

of the hour of midnight he sprang to his feet with a low, horrible gasp and fell upon his knees, facing toward my uncle's bed.

Nugent, whose fears had been mounting with every moment since the discovery of the letter and the treasure, gave a wild cry, rushed to the door, and clattered down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

*IN WHICH CAGGETT MAKES A STARTLING DISCLOSURE,
AND I PASS THROUGH THE GREAT CRISIS OF MY LIFE.*

THERE beside the faint light of the lowered lamp, in presence of a kneeling man writhing with agony, I stood horror-stricken. It was a terrible moment—terrible in its present features, more terrible still in what it promised. Caggett was looking with a strained gaze not at the bed but at something on a line with it. His hands were alternately clasped, then thrown out from his body as though he were waving off some hideous vision. Inarticulate gasps and groans were laboring from his throat, gasps and groans beastlike in their sound, with the added human agony of a man beside himself with terror. I did not know it at the time; but I am now certain that, as Nugent had predicted, he was crazed with drink.

I would have come to his help; but I was no longer master of myself; and for what seemed a long span of time I stood motionless, gazing with awe upon this uncanny sight.

At last Caggett burst into speech:

"O Mr. Dee! Mr. Dee! You made me do it!

Go away—for God's sake don't look on me that way," and he waved his hands madly. I looked in the direction of the bed, almost expecting to see the luminous spectre of my uncle. But I saw nothing.

"It was all your own doing, Mr. Dee; you drove me to it. Didn't you tear up the will which made me your heir? I was listening, and I knew you had over forty thousand dollars with you. I couldn't help it—I didn't mean to kill you!"

Imagine my state of mind when I heard these words. It *was* a murder after all, and I was alone with the murderer.

"Before God, I didn't mean it! I stole up here, and tried to get your money without waking you. But you opened your eyes, and recognized me. Then I seized your knife and—oh! keep off—keep off——"

He gave a wild cry, and fell foaming at the mouth.

With an effort I freed myself from the spell which had bound me, and turning on the full light of the lamp I hastened to Caggett. There he lay, the embodiment of remorse and terror, his mouth still covered with foam, his eyes glassed in horror, every feature hideous beyond all human features I had ever seen. There he lay—my uncle's murderer. I could scarcely bring myself to touch this inanimate clot of crime. How my soul sickened as I put my arms about this dreadful man and placed him on my uncle's bed!

I returned to the table, and seated myself. Serious as I feared was the condition of that man of blood, I could not bring myself to touch his loathsome body again. Even his stertorous breathing

filled me with disgust, and yet I realized that I would be obliged to spend several hours, at the very least, in his company; nor, as the time passed on, did my feelings of loathing lessen. To add to my disquietude, I found gradually that I was fascinated by that still figure on the bed. I could not withdraw my eyes from his face, though with every second that face seemed to take on additional repulsiveness.

At length, unable to endure the situation longer, I brought a chair to the table and set about counting my treasure-trove. I spent quite a time in separating the gold, silver, and the bills of various denominations; but presently I found that I was in no frame of mind to carry out my intention. Then I began pacing up and down the room, keeping my face turned from the bed, endeavoring to put Caggett out of my mind, and forcing my thoughts into lovelier channels. I thought of Percy; how I longed for the presence of that dear friend! I thought of Tom, our little Jesuit. By this time, Tom must have heard midnight mass, and it comforted me to think that his prayers were with me and helping me even now. *Now.* That one word brought back the ugly present realities; brought back Caggett and all the hideous train of thought I had endeavored to put aside. Yes; I was at length sure of the murderer; sure, too, of the money so long lost. But how about my uncle's note announcing his intention of committing suicide? How, too, did it happen that the money had been secreted? Certainly my uncle, as I knew from the data furnished me by Lang, had not been in the habit of hiding his money. Had he actually intended to commit suicide, only

to be killed by his villainous servant before he could carry out his purpose? If so, why then had he concealed the money? But I scouted the thought that my uncle had contemplated making away with himself. I remembered my last interview with him; I remembered his kind words, and I felt convinced that, if he had written the note directed to me, it had been written previous to our interview in his bedroom; and that his intention had certainly been changed.

For several hours did I ponder and consider, endeavoring vainly to piece these contradictory circumstances into a consistent whole. At length, wearied and troubled, I paused in my walk, and turned my face toward the open window which looked out upon the east. The first faint gray streaks of dawn were upon the horizon. I stood for some moments gazing upon this joyous promise of daylight. But I found presently that Caggett's figure was again asserting its horrible fascination: and once more I turned my face to the wall, and, seating myself, I forced my thoughts to dwell upon the sweetest memories of Christmas.

I believe that all boys take pleasure in thinking of Bethlehem and the angels' songs. It is a series of beautiful tableaux for young as well as old. At all events, I became very interested in these tender memories, and I actually made what Catholics call a meditation. My imagination grew vivid, and I almost saw the dear Infant, the sweet Mother, almost saw that multitude of the heavenly host praising and glorifying God; almost saw the great light which cast such holy fear upon the shepherds; almost heard the heavenly chorus singing *Gloria in*

excelsis Deo—when suddenly (why I do not know, unless it be that I have a guardian angel) the vision faded, and by some impulse, which I do not attempt to account for, I turned my head sharply. I was not one moment too soon. As I turned, I noticed in the very act that it was sunrise, and the sun, bright and cheerful, was peeping over the eastern hills. This I noticed in a flash; but the fact of sunrise had no interest for me at that moment. The bed was empty! Caggett, on tiptoe, had advanced half-way across the room. His evil eyes were fixed upon me in a way there was no mistaking; in his right hand he grasped an open knife. The knife almost escaped my attention, but the eyes! I read in them that I was not to leave the room alive.

You may be sure I didn't stop to stare; for as I took in the situation I bounded to my feet, while Caggett, throwing aside his attempt at stealthiness, sprang at me with a fierce cry like the cry of a savage beast in its most savage moment.

Fear lent me agility. In a trice I had placed the table between myself and him. Oh, how I reproached myself that I had neglected to bring a pistol! I was face to face with a man stronger than myself and more accustomed, I had good reason for thinking, to deeds of violence; he was armed with a knife; I was unprotected. My heart sank within me, for I realized that the chances were in his favor. I thought of making a dash for the door, but it was evident that before I could turn the knob his knife would be in my back. Again I thought of picking up a chair, and fighting him with that weapon. But this would involve a hand-to-hand conflict—a thing I was resolved to avoid as long as possible.

For my great hope was in getting assistance from without. That cowardly law-clerk might, after all, have heart enough in his chicken-breast to return, once it was broad daylight. His return was my strongest hope. I resolved, therefore, by putting the table between Caggett and myself, to keep him at a distance as long as possible. What a tragic chase it was! With his eyes fixed steadily upon mine, Caggett played me as an angler would play a fish. With the coming of day his bravery had returned; and it was the fierce bravery of desperation. His terror had disappeared as completely as the shades of night. The deadly purpose which animated him could be read in his every feature, and most legibly in the rigid determination of his compressed lips and heavy lower jaw. Our actions, were it not for our facial expressions, might have impressed an observer with the idea that we were playing a game of "tag." Round and round we moved about the table, anon with guarded step, anon with sudden dashes. His every movement, slow or rapid, his every pause, was my guide. As he moved, I moved; as he paused, I paused. How long this grim game went on, I cannot say; it seemed at times to be of interminable length; it seemed at times to have gone on but for a few seconds. Whatever the length of time, we were soon breathing heavily. I could feel my heart beating in a way that under ordinary circumstances would have alarmed me; but placed as I was, I was too excited to be sensible of fear. It was in one of these pauses, when I stood stock-still, separated by the length of the table from my adversary, that there came upon the stillness, thus far broken only by

our heavy breathing, a crashing noise; and with it the room grew suddenly quite dark. For the moment Caggett was disconcerted; he turned suddenly in the direction whence the noise came, and I took advantage of that one moment to seize the lamp from the table, and send it with all my force at his head. The noise that had alarmed Caggett so much was occasioned by the falling of the window curtain, which, owing doubtless to our violent motions, had broken from its fastening above the window. As I had been facing in that direction, I had taken in the circumstance, without being obliged to turn my eyes from my enemy.

But quick as I had been in hurling the lamp at Caggett, I was the least bit late. As he ducked his head, the lamp went crashing against the wall, within a few inches of the curtained window, and burst into a thousand fragments.

With a sharp hiss Caggett made a dash round the table: I was almost too late in recovering myself; and indeed, as I darted away, the blade of his knife touched my coat. The throwing of the lamp had given me a new idea. Upon the table there still remained the box, heavy with its store of coins. In passing around the table I seized it, determined to await my opportunity to throw it at his head. But here I made a fatal mistake. The box was heavy and cumbrous. Once in my hands, I discovered that I had to rid myself of it, or be caught in a few moments. I hesitated between replacing it or throwing it at Caggett. It was probably the hesitation of half a second, but my decision, as the sequel will show, was unfortunate. I threw it at Caggett's head. At once Caggett ducked beneath the

table; and while the papers and notes went fluttering about the room, and with a thousand jingles the silver and gold fell and rolled in all directions upon the carpetless floor, mingling confusedly with the fragments of the glass; and while I stood motionless, waiting for Caggett's head to reappear—I suddenly felt a strong clasp upon my left ankle. Caggett had crawled under the table to my side.

On the instant I screamed out, "Help! help!" and with all my energy I broke away.

I succeeded in tearing myself from his grasp; but at what a cost! I lost my balance, fell headlong, and though I sprang to my feet without waste of a moment, there was a sharp, stinging pain in my left leg just above the ankle, where Caggett's knife had penetrated. At once my plans were changed. Delay on my part would now be dangerous, for the blood was streaming from the wound; and I grimly foresaw that with loss of blood I would presently become weak and dizzy—and then all would be over. The issue must be at once, and, therefore, as I gained my feet I turned and sprang upon Caggett, catching him above the wrist of his right hand, so as to prevent his stabbing me, and bearing him, with the force of my spring and the unexpectedness of the onset, heavily to the floor. Then there resulted a fearful struggle. He was under me, glaring at me with that same murderous look, and despite all my efforts prodding me here and there about the shoulders with his knife. I put both hands to his wrist, and held it firmly, while the blood came trickling down my arm and fell upon his upturned face.

And very soon what little confidence I had was gone; for I felt my strength leaving me. Strange

noises—did they come from within or without?—broke like the beating of drums upon my ear. The firmness of my grasp relaxed, and as a feeling of intense lassitude came over my frame the full horror of my situation flashed upon me.

I endeavored to pray, and in the act heard, as I fancied, quick footfalls without. Perhaps help was nigh. The thought seemed to revive my strength; and indeed I needed it all. Catching Caggett's hand, which had just escaped me, I arrested what might have been a fatal stroke. The struggle was renewed; and as it went on I was certain that some one was coming. I felt now that my grasp upon him was losing its firmness—and then the door burst open, and a figure, so dim had my eyes become that I failed to make out who or what it was, bounded into the room. I saw an arm strike out once, twice—and then I slipped into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN WHICH PERCY WYNN THROWS ADDITIONAL LIGHT UPON CAGGETT'S NARRATIVE, AND PUTS AN END TO THE MYSTERY.

"HALLO, Harry! Merry Christmas." Percy was bending over me with a scared face.

"Thank God! thank God!" I whispered. "Is it you, Percy, that saved me? I never counted on looking upon your dear face again."

"Yes, Harry, without boasting I can say that I saved your life. Caggett had you down, when I struck out at him."

I attempted to rise from the bed on which I was

lying, but found I could scarcely lift my head, so stiff and sore was I from cuts, bruises, and loss of blood. I gave a gasp of pain, and sank back upon the pillow.

"Poor boy," said Percy, "you mustn't try to move again. I've spent over an hour bandaging you, and if you move my bandages will come loose. Be patient for a while; I've sent for a doctor for you, and a constable for Caggett."

"Where is he?" I inquired, trying to take a full view of the room, and noticing in the effort that the bed was stripped of blanket, coverlet, and sheets.

"He's in the room next this—the wretch! But you wouldn't know him. I've bundled him up in blankets and sheets—they were the nearest things to ropes I could get—till he can't move hand or limb. He's such an awful sight, though, that I thought it would be pleasanter for you to miss seeing him."

"But, Percy, you haven't told me how you came to save me."

"It's a long story, Harry. I went on the principle 'better late than never,' and took the evening train after paying your father a visit. I got to the depot beyond about three-quarters of an hour before sunrise; and I found standing there, solitary and stupid, an insignificant looking little man, who seemed to be in a state bordering on insanity."

"Oh, Mr. Nugent!" I put in.

"Yes; I got his name out of him in about the time that an ordinary dentist would have extracted all his double teeth. I plied him hard with questions, and I'm afraid I shook him a little roughly, poor fellow, before I could get the least inkling of the way things had been going on here. He gave me

the idea that Caggett was dead because of the ghost, and that you were dying. I didn't wait for anything more, but set off for the house at a dead run."

"Six miles! did you run all the way?"

"Pretty much. When I got in sight, though, I was content to walk; I came on, getting nearer and nearer, when, as I was within three or four hundred feet of the house, I heard a cry, 'Help! help!'"

"You heard me, Percy."

"So I thought; and then you should have seen me run; I beat my record that time, and came bounding into the house, and up the stairs. I could hear an awful rolling and tumbling going on—and guided by the sound I made for this room. Caggett was just about to stab you. The two blows I gave him were cruel; he dropped over to one side like a log."

"But, Percy——"

"There now, lie still; you needn't get excited. I've lots more to tell you, you see. I know the whole story; Caggett told me everything."

"How?" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Oh, he didn't want to; but I persuaded him. At first when he came to, and found himself tied up in sheets and bedclothes, he wouldn't talk at all. But I saw that he was nervous, and I thought that by taking him on his weak point I might get all the news out of him. I took it for granted, of course, that he was the murderer."

"How did you work on his nerves, Percy?"

"Oh, it was quite simple. I cocked a pistol and put the muzzle against his ear, and said: 'Mr. Caggett, will you be obliging enough to answer a

few questions?' And Mr. Caggett became very obliging all at once; for he professed himself willing and ready to answer any and all questions I might put to him. Then I took the pistol away from his ear, and began patching you up, poor boy, while I put him through a long examination. Would you like to hear the first and complete edition? He told me all that you know, and I'm sure you're puzzled still."

"Where did you get the pistol?"

"Right here in this room. I found it in Caggett's pocket, and it was loaded, too. I could see that by the way Caggett acted when I pressed it against his ear. By the way, Mr. Caggett, I believe, will never be hanged for the murder. What drinking has left undone in ruining his health the terror and the wounds and what-not of this night have accomplished. The wretched man will probably never leave his bed again."

"Tell me what he told you, Percy."

"Well, be quiet; you're weak. You know how, once upon a time, your uncle destroyed a will in your presence which favored Caggett, and read one in your favor. Your nurse claimed fifty thousand dollars from your uncle; said she'd have it, and made some remarks about your uncle's not living long. Caggett overheard every word. He had a trick of using a keyhole. He became very angry, and made up his mind to get something out of your uncle. He knew that Mr. Dee had a large sum of money on his person (forty-three thousand dollars), which he would place under his pillow at night, and he determined to get that money and fly the country. He did not make up his mind to kill your uncle—

that was an after-thought. At twelve o'clock he stole up to Mr. Dee's room, advanced on tiptoe to his side, and tried to get the money. But here began all the trouble. There was no money under Mr. Dee's pillow. Caggett examined very cautiously, and without disturbing the sleeper; he knew your uncle generally slept with it under his pillow; but on this particular night of all nights there wasn't a trace of the money."

"Was the dagger there?" I broke in.

"Yes; it was quite convenient to your uncle's hand."

"Where was the money?"

"In the place you found it," answered Percy. "You understand, don't you? It's plain that your uncle anticipated some danger or other that night, and hid those things away."

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "He suspected that Caggett might attempt to rob him."

"Precisely; knowing Caggett pretty well, it might have occurred to him that his servant had been eavesdropping and might attempt to visit him that very night. Anyhow, whatever was the reason of his suspicions, he was justified in the event. Well, to go on, Caggett began a systematic search of the room. Of course he didn't find the money; for, till a few hours ago, he didn't even know anything of that secret recess. Finally he approached the bed again, and was about to renew his search, when your uncle suddenly opened his eyes, gave a gasp, and whispered, 'Who's there?' and as he spoke he caught Caggett's arm. Caggett with a jerk released himself, and, as your uncle gave a cry for help, he caught him by the throat, choked him into silence,

and grasping the dagger, which had slipped from your uncle's hand, plunged it into his breast. Would you believe it, Harry? that villain told me this as though he was speaking on the state of the weather. Having assured himself that your uncle was dead, the wretch walked over to the table, and turning up the light—your uncle, it seems, always slept with a light burning low—he wrote a note in imitation of James Dee's handwriting, announcing—"

"Ah," I gasped, "there's more light."

"You saw the note already, Harry; Caggett told me. But to return to our story. Caggett had just blotted and sealed this, when he heard a footstep without. Scarcely knowing what he was doing and certainly not knowing why, Caggett hastened over to the bed and pinned the letter where you found it. Then he brought out a pistol and, cocking it, waited. The steps drew nearer and nearer. Caggett waited motionless. Then, Harry, you appeared—a little boy in your night-shirt. You stopped for a moment on the threshold, and, as Caggett says, looked straight at him. That was very near the last of you, old boy. Caggett picked up a heavy walking-stick, and advanced with the intention of brain-ing you. But, instead of drawing back, you walked right in. He remembered then that he had heard you were a sleep-walker, and lowered his arm. You kept on your course, walked past him and stopped at your uncle's bed. You passed your hands over your uncle's face and breast, and even touched the knife. In leaning against the bed, Caggett saw that you had dabbled your night-shirt with blood. This suggested a new plan to him. You were a somnambulist; it would appear that you in your sleep had

murdered your uncle. Resolving to destroy the letter he had forged next day, Caggett stole on his tiptoes out of the room, and made his way hastily to his own sleeping-room, which was half-way down the hall."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, "his were the footsteps that my nurse heard."

"So I think, too. Well, he had not been in his room half a minute, when he heard some one else coming along the corridor. He put a chair beside his door—there was no light in his room—and looked through the transom. He saw your nurse, who was very agitated, carrying a lamp in her hand, and then he saw the meeting between you and her. He watched your nurse's movements until she left the house; and then he felt sure that no suspicion would fall on him."

"Did he give up the search for the money?"

"No, indeed; after Mrs. Dorne left the house he spent a part of the night in searching your uncle's room. Even when all else had deserted the place he continued his search for several days. On the last day he was severely frightened in some unaccountable way, and left precipitately, vowing never to come near the house again."

"He didn't keep his vow," I observed.

"No; the fact was, when you announced your intention to him of making a search for the money, he remembered how in the hurry of leaving he had neglected to destroy the forged letter. Then it occurred to him that, if the money were found, he was entitled to it. Mr. Caggett is a poor logician. These considerations, added to your promise of money, overcame his fear. He counted on destroy-

ing that note, to begin with; and in the next place, if the money was found, he was determined to make off with it."

"Have you seen the treasure, Percy?"

"Yes; after removing Mr. Caggett I gathered up the scattered contents of that box. I never handled so much money in my life. It took me a long time to get it together; for I had to keep my eyes on you, and be on the lookout for some passer-by to get assistance. When I did get it all together, I brought the box by your side, Harry, and counted out the money, and watched you closely for ever so long a time. Do you know how much you've fallen heir to?"

"How much?"

"Forty-five thousand and some odd dollars."

"Isn't that a Christmas gift!" I exclaimed.

"Within a week, Percy, those forty-five thousand dollars will be put in a bank; and there they'll grow to more in preparation for that great boys' and girls' magazine that is to be. Percy, allow me to return your first greeting—I wish you a happy Christmas."

And as we shook each other's hand we heard voices without, and people entering, and we knew that the mystery of Tower Hill Mansion was solved, that the problem had been made out, and that the shadow which had wrapped my life thus far had been lifted forever.