

Earl Beardie's Game at Cards

By Anonymous

Science that has swept away, with its busy broom, so many picturesque cobwebs, has not interfered much with Glamis Castle. From that stronghold, legend and superstition grimly defy enlightenment, and fancy has only to play round the spot for some weird scene or other to flash forth. The mysterious room which everyone knows to exist, but of which only the Earl, the heir, and the factor of each generation know anything further, has, of course, been a treasure-trove of surmise, not only with the peasantry of the place, but with all who love the eerie.

Earl Beardie is the hero, and an ideal hero for the purpose. He was fierce and wild and wicked, and feared neither God nor man. As a consequence, everybody feared him, and opposition to his will was a thing he had seldom to brook. But one memorable Sunday it met him. His views on the Sabbath—since largely adopted!—were rather too liberal for his day. He lived before his time, and had to pay the price of advancement. As a Scot among Scots, he could not but “remember the Sabbath Day,” but it was only to keep it unholy. Hunting was, perforce, suspended (for what Scotch hounds would run of a Sunday?), but the more private desecration of a game at cards it grieved his spirit to forego.

It was a stormy November night. The ladies were at prayers, an exercise at which not even the wicked Earl cared to disturb them. With the cards in his hand, his problem was to find a partner.

One after another the domestics were summoned, but not even their terrible master could bully them into the direct transaction with Satan which handling “Deevil’s bricks” on the Sabbath meant. Whereupon the raging Earl mounted to his turret-room and slammed the door behind him, vowing he would play with the Prince of Darkness himself, rather than relinquish his game.

The evil Fates were kind. Even as he spoke a tap came to the door, and a tall, dark stranger, cloaked and bonneted, presented himself in silence. Little cared the Earl for name or address. He had got what he wanted, and asked no questions. ‘The cards were shuffled and dealt, and the game began.

Soon the trembling menials heard oaths and altercation, from which their experience led them to conclude that their master was losing. And losing indeed he was, so heavily, that soon he had nothing left to stake. “Make out what bond you will,” he cried recklessly, “and I will sign without regarding it!” The stranger did so, the Earl signed, and with oaths and curses the game proceeded.

At last the din inside grew so terrible, that the old family butler felt impelled to peep through the keyhole. The action was courageous but unwise. He fell back howling, and next instant the door was flung open, and the Earl appeared with a drawn sword.

“Stop him! Slay him!” he gasped. But the mysterious stranger was gone, and gone was the bond likewise.

All that the Earl could tell was that his partner had glanced up suddenly, and exclaiming, “Smite that eye!” had disappeared in a streak of lightning through the keyhole. The butler’s eye, long bruised and yellow-rimmed, bore out the tale.

It was five years before the bond was paid; and then, in the storms and winds of another wild November night, the Devil came to claim his own.

But though the body of Earl Beardie ceased from troubling, his spirit was as busy as ever. Each Sunday, as it came round, was made hideous by ghostly carousals in the turret. When the noises

could be endured no longer, the room was stoutly walled up, and inside sit Earl Beardie and his partner playing cards till the crack of doom.

