

How The Ghost Was Laid
by Percival Sturgis

“I AM sorry, sir, but all the rooms are taken.”

It was the landlord of the little inn at the L—who spoke.

“That is, all but one,” he added, “and that, I suppose, you would not care to occupy.”

“Why not?” replied I.

“Well, you see, it’s haunted,” returned the landlord, lowering his voice to a whisper as he spoke.

I was tired, and besides, being naturally incredulous on the subject of ghosts, engaged the room without further conversation.

A very quaint and attractive little place was the village of L—, nestling so [snuggly] in the valley, and this inn was a great resort for those who wished to escape the noise and bustle of the world; and, in consequence, on this autumnal evening the inn was filled.

My luggage having been sent up to my room, I sat with the landlord conversing.

Among other topics, we soon found ourselves talking about the haunted room, and I prevailed on the landlord to tell the story. He at first hesitated, but when I told him that I should like to hear its history before I occupied it, he related to me the particulars of the mysterious murder of a lady in that room many years before, and said that ever afterwards the servants were afraid to venture near it, because they said it was haunted by the murdered lady.

Thus closed my host’s story, and as it was quite late I arose and requested to be shown to my room.

“Now,” said the landlord as he lighted the candle, “I can accommodate you with a bed upon the floor if you desire it.”

“No,” said I, for I had too much pride to retreat, “I will take the room.”

“Well, if you are found dead in the morning, it will be no fault of mine.”

We had reached the door by this time, and bidding me good-night, my host departed.

I opened the door and walked in; it was a low room with the old-fashioned bed and rush-bottomed chairs, and through the window the moonlight cast weird shadows over the room, making it look so ghastly that I must confess that but for my pride I should have gone back; but there was no help for it, so closing the door, but not fastening, for there was no lock, I jumped into bed.

Still I could not sleep for some time. I tried all methods to woo the drowsy god, till at last I was successful.

How long I slept I know not; but I suddenly found myself broad awake while there was a strange stillness in the room, almost unnatural, a draft of air threw a cold chill over me, and I saw with astonishment, mingled with alarm, that my chamber-door was open.

Staring with painful intensity, as if expecting something—for I could not turn my eyes away—I saw a white robed figure glide swiftly along the old floor. Directly toward the bed it came.

Do what I could, I was not able to throw off the incubus which rested upon me.

A moment more, and I felt a cold, icy touch on my hand, and, it seemed, a clutch upon my throat, slowly but surely strangling me. I had almost fainted; when, with a sudden, quick effort, I made a desperate struggle, and sprang from the bed.

As I did so, I felt myself grasped about the arms again, and cold breath passed over my face, and the word “revenge” fell upon my ear, and the figure drew me along till it stood opposite the old [fireplace], and touched a small knob upon the wall above, which disclosed an aperture, and in it a box labeled “Woodfell Ames.”

A moment more and I was alone, the sunlight poured into my chamber, I rubbed my eyes and tried to get together my scattered recollections; at last I succeeded, and full of bewilderment presented myself at breakfast.

“Well, so you are alive, after all,” said the landlord, evidently astonished.

“Yes,” said I, “I did not experience much trouble.”

As I intended to stay at the inn two or three days, I determined to keep the room, to see the end of the whole matter. The second passed as the first, and I resolved to investigate the aperture in the wall, if there was any, which I hardly believed.

But feeling over the wall, what was my astonishment to see the same small door spring open and disclose that same box. To seize the box was the work of an instant, and opening it, I perused the papers. They were deeds of some valuable estate, and were quite old. They were drawn in favor of Ames’ Elmdale Grange.

I said nothing to [anyone], but kept my own counsel.

Casually speaking to my host, I asked him if he knew of a place called Elmdale, or of [anyone] called Ames.

“Oh, yes! that’s another story of this village, in which old Ames’s son was deprived of the estate on account of the loss of some necessary deed,” he replied. “It was a downright shame, for he was a nice, noble young man, and the estate is now in the hands of a villain.”

“If any man deserves hanging, he does,” he fiercely muttered. “Yes, the mean, low scheming rascal. Pray pardon my warmth,” he said, “but it is enough to set [anyone] crazy thinking about that young Ames slaving like a dog, while this villain lords it in Ames’s lawful wealth.”

These events caused me to prolong my stay, and I made up my mind to see the whole mystery entirely cleared. I took a walk over to Elmdale, and could not help but admire its beautiful grounds and the extent of its domain.

As I passed the entrance, I perceived an elegantly-dressed man sauntering up the wide path, carelessly clipping the top of the grass with his cane. He, I rightly guessed, was the proprietor. From the man’s evil face and the evident delight with which he used his cane, I knew that landlord had not misjudged him.

Hearing a step behind me, I turned and beheld a young man in the attire of a laborer; that the proprietor had heard him also, and that he knew him, was evident, for he bowed with a mocking smile.

The young man kept on without replying to the salutation, which, however, did not disconcert the careless stranger, for he walked as leisurely as before, and disappeared within the house.

“These,” thought I, “were the two contestants for the property. But,” I said, mentally, looking towards the house, “I shall have something to do with it; your triumph will not be long.”

I reached the inn in time for supper, and sought my own room, this time, however, with a determination to keep awake.

When the figure appeared I kept my fears under strong control, and saw what I noticed before in my terror, that the ghostly hand seemed rather like flesh and blood. It went through the same actions as before; but I seized its hand, and not catching it very tight, it slipped from my grasp, leaving in my hand a ring.

The next morning I examined, unobserved, the hands of the maid who had shown me to my room on my arrival. I knew she was accustomed to wear a ring, and I saw it was gone. Afterwards I found her looking quite anxiously about the different rooms.

“Have you lost anything?” asked I.

“Yes, sir, a ring,” she replied.

“Is this it?” at the same time taking the ring from my pocket.

“Yes,” said she, growing quite pale and scared-looking. “Why, [everyone] knows him.”

“Stop a moment,” said I. “Do you know Woodfell Ames?”

“Yes,” said she, growing quite pale and scared-looking. “Why, every one knows him.”

I looked at her rather sternly, and telling her about my discovery, I managed to work upon her fears, and she confessed that she had stolen the deeds from Ames' library, at the instigation of the present proprietor, Orville Glenn.

She was a servant at Elmdale at that time, and, being dazzled by a tempting bribe, had committed the deed. She was afterwards discharged on some ground, and came to the inn to live.

Where she had put the papers she had forgotten, and thinking so much about them—she must have got up in her sleep, and gone to where she had laid them. I informed the landlord of my proceedings, and young Ames was soon installed in his proper place.

The maid became afterwards cured of her sleep-walking, and the chamber ceased to be "haunted." In regard to my host's tale, I am unable to say whether he was laboring under a delirium or not, but I know that the only spectre I saw was one of pure flesh and blood.

The Golden Argosy [NY], February 21, 1885