

The man with troubled sleep

a brief tale

Sofie-Alice enjoyed making herself look good for the day. She spent much time in the bathroom, cleaning teeth, using conditioning cream on her face. She is a handsome, dark haired lady in her mid thirties. She keeps herself trim with a sensible vegetarian diet. Vegetables she loves them, can eat them every day, nothing much else.

Today she is preparing herself to visit Grandfather Georgian Merchant. She's by-passing her father Walter for this task, as she hopes the older of the two will be more sympathetic to her cause.

The cause is Tommy Faust.

She is concerned for his sanity and she seeks advice from Georgian who knows Tommy well.

Georgian Merchant, one year short of 70, was a happy domesticat. He lived in Pennyrose Cottage. It is a white washed timber frame cottage set away from the main traffic road running through Merton village. He accepted his life of adventure was mostly done. He had two wives and two sets of children. Now he shared with Eva Goode, wife No 2 and mother of Charmian and Stephen. Life gone, but he still rode his motorbike, played the piano, Bach and others, read literature, watched classic films, and opera and ballet.

Sofie was the daughter of his first son, Walter, by his first wife: Lacetta Silver.

Lacetta had been a great beauty, and a genius mind with a heartfelt soul. He had wooed her, fought for her, won her, made a family, and then lost her to illness.

Sofie had lost her husband, Peaceton, to some mysterious illness, a cancer of sorts, a few years ago. She had travelled the world and now gravitated to Worthshire and her paternal family.

She had telephoned Georgian the day before to arrange the meeting for the morning. Preparation is everything she thought to herself. She was a person of huge goodness. She didn't know or do anything else. Her concern for Tommy was bringing her to Grandfather. She liked him very much. She respected his intelligence and depth of thought, though she sometimes wondered if he was too much of another time. This interested her.

"Grandfather," she declared as they sat in the window seat of the cottage sitting room alone, Eva made excuses to leave them.

"I've come about my friend Tommy. I'm worried he may be losing his mind"

"Firstly, my dear, I've known Tommy all his life and I can assure you he lost his mind a long time ago. Not to worry about it. But he has managed it well over the years. He's a free spirit. Been through a great deal. He's seeking peace and a restful release."

“But I have plans for him. I can’t let him throw his life away.”

“That’s good. Do you love him?”

“Well I like him as a friend, except for that beard he has.”

“He’s rather proud of his beard I think.

“He’s so warm and intelligent and speaks well of life and I want to help him.”

“We know he’s had a turbulent life,” says Georgian, “a wild rocker biker...no wife...no children we know of...so what’s the problem?”

“He tells me he has trouble sleeping.”

“Not unusual. I too find sleep difficult.”

“No. I mean when he is asleep. He has trouble in his sleep.”

“Dreams. Bad dreams.”

“More I think terrible nightmares. He won’t tell me what they are.”

“Perhaps his past life is troubling him.”

“I hope not. How can I help?”

“You could go and see his twin brother Johnny. And there’s Dr Liebermann. He might pass you on to consulting people.”

“They might need counselling after meeting Tommy. But you’re right.

Outside help, I hadn't thought of that. His brother Johnny will want to assist me. But will Tommy respond; he's so wilful, and objects to conventional advice and authority."

"I know only too well. Perhaps his nightmares are a warning for him to take note. I should go and see Johnny first."

"Oh Grandpa, I do love you, you're great. Could I go today?"

"I'll call him and let you know."

Sofie-Alice drove her beloved land rover 4x4 out to Crown Farm Merton. She loved this vehicle. Could live in it she felt. Escape to the Highlands, buy a little camp stove for the hot meal a day, a sleeping bag, and she could be off with her "who needs anybody else" philosophy in mind. An attitude shown by many today in the over populated planet. Freedom of a special kind. Course she had her doubts, too lonely, and besides she had her plan didn't she. No one knew about it but herself.

The farm was where Johnny Faust hid from the world. It was some way out of the village of Merton, past some Roman remains, out to the fens reaching the sea. Grey-brown and brown-grey are the colours with tints of green and blue added to add highlights. Yes Merton had old roots. Anglo-Saxon, and probably Neolithic when all the land was water-logged. For many of the early centuries villagers moved about on stilts. Water dwellers fishing on eels and other slimy creatures. But now the land was reclaimed and farms

stood out like oases in deserts of fields. Crown Farm was not so old. Built as a farmhouse at the beginning of the 20th century, its Edwardian red brick and windows had seen the peak of the British Empire.

But Johnny was an amiable, somewhat bumbling chap with long hair, good manners, indifference to modern society, and full of opinions but no-one much to launch them upon

This is to change.

Sofie had telephoned.

She was making her way, steering herself along the byways; which turn do I want; is it that copse I have to go by; plotting how to get Tommy back in order. She was an enthusiastic lady, and once she had decided a course she stuck to it.

She's here, made it, and yes

Crown Farm had passed through 2 World wars and now lingered on as a semi-deserted relic of past glories. Johnny had inherited it from an uncle or somebody and lived forgotten, alone, amongst its tumbling outhouses, collapsed roofs and rotting wooden doorways. He lived on his earnings from his music career. He'd run some rock band with considerable success. His sons, Laurence and Raymond, had deserted him, but recently returned to the area taking possession of the local Westwich Hall. Laurence had come into conflict with Walter Merchant, remember, at the Trial of No Return.

That must be Johnny emerging from a fore door to greet her.

“Right, this is it,” she thinks.

“Why do you care about Tommy?” asks Johnny.

“I like him. I don’t want him to lose it, and waste his life,” Sofie-Alice replies.

“He lost it a long time ago, I’d say. I suppose he’s still staying at the old Keeper’s Lodge at Wild Anchor?”

“Yes, he is.”

“What a hovel, still surrounded by his motorbikes; let me tell you about Tommy

“We’re twins, born just about 60 years ago. I came first. The best way to describe it is to say we are two sides of the same coin. One good. One bad. Which is which? I am now the good straight sensible private. Tommy is the bad, lost, wayward, crazy. It wasn’t always so. In fact, when we were boys it was all reversed. I was the wild feckless useless boy, always playing, always naughty, whilst Tom was all goodness and made you sick; he excelled in everything. School. Music. Writing. Knowledge. Oh, he learned everything. Me? I scoffed at all that. Thought it was silly, locked up in his room, swotting as we used to call it. A wasted childhood. Then he went to university, big thing then. And he grew up. Rebelled, I think. Thought for himself. Took it abroad. French ideas. The Orient. Took up motorbiking. Said it set him free. And we never saw him again. Isolated. A recluse. Now he’s off the rails. Drinks I don’t doubt. Well that will send him round the bend. I let him have

the lodge, but I don't see him. I'm sorry there's nothing more I can do for him. But what brings you here?"

Sofie-Alice felt that what Johnny said was interesting, probable and likely, but also only his version of the situation.

"He's been having trouble sleeping. Nightmares that frighten him. I think he needs care. He says demons and monks come to him, haunting and menacing threatening to drown him and smother him. He doesn't seem to be able to control them."

"Medical care do you mean? Social. Tricky, he's so established where he is; it's remote."

"I'm not so sure that would help him. No, I think he needs something to do."

"There isn't much left for him to do."

"I don't know his private life. Has he ever married, had children?"

"He hasn't married, but I suspect he's had children along the way. I've never known of any women. Oh, there was one. Ages ago. I just don't know. He doesn't say. Anyway, they aren't around."

"Would you see him?"

"Yes, but I've never been able to handle him. Two different sides, you see."

“Have I your permission to see him and arrange a visit from you?”

“Yes, if you like.”

Sofie left Crown Farm feeling much calmer. Johnny had uplifted her. There was hope that she could rely on. Now she decided to visit Tommy and try to have him open up to her, more about his nightmares. She might be able to play psychiatrist and listen to him. Put him on a couch, she chuckled to herself. And listen to him talking, whilst she sat in an armchair, her back to him perhaps. It seemed crazy, and a little bit daft, but it might help.

“I must get the details of his nightmares, root them out, relieve him, and set him on the road to recovery,” she says to herself.

Tommy had indeed been a good boy, a scholarly boy, and an intense one. He felt a mission within him. He was set a task to fulfil, and with his intensity this deepened over the years to a richly fulfilling path of life. Not obsessive. His interests were many. The main interest was mankind, the state of its mind perception and way of living. He enjoyed many distractions as instructive entertainments in both the arts and the sciences: to him they were inseparable.

As she drove down the dirt lane that led to Keeper’s Lodge, Sofie-Alice remembered how Tommy had told her his sleep was troubled.

“I might start sleep walking,” he had said

She worried about that. He might wander out to the salt marsh, and be swallowed up by a bog of some kind.

She’d grown fond of him, certainly. Pity about his beard. For the past few years, Tommy had started sporting a beard. Not on the side of his face, it grew downwards from his chin. It had grown thickly and quite long, so it resembled the blade of a spade. It was square bottomed, flat and dense, and perpendicular. She thought it funny, ugly, grotesque, but Tommy kept it. Oh, never mind, I don’t care what people look like. Left that behind a long time ago, she thinks.

Sofie, having travelled far, was very sophisticated and worldly experienced. She had neither pride nor prejudices. She freed herself.

Oh, the gate.

She’s arrived.

“How good to see you,” declares Tommy.

“Come in. I’ve made coffee.”

And he had indeed. Laid out a tray with pot of coffee, milk and sugar, cups and a plate of various biscuits. All very civilised, and cosy in the bay window of the lodge.

“It all looks very neat and tidy,” says Sophie, “you haven’t got a woman hidden away who ‘does’ for you?”

Tommy laughs. “No,” he says, “I can manage myself. Every now and again, I have a purge, and set to with the vacuum and mop.”

“Well, it looks great. Thank you. And how are you?”

“Much better. Sleep’s better too. Less disturbing. I feel much more at eased.”

“You’re not just saying so, are you?”

“No. No. I feel refreshed and happy. The trees are blossoming great, aren’t they?”

“Don’t distract, Tommy Faust. Yes they are. You’ve had me worried”

“I’m sorry for that.”

“I’ve been telling everyone about your nightmares, and how they disturb you.”

“Nightmares? What nightmares? Who said they were? They’re not nightmares, though they trouble my sleep. They’re dreams.”

“Tell me more about them,” suggests Sofie.

Tommy looks out of the window.

“I dream of monks wandering over the land, chanting hymns and prayers. I see glorious light in the sky. And people are freed from trouble. It’s like the future filled with love. A world of perpetual peace, where all nations help not fight each other. We’re all allies in the global nation. You, Sofie-Alice,

are the goodest person I know. So you'll understand there's no time for enemies in the global nation, not now, only allies.

"People create their lives, their identities, in their work, in creating food, and in creating love free from competition. There's no struggle; only perhaps to live and enjoy. They will respect property and natural morality. It's like a return to nature.

"They acknowledge each other with kindness. It's a different age from ours. Sometimes I see it all so clearly."

"Oh, I thought your sleep was horror troubled. So what's wrong, if it's all so nice, so lovely?"

"So prophetic, perhaps," Tommy interlopes.

"Why are you troubled?"

"That it may never happen. It may never become real."

"Well, I'm glad it isn't all horrible. I can go away for the time being, easier in mind.

"I'm off to see a girlfriend for a few days."

"Come and see me when you return."

"I will, Tommy."

She jumps up and gives him a hug.

He certainly does seem better she thinks, as she drives back to Merton.

That night, staying at her friend's, Sofie-Aice herself was disturbed by bad dreams. She had visions of motor cycles, their wheels spinning, their handlebars turning and twisting, the skies looked dark and dirty; there was water everywhere and finally a man spread-eagled on the banks of the dykes. She awoke and could hardly breathe. Gasping for air, she sat upright and felt sweat running down over her eyes. She jumped out of bed, and looked out of her window. All was still and silent, dark with hardly any visible thing. She shrugged it off to herself and returned to bed. Sleep was slow to come, as she placated herself saying everything was fine, just jumbled up in her mind.

But as she slept again, the sounds came of engines screaming and roaring, thundering as in anger, and the whining as in pleading. Again she saw lines of motorcycles, which all seemed to be appealing to her to rise up and look for the man in the dyke. Then lightning flashed to reveal the fearful banks of the dykes, quivering and showing the terrors of the night. Creatures emerged: giant voles, badgers and other animals. They ran apart, and searched and stopped by the drowned man.

"Drowned," screamed Sofie.

She awoke, sat up and saw her bedroom door open, as her friend Nell rushed in.

“Calmly,” she said to Sofie.

“What’s up? Having a bad dream. Don ‘t worry. It’s all right. You’re here safe with me.”

Nell hugged the trembling Sofie.

After quieting her, and waiting a half hour or so, they decided to go downstairs for an early breakfast.

“I have to return. I have to go back right away!” Sofie cried.

A phone-call to Tommy produced no result.

“Course you do. It’ll be ok. It’s only a reflection of your concerns for him,” adds Nell.

They took the sedative of breakfast, as best they could.

Having decided Sofie would be better driving back alone, Sofie left, waving and smiling to the generous Nell.

The roads were quiet. It was early Sunday morning. She returned in just about an hour. She drove directly to Keeper’s Lodge. It looked hollow, still, deserted, wildly abandoned. She stepped out of her land rover and trod over the grassy unkempt front. The gravel was full of weeds. What was she doing noticing these trivia? She was so uncertain, so anxious, nervous and upset. The main door wasn’t locked. It never was, thank goodness. She called out his

name. No reply. What to do now. She wandered through the downstairs rooms, into the kitchen and so on.

No sign of him.

Upstairs now.

Calm down she said to herself.

His bedroom was empty of him. You couldn't tell if the bed had been slept in. It always looked unmade and a mess anytime. His things were always disarranged. Books he was reading scattered everywhere. Milton, Shakespeare, Dante and so on.

Right now she has to try the outbuildings. Garages. Falling down things they were. Full of lumber, more books, more dvds, and of course the bikes; the motor bikes. A couple of rooms of them. Small, big, vast ones, even a monster chopper. They all seemed present and correct.

He wasn't out on a bike.

She didn't see signs of drink. No empty bottles or cans about here, nor in the bedroom.

So he hadn't had a drinking party.

Where could he be?

Something told her not to worry. The house, the bikes showed good signs of calm and order.

It was just a case of tracking him down.

Should she call the police?

Not yet.

Think.

She waited and decided to wander around the house, checking all the environs.

There were some copses, fields, a river and a bridge, and there were dykes on the far side of the wasteland.

She went to the land rover, and changed her shoes for boots. Taking chocolate bars with her, she started her hopeful search.

She called his name once or twice, but soon gave that up.

It felt ridiculous.

Quiet and calm were what was needed, if she is to be successful.

After eliminating the bridge and the river, she wandered far away to the two dykes that helped to mark out some of the wheat fields of Crown Farm, still in use, just about.

As she approached the second dyke, she saw scurrying up from the bank one of the dogs of Crown Farm. It was a bonny Labrador known to Sofie.

The dog bounded up to her, wagging its tail and springing.

“Jessie,” Sofie calls, “what is it, baby? Have you found something?”

Jessie yapped and ran back to where she had emerged. Sofie followed quickly. Looking down the bank, she saw the Labrador dig among brambles, and yes a shoe or boot was visible. Sofie scrambled down. It was tricky as it was wet and treacherous. But there, laid face down on the ground was a man. It was Tommy. His head was at the water’s edge, but not submerged.

Jessie tried to pull the coat sleeves away from the ground, and Sofie, wearing stout gloves, was able to lift him upright a little. He looked unhurt. Asleep in fact. She cleared the mess behind them up to the top of the bank. And with the dog’s help, she was able to rescue the troubled man.

Help. She needed help. Should she phone? He seemed ok. Wait till she gets him home. He is waking up. He recognises her.

“Sofie, I fell into the dyke .”

“Are you hurt? Do you want an ambulance?”

“No, don’t waste their time. Give me a minute. Then I’ll stand. Then I’ll walk home with you. Have some tea.”

She didn’t ply him with questions. She waited. Jessie nuzzled up to him. Tommy responded by stroking her.

“Good girl. Did she find me?”

After a short while, he sat up, stood up, and they walked the half mile back to the house.

Tea was made. And Jessie was given some dog biscuits to curl up in a corner.

“I became angry with myself, with society, for not bringing about the changes to freedom my dreams depict.”

“You have to be patient. How did you end up in the dyke? Did you sleepwalk?”

“No. I nodded off in the evening. All my dreams, my nightmares, returned. I woke furious. I went for a walk. And found myself by the dykes, as it became dark.

The night engulfed me. I shouted at everything and slipped and fell down the bank. I think I may have knocked myself out.”

“Perhaps I had better come and stay with you for a while.”

“Would you?”

“I’d be happy to look after you.”

“Would I have to remove my beard?”

“No. I’ve grown used to it. Evolution takes place over very many small steps. We’ll make a better world, bit by bit.”

“You must be the goodest person in the world, Sofie. I don’t think there’s any badness in you at all.”

“Oh, I’m not very good really.”