HOW HE WON HIS BRIDE.

BY GEORGE HEPWORTH.

CHAPTER III.

"When I say lingered about three months in the city I don't mean to imply that I neglected the business in hand. The city was my headquarters, and I made six or eight flying visits to the village and the old homestead.

"One day Mrs. Grink said, as though she were raking among reminiscences:—

"'I can't quite understand why that house should be haunted. My husband Frank was one of the best-natured men in the world and hadn't an enemy either in this world or the other one. That a malignant spirit should hang round that once happy home, where no scandal ever grew, is beyond my comprehension. Sometimes I have a suspicion that it isn't a ghost, after all.'

"Then I took a sudden resolution. I was almost startled by the force with which it entered my mind. Like a robber, it seemed to break the door down as it came in.

"'I have it!' I cried. 'I'm going to spend a night in that house.'

"Louise, I noticed, looked at me with a startled glance, and, as nearly as I could discover in the dim light, her cheeks were pale. That was the first consciousness I had that she regarded me as anything more than a casual acquaintance.

"'Yes,' I said, 'I'll take the morning train, and to-morrow night I'll knock that ghost out or he shall knock me out.'

"The ladies tried to dissuade me, but, clearly, it was the manly thing to do, and I was bound to do it. In the first place, I wanted the house for my mother and sister, and, in the second place, the mystery had a fascination for me.

"Before I started on this eccentric mission, I managed to get Louise alone and bluntly told her I loved her and wanted to make her my wife. You haven't had that experience yet, Paul; or perhaps, you young rogue, you have had it, and it's locked up in the safety deposit as a secret."

"No," answered Paul; "the net in which the fowler is to catch the bird has not yet been woven. When it is, I shall not be refused as you were, my boy."

"How do you know I was refused?"

"By your voice and by a certain presentiment I have."

"You are right, old fellow. I was refused."

"On what grounds, pray? I always thought you worth having. A girl must be mighty particular to refuse a good-looking fellow like you with ten thousand a year."

"Well, she said plainly that it was all on account of the ghost."

"What, in Heaven's name, had the ghost to do with it? That must have been a ruse."

"No, it wasn't; and the ground she took did her great honor, I think."

"Humph!"

"Yes. She said that if the house was haunted, it must be by her father's spirit. She didn't know any reason why he could not rest in the grave, but if he was not, it must be because he had done something which neither her mother nor she knew anything about. Possibly he had committed some wrong and was anxious to have it righted. She admitted that she loved me, and that, under other circumstances, she would give me both her hand and her heart. But, she added, the family name was all she had to offer, and until that had been relieved from suspicion, she couldn't think of allowing me to go any further. Wasn't that pretty high ground to take, Paul?"

"Yes, it was, Jack. 'So shines a good deed in a naughty world.' Ten thousand in sight, and she hesitated to accept it. That girl ought to be preserved in amber as the only one of the kind in existence."

"Then you can understand why I was impatient to interview that ghost. A good deal depended on it, you see."

Paul smiled and nodded, at the same time puffing a great cloud of smoke to the ceiling.

"The next afternoon I went by Stephen Cogg's house on my way to the new place. He was sitting on the veranda and hailed me. There was something about the felow I didn't like. He had a great, bushy head like a lion's, and his eyes were so deep set under overhanging brows that you had to look twice before you could see them, and then you discovered they were full of fire and cunning. 'Coggs wants that land' was the first thought that flashed into my mind, and I can't tell why, but that fact seemed to have some connection with the ghost.

"'Going to take another look at the Grink estate?' he asked.

"'Yes,' I answered, 'I thought I would.'

"'Haven't given it up, then?'

"'Not quite,' I replied, 'and I don't think I shall yet awhile. I always did like haunted houses, and I propose to spend the night there.'

"'So, so,' he said, 'You are rather rash, arn't you? Don't reckon your life of much account, perhaps?'

"'Well,' I said, 'I like the situation, and I'm going to have a little talk with the ghost and see if I can't arrange matters amicably.'

"With that he wished me a pleasant time, and I went on.

"The old woman, that is the relict of the Egyptian mummy, gave me a welcome that was not entirely cordial. She emitted a series of grunts like an asthmatic trombone, but made up a very decent bed in the second-story front. I had an oil-lamp, a couple of novelettes, some choice cigars and a good deal of curiosity. The moon managed to get up light enough to give everything a ghostly look, and I sat until eleven, wondering whether I should live till morning, and if I did, what kind of a story I should have to tell, and then deliberately undressed."

"Deliberately, eh?" cried Paul. "You didn't jump into bed and pull the covers up over your face, then?"

"No, because, don't you see, I had letters of introduction to the stranger from beyonnd the grave, and wanted to deliver them. The sooner the circus began, the sooner it would be over. I didn't drop asleep, however, for a full hour; nerves a little excited, I suppose; but before twelve I was in the land of Nod.

"I think it was the shuffling of feet that roused me. I had an impression that the room was uncomfortably full of people, and that they were having high carnival. When I got my eyes well opened, I could discover only one rather undersized goblin, who was dressed in black, and had a huge hump on his back. For about two seconds there was gooseflesh all over me, and three or four cold shivers chased each other up and down my spinal column. After that I got my second wind, and proceeded to business. The goblin apparently came through the blank wall, scuttled over the bare boards in what seemed to be wooden shoes and disappeared through the blank wall on the other side. That rather startled me. However, I was bound to have a tussle with him, and nerved myself for the task. 'If that was Mrs. Grink's husband,' I said to myself, 'he must have been a queer looking fellow. They never mentioned that he had a hump, and I don't see how he could acquire one in the grave, unless he got up in a hurry and crawled into the wrong man's body—a neighbor's perhaps.' For five minutes I lay there watching, but ready for a spring. All was deathly still, though; and I had just concluded that my fears had got the better of me, when the goblin made another rush. I broke for him, but he was too quick. I really had my hand on his shoulder when he disappeared.

"So I sat down on the edge of the bed to think. 'He came through the wall,' I said to myself, 'and he went through the wall. Then, of course, he must be a ghost. However, I'll have a look and see if he left any cracks behind him.' I lighted a candle, and the moment the flame blazed up, the confoundedest racket greeted my ears you ever heard. I was positively afraid, and there were great drops of cold perspiration on my forehead. Just think of the situation, my boy. Midnight, a few rays of moonshine, a lonely house and the Lord knows how many uncanny creatures prowling about! It was exciting, but not wholly agreeable. How would you have felt under the circumstances?"

"I shouldn't have gone there at all," answered Paul. "It was paying for the place a good deal more than it was worth."

"Well, candle in hand, I examined the room. That scoundrel of a ghost didn't come through the wall at all! The walls were of a neutral tint, and the doors were painted a darker shade of the same color. It was the same on the other side. 'Oho!' I said. 'That lets more than moonlight on the subject. When the fellow comes again, I'll collar him as sure as fate! If he must needs come through a door he's no better than I am.'

"But the racket continued. Every bell in the house, from roof to cellar, started ringing, and as they were all set to a different key, the 'jangling out of tune' was enough to split your tympanum. It continued at intervals for an hour and a half, but the goblin didn't risk another trip across the floor.

"I lay on the bed pondering until sunrise and then went out to get a breath of fresh air."

"Plucky boy!"

"Perhaps; but I had a good deal at stake, you know, to make me plucky. What I was after was the girl behind the ghost. No ghost, no girl. Under the same conditions you woud be plucky, too."

CHAPTER IV.

"The second night was a rattler. Just after twilight I again passed the house of Stephen Coggs. He was evidently watching for me, and betrayed a degree of nervousness which roused my suspicions

"'Hope you had a pleasant night, last night,' he said.

"'Not very,' I replied, 'but I got through with it.'

"'Had enough of it?' he asked.

"'Not quite,' I answered, 'and I'm going to try it once more'

"'Better not, my man,' and his eyes flashed.

"'Why shouldn't I?'

"'Well, it's not always safe to persevere in such matters. If they were mortals you had to deal with, you might come out on top; but when they are spirits, you can't tell what will happen.'

"'All right, Mr. Coggs,' I said. 'I'm in for it, and propose to see it through. I came within an ace of catching one goblin last night, and hope I'll have another chance before twelve o'clock.'

"'You take your own risks,' he said sullenly, as he turned and entered the house.

"I somehow felt in my bones that this second night would be critical. During the day I stole a few hours' sleep, and felt not only fresh but expectant. I wanted the ghosts to come, and as I have a pretty fair muscle and am reasonably cool-headed, I thought I could give them as good as they might send.

"The moon failed me; that was unfortunate, for I didn't care to spend the time in pitch darkness. One is at an awful disadvantage unless he can see. Besides that, a fellow's courage gives out unless there is a glimpse of light somewhere. I lighted a candle, therefore, and arranged a shade in front of it, which threw the rest of the room into shadow, while this particular corner had a few rays of light.

"At eleven o'clock the devilish work began. Every bell clanged as though pandemonium had been let loose; but these sounds were no longer strange, and I paid little attention to them. I was a good deal bothered, though, by a terrific rumpus in the hall. It seemed as though a regiment of soldiers were marching up and down the stairway. Of course, my imagination exaggerated matters, so you will have to take my statements with a grain of salt; but it was bad enough even when you reduce it to a last analysis. I don't think my hair stood on end, though I wouldn't like to swear to that effect; but I am willing to confess that there were moments when I found it difficult to control myself. At one point, the hobgoblin with the wooden sabots shuffled through the room. I had been balked once, and was bound that that particular spirit should have a rugged road to travel. So I made a dash, and as luck would have it, the candle shade fell as I rose and gave me all the light I needed. I got the thing by the throat, and don't believe the arch-fiend himself could have got away from me. My blood was up, fairly boiling, and I suppose my nervous excitement gave me added strength.. At any rate, the goblin twisted and writhed and uttered a lot of incoherent cries, the best he could do, perhaps, since I had my thumb on his windpipe, or where the windpipe ought to be in an ordinary native American citizen. After a pretty hard struggle, I got him on the floor with my knee on his chest. That was a supreme moment, Paul. He couldn't budge, and I was master of the situation. But I had reckoned without my host, for I suddenly heard stealthy footsteps behind me, and the next instant received a blow on the back of my head which sent me sprawling. On looking, I discovered what seemed to be an immense figure, a veritable giant, also clothed in black."

"Great Heavens!" cried Paul. "And you are alive to tell the story?"

He laid his cigar down, too interested to smoke.

"Well, this giant was making for me. My college gymnastics stood me in good stead, however, and I pulled myself together. It was evident that this was to be no boy's play, but a matter of life and death. The old adage of our boxing professor came to me—to get in the first blow is half-way to victory. Before the giant reached me, therefore, I was on him. I felt as though I weighed a ton, was all ablaze with excitement and never gave a thought to the risks I ran. My attack must have been unexpected, for, when I threw myself against my opponent's body, he reeled. That was my opportunity I made a second dash, and as the big goblin fell to the floor, the little goblin took to his heels and disappeared. Talk about raining blows! It wasn't a rain, but a pour. I got one blow on the left eye, and, as he tried to rise, I let fly another, which took him under the ear. I don't believe a sledge-hammmer could do better work than my fists did. The goblin grew groggy, was dazed, and for the first time uttered a loud cry. But I didn't let up. It occurred to me at one moment during the struggle that if this was the spirit of my dear Louise's father, I was using the old gentleman rather roughly; but I was in no mood to be trifled with even by him.

"I think it took a full half-hour to pound that goblin to the point of surrender; but at last, just as I reached for about eighteen inches of broom-handle which lay on the floor, he cried out:—

"'I've had enough!'

"The candle burned dimly, the moon had gone behind a thick bank of clouds, the rain-drops were pattering against the window-pane, and, altogether, the spectacle was not particularly agreeable. I stood over the goblin ready to brain him if he made a movement, when he turned his face to the light, and I saw—"

"What? Your Diana's father?" cried Paul.

"Not a bit of it."

"Whom, then?'

"Can't you guess?"

"No, I haven't the dimmest idea. How should I? Tell me."

"Stephen Coggs."

"No."

"True!"

"But who was the hump backed goblin, Jack?"

"The relict of the mummy."

"And do you mean that this isn't a ghost-story, after all?'

"You must draw your own conclusions, Paul. The facts seem plain enough. I need only add that Coggs wanted that farm and tried to buy it for next to nothing by this nice little bit of strategy by which he scared off all purchasers until I came on the ground.

"That is how I won my wife, Paul."

Afraid of His Own Guns.

The incident which led to the order for the extinction of the Turkish navy was as follows: A transport was bringing a number of time-expired men home, when they respectfully mutinied, and begged their officers to go below, as they wished to do something which might not be approved of. Some non-commissioned officers then took command, and anchored off the palace, and, after firing a salute, began shouting: "Long live the sultan!"

This demonstration caused immediate confusion at the palace, and various high officers were dispatched to parley with the mutineers, but they insisted on seeing the Minister, and when he at last appeared they said they knew the sultan had given the money to pay them, but that they had not received it, and they would not budge until they did.

No arguments were of any avail, and the money had to be sent for and distributed, after which the men weighed anchor with a cheer, and gave up the ship again. The sultan, however, reflected that what a transport had done peaceably a heavily-armed man-of-war might do with evil intent, and, calling Hassan Pasha to him, he declared that he wanted no more navy.—Pittsburg Dispatch.

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"Well, he was riding on the train, and they'd been in Kansas about half an hour when the train reached Coulter Junction. It had to stop there to change engines, and Milligan got out and walked up and down the platform, sizing up the town. It was the first prohibition town he'd ever seen.

"A fellow with a suit of overalls was standing on the platform. Milligan went up to him and said, 'This is Kansas, ain't it?'

"'Right you are,' this fellow says.

"'Prohibition Kansas?'

"'Yes,' this fellow says.

"'Couldn't get a drink here, I suppose?'

"'Do you want a drink?'

"'No, but I just wondered if I could get one in case I did want it.'

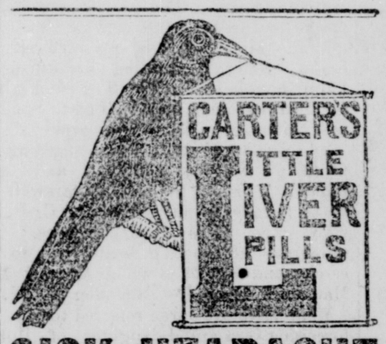
"'Say, come here.' The fellow led Milligan up to the end of the platform where they could see along the main street of the town.

"He says to Milligan, 'Do you see that two story buildin about two blocks down there—the white one with the fancy cornish?'

"'Yes,' says Milligan, 'I see it.'

"'And right across from it,' this fellow says, 'is a low kind of a buildin, with a window in the side of it.

"'Well,'' says this fellow, 'that low buildin is a millinery store. That's the only place in town where you can't get a drink.'"—Chicago Record.



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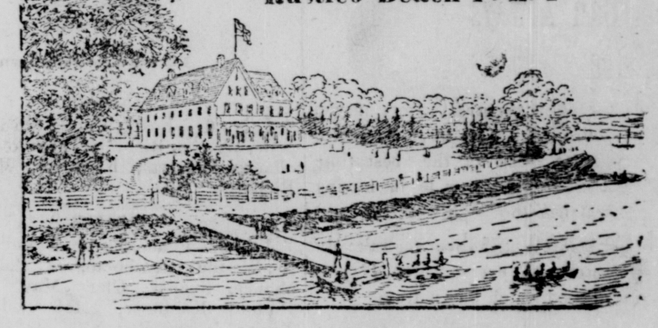

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