

# **Midnight Tales**

by

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## **The Funeral Party**

The funeral was taking place in Dublin of a young married woman whose death had been as sudden as it had been mysterious. Her beauty had been the object of much public gossip, the more so because her husband was a man of advancing years.

On the appointed day for her internment, the undertaker, after the wont of his craft, was early at the home of the deceased arranging the whole funeral party according to the local rules of mortuary etiquette.

With due solemnity and lowered voice he spoke to the widower, 'You, sir, will of course go in the carriage with the mother of the deceased.'

'What! Me go in the carriage with my mother-in-law? Not likely!' the man replied with surprising emphasis.

'Oh, sir, but I assure you it is necessary. The rule is an inviolable one, established by precedents beyond all cavil!' exclaimed the horrified undertaker.

But the widower was obdurate. 'I won't go in that carriage - and that's flat.'

'Oh, but my good sir. Remember the gravity of the occasion - the publicity - the - the - possibility - of scandal!' The voice of the man in black faded into a gasp.

But still the widower stuck to his resolution, and the undertaker went away to discuss the matter with some of his intimate friends who were awaiting instructions as to their duties for the funeral service. After some discussion, these men then approached the chief mourner and began to remonstrate with him.

'You really must, old chap, it is a necessity,' said one.

'Etiquette demands it,' insisted another.

'I'll not! Go with my mother-in-law? I'll rot first!' the husband again insisted.

'But look here, old chap - '

'I'll not, I tell you! I'll go in any other carriage that you wish - but not that one.'

Finally, one of the circle of undertaker's men who had been silent all the while spoke up.

'Well, of course, if you won't, you won't,' he said. 'But remember it beforehand that afterwards when it will be thrown up against you, it'll be construed into an affront to the poor girl that has gone. You loved her Jack, we all know that.'

This argument at last prevailed. The widower signalled to the undertaker and began to pull on his black gloves. But as he moved

towards the carriage in which his mother-in-law already sat, a stone-faced woman all in black, he turned to his friends and said in a low voice: 'I'm only doing it because you say I ought to - and for the girl that's gone. But you will spoil my day!'

### **The Shakespeare Mystery**

It was one of those pioneer towns in the Old West where drink started many an argument and guns settled the dispute. The cowboys from the ranges were raw, tough men, but by no means stupid and some were even quite well educated. A fact borne witness to by the subjects that might be found being debated in the town. -

One day in the bar of the town's hotel a group of men were discussing Shakespeare, in particular the puzzling question as to whether the Bard had written all the plays attributed to him or if they were actually the work of Francis Bacon. Both sides had their champions and as the evening wore on and the drinks flowed freely the argument grew more heated.

Soon some of the men got greatly excited and as a consequence began drawing their guns on one another. Before tempers were completely lost, however, one forthright man among the group said it was not a question to be settled with bullets but by arbitration.

The other men agreeing to this proposal, all holstered their guns and began looking for an arbitrator. After some time they at last agreed upon a suitable man to settle their disagreement.

The arbitrator selected was an Irishman, who had all the while the debate flew back and forth sat quietly smoking at the bar not saying a word - which circumstance had probably suggested his suitability for the task.

Agreeing to take the office of judge and jury, the man continued to sit quietly smoking while the arguments on both sides were formally stated before him. When the two groups had at last finished he paused a while and then slowly began to speak.

'Well, gintlemin,' he said in a brogue as thick as any to be found back in Ireland, 'me decision is this: thim plays was not wrote be Shakespeare! But they was wrote be a man iv the saame naame!'

## **A Deal With The Devil**

Not so many years ago I knew a rather unusual little boy, one of a large family. He was a mischievous chap, not above a little devilment, and never entirely to be trusted. Though his parents loved him, they were always on their guard against some new prank the boy might perpetrate.

It happened on one evening that the boy asked to be allowed to go to bed at the time he and his brothers and sisters normally had their tea. This was such a unique circumstance as to puzzle the servants who immediately conveyed the request to their mistress.

The mother refused the request with a wave of her hand. Her older sister, the boy's doting Aunt Julia, was expected for the night and would wish to see all the children before they went to bed.

But not to be gainsayed, the child persevered with his request, whimpering and even crying. Finally, he got his way.

In a little while, as night began to fall, the boy's father was sitting his study at the back of the house when he was suddenly aware of a small figure in the garden. Peering through the window, he made out the figure of his son in his nightshirt.

The father watched somewhat puzzled as the boy stole down the garden steps and hurried to a corner of the garden where there stood a clump of shrubs. In his hand he was carrying a garden fork.

After a lapse of some minutes during which time the father could see nothing of his child behind the shrubs, the boy reappeared and just as stealthily crept back into the house. Naturally curious as to what the youngster might have been doing with a fork, he went out into the garden to see for himself.

Behind the shrubs, the man was just able to make out some freshly turned earth. Using his hands, he began to investigate.

Hidden a few inches down in the ground he found a small, white envelope which the child had evidently buried. Standing up and coming out from behind the shrubs to get a little more light, he tore open the envelope.

Inside were two things. An unused lucifer match and a strip of paper on which the boy had scrawled some words in his childish hand. As the man read what was written he felt a shiver of unease run through his body. For the paper said: -

Dear Devil,  
Please take away  
Aunt Julia