

The Ghost of Rhodes House.

"Beyond any question, Mrs. Rhodes, you may be relieved of the reputation of maintaining ghosts," he told that lady later in the day. Woman-like, she drew some comfort from the assurance, even while she put little faith in it.

"Indeed, I hope so," she said. "This has been a terrible experience for me—you can't imagine how terrible. Percy has probably given you a hint of our troubles. We are all anxious, so anxious, to dispose of this place, and now I suppose we never can sell it. Mr. McBrayer will never take it. We did not care for him personally. If only Harry had the money we should prefer him a thousand times; but the poor boy cannot scrape together the amount required. He tried to get it, tried and tried again, but to no purpose. I know it almost broke his heart when he heard of the bargain with Mr. McBrayer. They have never been good friends. But after what has happened it doesn't seem to matter much. Really, Mr. Slater, when I look forward to living here perhaps for years, I can't help being selfishly wrapped up in our own misfortunes."

"Possibly the end of them is nearer than you think."

"I'd like to believe that," said Percy, who had been listening to the talk; "I'd like to believe it, but I can't. You don't appreciate the ancestor, old man. He's reappeared just to make certain that, after he has kept us tied to this place for so these many years, the knots are still tight. He was a gentleman of very strong opinions, he was, and the other world hasn't changed him."

"Then you are satisfied that it was his shade that we saw in the hall?"

"What else could it be? There he was, plainly enough, yet there was nothing fleshly about him. Why, I seemed to see through him. I dare say McBrayer had been through just the same experience in his room."

"Undoubtedly. But, Percy, isn't it conceivable to you that this ghostly incident can be accounted for in a reasonable way? The optical delusion theory won't explain it, I admit; McBrayer's visions might be laid to that, but it's scarcely possible that four of us could be similarly and simultaneously

deluded. So we'll agree that we saw something which existed. My contention is that we may be able to explain its presence in the hall without resorting to the supernatural."

"You ought to confer with Harry; he's another sceptic and scoffer. I'll call him over here to compare notes. He's the only one, you know, who didn't have a chance to be scared out of his wits."

"Yes, bring him along," said Slater. Ever since his discoveries of the morning he had been evolving a plan, and the thought now struck him that perhaps the moment for putting it into effect had arrived. There was risk in what he proposed, and he might find himself in a most unpleasant position; but, after all, the chance was worth taking. By a process of elimination he had reduced the number of possible human factors in the nocturnal mystery until only one was left in his calculations; and, although there was little of evidence and much of speculation in the case he was trying to make out, he was beginning to feel the desire strong within him to convict the defendant he had hit upon.

"Here's the other scientific doubter," Percy announced. "Get together, you two, and do your worst. As for me, I stick to the good old way; seeing's believing. Let me know when you agree. I've got to look after some earthly affairs for a few minutes."

"So, Mr. Slater, you've formed a theory?" said Harry. He spoke quietly, and with the air of one who took little interest in the subject.

"In a way, yes. I shall be glad to tell you of it. You may be able to help me out."

"Delighted to do so, I'm sure."

Slowly, and with eyes fixed upon his hearer's face, Slater recounted his discoveries in the room McBrayer had occupied on the first night, the curious manner in which the cobwebs were fastened to the door, the cleats against the wall, the hole in the ceiling, and the rope tied to the rafter above it.

"In short," he added, I satisfied myself that an active man could easily make his escape after the demonstration in McBrayer's room, especially as the victim of such a practical joke would, naturally, be too terrified to attempt an immediate investigation. The very fact that McBrayer noticed the webs leads me to believe that he did not make an examination until some time later, probably not till day-break. A person in a state of intense excitement would hardly be impressed by such a trifling matter. We may assume that McBrayer was cowering under the bedclothes long after his visitant was safely out of the way."

"It is altogether probable," the younger man responded. He spoke in the same quiet manner, but Slater saw that his fingers were beginning to pick at the arm of his chair.

"Then I explored the attic, where I found a number of interesting things. In brief, I reached a point where—" The speaker paused for a moment, for he was arriving at the most difficult part of his narrative, and was passing from facts to surmise—"where I decided that my discoveries ought to be laid before you."

It was a chance shot at the best, but it told. Young Rhodes was startled, plainly enough, but in an instant he had recovered command of himself.

"In view of its results, this ghost-raising is a serious matter," Slater went on. "The disappointment it has brought upon your aunt—"

Harry interrupted him with a quick gesture.

"You've said enough. If you will come with me we may be able to solve the mystery," he said. He was very pale, and his face had become drawn and haggard.

He led Slater to his room, unlocked a trunk, and drew from the top tray a long white beard. Stepping to the wardrobe, he produced a dressing gown of a dull gray.

"These may assist you in developing your theory," he said, bitterly. "I wore them the first night. There is an opening from this room to the garret, much like the one you found in McBrayer's place. Knowing every nook and cranny of this house as I do, it was very easy for me even at night to mount overhead, cross the attic, descend into the little room adjoining his, and make my way on into his chamber. I wore the beard, the gown, and felt slippers, which were practically noiseless. When he awoke and saw me he must have fainted from fright, and I had no difficulty in passing under the curtain he described to you and partly closing the door to the inner room. Then I fastened the cobwebs—it had taken me many hours to arrange these details, and I carried a bottle of prepared glue in the pocket of the gown, while the webs were where I could get at them quickly—climbed easily to the attic by the aid of the rope, and went back to my room."

"But the second night's operations,—how about them?"

"They were less acrobatic, though they involved the use of a good deal of apparatus. I tried a simple trick, and I am almost surprised that none of you detected it. This was the chief appliance,"—he took a small magic