

The knock at the door- a true tale

After lunch, William sat dozing by the fire. It was a chill, February day and he'd been up early that morning seeing that the men tended the horses to his satisfaction. After their daily exercise he had decided the horses would be better off staying in their stalls. But they had continued to neigh and whinny their displeasure, and William roused himself to go and quieten them.

As he got to the stables, a thought struck him; his son-in-law Tom would be away from home, settling the quarterly accounts with his master, it being Candlemas. His daughter Jane would be alone, at home with the children. He knew she would be worried, she always did when Tom was away.

William decided; he'd ride over to Riby. It would take him about four hours but he'd be there early evening and could spend some time with his favourite daughter and her family. He missed her so much, and their welcoming cottage was his 'home from home'. Quickly, he saddled up Old Betsy; she was the most reliable. He quietened the other horses as best he could, called to his eldest to check the others hourly and was off on his journey.

The sky was full of dark grey clouds and it began to rain, but Old Betsy was sure-footed and at last he arrived. It was half-past six. He dismounted and knocked at the door. He heard his daughter's voice 'Furlow, will you go to the door please?' He could hear the lock draw back and the door opened.

'Hello Furlow lad. How are you?'

No reply. Furlow stared right through William, and wandered off.

Strange lad, thought William, and entered the farmhouse. He could hear children's voices from the other room; it was already bedtime, although Will, his eldest grandson was sitting on the settle in front of the fire, next to Jane.

'Hello Jane, hello Will! I've come to see how you are!'

He smiled, and put out his arms to embrace his daughter and her son. But what was happening? Something was wrong. They hadn't replied. And he couldn't touch them. It was as if he wasn't there at all.

Jane suddenly let out a wild sob and tears began to run down her face.

William's and Will's voices joined together in their concern.

'Jane, what's wrong, my darling? Please, tell me.'

'What's wrong, Mother?'

As William tried again to embrace his daughter, Jane clutched Will tight to her.

She replied, but only to her son.

'It's my father.' Jane sobbed. 'He's dead...'

'Mother! How long have you known? Why didn't you tell me?'

'There's been no news, Will. But I know. I think his spirit's here now, watching us. Can't you sense him? He must have come to say goodbye.'

William sighed. So that was why... 'Goodbye, Jane, goodbye Will...' he whispered. And his spirit was whisked back to his true home where it hovered above his lifeless body, still seated by the fire.

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[Note: based loosely on a tale from 1823, recounted by William [Will] Barker, my great great grandfather, in his journal]