

Grand story of adventure on Exmoor

MYSTERY ON THE MOOR

by Garry Hogg

Nessa and Lance Conway are in the care of their uncle, Bruce Halliday. He has business in the West country, and takes the children with him. Walking on the moor, Nessa and Lance are caught in a mist, and while trying to find their way home discover an electric cable just below the turf. They follow this, and it leads them to an isolated, castle-like building.

4. Mr. Benedick is nervous

WE could just see above the sills of the windows: great stone mullions with small panes on each side—and each window shuttered solidly behind, as though the occupants were expecting a siege.

"Which way shall we explore?" Nessa asked.

"Away from the dogs!" I said, and set off to the right, hoping to find a door with a bell that I could ring. I was determined to find someone to help us.

Still the dogs went on barking, but behind us, now. Even though they were chained, I did not relish the idea of encountering them. But at least it made it more likely that there were people about the place. The wonder of it was that no one had come out to see who or what it was that had set the dogs barking so.

We passed window after window, and every one of them was shuttered. After a bit we came to a standstill, puzzled and apprehensive.

"It's weird, isn't it!" I said, speaking quite loudly now. It would be all the better if someone *did* hear us and came out.

IN YOUR GARDEN

14. Radishes

GIANT radishes are not grown much in this country, although the seed is obtainable from most seedsmen. The plants are easy to grow and provide a welcome change of vegetable for the winter months.

Sow the seed in July or August and thin the small plants to 6 to 9 inches apart. In November or December dig up the roots with a garden fork, shake off the soil, then store in a box of sand somewhere in the dry. If you prefer, they can be left in the ground and dug up just a few at a time when wanted.

One excellent variety is China Rose, which has large carrot-like roots of a brilliant flame colour and is attractive in winter salads. Another is Bavarian, with roots sometimes reaching the proportions of a big turnip. It grows five feet high and has pretty pods which when green make an excellent filling for sandwiches.

"I think it is a deserted baron's castle, left over from the Middle Ages, even if it has got windows instead of arrow-slits!" Nessa said. "Probably there is a moat, with a drawbridge."

"Funny that we have managed to get as far as this without having to swim, or fight our way through, then, isn't it!" I said. "Or perhaps it has been filled in by the mist!"

"Lance—look!"

Nessa's hand had seized my elbow. We had come to a right-angled corner of the wall, where the building jutted out. There was a window facing us; and an unshuttered window at right angles to it. And standing in that window was a very small, plump man wearing a skull-cap. A bushy white moustache was the most noticeable thing about his pink and shiny face. He was holding a small oil lamp level with his ear, and making signs with the other hand.

"He is trying to tell us something," Nessa whispered.

Directions

While with one hand he held the lamp steady, he was pointing sideways with the other, making jerky movements as though to explain that we must keep on the way we were going. And as we nodded and began to move, we saw him put his finger to his lips and caution us to make no noise.

Side by side we slithered on the loose gravel, round the end of the wing through the window of which the small oil lamp had been held aloft like a beacon to guide us; down the farther side of the wing, past more windows, and so to a small oak door, behind which we could hear someone fumbling with the latch. A moment later it opened, creaking, and then a whispered "Come in, my dears," brought us in out of the cold mist to the shadowy interior. The door closed quietly behind us.

Frightened host

Courteously inclining his head sideways, he indicated that we were to follow him. Then, holding the lamp out to one side so that it lit up the stone-flagged passage, he led the way, limping slowly, till we came to an open door. He stood aside, and we went in.

There was a small fire in a big, open grate. A lot of old-fashioned furniture filled the room and there were rugs scattered about on a polished floor.

"I'm terribly sorry," I began, thinking it was up to me to explain ourselves. "We got lost on the moor when the mist came down, and don't know how to find our way home. I am Lance Conway, and this is my sister, Vanessa."

He had put his lamp down on a small table beside a chair by the fire, and sat down. Then he spoke: "I am happy to meet you, my dears," he began. "My name is Benedick. But—" He broke off, and became suddenly agitated. "I

am afraid—I am afraid you ought not to be here at all, and you will have to go. In fact, I think you must go at once. I know it is most inhospitable of me, but the fact is that—" Again he broke off, and we got the impression that he was listening intently for something, his head cocked sideways, towards the half-open door. "The fact is," he went on, "visitors are not—are not welcomed here. Indeed, I may say that you are the first who have called on me for what seems a very long time. Well—almost the first," he corrected himself. "I am so sorry, my dears, so sorry."

Not alone

We had not sat down, so all we had to do was to turn round and go out the same way we had come in. I apologised once more for having invaded him like this.

"Oh, no, not at all, not at all," he hastened to answer. "Quite right, my dears. You were quite right to come to me, if you were lost. Quite right, I assure you. The wonder to me is that no one has—" Again he broke off, agitatedly, and listened intently.

"As a matter of fact," Nessa said, speaking for the first time, "Lance and I had decided there wasn't anyone living here at all. Except for the dogs, it seemed absolutely deserted."

"Oh, but no, I assure you," said Mr. Benedick. "Not deserted at all. Very much on the contrary. My sister—she is an invalid, older than myself—is upstairs. Oh no, I assure you, not deserted by any means."

I had a strong feeling he had meant to say something quite different.

Oil lamp for company

"It must be very lonely, living in a huge place like this," Nessa said. "Especially when it is so dark. I mean, when there is mist on the moor. I would want all the lights on, if I lived here; at any rate on a day like this. Would you like us to light up for you, before we go?"

"Lights?" He seemed puzzled. "Oh, but I have my light beside me. An oil lamp is pleasant company, I assure you."

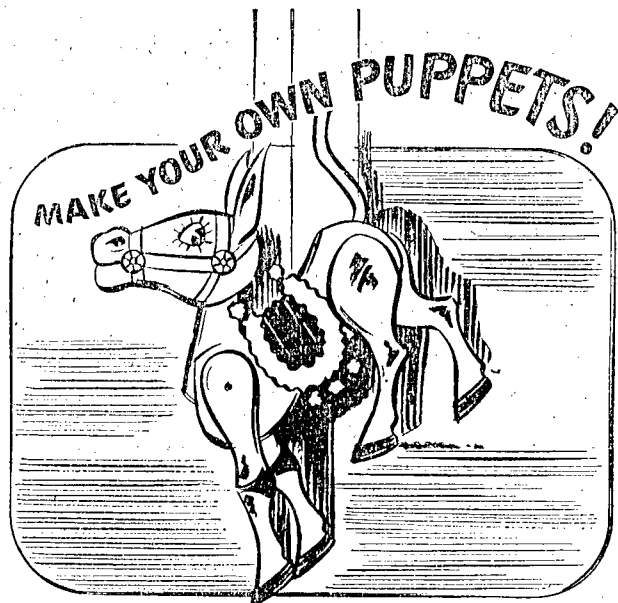
"I thought—" Nessa began, but I managed to press my foot lightly on hers, and she broke off. I guessed she was going to say something about the cable we had found, leading in from outside; but instinctively I felt it was better left unsaid.

"I thought at first the dogs were coming for us, I must admit," she said, as though that was what she had intended saying all along.

"The dogs? Oh yes, my dear. Most unfortunate. The dogs," said Mr. Benedick. "Dear me, of course, now, they would be about. You must have been quite frightened. Quite frightened. I am sorry. So sorry."

"Oh, it was quite all right, Mr.

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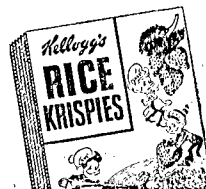


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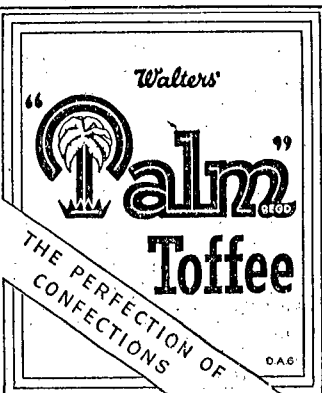
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