

The Dark Side of the Moon

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Random House Children's Books

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RED FOX DEFINITIONS

*Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these?*

King Lear, III, 4.

*As flies to wanton boys, are we to the Gods;
They kill us for their sport.*

King Lear, IV, 1.

PART ONE

ONE

ON A COLD, blustering day at the end of September 1976 a boy was kidnapped from Ruggles Academy in the city of Edinburgh.

The subsequent events in this 'crime against humanity' were to cover miles of news space in the press and hours of peak-time on television and radio stations.

What was to set it apart from all the other kidnaps, hijacks and hostage seizures of those troubled and discontented times was that no clear motive, either political or economic, was to emerge. No demands were made by the kidnapers; no ransom money was asked for, no political rights claimed.

Mr. Howard McRae, the headmaster of Ruggles, received only one note. It was made up in the usual, obligatory style of the twentieth-century cops and robbers mentality with words cut from the printed page. It read:

WE HAVE GOT YOUR BOY. MAY SOCIETY ROT AND THIS MESS OF A WORLD PERISH.

This is the story of the following three weeks.

*'As flies to wanton boys, are we to the Gods;
They kill us for their sport.'*

Telephone.

Bells ringing through a fine mist. Church bells, for a wedding; then the one bell of mourning; then the mist dissolving into . . .

'Telephone!'

'What?'

'Time is it?'

'Mmmmh?'

'Eleven. I was asleep.'

'Let it ring.'

He pulls her down into the warm undercurrent of the bed.

'I love you,' he says, kissing her shoulder, still half asleep.

'Who the hell can it be?'

'Let it ring.'

'I can't. Don't, Steven, I must go.' She kisses him on the cheek and pulls herself free of his encircling arms.

'It might be Mother,' she says, stretching and dragging the eiderdown round her body. 'Oooh, it's cold.'

'Let it ring,' still clinging to sleep. 'Who wants to talk to your mother?'

'I do. Dad isn't at all well.'

She crosses the room and goes out into the hall.

Steven fumbles in the dark for a cigarette, then she returns. As she enters she snaps on the overhead light.

'Hey!' he says, flinching in the sudden glare.

'It's your wife,' is all that she says.

'Jenny?'

'Steven? David has been kidnapped.'

'What?'

'He's been kidnapped. From Ruggles - the headmaster . . . he phoned, just now. . . .' trying not to cry.

'Can you come home?'

'It's a trick.'

'I must go, Jill,' pulling on his clothes.

'It's a trick.'

'She was crying.'

'Yes, I've heard her cry.'

'I'll come back. I'll just see what is happening.'

'Don't bother.'

'I must, Jill.'

'All right - but don't say you'll come back. Not tonight. You know you won't.'

'She said David has been . . . kidnapped.'

'She has only to pick up the phone for you to go running.'

'Can't you understand? She said David had been kidnapped. Well, for God's sake - of course I have to go. He's my son.'

'I'll give you a son.'

'Oh, not now, Jill. Please not now.'

'What - not now?'

'Not a row now, please. Surely it must be obvious that I have to go.'

'I'm not stopping you.'

Silence as he struggles into his shoes.

'How did she know where to reach you?'

He doesn't answer her. He goes quickly out of the room and down the hall.

'Phone me,' she says.

The front door slams.

Sir Giles Latimer, chairman of the board of governors of Ruggles Academy, was angry. The last thing that he wanted was a scare like this. 'Why in heaven's name couldn't it have happened to a state school?' was his only thought as he sat nervously in the headmaster's study on the following afternoon. It was Sunday and he had arranged to play a round of golf before reading the second lesson at evening service; his entire routine had been shattered.

'Presumably we must now wait for a ransom demand,' Detective Chief Inspector Wormsley was saying, as he replaced the piece of paper on the desk in front of him. 'Can you go over again the events of yesterday, Mr. ugh . . .'

'McRae.'

'Just call him "Headmaster", Inspector,' snapped Sir Giles. 'That is his title.'

'Thank you, Sir Giles.'

'Mason was last seen yesterday afternoon. There was a first fifteen friendly against Fettes up on the North End. . . .'

'First fifteen friendly?'

'A rigger match.'

'Rugby football, Inspector,' Sir Giles filled in.

'Thank you, Sir Giles. Please go on, Mr. . . . Headmaster.'

'Our rigger season hasn't really started - but we always have a friendly against Fettes on the first Saturday of Founder's Term - that's the autumn term, of course. . . .'

'I'm sure that the Inspector doesn't require a synopsis of the entire Ruggles tradition, Headmaster.'

'No, Sir Giles.' The headmaster cleared his throat, nervously, and continued after a moment. 'At high tea it was noted that he did not take his place at the prefects' table. However, this was not unusual. School prefects are at liberty to take tea in their studies if they desire to do so. It was therefore not until eight-thirty that the alarm was first raised. There was a Music Society meeting, and, as secretary of the society, Mason was expected to be there - particularly as it was the first meeting of the term. One of the other members of the society,' Mr. McRae checked his notes, 'Whittle of Cairngorm House, was sent to Mason's study. He found it empty. He returned to the Music Rooms and it was decided by Dr. Jefford, the master in charge, that the meeting should proceed without him. After the meeting Dr. Jefford called in to see Mr. Smedley, the housemaster of School West - that is Mason's house - and reported the boy's absence. He presumed, not unnaturally, that Mason was busy with other affairs which had precluded him from attendance to the Music Society. The beginning of Founder's Term is always a very busy time for the prefects. Not only is it the start of the academic year, but also preparations have to be got under way at once for the Founder's Weekend at the end of November. The school play, the concert, the Founder's Ball . . . ' - the headmaster cleared his throat again, sensing that he was losing his audience - 'and so on.

However, Mr. Smedley had not given Mason any other duties for the evening and had believed him to be attending the meeting. It is awfully difficult, Sir Giles, in a school of this size, to know where all the boys are. . . .’

‘Difficult, but essential, Headmaster.’

‘I quite agree.’

‘I am happy that you do, Headmaster. Now get on with it – I’m sure that the inspector is a very busy man,’ he glanced at his watch, ‘and I must admit that I have several other engagements to attend to today.’

‘Well, there isn’t much more to tell, really. Mr. Smedley searched through School West, rang round to the other housemasters to check that Mason wasn’t with any of them, and then came round here to see me at The Grange. It was his belief at this point that Mason could be a.w.o.l. We understand that Mason’s parents are going through matrimonial problems and this had been causing the boy a certain amount of distress.’

‘How did you know this, sir?’ Wormsley enquired.

‘The boy had confided in Mr. Jessop. He’s English Sixth and also the school C. of E. chaplain. He was also the boy’s form master. Mason evidently saw him the day after school reconvened. He was in a bit of a state and spilled the beans to him. Mr. Jessop of course had seen Mr. Smedley, Mason’s housemaster, and told him about this.’

‘Is any of this relevant?’ enquired Sir Giles, tersely.

‘Only to demonstrate, Sir Giles, the reasons for Mr. Smedley believing that Mason could have run away.’

‘Yes, all right.’

‘However, when he arrived here at The Grange and Mrs. McRae went down to answer the doorbell, she found this,’ he lifted up the sheet of paper lying in front of him on the desk, ‘stuffed through the letter box.’

‘Funny,’ Wormsley said, thoughtfully.

‘What is, Inspector?’

‘How did they know where the headmaster lived?’

'Oh, this has traditionally been the headmaster's house since the school was founded in 1848. It was the founder's own home, you know. Sir Godfrey Ruggles . . .'

'I think what the inspector is getting at, my dear Headmaster, is that only a Ruggolian would have known such details.'

'Not necessarily, Sir Giles. The postman and the milkman and. . . .'

'Oh, and the tradespeople, of course.'

'Precisely. Well, our job is to find out who they are and where the boy is. You will of course keep in touch with me, Headmaster.'

'Of course, Inspector.'

'Have the parents been informed?'

'Last night.'

'And the press?'

'No. We have spoken to no one else.'

'We won't be able to keep them out of it for long, I'm afraid.'

As Mr. McRae crossed the room to show his two visitors to the front door Wormsley picked up the kidnap note and deposited it in a brown manilla envelope which he produced from his briefcase.

'I'll keep this for the time being,' he said.

'What? Oh, the note. Yes, of course. I did want to show it to the parents. . . .'

'Do you think that wise, Headmaster?'

'I have to show them something, Inspector. They are both coming up here from London. I expect them this evening.'

'I should think that to see their off-spring will be their main preoccupation,' said Sir Giles, a little pompously. 'May we hope for that, Inspector?'

'We always hope, sir. I'll send a photo-copy round as soon as I've had some made, Headmaster.'

'Thank you, Inspector.'

The headmaster led the way down the stairs and into the spacious hall of The Grange.

‘What will be your next move, Inspector?’ enquired Sir Giles, collecting his hat and coat from the stand by the front door.

‘The usual routine enquiries, sir. We have already started. Did anyone see anything unusual on Saturday afternoon - a car parked near the school, that sort of thing.’

‘There are always cars parked near the school, Inspector.’

‘Yes, of course. I may have to question some of the boys, sir.’

‘We must have no panic, Headmaster.’

‘I should think, if anything, the kids will love every minute of it.’

‘These are no ordinary “kids”, Inspector. They are Ruggolians; the children of statesmen and politicians, industrialists and even the aristocracy.’

‘What does Mason’s father do, by the way?’

‘I haven’t the remotest idea; have you, Headmaster?’

‘I think that he is in publishing, Sir Giles.’

‘Well, he’s got a good story on his hands. Goodbye, Sir Giles, Headmaster. We’ll be in touch.’

The rumours of Mason’s disappearance swept through the school like a wave.

It was carried first to Cairngorm House by a fifther called Geoffrey Whittle. Whittle was a second violin in the school orchestra and also a member of the Music Society. It was he whom Dr. Jefford selected to ‘slip over to School House and ask our invaluable secretary if he could honour us with his presence for the first meeting of the term’.

Whittle found Mason’s study empty and, after asking one or two other members of the house if they knew where he was, he returned to the meeting.

‘Did you ask Mr. Smedley?’ Dr. Jefford enquired.

Whittle had not.

'Is it beyond your intelligence to surmise that, if he were not in his study, then perhaps - I only say perhaps - he could be with his housemaster?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Yes - it is beyond your intelligence?'

'I mean, no sir.'

'Oh, never mind. We'll do without him. We've already wasted enough time. To business - or should I say, to opus. At the end of November we are to attend a performance of *The Magic Flute*, given by Scottish Opera. I suggest, therefore, that we spend the first half of the term looking closely at this magnificent opera, in the hope that, when we take our seats for the performance, we will be familiar with the intricacies. . . .'

Later that same evening Mr. Smedley called Edward Wilson, the head of School West, into his study. Mr. Smedley had just returned from the headmaster's house and reported the details of the kidnap to his senior prefect, in the strictest confidence, of course.

Tug Wilson told only Chris Johnson who told only Jim Hope-Wesley and by Sunday lunch time a number of differing garbled versions of the truth were in circulation. Not much credence was given to the kidnap version for the simple reason that there were far better fish in the sea than Mason, should anyone consider kidnapping a Ruggolian. Razid's father was worth millions; Huntley's was a Cabinet Minister and so on.

The most popular story was that Mason had run away, and the boys' spirits soared as they looked forward to the drama of his return. Anything unexpected was always welcomed at Ruggles - because it broke the tedium.

Only one boy, Julian Wagstaff, was sure that he knew the truth.

Wagstaff, the son of a bank manager from Luton, was a first term at Ruggles and was a member of School West, Mason's own house.

On the previous afternoon, the Saturday, Wagstaff had made his way up to the North End to watch the friendly against Fettes.

Being unfamiliar with the grounds he took a wrong turning by the gym complex and found himself walking down the Wide Way. There was no one about. The majority of the school were already on their way to the North End by the correct route and anyway the Wide Way was out of bounds. He was about to retrace his steps when he saw a young man standing in the trees, by the side of the drive, looking at him.

After a moment the man walked across the grass towards him. He was dressed in a white sweater and jeans and he had a thin beard and shoulder-length hair.

'You,' he said brusquely, 'what are you doing here? Don't you know that this drive is out of bounds?'

'No, sir,' Wagstaff replied, nervously.

'What house are you in?'

'School West, sir.'

'Why aren't you up at the match?'

'I'm trying to get there, sir. I got lost.'

'All right. Cut along up that path, through the woods. It'll take you straight up to North End.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Wait a minute, I haven't finished yet. You know David Mason?'

'He's the second head of our house, sir.'

'Send him to me.'

'Who shall I say, sir?'

'You should know the masters' names by now, you know, lad.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, go on. Tell Mason that I'm walking down through the woods to Deeside House. Tell him to catch me up. Go, go, go. Or I'll have you for breaking half a dozen rules.'

He had done as he was told. He had found Mason, delivered the message, been ticked off for not knowing the name of the master and had watched Mason walk over towards the woods and disappear from view.

As soon as Wagstaff heard that Mason had disappeared he knew that the man he had spoken to was involved. At the time he had doubted that he was one of the masters. He could picture him quite clearly in his mind's eye. He knew that he should go and see Mr. Smedley and tell him what had happened. Two things delayed him.

The first was his own nature. Julian Wagstaff was a nervous, shy child. He was short and spotty and wore thick pebble glasses. He always avoided being the centre of any attention. He preferred to watch events from the wings. But he was aware that the information he had would be invaluable in whatever investigations that might now take place.

All of Sunday he wrestled with his conscience and then, at tea time, the second event occurred to distract him further.

He had thought that his headache was due to worrying about Mason, but during the afternoon he was violently sick. He reported to the house sick room and Mrs. Smedley took his temperature.

'Oh, you're for the San, Wagstaff - you've got a raging temperature!'

He was one of the first boys to go down with the epidemic of flu that rampaged through the school - and indeed the whole country - right up until Christmas.

Lying in bed the following Tuesday he read the account of the kidnap in the *Express*. He knew that it was too late to say anything, without being in real trouble. He resolved, therefore, to remain silent and, although he was on occasions racked with guilt, he never went back on that decision.

Ironically, he was not interviewed by the police, although at least a third of the school were called in, one by one, to

the headmaster's study over the next few weeks. If he had been, he would have been able to give a clear description to Detective Chief Inspector Wormsley of the man he met on the drive.

Perhaps even more ironically, he tortured himself unduly, for although he had undoubtedly seen and spoken to one of David Mason's kidnappers, it was where they were, not who they were, that was to become of paramount importance.

The news broke in an Edinburgh evening paper on Monday under the banner headline 'RUGGLES ACADEMY KIDNAP'.

The following morning it made the front page of every national newspaper.

Statements were issued by the police and by the Ruggles board of governors. These were brief and to the point; simply that a young student had disappeared from the school and that the police were treating the case as kidnap. No mention was made of the kidnap note until Thursday at which time Detective Chief Inspector Wormsley, in charge of the investigation, stated that the information had been withheld, pending further communication from the kidnappers.

But none came.

David Mason, a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, had disappeared, apparently off the face of the earth.

Mrs. Jennifer Mason was interviewed by both the B.B.C. and the I.T.N. sitting on a sofa in her drawing-room in Hampstead, London, with her husband, Steven, beside her. She was wide-eyed and spoke quietly and nervously. She appealed to whoever had taken her son to release him and she broke down completely when asked if she considered David strong enough to withstand the enormous strain that he must be undergoing.

'He's a child,' she whispered, 'only a child. Why should anyone want to do this terrible thing?'