

WAYFARING

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Coming in to Land on Saturn

BOY, are we moving fast! Advantage of being trained so taut. And when we hit, cosmic yammo, all perched on spinning balls, comet-dodging, looking for peace – in Lowestoft? Or King City. Well, I mean, what’s wrong with that? Came downstairs and dwelt among us; looking for jelly sandwiches in the ice-box. Just ripping off mythologies – only 45, dead on the kitchen floor, seared all over like a waffle. And jeeze boy – was he still travelling when he hit!

Guffaw full of respect. Spies’ hangout. Many wife- and ghost-slayers, inner-city spooks, skilled at vaporising in carburettors. Gotta slooow down fore I hit that firewall. One million miles of winds lapping, scent of hydrogen core. Grinding up the beach with surfboard dwindling, scuttering up styrofoam ridges like hares on snowfields. Brother planet arched like an eyebrow, or elephant-moth-caterpillar, defended with these goddam waves, going so fast against me sounding like sound or squeaky treacle. Experience pure: no connection with people living or dead: clean end like clouds belching. All is revealed just too quick and over before the sensor burning out can register.

Might have been a moonflower, cuticle of silverfish. Mooning on, about this really weird job, and boss, the hide and hunt game – something off there, a bit off course ...

*

The boss looked too clumsy, too human. It was a mixed meeting. He chewed on a seegar. ‘Men: And other things. And, er, peripherals.’

We operatives took it all in. The human ones unblinking. Other things absorbed with flickers of their liquid crystal eyes. And others, able to digest and crunch more information than there’d ever be in that room, took it all in with a frustrated clatter.

Key words: task, up front, on top. Wallflowers, foxgloves, redhot pokers, Canterbury belles – the chief had been obsessed with English gardens. Our spying roles fitted nicely with homelier flowers. Except, that we were spying on ourselves. Condemned by force majeure to a monastic mumble of key- and last-words, and to celibacy in all things, from head to heels.

‘We are,’ said the boss, ‘temporally between moments; you might say “temporarily”.’ He stumbled it. ‘Spatially, we are behind one thing, and before another. Just past, you could say, but not yet arrived. Not quite here, and not quite there. Not now, but not

then, no, definitely not *then*: more waiting, but not exactly *for* anything. We can't assume that when we have waited there will be anything – er – more; other; of the same; different, but similar in essentials. Meanwhile, however, we must all join in thanking you others – and peripherals – for helping in our search and struggles. All join, that is, who aren't mechanicals.'

These stood their ground well. No threatening word had been uttered. In essence, in this odd dimension where the 'extra-dimensional' – as we called them – roamed about, we were lucky to have mechanicals to help. The 'extras' appeared at times in marvellously tiny resolution or in immense, featureless enlargement. As the 'extras' moved towards, away from, and painlessly through us, like so many great, but dead, men, the machines could give us readings. Immense of the tiny ones, minute of the elephantine, so we thought we knew what 'they' were – if rightly one could use the plural. So, the endless furrows of what seemed a huge ice-plain might turn out to be the vast exaggeration of a speck of mica, and what seemed a common beetle to be really an army of millions upon millions of marching things as tall as cedars, bearing flags of nickel and orange. And theirs, I suppose, was help.

*

One of the advantages of being a spy, especially in a precarious place, for one like me *believing* I am dead, is that there is no problem of atonement. Believing, that is, like in fairies, or that ‘yes, that *is* my stetson with the bunch of grapes in it.’ Truth, the truth of mysteries, like the fading of teddy-bears in colour, then from shelf to cupboard, bonfire (even), to dustbin or to garbage chute – down into janitor Dan’s furnace and round the radiators one more time – that’s the truth, yes. Drastically recycled.

Report to our controls. Taking a fine, fair robot with me, well-hung with peripherals.

*

Before I killed my wife, I felt remorse. After, only the desire to escape what might be called ‘punishment’, or equally, rehabilitation. She had often tried to kill me, but perhaps in her case the balance between remorse and flight was different.

I did the decent thing: commit suicide immediately after. I threw myself from the window of our apartment. It was on the ground floor, but I could have hurt myself on a stake used to prop up chrysanthemums. When we spelled that word at

school, it seemed to combine a sacred beginning and a profane end.

I was surprised the police did not worry too much about my wife's death. Possibly they were fatalists – 'they'll all have to pop off one day' – more likely, because I was a spy. I was a spy for my country. I don't believe in any country but my own, which has a scanty population – one. But it lends itself to the profession of spying. I have always spied – on my parents, on the au pair girls opposite where we lived.

I was taken to the three colonels. They took it in turn to brief me. The briefings were very brief. They have pips on their shoulders, like bison grazing under mulberry trees. I used to think this and then remember colonels don't have pips. They were not very bright, but they were brighter than me. They pressed me to insult them. I succeeded, and lost my first professional spying job. More interesting was the journey into my brain. It was the first time for me but the brain itself was no new invention. My black colonels had already explored it, perhaps even discovered it. I was taken into it with the aid, indeed the company, of an unknown relative, supposedly Irish, but equally possibly Brazilian or Welsh, one Jesus Malarkey.

It was a most complex visit, no match or comparison with Disneyland or other funfairs. What a lot of slutter, of blur and blot, of forgotten Latin and

German, declensions, of nipple-tickling, trains from Victoria.

I asked J. ‘Is this really a brain that we’re washing?’

‘Well, rather walking through.’

‘Then, basically, I’m dead; if I’d any children to know of, this is what I’d have left them. It’s like when the light goes off. Seeing nothing is boring. The dark makes you fall about and forget where the door is.’

Washing brains can only be a prelude to eating them. I, carrying my country on my back, was – as it were – taken by a gymnastic through the oft short circuits of my brain by – had he understood the term – my amanuensis. Perhaps they paid an archivist to yoke together Jesus and Malarkey. ‘None of that Malarkey, bejusus.’ Names unearthed, which never would be earthed, ready on tiptoes to call each other out. An archivist, I fancied, with an old Plymouth, finely tuned, perhaps a girlfriend called Fay.

My brain was no hell: no heaven either. Hell of a fine brain you’ve got there. The two of us, what we found twiddling and fiddling with the springs and levers and the alphabets lying around was what would help me with my spying. *A mystery*. That thing the barber sees when he looks past the customer’s head at the next customer, the long-haired future ready – for a smallish sum – to be reduced to the past. A few snips.

Did I kill my wife?

I had always wanted to marry a dead person. All books on art, religion, literature say that the dead enhance the sense of life for the living. When Lord Nelson, patron signifier of so many pubs, gave up his ghost – surely, sent it out and about – Hardy, called upon to kiss those wooden false teeth, must have preferred to gum. Or perhaps, playing safe and forgetting Kismet, hard to do at such a time, realised Nelson had left his fangs safe in the cabin.

Life is indeed a matter of honour. And honour, as we are leading you into the wood, chosen by the family council to acquire a piece of lead within a spot between your dandruff and where the barber stopped – last Saturday – his snipping for a moment, you can hardly refuse. That's life, take another look soon, if you can.

No I didn't kill my wife, she was dead when I married her.

But yes, I was a spy, and I discovered the MYSTERY. It had nothing to do with why there is no sequel to the Bible, why is it a good book and sells so many copies – whereas I, filling pages of couplings, even those of good citizens of Varna, Ontario, though containing love, hate, etc. – would have meagre sales.

When they take you to the woods, think of the money rich people spend on shrinks to know they

married mummies: museum talk. Think of not pissing your pants, or worse. Think of Jiminy Cricket, the seven dwarfs, of grass as high as a rhinoceros's eye, and hope they get the deflection, the angle of dangle, right. Irremediably trivial, no sentiment, no humanist stuff for them to get their gums round.

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