

Prisoner of the Sierra Madre **BEGINS IN  
THIS ISSUE**

THE  
**ARGOSY**  
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*A Fact That Counts.*

*The Argosy is growing faster in circulation unaided by circulation schemes than any other magazine in America. Its growth rests solely on its merits. It is bolstered up by no clubbing offers or "inducements" of any kind whatever.*

*Frank A. Munsey.*

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left hand, and put the muzzle of the revolver to his head with the other.

"Stand still—or I fire!" I said. "It's not a toy; I mean business."

He staggered from me, dazed with surprise, then an ugly light came into his eyes.

"Would you?" he cried. "Is that your game?"

Before I could fire, he wrenched his arm free and sprang upon me.

He was a big, muscular fellow, and I had no chance against him that way, so I dropped the hammer. The shot took effect, but not fatally, I found afterwards—the sudden twist saved him. My next shot flew wide as we grappled, stumbled, and fell.

His strength, in that last brief struggle, was enormous. I felt that my ribs must soon be crushed in his grip, and red spots came before my eyes. And the iron steed went roaring on.

I made a last effort and came uppermost. He recovered himself, but in seizing me again, fell with his head full against the frame of the tender.

I took advantage of the stunning blow, shook him off, and rose to my feet. He endeavored to follow me, but his foot slipped, he reeled towards the step, made a vain attempt to grasp something, and fell from the engine.

The next few minutes I scarcely remember. I know that I pulled back the lever, blew off more steam, and put on the brakes with all my force. Then everything seemed to grow dark.

There is not much more to tell you, and I am glad. The horror of it all comes back to me too strongly, even now.

I had stopped the train somewhere near Darfield about 1:40, and all were saved.

The guard was found in the van with a fractured skull. Blakiston himself was picked up dead, and fearfully bruised, not far from where we stopped.

The fireman was found in the river Trent, with his skull fractured. There is no doubt that the engineer, after stunning him, had thrown him into the river while passing over the bridge.

## AN AMATEUR GHOST.

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL.

Being an American's experience as understudy to a spirit, billed to haunt an English castle.

I SAT up in bed and found it was much as I had suspected. The room was haunted, and there were two ghosts at the foot of my couch—one, an elderly man in a suit of chain armor, and the other, a lady, considerably younger, in the customary flowing white draperies.

It was half past one, I noticed, as I glanced at the clock on the bureau, which I could see quite plainly through the gentleman's breast.

This was my first visit to the home of my ancestors. Not desiring that the American branch of the family should seem ignorant of the customs of Walsingham Towers, I resolved to take the matter coolly.

"Good morning," I said.

The lady made a profound courtesy, and the gentleman bowed.

"I am sorry," I went on, "that I can-

not truthfully say I am glad to see you. Unless," I added hopefully, "you can haunt the room quietly."

Seeing they both looked somewhat surprised, I proceeded to explain.

"Last year in Germany I had the misfortune to spend a night in the haunted castle of Godesberg, where I found it utterly impossible to sleep. The ghost in charge insisted on rattling chains and groaning dismally during the greater part of the night. He also took the form of a black cat, and sat upon the foot of the bedstead from two to four. As I was ignorant of German, I was of course unable to convey to him any idea of my disapproval of his conduct. I trust that as compatriots—I should say, former compatriots—you will appreciate the folly of such behavior."

My suggestion was not well received.



"Sir," said the gentleman, drawing himself up, "you are guilty of a vast piece of impertinence in harboring such a suspicion. I can only hope it proceeds from ignorance."

"For I am sure," put in the lady, in a plaintive voice, "that I always disliked cats extremely, and we never even had one about the castle."

"And," continued the gentleman, "pardon my saying it, but you cannot have moved much in good society if you are indeed unable to distinguish between members of the feline species and members of the British peerage."

"I have seen dowagers——" I began; but I thought it better to apologize.

"I beg your pardon," I said, "but really I had no idea I was addressing any of the nobility."

Then, thinking this sounded a little abrupt, I added, "Of course, I might have known if I had examined more closely."

This may have mollified him. At any rate, his response was much more courteous.

"I am Sir Guy de Walshingham," he said, "and this," turning to his companion, "is my wife, the Lady Alicia."

I bowed as gracefully, I flatter myself, as was possible under the circumstances. It is not the easiest thing in the world to bow gracefully while sitting erect in bed.

Then I resumed the conversation.

"Time of Richard I—I believe? I think Lady Walshingham showed me your portrait this evening. You murdered your wife, if I am not mistaken, and went under the title of the Black Baron."

He blushed, I think; but it is difficult to be certain as to the embarrassment of a ghost. At least, he went on a trifle hastily:

"Perhaps I was spoken of in some such terms—the county people are very censorious; and I regret—bitterly regret—to confess that in a moment of undue excitement I assassinated my wife."

"And, I am sure, through no fault of mine," she interpolated.

"Certainly, my dear, you resisted with all your might. I only wish now that you had been stronger. But you,

sir," turning to me, "can now perceive, I suppose, the folly of expecting a baron and his wife to sit upon your bedstead and howl?"

After a little reflection I admitted I had never had that experience, nor, I handsomely added, could I recall any similar incident among my friends.

"The notion is certainly preposterous," went on the baron, smiling a trifle grimly at the idea. "We are here from very different motives. In fact, we wish to ask your advice in an extremely delicate affair."

"I shall be delighted," I murmured, "as a member of the family——"

Sir Guy interrupted.

"It is precisely because you are a member of the family," he said, "that we have ventured to disturb your slumbers. You may not be aware of the fact, but you bear a strong resemblance to me. You have the family face."

I looked towards the mirror. It reassured me.

"Really," I said, "of course it's very flattering—I hardly know—truthfully; my nose is generally considered straight."

"Appearances are proverbially deceitful," quoted the baron.

"And about the left hand corner," observed his lady, "I detect a distinct resemblance."

Here I broke in:

"I may be obtuse—I probably am. It's a bad habit—a very bad habit—formed in early infancy, and I never could break myself of it; and I haven't the slightest idea what you are driving at."

So the gentleman in chain armor went on:

"I will explain. We need you, to be explicit, in a very important matter—one which concerns the honor of the family."

I settled back among the pillows. Since he wanted to discuss family affairs at that hour of the morning, it would be clearly lacking in respect for me to interfere.

"Go on," I said.

And he did, without considering that a narrow minded chatelaine and an eight o'clock breakfast entails a certain amount of sleep.



I fear he had little respect for the present Lady Walshingham. Possibly he knew that her father was from Chicago, and had done something mysterious, but extremely lucrative, in connection with pork.

"Some centuries ago," he began in a hollow voice, "I murdered my wife under circumstances of peculiar brutality, as you with rather questionable taste have mentioned."

I felt somewhat abashed.

"Of course," I said, "these little family differences——"

But he again interrupted:

"So be it. Though, by my halidom! there was a time—ah, well, 'tis so. Let what has been be."

That seemed reasonable. So I let him go on.

"Some years afterwards," he continued, "I visited Palestine in that crusade now known as the third. 'Twas a goodly day! But alack! in our return my liege lord Richard was captured by that arch fiend, Leopold of Austria, and I, among others, paid the penalty of my fealty to our sovereign. 'Twas in a noisome dungeon—but I speak no more of that."

Truth to tell, I was glad that he refrained. Noisome dungeons are so prevalent in modern historical romances that I was pleased to escape one.

"Yet fain to fly as I was," went on the narrator, "there was but one way. It involved the slaying of my jailer—a step which was, I confess, distasteful to me. Though, in sooth, the life of a graceless varlet, void of all gentleness and with no bowels of compassion, was of little moment, and so——"

It was clearly impossible to simulate any emotion over the fate or anatomy of that twelfth century jailer. I confined my remarks to a sympathetic:

"Well?"

"I slew him and escaped to England, where I died not long afterwards. But, unfortunately, one is prone to be careless in small matters; so it came about that I slew him with little compunction and a large cobble stone on the anniversary of my wife's death."

"Of course," I put in, "there are various ways of celebrating an anniversary——"

Then, catching a black look from the Lady Alicia, I added:

"Or of drowning one's sorrows."

The correction was accepted, and after a wink—a tenuous, ghostly wink—the baron went on.

"It was heedless of me, I admit. At any rate, after my decease I found that, according to the general custom of the nobility, it entailed the haunting of two separate places by myself on the same night of each year. This being clearly impossible, I engaged as my understudy a former leprechawn, whose work, I must say, was generally satisfactory."

"Indeed it was," broke in the Lady Alicia. "By my troth! his handling of the dagger hath oftentimes caused me great joy. Thou, Guy, wert careless therewith——"

Again, with an abruptness that I could not but think true to life, Sir Guy waved aside his wife's remarks.

"Until the Goblins' Amalgated Union declared a strike, the organization asserted that night duty, involving as it does groaning upon the battlements and gibbering in the streets, should be regulated by a nine hours' schedule. To this I, with others, objected. Another point raised by the strikers was that, according to the present regulations, no ghost of good standing is permitted to carry an umbrella even in the stormiest weather. I scoffed at their protests. As a consequence I have no substitute tonight."

Finding this regrettable, but hardly explicit, I inquired:

"Pardon me, but what can I do? I am, as I have mentioned, willing, if obtuse. And I can't see——"

Sir Guy explained:

"You have, as I have said, the family face. You are, in fact, the living counterpart of me. I want you, for this night only, to impersonate my ghost. Will you?"

I gasped.

"I've had very little experience in that line," I said. "Not at all competent, you know; and I don't see how you'll manage to——"

"It is very easy," he reassured me. "A few trifling preliminaries will be, it is true, necessary to convert a living man into a ghost, but——"



I was, I confess, taken with the idea. It is not often one gets the chance nowadays to be of any assistance to a twelfth century crusader. But this was evidently the time for an understanding.

"The usual preliminaries," I said firmly, "will have to be dispensed with. If I am to be a ghost I want it to be a purely temporary arrangement. I must positively decline to be murdered or poisoned or anything of that sort, even to please a relative."

Both the baron and his wife assured me that any such radical step would be quite uncalled for. In fact, all I would have to do would be to drain the embossed goblet he carried.

I hesitated. Then, for the novelty of the thing, I drank off the potion. It had a slightly bitter taste, and I did not recognize the flavor.

At first, I thought it did not affect me in the least. Then I began to feel a trifle light headed. Next I looked down and was surprised to notice there was apparently no one in the bed.

Closer investigation revealed a shadowy outline. This, I decided, was all that was left of Me.

It was a queer sensation. I started violently—so violently that I flew out of bed, and found myself floating gently across the room.

You know the feeling, I suppose, though it is not quite describable. Sometimes you have it in your sleep; you fold your knees up under you and go along through the air without any effort; it seems ridiculously simple. You wonder you never thought of it before.

Then you think:

"Great idea! I'll just go down to business in the morning this way and show Smith how simple it is. Won't it astonish the fellows!"

Afterwards you wake up, and find that somehow you've forgotten the trick of it.

But just then it was easy. I floated around the bed once or twice, then up to the ceiling, merely for practice. Through inexperience, I miscalculated the necessary force and popped into Lady Cheltenham's room above, where I found myself hovering immediately over her ladyship's teeth, which she had left on the dressing table.

Then I rejoined my ancestors, and inquired what was next on the program.

"The assassination will take place in the White Turret," said Sir Guy, "as usual. The Lady Alicia will instruct you in the details. You can invent most of it, however, as the young man who occupies the room tonight is not, I dare say, familiar with our sad story."

Now, Ernest Seymour, who I knew had been put in that particular apartment for the night, was not an especial friend of mine.

He wears red ties, in the first place; in the second, there was once a girl, and we—however, Muriel is Mrs. Seymour now, so it scarcely matters. I dare say it was all for the best.

Just at that time I was not unwilling to ascertain exactly what effect a twelfth century assassination would have on his nerves. He might, or might not, be afraid of ghosts. If he was, there were possibilities.

While Sir Guy melted into air with an easy confidence that bespoke long practice, I followed my deceased ancestress up the winding stair that leads to the White Turret.

It was a gloomy, high paneled apartment with exactly the proper amount of moonlight streaming through the diamond panes. Any ghost, even an amateur, could have done credit to himself in such surroundings.

True, our audience of one was not over appreciative. Seymour waked up as I was practising a glide step suitable for a phantom in the patch of moonlight.

He shuddered and rubbed his eyes. Then he lay still, transfixed with terror.

For a beginner, I really think I did extremely well. I was realistically brutal; and while, of course, I had to invent the dialogue, I did not find it difficult.

I had read "Critchard Marvel" and "To Get and to Keep" so thoroughly that I could say "gadzooks" and "odsblood" as well as any blood stained buccaneer ever published at \$1.50.

I scattered these interjections in freely, and found that they lent quite a medieval flavor to my modern English. Meanwhile, Seymour cowered in terror and tangled sheets.



At last it was finished.

I had murdered my temporary wife. I had dragged her senseless body across the floor. I had given vent to a few fiendish "Ha-ha's."

In short, everything had gone off beautifully when I left the White Turret with a clear conscience and the Lady Alicia.

We went down the steps slowly. We were getting on splendidly, and she was telling me how much superior to either her husband or his substitute I was in executing a cold blooded murder.

This sounds ambiguous, but I am sure from the glance she gave me—she had really remarkable eyes—and the confidential way in which she leaned upon my arm, that she meant it to be taken in a complimentary sense. I am afraid my ancestress was something of a flirt in her day. I was just pondering over this possibility, and thinking that her hands were remarkably small and that her lips—

However, it was just then that we met John.

Now, John is undoubtedly a good butler. He has an air of mingled dignity and condescension while waiting at dinner that somehow reminds one of a clergyman in uncongenial surroundings.

His intoning of the remark, "Madam is served," is intensely ritualistic, and he passes the bread with the effect of bestowing a benediction. In short, John is perfection.

Still, I was by no means delighted to see him just then.

A good butler is all very well in his place; but at three A. M., in a hasty toilet, carrying a bedroom candle and an air of suspicion, even the best of servants seems out of his proper surroundings, especially when one happens to be coming down a dark stairway about that hour in a suit of chain armor, and with a lady who has been dead for several hundred years.

Some things are so difficult to explain.

I saw that John expected an explanation, and that his sturdy common sense had never for a moment suspected me of being either a baron or a bogie. Therefore, I thought it best to pass airily over the affair.

"Ah, John," I said, "morning. Just

out for a stroll, you see. This is my friend, the Lady Alicia de Walshingham, who has kindly offered to accompany me. Going out to gather—er—mushrooms, you know. And—er—see the sunrise and all that sort of thing."

I know very little about mushrooms, except the canned sort they keep in the grocery stores; as for sunrises, I rarely stay up late enough to see one.

But I had read about people doing this kind of thing in books, and I thought, of course, John had. Evidently he had not. I hate a poorly read man.

He looked so incredulous that I was strongly tempted to offer him a guinea as an incentive to silence.

On reflection, I dismissed the idea; it was too much like offering the Archbishop of Canterbury a shilling to cut his sermon short.

So I waited for his next remark, which was disconcerting.

He said, "Don't you think you'd better go to bed, sir?"

I could not see the reason of that, when I had left it only recently.

I told John that. I added that I was in duty bound to see the Lady Alicia home. Also, that she was my ancestress. Also, how I had met her.

To which he replied, "Yes, sir."

Somehow, John can throw such a chilling emphasis into two words that one feels it a waste of time to argue with him. At least, that was my sensation. More than ever when he added:

"Excuse me, sir, but I don't see any lady."

I looked around. Frankly, I did not either. But of course I understood that at once and proceeded to explain:

"Certainly not—that is, not just now. She's gone back to—er—that is, she's vanished—disappeared, you know. Cock crew and—er—all that sort of thing, you know."

John is skeptical by nature.

He said, "Yes, sir; I thought that punch was rather strong. Don't you think you'd better go to bed, sir?"

It was plain enough what he meant. He had, true enough, served a little punch in the smoking room that night—disgusting stuff, with entirely too much lemon in it—but he ought to have noticed I only took a glass or so of it.



Still, I could not argue the matter with him just then, so I went to bed.

I left later in the day as I had previously arranged.

I have never seen or heard of Sir Guy or the Lady Alicia since. But I have had reason to believe John is not the model of discretion his testimonials represent him to be.

I judge from these facts:

First, that the present Lady Walshingham, who has extreme views on Purity in Politics, the Drink Question, and other boresome subjects that have arrogated unto themselves capital letters, has never since then invited me to Walshingham Towers.

Second, that Muriel sent me a week afterwards a mysterious letter saying "good by," hoping I might be "true to

my better nature" and that I might attain "every success."

Another communication followed in something less than a fortnight, in which Mr. and Mrs. Albert Taliaferro Lambert requested, etc., etc., in all the glory of script and formal phrases. As I have said before, Muriel is now Mrs. Seymour.

Thirdly, the men at the club have some joke about Alicia and abstinence. I never heard it, for they invariably stop when I come in.

But when Jimmy Travis asked me recently about "the beautiful sosh I found in the White Turret," I began to suspect that it somehow concerned me and the incidents I have narrated.

I may be wrong, but I have thought it best to give the true facts in the case.

## WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS.

BY HORACE WILDWAY.

An incident involving the roulette table, a sympathetic bystander, and a stranger's hip pocket.

MONTE CARLO was the scene of this little adventure.

The season was early June. The gardens were sweet with a thousand odors and silvery with moonlight; but in the Casino there were glaring lights, and a heat that seemed to strike upon the top of one's head, and the scents that are bad counterfeits of flowers.

A young gentleman named Wilmot, whom I had met in Paris, had dined with me at the hotel, and we had then strolled across to the place where visitors are expected to spend their money in the purchase of nervous prostration.

I had never visited this temple of absurdity before, but Wilmot, who had spent some years abroad, had been there often—much oftener, in fact, than any real friend of his would have wished. On this occasion he lost about twenty louis without winning a bet.

"Well, well!" he cried. "I'm not in luck tonight. Aren't you going to play?"

I confessed that I could see nothing in the sport. I had tried it elsewhere and had found that gambling is the

most disappointing of all the polite vices.

All the seats at the table were occupied, but there was no great crowd about. Two or three men were dodging here and there to lay their bets, but we had room to spare at the end of the board, where we remained a while to watch the faces of the players.

There were no great gains or losses. I was interested principally in two women who sat side by side, one of them mildly successful, the other steadily losing.

It was amusing to observe that the woman who lost was angry with the woman who won, and not with the croupier who swept in her money, nor with herself for being so foolish as to play.

Among those who lost was a young gentleman with a typical Yankee countenance and the tall, thin figure that matches it. I sympathized with him because he was of the Anglo Saxon race, and because he was a long way from home and so might be more seriously embarrassed by the sort of in-