

THE WHITE HOUSE

A ghost story by Geoff Davies

(1959)

I

Bernard was eighteen when he came to Plomley to live. His father had just been promoted to the manager of the Carlton branch of the bank for which he worked. Plomley in fact lay about five miles from Carlton and was where Bernard's father had purchased a two year old house.

Whereas Carlton was situated at the centre of a wide bay, Plomley occupied an area which included one of the headlands of the bay. Carlton town itself had been built up around the mouth of the River Carr which flowed into the Bay and, due to its position and deep water harbour, the town was an excellent port where ships of many nationalities imported and exported goods. Bernard's father had in fact received a very good promotion. Plomley, on the other hand, was a very quiet place: an ideal tourist and holiday resort. The part of the coast line of Plomley exposed to the open sea had been slowly eaten away by the pounding, hungry waves leaving steep cliffs with deep clefts and hidden caves.

Bernard's family lived just a few minutes walk from the tip of the headland, from which the ground sloped gently down as one proceeded inland. The headland itself was very rocky and treacherous and, because of the potential danger to shipping, a lighthouse had been built on the rocks. On the comparative safety of the grassy slope a residential area had been established with houses of more expensive taste, in some cases with private swimming pools, tennis courts and other such luxuries. Bernard lived in such a house with an excellent lawn ringed by rose bushes. A crazy paving path ran from the back of the house to a small gate at the bottom of the lawn. This gate opened out onto a gravel track which provided a quick way to a secluded sandy bay a five minute walk away. The back of the house also looked out onto a grass covered hill with a shallow cleft running between it and the headland. The access road to the estate ran past the front of the house, the other side of which were built more large houses in various styles.

Bernard was glad and yet sorry that he had come to Plomley to live. He was sorry because he had left all his friends behind but on the other hand the move had set him a challenge: the challenge of a new life. He now had a large room of his own in the new house, as opposed to the small one he used to have, so was therefore busy for the first few days in Plomley sorting it out and deciding where to put the bedroom furniture and store his things. He had just finished his finals at school and had obtained some good passes in the subjects he took, so intended to start at the technical college

in Carlton after the holidays. During the first few days in his new home, Bernard did not notice any other young people of his age about so started going for walks alone in the afternoons and evenings down to the bay and up to the headland.

It was not until his third evening stroll that he noticed an old white house set slightly back from the headland but at the top of the rise. It was just an ordinary looking house: a box shaped brick building with a grey tiled roof. He was not close enough to distinguish any particular features but it was obviously vacant and boarded up. Bernard found the house rather intriguing and, as he stared at it in the setting sun, it seemed to lose its derelict appearance and gain a life of its own. He sat down on a grass mound and casually surveyed the environment. As darkness descended on Plomley the white house took on a more sinister look which sent a slight momentary shiver up his spine. His whole body shivered for a moment and he noticed that the air had turned a bit chilly. He took a final look about him, glanced once more at the white house and ran down the slope to his home.

A couple of weeks passed by before Bernard first noticed another chap, about his own age, enter the house nearly opposite his own. From that day he often saw the chap wandering down to the bay past the bottom of his house. One evening, when he again noticed the other boy wander past the garden gate, he took the opportunity to meet his new neighbour. He caught up with the chap on the gravel path not far from the bay. The boy was leaning on some

railings near a collapsed part of the cliff looking out to sea. Bernard wandered up to him.

"Hello there."

The chap turned his head to face the newcomer.

"Hi" he said. His face was expressionless. "You're the chap who's just moved in opposite aren't you?"

"That's right" replied Bernard, smiling. "I've seen you wandering about so I thought it time we got to know each other, seeing as we are neighbours. My name's Bernard." He held out his hand.

The boy extended his own hand. "Mine's Alan."

They shook in silence and Bernard joined Alan on the railings.

"You work near here Al?" he asked, looking out to sea.

Alan proceeded to do likewise.

"No" he said. "I'm attending the technical college in Carlton."

"Are you?" said Bernard, turning to face the boy next to him and supporting his weight on the railings with his left arm.

"I'm starting there next term."

"Maybe." said Alan, expressionless and still staring out to sea. "There are two colleges. I go to the Carlton Technical College."

"Oh" Bernard replied, and looked back out to sea noticing a small boat cruising around the headland from Carlton Bay. He solemnly watched it sailing in their direction. "What do you do around here?" he asked, his eyes still fixed on the moving boat.

"Nothing much" replied Alan. "There's nothing to do. There's no entertainment in Plomley, and what there is of it is in Carlton. Even so it's hardly worth the bother of going. Oh,

there are a couple of girls that I know that live at opposite ends of our road. One, Anne, always seems to stay in and only sticks her head out of the door when seeing her friend Julie, who always seems to be out and about. She's just passed her driving test and can be seen dashing past in a mini now and again. She often takes Anne out."

"What do you do then?" asked Bernard once again.

"Oh, I'm building a record player at the moment and I've also taken an interest in rock climbing. Some of the cliffs along the coast are excellent for scaling."

"It certainly sounds fun" Bernard said.

"I can also borrow a canoe, when I want to, from a chap up the road. It's good fun seeking out hidden coves and caves along the coast."

"I bet it is." Bernard was getting quite excited with the thought of exploring the caves, conjuring up images of smugglers.

They both continued to gaze out to sea, the small boat having now passed them and sailing on along the coast. Alan shifted, stretching his arms up in the air and letting them fall to stuff his hands into his pockets. Bernard also altered his position and leant on the railings with his back. Alan started walking back the way they had come and Bernard proceeded to do join him, with his left hand in his pocket. They reached a point where the path forked. One track led past the bottom of Bernard's house and the other over the hill at the back of the house, and on up to the headland. Bernard jerked his head at the right track to the headland.

"Coming this way?"

Alan looked at him for a moment then shifted his eyes to the ground. "Yeah, may as well; nothing else to do." He shrugged and followed Bernard up the slope.

Both of them, hands in pockets, trooped along. Bernard led the way along the narrow winding track, the white house suddenly climbing into his mind. In fact he became so preoccupied thinking about the house up ahead that Alan's first warning went unheard. He was woken from his daydreams by a shout from Alan.

"Watch out Bernard!"

Bernard jumped and stopped dead, a mass of bramble inches from him with some runners stuck to his clothes.

"Didn't you hear me?" called Alan, slightly annoyed it seemed. "You'll tear your arms on that stuff."

Bernard was momentarily dazed. "I er didn't know it was there. It wasn't here er yesterday."

Alan spoke mockingly. "I know that stuff grows quickly but not that quickly. Anyway, with all the holiday makers wandering around picking blackberries, it soon gets shifted about."

"Yes" replied Bernard dolefully, easing the prickly runners back with his fingers. He squeezed past and held some back for Alan.

"Thanks" came the reply.

They continued to walk up the slope with Alan now in the lead chatting about things they could possibly do during the summer vacation. Eventually they reached the grass mound

where Bernard had sat some time before. He began to get feelings of excitement.

"Look at that house Al" he said, pointing in its direction.

"Yeah" said Al. "It looks kinda weird after sunset."

"You've noticed it too?" said Bernard, rhetorically.

"Why, have you?" queried Al, staring at his new found friend.

"Yes" replied Bernard. "Say, how about having a closer look at it."

"Getting a bit late isn't it?" suggested Al, looking around at the darkening sky.

"Does it matter?" asked Bernard. "After all, we are on holiday so it doesn't matter what time we get up in the morning does it?"

"No, I guess not" replied Al, shrugging his shoulders.

They carried on walking up the slope and eventually came across another gravel path which appeared to lead to the house. The closer they approached the white building the more spooky it appeared. The path did in fact go right past the old house and on up to the headland.

"I think there're some steps at the end of this path, which lead down to a beach below. From there it isn't very far to the lighthouse."

Al gestured in the appropriate direction with a wave of his hand. They eventually stopped and turned to face the front of the house. It was surrounded by overgrown shrubs and long grass. The few remains of a fence existed along with an old rusty iron gate lying in the grass but the path to the front door was no longer visible. They stepped off the gravel path

and approached a notice nailed to an old wooden post leaning at a precarious angle. The printed notice read:

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED
Anyone found on these premises will
be liable to a fine of not less than £50.
J.M.Turner

They continued on towards the front door, Bernard surveying the front of the house with its three upstairs windows and one either side of the door. Dilapidated shutters were up at all of the windows and the front door was all boarded up with planks of wood nailed diagonally to the door and door frame. Al stood at the bottom of some worn concrete steps whilst Bernard ascended them to the door. He turned suddenly.

"Al, this place hasn't been inhabited for years and I doubt if anyone comes up here anymore."

"It certainly looks that way" replied Al, hands now on his hips.

"Shall we get in and have a look around?" suggested Bernard, with a grin.

"What if someone comes?" asked Al, with eyebrows raised.

"Is it likely that anyone will come near here at this time of night?" Bernard queried.

"I shouldn't think so." Al paused. "Yeah, why not. I've sometimes felt like doing it myself anyway."

"Have you?" asked Bernard excitedly. "Good. Come on then."

He grabbed a plank near the door handle and pulled. It was a bit firm but came away after a few combined tugs from both of them. Bernard reached for the door handle, turned it and pushed. The door seemed firmly fixed.

"Damn, it's stuck hard. I bet it's nailed on the inside as well." He stepped back.

"Let's have a go." said Al stepping forward and pushing violently at the door. "No, it's no good."

"Let's try around the back." Bernard was already on his way. Al followed.

Part of an old grass covered wall ran along the back of the house. Many of the bricks were strewn about a paved yard with bits of wood and rusty pieces of metal. A grating lay to the left of the back door which appeared to provide ventilation to a cellar. Both boys tried to peer through the grating, most of which was clogged up with earth, grass and leaves, but couldn't see anything because of the small holes and darkness within. They rose to their feet and stepped up to the back door. This was also boarded up and nailed like the front entrance.

"Useless" said Al. "We'll never get in."

"I guess not" said Bernard, casting his eyes all over the building with its shuttered windows like the front. There were seven at the back with three upstairs and four downstairs, two either side of the door. Bernard's eyes finally fell on the window shutters to the right of the door. He stepped up to them. One of the shutters, there were two shutters to each window, didn't appear to be too secure.

Two planks of wood nailed to the window frame held it in place. Bernard was quick to notice this.

"Al!"

"What?" Al wandered up beside Bernard.

"We can get in here if we can remove these two planks" he said, pointing them out. "We should be able to get in through this loose shutter." He turned around to look for something with which to lever the planks away from the frame.

Al studied the window. "Yes, I expect we could" he agreed. Bernard returned to Al's side holding a piece of an old plank of wood.

"Here we are; let's try this."

He wedged the plank under one of those nailed to the window frame. They both took a grip and pulled until the nails eased slowly out of the frame with a loud creak. One end was soon free and Al immediately proceeded to tear the other end loose. It came away with the splitting sound of breaking wood as Bernard wedged the plank under the second nailed board. They soon had the other piece free and carefully pulled the shutter back. Noses pressed to the glass, they peered through the window. All was dark inside. Bernard reached up and put increasing pressure on the inner window. It suddenly flew open causing them both to jump back in surprise. They stared at each other, both with white faces, grinned and burst into laughter. They then turned back to the window.

"I think we had better go in some other time" said Al. "It must be getting late now." He glanced about him. "Look, it's getting pretty dark. It must be about ten."

"Yes" said Bernard, stepping back from the window. "And we had better not leave it like this. Someone might notice."

"Mm, your right" murmured Al. "We'll get in tomorrow, in the daytime if the weather is rotten or in the evening. If the weather is fine during the day there will be too many people about."

Bernard reached forward and pulled the inner window closed. They both replaced the shutter, which was hanging from one hinge, and roughly replaced the two planks by knocking the nails back in with one of the bricks from the yard.

They wandered slowly home discussing the following day's proposed visit. Bernard frequently looked back at the house until it was out of sight. It took him a long time to get to sleep that night. He lay with his hands behind his head, for what seemed an infinite time, thinking about the house on the headland. After an extended period of twisting and turning he eventually fell off to sleep.

Bernard woke up to rays of sunlight streaming through his bedroom window. The white house immediately came to his mind. "Blast" he said aloud to himself. "There goes our visit to the house today. There'll be loads of people about in this fine weather."

He didn't see Al at all that morning or afternoon, but noticed many holiday makers wandering about with their picnic bags and cameras. He could imagine the headland, with its views of the bay, swarming with them. The day seemed to drag, so Bernard was quite thankful when the hall clock chimed seven times, indicating early evening. 'Seven' thought Bernard. 'Heck, I wonder where Al is.' He sat brooding for another quarter of an hour and jumped at the sound of a knock on the door. He leapt up, calling out to his parents.

"I'll get it. It's probably Al."

"Okay" his mother called back.

Bernard pulled the door open. "Hello Al."

"Hi Bern" Al replied, with his hands pushed deep into his pockets. "Ready?"

"Sure" replied Bernard, and stepped out slamming the door behind him.

They both wandered down the garden to the back gate of the house.

"Watch" said Al suddenly, and ran towards the gate. He cleared it quite easily, landing softly on the other side.

Bernard laughed and opened the gate to leave the garden

the conventional way. "Well done" he said. "I'm not as fit as that."

Al turned, smiling at Bernard. "I've learnt to jump like that during my explorations around the rocks and pools when the tide is out."

"Oh yeah?" said Bernard, not being particularly interested. "Good."

They proceeded to stroll leisurely up the slope towards the headland. There were still families with their children and young couples wandering about. Giggles and low voices could be heard filtering through the surrounding bushes. Both Al and Bernard strained their eyes for signs of movement amongst the green foliage and ferns but once again soon they found themselves on the gravel path leading past the white house. Even here, there were still people passing them every few yards.

"They must be coming up from the beach" said Al casually.

"Yeah" said Bernard in a lazy response.

They walked past the house to the end of the path where a wider rough track, which passed some distance away from the back of the building, ended in a circular plot. Obviously, many cars used the area to turn around. About fifty yards from this plot was the cliff edge. It was a steep drop to the sea in most places but in one location steps had been cut where the past crumbling of the cliff face had left a wide rough ledge which sloped to reach a small beach of sand and shingle large enough to accommodate a limited number of people. It was, however, empty now except for just one

family busy packing up their belongings and two couples, one at each end of the beach. Al dropped to the grass and lay back with his hands behind his head with his eyes closed. Bernard seated himself with his hands around his knees. 'Damn these holiday makers people' he thought. 'Why don't they hurry up and go home.'

"I haven't seen you all day" said Bernard, looking at Al, who appeared to be asleep.

"No" he replied, eyes remaining closed. "I've been over to Stritton for the day. I couldn't get a part for my amplifier in Carlton and wanted to finish it by the weekend, so I nipped over to the Radio Shack there and got it. Whilst I was there I looked over the castle, where they've got some excellent dungeons. All quite eerie you know."

Bernard instinctively looked behind him at the white house. Voices brought his attention back to the cliff edge as the gabble of childrens' voices and the authoritative voices of the parents indicated that the family they had seen was returning from the beach. Two scrambling boys and a little girl appeared at the cliff edge followed by the heads of the parents.

"Be careful now" the mother called out. "Don't mess about or you might fall."

The children ran off down the path as the adults glanced at Al and Bernard before wandering after their offspring.

"Now those two couples" said Bernard, impatiently.

"They'll probably be there all night" said Al, grinning.

"Yeah. Shall we go ahead then?" Suggested Bernard.

Al looked at him. "I'm easy."

"Right then, let's go." Bernard rose to his feet, Al followed suit.

More voices were heard: a young woman's and a man's. The boys looked at each other and fell flat on their stomachs with their chins resting on their hands.

"Don't fall darling" came the man's voice.

"I won't, if you stop doing that" replied the woman. "That other couple might see if you're not careful."

"No they won't; they're too busy. Ha, ha, ha."

"Trust you to think of that." The woman sounded amusingly disgusted.

A pause followed, then the woman's head appeared at the same time as another protest to her boyfriend.

"Stop it John. Don't do ..." her voice dropped to a just audible whisper. "Stop it now. There's someone up here."

The boys looked at each other, grinning. The couple walked on arm in arm, the woman glancing back once at the reclining figures of Al and Bernard. Once out of sight the protests and laughter recommenced.

Al laughed. "Wait 'till the others come up, if they ever do that is."

They got up and peered over the edge of the cliff for any sign of movement. The remaining couple was still tucked away under the cliff.

"Okay, let's go " said Al, thrusting his hands into his pockets and walking towards the house.

The sun had already begun to set and twilight was approaching. The boys were soon at the back of the house pulling the planks away from the window once again.

Bernard tugged open the shutter and Al pushed the inner window open. It was quite gloomy inside now.

"Give us a leg up" said Bernard, grabbing hold of the window ledge.

Al put his shoulder under Bernard's posterior and helped push his friend up. The weight soon disappeared and Al looked up to see Bernard turning round to offer his friend a hand. With a bit of a struggle, Al soon joined his friend on the sill. They jumped to the floor and surveyed the dusty, bare room.

"This must be the kitchen" said Bernard, noticing the sink and range, covered in cobwebs.

"Yeah" said Al, peering into a dirty sink.

The back door, all boarded up, lay to their left as expected. They moved towards another door standing slightly ajar, which faced the back door. As they pulled it open it emitted a slight squeak.

They now found themselves looking down a hall directly at the front door. They walked towards it and passed through an ornamental archway, which no doubt in the past used to be draped with a bead curtain, from the fragments that were left. This arch opened out into a long room which stretched the width of the house. A little of the fading light from outside trickled through odd gaps in the shutters, but the general gloom of the room remained.

"We'll have to come back in the daytime" said Bernard. "It's too dark now to see very much."

They noticed a door set in the wall to the left just after the

archway.

"Might be the dining room" said Al, looking at the door. He wandered over to it and twisted the knob. "Locked." There was another door directly opposite, but he didn't bother to try it. "Lounge?" he suggested.

"Looks like the place has been ransacked" suggested Bernard.

"A pity it can't be renovated."

"Probably closed up for good" countered Al.

"It's a wonder, then, that they don't knock it down or sell it" said Bernard, looking about him at the cobwebs and dust.

"Praps it's haunted" laughed Al.

"Boo!" shouted Bernard.

"I don't believe in ghosts" Al boasted proudly. "Do you Bern?"

"I don't really know" he replied with a look of doubt on his face. "Let's try another door."

He moved back through the archway with Al close behind him. There was another door in the hallway on their left.

"Might be a cellar?" Bernard queried.

"Perhaps they've got bodies down there, looking at the way it's all bolted up" Al said, fiddling with the door knob and laughing.

It did seem odd, with a large padlock and two large bolts at the top and bottom. It was as though the owner didn't want anyone entering what lay behind. The boys moved on down the hall back towards the kitchen and came to a stairway on the right.

"Up here how?" questioned Al, grabbing hold of a loose

bannister.

"May as well" replied Bernard, following his friend.

They cautiously climbed the stairs, many of them creaking beneath their tread, and soon arrived on the landing with a bedroom door directly facing them. To the left was a window directly above the front door. Another bedroom door was to the left of the stairs with the landing continuing along to their right towards the back of the house. There was a room at the end of the landing, probably above the kitchen, and two more doors opposite each other along the passage. The boys moved towards the end door first. It opened fairly easily into a smallish room, probably used as a box room, with a window that overlooked the back yard and a door in the wall on the right. A large wooden trunk lay on the floor to their left. Al walked over to it and lifted the lid. "Empty!" He exclaimed.

They glanced around once more then left, slamming the door behind them. The room on the left was bigger and obviously a bedroom but just as bare. There was, however, a built in wardrobe which Bernard investigated. This also was empty. The room opposite was, again, empty so they retraced their steps along the landing and stopped outside the door opposite the stairs. The door more or less opposite and to the right as they faced the staircase, which they had noticed earlier, was also bolted and padlocked.

"Another bolted door, chum" said Al. "Maybe there's loads of booze in there."

They entered the room at the top of the stairs where they had been standing. This one appeared to be the largest bedroom, which stretched to the front of the house and, like the previous rooms they had examined, was completely empty. There was the window overlooking the front of the house with an old fireplace set in the wall opposite the door, which Al had closed behind them.

"Let's make a noise and wake the ghosts" Al said, and proceeded to stamp about with his heels on the bare wooden floor boards.

"What a din" Bernard shouted, moving over towards the window. He peered through the slots in the shutters. "Shush!"

"What?" whispered Al, abruptly ceasing the racket he was making.

"There's someone coming." Bernard continued to peer through the shutters.

"Who?" Al moved over beside his friend.

"Oh, it's only the other couple coming up from the beach."

They both relaxed.

Al looked up at the darkening sky. "It must be getting late now."

"Yes, we'd better go as soon as that couple have gone" replied Bernard.

The couple drew level with the house and stopped. The man was talking and beckoning towards the house. As they both moved off to the side of the house their voices became audible.

"..... just for a minute, Bett."

"Okay, but only one minute."

Al and Bernard strained their ears to hear what was being said. Murmurings arose.

"Stop it, Harry."

"Aw, come on love."

"Not here."

"Why not?"

"Someone might come."

"Now? No, not very likely."

"I've got to get home."

The mumbling carried on for quite some time, then silence.

"We can't go out yet" Bernard whispered.

Al sounded a bit nervous. "No, they might hear us. Gosh, it's dark in here now. I wish they'd hurry up."

It seemed nearly half an hour before receding footsteps were heard on the ground. The boys ran over to the front window and made out the shapes of the couple moving off. A few clouds which had gathered were slowly moving away across the sky. The room was suddenly bathed in an eerie white light lying as strips across the floor.

"Hey, looks like a full moon" said Al, glancing out at the white circle high in the sky.

Visions of space travel entered his mind but were quickly dispelled. He always enjoyed reading science fiction novels.

"Come on Al." Bernard moved towards the door.

"Wait!" Al stood still.

"What now?" Bernard responded, with his hand resting on the door knob.

“Car coming.”

"Oh, no." Bernard let go of the door knob and moved to Al's side and listened.

Headlight beams shone up into the sky and slowly moved down towards the ground. The sound of a car engine grew louder and the vehicle appeared. It moved to the end of the path, turned and rolled down the track to stop a few yards from the house. The engine was switched off and the lights dimmed. Movement was seen in the car and then the headlights were switched off altogether.

“We've got to get out of here" said Bernard, getting impatient. "They won't see us. Come one." They moved towards the door again. Bernard's hand once again reached for the door knob. The car's engine was heard to start up.

Bernard dropped his hand. "Oh no. Why don't they make up their bloody minds."

He moved quickly to the window and was beginning to lose his temper. They stared out in silence as the headlights went on again. After another long pause the car engine started up and the vehicle moved off slowly. As it disappeared, a screeching of brakes was heard followed by a lot of shouting.

"Oh for crying out loud" shouted Bernard.

“This is bloody ridiculous“ joined in Al, kicking at the air.

The shouting turned to laughter and an old four-seater sports car appeared crammed with what appeared to be a dozen or so youths.

"From the pub no doubt" said Al, with a glum face. "I wish we had some booze with us now." He suddenly brightened up. "Say, this would be a great place for a party."

Bernard remained expressionless. "Yeah, yeah, but if anyone found us here we could be prosecuted; breaking and entering don't forget." He reminded Al.

"Yes. I guess you're right." Al's face returned to its former serious expression.

Several youths had piled out of the car and started undressing. They all had bathing costumes on and, with the aid of torches, made their way to the headland and down to beach. One couple remained in the car whilst another two moved off. One of the two wandering couples appeared to move around to the side of the house to settle down. '

"Oh hell" said Bernard, walking down to the other end of the room.

For another long period they just sat and discussed anything that came to mind.

"Must be nearly midnight" murmured Bernard.

"Mm" replied Al. "I didn't bring my watch."

"Nor me" said Bernard. "I didn't particularly want to, what with the climbing about."

"No" muttered Al.

After some time the laughing voices were heard returning and the youths were seen approaching the car drying themselves with their towels. They all climbed back into the car without bothering to get dressed.

"Come on you lot" shouted one.

The engine started up and one couple appeared from the bushes. A movement near the house was observed by Bernard and Al as the last couple ran to the car as it was

turned around. It rolled slowly down the slope and the last two passengers were hauled in by the many hands dangling from the side. A commotion arose from amid the mass of bodies and the car suddenly accelerated with screams and shouts. A body momentarily dangled from the back of the fast moving car but was rapidly hauled back to safety. The roar of the engine faded and all was silent once again. The boys were suddenly aware of the distant sound of waves breaking on the rocks of the headland but it seemed quite a while before Al suggested that they now get out of the house.

"Yes, I suppose we'd better" agreed Bernard.

They seemed to have lost the eagerness to leave now and moved slowly towards the door.

"Shush!" Al stopped dead.

"What?" This time the impatience wasn't present.

"Listen." They put their ears to the window.

A crunching sound of a heavy but soft tread on the gravel path reached their ears. The sound grew louder but the tread remained slow and careful. It stopped outside the house.

"Who is it?" whispered Bernard.

"I don't know" replied Al.

They peered through the shutter but failed to see anything. The moon disappeared behind some clouds and all went dark. The tread moved off the gravel and onto the grass, the slow, soft thud on the ground drawing nearer to the house when it stopped at the front door. Suddenly the whole

house was filled with the distant but violent rattling of the door knob. Bernard was standing with eyes wide open and lips slightly apart.

"Al" he whispered, "that door knob was stiff."

"I know" Al swallowed audibly.

The rattling ceased and the boys stood perfectly still. The sudden return of the rattling, much louder than before, caused both of the boys to turn white. The noise ceased abruptly. The heavy footsteps now proceeded slowly and cautiously around the house towards the back. The sudden rattling of the back door knob made the boys jump back. Once again it again ceased abruptly. A slight pause was followed by a terrible crashing sound which filled the house and seemed to echo in every room. Al gripped Bernard's arm. Another pause. Bernard looked at Al's deathly white face. No doubt his own was the same, he thought. The soft tread of footsteps now sounded along the hall and stopped at the bottom of the stairs. After another pause they proceeded to thud with increasing volume as they ascended the staircase. Louder and louder the steps grew. The whole house seemed to shake with the abrupt, deafening thuds. They stopped again at the top of the stairs. The boys were both shivering and crept slowly towards the wall near the fireplace. The steps then moved along the landing to the padlocked room, the doorknob rattling softly. The creak of the opening door echoed throughout the house loudly.

"Th-the door's p-padlocked" stuttered Al, pointing to the door of the room they were in.

Bernard didn't answer but swallowed audibly. The thudding footsteps could be heard moving across the other room then stopped. A loud whisper now sounded throughout the house and ceased as abruptly as it began. A low continuous moan now commenced. It rose in pitch and volume simultaneously and soon turned into a piercing, uncanny and deafening scream. The scream suddenly ceased to be followed by shuffling and a loud thud. The sound of something heavy was heard being dragged across the room and out onto the landing. Another pause and the movement recommenced with a quick succession of thuds descending the staircase with decreasing volume. The dragging could now be heard faintly along the hall until it stopped, followed by the sound of bolts being drawn back filling the air. Another door opened. The boys looked at each other. Both read each other's mind. The cellar door was being opened. A further long pause was followed by a deafening crash and then another pause. A new deep moan sounded far off. This again grew in volume to a deafening scream but not as high pitched as the first one.

After that the boys stood still for what seemed hours.

"Shall we"?" whispered Al.

"Yeah" Bernard agreed chokingly.

They stuck close together and moved towards the door. Al's shaking hand reached for the knob and gently pulled the door open. They both peered out onto the landing. All was quiet. Al's eyes were staring at the floor. Then Bernard noticed that the dust had not even been disturbed. Only

their footprints were visible. The moon appeared again from its long absence behind the clouds and a little light fell on the opposite door. It was sufficient to show that the padlock was still intact. The boys moved slowly down the stairs with Al in the lead. At the bottom of the staircase Al looked carefully to his left at the closed and padlocked cellar door. All was deathly quiet. The two boys moved towards the kitchen and stopped at the window, which was still open. The back door was undisturbed and still secured with the planks of wood. They eased themselves through the window and dropped silently to the ground outside. Hesitating at the grating for a moment they strained their ears for sound. Silence.

Soon they were walking back down the gravel path. Their steps quickened and they finally broke into a run. They decided not to go back the way they had come but along the road, even though it was longer. Once outside their respective homes they just whispered "See yer" and disappeared into the shadow of the buildings.

III

At least a fortnight passed before Bernard saw Al again. It was as though his friend had entered into a self-imposed exile because Bernard knew that Al had not left the district. He still went for his strolls, but only in the daytime, and he now found himself avoiding the old white house. When the distant building did catch his eye it sent shivers down his back.

It was about sixteen days after the ghostly experience, on a Sunday, that Bernard saw Al talking to a couple of girls outside his house as he was returning from one of his strolls and immediately went over to join them.

"Hi Al" he called over.

The trio turned to face him.

"Hello" replied Al, with a wave of his hand.

As Bernard entered into their company, Al introduced his friend to his companions.

"Oh, Bern; this is Anne and this is Julie." He indicated each girl with his hand.

"Hello" said Bernard somewhat shyly. ‘

"Hello" replied Anne in a soft but clear voice.

"Hi." Julie's voice was much louder and slightly deeper.

The two girls seemed near opposites. Anne was short and attractive with a very young face and blonde hair. She was slim and small built. Julie on the other hand was taller and about the same height as the two boys. She too was attractive, with black hair and a more mature appearance.

She was also more developed outwardly than her friend and both girls had their hair shoulder length. Al was obviously more attracted to Julie by his constant glancing at her. Bernard didn't quite know which girl he fancied from this first contact. They both appealed to him in their own way.

"I was just telling the girls" said Al, winking at Bernard but unobserved by the girls. "There's a dance on at the local theatre tonight in aid of some charity or other."

Bernard had caught sight of Al's wink and promptly replied "Well, why don't we take the girls then?" The boys looked at the girls, Al at Julie and Bernard at Anne.

"Okay with you two?" Al asked them both.

"Sure" replied the girls, looking at each other. "We'd love to."

"Good" replied Al, grinning. "We'll pick you up tonight at about seven; okay"

He was looking up into the sky whilst suggesting the time and brought his gaze back to the girls for the 'Okay'. It was as though the time had been written on a cloud for him to read.

"Fine" replied Julie. "We'll be ready."

"Be seeing you then" said Al, now winking at Julie. "So long girls."

"Cheerio" chipped in Bernard.

"Bye" the girls replied, walking off in the direction of Julie's home.

Al gazed after them, thoughts rushing through his mind. Bernard felt pleased too. He turned to look at Al and attempted to mentally analyse his friend's character. 'Al generally seemed a very reserved chap' he thought 'but quick

with girls, probably brazen and with plenty of self-confidence. He would probably get on alright later on in life.' The girls had now disappeared but Al was still gazing in the direction they had gone.

"Al" said Bernard, prodding his friend. "They've gone."

"Mm, I know" replied Al. "I was just thinking."

"Say, guess what?" he suddenly said excitedly, turning to face Bernard. "Julie's old man's has also got a canoe and said I could borrow it any time. I thought we'd go out in it this week sometime, maybe even tomorrow morning. We could nip around to the bay using the light-house as a port of call."

"Sure" agreed Bernard. "It should be a fine day tomorrow, according to the forecast."

Al spoke again. "I thought we could go up to the headland now and survey the landing area."

Bernard's face dropped. "The headland?"

Al caught on quickly. "Oh yeah. Say, what's the matter with you? It's daylight and there aren't any ghosts during the day. Anyway, I've been thinking about our experience during the past fortnight. It's possible that we dreamt it all you know. Just think how ridiculous it all seems now."

"Dreamt it?" Bernard's face was shocked. "You kidding?"

Al continued the argument. "Now look; be reasonable. What we went through is impossible. Let's face it, ghosts don't exist."

Bernard backed down. "Okay. Let's forget it and go up to the headland."

"Right" said Al, and thrust his hands into his pockets, a habit of his.

They followed the cliff path and were soon walking past the white house, now displaying its seemingly innocent derelict appearance. There was nothing sinister about it now. The sun was quite warm, the sky virtually cloudless and there were few people about. They soon finished their survey of the headland and the lighthouse and decided that they could land at the base of the tall beacon and possibly even get inside, assuming the door wasn't locked. It was most likely though for security reasons as the light was controlled automatically. Having discussed the following day's trip they started back home. Once level again with the white house Bernard lost all his previous fears.

"Al" he said casually.

"Yeah?" replied Al, staring at the ground ahead of his plodding steps.

"If you don't believe in ghosts, let's go into the house now and have a look around." Bernard had to say this rapidly for the full effect of his statement to be felt.

Al stuttered out his reply. "Er..er..what? But..er..but.." He had to search for an excuse. "Someone might come."

Bernard indicated the deserted area with a sweep of his arm.

"Someone might see us" gabbled Al "from ... er ... over there." He pointed in a random direction.

"Plenty of cover as you know" replied Bernard, proudly.

Al was caught. He couldn't admit that he was scared though.

"Look" He thought for another excuse, but gave up. "Oh, alright."

He grudgingly followed in the wake of Bernard's anxious steps. After all, it was daylight.

The back window was still open, where they had left it in a hurry a couple of weeks before, and they were soon inside the house and searching the rooms once more. The large long room at the front was now lit by rays of sunlight streaming through the gaps in the shutters. In fact the whole house had now lost its former gloominess and made the boys feel quite at ease. The cellar door and bedroom door were still securely locked and bolted, and only their own footsteps could be seen in the dust on the floor.

"There." said Bernard, somewhat warily. "What did I tell you. Let's try and get in the padlocked rooms."

"Okay, but what with?" Al had now also lost his former fears. "I think I saw some old iron railings outside. We could use one of those."

Bernard followed his suggestion by quickly walking back towards the kitchen. Al didn't intend to be left in the house on his own, in spite of his firm disbelief in ghosts. He soon trotted after his friend. They did manage to remove a railing from part of a rusting old fence, which ran around part of the house, and were soon back inside the building with the tool. They attempted the bedroom door first as it looked the least secure. They were right. The lock yielded quite easily with a crash of breaking metal and ripping of splintered wood. Al turned the door knob and gently pushed the door open. It creaked loudly on the rusting hinges.'

"This door hasn't been opened for years" he said, slowly

entering the room.

"It certainly looks that way."

Bernard followed his friend with the railing clutched in his hand like a weapon. The room didn't look very sinister as they had expected it to be. An old iron bed with a few springs missing was set against the wall opposite the window and a built-in wardrobe was set in the wall opposite the door. "Virtually the only piece of furniture in the house!" exclaimed Bernard. "I wonder why."

"Perhaps that's why they locked the door. In case someone nicked it" suggested Al, disbelieving his own statement as soon as he had made it.

"No, I doubt it" replied Bernard, wandering over to the wardrobe and carefully opening it.

It was empty of course, as they had expected it to be. They left the room, Al closing the door behind him, and made their way down the stairs. Now they were opposite the cellar door.

"Hey" said Al, looking at his chum. "Now we've reached their stronghold."

"Yeah" replied Bernard.

He made a gesture suggesting that Al begin on the lock. Al nodded, took the iron rod from Bernard and wedged it behind the lock. Both boys put their weights to the bar. The lock didn't give at first so they tried a number of positions before a slight creak from the woodwork indicated that a weak point had been found.

"It's coming" said Al glancing at his partner.

The following effort and excitement was rewarded by a

sudden splintering of wood and a shifting of the bar. Al dived for the lower bolt while Bernard reached for the upper one. Neither of them would shift so the boys once again had to resort to the iron bar treatment. Once the obstinate bolts had been forced back the boys paused and leant against the well opposite. It was certainly warm work this breaking open doors, they both thought.

"That was a tough one" said Bernard, wiping his forehead with his bare arm.

"It couldn't have been opened for donkey's years." Al also had to remove perspiration from his hot face.

"I guess not" Bernard replied, hands new dangling at his sides. "Well let's go in."

"Yeah, okay."

The two of them stood still for a few seconds, looked at each other and laughed.

"Anyone would think we are scared" grinned Al.

They stepped forward still laughing and both took hold of the rusty handle. One last glance at each other's excited face and they pulled hard. It hit the boys like a gale and sent them reeling back against the wall opposite causing a little loose plaster to fall to the ground supplementing the shock. Both of them viewed his friend's deathly white face.

"My God!" exclaimed Al. "Did you feel that Bern?"

"I should say I did. " Bernard was trembling slightly. "I'm sure I heard a hollow groan."

Immediately they had opened the door a wall of cold, clammy air had hit them. The air was not only damp and

stale from years of enclosure; it was as though it was impregnated with unearthly evil spirits, spectres and wraiths that had now all been released after centuries of imprisonment. It took some moments for them to recover before they gingerly stepped forward and peered down into the dark cellar. A few strands from a torn silky cobweb hung in their path from the doorframe and stone steps covered with dust and joined by more cobwebs descended into the cellar.

"Bit dark isn't it?" queried Al, peering around.

"Come on. It's not too bad" replied Bernard, beginning to descend into the gloom.

Al followed close behind. They reached the floor of the cellar with goose pimples covering their arms and feeling shivers running up their backs from the dank air. Set high in the wall of the room was the grating they had seen from the outside. It was choked up with plenty of earth allowing very little light to penetrate the darkness. Bernard indicated the grating and Al nodded in acknowledgement. The cellar contained very little, like the rest of the house. A cabinet, with a cupboard in the lower half, two drawers above it and shelving at the top, stood to the right of the steps. On investigation, the cupboard yielded dust and insects. In the left hand draw they found a dagger. The right hand drawer was missing. The sight of the lone knife puzzled and excited the inquisitors. Al picked it up eagerly but immediately dropped it as though it had burnt his hand.

"What's up?" his friend asked, puzzled.

Al stared at it. "It.....seemed to...." He couldn't find the right

words to describe the uncanny experience. "... I don't know. It just did something to me. Horrible."

Bernard bent down to pick it up from the dusty floor. His hand quivered as his fingers closed around the implement. He slowly lifted it up to the little light that filtered through the open doorway.

"My, that's handsome!" he exclaimed.

The blade was about eight inches long and had a white bone handle.

"What's that stain on the blade?" asked Al, lifting his friend's arm up a bit to allow a little more light to fall on the point of the blade.

Both boys swallowed.

"Looks like dried blood" whispered Bernard, astonished.

He stepped back to the drawer, dropped the knife in and closed it quickly.

Continuing the investigation they found a wooden chair with a broken seat in the far left hand corner of the cellar and a small door in the wall opposite the cupboard. This door had round handle knob covered in thick cobwebs. Bernard walked over to try and open the door but it was stuck fast. Even when Al joined him they couldn't move it. Neither of them commented on it but just shrugged their shoulders; they had already seen enough strange things. Walking back across the room, Al's foot suddenly struck something with a hollow sound. They both stopped and looked down at the floor.

"It's a trap door!" Bernard exclaimed.

The wooden hatch set in the floor was about three feet square with a large ring fixed close to one edge. Al reached down and pulled at the ring after stepping off the hatch. It opened with a loud rusty creak. Darkness met their gaze once again. Bernard put his ear close to the opening and listened.

"Hey." He grabbed Al's right arm. "I can hear the sea, Al."

"Big shell" replied Al, humorously.

"I'm not joking" said Bernard. "Listen."

Al bent down to join his friend. He also heard the distant sound of water lapping on rocks below. As their eyes became used to the darkness, they could see that the door opened to a roughly cut vertical shaft. The remains of a corroded iron ladder hung from about six inches from the top of the hole.

"Smugglers?" Suggested Bernard, somewhat excitedly.

"Pity we can't get down" said Al. "We ought to bring a rope next time."

"Next time?" Bernard expressed surprised. "You want to come back again?"

"Well it's okay. Bit of fun really." Al closed the hatch and they both stood up. Without any further conversation they returned to the hallway and slammed the cellar door. More plaster fell. A feeling of pursuing unseen spirits drove them quickly from the house out into the bright sunlight of a normal world. However, clouds were building up with signs of approaching rain and very few people about so the boys decided to head back home. Soon, they had forgotten their afternoon excursion and were chatting eagerly about the

dance. They were both looking forward to their dates with the girls that night. Bernard left his friend with mixed romantic and ghostly thoughts flitting through his mind.

IV

At seven o'clock precisely the boys met in the road, as planned, and proceeded to Julie's house to collect the girls. They were both waiting there and looked most attractive in summer dresses. After a short chat, the quartet departed to enjoy the dance. The evening went off well with a local pop group, composed of drums, bass and electric guitars, playing the latest hit tunes and some old favourites. Plenty of drink was consumed in the bar, the boys drinking beer and the girls, shandy and shorts. The revelry finished at about a quarter to midnight and the four staggered home singing pop songs, much to the annoyance of light sleepers in the neighbourhood. Having bid the girls goodnight, with a bit of kissing and cuddling, and having arranged to see them again, the boys dropped the girls off at their respective homes and met once more outside their own houses. They propped themselves up against the wall of Al's house.

"What a night" sighed Al. "And future prospects look good too."

"Yeah" agreed Bernard. "It sure was fun."

"I don't feel at all tired. I wish this could go on all night." continued Al.

"Must be something we can do" mumbled Bernard, staring at his feet.

Al stared up into space at the dark twinkling sky. He suddenly pointed.

"Look Bern. It's a full moon tonight."

Bernard looked up but failed to see anything.

"Twit" he said to his friend. "That drink must have affected you, to make you see things. There's no moon tonight. The last one was that night we spent up at the house and that was a few weeks ago."

"Hey." Al suddenly had a thought. "I wonder if the ghost only appears when there is a full moon."

Bernard caught him. "But you said it was only a dream."

"Uh, yes; so I did." He suddenly had another thought. "Look, to prove I'm right let's go up there the next time there is a full moon."

"Ah" Bernard said "but what if it's only an annual occurrence, like the anniversary of a foul crime."

"Well first let's see if it's dependant on the moon, then we'll investigate your suggestion, suggested Al.

Bernard looked doubtful. "We'll probably forget about it by next year."

They parted company making a mental note to enter the white house at the next full moon.

Over the next couple of weeks, prior to the day they were planning to enter the house once again, they got to know the two girls quite well. They often went around as a foursome but there were, of course, occasions when Al and Julie cleared off together for a day and likewise Bernard and Anne. Bernard found himself growing quite fond of the girl now that he was seeing her nearly every day. In spite of the budding romances neither Al nor Bernard forgot about the next full moon and consequently reserved the evening for their vigil. In fact they had to reschedule it for the month

following as they were enjoying the girls company so much and nearly cancelled it altogether.

Finally the planned evening arrived and they met, as usual, outside Al's house at about eight o'clock in the evening and decided to go for a drink, first, to pass the time. They remained in the pub until closing time and even then, left rather reluctantly. The four or five pints they had each consumed set them en route for the white house at a brisk pace and made them feel a bit like pioneers of the spiritual world. It wasn't long before they arrived once more outside the old house which even looked quite welcoming to them. It was now about eleven thirty and the moon, set in the cloudless sky, lit up the whole of the headland area. The boys made their way around to the back of the house and clambered in through the window they had left open after the last visit. It was dark inside, as expected, and it took a while for the two youths to get used to it.

Bernard spoke first. "Let's station ourselves in the locked bedroom this time, eh Al?"

"Sure" he agreed.

They proceeded up the creaking stairs. Al stopped and took hold of Bernard's arm.

"Wait a minute."

"What's the matter?" Bernard turned to face Al, expecting Al to have heard something.

Al released his chum's arm. "I'll station myself in the cellar" he suggested bravely.

"No" shouted Bernard, grabbing his friend's arm.

Al tore himself away and looked a little annoyed. "Why not? It's okay."

Bernard noticed his friend's annoyance and hesitated. There wasn't anything to worry about really. It was not likely to be any worse in the cellar than it would be in the bedroom. It was just that the basement seemed so horrible and evil.

"Well. I suppose it's alright, but yell if you get sca ... I mean in trouble."

Al gave Bernard a straight glance. "Yeah, sure."

He turned away, knowing that Bernard was going to say 'scared' and he didn't like the thought of it. He started off down the stairs. Perhaps he had been rather abrupt with Bernard and didn't really mean to sound so annoyed, so decided that he would apologise when they re-joined each other after this was over. Still, he would have to go through with it now and couldn't back out now even if the cellar did look eerie when he reached it. Opening the door he discovered it was still stiff and found it required some effort to open it again. Having achieved this he pushed it well back and descended into the gloom.

Bernard trudged up the stairs slightly concerned about Al down in the cellar. He was sure there was something very evil about the place even if Al didn't. He reached the landing and opened the bedroom door to his left. The moon was still shedding its white light through the window illuminating the lonely bed. He left the door open behind him and moved across to the wardrobe. He pulled open the doors and stepped inside. Here he planned to spend the night in watch

for the ghost. Ghost? Did he really think he would see one? Perhaps they did imagine the happenings that had occurred that night two months ago and were in fact asleep, although in his mind it still seemed rather vivid. Tonight however, they would find out, if the ghost turns up. He wasn't really looking forward to staying in the wardrobe all night and his legs would probably start aching soon, due to a somewhat cramped position. He glanced at his watch. It was half past twelve. Well, he would hang around until about three and then go and look up Al, if he had not given up first. He settled himself down and pulled the doors nearly closed, just leaving enough of a gap so that his field of vision included the bed and door.

Bernard began to wonder what Al was doing down in the cellar and also thought back over the past events since he had arrived in Plomley when he was awoken from his thoughts by the violent rattling from downstairs. He jumped.

"Hell! What was that?"

The rattling ceased but started again after a short pause. The second bout of rattling took his mind back to the previous night's visit.

"The ghost!" He exclaimed quite audibly. Then it wasn't a dream.

There was a long pause and Bernard visualised the ghost proceeding around to the back of the house. The silence was broken by the rattling from the back of the house followed by the terrific crashing sound. The same dull thuds sounded along the corridor and slowly and monotonously ascended

the stairs. Once again the steps grew louder to a deafening boom and then abruptly ceased outside the room. Bernard peered through the slight gap between the doors of the wardrobe and stared in amazement; the bedroom door was now closed. The doorknob itself was hidden in the shadows and, although he couldn't see it turn, he heard it rattle softly. Bernard's eyes were affixed to the door as it slowly began to open with a loud eerie creak. He peered hard but failed to see anything. Soon it was fully open and a figure slowly emerged from outside the room. It was staring towards the bed. Bernard could see it was a man of average height and slightly stooped. He looked about forty-five with long, black, swept back hair and had a long pointed nose with tired deep set eyes and a smallish mouth with thin lips. He was wearing a dark suit with baggy trousers and an open, two buttoned jacket. Bernard sensed a change in the atmosphere of the room and turned his eyes away from the stranger to survey the room itself. He received a second shock which nearly caused him to cry out in astonishment but just restrained himself. The room was fully furnished. The moonlight now seemed twice as bright at least and illuminated the room well. The wall was papered with a flowery pattern and various items of bedroom furniture, including an ornate dressing table, were set about the room. A large portrait of an elderly man with a moustache hung above the bed, in which Bernard could just see a figure snuggled beneath the sheets.

The movement of the stranger towards the bed attracted Bernard's attention back to the door. The figure glided past the wardrobe and stopped by the bed locking down at the sleeping person. A whispering sound now came from the direction of the stooping man and Bernard strained to hear what he was saying. He was obviously talking to the sleeping person but all that could be heard was a long whispering babble. A movement from the beneath the sheets caused the sudden cessation of the whisper. A moan now arose from the reclining figure and the stooping man reached into his pocket. The figure in the bed was moving now and, staring up at the long haired man stooping over, uttered a slightly louder moan. The man now removed his hand from his pocket and took out the knife the boys had discovered in the drawer in the cellar. The man's arms now moved towards the figure in bed that pulled itself up to a sitting position.

The appearance of the second ghost nearly made Bernard retch. The face he saw was deathly white and drawn, giving it a dehydrated appearance. The grey hair hung down around the long face covering the ears. The large round staring eyes were set back in deep sockets and had a look of terror in them. The moan from the figure in the bed was now turning to a cry of horror. The movement of the stooping man now blocked the scene from Bernard's view. The cry was turning to a scream as the arms of the man moved forward. The scream grew into a shriek and Bernard clapped his hands to his ears. Even this didn't shut out the ghastly

sound which was deafening, horrible and uncanny. He couldn't stand it. It was awful. He heard himself saying softly 'I can't stand it. Let me get out.' He pushed his hands forward and the shriek abruptly stopped. Bernard stopped his hands inches from pushing the doors open. 'God' he thought, 'what if I'd opened them?'

The shuffling from the bed brought his attention back to the evil deed that had just been performed. The stooping man moved with effort, pulling at something. He backed up and a loud thud signified something heavy dropping to the floor. He now began to step backwards pulling the "dead" person past Bernard's hiding place. As they passed him, Bernard saw the body's face again. Its eyes were now bloodshot and bulging out. Something new caught his attention. He looked down at the throat. It had been slashed with blood oozing from it. Bernard turned and was sick in the wardrobe. When he looked back through the gap between the doors, legs could be seen disappearing through the bedroom door. Now the door began to close on its own and slammed violently. The house was still.

Now the regular thud down the stairs began. When it ceased, Bernard pushed open the wardrobe doors, stepped out and crept across the room. The sound of the moving bolts stopped him dead in his progress. After a pause he continued and reached the bedroom door. His hand moved cautiously towards the handle, which he grasped and turned, slowly pulling open the door. He peered out along the landing. Nothing. His body moved gingerly out with his hand

pulling the door closed behind him. That door was too fond of slamming he thought. He stopped again at the top of the stairs at the sound of the second scream. It grew louder until once again it reached the deafening crescendo; then silence again. He thought about what Al was going through now and what fun it was going to be after, relating their experiences to each other. Bernard now began to venture cautiously down the stairs.

It took Al quite a while to get used to the darkness before he could undertake a further investigation of the cellar. There was nothing new to be found however. He suddenly remembered the dagger and began to step over towards the cupboard when the violent rattling stopped him. The air now grew cold and the surroundings eerie. It was as though the spirits of death had just entered the house. The cellar door began to swing shut. Al watched it until it slammed violently, shaking the whole room. He quickly walked over towards the steps leading up to the door and suddenly realised that he could see reasonably well, if not better than before. The whole room seemed brighter in fact. He climbed the steps and tried to pull open the door but to no avail. He turned around gloomily and then noticed the pattern on the floor. He looked up astonished and swallowed hard. "The grating!" He exclaimed to himself and stared. The grating was clear. No earth blocked it up now.

Fear now began to take hold of Al's body. With a sudden thought, he quickly moved over to the sideboard and tugged open the lone drawer: the dagger was gone. He felt scared

and wished he hadn't insisted on spending the night down in this evil place. He started to glance around the room but a distant crash drew his attention back to the cellar door. He now knew the ghost was in the house and listened attentively to the ascending footsteps followed by the distant shriek. He turned back to the cellar when a second shock shuddered through his body. The door opposite the cupboard was now slightly ajar; the one with the round handle. How? Who? Perhaps it was already open. He certainly hadn't paid much attention to it since he had entered the room. Then he thought carefully. Of course, it was just a hoax for idiots like himself and Bernard. Someone, probably the owner, looked out for night intruders and staged all this ghostly stuff. Having stomped around the house shrieking, the hoaxer would disappear through that little door. It must lead somewhere. He thought back about the bolted and locked doors. There was probably a secret way into the two rooms. Next time they came, and in the daytime at that, they would investigate the little door with torches and arm themselves with pieces of the old wrought iron fence. The regular thud down the stairs brought back a wave of panic. He tried to console himself and looked about frantically for somewhere to hide. The chair! Yes, of course; it couldn't be seen very easily as it was in the gloomiest corner of the cellar. He stumbled over to the corner and crouched down behind it. Not much cover, he thought, but it would-have to do. The thudding had ceased and now dragging sounds were approaching. Wait! Maybe it would be better to crouch down in the cupboard, he thought. Did

he have time? He moved slightly but coldness overcame him as bolts were heard being drawn back. Bolts? But they weren't drawn. He swallowed again and started shaking.

The door opened and Al peered around the chair. At first he couldn't see anything; then the same man Bernard had seen now appeared and an eerie light filled the cellar. The mournful face of the stooping figure looked into the cellar. The man now turned and bent down to grasp something. He rose slightly and backed down the stairs with effort, pulling something. Al could see he was dragging what looked like a body. The thought of a hoax now never even entered his mind. The man with the body reached the floor of the cellar and let his burden fall. The head fell back and Al, seeing the face and neck, retched but wasn't sick like Bernard. The figure now stooped to the little trap door and pulled it open. He allowed the door to fall back and returned to the body. He paused for a moment breathing heavily then stooped down once again to grasp hold of the corpse. Slowly he dragged the body over to the trap door, bent down to kiss it on the face and then roughly pushed it down the shaft. The bumping of the falling body and the distant splash caused Al some difficulty in holding back a gasp of horror. He turned his face away towards the small open door opposite the cupboard and froze. A large mass filled the doorway but partially out into the cellar. It had no definite shape and just looked like a mass of coats hanging to the floor. A damp mouldy stench also reached Al's nostrils. The stooping man had his back to this hulk and was just reaching to close the

hatch of the shaft when the violent slam of the cellar door shot him up to an erect position. He slowly turned and Al saw a look of fear on the man's face. The head continued to turn until it noticed the shape by the other door. The man's face now turned to horror and he staggered back with his hand to his mouth uttering a slight moan. He tripped at the edge of the shaft and fell back. The shape now emerged from the doorway and moved very slowly towards the fallen figure, whose face now had a most terrified look with the eyes staring in absolute terror. One hand was held up, as though in defence, whilst the other he used to push himself back up against the cupboard. The shape glided over the open shaft in the floor but didn't fall down it. The man scrambled to his feet muttering the word "No". The face was now twisted with agonised suffering.

'What could he see?' Al thought. 'Nothing could be that horrible. What was the hulk? What did it look like?'

The shape now blocked the man from view and moved closer to the scrambling figure. Al heard the struggling and then the moan turned into a shriek. The blood stained knife clattered to the floor. Al peered hard. It was the knife from the cupboard drawer. He gasped audibly just as the shrieking stopped and immediately clasped his hand over his mouth. Movement had stopped by the cupboard. Had the hulk heard Al? No, it couldn't have. These are only ghosts and ghosts can't see or hear anything material. He tried to relax and convince himself that everything was okay, but the shape was turning. Al swallowed hard, a lump came into his

throat and his heart was racing. He peered hard but couldn't see anything but the huge mass. It had now stopped turning. The sudden gloom which came over the cellar enveloped the shape in the shadows. It seemed to sense an intruder. Was it moving? Yes. The shape was gliding over towards Al. He stuck his fist in his mouth to stifle the issuing whimper. It was getting nearer. Al cringed in the corner and buried his head in his arms. Silence. Nothing. Should he look up? No, wait. It will go away. It must be dawn soon and then all will be alright. Don't look up. The suspense was agonising. He couldn't stand it and wanted to get up and run, but the cellar door was now closed. Wait, the other door; that was open. He could go through there. It must lead out somewhere; but maybe it didn't. Perhaps it was just a cupboard. He just had to get out. He glanced up ready to rise and run and then saw it, waiting. He heard himself scream at what faced him. Something protruding from the shape moved slowly towards him. He looked up and saw the big circular red eyes staring down at him. The rest of the face was his mind was swimming, his throat was hoarse suddenly all went black. Bernard heard the second shriek and knew it was Al. He had just reached the cellar door and now panic overtook him. He turned and ran down the corridor towards the kitchen. He knew they had left the kitchen window open so leapt blindly up at the window-sill. He noticed too late that the window was closed.

The dawn of a bright sunny morning one summer saw the body of a young boy of about eighteen years washed up in a

small bay at Plomley, near the town of Carlton. That same morning blood trickled from the torn throat of another young boy lying on a gravel path near an old white house, also in Plomley.

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