

THE SPECTRAL MORTGAGE.

TOWARD the close of a beautiful afternoon in early summer I stood on the piazza of the spacious country-house which was my home. I had just dined, and I gazed, with a peculiar comfort and delight, upon the wide-spreading lawn and the orchards and groves beyond; and then, walking to the other end of the piazza, I looked out toward the broad pastures, from which a fine drove of cattle were leisurely coming home to be milked, and toward the fields of grain, whose green was beginning already to be touched with yellow. Involuntarily (for, on principle, I was opposed to such feelings) a pleasant sense of possession came over me. It could not be long before all this would virtually be mine.

About two years before, I had married the niece of John Hinckman, the owner of this fine estate. He was very old, and could not be expected to survive much longer, and had willed the property, without reserve, to my wife. This, in brief, was the cause of my present sense of prospective possession, and although, as I said, I was principled against the voluntary encouragement of such a sentiment, I could not blame myself if the feeling occasionally arose within me. I had not married my wife for her uncle's money. Indeed, we had both expected that the marriage would result in her being entirely disinherited. His niece was John Hinckman's housekeeper and sole prop and comfort, and if she left him for me she expected no kindness at his hands. But she had not left him. To our surprise, her uncle invited us to live with him, and our relations with him became more and more amicable and pleasant, and Mr. Hinckman had, of late, frequently expressed to me his great satisfaction that I had proved to be a man after his own heart; that I took an interest in flocks and herds and crops; that I showed a talent for such pursuits, and that I would continue to give, when he was gone, the same care and attention to the place which it had been so long his greatest pleasure to bestow. He was old and ill now, and tired of it all, and the fact that I had not proved to be, as he had formerly supposed me, a mere city gentleman, was a great comfort to his declining days. We were deeply grieved to think that the old man must soon die. We would gladly have kept him with us for years; but, if he must go, it was pleasant to know that he and ourselves were so well

satisfied with the arrangements that had been made. Think me not cold and heartless, high-minded reader. For a few moments put yourself in my place.

But had you, at that time, put yourself in my place on that pleasant piazza, I do not believe you would have cared to stay there long; for, as I stood gazing over the fields, I felt a touch upon my shoulder. I cannot say that I was actually touched, but I experienced a feeling which indicated that the individual who had apparently touched me would have done so had he been able. I instantly turned, and saw, standing beside me, a tall figure in the uniform of a Russian officer. I started back but made no sound. I knew what the figure was. It was a specter—a veritable ghost.

Some years before this place had been haunted. I knew this well, for I had seen the ghost myself. But before my marriage the specter had disappeared, and had not been seen since; and I must admit that my satisfaction, when thinking of this estate, without mortgage or incumbrance, was much increased by the thought that even the ghost, who used to haunt the house, had now departed.

But here he was again. Although in different form and guise, I knew him. It was the same ghost.

"Do you remember me?" said the figure.

"Yes," I answered, "I remember you in the form in which you appeared to me some time ago. Although your aspect is entirely changed, I feel you to be the same ghost that I have met before."

"You are right," said the specter. "I am glad to see you looking so well, and apparently happy. But John Hinckman, I understand, is in a very low state of health."

"Yes," I said, "he is very old and ill. But I hope," I continued, as a cloud of anxiety began to rise within me, "that his expected decease has no connection with any prospects or plans of your own."

"No," said the ghost. "I am perfectly satisfied with my present position. I am off duty during the day, and the difference in time between this country and Russia gives me opportunities of being here in your early evening, and of visiting scenes and localities which are very familiar and agreeable to me."

"Which fact, perhaps, you had counted upon when you first put this uniform on," I remarked.

The ghost smiled.

"I must admit, however," he said, "that I am seeking this position for a friend of mine, and I have reason to believe that he will obtain it."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Is it possible that this house is to be haunted by a ghost as soon as the old gentleman expires? Why should this family be tormented in such a horrible way? Everybody who dies does not have a ghost walking about his house."

"Oh, no," said the specter. "There are thousands of positions of the kind which are never applied for; but the ghostship here is a very desirable one, and there are many applicants for it. I think you will like my friend, if he gets it."

"Like him!" I groaned.

The idea was horrible to me.

The ghost evidently perceived how deeply I was affected by what he had said, for there was a compassionate expression on his countenance. As I looked at him an idea struck me. If I were to have any ghost at all about the house, I would prefer this one. Could there be such things as duplex ghostships? Since it was day here when it was night in Russia, why could not this specter serve in both places? It was common enough for a person to fill two situations. The notion seemed feasible to me, and I broached it.

"Thank you," said the ghost. "But the matter cannot be arranged in that way. Night and day are not suitably divided between here and Russia; and, besides, it is necessary for the incumbent of this place to be on duty at all hours. You remember that I came to you by day as well as at night?"

Oh, yes; I remembered that. It was additionally unfortunate that the ghostship here should not be one of the limited kind.

"Why is it," I asked, "that a man's own spirit does not attend to these matters? I always thought that was the way the thing was managed."

The ghost shook his head.

"Consider for a moment," he replied, "what chance a man's own spirit, without experience and without influence, would have in a crowd of importunate applicants, versed in all the arts, and backed by the influence necessary in such a contest. Of course there are cases in which a person becomes his own ghost, but this is because the position is undesirable, and there is no competition."

"And this new-comer," I exclaimed, in much trouble, "will he take the form of Mr. Hinckman? If my wife should see such an apparition it would kill her."

"The ghost who will haunt this place," said my companion, "will not appear in the form of John Hinckman. I am glad that is so,

if it will please you; for you are the only man with whom I have ever held such unrestrained and pleasant intercourse. Good-bye."

And with these words no figure of a Russian officer stood before me.

For some minutes I remained motionless, with downcast eyes, a very different man from the one who had just gazed out with such delight over the beautiful landscape. A shadow, not that of night, had fallen over everything. This fine estate was not to come to us clear and unencumbered, as we thought. It was to be saddled with a horrible lien, a spectral mortgage.

Madeline had gone upstairs with Pegram. Pegram was our baby. I disliked his appellation with all my heart, but Pegram was a family name on Madeline's side of the house, and she insisted that our babe should bear it. Madeline was very much wrapped up in Pegram, often I thought too much so, for there were many times when I should have been very glad of my wife's society, but was obliged to do without it because she was entirely occupied with Pegram. To be sure, my wife's sister was with us, and there was a child's nurse; but, for all that, Madeline was so completely Pegramized, that a great many of the hours which I, in my anticipations of matrimonial felicity, had imagined would be passed in the company of my wife, were spent alone, or with the old gentleman, or Belle.

Belle was a fine girl; to me not so charming and attractive as her sister, but perhaps equally so to some other persons, certainly to one. This was Will Crenshaw, an old school-fellow of mine, then a civil engineer, in South America. Will was the declared suitor of Belle, although she had never formally accepted him, but Madeline and myself both strongly favored the match, and felt very anxious that she should do so, and indeed were quite certain that when Will should return everything would be made all right. The young engineer was a capital fellow, had excellent prospects, and was my best friend. It was our plan that after their marriage the youthful couple should live with us. This, of course, would be delightful to both Belle and her sister, and I could desire no better companion than Will. He was not to go to distant countries any more, and who could imagine a pleasanter home than ours would be.

And now here was this dreadful prospect of a household ghost!

A week or so passed by, and John Hinckman was no more. Everything was done for him that respect and affection could dictate, and no one mourned his death more heartily than I. If I could have had my way he would have lived as long as I, myself, remained upon this earth.

When everything about the house had settled down into its accustomed quiet, I began to look out for the coming of the expected ghost. I felt sure that I would be the one to whom he would make his appearance, and with my regret and annoyance at his expected coming was mingled a feeling of curiosity to know in what form he would appear. He was not to come as John Hinckman—that was the only bit of comfort in the whole affair.

But several weeks passed, and I saw no ghost, and I began to think that perhaps the aversion I had shown to having such an inmate of my household had had its effect, and I was to be spared the infliction. And now another subject occupied my thoughts. It was summer, the afternoons were pleasant, and on one of them I asked Belle to take a walk with me. I would have preferred Madeline, but she had excused herself as she was very busy making what I presumed to be an altar cloth for Pegram. It turned out to be an afghan for his baby carriage, but the effect was the same: she could not go. When I could not have Madeline I liked very well to walk with Belle. She was a pleasant girl, and in these walks I always talked to her of Crenshaw. My desire that she should marry my friend grew stronger daily. But this afternoon Belle hesitated, and looked a little confused.

"I am not sure that I shall walk to-day."

"But you have your hat on," I urged, "I supposed you had made ready for a walk."

"No," said she, "I thought I would go somewhere with my book."

"You haven't a book," I said, looking at her hands, one of which held a parasol.

"You are dreadfully exact," she replied, with a little laugh, "I am going into the library to get one." And away she ran.

There was something about this I did not like. I firmly believed she had come downstairs prepared to take a walk. But she did not want me; that was evident enough. I went off for a long walk, and when I returned supper was ready, but Belle had not appeared.

"She has gone off somewhere with a book," I said. "I'll go and look for her."

I walked down to the bosky grove at the foot of the lawn, and passed through it without seeing any signs of Belle. Soon, however, I caught sight of her light dress in an open space a little distance beyond me. Stepping forward a few paces I had a full view of her, and my astonishment can be imagined when I saw that she was standing in the shade of a tree talking to a young man. His back was turned toward me, but I could see from his figure and general air that he was young. His hat was a little on one side, in his hand he carried a short whip,

and he wore a pair of riding boots. He and Belle were engaged in very earnest conversation, and did not perceive me. I was not only surprised but shocked at the sight. I was quite certain Belle had come here to meet this young man, who, to me, was a total stranger. I did not wish Belle to know that I had seen her with him, and so I stepped back out of their sight, and began to call her. It was not long before I saw her coming toward me, and, as I expected, alone.

"Indeed," she cried, looking at her watch, "I did not know it was so late."

"Have you had a pleasant time with your book?" I asked, as we walked homeward.

"I wasn't reading all the time," she answered.

I asked her no more questions. It was not for me to begin an inquisition into this matter. But that night I told Madeline all about it. The news troubled her much, and like myself she was greatly grieved at Belle's evident desire to deceive us. When there was a necessity for it my wife could completely de-Pegramize herself, and enter with quick and judicious action into the affairs of others.

"I will go with her to-morrow," she said. "If this person comes, I do not intend that she shall meet him alone."

The next afternoon Belle started out again with her book, but she had gone but a few steps when she was joined by Madeline, with hat and parasol, and together they walked into the bosky grove. They returned in very good time for supper, and as we went in to that meal, Madeline whispered to me:

"There was nobody there."

"And did she say nothing to you of the young man with whom she was talking yesterday?" I asked, when we were alone some hours later.

"Not a word," she said, "though I gave her every opportunity. I wonder if you could have been mistaken."

"I am sure I was not," I replied. "I saw the man as plainly as I see you."

"Then Belle is treating us very badly," she said. "If she desires the company of young men let her say so, and we will invite them to the house."

I did not altogether agree with this latter remark. I did not care to have Belle know young men. I wanted her to marry Will Crenshaw, and be done with it. But we both agreed not to speak to the young lady on the subject. It was not for us to pry into her secrets, and if anything was to be said she should say it.

Every afternoon Belle went away, as before, with her book, but we did not accompany her, nor allude to her newly acquired love for solitary walks and studies. One

afternoon we had callers, and she could not go. That night, after I had gone to sleep, Madeline awoke me with a little shake.

"Listen," she whispered. "Whom is Belle talking to?"

The night was warm, and all our doors and windows were open. Belle's chamber was not far from ours, and we could distinctly hear her speaking in a low tone. She was evidently holding a conversation with some one whose voice we could not hear.

"I'll go in," said Madeline, rising, "and see about this."

"No, no," I whispered. "She is talking to some one outside. Let me go down and speak to him."

I slipped on some clothes and stole quietly down the stairs. I unfastened the back door and went round to the side on which Belle's window opened. No sooner had I reached the corner than I saw, directly under the window, and looking upward, his hat cocked a good deal on one side, and his riding whip in his hand, the jaunty young fellow with whom I had seen Belle talking.

"Hello!" I cried, and rushed toward him. At the sound of my voice he turned to me, and I saw his face distinctly. He was young and handsome. There was a sort of half laugh on his countenance, as if he had just been saying something very witty. But he did not wait to finish his remark or to speak to me. There was a large evergreen near him, and, stepping quickly behind it, he was lost to my view. I ran around the bush, but could see nothing of him. There was a good deal of shrubbery hereabouts, and he was easily able to get away unobserved. I continued the search for about ten minutes, and then, quite sure that the fellow had got away, I returned to the house. Madeline had lighted a lamp, and was calling down-stairs to ask if I had found the man; some of the servants were up, and anxious to know what had happened; Pegram was crying; but in Belle's room all was quiet. Madeline looked in at the open door, and saw her lying quietly in her bed. No word was spoken, and my wife returned to our room, where we discussed the affair for a long time.

In the morning I determined to give Belle a chance to speak, and at the breakfast-table I said to her:

"I suppose you heard the disturbance last night?"

"Yes," she said quietly. "Did you catch the man?"

"No," I answered, with considerable irritation, "but I wish I had."

"What would you have done if you had caught him?" she asked, as with unusual

slowness and deliberation she poured some cream upon her oat-meal.

"Done!" I exclaimed, "I don't know what I would have done. But one thing is certain, I would have made him understand that I would have no strangers prowling around my house at night."

Belle colored a little at the last part of this remark, but she made no answer, and the subject was dropped.

This conversation greatly pained both Madeline and myself. It made it quite clear to us that Belle was aware that we knew of her acquaintance with this young man, and that she still determined to say nothing to us either in the way of confidence or excuse. She had treated us badly, and we could not help showing it. On her side Belle was very quiet, and entirely different from the gay girl she had been some time before.

I urged Madeline to go to Belle and speak to her as a sister, but she declined. "No," she said, "I know Belle's spirit, and there would be trouble. If there is to be a quarrel I shall not begin it."

I was determined to end this unpleasant feeling, which, to me, was almost as bad as a quarrel. If the thing were possible I would put an end to the young man's visits. I could never have the same opinion of Belle I had had before, but if this impudent fellow could be kept away, and Will Crenshaw should come back and attend to his business as an earnest suitor ought, all might yet be well.

And now, strange to say, I began to long for the ghost, whose coming had been promised. I had been considering what means I should take to keep Belle's clandestine visitor away, and had found the question rather a difficult one to settle. I could not shoot the man, and it would indeed be difficult to prevent the meeting of two young persons over whom I had no actual control. But I happened to think that if I could get the aid of the expected ghost the matter would be easy. If it should be as accommodating and obliging as the one who had haunted the house before, it would readily agree to forward the fortunes of the family by assisting in breaking up this unfortunate connection. If it would consent to be present at their interviews the affair was settled. I knew from personal experience that love-making in the presence of a ghost was extremely unpleasant, and in this case I believed it would be impossible.

Every night, after the rest of the household had gone to bed, I wandered about the grounds, examining the porches and the balconies, looking up to the chimneys and the ornaments on top of the house, hoping to see that phantom, whose coming I had, a short

time before, anticipated with such dissatisfaction and repugnance. If I could even again meet the one who was now serving in Russia, I thought it would answer my purpose as well.

On the third or fourth night after I had begun my nocturnal rounds, I encountered, on a path not very far from the house, the young fellow who had given us so much trouble. My indignation at his impudent reappearance knew no bounds. The moon was somewhat obscured by fleecy clouds, but I could see that he wore the same jaunty air, his hat was cocked a little more on one side, he stood with his feet quite wide apart, and in his hands, clasped behind him, he held his riding whip. I stepped quickly toward him.

"Well, sir!" I exclaimed.

He did not seem at all startled.

"How d'ye do?" he said, with a little nod.

"How dare you, sir," I cried, "intrude yourself on my premises? This is the second time I have found you here, and now I want you to understand that you are to get away from here just as fast as you can; and if you are ever caught again anywhere on this estate, I'll have you treated as a trespasser."

"Indeed," said he, "I would be sorry to put you to so much trouble. And now let me say that I have tried to keep out of your way, but since you have proved so determined to make my acquaintance I thought I might as well come forward and do the sociable."

"None of your impertinence," I cried. "What brings you here, anyway?"

"Well," said he, with a little laugh, "if you want to know I don't mind telling you I came to see Miss Belle."

"You confounded rascal!" I cried, raising my heavy stick. "Get out of my sight, or I will break your head!"

"All right," said he, "break away!"

And drawing himself up he gave his right boot a slap with his whip.

The whip went entirely through both legs! It was the ghost!

Utterly astounded I started back, and sat down upon a raised flower-bed, against which I had stumbled. I had no strength, nor power to speak. I had seen a ghost before, but I was entirely overcome by this amazing development.

"And now I suppose you know who I am," said the specter, approaching, and standing in front of me. "The one who was here before told me that your lady didn't fancy ghosts, and that I had better keep out of sight of both of you; but he didn't say anything about Miss Belle; and by George! sir, it wouldn't have mattered if he had; for if it hadn't been for that charming young lady I shouldn't have been here at all. I am the ghost of Buck Edwards, who was pretty well known

in the lower part of this county about seventy years ago. I always had a great eye for the ladies, sir, and when I got a chance to court one I didn't miss it. I did too much courting, however, for I roused up a jealous fellow, named Ruggles, and he shot me in a duel early one September morning. Since then I have haunted, from time to time, more than a dozen houses where there were pretty girls."

"Do you mean to say," I asked, now finding strength, "that a spirit would care to come back to this earth to court a girl?"

"Why, what are you thinking of?" exclaimed the phantom of Buck Edwards. "Do you suppose that only old misers and love-lorn maidens want to come back and have a good time? No, sir! Every one of us, who is worth anything, comes if he can get a chance. By George, sir! do you know I courted Miss Belle's grandmother? And a couple of gay young ones we were too! Nobody ever knew anything of it, and that made it all the livelier."

"Do you intend to stay here and pay attention to my sister-in-law?" I asked, anxiously.

"Certainly I do," was the reply. "Didn't I say that is what I came for?"

"Don't you see the mischief you will do?" I asked. "You will probably break off a match between her and a most excellent gentleman whom we all desire——"

"Break off a match!" exclaimed the ghost of Buck Edwards, with a satisfied grin. "How many matches I have broken off! The last thing I ever did, before I went away, was of that sort. She wouldn't marry the gentleman who shot me." There was evidently no conscience to this specter.

"And if you do not care for that," I said, in considerable anger, "I can tell you that you are causing ill-feeling between the young lady and the best friends she has in the world, which may end very disastrously."

"Now, look here, my man," said the ghost; "if you and your wife are really her friends you won't act like fools and make trouble."

I made no answer to this remark, but asserted, with much warmth, that I intended to tell Miss Belle exactly what he was, and so break off the engagement at once.

"If you tell her that she's been walking and talking with the ghost of the fellow who courted her grandmother,—I reckon she could find some of my letters now among the old lady's papers, if she looked for them,—you'd frighten the wits out of her. She'd go crazy. I know girls' natures, sir."

So do I, I groaned.

"Don't get excited," he said. "Let the girl alone, and everything will be comfortable and pleasant. Good-night."

I went to bed, but not to sleep. Here was

a terrible situation. A sister-in-law courted by a ghost! Was ever a man called upon to sustain such a trial! And I must sustain it alone. There was no one with whom I could share the secret.

Several times after this I saw this baleful specter of a young buck of the olden time. He would nod to me with a jocular air, but I did not care to speak to him. One afternoon I went into the house to look for my wife, and, very naturally, I entered the room where Pegram lay in his little bed. The child was asleep, and no one was with him. I stood and gazed contemplatively upon my son. He was a handsome child, and apparently full of noble instincts, and yet I could not help wishing that he were older, or that in some way his conditions were such that it should not be necessary, figuratively speaking, that his mother should continually hover about him. If she could be content with a little less of Pegram and a little more of me, my anticipations of a matrimonial career would be more fully realized.

As these thoughts were passing through my mind I raised my eyes, and on the other side of the little bedstead I saw the wretched ghost of Buck Edwards.

"Fine boy," he said.

My indignation at seeing this impudent existence within the most sacred precincts of my house was boundless.

"You vile interloper!" I cried.

At this moment Madeline entered the room. Pale and stern, she walked directly to the crib and took up the child. Then she turned to me and said:

"I was standing in the door-way, and saw you looking at my babe. I heard what you said to him. I have suspected it before." And then, with Pegram in her arms, she strode out of the room.

The ghost had vanished, as Madeline entered. Filled with rage and bitterness, for my wife had never spoken to me in these tones before, I ran down-stairs and rushed out of the house. I walked long and far, my mind filled with doleful thoughts. When I returned to the house, I found a note from my wife. It ran thus:

"I have gone to Aunt Hannah's with Pegram, and have taken Belle. I cannot live with one who considers my child a vile interloper."

As I sat down in my misery, there was one little spark of comfort amid the gloom. She had taken Belle. My first impulse was to follow into the city and explain everything, but I quickly reflected that if I did this I must tell her of the ghost, and I felt certain that she would never return with Pegram to a haunted house. Must I, in order to regain my wife, give

up this beautiful home? For two days I racked my brains and wandered gloomily about.

In one of my dreary rambles I encountered the ghost. "What are you doing here?" I cried. "Miss Belle has gone."

"I know that," the specter answered, his air expressing all his usual impertinence and swagger, "but she'll come back. When your wife returns, she's bound to bring young Miss."

At this, a thought flashed through my mind. If any good would come of it, Belle should never return. Whatever else happened, this insolent ghost of a gay young buck should have no excuse for haunting my house.

"She will never come back while you are here," I cried.

"I don't believe it," it coolly answered.

I made no further assertions on the subject. I had determined what to do, and it was of no use to be angry with a vaporing creature like this. But I might as well get some information out of him.

"Tell me this," I asked; "if, for any reason, you should leave this place and throw up your situation, so to speak, would you have a successor?"

"You needn't think I am going," it said contemptuously. "None of your little tricks on me. But I'll just tell you, for your satisfaction, that if I should take it into my head to cut the place, there would be another ghost here in no time."

"What is it," I cried, stamping my foot, "that causes this house to be so haunted by ghosts, when there are hundreds and thousands of places where such apparitions are never seen?"

"Old fellow," said the specter folding its arms, and looking at me with half-shut eyes, "it isn't the house that draws the ghosts, it is somebody in it; and as long as you are here the place will be haunted. But you needn't mind that. Some houses have rats, some have fever-and-ague, and some have ghosts. Au revoir." And I was alone.

So then the spectral mortgage could never be lifted. With heavy heart and feet I passed through the bosky grove to my once happy home.

I had not been there half an hour when Belle arrived. She had come by the morning train, and had nothing with her but a little hand-bag. I looked at her in astonishment.

"Infatuated girl," I cried, "could you not stay away from here three days?"

"I am glad you said that," she answered, taking a seat, "for now I think I am right in suspecting what was on your mind. I ran away from Madeline to see if I could find out what was at the bottom of this dreadful trouble between you. She told me what you

said, and I don't believe you ever used those words to Pegram. And now I want to ask you one question. Had I, in any way, anything to do with this?"

"No," said I, "not directly." And then emboldened by circumstances, I added: "But that secret visitor or friend of yours had much to do with it."

"I thought that might be so," she answered, "and now, George, I want to tell you something, I am afraid it will shock you very much."

"I have had so much to shock me lately that I can stand almost anything now."

"Well then, it is this," she said. "That person whom I saw sometimes, and whom you once found under my window, is a ghost."

"Did you know that?" I cried. "I knew it was a ghost, but did not imagine that you had any suspicion of it."

"Why, yes," she answered, "I saw through him almost from the very first. I was a good deal startled, and a little frightened when I found it out, but I soon felt that this ghost couldn't do me any harm, and you don't know how amusing it was. I always had a fancy for ghosts, but I never expected to meet with one like this."

"And so you knew all the time it wasn't a real man," I exclaimed, still filled with astonishment at what I had heard.

"A real man!" cried Belle, with considerable contempt in her tones. "Do you suppose I would become acquainted in that way with a real man, and let him come under my window and talk to me? I was determined not to tell any of you about it, for I knew you wouldn't approve of it, and would break up the fun some way. Now I wish most heartily that I had spoken of it."

"Yes," I answered, "it might have saved much trouble."

"But, oh! George," she continued, "you've no idea how funny it was! Such a ridiculous, self-conceited, old-fashioned ghost of a beau!"

"Yes," said I, "when it was alive it courted your grandmother."

"The impudence!" exclaimed Belle. "And to think that it supposed that I imagined it to be a real man! Why, one day, when it was talking to me it stepped back into a rose bush and it stood there ever so long, all mixed up with the roses and leaves."

"And you knew it all the time?"

These words were spoken in a hollow voice by some one near us. Turning quickly, we saw the ghost of Buck Edwards; but no longer the jaunty specter we had seen before. His hat was on the back of his head, his knees were turned inward, his shoulders

drooped, his head hung, and his arms dangled limp at his sides.

"Yes," said Belle, "I knew it all the time."

The ghost looked at her with a faded, misty eye; and then, instead of vanishing briskly as was his wont, he began slowly and irresolutely to disappear. First his body faded from view, then his head, leaving his hat and boots. These gradually vanished, and the last thing we saw of the once Buck Edwards was a dissolving view of the tip-end of a limp and drooping riding whip.

"He is gone," said Belle. "We'll never see him again."

"Yes," said I, "he is gone. I think your discovery of his real nature has completely broken up that proud spirit. And now, what is to be done about Madeline?"

"Wasn't it the ghost you called an interloper?" asked Belle.

"Certainly it was," I replied.

"Well, then, go and tell her so," said Belle.

"About the ghost and all!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly," said she.

And together we went to Madeline, and I told her all. I found her with her anger gone, and steeped in misery. When I had finished, all Pegramed as she was, she plunged into my arms. I pressed my wife and child closely to my bosom, and we wept with joy.

When Will Crenshaw came home and was told this story, he said it didn't trouble him a bit.

"I'm not afraid of a rival like that," he remarked. "Such a suitor wouldn't stand a ghost of a chance."

"But I can tell you," said Madeline, "that you had better be up and doing on your own account. A girl like Belle needn't be expected to depend on the chance of a ghost."

Crenshaw heeded her words, and the young couple were married in the fall. The wedding took place in the little church near our house. It was a quiet marriage, and was attended by a strictly family party. At the conclusion of the ceremonies I felt, or saw, for I am sure I did not hear—a little sigh quite near me.

I turned, and sitting on the chancel-steps I saw the specter of Buck Edwards. His head was bowed, and his hands, holding his hat and riding-whip, rested carelessly on his knees.

"Bedad, sir!" he exclaimed, "to think of it! If I hadn't cut up as I did I might have married, and have been that girl's grandfather!"

The idea made me smile.

"It can't be remedied now," I answered.

"Such a remark to make at a wedding!" said Madeline, giving me a punch with her reproachful elbow.