The Haunting of B— School

By Elliot O'Donnell

Schools and Colleges, no less than various other public and private institutions, have their ghosts, and the following is one of the many versions of a haunting in connection with a famous school not two miles from Charing Cross. I will give it in the words of the narrator, Martin Flammarique, a very old friend of mine.

You want to hear about the B— ghost, he said. Well, I will tell you all I know about it. One afternoon in the August of 1870, I ran into an old B— friend of mine, Jack Andrews, in Sloane Street. We hadn't met for ages—not, indeed, since that eventful Commemoration Day at B—, when so many "O.B.'s" turned up that they had to camp out all night in the Big School. A lady was with him, a tall, slim girl, unmistakably foreign, and unquestionably beautiful—so beautiful, in fact, that I couldn't tear my eyes away from her.

"I'm awfully sorry we can't stop for a chat," Andrews said, "but we are in rather a hurry. We leave England to-night for Spain—Barcelona, where I am living at present. I am editing an English paper there, *The Anglo-Barcelonian.* Shall you be at the School concert at B— in December?"

I told him I should, that I had promised the Headmaster I would be there.

"That's good!" he exclaimed, "for I, too, am going. I'm down for a speech at the House Supper. Neither of us want to be in Spain for Christmas, so we are going to do a round of friends and relations in England. I shall look forward immensely to seeing you then; I've so much to tell you. You quite understand why we can't stay now. Remember, old chap, it's a bargain—December 20, at B—. Au revoir, and all luck to you."

They passed on, and I turned and watched them get into a 'bus for Victoria. I was overjoyed at seeing Andrews again, for he had been one of my earliest "pals" at B—. We had entered the school the same term, and had gone up together, form by form, till he got rheumatic fever, and left in consequence. We then went abroad, and I had not set eyes on him since.

It was strange he had not introduced the girl to me, but then, of course, they were in such a tearing hurry. She was undoubtedly his wife! Lucky fellow! What a face! What eyes! What a mouth! What feet, daintily encased in the naughtiest of high-heeled buckle-shoes and open-worked stockings, through the meshes of which I had caught the glistening surface of pink flesh! I longed for a closer acquaintance. Jack was in luck's way, that was certain. I devoutly hoped she had an equally attractive sister, and that I would be invited to stay with them in Barcelona. The sudden fervour which I displayed in writing to Jack was not, therefore, quite disinterested. I wrote two letters to his one, and ransacked every library to discover books on Spain and Spanish temperament! But Jack was very wily, for some reason or another he never alluded to the girl, and my queries as to whether he was married remained unanswered. He adhered rigidly to the discussion of old school-days, obstinately refraining from any allusion to his present home-life.

He renewed his promise, however, to be at the house-supper, and gave me repeated injunctions as to where we should meet. The last letter I received from him was on November 25. After that there was silence; he was to sail for England on December 10.

The eventful evening came at last. If I rehearsed it once, I rehearsed it twenty times. I, too, was booked for a speech and I am a rotten orator, and speaking before boys is different from haranguing men—it is a speciality in itself. At the preliminary concert, which was crowded to excess, there must have been at the very least a thousand "O.B.'s"; and the school song was roared louder and, I regret to say, far more out of tune than ever. That performance over, the audience broke up, distributing in gangs to the respective house-suppers.

Andrews had enjoined me to meet him at the entrance to the school-house.

"I may not be in time for the concert," he had written, "but I shall be outside the dear old house-gates at 9.30, without fail!"

It was 9.30 when I arrived there, but there was no Jack. I was annoyed, angry, perturbed. Why hadn't he come? Had he been hoaxing me? I spoke to Gray, the H.M., and he informed me that Andrews was down for a speech, and that as he hadn't sent word to say he wouldn't be there, everyone expected him, and be would undoubtedly turn up. Perhaps he would arrive during the banquet. Sincerely hoping this might be so, though filled with grim forebodings, I followed the other guests into the hall, and found myself placed between two very youthful "O.B.'s," who were no doubt as little interested in an old fogey like me, as I was in them.

I did not enjoy the supper. I was too disappointed to eat, and, after all, the menu at a house-supper is naturally more suited to the healthy appetites of boys than the more whimsical palates of men. I grew more and more uneasy as the minutes flew by. I was most anxious to see Jack, to renew the acquaintance with him which the Hall, the gilded names on the honour-boards, the very atmosphere of the place, so vividly brought back again to mind.

I tell you, O'Donnell, that when I sat there, facing those long rows of B— faces—faces that were, somehow, strangely typical of B— and of the school-house, and would have seemed totally out of keeping elsewhere—I felt as if those twenty intervening years did not exist, had never existed, and that I was once more a schoolboy, loaded with all a schoolboy's hopes and fears.

Jack's place had been laid three seats on my left. I continually glanced there, only to see a vacant space. It was too bad. Jack wasn't coming. He had fooled us, after all. I leaned back in my chair and cursed—cursed with all the abandonment of desperate bad luck. I had longed to meet Jack.

A sensation of extreme coldness suddenly made me look round, and, to my immeasurable delight, I saw Jack—the sly fellow had slipped into his seat unobserved.

Fearing that it might only be a hallucination, I shut my eyes, but, on opening them, Jack was still there.

"Jack!" I whispered, bending forward and trying to attract his attention. "Jack!"

But Andrews did not reply. Indeed, he apparently did not hear, but continued to sit silently in his chair, his elbows on the table, his eyes downcast, unheeding, moody, reflective. I recalled the attitude instantly— it was thoroughly characteristic of the Jack of ancient days. Again I whispered, but still he took no notice, and this time one of the men

next me asked what I wanted. I told him to tap Mr Andrews on the shoulder, and he eyed me curiously.

"Are you always as facetious as this, Mr Plainmarique?" he inquired, "or is it the claret-cup?"

I was about to reply when the house-master rose— the speeches had begun.

Jack and I were both down to speak for the "O.B.'s," but what was my amazement when the house-master said how sorry he was that J. L. Andrews had not turned up, and called upon another "O.B." to speak in his place.

"Jack not there!" I said to myself. "Either the house-master is mad, or I am. Why I can see him as clearly as I can anyone."

But even as I reasoned thus, the figure of my friend slowly faded away, and I found myself gazing at an empty space. The house-master was correct—after all, Jack was NOT there.

I remembered at once the cold sensation I had experienced, and became convinced that what I had seen—far from being a hallucination and consequently merely subjective—was either a phantom of the living or a wraith. You may imagine, therefore, that I was no little upset.

I gabbled through my speech, and made a sad hash of it. Jack's face haunted me. Try how I would, I could not banish it from my mind, and, as I turned into bed that night, I saw him again—in my mental vision—sitting at that festive board, surrounded by merry faces, yet seeing and hearing nothing.

"It is very curious, Andrews didn't let us know," the house-master observed next morning. "I fully expected to receive an explanatory letter from him, but nothing has come. Perhaps he will write to you. Should he do so, I should like to hear what happened."

I promised the house-master I would tell him, and, without waiting to say good-bye to any of the "O.B.'s" who crowded the precincts, I hastened to the railway station.

That night, in my rooms in Brook Street, I went to bed rather earlier than usual, and, falling into a deep sleep, awoke with a violent start as a neighbouring church clock struck two. To my astonishment, something heavy was on the bed. I put out my hand, and, to my horror, touched a head, the hair of which was dripping with water. I was so appalled that I dare not get up to see what it was, but, diving under the bedclothes, I lay thus till the weight on the top of me suddenly went and I intuitively felt my grim visitant bad gone. I was now so firmly convinced that something was wrong with Andrews, that I at last resolved to pay a flying visit to Barcelona. Accordingly, in the morning I packed my things—just a few absolute necessaries—and, making for Victoria, booked by the overland route to Spain. Some evenings later I arrived at Barcelona. Having settled on my hotel, a respectable-looking inn in a main street, I walked to the offices of the paper that employed Jack. My reception was not encouraging. Mr Andrews was no longer on the staff—they knew nothing about him—not even his address; and I fancied a covert smile lurked in their faces as they mentioned the word "address."

Much perplexed, but feeling more than ever sure there was some mystery about Jack—an enigmatical, horrid something that the newspaper officials most probably knew, but refused to give away—I next inquired at the Consulate. It was closed till eleven o'clock next day. As there were still some hours before it was time to "turn in," I strolled about the streets, and after wandering through several of the principal thoroughfares, found

myself in what I took to be a market square. In the rather dim and uncertain flare of a few scattered and very antiquated gas-lamps, it was impossible to get a very accurate idea of my surroundings. I merely obtained my impression from the size and shape of the place before me, and the rough cobble-stones with which it was paved. I had seen many market squares of a similar nature in England. It was now getting late. The thick fog, which had hung over the city during the afternoon, bad developed into a heavy downfall of rain, as a result of which the streets were soon practically empty, and I was about to retrace my steps and seek the more congenial precincts of the inn, when I heard a low moan proceeding, as I thought, from the centre of the square. All sorts of possibilities, generated by the many stories I had heard of Spanish intrigue and villainy, at once flashed through my mind. Was someone being murdered, or were those sounds a decoy? I halted and listened, and, again, there came a groan, hollow and sepulchral, and so suggestive of real pain that all doubts on that score instantly vanished; someone was out there suffering.

No longer hesitating, and fully determined to give a good account of myself should it be necessary, I took my revolver from its case, and, stepping cautiously over the slippery stones, made for the direction of the sounds.

As I have already observed, the square was but sparsely illuminated, and in the rain it was quite impossible to see more than a few feet in front of me. Consequently I was not aware that there was any obstruction in my way, till I suddenly bumped up against a wooden erection that might have been the stage of some street-orator or of a troop of travelling pierrots. I was deliberating what course to pursue, whether to climb over it or walk round it, when I saw, to my astonishment, the figure of a man sitting on a camp-stool close beside me.

He was apparently young and wore a black suit, but as his face was buried in the palms of his hands, I could not discern his features. He had no hat, and the rain, descending in torrents on his bare head, bid fair to drench him to the skin.

Touching him on the arm, I asked why he chose to sit out there on such a night, whether he was ill, and if there was anything I could do for him. In reply he gave the most horrible moan, and, slowly raising his face, disclosed the countenance of Jack Andrews!

To say that I was shocked is to put it very mildly.

I was completely flabbergasted and simply stared at him, too overcome with emotion to speak.

“I am stiff!” he murmured. “I have been sitting out here for four nights!”

“For four nights!” I echoed. “Good heavens, man, are you mad?”

He shook his head, and the water from it fell over my clothes in cataracts.

“No!” he said. “I’m not mad! I’m—” Here he checked himself, and said: “It’s no use telling you, you wouldn’t understand.”

“It’s very obvious that something very extraordinary has happened since last we met,” I observed. “Perhaps you will explain when we get to some kind of shelter. It’s my belief trouble, or rain, or both, have turned your brain. You must be absolutely sopping. My advice to you is to go home directly and soak yourself with hot whisky.”

“No,” Jack responded wearily. “I shan’t hurt— nothing hurts me now. And as for home, I shall have a long enough spell of it after you’ve gone. Let me go back with you to your digs.”

Totally at a loss to know what to make of him, I tacitly agreed, and he conducted me with marvellous rapidity to my hotel. The landlord eyed us, I thought, in the most peculiar manner. There was evidently something about my friend that both frightened and perplexed him, and I don't wonder, for Jack's cheeks were ghastly white, his hair was dank and dishevelled, and his eyes abnormally large and lurid. The other visitors shrank away from him as we entered the supper-room, and we had a table all to ourselves. An excellent meal was served—cold roast chicken, salad, sweets, cheese, dessert, oranges from Cadiz, and wine from Oporto. I own I ate like a gourmand, but Jack would touch nothing.

"I have lost my taste for food," he said, "and I can get on just as well without it!"

I stared at him in dismay. Whatever doubts I had had on the subject before were now removed— he was mad—hopelessly, indisputably triad. I would humour him.

"Your looks corroborate your words," I remarked.

"You don't appear to have eaten anything for days."

"Not since Monday," Jack replied, "and it is now Friday. I ate my last meal—bread and cocoa, reeking of garlic—at six o'clock on Monday morning. But tell me, how did the house-supper go off?"

We then fell to talking of schooldays, nor would Jack once digress. I learned nothing of his present life, nothing of his home, nothing of the charming woman I had deemed to be his wife.

The hour grew very late. I secured him a bed at an exorbitant price, and we continued our conversation in his room far into the night.

"Go," he said, at last, as the clock struck two.

"Go, old friend, and leave me here now. Maybe you will find a difference in me in the morning, but, whatever happens, whatever you may be told, take nothing for granted. Seek the truth."

He threw himself down on the couch as he finished speaking. The flickering fire-flames made the pallor of his countenance more ghastly than ever, and I stole out of the room full of the gravest apprehensions.

I do not know what I expected to find when I sought him next morning. He had been so strange, so weirdly strange, that I was prepared for almost anything, yet scarcely for what actually occurred.

He was lying on the couch in precisely the same attitude as I bad left him, i.e., on his back, his body at full length, his head slightly turned towards the door, and resting on his outstretched arm. I touched him gently—he did not reply. I felt his forehead— it was icy cold. I moved his head—it rolled helplessly on one side. I tore open his coat-collar, and his throat, mangled, blue, and swollen, lay fully exposed to view. With a yell of horror I rushed from the room.

A doctor was summoned, and I accompanied him fearfully to the bedside. He gave a loud cry of terror and astonishment as he saw the corpse, and, pointing his finger at the dead man's face, shrieked:

"Good God! How in the name of Heaven did he come here? Why, that is John Andrews, the murderer, who was garotted in the Public Execution Ground last Monday morning."

For days after this adventure I lay ill in bed, haunted all the time by those never-to-be-forgotten words:

“Seek the Truth.”

As soon as I recovered I at once prosecuted inquiries, and learned that the crime for which Jack had been executed was the murder of Carlotta Godivjez, the woman with whom he had lived. This was undoubtedly the pretty girl with the star-like eyes and naughty feet I bad seen him with in London. Carlotta was a married woman when Jack had first met her. She lived with her husband, Hermann Godivjez, in Cartagena, and, falling in love with Jack, had eloped with hnm. Neighbours spoke of the frequent quarrels between the lovers, and, when Carlotta was found in her boudoir stabbed to the heart, suspicion at once fell on Andrews.

The English Consul was away at the time, and his substitute was a Spaniard. The circumstantial evidence was dead against Jack. He was a foreigner, with little or no influence, and too hard-up to resort to bribery. The reputation of the police was at stake. Someone must be punished for the crime, and so Jack was garotted.

Well, I went to Cartagena, and employed a private detective to ferret out all he could about Hermann Godivjez; but, despite the fact that the evidence against the latter was absolutely damning, the Spanish police could not be prevailed upon to effect his arrest, ‘and so he escaped scot free. Disgusted at the hopeless corruption in Spain I returned to London, but maintained a strict silence with regard to poor Jack’s fate. Indeed, none of his old schoolfellows to this day know what became of him. Periodically, however, his ghost is still seen—just as I saw it—at the annual supper of his old house at B—; whilst, periodically, too, his ghost still haunts the rooms I once occupied in Brook Street.