

tale; and with what alarm I viewed its effect upon him! Alas! how little I knew the nature of the subject which engrossed his every thought, or the wild idea which had possession of him. The more I endeavored to turn his mind from it, the more tenaciously it clung to the disagreeable topic.

"At last he suggested that we pay a visit to the haunted room. If, instead, he had asked me to share with him the commission of some awful crime I could not have been more startled.

"Visit the haunted room! Louis! You must be jesting, surely!" I exclaimed.

"He said no more that day; but on the next and the next he repeated the suggestion.

"But, my friends, I need not weary you with the details of how he held to his purpose; and how, failing to coax me, at last he overcame my opposition. I loved him passionately—I loved him with all the fervor and strength of my young heart; therefore, when he threatened to leave me, I yielded. He planned the details, and I passively obeyed his instructions. He wished me to procure by stealth the rusty iron key during the day, preparatory to a visit to the haunted room at night, when all the house should be abed and still. This I dared not do, lest meanwhile my father should miss it from its accustomed place. We might get possession of it then, he said, after my father had retired for the night. To this proposition, in common with the rest, I tacitly consented.

"As the time selected by my lover for the ghostly mission arrived my feelings may be imagined, but not described. As if in keeping with the deed we meditated, and the forbidding character of the chamber whose inner mysteries we were about to fathom, the night was one of the wildest of the year. The heavy rain pounded the earth outside, and beat against the windows, and the shutters were loudly rattled by the wind that rumbled dismally in the chimneys.

"As the old clock on the landing tolled the hour of twelve, trembling with fear, I crept down the stairs leading from my chamber; through the darkness I groped my way to the portrait gallery, where Louis was to await my coming. So overcome was I with the terrors of the situation, that when Louis clasped my hand I threw my arms about his neck, and piteously begged him to abandon, or postpone, at least, his dreadful purpose. Careasing me tenderly, he used all his powers of argument and persuasion to calm my fears.

"Now, darling, get the key," he said.

"Oh, Louis, you cannot mean it—you do not mean it!" I pleaded.

"But in this, as in all things else, he was inexorable. Holding my hands, he accompanied me to the door of my father's chamber. Softly he raised the latch—cautiously he pushed open the door to let me through. Hardly conscious of where I was, or what I was doing, I passed in; somehow or other I gained my father's bedside. Pausing to collect my scattered thoughts and to calm my heart's fierce beating, I groped to the spot

where I knew I should find the object of my search. As my hand came in contact with the cold metal a shudder passed over me. I grasped the key desperately and turned to reach the door.

"At that instant a flash of lightning lit up the room. It was but momentary, yet sufficient to disclose a scene which I can never forget. The bed curtains were partly drawn, and there on his pillow, with his noble face upturned and one arm thrown over his head—there lay my dear father, sleeping peacefully.

"With precipitous haste I reached the door, and was clasped in my lover's arms, while he whispered in my ears words of praise and encouragement. After what I had already endured, to reach the door of the haunted room was comparatively an easy task. Again I endeavored to turn Louis from his purpose, but in vain. Stealthily, noiselessly he inserted the rusty key in the rusty lock; carefully he turned it, and grating dismally, the bolt retreated from its socket—the door was free. Inch by inch he pushed it back; the hinges creaked dolefully; the foul air rushed out, and the damp, disagreeable odors offended the sense of smell. After allowing the foul air to escape, Louis pushed his way in and bade me follow. When we were fairly inside he whispered,—

"Hold the candle."

"With trembling fingers I did so, while he struck a light.

"As the feeble, flickering rays lit up the interior of the room, I clung to my lover's arm. Everything was veiled with cobwebs and gray with dust. On the wainscotted walls, dimly outlined, hung cupids and dragons, pictures of a by-gone age. A coat of mail and helmets, with spear-heads and battle-axe, testified to the chivalrous and warlike traits of my ancestors. These objects I but glanced at, while Louis shaded with his hand the sputtering light. Removing his hand he took a step forward; instinctively I did likewise.

"Horrors! What a sight greeted me! Near the center of the room, with a sword thrust between its fleshless ribs, and with its skinny arms thrown out as if in supplication—there lay a grinning, ghastly human skeleton!

"There before us was the evidence of the tragedy said to have been enacted on that very spot so many years before, and respecting which there had been so much gossip and speculation. You may—if you will—picture to yourselves my terror, as speechless I stared at the ghastly object. Even my lover, to whom—as I afterward learned—the legend respecting it had been of no import whatever, even he was unable to do aught but stare blankly at the hideous skeleton, of whose existence until now he had entertained not the faintest idea.

"When able to speak, I said,—

"Louis, dear Louis, take me out of this room—do take me out of this dreadful place, or I shall go mad!"

"He was about to reply when the door behind us creaked on its hinges. So startled was I by this that I