

The Wretched

a Victorian Crime Thriller

by

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This book is dedicated to
Victor
and Vianden, too.

Author's Note

This is a follow-on
of sorts to
my other Victorian-set thriller
The Carpetbagger.
Can it be read independently
of that book?
Yes, both texts while sharing
a common character
are not
interdependent.

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Please note
this book contains
descriptions of
terrorism;
physical violence,
sexual threat and abuse.
Some characters have
questionable moral stances
and use potentially
upsetting language.

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

Chapter 1
The Convict

August 1885
Early Monday evening
going into Monday night,
and then into Tuesday morning
The area surrounding
Dartmoor Prison, County of Devon

John Michael Fitzpatrick, newly escaped convict known to all who mattered and some that didn't as Fistie, lay face down in a shallow dried out gully; his forehead and back wet with sweat; his legs, as he would say, aching like buggery, while his lungs burned 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.

Hours earlier, his escape had begun quite slowly. Under the guise of a work detail a guard, bought with a generous bribe, had escorted Fistie across the open yard outside the cell blocks, up through the heavy double doors of the inner gateway then onward to Dartmoor Prison's distinctive prisoner-built archway, with its chiseled Latin inscription: *Parcere Subjectis —Spare the Vanquished.*

It was under the archway that Fistie's pulse had suddenly quickened. He feared here on the cusp, the very threshold of freedom, he'd be thwarted. Would the guard turn to him and smirk, "Not happening today, mate." Then drag him back to the cell block, laughing all the way at his cruel prank?

No; no such taunting. The guard glanced around, "All clear," he said in an almost whisper and pressed something in Fistie's hand.

Still glancing around, the guard added; "They said to give you that, you might be needing it. It's a map. Now if it were me, I'd head for that cluster of trees over there. You then needs to follow the boundary stones. Off you go, go on. Scarper and be bloody quick about it!"

Without a further word the guard turned and began walking back to the double inner doors.

Fistie didn't need telling twice; he bolted across the open ground toward the trees and scrubland some tens of yards from the prison's archway entrance. There he threw himself into the undergrowth and pressed his body flat against the earth and began to count—slowly, deliberately—waiting for the inevitable high-pitched, piercing sound of whistles; shouts of alarm and the scurrying of pursuing boots. But none came.

After a full sixty-seconds, counted as slowly as he dared, the only sound to be heard was the pounding of blood in his ears as his heart beat out a frantic rhythm like some demented kettle drummer.

Fistie got to his feet and crouching low, used the trees as cover to hurriedly make his way up to and across what he'd heard the guards call, Tavistock Road—to Fistie it seemed little more than a wide cart-way.

“Come to London,” he'd gasped. “We got proper roads there.”

From thence and without pausing to fully catch his breath, he followed the boundary stones marking out the edge of the prison estate; leading him away from the austere Granite Palace that was Dartmoor Prison in a rough north west direction.

As he passed each boundary stone, Fistie gave it a kick with his boot, smiling that even these like everything belonging to the prison, were marked with a broad arrow and the initials DCP - Directors of Convict Prisons.

The boundary stones ended after maybe the seventh or eighth stone but Fistie continued on. Every so often he'd stop and turn, checking the last boundary stone was still square behind him. But all too soon the stone disappeared, swallowed into the landscape. Regardless he ploughed on; every foot fall another step further from the prison. Distance was his currency, the only wealth he was interested in amassing.

By degrees and turns, in his haste to amass this wealth, Fistie slipped into marshy peat bogs, tripped over half-buried rocks and snagged and scratched himself on gorse bushes. Finally losing his footing completely, he'd fallen into the 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 more than the turn of keys in heavy locks; the regimented shouting of guards and of meal times—such as they were.

He shifted to his side and peered over the top of the gully. Although the afternoon light was starting to change as it prepared to edge towards evening, he could still make out the rooftops of the prison off to the south-east, maybe two miles or more away. By now the other prison guards will have assuredly realised he was missing. Hopefully the guard who'd helped him would hold his tongue and not give up the direction he'd headed.

Sitting up fully, Fistie looked around and satisfied himself as best he could he wasn't being pursued. Relaxing a little, he opened out the hand-drawn map the guard had pressed into his hand.

The guard had only helped him because he'd been bribed, that much was true, and not through any belief Fistie deserved to be free or that he subscribed to any bigger cause...

"That reminds me that do..." Fistie said to no one other than himself.

Talking out aloud was a habit he had developed since becoming detained at what everyone, except the Queen herself no doubt, called Her Majesty's pleasure.

“...Just what be the bigger cause here?” Fistie continued, engaging in what theatre-land would call a soliloquy; in pubs the ramblings of a drunk and anywhere else, a ticket to Bedlam.

Undeterred by any of this, Fistie addressed himself and if it cared to listen, the bleak moorland.

“Be there a bigger cause at play here? I thinks so; Fistie doth think so, aye. For I were told Irish Fenians were behind me escape. They likely paid that guard a handsome bribe I imagine, aye. And for that I thank them. But what be their grand plan, eh? Not that it matters; all I wants is to be free.”

Fistie paused and looked around then shouted.

“Free Fistie!”

He grinned and made a sucking sound with his teeth.

“Maybe I’ll fret over any conditions later...”

Fistie smoothed out and studied the roughly drawn map; it showed the line of boundary stones; the so-called Tavistock Road and a path, maybe once an old drove-way, running up past the boundary stones and then onward to one of Dartmoor’s many rocky outcrops or tors, as they were known. From there the path wound around to a small quarry, marked as disused on the map.

This moorland seemed dotted with quarries Fistie mused: the prison had one; there was a railway one with a track that it was said, went from the town next to

Dartmoor Prison up to a quarry and back again and nowhere else. Then there were the slate, stone and lime quarries; so it wasn't surprising there'd be a disused quarry, small or otherwise that would be chosen as a meeting place.

He returned his attention to the map. From what he'd experienced of this pathway already, it wasn't really a path at all, drove-way or otherwise; leastways 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. More likely used by hungry sheep searching out better grazing than farmers herding their flocks to market.

Fistie sucked his teeth again and looked up at the sky.

"It be a good thing the Lord hath sent a blue sky with only a few clouds. At least He be giving me a chance. Best not tell that I ain't one for religion."

Fistie gave a smile then decided; if he kept the prison or at least where he thought the prison to be, more or less to his back and the sun roughly to his left, he should be going north-west or more properly north by north-west and would easily get to the quarry where so he'd been told, someone would be waiting for him.

Unless of course, Fistie rolled his eyes; he had no sense of direction and the map was completely wrong or the sky suddenly went cloudy, and rain came down in sheets and the quarry didn't lie north-west or even north by north-west of the prison at all! He put those thoughts to one side.

“Be useful to be at the quarry afore dark, me thinks. Get the lay of the land so to speak. I don’t want to go blundering in just in case it be hostile like. Trust no one and you won’t get disappointed.”

He looked up at the sky again; the clouds were the type that only seemed to appear in August.

“Now if you clouds stays up there and keeps being fluffed up and don’t darken, I reckon I still got me just enough time an’ light to reach the quarry 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; tomorrow morning. That same person would get him out of the county and up to Bristol. After that... Fistie shrugged.

“Whatever happens, happens.” He 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, dawn light and he took in his surroundings.

“Aye,” he spoke with a croaky voice. “It all be drifting back to us now. You be fine, Fistie-mate. This ain’t yer cell.

Fistie had made it to the small, disused quarry the previous evening in what had been the last useable light of the day. It was no more than a handful of miles from the prison, even less as the crow flies but given the wild, untamed Dartmoor terrain a few miles here would easily be equal to twice that distance anywhere else, crow or no straight-flying crow. Or so Fistie told himself.

He stiffly got to his feet; the building he’d awoken in was little more than a ruin with only a bit of roof and two walls. Perhaps it may once have been a storehouse for the quarry, an office of sorts even? On one side, 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. For 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. "I needs some sun to get me blood flowin' I does."

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

Fistie spat on the floor and cursed; when he'd arrived last night 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-captured 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, Your Honour. 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 gave a little shiver; 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. He nodded his head at the dead body.

“Ta for these, mate; 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 the smouldering butt to light a new one.



“Mind you’s, I s’pose I ought to be more respectful of yer Irishness an’ not call you a cork-bark, given how I got some Irish in me somewhere. Long ago tho’. I only really got the surname now by way of connection...” Fistie gave a shrug. “Aye an’ that were a hand-me-down.

I’ll bet you tho’ was proper Irish. 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 nabbed, caught. That’s what did it really. Them two things. It didn’t strike me as particularly fair but what can you do? So my Mary says 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 same week she sold off me bleedin’ 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 see, you is wearing me prison clobber. Now that in itself ain’t going be enough. So, I am going to push you down into the quarry. With a bit o’ luck, even tho’ it only be what, let’s see, a fifteen or twenty-foot drop, maybe a touch more maybe a tad less; 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. Aye, you did. 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."

Without further ceremony, Fistie dropped the heavy rock onto the face of the corpse—once, then twice; smashing the corpse's face, more so on one side than the other and to all intents and purposes the corpse was now unrecognisable.

"If all goes well, they'll think you is me and that I took a stumble in the dark then had a nasty tumble over the edge 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 or a wife 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 this 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."

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Chapter 2

The Inspector

Tuesday afternoon
Dartmoor Prison, County of Devon

The small office was basic, functional and lacking in anything that could be regarded as a comfort. Inspector Briggs stood with hands firmly planted in trouser pockets, his back to the room's one small window, watching the young detective sergeant squirm about uncomfortably on a wooden chair. A slight smile flickered across Briggs' face; he'd recognised the style of chair as soon as they'd entered the room: built for robustness and durability, more for standing next to than sitting on. It was the type of chair that usually out of necessity, sported a cushion of some description, he'd even come across one employed by a bookkeeper, with a pillow fastened to it. But here there was no such accommodation.

"Not a chair designed for comfort, Williams, more discomfort. It seems to convey that while the Governor of Dartmoor Prison is happy to see prisoners, he doesn't want them to outstay their welcome."

Williams stood up and rubbed the seat of his trousers. He would prefer it if the inspector addressed him as *detective sergeant*. Or even, *Detective Sergeant Williams*. He'd worked hard to get himself into Scotland Yard, *done himself real good* as his old ma would say. He rubbed the seat of his trousers again.

“How long does he expect his prisoners to sit still on these chairs for? I suspect the stools in the cells offer more ease.” Williams looked around for a clock.

“I doubt if the Governor’s average meeting with a prisoner lasts more than a few minutes. Having sat in the chair for a good 10 minutes, I would say Williams, you’ve done exceptionally well. You likely won’t find a clock in here either, if that is what you are looking for. Clocks only serve to remind a prisoner of how slow their day passes.”

Williams paced back-and-forth for a moment. “It’s all very plain in here, nothing fancy at all; surprised he ain’t set up his office in an empty cell.”

Briggs smiled and stepped away from the window, unpocketing his hands as the door to the office opened.

“Inspector, the Governor sends his apologies for having made you wait. My name is Boyle. I am the Governor’s secretary. If you will follow me, I will take you to the Governor now. ”

The secretary stood to one side. “The office is this way.” He pointed down the corridor. “This room here is used mostly for interviewing prisoners.”

Briggs and Williams followed Boyle to a rather more inviting and comfortable-looking office. The Governor, in a well-upholstered leather covered chair behind a well-ordered desk, got to his feet as they entered.

“Inspector, Sergeant; welcome to Dartmoor Prison. Boyle here has arranged tea and sandwiches.”

The Governor extended his hand.

“Now, I know you would not have got this far without displaying your credentials, but if you will indulge me. After recent events, I think it would be prudent.”

“Of course, Governor. Thank you for making us welcome.”

Briggs shook the Governor’s hand then reached into an inside jacket pocket and produced his Scotland Yard warrant card. The Governor glanced over the card and handed it to Boyle who noted down the inspector’s rank, number and name; Detective Inspector Reginald Briggs; Warrant Card no. 58258.

“And your credentials, Sergeant?”

Williams held out a folded piece of paper.

“This is unusual, is it not?” the Governor remarked, unfolding the paper to reveal the Scotland Yard letterhead, a brief, typed paragraph and the signature of the Chief Superintendent of the Detective Department.

“A letter of authority rather than an actual warrant card?”

Briggs gave a slight cough. “Detective Sergeant Williams misplaced his warrant card prior to our leaving. The note from the Chief Superintendent confirms he holds...” his voice trailed off.

Williams had not been Briggs' first choice; he was too new to Scotland Yard and losing his warrant card was careless.

"...I will naturally attest for Williams, Governor."

The Governor nodded and passed the note to Boyle who recorded Williams' details then folded and gave back the letter of authority, the slightest hint of a smile on his face.

Settling into his chair, the Governor indicated for Briggs and Williams to sit then motioned to a large tray perched at the end of his desk.

"I am not sure if you have already taken lunch. My suspicion is you may have barely had time for breakfast before your departure from London." He looked at his pocket watch.

"Indeed you have made good time to have arrived here for two o' clock. Please, gentlemen, be seated."

Williams took the chair nearest the tray of tea and sandwiches and lifted a corner of the square cloth covering the food.

"Boyle, will you do the honours. I can see the sergeant, sorry, detective sergeant, is keen for replenishment."

Without a word Boyle uncovered the sandwiches and passed empty plates to Briggs who declined, and Williams whose face betrayed that he would be happy to consume Briggs' share.

Boyle lifted the plate of small, triangular cut sandwiches from the tray and offered them to Williams who took two and then a third. By the time Boyle had poured three cups of tea, Williams was reaching out for a fourth sandwich.

“Please, Detective Sergeant Williams, do not hold back. They are there to be eaten.” The Governor turned to Briggs. “How would you like to begin, Inspector?”

“Williams here will take down notes and I assume Boyle will do the same for you?”

The Governor nodded and adjusted his seating, pushing further into his chair and the chair itself back from the desk.

Briggs noted the Governor’s defensive move. Clearly he felt uncomfortable and so he should. He was after all ultimately culpable regarding Fitzpatrick’s escape. Perhaps he had been too lax or insufficiently engaged in the day-to-day operations of the prison..?

“Let us begin then,” said Briggs. “I understand, Governor, the prisoner effected his escape yesterday afternoon. Perhaps we can start with the basics? Confirmation of the prisoner’s full name, prison number, time here and so forth.”

“Boyle?” The Governor looked at his secretary who opened a dark grey card folder.

"Prisoner 312, John Michael Fitzpatrick. Age 56 or is it, 58, the ink has smudged somewhat."

"Also known as Fistie," Williams offered through a mouthful of his fifth sandwich.

Boyle continued; "He was transferred here six months ago after spending time in..."

Briggs held up his hand. "That will be sufficient thank you. We are indeed talking about the right man."

"Prisoner..." Williams unhelpfully interjected.

"Quite." Briggs gave Williams an irritated look then continued. "The Home Secretary was hoping *prisoner* Fitzpatrick would simply wither and die in prison. Instead he thrived, running a business of sorts from his prison cell; bribing right, left and centre and becoming far too comfortable; hence his transfer here to the remoteness of Dartmoor."

"Yes, Inspector, it is a shame he was not charged with treason and his neck stretched. But evidence is evidence and lawyers will do what lawyers will always do."

"I would concur with you Governor. However, I am merely here to undertake an investigation and hopefully recapture Fitzpatrick and not pass judgement. That is for those who sit on higher benches than I. Now, as far as we are concerned, I understand Fitzpatrick was allowed to simply walk out unchallenged at some point yesterday afternoon."

Briggs glanced over at Williams to check he was taking notes. He hadn't, beyond writing 'Fistie' and a childish drawing of a noose.

"Perhaps Boyle could furnish me with a copy of his notes, once our meeting is concluded, Governor?"

Boyle smiled in a smug, self-satisfied way. He too had observed Williams' lack of diligence.

"Would it be fair to say, Fitzpatrick was assisted in his escape? I have little information beyond being told he had absconded. Naturally I knew his name instantly given that he had been embroiled in a failed assassination attempt on the Queen. His accomplice, the only one with a gun, at least according to Fitzpatrick, died while attempting to escape following arrest. There was some talk of a third person but nothing came of it.

The only surprising thing is that Fitzpatrick has waited three years before attempting an escape."

"Indeed, Inspector Briggs, I would have preferred he undertook his escape while he was imprisoned in London. But there you are, such are the cards we are dealt.

He was assisted in his escape, I am disappointed to admit, by one of our very own guards. Needless-to-say, the guard concerned has been identified, detained and placed in a cell. You will no doubt want to interview him?"

Briggs nodded. "But first, what steps you have taken to search for Fitzpatrick?"

"By the time Fitzpatrick's absence was confirmed, and that he had in fact escaped and been assisted by Prison Guard Moreton, it was almost sunset. I did send out a party of four guards to conduct a search of the immediate exterior of the prison and a further two guards into Princetown..." The Governor spread his hands.

"Inspector Briggs, Dartmoor is a stark and uninviting place, more so at night." He paused. "The police sergeant in Princetown was alerted. Given the closeness of Princetown and that some of our guards reside there, it seems unlikely Fitzpatrick would head to the town.

Although, Moreton and his wife do themselves have a house in Princetown. And yes, the house was thoroughly searched last night."

"And this morning? I assume with daylight you ordered a full search?"

"As we speak, two parties of four prison guards each are combing the moor. Fitzpatrick's choices are at best limited, especially dressed as he is in prison uniform."

"What of Moreton's wife? Has she been questioned? Her potential involvement considered?"

"Yes, Inspector. But she claimed to know nothing and Moreton assured me he acted on his own."

Briggs got to his feet and buried his hands in his trouser pockets. He looked dissatisfied with the Governor's answers.

"I suppose Moreton would say that would he not? I should like to see him now."

"Yes, of course. Boyle will escort you. I thought it pertinent to keep Moreton in a holding cell away from the main cell block. One or two of the guards expressed their displeasure with him in a physical way...

Until this incident we prided ourselves, Inspector Briggs, on running a tight ship with everyone interdependent. It now seems that impression was only skin deep."

The Governor shook his head in a resigned manner.

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### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Prison Guard**

Tuesday afternoon  
Dartmoor Prison, County of Devon

The cell Moreton had been allotted differed from those in the main block only in the absence of a bed, its place taken instead by a thin roll-up mattress. Much like the chairs in the Governor's spare office, the mattress was designed for discomfort.

Moreton, still wearing his prison guard uniform albeit minus the frock coat, stood up as the cell door opened. Williams entered but Briggs loitered in the doorway with Boyle to his right and a prison guard to his left.

"Thank you, Boyle. You need not wait. We will find our way back in due course."

Briggs saw no reason to give Boyle the courtesy of addressing him as Mr. He had a dislike of what he regarded as petty bureaucrats. He also had an odd inkling about Boyle - the man seemed...too smug almost as if he were taking some pleasure from the escape of Fitzpatrick.

"I must insist I remain Inspector, as will the guard here. The Governor cannot countenance any further..." he paused, "...mishaps."

Briggs gave a little smile. "Quite right and proper."

He stood to one side and motioned for Boyle to enter the cell.

Briggs had remained on the threshold for good reason; as the cell door opened he'd noticed the full-to-the brim slop bucket in the far corner. This suggested one of two things; either Moreton had suffered very loose bowels during the night, something that was possible as a result of his predicament or it was a present from the prison guards, another way of expressing their disapproval of Moreton's actions. Either way, the stench emanating from the bucket was powerful...

Boyle immediately gagged on entering the cell, while Williams, having already inhaled the unpleasant stench, applied a handkerchief to his own mouth and nose.

Briggs gave a knowing look at the guard. "Perhaps you could arrange for a prisoner to empty the slop bucket."

The guard nodded but said nothing.

Moreton glanced at Boyle then Williams and Briggs.

"Has one of you got a smoke?" He patted his trouser pockets. "They took mine an' left me with this black eye an' that bucket of shite." He held a finger up to his right eye then jabbed a thumb over his shoulder at the bucket.

Briggs was observing Moreton's face, he couldn't be sure but there seemed to have been a flicker of something in Moreton's eyes when Boyle entered the cell. Recognition? Acknowledgement? As the secretary

had his back to him, Briggs couldn't be sure if something, a knowing look or signal had passed between the two. He filed the thought away for now.

"Williams, you are a partaker are you not? Please furnish Moreton with a cigarette."

Williams took a slim packet from his jacket pocket, looked inside then passed the packet to Moreton.

"Keep them; there's a couple of matches inside an' all."

"Before you light that, Moreton, I think it would be pertinent to step out of the cell. It does not smell like a safe environment into which a naked flame should be introduced."

Briggs stepped back from the cell doorway to allow Moreton and Williams to leave, but he barred Boyle's exit.

"Boyle, I should like to interview Moreton in the Governor's spare room. I assume you have no objection?"

"Very well. If you will let me pass, Inspector. The guard will need to handcuff and escort Moreton."

Williams stuffed his handkerchief into a pocket. "Quite a stench that, Mr Briggs. Weren't sure if I were going to get all overcome an' bring them sandwiches up."

Briggs studied Williams for a moment. On the train journey from London, he had begun to form an opinion



of the detective sergeant; he was a talker, the sort who given a willing audience, would allow his mouth to run away unguided like a truckle of cheese rolling down a hillside. Briggs had heard of villages in this part of the world where that was viewed as a sport of sorts, cheese rolling that is and not mouth running. But no doubt somewhere people did indulge in mouth-running contests. Where Briggs had grown up, men would likely have fought or even killed for a truckle of cheese.

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Back in the Governor's spare room, where they had waited earlier, Briggs returned to his position by the window. Williams settled on a chair but recalling its lack of comfort immediately stood up. Boyle took the slightly more comfortable-looking chair behind the desk.

A moment later the guard brought in Moreton and, as directed by Briggs, placed him on one of the two comfortless chairs in front of the desk. Briggs then addressed Boyle;

"I must apologise, Boyle. This interview is to be conducted under Scotland Yard protocols and I must therefore ask you to leave."

Boyle scowled at Briggs, uttered a curt, "As you wish," and left the room but not before, Briggs noticed, he threw Moreton a stern look.

The guard who had brought in Moreton took up station outside the door.

Williams opened his regulation notebook and made a scribbled note, to find out just what Scotland Yard protocols were...

"The door, if you don't mind, Williams. Let us not make it easy for any prying ears" Briggs turned to the seated Moreton.

"I am Detective Inspector Briggs and this is Detective Sergeant Williams. We are here regarding the escape, as you have no doubt guessed, of John Fistie Fitzpatrick. A prisoner you helped escape."

Moreton said nothing but instead with a somewhat unsteady hand, took a cigarette from the packet Williams had given him and on the second attempt managed to light it. He drew in heavily on the cigarette then slowly exhaled.

"It will be of help, Moreton, if you are cooperative and readily forthcoming. I believe Williams here is quite adept with a truncheon; I am told wrapped in a towel it doesn't bruise as much."

Moreton closed his eyes and slowly shook his head before looking up at Briggs, still stood with his back to the small window.

"What will I get, d'you know?"

Briggs shrugged. "You helped someone who had been implicated in an assassination attempt on the Queen to escape. I dare say that could be construed as you being complicit to treason. Albeit after the fact but most assuredly in line with the Accessories and Abettors Act of 1861. And as I am sure you are aware, treason carries the death penalty. Indeed, the Treason Act of 1814 requires not only hanging in treason cases but also the posthumous quartering of the subject..."

Moreton's face paled and he stared down at his hands. "And if I tells you everything I knows? What then? Will I get let off or will I still swing?"

"Perhaps if you come clean..." Briggs stepped away from the window.

"Look, Moreton, you are in serious trouble. I cannot simply pat you on the head, tell you not to do it again and let you go. You need to tell me everything. Everything! You will most certainly at the very least be given a prison sentence. From that I am afraid there is no escape."

"You could always ask the Home Secretary for a pardon." Williams offered sarcastically "Doubt if the Queen would give you one though, seeing how you helped someone who tried to kill her, escape."

Briggs folded his arms and shot Williams a testy look.

"It is obvious you are guilty, Moreton. Not once have you protested your innocence. Like everything though, there are degrees of guilt. If you come clean, here and now,

you would at least be able to unburden your conscience.”

“It ain’t much of a choice, is it? You might as well put me back in the cell. Seems little point in me giving up names if I ain’t gonna get nowt-all from it. So if you haven’t a farthing’s worth of hope to offer, I’ll hold me tongue.”

Briggs knew Moreton was right. But damn it! He needed something, anything: just the merest of hints.

It was obvious Moreton had not acted alone, not planned the escape himself. The man didn’t look clever enough; he was little more than a chess pawn and judging by his shaking hand he was likely an alcoholic and not just suffering from nerves. A knock at the door interrupted Briggs’ train of thought. It was Boyle...

“Inspector, you need to come with me. There has been a...development.”

Briggs looked at Williams and was about to tell him to remain with Moreton but then thought better of it. He was also wary of leaving Moreton in the room by himself, especially a room with a window, albeit a small one.

“Very well, Boyle. Please have the guard escort Moreton back to his cell.”

Briggs turned to Moreton. “We will continue this discussion shortly, I am sure.”

Outside the room and in a hushed voice, Boyle explained to Briggs a body had been found out on the moor by the

search party and that it had been taken to the infirmary. The prison doctor was preparing to undertake an examination.

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The examination room of the prison infirmary was cramped; to Williams it looked to be no bigger than the width of two cells side-by-side, possibly three but with a large table in the centre, various cupboards around the walls, an upright wooden chair in one corner and with several people looking on, the room seemed crammed to capacity.

Briggs took up position at the foot of the table with Williams next to him. Boyle along with the Governor and prison doctor positioned themselves at the head of the table. One member of the four-man search party stood to the side.

Rather than wait or acquiesce to the Governor, Briggs took control.

“My name is Detective Inspector Briggs of Scotland Yard. Can I ask where the body was found?”

The guard gave a little cough. “Well, Inspector, we decided to give the quarry up near The Devil’s Frying Pan a try. We would have tried there last night but with the failing light ...” He shrugged then continued. “There’s some derelict buildings...”

Briggs held up his hand. "This quarry is where did you say?"

"I begs your pardon, Inspector; Devil's Frying pan is a local name; the actual name is Great Mis Tor. It lies about four miles from here and is on higher ground."

"I see, carry on. Oh, you say the quarry is no longer in use?"

"Yes, Inspector. Not used for many years now. It is but a small quarry. There are buildings that were once storerooms; they offer some protection but are little more than shells with collapsed roofing. More a place where sheep might shelter."

The guard coughed again. "We found the body below one of the buildings: looked like he'd fallen from the top."

Briggs nodded. "How much of a drop would you say?"

"I should think no more than twenty feet, sir. The buildings are above the quarry and I would imagine he lost his footing, slipped and fell. There is a narrow footpath running around the top and in the dark with no lantern or lamp..."

"Thank you. That will be all. Now with your agreement Governor, may we remove the sheet and view the body?"

The Governor motioned to the doctor who pulled away the thin white sheet covering the body. Williams drew a

sharp intake of breath and took a faltering step back from the table.

“I have not undertaken a thorough examination but as you can observe,” the doctor began, “the possible fall suggested by Guard Wilkins here, left little of the face recognisable. The nose, right eye and cheek bone are very disfigured, caved in as they are.

You must forgive me, Inspector, I lack the vocabulary of the pathologist being just a humble prison physician. All I can say is, the injuries are serious and without the prison uniform I would be hard pressed to positively identify this as the body of Fitzpatrick. The extensive damage to the face has rendered the corpse unrecognisable.”

Briggs folded his arms and stared at the body before him. Something did not ring true.

“Thank you, Doctor. I understand how you may be limited although I should like to know, in your opinion, would a drop of twenty feet normally be survivable?”

“Yes, indeed it would, Inspector. Of course there may be mitigating factors that could cause the faller to sustain potentially serious injuries beyond say, cracked ribs, a broken limb or two.”

Briggs moved to the side of the table, glancing at Williams as he did so. The detective sergeant looked very uncomfortable.

“Would it be possible Doctor, for these injuries to have been caused not by the fall but to have been inflicted

beforehand and the fall an attempt to disguise that? Or could they perhaps have been inflicted after death, that is after the fall, to prevent identification of the body?"

The doctor stared at the corpse then at Briggs and finally the Governor.

"You may speak freely, Doctor Hanson. It is important we co-operate with the Inspector to our best ability."

"In order for what you suggest Inspector, there would need to be an accomplice or assailant. In which case this would not just be someone who had accidentally fallen..."

"Quite right, Doctor. If what I suggest did occur then this would be murder." Briggs unfolded his arms and pushed his hands into his trouser pockets.

"Tell me, Governor, do you feed your prisoners well here at Dartmoor?"

The Governor looked surprised. "No better and no worse than what is set out in the prison regulations."

"Yes and quite right, Governor. However, this man laid out before us seems to be well fed: his uniform is particularly ill-fitting. From what I have seen, prison uniforms are consistently oversize. This one is undersized. I also note his hands..."

The Governor held up a hand to halt Briggs. "Are you suggesting this is not Fitzpatrick?"



Briggs said nothing. But instead turned to Williams.

“Williams could you seek out a guard and then Moreton and bring him here.”

Williams silently, gratefully left the room.

“What light do you hope Moreton will shed, Inspector?”

“Moreton was familiar with Fitzpatrick in a way that neither you, Governor, nor indeed anyone else around this table was and Moreton was likely the last person to see him. He may therefore be able to assess if this body is that of your escaped prisoner.”

“Very well Inspector. Perhaps we could step out of this room until Moreton arrives?”

It was a full twenty minutes before Williams returned with a handcuffed Moreton. The disgraced guard was then, together with Briggs, the Governor, Boyle and the doctor ushered back into the small room. The guard from the search party had returned to his duties elsewhere within the prison.

“Moreton, can you identify this corpse as Fitzpatrick?”

Moreton shrugged. “Might be him, might not. I ain’t no doctor.”

“I see. Your reluctance to be of any assistance is I assume, compounded by your guilt. Very well.

Doctor, would you be so good as to prepare a syringe with a seven percent solution of cocaine.”

“I fail to see how using cocaine will be of any benefit in loosening Moreton’s tongue Inspector and I will not be party to any such abuse.”

“Quite right, Doctor. I can assure you the cocaine is not intended as a tongue loosener.”

Briggs turned to the Governor “You may wish to absent yourself from the forthcoming proceedings.”

Briggs then directed Williams to move the wooden chair further into the room and place Moreton on it.

The Governor, a concerned look on his face, hastily left the infirmary with Boyle in tow. He suspected he knew what was about to happen and preferred to remain ignorant. The doctor meanwhile retreated to his desk in the main room and began a report on the as yet unknown corpse.

Briggs quietly spoke some instructions to Williams then turned to Moreton.

“This will be your last chance Moreton. Williams here, so he tells me, was a divisional boxing champion renowned for his uppercut.”

Moreton shrugged and spat on the floor. “It is what it is.”

“You have your handkerchief for your knuckles, Williams?”

“Always carries two, Mr Briggs, one for each fist. We used to get a lot of rough sorts on my last beat before I joined the Yard. My old sergeant always told us, ‘Look after your hands, lads.’”

Briggs nodded then left the small room, closing the door behind him as he did so. He was no stranger to the type of beating he had just instructed Williams to mete out but preferred not to be an active observer.

For a few minutes all was quiet in the small room now shared by Williams, Moreton and the unknown corpse.

Standing close to the door, Briggs could make out the hushed questioning voice of Williams and the negative responses from Moreton. Then came the sound of fist striking flesh; one then two then three punches, Briggs guessed to the face; each amplified by the small room and sounding like jaw breakers. Moreton let out grunts and groans and moans of pain.

Briggs continued listening and was caught by surprise at Williams’ sudden, shrill cry of “Any answers yet?” And stepped back from the door. No answer, or at least none that Briggs could make out seemed forthcoming and so the blows resumed, becoming more intense, more frenzied; the grunts ever louder.

A violent danse macabre was being enacted on the other side of the door. The smash and clatter and smash again as what sounded like a metal tray was employed against...surely Moreton’s knees thought Briggs, not his

face? Another clattering sound as the tray was dropped or thrown to the floor.

A cry rang out as one or the other, Moreton or Williams, slammed into the table on which the corpse lay motionless, still, unconcerned. More noise, this time shouting, followed by slapping; hitting, grasping. Then a pause and the scraping of a chair along the tiled floor and silence... An end point had been reached, all was quiet.

Briggs wiped the palms of his hands against his trousers and tugged down on his waistcoat then slowly opened the door. Williams stood dishevelled, arms hanging by his sides, his knuckle-protecting handkerchiefs stained with blood and the beginnings of a bruise starting to form around his right eye. Next to him, slumped half on the chair was Moreton: his face an un-pretty mess of blood, sweat and swelling. The musty scent of male exertion and waning adrenaline hung like moor mist in the room.

Briggs suddenly felt like a voyeur who had been discovered. He stepped back out of the room, quickly composed himself and turned to the doctor.

"I think that syringe of cocaine is now called for Doctor. Might I suggest a third of the syringe for Williams and the remainder for Moreton?"

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Chapter 4

Rumours and Partings

Tuesday, late afternoon
Dartmoor Prison, County of Devon

Briggs and a cleaned-up Williams stood in the Governor's main office with Briggs delivering an update.

"Moreton eventually confirmed to Williams what I had suspected, Governor; the corpse is not that of Fitzpatrick. I am afraid therefore, your escaped convict is still very much at large."

"Thank you, Inspector Briggs. No doubt your work in attempting to recapture Fitzpatrick will continue. My tenure here I feel is nearing an end. I am sure it will only be a matter of days before the Home Secretary invites my resignation.

As a matter of interest, did Moreton shed any light on whether he acted alone or had help in enabling Fitzpatrick's escape?"

"That, Governor, opens an interesting chapter. Moreton said he was approached by an Irish woman in a public house in Princetown. She seemingly knew who he was, that he was a guard here and offered him money to help Fitzpatrick escape. The woman didn't give her name but told Moreton if he was interested, he would be contacted again. Which indeed he was."

“Irish? Are we talking Fenians, Inspector?”

Briggs nodded. “The Fenians have stepped up their campaign in London of late and freeing prisoners is not unusual for them. But I would hesitate to blame this on London-based Fenians. A local group perhaps. However, there was additional help from inside the prison.”

“More corrupt guards?”

“No, not guards, Governor.” Briggs turned to face Boyle, who was sitting at his desk, diligently staring at an open file.

“Ignatius Boyle, I am placing you under arrest for assisting in the escape of John Michael Fitzpatrick and as an accomplice in the murder of the as yet unidentified corpse, discovered on Dartmoor earlier today.”

The Governor got to his feet and stared open-mouthed, first at Briggs then at Boyle.

“Surely there is some mistake, Inspector. Boyle here has been nothing but loyal to me.”

“No mistake, Governor. Boyle here is as involved as Moreton. Perhaps more so. Moreton has made a full and frank statement.”

Boyle stood up abruptly, knocking over his chair, and spat at Briggs,

“May you be burned and scorched and the Devil break your bones!”

For extra effect, he spat once more at Briggs.

“You talk of us as Fenians, you know nothing. Take out your notebook, peeler, and write this down. You have been bested by the Invincibles of the Irish Republican Brotherhood!”

Briggs, unmoved by Boyle’s words, opened the door of the Governor’s office and instructed the guard whom he had requested be placed there, to escort Boyle to a cell.

“Make sure you strip and search him thoroughly.”

The Governor slumped down onto his chair. For a moment he said nothing, then he looked up at Briggs.

“Well, Inspector, the future seemed slightly more positive before your arrival. Here I sit, having lost a prisoner; a secretary and I suspect my job all in less than twenty-four hours. All I have gained is an unnamed corpse.

Tell me was Boyle the mastermind behind all this?”

Briggs gave a slight shake of his head.

“No, Governor, from what Moreton told Williams, Boyle was in the right place at the right time—a Fenian or as he would have it, Republican Brotherhood sympathiser. If anything he was an overseer for this part of their plan. I doubt he even knows the name or names of those he was working for. In that respect, he is the same as Moreton.”

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Briggs and Williams retired to the Governor's spare office. Briggs wanted to get a rough draft of his report written up. He also thought notes to the Princetown police sergeant and local magistrate were warranted—at some point both were likely to come into professional contact with Boyle and Moreton.

He was certain Moreton had acted only out of monetary gain and was likely not interested in the Irish cause. Briggs further felt Moreton would not be prepared to fight in support of a free Ireland. He was merely a casual opportunist.

As for Boyle, it was clear where his sympathies lay. But he was likely on the outside, a mere affiliate to any local group; a useful stooge, hoping to be invited in and given a larger part.

Freeing Fitzpatrick was no doubt a bit of a coup, at least for the Fenian cause or, as Boyle preferred, the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Briggs could picture the penny broadsheets now: Fenians Free Queen Assassin!

It didn't matter what Boyle claimed their name to be; they were all Fenians as far as Briggs was concerned. It was only in these last months that Fenians had successfully attacked Scotland Yard with a bomb. He folded up his notes and placed them in his inside jacket pocket.

"Well, Williams, I would say we are done here. I have these two letters to hand to the Governor, for passing on



to the Princetown sergeant and magistrate, then we can be on our way.”

Williams had been variously pacing around the room and sitting for short periods on the uncomfortable chairs; he'd tried both and neither chair was better than the other.

“Can I just ask, Mr Briggs; about the Treason Act, is that right we still do the quartering?”

Briggs gave a little smile. “No, Williams, I was being somewhat loose with the truth. The quartering of those hanged for treason is still in the 1814 Treason Act but it was reduced to mere hanging by the Forfeiture Act of 1870, in England at least. In Scotland they do things differently.”

Williams nodded and paced back and forth for a moment. “Will we be in time to get the late train to London? I'm supposing we'll be getting it from Exeter?”

“Ah, not quite.” Briggs leaned back and stretched.

“We really need to follow up on this Fenian thing. The Fenian branch that operated in Exeter fell apart - at least our current knowledge and understanding would lead us to believe that to be the case. We have not had any reliable reports of activity or meetings regarding Exeter Fenians for a good year now.

The various Fenian branches scattered across England all seem to operate independently, probably

purposefully. The two biggest ones are to be found in London and Liverpool.”

Briggs sat up and leaned forward on the desk, continuing.

“In this part of the country there are two main branches or groups: Plymouth and Bristol.

The Plymouth Fenians are not interested in prison breaks. They like to spend their time trying to sow dissent among the navy’s sailors; doubtless hoping to bring about a mutiny on one of Her Majesty’s ships.

I believe, Williams, it is the Bristol Fenians we must pursue and that is where I fancy our man Fistic is headed.”

Williams looked unhappy. “Bristol? But what of the dead body?”

“Yes, I have been pondering that conundrum. It could be a red herring. But I think not. The corpse was either some luckless person who had become lost on the moor and sought refuge among the ruined quarry buildings, and Fitzpatrick just happened upon them or...”

Briggs tapped his fingers on the desk.

“I don’t know. But I feel we will get some answers in Bristol.”

Williams' unhappiness at the thought of having to go to Bristol rather than returning to London was turning into uneasiness.

"Can I speak openly, Mr Briggs, sir?"

Briggs slowly folded his arms and nodded.

"I would rather return to London. I do not doubt that you are correct in your assumptions, but I'm not long married, Mr Briggs, and my missus is expecting our first and what with the rumours."

"Rumours, Williams?"

"It is delicate, Mr Briggs."

"Is not a rumour by its very nature indelicate? Surely if it were delicate, it would not be spoken?"

"I ain't one for speaking in fancy ways, Mr Briggs. I was a beat constable who did good for himself and got into Scotland Yard."

"You do yourself down, Williams. You likely have the potential to be a good detective, especially if you prove to be more diligent in your note-taking. Now, what of these rumours?"

Williams moved to the door and slowly opened it, checking outside. He then closed the door and with his back against it, looked at Briggs. The inspector was smaller than him, quite gaunt, but in a strangely alluring way and his light sand-brown hair seemed...

Williams stopped himself. That was it; that was just what his wife said would happen. She cried when he said he was to be assigned to Inspector Briggs. Her friend's husband was a desk sergeant at Scotland Yard and had passed on a warning about Briggs.

"Come on Williams, out with it! We need to be making a move."

"It's them rumours about you, if you must know. The ones going round about you being a sodomite, Mr Briggs."

Briggs said nothing. It was a rumour that dogged him endlessly and made him the butt of innuendo and jokes.

"You see, I've been told that it's contagious. If I spend too long in the company of a sodomite, well, I'll end up catching the disease an' all! That's what it is, they say—a disease.

The lads at the Yard says I should be well enough for up to twelve hours, but after that, it starts to set in."

Briggs stared at Williams. My god he thought, he is actually serious!

"It is an old rumour, Williams. An old rumour, that is all."

"But you ain't denying it, are you? I can't go home to my missus and tell her I caught..." he paused, his face reddening.

“That I have been turned into, if you will excuse my language, Mr Briggs, a fucking sodomite!”

Briggs was taken aback by the forcefulness with which Williams had spat out *fucking sodomite*.

“I can assure you Williams, it takes more than just being in the company of someone to become or be turned into a sodomite.”

Williams bit his tongue and thought to himself, Just what a sodomite would say.

“But it is my intention to travel, Williams, to Bristol from here. If you, for your stated reason prefer to return to London, I will accept that. However, I will have to inform the Chief Superintendent of why we have gone our separate ways especially as this is a case with links to the Queen.

To spare us both embarrassment, I will prepare a note saying you have had to return due to your wife becoming ill because of her pregnancy.”

“Thank you, Mr Briggs. I apologise for my language.”

“I will also request that the Chief Superintendent assign Miss Runce from the records department to assist me in Bristol, should she be available. I have worked with her before. Her note-taking skills are excellent, something you may wish to take heed of, Williams.”

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Chapter 5

The Running Man

Earlier on Tuesday
mid-morning
western Dartmoor, County of Devon

It took Fistie almost three hours to reach Peter Tavy, which he discovered when he cadged a lift on a passing farm cart, turned out to be not a person but a place—an actual village.

Fistie was unsure how he felt about Peter Tavy not being a fellow. In his mind he had begun to picture Tavy as a genial sort; the type who would have laid on a bit of a feast: cheese, some meat or fowl; perhaps a nice pie and plenty of whatever passed for beer or ale in these parts. Was it cider down here, Fistie mused, or was that somewhere else?

So fixated on Peter Tavy being the welcoming sort had Fistie become that, prior to being told it was a place and not a person, he'd actually been salivating over what he imagined may have been spread out for his delectation.

The farm cart dropped the disappointed Fistie near a milestone with the cartman telling him

“Thou wants to be goin’ down that way, he does, down that lane there. Peter be down that way alright.”

Fistie nodded and gave a disappointed wave before setting off down the hedgerow-lined lane that seemed to narrow the further down he travelled, until it barely felt wide enough for a cart.

He did wonder if it actually led anywhere—surely a well-used lane would be kept clear and the various encroaching shrubs, brambles and bushes regularly tamed? But what did he know? He was not a countryside type of person; little in this part of the world made sense to him; from the accents to the amount of greenery, to the way people behaved. Still, it was what it was and all being well he'd be away from here soon enough.

Fistie briefly paused his walk down the lane and tried peering through the untamed shrubbery but to no avail and so he carried on.

The lane began to widen again and the hedge to his right thinned and petered out and became a waist-high stone wall. Fistie stopped and placed his arms on the wall, giving a wry smile. Here he was just beginning to think he'd be lucky to find a stale crust to toast around these parts, let alone a feast and now low and behold.

“What have we got here then on the other side of this wall? A graveyard, aye. Albeit small I'll grant thee but not thirty feet away, there be a church an' a solitary grazin' sheep! Well, that means sommat that do.” He slapped the wall with his hand.

“You won’t be getting a church unless there be a...” At this point, Fistie’s wry smile turned into a grin and he rubbed his hands together.

“Unless there be a flock to tend! Hah! With puns like that, I should’ve been a turn in a music hall!”

If a church meant anything in Fistie’s mind, other than a lazy pun, it was people, a flock, and aside from a church the other thing people needed in a village was a pub or an inn—call it what you will, both served drink!

“What else are people to do here in this village of Peter Tavy, ‘cept drink and pray for forgiveness?”

Fistie clambered over the wall and made his way through the graveyard, past the single uninterested sheep, around the church with its closed doors and stopped.

The church, named St. Peter’s and from whence the village derived part of its name, was a stone’s throw from the village’s only inn.

Fistie put his hands together in mock prayer. He were right; nowt to do here in Peter Tavy ‘cept drink and pray. Aye, that much be true! Fistie could imagine the villagers running out of the church on a Sunday morning and falling over each other to be first to the inn.

He crossed the short distance to the inn and stood in the doorway, letting his eyes adjust to the dark interior and remembering just how thirsty and hungry he was.

From somewhere inside, a voice called out.

“If yer feet be clodden with dirt ’n’ mud, stamp ‘em off outdoors. I just swept the floor.”

Fistie looked down at his feet, still clad in his prison boots. The shoes on the corpse had been too small for him. He gave a shrug, stepped back out and stamped his feet half-heartedly then re-entered the inn.

A stout woman with a ruddy face and a cloth in her hand appeared in front of him.

“Right my lovely, what can I do for thee?”

Fistie let out a sigh. “A weary traveller am I, in need of whatever ale or beer you have and a plate of food.”

“I’m sure I can get you sorted out, my lover. Tis a bit early for a midday meal and too late for breakfast, I’d say. But never mind, I still got sommat in the pot I can warm over from last night.

Go round to your left to the barroom and rest your feet. Mind out for the rickety table in front o’ the hearth tho’, I swear it have a mind of its own.”

The barroom was small and empty. Along the back wall, a bench fashioned from two roughhewn planks rested atop two barrels; Fistie took this to be the actual bar; a small collection of stone flagons positioned at either end seemed confirmation of this.

He glanced around and chose the high-backed settle next to the hearth, its patina and smooth-worn edges

testament to decades of constant use. He checked the table in front of the settle and satisfied it was wobble-free, lay the leather satchel on it and removed the notebook.

The first half-dozen or so pages of the notebook contained neatly written instructions and directions; all the other pages were blank, although the final page looked as if someone had started to scribble a note or message that was unfinished. Fistie did notice the middle pages had been torn out, perhaps for use as kindling? He returned to the first two pages; they detailed how to get to the quarry, when he, Fistie, might be expected and what to do if he didn't turn up.

The second page gave precise instructions on avoiding contact with any locals. Fistie gave a little smile and muttered, "A bit late for that."

The third page outlined the train to get from Mary Tavy: the train needed to be going to Lydford then Okehampton and not from Lydford down to Tavistock and Exeter.

Fistie looked at the fourth page. It showed the address of where to deliver him in Bristol. Whatever the place was, it had a funny name. He closed the notebook. The instructions seemed written in such a way that a child could follow them. Or maybe a dullard.

"If you are talking to yourself, you be fitting in well-enough round here, lover. T'ain't no one in these parts who don't go about without mumbling away to themselves."

The ruddy-faced woman placed a plate of food and a spoon in front of Fistie along with a tankard of ale.

He held up the notebook. “Just trying to make sense of some writing.”

“Afraid I can’t help he there; I ain’t one for reading much. Nor writing for that matter. I got me just enough learning to get by. Shout out if he wants anything else.”

Fistie nodded and waited for the woman to leave the room before replacing the notebook in the satchel. For a moment he sat and thought—idle thoughts—the sort of thoughts he couldn’t marshal in prison because everything was hemmed in, confined and closed. He gave a sniff and picked up the tankard of ale; if he were caught now it would be worth it just to have had this one drink. Fistie quietly toasted himself and downed the ale.

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Outside the Peter Tavy Inn, as the inn was known, Fistie lit a cigarette. The food had been much needed and very welcome. It had, however, fallen short of the sumptuous feast the imagined Mr Peter Tavy would have laid on. But it was considerably better by a well-travelled mile than anything provided by the prison. The ale had also been very satisfying.

Fistie drew in on the cigarette then stopped; in front of him was a goat. It looked like no ordinary goat though.

The goat stood stock still, staring blankly and impassively at Fistie, a leather horse collar around its middle. Fistie stamped out his cigarette and slowly approached then walked around the goat, not sure quite what to make of it.

“Here you, thou be leaving my prize goat alone. Keeps ‘em hands of yours off, right? I’ll knock he down good ‘n’ proper otherwise.”

Fistie turned around. A man, his shirt grubby, crumpled, and tight around his bulging belly filled the doorway of the inn.

“No offence intended, mate; just admiring your animal.”

“That ain’t no ani-mal. That, like I said, be my prized goat. She be prized by me ‘cause of her coat.”

“It does very much look a fine goat indeed.” Fistie tried to humour the man but muttered to himself, Not that I know owt about such things.

“I’ve got to ask, tho’, about the horse collar?”

“Right, you see’s...” The man moved away from the inn doorway and closer to his goat, lest this stranger with an odd accent try to run off with it.

“That there collar is goin’ to stop me prized goat from wandering off. She don’t like havin’ it on her, you see’s. Whenever she do, she don’t move unless I drags her along with that bit o’ cord that be hanging around her

neck. With her wearing the horse collar, 'cause she ain't gonna move, I gets a chance to go an' have me a good sup o' ale; cos I knows she ain't goin' be wandering off."

"On account of her not liking having the collar on." Fistie added.

"You not be from around these parts, be you?"

At that moment, the ruddy-faced innkeeper emerged from the inn.

"That'll do, Jeb. You've had your drink; now take your goat and be on your way. This man be a guest of the inn. Best be leaving him be or you'll be getting my dishcloth across the back o' your head."

Fistie and the innkeeper watched as Jeb removed the horse collar from his prize goat, placed it over his own head, adjusted it on his neck and set off in the direction of the church with the goat in tow.

"He be mostly harmless, be old Jeb. Him and that goat roams all over the place. T'ain't no wonder he never got himself a wife."

She gave a little laugh.

"Now sir, I know you have settled up for your meal, but is there anything else I can get for thee?"

Fistie shook his head.

"You'll be back on your travels now, will thee?"

“Aye, that I be. I just got to get me-self to Mary Tavy station an’ get the Exeter train.” He lied; he’d be heading up and out of the county to Bristol rather than south to Exeter. Nothing wrong with laying a false trail, just in case.

“Well, the station only be half an hour’s walk an’ the day be a pleasant one thus far. You’ll need to cross the small bridge the Tavy River goes under. But take heed an’ watch thyself; they got that big mine over by Mary Tavy. All sorts of rough ones works there.”

With that, she thanked Fistie for his custom, bade him good day and disappeared back into the inn.

Fistie lit a fresh cigarette and stifled a little laugh; rough mine workers were the least of his worries. He glanced around, then set off towards Mary Tavy train station.

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