

"To lose?" I queried.

"Yes," returned my friend, "to lose, for she is to be married to a worthy young fellow in the village yonder"—he pointed towards Murdstone—"to whom she has been engaged for a year past."

I commiserated, and told him of my own prospective happiness. He congratulated me heartily, and hoped that now I was returned to England I should speedily become re-acclimatised, and not again risk my life by yielding to the cold in—of all places—a railway carriage.

"Doctor," said I at this, "do you believe in ghosts?"

"Ghosts!" He stopped suddenly in the middle of the road and stared at me as if I were the sphinx. "Ghosts! No. What a question! Surely *you* don't!"

"I didn't till this very night," I replied, solemnly; "but if ever a man on this earth had a ghostly visitation that man is certainly I."

Then I told him—I felt I *must* do so—of what I had seen. I described minutely the appearance of the murderer in the churchyard, and gave so faithful a description of his victim that my friend was strangely and painfully affected. I repeated every word of the conversation I had heard between the two, and accompanied my remarks with a pantomimic reproduction of the manner in which the assassin had seized his helpless victim by the throat and forced her, dying, to the ground. When I had finished I felt, rather than saw, that the doctor had grown ghastly pale.

"I cannot," he said, hurriedly, "tell what to make of it, nor how very nearly your vivid description of the poor girl affects me. Your words carry so much conviction with them that I am disposed to think, with you, that there is vastly more in the story than appears on the face of it. Still, it may be, after all, only the result of reading sensational literature. The girl was young, you said?" he added, musingly.

"About eighteen or nineteen, at most," I answered.

"And fair?"

"Very fair. She had a peculiarity which I distinctly recall, and that was the measured and dignified way in which she spoke—a not usual thing in one of her age."

We parted presently at the bifurcation of the road, the doctor vainly pressing me to discontinue the journey and remain at his

house, close by, till the following morning. However, we should meet again, he said, on Christmas morning at Murdstone Church, where, by a coincidence, I and my Amy, and his daughter and her betrothed were to be united at the same time. He half suspected, he continued, that his daughter was already acquainted with my future wife, which would certainly make our next meeting the pleasanter. We separated with great heartiness on either side, and with a lighter heart I set forth to finish my journey.

I had still a good three and a-half miles in front of me. The way was dark, notwithstanding the whiteness of the snow; but I knew there were bright fires and brighter smiles at my journey's end, and strode forward as smartly as the heavy nature of the road permitted me. To make matters the more disagreeable, the snow recommenced falling very heavily; and although I felt pretty sure of the road, there were moments when I began to have grave doubts as to whether, after all, I should reach my destination that night or not. Twice or thrice, as I blundered on through the blinding flakes, I stumbled and fell; and it was only with extreme difficulty once that I managed to extricate myself from a snow-filled quarry by the wayside.

How long it took me to perform that journey I never knew—it seemed days to me. I lost the road completely, but gained some consolation from hearing a church bell near at hand give out the midnight hour. I guessed—and, as it proved, rightly—the bell to be that of Murdstone Church—the church in which, very soon now, I was to call Amy wife.

There was something unutterably weird and awful in the tolling of those dozen strokes which, far from allaying the disquieting effects from which I still suffered, filled me with a vague dread which, even now, I can scarcely recall without shuddering.

I grasped my trusty knobkerrie and pushed on. Whether I had dreamed a dream or seen a vision that night, I mused, mattered very little. One thing was certain—that if I lived for a century the feeling of horror I had experienced during the visitation would never cease to be remembered. Such another experience as that would certainly—

My God! What was that?

I felt my flesh quiver as if I had come in contact with the Evil One; each single hair upon my head started and stood erect as if