

Watchers Beside a Departed Priest

By A. Le Braz

I shall always remember one date, and that is the 20th of February. I was watching beside the curate, a holy priest, who had died that morning. My fellow-watchers were Fauch Savéant, the carpenter, and Marie Cinthe Corfec, an old spinner.

The dead man was placed in an arm-chair, robed in his best vestments. His face was calm, almost smiling. We were saying the prayers for the dead, separately, every one by himself.

The silence and stillness began to make me feel sleepy. Fearing to fall actually asleep, I proposed to Fauch and to Marie Cinthe that we should say the Litany all together, to help to keep us all awake.

The carpenter was very willing, but the old spinner, who was never of the same opinion as other people, preferred to sit apart near the fireplace, and to go on praying alone. The carpenter and I remained near the corpse.

I undertook to recite the Litany and he to answer.

All at once he made me a sign as though to bid me be silent, and hearken.

I listened attentively.

“Do you hear nothing?” he asked me.

I heard a little silvery sound, but very, very faint. It might have been the dim echo of sweet-sounding church bells, far away in the country.

It continued for a few seconds.

Then we both heard exquisite music, which seemed to come from out the walls, the floor, the very furniture, and to fill and flood the room.

Neither Savéant nor I had ever heard such sweet music.

Savéant sought right and left to discover whence it came. He could not find out.

When the music ceased, I was about to continue the interrupted Litany, when another sound became audible.

It was this time a strange, soothing, humming noise, as if a hive of bees had invaded the room, and were swaying about from side to side, not knowing where to settle.

“Surely,” said Savéant, “there must be bees about!”

He took one of the tapers that were burning round the dead priest, lifted it high up, and went from one side to another, but in vain did we peer into all the corners, we did not see a single bee. The humming continued all the same, sometimes loud, sometimes faint, feeble, and hardly perceptible.

Fauch Savéant had sat down again, and we remained interchanging glances of enquiry.

We were not afraid, but we were troubled at the strangeness of what we had heard. We felt as if in a dream.

Suddenly Marie Cinthe’s loud voice made us start. She said, “If you would like to come and warm yourselves, I will watch.”

We asked her if she had heard anything, but she said she had not.

And from that time we also heard nothing.

(Related by A. M. L’Horset, Penvénan, 1889.)