

Dog or Demon?

By Theo Gift (Dora Havers)

The following pages came into my hands shortly after the writer's death. He was a brother officer of my own, had served under me with distinction in the last Afghan campaign, and was young man of great spirit and promise. He left the army on the occasion of his marriage with a very beautiful girl, the daughter of a Leicestershire baronet; and I partially lost sight of him for some little time afterwards. I can, however, vouch for the accuracy of the principal facts herein narrated, and of the story generally; the sad fate of the family having made a profound impression, not only in the district in Ireland where the tragedy occurred, but throughout the country.

(signed) William J. Porlock,
Lieut.-Col.—Regt.
The Curragh, Co. Kildare

At last she is dead!

It came to an end today: all that long agony, those heart-rending cries and moans, the terrified shuddering of that poor wasted body, the fixed and maddening glare, more awful for its very unconsciousness. Only this very day they faded out and died one by one, as death crept at last up the tortured and emaciated limbs, and I stood over my wife's body, and tried to thank God for both our sakes that it was all over.

And yet it was I who had done it. I who killed her—not meaningly or of intent (I will swear that), not even so that the laws of this earth can punish me; but truly, wilfully all the same; of my own brutal, thoughtless selfishness. I put it all down in my diary at the time. I tear out the pages that refer to it now, and insert them here, that when those few friends who still care for me hear of the end they may know how it came about.

June 10th, 1878. Castle Kilmoyle, Kerry—Arrived here today with Kilmoyle after a hard battle to get away from Lily, who couldn't bear me going, and tried all manner of arguments to keep me from leaving her.

“What have you to do with Lord Kilmoyle's tenants?” she would keep on asking. “They owe no rent to you. Oh, Harry, do let them alone and stay here. If you go with him you'll be sure to come in for some of the ill-feeling that already exists against himself; and I shall be so miserably anxious all the time. Pray don't go.”

I told her, however, that I must, first, because I had promised, and men don't like going back from their word without any cause; and secondly, because Kilmoyle would be desperately offended with me if I did. The fact is, I hadn't seen him for three years till we met at that tennis-party at the FitzHerbert's last week, and when he asked me if I would like to run over for a week's fishing at his place in Ireland, and help him to enforce the eviction of a tenant who declined either to pay for the house he lived in or leave it, I accepted with effusion. It would be a spree. I had nothing to do, and I really wanted a little change and waking up. As for Lily, her condition naturally makes me rather nervous and fanciful at present, and to have me dancing attendance on her does her more harm than good. I told her so, and asked her, with half a dozen kisses if she'd like to tie me to her apron-string altogether. She burst out crying, and said she

would! There is no use in reasoning with the dear little girl at present. She is better with her sisters.

June 12th—We have begun the campaign by giving the tenant twenty-four hours' notice to quit or pay. Kilmoyle and I rode down with the bailiff to the cottage, a well-built stone one in the loveliest glen ever dreamt of out of fairyland, to see it served ourselves. The door was shut and barred, and as no answer save a fierce barking from within responded to our knocks, we were beginning to think that the tenant had saved us the trouble of evicting him by decamping of his own accord, when, on crossing round the side of the house where there was a small unglazed window, we came in full view of him, seated as coolly as possible beside a bare hearthstone, with a pipe in his mouth and a big brown dog between his knees. His hair, which was snow-white, hung over his shoulders, and his face was browned to the colour of mahogany by exposure to sun and wind; but he might have been carved out of mahogany too for all the sign of attention that he gave while the bailiff repeated his messages, until Kilmoyle, losing patience, tossed a written copy of the notice into him through the open window, with a threat that, unless he complied with it, he would be smoked out of the place like a rat; after which we rode off, followed by a perfect pandemonium of barks and howls from the dog, a lean and hideous mongrel, who seemed to be only held by force from flying at our throats.

We had a jolly canter over the hills afterwards, selected the bit of river that seemed most suitable for our fishing on the morrow; and wound up the day with a couple of bottles of champagne at dinner, after which Kilmoyle was warmed up into making me an offer which I accepted on the spot—i.e., to let me have the identical cottage we had been visiting rent free, with right of shooting and fishing, for two years, on condition only of my putting and keeping it in order for that time. I wonder what Lily will say to the idea. She hates Ireland almost as much as Kilmoyle's tenants are supposed to hate him, but really it would cost mighty little to make a most picturesque little place of the cabin in question, and I believe we should both find it highly enjoyable to run down here for a couple of months' change in the autumn, after a certain and much-looked-forward-to event is well over.

June 19th—The job is done, and the man out; and Kilmoyle and I shook hands laughingly today over our victory as he handed me the key in token of my new tenantry. It has been rather an exciting bit of work, however; for the fellow—an ill-conditioned old villain, who hasn't paid a stiver of rent for the last twelve months, and only a modicum for the three previous years—*wouldn't* quit; set all threats, persuasions, and warnings at defiance, and simply sat within his door with a loaded gun in his hand, and kept it pointed at anyone who tried to approach him. In the end, and to avoid bloodshed, we had to smoke him out. There was nothing else for it, for though we took care that none of the neighbours should come near the house with food, he was evidently prepared to starve where he was rather than budge an inch; and on the third day, Donovan, the bailiff told Kilmoyle that if he didn't want it to come to that, he must have in the help either of the "peelers" or a bit of smoke.

Kilmoyle vowed he wouldn't have the peelers anyhow. He had said he'd put the man out himself, and he'd do it, and the end of it was, we first had the windows shuttered up from outside, a sod put in the chimney, and then the door taken off its hinges while the tenant's attention was momentarily distracted by the former operations. Next, a good big fire of damp weeds which had been piled up outside was set alight, and after that there was nothing to do but wait.

It didn't take long. The wind was blowing strongly in the direction of the house, and the dense volume of thick, acrid smoke would have driven me out in about five minutes. As for the tenant, he was probably more hardened on the subject of atmosphere generally, for he managed to stand it for nearly half an hour, and until Kilmoyle and I were almost afraid to keep it up lest he should let himself be smothered out of sheer obstinacy. Just as I was debating, however, whether I wouldn't brave his gun, and make a rush for him at all costs, nature or vindictiveness got the better of his perversity; a dark figure staggered through the stifling vapour to the door, fired wildly in the direction of Kilmoyle (without hitting him, thank God!), and then dropped, a miserable object, purple with suffocation and black with smoke, upon the threshold, whence some of the keepers dragged him out into the fresh air and poured a glass of whisky down his throat, just too late to prevent his fainting away.

Five minutes later the fire was out, the windows opened, and two stalwart Scotch keepers put in charge of the dwelling, while Kilmoyle and I went home to dinner, and the wretched old man, who had given us so much trouble for nothing, was conveyed in a handcart to the village by some of his neighbours, who had been looking on from a distance, and beguiling the time by hooting and groaning at us.

"Who wants the police in these cases?" said Kilmoyle triumphantly.

"To my mind, Glennie, it's more cowardice to send for those poor fellows to enforce orders we ought to be able to carry out for ourselves, and so get them into odium with the whole neighbourhood. We managed this capitally by ourselves"—and, upon my word, I couldn't help agreeing heartily with him. Indeed, the whole affair had gone off with only one trifling accident, and that was no one's fault but the tenant's.

It seems that for the last two days his abominable dog had been tied up in a miserable little pigsty a few yards from the house, Donovan having threatened him that if the brute flew at or bit anyone it would be shot instantly. Nobody was aware of this, however, and unfortunately, when the bonfire was at its height, a blazing twig fell on the roof of this little shelter and set it alight; the clouds of smoke which were blowing that way hiding what had happened until the wretched animal inside was past rescue; while even its howls attracted no attention, from the simple fact that not only it, but a score of other curs belonging to the neighbours round had been making as much noise as they could from the commencement of the affair.

Now, of course, we hear that the evicted tenant goes about swearing that we deliberately and out of malice burnt his only friend alive, and calling down curses on our heads in consequence. I don't think we are much affected by them, however. Why didn't he untie the poor brute

June 22nd—A letter from Lady FitzHerbert, Lily's eldest sister, telling me she thinks I had better come back at once! L. not at all well, nervous about me, and made more, instead of less so, by my account of our successful raid. What a fool I was to write it! I thought she would be amused; but the only thing now is to get back as quickly as possible, and I started this morning, Kilmoyle driving me to the station. We were bowling along pretty fast, when, as we turned a bend in the road, the horse swerved suddenly to one side, and the off-wheel of the trap went over something with that sickening sort of jolt, the meaning of which some of us know, by experience, and which made Kilmoyle exclaim:

"Good heavens, we've run over something!"

Fortunately nothing to hurt! Nothing but the carcass of a dead dog, whose charred and blackened condition would have sufficiently identified it with the victim of Tuesday's bonfire, even if we had not now perceived its late owner seated among the heather near the roadside, and

occupied in pouring forth a string of wailing sounds, which might have been either prayers or curses for aught we could tell; the while he waved his shaggy white head and brown claw-like hands to and fro in unison. I yelled at him to know why he had left his brute of a dog there to upset travellers, but he paid no attention, and did not seem to hear, and as we were in a hurry to catch the train we could not afford to waste words on him, but drove on.

June 26th. Holly Lodge, West Kensington—This day sees me the proud father of a son and heir, now just five hours old, and, though rather too red for beauty, a very sturdy youngster, with a fine pair of lungs of his own. Lily says she is too happy to live, and as the dread of losing her has been the one thought of the last twenty-four hours, it is a comfort to know from the doctor that this means she has got through it capitally, and is doing as well as can be expected. Thank God for all His mercies!

July 17th—Lily has had a nasty fright this evening, for which I hope she won't be any the worse. She was lying on a couch out in the veranda for the first time since her convalescence, and I had been reading to her till she fell asleep, when I closed the book, and leaving the bell beside her in case she should want anything, went into my study to write letters. I hadn't been there for half an hour, however, when I was startled by a cry from Lily's voice and a sharp ringing of the bell, which made me fling open the study window and dart round to the veranda at the back of the house. It was empty, but in the drawing-room within, Lily was standing upright, trembling with terror and clinging to her maid, while she tried to explain to her that there was someone hidden in the veranda or dose by, though so incoherently, owing to the state of agitation she was in, that it was not until I and the man-servant had searched the veranda, garden, and outbuildings, and found nothing, that I was even able to understand what had frightened her.

It appeared then that she had suddenly been awakened from sleep by the pressure of a heavy hand on her shoulder, and a hot breath—so close, it seemed as if someone were about to whisper in her ear—upon her cheek. She started up, crying out, "Who's that? What is it?" but was only answered by a hasty withdrawal of the pressure, and the pit-pat of heavy but shoeless feet retreating through the dusk to the further end of the veranda. In a sudden access of ungovernable terror she screamed out, sprang to her feet, ringing the bell as she did so, and rushed into the drawing-room, where she was fortunately joined by her maid, who had been passing through the hall when the bell rang.

Well, as I said, we searched high and low, and not a trace of any intruder could we find; nay, not even a stray cat or dog, and we have none of our own. The garden isn't large, and there is neither tree nor shrub in it big enough to conceal a boy. The gate leading into the road was fastened inside, and the wall is too high for easy climbing while the maid having been in the hall, could certify that no one had passed out through the drawing-room. Finally I came to the conclusion that the whole affair was the outcome of one of those very vivid dreams which sometimes come to us in the semi-conscious moment between sleep and waking, and though Lily, of course, wouldn't hear of such an idea, for a long while, I think even she began to give into it after the doctor had been sent for, and had pronounced it the only rational one, and given her a composing draught before sending her off to bed. At present she is sleeping soundly, but it has been a disturbing evening, and I'm glad it's over.

September 20th—Have seen Dr C— today, and he agrees with me—that there is nothing for it but change and bracing air. He declares that the fright Lily had in July must have been much more

serious than we imagined, and that she has never got over it. She *seemed* to do so. She was out and about after her confinement as soon as other people; but I remember now her nerves seemed gone from the first. She was always starting, listening, and trembling without any cause, except that she appeared in constant alarm lest something should happen to the baby; and as I took that to be a common weakness with young mothers over their first child, I'm afraid I paid no attention to it. We've a very nice nurse for the boy, a young Irishwoman named Bridget McBean (not that she's ever seen Ireland herself, but her parents came from there, driven by poverty to earn their living elsewhere, and after faithfully sending over every farthing they could screw out of their own necessities to "the ould folks at home", died in the same poverty here). Bridget is devoted to the child, and as long as he is in her care Lily generally seems easy and peaceful. Otherwise (and some strange instinct seems to tell her when this is the case) she gets nervous at once, and is always restless and uneasy.

Once she awoke with a scream in the middle of the night, declaring, "Something was wrong with the baby. Nurse had gone away and left it; she was sure of it!" To pacify her I threw on my dressing-gown and ran up to the nursery to see; and, true enough, though the boy was all right and sound asleep, Nurse was absent, having gone up to the cook's room to get something for her toothache. She came back the next moment and I returned to satisfy Lily, but she would scarcely listen to me.

"Is it gone?" she asked. "Was the nursery door open? Oh, if it had been! Thank God, you were in time to drive the thing down. But how—how could it have got into the house?"

"*It?* What?" I repeated, staring.

"The dog you passed on the stairs. I saw it as it ran past the door—a *big black dog!*"

"My dear, you're dreaming. I passed no dog nothing at all."

"Oh, Harry, didn't you see it then? I did, though it went by so quietly. Oh, is it in the house still?"

I seized the candle, went up and down the stairs and searched the whole house thoroughly; but again found nothing. The fancied dog must have been a shadow on the wall only, and I told her so pretty sharply; yet on two subsequent occasions when, for some reason or another, she had the child's cot put beside her own bed at night, I was awoken by finding her sitting up and shaking with fright, while she assured me that something—*some animal*—had been trying to get into the room. She could hear its breathing distinctly as it scratched at the door to open it! Dr C—is tight. Her nerves are clearly all wrong, and a thorough change is the only thing for her. How glad I am that the builder writes me my Kerry shooting-box is finished! We'll run over there next week. . .

September 26th, The Cabin, Kilmoyle Castle, Kerry—Certainly this place is Paradise after London, and never did I imagine that by raising the roof so as to transform a garret into a large, bright attic, quite big enough for a nursery, throwing out a couple of bay windows into the two rooms below, and turning an adjoining barn into a kitchen and servants' room, this cottage could ever have been made into such a jolly little box. As for Lily, she's delighted with it, and looks ever so much better already. Am getting my guns in order for tomorrow, anticipating a pleasant day's shooting.

September 27th—Here's an awful bother! Bridget has given warning and declares she will leave today! It seems she knew her mother came from Kerry, and this morning she has found out that the old man who lived in this very cottage was her own grandfather, and that he died of a broken heart within a week of his eviction, having first called down a solemn curse on Kilmoyle and me,

and all belonging to us, in this world and the next. They also say that he managed to scoop out a grave for his dog, and bury it right in front of the cabin door; and now Bridget is alternately tearing her hair for ever having served under her “grandfather’s murderer”, and weeping over the murderer’s baby the while she packs her box for departure. That wouldn’t matter too much, though it’s awfully unpleasant; for the housekeeper at the Castle will send us someone to mind the boy till we get another nurse; but the disclosure seems to have driven Lily as frantic as Bridget. She entreated me with tears and sobs to give up the cabin, and take her and baby back to England before “the curse could fall upon us”, and wept like one brokenhearted when I told her she must be mad even to suggest such a thing after all the expense I had been to. All the same, it’s a horrid nuisance.

She has been crying all day, and if this fancy grows on her the change will do her no good, and I shan’t know what to do. I’m sorry I was cross to her, poor child, but I was rather out of sorts myself, having been kept awake all night by the ceaseless mournful howling of some unseen cur. Besides, I’m bothered about Kilmoyle. He arranged long ago to be here this week, but the bailiff says he has been ill and is travelling, and speaks in a mysterious way as if the illness were D.T. I hope not! I had no idea before that my old chum was even addicted to drink. Anyhow, I won’t be balked of a few days shooting, at all events, and perhaps by that time Lily will have calmed down.

October 19th, The Castle—It is weeks since I opened this, and I only do so now before closing it for ever. I shall never dare to look at it again after writing down what I must today. I did go out for my shooting on the morning after my last entry, and my wife, with the babe in her arms, stood at the cabin door to see me off. The sunlight shone full on them—on the tear-stains still dark under her sweet blue eyes, and the downy head and tiny face of the infant on her breast. But she smiled as I kissed my hand to her. I shall never forget that—the last smile that The woman we had brought with us as servant told me the rest. She said her mistress went on playing with the child in the sunshine till it fell asleep and then laid it in its cot inside, and sat beside it rocking it. By-and-by, however, the maid went in and asked her to come and look at something that was wrong with the new kitchen arrangements, and Lily came out with her. They were in the kitchen about ten minutes, when they heard a wail from the cabin, and both ran out. Lily was first, and cried out:

“Oh, Heaven! Look! what’s that—that great dog, *all black and burnt-looking*, coming out of the house? Oh, my baby! My baby!”

The maid saw no dog, and stopped for an instant to look round for it, letting her mistress run on. Then she heard one wild shriek from within—such a shriek as she had never heard in all her life before—and followed. She found Lily lying senseless on the floor, and in the cradle the child—stone dead! Its throat had been torn open by some strange savage animal, and on the bedclothes and the fresh white matting covering the floor were the blood-stained imprints of a dog’s feet!

That was three weeks ago. It was evening when I came back, came back to hear my wife’s delirious shrieks piercing the autumn twilight—those shrieks which, from the moment of her being roused from the merciful insensibility which held her for the first hours of her loss, she has never ceased to utter. We have moved her to the Castle since then; but I can hear them now. She has never regained consciousness once. The doctors fear she never will.

And she never did! That last entry in my diary was written two years ago. For two years my young wife, the pretty girl who loved me so dearly, and whom I took from such a happy home, has been a raving lunatic—obliged to be guarded, held down, and confined behind high walls. They have been my own walls, and I have been her keeper. The doctors wanted me to send her to an asylum; said it would be for her good, and on that I consented, but she grew so much worse there, her frantic struggles and shrieks for me to come to her, to “save her from the dog, to keep it off”, were so incessant and heart-rending that they sent for me; and I have never left her again. God only knows what that means; what the horror and agony of those two years, those ceaseless, piteous cries for her child, our child, those agonized entreaties to me “not to go with Kilmoyle; to take her away, away”; those—oh! how have I ever borne it! . . .

Today it is over. She is dead; and—I scarce dare leave her even yet! Never once in all this time have I been tempted to share the horrible delusion which, beginning in a weak state of health, and confirmed by the awful coincidence of our baby’s death, upset my darling’s brain; and yet now—now that it is over, I feel as if the madness which slew her were coming on me also. As she lay dying last night, and I watched by her alone, I seemed to hear a sound of snuffing and scratching at the door outside, as though some animal were there. Once, indeed, I strode to it and threw it open, but there was nothing—nothing but a dark, fleeting shadow seen for one moment, and the sound of soft, unshod feet going pit, pat, pit, pat, upon the stairs as they retreated downwards. It was but fancy my own heartbeats, as I knew; and yet—yet if the women who turned me out an hour ago should have left her alone—if that sound now—

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Here the writing came to an abrupt end, the pen lying in a blot across it. At the inquest held subsequently the footman deposed that he heard his master fling open the study door, and rush violently upstairs to the death-chamber above. A loud exclamation, and the report of a pistol-shot followed almost immediately; and on running to the rescue he found Captain Glennie standing inside the door, his face livid with horror, and the revolver in his outstretched hand still pointed at a corner of the room on the other side of the bier, the white covering on which had in one place been dragged off and torn. Before the man could speak, however, his master turned round to him, and exclaiming:

“Williams, *I have seen it!* It was there! *On her!* Better this than a madhouse! There is no other escape,” put the revolver to his head, and fired. He was dead ere even the servant could catch him.