

COLD COMMONS

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A Weird Anthology
By Lewis L Mason

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And he would also like to thank the Vague Ones. That flicker.

That follow.

Let their graves be still.

DEO DĪS...PAT...HABE...SUBTERR...IN TENE...SUNT...P...AET...

PROLOGUE

*"They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars - on stars where no human race is
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places."
- Robert Frost, Desert Places*

Hello, friend.

...

No, *no*, please take a seat. It's a good spot. I *always* sit here.

...

I say. What a lovely morning this is, eh?

A *misty, moisty morning*, as the saying goes, what?

...

Ha-ha! Well now, you're right.

It *is* more like a foggy, fusty one. Foggy indeed. *Goodness*.

You can barely see the line of oak trees across the field there.

...

It's easily one of the foggiest mornings I've seen in a long time. And I've seen a lot of mornings rise over this park. A lot of mornings.

This 'un's very foggy and fusty indeed...eh? *Ha-ha!* *Yes... yes...*

...

Out early, then? Having a pre-dawn stroll, are we?

...

A *morning constitutional*. Now *there's* a wonderful old phrase I've not heard in many a year. A morning constitutional - it's good for the circulation you know. *Yes*.

...

I *say*. These double benches *are* a great invention, aren't they? People get a bit uncomfortable sitting too close to each other, I find. English propriety and all that. But now, one can occupy a bench each, and still say good morning, eh? And you've picked the *better* of these two to sit on, I can tell you.

...

What do I mean? What do I mean *indeed*. Hmm...

Well now, these benches, yours and mine - I know they're identical to *look* at, but you see, no two things are actually the same. I mean, in more ways than simply being different duplications of an object or design, and occupying different spaces. I *mean*, in the sense of *fundamental* difference. Identity without identification. F-for instance, even *twins* differ, in character and soul. And in this case, you've landed on the *good* twin. The bright side.

Alright, *alright*, you can laugh at a daft old man. I would at your age. *Goodness*.

...

Thank you, I'm *sure*, but it's more than just an interesting theory. It's a *fundamentum* - a *principium* of our universal reality. But listen, my friend... have you got a moment?

...

You do? Oh, that's *marvellous*. You see, I've been writing these little *tales* - for my granddaughter - and I wondered if they were any good. They're all examples of what we've just

been discussing, actually. Of course, I'm no Bernard Shaw, that's for certain, but... well, I wondered if I might impose upon you to have a quick listen to them...? It would only be a brief perusal... I have my writing book here... you will? Oh, that's *wonderful*...

...

Thank you *so much* for this, my friend... one sees so few people nowadays. The mornings can be very lonely, when people don't say good morning, when people just will not see any person other than *themselves*... you know?

When one sits and waits alone. You know? Just sitting... waiting.

...

Sorry, *I'm just opening the page*... there we are...

...

Well, now... I'm delighted that you agreed to this. So, let me give you a short *preamble*, as the old men used to say in the country taverns, when I was a nipper. In between cursing and swearing, granted! *He-he! My*, how they used to go on in those old tavern houses. Quite shocking!

Alright, then; I started these writings as I sat here, on this very bench - reminiscing and pondering, as the older gentleman does. I sat and pondered for so long that, in the end, all I could do was write it all down. And I have. Faithfully.

I only brought pen and paper out with me to make a few rough sketches of the trees over yonder - I was thinking of painting a watercolour. *Hmm* - silly to think of it really... to think of it now...

You know, if one sits somewhere long enough, one ceases to be there at all. Did you know that? One ceases to occupy the space at all. One *abstracts*...

One starts to see other things; not those things present before the eyes, but things *elsewhere*. Beautiful things. And terrible things too. Perhaps it's simply that one starts to see more truly, you know? More clearly.

One becomes so still, so silent... *inwardly*... that one's mind wanders. Tears its bonds and... and sort of drifts off. Not like a ghost or a bird, no. More like a cloud of smoke, as it expands and becomes more and more *dispersed*, as it were. One starts to see other places, to dream of other people, other lives. It sounds strange, *whimsical* perhaps. But I found myself drifting, just like that, and discovered that I was becoming present in *other* places, like a fly on other people's walls.

And whatever I saw, I wrote down.

For my grand-daughter.

Anyway, they are in the manner of accounts... a bit like cautionary tales, I suppose, if one wished to place them in a category. *Yes, cautionary*. I wanted to leave behind as much as I could for my Ellie - that's my grand-daughter - so that she could have something *of* me to keep with her.

To keep *inside* her.

As much of my *essence*... as I could give her from such a distance...

...

Of my... e-experiences and *wisdom*, if you will. Do you understand?

You see, it's all about the great *difference* that I've found, that exists in the world around us. A great division.

...

... No, not between *people*, so much. Not between nations, people, or families.

But between *things*. Objects.

You see, a writer from the old days, the fin-de-siècle period - I don't recall his name - well, *he* once said that there was *a certain malice in inanimate objects*. A malice. And he was right. But it's not in *all* of them, you see.

There are the ordinary common objects - trees, houses, furniture, clocks and tables, kitchen appliances, cutlery, locations, and everything else. Just ordinary and plain; inanimate and utilitarian. The majority of things in the world, one would hope.

But then there are the *other* locations, the *other* objects, alike in form and appearance - but they're not like the ordinary things; identifiable but not *identical* in the ordinary sense.

They're *different* to the normal objects, you see...

They're *cold*.

Cold and dead. And full of *malice*.

I call the first things the common things. The natural things.

But I call the second lot *cold commons*. Because, believe me friend, *they are cold*.

And they lay in wait for the innocents. Like the Serpent in the garden. Laying and waiting.

Those cold, *wicked* things.

They say that it was this world to which the old biblical writers were referring when they described the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, with its poison fruits. This material world, girt with that wicked Serpent. A world of impurities, of admixture - fair and foul, black and white, sun and shadow - a world of things ordinary, natural and good, interspersed with the *other* things.

The *things* belonging to the Serpent.

And I *never* want my little Ellie caught up in any of them.

So... I've written these accounts, organised by number, to give her an idea of what to watch out for. These *cold* versions of things - believe me, they're everywhere. *Cold commons* are everywhere.

And there are always signs, indications. Ways of telling *what* they are. What they do, and *have done*. But people just don't seem to *see* them for what they are, until it's too late.

I mean, take this first example...

Something as ordinary as a street corner, for goodness sake...

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