

# The Ghost in All the Rooms

By Daniel Defoe

A certain person of quality, being with his family at his country seat for the summer season, according to his ordinary custom, was obliged, upon a particular occasion of health, to leave his said seat and go to Aix-la-Chapelle, to use the baths there. This was, it seems, in the month of August, being two months sooner than the usual time of his returning to court for the winter.

Upon thus removing sooner than ordinary he did not then disfurnish the house, as was the ordinary usage of the family, or carry away his plate and other valuable goods, but left his steward and three servants to look after the house. And the padre or parish priest was desired to keep his eye upon them too and to succor them from the village adjoining, if there was occasion.

The steward had no public notice of any harm approaching, but for three or four days successively he had secret strange impulses of dread and terror upon his mind that the house was beset, and was to be assaulted by a troop of banditti, or as we call them here housebreakers, who would murder them all, and after they had robbed the house would set it on fire. And this followed him so fast and made such impression upon his mind that he could think of nothing else.

Upon this, the third day he went to the padre or parish priest and made his complaint. Upon which the priest and the steward had the following discourse, the steward beginning thus:

“Father,” said he, “you know what a charge I have in my custody and how my lord has entrusted me with the whole house, and all the rich furniture is standing. I am in great perplexity about it and come to you for your advice.”

*Priest:* Why, what’s the matter? You have not heard of any mischief threatened, have you?

*Steward:* No, I have heard nothing. But I have such apprehensions and it has made such impression upon me for these three days that—

Here he told him the particulars of the uneasiness he had been in and added, besides what is said above, that one of the servants had the same and had told him of it, though he had communicated nothing to that servant in the least.

*Priest:* It may be you dreamed of these things?

*Steward:* No, indeed, padre! I am sure I could not dream of them, for I could never sleep.

*Priest:* What can I do for you? What would you have me do?

*Steward:* I would have you first of all tell me what you think of these things, and whether there is any notice to be taken of them.

Here the padre examined him more strictly about the particulars, and sent for the servant and examined him apart and being a very judicious honest man, he answered him thus:

*Priest:* Look you, Mr. Steward, I do not lay a very great stress upon such things, but yet I don’t think they are to be wholly slighted. And therefore I would have you be upon your guard, and if you have the least alarm, let me know.

*Steward:* That is poor satisfaction to me to be upon my guard, if I am overpowered. I suppose if any villains have a design to attack me they know my strength.

*Priest:* Shall I reinforce your garrison?

*Steward:* I wish you would.

*Priest:* Well, I’ll send you some men with firearms to lie there this night.

Accordingly the priest sent him five stout fellows with fuses, and a dozen of hand grenades with them, and while they continued in the house nothing appeared. But the padre, finding nothing come of it and being loath to ~ his patron to so continue a charge, sent for the steward and in a chiding angry tone told him his mind.

*Priest:* I know not how you will answer it to my lord, but you have put him to a prodigious expense here, in keeping a garrison in the house all this while.

*Steward:* I am sorry for it, padre, but what can I do?

*Priest:* Do! Why, compose your mind, and keep up your heart, and don't let my lord spend two or three hundred livres here to cure you of the vapours.

*Steward:* Why, you said yourself, padre, that it was not to be wholly slighted.

*Priest:* That's true; but I said also I would not lay too great a stress upon it.

*Steward:* What must I do then?

*Priest:* Do! Why, dismiss the men again and take what care you can. And if you have any notice of mischief that may be depended upon, let me have notice too, and I will assist you.

*Steward:* Well, then, the good angel must protect my lord's house, I see, for nobody else will.

"Amen," says the padre. "I trust the good spirits will keep you all." So he blessed the steward (in his way) and the steward went away grumbling very much that he took away his garrison and left him to the good spirits.

It seems, for all this, that the steward's notices, however secret and from he knew not who, were not of so light an import as the padre thought they were. For as he had this impulse upon his mind that such mischief was brewing, so it really was, as you will see presently.

A set of robbers, who had intelligence that the nobleman with his family was gone to Aix-la-Chapelle, but that the house was left furnished and all the plate and the things of value were left in it, had formed a design to plunder the house and afterwards to burn it, just as the steward had said.

They were two and twenty strong, in the whole, and thoroughly armed for mischief. Yet while the additional force which the padre had placed to reinforce the steward were in the house, of whom, including the other four, three sat up every night, they did not dare attempt it.

But as soon as they heard that the guard was dismissed, they formed their design anew, and to make the story short they attacked the house about midnight. Having, I suppose, proper instruments about them, they soon broke open a window and twelve of them got into the house, the rest standing sentinel at such places as they thought proper, to prevent any succours from the town.

The poor steward and his three men were in great distress. They were indeed above stairs, and had barricaded the staircases as well as they could, hearing the fellows were breaking in. But when they found they were got in, they expected nothing but to be kept above stairs till the house was plundered, and then to be burnt alive.

But it seems the good spirits the priest spoke of, or somebody else, made better provision for them, as you will see presently.

When the first of the fellows got into the house, and had opened the door and let in as many of their gang as they thought fit, which, as above, was twelve in number, they shut the door again and shut themselves in; leaving two without the door, who had a watchword, to go and call more help if they wanted it.

The twelve ranging over the great hall found little there to gratify their greedy hopes. But breaking next into a fine well-furnished parlour where the family usually sat, behold! in a great easy chair sat a grave ancient man with a long full-bottomed black wig, a rich brocaded gown,

and a lawyer's laced band, but looking as if in great surprise, seemed to make signs to them for mercy; but said not a word, nor they much to him, except that one of them, starting, cried, "Ha! who's here?"

Immediately the rogues fell to pulling down the fine damask curtains in the windows, and other rich things; but one said to another with an oath, "Make the old dog tell us where the plate is hid." And another said, "If he won't tell you, cut his throat immediately."

The ancient gentleman, with signs of entreaty, as if begging for his life, and in a great fright, points to a door which being opened would let them into another parlour, which was the gaming room, and served as a drawing room to the first parlour, and by another door opened into the great saloon which looked into the gardens. They were some time forcing their way into that room, but when they came in, they were surprised to see the same old man, in the same dress and the same chair, sitting at the upper end of the room, making the same gestures and silent entreaties as before.

They were not much concerned at first, but thought he had come in by another door, and began to swear at him for putting them to the trouble of breaking open the door when there was another way into the room. But another, wickeder than the first, said with a heavy curse: the old dog was got in by another door on purpose to convey away the plate and money; and bade knock his brains out. Upon which the first swore at him that if he did not immediately show them where it was he was a dead dog that moment.

Upon this furious usage he points to the doors which opened into the saloon, which, being a thin pair of folding doors, opened presently, and in they run into the great saloon; when looking at the further end of the room, there sat the ancient man again, in the same dress and posture as before.

Upon this sight, those that were foremost among them cried out aloud, "Why this old fellow deals with the Devil, sure! He's here afore us again."

But the case differed a little now, for when they came out of the first parlour, being eager for the plate and money and willing to find it all, the whole body of them run into the second parlour. But now, the ancient man pointing to the third room, they did not all immediately rush out into the saloon, but four of them were left behind in the parlour or gaming room mentioned just now, not by order or design, but accidentally.

By this means they fell into the following confusion: for while some of them called out from the saloon that the old rogue was there before them again, others answered out of the parlour, "How the devil can that be? Why, he is here still in his chair, and all his rubbish."

With that, two of them run back into the first parlour, and there they saw him again sitting as before. Notwithstanding all this, far from guessing what the occasion should be, they fancied they were gamed, or suggested that they were but jested with, and that there were three several old men all dressed up in the same habits for the very same occasion, and to mock them, as if to let them know that the men above in the house were not afraid of them.

"Well," says one of the gang, "I'll despatch one of the old rogues. I'll teach one of them how to make game at us." Upon which, raising his fusee as high as his arm would let him, he struck at the ancient man, as he thought it was, with all his force. But behold! there was nothing in the chair, and his fusee flew into a thousand pieces, wounding his hand most grievously. And a piece of the barrel, striking him on the head, broke his face and knocked him down backward.

At the same time, one of those in the saloon running at the ancient man that sat there, swore he would tear his fine brocaded gown off, and then he would cut his throat. But when he went to take hold of him, there was nothing in the chair.

This happening in both rooms, they were all in most horrible confusion, and cried out in both rooms at the same moment, in a terrible manner.

As they were in the utmost amazement at the thing, so after the first clamor they stood looking upon one another for some time, without speaking a word more. But at length one said, "Let's go back into the first parlour and see if that's gone too."

And with that word, two or three that were on that side run into the room, and there sat the ancient figure as at first. Upon which they called to the company and told them they believed they were all bewitched, and it was certain they only fancied they saw a man in the other rooms, for there was the real old man sitting where he was at first.

Upon this they all run thither, saying they would see whether it was the devil or no. And one of them said, "Let me come. I'll speak to him. 'Tis not the first time I have talked with the devil."

"Nay," says another, "so will I." And then added with an oath: gentlemen that were upon such business as they were ought not to be afraid to speak to the devil.

A third (for now their courage began to rise again) calls aloud, "Let it be the devil, or the devil's grandmother, I'll parley with it. I am resolved I'll know what it is."

And with that he runs forward before the rest, and, crossing himself, says to the ancient man in the chair, "In the name of St. Francis, and St.—(and so reckoned up two or three saints' names that he depended were enough to fright the devil), what art thou?"

The figure never moved or spoke. But looking at its face, they presently found that instead of his pitiful looks and seeming to beg for his life, as he did before, he was changed into the most horrible monster that ever was seen, and such as I cannot describe. And that instead of his hands held up to them to cry for mercy, there were two large fiery daggers, not flaming, but redhot and pointed with a livid bluish flame, and, in a word, the devil or something else in the most frightful shape that can be imagined. And it was my opinion, when I first read the story, the rogues were so frightened that their imagination afterwards formed a thing in their thoughts more terrible than the devil himself could appear in.

But be that as it will, his figure was such that when they came up to him not a man of them had courage to look in his face, much less talk to him. And he that was so bold, and thus came armed with half a regiment of saints in his mouth, fell down flat on the ground, having fainted away, as they call it, with fright.

The steward and his three men were all this while above stairs, in the utmost concern at the danger they were in and expecting every moment the rogues would strive to force their way up, and cut their throats. They heard the confused noise that the fellows made below but could not imagine what it was, and much less the meaning of it. But while it lasted it came into the mind of one of the servants, that as it was certain the fellows were all in the parlour, and very busy there, whatever it was about, he might go up to the top of the house and throw one of their hand grenades down the chimney, and perhaps it might do some execution among them.

The steward approved of this design, only with his addition. "If we throw down but into one parlour, they will all fly into the gaming room, and so it will do no execution. But," says he, "take three, and put down one into each chimney, for the funnels go up all together, and then they will not know which way to run."

With these orders, two of the men who very well knew the place went up, and firing the fuses of the grenades, they put one shell into each of the funnels; and down they went roaring in the chimney with a terrible noise, and (which was more than all the rest) they came down into the parlour where almost all the rogues were, just at the moment that the fellow that spoke to the spectre was frightened into a swooning fit and fallen on the floor.

The whole gang was frightened beyond expression. Some run back into to the gaming parlour whence they came, and some run to the other door which they came in at from the hall, but all at the same instant heard the devil, as they thought it was, coming down the chimney.

Had it been possible that the fuses of the grenades could have continued burning in the funnel of the chimneys, where the sound was a thousand times doubled by the hollow of the place, and where the soot burning fell down in flakes of fire, the rogues had been frightened out of their understandings; imagining, that as they had one dreadful devil just among them in the chair, so there were ten thousand more coming down the chimney to destroy them all, and perhaps to carry them all away.

But that could not be. So after they had been sufficiently scared with the noise, down came the shells into the rooms, all three together. It happened as luckily as if it had been contrived on purpose, that the shell which came down into the parlour where they all were, burst as soon as ever it came to the bottom, so that it did not give them time so much as to think what it might be, much less to know that it was really a hand grenade. But as it did great execution among them, so they as certainly believed it was the devil as they believed the spectre in the chair was the devil.

The noise of the bursting of the shell was so sudden and so unexpected that it confounded them, and the mischief was also terrible. The man that fainted and who lay on the ground was killed outright, and two more that stood just before the chimney. Five of them were desperately wounded, whereof one had both his legs broken, and was so desperate that when the people from the country came in, he shot himself through the head with his own pistol to prevent his being taken.

Had the rest of them fled out of the parlour into the two other rooms, it is probable they had been wounded by the other shells. But as they heard the noise in both the outer rooms, and besides were under the surprise of its being not a hand grenade, but the devil, they had no power to stir. Nor if they had could they know which way to go to be safe. So they stood still till both the shells in the other rooms burst also. At which, being confounded, as well with the noise as with the smoke, and expecting more devils down the chimney where they stood, they run out all that way, and made to the door, helping their wounded men along as well as they could. Whereof one died in the fields after they were got away.

It must be observed, when they were thus alarmed with they knew not what coming down the chimney, they cried out that the devil in the chair had sent for more devils to destroy them. And it was supposed that had the shells never come down, they would all have run away. But certain it was that the artificial devil joining so critically as to time with the visionary devils, or whatever they were, completed their disorder and forced them to fly.

When they came to the door to the two men, they made signals for their comrades who were posted in the avenues to the house to come to their relief; who accordingly came up, and assisted to carry off their wounded men. But after hearing the relation of those that had been in the house and calling a short council a little way from the door (which, though dark as it was, the steward and his men could perceive from the window), they all resolved to make off.

There was another concurring accident which, though it does not relate to my subject, I must set down to complete the story: that two of these grenades by the fire of their fuses set the chimneys on fire. The third, being in a funnel that had no soot in it, the room having not been so much used, did not. This fire flaming out at the top, as is usual, was seen by somebody in the village, who run immediately and alarmed the priest or padre, and he again raised the whole town, believing there was some mischief fallen out and that the house was set on fire.

Had the rest of the gang not resolved to make off as is said above, they had certainly fallen into the hands of the townsmen, who ran immediately with what arms came next to hand, to the house. But the rogues were fled, leaving, as above, three of their company dead in the house, and one in the field.