

A thrilling serial story of smuggling 150 years ago

THE HOUSE OF BLUE DRAGONS

by Geoffrey Trease

It is 1807. Andrew and Sarah Hunt have gone to live in the little Dorset town of Midport, where their father has become vicar. In the middle of the night they hear ghostly noises in the churchyard. Andrew creeps out to investigate.

6. "Better not tell father!"

THE darkness was not quite so complete as it had seemed when he had peered down through the glass of the bedroom window.

Either his eyes were becoming used to it, or perhaps the time was later than he had realised. Perhaps the early Summer dawn was near at hand.

Anyhow, he could now see the tombstones just in front of him, vague and dim against the gloom. And suddenly he saw the figure in white.

Andrew was never so frightened in his life, before or after.

It had been easy enough to laugh and say he did not believe in ghosts. This was enough to change anyone's opinion.

The figure was shrouded in white. It was tall—unnaturally tall. For it was as tall as a big man, even without its head.

Even without its head! A scream of horror sprang to the boy's lips. But it was as though his vocal chords had been seized by sudden paralysis. No sound came. He crouched there behind a gravestone, unable to move or utter a cry.

It was not, strictly, a headless figure. It had its head, all right. That was the most blood-freezing part about it. As the figure turned, Andrew saw that it was carrying its head, casually, like a basket, at the end of one shrouded arm. The two eyes shone in the bony sockets with a pale, yellow-green light.

He could not meet that unearthly stare. He dropped on to his knees in the dew-soaked grass, shutting his eyes tight, and pressing his face against the cold stone. At any moment he expected to feel the hand of death upon the nape of his neck.

In the distance a cock crowed. He felt nothing. Nothing but

the clammy stone against his hot cheek, the wetness of the ground soaking through his breeches.

Again the cock crowed. There were no more mysterious sounds. No hollow, rhythmic rumbling. No clank of chains. Just a faint rustle in the trees, no more than a sigh, passing through the graveyard and fading. The breeze of dawn.

He opened his eyes with immense relief. Of course! Dawn! Dawn was the time when evil spirits lost their power and went back to their own place. All the old stories said so. It came into Shakespeare's old play, *Hamlet*.

Shivering, he scrambled to his feet. Yes, the sky was a little lighter now. The church tower stood out, black and bold, against the paler east. He looked right and left. The tombs, the cypresses and yew-trees, stood in their accustomed places. Nothing moved anywhere. He was alone.

"Andy!"

He spun round, startled.

It was his sister, half-dressed, like himself, and her hair just as wild.



He crouched there behind a gravestone, unable to move or utter a cry.

"I couldn't stand it any longer," Sarah explained. "I simply had to come and see what had—"

"What did you see?" he interrupted hoarsely.

"Nothing." She looked surprised at his manner.

"Nothing?"

"I thought I saw the light once—the corpse-light or whatever it was."

"No figure?"

"Was there a figure?"

"There certainly was a figure," said Andrew. He shuddered again, either at the memory or because of the chilly breeze which had sprung up. "Come back into the house," he said quickly. "I'll tell you."

Neither of them was sorry to

get inside the back door of the vicarage, turn the key and slide back the bolts, and steal up to Andrew's bedroom again. When he had told his story, she said:

"I didn't see anything like that! I'm glad I didn't."

"You do believe me?"

"Of course. I wouldn't see more than the light, I expect, at this distance. Anyhow, that must have been just the time I'd gone to my own room to put some more clothes on."

"I did see it," said Andrew doggedly. "As long as you don't say I'm making it up, or fancying things—"

"Of course not! There must be an explanation," she mused, knitting her brow.

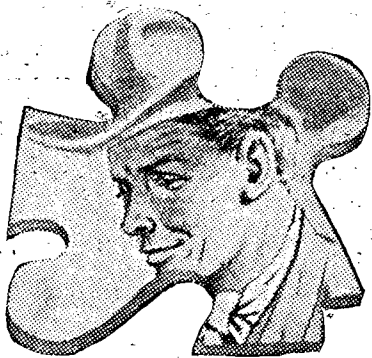
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