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The PHANTOM FIDDLER

by ARLTON
EADIE



"Something between a hiccup and a groan came from the lips of the corpse."

I HAD been exceptionally busy that day, both at the hospital and my own surgery, and was just in the act of smoking a final pipe before turning in to enjoy a well-earned night's rest when my hopes in that direction were rudely dispelled by a loud ring at the night bell. Opening the door, I found a ragged urchin, breathless and excited.

"'Old George—dahn at Melford's Wharf—'e's taken real bad, Doctor," he gasped out. "'E yelled outer the winder to me as 'ow 'e was slipping 'is cable. I funks yer had better come rahnd at once, afore 'e snuffs out."

A few moments of thought, together with his nautical mode of express-

ing his impending demise, enabled me to fix the identity of "Old George." He was a panel patient of mine, an old naval pensioner who acted as watchman at a large warehouse and wharf lying between Wapping High Street and the Thames. Flinging on my hat and overcoat, I was soon threading my way through the narrow side-streets leading to the riverside.

I soon reached the High Street, and entering the unlatched door of the lodge beside the double gates of the wharf, where the old man lived alone, I found my patient propped up with pillows in a great armchair. A huge fire roared on the old-fashioned open hearth before him; a stiff glass of grog was at his elbow, and

the room was hazy with the fumes of plug tobacco from the clay pipe he held between his teeth. Altogether he looked about as much unlike a dying man as it is possible to imagine. But there was a drawn look on his weather-beaten features, and this, added to the constrained attitude in which he held his right leg, made my diagnosis an easy one.

"So it's the old trouble again, eh?" I inquired in that tone of hearty cheerfulness which the slum doctor has to assume for his bedside manner.

"Aye, sir. The rheumatiz be real bad tonight. Seems as though summat's seized in the knee o' my star-board leg, so's I can't get it under way nohow."

A brief examination satisfied me that the old man's condition was not very serious, but the slight synovitis which had developed in the knee made movement painful and difficult. As the old fellow had nobody to look after him it was clearly a case for hospital treatment.

"But, Lord love yer, sir, I can't do that," he cried when I announced my verdict. "If I goes into dock, who's to look after the wharf? It's the rule that someone has allers to be here at night."

"Well, it's getting on toward morning now," I answered, glancing at my watch. "I'll arrange for the ambulance to take you away tomorrow, and afterward, if you'll give me their city address, I'll 'phone up your employers and explain how matters stand, so that they can make arrangements for another man to take your place until you're about again—which will not be long, I promise you."

I assisted him to hobble across the room to his bed, afterward making him as comfortable as possible under the circumstances by giving an injection to alleviate the pain.

"Why, you ought to be doctor to

the king, sir!" he beamed presently. "I feel cured already."

You may be sure I did not explain to him that his present blissful state was merely due to the transient effect of the opiate I had administered. Consequently, under the firm conviction that I had already effected a cure, he grew cheerful and talkative, his gratitude taking the form of insisting on recounting for my benefit some of the adventures that had befallen him during his threescore or so years afloat.

He was a hearty, white-bearded old sea-dog of an age now past, "when a sailorman was a sailorman—not a half-baked mechanic same's they are now," as he explained to me more than once that evening; and his yarns, though they may possibly have been spiced with picturesque details outside the borderland of strict veracity, were absorbing to a landsman like me. In spite of my weariness I found myself interested, and occasionally somewhat amused, at the naïve recital, which had a quaint charm that a more polished narrative might have lacked.

It was in the middle of a thrilling account of a hurricane off Cape Horn that I first heard the faint strains of a violin played, I surmised, in the street outside. For a while I listened to it heedlessly as the old man rambled on. All at once it struck me as being a queer time of night for an itinerant musician to be plying his calling.

"Somebody hereabouts must be very fond of music," I remarked with a laugh. "That's the third time he has played that tune."

Old George paused in his narrative and listened, a tense look taking the place of the cheerful animation called up by the recollection of past perils. For a few moments he remained silent; then he slowly nodded his head.

"It's the Fiddler," he said in a low voice.

I laughed again. "So I presume—seeing that he is playing a fiddle," I rejoined gayly. "But I can't honestly say that I admire his idea of a fitting time at which to exhibit his talent. He'll get run in if he's not careful."

Old George turned and looked at me queerly.

"He ain't outside in the street," he said, speaking very deliberately. "He's inside this house!"

"Indeed?" I cried in surprize. "I was certainly not aware that you had a lodger."

"No more I ain't," he answered with ungrammatical decisiveness. "At least, none o' my own choosing."

"What do you mean?"

The old seaman gave a sardonic chuckle. "You're by way o' being an eddicated college gent, and I suppose you reckons you knows a'most all there is to know. Just listen a bit and see what you make o' that there music."

IMPRESSED in spite of myself by the man's manner, I listened. To my uncritical ear the playing seemed passable enough; at the same time it was apparent that the performer was no genius. The tune was a spirited nautical air, possibly a hornpipe; but in spite of its intended liveliness there was a plaintive sound in the distant strains.

Not a word passed between us until the strange, sad-merry air had been scraped over and over again for maybe half a dozen times. Then Old George broke the silence with a husky whisper.

"That's an old capstan shanty he's playing. Many's the time that I've footed it round the deck as we broke the anchor out to that there tune—long afore they had them stinking steam winches——"

I held up my hand with a sudden gesture and motioned him to be silent. It seemed to me that the music

was getting louder, almost as though the unseen player were slowly approaching the room in which we were. Old George seemed to read my thoughts.

"Aye, he's coming nearer—the Fiddler's a-coming nearer!" he chuckled, apparently finding something humorous in the bewilderment that must have been reflected on my face. "He's a-coming here—he allers does about this time!"

I turned sharply on him, but the words I was about to utter died on my lips. For he was right. Whoever the mysterious nocturnal musician might be, it was clear that he was advancing steadily toward us.

"Dandy tune, ain't it?" the old man rambled on, dreamily waving his hand in time to the music. "When ye listen to that can't ye hear the clatter o' the winch and the thudding o' the bare feet on the planks o' the deck? And then—ashore—money in yer pocket—a can o' grog in yer fist and a gal on yer knee—and the same old tune a-playing! Don't yer feet just itch to go dancing to the lilt of it? Ah, many's the time——"

"Hush!" I whispered fiercely, for the strangeness of the whole thing was affecting my nerves. "You are right. The fiddler is coming this way."

"Didn't I tell ye so?" he muttered pcevishly. "I allers hears him about this time. At first I was scared-like; but after a bit I didn't seem to mind. But I never could abide that screech at the end—when he finishes up. It allers seems to me as though summat has happened to him just then."

"Happened to whom?" I demanded tersely.

He gave a vague, enigmatical smile as he made answer.

"The Fiddler."

I turned and faced him squarely.

"Don't talk in riddles, man!" I cried. "Who is this Fiddler of yours?"

"Have a look for yourself, Doctor," he answered with a laugh. "He's just outside the door now."

So loud and distinct had the music become that the player must have been standing on the very threshold at that moment. Yet, although I was a skeptic in matters concerning the supernatural, I felt an unaccountable reluctance to open the door. But the feeling quickly passed. Of course, I told myself, it must be some old crony of George's, with a taste for music and late hours, who was seeking to perpetrate a joke at my expense. A joke—I took heart again at the thought. After all, what other explanation could there possibly be?

Walking on tiptoe, I silently approached the door. In my hand I carried my heavy walking-stick. If this unknown serenader was so fond of a joke I could show him one at which we could all laugh!

Reaching the doorway, I raised the stick above my head and laid my hand on the door-handle. On the other side, separated only by the thickness of the wood, the fiddler was still scraping away merrily. A quick turn of the wrist, and I had flung the door open to its fullest extent. At the same instant a horribly discordant screech came from the violin, as though the bow had been drawn violently and at random across the strings. I peered out into the passage—then drew back, a nameless dread clutching my heart like an icy hand.

A gas jet was burning at the head of the stairs, revealing the long stretch of corridor bare and empty from end to end.

The Fiddler had vanished.

THE long course of scientific study which every medical man has of necessity to undergo usually leaves him with a firm and unshakable belief in the immutability of what are

for convenience termed the "laws of nature." So accustomed does his well-drilled mind become to the invariable sequence of cause and effect, that he views with extreme distrust any occurrence for which a definite and satisfactory reason is not forthcoming. This does not, of course, imply that the scientist denies the existence of the mysterious in nature. He admits that the germination of the commonest plant-seed may be called a mystery inasmuch as it defies scientific explanation. Combustion is yet another mystery; likewise electricity; and life—the commonest thing, perhaps, on this planet—is the greatest mystery of all.

But these are mysteries which conform with the established order of things. Experience has enabled us to predict with certainty the effect of the working of the various unknown forces, and even to utilize them in the service of mankind. But when the trained scientist comes into contact with something which, besides being contrary to human experience, is also unexplainable, he finds his carefully constructed edifice of cherished dogmas is apt to come tumbling about his ears, reducing his preconceived notions to a state of chaos. Such, in fact, was the condition of mind in which my adventure left me. Throughout the routine of work on the following day I found my thoughts continually reverting to the subject. Of course, I argued, there must be some natural explanation, some peculiar acoustic property possessed by the old house, some accidental freak in its construction, which would explain what I had heard. But in spite of my efforts to reason the matter off I found it taking a greater hold than ever on my mind; so much so that when I 'phoned up the firm that owned the wharf and informed them that their watchman was now in the hospital, I at the same time requested per-

mission to take his place for the coming night.

It was the junior partner who answered my call—a very junior partner, judging from his voice—and he was somewhat taken aback by my request, as well he might be.

“I suppose you’re not a night-watchman by—er—profession?” he asked over the wire.

“No. I happen to be a doctor,” I answered.

There was a pause.

“I hope you will not mind my saying so,” he went on presently, “but it strikes me as being rather a queer idea for a medical man to want to stay the night in a rat-ridden old shanty like that.”

There was nothing for it but to take him into my confidence.

“As a matter of fact,” I said, “I believe the place to be haunted.” And I went on to tell him what had happened. Judging by the interjections he threw in, he seemed to be interested in my story.

“Well, that’s about the limit!” he called out when I had finished. “I know the place is hundreds of years old—it was standing there before our warehouse was built, and that’s over eighty years ago—but I never knew we had a real live spook on the premises. I say,” he went on in a tone of almost boyish excitement, “I’ve a jolly good mind to run down and join in the fun. It’s been deathly dull here all day, and I feel just in the humor for a little spook-hunting.”

“I should be very pleased to have you with me,” I answered. “If the thing is really due to some supernatural cause I should be glad of a witness to check my observations.”

“Righty-oh,” came the cheerful response. “I’ll send for the keys and fix it up with the foreman so that we have the place entirely to ourselves. I’ll be round at your place in good time to enable us to take up our position well before the witching

hour. And I’m going to borrow the pater’s six-shooter—just in case we should knock up against something solid enough to stop a bullet. Bye-bye. Hope you’ll enjoy the hunting!”

PROMPTLY at 10 o’clock the sound of a high-powered car drawing up before my surgery announced the fact that my prospective companion had been as good as his word. Dick Melford—as he introduced himself with gay informality—was considerably younger than I. He had, in fact, but recently left Oxford, and his brief experience of business life had not been sufficient to quench the spirit of irresponsible, daredevil adventure which seems to be indigenous to that grave seat of learning. He was all agog with excitement and even keener on seeing the outcome of the strange business than I myself.

Dismissing his car at the main gates of the wharf, young Melford let himself into the now deserted lodge.

“Old George has been with our firm for years,” he told me as we made our way upstairs. “He must be a queer old card—listening to that banshee jazz-band night after night and not letting on to a soul about it. That is,” he added with a laugh, “unless the whole thing is just bunkum.”

I shook my head. “I heard it myself, and I am certainly not subject to hallucinations.”

Thereupon I seized the opportunity to relate the events of the previous night in a more detailed manner than had been possible over the phone. Presently I noticed him shiver slightly.

“Oh, it’s all right, Doctor,” he said with that ready laugh of his. “Don’t flatter yourself that your yarn was giving me the creeps. It’s this confounded house—no wonder the old chap has developed rheumatism—it seems as cold as an ice-

house and as damp as the very deuce." Then he glanced at the empty fireplace. "What about having a fire?"

"It would certainly make things more comfortable," I agreed; for the chill mist that was rising from the river was beginning to find its way into the room. "I wonder where he keeps his firewood and coals?"

We finally located the necessary combustibles in a little lean-to at the rear of the house, and soon had a fire roaring cheerfully up the wide chimney.

"We have long intended to have this place knocked down and a new lodge built," Melford explained as he spread his hands to the blaze. "We would have done so years ago if the antiquarian fanatics hadn't raised such a chorus of protest about destroying an historic landmark of Old Wapping. You know the way they carry on—'interesting links with the past' and all that sort of tosh. According to them this house was one of the most famous of the one hundred and forty ale-houses which used to line the High Street in the days when the old wooden hulls used to anchor within hail of Wapping Old Stairs, being in fact the very tavern where the notorious 'Meg of Wapping,' whose charms have been sung in verse by Dibdin, kept open house night and day. I bet these old walls have witnessed some queer doings in their time—yes, and been the scene of many a dark deed, too! In the days of Nelson's wars this was reckoned the foulest and most lawless spot in all London—and the London of the Georges bore none too good a reputation on the whole. The vilest characters gathered at the riverside to prey upon the seamen who came ashore at the Old Stairs with their pockets bursting with prize-money, only to be drugged, robbed, and either murdered outright or else shipped while still insensible on some

floating hell which could not otherwise get a crew. You can take it from me that the sailor of the last century did not have quite such a rollicking good time as the old sea-songs would lead you to suppose! Many a poor devil has probably met his death within a few feet of where we stand, and——"

He broke off suddenly and stood as motionless as a man turned to stone. Faint and muffled, as though coming from deep beneath the foundations of the old house, the thin wail of the fiddle had made itself heard. It was the same unskilful playing, the same sad-merry air.

Silently, breathlessly intent, we stood with straining ears for what, under the circumstances, seemed hours. Yes, the music was getting louder, nearer, even as it had done before. I could almost fancy that I could trace the progress of the unseen musician while he traversed the long corridor beneath, slowly mounted the worm-eaten stairs, then played his doleful way down the passage which terminated at the door of the room.

Young Melford's face was very set and grim when at length he turned toward me.

"We forgot to light the gas at the head of the stairs!" he said in a low whisper.

I shrugged in hopeless dismay. Like a fool I had quite overlooked the fact that the passage would be pitch-dark; and, to add to our discomfort, neither of us had possessed the forethought to bring an electric torch. However, it was too late to rectify our blunder now; for, judging from its loud tone, the fiddle was now droning and wailing not a couple of yards from the closed door.

Melford straightened himself up with a quick, nervous jerk, and slipped his right hand behind him; when it again came into sight it was

grasping something that reflected the firelight from its plated parts.

"I reckon this'll fix him—whoever he is!" he cried.

As he spoke he dashed forward and wrenched open the door.

"Now then, you there!" he shouted into the darkness. "Quit that foolery and put your hands up!"

There was no answer; but the music still continued to play.

"None of your tricks," he called out again, his voice taking a higher key in his excitement. "If you don't stop that infernal row I'll pepper your hide in a way you won't fancy! It's no use your trying to come the giddy spook over us! I can see you quite plainly, my man, and I've got you covered."

In spite of the tenseness of the situation I could not help smiling as he made use of this time-honored ruse to expose a lurking enemy. As a matter of fact it was obvious that he could not see more than a few feet up the passage.

"I shall count up to six," he cried, after waiting in vain for a response. "Then I shall certainly fire."

I heard, to the accompaniment of the wailing violin, Melford's voice slowly count the numbers.

"Six!"

Following hard upon the final word came a spurt of flame and a crashing report. The music ceased abruptly in a sharp, discordant howl. Melford pocketed his revolver and turned to me.

"Get a light of some sort and help me bring him in," he said grimly. "I couldn't have missed at that range."

I lit the candle-end I found on the mantelpiece, and, holding it low, slowly paced the length of the passage. At the head of the stairs I straightened myself up and turned to meet the scared eyes of my companion.

"That cartridge was loaded with

swan-shot—and it spreads like the very devil!" he gasped. "If there was anyone in the passage he must have been hit. I can't understand it at all."

"Neither can I. But there seems to be quite a lot of things about this house——"

I started violently and the words died away on my lips. The unearthly music had commenced again—almost at my elbow, it seemed. I held the candle high. Nothing was visible on the staircase before us. To the right—nothing; to the left—nothing. All around us was emptiness, and yet that droning devil's tune throbbed at our very ears.

I felt a hand clutch my wrist. Melford was pointing excitedly downward.

"It's going downstairs!" he whispered hoarsely. "Listen! the thing is going down the stairs!"

He was right. Step by step, one could trace the course of the invisible musician as he receded; could even detect the moment when he changed direction after rounding the end of the banisters in order to make his way along the ground-floor passage running immediately under where we stood.

"I'm going to see this through," said Melford with a reckless laugh. "Come on, let's follow him. I'll lay you six to four that the thing is all humbug."

The volume of sound swelled louder as we hastened down the creaking stairs—I took note of the fact that they had not creaked beneath the tread of the one who had passed before us. Along the lower passage, our straining ears tracing the progress of our ghostly guide, we made our way, through a low door leading into what appeared to be a kind of kitchen; and here, at a spot in the center of the floor, the music began to die gradually away.

We looked at each other in silent disappointment. So engrossed had

we been in the excitement of the chase that this tame anticlimax seemed a thing incredible.

Suddenly Melford slapped his thigh. "Don't you see?—he's gone farther down. There must be a trap-door or something beneath the floor!"

Hastily kicking aside the strips of worn oilcloth which covered the floor, I examined the boards. Yes, the boy was right! A large square space was composed of shorter planks of a different and less ancient wood than the rest. Evidently they had been nailed there to fill the gap where a trapdoor had formerly existed.

The same thought must have flashed across Melford's mind.

"Old George has some tools here somewhere," he muttered as he commenced searching the cupboards. "I'm going to see what's under that floor if I die for it!"

He presently found a short claw-headed wrench such as is used for opening packing-cases. With this we quickly removed a section of the planking of sufficient width to admit the passage of a man. Again the music swelled louder. It seemed as though it were beckoning, compelling us to follow where it led.

Lying down full-length on the floor, I lowered the candle to light up the yawning black gulf below. But all that was revealed by the feeble rays was the top rungs of a ladder leading downward into the obscurity. Very gingerly, testing each of the worn rungs before trusting my full weight on it, I descended.

"Come on," I called when I felt my feet touched level ground.

In an instant Melford was at my side.

THE underground apartment in which we found ourselves must have been of considerable size, for the rays of the candle failed to reach the farther walls. The manner in

which it was furnished presented such a mingled contrast of luxury and squalor as to be positively grotesque. The rough, uneven floor was spread with rich-piled rugs which, rat-gnawed and rotting as they were, still bore unmistakable signs of having come from some rare Eastern loom. On the walls of unplastered brick were ornate gilt candle-sconces; while a rusty and battered ship's lantern hung from a hook in one of the beams overhead. A long table of polished mahogany occupied the center of the room, and on it was as motley a collection of tableware as it is possible to imagine. Chipped china mugs lay cheek-by-jowl with the most exquisite Venetian glass; dishes of delicate porcelain stood beside platters of dented pewter. The seats round the board ranged from elaborately carved chairs, upholstered in rich velvet, to rough wooden forms and upturned kegs. But everything alike bore signs of age, damp and decay. It seemed as though the place had not been entered for centuries. Long festoons of gray cobwebs hung from the rafters; patches of yellow fungus grew on the reeking walls. An indescribable moldy odor pervaded the whole place.

Everywhere were signs of a revel suddenly abandoned. Those seats that were not overturned were standing at all angles, just as they had been pushed back when their occupants rose from the table. The brown, dried-up dregs of liquid still remained in the glasses; a queer-shaped clay pipe still contained some half-burned tobacco within its tiny bowl. On the table, near a nosegay of withered roses, lay a woman's fan. A moth-eaten boat-cloak hung over the high back of one of the chairs, on the corner of which a three-cornered hat, trimmed with tarnished gold lace, was perched rakishly. Almost at my feet, as though it had fallen from her shoulders as the

wearer rushed from the room, lay an old-fashioned hooded mantle. So perished was it with age that, when I attempted to lift it, the silken fabric came to shreds in my hand.

What secret orgy was it whose relics lay before us? What had happened to cause the revelers to fly abruptly from the place, never to return? Then, as if to answer the flood of questions which rose to my mind, the plaintive strains of the fiddle came floating out of the darkness that screened the farther end of the room. As though by one accord we made our way toward the sound.

An age seemed to elapse while we, intruders from another century, made our way across the untrodden dust of that scene of long-dead gayety. My confused mind began to speculate on the nature of the horror we should presently behold. I braced my nerves to meet the worst as some object at last became visible in the circle of candle-light. For a moment I halted, peering. Then I think I must have laughed aloud in the sudden sense of relief which came over me. The thing before us was merely one of the series of casks stacked against the wall. Kegs, barrels, hogsheads, of all shapes and sizes; I counted more than twenty of them within the short range of my guttering candle, besides crates of dust-covered bottles. Truly "Landlady Meg" had kept her cellar well stocked! Then, as a sequence of the thought, all my misgivings returned. What terrible thing could have happened to cause so much valuable liquor to be abandoned?

A sudden movement from Melford roused me from my reverie. He had stepped to the side of one of the largest casks, a huge hogshead standing a little apart from the others, and was bending over it with his ear close to the staves.

"I do believe the music's coming from inside this barrel!" he cried in horrified tones. Before I could make

answer he snatched the wrench from my hand and set to work to prize off the head.

Considering its massiveness, the top came off with surprizing ease. As it did so the music came to an end with a loud, triumphant chord.

In a silence so profound that I could hear the beating of my own heart I drew near to the cask and looked within. It was filled to the brim with an amber-colored liquid which, judging from its almost overpowering fumes, must have been cognac of a strength not nowadays met with. Floating on the surface was an old violin and a broken bow. Years must have elapsed since they had been placed there, for upon my attempting to remove the instrument I discovered that its prolonged immersion had so softened the glue of the joints that each piece came apart.

But the fiddle was not the only thing contained within the cask. Deep down in the clear amber liquor a shrunken and wrinkled face was staring horribly up at us, its open mouth and distended eyeballs giving it an aspect of unspeakable terror—an aspect that was accentuated by the long hair which, floating upward except where it was tied into a pig-tail at the back, seemed literally to be standing on end.

A MEDICAL man is popularly credited with the ability to retain his composure in the presence of the ghastliest relics of departed humanity; but I will confess that the sight of that face leering up at me from its strange coffin left me for a moment sick and nerveless. Melford, less accustomed to the sight of death than I, had drawn back appalled. He seemed hesitating whether he should take to his heels or not.

"Hold the candle," I said, at the same time thrusting it into his hand, "while I get the body out."

I took off my coat and rolled my shirt sleeves up as far as possible.

Then I reached—not without an inward shudder, however—beneath the brandy until I got my hands under the armpits of the corpse. Melford leaned over my shoulder, his eyes fixed in a fascinated stare, as I slowly raised the body.

Even in the brief glimpse I caught of it I could see that it was attired in a fashion of a bygone age. A draggled lace cravat hung limply over a long vest embroidered with flowers worked in bleached silk. Large buttons of blackened silver adorned the snuff-colored coat. Then something else came into view—the hilt of a sailor's sheath-knife protruding from between the shoulder-blades!

Almost at the same moment, as I realized the import of the sight, a sound, something between a hiccup and a groan, came from the lips of the corpse. Subsequent cool reflection has convinced me that it was but the natural effect of the imprisoned gas escaping because of the body's being disturbed; but the sound, coming as it did on top of the weird experiences of that night, caused me to start so violently that I lost my hold, and the corpse sank downward with a sullen splash. As it did so the half-human moan again burst from its shriveled lips.

"My God!" Melford almost screamed. "It's alive!"

He threw up his hands in horror, letting fall the lighted candle. It glanced off my shoulder—then my wrist—then plunged, still alight, straight into the cask of spirit!

A spurt of bluish flame flashed up before my eyes as, with a loud ex-

plosive whoof, the whole contents took fire.

"The ladder! Up!—up for your life!"

I shouted the words as I groped through the smoke and fumes of that devil's bonfire. The released cognac was now spreading over the floor, and little rivulets of blue flames followed its course. If in the gloom we missed the ladder we were doomed. But we had entirely lost our sense of direction. We could only grope like blind men, while further explosions at the far end of the cellar told that the other barrels of spirit were fast adding their quota to the inferno.

It was more by luck than anything else that Melford at last stumbled against the foot of the ladder.

"Here!" he cried. "Make for the sound of my voice! Here!"

For two precious minutes he remained there, not daring to leave the spot lest he should be unable to find it again, yet pluckily imperiling his own safety in order to insure mine.

His devotion was likely to have cost him dear. At the same moment that my groping hand met his, a salvo of the remaining barrels turned the cellar to a sea of roaring flame.

Scorched and half blinded, we staggered out into the street and gave the alarm. But the fire brigade when they arrived could only confine their efforts to preventing the flames from spreading to the surrounding property.

In less than two hours nothing remained of the old Ship Inn but a heap of smoldering ashes, beneath which lay for ever buried the secret of the ghostly fiddler.

