



CHAPTER XXV.

This interruption of his plans was extremely annoying to the lawyer, who had been bent on when matters reached the crisis previously narrated. The workmen were gathered at a safe distance from the old mansion. It was vain that he interceded with them. All were inclined to attribute to some supernatural means, save one man—the red-bearded, jovial fellow, who had sneered at the superstitious tales about the old house in the bar-room of Ronk's tavern a few evenings before. He was a carpenter—a burly, good-natured, sceptical, fearless man; and now, having recovered his presence of mind, he was disposed to ridicule the fears of his fellow workmen.

"Soho," he exclaimed, "we are to be frightened from our work by spooks or what? For my part, I believe some chap is down there in the cellar trying to make fools of us, and if any man dare go with me, we will go down and rout him out."

Not a man ventured to accept this offer, spite of his taunts of cowardice and at length he said:
"Well, if no one will go with me, I will go alone. But you're all babies to be frightened by ghost stories. There's some rascal in that house has been playing tricks on us. But I'll show him he can't frighten me. If he's in there yet, I'll find him out."
So saying he boldly entered the hall again, seized a candle that had been left burning, and started down to search the lower rooms, while his companions waited outside in consternation at his daring actions.

He had not been gone over five minutes, however, when he appeared again, rushing out of the house, with white countenance and evidently in mortal terror, he paused on reaching the group of his comrades, who gathered around him and eagerly besought him to tell what he had seen. It was some seconds before he could regain control enough of himself to speak. At last he said:
"What a fool and coward I am! But upon my soul, I couldn't help it. They tell no lies about that house. As I am a living man, when I got down in that gloomy old basement I saw somebody who must be the spirit of old Magnus Rolf, or else the very Devil himself. I want mistakes. It was no human being. For my part, I won't go in that house again except in the daylight to get my tools. I've had enough of it."

"That is the way I feel," replied the elder plott. "If something must be done and I see it as if there was no means but for us to attempt it ourselves. Let us be practical, Ralph. Of course, there are no ghosts in that old house. Somebody is causing these disturbances. They will probably not remain in the house now that the work has been stopped. We can go over, well provided with lights, and if necessary, make an investigation that will probably result in discovering some clue to the means by which the noises and other ghostly tricks have been produced. We must go. Our success depends upon it. What do you say?"
"Well, if we must, we must," replied Ralph, "but I had rather it were somebody beside me."

"Of course, of course," replied the father, "and so would I. But go we must. Perhaps we can get some hardy fellow to accompany us. I'll see in the morning. But to-morrow afternoon I propose to make an investigation that will unravel this mystery."

CHAPTER XXVI.
Although, in the war that had ensued between the British government and the young American republic, the British naval commanders had promptly declared a blockade of the entire American coast, and great fleets had been sent to enforce the blockade, yet such was the adventurous and hardy character of our seamen of the day, that the efforts to shut up our ports were very far from successful. Not only did the crews of our infant navy put to sea, and, under daring and skillful commanders, gain a series of brilliant victories, that compensated largely for the early military disasters on land, but within a few weeks after the declaration of war, the seas were fairly swarming with American privateers. The most prominent and wealthy merchants of the country engaged in this sort of business venture, and light, swift schooners, heavily armed, and capable of outtailing any other vessels they knew, were sent to sea by the hundreds from every port almost, and inflicted immense damage on the enemy's commerce. The further seas that were whitened by Britain's commercial fleets were not safe from the depredations of these daring cruizers. They even invaded the British Channel, and watched like hawk like the English coast while it is related that one daring privateer commander, while cruising in the mouth of the Thames, sent a carte to London proclaiming a blockade of the entire British Islands, in ridicule of the blockade of the American coast so loftily proclaimed by the British naval commanders.

The Chesapeake Bay became the great rendezvous of these privateering craft, owing to the difficulty of blockading it, and the city of Baltimore gained its early commercial supremacy and laid the foundation of its future prosperity by the ventures of its merchants in this sort of speculation.

charge. During the conflict with the enemy's brig, while helping to man one of the guns, he had been struck in the side by a flying bolt from the gun-carriage of the gun he was helping to work, which had been hit by one of the enemy's shot, and, besides the breaking of three or four ribs, had received severe internal injuries.

He was not yet out of danger—indeed the shock to his system from effects of his removal to the hospital had aggravated his symptoms, and caused the surgeon considerable anxiety. His first words, on reaching the hospital, had been the inquiry:
"Doctor, how soon can I get out of this?"
The surgeon did not reply, but proceeded to examine into his injuries, and then to recommend to his assistant such measures as he thought necessary to better his condition. But ere the surgeon drew away, the young patient repeated his question.
"Doctor, won't you tell me how soon I can get out of this?"
"Why, my dear sir," replied the kind surgeon, "judging from your present condition, you must have to remain with us several months."

A week passed by and every day the "interesting young patient," as the surgeon termed the wounded young sailor from the Harpy renewed his pleading with the surgeon to secure an early discharge from the hospital. With good care, rest and nourishing food, he was slowly gaining strength and asserted that he felt well enough to leave; but the surgeon was afraid that the internal injuries were of too grave a character to warrant an early discharge from his care, and denied every appeal allowed to leave.

CHAPTER XXVII.
Spite of his skepticism as to the nature of the mysterious occurrences at Rolf House, and his suspicions that Carl Crum was at the bottom of the business, Anthony Saybrook felt nervous and uneasy in regard to the proposed visit of himself and Ralph to the house to investigate the matter. The truth was, that the lawyer, like many men who are intellectually very daring, was physically a coward, and though he was no believer whatever in ghosts, he had an undefinable dread of again entering the old mansion while in its present state. He could not forget the strange and terrible death of Leeb Sackett, nor the fright he had had at the time of the discovery of the corpse of the would-be robber of the strong vault built by Magnus Rolf.

While inwardly sneering at his own cowardice, he made an effort to secure the services of some resolute man to accompany him on the proposed investigation; but without success. There were but few men in the little community whom he would have trusted for such a purpose, and not much to his surprise, all whom he approached on the subject had business on hand that prevented their acceptance of his offer, or else they honestly confessed that they had no wish to enter the old house after all the strange occurrences there.

able to give a good account of ourselves. But I have no idea we shall meet anybody; and, of course, the idea of our encountering ghosts is preposterous."

After securing their arms and lanterns, they set out for the old house. On arriving, they found the door locked, the workmen having been there, taken away their tools, and closed the house. They consulted together a few moments in whispers. Then they got their arms ready, lighted the lanterns, and Anthony Saybrook applied the key, opened the door, and the two adventurous investigators stepped into the old hall.

For a moment all was dark and gloomy, and they peered cautiously and suspiciously about. Not a sound was to be heard. The feeble light of the lanterns scarcely sufficed to dispel the darkness. The long perspective faded into darkness, the doors leading off to adjoining rooms seemed to glow blackly at them, the tall climbing staircase, with its heavy balustrades, showed spectral and ghostlike. In short, there was an air of gloomy mystery about the dusky surroundings that greeted the two adventurous investigators of the mystery that had so long been the subject of legend and unqualified faith.

Acting on this suggestion, they proceeded up the stairs, and, passing from room to room, chatted cheerfully on the subject of the peculiarities of the rooms and the improvements that could be made in them. But there was little to attract them long in the bare, unfurnished floors, and they proceeded down stairs again and wandered through the rooms leading off from the old hall. Here there was the faint and massive furniture, the once rich but faded decorations, and the many evidences of former grandeur and taste surrounding them. Ere long they found themselves in the room that had been occupied by the late mistress of Rolf House, and in which she had died. While examining this room, the keen glance of Anthony Saybrook detected a small door that was set in the dark wainscoting, and which appeared as if it might be a closet. Opening it casually, he was surprised to discover a passage, which evidently led down to the basement.

He stopped, and whispered to Ralph his suspicion. They closed the slides of their lanterns, leaving the hallway in darkness, and then the entrance of the lawyer became a reality. There was certainly a door-way ahead, and rays of light gleamed from within.

The door opened into a large room. The bare stone-walls were unplastered, and the beams overhead were unlathed, and hung with cobwebs. The floor was of rough boards, and no window admitted a single ray of sunlight. At a tall, old-fashioned secretary in one corner of the room there sat the figure of a tall man, clothed in a dark robe that entirely covered his figure. Two candles burned on the secretary, and from these proceeded the rays of light that had shown through the door. The dress of the secretary was covered with papers.

The figure was that of a tall, very venerable man. He was shrouded from shoulders to feet in a long black robe. A small, close-fitting black cap was upon his head, from underneath which escaped snowy white locks. His face was smooth-shaven, and large, piercing eyes looked out from underneath shaded white eyebrows. The expression of his countenance was dignified and majestic as he gazed sternly at the intruders.

For a moment, the two men stood huddled together in the narrow hallway in the full light issuing through the door. Sudden surprise had deprived them of all power to act in so unexpected an emergency. They could only gaze as if petrified at the majestic and apparently unearthly figure before them.

Neither of the men could resist the inclination to flee. They hurried through the hall and up the stairs, nor did they pause till, pale and panting, they were a half-dozen rods from the house. "Men of power," Ralph exclaimed, "Anthony Saybrook, what can this mean?"
"Don't ask me," replied Ralph. "It's a mystery beyond my fathoming. I expected to be annihilated on the spot," exclaimed Ralph.
"I too," responded the father, "it's a most incomprehensible mystery. What shall we do?"
"Go home," responded Ralph.
"And Rolf House?"
"Leave it to the devil and old Rolf's ghost," replied Ralph; "I've had enough of it."
Ralph's suggestion strikes me, said the lawyer.

He felt the want of a stimulant. Settling back in his chair, Anthony Saybrook put his hand to his head and knotted his brow in deep thought. "Rolf" he said, "what a suggestion!" "Yes," was the reply, "I have been comparing probabilities in my mind. This is a deep riddle, Ralph. There is more in it than I like to think. That strange old man in Rolf House—who can it be? The ghost of Magnus Rolf? That's too weak—too silly. Who then? Why not old Magnus Rolf himself. He never died that anybody knows. He simply disappeared. That is the only explanation I can think of to meet this mystery. It seems incredible, too; but what else are we to think? Where could he have been all these years? In it he has been creating all these strange gongs at Rolf House? What can his object be? The whole subject grows more complicated and strange as one thinks of it. I am puzzled beyond expression; but many little things occur to me that seem to fit this theory. If it is not Magnus Rolf, then the strange old man we met must be a madman or a thief. But it is—it must be him. He may be mad, also—an eccentric, at least in this strange reappearance."

Ralph staggered back in consternation. "You?" he exclaimed.
"Yes, it is I," replied the young man. "I am glad you recognize me. I hardly thought any one would know me. I thought my visit was unexpected."
As the young man thus spoke, he turned his eyes on Anthony Saybrook. That individual still sat on his chair, but he had leaned forward; his small sharp eyes were fixed on the face of the young man, a waxy, sickly pallor had overspread his face, and his hands grasped the arms of his chair convulsively.

The face and form of the young man in sailor attire were those of Claude Rolf.
[To be continued.]

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