

# **The Wretched**

*~ a Victorian adventure ~*

**by**

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# **Contents**

## **Part One**

### **The Pursued and the Pursuer**

**The Convict** page 1

**The Inspector** page 6

**The Prison Guard** page 10

**Rumours and Partings** page 17

**The Running Man** page 21

## **Part Two**

### **Arrivals**

**Bristol** page 25

**Watching** page 32

**Enter the Llandoger** page 35

**A Case Review** page 42

**A Lack of Cooperation** page 47

**The Shootist** page 50

## **Part Three**

### **Of Monkeys and Games**

**A Monkey, Melancholia and Mal Français** page 55

**Alice in Bristol** page 63

**A Backroom Meeting** page 69

**Parlour Games** page 75

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# **Contents**

*continued*

## **Part Four Captive Problems**

**Strangers Upstairs, Danger Downstairs** page 82

**Captured** page 86

**The Second Escape** page 90

**A Chief Inspector Calls** page 93

## **Part Five Bring It Crashing Down**

**Strike First, Strike Hard** page 97

**Saturday Night/Sunday Morning** page 100

**Restless Feelings** page 104

**Peel; Peeled; Peeler** page 109

**Arrivals and Departure Preparations** page 112

**The Horse Trough** page 117

**This Woman's Work** page 121

## **Part Six The Wretched**

**The Aftermath** page 123

**The Stalked and the Stalkers** page 126

**A Little Breaking and Entering in the Night** page 131

**This Mortal Coil** page 135

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~ Part One ~  
**The Pursued and the Pursuer**

**Chapter 1**  
**The convict**

August 1885  
Monday  
Early evening into night into Tuesday morning  
Dartmoor, County of Devon

John Michael Fitzpatrick, an escaped convict known to all who mattered and some that didn't, as Fistie, lay face down in a shallow gully; his forehead and back damp with sweat; his legs, as he would say, aching like buggery and his lungs burning from exertion. For the last two hours, he had half-run, half-walked, trampled, and stumbled his way across the rugged, undulating moorland of Dartmoor.

At first, he'd headed to the trees and scrubland a short distance from the prison and from there, made his way up to and crossed what he'd heard called, the Tavistock Road - to Fistie, it were little more than a wide cartway. "Come to London," he muttered to himself. "We got proper roads there."

Then he followed the line of boundary stones that marked out the boundary of the prison land and led away in a rough north by north west direction. As he passed each stone, he gave it a pat with his hand, smiling that even these, like everything belonging to Her Majesty's Prisons, were marked with a broad prison arrow.

After the sixth or seventh stone, the markers finished but he carried on, trying to keep a straight track: every so often he'd stop and turn, aiming to keep the last boundary stone square behind him. But soon it was out of sight. Regardless, he ploughed on, every foot fall another step further from the prison. Distance was his only currency, the only wealth he was interested in amassing.

By degrees and turns Fistie slipped into marshy peat bogs, tripped over half-buried stones, and snagged and scratched himself on gorse bushes. Finally, losing his footing completely, he'd fallen into the dried-out gully.

How long he'd lain there, he was unsure: fifteen minutes, thirty, an hour? Surely not an hour? No, never an hour; since being a wretched prisoner, he had lost all sense of time - his days chiming to nothing other than the turn of keys in heavy locks; the regimented shouting of guards and of meal times.

He shifted onto his side and peered over the edge of the gully. Although the afternoon light was starting to wane, edging towards evening, he could just make out the tall chimneys of Dartmoor prison, off to the south-east, maybe two miles away. By now, the prison guards will have realised he was missing. Hopefully the guard who'd helped him escape wouldn't blab straight away and give up the direction he'd headed.

Fistie sat up fully, looked around and satisfied himself, as best he could, he wasn't being pursued. Relaxing a little, he pulled out the hand-drawn map the guard had pressed into his hand, saying as he did so, "They said to give you this, you might need it."

Truth be told, the guard was only doing what he did because he'd been bribed and not through any belief Fistie should be free or that he subscribed to any bigger cause - whatever that may be.

"That reminds me, that do..." Fistie said to no one except himself. This was a habit he had developed since becoming detained at what everyone, except the Queen herself, called Her Majesty's pleasure.

"Just what be the bigger cause here? Be there a bigger cause? I thinks so, 'cause I were told Irish Fenians were behind me escape. But what be their grand plan, eh? Not that it matters; all I wants is to be free. I'll maybe worry about any conditions later."

Fistie studied the map; it showed the line of boundary stones and a path, maybe once an old drove-way, running up past the stones to and then around a small disused quarry. This moorland seemed dotted with quarries: the prison had one, there were a railway one that from what he'd gleaned, went from the town outside Dartmoor Prison to nowhere in particular and back again. So it weren't surprising there'd be a disused quarry, small or otherwise.

He returned his attention to the map. From what he'd experienced of this pathway already, it weren't really a path at all, drove-way or otherwise, at least not that he could see. At best it was a faint trail that came and went and veered off left and right, here and there.

Fistie made a sucking sound with his teeth; if he kept the prison or at least where he thought the prison was, more or less to his back and the sun roughly to his left, he should be going north-west and would easily get to the quarry, where, so he'd been told, someone would be waiting for him.

Unless, of course, the map were completely wrong, he had no sense of direction, and the quarry didn't lie north-west of the prison at all! He put that thought to one side.

"Be useful to be at the quarry afore dark; get the lay of the land, so to speak. I don't want to go blundering in, just in case, like. Trust no one and you won't be disappointed."

He looked up at the sky. "Now, I reckon I still got me just enough time an' light afore the day settles itself into sunset."

Fistie took one last look at the map then folded it up but kept it in his hand. From what he'd been told, the someone at the quarry would wait for him, at least until morning. That same person would then get him out of the county and up to Bristol. After that... Fistie shrugged. "Whatever happens, happens." He took one more glance around, then stood up and set off.

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## The Disused Quarry

Fistie awoke with a start and was at first confused. He thought he was still in his prison cell, but no; the usual smell of overnight piss and shit from his slop bucket, and the sound of heavy doors opening and closing, as well as booted feet on stone flooring, had been replaced by birdsong, and the smell of burnt wood.

His brain slowly engaged as his eyes began to focus in the grey, pre-dawn light and he took in his surroundings. No, Fistie-mate, he told himself, this ain't your cell.

"Aye," he said with a croaky voice. "It all be drifting back to us now."

He'd made it to the small, disused quarry, less than a handful of miles from the prison. However, given the wild, untamed Dartmoor terrain, a few miles here would be easily equal to twice that distance anywhere else, or so Fistie told himself.

He stiffly got to his feet; the building he was in was little more than a ruin with only half a roof and two walls. Perhaps it may once have been a storehouse for the quarry, an office of sorts even. On one side of the room, to the right of where he stood, was a pile of ash and scavenged wood that had been last night's fire. Near his feet a scrunched-up ball of paper that had contained some sandwiches; he'd kept the paper in case he needed to start a new fire. Given the choice, he'd like as not light one now. Despite it being summer, the moorland retained little warmth after the sun went down, unlike the London he'd grown up and lived in, where brick and iron and concrete soaked up the summer heat, giving by turns sultry nights, restless sleep, and frayed tempers.

"I feels as wretched as one of them reptiles they got in London Zoo." Fistie said aloud to no one other than himself. "Needs some sun to get me blood flowin', I does."

He yawned and sucked on his teeth, his eyes falling on the body lying breathless, cold, and dead against the wall. What sort of escape was this was turning out to be? If he were caught, he knew exactly how it would look; an escaped convict found with a dead body...

He spat on the floor and cursed; when he'd arrived last night, at sunset, the man was already dead. He didn't look like he'd been robbed or done in, so maybe it were his heart that had packed up. He'd seen that sort of thing before had Fistie, blokes keeling over for no other reason than their heart had decided enough were enough. But still, this were not good as far as the escape plan went; he could see himself getting re-caught and put up before the local magistrate post-haste.

"Well, it were like this, Your Honour; yes, I did escape, but I didn't kill no one. The man were dead when I got to the quarry. No, he weren't dead cos I killed him. I reckon he must've died on his own, like. No, I ain't no doctor, Your Honour, but I knows a dead body when I sees one. Have I seen very many dead bodies? Yes, Your Honour, I served my country as a lad in the Opium War. I seen plenty of dead bodies in that one, mostly Chinamen, but a dead body is a dead body, Your Honour."

Fistie allowed himself a little smile, then slowly stretched his arms and clicked his back; the chill of the Dartmoor night had crept into his bones. He pulled out and opened a cigarette packet; there were three, no, three and a half cigarettes left. He took out and lit

the half-one and inhaled, immediately coughing and spluttering. Fistie nodded his head at the dead body.

“Ta for these; I found ‘em in that leather satchel o’ yours, with another packet, a note book, and a map that I’ll look at later. There was some sandwiches an’ all, which by-the-by was stale. Beggars can’t be choosers, tho’, eh? I will say this: you could have at least gotten yourself some decent salmon an’ trout. Huh? Nah, I ain’t meaning fish; you knows or maybe don’t: Cockney slang, London East End talk; salmon an’ trout, you know, snout.”

Fistie tutted.

“Cigarettes, you bloody cork-bark! Snout is cigarettes! These tastes like they was swept up from the tobacco house floor. Ain’t no wonder you up an’ died.”

Fistie finished the half-cigarette, then used it to light a new one, flicking the stub into the fire ashes.

“Mind you’s, I s’pose I ought to be more respectful an’ not call you a cork-bark, given how I got some Irish in me somewhere. Long ago, though. I only really got the surname now by way of connection an’ that were handed down. You was proper Irish, tho’ I don’t doubt. Heart like a shamrock; believe in the cause an’ everythin’, did you? That were like my Mary; she were your full cream Irish, right enough. Aye, but then she up an’ left us. Me gettin’ banged up for trying to shunt off the Queen were the last straw. Well, that ain’t exactly true. It were more me completely failing to shunt off the Queen. You know what I means, don’t thee? Aye, you got it, that’s right, assassinate the Queen. Then I gets caught; that’s what did it really. Them two things. She said to me, and I can still hear her voice as plain as day.

"Fistie, you are a rogue, and even though I have love enough for you, I will not wait around."

Course she had to say that; at the time I were in a holding cell with a crowd of flat foots, you know, police, lookin’ on. Gotta laugh—that were the same week she sold off me pawn shop. Lock, stock, and bloody barrel. Wrote an’ told me she did. Blimey, imagine if we’d been proper married, would’ve taken me soul an’ all! She were worth every penny, tho’.

Right then, let's get this smoked, have a good cough, an’ get you sorted out. I wants to be far away from here.

Fistie finished the cigarette, flicked the butt away, then bent over and, with his hands on his knees, coughed until he had hocked up enough phlegm to spit out a satisfying gob. Pleased with himself, he set about his next task, dragging the cold, stiff body away from the wall and stripping its clothes.

“Quite opportune, as they says, that we are of the same height. But I must say, you have been dining a lot better than me. And it’s good of you to agree to this clothes swap—not that you got much choice, of course. Just hoping I can get me prison clobber on you, mate.”

Twenty minutes later, having succeeded in the clothes swap, Fistie dragged the now prison-uniformed corpse out of the ruined building and a short distance along a narrow path that ran above the quarry.

“Right me Irish, matey, I needs you to help out Fistie here a bit more. As you can sees, you is wearing me prison clobber. Now that in itself ain’t going to be enough. So, I am going to push you down into the quarry. With a bit o’ luck, even tho’ it only be what, a fifteen or twenty-foot drop, maybe a touch more, you’ll land face down, an’ from up here all anyone will see is a dead prisoner. Clever, eh? Now, that should delay things a bit. But,” Fistie smiled at the corpse, “you knew there were a ‘but’ coming, didn’t thee. I needs as much time as I can get.”

Fistie picked up a heavy rock. “Don’t thee worry, it ain’t going to hurt cos you already be dead. S’pose I ought to say sommat first. Erm, Mother, Mary of Joseph. No, that don’t sound right; Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, is that it? Shite, who knows. Fistie, thanks you for your dedication to the cause.”

With that, Fistie dropped the heavy rock onto the face of the corpse—once, then twice. The corpse’s face was smashed in, more so on one side than the other, and to all intents and purposes, was now unrecognisable.

“With any luck, they’ll think you is me and that I took a stumble in the dark, then had a nasty tumble over the side here, down into the quarry, an’ got me face all messed up. That should call off the search, cos they is goin’ to think old Fistie is dead. Whereas in truth, I am a goner, as in gone from here.”

Fistie stepped back, tossed the rock away, then dropped to his knees and rolled the corpse over the edge and down into the quarry. He didn’t bother to see how the corpse landed; instead, he pulled out the small, hand-drawn map he’d found earlier in his newly acquired satchel.

“Another bloody, home-drawn map. Instead o’ fightin’ for the cause, you should have just opened yourselves a map shop; could’ve done a right roaring trade making pixie maps. Right, let’s get our marching shoes on and make haste.” He squinted at the name on the map.

“We needs to head for... Peter Tavy? Is that a fella? If it be, he got himself a sister by the name o’ Mary Tavy, cos her name’s here as well. Perhaps it means if Peter Tavy ain’t around when I gets there, I needs to go on a bit and find his sister, Mary. Mind you, Tavy don’t sound much like an Irish name. I ain’t bothered who it be tho’, long as there be a station with a train to get me away and maybe a bite of sommat. Aye, a nice bit o’ sommat tasty for Fistie’s gullet.”