

Famous Irish Ghosts



Episode (52)

MEET LADY BETTY

The horrific story of an infamous Roscommon woman

AN infamous and despised woman who lived and died in County Roscommon, was known as lady Betty. Many strange and grisly stories were told about her, and her ghost, horrifying and invariably wailing, is supposed to haunt the old jail where she lived and worked. Many foul crimes are said to have been committed by her.

It is said that Lady Betty was born into a very poor family. Most days she was hungry and had to beg and steal to keep from starving. As soon as she was old enough she ran off with two other girls and went to work in a landed gentleman's house. Although poorly paid, she was given good food to eat and treated fairly well.

After a while she became very friendly with one of the workmen, the story goes, and the pair were married. Her husband, however, turned out to be a heavy drinker, fond of company, and he began to ill-treat her. Some say she ran away, bringing her young son with her.

Another story has it that Lady Betty's husband ran away with another woman and she had to leave her job and go to work in a coach inn on the west side of Roscommon town.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, times became very hard. Her son could not find work and he decided to emigrate to England.

THE young man worked hard and long in his new country, mostly at farm work, and little by little he saved some money, intending to return home eventually and buy a little holding. In time he had a fair amount saved, but it was not until he went to work for an elderly bachelor farmer near Kettering, Northamptonshire that he began to progress more swiftly towards his ambition.

He worked so well and was so honest that the old farmer treated him as a brother. The two of them

lived happily and comfortably, and Lady Betty's son invested in cattle and sheep, and his bank account became fairly substantial.

Several years passed, and the old Kettering farmer died, leaving all his property to his Irish "friend and worker" and making him a wealthy man. During his absence his mother had to "toil long and strong" to get enough to eat.

As he had intended, Lady Betty's son sold all he owned in England and boarded a ship bound for Ireland.

When he arrived in Dublin, he bought himself a complete new outfit of clothes, which made him look like a wealthy merchant. He stayed in the capital for some time, learned how to dance and speak properly and developed the manners of the upper class.

He then decided to go to Roscommon town. He wanted to surprise his mother so he went to the coach inn and thought it better not to reveal his identity until the next morning.

HE booked one of the best rooms in the inn, and that night he mingled with the customers and other guests. While in England he had grown taller and stouter, and his face was half covered by a luxuriant beard and moustache. He smiled to himself as his mother, now more wrinkled, went about her business as a servant in the inn and did not recognise him, even though she rubbed shoulders with him several times.

He did not know that while he was in England his mother had resorted to crime to make a living.

Lady Betty was not blind to the handsome young gentleman who wore costly clothes and who seemed to have plenty of money to spend. She paid a lot of attention to that table where he sat and dined, and received a number of silver pieces as a reward.

After he had had several drinks and chatted for a couple of hours with some customers, the bearded young gentleman announced that he was going to retire.

During that night Lady Betty stole into the returned emigrant's room. Her victim hadn't a chance. She produced a pointed knife, and as her son slept peacefully she plunged the knife into his chest. He moaned and died. She then stole all his money and belongings. These she brought to her room. It was while rummaging through the stolen items that she discovered she had murdered her own son.

GRIEF-STRICKEN, she fled from the inn and ran through the streets of the town shouting aloud her awful deed. A hue-and-cry was started, and after a wild chase through lanes and alleys the half-demented woman was arrested. She was later tried and sentenced to death by hanging.

Crowds gathered around town jail, mocking and throwing stones at her cell window and called for her immediate death.

According to one version of the story, on the day appointing her execution the hangman took ill and Lady Betty was pardoned after offering to and carry out the sentence on four other prisoners, who had been condemned to die that day.

The people of Roscommon town nearly went wild with anger, when news of Lady Betty's macabre proposition announcement leaked out. But they were in for an even greater shock.

When the hangman died shortly afterward, Lady Betty was given the job. She lived in the jail and is said to have induced various gruesome practises on or these was to draw pictures of her victims on the walls of their room.

Several times through the years her ghost, lamenting and wailing has been seen near the spot, where the old coach inn stood and where she committed one of the numerous deeds of her crime-riddled life.

DO A FRIEND A FAVOUR—
PASS ON YOUR COPY OF

IRELAND'S OWN