

Swift and Reg promptly obeyed, Daymer stood as if rooted to the spot, and I watched him.

Evidently there was some mystery here, something, too, of which this man was cognizant. I remembered his strange looks at Madge's question; I remembered, still further back, that when this trip was planned he had opposed it for himself and wife—had suggested that they go elsewhere and visit Tahoe in the future; but she and "our girls" had become fast friends, and she begged to come at this time. With evident reluctance—though he tried to hide it—he had consented; and now—

It required but a few seconds for all this to pass through my mind, and then Reg was saying—

"Giles, Daymer, come here."

I had only removed my eyes from my companion's face a moment to look at Reg, whose excited countenance was visible around the corner; but when I looked again he was calm and collected, even the pallor was giving way to his usual healthy color.

"Come," he said, moving to join the others. Mechanically I followed, completely dazed by the metamorphosis.

"See!" said Reed Huntley.

One glance through the broken pane of glass and torn curtain sufficed me; the next was bestowed upon Dwight Daymer, who showed no more signs of horror and perturbation than did the others, save that his hands trembled and his knees shook.

"Shall we go in?" Ted Huntley's pale lips asked.

If our actions appear cowardly, please remember we were not "to the manor born." We were young men born and bred amid the tamest civilization; nothing dramatic had ever before come our way, off the stage. No wonder, then, the intrusion of this weird, old house, with its overgrown, neglected garden, and its ghastly occupant on the kitchen hearth, into our day of pleasure made us hesitate and tremble.

No one answered Ted's question for a little, and then it was Daymer who said, lightly—

"Why not?"

"Suppose you lead, then," said Swift, whose love of nature had never reached out to the supernatural.

"Certainly."

We followed him to the door, which he tried in vain.

"Maybe we can open a window," somebody suggested. Reg and Ted tried them, but with no better success.

"If none of you have any scruples against entering a sarcophagus by force, we can break this door in," laughed Daymer, pressing his knee against it.

He was a strong, well-built man, and at the second push with knee and shoulder the rusty lock yielded, and we were in the presence of the dead.

The room was low and furnished only with a stove given over to rust, a cupboard built in the wall, a table and some chairs. The table seemed to have been pushed hurriedly or violently aside, and one chair lay on its side, while close beside another lay the skeleton of a man. His mildewed clothing was dropping away from the dry bones, and his attenuated face showed ghastly in the dim light. Some one wrenched the curtain down just as some one else caught Daymer falling to the floor. Quickly he was carried out.

"Got nervous," was Reed Huntley's brief comment, but he revived almost immediately.

"Foul air," he muttered. "Go on, boys; I'll soon be all right."

"I say, fellows, there's been an awful crime here," said Swift, solemnly, when once more we assembled in the kitchen.

"Looks like it," said Ted.

"Shall we lift him up?" I questioned.

At this moment Reed Huntley remembered that he was a lawyer, and, some of his legal knowledge coming to his aid, he interposed—

"No, no, gentlemen, we must not touch him nor anything else here; we ought not to have broken in the door. We must send to Truckee for the proper officers."

We all recognized the force of his words at once, and, hurrying out of the ghoulish place, fastened the door as best we could.

Shooting had lost its charm; accordingly we took our way back to the tents, perfecting our plans in regard to the dead man, and agreeing, under no considerations, to tell the ladies of either party the dreadful story.

As for myself, I could not sleep that night, and Dwight Daymer tossed restlessly the long hours through. The ladies, emerging from their tent in the morning, laughed at us for our weary looks, declaring that they believed we were afraid. That day Huntley sent a message to Truckee by the stage driver, and on the following day three of the town officials came out, ostensibly shooting, and we joined them, leaving the ladies of the two camps to entertain each other.

"I'll bet it's Kail—old Kail Quimby," said one of the dignitaries, and when once more we stood in the presence of the dead he exclaimed, emphatically: "Tis Kail hisself."

"You see," he went on, "he came here nigh on thirty year ago and built a shanty right here. I guess he lived in it fer ten year or more and then put up this house. Nobody knows why he come, or why he lived alone, no more'n they knowed why he built sech a big house jist fer hisself alone. Some called him lunny, some a miser, some one thing and some another, and no un really cared either. I kept the Truckee