

New Orleans Republican.

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE UNITED STATES

SPECIAL JOURNAL OF NEW ORLEANS

CHRISTMAS CAROL.

There's a song in the air, There's a star in the sky, There's a mother's deep prayer, And a baby's low cry, And the stars raise its fire while the beautiful King, For the manger at Bethlehem cradles a King!

There's a thrush of joy, Over the wonderful earth, From the Virgin's sweet boy, In the Lord of the earth, As the stars raise its fire while the beautiful King, For the manger at Bethlehem cradles a King!

We rejoice in the light, And we echo the song, That comes down through the night, From the heavenly throng, As we greet the lovely angel who bring, And we stand in his cradle our Savior and King.

[Written for the New Orleans Republican.] AUNT OLIVER'S GHOST

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY A NEW ORLEANS LADY.

In the town of Perth Amboy, which is situated on the Raritan river just where that stream empties itself into Raritan bay, stands an old stone dwelling, which for generations has been called "The Castle."

It must be remembered that I am writing now of Amboy, as it was in the far past when ghosts and goblins were believed in, and the famous Dr. Deo was named with emotions of awe and respect, at which we of this unbellying age have learned to laugh.

Presented to Perth Amboy, our pride of joy, ANNE, REG.

Which poetry speaks more for the Queen's mind than heart than her poetical ability.

The castle belonged to the descendants of the McGregors. It had been built by a Scottish chieftain of that name, who had been obliged to flee from Scotland for fighting against the reigning monarch, in favor of some one of the numerous pretenders to the throne.

It was an old-fashioned, heavy-looking square building of rough stone, and stood directly on the bay, whose waters, it was said, in old times, had washed the foundations.

The lower story, or first floor, far below the level of the street, contained the kitchen, laundry, etc. The second of the second floor opened out to the little flower garden, which was fenced off from the street.

This story comprised the parlors and sitting rooms, large, cheerful, airy chambers, with wide chimneys, and high mantel-pieces. Their peculiar forms and odd nooks showed the primitive times in which they had been built.

In the third story were the bedrooms. On the dark eken floor of one of these apartments, called by every one "the haunted chamber," there were many suspicious-looking stains, made, it was said, by the blood of a hero of the house, spilled there during the first American revolution.

The castle had a guardian spirit, who watched over it, and appeared to the family to warn them of approaching danger, or to lead them from it. Many and varied were the stories related of this ghost—"Aunt Oliver," as it was called.

Aunt Oliver, a virgin of some fifty winters when she died, seemed to have had two passions in life—a huge black cat, her constant companion and friend, and her money-bags—for the good old lady was a miser. She had hoarded her treasure, and had hidden it so securely that her descendants had never profited by it, although each heir, on assuming possession, had instituted strict search through all the numerous nooks and crannies, odd dark closets and other hiding holes with which the old place abounded.

The chief ornament of the parlor was a huge and hideous painting of the McGregor, Aunt Oliver's uncle, and the founder of the American branch of the house. If the picture resembled the original at all, old McGregor must have been a close-fisted, hard-hearted, hard-featured old fellow. He was represented as being dressed in Highland costume, and wore a tuft of feathers in his cap. As if to render his face more uncanny, an English soldier had run his bayonet through the rebellious old Scotchman's eye. But in view of its disfigurement, this picture had been the pride of the family, as they felt that it proved their descent from a British lord.

The popular belief was, that the stout old stepman was something of a smuggler, and that when he built the castle on the water's edge, he had also constructed underground passages leading far back into the country, and had been even early enough to dig one under the churchyard, up into the family vault. Here the noble McGregors and his descendants, who feared neither God nor man, stored in coffins, besides the mouldering bones of the dead, contraband goods. It was a marvel the good folks said, how the church stood steady, and Queen Anne's gift rung out pure and clear each Sabbath day, when such evil deeds were doing under its shadow. However, with these facts or fancies my story has little to do.

At the time of the breaking out of the American revolution the castle was in the possession of a widow lady, Mrs. Whitehurst. She was the last direct descendant of the McGregors.

Her family consisted of herself and her two children, a son twenty-two years of age, McGregor Whitehurst, familiarly called McGro, and a daughter, a handsome, high-spirited, noble-looking girl—Edith Whitehurst.

Mrs. Whitehurst was by no means wealthy; her chief dependence was on her son. The young man had been well educated in England, and, having a fancy for profession, had studied medicine. In the "idle days" I am writing of, the doctor a village was also an apothecary, and dispensed the medicines he prescribed, young McGro being his chemist, druggist and doctor. He was really a sing man, and bade fair to displace, in the hearts of the villagers, the old Esculapian,

who had done them during half a century, and to rebuild the fortunes of the McGregor Whitehurst, with drugs, in place of the sword. Perhaps the profession of the doctor was not so widely separated, as both believed in free blood-letting.

McGregor's chum and beloved friend and comrade in the town was a handsome, rather wild young man—Edward Mortimer. He was of good family, and had some property. At first sight, he had fallen deeply in love with Miss Edith, and had gained her promise to share his fortunes, much to her brother's delight, and to her mother's annoyance, as she had hoped that her beautiful daughter would marry wealth.

The mother had insisted that Edith should not wed until she reached the mature age of eighteen.

Perth Amboy, like every other little village and town throughout the colonies, was divided into two factions, and party spirit burned strong between the royalists and patriots. The Governor of New Jersey was loyal, and he considered Amboy of some importance—it was at one time expected that it would become the great city of New York has since become—stationed a number of British soldiers there, as a garrison.

Not far from Mrs. Whitehurst's, there lived an Englishman, a Mr. Bruin, who prided himself upon his loyalty. He was a widower, the wealthy man of the town, and the chief magistrate; indeed, a sort of petty prince, whose word was law.

Since the difficulties between the two countries, he had made himself rather obnoxious, and was strongly suspected by his neighbors of giving the Governor such information as had led to the arrest of many of the patriots, who had determined to join the colonial forces; at all events, he was greatly feared by the town folks. He had never been received by the aristocracy of the place with cordiality.

Mr. Bruin had long admired, at a respectful distance, the beautiful Edith Whitehurst. But as her family, by right of descent, belonged to the aristocracy, and occupied a position, which, in those days, money could not purchase, he had never succeeded in being admitted into the family on a friendly footing.

"Now then," thought he, "is my time coming," and he was more attentive than ever; as the second year drew to a close, tired of his slow progress with Edith, his attentions grew so pointed that his intentions became evident; and as the old lady knew that her daughter was engaged to Edward Mortimer, she felt that she could no longer accept any favors from her friend. She at once spoke to Mr. Bruin, explained to him Edith's relationship to Edward, and declined receiving anything more from her rich neighbor.

"I am sorry, dear madam," he replied, "to learn that Miss Edith is already promised to another. I admit frankly I did have hopes; they are gone now. But you must still let me aid you. This year cannot last much longer; it must be decided in the spring, in one way or the other. Your son will then come home, and we will settle everything."

The old lady shook her head doubtfully. "Well then," he continued frankly, "if you don't like that, let me advance you some money on any security you like; this house for instance." "And," he continued laughingly, "to satisfy your over nice scruples, I will name a certain sum, in the mortgage papers, as payment for what I have already advanced."

Mrs. Whitehurst accepted his kind offer eagerly, she was warm in her expression of thanks, and when he had gone, extolled his generosity and delicacy to her daughter. Of course, when he brought the papers, made out by his lawyer, she signed, without taking the trouble to read them. How could she, but place implicit confidence in one who, for two years, had been a consistent and generous friend.

As Mr. Bruin put up these documents, he was a proud man. He felt that with Mrs. Whitehurst's signature to them, he was, to all intents and purposes, the possessor of the old castle. He felt certain that even should

the war come to a close, or he had so confidently prophesied, McGregor Whitehurst would be unable to pay him in the time specified. And then he thought, exultingly, "pretty Miss Edith will have to choose between me and beggary. She shall have the castle for her dower when she accepts me," he said, perfectly content with her choice would be.

A third year was coming to a close. Mrs. Whitehurst had not heard from her son, and poor Edith was without news of her lover.

The two women were seated quietly in the parlor talking one night, in the latter part of November.

"Mother," said Edith, "I wish you had understood the contents of those papers before you signed them. Do you know it is rumored through the village that Mr. Bruin owns our house, and has turned us from it at any moment!"

"Nonsense, child," replied the mother, "but here comes our good friend, I will ask him."

As soon as Mr. Bruin was quietly seated, Mrs. Whitehurst repeated to him as village gossip, what Edith had heard.

"Gossip my dear madam," he answered in a questioning tone. "Do not call it gossip, it is fact. But of course, the question can never arise; we shall find an amicable way of settling it," and he glanced at Edith, with a look which she could not mistake. "I am glad you broached the subject; I intended to do so myself. The time for you to redeem your pledge expires just one month from to-day, and this is the twenty-fourth of November," he continued, as the ladies sat silent from astonishment and terror.

Edith saw all, and fully understood the dreadful position to which her mother's confident generosity had placed them. She also saw that it was expected that she would sacrifice herself in order to save her mother.

Their visitor did not like the silence which both maintained. He went on to exclaim himself:

"I would not have mentioned this now, madam," he said, "but unfortunately I am pressed for money; indeed, I shall have to raise it at any sacrifice," and again he paused.

"Mr. Bruin," said Edith, rising, "we have still a month, eh?"

"Certainly, Miss Edith; but I have a plan to propose that will prevent your disturbing yourself in any way," and Mr. Bruin told Edith of his love; he painted to her in glowing colors, the life she should lead as his wife. He promised to give her the castle as her own, and then dimly threatened her with what she would have to endure, if she dared to drive him to despair by a refusal.

When he ceased speaking, Edith, who was as pale as a ghost, but perfectly calm, said, in a firm voice:

"Sir, I do not fear poverty, but I do love wealth; and my mother needs the comforts it brings. Give me this month to think your offer over. I do not bid you hope; I dare not bid you despair."

Mr. Bruin was profuse in his thanks. He had at least expected a scene, tears and entreaties.

"As he took his leave, he said: 'May I visit you still, Miss Edith?'"

The poor girl consented; she dared not refuse.

Once they were alone, "Mother," said Edith, "for the next month I wish to go where I please, and do what I please. I must try to save us, and I have but one chance, and oh!" she sobbed, "it is so slender."

The wealthy man went home, his way led him directly past the churchyard; the tomb light over the McGregor vault looked grim and ghastly in the silent city in which it stood.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed he, as he snatched his fingers to the tomb; "that for you, old Ma, I am going to buy one of your dainty descendants; you and Aunt Oliver must have been hobnobbing somewhere, when the old lady signed that paper, or you would have appeared and stopped her. I never had very great faith in your ghost-spirit, though the person himself swears to having seen old Aunt," said the sacrilegious wretch.

The month was fast drawing to a close; it lacked but a few days to Christmas, when, as Mr. Bruin stood one afternoon at his bedroom window, he saw a lady closely wrapped up in her shawl and veil, approaching the house. Though he could not see the face, he recognized Edith Whitehurst. "Ha!" thought he, "my pretty mistress is coming to pay me a visit."

But the veiled lady turned down a lane that led past his house, into the suburbs of the village. The water was filled with curiosity and suspicion. "I will see what this means," he said, "that little rebel is daring enough for anything," and putting on his hat and cloak, Mr. Bruin followed the veiled figure. It was growing dark rapidly, and he had no difficulty in doing so unobserved. At length he saw the lady enter an old deserted house on the outskirts of the village. "Treason," thought Mr. Bruin, and as he hurried forward he met one of his servants, whom he immediately sent back to the village to bring a squad of soldiers to his aid.

The spy advanced cautiously until he stood before one of the low windows of the house into which the lady had gone. The ill-fitting shutters allowed him a free view of the room. In the chimney a small wood fire was burning; before it stood two men; between them, her bonnet and veil off, stood Edith Whitehurst. Each of the men held one of her hands, and they were both looking at her with passionate attention.

"Yes, Ma," she was saying, "the miserable villain managed to get mother to give him a mortgage, and now he threatens to sell the place and turn us out, unless I marry him."

"I'll squeeze his throat first," exclaimed one of the two men, "to let me marry you, my beautiful Edith. The wretch!"

"But, Edward, what am I to do, where can we get five hundred pounds and without it he will turn us out into the street."

"Sister," exclaimed McGregor Whitehurst, for the two men were Edith's brother and lover, "you two mother must go with us, and leave the castle to that villain, until, at least, the war is over and we can get our own again."

So the young folks talked of the long happy future before them, laughed scornfully at their foe, and laid their plans for flight. "Why, a week, Edith darling, is an eternity, and we can do all we want in it, and then laugh at your old boy," whispered Edward, as he saw his mistress to the door, McGregor, the brother, generously standing with his back to them, that they might part without witnesses.

As a sudden scream from Edith, he turned hastily, to see his sister struggling

in the arms of her foe, Mr. Bruin, and his friend in the grasp of two soldiers; before he could recover himself or seize his old fist-brother, McGregor Whitehurst was also a prisoner in the hands of the British.

"To the guardhouse with them!" shouted Mr. Bruin. "They are spies, and shall die the death," he added, shaking poor Edith roughly, "unless Christmas morning sees you my bride. So you thought to escape me, you jade, and have only been playing with me, while you sent word to your lover and brother to come and carry you off; but they shall all pay dearly for it, unless this hand redeems them."

Mrs. Whitehurst sat alone in her parlor. "What can keep Edith out so late," she murmured, "it is very cold and dark. My poor child, what will she do?"

As the good old lady spoke, the door was burst open, and Edith, pale and trembling, rushed in, and throwing herself on her knees before her mother, shrieked:

"Oh, mother! I thought to save us all, and I have lost them. I sent them a letter telling them of our troubles; they came here to carry us off, and he has arrested them as spies."

"What? Who?" questioned Mrs. Whitehurst.

"Edward and McGregor. But do not fear, mother; they shall not be lost. I will marry him, and when they are safe, I will myself. Yes, my bridal bed shall be the grave."

So the poor girl raved through that long night.

Early the next morning, Edith and her mother went up to the Judge's house to try and move him to compassion. As they entered his hall, one of his servants, a foster brother of Edward Mortimer's, met them, and whispered to Edith, "Make no rash promises, miss; put him off; give me three days and I will save them."

Mr. Bruin was remorseless. "No, Edith," he answered to her pleadings, "unless you swear to marry me on Christmas day they shall be tried and condemned; this day is the twenty-first of December; and on the twenty-fourth they shall die. Perhaps, proud girl, when you hear that they are condemned, you may change your mind. It is that certainly alone which makes me grant them the three days' respite you ask for. You and your mother, girl, shall eat your Christmas dinner in the street, unless you prefer to take it at the foot of the gallows, in company with your precious relatives; for they shall not be shot, they shall be hanged, and your bodies shall be warning to rebel sympathizers. I have full authority, and shall use it, unless—"

and he laughed and looked at Edith with a hideous leer.

Unfortunately for the prisoners, accident had given Mr. Bruin the means of fulfilling at least a portion of his threat. The two young men were tried that very morning. Mr. Bruin appeared against them, and told a long story of a conversation that he pretended to have overheard, in which fact and fiction were so mixed up that the prisoners themselves would have found it difficult to sift it. The fact that they had been found within British lines would have been, of itself, enough to have caused their arrest; exaggerated by Mr. Bruin's malice, it brought about their condemnation.

His morning's work completed to his satisfaction, the rich man went home and at his dinner with a sense of inward delight at his success that was edifying. Dinner over, he sat in his comfortable arm-chair, and thought: "Well," he said, "once those two fellows are out of the way, I am sure of the castle. Owning it, when this little matter is blown over, will give me a position in the town. But shall I ever be able to live in the castle? Won't it be better to pull it down?" He had uttered his thoughts aloud, and as he spoke his last thought, he heard a distinct, though smothered groan. He started, and looked around. "How foolish I am," he continued, "though they do say the place is haunted, and I have heard strange sounds there. Mr. Bruin met no one. As he approached the churchyard he became suddenly conscious that some one or something was following him softly. He glanced timorously around; two fiery eyes glared at him through the darkness, and as he reached the churchyard gate, a dark object brushed against his legs. He looked down. Horror of horror! it could be believe his own senses! There, at his feet, rubbing against him, purring and looking at him with fiery eyes, was a monstrous animal, which, conscience whispered to him, was Miss Oliver's cat.

His hair bristled on his head, his knees knocked together, his teeth clattered, big drops of sweat rolled down his face. His first thought, as he found the animal did not tear him, was to seek safety in flight. "But what chance should I have against a cat, and a diabolical one, at that?" he cried.

"Avaunt thee, Satan!" he cried in faltering tones, as he made the sign of the cross.

"Mow, mew," answered the cat, rubbing harder than ever against his legs.

The wretched man heard a slight rustling, as of long garments dragging on his other side. He looked around. A tall female figure, in white robes, which glowed all over with sulphurous light, stood there. He felt that it was Aunt Oliver's spirit; he glanced behind him and there he saw the redoubted McGregor as he had looked that night when the fire-light flashed over him, as the old lady spoke of her dream; one eye seemed to close by some invisible and irresistible power.

The next instant the two men's bodies were swinging in the air; it was either he, or his doubles, who had been supporting them, that had knocked the scaffold from under their feet. They fell on no caps, and he could see their convulsed limbs, staring eyes and agonized faces. He awoke with a shout—bathed in cold sweat; as he opened his eyes, a huge black cat, just such a one as he had heard described as Miss Oliver's nightly companion in her wanderings, sprang from his lap and ran under the table. His heart had brought his servants into the room. The first who entered was Edward Mortimer's foster brother, Jack Spencer. Their master bade them "put the black cat out of the room," but as none could be found, they glanced at one another suspiciously.

Mr. Bruin did not dare to go to bed that night; his dream had made too terrible an impression upon him. He had not recovered from the effects the next day, and did not leave the house. As he was seated quietly by the fire just after dark, one of his servants rushed in, shouting in terror: "Oh! sir, master, the prisoners have escaped; a big black cat with fiery eyes ran down the wall. When the guard looked into the room, the prisoners were gone, and over the chimney, in fiery letters, was written, 'Aunt Oliver's work!'"

Mr. Bruin started up. "D—the cat and Aunt Oliver," he cried.

"Oh, please don't," groaned the man, "they will catch us."

"Get up, you fool, and give me my cloak

and hat. I will carry that paper on my person, though," thought Mr. Bruin. "If those two rascals have escaped, they are just bold enough to steal it when I am out." And he put poor Mrs. Whitehurst's mortgage carefully in his pocket and sallied forth.

Mr. Bruin, for greater safety, had locked the prisoners up in the second story of the jail. Soldiers had been posted around to watch. When the guard had gone to relieve the sentry under the window, they had found him lying senseless on the ground. As soon as he could speak, he told them, in tones of terror, that a huge black cat, as big as a bear, with eyes that emitted flames of fire, had rushed by him and gone up the wall. He had been unable to call out, and remembered nothing more, until he found himself in the jailer's room.

The guard immediately rushed to the prisoner's room; it was empty. On the wall, in large old English letters, was the inscription which the servant had repeated. The men were in an indescribable state of terror, and Mr. Bruin found that it would be impossible to organize, that night, a proper search. He started at once for the castle, determined, if the women seemed to know of the escape, to remain there all night. He found the widow and her daughter alone, and seated silently over a little fire of a few chips which Edith had picked up.

"Well, Edith," he said abruptly, as he sat down uninvited, "are you still obstinate, and bent on murder? They are both condemned, you know."

"I can not marry you, sir," replied the poor girl, in a dreary, hopeless tone.

"You mean you will not. Now look at your old mother, and tell me if you are not ashamed of yourself? One word from your lips would give her back her son, give her wealth, and every comfort she needs. Surely, dear Edith, you will not go forth with the curse of Cain on your brow, for you will kill your brother. Why not find shelter in these arms?" and he looked at her mother's presence, the miserable wretch strove to clasp her in his arms.

Edith started back. Her sudden movement aroused the old lady. She turned her pale face toward her visitor, and as she eyed him, rose slowly, and drawing her tall figure up to its full height, pushed back her disheveled gray locks from her face, looking, in the flickering fire-light, like some Pythoness of old. She slowly raised her hand, and pointing to the oil painting of the McGregor, said, in a hoarse, awe-inspiring whisper:

"Man of sin! be silent here, in that presence, and in this, the last stronghold of our race. Last night, for the first time in many nights, I slept. He, my son-in-law, McGregor, the strong and true, came to me. By his hand he led the protecting spirit of our house, my Grand-Aunt Oliver."

"Oh!" groaned the magistrate, trembling, "Aunt Oliver, again."

Headless of the interruption, the old lady went on:

"He bade me not to fear. He told me that the wronged should be righted, the prisoner freed. Man of blood, I await the fulfillment of the prophecy. So do not dare to insult this maiden, for those who have ever cursed or offered insult to the maidens of our house have met with terrible punishment."

At the old lady stopped, a sudden and brilliant red tongue of flame leaped from the expiring embers, and threw a ruddy, preternatural glare over the whole room, and lighted up the oil painting of the McGregor so fearfully that he looked as if about to step from his frame. The terrified magistrate did not wait for a second bidding, but snatching up his hat and cloak, fled from the room. But fate had not ordained that the worthy judge should reach home without further adventure.

The night was cold, and dark and stormy; the times were troublous, and few people cared to be abroad after nightfall, and Mr. Bruin met no one. As he approached the churchyard he became suddenly conscious that some one or something was following him softly. He glanced timorously around; two fiery eyes glared at him through the darkness, and as he reached the churchyard gate, a dark object brushed against his legs. He looked down. Horror of horror! it could be believe his own senses! There, at his feet, rubbing against him, purring and looking at him with fiery eyes, was a monstrous animal, which, conscience whispered to him, was Miss Oliver's cat.

His hair bristled on his head, his knees knocked together, his teeth clattered, big drops of sweat rolled down his face. His first thought, as he found the animal did not tear him, was to seek safety in flight. "But what chance should I have against a cat, and a diabolical one, at that?" he cried.

"Avaunt thee, Satan!" he cried in faltering tones, as he made the sign of the cross.

"Mow, mew," answered the cat, rubbing harder than ever against his legs.

The wretched man heard a slight rustling, as of long garments dragging on his other side. He looked around. A tall female figure, in white robes, which glowed all over with sulphurous light, stood there. He felt that it was Aunt Oliver's spirit; he glanced behind him and there he saw the redoubted McGregor as he had looked that night when the fire-light flashed over him, as the old lady spoke of her dream; one eye seemed to close by some invisible and irresistible power.

The next instant the two men's bodies were swinging in the air; it was either he, or his doubles, who had been supporting them, that had knocked the scaffold from under their feet. They fell on no caps, and he could see their convulsed limbs, staring eyes and agonized faces. He awoke with a shout—bathed in cold sweat; as he opened his eyes, a huge black cat, just such a one as he had heard described as Miss Oliver's nightly companion in her wanderings, sprang from his lap and ran under the table. His heart had brought his servants into the room. The first who entered was Edward Mortimer's foster brother, Jack Spencer. Their master bade them "put the black cat out of the room," but as none could be found, they glanced at one another suspiciously.

Mr. Bruin did not dare to go to bed that night; his dream had made too terrible an impression upon him. He had not recovered from the effects the next day, and did not leave the house. As he was seated quietly by the fire just after dark, one of his servants rushed in, shouting in terror: "Oh! sir, master, the prisoners have escaped; a big black cat with fiery eyes ran down the wall. When the guard looked into the room, the prisoners were gone, and over the chimney, in fiery letters, was written, 'Aunt Oliver's work!'"

Mr. Bruin started up. "D—the cat and Aunt Oliver," he cried.

"Oh, please don't," groaned the man, "they will catch us."

"Get up, you fool, and give me my cloak

and hat. I will carry that paper on my person, though," thought Mr. Bruin. "If those two rascals have escaped, they are just bold enough to steal it when I am out." And he put poor Mrs. Whitehurst's mortgage carefully in his pocket and sallied forth.

Mr. Bruin, for greater safety, had locked the prisoners up in the second story of the jail. Soldiers had been posted around to watch. When the guard had gone to relieve the sentry under the window, they had found him lying senseless on the ground. As soon as he could speak, he told them, in tones of terror, that a huge black cat, as big as a bear, with eyes that emitted flames of fire, had rushed by him and gone up the wall. He had been unable to call out, and remembered nothing more, until he found himself in the jailer's room.

The guard immediately rushed to the prisoner's room; it was empty. On the wall, in large old English letters, was the inscription which the servant had repeated. The men were in an indescribable state of terror, and Mr. Bruin found that it would be impossible to organize, that night, a proper search. He started at once for the castle, determined, if the women seemed to know of the escape, to remain there all night. He found the widow and her daughter alone, and seated silently over a little fire of a few chips which Edith had picked up.

"Well, Edith," he said abruptly, as he sat down uninvited, "are you still obstinate, and bent on murder? They are both condemned, you know."

"I can not marry you, sir," replied the poor girl, in a dreary, hopeless tone.

"You mean you will not. Now look at your old mother, and tell me if you are not ashamed of yourself? One word from your lips would give her back her son, give her wealth, and every comfort she needs. Surely, dear Edith, you will not go forth with the curse of Cain on your brow, for you will kill your brother. Why not find shelter in these arms?" and he looked at her mother's presence, the miserable wretch strove to clasp her in his arms.

Edith started back. Her sudden movement aroused the old lady. She turned her pale face toward her visitor, and as she eyed him, rose slowly, and drawing her tall figure up to its full height, pushed back her disheveled gray locks from her face, looking, in the flickering fire-light, like some Pythoness of old. She slowly raised her hand, and pointing to the oil painting of the McGregor, said, in a hoarse, awe-inspiring whisper:

"Man of sin! be silent here, in that presence, and in this, the last stronghold of our race. Last night, for the first time in many nights, I slept. He, my son-in-law, McGregor, the strong and true, came to me. By his hand he led the protecting spirit of our house, my Grand-Aunt Oliver."

"Oh!" groaned the magistrate, trembling, "Aunt Oliver, again."

Headless of the interruption, the old lady went on:

"He bade me not to fear. He told me that the wronged should be righted, the prisoner freed. Man of blood, I await the fulfillment of the prophecy. So do not dare to insult this maiden, for those who have ever cursed or offered insult to the maidens of our house have met with terrible punishment."

At the old lady stopped, a sudden and brilliant red tongue of flame leaped from the expiring embers, and threw a ruddy, preternatural glare over the whole room, and lighted up the oil painting of the McGregor so fearfully that he looked as if about to step from his frame. The terrified magistrate did not wait for a second bidding, but snatching up his hat and cloak, fled from the room. But fate had not ordained that the worthy judge should reach home without further adventure.

The night was cold, and dark and stormy; the times were troublous, and few people cared to be abroad after nightfall, and Mr. Bruin met no one. As he approached the churchyard he became suddenly conscious that some one or something was following him softly. He glanced timorously around; two fiery eyes glared at him through the darkness, and as he reached the churchyard gate, a dark object brushed against his legs. He looked down. Horror of horror! it could be believe his own senses! There, at his feet, rubbing against him, purring and looking at him with fiery eyes, was a monstrous animal, which, conscience whispered to him, was Miss Oliver's cat.

His hair bristled on his head, his knees knocked together, his teeth clattered, big drops of sweat rolled down his face. His first thought, as he found the animal did not tear him, was to seek safety in flight. "But what chance should I have against a cat, and a diabolical one, at that?" he cried.

"Avaunt thee, Satan!" he cried in faltering tones, as he made the sign of the cross.

"Mow, mew," answered the cat, rubbing harder than ever against his legs.

The wretched man heard a slight rustling, as of long garments dragging on his other side. He looked around. A tall female figure, in white robes, which glowed all over with sulphurous light, stood there. He felt that it was Aunt Oliver's spirit; he glanced behind him and there he saw the redoubted McGregor as he had looked that night when the fire-light flashed over him, as the old lady spoke of her dream; one eye seemed to close by some invisible and irresistible power.

The next instant the two men's bodies were swinging in the air; it was either he, or his doubles, who had been supporting them, that had knocked the scaffold from under their feet. They fell on no caps, and he could see their convulsed limbs, staring eyes and agonized faces. He awoke with a shout—bathed in cold sweat; as he opened his eyes, a huge black cat, just such a one as he had heard described as Miss Oliver's nightly companion in her wanderings, sprang from his lap and ran under the table. His heart had brought his servants into the room. The first who entered was Edward Mortimer's foster brother, Jack Spencer. Their master bade them "put the black cat out of the room," but as none could be found, they glanced at one another suspiciously.

Mr. Bruin did not dare to go to bed that night;