

*There Was a Logical Explanation for the
Ghostly Doings in This Haunted House*

THE HAUNTED MANSION IN THE PINES

By LEONARD F. SCHUMANN

THE HAUNTED Mansion stood in a lonely pine grove, just on the edge of a large old Connecticut town. That the house was haunted there seemed to be no doubt, for the different families who had been induced to occupy it all moved away after a short stay. Strange noises were heard during the night, and peculiar things happened. Only a short time ago, a farmer passing the house late at night was badly scared by a horrible wailing, which was followed by an inhuman laugh.

How long the mansion had possessed the reputation of being haunted, no one seemed to know. It was built just before the Civil War, and the owner was found murdered in his bed a few years later. He had been well-to-do, and lived alone after his three sons went into the army, for the wife and mother had died the same year the house had been built. Only one of the sons lived to come home. Arriving the day of his father's funeral, the boy was grief-stricken. He spent the night alone in the house, and the next day some workmen, passing along the road, were attracted by screaming, and the sound of running, then the smashing of glass. Rushing into the mansion, they found him putting his fists through all the window panes, and laughing insanely as the glass broke under the blows.

"They killed my father, and now I'm killing them," he shouted at the top of his voice.

He was overpowered by the men, and passed the remainder of his days a frothing maniac.

At night the mansion had an extremely dismal appearance. Standing back from the road a hundred feet or more, surrounded by great pine trees, it looked strangely forbidding to the townspeople passing that way to their homes, in the dark. Many a man and woman quickened their pace on coming near the Haunted Mansion, and instinctively looked back over their shoulders, as if

expecting to find something horrible at their heels.

During the late world war the house was unoccupied for more than two years. No one in the town could be induced to rent it, so the owner's agent was compelled to advertise in out-of-town newspapers. He offered a very low rental, and would give one month's rent free to anyone willing to lease the place for at least six months.

It so happened that a man and his wife, in a city nearby chanced to read this advertisement and were impressed with the terms and the glowing description of the house. The husband was a writer, recuperating from an illness. This seemed to them an opportunity to spend a few pleasant months in the country, which would be beneficial to both. Accordingly, all arrangements having been completed by mail, the Drakes arrived, with a servant, on the first day of May. Mrs. Drake brought with her a pet monkey, to which she was very much attached. The house was always let furnished, so their only baggage consisted of two or three trunks, and some hand luggage.

The Haunted Mansion consisted of two stories of eight rooms each, an attic and a large cellar. At the rear, a coachman's house was joined to the main building. A door led from the cellar of the house to the unused stable, under the coachman's quarters. Drake and his wife occupied two connecting rooms on the second floor, and the maid had a smaller one on the same floor, in the rear. On the first floor were their dining room, living room, kitchen, and library. The other rooms they did not use. The house was lighted by gas. In the cellar was a large hot-air furnace; store rooms, rows of shelves for preserves; a coal bin, and several cords of old wood. A dozen jars of jam stood on one of the shelves, mute evidence of somebody's hasty departure.

To anyone not acquainted with the awful history of the house, its appearance was attractive, and the Drakes con-

gratulated themselves on obtaining such a beautiful place on such reasonable terms.

They were at breakfast after their first night in the house, when Hannah, the girl, startled them by saying that the milkman had acted very queer that morning. He had winked at her knowingly, and remarked that he didn't expect to have them as customers very long. "I wonder what he meant by that?" Drake asked of his wife. "I'm sure I don't know," she replied absently.

At about ten o'clock that night, the three occupants of the old mystery house retired. The lights had been extinguished, and in a short time they were all asleep. Some time later, Drake was startled out of a dream. He sat up in bed, and listened. He could have sworn that he had heard footsteps outside his door. There they were now. Very softly at first, and then quite loud, they seemed to go up and down the hall. It was possibly the maid, or his wife. To satisfy himself, he got out of bed. Stumbling across the room in the dark, he struck a match. Peering into the next room, he found his wife peacefully sleeping. The match went out, and he made his way back to the bed and sat down. In a short time, he again heard the sound of footsteps. He trembled a little as he lit another match. He opened the door cautiously and peered out. The moonlight streamed in through the back window, and he could see faintly down the long hallway. The big house was as still as death. He could see nothing strange, and went back to bed, quite puzzled. The next morning he mentioned the incident to the women, but neither had been disturbed during the night, nor had they left their rooms.

In the afternoon, Hannah went to the cellar for a glass of jelly. The Drakes were accustomed to having tea, with bread and jelly, about four o'clock each day. Seated in the library at a small table, they were surprised by a wild scream, and the sound of someone ruf-

ning up the cellar stairs. Hannah, pale and panting for breath, ran to them and fell into a chair.

"There is someone, or something, down there in the cellar," she cried, wild eyed and trembling with fear. "I was reaching for a glass of jelly on one of the shelves, in the dark, when I distinctly heard a low, horrible laugh, like a crazy person. I was so surprised, that I screamed, and ran up here as fast as I could."

Drake was visibly worried. What did it mean? Had this anything to do with the footsteps of the night before? His wife was inclined to laugh, and jokingly remarked that she would obtain a guard for them. He got a flash-light and searched the cellar from end to end. Everything looked the same as the day before, and he could find nothing suspicious. He began to think that Hannah's imagination had gotten the best of her. Although his wife was indifferent, he found that he could not feel entirely satisfied that all was well. Both occurrences were mysterious, to say the least. Was it possible the mansion had an unsavory history? That would explain the low rental. If that was it, they would, no doubt, hear some talk before many days elapsed. People in small communities liked to talk, and it wouldn't be long before they would begin to hear things, if there was anything wrong with the old house, he reasoned.

At five o'clock that same day, Drake left for New Haven to attend a banquet of authors, and was to return on a late train. About eight-thirty Hannah went to her room. Mrs. Drake seated herself in a comfortable chair in the library, with a book, intending to read until her husband's return. Some time later she found herself staring at the gas light and feeling very uneasy. Slowly but surely the light went out and left her sitting in total dark. She sat there, afraid to move. What had caused the light to go out? There was no breeze coming in at the open window. She found enough courage to search the library for a match. Finding one, she lit the gas again. It burned with a bright flame. Somewhat alarmed, she decided to go to her room, and sit there until Drake got in. Allowing the light to stay lit in the library, she went into the hall to the dark stairway, and began to ascend. Halfway up she thought she heard footsteps following her. Nervously she looked over her shoulder into the darkness below. She stopped, trembling, and listened. There was nothing but awful silence. Regaining her courage to some extent, she climbed the remaining steps and entered her room.

Hannah was awakened by a piercing shriek. Trembling violently, she succeeded in lighting the gas jet at the head of her bed. Who had screamed? She heard someone crying, and, recognizing her mistress' voice, opened the door and hurried down the hall to the lighted room. As she went to Mrs. Drake, she stared in amazement at something on the floor. There, in a little pool of blood, lay Pong, the pet monkey, with his throat cut from ear to ear. This was terrible. What mysterious agent was at work in the lonely house? It was uncanny. Mrs. Drake lay down on the bed and sobbed hysterically. Hannah closed the door, and wringing her hands with agitation, slumped into a chair as far away from the dead animal as possible. Who or what had caused the little pet's death? Now she though she knew what the milkman meant by his remarks to her. The house was haunted! That was the terrible truth, she thought. As soon as morning came, she would leave the place. It was the last night she would spend in the big house.

Both women fell asleep from nervous exhaustion, and were awakened next morning by the door-bell ringing violently. Hannah went down to the door and was relieved to see Drake standing there. He had missed his train, and taken the first one in the morning. She explained to him in a few words what had happened during his absence. He rushed upstairs to console his wife. He was indeed surprised, and blamed himself for leaving the women alone.

Pong was buried under one of the pines and Hannah was induced to stay, although against her better judgment.

Coming back to the house after a stroll through the woods that afternoon, the Drakes were startled by seeing a heavy, black crepe on the front door. They stared in amazement. What did it mean? Could Hannah have died during their short absence? It could not be. They hurried to the kitchen, and were relieved to find her busy baking bread. They did not mention the finding of the crepe to her, for fear she would think it an ill omen, and clear out. Drake quietly went to the front of the house to remove it. Stepping on to the porch, he was dumfounded to find that it had disappeared. He searched the front yard, and around the flowers, yet was unable to see any trace of it. He was extremely puzzled by this, and went into the living room, to his wife.

"Ethel, I wonder if somebody is playing a joke on us?" he asked thoughtlessly.

"Do you call murdering little Pong a joke?" she snapped.

"Of course not," he answered. "This place must be getting on my nerves. I can't seem to think clearly. But you know yourself that crepe was not on the door when we went out today. It must have been put there by some human hand. And there must surely be something wrong with the gas. Probably the pipe is plugged up in some manner. I will send for someone to look at it."

He went to a desk and wrote a note, then, seeing a boy with a bicycle he called to him. Giving the lad a dime, he asked him to deliver the note at the gas office.

Ten minutes later Drake went to the cellar to look for some garden tools. As he entered, he was surprised to see a sickly-looking fellow standing near the door. His face wore a hard expression, and he was clothed in very dirty army clothes. He had a light, unkempt beard of several months' growth. His eyes had a fiery, piercing look. He did not speak.

Drake stared at him dumbly for a minute, then asked, "What are you doing here?"

The fellow looked at him strangely, and slowly replied, "I came here to fix the gas. Just got here. Haven't had time to look around."

Drake wondered how on earth he could have gotten there so quickly but simply said, "Oh, I see; well, go ahead with the job. I won't keep you."

He selected a spade and rake, and walked to the front of the house, with the intention of setting out some flowers, before dark. As he rounded the corner of the house, he noticed a workman, with a tool-kit, coming through the trees.

"You are Mr. Drake, I suppose," he remarked, as they met on the path. "I got your note, and came right up in the flivver. What kind of trouble did you have with the gas?"

"What!" exclaimed Drake, his jaw dropping in astonishment. "There must be some mistake. There's a workman in the cellar now trying to find the trouble."

"Can't be anybody from the gas company, because we have only two men, and the other fellow is home sick," answered the man shortly.

"Come around and see if you know him," said Drake, and together they went to the cellar.

They entered, but could see no one. The man had disappeared. The gasman looked at Drake inquiringly, and shrugged his shoulders.

"This is singular," said Drake, deeply mystified. "I can't understand it at all."

The man smiled oddly, and went to work. He found nothing wrong, and soon left. Drake pondered over this odd occurrence for a long time, but said nothing to his wife concerning it. He spent the short time before darkness came in setting out some flowers.

They sat up quite late that night, playing cards. Hannah sat in the same room, quietly sewing. Now and then she glanced toward a window looking out upon the front porch. She saw nothing, and yet some unseen force seemed to draw her gaze in that direction repeatedly. Suddenly she shrieked and pointed to the window. The Drakes were just in time to see a distorted face pull away from one of the window panes. Hannah sat helplessly staring, deep fear written plainly on every feature of her face. Drake dashed toward the hall door, and, just as he reached it, a shot sounded outside. Flinging open the door recklessly,

he peered out into the dark. Someone was feebly calling for help. Going in the direction of the low voice, he found a man stretched full-length on the gravel path at the side of the house.

With the help of the two women, who by this time were somewhat calmed, he carried the man into the library and laid him on a couch. He immediately recognized him as the man he had seen in the cellar. The man was shot through the lung, and Drake could see that he would be dead in a few minutes. The man feebly motioned him to come near, and indicated he had something he wanted to say.

Drake bent over the dying man, who gasped out: "Sorry . . . scared . . . you folks; . . . crazy, I . . . guess. Had . . . grudge . . . against . . . owner. He was head . . . draft . . . board. Sent me . . . France . . . afraid . . . to . . . go. No father . . . mother . . .

Hell . . . hell, . . . death . . . all . . . around me. Shell shock . . . hospital . . . home . . . Came . . . here. Hate . . . owner. Played ghost . . . so . . . no one . . . rent . . . Damn house . . . stole . . . your food."

Here he rested a few seconds, and then went on in a much weaker voice, as Hannah opened his shirt, and applied a cloth to the wound to stop some of the flow of blood.

"No use . . . want . . . to die. Slept in rooms . . . over . . . stable . . . no one looked . . . there . . . here what . . . you . . . said . . . through . . . furnace . . . pipes. Knew . . . what . . . you . . . doing . . . all . . . time. Easy to fool you . . . I . . . crazy, maybe . . . Sorry . . . Sorry . . . late . . . night . . . dark, . . . dark. I . . . I . . . I . . ."

He was dead, and the mystery, so far as they were concerned, had been solved.

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