hastily jumped up, while another man, whom he had not seen before, came hurrying from the other end of the room, a pistol in hand. Berger stopped to look no longer, but made for the village with his best speed.

When he had finished his story no one said a word, from sheer amazement. Miller Schmidt was the first to break the silence.

"How came you to be passing there, anyway, at this time of night? That is not the nearest way from Grenwitz."

Berger, in no condition to lie now, told the truth, and said that he had been hunting in the forest, and had dropped his gun on his flight.

"Do you think they were ghosts?" asked another.

"Pooh! who ever heard of ghosts having pistols, and reading papers, and having to have candle-light to see by!" retorted farmer Kuhn, who was well versed in ghost lore.

"I don't believe the story is true, at all," said young Berkau, "for I went all over the old place last year, and there is no such room in the cellar as the one he speaks about. For my part, I think Berger must have been frightened at one of his own drunken dreams."

"That may be so," replied Schmidt; "but he tells his story plainly enough, and he ought to know what he himself has seen, and he looks sober enough now."

So they discussed the matter further, without arriving at any satisfactory explanation of the story. When, however, at a late hour, they were about to depart for their homes, the bailiff, Sommer, the magistrate of the village, a shrewd man, whose advice was much respected by all the townfolk, addressed them:

"My friends," he said, "this may be an important matter, and I am sure that it will be for the best that you say nothing about it; therefore I wish you to promise me to keep it to yourselves."

All promised, and then went their ways to their respective homes. But Sommer, when he had reached his house, instead of stopping there, continued on to the deserted lodge in the forest.

The next day Berger's mysterious tale was the gossip of the village; for in the morning, farmer Kuhn, who had been honestly trying to keep his promise, finally gave up the contest, and told the story to his wife, and Frau Kuhn had naturally told it to her dearest friend—and after that it was an open secret.

Now, it chanced that on this same day, a party of French soldiers, under the command of a lieutenant, who were on their way to join their regiment in a neighboring town, passed through the village. Stopping at the tavern for refreshment, the story of the event of the night before of course reached the ears of the officer. When he had finished his dinner he called for his orderly, and sent him to find Berger, which was soon done, since the latter, as usual, was then at the tavern. Having presented himself, he was directed to show the way to the forester's house; and, notwithstanding his objections, the lieutenant, sergeant, and two other soldiers soon after proceeded thither under his guidance.

"Now show me the window into which you looked," said the lieutenant, after they had arrived at the house.

"I can't do it, your honor," answered Berger; "when I was here last night, I was so frightened that I did not notice which one it was. It was on this side, though."

The party entered the house with no trouble, since the door had long ago been torn from its hinges, and looked about. It was not safe to walk around very recklessly, on account of the holes in the rotten planks, which were the remains of the floor, and the débris with which they were covered. At length a hatchway was found which led to the cellar. All looked dark and indistinguishable below, but candles having been lighted, Berger, in spite of his reluctance, was made to go down first, and the others followed. Search showed nothing suspicious here, and at the corners of house on the side where the lieutenant, sergeant, and two other soldiers had gone, only two small rooms were found, and no such apartment as the one he had described. The party returned to the village, and the lieutenant, when he had reached his regiment, told the story as it had been told to him, and gave the soldiers the names of the two men who had apparently been passing by the village on the night before. The soldiers were much astonished at the story, and many people were convinced that it was true, but there was no means of verification, and the matter was left there.