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ARLO BATES

THE INTOXICATED GHOST

I

It was not her beauty which made Irene Gaspic unusual, although she was bewitchingly pretty; nor yet her wit, her cleverness, or her wealth, albeit she was well endowed with all these good gifts: other girls were pretty, and wise, and witty, and rich. It was something far more piquant and rare which marked Irene as different from her mates, the fact being that from her great-aunt on the mother's side, an old lady who for nearly ninety years displayed to her fellow-mortals one of the most singular characters possible, Irene had inherited the power of seeing ghosts.

It is so generally regarded as a weakness even to believe in disembodied spirits that in justice to Irene it is but fair to remark that she believed in them only because she could not help seeing them, and that the power with which she was endowed had come to her by inheritance quite without any wish on her part. Any fair-minded person must perceive the difference between seeing ghosts because one is so foolish as to believe in them, and believing in their existence because one cannot help seeing them. It might be added, moreover, that the firmness which Miss Gaspic had displayed when visited by some of the most unpleasant wraiths in the whole category should be allowed to tell in her favor. When she was approached during a visit to Castle Doddyfoethghw—where, as every traveler in Wales is aware, is to be found the most ghostly phantom in the three kingdoms—by a gory figure literally streaming with blood, and carrying its mangled head in its hands, she merely remarked coldly: "Go away at once, please. You do not alarm me in the least; but to come into the presence of a lady in such a state of unpleasant dismemberment is in shockingly bad taste." Whereat the poor wraith fell all along the ground in astonishment and alarm, leaving a stain of blood upon the stone floor, which may be seen to this day by any one who doubts the tale enough to go to Castle Doddyfoethghw to see.

Although Irene seldom referred to her inheritance, and professed, when she did speak of it, to feel a lively indignation that her aunt Eunice Mariamne should have thrust upon her such a bequest, she was too thoroughly human and feminine to lack wholly a secret pride that she should be distinguished by a gift so unusual. She had too good taste openly to talk of it, yet she had not the firmness entirely to conceal it; and her friends were pretty generally aware of the legacy and of many circumstances resulting from its possession. Some few of her intimates, indeed, had ventured to employ her good offices in communicating with family wraiths; and although Irene was averse to anything which savored so strongly of mediumship and other vulgar trades, she could not but be pleased at the excellent results which had followed her mediations in

several instances.

When, therefore, she one day received a note from her old school friend Fanny McHugh, inviting her to come down to visit her at Oldtower, with the mysterious remark, “I not only long to see you, dear, but there is something most important that you can do for me, and nobody but you,” Irene at once remembered that the McHughs had a family ghost, and was convinced that she was invited, so to say, in her professional capacity.

She was, however, by no means averse to going, and that for several reasons. The McHugh estate was a beautiful old place in one of the loveliest of New England villages, where the family had been in the ascendancy since pre-Revolutionary days; Irene was sufficiently fond of Fanny; and she was well aware, in virtue of that intuition which enables women to know so many things, that her friend’s brother, Arthur McHugh, would be at home at the time named for the visit. Irene and Lieutenant Arthur McHugh had been so much to each other at one time that they had been to the very verge of a formal engagement, when at the last moment he drew back. There was no doubt of his affection, but he was restrained from asking Irene to share his fortunes by the unpleasant though timely remembrance that he had none. The family wealth, once princely for the country and time, had dwindled until little remained save the ancestral mansion and the beautiful but unremunerative lawns surrounding it.

Of course this conduct upon the part of Lieutenant McHugh was precisely that which most surely fixed him in the heart of Irene. The lover who continues to love, but unselfishly renounces, is hardly likely to be forgotten; and it is to be presumed that it was with more thought of the young and handsome lieutenant in flesh and blood than of the Continental major in ghostly attenuation who lurked in the haunted chamber that Miss Gaspic accepted the invitation to Oldtower.

II

Oldtower stands in a wild and beautiful village, left on one side by modern travel, which has turned away from the turnpike of the fathers to follow the more direct route of the rail. The estate extends for some distance along the bank of the river, which so twists in its windings as almost to make the village an island, and on a knoll overlooking the stream moulders the crumbling pile of stone which once was a watch-tower, and from which the place takes its name.

The house is one of the finest of old colonial mansions, and is beautifully placed upon a terrace half a dozen feet above the level of the ample lawn which surrounds it. Back of the house a trim garden with box hedges as high as the gardener’s knee extends down to the river, while in front a lofty hedge shuts off the grounds from the village street. Miss Fanny, upon whom had largely devolved the care of the estate since the death of her widowed mother, had had the good sense to confine her efforts to keeping things

in good order in the simplest possible way; and the result was that such defects of management as were rendered inevitable by the smallness in income presented themselves to the eye rather as evidences of mellowness than of decay, and the general effect remained most charming.

Irene had always been fond of the McHugh place, and everything was in the perfection of its June fairness when she arrived. Her meeting with Fanny was properly effusive, while Arthur gratified her feminine sense by greeting her with outward calmness while he allowed his old passion to appear in his eyes. There were, of course, innumerable questions to be asked, as is usual upon such occasions, and some of them were even of sufficient importance to require answers; so that the afternoon passed rapidly away, and Irene had no opportunity to refer to the favor to which her friend's letter had made allusion. Her suspicion that she had been summoned in her capacity of ghost-seer was confirmed by the fact that she had been put in the haunted room, a fine square chamber in the southeast wing, wainscoted to the ceiling, and one of the handsomest apartments in the house. This room had been especially decorated and fitted up for one Major Arthur McHugh, a great-great-uncle of the present McHughs, who had served with honor under Lafayette in the Revolution. The major had left behind him the reputation of great personal bravery, a portrait which showed him as extremely handsome, and the fame of having been a great lady-killer and something of a rake withal; while he had taken out of the world with him, or at least had not left behind, the secret of what he had done with the famous McHugh diamonds. Major McHugh was his father's eldest son, and in the family the law of primogeniture was in his day pretty strictly observed, so that to him descended the estate. A disappointment in love resulted in his refusing to marry, although urged thereto by his family and much reasoned with by disinterested mothers with marriageable daughters. He bequeathed the estate to the eldest son of his younger brother, who had been named for him, and this Arthur McHugh was the grandfather of the present lieutenant.

With the estate went the famous McHugh diamonds, at that time the finest in America. The "McHugh star," a huge stone of rose cut, had once been the eye of an idol in the temple of Majarah, whence it had been stolen by the sacrilegious Rajah of Zinyt, from whose possession it passed into the hands of a Colonel McHugh at the siege of Zinyt in 1707. There was an effort made, about the middle of the eighteenth century, to add this beautiful gem to the crown jewels of France, but the McHugh then at the head of the family, the father of Major McHugh, declared that he would sooner part with wife and children than with the "McHugh star," an unchristian sentiment, which speaks better for his appreciation of jewels than for his family affection.

When Major McHugh departed from this life, in 1787, the McHugh diamonds were naturally sought for by his heir, but were nowhere to be found. None of the family knew where they were usually kept—a circumstance which was really less singular than it might at first appear, since the major was never communicative, and in those days concealment was more relied upon for the safety of small valuables than the

strength which the modern safe, with its misleading name, is supposed to supply. The last that was known of the gems was their being worn at a ball in 1785 by the sister-in-law of the owner, to whom they had been loaned for the occasion. Here they had attracted the greatest attention and admiration, but on their return to Major McHugh they seemed to vanish forever. Search had of course been made, and one generation after another, hearing the traditions, and believing in its own cleverness, had renewed the endeavor, but thus far the mystery had remained unsolved.

III

It was when the girls were brushing out their hair together in that hour before retiring which is traditionally sacred to feminine confidences, that Irene asked rather abruptly:—

“Well, Fanny, what is it that you want of me?”

“Want?” replied her friend, who could not possibly help being femininely evasive. “I want to see you, of course.”

“Yes,” the guest returned, smiling; “and that is the reason you gave me this room, which I never had before.”

The hostess blushed. “It is the handsomest room in the house,” she said defensively.

“And one shares it,” Irene added, “with the ghost of the gallant major.”

“But you know,” protested Fanny, “that you do not mind ghosts in the least.”

“Not so very much now that I am used to them. They are poor creatures; and it seems to me that they get feebler the more people refuse to believe in them.”

“Oh, you don’t suppose,” cried Fanny, in the greatest anxiety, “that the major’s ghost has faded away, do you? Nobody has slept here for years, so that nobody has seen it for ever so long.”

“And you want me to assure it that you think it eminently respectable to have a wraith in the family, so you hope it will persevere in haunting Oldtower?”

“Oh, it is n’t that at all,” Fanny said, lowering her voice. “I suppose Arthur would be furious if he knew it, or that I even mentioned it, but I am sure it is more for his sake than for my own. Don’t you think that it is?”

“You are simply too provoking for anything,” Irene responded. “I am sure I never saw a ghost that talked so unintelligibly as you do. What in the world do you mean?”

“Why, only the other day Arthur said in joke that if somebody could only make the major’s—” she looked around to indicate the word which she evidently did not care to pronounce in that chamber, and Irene nodded to signify that she understood—“if only somebody could make it tell where the McHugh diamonds are—”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” interrupted Irene. “Well, my dear, I am willing to speak to the major, if he will give me an opportunity; but it is not likely that I can do much. He will not care for what I say.”

“But appeal to his family pride,” Fanny said, with an earnestness that betrayed the importance of this matter to her. “Tell him how we are going to ruin for want of just the help those diamonds would give us. He ought to have some family pride left.”

Miss Gaspic naturally did not wish to draw her friend into a conversation upon the financial straits of the family, and she therefore managed to turn the conversation, only repeating her promise that if the wraith of the major put in an appearance, she would do whatever lay in her power to get from him the secret which he had kept for a century. It was not long before Fanny withdrew, and, taking a book, Irene sat down to read, and await her visitor.

It was just at midnight that the major’s spirit made its appearance. It was a ghost of a conventional period, and it carefully observed all the old-time conditions. Irene, who had been waiting for it, raised her eyes from the book which she had been reading, and examined it carefully. The ghost had the likeness of a handsome man of rather more than middle age and of majestic presence. The figure was dressed in Continental uniform, and in its hand carried a glass apparently full of red wine. As Irene raised her eyes, the ghost bowed gravely and courteously, and then drained the cup to its depth.

“Good-evening,” Miss Gaspic said politely. “Will you be seated?”

The apparition was evidently startled by this cool address, and, instead of replying, again bowed and again drained its glass, which had in some mysterious manner become refilled.

“Thank you,” Irene said, in answer to his repeated salute; “please sit down. I was expecting you, and I have something to say.”

The ghost of the dead-and-gone major stared more than before.

“I beg your pardon?” he responded, in a thinly interrogative tone.

“Pray be seated,” Irene invited him for the third time.

The ghost wavered into an old-fashioned high-backed chair, which remained distinctly visible through his form, and for a moment or two the pair eyed each other in silence. The situation seemed somehow to be a strained one even to the ghost.

“It seems to me,” Irene said, breaking the silence, “that it would be hard for you to refuse the request of a lady.”

“Oh, impossible,” the ghost quavered, with old-time gallantry; “especially of a lovely creature like some we could mention. Anything,” he added in a slightly altered tone, as if his experiences in ghostland had taught him the need of caution—“anything in reason, of course.”

Irene smiled her most persuasive smile. “Do I look like one who would ask unreasonable things?” she asked.

“I am sure that nothing which you should ask could be unreasonable,” the ghost replied, with so much gallantry that Irene had for a moment a confused sense of having lost her identity, since to have a ghost complimenting her naturally gave her much the feeling of being a ghost herself.

“And certainly the McHugh diamonds can do you no good now,” Miss Gaspic continued, introducing her subject with truly feminine indirectness.

“The McHugh diamonds?” echoed the ghost stammeringly, as if the shock of the surprise, under which he grew perceptibly thinner, was almost more than his incorporeal frame could endure.

“Yes,” responded Irene. “Of course I have no claim on them, but the family is in severe need, and—”

“They wish to sell my diamonds!” exclaimed the wraith, starting up in wrath. “The degenerate, unworthy—”

Words seemed to fail him, and in an agitated manner he swallowed two or three glasses of wine in quick succession.

“Why, sir,” Irene asked irrelevantly, “do you seem to be always drinking wine?”

“Because,” he answered sadly, “I dropped dead while I was drinking the health of Lady Betty Rafferty, and since then I have to do it whenever I am in the presence of mortals.”

“But can you not stop?”

“Only when your ladyship is pleased to command me,” he replied, with all his old-fashioned elaborateness of courtesy.

“And as to the diamonds,” Irene said, coming back to that subject with an abruptness which seemed to be most annoying to the ghost, “of what possible use can they be to you in your present condition?”

“What use?” echoed the shade of the major, with much fierceness. “They are my occupation. I am their guardian spirit.”

“But,” she urged, bringing to bear those powers of logic upon which she always had prided herself, “you drink the ghost of wine, don’t you?”

“Certainly, madam,” the spirit answered, evidently confused.

“Then why can you not be content with guarding the ghost of the McHugh diamonds, while you let the real, live Arthur McHugh have the real stones?”

“Why, that,” the apparition returned, with true masculine perversity, “is different—quite different.”

“How is it different?”

“Now I am the guardian of a genuine treasure. I am the most considerable personage in our whole circle.”

“Your circle?” interrupted Irene.

“You would not understand,” the shape said, “so I will, with your permission, omit the explanation. If I gave up the diamonds, I should be only a common drinking ghost—a thing to be gossiped about and smiled at.”

“You would be held in reverence as the posthumous benefactor of your family,” she urged.

“I am better pleased with things as they are. I have no great faith in the rewards of benefactors; and the people benefited would not belong to our circle, either.”

“You are both selfish and cynical,” Irene declared. She fell to meditating what she had better say to him, and meanwhile she noted with satisfaction that the candle was burning blue, a fact which, to her accustomed eye, indicated that the ghost was a spirit of standing most excellent in ghostly ranks.

“To suffer the disapproval of one so lovely,” the remnant of the old-time gentleman

rejoined, “is a misfortune so severe that I cannot forbear reminding you that you are not fully familiar with the conditions under which I exist.”

In this unsatisfactory strain the conversation continued for some time longer; and when at length the ghost took its departure, and Irene retired to rest, she could not flatter herself that she had made any especial progress toward inducing the spirit to yield the secret which it had so long and so carefully guarded. The major’s affections seemed to be set with deathless constancy upon the gems, and that most powerful of masculine passions, vanity, to be enlisted in their defense.

“I am afraid that it is of no use,” Irene sighed to herself; “and yet, after all, he was only a man when he was alive, and he cannot be much more than that now when he is a ghost.”

And greatly comforted by the reflection that whatever is masculine is to be overcome by feminine guile, she fell asleep.

IV

On the following afternoon Irene found herself rowing on the river with the lieutenant. She had declined his invitation to come, and had immediately felt so exultant in the strength of mind which had enabled her to withstand temptation that she had followed the refusal with an acceptance.

The day was deliciously soft and balmy. A thin haze shut off the heat of the sun, while a southerly breeze found somewhere a spicy and refreshing odor, which with great generosity it diffused over the water. The river moved tranquilly, and any one capable of being sentimental might well find it hard to resist the influences of the afternoon.

The lieutenant was as ardently in love as it is possible for a man to be who is at once a soldier and handsome, and indeed more than would have been expected from a man who combined such causes of self-satisfaction. The fact that Irene had a great deal of money, while he had none, gave to his passion a hopelessness from his point of view which much increased its fervor. He gazed at his companion with his great dark eyes as she sat in the stern, his heavy eyebrows and well-developed mustache preventing him from looking as silly as might otherwise have been the case. Miss Gaspic was by no means insensible to the spell of the time and of the companionship in which she found herself, but she was determined above all things to be discreet.

“Arthur,” she said, by way of keeping the talk in safe channels and also of finding out what she wanted to know, “was search ever made for the McHugh diamonds?”

“Search!” he repeated. “Everything short of pulling the house down has been tried. Everybody in the family from the time they were lost has had a hand at it.”

“I do not see—” began Irene, when he interrupted brusquely.

“No,” he said; “nobody sees. The solution of the riddle is probably so simple that nobody will think of it. It will be hit upon by accident some day. But, for the sake of goodness, let us talk of something else. I always lose my temper when the McHugh diamonds are mentioned.”

He relieved his impatience by a fierce spurt at the oars, which sent the boat spinning through the water; then he shook himself as if to shake off unpleasant thoughts, and once more allowed the current to take them along. Irene looked at him with wistful eyes. She would have been so glad to give him all her money if he would have it.

“You told me,” she said at length, with a faint air of self-consciousness, “that you wanted to say something to me.”

The young lieutenant flushed, and looked between the trunks of the old trees on the river-bank into the far distance. “I have,” he responded. “It is a piece of impertinence, because I have no right to say it to you.”

“You may say anything you wish to say,” Irene answered, while a vague apprehension took possession of her mind at something in his tone. “Surely we have known each other long enough for that.”

“Well,” the other blurted out with an abruptness that showed the effort that it cost him, “you should be married, Irene.”

Irene felt like bursting into tears, but with truly feminine fortitude she managed to smile instead.

“Am I getting so woefully old and faded, then, Arthur?” she asked.

His look of reproachful denial was sufficiently eloquent to need no added word. “Of course not,” he said; “but you should not be going on toward the time when—”

“When I shall be,” she concluded his sentence as he hesitated. “Then, Arthur, why don’t you ask me to marry you?”

The blood rushed into his face and ebbed away, leaving him as pale as so sun-browned a fellow could well be. He set his teeth together over a word which was strangled in its utterance, and Irene saw with secret admiration the mighty grasp of his hands upon the oars. She could be proud of his self-control so long as she was satisfied of the intensity of his feelings, and she was almost as keenly thrilled by the adoring, appealing look in his brown eyes as she would have been by a caress.

“Because,” he said, “the McHughs have never yet been set down as fortune-hunters, and I do not care to be the one to bring that reproach upon the family.”

“What a vilely selfish way of looking at it!” she cried.

“Very likely it seems so to a woman.”

Irene flushed in her turn, and for fully two minutes there was no sound save that of the water lapping softly against the boat. Then Miss Gaspic spoke again.

“It is possible,” she said, in a tone so cold that the poor lieutenant dared not answer her, “that the fact that you are a man prevents you from understanding how a woman feels who has thrown herself at a man’s head, as I have done, and been rejected. Take me back to the shore.”

And he had not a word to answer.

V

To have proposed to a man, and been refused, is not a soothing experience for any woman; and although the ground upon which Arthur had based his rejection was one which Irene had before known to be the obstacle between them, the refusal remained a stubborn fact to rankle in her mind. All the evening she nursed her wounded feelings, and by the time midnight brought her once more face to face with the ghost of the major, her temper was in a state which nothing save the desire to shield a lady could induce one to call by even so mild a word as uncertain.

The spirit appeared as usual, saluting, and tossing off bumpers from its shadowy wine-glass, and it had swallowed at least a dozen cups before Miss Gaspic condescended to indicate that she was aware of its presence.

“Why do you stand there drinking in that idiotic fashion?” she demanded, with more asperity than politeness. “Once is quite enough for that sort of thing.”

“But I cannot speak until I have been spoken to,” the ghost responded apologetically, “and I have to continue drinking until I have been requested to do something else.”

“Drink, then, by all means,” Irene replied coldly, turning to pick up a book. “I only hope that so much wine will not go to your head.”

“But it is sure to,” the ghost said, in piteous tones; “and in all my existence, even when I was only a man, I have never been overcome with wine in the presence of a lady.”

It continued to swallow the wraith of red wine while it spoke, and Irene regarded it curiously.

“An inebriated ghost,” she observed dispassionately, “is something which it is so seldom given to mortal to see that it would be the greatest of folly to neglect this opportunity of getting sight of that phenomenon.”

“Please tell me to go away, or to sit down, or to do something,” the quondam major pleaded.

“Then tell me where the McHugh diamonds are,” she said.

A look of desperate obstinacy came into the ghost’s face, through which could unpleasantly be seen the brass knobs of a tall secretary on the opposite side of the room. For some moments the pair confronted each other in silence, although the apparition continued its drinking. Irene watched the figure with unrelenting countenance, and at length made the curious discovery that it was standing upon tiptoe. In a moment more she saw that it was really rising, and that its feet from time to time left the carpet entirely. Her first thought was a fear that it was about to float away and escape, but upon looking closer she came to the conclusion that it was endeavoring to resist the tendency to rise into the air. Watching more sharply, she perceived that while with its right hand it raised its inexhaustible wine-cup, with its left it clung to the back of a chair in an evident endeavor to keep itself down.

“You seem to be standing on tiptoe,” she observed. “Were you looking for anything?”

“No,” the wraith responded, in evident confusion; “that is merely the levitation consequent upon this constant imbibing.”

Irene laughed contemptuously. “Do you mean,” she demanded unfeelingly, “that the sign of intoxication in a ghost is a tendency to rise into the air?”

“It is considered more polite in our circle to use the term employed by the occultists,” the apparition answered somewhat sulkily. “We speak of it as ‘levitation.’”

“But I do not belong to your circle,” Irene returned cheerfully, “and I am not in sympathy with the occultists. Does it not occur to you,” she went on, “that it is worth while to take into consideration the fact that in these progressive times you do not occupy the same place in popular or even in scientific estimation which was yours formerly? You are now merely an hallucination, you know, and there is no reason that I should regard you with anything but contempt, as a mere symptom of indigestion or of mental fatigue.”

“But you can see that I am not an hallucination, can you not?” quavered the poor ghost

of the major, evidently becoming dreadfully discouraged.

“Oh, that is simply a delusion of the senses,” Irene made answer in a matter-of-fact way, which, even while she spoke, she felt to be basely cruel. “Any physician would tell me so, and would write out a prescription for me to prevent my seeing you again.”

“But he could n’t,” the ghost said, with pathetic feebleness.

“You do not know the physicians of to-day,” she replied, with a smile. “But to drop that, what I wished to say was this: does it not seem to you that this is a good opportunity to prove your reality by showing me the hiding-place of the diamonds? I give you my word that I will report the case to the Psychical Research Society, and you will then go on record and have a permanent reputation which the incredulity of the age cannot destroy.”

The ghost was by this time in a state of intoxication which evidently made it able only with the utmost difficulty to keep from sailing to the ceiling. It clung to the back of a chair with a desperate clutch, while its feet paddled hopelessly and helplessly in the air, in vain attempts once more to get into touch with the floor.

“But the Psychical Research Society is not recognized in my circle,” it still objected.

“Very well,” Irene exclaimed in exasperation; “do as you like! But what will be the effect upon your reputation if you go floating helplessly back to your circle in your present condition? Is levitation in the presence of ladies considered respectable in this society of whose opinion you think so much?”

“Oh, to think of it!” the spirit of the bygone major wailed with a sudden shrillness of woe which made even Miss Gaspic’s blood run cold. “Oh, the disgrace of it! I will do anything you ask.”

Irene sprang to her feet in sudden excitement.

“Will you show me—” she began; but the wavering voice of the ghost interrupted her.

“You must lead me,” it said. “Give me your hand. I shall float up to the ceiling if I let go my hold upon this chair.”

“Your hand—that is, I—I don’t like the feeling of ghosts,” Irene replied. “Here, take hold of this.”

She picked up a pearl paper-knife and extended it toward the spirit. The ghost grasped it, and in this manner was led down the chamber, floating and struggling upward like a bird. Irene was surprised at the amount of force with which it pulled at the

paper-knife, but she reflected that it had really swallowed an enormous quantity of its ghostly stimulant. She followed the directions of the waving hand that held the wine-glass, and in this way they came to a corner of the room where the spirit made signs that it wished to get nearer the floor. Irene pulled the figure downward, until it crouched in the corner. It laid one transparent hand upon a certain panel in the wainscoting.

“Search here,” it said.

In the excitement of the moment Irene relaxed her hold upon the paper-knife. Instantly the ghost floated upward like a balloon released from its moorings, while the paper-knife dropped through its incorporeal form to the floor.

“Good-by,” Irene cried after it. “Thank you so much!”

And like a blurred and dissolving cloud above her head the intoxicated ghost faded into nothingness.

VI

It was hardly to be expected that Irene, flushed with the proud delight of having triumphed over the obstinate ghost of the major, could keep her discovery to herself for so long a time as until daylight. It was already near one in the morning, but on going to her window, and looking across to the wing of the house where the lieutenant’s rooms were, she saw that his light was still burning. With a secret feeling that he was probably reflecting upon the events of the afternoon, Irene sped along the passage to the door of Fanny’s chamber, whom she awakened, and dispatched to bring Arthur.

Fanny’s characteristically feminine manner of calling her brother was to dash into his room, crying:—

“Oh, Arthur, Irene has found the McHugh diamonds!”

She was too incoherent to reply to his questions, so that there was manifestly nothing for him to do but to follow to the place where Irene was awaiting them. There the young couple were deserted by Fanny, who impulsively ran on before to the haunted chamber, leaving them to follow. As they walked along the corridor, the lieutenant, who perhaps felt that it was well not to provoke a discussion which might call up too vividly in Irene’s mind the humiliation of the afternoon, clasped her quite without warning, and drew her to his side.

“Now I can ask you to marry me,” he said; “and I love you, Irene, with my whole heart.”

Her first movement was an instinctive struggle to free herself; but the persuasion of his embrace was too sweet to be resisted, and she only protested by saying, “Your love seems to depend very much upon those detestable old diamonds.”

“Of course,” he answered. “Without them I am too poor to have any right to think of you.”

“Oh,” she cried out in sudden terror, “suppose that they are not there!”

The young man loosened his embrace in astonishment.

“Not there!” he repeated. “Fanny said that you had found them.”

“Not yet; only the ghost—”

“The ghost!” he echoed, in tones of mingled disappointment and chagrin. “Is that all there is to it?”

Irene felt that her golden love-dream was rudely shattered. She was aware that the lieutenant did not even believe in the existence of the wraith of the major, and although she had been conversing with the spirit for so long a time that very night, so great was the influence of her lover over her mind that she began at this moment to doubt the reality of the apparition herself.

With pale face and sinking heart she led the way into her chamber, and to the corner where the paper-knife yet lay upon the floor in testimony of the actuality of her interview with the wraith. Under her directions the panel was removed from the wainscot, a labor which was not effected without a good deal of difficulty. Arthur sneered at the whole thing, but he yet was good-natured enough to do what the girls asked of him.

Only the dust of centuries rewarded their search. When it was fully established that there were no jewel-cases there, poor Irene broke down entirely, and burst into convulsive weeping.

“There, there,” Arthur said soothingly. “Don’t feel like that. We’ve got on without the diamonds thus far, and we can still.”

“It is n’t the diamonds that I’m crying for,” sobbed Irene, with all the naïveté of a child that has lost its pet toy. “It’s you!”

There was no withstanding this appeal. Arthur took her into his arms and comforted her, while Fanny discreetly looked the other way; and so the engagement was allowed

to stand, although the McHugh diamonds had not been found.

VII

But the next night Irene faced the ghost with an expression of contempt that might have withered the spirit of Hamlet's sire.

"So you think it proper to deceive a lady?" she inquired scornfully. "Is that the way in which the gentlemen of the 'old school,' of which we hear so much, behaved?"

"Why, you should reflect," the wraith responded waveringly, "that you had made me intoxicated." And, indeed, the poor spirit still showed the effects of its debauch.

"You cannot have been very thoroughly intoxicated," Irene returned, "or you would not have been able to deceive me."

"But you see," it answered, "that I drank only the ghost of wine, so that I really had only the ghost of inebriation."

"But being a ghost yourself," was her reply, "that should have been enough to intoxicate you completely."

"I never argue with a lady," said the ghost loftily, the subject evidently being too complicated for it to follow further. "At least I managed to put you as far as possible on the wrong scent."

As it spoke, it gave the least possible turn of its eye toward the corner of the room diagonally opposite to that where it had disappeared on the previous night.

"Ah!" cried Irene, with sudden illumination.

She sprang up, and began to move from its place in the corner an old secretary which stood there. The thing was very heavy, but she did not call for help. She strained and tugged, the ghost showing evident signs of perturbation, until she had thrust the secretary aside, and then with her lamp beside her she sat down upon the floor and began to examine the wainscoting.

"Come away, please," the ghost said piteously. "I hate to see you there on the floor. Come and sit by the fire."

"Thank you," she returned. "I am very comfortable where I am."

She felt of the panels, she poked and pried, and for more than an hour she worked, while the ghost stood over her, begging that she go away. It was just as she was on the

point of giving up that her fingers, rubbing up and down, started a morsel of dust from a tiny hole in the edge of a panel. She seized a hairpin from amid her locks, and thrust the point into the little opening. The panel started, moved slowly on a concealed hinge, and opened enough for her to insert her fingers and to push it back. A sort of closet lay revealed, and in it was a pile of cases, dusty, moth-eaten, and time-stained. She seized the first that came to hand, and opened it. There upon its bed of faded velvet blazed the “McHugh star,” superb in its beauty and a fortune in itself.

“Oh, my diamonds!” shrilled the ghost of Major McHugh. “Oh, what will our circle say!”

“They will have the right to say that you were rude to a lady,” Irene answered, with gratuitous severity. “You have wasted your opportunity of being put on record.”

“Now I am only a drinking ghost!” the wraith wailed, and faded away upon the air.

Thus it came about that on her wedding-day Irene wore the “McHugh star;” and yet, such is human perversity that she has not only been convinced by her husband that ghosts do not exist, but she has lost completely the power of seeing them, although that singular and valuable gift had come to her, as has been said, by inheritance from a great-aunt on her mother’s side of the family.