

A Pair of Ghosts.

By MARIAN F. STOCKTON.

The winter night was clear, and with that delightful sharpness in the air that makes young spirits buoyant. The snow crackled crisply and musically under my feet. The white roads looked very inviting in the gleam of the starlight, and I pictured myself flying over them in our red sleigh, with Jenny Carroll by my side, all tucked in snugly with buffalo robes to keep her dear little self warm. She had promised to ride with me at moonrise, which would be at nine o'clock. It was now seven, and I was on my way home from the village store. I was doing so well on the farm, that I thought I was justified in asking Jenny to be my wife, and I felt sure that she cared for me a little; perhaps not enough, though for that—I could not be certain. At all events, I intended to ask her, for she was not likely to tell me unless I did; and, as I walked home in the starlight, I concluded it would not be amiss to ask her this important question that very evening, during our ride.

An extinguisher was clapped over my buoyant spirits at the supper table, by the announcement that our horse was dead lame. We had but one horse at that time, but he was a fine, spirited creature and a first-rate trotter; and that he should have contrived to get something into his foot on that particular day was certainly most provoking. There was no help for it, however. The foot had been doctored and tied up, and there was an end of him for that night. It was a great disappointment to me, and I knew it would be to Jenny, for the sweet little thing loved sleighing as well as she did sugar-plums.

"I must have a horse from somewhere, father," I said, "for I promised Jenny Carroll a ride."

"That's unlucky," said father, "for Jim Bent and Fred Hackett are both going to take their sweethearts sleighing, as I happen to know. I don't know where you can get a horse, except at Carrolls'."

"Oh, that will never do!" I said. "I have it! I'll ask old Andrew Springer to lend me his horse. Davy is venerable and rather stiff in the legs, but he will do on a pinch."

"Don't build your hopes on that," said father. "Old Andrew is very cross-grained."

"Yes, but I am a special favorite, and he has already loaned me Davy three times. It comes in my way occasionally to do him a favor."

I saw that father was incredulous, but I felt sure I would get the horse. So I tramped willingly enough over the snow, for I did not mind a mile walk to please Jenny, and, returning, I could ride the horse. I was not long in reaching Andrew Springer's place, where I found everything as still as the grave. I had not been there for a month. There was not even a dog to greet me with a bark. Everything about the place was old; the house, the stable, the outbuildings and the fences. Andrew was very old; he had two servants older still; and the age of Davy, the horse, was put at fabulous figures by the villagers. But, somehow, all these old things seemed to possess amazing vitality, and there were certain legends current among us young folks, all tending to show that old Andrew was a very successful practitioner of the black art. We took pleasure in pretending to believe these stories, though we knew well enough that Andrew was nothing in the world but a crusty, musty, stingy old man. For some reason he had always been especially gracious to me, and, as I was the only individual he favored, with his smiles, I plumed myself very much thereupon. But when I entered his room, after my brisk walk, I found him looking as sour as a crab-apple, and just about as hard and knobby. Old Chrissy, his maid-servant, had opened the door in answer to my knock. Her face was puckered into more wrinkles than she had hairs on her head; and her light, fishy eyes had a peculiar cast in them which did not add to the beauty of her countenance.

She looked especially ugly that night, I thought; and as she flared the candle up in my face she gave me a sinister glance and vanished into the darkness without a word. This was of no consequence, for I knew which was Andrew's room. I found him in it, busily engaged writing in a dilapidated old ledger, by the light of a tallow candle.

"Good evening, Mr. Springer," said I. "I will not interrupt you. I came to see if you would lend—"

He looked up quickly and interrupted me.

"Lend, indeed!" he said, snappishly.

"No money coming in, and—"

"It is not money I want," I said, interrupting him in my turn, "but your horse."

"Oh, my horse! old Davy?"

"Yes, old Davy. I will take good care of him, and not drive him fast."

"Now that's a different thing from money, ain't it?" he said, good humoredly, and then he began to chuckle.

"You're welcome enough to old Davy," he added, presently; "but my man don't live here, and has gone away for the night, and if I go to the stable with you I'll be laid up for a week. But I

unlocked it, and we both entered. No sooner were we inside than the door went to with a bang, and out went the light!

"I turned the open side of the lantern out," muttered Chrissy, "and now I'll have to go back and light it."

"No, you won't," said I, sharply.

"Open the door, and I'll find the horse."

"You can't do it," said Chrissy, as she opened the door and slipped out. Bang went the door again, and I was alone in the pitchy darkness.

The darkness did not terrify me, but I was immediately conscious of a vague feeling of uneasiness, as if there were something "uncanny" about the place. It was foolish, of course, but I felt as if I should breathe more freely outside, and in a few minutes I would return and get the horse without waiting for Chrissy. The door opened with a latch, I noticed, and after some fumbling I found it, lifted it up, and pushed against the door. It was locked!

I whistled and walked up and down the narrow space near the door, trying to think that this was only an odd freak of old Chrissy's to keep me from doing any mischief, but my courage grew less with every moment. I recalled the looks and actions of both master and servant, and now these seemed fraught with sinister meanings. They could not suppose I had any money. What diabolical purpose could they have for doing

I entered and examined the third stall. Empty also! Then I came to the dead-wall. There were no more stalls on that side. I felt along this wall, and soon came to a window. There were no sashes in it, and the shutter was bolted. Happy discovery! Here I could get some light, I thought, but the bolt was so rusty I could not move it, though I shook it with all my force. I walked on, and found a blank wall to the door. There were, then, but three stalls, and they were empty!

It was clear enough that I had been enticed into the stable for some evil purpose. The ugly stories I had heard about old Andrew rushed into my memory, and I was thinking that, perhaps, his mysterious reputation was due to a blacker art than any we had fancifully ascribed to him, when I heard directly opposite to me the hoarse breathing of a horse. I listened breathlessly. There could be no mistake; and, to put the matter past doubt, I heard him rubbing against his stall. How could I have overlooked such a great creature as a horse! The idea was absurd. But I could distinctly hear the breathing and the rubbing, and I rushed into the stall without regard to kicks. It was as empty as before! While I stood irresolute I heard the same rubbing noise in the last stall, and immediately after a faint thumping of hoofs on the floor. I knew now the situation of the stalls, and I flew around to this last one, but I found nothing. What could it mean? Had a phantom horse taken up his abode there? Had Chrissy been frightened by these ghostly noises, and had she locked me in there to find out whether I could also hear them? Just here there came a heavy stamping and an impatient pawing very near me. That could be no phantom. It was a flesh and blood animal of some kind, and, moreover, it was certainly in the next stall. But when I walked in I encountered only vacancy, and, on examining the first stall again, I found it to contain nothing.

I had never put any faith in ghostly apparitions or ghostly noises, but now that my skepticism was compelled to face this mystery, I think it must have given way, for I felt as if little lumps of ice were chasing each other down my back, and my heart beat loudly. At that moment old Andrew, with club, pistol, or whatever murderous weapon he might select, would have been welcome to me compared with this phantom horror. I must have had a grain of courage and a small fraction of common-sense left, for I tried to convince myself that there was nothing frightful in the breathing of a horse, whether phantom or otherwise. What harm could that possibly do me? But this question did not stop the beating of my heart or check the lumps of ice.

Even this last flickering spark went out when, standing within the middle stall, close by the manger, with my hand upon it, I distinctly felt the board move, as the phantom horse rubbed its head against it; and immediately after the head was raised, and there came from out the empty air a loud whinny close to my ear!

I could bear no more. I rushed to the window, shook the shutter frantically, and rattled the rusty bolt with the desperation of terror. The whole thing gave way, and fell with a crash into the yard, and I lost no time in vaulting out. The moon was shining brightly to raise my spirits, and I ran swiftly from the horrible place. I did not go home, but to the Carrolls', who lived much nearer. Disordered in dress, but still more disordered in mind, I burst into their family circle and told my tale.

Simon Mervel was there, and as soon as I had finished, he exclaimed:

"Why, old Davy died two weeks ago! I know it, for I bought his skin."

"Then you really did see a ghost—I mean hear one?" cried Jenny, most delightfully excited. "But if you had to meet a ghost, it is a great pity that it was that of a horse!"

After the matter had been talked over for a few moments, and I had become calmer, it was decided that Simon, the two Carroll brothers and myself should at once return, armed with different weapons, and explore this mystery; for, though I gave up the ghost theory as absurd, now that I was by a cheerful



"He cowed down on the floor, and shrieked: 'Oh, good Lord! It's Davy! Help! Chrissy!'"

guess Chrissy will go with you. She is as tough as a pine-knot."

In vain I protested that I could find my way to the stable and the horse if he would furnish me with a lantern. "It was a crooked way," he said, "and Chrissy did not mind going."

I remained in the room while he went into the kitchen, and he soon returned and told me Chrissy was ready, upon which I took my leave of him with many thanks for the service he had rendered me.

I found Chrissy in the kitchen, opening cupboard doors and peering under shelves and grumbling with all her might. It presently appeared that she was searching for a lantern, which she at last produced—a forlorn old concern, with one of the glasses out. In this lantern she stuck a lighted piece of candle, and declared herself ready. I was impatient enough by this time, and insisted that she should give me the lantern and let me go alone to the stable, but she declared that she must obey her master's orders. I thought perhaps old Andrew had hidden some of his gold in the stable, and they were afraid I had come to search for it.

The way to that stable certainly was "crooked," and it seemed to me that the stars gave very little light, and the lantern only shed a feeble gleam; but we reached the door at last, and Chrissy

away with me? I knew nothing about the stable or the buildings around it, and there was no house within half a mile.

Suddenly I conceived the brilliant idea of taking the horse out of the stall and bridling him. I had brought a bridle with me, intending to ride the horse back home. It was not quite clear to my mind what I would do with him. I think it was my purpose to jump on his back and use him as a weapon of defence. And then it occurred to me for the first time as strange that during all the noise at the door, and my walking and whistling, I had heard no movement whatever from the horse. Apparently our proceedings had not aroused his attention.

I groped along, feeling for the stalls—very cautiously, for I had a reasonable fear of receiving a kick if I came suddenly near old Davy's hind legs. I found the first stall, and slipped quietly in close to the side, until I reached the manger. Here I was safe, and I began in a coaxing tone. "Whoa, old Davy! Whoa, sir!" and stretched out my hand. I encountered only vacancy. I felt along the floor with my feet. There was no litter of straw and no horse lying down. I felt my way into the second stall, where I went through the same forms I had in the first, and with the same result. In like manner