

at me with his harsh frown and his stern eyes. I could stand the suspense no longer.

"Uncle," I cried, "why do you appear to me thus?"

"Nephew! when did you see me last?"

"Here, uncle—on that sad Christmas eve."

"What did I do for you that night?"

"You made a will leaving me all your property."

"What happened to me that night?"

"You were murdered in your bed."

"Has the murder been avenged?"

"Not yet, uncle."

"Are you taking any measures to have it avenged?"

"No, uncle."

Oh! how I trembled beneath his searching glance.

"Nephew, listen: swear that you will take *reasonable* measures to have my murder avenged—*reasonable* measures. You are not bound to anything extraordinary. Do you understand?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Then lift up your right hand and say 'I swear.'"

I complied, and even as I spoke the lamp sputtered again, the light rose higher and higher; my uncle's figure became ill-defined and featureless, then resolved itself into a mist, till, as the lamp gave forth its normal light, I was alone. I sank back into my chair and my eyes closed. In a moment I was again on my feet, and with two strides was beside my friend.

Clutching him by the shoulder—

"Tom! Tom!" I cried.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

*IN WHICH THE HALL CLOCK TELLS A STORY.*

"HALLO! What's the matter?" cried Tom, jumping to his feet and rubbing his eyes.

"Is it twelve?"

"O Tom!"

I could say no more, but clinging to him, sobbed like a little child.

Tom glanced at me anxiously and took out his watch. "Four minutes past twelve," he exclaimed.

"Tell me what's happened, Harry. You needn't be afraid. If you've seen a ghost you're better off than most people."

"Tom, I've seen my uncle!"

"You did? Tell me everything from the time I went to sleep till now."

With no little incoherence I gave him a full account of my adventure. Tom was certainly astonished. At several points he was surprised, and was very particular in inquiring into the exact words my uncle used. These words and my answers he insisted on my repeating over and over again, and he seemed to find an import in them beyond what was on the surface.

"Hallo! What's this, Harry?" he exclaimed suddenly as he stooped to the floor and picked up my watch. "Why, here's more mystery. Your watch has stopped at twelve to the minute. There's a coincidence."

"Yes; but it can be explained," I answered. "I dropped my watch at twelve, and most probably the shock of the fall stopped it."



"Suppose we take a look at those clocks." Lamp in hand, Tom led the way through the hall and went from room to room. But the clocks were as we had seen them at first.

"Well, Tom," I said, when we had completed this investigation, "what have you to say—what's your advice?"

"Mrs. Raynor has to be found. Your uncle's appearance to you has thrown no light upon the matter; and what's more, I doubt whether he appeared to you at all. Ghosts that are anxious to have their murders avenged are good enough for story-books, but I don't believe in them. If they were so anxious to have their murders avenged, all they'd need to do would be to appear to the fellow that murdered them and make faces at him."

"But, Tom, I'm sure I saw my uncle."

"If he had come to ask your prayers for his soul, I could believe it; but the 'avenge-his-foul-and-most-unnatural-murder' sort of a ghost is a fraud. The fact is, Harry, I didn't believe this house was haunted from the first; and now I'm sorry I talked about it seriously to you. I'm afraid it wound up your imagination: it would have been better had I wound up the clock. As it was, it was your imagination that struck twelve."

Tom talked in the same strain at some length, but he failed to convince me.

The hours passed wearily, draggingly. What a cry of joy broke from me as the first faint streaks of day lined the eastern rim of the horizon.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" cried Tom. "Just wait till the sun takes his first peep at us. Then we'll

settle whether we think this house is haunted. Then, lunch."

Brighter and brighter grew the eastern sky: the birds broke into song without in my uncle's garden, and their singing sank into my heart like a healing balm.

"Whoop-la! The sun!" exclaimed my companion. "Now, Harry, give me your honest verdict. Do you think this house is haunted?"

"I do: what do you say, Tom? Do you think it is haunted? Don't be afraid to tell me the truth."

Tom put his feet apart, his hands behind his back, and reflected. Suddenly his face lighted up and he clapped his hands together.

"Harry," he said, "I've got it. Come along." And catching me by the hand, he hurried down the stairs.

"Now," he continued, "look at that clock."

Much puzzled, I fixed a steady gaze upon the hall clock, expecting from Tom's animation that I was about to read the solution of my midnight adventure upon its face.

"Well," I said at length, "I see nothing striking about that clock."

"If you don't see anything striking about it, perhaps you hear something striking?"

"Look here, Tom, if you've hustled me down here to work off a vile pun like——"

"Oh, hold on; there's sense in my pun. You didn't——"

Here Tom suspended his sentence as he jumped upon a chair and examined the top of the clock. As he looked, his face brightened; he exclaimed under his breath, "I knew it," and added aloud:



"You didn't hear that clock strike last night, and I'll bet I can prove it. Here—hop up on this chair and take a good look at the top."

I got up beside him on the chair.

"What do you see?" he pursued.

"I see lots of dust, varied by the name 'Tom Playfair.'"

"Now, Harry, take a good look at that name; look at it letter by letter. Try to photograph it on your memory."

I was now deeply impressed, for I saw that Tom was both earnest and excited, so I gazed at the letters one by one till I was perfectly satisfied that examination could no farther go.

"Harry," resumed my companion when we had stepped down from the chair, "have you read many ghost-stories?"

"Yes. The two years before coming to St. Maure's I read every ghost-story I could get my hands on till our doctor found me out and told my father I was ruining myself. The doctor said that an occasional ghost-story might not harm a healthy boy, but that for one in my state of health nothing could be worse."

"Oh, bother the doctor! But didn't you come across a good many ghosts appearing at midnight and just on the stroke of twelve?"

"Yes; but, look here, Tom Playfair," I began, somewhat nettled, "you needn't try to make me believe that I'm a born fool. I——"

"There's no use in getting excited, Harry, and it's no sign of foolishness to have a vivid imagination. But even your doctor is against you. Why in the world should a ghost wait till it strikes

twelve? That's a bit out of story-books. But just wait till I prove you're wrong."

Tom opened the clock-door, and after peering about for a few moments discovered the key.

"Now, Harry, I'm going to put the hand of this clock back to one half minute to twelve. There! that's done. Now I'm going to wind it—so! and now that it's wound we'll both wait for results."

"Tick, tick," went the clock solemnly and slowly. The sound of it sent a shiver through me. Tom, quick to divine my feelings, caught my hand and held it in his warm clasp. I gave his hand a hearty squeeze, and as I gave it I could see that Tom understood the squeeze to be an apology for my touch of temper in the conversation just set down. Tom answered the apology by a grin, which I interpreted as meaning "that's all right, Harry."

It is thus that the small boy saves time and many words.

Presently there was a whirr—whirr—whirr—a rasping convulsion that seemed to set the clock-case into a tremble and certainly sent me into that undesirable state; then the clock began to strike.

Tom's arm came around my neck at the first whirr; and I was indeed grateful, for I had as lief face a wild beast of the forest just then as this striking clock.

With much groaning and wheezing and internal agitation the clock gave forth its twelve strokes. Had it not been for Tom's protecting arm I fear me I should have run away. The reader may laugh; but such is the fact. Tom seemed to be highly pleased with the clock's performance.

"Look here, Harry, did the clock strike just that way last night?"



"Exactly," I answered promptly; "only, of course, I make allowances for the difference in distance."

Tom was not pleased with this answer, and knit his brow in thought.

"Oh!" he exclaimed presently, "didn't you hear that clock strike the night you were here before?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And did you notice it particularly?"

"It scared me. I thought it sounded like my poor uncle and Caggett growling and groaning together."

"Whoo! what an imagination you had, Harry. No wonder you dreamed of it last night."

I was about to lose my temper, when Tom jumped upon the chair, gave one look, and uttered a cry of triumph.

"*Quod erat demonstrandum*, Harry. Hop up here quick and tell me what you think about it."

I took my former place beside him on the chair.

"Your name is a little blurred by the dust," I said.

"Precisely: the clock, when it struck, set the dust a-flying, and that's the result—see?"

"Pshaw! what else could you expect?"

"Harry Dee," exclaimed Tom in his highest tones, "where are your brains? If that clock struck at twelve o'clock last night my name would have been blurred then. It wasn't. The dust upon the top wasn't disturbed one bit last night; now do you see?"

"Tom, I take it back; I *am* a born fool; that clock did not strike last night."

"Consequently——" suggested Tom.

"Consequently I dreamed that it struck; and—and—Tom. you're right; it was a vivid dream."

"Now you're talking sense. I'm mighty glad I put my name up there last night; it spoiled a ghost. This house, Harry, is no more haunted than I am. The fact is I never thought it was; but I thought it wouldn't hurt to spend a night here, especially as it's the best kind of fun."

"Yes—that's all right, Tom; but we're as far off now from the mystery as we were before."

"Not at all," retorted Tom, "at least you are not. And now, Harry, you go to work and hunt up Mrs. Raynor, and you'll find out something more."

## CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH THE CHAPTER PROCEEDS FROM GAY TO GRAVE,  
FROM LIVELY TO SEVERE.

"*THOMA, quænam est hujus vocis significatio?*"

"Tom, what's the meaning of this word?"

I asked, pointing him to the word "*naviculariis*" in the "Manilian Law."

"*Revera, nescio: nunquam antea vidi.*"

"I'm sure I don't know: never met it before."

"*Nonne derivatur a voce 'navis' quæ anglice significat 'ship'?*"

"Isn't it from '*navis*,' a ship?" inquired Harry Quip.

"*Utique, Henrice: jamjam magistrum hac de re rogavi, qui me certiore fecit vocabulum istud significare 'ship-owner.'*"

"Yes, Harry; I've already asked our professor, and he tells me that the word in question means a ship-owner," came from Percy.

"*Si quis me rogaret, quomodo anglice redderem istam*