

"Don't you remember the little boy who came to spend Christmas night with his uncle six years ago?"

Again he looked at me keenly, and I saw, as the blood deserted his cheeks, that he recognized me.

"Yes, I know you—ha, ha, ha!" (what a blood-curdling laugh it was!)"—"I thought you were the murderer once—didn't I? But I meant you no harm. Honestly I thought you did it in your sleep. But I was glad when I heard that that she-devil had done it and not you."

My anger at his allusion to Mrs. Dorne almost got the better of me. But I held myself in check.

"So you're in need of help?" I said.

"I haven't had a square meal in three days, sir. Things have gone awful hard with me. An honest man can't make a living in these hard times. Yes, sir; I've been obliged to beg. Couldn't you get me something to do, sir?"

"Yes," I answered quickly. "You come to my father's house at eight sharp on the morning of December the twenty-fourth, and I'll give you a job that will pay you well, and if you satisfy me, I'll try to help you along."

"I'll be there, sir. Will it be ready money?"

"You'll get a good sum from me on Christmas morning. Here are two dollars and a half for your present needs. I'd give you more, only I count on making it up when we meet again."

"Thank you, sir. [How eagerly he clutched the money!] You may be sure that I'll call on the morning of December 24th."

His rasping voice still rasped in my ears as I

made my way home; and into the disordered dreams of that night floated this gloomy-browed, hideous tramp, moving about in all the fantastic shapes born of unpleasant memories.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN WHICH MR. CAGGETT ALLOWS HIMSELF TO BE PERSUADED TO SPEND A NIGHT IN MY UNCLE'S HOUSE.

IF my dreams were unpleasant on the night of the 22d, they were positively frightful during the succeeding night. My uncle came and went in various loathsomeness of shape. Caggett came and went in all the bloated proportions of unhealthy dreamland; both, by way of variety, invaded my slumbers together, and their harsh, rasping voices cut my agonized dream-self like a knife. These hideous apparitions were succeeded by moments of wakefulness, at which intervals I half repented of my morrow's expedition, and devoutly wished that my uncle and his money had never come within the sphere of my life.

At three in the morning I arose in disgust, took a cold shower-bath, and composed myself to read. After an early breakfast I threw my things into my valise, and was taxing my memory to find whether anything had escaped me, when I heard a sharp ring at the door-bell. Being on the tiptoe of expectation I hastened to the door myself and opened it upon a boy, who delivered me the following telegram:

Train delayed six hours. Can't make it so as to meet you at Sessionsville. Will see what I can do.

PERCY WYNN.

My heart sank on reading these lines; the disappointment was keen, and again I was tempted to abandon the extravagant project. What! spend that night of all nights, in that house of all houses, with that man of all men—Caggett? The fear and loathing with which the very thought of this fellow filled me is unspeakable. To the reader it may appear childish, and, indeed, in a certain way it was childish. There are impressions made on us in early days which many years efface not. In the presence of Caggett I was still, so to speak, the small, nervous, sickly boy not yet in his teens. Yet why should I fear him now? I was strong, healthy, well developed, his superior in intellectual training, nearly his equal in strength. Thus I reasoned; but feeling and memory were not to be carried by syllogisms. I was afraid of Caggett—that was clear. I was resolved that he should be my companion—that too was certain. But I could not bring myself to think of spending a single night alone with him. Accordingly, within three minutes of receiving the telegram I sent a note to Mr. Lang, telling him I needed him at once, and unfolding the circumstances that made me request his attendance. I sent this note by a special messenger, and after an interval which, short as it was, seemed an age to me, I received this answer:

DEAR SIR:—I regret exceedingly that business of most pressing moment, and to which I have pledged myself, will not allow me to accompany you on your visit to your uncle's house. Am very sorry, indeed, for am most interested in the case. The best thing I can do—the only thing—is to send you the only available man I can command—Mr. John Nugent. He is a good man, very acute, but young, inexperienced, and as yet much

wanting in physical bravery. Hope he will do. It will be a good novitiate for him in our line of life to spend a night in what is popularly supposed to be a haunted house. With regrets, I am yours sincerely,
LANG.

P. S.—Nugent has given me trouble; doesn't want to go at all. But I've put the screws on him. He'll be at your house within a few minutes of this letter.

L.

This missive did not raise my already depressed spirits. Everything seemed to be going awry, even the weather, which had grown ugly.

A few minutes before eight a young gentleman with nondescript clothes, straw-colored hair and mustache, and a washed-out complexion, presented himself to me as Mr. John Nugent. I was struck with his retreating chin, weak mouth, and general air of irresolution.

"I'm afraid," I said, as I shook his hand, "that I'm taking you upon a very uncongenial task."

"Oh dear no! not at all. You don't know how delighted I am," and he smiled as men smile when they are lost for facial expression.

"My friend," I thought, as I gazed into the face of the very weak man, "if unnecessary and injudicious lying be a passport to success in your profession, you'll stand at the top in a disgracefully brief time."

Further reflections were cut short by the appearance of Mr. Caggett; every inch a tramp still, but a tramp brushed up as to his shreds and patches for a special occasion.

"Good-morning, Caggett," and as I spoke I felt grateful for the encouraging presence of even the insignificant Mr. Nugent; "you're on time for a splendid job. I'll need your services to-day and

perhaps to-morrow, for which I'll give you twenty-five dollars."

"I'm your man," said Caggett promptly. "What do you want me to do? I'll begin right off."

"I want to examine my uncle's house."

What a living horror his face became as he took in these words!

"The haunted house?" he gasped.

"Pshaw! that's talk," I answered.

"No, it isn't," he protested. "You'll never come out alive."

"Nonsense; I spent a night there already, and I liked it so much that I'm not afraid to go again."

"But I am, and I'll not go. Lord! to think of staying there alone where my old boss was murdered."

"But you'll not be alone," I urged. "This gentleman and myself will keep you company."

The horror was still on his face as he repeated:

"I'll not go."

"Caggett, I need you. I want to search all the rooms for a large sum of money. You know the house better than any one alive. I'll make it worth your while to go. You'll get fifty dollars."

Was it the fifty dollars which changed Caggett's purpose? I thought so at the time. Perhaps the sequel will supply the reader with another and a stronger motive. At any rate, after due pause and consideration, Caggett asked:

"Will you give me one pint of brandy to-day, another to-night, and another to-morrow?"

"Yes," I answered, after reflection; "but mind, if you get drunk, you get no pay."

He laughed a laugh which was as the swinging

of multitudinous hinges, whereat the law-clerk changed color, and tugged nervously at his mustache.

"You needn't fear that I'll get drunk on that allowance. Well, I agree to go: but remember I'm not to be alone for a single second during this night."

"That you may rely upon," I said, "if you follow instructions."

Thus it came to pass that Caggett, Nugent, and myself, a most ill-assorted trio, took the nine o'clock train for Tower Hill Mansion, arrived there on a gloomy evening, and established ourselves in my uncle's house, to pass a night so full of strange occurrences, so remarkable in its turn of events that I shall give it the benefit of at least one chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH I GET A LETTER AND MAKE A DISCOVERY.

"NOW," I began, when we had taken a general survey of the whole interior, "I want you both to understand what I'm after. I have reason to think that my uncle died with over forty thousand dollars by his side. That money, I have also reason to think, is still in the house. Probably it is in one of the three rooms——"

"I thought," interrupted Caggett, "that that Mrs. Raynor ran away with all the money."

"So did others," was my answer, "but later events have changed that opinion. As I was saying, I have reason to think that if this money is about at all, it is probably in my uncle's library or in his bedroom,

or in the room where I slept that night. We'll begin by making a thorough search of the library; then we'll go on either to the room where I slept that night or to my uncle's bedchamber, according to the time it takes us to complete our search in the library."

"I don't understand," said Caggett, with his frown and rasp in the superlative.

"Well, you know enough for the present."

We entered the library and began the search. At first I was amused by the nervous, terrified glances of my two companions. Nugent was constantly looking over his shoulder, while his fingers were flying up and twitching his mustache every minute. Caggett was less nervous in his movements, but by no means less frightened. The peculiar look of horror to which I have already referred was his characteristic expression; his hand was cold and clammy, his face pale and drawn.

All this, I repeat, was amusing at first. But the amusement was short-lived. Nothing is more contagious than fear; and very soon I discovered that I too was yielding to fright. Unconsciously I began to take an occasional look over my shoulder. In short, we were a trio of cowards. Frightened as I was, however, I was determined to brave it out. In comparison with my companions, I was a hero.

Despite our condition we effected a thorough search of the library. Not a case, not a shelf, scarcely a book remained unexamined. Then we sounded the flooring and the walls. Here my weak friend, the clerk, showed that he was not utterly an ignoramus. So interested did he become in tapping the walls and partitions that he lost sight of his ter-

ror and actually put fresh spirit into me. The library was a large room, and I discovered when we had finished its examination that it wanted but five minutes to eleven.

"Now, gentlemen," I said, "we shall go to my uncle's room, and examine it in the same manner."

But here the wretched Caggett objected.

"No, no!" he exclaimed, his voice hoarse with emotion. "Not that room! Take your own first. We can go to your uncle's in the morning."

"My mind is made up. My uncle's first."

"No! or at least wait here till midnight passes."

There was a great fear upon his features.

"Come on," I said sternly, catching up the lamp.

"I'll not go," he growled.

"Very well," I said, "then I'm going to lock you up here alone without light, and besides——"

"Oh! I'll go! I wouldn't be alone here for all the money in the world."

As he spoke he took a mouthful of brandy.

How closely these two men clung to me as we ascended the stairs together! so closely that I could feel that they were trembling, and hear, as I thought, their heart-beats. As we were midway between the first and second floors, the woodwork upon which we trod gave a dismal creak; Caggett jumped with fright, and had it not been for the support of my free hand would have fallen down the stairs.

Soon we were hard at it examining my uncle's room. Nugent was now a trifle brave. There was something of the detective in him, for he was really earnest in the work of finding out every nook and cranny of the apartment. Within fifteen minutes we had explored my uncle's wardrobe, his table, and

his desk. Then Nugent took the lead. Caggett was in a state of terror, which he kept within limits by frequent applications to the bottle of brandy. After we had examined the flooring he threw himself into a chair, and addressed the detective:

"It's no use; if I were you I would sit down. We'll put in our work in the other room. Hadn't we better try the other room now?" he inquired, turning to me.

Neither Nugent nor myself paid him the least attention. We were both busy sounding the walls. I had come within a few feet of my uncle's bed when Caggett jumped to his feet and ran over toward me.

"For God's sake!" he cried, "let us leave the house now. To-morrow will be the time—to-morrow."

"Sit down, you coward," I said sternly.

He complied, yielding rather to his own terror than to my words, and I continued tapping the wall.

"Have you ever made a close examination of the bedding," asked Nugent, turning to me.

"Tom Playfair and myself took a look at it when we were here," I replied. "But we didn't spend much time at it."

"There's nothing there," growled Caggett. "I made it up myself before I left this horrible house."

Nugent, taking no notice of the remark, proceeded to throw coverings, pillowcase, and mattress upon the floor.

Scarcely had he done so, when Caggett rose and advanced to his side.

"Let that bed alone," he growled.

Caggett was an awful spectacle. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face was quivering with fear and

rage. Nugent was daunted by the horrid sight. He stepped back, and stood gazing spell-bound upon this wretched figure.

"Here, Nugent!" I exclaimed. "You try your hand at this wainscoting. I'll examine the bed myself."

Caggett closed his hands tightly and made a few steps toward me, brandishing his fists as he advanced.

"Stand still!" I cried. "Nugent, I call upon you to look at this man."

Nugent, who had put himself beside me, lifted his head, and the two of us eyed the would-be aggressor in silence.

Caggett quailed before our stare. Muttering a curse, he returned to the chair and buried his face in his hands.

Suddenly an involuntary exclamation from my lips brought the detective to my side.

"What's this?" I exclaimed, pointing to a letter which was pinned to the under side of a bed-slat. The clerk, without answering, pulled away the pin, and the letter fell to the floor.

There was a muffled sound from Caggett.

"Why," I cried, as I picked it up, "just look at this address."

Nugent bent over and read:

MASTER HARRY DEE,
Present.

"Get the lamp, Nugent," I said. "This letter looks very old, and who knows but it may have come from my uncle."

I tore open the envelope, and, as the clerk held

the lamp, I read with wonder and dismay such as no words can express:

Dec. 24th, 18—.

NEPHEW HARRY:—To-night at twelve o'clock I commit suicide. If you should enter this, my room, to-morrow, you will find me dead with my own knife in my heart.

JAMES DEE.

"Good God!" I cried, "am I awake or dreaming."

Nugent took the note from my palsied hand and read it with eagerness.

"What do you think of it?" I asked.

He handed me back the note, glancing as he did so toward Caggett. And again the terror of that sight seemed to penetrate Nugent's inmost being.

"Look! look!" he gasped.

Well might he be frightened. Seated beside the table Caggett was the personification of horror—his facial muscles were twitching madly, his eyes were fixed upon us with a glassy stare; his mouth was open, and he appeared to be struggling for breath. It appeared to me at once that the wretched man had been taken by a fit. Placing the lamp on the table, just at his elbow, I hastily took another pint of brandy from my valise and filled him a small glass.

"More! more!" he gasped, as he drank it down at a single draught.

I filled him another.

His terror moderated sensibly.

"Caggett," I said, when I was satisfied that he was calm enough to converse. "Look at this letter from my uncle."

He endeavored to hold the paper, but it fluttered from his hands to the floor.

Picking it up I read it aloud.

"Do you understand this, Caggett?"

There was a fearful play of the muscles about his throat and a few deep gurgles as of a man choking to death, before he succeeded in forcing out the words:

"Yes, and it's true."

"What!" I cried, "all these years you have known that my uncle made away with himself, and you have allowed an innocent woman to be hunted? But how did you come to know of my uncle's suicide?"

The same struggling and play of his throat ensued before he labored forth the words:

"More brandy."

I administered him another glass. "That night," he began with an effort, "I was working in the cellar till after twelve o'clock. When I came upstairs I knocked at his room."

He paused to pass his hand over his brow.

"There was no answer, and I entered, and then I saw your uncle lying in the bed, dead—killed by his own knife. On the chair beside him was that letter addressed to you. I read it. I took the letter and hid it in that place where you found it."

"Why—why?"

"I don't know."

"That's a lie; tell me the reason."

"I—I—I had overheard what your nurse had said to your uncle, and I wanted to throw his death on her."

I was not satisfied with this explanation, the more so as his halting way of delivering it gave me reason to suspect that he was holding something back.

"Now, Caggett, why should you want to throw the suspicion on Mrs. Raynor?"

"Because I—I thought people might think I did it."

"Was that your only reason?"

Caggett seemed to have fallen into a stupor.

"Don't give that man any more brandy," whispered the frightened young man in my ear. "If you do, there's every chance that we'll have a mad-man on our hands. I was a fool to come here." With which Nugent, taking another shuddering look at the hideous tramp, turned his back to us and resumed his examination of the wainscoting.

"Caggett," I repeated, catching him by the shoulder and shaking him, "was there any other reason?"

He opened his lips to reply, but though his lips moved there came no sound.

"Do you understand, Caggett?"

"I intended to steal his money," he answered with an effort.

I glanced at the detective.

"Tom Playfair was right," I muttered. "Mrs. Dorne did hear real footfalls besides my own, and here is the thief."

"No," said Caggett. "When I got here the money was already stolen."

I looked at him earnestly; he seemed to be speaking the truth.

"Mrs. Raynor stole it," he added.

"You wretched villain," I broke forth, "if you ever speak of Mrs. Raynor in that way again——"

"Look! look," Nugent suddenly broke in. "Here's something!"

I ran to his side. Kneeling beside the bed, which he had moved out from the wall, he was gazing into an opening in the partition, evidently much fright-

ened at the discovery he had made. The opening revealed a recess about one foot square.

"How did you find this?" I asked.

"I—I touched something or other; it must have been a spring, and a part of the wainscot rolled back."

As Nugent seemed utterly unable to proceed further, I gently shoved him aside. He fell sprawling as though I had struck him with a club. Putting my hand into the secret recess, I drew out a heavy wooden box open at the top. Bringing it nearer to the lamp I perceived almost at a glance that I was holding a fortune in my hands. Bank-notes of all values, gold and silver, every species of money. The missing treasure was found.

But who had placed it in this unknown hiding-place? It must have been my uncle. Could it be possible that he had deliberately secreted the large sum before committing suicide? This train of thought brought me back to Caggett.

Why had he thrown the awful suspicion of murder on Mrs. Dorne? Ah! it was true that he himself had wished to make away with the money. I turned to address him.

As I was about to speak, the clock in the hall, which, I had taken care to set early in the evening, broke into a peculiar whirring noise, at which sound Caggett gave a nervous start, and in moving his arm struck the shade of the student lamp. The shade moved several inches. It was connected with the wick, and in turning lowered it so that we were at once in a dim, ghostly light.

Caggett did not know that he was the cause of the darkness, and as the clock struck the first stroke