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The Haunted Closet.

MY sister wrote to me that she had taken a house for the summer, "a queer, old-fashioned house" away down on the lonely coast, where the children would have the benefit of the sea-breeze and the surf-bathing prescribed for them after a sickly spring season. And she urged me at once to come and join them in their new abode. Queer and old-fashioned indeed I found it; each room had the appearance of having been built separately, by successive owners.

At the back of the main building projected a sort of long and narrow wooden gallery, consisting of a row of three or four small rooms, last used, it appeared, as store-rooms for grain and vegetables, all opening upon a covered passage-way connecting with a brick office which had formerly stood separate from the house. These rooms and the office were unused by the family as too remote to be desirable; besides there was plenty of room in the main building.

Yet the first time I visited the little brick office, it at once took my fancy. It was a good-sized, comfortable room, with a fireplace on one side, and a queer little triangular closet, or cupboard in a corner, bearing the marks of books and ink-stands on the shelves. The very place, I thought, for a study, so I at once chose this little room for my own, bedroom and study in one, and after giving it a thorough purification and airing, took possession.

It proved quite as pleasant as I anticipated. Here, awaking in the morning, I would open the windows and let in the fresh sea-breeze; and when evening came, I would sit in my little garden-door, and rejoice in the quiet and seclusion which I loved so much.

Thus I was sitting, about twilight a few days after I had moved into my little hermitage, as I called it. The air was very still; scarce a rustle disturbed the branches of the willow, and the surf rippling on the beach made but a low murmur. Suddenly, I became aware of a faint, uncertain sound, like the whispering of voices and rustling of garments. Fancying that my sister or the children had playfully stolen upon me I looked around; but to my surprise, there was no one visible.

It must have been fancy, of course, I thought, and turned once more to the book; but hardly had I done so when again I heard the rustling of drapery, and what sounded like a foot fall on the floor. I was startled and sat breathless, staring around and listening. Once or twice it was repeated and then all was as still as before.

That my story may be credited, I must tell the reader that I was at this time a woman of four-and-twenty, had never in my life been ill or nervous, was the farthest possible from being superstitiously inclined, and had been accustomed to regard with ridicule all stories concerning ghosts, goblins, and other so-called spiritual manifestations. Such being the case I set it down as one of those odd and fleeting fancies which do sometimes puzzle and bewilder even the most rational.

But on the following day, and again on the next, the mysterious sounds which I have described were repeated. It was exactly as though some person or persons were occupying the room with me—moving with soft footsteps and speaking in low whispers, as if unwilling to be heard. Once I distinctly distinguished a grating noise, as of a key turned in a lock; after which, all was quiet.

Should I tell my sister and brother-in-law? No; I shrank from the thought of their laughter. Finally—and the reader

will credit me with the possession of almost more than feminine courage in so doing—I resolved to keep silence for the present, and spend the night as usual in my little office room.

The first few hours passed away quietly, and I was just falling into a doze, when I was aroused by the door of the corner closet slowly creaking. The moonlight enabled me to see that this door stood ajar, though I distinctly recollected having closed it before retiring. It had neither lock nor bolt by which it could be secured.

I sat up in bed, watched the closet and looking half-fearfully around the room; and as I looked, with my eyes fixed upon the half-open door, I heard within a jingle of glasses and phials. It was a sound not to be mistaken, and almost at the same instant a voice said near me, in a hoarse whisper: "Bring a light!"

I started up trembling, and with a cold perspiration breaking out on my forehead, reached for a match and the lamp, and tried to strike a light, but in vain. I had but one or two matches left, and as I dropped the last in despair, I heard the voice which had before spoken, say slowly and distinctly: "Poison!"

My first impulse was to flee from this haunted room, but had my life depended upon it, I could not have passed that closet and sped through the long deserted gallery alone. I sank back upon my pillow and drew the sheets about my head, and remained thus until daybreak.

It was now no longer a question with me as to whether I should or should not inform my relatives of what had occurred. I told them the whole, and as I had expected, was met with laughter and badinage.

"Try it, yourself?" was all I could say in answer; and on that night my brother-in-law, Mr. Walton, agreed to occupy the office-room, I remaining with my sister.

"Well, Richard, did you see or hear anything of Louisa's ghost?" inquired my sister, playfully, on our meeting at the breakfast table in the morning.

"I saw nothing," he answered thoughtfully. "But really, Emma, it did appear as though more than once during the night, I heard some unaccountable sounds—the turning of a key in the lock, a sort of moaning and sobbing child's voice, and very distinctly the shutting of a small door. And this last sound," he added decidedly, "certainly came from the closet or cupboard in the corner of the room."

Emma opened her eyes and looked frightened. "Oh, Richard! you don't really think that you heard these sounds in the room, with no one there but yourself?"

"It is very unaccountable at present, I admit; but you know that I do not believe in the supernatural. We must examine more fully into the matter."

For some days he kept sole possession of the room, reporting once or twice that he had again heard the mysterious noises, and especially the grating of a rusty key, as in the lock of the corner cupboard, was very distinctly audible. And yet, as we all knew, there was neither lock nor key to the cupboard door, only traces of one that had been there. There was no room adjoining, no cellar below or garret above, and the whole thing was most singular and unaccountable. And once he even hesitatingly suggested, "Could it be, after all, spiritual manifestations?" My own mind echoed the inquiry.

Our nearest neighbor was a farmer who lived about a mile distant, and of himself and wife we made inquiries in regard to the former occupants of the house. It had for twenty years within his memory, Mr. Grover said, belonged to a small farmer, an illiterate but good sort of man, who had finally sold out and purchased a better place farther south. Then the house, with a part of the land adjoining, had been taken by a gentleman who was known as Dr. Mather, and was understood to be very learned and a writer. Mr. Grover and the rest of the neighbors believed him to be "a little cracked." He used to go about the country gathering sea-weeds, plants, and insects, but would repel all approach to acquaintance. He had a wife with whom it was said he lived on bad terms, and three sickly children whose presence he would scarcely tolerate. The wife and two of the children died, and then Dr. Mather went away with the remaining child, leaving the place to an agent for sale. It was then rented for a time by some people, who, for reasons known only to themselves, would not remain their term out; and finally, we had taken it, furnished as it was, for the summer. This was all that Mr. Grover knew.

Upon hearing this simple account, there

instinctively formed in my mind an explanation, if such it can be called, of the mysterious circumstances which had so puzzled and disturbed us. "They had all three died," and my memory reverted with a shudder to the word "Poison!" which I had heard uttered by that mysterious voice. Perhaps murder had been committed in this house—even in that very office-room which I had appropriated; and this impression was deepened upon being informed by Mr. Grover, in answer to my inquiries, that room had in reality been Dr. Mather's study or library, into which no one was ever admitted; and that he would sometimes remain in it whole days and nights together without being interrupted—having his meals brought and deposited outside the door, in the adjoining gallery.

The office and gallery were now carefully shunned by us all, with the exception of Mr. Walton, who haunted it with a persistency doubtless equal to that of the ghost itself. He was determined, he said, to learn all that could be learned of this mystery, and if possible, to thoroughly unravel it.

One evening after a rain, a heavy sea-fog set in upon the coast, and the atmosphere became all at once so damp and chilly as to render a fire indispensable to comfort. The two most comfortable apartments of the house for cool weather were the nursery and the office-room, which were situated at opposite extremities of the long building. So, leaving the former to the nurses and children, Mr. Walton proposed that he and Emma and I should make ourselves comfortable for the evening in the haunted room, as he now called it, maugre the ghost; and, as an inducement, promised us a hot oyster supper. The oysters were to be had fresh out of the water, almost at our very door, just for the trouble of picking them up.

Certainly the room, as Emma and I rather hesitatingly entered it, looked pleasant and cheerful enough, with its blazing wood fire, and the tea-kettle steaming on the hearth. No one made any allusion to the ghost.

Supper over, Mr. Walton who was a fine reader, entertained us with some chapters from Dickens' latest work, and we were soon so much interested as to forget everything else. In the very midst of this, however, I was startled by feeling a faint breath of cool air upon my neck, and at the same instant saw my sister's eyes lifted with a frightened glance toward the corner closet behind me.

I instinctively started up and crossed over to the opposite side of the fireplace.

"What is it, Louisa?" said Emma, nervously, "I saw the door of the closet open."

Mr. Walton closed his book and sat looking attentively at the cupboard. And it was while we were all thus, perfectly silent and motionless, that a sound broke the stillness—at first what seemed the jingling of phials, and rattling of chains, and then the faint, uncertain sound of muffled voices which I had heard more than once before, all coming unmistakably from the little triangular closet in the corner.

"O Richard, do you hear?" gasped Emma, seizing fast hold of her husband's arm. For myself, I came very near screaming outright.

"Hush! be quiet," said Mr. Walton. And taking the lamp, he advanced to the cupboard, threw wide open the door, and surveyed it minutely.

It was simply a closet built of deal boards against the naked whitewashed walls of the room. Three rickety ink-stained shelves were all it contained. Between the lower and middle shelves was a strip of wood nailed against the wall, as if to cover a place, where, as we could see, the plaster had fallen away, and beneath this strip could be discerned part of what seemed to be a rat hole. Besides these, not a thing was visible in the closet.

And yet as I live, while we three stood there gazing into the empty closet, from its recesses came a hollow laugh, and a low, childish voice said plaintively:

"Three—all dead—poisoned!"

Emma sank down, half swooning.—Even Mr. Walton's face as I fancied, became a shade pale; and then we heard the voice again:

"Bury them—grave under the walnut!" I looked again at my brother-in-law, and saw his lips compress and a kind of desperation appear in his face. He advanced close to the closet, put his head almost within, and shouted loudly and distinctly:—"Who are you? Who is it that speaks?"

"In answer came a shriek, loud and appalling, ringing in our very ears. Then the same breath of cold air swept past,

followed by the violent shutting of a door and grating of a key in a lock. We looked at each other aghast, but before we had time to utter a word, we were again startled by a different sound—that of children's cries, and footsteps hurrying along the gallery to the room in which we were. The next moment the door burst open, and in rushed nurse, bearing baby in her arms, followed by her assistant, dragging the three elder children after her—all the latter pale and terrified, and Freddy in particular shrieking shrilly.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" screamed Emma, forgetting her own recent terror in alarm for her children.

"Oh, master! oh, missus!" grasped nurse, piteously, her eyes rolling white in their sockets, "A ghost! A ghost in the nursery!"

"A ghost?"

"In the corner closet in the nursery! I heard it! We all heard it! Master Freddy was looking in that closet to see if there was any mice in the trap that he'd set, and somebody in the closet hollered out 'Who are you? What are you talking about?' We all heard it."

Mr. Walton turned around and once more looked into the closet. Then taking the tongs from the hearth, he inserted them behind the bit of board which I have mentioned as nailed to the wall, and wrenched it away, exposing, as he did so, a small aperture surrounded by a metallic ring.

"I have discovered the mystery at last!" he said, turning to us with a smile. "It is no ghost, but simply a speaking-tube. Stay here, and when you hear the spirits, place your mouth to this and answer them."

"He left the room, and in a few moments we again heard the mysterious, sepulchral voice in the closet, only much more distinct now, since the board had been removed.

"How are you all?"

I summoned courage to answer: "Much better!" And then there came a low laugh, ghostly enough certainly, to have caused our blood to curdle, had we not been aware of the identity of the apparent ghost.

And so it was all explained, and the mystery of the haunted closet cleared up.—There was as Mr. Walton had said, a speaking-tube communicating between the office-room and the distant nursery—placed there doubtless by the eccentric naturalist, Dr. Mather, for his own convenience; and he on leaving the house, had simply carelessly boarded over the mouth of the tube, not dreaming of or indifferent to the consequences of this negligence.

The explanation of the various sounds heard by us in the office-room is very simple. The corresponding mouth of the tube was in a closet in the nursery, precisely similar to that in the office. Nurse stored in this closet the various cups, phials, and so-forth, used in the nursery, and to secure these from the children, the closet was generally kept locked. It was the opening and shutting of this closet door, with the grating of the key in the rusty lock, that had so often alarmed me; and when it was open and a search going on among its contents for some special article, the noise thus made and the words spoken in the closet could be heard, more or less distinctly, in the office. Also, when the closet door was suddenly shut to, it would produce a current of air through the tube sufficient to slightly open the loosely hung door of the office cupboard. Master Freddy's idea of setting a mouse-trap in the closet, baited with poisoned food, had added much to the effect of the mystery; and it was little Mary's voice which had pleaded so pathetically for the three victims of her brother's experiment, imploring that they might be buried under the walnut-tree.

Mr. Walton used to say that it was almost a pity that the secret of the tube should have been discovered, and thereby so capital a ghost story spoiled.

A California Dairyman.

In the year 1855 or 1856, or thereabout, says the Grass Valley Union, we knew a man in Nevada City who milked two or three cows and who used to walk around the town and sell the lacteal fluid. He carried two cans on a wooden yoke, which was placed over his neck and shoulders. He has flourished since then, and now has lands and horned cattle down in Montgomery county. He is now engaged in milking 1,200 cows, and he makes butter and cheese. Next spring he will milk 1,500 cows. His cows are of excellent stock, consisting of Devon, Short Horn and A.M. Jersey blood.—The name of this successful milkist and ex-Nevada City man is S. C. Abbott. His property is assessed at \$400,000, and we doubt much if he would sell out at that figure.

An Address by the United States Centennial Commission

To the people of the United States:

The Congress of the United States has enacted that the completion of the One Hundredth Year of American Independence shall be celebrated by an International Exhibition of the Arts, Manufactures and Products of the soil and mine, to be held at Philadelphia in 1876, and has appointed a commission, consisting of representatives from each State and Territory, to conduct the celebration.

Originating under the auspices of the National Legislature, controlled by a National Commission, and designed as it is to "Commemorate the first Century of our existence, by an Exhibition of the Natural Resources of the Country and their development, and in our progress in those Arts which benefit mankind, in comparison with those of older Nations," it is to the people at large that the Commission look for the aid which is necessary to make the Central Celebration the greatest anniversary the world has ever seen.

That the completion of the first century of our existence should be marked by some imposing demonstration is, we believe, the patriotic wish of the people of the whole country. The Congress of the United States has wisely decided that the Birth-day of the Great Republic can be most fittingly celebrated by the universal collection and display of all the trophies of its progress. It is designed to bring together, within a building covering fifty acres, not only the varied productions of our mines and of the soil, but types of all the intellectual triumphs of our citizens, specimens of everything that America can furnish, whether from the brains or hands of her children, and thus make evident to the world the advancement of which a self-governed people is capable.

In this "Celebration" all nations will be invited to participate; its character being International. Europe will display her arts and manufactures, India her curious fabrics, while newly opened China and Japan will lay bare the treasures which for centuries their ingenious people have been perfecting. Each land will compete in generous rivalry for the palm of superior excellence.

To this grand gathering every zone will contribute its fruits and cereals. No mineral shall be wanting; for what the East lacks the West will supply. Under one roof will the South display in rich luxuriance her growing cotton, and the North in miniature, the ceaseless machinery of her mills converting that cotton into cloth. Each section of the globe will send its best offerings to this exhibition, and each State of the Union, as a member of one united body politic, will show to her sister States and to the world, how much she can add to the greatness of the nation of which she is a harmonious part.

To make the Centennial Celebration such a success as the patriotism and the pride of every American demands will require the co-operation of the people of the whole country. The United States Centennial Commission has received no government aid, such as England extended to her World's Fair, and France to her Universal Exposition, yet the labor and responsibility imposed upon the Commission is as great as in either of those undertakings. It is estimated that ten millions of dollars will be required, and this sum Congress has provided shall be raised by stock subscription, and that the people shall have the opportunity of subscribing in proportion to the population of their respective States and Territories.

The Commission looks to the unflinching patriotism of every section, to see that each contributes its share to the expenses, and receives its share of the benefits of an enterprise in which all are so deeply interested. It would further earnestly urge the formation in each State and Territory of a centennial organization, which shall in time see that county associations are formed, so that when the nations are gathered together in 1876 each Commonwealth can view with pride the contributions she has made to the national glory.

Confidently relying on the zeal and patriotism ever displayed by our people in every national undertaking, we pledge and prophesy, that the Centennial Celebration will worthily show how greatness, wealth and intelligence, can be fostered by such institutions as those which have for one hundred years blessed the people of the United States.

JOS. R. HAWLEY, President.
LEWIS WALN SMITH, Temporary Sec'y.