

# The Day of My Death<sup>1</sup>

By Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Alison was sitting on a bandbox. She had generally been sitting on a bandbox for three weeks,—or on a bushel-basket, or a cupboard shelf, or a pile of old newspapers, or the baby's bath-tub. On one occasion it was the baby himself. She mistook him for the rag-bag.

If ever we had to move again,—which all the beneficence of the Penates forbid!—my wife should be locked into the parlor, and a cargo of Irishwomen turned loose about the premises to “attend to things.” What it is that women find to do with themselves in this world I have never yet discovered. They are always “attending to things.” Whatever that may mean, I have long ago received it as the only solution at my command of their superfluous wear and tear, and worry and flurry, and tears and nerves and headaches. A fellow may suggest Jane, and obtrude Bridget, and hire Peggy, and run in debt for Mehetable, and offer to take the baby on 'Change with him, but has he by a feather's weight lightened Madam's mysterious burden? My dear sir, don't presume to expect it. She has just as much to do as she ever had. In fact, she has a little more. “Strange, you don't appreciate it! Follow her about one day, and see for yourself!”

What I started to say, however, was that I thought it over often,—I mean about that invoice of Irishwomen,—coming home from the office at night, while we were moving out of Artichoke Street into Nemo's Avenue. It is not pleasant to find one's wife always sitting on a bandbox. I have seen her crawl to her feet when she heard me coming, and hold on by a chair, and try her poor little best to look as if she could stand twenty-four hours longer; she so disliked that I should find a “used-up looking house” under any circumstances. But I believe that was worse than the bandbox.

On this particular night she was too tired even to crawl. I found her all in a heap in the corner, two dusters and a wash-cloth in one blue-veined hand, and a broom in the other; an old corn-colored silk handkerchief knotted over her hair,—her hair is black, and the effect was good,—and her little brown calico apron-string literally tied to the baby, who was shrieking at the end of his tether because he could just not reach the kitten and throw her into the fire.

On Alison's lap, between a pile of shirts and two piles of magazines, lay a freshly opened letter. I noticed that she put it into her pocket before she dropped her dusters and stood up to lift her face for my kiss. She forgot about the apron-strings, and the baby tipped up the wrong way, and hung dangling in mid-air.

After we had taken tea,—that is to say, after we had drawn around the ironing-board put on two chairs in the front entry, made the cocoa in a tin dipper, stirred it with a fork, and cut the bread with a jack-knife,—after the baby was fairly off to bed in a champagne-basket, and Tip disposed of, his mother only knew where, we coaxed a consumptive fire into the parlor grate, and sat down before it in the carpetless, pictureless, curtainless, blank, bare, soapy room.

“Thank fortune, this is the last night of it!” I growled, putting my booted feet against the wall, (my slippers had gone over to the avenue in a water-pail that morning,) and tipping my chair back drearily,—my wife “*so* objects” to the habit! Allis made no reply, but sat hooking

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<sup>1</sup> The characters in this narrative are fictitious. The incidents the author does not profess to have witnessed. But they are given as related by eye-witnesses whose testimony would command a verdict from any honest jury. The author, however, draws no conclusions and suggests none.

thoughtfully, and with a slightly perplexed and displeased air, into the sizzling wet wood that snapped and flared and smoked and hissed and blackened, and did everything but burn. "I really don't know what to do about it," she broke silence at last. "I'm inclined to think there's nothing better to do than to look at it."

"No; not the fire. O, I forgot,—I have n't shown it to you."

She drew from her pocket the letter which I had noticed in the afternoon, and laid it upon my knee. With my hands in my pockets—time room was too cold to take them out—I read:—

"Dear Cousin Alison—

"I have been so lonely since mother died, that my health, never of the strongest, as you know, has suffered seriously. My physician tells inc that something is wrong with the periphastic action, if you know what that is," [I suppose Miss Fellows meant the peristaltic action,] "and prophesies something dreadful, (I've forgotten whether it was to be in the head, or the heart, or the stomach,) if I cannot have change of air and scene this winter. I should dearly love to spend some time with you in your new home, (I fancy it will be drier than the old one,) if convenient to you. If inconvenient, don't hesitate to say so, of course. I hope to hear from you soon.

"In haste, your aff. cousin,

"GERTRUDE FELLOWS.

"P. S.—I shall of course insist upon being a boarder if I come.

"G. F."

"Hum-m. Insipid sort of letter."

"Exactly. That's Gertrude. No more flavor than a frozen pear. If she had one distinguishing peculiarity, good or bad, I believe I should like her better. But I'm sorry for the woman."

"Sorry enough to stand a winter of her?"

"If we had n't just been through this moving! A new house and all,—nobody knows how the flues are yet, or whether we can heat a spare room. She has n't had a home, though, since Cousin Dorothy died. But I was thinking about you, you see."

"O, she can't hurt me. She won't want the library, I suppose; nor my shippers, and the small bootjack. Let her come."

My wife sighed a small sigh of relief out from the depths of her hospitable heart, and the little matter was settled and dismissed as lightly as are most little matters out of which grow the great ones.

I had just begun to dream that night that Gertrude Fellows, in the shape of a large wilted pear, had walked in and sat down on a dessert plate, when Allis gave me a little pinch and woke me.

"My dear, Gertrude has *one* peculiarity. I never thought of it till this minute."

"Confound Gertrude's peculiarities! I want to go to sleep. Well, let's have it."

"Why, you see, she took up with some Spiritualistic notions after her mother's death; thought she held communications within her, and all that, Aunt Solomon says. Stuff and nonsense!"

"Of course. But, Fred, dear, I'm inclined to think she *must* have made her sewing-table walk into the front entry; and Aunt Solomon says the spirits rapped out the whole of Cousin Dorothy's history on the mantel-piece, behind those blue china vases, you must have noticed them at the funeral,—and not a human hand within six feet."

"Alison Hotchkiss!" I said, waking thoroughly, and sitting up in bed to emphasize the opinion, "when I hear a spirit rap on my mantel-piece, and see *my* tables walk about the front entry, I'll believe that,—not before!"

"O, I know it! I'm not a Spiritualist, I'm sure, and nothing would tempt me to be. But still that sort of reasoning has a flaw in it, has n't it, dear? The King of Siam, you know—"

I had heard of the King of Siam before, and I politely informed my wife that I did not care to hear of him again. Spiritualism was a system of refined jugglery. Just another phase of the same thing which brings the doves out of Mr. Hermann's empty hat. It might be entertaining if it had not become such an abominable imposition. There would always be nervous women and hypochondriac men enough for its dupes. I thanked Heaven that I was neither, and went to sleep.

Our new house was light and dry; the flues worked well, and the spare chamber heated admirably. The baby exchanged the champagne-basket for his dainty pink-curtained crib; Tip began to recover from the perpetual cold with which three weeks' sitting in draughts, and tumbling into water-pails, and playing in the sink, had sweetened his temper; Allis forsook her bandboxes for the crimson easy-chair (very becoming, that chair), or tripped about on her own rested feet; we returned to table-cloths, civilized life, and a fork apiece.

In short, nothing at all worth mentioning happened, till that one night,—I think it was our first Sunday,—when Allis waked me at twelve o'clock within the announcement that some one was knocking at the door. Supposing it to be Bridget with the baby,—croup, probably, or a fit,—I unlocked and unlatched it promptly. No one was there, however; and telling my wife, in no very gentle tone, if I remember correctly, that it would be a convenience, on such cold nights, if she could keep her dreams to herself, I shut the door distinctly and returned to my own.

In the morning I observed a little white circle about each of Allis's blue eyes, and after some urging she confessed to me that her sleep had been much broken by a singular disturbance in the room. I might laugh at her if I chose, and she had not meant to tell nine, but somebody had rapped in that room all night long.

"On the door?"

"On the door, on the mantel, on the foot of the bed, on the head-board,—Fred, right on the headboard! I listened till I grew cold listening, but it rapped and it rapped, and by and by it was morning, and it stopped."

"Rats!" said I.

"Then rats have knuckles," said she.

"Mice!" said I, "wind! broken plaster! crickets! imagination! dreams! fancies! blind headache! now sense! Next the wake me up, and fire pillows at me till I'm pleasant to you. Now I'll have a kiss and a cup of coffee. Any sugar in it?"

Tip fell down the cellar stairs that day, and the baby swallowed a needle and two gutta-percha buttons, which I had been waiting a week to have sewed on my vest, so that Alison had enough else to think about, and the little incident of the raps was forgotten. I believe it was not recalled by either of us till after Gertrude Fellows came.

It was on a Monday and in a drizzly storm that I brought her from the station. She was a thin, cold, phantom-like woman, shrouded in water-proofs and green *barège* veils. Why is it that homely women always wear green *barège* veils? She did not improve in appearance when her wraps were off, and she was seated by my parlor grate. Her large green eyes had no speculation in them. Her mouth—an honest mouth, that was one mercy—quivered and shrank when she was addressed suddenly, as if she felt herself to be a sort of foot-ball that the world was kicking about at pleasure,—your gentlest smile might prove a blow. She seldom spoke unless she were spoken to, and fell into long reveries, with her eyes on the window or the coals. She wore a horrible sort of ruff,—“illusion,” I think Allis called it,—which, of all contrivances that she could have chosen to encircle her sallow neck, was exactly the most unbecoming. She was always knitting blue stockings,—I never discovered for what or whom; and she wore her lifeless hair in the shape of a small toy cartwheel, on the back of her head.

However, she brightened a little in the course of the first week, helped Alison about the baby, kept herself out of my way, read her Bible and the "Banner of Light" in about equal proportion, and became a mild, inoffensive, and, on the whole, not unpleasant addition to the family.

She had been in the house about ten days, I think, when Alison, within a disturbed face, confided to me that she had spent another wakeful night with those "rats" behind the head-board; I had been down with a sick-headache the day before, and she had not wakened me. I promised to set a trap and buy a cat before evening, and was closing the door upon the subject, being already rather late at the office, when the expression of Gertrude Fellows's face detained me.

"If I were you, I—would n't—really buy a very expensive trap, Mr. Hotchkiss. It will be a waste of money, I am afraid. I heard the noise that disturbed Cousin Alison"; and she sighed.

I shut the door within a snap, and begged her to be so good as to explain herself.

"It's of no use," she said, doggedly. "You know you won't believe me. But that makes no difference. They come all the same."

"*They?*" asked Allis, smiling, in' Do you mean some of your spirits?"

The cold little woman flushed, "These are not *my* spirits. I know nothing about them. I did not mean to obtrude a subject so disagreeable to you while I was in your family; but I have seldom been in a house in which the Influences were so strong. I don't know what they mean, nor anything about them, but just that they're here. They wake me up, twitching my elbows, nearly every night."

"Wake you up *how?*"

"Twitching my elbows," she repeated, gravely.

I broke into a laugh, from which neither my politeness nor the woman's heightened color could save me, bought the cat and ordered the rat-trap without delay.

That night, when Miss Fellows had "retired," she never "went to bed" in simple English like other people,—I stole softly out in my stockings and screwed a little brass button outside of her door. I had made a gimlet-hole for it in the morning when our guest was out shopping; it fitted into place without noise. Without noise I turned it, and went back to my own room.

"You suspect her, then?" said Alison.

"One is always justified in suspecting a Spiritualistic medium."

"I don't know about flint," Allis said, decidedly. "It may have been mice that I heard last night, or the wind in a bottle, or any of the other proper and natural causes that explain away the ghost stories in the children's papers; but it was not Gertrude. Women know something about one another, my dear; and I tell you it was not Gertrude."

"I don't assert that it was but with the bolt on Gertrude's door, the cat in the and the rat-trap on the garret stairs, I am strongly inclined to anticipate a peaceful night. I will watch for a while, however, and you can go to sleep."

She went to sleep, and I watched. I lay till half past eleven with my eyes staring at the dark, wide awake and undisturbed and triumphant.

At half past eleven I must confess that I heard a singular sound.

Something whistled at the keyhole. It could not have been the wind, by the way, for there was no wind that night. Something else than the wind whistled at the keyhole, sighed through into the room as much like a long-drawn breath as anything, and fell with a slight chink upon the floor. I lighted my candle and got up. I searched the floor of the room, and opened the door and searched the entry. Nothing was visible or audible, and I went back to bed. For about ten minutes I heard no further disturbance, and was concluding myself to be in some undefined manner the victim of my own imagination, when there suddenly fell upon the headboard of my bed a blow so distinct

and loud that I involuntarily sprang at the sound of it. It wakened Alison, and I had the satisfaction of hearing her sleepily inquire if I had caught that rat yet? By way of reply I relighted the candle, and gave the bed a shove which sent it rolling half across the room. I examined the wall; I examined the floor; I examined the headboard; I made Alison get up, so that I could shake the mattresses. Meantime the pounding had recommenced, in rapid, irregular blows, like the blows of a man's fist. The room adjoining ours was the nursery. I went in within my light. It was empty and silent. Bridget, with Tip and the baby, slept soundly in the large chamber across the hall. While I was searching the room my wife called loudly to me, and I ran back.

"It is on the mantel now," she said. "It struck the mantel just after you left; then the ceiling, three times, very loud; then the mantel again,—don't you hear?"

I heard distinctly; moreover, the mantel shook a little within the concussion. I took out the fire-board and looked up the chimney; I took out the register and looked down the furnace-pipe; I ransacked the garret and the halls; finally, I examined Miss Fellows's door,—it was locked as I had left it, upon the outside; and that locked door was the only means of egress from the room, unless the occupant fancied that of jumping front a two-story window upon a broad flight of stone steps.

I came thoughtfully back across the hall; an invisible trip-hammer appeared to hit the floor beside me at every step; I attempted to step aside from it, over it, away from it; but it followed me, pounding into my room.

"Wind?" suggested Allis. "Plaster cracking? Fancies? Dreams? Blind headaches?—I should like to know which you have decided upon?"

Quiet fell upon the house after that for an hour, and I was dropping into my first nap, when there came a light tap upon the door. Before I could reach it, it had grown into a thundering blow.

"Whatever it is I'll have it now!" I whispered, turned the hatch without noise, and flung the door wide into the hall. It was silent, dark, and cold. A little glimmer of moonlight fell in and showed me the figures upon the carpet, outlined in a frosty bar. No hand or hammer, human or superhuman, was there.

Determined to investigate matters a little more thoroughly, I asked my wife to stand upon the inside of the doorway while I kept watch upon the outside. We took our position, and I closed the door between us. Instantly a series of furious blows struck the door; the sound was such as would be made by a stick of oaken wood. The solid door quivered under it.

"It's on your side!" said I.

"No, it's on yours!" said she.

"You're pounding yourself to fool me," cried I.

"You're pounding yourself to frighten me," sobbed she.

And we nearly had a quarrel. The sound continued within more or less intermission till daybreak. Allis fell asleep, but I spent the time in appropriate reflections.

Early in the morning I removed the button from Miss Fellows's door. She never knew anything about it.

I believe, however, that I had the fairness to exculpate her in my secret heart from any trickish connection with the disturbances of that night.

"Just keep quiet about this little affair," I said to my wife; "we shall come across an explanation in time, and may never have any more of it."

We kept quiet, and for five days so did "the spirits," as Miss Fellows was pleased to pronounce the trip-hammers.

The fifth day I came home early, as it chanced, from the office. Miss Fellows was writing letters in the parlor. Allis, upstairs, was sorting and putting away the weekly wash. I came into the room and sat down by the register to watch her. I always liked to watch her sitting there on the floor with the little heaps of linen and cotton stuff piled like blocks of snow about her, and her pink hands darting in and out of the uncertain sleeves that were just ready to give way in the gathers, trying the stockings' heels briskly, and testing the buttons with a little jerk.

She laid aside some under-clothing presently from the rest. "It will not be needed again this winter," she observed, "and had better go into the cedar closet." The garments, by the way, were marked and numbered in indelible ink. I heard her run over the figures in a busy, housekeeper's undertone, before carrying them into the closet. She locked the closet door, I think, for I remember the click of the key. If I remember accurately, I stepped into the hall after that to light a cigar, and Alison flitted to and fro with her clothes, dropping the baby's little white stockings every step or two, and anathematizing them daintily—within orthodox bounds, of course. In about five minutes she called me; her voice was sharp and alarmed.

"Come quick! O Fred, look here! All those clothes that I locked into the cedar closet are out here on the bed!"

"My dear wife," I blandly observed, as I sauntered unto the room, "too much of Gertrude Fellows hath made thee mad. Let *me* see the clothes!"

She pointed to the bed. Some white clothing lay upon it, folded in an ugly way, to represent a corpse, with crossed hands.

"Is it meant for a joke, Alison? You did it yourself, I suppose!"

"Fred! I have not touched it with the tip of my little finger!"

"Gertrude, then?"

"Gertrude is in the parlor writing."

So she was. I called her up. She looked surprised and troubled.

"It must have been Bridget," I proceeded, authoritatively, "or Tip."

"Bridget is out walking within Tip and the baby. Jane is in the kitchen making pies."

"At any rate these are not the clothes which you locked into the closet, however they came here."

"The very same, Fred. See, I noticed the numbers: 6 upon the stockings, 2 on the night-caps, and—"

"Give me the key," I interrupted.

She gave me the key. I went to the cedar closet and tried the door. It was locked. I unlocked it, and opened the drawer in which my wife assured me that the clothes had lain. Nothing was to be seen in it but the linen towel which neatly covered the bottom. I lifted it and shook it. The drawer was empty.

"Give me those clothes, if you please."

She brought them to me. I made in my diary a careful memorandum of their naming and numbering; placed the articles myself in the drawer,—an upper drawer, so that there could be no mistake in identifying it; locked the drawer, put the key in my pocket, locked the door of the closet, put the key in my pocket; locked the door of the room in which the closet was, and put that key in my pocket.

We sat down then in the hall, all of us; Allis and Gertrude to fill the mending-basket, I to smoke and consider. I saw Tip coming home with his nurse presently, and started to go down and let him in, when a faint scream from my wife arrested me. I ran past Miss Fellows, who was sitting on the stairs, and into my room. Allis, going in to put away Tip's little plaid aprons,

had stopped, rather pale, upon the threshold. Upon the bed lay some clothing, folded, as before, in rude, hideous imitation of the dead.

I took each article in turn, and compared the name and number with the names and numbers in my diary. They were identical throughout. I took the clothes, took the three keys from my pocket, unlocked the “cedar-room” door, unlocked the closet door, unlocked the upper drawer, and looked in. the drawer was empty.

To say that from this time I failed to own—to myself, if not to other people—that some mysterious influence, inexplicable by common or scientific causes, was at work in my house, would be to accuse myself of more obstinacy than even I am capable of. I propounded theory after theory, and gave it up. I arrived at conclusion upon conclusion, and threw them aside. Finally, I meld my peace, ceased to talk of “rats,” kept my mind in a state of passive vacancy, and narrowly and quietly watched the progress of affairs.

From the date of that escapade with the underclothes confusion reigned in one corner of Nemo’s Avenue. That night neither my wife nor myself closed an eye, the house so resounded and re-echoed with the blows of unseen hammers, fists, logs, and knuckles.

Miss Fellows, too, was pale with her vigils, looked troubled, and proposed going home. This I peremptorily vetoed, determined if the woman had any connection, honest or otherwise, within the mystery, to ferret it out.

The following day, just after dinner, I was writing in the library, when a child’s cry of fright and pain startled me. It seemed to come from the little yard behind the house, and I hurried thither to behold a singular sight. There was one apple-tree in the yard,—an old, stunted, crooked thing; and in that tree I found my son and heir, Tip, tied fast with a small stout rope. “Tied” does not express it; he was gagged, manacled, twisted, contorted, wound about, crossed and recrossed, held without a chance of motion, scarcely of breath.

“You never tied yourself up here, child?” I asked, as I cut the knots.

The question certainly was unnecessary. No juggler could have bound himself in such a fashion scarcely, then, a four-years’ child. To my continued, clear, and gentle inquiries, the boy replied, persistently and consistently, that nobody tied him there,—“not Cousin Gertrude, nor Bridget, nor the baby, nor mamma, nor Jane, nor papa, nor the black kitty”; he was “just taken up all at once into the tree, and that was all there was about it.” He “s’posed it must have been God, or something like that, did it.”

Poor Tip had a hard time of it. Two days after that, while his mother and I sat discussing the incident, and the child was at play upon the floor, he suddenly threw himself at full length, writhing with pain, and begging to “have them pulled out quick!”

“Have *what* pulled out?” exclaimed his terrified mother. She took the child into her lap, and found that he was stuck over from head to foot with large white pins.

“We have n’t so many large pins in all the house,” she said as soon as he was relieved.

As she spoke the words thirty or forty *small* pins pierced the boy. Where they came from no one could see. How they came there no one knew. We looked, and there they were, and Tip was crying and writhing as before. For the remainder of that winter we had scarcely a day of quiet. The rumor that “the Hotchkisses had rented a haunted house” leaked out and spread abroad. The frightened servants gave warning, and other frightened servants took their place, to leave in turn. My wife was her own cook and nursery-maid a quarter of the time. The disturbances varied in character with every week, assuming, as time went on, an importunity which, had we not quietly settled it in our own minds “not to be beaten by a noise,” would have driven us from the house.

Night after night the mysterious fingers rapped at the windows, the doors, the floors, the walls. Day after day uncomfortable tricks were sprung upon us by invisible agencies. We became used to the noises, so that we slept through them easily; but many of the phenomena were so strikingly unpleasant, and so singularly unsuited to the ordinary conditions of human happiness and housekeeping, that we scarcely became—as one of our excellent deacons had a cheerful habit of exhorting us to become—“resigned.”

Upon one occasion we had invited a small and select number of friends to dine. It was to be rather a *recherché* affair for Nemo’s Avenue, and my wife had spared no painstaking to suit herself within her table. We had had a comparatively quiet house the night before, so that our cook, who had been with us three days, consented to remain till our guests had been provided for. The soup was good, the pigeons better, the bread was *not* sour, and Allis looked hopeful, and inclined to trust Providence for the gravies and dessert.

It was just as I had begun to carve the beef that I observed my wife suddenly pale, and a telegram from her eyes turned mine in the direction of General Pop-gun, who sat at her right hand. My sensations “can better be imagined than described” when I saw General Popgun’s fork, untouched by any human hand, dancing a jig on his plate. He grasped it and laid it firmly down. As soon as he released his hold it leaped from the table.

“Really—aw—very singular phenomena,” began the General; “very singular! I was not prepared to credit the extraordinary accounts of spiritual manifestations in this house, but—aw—Well, I must say—”

Instantly it was Pandemonium at that dinner-table. Dr. Jump’s knife, Mrs. M’Ready’s plate, and Colonel Hope’s tumbler sprang front their places. The pigeons flew from the platter, the caster rattled and rolled, the salt-cellars bounded to and fro, and the gravies, moved by some invisible disturber, splattered all over Mrs. Elias P. Critique’s *moire antique*.

Mortified and angered beyond endurance, I for the first time addressed the spirits,—wrenched for the moment into a profound belief that they must be spirits indeed.

“Whatever you are, and wherever you are,” I shouted, bringing my hand down hard upon the table, “go out of this room and let us alone!”

The only reply was a furious mazourka of all the dishes on the table. A gentleman present, who had, as he afterward told us, studied the subject of spiritualism somewhat, very sceptically and within unsatisfactory results, observed the performance keenly, and suggested that I should try a gentler method of appeal. Whatever the agent was,—and what it was he had not yet discovered,—he had noticed repeatedly that the quiet modes of meeting it were most effective.

Rather amused, I spoke more softly, addressing the caster, and intimating in my blindest manner that I and my guests would feel under obligations if we could have the room to ourselves till after we had dined. The disturbance gradually ceased, and we had no more of it that day.

A morning or two after Alison chanced to leave half a dozen teaspoons upon the sideboard in the breakfast-room; they were of solid silver, and quite thick. She was going to rub them herself, I believe, and went into the china-closet, which opens from the room, for the silver-soap. The breakfast-room was left vacant, and it was vacant when she returned to it, and she insists, with a quiet conviction which it is hardly reasonable to doubt, that no human being did or could have entered the room without her knowledge. When she came back to the sideboard every one of those spoons lay there *bent double*. She showed them to me when I came home at noon. Had they been pewter toys they could not have been more completely twisted out of shape than they were. I took them without any remarks (I began to feel as if this mystery were assuming uncomfortable proportions), put them away, just as I found them, into a small cupboard in the

wall of the breakfast-room, locked the cupboard door with the only key in the house which fitted it, put the key in my inner vest pocket, and meditatively ate my dinner.

About half an hour afterward a neighbor dropped in to groan over the weather and see the baby, and Allis chanced to mention the incident of the spoons.

“Really, Mrs. Hotchkiss!” said the lady, with a slight smile, and that indefinite, quickly smothered change of eye which signifies, “I don’t believe a word of it!” “Are you sure that there is not a mistake somewhere, or a little mental hallucination? The story is very entertaining, but—I beg your pardon—I should be interested to see those spoons.”

“Your curiosity shall be gratified, madam,” I said, a little testily; and taking the key from my pocket, I led her to the cupboard and unlocked the door. I found those spoons as straight, smooth, and fair as ever spoons had been;—not a dent, not a wrinkle, not a bend nor untrue line could we discover anywhere upon them.

“*Oh!*” said our visitor, significantly.

That lady, be it recorded, then and thenceforward spared no pains to found and strengthen throughout Nemo’s Avenue the theory that “the Hotchkisses were getting up all that spiritual nonsense to force their landlord into lower rents. And such respectable people too! It did seem a pity, did n’t it?”

One night I was alone in the library. It was late; about half-past eleven, I think. The brightest gas jet was lighted, so that I could see to every portion of the small room. The door was shut. There was no furniture but the book-cases, my table, and chair; no sliding doors or concealed corners; no nook or cranny in which any human creature could lurk unseen by me; and I say that I was alone.

I had been writing to a confidential friend a somewhat minute account of the disturbances in my house, which were now of about six weeks’ duration. I had begged him to come and observe them for himself, and help me out with a solution,—I myself was at a loss for a reasonable one. There certainly seemed to be evidence of superhuman agency; but I was hardly ready yet to commit myself thoroughly to that view of the matter, and—

In the middle of that sentence I laid down my pen. A consciousness, sudden and distinct, came to me that I was not alone in that bright little silent room. Yet to mortal eyes alone I was. I pushed away my writing and looked about. The warm air was empty of outline; the curtains were undisturbed; the little recess under the library table held nothing but my own feet; there was no sound but the ordinary rap-rapping on the floor, to which I had by this the become so accustomed that often it passed unnoticed. I rose and examined the room thoroughly, until quite satisfied that I was its only visible occupant; then sat down again. The rappings had meantime become loud and impatient.

I had learned that very week from Miss Fellows the spiritual alphabet with which she was in the habit of “communicating with her dead mother”. I had never asked her, nor had she proposed, to use it herself for my benefit. I had meant to try all other means of investigation before resorting to it. Now, however, being alone, and being perplexed and annoyed by my sense of having invisible company, I turned and spelled out upon the table, so many raps to a letter till the question was complete:—

“*What do you want of me?*”

Instantly the answer came rapping back:—

“*Stretch down your hand.*”

I put my fingers under the table, and I felt, as indubitably as I ever felt a touch in my life, the grasp of a *warm, human hand.*

I added to the broken paragraph in the letter to my friend a brief account of the occurrence, and reiterated my entreaties that he would come at his earliest convenience to my house. He was an Episcopal clergyman, by the way, and I considered that his testimony would uphold my fast-sinking character for veracity among my townspeople. I began to have an impression that this dilemma in which I found myself was a pretty serious one for a man of peaceable disposition and honest intentions to be in.

About this time I undertook to come to a little better understanding with Miss Fellows. I took her away alone, and having tried my best not to frighten the life out of her by my grave face, asked her seriously and kindly to tell me whether she supposed herself to have any connection with the phenomena in my house. To my surprise she answered promptly that she thought she had. I repressed a whistle, and “asked for information.”

“The presence of a medium renders easy what would otherwise be impossible,” she replied. “I offered to go away, Mr. Hotchkiss, in the beginning.”

I assured her that I had no desire to have her go away at present, and begged her to proceed.

“The Influences in the house are strong, as I have said before,” she continued, looking through me and beyond me with her vacant eyes. “Something is wrong. They are never at rest. I hear them. I feel them. I see them. They go up and down the stairs with me. I find them in my room. I see them gliding about. I see them standing now, with their hands almost upon your shoulders.”

I confess to a kind of chill that crept down my backbone at these words, and to having turned my head and stared hard at the book-cases behind me.

“But they—I mean something—rapped one night before you came,” I suggested.

“Yes, and they might rap after I was gone. The simple noises are not uncommon in places where there are no better means of communication. The extreme methods of expression, such as you have witnessed this winter, are, I doubt not, practicable only when the system of a medium is accessible. They write all sorts of messages for you. You would ridicule them. I do not repeat them. You and Cousin Alison do not see, hear, feel as I do. We are differently made. There are lying spirits and true, good spirits and bad. Sometimes the bad deceive and distress me, but sometimes—sometimes my mother comes.”

She lowered her voice reverently, and I was fain to hush the laugh upon my lips. Whatever the thing might prove to be to me, it was daily comfort to the nervous, unstrung, lonely woman, whom to suspect of trickery I began to think was worse than stupidity.

From the time of my midnight experience in the library I allowed myself to look a little further into the subject of “communications.” Miss Fellows wrote them out at my request whenever they “came” to her. Writers on Spiritualism have described the process so frequently, that it is unnecessary for me to dwell upon it at length. The influences took her unawares in the usual manner. In the usual manner her arm—to all appearance the passive instrument of some unseen, powerful agency—jerked and glided over the paper, writing in curious, scrawly characters, never in her own neat little old-fashioned hand, messages of which, on coming out from the “trance” state, she would have no memory; of many of which at any time she could have had no comprehension. These messages assumed every variety of character from the tragic to the ridiculous, and a large portion of them had no point whatever.

One day Benjamin West desired to give me lessons in oil-painting. The next, my brother Joseph, dead now for ten years, asked forgiveness for his share in a little quarrel of ours which had embittered a portion of his last days,—of which, by the way, I am confident that Miss Fellows knew nothing. At one the I received a long discourse enlightening me on the arrangement of the “spheres” in the disembodied state of existence. At another, Alison’s dead

grandfather pathetically reminded her of a certain Sunday afternoon at “meetin’ ” long ago, when the child Allis hooked his wig off in the long prayer with a bent pin and a piece of fish-line.

One day we were saddened by the confused wail of a lost spirit, who represented his agonies as greater than soul could bear, and clamored for relief. Moved to pity, I inquired:—

“What can we do for you?”

Unseen knuckles rapped back the touching answer:—

“Give me a piece of squash pie!”

I remarked to Miss Fellows that I supposed this to be a modern and improved version of the ancient drop of water which was to cool the tongue of Dives. She replied that it was the work of a mischievous spirit who had nothing better to do; they would not infrequently take in that way the reply from the lips of another. I am not sure whether we are to have lips in the spiritual world, but I think that was her expression.

Through all the nonsense and confusion of these daily messages, however, one restless, indefinite purpose ran; a struggle for expression that we could not grasp; a sense of something unperformed which was tormenting somebody.

One week we had been so much more than usually annoyed by the dancing of tables, shaking of doors, and breaking of crockery, that I lost all patience, and at length vehemently dared our unseen tormentors to show themselves.

“Who and what are you?” I cried, “destroying the peace of my family in this unendurable fashion. If you are mortal man, I will meet you as mortal man. Whatever you are, in the name of all fairness, let me see you!”

“If you see me it will be death to you,” tapped the Invisible.

“Then let it be death to me! Come on! When shall I have the pleasure of an interview?”

“To-morrow night at six o’clock.”

“To-morrow at six, then, be it.”

And to-morrow at six it was. Allis had a headache, and was lying down upstairs. Miss Fellows and I were with her, busy with cologne and tea, and one thing and another. I had, in fact, forgotten all about my superhuman appointment, when, just as the clock struck six, a low cry from Miss Fellows arrested my attention.

“I see it!” she said.

“See what?”

“A tall man wrapped in a sheet.”

“Your eyes are the only ones so favored, it happens,” I said, with a superior smile. But while I spoke Allis started from the pillows with a look of fear.

“I see it, Fred “ sire exclaimed, under her breath.

“Women’s imagination!” for I saw nothing.

I saw nothing for a moment; then I must depose and say that I *did* see a tall figure, covered from head to foot with a sheet, standing still in the middle of the room. I sprang upon it with raised arm; my wife states that I was within a foot of it when the sheet dropped. It dropped at my feet,—nothing but a sheet. I picked it up and shook it; only a sheet.

“It is one of those old linen ones of grandmother’s,” said Allis, examining it; there are only six marked in pink with the boar’s-head in the corner. It came from the blue chest up garret. They have not been taken out for years.

I took the sheet back to the blue chest myself,—having first observed the number, as I had done be-before with the underclothes; and locked it in. I came back to my room and sat down by Allis. In about three minutes we saw the figure standing still as before, in the middle of the room.

As before, I sprang at it, and as before the drapery dropped, and there was nothing there. I picked up the sheet and turned to the numbered corner. It was the same that I had locked into the blue chest.

Miss Fellows was inclined to fear that I had really endangered my life by this ghostly rendezvous. I can testify, however, that it was by no means “death to me,” nor did I experience any ill effects from the event.

My friend, the clergyman, made me the desired visit in January. For a week after his arrival, as if my tormentors were bent on convincing my almost only friend that I was a fool or a juggler, we had no disturbance at all beyond the ordinary rappings. These, the reverend gentleman confessed were of a singular nature, but expressed a polite desire to see some of the extraordinary manifestations of which I had written him.

But one day he had risen with some formality to usher a formal caller to the door, when, to his slight amazement and my secret delight, his chair—an easy-chair of good proportions—deliberately jumped up and hopped after him across the room. From this period the mystery “manifested” itself to his heart’s content. Not only did the rocking-chairs, and the cane-seat chairs, and the round-backed chairs, and Tip’s little chairs, and the affghans chase him about, and the heavy *tête-à-tête* in the corner evince symptoms of agitation at his approach, but the piano trundled a solemn minuet at him; the heavy walnut centre-table rose half-way to the ceiling under his eyes; the marble-topped stand, on which he sat to keep it still, lifted itself and him a foot from the ground; his coffee-cup spilled over when he tried to drink, shaken by an unseen elbow; his dressing-cases disappeared from his bureau and hid themselves, none knew how or when, in his closets and under his bed; mysterious uncanny figures, dressed in his best clothes and stuffed with straw, stood in his room when he came to it at night; his candlesticks walked, untouched by hands, from the mantel into space; keys and chains fell from the air at his feet; and raw turnips dropped from the solid ceiling into his soup-plate.

“Well, Garth,” said I one day, confidentially, “how are things? Begin to have a ‘realizing sense’ of it, eh?”

“Let me think awhile,” he answered.

I left him to his reflections, and devoted my attention for a day or two to Gertrude Fellows. She seemed to have been of late receiving less ridiculous, less indefinite, and more important messages from her spiritual acquaintances. The burden of them was directed at me. They were sometimes confused, but never contradictory, and the sum of them, as I cast it up, was this:—

A former occupant of the house, one Mr. Timothy Jabbers, had been in early life connected in the dry-goods business with my wife’s father, and had, known to any but himself, defrauded his partner of a considerable sum for a young swindler,—some five hundred dollars, I think. This fact, kept in the knowledge only of God and the guilty man, had been his agony since his death. In the parlance of Spiritualism, he could never “purify” his soul and rise to a higher “sphere” till he had made restitution,—though to that part of the communications I paid little attention. This money my wife, as her father’s sole living heir, was entitled to, and this money I was desired to claim for her from Mr. Jabbers’s estate, then in the hands of some wealthy nephews.

I made some inquiries which led to the discovery that there had been a Mr. Timothy Jabbers once the occupant of our house, that he had at one period been in business with my wife’s father, that he was now many years dead, and that his nephews in New York were his heirs. We never attempted to bring any claim upon them, for three reasons: in the first place, because we knew we should n’t get the money; in the second, because such a procedure would give so palpable an “object” in people’s eyes for the disturbances at tire house that we should, in all probability, lose

the entire confidence of the entire non-spiritualistic community thirdly, because I thought it problematical whether any constable of ordinary size and courage could be found who would undertake to summon the witness to testify in the county court at Atkinsville.

I mention the matter only because, on the theories of Spiritualism, it appeared to give some point and occasion to the phenomena, and their infesting that particular house.

Whether poor Mr. Timothy Jabbers felt relieved by having unburdened himself of his confession, I cannot state; but after he found that I paid some attention to his messages, he gradually ceased to express himself through turnips and cold keys; the rappings grew less violent and frequent, and finally ceased altogether. Shortly after that Miss Fellows went home.

Garth and I talked matters over the day after she left. He had brought his "thinking" to a close, whit-tied his opinions to a point, and was quite ready to stick them into their places for my benefit, and leave them there, as George Garth left all his opinions, immovable as the everlasting bills.

"How much had she to do with it now,—the Fellows?"

"Precisely what she said she had, no more. She was a medium, but not a juggler."

"No trickery about the affair, then?"

"No trickery could have sent that turnip into my soup-plate, or that candlestick walking into the air. There *is* a great deal of trickery mixed with such phenomena. The next case you come across may be a regular cheat; but you will find it out,—you'll find it out. You've had three months to find this out, and you could n't. Whatever may be the explanation of the mystery, the man who can witness what you and I have witnessed, and pronounce it the trick of that incapable, washed-out woman, is either a liar or a fool.

"You understand yourself and your wife, and you've tested your servants faithfully; so we're somewhat narrowed in our conclusions."

"Well, then, what's the matter?"

I was, I confess, a little startled by the vehemence with which my friend brought his clerical fist down upon the table, and exclaimed:—

"The Devil?"

"Dear me, Garth, don't swear; you in search of a pulpit just at this time, too!"

"I tell you I never spoke more solemnly. I cannot, in the face of facts, ascribe all these phenomena to human agency. Something that comes we know not whence, and goes we know not whither, is at work there in the dark. I am driven to grant to it an extra-human power. Yet when that flabby Miss Fellows, in the trance state, undertakes to bring me messages from my dead wife, and when she attempts to recall the most tender memories of our life together, I cannot,—he paused and turned his face a little away—it would be pleasant to think I had a word from Mary, but I cannot think she is there. I don't believe good spirits concern themselves with this thing. It has in its fair developments too much nonsense and too much positive sin; read a few numbers of the 'Banner,' or attend a convention or two, if you want to be convinced of that. If they're not good spirits they're bad ones, that's all. I've dipped into the subject in various ways since I have been here consulted the mediums, talked with the prophets; I'm convinced that there is no dependence to be placed on the thing. You never learn anything from it that it is worth while to learn; above all, you never can trust its *prophecies*. It is evil,—*evil* at the root; and except by physicians and scientific men it had better be let alone. They may yet throw light on it; you and I cannot. I propose for myself to drop it henceforth. In fact, it looks too much toward putting one's self on terms of intimacy with the Prince of the Powers of the Air to please me."

"You're rather positive, considering the difficulty of the subject," I said.

The truth is, and it may be about the to own to it, that the three months' siege against the mystery, which I had held so pertinaciously that winter, had driven me to broad terms of capitulation. I assented to most of my friend's conclusions, but where he stopped I began a race for further light. I understood then, for the first time, the peculiar charm which I had often seen work so fatally with dabblers in Spiritualism. The fascination of the thing was upon me. I ransacked the papers for advertisements of mediums. I went from city to city at their mysterious calls. I held *séances* in my parlor, and frightened my wife with messages—some of them ghastly enough—from her dead relatives. I ran the usual gauntlet of strange seers in strange places, who told me my name, the names of all my friends, dead or alive, my secret aspirations and peculiar characteristics, my past history and future prospects.

For a long time they never made a failure. Absolute strangers told me facts about myself which not even my own wife knew: whether they spoke with the tongues of devils, or whether, by some unknown laws of magnetism, they simply *read my thoughts*, I am not even now prepared to say. I think if they had made a miss I should have been spared some suffering. Their communications had sometimes a ridiculous aimlessness, and occasionally a subtle deviltry coated about with religion, like a pill with sugar, but often a significant and fearful accuracy.

Once, I remember, they foretold an indefinite calamity to be brought upon me before sunset on the following Saturday. Before sunset on that Saturday I lost a thousand dollars in mining stock which had stood in all Eastern eyes as solid as its own gold. At another time I was warned by a medium in Philadelphia that my wife, then visiting in Boston, was taken suddenly ill. I had left her in perfect health; but feeling nevertheless uneasy, I took the night train and went directly to her. I found her in the agonies of a severe attack of pleurisy, just preparing to send a telegram to me.

"Their prophecies are unreliable, notwithstanding coincidences," wrote George Garth. "Let them alone, Fred, I beg of you. You will regret it if you don't."

"Once let me be fairly taken in and cheated to my *face*," I made reply, "and I may compress my views to your platform. Until then I must gang my own gait."

I now come to the remarkable portion of my story,—at least it seems to me the remarkable portion under my present conditions of vision.

In August of the summer following Miss Fellows's visit, and the manifestations in my house at Atkinsville, I was startled one pleasant morning, while sitting in the office of a medium in Washington Street in Boston, by a singularly unpleasant communication.

"The second day of next May," wrote the medium,—she wrote with the forefinger of one hand upon the palm of the other,—"the second of May, at one o'clock in the afternoon, you will be summoned into a spiritual state of existence."

"I suppose, in good English, that means I'm going to die," I replied, carelessly. "Would you be so good as to write it with a pen and ink, that there may be no mistake?"

She wrote it distinctly: "The second of May, at one o'clock in the afternoon."

I pocketed the slip of paper for further use, and sat reflecting.

"How do you know it?"

"I don't know it. I am told."

"Who tells you?"

"Jerusha Babcock and George Washington."

Jerusha Babcock was the name of my maternal grandmother. What could the woman know of my maternal grandmother? It did not occur to me, I believe, to wonder what occasion George

Washington could find to concern himself about my dying or my living. There stood the uncanny Jerusha as pledge that my informant knew what sire was talking about. I left the office with an uneasy sinking at the heart. There was a coffin-store near by, and I remember the peculiar interest with which I studied the quilting of the satin lining, and the peculiar crawling sensation which crept to my fingers' ends.

Determined not to be unnecessarily alarmed, I spent the next three weeks in testing the communication. I visited one more medium in Boston, two in New York, one in New Haven, one in Philadelphia, and one in a little out-of-the-way Connecticut village, where I spent a night, and did not know a soul. None of these people, I am confident, had ever seen my face or heard my name before. It was a circumstance calculated at least to arrest attention, that these seven people, each unknown to the others, and without concert with the others, repeated the ugly message which had sought me out through the happy summer morning in Washington Street. There was no hesitation, no doubt, no contradiction. I could not trip them or cross-question them out of it. Unerring, assured, and consistent, the fiat went forth:—

“On the second of May, at one o'clock in the afternoon, you will pass out of the body.” I would not have believed them if I could have helped myself. I sighed for the calm days when I had laughed at medium and prophet, and sneered at ghost and rapping. I took lodgings in Philadelphia, locked my doors, and paced my rooms all day and half the night, tortured by my thoughts, and consulting books of medicine to discover what evidence I could by any possibility give of unsuspected disease. I was at that the absolutely well and strong; absolutely well and strong I was forced to confess myself, after having waded through Latin adjectives and anatomical illustrations enough to make a ghost of Hercules. I devoted two days to researches in genealogical pathology, and was rewarded for my pains by discovering myself to be the possessor of one great-aunt who had died of heart disease at the advanced age of two months.

Heart disease, then, I settled upon. The alternative was accident. “Which will it be?” I asked in vain. Upon this point my friends the mediums held a delicate reserve. “The Influences were confusing, and they were not prepared to state with exactness.”

“Why *don't* you come home?” my wife wrote in distress and perplexity. “You promised to come ten days ago, and they need you at the office, and I need you more than anybody.”

“I need you more than anybody!” When the little clinging needs of three weeks grew into the great want of a lifetime,—O, how could I tell *her* what was coming?

I did not tell her. When I had hurried home, when she came bounding through the hall to meet me, when she held up her face, half laughing, half crying, and finishing and paling, to mine,—tine poor little face that by and by would never watch and glow at my conning,—I could not tell her.

When the children were in bed and we were alone after tea, she climbed gravely up into my lap from the little cricket on which she had been sitting, and put her hands upon my shoulders.

“You're sober, Fred, and pale. Something ails you, you know, and you are going to tell me all about it.”

Her pretty, mischievous face swam suddenly before my eyes. I kissed it, put her gently down as I would a child, and went away alone till I felt more like myself.

The winter set in gloomily enough. It may have been the snow-storms, of which we had an average of one every other day, or it may have been the storm in my own heart which I was weathering alone.

Whether to believe those people, or whether to laugh at their predictions; whether to tell my wife, or whether to continue silent,—these questions tormented me through many wakeful nights

and dreary days. My fears were in nowise allayed by a letter which I received one day in January from Gertrude Fellows.

“Why don’t you read it aloud? What’s the news?” asked Alison. But at one glance over the opening page I folded the sheet, and did not read it till I could lock myself into the library alone. The letter ran:—

“I have been much disturbed lately on your behalf. My mother and your brother Joseph appear to me nearly every day, and charge me with some message to you which I cannot distinctly grasp. It seems to be clear, however, as far as this: that some calamity is to befall you in the spring,—in May, I should say. It seems to me to be of the nature of death. I do not learn that you can avoid it, but that they desire you to be prepared for it.”

After receiving this last warning, certain uncomfortable words filed through my brain for days together:—

“Set thine house in order, for thou shalt surely die.”

“Never knew you read your Bible so much in all your life,” said Alison, with a pretty pout. “You’ll grow so good that I can’t begin to keep up with you. When I try to read my polyglot, the baby comes and bites the corners, and squeals till I put it away and take him up.”

As the winter wore away I arrived at this conclusion: If I were in fact destined to death in the spring, my wife could not help herself or me by the knowledge of it. If events proved that I was deluded in the dread, and I had shared it with her, she would have had all her pain and anxiety to no purpose. In either case I would insure her happiness for these few months; they might be her last happy months. At any rate happiness was a good thing, and she could not have too much of it. To say that I myself felt no uneasiness as to the event would be affectation. The old sword of Damocles hung over me. The hair might hold, but it was a hair.

As the winter passed,—it seemed to me as if winter had never passed so rapidly before,—I found it natural to watch my health with the most careful scrutiny; to avoid improper food and undue excitement; to refrain from long and perilous journeys; to consider whether each new cook who entered the family might have occasion to poison me. It was an anomaly which I did not observe at the time, that while in my heart of hearts I expected to breathe my last upon the second of May, I yet cherished a distinct plan of fighting, cheating, persuading, or overmatching death.

I closed a large speculation on which I had been inclined, in the summer, to “fly”; Alison could never manage petroleum ventures. I wound up my business in a safe and systematic manner. “Hotchkiss must mean to retire,” people said. I revised my will, and held one long and necessary conversation with my wife about her future, should “anything happen” to me. She listened and planned without tears or exclamations; but after we had finished the talk, she crept up to me with a quiet, puzzled sadness that I could not bear.

“You are growing so blue lately, Fred! Why, what can ‘happen’ to you? I don’t believe God can mean to leave me here after you are gone; I don’t believe he *can* mean to!”

All through the sweet spring days we were much together. I went late to the office. I came home early. I spent the beautiful twilights at home. I followed her about the house. I made her read to me, sing to me, sit by me, touch me with her little, soft hand. I watched her face till the sight choked me. How soon before she would know? How soon?

“I feel as if we’d just been married over again,” she said one day, pinching my cheek with a low laugh. “You are so good! I’d no idea you cared so much about me. By and by, when you get over this lazy fit and go about as you used to, I shall feel so deserted,—you’ve no idea! I believe I will order a little widow’s cap, and put it on, and wear it about,—now, what do you mean by

getting up and stalking off to look out of the window? Fine prospect you must have, with the curtain down!"

It is, to say the least, an uncomfortable state of affairs when you find yourself drawing within a fortnight of the day on which seven people have assured you that you are going to shuffle off this mortal coil. It is not agreeable to have no more idea than the dead (probably not as much) of the manner in which your demise is to be effected. It is not in all respects a cheerful mode of existence to dress yourself in the morning with the reflection that you are never to half wear out your new mottled coat, and that this striped neck-tie will be laid away by and by in a little box, and cried over by your wife; to hear your immediate acquaintances all wondering why you *don't* get yourself some new boots; to know that your partner has been heard to say that you are growing dull at trade; to find the children complaining that you have engaged no rooms yet at the beach; to look into their upturned eyes and wonder how long it is going to take for them to forget you; to go out after breakfast and wonder how many more times you will shut that front door; to come home in the perfumed dusk and see the faces pressed against the window to watch for you, and feel warm arms about your neck, and wonder how soon they will shrink from the chill of you; to feel the glow of the budding world, and think how blossom and fruit will crimson and drop without you, and wonder how the blossom and fruit of life can slip from you in the time of violet smells and orioles.

April, spattered with showers and dripped upon a little with ineffectual suns, slid restlessly away from me, and I locked my office door one night, reflecting that it was the night of the first of May, and that tomorrow was the second.

I spent the evening alone with my wife. I have spent more agreeable evenings. She came and nestled at my feet, and the fire-light painted her cheeks and hair, and her eyes followed me, and her hand was in mine; but I have spent more agreeable evenings.

The morning of the second broke without a cloud. Blue jays flashed past my window; a bed of royal pansies opened to the sun, and the smell of the fresh, moist earth canine up where Tip was digging in his little garden.

"Not feeling exactly like work to-day," as I told my wife, I did not go to the office. I asked her to come into the library and sit with me. I remember that she had a pudding to bake, and refused at first; then yielded, laughing, and said that I must go without my dessert. I thought it highly probable that I *should* go without my dessert.

I remember precisely how pretty she was that morning. She wore a bright dress,—blue, I think,—and a white crocus in her hair; she had a dainty white apron tied on, "to cook in," she said, and her pink nails were powdered with flour. Her eyes laughed and twinkled at me. I remember thinking how young she looked, and how unready for suffering. I remember that she brought the baby in after a while, and that Tip came all muddy from the garden, dragging his tiny hoe over the carpet; that the window was open, and that, while we all sat there together, a little brown bird brought some twine and built a nest on an apple-bough just in sight.

I find it difficult to explain the anxiety which I felt, as the morning wore on, that dinner should be punctually upon the table at half past twelve. But I now understand perfectly, as I did not once, the old philosophy: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

It was ironing-day, and our dinners were apt to be late upon ironing-days. I concluded that, if the soup were punctual, and not too hot, I could leave myself ten or perhaps fifteen unoccupied minutes before one o'clock. It strikes me as curious now, the gravity with which this thought underran the fever and pain and dread of the morning.

I fell to reading my hymn-book about twelve o'clock, and when Alison called me to dinner I did not remember to consult my watch. The soup was good, though hot. A grim Epicurean stolidity crept over me as I sat down before it. A man had better make the most of his last chance at mock-turtle. Fifteen minutes were enough to die in.

I am confident that I ate more rapidly than is consistent with consummate elegance. I remember that Tip imitated me, and that Allis opened her eyes at me. I recall distinctly the fact that I had passed my plate a second time. I had passed my plate a second time, I say, and had just raised the spoon to my lips, when it fell from my palsied hand; for the little bronze clock upon the mantel struck one.

I sat with drawn breath and glared at it; at the relentless silver hands; at the fierce, and, as it seemed to me, *living* face of the Time on its top, who stooped and swung his scythe at me.

"I would like a very *big* white potato," said Tip, breaking the solemn silence.

You may or may not believe me, but it is a fact that that is all which happened.

I slowly turned my head. I resumed my spoon.

"The kitchen clock is nearly half an hour too slow," observed Alison. "I told Jane that you would have it fixed this week."

I finished my soup in silence.

It may interest the reader to learn that up to the date of this article "I still live."