

## The Ghost of my Great Grandfather.

BY THEO. READE.

These are the drawing rooms, Miss Clyde, and the music and reception rooms, Miss Challoner says, as she leads the way through the lovely apartments of Challoner House, down in Surrey, where I am never arrived to take my place as companion and secretary in general to the hon. ladies of the place.

'This is the picture gallery,' continues Miss Challoner, with a grand, old fashioned air, that suits well with her silvery hair and stately mien, 'and this, she continues, pointing to a particular picture 'is the portrait of my grandfather, General Sir Richard Hope. What's the matter, child?' she cries, turning towards me, 'you look pale and faint, is it too warm for you? Take a run on the lawn.'

'No, thanks, Miss Challoner,' I answer, as calmly as I can. 'I would rather—not that it is not too warm, indeed I do not feel faint.' So with a beating heart I stood gazing at the portrait of General Sir Richard Hope. How the mention of that name brought back the sad story of my dead mother's life to me—her early marriage with Everett Clyde, a poor artist, whose only claims were his handsome face and his love for her; the rage of her grandfather, whose ward she was and his casting her off forever, and utterly refusing to see her when her obnoxious husband died and I was left, a baby burden, in her weak white hands. It was at eighteen that I learned the name of my grandfather—it was General Sir Richard Hope.

And here I found myself, a small-sized motherless girl of nineteen, with a recommendation from Madame de Blanc's, where I had graduated, in the house of my ancestors, and staring at the portrait of my great grandfather.

'He was a very handsome man,' Miss Challoner said with a sigh, 'very handsome. That was painted when he was only thirty years of age.'

Very handsome truly! A ruddy, high-bred face, with delicious blue, bewitching eyes, and a mouth that was red as a spice-pink, smiling in wilful curves under a little waxed black moustache, he looked tall, too, and straight as an arrow in his regimentals, with his general's cap in his hand, and his mighty swordhilt dangling at his side. Sir Richard looked a very valiant knight in his youth to be sure; but with all his beauty, I had not much cause to love his memory.

'You admire the General?' Miss Challoner asks me, as I stand mutely before the picture. 'Ah, everybody does; that is just the way I remember him when he was ordered to India and took us all with him. Janette married there, so did my brother Algernon; but they are dead, and there is no one left but Agnes and I—the old lady goes on gallantly while I wander down the splendid length of the gallery.'

'Janette left no children, and Algernon only one, a son; and there was Lydia, poor Lydia! I sorely remember her; she ran away and married some one, I've forgotten the name even, and died shortly, she and her little one both.'

'Lydia was my mother; I was the little one. How I longed for sympathy and womanly love no one can know, but I held my peace, remembering my mother's almost dying instructions, 'to seek none of my relatives, and to beg my bread rather than owe it to their bounty.'

'Now, Miss Clyde, I believe I've shown you over all the lower part of the house. I want you to feel at home, perfectly so; now we'll go upstairs. These two are your rooms; I am glad you like them; this staircase leads down into my corridor and the apartments opposite yours are out of repair, locked up and never used; they used to be stately chambers in the days gone by, but they are completely dismantled now, one of them was the General's study, Miss Challoner says, with a sigh. 'I'll leave you now, my dear; to-morrow you may begin your duties with Miss Agnes and me in the morning.'

'My duties' prove extremely light, and the Misses Challoner, two most worthy and lovely old ladies, who have very few letters, generally speaking, to be answered, and whose passion for being read aloud to is quite limited; the principal portion of my time is at my own disposal, and, truth to tell, I am rather sorry for it, for in this big, rambling old house I scarce know what to do with myself.

I often wander all over the house, and spend hours in the library, poring over my great-grandfather's books, and now and then coming across some volume with my mother's maiden name, Lydia Montessor, written on the fly-leaf in a girlish hand. By nine o'clock every evening Miss Challoner and Miss Agnes are sleeping the sleep of the just, and I sit on, crumpling by the bright wood fire with some fascinating book, until eleven and twelve o'clock frequently.

It was on one of these occasions that becoming more than usually absorbed in what I was reading I did not start to go up stairs till after twelve, and as I came through the hall, I not only saw the candle light shining out from my own half open door, but also gleams of light through the cracks of the disused rooms opposite mine. I stood still for a moment, and then suddenly reflecting that Miss Challoner had very probably given some of the numerous house servants permission to occupy the apartments, I thought to no more of the matter and went to bed with a light and cheerful heart. Intensely interested in my new found volume, I did not retire the following night until quite late, and although I had not thought of it from that moment to this, I found myself instinctively looking for the gleams of light; there were none and again I went to my bed. Perhaps I had been asleep but five minutes, may be for two hours—that I do know is that I was awakened that night of the fifteenth of November by a sharp snapping fall it seemed to me, at my very hand; I sprang up and searched for the matches, but, as I chance would have it, of course they were nowhere to be found; I listened intently for a minute, again the noise was repeated, and I went to the door, slid it back, pulled open the door, and

beheld—my great-grandfather, just as his portrait down stairs in the gallery depicted him, the same ruddy face with the bewitching blue eyes, only instead of his military garments he wore a richly covered dressing gown, and instead of a gilded sword hilt, a pistol was in his hand. I took all this in one terrified glance that froze my very blood in my veins, and then I was conscious of uttering one little miserable scream that was smothered before it could possibly have reached any one's ears in the house—smothered by my great-grandfather, who, promptly clapped one hand over my mouth, while with the other he held me with a grip of iron.

'If you scream, my great-grandfather says in the lowest possible whisper, 'I will shoot you dead, do you hear?' I am shivering with terror, and certainly cannot reply with a hand held tightly over my lips.

'You're one of the maids, I suppose,' my great-grandfather ejaculates still in a whisper. 'Remember I've seen you and as sure as you mention having seen me to a living soul I'll shoot you. Don't stir, recollect that I am dead! That I died in India six months ago! I feel the hands withdrawn from my mouth and wrists. I lie there almost senseless, for I know not how long a time, only when I open my eyes at last the sunshine is streaming into the window at the end of the hall, and I am as cold as a block of marble.

In vain I try to reason with myself that I have had the nightmare, that I have been dreaming, and walking in my sleep. I cannot shake off the impression that I have seen the ghost of my grandfather face to face, and indeed the physical effects of this making his acquaintance at midnight some twenty years after his demise, are too palpable to be passed lightly over. By degrees of course this feeling wears off but still the vision was an unexplainable one; and I know not why I have never mentioned it to any one. I said I was not superstitious; but I fear nevertheless, that that injunctive of my handsome great-grandfather's really kept me silent. I think of it constantly, and grow each day more and more perplexed.

'Miss Challoner, I say one morning as we are refilling the flower vases in the picture gallery, 'whereabouts did Sir Richard Hope die?' 'In India,' I certainly start, but Miss Challoner's head is bent close over a pot of Parma violets. 'Yes, in India. Let me see, twenty-three years and six months ago—I remember the anniversary so well because we were in London last May, and the Times made honorable mention of him in a long list of officers who had perished in India.'

'In India, six months ago?' The ghost was accurate, indeed I could not have imagined things about which I knew absolutely nothing, but I tried my best to banish it all from my mind, especially as from that night forward I had never heard or seen again to alarm me, for now three weeks past.'

By the end of that time Challoner House was full of guests, and I had not much time to think of ghosts or great-grandfathers either. Kind Miss Challoner made the days pass very pleasantly for her orphaned daughter, and with all her hauteur scarce ever made me feel my dependence. The days sped swiftly, and the evenings were filled with music, conversation and theatricals. It was after one of these festive occasions that, late at night, I sought my room, and on reaching the passage way, again I beheld those mysterious gleams of light coming from under the door of the locked up apartments. I stood still for a moment, my heart throbbing wildly, I thought I heard voices, as though one were outside and one within conversing through the window; but gaining my own door where the candles and the firelight greeted me cheerily, I put aside my foolish fancies, bolted myself in, and ere long was in the arms of Morpheus.

Again, that crackling, crushing sound awoke me! Only to night I was able to distinguish that it was as though some great rusty bolt were being drawn by a forceful hand; again I sprang up, determined this time to rouse the household if power of feminine lungs could do it. I drew the bolt, flung open the door, and there before me in a flood of warm light, stood my great-grandfather.

'For God's sake don't scream!' he said, coming a pace nearer to me; but of this abjecting terror was no need, my tongue clapped to the roof of my mouth. Another pace nearer came the ghost of my great-grandfather, and by the light of the candle he held, he surveyed me from head to foot and I have no doubt a very terror-stricken spectacle I presented to his ghostly eyes—a small shaking girl with staring eyes and tangled masses of yellow hair hanging to the hem of her gown.

'Who are you?' he asked in a spiritual whisper.

'I—I am Essie Clyde,' I answered under my breath, shrinking before his gaze.

'Clyde!' my great-grandfather murmurs to himself. 'Any relation to Algy Clyde, of the Guards.'

'No,' I answer, as I feel my heart turning over within me. 'I am your great-grandchild, Lydia Montessor's daughter.'

'My great-grandchild! The devil you are! Beg pardon, are you mad?' the ghost inquires, sardonically. 'Do you know who I am?'

'Yes, I do; you are Sir Richard Hope.'

My great-grandfather starts, and turned his blue delicious eyes in I think a most sinister fashion.

'Well, my dear great-grandchild, you are a very pretty little relation—and by-the-by do you think I resemble my portrait?'

'Yes, yes, I manage to say, and then I fell over, unable to bear the strain upon my nerves an instant longer. I suppose I swooned, for I recollect distinctly coming to and finding myself lying in an utterly strange room on a lounge that the brocade is hanging in moth-eaten tatters from; a dim light burns in one corner, and my great-grandfather kneeling beside me chafing my hands and smoothing back my hair.

if they knew I was here; they think I'm in India.'

I begin to think that I am dead or becoming mad, one of the two, for I am powerless, I lie there like a log of wood, gazing into the comely face of my ancestor.

'I am Dick Challoner, in hiding for a duel with Fred Ward; they told me on the field that I'd killed him, so I gave out I'd gone to India, and I came down here to the old place to hide till the affair blew over. Deuced contemptible thing for a fellow to do, but I never could fancy serving myself up alive for tigers. Not a soul knows I'm here. I get up every night and howl and get something to eat, but I never could learn a syllable about Fred; now, my little girl, you might find out for me.'

The ghost looks wistfully at me, and at once I begin to laugh, and then to cry and bury my face out of sight.

'Don't! oh, for mercy sake! Why, Essie, you're my grandchild, don't you know? At any rate, we're cousins or something—'

'Fred Ward's alive and perfectly well,' I cry, 'and let me go, take me away, I'm afraid of you!'

'Alive! Thank God! Let you go, little coz; well, if I must, kiss me first, a very remarkable way of making your acquaintance, but I don't think I could have devised a more delightful one. To-morrow when I walk up to Challoner House, I shall expect you there to meet me.'

My ancestor looks me courteously to the door, lights me to my room, and kisses his hand to me, while his blue eyes laugh in most engaging fashion.

The next morning I kept very decidedly out of the way. What have I done! Betrayed my identity in a moment of frenzy? Laid on the lounge in the deserted rooms at midnight while a handsome young guardsman chafed my hands and knelt along side of me, and kissed me! Never—never again can I meet him face to face, never. I will leave Challoner House under any pretext, no matter how futile, this very day. Where shall I go? Ah! I don't know; but to Madame de Blanc's I suppose. I am pursuing the foregoing most salutary train of thought in the cold, cheerless garden, whither I have fled to avoid the malicious blue orbs of Dick Challoner.

'Ah, good morning, Essie. Why, little coz, what's the matter? Oh, no, you can't run away from me. I've made it all straight with my aunts, and they're both at this moment hard at work killing the fattest calf. Essie, you don't look a bit glad! He says a little ruefully. 'To be sure, though, you never saw me before, and can't be supposed to take a very violent interest in me; it seems to me though, as if I'd been looking for you all my life and just found you.'

'I am your aunt's companion, Capt. Challoner,' I cry through slow falling tears. 'Sir Richard turned my mother out of doors, and I am only here by chance. Miss Challoner and Miss Agnes don't know who I am or anything about me!'

'It's time they did then,' he says, pulling my hands down from my face. 'Why, Essie, you treated me with a great deal more consideration when you thought I was that wicked old Sir Richard than you do now. Say, little girl,' he says impetuously, putting his arms about me in fond fashion. 'I'm just desperately in love with you! I was taken captive last night while you lay in my arms in a swoon. Essie, don't you think you might like me a little bit after a while? I have got five thousand a year, and when the dear old souls yonder go off, we'll have Challoner House and fifty thousand more. And Essie, I'm not—very bad looking, I suppose, as follows go.'

I laugh through my tears at his whimsical voice.

'Essie, you will take me, won't you? My great-grandfather's bewitching blue eyes are pleading passionately with my heart.'

'I'll tell you in six months,' I answer, 'when I know you, and when you know me.'

'I know now,' he says quickly, 'that you are the prettiest little girl in Great Britain; but I suppose you're not so sure about me, with a little dubious air that looks for contradiction.'

'Not altogether, but—'

'But what? he cries eagerly. 'His warm lips press closely down upon mine.'

'Essie, are you glad I am not your great-grandfather, and a ghost?'

'Partially,' I answer. 'You're an aggravating little woman. Just wait until you are Mrs. Richard Hope Challoner.'

'And he did. With exemplary patience the ghost of great-grandfather waited precisely six months, and then the owner of the bewitching blue eyes became also sole proprietor of Essie Hope Challoner, nee Clyde.'

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