

WEIRD TALES

The Unique Magazine

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A Terrifying Ghost Story

The Room in the Tower

By D. L. RADWAY

NOT LONG AGO, I was stopping at an old castle in the northern part of Scotland—that land of mystic-minded people—and a certain tower in this castle, somewhat older than the other portions of the building, had for centuries been known by both the inmates and the villagers to be inhabited by ghosts.

There was an old tapestried room in this tower which had not been touched or slept in within the memory of the place. However, my love of and interest in the supernatural was so strongly implanted in my nature that I implored my hostess, Lady Garvent, to allow me to sleep in this ancient tapestried room for one night at least. Accordingly, the valet transferred my baggage, shortly after my arrival that afternoon, to the apartment in the tower.

It was a typical Scottish winter's night, the rain coming in driven gusts

against the panes, with a howling wind with a scream in it like the voice of some unhappy Banshee, and occasionally a storm of sleet driving against the windows like the rattle of artillery. Round the big fire of logs in the hall we gathered cosily, the more content to be ensconced warmly indoors for hearing the war of the elements without.

My hostess expressed herself as only too pleased to be able to give me a night in the company of the family ghosts,



who had, happily, always confined themselves strictly to the room in the tower. The conversation drifted to the weird and the supernatural, and we all started to recount ghost stories that had come

within our knowledge or that of our immediate friends.

I candidly confess that in a short space of time the members of the house-party had got me into a thoroughly "jumpy" state of nerves, and I felt that really in such a place "anything might happen."

Then, at last, my hostess said, "I think it is time for us to put an end to this delightful conversation," and in saying "good-night" she added:

"I really do feel that I have, as it were, been communing tonight with spirits of another world than this. It is almost uncanny."

Everyone was a little inclined, I thought, to joke at my expense when they realized that I seriously meant to spend my night in the "haunted room," and I was laughingly escorted by the entire house-party to the worn stone staircase leading to the tower in the northwest corner of the castle. We said "good-night," and I mounted to my room.

It was furnished with the weirdest and most gruesome-looking black oak furniture it is possible to imagine, and a huge four-poster bed occupied the center of one wall and jutted well out into the room. My own "home comforts" were there—supplied by the thoughtful care of my man-servant—but there also, on the walls above the mantelpiece and above my bed, were the uncanny weapons of a bygone generation of Scotsmen. Pieces of armor of beautiful and intricate design—doubtless of Spanish workmanship—were propped against the walls; and in one corner, with most uncomfortable effect, stood a suit of armor.

The room in this square tower was very large. Never had I seen anything like the fireplace; so enormous was the chimney that one could almost stand upright within it, the hearth of bricks being on a level with the floor of the room. As my kind hostess had insisted on a large fire being lit on this wintry night, it was piled up with huge logs, and the room was lit up by the weird and flickering lights that come from burning wood.

The only other illumination was from four large candles, two on the dressing-table and two on the high mantelpiece. The mullioned windows, sunk deeply into walls over six feet thick, were heavily curtained with dark red velvet.

Not until a door had slammed—shot to by a fiercer gust of wind than usual, which seemed to shake the very tower to its foundations—and the deeply-glowing logs fell apart with terrible and startling suddenness at the same moment, did

I realize that I was indeed shut out from all this ordinary world.

Intensely then did I realize that I was alone, and about to enter here into the life of the unreal, the occult—which up till now had been so fascinating merely to hear about. What would the experience be like at first hand? Always supposing that the spirits of the tower would reveal themselves!

The sides of this great room were hung with magnificent old tapestry, portraying scenes of the chase and the figures of huntsmen in their woodland costume, and hounds among the trees of a vast forest. It was a beautiful piece of needlework, and at another time it would have interested me greatly; but somehow, on this particular night, imagination had so played upon the chords of my mind that they jangled out of tune—so that to my fancy it seemed as though the eyes of the pictured horsemen really moved and followed my movements round the ancient room. On this wild night the draft behind the tapestry caused it to sway slightly in all its length, from time to time, and then the beings embroidered upon it seemed to dance and sway with it.

To the accompaniment of the shrieking wind and cruel blast outside, and the loud rattling of the panes as furious gusts of rain and sleet were forced against them, I undressed quickly, preparing for the night with a sort of quivering hurry to be done with it and into bed, very foreign to my nature. And after I was between the sheets I was actually coward enough not to wish to blow out the only candle that I had left burning!

In another moment, strange as it may seem, I swear that I heard a sigh of human breath close to my head—so strong that in a flash the candle on the small table by my bed's head was extinguished, and I was left holding my very breath in the semi-darkness, with only the flickering lights and shadows from the old logs crackling and spitting in the vast old fireplace.

There I lay, determined not to close my eyes for a moment—for I felt through all my being that weird events were near at hand. However, soon a sort of drowsiness, against which I was powerless to fight, overcame me, and I seemed, in a vision as it were, to see how a curtain, at the extreme end of the room, was blown slightly but unmistakably on one side by some invisible means.

This drowsiness now overcame me more and more, in spite of the growing horror of the night, and I must have dropped off into unconsciousness.

WHEN I AWOKE it was with a sensation that I can never forget while life lasts, of creepy chills that passed from the back of my neck up and down my spine, producing the most horrible feeling of shivering chilliness throughout my entire body. It is beyond the power of words to describe what I felt at that moment.

In another minute—when I found myself fully awake again—to my amazement and horror I saw by the light of the still faintly glowing logs on the hearth, crouching down in an indescribable heap round that great fireplace, a large and shapeless mass, covered apparently by a dingy white sheet, the dinginess of muslin yellow with age.

As I gazed—lying still and motionless upon my bed—I saw that thing move with an undulating motion, and I discovered that they were separate beings lying there, all enveloped in yellowish-white draperies of quaint and, to my eyes, unaccustomed material. Perhaps, centuries ago, when in real life it had been worn, it was white; but now it was musty and yellow with the passing of the years.

I gazed as if in a trance—and yet I know that I was fully awake. While paralyzed with horror, I felt every nerve in my body was pitched to its highest point of tension—waiting and watching eagerly to see what these beings round the fire were about to do.

One moment, and to my horror the central form began to move—slowly, slowly, with a strange "wavy" movement of arms and draperies quite impossible to describe, turning toward the bed on which I lay; and the next thing that caught my eye and held me transfixed was a long tangled lock of white hair that reached to the floor as the figure moved to its feet.

And as it turned, the face revealed to me—merciful heavens!—instead of a face, a grinning skull! And on the other side of the skull, too, was a long stream of white hair which reached to the floor.

The great hollows of the eyes of the death's-head seemed all at once to discover that a human being lay in the bed—and to smile repulsively. As I looked, all power to speak or cry for assistance, or move or turn, had gone from me. I lay there, frozen to the mattress by the sight.

This awful figure raised one arm to push back its robe; I saw the hand extended—but the flesh of that hand had left those bones years before. In its skeleton fingers it held aloft to me a smoking goblet—gliding swiftly now toward the bed.

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THE ROOM IN THE TOWER

(Continued from page 62)

Perhaps you can imagine my horror as I saw the figure gliding, creeping, toward me, its death-mask grinning as if with pleasure to find at last the room inhabited by a human—as I marked the eyeholes of doom, seeming to glow red in the firelit room, and the bony hand holding on high what I knew to be a cup of poison meant for me!

My eyes fell now on the other ghostly figures; they remained stationary, all turning toward the bed—and, as they raised their arms, I saw that every one held aloft a smoking goblet!

The sweat was now streaming from my every pore, and as the first ghastly figure came on with firm steps nearer to the bed on which I lay, I made absolutely sure that my last hour had struck, even that death would be preferable to the madness, the frenzy, that I felt running through every vein, to the terror of

knowing the unknown, of seeing those things usually unseen.

A cold breath emanated from the figure as it drew close to me, until I seemed to feel the very atmosphere of the tomb. I even longed for death!

Now the steam from the goblet wafted hot and heavy upon my face. I was going mad—mad!

AT THE other end of the room a deep-toned clock began sonorously to strike the hour of twelve. With a shriek of ungovernable fright—that sound of the striking of the hour breaking the spell that held me silent—I fell back unconscious upon the pillows, and knew nothing whatever until the dawn arrived.

With the morning the storm had passed, and I was aroused from my lethargy by the bright, cold rays of the winter sun.

And as I dressed and prepared once more to mingle with the people and the surroundings of bright reality, I made a vow never again to try and penetrate into that other world, remote, mysterious, beyond the grave! Never again to show even curiosity about the life of those spirits which inhabit that world; but to leave them to the companionship of other ghosts.