

The Bath

It was a very ordinary bath. It was old fashioned, and was made from cast iron and stood on four short legs. It had served very well the various families who had lived in the house since it was built in the 1920's. It was about six feet long with plenty of elbow room. No one had ever complained about its behaviour, its size, or eccentricities. Harry thought it must have been installed as a special order for a large person. It had not been boxed in and the rusty iron pipes were visible here and there. He had central heating put in, and had intended to make many improvements as time went by, but he had never got round to it until he met Joanie.

From that time he would lie in the bath and lazily plan all the things she had asked him to do in the house before they got married. One task which she urged him to do was to paint the bath-room in her favourite colour, pale pink.

One day he noticed that one of the legs had fallen off the bath. As he could not reach it with his hand, he hooked it out with a walking stick only to find that it could not be put back very easily. There was no room between the wall and the bath to manoeuvre his body. He put the leg in the garden shed until such times as he could fathom out a way to do it.

He decided to give the bath a first coat of paint using up some white paint, and then went over it with pale pink, and covered the floor with pale grey covering. When Joanie saw it she was entranced!

"Oh Harry! It does look lovely! I like it better than having it boxed in. It gives it a trendy, 'with it' look."

All went well for some days with Harry using the bath feeling rather pleased with himself for his dash of inspiration. About two weeks later, he and Joanie were planning their wedding day, and putting finishing touches to the house when, looking at the legs of the bath, Joanie had an idea.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" she asked herself. The legs were curved and moulded like the paws of a lion. She went to her hand-bag and, taking from it her scarlet nail varnish, she painted each claw a vivid red.

"Harry! Come and see what I have done to the bath!" she called.

Harry came and together they looked at the legs of the lion. He put his arms around her.

"You are a little nit!" he said, "but I like it. It gives the bath a touch of class. Yes, I definitely like it."

Later that evening Joanie decided to have a bath before going home, since she felt rather bedraggled after unpacking all the things they had brought from her old flat. Packing cases and cardboard boxes were everywhere, as well as curtains draped over furniture. She looked at the time.

"I'm going to have a bath!" she called out. She ran her bath and wallowed in the warm water.

"This is the life." she said to herself. As she relaxed with her mind in a sort of blank haziness, she thought she heard a sound like a deep groaning coming from under the bath.

"It must be the creaking floor boards." she thought. After she had let the water out, she wrapped a towel around herself and went downstairs.

"You know, Harry, those floor boards in the bath-room creak and groan like some

one in pain!"

"It must be the poor old lion. He has to stand all day long on three legs. It must be rather tiring for him, don't you think?"

"I wonder how he likes his red toe nails."

"They may make him feel like a bit of a Cissy-lion." said Harry. They both laughed and danced fandango round the room.

"I must go home," said Joanie, "I have a stack of work to do before I leave the office. It is all your fault. If you had not asked me to marry you, I would have gone on auditing for many years to come."

"Get your glad rags on and I will see you safely on your way. I too have lot of work to do. I have to go to Leeds tomorrow to get my dear old Granny, who is to stay with my mother until after the wedding."

After seeing Joanie to her car, Harry felt a strange reluctance to enter the house. It seemed too quiet except for the gurglings and noises coming from the bath-room. He started to ran a bath for himself and sat down to wait.....

"Oh, lord! I forgot the bath."

He ran up the stairs two at a time. The bath was full of lukewarm water. As he plunged his hand in the water to reach the plug, the chain seemed to twist in his hand. He let some of the water out, and stepped into the bath.

"The best things in life are free-ree-ee", he sang as he sank down into the water. He had a feeling of utter contentment. After a while, he became drowsy as he often did when in the bath, but this time he felt a rocking motion. Rocking motion..? The bath seemed to be moving, as if creeping along on all four legs. Or, rather, on three feet as the motion was a sort of 'one-two-three-hop, one-two-three-hop'. He opened his eyes and looked around. All was still, but he saw something on the window-sill that gleamed like an angry eye.

"What on earth is that?"

He lay there and puzzled over it, but was too lethargic to get up to investigate. He did move his hand once, but it felt so heavy that he let it slip back into the water. He realised that he felt heavy all over. He decided to make this a quick bath, and to spend what was left of the evening with a book. He made an effort to get out of the bath, but he found that his toe was trapped by the chain on the plug.

"This is damned silly." he muttered, "Come on, man, shake yourself and get out!"

He made another effort to move. This time he managed it, but as he tried to sit up, the bath shook. He thought he heard a low rumbling noise from beneath the bath near the tap end. It continued to rumble, but as he stood up the bath seemed to heave from one side to the other like an animal getting onto its haunches. Harry lost his balance somewhat and sat down in the bath once more.

"This is more than daft! What on earth is the matter with me?"

He closed his eyes for a moment. He found he had trouble in keeping awake. The light became dim until it was almost dark. The halting, trotting motion he now felt became fast and powerful, then it was a springing, leaping movement. Harry could do nothing but hold onto the mane. The mane? Harry felt the texture of a lion's mane between his fingers. He felt the rippling of the creature's muscles. The lion, for such it was, loped with great strides, covering the ground. Harry felt the rush of wind, and the warmth of the animal as it pawed its way through the undergrowth. He heard the panting breath and occasional deep growl from his mount. He tried to see where he was, but it was too dark. He could only see the angry gleam in the lion's eye as it turned

its head to look at him with shining eyes. Harry now began to feel exhilarated. He did not feel at all nervous, but bent over the lion's back like a motor cyclist at a rally. He wanted to shout and wave his arms about, but he dared not leave go of the lion's mane. When he had travelled about three miles, or so it seemed to him, he became aware of being at the head of pride of lions. He listened to their grunts and growls which he now began to understand. He heard his name being mouthed from one to the other. They were displeased about something, for they snarled and glared at each other as they ran. The pace was beginning to slow down now. The lion on whose back Harry had been travelling stopped for a moment, and brought its tail round to its side giving Harry a stinging slap with its tufted end. Before he had time to yell out it was off again. He discovered he had his voice back again.

"Whoa! Whoa-back, you great, thundering jungle beast!"

At the sound of Harry's voice, the lion slowed down to a stop, to be followed by all the other lions. They formed a semi-circle around him. He slid from his lion's back on to the cool grass. He could just see the shapes of the lions as he peered through the gloom. He lay there panting for a moment while the lions watched him out of their yellow eyes. They were sitting up with their tails curled round their feet, with just the tufted ends moving slightly. The look in their eyes was almost human. Harry turned to identify the lion on whose back he had ridden from the bathroom to the jungle. The bath-room! The jungle! He stood up.

"I've got to wake up in a minute."

He tried to make his mind work properly. He was dreaming in the bath! He must have had the water too hot and was feeling faint! He tried to feel around for the soap, or the sponge - anything to reassure him that he was not out of his mind, but he could feel nothing solid, just a rushing wind and a warmth that came from the animals. One of the lions approached him with open eyes. It was the lion from the bath-room. It stood before him scratching the ground with its scarlet claws which it lifted up one after the other, growled and shook its head, and said,

"Cissy-lion! Cissy-lion!"

The truth dawned on Harry.

"Not you! A Cissy-lion? Never! Look here, I'm getting cold in this jungle. I would like to be home if you don't mind. I'll take the red off tomorrow. Now, please...."

The lion charged him and he fell over on to the grass. Once more he felt the texture of the lion's mane in his hand and the rippling muscles as it tore through the undergrowth. He felt a pain in his big left toe as it caught on a bush. He jerked it free. The lion turned to look at him. He saw the brilliance of its eyes. He blinked, then found he was in the bathroom of his own house with his left big toe caught in the chain on the plug. He freed himself and was letting out the now cold water when the phone rang. It was Joanie.

"Hello! Did I get you out of the bath? Sorry, but did I leave my engagement ring behind? I think it must be in the bathroom. I put it on the window sill, I think."

"Hold on! I'll go and have a look."

Harry went upstairs and as soon as he got into the bath-room, he saw the ring. It was on the window-sill, just to the left of his shaving mirror. He stared at it for a moment, thinking he saw it move. It shone with the look of an all-seeing eye, flickering and bright. It followed his movements as he went to get it. He glanced at the bath with its scarlet claws.

"Take hold of yourself, Harry," he thought. He went back to the phone.

"It's alright, Joanie, you left it on the window sill."

"Are you alright, Harry? You sound as if you have had one over the eight! Take care, See you on Monday. I love you."

"I love you!"

Harry turned out the lights and went upstairs to the bathroom.

"You are no Cissy-lion! I'll paint your claws grey tomorrow, but I must never tell Joanie about this!"

He looked at the floor, then went down on his knees for a closer look. There were faint, red scratches on the floor under the bath which he had never noticed before. As if made by the claws of some animal...

Canvey Island 1921

I first saw Canvey Island in 1920 when my father took my sister and I there one glorious September day. We traveled from Sidcup where we were then living, being joined at Barking by my mothers brother, Jack.

"We are having a "skynops", said my father, in his Essex sing-song voice. This was a saying of his when he went having a look around.

We skynopsed around all day, and my father so liked what he saw of Canvey Island that he hardly noticed the two mile walk to the station in the evening. We walked along Furtherwick Road, which was little more than a lane in those days, being lined on either side with tall elm trees. We walked past Lakeside Corner, over the "duck boards", and through Winter Gardens onto the road to Benfleet station, only to miss the last train home, so we went on to Southend in the evening for the night.

The following year we went back again but this time to live there.

Here my parents lived through war and floods for the next forty-five years.

I was on Canvey Island with my two small sons when the floods came, but this is another story.

So, we shook the dust of Sidcup from our feet on the 15th of June 1921, to start a new life. We were father, mother, my two sisters, my small brother and myself. In spite of our new blue dresses and brown straw hats the journey was somewhat marred by my sister and I having to carry a BROOM. This BROOM had been left behind by the removal men and we had been detailed off to carry it from Sidcup to Canvey. The indignity of it! This exciting, breath-taking trip into the unknown, and we were lumbered!!! With a BROOM! I was by no means mollified when my father said with his whimsical smile,

"You are the mace bearer"

Luckily the tide was out when we arrived at Benfleet so we could continue our journey without delay. At that time before the bridge was built in 1931 one had to walk over the causeway on stepping stones at low tide.

At high tide one had to rely on being ferried over by rowboat. This was a one man affair. Whether he had the sole rights to the ferry I do not know, but he was very independent and if he did not feel like coming out of his little wooden hut he would not come. The charges were 1 penny for a child, and 2 pence for an adult. One such an occasion I recall was when a party of people from Canvey had been to Wembley to see the Search Light Tattoo in the early 1920s, and on arriving at Benfleet at high water they could not arouse the ferry men from his torpor or unwillingness to come out of his hut to ferry them over the creek, where their return bus was waiting. After about twenty minutes of cajoling and pleading, all to no avail, the young man who was the driver of the bus stripped down to his pants, and plunging into the water, swam out for the boat, came back, dressed, rowed all the people over to the Island, tied the boat up on the wrong side of the creek for the ferry man and continued their journey.

Bus journeys in those days were hilarious and precarious, since these buses were often merely half ton vans with "seats" consisting of two planks of wood and four 2 gallon petrol cans for them to rest on.

These buses were owned by happy-go-lucky young men with their eyes on the future of a growing island. There were two sets of brothers who started the

real bus service with an old coach called the Bluebird. These four were Vic and Basil Hiscock, and Bill and Bob Helliker. Other young men who joined in were Freddie Lemon and Bertie Clark, plus two more brothers, Alec and Willie Kemp.

For two vehicles to pass one another was a hazardous business, as the road was raised and very narrow in those days, before it was rebuilt in 1931. One false move, and one or the other would be over the edge, down a seven foot slope into a ditch of water.

Great Fun

So there we were, four of us, waiting for a conveyance to take us to our new home. Our elder sister had gone on ahead on her bicycle. Father hired a pony and trap complete with driver, one Jim Crow, who for some reason my father disliked on sight. However beggars could not be choosers in those days of limited transport. There were four seats in the trap - one for Father, one each for my younger sister and small brother. I sat on the floor of the trap with my legs dangling over the edge.

I remember that journey to this day. The dainty hooves of the pony clip-clopped-clip clopped along the one main road which was built up about seven feet above ground level. Through the gaps in the hedges of sweet may blossom and wild dog roses could be seen a thin, blue line which was the sea. Passing shipping seemed to be riding on top of the sea wall.

We arrived safely at our home in May Avenue, or, Rosewinkle Avenue as it was known as in those far off times, and we children scampered onto the beach as fast as we could run.

In the 1920's odd bungalows were dotted about regardless of order so that many a boundary had to be altered when Town and Country Planning came into force.

Our new HOME was an ex-WD. three-roomed army hut made of weather boarding, and lined with asbestos.

The structure cost £60. Father had bought a plot of land in 1920 about sixty feet by forty five feet for £21 ie. for £7 per plot. He had the foundations laid for £10, so in all our new home cost £91. When he died much later, in 1963, it was sold for £700.

There were two bedrooms, and one living room. One bedroom was shared by our mother and father, and little Georgie with us three girls sharing the other bedroom. We slept on bunk beds that had been specially made for us. My two sisters' beds rested on trestles on the floor, but my bunk was hinged to the wall on one side, and supported on the outer edge by strong piano wire hooked up to the ceiling by piano wire. Getting in and out of my bed was quite a feat, and was to be proud of sometimes.

In the one living room was a round, pot-bellied iron stove that had a five inch galvanised pipe for a flue that went up from the stove and out through a hole in the roof. On this stove we made our toast by holding the slice of bread flat against the hot metal. We also ironed our handkerchiefs and smalls around the pipe.

At this time my father was working in Ilford, coming home at weekends, so it was some time before we had any improvements to our way of life. The first thing he did was to make a privy in one corner of the garden. It was a sentry box about three feet square, built of very rough wood holding a galvanised bucket with a wooden seat. Paper was on string on a nail on the wall. Much interesting

information was gleaned as we sat on the Lowly Seat.

But it became a home for spiders; fat-bellied ones lurked in every corner. Some had silvery backs and some were enormous hairy ones; some were long and thin. In the daytime they could be seen, but it was a real test of nerves to venture into the Lavvy at night time. Many a time we girls watered the grass at night, rather than risk the terrors of the spiders.

At that time there was no mains water supply in Canvey. Our water supply was a large 500 gallon rainwater tank fed via a homemade charcoal filter from the roof. Large as this tank was, and economical as we were forced to be, it was not always sufficient for a family of 6 people, and there were times in the summer when we had to go to nearby unoccupied holiday homes to get water.

The Cat

Kate was sitting quietly by the window of her living room. In her mind she was turning many thoughts over and over, of her children, and her grandchildren, and of Erica, in particular.

Erica was engaged to be married in the spring. She was now living in London, sharing a flat with a girl friend. Soon after she had settled in the flat she intended to take her cat, Flopsy, back to London with her.

Flopsy, who had been living with Kate, was not very well at that time, having what seemed to be something like sciatica in her hind legs and could not move around easily. So that she could get in and out with as little bother as possible, Kate left a window open in her back bedroom with a short plank of wood leading from the window sill on to the roof of the kitchen of the flat downstairs, and from there Flopsy could jump down on to the dust bin and from there on to the ground. It was becoming quite an effort for her to make the journey back, but she did it.

She was not a friendly cat, but she seemed to love Erica, and her grandmother, Kate. She would fawn on them, rubbing herself against their legs, or twisting herself in and out as they walked around. Flopsy had a particular admirer, a large, tatty, black and white tom. They sported together around the garden and piece of greenery Kate laughingly called her lawn. They would sit for a time watching other cats and flying birds.

The day came when Flopsy was transported to her London home. But she never really settled down to being a "towny" cat. Her sciatica grew worse, and when Erica took her to see a vet, she was told Flopsy was in some pain and would never get any better. The inevitable day came when she had to be put to sleep. Erica was very upset over this, and as she knew that Kate would also be upset, she decided to go and stay with her grandmother for the weekend.

When Kate received Erica's letter, she was about to make herself a mid-afternoon cup of tea. This was the time of day she enjoyed the most. All the daily chores were done, and she could relax and get on with crocheting a multi-coloured wool blanket which grew in beauty under her skilful hands. This particular afternoon she fell to talking to herself which was unusual, as she was a very "earthy" person.

"I don't suppose anyone would believe me if I told them," she said to herself. "They would, more than likely, rush me off to the funny farm."

She went into her bedroom and pulled out from under her bed four canvases that she had been painting. None of them were finished. She had stopped painting each one before she had completed the left hand corners. Each time some unseen power seemed to prompt her to leave this corner until the last; and then each time, her brush was gently taken over; and then she found she had painted in a misty, grey shadow of a cat. The same thing had happened in each of the pictures. She ranged the four paintings on her bed, leaning them against the wall for support. Each cat was sitting up with its tail curled round in front of its forepaws. But the cats had no eyes, and this worried Kate.

"Why haven't I painted the eyes?" she asked herself.

She tried to laugh it off, but all the same she was puzzled. She put the canvases away and went into the spare bedroom. The day was warm and sunny. She looked out of the window. In the middle of the lawn was a round indentation which looked as if a small animal had twisted its body round and round in it before settling down for a quiet snooze. Kate, thinking of Flopsy, through habit, opened the window at the bottom about eight inches, adjusted the plank of wood, and was about to leave the room when she remembered that Flopsy was no longer with her. She decided to leave the window open to let in some air, and

then passed into the kitchen to make a pot of tea. She laid the tray, made the tea, and carried into the sitting room. She poured herself out a cup of tea and was leaning back in her chair, her eyes closed with sheer enjoyment. She had almost drifted off to sleep with the cup in her hand, when she heard a noise in the hall, just outside the sitting room door. She rose up slowly, thinking something had fallen from the kitchen table, but as she reached the door she saw the large black and white tomcat backing away from her with its fur standing on end.

"What do you want? Skat! Get out of here, go on, shoo, shoo!"

The black cat looked at her with its rheumy eyes, turned tail and walked slowly into the spare bedroom, yowling mournfully as it went. Before it jumped onto the window-sill, it turned its head and looked at Kate with such misery in its eyes that it looked almost human. She closed the window feeling a little sick and frightened. The black and white cat had never attempted to come in the house before, although he had often sat on the window sill with his nose pressed against the glass. Sometimes she and Erica had wondered if the cat was dumb, because he would open his mouth but without any sound coming out. It was quite a shock to Kate to hear this harsh, throaty, sound coming from him. She watched him walk down the garden path. He found the indenture in the green grass, walked slowly round it, and then curled up in it to go to sleep.

Kate walked back into her sitting room to her now cold cup of tea. She sat down with the cup in her hand when she remembered Erica's letter. She finished the tea to the dregs, idly turned the cup upside down on to the saucer, and reached for the letter. As she was reading it she thought she felt Flopsy's warm, fury body rubbing against her legs. Kate was saddened by the thought that the cat had been so ill. Flopsy had never been a strong cat, and had been very nervous, preferring to creep under places to sleep. Tears welled up in Kate's eyes, stinging tears.

"Poor little Flopsy," she thought.

She stood up to take the tray into the kitchen, idly righting the cup as she did so. She peered into the hollow cup expecting to see the usual swirl of tea-leaves and unstirred sugar at the bottom of the cup, but there, at the bottom, was the image of a cat, sitting up with its tail curled round in front of its forepaws. There were black circles where the eyes should have been. Kate could hardly believe her eyes. She turned the cup this way and that way, she shook it, and even blew on it to try to change the shape, but it would not move.

"I must save this to show Erica when she comes," she said to herself.

She took the cup into the kitchen and wrapped it in a small, plastic bag to keep it moist, and placed it on a high shelf so that it would not get broken. It was her favourite cup.

Erica arrived about five o'clock the next evening with one small bag slung over her shoulder.

"Oh, Gran, it is so lovely to see you." she said, as she gave Kate's ample figure a hug.

"I'm starving. What have you got for tea? Very soon I shall be as fat as butter and no one will want to marry me, not even Leslie."

"It won't be long." said Kate, keeping her arms around Erica's shoulders. "I have fish in mushroom sauce. You liked this at one time."

It seemed as if they both wanted to keep off the subject of cats. When the meal was finished, Erica helped her grandmother wash the dishes.

"We'll have a nice cup of tea." Erica said. "You sit down while I make it."

It was then that Kate remembered about the cup. She reached for it.

"I have something to show you, Erica," she said, and unwrapped the cup and showed it to her granddaughter. Then she told her about the black and white cat coming into the room, and of the paintings. Erica looked at the image of a cat in the bottom of the cup formed by tea-leaves and sugar at the bottom of the cup.

"It's a cat alright. It does seem odd when the black cat comes around when Flopsy is no

longer here, doesn't it?"

She put the cup into the water to wash it.

"Show me the paintings while the cup is soaking in the water." she asked

Kate led her to the pictures, still on the bed where she had left them.

"There. What do you think of that? What do you see in the bottom left hand corners of each one?"

Erica stared at the pictures in amazement. She saw the unmistakable outlines of cats in sitting positions with their tails curled around their forepaws, in each of the four canvases.

They left the bedroom and went back into the kitchen. Erica picked the cup out of the water, ran her hand round the inside, and turned it upside down. Kate picked it up from where Erica had placed it and turned it over, saying as she did so,

"This is my favourite cup. It is the last one left of the service that your grandfather bought for me many years ago. I hope nothing happens to it. I don't think much of your washing up; the tea leaves are still in the bottom of the cup."

"Oh, Gran, don't be so fussy. Give it to me."

The girl took the cup from Kate and looked inside. The leaves were still there forming the shape of a sitting cat. She plunged the cup into the water with a smile, and swirled it round. The leaves came away but a grey, cat-like stain remained at the bottom of the cup. It would not wash off, but this time the shadowy thing had eyes. Erica's hands trembled, and her eyes grew wide as she handled it. She turned the cup over in her hands, then, opening her fingers very slightly, she let the cup fall to the floor. She looked at her grandmother's horrified face.

"I'm so sorry, Gran, I've broken your favourite cup."

Tears ran down Kate's face. She had used that cup for so many years, and now it was gone, taking part of her with it. Then as she realised she would never again use it, she put her arm around Erica saying as she did so,

"Poor little Flopsy! Never mind, darling, let's enjoy the rest of this weekend together, shall we?"

After Erica had gone back to London, Kate looked at the paintings again. She lifted them onto the bed to study them. The cats were still there, but this time they had eyes, big golden eyes, that followed her round the room. She lifted one of the paintings onto an easel, mixed some paint, and approached the canvas. As she did so, it seemed to fade in the bottom left hand corner until there was nothing left but the bare canvas which was shaking on the easel. She looked again. The cat was gone! She went to touch the other paintings, but as soon as her brush touched the canvas, the cats disappeared, leaving bare, unpainted canvas. She filled each corner of the paintings, washed her hands and left the room.

"Poor little Flopsy," she said, "Poor little Flopsy."

Ode to a Commode

A cry goes forth "Nu-urse...Nu-urse!"
down the ward in tones of urgency.

Please, a commode to ease the ache within myself....

Soon comes the sound of rattling wheels and running feet, and the squeak of curtains being drawn.

Then to the sufferer comes a long drawn breath.

A relieved state is followed by a quiet five minutes wait.

And again the bleat of "Nu-urse...Nu-urse!" echoes through the hall and walls.

A hurried rustle of paper

Then the same relief for bone and flesh of the aches and pains that flesh is heir to but bears with fortitude.

And so is bid farewell, for the moment, this instrument of necessity and dread.

To a bedpan a ballad

by Amy Bowman

When lights are dimmed
and all should be within their beds asleep
A tremulous sound swells forth, like a flock of sheep, in querulous tones, the bleating call of
sheep to sheep in dire distress...
"Nurse...Nurse...Nurse...Nurse..."
"A bedpan please....A bedpan please....Can I....?"
"You can, you can", a gentle voice replies.
And to each and all comes the dreaded pan....
Then from the company of sheep comes a sigh of joy and pure relief when the pan is removed
from steaming flesh and aching bones.
And then the softly sleeping flock is left in darkness and alone in peace.

THE DREAM

She was a solitary person and a dreamer. Hardly a night went by without her having a vivid dream. So real were the dreams that they left her feeling drained when she awoke. She could remember most of them, and although she did not travel far in these dreams, she met many old friends and made many new ones. She visited places she had never seen in her waking hours, and found she could revisit them again another night.

There was one house she visited in her dreams that drew her to it again and again - that drew and repelled her at the same time. She never saw the outside of this house. In her dream, she always found herself inside, at the bottom of a wide flight of stairs that narrowed at the top. She never saw the downstairs part apart from the entrance hall, but knew the upstairs very well indeed. She knew every room - every piece of furniture, every corner, and even the smell of each room. She would climb the stairs to see at the top the gallery going round on three sides. The fourth side she never seemed to see. There were two small rooms directly facing the stairway, a larger room in each corner. Adjoining each of these rooms was another room which came round the side of the gallery. Each room had a communicating door from one to the other, except two which had alcoves leading into the two corner rooms.

One night she fell asleep and found herself at the foot of the wide stairway. She climbed the stairway to the gallery, turned right to the corner room, and from there made her way to the end room. This room was very restful and beautiful, with big windows overlooking green lawns and wooded country side. Here was peace and serenity. There was a great sense of love and well being. The furniture was large and highly polished. There were fresh flowers everywhere, and in the centre of the room was a dining table set for two, for herself and one other person she did not see.

She walked through this room into the right hand corner room. This was a very warm and friendly room. From the south window was a view of a river estuary with shipping passing by. This room smelled of aging furniture and books. It was a room for children to play in and for older people to lounge around in comfort. She sat back in a chair to recall the singing and laughter she had heard before.

She passed into the first small room and was disturbed by the soft moaning coming from it. She went into the second small room. Here the atmosphere changed. She did not want to enter this room, and so opened the door and waited. It smelled of mildew and dust, and was in a dirty condition. A fully clothed man was sleeping on one of the beds. The furniture had been polished at some time in the past, but now was strewn about with the man's possessions. He stirred as she entered the room. She had to enter it in order to get into the left hand corner room, then into the last room of all.

This corner room was very cold and damp. The chill gripped her so that she started to shiver. There was no window in this room, the only light coming from an old oil lamp which flickered and sputtered. The floor was uneven, having a three inch slope towards the last room.

She hesitated in the doorway of this last room, for she was met with a feeling of such evil and dread that she turned to go out again. But she was propelled into the room by unseen forces so strong that she was sent stumbling from side to side to the far end of the room. The floor was spongy and damp. Her feet slithered and sank with every step she took. It seemed very important that she got something from this room. She looked around for a window, but did not see one because it was hidden behind the swaying, rotting curtains that hung from ceiling to the floor. There was the smell of the sea mixed with stagnant slime. She sensed that the room was crowded with something; she could hear it breathing and passing which ever way

she turned. Every thing was ice cold to the touch and slippery. She managed to find what she was looking for, a chest, but the key was not there. The key was at the other end of the room. She struggled back for the key, pushing her way through the forces that did all in their power to stop her moving. She reached for the key, but on the way back it turned hot in her hand. It was difficult to open the chest, as she was being pressed on all sides by the 'things' that were in possession of the room. They hissed and laughed in her ears. They pulled at her and twisted her, first this way and then that way. Her mouth was too dry with horror for her to be able to cry out, or make any sound at all.

She managed to open the chest to take out some papers, but then the lid slammed shut, grazing her hand as it did so. The key had now become very hot, almost too hot to handle, yet she could not drop it. The pain made her clutch at the rotting curtains which fell down around her head, revealing a window covered in cob-webs. What little light it let in gave her strength. She beat about her with both arms and tried to run from the room. She was up to her ankles in the slimy, spongy sludge. She screamed, and this seemed to release the hold the "things" had on her. Then with a great rush of wind, she was being borne along like a feather - through the door, round the gallery, at a terrific speed, then down the stairway into the hall. She fell over and banged her head. She closed her eyes for a moment.

When she opened them again, she was sitting at the bottom of a short flight of stairs in her own home. Her head ached. She looked into a mirror and saw a nasty bruise. Then she remembered the dream. She was aware of a pain in her right hand. She turned her hand over, palm uppermost. On the outer edge was a small, jagged cut and a fresh, white scar that looked as if it had been caused by a burn.

It was shaped like a key....

Ginger

Jessica Allen was in her local library, poring over a book about medieval costumes and hair styles.

Most of the plates were in colour, but there were a few smaller ones in black and white, one of which was particularly interesting. It was to this picture, a small painting of a young Plantaganet troubadour, that she returned again and again. As she studied the picture, it seemed as if the book shook slightly in her hands. Then the shades of the picture seemed to take on colours. She moved her head and blinked her eyes, but the colours persisted, definite in blues, reds, and golds. She felt a little startled, but decided it was a trick of the light, and thought to herself,

"This young man has ginger hair and hazel eyes..."

She turned the page over.

Although it was something she could never explain to anyone, she had always had an aversion to men with ginger hair since she was a child. When her brother's friend Josh, who had this colour hair, came into the house she would run upstairs to her room and cringe in one corner feeling sick.

"This is stupid!", she said to herself, and turned back to the picture of the troubadour. He seemed to be looking straight at her. She half closed her eyes, and as she did so she thought she saw the white fingers moving over the strings of the lute he was holding, as if playing a melody. He pursed his lips to whistle. Jessica heard the strains of the music and the whistling clearly. As first it was faint and far away, then it grew louder, the sweetest sound, and yet it held a mocking note as if challenging her to follow it.

"Oh, no!" she whispered, with tears streaming down her face, "I can't! I can't! Please stop! Oh, stop!"

He lifted one white finger in a beckoning gesture. She put out her hand which he clasped in his. At the touch of his cold hand, a great shudder went through her body. The world became dark and she sank to the floor. When she opened her eyes again a man was bending over her holding her hand.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, thank you." she said without looking up. She was still holding the book. Glancing at the picture of the troubadour she saw that his face had faded and in the top left hand corner was a mask of her own face. She heard the man speak to her and heard herself answer,

"I am trying to remember, I am trying to remember!"

It was all so long ago. It seemed as if she had been through many lives and many countries and was searching for the right one in which to come to rest; she felt so tired....

Jessica tried to remember what Allan had said to her before he went away as a troubadour to entertain the soldiers of King Richard's army.

"I shall be gone for one year. You must promise to wait for me, and stay with my mother until I return. She will watch over you and guide you, as you are to be my wife and her daughter-in-law. For although we were betrothed as children, you are still very wilful in thinking that it does not matter. It is binding and I will not set you free. We need your lands to enlarge our farm. We shall be married as soon as I return one year from now."

Jessica bowed her head and with a heavy heart she watched him gallop off down the road, his lute slung over his back. His mother called to her,

"Come, girl, we have much to do. You have much to learn if you are to be a good wife to my

son. You can start on the dairy by cleaning the butter and milk churns."

The work of the farm and the house, as well as spinning and waving, was long and tiring to a girl brought up as gently as Jessica had been. But her parents had died and she was now in the care of her mother's cousin, Madam Fullalove, Allen's mother. The work started early and finished late in the evening. Madam Fullalove kept her at it through most of the day. She was not an unkind person, but she knew the work had to be done and there was no time for day-dreaming. What work did not get done on its appointed hour on the right day could put the running of the farm very much out of schedule. Delays cost money and money was what she looked after most carefully at all times

One day, when Madam Fullalove was away at the market, a neighbouring farmer came to call. Jessica heard him galloping along the highway on his brown horse. He drew up at the side of the house where his horse would not be seen from the road, dismounted, and came into the dairy where Jessica was working, skimming the cream from the milk to turn into butter.

She was feeling very tired, and longed to leave the dairy and to take off her shoes and run wildly through the fields of yellow buttercups until she dropped with sheer happiness. Life with her prospective mother-in-law was far from easy. She dreaded each day as it dawned and each season as it came round.

She dreaded the return of Allan from the wars, and the thought of being his wife filled her with despair so great that sometimes, as she stood by the water well to draw the daily buckets of water, she wondered what it would be like to fall to the bottom and know no more.

The farmer, John Finch, came into the dairy and stood behind Jessica so closely that she could feel the heat from his body. The smell of horse and the maleness of him made her close her eyes. She put up a hand to her mouth to stop the sound of a scream.

"Jessica," his voice was rough and harsh. He put his large hands on her shoulders,

"You don't have to marry Allan you know. If you marry me there is nothing anyone can do to hurt you. True, I need your lands, and this is partly what prompts me to ask you to be my wife, but my house is not so large as this one and you would be your own mistress. I have no mother to worry about. Think, girl, marry me, be my wife, my real wife; and you are your own mistress from then on."

He turned her round to face him. She saw a face reddened by the sun, wind, and rain, with its thatch of straw coloured hair. If this was her only means of escape then she knew that she had to give it more thought. Twisting out of his arms, she moved further down the dairy away from him.

"Think it over and let me know next time I come here." he said. "Then, if you decide to do as I ask, I will arrange everything, and we shall be married within the month."

"I will think about it." she replied. "If I decide to marry you, I will show it by wearing a blue apron next time you come."

With that she ran out of the dairy, across the yard to the house and into the tiny room at the top of the house which was hers. She sat there until it was nearly dark.

When Madam Fullalove returned home and found that Jessica had not finished in the dairy, she berated her soundly, saying how lazy, good for nothing and useless she was, and then left her in her room in the eves of the house. Once there Jessica sank to the floor beside her bed, and leaning her head against the worn quilt burst into tears. When she had calmed down she undressed and climbed wearily under the covers. She tried to sleep, but it seemed impossible. Every now and again a huge sob would shake her body.

At last she did sleep. And when she opened her eyes again dawn was appearing in the east. She got out of bed and crossed to the window. The shadows were lifting and the first rays of the sun could be seen through the trees. Even as she watched the rays grew longer. Just over the horizon the first arc of the sun began to rise and show through the moving leafy fingers of the trees.

Jessica looked around her room and made up her mind quickly. She pulled out of a

cupboard a large hessian bag that she had made for herself, embroidering it with brightly coloured wools. Hastily she put in it all her belongings and crept quietly down stairs in her rough woollen stocking feet. As she passed through the farm yard to the gate nearest the road a cock crowed and the chickens cackled.

Once on the uneven, rutted, road she put on her shoes and walked as swiftly as she could the four miles to the farm of John Finch.

As Jessica approached the farm she saw John looking out of an upstairs window. As she drew nearer the dogs in the outhouse started to bark making John look down.

"Jessica" he cried in amazement.

"I have come to be with you" she whispered.

John's head disappeared from the window. He ran downstairs and flinging open the door he held out his hand. As Jessica put her hand in his, he drew her into the house and she went with him, knowing she could fight no more, for Allan would be home the following month.

John and Jessica were married within the month, as John had promised. As they came out of the church into the autumn sunshine and were walking down the gravel path to the gate Jessica saw Madam Fullalove watching her from her dark, brown eyes. As the couple drew near to her she said to Jessica

"Allan is here".

The girl looked round and standing under the shade of a tree was Allan. He bowed his head as she passed, then said to her in an icy voice.

"You should have waited for me. I have waited for you, and I shall always wait, throughout the ages if needs be, but I shall have you in the end. You will always be mine."

Throughout the ages! Jessica felt John hold her a little more tightly. As he swung her on to his horse and mounted behind her she glanced back at Allan.

"Through out the ages" he said. "Remember this!"

Jessica all but slipped from the horse as the world grew dark around her. John steadied her with his muscular arms and with a "Hey up!" they galloped off down the road. Allan's last words were ringing in her ears to the rhythm of the horses hooves.

"Throughout the ages - throughout the ages"

These words kept coming back into Jessica's head as she hurried into the entrance of Russell Square station and into the lift. She edged her way carefully to the other side. The attendant was calling to the late comers to hurry. As the gates clanged together and the lift began to descend she became aware of a presence, as if eyes were boring into the back of her head. She knew without turning her head who it was. For the last three weeks it had been the same. Every evening the same dash for the lift and he was the last one in every time. The gates opened and everyone spilled out onto their various platforms for the train home. She would look round but the man was never in sight until she got out at Kings Cross, then somehow, he would be on the escalator ahead of her. He was always in the same carriage sitting opposite her, this tall, young man with ginger hair and hazel eyes. He always carried a guitar in a black case. He never looked at her directly, but glanced at her now and again through long, tawny eye lashes.

As the train slowed down at the stop before hers, Jessica rose to her feet and stood by the door. The young man stood behind her, then, as the doors opened, he stepped out in front of her on to the platform. As he did so Jessica stepped back into the train. The doors closed and she sank into the nearest seat. She was alone in the carriage. When she got out at the next station of to her amazement he was waiting for her at the barrier. He said to her in a reproachful voice, which was at the same time sweet and musical,

"I have waited for you. You made a promise that you would wait for me."

With wonder that was tinged with a kind of sick fear, she said, "Now I know who you are".

The ginger haired young man held out his white hand, and taking hers he gripped it firmly

and said to her,

"I told you I would wait. I told you I would come, however long it took to do so, even throughout the ages."

Even throughout the ages? The young man still holding her arm led her up the steps and over the bridge. As they descended the steps, Jessica saw the tall figure of John, her husband coming towards them with outstretched arms, and, smiling, he said,

"I finished work earlier than usual as something told me you would appreciate my meeting you this evening. Who was that young man?"

She turned her head to see through the tears in her eyes to see the ginger haired young man standing a little way off near the entrance of the station. It may have been the mist in her eyes, but he slowly disappeared, melting shapelessly into the evening shadows. Jessica thought she heard the sound of a sweet whistle and the strumming of a guitar in her ears, then he was gone!

"Who was that young man?", asked John again.

"Just someone who has travelled along the way with me." she replied.

The Glass Door

Those of us who have looked into a frosted, pebble glass window, even momentarily, will have seen glimpses of a distorted, moving picture. The slightest movement of the hand can make many different shape and colours. One sees an eye, a left eye or a right eye, but never the two together, giving the picture a faintly odd and rather disturbing appearance. One might be looking at a picture of an eye in the left hand corner of the glass and be disturbed by a passing shadow and the picture would move swiftly into the top right hand corner.

Or so Gertrude thought, as she came down the stairs with a suitcase in each hand and her handbag over her shoulder. She put them down by the front door, her handbag on the hall table, then sat down on the bottom step to wait for the taxi to take her to the station. She was a half hour too early, but felt the need to be ready. She felt drained and beaten. The last few months had been fraught with anxiety and very traumatic. Her hair that had once been a rich, dark, brown was now streaked with grey and getting thin. Every little thing seemed to build up into an almost unbearable weight. The house claimed all her attention, so that she felt she was not free to go and come as she pleased. She refused invitations from friends in case the house was burgled while she was out. She was very tired.

Gertrude was a slim woman in her early sixties, and, as a rule, quite active. She lived alone in her small terraced house that she had bought after Tommy, her husband, had died fifteen years ago. She had been quite happy in the old home with its memories of the children when they were small, until she started to have bad dreams at night. She started to fancy that Tommy was still in every room she went into, and fond of him as she was, she found this feeling of his continuous presence so unnerving that she decided to move away.

So, now she lived in this small house, with its pleasant garden and atmosphere. There were several trees in the garden; an overgrown yellow plum tree, two silver birches, and a laburnum at the bottom. The first Sunday she was there she was awakened by the church bells from the parish church a few hundred yards away. It was all so peaceful and calm.

Then she had met Robert. They began their friendship by comparing prices in the local supermarket. They met again quite by chance a few days later and their friendship grew from there. They met for morning coffee, and sometimes for afternoon tea, in one of the local tea rooms. Gertrude found his soft Scottish accent soothing. It amused her when he called her "young woman".

"You know", he said, "when you grow older there is no one left around to think of you as 'young' any more. I was always 'Young Robert'".

"At home we were always called 'little Gertrude', or 'little Helen'" said Gertrude. "We were probably quite spoiled."

And they both laughed at the happy memories of their childhood.

Gertrude and Robert took trips to Covent Garden, and to the Barbican. They went to shows in the Festival Hall. They exchanged gifts on their respective sixty-eighth birthdays.

It was nearing the first Christmas of their friendship when they were walking through the local park that Robert complained of not feeling well, and being strangely tired. They sat down on seat with "IN MEMORY OF ---" on it. Robert said he could not go on. He had a gripping pain in his chest, then sank down from the seat to the ground. People came running to help and within twenty minutes he was in hospital. But his heart had given out, and he never returned.

Gertrude was stunned. Somehow she managed to get through the following days. Once again she felt the warm presence of Tommy, and found it very disturbing. She now felt she could

bear things no longer, so she put her house on the market and prepared to move to Dorset with her brother.

Now she was waiting for the taxi to take her to the station.

"I may as well make a cup of tea while I am waiting." she thought.

She went the kitchen to put the kettle on. She plugged it in and put the teapot over the spout to warm up, then returned to the stairs.

From the corner of one eye she thought she saw movement on the glass door. She looked again and saw the eyes were upon her. There were bright, merry eyes with large, deep blue pupils of grey-green eyes.

She saw her father's eyes, light blue dreamy eyes. When they twinkled, they lit up his face. He had been a gentle father, loving his own children dearly, but none too keen on other children. He would say to his children when they had friends round,

"You harbour the kids around here."

Memories of him came flooding back to her. One of her earliest was of one Christmas time when he dressed up as a ghost complete with phosphorus paint on his face that shone in the darkened room. Another memory of him was of a certain Easter time when they were very small. It was early morning and they were all in bed when a shout came from below in the front garden. Father opened the window of the bedroom and a large bag of hot cross buns came sailing in, thrown by the baker's boy.

Then came another memory of him of a time when his eyes clouded over, saddened by Life's knocks, of which we children had no knowledge, being too young. When asked what was wrong, he said with misty eyes,

"I wish I could wake up and find it was all a dream and I was home again with my mother".

We children thought about this for a moment, then said,

"You would not have had us then!"

He smiled his slow smile then putting his arms around us said,

"No, I wouldn't, would I? My beloved little daughters."

Gertrude recalled the love in his eyes as he said this, and smiled back at the reflection in the door; then she closed her eyes that were, as she had been told so many times before, so like his own.

"Keep young and beautiful if you want to be loved."

Gertrude opened her eyes wide. This was the song her mother had sang when she was in her seventies, her bright blue eyes under their thick dark brows shining with mischief. Mother went everywhere at the trot. Upstairs and downstairs, in and out of the garden, she tripped and trotted. Gertrude saw her mother's eyes brimming with fun as she squeezed water from a sponge onto the up-turned face of one of her sons-in-law to waken him. Mother's eyes twinkled brilliantly from the glass door. She had so much love in her that she readily gave up her war time butter ration to her two little grand-daughters when they were small, calling it 'Granny's Marger'. Her eyes were so seldom sad that it was with surprise that the children found her in tears one day and crying out,

"I want my mother! Oh, I want my mother!"

She would have been about forty at the time, and her mother had been dead for about ten years. Father and mother must have been going through a rough patch at that time. But those bright, merry blue eyes laughed their way through eighty-four years before they finally closed.

At this moment the sun shone through the glass door making it twinkle like a rainbowed prism. The eyes danced and changed places, sending ripples of colour on to the cream walls of the hall-way. Gertrude took off her hat and put it on the hall stand where it looked like a bunch of for-get-me-nots. When she and Tommy were first married they had a patch of for-get-me-nots

just outside the back door. After a while Gertrude had wanted to clear them away, as she considered them untidy, but Tommy liked them and asked her to leave them there. She saw his eyes now, on the bottom left hand corner of the glass door, mild, hazel eyes with a darker brown rim around the iris. They seemed to be puzzled, as if they did not know what to do. They seemed to be saying,

"Why, Gertrude, why?"

Gertrude got up and walked to the door, placing her hands on the glass, and rested her head on them. After a while, there came a warmth and a tingling sensation which travelled through her body from her head to her toes, giving her strength. She burst into tears.

"Oh, Tommy! Oh, Robert! Don't leave me! Don't leave me!"

She felt the glass get warm, so warm, that when she tried to take her hands away she found she could hardly move them. Some power was holding them there. It was as if someone was holding her hands. She felt the strength of a pair of masculine hands. There was the smell of tobacco smoke and garden coats. She held on to the warmth in her grasp, the tears falling down her face like rain. She felt her hands lose their grip and then drop to her sides. For a moment she stood there until the shaking of her body was stilled. Then, suddenly a blaze of strong sun lit the hall in the hall-way through the glass door, sending the colours dancing with joy. Calmer now, Gertrude went to the front door, picking up her hat as she did so. She tried to open the door but the barrier of colour and sun light made her lightheaded, and the myriad of eyes that were watching her lovingly shone like a cascade of many jewels, amethysts, amber, topaz and opals.

Gertrude reached up to touch the top left hand corner of the glass. To her surprise she saw that it was cracked like the rays of the sun and in the middle of the cracks was a small, round hole which she had not noticed before. It was as if a sharp pointed object had been pushed through the door.

"I must get a new piece of glass put in this door," she said to herself. As she said this, Gertrude also realised that she was about to leave this house with the hole in the glass door. She slowly took off her coat and threw it over the newel post at the bottom of the stairs. She slipped off her shoes and padded in stocking feet into the kitchen. The kettle was just boiling, so she made the tea, and arranged the cup and saucer, milk, and sugar, on a little tray. She looked into the garden where the late spring sunshine slowly spread over the grass and dappled the leaves in the trees.

"How lovely it all is..."

She thought of her little greenhouse coming to life with baby plants and seedlings. She turned round, and going into the hall, looked at the glass door. It was a plain pebbled frosted glass door with the sun streaming through a small hole in the top left hand corner. She smiled at the door and gave it a friendly wave of her hand. Then she lifted the telephone to call the estate agent, asking them to take her house off the market. She phoned to cancel the taxi. She then collected her tea-tray from the kitchen, bringing it into the hall, and sat down on the bottom stair with a cup of tea in her hand. With the warmth of the sun's rays, and the feeling of being surrounded by so much love, she felt utterly at peace.

KAY

The party of young people were laughing and joking as they spilled out of the old minibus in a quiet, side road of the old, country town. They had come to see a very fine and beautiful old church built in the sixteenth century.

When they entered they found it cool and peaceful. They wandered around in twos and threes reading the inscriptions on the floor and walls. There were hand carved pews and altar rail, hand embroidered hassocks, and the most exquisite hangings. A well maintained, be-flowered, and very much loved place of worship for all that lived in the town. As the young people wandered around talking softly, a verger came in through a side door, nodding his head towards them in greeting. As he came nearer he seemed to notice one young woman standing with two friends a little apart from the others.

"Would you care to be shown around?" he asked.

Kay, Leslie, and James agreed to a guided tour of the church, while the others decided to go back into town to make arrangements for a meal before setting off to see other churches. They walked up one aisle and down another. They read all the brass plates on the walls, with the verger explaining who each person was and his connection with the town. These plates were put up in honour of people who had helped the church and the town in various ways. There was a list of rectors who had served the church dating from 1500 to 1967. One very prominent name on the list was that of "Vincent".

"James Vincent, Rector of this Parish 1500-1537"

"Pemberton Vincent, Rector of the Parish 1540-1580"

"Hubert Vincent, Rector of this Parish 1580-1610"

There were five more Vincents between 1640 and 1957. To Kay the name of Hubert Vincent had a vaguely familiar ring to it, a rather disturbing ring that she could not account for at all.

"Hubert Vincent?" she said in a slow voice. "Isn't there a marble effigy of him on the other side of the church?"

"Yes," said the verger, "it is over here", and showed her to the corner of the church where there were three such effigies in grey marble lying down side by side. He explained to Kay who they represented.

"This is a likeness of Hubert Vincent who was Rector here from 1630-1650. He was the youngest of all the Rectors we have had in the town. He was thirty when he first became Rector and sixty-five when he retired. He married a local girl, one Catharine Harbottle. It was an arranged marriage. As she was a lively, fun loving girl, her father, a staunch churchman decided that this tall, handsome, if rather narrow minded, young man would keep her in check."

Kay looked at the cold, grey stone face with its curling hair and short, curling beard. Although the face seemed stern, the mouth with its full lips held a mocking smile. The left hand was resting over the right hand half concealing it. Something made her touch lightly the fingers of the strong looking left hand on which was a ring, a strange ring like a cat's head, but when she tried to take her hand away, a slight magnetic force was keeping it there. The hand felt warm and pliable to the touch. Feeling startled, she turned to the verger and came face to face with a strange, yet familiar, young man who was standing so close to her that her long, fair hair brushed his face as she moved her head.

She quickly apologised.

"I thought you were the verger." she said, "He was here a moment ago."

"I think he had other duties to perform." said the young man. "Some times I take over

from him. If you like I will finish the guided tour for him."

"Thank you. I should like to see more of the church. I would also like to know more of this Hubert Vincent."

So saying, she made as if to turn around once more to look at the grey effigy of Hubert Vincent. The young man caught her arm and pulled her away, but not before she had time to catch a quick glimpse of it. The clear cut chiselled lines of the carving had collapsed slightly as if air were slowly escaping from a pricked balloon. She shook her head. She thought it must be the heat, and turned to face the young man who was still holding her arm in his rather cool hand. She saw a tall young man with fair curling hair, and a short fair beard.

"Come, I'll show you round and explain things. What would like to see first?"

"Do you know the town very well?"

He told Kay that he had lived in the town all his life. Indeed, his ancestors had lived in the town for generations and had practically built it. He led Kay round the church, explaining in detail the reasons why the various plaques were on the walls. Some were in memory of past dignitaries and some in memory of departed persons. He took her into the vestry, where she looked around her in wonderment.

"It all looks so familiar to me and yet I have never been here before..."

"It will come back to you eventually." said the young man. "Come, I will show you a very old marriage register and some of the names may help you to remember more clearly."

Kay went with him. She had completely forgotten her two companions, Leslie and James. They saw her go, looked at one another, and shrugged their shoulders. As they walked out of the church, they called back to her.

"We will come back in an hour, see you about three o'clock."

Kay saw them go, then turned to the young man beside her who guided her to the vestry. As she stood in the vestry with her back to the door, she saw shadowy figures all around her. She walked to the table with the young man at her side. The shadowy figures were noiselessly speaking. She could not hear what they were saying, but sensed the words they were using. They were asking her questions, but she was unsure of the answers. Something she said made them throw up their hands in horror. They spoke to the young man. They were bowing and smiling at the answers he gave them. They called him "Your Honour". He wrote something down in a big book that was on the table.

That done, they turned and slowly walked out of the church. The young man took Kay's right hand and placed his left hand over it. He pressed it rather tightly so that she felt his ring cut into her hand.

"I thought you were going to pass out when we were in the church just now." he said.

Kay snatched her hand away and saw that it was bleeding a little and that a small drop of blood had fallen onto the cuff of his shirt, spreading out to the size of a penny.

"Oh, dear! I am sorry." she said.

"Don't worry about it. It will be something to remember you by. Shall we have coffee somewhere?"

"Why don't you join us?" said Kay, "We are meeting at the Ten Leaguer Inn in South street."

"Oh, please have it with me!" begged the young man. "We may not meet again for such a long time to come. I know a lovely place to go top. It has a corner seat by a window where we can watch the world go by. I always go there."

"Then the people must know you quite well." laughed Kay.

"They don't notice me." he replied. "This is the oldest shop in the town. It was built on the ruins of old barn that was here in 1266. You see, I am quite knowledgable on local history. I can tell you anything you may want to know about the town from the 1500's to the present day."

"Why are you so interested in this particular town?"

"My ancestors owned most of the land around here for centuries. It's only during the last hundred years that they have been selling."

"What is your name?" asked Kay. "You don't know mine, and I don't know yours."

"But, I do know your name.... It is Kay. I heard your friends address you as Kay when you first came into the church."

"And yours...?"

The young man hesitated for a moment, and his face clouded over.

"My name is Vincent, Hubert Vincent."

"Oh, are you one of THE Vincents. One of the many whose names we see all over the town?"

"I am." he said, and offered no further explanation.

Kay smiled at his somewhat saddened face.

"Take me to your old shop and let us sit in the corner to watch the world go by. It sounds fun."

They left the church, closing the door quietly behind them. Taking Kay by her arm he led her through a series of narrow passage enclosed by rough and worn old brick walls that had moss and lichen growing on them. In a few minutes they came out into a side street brilliant with sunshine. On the first corner was a shop so small that it would seem almost impossible to find which appeared to be able to hold no more than two tables. However, once inside, Kay was amazed to find it held a half dozen tables going the length of the room. At the farther end of the room was a large picture window leading onto a patio gay with flowers. Hubert led her to a small window that faced the front of the shop. As they sat down a waitress came slowly towards them.

"Do you know, I don't feel very hungry. I suppose it must be the excitement of meeting you." said Hubert. Kay laughed.

"It is the same with me. Shall we just have coffee?"

As the waitress came to the table to take their order, Hubert leaned over the table and said in a low voice,

"Will you order the coffee, Kay?"

She looked at him in surprise, but ordered the coffee. She saw that his eyes were far away and dreamy as they stared out of the window at the people passing by. She thought she saw his eyes fill with tears for a moment. Seeing her look at him, he hastily blinked and gave a long sigh.

"Oh, Kay!, it has been such a long time waiting for you to come. There is so much I want to say. All sorts of "do you remember's?" Do you remember the day when my horse lost a shoe and I fell off his back? And the day you gave me this ring to wear while you were away? It has never left my hand in all this time, but you never came back."

Kay looked at him with her cup of coffee half way to her lips.

"You are mixing me up with someone else, someone who looks like me.

I have certainly never been horse riding with you, or given you a ring."

It was his turn to look surprised.

"Kay! Take my hand, look at me, then tell me that you honestly remember nothing at all of the past!"

He held her left hand in his left hand, and smiled at her with raised eyebrows. She drained her cup and put it down. Her hand began to feel a warm glow which became a tingling sensation her hand.

"I seem to remember something, but I don't know what it is!" she whispered. Still holding Kay's hand, Hubert drew the ring from his finger and put it onto her finger. It was a curious ring of silver with shape of a cat's head in diamonds on it.

"Now you will remember the days that have gone before. You must never forget again, and as long as you have this ring on your finger you will be reminded of me. Now, give me

yours to wear."

"Mine is only a birthstone ring, an amethyst. It doesn't mean anything."

"It will mean something to me if you let me have it."

Kay looked at the birthstone ring on her right hand. She liked it and was rather reluctant to part with it, but she held out her hand, and taking her hand in his, he gently drew it from her finger and placed it on the little finger of his right hand. Kay felt a feeling of revulsion.

"Please excuse me for a moment," she said, and getting up from the table she walked swiftly through the room to the "powder room". On her return she saw that Hubert was not there. She looked out of the window with its small panes at the people passing and re-passing. She was so interested in watching the world go by that she almost forgot the time. Half an hour passed and Hubert had not returned. The waitress came up to the table to ask her if there was anything else she needed.

It was then that she noticed that his cup of coffee had not been touched.

"You really didn't want two cups of coffee, did you?" she said cheerfully to Kay.

"One was for my friend," answered Kay. "He was here a short while ago. Did you see him go out?"

The waitress looked at Kay sharply. She told her that there had been no one else at the table with her and she would have to pay for the two cups of coffee as she had ordered them. Kay paid for the coffee and went out in a daze. She tried to find her way back to the church, but got completely lost in a maze of small streets and alley ways. Then as she came round a corner, she was grabbed by her arm, and there were her friends, Leslie and James.

"We have been looking for ages! Where have you been? We have to meet up with the others soon. Come on!"

"I must go back to the church," said Kay, a little wildly, they thought.

"There isn't the time, really," said James, but we can do it if we hurry".

When they got to the church Kay asked to go in alone. She went to the aisle to the left hand corner where the cold, grey stone effigies were lying. She looked at the tallest of the three.

"Hubert Vincent" she whispered, and touched the cold, grey face. Her eyes travelled down to the cold, grey hands. On the cuff of the right sleeve of the shirt was a dark stain that had not been there before, and on the little finger of the right hand was a ring, an amethyst birthstone ring.

"Oh, Hubert! I am so sorry, I could not do it then, and I can't do it now!"

Slowly she drew from her finger the ring with the diamond cat's head and placed it in the folds of his jacket nearest his heart, and walked out of the church into the sunshine.

Leslie and James were waiting for her. James took her hand.

"Where is your birthstone ring?" he asked.

"I gave it to someone to remember me by." she said. "Someone I knew a long time ago."

My father's side

John and Anne Nunn

John and Anne Nunn were my great-grandparents. How they met I have yet to discover. John was a Tailor and Hatter from Colchester and Anne was a farmer's daughter from Billericay in Essex who used to go to Romford market with eggs from the farm. These eggs were in panniers one on each side of a horse that she would ride home again. Could it be that they met in Romford while she was selling eggs and he, John, was buying cloth and leather? I must find the truth of this one day. I must try to find the church in which they were married. I should think it would be somewhere in or near Billericay.

Anne and John had three children, Henry, John Edwin and one daughter. Edwin married Harriet Watson of Butt Lane Colchester and became our grandfather. He and his two brothers carried on with the tailoring business after their father, John died. He, Edwin carried on with the

Lots xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx more to come here

Edwin my grandfather

He was a short, Pickwickian, type of man with a round head with curling brown hair, blue eyes and a cleft chin.

He had big ideas, and talked in thousands of pounds, venturing into many different businesses, sometimes winning, and sometimes losing. He loved a gamble - which was his undoing in the end.

At the time of the birth of my father, Edwin senior and Harriet were living in Merrick Crescent.

My grandparents family

The family consisted of Edwin senior, Harriet my grandmother, and the 4 children, Ophelia, the only daughter and three brothers, Edwin Grimston, William, known as Willie, and the youngest, Josiah, or Joey, as he was called.

Family Fortunes

The Law Suit

When my father was about 2 years old, Edwin and his brothers Henry and John were fighting a law suit on behalf of some distant cousins, Henry Grimston, from Tasmania. A great deal of money was involved in the law suit, many tens of thousands of pounds.

So, in order to be near the Law Courts in London, my grandfather rented a house at Carlton Hill in St. Johns Wood. For this he paid the sum of £2.00 per week!

The Tasmanian cousins were from Hobart, reputed to be the wildest part of Tasmania. While the law suit was in progress, they came to England to stay at St. Johns Wood with my grandparents, bringing with them their pet kangaroo. The old lady would sit on the front door step of this rather elegant house with her kangaroo, smoking a clay pipe. Harriet was mortified! These things were not done in St. Johns Wood!

The law suit dragged on for some time, but in the end was decided in favour of Henry Grimston and his wife. They returned to Tasmania, Henry apparently being quite happy there with his life as a ferryman in Hobart. But before going he rewarded Edwin Nunn senior with

£30,000 for his trouble, which Edwin shared with his 2 brothers John and Henry. With their combined resources they bought the old Theatre Royal in Queens Street in Colchester. This was kept going until 1888 with Henry ending up as the sole owner, the other 2 brothers having bowed out previously.

Henry and John profited by their share, but unfortunately Edwin was not so resourceful in the management of money. Edwin later involved himself in a farm in Wivenhoe, but this was also unsuccessful and later he became bankrupt.

My Grandfather

Edwin, the elder, died in the early 1890's. He was a bell-ringer in a local church and after getting rather hot one day he went outside into the cold air and catching pneumonia, he died within three days.

Family Fortunes

In spite of the riches of the early years of my father's life, he and his younger brother Josiah were to plumb the depths of poverty in their lives, but this did not impair their health, as can be seen by the fact that they both lived to be over ninety years of age before they died. They both had helpful and loving wives who stuck to them through thick and thin.

But neither men had a trade or profession. Although Harriet tried to suggest that they should take something up, it seems that my grandfather did not regard this as necessary, apparently believing that they would never have "the need to earn a living"!

Edwin (my father) did want to follow in the footsteps of his cousin XXXX's footsteps and become a chemist, and he did have a go at this in 19?? at 19??. But he had a stammer which seems to have hindered him in this, although his stammer seems to have left him at the age of 25 or so.

My grandmother Harriet had a little money herself and through the years received several small legacies. With this money she set up both my father and my uncle Joey in businesses of their own.

Joey had a newsagents and tobacconists shop in Crouch Street in the early 1900's.

My father was supplied with 3 horses, 2 dainty governesses carts, and a van for removals. With this he made a comfortable living until his horses were commandeered by the army for the Boer War.

My Grandparents home

The Nunns lived in a house in Maldon road called "Diamond Place", so called because all its rooms were odd shapes. Not one was really square. On the rare times when my sister and I have gone back to Colchester, we have looked at it and tried to imagine how it must have been nearly one hundred years ago when my father's family lived there.

Harriet my grandmother

She was a very good dressmaker and a wonderful cook, so my father told us. She was generally pessimistic, in contrast to grandfather, an eternal optimist.

Her father, William Watson, had a boot and shoe shop in High Street in Colchester. Physically he was tall with a thin boney face. In later life he took to visiting the sick, and reading the bible to the dying.

He was very musical, being able to play the flute, the organ, the piano, and the concertina.

Ophelia - The Bankruptcy - The connection between the Nunns and the Browns

In 18?? Ophelia Nunn became a short stay boarder in Eliza Brown's school at Tor House.

Although Ophelia lived in Colchester in the family home in Diamond Place, the Nunn's were having as sticky time financially, owing to Edwin's father, (also Edwin) having involving himself with a law suits, a farm in Wivenhoe, and the Old Theatre Royal in Queen Street, Colchester, he became bankrupt. As they were expecting the bailiffs in any day, it was decided that it would be better if eight year old Offie was spared any troublesome events. and they thought it best for her if she was elsewhere at this time, so she went to Eliza's school as a boarder.

At the top of Diamond Place was a rumpus room for the boys that went over the whole house. Before the arrival of the Bailiffs, into this room went all Harriet's precious things, ranged on one side. These included a set of Hepplewaite chairs and tables, china and cabinets. Then these were bricked in by George Bone, their houseman-handyman, safely hidden until all danger had passed. The many garden statues were buried in the garden. Harriet was mortified by all these trials and tribulations.

Ophelia's arrival resulted in a friendship between Ophelia and Nelly that lasted all their lives, and later Nelly married Ophelia's eldest brother, Edwin, when she was twenty four and he was thirty two.

Edwin my father

Edwin was always called "Brother". In all the letters that passed between them he was addressed as "Dear Brother". When young he was called Edwin but after a while he became for some known as "Grimston", Grim, or Grimmy. Nelly, his wife called him Grim.

Edwin was, as I have mentioned before, a quiet man who enjoyed learning for learning's sake. He liked Latin, but was not so fond of French, so he and a school friend who also went to the Colchester Royal Grammar school, one Charlie MacLoughlan put their heads together for a solution. Grimmy did all their Latin home work and Charles did all their French home work.

In those days Saturday School was compulsory, and although Wednesday afternoons were free, the boys were not supposed to leave the school grounds. However this did not deter the boys leaping over the walls and going home. Grimmy had only to leap over one wall to be in his own garden, and this he did on many occasions. Yet he was, all told, a very law abiding fellow. The Headmaster, the Rev. Acland, tried to get Grimmy to join the school and Chapel choirs. This he did and it seemed to help him with the stammer with which he was plagued. However he left after a few weeks, for being a very earnest boy, he could not stand the fooling about that went on between the other boys in the vestry. He always said that there are three sort of boys:

"Good boys, bad boys, and choir boys, And the choir boys are not by any means so angelic as they look."

He had a good tenor voice and a beautiful whistle like a lark. We loved to hear him whistling. Even now I think a melody tunefully whistled is as enjoyable as any voice singing a song. He would sing and whistle old Victorian and Edwardian songs such as,

"In the days when we went gypsying a long time ago..",

"Oh, my Jane, my pretty Jane, thou has never looked so shy..",

"When you and I were young, Maggie...."

as well as all Gilbert and Sullivan songs from their operas.

The rough and tumble of Life seemed to be to much for him at times. He would sit quietly cogitating, and when asked what he was thinking about, he would say he was "just collecting his thoughts."

As bed time neared he would say,

"Now let us sing the Doxology..." and would begin by chanting,

"Lord, now lettest Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word"

While at school he played some minor parts in the various stage productions presented.

He was interested in music, but his playing was limited to the mouth organ. At one time he started to study the piano, but gave this up after a year or so.

Diamond Place

When little Offie went home to tea on Sundays to her home in Diamond Place, she often took Nelly, my mother, with her. Nelly loved the free and easy lifestyle of the Nunns, and at Diamond Place there were trees to climb, dogs and rabbits to fondle, and a pony to ride. In the house there was a rumpus room like an attic going over the whole of the house, and there were seats ranged round for the boys to do their school home work home. Outside there were dogs, cats, rabbits and a pony. The rabbits belonged to young Joey.

Dad's brothers and sisters

Willie had a odd streak in him. When my father had a removal job to do he would enlist his help, despite the fact that this nearly always led to friction between them. For instance, once when manoevering a piano down stairs Grimmy found that Will was using one hand only, so once out in the street Grimmy gave his brother a clout. This seemingly trivial event, probably forgotten by Grimmy after the event, was to return as a worry later on.

Will married a girl from Stoke-on-Trent through, I believe, an agency somewhere. The girl, Marie, was a dark pretty girl - like all the Nunns, Will had an eye for a pretty girl. She had some money of own, her father being a shareholder in a Railway company. They went to live in Brightlingsea, but the relationship did not turn out as happily as one might have hoped.

Although very handsome, with dark curly hair and deep blue eyes, he was, as I have said above somewhat odd. Perhaps nowadays one would say that he was merely eccentric, and let it go at that, but at the turn of the century people had different ideas. One of his notions was that sheets on a bed should be turned back at the bottom of the bed as well as at the top, in order to allow a current of air to pass through the bedclothes. Poor Marie used to freeze!

Once a neighbour accused him of trying to listen in to her conversation while he was in the back garden. This so annoyed Will that he threw a bucket of cold water over her. Perhaps nowadays he might have been bound over to "keep the peace", but after so many years of keeping the peace herself, Marie had him committed to Severalls Mental Institute in Colchester, where he stayed for some years, eventually ending up somewhere in Wales. He used to go home for Christmas and other holidays, but he preferred to go back afterwards to Wales where he was regarded as a "trusty". Here he died during the 1914-1918 war.

He and my father corresponded at times but he used to maintain that he was not really Grimmy's brother, but rather the son of someone called Sir Percy Nunn. Poor fellow!

He used to remind Grimmy of the occasion when he, Grimmy clouted him for lifting the piano with one hand in his pocket and one hand under the piano. He was very reproachful over that incident, and could never accept that he had been at fault. The reproach hurt my father, who never liked to hurt anyone at all, whether physically or mentally.

KITH.

"Your life, " said Dr. Thompson to me, "must be full of incident. This started me thinking of how life is made up of incidents, some small, some large, some very surprising, and some quite ordinary. They can be "funny-ha-ha, peculiar, unhappy, or tragic."

"Rolling-in-the-aisles funny." or "can I believe my eyes ?" odd.

Some we like to recall and some we would rather forget. Some do not come back to us until many years later on in life, to be recalled by sounds or scents, a distant train coming nearer until it comes to a halt with a great puff of steam, a long, drawn out whistle and grinding of brakes, or wood smoke from a garden bon-fire in on an autumn evening. All can bring tears to the eyes or sweet memories. Even our dreams are incidents in our lives. They influence us as much and are as wonderfully interesting as the day dreams of our waking hours.

It is a pity that our night time dreams are so fleeting and slip away from us all too soon unless, as I have taught myself to do, one can re-call it back the instant one opens one's eyes. I can do this. I can re-dream old dreams. Of course, they do not follow the old dream in every detail, but the difference between the two does in no way detract from the enthralling interest of the first dream. I remember reading not so long ago about a quite well known writer, whose name I forget for the moment, who wrote that he thought sleep was a waste of time and so had as little of it as possible. This fellow, and others who declare they never dream at night, do not know what they are missing. Of course, I do get the occasional nightmare, when I wake up in a hot sweat unable to move my arms or legs. When I am totally unable to stretch out my hand to switch on the bed-side lamp. These are terrifying and debilitating.

The idea of recording the small happenings of life of my nearest and dearest was started by that remark from one of the best and nicest of family G. P's that anyone could possibly have, after I had recounted something that had happened in our house on that morning before I had attended the surgery.

This is not intended to be an autobiography in any sense of the word. My life as such could not be of much interest to the world or general public; I am just an ordinary Mum and Granny. But as a journal of snippets and newsy anecdotes, it may raise a few smiles. In any case it is something for my descendants to follow up if they ever wish to make a family tree. Often one reads in a newspaper a short, two hundred word article that catches one's eye and sets up a little chuckle and intrigues so much that we say to a friend,

"Did you read in the paper about X?", or whatever it was that amused you.

It could be knitting, babies, a film star, the Prime Minister, compost, or cooking. So, in such a way, I hope to entertain, intrigue, and interest anyone who might be reading this journal of my kith and kin. It is a record of what I know and of tales that have been handed down by my forebears.

And as Charles Dickens's David Copperfield said, "One can't start anything until one is born." I will tell you when and where I was born.

Mum and Dad

Their first encounter

One day in the Nunn house at Diamond Place, Joey was driven to despair by Nelly, who one day let the rabbits out of their hutches. He was in such a fury that he chased little eight year old Nelly round and round the garden to reap revenge on her, but she was very fleet of foot, having learned to run from her own brothers at times, so she ran to a tree and climbing a ladder that was there, she was soon high up amongst the branches away from the furious Joey, who promptly took the ladder away, leaving her there. She could have shinned down quite well, but she did not know where Joey might be hiding to catch her unawares. After a while just as she was getting worried, and not knowing what to do in case, Joey was still lying in wait for her, along came six foot, sixteen years old Grimmy who saw her plight.

"Jump down, and I will catch you." he said.

"No, I can't!" said Nelly. "If I do you will see up my clothes!"

"You jump" he said, "and I'll turn my head."

So Nelly jumped happily and Grimmy caught her neatly and gently in his strong arms and lowered her to the ground. She loved him dearly from that day. She even became firm friends with Joey.

My parents engagement

When the troubles of the Nunn's was solved they moved away to another part of the town to a house in Military Road, so the paths of Nelly and Grimmy did not meet for some years to come, when Nelly was nearly twenty two and Grimmy thirty years old.

It happened one day when Nelly was at a loose end for somewhere to go or something to do. The happy times she had in her childhood with Ophelia Nunn came back to her so she made her way across Colchester from Alexandra Road to Military Road where she heard the Nunn's now lived. Ophelia was delighted to see her and asked her to stay to tea. Ophelia's mother, Harriet, agreed to this so Nelly stayed. One after the other Ophelia's brothers came in after their day's work. After tea Edwin offered to drive Nelly home in his pony and trap. Nelly accepted this and agreed to joining a family picnic at the coming weekend. This invitation included Nelly's two sisters, Mary and Rosie as well as Ophelia.

Six weeks later she and Edwin were engaged to be married. The engagement was for two years before they married in 1903.

We have a photograph of this pony and trap outside a newsagents shop in Crouch Street. This shop was owned by Edwin's brother, Joey. It had been bought for him by Harriet, his mother. We have a photograph of him outside the shop with young Willie Houchen (?) the paper boy by his side boy by his side, and standing in the road way is a spanking, shining pony and trap with Grimmy proudly holding the reins.

At that time, Grimmy owned a stable, two more ponies, another trap and a small van for removables. He had been set up in business by Harriet, which he kept going until the Army commandeered his horses during the Boer war. By this time Grimmy and Nelly were engaged, and were to be married within two years. During this testing time they wrote beautiful love letters one to another all in

rhyming couplets. It was in these stables in a certain drawer containing Grimmy's private bits and pieces and book-keeping ledgers that he put all tied up in blue ribbon the letters that Nelly sent to him. Her also had in with these letters some very valuable stamps which including a rare Queen Victoria "Penny Black" stamp. And it was to these stables that Nelly went one day after they had a quarrel, because she had heard that Grimmy's mother, Harriet, had been reading these letters. Nelly went to this drawer, took the packet containing her letters, and, unbeknown to her, also his other precious objects and burned them there and then. When Grimmy came back to the stables and saw what she had done he was very upset. He wrote her a very unhappy and reproachful letter. She sent to him a letter so full of remorse and anguish. These two letters are the only two still in existence, and we, their children, cherish them. They forgave each other and were married on her twenty-third birthday, the eighth of June, 1903.

My parents, married at last

So, Nelly and Grimmy were married at Holy Trinity Church on her birthday, June 8th 1903. They arranged to honeymoon at Mersey Island, but the weather was so cold that time that they came home after three days.

They had a small furnished house in Military Road, Colchester. This had been bought for them by Harriet. The original owner, a Miss Pretty, was leaving Colchester to live with friends, so Harriet arranged to have it from her, lock, stock and barrel. They were very happy in this house and their first born, a son Bobby, was born in it. But shadows began to loom for them, as this Miss Pretty from whom Harriet had bought the house decided she was not happy where she was and gave Harriet no peace until she was able to move back into it again.

At this time, the Boer war having started started, and the Government having commandeered all three of Grimmy's horses for the Army, Grimmy was left without a job or a trade, and with no means to support a family.

When the Nunn boys were younger, their mother, Harriet, had wanted them to learn a trade of some kind, but Edwin, (their father), pooh-poohed the very idea, saying that there would never be the need for his sons to work. This might have come about if he had not squandered it on buying a farm that failed, by helping a cousin to lay claim to a law-suit that lasted nearly ten years before it was finally settled, and by taking over the old Theatre Royal in Queens Street with his two brothers Henry and John.

So, without a trade or profession, and no job there was nothing else to be done but to move back temporarily into the family home.

Grimmy went back to his warm, loving family home with Harriet and Ophelia, but Nelly with little one year old Bobby had to move into Tor House which already housed Rosie and Lome, a dying Amy, although no one suspected she was so ill at the time, and Mary, the sister whose care Nelly did not want to accept.

After a while, Grimmy, a Colchester Royal Grammar School educated man, found a job as a driver for a local antique dealer, a Mr Jarman. Edwin learned something of antiques while he was with Mr Jarman. He acquired an old bible that had at the back of it old cures for illnesses, such as "swallow a spider for croup", etc. but somehow this bible disappeared and he always mourned its loss. He also had the complete works of Bunyans "Pilgrim's Progress", which had beautiful plates in red, scarlet and gold. These he kept in a box allowing no one, not even Nelly, to touch them. After his death in 1964 we, his children, found that they had completely disintegrated with time. We would have had so much enjoyment with those beautifully illustrated books had we been allowed to look at

them.

Nelly was not so happy back in Tor House. Amy was ill, and although Eliza was still teaching in her by now dwindling school, she was nearly seventy and needed care and attention as she had "dropsy" in her legs. Moreover, when Grimmy came to see Nelly and his little son, Bobby, Eliza insisted that as he smelled of "the stables", he must use the bottom area steps to come into the house. It was in "Tor House" that another baby was born to Nelly and Grimmy, a little girl whom they named Kate Lavinia. Things began to get a little more difficult now for Nelly. The atmosphere was decidedly chilly. The most beloved sister, Amy, who had always been so understanding and kind to Nelly, died of "galloping consumption", leaving her feeling saddened and very lonely. She was now ensconced in the old top back nursery finding it difficult to climb up and down four flights of stairs with two babies.

At the first Christmas after Amy died, before Bobby was two and little Lavinia, (Venie) six months old, Grimmy had found a house, 73, Mersey road. He was furnishing it, and making it ready for his family to move into in the New Year. He had a shop built on to the side and was getting all set up for a thriving business. Little Bobby was not very well having what the doctor said was a feverish cold. Nelly nursed him, played with him expecting him to be up and about with in a day or two. On Boxing Day he slept longer than usual so Nelly thankfully got on with ironing a dress for him to wear when his father came to see him that afternoon, but he never regained consciousness dying of meningitis two days later, poor little fellow. It was strange that during that night when Nelly sat up watching her baby son drifting away when he suddenly sat up in his cot, opened his eyes wide and stretched out to something or some one that Nelly could not see and cried out, "Pretty! Pretty!"

This was the name that Bobby had given to Amy when she was alive. Nelly always said it must have been her dear sister, Amy who came to carry him away HOME in her arms. This was the only thing that could bring any kind of comfort to the wildly grieving Nelly. Her sisters were kind enough to her but she could not forget the days when she had not been as welcome with her two children as her sisters Rosie and Lilian had been with theirs. On the day of his funeral she did not want all the curtains closed as was tradition, but opened them all as wide as she could

Soon after Bobby's funeral, Grimmy came to tell her that number 73, Mersey road was ready to move into at any time and his business which he had called "The Garrison Cycle Dep" had good business with the various Army barracks in and around the Town. He had switched from horses and traps which he used to let out on hire, to bicycles, the up and coming means of transport for both civilian and army life. Nelly was overjoyed! At last she had a home of her own. She told no one at Tor House about it until Grimmy drove up with a pony and trap to collect his family.

She dressed little Venie, packed up her belongings, then went downstairs to the lower school room where Eliza was still teaching, and walking up to her mother, Eliza, she said,

"Well, goodbye, Ma. Grimmy has come to take me home."

Then she walked out of the house to the waiting pony and trap, and Grimmy. After the initial shock of the departure of her youngest daughter, Eliza had much to think about.

Nelly remained very close to her family after this move to Mersey road. It was

here that Nelly and Grimmy had two more little daughters, myself and Little Nelly. It was not until the second of August, 1914 that another son, George, was born to Nelly and Grimmy.

Edwin, the elder, died in the early 1890's. He was a bell-ringer in a local church and after getting rather hot one day he went outside into the cold air and catching pneumonia, he died within three days.

My Mothers side, up to her marriage

Charles and Eliza(my grandparents).

My maternal Grandmother was born in Lavenham, Suffolk around the late 1830's or early 1840's. Her mother was the daughter of a "gentleman farmer" so we have been told, whose name was John Butler, and I believe his wife's name was Honor. He had but one child, a daughter Mary, who, was a very attractive, high spirited girl with beautiful curling chestnut coloured hair. When Mary needed any money she would go to the village barber and sell one of her curls telling him to take it from underneath where it would not show. She was a fearless horsewoman, riding her horse around at a full gallop. Once when she was racing round, one of the farm hands called after her,

"Mary ! Mary ! We can see all you have got!"

"You won't see more than God has made!" was her memorable reply.

Birth of Eliza

When Mary was fifteen and staying with friends, the family doctor took advantage of her, and the result was Eliza, my grandmother, who was born before Mary was sixteen years old. Eliza was always very reticent about her birth. She had a happy childhood and was rather a pious little girl given to holding prayer meetings in the meadows for the local village children.

She remembered that a certain gentleman whom she did not know used to come riding through the road, dismount and picking her up in his arms would say.

"My little girl ! My little girl !" And then ride away again.

She was never told who her father was. When Eliza was about three years old Mary Butler married a local farmer, John Kett, who loved little Eliza and adopted her as his own, loving her dearly. Sadly, Mary and John had no more children.

Eliza was a clever girl, starting her education as a pupil teacher in a Dame's school. Then when she was about nineteen, she won in 1858, one of the first scholarships arranged, so we were told, by Queen Victoria, to enable her to go to Whitelands College in Putney. She left in 1852 with Second Class Honours, taking her first post as head teacher of the girls section at Tor National school in Torquay. This school survived until quite recent years. She was very happy there until she left to get married in the early 1860's.

Eliza's marriage

The head master of the boys' section was a John Daniel Brown from Colchester. He wrote to his younger brother, Charles, in Colchester telling him about this lovely girl, Eliza Kett, saying that they must not let her go out of the family. Charles went to Torquay to investigate, saw Eliza and was completely captivated by her. She loved him dearly even though he took great delight in shocking her Victorian sensibilities. While attending a party one evening he excused himself from her side for a moment or two. Soon after this a young lady came in the room and began to dance with the young men in a most unheard of fashion for as she danced she kicked her legs up into the air, disclosing her long lacy underwear. This young lady later revealed herself as none other than the irrepressible Charlie Brown. Eliza was duly very shocked and it took some time for her to forgive him. She did so, and they were married setting up home in Colchester. He, having a business in the town of "Cabinet, and Furniture Maker", made most of the furniture for his bride with his own hands. Some of it is still in use to this day, somewhere in Berkshire, being used by his great-grand children.

Charles and Eliza called their first home "Torquay House", and when they moved from

there to another house in Alexandra Road, they called it "Tor House". Charles was a convivial man rather given to champagne. Such was his liking for it, that he was known as "Champagne Charlie". After some time he began to drink to excess, much to the horror of the pious, Victorian mind of Eliza. He rode every where on horseback in those days before the motor car had been invented. The stories go that one day he was so drunk that he fell off his horse and was found by his groom lying in the middle of the road with the horse standing guard over him. Then on another occasion when he was "half seas over" the limit, he arrived home to find that Eliza had locked him out of the house. After calling to and cajoling with Eliza to let him in, but, having no response, he called a policeman, gave him a pound to break the door down, then still on his horse he rode in over the broken door.

The Children

Charles and Eliza had nine children: Lillian, Arthur, Rosina (or Rosie, as she preferred to be called) Mary, Ernie, who later became Bob, Amy, Jack, Nelly, and little Reggie.

Lillian married one Frank King who was employed by my grandfather in his business and by the time little Nelly was four years old he was an aunt to little Lillian King.

Soon after this my grandfather died, leaving Eliza a widow at quite a young age of about forty-three, with nine children, the youngest being little two year Reggie.

As well as making furniture and out fitting yachts he also made coffins and was pall bearer at many funerals. It was while being a pall-bearer and having to walk very slowly behind the coffin that he caught pneumonia and died within three days. When he died, the firm paid Eliza certain amount of money each month for some time, but it never seemed enough. So she went back to teaching, which was something she knew she could do to provide for her family, charging two shillings per week unless they were boarders.

Most of her pupils came from the many army camps around the town. My mother, Nelly, enjoyed name dropping so we were told of Major X's daughter and Captain Lapham's daughter coming to the school. She and her sisters were often asked to a childrens' party in one military camp or other that were situated in the town. A carriage would be sent to Tor House for the young ladies and they would be driven in style to the camp where there would be a soldier at the gate to wave them through, calling out,

"This way to Captain Lapham's party !"

When Nelly was about sixteen, the National schools began to take on in popularity and consequently Eliza's classes dwindled. So Nelly decided to do something to earn money. She tried being a governess but she found that she was expected to be a nanny to the baby of the family as well.

So she started up a class of children on her own in Tor House. She went round the smaller cottages canvassing for children, putting her charges as low as one shilling a week.

She very soon had forty pupils and so was able to hand over to Eliza £2 pounds per week for several years. Although Eliza had engaged at her school for many years a certain Herr Waldo to teach her pupils German, and a Monsieur du Pre for French, it was not possible to keep this up any more.

John, the father of Charles

Charles Brown, his brother Daniel, and sister, Susanna, were the children of John Brown, Cabinet Maker, of St John's Street. It was this John Brown who made family history.

In the year 1812, the coffin containing the body of Queen Caroline rested overnight in Colchester on the way to Harwich and thence to Brunswick. It is understood that the people of Colchester refused to allow her to leave England with the coffin plate inscribed,

Caroline of Brunswick |

They employed John Brown of St John's Street, our great-grandfather to make another which read,

Here Lies Caroline, the Injured Queen of England

In the dead of night our great-grandfather Brown substituted the new coffin plate. The substitution was not discovered until the body of the Queen had left England.

Our mother Nelly Brown, was told of this many times, and was very proud of this.

Charles carried on in the Cabinet Makers and Yacht Outfitters firm until he died.
Daniel became a school master in Torquay.

Susanna married to a Dr. John Turner who, I believe, started the Turner Village for mentally handicapped persons at the bottom of North Hill, Colchester. Nelly said that "Uncle Turner" was always very good to his widowed sister-in-law, Eliza. He always sent them a ten pound turkey for Christmas, besides other gifts during the year.

Eliza also took in the odd recommended paying student as a boarder. One of these was Lome Strathern, a young Scotsman, who fell in love with, and later married Eliza's daughter, Rosie. Another lad was Herbert Eagle who fell in love with Nelly, but Eliza thought she was much too young at fifteen so sent Herbert away.

By the time Charles died, the eldest girl, Lillian, was married to one Frank King who was employed by my grandfather in his cabineting business. He, Frank, came to live in Tor House bringing Lillian, his wife, and baby girl, also Lillian. This made my mother, little Nelly, an aunt at four years old. Frank, an earnest young man, took up the roll of father figure and head of the household.

Eliza started a school in Tor House, charging two shillings per week, which thrived until Nelly left home to be married at the age of twenty four. Lillian began teaching here and was known as "Mrs King" by all the pupils, including her four younger brothers and Nelly. All through her life my mother referred to Lillian as "my sister, Mrs King".

Frank was always remembered with affection by Eliza's younger four little children, and with respect by the five older ones. He guided Eliza over money matters and became a father figure to them all. My mother always remembered the long walks on Sundays after church, which was three times a day when they were small. He would take them walking from Colchester to Wivenhoe where they might have a glass of lemonade to fortify them for the long walk back home. He was Eliza's right hand until her eldest son, Arthur, was old enough to go into his father's business.

Arthur had no liking for this. He wanted to be a veterinary, so he took a job on a farm to learn all as much as he could about animals. Eliza was very put out over this. When he came home from work she insisted that as he smelled of stables and horses he must use the back area steps and back door to come into the house.

He married, at twenty two, Alice, a woman ten years older than himself who helped him, loved him, and pushed him through his many exams so that he, Arthur Oakely Brown, became a much loved doctor. He became head surgeon of a field hospital in France during the 1914-1918 war.

He and Alice lived in Swindon in a house named "Norbury" until Alice died. A few years later Arthur re-married one of Alice's friends and seemed very happy. When he died aged about seventy, there was a column in the local newspaper about his funeral, which was attended by about two hundred people including doctors and nursing staff from local hospitals.

Arthur and Alice had one child, a son, named Valentine to whom they were devoted, giving

him the best education possible and sending him on to Sandhurst from where he became an army officer serving in the 1914-1918 war. He, poor fellow was killed on November 11th 1918, the very day of the armistice. (?)

Arthur found that he, Valentine, had run up considerable debts amounting to about £1000, which in those days was a fortune. Arthur said it would take him a lifetime to re-pay these debts. Whether he paid these debts I do not know; he did not communicate with the family very much apart from a birthday cheque to my mother each year and five shillings a week to his then widowed sister, Rosie.

Eliza's eldest daughter, Lillian, who married Frank King, had one little girl also named Lillian. This little girl married a John Goodchild who was lame in one leg. He became a church vicar in, I believe, Halesworth, Suffolk, being known as the "lame vicar". They had but one child who followed in his father's footsteps and became a church vicar somewhere in Suffolk. My mother, Nelly went to stay there now and again.

Eliza's second daughter, Amy, died at thirty-eight with what was called in those days "galloping consumption", brought on by an unfortunate love affair with someone named "Tom". This Amy was very beloved being the confidant and comforting friend to all the family.

My mother always remembers her wearing a pretty, colourful apron. This apron played a wonderful role the early years of her married life. Her first born, a son, little Bobby, died at twenty one months old from meningitis and as my grieving heart broken little mother sat by his cot watching him, he sat up in bed, and with glowing eyes, held out his little arms to someone unseen by other eyes and said,

"Pretty ! Pretty !".

This was the name he had for Amy in her pretty apron. But Amy had died some months earlier. Nelly had then a wonderful sense of peace as her baby passed into the waiting arms of "Pretty". Who shall say that Pretty Amy was not there for Bobby ? Nelly always believed it was so, and this belief helped her to come to terms with her great loss.

Rosie continued to live in Tor House for some years after she was married to a young Scotsman, Lome Strathen, He had come to Colchester to work and ended up lodging with Eliza.

He, Lome, was from a very good, old Scots family. I believe one of his cousins was High Sheriff of Glasgow at one time. Rosie and her four children, Donald, Olive, Marjory, and Fairly, always claimed descent from Robert the Bruce, of Scotland who married Joanna Strathern.

Lome and my mother, Nelly, were firm friends throughout his short life. He died of diabetes at forty two. His daughter, Marjory, also died of diabetes when she was about sixty. Medicine has come a very long way since those days before insulin injections and tablets.

On one of his visits to see Nelly he stayed to dinner. I dimly remember him as a black bearded young man. This dinner was evidently a pie of some kind and Nelly gave him a generous helping leaving the dish empty. When my father came in to his dinner I piped up with accusing four year old voice,

"There would have been a piece of pie for your dinner, but Mummy gave it to Uncle Lome!"

My father just laughed and assured me that he did not mind Uncle Lome having a piece of pie.

Of Lome and Rosie's four children Olive was the eldest. She was a fun loving girl and rather high spirited. When he, Lome was dying, he said to Rosie,

"I don't know what you will do with that girl, Olive!"

Olive became a telephonist in Colchester exchange and married a man named Gould who

was also a employed by the GPO. This man claimed a kinship with Nat Gould, the author of all those stories of "THE TURF". They lived in Mile End road, Colchester all their lives. They had no children, devoting their lives to their niece, Anita, daughter of Olive's sister Marjory. Olive's husband died at the age of about fifty but Olive was nearly ninety when she died.

Marjory, Olive's sister married George Gilbertson, the son of a Major Gilbertson who had been stationed in India in the early 1900's who had married an Eurasian girl. On his return to England he was stationed in Colchester, living next door to Rosie Strathern. Naturally the children became firm friends. The Gilbertsons had three daughters, Olive, Kitty, Flossy, and one son, George. It was to George, who looked very Indian, that Marjory married after he had a nasty accident on his motor-bike. After a while Marjory, George, and Anita went to live in Selhurst Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, taking Rosie, now an old lady of nearly seventy, with them.

They had one child, a little girl, Anita, who seemed to resent the fact that her father was Anglo-Indian. She did not much care for her father's family saying they were snobbish. As far as I know never married. She took up nursing somewhere. She inherited Olive's possessions and house in Mile End road, Colchester.

Donald, or to give him his full name, Donald Brisbane Strathern, elder son of Rosie and Lome was sent after the death of Lome, his father, to the Royal Wanstead residential home for orphans in Wanstead. To get into this place. a boy had to be voted in by some one of good repute. Donald was voted in and befriended by a Major of the British Army, I believe his name was Baker, but of this I am not sure.

He, Donald, spent much of his early days at the home of this man. My memory tells me that the name of this man could be Baker. I have no means of verifying this at all. Donald became sale representative for the tailoring firm of Hector Powy. After several like positions, he went into partnership with George taking a garage, hiring out and selling second hand cars. He married, and had two daughters, but when life got on top of him for some reason I do not know, he took an overdose of pills and died aged about fifty.

Rosie's last and youngest child, a son, Fairley Steed, I know little off except that he eventually married, went to live in New Zealand, had three daughters, Joanna, Janice, and Jonquil. One of these daughters wrote a book about her wanderings around the world, calling it "Gullible Travels". She now lives somewhere in Scotland.

Mary, Eliza's fourth daughter lived unmarried at home in Tor House with her mother, Eliza, until, she, Eliza, died aged seventy in February 1908. Mary was a high spirited, attractive girl with slightly prominent blue eyes.

One young man she loved when young was Valentine, a friend of her brother Jack, in most respects a extremely eligible young man who spent many happy hours at Tor House. He liked cheerful music, so introduced Eliza to the hymns of "Sank & Moody". He and Mary became firm friends, enjoying each other's company and walking out together, on the understanding that they took little Nelly, six years younger than Mary with them, who naturally enough resented this ruling of Eliza's. However it was not to be. Eliza put a stop to this affair when it came to her attention that Val was in the habit of going to Monte Carlo and actually gambled there. Mary naturally resented this and in some way it turned her a little against Nelly and through her life it seems that she felt a slight feeling of the same resentment towards Nelly.

Although they on friendly terms there was not much of a family bond between the two of them. Yet, when Nelly had her second baby born in Tor House, Mary was a kindly competent nurse to her. Her one feeling of resentment went no further than saying to Nelly as she handed over a baby,

"Here, take it ! You all have them but me."

Nelly, my mother, was confined to bed with me, her second little daughter when Eliza, her mother died. She got out of bed to watch the funeral cortege pass by her bedroom window. She named me Amy after the sister who had died four years previously.

After the death of Eliza, Mary took as position as companion to the invalid wife of a Baptist minister living in Ashmore Green, Berkshire. This minister was one Harry Clark. The house was called "Ash House", which is still there today. The chapel still stands but the windows are boarded up and it seems as though it will never be used again. Before she died, Harry's wife asked Mary to look after him and to marry him. With the blessing of his now grown up family Mary did just this and was fairly contented with her life. Mary and Harry had one child, a little girl they named Mavis. She was a clever, bright child, playing the organ for the congregation at the age of ten years old.

Mary and my mother kept in touch although Mary had eventually married again to a member of the Plymouth Brethren. Mavis herself also married into the Brethren Sect and had one child, a daughter, Beryl. My son, Donald, started to correspond with Beryl when they were both about ten years old but after he had mentioned in one of his letters that he had taken small parts in films we heard no more of them.

He, Donald, together with his brother, Philip, had played small parts in the film "The Divided Heart" and another part in "The Loves of Three Women." When he came home the day he had been in "The Loves Of Three Women" he said to me,

"Guess who was playing in this film ? Petula Clark!"

At eight years old he had fallen in love !

Once when Mary and Mavis came to see us when we lived on CAnvey Island she, Mary told Nelly, my mother, that she was too worldly.

"Nelly", she said, "When Jesus comes again to this world he will pass you by, because you are not ready for him".

This rather incensed Nelly for she answered sharply to her sister,

"Mary! When Jesus comes again I shall be as ready as you are, but I shall probably be sitting one of these children on the pot!", indicating her four little grandchildren all under five running round her feet. To this, Mary had no reasonable answer!

Once in the middle 1920's, my younger sister, little Nelly, then aged fifteen and two of Rosie's teenage sons, Donald and Fairly Strathern were staying with the then widowed Mary in "Ash House" in Ashmore Green which was hardly more than a hamlet miles from anywhere in those days, and finding themselves with no where to go and nothing to they began to do the "Charleston" in an upstairs bedroom, and play on the piano "God Bless The Prince of Wales", the only tune that Mary allowed to be played other than hymns on Sundays. Mary was so horrified at their depravity that she went out into the garden taking baby Mavis with her and walked round and round singing her favourite hymn seemingly to keep the devil at bay. She sang

"HE is coming perhaps today!"

Now, for the four younger members of Eliza's family....

Ernie, as he was called when young, or Bob as he grew older must have been dyslectic when small, for it seemed as if he could not easily learn to read. It was called laziness in the good old days. Little Nelly read to all four of the young brothers as she loved them dearly. Ernie was the eldest, Jack was two years younger, Nelly, eighteen months younger than Jack, and little Reggie was two years younger than Nelly.

All four played together and fought each other fiercely. Mother, Nelly, said she could not remember a single day that there was not a fight in the boys' room, and more often than not she would wade in with arms flailing, especially if it was her favourite brother, Jack, in need of being defended against Ernie and Reggie. Nelly would see that justice was done. Once when Eliza was taking Ernie, Jack, Reggie, and Nelly out with her she said to them with sorrow in her voice,

"The people will say 'There goes poor Mrs Brown with her naughty little children !'"

So Nelly, stung a little by her mother's voice, retorted that she would never say such things to her own little children when she grew up.

"Oh, won't you," said Eliza, "I should hate to be one of your children!"

Nelly had five children, but sadly her first born, a son, died aged nearly two years old. Of the others not one of them can remember a rough or sharp word from her. She was much given to laughter, bursting out at the drop of a hat. We were never slapped.

Perhaps Eliza had need of patience with the younger members of her family, for once when the children were small Nelly persuaded her brother Ernie to become an Ancient Briton by painting him all over with blue paint from her paint box. She then took him to the front door of Tor House, opened it and pushed him out side just at the very moment when a lady was coming up the steps to make inquiries about sending her little girl to Eliza's school. Eliza made the excuse that this was an aftermath of teaching history. One day Ernie had been asked to a picnic and Eliza lent to him Jack's best school trousers. All went well. Then the mother of the birthday child asked Ernie if he would like another jam tart which he accepted, then he put it down on his plate. A little two year old girl baby, Maggie, came toddling round to him, lost her balance, and sat down on Ernie's jam tart.

The mother saw this and picking the child up said to Ernie,

"You can eat it, Ernie, she's quite clean!"

Ernie nearly threw up. He managed to put it in his pocket instead and forgot it was there. Next day when at the Quaker School that he attended Jack thrust his hand into his pocket to bring out his handkerchief and out it came covered with jam.

There was another fight in the boy's room that night ! Forever afterwards that little girl was called "Little-Miss Maggie-Sit-Upon-a-Tart"

In later life Nelly would turn to Jack when events threatened to engulf or overwhelm her. Money was very scarce.

Jack ran away to sea when he was fourteen, starting as a boy on a sailing ship. When he came home he kept them all agog with tales of his adventures. Some were true and some a little far fetched - especially the one about when he was ship-wrecked in the Bay of Biscay.... Or the one about when he swam Shark Bay with a knife between his teeth....

Although he obtained his Master's Ticket and became a naval captain, he never had a ship. He worked for many years at the Surrey and Commercial docks as head stevedore and later in Southampton docks as Shore superintendent for the Pacific Line. They then lived in the Bittern Park district. He had married a very pretty Irish girl, Cissy O'Malley, by whom he had ten children, who live somewhere in the Southampton area even now, except the eldest son, also Jack, who followed his father's footsteps and went to sea, but after a while he jumped ship in New York, living there for rest of his life. His full name was John Thornton Brown, and when he was a teenager he would boast of the time when he would be the owner of a large house saying,

"I shall be Johnny Thornton of the Ma-a-ansion!"

We often wonder if he fulfilled his dream he had about "The Ma-a-nsion"

Mother remembered her father, Charles, taking little Jack between his knees and handing

the boy a golden sovereign saying,

"This is because you are my son Jack !"

Jack took the money. Then little Nelly, feeling aggrieved, piped up with,

"I'm your girl Nelly !"

Her father kissed her and gave her a bright penny,

"Because," he said, "you are my girl Nelly !"

Four year old Nelly new something was not quite right here, but could not put her finger on it.

All Jack's children got on extremely well in Life. One became a doctor, one a master builder, having a large house complete with swimming pool in Southampton. He was Joseph Brown. Some of the others were Amy, Iris, Bobbie, Frank, Jimmy, Bessie, Denis, and Paddy. The others born in Southampton I never knew.

Jack, like his father, Charles, before him liked his "pint". Sometimes after a session at his "local" when he was walking unsteadily homewards, he would take a handful of coins from his pocket regardless of value and scatter them for children to gather. We loved him.

To go from Sidcup where we were then living, to have tea with Uncle Jack in Barking was a great treat. After tea on Sundays we would gather round the piano with either Nelly or Jack playing to sing Sank and Moody hymns, the favourite being "Shall we gather at the River?". He had a set of Arthur Mee's Children's Encyclopedias from which we had much pleasure. We remember, too, with much affection, Cissy's mother and father who seemed to always there on the days when we went to tea. I can still hear the voice of Nan, as she was called saying sharply to one of her little grandsons when one of them asked for more "cumbercue" at the tea table. She gave him some more then said-

"Yes, here you are!. Take that! And you'll get n'more!"

When we were living on Canvey Island in the early 1920's, Nelly, my mother, had five of Jack's children to stay for a holiday by the sea. She had six of them, Iris, Joey, Bobby, Frankie, Denis, and baby Bessie who was called "My Peachy" by her adoring older sister, Iris. So, with four of her own as well, mother had quite enough to do. As it happened, my father had bought an old ex-army round "Nissen" hut made of corrugated iron and this is where they all slept on camp beds. My father was not over keen on having so many children, but he put up with it for Mother's sake.

Nelly, like Jack, loved the sea in all its moods. Frank King, her brother-in-law, had instilled it into her during his many Sunday afternoon walks to Walton on The Naze, and occasional holidays at Mersey Island. We have an old tint type photograph taken at Walton. Frank is standing up at the back next to Amy who is holding a parasol over her head. Seated is Frank's wife, Lillian, with Mary by her side, and seated on the ground are Nelly aged about six years old, and little two year old Lillian, the daughter of Lillian and Frank. Little Lillian was also six year old Nelly's niece.

One year when they were older and going on holiday to Walton Mary, for some reason decided that she did not want go so stayed at Tor House with just the little maid, Caroline, for company. All went well for three days Nelly had a strong sense of foreboding. She told Eliza that she had better go home, and when asked for an explanation, she said she thought that Mary needed her at home.

"I think Mary needs me. I had better go soon."

Eliza said she had better go if she was worried over Mary. On arriving at the bottom of Alexandra Road, she saw Mary looking for her out of the drawing room window, waiting for her.

"Oh, Nelly ! I knew you'd come! I felt so nervous on my own. I prayed you would come."

She cried, almost falling onto her little sister with relief. She had started to feel very lonely

and panicky. She was about 20 then and Nelly 14.

Then again, Mary Kett, Eliza's mother, was away in London nursing an old friend when one night she saw a vision of Eliza standing by her bedside, and heard her saying,

"Mother ! Mother !"

She packed her bags next day and arrived at Tor House just in time to be at the birth of one of her grandchildren. How does one explain such things ?

Eliza heard one day that a loving home was required for a sick little girl for about weeks. She answered the advertisement and received a caller at Tor House, a Mrs Harper, who explained that one day as she was driving in her carriage through a certain village she heard screams coming from a cottage and on making inquiries found that they came from a little girl, the niece of the woman looking after her. The child screamed because she was covered in painful sores.

Perhaps this was infantile excema, but no one knew of this then.

So, she, Mrs Harper, made arrangements for the child to be cared for and sent to school at her, Mrs Harper's, expense. Eliza took in this little girl who by now was given the name of May Harper. May lived at Tor House for many years and was very loved by the family. May lived at "Tor House" until she was fourteen, by which time she was cured of her illness. She became a teacher when she was older and as far as Nelly knew married very happily.

Mother as an artist

When little Offie went home to tea on Sundays she often took Nelly with her. Nelly loved the free and easy lifestyle of the Nuns, and at Diamond Place there were trees to climb, dogs and rabbits to fondle, and a pony to ride. The first time she went there she was shown into the drawing room. She was not prepared for anything so lovely as this room. The carpet was white with beautiful blue pansies on it and the furniture was Hepplewhite. The beauty of it made her stomach turn over and she was promptly physically sick on the carpet. Harriet made light of it then but reminded her of it in years to come. Nelly was very artistic and loved painting and beautiful things. She would rather have a good box of Reeves best paints, drawing paper and pencils than a doll or sweets. She often recalled the day when as a little girl she was taken "down town" to the newly opened Penny bazaar by one of her sisters and had seen, admired and wanted a pretty little tin tray. She looked good and hard before she spent her penny. Then paid for it and carried it home in raptures of joy at possessing this treasure with a beautiful German picture on it.

Alas, although it was plain to anyone that she wanted this tray, this beautiful thing, when Eliza saw it she made Nelly go straight back to change it for a stick of Evertor toffee. All through her life, Nelly never forgot the sadness and the seemingly unfairness of her mother in doing this.

The sense of loss that she had at seven years old made her see through the eyes of a child. We, her own children, always had the best of Reeves paints, and Watman paper to draw on, which we preferred to sweets ourselves.

Nelly hated dolls and sewing, yet many a time her sisters would try to instruct her, giving her a pretty piece of cloth telling her to make a dress for a doll with it. Nelly would wander around miserably with the cloth in her hand to find an elder sister with enough time to help her. It was generally Rosie. Going up to her Nelly would say in a rush of irritation,

"Needle and cotton, and please will you cut it out !".

She was never any good at darning socks either. I remember, and so does my brother, George, a certain day when he was about to go to work in the morning and she saw a hole in the heel of his sock, and decided to cobble it up until he came home in the evening. He, all

unsuspecting, put his foot up on a chair while she did the job, then he went happily off to work. After a while one of his work mates asked him who had mended his sock. He glanced down to see what was amiss and there he saw to his horror the grey sock had been cobbled up with red wool!

Moreover, Nelly had no idea how to run a house, never having been called upon to do much when living at home with four elder sisters in Tor House, and was an indifferent cook. But she was rather proud of the fact that she had made some splendid apple dumplings one day for dinner. She made some pastry, peeled and cut up the apples.

But she was over generous with the apples and did not have enough to put in the last dumpling. Her sister, Mary, complained about this, saying that she knew she would be the one to get it for dinner. While Eliza, unknowingly, was handing out the dumplings at dinner time, she, Mary, kept her eyes on that apple-less dumpling. Sure enough it landed on her dish !

She started to say something about it but was cut short by o Eliza saying,

"Nelly has worked hard at these dumplings, Mary, so enjoy them!"

Mary ate her dumpling in silence.

She was the general factotum in Tor House as she grew older, being a very good housekeeper and manager.

Nelly remembers the coldness of Tor House, of washing in cold water, of having chilblains in winter, and starched chemises that cut under the arm pit.

The only two warm rooms in the house were the kitchen, and the drawing room, which was the sanctum for Eliza and the five elder children. Here Rosie was to be found lying on a sofa enlisting whoever was at hand to "rub my poor feet". She was not the strongest of people, being always thought of as "poor Rosie", yet she lived to be seventy-five.

Once when little Nelly ventured into the drawing room she was met with a cool stare from Eliza and,

"Did you want anything, Nelly ?"

Nelly, obviously less than welcome, quickly disappeared from view and hurried down stairs to the kitchen and Caroline, the little maid of all work, and the warmth of the old kitchen range. She and Mary were always to be found in the kitchen; Mary, because she rather enjoyed cooking: and Nelly, to keep warm.

My life when young

I was born in Number 73, Mersey Road, Colchester, on the eighth of February, 1908, which now makes me at the time of writing this, as any one with, or without a maths degree will know at once that I am now over eighty years old.

I was the second daughter of my parents. They already had one little girl, of nearly three years old who was known as "Venie" throughout her life. She was a fair, haired child with black eyebrows, like our father. I think my parents were just a little bit disappointed at first that I was not a boy, as they had lost their precious first-born, a little boy named Bobby, about six years earlier. But our parents loved all their children dearly, making as our father used to say, "Neither fish nor foul"

I was christened Amy Gertrude, after one of mother's sisters who had died at the age of 38. Had I been a boy, Mother was going to call me Eric, after a little boy in the old Victorian book called "Eric, or Little by Little". Soon after I was born, I contracted scarlet fever, so my first few days were spent in an isolation hospital, and within a few days was joined by my sister, Venie, who was quickly followed by our father. I was, I believe, a plump little baby, but slimmed down as I started to walk, which was not until I was nearly two years old.

One year and eight months later, on October 26th, I was joined by another sister, Nelly Rosalie. But ever after, she was just "Nelly", until my own two boys called her "Betty", and her grandsons called her "Morry". I will explain this later. Another girl! Poor Dad!

It was not until nearly five years later, after we had left Colchester for Manor Park, that a son was born to Nelly Lavinia, (my mother) and Edwin Grimston, (my father). Their joy knew no bounds at the birth of this little boy, mother going so far as to say that he was her "supreme moment". So from that day, usually in our rare moments of irritation towards him, we three girls called him "SM".

From Colchester we were to move to Ilford, to Manor Park, to Sidcup, and then finally to Canvey Island.

My father, Edwin Grimston Nunn, was born and brought up in Colchester. He earned his living with a fairly prosperous cycling business next to our house. He had most of the trade from the public in those days of the cycling boom, as well as the trade from the various military camps in the town.

He was born in 1872 on March 8th. He was about thirty-six when I was born, a tall, well built, quiet young man with mid-brown hair, and blue eyes set under thick, black bushy eye brows. He was a quiet, dreamy man with blue eyes, a sensitive mouth and large thin ears. He spoke with the slow, sing-song accent and dialect of the Essex man.

When addressing us he would call us "Together". " Come on, Together !" he would say, if he wanted us for some reason or other.

He took an interest in astronomy and even when we were quite small he would tell us about the stars, their names. their distance from the earth and their colours. This one was blue, this one was red, and Mars was the nearest to the earth. He very often said to us,

"One day, Together, they will put a man on the moon".

Although he lived to be ninety two, he did not live long enough to see his words come true.

He also showed his scientific leanings by making homemade fireworks with iron filings and magnesium.

One Christmas when we were visiting our Aunt Ophelia in Colchester, he made himself up as a ghost, complete with sheet and phosphorus paint on his face and hands. Somehow we knew it was Daddy, and so we were not afraid.

My mother also loved having fun and was a great tease. However, when mother dressed up we did not like it. I remember one Christmas time, when I was about 3 years old, missing my mother from the room, and when we were asked to go into the next room we saw a little old lady about 3 feet high dancing on a table. She had a painted face with one tooth missing and hair all over the place and was wearing a dark cloak.

I was horrified! It seemed to me that my mother had turned into this dreadful being. I was so upset that I stopped the performance there and then.

When I was young I very often had nightmares about my mother being someone other than her usual merry, loving self

My father was very proud of the way he could double up like a jack-knife. He could bend from the thighs and with knees straight he could place his large, bony hands flat on the floor, challenging us to do the same if we could manage it.

He rode his old upright bicycle everywhere, weaving in and out of what traffic there was. Later, at Canvey Island, motorists became aware off him peddling slowly along the road, making allowances for his not putting a hand out to the right or left until he was on the point of turning.

He was an intellectual man, quietly spoken until his temper was roused; and then he roared like an angry bull. Neither he nor my mother, Nelly, ever smacked us although we must have deserved at times. He was a kind father, loving his own children dearly but never welcoming other children around him or in the home. When our friends called for us, and there were more than two, he would say,

"You harbour the children ! They make too much 'ni-oz'"which in his Essexism was meant to be "noise".

Nelly, our mother, also born and raised in Colchester, had the merriest of laughing blue eyes and real, golden hair down to her waist. She was very rarely angry or cross with us. Mother told us of a day when we three little girls were all under four years old and when "enough had been enough" for one day. Our father just sank back into a chair with a sigh of relief, saying as he did so,

"It is like Heaven!. One in the lavatory, one on the pot and one asleep !"

Our brother George, or, to give him his full names, George William Watson, was loved very dearly by all of us, petted, but not spoiled. He was, and still is a gentle and most lovable person. At the time of writing, he is now in his mid-seventies, has four strapping sons, one daughter, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. One day Dad called him " Master of the house". So from that day on, he was always known as "Master". This had a disastrous effect; one day when he was about four years old, he took a walking stick and smashed several fragile gas mantles, saying as he did so, "I am Master ! I can break gas mantles !"

When Dad heard this, he very gently explained to little Georgie that being "Master" did not mean that he could break up the home ! He was a timid little boy and went to a private school run by two spinster sisters until he was nearly ten years old, Then he went to the local council school. Here he had his first fight which, to his surprise, he won. He came home from this school complaining that one boy, Tom Mellor, was bullying him and in general pushing him around, so during the official mid-morning break, he, George, could take it no longer and lunged out with his seemingly puny little fist and punched the other boy on the nose. This resulted into a battle royal which lasted until both boys were exhausted. We were told later by a friend who happened to be passing that as George was holding his own, he did not interfere

in the fight. Needless to say, as so often happens, the two boys were firm friends from that day onwards.

Life in Colchester

So, I must return to Colchester and back to 73, Mersey Road, with memories, and tales told of it by our parents. There we were, Nelly, (my mother) and Grimmy, as my father was called, Venie, myself, and little Nelly in our little cottage where we lived until I was about five years old. Then we moved to Ilford, and later, on to Manor Park where, as I have already mentioned, George was born. My own memories of Colchester are like a series of pictures. They are like "stills" from a film. Some are sharp and some are faded. The sharp ones we know are there and true, but the faded ones are those we are not quite sure of as we peer into the past trying to get the details right. Some of the things we remember and some we are told by our parents and other elders, but the problem is to decide which is which. I remember being sat on a table while a uniformed nurse washed my face and hands. This, I was told, was the nurse who attended to my mother at the birth of her third little girl. I remember a colourful Christmas tree. I remember playing in the garden on a little patch of greenery that little Nelly and I called "our little green."

I remember that the woman next door had a prop holding up her linen line which swayed and moved in a most alarming way to us children. We lived on the corner of Mersey Road and Claudio, and our home had a back garden and a small front garden. It was here in this front garden that my sisters and I would run to the gate in great excitement to hear and see the Gordon Highlanders come round the corner of Pownal Crescent, turning left into Mersey road, swinging their kilts as they marched to "The Campbells are Coming", played on their bagpipes. For some time afterwards Nelly and I would go around with our toes turned outwards, and making bag-pipes of our fingers we would wail, "Ow-ow-ow-owowow", to the air of "The Campbells are Coming."

As well as a small front garden, we had a long back garden ending in a narrow, pointed patch of grass that we called "our little green". There we had our tea-parties, played with our toys, and made mud pies. The fence seemed very high to us, as we could not see over the top or through it. I remember on one occasion when the back gate was left open to let Nelly and me see something of the outside world, on condition that we did not move from the gateway. Three events stand out in my mind from that day. One was when a horse and cart came by with a wooden crate on it and standing inside this crate was a man holding on to it, probably to keep it from falling off, but it filled me with horror. I ran indoors sobbing that I had seen "a man in a cage."

I thought he was being punished for something he had done wrong. It took quite a long time to comfort me. Another time we were at this open gate when a crowd of people headed by a man dressed all in white came marching up Claudio Road singing loudly. This we enjoyed very much. My father told us afterwards that this was an Easter parade. It was real when we were all very small that early on one Good Friday morning at Easter, a baker's boy threw a pebble at the bed-room window, and as it was opened by our father a bag of hot cross buns came sailing in through the window. This had been arranged by our father, but to three very small girls this was magic indeed. I must have been about four and Nelly nearly three when we had our first taste of male chauvinist piggery. Once again we were watching the world go by outside the back gate, but we must have ventured a little further afield than usual, for two small boys aged about six or seven came up saying one to the other as they drew near,

"You take the big'un and I'll take the littl'un!"

They pounced on us and putting their arms around our necks, bore us to the ground, then ran off laughing. This incident had a traumatic affect on me, and I gave the male sex a wide berth after that incident. I felt them to be rough and menacing, to be avoided at all costs in the future. This feeling remained with me until my mid-teens. If I saw a group of boys when I was out, I would go out of my way to avoid passing them.

Schooldays

When I was five I joined my big sister, Venie, at the National School in Claudius Road. How long this lasted I cannot remember, but only one day stands out in my mind. I remember I had a navy blue "reefer" coat with brass buttons on it. It was a wretched day there for me, as I cried most of the time. First we assembled in the hall for morning prayers. There seemed to be little brass knobs all over the floor, one of which was allotted to me to kneel by. It hurt my knees as I knelt on it! The head teacher, one Miss Flitton, showed me some sweets on top of the piano, telling me I could have them if I stopped crying. I did not have them! When it was time to go home, I could not find my coat. All that I knew was that it had brass buttons on and some "ABC" biscuits in one of the pockets. I remember the joy and relief at seeing my mother coming down the road to meet me. About this time Mother took a part time job teaching art in a private school run by some ladies named Stewart, (or Stuart). Venie then went to this school and Mother took us smaller girls with her. I have no recollection of any more school days in Colchester. Our next school days were not until we moved from Manor Park to Sidcup after little George was born, just before World War One.

To Ilford - 1913

My Uncle Josiah invited my father to come and share a shop premises in Ilford in Ley Street where he had started a small business, manufacturing things like Weather Flowers which turned blue for sunshine and pink for rain.

He also made Bats out of black tissue paper, fine cane and elastic, which one wound up and put into envelopes that one sealed 3/4 of the way and posted to friends or took to parties. When the envelope was opened, the bat flew all around the room. At the time of my father moving to Ilford the business was not going too well, but in the years to come my Uncle Joey earned a good living with these things, WH. Smith and Son being one of the biggest and best customers. My sister Nelly in later years went to work for him making these delicate things. We went to live with our Uncle Josiah.

My father used the front of the shop for Cycle Repairs. We shared the rest of the building with my uncle Joey, his wife Lily, and his family.

He and his family had the front bedroom, the small bedroom over the sitting room, and the room at the back of the shop.

We all slept in the one small room over the kitchen which we had to live in.

Unfortunately, the shop did not pay and my father regretted the move. Before we came my father does not seem to have realised that my uncle was seriously in debt.

Neither was my mother happy there, but she was kept sane by her brother Jack who paid frequent visits and took her out. My uncle Jack who was then living in Barking was Head stevedore of the Surrey Docks. On one occasion he gave my sister Nelly and myself sixpence each (equivalent to 2 and 1/2 newpence)- a considerable sum in those days. I remember that as soon as he had left the house with my mother our Auntie Lily made a lovely suggestion to us. If we gave the money to her, she would buy some cakes and we could have tea with her! So we gave her the money and had tea with her in her part of the house. We have never forgotten that tea! That shilling must have gone a long way then.

There was an occasion when Uncle Joey sent his ten year old daughter Dorothy to collect and pay for a small order of Weather Flowers. At home my Aunt was waiting to buy food with

Another memory of 73, Mersey Road is of being near my mother while she was talking to a tall young man. They were apparently saying some sort of "Goodbye". This I now know was my Uncle Reginald Brown. I remember that his fingers, which I could just reach with my nose, were stained brown, but I have learned since that he was a keen photographer. He went away shortly after to South Africa with the Mounted Police. Contact seems to have been lost after a year or so, not to be remade until the 1930's, when my cousin Donald Strathern, son of my

aunt Rosie traced him. He had married, had an Orange grove, and had 2 children. It seems that the breaking of contact was his choice. Perhaps he married a native girl. No one knows.

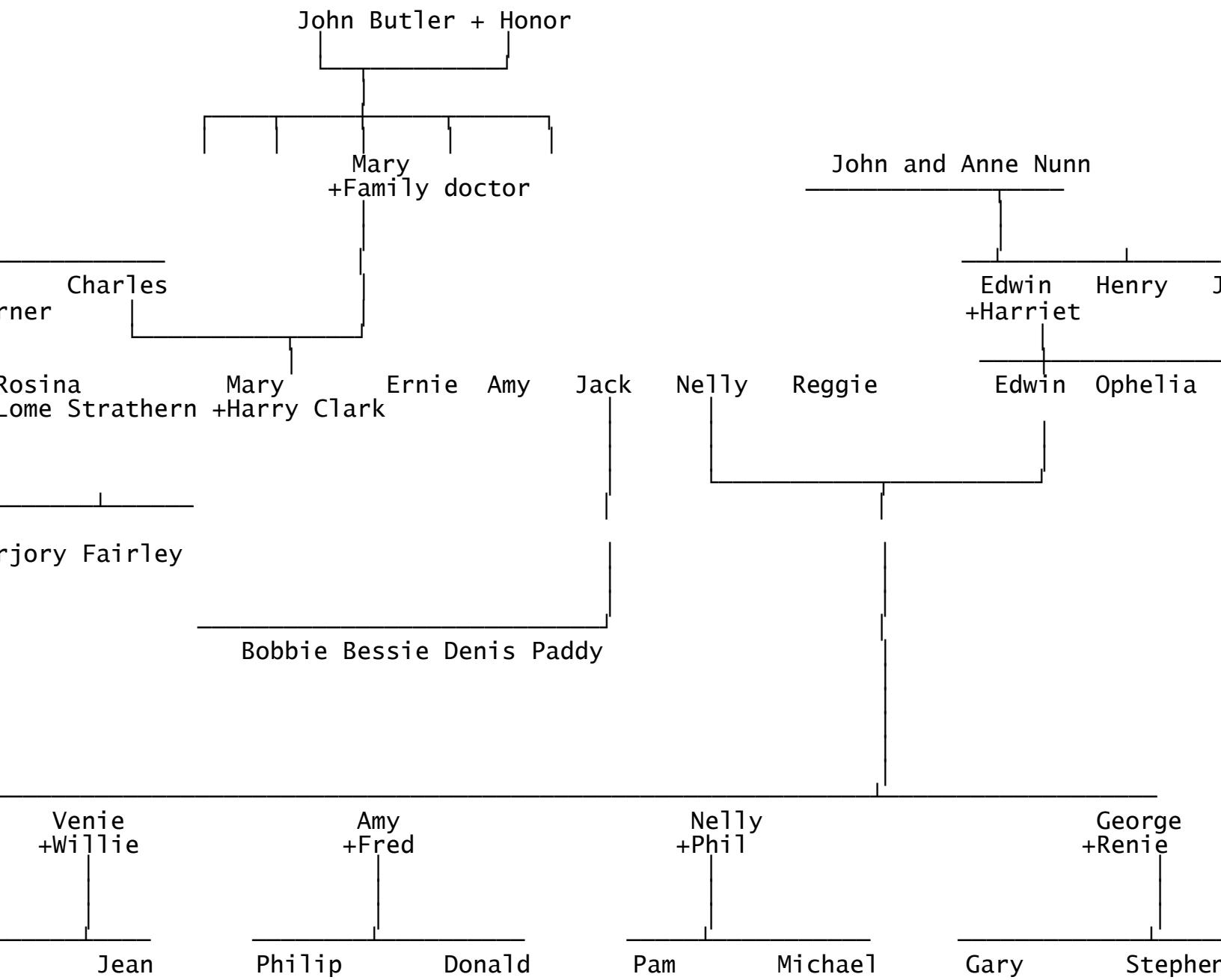
My mother's tales

When we were young and Mother wanted to keep us quiet, amused, or wanted to brush our hair, we would badger her with, "Tell us about the things you used to do when you were a little girl!"

Her memory was amazing. She could remember as far back as when she was two or three years old and kept us enthralled for hours while re-counting her stories. My memory could possibly be a little at fault, but, I am not making up fantasies to amuse you, for as far as my sisters and I and concerned they are all true.

My father also told us many "tales" as he called them, of his childhood in Colchester in the 1870's and later, until he left Colchester for Ilford when I was about five years old, little Nelly being nearly three and big sister, Venie, going on for eight. My father never went back to Colchester again except for one or two fleeting visits, when one of his sons-in-law took him there in a car. But he always missed his roots and there were times when he expressed a wish for his "time over again". He, Grimmy, his younger brother, Joey, and sister Ophelia, were very close together, remaining friends until they were all in their nineties. When we were living on Canvey Island in the early 1920's, Nelly, my mother, had five of Jack's children to stay for a holiday by the sea. She had six of them, Iris, Joey, Bobby, Frankie, Denis, and baby Bessie who was called "My Peachy" by her adoring older sister, Iris. So, with four of her own as well mother had quite enough to do. As it happened, my father had bought an old ex-army round "Nissen" hut made of corrugated iron and this is where they all slept on camp beds. My father was not over keen on having so many children but he put up with it for Mother's sake.

The Nunn Family Tree



Mary Miller

Mary Miller was a quiet, gentle woman in her mid-sixties. As she lay in the hospital bed very ill with pneumonia, she fell to dreaming more and more of the past events in her life. They appeared to her as pictures in a book. Sometimes she dwelled on one picture for a moment or two to get the full sense of identification with it, but other times she had to leaf through the book many times going backwards and forwards until she had the proper details in order.

She moved her hands over the covers as if feeling for something, and finding it, she smiled happily. Her lips moved as if she were saying,

"Harry!". Oh, Harry."

Then she drifted off to sleep again. Two nurses standing by her bedside looked at one another, not knowing quite what to say. Then the younger of the two said slowly,

"Who is that young man standing by the bed holding her hand?"

"What young man?" asked the older nurse.

"He comes in every day and stays until about six. I never see him come in, but he is always here. He smiles and waves his hand as he goes out. She calls him Sam."

"It is about time you had a holiday, dear, your mind is playing tricks on you." said the older nurse, "There is no one there at all."

The little nurse looked thoughtful. Sam.. and Harry..?

"I'll ask Mrs Miller when she wakes up."

She and the older nurse walked out of the ward together.

Mary Miller held the Book of her Life in her hands. Sometimes the pages were bright and clear, some were faded and a little misty, some were black and white. She had to make quite an effort to remember what they represented and how far back they went. On one page was a picture of herself as a child of about four years old, who, with her two sisters and their father, were standing in a meadow waiting for a little figure in a dove grey costume coming dancing along to meet them. This was their mother. She had golden hair and merry, bright blue eyes. Her picture never faded. It seemed to be alive in her hand. There was a great deal of love surrounding these pictures.

There was another picture somewhere if only she could find it. It seemed very important to her. She tried to peer through the mist and shadow. She moved her hands agitatedly and moaned a little. Suddenly it was there! The picture she most wanted to see...Harry!..Harry, in the uniform of an officer in the army. She had met Harry through her brother, also an officer in the army. They had laughed a great deal the day they met, and were so much on the same wavelength, that they knew from the start they would be together for all times. They went dancing and swimming.

Harry borrowed a car from a friend and they had one glorious week end in Sheringham on the Norfolk coast. It was there that Harry had placed an opal ring upon her finger.

"Shall we get married on my next leave?" he asked.

She had looked at him her face aglow with happiness.

"Oh, yes, Harry! Oh, Harry, I love you so much!"

But there was no next leave. Harry, together with hundreds of other young men had left Tilbury Docks on a troop ship for Dunkirk. He was among a car load of soldiers going towards the Docks when a bus with some W.A.A.Cs aboard passed them coming away from the Docks. These joyous young men had called out,

"Hey, there, girls, you are going the wrong way!"

Mary had a letter from one of them some time later. Harry had been left behind at Dunkirk, his dear face buried in the sand.

He had named her as his next of kin, so she had inherited his small cottage in Hertfordshire where he had been brought up, and from where he had gone forth as a soldier. Mary loved the cottage. She felt his presence everywhere. It was something she could not explain to anyone.

After the shock of Harry's death had dimmed a little, she was so calm that people dismissed her as having no feelings. She had not cried since the day she had heard officially from the War Office that he was dead. When two years had passed she became, as the neighbours thought, a little cooler, and a little more detached in her attitude, although she was still quite friendly. They did not know, could not know, that Harry came to see her.

It started one evening as she was sitting quietly in an armchair with her hands in her lap. She became aware of some one standing by the window looking at her. It was so real that she stood up in surprise. As she did so she saw that it was Harry.

"Harry! Oh, Harry!, you've come!"

He smiled at her in his old way, the corners of his mouth turning up and his nose wrinkling up with pleasure. He came towards her, and gathered her into his arms. Mary clung to him saying to him through her tears,

"Oh, I knew you would come if I waited, Harry. I knew you would."

"I shall be near you always," he said. "I shall be near you when you most need me. My last visit will be when I come to take you back with me. It will be so easy for you because I shall know the way. Trust me, my little love, trust me."

As Mary stood there a warmth passed through her body. She closed her eyes for a moment, then felt him slipping away from her. As he did so she heard him say he would be back again, but this time his voice was so faint that she could not hear him say when he would be coming. After that visit, Mary went about her daily affairs with a feeling of calm and joy. She had many friends. Three men proposed to her, but she refused them all. When she was laughingly accused of waiting for a very special man, she would agree that the man she was waiting for was very special indeed.

Mary waited for another year. She was now thirty-four.

One evening nearing Christmas time, she knew he was coming. The fire burned more brightly than usual, her senses were more acute, and the house smelled of lilac, of warm summer evenings, and fresh spring mornings. She had just come in from the garden and was changing her shoes in the kitchen. She lifted her head, sensing something, and there he was, sitting in the armchair, as if he had been there all the time. He opened his eyes very wide when he was looking at her which was a trick he had of doing. She walked quickly to his side, sat down at his feet with her head on his knees. They did not speak, for it seemed as if they had no need for words. They each knew the questions and the answers. Time was meaningless to them.

Then there came the time when she knew he would not be coming again for many years. He told her he had been privileged to have been able to come in the past. This was not granted to many people. He would come back but twice more before the day when he would come to guide her to the Fields of Beyond Time. She went to the window to watch the sun going down and the evening shadows gathering. She felt his hands on her shoulders turning her around to face him. He held her closely to him.

"Come and rest," he said gently. "Come and rest with me. I love you!"

He guided her to the bedroom and as he lifted her onto the bed Mary felt as if she were floating on air as he touched her. She all but fainted with exquisite joy, then he was slipping away from her again.

"Harry, don't leave me! I can't bear it," she cried.

"I'll be back, my love, I'll be back!"

Then she saw through her tears that he was gone.

Christmas came and went. At the approach of Easter Mary knew she was going to have a baby, in the autumn. After the first shock had worn off, her friends rallied round her, comforting her and giving her advice. She told them the father was some one she had known for a long time. The following October she gave birth to a baby boy and called him Sam.

He was a delightful child with fair, downy hair and hazel eyes. Surrounding the hazel of the irises of his eyes was a darker brown circle. He was a happy little boy, not brilliant at school, but he enjoyed the work and was consistent.

A bit dreamy at times, he would sit in the armchair by the fire, his head in his hands with a far away look in his eyes. He would nod his head, or shake it slowly from side to side as if indicating to someone "yes" or "no". Mary first noticed him doing this when he was about four years old. When she asked him if anything was wrong, he looked up at her and said seriously that he was talking to Harry. Then he would leap to his feet and become engrossed in the day to day activities of a small boy. Mary had stood still for a moment holding onto a table for support. How did Sam know the name of 'Harry'? He certainly had no friends of that name. When she asked him about this, another time, he said that 'Harry' was his friend. She told no-one of this, but as he grew older, he told her 'Harry' helped him with his homework.

"What does your friend Harry look like?"

"I don't know, I can't see him clearly," answered Sam, "but he is a soldier, I love him and he loves us."

Us! Mary put her hand over her mouth to stop the sound coming out. A soldier came to see Sam! A soldier who loved us! Mary walked out of the room, then flew upstairs to her bedroom.

"I shall come back, my little love, never fear, I shall come back."

She recalled his voice and the touch of his hand.

"Oh, Harry, I can't bear it! I can't wait. I want you so much. I can't go on without you."

But Mary Miller waited for thirty years. She watched Sam grow up into a very likable young man. When Mary questioned him about particular girl friend, his face would cloud over for a while and he would say,

"I haven't the time, Mum."

He would put arm around her and give her a hug.

"Don't worry about me. Things are working out just as Harry said they would. I'm not spoiling any girl's life if I can help it."

Then, wrinkling up his nose, he smiled at her and the cloud disappeared.

Mary Miller opened her eyes for a moment. She saw the nurses moving about and other patients slowly walking about. She felt so far away and lost.

"How nice," she thought, "if I were going home. I feel so tired."

At two o'clock the doors opened to allow the visitors to come in. She looked at everyone who came in bearing flowers. She saw two nurses standing in the doorway. They seemed to be concerned over her. One of them came over to her bedside with a letter in her hand."

"That is for me, isn't it?" said Mary, "I know what it is. Harry has just told me. Sam will be a little late today."

The little nurse saw that Mary had both hands on the cover as if she were holding something in between them. She murmured softly. The little nurse bent over to hear what she was saying.

"Harry! Oh, Harry!"

The little nurse thought she heard a man's voice speaking.

"I told you I would come back, my little love. This time I have Sam with me. Don't be afraid, I know the way."

Mary Miller smiled, and closed her eyes for ever. Mary Miller's waiting days were over. The older nurse opened the letter and read it.

It said that Sam Miller had been involved in a car accident three days before and had died instantly.

MEDAL.

Sam was the last person one would think might be interested in the occult, palmistry, and the Tarot cards, yet he always hovered round fair grounds and garden fetes looking for that little, square tent with the front flap open showing a table covered with a coloured cloth on which there invariably glowed a dim light.

Seated at the table would be the mysterious figure of the "seer". She would sometimes be wearing a turban on her head but, at other times, she would look so ordinary that Sam doubted her ability to do more than play whist at the local church hall. Yet, he always went into the tent with a piece of silver in his hand. Sam was a short, stocky man with a square chin, mild hazel eyes, half hidden by horn rimmed glasses, and a head of silvery curly hair. Yes, he always went into the fortune telling tent.

This, was not he used to say, that he wanted to know what Life had in store for him, as he was at the time I am telling you of, about sixty years old, fairly happily married with four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. No, he would say, he was just interested in the science of the Tarot cards and crystal ball. Each time he consulted the "seer", he was told that he should "let his left hand know a little more of what his right hand was doing."

"My left hand knows enough to earn my bread and butter," he would laugh, "and my right hand, enough to keep me out of mischief."

Then two years ago there was the usual spring fete being held in a local park; so, of course, he was drawn as usual to the little tent with its cloth covered table. He sat on the warm grass waiting for his turn to come, and as he was number three, did not have long to wait. He never minded waiting in queues, as he said one could always watch the world go by. When his turn came, he went inside, put his money on the table and looked up to find that the "seer" was a man. A sandy haired man with washed out blue eyes. Sam sat down rather heavily as the surprise at finding a man there had put him slightly off balance. The man smiled with his mouth but not with his eyes. Sam supposed he must be tired after a long day in the "hot" seat.

"Cards, crystal ball, or hand?" he inquired of Sam.

"Er...er... Crystal ball and cards, please." said Sam.

The man uncovered the crystal ball, which he passed to Sam, telling him to hold it for a few moments. He then covered Sam's hands with a black cloth. He spread his own hands out on the table and closed his eyes.

Sam's thoughts were going a little hay-wire...

"A man! A man telling fortunes and reading a crystal ball! Oh, well.... He might have a different approach"

This was something new to Sam, and it interested him. After a while, the man opened his eyes, took the ball from Sam, keeping it covered for a moment. He then removed the black cover and began to turn the crystal ball slowly round and round. He nodded once or twice as if in agreement with his own thoughts, his light blue eyes flickering up at Sam.

"You do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. It might be advisable to do so sometimes. It might add spice to your days. You are a person who likes variety - a little of the unusual in your routine. Today is a day you should take note of. Something will give you time for thought."

He went on to tell Sam all the things he had heard many times before. Sam nodded his head up and down; then shook it from side to side as he half listened to what was being said to him. The man sat back in his chair with an air of finality, clasping his hands in front of his chest.

"That is all for today. Don't forget to let your right hand know a little of what your left

hand does once in a while. You may be very pleasantly surprised one day at what might happen. Good afternoon!"

Sam rose from his chair, thanked the man and walked out into the bright sunshine.

His mind wandered back to the day some forty years ago when he made a complete turnabout in his ideas. That day he was going to see Bella, a girl he knew. He had stepped out of the house in his usual confident way, stopped at the gate, squared his shoulders, and turned left, instead of his usual right turn. He decided to walk the two miles to Bella's house. Through the small park at the bottom of the road, on through the children's play ground, past a row of shops to the house where Bella lived with her mother. The day was warm and sunny and he reflected that the exercise would do him good. Sam decided that he would make a change, and he knew he had enough time to spare. He turned into the park gates and walked besides the stream that ran and rippled its way under an ornamental bridge, taking with it sticks and leaves and pieces of paper. He dropped an empty match box over one side of the bridge, then moved quickly to the other side. His eyes lit up like a small boy as he saw the match box come sailing through to the other side.

"Fascinating, isn't it?"

It was a woman's voice. He started at the sound. He had not expected to find anyone near him, since when he came on the bridge there was no one in sight.

"I thought I was alone," he said, "When I came there was no one around just here. Every one is at the fair."

"I get the call, you see," she said, "especially if it is something unusual. You are a little unusual yourself today, aren't you?"

Sam gave her a sidelong look to see if she was laughing at him, but she only gave a small, faint smile.

"This is the day of the right hand," he said, placing both hands on the wall. Then, to his own surprise, began to tell her the things his friends had told him - that he should let his right hand know a little more of what his left hand does - and that he should be a little more flexible in his ideas.

She listened quietly, and as she did so put her hand over the top of the wall close to the hand nearest her, nearly touching it. Sam's hand began to tingle and feel hot. He drew it away quickly, putting it in the pocket of his jacket. Then, with his other hand he felt something hard and metallic on the wall, a small round object. His hand closed over it, and as he drew it out she saw it and whispered.

"I put it there." she said, "I want you to have it. It is all I have left now."

Sam noticed that she wore no jewellery of any kind, no ring, no watch.

She saw him looking at her hands.

"I have no jewellery at all now. They took it away from me when I was so ill."

Not knowing what to say, he just leaned on the bridge looking into the stream. He opened his hand to study the medallion. It was made of silver, and just discernable through the dirt, bore an inscription "Marion Wells, 1946" It appeared to be an award for dancing.

The noise of the fair ground, the children shouting, and the organ playing on the far side of the park were lost to Sam. He was wondering how this medallion had remained undiscovered in the wall, if, as she had said, she had put it there long ago, and why it had not been found by children playing on the bridge.

The woman moved a little nearer to Sam, who then straightened his back, and half turned, ready to leave the park when she spoke again.

"Yes, I used to come here with my baby in his pram. I lived in a small flat over there," indicating a distant block of flats, "but flats are not for babies. My baby kept on crying, so other people complained about him. That is why I brought him here so often. One day in winter I came here when it was very cold. I came on to this bridge to watch the children playing at

dropping sticks and pieces of paper into the water on one side of the bridge, and running to the other side to see them all come out on the other side.

After a while they all went away leaving me alone. My baby started to cry and it gave me a headache. I took him out of his pram to keep me warm. I took the medal from round his neck where I kept it for good luck, and put it in the wall where you have just found it. Then, as I was looking into the cold water I dropped him into it, but when I ran to the other side to get him I could not find him. He didn't come out the other side like the sticks and leaves. I can't find him anywhere. Help me! Oh, please help me!"

The woman was sobbing wildly now, her eyes and cheeks wet with tears as she clung to Sam's arm. He released her hand from his arm and turned to leave her. He walked a few steps then turned back again. There was no one there! The woman had vanished! Sam walked back to the bridge with shaking legs. Had he been dazzled by the brilliance of the sun into imagining things? He threw a stick into the water and watched it sail away through the tree lined stream. As he turned homewards he thrust his hand into the pocket of his jacket, and found a silver medallion tarnished, and dirty with age dated some fifteen years earlier, bearing the name of "Marion Wells".

When he later made inquiries about the medal he found out that Marion Wells has been a dancer, winning both gold and silver medals. Her life had been very tragic; she had suffered a mental breakdown after having a baby.

Some days later, Sam went back into the park and after strolling along by the stream, found the deepest part of it where it was covered with thick foliage and roots of trees. Here he threw the medal into the stream where the water gently covered it from view. This day, forty years on, leaning over the bridge looking into the water, Sam seemed to feel a presence around him and a soft, weeping, which sent a shiver down his spine.

"Help me! Oh, please help me!"

Mist

Now, I am not afraid of the dark, but I do not find it particularly pleasant to be in total darkness, the sort of blackness that seems to wrap one in a soft, woolly blanket. I do not draw the curtains across the windows at night, as I like to see a gleam of the outside world as I lie in bed. I usually read for a while before I turn out the light. As my bedroom is at the back of the house, and the house backs on to a golf course where there are plenty of tall trees, I can sink back under the covers and open my current library book. I cannot be seen unless there is a 'Peeping Tom' sitting in one of the trees with a telescope.

There is a wardrobe with a mirror in it standing in an alcove by the window and in this alcove I see a reflection of the outside world, making my room seem twice as large.

The only light I do not appreciate shining into my room is the moon. For some reason that I cannot explain, I have always had a fear of the moon, especially a full moon. All the romance and love songs about it have not cured me of this awful dread of looking at the full moon.

Another fear of mine was the searchlights during the World War 2. The raids did not frighten me so much as these lights moving their long, finger-like movements across the sky, even though I knew they were there for my protection. This did nothing for me as I crept along the unlit roads trying to find my own front door.

Now they are gone and I have only the moon with which to contend.

Which brings me to my Ring of Mist.

About twenty five years ago, I had an invitation from my sister-in-law, Maggie, to stay with her for a few days. She was feeling very distressed and in need of comforting, as her husband was in hospital after having a stroke. I understood her needs; my own husband had died just three years earlier. So, I packed my bags and went so that she would not be alone. We spent the first afternoon talking and even found quite a lot to laugh over, about things that had happened in the past.

Maggie's bungalow had two bedrooms with twin beds in each room.

Although I had always had a room on my own up to now, she suggested that we share one room during my stay. She said she would like to sleep in the same room with me, to which I agreed.

When the time came for bed, she drew the curtains across the windows so that we could sit up in bed reading for a while in privacy. We were warm and comfortable and enjoyed each others company until came time for "lights out".

Then we were plunged into the thickest blackness I have ever known. I laid there for a while, then asked if I could have the curtains open just a little, but the fear of someone looking in through the window was too much for Maggie, so I did not press the matter. It took me some time to get to sleep but did manage it after a long while.

I was awakened at six o'clock by Maggie holding a cup of morning tea. The night before was forgotten and the day showed promise of being warm and sunny, so we made our plans to walk to Littlehampton after lunch. Our path took us past corn fields on one side and the sea not far from us on our left side.

The memory of that walk is with me today, although so many years have passed into limbo.

That night the curtains were drawn as tightly as before, so not a gleam of light could penetrate the gloom. The darkness could be cut with a knife, and I wondered how long I could stand the intense discomfort of this heavy blackness. It was like a weight on my eyes. The

darkness seemed to swell and move in a spiral towards the ceiling. I tried to pierce the unrelieved fog that had settled on me so heavily that I almost began to have difficulty in breathing, and in moving my limbs. I felt I was being overpowered by an unseen force beyond my reckoning.

"This is no good!" I thought, "Take hold of yourself! There is nothing here but darkness caused by having the curtains drawn over the windows. Sit up in bed!"

I must have spoken aloud for Maggie awoke asking what was wrong. I passed it off as a bad dream, which made her tell me of the dreams she had been having about her husband, Jack. She cried bitterly.

"Oh, Irene. Irene! He mustn't leave me..! I can't take it!"

I forgot the darkness as I tried to comfort her with soothing words, and taking her hands in mine. I felt a great need for words of solace myself. After a while we both calmed down and drifted off to sleep still holding hands.

When we awoke it was half past six and the sun was beginning to rise. Maggie opened the curtains and switched on the teasmaid for a cup of tea. We smiled at one another but neither of us mentioned the night of misery. I looked around the room at all the familiar objects shining brilliantly as their polished surfaces caught the bright, morning sun. The scent of ozone blowing from the sea a half mile away was very strong and heady.

We made more plans for this day, the first being to visit Jack in hospital in the afternoon. I had not seen him for some while so was deeply shocked at his appearance. He was sitting in the middle of the ward with twenty other men, all with various degrees of fear in their eyes. Jack's speech was very slurred and difficult to follow but I managed somehow to hold a conversation with him. He was trying to tell me something that seemed to be rather important to him. I let him think I understood what it was that he wanted me to know. All I could really understand was the word "light".

That evening at Maggie's home was spent with some of her friends. We chatted and played cards, reminiscing over our coffee about old times, trying to keep Maggie's mind off what might happen to Jack.

When in bed that night I was more than a little upset. As Maggie switched off the light plunging the room into total darkness, I found I could not get warm, and my limbs were shaking so much that I could not get comfortable.

After about an hour I began to panic. I closed my eyes to pray for relief, and when I opened them again there was a glow above my head, not so much a light as an uneven ring of misty light coming through a frosted glass window. I turned my head to look at the wall behind me, although I knew full well that there was no window. I thought of Jack and his "light" that I had dismissed as incomprehensible. It was here! It was here to comfort me through the darkness of the night. I sat up in bed, took a sip of water, closed my eyes, and blinked several times, yet the light was still there! I soon slept with a calmness that I had never felt before, or since that night.

Jack died three weeks later, but, although I have never seen it again the thoughts of his "light" has comforted me many times. Whenever I retell this story I get odd looks, but I know what I know.

I saw a Ring of Mist three foot by two foot hovering above me as if coming through a frosted glass window.

Paul

I have just seen Paul. He looks ageless, yet he must be over seventy years old. At first I thought I must be mistaken, as it is nearly forty years since I last saw him, but he saw me, and a look of recognition came into his eyes. He smiled the same old smile and waved to me as he tried to weave his way through the crowds of children with sailing boats.

I was sitting on the top of Hampstead Heath by the Whitestone Pond with my two small grandsons, who were sailing their boats in the pond. I had just made up my mind to get ready to go home,

While he was approaching, one of the boys fell into the water. Paul and I reached out together to get him out, and as we did so Paul caught one of my hands in his. I felt a shock go through me at his touch.

"He'll be alright!" said Paul. "He isn't hurt, only wet. Can you manage?"

"Yes, thank you!" I answered, then before he had time to say more, I had gathered up the boats and boys and made for my little car parked by the side of the road.

"Mary! Mary!"

It was Paul calling. He signalled to me to stop, but I bundled the children into the car, started the engine and moved away down the hill before he had time to recover.

When I was alone that night, my mind went back to the first time we had met on this very same Heath. He was taking a walk from Swales Lane in Highgate to Hampstead, and I was walking from Hampstead to Highgate. It had been raining the night before and I was trying to avoid a particularly marshy patch of ground, when I slipped and fell, burying my arms in soft, wet mud. I felt like crying, but then I looked up to see what appeared to be a pair of very blue eyes on very long legs. It was Paul. We both burst out laughing. He helped me to my feet, and after I had wiped most of the mud off, he insisted I took off my wet jersey and put on his dry pullover.

It was the most natural thing in the world that we strolled into the nearest cafe for coffee. Sitting there with him seemed the only thing I ever wanted to do. We met many times after that; so when he asked me to marry him my happiness was complete. He took me to see his house, where we were to live after we were married. He showed me his studio where he did all his work. There were paints and canvases everywhere, piles of books on chairs, and empty wine bottles.

"This is my studio-cum-workshop-cum-hide-away." he told me.

For some reason I did not feel comfortable in that room. It had an atmosphere of dryness and old age, but as it was but three weeks to our wedding day I put it down to pre-wedding nerves, telling myself not to be silly.

I wandered around the room while Paul made coffee thinking how lucky I was to have met this wonderful man. We sat and talked of many things, of hopes and dreams. We talked of many things including mesmerism, body levitation, and hypnotism.

One night as I lay in bed I thought it might be rather fun if I could impress myself on him, so that he thought of me at the same time and we could laugh about it next time we met. I lay in bed and looked around the room. It was just the same as many other rooms except that I did have a photograph to look at of the man I was about to marry. Just one taken when he was dressed in the Edwardian style, and he would not have another one taken. I closed my eyes and relaxed completely. After a while I felt as though I was floating on a warm, fluffy summer cloud. I called his name.

"Paul! Paul!" I seemed to see his face before me so I called again.

"Paul! Paul!"

A slight wave of perspiration broke over me, and I began to be a little nervous.

I found I was almost powerless to move my limbs. My head and feet went up and down in a rocking motion, up and down, up and down. I was now very afraid but could not do anything to help myself. My body rose into the air until it formed an arch with my head and feet resting on the bed. This happened twice. I felt as light as a feather.

My body started the rocking motion again. Then, hovering over the bed for a few moments, I drifted like a cloud through the open window into the night. As I drifted along at rooftop level, I tried to stand upright but the effort of moving made me turn over on to my stomach and in this way I continued to travel. Floating in a rushing wind, feet first with my head downwards was terrifying. I began to gather speed. I passed Whitestone Pond, and went on and on, twisting and turning.

I now heard low murmurings in my ears. I saw shapes floating with me, tattered, black things, dank smelling and horrible. They pulled at me with their crooked fingers and clawed at my clothes. Then they began to drag me down in a sharp descent. Then I knew where I was going. To Paul....

When I came to Paul's house, the Tattered Things screamed, laughed and danced round me. Then, as I descended they pushed me violently through the walls into the studio. There was Paul, looking at me with unseeing eyes. He passed his hand over his face as if he was very weary, then he saw me.

"Oh, Mary, my dear, I thought you would come!" and reaching out his hands he drew me to his side and took me in his arms as he had done so many times before. As he held me I looked into the mirror on the wall.

To my horror I saw that the face of the man in the mirror was that of an old, old man. His neck was brown, skinny and wrinkled in criss-cross folds. The old man looked at me with Paul's eyes and smiled with his dry, old mouth. He was holding me closely and smoothing my hair with claw-like hands. He smelled of age, mildew, and decay....

I broke away from this old man, yet who was the Paul that I loved.

I ran from the house, stumbling as I did so until I reached my own front door where I collapsed on the door step.

When I awoke at last, I was in bed with the sun shining through the window. The dream, or experience of the night before came flooding back to me. I knew I could never marry Paul. I left the country soon after, taking a job as a nanny in Canada, and married Eddie, not seeing Paul again until yesterday on Hampstead Heath. He has not changed at all, nor yet grown older in forty years. I never wish to see him again. He scares, and frightens me. He should grow old with the years.

I never wish to see him again.

The House Plants.

A year or so ago I was staying with a friend of mine in her small wooden bungalow by the sea. We had been friends for so many years that it was home from home to me. So close were we that I did not have to let her know beforehand, if, or when, I might be arriving at her house. She had no children to consider. She lived alone but for her cat, a pet rabbit, and one spoilt hen, Jemima. And her house plants!

She had about forty house plants of various kinds in the front porch-cum-greenhouse, some blooming, others just foliage, green and lush. They grew and flourished under her care - "having green fingers" is the name of the quality these people have, I believe. My friend, Sadie, had other plants on small tables and window sills. She called them "her children". The biggest and best, the pride and joy, was a plant that is sometimes known as a "lucky" plant and sometimes as a "money" plant. It stood on a low stool in the corner of the sitting room. It was about twenty inches high and eighteen inches round, with a stem an inch and a half thick, and fleshy oval leaves. My friend, Sadie, loved this plant. She talked to it, and she sang to it, albeit in a cracked voice. She tenderly sponged its leaves with room temperature water and a soft sponge. Indeed, all her plants looked so well and happy that one felt that they knew what a loving home they had there. They sprouted and branched in abundance, spreading their glossy green leaves in contentment. They almost smiled. I asked Sadie if she had ever had any luck from the "lucky" plant.

"Not exactly," she said, "but then nothing nasty has happened to me either." She thought for a moment then said, "Oh, yes! Someone gave me a carpet for my bedroom and a man building a house down the road gave me enough odds and ends of wood to carry me through the winter. Little things like this happen to me".

Being in need of some small gifts like this myself, I asked Sadie if she would give me some cuttings from the plant. This she did, and then explained to me how to look after them for the best results. I brought them home and carefully potted them in the best compost for the job and stood them in a sunny window in my sitting room. I sang to them, I talked to them, and lovingly washed their glossy green leaves in room temperature water. Each day, before I had my breakfast, I went into the room to wish them "good morning". I gave them the odd cup of tea left over from my little two-cup capacity tea-pot. I smiled ingratiatingly, and gently patted their little green heads. I introduced them to my friends hoping that the plants would think that they had the best minder ever. They flourished and branched. Their oval leaves glistened and shone. They stood as upright and as motionless as Grenadier Guards. As has happened to the Guards at times, one leaf fell over and off. Picking it up, I planted it at the base of the parent plant, where it survived, looking at me with gratitude in its little face. I waited patiently for something nice to happen. For someone to give me a carpet, or, at least, something out of the ordinary, perhaps an exciting letter to drop through my letter box, or something to fall off the back of a lorry into my lap. But, in the avenue where I live, not many lorries bearing gifts pass through.

I realised that I was half afraid of these magic pieces of greenery, half afraid of what might happen should I neglect them in any way. I was stricken with guilt if I had my morning cup of tea to shape me up for the day, before giving my plants their morning salutations. This would happen if I had overnight guests. My role as hostess overruled my role as a "precious plant" minder. I found the ridicule of my fellow men less easy to bear than the reproachful atmosphere in the corner of the bay window where the plants sat in state. Once, in one of his flying visits my son caught me doing my daily obeisance and burst into scornful laughter. He thought I was quite mad.

"Oh, Mum, do you think for one moment that the stupid plant will bring you a fortune? That green object? Oh, Mum!"

"No," I answered. "It is only a plant."

But, as soon as his back was turned, I resumed my hopeful vigil on letter box and lorry. I walked the streets with bent head and eyes peeled looking for dropped £1 notes. Then one day I found one! It was very dirty, having the footprint on it of a cleated, rubber sole of a shoe. Did I care about mud? Not I! Oh, joy! Deep joy! My little green friends!

After that I had several small strokes of luck. I won £30 in a newspaper competition. I won free seats to a theatre. I won a "guess the weight of the cake" at a church fete, and another time, dinner with my favourite T.V. star. I shall not tell you which one as that would spoil the memory for me. During the next week or two I began to backslide in my attention to the plants. I gave up singing to them, and gave up washing them, although I still spoke to them. Then came the day when I just poked my head around the door giving them a wave of my hand and a cool "good morning". I felt they did not approve of this, but the skies did not fall on my head, so I did not worry. I gave them water regularly, but not much of my company, until it was time to sit down in the evening to read a book or watch the television.

"They are only house plants," I persuaded myself. "Don't get worked up over house plants!".

Sometimes I spoke this aloud. I began to notice that things began to happen that made me think that these house plants were beginning to take over my life. I broke china, and the fence in the back garden fell over and split into fragments. The roof tiles loosened and came sliding down onto the pathway below once just missing my head. I began to feel jittery.

"Nerves," I thought.

But I started to talk to the plants again, and to sing to them in the morning. The tune was pretty but the words were uncomplimentary to house plants. This they did not seem to mind as they perked up and grew more leaves. One morning after a sleepless night, I went over to the plants and said to them in a firm voice,

"You'll have to go! You are making me nervous!".

I put my hand out to touch the leaves - the smooth, green leaves - and one of them caught my middle finger and made a half inch cut in it. It bled into the compost in the pot before I had time to take my hand away. I went into the kitchen to hold it under the tap for a moment, the water turning slightly red. I reached out to take the pot to the window for a closer look, but my hand shook so violently that I dropped the plant pot on to the floor and the one inch thick stem of the plant snapped in two with a crackling sound. Or was it a laugh? It tore my stockings as it went down and scratched my leg. I pulled myself together and muttered under my breath to it.

"You are only a house plant! Do you hear me? Only a house plant!".

I swept up the compost and re-potted it in the unbroken pot. Ten days passed quite quietly and all seemed well. The plant returned to its normal glossy, green colour. My finger healed.

Then one Sunday I was checking my football coupon and in my excitement I again knocked the plant to the floor. It almost cried! I gave a silent scream of joy and disbelief at the unreality of the situation! There they were! Eight little beautiful crosses! Eight beautiful draws! And a half million pounds! I stumbled to the phone to register my claim. I picked up a book with all the phone numbers in it that I needed and - there it was! Under the book! Unposted, a brown envelope addressed to Liverpool!

The plants still flourish. The leaves are sleek and glossy.
I know when I am beaten!

The Plumtree.

It was a large tree, with over grown branches badly in need of pruning, but Ethel could not bring herself to have it butchered.

It was also a very beautiful tree. Smothered with white blossom in the springtime that blew down onto the green grass beneath covering it like a carpet of snow flakes. The dappled sunshine danced through its leaves making them shine like stars. Birds nested and sang their songs in year after year.

Yet in all the ten years that Ethel had lived in the house it had born fruit but once, and then in such abundance that the branches were bowed down with the golden-yellow fruit, sweet and delicious. But the effort of producing this one bumper crop was all too much for it to deal with, for it never happened again. The blossom came and went, the tree leafed, the branches and twigs grew strong, creaking in the rough winds. Eventually the plum tree grew too wide; it was hanging over the neighbour's garden; so Ethel called in a tree surgeon for advice.

"It's a beautiful tree!" he said "but it is on its way out. It will not fall on your head, but it is finished as far as fruit is concerned. It would be better to have it pruned as soon as the leaves have fallen."

Ethel agreed. After that, she often heard the plum tree sighing and gently creaking in the wind as she wandered up and down the garden. She would stand beneath and look up into the heart of it while she leaned against its trunk. She felt she had to touch it as she passed by. It seemed to bend its branches towards her, as if it wanted to touch her, or shelter her from the wind and rain. Sometimes she spoke to it, then laughed at herself for being so childish. She had end of her linen line tied to one of the lower branches which swung and lifted as the breezes blew them, making the little birds that sat on the line clutch tightly to the swaying line that threatened to hurl them in all directions, to the four winds.

Came the autumn and the tree surgeon with his electric saw. He removed all the dead wood and some of the more untidy branches. As Ethel heard the saw biting into the wood she thought she heard the tree groan as the branches fell to the ground, she felt the pain of the tree. She could not go out into the garden for several day afterwards for the pity of it.

Then winter came with its snows and frosts. The tree stood firmly and bravely up during the rough weather waiting for the spring, which brought a day when Ethel was looking out into the garden and thought how light the garden was now. She knew she had done the right thing by having the plum tree pruned and began to have to feel the pleasure of the garden once more, but she was puzzled by the grass that used to grow under the tree. It was turning brown and soft as she walked over it. Where ever her foot went, so the grass withered and disappeared after a while.

When May came and more time was spent in the garden, she fancied the groans and creeks of the plum tree seemed unusually loud as it swayed in the wind. Several large twigs fell around her as she passed under the tree to get to the bottom of the garden. One twig fell one day catching the back of her leg as it did so. A slight trickle of blood ran down her leg and, although it was only a superficial wound, it stung her enough to make her cry out and hit the tree with both hands.

"Oh, dear! You would do that! Why can't you be more careful?"

She looked up at the tree with an angry tilt of her head.

"You are on your way out, and one word from me!"

The tree became very still. Although there was a breeze, not a leaf stirred in its branches. Even the birds fell silent save for a few gentle twitterings. There was a silence and a stillness

around the tree. A warmth seemed to radiate from its trunk which was ragged and peeling away in places where the squirrels scrambled up and down through the branches.

Ethel went into the house to change her tights which happened to be a new pair put on that morning. These that were ruined were the last pair left in the shade of "Jasmine" left to wear. She grumbled to herself and glared balefully out of the window as she peeled the ruined tights from her legs. Changing into another pair, she ran downstairs again. She stood in the doorway of the kitchen looking out into the garden, feeling there was something she ought to do about the plum tree but did not know what it was she was supposed to do. She walked down past the tree to the bottom of the garden. The delicate, pale green leaves on the smaller branches and twigs turned in her direction fluttering gently like fingers waving "goodbye" to an old friend. As she came back again up the garden path towards the house they turned to her; when she was under the trees they were over head; but as she moved nearer the house they turned again in her direction. The tree groaned and creaked loudly, which so startled Ethel that she ran into the house closing the door and locking it behind her. She sat down on the nearest chair, her hands and legs shaking.

"This will not do!" she said to herself "A tree is only a tree. The twigs falling on my leg is just one of many things that could have happened to me in the garden....!"

But she could not explain the stillness of the tree, the quietness of the birds, the lack of movement in the garden in spite of the now fresh wind blowing. She felt cold and very tired. She made herself a cup of coffee and went into the dining room to drink it. She could not keep her eyes off the plum tree. The notches in the wood became gaping mouths that opened and closed as if calling for help.

The branches began to cling together as if to gain comfort and support in their pain and loss. Ethel called through the glass of the window to the tree,

"I am so sorry but I did what I thought was best for you. If I had not had your useless limbs removed, the rest of you would have had a very short life. Oh, don't you see that! You would have died!"

The plum tree stood very still for a while then it started to sway in the wind. The boughs bent and dipped to and in their effort, so she thought, to communicate with her. They creaked and groaned. The birds flew out from their green hiding places, circled round and flew in again only to be danced up and down by the roughly swaying antics of the plum tree.

Ethel stood as if transfixed. Then she managed to pull herself together.

"It can't be true! It isn't happening! It can't be!"

Then, as quickly as it had started, the garden became quite still once more. The wind dropped, the sun shone brilliantly, and the birds began to twitter in the leaves.

Ethel opened the kitchen door and stepped out into the warm air. For a while she stood with her back leaning on the brickwork of the house studying the plum tree. It was rather overgrown even now, after it had been pruned. It spilled over into the garden next door and although the neighbours were very nice about it, Ethel felt sure they would be far happier if all the overhanging branches had been removed as well.

"As soon as autumn comes again, I will have all those boughs off. It will make the tree look rather odd, but it must be done."

The plum tree gave a faint moan and swayed slightly towards the house.

Ethel had by now recovered from the scratches on her leg but still felt angry and resentful over the torn tights. She fetched a hand fork and her kneeling pad and began to pull up the weeds that grew round the path at the foot of the tree. A blackbird hovered near her as she worked waiting for her to turn up some grubs. She spoke to it as she worked. It seemed very unafraid but she avoided making any sudden movements to scare it away. She even began to hum to herself. Things were so peaceful, that she forgot the feelings of tension and worry she had earlier. The garden was filled with tranquillity. She looked up into the foliage of the tree and wondered what it was that made her feel so uneasy.

"You are a fool! It is a good thing that trees can't talk, or I would be in for a trouncing from this one!"

As she said this the plum tree started to rustle its leaves and bend its twigs slightly. Very gently at first so that Ethel was hardly aware of any change at all. Then came movement in the boughs like some one shivering with ague as the leaves trembled and shivered, so Ethel trembled and shivered. She could not keep her hands steady. She tried to stand but the effort was too much for her. She lost her balance and fell against the plum tree which seemed to engulf her, drawing her into the soft, fruity-smelling pappy mass that was its trunk. Little slivers of wood pricked and clawed at her body. She protected her head with her left arm and beat on to the pulp of the trunk with her right hand which still held the small gardening fork. The plum tree creaked and moaned and shuddered. The wind through the leaves whispered to her,

"Tooth-to-oo-th to-oo-ooth". It hissed it at her

"I am sorry, I am sorry," she said fearfully. The tree sighed." Eye-eye-eeyyee-eye. Too-oo-ooth".

Ethel felt she had no more fight left in her. As she sank to the ground at the bottom of the tree she weakly called out in a pleading voice,

"Help me! Oh, please, please, I won't hurt you any more!".

Her hand hurt her and she felt sore all over. Some one whispered in her ear yet the sound was deafening.

"Ethel! Ethel! Are you alright?"

Hands were gently lifting her to her feet. For a moment she could neither stand or see. Then her vision cleared and she saw neighbours were bending over her and trying to get her to stand. Strong arms supported her until she could stand alone.

"Ethel! You nearly "had it"! This plum tree tried its best to pin you to the ground but you managed to roll over out of its way. Then you got entangled in the sheets hanging on the line as it fell with these branches."

It was then that Ethel saw the plum tree. It was still standing proudly up, its pale, green leaves gently fluttering in the breeze like hands waving "goodbye" to an old friend. The two boughs that had been overhanging the neighbour's garden had cracked and fallen into her garden breaking her fence, pinning her to the ground by its topmost little twiglets, not hurting her at all, save a scratched hand.

"It could have been much worse." said the neighbour. "You had better have that old plum tree cut right down in the autumn!"

"Yes," she answered, "I must think seriously about it."

She thought she heard the tree muttering,

"Eye-for-eye-for-too-oo-ooth".

Then the birds twittered and whistled.

"Tooth-too-th-too-oo-tooth"!

"Yes, I will have it cut down in the autumn. It is dangerous."

Ethel stuck the small hand fork into the tree, turned and left it quivering there. The tree groaned, then was silent.

The Blue Ribbon

Aubrey Wyllie had spent most of his holidays in Suffolk. He found the air there more bracing for him than at the South Coast, and as by now he had made many friends among the locals, he felt as if it were home from home to him.

Yet as he opened the door of the same little cottage he rented year after year, he felt that somehow this year was going to be different. He had booked the cottage for September and half October, but although only three weeks had passed, he was already feeling slightly alone and in need of a little company.

It was a damp day with a suspicion of sea mist in the air. He put on his heavy anorak and his walking boots to walk to a village further along the coast to get some provisions in case the weather turned rough as it promised to do by the look of the skies.

It was in this further village that he had seen the GIRL. He liked girls, but in all his thirty-four years he had not felt seriously inclined toward any particular one. Now this GIRL bothered him. He had seen her on several occasions walking around the village. She was not pretty, but once when their eyes had met his heart had jumped. Her eyes were very blue, so that when the sun caught them they shone and glittered. She wore clothes of a decade ago, yet they were good clothes.

After he had walked about two miles, it began to rain, softly at first. Then, as the wind began to blow from the sea, it became quite heavy. He decided to carry on for the next half mile, even though a mist was beginning to form. This thickened so much that he decided to turn off to the left to make a detour round the lanes, to see if the mist was less heavy inland. After a short, while he wished he had never started out, for the route was becoming increasingly difficult to fathom out. He stood still for a moment to light his pipe.

"This is no good." he said to himself. "I had better knock on some door to find shelter for a while."

But where to find a door? There was nothing to be seen. Even the hedgerows were dim shadows now. He walked on slowly, then suddenly to his right, he saw a light. He walked towards it, and came to what he thought was a gate post, took one step forward, then slipped with both feet into a shallow ditch of water. He swore roundly, climbed out, then found the gate. He squelched up the garden path, found the bell on the door and pressed it twice.

For some time there was no answer, although he could hear movement and voices coming from inside the house. After a while the door was opened by a fair haired young woman. To his surprise it was opened by the same young woman who had disturbed his thoughts so much lately. She seemed to recognise him, for half a smile came to her lips, but this then disappeared as a man's voice called her from inside the house.

"Who is that at the door, Glenda.?"

Glenda looked at Aubrey inquiringly.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I was wondering if I could shelter for a while, just until the mist clears a little, so that I can get to the village."

She seemed very nervous and timid, and looked over her shoulder quickly as the man called out again.

"Who is it?" he demanded in an irritable voice.

"I don't think we can help you." she whispered, "My husband does not like strangers in the house. There is another house a little further along the lane. They will help you."

Then turning her head she called back into the house.

"Someone wants to take shelter from the mist and rain for a while. I have already told

him that it is not convenient, and to go on to the Brennons' place."

A man's face appeared round a corner. He had large features surrounded by a shock of grizzled, grey hair.

"I don't really want no one coming in here. If he does come in he will have to stay in the other room by himself. You need not light a fire; it not all that cold."

Aubrey called out a "Thank you" and stepped in out of the steadily pouring rain. The girl, for she was not much more, opened a door just inside the hallway and motioned him to go inside. He slipped off his wet shoes holding them in his hand, not quite knowing what to do with them. She took them from him, saying as she did so,

"I will dry these for you, although I can't dry any thing else for you. I will try to get you something hot to drink. I'll ask Charles."

She took the boots from him and went quietly from the room, giving him a shy smile as she went. He was left in what appeared to be a sparsely furnished old fashioned room. A large mahogany table took up much of the room. There were four dining chairs and a glass front case holding Victorian figurines, Chinese and Japanese porcelain. There were small carved wooden figures from the West Indies. He thought as he examined them that the owner must be a well, travelled person. He wandered around the room to keep himself warm. He went to the window, but could see nothing except thin shadows of very tall trees.

He must have been in the room for nearly two hours and wishing he had never set foot inside the place. He was about to ask for his boots so that he could be on his way, chancing getting to the village, when the door opened and the girl came in carrying his boots in her hands. He took them from her and put them on. They were warm and fairly dry. He looked up at her and was about to tell her that he would be on his way when she spoke.

"My husband has agreed that the mist will be around for some time yet, so asks you to have a light lunch with us. That is, if you would care to do so."

Her eyes were pleading.

"Thank you very much. I shall be very pleased to lunch with you." he said, watching her face as he spoke. He followed her into the hall and passed from there into a sort of kitchen-cum-living room. This room seemed to be a complete replica of a one-roomed log cabin from the wildest out-back of Australia, in the nineteenth century. The floor was covered and cluttered with books. The wall was hung with rabbit skins. The stove was a round iron cylindrical shaped thing with a five inch flue pipe going up through a hole in the ceiling. The man was busy plucking the feathers from a chicken, catching the feathers on to old newspapers spread around the floor. He looked up as they came into the room, and after eyeing Aubrey up and down, motioned him to sit down on the other side of the table, saying as he did so,

"We do not welcome strangers here. It is a great inconvenience to me. I would rather you were on your way as soon as you have had your lunch, but my dear little wife fancies you fancy her."

Tears slid silently down Glenda's face. She closed her eyes to try to stop them, but they fell like rain. She sat down on a chair by the window and looked into the garden. She gave a little moan and after a while became quite distraught weeping as if her heart would break.

"Shall I tell you why she married me? To save her father from bankruptcy. She has actually cost me around £10,000 initially and would cost a great deal more if I did not keep a tight hold on the household budget. She is always wanting to gad about the village buying new clothes. That is why I bought this particular house well off the beaten track. She does not know when she is well off. Neighbours are forever running in and out if they are too near. They bring in tales in and take tales out. We do go to the village once a month to get stores and food for the livestock. She going to have a child, which is something I do not want. We shall have to wait and see what can be done about it."

He stood up, banging the now plucked chicken down on the table and told Glenda to clear up the mess and feathers and get lunch on the table. She started to gather the old newspapers holding the feathers, her face white, her hands trembling. Aubrey walked to the other side of the table and told her she was not in a fit state to do it. The man gave a bellow of rage and running round the table he pushed Glenda on one side saying as he did so,

"You do as you are told."

He lunged at Aubrey who ducked his head in time to avoid the blow which would have felled him to the ground.

"Get out of here." the man roared, "What I do in my own house is no concern of yours. Glenda is my wife and that is how she is staying. I want no busy-body young jack-a-napes telling me what to do. Glenda, get those feathers up and outside. Now!"

Aubrey put a restraining hand on the girls shoulder and felt the blue ribbon with which she had tied back her hair. The bow had come undone and the ends were hanging down touching her back. She moved from him, running past the man, into the fields at the back of the house. As she went past, the man made a grab at her hair pulling the ribbon off as she passed him. He lost his balance and fell across the table, his hand falling on to the handle of a pointed kitchen knife which he took hold of, and springing up, he went to attack Aubrey, who could sense the terrific strength of the other man and knew he was no match against him. He seized a steel which the other man used for sharpening knives and, as the man lunged at him with the knife, Aubrey hit out with it, catching the man on the side of the head so that he went down with a crash amongst the papers and feathers with blood from a large gash in his head staining the white feathers crimson.

Aubrey shook his head to clear it and was appalled to see what he had done. He dropped the steel. It fell across the mans hand, the fingers still holding the blue ribbon he had snatched from Glenda's hair. Aubrey picked up the ribbon and fled through the back door into the fields with a hope of finding her. He searched the outside buildings, he looked across the fields through the mist. He called her name as he stumbled about.

"Glenda! Glenda! Where are you? I am trying to find you. Answer me, please answer me!"

He ran around to the front of the house, out of the gate, and along the lane, scarcely knowing what he was doing, just calling her name. Suddenly he fell as a great weight seemed to descend on him bearing him to the ground. He felt a blinding pain in his head, then knew no more.

When he came to, he was in a hospital bed. He heard one of the nurses saying,

"Poor fellow! He ran right into that old brick wall by the old derelict house - the one that has no roof on. It must have fallen on to him when he walked into it. That house has not been used for forty years. He must have sheltered there from the rain and mist. People say it is haunted by the man who used to keep his wife virtually a prisoner there, until one day she drowned herself in the sea. He was found with his head cracked open. As no one ever found out who did it, the police suppose it must have been a tramp who lost his way and his temper. It has been a complete mystery."

Aubrey heard all this through his dull headache. It can't be, he thought, I saw them! I did it! He sat up in the bed and shouted,

"I didn't do it, did I? I didn't do it! You can't kill ghosts, can you?"

"Now, Mr Wyllie, don't worry yourself. You have had a nasty accident, but you will soon be alright again. There is nothing for you to worry about at all."

He sank back in to the pillows trying to remember what had happened. It must have been a dream, a bad dream! He felt something soft clutched in his right hand. He brought his hand above the bed-clothes.

In his hand he was holding a length of blue satin ribbon.

Robin

The old man worked away in his garden with hardly a pause, or even a brief stop. When he did stop to rest, one could see that his back was very bent, bent with the years of stooping over to plant and weed the ground. His once blue eyes were now faded to a washed-out blue, so pale that there was hardly any colour, giving the appearance of being sightless. But he was not! Far from being blind, he could see objects moving far over the distant fields and along the country road half a mile away. He could see the birds perched high in the elm trees on the edge of his garden. However he had no time for birds of any kind, shooing them away from his vegetable patch, spitting angry oaths out from the corner of his mouth.

"Ah, ah-ah!", he would snarl. "Them birds are a bloody nuisance. Git orf with yer!"

He would wave his long arms around his head like windmills, if even one small sparrow settled within six feet from his spade.

It was getting late in the day towards the end of April, and Old Ted, as he was known as by most people, was in a particularly awkward frame of mind. A spate of bills had dropped through his letter-box that morning, General rate, water rate, and ground rent for the coming quarter. He begrudged paying ground rent to a landlord who lived in the lap of luxury in Scotland. HE did not have to scrape and dig for a living! HE just sat back and let the money pour into his lap! Never mind the poor old feller with a bent back and varicose veins who lived all alone with no one to come near for days on end!

"He'll be under the turf sooner than me." said Old Ted savagely, as he thrust his fork deep into the rich, loamy earth. It was then that he noticed all the birds sitting on the fence waiting to pounce on the worms and grubs with which to feed their young. The blackbirds were timid and flew off at the slightest movement of his hands. The sparrows hopped a few feet nearer, made sudden darts at the worms, and then flew off. But a pair of robins were bolder than the rest of the birds. They flew up and down and round Old Ted's fork, snatching beaks full of worms and grubs, flying off to their nest to feed their young, then returning time and time again for more.

Old Ted picked up his spade, and as the robins came back for the fifth time, he waved it around his head, Then using it as a cricket bat he caught one of the robins on the end, killing it instantly. The cock bird stood still for a while then flew off with its beak full of grubs. Then he came back again to sit beside the dead body of his dead mate. He looked up and down, from left to right, then circled round making sad little noises and whistles.

"Shouldn't have got in my way," roared Old Ted at the robin. The robin flew onto the handle of the old man's spade and stared into his eyes without blinking. The old man shook him off, but the bird came back again as fast as the man shook him off.

"Pesky thing!" shouted Old Ted, flinging down the spade.

The robin immediately perched on top of the old man's hat, resettling there as soon as it was brushed off. When the old man changed the spade for the fork, the robin flew off a little way and perched on top of the compost heap.

Old Ted began to feel very tired, and strangely for him, his back ached and his head felt rather hot, and so he took his hat off to wipe his brow. As he straightened his back to ease it a little, he decided to finish for the day. He picked up his jacket from the grass, and put it on. He then picked up his fork and walked over to where he had left the spade. As he bent down to get it he happened to glance up to where the robin still sat on the heap of rotting vegetation. It was watching him out of its beady little eyes.

"Git orf, you!" he said, and bent down to pick up the spade.

The robin made straight for the old man's hat. It clung on tightly with its tiny claws, pecking viciously until old Ted took his hat off, at which the bird flew off. But as soon as the has was put

on again, the bird resumed its clawing and pecking. And so it went on. No sooner did the hat go on Ted's head but the bird came back and as the hat came off the bird flew off to perch on the fence.

Old Ted opened his shed door to put away all his tools, except the spade which he would use as a support as he walked up the garden path. He carefully locked the shed door and made his way into the house. Once inside he sank down into the nearest chair feeling very tired.

From the corner of his eye he saw a shadow flick across the window and turning round he saw it was the robin clinging to the sash, pecking away at the glass pane. He started to prepare his evening meal. He filled the kettle from the tap, and as he was carrying it from the sink to the gas stove he heard the tapping again.

He looked up, and seeing the bird on the window-sill, dropped the kettle of water on to the floor. With trembling hands he picked up the kettle, mopped the water from the floor and drew the curtains over the window. Although it was late April and mild weather, he felt quite chilly, so he put a match to the fire and sat down in front of it until it started to glow. Feeling unable to keep his eyes open for long he dozed for a while. It was not until his stomach gave a loud rumble that he realised he had forgotten to eat. He put a pot of stew on to heat through and refilled the kettle for his cup of tea. The hot stew and sweet tea was comforting and soon he felt relaxed enough to take off his boots, put on slippers, and read the daily paper.

The first thing to catch his eye was picture of some house martins building a nest in the eaves of a house. He rustled the paper angrily. He had them last year, four or five of them swirling and swooping over the garden, and making a mess right down the side of his bedroom window. He soon put a stop to that by opening the window and knocking the nest down with a long cane.

"Little perishers, they was." he muttered to himself. He put the paper down, cleared the table, and put the dishes in a bowl in the sink. Usually he was very tidy, clearing up as he went through the day, but tonight he was out of his regular habits.

He climbed the stairs to his small bed-room, which was where he slept since his wife had died. It was a warm room facing west, so the sun did not wake him too early in the morning. Also it was far away from the trees and the dawn chorus of the birds. Suddenly, he jerked his head to one side, thinking that he heard a noise from the kitchen, faint scratchings and squeaks. Down he went plodding in his bare feet expecting to see a mouse, but there on the table was the robin tearing his paper to pieces.

"How did you get in here?" he roared as he picked up what was left of the paper and waved it round his head. Old Ted moved across the room as the bird flew on to the lintel of the door, clinging on with its tiny claws. As Ted lumbered around, the bird flew to the bottom of the stairs, then up the stairs tread by tread until it reached the small bed-room. It rested for a moment on the bed, looking at Ted with unblinking eyes, then flew out of the window through the two inch gap at the bottom that the old man had left open for fresh air. Ted flung the window wide open, and lashed out at the bird, then closed it with a loud bang.

He slept fitfully that night. When he awoke next day he had a slight headache. It seemed to be at the top of his head in the exact spot where the robin had picked at it. His head felt sore just there, even though he had his hat on his head.

"No doubt it will wear off during the day." he thought, "It's cooler today than yesterday."

The clock showed the time to be a quarter to seven, so he rose carefully, pulled the bed-clothes to the bottom of the bed, opened the window to let in the air, dressed himself, and went downstairs to the kitchen.

He checked the front mat for possible letters. Not that he received many letters. A once-a-month duty letter from his daughter in Bristol, due about now, had arrived. He answered it straight away, so that she would know he was alright. She came to see him two or three times a year, staying for four days - which was about as much as they could stand of each other's

company. It was a love-hate relationship.

He opened the back door and walked down the garden to review the work he had done the day before. The air was soft and warm. Old Ted began to feel more like his old self again. He had half forgotten the robins.

"A fair day's going." he said feeling very satisfied with himself.

"If I finish down to here," marking a patch about six feet wide, "I'll call it a day and go to see about getting my saw sharpened."

As soon as he was inside the house the pain in his head started.

He ate a hurried breakfast, put on his gardening boots, and carefully closing the kitchen door behind him, went to the garden shed to select the tools for the day's work. He carried them over his shoulder to the place where he had left off the day before. He took the spade and dug into the ground so that it stood upright the hung his coat on the handle.

He bent down to pick up the fork and as he did so, he became aware of being watched by many eyes around him. He stood up to face the bottom of the garden. There in the trees at the end, were many birds, all looking down at him with their sharp little eyes. They were whistling softly and gently fluffing their feathers. They sharpened their beaks on the sides of the twigs, their little heads moving from side to side as they did so. Then he saw the robin.

It was standing as it had done the day before, on top of the compost heap near the body of it's dead mate. Old Ted quickly looked away and, stamping his feet in irritation, he took up the garden fork, thrusting it into the soft earth.

As he lifted each forkfull, he shook it a little so that the soft, dry loam fell loosely onto the ground. It had a rich, sweet smell of hay and rotting apples. People told him he was lucky to have such good soil, but he always told them that,

"You only got out of the ground what you put into it."

It was good and rich, and he did get good crops from it, but a lot of back breaking, hard work went into working it every day, all the year round. He sold some of the produce, and his daughter would take some home with her on the rare occasions when she came to visit him. Old Ted enjoyed vegetables of all kinds, and was not a big meat eater. He fell to wondering what he should put in the patch he had just turned over.

"Flowers, Ted. Put in some sweet peas!" He seemed to hear a soft voice in his ear. It was the pleading sound of his wife's voice. She loved flowers, which he said were a waste of space. He looked round for her; then remembered that she had been dead for the last fourteen years.

He felt the sting of tears welling up in his eyes. He wished he had planted more flowers for her when she was alive, but then, it was right, flowers didn't do much good; vegetables and fruit were much better. He began to feel very alone; and started to mutter to himself.

"It's very lonely being on your own. It doesn't matter what your partner is as long as you don't quarrel too much over things. Emmy and me used not to see eye to eye over much, but she was there. Even if she was always first up and last to go to bed... Life is for two people together.... mates if you like,... yes, that is right, MATES!"

Old Ted came across a hard patch of ground which did not yield to his fork. So, throwing it carefully prongs downwards to the ground, he took up the spade to force it into the ground with his foot. He started to sweat a little and after a while his head began to ache in the place where the robin had pecked at the hat. The old man looked up quickly, to find the robin still watching him from the compost heap, still standing close to the tiny body of it's dead mate. Ted suddenly felt tired and a little afraid.

He felt cold and started to shiver. The shivering became violent, almost uncontrollable. So leaving the fork where it was, he slowly walked towards the house, using the spade as a support to help himself along. He opened the kitchen door, and making for the nearest chair, he sank down heavily into it. Through the open doorway he could see the robin hopping up the garden path, pausing now and then to look from side to side, as if to see if the coast was clear

for action. Old Ted just sat there without moving.

The robin came into the house, It hopped onto the handle of the spade which the old man was still holding, and started to peck at his fingers, very gently at first, then vigorously. The old man seemed powerless to move his hand. Strangely enough it did not hurt him. It was as if his hand was numb. Now, to his washed-out blue eyes the bird seemed to be growing larger and larger. It spoke to him, saying one word over and over again.

"Mate... mate..., Mate".

The old man nodded his head and could only repeat in a strangled, throaty voice, "Mate... Mate... MATE."

The bird, now the size of a wild goose, was perched on top of his head.
Old Ted closed his eyes.

The postman found him next day, dead in his armchair, still clutching the spade in his hand. His knuckles were raw, as if he had been picking at them. As the postman touched the old man, his hat fell from his head to the floor, revealing a round, scarlet patch of skin where the hair had been plucked from the scalp.

The Cause of Death was... or at least was stated to be... Natural Causes.

Retribution

Now, as all my neighbours will tell you, I am a tree loving man, having several in my garden. As a matter of fact, they are getting a little out of hand, as they are spreading their branches a little too far over the neighbour's garden. I keep saying that I will trim them up, but they are so beautiful that the thought of the saw cutting into them appalls me. Half way down the garden is an old lilac tree which spreads its branches very wide. Next to this is an old plum tree which has born fruit but twice in the last twenty years, although it has masses of blossom in the springtime. At the bottom of the garden is a laburnum guarding the compost heap.

Three weeks ago, I decided to do something about the trees, so I wandered around trying to make up my mind which tree to sacrifice.

"Something will have to go!" I said to myself, "but which one?"

Another couple of turns and I had come to a decision. The lilac tree would be the one to go. It was old and gnarled - its base was green and shredding.

"Right! I will do it tomorrow afternoon." I promised myself, and walked slowly back into the house. Somehow I did not have the heart to go into the garden any more for several days.

But "tomorrow" finally came, so, armed with a saw, hedge cutter and small axe, I walked down the garden and began to lop off the lower branches of the lilac tree. As I cut each branch, I carried it to the bottom of the garden to dry off before being burned. This took me about two hours off and on, for, although my arm was willing, my heart was not in the job.

Another two days passed, after which I tackled the roots. I loosened the earth around them. I dug and scratched at the smaller roots to remove as much as earth as I could before getting down to the bigger roots.

At one point my neighbour put his head over the fence to see what I was doing.....

"I thought I heard someone moaning and groaning." he said, "Are you having a rough time?"

"I have not opened my mouth yet," I answered. "but you will hear some choice language in a minute or two. There is a root here that is only seven inches under the ground, but it won't budge!"

"You want to watch it." he said, "It may come out when you least expect it to come. Carry on with the good work!"

So saying he disappeared into his house. I stopped work to light my pipe and look at the blisters on my hands. Polly, my wife, came out with a cup of tea; she knows I like a little encouragement when I am working in the garden.

"I thought I heard you moaning and groaning just now. Are you having a tough time?"

I swallowed the last mouthful of tea before I answered her with a "look". She interpreted the "look", turned on her heels and went quickly back into the house, saying as she did so,

"Carry on with the good work."

I carried on. Moaning and groaning? I had not uttered a word yet! What on earth did they mean? Determined to keep my "cool" whatever happened, I put my spade under the root, and using it as a lever, I heaved it up and down making some progress. Now the root was arching a little in the middle and seemed looser at the end where it tapered down to about one inch in diameter. It was getting late and I was getting tired, wishing I had not started on a career in forestry that afternoon in March. However, heartened by the fact that the root was now more pliable, I severed it nearly by the old stump. I stood back and looked at it as it rose into the air about four inches at the end.

"Aha," I thought "This is it! Another half hour and I shall be finished, and then it is no more gardening for me for another week."

Polly looked out of the dining room window and smiled at me. My neighbour looked over the fence to wish me "goodnight" and once more vanished into his house. Polly put the lights on in the house so that they shone cheerfully down the garden path, enhancing the gathering gloom. I began to work on the last root half buried in the rather heavy clay soil. As I picked up my small axe to swing above my head to bring it down onto the root I thought I heard a loud sighing from the ground. I paused for a moment, cocking my head on one side to listen, and then shrugging my shoulders, I brought it down onto the root, a tapering tendril-like root. I gave it a couple of swipes and then it was cut right through, although there were still a few hair-like fibres holding it to the ground.

I straightened my back and let out a loud "Aaah!" of relief; then turning to Polly I gave her the "thumbs up" sign. At that precise moment the root sprang out of the ground and gave me such a hearty thwack on my backside that I nearly lost my balance, and I swear I heard the sound of baleful, devilish laughter from behind me at ground level. Polly came out.

"I am so glad you have finished." she said. "I thought I heard you laughing just now, but somehow it was not like your usual laugh".

"It was not." I answered her, "It was that damned lilac tree getting its own back on me!"

Do you know, since that day, nothing I try to plant on that patch of ground thrives or flourishes.

The lilac tree had the last laugh.

The Smoke Ring

The man sat in a deck chair on the patch of green grass he called a lawn, his panama hat tipped over his eyes. He was, on the whole, a contented man, asking no more from life than he already possessed... Well... not much more. He did wish at times that his garden was a little larger than it was, and he wished he could live by the sea which he loved in all its moods. But, Jean, his wife, was a little afraid of the sea, especially at night, when it seemed so dark and menacing. A day here and there was quite enough for her. Dear Jean!

He was content. He had recently retired from a rather boring office job. The house they owned was paid for now. He had a wife who he dearly loved; two children settled in life; five grandchildren; a small car; and it was pension day on Tuesday.

He was thinking of the annual holiday that he and Jean were planning to take in two weeks time. A friend had lent them a caravan trailer with which they hoped to tour the South Coast of England, calling on one or two relations on the way. For a while he let his thoughts wander here, there, and everywhere. He was glad to be retired. This year was the first time there was no need to hurry over anything. They could go where they pleased, taking their time for one whole month. Other years they had stayed in hotels and boarding houses, especially when the children were young. Twice they had taken narrow boats on the canals, and had enjoyed unforgettable holidays. He closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair, letting the warm sun and soft wind begin to soothe him off to sleep with the scent of roses drifting in and out of his dreams...sleep!..dreams!

He jerked up in his chair and groaned. He had forgotten about his sister, Rose! Older than him by six years, she had bossed him and the family about ever since he could remember, and still fancied herself as part of their lives. She still loved to lay down the law. They ought to do this, and they ought to do this, she would say, still bringing a certain amount of pressure to bear on their actions and movements.

She came to stay with them periodically, usually just as the time drew near for their summer holidays. She always managed it so that she came to stay two or three days beforehand so that they felt guilty for not asking her sooner. But he and his sister had never really got along together...a Mrs Knowall! Her coming meant so much more work for Jean, and the strain was great.

"Mrs Knowall!" he muttered, "Why can't she go on the canals with Joe?"

Joe was Rose's son. He owned his own narrow boat which he hired out during the year.

"Why can't she go to Rustington to stay with Vera? Vera has no young children to worry about?"

Then, after a moment or two, he felt ashamed of himself for his meanness.

Poor woman! Who does she get along with? Who could get along with her? If only she could control her tongue!

He puffed away at his pipe, then gave a sort of gurgling sigh. He tried to sink back into the lazy oblivion of his day-dreams. He felt the soft breeze on his face, playing round his greying hair. He thought of his father. It seemed as if the breeze was whispering to him in his father's voice. He nodded his head as if sleepily agreeing to conversation. He came to with a start. His sister had come into the garden with a basket of washing to put on the linen line. She spoke to him. Her voice came to him from a far distance at first, then became a jangle of noise in his ears. He puffed away trying not to hear her.

"Why you have to smoke that disgusting old pipe I shall never know! It is a horrible, smelly thing. You are just like Father. He used to smoke first thing in the morning and last thing

at night. Thank goodness I made him give it up when he came to live with me. I've never liked that tobacco you smoke any way. You won't be able to smoke next week when we are on holiday in a caravan, I can tell you! There is no getting away from it at all. It gets into the food, into your eyes, and hair...."

"Stop nagging, woman" he muttered, trying hard not to let a note of irritation creep into his voice. It was like this so often when he was with her. But she went on and on....if only she would stop!

"You'll have to stop now that I have put the washing out, or else move further down the garden, or into your potting shed."

The blue-grey smoke from his pipe seemed to give a little shiver of annoyance. The man almost felt the vibration in his left hand, as if someone had taken hold of his wrist and shaken it to gain his attention. He refilled his pipe with difficulty and lit it with his father's old lighter that had been a retirement present to him when he retired from work.

He thought of his father. Easy going, gentle Dad! He was never without his pipe. It went everywhere with him in the top pocket of his jacket. It was in his mouth unlit at times. The man recalled one afternoon when he was about fifteen years old. His father was wandering around the house looking for something and when asked what it was he was looking for he said it was his pipe. Knowing the importance of the pipe, everyone stopped what they were doing to join in the search. This went on for one exhausting hour until with a cry of,

"Dad..!" twelve year old Vera pointed to the pipe. "You have it in your mouth!".

There it was, held firmly between father's clenched teeth. This was something he was always reminded of with great affection, when anything was missing afterwards. Father was, and here, Rose was right again, rather untidy. As a family, the members were all rather slapdash except Rose, who was the odd one out. After their mother had died, Rose, being the eldest, took on the role of head of the house. The young ones, trained by Rose's eagle eye, managed to get by without too much bother, but Dad was in constant hot water and frequently had the sharp end of Rose's tongue. It was unfortunate that she was the only one in a position at the time to care for him when he became ill. Poor Dad! He always thought the best of every one and made the best of all situations. The man could almost hear his father's voice saying to him,

"Don't worry, boy, every thing will work out alright, you'll see."

The man gave three or four hard pulls at his pipe and let out a series of smoke rings that rose higher and higher into the air, so firm at first and blue-grey in colour. He watched them give little jerking movements before they began to lose shape and disappear from view.

"I wish you'd lose shape and disappear," he said to the retreating figure of his sister. Sensing something she turned to look at her brother in a puzzled sort of way. Catching his eye, she gave a contemptuous sniff and passed into the house.

He stayed where he was for a moment with his pipe, warm, and to him, fragrant, in his right hand. Just as he was about to knock the pipe out on the heel of his shoe, she came out again with some sheets to put on the line.

He waited until she had finished and was walking back towards the house. Then, putting the pipe between his lips as if he were a trumpeter about to sound, he let out a series of smoke rings that rose high into the air, but which did not lose their shape. They were firm and steady and kept their blue-grey colour. He saw with astonishment that they were drifting towards his sister. As they reached her they grew larger and hovered over her head. One by one they descended, pirouetting lightly before coming to rest on her head like a hat. She began to cough and splutter, with tears streaming down her face. She waved her arms in front of her face to disperse the smoke which she thought was coming from a neighbouring bonfire. The man watched them travel toward his sister, willing them to settle on her. He knocked his pipe out on the heel of his shoe saying as he did so,

"Ok, ok. I suppose I'll have to put it out now."

The pipe seemed to move in his hand as he walked slowly after her as she made her way into the house. The rings of smoke sailed gently along keeping at a distance of about six feet in front of him. When Rose was within ten feet of the house, he blew at them a long, steady puff of breath. They danced and twisted, rose and fell. They expanded to a yard in circumference, then retracted to their original pipe size. He gave another puff. This sent them scudding through the air at a furious rate until they came to Rose. They settled on her head, and began to expand once more, and one by one to slowly slip over her, coming to rest like a fur collar. She started to cough again, putting one hand on her chest and the other on her head. For a moment or two it seemed as if she might collapse, so violent did the attack become. Tears streamed down her face. She could not speak, although her mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water. Once inside the house, she sank down into the nearest chair and closed her eyes. Jean, the man's wife, went to her side.

"Whatever is the matter with you? I saw you from the window waving your arms about and coughing. This is not like you, Rose!"

"It's the smoke, Jean! I don't know where it came from but it nearly choked me when I was in the garden just now."

"I saw no smoke at all - only John smoking his pipe - and he was sitting at the bottom of the garden."

"It was smoke, I tell you! It was Father's tobacco smoke; I'd know it anywhere. It was Old City tobacco."

"You were quite alright half an hour ago" said Jean. "Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Yes, please, Jean,. I don't feel at all well. I think I will go and lie down for a while. I may have a cold coming. If I don't feel any better tomorrow, I think I will go home."

The man following her into the house paused in the doorway. Turning to look skywards, he waved his pipe several times at the mistiness the smoke rings had left behind. He put the pipe away carefully into its rack on the wall, patting it in an affectionate and conspiratorial way.

"Keep up the good work, Dad." he said.

"What did you say?" asked Rose sharply.

"John always says that, and "Goodnight, Dad" when he has been smoking Dad's old pipe." said Jean.

"Is that Dad's old pipe?" gasped Rose.

"Yes, it is..." answered John with a wicked gleam in his eye.

"You had better look out for yourself, old dear."

So saying, he strolled down the garden to pack up his deck chair and disappeared into his potting shed.

Wall

"This," said the estate agent, "is a very charming house."

He guided the young couple around droning on and on as he walked swiftly from room to room. Downstairs, upstairs, and downstairs again. Mary saw the stained glass window on the landing ceiling which let in the sunlight through a plain glass skylight set in the roof. Philip was looking for such things as good flooring and dry walls.

Once downstairs again, Mary looked out of the french window that led into the garden. There were lilac trees in full bloom scenting the air. On the right, under two cypress trees was an old wall, as varied in colour as Autumn leaves. There were uneven bulges in it here and there, giving it the appearance of continual movement...a shimmering, rippling movement. It may have been a trick of the bright sunlight that caused it, but Mary felt uneasy as she did so, as if unseen eyes were all around. The agent ushered them into the garden. Mary drew a sharp breath and took hold of Philip's hand as they walked the length of the garden and back again. She kept her eyes on the wall, an uneasy feeling assailing her. Turning to the agent, she asked,

"This is a very curious wall! Is it very old?"

He hesitated for a moment.

"It is about four hundred years old, I believe. It is in very good condition and well preserved, yet I have never heard of any one repairing it. It is part of an old monastery built in the sixteen hundreds."

"Tell us a little more." said Philip.

"About four hundred years ago a monastery stood here. History has it that the monks were not all they should have been in their time. They were strange in their behaviour towards the younger generation of that time, as many a young person could have told had they been capable of doing so after a visit to the monastery. They would go to confession, and were returned by one of the monks in the evening who told relatives that their sins had turned their heads and brains. However, it is only hearsay, or old wives tales."

As they walked round the garden, Mary felt a strange sensation, as if her head was being caressed by a pair of soft, smooth hands that were faintly scented with sandalwood. She felt sick and afraid. Turning to Philip, she said,

"I don't like this garden very much."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Whatever is the matter with you? There is nothing wrong with the garden!"

"I don't know what it is," she said, "but there is something wrong with it."

Philip laughed.

"You have got the jitters. When I have the garden ship-shape, by moving that rockery further down the gardens, so that we can see the whole of the wall in one stretch, you will not know the place."

"Please, Phil, let us go into the house,"

Once inside, she recovered her good spirits and laughed at herself for being so silly.

"I'm sorry. I do like the house. It is the garden I don't like very much. It must be all those trailing weeds that put me off."

She asked the agent about the story attached to the wall.

"They do say that the monks used to bury their dead in the wall."

Philip whistled.

"I'd like to hear some more of this. It sounds very interesting."

As they turned to leave the house, Philip said he had left his gloves in the garden. As he went back to get them, Mary heard him whistling cheerfully, but then it stopped suddenly, and she heard him call out sharply to her,

"Mary! Mary!"

It was a frantic call for help. She flew into the garden but he was nowhere to be seen. She stood as if turned to stone.

She thought she heard the sound of low murmuring voices, of singing and chanting, that seemed to come louder and louder. The scent of sandalwood was very strong. Now a voice was in her ear, deep, soft and caressing.

"Marie, Marie, I am coming for you very soon. We shall have many happy hours together, you and I."

She felt soft hands smoothing her hair. She brushed them away and ran to the wall. Here she found one of Philip's gloves on the ground, by the rockery. The other was held prisoner in the brickwork of the wall, its fingers struggling to be free. She saw a strange new bulge in the wall that had not been there before. She beat on the wall with her hands and clung to the still fluttering glove, feeling the warmth of Philip's hand in hers. She heard evil, harsh laughter that made her blood run cold. She heard the sound of singing, and feet shuffling along.

The chanting grew louder and louder, then something pulled at the glove she was holding.

"Let him go, you devils!" She screamed. "Philip! Philip, where are you? Come back! Oh, where are you?"

The chanting grew to a deafening crescendo. The wall heaved and swayed, then fell into a crumbling mass of brick dust. Mary all but fainted.

When she recovered, Philip was bending over her.

"Mary! Are you alright? What is the matter?"

"What happened to you, Philip?"

"I went into the garden for my gloves and I felt quite giddy for a while, and like a fool, I called out to you."

Mary clung to him for a moment.

"Oh, Philip!", was all she said, but she could still feel the fingers of the glove fluttering in her hand. They both looked at the heap of coloured brick dust.

"How did it fall,?" she asked.

"Oh, I just gave it a push," Philip laughed in a strange way.

But he did not tell her the whole truth, that as he went into the garden he seemed to be seized by a mighty pair of arms, and was dragged for some yards across the ground. He had heard voices speaking around him. He was taken into a building which he saw a chapel, part of a monastery. All around were old hand carvings and beautifully worked hangings in rich golds, reds, and blues. A monk was seated at the organ, his body swaying to the rhythm of the music he was playing. The sound reached the most tremendous heights, then dropped to an almost soundless movement of the player's hands. The monks sang with voices of most wondrous beauty. As the last "Amen" rang out, Philip was led out to the front and swung round to face the congregation. Their faces appalled him.

He put his hands over his eyes, then a voice rang out, loud and clear.

"Brother Philip, you rebel against all our teachings. You have been here five years and still you do not conform. The only answer is death!"

Philip started forward, but a pair of brawny arms held him back. He fought to free himself and running, to the altar, he turned, and with eyes blazing he faced the two hundred monks clad in their purple robes held in place by scarlet girdles.

"Yes, I rebel. I rebel against your hypocrisy," he cried.

"Your souls are black and tortured. You walk, eat, sleep and pray. Your prayer books under your arms, while everyday and night you are thinking up fresh devilry, and how to corrupt the innocent and the ignorant yet again. You gorge yourselves, your bloated bodies groan under their weight while children starve. You soak yourselves in red wine, red as the blood that trickles down the backs of those you have flogged for daring to murmur against you and your....,"

Half a dozen monks seized him and forced him to his knees before he had time to say any more.

"Death is the only way out!"

The soft voice of Brother Mark came to him, Brother Mark, the most feared monk of all.

"Death is the only way out for dissenters. We will take him to the wall and make him comfortable. This evening I shall bring his sister to see him. I will show him how we care for his grieving, loved ones when he is no longer here to help them. I shall look after the gentle Marie when he, Brother Philip, is no longer with us"

He waved a strong, white hand towards one of the other monks.

"Brother Peter, go with all haste to Eastwich and bring back the young lady known as Marie Wofen. Tell her that her brother, Philip, is ill and wishes to see her. Go as soon as possible. Tell her to come prepared to stay for several days and tell her that we shall take all possible care of her."

The monk bowed his head and hurried away.

The monks led Philip away and locked him in his cell. He gave a great cry of helplessness. He knew there was nothing he could do to stop his sister coming, as they had always been very close friends. He also knew the monks would use force on her if they felt like using it.

After what seemed to him to be about four hours, they came for him again and led him through the cool corridors out into the garden. They led him down the stone, flagged pathway towards the old wall under the two cypress trees on the eastern side of the chapel. Here six monks were waiting with Brother Mark at the head, hands in the sleeves of his cassock, his eyes lowered to the ground. As Philip drew nearer he saw another figure, a small and slender girl, with grey eyes, large and luminous under a blue hood. It was his sister, Marie. She started forward to meet him but was held back by Brother Mark.

"Philip,! Philip!"

She freed herself from her captor and flew to him.

They said you were ill and soon to die. They said that I had to come at once because you needed me. What ever does it mean? What are they going to do to you?"

"I have told you never to come here on any reason whatsoever."

Philip caught her hand in his own, and tried to pull her a little nearer to him.

"You know well enough what they do to us here when we finally see them for what they really are. And you also know what will happen to you when I can no longer protect you. Why did you come?"

He bent down to kiss her, but she was pulled away from him and was dragged crying to the side of Brother Mark. He saw that she was held firmly in his arms. The eyes of Brother Mark were like two hard, blue pebbles in his head as he looked at Philip from under their hooded lid

"Marie! Marie!"

They dragged him to the wall and forced him into an empty cavity and while two monks held him firmly, they bricked him in the opening, brick by multi-coloured brick. He saw her weeping helplessly in the arms of Brother Mark, he saw the blue of her cloak, then his vision blurred. The full horror of it descended on him as the bricks reached his chest. He could just see where Brother Mark stood with eyes gloating above his many chins. Philip struggled to be free; he felt as if he were choking...choking....."

"Marie! Marie!"

He gave a despairing cry, and giving a final struggle to free himself he pushed at the wall, then became still.

"Yes," said Philip to Mary, "I stumbled in the garden and fell against the wall. I put my hand out to save myself, I gave it a push and the whole thing collapsed around me."

He tightened his hold on her.

"I was so frightened," she said. "For a while I could not see you. It must have been the sun in my eyes".

Philip turned to Mary, and stared at her in amazement.

"You know! How did you know?" he exclaimed

"I heard them," she answered, "I thought I felt them too. They were in the garden - and the scent of sandlewood."

"Do you know," he said, "I think we will take this house and beat them yet." - finally acknowledging the truth of their experience.

"You don't think they will be too strong for us.?" asked Mary.

"Not now! The wall is destroyed and with that their memory. I feel sure they are gone for ever. Of course, we shall have to get rid of the cypress trees as well, and that will finish everything."

The voice of the estate agent broke in on them.

"Have you seen enough of the house? I would be a pity to let it slip away from you. I take it that you intend to buy?"

"Yes, we'll buy it." said Mary and Philip together.

"It is an odd thing," said the agent, "but for a moment or two you both seemed to disappear from view as you walked down the garden about a quarter of an hour ago."

"It must have been the sun in your eyes", said Mary.

The agent ushered them into his waiting car. As they left the house they heard blackbird singing its heart out with joy.