

The Captain's Money.

A Tale of Buried Treasure, Cuban Revolt and Adventure Upon the Seas.

IN FOUR PARTS.

BY JAMES FRANKLIN FITTS.

The artful falsehood prevailed, and Mrs. Willis voluntarily told Hunter that he could remain a few days if he chose.

"Thank you, ma'am; I feel sure that your husband will be pleased that you have invited me here."

"The Captain's chamber is immediately over this room," said Mrs. Willis. "You may occupy it. When he is away, I always sleep with Helen, down stairs."

"The Captain said something to me about the old part of the house being haunted. I should judge that he really believed it. Do you, may I ask?"

"It's an unpleasant subject, sir. The place has so bad a name in this respect, that the neighbors will not set foot in it after dark. I lived here for years before I was married and used to laugh at these stories. Since then, I must say, I have heard some strange and disturbing noises at night, off somewhere in the old part. I'm a religious woman, and don't believe in ghosts. Captain Willis does, but they don't seem to give him any great annoyance. The most unpleasant thing to me is the talk that it makes through the town; but my husband is attached to the place, and he won't leave it."

"I don't think the spirits will disturb me," said Hunter.

He went up to the room designated. Immediately, and remained there till he was summoned down to tea. The windows overlooked the bay; he drew a chair to one of them and sat down. As he looked over the wide sweep of water with all its craft, an incident occurred that for a moment struck terror to the soul of this man, and gave him a rude foretaste of the pangs of punishment. A bark had passed the cape, coming in, whose appearance reminded him instantly of the "Nellie Willis." There were the foremast and mainmast square-rigged, the miz-

zen-mast sloop-rigged, the same cut of bow and stern, and she sat low in the water as did the "Nellie" when full-freighted. This vessel was in fact the twin of "Nellie" built and launched at the same time, in the same yard; but Louis Hunter knew nothing of this. A cold sweat stood out on his forehead. Could this, he asked of himself, be the specter of the bark he had stranded and burned in the Bahamas, coming up here to betray him? A marine glass lay on the table; he snatched it up and looked anxiously and with trembling hands holding it, till the progress of the vessel showed her stern. To his

unbounded relief he read the words: "Lady Jane Grey."

Smiling at his absurd fears, he sat down and reflected. All was going prosperously with him; he was domiciled in the house where the treasure was concealed; no living person knew of its existence but he. It was perfectly safe in its place of concealment. The next thing was to get Mrs. Willis and Helen out of the house; then to devise a secure plan to remove the money.

He thought of Helen; and his brow darkened. Success would crown his efforts; yet without her, it would not be complete.

"But she'll never see him again," he thought. "I must be patient. Time works wonders; time will soften her stubborn heart when she finds he does not return. By all the gods, I'll have her yet! She will have one more chance. The next time she'll not refuse me—and fifty thousand dollars!"

Mrs. Willis sat alone at the tea-table, and her manner was anything but cordial. He inquired for Helen, and was told that she refused to meet Mr. Hunter. The mother added, with some acerbity, that Helen would go to Boston in the morning, to stay a week with her aunt. The perfect coolness and nonchalance of Hunter's manner under the delicate circumstances in which he appeared in her house had somewhat puzzled and annoyed the good lady; but his demeanor upon hearing this announcement, which she had expected would disconcert him, not only vexed but annoyed her. He merely said "Ah!" and elevated his black eyebrows. Then he fell to and ate a hearty supper. He complimented Mrs. Willis on her biscuits, and ate a round dozen of them. He almost exhausted her patience with his calls for more tea, talking garrulously all the time of different varieties of the herb, and what he had read about the modes of preparing it. When the tea-things were cleared away and Mrs. Willis had returned to the sitting-room, Hunter lingered, hoping that Helen would appear; but she did not. The candles were lighted and he was told which one he might take when he was ready to retire, but the hint was thrown away upon him. Mrs. Willis wished to ask many questions about her husband, but she was so thoroughly provoked at her strange and unwelcome guest that she kept silence. Finally he bade her good night, and went up to his room. Between her annoyance and her mystification upon Hunter's conduct, Mrs.

Willis was in a very unsettled state of mind, and went in to talk the matter over with Helen. But the latter, usually so mild and gentle in her ways, was thoroughly aroused at the man's rude persistence, and she refused even to talk of him. She had already packed her trunk, to be ready for her departure, and made no scruple of informing her mother that she should not return until Mr. Hunter had left the house. Mrs. Willis remained awake half an hour after Helen had begun to dream of Henry Crawford escaping from a Spanish dungeon, and coming back to her with a ball and chain on each leg, his hands manacled, and his moustache shaved off. The mother perplexed herself with plans as to how she should contrive to inform their guest in the morning that she was not at liberty to offer him her hospitalities any longer—and she fell asleep over the problem. Between ten and eleven o'clock there were no lights visible in the house. The night was wild and misty. The far-away bark of a dog and the faint sound of bells striking on the vessels in the harbor were the only noises.

PART III—CHAPTER III.

GHOSTLY VISITANTS.

Mrs. Willis was drowsily conscious that the clock was striking twelve. Her sleep was not sound for the next hour; the intelligence of her husband's safety and the perplexing events of the afternoon and evening would not permit the unbroken slumber that she craved and needed.

But the soundest sleeper would have been aroused by the frightful disturbance that rung through the house before the clock struck again. Even her daughter, sunk in the profound rest of youth, health, and innocence, by her side, was instantly startled to wakefulness by it.

A long-drawn cry, pealing out as though voicing the lowest depths of agony and remorse! It rose and fell and died away, leaving the very silence that succeeded horrible.

It was surely from somewhere in the house, and surely not near by. Loud as it was, distinct as it was, there was something about it that suggested that walls and shut doors were between.

The two women sat up, but said nothing. Their arms were about each other; terror kept them silent. They listened in almost breathless suspense.

The door between their chamber and the sitting-room was wide open; that leading into the hall was ajar. From this hall as well as from that above, all doors of communication with the old part of the house had been closed and barred. This Mrs. Willis remembered in the hours of terror that followed, and she derived some little courage from the thought.

Again that cry—or rather, this time, a mocking yell, ending with a loud and discordant "ha! ha!"

It was unquestionably nearer than the other; it sounded as though it might have come from one of the nearest rooms of the old part on the second floor.

These two women were as brave as their sex is ever expected to be; but these demoniac noises, coming in the dead silence of the night, filled their very souls with terror. The man who at the place and time could have heard them without fear and trembling is stronger than the most of his sex.

"Let us get up, mother," Helen whispered. "We can't stay here. O hear that—hear it!"

It was a great clanking of chains, intermingled with yells and oaths, winding up with two pistol-shots in rapid succession.

Mrs. Willis sprang up and bolted the door leading into the hall. Helen lit a candle with trembling fingers; and both, hastily dressed, sat holding hands, and shivering in silence.

Until tardy daylight came they sat thus: except that once, when the weird noises swelled and waned in a deeper volume of imprecations and blasphemies, Mrs. Willis opened the great Bible on the stand, the precious family heirloom that was on the Mayflower when she anchored off the coast where Provincetown stands—and placed her hands upon its pages, as if invoking its protection against the fiends that were raging through the house. Once Helen raised the curtain and looked out of the window. The night had grown foggy and dark.

"Let us slip out at the back door, mother," she whispered. "We can run over to Mrs. Tryon's, and get away from this awful place."

Mrs. Willis half rose from her chair. A heavy step sounded on the stair. Tramp, tramp, tramp, came the foot-falls down to the hall—tramp, tramp,

day poured into the room; in the joy of their relief, both fell upon their knees and offered a silent prayer. A rap at the door disturbed them.

"Are you awake Mrs. Willis?—are you and your daughter alive?" It was the voice of Louis Hunter, shaking with excitement and agitation.

The door was unfastened to him, he came in, looking haggard, exhausted, sleepless. He stared wildly at the women.

"Excuse me—I've come to bid you an abrupt farewell," he said. "Nothing could tempt me to remain an hour longer in this cursed house. I should have fled in the night had I dared."

He turned to go. In the hall he stopped and looked back.

"Did you see them?" he whispered, glancing fearfully up the stairs.

"We heard the horrible noises; that was enough," Mrs. Willis said. "Pray don't talk of it! Good-bye, sir; Helen and I will leave here at once."

"Not talk of it!" he cried. "No, I would not—to any one but you. I've seen that in the night which has turned men's hair white, and made the strong man a chattering idiot. O, Heaven!—O, God, bid it out from my memory!"

He put his hands over his face, and shuddered.

"Spare us!" cried the mother. "Go in peace."

"I can not go till I have told you; it would be cruel to keep you in ignorance of what these horrible things mean. You must know; you must be prepared for the news that is on its way to you."

The poor woman stood rigid as a statue, staring at him, held up from falling only by the arms of Helen.

"I heard the awful noises all through the night," he went on. They chilled my blood with terror. I fear not man, but I lay cowering with fright at the demons from another world. At last, when for an hour there had been a lull in the hellish revels, I became bold enough to open my door and look out into the hall. Horror of horrors! I saw a light coming up the stairs. I heard the footfalls of the man who carried it; it was a ship's lantern, held high up at arm's length, as if the bearer wished to make sure of the way. I fell back into the chamber; the hideous thing followed me. He stopped at the stand, and laid something upon it. Then he looked at me with the ghastly face and dull eyes of the dead. He looked at me, and pointed at the object which he had placed upon the stand. I looked that way, and I saw that it was a great seal-ring. He made the circuit of the room slowly, examining everything in it; then he

vanished through the doorway, and I lost sight of him."

"You saw his face," Mrs. Willis screamed. "Who was it?"

"You know—don't ask me! Here is what he left with me."

It was a massive ring with an onyx stone, engraved with a Roman W—Mrs. Willis' own gift to her husband, which he had worn for ten years on his little finger.

Helen was holding a senseless form in her arms.

Louis Hunter hastened away by the back door.

PART III—CHAPTER IV.

THE TERROR IN THE OLD HOUSE.

Rumors of the mysterious and frightful occurrences of the night in the Lobdell House flew fast and thick through the town all the day. The fame of the men spread abroad over the sandy peninsula, and for the time there was hardly any other topic in the minds or upon the tongues of men and women. Groups of people, old, middle-aged, young, boys and girls, gathered upon the streets at a respectful distance from the old house, and gazing in awe at it, spoke in low tones and with bated breath of the last rumors about it. In the terror and distress in which Mrs. Willis and Helen had that morning abandoned their part of it, they had left the hall-door open. No man ventured to go up and close it. Helen sadly needed the articles of dress and toilet which she had packed in her trunk the night before, and Mrs. Willis wanted her own wardrobe; but the man who was bold enough to enter those rooms was not to be found in Provincetown. The more pressing needs of the ladies were supplied by their sympathizing friends and neighbors; but neither friendship nor money could have induced any one to go to the now untenanted house for their effects.

Our tale is so largely based upon facts, and the thread of fiction that runs through it so thin, that the writer feels like stopping at this point and answering the objection that may be made in some quarters, that no such effect as we have described would be produced upon people by tales of supernatural events occurring in an old house.

To those who think thus, we would say that they fail to take into account the time, and especially the locality of these last scenes of the story.

Should such things occur to-day, particularly at the West, a committee of untried men would probably visit the infested house, thoroughly armed, and discover any traces that might remain of human agencies.

But we are not writing of the West, nor of the present day. It is of New England that we are telling, where, even among intelligent and educated people, a lurking if unexpressed belief in the supernatural has descended from the over-religious and darkly superstitious Puritans, who burned witches at the stake less than two hundred years ago. And we are telling of, and time removed thirty-five years from us, and of a New England sea-faring community—the most likely people under the sun to yield to an implicit belief in things apparently supernatural in their origin. So we are simply portraying life as it was, at the time and place named.

All day had the people come and gone, gathering in groups in the vicinity of the old house, and passing from group to group to learn every report that had been set afloat.

As night came on, all these gatherings slowly dispersed. Curiosity was by no means satisfied; but nobody wanted to remain in the vicinity of the

haunted house after dark.

This night was dark from twilight. Ten rods off the house could not be seen at all.

It was at this prudent limit that the loafing company of old sailors were assembled near eleven o'clock of that night. The fascination of the supernatural, too powerful to be resisted by men of their peculiar education and experience, had drawn them away from their customary haunts. The stories and the excitements of the day would not permit them to rest peacefully in their beds, and they had come up here to breathe the atmosphere of mystery and terror. It will be useful to the reader to overhear their talk.

"Both gone, d'y'ye say?"

"Yes; they went to Bos'n this afternoon."

"Poor wimmin! how did they stand it?"

"Better'n you could expect. Mis' Willis was weak as a cat, with all the high-strikes (It is presumed that this

worthy son of Neptune referred to hysterics) she's had, and the pretty young 'oman bears up bravely while it's plain to be seen that she's a most down sick with her fright."

"As any one would be, after the things that happened in that old dev-

il's den last night! I say, Uncle Peter—, do you really think Mis' Willis saw the Cap'n's ghost last night?"

"I haven't a doubt of it! Didn't I tell ye yesterday that he'd never come back? That meant that he'd not come back in the flesh, and I told ye why; but if you'd axed me, would his spirit come back, I'd said yes, of course. We can't know much about these things; but I fancy that old pirate Lobdell's got a hold on the Cap'tain's ghost, and is goin' to train him round with his bad spirits."

After a silence of some minutes, one of the old men remarked:

"I'd like mighty well to know what's goin' on in the old shell to-night."

"May be you'd like to go and find out," was the crushing sneer of old Peter.

"I didn't say so," the other replied, with some spirit. "I can't fight the devil, no more'n you can; and, of course, I wouldn't dare go inside. But I'll go up close to the outside with any man here, and listen."

No one volunteered to accompany him.

"Don't know but I'd go alone," said the seaman, rather doubtfully.

"You don't dare to!" Peter Mullins taunted.

These two venerable seamen had a long-standing grudge, arising out of their differences about people and lands they had visited in their voyages; which differences were being continually stimulated by their companions, for the sake of mischief. No sooner was this incipient quarrel commenced between Mullins and the other than the bystanders began to express their opinions as to whether Tom Burt dared or did not dare to go up close to the outside of the Lobdell house at that hour.

"There's one way to settle that question," said Burt, who was aggravated to exhibit a bravery that he was far from feeling. "I'll go now. If any of you want to come, now's your time."

He walked slowly forward and disappeared in the darkness.

Nobody followed him. Some wanted to cry out to him to stop, and not tempt the powers of darkness; but the bantering that had occurred restrained them.

They waited in suspense for his return. He was absent not more than ten minutes; but in the painful silence that prevailed no man spoke a word.

He came back hatless, his usually ruddy face pale as ashes, his eyes wild and staring.

Eagerly they gathered about him and plied him with questions.

"Not here," he said, faintly, looking over his shoulder as if fearful that some ghostly presence was pursuing him. "Let's get away from this accursed place. Come down to the tavern, and I'll tell you."

They all eagerly complied.

Seated in the ale-house, with his drooping courage braced by a stimulant, Tom Burt gave his plain and strange narrative.

By daylight it was being repeated in every house in the town; and thereafter in the vicinity of the old Lobdell house was shunned as though the plague had possessed it.

PART IV—CHAPTER V.

A HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

The narrative of what Tom Burt had seen and heard in that brief ten minutes was delivered to his gaping companions in the tavern with all the old locuacity. It is given here in the third person, as we wish to strip it of all unnecessary verbiage and details, and free it from all the mannerisms of speech and peculiarities of sailor dialect with which the hero of it managed to spin it out for a whole hour.

He said that as he slowly came up to the old house, there was not a ray of light proceeding from it.

His long front rose before him like a great black wall. All was silence and quiet about it.

He had heard some talk during the day about Mrs. Willis and Helen leaving the front door of their part of it open on their hasty flight. He thought he would get near enough to see whether it was, or if open.

He did so. He plainly saw that it was open. He heard the sound of the clock striking eleven.

He thought that his feelings were highly wrought up, considering where he was, and that he was alone; yet he knew that his senses were all alert and acute.

He waited for a moment after the clock had ceased to strike. For a moment he heard nothing.

Then, seeming to proceed from somewhere along the abandoned part of the house, he heard a moan. A moan by a person in mortal agony might have sounded so. It was not loud, but distinct.

He was terrified. He was reluctant to approach nearer to the place from which the sound seemed to proceed.

Again the moan—repeated, again and again. It was muffled, breathless—but sounded strangely like a human cry for help.

Against his will, by the fascinating terror of the time and place, his reluctant feet were drawn toward the place. He came as though drawn by magnetism.

Window-places, half-raised from the cellar, were a feature of the house. At one of these, midway of the unused part, the sailor's feet were arrested.

The sunken part had been nearly filled up by dirt and rubbish. The window-panes had been broken out; only at one place was it possible for light or air to enter the old cellar through this window; and at this place only through a narrow chink.

But now a single ray of light shot through this crack in the darkness outside.

An eager desire to see what was occurring within overcame the fears of the sailor. He knelt down by the window-place and tried to peer inside. His hat fell off as he leaned forward, but he took no heed of it.

His eye followed the ray of light, or tried to follow it; but he could make nothing of it. It was like a ray of sunlight shining into a cavern choked with damps and poisonous exhalations.

HE KNELT DOWN BY THE WINDOW-PLACE.

The darkness of the place threatened to extinguish the light; the light did not illuminate the darkness.

The moans burst forth again; audible words were pronounced; the ear of the horrified listener plainly heard them. He shook with fright, but he stayed.

"O, God! have mercy! O, save me from a miserable death! Help! help! O, Christ! have mercy!"

The stifled cry could only be heard by one near to the house; the words could only have been audible to one crouching close to the window-place, as Burt was, to hear them. The words ended in a strangely muffled and subdued shriek, full of agony and terror, but still faint and low.

Moans, stifled breathings, dreadful utterances of pain and rage, came faintly up from the dismal recesses of the old cellar.

The sailor staggered to his feet and rushed from the spot, holding his hands to his ears.

The story when told to his comrades in the tavern was at first received with appalled silence. Then old Mullins uttered an opinion from which none dissented.

"It's Captain Lobdell and his crew murdering their victims over and over again. But it beats me to know why the innocent should keep on sufferin' in this way! Must a poor fellow, killed by pirates a hundred years ago, keep on bein' killed every night? I hope I'm a Christian, but I'll be hanged if I see the justice of it. Who does?"

None of them seemed to. And for two months more the old house was shunned, talked about, and by unanimous consent given over to ghosts and mystery.

PART IV—CHAPTER I.

THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT.

Hearts bowed with grief, heavy with terror and distress, as were those of Mrs. Willis and Helen, need rest, quiet and comfort. All this was kindly secured to them in the home of Mrs. Willis' sister, in Boston. The latter was now a widow of ample means, and greatly attached to these, her only relatives. Welcoming them to her house at this time, she was at once informed of late occurrences at Provincetown. The engagement of Helen to Henry Crawford had been made under her own eyes, as it were. She now learned from her niece that he had gone to Cuba with Lopez. The newspapers had informed her of the disastrous fate of the expedition. In the whole outlook she saw nothing but sorrow and misfortune to come for these two; and she resolved that, so far as she could control events, their sad path in life should be brightened by whatever wealth, aided by warm affection, could bring to them.

It was in this comfortable home that, little by little, Mrs. Willis learned the fate of her husband. First came the certainty that the "Nellie" had left Havana on the second day of September. Afterward the report of the character of the crew reached her, and the suspicious entertained on the wharf at Boston, rising almost to a painful certainty as time went on, that mutiny had ended the long and honorable career of Captain Willis—perhaps that of the vessel. The dreadful truth came out at last. The charred and blackened hulk of a vessel, just the size and dimensions on the water of the bark, was discovered grounded on the low shores of New Providence, remote

from any of the inhabited parts. Nothing but a burned rim remained above the water; a brief search discovered some undistinguishable human remains near what had been the cabin. Those who were familiar with marine registers, and the comings and goings of merchant-vessels, had no doubt that this was all that remained of Captain Willis' vessel, nor that he, and perhaps his crew, had perished by some unknown calamity of the ocean. That the destruction had been by fire was all that was certain.

For this intelligence Mrs. Willis and her daughter were of course prepared. They mourned for the lost husband and father; but they had for weeks been mourning in silence, anticipating such a somber certainty as this.

In the presence of this grief, neither of them had bestowed any further thought upon Louis Hunter, his recent mission from Captain Willis, or his startling announcement of what he had seen on that dreadful night in the old house at Provincetown. They had

not seen him since the morning that followed that night; they hoped never again to see him or hear of him.

Poor Helen Willis lived and still hoped under the cloud of her own overshadowing grief. Not a word had reached her directly from Henry Crawford since the letter that told her he had joined Lopez. The dreary list of Crittenden's men, slaughtered by Spanish volleys after their surrender, was published in the papers; her lover's name was not in it. Other lists followed, of captive filibusters deported to Spain in irons, for whom the American Government was making intercession, but he was not named among them. She was heavy-hearted, and yet hopeful. His cruel silence seemed like the silence of the grave, yet she had no positive intelligence of either his death or his captivity, and hope with her was a beacon that never expired.

The days went on till October was well-nigh spent. On one of those golden afternoons, Helen sat in her room alone. She had been reading for the hundredth time that last letter of her beloved; she had kissed it again, and cried over it. The strong, passionate yearning of her heart went out to him over seas and lands; she could not, would not, think him dead.

Her aunt rapped at her door, and entered.

"Helen," she said, "there's a poor vagabond-looking fellow down below in the parlor who insists on seeing you. He looks as if he wanted charity; but I couldn't get rid of him by offering him half a dollar. He was so earnest about it that I finally let him in."

"I suppose it's one of my Provincetown sailor-friends," Helen replied. "I'll go down."

The stranger attempted to rise as she entered the parlor. He walked with two canes, but seemed so feeble that they could not support him in his attempt.

"Pray, don't rise," Helen said. "What do you wish?"

"I have walked too far," the man said. His voice was weak, his face was wan and hollow; but there was a fire in his eye that spoke of the inviolable ambition to be away from the sick-room. "I am not long out of the hospital; the doctor says I should not be out yet."

"What do you wish?" she asked again, touched by his appearance and manner.

"I was directed to Miss Helen Willis," he said. "You are the lady, I suppose? Well, miss, I've been in Cuba; I've seen rough times there with the filibusters; there were not many of us got away. Not knowing from one day to another if we should ever see home again, we used to give each other messages to carry for us. There was one fellow gave me some word for you; and now it is curious I can't think which one it was."

"Crawford?" was her breathless question.

"O, yes; Henry Crawford; I remember now. An ordinary kind of fellow."

"Sir, you must speak respectfully of him, if you talk to me! Where is he?"

"Crawford—Crawford—let me see," the man mused. "The fact is, miss, it is not easy to remember names among several hundreds. I hope he escaped, as I did. Haven't you heard from him lately?"

"No—not a word. You have something to tell me of him; why don't you tell it? If he is dead, say so, and end my misery."

"No, miss; he's not dead."

"Where is he?"

"The last I saw of him he was walking along the streets of Boston inquiring for an address that he got at Provincetown, so he could find Helen Willis."

She came up close to him and looked into his face. How could she know him? How tell that the poor, wasted creature before her was the strong, handsome lover who had bidden her farewell here less than three months before?

"Is it you, Henry?" she asked, amid her tears.

"I must be sadly changed, Helen, when your eyes don't recognize me. But every thing seems changed to me of late; I hardly knew the house where we parted."

She took him in her arms; she wept over him tears of mingled sorrow and joy. Sorrow for his sufferings, joy that he had returned to her.

An hour later they were sitting there together. Her mother and aunt had been with them; they had brought him refreshment and cheered him with their sympathy and kindness. He had briefly told them of the fate of the bark and its Captain, and his own rescue from the burning deck by the boat of an English ship; of his being carried into Nassau and being placed in the hospital, from whence, barely convalescent, he had come to New York, against the advice of the doctors. At Provincetown he had learned of the events that had caused Mrs. Willis and her daughter to leave it; and impatient above all to see Helen, he had hurried on to Boston.

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