

Blackmask Online -- The Drummer Ghost

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THE DRUMMER GHOST

John William DeForest

A bit of village, -- we can hardly call it a street; at best, the mere fag-end of a street; six houses and a church spire in sight, -- one of the houses, brick.

This is by no means the whole of Johnsonville, for the greater number of its dwellings lie in a neighboring hollow, clustered industriously beside the mill-dam over the Wampoosue, or loafing, as it were, at the two ends of the wooden bridge, or straggling, like picnickers, down the course of the black streamlet. But as these are all hidden from us by trees, and are, moreover, of not the least consequence to our story, we will not invade their sequestered insignificance. A young man, and also, of course, a young woman, demand our instant attention.

"Your uncle's appearance quite interests me," says Mr. Adrian Underhill. "Isn't there something, -- I don't quite know how to express myself, -- something rather remarkable about him?"

"I don't perceive that there is, except his appetite for wives; he is just finishing his third."

To think of a girl of nineteen, and a blond, blue-eyed girl at that, making such a speech! But in Miss Marian Turner's auburn there was a slightly disquieting dash of red, and about the corners of her rosy mouth there was a flexible twist which reminded one of the snapper of a whip-lash.

Furthermore, she carried herself upright, in a knightly manner, always ready for joust; she had a quick, positive step, as if she knew to the ends of her little bootees what she wanted; and there was a look in her eyes which declared, "I always mean more than I say." Clearly, if she had not seen life, she had guessed more than enough of it.

"Is that speaking light-mindedly of uncles?" she added. "I don't remember that it is anywhere commanded to be reverential towards them. Well, I mustn't perplex you. Don't mention my queerness to anyone."

"Of course not," answered Mr. Underhill, meanwhile studying her with profound attention.

Just graduated from Winslow University, and from the quiet, bookish sociables of New Boston, he had fancied himself well read up in young ladies, and was almost awed at meeting one whom he could not understand. She said and did the most original things; that is, he considered them most original; and to him what was the difference? Moreover, she had a way of ordering him which was quite new in his experience, for he had been a bit of a Grandison among the female circles of New Boston, and at home he was an only son, the natural governor of his mother and sisters. What was still more curious, and what was even alarming, he had begun to perceive that he liked to be thus ordered.

"There he is," she resumed, nodding towards a tall, thin, haggard man of fifty-five, who just then appeared in the veranda of the brick house; "he looks as if he wanted to see one of us. It can't be me. You had better come in."

Underhill hesitated. Parents in New Boston had put it to him about his "intentions," and perhaps Mr. Joshua Turner was waiting to ask him what he meant to do for Marian. He was aware that he had paid the girl some undeniable courtship, and still he was perplexedly conscious that he did not as yet hanker for marriage. But

he drifted along, as is the manner of his unwise sex, and so presently found himself in the veranda of the brick house.

While Marian walked haughtily into the dwelling, without speaking to or looking at her uncle, the latter arrested Underhill with a grim, skeleton-like shake of the hand. Although a landgoing citizen from his youth, Mr. Joshua Turner was as long and lean and brown as the Ancient Mariner, and had moreover somewhat of his ghostly expression of enchantment. A shock of towzled, iron-gray hair; a high, narrow, wrinkled, tawny forehead; hollow black eyes, surrounded with circle on circle of brown and yellow; a lofty Roman nose, looking across a wide, thin-lipped mouth at a projecting chin; cheeks so sunken and pitted that they put you in mind of the epithets weather-beaten and worm-eaten; the whole face discolored by bile, indigestions, and lack of exercise, and corroded by care; the expression eager, anxious, and troubled, to the verge of lunacy; -- such was the awful head of Joshua Turner.

"Mr. Underhill, come into the parlor," he said, in a deep, tremulous voice. "I have something private, strictly private, to tell you."

Leading the way into a sombre, curtained room, rendered additionally funereal by that musty smell which country parlors are apt to have, he turned the key in the door, and, without inviting his guest to sit, commenced striding from corner to corner.

"Mr. Underhill, I am almost crazy," he said. "I don't know but I am quite crazy. If I am, it is the drummer -- the invisible, ghostly, fiendish, infernal drummer -- who has made me so. Who wouldn't be crazy with that unearthly, horrible rubadub-dub?"

Here he began to beat upon his left hip, in the manner of one drumming, meanwhile repeating rapidly, "Rubadub-dub, rubadub-dub, rubadub-dub."

Underhill looked on in amazement and some slight alarm, suspecting that the man was really insane. He mustered up what anecdotes he had heard of lunatics, glanced at the door and windows, in order to settle upon his best method of escape, and finally took a chair by the fireplace, so as to have the poker within easy reach.

"Yes, that is his devilish tune," resumed Turner. "He began it only three days ago, and it has already driven me nearly mad. You are a college man; perhaps you can explain it all. I will tell you the whole story. I was sitting there, in that very chair where you are sitting now, when I first heard him. I was reading a paper, -- reading about one of Sherman's battles, -- when he came drumming down the street. I thought it was a pack of boys, or a company of furloughed soldiers. But it stopped, or he stopped, or she stopped, whatever it may be, and drummed so long and loud that I laid down my candle and went to the window. I looked out; I could see the whole street by the bright moonlight; but there was no one there."

After two or three long sighs of profound depression, he resumed: "I thought that the boys or the soldiers had passed, and I went back to the fire. Then it began in the hall, -- softly, very softly, -- rubadub-dub. Thinking that some joker was playing pranks upon me, I rushed to the door and opened it. Nothing was there. I went through the hall; I ran upstairs and downstairs; I looked into every room; -- nobody! But when I came back to the parlor, something quiet and cold, like a breath of winter wind, followed me. I slammed the door behind me, and I hoped that I had shut the thing out. Then I took up my paper and tried to read. But I was scarcely seated before I heard it again."

Here he stopped his march from corner to corner, and commenced circling a chair which stood in the centre of the room, his hands meanwhile beating gently on his breast.

"It started at the door," he continued, "and drummed straight up to me, rubadub-dub; then it drummed all around me, twice, in a circle, rubadub-dub, rubadub-dub; then it stood between me and the hearth, chilling me through, such a dub-dub, rubadub-dub, rubadub-dub. It had begun softly, but as it went on it beat louder and louder and louder, until at last it almost deafened me with its cursed uproar."

Once more he drummed violently on his hips, repeating in a hurried stammer, "Rubadub-dub, rubadub-dub, rubadub-dub."

Underhill, as may be supposed, was thinking fast without coming to any conclusion. He made a hasty muddle of the Stratford Mysteries, Rochester Knockings, Cock Lane Ghost, and Salem Witchcraft, and did not perceive that any light was thereby shed upon the case now brought under his consideration. Meanwhile he stared at Mr. Turner, and kept within arm's-length of the poker.

"Since then he has never left me for a day," resumed the Unafflicted. "I have struck at him, and kicked at him, and thrown books at him, without touching anything, or hearing anything escape. But he has drummed; O, how he has drummed! Nothing will stop his drumming. He will drum me out of my senses; he will drum me out of my life. That is my story, Mr. Underhill. Can you make anything of it?"

It is not judicious to tell a man that he is a maniac, especially when there is a likelihood that he is one. Instead of venturing on this slightly perilous discourtesy, our young friend meekly replied, "No, Mr. Turner, I can't at once make anything of it. My college education doesn't seem to come in play here," he added. "This sort of thing wasn't lectured upon by the professors. If I had only been a medical student! It does strike me, Mr. Turner, that this is a matter of nerves. Have you consulted your doctor? Why not call him in?"

"My doctor is an old fool," exploded the haunted man. "He would give me a blue-pill or some morphine. What good would that do me? Do you suppose the drummer would care if I should take all the blue-pills in the universe? I won't have any medicine. I am a well man and a sane man, whatever you think to the contrary," he asseverated, loudly, his eyes glowing like fires within their deep, discolored hollows.

Although his expression was not reassuring, Underhill nodded assent to his declaration of sanity, being much guided at the moment by worldly wisdom.

"Come here to-night at ten o'clock, and you shall hear him for yourself," continued Turner. Then judge whether drugs will stop him."

The seance was agreed upon, and the young man departed. As he went out, he gave the house a keener glance of investigation than he had hitherto bestowed upon it. The plan was obvious at first sight: a broad hall running from front to rear, with two rooms on each side; the second story an almost precise counterpart of the first; above, the usual pointed attic. The flooring was of considerable extent, while the stories were not more than eight feet in height, giving to the edifice a flattened, squat appearance.

The material was brick, originally soft, and now very old, so that the exterior had become strangely haggard and pitted, as if from a complex attack of architectural consumption and smallpox. It seemed as if the building were not only infirm with age, but infected, disfigured, and unwholesome with disease. A coat of glaring red paint, put on within the last three or four years, reminded one of rouge on the wrinkled visage of a dowager. In spite of the fresh coloring without, and the new papering within, the building had a moldering look and a musty odor. Underhill could not help conceding that the nineteenth century, as it exists in the United States of America, rarely offers a more suitable haunting-place to a ghost.

At a quarter to ten in the evening, he returned to the house, and was received by Turner in the parlor.

"Excuse my wife for not seeing you," said the haunted man. "She has gone to bed. Her health is very feeble, and this mystery has nearly prostrated her. As for my niece, she has her own ways; I don't pretend to govern her. By the way, you may think it odd, Mr. Underhill, that I should make my niece earn her own living, in part, at least, as a school-teacher. I do it from principle, sir. Young people should learn how hard it is to get money; then they will know how to keep it. I understand that people talk about it; but what business is it of theirs? My conscience tells me that my course is the right one."

Underhill nodded; he rather thought that the young lady might make a better wife for a poor man because of this system of education; and he, just beginning the world, was a poor man, the very one that he was thinking of for her. Not finding it easy, however, to converse concerning Miss Marian, he asked: "Any more light as to the nature of your -- your ghost?"

"Judge for yourself," replied Turner, with an anxious glance at the clock.

"Is he regular? Does he come at certain hours?"

"Not always. Morning and evening. He has been thrice at ten o'clock. There!"

Rubadub-dub! There was no doubt about it; a drum of some sort was being beaten upon by something; rubadub-dub, down the street, through the door-yard, and into the veranda; there it rattled furiously for a moment, and then stopped. Underhill was so startled by the sound, -- it so surprised and convinced, or deluded, his hitherto incredulous soul, -- that he felt his skin writhe and the roots of his hair shudder. Perhaps he would not have been so moved had he not seen all the yellowish and brownish patches of Turner's complexion bleach to an ash-color at the first sound of the ghostly tattoo. For a full minute the two sat motionless, staring at each other with an air of sentenced criminals. When the young man recovered himself, he sprang up, and stepped softly toward the door, his idea being to steal into the veranda, and surprise some practical joker. His companion arrested him with a wave of the hand, and a hoarse whisper, "It is coming in."

Did it come in? Underhill was not quite satisfied as to that point. The rattle of a drum entered, no doubt; it rolled through the parlor in a distressingly audible manner; but did the mysterious agency which produced it likewise find ingress? Turner evidently believed that the drummer, whoever or whatever it might be, was in the parlor; his ghastly glare said thus much, and he vehemently asserted it afterwards; but the younger man, healthy in body and soul, was even yet only half convinced.

Underhill's first impulse, however, was towards faith; he believed what he saw that his companion believed. For a minute it seemed to him that the drummer entered with a soft rat-tat-ta, the mere trembling of the sticks on the sheepskin; that within a few seconds thereafter he commenced beating a march at the door and continued it straight up to Turner; then came a circling around the haunted man, followed by a furious long roll between him and the fire. This was Underhill's first impression, and while it lasted it was a terrible one.

He had supposed that he was a radical unbeliever in spiritual manifestations; that, if phenomena purporting to be of that nature were presented to his attention, he would receive them with perfect coolness; that he would laugh the mystery to scorn and proceed to unravel it. But on the present occasion his soul did not work in this satisfactory fashion. He was almost paralyzed intellectually; he glared about the room wherever Turner glared; he was little less than thoroughly frightened.

Presently his mind swung back towards its normal rationality, and caught once more at the suspicion that the creator of the noise was in the hall. Rising softly and gliding to the door, he cautiously opened it. No one! nothing but the rolling of the drum; nothing but a clamor without a cause. Another remarkable fact was that the drumming did not seem quite so clear without as within. Unchecked by this observation, to which in fact he then hardly gave a thought, he walked to the lower end of the passage, severely shook a venerable

overcoat which hung there upon a nail, returned as far as the foot of the stairway, and mounted to the upper hall.

It seemed to him now as if he were nearing the mystery; and finding another stairway, he pushed on to the garret, but there the uproar grew dull again. He had in his hand a candle which he had taken from the lower passage, and which answered in the Turner house the purpose of an entry lamp. By its light he glanced over the trunks, broken furniture, dismissed demijohns and bottles, fragments of carpets and other indescribable rubbish, which ordinarily encumber a garret, without discovering the smallest fraction of a band of music. Moreover the noise had ceased; it had died away as he set foot on the creaking garret floor; the house was as silent as a decrepit and sickly old mansion could be.

Now back to the second floor; and here he made a discovery. Marian Turner, dressed in her every-day guise and holding a lighted candle in her hand, met him with a mournful and stern countenance which put him in mind of Lady Macbeth.

"Tell my uncle," she whispered, "that my brother must be dead."

"Your brother?" he inquired. "I didn't know that you had a brother."

"I have none now," she answered, her voice shaking with unmistakable emotion. "You will learn yet that he is dead." After a brief hesitation she continued more firmly: "My uncle put him to a trade, and he hated it. Last year he ran away and joined the army as a drummer-boy. He would have been sixteen to-day, if he had lived."

Here her self-possession quite broke down, and she burst into a loud sobbing. Underhill tried to offer encouragement; he took her hand, and then he drew her towards him: indeed we have reason to suspect that she cried for a while upon his shoulder. At last she raised her head, and whispering, "Tell my uncle," slipped away to her own room.

Returning to the parlor, Underhill found Turner, his face buried in his hands, shivering in front of the fire. At the entry of the young man, the elder, without removing his bony fingers from his sunken eyes, inquired in a shuddering voice, "Did you find anything?"

"No. But perhaps I might, if you had gone with me. I didn't know the house and couldn't get about it fast enough."

"No use. I have been about it at full speed, like a madman. No use."

"Have you seen nothing?" inquired Underhill, wondering why Turner covered his eyes.

"No," answered the haunted man, dropping his hands, "I tell you there is nothing to be seen." After a moment he added, "I was afraid I might see something."

"O, I met your niece upstairs," said Underhill. "She told me to tell you -- well, it is very unaccountable and painful; but she has a strong impression that her brother -- a drummer-boy, she called him -- that he is dead."

"Ah!" exclaimed Turner, springing to his feet and staring at the young man with an expression of intense horror. "What did you tell me that for? O my God! What did you say it for? Do you want to drive me into the grave? Don't you see that I can't bear such things?"

After walking about the room for a moment, he partially recovered his self-possession, and broke out peevishly: "What does the fool mean by such nonsense! I won't have it in my house, -- I won't have people under my roof talking such nonsense."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Turner. I was in fault for telling you. Don't lay blame upon her. I assure you that she was quite beside herself with emotion."

As the only response to this was a groan, Underhill concluded that he could do little good by prolonging his stay, and, after a few words of useless sympathy, he took his departure.

During the next day, he learned something new about the Turners. It is time now to explain that he was a lawyer, and that he had set up his virgin shingle in Johnsonville, with the intention of removing to New Boston at the first flattering opportunity. Into his office strolled an elderly male gossip, one of those men who do the "heavy standing round" in villages, and who have discovered whispering galleries at certain sunny corners, where they can overhear all the marvels of the neighborhood.

"Curious goings-on at Josh Turner's, I understand," said this useful personage, dropping into one of Underhill's arm-chairs. "Sat up with 'em last night, I understand. Say he's troubled with a ghost. Pshaw! No ghosts nowadays; ain't legal tender; don't circulate. It's a bad conscience, that's what it is. Tell you, Josh Turner's got an awful sink-hole in one corner of his conscience. Hadn't treated those children right, -- brother's children, too, -- only brother. Sam Turner came home, seven years ago, with fifty thousand dollars and two motherless children. Sam died, -- left Josh executor, -- gardeen of the boy and girl. Where'd the money go to? Josh Turner can't tell. Sam's estate settled up for nothing, an' Josh Turner turned out rich. Never made enough before to lay up anything, and here he is rich, retired from business, investing in railroads, painting his house. Looks kind of ugly, don't it? Then he made the girl teach school, and 'prenticed the boy to a trade, and let him run off to the army. Can't say I'd take Josh Turner's conscience for all his money. Well, I must be going. Don't mention this, Mr. Underhill. A lawyer ought to know how to keep secrets. Good morning."

From other sources our young barrister learned further particulars. The four children who had been born to Joshua Turner by his first two wives were now all away from home, the two girls prosperously married, the boys in successful business. By his living wife he had another boy, at present five years old. In this youngster the whole affection of both father and mother seemed to have centered. They cared little for the other children; they cared nothing for the nephew and niece. It was currently reported in Johnsonville that little Jimmy Turner would inherit the whole, or nearly the whole, of the Josh Turner property.

"The old woman will bring that around certain," said Phineas Munson, the gossip above mentioned, during a second call on Underhill; "she won't let the old man catch his last breath till he makes out a will in favor of her Jimmy. Dunno why I call her old, though; ain't more than forty. S'pose I call her so because she's such a poor, sickly, faded creetur. She's in a decline, and coughs to kill. But, sick as she is, she's got a temper like a wildcat, and she governs Josh Turner at the first yelp. By the way, heard any more about the ghost? Say it's a drummer, and drums like sixty. Wonder if Freddy Turner's dead? However, I don't believe in ghosts. All fiddle-faddle. Haw, haw, haw," he laughed just here. "I said, all fiddle-faddle. No drumming, don't ye see? Fiddle-faddle. Didn't mean to joke, though. Good morning."

While Underhill was thus studying the shadows of the Turner past, the village was going mad about the ghost. The Johnsonville drummings ought long since to have taken their place, in the history of "spiritual manifestations," by the side of the Stratford Mysteries and the Rochester Knockings. The house was invaded by so many people, and they were there at times in such incommodious crowds, that the Turners were nearly as much troubled by the living as by their spiritual visitant. What added to the excitement was the publication of a list of the casualties in one of Sherman's minor battles, wherein the name of Frederic Turner figured

among the dead. Nothing could be more obvious than that the drummer was the ghost of Joshua Turner's ill-used nephew.

Of course, efforts were made to trace the disturbance to a human, or at least a physical origin. The village materialists, that is to say, the doctor, the apothecary, Phineas Munson, and two or three more, nosed about the house by day and watched it by night. One talked of a peculiar circulation in the chimney; another of a loose shingle on the roof which clattered in the wind; another suspected little Jimmy Turner, and wanted to tie him up. All these frantic hypotheses were laughed to scorn by the great majority of Johnsonvillians, who found it more rational to believe in a ghost, and far more amusing.

Curiously enough, Mrs. Turner was one of the most vehement of the unbelievers. This determined woman, feeble and ghastly under the prolonged gripe of consumption, searched the dwelling from garret to cellar, by day and by night, to discover the trick which she declared was being played upon her household. In this investigation she displayed a feverish eagerness which was attributed partly to her native fervor of character and partly to the nervous excitability of invalidism. Small, meager, and narrow-shouldered, her clothes hanging straight along her skeleton figure, her puny and pointed face of a uniform waxen yellow, her large, prominent, lusterless eyes wandering hurriedly from object to object, her shrunken, glassy forefinger beckoning here and there in tremulous suspicion, she was woeful and almost terrible to look upon. So anxious was she to dissipate the mystery, that, passionately as she loved her little boy, she threatened him and whipped him to make him avow that he did the drumming. Then, when convinced of his innocence, she cried and coughed over him until it seemed as if her flickering life would go out in the spasm.

Against the assumption that the noises were produced by Frederic Turner's ghost, she argued with praiseworthy energy though inexcusable logic. At first, she scouted the idea that the boy was dead, asserting that he would yet reappear to make trouble for his family. When further news demolished this supposition, she declared that the drummings had commenced a week after the decease, so that there could be no connection between the two facts. But popular credulity stepped in here to controvert her; people now remembered to have heard the mysterious uproar for some time back; one and another had been startled by it a week before Josh Turner complained of it; in short, the dates of the drumming and the death became identical. Even the cautious and intelligent were obliged to admit that the manifestations began several days before the news of the boy's decease reached the village, and to infer that this circumstance tended to disprove all supposition of trickery. Why should a person, who did not know that Fred Turner was dead, set out to counterfeit Fred Turner's ghost?

For the ear of her husband, Mrs. Turner had another theory which she did not care to make public. "It's that girl," she said. "It's your own niece, Marian Turner, that does it."

"But you've searched her room and found nothing," groaned the husband, as sick in soul as his wife in body. "You've searched the whole house."

"Yes, but I shall find something. She's precious sly and deep, but I shall find her out yet. I have my eye on her, every day, while I am talking about other things."

"But when the -- the noises commenced, Marian didn't know about Freddy."

"Yes, she did. You believe me, Joshua Turner, she did. She had a letter or something. Then she knew that the news would get to us later, and she begun her tantrums. O, she's precious deep, -- precious deep! I wish she'd cleared out when her brother did."

"I wish he hadn't gone," moaned the husband. "I wish I'd treated him better, and kept him by us."

"Joshua Turner, you haven't got the spirit of a man. If you had half my spunk, sick and dying as I am, you wouldn't whimper that way. Everything has gone right, except that you are a coward, -- a poor, feeble, sick-headed creature, -- afraid of your own shadow. If you only would pluck up a spirit and let this thing worry itself out, everything would be right."

"Pluck up a spirit? I tell you I can't. It 's killing me."

"Well," she gasped, laying her hand on her breast as if to aid the action of her withered lungs, -- "well, it 's killing me, too. That is, you are killing me. But do I flinch? Just look at me and see how I bear it. I wish to Heavens," concluded this audacious woman, "that I could give you my courage."

"Sarah Turner, you have no conscience," he replied, in a tone which was not so much reproachful as horror-stricken.

"How dare you say that to me, Josh Turner? And you know who I am suffering for and slaving for! It isn't for myself that I care," she continued, coughing and crying. "It 's for Jimmy. I want Jimmy to be well off. And you want to rob him, -- leave him a beggar!"

"O my God! my God! " groaned Turner, and walked from her without another word.

"See here," she called after him, suppressing her tears. "If I find that girl is doing it, will you turn her out of the house? Will you send her off?"

He hesitated, looking at her sternly, and at last sighed, "No; I have done harm enough to Sam's children."

She turned her back upon him and left him, with an ejaculation of anger and contempt.

Meanwhile the manifestations pursued their course, to the beatitude of the wonder-loving, and the perplexity of the philosophical. One noteworthy circumstance was that the drummer seemed to hate a crowd. He rarely vouchsafed his music to the swarms of curious who invaded the house, while he poured it forth without stint to enliven the solitude of the Turners. He drummed rarely on a Sunday, frequently on a Saturday, and almost always in the evening. His favorite place of recreation was the parlor, and the listener in whom he delighted was Joshua Turner. Nevertheless, he sometimes assailed little Jimmy with long rolls and tattoos which almost drove him out of his five-year-old senses. The poor child was hysterically afraid of the ghostly visitant, and, at the first murmur of spiritual sheepskin, would fly screaming to his mother.

"There! don't be scared at it," she was once heard to whisper, while looking in his face with the anxiety of ardent love. "If Jimmy won't mind it, he shall be very rich some day, and have all the pretty things he wants."

At last, Joshua Turner remarked, apropos of a clamor which had driven the boy into spasms, "Sarah, it is killing our child."

"I know it," she burst out with a despairing cry. "O, I wish you and I were both dead. Then it would stop."

"If justice were done it might stop," replied the man, solemnly.

"Joshua Turner, don't you do it!" she gasped, tottering up to him and putting her tallowy face close to his. "Don't you do what you're thinking of! If you do, I '11 haunt you. I will. I '11 haunt you to the grave, and beyond it."

Not long after this interview, Mrs. Turner began to hint to the neighbors that her husband's mind was failing.

The charge seemed natural enough; it was countenanced by his extravagance of speech and violence of manner; at times, especially when he talked of the drummer, his conversation was little less than maniacal. For instance, he once broke out in the following fashion upon gossip Phineas Munson, meantime walking frantically round the rocking-chair in which that gentleman was blandly oscillating.

"What do you come here for? Rubadub-dub" (beating on his hip); "is that it? Like drumming? I '11 drum for you. Rubadub-dub, rubadub-dub. I '11 be your ghost, Mr. Munson, I '11 furnish you with the music of the spheres; send the whole band around to your house every evening; give you a diabolical drumming serenade; give you one now. Rubadub-dub, rubadub-dub, rubadub-dub. Had enough of it, Mr. Munson? Now go to every house in the village and report that you have seen the ghost. Do you want anybody to look more like a ghost than I do? I tell you I shall be one shortly; I am being killed by this thing and these people. Why can't they let me bear my torment alone? Why can't you go home, Mr. Munson? Yes, **GO HOME!**"

"Tell you I never was so insulted in my life," repeated Phineas to his fellow-citizens. "Begin to think the old woman's right. Turner must be cracked. Wouldn't 'a' pitched into me so, if he hadn't been. Ought to have a conservator and a keeper. If he ain't watched, there'll be more ghosts of his manufacture."

What was the attitude of Marian Turner during this grotesque and yet horrible drama? Underhill watched her narrowly, not so much in a spirit of philosophical investigation, as because he was on the verge of being in love with her. The theory which he had constructed for the girl was, that she knew that she had been plundered by her uncle, and that she was now engaged in terrifying the plunderer into a restitution. Looking at her from this point of view, he was astonished at the determination, the hardness of spirit, with which she persecuted this family. She was killing her uncle and his wife; she was driving her childish cousin into chronic hysteria; yet she did not flinch. Perhaps she excused herself on the ground that the two elders had been in a manner the slayers of her brother, and that it was not in reality she, but their own evil consciences, which put them to the torture. Nevertheless, he would have been glad to discover in her more of feminine gentleness and even feminine weakness. It must be admitted that man does not easily adore a self-helpful woman.

Meanwhile the girl fascinated him. In the first place, she was the belle of the village, and the belles of other places were too far away to counteract her attraction. In the second place, she was bright and strange; she had entertaining oddities of thought and utterance; she had what he considered dazzling flashes of sarcasm. On the whole, she was the most interesting and original girl that he had ever seen, even putting aside her supposed connection with the so-called spiritual manifestations.

"Talking of ghosts," she one day said to Underhill, "I only know of Mrs. Turner. Did you ever see another person in this world, who so evidently belonged in the next? Why don't she follow her two predecessors? How it must provoke them to see her linger so, and the house new painted and papered!"

"You have very little pity for her," replied Underhill, gravely.

"I haven't a particle. Why should I pity a woman who would marry such an inveterate woman-killer as my uncle?"

He reminds me of the returned missionaries who used to come to South Hadley School to pick out second and third wives. Why is it that missionaries have such a matrimonial hunger? I suppose it is living among cannibals that demoralizes them."

"I really don't like to hear you joke in this manner,

Underhill ventured to protest, though in an imploring tone.

"People joke the most when they are most unhappy," she answered, coldly. "That is, some people. Do you suppose I am gay?" she continued, with energy. Here I am, earning my own living, liable to be homeless any day, and wearing black for my only brother. Think of it. How do you suppose I can be soft-hearted towards people who_ n

Here she stopped, as if she were saying more than was prudent; in another moment she pressed her hands to her face and began to sob. It is not difficult to believe that this interview might have ended in a very common and yet very efficacious sort of comforting; but just as Underhill had taken the girl's hand, a servant appeared in the veranda of the haunted house, and beckoned to them wildly.

They were soon at the door of Mrs. Turner's room; there was silence within, broken only by gurgling gasps for breath; the consumptive was stretched, pallid and quivering, on the bed; the husband was leaning over her, his face almost as cadaverous as hers. Marian Turner walked to the side of the dying woman, and looked at her steadily without speaking. Underhill hesitated, and then advanced, slowly, on tiptoe.

"Shall I call a doctor?" he whispered, while thinking, "It is too late."

"They have gone for him," replied Joshua Turner, without lifting his eyes from that incarnate spasm.

The invalid was struggling violently, not seemingly to live, but to speak. She rolled her glassy eyes frightfully; her dry, blue lips opened again and again, but only to gasp; her whole frame joined feebly in the wrestling for words. It was evident, from the dullness and the fixed direction of her eyes, that she did not see any one, and it is almost certain that she was not aware of the presence of Marian and Underhill. At last the utterance came; it was a kind of voiceless whispering; it merely breathed, "Don't do it, Joshua!"

"Here is Marian," replied the husband, doubtless fearing lest the ruling passion might avow too much. "Have you any word for her?"

A strange look crossed the dying face; it was an expression of many conflicting emotions; it hated, defied, implored, and wheedled. It said: "I detest you, -- don't rob my child; I have been your enemy, -- don't take advantage of my death."

But this look, and the emotion which writhed beneath it, exhausted her strength; she had not another word, or even another change of countenance, for any one on earth; the planning s, pleadings, and fightings of her feverish life were over. There was an air and almost a movement of sinking, and as it were flattening, into the calmness of dissolution. Expression slid from her lips; the waxen yellow of her skin turned ashy; the tremulous hands stiffened into peace; -- she was gone.

The husband, already accustomed to such scenes, was the only one of the three spectators who instantly recognized the great change. He laid his ear upon the body, listened awhile for breathing, slowly raised his neglected head, shook it solemnly rather than sadly, and exhaled a profound sigh. The expression in his face, like that in the face of his wife, was mainly "long disquiet merged in rest." It seemed as if he were glad that the struggle was over, as if he were soothingly conscious of relief from oppression, as if he breathed freer because her breath had ceased.

Divining from his manner the presence of death, Marian Turner shuddered slightly and drew a pace backward. Then she stood like a statue, looking at the corpse askant and with slightly contracted eyes, as one sometimes watches an object of aversion while desiring to turn away from it. Her mien was that of distaste, and little less than disgust. Like her uncle, she did not utter a syllable.

Underhill was the only one who spoke; and his words were but a commonplace of announcement and

surprise: She is -- she is dead -- good heavens!" This was the only utterance of emotion over the body of one who had just gasped out a life of passionate hatred and love. The child for whom this mother had plotted and throbbed was not even in the village, having been sent the day before on a visit to one of his half-sisters. So far as concerned the presence of affection and mourning, she died alone.

Underhill retired from the scene with exceedingly painful impressions. What struck him most disagreeably was, not the fact of dissolution, but the coldness with which it had been regarded. Not that he wondered and groaned over the widower: it seemed natural that the decease of a third wife should be endured with equanimity; moreover, the departed had been a wretched invalid, and the survivor was a man; finally, what did Underhill care for Joshua Turner?

But that Marian should firmly carry her dislikes up to the verge of the grave was a circumstance which filled him with alarm and almost with horror. A woman, and not a relenting tear; almost a child, and not a start of pity! He called up, over and over again, the sidelong gaze of aversion which she had bent upon the helpless corpse, itself at peace with all the world. "What sort of a wife will she make?" was the selfish but natural question of the young man as he strolled alone at midnight by the sluggish stream of the Wampoosue, as black, silent, and funereal as if it were a gigantic grave. He walked there at that hour because he could not sleep; and he groaned aloud over his doubt, without being able to solve it.

Death, however, brought one relieving change in this drama; from the time that he entered the household, the drummer left it. Not another ghostly reveille or tattoo or long roll gladdened the ears of the gossips and wonder-lovers who had hitherto delighted in such uproars. During the funeral, the dwelling was filled and surrounded by a dense crowd, attracted by the belief that extraordinary manifestations would mingle with the burial rites, and so regardless of decorum in its curiosity that not a room was left unvisited by stealthy feet and peering faces. At times the whisper and buzz of discussion rose so loudly as to drown the voice of the clergyman. At other moments a suspense of expectation seemed to settle upon every one, producing a sudden, universal, profound silence which was inexpressibly sombre. But amid all the debate, and through all the agony of listening, not a note came from the mysterious visitant whose advent was so desired. Probably the prevailing feeling at the funeral of Mrs. Turner was extreme disappointment.

During the following week Underhill did not see any of the Turners. He was afraid to meet Marian, lest he should be fascinated by her presence, and should offer himself as her husband, only to repent of it for life. While he admitted that the girl had had great provocations, and was still suffering under grievous injustice, he could not clear her of a suspicion of cruelty. If she were really the author of the mysterious noises, she might be charged with having hastened the death of her aunt, and that with the full knowledge of what she was doing. No one could have watched the wild excitement of the consumptive during the last three weeks, without perceiving that it was lessening her hold on life. On the other hand, the drumming had ceased with her death. That looked like compunction; in that there was some mercy of womanliness, and from it he drew a hope.

In the midst of his indecisions he received a message requesting him to call upon Mr. Turner. He found the widower much changed, -- no longer wild in manner and language, as during the whole course of the "manifestations"; with something, indeed, of his native excitability in the tones of his voice, but, on the whole, languid, melancholy, and meek.

"Mr. Underhill," he said, pointing to writing materials on the table, "I wish to make a new will. Can you do it here?"

The young man sat down, and prepared to write.

"Begin it thus," said the widower, bending his shaggy head low, as if in humiliation: "The last will and

testament of Joshua Turner, the chief of sinners."

"Let us avoid expressions which may lead to doubts of sanity," remarked the lawyer. "There have been singular circumstances of late in your life. If your will is to be anywise unusual -- "

"Leave it out then," interrupted Turner, with the abrupt pettishness of a sickly man. "So I must not even confess?"

After a moment, during which he bent his head almost to his lean knees, he resumed: "Here it is. Ten thousand dollars to my son, James Pettengill Turner. All the rest of my estate, real and personal, to my niece, Marian Turner, to her and to her heirs and assigns. That is all."

It was written; two neighbors were called in as witnesses; the testator affixed his signature. As soon as he was once more alone with Underhill, he walked feebly to the door, and called in a hoarse voice for his niece. Presently the girl entered, bowed gravely to the lawyer, and seated herself at a distance from her uncle, not even looking at him.

"Marian," said Turner, rising, and handing her the will, "read this through, and speak to me."

She read it, gradually flushing with emotion, and when it was finished, she raised her eyes to his face, but still without uttering a word. Evidently she was oppressed by surprise, and hampered by the presence of Underhill.

"The whole estate is sixty thousand dollars. Are you willing that James should have ten thousand?" asked the uncle, with an affecting humility. "If not, I will cross him out."

"I am willing," she replied.

"If you wish it," he continued, "I will give up the property at once, though I am dying.

"I do not wish it."

"And you can't say more?" he implored. "You can't forgive?"

Some hard barrier in the girl's heart gave way at once, and she threw herself into her uncle's arms, crying upon his neck. The outburst astonished the man who had called it forth; never before, probably, had any adult member of his family met him with tears and kisses; it was not thus that the Turners expressed themselves. His words were, "Marian, I thank you; Marian, you are a very strange girl"; and then he let her leave him. Underhill, differently educated in the language of emotion, was unspeakably delighted with the sight of this gush of tenderness, and stole away from the room with a haze of moisture across his eyelashes.

The very next day he heard that Joshua Turner was ill. He offered his services as a nurse, and for a fortnight was almost hourly in the house, watching the progress of an evidently hopeless malady. Through the clouds of a brain fever the invalid heard, and at times beheld, his old tormentor. He continually complained of the drummer; through the windows and down the chimney came the drummer; the street rang and the house trembled with the infernal music of the drummer; at the judgment-seat, ready to bear witness against him, stood the drummer.

The bemoanings and adjurations of the haunted man were horrible. "Has the demon come again?" he shouted, in a high, hard scream. "See him there, stepping through the wall. My nephew? Have I devils for nephews? How is that? Ah! I belong to him; I must go to him. O, hear him! Can nobody stop his beating? Is there no

mercy for me?"

During a lucid interval, Underhill said to him, "You have been a little out of your head."

"I have been out of my head for months, for years," he returned, in the husky whisper which was now his only voice. "I have done only one sane thing in five years. Restitution! Restitution!"

"Do you still believe in the manifestations?" the young man ventured to add.

"Thank God that I did believe in them! That madness led me back to sanity."

When Underhill returned to the house on the following morning, Marian said to him, in a trembling whisper, "My poor uncle is dead."

He hailed the tone of sorrow and tenderness with such joy that he forgot the solemnity of the moment, and kissed her hand.

We must pass over six months; during their flight the hand was kissed many times again. Underhill and Marian Turner were engaged. She was greatly changed from what she was when he first knew her. Either prosperity, or penitence for some evil done, had divested her of her old bitterness, and even made her exceptionally gentle. She had taken her little cousin James to her heart, and was doing by him the part of a mother. In deep mourning for her brother, uncle, and aunt, she usually had a pensive gravity which befitted the garb, and she was handsomer than any one had ever before known her.

At last she was Mrs. Underhill. Among the many confessions which she doubtless made to her husband, did she admit a connection with the mystery of the drummings? No; not a word on that subject; not a response when it was mentioned. Nor did Underhill question her; he did not care to open old sorrows.

But one day he discovered, inside the lath and plaster casing of the parlor, a square tin pipe, four inches deep by seven or eight broad, the remnant of some ancient heating apparatus. The opening by which it had once communicated with the room was simply covered over with wall paper, while the upper extremity terminated in the closet of a chamber which, in the time of the manifestations, had been occupied by Marian Turner.

It struck him that a drum beaten in this closet might have sounded below as if in the parlor, and, beaten gently outside of a window, might have produced an illusion that it was coming down the street. A perturbed conscience, the imagination of a sickly man, and the epidemic power of popular credulity, might have completed the delusion. The mystery was as simple as a conundrum after you know it.

But he discovered no drum, and he put no queries concerning the drummer, so that we have a margin for charitable doubt as to Marian, and also a pleasing chance for faith in mysteries.