

# At the Door

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

Mrs. Cardew,<sup>1</sup> the wife of a consul living in the Highlands, had a remarkable experience a few years ago. She is a very practical American, with no respect for “antiques,” full of common sense, and was not, until the following episode occurred, a believer in ghosts or any other phenomena. In fact, she always laughed at the idea of such things and scoffed frankly at everything occult.

One night she and her husband retired to bed as usual and went to sleep. Mrs. Cardew was rather worried at the time because she had not heard from her mother—an old lady living in California—for some time, and had had a “funny feeling,” as people call it, all day that her mother was not well, or would have written.

Mrs. Cardew had been asleep for some time, when she heard a loud, determined knocking which she could not locate. Sitting up in bed, she exclaimed, “I wonder what that can be!” She thought of waking her husband, but as the knocking now stopped she lay down and went to sleep again, thinking vaguely to herself, “It must be one of the maids.”

Presently the knocking was repeated, louder and more prolonged. It did not seem to disturb her husband, but was very determined nevertheless.

Puzzled, but not in the least bit frightened, Mrs. Cardew got up and, putting on a dressing-gown, lighted a candle, went out on the landing and listened. The knocking was repeated, and she was now aware that it came from below, from the back part of the house. As in many of the large houses in Scotland, the outbuildings at the back were connected with the house itself by a glass roof, which in wet weather protects the servants as they pass to and fro to the larder, laundry, and so on. Under this roof was the inner back door, which, like the outer door a few yards away, was securely bolted.

Going downstairs, with a candlestick in her hand, Mrs. Cardew unbolted the door and opened it. When she did so, she saw her mother standing on the threshold, dressed in what looked like a long white nightgown or shroud. The figure did not speak, but Mrs. Cardew cried out, “Mother!” and dropped the candle. All was in darkness, and her mother had disappeared. She went outside and looked about, but everything was still and the outer door was fast bolted. Groping her way back to the house, feeling certain that something had happened to her mother, she went back to her room, and, feeling ill, frightened and exhausted, went to sleep.

In the early morning, when she awoke, her first impression was that she had had an unusually vivid dream, but as her mind grew gradually clearer she remembered every little detail of what had happened. She told her husband, and they went down to the back door. The servants were not up, and there on the floor lay the china candlestick she had carried in her hand the night before, broken in pieces—silent testimony to the fact that at any rate it had not been a dream. During the day a cable came from America, saying that her mother had died in California during the night.

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<sup>1</sup> This name is fictitious.

I know the story to be true, but unfortunately am not permitted to give names and dates. The sceptical will no doubt conclude that Mrs. Cardew, being already rather worried about her mother when she retired to rest, either walked in her sleep or imagined the whole thing, being in a nervous state of mind, and therefore predisposed to see her mother's ghost; but the fact that she told her husband the full details *before* the cable came from America (to say nothing of the shattered fragments of the candlestick) disposes of both explanations.

People who walk in their sleep have no recollection whatever of it next morning, and far from imagining the ghost, its appearance made a very terrible and lasting impression on Mrs. Cardew, as those who know her well have testified to me, and which I know to be the case.