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WHAT WAS IT? A MYSTERY.

I confess, with considerable diffidence to approach the strange narrative which I am about to relate. The events which I am detailing are of so extraordinary and unaccountable a character that I am quite prepared to meet with an unusual amount of incredulity and scorn.

It is situated at No. Twenty-sixth Street, in this city. The house is in some respects a curious one. It has enjoyed for the last two years the reputation of being haunted. It is a large and airy residence, surrounded by what was once a garden, but which is now only a green inclosure for bleaching clothes.

The house is very spacious. A hall of noble proportions leads to a vast spiral staircase winding through its centre; while the various apartments are of imposing dimensions. It was built some fifteen or twenty years since by Mr. L., the well-known New York merchant, who five years ago threw the commercial world into convulsions by a stupendous bank fraud.

On the evening in question, the 10th of July, the Doctor and myself found ourselves in an unusually metaphysical mood. We lit our large meerschaums filled with fine Turkish tobacco, in the core of which burned a little black nut of opium, that, like the nut in the fairy tale, held within its narrow limits wonders beyond the reach of kings; we paced to and fro, conversing. A strange perversity dominated the currents of our thought. They would not flow through the sun-lit channels into which we strove to divert them.

THE AGITATOR.

Devoted to the Extension of the Area of Freedom and the Spread of Healthy Reform.

WELLSBORO, TIOGA COUNTY, PA., THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 31, 1859. NO. 35.

ance, it having leaked out that I was tolerably well versed in the history of supernaturalism, and had once written a story, entitled "The Pot of Talips," for Harper's Monthly, the foundation of which was a ghost. If a table or a wainscot panel happened to warp when we were assembled in the large drawing-room, there was an instant silence, and every one was prepared for an immediate clanking of chains and a spectral form.

Things were in this state when an incident took place so awful and inexplicable in its character that my reason fairly reels at the bare memory of the occurrence. It was the 10th of July. After dinner was over I repaired, with my friend Dr. Hammond, to the garden to smoke my evening pipe. Independent of certain mental sympathies which existed between the Doctor and myself, we were linked together by a secret vice. We both smoked opium.

Those hours of opium happiness which the Doctor and I spent together in secret were regulated with a scientific accuracy. We did not blindly smoke the drug of Paradise, and leave our dreams to chance. While smoking we carefully steered our conversation through the brightest and calmest channels of thought. We talked of the East, and endeavored to recall the magical panorama of its glowing scenery.

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What do you consider to be the greatest element of Terror? The question, I own, puzzled me. That many things were terrible, I knew. Stumbling over a corpse in the dark; beholding, as I once did, a woman floating down a deep rapid river, with wildly-lifted arms and awful, upturned face, uttering, as she sank, shrieks that froze one's heart, while we, the spectators, stood frozen at a window which overhung the river at a height of sixty feet, unable to make the slightest effort to save her, but dumbly watching her last supreme agony and her disappearance.

"Wieland is awful; so is the picture of the Dweller in the Threshold in Bulwer's 'Zanoni'; but," he added, shaking his head gloomily, "there is something more horrible still than these."

The room was in total darkness. The atom of gas that still remained lighted did not illuminate a distance of three inches round the burner. I desperately threw my arm across my eyes, as if to shut out even the darkness, and tried to think of nothing. It was in vain. The confounded themes touched on by Hammond in the garden kept obtruding themselves on my brain. I battled against them. I erected ramparts of would-be blankness of intellect to keep them out. They still crowded upon me. While I was lying still as a corpse, hoping that by a perfect physical inaction I would hasten mental repose, an awful incident occurred.

At last, after a silent, deadly, exhausting struggle, I got my assailant under by a series of incredible efforts of strength. Once pinned, with my knee on what I made out to be its chest, I knew that I was victor. I rested for a moment to breathe. I heard the creature beneath me panting in the darkness, and felt the violent throbbing of a heart. It was apparently as exhausted as I was, that was one comfort. At this moment I remembered that I usually placed under my pillow, before going to bed, a large, yellow silk pocket handkerchief, for use during the night. I felt for it instantly; it was there. In a few seconds more I had after a fashion, pinioned the creature's arms.

I can not even attempt to give any definition of my sensations the instant after I turned on the gas. I suppose I must have shrieked with terror, for in less than a minute afterward my room was crowded with the inmates of the house. I shudder now as I think of that awful moment. I saw nothing! Yes; I had one arm firmly clasped round a breathing, panting, corporeal shape, my other hand gripped with all its strength, a throat as warm, and apparently fleshy, as my own; and yet with this living substance in my grasp, with its body pressed against my own, and all in the bright glare of a large jet of gas, I absolutely beheld nothing! Not even an outline—a vapor!

I do not, even at this hour, realize the situation in which I found myself. I can not recall the astounding incident thoroughly. Imagination in vain tries to compass the awful paradox. It breathed. I felt its warm breath upon my cheek. It struggled fiercely. It had hands. They clutched me. Its skin was smooth, just like my own. There it lay, pressed close up against me, solid as stone—and yet utterly invisible! I wonder that I did not faint or go mad on the instant. Some wonderful instinct must have sustained me; for, absolutely, in place of losing my hold on the terrible Enigma, I

seemed to gain an additional strength in my moment of horror, and tightened my grasp with such wonderful force that I felt the creature shivering with agony. Just then Hammond entered my room at the head of the household. As soon as he beheld my face—which, I suppose, must have been an awful sight to look at—he hastened forward, crying, "Great Heaven, Harry! what has happened?" "Hammond! Hammond!" I cried, "come here. Oh! this is awful! I have been attacked in bed by something or other, which I have hold of; but I can't see it—I can't see it!" Hammond, doubtless struck by the unfeigned horror expressed in my countenance, made one or two steps forward with an anxious yet puzzled expression. A very audible titter burst from the remainder of my visitors. This suppressed laughter made me furious. To laugh at a human being in my position! It was the worst species of cruelty. Now, I can understand why the appearance of a man struggling violently, as it would seem, with an airy nothing, and calling for assistance against a vision, should have appeared ludicrous. Then, so great was my rage against the mocking crowd that had I the power I would have stricken them dead where they stood.

"Hammond! Hammond!" I cried again, despairingly, "for God's sake come to me. I can hold the—The Thing but a short time longer. It is overpowering me. Help me! Help me!" "Harry," whispered Hammond, approaching me, "you have been smoking too much opium." "I swear to you Hammond that this is no vision," I answered in the same low tone. "Don't you see how it shakes my whole frame with its struggles? If you don't believe me convince yourself. Feel it—touch it!" Hammond advanced and laid his hand on the spot I indicated. A wild cry of horror burst from him. He had felt it! In a moment he had discovered somewhere in my room a long piece of cord, and was the next instant winding it, and knotting it about the body of the unseen being that I clasped in my arms.

"Harry," he said, in a hoarse, agitated voice, for though he preserved his presence of mind, he was deeply moved, "Harry, it's all safe now. You may let go, old fellow, if you're tired. The Thing can't move." I was utterly exhausted, and I gladly loosed my hold. Hammond stood holding the ends of the cord that bound the Invisible, twisted round his hand, while before him, self-supporting as it were, he beheld a rope, laced and interlaced, and stretching tightly around a vacant space. I never saw a man so thoroughly stricken with awe. Nevertheless his face expressed all the courage and determination which I knew him to possess. His lips, although white were set firmly, and one could perceive at a glance that, although stricken with fear, he was not daunted.

The confusion that ensued among the guests of the house, who were witnesses of this extraordinary scene between Hammond and myself—who beheld the pantomime of binding this struggling Something—who beheld me almost sinking from physical exhaustion when my task of jailing was over—the confusion and terror that took possession of the by-standers, when they saw all this was beyond description.—Many of the weaker ones fled from the apartment near the door, and could not be induced to approach Hammond and his Charge. Still incredulity broke out through their terror. They had not the courage to satisfy themselves, and yet they doubted. It was in vain that I begged of some of the men to come near and convince themselves by touch of the existence of a living being in that room which was invisible. They were incredulous, but did not dare to undecieve themselves. How could a solid, living, breathing body be invisible? they asked. My reply was this. I gave a sign to Hammond, and both of us—conquering our natural repugnance to touching the invisible creature—lifted it from the ground, manacled as it was, and took it to my bed. Its weight was about that of a boy of fourteen.

"Now my friends," I said, as Hammond and myself held the creature suspended over the bed, "I can give you self-evident proof that here is a solid, ponderable body which, nevertheless, you can not see. Be good enough to watch the surface of the bed attentively." I was astonished at my own courage in treating this strange event so calmly; but I had recovered from my first terror, and felt a sort of scientific pride in the affair which dominated every other feeling. The eyes of the by-standers were immediately fixed on my bed. At a given signal Hammond and I let the creature fall. There was the dull sound of a heavy body alighting on a soft mass. The timbers of the bed creaked. A deep impression marked itself distinctly on the pillow, and on the bed itself. The crowd who witnessed this gave a sort of low, universal cry, and rushed from the room. Hammond and I were left alone with our Mystery.

It was in this state of things that my landlady—who at that time kept a boarding-house at No. Twenty-sixth Street, and who wished to move her up town—conceived the bold idea of removing to Twenty-sixth Street. Happening to have in her house rather a plucky, and philosophical set of boarders, she laid her plans before us, stating candidly every thing she had heard respecting the ghostly qualities of the establishment to which she wished to remove us. With the exception of one or two persons—a sea-captain and a returned California man, who immediately gave notice that they would leave—every one of Mrs. Moffat's boarders declared that they would accompany her in her chivalric incursion into the abode of Terror.

The portion of Twenty-sixth Street between Broadway and Avenue C is one of the pleasantest in New York. The gardens back of the houses, running down nearly to the Hudson, form, in the summer time, a perfect avenue of greenery, as it does, straight across the river to the Westchester heights, and even the ragged peaks which surrounded the house on two sides, although displaying on washing-days a much clothes-line, still gave us a view of green sward to look at, and a cool breeze in the summer evenings, where we smoked our cigars in the dusk, and watched the fire-light gleam on their dark-lanterns in the long shadows.

Of course we had no sooner established ourselves at No. — than we began to expect the same aggressions. Our dinner conversation was interrupted. One of the boarders, who had been introduced to Mrs. Crowe's "Night Side of Nature" as a public enemy by the entire household, had not having bought twenty copies. The landlady had a life of supreme wretchedness while she was perusing the volume. A symptom of epilepsy was established, of which he was the victim. If he incautiously laid the book down on the table, he would be seized and read aloud to a select few.

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I had made several passages up the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, and never without seeing on board more or less professional gamblers. It is a thriving business on board the boats where time hangs heavily on the hands of the passengers, and blacklegs carry off large sums of money. They usually remain on board a day or two—long enough to have their true character exposed.

During one of my trips the boat put in at the mouth of the Arkansas river, and as usual I took a stroll on the shore. I heard the bell for the departure of the steamer, and I hastened back to the landing. As I was on my way I was overtaken by a gentleman with a broad brimmed hat, green goggles, and a white neckcloth, tugging along with a large valise.

My friend, whom I never knew his name I shall have to call the Rev. Mr. Goggles, retired to a vacant state-room. It was now nearly dark, and I did not see him again that night. As usual in the evening, there was a table in the cabin, devoted to the cards; in a word, there was gambling without stint. No one objected to the practice, so long as it was not done by professional blacklegs. I never played but I often stood by the table to observe the progress of the game, and study the looks of the players, as they were agitated by the fickle changes of a moment.

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