

# What Happened Easter Eve.

By Chester F. Baird.



FERCE and wild the March wind whisted the Revolution. The brook was frozen tight, the ridges of snow lay along the mountain gorges, and old Greta hastened into the house, her head tied up in a woolen shawl, like a ship scudding before a gale.

"Miss Becky! Miss Becky!" she screamed, "the weasels has got into the henhouse and killed every solitary fowl! Bled 'em to death as neat as if it was done with a lancet."

At the same moment Lillian Darling had rushed into the only room where they kept a fire—the great, shining, yellow-walled kitchen—crying out:

"Oh, Rebecca, the violets are frozen, and so are all of the lilies that you were saving for the Easter market. Oh, isn't it dreadful!"

Rebecca Darling laid down her tablet and pencil.

"You're a pair of Cassandra's," said she, with enforced composure. "Is there any other piece of bad news you have got to tell me?"

"I say, Miss Becky," called a bass voice from the shed adjoining, "I ain't fit to come in where folks is, but I'll jest have to go to Squire Parlett's well for water; our chain pump's friz as tight as a drum!"

"It does seem as if we had the wust luck of anybody," sighed old Greta.

Lill went up to her sister and passed her arm lovingly around the long, slim neck.

"Come to breakfast, Becky," said she. "At least the coffee pot hasn't exploded, and the last of the eggs is beaten into a delicious omelet. I should like meat for breakfast, but as long as Adonijah has such a limitless appetite I shall have to content myself with biscuits and coffee."

"There it is, Lill," said the elder sister, "I was just adding up our accounts and I find we can't afford the luxury of retainers. Adonijah must go."

Lill clasped her hands.

"Adonijah! Oh, Becky! Poor Adonijah, who works so zealously all day long and worships you as if you were his patron saint. But what is to become of him?"

"I don't know, Lill, I only know that adverse fortune has proved too much for me. I had calculated on sending those fowls to the Boston market at fancy prices, and on realizing a considerable sum on the Easter flowers. But they are both gone at one fell swoop. And, oh! Lill, this is to be a disastrous Easter for us!"

"Don't talk in that way," said Lill, stamping her foot on the floor. "Easter is never disastrous."

At this juncture, honest Adonijah, all unconscious that his fate was trembling in the balance, came in with a pail of water—a ruddy-faced, gipsy-eyed boy of sixteen, who regarded Miss Becky as little short of a guardian angel.

"I say, Miss Becky," began he, "is it true?"

"Is what true, Adonijah?"

"That this 'ere house is haunted?"

"What nonsense, Adonijah!"

"Just what I told 'em myself," nodded the lad.

"But Squire Parlett says there's a picture of the house in the New York Sunday paper, with 'The Haunted House of Juniper Mountain' writ under it, and a long story of a Revolutionary soldier that was shot down at the upper window, over the porch, and that comes here moonlight nights, all in his buff toggerly."

"Oh, Becky!" cried Lill, with a little, hysterical laugh, "I knew that man was a reporter, though he made believe he was a surveyor, and wanted to run lines parallel with the new turnpike."

"Well, what difference does it make?" said Becky, dejectedly. "Nothing signifies very much now. If the New York people like to open their eyes over a ghost story—"

"But is it true," urged Adonijah, "about the soldier, I mean?"

"Why, yes, I believe it is," abstractedly answered Becky: "it was my great grandfather, Ruggles. Shot down one Easter eve by a Hessian—and my great grandfather followed the assassin half way across the swamp with a rusty scythe—the first implement of warfare he could

seize upon—and cut him down just beyond the big yellow pine that was struck by lightning last fall."

Adonijah rubbed his hands gleefully.

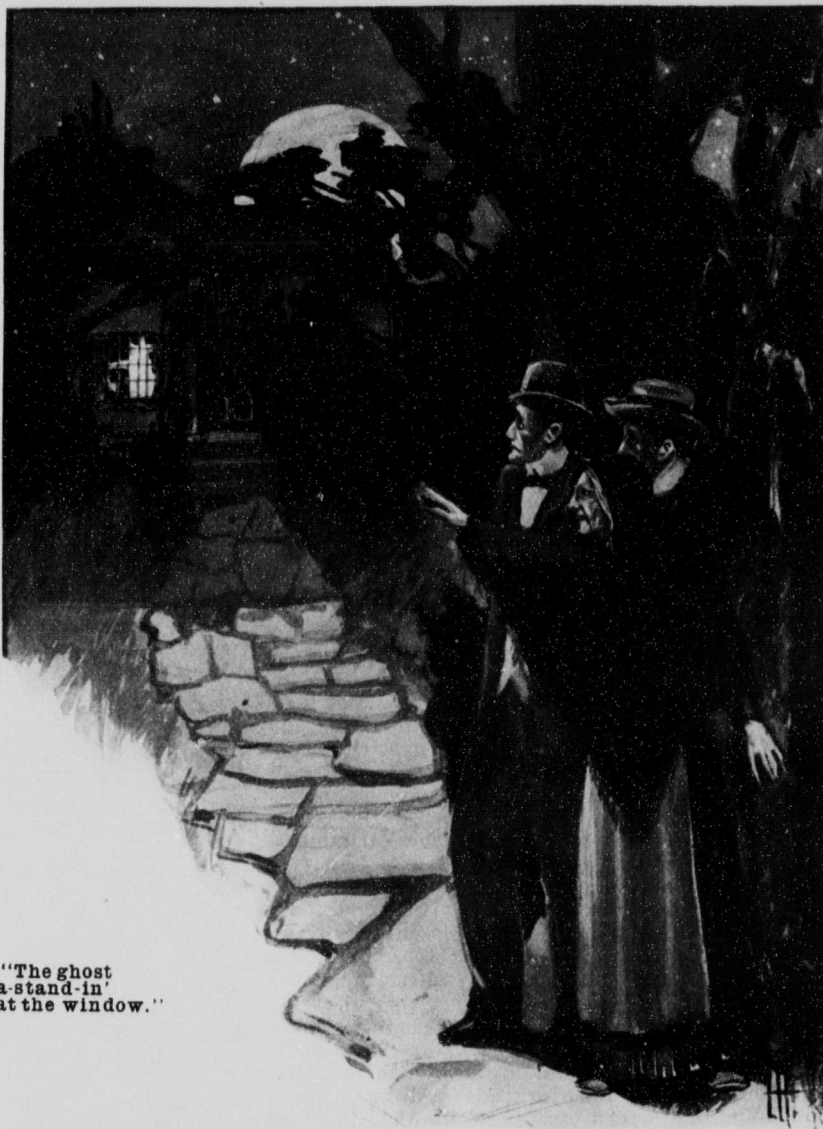
"Then, by hookey, there ought to be two ghosts! And if I—"

"Hold your tongue, Adonijah," shrilly interrupted old Greta, bringing the hot cornbread which she had planned for a breakfast surprise. "Your bacon and fried potatoes is a-waitin' for you out in the shed, and the quicker it's eaten the quicker you'll get back to your wood chopping!"

"Gee-whillikins!" muttered Adonijah, "why didn't I never hear these ghost stories before? I mean to watch the window over the porch the very first moonlight night."

As spring dawned slowly over the land Adonijah's blunt perception awakened to more facts than one.

First, that his beloved Miss Becky and Lill were in sore need of money; second, that there was some talk of selling the old house, and that Squire Parlett had offered three thousand dollars for it.



"The ghost a-standin' at the window."

"It's only a tumble-down ruin," said the Squire. "Over a hundred years old, and nothing solid about it but the chimbley and only a few acres of stony mountain land. Nobody else won't give that for it!"

"Three thousand dollars!" exclaimed Lill. "Why, the man wants to swindle us!"

"But we can't stay here and starve," sighed Becky. "Of course the place is worth more than that; but there is no market for real estate on Juniper Mountain. We must sell out at some price and get nearer New York or Boston."

"Oh, Becky, how very hard the world is!" sighed Lill.

"If we could only raise a clear sum of three thousand dollars, we might run a summer boarding house on Glassy Lake," said calculating Becky.

"But the squire wants half the money to remain on mortgage."

"And for all I can see he is likely to have everything his own way," sighed Becky. "Oh, look there, Lill, who's that?"

"An artist sketching the place," said Lill, frowning. "Sitting on the wall exactly as if he owned it. Send Adonijah to order him off!"

"No, don't," interposed gentle Becky. "The old house is picturesque, I suppose, against the March sunset."

"But there was another there this morning, Miss," said Adonijah, "and two women asking at the swing gate if this 'ere was the 'Haunted House.'"

"It's getting a deal too much talked about to suit me," growled old Greta. "Most everybody's got something to say about it every time I go to the village. They saw for sartin there's two or three seen the ghost."

"Let them talk," said Becky. "Talk does no harm."

But "talk" naturally produced a sensation—and the sensation ended in a regular string of sight-seers, who nearly drove old Greta distracted by asking for glasses of water and crocus blooms, and propounding interminable questions.

"I wish the ghost was in Jericho," scolded Greta.

But one night she came scampering in from a visit to a crony down the road.

"I've seen it," she cried. "I've seen it with these eyes! The ghost a-standin' at the window! And I warn't the only one as seen it, nyther! There was three or four others staring down by the hemlock tree—a newspaper man and the picture-maker of a New York paper—and we only see it one minute. Call Adonijah up! Let him tell them fools to go about their business! It's bad enough to be scared out o' one's wits without bein' mobbed by a set of curiosity hunters. And Adonijah's no business to go to bed before nine o'clock."

"Adonijah works hard daytimes, and needs his sleep," said Becky. "The people will go away in time. It's rather annoying, but—"

"They actually asked leave to go through the house," said Greta, "and I told 'em you wouldn't

hear to it; and the newspaper man tried to give me a dollar, but I throwed it back in his face. But I seen the ghost—yes, I did!"

And she shivered and threw an apron over her head.

Scarcely a week had elapsed when two gentlemen knocked at the door and requested to see Becky and Lill Darling.

They were the identical newspaper man, whose subsidy had been scorned, and the artist from the New York Sunday paper, and they offered the two sisters the sum of six thousand dollars in cash for the old place on Juniper Mountain.

"Not that it's worth that," exclaimed Mr. Joyce, "but it has become rather prominent of late—a sort of Mecca for superstitious people. And there is something rather strange about that porch window—the light on the little window panes, or the refraction of the moonbeams, or some curious ef-