

Peggy's Double

by George M. Dennys

Jonathan Savage, having bought a house out of town, and comfortably established himself and family therein, found himself in want of a cook.

A young girl applied for the situation.

When questioned by her new mistress, the girl proved respectful and apparently capable.

She stated that she had been brought up as a cook.

She gave her name as Peggy, and declared herself anxious to suit.

And having given satisfactory answers to all interrogatories, she took her way to the kitchen, where she set herself zealously to work without delay.

“A perfect treasure,” Mrs. Savage declared—“decidedly a perfect treasure.”

There was no cause to change the opinion the next day, nor the next.

On the third night, however, Mr. Savage was surprised, on alighting from the train, to see Peggy in her black straw hat and waterproof cloak standing on the platform.

He addressed her, but she did not answer him.

And he hastened home, wondering what had happened that the “treasure” should have been dismissed so suddenly.

To his surprise, Peggy opened the door for him.

“Well, Peggy, you must have waked fast to get here before me,” he said pleasantly.

Peggy made a curtsey, but said nothing.

“I saw you at the depot, didn't I?” said Mr. Savage.

“Please, sir, I don't know,” said Peggy.

“You've been there?”

“Not to my knowledge, sir.”

“Her way of being polite and leaving it all to me,” said Mr. Savage to himself.

But though he discovered that Peggy had not left the house all day, he could scarcely believe that he had not seen her.

That very evening another odd thing happened.

Little Thomas Savage, going to look for a lost chicken, came in with a story.

“I thought I saw a ghost, mother,” he said. “It was standing by the well, looking ever so funny; but just as I was going to run, I saw it was Peggy, all wrapped up in something.”

“Peggy has been standing just there chopping meat ever since you went out,” said his mother, pointing to the kitchen door.

It was no more Peggy than it was a ghost, but the boy persisted in his statement.

He was so obstinate, indeed, that he was sent to bed in some disgrace for contradicting his mother.

Mr. Savage slept late next morning, and was aroused by the breakfast bell.

As he hurried down stairs, consulting his watch, he saw the door of the servant’s room, which opened on the stairs—the room being built over the kitchen—standing slightly ajar.

And as he looked, a dark face, encircled by a night cap, peeped out, and a hand, with a white frill about it, pushed it to.

Peggy’s face, Peggy’s hand, without a doubt.

“Had to breakfast yourself, my dear?” said Mr. Savage, as he took his seat at the table.

“Oh, no,” replied his wife. “Why did you think so?”

And at that moment, Peggy, in her ordinary dress, walked into the room with a plate in her hand.

“Singular,” said Mr. Savage to himself, but made no further explanation.

It was a month since Peggy’s entrance into the family and she had given every satisfaction.

Still, it was plain to be seen that something was the matter.

Miss Olivia had come to reside with them; and every one was well, but Mrs. Savage looked anxious.

So did her sister.

So did Mr. Savage.

The ladies exchanged mysterious glances with each other, and the gentleman often shook his head warningly at his eldest boy, when he had just opened his lips to say something.

Mr. Savage often asked his wife what could trouble her, and she frequently said:

“Why are you so serious, my dear?”

At last Olivia was found in hysterics in the hall, and matters grew too serious to be kept quiet any longer.

“I must know what it is,” said Mr. Savage.

“Don’t tell him,” sobbed Olivia.

“I don’t see why you should be ashamed of it,” said Mr. Savage. “You can’t help it. It’s nerves, I suppose. We’d better send for a doctor.”

“I’m not nervous,” sobbed Olivia. “Oh, dear, dear!”

“There now,” said Mrs. Savage, “I declare I can’t bear it any longer. My dear, poor Livy has taken to ghost seeing, and she’s so affected me that I really have imagined something of the sort myself.”

“She sees a woman exactly like Peggy over and over again, when Peggy is found somewhere else to my certain knowledge, and I’ve seen the same thing twice.”

“It’s an optical illusion, I presume; I’ve read of such things.”

Mr. Savage turned pale.

“My dear girls,” said he, “Thomas is as bad as you are.”

“I’ve been threatening to flog the poor fellow if he frightened you with his stories; but he sees Peggy in the garden, in the meadow—here, there, everywhere. And he speaks to her, and she does not answer. And then he runs home and finds her in the kitchen, or where not, and naturally feels oddly about it. I myself have seen the same thing twice.”

“You have?” cried Mrs. Savage.

“You!” screamed Olivia. “Oh, I’m so thankful! I’m not crazy, then.”

“Oh, dear, no,” said Mr. Savage, “Oh, dear, no. You see it’s becoming plain to me that a certain old superstition of which I have read is founded in fact.

“You’ve heard of people who had doubles. Peggy, evidently, has a double.

“The wraith does not speak, you say? That coincides with all the stories on the subject. Yes, that’s the solution of the mystery. Peggy has a double.”

“But we can’t keep such a mysterious girl about the house. It’s like hiring a ghost,” said Mrs. Savage.

“Suppose we talk to Peggy?” said Mr. Savage.

The proposition met with favor.

Peggy was sent for, and came at once.

“Now, my good girl, I don’t want to frighten you,” said Mr. Savage, “but something odd has happened. Did you ever have anything singular said to you about yourself—for instance, that you were seen where you never went, you know, or something like that?”

“Oh, yes,” said Peggy—“yes, sir, to be sure; I always hear the same story. There’s two of me. It scares folks, but I can’t help it.”

“Don’t it frighten you?” asked Mrs. Savage.

“I’m used to it.” Said Peggy. “Being two of me got me lots of scoldings where I was before, ‘cause, you see, I can’t help where t’other one of me goes, or what it does.”

“Yes, she has a double,” said Mr. Savage—“yes, yes. Very singular—very.”

“I’m sorry Peggy,” said Mrs. Savage, “but it frightens my sister very much, and we shall be obliged to part. You’ve been a good girl, Peggy. I’ll pay you one month’s wages, but I can’t bear ghost-seeing any longer.”

“Very well, ma’am,” said Peggy, “I’ll pack up. You must excuse there being two of me—I can’t help it.”

“Very singular,” said Mr. Savage—“very, very, very!”

Peggy went up stairs to pack her clothes, and came down with her box.

“If you’d like to look over my things, ma’am,” said she, “there they are. If there is two of me, why I’m honest.”

Then Peggy slowly proceeded to spread upon the floor her worldly possessions.

“Nothing that ain’t mine,” she said; “and there’s my pocket.”

She turned this receptacle inside out as she spoke, and spread out her hands.

“I’m honest, if there is two of me,” she said again. “I can’t help that.”

“Ma,” cried Thomas, just then pointing at the door, “Peggy’s going over the bridge with a big bundle—oh! Why here is Peggy. Oh, my, look!”

The three older folks rushed to the window, and stood solemnly gazing out.

In the room, beside them, stood Peggy, with her black calico dress, pink calico apron, and round black hat, and a bundle under her arm.

Over the bridge, slowly, as a phantom should, passed Peggy’s double—black dress, pink apron, round hat, bundle and all.

They all saw it at once.

It was frightful.

Miss Olivia sank into a chair, trembling.

Mrs. Savage grasped her husband’s arm.

Thomas fairly yelled.

Even the sterner man turned pale.

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy,” he quoted, solemnly.

Yes, sir,” said Peggy. “Good morning all.”

Away she went, and those to whom she bade adieu breathed more freely when she had left the house.

“The most curious thing I ever heard of,” said Mr. Savage. “I shall write an account of it for the papers and a letter on the subject to my friend —, the mesmerist. Most mysterious, indeed.”

It was nearly two hours after Peggy’s departure that a stout gentleman rang the door bell.

Mrs. Savage answered it in person.

There stood before her the stout gentleman.

“I call, madam,” said he, “to make a few inquiries concerning a girl you hired about three weeks ago—a girl named Peggy. I should like my inquiries to be quite private for the present, if you please.”

Mrs. Savage immediately summoned her husband and sister.

The parlor door was closed, and the visitor began.

“I do not wish the girl to suspect anything as yet. If you can keep her from leaving the house, you will oblige me.”

“She left us this morning,” said Mr. Savage.

“I am sorry to hear that,” said the gentleman. “Pray, may I ask if anything singular occurred during her stay?”

“Sir,” said Mr. Savage, “something singular did occur. I presume you hope to investigate the phenomena?”

“Well, sir,” said the other, “I don’t call it that, you know, I see you’ve been taken in, just as the Smiths were. She’s a cute girl, that Peggy.”

“My dear sir,” cried Mr. Savage, “you scientific men doubt everything. Now it is certain to me that Peggy has a double. I myself—“

“My dear sir,” cried the other, “stop a bit. I’m not exactly what you suppose me. I’m a detective.”

“Peggy’s double is a deaf and dumb twin sister, as like her as two peas, and this ghost dodge is her little game.”

“She smuggles the dumb girl into the house she lives at, and she goes through the closets and trunks. Has the lady made certain that nothing is gone?”

The wraith-seers stared at each other.

Mr. Savage turned red.

The ladies rushed up stairs together.

A few moments inspection proved to them that they had been robbed.

While Peggy had been exhibiting her bundle, the double had walked away with another containing laces, jewelry and other small matters, not to speak of Mr. Savage’s watch, which he left on the stand in his room that morning, and the cuckoo clock from the back parlor.

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