

The Spectre Revels

A Tale of All Hallow Eve

By Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth

Black spirits and white,
Blue spirits and gray,
Mingle, mingle, mingle,
Ye that mingle may.—Shakespeare.

O'er all these hung a shadow and a fear!
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
That said as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is haunted!—Thomas Hood.

“Did I ever see a ghost, friends? Um-m—Well, ‘ghost’ is not the modern name for such an apparition. It is called ‘imagination,’ ‘optical illusion,’ fancy, fever, or something else—never ‘ghost,’ which makes no difference in the nature of the thing, however. ‘A rose by by other name would smell as sweet.’ Yes! I have—I have gone through more than seeing them—I have known them!”

“Ghosts?”

“No, I repeat to you the term is obsolete—optical illusions. Though to be sure the ghostly experience that has left the deepest impression upon my mind—and that this anniversary especially recalls, was no optical illusion.”

“What! was it a real ghost story, though? and did it happen to you?”

“You shall hear.”

It was the thirty-first of October, All Hallow’s Eve, a ghostly season, as every one properly posted in ghostly lore knows very well. A dreary storm of rain and wind was beating against the windows; but the fire on the old sitting-room hearth was burning warmly, the candles were not yet lighted, our father, the pastor, had not returned from a sick call, and with a delightful show of expectation we all gathered around the fire to hear Aunt Madeleine’s ghost story.

It is now more years than I care to remember, she began, since we moved from the old forest of St. Mary’s up to the town of W.

Our family then consisted of our grandmother, Mrs. Hawkins, my sister Alice (your mother, dears), and two old family servants, Hector and his wife Cassandra.

That removal was the first great memorable epoch in my own and my sister’s lives. We had never seen anything approaching nearer to a town than the little hamlet of St. Inigoes, and though W. was just exactly the drowsiest old city that ever slept through centuries and slept itself to death, yet to us, coming from the forest farm, it seemed a very miracle of life, enterprise and excitement.

We reached our home in Church street just about the last of October.

At first the change was delightful to us. We were never weary of exploring the streets and reading the signs, and—as we gained confidence and ventured into the shops—of examining the marvelous treasures of silks and satins and laces and jewelry and china, and “all that’s bought and sold in city marts.”

I recall the first six months of our residence in W., while the novelty still lasted and all was beautiful illusion, and think that no mere worldly event can ever give me such true pleasure again.

Ally and I told each other over and over again that “the city was the true Arcadia!” that there all poetry, romance and adventure was to be found, and that it was like scenes in the “Arabian nights.”

We were never weary of exploring new quarters—even the narrow, squalid lanes and alleys with their dilapidated houses and ragged denizens, had a grotesque attraction for us—and often we would stand gazing at some wretched tenement, with falling timbers and stuffed windows, and speculate about the life of the people within.

And besides the wonders of treasures and pleasures—there was the daily recurring astonishment at the convenience of the place.

We could scarcely get used to the idea that when we wanted a skein of silk or a paper of needles, it was only necessary to go across the street, or around the corner to get them, instead of putting the mare to the gig and riding seven miles to the nearest store; or that when we went out to tea, we had only to walk a square or so, instead of driving from three to ten miles; or that we might stay out until bedtime, instead of ordering the horses to start for home at sunset.

And then the comfort of being able to walk out dry shod over the clean pavements in all weathers, instead of in the winter being obliged to ride in a carriage, plunging axletree deep through lanes of mud and water, or worse still, being weather-bound by the state of the roads.

In fact, so charmed were we all with this walking with impunity at unaccustomed times and seasons, that the old carryall gathered dust in the coach house, and Jenny, the mare, accumulated fat in the stable.

But if the autumn in the city seemed so delightful to us rustics, what shall I say of the winter, when the lecture rooms and concert halls were thrown open, and when evening parties were given? There seemed to us no end of enchantments.

I should have told you that when we first went to town we had but one- acquaintance there. It was with the family of our Uncle and Aunt Rackaway. They had a large family of growing sons and daughters, of which our dear Cousin Will (your own respected father, girls), was the eldest, the handsomest, the wildest, and the best beloved. Will Rackaway soon initiated us into all the innocent amusements of the season—took us to evening meetings, lectures, concerts, exhibitions of every sort, except the theatre, which our grandmother could not be persuaded to regard as an innocent amusement.

We were a social family, and soon collected around us a very agreeable neighborhood circle, some one or two of whom would drop in upon us every evening when we were at home, or else invite us out. Ally and I extended our acquaintance among young people whose parents occasionally gave dancing parties, at which we were always present, and which, therefore, our good grandmother felt bound to sometimes reciprocate. You are not to suppose that our days passed in a round of fashionable dissipation. Nonsense! nothing of the sort. We were rather a staid, domestic family—but upon the whole what a contrast this to the long, monotonous evenings in the farm house!

Well, so passed that winter, so full of future consequences—that winter in which Ally’s gentle spirit first won the heart of her wild Cousin Will. All pleasures pall! Before the season was over, the streets, the shops, the shows—all the wonders and glories of the city had lost their attraction with their novelty.

When the spring came, we had grown just a little weary of city life. With April, a spring fever for sowing, and planting, and pruning, and training came upon us. But, alas! there was nowhere to sow or plant—our back yard was flagged, and our front one paved. And there was nothing to prune or train—four forlorn trees, trimmed by city authorities into the shape of upright mops, standing upon the hard pavement before our door, were the only apologies for vegetation near us, and they looked as exiled and homesick as ourselves. Mrs. Hawkins also missed her chickens and turkeys, and we all felt the loss of the cows.

“Ah, if we could only get a house away to ourselves, a house in the suburbs, with ground around it, where we could be private, and have shade trees and a garden, and rows and poultry, and all that, within easy walk to the city, how happy I should be,” said grandmother, sighing.

“Ah, yes! if we only could! then we should enjoy the pleasures of both city and country life,” said I.

“ ‘Oh, that would be joyful, joyful, joyful, joyful!’ ” exclaimed Ally, quoting the chorus of a popular hymn.

“Ah! well, we must keep our eyes open, and see what we can find,” said our grandmother.

The street upon which we lived was narrow and closely built up. It led down half a mile to a long bridge that crossed the river. Consequently this street was the great thoroughfare of country people coming into town, to market, or to shop, or upon any other errand.

Among those who came every day was one old man, who was quite an eccentric character, and who is still remembered by the aged inhabitants of W—. Dr. H— always wore a cocked hat, a powdered wig, a black velvet coat, double waistcoat, ruffled shirt, knee -breeches, long hose and silver buckles, and carried a gold-headed-cane, keeping up in his age the style and costume of his youth

He came in town every morning in a gig driven by a servant as aid and as quaint as himself.

He returned every evening.

The doctor was a never-failing object of interest to us. The little information we could get respecting him only whetted our curiosity to a keener edge. We learned from Cousin Will that he had no family and no society; that he lived alone in a secluded country house, called the Willow Cottage, with no companion except the aged servant seen always with him; that he had a traditional reputation of having possessed great skill in his profession, and that he now followed a limited practice among his old contemporaries in the city.

So much of authentic facts.

Besides these it was rumored that, years before, he had married a lovely young girl, who had been persuaded or forced to sacrifice her youth and beauty and a prior attachment, to his wealth and age and infirmities; whose short life had been embittered by his jealousies, and whose sudden death, under suspicious circumstances, had not left him free from imputations of the gravest character.

This was all we could learn of the doctor; and you may depend that our interest in him was deepened and darkened. We watched him with closer attention. His hard, sharp features, his deep-set eyes, whitened hair, and thin, bent figure, took on a sinister appearance, or we fancied so.

However that might be, we felt more shocked than grieved when one morning the news came that the doctor was found at daybreak dead in his bed, with dark marks upon his neck as from the pressure of a thumb and finger!

The news spread like wildfire. The long-closed doors of the Willow Cottage flew open to the public, and its darkened chambers to the sunlight. Crowds flocked thither; the old servant was

examined and discharged, no suspicion attaching to him; the coroner's inquest met and, after a session of twelve hours, rendered its sapient verdict: "Found dead," Which, of course, greatly enlightened the public mind. The old servant obtained a home in the almshouse, and the Willow Cottage passed to the next of kin.

These events occurred in the month of May. About the middle of June the weather became so hot, the streets so dusty, that the city grew intolerable to us. During winter the town of W— had afforded a pleasant contrast to the country; during summer it was quite the opposite. In the height of our discontent one morning Will Rackaway came in.

"The Willow Cottage is for rent! Here is a chance for you!"

"The Willow Cottage for rent! Oh, that is delightful," said Ally and I in a breath.

"Who has the renting of it?" inquired grandmother. "Well, the agent is out of town; but I got the key from his clerk, and if you'll order Jenny put to the carryall, I'll drive you out there to look at it. I think it will be let cheap, for the associations of the place are so gloomy that none but a strong-minded woman like Aunt—"

"A Christian woman, you mean, Will."

"Well, yes, a Christian woman, like Aunt, would venture to live in it."

Mrs. Hawkins had in the meantime put her hand to the bell, summoned Hector, and given him an order to get the carryall ready for a drive. We were soon in the carriage, and half an hour's drive took us down the street, across the long bridge to the other side of the river, and to the Willow Cottage.

There is, as I have noticed always, a remarkable fitness in the names given to country houses. This was certainly the case with the present one. There was not a willow neat the place.

A few yards from the end of the bridge, and to the right hand of the highway, a disused, grass-grown road led through a close thicket of evergreens, some quarter of a mite on to an open level area, of about an hundred acres of exhausted land, grown up in broom sedge and completely surrounded by the pine forest.

In the midst of this area stood a red stone cottage, consisting of a central building of two stories, flanked each side by wings of one story in height. The central building was finished by a gable roof front, with a large single fan-shaped window just above the front portico.

The cottage stood in the midst of a garden of about one acre, shaded with many trees and surrounded by a substantial stone wall, parallel to which, on the inside, was a hedge of evergreens, and on the outside another hedge of climbing and intertwining wild %se, eglantine~ and blackberry vines.

An iron gate, very rusty and dilapidated, admitted us to the grass-grown walk that led between two rows of black-oak trees to the front portico of the central building.

We entered a small front hail; behind which was a large, square parlor, in the rear of which was a long dining-room. The wings on the right and left consisted each of a bedchamber, entered from the front hall. There was but one room above stairs, a large chamber immediately over the parlor in the central building, and lighted by the fan-light in the front gable.

The kitchen, laundry and servants' rooms were in another building in the rear of the cottage; they were not joined together, but stood, as it were, back to back, presenting to each other a dead wall without door or window, and about two feet apart, thus forming a blind alley.

I have been thus particular in describing the house, that you may better understand the story that follows.

"The builder who designed this was certainly demented," said one of the party, pointing to the blind alley, with its waste of wall.

Will laughed.

“I have noticed, Madeline, that quite as much of character is shown in the construction of houses as in the cut of physiognomies.

“But, upon the whole, I like it,” said the other. And so said every one.

There was a -stable, a coach-house, a hen-house, a smoke-house, and, in fact, every possible accommodation for the household. The fruit trees and vines were teeming with fruit, which also lay ripening or decaying in great quantities upon the ground. The rose bushes had spread the grass with a warmer hue and sweeter covering.

We filled our old carryall with fruit and our hands with flowers and prepared to return home. Ally was in ecstasies. So was Cousin Will. So was our grandmother, as much as a self-possessed and dignified matron of the old school could be said to be. As for myself, I could not sleep that night for thinking of our removal to the fine old place. We had unanimously resolved to take it.

Alas! we had reckoned without our landlord. Upon inquiry of the agent next day we learned that the place was already let to a man who intended to make it a house of summer resort, for which its convenient distance from the city, its cool and shady and secluded site. and its extensive grounds numerous shade trees and fine-fruit, and many other good points, peculiarly adapted it.

We were very much disappointed, but our regret was somewhat modified when we ascertained that it was let at a preposterous rate of rent, that a prudent woman like our grandmother never would have undertaken to pay. So we resigned ourselves to the inevitable.

However, in a week or two we were so fortunate as to rent a small, neat house on the opposite side of the road from the Willow cottage, and nearer to the bridge. We immediately moved into our new home; and grandmother sent Hector down into the country to bring up her poultry, and drive up her cows—a business that he took but three days to accomplish.

We were thus settled in our suburban residence, with which, by the way, we were not quite content. It was, too small, too exposed to the rays of the sun, the dust of the road and the eyes of the passengers; it was too new also, and the shrubs and flowers had not had time to grow, and then—we had been disappointed of Willow Cottage.

In addition to these drawbacks, and even worse than these, was the fact that we were annoyed all day long and every day by the troops of visitors, on foot and on horseback, in sulkies and buggies, all bound for the Willow Cottage.

And, worst of all, we were disturbed all night by the noisy passage of these revelers returning home.

On Sundays and Sunday nights this was insufferable. It seemed as if ten times as many revelers went out in the day and came back ten times as much intoxicated and as noisy in the night! Our poor old Cassandra vowed that when we changed the farm for the city house it was bad enough, but when we changed the city house for the suburban cottage, “we jest did it—jumped right out de fryin’ pan inter de fire!”

However, a terrible event soon occurred at the Willow Cottage that crowded everything else out of our heads.

It was the night of the Fourth of July. All day long crowd after crowd had passed our house on their way out there. From early in the morning until late at night the road was kept clouded with the dust, that settled upon everything in and around our house. We were glad when, late at night, the revelry seemed to cease, and we were permitted to be at peace.

We retired, and, exhausted by the exciting annoyances of the day, I fell asleep. I know not how long I had slept, when I was suddenly aroused by the noise of many persons hurrying past the

house in apparently a state of great excitement. In another moment I perceived that all the family had been aroused as well as myself. They hurried into my room, which was the front chamber of the second floor, and thus from a secure point commanded the street. We all crowded to the two windows, left the candles unlighted that we might not be seen, and remained as mute as mice that we might not be heard.

The stars were very bright, and we could distinctly see the hurrying crowd in the road below. Some were running in the direction of the Willow Cottage, while others were hastening thence. These opposite parties, meeting, would exchange a few vehement words and gestures, and then speed upon their several ways.

At last a man, running against another immediately under the window, inquired:

“For Heaven’s sake, what is the matter at the Willow Cottage?”

“Don’t stop me, for the Lord’s sake! O’Donnegan, the landlord, has killed young Keats, the only son of Colonel Keats! I am running to fetch his father!”

“Heaven and earth! another murder within that accursed house! That is the third!” exclaimed the questioner, in a voice of horror.

The men separated in opposite directions, the one running toward the town, the other toward the scene of the outrage. The same questions and the same answers were quietly heard between other meeting parties, who separated, running in opposite ways, as the first had done. The dreadful news was thus confirmed.

We drew back our heads and looked each other in the face in consternation. We knew none, of the parties concerned, yet we could not compose ourselves to sleep that night.

The next day was a terrible one to the friends of the murdered and the murderer.

Once more—the third time—a coroner’s inquest sat upon a dead body at the Willow Cottage. But this time their verdict, made up after a careful investigation and patient deliberation, was of a more fatal character. It was that “The deceased came to his death by blows upon the head from a bludgeon in the hands of Patrick O’Donnegan.”

O’Donnegan, who was under arrest, awaiting the verdict, was then fully committed to stand his trial at the approaching session of the criminal court.

The establishment at the Willow Cottage was broken up, the furniture sold, the house closed, and the premises once more advertised for rent. But now with the bad odor hanging around the place, no one wished to take it, and the house remained idle upon the proprietor’s hands.

Meantime the trial of O’Donnegan approached. He was arraigned, convicted and sentenced, in a shorter space of time than I ever heard of in the trial of any criminal. Many people thought that the prosecution was conducted in a vindictive spirit, and that the friends of the deceased exerted every faculty, sparing neither influence nor expense in the pursuit of a conviction. They retained the best counsel in the country to assist the state’s attorney, while on the other hand the poor wretch of a prisoner had no defense except that appointed for him by the court. However that might be, in the short space of one month from the time of committing the homicide, he was sentenced to die; and in six weeks from his conviction he expiated his crime upon the scaffold.

It was about the middle of September, of that eventful year, when a rumor arose—as all rumors arise, mysteriously—that the Willow ‘Cottage was haunted; that ghostly lights flitted through its chambers; that ghostly revelers held midnight orgies in its deserted halls; and that the murderer and the murdered still played their game at ninepins, or waged their last war along its lonely corridors.

While these reports were rife in the neighborhood, our Grandmother Hawkins turned a deaf ear, or threw in a good-humored, sarcastic word to the marvel-mongers—upon one occasion launching at them and us the time-honored proverb:

“You will never see anything worse than yourselves, my dears.”

“I believe you, mistress, honey! for long as I lib on dis yeth, and feared as I is o’ ghoses, I nebber see nothin’ worse nor myse’f yet—dough, the Lord betune me an’ harm; I sartinly saw de debbil once—I did,” observed old Cassy, sapiently.

“If no one else takes the Willow Cottage beforehand, just wait until my term is up here, and then if Mr. Buzzard will let it to a small, quiet family on anything like reasonable terms, you’ll see how we meet spectres,” said our grandmother.

“Too late, Aunt Rachel the Willow Cottage is let,” exclaimed Will Rackaway who had a few minutes previously joined our party.

“Let, is it? Ah! well, I hope it is not to another rum-seller!”

“No, indeed! to another guess tenant! to Colonel Manly, of the — regiment, who is now ordered to join General Armistead, in Florida, and who takes the cottage as a pleasant country home for his wife and children during his absence.”

“Hum-m me! then we shall have neighbors. I am very well reconciled,” said Mrs. Hawkins.

A few weeks after this conversation the new tenants were settled in the Willow Cottage, and the colonel embarked for Florida.

Grandmother Hawkins was rather slow and ceremonious in all her dealings with society. Therefore she “took her time” in calling upon Mrs. Manly. Consequently, upon the very morning that she set out to pay that lady a visit she met a train of furniture drays proceeding from the premises, and heard to her great astonishment that the family were moving away.

“And they have been only here a week!” exclaimed the old lady, by unmitigated astonishment thrown for a moment off her guard.

Significant looks and mysterious gestures were the only comments made by the servants upon the subject.

And Mrs. Hawkins, thinking it improper to push inquiries in that quarter, sent in her respects and good wishes to Mrs. Manly, and then, without having alighted from her carryall, gave the order to turn the horse’s head homeward.

You may judge the surprise with which we heard the news of this flitting; but as our grandmother had asked no questions, she could give us no information.

Others, however, were not so discreet. Inquiries were made and answered, and soon the news flew all over the country that Mrs. Manly, upon account of the mysterious noises that nightly disturbed her rest, found it impossible to live in the house.

The cottage remained idle for some weeks, and then was taken by another family, who stayed ten days, then vanished—whispering the same cause for their abandonment of the premises.

The excitement of the neighborhood increased. There was nothing talked of but the haunted house. Large parties visited the spot during daylight, who, after the most curious investigation, found nothing unusual about the looks of the place. But no tenant could be induced to take it, and it remained idle for several weeks, at the end of which time a family from down the country moved up, and reading of this fine place to let,” and not knowing its “haunted” reputations engaged it at once. The name of the newcomers was Ferguson. The neighborhood waited the event in deep interest.

Upon the day after their settlement at the cottage, as we were just about to sit down to our very early breakfast, there was a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of a good-looking

motherly, colored woman, who announced herself as “Aunt Hannah, ole Marse Josh Ferguson’s woman,” and stood waiting.

“Well, Hannah, you look tired—sit down on that stool and let us know how we can do you good,” said Mrs. Hawkins.

“Thanky misst’ess, no time to sit honey; ’deed I hasn’t—I come to see if you would ’form me where I could buy a little drap o’ cream, for ole marse coffee. Our cows hasn’t riv from below yet.”

“You cannot buy cream at all in this neighborhood, but I will supply your master, with great pleasure, until his cows come home.”

“Thanky, mist’ess! thanky, honey! I ’cepts of it wid all de comfort in life! An’ if so be you-dem wants any plums, or pears, or squinches, for ’serves, we’d s’ply you in like manner.”

After this Aunt Hannah came every morning for her pitcher of cream. One morning I overheard her talking with Cassy in the kitchen.

“How you dew likes your new place?” inquired Cassy.

“Hush, honey!” exclaimed the other, with an air of deep mystery.

“Lord! ’deed, now?” whispered Cassy.

“Trufe I’m telling you!” replied Hannah.

“Do any one sturve you o’ nights?”

“Hush, honey!”

“Dead people.”

“The Lord betune us and harm!”

“Hush, honey! Don’t let on! We’s gwine ’way; but de family don’t want it should be known as dey leave for sich a cause.”

“I unuerstans! The saints betune us an’ sin!”

A few days after this conversation Mr. Ferguson’s family left the Willow Cottage; and the excitement of the neighborhood upon the subject of the haunted homestead received a tremendous impetus. As it had been once visited from motives of incredulous curiosity, it was now avoided in the spirit of superstitious dread. It was believed to be unlucky to the visitor. All the worst rumors about the former proprietors were revived and credited. It was said that a curse rested upon the house where marriage faith and friendship’s trust and hospitality’s laws had each in succession been basely betrayed—upon the house of three reputed murders!

Mrs. HaWkins stoutly stood up for the defense at of the Willow Cottage.

“Three murders! nonsense! three stage plays! The doctor s wife fretted herself into illness, and died young of heart disease, poor thing. She was not, therefore, murdered. The old doctor himself lived to a good age and died in a fit. Was he murdered? I guess the coroner’s jury knew! The unhappy young man Keats lost hiss life in a sinful revel—a warning to all youth. What guilt, then, rests upon the comfortable hore and beautiful garden? Did they suggest wine-bibbing and brawling? Pshaw! I am ashamed of people’s want of logic. Only wait until my term is up here, and then see if I do not move into the house, and stay in it, too!”

“This decision of Mrs. Hawkins produced different effects upon each of her family. I for my own part had a natural turn for melodramatic heroism—admired Joan of Arc, Margaret of Norway, Philippa of Hainault, and all the lion-hearted, eagle-eyed, battle-ax heroines and wished for the opportunity of imitating them. I had an aspiring, courageous spirit, but weak nerves; and so I stoutly seconded the move to move, though my heart quailed at the idea of our living alone in the haunted house.

Ally's trust in her grandmother was so perfect that she resigned herself in confidence to her decision.

The old negroes were possessed with the direst forebodings, but feeling that it would be vain to remonstrate, only shook their heads and muttered something to the effect that "old mist'ess' " confidence in herself would be sure to have a check some day.

Mrs. Hawkins was as good as her word. She began in her steady, energetic way to tie up parcels and pack boxes of such things as were not in daily use, in anticipation of moving. There was no competition for the possession of the deserted mansion. Mrs. Hawkins engaged it at a very moderate rate of rent.

And upon the 31st of October—the ghostly anniversary of Hallow E'en—a day ever to be remembered, we began our removal to the haunted house.

It was a dark, overcast day.

Mrs. Hawkins, who seldom stopped for weather, was anxious to get all her effects safely housed before the rain, or at least before night, So, very early in the morning, accompanied by Alice and attended by old Hector, she drove over to Willow Cottage to have fires lighted in the damp house, and to receive and dispose of the furniture as it should arrive.

Myself and Will Rackaway, who came to help me and old Cassy, remained in charge of the house to dispatch -the furniture. It was a hard day's work, I assure you. And as the twilight hours passed the sky grew darker, and the air damper and colder. A gloomier and more depressing day could scarcely be imagined.

It was nearly night when at length we dispatched the last cartload of effects, locked up the house, and got into 'the old carryall that had returned for us. Old Cassy sat with me on the back seat, and old hector, who drove for us, sat beside Will Rackaway, in front. The rain was now falling in a fine, slow drizzle. Perhaps it was the dark and heavy atmosphere, fatigue, and the approach of night, that so oppressed my spirits, but I well remember the feeling of gloom and terror with which I crossed the highway and entered upon the grass-grown and shadowy road, through the thicket that led to Willow Cottage. It was a very dark and silent scene—no sight but the trees, that, like lower and heavier clouds, met and hung over our heads; no sound but the stealthy, muffled turn of the wheels over the wet and fallen leaves.

"The road to the haunted house is a very ghostly one I think, for my part, Mark Tapley would have found this a fine place to get jolly in," said Will, twisting his head around to look at me.

But he had quickly to recall his attention, for his first words had so upset the equanimity of our driver that he had allowed his horse to run full tilt into the trees. Will seized the reins from the shaking hands of old Hector and soon righted the carryall.

At last we emerged from the thicket, and saw dimly the great open area girdled with its pine forest, of which I have already spoken.

Only like a denser group of shadow was the old Willow Cottage, in the midst of its ancient trees, in the center of that open space.

We followed the road through the broom sedge across the field until we drew up at the rusty iron gate of the cottage.

There we alighted, and, leaving old Hector to drive the carryall around to the stable door, we entered and went up the long grass-grown walk between the black oaks, until we reached the house.

The doors and window blinds were all closed, and the faint light within gleamed fitfully through the chinks where the framework was warped.

The front door was not locked, and we entered at once into the hall that ran parallel with the front of the house, and formed, in fact, a sort of anteroom to the large parlor that lay behind it. From this hall, besides the central door before us that led into the parlor, there was a door on the right hand and one on the left, leading into the side bedchambers in the wings; and by the side of the right-hand door, nearer the front wall, was the staircase leading up to the large chamber in the gable end, that was lighted and ventilated by that fan-shaped window seen in the front of the house over the portico.

We passed through the hall, and through the large, empty parlor behind it, and entered the long dining-room in the rear.

There we found Mrs. Hawkins and Alice awaiting us among the piled-up furniture.

“You look tired and out of spirits, Madeleine. You must have worked harder than we did.”

“How have you got on?” I inquired.

“Why, we have arranged the bedchambers and the kitchen—that is all. We have left the dining-room and parlor and hall to be put to rights to-morrow. But Hector has got the supper ready, and set the table in the kitchen; let us go in there; it is warmer. Come, girls—come, Will.”

As I before mentioned, the kitchen, pantry, laundry and servants’ rooms were in a building behind the dwelling-house, not joined to it, but standing back to back with it at a distance of three feet. So we had to go out of doors to enter the kitchen.

I remember even now the sense of comfort I experienced on entering that cozy room. It was a stone room, with a great fireplace, in which blazed a fine fire, a wide, high dresser, upon which shone, tier upon tier, rows of bright metal and clean crockeryware; in the middle of the floor was an inviting table, upon which smoked an abundant supper.

“Ah!” said Will, with an appreciating glance at the board; “thus fortified, we can meet the enemy!”

“Can you spend the night with us, Will?” inquired Mrs. Hawkins.

“Oh, no! must return; mother doesn’t know I’m out!” replied the youth.

Accordingly, after supper Will prepared to take his leave of us.

“Before you go, Will, I wish you to take Hector and the lantern and go over every foot of the grounds, and all along the walks, to see that everything is safe here,” said our grandmother.

“Of course, of course, noble lady! Order the seneschal and the luminary, and I will reconnoitre the state of the fortifications!” said Will, as he buttoned up his coat.

By the time he had drawn on his gloves Hector appeared at the door with the lantern, and they sallied forth. I looked through an end window, and found strange amusement in watching the progress of that lantern up one shadowy walk and down another, and along the hedged wall, until at last it approached the house. Will entered, speaking gayly.

“Well, Lady Hawkins, I have reconnoitred the defenses, and found them in an excellent condition! The wall is strong, the hedge on the inside is high, and that upon the outside sharp. The enemy could not attempt to scale without such damage to cuticle from the one, and bone from the others, as no enemy endowed with the better part of valor’ would risk. All is quiet within the garrison; and if you will send the warden to lock the gate after me, I think the castle will be impregnable for the night.”

Hector once more received orders to attend the young master, who now bade us good-night and left the house.

Meanwhile, Cassy had washed up the supper service and restored the kitchen to order. So that when old Hector returned from his errand, bearing the key of the gate, nothing remained for us to do but examine and close the house, offer up our evening worship, and go to bed, which, as

it was very, late and we were very tired, we prepared to do at once. After every room was visited, and every door and window firmly secured, we went to the dining-room for family prayer, and then let Gassy and Hector out, and gave them the key to lock the door on the outside, so that they might be able to let themselves in in the morning to light the fires without disturbing us. After having thus dismissed them, dosed the door, and heard it locked, we turned to seek our rest.

“I do not consider these lower bedrooms quite dry and safe just at present, girls; so I have had two beds made up in the room overhead, which is large and well ventilated. Alice can sleep with me in the large bed, and you, Madeleine, can occupy the other,” said our grandmother as she led the way upstairs.

I did not quite like the arrangement, but could not resist Mts. Hawkins.

The upper room, notwithstanding the fact of its being in the roof, was amply high and large enough for a healthful, double-bedded chamber. Our beds stood parallel, but sufficiently far apart, with their heads against the north, or back wall, and their feet toward the front gable, lighted by the fan-shaped window aforesaid. As it was very damp and chill, and we were very much exhausted, we did not linger long over our final preparations, but went speedily to bed.

Our grandmother and Alice seemed scarcely to have settled themselves under the blankets and given me a drowsy good-night when they slid off into the land of dreams.

I could not sleep! I seldom can the first night in a strange house, and this was—such a house! I felt quite alone—as much alone as if the heavy sleepers in the next bed were a thousand miles away, for farther still in spirit were they. I thought of the isolated situation of the house we were in; of the crimes, real or reputed that had stained its hearthstone; of the superstitious terror attaching to the haunted place; of the hard facts that three several families, not reputed less wise or brave than their neighbors, had been driven from the spot by supernatural disturbance as yet unexplained; of the coincidence that this dreary night was the ghostly Hallow Ee; then of the superstition that spirits, when they wish to appear to only one in a room, have the power of casting all others into a profound sleep, from which the haunted one cannot awake them; and of isolating their victim from all the natural world—even from the very bedfellow by their side. The room was very dark and still—solid blackness and dead silence. It oppressed me like a nightmare. At last, when my senses grew accustomed to the scenes by straining my eyes, I could dimly perceive beyond the foot of the bed the segment of a circle formed by the fanlight window, that now only seemed a thinner darkness; and, by straining my ears, I could faintly hear the stealthy fall of the drizzling rain. It was almost worse than the first total silence and darkness; for it kept my nerves on a strange *qui vive* of attention. Presently this was over, too. The muffled sound of the drizzling ceased. Yet darker clouds must have lowered over the earth, for the faint outline of the fanlight window was no longer visible. All was once more black darkness and intense silence, and again I felt oppressed almost to suffocation. Welcome now would have been the faint fall of the fine rain or the dim outline of the window. I strained my senses in vain; no sight or sound responded. I felt the silence and the darkness settling like the clods of the ground upon my breast.

Hoo-oo-o!—went something.

Hark! what was that? I thought, starting.

“Hoo-oo-o—!

Oh! the wailing voice of some low, wandering wind, I concluded.

Whirrr-rr-r—!

Yes! the wind is rising, but how like a lost spirit it wails.

‘Urr-rr-rr-r-r-r—!

My Lord! it’s not the wind! What is it? Great Heavens!

Urr-rr-rr-rr-r-r-r-r!

I started up in a sitting posture, and, bathed in a cold perspiration remained listening, my hair bristling with terror.

Urr—rr-rr-rr-r-r-r-r—“Ha—ha—ha!”

I could bear no more! Springing out, I called:

“Grandmother! Grandmother!”

“What’s the matter? Why, what ails the child?” exclaimed Mrs. Hawkins.

“Oh! listen! listen!”

“Listen at what? You are dreaming!”

“Dreaming, am I? Oh! wait! Listen—”

Urr-rr-rr-r-r-r-r—“Ha!—ha!—ha!”

It was, as plainly as I ever heard, the sound of the rolling of a ball, followed by a peal of demoniac laughter.

I turned on Mrs. Hawkins an appalled look.

She was surprised, but self-possessed, and evidently bent on calmly listening and investigating. She sat straight up in bed with a strong, concentrated attention to the sounds. They came again:

Urr-rr-rr-r-r-r-r-rattle-te-bang!—“A ten-strike at last!—O’s a dead shot!”

“A dead shot.”

“A dead shot,” was echoed all around.

Grandmother calmly threw the quilts off her, stepped out of bed, and began to dress herself.

“Strike a light, Madeleine,” she said.

“What are you going to do, grandmother?”

“Dress myself and examine the premises.”

Urr-rr-rr-r-r-r-r,”Ha! ha! ha!” sounded once more the demoniac noise and laughter.

The matchbox nearly dropped from my shaking hands, but I struck the light,

The sudden flash awoke Alice just as another sonorous roll of the ball, and fall of the pins, and peal of demon laughter, sounded hollowly around us.

“Heaven and earth! what is that?” she exclaimed starting up.

“What do you think it is, Alice?” said I.

“My Lord! my Lord!—it is the phantoms of the murderer and the murdered playing over again their last game!” cried the girl, in an agony of terror.

Just at this moment a distinct knocking was heard at the little door at the foot of the staircase.

Alice screamed.

I held my breath.

The knocking was repeated.

“Who is there?” said Mrs. Hawkins, going to the head of the stairs.

No answer; but the knocking was repeated; and then a frightened, plaintive voice, crying:

“Ole mist’ess—ole mist’ess—oh! do, for the Lord sake, let me in, chile! the hair’s almos’ turn gray on my head.”

“Is that you, Cassy?”

“Yes, honey—yes, what the ghoses has left o’ me,”replied the poor creature, in a dying voice.

Grandmother went down the stairs and opened the door at the foot, and Cassy came tumbling up into the room after her. She was absolutely ashen gray with terror, and her limbs shook so that she could scarcely stand,

“Oh! did you hear—did you hear all the ghoses and devils playing ninepins together in our very house?” she gasped, dropping into a chair.

As if in answer to her question, once more the phantom ball rolled in detonating thunder, the pins fell with loud, rattling sound, followed by a hollow shout of triumph!

Cassy fell on her knees and crossed herself devoutly. Alice clung in terror to her grandmother.

I felt that the time to play the heroine was come, and strove to exhibit self-possession and courage.

“Take up the candle, Cassy, and lead the way down-stairs. We must go and search the house,” said Mrs. Hawkins.

“Oh! for the Lord’s sake, don’t! don’t! old mist’ess, honey! Don’t be a temptin’ o’ Providence! Leave the ghoses alone and stay here, and fasten the door.”

“I shall search the house and grounds,” said Mrs. Hawkins, in a peremptory voice. “Therefore, take up the light and go before me.”

“Oh! For de Lord’s love, ole mis’tess! ef we mus’ go, you go first, you go first; I dar’n’t; I’s such a sinner, I is!” cried Cassy, wringing her hands in an agony of terror.

Urr-rrr-rr-r-r-rattle-te-bang-ang!

A ten-strike! Ho! ho! ho! ho! ho! Ho!” again sounded the revels.

“Hooley St. Bridget, pray for us! Hail Mary, full of grace! Don’t go, ole mist’ess, honey! Oh, stay where you is in safety!” pleaded the old woman, clasping her hands.

“Nonsense! Hold your tongue, Cassy. If ever there was a woman plagued with a set of cowardly simpletons, it is myself. Let go my skirts this moment, Alice! Be silent, every one of you, and follow me as softly as possible,” said my grandmother, in a low, stern voice, as she took up the candle and led the way downstairs. We followed at this order—Cassy holding on to her mistress’ skirts, Alice holding to Cassy’s, and I bringing up the rear, with carnal weapons in one hand and spiritual ones in the other—that is to say, with a big ruler and a prayerbook.

A chili, damp air met us at the foot of the stairs—nothing else.

The front hall was empty and bleak. We tried the doors, and found them as secure as we had left them, with the exception of the parlor door, by which Cassy had entered, and which was on the latch. Mrs. Hawkins pulled it to and locked it, saying, in a low voice, that she wished, while examining each room, to keep all the rest locked, that there might be no escape for any one concealed in the house.

First we went into the right-hand bedroom, opening from the hall. It was secure, vacant and bleak. We locked the door and drew out the key.

Next we looked into the left-hand bedroom; it was in precisely the same condition. We made it fast in the same manner.

Then we opened and entered the parlor. This was the bleakest room of any—large, square, lofty, totally bare, cold and damp.

“Nothing here,” said Mrs. Hawkins, looking around.

Urr-rr-rr-r-r-r-r-rattle-te-bang-ang-ang! the phantom ball rolled, and scattered the ninepins.

“Ha! ha! ha! ha! Ha!” shouted the hollow, ghastly voices.

They seemed to be in the very room with us, reverberating in the very air we breathed, echoing from the four walls around, and from the ceiling above us!

“Jesu, Mary!” cried Cassy, dropping on heir knees.

“Oh! oh! oh!” gasped Alice, clinging to me.

“This is very unaccountable,” said our grandmother, looking all around the room, where nothing but bare walls and bare boards met the view.

We looked at each other in silence for a few moments, and then Mrs. Hawkins said:

“Come! let us look into the dining-room, and then call up Hector to assist us in searching the grounds.”

We passed on into the next room and locked the door behind us, as we had locked every one in our tour through the house. That room was closely packed with furniture, over which we had to clamber our passage.

While we were doing so, once again sounded the detonating roll of the ball, the rattling, scattering of the pins, and the hollow peals of laughter, all echoing around and around us, as it were, in the same rooms.

Alice again seized her grandmother.

Cassy fell over a stack of washtubs, and called on all the saints to help her.

Mrs. Hawkins ordered Alice to let her go, and Cassy to get up, and me to move on.

She was obeyed. A great general was our grandmother, and we all knew it!

We left the dining-room, locking the last door behind us. We dodged the dark, blind alley, sheltered the candle from the drizzling mist, and went around into the kitchen and called Hector from above.

The old man answered, and soon came toddling down the narrow stairs.

“Hector, have you heard those noises?” inquired Mrs. Hawkins.

“The Lord between us and evil! I’ve heern, mist’ess! I’ve heern!”

“What do you suppose it is?”

A dubious, solemn shake of the head was the old man’s only reply.

“Can’t you speak, Hector? How do you account for these noises? Come! no mysteries; answer if you can; what are they?”

“Dead people!” groaned the old man, with a shudder.

“Pooh!” exclaimed Mrs. Hawkins

But I could see that even she was paler than usual.

“Come, Hector! There is no one in the house—that is certain. And no one can get into it while we are gone, because, it is locked up. Now fasten up the kitchen, and let us go and search the grounds, and unkennel any interlopers that may be lurking there.”

We came out and secured the kitchen door, and began our tour of the garden.

As we left the door, our watchdog ran out to join us. This, circumstance, while it greatly assisted us in our search, very much increased the perplexity of our minds. Had the dog heard the noises that had disturbed us, and if so, why had he not given the alarm?—or, on the other hand, were dogs insensible to supernatural sights and sounds? We could not tell; but we were glad to have Fidelle snuffing and trotting along before us, confident that if there were a human being lurking anywhere in the garden, he would smell him out. So we went up one grass-grown walk and down another, between rows of gooseberry bushes, currant bushes, and raspberry bushes, all damp and dripping with mist, and through alleys of dwarf plum trees, and all along the hedges of evergreen inside the brick wall, and past the iron gate, which was still chained, as it had been left, and then around in the stable, coachhouse, henhouse and smokehouse, each of which we found securely locked, and, when opened, damp, musty and vacant; and so we looked, over every foot of ground, and into every outbuilding, finding all safe and leaving all safe; and at last, without having discovered anything, we arrived again at the dining-room door.

We all entered, locked the door after us, clambered over the piles of furniture, and passed on into the parlor.

The parlor, as I have said, was as yet unfurnished, damp and cold. Yet there we paused for a little while to take breath.

“There is nothing concealed in the garden, and nothing in the house; that is demonstrated. These strange manifestations must admit of a natural explanation; but I confess myself at a loss to explain them,” said Mrs. Hawkins.

“Oh! ole mist’ess; ’fess it’s de ghoses, honey! ’fess it’s de ghoses! Memorize how nobody was ever able to lib in dis cussed house!” pleaded Cassy.

“Oh, yes, grandmother, do let’s sit up here all night to-night, and move out early to-morrow morning,” entreated Ally.

“What do you say, Madeleine?” inquired my grandmother.

“I say, brave it out!”

“So do I, my girl!” replied Mrs. Hawkins.

“Oh, for de love o’ de Lord, don’t, ole mist’ess I don’t, Miss Maddy! don’t! It’s a temptin’ o’ Providence! Leave de ’fernel ole place to de ghoses, as has de bes’ right to it!” prayed Cassy.

“We’ll see about that!” said our grandmother. “But come! all seems quiet now; we will go to bed, and investigate further to-morrow.”

“Yes, ole mist’ess, honey, I knows all is quiet jest now, but—”

“Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!—Ho! ho! ho! ho! ho! ho! ho!” burst a peal of demoniac laughter, resounding through and through the room, and close into our ears.

“The Lord between us and Satan!” cried Cassy, dropping the candle, which immediately went out and left us in darkness.

While, peal on peal, sounded the demoniac laughter around us.

Cassy fell on her knees and began praying:

“St. Mary, pray for us! St. Martha pray for us! all ye hooly vargins and widders, pray for us lone women! St. Peter pray for us! St. Powl pray for us! All body ’postles and ’vangellers, pray for us poor sinners!—Saint—Saint—Saint—oh! for de Lor’s sake, Miss Ally, honey, tell me de name o’ that booty saint as met a ghose riding on Balaain’s ass and knows hows—how it feels!”

“It was Saul or Samuel, or the Witch of Endor, I forget which,” said Alice, whose knowledge of the Old Testament, never very precise, was frightened out of her.

“St. Saul, St. Samael, St. Witchywinder, pray for us, as met a ghost yourself and knows how it feels.”

And still, while Cassy prayed her frantic prayers. and poor old Hector told his beads, and Alice trembled and clung to me, the demon laughter resounded around and around us. We were in such total darkness that I had not seen Mrs. Hawkins withdraw herself from the group, nor suspected her absence until we heard her firm, cheery voice outside near the dining-room door, saying:

“What can any one think of this? Come here, Hector! Come here, children!”

We all went—expecting some *denouement*.

Mrs. Hawkins telegraphed to us to be perfectly silent, and to step lightly. She turned the angle of the house and walked up the blind alley between the back of the house and the back of the kitchen; when she had got about midway of the walk, she stopped, and silently pointed to the rank weeds and bushes that grew closely under the wall of the house.

“There! what do you think of that?” she said, in a low voice.

We looked, and at first could see nothing; but, on a closer inspection, we perceived a very faint mere thread of red light, low down among the bushes.

We looked up at Mrs. Hawkins for explanation.

“After the candle fell and went out,” she said, “I slipped out with the intention of exploring again, and this time alone, and in darkness. I came up this blind alley and, looking sharply, descried that glimmer of light. And now I am convinced that the revelers, human or ghostly, are below there, in that old, disused cellar that we were made to believe was nearly full of water, and required to be drained. Don’t be agitated, children! take it coolly,” concluded Mrs. Hawkins, stooping down to put aside the weeds and bushes.

Just at this moment another detonating roll of the ball, and scattering fall of the pins, and peal of hollow laughter resounded from below.

Urr-rr-rr-r-r-rattle bang-ang-ang! “Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho! ho! A dead shot!”

“Too late, young gentlemen! Your fun is all over! Your game is up! You are discovered! Come forth!” said Mrs. Hawkins, who, down upon her knees, pulled away the bushes, turned up the old, broken and mouldy cellar door, and discovered the scene below.

A rudely fitted-up bowling alley, occupying the further end of the room, and some eight or ten youths, no longer engaged in rolling balls, but, on the contrary, standing in various attitudes of detected culpability.

“Come! come forth!” commanded Mrs. Hawkins.

And they came, climbing up the rotten and moldering steps, and the very first who put his impudent head up through the door into the open air was Will Rackaway!

“Oh! Will,” exclaimed Alice, reproachfully.

“You! Will?” questioned Mrs. Hawkins, in scandalized astonishment.

“No! the ghost of O’Donnegan,” replied the youth, in a sepulchral voice.

“Reprobate!” exclaimed our grandmother.

“Now, indeed, indeed. I was only taking the liberty of entertaining my friends in my kind Aunt Hawkins’ cellar. Quite right, you know! Only don’t tell father, and I’ll never do so no more!” pleaded Will, with mock humility.

“Dismiss your comrades, sir! and come into the house! I shall send for your father to-morrow morning,” said Mrs. Hawkins, in a stern voice.

There was no need to dismiss the intruders; they were climbing up the dilapidated steps as fast as they could come, and slinking away with averted heads, trying to conceal their faces, which Mrs. Hawkins did not insist upon discovering. When they were all gone, Will followed us into the house.

“Now, then, sir, explain your conduct,” ordered Mrs. Hawkins.

And Will, with an air of mock humility and deprecation, obeyed.

The account he gave was briefly this: Himself and several other youths, Sons of very strict parents, who proscribed ninepins with other games, had, out of some old timber and furniture left of O’Donnegan’s old ninepin alley, that had been taken down and carried away, fitted up the old, disused cellar for their games. They had played there recently every night, with no other intention than that of amusing themselves, and of keeping their game concealed—with no thought of enacting a ghostly drama, until, to their astonishment, they gradually learned that these revels were mistaken for ghostly orgies, and had given the house its unenviable reputation of being haunted—a joke much too good for human nature, and especially for boys’ human nature, not to carry out. Everything favored their concealment. The cellar was reputed to be half full of water, and was long disused, and every cellar window, except the narrow, hidden one that they had turned into a door, was nailed up. Besides, the front division of the cellar was really two feet deep in water, and when there was any great risk of discovery they had a means of letting it

in to overflow the back divisions, so that their fixtures were all covered. Thus for months they had played the double game of ninepins and of a ghostly drama!

Need I say more? Will was let off with a lengthy lecture, which I have reason to believe did him a vast deal of good, as he is now the staid father of a family, and pastor of a church. Mrs. Hawkins was for the next nine days the wonder of the neighborhood for having so valiantly exercised the ghosts. And we settled down in perfect content in the fine old house, to which we possessed the double right of rental and of conquest.