

## The Unexpected Husband

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The things that go bump in the night seem to do so most frequently between two and three o'clock in the morning. Perhaps this timing has something to do with the position of the sun, or the quantity of competing vibrations, or the relative thinness of the "veil" between this world and the next. Or maybe it's just that our minds are more sensitive to such disturbances when we are drowsy.

No doubt Mrs. Mary Wilson was drowsy when, at about 2:30 a.m., she saw the man standing in the darkened doorway. Perhaps she was actually asleep, although she claims she wasn't. Either way, alert or somnolent, she wondered how the man could have gotten into the house without making a sound. Then she became aware that he was perfectly motionless and, with a chill, she realized that she was staring at a ghost.

Although she was 45 years old and a professional nurse, Wilson was a timid woman with a rather nervous disposition. For the past six weeks she had been listening to her patient, Mrs. Caroline Rogers, talk about her deceased husband and children and tell how much she looked forward to seeing them in the afterlife. Then Rogers would speak of the friends who came to visit her in her bed chamber, friends who had long since passed on from this mortal world. Such talk had done nothing to dampen the nurse's dread of the supernatural. She had seen a ghostly vision once before, as a young girl, and she had no wish to repeat the experience. In such a situation, it would be easy to discount Wilson's vision as simply the result of a tired and superstitious mind reacting to repeated suggestion by hallucinating a vision of the deceased husband.

The only problem with that scenario is that she "hallucinated" the wrong husband!

Caroline Rogers was 72 years old when she was stricken with paralysis in March of 1890. On April 14, in the afternoon, she lapsed into a coma. This is why Wilson decided to stay up all night watching over her. To keep her company, the nurse brought her daughter, 25-year-old Ida Wilson. The only other person in the house was a young boy whose job was to summon help in an emergency. When the apparition appeared, Ida was asleep on a couch near her mother and the boy was sleeping in an adjoining room.

A lamp in the sick room was fully lit, allowing Wilson to observe the details of the visitor's appearance. She later described him as "middle-sized, broad-shouldered, with shoulders thrown back, had a florid complexion, reddish-brown hair (bare headed) and beard, and wore a brown sack overcoat, which was unbuttoned." His expression, she said, was grave, neither stern nor pleasant, and he seemed to look straight at her and then at her patient.

Once she realized the man wasn't a living human, Wilson turned her head to awaken her daughter. When she turned back again, the doorway was empty. A subsequent search of the house revealed all the doors locked and everything in order.

The next morning, Rogers' niece, Mrs. F.E. Hildreth, came to visit her comatose aunt. Nurse Wilson related her experiences of the previous night and asked Hildreth if the man she described sounded like Mr. Rogers. No, Hildreth replied emphatically, it did not. But, she continued, it was an exact description of Caroline's first husband, a Mr. Tisdale, who had been dead for 35 years.

Further investigation revealed that Mrs. Rogers had not moved into the area until she had married her second husband. No one in town, except her niece, had ever met her first husband,

and there were no portraits of the man anywhere in the house. Since Wilson had only met Rogers when she arrived to be her nurse a few weeks before, there was no way – other than actually observing his spirit – that she could have known what Tisdale looked like, even if she had known that he existed.

As for Caroline Rogers, within 12 hours of Mr. Tisdale's visit, she was on her way to see both of her ex-husbands.

This case was first presented by Professor W.O. Crosby, a member of the S.P.R. Signed statements by both Mary Wilson and F.E. Hildreth accompany the paper.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Myers, F.W.H., "On Indications of Continued Terrene Knowledge," *Proceedings of the Society of Psychical Research*, Vol. 8, 1892, pp. 229-231.