

The Police

Macabre Collection

by David Haynes,

Published: 2013



To go home and sleep would be unthinkable, and as I walked the streets in the fresh air of the early morning, I began to wonder if it had been some terrible nightmare. What I had seen was akin to the imaginary horror of a Drury Lane show, not reality. Was I nothing more than a lunatic, bound for the white tiled walls of Bethlem? It would be of no surprise if that were the case, my mind was a wreck.

Would Booth know what to do? It was unlikely; he was ill equipped to deal with anything more serious than his magic lantern or a bottle of port. If I were to go to the police I would be locked up for burglary or declared a madman and thrown

into Bethlem. I walked aimlessly waiting for something to happen, for a cab to end my life under wheel or hoof. Would the Lord, upon whom believers placed such reverence, send me guidance?

„Mr Napier, you look dreadful! Come in this instant,“ John Collins ushered me inside, „I must ask you something, sir. Although I cannot smell gin about you, are you in drink?“

In my usual spirits I might have bristled at such a question but I was simply too weary to react. „No, Mr Collins. Although my mind shares a state of ruin akin to that caused by drink. Is Anna, Miss Collins awake yet?“

„She is taking breakfast upstairs in our apartments. I shall tell her you wish to speak with her.“

He led me along the dark corridor into the garish parlour. „If you would care to take a seat?“ He indicated the chaise but I took one of the hard chairs instead. He disappeared through a door in the corner of the room.

A few moments passed in uncomfortable silence. It was not a place I felt relaxed, particularly following recent events.

„Matthew?“ Anna came into the room and brightened my mood immediately. „John was right, you look terrible. What on earth has happened to make you look so wretched?“

She was so pretty and kind. I could not burden her or John with my terrible discovery. I rose from the chair. „I’m sorry, Anna. I should never have come.“

She placed her hand on mine. „From the moment I saw you, Matthew, I knew I was sent to help you. I do not how, and I do not know why, but I will not go against that instinct; it has served me well these years.“

„I am plagued with an insidious lunacy, Anna. It creates terrible visions of things which cannot be real. They simply cannot exist for if they did then I am in hell. Just last night...“ I could not say what I had seen for who would believe it.

„What happened, Matthew? What has happened since I saw you last?“

I fell to my knees. „There were babies and bones. I saw cadavers praying to the cross in a blasphemous church. My mother was there, Anna; dressed in a silken gown and I slept beside her.“ I drew my hands down my unshaven face. „It cannot be real! Why am I being tortured so? Why!“

I felt her arm around my shoulder. „Allow me to help you. Allow us both to help you.“

The same strong hands that had lifted me from the gutter, hoisted me to my feet. „You shall come upstairs and rest.“

Once again I was taken from my misery by John Collins and delivered into salvation. Like a Crimean invalid, I was discharged to bed, and as my shoes and overcoat were removed, I felt the full weight of my grief bear down on my soul. The tears flowed in a silent torrent and soaked the pillow beside my cheek.

„Bring me a chair, John, so I may watch over him.“

I lay there until my tears dried and my mind crept free from its tormented cell. Still, Anna remained at my side, watching and whispering softly into my ears.

„Lily loves you. She is safe with your mother. She is happy but she is afraid for you and wants you to be careful.“

It was an ordeal to open my eyes for the shame I felt at having wept so openly in front of Anna. She looked down on me; there was no sign of pity or

embarrassment, simply kindness. It had been a long time since I had been looked upon in that way.

„You were restless, Matthew. Tossing and turning and calling out for Lily.“

I smiled up at her; it felt like an age since I had felt that happy compulsion. „I am sorry for my behaviour. I can assure you, it is quite out of character.“

Her expression turned grave. „Please do not apologise. All I ask is that you tell me what it was that disturbed you so. You made little sense in your torpor.“

„I cannot, and will not say, for you already think me deranged.“

She placed her hand on my cheek. „I do not think you deranged, Matthew. I think you have seen and felt too much without a hand to guide you.“

I took her hand and lightly kissed her palm. „I shall tell you but it is truly despicable. Would you hand me my overcoat, please?“

I withdrew the butchered face of my sister and held it for Anna to see. She covered her eyes and called for her brother.

John arrived and listened while I regaled them with the truth of what I had seen. As I spoke the words and recalled the images, it seemed like they were some other person's memories and not my own.

I started with the experience from my childhood before moving onto the previous evening's events. When I had gone through the entire story, I waited for a reaction. To my own ears it sounded absurd, so what would they make of it?

Anna spoke first. „I have witnessed things about Louis and Susanna which are troubling. They seem to revel in the anguish of others. She calls it the truth but to me it is spite. Have you not seen it too, John?“

He took her hand as I had often taken Lily's. „If you feel troubled by them, sister, then so do I. You have always felt things that I do not understand but you have always kept the word of the Lord in your heart. Your intentions are without question. I will help you, however I can.“

I would never have chance to say such things to my own sister and tears welled in my eyes.

„What must we do? I am ready to be taken to the police if that is what we decide is best. They cannot ignore the evidence.“

„We must discuss this carefully, Matthew. We must expose them and bring the full weight of the law upon them. There is also something else we must consider.“ Anna spoke slowly, choosing her words carefully.

„That being?“ I asked.

„We must set those poor spirits free.“

I looked down at Lily's face. „We must return them to the earth. Where they all belong.“ I looked up again, „How long have they been part of this church?“ I asked of John.

„They came as soon as I made it known we were here. I took it as a sign because her skills in communing with the dead delivered us a great congregation and without that my work in the community would be impossible. You, Mathew might have perished in the gutter if it weren't for the money they raised.“

„And what do they get in return? From what I see they are not God fearing individuals with an altruistic bent.“ My mind was at last beginning to apply logic to the situation.

Anna jumped in. „They both obtain great pleasure from observing the pain and distress Susanna’s lies impart.“

„Yes and a good deal of wealth from private consultations.“ John said blandly.

I rose from the bed. „We shall go to Bloomsbury and find the police station. It shall be done tonight.“

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As we rattled along in the cab, I could not help but question myself again. What if all I had seen were just illusions in a demented mind? Yet, buried deep in my pocket, beside the memento mori of my father, was the macabre mask of my sister’s face. I did not need to touch it again to know how real it was.

Three constables and a sergeant were spared to visit the address. The Inspector obviously considered my companions orderlies from the asylum and me a lunatic. I could not bear to show him my sister for I knew he would have taken it from me and now I had her again, I would not let go. Nevertheless he could ignore my pleas for only so long before my insistence bore a dividend.

„Sergeant Shaw, you shall take Mr Napier and his comrades to thirty-four Bedford place and you shall search it top to bottom. If it is, as Mr Napier suggests, a house of horrors, then no doubt half of Leman Street station will be here within minutes to help us.“

Sergeant Shaw was a burly man but I feared for him as he entered the unlocked address with his revolver pointing the way.

„Police!“ he yawped into the darkness and turned to face us. „You three wait here until I call for you.“

We waited as they searched the house. The only sounds came from the muffled laughter of passengers as they passed us in a cab. What was taking them so long? The horrors inside were obvious to anyone.

The sound of gunshot smashed through my imaginings and hurtled me back inside. „Sergeant?“ I bounded up the stairs. All my fear had departed, leaving behind a terrible anger.

There was laughter then, terrible raucous laughter.

„Sergeant Shaw!“ I threw back the parlour door. The infant’s coffin remained, alone and unwelcome in the centre of the room. I did not need to see inside to know it was empty.

„Mr Napier, will you step in here for a moment, please?“ Sergeant Shaw stood in the doorway to hell and beckoned me inside.

I did not wish ever to enter that hellish church again yet I knew I must. I must see what Fettiplace had left for me.

The room was empty; the congregation had left. The silent prayers of the deceased would not be answered tonight.

„I do not understand, sergeant. I was not mistaken. I saw...“ He stared blankly back.

„The gunshot and the laughter? What caused you to open fire?“

Sergeant Shaw took my shoulders and turned me to face the door. „This. I nearly shot a dead man, which caused a good deal of mirth from my men.“

Beside the door, in the piercing light of the moon, was the shrunken mask of a dead man. Below it, in charcoal lines as fine as a spiders legs, was the perfect portrait of me.

„That's you int it, Mister Napier? Don't know who the other poor bugger is though.“

„My father.“ I answered.

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„I fail to see how they could have moved so many cadavers, so quickly, without drawing attention to the act.“ I lit the fire and motioned for Anna and John to sit.

„A man can move a great many things without notice if he so chooses and has the right connections.“ John replied.

„Perhaps I was mistaken. I could...“

„Do not say that, Matthew. You were not mistaken as well you know it.“ Anna remained standing beside me.

„I should say they intend to kill me. By physical or other means I do not know, and for what insane reason, I cannot say. I do not believe I have ever caused them ill.“

„I think it is the last we shall see of them. They have had their fun and now they will move on to another victim. If not, the police will capture them and they will surely hang. You are lucky you possess the strength to resist them. I am not sure I could, if I had seen those I love in that room.“ John stared into the fire.

„I am not sure they will move on until they have their prize.“ The mantel clock chimed the eleventh hour. „Would you both remain here tonight? I should feel better for all of us if we remain together.“

„We shall be happy to.“ Anna replied.

„Thank you. Anna, you may take my room and John will you take my uncle's room?“

„And where will you sleep?“ Anna asked.

„I shall not sleep tonight. I will be quite comfortable here beside the fire, I assure you.“

With Anna and John both in bed I took my place beside the fire with a bottle of brandy. There, I withdrew the greater part of my family from the deep dark lining of my pocket. Sergeant Shaw had no use for the wizened flap of flesh my father had become, and so before Anna or John arrived in the room, I took it for myself.

I laid them carefully in my lap, side by side. „See how your daughter has grown, father. She is quite beautiful, is she not?“ Their cold, dead flesh was warmed in the glow of the fire and the flames sent glorious shadows to dance on their faces. In my eyes, they were once again, animate and living.

„We need only Mother to be complete again.“ I kissed my sister's cheek, „It is lovely to have you home again, Lily. Perhaps tomorrow we will take a walk to Drury Lane and see the bearded lady.“

Once again the golden abyss which lay within the bottle, consumed my conscious body.

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As I floated helplessly upward through the various stages of waking, I became aware of a cold, biting ache building through my body. I had not intended to sleep, but with the aid of brandy and the curious warmth emanating from my father and sister, I had drifted off.

The fire had gone out but the morning had not yet broken. It was a miserable time of night when the darkness wraps a velvet cloak about you and takes a sickle to your senses.

I reached down to feel the reassurance from my father and sister but could feel nothing except the cold wool of my trousers. „Lily? Father? Where have you gone?“ I reached beneath my legs but my fingers felt only a threadbare patch on the rug. Had I taken them somewhere in my stupor? I would certainly have disturbed Anna had I taken them to my room. Besides, it was something I would recall, and I did not.

I stumbled from the chair and walked across the room. A faint light slid along the banister and pooled at the foot of the stairs. Perhaps Anna and John were also awake; it would not be a surprise in the circumstances. Had one of them come down to me and taken them from me? Why would they do such a thing? I felt anger building in my drunken mind.

Candlelight seeped from beneath their doors, and although my languid mind reminded me of Anna's naked form, I could not enter her room with her brother so close.

I knocked lightly on the door which had once belonged to my mother and father and then to my uncle.

„John, are you awake?“ I whispered. His form lay motionless on the bed.

He lay fully clothed on top of the blankets. They had not been used since my uncle's death and were, no doubt, dusty and damp.

Why did his face look so much in shadow? Something was wrong with him. He was at rest as an undertaker would lay a freshly dead corpse for viewing.

„John?“ I stepped closer to the bed.

He was dressed in my father's suit, and as the flames danced in the draft, they lit the whiskers upon his face.

„You are not my father!“ I leapt onto the bed and took his throat in my hands. „You cannot have him!“ I squeezed his throat with all my might and felt the brittle bones in his neck give under my pressure. He was as helpless as a child under my grip and uttered no sound as I choked the life from his body.

When, at last my strength failed, I looked down on what I had wrought. John Collins was dead, undoubtedly, and his ruddy flesh crept around the edges of my father's blackened face creating a duplicitous visage of death.

I had killed a man. I had killed a man whose only crime had been to try and help me. I peeled the leathery countenance from his face and held it to my own.

„Father? Why did you not stop me?“

I must find Anna and explain my actions. I must try to bring order to this madness.

The light from her room, convulsed as if repelled at what it had witnessed. I pushed the door and stepped into the room. „Anna, I can bear it no longer, my mind is destroyed. I have killed John. You must help me.“

Her form was as her brother's had been, clothed and ready for the coffin. In my darkest thoughts I knew what to expect, but as I looked down, I saw not the face of Anna Collins, but the shrivelled face of my sister. I felt no rage, only grief for what I must do.

I slid onto the bed beside Anna and caressed her cheek. Her bosom swelled with each breath and her hair fell in gentle curls around my sister's face.

„You cannot have my sister, Anna. She belongs to me.“ I cupped her neck and pushed my thumbs against her throat. „I am sorry.“ I whispered. Unlike John, her body trembled and shook as she tried to gain her breath, until slowly she stopped and I released my hold.

„Bravo! What a performance, sir!“ The sound of applause broke the pestilent air.

„Now look what you've done, Louis. He's gone and stopped. What about the bleedin' encore?“ I looked over my shoulder. Fettiplace and his sister stood in the doorway. Susanna held the skeleton infant to her bosom.

„We shall just have to create one of our own, that's all.“ Fettiplace came toward me and brought a cudgel down on my head.

