

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Tom Brown's Body

Gladys Mitchell

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TOM BROWN'S BODY

Gladys Maude Winifred Mitchell – or 'The Great Gladys' as Philip Larkin described her – was born in 1901, in Cowley in Oxfordshire. She graduated in history from University College London and in 1921 began her long career as a teacher. She studied the works of Sigmund Freud and attributed her interest in witchcraft to the influence of her friend, the detective novelist Helen Simpson.

Her first novel, *Speedy Death*, was published in 1929 and introduced readers to Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley, the heroine of a further sixty-six crime novels. She wrote at least one novel a year throughout her career and was an early member of the Detection Club along with G. K. Chesterton, Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers. In 1961 she retired from teaching and, from her home in Dorset, continued to write, receiving the Crime Writers' Association Silver Dagger Award in 1976. Gladys Mitchell died in 1983.

ALSO BY GLADYS MITCHELL

Speedy Death
The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop
The Longer Bodies
The Saltmarsh Murders
Death at the Opera
The Devil at Saxon Wall
Dead Men's Morris
Come Away, Death
St Peter's Finger
Printer's Error
Brazen Tongue
Hangman's Curfew
When Last I Died
Laurels Are Poison
The Worstest Viper
Sunset Over Soho
My Father Sleeps
The Rising of the Moon
Here Comes a Chopper
Death and the Maiden
The Dancing Druids
Groaning Spinney
The Devil's Elbow
The Echoing Strangers
Merlin's Furlong
Faintley Speaking
Watson's Choice
Twelve Horses and the Hangman's Noose
The Twenty-third Man
Spotted Hemlock
The Man Who Grew Tomatoes
Say It With Flowers

The Nodding Canaries
My Bones Will Keep
Adders on the Heath
Death of the Delft Blue
Pageant of Murder
The Croaking Raven
Skeleton Island
Three Quick and Five Dead
Dance to Your Daddy
Gory Dew
Lament for Leto
A Hearse on May-Day
The Murder of Busy Lizzie
Winking at the Brim
A Javelin for Jonah
Convent on Styx
Late, Late in the Evening
Noonday and Night
Fault in the Structure
Wraiths and Changelings
Mingled with Venom
The Mudflats of the Dead
Nest of Vipers
Uncoffin'd Clay
The Whispering Knights
Lovers, Make Moan
The Death-Cap Dancers
The Death of a Burrowing Mole
Here Lies Gloria Mundy
Cold, Lone and Still
The Greenstone Griffins
The Crozier Pharaohs
No Winding-Sheet

GLADYS MITCHELL

Tom Brown's Body

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Spey is not intended to represent any public school ever founded by king, bishop, guild, worshipful company or private citizen.

Preamble

*

What a dickens is the Woman always a whimpring about
Murder for?

John Gay - THE BEGGAR'S OPERA (*Act 1, Scene 4*)

THE village of Spey is delightfully situated. It has woods and a river to the north, and to the south and west the undulations of its open fields meet the gorse and heather of the moors. It has a blacksmith, livery stables, a haunted Priory, and a witch.

The manor house of Spey was built in 1730, and in 1829 it became a public school. Nowadays the Headmaster, his wife, and, when they are at home, his two daughters, live in one wing of the manor, and the School House boys, some of the masters, the Headmaster's servants, and his butler's budgerigars, occupy the rest of the building.

Around the eighteenth-century mansion, like satellites around a noble planet, courtiers around a king, or his family of sheaves bowing down to Joseph the Dreamer, are other and lesser Houses which, with the mansion itself, make up the School.

There are twelve of these lesser Houses, and they are so discreetly situated - having been added one at a time as the School increased its numbers - that they do not impair the prospect of the original mansion. Unfortunately, together

with Spey itself, they come to the number of thirteen, and, by superstitious boys and masters, that lesser breed, the parents, and that influential hierarchy, the Old Boys, to this mystic number has been attributed the dire misfortune which fell upon the School soon after the conclusion of the war.

The School, in short, has added to its other traditions the dubious one of a murdered junior master.

1. *French Leave*

*

We run great Risques – great Risques indeed.

IBID (*Act 3, Scent 6*)

ON Wednesday afternoon in the middle of a delightful and mild October, Merrys and Skene were about to make a plan to be A.W.O.L. It was their reaction to the unjust and unreliable behaviour of their seniors. In other words, Merrys had had a row with his form-master, and Skene had been put down to play in the House Third instead of the House Second, where he considered that he belonged.

'And if that ass Cartaris thinks he can sack me in favour of that ass Timms, he can jolly well get his head looked at with X-rays, because it just means we shall lose to those asses in Mayhews,' said Skene. 'Just because I happened to fumble the ball once – and only once, mind you! – and that ass Scallamore picked up and just happened, by the most fearful bit of luck – and I'm not sure he wasn't offside at that! – to drop a goal, Cartaris needn't think I funk'd. He practically said I did, and I practically called him a liar, and, anyhow, I'd been kicked over the heart – that ass Felles did that; I hacked his shins for him in the next scrum; and, anyway –'

'Yes,' said Merrys, who had been waiting with some impatience for this tirade to end, and now deemed it best to interrupt it, 'and if Conway thinks he can shove me in D for

not being able to translate a lot of rot which nobody would have got up to if that ass Micklethwaite hadn't been put on first and rattled off all the bits everyone knew without even stopping to breathe -'

'Oh, Micklethwaite!' said Skene. 'He'll get a Balliol. Everybody thinks so.'

'More likely to get a brick in his ribs,' said the vengeful sufferer from Micklethwaite's virtuosity. 'Anyway, I'm about fed up with this place, and I'm going to do something about it. I've jolly well made up my mind.'

'There's not much you *can* do,' said Skene, 'without getting gated or lammed.'

'I'd just like to *show* them!' said Merrys, who was seriously annoyed with Mr Conway. 'Fancy shoving me in D when I was down for my turn of the Roman Bath!'

'Hard cheese, of course,' admitted his friend, realizing that the core of the grievance had been reached. 'Let's go and have a look at it,' he added, 'and bung a brick at Micklethwaite. He's *always* there! Nancy gets him extra turns, I think.'

'Nancy's a - !' stated Merrys. 'Come on, then, if you want to fag over there. But we mustn't be late for tea!'

They strolled off towards the far end of Deep Field, to where the ground dropped to what had once been a little stream.

Here there was a high board fence reinforced at every fifth yard by a post made of concrete. Behind the fence the scene changed. A great rectangular hollow had been delved from an outflanking spur of the moor, and within the hollow was the Roman Bath referred to in bitter tones by Merrys.

All of it was under cover. Inside the Bath were frescoes copied faithfully by a famous modern cartoonist from Roman models; was a beautiful piece of tessellated pavement, modern, but so skilfully copied from the one discovered on a Roman site not very far from the school that even experts looked at it twice before they realized that it was not the original; was a Latin inscription inviting the rich, the virtuous, and the learned to bathe in the health-giving waters blessed by Priapus (a strange god to introduce into a world of boys, some thought), and dedicated to the gentler Glaucus.

Beyond the Roman Bath was the School boundary, and, beyond that again, a moorland road which led ultimately to the village of Spey and on to the town.

The Roman Bath was the apple of Mr Loveday's eye, and in his House Merrys and Skene had been nurtured for the past two years. Unlike most such loves, this one happened to appeal as strongly to the public as to its originator. Good boys – that is to say, boys who had not been detected in wrong-doing – were always put on a rota by Mr Loveday at the beginning of the Christmas Half, and, whilst the river was too cold for comfort, these good or – it cannot be overemphasized – undetected boys had a turn in the warmed Roman Bath, and regarded this as a privilege not to be despised, particularly as it was restricted to the members of Loveday's House.

The building had been constructed under the fanatically zealous eye of Mr Loveday, partly by professionals and partly by means of forced labour recruited amongst his boys. The plans and blue-prints he had made for himself one winter after he had visited Pompeii and Herculaneum.

He had employed workmen to instal the heating system, but even this, his chief pride, was on the Roman model, and

the completed building included a *caldarium*, a *tepidarium*, and all such other adjuncts as archaeology and the Latin authors suggested. Mr Loveday had had the most enormous fun over his Bath, and had spent some years on the plans and in saving money to carry them out. The Roman Bath had become one of the show-pieces of the School, and rivalled the Chapel and the Headmaster's garden in interest and importance.

The names of naughty boys, unwashed boys, late boys, and lazy boys were sternly removed from the rota by the august hand of Mr Loveday himself, and were only reinserted after a period of penitence and atonement.

Due for their turn, therefore – and not more than five of them were ever allowed to use the Roman Bath at one time, and that time was from four o'clock until five on first Thursdays – boys were apt to slink about doing evil with much more circumspection than usual, or even, to the irritation of boys in other Houses but in the same form, to eschew evil together for a season. Merrys, therefore, whose piety had become lately a matter of fury to his co-mates and brothers in exile, was naturally more than incensed at the mean trick played by fate and his form-master Mr Conway in doing him out of his turn. Fate was in baulk, but upon Mr Conway he desired vengeance.

'Of course, *you* can rag in form, and take it out of Conway that way,' said Skene, when they had satisfied themselves that the place was locked and that the virtuous, favoured, and erudite Micklethwaite was nowhere to be seen. 'But what can *I* do? I can't rag Cartaris. I'd only get my bottom tanned, and there isn't much future in that.'

'There isn't much point in ragging Conway, either,' said Merrys. 'He'd only shove me in D again. No, we've got to do something to sort of give ourselves uplift. You know – rise on

the stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things, and at the same time, get our revenge. That's what we've got to do. The thing is - how?'

Skene, a pale-skinned, hazel-eyed, reddish-haired, chunky boy - one of the more easily-recognizable Scottish types - looked at his friend with anxiety.

'You're nuts,' he said.

'No, I'm not. I read about it in the hols,' explained Merrys. 'You sublimate things. For instance, if you get tanned, you think of being an early Christian martyr, and decide to live a good life - well, you might do that in any case, but, well, you know the sort of thing; or - well, it's not easy to explain, but - oh, well, we've got to *do* something. We've got to get on top again, and atone to ourselves for this bally sucks about the Bath, and you, I suppose, about getting shoved into House Third instead of House Second - although, if you ask my opinion -'

'Well, I don't!' said Skene, giving his friend a vicious and indignant kick.

'All right! All right!' said Merrys, rubbing his ankle. 'What I was saying was to buck ourselves up, and look the whole world in the face, for we owe not any man because we've got our own back on Fate and what-not, if you can get that idea into your fat head.'

'Yes, I see that, all right. But what *can* we do?'

'It's got to be something that hasn't been done before,' said Merrys solemnly. 'Otherwise it isn't much good.'

'Don't be a silly owl. Everything worth doing *has* been done before.'

'Not quite everything,' said Merrys, mysteriously, glancing round the rapidly-emptying field, as boys began going in to

tea.

'What do you mean?' demanded his practical friend.

'Swear you'll come in with me if I tell you?'

'Well, all right, then. But I don't believe - anyway, spit it out pronto, or we'll be late in, and all the potted meat will be gone.'

'Look here, then. We'll go to the Dogs.'

'Go to - Oh, but we'd never be able to sneak out of footer to do that! It's always House Practice on Wednesdays.'

'I'm not talking about the afternoon Dogs, chump. I'm talking about the evening Dogs. They don't start until eight, and it's dark by the time Prep's over. We could easily -'

'What about Call-Over and supper?'

'We can manage those. We'd better not miss supper. After that, well, Albert-Edward's got a bike, and it's got a step. We could take turns at riding the bike and standing on the step. We could get to the place by nine, see two or three dog-races, nip back again on the bike, and so home by about eleven.'

'And suppose we get nabbed? We'd be sacked at once.'

'You can't be sacked unless you're out after midnight. I know that for a cast-iron fact. Besides, we shan't be nabbed. How can we be? Who's to nab us?'

'Things might go wrong. Besides, the bike! Think of the frightful row there'd be if Albert-Edward knew we'd pinched his bike! He may be an ass, but he *is* a Housemaster.'

'Oh, rot! He never even looks at the bike. He only had the thing for the war when he was in the Home Guard. It's just shoved inside that little place by Jack the Ripper's toolshed.'

I expect Albert-Edward's forgotten he's got it by now. Beaks are always absent-minded about property.'

'The tyres'll be flat.'

'Oh, well, it's sure to have a pump on it. Tell you what! Let's get Jack the Ripper to pump it up, and tell him to see that the lamps are O.K. He'll do it for a bob, and once he's taken the bob he'll have to keep his mouth shut for his own sake. What do you say?'

'We'll have to go out past Spivvy's cottage, remember.'

'What odds? Ten to one, he'll be up in the masters' Common Room when we go, and asleep by the time we get back. Now you *said* you'd come -'

'On condition that you get the bike, then.'

'All right, then, although I think -'

'And that the lamps and the tyres are all right. I'm not going to break my neck.'

'All right, then, but they *will* be all right. And who cares, anyway, about your bally neck?'

'*And,*' said Skene, with sudden cunning, 'that if we win anything on the Dogs, we split it fifty-fifty. You're always much luckier than I am.'

'*Win* anything on the - Gosh! I'd never thought of that!' said Merrys, startled. 'I say, though, that *would make* a stink if it came out! Do you think - ?'

'It's my last condition,' said Skene, who now saw a ray of hope that the expedition, of which he was thoroughly nervous, might, after all, be abandoned. 'Unless you bet, and we split your winnings, I'm out. I don't mind subbing up half your stake if you lose,' he added handsomely.

'You're a blasted Shylock,' said Merrys. 'All right, then, fifty-fifty.'

Hope died in Skene's loyal but cautious breast.

'All right, then,' he agreed despondently. 'I'm on, I suppose. Let's do it soon and get it over.'

*

Merrys was not the only person who was disgruntled that he had missed a visit to the Roman Bath. Mr Loveday (Albert-Edward to the members of his House) was a mild and scholarly gentleman of advanced views, particularly on what is called, erroneously, discipline, but as a rule he reserved these views for the eyes of editors of educational journals. On this occasion, however, he felt that he had been cold-shouldered to the point of insult, for Mr Conway had not seen fit to inform him that he was keeping back one of his candidates for immersion, although there was evidence that the boy had pointed this out.

'It's time we thought of some better way of managing boys than by beating them and putting them in Detention,' he observed bitterly in the Common Room, after his roll-call for the Roman Bath had failed to elicit a response from Merrys. 'I don't complain, of course. Those are the recognized ways of keeping order, especially by people whose brains and personalities are deficient in the vital qualities which go to make a schoolmaster. Nevertheless' - he glared at the back of Mr Conway's neck - 'I am suffering from -'

'Another overdose of Neill magnesia?' said Mr Conway, turning his head only slightly. He was young enough to despise Mr Loveday wholeheartedly. He thought it was quite time that the Headmaster dispossessed some of these senile Housemasters - got them to take Orders and push off into rural England - so that their legitimate successors

(himself primarily) could afford to marry and settle down. 'Go and work it off somewhere else, Loveday, old dear. I can't help it if your whelps aren't given a chance to do their Prep, and so fall down on their classwork.'

'I don't believe in all this Prep,' said Mr Loveday, his fingers angrily clutching the bowl of the pipe that was in his jacket pocket. 'With competent teaching it is quite unnecessary. As for keeping boys in when they should be taking exercise' - he broke off to glare across the room again at the thick-set, aggressive, black-haired Mr Conway, who, unfortunately, again had his back to him and was earnestly discussing the respective merits of pre-war light ales with a master of his own age and tastes - *'then, I say, it is time to consider whether the principle of granting and withholding privileges is not very much to be preferred.'*

'It's what they try at Borstal Institutions, isn't it?' said Mr Conway, suddenly swinging round. 'Why don't you get a job at one of them?'

Mr Loveday, who was a genuine reformer and therefore did not make quite such a mess with his theories as a less sincere man might have done, said that, in his view, the system, Borstal-based or not, was the right one. He then referred (mistakenly) to the success of his Roman-Bath privileges and their abuse by incapable form-masters, and received in reply a long and spirited denunciation of his boys from Mr Conway, who referred to their sins of omission and commission, their furtiveness, their impudence, their laziness, their slackness in form and on the games-field, their unwashedness (Roman Bath or no Roman Bath), and their general and unrelieved wrong-headedness.

'In other words,' said Mr Conway unpardonably, 'they're governed by a couple of elderly women, and they know it.'

Mr Loveday turned very white, and another master said, quietly, 'Steady on, Conway,' but, beyond his ebbing colour and a sudden intake of breath as though something had sharply hurt him, Mr Loveday made no attempt to challenge the insult. He gave Conway a straight glance, and walked out. It had been a mild Common Room joke for years that Mr Loveday's sister, who was his housekeeper, wore the trousers, but it was a joke so far made in Mr Loveday's absence.

*

Mr Kay, referred to by Skene as Spivvy and as possessing a cottage which the Dog-fanciers would have to pass on their way out from school, was the only married member of the staff who was not a Housemaster. He was too newly-joined to have been given a House, and, a cottage falling vacant upon the cricket professional's retirement to his home town in Yorkshire (and no other professional having been appointed), Mr Kay had been granted the use of this cottage for himself and his wife. He paid no rent, but had given Mr Wyck, the Headmaster, an undertaking that he would keep the cottage garden tidy without pressing the Headmaster's gardener into service, and would vacate the place if another pro were appointed.

Mr Kay was not very popular with the boys, and some of the masters despised him. He was yellow-faced, black-eyed, and claimed to be half-Portuguese - his mother had been born in Brazil - and Mr Conway, who had a sharp but accurate tongue, called him Louis the Spiv, for Mr Kay taught French to the lower forms and Economics on the Science side. Thus Mr Conway's nickname for him was sufficiently descriptive to be considered worthy of Common Room use by some of the younger masters. It had also become known to the boys, a fact of which Mr Kay had been

apprised by a Fourth Form clerihew, which he had been handed, cheekily, in place of a French exercise. It ran:

Louis the Spiv
Had not the right to live.
Like every other skunk, He stunk.

It had also leaked out (again through Mr Conway, who interested himself unkindly in other people's affairs) that Mr Kay had taught for a time at a grammar school somewhere in the Midlands, and had left hurriedly in the middle of a term. He was, in consequence of Mr Conway's discoveries and verbal allusions, a solitary man, not even very happily married, and as soon as his duties for the day were over, he was in the habit of going home to his cottage for the evening and night, and shutting himself up with his work. He did not return to School until nine-thirty on the following morning.

The pious argument voiced by Merrys, therefore, that Mr Kay would be in the masters' Common Room when the truants departed for their illegal outing, was based on a fallacy. Mr Kay was not only in his cottage when the boys went by, but he even heard the sound of the bicycle wheels on the gravel drive near his windows.

The sound did not disturb him in the slightest. Marrys and Skene were far too wary to risk talking to one another while they were so near the School, and Mr Kay, hearing the bicycle's somewhat laboured progress, merely concluded that it marked the entrance or exit of the postman, who must be rather later than usual. He did not draw aside his curtain to glance out. He did not listen for the postman's knock. His wife was away from home, and he had heard from her by the morning delivery. He was not expecting any other letters.

Merrys and Skene had found it unexpectedly easy to borrow Mr Loveday's bicycle. They did not even have to take Jack the Ripper – Mr Loveday's knife-and-boot boy – into their confidence. It was Merrys who had done the actual borrowing. Skene had insisted on this.

'You got me to promise to come,' he said. 'It's up to you to do the rest.'

'Cold feet?' asked Merrys, in accents calculated to embarrass and wound the hearer.

'Yes, if you want to know, I *have* got cold feet,' said Skene, firmly. 'But I *said* I'd come with you, so I'm coming. But that's *all* I'm going to do.'

'All right, then,' said Merrys. 'I only wish it was Conway's bike, though,' he added, in a different tone. 'The silly, sickening, unfair beast! I'd jolly well smash it up for him as well as borrow it, if I had it.'

'No, you wouldn't, chump. There'd be a row, and everything would come out.'

Merrys did not contest this, but went off to spy out the lie of the land with a view to sneaking the bicycle. Mr Loveday's potting-sheds, garage, and kitchen premises were out of bounds to his boys, but there were ways and means of circumventing this law.

'I say, Stallard,' said Merrys, presenting himself before his House captain as that august man was dismembering a bloater which he had just cooked for himself over his study fire, 'I'm awfully sorry, but I've dropped a gym shoe out of the dorm window, and I think it's got caught in a bush. May I go round and pick it up?'

'How the devil *could* it drop out of the dorm window?' demanded Stallard, irritated, for a bloater must be eaten.

hot, in his opinion, or not at all. Fagging was not part of the official system at Spey, and he did not want the trouble of cooking another bloater if this one grew cold and, in his view, inedible.

'Please, Stallard, I had cleaned it, and shoved - put it on the window-ledge to dry, and, as I went to move away, I suppose I must have caught it with the edge of my hand, sort of, and -'

'Oh, go to hell and get it!' said Stallard, hitching his chair nearer the table and picking up a fork and a bit of bread. 'And no messing about, do you hear!'

'Oh, yes, Stallard. Thanks a lot.'

Merrys then ran round to the forbidden territory, found the coast clear, collared the bicycle, hid it in the bushes and rejoined his comrade. Both were studious during Prep, both ate large suppers of bread and margarine, both responded to Call-Over in the hearty, trumpet-voice of virtue, and both (having sworn the two boys in their dormitory to secrecy) descended on to the roof of Mr Loveday's outhouse, crept past a chimney-stack, slithered down a drainpipe, and so gained the kitchen garden unheard, unseen, and unthought-of, at exactly ten minutes past nine.

Mr Loveday kept no watchdog. Their progress was neither stayed nor interrupted. Merrys dragged the bicycle from the bushes and wheeled it up a concrete path and then across Mr Loveday's lawn. Soon Skene had mounted to the step, Merrys was in the saddle, and the boys were on the main drive and zigzagging towards Mr Kay's cottage and the School gates.

The new dog-racing track was distant some seven miles from the School. With optimism which proved to be misplaced, Merrys had allowed half an hour each way for

the journey. Winter Call-Over was at nine, and boys of the age of the heroes were expected to put lights out at half-past. Talking was then allowed until a quarter to ten, and silence was anticipated from that hour until half-past six on the following morning. Housemasters made their own rules, and these were the rules of Mr Loveday.

It was therefore a little after nine-fifteen when Skene and Merrys reached the road beyond the School, and half-past chimed from a church tower when, the School two miles or so behind them, and the bicycle careering merrily down a steep hill, the lads left care in the background and began to enjoy the escapade.

'I say, this is wizard!' observed Merrys. Comfortably seated – for Mr Loveday was not a tall gentleman and Merrys was a long-legged youth – he was allowing the bicycle, still zigzagging a little, to cut out a good pace along the moorland road.

'Smashing!' agreed Skene, although he was still not so wholeheartedly enthusiastic as his friend. In addition, his position on the vehicle was not particularly comfortable, as anyone who has ridden on the step of a bicycle will know. In fact, it was not so very long before he suggested that it might be a good idea for the two of them to change places.

Almost as soon as the exchange was made, he thought better of it, for the flattish half-mile of lonely countryside which had succeeded the downhill glide gave place to a long hill up which the bicycle ground its way to the agony of both its passengers.

The dog-racing track came in sight at last, however, and the boys, secreting their – or rather Mr Loveday's – machine in an alley, walked up to the gates and sought admission. They were daunted by the discovery that it was necessary to pay half a crown each before they could pass the

turnstiles. Merrys looked at Skene, and Skene said, with gloomy doggedness, that he was hanged if he was going to fork out half a crown for the doubtful pleasure of watching a couple of races, which was all they could possibly find time for. Merrys was inclined to agree. The man on the gate took no notice of them, except to suggest that they had better make up their minds, or the crowd would be out, anyway, before they got inside.

'Why, what time is it over?' asked Merrys.

'Last race about half-past ten,' replied Aeacus. The boys looked at one another again. Then Merrys turned away, and, followed by the faithful but greatly-relieved Skene, took up the bicycle and pushed it disgustedly into the main road to make for home. Suddenly he changed his mind.

'I say, we needn't go back *yet*,' he suggested.

'Better not, perhaps,' agreed Skene. 'The beaks won't be in bed yet, and we don't want to get nabbed by somebody walking across the quad.'

'Besides, we've got to put Albert-Edward's bike to bed,' said Merrys, 'and it won't do to sneak round there if there's any chance of anybody hearing us. Tell you what! Let's go through the town on to the bypass and use the cycle track as far as Belling cross-roads. Then we can cut across the moor- it's quite a good surface, I expect - and get back into the village by Double Corner. It's not so hilly that way, either.'

The cycling track alongside the bypass brought the adventurers all too soon to the cross-roads at which they were obliged to turn eastwards. After the broad, well-lighted road, the little white track across the moor looked narrow, lonely, and frightening.

'I say, I almost wish we'd gone the other way,' said Merrys. His knee, on the mudguard, had grown (he believed) a corn, and his foot, on the step, had gone to sleep. 'What about *me* pedalling now?'

'Steady, you ass!' cried Skene, as his friend attempted to alleviate the discomfort of his position. 'You'll have us into the heather! Count 500 out loud, and then we'll change.'

His friend obeyed; they stopped the bicycle, changed about, and the moor grew larger all round them. The road was eerily lonely, the night grew blacker and blacker, and the journey, which had become more and more uncomfortable, now seemed disagreeably long.

'I should have thought we'd have been in sight of the village by now,' said Skene, at last.

'Well, I don't know,' said Merrys, who (secretly) had been thinking the same thing for the past quarter of an hour. 'Come to think of it, you see, all the lights would be out by now. You know how early villagers go to bed. We won't know we're in the village until we get there. We shall suddenly come to the pub. That's the first building, going by this road.'

'I suppose,' said Skene, 'we haven't missed Double Corner in the dark?'

'Good Lord, no, of course not!' said the startled Merrys. 'How *could* we miss it, you ass?'

'Easily, I should think,' said Job's comforter, now on the step. 'The trouble would be to see it. Except for our front lamp, it's as black as your hat all the way.'

At the end of another quarter of an hour the horrid truth had to be faced. The Corner must lie some miles in the rear of the cyclists. These, however, were not free from the

unreasonable human conviction that to go on is better than to go back.

'We're sure to come to somewhere soon,' said Merrys. 'Ten to one, if we rode back, we'd only miss it again, and be no better off. We don't want to find ourselves back in that bally town.'

It was at this point that they saw a light ahead of them. Both boys were greatly relieved. They took it for granted that they had come to the inn. Once through the village, a little over a mile would bring them to the gates of the School - or, rather, to where the gates had been. They had been seized for scrap, and the governors had not replaced them.

The bicycle lamp, however, showed a broken fence painted in some dark colour, a ragged hedge, and a glimmering path between bushes.

2. *Witches' Brew*

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Why are the Laws levell'd at us? – are we more dishonest than the rest of Mankind?

IBID. (*Act 2, Scene 4*)

MRS BEATRICE ADELA LESTRANGE BRADLEY had long cherished the notion of writing an account of an ancestress of her own, one Mary Toadflax, who bore the early seventeenth-century reputation of having been a witch.

Finding herself with some welcome leisure one summer, Mrs Bradley therefore had begun her researches into this fascinating history, and had progressed far enough to be able to pass the results on to a specialist in such matters.

He was able, at the end of eighteen months of painstaking work, to direct her to the village of Spey, where, in the possession of an old woman named Lecky Harries, was a book of spells and charms which, he had reason to believe, might have been the property of Mary Toadflax in her heyday and which, for some unknown reason, had escaped the fire which consumed its owner.

The details which he was able to supply tempted Mrs Bradley to leave her clinic in the care of her chief assistant, and travel north and east to the cottage where the book reposed. She had no adventures on the way. Spey was clearly marked on the Ordnance map, and she arrived there