

The Rival Ghosts

By Brander Matthews

The good ship sped on her way across the calm Atlantic. It was an outward passage, according to the little charts which the company had charily distributed, but most of the passengers were homeward bound, after a summer of rest and recreation, and they were counting the days before they might hope to see Fire Island Light. On the lee side of the boat, comfortably sheltered from the wind, and just by the door of the captain's room (which was theirs during the day), sat a little group of returning Americans. The Duchess (she was down on the purser's list as Mrs. Martin, but her friends and familiars called her the Duchess of Washington Square) and Baby Van Rensselaer (she was quite old enough to vote had her sex entitled her to that duty, but as the younger of two sisters she was still the baby of the family)—the Duchess and Baby Van Rensselaer were discussing the pleasant English voice and the not unpleasant English accent of a mannerly young lordling who was going to America for sport. Uncle Larry and Dear Jones were enticing each other into a bet on the ship's run of the morrow.

"I'll give you two to one she don't make 420," said Dear Jones.

"I'll take it," answered Uncle Larry. "We made 427 the fifth day last year." It was Uncle Larry's seventeenth visit to Europe, and this was therefore his thirty-fourth voyage.

"And when did you get in?" asked Baby Van Rensselaer. "I don't care a bit about the run, so long as we get in soon."

"We crossed the bar Sunday night, just seven days after we left Queenstown, and we dropped anchor off Quarantine at three o'clock on Monday morning."

"I hope we shan't do that this time. I can't seem to sleep when the boat stops."

"I can, but I didn't," continued Uncle Larry, "because my state-room was the most for'ard in the boat, and the donkey-engine that let down the anchor was right over my head."

"So you got up and saw the sun rise over the bay," said Dear Jones, "with the electric lights of the city twinkling in the distance, and the first faint flush of the dawn in the east just over Fort Lafayette, and the rosy tinge which spread softly upward, and—"

"Did you both come back together?" asked the Duchess.

"Because he has crossed thirty-four times you must not suppose he has a monopoly in sunrises," retorted Dear Jones. "No; this was my own sunrise; and a mighty one it was, too."

"I'm not matching sunrises with you," remarked Uncle Larry calmly, "but I'm willing to back a merry jest called forth by my sunrise against any two merry jests called forth by yours."

"I confess reluctantly that my sunrise evoked no merry jest at all." Dear Jones was an honest man, and would scorn to invent a merry jest on the spur of the moment.

"That's where my sunrise has the call," said Uncle Larry complacently.

"What was the merry jest?" was Baby Van Rensselaer's inquiry, the natural result of a feminine curiosity thus artistically excited.

"Well, here it is. I was standing aft, near a patriotic American and a wandering Irishman, and the patriotic American rashly declared that you couldn't see a sunrise like that anywhere in Europe, and this gave the Irishman his chance, and he said, 'Sure ye don't have 'em here till we're through with 'em over there.'"

"It is true," said Dear Jones thoughtfully, "that they do have some things over there better than we do; for instance, umbrellas."

“And gowns,” added the Duchess.

“And antiquities”—this was Uncle Larry’s contribution.

“And we do have some things so much better in America!” protested Baby Van Rensselaer, as yet uncorrupted by any worship of the effete monarchies of despotic Europe. “We make lots of things a great deal nicer than you can get them in Europe—especially ice-cream.”

“And pretty girls,” added Dear Jones; but he did not look at her.

“And spooks,” remarked Uncle Larry casually.

“Spooks?” queried the Duchess.

“Spooks. I maintain the word. Ghost, if you like that better, or spectres. We turn out the best quality of spook—”

“You forget the lovely ghost stories about the Rhine and the Black Forest,” interrupted Miss Van Rensselaer, with feminine inconsistency.

“I remember the Rhine and the Black Forest and all the other haunts of elves and fairies and hobgoblins; but for good honest spooks there is no place like home. And what differentiates our spook—*spiritus Americanus*—from the ordinary ghost of literature is that it responds to the American sense of humour. Take Irving’s stories, for example. The ‘Headless Horseman’—that’s a comic ghost story. And Rip Van Winkle—consider what humour, and what good humour, there is in the telling of his meeting with the goblin crew of Hendrik Hudson’s men! A still better example of this American way of dealing with legend and mystery is the marvellous tale of the rival ghosts.”

“The rival ghosts!” queried the Duchess and Baby Van Rensselaer together. “Who were they?”

“Didn’t I ever tell you about them?” answered Uncle Larry, a gleam of approaching joy flashing from his eye. “Since he is bound to tell us sooner or later, we’d better be resigned to hear it now,” said Dear Jones.

“If you are not eager, I won’t tell it at all.”

“Oh, do, Uncle Larry! You know I just dote on ghost stories,” pleaded Baby Van Rensselaer.

“Once upon a time,” began Uncle Larry—“in fact, a very few years ago—there lived in the thriving town of New York a young American called Duncan—Eliphalet Duncan. Like his name, he was half-Yankee and half-Scotch, and naturally he was a lawyer, and had come to New York to make his way. His father was a Scotchman who had come over and settled in Boston and married a Salem girl. When Eliphalet Duncan was about twenty he lost both his parents. His father left him enough money to give him a start, and a strong feeling of pride in his Scotch birth; you see, there was a title in the family in Scotland, and although Eliphalet’s father was the younger son of a younger son, yet he always remembered, and always bade his son to remember, that this ancestry was noble. His mother left him her full share of Yankee grit and a little old house in Salem which had belonged to her family for more than two hundred years. She was a Hitchcock, and the Hitchcocks had been settled in Salem since the year 1. It was a great-great-grandfather of Mr. Eliphalet Hitchcock who was foremost in the time of the Salem witchcraft craze. And this little old house which she left to my friend, Eliphalet Duncan, was haunted.”

“By the ghost of one of the witches, of course?” interrupted Dear Jones.

“Now how could it be the ghost of a witch, since the witches were all burned at the stake? You never heard of anybody who was burned having a ghost, did you?” asked Uncle Larry.

“That’s an argument in favour of cremation, at any rate,” replied Dear Jones, evading the direct question.

“It is, if you don’t like ghosts. I do,” said Baby Van Rensselaer.

“And so do I,” added Uncle Larry. “I love a ghost as dearly as an Englishman loves a lord.”

“Go on with your story,” said the Duchess, majestically overruling all extraneous discussion. I

“This little old house at Salem was haunted,” resumed Uncle Larry. “And by a very distinguished ghost—or at least by a ghost with very remarkable attributes.”

“What was he like?” asked Baby Van Rensselaer, with a premonitory shiver of anticipatory delight.

“It had a lot of peculiarities. In the first place, it never appeared to the master of the house. Mostly it confined its visitations to unwelcome guests. In the course of the last hundred years it had frightened away four successive mothers-in-law, while never intruding on the head of the household.”

“I guess that ghost had been one of the boys when he was alive and in the flesh.” This was Dear Jones’s contribution to the telling of the tale.

“In the second place,” continued Uncle Larry, “it never frightened anybody the first time it appeared. Only on the second visit were the ghost-seers scared; but then they were scared enough for twice, and they rarely mustered up courage enough to risk a third interview. One of the most curious characteristics of this well-meaning spook was that it had no face—or at least that nobody ever saw its face.”

“Perhaps he kept his countenance veiled?” queried the Duchess, who was beginning to remember that she never did like ghost stories.

“That was what I was never able to find out. I have asked several people who saw the ghost, and none of them could tell me anything about its face, and yet while in its presence they never noticed its features, and never remarked on their absence or concealment. It was only afterwards, when they tried to recall calmly all the circumstances of meeting with the mysterious stranger, that they became aware that they had not seen its face. And they could not say whether the features were covered, or whether they were wanting, or what the trouble was. They knew only that the face was never seen. And no matter how often they might see it, they never fathomed this mystery. To this day nobody knows whether the ghost which used to haunt the little old house in Salem had a face, or what manner of face it had.”

“How awfully weird!” said Baby Van Rensselaer. “And why did the ghost go away?”

“I haven’t said it went away,” answered Uncle Larry, with much dignity.

“But you said it *used* to haunt the little old house at Salem, so I supposed it had moved. Didn’t it?” the young lady asked.

“You shall be told in due time. Eliphalet Duncan used to spend the most of his summer vacations at Salem, and the ghost never bothered him at all, for he was the master of the house—much to his disgust, too, because he wanted to see for himself the mysterious tenant at will of his property. But he never saw it, never. He arranged with friends to call him whenever it might appear, and he slept in the next room with the door open; and yet when their frightened cries waked him the ghost was gone, and his only reward was to hear reproachful sighs as soon as he went back to bed. You see, the ghost thought it was not fair of Eliphalet to seek an introduction which was plainly unwelcome.”

Dear Jones interrupted the story-teller by getting up and tucking a heavy rug more snugly around Baby Van Rensselaer’s feet, for the sky was now overcast and grey, and the air was damp and penetrating.

“One fine spring morning,” pursued Uncle Larry, “Eliphalet Duncan received great news. I told you that there was a title in the family in Scotland, and that Eliphalet’s father was the younger son of a younger son. Well, it happened that all Eliphalet’s father’s brothers and uncles had died off without male issue except the eldest son of the eldest son, and he, of course, bore the

title, and was Baron Duncan of Duncan. Now the great news that Eliphalet Duncan received in New York one fine spring morning was that Baron Duncan and his only son had been yachting in the Hebrides, and they had been caught in a black squall, and they were both dead. So my friend Eliphalet Duncan inherited the title and the estates.”

“How romantic!” said the Duchess. “So he was a baron!”

“Well,” answered Uncle Larry, “he was a baron if he chose. But he didn’t choose.”

“More fool he!” said Dear Jones sententiously.

“Well,” answered Uncle Larry, “I’m not so sure of that. You see, Eliphalet Duncan was half-Scotch and half-Yankee, and he had two eyes to the main chance. He held his tongue about his windfall of luck until he could find out whether the Scotch estates were enough to keep up the Scotch title. He soon discovered that they were not, and that the late Lord Duncan, having married money, kept up such state as he could out of the revenues of the dowry of Lady Duncan. And Eliphalet, he decided that he would rather be a well-fed lawyer in New York, living comfortably on his practice, than a starving lord in Scotland, living scantily on his title.”

“But he kept his title?” asked the Duchess.

“Well,” answered Uncle Larry. “he kept it quiet. I knew it, and a friend or two more. But Eliphalet was a sight too smart to put ‘Baron Duncan of Duncan, Attorney and Counsellor at Law’ on his shingle.”

“What has all this got to do with your ghost?” asked Dear Jones pertinently.

“Nothing with that ghost, but a good deal with another ghost. Eliphalet was very learned in spirit lore—perhaps because he owned the haunted house in Salem, perhaps because he was a Scotchman by descent. At all events, he had made a special study of the wraiths and white ladies and banshees and bogies of all kinds whose sayings and doings and warnings are recorded in the annals of the Scottish nobility. In fact, he was acquainted with the habits of every reputable spook in the Scotch peerage. And he knew that there was a Duncan ghost attached to the person of the holder of the title of Baron Duncan of Duncan.”

“So, besides being the owner of a haunted house in Salem, he was also a haunted man in Scotland?” asked Baby Van Rensselaer.

“Just so. But the Scotch ghost was not unpleasant, like the Salem ghost, although it had one peculiarity in common with its transatlantic fellow-spook. It never appeared to the holder of the title, just as the other never was visible to the owner of the house. In fact, the Duncan ghost was never seen at all. It was a guardian angel only. Its sole duty was to be in personal attendance on Baron Duncan of Duncan, and to warn him of impending evil. The traditions of the house told that the Barons of Duncan had again and again felt a premonition of ill-fortune. Some of them had yielded and withdrawn from the venture they had undertaken, and it had failed dismally. Some had been obstinate, and had hardened their hearts, and had gone on reckless to defeat and to death. In no case had a Lord Duncan been exposed to peril without a fair warning.”

“Then how came it that the father and son were lost in the yacht off the Hebrides?” asked Dear Jones.

“Because they were too enlightened to yield to superstition. There is extant now a letter of Lord Duncan, written to his wife a few minutes before he and his son set sail, in which he tells her how hard he has to struggle with an almost overmastering desire to give up the trip. Had he obeyed the friendly warning of the family ghost, the letter would have been spared a journey across the Atlantic.”

“Did the ghost leave Scotland for America as soon as the old baron died?” asked Baby Van Rensselaer, with much interest.

“How did he come over,” queried Dear Jones—“in the steerage, or as a cabin passenger?”

“I don’t know,” answered Uncle Larry calmly, “and Eliphalet didn’t know. For as he was in no danger, and stood in no need of warning, he couldn’t tell whether the ghost was on duty or not. Of course, he was on the watch for it all the time. But he never got any proof of its presence until he went down to the little old house of Salem, just before the Fourth of July. He took a friend down with him—a young fellow who had been in the regular army since the day Fort Sumter was fired on, and who thought that after four years of the little unpleasantness down South, including six months in Libby, and after ten years of fighting the bad Indians on the plains, he wasn’t likely to be much frightened by a ghost. Well, Eliphalet and the officer sat out on the porch all the evening smoking and talking over points in military law. A little after twelve o’clock, just as they began to think that it was about time to turn in, they heard the most ghastly noise in the house. It wasn’t a shriek, or a howl, or a yell, or anything they could put a name to. It was an undeterminate, inexplicable shiver and shudder of sound, which went wailing out of the window. The officer had been at Cold Harbour, but he felt himself getting colder this time. Eliphalet knew it was the ghost who haunted the house. As this weird sound died away, it was followed by another, sharp, short, blood-curdling in its intensity. Something in this cry seemed familiar to Eliphalet, and he felt sure that it proceeded from the family ghost, the warning wraith of the Duncans.”

“Do I understand you to intimate that both ghosts were there together?” inquired the Duchess anxiously.

“Both of them were there,” answered Uncle Larry. “You see, one of them belonged to the house, and had to be there all the time, and the other was attached to the person of Baron Duncan, and had to follow him there; wherever he was, there was that ghost also. But Eliphalet, he had scarcely time to think this out when he heard both sounds again, not one after another, but both together, and something told him—some sort of an instinct he had—that those two ghosts didn’t agree, didn’t get on together, didn’t exactly hit it off; in fact, they were quarrelling.”

“Quarrelling ghosts! Well, I never!” was Baby Van Rensselaer’s remark.

“It is a blessed thing to see ghosts dwell together in unity,” said Dear Jones.

And the Duchess added: “It would certainly be setting a better example.”

“You know,” resumed Uncle Larry, “that two waves of light or of sound may interfere and produce darkness or silence. So it was with these rival spooks. They interfered, but they did not produce silence or darkness. On the contrary, as soon as Eliphalet and the officer went into the house, there began at once a series of spiritualistic manifestations—a regular dark séance. A tambourine was played upon, a bell was rung, and a flaming banjo went singing around the room.”

“Where did they get the banjo?” asked Dear Jones, sceptically.

“I don’t know. Materialized it, maybe, just as they did the tambourine. You don’t suppose a quiet New York lawyer kept a stock of musical instruments large enough to fit out a strolling minstrel troupe just on the chance of a pair of ghosts coming to give him a surprise party, do you? Every spook has its own instrument of torture. Angels play on harps, I’m informed, and spirits delight in banjos and tambourines. These spooks of Eliphalet Duncan’s were ghosts with all modern improvements, and I guess they were capable of providing their own musical weapons. At all events, they had them there in the little old house at Salem the night Eliphalet and his friend came down. And they played on them, and they rang the bell, and they rapped here, there, and everywhere. And they kept it up all night.”

“All night?” asked the awe-stricken Duchess.

“All night long,” said Uncle Larry solemnly; “and the next night, too. Eliphalet did not get a wink of sleep, neither did his friend. On the second night the house ghost was seen by the officer; on the third night it showed itself again; and the next morning the officer packed his gripsack and took the first train to Boston. He was a New-Yorker, but he said he’d sooner go to Boston than see that ghost again. Eliphalet wasn’t scared at all, partly because he never saw either the domiciliary or the titular spook, and partly because he felt himself on friendly terms with the spirit world, and didn’t scare easily. But after losing three nights’ sleep and the society of his friend, he began to be a little impatient, and to think that the thing had gone far enough. You see, while in a way he was fond of ghosts, yet he liked them best one at a time. Two ghosts were one too many. He wasn’t bent on making a collection of spooks. He and one ghost were company, but he and two ghosts were a crowd.”

“What did he do?” asked Baby Van Rensselaer.

“Well, he couldn’t do anything. He waited awhile, hoping they would get tired; but he got tired out first. You see, it comes natural to a spook to sleep in the daytime, but a man wants to sleep nights, and they wouldn’t let him sleep nights. They kept on wrangling and quarrelling incessantly; they manifested and they dark-séanced as regularly as the old clock on the stairs struck twelve; they rapped and they rang bells and they banged the tambourine and they threw the flaming banjo about the house, and, worse than all, they swore.”

“I did not know that spirits were addicted to bad language,” said the Duchess.

“How did he know they were swearing? Could he hear them?” asked Dear Jones.

“That was just it,” responded Uncle Larry; “he could not hear them—at least, not distinctly. There were inarticulate murmurs and stifled rumblings. But the impression produced on him was that they were swearing. If they had only sworn right out, he would not have minded it so much, because he would have known the worst. But the feeling that the air was full of suppressed profanity was very wearing, and after standing it for a week he gave up in disgust and went to the White Mountains.”

“Leaving them to fight it out, I suppose,” interjected Baby Van Rensselaer.

“Not at all,” explained Uncle Larry. “They could not quarrel unless he was present. You see, he could not leave the titular ghost behind him, and the domiciliary ghost could not leave the house. When he went away he took the family ghost with him, leaving the house ghost behind. Now spooks can’t quarrel when they are a hundred miles apart any more than men can.”

“And what happened afterwards?” asked Baby Van Rensselaer, with a pretty impatience.

“A most marvellous thing happened. Eliphalet Duncan went to the White Mountains, and in the car of the railroad that runs to the top of Mount Washington he met a classmate whom he had not seen for years, and this classmate introduced Duncan to his sister, and this sister was a remarkably pretty girl, and Duncan fell in love with her at first sight, and by the time he got to the top of Mount Washington he was so deep in love that he began to consider his own unworthiness, and to wonder whether she might ever be induced to care for him a little—ever so little.”

“I don’t think that is so marvellous a thing,” said Dear Jones, glancing at Baby Van Rensselaer.

“Who was she?” asked the Duchess, who had once lived in Philadelphia.

“She was Miss Kitty Sutton, of San Francisco, and she was a daughter of old Judge Sutton, of the firm of Pixley & Sutton.”

“A very respectable family,” assented the Duchess.

“I hope she wasn’t a daughter of that loud and vulgar old Mrs. Sutton whom I met at Saratoga one summer four or five years ago?” said Dear Jones.

“Probably she was,” Uncle Larry responded.

“She was a horrid old woman. The boys used to call her Mother Gorgon.”

“The pretty Kitty Sutton with whom Eliphalet Duncan had fallen in love was the daughter of Mother Gorgon. But he never saw the mother, who was in ’Frisco, or Los Angeles, or Santa Fe, or somewhere out West, and he saw a great deal of the daughter, who was up in the White Mountains. She was travelling with her brother and his wife, and as they journeyed from hotel to hotel Duncan went with them, and filled out the quartet. Before the end of the summer he began to think about proposing. Of course, he had lots of chances, going on excursions as they were every day. He made up his mind to seize the first opportunity, and that very evening he took her out for a moonlight row on Lake Winnepesaukee. As he handed her into the boat he resolved to do it, and he had a glimmer of suspicion that she knew he was going to do it, too.”

“Girls,” said Dear Jones, “never go out in a rowboat at night with a young man unless you mean to accept him.”

“Sometimes it’s best to refuse him, and get it over once for all,” said Baby Van Rensselaer impersonally.

“As Eliphalet took the oars he felt a sudden chill. He tried to shake it off, but in vain. He began to have a growing consciousness of impending evil. Before he had taken ten strokes—and he was a swift oarsman—he was aware of a mysterious presence between him and Miss Sutton.”

“Was it the guardian-angel ghost warning him off the match?” interrupted Dear Jones.

“That’s just what it was,” said Uncle Larry. “And he yielded to it, and kept his peace, and rowed Miss Sutton back to the hotel with his proposal unspoken.”

“More fool he,” said Dear Jones. “It will take more than one ghost to keep me from proposing when my mind is made up.” And he looked at Baby Van Rensselaer.

“The next morning,” continued Uncle Larry, “Eliphalet overslept himself, and when he went down to a late breakfast he found that the Suttons had gone to New York by the morning train. He wanted to follow them at once, and again he felt the mysterious presence overpowering his will. He struggled two days, and at last he roused himself to do what he wanted to in spite of the spook. When he arrived in New York it was late in the evening. He dressed himself hastily, and went to the hotel where the Suttons were, in the hope of seeing at least her brother. The guardian angel fought every inch of the walk with him, until he began to wonder whether, if Miss Sutton were to take him, the spook would forbid the banns. At the hotel he saw no one that night, and he went home determined to call as early as he could the next afternoon, and make an end of it. When he left his office about two o’clock the next day to learn his fate, he had not walked five blocks before he discovered that the wraith of the Duncans had withdrawn his opposition to the suit. There was no feeling of impending evil, no resistance, no struggle, no consciousness of an opposing presence. Eliphalet was greatly encouraged. He walked briskly to the hotel; he found Miss Sutton alone. He asked her the question, and got his answer.”

“She accepted him, of course?” said Baby Van Rensselaer.

“Of course,” said Uncle Larry. “And while they were in the first flush of joy, swapping confidences and confessions, her brother came into the parlour with an expression of pain on his face and a telegram in his hand. The former was caused by the latter, which was from Frisco, and which announced the sudden death of Mrs. Sutton, their mother.”

“And that was why the ghost no longer opposed the match?” questioned Dear Jones.

“Exactly. You see, the family ghost knew that Mother Gorgon was an awful obstacle to Duncan’s happiness, so it warned him. But the moment the obstacle was removed, it gave its consent at once.”

The fog was lowering its thick, damp curtain, and it was beginning to be difficult to see from one end of the boat to the other. Dear Jones tightened the rug which enwrapped Baby Van Rensselaer, and then withdrew again into his own substantial coverings.

Uncle Larry paused in his story long enough to light another of the tiny cigars he always smoked.

“I infer that Lord Duncan”—the Duchess was scrupulous in the bestowal of titles—“saw no more of the ghosts after he was married.”

“He never saw them at all, at any time, either before or since. But they came very near breaking off the match, and thus breaking two young hearts.”

“You don’t mean to say that they knew any just cause or impediment why they should not for ever after hold their peace?” asked Dear Jones.

“How could a ghost, or even two ghosts, keep a girl from marrying the man she loved?” This was Baby Van Rensselaer’s question.

“It seems curious, doesn’t it?”—and Uncle Larry tried to warm himself by two or three sharp pulls at his fiery little cigar. “And the circumstances are quite as curious as the fact itself. You see, Miss Sutton wouldn’t be married for a year after her mother’s death, so she and Duncan had lots of time to tell each other all they knew. Eliphalet got to know a good deal about the girls she went to school with; and Kitty soon learned all about his family. He didn’t tell her about the title for a long time, as he wasn’t one to brag. But he described to her the little old house at Salem. And one evening towards the end of the summer, the wedding-day having been appointed for early in September, she told him that she didn’t want a bridal tour at all; she just wanted to go down to the little old house at Salem to spend her honeymoon in peace and quiet, with nothing to do and nobody to bother them. Well, Eliphalet jumped at the suggestion: it suited him down to the ground. All of a sudden he remembered the spooks, and it knocked him all of a heap. He had told her about the Duncan banshee, and the idea of having an ancestral ghost in personal attendance on her husband tickled her immensely. But he had never said anything about the ghost which haunted the little old house in Salem. He knew she would be frightened out of her wits if the house ghost revealed itself to her, and he saw at once that it would be impossible to go to Salem on their wedding trip. So he told her all about it, and how whenever he went to Salem the two ghosts interfered, and gave dark séances and manifested and materialized and made the place absolutely impossible. Kitty listened in silence, and Eliphalet thought she had changed her mind. But she hadn’t done anything of the kind.”

“Just like a man—to think she was going to,” remarked Baby Van Rensselaer.

“She just told him she could not bear ghosts herself, but she would not marry a man who was afraid of them.”

“Just like a girl—to be so inconsistent,” remarked Dear Jones.

Uncle Larry’s tiny cigar had long been extinct. He lighted a new one, and continued: “Eliphalet protested in vain. Kitty said her mind was made up. She was determined to pass her honeymoon in the little old house at Salem, and she was equally determined not to go there as long as there were any ghosts there. Until he could assure her that the spectral tenant had received notice to quit, and that there was no danger of manifestations and materializing, she refused to be married at all. She did not intend to have her honeymoon interrupted by two wrangling ghosts, and the wedding could be postponed until he had made ready the house for her.”

“She was an unreasonable young woman,” said the Duchess.

“Well, that’s what Eliphalet thought, much as he was in love with her. And he believed he could talk her out of her determination. But he couldn’t. She was set. And when a girl is set, there’s nothing to do but to yield to the inevitable. And that’s just what Eliphalet did. He saw he would either have to give her up or to get the ghosts out; and as he loved her and did not care for the ghosts, he resolved to tackle the ghosts. He had clear grit, Eliphalet had—he was half-Scotch and half-Yankee and neither breed turns tail in a hurry. So he made his plans and went down to Salem. As he said good-bye to Kitty he had an impression that she was sorry she had made him go; but she kept up bravely, and put a bold face on it, and saw him off, and went home and cried for an hour, and was perfectly miserable until he came back the next day.”

“Did he succeed in driving the ghosts away?” asked Baby Van Rensselaer, with great interest.

“That’s just what I’m coming to,” said Uncle Larry, pausing at the critical moment, in the manner of the trained story-teller. “You see, Eliphalet had got rather a tough job, and he would gladly have had an extension of time on the contract, but he had to choose between the girl and the ghosts, and he wanted the girl. He tried to invent or remember some short and easy way with ghosts, but he couldn’t. He wished that somebody had invented a specific for spooks—something that would make the ghosts come out of the house and die in the yard. He wondered if he could not tempt the ghosts to run in debt, so that he might get the sheriff to help him. He wondered also whether the ghost could not be overcome with strong drink—a dissipated spook, a spook with delirium tremens, might be committed to the inebriate asylum. But none of these things seemed feasible.”

“What did he do?” interrupted Dear Jones. “The learned counsel will please speak to the point.”

“You will regret this unseemly haste,” said Uncle Larry gravely. “when you know what really happened.”

“What was it, Uncle Larry?” asked Baby Van Rensselaer. “I’m all impatience.”

And Uncle Larry proceeded:

“Eliphalet went down to the little old house at Salem, and as soon as the clock struck twelve the rival ghosts began wrangling as before. Raps here, there, and everywhere, ringing bells, banging tambourines, strumming banjos sailing about the room, and all the other manifestations and materializations followed one another just as they did the summer before. The only difference Eliphalet could detect was a stronger flavour in the spectral profanity; and this, of course, was only a vague impression, for he did not actually hear a single word. He waited awhile in patience, listening and watching. Of course, he never saw either of the ghosts, because neither of them could appear to him. At last he got his dander up, and he thought it was about time to interfere, so he rapped on the table and asked for silence. As soon as he felt that the spooks were listening to him, he explained the situation to them. He told them he was in love, and that he could not marry unless they vacated the house. He appealed to them as old friends, and he laid claim to their gratitude. The titular ghost had been sheltered by the Duncan family for hundreds of years, and the domiciliary ghost had had free lodging in the little old house at Salem for nearly two centuries. He implored them to settle their differences, and to get him out of his difficulty at once. He suggested that they had better fight it out then and there, and see who was master. He had brought down with him all needful weapons. And he pulled out his valise, and spread on the table a pair of navy revolvers, a pair of shotguns, a pair of duelling-swords, and a couple of bowie-knives. He offered to serve as second for both parties, and to give the word when to begin. He also took out of his valise a pack of cards and a bottle of poison, telling them that if they wished to avoid carnage they might cut the cards to see which one should take the

poison. Then he waited anxiously for their reply. For a little space there was silence. Then he became conscious of a tremulous shivering in one corner of the room, and he remembered that he had heard from that direction what sounded like a frightened sigh when he made the first suggestion of the duel. Something told him that this was the domiciliary ghost, and that it was badly scared. Then he was impressed by a certain movement in the opposite corner of the room, as though the titular ghost were drawing himself up with offended dignity. Eliphalet couldn't exactly see those things, because he never saw the ghosts, but he felt them. After a silence of nearly a minute a voice came from the corner where the family ghost stood—a voice strong and full, but trembling slightly with suppressed passion. And this voice told Eliphalet it was plain enough that he had not long been the head of the Duncans, and that he had never properly considered the characteristics of his race if now he supposed that one of his blood could draw his sword against a woman. Eliphalet said he had never suggested that the Duncan ghost should raise his hand against a woman, and all he wanted was that the Duncan ghost should fight the other ghost. And then the voice told Eliphalet that the other ghost was a woman."

"What?" said Dear Jones, sitting up suddenly. "You don't mean to tell me that the ghost which haunted the house was a woman?"

"Those were the very words Eliphalet Duncan used," said Uncle Larry; "but he did not need to wait for the answer. All at once he recalled the traditions about the domiciliary ghost, and he knew that what the titular ghost said was the fact. He had never thought of the sex of a spook, but there was no doubt whatever that the house ghost was a woman. No sooner was this firmly fixed in Eliphalet's mind than he saw a way out of the difficulty. The ghosts must be married!—and then there would be no more interference, no more quarrelling, no more manifestations and materializations, no more dark séances, with their raps and bells and tambourines and banjos. At first the ghosts would not hear of it. The voice in the corner declared that the Duncan wraith had never thought of matrimony. But Eliphalet argued with them, and pleaded and persuaded and coaxed, and dwelt on the advantages of matrimony. He had to confess, of course, that he did not know how to get a clergyman to marry them; but the voice from the corner gravely told him that there need be no difficulty in regard to that, as there was no lack of spiritual chaplains. Then, for the first time, the house ghost spoke, a low, clear, gentle voice, and with a quaint, old-fashioned New England accent, which contrasted sharply with the broad Scotch speech of the family ghost. She said that Eliphalet Duncan seemed to have forgotten that she was married. But this did not upset Eliphalet at all; he remembered the whole case clearly, and he told her she was not a married ghost, but a widow, since her husband had been hanged for murdering her. Then the Duncan ghost drew attention to the great disparity in their ages, saying that he was nearly four hundred and fifty years old, while she was barely two hundred. But Eliphalet had not talked to juries for nothing; he just buckled to, and coaxed those ghosts into matrimony. Afterwards he came to the conclusion that they were willing to be coaxed, but at the time he thought he had pretty hard work to convince them of the advantages of the plan."

"Did he succeed?" asked Baby Van Rensselaer, with a woman's interest in matrimony.

"He did," said Uncle Larry. "He talked the wraith of the Duncans and the spectre of the little old house at Salem into a matrimonial engagement. And from the time they were engaged he had no more trouble with them. They were rival ghosts no longer. They were married by their spiritual chaplain the very same day that Eliphalet Duncan met Kitty Sutton in front of the railing of Grace Church. The ghostly bride and bridegroom went away at once on their bridal tour, and Lord and Lady Duncan went down to the little old house at Salem to pass their honeymoon."

Uncle Larry stopped. His tiny cigar was out again. The tale of the rival ghosts was told. A solemn silence fell on the little party on the deck of the ocean steamer, broken harshly by the hoarse roar of the fog-horn.