

An Unbidden Guest

By Anonymous

My cousins, Kate and Torn Howard, married at Trinity, at Easter time, concluded to commence housekeeping by taking one of those delightfully expensively furnished, unfurnished cottages, with which the fashionable watering place of W— abounds, from whose rear windows one might almost take a plunge into the surf, the beach beginning at the back door. They went down quite early in May, being in a great hurry to try their domestic experiment and, as the evenings were still cold, they spent them about the open fire, “spooning.”

It was upon one of those nights, about eleven o'clock, that they were startled by a noise, as of some small object falling, soon followed by the sound of heavy footsteps, and then quiet again reigned supreme. At once Tom, poker in hand, boldly started in search of the burglar, followed by Kate, wildly clutching at his coat-tail, and in a state of tremor. They looked upstairs, under the various beds, Kate suggesting that in novels they were always to be found there.

The dining-room was next explored, where all seemed well, and, lastly the kitchen, where they found what was evidently a solution of the mystery. The burglar had entered by the back door, which was found to be unlocked and slightly ajar. The first excitement subsiding, they returned again to the dining-room, where Tom, upon closer inspection, then discovered that one of a pair of quaint little pepper-pots, wedding gifts, was hissing, and other small articles on the sideboard had been slightly disturbed.

The next morning, when Kate mildly remonstrated with the queen of the kitchen for her carelessness, she received a shock by being told that it was her usual custom to leave the door open, “so that it would be aisy, convanient loike for the milkmaid.” They parted with her, and a new maid was engaged, whose chief qualification for the place was that she was most faithful in the discharge of her duties, especially in “locking up.”

While they mourned the loss of the pepper-pot, still it seemed so trifling when they thought of that lovely repousse salad bowl, sent by Aunt Julia, which stood near by, that nothing was said of the loss outside of the family, and the little household settled into its normal state once more of “billing and cooing.”

About a fortnight later, Tom started out one night with an old fisherman, one of the natives, and a local “character,” to indulge in that delightful pastime, so dear to the heart of man, known as “eeling,” and, as the night was dark, the eels were particularly “sporty,” so that it was well on towards the “wee sma' hours” when Tom at last returned to the cottage.

He found all excitement within. Kate was in hysterics, and the new maid, also weeping, was industriously applying the camphor bottle to her mistress' nose. The burglar, or ghost, as they had now decided, the windows and doors being found to be securely locked this time, had been abroad again, but had succeeded in purloining nothing. His royal ghostship had amused himself, apparently, by simply walking about.

“Oh, Tom! he had on such heavy boots and was so dreadfully bold about it,” said Kate, tearfully.

From that time Kate became nervous and refused to be left alone. Tom started whenever a door creaked, and the “treasure” departed hurriedly, saying, “Faith, the house is haunted, sure.”

After that Kate spent her days in “girl hunting,” and her nights in answering shadowy advertisements that never materialized. They tried Irish, English, Dutch, and a “heathen Cbinee,”

with a sprinkling of “colored ladies” to vary the monotony. They seemed about to become famous throughout the length and breadth of the land as “the family that changes help once a week,” when they landed Treasure No. 2.

Shortly after her advent we were all asked down to W—, to help celebrate their happiness, and incidentally to christen the new dinner set. We were not a little surprised at finding Kate so pale and Tom rather distraught. However, after a delightful dinner, that should have filled with pleasure the most exacting bride, we adjourned to the piazza, leaving the men to the contemplation of their cigars. We were enthusiastic in our praise of the house, and congratulated Kate in securing such a prize, when, to our horror, she burst into tears, and said: “Oh, girls, it’s a dreadful place; it’s haunted!” and then tearfully proceeded with the details, until we all felt creepy and suggested the parlor and lights.

It was not until long afterwards that Kate discovered that Torn had also related the “ghost story” to the men, that evening, to which Ned Harris had said, laconically, “Rats,” and Bob Shaw laughingly remarked, “Tom, old chap, you really shouldn’t take your nightcap so strong.”

About the first of July the climax came. The ghost walked again, this time taking not only the remaining pepper-pot, but also a silver salt-eel-bar. Evidently he had a penchant for small articles, but unlike former times, everything on the sideboard was in the greatest disorder. Aunt Julia’s salad bowl was found on the floor, and not far away the cheese-dish, with its contents scattered about. This time one of the windows was found half open. A week later a note came to me from Kate, saying that she and Tom had gone to Saratoga to spend the remainder of the season with her mother.

The following spring Torn received a note and parcel from Mr. B—, the owner of the house at W—, which read as follows:

DEAR MR. HOWARD: I send you by express three articles of silver, which my wife suggests may belong to you, as they are marked with your initials, namely, two silver pepper-pots and a salt-cellar; they were found, the other day, during the process of spring house cleaning, in a rat hole, behind the sideboard. I forgot to have the holes stopped up last spring, or to caution you against the water rats; the great fellows will get in, you know. Kind regards to Mrs. Howard.

Very truly,

JOHN B—.

The next season the “Ghost Club” was organized, the badge being a small silver rat, bearing proudly aloft a tiny pepper-pot. We thoughtfully offered Tom the presidency, but he declined, with offended dignity, from the effects of which I think he will never fully recover,