

seemed to me, should be treated with respect, if not with awe. On one occasion I felt obliged to expostulate.

"Why, Aunt Cameron," exclaimed Hilda, laughing, "I am almost sure you believe in the ghost!"

Cecily took the matter more seriously, and agreed with me that too much fun had been made. After that, it was a favorite joke of Hilda's to tell her friends confidentially that her aunt and Cecily believed in old Vallyer's re-appearance.

Weeks passed away, during which we saw nothing, and the winter set in. A young nephew of mine, and cousin of my nieces, came to spend some days with us; chiefly, I believe, on account of the skating. His arrival made Hilda and Cecily think it high time to make a little return for the kindness and hospitality which had been shown to us; or, rather, to induce me to think it. I let myself be persuaded, and cards went out for a small evening party.

The evening of the party arrived, and brought our guests. Sixteen in all, including our own young people; I made the seventeenth. The time passed pleasantly, and lastly dancing was introduced. They had had a few quadrilles, when one gentleman had to leave, to catch a midnight train: and a double set of lancers was formed after his departure, one was lacking to make it up. There were only fifteen. You may think it strange I should enter into such particulars, but you will see.

"You must do double duty, Leonard," I said.

"No, aunt," exclaimed Hilda, with a saucy smile. "You shall invite old Mr. Vallyer to join us. I wish he would!"

All laughed; and then our neighbor, Mrs. Goldsmith, a tall, handsome woman, called out that she had no objection to dance with the old gentleman—should like to. "See, here he is!" she went on, making a bow to the sofa cushion in her careless merriment, and taking it up in her arms. "You are not accustomed to dancing, sir, we will go to the side. Now let us begin."

I had been so used to playing dance music, that I did it quite mechanically, often turning half round on the music stool to watch the dancers while my fingers were busy. My nieces were fine-looking girls, and I liked to follow Hilda's striking figure and Cecily's quiet grace as they moved through the mazes of the dance. After striking up the first inspiring chords of the Lancers, I turned to see how Mrs. Goldsmith was getting on with her "partner." She stood opposite to Cecily and young Kirby, a rising engineer, with whom she was dancing. Hilda and Leonard were at the bottom of the set.

There was a good deal of laughing at the cushion at first, but it soon subsided, and I was glad of it, for I had fatigued myself much in preparing for our little entertainment; my head ached now, and the mirth jarred upon my nerves. I began to feel in that stage of weariness when voices sound far off; when the hands work on at what ever occupies them, without help from the brain; when the thoughts roam away and the eyes sees things mistily. It suddenly struck me that the room was growing very cold. Just as Mrs. Goldsmith was passing me, cushion in arm, I felt a shiver.

"Ten degrees below freezing point last night, and colder to-night," I thought to myself. "What shall we come to?"

Turning round again to look at the dancing, I noticed how very pale they appeared, and how singularly quiet. Why had they ceased talking? As Cecily glided past me, I was struck by her face. It was white as marble, and her blue eyes

were strangely distended and fixed with a puzzled kind of fascination on Mrs. Goldsmith. Mine followed them. That lady was moving through the figure in her stately manner, the cushion still in her arms, and a fixed smile on her lips; and by her side—now, was it an overwrought brain or was I dreaming? Surely the latter, for I felt no surprise, no alarm—*there danced by her side a little old man!*

This old man was dressed in a long grey coat, with a little cape, and a white spotted neckerchief loosely tied, and he carried a thick stick in his hand. He danced in an old-world fashion, executing his steps with great precision, and making formal bows to his partner and the rest of the company. Just then Mrs. Goldsmith laid the cushion back on the sofa; shivering apparently with cold, she took up a scarf, and wrapped it closely round her, dancing all the time. It was now the grand chain in the last figure, and for a moment or two I lost sight of the old man. Suddenly there was a wild scream—the dance stopped—Cecily had fainted!

A medical man, Mr. Brook, was the party. He attributed Cecily's attack to the intense coldness of the weather, and to the morning's skating, when



she must have over-fatigued herself. The depression most of them had felt during the last set of quadrilles he put down to the same cause—unusual cold.

Cecily continued very poorly the following day. She confided to me privately her extraordinary impressions of the previous evening. I found them to be similar to my own; but I mentioned nothing to her about myself, and laughed a little.

"But I did see the old man, Aunt Cameron," she persisted. "He was by Mrs. Goldsmith's side."

I would not listen. On the contrary, I treated the matter entirely from a common-sense point of view; endeavoring to persuade her that the whole thing was due to an overwrought imagination.

Cecily tried to take up my view of the case. We agreed not to mention the matter to Hilda, or anyone else.

"Please, Mr. Cameron, you are wanted," said Martha to my nephew, interrupting us that same evening when we were all sitting together, young Kirby, the engineer, being with us.

"Who is it?" cried Leonard.

"Will you please come out, sir: he won't give any name."

Leonard went out. He came back in a minute

or two, and beckoned to Kirby, who was playing chess with Hilda.

"It's nothing," he said, as we all started up. "Only Martha has been frightened at some one standing at the back door and then going away without speaking. We'll go round the garden to make sure no tramps are about."

I left the room myself, thinking of tramps, and of nothing else. The cottage was so low and so covered by fruit trees and trellis, that it would have been a very easy matter to climb into the bed-rooms. My window, just over the porch, had especial facilities that way, and I went up to it. Opening the lattice very gently, I concealed myself behind the curtain and looked out. The moon was bright. The voices of the two young men reached me from below.

"It's queer, Kirby—after all the talk, you know. Martha says she opened the door to get some wood, and there the old man stood. She thought it was a real tramp, mind you, and she did not like his staring in her face and never speaking. I am sure I saw him; he was going round towards the orchard."

"Very odd!" replied young Kirby. "I saw him too. He was leaning over the front gate."

"And, by Jove, there he is now!"

"Where?"

"At the gate."

"I don't see him!"

"Nor do I now—he's gone."

Yes, there was no mistake; I saw him too from my window; the old man leaning on his stick at the gate, where he used to stand so often in life. Presently the two young men came in, and I went down.

"Have you seen any tramp, Leonard?"

"No, aunt. Not a tramp."

"What then? Anything?"

"A little old man leaning on a stick."

"I saw him too, Mrs. Cameron," added Mr. Kirby.

"We had better say nothing to the girls," whispered Leonard.

"No, nor to anyone else, Leonard. The whole place would be astir."

"What—on account of old Vallyer?"

I nodded. Just then the girls came running out.

"What a long time you have been! Have you found him?"

"Of course not," Leonard replied.

"He had got clear off: those tramps are cunning. Let us have supper—it's awfully cold!"

This second little episode put me very much out of conceit with my pretty cottage. My nieces had a pressing invitation from Leonard's mother, and were to return with him to London. I thought I would go away somewhere too.

It was the afternoon of the day before Leonard and they were to leave. We had had one heavy fall of snow, and the air was again thick with the feathery flakes. Strangely depressed, both mentally and bodily, I stood alone at the window and looked out over the valley, which lay so still under its great white shroud. At last Cecily came in and stood by me.

"You will be very lonely, aunt, after we are gone."

"Ay." And then we stood in silence.

Suddenly the girl laid her hand on my arm, as though to attract my attention. A chilly draught of wind seemed to blow through the room, raising the hair off my forehead with a pricking sensation.

A feeble, bent figure, leaning heavily on a stick, passed slowly and silently from the door to the other window. A coal falling in the grate, the flame flickered up, showing distinctly the old man whom I had twice before seen!

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