

him, I slipped noiselessly into my chamber.

And now, at this point, I must become minute, and perhaps even tedious in detail, for I have a strange story to tell, and wish faithfully to relate the strange occurrences of that night.

There was but one other boarder on the second floor of Mrs. Hone's house besides my uncle and myself. This was a stern, unsocial man named Foster, a bachelor, who always returned my cheerful "Good-morning!" with an unmoved face and a jerky bow, as though his good angel had suddenly pulled some invisible string to prevent him from seeming the surly fellow he really was. This gruff personage stalked up the stairs and into his room soon after I had entered mine. Our apartments were at the back of the house, and adjoining, though his, being but a small chamber at the end of the hall, had its door standing at a right angle with my own. I could hear him moving briskly around his room for a while, and finally, as I arose to close my door, saw him emerge, carpet-bag in hand, and disappear at the turn of the stairway. Soon after there were other footsteps in his chamber, apparently those of two persons, and I could hear my landlady's voice saying, in her usual indistinct over-tone,

"There is no other way; we will have to try poison, though I dread the consequences."

Then there was some muttered reply, and a discussion ensued, through which I could plainly distinguish the words "no one in here to-night"—"never knew it to fail!"—"children"—"horrible!"—"the uncle's room"—"danger!"—"uncle can't get out bed"—"no, it's better here," etc., etc.

Just then uncle's hand-bell tingled out its familiar summons, and I hastened to his bedside.

"Fanny," he said, "can't you make it a little lighter here? I've had one of my ugly dreams, and I want to be certain you're all right."

"To be sure I am, uncle dear," I rejoined, cheerfully, at the same time lighting the gas near the head of his bed. "Is that too bright for you?"

"No, no; leave it up—so. Now come tell me what you have been doing this afternoon."

"Should I tell him every thing? No. He would either be distressed at his own powerlessness, or would laugh at my nervous fears. So I replied, at the same time lifting a small table nearer his bed preparatory to bringing up his supper.

"Doing, uncle? Why, I have been here with you most of the afternoon, and before that I was reading a letter from—"

"Ah! I understand. Well, it's all my own fault for ever letting that fellow with the buttons have a word to say to you. I shall have to hire some fat old nurse in a year or two, while you'll be sporting around with that scamp—hey?"

My only answer to this was a laughing thren. To go to the young scamp at once if uncle were not more respectful; though, at heart, I felt quite resolved that, married or single, I should never resign my self-imposed duty of nursing him.

"Well, well," said uncle, "you've always been such a good girl I shan't be hard on you. See if it's time for my mixture."

"No, not for an hour yet. You must take your supper first."

"Very well. Don't put any butter on the toast to-night; and if the chicken's as tough as it was yesterday bring up something else."

"Yes, uncle."

On my way from the dining-room with uncle's supper I could not resist the temptation of taking a look into Mr. Foster's apartment. So resting my tray in a vacant niche at the head of the stair, I turned his knob; but the door would not open. It was locked, and the key had been taken away. Thrust partly under my own closed door was a penciled note from one of the lady boarders, requesting that, if my patient were well enough, I would pass the evening in her room. Well pleased at the prospect of a cheerful gossip with Mrs. Gray's delightful family, I resolved to avail myself of the invitation after my uncle had fallen into his usual slumber, and so lost no time in attending to my evening duties.

It was nearly half-past eight before I found myself in Mrs. Gray's pleasant parlor, and by this time the beautiful afternoon had passed into a chilly, unpleasant evening. But we soon forgot the outside darkness in the brightness and comfort within. We talked of the campaign, Thomas, Canby, and others, and in our excited comments developed sundry original and startling views upon matters and things in general, and the strategy of the present campaign in particular.

Well entertained by the conversation and the music that followed, I lingered in Mrs. Gray's room until ten o'clock. Then, after seeing that uncle was comfortably settled for the night, I sought my own room, and, carefully locking the door leading into the hall, commenced to undress. This done, I stood in my long night-wrapper near the gaslight, and began reading once more the words of my absent soldier. I had just come to the passage, "By-the-way, my dear Fanny," when a sudden, but continuous, clicking startled me. It might have been the sharp dropping of rain-drops on the roof of the piazza beneath my opened window, or the ticking of the queer clock in Mr. Foster's room; or it might have been caused by some leakage in the water pipes, or the creaking of the poor sick baby's cradle in the room above. It might, in short, have arisen from either of these or twenty other innocent causes, and so I tried to reason as, hastily putting the letter away, I turned the gas entirely off (unintentionally, for that matter, but my hand was not steady) and sought my pillow, quite sure that I should not sleep a wink that night. But youth and health are often proof against more serious alarms than mine had been, and I soon sank into a profound slumber.

Hours afterward I awoke with a start from some troubled dream. What it had been I could not precisely recall; but I was agitated, and my brow and neck seemed fairly dripping with perspiration. In an instant the deep tones of the town clock striking "two" reassured me, with its familiar, everyday sound, and I soon floated off again into the land of dreams. This time the sleep was far less sound; and more than once, without quite awaking, I instinctively drew my muslin night-sleeve across my forehead; it was strangely moist, though I could feel the cool night-air stealing through the darkness from the open window opposite. After turning uneasily upon my pillow for a while, I finally sank into a deeper slumber once more, and must have remained unconscious for nearly an hour, when suddenly I started up with a sense of acute pain; and, wide awake in an instant, became conscious that I was not alone in the room. Else why that heavy thump upon the floor, and the quick rush that followed? All was dark, but I could feel that the pillow, my face, neck, and the shoulder and sleeves of my night-dress were covered with a strange, clammy moisture. Seized with a horrible clammy, and darting from the bed in an agony of terror, I flew to the other side of the room, and groping for my uncle's door, burst with a cry into his room. Dimly lighted as it was, I could see every object distinctly as I entered; and first of all, because the long mirror hung directly opposite the door, and the small gas-jet threw its rays full upon me, I saw my own reflection in its bright surface. Great Heavens! I was covered with blood! My hands were wet with it, while my cheek and throat were crimson with the streams which flowed profusely from my temples. What could I do? My uncle still slept soundly, under the effects of an opiate which his physicians had prescribed for him. Frantic with fear, I tore into the hall, flew up the stair, and would have gone into Mrs. Gray's room, had I not come in collision with my landlady at the landing-place.

"Goodness! Miss Fanny, was it you that screamed? What has happened? Hush!"—and she drew me quickly into her little room. "Why, your shoulder's all wet! Gracious! child, what is the matter? Here, you're safe enough now—don't cry. Oh! where are the matches? I haven't had my room dark at night before, I don't know when—here they are! Hush! you'll scare Mrs. Gray."

By this time the room was lighted, and apparently Mrs. Hone was as much alarmed as myself when she saw my condition. She was, however, a woman of strong nerve, and in a moment was coolly bathing my face and neck and endeavoring to stanch the blood still flowing from my temples. When the bleeding ceased she lost no time in changing my garments and making me as comfortable as possible.

For some time I stayed in the landlady's room, and we talked over the affair together. There was but one solution of the matter; and when, with a shudder, I suggested it to her, she answered softly—

"Just so, Miss Fanny, it was nothing else, depend upon it. Poor child! Did you see him?"

"No," I whispered, "the room was dark; but I heard him distinctly. Oh, Mrs. Hone, I can never sleep in that room again! I must leave the house to-morrow."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Hone; "it's always some trouble with me; first one thing, and then another. But I'm sure I can't blame you, Miss Fanny; though, if you would stay, I could get a man here to-

morrow who told me he could soon put a stop to all such troubles. But I hated to have him come before, because I knew it would make so much talk in the house, and make the help saucy. Goodness knows, they're unbearable enough already!"

I felt sorry for the landlady, but in my own mind fully resolved to leave her roof as soon as possible. The clock boomed out "four."

"Oh, Mrs. Hone!" I exclaimed, struck with a new fear, "I have left uncle alone all this time. Will you go down stairs with me? I can't go alone!"

The landlady was naturally unwilling to run any further risk of disturbing the household, and tried to persuade me not to go, but I was resolute.

The dear old man lay there safely enough when we entered his room, but his sleep was heavy—too heavy; and his brow was burning hot. The next day he was worse; and when I asked the physician concerning him, the reply was,

"Oh, it's nothing very serious. Perfect quiet for a week or two, and careful nursing, are all that are necessary."

So there, of course, was an end for the present of my plan to leave the house. But I did not attempt to sleep in my apartment again, or even to undress at all. For four nights I stayed in the sick chamber, resting only in a large arm-chair, or perhaps indulging in a brief repose upon the lounge. On the fifth day uncle was so much better that, unconscious of all that had happened, he insisted upon my retiring to my room and seeking rest. Willing to relieve his anxiety, and being really very much exhausted from continued watching, I obeyed; and in a few moments was comfortably reclining on a sofa which stood near the window across the corner of my room.

That pleasant, sunny room! How different its appearance was now from what it had been less than a week ago! Then, all was order and neatness; and the mantel, toilet-table and walls had been decked with various tasteful articles and engravings, brackets and images. Now, the walls were bare, and the pictures stood on the floor ready to be taken away as soon as uncle should be able to leave the house (for I now felt confident I could persuade him to go), and the little nick-nacks and souvenirs were already safely stowed away in trunks. The curtains were drawn tastelessly back by Betty's ruthless hand; and on the furniture lingered a peculiar bloom—neither cleanliness nor dirt—left by the housemaid's duster. To add to the air of discomfort, in one corner stood a pile of trunks (which had been noiselessly packed while uncle slept); and in another lay portions of a dismembered bedstead and a quantity of bedding, which the landlady had asked permission to leave there, "being as the room wasn't used."

All these things were duly noted as I lay there, vainly counting the sleep I so much needed. I could hear my uncle's heavy breathing in the next room, and the occasional passing of footsteps along the hall as the boarders came straggling up from dinner. It was no feverish dream then that possessed me when there, in the broad daylight, I saw the detested creature who had attacked me in the dead of night, and the traces of whose diabolical work were still upon my temple, cautiously enter my room, and, gliding slowly and stealthily along, close up to the very wainscot, actually secrete himself under the bedding in the corner!

Goaled to desperation I leaped from the couch, and, scarce conscious of what I was doing, flew to the spot, and, seizing a small bedpost which lay there, beat with all my might upon the place where I believed his head and breast to be! No sound escaped him, but from the first stroke I felt that he was in my power. Blow after blow fell, for I had the strength of a maniac, and I dared not stop. By this time my cries were heard, and my landlady and several of the boarders rushed into my room. They forced me into a seat, and lifted the bedding from the floor. There he lay, motionless! They turned him over. He was dead—stone dead!—and by my hand!

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Williams, the strong young man from the third story, as he lifted my victim from the floor, "he is dead, big as he is; but how did you ever find courage to kill him?"

"I'm sure I hardly know," I gasped, except that I was desperate. He has tormented me almost to death for two or three weeks past, and last Saturday night he actually did come near killing me in earnest."

"How? how?" cried everybody but the landlady, crowding me closely. The good lady winked prodigiously at me just then, and tried to change the subject; but I was too excited to heed her. Turning with a shudder from the lifeless cause of my past miseries, I explained how I had felt a natural antipathy against him

from the first moment I had encountered him in the hall at Mrs. Hone's; how terrified I had been when I saw him pass through the reception-parlor where I sat conversing with a gentleman; how I had heard and seen him several times since; how he had actually dragged a letter from my room out into the hall; and, above all, how he had bitten my temple on that fearful night. I had just raised the hair carefully from my brow to show my audience the still unhealed traces of those cruel teeth, when Biddy, the chamber-maid, came bustling in. The moment she saw the lifeless corpse she shrieked.

"Who killed him? Not you, Miss Fanny! I'd have been skeered to death. I'm glad he's dead, anyhow. I told you, ma'am," she added, turning to Mrs. Hone, "twan't no use tryin' to pizen him. We couldn't have got rid of him; and he'd smelt awful all summer; and—"

"Hold your tongue!" exclaimed Mrs. Hone, out of patience.

Thus tenderly admonished, Biddy subsided, only murmuring, under her breath, that people's lives "hadn't been safe with a critter like that rummin' around;" and finally uttering a piercing shriek as Mr. Williams, the strong young man from the third story, lifted the lifeless body toward her.

At that moment Mrs. Hone's oldest son, Fred, a student in the academy, burst into the room. He stopped for a moment, surveying the strange tableau. There was I, flashed with the excitement of my exploit; Biddy, angry at being checked in her voluble exclamations, and shrinking from the corpse; Mrs. Hone, severe in her dignity as head of the house, glad that the obnoxious creature was dead, yet anxious to prevent any talk among her boarders; and Mr. Williams holding up the dead body so that all could see it.

Master Fred, who being six years my junior was my sworn admirer, and hated my mysterious foe as much as I did, took in the whole affair at a glance.

"You've killed him, Miss Fanny, have you?" he exclaimed. "Bully for you! He's the biggest fellow I ever saw. 'A rat, dead for a ducat, dead!' he added, imitating as nearly as he could the tone and attitude of R. W., whom he had seen the evening before in Hamlet at a private theatrical, pointing at the dead body of the huge rat whom I had just killed, which Mr. Williams was handing to the shrinking Biddy to be disposed of.

Possibly the ready of this narrative may, like my lord Hamlet, have taken this slaughtered rat for "his better." If so, he has read with his imagination instead of his eyes—"a bad habit; I pray you avoid it."

I have only to add here that my strange enemy was the first and the last of his kind that has ever succeeded in penetrating into the immaculate mansion of Mrs. Hone.

"Are there any fools in this city?" asked a stranger of a newsboy. "No; do you feel lonesome?" was the reply.

A bad little boy, upon being promised five cents by his mother if he would take a dose of castor oil, obtained the money, and then told his parent that she might cast-er oil in the street.

A SCHOOLBOY being asked by the teacher how he should flog him, replied: "If you please, sir, I should like to have it on the Italian system—the heavy strokes upwards, and the down ones light."

Down in Connecticut butter is being made at a cost of three cents per pound. When an unfortunate man gets a mouthful of the compound, his chief anxiety is to find a good place to have a fit.

A man in digging a load of sand from a sand bank in Seneca Falls was buried to his shoulders by an avalanche of the treacherous earth. When discovered by his friends he had been planted about three hours, and was beginning to grow—discouraged.

A rustic youngster, being asked out to take tea with a friend, was admonished to praise the eatables. Presently the butter was passed to him, when he remarked, "Very nice butter—what there is of it," and observing a smile, he added, "and plenty of it—such as it is."

Doctor Bolus, who was very angry when any joke was passed on his profession, once said:

"I defy any person whom I ever attended to accuse me of ignorance or neglect."

"That you may do safely, doctor," replied a wag; "dead men tell no tales!"