

A nocturnal visitor

If I could have stayed out of the UK for one more week I could have legitimately avoided income tax for the year, so I arranged to leave my ship at Limerick and spend the week there. I was keen to see again the Ardnacrusha power station and the locks which I had sailed through in 1949, in the motor yacht "Severn Dragon" with the Larcher family (Herman, Margo and Anita), long before I became a professional navigator.

March 1962 was cold, and seemed all the colder after a year up and down the Amazon. I spent my first night at the Glentworth Hotel in a cold rear room. In the morning I asked if I could move to that cosy and warm front room, the one over the entrance, with the radiator in it. Why was that room not occupied? Why was the girl at the reception desk so reluctant to move me into it? And why was that room still not occupied in September 1981, over nineteen years later, when the hotel had been virtually rebuilt and modernised?

Maybe, through a few coincidences and a lot of imagination, it could all be put down to physical causes, but I was sure that on that March night, after turning out the light to go to sleep, I heard some scratching. Thinking that it was a mouse, or perhaps a rat, I turned on the light. The scratching stopped. I switched off the light again, and the scratching resumed. I kept my finger on the switch and waited. "The room is rat-infested" I

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thought, "that's why they were reluctant to move me in here!" When I judged the rat to be in the middle of the room I switched the light on again. Nothing. Dead silence. This time I got out of bed and examined the room for rat-holes.

It was odd that the rat should have got away so swiftly that I hadn't seen it and so silently that I hadn't heard it. In grain laden ships I had been able to smell rats when they were about, so I got down on my hands and knees and sniffed around the room like a dog but the only smell was the clean smell of soap.

As I stood up, the word 'poltergeist' came into my head. In an instant I had a vision of a creature, not of this world, as large as a badger, with long hair and long claws at the ends of its feet. Satisfied that I had solved the mystery, I returned to bed and switched off the light.

Sure enough, the scratching started again. This time I did not switch the light on. I waited until the thing came to the middle of the room, "I know what you are", I said aloud as the scratching neared the bed, "You are what we human beings call a poltergeist. I am a

human being", I went on, as it slowly began to climb on to the foot of my bed, "and you and I live in different worlds." I could now feel its weight on my feet. "Now I, as a human being, am very, very tired. From my world to your world I wish you a peaceful goodnight". The weight on my feet melted away altogether, and all that was left was a quiet sense of tranquility and satisfaction. Being, as I had said, very, very tired, I went straight to sleep.

The next day I had little time to reflect upon the events of the previous night, exploring Limerick and visiting the Ardnacrusha locks. But when I got to bed that night, and turned out the light, the scratching started again. "You again!" I said. "All right, jump up and let us both have a peaceful night". Momentarily I felt its weight on my feet, but I was asleep almost before it had melted away.

The same performance was repeated every night while I stayed at the Glentworth and when I left and paid my bill, I couldn't help commenting to the girl on the reception desk: "I know why you were reluctant to put me in the room with the radiator, but as it happens I liked it very much. Thank you for a very pleasant stay". The girl smiled. Perhaps she was pleased at not having a complaint about the nocturnal visitor, or merely acknowledging the crisp ten shilling note that I pressed into her hand, but we never discussed the "ghost".



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