

John Henry's Ghost Story

By GEORGE V. HOBART

The ponies had put a sad crimp in my roll, and I had to square myself with Clara J. I told her I had bought a cottage in the burbs, and Bunch had helped me out by lending me his country house for a day. I was supposed to show it to Clara J., and then rent on it because it was haunted.

When the alarm clock went to work the next morning Clara J. turned around and gave it a look that made its teeth chatter.

She had been up and doing an hour before that clock grew nervous enough to crow.

Her enthusiasm was so great that she was a Busy-Lizzie long before 7 o'clock and we were not booked to leave the Choo-Choo House till 10:30.

About 8 o'clock she dragged me away from a drama and I reluctantly awoke to a realization of the fact that I was due to deliver some goods which I had never seen and didn't want to see.

"Get up, John!" Clara J. suggested, with a degree of excitement in her voice, "it's getting dreadfully late and you know I'm all impatience to see that lovely home you've bought for me in the country!"

Me under the covers, gnawing holes in the pillow to keep from swearing.

"Oh, dear me!" she sighed, "I'm afraid I'm just a bit sorry to leave this sweet little apartment. We've been so happy here, haven't we?"

I grabbed the ball and broke through the center for 10 yards.

"Sorry," I echoed, tearfully, "why, it's breaking my heart to leave this cozy little collar box of a home and go into a great country house full of—of—of rooms, and—er—and windows, and—er—and—er—piazas, and—and—and—er—and—er—things like that."

"Of course we wouldn't have to

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For some time I lay there with my brain huddled up in one corner of my head, fluttering and frightened.

Presently an insistent scratch-r-r-r aroused me and I began to sit up and notice things.

The things I noticed consisted chiefly of Tacks, my youthful brother-in-law, and the kitchen carving knife. The former was seated on the floor laboriously engineering the latter in an endeavor to produce a large arrow-pierced heart on the polished panel of the bedroom door.

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"You little imp!" I yelled. "Do you mean to tell me you've been doing a panel comic all over this man's house? Scat!" and I reached for a shoe.

"Cut it!" cried Tacks, indignantly. "Didn't the janitor say he'd miss me dreadful, and how can he miss me 'less'n he sees my loving remembrances all over the place every time he shows this compartment to somebody else? And it is impolite to go 'way forever and ever amen without farewelling the janitor."

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"To the country to live, sister told me," Tacks bubbled; "and we ain't never coming back to this horrid city, sister told me; and you bought the house for a surprise, sister told me; and it has a pizzazus all around it, sister told me; and a cow that gives condensed milk, sister told me; and

instructions to hand it to the janitor as soon as possible.

"It's a little present for the janitor in loving remembrance of his memory," Tacks explained with something that sounded like a catch in his voice.

"Hasn't that boy a lovely disposition," Aunt Martha beamed on Tacks, "to be so forgiving to the janitor after the horrid man had sworn at him and blamed him for putting a cat in the dumb waiter and sending it up to the nervous lady on the seventh floor, who abominated cats and who screamed and fell over in a tub of suds when she opened the dumb-waiter door to get her groceries and the cat jumped at her? Mercy! how can the boy be so generous?"

Tacks bore up bravely under this panegyric of praise and his face wore a rapt expression which amounted almost to religious fervor.

"What did you give the janitor, Angel-Face?" I asked.

"Only just another remembrance," Tacks answered, solemnly. "I happened to find a poor, little dead mouse under the gas range, and I thought I'd farewell the janitor with it."

Aunt Martha sighed painfully, and Uncle Peter chuckled inwardly like a mechanical toy hen.

On the train out to Jiggersville, Clara J. was a picture entitled "The Joy of Living"—kind regards to Mrs. Pat Campbell; Ibsen please write.

As for me, with every revolution of the wheels I grew more and more a half portion of chipped beef.

"Oh, John!" said Clara J., her voice shrill with excitement; "I forgot to tell you! I left my key with mother and she's going to superintend the packing of the furniture this afternoon. By evening she expects to have everything loaded in the van and we won't have to wait any time for our trunks and things!"

"Great Scott!" I yelled. "Maybe you won't like the house! Maybe it's only a shanty with holes in the roof—er, I mean, maybe you'll be disappointed with the layout! What's the blithering sense of being in such a consuming fever about moving the fendish furniture? I'm certain you'll hate the very sight of this corn-crib out among the ant hills. Can't you back-pedal on the furniture gag and give yourself a chance to hear the answer to what you ask yourself?"

Clara J. looked tearfully at me for a moment; then she went over and sat with Aunt Martha and told her how glad she was we were moving to the country where the pure air would no doubt have a soothing effect on my nerves, because I certainly had grown irritable of late.

At last we reached the little old log cabin down the lane, and after the first glimpse I knew it was all off.

The place I had borrowed from Bunch for a few minutes was a dream, all right, all right.

With its beautiful lawns and its glistening graveled walks; with a modern house perfect in every detail; with its murmuring brooklet rushing away into a perspective of nodding green trees, and with the bright sunshine smiling a welcome over all, it made a picture calculated to charm the most hardened city crab that ever crawled away from the cover of the skyscrapers.

As for Clara J., she simply threw up both hands and screamed for help. She danced and yelled with delight. Then she hugged and kissed me with a thousand reiterated thanks for my glorious present.

I felt as joyous as a jelly fish. Ten-legged microbes began to climb into my pores. Everything I had in my system rushed to my head. I could see myself in the giggle-giggle ward in a bat house, playing I was the king of England.

I was a joke turned upside down.

After they had examined every nook and cranny of the place and had talked themselves hoarse with delight, I called them all up on the front piazza for the purpose of putting out their lights with my ghost story.

I figured on driving them all back to the depot with about four paragraphs of creepy talk, so when I had them huddled I began in a hoarse whisper to raise their hair.

I told them that no doubt they had noticed the worried expression on my face and explained that it was due chiefly to the fact that I had learned quite by accident that this beautiful place was haunted.

Tacks grew so excited that he dropped a garden spade off the piazza and into a hot-house below, breaking seven panes of glass, but the others only smiled indifferently and I went on.

I jumped headfirst into my most blood-curdling story and related in detail how a murder had been committed on the very site the house was built on and how a fierce bewhiskered spirit roamed the premises at night and demanded vengeance. I described in awful words the harrowing spectacle and all I got at the finish was the hoot from Uncle Peter.

"Poor John," said Clara J. "I had no idea you were so run down. Why, you're almost on the verge of nervous prostration. And how thoughtful you were to pick out a haunted house, for I do love ghosts. Didn't you know that? I'll tell you what let's do. I'll give a prize for the first one who sees and speaks to this unhappy spirit—won't it be jolly? Where are you going, John?"

"Me, to the undertakers—I mean I must run back to town. That telegram this morning—important business—forgot all about it—see you later—don't breathe till I get back—I mean, don't live till I—Oh! the devil!"

Just then I fell over the lawn mower, picked myself up hastily and rushed off to town to find Bunch, for I was certainly up against it good and hard.

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"I Jumped Head First Into My Most Blood-Curdling Story."

keep the cow in the house," she said, thoughtfully.

"Oh, no," I said, "that's the point. There would be a barn, and you haven't any idea how dangerous barns are. They are the curse of country life, barns are."

"Well, then, John, why did you buy the cow?" she inquired, and I went up and punched a hole in the plaster.

Why did I buy the cow? Was there a cow? Had Bunch ever mentioned a cow to me? Come to think of it, he hadn't, and there I was cooking trouble over a slow fire.

When I came to she was saying quietly, "Besides, I think I'd rather have a milkman than a cow. Milkmen swear a lot and cheat sometimes, but as a rule they are more trustworthy than cows, and they very seldom chase anybody. Couldn't you turn the barn into a gymnasium or something?"

"Dearie," I said, trying my level best to get a mist over my lamps so as to give her the teardrop gaze, "something keeps whispering to me, 'Sidestep that cave in the wilderness!' Something keeps telling me that a month on the farm will put a crimp in our happiness, and that the moment we move into a home in the tall grass till luck will get up and put the boots to our wedded bliss."

Then I gave an imitation of a choking sob which sounded for all the world like the last dying shriek of a bathtub when the water is busy leaving it.

"Nonsense, John!" laughed Clara J.; "it's only natural that you regret leaving our first home, but after one day in the country you'll be happy as a king."

"Make it a deuce," I muttered; "a dirty deuce at that."

"Now," she said joyfully, "I'm going to cook your breakfast. This may be your very last breakfast in a city apartment for months, maybe years, so I'm going to cook it myself. I've got every trunk packed—haven't I worked hard? Get up, you lazy boy!" and with this she danced out of the room.

Every trunk packed! Did she intend taking them with her, and if she did how could I stop her?

they's hens and chickens and turkey gobblins and a garden to plant potato salad in, and they's a barn with pigeons in the attic, and they's a lawn with a barber's wire fence all around it, sister told me; and our trunks are all packed, and we ain't never coming back here no more, sister told me; and I must hurry and farewell them two doors!"

Tacks was slightly in the lead when my shoe reached the door, so he won.

At breakfast we were joined by Uncle Peter and Aunt Martha, both of whom fairly oozed enthusiasm, and Clara J.'s pulse began to climb with excitement and anticipation.

I was on the bargain counter, marked down from 30 cents.

Every time Uncle Peter sprang a new idea in reference to his garden, and they came so fast they almost choked him, I felt a burning bead of perspiration start out to explore my forehead.

Presently to put the froth of fear upon my cup of sorrow there came a telegram from "Bunch" which read as follows:

New York.

John Henry,

No. 301 W. 109th St.

Sister and family will move in country house tomorrow. Be sure to play your game today. Good luck.

Bunch.

"Poor John! you look so worried," said Clara J. anxiously; "I really hope it is nothing that will call you back to town for a week at least. It will take us fully a week to get settled; don't you think so, Aunt Martha?"

I dove into my coffee-cup and stayed under a long time. When I came to the surface again Uncle Peter was explaining to Tacks that baked beans grew only in a very hot climate, and in the general confusion the telegram was forgotten by all except my harpooned self.

Clara J. and Aunt Martha were both tearful when we left the flat to ride to the station, but to my intense relief no mention was made of the trunks; consequently I began to lift the mortgage from my life and breathe easier. On the way out Tacks left a small parcel with one of the hall boys with

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Back to the Soil.

"Back to the soil," cried the sages,
"That way lies money and health."
Somehow it seemed too hard labor
Sowing and reaping for wealth.

"Back to the soil," cried the boomers,
"Country and city in one."
Yet an existence suburban
Seemed but a farce of true fun.

"Back to the soil," cried promoters,
"Gold mines but two cents a share."
That looked a bit more inviting,
Still he did not seem to care.

Yet he succumbed to the slogan,
And for a tiny estate,
Gee, but he ran like the dickens
Trying to reach the home place.

—McLanburgh Wilson, in New York Sun.

Knights of the Toasting Fork

By KATE LILLY BLUE

The perplexed frown cleared from Dorothy's brow as she laid down pencil and note book.

"Yes," she said, in answer to Helen's inquiring look, "feel sure we can make it, if you will just remember to be economical about the cooking. Of course, after paying for rent, gas and food we will have nothing left, but fortunately, we will not need any clothes this year."

"And by the time we do you will be making lots of money with your stories."

"I hope so, indeed, but let us not count chickens before they hatch. She smiled light-heartedly as she rose from the little table where they had eaten their first meal in an apartment house in the big city to which they had come to try their fortunes—the orphan daughters of an impecunious doctor in a country town.

"Put on your hat and let us sally forth to get our bearings," said Dorothy, the literary genius who was to conquer fortune with the point of her pen.

"And find the shop where food is cheapest," replied Helen, the domestic goddess who was to rule over the pots and pans during the warfare.

But lo, when they tried the door it refused to open, and after vain attempts by both they realized they were imprisoned in a room on the seventh floor of the big building with no apparent means of getting out except by way of the fire escape.

They were too far above the street to attract the attention of the passers-by and unless they sprouted wings, or an airship strayed by, they must get out by the door.

"If some one would pass along the corridor," said Helen dolefully.

"The transom!" cried Dorothy, "the transom! Maybe I can see some one from there."

In a trice they had rolled the dresser in front of the door and Dorothy had mounted to peer through the glass transom.

"I hear footsteps—oh, hope they are coming this way. Oh, please, please, sir, whoever you are, we are locked in! Can't you help us?"

The young man who was walking aimlessly down the corridor looked up in amazement to encounter a flushed young face lit by a pair of pleading gray eyes.

"Locked in? Who did it? What for? Of course I'll help you, if you tell me how. Shall I break in the door or go for the police?"

Dolly smiled, showing a dimple which was her most valuable asset.

"We did it ourselves, I suppose, not understanding the lock. If you will kindly call the janitor I think he can liberate us."

The young man turned and vanished to reappear in an incredibly short time with the janitor who opened the door with his pass key and explained to them the mechanism of the spring lock.

Both the girls thanked him gratefully and as he retired turned to the youth who still held his ground, hat in hand. His face flushed at their thanks and he stammered, "Don't mention it. I am one of your neighbors. My room is just below and if it happens again just call on me. My name is Peter Harris."

As the girls walked along the street they laughed over the adventure.

"I hope our deliverer will not presume on this," said Helen.

"I don't think he looks presumptuous. Oh, Helen, I have never seen anyone who looked as much like an angel as he did through that transom."

"An angel with red hair and freckles. Just fancy!" laughed Helen.

"But you will have to grant that his name is appropriate, at least."

"Even so. St. Peter sounds all right to me. He is yours—at least you may claim him, even if you never speak to him again."

A week went by. Dorothy spent most of her time at her typewriter while Helen kept the tiny apartment beautifully neat and clean and prepared the meals on the gas stove.

Twice a day they went for a long walk, and on one or two occasions met Peter Harris on the stairs. They always spoke pleasantly, but hurried on though he showed a disposition to linger.

One afternoon Dolly had gone out

friend remained so late that she asked them to tea.

While she and Peter were laying the table, Helen and the doctor watched them from the other room. Helen frowned.

"Dorothy ought not to marry a poor man. She ought to stay single, or marry money."

"And why?" inquired the doctor with interest.

"Because she has genius, and for her genius to develop properly she should not bother about the loaves and fishes."

"And, besides, her cooking would drive any man to drink."

"You needn't worry about that if she marries Peter. You see what a good cook she is. And then—he isn't a cook by profession. He learned to do it on some of his many camping expeditions. He is really a very rich man, with a handsome home which he shut up when his mother died, and came to live with me."

"Oh, I am so glad," exclaimed Helen, as she saw Peter furtively kiss a burn on Dolly's arm.

The doctor's voice recalled Helen.

"I suppose you ought to marry a rich man, too—a man who could furnish the proper setting for your beauty."

"I—oh, no," she replied, sweetly. "My only talent is home-making, and that could be cultivated to better purpose in the modest home of a man in moderate circumstances."

He bent over her quickly.

"Helen, Helen! Do not play with me! You know I love you. Am I the man for whom you are willing to exercise your talents?"

The blue-gray eyes met the brown ones above them in one look of understanding, while his hand found hers and clasped it.

"Supper is ready. St. Peter bids you come and feast on viands of his preparing. Let us eat, drink and be merry today, for tomorrow—"

"We marry," finished St. Peter.

QUAINT OLD MAYPOLE INN

House of Public Entertainment That Stood at the Edge of Epping Forest.

In the year 1775 there stood upon the borders of Epping forest, at a distance of about 12 miles from London—measuring from the standard in Cornhill, or rather from the spot on or near to which the standard used to be in days of yore—a house of public entertainment called the Maypole; which fact was demonstrated to all such travelers as could neither read nor write—and 66 years ago a vast number both of travelers and stay-at-homes were in this condition—by the emblem reared on the roadside over against the house, which, if not of those goodly proportions that Maypoles were wont to present in olden times, was a fair young ash, 30 feet in height, and straight as any arrow that ever English yeoman drew.

The Maypole—by which term from henceforth is meant the house, and not its sign—the Maypole was an old building, with more gable ends than a lazy man would care to count on a sunny day; huge zig-zag chimneys, out of which it seemed as though even smoke could not choose but come in more than naturally fantastic shapes, imparted to it in its tortuous progress; and vast stables, gloomy, ruinous and empty.

Its windows were old diamond pane lattices, its floors were sunken and uneven, its ceilings blackened by the hand of time and heavy with massive beams. Over the doorway was an ancient porch, quaintly and grotesquely carved; and here on summer evenings the more favored customers smoked and drank—ay, and sang many a good song, too, sometimes—reposing on two grim-looking, high-backed settles, which, like the twin dragons of some fairy tale, guarded the entrance to the mansion.—Charles Dickens, in "Barnaby Rudge."

Importance of the Recess.

"The school recess is one of the most important features of child education. Its influences are more powerful than those of the classroom and more vital than any other the child participates in," said W. E. Watt, principal of the Graham school, Chicago.

"During this playtime activity," continued Mr. Watt, "he learns his true relation among those who are stronger than himself. One helpful lesson is that the fellow who appeals to the teacher or principal is not esteemed highly."

"The children of the grammar school find the recess to be the most profitable period. Every teacher goes down with her own pupils. She organizes the games, of which she knows a great many. She encourages the pupils to play the games familiar to their parents, perhaps in the old country. We have printed a little book of recess games which require little or no apparatus. The teachers get as much benefit out of the games as do the pupils."—Christian Science Monitor.

A Bibulous Blunder.

"How did Colonel Rosky happen to buy a copy of Rider Haggard's 'Red Eye?'"

"Oh, the colonel glanced at the title rather hastily and thought it was 'Red Eye.'"

A New Definition.

Little Bobby—What are the sins of omission? Uncle Bob—Those we have forgotten to commit, but which we promptly attend to as soon as we are reminded of the oversight.—Life.