

The Haunted Picture.

By TOM GALLON.

WHEN I first went down into Lancashire—Voyce and I—on behalf of a certain illustrated paper, yet, curiously enough, and for a reason you shall learn, the article containing the photographs was never published. Therefore, I would beg of you not to search for it, starting, as we did, in the most innocent and prosaic fashion. It is the more remarkable that so fragile an adventure should have sprung upon us, as it were, unawares.

Hancroft Manor lies among the Pennine flat, level roads lead to it, a dank breath from the marshes comes up about it. It is, I verify before you, one of the loveliest spots in the three kingdoms. It dates back to Henry and the chronicles only know how many centuries, and it is crammed with treasures, chiefly in the shape of statuary and pictures. It was the pictures that took Enoch Voyce and myself down to Hancroft.

A certain Sir Owen Fishlock—the last of a long line that had owned the manor—was the proprietor of the place, and he had been approached by the editor of that particular illustrated paper with a view to certain treasures of art being reproduced for the benefit of the public. There had, I believe, been some little delay and some reluctance on his part to give in the world even reproductions of treasures he had so jealously guarded; but the negotiations were brought to a successful issue, with the result that I went down, as I have stated, into Lancashire, accompanied by Enoch Voyce, who posed for the time being as my assistant.

The place cast a chill over me from the first. Half of it seemed to be shut up; the studios were almost empty, and I saw few servants, considering the size of the house. And even the servants were elderly and sour looking, and seemed to resent the presence of a stranger. In the village, when I strolled through it once and got into conversation with some of the people, it was freely stated the old house was haunted. It was suggested that wild and unearthly cries had been heard at night; that during servants who had ventured into the shut up parts of the building had heard the rattling of garments, and so had wisely left at once. I put down these tales to the situation of the house and the desolate surroundings.

Sir Owen Fishlock was a man of some 50 years of age—lean and dark, with a swarthy skin and sunken, black eyes. He was courteous enough, I am bound to admit, and had made arrangements for us to be well looked after during the few days it would be necessary for us to be at work. For the rest, we saw but little of him. Once, I remember, I met him wandering forlornly in the neglected grounds with his chin sunk upon his breast. He did not see me, as I stood aside in the most extraordinary fashion. And on this occasion he seemed to be fascinated by that closed wing of the house. For my part, I had enough to do with the various treasures I had discovered, and the closed part of Hancroft Manor did not interest me. Enoch Voyce, on the other hand, could not let it alone. He actually informed me he had tried already to get into it, but found all doors locked against him. His manner became so persistent at last that I own I was almost equally excited. At first it dawned upon me that some other treasures might be shut away there in the disused rooms; but Enoch Voyce, although he said nothing beyond expressing his desire to see the rooms, seemed to have some other object in view. And at one day he came to me with a beaming face and informed me that he had received permission for us both to visit that closed wing.

"He wanted a deal of talking over, I assure you," said Enoch, referring to Sir Owen. "Remarkably suspicious as to why I wanted to go; admitted, however, that there were pictures there—some I understand, wall paintings. He seems to think they'll be a bit spooked by neglect."

"I'm glad you've managed to talk him over," I said, laughing. "Does he give us free leave to wander where we like?"

"O, dear, no," replied Enoch, shaking his head. "He will go with us and will point out the really valuable things. I tried to discover how it was that part of the house was locked up. He merely suggests that the plan was too big for him, and so he had determined to come on—on space and servants."

The following morning the object of the search—a crumpled, bent old fellow, who was called Simon, presented himself to us, armed with a large bundle of keys. Sir Owen was waiting to go with us to the old rooms. Simon would act as warder. We were to have possession of the photograph certain pictures, to be selected by Sir Owen himself. Therefore, I took my materials.

From the first I noticed the extraordinary attention with which the man watched us. Did we pause for a moment to admire any particular thing and to whisper together concerning it, Sir Owen had an ear cocked to listen; did we linger behind for a moment he inquired also. Coming at last to the door which led into that particular wing old Simon, at a nod from his master, opened it, and we went in. The place was misty and damp; our footsteps seemed to echo through its corridors and darkened rooms.



There, surely enough, crouching in the doorway, was something that gibbered at us.

In one or two instances the shutters were opened by the old servant in order that we might view the pictures; but there seemed to be nothing of any great value there. At last, as we seemed almost to have exhausted the place, Enoch Voyce stopped and made a suggestion.

"I understood there was a painting on a wall," he said. "If we might see that—"

I saw Simon turn quickly and glance at his master. I saw also an impatient frown gather on the brows of Sir Owen.

"It's quite valueless," he said, after a pause; "but you may see it." "It proved to be in a room in a tower at the extreme end of the building. This part was evidently the oldest of the manor; the deep windows and the uneven stairs and doorways proved that. The curious thing was, too, that other doors had to be unlocked in order to reach it, although, as a matter of fact, that first door through which we had passed secured the whole wing from intrusion. We must have reached the highest room in that tower before we faced the picture at all.

It was not a good picture by any means, and the dump of the wall had crept into it and blotched and stained it. It was the rather stiff portrait of a woman of about the sixteenth century, standing upright, and fondling the head of a dog. It was of full life size. The only light came from a high, deep window at one side of the room; and the light, although not good, was fair. The picture, however, seemed to me to possess so little interest that I was turning away disappointedly when the voice of Enoch arrested me.

"We should like to take the portrait," he was saying. "The picture is old, and is more curious because it is apparently painted on the wall itself."

"You'll want a long exposure," said Sir Owen. "An extremely long one." I broke in. "But I can fix the camera in position and leave it. I shall be able to guess the time wanted."

So it was arranged, and I set about my preparations at once. I determined that I would come back early in the afternoon and take away the camera; in the meantime

I was not sufficiently interested in the room to wish to remain there, Enoch Voyce seemed, however, to be strangely attracted by the picture; he went round to it, and actually touched it. The voice of Sir Owen broke in sharply.

"Don't touch that picture!" he cried, striding a step towards it. "I shan't hurt it," said Voyce, a little sulkily, and came away.

Old Simon carefully let us out of that wing and locked the outer door. I noticed, however, that the other doors were not locked, in all probability because we should be returning to that lower room within a short time. And in the afternoon he took us back again, only on that occasion Sir Owen did not put in an appearance.

There was something peculiar about the picture, I found, when I came to develop it. For a long time I could not make out what it was. Then, to my astonishment, I discovered that by some extraordinary freak of the camera the picture was not there at all. In the midst of my work I was joined by Enoch, who looked over my shoulder without speaking. When at last he broke the silence it was with a note of deep satisfaction in his voice.

"So there was something behind that picture, after all," he said. "I was too much occupied with the plate to notice him. For the picture on the wall had in the photograph entirely disappeared, leaving a square cut aperture. And in that aperture, with a broad band of light falling across it, stood a figure, peering into the room—a figure so wild and awful and unearthly that I shuddered as I looked at it.

It was the figure of a man, with wild, ragged white hair falling about his face, and clad in rags—a stooping, horrible, decrepit thing, like some large monkey. I looked round at Enoch Voyce, and his face was serious. Bending over the plate together, we looked at it while Enoch spoke.

"This is the unravelling of a secret that has hung about this place like an unwholly cloud for years," he said at last. "I have heard a word here and a word there. I have put the little bits together, until it only needed this to complete the puzzle. Listen a moment and I'll explain what that figure means."

I watched the old man in silence. I saw by his compressed lips and the hard glitter in his eye that there was here some tale of wrong, or tragedy, or of the common. Eighteen years ago, this Sir Owen Fishlock was a young man of some 20 years of age, and he was a pretty bad lot. This place saw but little of him; it was in London that he had his haunts. And among his companions in London was a certain young man—a mere boy—Lieut. Arthur Dorgan. He was wild and he was weak, and he was completely under the sway of the older man. Yet the note of tragedy was only struck when the inevitable woman came into their lives, and both loved her.

I was still at a loss to understand what this had to do with the extraordinary figure in the photograph; but I waited in patience. Grimly enough Enoch Voyce continued.

"Her name was Deborah Hayes, and she chose the boy, Sir Owen apparently accepted his dismissal calmly enough. In secret, it seems, he brooded over it. There was more than one quarrel between the men; but those quarrels were patched up again. Then at last it came about that in a brawl in a gaming house a man was killed, and the boy, half dazed with drink, was found alone with the body. And that was the last ever seen of him."

"What became of him?" I asked. "No one knows. He was smuggled out of the way, chiefly through the instrumentality of Sir Owen Fishlock. There was a hue and cry after him, but he was never found. It was believed that he had succeeded in getting away from England, and was living under another name at the other side of the world. Sir Owen had the coast clear as regarded the girl, only to discover, to his regret, that she was foolishly faithful to her lover, and refused steadily to have anything to do with his friend. Her history ends with her death—a broken heart, people said—some two years after the disappearance of the boy."

In his excitement Enoch Voyce was pacing about the room. He came back to me and lowered his voice when he began speaking again.

"The damned wing of the house was shut up at the time young Lieut. Dorgan disappeared. It has been kept shut up ever since. Two people only have ever entered it—Sir Owen and the old servant Simon. For eighteen or twenty years no one else has been allowed to enter it, not ourselves, and wild cries—mark you, Rattenbury, wild cries—the old man tapped me on the breast to emphasize the words—'have been heard proceeding from it.'"

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"When I touched the picture today," he went on, in a low tone, "I found that a jewel painted on the hand of the woman was raised above the apparent stonework of the wall. I pressed it and felt the thing move slightly. When I was called away by Sir Owen I left it in that condition."

"And whoever was behind the picture was able to open it still further?" I whispered. "Exactly," he replied. "The light in the room was dim, but when this poor prisoner thrust open the door—for the first time of his own accord, in all these years—he stood for a moment in the full sunlight streaming from some place outside in which he lives; that blinding light scoured the photograph. Then, terrified, he must have closed the door again, and crept away."

There was a long pause, while we looked at each other. "What are we to do?" I asked at last, feebly. "Find an excuse and go back to the room," was his prompt reply. "The plate has been spoiled; we must take another."

"But if Sir Owen suspects?" "Then we'll try rougher methods and force him to let us and others in," said Enoch sternly. "If, however, we are careful, he may not suspect anything. If he finds, as he thinks, that one visit has shown us nothing, he may be more careless regarding another."

And that was exactly how it turned out. Enoch Voyce was so apologetic, but so determined to have a proper photograph of the picture now that we had begun, that he was not to be denied. Sir Owen laughingly gave consent.

in her grave. The creature leaped and jumped round its cage, always watching us. Enoch's voice arrested it for a moment.

"Arthur Dorgan," said Enoch quietly, "we're not here to hurt you. Stand up, man."

Some long dormant memory was stirred in the creature. He stopped and stared at us, and brushed aside the heavy masses of white hair from his forehead. It struck me then as horrible that he could not be quite so much as 40 years of age, yet he might have been more than a hundred to look at him. He made some inarticulate sounds; but when we attempted to approach him he backed away into a corner and showed such savage fight that we desisted.

"Now that we know," whispered Enoch, "we'd better go down and face his keeper. He won't defy two of us."

We went down into the room and softly pushed the picture back into place without closing it, however. I gathered my materials together and, preceded by Enoch, went towards the outer door of that wing. As I reached it I saw Knoch fumbling with the handle. He looked round at me quickly as I approached.

"Latched!" he said. Evidently Sir Owen had discovered what we had done; we were trapped. I wondered a little whether it meant to leave the place and to leave us there, or what the game was. We waited quietly for at least a couple of hours before we were permitted to know.

Evidently, however, it was merely his purpose to show his power, and to show us that he knew that we had discovered the secret of the picture, for after our long wait a key turned in the lock, and Sir Owen came through. He opened the keys jangling in his hand, and sternly mentioned us by name before him. And in that order we came back to that journey room in the tower. There he faced us, innocently enough.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "so you have discovered my making-out? I don't like being spied upon—I resent that sort of thing bitterly—but let us know what else has been discovered?"

"We know exactly who this unfortunate creature is; we know him to be the missing Lieut. Arthur Dorgan," I said. "We know why you kept him caged here like a wild beast for all these years; we know that it was because he stood in the way of a woman you loved."

"You have the story pretty pat," he said moodily. "I did love her, I thought that with him out of the way—disgraced and dead, for all that she knew to the contrary—she would turn to me. She didn't do that. Dying she breathed his name. Dead—were it smelt on her face for love of him."

He had seated himself on a table with his back to the picture, and it was then that I saw the picture begin to move. I could not have cried out if I had wished to do so. I was fascinated. A clawlike hand held the frame of the picture and was thrusting it slowly open.

"That madman there"—he jerked his head upwards to denote the roof of the tower—"believes that she lives still; babble her name whenever he sees me. I've kept him there—fed him, as they feed beasts; some day he'll die there. He doesn't know she's dead."

I saw that curious door open a little wider. I saw the wild face staring in.

As Sir Owen went on speaking again the figure glided through the opening and dropped with a little soft thud to the floor.

Sir Owen did not look round.

"Dead—sweet little Deborah Hayes—dead these many years," said the man, with a laugh. "Now, what are you going to do about my madman? Even while the man sitting on the table spoke, I had seen that wild creature behind him stoop and snatch something from a table that stood against the wall—something that gleamed brightly in the semi-darkened room. As the man mentioned the name of the girl I saw the face of poor Dorgan light up; perhaps in that moment he understood all that had happened. A wild scream rang through the room, and, as Fishlock swung round, the creature sprang upon him and buried the weapon twice in his breast. They went down together, looked hideously, overturning the table as they fell.

When at last we forced them apart Sir Owen was stone dead. We looked to Dorgan, who lay limp in our arms; a little trickle of blood crept down and mingled with the rugged white beard. He looked at us with a faraway look for a moment or two, then turned, and sobbed once, with a sob that seemed to reach him and died.

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I found it hard to believe at first that this thing—so horrible, with long matted hair falling about it, and with gleaming teeth and clawlike hands—could once have been the bright boy loved long since by the girl who now lay

sent. I have thought since that in all probability he felt that the showing of that photograph of the picture might seal forever that door behind which his prisoner lived. He that as it may, we were actually admitted into that wing, unaccompanied by either Sir Owen or the servant.

We came into the room and faced the picture, listened carefully for any sound that might come from below, and then began to talk in ordinary tones. The moment our voices ceased I heard above me that light, quick tread as of some animal. The next moment the room was flooded with light, as Enoch Voyce pressed hard upon the springs, and the picture swung open like a door. And there, sure enough, crouching in the doorway, was something—whether human or not I could not see in that flash of time—something that gibbered at us, and beat us off with clawlike hands and darted away.

We both sprang through the hole at once; we ran, stumbling against each other, up a narrow stone staircase of a dozen steps; we both tumbled out together on to some leads at the top—the roof of the tower—and so looked round about us at the prison of the poor creature that crouched in a corner and glared at us.

The prison first. It was formed of the actual roof of the tower, high and overhanging it a wall seven or eight feet high. From the top of this wall sprang upwards, and meeting in one common knot in the center, were stout iron bars, evidently old, and built in that way to form a sort of cupola. This had been the wretched creature's prison. Here, with the roof and that short staircase for his sole apartment, he had crouched in every sort of weather—blistered by the sun and soaked by the rain of many years, and utterly unable to make his presence known to any one outside. Doubtless, when first he came there, he was glad enough, with that terrible charge hanging over him, to find so safe a refuge; but the man who had got him in his power like that was not the man to let him go.

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The prison first. It was formed of the actual roof of the tower, high and overhanging it a wall seven or eight feet high. From the top of this wall sprang upwards, and meeting in one common knot in the center, were stout iron bars, evidently old, and built in that way to form a sort of cupola. This had been the wretched creature's prison. Here, with the roof and that short staircase for his sole apartment, he had crouched in every sort of weather—blistered by the sun and soaked by the rain of many years, and utterly unable to make his presence known to any one outside. Doubtless, when first he came there, he was glad enough, with that terrible charge hanging over him, to find so safe a refuge; but the man who had got him in his power like that was not the man to let him go.

I found it hard to believe at first that this thing—so horrible, with long matted hair falling about it, and with gleaming teeth and clawlike hands—could once have been the bright boy loved long since by the girl who now lay

sent. I have thought since that in all probability he felt that the showing of that photograph of the picture might seal forever that door behind which his prisoner lived. He that as it may, we were actually admitted into that wing, unaccompanied by either Sir Owen or the servant.

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