

'It—it said,' Green replied, his voice faltering again, "'I think I know who you are, and by to-morrow night I shall have made certain.'" And then it glided to the end of the bed and muttered, "He was only a little insignificant half-man just like this one. The wart is in the same place, too! Just on the bridge of the nose, and his glasses rested on it. How it annoyed me! Do you wear glasses?" it said, turning on me fiercely. "No, sir, thank you," I replied, as well as I could speak, "but I will if you like." "Do so at your peril. To-morrow night I shall come to warn you to prepare for your end, and the next night—you die!" He gave an empty sort of chuckle as though he were hungry, and holding up both his arms in the way you see in pictures, stalked from the room. I couldn't help thinking it strange, though, when I put my hand outside the bed-clothes some time after to get a little fresh air, that the ghost who's going to kill me to-morrow night had to lower one arm to open the door. I expected to see him walk through it. But it doesn't matter! poor Charlie declared hopelessly. "Nothing matters now. It will be Boxing Day, won't it, you chaps? And then I shall be boxed up," and he laughed mirthlessly at his own joke.

'Come, come, Green, my boy, surely you are not afraid of an alleged ghost. True,' said Sir Roger thoughtfully, 'some parts of this place do date back to the sixteenth century, and the blue room is one, but I tell you what I will do; put you in another room where Va—the ghost, I mean—cannot find you. Now, then, Vane,' he continued quickly to cover up his slip of the tongue, 'you must exchange with Charlie, and let him have a peaceful night to-night.'

'Certainly, Sir Roger,' Vane replied courteously, 'I shall be most happy to oblige you, and if Charlie thinks he will have a more restful night in my present room—a fit of coughing stopped him for a moment—he is quite welcome to it.'

'Thanks awfully, Vane,' said Charlie, relieved beyond measure. 'I certainly will accept your offer.'

'That's settled, then,' exclaimed Sir Roger Bentley. 'Now come and join the ladies. We mustn't keep Christmas all by ourselves.'

The next morning, Christmas Day, Charlie Green crawled into the breakfast-room and literally dropped into a chair without, as he thought, attracting attention. Covert glances, however, were shot in his direction by the men of the party, and sundry sly winks passed between them. Poor Green looked decidedly seedy, and the resigned expression which every now and then came over his face was extremely funny. He would throw up his eyes, and the corners of his mouth would droop, while a deep sigh would proceed from his half-open mouth.

'Good gracious, Mr. Green!' said a vivacious little lady sitting next to him, 'are you practising for a tableau? What a weird, uncanny character! How can you do it? But there, some men have such peculiar faces. They can do what they like with them.'

'Quite right, Mrs. Firth,' joined in Sir Roger jovially from the top of the table. 'With the aid of a little paint and things some men can make themselves look perfect demons,' and Bentley's eyes caught Vane's, who smiled broadly. 'While the ladies get ready for a canter across the Downs, we'll adjourn to the smoking-room,' said the master of the house after a short pause, beckoning Charlie to follow him.

'Now, then, Green, my boy, what sort of a night did you have?' asked Sir Roger cheerfully, after everyone had got their pipes or cigars going well.

'Awful! I thank you, Sir Roger. Simply awful! and the worst is to come,' said Charlie in a toneless voice.

'What!' shouted Bentley, 'do you mean to say that the same rascally ghost has dared to enter the sacred chamber where King George the something—I forgot which of the four it was—slept?'

Charlie nodded listlessly. It mattered little to him who had slept there. He hadn't. All he knew was that at one period of the night he had experienced the temperature of the arctic regions, while at another he was plunged into a Turkish bath of the hottest description, with periodical gusts of cold wind coming from somewhere.

'Confound him!' roared Sir Roger. 'To desecrate with his sulphurous presence the room reserved for distinguished visitors only. Where is he? I'll break every bone in his body!' and he spoke with such spirit, and glared so viciously, that Freddy Vane thought it prudent to shift his seat farther back.

'What did the ghost say this time?' one of the men interposed soothingly, to cool the air somewhat.

'Oh, he didn't say very much, but it was to the point. You can't help me, any of you. I have just got to die. In what way I don't know yet, but it will be in the small hours of to-morrow—Boxing Day—when you will all be dreaming of the jolly times you are going to have. Never mind. Enjoy yourselves. Life is still you—'

'Shut up, you maundering idiot!' cried Vane sharply. 'You don't suppose for a moment we are going to let a ghost roam from room to room in this fine old ancestral mansion—ahem—and polish people off without any rhyme or reason?'

'Ah! that's just it!' said Charlie, in a despondent voice. 'He has a reason. He said something last night about my great grandfather meeting him in mortal combat, and my old grand-dad, it appears, got in first blow.' Charlie spoke quite proudly as he added, 'You see, they fought with hatchets in those days, which they held with both hands, and so there wasn't any need for a second whack. Now, this ghost is trying to make out that our side took a mean advantage, and didn't swing the hatchet the regulation number of times. Had my great grand-dad done so, the ghost would have got home first, so I reckon Grandfather Green the Great was pretty cute in getting enough weigh on to kill his man under the regulation number of swings.' Charlie's voice soon resumed its former dull tones as he went on to say, 'Now I have got to die instead. Why he has chosen me I'm sure I don't know.' And the other members of the party also expressed their astonishment.

'But we sha'n't let him kill you, Charlie, my boy,' said Sir Roger, cheerily. 'This bloodthirsty ghost must not interfere with my guests like that, you know. I don't mind a quiet, reasonable chat and a talk over old times, now that it is Christmas-time. Ghosts, like everyone else, must have a little license at this time of the year, and all the while they are peaceable they are welcome to any pleasure they may derive these cold nights by walking about the passages and stairs in my house. But when it comes to talking of killing, then they must transfer their custom elsewhere.'

Sir Roger spoke in decisive tones, as if the matter was settled without any occasion for further discussion.

'B-but, Sir Roger, how are you going to stop him from committing the fatal deed?' asked Charlie, in desperation.

'Um-yes! There is that to be thought of, isn't there? Ah! I have it!' cried Sir Roger, jubilantly.

Charlie looked up eagerly, a faint ray of hope illuminating his mournful countenance.

'You shall have my room, and I will lock the door myself, and all the ghosts in existence—transparent or thick—won't be able to touch you there! That's a capital idea! The ghost will think I'm sleeping there, and won't dare to come near!'

Charlie looked dubious.

'Come along, all of you. The horses are ready and the ladies are waiting. A glorious scamper to the Bars on a crisp morning like this is the finest antidote on earth for mouldy ghosts, Charlie. Here we are, ladies! Mind the mistletoe, Mrs. Frith! Charlie Green here is a terror. What's that, Vane? No, I didn't say "in a terror." What do you mean, sir?'

After a long day of pleasure the time at length arrived for retiring—a time dreaded, indeed, by Charlie, despite his host's confident assurances. He felt very tired, but fully expected that his next sleep would be the long one from which there was no awakening.

Sir Roger saw him to his room, and looked under the bed and into every cupboard to assure Charlie that no one was hidden in any likely spot. Then, patting the dejected man gently on the back, he told him to cheer up and think no more of ghosts, but jump into bed and sleep soundly till the morning.