

an hour and a half before twelve, and we must keep awake somehow."

"I don't know that I have any lead. There's the shot in my riding skirt, but it would take too long to melt that."

Lucy mused. "We might scrape off a little from the outside. Anything for fun. Where is the skirt?"

"In the closet. Ah!"

"What is it?" and Lucy faced round in surprise on her way to the wardrobe.

"Nothing. I fancied I saw some one moving down there in the shadows. It was only fancy," she finished, turning away.

"How do you know it was fancy? Suppose—"

"Lucy, for the second time I beg you not to be a goose! I could imagine I saw fifty people if I stared into the dark long enough. Rip the shot out of the skirt, and we'll go down to the kitchen."

To the kitchen they forthwith repaired, each carrying a lighted candle, and each with a ball of lead in her pocket; nor had Lucy forgotten her hand-glass. Half way down the great staircase Bertha paused to laugh at the ridiculousness of their proceedings. Not so Lucy. Hurrying through the dark halls with cheeks as white as the shawl she wore, she rushed into the kitchen and hastily lighted the gas.

"Hurry and shut the door, Bertha. Is everything locked up down here?" with an apprehensive glance at the dusky corners of the room.

"I suppose so. I have the keys of the outer doors in my pocket. Why, Lucy, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. It seems so unnaturally still after the wind. I thought I heard a noise in that recess under the stairs."

Her sister laughed again as she extinguished the candles and examined the fire in the range.

"It was one of the future husbands, of course, Lucy. Do hunt up an iron spoon and get a basin of cold water while I try to scrape this lead."

Lucy presently forgot everything in her interest in the lead experiment. After tedious scrapings she managed to melt the mineral in a spoon, and dropped it into water, where it immediately hardened into incomprehensible shapes.

"Those are fishes and crowns. You're going to see low and high life, Lucy. You'll espouse a fisherman and a king."

"Don't be foolish. I'll try again."

Again and again she did try with no better success. But when Bertha, in her turn, dropped the lead, there was a cry of surprise from both girls. The rude semblance of a musket lay in the water. Bertha fished it out with a laugh.

"Fate speaks. I'm to marry the son of a gun."

"Try again, Bertha. Let's see if it comes again."

Bertha complied. This time it was certainly no musket. It was a nondescript appearance, three-cornered and pointed.

"A soldier's cap!" cried Lucy with a little scream of delight. "A soldier's cap with a plume! What makes your cheeks so red, Bertha?"

"The fire, I suppose," was the cool answer, as Bertha arose and shook out her silken skirts.

"And not the thought of our friend Colonel Dudley?"

"Lucy, you're positively ridiculous," but this time there was no doubt about her blushing. "See," she went on, hastily, "it's getting near twelve. Are you going down cellar?"

Lucy's cheek grew a shade paler. The speaker had walked over to a door in a dim corner and thrown it wide.

"Are you going in the east parlor?"

"I suppose I am. I must find an apple somewhere."

"You've forgotten the key. It's upstairs."

"That's true; but the lock on the east parlor door is broken. I spoke to papa, but he said it was no matter. Here are some apples," she continued, emerging from a closet. "Now my soldier will have a chance to appear. Do I say over anything to myself

while I eat the apple?—any incantation?"

"No; you just eat, and begin at the first stroke of twelve."

"And I see somebody looking over my shoulder. I'm afraid he'll have horns, Lucy."

The one addressed uttered a little cry of terror.

"Oh, Bertha, I'm scared to death now. I'll never dare go into the cellar. Let's give it up and go to bed."

"What a little coward! Lucy, there's no such thing as a ghost. There's nothing in the cellar—only it's dark."

Lucy only looked shudderingly down the black stairway. "I don't know what makes me so nervous. If I should see anything—"

"Suppose you go to the east parlor, and let me go down there?"

"Go through those halls into that great ghostly room? Never!"

"Well, as I said before, you're a little coward," remarked her sister,

to the east parlor. As she stood there the old clock gave warning of twelve; so she threw the door wide and went in.

It was, as Lucy had said, a great, ghostly room. Everything in it was black and massive; heavy curtains fell before the lofty windows; dim pictures of ancestors and ancestresses started out of the gloom like phantoms as the candle's flickering rays penetrated the gloom. Two great mirrors were set in the wall opposite each other. The chill air of the room made the new-comer shiver as she walked round a high black cabinet, set down her candle on the slab before the nearest mirror, and felt in her pocket for the apple.

"I wonder if any of

"These knights and these dames

Come down from their frames?"

and walk the house at the witching hour of midnight?" Bertha soliloquized, surveying the portrait of a bewig-

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scornfully. "Sit down here by the fire then, and wait for me."

"Oh, Bertha, don't go! Suppose you should see something terrible!" moaned superstitious Lucy.

"Lucy, I'm surprised at you. There's my future husband waiting under the stairs. You heard him, you know. He'll come out and follow me to the east parlor, and I shall see how he looks." And Bertha, who seemed possessed by the very spirit of mischief, laughed heartily, as her sister covered her face with a cry. "Just let me see the thing through. I'll be back soon." And shutting the door at the last word, she commenced her pilgrimage through the halls, feeling so completely indifferent to the ghostly influences of the time and occasion that she even hummed a tune as she went.

White squares of moonlight lay on the floor and walls opposite the great windows when she came into the main hall, and passing along to the front, paused for a moment at the entrance

of old gentleman in a flowered silk doublet, who seemed to be eyeing her with interest from the wall behind.

A healthy disbelief in the supernatural is an excellent steadier of the nerves. Not many young ladies would have commenced eating as coolly as Bertha did when the first stroke of twelve rang through the house. She was rather ashamed of the silliness of the proceeding and laughed at her own reflection, standing in modern furbelowed dress, apple in hand, beneath those ancient pictures.

Three, four, five, six. Still no stir, no appearance. Still her eyes vainly explored the shadowy space behind her, doubly reflected in the twin mirrors. "Look over your right shoulder all the time," Lucy had said. What was it that at the stroke of seven suddenly drew her gaze, as by magnetic attraction, to the left, and gave her a curious, uneasy sensation as of someone watching her, or of another presence in the room? There was nothing in the parlor. Ah! but in the

glass behind her was mirrored the door through which she had come. It was hidden from her as she stood by the bulky black cabinet; but in the mirror's depth she saw plainly a crouching form appear for an instant in the gloom of that doorway, and an ugly, sinister face look in. Another instant and it was gone; and Bertha's heart seemed to stop beating, and the apple fell to the floor.

It was a wonder she did not scream in her first surprise. She was not afraid of the dead, but she certainly was of the living, and the shock caused by that momentary glance made her faint and cold with terror. Mechanically she picked up the apple. No ghost could have been whiter than she as she faced the mirror again.

How much thinking can be done in a second! It seemed to Bertha that an age was compressed into the time occupied by the last four strokes of twelve. The first glance had shown her the whole peril of the situation. Two girls and a helpless old man in a lonely house two miles from a village, and at least one from the nearest neighbor! One robber already in the house, probably another outside—for she leaped at once to the conclusion that she had really seen a figure lurking in the shrubbery. How many more might be about she dared not think, but that the one in the house had just followed her she had no doubt. She shuddered at the remembrance of her own light words uttered not ten minutes ago: "He will follow me to the east parlor, and I shall see how he looks."

What was to be done? There were no firearms in the house but her father's pistols, and she doubted if these were in a condition to use, for Mr. Morris's careless, improvident security was too well known to his family. Her father asleep above with unlocked doors—scarcely an inner lock in the house was in order—Lucy waiting for her sister in the kitchen (she would not dare give her sister any hint of the fearful discovery). What a position! Would the burglars be satisfied with the silver below stairs? No, surely; there was jewelry and money to tempt them in the chambers. And if her father were aroused, as he was sure to be, there might be murder as well as robbery. Oh, what should she do? And how should she go through the halls again with that uncanny follower, who no doubt had been listening grimly to all their nonsense in the kitchen about Hallow-eve magic?

It was all she could do to keep up an appearance of indifference as she closed the east parlor door and began to retrace her steps. It seemed as if that crouching figure was ready to spring at her from every shadowy corner. Still, she compelled herself to move slowly, and even to go on eating the apple. Anything was better than to excite suspicion. When she came opposite the dark recess under the stairs, she dared not glance that way; but listening as she passed, with hearing quickened with apprehension, she was certain she heard a stealthy movement. Again it required an effort to control the impulse to run and scream. She did close the kitchen door rather hastily, and came into Lucy's presence with a face so different from the one with which she left it that the latter exclaimed:

"Oh, Bertha! you're white as a sheet!"

"White? Nonsense! I'm only cold. The room was like a tomb."

"Bertha!—Lucy's voice dropped to an awe-stricken whisper—"did you see anything?"

"I saw all I expected to see—the walls and furniture. I didn't see anything else," was the unnecessarily loud reply.

"You didn't? Oh dear!" said inconsistent Lucy. "Well, then, let's go to bed."

"Don't go just yet," Bertha said, feeling that she must gain time somehow.

"I must, I'm dreadfully worn out."

"Well, then, you'll have to go alone. I shall stay up a while."