

At this time I was artieled to Blair and Smoothly, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and consequently left the village, but I continued to receive periodical reports of all that went on there.

The marriage of a sister filled our house with visitors, and as I was expected to take part in the ceremony, it was agreed that I should take up my quarters in Jack Charters' lodgings.

A few days before going down into the country, I had been attracted by a sale of some theatrical properties, and had laid out a few shillings in the purchase of curious dresses, that I knew would be useful to me some day or other.

One was a tight-fitting demon's costume, black body, tail, hideous mask, three pronged fork and all, that doubtless figured in some Christmas pantomime. This was so suggestive of fun to be got out of the unsophisticated Boeotians I was about to visit, that I tossed it into my portmanteau to be made use of if opportunity occurred.

Jack Charters was delighted with it. He made me put it on for his especial inspection, and vowed it was perfection itself.

"My dear boy," he said, "it must have dropped from the clouds for the very purpose I want it."

"What's that?"

"Why, all the prestige we got up about the ghost at the White House is waning away. The people are so involved in the mystery of its occupants that they forget all about the ghost. This mustn't be."

"Certainly not,"

"That confounded old prig, Garston, too, hasn't a bit of reverence for us, and vows that if all the ghosts of the other world came, he wouldn't run; and if we could only give him a good fright, the success of our spiriting would be immortal."

"How shall it be done?"

"I don't know. You see there's that pretty girl there, and I shouldn't like to frighten her."

"There's no one else there but the girl and the servant?"

"Well yes, there is to day a stranger. I went into the Red Lion this morning for a glass of bitter, when a spruce old gentleman, rather a stout party, came to enquire where Mr. Garston lived. He was immediately set upon by the landlady, who tried all she knew to pump him, but it was no go. So I blandly informed him that Mr. Garston lived at the haunted house. 'The what?' says he. 'The haunted house,' says I, very solemnly, and looking all over as if I meant it. 'What, a house with a ghost in it?' 'Yes,' says I. 'And do you mean to say that in these days of steam engines and daily newspapers there are to be found fools in England, stultified enough to believe in ghosts?' So saying he caught up his carpet bag, which by-the-bye clearly demonstrates his intention of stopping all night, and went away. I should amazingly like to frighten that old party."

"I've got it," I said.

"Got what?"

"An idea. It'll want a little pluck to carry it out, but still it's feasible."

"Quick then, what is it?"