

The Ghost of Lille: The "Garbled" Version

First published anonymously in [The Album](#) for 1822 (no. III, November 1822), and later re-published in [Accredited Ghost Stories](#), T.M. Jarvis (1823).

At the commencement of the French revolution, Lady Pennyman and her two daughters retired to Lisle, where they hired a large and handsome house at a very trifling rent. During their residence in this abode, the lady received from her husband, Sir John Pennyman, a draft for a considerable sum, which she carried to the banker of the town, and requested to have cashed. The man, as is much the custom on the continent, gave her a large portion of silver in exchange.

As Lady Pennyman was proceeding to pay some visits, she requested that the banker would send the money to her house, of which she described the situation. The parcel was instantly committed to the care of a porter; and, on the lady's inquiring of him whether he understood, from her directions, the place to which his charge was to be conveyed, the man replied that he was perfectly aware of the place designated, and that it was called the "Haunted House."

The latter part of this answer was addressed to the banker in a low tone of voice, but was overheard by Lady Pennyman: she paid, however, no attention to the words, and naturally supposed that the report connected with her habitation was one of those which are raised by the imagination of the ignorant respecting every dwelling which is long untenanted, or remarkable for its antiquity.

A few weeks afterwards, the words were recalled to her recollection in a manner that surprised her: the housekeeper, with many apologies for being obliged to mention any thing that might appear so idle and absurd, came to the apartment in which her mistress was sitting; and said that two of the servants, who had accompanied her ladyship from England, had that morning given warning, and expressed a determination of quitting her ladyship's service, on account of the mysterious noises by which they had been, night after night, disturbed and terrified.

"I trust, Carter," replied Lady Pennyman, "that you have too much good sense to be alarmed on your own account by any of these superstitious and visionary fears; and pray exert yourself in endeavouring to tranquillize the apprehension of others, and persuading them to continue in their places."

The persuasion of Carter was ineffectual: the servants insisted that the noises which had alarmed them were not the operation of any earthly beings, and persevered in their resolution of returning to their native country.

The room from which the sounds were supposed to have proceeded was at a distance from Lady Pennyman's apartments, and immediately over those which were occupied by the two female servants, who had themselves been terrified by them, and whose report had spread a general panic through the rest of the family. To quiet the alarm, Lady Pennyman resolved on leaving her own chamber for a time, and establishing herself in the one which had been lately occupied by the domestics.

The room above was a long spacious apartment, which appeared to have been for a length of time deserted. In the centre of the chamber was a large iron cage: it was an extraordinary piece of furniture to find in any mansion, but the legend which the servants had collected respecting it appeared to be still more extraordinary: it was said that a late proprietor of the house, a young man of enormous property, had in his minority been confined in that apartment by his uncle and guardian, and there hastened to a premature death by the privations and cruelties to which he was exposed: those cruelties had been practised under the pretence of necessary correction. It was alleged that "He was idle, stubborn, inattentive, and of an untoward disposition, which nothing but severity could improve."

In his boyhood, frequent chastisements, continued application, and the refusal of every interval of relaxation were in vain essayed to urge and goad him to the grave, and to place his uncle in possession of the inheritance: his constitution struggled with the tyranny of his unnatural relation, and, wasted as it was by the unmitigated oppression, still resisted with an admirable vitality the efforts which were ingeniously aimed against his existence. As he drew nearer the age in which he would have been legally delivered from the dangers and impositions of his uncle, his life was subjected to more violent and repeated severities; every, even the slightest offence was succeeded by the most rigorous inflictions. The iron cage was threatened, was ordered, was erected in the upper chamber.

At first, for a few weeks, it remained as an object of terror only: it was menaced that the next transgression of his guardian's wishes would be punished by

a day's imprisonment in that narrow circle, without the possibility of rest, or the permission of refreshment. Twice the cage was threatened and remitted, from an affected show of mercy, and the better to cover and to palliate the premeditated enormities: the youth, who was about sixteen, from the dread of this terrible infliction, applied himself with sleepless diligence to labours difficult to be accomplished, and extended, purposely extended beyond the capacity of the student: his lessons were exacted, not in proportion to his abilities, but his endeavours and performance.

The taskmaster eventually conquered: then followed the imprisonment, and the day without food. Again the imposition was set; again executed with painful exertion: again lengthened; again discovered to be impracticable, and again visited with the iron cage and the denial of necessary subsistence. The savage purpose of thus murdering the boy, under the pretence of a strict attention to his interest or his improvement, was at last successful: the lad was declared to be incorrigible: there was a feigned necessity of more severe correction: he was sentenced to two days' captivity and privation.

So long an abstinence from food and rest was more than his enfeebled frame and his broken spirits could endure: and, on his uncle's arriving, with the show of an hypocritical leniency, an hour previous to the appointed time, to deliver him from the residue of his punishment, it was found that death had anticipated the false mercy, and had for ever emancipated the innocent sufferer from the hands of the oppressor.

The wealth was won; but it was an unprofitable acquisition to him who had so dearly purchased it: — "What profit is it," demands the voice of Revelation, "if a man should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

His conscience haunted him: the form of the dead and inoffensive boy was constantly before him. His dreams represented to his view the playful and beautiful looks that won all eyes towards him, while his parents were yet alive to cheer and to delight him: and then the vision of his sleep would change; and he would see his calm suffering and his silent tears, and his patient endurance and his indefatigable exertions in attempting the accomplishment of difficult exactions, and his pale cheek, and his wasted limbs, and his spiritless countenance; and then, at last, there was the rigid, bony, and distorted form, the glazed open eye, the mouth violently

compressed, and the clenched hands, on which his view had rested for a moment, when all his wicked hopes had attained their most sanguine consummation, as he surveyed the corpse of his murdered relative.

These recollections banished him from his home; the mansion was left tenantless; and, till Lady Pennyman had ignorantly engaged it, all had dreaded to become the inmates of a dwelling which had been fatal to one possessor, and shunned as destructive to the tranquillity of his heir.

On the first night or two of Lady Pennyman's being established in her new apartment, she met with no interruption; nor was her sleep in the least disturbed by any of those mysterious noises in the Cage Chamber (for so it was commonly called in the family) which she had been induced to expect by the representations of the departed servants. This quiet, however, was of very short duration: one night she was awakened from her sleep by the sound of a slow and measured step, that appeared to be pacing the chamber overhead: it continued to move backwards and forwards with nearly the same constant and regular motion for rather more than an hour — perhaps Lady Pennyman's agitation may have deceived her, and induced her to think the time longer than it really was. It at length ceased: morning dawned upon her.

The lady naturally felt distressed by the occurrence of the night; it was in every point of view alarming: if she doubted its being the effect of any preternatural communication, there was only another alternative, which was almost equally distressing — to suppose that there were means of entering the house, which were known to strangers, though concealed from the inhabitants. She went down to breakfast, after framing a resolution not to mention the event.

Lady Pennyman and her daughters had nearly completed their breakfast before her son, a young man who had lately returned from sea, descended from his apartment.

"My dear Charles," said his mother, "I wonder you are not ashamed of your indolence and your want of gallantry, to suffer your sisters and myself to finish breakfast before you are ready to join us."

"Indeed, madam," he replied, "it is not my fault if I am late: I have not had any sleep all night. There have been people knocking at my door and peeping into my

room every half-hour since I went up stairs to bed: I presume they wanted to see if my candle was extinguished. If this be the case, it is really very distressing; as I certainly never gave you any occasion to suspect I should be careless in taking so necessary a precaution; and it is not pleasant to be represented in such a light to the domestics."

"Indeed, my dear, the interruption has taken place entirely without my knowledge. I assure you it is not by any order of mine that your room has been looked into: I cannot think what could induce any servant of mine to be guilty of such a liberty. Are you certain that you have not mistaken the nature and origin of the sound by which your sleep has been disturbed?"

"Oh, no; there could have been no mistake: I was perfectly awake when the interruption first took place, and afterwards it was so frequently repeated as to prevent the possibility of my sleeping."

More complaints from the housekeeper; no servant would remain; every individual of the family had his tale of terror to increase the apprehensions of the rest. Lady Pennyman began to be herself alarmed. Mrs. Atkins, a very dear and approved friend, came on a visit to her: she communicated the subject which had so recently disturbed the family, and requested her advice.

Mrs. Atkins, a woman devoid of every kind of superstitious fear, and of tried courage, understanding, and resolution, determined at once to silence all the stories that had been fabricated respecting the Cage Room, and to allay their terrors by adopting that apartment for her own bedchamber during the remainder of her residence at Lisle. It was in vain to oppose her purpose: she declared that no half measure could be equally effectual: that, if any of the family were to sleep there though their rest should be perfectly undisturbed, it would have no efficacy in tranquillizing the agitation of the family; since the servants would naturally accuse either Lady Pennyman or her son of being interested witnesses, and doubt of the fact of their having reposed in the centre of the ghost's dominions, without undergoing any punishment for the temerity of their invading them.

A bed was accordingly placed in the apartment. The Cage Room was rendered as comfortable as possible on so short a notice; and Mrs. Atkins retired to rest, attended by her favourite spaniel, saying, as she bade them all good night:

"I and my dog, I flatter myself, are equal to compete with a myriad of ghosts; so let me entreat you to be under no apprehension for the safety of Rose and myself."

Mrs. Atkins examined her chamber in every imaginable direction: she sounded every panel of the wainscot, to prove that there was no hollowness, which might argue a concealed passage; and, having bolted the door of the Cage Room, retired to rest, confident that she was secure against every material visitor, and totally incredulous of the airy encroachments of all spiritual beings.

Her assurance was doomed to be short-lived: she had only been a few minutes asleep when her dog, which lay by the bedside, leaped, howling and terrified, upon the bed; the door of the chamber slowly opened, and a pale, thin, sickly youth came in, cast his eyes mildly towards her, walked up to the iron cage in the middle of the room, and then leaned in the melancholy attitude of one revolving in his mind the sorrows of a cheerless and unblest existence: after a while he again withdrew, and retired by the way he entered.

Mrs. Atkins, on witnessing his departure, felt the return of her resolution: she was reassured in her original belief in the impossibility of all spiritual visitations: she persuaded herself to believe the figure the work of some skillful impostor, and she determined on following its footsteps: she took up her chamber lamp, and hastened to put her design in execution. On reaching the door, to her infinite surprise, she discovered it to be fastened, as she had herself left it, on retiring to her bed. On withdrawing the bolt and opening the door, she saw the back of the youth descending the staircase: she followed, till, on reaching the foot of the stairs, the form appeared to sink into the earth.

It was in vain to attempt concealing the occurrences of the night: her voice, her manner, the impossibility of sleeping a second time in the ill omened chamber would necessarily betray that something of a painful and mysterious nature had occurred.

The event was related to Lady Pennyman: she determined to remain no longer in her present habitation. The man of whom the house had been engaged was spoken to on the subject: he became extremely violent — said it was no time for the English to indulge their imaginations — insinuated something of the guillotine — and bade her, at her peril, drop a single expression to the injury of his property.

While she remained in France, no word was uttered upon the subject; she framed an excuse for her abrupt departure: another residence was offered in the vicinity of Lisle, which she engaged, on the pretext of its being better calculated to the size of her family; and at once relinquished her habitation, and with it every preternatural occasion of anxiety.

Transcriber's Note: This transcription has been slightly re-paragraphed for legibility, and to better confirm with modern text conventions.