seems a fairly strong one. This is not the skeleton of a man at all but a woman, and this handkerchief which I found in the coat pocket is marked 'Phoebe Nelson.'"

## X

### A HAMPSTEAD HAUNTING

NOT very far from Well Walk, Hampstead, there is a detached three-storeyed house, which I will name "The Deacons," that has long been reputed to be haunted. Many and diverse accounts of the haunting have been given at different times and by different people; but that of the two men who are here designated "the Professor" and "the Novelist," and who, desirous of doing a little Psychical Research work on their own, together spent a night there, some few years ago, comes, in my opinion, nearest to the truth, and is, moreover, undoubtedly, the most interesting. What they actually experienced in this old house, which possesses not one ghost only, but ghosts galore, the Novelist narrated to me as follows:

We began our vigil in a back room on the first floor at about ten o'clock. But, to begin with, I must tell you, we had very great difficulty in obtaining the landlord's permission to conduct this investigation, and I doubt if we should have succeeded had not my wife been a very old friend of his—in fact an old flame. Well, we chose this room



partly because it had an atmosphere about it that strongly suggested the superphysical—more strongly, we thought, than any other room in the house, and partly because its French windows opened on to a verandah, from which—if the worst came to the worst—we could drop with comparative ease and safety on to the soft ground beneath. That I might turn tail was, of course, quite on the cards, for I am admittedly a coward, but, I must confess, I had great faith in the Professor. His courage, to my mind, was beyond question; he was so calm and collected, so dignified and, over and above all, so frightfully clever (he had at least half a dozen letters after his name) that I could not imagine him yielding to any sudden fear or panic. Besides, he had seen ghosts—he had been to several materialising séances, where, he assured me, the most wonderful phenomena had taken place, whereas I was an utter novice—I knew nothing of spiritualism and had never to my knowledge even seen a medium.

But to proceed, we had, perhaps, been sitting in this back room half an hour, when I thought I heard a footstep outside on the staircase. The Professor remarked that it was only the timber creaking, and forthwith entered into such a lengthy dissertation on the causes of the expansion of metal and wood, that at last I could not help reminding him, that I had heard it all years before in the schoolroom. We then sat mute, and watched the shadows from the ivy leaves playing all sorts of mad pranks on the moon-

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lit floor; whilst every now and again queer little noises on the landing forced me involuntarily to glance in that direction.

Presently I caught the sound of horses' hoofs and wheels coming at a furious pace along the road, and, to my astonishment, the carriage, or whatever it was, seemed to turn in at the gates of "The Deacons." I then heard the crunching of gravel, and, immediately afterwards, a series of loud raps at the front door, which, since the Professor and I, when entering the house, had commented on the absence of a knocker, naturally sent a thrill of consternation through me. But it was when I glanced at the Professor that I got my first real shock of the evening. Prior to the knockings he had been leaning back in his chair, with an expression of complete tranquility on his face, whilst his extremely easy attitude had suggested a self possession that almost bordered on indifference. All that was gone now. An entire metamorphosis had taken place. He was sitting bolt upright, his eyes almost twice their ordinary size, staring fixedly at the open doorway, his hands clutching the sides of the chair.

If ever a man was afraid, he was, and the sight of terror in one whom I had thought utterly proof against such weakness, made my blood run cold. Moreover, the knocking which had continued for some time, now suddenly ceased, the front door opened, and I heard something surreptitiously enter the house.

That was the climax as far as the Professor was concerned. Springing from his chair he dashed out of the window, on to the verandah, and that was the last I saw of him.

I would have followed him had I been able—but I was too paralysed with fear to stir, and I simply had to wait, sick with terror, the entrance of the Unknown. What was it? What should I see? How would it come? God, such moments can only be appreciated—understood, by those who have experienced—and by those who have been situated, as I was situated then, alone, in strange—utterly strange surroundings, and alone with something that all my instincts told me was peculiarly fantastic and super-physical, and that I knew was prowling about and liable to come creeping after me at any moment. Can anyone wonder that I was terror stricken. The seconds passed, and still it kept at a distance. Then slowly a cloud began to obscure the room, the shadows, all around me on the floor, became merged into a black, impenetrable pall;—and I heard first a creak and then the sound of soft, very soft footsteps on the staircase. Up and up they came. I tried to move, to run away, to avert my gaze from the direction of the doorway and landing. I could not; and the steps gradually drew nearer and nearer until they reached the last stair; and stood on the landing in a direct line with me. At last they enter the room in which I am sitting, and still I can see nothing. Then, as they cross the floor towards my chair, I

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perceive two separate discs of pale phosphorescent light, which gradually materialise into two hands—two exquisitely beautiful hands—with slim, white, tapering fingers and rosy, highly polished nails. They are smothered in rings—rings that sparkle with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, and as they move swiftly towards me I receive a whiff of some delicious and subtle scent; someone then bends over me and I can feel the folds of their rich silken gown sweep against me. A soft arm encircles my neck, warm, fragrant lips are pressed against mine, and those delicate enchanting fingers soothingly caress by brow and cheeks. All fear vanishes in a moment—I am in Elysium.

“Oh, God,” I say to myself in ecstasies of joy. “What have I done to deserve this Heaven—may it continue for ever.”

The velvety fingers then open my mouth, a soft and cooling fluid is poured down my throat, my head is gently pressed back against the chair, and a cool hand is laid on my forehead. Under its touch I slowly lose consciousness and sink into the most entrancing luscious slumber. All was then a blank—a blank in which mind and soul seemed alike lost. The return to consciousness—to the cognizance of “I” again, was gradual—very gradual; but as soon as my sense of personal identity did come back, the yearning for that final scene of watchfulness—for that scented breath, those lovely feminine fingers followed quickly in its trail.



"Come back!" I prayed. "Oh, come back, if only for a moment and let me feel that heavenly soothing touch again." There was no response. I endeavoured to speak—to call to them; I could not. I essayed to move my limbs; I could not.

Then suddenly, with lightning-like velocity, there flashed upon me, in succession, the facts that I was cataleptic—incapable of the slightest physical action—in bed, and no longer alone in the room.

Forms that I could not see, but whose presence I could none the less feel, were standing close beside me discussing my supposed death and funeral. Hands—coarse, disgustingly coarse and unsympathetic—measured me for my coffin, into which I was unceremoniously pushed. Then followed the ghastly process of hammering me down, during which I struggled frantically—with all the pent-up agony of the ten times damned—to overcome my catalepsy and shriek out; I could not. I was compelled to lie lie there helpless and breathe into my lungs the cursed, sickly odour of that sweet, nauseating varnished wood.

Stalwart arms then raised me up enclosed thus, and, carrying me downstairs, bumped me—like the thick-headed, infernal idiots that they were—into the hearse. I heard the rattling of harness and the jingling of bits, as the horses tossed and shook their heads prior to starting: after which came the rumble, rumble of the wheels on the hard road. Then, for a brief space of time, came a merciful blank, after

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which I awoke to the bitter, the hideous, the appalling reality that I was buried ALIVE.

The horror of my discovery so shocked me that I fainted; but the cold and stifling atmosphere of the earth, that despite the thickness of the coffin penetrated to the very marrow of my bones, brought me quickly to myself, and I instantly recollected all that had occurred.

The most frightful current of despair now surged through me. I endeavoured to shriek, to shout, to make any kind of noise, but could not move my jaws. I threw out my arms, which had been lying at full length, with the wrists crossed, and they struck the wooden walls of my prison a few inches above my face.

I banged my head, my body; kicked till I crunched my toes; writhed, struggled, swore, till the foam and blood poured out of my mouth, and I was forced to give in through sheer exhaustion.

I then became conscious of an unendurable oppression. The sea of black above me felt like a barrow-load of bricks on my chest, and I gasped, choked, retched, tearing the palms of my hands in ribbons with my nails.

Once again I was motionless. The darkness all around me, comparable only with the intensity of the silence, overwhelmed me with its frightful solemnity. It was the darkness of Death—the intervening barrier to all the mysteries of Futurity.

Then I thought of my past life—of its neglected

opportunities; its countless failures, vices, sins; of the evil that I had but too often returned for evil; and as my memory rehearsed all this, a great, an indescribably great terror of what the Unknown would have in store for me gripped me with fearful tenacity. Oh, if I could only escape! Live my life again.

The air in the churchyard above me never seemed so sweet, so fresh, so free, nor the grass so green, so vivid.

And then I thought of my friends. If only I could inform them that I was still alive! One second, the briefest duration of time possible, and they would know.

I imagined their joy, their indescribable joy, on learning their mourning was all in vain—that the doctor had been mistaken—that I was still breathing, still animate.

How promptly they would fly to save me, and with what rapture I should hear the sound of pick and shovel paving my way to freedom!

Then the hopelessness of my position came home to me with new cruelty. It was impossible to acquaint them with my position—the truth would never be revealed.

I must die—die down here—alone—alone amid all the still and foetid paraphernalia of the charnel-house.

The charnel-house—the feeling of oppression at once left me. My brain grew clear. Without open-

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in or rolling my eyes I could see on either side of me—see into the vast expanse of slimy, reeking mould.

Great God; what had that man died of—that hideous, festering corpse, with swollen hands and bloated cheeks; and that woman, that toothless woman with the grizzly hair; and that child—that tiny, half-formed skeleton with the unspeakable relics of a face.

I saw them all, row upon row, line after line, and as I looked at them they looked at me—and grinned. Grinned with a grin that made me swoon; and when I looked again, they had all vanished, and in their stead I saw a dreadful, worm-like figure come writhing and wriggling through the earth towards me. Its body was yellow, and its face like a bladder of lard!

Hand over hand, leg over leg, it came, until it touched my feet, and I intuitively recognised in it—the Elemental of Death.

Then, again, my senses left me; but, after a long, uninterrupted period of obliteration, consciousness suddenly returned, and I found myself seated once more beside the open windows at “The Deacons.”

. . . . .

Never again did I attempt a sitting there, that one experience was enough. I made endless endeavours, however, to get in touch with former tenants of the house, and in the end I succeeded. Two of them,



a Mr De Cossart and Mrs Smith, came to see me the same morning.

Mr De Cossart arrived first. He was a tall, thin, ascetic-looking man, of probably rather more than middle age, clad in a suit of rusty black.

He might have been a Plymouth Brother, or a German waiter of a particularly thrifty turn of mind.

"You have something to tell me," I said, offering him a seat and closing the door carefully, for fear of any eaves-dropping on the part of my extremely motherly and exceedingly officious landlady.

"I have," Mr De Cossart replied, shaking his head gloomily as I indicated the whisky bottle.

"Two years ago I took 'The Deacons' on a twelve-month's lease, but I only occupied it for one night. I did not dare try to sleep there twice.

"My household was a small one—a staid, elderly housekeeper (I had been a widower for three years), a cook, and housemaid.

"We had all retired to rest by ten o'clock, and it was about midnight—I had struggled in vain to sleep—when I heard a footstep in the corridor.

"It rapidly approached my door, and I was much alarmed by series of tremendous crashes on the upper panels.

"Thinking that it was the housekeeper come to tell me that the house was on fire, I slipped on a dressing-gown, and, rushing to the door, flung it open.

"It was not the housekeeper, however, but," and Mr De Cossart, shuddering, cast a fearful, half-ex-

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pectant look around him, "the lofty and enshrouded figure of a man with wild, staring eyes, shrunken cheeks, and bloody foaming lips. He raised his fingers towards me, they clawed the air convulsively, and I noticed their ends were battered, raw, and bleeding.

"The phantasm—for I knew at once it was a ghost—did not attempt to molest me, but confronting me just long enough for its features to be firmly impressed on my mind, suddenly vanished, and then I saw two lovely hands—a woman's—that, seizing me gently by the arm, took me back to bed and soothed me to sleep. It was a fool's paradise, for when I awoke, or rather fancied I awoke, I underwent all the hellish agonies of premature burial, only recovering consciousness, when the maid brought me hot water in the morning.

"I was so struck with the singularity of the visitation, that I prosecuted inquiries in the neighbourhood, and discovered that my description of the apparition corresponded with a Mr Robert Valentine, who had once been a tenant of the house.

"I got in touch with his relatives, who although never on very friendly terms with him, were greatly affected by what I told them. His body was exhumed; every evidence of premature burial was visible, and, on analysing the contents of his stomach, the latter was found to contain a powerful narcotic, after the nature of conine.

"The deceased might have been in the habit of

taking drugs; there was nothing to suggest the narcotic found in his stomach had been administered to him with any sinister motive. He had certainly not been poisoned, but the coma produced by the conine had not unnaturally been mistaken for death, and—he had been buried *alive*.

"The matter ended there. What more could be done? The deceased had been attended by some strange, unknown doctor; the whereabouts of his widow was entirely enigmatical.

"I got out of touch with the dead man's relatives and went abroad—Turin. There I met a beautiful woman. I fell in love with her face, but more especially with her hands"—here Mr De Cossart shivered, and cast a furtive look at the door. "They were the exact counterpart of those that had appeared to me in spirit form at 'The Deacons.'

"We were married, but not before she persuaded me to assign all my property to her. She now no longer caresses me, and I have horrid dreams at night."

"In short, sir," I said, gazing at him intently, "she is not what she professed to be at first? You have misgivings?"

"I have," he whispered, "the strongest misgivings. My dreams are repetitionary of the one I had at 'The Deacons.' I believe she is the woman."

"You have her photograph?" I asked curiously.

"Yes—there it is. I thought perhaps you might like to see it. Doubtless you are a physiognomist,

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as is the case with so many novelists," and he handed me the photo as he spoke.

I was about to examine it, when there came a gentle tapping at the door, and an emaciated woman in black, who announced herself as Mrs Smith, glided unceremoniously into the room.

Mr De Cossart rose to go. I detained him, and the woman catching sight of the photograph, uttered a loud ejaculation.

"My Sakes!" she cried, "if that isn't Mrs Furniss."

Mr De Cossart started.

"Do you know the lady?" he said, pushing the photo under Mrs Smith's nose and eyeing her closely.

"Are you the author gentleman?" Mrs Smith gasped.

Mr De Cossart shook his head solemnly.

"No," he replied in a melancholy voice. "I am this lady's husband."

"But she was Mrs Furniss, wasn't she?" Mrs Smith said, taking the seat I offered her.

Here I thought fit to interrupt.

"Mrs Smith," I explained to Mr De Cossart, "is also interested in 'The Deacons' affair—that is why she has come here this morning. Let us hear what she has to say. You may speak freely before us," I added, turning to Mrs Smith—"like me—this gentleman has had strange experiences at 'The Deacons.'"

"But," Mrs Smith commenced tremulously, "I



want it to be in confidence—it must be in confidence. Will you promise, both of you, you won't make use of anything I tell you to get me into trouble?"

We promised.

"In a month's time," she murmured, "it won't make any odds, as I shall in all probability be dead. I've three incurable cancers—one on my breast, one just over an artery, so the doctor says, on my neck, and one——"

"Great Heavens!" Mr De Cossart broke in, his face livid. "Don't diagnose here, begin your story."

"It's a beginning and an ending, it seems to me," the woman sighed. "Well, sirs, I live at Hampstead. Three years ago I lost my husband there—he died of Bright's disease. I was working then—my business is the laundry—for Mrs Furniss, who occupied 'The Deacons.' From the very first she had taken a peculiar interest in my husband's case, but I did not think there was anything very remarkable about that, till she called at my house one day, and, getting me alone in our little back parlour, suddenly said: 'I suppose, Mrs Smith, your husband's illness is a very great expense to you.'

"'That it is, ma'am,' I replied, drying my eyes on the corner of my apron, 'a very great expense!'

"'Is there any hope of his recovery?' Mrs Furniss asked again.

"I shook my head.

"'None, ma'am,' I said. 'The doctor says he can't live for more than three or four days at the most.'

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“‘How often does the doctor come?’ she asked again.

“‘Never unless I send for him, ma’am,’ I answered.

“She then touched me on the shoulder with her beautiful hand—she had the slenderest fingers you can imagine, gentlemen—and in low and measured tones, hissed rather than spoke.

“‘You are very poor,’ were her words. ‘Money would be extremely welcome to you. You would do much for £100.’

“I admitted I would—much. A hundred pounds is a fortune to a poor woman.

“‘Very well, then,’ she observed. ‘I want you to let your husband come to my house and remain there till he dies, when his body will be brought back here for burial. I can assure you he will be well looked after at “The Deacons,” and as, you say, he has to die, it cannot matter to him where his death takes place, whereas it will make a great deal of difference to you.’

“The strangeness of her proposal staggered me. I did not know what to make of it.

“‘But, ma’am,’ I stammered, ‘what is your motive?’

“‘Oh! you wouldn’t understand if I told you,’ she replied, with a curious smile, ‘and if you want that £100—don’t ask. Do you agree?’

“I knew Mrs Furniss would be as good as her word, and I should get the money—I had no fears on that score—so I consented. My husband was

tractable. I talked him round. Jim—that's my only boy—and I smuggled Smith into 'The Deacons' at the dead of night, and brought his body home three nights later. No one saw us, and the doctor told me I did quite right in not sending for him earlier, as nothing could have saved my husband. I got the hundred pounds, and we—Jim and I—took good care to hold our tongues. What certainly did strike us as rather queer was that Mr Furniss, whom we never even knew was ill—they had only been in this neighbourhood a year—died about the same time as my husband, and from the same complaint."

I looked at Mr De Cossart. Our glances met, and we both shuddered.

"Are you sure Mr Furniss died of Bright's disease?" I asked.

Mrs Smith shrugged her shoulders.

"That is what I heard," she said. "Several people told us so. His funeral was a very quiet one—no one there but the widow and paid mourners. He did not seem to have been on very good terms with his relations. Well, gentlemen, try how we would, Jim and I couldn't get the affair out of our minds. We often had horrible dreams, always about being buried alive, and hands—hands like those beautiful long snowy white hands of Mrs Furniss."

"Then what do you think, Mrs Smith?" I asked abruptly. "You have formed a theory!"

"I think," she replied, with the pregnancy of solemn admonition in her tones, "I think that my poor hus-

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band was substituted for Mr Furniss, and that the doctor whom Mrs Furniss suddenly sent for, unaware of the deception, gave what he thought to be a genuine certificate of death.

“A change was again made, my husband’s corpse was brought back home, and the real Mr Furniss was buried from ‘The Deacons’; but as sure as I sit here, gentlemen, I believe he was buried *alive*, and that devil of a wife of his did it on purpose. Now, gentlemen, I’ve eased my mind of what’s been weighing on it for the past three years, and if you think there is anything in what I have said, at the end of a month have Mr Furniss exhumed.”

“That has been done already, Mrs Smith,” Mr De Cossart slowly observed, “and your suspicions were only too well justified—he *was* buried alive. But you, Mrs Smith, have nothing to fear; your secret is safe—unfortunately only too safe—for I’ve married the murderess!”



## XI

### THE HAUNTING OF B—— SCHOOL

SCHOOLS and Colleges, no less than various other public and private institutions, have their ghosts, and the following is one of the many versions of a haunting in connection with a famous school not two miles from Charing Cross. I will give it in the words of the narrator, Martin Flammarique, a very old friend of mine.

You want to hear about the B—— ghost, he said. Well, I will tell you all I know about it. One afternoon in the August of 1870, I ran into an old B—— friend of mine, Jack Andrews, in Sloane Street. We hadn't met for ages—not, indeed, since that eventful Commemoration Day at B——, when so many "O.B.'s" turned up that they had to camp out all night in the Big School. A lady was with him, a tall, slim girl, unmistakably foreign, and unquestionably beautiful—so beautiful, in fact, that I couldn't tear my eyes away from her.

"I'm awfully sorry we can't stop for a chat," Andrews said, "but we are in rather a hurry. We leave England to-night for Spain—Barcelona, where

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I am living at present. I am editing an English paper there, *The Anglo-Barcelonian*. Shall you be at the School concert at B—— in December?"

I told him I should, that I had promised the Headmaster I would be there.

"That's good!" he exclaimed, "for I, too, am going. I'm down for a speech at the House Supper. Neither of us want to be in Spain for Christmas, so we are going to do a round of friends and relations in England. I shall look forward immensely to seeing you then; I've so much to tell you. You quite understand why we can't stay now. Remember, old chap, it's a bargain—December 20, at B——. Au revoir, and all luck to you."

They passed on, and I turned and watched them get into a 'bus for Victoria. I was overjoyed at seeing Andrews again, for he had been one of my earliest "pals" at B——. We had entered the school the same term, and had gone up together, form by form, till he got rheumatic fever, and left in consequence. We then went abroad, and I had not set eyes on him since.

It was strange he had not introduced the girl to me, but then, of course, they were in such a tearing hurry. She was undoubtedly his wife! Lucky fellow! What a face! What eyes! What a mouth! What feet, daintily encased in the naughtiest of high-heeled buckle-shoes and open-worked stockings, through the meshes of which I had caught the glistening surface of pink flesh! I longed for a closer

acquaintance. Jack was in luck's way, that was certain. I devoutly hoped she had an equally attractive sister, and that I would be invited to stay with them in Barcelona. The sudden fervour which I displayed in writing to Jack was not, therefore, quite disinterested. I wrote two letters to his one, and ransacked every library to discover books on Spain and Spanish temperament! But Jack was very wily, for some reason or another he never alluded to the girl, and my queries as to whether he was married remained unanswered. He adhered rigidly to the discussion of old school-days, obstinately refraining from any allusion to his present home-life.

He renewed his promise, however, to be at the house-supper, and gave me repeated injunctions as to where we should meet. The last letter I received from him was on November 25. After that there was silence; he was to sail for England on December 10.

The eventful evening came at last. If I rehearsed it once, I rehearsed it twenty times. I, too, was booked for a speech and I am a rotten orator, and speaking before boys is different from haranguing men—it is a speciality in itself. At the preliminary concert, which was crowded to excess, there must have been at the very least a thousand "O.B.'s"; and the school song was roared louder and, I regret to say, far more out of tune than ever. That performance over, the audience broke up, distributing in gangs to the respective house-suppers.

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Andrews had enjoined me to meet him at the entrance to the school-house.

"I may not be in time for the concert," he had written, "but I shall be outside the dear old house-gates at 9.30, without fail!"

It was 9.30 when I arrived there, but there was no Jack. I was annoyed, angry, perturbed. Why hadn't he come? Had he been hoaxing me? I spoke to Gray, the H.M., and he informed me that Andrews was down for a speech, and that as he hadn't sent word to say he wouldn't be there, everyone expected him, and he would undoubtedly turn up. Perhaps he would arrive during the banquet. Sincerely hoping this might be so, though filled with grim forebodings, I followed the other guests into the hall, and found myself placed between two very youthful "O.B.'s," who were no doubt as little interested in an old fogey like me, as I was in them.

I did not enjoy the supper. I was too disappointed to eat, and, after all, the menu at a house-supper is naturally more suited to the healthy appetites of boys than the more whimsical palates of men. I grew more and more uneasy as the minutes flew by. I was most anxious to see Jack, to renew the acquaintance with him which the Hall, the gilded names on the honour-boards, the very atmosphere of the place, so vividly brought back again to mind.

I tell you, O'Donnell, that when I sat there, facing those long rows of B—— faces—faces that were,



somehow, strangely typical of B—— and of the school-house, and would have seemed totally out of keeping elsewhere—I felt as if those twenty intervening years did not exist, had never existed, and that I was once more a schoolboy, loaded with all a schoolboy's hopes and fears.

Jack's place had been laid three seats on my left. I continually glanced there, only to see a vacant space. It was too bad. Jack wasn't coming. He had fooled us, after all. I leaned back in my chair and cursed—cursed with all the abandonment of desperate bad luck. I had longed to meet Jack.

A sensation of extreme coldness suddenly made me look round, and, to my immeasurable delight, I saw Jack—the sly fellow had slipped into his seat unobserved.

Fearing that it might only be a hallucination, I shut my eyes, but, on opening them, Jack was still there.

"Jack!" I whispered, bending forward and trying to attract his attention. "Jack!"

But Andrews did not reply. Indeed, he apparently did not hear, but continued to sit silently in his chair, his elbows on the table, his eyes downcast, unheeding, moody, reflective. I recalled the attitude instantly—it was thoroughly characteristic of the Jack of ancient days. Again I whispered, but still he took no notice, and this time one of the men next me asked what I wanted. I told him to tap Mr Andrews on the shoulder, and he eyed me curiously.

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"Are you always as facetious as this, Mr Flammarique?" he inquired, "or is it the claret-cup?"

I was about to reply when the house-master rose—the speeches had begun.

Jack and I were both down to speak for the "O.B.'s," but what was my amazement when the house-master said how sorry he was that J. L. Andrews had not turned up, and called upon another "O.B." to speak in his place.

"Jack not there!" I said to myself. "Either the house-master is mad, or I am. Why I can see him as clearly as I can anyone."

But even as I reasoned thus, the figure of my friend slowly faded away, and I found myself gazing at an empty space. The house-master was correct—after all, Jack was NOT there.

I remembered at once the cold sensation I had experienced, and became convinced that what I had seen—far from being a hallucination and consequently merely subjective—was either a phantom of the living or a wraith. You may imagine, therefore, that I was no little upset.

I gabbled through my speech, and made a sad hash of it. Jack's face haunted me. Try how I would, I could not banish it from my mind, and, as I turned into bed that night, I saw him again—in my mental vision—sitting at that festive board, surrounded by merry faces, yet seeing and hearing nothing.

"It is very curious, Andrews didn't let us know,"

the house-master observed next morning. "I fully expected to receive an explanatory letter from him, but nothing has come. Perhaps he will write to you. Should he do so, I should like to hear what happened."

I promised the house-master I would tell him, and, without waiting to say good-bye to any of the "O.B.'s" who crowded the precincts, I hastened to the railway station.

That night, in my rooms in Brook Street, I went to bed rather earlier than usual, and, falling into a deep sleep, awoke with a violent start as a neighbouring church clock struck two. To my astonishment, something heavy was on the bed. I put out my hand, and, to my horror, touched a head, the hair of which was dripping with water. I was so appalled that I dare not get up to see what it was, but, diving under the bedclothes, I lay thus till the weight on the top of me suddenly went and I intuitively felt my grim visitant had gone. I was now so firmly convinced that something was wrong with Andrews, that I at last resolved to pay a flying visit to Barcelona. Accordingly, in the morning I packed my things—just a few absolute necessities—and, making for Victoria, booked by the overland route to Spain. Some evenings later I arrived at Barcelona. Having settled on my hotel, a respectable-looking inn in a main street, I walked to the offices of the paper that employed Jack. My reception was not encouraging. Mr Andrews was no longer on the staff—they knew

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nothing about him—not even his address; and I fancied a covert smile lurked in their faces as they mentioned the word “address.”

Much perplexed, but feeling more than ever sure there was some mystery about Jack—an enigmatical, horrid something that the newspaper officials most probably knew, but refused to give away—I next inquired at the Consulate. It was closed till eleven o'clock next day. As there were still some hours before it was time to “turn in,” I strolled about the streets, and after wandering through several of the principal thoroughfares, found myself in what I took to be a market square. In the rather dim and uncertain flare of a few scattered and very antiquated gas-lamps, it was impossible to get a very accurate idea of my surroundings. I merely obtained my impression from the size and shape of the place before me, and the rough cobble-stones with which it was paved. I had seen many market squares of a similar nature in England. It was now getting late. The thick fog, which had hung over the city during the afternoon, had developed into a heavy downfall of rain, as a result of which the streets were soon practically empty, and I was about to retrace my steps and seek the more congenial precincts of the inn, when I heard a low moan proceeding, as I thought, from the centre of the square. All sorts of possibilities, generated by the many stories I had heard of Spanish intrigue and villainy, at once flashed through my mind. Was someone



being murdered, or were those sounds a decoy? I halted and listened, and, again, there came a groan, hollow and sepulchral, and so suggestive of real pain that all doubts on that score instantly vanished; someone was out there suffering.

No longer hesitating, and fully determined to give a good account of myself should it be necessary, I took my revolver from its case, and, stepping cautiously over the slippery stones, made for the direction of the sounds.

As I have already observed, the square was but sparsely illuminated, and in the rain it was quite impossible to see more than a few feet in front of me. Consequently, I was not aware that there was any obstruction in my way, till I suddenly bumped up against a wooden erection that might have been the stage of some street-orator or of a troop of travelling pierrots. I was deliberating what course to pursue, whether to climb over it or walk round it, when I saw, to my astonishment, the figure of a man sitting on a camp-stool close beside me.

He was apparently young and wore a black suit, but as his face was buried in the palms of his hands, I could not discern his features. He had no hat, and the rain, descending in torrents on his bare head, bid fair to drench him to the skin.

Touching him on the arm, I asked why he chose to sit out there on such a night, whether he was ill, and if there was anything I could do for him. In reply he gave the most horrible moan, and, slowly

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raising his face, disclosed the countenance of Jack Andrews!

To say that I was shocked is to put it very mildly. I was completely flabbergasted and simply stared at him, too overcome with emotion to speak.

"I am stiff!" he murmured. "I have been sitting out here for four nights!"

"For four nights!" I echoed. "Good heavens, man, are you mad?"

He shook his head, and the water from it fell over my clothes in cataracts.

"No!" he said. "I'm not mad! I'm——" Here he checked himself, and said: "It's no use telling you, you wouldn't understand."

"It's very obvious that something very extraordinary has happened since last we met," I observed. "Perhaps you will explain when we get to some kind of shelter. It's my belief trouble, or rain, or both, have turned your brain. You must be absolutely sopping. My advice to you is to go home directly and soak yourself with hot whisky."

"No," Jack responded wearily. "I shan't hurt—nothing hurts me now. And as for home, I shall have a long enough spell of it after you've gone. Let me go back with you to your digs."

Totally at a loss to know what to make of him, I tacitly agreed, and he conducted me with marvellous rapidity to my hotel. The landlord eyed us, I thought, in the most peculiar manner. There was evidently something about my friend that both

frightened and perplexed him, and I don't wonder, for Jack's cheeks were ghastly white, his hair was dank and dishevelled, and his eyes abnormally large and lurid. The other visitors shrank away from him as we entered the supper-room, and we had a table all to ourselves. An excellent meal was served—cold roast chicken, salad, sweets, cheese, dessert, oranges from Cadiz, and wine from Oporto. I own I ate like a gourmand, but Jack would touch nothing.

"I have lost my taste for food," he said, "and I can get on just as well without it!"

I stared at him in dismay. Whatever doubts I had had on the subject before were now removed—he was mad—hopelessly, indisputably mad. I would humour him.

"Your looks corroborate your words," I remarked. "You don't appear to have eaten anything for days."

"Not since Monday," Jack replied, "and it is now Friday. I ate my last meal—bread and cocoa, reeking of garlic—at six o'clock on Monday morning. But tell me, how did the house-supper go off?"

We then fell to talking of schooldays, nor would Jack once digress. I learned nothing of his present life, nothing of his home, nothing of the charming woman I had deemed to be his wife.

The hour grew very late. I secured him a bed at an exorbitant price, and we continued our conversation in his room far into the night.

"Go," he said, at last, as the clock struck two. "Go, old friend, and leave me here now. Maybe

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you will find a difference in me in the morning, but, whatever happens, whatever you may be told, take nothing for granted. Seek the truth."

He threw himself down on the couch as he finished speaking. The flickering fire-flames made the pallor of his countenance more ghastly than ever, and I stole out of the room full of the gravest apprehensions.

I do not know what I expected to find when I sought him next morning. He had been so strange, so weirdly strange, that I was prepared for almost anything, yet scarcely for what actually occurred.

He was lying on the couch in precisely the same attitude as I had left him, i.e., on his back, his body at full length, his head slightly turned towards the door, and resting on his outstretched arm. I touched him gently—he did not reply. I felt his forehead—it was icy cold. I moved his head—it rolled helplessly on one side. I tore open his coat-collar, and his throat, mangled, blue, and swollen, lay fully exposed to view. With a yell of horror I rushed from the room.

A doctor was summoned, and I accompanied him fearfully to the bedside. He gave a loud cry of terror and astonishment as he saw the corpse, and, pointing his finger at the dead man's face, shrieked: "Good God! How in the name of Heaven did he come here? Why, that is John Andrews, the murderer, who was garotted in the Public Execution Ground last Monday morning."



For days after this adventure I lay ill in bed, haunted all the time by those never-to-be-forgotten words:

"Seek the Truth."

As soon as I recovered I at once prosecuted inquiries, and learned that the crime for which Jack had been executed was the murder of Carlotta Godivjez, the woman with whom he had lived. This was undoubtedly the pretty girl with the star-like eyes and naughty feet I had seen him with in London. Carlotta was a married woman when Jack had first met her. She lived with her husband, Hermann Godivjez, in Cartagena, and, falling in love with Jack, had eloped with him. Neighbours spoke of the frequent quarrels between the lovers, and, when Carlotta was found in her boudoir stabbed to the heart, suspicion at once fell on Andrews.

The English Consul was away at the time, and his substitute was a Spaniard. The circumstantial evidence was dead against Jack. He was a foreigner, with little or no influence, and too hard-up to resort to bribery. The reputation of the police was at stake. Someone must be punished for the crime, and so Jack was garotted.

Well, I went to Cartagena, and employed a private detective to ferret out all he could about Hermann Godivjez; but, despite the fact that the evidence against the latter was absolutely damning, the Spanish police could not be prevailed upon to effect his arrest, and so he escaped scot free. Disgusted at the hope-

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less corruption in Spain I returned to London, but maintained a strict silence with regard to poor Jack's fate. Indeed, none of his old schoolfellows to this day know what became of him. Periodically, however, his ghost is still seen—just as I saw it—at the annual supper of his old house at B——; whilst, periodically, too, his ghost still haunts the rooms I once occupied in Brook Street.

## XII

### MISCELLANEOUS HAUNTINGS

ONE is so accustomed to hearing of, and reading about, ghosts in old country houses and West End mansions, that one can hardly realise the possibility of ghosts in meaner places. I would like, therefore, to remind my readers that superphysical phenomena are not the monopoly of the rich, any more than the investigation of them is the monopoly of the Psychical Research Society, or graduates from the Universities; and that there are just as many—probably more—cases of hauntings in the poorer parts of London than there are in the West End.

In Peckham Rye there is a shop that has a very queer form of haunting, indeed. Entering it one evening in August, just when the shadows were beginning to fall upon the pavements and the hush, resulting from the departure of the children to bed, was beginning to be felt, I found the proprietor in the act of administering brandy to a woman, who was half sitting, half lying on the floor in a semi-faint.

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"Hulloa, Mr D——" I exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

"The lady's received a bit of a shock, that's all," he said, "but she's coming to all right."

He told me, as soon as she had left the shop, that when he was cutting her some rashers of bacon she shrieked out, thinking that he had cut off one of his fingers, and fainted.

"Of course," he said, "you'll say it was only an hallucination—optical illusion, or whatever else you may choose to call it, and I shall tell her it was that the next time she comes in, but there's something very strange about this place, all the same. Look here—only mind you don't go writing about it in any of your articles—often, about the same time in the evening, and about the same time of year, customers declare they see the same thing happen. They see one of my fingers come right off, when I'm cutting them a piece of bacon—it's never cheese, corned beef, or anything else—but always bacon. And it gets on my nerves to such an extent that occasionally I think that I really am chopping off one of my fingers and holler out to the missis."

"Well, why don't you get your wife or someone else to serve the bacon," I suggested. "Perhaps it wouldn't happen then."

But it did, and next time I visited the shop he told me all about it.

"I'm leaving this place," he said, "and it's partly



through you. Do you recollect advising me to get someone else to serve the bacon?"

I nodded.

"Well," he went on, "I turned that job over to my sister-in-law, who was in this line of business down Brixton way before she came to live with us. The first night she took it on nothing happened, but the second she brought my wife into the shop in a panic, by suddenly screaming out: 'Oh, my finger, I've cut it off.' Thinking it was the same old game I was beginning to laugh and treat the matter as a joke, when my wife running up to the counter, where Sissy had been serving, turned round to me, pale as ashes, and said:

"'Go for a doctor, quick——' and 'damned if a finger wasn't really lying on the counter.'"

. . . . .  
There is also a house in the Kennington Park Road, where the haunting is of a rather unusual nature. It is one of those black, funereal-looking houses not very far from where the road begins.

A friend of mine, a journalist, who often sat up half the night writing, took a room there. Well, the night of his arrival, being very tired, and having nothing very urgent on hand, he decided to go to bed early—at least early for him. There was no gas, only candles, and he had blown out one and was preparing to blow out the other when, a thought striking him, he looked under the bed. It was swarming with cockroaches. That decided him. If

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there was one thing in the world he loathed and dreaded, it was black beetles; so, climbing on to the table and seating himself with his legs crossed, he resolved to remain in that position till morning.

For some time he steadily averted his gaze from the bed, but at last compelled to look in that direction by a kind of magnetic attraction, his attention was at once drawn to the pillow, which seemed to have assumed a very extraordinary shape. Thinking there must be something wrong with his sight—that he had, perhaps, over-strained his eyes—he tried to rest them by looking at nothing in particular, but again coming under the powerful influence which had previously forced him to gaze at the bed, he now looked towards it, and saw that the pillow was no longer a pillow, but a face. There was the nose, thick and slightly crooked; there, the ears, big and set low down and far back on the head; and there the eyes, and the mouth; and it was the last that fascinated my friend most. The lips were so life-like—so absolutely real—coarse, sensual lips, such as one sees on so many faces—and the jaws were so wide open, just as if the person were in the act either of snoring or yawning. It was a common, almost repulsively common face, and yet my friend kept on staring at it.

His candle at length burnt low, but without getting off the table, he lit the only other candle he had, and again concentrated his attention on the face.

The traffic outside had now practically ceased, and, in place of the continual jingle, jingle of the hansoms, the clatter of horses' hoofs, and the rattle of the trams and carts, a tremendous silence supervened. My friend heeded it not, all his faculties, his ideas, his thoughts were centered on the spot where the the pillow should have been and the face lay.

Of course it was a face—he knew the type well. It belonged to a fat, lumbering, pot-bellied kind of creature, who spent all his time in the public house; and, as if to clinch the matter and assure him that no further proof was needed, he suddenly smelt beer.

Now there is no mistaking the smell of beer, especially if it is stale. To my friend, who was practically a teetotaller it was one of the most offensive smells imaginable, and as it came to him in whiffs from the bed, he screwed up his nose and uttered an expression of the greatest disgust. Then something drew his eyes to the valance—a huge, black thing with long, sprawled-out legs and wavy antennæ was slowly crawling up it. Another, almost immediately afterwards, followed suit, and yet another, until at last the whole valance swarmed with them, and my friend could hear, very distinctly, the ticking of their legs each time they moved. Never had he undergone such torments; his whole skin itched, his spine felt as if it was being subjected to a shower bath. Right to the top of the valance the beetles crept, now on to the counterpane, now

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the sheet, now the face, and now the mouth. Yes, it was for the mouth one and all aimed. My friend then forced his gaze away from the bed and directed it to the floor—the floor that lay between him and the doorway—here and there he thought he saw something move, but there was no comparison between the path to the door and the floor near the bed.

Placing his rent for the week on the table, together with a hastily scribbled note explaining his conduct, he cautiously descended from his perch, and, snatching up his portmanteau, made a bolt for the front door.

Some weeks later, a brother journalist asked him if he could recommend any rooms on the south-east side of the river, "but not in Kennington Park Road."

"Why not there?" my friend inquired.

"Because of an experience I once had," was the reply, "and which I have never forgotten. Do you believe in ghosts, and are you fond of beetles?"

"What!" my friend exclaimed, "so you've been to that house, too!"

They then compared notes and it not only turned out the brother journalist had had a precisely similar experience; but that he had terminated his sojourn in the house in exactly the same manner.

"The landlady must be getting used to midnight flittings by this time," he observed, "and I only hope everyone has not been so scrupulous with regard



payment as you and I . That woman is an old 'devil. Do you know what happened there? I found out about it from the doctor who was called in to see the body, and, of course, what he told me explains that ghastly pillow face.

"Some years ago, the landlady's husband came back so drunk that he could not get into bed, and, instead of having him lifted up and placed out of reach of those infernal cockroaches, she let him lie on the ground by the side of the bed all night. You know how fond beetles are of beer; well, they smelt his breath, and when his good spouse came to have a look at him in the morning, she found him just where she had left him—choked!"

. . . . .

Soho—so rumour asserts—is full of ghosts. Everyone knows the story of the phantom blackbird that for generations haunted a house in Dean Street, but the case of the flat over a shop in Greek Street, quite close to Shaftesbury Avenue, is, perhaps, new to most of my readers.

I can only quote from hearsay. According to my informant, shortly before the War, a medical student took rooms at No.— Greek Street, and, after being in them for a week, angrily demanded of the landlady one morning what she meant by putting him to sleep in damp sheets. The landlady declared indignantly she had done no such thing, but the student persisted that she had, and said he would give notice,

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if it occurred again. That evening, on his return from the hospital, the landlady asked him to come with her to his bedroom and feel the sheets so as to satisfy himself they were thoroughly dry.

"I have had them in front of the kitchen fire all the afternoon," she said.

Accompanying her to the room the student did as she wished.

"Now," she cried, "are you satisfied?"

"Yes, they're dry enough now," the student replied, "but I can assure you last night they were sopping."

He didn't go to bed that night till late, but he had hardly got in between the sheets, when he was out of them again—they were wringing wet. In the morning, however, when he felt them with the intention of showing them to the landlady they were absolutely dry.

Much mystified he gave notice to leave, when the landlady at once offered to put him in another room, and, on being asked several times what difference that would make, she at length reluctantly admitted that other lodgers who had occupied that apartment had complained of the same thing and told her the bed was haunted.

"I always put it down to their imagination," she said, "but now since you are so positive, maybe, there is something in it after all. There's a room on the landing just above this that's empty and you can move into it to-day."

The student, however, had had quite enough of the house and, adhering to his resolution, he left that evening.

Talking of medical students reminds me of Wimpole Street. There is a house there, invariably occupied by doctors, that has long borne a reputation for being haunted. According to an account published in a magazine some twenty or thirty years ago the phenomena that occurred there were chiefly auditory. The cracking and swishing of a whip was periodically heard in one of the rooms, as if somebody was being mercilessly chastised, whilst sounds of a desperate scuffle—a scuffle that ended in a significant thud—were from time to time experienced by those sleeping on a certain landing. All sorts of theories have been advanced in explanation, none more feasible, perhaps, than that the hauntings are the re-enactions of certain gross acts of cruelty to a poor servant maid who once lived—and died—on the premises.

During the war I had rather a weird experience looking for a ghost in Wigmore Street. A flat there was reputed to be haunted by a blue light that moved from room to room, and by the figure of a man that was seen almost every night and at about the same time, as the lights appeared, standing motionless at the foot of one of the staircases.

Well, one night, having arranged to meet several people there to do an all-night sitting, I had only just started from a Club in Regent Street, when

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the maroons went off, and very shortly afterwards the only too familiar sound of the guns was heard.

Everyone, of course, was taking cover, but as I considered myself bound to keep my appointment, I jumped into a 'bus, which took me as far as Oxford Circus, and I subsequently enjoyed the somewhat novel sensation of finding myself the only pedestrian in Wigmore Street. A perfect pandemonium was now going on in the air, every now and then bits of shrapnel were falling on the pavement and roadway (unpleasantly reminding me that I had nothing on my head but a soft felt hat), and all was pitch dark, saving for a glimmer of red light from a lamp post, just sufficient to enable one to read the very ominous words—"Take Cover."

I do not think—outside ghost land—any scene effect could have been much weirder. I confess I did not walk all the way—at times I ran—and when I reached my friend's house I rapped with no ordinary vigour. No one but the owner of the flat and her companion were there, my friends—the friends to meet whom I had strained every fibre and muscle in my body—did not turn up.

We sat—we did everything we could to encourage the ghost to appear—but it refused to be drawn.

"No doubt," as the lady of the flat facetiously remarked, "the firing has scared it and, following the example of all wise citizens, it has taken cover."



In Harley Street there are two houses that I know of haunted; and I daresay there are many others—at least there ought to be—for though it is true that the doctors who live there have sometimes effected a cure, God knows how many others of their patients their superior medical knowledge may not have destroyed. I shrewdly suspect, too, that in this street, many a poor doggie has been barbarously tortured in the private operating theatres of those most infamous of all so-called scientists—the “highly qualified” vivisectionists.

One, indeed, of the houses to which I have referred is haunted by the phantom of a dog—a spaniel that is often heard howling and screaming as if in terrible agony in one of the top rooms; and in the other house, which witnessed a very dreadful and sordid crime some forty or fifty years ago, the haunting takes the form of a barrel, which is occasionally seen standing in a passage in the basement and heard, in the dead of night, descending the kitchen stairs with a series of appalling bumps and thuds.

This discussion of haunted houses in London must not be closed before some allusion has been made to a case in Piccadilly. Several writers have referred to a haunted flat over a shop not very far from Dover Street, and from what they have said I am convinced that they have got hold of spurious facts.

I went with a barrister friend to the flat some eight

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or nine years ago, when it was temporarily untenanted, and although we could not obtain permission to spend the night there, we learned from very reliable sources that one of the rooms, which we saw, was haunted by a presence—thought to be that of a lady—that periodically visited whoever happened to be sleeping there, and, sitting on their bed, imparted to them so real a sensation of strangulation that they sometimes relapsed into a condition of unconsciousness. There is, apparently, no satisfactory explanation of the hauntings, but the most feasible theory that has been formulated, so far, is that the flat was once occupied by a lady, who, in a fit of temporary insanity, attempted to strangle, first her sister, and then herself. This—if it be true—would bear out the idea I formed long ago, that houses in which homicidal maniacs have lived and died have, at least, one superphysical phenomenon in common, namely, the sensation of choking or strangulation.

And now, having said all I intended to say with regard to haunted houses, I will conclude this volume with a reference to some of the hauntings connected with the London bridges. Considering the number of tragedies—murders, suicides and accidents—that are associated with the Thames, it is not in the least surprising that its banks are haunted. However, to get to know something of the ghosts that are periodically seen along the Embankment and on certain of the bridges, one has to spend nights out-of-doors and get in close touch with the vagrants who sleep

under the arches, and with the older members of the River Police. It is they who can tell us of these ghosts—and they will tell one much, if one knows how to loosen their tongues and allay their suspicions.

A tramp once told me, that late one night, as he was leaning over Waterloo Bridge trying to sum up the courage to jump, and thus terminate his existence, a fashionably dressed youth passed him by, reeling slightly as if he were the worse for drink. The sight of a gold watch and chain on the youth's waiscoat inspiring my friend, the tramp, with an idea, he followed the young man, intent on robbing him. To his delight the youth soon came to a halt and lolled against the parapet of the bridge for support. Now was his chance. Stealing quietly up behind his victim he made a sudden grab at his watch; but, to his amazement, his hand closed on nothing solid at all, and he found himself in violent collision with the wall. There was no trace of his would-be victim anywhere; he had disappeared as completely as if the bridge had suddenly opened and let him through.

"That cured me of all desire to put an end to myself that night," the tramp observed, "indeed, my one thought was to get off the bridge as quickly as possible, and to seek company—the company of some living human being like myself."

A case of haunting on Westminster Bridge was experienced and related to me by a policeman. He

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was crossing the bridge from the direction of the Abbey about two o'clock one morning, when he heard someone running after him, and looking round, he found himself face to face with a well-dressed girl of the most singular beauty.

"Please come back—come back with me at once," she pleaded. "Someone whom I have just left is in great trouble."

As the policeman had to report himself to the sergeant almost directly, he hesitated, but the girl's eyes were fixed on his with an expression of such irresistible entreaty that he finally gave way and followed her. She led him off the bridge, and, as he turned the corner on to the Embankment, he saw a woman in the act of throwing herself into the river. After a short and desperate struggle he succeeded in preventing her, but, judge of his astonishment when, on looking into her face, he found she was the exact counterpart of the girl who had fetched him, and, on turning to the latter for an explanation, he found she had vanished.

"Whatever has become of your daughter, or twin sister?" he cried, gazing eagerly around him in every direction.

"Become of whom?" the woman said.

"Why, your daughter or twin sister," the policeman replied, "for the lady who brought me here is the living image of yourself."

It was now the woman's turn to look astonished.

"Why, what do you mean?" she exclaimed. "Are

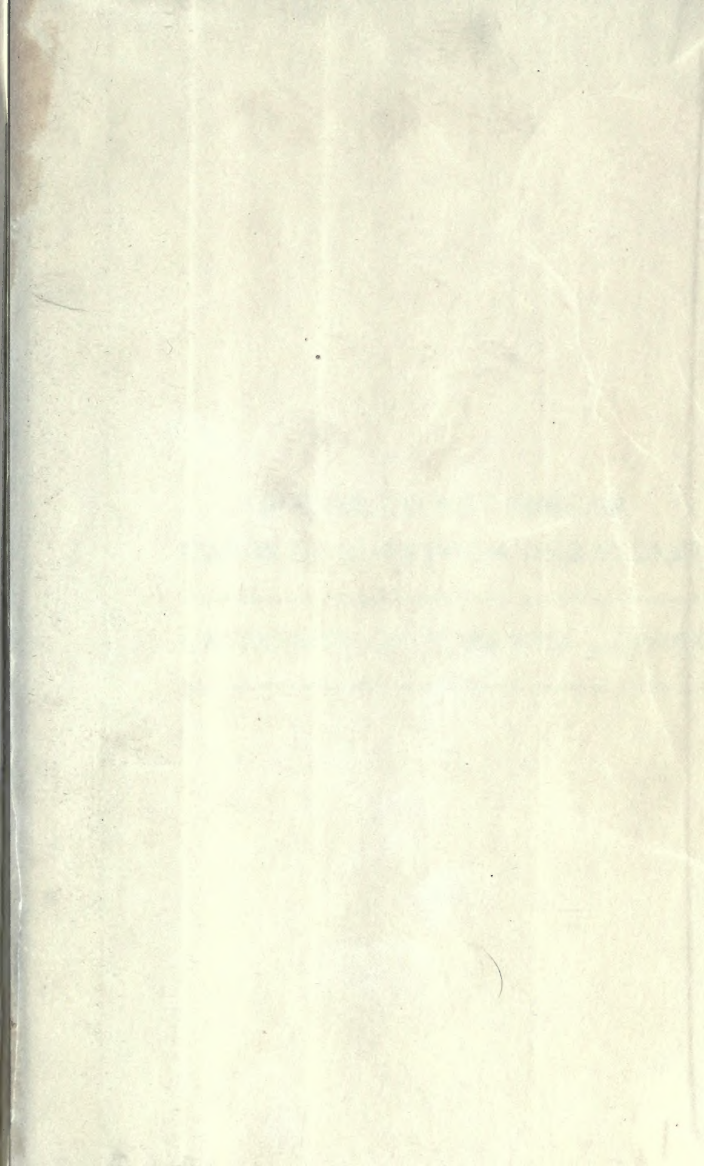


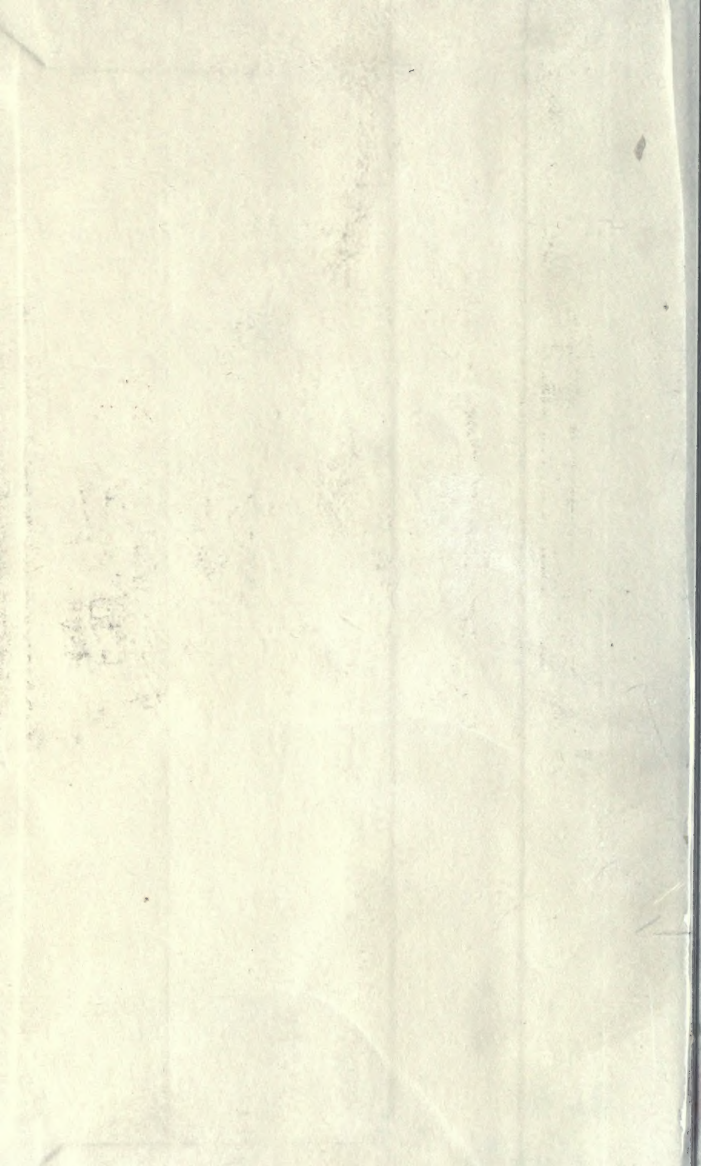
you mad? I have no daughter or twin sister—in fact, I have neither friends nor relatives—I am utterly alone. I can assure you I have seen no woman since I came out here, and without meaning any offence, I wish I hadn't seen you."

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