

HIS HEART SHALL SPEAK NO MORE



by John Linwood Grant

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It had long been my habit to spend at least a fortnight each autumn with my friend Emilia Rawkins, the wife of a successful wine-merchant in Suffolk. The countryside there was charming, with the advantage that their house was only some ten miles from the coast, not that far from the towns of Southwold and Dunwich. Emilia herself had a passion for the natural history of marine life, which inevitably involved numerous enjoyable trips to the long Suffolk shoreline.

I was disconcerted, therefore, to find that just before my next planned visit, I was unexpectedly placed in charge of my nephew Philip, a young man reading Law at Oxford. Philip had suffered a fearful blow that summer, having been jilted by his fiancée only days before his wedding. Neither his spirits nor his studies had recovered from the blow, and so my ailing sister appealed to me, long widowed and unencumbered by other duties as I was, to take him in hand.

Whilst I will not say that I had maternal feelings for Philip, I was sufficiently fond of him to see that something had to be done. Accordingly, I agreed, and wrote to Emilia to enquire if an additional guest would be an inconvenience. I received a card by return saying that it would be no bother at all, and so I informed a diffident Philip that he should pack his cases.

The railway journey to Halesworth, by way of Ipswich, was quiet. A slight, shy fellow, given to too much reading, Philip stared out of the railway carriage window throughout, answering questions politely but with no sense of engagement.

Isaiah Rawkins himself was at Halesworth Station with their large, two-horse wagonette. He was a short, portly man, with red cheeks which came more from his own wares than from any sea breeze.

“Beatrice, good to see you again.” Isaiah kissed my glove. “And, um, young Philip, yes.”

They shook hands formally as a porter placed our cases in the carriage.

During the journey Isaiah and I engaged in empty conversation about London these days, the weather and his trade, while Philip once again stared at the countryside. With the Adnams Brewery doing well at Southwold, Isaiah had secured business supplying wines and spirits to all their public houses, and he was busier than ever.

“Emilia will be delighted to see you,” he said. “The wagonette will be yours for the week, as I have my automobile. She has many ideas to entertain our young... to entertain anyone who wishes to take, um, advantage of this mild October.”

Little need be said of our being installed at Bitterns, the Rawkins' large, comfortable place just outside Halesworth. Emilia was not given to fuss, and so left Philip to arrange his

room to his liking, pointing out that Isaiah had a small library downstairs which was open to all. I had warned her of my nephew's circumstances in a letter the day before.

"Remind me, Beattie, how old is he?" Emilia poured tea for the two of us in the drawing room, dismissing the maid as soon as the tray had arrived.

"Twenty three," I sighed. "The arrangement was ill-starred, the two of them with such different expectations, but they would hear nothing against it from those around them. With Philip's allowance from his grandfather, he was keen to marry. She was taken by his earnestness at first, drawn in by his plans, I believe, but near the end, well, she saw only the limitations which marriage would impose."

"We did not do so badly, did we?"

I smiled. "No, indeed, but perhaps we were fortunate. Now Philip's girl has fled to an aunt in Scotland, breaking his heart, and he has been reluctantly attached to an aunt in England..."

"Yourself." Emilia laughed, her brown curls their usual tangle. "Well, a change of air may do him some good, so the coast it will be."

After a light dinner, Emilia insisted on taking us to see her study. I had been many times before of course, but it was always an experience. The smell, for example, was never the same. One week she had garlands of seaweed drying on a ceiling rack; the next, a fox hide curing by the window. Had she continued her schooling, I think that Emilia might have been counted a considerable natural historian. As it was, she was known as a slightly eccentric enthusiast, and rarely published at all.

Her study contained shelves of books and pamphlets in disorder, along with far more shelves displaying relics of her trips around Suffolk, most of them as yet unlabelled. The jumbled nature of the room seemed to intrigue Philip, who examined item after item.

"Aunt Beatrice, what's this?" He held up a Kilner jar full of murky brown liquid. I peered over my glasses as he swirled the jar, but could see nothing else.

"Emilia?"

She clapped her hands together.

"Goodness, you've found my foetal pig. How marvellous."

Philip and I abandoned the jar to examine other, more recent finds of hers. A small Chinese table stood by the door, its lacquer peeling. The surface was littered with pale, delicate shells of a type I had not seen before.

"Sea potatoes," she said, pleased at our attention. "The heart urchin, *Echinocardium cordatum*. They burrow in the beaches here, rarely seen alive. These are what we call their tests, or shells."

She passed some around, letting us examine the fragile shells, which were indeed almost heart-shaped. The largest was three inches from top to bottom, the shell dotted with rows of tiny holes.

"They have flexible spines in life, you see," she pointed out. "Harmless, but no doubt part of their burrowing equipment. We might find more tomorrow at Dunwich."

#

The wagonette ride to Dunwich the next afternoon was pleasant, Emilia chatting as she drove. We disembarked in the fields by the remains of Greyfriars Priory, a tumble of walls and arches which seemed perilously close to the beach.

“Most of Dunwich has gone, of course, washed away by centuries of storms. It's a haunted coast, in its way. There are supposed to be a dozen churches out there, under the sea.”

“Really?” I gazed out over the grey water, imagining spires and stained-glass windows being stared at by the fish, pews and stalls which now harboured only crabs and lobsters.

“Mmm. They say you can hear the bells ringing some nights, far below the waves.” She handed each of us a small hessian sack for anything interesting we might find.

An easy slide brought us down the crumbling cliffs to the stretch of beach. A line of shingle, a line of sand nearer the water. I had waxed and treated my boots, knowing what Emilia would have us doing, and was pleased enough to stroll along with her while Philip ranged ahead. He had not been communicative that morning and was lost, I supposed, in the doldrums of his own thoughts.

“Now, Beattie, tell me about that captain who was bothering you at the Sutherland's dance...”

And we walked, discussing life, the latest gossip, and of course Captain Martins, who I had threatened to shoot if he pressed his attentions further. My late husband had been an army man, and I did know how to load and aim a revolver, after all.

“So after the next waltz, we--”

“Aunt Beatrice!”

A hundred yards away, Philip was waving to us. My nephew stood near the lapping waves of the outgoing tide, tips of foam on the long lines of dark water. Around him were shells, not only razor clams and the little tellins but at least half a dozen tests, as I had learned to call them, of heart urchins.

Emilia was delighted. “Quite a high tide earlier this morning. It seems these were discarded in its wake. Let's see what we have.”

We spent some hours exploring the lower beach, popping anything to which we took a fancy into Emilia's sacks, and the sea was coloured with the first pink tinges of sunset by the time we abandoned our beach-combing to return home. Even Philip seemed more animated than usual.

At Bitterns we washed, ate a cold collation (Isaiah was in Ipswich on business), and examined our finds. Most were akin to Emilia's existing collection, but she had found a large tellin, the two halves of its shell spread in the manner of a perfect rose-coloured butterfly. Some of the urchin tests were broken, the material like fine porcelain. She discarded those as Philip went though his own sack.

“Mrs Rawkins...” He stared at the rounded object in his hand. It was crusted with sand, the crude shape of a heart and some three and a half inches across.

She took it from him gently, and frowned. Her hand-brush took the sand away, to reveal something which was clearly not an urchin.

“Wood,” she said, peering through an eyepiece she had been using to identify crustacea. “It appears to be a wooden carving.”

“Of a heart urchin?” he asked, though I thought that one would hardly need to make an effigy of these common animals.

“No, of an actual heart I think, Philip. Quite a curio. A sailor's carving, perhaps, from a dull voyage.”

She threw it back to him, and went about her work.



“I shall keep it as a memento of this afternoon.”

He cradled it oddly in his hands, as if it were delicate, then slid it into his jacket pocket. I forbore from saying the cloth might stain – at least his attention had been dragged from his own unhappiness.

Isaiah returned not long after, and a pleasant late supper ensued, punctuated by

Isaiah's tales of dim-witted shipping agents and watered whisky. Emilia and I laughed or nodded as appropriate, used to his stories. Philip picked at his food, saying little but offering the occasional faint smile.

"Emilia tells me you found a rather unusual 'urchin'," said Isaiah, wiping his fingers on a napkin. "Might I have a look?"

My nephew took the carving out of his pocket, though at first he seemed reluctant to hand it over. Isaiah turned the object in his thick fingers, examining it.

"Amazing what gets washed up around here. Emilia found, um, part of a figurehead once, half buried in the sands after a storm."

"A shipwreck?" I asked.

"Or an incompetent carpenter." Isaiah laughed. "This wooden thing, however, reminds me of something I once read, long ago. A local bit of, um, nonsense. You could try my library, young man."

"Thank you, Mr Rawkins." Philip took the carving back, slipping it into his pocket once more. I had to wonder why the boy was still carrying it around. There was something about it which was not to my taste.

The Rawkineses and I played cards for an hour or two, leaving Philip, at his request, to follow Isaiah's suggestion and investigate the library. I did not see him again that night.

#

Our second visit to Dunwich was at Philip's request. As Emilia thought his interest to be healthy, I acquiesced. The trip was without note, excepting one seemingly unimportant incident.

I had settled by the cliffs, which were little more than dunes in places, and was polishing a pebble on the coarse grass. Emilia was further down the beach, inspecting wrack from the last tide. I scanned the horizon for my nephew, and saw him on the shingle, holding the wooden heart in one hand and talking, as it seemed, to the air. I had to suppose that he was talking to himself, or reciting poetry perhaps, as the lovelorn do, and said nothing when we reunited.

The afternoon was overcast. Philip chose to cloister himself in the library again, whilst I helped my friend to put some order into her linen stores. Emilia was not enthusiastic about domestic duties, but occasionally interfered with the work of her maids as a token gesture.

The full-time housemaid, Sarah, was already folding bedsheets which had returned from the laundry.

"If I may, ma'am..." She bit her lower lip, obviously feeling awkward in my presence.

"Yes, Sarah. Say whatever it is." Emilia smiled.

"The young man, ma'am... did he get very wet, yesterday?"

"What might you mean, dear?" I asked before Emilia could speak, trying to sound gentle.

The maid looked at the toes of her boots.

"It's just that, me and Lucy were wondering, with you two ladies seeming dry, and so much water in the young gentleman's room this morning... we thought as he might have fell in or the like..."

"Water?" I pressed her for more details.

According to Sarah, there had been wet patches on the carpet of Philip's room when she cleaned it, and his armchair had been quite damp, as if someone had sat in it after a ducking. They had had to coerce the gardener into taking the chair outside to air it.

"There was some spray on the beach," I said quickly. "That must be it."

I slipped her sixpence, to share with Lucy, and her pleasure at that seemed to dismiss the matter.

Emilia and I abandoned the linen for a walk in the garden. The armchair was there, by the gravel drive, and indeed, the upholstery was damp. I could think of no explanation, knowing that we had kept quite dry all day.

I ventured to inspect the library myself that evening. A book was open on the table by the window. I lifted the cover without fully closing the book. Leather-bound and somewhat foxed, it bore the title *Curiosities of Old Suffolk, Being a Collection of Sundry Tales*, by one Josiah Smith, Rvnd.

I sat down and turned to the open section.

'In the Parish of Dunwich they have a number of such stories, including that of a young woman who killed herself after being abandoned by her sailor lover. It is said that the girl, being without that Mercy which God might have granted, may be encountered as a restless spirit on the sands. Some believe that those creatures known as sea potatoes are shaped in a reminder of her lost heart.

'Others, more fantastically, report that she tore the organ in question from her own bosom and cast it to the sea. Old folk say that her heart may yet be found on Dunwich sands, hardened by grief, and that if found it should be consigned to the waves, for ill-fortune will otherwise follow.'

The general tone of the book made it clear that the Reverend Josiah Smith placed little faith in the folk legends he had recorded.

This must be the tale which Isaiah had vaguely remembered at dinner. Philip had indeed found a heart-shaped object in the sand. I did not for one second believe that it was any organ of the lost girl's, hardened or otherwise, but nor did I have any sure notion as to why someone would carve such a thing. If it were not a sailor's discarded toy, then had it been made to keep an ageing legend fresh, to attract those who took pleasure in the macabre? Was what remained of Dunwich Town (a grand word for those houses which had not been washed away) eager for additional revenue?

Whatever the truth, I was hardly pleased at this discovery. I feared that it might play upon my nephew's mind, abandoned as he too saw himself.

#

As the next day brought a smatter of rain, we undertook a train journey down the branch line to Southwold, where we had lunch in a respectable hotel called Masons. The food was palatable and a good view could be had of the harbour.

"Rather dull for you in here, Philip," I said, knowing that in Oxford there were many more lively establishments catering for student tastes. "Perhaps we might call in at a local hostelry afterwards?"

In our youth, Emilia and I had undertaken many dares, not the least of which was going into a Camden public house and ordering a half-pint of porter each. The denizens of that establishment had been too surprised to do anything other than stare as we finished

our drinks and left to collect our reward from a friend.

The hotel waiter recommended The Quay as 'tolerable'. We admired the Southwold lighthouse which stood, rather disconcertingly, in the centre of the town and had only been erected a decade earlier. The Quay, a tall, narrow tavern, was to be found a short distance beyond that landmark, near the new pier.

The beer was Adnams, as I had expected, and we could see a case of spirits bearing Isaiah's import mark by the bar. I had acquired a taste for ale from my husband, and Philip was used to drinking it at his college, but Emilia only sipped, declaring it 'a trifle sharp'. She and Isaiah favoured a mellow, aged sherry at home.

The tavern was busy but not crowded. As Philip went to fetch a second glass of ale for the two of us, he lurched to one side without apparent reason, almost falling. In the process he jostled a man in an oilskin coat.

"Sir, I do apologise--" began my nephew, regaining his balance.

The fisherman (I assumed) was not looking at Philip. He was staring at an object on the floor. It was the carved heart we had found the day before, kept in Philip's jacket ever since.

"That yers, bor?" The man pointed at the carving.

"Er, yes." Philip picked it up, shoving it back into his pocket hastily.

"If Oi was yer, Oi'd hull e back, 'fore next tide is gorn."

Philip looked nonplussed, but the fisherman had walked away. My nephew turned a questioning look on Emilia.

She was frowning.

"He said that you should throw it away, into the sea. I can't imagine why."

The man who had spoken to Philip had lingered by the tavern door, tamping down his pipe. I made my way to him quickly.

"Excuse me, sir."

The look he gave me was one of indifference.

"You said something to my nephew, at the bar." I nodded in the direction of Emilia and Philip. "I wondered, did you recognise what fell from his pocket?"

I saw suspicion growing, but I was, if I flatter myself, a tall, handsome enough woman and practically dressed, not some ribbon-bedecked girl from a seaside charabanc.

"Aye," he said begrudgingly. "Oi sin e, betimes."

Men are men, whatever rank they hold. I improvised what was hopefully a winning smile.

"If you could give me just a little more detail about the... item?" I prompted.

The fisherman pushed his pipe-stem into the corner of his mouth. "Jackie Stanley did find e, this las' winter. Kept e, too."

"And could I speak to Mr Stanley?"

"Not unless yer swim well an' deep-loik, lady. Oi see him drown an' gorn, not a se'enday after that, off Lower-stoff."

"You believe that the carving brought bad luck?"

He stared at me from under dark, unkempt eyebrows.

"Jackie found e, and no good come after, if that be what yer want t'hear, lady."

There was no more to be had from that source.

On the train journey back I felt something pressing at the back of my mind.

"Did you trip on something, Philip, in that tavern?" I asked. "When you almost fell."

“Trip? Oh, no. I was trying to avoid the girl.”

“What girl was that?”

“You know, Aunt Beatrice, the one with the tangled hair. She was right in my way.”

Emilia and I exchanged a glance. There had been no-one between my nephew and the bar save the man in oilskins. I knew my friend well, and with that glance we agreed to leave the matter there.

That night, I slept badly. It was windy outside, and I could swear that I could smell the sea, even that far inland. The air felt damp, my bedclothes felt damp, and I went to the window to see if it was actually raining.

It was not, but there on the front lawn, illuminated by the lantern at the main door, stood Philip. That carving was in his left hand; with his right he was gesticulating, as if illustrating a point to someone. The lantern shifted in the breeze, and for a moment I thought that I did indeed see a slender figure before him, then it was gone.

I examined the lawn that morning, on the pretext of admiring Emilia's rather random approach to gardening. It was easy enough to see the prints of Philip's boots in the grass, but were those other prints beyond his, less defined?

“An early frost, it seems,” said Emilia. I looked to where she pointed, a faint line of white across the lawn. As she walked on, I bent down. Touching the whiteness, which was cold enough, I brushed my fingertips to my lips. It was not frost.

It was salt.

I did not understand how that could be, but we rationalise in the oddest ways. A gardener, I told myself, had spilled rock salt stored against the winter, or something he used on the abundant slugs.

In the end I feigned admiration of an old cedar and said nothing to Emilia.

#

I was less than enthusiastic when Philip suggested that we went again to Dunwich, but there were no obvious excuses to be made. We took the wagonette to Greyfriars, with a picnic lunch in a hamper, and with some reluctance began our beachcombing.

Philip, as before, was well ahead of us, following the low cliffs. Given the circumstances I kept a closer eye on his whereabouts, and Emilia was left to wander the shingle on her own, collecting shells, semi-precious stones and those pieces of sea-weathered glass that so often delight. I found it difficult to concentrate on the beach itself, picking up the occasional piece of weed or interesting pebble out of duty.

Calling to Emilia that we might soon go back to the carriage for our lunch, I turned to check on my nephew. He was talking to someone in the shadow of the cliff, presumably another beachcomber.

“Philip!” I shouted. “Lunch-time.”

Emilia scrambled to my side, struggling with her sack.

“I found a rather large cuttlefish bone,” she said, face flushed. “Look...” She parted the hessian, lifting out a chalky oval.

I glanced at it, and turned to Philip. He was on his own again, a hundred feet away. His acquaintance must have climbed the cliff, which was easily scaled in these parts.

“Come on now. We're hungry.”

He came slowly, his face pale.

“Are you alright, dear?” I took one of his hands, which was wet, as if he had been dipping into pools.

His eyes were clear enough when he looked up at me.

“I... yes, thank you, aunt. The girl distracted me, she seemed so sad.”

“Girl?”

“The one with the long wet hair, the one we saw in Southwold. I think she lacks company.”

I felt strangely faint, seeing Reverend Smith's book as if it were there before me at Dunwich. 'A restless spirit upon the sands.'

“What... what did she say to you, Philip?” I managed to ask.

Emilia looked puzzled, the cuttlefish bone still in one hand.

He shrugged. “She didn't really say anything. She was waiting for me, I think, but she seemed so lonely that I showed her the heart, which --”

“What did she do when she saw it?” I spoke more sharply than I had intended.

“Aunt Beatrice, we were only talking.” He flushed. “She reached towards me, and then you shouted... You must have startled her, for when I looked back she had gone.”

I had heard enough.

“We must get back to Halesworth.” I gave Emilia a hard glance.

“Yes,” she said. “I do think it might rain, and we're hardly dressed for it today. October rain can be so cold. Let's have lunch back at the house, instead.”

I could see that Philip wanted to argue, but between us we hustled him away from the beach, making empty chatter as we went. I engineered it that he should see to the horses, taking his linen jacket from him while he checked the traces. The wooden heart was there, easily taken. I handed the jacket to Emilia.

“I'm just going to check if I dropped a hair-pin on the way up.” I said.

The army does not breed weak women. At a moment when Philip was involved in settling one of the mares, I took up the carving and hurled it across the shingle, hearing the faint dull sound of it landing at the edge of the incoming tide. Innocent or not, let someone else find it.

There was no wind that night, but the house had a compelling odour of mud-flats and fish which had passed their best. Emilia had all the windows thrown open, and she ejected certain bags from her study, claiming that some specimens must have gone bad.

I did not entirely believe her.

I think that at that point, God help us, Emilia and I still wished to pass this matter of the heart and the mysterious girl off as a fancy caused by my nephew's recent distress, a fancy which had unnerved us through association. I could not offer an immediate solution to Philip's woes, but at least with that carving gone, an unhealthy focus had been removed.

#

By the following morning guilt had wormed its way into me. I resolved to tell my nephew what I had done with his find, and why, however ridiculous it might seem. Perhaps we might even broach the subject of his fiancée, and how he now felt, though I doubted I could find a way to introduce the topic easily. I had no idea how to play the amateur alienist, having always been of a somewhat robust temperament myself.

He was in his room, reading *Curiosities of Old Suffolk*.

“Quite a bit of poppycock in there,” I tried to joke, sitting on the edge of his bed. The room held the iodine tang of seaweed from the study below.

He nodded.

“I suppose so. There must be some truth to one or two of these tales, though.”

“People make things up, all the time.”

I put my hand on the quilt. It was damp, and when I looked around I thought that there were darker patches on the carpet.

“Have you spilled something?”

He looked at the patches, shrugged. “I must have upset my water-glass last night.” He tilted his head on one side. “Is something bothering you, Aunt Beatrice?”

“Philip, the wooden thing you found...” I prepared myself to explain why I had disposed of it.

“The heart?” He reached into his jacket, which was on the back of the chair, and held up the same object which I had thrown to the waves not five hours before. “I think it must have got wet at the beach somehow. I mean to dry it with a towel later, before it warps or cracks...”

“May I see it closer?” I managed to keep my voice steady.

“I’d rather...” He pursed his lips. “Perhaps when I’ve dried it out. Perhaps then...”

I did not stay to hear whatever excuses might have followed.

Emilia was in her study. Taking her arm, I poured out what I had read, and what I had done.

She listened as she washed her cuttlefish bone in a small bowl, then put it down. She knew me for a practical woman, whose normal reading was confined to the like of sewing books and poultry manuals. I had imagination, yes, but not the sort that dwelled on the psychic or the strange.

“The girl with wet hair...” Emilia pulled up a stool. “Philip has been under a lot of strain. Might it have caused, how I can I put it, a peculiarity in his thinking? Temporary, of course,” she added hastily.

“I suppose that it might.” She was too old a friend to upset me by making such talk. “You remember O’Connor, in David’s old regiment? He was never quite the same after he lost his wife.”

“Yet the heart found its way back,” she said, templeing her fingers at her chin. “Listen to me talking like that! I mean, someone must have brought it back.”

This I could not explain.

“The girl he mentions,” I murmured.

“The girl who may not even exist.” Emilia’s finger-tips were white, pressed together so tightly. “But we’ve had no visitors this afternoon, and Sarah’s been polishing the hall floor. It would have been nigh impossible to slip in the house. I can’t make head nor tale of this, really I can’t. Do we require a doctor, a policeman or a priest?”

I had no answer, unless we were over-complicating matters. Had a local girl taken a fancy to him and come in pursuit? If that were the case, what of the incident in the public house?

Emilia and I agreed, after some discussion, that it might be necessary to cut short our stay, for Philip’s sake. If Dunwich was bringing him distress, or unhealthy thoughts, then he must be taken from Dunwich’s reach. As for tangible threat, a passing fisherman’s story and suggestions in an old book were hardly proof that anything dreadful would

happen.

But there was one matter I had not mentioned to my friend. If I were pushed, I would have said that the damp patches in Philip's room resembled small, regular footprints, leading to and from the window.

#

Matters were brought to a head by the arrival of Isaiah that afternoon, home from business in Lowestoft. He bustled in, the antithesis of anything strange or unnatural, but his first words cut into me.

“Who's that odd lass at the end of the drive?” he asked, throwing his gloves onto the hall table. “Have we had callers?”

Emilia dropped the cut flowers in her hands, scattering the last of the dahlias in a red and yellow confusion.

“What sort of lass, Isaiah?” I helped pick up the flowers, squeezing Emilia's arm as I did so.

“Haven't the faintest. Slim, lots of tangled long brown hair, an old-fashioned dress. A gypsy, perhaps. She seemed to be looking up to the house. Didn't look at me, so I drove past her.”

He kissed her on the cheek.

“Have we had rain here while I was away?”

“Why?” asked Emilia.

“Oh, just that the lass seemed rather wet,” he said, and bustled off to change for dinner.

And then I knew what must be done. At least, I knew what to do next.

That evening we took Isaiah aside, and told him that Philip was a little unwell, that I was considering returning to London. He thought it over, but had noticed the mood at dinner.

“I have to go to Ipswich tomorrow, to the Tollemache brewery. Shall I drive you and Philip down? You could take the train to Liverpool Street from there.”

I accepted with relief, much though I would like to have seen more of Emilia.

Philip and I argued, for the first time ever. He wished to stay, to visit Dunwich again and spend time by the sea. When I asked him why, he reddened.

“The girl needs me.”

I found that I had clenched my fists, unknowing.

“The girl. Philip, if there is a girl here, she's a fisherman's daughter making sport of you. I know that you've been disappointed -”

“Abandoned! Like her.”

The air in his room seemed cool and damp around us, as if an unseen sea-mist had gathered there, brushing against our skin.

“Is that what she says?”

He mumbled something, but would not speak out plainly. I caught only a name. Eva.

“Bring this Eva to me, then.” I tried not to glare at him. “Let her show herself, and make clear her intentions.”

“I...” He stared around, seemingly at everything but me. “I cannot. She will not come

with others present.”

“She has been here, in this house?”

He wiped one hand across his brow.

“No. I mean, I don't know... in the night, maybe. Perhaps I was dreaming...”

“Enough.” I tried to soften my tone. “Philip, dear, you know that I care for you. Your mother's ill, and I have no choice but to take some charge here.”

He nodded, still looking away.

“Then trust me. You have had a shock, a great upset to your life, and now you seek something to balance that unhappy event. But it is not here, in Suffolk. These lonely shores are not for you, and local superstitions help even less.”

“But...”

“You need company, and purpose, which we'll find again in London.”

There were other words, but I was still formidable enough to prevail. Somewhat sulkily, he agreed to pack that night.

“You ought to leave that... carving for Mrs Rawkins to examine further,” I said. “She might find out more about it on her travels.”

“I shall keep it,” was his only defiance. “It was meant for me.”

#

I was not fond of automobiles, but was persuaded by Isaiah's bluff, matter-of-fact approach. He stuffed Philip and the cases in the back. I was given goggles, one of Emilia's scarves and placed firmly next to Isaiah in the front. The noise of the engine was uncomfortable at first, but as we sped down narrow lanes I became more at ease. We were heading away from the vicinity of Dunwich, and that was a start.

It was a straightforward journey, a route Isaiah apparently knew well, and we swung down through Suffolk without incident. Philip sat silent in the back seat. I glanced at him once or twice, but he was gazing east over the fields, expressionless. North-east, in fact, towards that low coast where we had sought shells and urchins but found... what? The idle carving of a long-dead sailor, probably worth a shilling on a bric-a-brac stall in Covent Garden. That was all.

We made good time. I had booked tickets on the three forty-five London train, but we arrived in Ipswich before noon. Having said our good-byes to Isaiah, I tipped a porter to secure our cases ready for the train, and encouraged Philip to see something of Ipswich with me.

We must have been some fifteen miles from Felixstowe and the sea, in a place which the girl Eva, real or phantasmal, would hardly know. The weather had cleared, leaving a sunny day. There were cafes and a fine museum. We wandered through the town and admired the scale, if not the delicacy, of the Cliffe brewery with which Isaiah had occasional business.

I did not see a slender figure with long wet hair, standing at the opening of an alleyway near the brewery. I am sure that I did not.

“We should move on,” I said, and hurried a puzzled Philip away.

There was a small regatta on the River Orwell, and we decided to spend our last hour in Ipswich watching the boats..

“A fine sight, eh?”

I smiled at him, and he managed a dutiful nod.

I thought him paler again, which worried me. We had sandwiches and lemonade by the river, surrounded by a mixed crowd of boating enthusiasts and idle onlookers. When he went to relieve himself in the nearest public house, I noticed that the right-hand side of his jacket bulged oddly. The carved heart, which I had thought safely stowed in his luggage, must be in his pocket.

Why in God's name had I not forced him to leave it behind us with Emilia?

After five or six minutes had passed and Philip had not returned, I began to worry. I scattered change for the attendant, and went into the tavern. It was almost empty, the crowds being by the river.

"A young man in a cream jacket, clean-shaven, came in here a few minutes ago." I said to the thickset barman. "Have you seen him since?"

"Went out the side-door, lady," he said, tipping his head to an exit I hadn't noticed. "Asked him if he wanted a drink, but he said he had to meet a girl. Some Eva..."

The cold I felt then was not of any unnatural nature. It was fear.

I strode out of that side-door, scanning the narrow street. To the right it led into Ipswich, but to the left it went down to the river. Almost running, I pushed past idlers and locals alike. The chair where we had been sitting was empty, but I could see the back of his linen jacket as he slipped between the people on the river bank.

"Philip!" I cried out, trying to make my way towards him. He was down at the water's edge by then, and I had a presentiment of some dreadful act to come. All I could think of was that damnable carving, and a phrase from Ecclesiastes.

All the rivers run into the sea...

"Oh God. Stop him, someone!"

Before anyone could grasp who I meant, Philip was in the water. It might have gone differently, but the small boats of the regatta were passing our vantage point, and I was too late. I saw his hat, then his head bobbing in the water – no, surely two heads, one a tangle of long dark hair – and then the boats were on them, oars coming down blindly into the grey-brown river, driving the regatta past us...

They pulled my nephew's body from the Orwell a half hour later. No-one else had seen a second person in the water, and no other body could be found. People were very kind, plying me with blankets, tea, anything to hand that might be of comfort. I took a tall man's flask, guessing its contents, and poured brandy down my throat until it burned.

The police asked me to view Philip in the mortuary an hour later and complete the formalities. The police doctor was nervous, but I reached to draw the sheet away myself, to see my nephew's face for the last time.

"He drowned, I suppose," I said, my voice dull. "Or was struck by a boat."

The doctor shook his head.

"I fear... I believe that the young man had a seizure, or some form of cardiac attack."

The sheet fell away from his upper body. Philip's left hand was by his chest, empty but clawed as if clutching at something, and his expression was one of terrible, terrible loss.

I searched his sodden jacket.

The heart had gone.

My sister, always frail, had been invalided by the shock, and it was decided that Edward, Philip's elder brother, and I would make all necessary arrangements. I told Edward everything, even down to the most minor events of our stay in Suffolk. He listened without comment, squeezed my hand and said he would need to contact a more experienced friend.

I received two communications of note at my London address that week. The first was from the friend of Edward's, one Henry Dodgson, of whom I knew nothing. He had enclosed a small, yellowing pamphlet, along with a note to express his deepest sympathy. I found his mark upon the second page.

'In the year of Our Lord 1746, it is told, Eva van der Druysen, daughter of a Dutch merchant resident in Dulwich, Suffolk, took her own life. This was done in the most dreadful manner by her tearing into her own breast. The tragedy took place after she was abandoned by one of van der Druysen's captains, not long before their proposed marriage – and after he had had his way with her. Reliable authorities state that her spirit walks the strand still, intent on bringing destruction to any who find her ruined heart.'

The pamphlet was stamped as privately published, but the details of the author were unreadable. Edward would speculate no further on the circumstances or background to his brother's death. This Mr Dodgson also appended certain suggestions as to protecting oneself from such malign influences.

"He knows of such things, Aunt Beatrice," said Edward, as if that settled it.

A second letter was addressed in Emilia's distinctive handwriting. It held a single newspaper clipping, cut from the Southwold Examiner of two days before.

'A most curious recent find on the shore at Dunwich has today been handed to the Southwold museum, being a carved wooden heart of some age. The curator plans to place it...'

I could not read on.

#

My case is packed. I have my late husband's revolver and money to buy sufficient petroleum products for the task ahead. My nephew's funeral is the day after tomorrow.

Before I see him lowered into the ground, I shall visit the Southwold museum, and I shall not be turned away. I shall see the dark heart of Eva van der Druysen burn until it is no more than ashes, and those ashes buried deep in consecrated ground.

Poor Philip.

John Linwood Grant's latest, sixth collection, 'Miss Linwood Entertains' (Cathaven, 2026) is now available in paperback and Kindle formats.

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