

# Grant's Big Advent Calendar

THANKS FOR PARTICIPATING!

Merry  
Christmas  
one and all



Here's your  
Master Author Showcase story  
from the pages of the  
Inner Circle Writers' Magazine





PRESENTS  
MASTER AUTHOR  
SHOWCASE

# Bluebeard's Ghost

by William Makepeace Thackeray





**William Makepeace Thackeray** (1811—1863) was an English novelist whose reputation rests chiefly on his novel *Vanity Fair* (1847–48), set in the Napoleonic period in England, and *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq.* (1852), set in the early 18th century. His book *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* became a film by Stanley Kubrick.

We present here Part One of his short story 'Bluebeard's Ghost'. [Subscribe now](#) so that you don't miss Part Two.

For some time after the fatal accident which deprived her of her husband, Mrs. Bluebeard was, as may be imagined, in a state of profound grief.

There was not a widow in all the country who went to such an expense for black bombazine. She had her beautiful hair confined in crimped caps, and her weepers came over her elbows. Of course, she saw no company except her sister Anne (whose company was anything but pleasant to the widow); as for her brothers, their odious mess-table manners had always been disagreeable to her. What did she care for jokes about the major, or scandal concerning the Scotch surgeon of the regiment? If they drank their wine out of black bottles or crystal, what did it matter to her? Their stories of the stable, the parade, and the last run with the hounds, were perfectly odious to her; besides, she could not bear their impertinent mustachios, and filthy habit of smoking cigars.

They were always wild, vulgar young men, at the best; but now,—now, O, their presence to her delicate soul was horror! How could she bear to look on them after what had occurred? She thought of the best of husbands ruthlessly cut down by their cruel, heavy, cavalry sabres; the kind friend, the generous landlord, the spotless justice of peace, in whose family

differences these rude cornets of dragoons had dared to interfere, whose venerable blue hairs they had dragged down with sorrow to the grave.

She put up a most splendid monument to her departed lord over the family vault of the Bluebeards. The rector, Dr. Sly, who had been Mr. Bluebeard's tutor at college, wrote an epitaph in the most pompous yet pathetic Latin: "Siste, viator! mœrens conjux, heu! quanto minus est cum reliquis versari quam tui meminisse"; in a word, everything that is usually said in epitaphs. A bust of the departed saint, with Virtue mourning over it, stood over the epitaph, surrounded by medallions of his wives, and one of these medallions had as yet no name in it, nor (the epitaph said) could the widow ever be consoled until her own name was inscribed there. "For then I shall be with him. In cœlo quies," she would say, throwing up her fine eyes to heaven, and quoting the enormous words of the hatchment which was put up in the church, and over Bluebeard's hall, where the butler, the housekeeper, the footman, the housemaid, and scullions were all in the profoundest mourning. The keeper went out to shoot birds in a crape band; nay, the very scarecrows in the orchard and fruit garden were ordered to be dressed in black.



Sister Anne was the only person who refused to wear black. Mrs. Bluebeard would have parted with her, but she had no other female relative. Her father, it may be remembered by readers of the former part of her Memoirs, had married again, and the mother-in-law and Mrs. Bluebeard, as usual, hated each other furiously. Mrs. Shacabac had come to the hall on a visit of condolence; but the widow was so rude to her on the second day of the visit that the step-mother quitted the house in a fury. As for the Bluebeards, of course *they* hated the widow. Had not Mr. Bluebeard settled every shilling upon her? and, having no children by his former marriage, her property, as I leave you to fancy, was pretty handsome. So Sister Anne was the only female relative whom Mrs. Bluebeard would keep near her; and, as we all know, a woman *must* have a female relative under any circumstances of pain, or pleasure, or profit,—when she is married, or when she is widowed, or when she is in a delicate situation. But let us continue our story.

"I will never wear mourning for that odious wretch, sister!" Anne would cry.

"I will trouble you, Miss Anne, not to use such words in my presence regarding the best of husbands, or to quit the room at once!" the widow would answer.

"I'm sure it's no great pleasure to sit in it. I wonder you don't make use of the closet, sister, where the *other* Mrs. Bluebeards are."

"Impertinence! they were all embalmed by M. Gannal. How dare you report the monstrous calumnies regarding the best of men? Take down the family Bible, and read what my blessed saint says of his wives,—read it, written in his own hand:—

"*Friday, June 20.*—Married my beloved wife, Anna Maria Scrogginsia.

"*Saturday, August 1.*—A bereaved husband has scarcely strength to write down in this chronicle that the dearest of wives, Anna Maria Scrogginsia, expired this day of sore throat.'

"There! can anything be more convincing than that? Read again:—

"*Tuesday, September 1.*—This day I led to the hymeneal altar my soul's blessing, Louisa Matilda Hopkinson. May this angel supply the place of her I have lost!





"Wednesday, October 5.—O Heavens! pity the distraction of a wretch who is obliged to record the ruin of his dearest hopes and affections! This day my adored Louisa Matilda Hopkinson gave up the ghost! A complaint of the head and shoulders was the sudden cause of the event which has rendered the unhappy subscriber the most miserable of men.

"Bluebeard."

"Every one of the women are calendared in this delightful, this pathetic, this truly virtuous and tender way; and can you suppose that a man who wrote such sentiments could be a murderer, miss?"

"Do you mean to say that he did not kill them, then?" said Anne.

"Gracious goodness, Anne, kill them! they died all as naturally as I hope you will. My blessed husband was an angel of goodness and kindness to them. Was it *his* fault that the doctors could not cure their maladies? No, that it wasn't! and when they died the inconsolable husband had their bodies embalmed in order that on this side of the grave he might never part from them."

"And why did he take you up in the tower, pray? And why did you send me in such a hurry to the leads? and why did he sharpen his long knife, and roar out to you to COME DOWN?"

"Merely to punish me for my curiosity,—the dear, good, kind, excellent creature!" sobbed the widow, overpowered with affectionate recollections of her lord's attentions to her.

"I wish," said Sister Anne, sulkily, "that I had not been in such a hurry in summoning my brothers."

"Ah!" screamed Mrs. Bluebeard, with a harrowing scream, "don't,—don't recall that horrid, fatal day, miss! If you had not misled your brothers, my poor, dear, darling Bluebeard would still be in life, still—still the soul's joy of his bereaved Fatima!"



Whether it is that all wives adore husbands when the latter are no more, or whether it is that Fatima's version of the story is really the correct one, and that the common impression against Bluebeard is an odious prejudice, and that he no more murdered his wives than you and I have, remains yet to be proved, and, indeed, does not much matter for the understanding of the rest of Mrs. B.'s adventures. And though people will say that Bluebeard's settlement of his whole fortune on his wife, in event of survivorship, was a mere act of absurd mystification, seeing that he was fully determined to cut her head off after the honeymoon, yet the best test of his real intentions is the profound grief which the widow manifested for his death, and the fact that he left her mighty well to do in the world.

If any one were to leave you or me a fortune, my dear friend, would we be too anxious to rake up the how and the why? Pooh! pooh! we would take it and make no bones about it, and Mrs. Bluebeard did likewise. Her husband's family, it is true, argued the point with her, and said, "Madam, you must perceive that Mr. Bluebeard never intended the fortune for you, as it was his fixed intention to chop off your head! It is clear that he meant to leave his money to his blood relations, therefore you ought in equity to hand it over." But she sent them all off with a flea in their ears, as the saying is, and said, "Your argument may be a very good one, but I will, if you please, keep the money." And she ordered the mourning as we have before shown, and indulged in grief, and exalted everywhere the character of the deceased. If any one would but leave me a fortune, what a funeral and what a character I would give him!







Bluebeard Hall is situated, as we all very well know, in a remote country district, and, although a fine residence, is remarkably gloomy and lonely. To the widow's susceptible mind, after the death of her darling husband, the place became intolerable. The walk, the lawn, the fountain, the green glades of park over which frisked the dappled deer, all,—all recalled the memory of her beloved. It was but yesterday that, as they roamed through the park in the calm summer evening, her Bluebeard pointed out to the keeper the fat buck he was to kill. "Ah!" said the widow, with tears in her fine eyes, "the artless stag was shot down, the haunch was cut and roasted, the jelly had been prepared from the currant-bushes in the garden that he loved, but my Bluebeard never ate of the venison! Look, Anne sweet, pass we the old oak hall; 'tis hung with trophies won by him in the chase, with pictures of the noble race of Bluebeard! Look! by the fireplace there is the gig-whip, his riding-whip, the spud with which you know he used to dig the weeds out of the terrace-walk; in that drawer are his spurs, his whistle, his visiting-cards, with his dear, dear name engraven upon them! There are the bits of string that he used to cut off the parcels and keep, because string was always useful; his button-hook, and there is the peg on which he used to hang his h—h—*hat!*"

Uncontrollable emotions, bursts of passionate tears, would follow these tender reminiscences of the widow; and the long and short of the matter was, that she was determined to give up Bluebeard Hall and live elsewhere; her love for the memory of the deceased, she said, rendered the place too wretched.



Of course, an envious and sneering world said that she was tired of the country, and wanted to marry again; but she little heeded its taunts; and Anne, who hated her step-mother and could not live at home, was fain to accompany her sister to the town where the Bluebeards have had for many years a very large, genteel, old-fashioned house. So she went to the town-house, where they lived and quarrelled pretty much as usual; and though Anne often threatened to leave her, and go to a boarding-house, of which there were plenty in the place, yet, after all, to live with her sister, and drive out in the carriage with the footman and coachman in mourning, and the lozenge on the panels, with the Bluebeard and Shacabac arms quartered on it, was far more respectable, and so the lovely sisters continued to dwell together.

For a lady under Mrs. Bluebeard's circumstances, the town-house has other and peculiar advantages. Besides being an exceedingly spacious and dismal brick building, with a dismal iron railing in front, and long, dismal, thin windows, with little panes of glass, it looked out into the churchyard, where, time out of mind, between two yew-trees, one of which is cut into the form of a peacock, while the other represents a dumb-waiter, it looked into the churchyard where the monument of the late Bluebeard was placed over the family vault. It was the first thing the widow saw from her bedroom window in the morning, and 'twas sweet to watch at night, from the parlour, the pallid moonlight lighting up the bust of the departed, and Virtue throwing great black shadows athwart it. Polyanthus, rhododendra, ranunculuses, and other flowers, with the largest names and of the most delightful odours, were planted within the little iron railing that enclosed the last resting-place of the Bluebeards; and the beadle was instructed to half kill any little boys who might be caught plucking these sweet testimonials of a wife's affection.







Over the sideboard in the dining-room hung a full-length of Mr. Bluebeard, by Ticklegill, R. A., in a militia uniform, frowning down upon the knives and forks and silver trays. Over the mantel-piece he was represented in a hunting costume, on his favourite horse; there was a sticking-plaster silhouette of him in the widow's bedroom, and a miniature in the drawing-room, where he was drawn in a gown of black and gold, holding a gold-tasselled trencher cap with one hand, and with the other pointing to a diagram of Pons Asinorum. This likeness was taken when he was a fellow-commoner at St. John's College, Cambridge, and before the growth of that blue beard which was the ornament of his manhood, and a part of which now formed a beautiful blue neck-chain for his bereaved wife.

Sister Anne said the town-house was even more dismal than the country-house, for there was pure air at the Hall, and it was pleasanter to look out on a park than on a churchyard, however fine the monuments might be. But the widow said she was a light-minded hussy, and persisted as usual in her lamentations and mourning. The only male whom she would admit within her doors was the parson of the parish, who read sermons to her; and, as his reverence was at least seventy years old, Anne, though she might be ever so much minded to fall in love, had no opportunity to indulge her inclination; and the town-people, scandalous as they might be, could not find a word to say against the *liaison* of the venerable man and the heart-stricken widow.



All other company she resolutely refused. When the players were in the town, the poor manager, who came to beg her to bespeak a comedy, was thrust out of the gates by the big butler. Though there were balls, card-parties, and assemblies, Widow Bluebeard would never subscribe to one of them; and even the officers, those all-conquering heroes who make such ravages in ladies' hearts, and to whom all ladies' doors are commonly open, could never get an entry into the widow's house. Captain Whiskerfield strutted for three weeks up and down before her house, and had not the least effect upon her. Captain O'Grady (of an Irish regiment) attempted to bribe the servants, and one night actually scaled the garden wall; but all that he got was his foot in a man-trap, not to mention being dreadfully scarified by the broken glass; and so *he* never made love any more. Finally, Captain Blackbeard, whose whiskers vied in magnitude with those of the deceased Bluebeard himself, although he attended church regularly every week, —he who had not darkened the doors of a church for ten years before,—even Captain Blackbeard got nothing by his piety; and the widow never once took her eyes off her book to look at him. The barracks were in despair; and Captain Whiskerfield's tailor, who had supplied him with new clothes in order to win the widow's heart, ended by clapping the captain into jail.

His reverence the parson highly applauded the widow's conduct to the officers; but, being himself rather of a social turn, and fond of a good dinner and a bottle, he represented to the lovely mourner that she should endeavour to divert her grief by a little respectable society, and recommended that she should from time to time entertain a few grave and sober persons whom he would present to her. As Dr. Sly had an unbounded influence over the fair mourner, she acceded to his desires; and accordingly he introduced to her house some of the most venerable and worthy of his acquaintance,—all married people, however, so that the widow should not take the least alarm.















It happened that the doctor had a nephew, who was a lawyer in London, and this gentleman came dutifully in the long vacation to pay a visit to his reverend uncle. "He is none of your roystering, dashing young fellows," said his reverence; "he is the delight of his mamma and sisters; he never drinks anything stronger than tea; he never missed church thrice a Sunday for these twenty years; and I hope, my dear and amiable madam, that you will not object to receive this pattern of young men for the sake of your most devoted friend, his uncle."

The widow consented to receive Mr. Sly. He was not a handsome man, certainly. "But what does that matter?" said the doctor. "He is *good*, and virtue is better than all the beauty of all the dragoons in the Queen's service."

Mr. Sly came there to dinner, and he came to tea; and he drove out with the widow in the carriage with the lozenge on it; and at church he handed the psalm-book; and, in short, he paid her every attention which could be expected from so polite a young gentleman.

At this the town began to talk, as people in towns will. "The doctor kept all bachelors out of the widow's house," said they, "in order that that ugly nephew of his may have the field entirely to himself." These speeches were of course heard by Sister Anne, and the little minx was not a little glad to take advantage of them, in order to induce her sister to see some more cheerful company. The fact is, the young hussy loved a dance or a game at cards much more than a humdrum conversation over a tea-table; and so she plied her sister day and night with hints as to the propriety of opening her house, receiving the gentry of the county, and spending her fortune.



To this point the widow at length, though with many sighs and vast unwillingness, acceded; and she went so far as to order a very becoming half-mourning, in which all the world declared she looked charming. "I carry," said she, "my blessed Bluebeard in my heart,—*that* is in the deepest mourning for him, and when the heart grieves, there is no need of outward show."

So she issued cards for a little quiet tea and supper, and several of the best families in the town and neighbourhood attended her entertainment. It was followed by another and another; and at last Captain Blackbeard was actually introduced, though, of course, he came in plain clothes.

Dr. Sly and his nephew never could abide the captain. "They had heard some queer stories," they said, "about proceedings in barracks. Who was it that drank three bottles at a sitting? who had a mare that ran for the plate? and why was it that Dolly Coddlin left the town so suddenly?" Mr. Sly turned up the whites of his eyes as his uncle asked these questions, and sighed for the wickedness of the world. But for all that he was delighted, especially at the anger which the widow manifested when the Dolly Coddlin affair was hinted at. She was furious, and vowed she would never see the wretch again. The lawyer and his uncle were charmed. O short-sighted lawyer and parson, do you think Mrs. Bluebeard would have been so angry if she had not been jealous?—do you think she would have been jealous if she had not ... had not what? She protested that she no more cared for the captain than she did for one of her footmen; but the next time he called she would not condescend to say a word to him.

"My dearest Miss Anne," said the captain, as he met her in Sir Roger de Coverley (she herself was dancing with Ensign Trippet), "what is the matter with your lovely sister?"







"Dolly Coddlin is the matter," said Miss Anne. "Mr. Sly has told all." And she was down the middle in a twinkling.

The captain blushed so at this monstrous insinuation, that any one could see how incorrect it was. He made innumerable blunders in the dance, and was all the time casting such ferocious glances at Mr. Sly (who did not dance, but sat by the widow and ate ices), that his partner thought he was mad, and that Mr. Sly became very uneasy.

When the dance was over, he came to pay his respects to the widow, and, in so doing, somehow trod so violently on Mr. Sly's foot, that that gentleman screamed with pain, and presently went home. But though he was gone, the widow was not a whit more gracious to Captain Blackbeard. She requested Mr. Trippet to order her carriage that night, and went home without uttering one single word to Captain Blackbeard.

The next morning, and with a face of preternatural longitude, the Rev. Dr. Sly paid a visit to the widow. "The wickedness and bloodthirstiness of the world," said he, "increase every day. O my dear madam, what monsters do we meet in it,—what wretches, what assassins, are allowed to go abroad! Would you believe it, that this morning, as my nephew was taking his peaceful morning-meal, one of the ruffians from the barracks presented himself with a challenge from Captain Blackbeard?"

"Is he hurt?" screamed the widow.

"No, my dear friend, my dear Frederick is not hurt. And O, what a joy it will be to him to think you have that tender solicitude for his welfare!"



"You know I have always had the highest respect for him," said the widow; who, when she screamed, was in truth thinking of somebody else. But the doctor did not choose to interpret her thoughts in that way, and gave all the benefit of them to his nephew.

"That anxiety, dearest madam, which you express for him emboldens me, encourages me, authorises me, to press a point upon you which I am sure must have entered your thoughts ere now. The dear youth in whom you have shown such an interest lives but for you! Yes, fair lady, start not at hearing that his sole affections are yours; and with what pride shall I carry to him back the news that he is not indifferent to you!"

"Are they going to fight?" continued the lady, in a breathless state of alarm. "For Heaven's

sake, dearest doctor, prevent the horrid, horrid meeting. Send for a magistrate's warrant; do anything; but do not suffer those misguided young men to cut each other's throats!"

"Fairest lady, I fly!" said the doctor, and went back to lunch quite delighted with the evident partiality Mrs. Bluebeard showed for his nephew. And Mrs. Bluebeard, not content with exhorting him to prevent the duel, rushed to Mr. Pound, the magistrate, informed him of the facts, got out warrants against both Mr. Sly and the captain, and would have put them into execution; but it was discovered that the former gentleman had abruptly left town, so that the constable could not lay hold of him.





It somehow, however, came to be generally known that the widow Bluebeard had declared herself in favour of Mr. Sly, the lawyer; that she had fainted when told her lover was about to fight a duel; finally, that she had accepted him, and would marry him as soon as the quarrel between him and the captain was settled. Dr. Sly, when applied to, hummed and ha'd, and would give no direct answer; but he denied nothing, and looked so knowing, that all the world was certain of the fact; and the county paper next week stated:—

"We understand that the lovely and wealthy Mrs. Bl—b—rd is about once more to enter the bands of wedlock with our distinguished townsman, Frederick S—y, Esq., of the Middle Temple, London. The learned gentleman left town in consequence of a dispute with a gallant son of Mars, which was likely to have led to warlike results, had not a magistrate's warrant intervened, when the captain was bound over to keep the peace."

In fact, as soon as the captain was so bound over, Mr. Sly came back, stating that he had quitted the town not to avoid a duel,—far from it, but to keep out of the way of the magistrates, and give the captain every facility. *He* had taken out no warrant; *he* had been perfectly ready to meet the captain; if others had been more prudent, it was not his fault. So he held up his head, and cocked his hat with the most determined air; and all the lawyers' clerks in the place were quite proud of their hero.

As for Captain Blackbeard, his rage and indignation may be imagined; a wife robbed from him, his honour put in question by an odious, lanky, squinting lawyer! He fell ill of a fever incontinently; and the surgeon was obliged to take a quantity of blood from him, ten times the amount of which he swore he would have out of the veins of the atrocious Sly.

The announcement in "The Mercury," however, filled the widow with almost equal indignation. "The widow of the gallant Bluebeard," she said, "marry an odious wretch who lives in dingy chambers in the Middle Temple! Send for Dr. Sly." The doctor came; she rated him soundly, asked him how he dared set abroad such calumnies concerning her;

ordered him to send his nephew back to London at once; and as he valued her esteem, as he valued the next presentation to a fat living which lay in her gift, to contradict everywhere, and in the fullest terms, the wicked report concerning her.

"My dearest madam," said the doctor, pulling his longest face, "you shall be obeyed. The poor lad shall be acquainted with the fatal change in your sentiments!"

"Change in my sentiments, Dr. Sly!"

"With the destruction of his hopes, rather let me say; and Heaven grant that the dear boy have strength to bear up against the misfortune which comes so suddenly upon him!"

The next day Sister Anne came with a face full of care to Mrs. Bluebeard. "O, that unhappy lover of yours!" said she.

"Is the captain unwell?" exclaimed the widow.





"No, it is the other," answered Sister Anne. "Poor, poor Mr. Sly! He made a will leaving you all, except five pounds a year to his laundress: he made his will, locked his door, took heart-rending leave of his uncle at night, and this morning was found hanging at his bedpost when Sam, the black servant, took him up his water to shave. 'Let me be buried,' he said, 'with the pincushion she gave me and the locket containing her hair.' *Did you give him a pincushion, sister? did you give him a locket with your hair?*"

"It was only silver-gilt!" sobbed the widow; "and now, O Heavens! I have killed him!" The heart-rending nature of her sobs may be imagined; but they were abruptly interrupted by her sister.

"Killed him?—no such thing! Sam cut him down when he was as black in the face as the honest negro himself. He came down to breakfast, and I leave you to fancy what a touching meeting took place between the nephew and the uncle."

"So much love!" thought the widow. "What a pity he squints so! If he would but get his eyes put straight, I might perhaps—" She did not finish the sentence: ladies often leave this sort of sentence in a sweet confusion.

But hearing some news regarding Captain Blackbeard, whose illness and blood-letting were described to her most pathetically, as well as accurately, by the Scotch surgeon of the regiment, her feelings of compassion towards the lawyer cooled somewhat; and when Dr. Sly called to know if she would condescend to meet the unhappy youth, she said in rather a *distrain* manner, that she wished him every happiness; that she had the highest regard and respect for him; that she besought him not to think any more of committing the dreadful crime which would have made her unhappy forever; *but* that she thought, for the sake of both parties, they had better not meet until Mr. Sly's feelings had grown somewhat more calm.







"Poor fellow! poor fellow!" said the doctor, "may he be enabled to bear his frightful calamity! I have taken away his razors from him, and Sam, my man, never lets him out of his sight."

The next day, Mrs. Bluebeard thought of sending a friendly message to Dr. Sly's, asking for news of the health of his nephew; but, as she was giving her orders on that subject to John Thomas the footman, it happened that the captain arrived, and so Thomas was sent down stairs again. And the captain looked so delightfully interesting with his arm in a sling, and his beautiful black whiskers curling round a face which was paler than usual, that, at the end of two hours, the widow forgot the message altogether, and, indeed, I believe, asked the captain whether he would not stop and dine. Ensign Trippet came, too, and the party was very pleasant; and the military gentlemen laughed hugely at the idea of the lawyer having been cut off the bedpost by the servant, and were so witty on the subject, that the widow ended by half believing that the bedpost and hanging scheme on the part of Mr. Sly was only a feint,—a trick to win her heart. Though this, to be sure, was not agreed to by the lady without a pang, for, *entre nous*, to hang one's self for a lady is no small compliment to her attractions, and, perhaps, Mrs. Bluebeard was rather disappointed at the notion that the hanging was not a *bona fide* strangulation.

However, presently her nerves were excited again; and she was consoled or horrified, as the case may be (the reader must settle the point according to his ideas and knowledge of womankind),—she was at any rate dreadfully excited by the receipt of a billet in the well-known clerk-like hand of Mr. Sly. It ran thus:—

"I saw you through your dining-room windows. You were hob-nobbing with Captain Blackbeard. You looked rosy and well. You smiled. You drank off the champagne at a single draught.



"I can bear it no more. Live on, smile on, and be happy. My ghost shall repine, perhaps, at your happiness with another,—but in life I should go mad were I to witness it.

"It is best that I should be gone.

"When you receive this, tell my uncle to drag the fish-pond at the end of Bachelor's Acre. His black servant Sam accompanies me, it is true. But Sam shall perish with me should his obstinacy venture to restrain me from my purpose. I know the poor fellow's honesty well, but I also know my own despair.

"Sam will leave a wife and seven children. Be kind to those orphan mulattoes for the sake of

"Frederick."

The widow gave a dreadful shriek, and interrupted the two captains, who were each just in the act of swallowing a bumper of claret. "Fly—fly—save him," she screamed; "save him, monsters, ere it is too late! Drowned!—Frederick!—Bachelor's Wa—" Syncope took place, and the rest of the sentence was interrupted.

Deucedly disappointed at being obliged to give up their wine, the two heroes seized their cocked hats, and went towards the spot which the widow in her wild exclamations of despair had sufficiently designated.

Trippet was for running to the fish-pond at the rate of ten miles an hour.

"Take it easy, my good fellow," said Captain Blackbeard; "running is unwholesome after dinner. And, if that squinting scoundrel of a lawyer *does* drown himself, I shan't sleep any the worse." So the two gentlemen walked very leisurely on towards the Bachelor's Walk; and, indeed, seeing on their way thither Major Macabaw looking out of the window at his quarters and smoking a cigar, they went up stairs to consult the major, as also a bottle of Schiedam he had.





"They come not!" said the widow, when restored to herself. "O Heavens! grant that Frederick is safe! Sister Anne, go up to the leads and look if anybody is coming." And up, accordingly, to the garrets Sister Anne mounted. "Do you see anybody coming, Sister Anne?"

"I see Dr. Drench's little boy," said Sister Anne; "he is leaving a pill and draught at Miss Molly Grub's."

"Dearest Sister Anne, don't you see any one coming?" shouted the widow once again.

"I see a flock of dust—no! a cloud of sheep. Pshaw! I see the London coach coming in. There are three outsides, and the guard has flung a parcel to Mrs. Jenkins's maid."

"Distraction! Look once more, Sister Anne."

"I see a crowd,—a shutter,—a shutter with a man on it,—a beadle,—forty little boys,—Gracious goodness! what *can* it be?" and down stairs tumbled Sister Anne, and was looking out of the parlour-window by her sister's side, when the crowd she had perceived from the garret passed close by them.

At the head walked the beadle, slashing about at the little boys.

Two scores of these followed and surrounded

A SHUTTER carried by four men.

On the shutter lay *Frederick*! He was ghastly pale; his hair was draggled over his face; his clothes stuck tight to him on account of the wet; streams of water gurgled down the shutter-sides. But he was not dead! He turned one eye round towards the window where Mrs. Bluebeard sat, and gave her a look which she never could forget.

Sam brought up the rear of the procession. He was quite wet through; and, if anything would have put his hair out of curl, his ducking would have done so. But, as he was not a gentleman, he was allowed to walk home on foot, and, as he passed the widow's window, he gave her one dreadful glance with his goggling black eyes, and moved on, pointing with his hands to the shutter.



John Thomas the footman was instantly despatched to Dr. Sly's to have news of the patient. There was no shilly-shallying now. He came back in half an hour to say that Mr. Frederick flung himself into Bachelor's Acre fish-pond with Sam, had been dragged out with difficulty, had been put to bed, and had a pint of white wine whey, and was pretty comfortable. "Thank Heaven!" said the widow, and gave John Thomas a seven-shilling piece, and sat down with a lightened heart to tea. "What a heart!" said she to Sister Anne. "And O, what a pity it is that he squints!"

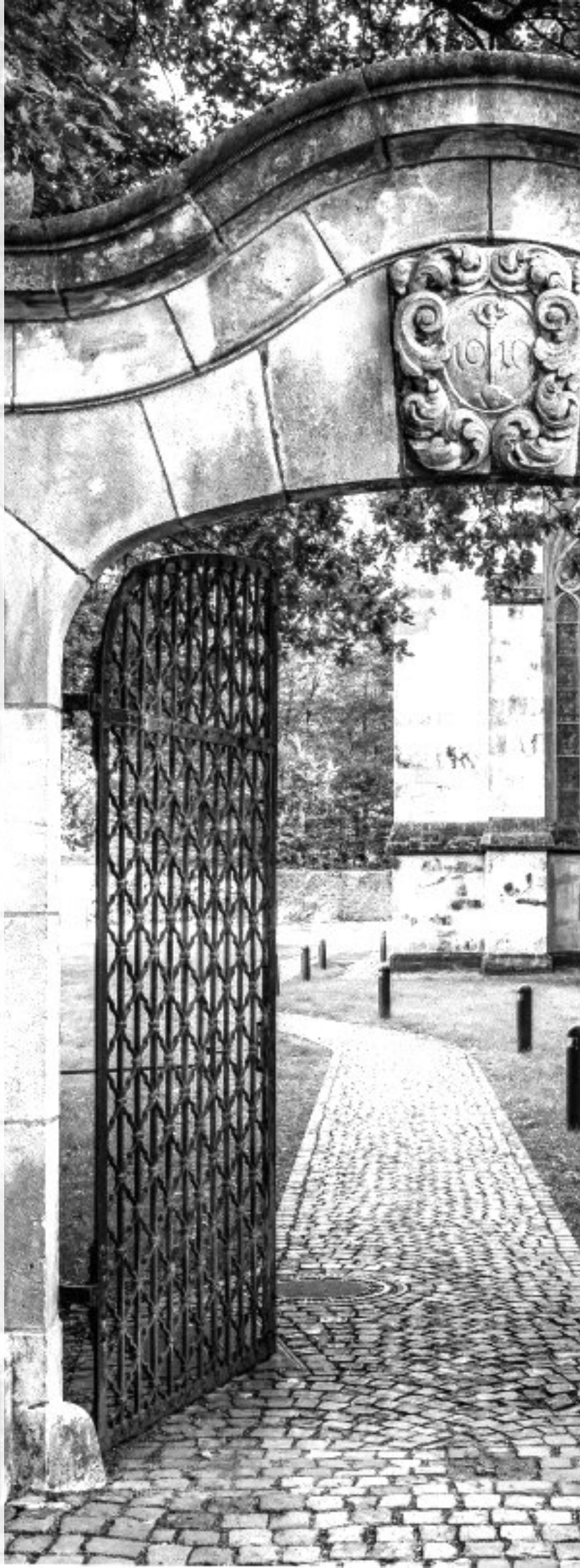
Here the two captains arrived. They had not been to the Bachelor's Walk; they had remained at Major Macabaw's consulting the Schiedam. They had made up their minds what to say. "Hang the fellow! he will never have the pluck to drown himself," said Captain Blackbeard. "Let us argue on that, as we may safely."

"My sweet lady," said he, accordingly, "we have had the pond dragged. No Mr. Sly. And the fisherman who keeps the punt assures us that he has not been there all day."

"Audacious falsehood!" said the widow, her eyes flashing fire. "Go, heartless man! who dares to trifle thus with the feelings of a respectable and unprotected woman. Go, sir, you're only fit for the love of a—Dolly—Coddilins!" She pronounced the *Coddilins* with a withering sarcasm that struck the captain aghast; and, sailing out of the room, she left her tea untasted, and did not wish either of the military gentlemen good night.

But, gentles, an' ye know the delicate fibre of woman's heart, ye will not in very sooth believe that such events as those we have described—such tempests of passion—fierce winds of woe—blinding lightnings of tremendous joy and tremendous grief—could pass over one frail flower and leave it all unscathed. No! Grief kills as joy doth. Doth not the scorching sun nip the rose-bud as well as the bitter wind? As Mrs. Sigourney sweetly sings:—

"Ah! the heart is a soft and a delicate thing;





Ah! the heart is a lute with a thrilling string;

A spirit that floats on a gossamer's wing!"

Such was Fatima's heart. In a word, the preceding events had a powerful effect upon her nervous system, and she was ordered much quiet and sal-volatile by her skilful medical attendant, Dr. Glauber.

To be so ardently, passionately loved as she was, to know that Frederick had twice plunged into death from attachment to her, was to awaken in her bosom "a thrilling string," indeed! Could she witness such attachment and not be touched by it? She *was* touched by it,—she was influenced by the virtues, by the passion, by the misfortunes, of Frederick: but then he was so abominably ugly that she could not—she could not consent to become his bride!

She told Dr. Sly so. "I respect and esteem your nephew," said she; "but my resolve is made. I will continue faithful to that blessed saint whose monument is ever before my eyes" (she pointed to the churchyard as she spoke). "Leave this poor tortured heart in quiet. It has already suffered more than most hearts could bear. I will repose under the shadow of that tomb until I am called to rest within it,—to rest by the side of my Bluebeard!"

The ranunculuses, rhododendra, and polyanthuses, which ornamented that mausoleum, had somehow been suffered to run greatly to seed during the last few months, and it was with no slight self-accusation that she acknowledged this fact on visiting "the garden of the grave," as she called it; and she scolded the beadle soundly for neglecting his duty towards it. He promised obedience for the future, dug out all the weeds that were creeping round the family vault, and (having charge of the key) entered that awful place, and swept and dusted the melancholy contents of the tomb.

Next morning, the widow came down to breakfast looking very pale. She had passed a bad night; she had had awful dreams; she had heard a voice call her thrice at midnight. "Pooh! my dear, it's only nervousness," said sceptical Sister Anne.



Here John Thomas, the footman, entered, and said the beadle was in the hall, looking in a very strange way. He had been about the house since daybreak, and insisted on seeing Mrs. Bluebeard. "Let him enter," said that lady, prepared for some great mystery. The beadle came; he was pale as death; his hair was dishevelled, and his cocked hat out of order. "What have you to say?" said the lady, trembling.

Before beginning, he fell down on his knees.

"Yesterday," said he, "according to your ladyship's orders, I dug up the flower-beds of the family vault, dusted the vault and the—the coffins (added he, trembling) inside. Me and John Sexton did it together, and polished up the plate quite beautiful."

"For Heaven's sake, don't allude to it," cried the widow, turning pale.

"Well, my lady, I locked the door, came away, and found in my hurry—for I wanted to beat two little boys what was playing at marbles on Alderman Paunch's monyment—I found, my lady, I'd forgot my cane.

"I couldn't get John Sexton to go back with me till this morning, and I didn't like to go alone, and so we went this morning; and what do you think I found? I found his honour's coffin turned round, and the cane broke in two. Here's the cane!"

"Ah!" screamed the widow, "take it away,—take it away!"

"Well, what does this prove," said Sister Anne, "but that somebody moved the coffin, and broke the cane?"

"Somebody! *who's somebody?*" said the beadle, staring round about him. And all of a sudden he started back with a tremendous roar, that made the ladies scream and all the glasses on the sideboard jingle, and cried, "*That's the man!*"

He pointed to the portrait of Bluebeard, which stood over the jingling glasses on the sideboard. "That's the man I saw last night walking round the vault, as I'm a living sinner. I saw him a-walking round and round, and, when I went up to speak to him, I'm blessed if he didn't go in at the iron gate, which opened afore him like—like winking, and then in at the vault door, which I'd double-locked, my lady, and bolted inside, I'll take my oath on it!"





"Perhaps you had given him the key?" suggested Sister Anne.

"It's never been out of my pocket. Here it is," cried the beadle; "I'll have no more to do with it." And he flung down the ponderous key, amidst another scream from Widow Bluebeard.

"At what hour did you see him?" gasped she.

"At twelve o'clock, of course."

"It must have been at that very hour," said she, "I heard the voice."

"What voice?" said Anne.

"A voice that called, 'Fatima! Fatima! Fatima!' three times, as plain as ever voice did."

"It didn't speak to me," said the beadle; "it only nodded its head, and wagged its head and beard."

"W—w—was it a *bl—ue beard*?" said the widow.

"Powder-blue, ma'am, as I've a soul to save!"

Dr. Drench was of course instantly sent for. But what are the medicaments of the apothecary in a case where the grave gives up its dead? Dr. Sly arrived, and he offered ghostly—ah! too ghostly—consolation. He said he believed in them. His own grandmother had appeared to his grandfather several times before he married again. He could not doubt that supernatural agencies were possible, even frequent.

"Suppose he were to appear to me alone," ejaculated the widow, "I should die of fright."

The doctor looked particularly arch. "The best way in these cases, my dear madam," said he, "the best way for unprotected ladies is to get a husband. I never heard of a first husband's ghost appearing to a woman and her second husband in my life. In all history there is no account of one."

"Ah! why should I be afraid of seeing my Bluebeard again?" said the widow; and the doctor retired quite pleased, for the lady was evidently thinking of a second husband.



"The captain would be a better protector for me certainly than Mr. Sly," thought the lady, with a sigh; "but Mr. Sly will certainly kill himself, and will the captain be a match for two ghosts? Sly will kill himself; but ah! the captain won't." And the widow thought with pangs of bitter mortification of Dolly Coddlin. How—how should these distracting circumstances be brought to an end?

She retired to rest that night not without a tremor,—to bed, but not to sleep. At midnight a voice was heard in her room, crying, "Fatima! Fatima! Fatima!" in awful accents. The doors banged to and fro, the bells began to ring, the maids went up and down stairs scurrying and screaming, and gave warning in a body. John Thomas, as pale as death, declared that he found Bluebeard's yeomanry sword, that hung in the hall, drawn, and on the ground; and the sticking-plaster miniature in Mr. Bluebeard's bedroom was found turned topsy-turvy!

"It is some trick," said the obstinate and incredulous Sister Anne. "To-night I will come and sleep with you, sister." And the night came, and the two sisters retired together.

'Twas a wild night. The wind howling without went crashing through the old trees of the old rookery round about the old church. The long bedroom windows went thump thumping; the moon could be seen through them lighting up the graves with their ghastly shadows; the yew-tree, cut into the shape of a bird, looked particularly dreadful, and bent and swayed as if it would peck something off that other yew-tree which was of the shape of a dumb-waiter. The bells at midnight began to ring as usual, the doors clapped, jingle—jingle down came a suit of armour in the hall, and a voice came and cried, "Fatima! Fatima! Fatima! look, look, look; the tomb, the tomb, the tomb!"

She looked. The vault door was open, and there in the moonlight stood Bluebeard, exactly as he was represented in the picture, in his yeomanry dress, his face frightfully pale, and his great blue beard curling over his chest, as awful as Mr. Muntz's.







Sister Anne saw the vision as well as Fatima. We shall spare the account of their terrors and screams. Strange to say, John Thomas, who slept in the attic above his mistress's bedroom, declared he was on the watch all night, and had seen nothing in the churchyard, and heard no sort of voices in the house.

And now the question came, What could the ghost want by appearing? "Is there anything," exclaimed the unhappy and perplexed Fatima, "that he would have me do? It is well to say 'now, now, now,' and to show himself; but what is it that makes my blessed husband so uneasy in his grave?" And all parties consulted agreed that it was a very sensible question.

John Thomas, the footman, whose excessive terror at the appearance of the ghost had procured him his mistress's confidence, advised Mr. Screw, the butler, who communicated with Mrs. Baggs, the housekeeper, who condescended to impart her observations to Mrs. Bustle, the lady's-maid,—John Thomas, I say, decidedly advised that my lady should consult a cunning man. There was such a man in town; he had prophesied who should marry his (John Thomas's) cousin; he had cured Farmer Horn's cattle, which were evidently bewitched; he could raise ghosts, and make them speak, and he therefore was the very person to be consulted in the present juncture.

"What nonsense is this you have been talking to the maids, John Thomas, about the conjurer who lives in—in—"

"In Hangman's Lane, ma'am, where the gibbet used to stand," replied John, who was bringing in the muffins. "It's no nonsense, my lady. Every word as that man says comes true, and he knows everything."

"I desire you will not frighten the girls in the servants' hall with any of those silly stories," said the widow; and the meaning of this speech may, of course, at once be guessed. It was that the widow meant to consult the conjurer that very night. Sister Anne said that she would never, under such circumstances, desert her dear Fatima. John Thomas was summoned to attend the ladies with a dark lantern, and forth they set on their perilous visit to the conjurer at his dreadful abode in Hangman's Lane.



What took place at that frightful interview has never been entirely known. But there was no disturbance in the house on the night after. The bells slept quite quietly, the doors did not bang in the least, twelve o'clock struck, and no ghost appeared in the churchyard, and the whole family had a quiet night. The widow attributed this to a sprig of rosemary which the wizard gave her, and a horseshoe which she flung into the garden round the family vault, and which would keep *any* ghost quiet.

It happened the next day, that, going to her milliner's, Sister Anne met a gentleman who has been before mentioned in this story, Ensign Trippet by name; and, indeed, if the truth must be known, it somehow happened that she met the ensign somewhere every day of the week.

"What news of the ghost, my dearest Miss Shacabac?" said he (you may guess on what terms the two young people were by the manner in which Mr. Trippet addressed the lady); "has Bluebeard's ghost frightened your sister into any more fits, or set the bells a-ringing?"

Sister Anne, with a very grave air, told him that he must not joke on so awful a subject, that the ghost had been laid for a while, that a cunning man had told her sister things so wonderful that *any* man must believe in them; that among other things, he had shown to Fatima her future husband.

"Had," said the ensign, "he black whiskers and a red coat?"

"No," answered Anne, with a sigh, "he had red whiskers and a black coat."

"It can't be that rascal Sly!" cried the ensign. But Anne only sighed more deeply and would not answer yes or no. "You may tell the poor captain," she said, "there is no hope for him, and all he has left is to hang himself."

"He shall cut the throat of Sly first, though," replied Mr. Trippet, fiercely. But Anne said things were not decided as yet. Fatima was exceedingly restive, and unwilling to acquiesce in the idea of being married to Mr. Sly; she had asked for further authority. The wizard said he could bring her own husband from the grave to point out her second bridegroom, who shall be, can be, must be, no other than Frederick Sly





"It is a trick," said the ensign; but Anne was too much frightened by the preceding evening's occurrences to say so. "To-night," she said, "the grave will tell all." And she left Ensign Trippet in a very solemn and affecting way.

At midnight, three figures were seen to issue from Widow Bluebeard's house, and pass through the churchyard turnstile, and so away among the graves.

"To call up a ghost is bad enough," said the wizard; "to make him speak is awful. I recommend you, ma'am, to beware, for such curiosity has been fatal to many. There was one Arabian necromancer of my acquaintance who tried to make a ghost speak, and was torn in pieces on the spot. There was another person who *did* hear a ghost speak certainly, but came away from the interview deaf and dumb. There was another—"

"Never mind," says Mrs. Bluebeard, all her old curiosity aroused, "see him and hear him I will. Haven't I seen him and heard him, too, already? When he's audible *and* visible, *then's* the time."

"But when you heard him," said the necromancer, "he was invisible, and when you saw him he was inaudible; so make up your mind what you will ask him, for ghosts will stand no shilly-shallying. I knew a stuttering man who was flung down by a ghost, and—"

"I *have* made up my mind," said Fatima, interrupting him.

"To ask him what husband you shall take," whispered Anne.

Fatima only turned red, and Sister Anne squeezed her hand; they passed into the graveyard in silence.

There was no moon; the night was pitch dark. They threaded their way through the graves, stumbling over them here and there. An owl was toowhooing from the church tower, a dog was howling somewhere, a cock began to crow, as they will sometimes at twelve o'clock at night.







"Make haste," said the wizard. "Decide whether you will go on or not."

"Let us go back, sister," said Anne.

"I *will* go on," said Fatima. "I should die if I gave it up, I feel I should."

"Here's the gate; kneel down," said the wizard. The women knelt down.

"Will you see your first husband or your second husband?"

"I will see Bluebeard first," said the widow; "I shall know then whether this be a mockery, or you have the power you pretend to."

At this the wizard uttered an incantation, so frightful, and of such incomprehensible words, that it is impossible for any mortal man to repeat them. And at the end of what seemed to be a versicle of his chant he called Bluebeard. There was no noise but the moaning of the wind in the trees, and the toowhooing of the owl in the tower.

At the end of the second verse he paused again, and called *Bluebeard*. The cock began to crow, the dog began to howl, a watchman in the town began to cry out the hour, and there came from the vault within a hollow groan, and a dreadful voice said, "Who wants me?"

Kneeling in front of the tomb, the necromancer began the third verse. As he spoke, the former phenomena were still to be remarked. As he continued, a number of ghosts rose from their graves, and advanced round the kneeling figures in a circle. As he concluded, with a loud bang the door of the vault flew open, and there in blue light stood Bluebeard in his blue uniform, waving his blue sword, and flashing his blue eyes round about!

"Speak now, or you are lost," said the necromancer, to Fatima. But, for the first time in her life, she had not a word to say. Sister Anne, too, was dumb with terror. And, as the awful figure advanced towards them as they were kneeling, the sister thought all was over with them, and Fatima once more had occasion to repent her fatal curiosity.

The figure advanced, saying, in dreadful accents, "Fatima! Fatima! Fatima! wherefore am I called from my grave?" when all of a sudden down dropped his sword, down the ghost of Bluebeard went on his knees, and, clasping his hands together, roared out, "Murder, mercy!" as loud as man could roar.





*Six other ghosts* stood round the kneeling group. "Why do you call me from the tomb?" said the first; "Who dares disturb my grave?" said the second; "Seize him and away with him!" cried the third. "Murder, mercy!" still roared the ghost of Bluebeard, as the white-robed spirits advanced and caught hold of him.

"It's only Tom Trippet," said a voice at Anne's ear.

"And your very humble servant," said a voice well known to Mrs. Bluebeard; and they helped the ladies to rise, while the other ghosts seized Bluebeard. The necromancer took to his heels and got off; he was found to be no other than Mr. Claptrap, the manager of the theatre.

It was some time before the ghost of Bluebeard could recover from the fainting-fit into which he had been plunged when seized by the opposition ghosts in white; and while they were ducking him at the pump his blue beard came off, and he was discovered to be—who do you think? Why, Mr. Sly, to be sure; and it appears that John Thomas, the footman, had lent him the uniform, and had clapped the doors, and rung the bells, and spoken down the chimney; and it was Mr. Claptrap who gave Mr. Sly the blue fire and the theatre gong; and he went to London next morning by the coach; and, as it was discovered that the story concerning Miss Coddlin was a shameful calumny, why, of course, the widow married Captain Blackbeard. Dr. Sly

married them, and has always declared that he knew nothing of his nephew's doings, and wondered that he has not tried to commit suicide since his last disappointment.

Mr. and Mrs. Trippet are likewise living happily together, and this, I am given to understand, is the ultimate fate of a family in whom we were all very much interested in early life.

You will say that the story is not probable. Pshaw! Isn't it written in a book? and is it a whit less probable than the first part of the tale?

**Subscribe now to the**  
**Inner Circle Writers'**  
**Magazine so that you**  
**don't miss out on a**  
**monthly Master Author**  
**Showcase!**  
**And stay tuned to the**  
**2024 Advent**  
**Extravaganza to**  
**download your next**  
**story for FREE!**

# CLARENDON HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

© 2024 by Grant P. Hudson.  
Clarendon House Publications,  
76 Coal Pit Lane, Sheffield, South Yorkshire,  
United Kingdom S36 1AW  
[www.clarendonhousebooks.com](http://www.clarendonhousebooks.com)  
Email: [grant@clarendonhousebooks.com](mailto:grant@clarendonhousebooks.com)