

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

BY MARIE HAZEN.

I am a poor man, only a clerk with a salary of two thousand per annum. I have a wife and two children—son and daughter—both of them as pretty a wife and as nice little children as can be found within a hundred miles of New York, and I am prepared to fight any man—smaller than myself—who pretends to deny it. Now, having a pretty wife and nice children, I naturally desire to place them in a good position. I have a weakness for a nice house, plenty of pictures, fine china, and so forth. So has my wife.

with you until you have given the house a trial yourself," were the closing words of my friend. I reported my interview with Johnston to Mollie, but she remained firm in her determination to accompany me. In a week the children were dispatched to Aunt Kate's, and Mollie and I paid a visit to the haunted house. In appearance, we found it all we could desire. The hall was spacious, the parlors high, large and elegant, furnished with all a French woman's taste. The dining-room—which was the first part—was like the parlors and hall, rich in mirrors.

The second floor was as possible more elegant than the parlors, since here had crept in together with the show and glitter, an air of easy comfort. Especially was this true of the little hall room, which was upholstered in blue satin. At each point of intersection—where usually a button or tuft is placed—was a crystal ball, which under the gaslight must be garish and queer. At least so thought Mollie and I, going through for the first time. In the day time, with the sun streaming in at the windows, nothing could be more charming. The third floor was a counterpart of the second and the fourth was exactly like the third. In short, the whole place was bright, pretty and elegant in the extreme.

After we had made the tour of the rest of the house, Mollie and I descended to the basement. Here plainness reigned supreme; no frescoed ceilings—no mirrors or pictures on walls; evidently Mrs. Madden took small interest in this portion of her dwelling. Having convinced ourselves of the desirability of the premises, as far as pertained to external comforts, Mollie and I separated for the day; she to do a little necessary shopping, I to attend to my business. The day passed slowly. Some misgivings on Mollie's account took possession of me. At last I resolved to get her two brothers, Charlie and Ed—two gay, devil may care young men—to come and bear us company. When I arrived at the place where we were to dine and saw Mollie's face I was glad I had done so, for she looked pale and anxious, though she insisted that she felt no fear.

After dinner—about half past six—we all started for the haunted house. The weather was warm, and as Mollie had sent bed linen and all necessary articles for our use, we had nothing to do but await as patiently as we could the arrival of the ghosts. The rooms were close and musty, from their long disuse, and we were glad to open the parlor windows. But when the shadows began to fall, left Ed with Mollie, and taking Charlie to light the gas, which I had taken precaution to have "turned on," determined no trick should be played on me in the dark. Nothing occurred to alarm us till we reached the second floor. I had just lighted one burner, and was about to light another, when I was startled by a sharp cry from Charlie. Turning around I saw him standing with a face like marble, eyes staring from their sockets with horror and his lips drawn back and disclosing his set white teeth.

Started more by his look than by the fear or dread of the something that I knew he saw, I shouted to him—"Charlie! Charlie! what is it, old man?" He clatched my arm with one hand and pointed with the other toward the blue room. "For God's sake Dick," he said hoarsely, "look there." I turned slowly around and looked where he pointed. In the center of the little upholstered room, I saw a figure—thin, unsubstantial and gigantic. The eyes were closed, but one hand moved restlessly to and fro across the forehead. For an instant I was riveted to the spot, staring with all the fascination of terror at the unearthly figure reflected so horribly in the garish light, the next I had recovered myself. Shaking off Charlie's detaining hand I sprang forward, brandishing the gas-lighter, and aimed a savage blow at it. To my horror the blow passed through the body, but the object never stirred, except to continue the wearied motion of the hand. A moment more, then it disappeared as mysteriously as it had come. Calling up my native resolution I persuaded Charlie to continue the roads of the house with me, and preceded him up stairs.

Nothing more occurred worthy of mention till the time for retiring. Charlie and Ed had gone to their room—the second floor back—and Mollie and I were about to follow to ours, when I saw walking toward me, a man with a razor in his hand. I glanced at Mollie; her eyes were fixed on the same object; neither of us spoke, but both watched with bated breath. Presently the specter began to shiver; suddenly he cut himself, and the blood streamed down; he threw the razor away angrily and walked toward us, passed over us, and disappeared into the opposite wall. I was dumb with surprise, Mollie white and cold, but firm as a rock. "Dick," said she, "did you see that man?" "Yes, dear, I am sure I saw something."

"Well, whom did it look like?" "Very much like Ed," I replied, as calmly as I could. "So I thought," faltered Mollie. "Can it be a warning? Let us send him away. Perhaps he will be murdered!" "No, Mollie," I answered, "I think we can prevent anything of that kind taking place, though we may not be able to resist being frightened. Bear up, little woman! To-morrow we will give it up, if you say so. There is a mystery here which we may be able to discover. Don't let us yield to the first thing which appears."

With the exception of Mollie's anxiety on Ed's account, I confess I think she was less frightened than I. She indignantly refused to give the matter up, or allow me to investigate without her. After waiting a half-hour, and nothing appearing, we retired—but not to rest. My nerves had been more strained than I knew, and I found it impossible to sleep. Each tiny noise grew big in my waiting ears, and my eyes were strained in the half light to see what there was not. Day was breaking when I fell asleep and the sun was three hours high

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