

The Grandfather's Clock

A Lincolnshire Story

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

About forty years ago a young waggoner, named Joseph Smallman, who worked on a farm at Mavis Enderby in Lincolnshire, was one night, about Christmas time, sitting up for his master and mistress, who had driven to some festivity in the neighbourhood and were returning late and would require him to unharness and stable the horse.

As was usual in those days in small farmhouses in the country, the waggoner slept in the house and sat, during the evening, by the kitchen fire. The kitchen was an old-fashioned one, with a high dresser covered with shining copper and pewter, and in it was a large, very high eight-day grandfather's clock. The clock was an ancient one, such a clock as descends in families from generation to generation. It did not stand in the corner, but by the side of the wall and was partially sunk in the ground, some of the tiles having been removed to make a sort of groove for it and keep it standing firmly, which is often done to this day in cottages in Lincolnshire. It is thought a great privilege to have a grandfather's clock, and when once possessed they are taken care of.

The inner door of the kitchen opened into the living room on the left. To enter this room any one coming into the kitchen by the outer door—which led into the back yard—would not have to pass the clock, which stood over by the far wall.

The old master of the farm had died about two years before my story opens, and the farm was carried on by his widow and her son. He had been a wicked old man and very exacting with his farm hands. Nobody had regretted him very much, and when he died everybody was surprised that he left so little money behind him, for he was reputed to be a miser, and it was expected that his widow and his son would be left exceedingly well off. On the contrary, however, they hardly benefited at all, and had a hard struggle to make both ends meet at the farm.

Soon after the old man's death, strange noises used to be heard at night in the house—doors opening and shutting and mysterious footsteps walking up and down, but they had been put down to ordinary causes, and not until afterwards did the dwellers in the farmhouse realize that they had anything to do with the supernatural.

On this particular evening Joseph sat over the fire of logs and peat in the dim light of a candle, which he snuffed from time to time with the brass snuffers used in those days in the country, but which are rarely met with nowadays except in antique shops as curiosities. The candle gave only a small flame, and the smouldering fire, mostly of peat, gave very little light, so the kitchen, which was a very large one, was in semidarkness.

All at once Joseph heard the outer door open, and thinking it was his master and mistress returning, he got up from his chair. To his dismay, however, he saw the figure of a man with a white beard cross the kitchen, without taking any notice of him, go to the clock, look steadfastly at it, and then walk coolly into the inner room.

Joseph, thinking, in the dim light, that he was a thief, cried out, "Who the devil are you?" As he did so the figure turned and he saw it was his old master. He caught hold of the handle of the inner door to prevent the figure from shutting the door after him. Some strong force resisted him, and try as he might he could not force the door open one inch,

for though it was not shut it was firmly held on the other side. Then he tried to take his hand from off the handle, but it stuck fast to it and he could not draw it away. He stood like this for several moments, and his terror can be imagined. At last he broke free and searched the inner room, but it was perfectly empty and not a thing was disarranged.

Next day Joseph gave his mistress notice to leave, for he was so terrified by his experience of the previous night that he made up his mind to get away as far from the house as possible.

His mistress, however, would not hear of his leaving without giving her a good reason, and at last, on being pressed, Joseph told her his old master had appeared to him and looked very fixedly at the clock, and how he had then gone into the inner room and held the door to prevent him following. It was the holding of the door which had filled Joseph with special horror, and he told his mistress he would rather leave that hour than stay another night in the place.

The farmer's widow on hearing the story was convinced by the way he told it that it was genuine, and called to mind the many curious sounds they had heard since her husband's death. She said there must have been some reason why the ghost of her husband had stopped so pointedly by the old clock, and said she would have the clock moved in order to try and unravel the mystery.

Accordingly the tiles were taken up and the clock moved out of its socket in the floor. Underneath it was found a box, which on being opened contained the old miser's secret store—more than enough gold to keep his wife and son in comfort for the rest of their days.

Joseph stayed on at the farm a little longer, and the ghost was never seen again. Eventually he moved to another part of Lincolnshire in the fens district, where he is living yet. To hear him tell the story would convince the most sceptical, and the explanation is that the old miser's restless spirit returned to the house to point out where the miser's gold was hidden, which in his life he had hoarded for his own gratification, but afterwards was most anxious to restore to its proper owners.