

The Haunter Haunted

During the first three years of my career as a detective I had some singular jobs given to me to work on, and the manner in which one of them was worked, and the developments of the case, may interest the reader.

About three miles outside the limits of a large city in Pennsylvania stood a large farm house. There had been a murder committed there, and whisky had played havoc with an heir, and the house had stood vacant for three years before I saw it. The farm had passed into the hands of a New Yorker on a mortgage, and he seemed to have forgotten all about it. Naturally enough the cry of "haunted house" was raised, and presently you could not have hired a neighbor to enter the house in the day time. There were people living within a quarter of a mile of the place, and by and by they began to tell some queer stories. On two occasions parties of three or four went out from the city to stop in the house all night, but in each instance they were driven away by strange noises before midnight. I lived in a town forty miles from the haunted house, and consequently heard nothing of it.

I had a case against an absconding treasurer. He had the funds of a large and prosperous lodge in his hands, and got away with \$3,000 belonging to it. He furthermore borrowed about \$2,000 of his friends, and got \$800 more on a forged draft. This occurred in a town about thirty miles from the haunted house. The defaulter had bought a railroad ticket for Chicago, and had left behind him, as if by accident, a parcel addressed to a party in the Garden City. It ought to have been reasoned that this party was he under another name, and that he had gone to Chicago as fast as steam could carry him, but I reasoned just the opposite. He had gone without his trunk or clothing, but when I came to overhaul his things, his landlady figured out that two clean shirts, several collars, a stout pair of boots, and an old suit of clothes were missing from the house. The boots and old suit had belonged to a boarder who died months before.

There were three highways leading out of the town. I worked two of them without success. On the third I soon found a farmer who had seen a foot traveler resembling my man pass on the evening he absconded. Five miles further on I became positive of his identity. He walked all that night with only two brief halts before midnight to inquire about roads, but once on his trail I soon picked up plenty of pointers. The absconder's name was Kelly, and he was a keen, shrewd fellow. He had planned the embezzlement and escape weeks ahead, and he followed out a regular programme. He left town dressed as a laborer, and carrying a valise. He had a light felt hat, a black felt hat and a cap, and about once in ten miles he exchanged his headgear. He was a smooth faced man, but he had provided himself with a goatee and side whiskers. I thus heard of him once as a smooth faced young man wearing a cap and having one arm in a sling; next as a youngish man with a goatee and a black hat; again as a full whiskered man with a light hat. I confess that I was badly puzzled and about ready to despair when I came to a farm house where he had stopped for dinner. He was then smooth faced and wore a cap, and claimed to be an agent for a windmill company whose rights had been infringed on, and who were taking steps to collect royalty.

When Kelly entered the kitchen for dinner a hired boy of color, who was not permitted to eat with the family, was left in the sitting room. His curiosity regarding the contents of the valise was aroused, and he picked the lock and overhauled them. He was careful not to say anything of

this to the family, but when I came along on my errand I soon discovered that he had a secret. The sight of a silver piece loosened his tongue, and he told me of the hats and false whiskers. After that I had no trouble in following Kelly, no matter which disguise he assumed. There was a direct highway from the town he left to the city with the haunted house, but he did not keep it. He would branch off here and there and make a half circle to come back again. One or two nights he slept in barns, and so I lost track of him for a few hours. On another occasion his feet became sore, and he lay by at a tavern for two days, and I actually got ahead of him.

While the towns were only thirty miles apart Kelly traveled all of 100 miles in making the distance, and he was twelve days about it. I followed him mile by mile, and owing to a severe storm was thirteen days. I traced him into the suburbs of the city, and there lost him, and, though I had the help of three or four local officers, we could get no further trace of him. At length we heard of a person 100 miles away who bore Kelly's description, and I was about to start after him when I overheard the following conversation in a restaurant:

“So the boys who went to the haunted house got a scare?”

“An awful scare. I guess a new ghost has taken possession,”

“What did they see or hear?”

“Saw doors open and heard groans and various other noises.”

“Well, it's funny.”

“Yes.”

It may seem strange to you that I at once decided that I had located Kelly again. It was quite probable that he had known of the haunted house for years, as its fame was widespread, and, the fact of a new ghost showing up just at this time made me suspicious. That night at 10 o'clock, accompanied by a local detective, I visited the place. It was a rambling, big farm house, situated twenty rods from the highway, and the ground around was grown up to weeds and bushes. All the windows were broken, and some of the doors stood open, and a more gloomy place I never saw. We entered by a rear door, and found the floors rotting away and the plastering crumbling off. We pushed on to the sitting room, where the young men had stationed themselves the night before, and here found some blocks of wood to sit down on. There was a doorway leading into the front hall, but the door was gone. There was a doorway to the parlor, and the door was partly open. As we looked into the parlor I swung the door to and fro, and knew from the movement that the hinges had been freshly oiled.

When we came to inspect the cellar we found little but cobwebs and dust. Each of us had a lantern, and each inspected for himself. At one corner of the cellar I found an old oyster-can in a queer position. It seemed to be sticking to the floor above, but after a close examination, without, however, touching it with my hands, I made up my mind that it was held up there by a cord. I said nothing to my companion about this, nor about another discovery made in the front hall. At one spot, where the plaster was off from base to ceiling, I caught sight of a wire behind the laths.

This led up and down, and the lower end was probably attached to some object. We did not go up stairs. The front stairs had never been finished, and the back ones were so dilapidated that we hesitated to trust them with our weight. By 11 o'clock we had taken our seats in the sitting room, eyes and ears alert, and ready for any emergency. There was no lock or catch on the door opening into the parlor, but it was shut. The two windows looking out of the room had been boarded up. We placed our lanterns in a corner, and as we watched and waited the room was in semi-darkness and the house as still as death.

It must have been near midnight when the performance opened. We suddenly caught the faint notes of music, and the sounds lasted for two or three minutes. I was satisfied that the sounds came from a jewsharp. My companion whispered that two female voices were singing, while a guitar played an accompaniment. The music had scarcely died away when the parlor door opened as noiselessly as the swing of a coffin lid. I was perfectly satisfied that it was the work of human hands, but I was startled. I had not told the detective that I expected to find Kelly in the house. I had simply said that I expected to make an important discovery. When the door swung open the man started up in alarm and whispered:

“Great heavens! Let us be gone!”

I put my hand on his arm and waited for the next move. In about a minute we heard a tunk! tunk! tunk! on the cellar stairs. I knew that the sound was made by the oyster can being lowered a few inches from the floor and drawn up again by the string, but my companion rose to his feet, wheeled half around and whispered:

“Look out for yourself! The cursed thing is coming up out of the cellar.”

“Keep still—listen!” I replied, and when the can had “tunked” one for each step the sound ceased. Then the parlor door slowly and silently swung to. As I have told you, I was dead sure that all these things were caused by human agency, and yet I felt a creeping of my flesh, and my forehead was damp with perspiration. The detective with me was as brave a man as ever took up a trail, but such was the effect upon him that his face was as white as snow, his teeth chattered, and he clutched me and pleadingly exclaimed:

“If we stay here another minute we are both dead men!”

I sat down and drew him down beside me, and as I did so the parlor door opened again, and from the front hall came groans and sighs and dull sounds of a struggle. I knew that the wire I had seen was being worked behind the laths, but my companion could stand no more. He seized both lanterns and started out, and I had to go along or be left in the dark. When clear of the house he made a run for the highway, and I found him on the further side of it when I came up.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Good God, man, but my nerves are all gone!” he gasped. “I wouldn’t stop in that house another five minutes for all the money in the state!”

I was satisfied that all the noises had been made by human agency. Some one had taken possession of the house, and I had a feeling that it was Kelly. It was just in line with his other sharp tricks. I did not tell my companion what I suspected nor what I intended to do, but I had all my plans laid before morning. The old house was two and a half stories, and whoever was hiding there was likely to be in the garret. It was also likely that this garret was reached from the second story by a ladder. If the person was Kelly or any other sharp fellow, the ladder would be drawn up, or any one showing his head above the scuttle would receive a rap. If I got a squad of men and surrounded the house the occupant might get off by some unknown way, or find a hiding place unknown to us. If we failed to find any one the whole city would hold us up to ridicule.

There was no window in the garret at the back end of the house. It was hardly daylight before I approached it from that direction, entered the place with great caution, and hid myself away beneath the kitchen stairs. I expected the occupant of the garret would come down before noon, but he did not show up. It was a dark and gloomy day in the fall, with frequent rain squalls, and about 2 o'clock in the afternoon I crept up the stairs in my stocking feet, entered a room near where the garret scuttle was locked, and began playing the ghost for some one else's benefit. I had brought along a mouth organ, and I sounded and hung on to a few lonesome notes several times over. Pretty soon I heard a slight movement overhead. Then I took a fiddle string, made one end fast to a nail, and when I had hauled taut I picked the string with my thumb nail. I sent forth complaining sounds, and I added a few sighs and groans. The sounds above me became plainer, and I knew that some one was listening at the scuttle.

I gave him a few more notes, scratched on the wall and floor, and in a few minutes a ladder was thrust down from the scuttle. A few deep drawn groans on my part brought a man down the ladder, and as he reached the foot of it I collared him. It was Kelly. He who had played ghost on others had himself fallen into the trap. He screamed right out at sight of me, and he did not get his nerve back until I had him outdoors. He fully believed for the time that a spirit made the sounds. The case was about as I had figured. He had planned to come to the house, and he intended to remain there several weeks. He had affixed cords to the top of the parlor door to swing it, and had arranged for all the sounds we heard. If I felt elated he felt very sheepish as an offset, and when sentenced to two years instate prison for his crime, he said to me:

“It isn't that I was caught, but that I was outwitted and bamboozled. Why, man, I had that whole plan in my head for months, and I'd have bet a hundred to one that I'd get safe off. Just think what a fool I was to take up quarters in a haunted house, and then let some one play the ghost on me!”—*New York Sun*.

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