

A Burglar in the Coffin.

“YOU are not afraid, Maggie?” “Me afraid!” said Maggie.—“I’d no fear born with me. As for the house, its the strongest fastened ever I was in. You say yourself there’s no lock a burglar could force, and I’m not one to let tramps or the like in of my own free will. God knows the place will be safe enough when you come back—as safe as though there were a regiment of soldiers in it; and I’ll have all bright for your new wife, Mr. Archibald.”

She called her master Mr. Archibald still, this old woman; but she was the only one who still used his Christian name. He was an elderly man himself, and had few intimate friends, hospitality not being one of his virtues. He was rich, and there was much that was valuable in the house; more ready money, too, than most men keep about them; but then it was as secure as a bank vault—patent locks and burglar alarms that first sent a bullet into any one who sought to enter by stealth, and then rang a bell to wake the household, were attached to every door, and a furious watch-dog, that lived on raw meat, was in the back garden. The Van Nott mansion could have withstood a siege at a moment’s notice.

Mr. Van Nott was a money dealer. He had ways and means of accumulating property which were mysteries to his neighbors, and they were suspicious that the little back parlor, sacred to business, had even seen such lesser dealings as the loan of money on the gold watches, cashmere shawls, and diamonds of genteel distress. Two or three mortgages that he had bought up had been rather cruelly foreclosed, and he was a hard landlord and a bad person to owe money to altogether. On the whole, he was disliked in the place, and, rich as he was, would have found it hard to get a wife to his liking among his neighbors at Oakham.

However having resolved to marry again—there had been Mr. Van Nott, who died years before—he sought out a wealthy widow of saving disposition, who lived on a small farm some miles out of town, and having already disinherited her daughter for espousing an estimable man of small means, and had turned her only son out of doors for equally prudent reasons, was not likely to bring any troublesome generosity into his household, and had offered himself to her and had been accepted. And now, though both their economical souls revolted against it, custom decreed a wedding of some sort, and a honeymoon trip somewhere, and they had decided to do it as cheaply as possible. For this brief time Mr. Van Nott must leave his business and his houses, and it was on the eve of departure, that he held the above conversation with his old servant, standing with his gortmanteau in his hand, and regarding her gravely.

“Yes, yes,” he said, “I presume it is all safe enough. And I’ll speak to the night watchman, and give him a dollar to take a particular look at this house. Well, good-bye, Maggie; make things as neat as possible. If they look dirty my wife may think the furniture old and want something new for the parlor.” And Mr. Van Nott departed.

“Yes, yes,” said old Maggie, “no doubt she’ll have fine, extravagant ways. Poor master! What a pity he should marry, after all—but old fools are the worse fools. A young thing of eight-and-forty, too, when he has a sensible servant, sixty last January, and knows what belongs to good housekeeping. If he wanted to marry why didn’t he ask me? I’d not have gone galivanting and spending. Ah, well, he’ll suffer; not I.” And Maggie trotted away to begin her sweeping and dusting.

She had truly said that there was no fear born with her; but as the night drew on she began to feel somewhat lonely. Her master’s presence was strangely missed out of the great house, and there was something ghostly in the look of his empty chair when she peeped into his little back office. “If I was superstitious,” she said to herself, “I should think something dreadful was going to happen. I feel chilly up and down my back, and I keep thinking of funerals. I’ll make myself a cup of tea and see if I can’t get over it.” And accordingly old Maggie shut herself in to the snug kitchen, and lighting two candles, drew out a pot of the strongest young hyson, and putting her feet close to the cooking stove began to feel much more comfortable.

“A carriage!” cried Maggie. “Has he changed his mind and brought her home at once? But he can’t be—he’s not married yet.” And taking one of candles, she trotted to the door, but not before the bell had rung again.

“Who’s that?” she cried, holding the door slightly ajar.

“A stranger,” said a voice, “one who has something particular to say to you.”

“You’ll have to wait for to-morrow,” said Maggie. You can’t come in to-night.”

“My good woman,” said the stranger, “are you Margaret Black?”

“That’s my name.”

“Mr. Van Nott’s housekeeper for twenty years?”

“Yes.”

“My good woman, if you are attached to your master I have very bad news for you.”

“Gracious Lord!” cried Maggie, but she did not open the door much wider—only enough to thrust her head out. “Don’t scare me mister. What is it?”

“The worst you can think of,” said the man. “Mr. Van Nott traveled on the—road. There has been an accident.”

“Preserve us!” cried Maggie, letting the door fall back, “and him on his way to his wedding. He’s hurt badly then?”

“He’s dead,” said the man. “Dead and we’ve brought him home.”

Maggie sat down on a chair and began to cry.

“We’ve done what we could,” said the man. “The lady he was to marry and her friends will bedown to-morrow. Meanwhile my instructions are that you shall watch him, and allow no strangers to enter the house. There are valuable things here, I’m told; and Mr. Van Nott’s lawyer must take possession of them, and seal them up before strangers have access to the room.”

“Oh, dear, dear!” cried old Maggie.—“That it should come to this. Yes, I’ll watch alone. I’m not afraid, but—oh dear!”

Then she shrank back and let two men carry a horrible coffin into the front parlor.

They came out with their hats off, and the other man held his in his hand. “I don’t mind that,” said old Maggie, “but it’s terrible, terrible!”

The head bobbed down again. Maggie reseat herself. She knew that this could not last very long—that there must be a conflict before long. It was as she supposed. A moment more and the coffin was empty, and a ferocious young fellow sat on its edge, and thus addressed her:

“We meant to do all quiet,” he said “and I don’t want to frighten an old woman. Just put them down.”

“I’m not frightened,” said Maggie. “I’m coming to take them things away from you,” said the man.

“Come,” said Maggie.

He advanced one step. She took aim and he dodged, but the bullet went through his left arm, and it dropped by his side.

Furious with pain, he dashed toward her. She fired again, and this time wounded him in the right shoulder.—Faint, and quite helpless, he staggered against the wall.

“There, you’ve done it, old woman,” he said. Open the door and let me out. My game is up.”

“Mine isn’t,” said old Maggie. “Get into your coffin again, or this time I’ll shoot you through the heart.”

The burglar looked piteously at her, but saw no mercy in her face. He went back to the coffin and lay down in it. Blood dripped from his wound and he was growing pale. Maggie did not want to see him die before her eyes, but she dared not call aid. To leave the house before daylight would be to meet this man’s companions, and risk her own life. There was nothing for it but to play the surgeon herself, and in a little while she had stopped the blood and saved the burglar’s life. More than this—she brought him a cup of tea, and fed him with it as if he had been a baby. Nothing, however, could induce her to let him out of his coffin.

About one or two o’clock she heard steps outside, and knew that the other burglars were near, but her stout heart never quailed. She trusted in the bars and bolts and they did not betray her.

The daylight found her sitting quietly beside her wounded burglar, and the milkman, bright and early, was the ambassador who summoned the officers of justice.

When the bridal party returned next day the house was neat and tidy, and Maggie, in her best alpaca, told the news in a laconic fashion.

“Frightened!” she said in answer to the sympathetic ejaculation of her new mistress. “Frightened! Oh, no! Fear wasn’t born in me.”

A Desperate Deed.

SARATOGA was greatly excited recently, on the discovery of an appalling and unnatural crime. We give the particulars as they come to us:

As the guests of the United States Hotel were departing for the races, Eli Perkins walked briskly up to the desk and informed Mr. Gage, one of the proprietors of the States, that Governor Jewell, of Connecticut, had just thrown his son out of the window, and to please—

“What window—where?” interrupted a dozen voices at once.

“Out of the fourth story back,” said Mr. Perkins, “on to the picket fence—”

“Why, a man throwing his son—his only son—out of a four story window.” “I don’t see anything fiendish about it,” said Eli, “it was an old son and no use to the Governor, and—”

“No use to the Governor? and do you think because Governor Jewell had no use for his son he had the right to throw such a son out of the window?” interrupted Isaac Phelps.

“Why of course he had a right to do as he chose with his own son,” said Mr. Perkins. “As I was saying I told the Governor to toss it down to me and he gave it a throw, and—”

“If? What do you mean by calling a boy an it?” interrupted a dozen voices.

“Why who said it was a boy?” said Mr. Perkins, greatly surprised. “I said Governor Jewell threw his son his weekly Sun, out of the window. It was an old Sun; he had read it, and I wanted to read it myself, and—”

In just two minutes, by Judge Fitch’s old yellow watch, the office was cleared, and no one knew how Eli Perkins finished the sentence. Somebody told our reporter that Eli was trying to illustrate the proverb “That truth, absolute truth, is sometimes stranger than fiction.”

A WEDDING IN WYOMING.

CAMPING near the town, we secured our stock and then went in. Entering the leading store, I introduced myself to Mr. Stiles, one of the proprietors and the Postmaster.

“It is now half past 2, and at 3 there’s to be a wedding down the street at Jonas Burton’s. Old Jonas is a rough old coon that we elected Justice of the Peace about a month ago, and as this will be his first attempt at a marriage, I think we will see some fun. Come and go down with me.”

We went to the old ‘Squire’s cabin.— We found him poring over a large volume of the statutes of Wyoming, swearing like a horse and looking terribly anxious. After greeting us he said:

“Stiles, the darned galoots that got up these ‘yer laws hadn’t gumtion enough to last ‘em over night. I’ve run through the blamed book a half dozen times; an’ can’t find a dod blasted word about matrimony, or how the hitchin’ process is proceeded with. I’ve just got ter put the clamps on this couple hit or miss, an’ if I don’t yoke ‘em up legal I can’t help it.”

“Oh!” said Stiles, “just do the best you can. Any kind of a ceremony will do in this country, for people’ll never question the legality of the thing. I’ll post you as well as I can.”

Stiles then explained to him about how he should proceed, and the old man finally thought he could worry through in tolerable shape. Ere long the couple appeared, followed by a crowd of the citizens of the camp. The candidates stood up before the ‘Squire, who began:

“Feller citizens, this ‘yar man an’ this ‘yar woman have appeared before the court to be hitched in the legal bands of wedlock. If any galoot in the mob knows of anything that mout block the game if tuk to a higher court, let him now toot his bazoo, or else keep his jaw to himself now and forevermore. All in favor o’ me peecedin’ as authorized by the law, say ‘I.’”

Everybody said “I.”

“Contrary, ‘no.’”

Nobody said “no.”

“The motion’s carried unan’ously, an’ the Court rules that thar hain’t nuthin’ to pervert the tryin’ of the case. Grip yer fins.”



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ESTATE NOTICE.—Notice is hereby given, that letters of administration on the estate of Rev. S. B. Richmond late of Torone township, Perry County, Pa., deceased, have been granted to the undersigned. P. O. Address—Landsburg, Perry County, Pa. All persons indebted to said estate are requested to make immediate payment and those having claims will present them duly authenticated for settlement to ALBERT E. RICHMOND, CHAS. H. SMILEY, A.D'Y. Administrator, May 10, 1881.

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Estate of Samuel Miller, Deceased. LETTERS of Administration on the above estate having been granted to the undersigned, all persons indebted to said estate are requested to make payment, and those having claims to present the same without delay to WALLACE DEWITT, Administrator, [Sept. 23, 1881.] [Harrisburg, Pa.]