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THE BURGLAR'S GHOST.

CHAPTER I. CONTINUED.

I made my plan of action rapidly. I took a revolver with me, and went up to Miss Singleton's house. Fortunately, I knew the housekeeper there a middle-aged, strong-minded woman, not easily frightened, which was a good thing. To her I communicated such information as I considered necessary. She consented to conceal me in the room where the safe stood. There was a cupboard close by the safe, from which I could command a full view of the burglar's operations, and pounce upon him at the right moment. Heavily my information was to be relied upon, there was every chance of my capturing the famous burglar.

Soon after midnight, when the house was all quiet, I went to the pantry and got into the cupboard, locking myself in. There were two openings in the panel, through either of which I was able to command a full view of the room. My position was somewhat cramped, but the time soon passed away. My mind was principally occupied in wondering if I was really about to have a chance of distinguishing myself. Somehow, there was the air of unreality about the event of the evening which puzzled me. Suddenly I heard a sound which put me on the alert at once. It was nothing more than the creaking of a board or two, but it would make is a quiet house; but it seemed intensified to my excited ear. I drew myself up against the back of the cupboard and placed my eye to the opening in the panel. I had oiled the key of the door, and kept my fingers upon it, in readiness to spring upon the burglar at the proper moment.

Presently I saw what seemed some time I saw the gleam of light through the keyhole of the door opening into the pantry. The door opened, and a man, carrying a small lantern, came quietly into the room. At first, I could see nothing of his face; but when my eyes grew accustomed to the hazy light, I saw that I had been rightly informed, and that the burglar was indeed no other than the famous Light-toed Jim.

As I stood there watching him, I could not help admiring the cool fashion in which he went to work. He went over to the window and examined it. He went over to the door of the cupboard in which I stood concealed. Then he locked the door of the pantry and turned his attention to the safe. He had his lamp on a chair before the lock and took from his pocket as neat and pretty a collection of tools as ever I saw. With them he went quietly and swiftly to work.

Light-toed Jim was a somewhat slimly-built fellow, with little muscular development about him, while I am a big man with plenty of bone and sinew. If matters had gone to a fair struggle between us I could have done what I pleased with him; but I knew that he would not give me a fight. Somewhere about him, I felt sure there was a revolver, which he would use on the least provocation.

My plan, therefore, was to wait until his back was bent over the lock of the safe, then to open the cupboard noiselessly and fall boldly upon him, pinning him to the ground beneath me.

Before long the moment came. He was working steadily away at the lock, his whole attention concentrated on the job. The slight noise of the door was sufficient to drown the faint click of the key in the cupboard door. I jumped it quickly and embodied upon him, driving the tool out of his hands and tumbling him upon a heap at the back of the safe. He uttered an exclamation of rage and astonishment as he went down, and immediately began to wrig the under me like an eel. As I kept him down with one hand, I tried to pull out the handcuffs with the other. He was strong and energetic, and the tussle promised to be a sharp one. He had worked himself round on his back and begun to regret what he was after, when as he lay furiously at me with his keen dagger-like blade. Then I realized that we were going to have a fight for it, and prepared accordingly. He tried to run the blade into my side. I warded it off, but the blade grazed the fleshy part of my left arm, and I felt a warm stream of blood spurt out. That maddened me, and I seized one of the good-little lying near at hand and let my man such a blow over the temples that he collapsed at once and lay as if dead. I put the handcuffs on him instantly, and, finding no other fellow overtook, I secured his ankles. Then I rose and looked at my arm. The knife had made a nasty gash, and the blood was flowing freely; but it was not serious, and when the housekeeper, who had then appeared on the scene, had bandaged it, I went out and secured the help of the policeman I met in conveying the light-toed one to the office.

I felt pretty sick when I made my report to the inspector.

"Light-toed Jim!" said he. "What, James Hall! Nonsense, Parker." But I took him to the cell, where Jim was being attended to by the doctor.

"Come right, Parker," he said. "That's the man. Well, it is will be a fine thing for you."

After a time, feeling a bit exhausted, I went home to lay and get some sleep. The surgeon had attended to my arm, and told me it was but a superficial wound. I felt sore enough in spite of that.

I had secured my lodgings than I saw, sitting in my easy chair, the strange man who had fallen upon me earlier in the evening. He rose to his feet when I entered. I stared at him in utter astonishment.

"Well, you need gaze at me like that," said he. "You owe me a good turn, and you've done it. You've caught Light-toed Jim."

"My dear sir," said I, "I don't understand you."

"Don't understand! Why, I mean what I say. I've come to know who this man was this time. Sit down," said. "There's a question or two I want ask you. Just let me get my coat off, and I'll talk to you." I took my coat off and went over to the bed to change. "Now then," I began, and I turned round to find no more, being literally struck dumb. The man was gone! I began to feel uncomfortable. I ran down stairs to find the outer door locked and bolted, as I had left it a few minutes before. I went back, utterly perplexed. For an hour I pondered the matter over, but could make neither head nor tail of it.

When I went down to the office next morning I was astonished to find that the burglar had escaped. I went to his cell, where he was lying on a bed with his head bandaged. I had hit him pretty hard as it turned out, though it appeared he would have to die on the scaffold for my blows. "Well, guv'nor," said he, "you've got me at last." "Yes, and a good job too," said I, "you've given us a good deal of trouble." "Well, guv'nor," said he, "you've got me at last, and I'm not the man to go back on it. I've had a good run for my money, and I've got to pay for it. I've been a fool, I have, to let a man like you get the better of me. But I'm not the first by a long chalk, and I don't feel ashamed of being beaten by a man like you." "But," said I, "I want to ask you a question. How did you know I was on that little game last night? For, so far as I know, there was no one but myself and the man who knew a word about it, and I don't think he let out to a living soul. How came you to suspect it, and how did you know me?" "Come, we may as well be comfortable in the cell while we talk," said he. "Sit down on the bed, and I'll tell you all I know about it, and how I came to know you." He rose and locked the door, and we sat down side by side on the bed, while he told me the following strange story:

"I was born in Westford, and lived there till I was a young man. My father was a farmer, and I was his only son. He was well to do, and I might have had a good time of it if I had been a steady lad. But I was a wild young fellow, and I got into bad company, and my ways were not his ways nor those of the neighbors among whom I lived. There was a young girl in Westford whom I had known from a child, and we had grown up together, and I had learned to love her with all the strength of my nature. She was a good girl, and she loved me with a woman's love, and we were betrothed to one another. My father was well pleased with the match, for he had a good opinion of Mary Lane, and he was glad that I was settling down to be a steady, hard-working man. But I was not steady, and I was not hard-working. I was a wild young fellow, and I had my own ideas of how I should spend my time, and they were not my father's ideas. I wanted to be a gentleman, and to live like a gentleman, without the trouble of working for my living. I was a fool, and I had my head full of foolish ambitious ideas, and I was ready to listen to the first man who came to me with a plausible scheme for making a fortune without work. The man who came to me with such a scheme was a tall, dark fellow, with a black beard and a pair of black eyes that could look very pleasant when their owner wanted them to look so, but could also look very dangerous when they had a mind to. I was a fool, and I let that man persuade me that he was a gentleman who had met with a reverse of fortune, and was willing to make his fortune over again by honest means. He was a good-looking fellow, and he had a good deal of the gentleman about him, and I was a fool, and I let him persuade me that he was what he seemed to be, and that I was the man he had been looking for all his life—a young fellow with money to spend who was willing to pay for the pleasure of his company. We became fast friends, and he introduced me to his friends, who were all of the same stamp as himself, and I was a fool, and I let them teach me to drink and game, and I was a fool, and I let them persuade me that it was the manly thing to do to despise the girl who was to be my wife because she was only a farmer's daughter, and that it was the mark of a gentleman to be ashamed of his honest, hard-working father because he was only a farmer himself. I was a fool, and I let my friends persuade me that it was the mark of a gentleman to be ashamed of the girl I had promised to marry, because she was only a farmer's daughter, and that it was the mark of a gentleman to be ashamed of my