POOR DOCUMENT

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THE GHOST OF LOCHRAIN
OR
THE UNDERGROUND SYNDICATE

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson, author of "The Princess Passes," "The Lightning Conductor," Etc.

CHAPTER I.—(Continued.)

Elspeth began to feel as if she had got into a story book far more interesting than the one she was trying to read. "What will they do when they see me at Lochrain?" she wondered. But she soon decided that the Countess of Lambart was not a woman to care much for the opinion or thoughts of a humble typist, even if she remembered that she had seen the face before.

The journey did not seem long to the girl, for her brain teemed with all sorts of interesting fancies, from the beginning to the end. The station at which passengers descended for Lochrain Castle Hydropathic Hotel was that of a small town, popular among tourists, and so there was no reason why it should occur to her fellow travelers that her destination was the same as theirs. Lochrain was five or six miles distant, and Elspeth saw her three late companions go away in a very smart motor car, so exactly like several others at the station that she guessed that they were sent by the management of the hotel. There were evidently a number of other guests for the new and fashionable Hydro, and eight or ten of their maids and valets departed in a bunch in a big motor omnibus. Everything was so quickly done that Elspeth had not time to wonder what was to become of her, before a voice spoke her name.

"Are you Miss Dean, engaged as secretary for Lochrain Hydro?"

"Yes," said Elspeth, turning quickly, to see, not a servant, but a pale-faced, black-eyed young man, very well dressed in dark blue serge.

"I am Mr. Grant, Mr. McGowan's assistant," he announced, with his hat off. "Mr. McGowan wished me to meet and drive you back, so that on the way I might prepare you for some of your duties, and save time."

"It will be very kind of you," said the girl.

"I shall be glad to help you in any way I can," he answered; and looking up, Elspeth caught a flash in the dark, deepset eyes which contradicted the white coldness of the face.

"I wonder whether I'm going to like Mr. Grant or not!" she thought. The look in his eyes told her that the pale man was not unaware of the fact that she was a pretty girl.

The drive to Lochrain was a wild and beautiful one, but Miss Smith's eulogiums had not half prepared her for the magnificence of the place itself.

"Why, it's like a great castle, and has the air of being hundreds and hundreds of years old!" she exclaimed in intense admiration, when the dogcart Mr. Grant drove had passed through a park, and brought them into sight of a huge, grey stone pile on a slight grassy elevation. But even before her companion replied, she remembered how Mr. Kenrith had spoken of "turning the old castle into a hotel."

"How delightful," the girl went on. "This is even better than I expected. It's always been my dream to live in a place like this. I do hope it's haunted?"

Mr. Grant smiled grimly.

"There are more gruesome stories told about Lochrain as it used to be in the past than about almost any of the feudal houses, which is saying a good deal, especially in Scotland. Aren't you afraid of ghosts?"

"Not in the least. I don't believe in them, though I love ghost stories dearly," she said.

"Very well, then. I'll tell you what I wouldn't have told you, otherwise. It will no doubt, please you to hear that your room is in the haunted tower,' as it used to be called. The Hydro is crammed for the season, and if you hadn't been put there, you would have had to be tucked away in an attic. You'll find the room a nice one, so nice that Mr. McGowan would would have had to keep it for guests, if it hadn't been for the ugly stories which, if any one got to know—as they most certainly would one way or another—would have led to rows with the management. So you see, an ill wind has blown you some good—especially as you're fond of ghost stories."

"What are the stories about my tower?" asked Elspeth.

"Here we are at the door," said Mr. Grant; and she could not guess from his tone if the evasion of her question was deliberate or not.

A queer little thrill crept through her veins, such as she had never felt before. Something seemed to whisper in her ear that experiences—whether ghostly or not—would come to her at Lochrain, strange enough to try the bravest spirit. And yet it was a fashionable Hydro, full of gay, pleasure-seeking people, and she was only an insignificant little typist, come here to work for her living in a prosaic way, at two guineas a week. Reason said that imagination was flying away with her good sense; and yet the thrill and the presentiment remained.

CHAPTER II.

The Room in the Tower.

Elspeth had only just time to be impressed with the magnificence of the great stone-pillared hall, with its vast fireplace, its tapestries and its ancient armor, when she was led down a conecting corridor into a small room, where she found herself in Mr. McGowan's presence.

He was a clever-looking, middle aged man, evidently a gentleman, with a worried, over-worked air, and such kind eyes that Elspeth did not wonder the millionaire had liked and wished to help him in his ambitious venture.

"But you are a mere child," was his first exclamation on seeing the new stenographer. Still he did not seem wholly disappointed in her appearance, Elspeth could not help thinking and when, to prove what she could do, she had taken down a few rapidly dictated sentences, without an instant's delay or hesitation, he expressed himself satisfied.

"You will do very well. Miss Dean," he said pleasantly. "Tomorrow morning your work will begin. What remains of today you will have to yourself; but some time this evening, when you are rested after your journey, I should like you to come here again, to learn what your work is to be."

"I am not tired," said Elspeth lightly. "I should be glad to hear everything now, unless you prefer"——

"That will be better, if you are equal to it. Well, from 9 in the morning till 10.20 I shall be obliged if you will be at my disposal here, to answer letters, as Mr. Grant is engaged then, and can only help me in the evening. From 10.30 until 12.30 I have promised your services to Mr. Kenrith, who has arrived today; that is, I wired him I would have an efficient stenographer to work with him, which was the principal reason why I wanted you in such a hurry."

"I beg your pardon, may I come in?" asked a voice at the door, which was slightly ajar. It was a man's voice, and spoke with a marked American accent.

"Come in. Mr. Trowbridge," replied the manager politely, and a person of striking appearance entered; a man of 32 or 33, perhaps, tall, clean shaved, with thick, fair hair parted in the middle, dark brows, and black-lashed, narrow, yet bold, gray eyes. He was handsome, exceedingly well dressed, with an air of wealth and prosperity which was almost aggressive. His glance dwelt for a few seconds with flattering admiration upon shabby little Elspeth; yet the girl was ungrateful enough not to like the newcomer.

"So sorry to interrupt, but I'm badly in need of your help, Mr. McGowan," said he, laughing in a friendly way. "I'm a busy man, and can't let everything slide, even up here, while I'm taking a vacation. My correspondence has run miles ahead of me. Can you recommend anybody in the neighborhood who can write pretty well from dictation?"

"This young lady will be able to help you, I think. She has just come to act as my secretary, but I can spare her for some hours a day to guests of the hotel who want her services."

"What an odd coincidence, and a lucky one for me. Introduce me, please," said Mr. Trowbridge, and the stenographer should have been more than ever flattered thus to be intentionally (no doubt that it was intentionally) raised to a footing of social equality by a young and handsome man, evidently a person of importance in the world.

Mr. McGowan obeyed, and Mr. Trowbridge made himself agreeable to Miss Dean, looking at her with an expression which seemed to say: "What a surprising thing to find such a pretty girl in your position. I admire you immensely, and want you to like me."

Still, Elspeth did not like him. "There's something that doesn't ring true," she said to herself. And she did not believe that it was a coincidence that Mr. Trowbridge had happened to ask for a secretary, at the very moment when she had arrived. She had an idea that he had come to Mr. McGowan's door with some other object, that he had overheard a word or two of the conversation, and had taken his cue from it. Still, even if she were right in the surmise she had to remind herself there was no great harm in what Mr. Trowbridge had done. Probably the man must want help with his correspondence, for she was not such a radiant beauty that he should invent a need solely as an excuse for enjoying her society for an hour each day. Such things might happen in novelettes, but not in real life; and in any case Mr. Trowbridge could hardly have seen her face through the crack of the door before putting his question to Mr. McGowan.

In five minutes it was settled that Miss Dean should work for the newcomer for an hour a day. She was to go to his private sitting room from 6 o'clock till 7 each evening. "That time's to be mine from now,' he said. "If some day I shouldn't need you, why if you don't mind I'll lend you to a friend; lots of people, ladies especially, would be only too thankful to get a few notes written for them while they are resting on their sofas between tea and dinner; but I don't believe I shall be able to spare you often."

Mr. Trowbridge was to pay the management seven shillings and sixpence an hour for the privilege of Miss Dean's assistance, and Elspeth began to see that it was not entirely from motives of philanthrophy that the guests of Lochrain Castle Hydro were to be supplied with the services of a stenographer. The appointments already made for her would put seventeen shillings and sixpence daily, except on Sundays, into the pockets of the management, and doubtless it would eventually work out to more. In this way, Mr. McGowan would get all the help he had from her for nothing, while the hotel made money out of the arrangement besides. But this did not matter to the girl. She was more than satisfied with her two guineas a week, her beautiful surroundings, and the prospect of an interesting and exciting life.

"Mr. Trowbridge is an American millionaire," explained the manager, when he and Elspeth were alone together again. "He's only been here a few days, but he has already made himself very popular—a man with a magnetic way, just goes about and talks to people; when they've known him ten minutes they feel as if it might have been ten years. All the ladies like him, especially a certain countess; and if, as he says, he lends you to some of his friends, at his expense, you'll probably get a good deal of amusement out of your job. You will know more than anyone else in the hotel about Mr. Trowbridge's flirtations, and I prophesy that hour between ten and dinner won't be dull. Mr. Kenrith is also a millionaire, as you know, I suppose; but he is a very different sort of man. He doesn't go in for nonsense, and your work with him will be work."

"You seem to have plenty of millionaires," said Elspeth.

Mr. McGowan smiled. "We are fashionable and successful," said he contentedly. "I have sometimes thought, since our season began, what a rich haul jewel thieves could make if—" he checked himself and frowned, as if annoyed at his own garrulousness with a girl who was, after all, a stranger. "But," he added more slowly, "we're well prepared for such emergencies, and there isn't a professional in Great Britain or Europe clever enough to get away with so much as a hat-pin from this house. And by-the-by, talking of rich people, you will give your time from 2 to 3 to Lady Ardcliff—the peeress who fancies that she's a poetess, you know. From 3 to 4.30 we will keep open for extras and emergency work. Then you will have an hour to yourself for tea and a walk, and your evenings will be your own. Now I need not see you again until 9 tomorrow morning. Your luggage will be in your room and the housekeeper shall show you the way. You'll like it, I think; and I fancy you will prefer having your meals there."

"Oh, yes, thank you," Elspeth cried quickly, with visions of nice books to read while she ate near some window that gave on a beautiful view.

"Everything is settled, then," said Mr. McGowan, with the relieved sigh of a very busy man, "except that I may add, your salary will be paid at the end of each week."

As he spoke he touched an electric bell near his desk, and the youth in smart livery who almost immediately appeared, was sent off post haste to call the housekeeper.

"I do hope she is a kind creature," Elspeth thought, "for I suppose I shall be a good deal at her mercy."

But the first glimpse of plump Mrs. Warden, with her pink cheeks, her white hair under a lace cap, and her rustling black silk frock—for all the world like a housekeeper in some great nobleman's house—was reassuring. She smiled on the newcomer, and volunteered, as the guests of the Hydro would be dressing for dinner, to show Miss Dean something of the house, on their way to the tower-room.

It seemed to Elspeth that she had strayed into a wonderful story book. She had never seen anything like Lochrain Castle, and could hardly realize that it was a hotel. There were drawing rooms, and reading rooms, and writing rooms, and conservatories to see, and stories to hear of what each had been in the past; for Mrs. Warden had known the place when it had belonged to Lord Lochrain. "Poor old man, he's dead now; died of grief over the ruin of the family fortune," sighed the housekeeper, "as if his own private sorrows were not enough! He went before there was any idea of turning the Castle into a hotel, or that would have killed him, for sure, such a proud man he was, thinking all the world of his family history, and the part his people and their house had played in the past. Lochrain was a great name in old days, miss; and the Marquises of Lochrain were among the highest in Scotland. But for the last hundred years or more their fortunes have been going down. Superstitious folk said it was because an old family prophecy was being fulfilled; but that's a long story; never mind it now. The poor old Marquis died, and the new one is a distant cousin, quite a common man on one side, who would never have inherited if it hadn't been for an awful thing that happened in the old lord's immediate family, a good many years ago.

"It was this new man sold the castle to Mr. McGowan, or rather to some rich gentlemen Mr. McGowan influenced to buy it for a hotel, and to make him manager. Young Lord Lochrain—though not so very young (except as compared with the old lord), was glad to get rid of the place, it was in such awful repair, and he'd nothing to keep it up with, so he sold it for a song, and all the old family portraits, and tapestry, and armor. It did seem a cruel shame. Luckily for him, though, they didn't want the whole estate, only just the park, as pleasure grounds for the hotel guests, and Lord Lochrain was obliged to keep the rest. But, would you believe it, coal has been found now on a distant part of the land, and he'll have a great fortune, after all?"

"Too late to get back the Castle," said Elspeth, interested.

"Yes, but he doesn't care for that. There's another splendid estate in Surrey, not so old as this, yet very fine, and a house in London, both of which have been let for many years; but he'll have them again now. Great luck, isn't it, miss? And the man doesn't deserve it, I'm afraid. Nobody likes him. You'll see for yourself, perhaps, as Mr. McGowan tells me his lordship is running up here from London to look after his interests, and will stop in the hotel, like an ordinary guest. He inherits from the distaff side, and the relationship is quite distant, as I said. His mother was a Miss Dean, who married beneath her, and she was a third cousin of his old lordship"——

"A Miss Dean?"

"Yes. Why, to be sure, that's your name, isnt' it? I forgot for a moment. Are your people Scotch, miss?"

"My father was Scotch. His people lived in Perthshire."

"Why then, they must be the same Deans, I should think. Only fancy, miss, you're being one of the family, I might say, and coming to the old ancestral house as—as"——

"As a typewriter!" laughed Elspeth. "I shall begin by feeling quite at home now." She spoke lightly, but in reality she was deeply interested and even excited. Her father had scarcely ever spoken of the relations who had turned their backs upon him on his marriage, but the girl knew they had aristocratic blood in their veins, and she made up her mind that now she would try and trace the connection, if any, between her Deans, and the Deans who were connected with Lochrain.

"I won't mention it to Mr. McGowan," she said to herself; "it would seem boastful and silly, but I shall enjoy feeling like a kind of daughter of the house, and I hope Lord Lochrain will come. I should like to see what he is like, in case he should turn out to be a sort of forty-second cousin, although he will never know."

When at last Mrs. Warden had led the girl up the winding stone stairway of the "haunted tower," to the room which was to be her own, Elspeth thanked the ghosts to whom she owed such delightful quarters. If it had not been for them, surely this must have been one of the most desirable rooms in the whole great house, she thought; and if she could, would have persuaded Mrs. Warden to tell the story of the tower. But, as Mr. Grant had done, the housekeeper grew suddenly reserved when the subject of the haunted tower was mentioned. Elspeth did not wish to insist, but she was becoming very curious.

As the housekeeper was on the point of leaving her alone, having promised that dinner should be sent up at 7.30, the old woman turned on the threshold. "I hope you won't be timid here," she said. "It is a bit lonely, for the room under yours has been turned into a place for storing luggage and odds and ends of furniture that aren't wanted, and the one under that is where the carpenter of the hotel does his work. So there's nobody but you in the tower at night. Yet it's all the quieter, and better for sleeping because of that, and you have an electric bell, just like anybody else, which you've only to touch as you lie in bed if you have a fright, and the night porter would be at your door inside of two minutes. But there, you won't have a fright. Why should you? There's nothing to frighten you here."

"Of course not, and I shan't be in the least afraid," answered Elspeth stoutly.

Even when Mrs. Warden had gone, she was still of the same opinion, though even thus early in the evening there was a deathlike silence in the tower, which seemed strange in a crowded hotel, full from cellars to attics of lively people.

It was a large room, circular in shape, with two extraordinary deep at sea windows, opposite one another, so retired in the thickness of the tower wall that each one had the appearance of being at the far end of another and smaller room; but the windows were so wide and so high that despite this peculiarity they gave plenty of light.

Under each was a cushioned seat; and the alcove of the eastern window had doors on each side, in the black oak wainscot. These doors concealed spacious wardrobes, but the west alcove had doors of glass on either side, opening into large recesses. The one on the left was a bathroom, while in the one to the right stood a bed, apparently carved out of one piece, with the oak wall behind it. This bed was, of course, invisible from the outer room, as the wainscoted wall hid it from the alcove, therefore Elspeth was practically in possession of a separate sitting room. The glass doors were sliding doors therefore they did not interfere in passing to and fro, and could always be left open. The furniture of the big outer room was admirable. Elspeth thought, although it was of many different periods and had perhaps been relegated here, because it had made place for something better elsewhere. There were two or three wonderful old chairs, a charming table with claw feet, an ancient "secretary book-case bureau," with glass doors, behind which the covers of old-fashioned books showed, and a tall screen of beautiful, though faded, embossed leather, which hid a too modern dressing-table from view.

The girl thoroughly enjoyed the task of unpacking and putting away her few modest belongings in the great wall-cupboards, one of which she discovered was lined with cedar; and before she had finished all she had to do in settling in, dinner arrived—quite a little feast, it seemed to her, on a large damask-spread tray, with silver covers for the dishes.

There was a rose silk-shaded lamp on the table, which the servant who brought in the tray obligingly lit; but though the flame within made the thin silk look like a bouquet of roses, the wainscoting drank up the light, and it seemed to Elspeth, sitting at the table with a volume of Scott, chosen from the secretary book-case that the black walls were closing in around her as darkness fell. She jumped up and extravagantly lit the two candles on the pretty, old-fashioned dressing-table, but the difference they made was scarcely noticeable. They looked like fire-flies in the gloom, and the girl began to wonder whether, after all, she were quite so lucky as she had thought in having the haunted tower at Lochrain to herself.

She could not remember having such a dainty and well served dinner, and it ought to have been delicious to think that she could do as she pleased with her time until tomorrow morning at 9. How nice it would be to read until she was sleepy, and then to dream in that wonderful old bed with the great ruffled linen pillows!

But when the tray had been taken away there began to be strange, little creepy sounds behind the wainscoting, sounds like light, hurrying footfalls, rustling of stiff silk, tappings of unseen fingers. Only mice of course, beginning their night revels; Elspeth knew that, and she was not afraid. Still, she had to tell herself again and again that she rather liked the queer noises, that they were companionable, here in this isolated room, where no sounds of human life save her own could come.

She read, fitfully, until a soft-voiced clock on the narrow mantel over the big fireplace had struck 11, and it was nearly 12 before she had cuddled into the great bed in the alcove. Lying there between the cool linen sheets, the girl felt very widewake, though after the long, exciting day she had passed, sleep ought to have come quickly. She had left the glass doors pushed wide open, and the alcove which she faced as she lay was white with the light of a late rising moon.

"I'm glad I don't believe in ghosts!" she said to herself. "Oh such a night"—— The sentence broke off short in Elspeth's thoughts, and her heart gave a leap. Just behind her head there was a new sound, which neither mice nor rats could have made, a queer, metallic sound, like the clinking of a chain or a jingling of keys one against another. Once and again it came; then, the top of a high heel on a stone stair.

The girl's blood knocked at her temples. She sat up in bed and listened through the thick beating in her ears. The sound was fainter now, as if farther away. With hands that shook a little she found the candle and matches on a small table by the bedside, and struck a light which glowed small and yellow in the white moonhaze.

All was still now, as she waited, and the impression she had had of something strange and horrifying began to fade. She must have imagined the jingling, and the tap, tap of little heels. It was well known that mice could make all kinds of extraordinary noises, scuttling about in a hollow space between the wainscoting and the actual wall of the tower, a glorious playground for the mouse tribe. How stupid she was to have a fright, she who had boasted of her courage, and said that she "hoped the tower was haunted!" Now, she would blow out the candle and force herself to sleep, or she would not be at her best to begin work tomorrow morning.

Down she flung herself among the big pillows again, but scarcely had she begun conscientiously to count sheep jumping over a gate, when a soft, heavy weight brushed against the wall which was one with the head of the bed. A faint cry followed, sounding as if it came from somewhere above, and again the tap, tap, tap of the heels.

Elspeth did not sit up in bed this time. She lay still as if frozen, her eyes staring wide, her ears strained to catch a troubled murmur of voices. It was as if a man and woman talked together, and then came footsteps mingled with the metallic clinking in which the girl had tried to disbelieve.

She no longer struggled to be brave. Cold and shaking with terror she sprang out of bed, and ran, pattering on her bare feet, out into the tower room.

There in the moonlight which filtered through the two windows left uncurtained, she could see the objects which had already become familiar to her eyes. Somehow, they were a comfort, suggesting as they did the details of life, soon to be her everyday life.

"Nonsense—nonsense — nonsense!" she repeated angrily, half aloud, glad to hear the sound of her own voice, "it's nothing. What could it be unless I dreamed it? Oh, why can't I get this lamp lighted?"

Soon she had the rosy glow shining through the fleecy silk of the lamp shade, but not satisfied with that, she must have all the candles as well. The light was like a friend. She could think now, ask herself questions, and answer reasonably. What had the housekeeper told her? That she would be alone in the tower at night. In a room on the ground floor, the hotel carpenter worked by day; in the room above that, furniture and luggage were stored. Next, came her own floor, and over it—what? Mrs. Warden's explanations had gone no further; but Elspeth had noticed that the newly restored, winding staircase ended outside her room. The way beyond was blocked up with brick, therefore there could have been no voices, no footsteps, no tapping of heels. She must have dreamed the sounds. Besides, even if the staircase leading to the floor above were not obstructed, the walls were far too thick for noises such as she had fancied to penetrate to her room; and, at all events, that alcove where the bed stood was not a place people would pass in going up the stairs. But—if there were such things as ghosts, after all?

No, she would not let her thoughts turn that way. If she did—if she once indulged herself in such foolishness, there would be no end to the peace and pleasure in this tower room, to which she had looked forward. She would be sensible, but there was no use in going back to bed, until she should feel sleepy. She would grow more and more nervous lying there, imagining stupid things. Just for this one night she would allow herself to sit up and read, and tomorrow she would probably find out some perfectly simple explanation of the sounds which had seemed so ghostly. She would explore a little, and understand her surroundings thoroughly, before another night should fall.

She took up the volume of Scott which she had begun to read at dinner, but, as if to prove that she was not mistress of her nerves, she started so sharply at the noise of a scampering rat behind the wainscot, that the book fell to the floor. It lay open, on its face, and a square bit of blank paper escaped from some hiding place among the yellow, musty-smelling pages.

Elspeth picked up the scrap, and after all it was not blank. Upon the side which had lain next the floor, some one had sketched the face of a young boy. The penciled lines had faded, the paper was the color of old ivory, and the collar and tie suggested by a few light strokes were of quaint fashion. But the face was strikingly handsome, and so individual as to convince Elspeth that as a likeness the little sketch must have been a success. In one corner there were initials, and a date, but they had been blurred either deliberately or by accident, and Elspeth held the paper close to the light without being able to decipher them. Suddenly as she studied the faint lettering, something seemed to fall from above, past her eyes—something swift and small, from which the light struck a gleam as if from a ruby, and at the same instant the ruby was shattered in a red splash upon the sketch.

With a cry Elspeth sprang to her feet, still mechanically holding the bit of paper. The pictured face of the boy was stained red; there was a red liquid smear on her thumb and finger, and as she stared, horrified, dumfounded, again there was a swift, ruby flash before her eyes.

CHAPTER III.

A Mystery at Midnight.

Instantly the words of the housekeeper leaped into the girl's mind. The bell! The bell by which she could summon the night porter—where was it? Ah, she remembered, and almost as quickly as the thought had flashed into her mind, her finger was hovering over the electric button.

A second more, and the summons would have gone flashing over the wire; but something seemed to restrain Elspeth's hand, as if it had been seized and forcibly held back. "No!" she said, half aloud, "I won't do it." And with great force of self-control, she turned her back on the bell, which meant help and human companionship, if she chose to have it.

"Very likely they have had the same kind of trouble here before with their secretaries," the girl thought. "Mr. McGowan told me the one from the neighborhood whom they had had before couldn't manage the work, but I'm sure he looked odd when he said it, and perhaps there was more behind. Probably they're expecting me to make a fuss of some sort, though I don't come from the neighborhood, and am not supposed to have heard the story of this Tower, whatever it is. Maybe the other girl knew it beforehand. But it doesn't matter. I won't make a fuss! I boasted that I was brave, and I'm going to stand it somehow, if it kills me. It can't be ghosts; ghosts don't have blood. The chances are that some one tonight has been playing a horrid trick on me. Well, they shan't get any satisfaction from it! I'm going to stop on here, and in this room, if I have to stay awake all night, and work all day, every day, till whoever it is gets tired."

This forceful determination poured courage into Elspeth's chilled veins, as if she had been drinking strong wine. Instead of completing the havoc already made in her spirit by terror, as for a few seconds it had threatened to do, the fall of ruddy drops from the ceiling had undone the work of the strange sounds behind the walls. The girl was even calm enough now to regret the damage to the sketch she had found in the old volume of Scott, and to attempt repairing it by pouring a stream of water over the paper while the red spot was fresh and wet. In spite of her efforts, however, a stain was left, but the vivid red was changed to a pale pink, which gave an effect as if the smiling face of the boy had been washed over with a faint flesh color. The penciled lines, faded before, were still more faded by the application of water; still, they were not obliterated, and Elspeth was vaguely glad. She did not know who the boy had been; if he lived, he must be an elderly man now, judging by the fashion of his dress; she would probably never learn anything more of his story, even if it had been worth hearing. Nevertheless, she was interested, and said to herself that, as she was apparently connected in some distant way with the Lochrain family, through her father's people, the Deans, the boy of the sketch was perhaps a cousin of hers, far removed. This house had always been the home of the Lochrains until lately, when it had been bought for an hotel, and as everything in it, furniture, books and pictures, had been the property of the Lochrains, it was likely that the boy was a member of the family.

"I'll be worthy of their blood, if it's really in my veins," Elspeth thought, "and I won't be a coward in their house."

As if for a reward of courage, no further sounds came, and no more of those ruby drops fell from the ceiling. Had it not been for the pink stain on the sketch the girl might have begun to fancy by and by that it had all been a bad dream; but the practical side of her nature was in the ascendant now, and she did not fancy that. She realized, and acknowledged to herself that she meant sooner or later to have an explanation of everything that had happened.

"I will find out for myself if I can, without confiding in anybody," she decided.

The one thing the girl could not do, however, was to go back to bed. She sat up in her dressing gown until moonlight faded into dawn. Then, when the Tower room was gray with morning light, she lay down and actually went to sleep.

It was after 7 o'clock when she waked, and she had scarcely more than three hours of rest. Nevertheless, she felt well and strangely buoyant, helped by excitement to go through whatever new experiences might be in store for her.

The first thing she did was to look carefully at the ceiling for any trace of red stain, but nothing was visible, though the early sunshine was pouring in through an east window. There was, however, a wide crack in one of the dark oak beams which crossed the ceiling, at exactly the spot, so far as she could calculate, whence the ruby-like drops had fallen, splashing down on to the sketch. But many more red drops might have come through such a crack in the black wood without leaving a visible mark. If she were to find out the mystery it would not be in such an obvious way as by a crimson stain on the ceiling.

Elspeth bathed and dressed quickly, and was almost ready to go down when the servant, who had brought her dinner in the evening, knocked at the door, with an attractive looking breakfast tray. A delicious fragrance of tea, crisply fried bacon and toast, greeted her nostrils refreshingly, and she was more than ever glad, as the pleasant commonplaceness of everyday life seemed to come in at the door behind an atmosphere, that she had not called any one to her rescue in the night. If she had, by this time the news would have spread over the hotel, and every servant would know that "the new secretary had had a fright."

Even as it was, she thought the waiter looked at her with a furtive interest. It was as if he were expecting something. "I hope you rested well, miss," he said civilly, and Elspeth, thanking him, answered with serene cheerfulness that she had never been better in her life than she was this morning. The best of it was that it was perfectly true. The girl felt ready for anything.

As soon as she had finished her breakfast, she started to thread her way to Mr. McGowan's room, but she had not yet "got her bearings" in this immense and rambling old house, and to reach the place she wished to find was easier said than done. After some wandering, she came out through a corridor into a square hall of considerable size, which she was sure she had not seen before. However, there was the stairway, which descended in the middle, and rather than retrace her steps, perhaps to be lost again, she decided that it would be better to go down. On the floor below she would probably meet servants of the hotel, who would put her in the right way.

There were, however, several ladies standing in a group on the third or fourth step. Elspeth waited for a moment at a distance, thinking that they would go up or down; then, seeing that they did not move, and that the stairway was very broad, she thought that she might pass without disturbing them. She moved forward rather timidly, conscious that she was a paid employe, and that it would be a grave offence for one in her position to discommode guests. Drawing nearer, she saw that one of the three ladies was the beautiful young girl with whom she had travelled up from London yesterday. This morning she wore a short, white serge dress, with dainty white shoes, and hat on a hat, therefore she was presumably just going out, or had just come in, early as it was.

(To be Continued.)

"I beg your pardon, may I come in?"

IN TOWN IN SEARCH OF WIFE

John Barnett, of Jerusalem Queens Co., Says She Left Home Under Strange Circumstances.

John Barnett, of Jerusalem, Queens county, was in the city Wednesday seeking information as to the whereabouts of his wife, Mrs. Alice Maud Barnett, who, he says, accompanied by their 15-year-old daughter, Emma Hazel, left her home unknown to him last Monday week and came to St. John. Mr. Barnett is left with four young children and is anxious for his wife and daughter to return.

Speaking to a Telegraph reporter Mr. Barnett, who evidently felt his position keenly, said he could offer no explanation for his wife's strange action. On the day she left she had taken a team, as he thought, to visit a family a short distance from his home and when she did not return he supposed she had gone to another place where she was accustomed to help with house cleaning. It was three or four days before he knew that she had driven twelve miles to Welsford and taken the train for St. John.

On making a search in the house, Mr. Barnett said he found that $40 had been taken from a drawer. "It was all the money I had," he added, "and I had to borrow to pay my fare to come down today."

He said he was told later by the man who brought back the team that Mrs. Barnett said she wanted the money to hire a room. On making enquiries the husband learned that his missing wife had been seen in St. John, where she has friends, on Tuesday of this week and that brought him to the city. Mr. Barnett was anxious to have both his wife and daughter home again. He did not like the idea, he said, of the girl being in St. John and he wanted his wife to come back and look after the children. In reply to a question he mentioned that he was a farmer and had deeded the farm to his wife as a means of support for the children. All he wanted was to meet his wife and clear up the mystery.

Mrs. Barnett is said to be about forty years old with her hair going grey. Mr. Barnett gave his age as sixty-three. He hoped his wife would find out he was looking for her and with their daughter return home.

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