

The Open Door

By A. Le Braz

It took place at Lescadou, in the old manor-house of that name, between Penvénan and Plangniel.

Watch was being kept over the master of the house, a man named Le Grand, who had died during the day. The watchers consisted of the servants, both men and women, and some of the neighbours who had offered their services, as is customary.

The last moments of Le Grand had been attended by strange circumstances. While he was dying the dog had rushed out of its kennel howling frightfully. When some one went out to quiet it the poor thing was found to be on fire, half roasted, and sending forth a horrible odour. It died at the same moment as its master. This was considered a strange coincidence.

No sooner were the man and the dog dead than a terrible storm arose. A stack of straw in the yard was carried to a hundred yards' distance into the middle of a field, and an old yew tree was rent from its top to its roots.

The watchers conversed long and anxiously concerning these events.

It was well known that Le Grand had not lived an edifying life. He had the reputation of having been harsh to his own family, and pitiless towards the poor.

Suddenly the watchers became silent.

The door opened quite wide. They looked up, expecting to see some one enter; but nothing entered except the wind.

"Go and shut that door at once!" said a woman to one of the servants.

The man got up, shut it fast, and returned to his place by the fireside. But he had no sooner sat down again on his stool than the door was once more wide open.

"Stupid fellow!" cried one, "it is evident he has never been to Paris!"¹

"I declare I shut it," said the man. And he went and shut it again, taking special care this time to give it a hard push, and to make sure that the lock had fallen into its place. "There, if it opens again you can't say it's my fault!" he grumbled, as he went back to the hearth.

"Either you are a blockhead, or the door is bewitched," said another servant. "Look, it is wider open than ever

"Go and shut it yourself then. As for me, I give it up!"

"Oh, I will shut it, if the devil himself be there!" The servant who spoke was a young man, strongly built, and with the arms of a prize-fighter. He pushed his fists against the boards of the door, making its hinges creak, and leant against it with his broad shoulders. "I'll lay anything," said he, "that the wind may blow as much as it pleases, but it won't open that door one inch!"

He had not finished speaking when the door knocked him on the back, and sent him spinning, and down he fell flat on the floor. He got up much bruised, and began cursing and swearing.

"A thousand curses!" he cried. "Who is daring to open that door?"

¹ The Bretons have a saying that you must go to Paris to learn to shut doors.

A mocking laugh was heard, and a voice said: "Did you not boast that you would shut it, even if the devil was there?"

The man was frightened, but he was determined to put a brave face upon it, so he said "I ask again, who it is that ventures to open that door?"

"It is I!" replied the voice, in such a hard, cold, angry tone, that the man desisted, and with good reason, for it seemed to him that a fiery breath blew straight into his face.

His alarm was even the greater because there was no one to be seen.

He went, pale as death, to hide himself amongst the other watchers who also were all shaking and trembling with fright.

The house clock slowly struck the midnight hour. When the twelfth stroke had sounded the tapers burning round the dead man's bed went out, as though of themselves.

No one of the watchers ventured to re-light them, so that the corpse remained in profound darkness.

The open door kept up a flapping sound, like that of linen drying in an open field.

From midnight to dawn the watchers did not exchange a single word. And not one prayer was said. They crept up close together, with no light but that of the embers of the hearth and of a smoky rushlight, trying to hide their eyes and stop their ears while they longingly waited for the dawn.

(Related by Jeanne Marie Corre, Dressmaker, Penvénau, 1888.)