
C.S. LEWIS

AUTHOR OF


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THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

That Hideous Strength

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Out of the Silent Planet
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C. S. Lewis

THAT
HIDEOUS
STRENGTH

A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups

THE SHADOW OF THAT HYDDEOUS STRENGTH
SAX MYLE AND MORE IT IS OF LENGTH.

(Sir David Lyndsay: from *Ane Dialog*, describing the Tower of Babel)

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To J. McNeill

PREFACE

I have called this a fairy-tale in the hope that no one who dislikes fantasy may be misled by the first two chapters into reading further, and then complain of his disappointment. If you ask why—intending to write about magicians, devils, pantomime animals, and planetary angels—I nevertheless begin with such hum-drum scenes and persons, I reply that I am following the traditional fairy-tale. We do not always notice its method, because the cottages, castles, woodcutters, and petty kings with which a fairy-tale opens have become for us as remote as the witches and ogres to which it proceeds. But they were not remote at all to the men who made and first enjoyed the stories. They were, indeed, more realistic and commonplace than Bracton College is to me: for many German peasants had actually met cruel stepmothers, whereas I have never, in any university, come across a college like Bracton. This is a “tall story” about devilry, though it has behind it a serious “point” which I have tried to make in my *Abolition of Man*. In the story, the outer rim of that devilry had to be shown touching the life of some ordinary and respectable profession. I selected my own profession, not, of course, because I think fellows of colleges more likely to be thus corrupted than anyone else, but because my own is the only profession I know well enough to write about. A very small university is imagined because that has certain conveniences for fiction. Edgestow has no resemblance, save for its smallness, to Durham—a university with which the only connection I have had was entirely pleasant.

I believe that one of the central ideas of this tale came into my head from conversations I had with a scientific colleague, some time before I met a rather similar suggestion in the works of Mr. Olaf Stapledon. If I

am mistaken in this, Mr. Stapledon is so rich in invention that he can well afford to lend, and I admire his invention (though not his philosophy) so much that I should feel no shame to borrow.

Those who would like to learn further about *Numinor* and the True West must (alas!) await the publication of much that still exists only in the MSS. of my friend, Professor J. R. R. Tolkien.

The period of this story is vaguely "after the war." It concludes the Trilogy of which *Out of the Silent Planet* was the first part, and *Peregrandra* the second, but can be read on its own.

C. S. LEWIS
Magdalen College,
Oxford.
Christmas Eve, 1943.

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I

Sale of College Property

I

"Matrimony was ordained, thirdly," said Jane Studdock to herself, "for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other." She had not been to church since her schooldays until she went there six months ago to be married, and the words of the service had stuck in her mind.

Through the open door she could see the tiny kitchen of the flat and hear the loud, ungentle tick tick of the clock. She had just left the kitchen and knew how tidy it was. The breakfast things were washed up, the tea towels were hanging above the stove, and the floor was mopped. The beds were made and the rooms "done." She had just returned from the only shopping she need do that day, and it was still a minute before eleven. Except for getting her own lunch and tea, there was nothing that had to be done till six o'clock, even supposing that Mark was really coming home for dinner. But there was a College Meeting today. Almost certainly Mark would ring up about teatime to say that the meeting was taking longer than he had expected and that he would have to dine in College. The hours before her were as empty as the flat. The sun shone and the clock ticked.

"Mutual society, help, and comfort," said Jane bitterly. In reality marriage had proved to be the door out of a world of work and com-

radeship and laughter and innumerable things to do, into something like solitary confinement. For some years before their marriage she had never seen so little of Mark as she had done in the last six months. Even when he was at home he hardly ever talked. He was always either sleepy or intellectually preoccupied. While they had been friends, and later when they were lovers, life itself had seemed too short for all they had to say to each other. But now . . . why had he married her? Was he still in love? If so, "being in love" must mean totally different things to men and women. Was it the crude truth that all the endless talks which had seemed to her, before they were married, the very medium of love itself, had never been to him more than a preliminary?

"Here I am, starting to waste another morning, mooning," said Jane to herself sharply. "I *must* do some work." By work she meant her doctorate thesis on Donne. She had always intended to continue her own career as a scholar after she was married: that was one of the reasons why they were to have no children, at any rate for a long time yet. Jane was not perhaps a very original thinker and her plan had been to lay great stress on Donne's "triumphant vindication of the body." She still believed that if she got out all her notebooks and editions and really sat down to the job, she could force herself back into her lost enthusiasm for the subject. But before she did so—perhaps in order to put off the moment of beginning—she turned over a newspaper which was lying on the table and glanced at a picture on the back page.

The moment she saw the picture, she remembered her dream. She remembered not only the dream but the measureless time after she had crept out of bed and sat waiting for the first hint of morning, afraid to put on the light for fear Mark should wake up and fuss, yet feeling offended by the sound of his regular breathing. He was an excellent sleeper. Only one thing ever seemed able to keep him awake after he had gone to bed, and even that did not keep him awake for long.

The terror of this dream, like the terror of most dreams, evaporates in the telling, but it must be set down for the sake of what came afterwards.

She had begun by dreaming simply of a face. It was a foreign-looking face, bearded and rather yellow, with a hooked nose. Its expression was frightening because it was frightened. The mouth sagged open and the eyes stared as she had seen other men's eyes stare for a second or two when some sudden shock had occurred. But this face seemed to be meeting a shock that lasted for hours. Then gradually she became aware of more. The face

belonged to a man who was sitting hunched up in one corner of a little square room with white-washed walls—waiting, she thought, for those who had him in their power, to come in and do something horrible to him. At last the door was opened and a rather good-looking man with a pointed grey beard came in. The prisoner seemed to recognize him as an old acquaintance, and they sat down together and began to talk. In all the dreams which Jane had hitherto dreamed, one either understood what the dream-people were saying or else one did not hear it. But in this dream—and that helped to make its extraordinary realism—the conversation was in French and Jane understood bits of it, but by no means all, just as she would have done in real life. The visitor was telling the prisoner something which he apparently intended him to regard as good news. And the prisoner at first looked up with a gleam of hope in his eye and said, “*Tiens . . . ah . . . ça marche*”; but then he wavered and changed his mind. The visitor continued in a low, fluent voice to press his point. He was a good-looking man in his rather cold way, but he wore *pince-nez* and these kept on catching the light so as to make his eyes invisible. This, combined with the almost unnatural perfection of his teeth, somehow gave Jane a disagreeable impression. And this was increased by the growing distress, and finally the terror, of the prisoner. She could not make out what it was that the visitor was proposing to him, but she did discover that the prisoner was under sentence of death. Whatever the visitor was offering him was something that frightened him more than that. At this point the dream abandoned all pretence to realism and became ordinary nightmare. The visitor, adjusting his *pince-nez* and still smiling his cold smile, seized the prisoner’s head between his two hands. He gave it a sharp turn—just as Jane had last summer seen men give a sharp turn to the helmet on a diver’s head. The visitor unscrewed the prisoner’s head and took it away. Then all became confused. The Head was still the centre of the dream but it was quite a different head now—a head with a flowing white beard all covered with earth. It belonged to an old man whom some people were digging up in a kind of churchyard—a sort of ancient British, druidical kind of man, in a long mantle. Jane didn’t mind this much at first because she thought it was a corpse. Then suddenly she noticed that this ancient thing was coming to life. “Look out!” she cried in her dream. “He’s alive. Stop! Stop! You’re waking him.” But they did not stop. The old, buried man sat up and began talking in something that sounded vaguely like Spanish. And this for some reason frightened Jane so badly that she woke up.

That was the dream—no worse, if also no better, than many another nightmare. But it was not the mere memory of a nightmare that made the sitting room of the flat swim before Jane's eyes and caused her to sit down quickly for fear she should fall. The trouble was elsewhere. There, on the back page of the newspaper, was the Head she had seen in the nightmare: the first head (if there had been two of them)—the head of the Prisoner. With extreme reluctance, she took up the paper. EXECUTION OF ALCASAN was the headline, and beneath it SCIENTIST BLUEBEARD GOES TO GUILLOTINE. She remembered having vaguely followed the case. Alcasan was a distinguished radiologist in a neighbouring country—an Arab by descent, they said—who had cut short an otherwise brilliant career by poisoning his wife. So that was the origin of her dream. She must have looked at this photo in the paper—the man certainly had a very unpleasant face—before going to bed. But no: that couldn't be it. It was this morning's paper. But, of course, there must have been some earlier picture which she had seen and forgotten—probably weeks ago when the trial began. It was silly to have let it give her such a turn. And now for Donne. Let's see, where were we? The ambiguous passage at the end of *Love's Alchymie*,

*Hope not for minde in women; at their best
Sweetnesse and wit, they are but Mummy possesst.*

"Hope not for mind in women." Did any man really *want* mind in women? But that wasn't the point. "I *must* get back my power of concentrating," said Jane; and then, "was there a previous picture of Alcasan? Supposing . . ."

Five minutes later she swept all her books away, went to the mirror, put on her hat, and went out. She was not quite sure where she was going. Anywhere, to be out of that room, that flat, that whole house.

2

Mark himself, meanwhile, was walking down to Bracton College, and thinking of a very different matter. He did not notice at all the morning beauty of the little street that led him from the sandy hillside suburb where he and Jane lived down into the central and academic part of Edgestow.

Though I am Oxford-bred and very fond of Cambridge, I think that Edgestow is more beautiful than either. For one thing it is so small. No maker of cars or sausages or marmalades has yet come to industrialise the country town which is the setting of the University, and the University itself is tiny. Apart from Bracton and from the nineteenth-century women's college beyond the railway, there are only two colleges: Northumberland which stands below Bracton on the river Wynd, and Duke's opposite the Abbey. Bracton takes no undergraduates. It was founded in 1300 for the support of ten learned men whose duties were to pray for the soul of Henry de Bracton and to study the laws of England. The number of Fellows has gradually increased to forty, of whom only six (apart from the Bacon Professor) now study Law and of whom none, perhaps, prays for the soul of Bracton. Mark Studdock was himself a Sociologist and had been elected to a fellowship in that subject five years ago. He was beginning to find his feet. If he had felt any doubt on that point (which he did not) it would have been laid to rest when he found himself meeting Curry just outside the Post Office and seen how natural Curry found it that they should walk to College together and discuss the agenda for the meeting. Curry was the Sub-Warden of Bracton.

"Yes," said Curry, "it will take the hell of a time. Probably go on after dinner. We shall have all the obstructionists wasting time as hard as they can. But luckily that's the worst they can do."

You would never have guessed from the tone of Studdock's reply what intense pleasure he derived from Curry's use of the pronoun "we." So very recently he had been an outsider, watching the proceedings of what he then called "Curry and his gang" with awe and with little understanding, and making at College meetings short, nervous speeches which never influenced the course of events. Now he was inside and "Curry and his gang" had become "we" or "the Progressive Element in College." It had all happened quite suddenly and was still sweet in the mouth.

"You think it'll go through, then?" said Studdock.

"Sure to," said Curry. "We've got the Warden, and the Bursar, and all the chemical and bio-chemical people for a start. I've tackled Pelham and Ted and they're sound. I've made Sancho believe that he sees the point and that he's in favour of it. Bill the Blizzard will probably do something pretty devastating but he's bound to side with us if it comes to a vote. Besides, I haven't yet told you. Dick's going to be there. He came up in time for dinner last night and got busy at once."

Studdock's mind darted hither and thither in search of some safe way to conceal the fact that he did not know who Dick was. In the nick of time he remembered a very obscure colleague whose Christian name was Richard.

"Telford?" said Studdock in a puzzled voice. He knew very well that Telford could not be the Dick that Curry meant and therefore threw a slightly whimsical and ironical tone into his question.

"Good Lord! Telford!!" said Curry with a laugh. "No. I mean Lord Feverstone—Dick Devine as he used to be."

"I *was* a little baffled by the idea of Telford," said Studdock, joining in the laugh. "I'm glad Feverstone is coming. I've never met him, you know."

"Oh, but you must," said Curry. "Look here, come and dine in my rooms tonight. I've asked him."

"I should like to very much," said Studdock quite truly. And then, after a pause, "By the way, I suppose Feverstone's own position is quite secure?"

"How do you mean?" asked Curry.

"Well, there was some talk, if you remember, as to whether someone who was away quite so much could go on holding a fellowship."

"Oh, you mean Glossop and all that ramp. Nothing will come of that. Didn't you think it absolute blah?"

"As between ourselves, yes. But I confess if I were put up to explain *in public* exactly why a man who is nearly always in London should go on being a Fellow of Bracton, I shouldn't find it altogether easy. The real reasons are the sort that Watson would call imponderables."

"I don't agree. I shouldn't have the least objection to explaining the real reasons in public. Isn't it important for a college like this to have influential connections with the outer world? It's not in the least impossible that Dick will be in the next Cabinet. Even already Dick in London has been a damn sight more use to the College than Glossop and half a dozen others of that sort have been by sitting here all their lives."

"Yes. Of course, that's the real point. It would be a little difficult to put in that form at a College meeting, though!"

"There's one thing," said Curry in a slightly less intimate tone, "that perhaps you ought to know about Dick."

"What's that?"

"He got you your fellowship."

Mark was silent. He did not like things which reminded him that he

had once been not only outside the Progressive Element but even outside the College. He did not always like Curry either. His pleasure in being with him was not that sort of pleasure.

"Yes," said Curry. "Denniston was your chief rival. Between ourselves, a good many people liked his papers better than yours. It was Dick who insisted all through that you were the sort of man we really wanted. He went around to Duke's and ferreted out all about you. He took the line that the one thing to consider is the type of man we need, and be damned to paper qualifications. And I must say he turned out to be right."

"Very kind of you," said Studdock, with a little mock bow. He was surprised at the turn the conversation had taken. It was an old rule at Bracton, as presumably in most colleges, that one never mentioned in the presence of a man the circumstances of his own election, and Studdock had not realised till now that this also was one of the traditions the Progressive Element was prepared to scrap. It had also never occurred to him that his own election had depended on anything but the excellence of his work in the fellowship examination: still less that it had been so narrow a thing. He was so accustomed to his position by now that this thought gave him the same curious sensation which a man has when he discovers that his father once very nearly married a different woman.

"Yes," continued Curry, pursuing another train of thought. "One sees now that Denniston would never have done. Most emphatically not. A brilliant man at that time, of course, but he seems to have gone quite off the rails since then with all his Distributivism and what not. They tell me he's likely to end up in a monastery."

"He's no fool, all the same," said Studdock.

"I'm glad you're going to meet Dick," said Curry. "We haven't time now, but there's one thing about him I wanted to discuss with you."

Studdock looked enquiringly at him.

"James and I and one or two others," said Curry in a somewhat lower voice, "have been thinking he ought to be the new Warden. But here we are."

"It's not yet twelve," said Studdock. "What about popping into the Bristol for a drink?"

Into the Bristol they accordingly went. It would not have been easy to preserve the atmosphere in which the Progressive Element operated without a good many of these little courtesies. This weighed harder on Studdock than on Curry who was unmarried and had a Sub-Warden's

stipend. But the Bristol was a very pleasant place. Studdock bought a double whiskey for his companion and half a pint of beer for himself.

3

The only time I was a guest at Bracton I persuaded my host to let me into the Wood and leave me there alone for an hour. He apologised for locking me in.

Very few people were allowed into Bragdon Wood. The gate was by Inigo Jones and was the only entry: a high wall enclosed the Wood, which was perhaps a quarter of a mile broad and a mile from east to west. If you came in from the street and went through the College to reach it, the sense of gradual penetration into a holy of holies was very strong. First you went through the Newton quadrangle which is dry and gravelly; florid, but beautiful, Gregorian buildings look down upon it. Next you must enter a cool tunnel-like passage, nearly dark at mid-day unless either the door into Hall should be open on your right or the buttery hatch on your left, giving you a glimpse of indoor daylight falling on panels, and a whiff of the smell of fresh bread. When you emerged from this tunnel you would find yourself in the medieval College: in the cloister of the much smaller quadrangle called Republic. The grass here looks very green after the aridity of Newton and the very stone of the buttresses that rise from it gives the impression of being soft and alive. Chapel is not far off: the hoarse, heavy noise of the works of a great and old clock comes to you from somewhere overhead. You went along this cloister, past slabs and urns and busts that commemorate dead Bractonians, and then down shallow steps into the full daylight of the quadrangle called Lady Alice. The buildings to your left and right were seventeenth-century work: humble, almost domestic in character, with dormer windows, mossy and grey-tiled. You were in a sweet, Protestant world. You found yourself, perhaps, thinking of Bunyan or of Walton's *Lives*. There were no buildings straight ahead on the fourth side of Lady Alice: only a row of elms and a wall: and here first one became aware of the sound of running water and the cooing of wood pigeons. The street was so far off by now that there were no other noises. In the wall there was a door. It led you into a covered gallery pierced with narrow windows on either side. Looking out through these, you discovered that you were crossing a bridge and the dark

brown dimpled Wynd was flowing under you. Now you were very near your goal. A wicket at the far end of the bridge brought you out on the Fellows' bowling green, and across that you saw the high wall of the Wood, and through the Inigo Jones gate you caught a glimpse of sunlit green and deep shadows.

I suppose the mere fact of being walled in gave the Wood part of its peculiar quality, for when a thing is enclosed, the mind does not willingly regard it as common. As I went forward over the quiet turf I had the sense of being received. The trees were just so wide apart that one saw uninterrupted foliage in the distance but the place where one stood seemed always to be a clearing; surrounded by a world of shadows, one walked in mild sunshine. Except for the sheep whose nibbling kept the grass so short and who sometimes raised their long, foolish faces to stare at me, I was quite alone; and it felt more like the loneliness of a very large room in a deserted house than like any ordinary solitude out of doors. I remember thinking, "This is the sort of place which, as a child, one would have been rather afraid of or else would have liked very much indeed." A moment later I thought, "But when alone—really alone—everyone is a child: or no one?" Youth and age touch only the surface of our lives.

Half a mile is a short walk. Yet it seemed a long time before I came to the centre of the Wood. I knew it was the centre, for there was the thing I had chiefly come to see. It was a well: a well with steps going down to it and the remains of an ancient pavement about it. It was very imperfect now. I did not step on it, but I lay down in the grass and touched it with my fingers. For this was the heart of Bracton or Bragdon Wood: out of this all the legends had come and on this, I suspected, the very existence of the College had originally depended. The archaeologists were agreed that the masonry was very late British-Roman work, done on the eve of the Anglo-Saxon invasion. How Bragdon the wood was connected with Bracton the lawyer was a mystery, but I fancy myself that the Bracton family had availed themselves of an accidental similarity in the names to believe, or make believe, that they had something to do with it. Certainly, if all that was told were true, or even half of it, the Wood was older than the Bractons. I suppose no one now would attach much importance to Strabo's *Balachthon* though it had led a sixteenth-century Warden of the College to say that, "We know not by ancientest report of any Britain without Bragdon." But the medieval song takes us back to the fourteenth century.

*In Bragdon bricht this ende dai
 Herde ich Merlin ther he lai
 Singende woo and welawai.*

It is good enough evidence that the well with the British-Roman pavement was already "Merlin's Well," though the name is not found till Queen Elizabeth's reign when good Warden Shovel surrounded the Wood with a wall "for the taking away of all profane and heathenish superstitions and the deterring of the vulgar sort from all wakes, may games, dancings, mummings, and baking of Morgan's bread, heretofore used about the fountain called in vanity Merlin's Well, and utterly to be renounced and abominated as a galli-maufrey of papistry, gentilism, lewdness and dunsicall folly." Not that the College had by this action renounced its own interest in the place. Old Dr. Shovel, who lived to be nearly a hundred, can scarcely have been cold in his grave when one of Cromwell's Major Generals, conceiving it his business to destroy "the groves and the high places," sent a few troopers with power to impress the country people for this pious work. The scheme came to nothing in the end; but there had been a bicker between the College and the troopers in the heart of Bragdon, and the fabulously learned and saintly Richard Crowe had been killed by a musket-ball on the very steps of the Well. He would be a brave man who would accuse Crowe either of popery or "gentilism"; yet the story is that his last words had been, "Marry, Sirs, if Merlin who was the Devil's son was a true King's man as ever ate bread, is it not a shame that you, being but the sons of bitches, must be rebels and regicides?" And always, through all changes, every Warden of Bracton, on the day of his election, had drunk a ceremonial draught of water from Merlin's Well in the great cup which, both for its antiquity and beauty, was the greatest of the Bracton treasures.

All of this I thought of, lying beside Merlin's Well, beside the well which must certainly date from Merlin's time if there had ever been a real Merlin: lying where Sir Kenelm Digby had lain all one summer night and seen a certain strange appearance: where Collins the poet had lain, and where George the Third had cried: where the brilliant and much-loved Nathaniel Fox had composed the famous poem three weeks before he was killed in France. The air was so still and the billows of foliage so heavy above me, that I fell asleep. I was wakened by my friend hallowing to me from a long way off.

4

The most controversial business before the College Meeting was the question of selling Bragdon Wood. The purchaser was the N.I.C.E., the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments. They wanted a site for the building which would worthily house this remarkable organisation. The N.I.C.E. was the first-fruits of that constructive fusion between the state and the laboratory on which so many thoughtful people base their hopes of a better world. It was to be free from almost all the tiresome restraints—"red tape" was the word its supporters used—which have hitherto hampered research in this country. It was also largely free from the restraints of economy, for, as it was argued, a nation which can spend so many millions a day on a war can surely afford a few millions a month on productive research in peacetime. The building proposed for it was one which would make a quite noticeable addition to the skyline of New York, the staff was to be enormous, and their salaries princely. Persistent pressure and endless diplomacy on the part of the Senate of Edgestow had lured the new Institute away from Oxford, from Cambridge, from London. It had thought of all these in turn as possible scenes for its labours. At times the Progressive Element in Edgestow had almost despaired. But success was now practically certain. If the N.I.C.E. could get the necessary land, it would come to Edgestow. And once it came, then, as everyone felt, things would at last begin to move. Curry had even expressed a doubt whether, eventually, Oxford and Cambridge could survive as major universities at all.

Three years ago, if Mark Studdock had come to a College Meeting at which such a question was to be decided, he would have expected to hear the claims of sentiment against progress and beauty against utility openly debated. Today, as he took his seat in the Soler, the long upper room on the south of Lady Alice, he expected no such matter. He knew now that that was not the way things are done.

The Progressive Element managed its business really very well. Most of the Fellows did not know when they came into the Soler that there was any question of selling the Wood. They saw, of course, from their agenda paper that item Fifteen was, "Sale of College land," but as that appeared at almost every College Meeting, they were not very interested. On the other hand, they did see that item One was, "Questions about

Bragdon Wood." These were not concerned with the proposed sale. Curry, who rose as Sub-Warden to introduce them, had a few letters to read to the College. The first was from a society concerned for the preservation of ancient monuments. I think myself that this society had been ill-advised to make two complaints in one letter. It would have been wiser if they had confined themselves to drawing the College's attention to the disrepair of the wall round the Wood. When they went on to urge the desirability of building some protection over the Well itself, and even to point out that they had urged this before, the College began to be restive. And when, as a kind of afterthought, they expressed a wish that the College could be a little more accommodating to serious antiquaries who wanted to examine the Well, the College became definitely ill-tempered. I would not like to accuse a man in Curry's position of misreading a letter; but his reading of this letter was certainly not such as to gloss over any defects in the tone of the original composition. Before he sat down, nearly every one in the room desired strongly to make the outer world understand that Bragdon Wood was the private property of Bracton College and that the outer world had better mind its own business. Then he rose again to read another letter. This was from a society of Spiritualists who wanted leave to investigate the "reported phenomena" in the Wood—a letter "connected," as Curry said, "with the next which, with the Warden's permission, I will now read to you." This was from a firm who had heard of the Spiritualists' proposal and wanted permission to make a film, not exactly of the phenomena, but of the Spiritualists looking for the phenomena. Curry was directed to write short refusals to all three letters.

Then came a new voice from quite a different part of the Soler. Lord Feverstone had risen. He fully agreed with the action which the College had taken about these impertinent letters from various busybodies outside. But was it not, after all, a fact, that the wall of the Wood was in a very unsatisfactory condition? A good many Fellows—Studdock was not one of them—imagined they were watching a revolt on Feverstone's part against "Curry and his gang" and became intensely interested. Almost at once the Bursar, James Busby, was on his feet. He welcomed Lord Feverstone's question. In his Bursarial capacity he had recently taken expert advice about the wall of the Wood. "Unsatisfactory" was, he feared, much too mild a word to describe its condition. Nothing but a complete new wall would really meet the situation. With great difficulty the probable cost of this was elicited from him; and when the Col-

lege heard the figure it gasped. Lord Feverstone inquired icily whether the Bursar was seriously proposing that the College should undertake such an expense. Busby (a very large ex-clergyman with a bushy black beard) replied with some temper that he had proposed nothing: if he *were* to make a suggestion, it would be that the question could not be treated in isolation from some important financial considerations which it would become his duty to lay before them later in the day. There was a pause at this ominous statement, until gradually, one by one, the "outsiders" and "obstructionists," the men not included in the Progressive Element, began coming into the debate. Most of these found it hard to believe that nothing short of a complete new wall would be any use. The Progressive Element let them talk for nearly ten minutes. Then it looked once again as if Lord Feverstone were actually leading the outsiders. He wanted to know whether it was possible that the Bursar and the Preservation Committee could really find no alternative between building a new wall and allowing Bragdon Wood to degenerate into a common. He pressed for an answer. Some of the outsiders even began to feel that he was being too rude to the Bursar. At last the Bursar answered in a low voice that he *had* in a purely theoretical way got some facts about possible alternatives. A barbed wire fence—but the rest was drowned in a roar of disapproval, during which old Canon Jewel was heard to say that he would sooner have every tree in the Wood felled to the ground than see it caged in barbed wire. Finally, the matter was postponed for consideration at the next meeting.

The next item was one of those which the majority of the Fellows could not understand. It involved the recapitulation (by Curry) of a long correspondence between the College and the Senate of the University about the proposed incorporation of the N.I.C.E. in the University of Edgestow. The words, "committed to," kept recurring in the debate that followed. "We appear," said Watson, "to have pledged ourselves as a college to the fullest possible support of the new Institute." "We appear," said Feverstone, "to have tied ourselves up hand and foot and given the University *carte blanche*." What all this actually amounted to never became clear to any of the outsiders. They remembered fighting hard at a previous meeting against the N.I.C.E. and all its works, and being defeated; but every effort to find out what their defeat had meant, though answered with great lucidity by Curry, served only to entangle them further in the impenetrable mazes of the university constitution and the still darker mystery of the relations between University and Col-

lege. The result of the discussion was to leave them under the impression that the honour of the College was not involved in the establishment of the N.I.C.E. at Edgestow.

During this item the thoughts of more than one Fellow had turned to lunch, and attention had wandered. But when Curry rose at five minutes to one to introduce item Three, there was a sharp revival of interest. It was called, "Rectification of an anomaly of the Stipends of Junior Fellows." I would not like to say what the most junior Fellows of Bracton were getting at this time, but I believe it hardly covered the expenses of their residence in College, which was compulsory. Studdock who had only recently emerged from this class felt great sympathy with them. He understood the look in their faces. The Rectification, if it went through, would mean to them clothes and holidays and meat for lunch and a chance to buy a half, instead of a fifth, of the books they needed. All their eyes were fixed on the Bursar when he rose to reply to Curry's proposals. He hoped that no one would imagine he approved the anomaly which had, in 1910, excluded the lowest class of the Fellows from the new clauses in the eighteenth paragraph of Statute 17. He felt sure that every one present would *wish* it to be rectified; but it was his duty, as Bursar, to point out that this was the second proposal involving very heavy expenditure which had come before them that morning. He could only say of this, as he had said of the previous proposal, that it could not be isolated from the whole problem of the present financial position of the College, which he hoped to lay before them during the course of the afternoon. A great deal more was said, but the Bursar remained unanswered, the matter was postponed, and when, at quarter to two, the Fellows came surging out of the Soler for lunch, hungry and headachy and ravenous for tobacco, every junior had it fixed in his mind that a new wall for the Wood and a rise in his own stipend were strictly exclusive alternatives. "That darn Wood has been in our way all morning," said one. "We're not out of it yet," answered another.

In this frame of mind, the College returned to the Soler after lunch to consider its finances. Busby, the Bursar, was naturally the principal speaker. It is very hot in the Soler on a sunny afternoon; and the smooth flow of the Bursar's exposition, and even the flashing of his level, white teeth above his beard (he had remarkably fine teeth) had a sort of hypnotic power. Fellows of colleges do not always find money matters easy to understand: if they did, they would probably not have been the sort of men who became Fellows of colleges. They gathered that the situation

was bad, very bad, indeed. Some of the youngest and most inexperienced members ceased to wonder whether they would get a new wall or a rise of stipend and began to wonder instead whether the College would continue to function at all. The times, as the Bursar so truly said, were extraordinarily difficult. Older members had heard of such times very often before from dozens of previous Bursars and were less disturbed. I am not suggesting for a moment that the Bursar of Bracton was in any way misrepresenting the position. It is very seldom that the affairs of a large corporation, indefinitely committed to the advancement of learning, can be described as being, in a quite unambiguous sense, satisfactory. His delivery was excellent. Each sentence was a model of lucidity; and if his hearers found the gist of his whole statement less clear than the parts, that may have been their own fault. Some minor retrenchments and reinvestments which he suggested were unanimously approved and the College adjourned for tea in a chastened mood. Studdock rang up Jane and told her he would not be home for dinner.

It was not till six o'clock that all the converging lines of thought and feeling aroused by the earlier business came together upon the question of selling Bragdon Wood. It was not called, "the sale of Bragdon Wood." The Bursar called it the "sale of the area coloured pink on the plan which, with the Warden's permission, I will now pass round the table." He pointed out quite frankly that this involved the loss of *part* of the Wood. In fact, the proposed N.I.C.E. site still left to the College a strip about sixteen feet broad along the far half of the south side but there was no deception for the Fellows had the plan to look at with their own eyes. It was a small scale plan and not perhaps perfectly accurate—only meant to give one a general idea. In answer to questions he admitted that unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—the Well itself was in the area which the N.I.C.E. wanted. The rights of the College to access would, of course, be guaranteed; and the Well and its pavement would be preserved by the Institute in a manner to satisfy all the archaeologists in the world. He refrained from offering any advice and merely mentioned the quite astonishing figure which the N.I.C.E. was offering. After that, the meeting became lively. The advantages of the sale discovered themselves one by one like ripe fruit dropping into the hand. It solved the problem of the wall; it solved the problem of protecting ancient monuments; it solved the financial problem; it looked like solving the problem of the junior Fellows' stipends. It appeared further that the N.I.C.E. regarded this as the only possible site in Edgestow; if by any chance

Bracton would not sell, the whole scheme miscarried and the Institute would undoubtedly go to Cambridge. It was even drawn out of the Bursar by much questioning that he knew of a Cambridge college very anxious to sell.

The few real "Die-hards" present, to whom Bragdon Wood was almost a basic assumption of life, could hardly bring themselves to realise what was happening. When they found their voices, they struck a discordant note amid the general buzz of cheerful comment. They were manoeuvred into the position of appearing as the party who passionately desired to see Bragdon surrounded with barbed wire. When at last old Jewel, blind and shaky and almost weeping, rose to his feet, his voice was hardly audible. Men turned round to gaze at, and some to admire, the clear-cut, half-childish face and the white hair which had become more conspicuous as the long room grew darker. But only those close to him could hear what he said. At this moment Lord Feverstone sprang to his feet, folded his arms, and looking straight at the old man said in a very loud, clear voice:

"If Canon Jewel wishes us *not* to hear his views, I suggest that his end could be better attained by silence."

Jewel had been already an old man in the days before the first war when old men were treated with kindness, and he had never succeeded in getting used to the modern world. For a moment as he stood with his head thrust forward, people thought he was going to reply. Then quite suddenly he spread out his hands with a gesture of helplessness, shrunk back, and began laboriously to resume his chair.

The motion was carried.

5

After leaving the flat that morning Jane also had gone down to Edgestow and bought a hat. She had before now expressed some contempt for the kind of woman who buys hats, as a man buys drinks, for a stimulant and a consolation. It did not occur to her that she was doing so herself on this occasion. She liked her clothes to be rather severe and in colours that were really good on serious aesthetic grounds—clothes which would make it plain to everyone that she was an intelligent adult and not a woman of the chocolate-box variety—and because of this preference, she did not know that she was interested in clothes at all. She was there-

fore a little annoyed when Mrs. Dimble met her coming out of Sparrow's and said, "Hullo dear! Been buying a hat? Come home to lunch and let's see it. Cecil has the car just round the corner."

Cecil Dimble, a Fellow of Northumberland, had been Jane's tutor for her last year as a student and Mrs. Dimble (one tended to call her Mother Dimble) had been a kind of unofficial aunt to all the girls of her year. A liking for the female pupils of one's husband is not, perhaps, so common as might be wished among dons' wives; but Mrs. Dimble appeared to like all Dr. Dimble's pupils of both sexes and the Dimbles' house, away on the far side of the river, was a kind of noisy *salon* all the term. She had been particularly fond of Jane with that kind of affection which a humorous, easy natured and childless woman sometimes feels for a girl whom she thinks pretty and rather absurd. For the last year or so Jane had been somewhat losing sight of the Dimbles and felt rather guilty about it. She accepted the invitation to lunch.

They drove over the bridge to the north of Bracton and then south along the bank of the Wynd, past the cottages, then left and eastward at the Norman church and down the straight road with the poplars on one side and the wall of Bragdon Wood on the other, and so finally to the Dimbles' front door.

"How lovely it's looking," said Jane quite sincerely as she got out of the car. The Dimbles' garden was famous.

"You'd better take a good look at it then," said Dr. Dimble.

"What do you mean?" asked Jane.

"Haven't you told her?" said Dr. Dimble to his wife.

"I haven't screwed myself up to it yet," said Mrs. Dimble. "Besides, poor dear, her husband is one of the villains of the piece. Anyway, I expect she knows."

"I've no idea what you're talking about," said Jane.

"Your own College is being so tiresome, dear. They're turning us out. They won't renew the lease."

"Oh, Mrs. Dimble!" exclaimed Jane. "And I didn't even know this was Bracton property."

"There you are!" said Mrs. Dimble. "One half of the world doesn't know how the other half lives. Here have I been imagining that you were using all your influence with Mr. Studdock to try to save us, whereas in reality—"

"Mark never talks to me about College business."

"Good husbands never do," said Dr. Dimble. "At least, only about

the business of other people's colleges. That's why Margaret knows all about Bracton and nothing about Northumberland. Is no one coming in to have lunch?"

Dimble guessed that Bracton was going to sell the Wood and everything else it owned on that side of the river. The whole region seemed to him now even more of a paradise than when he first came to live there twenty-five years ago, and he felt much too strongly on the subject to wish to talk about it before the wife of one of the Bracton men.

"You'll have to wait for lunch till I've seen Jane's new hat," said Mother Dimble, and forthwith hurried Jane upstairs. Then followed some minutes of conversation which was strictly feminine in the old-fashioned sense. Jane, while preserving a certain sense of superiority, found it indefinitely comforting; and though Mrs. Dimble had really the wrong point of view about such things, there was no denying that the one small alteration which she suggested did go to the root of the matter. When the hat was being put away again Mrs. Dimble suddenly said,

"There's nothing wrong, is there?"

"Wrong?" said Jane. "Why? What should there be?"

"You're not looking yourself."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Jane aloud. Mentally she added, "She's dying to know whether I'm going to have a baby. That sort of woman always is."

"Do you hate being kissed?" said Mrs. Dimble unexpectedly.

"Do I hate being kissed?" thought Jane to herself. "That indeed is the question. Do I hate being kissed? Hope not for mind in women—" She had intended to reply, "Of course not," but inexplicably, and to her great annoyance found herself crying instead. And then, for a moment, Mrs. Dimble became simply a grown-up as grown-ups had been when one was a very small child: large, warm, soft objects to whom one ran with bruised knees or broken toys. When she thought of her childhood, Jane usually remembered those occasions on which the voluminous embrace of Nurse or Mother had been unwelcome and resisted as an insult to one's maturity; now, for the moment, she was back in those forgotten, yet infrequent, times when fear or misery induced a willing surrender and surrender brought comfort. Not to detest being petted and pawed was contrary to her whole theory of life; yet, before they went downstairs, she had told Mrs. Dimble that she was not going to have a baby, but was a bit depressed from being very much alone, and from a nightmare.

During lunch Dr. Dimble talked about the Arthurian legend. "It's really wonderful," he said, "how the whole thing hangs together, even in a late version like Malory's. You've noticed how there are two sets of characters? There's Guinevere and Launcelot and all those people in the centre: all very courtly and nothing particularly British about them. But then in the background—on the other side of Arthur, so to speak—there are all those *dark* people like Morgan and Morgawse, who are very British indeed and usually more or less hostile though they are his own relatives. Mixed up with magic. You remember that wonderful phrase, how Queen Morgan 'set all the country on fire with ladies that were enchantresses.' Merlin too, of course, is British, though not hostile. Doesn't it look very like a picture of Britain as it must have been on the eve of the invasion?"

"How do you mean, Dr. Dimble?" said Jane.

"Well, wouldn't there have been one section of society that was almost purely Roman? People wearing togas and talking a Celticised Latin—something that would sound to us rather like Spanish: and fully Christian. But further up country, in the out-of-the-way places, cut off by the forests, there would have been little courts ruled by real old British under-kings, talking something like Welsh, and practising a certain amount of the Druidical religion."

"And what would Arthur himself have been?" said Jane. It was silly that her heart should have missed a beat at the words "rather like Spanish."

"That's just the point," said Dr. Dimble. "One can imagine a man of the old British line, but also a Christian and a fully-trained general with Roman technique, trying to pull this whole society together and almost succeeding. There'd be jealousy from his own British family, and the Romanised section—the Launcelots and Lionels—would look down on the Britons. That'd be why Kay is always represented as a boor: he is part of the native strain. And always that under-tow, that tug back to Druidism."

"And where would Merlin be?"

"Yes. . . . He's the really interesting figure. Did the whole thing fail because he died so soon? Has it ever struck you what an odd creation Merlin is? He's not evil; yet he's a magician. He is obviously a druid; yet he knows all about the Grail. He's 'the devil's son'; but then Layamon goes out of his way to tell you that the kind of being who fathered Merlin needn't have been bad after all. You remember, 'There dwell in the

sky many kinds of wights. Some of them are good, and some work evil."

"It *is* rather puzzling. I hadn't thought of it before."

"I often wonder," said Dr. Dimble, "whether Merlin doesn't represent the last trace of something the later tradition has quite forgotten about—something that became impossible when the only people in touch with the supernatural were either white or black, either priests or sorcerers."

"What a horrid idea," said Mrs. Dimble, who had noticed that Jane seemed to be preoccupied. "Anyway, Merlin happened a long time ago if he happened at all and he's safely dead and buried under Bragdon Wood as every one of us knows."

"Buried but *not* dead, according to the story," corrected Dr. Dimble.

"Ugh!" said Jane involuntarily, but Dr. Dimble was musing aloud.

"I wonder what they *will find* if they start digging up that place for the foundations of their N.I.C.E.," he said.

"First mud and then water," said Mrs. Dimble. "That's why they can't really build it there."

"So you'd think," said her husband. "And if so, why should they want to come here at all? A little cockney like Jules is not likely to be influenced by any poetic fancy about Merlin's mantle having fallen on him!"

"Merlin's mantle indeed!" said Mrs. Dimble.

"Yes," said the Doctor, "it's a rum idea. I daresay some of his set would like to recover the mantle well enough. Whether they'll be big enough to fill it is another matter! I don't think they'd like it if the old man himself came back to life along with it."

"That child's going to faint," said Mrs. Dimble, suddenly jumping up.

"Hullo! What's the matter?" said Dr. Dimble, looking with amazement at Jane's face. "Is the room too hot for you?"

"Oh, it's too ridiculous," said Jane.

"Let's come into the drawing room," said Dr. Dimble. "Here. Lean on my arm."

A little later, in the drawing room, seated beside a window that opened onto the lawn, now strewn with bright yellow leaves, Jane attempted to excuse her absurd behaviour by telling the story of her dream. "I suppose I've given myself away dreadfully," she said. "You can both start psycho-analysing me now."

From Dr. Dimble's face, Jane might have indeed conjectured that her dream had shocked him exceedingly. "Extraordinary thing . . . most extraordinary," he kept muttering. "Two heads. And one of them Alcasan's. Now is that a false scent . . . ?"

"Don't, Cecil," said Mrs. Dimble.

"Do you think I ought to be analysed?" said Jane.

"Analysed?" said Dr. Dimble, glancing at her as if he had not quite understood. "Oh, I see. You mean going to Brizeacre or someone of that sort?" Jane realised that her question had recalled him from some quite different train of thought and even—disconcertingly—that the problem of her own health had been shouldered aside. The telling of her dream had raised some other problem, though what this was she could not even imagine.

Dr. Dimble looked out of the window. "There is my dullest pupil just ringing the bell," he said. "I must go to the study, and listen to an essay on Swift beginning, 'Swift was born.' Must try to keep my mind on it, too, which won't be easy." He rose and stood for a moment with his hand on Jane's shoulder. "Look here," he said, "I'm not going to give any advice. But if you do decide to go to anyone about that dream, I wish you would *first* consider going to someone whose address Margery or I will give you."

"You don't believe in Mr. Brizeacre?" said Jane.

"I can't explain," said Dr. Dimble. "Not now. It's all so complicated. Try not to bother about it. But if you *do*, just let us know first. Good-bye."

Almost immediately after his departure some other visitors arrived, so that there was no opportunity of further private conversation between Jane and her hostess. She left the Dimbles about half an hour later and walked home, not along the road with the poplars but by the footpath across the common, past the donkeys and the geese, with the towers and spires of Edgestow to her left and the old windmill on the horizon to her right.

Dinner with the Sub-Warden

I

"This is a blow!" said Curry standing in front of the fireplace in his magnificent rooms which overlooked Newton. They were the best set in College.

"Something from N.O.?" said James Busby. He and Lord Feverstone and Mark were all drinking sherry before dining with Curry. N.O., which stood for Non-Olet, was the nickname of Charles Place, the Warden of Bracton. His election to this post, some fifteen years before, had been one of the earliest triumphs of the Progressive Element. By dint of saying that the College needed "new blood" and must be shaken out of its "academic grooves," they had succeeded in bringing in an elderly civil servant who had certainly never been contaminated by academic weaknesses since he left his rather obscure Cambridge college in the previous century, but who had written a monumental report on National Sanitation. The subject had, if anything, rather recommended him to the Progressive Element. They regarded it as a slap in the face for the *dilet-tanti* and Die-hards, who replied by christening their new Warden Non-Olet. But gradually even Place's supporters had adopted the name. For Place had not answered their expectations, having turned out to be a dyspeptic with a taste for philately, whose voice was so seldom heard that some of the junior Fellows did not know what it sounded like.

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