NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07487336 9

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

JUN

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

NCW

Lauriston

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE TWENTY-FIRST BURR

VICTOR LAURISTON

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

NCW

Lauriston

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE TWENTY-FIRST BURR

VICTOR LAURISTON

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE TWENTY-FIRST BURR

BY

VICTOR LAURISTON

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

111401B

COPYRIGHT, 1922,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY.

NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE TWENTY-FIRST BURR. I

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

OCT 1922

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Day of Huge Event	9
II	The House of Ghosts	21
III	The Print of a Hand	30
IV	The Man in Grey	41
V	The Source of the Smear	52
VI	The Record That Vanished	62
VII	The Letters in Winright's Desk	75
VIII	The Return of Annisford	86
IX	The Man in Grey Again	95
X	The Parting of the Ways	104
XI	The 'Phone Message from Nile	115
XII	The Ride in the Storm	125
XIII	The End of the Ride	135
XIV	The Interrupted Search	144
XV	The Book of the Past	156
XVI	The Twenty-First Burr	167
XVII	The Unknown Quantity, *X*	177
XVIII	The Man Who Could Tell Everything	186
XIX	The Woman Who Could Tell	199
XX	The Road of Tears	211
XXI	The Unanswered Question	223

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII	The Irretrievable Step	232
XXIII	The Broken Shackles	241
XXIV	The Hand of Nick Ross	252
XXV	The Man in the Ghost Room	259
XXVI	The Still Unsolved Problem	267
XXVII	The Heir of Castle Sunset	276
XXVIII	The Escape of the Man in Grey	286

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE TWENTY-FIRST BURR

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE TWENTY-FIRST BURR

CHAPTER I

THE DAY OF HUGE EVENT

Our lives are mostly desert wastes of petty things. Yet here and there in a wide expanse of Nothing Doing stands out one day, an oasis of huge event, whose miraged memory we mark in red—yes, or in black.

Such a day, vivid, outstanding, unforgettable, Laura Winright knew when she again met George Annisford after two years' absence.

She had just returned from Europe, called home by her father's letter.

Annisford, she knew, would meet her at New York.

He did not.

That was the first shock which startled Laura Winright into stark attention.

Her father, then, must be even worse than his last letter had intimated. That was the one conclusion she could draw from her fiancé's default. With characteristic impetuosity she straightway used the long distance telephone to reach Annisford at Detroit. Then, being a normal woman, she forgot to ask most of the questions that had fluttered excitedly in her mind.

"Oh, see here, chick!" protested Annisford jestingly across six hundred miles of wire. "You've come down on us like the wolf on the fold. We haven't time to send out for crackers and cheese. . . . Of course your father

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

is just fine and dandy. Why shouldn't he be? . . . Now, you might just as well stay in New York and do a bit of shopping. You can't get the styles or the bargains we have right here at Winright's but it'll be something to tell Maitland Port that your summer outfit came from Fifth Avenue. . . . Well, come right on, if you're so utterly perverse! . . . Now, chick, there's no blamed use asking if I love you! Of course I do. . . . Well, now, that's a question! Why do I talk like this? Why—why—well, you came down on us just like the Assyrian, as I was saying. I mean, like the wolf. Nobody expected you home for at least six months. . . ."

Annisford said a lot more; but these were the significant words that haunted Laura Winright.

Her return from Europe, in response to her father's urgent summons, had surprised her fiancé.

Her father seemed in his usual good health.

Annisford could see no reason whatever for her insistence on reaching Maitland Port without delay.

She wished she had her father's letter in her hand-bag, instead of in her steamer trunk. But, anyway, she could remember its purport quite well. Adam Winright was ill—so ill that he felt alarmed—he wished to see her before he died—would she come home by the next boat?

Throughout the voyage, that message had stood out before her mind in characters of fire. Its terror dominated all the dangers that lurked in wait for the ocean liner. Her father was ill, perhaps dying, at Maitland Port. At whatever risk to herself, she must see him before he died.

As she left the telephone booth a few vivid phrases in his letter flashed before her mind:

"Laura, you must come home at once. Come by the next boat. I am far from a well man, and there are things

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

I cannot write in a letter, that I must tell you before I die . . ."

Laura caught a night train for the west. Then she wished she had telegraphed her father, at Maitland Port. On after thought she telegraphed him in the early morning, from Albany.

At noon when the train pulled into Buffalo, George Annisford, big and beaming, joined her at lunch.

"How is he?"

Her anxious question tore like shrapnel through the young man's story of how he had come down from Detroit to meet her.

"He? Who? Is it a conundrum?"

A flash from Laura's blue eyes wilted Annisford's mirth.

"Who? Father, of course!"

"He's bright as the lark that sings at dawn from yonder hedgerow. . . . Here am I, chick, old-countryizing my conversation to please your Anglicized taste, and you look like a funeral! Very likely your dad will die of surprise when you come prancing in so unexpectedly, but . . . oh, say, you surely never meant all that rot about going for a Red Cross nurse!"

Laura Winright, bewildered, watched Buffalo slide past the windows, the city merging into straggling suburbs and wide fields. George was surprised at her homecoming. Her father would be surprised. Yet her father had himself written her to come! The problem grew singularly puzzling. Of course she must have misunderstood his letter—

Yet there were lines of it photographed on her memory:

"Laura, you must come home at once. Come by the next boat. I am far from a well man, and there are

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

things I cannot write in a letter, that I must tell you before I die . . ."

She stared at Annisford.

Adam Winright must have some deep reason for keeping his serious illness a secret from the man nearest him, his partner, young Annisford.

"Tom's in Detroit," breezed Annisford. "He's filling the toes of my shoes for the day. He was powerful anxious to welcome the prodigal daughter personally and to murder the overgrown ox with his own howitzer. You see, patriotic citizens don't kill fatted calves any more; they let them grow up into beef. Oh, I say, I'd better wire your father—"

"I did, this morning, from Albany."

"Good! That will give Turkey Bird time to toast your slippers before the grate and chase the moth balls out of your pink kimono."

Laura refused to laugh.

"You're sure father is quite well, George?"

"Never better." No shadow clouded Annisford's outlook. "We'll see the show at Detroit to-night, and—"

"We'll go right on to Maitland Port the minute we reach Detroit."

"Why not take a taxi out to Woodlawn Cemetery? It's just as dead."

She was in no mood to laugh.

"I mean it," she declared. "I'm not going to argue, either. I simply must get home."

Long before reaching Detroit, their protracted argument had ended in victory for Laura. She would take the next train for Maitland Port. She fretted at the fifteen minutes' delay between trains. She refused to leave the Union Station.

Tom Winright filled in the interval. A very dignified

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

brother he was, though in his early twenties, tall, with soldierly moustache and steel grey eyes that lit when they rested on her.

"How is he—father?" Again the anxious question surged to Laura's lips.

Her brother, she felt sure, must know of her father's illness, even if Annisford did not.

Tom twisted the tips of his moustache.

"Laura," he rejoined, with an air of bantering philosophy, "this world is full of uncertainties. But when I left Maitland Port on Sunday there was one certainty. Dad felt fine. Did you ram any U-boats on the trip across?"

"N-no." Laura's mind, preoccupied with her father's illness, quite failed to grasp the question. "No, I suppose not. I—"

She halted. Her brother's slender fingers, curving, with a swoop imprisoned a fly that had settled on the back of the seat. Tom, still chatting serenely, drew a pin from his coat lapel and studied his prisoner with the cold, critical eye of a skilled anatomist. Laura's lips trembled.

"Tom! That's sheer cruelty!"

Tom smiled.

"Swat the fly!"

"But don't torture him."

Tom carelessly brushed aside the mangled remains.

"Never again, Laurie," he vowed. "Yet there's so many millions of flies, I think you really could spare me just one. I'd like to take the run back to Maitland Port with you," he went on, "but—well, our friend Annisford has first call. Eh?"

Laura flushed. The jesting tones of both men chimed in ill with her apprehensive mood. The blue coated,

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

dogmatic announcer at the exit bellowed a warning of the north-bound train.

Tom, stooping, gravely kissed the fair-haired girl. She gazed into his eyes.

"You're sure that dad's all right, Tom?"

"Positive."

As she passed with Annisford through smoke and noise and confusion to the train, she saw again those words, written in letters of fire:

"Laura, you must come home at once. Come by the next boat. I am far from a well man, and there are things I cannot write in a letter, that I must tell you before I die . . ."

An early evening breeze blew off Lake Huron when the two descended from the train. The last red kiss of sunset lingered lovingly on the cedar-clad cliff that overhung the shadowy harbour of Maitland Port. Away above them dozed the little lake town; about them lay the shadowed harbour and the darkened wharves, with gloomy buildings and ghostly spars, and from beyond the sand bar at the river mouth came the beat of waves on the beach. With quick glances Annisford searched the deserted station platform.

"Why isn't the car here?" he demanded.

"The car! Is it possible?"

"It most emphatically is *not* possible for that chauffeur ever to be on time, or to be on hand at all when he's wanted. As for the car, chick—oh, I suppose it's one of your father's surprises—eh? He's like providence, is Adam Winright—he moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. Anyway, the car's not here. Now that shoe leather is so abominably high, we'll have to hire a taxi or—"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

He checked himself. A mud-bespattered car whirled up. The driver, leaping to the platform, came up to Laura Winright. She noticed he was dark, and young. He held out his hand.

"I'm Nick Ross," he announced. "Is this Laura Winright?" He gripped her hand. "Mr. Winright just now telephoned me—"

Already he was assisting Laura to her seat.

"Thank you," she said, and beamed on him.

Annisford took his place beside her. "Ross," he said, leaning forward, "you're an impertinent pup." His tone was perfectly good-natured.

"Annisford," said Ross, without turning from the wheel, "you're another."

Laura smiled.

"Really he's very nice," she whispered. "Who is he, anyway? I don't remember any Nick Ross in Maitland Port."

"He's the chauffeur."

Laura felt a shock. A mere servant had presumed to run up to her on the station platform and to shake hands, yes, and to call her Laura Winright. She glanced at him again. Beneath the arc light that swung above the station platform, the young man's lips were drawn tight. That bespoke hurt; or, at least, an effort at self-control.

"Castle Sunset!" she commanded imperiously. She meant to put the presuming chauffeur in his place.

Then, suddenly, an affrighted idea drove all thought of dignity from her mind. She leaned forward.

"Just a minute, Ross."

The chauffeur turned. This time he played superbly the rôle of deferential servant.

"At what time did Mr. Winright telephone you?"

"Eight or nine minutes ago, I should say, Miss Winright." He glanced at his watch. "That would be—

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

let me see—two minutes to eight. Yes, I'm certain the clock in the garage struck the hour just as I started the car." He seemed oddly eager to fix the minutest detail in her mind. "You will excuse my being a little late?"

"It is of no moment."

Laura's manner rebuked the dark-faced young man's unforgotten presumption.

Then she put him out of her mind. She sank back on the leather-cushioned seat. Her eyes closed.

The nervous strain that had oppressed her ever since her father's letter reached her in England, was gone now. She was free, at last, to joy in these familiar sights and sounds—the darkness creeping across Lake Huron, the road up Harbour Hill, the lighted clock-tower in the distant Square, whose dial, as they turned into wide West Street, marked nine minutes after eight.

The apprehension that had haunted her all day vanished with the chauffeur's words. Whatever the more distant future might hold, in a few moments now she must find her father waiting to welcome her.

Annisford spoke.

"Nobody loves him," he whispered, nodding toward the chauffeur. "So he just stays in the garage and invents inventions. He's invented a long wiry one and a square black one."

Laura laughed.

"We won't bother about him," she commented. "In a minute or two we'll see the house of ghosts."

Both laughed, this time. That jest reached back to their childhood, when Judith MacTurk, the old Scotch housekeeper, had told them dismal stories that put their hair on end.

"Turkey Bird did hand out some tall old yarns," laughed Annisford. "Do you remember that night I caught her wandering about the house in the dark? I

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

asked her why she didn't have a light, and she said it would scare away the ghosts. She was horribly fond of spectres, wasn't she?"

Again Laura laughed. From a source of childish terror, old Mrs. MacTurk's ghosts had degenerated into theme for maturer jest.

"See," she added, quickly, "there's Castle Sunset now!"

"And not a blue ghostlight glimmering from a single turret," flashed Annisford. "Ghost-lights *are* blue, aren't they?"

The car swept up toward a huge, horned monster darkly outlined against night sky and river valley.

"Let us down at the front gate," commanded Miss Winright.

The headlights lit a tall, serrated iron fence; and beyond it the huge monster, illumined, grew into a grey old house, and the horns into turrets topped with slender spires. Beyond, the sunset had gone to sleep in the grey bed of the lake. The dismal wash of the waters came to them, and the scent of the chill lake breeze.

The chauffeur with silent deference helped Laura to descend. His fingers seemed to linger on her gloved hand. With queer intentness, Laura Winright realized that the young man's hand trembled.

She hurried with Annisford up the winding walk, her eyes anxiously scanning the broad porch, and the rustic seats on the lawn.

"It's strange"—with a sudden start of returning apprehension—"that father didn't come to the station. Where is he?"

The façade of the strange old house overhung her like a threatening cloud.

"It's all so dark!" she breathed.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The front door stood a trifle ajar, though the May evening was chill. Annisford stepped aside.

"You go first, George," urged Laura Winright.

The young man, entering, snapped on the light. He did not need it; he could have threaded his way through the house blindfold. To the girl's trembling heart the light brought a world of cheer.

"Father will be in the Ghost Room." She essayed to laugh.

Annisford knew. Always, the old man had clung to his library, which, shut off at the end of the long hall, assured him the solitude he craved and an unbroken view of the brilliant Huron sunsets. She remembered as a little girl sitting on his knee in that room, watching the changing panorama of scarlet and gold.

Past the foot of the broad staircase they entered shadow. The library door at the end of the hall stood open; but the only light from its black recess was the tiny glow of a coal in the grate.

"Is father there?" questioned Laura.

Annisford pushed the door wider. Adam Winright sat there, his shadowy figure bowed over the library table.

"Father!" cried Laura.

She stretched out her arms to him. Silence was the only answer.

"Poor dear! He's gone to sleep!" she told Annisford, in tones tremulously low.

She stole into the room, her light footfalls making scarce a sound, her soul intent on glad surprise. Annisford followed, with steps instinctively hesitating.

Laura came up softly behind the old man's chair. Her heart felt glad. So, many and many a time, she had surprised him dozing in his chair.

"Father!" she cried, her tone a-thrill.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Still there was no answer.

"Father! Don't you hear me? It is I—Laura."

The man at the table never stirred. The girl glanced at Annisford, her breath coming and going, terror in her eyes. Annisford, bending over the old man, listened.

"Mr. Winright!"

In the quiet room where a moment before they could almost have heard their own heart-beats, his voice rang strangely loud.

A sudden flame in the silence that followed leapt from the red embers in the grate. Its glow kindled the girl's terrified face.

"What is it?" She commenced horribly to understand. "It can't—oh, surely, it can't be—"

Annisford gripped her hand.

"Be brave, dear," he whispered.

She tried to be brave. Annisford, stepping to the wall, pressed a push-button. Then she saw him standing at the telephone in the hall, impatiently banging the receiver up and down.

"I want Doctor Chalmers." His tone was peremptory. "Tell him to come at once. Gone on a case, eh?" There was a moment of silence. "Then I must get someone else."

Again he jabbed fiercely at the push-button. In the hall sounded hasty, excited footsteps.

"Right here, Mrs. MacTurk!" commanded Annisford.

He turned to Laura at last. She still stood like a statue, uncomprehending.

A man's voice came to them from the hall.

"Is that you, Winright?"

Then:

"Annisford!" The cry burst from the newcomer's

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

lips. "What has happened? Did you reach him in time?"

"Doctor Chalmers! The very man I've been trying to reach."

Already the stout little doctor was kneeling beside his patient.

"Mr. Winright telephoned me less than ten minutes ago." As he spoke, he felt and listened, his florid face intent.

Silence dwelt in the room. Laura, relinquishing Annisford's arm, sank into a chair. With the gaze of one fascinated, she watched the physician at his work. Her lips parted in a soundless question.

"He told me"—the doctor worked on—"told me he wanted to live—till Laura came—he had a message—"

Laura shivered. Chalmers, looking up at last, reluctantly faced her. He shook his head.

"That was ten minutes ago, Miss Winright . . . and I am ten minutes too late."

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF GHOSTS

In the living-room at Castle Sunset, George Annisford sat alone before the fire. It was now past midnight. In the emergency, the young man had taken command and possession of the place and ordered things as he saw fit, promptly and with decision as was his nature.

Laura was in no condition to direct affairs, and Tom, whom Annisford was trying to call by long distance telephone, could not in any event reach Maitland Port till next day.

The tragedy had jolted George, and he knew it must have jolted Laura. Annisford had no great amount of imagination, but it needed no imagination for him to realize how Laura must feel. The more he thought, the sorrier he was for her.

He filled his pipe, and lit it with a coal from the grate. The fumes of nicotine would help shut out the harrowing aspect of the tragedy. Annisford wanted to shut it out. It was too blamed bad, but—well, it was done now and couldn't be helped. There was no use allowing oneself to feel tough about it. So mused Annisford.

He rose, and half closed the double doors. Across the hall in the unlit parlour, Adam Winright lay under a white coverlet. "It's too blamed bad," repeated Annisford, and drew one door tight. Then he went back to the fire.

As he did so, the telephone summoned him to the far end of the hall.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

This, mused Annisford, must be Tom, calling from Detroit. He was right. It took some moments to get the connection. Annisford, however, did not trouble to turn on any light. With businesslike directness he told Tom what had happened.

From the other end of the wire came a choking sob, and a long, tragic silence.

"See here, Tom," urged Annisford, "there's no blamed use buckling. You've simply got to keep up. Laura went all to pieces, of course; it'll need all your pluck and mine to get her back to cheerfulness. Just put Macey in charge at the store, and come right down here on the first train. Let's see—you can't get in till seven to-morrow morning? That'll be all right. I'll have Nick Ross meet you. Now, hustle and get ready."

Action, he knew—any kind of action—would divert Tom's attention from the tragedy itself. Keep him busy, and the thing would work out gradually. Tom now insisted on asking questions. Annisford held back nothing.

Then he went back to the fire.

Laura's collapse was natural, she being a woman; but he had not expected Tom to buckle and cry like that. Why, when the Colonel, his own father, died—it was heart failure, and all happened in a moment—he had just said, between gasps, "George, boy, when we meet again I'll have a heluva lot to tell you." And George had replied, "Save me an earful, anyway." That was all there was to it. He had travelled a lot, had George Annisford; he had never cried at railway stations; and this journey was only a bit longer than the others. If folks would only remember that!

Annisford re-lit his pipe, which had gone out, and glanced at the clock on the mantel. From over town came the deep tones of a bell.

"One—two!"

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Adam Winright would never hear that again! Annisford couldn't help that reflection. But he tried assiduously to narcotize it into the background of his mind.

The door bell jangled.

The household were all asleep, except perhaps old Mrs. MacTurk. Annisford went to the door.

"Oh!" he ejaculated; and, without enthusiasm, admitted Doctor Chalmers.

"I couldn't sleep," explained the ruddy-faced doctor, "so I decided I'd come over and sit up a while with you." He let Annisford take his hat, and himself settled in Annisford's chair.

Annisford drew up another chair, and resumed his pipe. He glanced once or twice at Chalmers. He did not know Chalmers well. As a boy, he had spent much time in Maitland Port; but in recent years, except for flying visits, the management of the business at Detroit had pretty well monopolized his time.

"You got word to Tom?" asked the doctor, presently.

"Yes. He was awfully cut up. He's coming down first thing in the morning."

"How is Miss Winright?"

"She's asleep. I made them all turn in."

Annisford looked hard at the physician. Doctors, he mused, didn't usually call on the patients they had lost, particularly in the dead of night. Doctors usually were able to sleep when they found time for it. Even to unobservant Annisford it presently became evident that, whether or not the alleged sleeplessness were a subterfuge, the stout little doctor had come with the deliberate purpose of asking questions. The most obvious course was to answer everything, and to volunteer whatever additional information seemed apropos. This George Annisford did.

He asked questions on his part, not out of curiosity,

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

for he never was curious, but from sheer natural friendliness.

"Winright always puzzled me," ventured Chalmers. "I probably knew him better than did most people in Maitland Port, and I can't say that I really knew him."

"He struck most people as odd? Eh?"

"That's just it. He kept to himself. He made no friends in Maitland Port. He didn't want them."

"Hardly."

"I'd almost have thought"—Chalmers spoke very deliberately—"that he came here for the sake of solitude. He kept to his grounds, to his house, to that one room where he died." His words held an interrogative note.

"I never imagined him ill."

"Nor I. He seemed never better in his life."

"Yet you said heart failure?"

Doctor Chalmers silently scratched his head. Annisford filled the gap in the conversation.

"Wouldn't there be previous symptoms? Occasional light attacks?" His manner was indifferent.

The doctor eyed him queerly.

"I'm puzzled." His tone was self-accusatory. "I must have been careless. Tom did tell me his father seemed ill. That was three or four weeks ago. Then Winright himself came to me. 'Is there anything the matter with me?' he asked. I examined him, and do you know, I found not the slightest trace of heart trouble, or anything else? He was sound as a bell. So I thought, anyway—for of course it *is* heart failure. My examination then must have been at fault." The firelight lit his ruddy, troubled face. "We all make mistakes, Annisford. If I'd only been a bit more careful then——"

His voice faded.

"Tom took it terribly hard," put in Annisford.

Chalmers nodded.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"He must have known he was dying?"

"Yes. He knew. I was just leaving my office when the 'phone rang, and my car was waiting outside. I had a little trouble cranking, but I reached here inside ten minutes."

"He wanted to see Laura?"

"Evidently. Apparently he thought she might not come till morning, and hoped to last through the night. That's a man for you"—the doctor's voice rang. "Not a bit of terror in his tone, Annisford—he spoke just as coolly as though he were asking for a cup of coffee."

"What did he say?"

"What he said was so utterly out of the ordinary. "I didn't understand at first. One doesn't look for a man to say such things so calmly. 'Please repeat that' I told him. Then I got his words: 'Chalmers, this is Adam Winright. I am dying. Please come at once. I must live till Laura comes. I have a message for her.' I said, 'I'm coming'—"

"Then he must have hung up the receiver and crossed to the table and sat down—"

"And died immediately."

The flame in the grate leapt up, kindling the doctor's troubled face.

"He was quite alone?" he questioned.

Annisford nodded. "Yes. Katie went out at seven, and Turkey Bird spent the evening gossiping with Fan Sifton. You know Fan Sifton, the unclaimed treasure with the wheezy old setter? Why, I can remember when Fan—"

"Sh!"

Annisford stared in surprise.

"Did you hear that?" demanded Chalmers.

"What?"

"I'm positive I heard someone at those doors."

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Nonsense." Annisford's tone was careless. "Why, I can remember when I was a kid and Fan Sifton—"

"There it goes again," insisted the doctor. "Like something choking."

Yet he made no move to investigate. Annisford gazed a moment at the ruddy-faced little man. He was horribly frightened. With a careless laugh the young fellow went to the door, and glanced up and down the hall.

"Nothing doing," he reported, cheerily.

Then he fancied a glimmer of light at the end of the hall. "Excuse me, doctor. I'll investigate." He stepped boldly enough down the hall toward the Ghost Room. Neither non-existent ghosts nor real dead folk had any terrors for him.

Sure enough, the library was a glow of light. Annisford eyed the electrolier. "Did I turn that light *on* when I was telephoning Tom?" he asked himself. "No, I did not. I'm sure I did not. But I must have."

The matter was inconsequential, anyway. Annisford snapped off the light, and turned back toward the living-room. At the foot of the stair he glanced up; then ascended, none too quietly, to the landing above. Laura's door was closed. He listened a moment, heard nothing, imagined nothing; finally, descending, rejoined the doctor before the fire.

"I guess you're nervous to-night," he adjudicated.

Once more from over town came the notes of the deep-toned bell.

"One—two—three!"

Annisford again filled his pipe.

"He could have deliberately concealed some of the symptoms from me," said the doctor. "It must have been that. Yet, if he wished to conceal his illness, why did he seek an examination at all?" He puzzled. "It is all of a part with his general reputation, though."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"You Maitland Port people thought him eccentric?"

"Decidedly—or deep."

"He wasn't eccentric in business. Of course," conceded Annisford, "he was reticent. He never discussed his private affairs with me, though I was the one man nearest to him. Yet he was a careful, methodical, capable business man from corns to bald spot. If he wanted a letter of ten years ago, he could place his fingers on it in ten seconds. He could tell to a cent how much we had in any line of stock, or how much were each day's sales and profits in each department. That store of ours is organized to the hilt. Adam Winright put in the first time-clocks in Detroit, I guess; everyone from the president down had to punch them. There's a room full of the stuff at Detroit right now; I can tell you when every employé was on and off for ten years back. You can see my record, and Tom's, and Mr. Winright's own record. Adam Winright was a miracle of system. Maybe he overdid it. Of course he didn't mingle in Detroit society, or mix in politics—no call for that, you know. He was just a business man—hadn't another interest."

"Except Laura."

"Another interest in Detroit, I mean. She was here."

"That always puzzled us," explained Chalmers. "Why he lived in Detroit and the children in Maitland Port, and he so rarely saw them. I used to puzzle it over when I was younger. I'm inquisitive, you know. The children made a few friends, but when they got old enough to mix in our society, Tom went to Detroit, and Laura abroad. Some people used to say Mr. Winright was hard up, but I always thought he must be comfortably fixed. He"—the doctor hesitated—"he'd be worth all of fifty thousand, I should say? Oh, thirty thousand, anyway?"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

George Annisford almost laughed. Only the thought of Adam Winright across the hall muzzled his mirth.

"Fifty thousand! Why, Adam Winright was a millionaire twice over!"

Chalmers stared.

"Who gets the money?" he blurted.

"I don't know. I've never seen his will. Of course he'll have one. If he hadn't, the money would go half to Laura and half to Tom."

"But his brother, Harold?"

Annisford gazed oddly at the physician.

"Harold? Oh, Harold died years ago." What Annisford thought he knew, he was complacently sure of. "Winright told you so, didn't he?"

"He never told me much of anything."

They were silent a moment. A coal in the grate split, with a loud report.

"What was that?"

Chalmers glanced suspiciously about him.

"Just that coal," assured Annisford.

"No. There." The doctor, springing up, pointed toward the door. "Didn't you see something?"

Annisford laughed.

"Sit down. You're nervous. Did you ever hear Turkey Bird tell about the ghost in the old mill back of Dungannon? You know, folks driving by on dark nights used to see blue lights flittering past the windows and—"

He broke off, grinning.

"What you saw was a shadow on the hall carpet. The moonlight shines through the front window and there's vines outside, and when the wind blows the shadow of the vines shifts. As for Harold, he was drowned before Mr. Winright married. I've heard he was a bad lot. Guess the brothers didn't get along any too well. But Harold was drowned years and years ago."

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Chalmers fixed his gaze on the cheery fire.

"Mr. Winright will be buried at Detroit, beside his wife, I suppose?"

It was Annisford's turn to stare into the fire. "Tom will arrange all that," he said at last. "He'll be here in the morning. I must send the car for him."

Catching up the scuttle, he deluged the fire with coal. The cannel cracked noisily as it caught. Chalmers, hunched in his chair, with fascinated gaze again sought the gap in the double doors where he had fancied the moving shadow.

"I heard someone."

"It's only the wind in the trees."

"No. Listen." Rising, he tip-toed toward the door; but halted half-way, shuddering. "Can't you hear it?"

Annisford's lips parted in a laugh.

"Nonsense, doctor. You're just—"

He stopped short.

There was a gasp, a stifled cry, from the room where the dead man lay; and then the sound of a heavy fall. Annisford, slow to hear but instant to act, crossed the hall and gripped the door-knob.

"It's locked!" he exclaimed.

Without hesitation, he flung his full weight against the door. It gave, presently, with a crash. The room he had left dark was now a blaze of light. Annisford glimpsed the bier where the dead man lay, covered with a white sheet; and then on the floor beside it a crumpled little heap of pink and white.

He knelt.

"Laura!" he cried. "Wake up, Laura!"

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER III

THE PRINT OF A HAND

The first thing that fixed itself in Laura Winright's mind was the monotonous beat of waves upon a sandy beach.

She ran along the shore, the waves lapping her bare feet; and before her ran old Adam Winright, always just out of reach, laughing when she cried out to him to carry her.

The pursuit seemed unending. In darkness she ran, yet despite the darkness she saw him clearly, just beyond her reach.

At last she cried, and stretched out her hands.

Then she saw the sunlight.

A dusty sunbeam streamed through tall windows. Then she was not on the beach, after all. She was in her own old room at Castle Sunset. She felt terribly tired after all the running, and wished she could lie down and go to sleep.

A long while afterward she realized that she was in bed. She had been sleeping, and felt not at all rested. After all, she had not been running. That was merely a horrid dream.

The beat of the waves was reality, though. It came from Lake Huron at the foot of the hill. From where she lay she could see the sunshine again, and the waving tops of cedars that fringed the hillcrest.

Then she saw the nurse, and knew that she must have

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

been ill. She felt tired anyway. There was a vague something that must be attended to at once, but—

She woke after a long time, in the dark. Then she remembered having caught herself walking in her sleep. She had heard some talk betwixt George Annisford and Doctor Chalmers. Then—it seemed that there was something she had lost, which must be found.

In the morning, when there was light, she would find it.

Again she woke, and saw the nurse standing between her and the light.

Perhaps the nurse would remember what she herself had forgotten.

"Nurse!"

The nurse came in swift silence, with a sweet smile.

"You are better, dear."

Her uniform was primly starchy, but her voice suggested the soft rustle of silks.

"Yes, I'm better," agreed Laura; and forgot her question.

It was not before the next day that her clearing mind again essayed the question to which she seemed subconsciously driven.

"Nurse," she asked, "how long is it—?"

"It's only a few days. You'll lie quiet, now, and rest —rest—"

Her voice trailed off, suggesting to a tired spirit a thought of welcome repose. Laura, yielding to the impulse of the stronger mind, slipped back again into forgetfulness. Yet this time she struggled though vainly for mastery of herself.

Vain day seemed to follow vain day, with the insistent question in the back of her mind still unasked. For hours at a time the girl lay weak, trying to piece out in her mind what of the stuff she remembered was actual fact and what was mere horrid phantasmagoria. George was

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

in it. This nurse was in it. Old Mrs. MacTurk was in it, her gnarled face anxiously wrinkled. And Tom was in it—stately, gallant, courageous Tom. Her heart warmed to him. She could always count on Tom.

"Where is Mr. Annisford?" she found herself asking the nurse.

"In Detroit. But your brother is here."

Laura lay quiet. Doggedly she fought off the inclination to sleep again.

The nurse's hair, under her little white cap, was dark—black, almost—yet seen in the sunlight it turned to fine gold. Her eyes were brown. Yes, unmistakably, they were brown. Yet when she smiled, they lit.

No, she was not an ordinary nurse.

"Nurse," the girl began hesitantly, "the man—you know, the man who was with my father? Who was he?"

"There was no one with him, dear."

Laura made no immediate answer. The nurse drew her rocker close to the bed, and, taking the patient's hand in hers, thoughtfully studied the lines.

"I know you now," said Laura at last. "You're Glory Adair."

She talked to keep awake. Anything was preferable to being lulled back into that clinging, horrible forgetfulness.

She had been weak before; now she began to feel strong, and rebellious in her strength. Glory Adair looked at her questioningly.

"Did you ever have your hand read?"

"No. I don't believe in palmistry."

"Then I'll read your hand."

Laura resented the offer just a little. Manifestly, the nurse divined that her mind dwelt on other things; and manifestly also, the nurse had decided to lure her into chatter over non-essentials rather than leave her to brood.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Yet she surrendered to the compelling brown eyes.

"You will make a quick recovery. I see no set-back. In place of worry you will experience peace of mind and comforting thoughts."

"Bosh!" thought Laura. "Mental suggestion to meet my case. No palm-reading at all."

The nurse seemed to hesitate. "A mystery hangs over you. I see a fair woman—"

Laura smiled. Had it not been for the tragic shadow overhanging her, this travesty on the familiar stock-in-trade of the fortune-teller would have sent her into peals of laughter.

"You have lived in pleasant circumstances for years. As a baby, though, you were not so happily circumstanced."

"Anyone could guess that." Laura's pessimism was itself a hint of growing interest. "Father's business grew from small beginnings. And—"

A glance from the brown eyes soothed her.

"Your mother is dead. You had one sister. She is also dead."

Evident error always compels contradiction.

"I never had a sister."

"Your mother died when you were a baby," returned the nurse. "Your sister died before you were born." Her tone was pleasantly firm. "Your hand tells me of that sister, and it is a witness I will believe against the world." Thoughtfully she studied the finger-tips, and the mounts at the foot of each digit, and the fine, complicated lines of the palm. "You are loving, impetuous, quick to jump at conclusions—"

"And my conclusions—are they right?"

"Not always—not often—but, on rare occasions."

Laura felt slighted. The nurse purred on.

"Your life in Maitland Port has been very uneventful.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Your hand shows no great emotional stress, though you are capable of great emotions, of love and of sacrifice. Intense self-sacrifice—for a loved one." Her brown eyes, gazing into distance, seemed to compass worlds that Laura Winright could not see. "In recent years you have travelled much, but for pleasure. Here"—she indicated—"a line is broken. You are in great danger. A cloud hovers about you. It threatens you less than it threatens others, but all the time it seems to follow you."

She paused. Laura shivered.

The nurse noticed.

"There—I've talked too much. You will lie quiet, now, and rest—rest—rest—"

"I will not rest," Laura breathed, rebelliously.

The nurse rose and crossed to the window. Laura surrendered. Yet her fascinated eyes followed Glory Adair. She was patiently disciplining her mind to think. Next time she would not be beaten in her quest—no, not even by a silky-voiced, steel-souled nurse.

She tried to piece things together. She had walked in her sleep that night her father died, had found herself in the lower hall, had heard George Annisford and Doctor Chalmers—yes, and then for some reason had gone to the room where her father lay.

She did not remember leaving that room. She remembered nothing after that. Her illness must have been from nervous shock. Very well, she felt stronger now.

Yet there was a missing link somewhere in it all that she could not place.

"Miss Adair," she said next morning; and held up her hands, the white palms uppermost. "Go on."

"I told you that you were loving and impetuous," murmured Miss Adair. "On occasion, too, you seem very determined."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

She smiled. Laura felt with sudden disappointment that her palm reading had been merely jest.

"Everything you told me yesterday that was true you could have learned from Doctor Chalmers. The things you could not have learned from Doctor Chalmers were —*mistakes.*" Laura softened the word that came first to her lips.

"Lies, you mean?" Glory's tone was placid. "But your hand tells no lies—neither does it make mistakes. None whatever. It is a witness that can be trusted to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. You may so delude yourself that you will swear to a lie in the witness box, firmly believing it the truth, but—you cannot delude your hand."

She smiled in deprecation of her burst of earnestness. Then she sat down beside the bed.

"Merely as a test," she suggested, "let me repeat a few things your hand tells me, that assuredly nobody in Maitland Port can know. You were not born in Maitland Port, but a long distance away—perhaps in another country? You travelled much the first year of your life. After that you lived in the same place many years? Tell me, isn't that all true?"

From the patient's hand she lifted her eager, confident gaze to the patient's face.

"No."

Glory sat dumfounded.

Laura Winright hastened to qualify.

"I was not born in Maitland Port. That is true. I lived here many, many years, and never visited the store at Detroit, even—just lived here with Tom and Mamma Judy. She and old Angus—he's dead now—took care of Castle Sunset; and Mamma Judy took care of me after my mother died. I never saw my mother, to remember. Dad did not really live here till he retired, and

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mr. Annisford became manager. You thought we were queer, queer people, didn't you?"

"Rather! And your mother?"

Laura did not answer.

For the first time in all her life the fact stood out nakedly, that no one had told her of her mother, that all she knew was by her own inference.

Glory Adair nodded ever so slightly. Her palm-reading was not disproven.

"Doctor Chalmers," she intervened, heroically, "said you must not talk."

"Will it hurt me? Ask my hand."

"I see no danger there—rather good. You have your mind set on getting well; there is something you have decided to do. What you think of doing, I can't tell. It will baffle you a long time. Nevertheless, you may win. You are very determined, Miss Winright."

Laura felt her interest enhanced.

"But you're a nurse," she protested. "Scientific. Exact. Are you really so superstitious as to believe in palmistry?"

"I am not superstitious. I am sane. Palmistry is not guess-work. It is science. For thousands of years it has been studied. It is taught by regularly constituted schools, and has its literature. It is quite logical. No two natures in the world are precisely alike; nor are any two hands. Why should not the lines of the palm furnish a clue to the character?"

"But—can you really tell the future—?"

Laura was all eagerness now. Glory Adair shook her head.

"I can tell character. I can tell the past, to some extent. As to the future, I can tell what you will do under any given set of circumstances and whether you are likely

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

to put yourself into those circumstances. You see, Laura Winright, palmistry isn't just a slick trick. It's hard work, if you practice it honestly. Then, it has its limitations."

She smiled.

"Some day you must see my collection of palms. I have hundreds of them at the Barracks. You know, four of us nurses room together and we've christened the place the Barracks in honour of our quarters at the hospital where we were novices. Palmistry's quite fascinating. I picked it up when I was training at the hospital. First, I practiced with the girls, and then with the patients —it helped to while away the dull hours when I was on special with a convalescent. Then I started collecting hand prints around town. I've every prominent man on my list—"

"Including dad?"

"Yes, dear. I even bearded the lion in his den. He was quite pleasant. I have your brother's print. I'd have taken yours too, but you had just left for England. I'll take it when you're a bit stronger. A little lamp-black will make your hand quite legible."

Laura thrilled.

"Are criminals really identified by their hand-prints?"

"It's gospel. Sir Francis Galton in England reduced it to a science. He claimed that the chance of the finger-prints of two individuals being identical was less than one in sixty-four billions. The finger-prints alone, mind you —the mere tips. In South Africa the Kaffirs in the mines are identified by their finger-prints. The Chinese have used thumb-print signatures in banking for centuries. In the Farrow murder case at Deptford—I'm jumping from China to England—the Strattons were identified

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

and convicted by their finger-prints on a cash box. There are scores and scores of cases—"

Mentally, Laura Winright groped her way to the light.

"Could you read a hand-print just as well as the hand itself?" Her tone was animated.

"Not quite so well. The nails and the back of the hand help in reading, and the print doesn't show them. The little lines of the palm modify the main lines, and often make all the difference in the world, and a print can't always show them, either. Still"—her brow wrinkled—"with a hand-print one can at least try."

Laura's mind leapt back to the night of her home-coming. Convulsively she struggled up in bed. The nurse caught her.

"Don't, dear. You must lie down."

The patient surrendered.

"I don't need to sit up," she whispered. "But I can. And—soon, I must."

"Did you want anything, dear?"

Laura recollected herself.

"Yes. Please go to that clothes closet"—she indicated a corner of the room. "I think you'll find a pink kimono. Feel in the pocket."

The nurse obeyed without comment. Laura heard with relief the distant crackling of paper.

The nurse, returning, drew away.

"No—I'm not asleep." Laura opened her eyes. "You have it—a telegram. That's good. I was afraid it might be lost. Tell me, Miss Adair"—her tone grew appealing—"tell me about that man. The man whose hand-print is there—on that telegram."

Miss Adair sat down again. She gazed at Laura Winright oddly, as though fearing her palm-reading had carried her too far. Then she turned the telegram over. The message read:

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Albany, N. Y., May 25, 1915.

Adam Winright,
Maitland Port, Ontario.
Arrived early Wednesday morning. Coming right through to Maitland Port.

Laura.

That telegram Laura Winright had despatched from Albany the morning of the day Adam Winright died. So much was obvious.

Miss Adair turned over the yellow paper. On the back was a black smear that, closely regarded, defined itself as the broken impress where some grimy hand had clutched the paper. Laura watched the nurse's face, expectantly.

"Man's hand—young—not over thirty-five—good—and bad—a singularly intricate mixture of good and bad. Most people are that, aren't they, Miss Winright? But here the good is very good, and the bad—well, it's uncommonly bad." She paused. "It's a pity the print is so incomplete, dear. Couldn't you get me a better one?"

"Surely you can tell me more!"

"I'll try." The fair brow puckered. "Ups and downs—vicissitudes—always trying—much travel—healthy—outdoor man, I should say—strong—self-reliant. You are disappointed, Laura Winright?"

Laura was disappointed. There was no shadow on this impressionistic picture Glory Adair conjured from the lines; a fighting soul battling against difficulties to the mastery—a strong, hardy, self-reliant man—such a man was close to her own ideal.

Glory's brows again puckered. She seemed to have more to say, yet hesitant to say it.

"I am inclined to think—I hope this won't offend—

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

that your friend finds a certain attraction in things criminal."

Laura's eyes gleamed.

"I'd like to meet him," pursued the nurse. "You'll introduce me, won't you?"

"I don't know who he is."

"Then why are you so interested?"

"Tap! Tap!" sounded softly on the door; but both minds shut out the sound.

"Why?" repeated the nurse.

Said Laura:

"Because I want to find this man."

The door opened. Tom Winright came in. He bowed magnificently to the brown-eyed nurse, and nodded cheerily to Laura. He was a strong, upstanding, resolute young man with steel-grey eyes.

"Pardon me, sister mine, but—I merely dropped in to enquire—not an intentional eavesdropper, Miss Adair —but—I couldn't help overhearing a little, and—*who is this man?*"

Laura disregarded Glory Adair's warning glance.

"Tom—Tom—see this!" She held the yellow sheet toward her brother. "There was a man in the Ghost Room that night, with my father. Tom, he killed my father. See. This is the print of his hand."

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN IN GREY

Tom Winright's glance questioned the nurse.

"Delirious?" he whispered.

Glory Adair felt her patient's wrist.

"Pulse good! Not a trace of fever." She smiled on Laura, too shrewd to attempt to hold in this pent up volcano of feeling. "You won't fret yourself, dear. Just tell us, quietly, all about it."

So Laura, with occasional pauses, told them.

"I must have walked in my sleep that night," she insisted.

She recollected nothing till she found herself in the Ghost Room, dressed in the pink kimono. There on the library table lay the telegram with its black smear. She had heard voices in the living-room, the voices of Annisford and Chalmers.

"I couldn't help listening," she protested. "I heard him—the doctor—say that father had not been ill. Everybody that day had told me the same thing—father had never mentioned being ill. Then there was that telephone message father sent the doctor just before he died—do you remember it, Tom? Did George tell you it?"

Tom slowly repeated:

"Chalmers, this is Adam Winright. I am dying. Please come at once. I must live till Laura comes. I have a message for her."

Laura shivered. She was living again what followed.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Glory Adair gripped her hand encouragingly. She would save her patient the telling.

"This is what you thought, Laura Winright? That hand-print was made by a man who held the telegram after the envelope was opened?"

"Yes, yes."

"You see, the telegram would be delivered to Mr. Winright, himself, in a sealed envelope. He must sign for it before breaking the seal. He would have it with him in the library. If that hand-print were not your father's, it must be the print of another man's hand; and that other man would be with your father when he died—"

"Yes, and would know how he died?" cried Laura. "And it was not my father's hand-print. That was why they found me in the parlour. I had to find out the truth at once, that very night. I could not wait till morning. That hand-print was not my father's."

She sank back, panting.

"Tom! Where are you going?"

Tom turned, magnificently deliberate. As ever, he did the right thing in the right way.

"I am going to telegraph at once for a private detective. Sister, I can't believe this! Poor old dad! But, if there's such a man on earth as you say, I'll hunt him down. For a case like this," he went on, practically, "the ordinary police are useless. They haven't the time. They haven't the skill. And we don't want publicity." To admiring Laura, his quick mind seemed instantly to grasp every detail of the situation. "I'll send for Harry Burnville. He's the very man we want."

He went out.

"I'm sorry!" whispered the nurse.

Laura's blue eyes questioned her.

"How can I help you, now? But surely, you don't believe it, anyway!"

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"I do."

"How could he be murdered? Not a sign of violence, not a wound, not even a scratch—"

"I know." Yet Laura Winright's tone was stubborn. "Oh, yes, now I remember, there was a scratch—just there—on his hand—see!" She held up her own hand, indicating betwixt the first and second fingers. "I saw it."

Glory Adair shrugged her shoulders.

"Sh! Sh!" she soothed.

Tom Winright was back inside half an hour.

"I used the long distance 'phone," he said. "It's quicker. Burnville has another case on, but he'll be here Saturday morning, or maybe Friday night. We're losing very little time."

His manner was impressively self-congratulatory.

A thought came to Laura.

"There must be no—no publicity?"

"None whatever. Even Annisford won't know Burnville's real business. You see, sister mine, poor dad doesn't seem to have left any will. He never mentioned one, but I always presumed that—as a practical business man, you know—he had made one. After a casual look the morning after he died, Annisford and I locked the library till we could make a thorough search. It has stayed locked ever since. We were waiting for you to get better. Now"—wisely—"Mr. Harry Burnville is ostensibly a lawyer's clerk, representing Airth & Kinzie, attorneys, of Detroit, sent down here to make a proper search for the will, and, if there isn't any, to draft the necessary papers."

He lifted his eye-brows wisely. Laura realized that it was for such a man as Tom Winright to wrestle with these problems, and not for her, an impetuous, inexperienced girl.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"You think of everything, Tom!" she exclaimed.

After Tom had gone, Glory Adair glanced up, musingly.

"Saturday, or, maybe, Friday. This is Wednesday. This Burnville has a smart record as a private detective. He did some fine work in the Morand murder case. There were a couple of jewel robberies that he cleared up, too, very neatly. He's not a fool, even if he is a detective."

Doctor Chalmers on Thursday morning pronounced Laura much better.

"You look as though you were taking a new interest in life, Miss Winright," he jested. "You can get up today."

When the doctor had gone, Laura for the first time noticed a change in the nurse's manner.

Miss Adair grew restless. She fingered the telegram nervously. More than once she shot curious glances at her patient.

"I'm going down town," she burst forth, suddenly. "Mamma Judy can look after you."

And she was gone like a shot.

Mrs. MacTurk took Glory's place at the bedside. "I'm quite well," protested Laura Winright. "I can look after myself. I don't need waiting on." But Judith MacTurk settled herself down, none the less.

She was a tall, straight Scotchwoman with an old, gnarled face. In the earlier Maitland Port days, the population of the little lake town was all Scotch; and Judith MacTurk was then of the Scotch Scotchy. When she came with her husband, Angus, to take charge of Castle Sunset, she was past forty, now she was in the sixties, and old Angus was dead these many years. Her gnarled face was kindly; her Scotch burr had smoothed

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

a bit; she was a second—nay, an only—mother to Laura Winright.

"Sitting there, you make me think of old times, Mamma Judy," said Laura. "I—I feel just like a little girl—yes, a tiny baby—"

The old woman dabbed a fistful of blue apron into one eye.

"Nae ye mind," she urged, kindly. "Cheer up, and I'll tell ye a ghost story."

Laura smiled. These ghost stories were olden diversions. She had shivered at them once. Now, she enjoyed them. She lay listening intently to stories she had heard thousands of times before, told in the rasping Scotch voice that the years had made lovely to her.

"But, Mamma Judy," she argued, gently, "Miss Adair says there's no such thing as a ghost."

"That nursie body!" Judith MacTurk rose in affronted dignity. "Which shows she nae kens muckle—beggin' her pardon, but young folk aye rush in where angels fear to tread. Ghosts! Ghosts! Me name's Judith MacTurk." Her tone breathed defiance. "Be there a ghost in a' the country Judith MacTurk doesna ken? Belike I never told ye, Laura lassie, o' auld Jim Bailey's ghost what haunts ower Saltford way, which he hanged himsel' when his wife ran awa' wi' anither man, an' noo he's waitin' till she cooms back, an' then he'll creep up behind her in the dark an' put his icy fingers aboot her neck an' juist squeeze an' squeeze an' squeeze—"

A plaintive squeal came from the shadowy recesses beyond the door. Laura started.

"Oh, ye ninny!" scorned Judith MacTurk. "What ghost wad bother his empty skull wi' a soft mushmelon of a girl like ye, Katie Sparrow, wha forgets her work tae snoop aroond corners? An' Laura, lass, there do be

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

an Indian ghost up tae the Black Hole what's been kickin' oop dog there for thousands o' years. Many says there's nae sic ghost, but Judith MacTurk kens him wi' her own eyes. An' in the auld mill back o' Dungannon there's a tall ghost wha' gropes aboot the mill at midnight a' wrappit in blue flame. Oh, Judith MacTurk kens a' these ghosts an' mair—there's nae a ghost in a' the country Judith MacTurk doesna ken, an' that doesna ken Judith MacTurk. Now, be ye gane, Katie Sparrow."

Katie Sparrow shivered, but stayed. Laura Winright smiled. For her, all this spectral rigmarole was an oft-repeated story. Glory Adair, were she here, would not like it; Glory Adair would send Mrs. MacTurk scuttling back to the basement with ears tingling. But Glory Adair was not here; and Judith MacTurk was, and in most reminiscent mood.

"It wasna trouble killed your puir father." Mamma Judy's tone died to a whisper. "It was the ghost."

Laura stiffened into attention. She caught a new, strange note in the ancient rigmarole. This, too, Glory would have vetoed.

"What do you mean? Tell me, Mamma Judy—tell me, quick!"

"Sh! Listen ye. Many's the time Judith MacTurk, being upstairs, has heard below folk movin' aboot—the sort o' folk ye can see through, an' that passes through locked doors—"

Laura, shivering, hungered for more.

At any moment Glory might return, might interrupt before she could learn all the old woman had to say. Glory thought her suspicions a delusion, to be entertained but not believed, like any other delusion of a sick girl; and Glory would not allow this to go on. To Laura, it was no longer a hieroglyphic of ghosts that Mrs. MacTurk spread out. Did her father, she mused, have an

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

evening visitor who came often and stayed late? Was that why, through so many years, he had so often shut himself apart in the library and at times forbidden his own children to interrupt him there?

"Oh, but, Mamma Judy," she urged, "old houses at night are often full of just such noises. Castle Sunset was always that way. I was young and slept through it all."

"Nae, nae, lass." Judith MacTurk's mournful tone sounded a dirge for ghost-hunting opportunities that Laura Winright had lost. "It wasna always that way. Which Judith MacTurk, when she first came, thought, 'Tis the fine hoose for a ghost tae haunt'—an' many's the time at midnight Judith MacTurk went hunting for ghosts upstairs an' doon. Yet never she saw nor heard ane till Mr. Winright came home to stay—just when ye went awa, Laura, lass. Then she, Judith MacTurk, did hear it. It wasna like anyone walkin'—not a step, not Mr. Winright's step. It was more a shufflin', draggin', crawlin'. Which Judith MacTurk askit him of it. 'It's a tonic ye need, Judith,' says he. 'I'll have Chalmers put ye oop one.' Tonic!" The gnarled face widened in a beaming smile. "From that hour life was livin' for Judith MacTurk. Nae need o' tonic when she had a ghost i' the hoose wi' her, even though she never set eyes on him, but juist heard him draggin' aboot."

"Go on, Mamma Judy!" urged Laura, breathless.

The old woman's chatter terrified her, yet she must know. And every moment Glory Adair might return. Laura saw, not the fringe of cedars and the blue sky beyond her window, but the queer, lonely past that had peopled that old Ghost Room with affrighting shadows.

"That was after I went away? And then?"

"They say there's nae will. Ah, but there was. An' Judith MacTurk's name is signed to it, an' Katie

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Sparrow's, too, as witness. Katie Sparrow! Katie Sparrow! Coom forth." The trembling, fascinated maid obeyed. "Werena we a-sittin' doonstairs ae nicht? Didna ye hear a draggin' an' crawlin' in the room juist ben? Didna Judith MacTurk tell ye, there was the ghost again? Didna ye hear steps, coomin' doon the basement stair? Didna the very door open beside ye—?"

Katie, shivering, buried her face in the coverlet of Laura's bed.

"In cooms puir Maister Winright. He holds oot a paper. 'Will ye witness this, Judith, an' ye, Katie?' says he. 'It's me will.' An' he signed an' we baith signed, an' ye a-shiverin' a' the time so ye could scarce write."

Laura heard or fancied a step outside. The old woman held up a gnarled forefinger.

"That nursie body says there's nae sic thing as a ghost, Laura, lass? But if there's nae ghost i' the hoose, wha tookit the will? The last word's spoke."

The door opened.

In came Glory Adair, frowning.

"Oh! The last word's spoke, is it? Laura will feel relieved, I'm sure." Anxiously she felt her patient's pulse. "How in Heaven's name Laura stood your rubbish I don't know. Go away—I'll look after her. And I'll never trust you with her again."

"I—I enjoyed it," protested Laura Winright. "Why did you interrupt us?"

Mamma Judy stamped defiantly downstairs. Glory Adair sat down in the rocker, gazing at Laura all the while as though asking herself a question. She took the patient's hand in hers and studied the lines. That, Laura knew, was also a question.

"It can't hurt you," she announced with decision. "There's only one thing can hurt you, and that is holding you back. You're determined to go ahead. It's written

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY