

The Story of the Green House, Wallington

By Allen Upward

In undertaking to relate some of my experiences in connection with the purchase and sale of haunted houses, I desire to make it clear that I have no theories to put forward on the subject of what is called the "occult".

I was successful in this class of business, but some of the adventures I went through were of such a character that I dared not continue. My nerves are fairly strong, but there are some things which I never wish to face again.

I was first tempted to dabble in this unlucky class of business by the Green House, Wallington.

My partner, Mr Mortimer—our firm is Mortimer & Hargreaves—mentioned to me one day that he had had a client into see him who was very anxious to obtain an immediate offer, at almost any price, for a house situated in what was then the rural district of Wallington.

"He says he cannot sell the house because people think it is haunted. It is all nonsense of course; but the people in the neighbourhood have got the idea firmly into their heads; and now if any tenants come they are sure to hear of it directly, and get frightened. The result is that he has lost tenant after tenant, and now the reputation of the house is so bad that he cannot sell it."

"What sort of a house is it?" I asked. "And what will he take for it?"

"He says he will take anything—£500 if he can't get more; though the house cost £1,500 to build. You had better see the man yourself"

I therefore dropped a line to Mr Giltstrap, the owner of the Green House, requesting him to go down with me to see the property.

On the way to Wallington I put some questions about the house to Giltstrap, whose manner was rather reserved. He assured me it was in thorough repair, but he seemed reluctant to answer when I asked him about the ghost

"Is there any story about the house? Anything to account for its being haunted?"

"No; no. What story should there be? It's a modern house—hardly been built ten years."

"And how long has it been your property?"

"I bought it as soon as it was put up."

"And how long has it been haunted?"

Mr Giltstrap frowned as though he disliked to hear this word.

"The house has been talked about for some years now—four or five."

His disinclination to speak was so evident that I did not care to pursue the subject

We got out at Wallington Station, and as we passed a house agent's on the road Giltstrap said abruptly:

"I must step in here and get the keys. Wait a moment."

As a house-agent myself I could understand that he did not wish to introduce me to the local man, lest it should lead to any dispute about commission. But my curiosity about the Green House was so strong that I could not resist the temptation to walk in after him.

I was just in time to hear the owner say curtly:

"I have called for the keys of the Green House, if you please."

The local agent was evidently a man in a small way, for we found him seated at a desk in the outer office, in his shirtsleeves. He gave a cross look at Giltstrap, and a suspicious one at me, and then rose and reached down the keys from a nail.

“I haven’t been able to find a caretaker yet,” he said with a touch of malice. “They say you must pay them for living in such a house.”

Giltstrap reddened at this speech, which was calculated to put off an intending purchaser. He glared first at the agent and then at me, snatched the keys without a word, and hurried out.

The Green House was a modern, red-brick one, standing in a road with several others, and certainly not looking at all the kind of place to have a supernatural legend attached to it.

As soon as we got inside I saw that the house was partly furnished.

Giltstrap explained that he had been trying to get someone to come and occupy it rent free for a time in order to live down its reputation.

I asked if there was any room particularly connected with the ghostly rumours.

After what struck me as a momentary hesitation, he led me upstairs into what was dearly the principal bedroom, overlooking the front garden and the road outside.

“Is this where the ghost walks?” I asked as I glanced round the empty room. The paper on the walls was in good condition, and the ceiling had been newly white-washed.

The owner of the Green House was plainly annoyed by my insistence.

“There is no ghost, and it does not walk anywhere,” he said irritably. “But the people who sleep in this room complain.”

“What do they complain of?”

He fidgeted and again showed some reluctance in answering. “Oh, nothing except some nonsense or other. They say they do not sleep well, and they dream things. Fancies, you know—fancies.”

“Well, what sort of fancies?” I persisted. “If they dream, they must dream of something.”

Giltstrap glanced up at the ceiling, and swiftly withdrew his eyes with a nervous tremor. I was now firmly persuaded that he himself had been the victim of some spectral horror, though he was anxious to conceal it for fear of frightening me off.

“Perhaps I had better not tell you anything,” he said, after considering a moment “There is a great deal in the influence of suggestion, so it is said. If I were to tell you what the people who have slept in this room have seen, or dreamt they have seen, that might be enough to make you dream the same. Whereas, if a sensible man without any notions came and slept here, he would most likely never be disturbed.”

I thought there was something in what he said, and did not press him further.

There was a staircase outside leading to a second floor, and I moved towards it.

“Oh, do you want to see the other rooms?” Giltstrap snapped, as he prepared to follow.

“I want to see everything,” I said decidedly.

Upstairs I found another room which had been left unfurnished. The prospect from the window showed me that it was situated over the haunted chamber.

“Is there something wrong with this room, as well?” I demanded.

“The servants don’t like sleeping in it,” was the grudging admission. “It does very well as a boxroom.”

I saw that it was useless to try and extract any more information from Giltstrap.

After a thorough inspection, I decided that the house would be well worth £1200, apart from its evil reputation. I went back to town with the owner, and bargained with him on the way.

I was very anxious to secure an option to purchase the Green House at the end of a month, during which time I was to occupy it, but this proposal the owner obstinately refused.

“I want to sell it outright or not at all. If you live in it a month and have no trouble, I shall then be able to ask a reasonable price.”

Anxious to secure a bargain, I gave way, and got out at Victoria the owner of the Green House, at the price of £500.

When I told my partner the next day what I had done, he declined to commit himself.

“I shall know whether it is a good bargain or not when I hear what you have sold it for,” he observed grimly.

My next step was to secure some attendance, and to send down some furniture for the two empty rooms round which the mystery appeared to cling.

In the course of the negotiations I had occasion for the services of my lady secretary.

I was accustomed to discuss business matters with her, and as soon as she learned the character of the present transaction, she surprised me by displaying an unusual interest in it. She even volunteered her assistance.

“I wonder if you would mind my going to see the Green House, Mr Hargreaves? I am very much interested in psychical research.”

“Do you mean that you really believe there is something in it?” I exclaimed in dismay. I had grown to look on Miss Sargent as a young lady of great intelligence, and I was not very well pleased at the idea of taking the ghost seriously.

“I know that there are things in Nature which ordinary rules do not explain,” was the grave answer. “I have seen things myself which could not be accounted for by natural means.”

This was rather alarming. I recalled the strange, uneasy manner of the late owner of the Green House, and asked myself whether he had not been a secret believer in some occult happenings.

“I am what is called a sensitive,” Miss Sargent proceeded to explain.

“I have a peculiar faculty for seeing any abnormal manifestations.” A thought struck me.

“Would it be possible for you to go and pass a night or two there?” I inquired. “I don’t mind telling you that if the apparition, or whatever it is, can be exorcized I hope to sell the house at a considerable profit, and I should be glad to pay a small commission.”

Miss Sargent appeared to welcome the suggestion. She was a good girl, the chief support of a widowed mother and three little sisters, and I knew she would like to earn something for them.

The question was referred to her mother, who arranged to come with her, it being understood that I should form one of the party. I engaged a respectable woman to come in by the day, and, on the evening agreed upon, we went down together to take possession of the haunted house.

Miss Sargent and her mother were installed in the haunted room, and I decided to occupy the attic overhead.

After a pleasant supper the two ladies retired at about eleven o’clock. I sat up a little later, smoking a cigar and contrasting the cheerful evening I had just passed with the lonely ones I was accustomed to in my West End chambers.

Towards twelve I went upstairs, intending to go to bed. But whether it was the sensation of being in a strange house under such circumstances, or a secret apprehension of which I was hardly conscious, no sooner did I find myself in the room I had chosen than I was seized with an overmastering reluctance to get into the bed.

I took off my coat merely, rolled myself well up in the blankets, and tried to go to sleep. I am an old traveller, and have never experienced any difficulty in sleeping in my clothes in trains, or under similar circumstances.

But on this occasion the attempt was hopeless; I lay on the bed literally shivering, and not from cold. I neither saw nor heard anything, I was not alarmed in the ordinary sense, and yet if I had known there was a murderer lurking in the room ready to spring on me and stab me the moment I closed my eyes I could not have felt more wretchedly afraid.

Suddenly I heard a low moan—the moan of a creature in mortal terror, drawn out till it became a muffled scream.

I flung off the blankets, raised my head, and listened with a beating heart.

The moan was repeated, coming distinctly from underneath me. In an instant I had grasped the truth. It came from the room below.

I sprang from the bed, and, without stopping to put on my coat, lit the candle I had brought up with me, and flew downstairs.

As I reached the first floor landing the moan was repeated in a more terrible key—the key of horror instead of terror. At the same moment the door of the haunted room was thrown open, and Mrs Sargent appeared on the threshold, with a cloak thrown over her shoulders, and a look of fear and distress on her face.

“What is it?” I gasped.

“It is Alwyne!” she cried in answer, “She is seeing something horrible in her sleep, *and I can’t wake her?*”

Without stopping to consider questions of etiquette, I dashed into the room. The gas had been turned full on, and by its light I saw the girl lying stretched on a couch at the foot of the bed, her features frozen into the expression of one who looks upon some horrid sight, while from her parted lips there issued those appalling sounds which wounded like the stabs of a knife.

I caught her by the shoulders and shook her, without making the slightest change in her swoon-like condition.

“Water!” I called out to the mother, who stood wringing her hands, too dazed to act

The water was brought, and I dashed half a glassful in the face of the sufferer. At first it had no more effect than if she had been dead.

Then came a startling change.

The moans suddenly ceased, the victim opened her eyes, which showed the dull glassy stare of a somnambulist, and sitting half up, she commenced muttering so quickly and indistinctly that it was difficult to catch the words.

“The-blood-the-blood-the-blood-the-blood-dripping-drippingdripping-dripping-from-the-red-leak-in-the-ceiing-the-red-leak-the-red-leak-in-the-ceiling-in-the-ceiling-dripping-on-me-dripping-on-me-dripping-on-ME!”

The words rose into a wild shriek as her blank eyes were turned full on the ceiling overhead, the ceiling between her room and mine.

Involuntarily I looked up. The ceiling did not show the slightest mark. As I had noticed when I went over the house with Giltstrap, it was newly whitewashed—I thought I now knew why.

But the moment was not for reflection.

“Help me to carry her out of this—quick!” I called out to the mother.

Between us we lifted up the unconscious girl and carried her out of the accursed room, and into one adjoining, where we laid her on the bed.

Hardly had she passed the doorway of the haunted chamber when the dreadful ejaculations began to die away, and the rigidity of the features to relax. In a short time the trance condition passed away into a deep sleep, and I was able to leave Miss Sargent in her mother’s care.

When she woke in the morning, her mother told me, she remembered nothing whatever of what had passed in the night. She was barely conscious of having had a bad dream.

At her own request, I described to her at breakfast what had occurred, as minutely as possible. She was profoundly impressed.

"I am certain," she declared with conviction, "that what I saw represents something that actually happened in this house. Dreadful as it sounds, I firmly believe that somebody has been murdered in that attic in which you slept, and that his blood did drip through the ceiling of the room below, as I saw it last night."

Reluctant as I was for many reasons to entertain such a suggestion, I dared not neglect it altogether. I determined at all events to do whatever could be done to solve the mystery.

As soon as Miss Sargent and her mother had left the house, in which the elder lady would not hear of their passing another night, though her daughter did not seem in the least afraid, I went straight to a builder's in the neighbourhood, and engaged him to send some men to examine the flooring between the two haunted rooms.

The builder received my order with marked interest

"I knew there was something the matter with that house," he observed. "It ain't likely that tenant after tenant would come away scared without something was wrong. Why, do you know, sir, in the last five years, since Mr Giltstrap gave it up, I've white-washed one ceiling in that house *nine times!*"

"Then Mr Giltstrap once lived in it himself, did he?" I exclaimed.

"Seeing that I built it for him, I can say he did," was the answer.

"And why did he leave it?" I demanded, fairly roused.

But the builder could not or would not satisfy my curiosity on that head.

"Mr Giltstrap was a good customer of mine; he always paid me regular, and I ain't got nothing to say against him."

The builder's interest led him to accompany his men, a carpenter and a plasterer, to the scene of action.

I pointed out the place on the ceiling, as nearly as I could judge it, from which the ghostly dew had appeared to fall.

The men took measurements, and then, proceeding to the attic above, located a spot under the bed in which I had tried to sleep.

The bed was quickly removed, the flooring stripped off, and in the space between the joists there was exposed a mass of lime.

Both the men, as well as their master, were quick to declare that the lime could not have been left there when the house was completed.

"That lime has been put there for no good," the builder asserted. "If you want some things hidden away and destroyed, there's nothing better than what lime is when it's fresh. It burns as well as fire, and makes no smoke."

"You mean a dead body?" I said shuddering.

"I don't say nothing about that," the builder answered, pulling himself up. "It ain't for me to say what that lime's been used for. All I say is it wasn't me that left it there, nor yet my men."

The two men began clearing the stuff away. The volatile element had evidently evaporated long ago. As they struck downward with their tools, one of them went through the plaster of the ceiling below, and a shaft of light came up.

An exclamation from one of the men followed. I bent down and peered into the cavity.

On a large beam which here crossed the floor I saw a deep black stain, the stain of long-dried blood!

A moment after the carpenter stooped suddenly, groped about with one hand amid the woodwork, and drew forth to the light a small sharp stiletto, rusted with the same dismal stain.

Nothing more was found. I gave the builder an order to entirely renew the flooring between the two haunted rooms; and from the time that was done, there has never again been the slightest complaint from any occupier of the property.

I let the Green House almost immediately to a respectable tenant, a retired schoolmaster, who changed its name; and before a year was out I was able to dispose of it to a purchaser at the price of 1,250, a sum which enabled me to compensate Miss Sargent for her trying experience.

The most extraordinary part of the story remains to be told.

The report of what had taken place having got abroad in Wallington, the local police came to me to obtain the stiletto, which I had been careful to preserve. By its means they were enabled to unearth a crime which had gone unsuspected till that hour, and to extort a confession from the murderer.

Into the details of this terrible case I do not mean to enter. It is sufficient to say that the victim had perished while asleep in the attic, and that his blood had actually soaked through the ceiling into the room below, which was that of his murderer—Giltstrap!