

The Dream House

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

There is a certain strange story which I have come across, in various forms, over and over again. I have never read it in any book, paper or magazine, though, for aught I know, it may have been told in print as often as it has been related by word of mouth by persons interested in such matters.

The first time I heard the story was at a house in St. John's Wood when, learning that I was collecting material of the kind, a lady who was staying in the house told me one version of it as having happened to friends of her own.

Soon after I heard another version. Then another. And still more. And each time the circumstances in the story have been quite different. The true explanation must be, I think, that the experience is a common one with psychic people, and that although so weird and alarming, it frequently happens to those who fully realize the truth of that wonderful line of Wordsworth's: "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting."

I will give below a version of this story which reached me quite lately. The lady who had the dream is a well-known woman of title, and so is the lady who owns the house in Ireland. I have given them both imaginary names, retaining their initials only.

Lady Barton used often to dream of a house which she could see quite plainly, down to the smallest detail. Dreams are often vague and shadowy, but this one was always exceptionally clear. She knew every nook and corner of the house—its garden and its surroundings—wandered about in it, went up and down stairs and experienced many happy moments in her Dream House.

One day Lady Barton, who had not been well, and was looking out for a country house in which to find complete rest and change, saw a house advertised in Ireland. She at once wrote to her son, who was in Ireland at the time, asking him to go and look at it for her, which he accordingly did, and wrote back saying it was a charming place belonging to Lady Martin and in perfect repair; in fact, he strongly recommended his mother to take it. He wrote so highly of it that Lady Barton, without seeing it, entered into negotiations for taking it, furnished, for several months. She had never visited Ireland and had always wished to go there.

Soon after she went over, with her daughter, to take possession, and arrived at Ballyhoolish on a fine August day. The moment she saw the house she exclaimed, to her daughter's astonishment, "Why, I know this house quite well!"

They entered the front door and were received by an old housekeeper of Lady Martin's, who had been left in the house to look after their comfort. When Lady Barton saw the hall, she said, "Yes, this is the hall! I know every nook and corner. But surely there is one difference. I thought there was another staircase here."

"There *used* to be a staircase, my lady," said the housekeeper, who evidently concluded that the newcomer had been a former guest in the house, "but it was removed last year."

They all went upstairs, Lady Barton recognizing pictures, statues, and so forth, on the way. And presently they went a round of the bedrooms. Lady Barton knew each room and described it briefly to her daughter before going into it. All at once she looked puzzled and said to the housekeeper, "I thought there was a sitting-room here."

“So there was, my lady,” she replied, “but last year, when there was a big shooting-party, there was so little room that it was turned into a bedroom.”

Nothing more was said at the time. Lady Barton was, of course, greatly mystified for, never having been in Ireland in her life, she could never have seen the house, and yet she knew it from top to bottom, except the alterations which had been made the previous year—the removal of the staircase and the conversion of the first-floor sitting-room into an extra bedroom. It was all, she thought, very odd and most perplexing. But the sequel was still to come.

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While Lady Barton was staying in Ireland, she regained her health and returned to London feeling quite her old self once more.

One day, soon after her return, she went with her daughter to call on Lady Martin, whom she had never met, but in whose house she had just been staying. They were shown into the drawing-room, and a minute or two later Lady Martin came in. The moment she entered the room and saw Lady Barton she started back and could hardly speak, but, controlling her feelings, she managed to pull herself together and greet her visitors, though not before Lady Barton had noticed her agitation.

“Do I remind you of any one, Lady Martin?” she said.

“Well, to speak quite frankly,” said the hostess, “you are the exact image of the ghost that haunts our house in Ireland.”

Lady Barton thereupon confessed that there must be something supernatural in the whole affair, since she, too, had recognized every detail of the house which she had never seen, and felt that she must have visited it in the spirit at some time or another.

Can any reader explain this strange phenomenon? I can only surmise that Lady Barton had been in the habit, until the previous year, of becoming detached spiritually from her body while she slept, her astral body meanwhile visiting the house in Ireland with which, no doubt, she had had some connection in a former incarnation. I have met, as I say, with many instances of the kind.