

'Thank you. I will try,' Charlie replied, trying to speak bravely and hide the quaver in his voice.

Sir Roger locked the door ostentatiously, and walked off whistling the tune of a comic song. In the bedroom where Charlie had slept the previous night, the other men were gathered, talking and laughing quietly amongst themselves. Presently their host joined them.

'Ha! ha! he laughed. 'What a poor little foolish fellow he is. How on earth he can be taken in so easily I can't conceive. Perhaps when he sees what a consummate ass he has been it may sharpen up his wits a bit. I don't wonder at his losing £800 by the time-honored confidence trick. Fancy believing in such things as ghosts, and not seeing through so palpably crude a disguise, for I must say you make up jolly badly, Freddy. Poor little Charlie. He'll hide his head under the sheets to-night for shame, not fright. But I do hope we'll make a man of him,' he concluded, earnestly.

The conversation was desultory, and turned on various topics until Sir Roger roused himself with a gigantic yawn, and said, mockingly, in a hollow voice: 'The bewitching hour of three is about to strike, and the death-dealing ghost starts forth on his quest for blood. Come on, Vane, you idiot. What's the matter? Bitten your tongue or got the toothache?'

'Neither,' replied Vane, shortly. 'Swallowed some paint.'

'Hard luck, old chap: mind you don't swallow the brush,' to which no answer was vouchsafed.

Creeping softly in their stockinged feet, the party of men, without any disturbance or noise, reached the room in which lay their victim.

Vane opened the door silently, and immediately blew his syren whistle. In a moment the doomed man, as he fully believed himself to be, was sitting bolt upright in bed. Beads of perspiration poured down his

face, and his breath came in quick gasps. He tried to speak, but no sound came, and he looked imploringly at his tormenter. Vane had no mind to prolong the agony of the poor wretch, and he decided to bring about the denouement as quickly as possible.

Speaking in the sepulchral tone he had adopted all through, he said: 'In two minutes the clock will strike thræe, and—er—it will then be three o'clock,' he added, forgetting what he had intended to say. 'I do not propose to kill you in cold blood, or warm for that matter, so I have brought these two revolvers, but you must not do as your great grandfather did. You must not shoot until I tell you to. Do you hear?'

'Y'es, sir, I heard. I won't shoot, really. You do it for me. Oh, dear! I do wish my back would leave off running about,' he moaned.

'Have you ever used a revolver?' the ghost demanded.

'Yes—no—I mean, I don't think so. But it doesn't matter, does it?'

Vane muttered a bad word beneath his breath, and next ordered the shaking man to jump out of bed. He then handed Charlie one of the weapons.

'Now,' said the ghost, 'we will stand on either side of your bed, and I will count ten. As soon as ten has left my mouth you are at liberty to fire—but I shall be first,' he added with a low chuckle. 'Are you ready?'

'One moment, please. I can't find the thing you pull to make it go off. Will you show me, Mr. —?'

Charlie asked, inquiringly.

'Mr. —?' repeated the ghost. 'Of course that reminds me. We have not exchanged names. My name is Green, and yours is —?'

'Mine is Green, too—Charlie Green.'

'What!' shrieked the ghost. 'Do you mean to tell me that your name isn't Kean, and that your great-grandfather Kean didn't kill me in unfair combat?'

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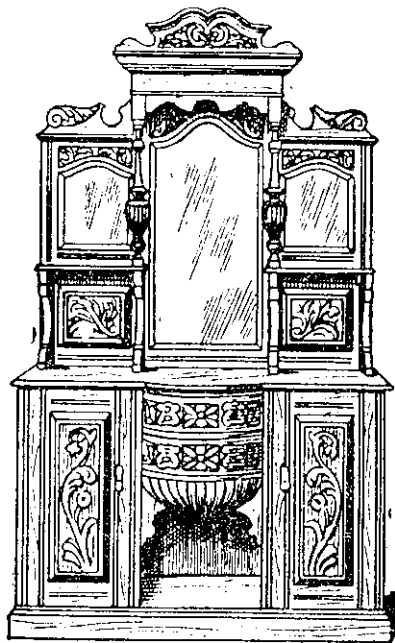
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