

# Fantasy and Science Fiction

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*So great was Daniel Defoe's skill at making fact seem as alluring as fiction and fiction as convincing as fact, that we frankly have no idea whether the pamphlet anecdote here reprinted is based on fact or stems from Mr. Defoe's ever-plausible imagination. In either case we recommend it as a fine specimen of dry humor, and for its disclosure of the fascinating profession of "stroker of bewitched persons."*

## *The Friendly Demon*

by DANIEL DEFOE

A GENTLEMAN in Ireland, near to the Earl of Orrery's house, sending his butler one afternoon to a neighboring village to buy cards, as he passed a field, espied a company in the middle thereof, sitting round a table, with several dishes of good cheer before them. And moving towards them, they all rose and saluted him, desiring him to sit down and take part with them. But one of them whispered these words in his ear, "Do nothing this company invites you to." Whereupon, he refusing to accept of their kindness, the table and all the dainties it was furnished with immediately vanished, but the company fell to dancing and playing upon divers musical instruments.

The butler was a second time solicited to partake of their diversions, but would not be prevailed upon to engage himself with them. Upon which they left off their merrymaking and fell to work, still pressing the butler to make one among them, but to no purpose. So that, upon his third refusal, they all vanished and left the butler alone, who in a great consternation returned home without the cards, fell into a fit as he entered the house, but soon recovering his senses, related to his master all that had passed.

The following night, one of the ghostly company came to his bedside and told him that if he offered to stir out the next day, he would be carried away. Upon this advice, he kept within till towards the evening, and, having occasion to make water, ventured to set one foot over the threshold of the

door in order to ease himself, which he had no sooner done but a rope was cast about his middle, in the sight of several standers-by, and the poor man was hurried from the porch with unaccountable swiftness, followed by many persons.

But they were not nimble enough to overtake him, till a horseman, well mounted, happening to meet him upon the road, and seeing many followers in pursuit of a man hurried along in a rope without anybody to force him, caught hold of the cord and stopped him in his career; but received, for his pains, such a strap upon his back with one end of the rope as almost felled him from his horse. However, being a good Christian, he was too strong for the devil, and recovered the butler out of the spirits' clutches, and brought him back to his friends.

The Lord Orrery, hearing of the strange passages, for his further satisfaction of the truth thereof, sent for the butler, with leave of his master, to come and continue some days and nights at his house, which, in obedience to his lordship, the servant did accordingly. Who after his first night's bedding there, reported to the earl in the morning that his specter had again been with him and assured him that on that very day he should be spirited away, in spite of all the measures that could possibly be taken to prevent it. Upon which he was conducted into a large room, with a considerable number of holy persons to defend him from the assaults of Satan, among whom was the famous stroker of bewitched persons, Mr. Greatrix, who lived in the neighborhood, and knew, as may be presumed, how to deal with the devil as well as anybody. Besides, several eminent quality were present in the house; among the rest, two bishops, all waiting the wonderful event of this unaccountable prodigy.

Till part of the afternoon was spent, the time slid away in nothing but peace and quietness, but at length the enchanted patient was perceived to rise from the floor without any visible assistance, whereupon Mr. Greatrix and another lusty man clapped their arms over his shoulders and endeavored to weigh him down with their utmost strength, but to no purpose. For the devil proved too powerful and, after a hard struggle on both sides, made them quit their hold; and snatching the butler from them, carried him over their heads and tossed him in the air, to and fro like a dog in a blanket, several of the company running under the poor wretch to save him from the ground. By which means, when the spirits' frolic was over, they could

not find that in all this hurry scurry the frightened butler had received the least damage, but was left in statu quo upon the same premises, to prove the devil a liar.

The goblins, for this bout, having given over their pastime and left their May-game to take a little repose, that he might in some measure be refreshed against their next sally, my lord ordered the same night two of his servants to lie with him, for fear some devil or other should come and catch him napping. Notwithstanding which, the butler told his lordship the next morning that the spirit had again been with him in the likeness of a quack doctor, and held in his right hand a wooden dish full of grey liquor, like a mess of porridge, at the sight of which he endeavored to awake his bedfellows.

But the specter told him his attempts were fruitless, for that his companions were enchanted into a deep sleep, advising him not to be frightened, for he came as friend and was the same spirit that cautioned him in the field against complying with the company he there met, when he was going for the cards; adding that if he had not refused to come into their measures he had been forever miserable; also wondered he had escaped the day before, because he knew there was so powerful a combination against him; that for the future there would be no more attempts of the like nature; further telling the poor trembling butler that he knew he was sadly troubled with two sorts of fits; and therefore as a friend he had brought him a medicine that would cure him of both, beseeching him to take it.

But the poor patient, who had been scurvily used by these sort of doctors, and fearing the devil might be at the bottom of the cup, would not be prevailed upon to swallow the dose, which made the spirit angry; who told him, however, he had a kindness for him, and that if he would bruise the roots of plantain without the leaves and drink the juice thereof, it should certainly cure him of one sort of his fits; but as a punishment for his obstinacy in refusing the liquor, he should carry the other with him to his grave.

Then the spiritual doctor asked his patient if he knew him. The butler answered no. "I am," says he, "the wandering ghost of your old acquaintance John Hobby, who has been dead and buried these seven years; and ever since, for the wickedness of my life, have been lifted into the company of those evil spirits you beheld in the fields, am hurried up and down in

this restless condition, and doomed to continue in the same wretched state till the day of judgment" — adding that "had you served your Creator in the days of your youth, and offered up your prayers that morning before you were sent for the cards, you had not been treated by the spirits that tormented you with so much rigor and severity."

After the butler had reported these marvelous passages to my lord and his family, the two bishops that were present, among other quality, were thereupon consulted, whether or no it was proper for the butler to follow the spirit's advice in taking the plantain juice for the cure of his fits, and whether he had done well or ill in refusing the liquid dose which the specter would have given him. The question at first seemed to be a kind of moot point, but after some struggle in the debate, their resolution was that the butler had acted through the whole affair like a good Christian, for that it was highly sinful to follow the devil's advice in anything, and that no man should do evil that good might come of it.

So that, in short, the poor butler after his fatigue had no amends for his trouble, but was denied, by the bishops, the seeming benefit that the spirit intended him.

