

# TWO CHRISTMASSES,

## OR, THE MYSTERY OF THE HAUNTED GARRET.

### CHAPTER III.

Hugh carries a candle, leading the way; I follow, holding up my velvet gown from contact with the dusty boards. The garret stairs are at the upper end of a kind of passage leading from the corridor, and rather removed from the inhabited part of the house. My room is at the lower end of the corridor, not far from the head of the staircase leading down into the hall.

On the lobby at the top of the garret flight there are two low doors, one opening into a spacious attic full of broken furniture and empty boxes and other lumber, the other upon a range of smaller rooms opening one out of the other, the inner of these being the one popularly supposed to be haunted. I do not know by what or whom.

Hugh merely gives a glance into the larger garret, with its piles of dusty rubbish when leads the way into the one opposite; and I follow him, shivering more with cold than actual fear. The attics of Grayacre are as cold in winter, when there is snow on the roof, as they are suffocatingly hot in summer; and, as there are no fireplaces they have never been occupied as bed room, by any of the servants.

There are three lesser garrets, one within the other, all with high sloping roofs of lath and plaster, plentifully festooned with ancient cobwebs. The outer one has a dormer window, the next no window at all, the third and last neither door nor window, only a square aperture about a yard from the floor, through which one might scramble into the very gable-end of the roof.

"This is the haunted one," I say, standing in the middle of the second room, while my cousin explores the last as far as he can by putting his head and his candle through the opening. "I never went farther than this in my life, nor anybody else that I know of. What do you see?"

"Nothing but dust and cobwebs."  
"Then come away, for pity's sake! My teeth are chattering, and the terrible musty odour is making me ill."

"Wait a moment," Hugh says; and putting the candle on the ledge, he springs through the opening, returning in a moment with something in his hand like a paper packet, inch-thick with dust.

"What have you there?" "The missing will."

"The missing will!"  
"I verily believe it. Your uncle Daniel did not come up here for nothing. I wonder you never thought of connecting the two things in your mind—his midnight ramble and the disappearance of the will. I always suspected your uncle or making away with that will himself."

I am too bewildered even to connect them now. Hugh looks eager and excited, examining the flatly-folded paper, from which he has wiped some of the dust and cobwebs with his handkerchief, while I stare at him, holding the candle in one hand and with my dress still instinctively clutched up in the other.

"What will you do with it?"  
"Take it down-stairs, I suppose; or," he adds, looking at me, "shall we put it back where we found it?"

"We cannot do that. I suppose we are bound to make the thing public, now that we have found it!"

"Well, I think it would be the best plan. But it shall be exactly as you please."

For a moment I am tempted to consign the thing to the limbo where it has lain for so many years. But then I think that it is nonsense to suppose it can make any change in the position of affairs, even if it should prove to be the missing will. My uncle had never made any secret of his intention of leaving Grayacre to me, and it is not very probable that he changed his mind within a month of his death. My mother was his only sister—he had never had a brother. The next of kin would be the Wills Tressilian who had gone out and settled in Canada, or his descendants. But these were so distantly related to my uncle that they had no claim upon the property beyond the mere fact of bearing the same name. Even the fanciful injustice of leaving a place to a Ludlow which had belonged to Tressilians for centuries had been apparently avoided, as at the time of my uncle's death I was engaged to be married to a son of this very Wills Tressilian of La Hougue Bic.

Hugh follows me down-stairs and into the oak parlour.

"Aunt Wills, we have found my uncle's will!"

"You have found the will!" my aunt exclaims sitting erect in her chair, with a deep brick-red colour in her cheeks. "Do you tell me you have found the will?"

"Hugh found it," I answered, setting the candle down on the table deliberately.

"Where?"

"In the gable attic."

"But who could have put it in the gable attic?"

"My uncle Daniel must have put it there himself."

Like a delirious person aunt Wills stares at me with dilated eyes.

"Have you read it, Joan Ludlow?"

"No. Nobody has read it."

"It is tied up and sealed," Hugh says, examining it. "Whether it is the missing will or not, this document is certainly a legal instrument of some kind, though it may be nothing but an old expired lease."

"Let me look at it."

Aunt Wills takes it, but her hand shakes so that she immediately lets it fall. Hugh stoops to pick it up.

"It will make no difference?" I ask, in a sudden panic, my lips almost refusing to frame the question. "It does not take Grayacre away from me?"

"No," aunt Wills says without looking at me. "It does not take Grayacre away from you unless you choose to throw it away."

"Throw it away!"—laughing harshly. "It is not very probable that I shall like to throw away Grayacre!"

"I suppose not."

"I shall advise you to send for Winder & Curtis to-morrow," Hugh suggests gravely, standing on the rug with his back to the fire. "They will know at once how to proceed."

"Yes," I answer stupidly. "Good night, aunt Wills—good night, cousin Hugh. Will you keep it for me till to-morrow?"

"You had better lock it up in your own desk, Joan."

I put it away in the walnut bureau. As

I drop the keys into my pocket, I raise my head with a sudden exclamation.

"The joy-bells! Open the window, Hugh."

Hugh draws back the heavy curtains and opens the sash with its little lozenge panes, and he and I lean out together, listening to the faint hurrying clatter and clang of the bells as it comes sweet and clear on the frosty air.

"I must be the first to wish you a merry Christmas, cousin Joan."

My eyes are full of tears, but I smile at him in my contradictory way.

"Don't you think you might give me a kiss, cousin, on Christmas morning?"

I should not have denied him one calm, cousinly kiss, though I do not in general approve of such familiarity; but perhaps, though he asked for it, Hugh Tressilian thinks a kiss so given would scarcely be worth the having, for he does not take it.

"Good-night again, aunt Wills."

My aunt gives me her cheek to kiss—I love aunt Wills, for Laurie's sake, more than she has ever loved me—and then I go up-stairs to bed.

Dorothy calls me early on Christmas morning, before the stars have begun to fade in the sky. I have not slept at all, and am glad when she comes into my room with her flaming candle, a grotesque little figure in her short petticoat with a shawl over her head. But a feverish excitement prevents my looking or even feeling tired when I come down to the oak parlour with my wraps over my arm. I always go to the early service in the church on Christmas morning.

"I hope you are satisfied with the result, cousin?"

I turn from the tall narrow glass between the windows. I suppose Hugh thinks it was pure vanity which prompted me to stand before it, but I never was vain of myself. Vain of Grayacre I am, vain of Laurie I was, but never vain of my personal appearance.

"What has brought you down-stairs at this unearthly hour, Mr. Tressilian?"

"I am going to church."

"Now—with me?"

"If you will allow me."

I am glad he is coming. Dorothy has laid breakfast for us at the end of the table nearest the fire; but, though I make a pretence of eating, I can scarcely swallow the strong tea I have poured out for myself.

There is no change in my cousin's look or manner, no anxiety, no indication in his dark face that he hopes or fears anything from our discovery last night. He never mentions it, and if it were not for an odd twinge of apprehension now and then, I should be inclined to think our adventure in the garret was nothing but a feverish dream. That I could in any way lose or be deprived of Grayacre is utterly impossible. My uncle could do what he liked with it, and always told me, and my mother before me, that he would leave it to me. He was not a man to be moved from his purpose even by the most undue influence—supposing such influence to have been brought to bear upon him. But there was nobody in the house at the time of his making the will who could have influenced him in any way, except aunt Wills, and she was not very likely to wish Grayacre left away from her son's wife. Hugh was her favorite certainly, but then I am perfectly certain no power on earth could have induced uncle Daniel to leave Grayacre to Hugh, whatever he might have been coerced into leaving to Laurie as my husband. Nor was aunt Wills capable of counselling such an act of injustice, little as she ever cared for me. I think myself that the only difference in the new will will prove to be a legacy to my aunt—she had been very kind and attentive to my uncle during his last illness, and, though he was not fond of her, he respected her, and was very willing to have her remain at Grayacre as long as she pleased. He must have had a good deal of confidence in her when his last request to her was that she would take care of his "poor little girl."

Aunt Wills has always been kind to me, though she never loved me. I think she was jealous of my being mistress of Grayacre—I was only a girl of fifteen when she first came from Canada, but uncle Daniel had never dreamed of deposing me for her. Laurie had been ordered to Europe for his health, and they had lived in the South of France for two years before they came to Grayacre—I believe my uncle's inviting them was a plot to introduce Laurie and me to each other, connived at if not first instigated by aunt Wills herself.

I remember our first introduction, in this very oak parlour, and what a pretty boy I had thought him, in his fur-lined coat and white silk muffler, with his fair complexion and blue eyes and fine soft golden hair, and how uncle Daniel and aunt Wills both laughed at us for being so shy—for, though we looked at each other, we never spoke. I believe we fell in love with each other at first sight—I never remember any joy or pleasure afterwards in which Laurie had not a part. We rode together, skated together, walked together; what he liked I liked, what he disliked I hated; I sat up late at night to keep pace with him in his studies; he taught me German, and I helped him with his Latin and Greek. And he seemed to grow well and strong in the sweet clear air fragrant with the breath of the pastures and pine woods, and to outgrow the delicacy of lungs which had made it impossible for him to live in Canada, and at one time threatened the consumption of which his father died.

I do not think I ever really enjoyed existence till Laurie came; it was for my sake that Uncle Daniel pressed them to stay on month after month and year after year. Aunt Wills went back to Canada two or three times to see her eldest son, who could not leave his farm, but Laurie stayed with us—he liked Grayacre better than La Hougue Bic, he said, and his cousin Joan better than Leslie Creed. Leslie came back with aunt Wills once, and remained for a year; but she was so much younger than Laurie and I, and so fond of playing in the house, that we did not miss her very much when she went back again. Aunt Wills, however, was as passionately fond of her as if she had been her own child, though I don't think Leslie cared for her—she was a self-possessed, old-fashioned child, very pretty, but as cold as ice.

When I was seventeen and Laurie nineteen, we were engaged to each other with the full consent of our elders—we had privately promised to marry each other long before that. Very soon afterwards uncle Daniel fell ill of the malady of which he died. He was a very old man, and though he lingered for nearly a year, we had no hope of his recovery. At this time Laurie seemed to me quite strong and well; but aunt Wills told me afterwards that even then old Doctor Murray had told her that it was only a question of time—he might live for a year or two, or he might break a blood-vessel and die in a few hours.

A month after uncle Daniel's death he did break a blood-vessel, but he rallied again for the last time, and aunt Wills took him to Bournemouth. She would not take me, though Laurie pleaded hard to have me—I think she was jealous of his love for me, and wanted to have her boy to herself. But I would not remain at Grayacre. I went to a London hospital as a probationer nurse, and during the year Laurie lingered at Bournemouth went down to see him constantly—for the last six weeks remained at Bournemouth, Laurie liked to have me, though I knew aunt Wills had rather I had kept away. But Laurie liked to have me, and he was mine; it was my hand he held when he died, it was my lips he kissed last, my name was the last word he spoke.

Aunt Wills came back with me to Grayacre. I loved her for Laurie's sake—for Laurie's sake I love her still. The climate of Canada, though the most bracing and healthy in the world, did not suit her disposition exactly; and, though she would have gone back to her son Hugh if she could she was so strongly attached to Grayacre, partly for its own sake, partly because Laurie loved it, that she was not altogether unwilling to remain. It was only six weeks ago that Hugh had been able to give himself a holiday and come to England, though, to please aunt Wills I had invited him over and over again.

I look at him now in the flickering light of Dorothy's solitary candle and feel that when the time comes I shall not be able to part without a sense of loss. He has been like a brother to me—he could not be kinder if I really had been his brother's wife. And then he is familiar with all our household sayings and doings, understands all our family affairs, sits down to his meals in common with us, takes an interest—for our sake—in stable and paddock, storehouse and barn, walks about the house, comes in and goes out, in a kind of protecting presence, which, independent as I am and prone to think myself sufficient for myself, has something pleasant about it—so much so that I am beginning to be quite fond of tobacco-smoke!

The sound of the church-bell is coming clear and sharp across the snowy fields when we go out a few minutes later, the morning air is raw and cold. A dense frosty fog blots out the distance, a dull yellow glow suffusing it in the east; as far as we can see stretch the snowy fields and sombre fir woods, skirted by the dark frozen lake with its border of stiff reeds and rushes, with the black water showing through the ice here and there, where it was broken by my Aylesbury ducks.

There are not more than half a dozen people in the little old-fashioned church, with its dim candles and Christmas bravery of holly and ivy.

"Have you heard anything of Nanny Dobson?" I ask Anne Carmichael, as we come out of church.

Dr. Nesbitt happens to be standing beside her, and he answers the question.

"She is dead, Miss Ludlow—died this morning at a quarter past four."

It shocks me a little to hear of it, though I could scarcely have expected anything else.

"You are coming over this evening, Joan?" Ann says, turning to me.

"Mr. Tressilian says he will come if you do. I've just been telling him what a shame it was he did not come to help us decorate the church."

"I gave him your message, Anne."

"All right. We'll be looking out for you. She nods to me, but she looks at Hugh, who, however is looking at my chrysanthemums."

"I suppose aunt will write that note to Winder & Curtis?" I say, as we walk up the road. The two old attorneys are always bracketed together in this way at Grayacre.

"I dare say she will write to-day."

"I don't suppose there will be much difference between the two wills?"

"I have no idea. My mother never mentioned the subject to me until last night."

We breakfast again when we get back; but Hugh does more justice to the coffee and hot cakes than I do, and to Dorothy's round of spiced beef. I have exchanged my seal-skin coat for a limp esthetic-looking gown of bronze silk—I am fond of brown—and wear some of Bob's white chrysanthemums. Hugh looks at me a good deal—I am sure he thinks I am very tired—but he does not say much, except that I am foolish to fret for Nannie Dobson.

"The world is a very sorrowful place!" I have made old Michael sweep the snow from the window sill that I may feed my robins, and I am watching them now, with a frown on my face.

"And yet you have more to make you happy than most people," my cousin answers from the rug.

"Do you think so?"

"You are not three-and-twenty yet, Joan, and you speak as if you were threescore."

"Sometimes I wish I were. Do you remember that story of the bride and bridegroom travelling in Switzerland? He was lost in a crevasse, and she waited and waited for years, hoping the ice would melt and restore him to her, till the pretty young bride changed into an old, old woman. And at last the glacier did carry him down, and she saw him again—the young boy-husband—just as she had seen him last, with his blue eyes and golden hair. How strange it must have seemed to her to think that lad could be her husband—she a withered old woman, with a face furrowed by grief and tears!"

"It is a very improbable story," my cousin says, walking to the other window, where he stands a minute or two looking out at the flower beds, like graves in the deep snow. Then he turns about suddenly and walks out of the room, and I do not see him again until I am sent for an hour later, and find him in the oak parlour with my aunt and the two attorneys.

Aunt Wills is in her easy-chair, with a strange flush on her face. Hugh standing on the rug; the two attorneys are sitting at the table—Mr. Winder is as plump and as

rosy as Mr. Curtis is cadaverous and thin. They are both friends of the family, and I fancy they look at me rather oddly as I come into the room and take my place near the fire, opposite to aunt Wills.

The will is soon read; and, if it surprises me, it seems to surprise my cousin Hugh Tressilian still more, and not only to surprise him, but to make his sunburnt face turn pale.

My uncle Daniel leaves Grayacre and everything belonging to him to me. For this the new will is exactly like the old. But there is a condition. I am to marry one of Wills Tressilian's sons. Failing his second son Laurence, I am to marry Hugh—if he asks me. If he declines to ask me, Grayacre is mine as long as I live, and will belong to my heirs after me, or, should I die without children, will revert to Hugh or his descendants. But, if he asks me, and I refuse, Grayacre is no longer mine, but his.

At first I can scarcely comprehend it; the words seem to mix themselves up, to convey no distinct impression to my brain. Mr. Curtis's voice hums on and on; Hugh stands motionless, aunt Wills looks into the fire.

"What does it mean?" I ask at last, turning to Mr. Winder, who sits next to me.

"It means that your uncle was determined you should not die an old maid, my dear!" he laughs a little uneasily, fidgeting on his chair.

"But it ignores Laurie altogether!"

"Oh, no—it does not do that!"

"I am not forced to marry any one [by this new arrangement—uncle Daniel would never have been so cruel as to force me to marry any one I did not like!"]

"Certainly not."

"And nobody is forced to marry me?"

"No," Mr. Winder allows again, with a glance at Hugh.

"Things remain just as they are if—my cousin does not want to marry me?"

"Exactly so—if he does not want to marry you."

### (TO BE CONTINUED.)

### Arbitration.

A delegation of prominent Englishmen, representing two hundred and thirty-five members of the House of Commons, has recently visited the United States on an errand of peace. Among the delegates were several members of Parliament, and at their head was Sir Lyon Playfair, who has several times sat in the English Ministry.

The delegation waited upon the President at Washington, and presented to him a memorial in favor of "arbitration in political differences, when diplomatic agency has failed to settle such differences." Sir Lyon Playfair remarked that the times are favorable to such a course, since "the whole world is startled at the new aspect of war, which the progress of science is making a huge engine for the butchery of men, and the wanton waste of property." He added the startling fact that during the past ten years the cost of maintaining European armies has increased at least twenty-five per cent.

The President responded in a sympathetic manner, and expressed the hope that arbitration might one day be generally adopted.

It is fitting that such a subject should be taken up by the two great Anglo-Saxon powers, and that an effort should be made by enlightened nations to devise a peaceful method of settling the disputes which are constantly arising between formidable powers.

The most striking example ever set in this direction was that of the United States and England, when they agreed that the claims for the depredations of the privateer *Alabama* and other confederate cruisers should be submitted to a court of arbitration, with authority, not merely to determine how much was due to the United States by Great Britain, but to decide if anything was due. Thus it was commissioned to sit in judgment upon the conduct of a proud and independent government.

That subject had long threatened to bring about a war between the two countries; but when the arbitration was agreed to, and the Court at Geneva adjudged that England should pay the United States fifteen and one-half millions of dollars, for the damage done by the *Alabama* and other vessels, the decision was promptly acquiesced in, and the money was paid over without a murmur.

One of the great obstacles in the way of the adoption of arbitration for the settlement of international quarrels is, that no nation is willing to submit a question in which its "honor" is concerned to such a court. It is still the prevailing doctrine that if a nation has been "insulted" by another, the shedding of blood can alone preserve its honor.

It is to a large degree owing to this feeling, that all Europe is to-day burdened with enormous military armaments, and that treasures and the pockets of the people are being drained to support them.

One strong argument, however, in favor of arbitration is, that wars very rarely settle the disputes which have provoked them. Thousands of men are slaughtered; millions of money are squandered; territories are desolated; industries are ruined; and yet at the end of it all, the seeds of future quarrels and future wars remain.

Two hundred years ago, a French king seized and added a German province to his realm. The Germans were not, however, made content to lose it by defeat; and in 1870, they rose up and took the province back by force. With this again, the French are not satisfied; and are at this day watching their opportunity to reconquer the province.

Many more examples might be taken from history to show how useless even long and bloody wars are, to bring about final settlements between nations. The history of peaceful settlements, on the other hand, by diplomacy or by reference to a court of arbitration, shows that disputes which are brought to an end in this way usually entirely disappear.

It may be that wars in defence of national honor may cease to be waged, just as duelling, to satisfy the honor of individuals, has ceased to be practised, to a large degree, in England and America. Arbitration, if it could be adopted, would be an unspeakable blessing to all the world; and the example of England and the United States, settling their differences in this way, may result in great good to all the world.

The manager of the New York telephone company states that on a recent day they received an average of 74 calls from each of their almost seven thousand subscribers. One subscriber made 68 calls and another received 131 calls.

### Government Terrorism in Russia.

The following is from George Kennan's account of "Prison Life of the Russian Revolutionists" in the December *Century*; When General Strelnikoff was intrusted by the Tsar with almost dictatorial power in order that he might extirpate sedition in the provinces of southern Russia, he arrested and threw into prison in the single city of Odessa no less than 118 persons in three days. He then went to Kiev and arrested eighty-nine persons almost simultaneously, and ordered the imprisonment of hundreds of others in Kharkoff, Nikolaief, Pultava, Kurak, and other south Russian cities. Most of these arrests were made entirely without what is known as "probable cause," and for the sole purpose of obtaining clues to plots which the police believe to exist, but which they had not been able to discover. Many of the persons arrested were mere children—immature school-boys and girls from fifteen to seventeen years of age—who could not possibly be regarded as dangerous conspirators, but who might, it was thought, be terrified into a confession of all they knew with regard to the movements, conversations, and occupations of their older relatives and friends. General Strelnikoff's plan was to arrest simultaneously a large number of persons belonging to the "untrustworthy" class; throw them into prison; keep them for ten days or two weeks in the strictest solitary confinement, and then subject them to a terrifying inquisitorial examination, with the hope of extorting scraps of information, here a little and there a little, which might be pieced together, like the parts of a dissected map, so as to reveal the outlines of a revolutionary plot. If, for example a young girl belonged to an "unworthy" family, and a "suspicious" letter to her had been intercepted by the authorities; or if she had been seen coming out of a "suspicious" house at a late hour in the evening, she was arrested in one of these police raids, generally at night; conveyed in a close carriage to the Odessa prison; put into a small solitary-confinement cell and left to her own agonizing thoughts. No explanation was given her of this summary proceeding, and if she appealed to the sentinel on duty in the corridor, the only reply she obtained was "Prikazano ne gavarit"—"Talking is forbidden." The effect produced upon a young, inexperienced, impressionable girl, by the overwhelming shock of such a transition from the repose, quiet, and security of her own bedroom, in her own home, to a narrow, gloomy cell in a common criminal prison at night, can readily be imagined. Even if she were a girl of courage and firmness of character, her self-control might give way under the strain of such a ordeal. The sounds which break the stillness of a Russian criminal prison at night—the stealthy tread of the guard; the faintly heard cries and struggles of a drunken and disorderly "casual" who is being strapped to his bed in another part of the prison, cries which suggest to an inexperienced girl some terrible scene of violence and outrage; the occasional clang of a heavy door; the moaning and hysterical weeping of other recently arrested prisoners in cells on the same corridor, and the sudden and noiseless appearance now and then of an unknown human face at the little square port-hole in the cell door through which the prisoners are watched—all combine to make the first night of a young girl in prison an experience never to be forgotten while she lives. This experience, however, is only the beginning of the trial which her courage and self-control are destined to undergo. One day passes—two days—three days—ten days—without bringing any news from the outside world, or any information concerning the nature of the charges made against her. Twice every twenty-four hours food is handed to her through the square port-hole by the taciturn guard, but nothing else breaks the monotony and the solitude of her life. She has no books, no writing materials, no means whatever of diverting her thought or relieving the mental strain which soon becomes almost unendurable. Tortured by apprehensions and by uncertainty as to her own fate and the fate of those dear to her, she can only pace her cell from corner to corner until she is exhausted, and then throw herself on the narrow prison-bed and in sleep to lose consciousness of her misery.

At last, two weeks perhaps after her arrest, when her spirit is supposed to be sufficiently broken by solitary confinement and grief, she is summoned to the *depos*, a preliminary examination, without witnesses or counsel, conducted by General Strelnikoff in person. He begins by saying to her that she is "charged with very serious crimes under such and such section of the Penal Code, and that she stands in danger of exile to Siberia for a long term of years. In view, however, of her youth and inexperience, and of the probability that she had been misled by criminal associates, he feels authorized to say to her that if she will show repentance, and a sincere desire to reform, by making a 'crisostoverchni'—'clean-hearted' confession—and will answer truthfully all questions put to her, she will be immediately released. If, on the contrary, she manifests an obdurate disposition and thus proves herself to be unworthy of clemency, it will become his duty, as prosecuting officer of the Crown, to treat her with all the rigor of the law."

The poor girl is well aware that the reference to Siberian exile is not an empty threat. Belonging as she does to an "untrustworthy" family, she has often heard discussed the case of Marie Prisdski, who was exiled before she was sixteen years of age because she would not betray her older sister, and the case of the Ivitchevitch children, one seventeen and the other fourteen years of age, who were arrested in Kiev and sent to Siberia in 1879 for no particular reason except that their two older brothers were revolutionists and had been shot dead while resisting arrest.

It is not a matter for surprise if a young girl who has thus been torn from her home, who is depressed and disheartened by solitary confinement, who is without counsel, without knowledge of the law, without the support of a single friend in this supreme crisis of her life, breaks down at last under the strain of deadly fear, and tells the inquisitor all she knows. She is at once released, but only to suffer agonies of self-reproach and remorse as she sees her relatives and dearest friends arrested, imprisoned, and exiled to Siberia, upon information and clues which she herself has furnished. It frequently happens, however, that a girl remains steadfast and refuses to answer questions even after months of solitary confinement. The authorities then resort to other and even more discreditable methods.