

# Eight Omens of a Death

By A. Le Braz

Every time that one of my family has died, I have been warned by an omen; but the most remarkable omens that have ever come to me have been those which preceded the death of my husband. I was subjected to every variety of these during the seven months that his illness lasted.

One evening that I had been sitting up rather late, I had gone to sleep from exhaustion on the bench by the bedside, I was awaked, all in a moment, by a noise like that of a window being opened.

“Dear me!” I thought, “the wind is playing pranks.” Then there passed over my face a cold, damp breath, which might have come up out of a cellar. I remembered that I had left some linen drying on a hedge, and I said to myself: “Suppose the wind carries away my washing!”

I got up at once. To my extreme surprise, the window was fast shut. I went to the door and opened it. The night was fine and the stars were shining. The linen

hung upon the hedge where I had left it. The trees were motionless; there was not a breath of wind.

I did not trouble much about this circumstance, though it did seem to me mysterious.

Some days later, I was spinning at the door with a neighbour. All on a sudden, I heard my husband, who was in bed near the hearth on the other side the house, calling me. I ran to him. “Do you want anything?” I asked. He made no answer, and then I saw that he was fast asleep, with his head turned towards the wail.

I returned to my neighbour’s side. “Did you not hear Lucas call me just now?” I asked. “Yes, I did.” “What can it mean? He is as sound asleep as a badger!”

A month or two went by. My husband was neither better nor worse. One night, I had just lain down by his side and was dozing off, when I heard, just over my head in the garret, the sound of a footstep, as of one walking stealthily. Then there was the sound of whispering amongst several persons. Then came a noise as of the moving of planks, and, next, the regular knocking of a hammer driving in nails.

All this was very extraordinary, for the trap-door of the garret had not been lifted for more than a week, and I knew there could not be anything in the garret but part of a truss of hay, a few small faggots, and certainly not a single plank.

I called out loudly, “Who is making that noise up there, keeping Christians awake?”

I made the sign of the cross and I waited.

But as soon as I had spoken, the noise ceased.

The next day, I went to the river to wash some sheets. To reach the Guindy stream from our house, there is no regular road, but only a narrow path, winding all the way amongst willow trees. I had hardly entered on this path when I heard a step behind me, and a low breathing sound, together with a rustling in the overhanging boughs of willow. And, strange to say, I recognised my husband’s footstep, such as it was in the old days, when he was well and came home from his day’s work on one of the neighbouring farms.

I turned round.

There was no one to be seen!!

I spent the morning washing. On my way back I heard nothing, but the bundle of linen which I was carrying began weighing on my shoulders so heavily that I could have declared the linen had been changed into lead. I have since understood how that was. Amongst these sheets was the one in which my poor, dear man was buried three days later. For Lucas indeed died three days after that. God rest his soul! During those three days, omens were constantly occurring, with hardly any interruption.

One night there seemed a violent beating against the door, and then the murmur of a crowd of people coming into the house, countless feet ascending the stairs. The next night, there came the distant sound of bells, a pale coloured light burnt at the head of our bed, and the chanting of priests seemed borne across the fields, as if from the town.

I was unable to close my eyes.

But the last night was the most terrible of all. My husband, who did not appear to be worse, had forbidden me to sit up. When I had made sure that he was tranquil, I tried to doze. But immediately the jolting of a cart fell upon my ear. It was all the more startling because there was no roadway near our house. When we first came to it, we had had to transport our furniture in wheel-barrow. Nevertheless, this conveyance seemed coming to our house. The creaking of the ill-oiled axle-tree became more and more distinct. Ere long I heard it strike the gable-end of the house. I rose up and knelt. In the wall against which the bedstead was placed, there was a skylight. Through this I looked, expecting to see the cart. But I saw nothing but the white moonlight and the dark outlines of the trees beside the field ditches. The axle-tree, however, continued to grate, and the cart to jolt. It went round the house once, twice, and then a third time. At the third circuit, a tremendous knock thundered on the door. My husband awoke with a start. "What is it?" he whispered. I did not wish to distress him, so I answered, "I do not know." But I was shivering with fear.

It is impossible to die of fright, or I should never have survived that night!

My husband died the next day, a Saturday, exactly at ten o'clock.

*(Communicated to M. Le Bras by a schoolmaster, to whom  
it was related by an old weaving woman of Plustenet  
(Côtes di Nord), 1891.)*