

The Haunted Child

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

Miss Mary Jarvis¹ (the daughter of a late well-known doctor in New Zealand), with whom I am thoroughly well acquainted and for whose high integrity I can vouch, related to me the following curious facts, which took place in Napier, New Zealand.

“Five years ago,” she said, “an old man named William Stone called one day to see my father professionally. He was employed in a draper’s shop, and was a very respectable, hard-working man. When my father asked him what ailed him, he said, ‘I want you to give me something for my nerves. I have had a very bad shock, and can’t seem to get over it.’ When my father began to question him, he told him, after some hesitation, the following extraordinary story.

“He said he had a daughter, married and living at Clive, six miles out of Napier, and that he had several grandchildren, of whom he was very fond. Another daughter, who had always been a very worthless girl and given him great trouble, he had finally cast off, and she had led a wicked life; in fact, as he expressed it, ‘gone to the devil,’ and a short time previously had died of some painful disease in a hospital.

“Before she died, when she knew she could not possibly recover, she asked to be allowed to see her niece May, one of her sister’s children, to whom she had been very devoted before she was driven from home. The child’s mother, however, refused to let May go to see her aunt, and in this she was upheld by her husband and the rest of the family.

“When the aunt was told that the child would not be allowed to come and see her, she was exceedingly angry, and said, ‘Very well—I’ll haunt her when I am dead!’

“Nobody paid much attention to the threat, and a few days later she died.

“And now a very remarkable thing took place. The child May began to see her aunt at night, and screamed out that ‘Aunty’ was ‘sitting in the corner, with a man with his hat over his eyes.’ Also at the same time there were loud sounds, as if heavy stones were being dashed against the roof of the house just over the child’s bedroom. The whole family heard the noise, but no one except May saw anything. This happened night after night.

“At school none of the other children would go near May, for they said that bells were ringing round her wherever she went, and it frightened them out of their wits. May heard the bells, too, ringing and ringing all about her, though there were no bells anywhere near. She and her brother and sister used often to come home, after leaving for school, saying that hands were dragging them back; and as they always loved going to school, their mother knew that something out of the ordinary must be happening. They told the police, and the house was watched, but no trick or hoax could be discovered, and still May continued to see her dead aunt and ‘the man with the hat pulled down over his face,’ and still the rocks seemed to crash down, bang! bang! on the roof.

“At last May’s mother went over to Napier and told her father, William Stone, about the whole matter and how terrified she was. Manlike, he was very angry and pooh-

¹ The names in this story are fictitious.

pooed the whole thing, saying, 'What a pack of woman's nonsense! Send the child to me, and I'll soon put an end to all this silly gossip.'

"Accordingly May was sent over to Napier to stay with her grandfather. The first night she arrived there the same thing happened, and Stone assured my father that it was all perfectly dreadful and had frightened him beyond description. There was no doubt whatever that May *did* see her aunt and the man, for she was far too terrified to pretend anything of the kind, and he told my father how the crashing sounds came down on his roof as well as on the roof of May's home.

"My father gave him some medicine, and that evening told my mother and myself the whole story, for, of course, we all knew Stone quite well, and he thought the whole thing most mysterious, because the man was very downright and honest and truthful, and my father was certain he had not concocted the story. He was really ill from shock, and evidently in a great state of agitation. My father asked him if he had seen anything himself, but he said 'No,' adding that when the noises started he had rushed into the child's room and found her convulsed with fear, saying that she had just seen her aunt, but that he had seen no one, and that presently the noises stopped.

"The day after Stone visited my father, it occurred to him that neither May, nor her sister nor brother, had ever been christened. He told his sister that this ought to be done at once, and the children were taken to the vicar, who soon after performed the ceremony. It proved to be most efficacious, for from that day all was quiet, and May was never troubled again with ghostly sights or sounds."

Miss Jarvis went on to say that there are plenty of people now living in Napier who can testify to the truth of the events, as they heard the crashing sounds, and many of them saw the child's terror, which could not have been assumed.

I have just come across other cases of haunted children, and am inclined to account for the dead aunt's return to earth by the fact that she had led an openly evil life, and was therefore on a very low plane. The child was, so to speak, on a loose plane, being young and immature. Evil triumphed for a time in the terrible revenge against the family because May was withheld from the death-bed, but the fact of taking the child to church, *and believing it was going to help*, exorcised the evil spirit.

The wife of the clergyman who baptised the child has also authenticated this story, every word of which she says happened as here related.