

A LETTER TO PAPA.

I'm going to write a letter to papa. I got a letter from him last night. What his little girl is doing. The same as when he's near. I'll tell him how I missed him. And how I wished he'd come. And never, never leaves us. But always stay at home.

SPECTER HAUNTED.

I certainly do not believe in visions, and have often laughed at visionaries when I have heard them relate some wonderful spectral tale, in which they placed implicit faith. This was my manner of thinking when I paid a visit to the colonel of my regiment, who inhabited an old mansion a few miles from the town.

The colonel was a cheerful, good humored man, and his wife was a perfect personification of calmness and domestic quietness, the fitting companion of a man who liked to repose in the tranquillity of his home after the fatigues of service.

The eldest was a merry girl, spirited to excess, always dancing in life, jumping restlessly from one object to another. I have seen her reading, dancing, singing, and all within the same quarter of an hour.

It would be impossible to find a greater contrast than that which existed between the characters of Augusta and Maria, her younger sister. Relative to the latter, imagine a majestic figure and a face of wonderful beauty, though of deathlike paleness.

When I had overcome this feeling and conversed with Maria I soon felt convinced that her singular and fantastic nature was rather external than internal. In the few remarks she made to me she manifested a delicate, womanly feeling, a clear mind and a kind heart.

One thing appeared strange to me, which was that the family was always disgraced when any one held conversation with Maria, and that they invariably tried to interrupt the discourse, even by interfering in an abrupt and decided manner.

Thus my conversation was limited to the spirited Augusta, who entertained me with her sprightly and variable wit. But as soon as I began to speak of Maria's sadness passed over the entire family, and the mother, to put an end to my inquiries, told me that Maria was in a bad state of health, that every evening about 8 o'clock she was visited with feverish attacks, and that the physician had ordered her perfect repose and tranquillity at that hour.

I felt convinced from the manner in which this account was given that it was not correct, and that some mys-

tery was connected with Maria and her regular disappearance in the evening, but it was long after I had left the house that this mystery was solved, as follows:

Maria had been a healthy girl, as merry and as happy as her elder sister Augusta. Her fourteenth birthday had arrived, and a great many of her girl friends were assembled in order to celebrate it.

"Now, my friends," said Maria, in a voice of exuberant gaiety; "now I will approach you as the White Lady, of whom the late gardener has told us so many strange tales. But you must come with me to the other end of the garden—there, by the walls of the old tower."

Thus speaking she enveloped herself in a white shawl, and away she flew, followed by a swarm of merry, laughing girls. Scarcely had Maria reached the old dilapidated wall when she stopped suddenly, and becoming motionless as if paralyzed in all her members, exclaimed, in a hollow voice, "Do you see, do you see?"

The sound of the clock striking at that moment the hour of nine increased the terror with which Maria's manner inspired her companions.

"Do you see?—the figure—close to me—stretched her arms after me! You see?"

The girls did not see anything, but overcome by terror they all ran away. One only remained with Maria, and this was her sister Augusta. She tried to take her in her arms, but Maria fell to the ground as if dead. At that moment the household, who had been alarmed by the cries of the girls, entered the garden and hastened to the spot where Augusta and Maria still remained. Maria was carried into the house and restored to her senses, but she still trembled violently as she told them that at the moment she had reached the wall of the tower she had seen an aerial figure, surrounded by vapor, close at her side, and that the figure had stretched out its hand as if to catch hold of her.

The only plausible conclusion which the family could arrive at was that Maria had been deluded by some curious phenomenon produced by the peculiar twilight of an evening in the month of June. She recovered from her fright on the same night so entirely that her friends lost all their apprehensions of ill consequences resulting from it. The following evening the family were assembled in the parlor, talking and laughing in their usual manner. The colonel was smoking his cigar, his wife was engaged in knitting; the governess had, just as usual, let fall some of her last pinch of snuff over the face of her pet, and the dog sneezed violently; Augusta was laughing merrily, when, as the clock struck nine, Maria suddenly jumped off her seat and, apparently horror struck, cried: "There she is! There—close before me—don't you see? There, at my side!"

However, nothing was to be seen. Maria, as on the preceding evening, fainted, and on recovering her senses she told her friends that she had again seen the aerial figure, wrapped in vapor, which stretched out its hand toward her. The family became alarmed. The colonel went for a physician, his wife ran to the clergyman and Augusta spent the whole night in watching Maria. The evening of the following day was looked forward to with the greatest anxiety; the doctor and the clergyman were present, and at the same hour Maria saw the same vision.

When the fainting was over there was only one calm person in the assembly, and that was Maria herself. She smiled at the fears of her father, endeavored to quiet her mother and sister, followed the advice of the doctor, and listened to the admonitions of the clergyman. But as, each succeeding evening, the hour of nine was marked by a repetition of the scenes of the former ones, and as the prescriptions of the doctor, the admonitions of the clergyman, and the cares of the family were proved to be useless, the poor girl was declared to be laboring under the influence of a fixed delusion.

Other physicians were consulted, other medicines prescribed, other moral remedies tried; but all in vain. As regularly as the hour of nine arrived as regularly arrived the phantom to the imagination of Maria. At last the poor girl, wearied by prescriptions and admonitions, supplicated her parents, with tears in her eyes, to leave her to herself, as the figure, having nothing of a terrible nature in its appearance, did not cause her any more alarm. She had become used to it, and the only unpleasant feeling she experienced was a kind of weakness when the phantom had vanished. The family complied with the wishes of Maria. The only precaution they took was to make her

retire into her own room at 8 o'clock, so that strangers might not witness her peculiar state of mind.

Thus the family regained its usual tranquillity. The father resigned himself to the unhappy state of his daughter; the mother deplored in silence; the dog, as usual, inhaled an overdose of snuff; Augusta became a lively and as spirited as before, and Maria as melancholy as if she felt doomed to pass her life in the companionship of the phantom. Such was the state in which I found and left this family.

Some time after my departure the colonel became acquainted with a celebrated physician who had a reputation for curing mental delusions. He was said to work in a shy, cunning way, always endeavoring to overreach the madness and outwit the fixed idea. When the colonel consulted the physician the state of mind of his unhappy daughter, the doctor laughed and said that holding was easier than to cure such madness.

The idea of the apparition, he said, had become intimately connected with the ninth hour of the evening, and that her mind could not separate one from the other; consequently the separation should be effected externally; therefore the only thing to be done was to deceive the lady in the hour, and thus to make her pass the ninth hour without knowing it. Let one evening pass without the appearance of the phantom and Maria would recognize her delusion; physical restoratives would then complete the cure.

The doctor's counsel was put into immediate execution, and one night after Maria had gone to bed all the clocks in the house were put back an hour; even the clock of the village, whose solemn sounds had in the first instance marked the hour of the appearance of the vision, was retarded in its progress for the same lapse of time, so that when Maria arose in the morning she would be deceived in the hour.

The evening was advancing and the family were as usual assembled in the parlor and without company. The wife of the colonel tried to be as merry as possible, and related many amusing tales. The colonel himself began as he had been used to do when in good humor—to rally the governess, in which he was assisted by Augusta. They laughed as merrily as ever.

Suddenly the brass clock struck 9 (the right time being, of course, 8).

Pale and heavy as a corpse Maria fell back in her chair, while the needle-work escaped from her hands. Then she rose, and with all the frightful expression of terror on her countenance, she started into the vicinity of the lamp-parlor and muttered, in a hollow, desecrated voice: "What an hour earlier! Ah! do you see? There is the figure—there—close before me!"

The whole family rose as by common consent. All looked at the spot pointed out by Maria; but as they could not perceive anything which could be taken for a figure or apparition, the colonel, stepping toward his daughter said in a voice of the greatest composure: "My dear girl, be calm—recover yourself—this apparition is nothing but a vision, a chimera, a creation of your own brain. We can see nothing, absolutely nothing; and if there was any figure before you should we not see it as well as you? Try to be calm, my child! recollect yourself!"

"My God!" sighed Maria; "do you then think me mad? There it is, there! It stretches its long white arms toward me! Oh! it makes me signs—it nods its head!"

As if deprived of free will, and with her eyes staringly directed before her at the spot where she said the figure was standing, Maria put her hands behind her and took hold of a plate which was on the table. She raised it high, and then released it from her hands, and the plate, as if sustained by some invisible power, turned slowly round in the air, and then fell gently to the ground.

The following day the desolation caused by the scene of the preceding evening was to be clearly observed. It appeared as if the phantom had made its way from Maria to Augusta. The former became quite freed from her vision, but from that moment Augusta's mind became affected, and she imagined herself to be the aerial specter that frightened Maria.

She who had before been so joyful, so merry, fell into even a deeper melancholy than that which had oppressed her sister. Augusta avoided all society; she scarcely dared speak or even breathe before any one, fearing to betray her presence and to spread terror around her. The only person who attended her was her sister Maria, assisted by the governess. The madness of Augusta was not to be overreached by the cunning of the physician, who had caused the clocks to be altered. His advice even proved valueless in the brain fever, which on the fatal evening attacked the mother of the girls and deprived her of life.

When, some time after my first visit, I again stood in the parlor where I had once been so hospitably received, I found no one but the French lady. The colonel, rendered desperate by the

misfortune which had befallen his family, entered again into active service. Maria was in close attendance on her sister, vainly endeavoring to sweep away that illusion, the influence of which she had herself once labored under. In a little time Augusta died, and from that moment Maria again became a visionary. Her phantom appearing at its old hour and assuming the form of Augusta.—New York World.

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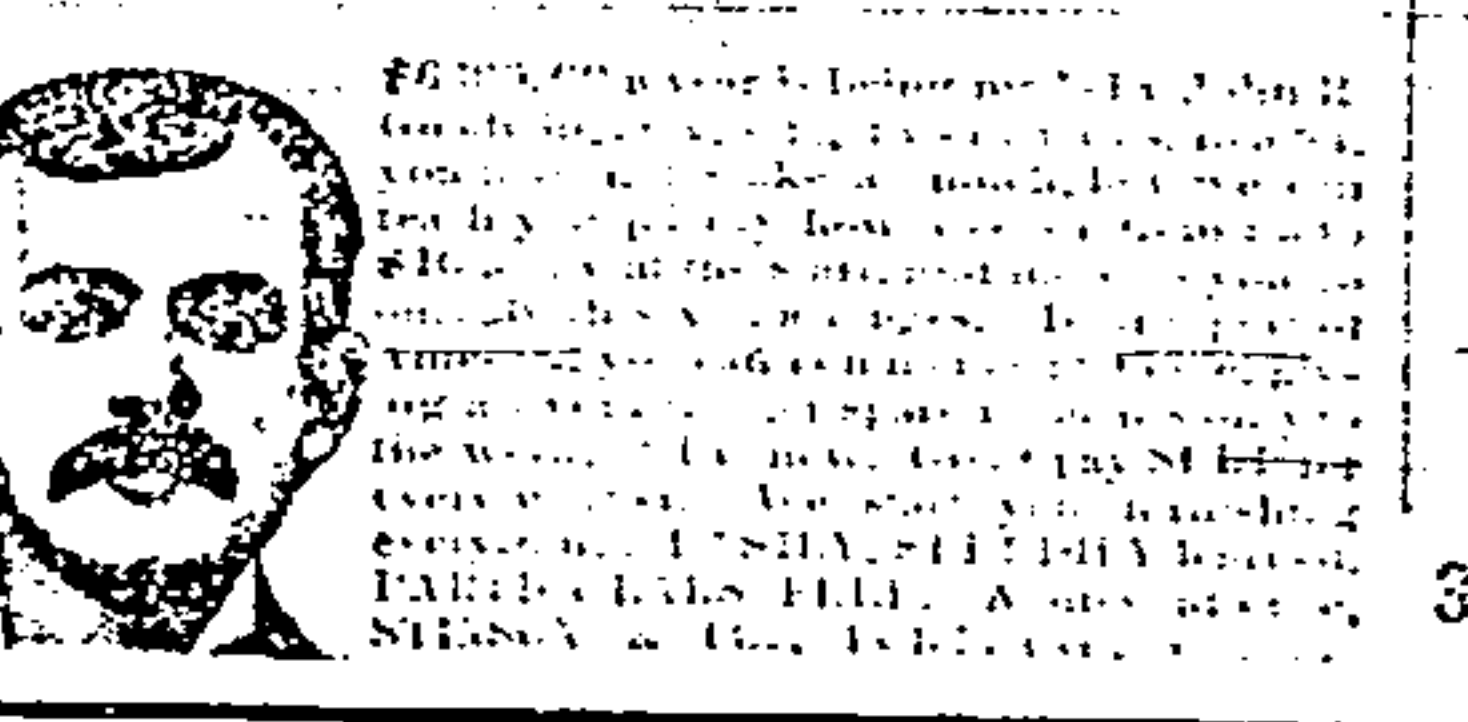
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