

A New Costume

Macabre Collection

by David Haynes,

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First and foremost, I am an entertainer. Secondly, I am a killer. It may surprise you but I believe the two can be partners; uncomfortable perhaps, but with a little creativity, it can be achieved with a certain elegance. Unfortunately it means I carry no reputation as an artiste and must, inevitably, perform only in the smaller halls and theatres of this land. Whilst this somewhat demeans my soul, the anonymity it provides is a means of satisfying both my desires; to entertain and to murder.

I am fortunate enough to have been blessed with the spirit of a performer and provided with the skills to accompany that gift. It has seen me perform many roles in many genres and helped me kill many men.

As a young man I had never had much interest in the theatre but one day I passed a poster which caught my eye. It showed a man of Moorish appearance carrying a giant curved sword. There were other characters on the crude poster but he alone caught my eye; Othello it said beneath his sword. The theatre was nothing more than a ramshackle lodge and being a man of low means I took a seat in the gods. It was the first show I had seen and it was life changing. The theatre and the cast were the most beautiful things I had ever seen. I made a vow to myself that this is where I would spend my life.

I felt no connection with the man Othello or the actor himself and found myself increasingly drawn to the character Iago. His duplicity and seething madness were what attracted me so; the devious natures of his intentions were both frightening and brilliant. The bawdy crowd booed and shouted abuse whenever he appeared and I found myself hating them all. I cheered for him and championed his cause at every opportunity, although I was alone in this. It was after my last call in his support that a fist split my lip and sprayed blood down my shirt.

„Shut up you ignorant fool. We have come to shout at the villain, not listen to your rubbish.“ The oaf pushed me off my seat and stole my shoes. His reeking breath smelled of gin and grease.

„Give me my shoes!“ I yelled and fought to get them back but he threw them down into the stalls, where they melted away. His friends laughed until they could barely breathe and the oaf yelled at me as I hobbled away. „That'll teach you to ruin my night!“

I waited for a long time outside that theatre; in the cold drizzle of a dreary night, and when at last he left, I followed him. The brute and his drunken colleagues staggered their way through the gas lit streets; until one by one, his friends left and he was alone. I gave as little thought to what I did next as I would to picking his pocket. He never even heard me step out from the shadows, and as I followed close behind, the stench of gin followed him like a putrid vapour. I felt hatred for that man or for what he had done to me in the theatre. The first blow split his head in a crazed line from top to bottom, and as I raised the rock to hit him again, I spied greyness beneath. It was a strange sight, for beneath the skin, I expected only blood and not this disappointing stain. He sank to his knees and uttered a guttural sound but I brought it down again, hard against his broken skull. I dropped the rock quickly and removed his battered old shoes. „And that sir, will teach you.“ Thus began my love for the stage and for taking a life.

I could have done the same to Mr Jonathan Lovett after what he had done to my sister. I could have split his skull like so many others but where is the skill in that? Where is the entertainment? And above all, where is the performance?

I watched as they took the final two generations of Lovett men away from their mansion in Belgravia. Feet first through the door they came, wrapped in white linen as pure as the snow. Yet, even from across the street, in the warmth of the cab, I could smell their decay.

„Sister? Where is my costume?“ Susanna sat beside me and as always had her part to play.

„Right here my brother. Here, let me adjust the collar.“

The driver, paid handsomely, drove at a deathly speed away from the house. I knew time was short before the next act began. Before long, he pulled up at the gates and I banged my cane on the roof. „We shall walk from here I think.“ I took my sister’s arm and we walked through the grounds, just where we had walked last night. This morning, high in the yew, a dove called to its mate, where last night the owl had screeched to its prey.

„I really think this costume suits you well brother. I think this may be your finest performance yet.“

„Do you think so dear? It feels a little sticky still.“

„After the show, we shall wash the blood off or even better, purchase a new one.“

We took our place beside the graves and waited in silence. After all this time, and after all those performances, I am a little ashamed to say I still suffer with stage fright. The mound of fresh earth beside the freshly dug graves writhed with a mass of excited worms as the procession advanced.

The pallbearers lowered the coffins beside their final destinations and stood back. I was surprised at the attendance for barely a handful of mourners had come.

Two coffins placed side by side; father and son together for eternity.

I coughed to clear my throat for the first line, and looked to the audience.

„Let us commend Matthew and Jonathan Lovett to the mercy of God. We commit their bodies to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life.“

The coffins were lowered into the earth.

I wonder what entertainment I can conjure in my new role as a man of god? The possibilities, at least at the moment, seem endless.“

Special Thanks to Kath Middleton.

