

YELLOW AND RED

Tanith Lee

Tanith Lee began writing at the age of nine. After school she worked variously as a library assistant, shop assistant, filing clerk and waitress before spending a year at art college.

She published three children's books in the early 1970s, but it was only when DAW Books published her novel *The Birthgrave* in 1975, and thereafter twenty-six other titles, was she able to become a full-time writer. To date she has published nearly sixty novels, including such recent titles as *White as Snow*, *A Bed of Earth* and *Venus Preserved*, plus nine collections of novellas and short stories. Her radio plays have been broadcast by the BBC and she scripted two episodes of the cult TV series *Blake's 7*.

Tanith Lee has twice won the World Fantasy Award for short fiction, and in 1980 she was awarded the British Fantasy Society's August Derleth Award for her novel *Death's Master*.

"I am a great admirer of, amongst others, M.R. James...", reveals the author. "His influence on me, in this story, is perhaps evident only to myself."

From the Diary of Gordon Martyce:

9th September 195-: 7:00 p.m.

Coming down to the old house was at first interesting, and then depressing. The train journey was tedious and slow, and after the second hour, over and over again, I began to wish I had not undertaken this. But that would be foolish. The house, by the quirkiness of my Uncle's will, is now mine. One day I may even live in it, although for now my job, which I value, and my flat, which I like, keep me in London. Of course, Lucy is terribly interested in the idea of an old place in the country. I could see her eyes, lit by her second gin, gleam with visions of chintz curtains, china on the mantelpiece, an old, dark, loudly-ticking clock. But it is not that sort of house—I knew that even then, never having seen inside it in my life. As for Lucy, I am never sure. She has stuck to me for five years, and so I have not quite given up on the notion of one day having a wife, perhaps a family. Quite a pretty woman, quite vivacious in her way, which sometimes, I confess, tires me a little. Well, if it comes to that, she can do what she wants with the house. It is gloomy enough as it stands.

Beyond the train, the trees were putting on their September garments, brown and red and yellow, but soon a drizzle began which blotted up detail. It was raining more earnestly when I reached the station and got out. I had only one small bag, the essentials for a stay of a couple of nights. That was good, for there was no transport of any kind.

I walked to the village, and there was given a cup of tea, the keys, and a lift the last mile and a half.

Johnson, the agent, let me off on the drive. He had offered to take me round, but I said this was not necessary. There is a woman, Mrs Gold, who comes in every day, and I was told, she would have put things ready for me—I trusted this was true.

The rain eased as I walked along the last curve of the drive. Presently I saw the house, and recognized it from a photograph I had observed often enough in my Father's study. A two-storey building, with green shutters. Big oaks stood around it that had done the walls some damage, and introduced damp. I supposed they could be cut down. Above, was my Grandfather's weather-vane, which I had never been able, properly, to make out in the photograph, but which my Father told me was in the shape of some Oriental animal deity. Even now, it remained a mystery to me, between the leaves of the oaks and the moving, leaden sky.

I got up the steps, and opened the front door, and stepped into the big dark hall. The trees oppress this house, that is certain, and the old stained glass of the hall windows change the light to mulberry and spinach. However, I saw through into the sitting room, and a fire had been laid, and wood put ready. A touch on a switch reassured me that the electricity still worked. On the table near the door I found Mrs Gold's rather poorly spelled note. But she had done everything one could expect, even to leaving me a cold supper of ham and salad, apple pie and cheese. She would be in tomorrow at eleven. I need have no fears.

I looked round. I am not fearful by nature. I always do my best, and am seldom in a position to dread very much. A childhood visit to the dentist, perhaps, for an especially painful filling—something of that apprehension seized me. But it was the nasty dark light in the hall. My Uncle died in this house not three months ago. Before him, he had lost his family, his wife and sister, and two sons. Before them another generation had perished. As Shakespeare points out, it is common for people to die.

Going through into the sitting room, I have put a match to the fire. This has improved things. On a sideboard stands a tray with brandy, whisky and soda. Though it is early for me, I shall pour myself a small measure. I gather the boiler is at work, and I can count on a hot bath. I do not want a chill.

10th September: 2:00 p.m.

The house is a mausoleum. Lucy be blowed, I think I shall sell it. Last night was dreadful. Creaks and groans of woodwork, an eldritch wind at the windows and down the chimneys. I read until nearly two a.m. Then at three I was woken by a persistent owl hooting in the garden trees. I am not a country person. I longed for my warm city flat and the vague roar of traffic.

However, this morning early I went over the place thoroughly, from attic to cellar. There are a great many rooms, more than I should ever want, and the heating would be prohibitive. It is very old fashioned, those thick, bottle-green and oxblood curtains favoured by our grandfathers—evidently by mine, and my Uncle William, too—enormous cliffs of furniture, and endless curios, some of them I expect very valuable, from the East—Egypt, India and China. I am not particularly partial to any of this sort of thing. I find the house uncomfortable, both physically—it is cold and damp—and aesthetically.

At about eleven thirty, the not very punctual Mrs Gold arrived. I was not surprised. Women are generally unreliable. I have learnt this from Lucy. Nevertheless, I commended Mrs Gold on keeping the house clean, which she has more or less done, and on the supper left for me yesterday. She is a large woman, constructed like a figurehead, with severe grey hair. She began, of course, at once to tell me all about my Uncle, and what she knows of my Grandfather before him. She is, naturally, as her class nearly always are, fascinated by details of all the deaths. It was with some difficulty that I got her to resume her work. Going into the library, I then took down some boxes of photographs, and began to go through them, more to pass the time than anything else. The agent is coming tomorrow, to discuss things, or I would have tried to get home today.

The photographs, most of which have dates and names written on the back, are generally displeasing, many the dull, antique kind where everyone stands like a waxwork, as the primitive camera performs its task. My grandfather was a formidable old boy, with bushy whiskers, in several scenes out in some foreign landscape, clutching his gun, or his spade, for he had been involved in one or two famous excavations, in the East. Here he had taken his own photographs, some of which had appeared in prominent journals of the day. These, obviously, were not among the general portraits, nor was I especially interested to look them out. My father had been wont to tell me, at length, how Grandfather Martyce had taken the very first photograph inside some remarkable ancient tomb. I had found this, I am afraid, extremely boring, then, and scarcely less so now. I have, too, forgotten the location. Lucy has often commented that I am not a romantic. I am glad to say I am not.

Eventually Mrs Gold finished her ministrations, and I went down to learn her wages, which were modest enough. She had put into the oven for me, besides, a substantial hot-pot.

“Your Uncle was very fond of those, I must say,” she announced. “He relied on me, once the old cook had retired. Mrs Martyce was often ill, you understand, Miss Martyce too. I had a free hand.”

I said something gallant about her cooking. She ignored this.

“It was a great worry,” she said, “to see them waste away. First the boys, and then the sister and the wife. Your Uncle was the last to go. He was very strong, fought it off, so to speak. The doctors couldn’t

find anything wrong with him. But it was the same as with the ladies, and the children.”

I privately thought that no doubt a reliance on elderly country doctors was to blame here, but I nodded lugubriously, and was apparently anticipated.

“Your Grandfather now,” persisted this tragic choric Mrs Gold, glowering on me in the stone kitchen, the pans partly gleaming at her back from her somewhat hard work upon them, “he was the same, but they put it down to some foreign affliction, bad water, those dirty heathen foods. You understand, Mr Martyce—your Uncle, Mr William Martyce, was only in the house a year before he first fell ill. And before that, never a day’s indisposition.” I noted that, not only did she employ words she could not, probably, spell, but that she was also able to invent them.

“It seems an unfortunate house,” I said. She appeared to wish me to.

“That’s as may be. The cook was never out of sorts, nor any of the maids, while they had them. And I’ve never had a day in bed, excepting my parturition.” I assumed she meant childbirth, and kept a stern face. Mrs Gold was certainly most serious. She said, “If I was you, sir, I’d put this house up for sale.”

“That might be an idea,” I said.

“Not that I want to cause you misgivings.”

“Not at all. But it will be too big for me, I’m sure.”

When she had gone, I ate the beef sandwiches she had left me, and was grateful her meals were more cheerful than her talk, although I have jotted down here her two interesting words, to make Lucy laugh.

10th September: 6:00 p.m.

I do not like this house. No, I am not being superstitious. I believe there is not a fanciful bone in my body. But it depresses me utterly. The furnishings, the darkness, the chilliness, which lighting all the fires I reasonably can—in the sitting room, dining room, my bedroom, the library—cannot dispel. And the things which so many would find intriguing—old letters in bundles, in horrible brown, ornate, indecipherable writing—caskets of incenses and peculiar amulets—such items fill me with aversion. I want my orderly room with its small fire that warms every inch, my sensible plain chairs, the newspaper, and a good, down-to-earth detective novel.

I have already taken to drink—a whisky at lunch, and now another before dinner—and even this went awry. I am not a man who spills things. I have a sound eye and a steady hand. However, sitting over the fire in the library, crouching, should I say, with pure ice at my back, I was looking again at some of the more recent photographs. These comprised a picture of my Uncle and his sons on the lawn before the house, and some oddments of him, pruning a small tree, standing with a group I took to be the local vicar and various worthies of the nearby village. In these scenes, my Uncle is about forty, and again about fifty. He looks hale enough, but I had already gathered from the delightful Gold that he was, even then, frequently laid low.

Finally I put the pictures down on the side table, and rested my whisky, half full, beside them. I then stood up to reach for my tobacco. I have often seen Lucy have little accidents like this. Women are inclined to be clumsy, I find, something to do with their physique, probably. In brief, I knocked the table,

the whisky glass skidded over it, and upset its contents in four splashes, one on each of the photographs.

I gave a curse, I regret to say, and set to mopping up with my handkerchief. The pictures seemed no worse for the libation, and so I went downstairs to refill my glass. Having looked in on the hot-pot, I decided to give it another half hour, and came back reluctantly upstairs, meaning to try to find some book I could read—my own volume was finished during the early hours this morning. There was not much doing in this line, but at last I found some essays on prominent men, and this would have to serve. Returning to the fire in haste, I there found that each of the photographs on which the alcohol had spilled was blotched with an erratic burn. I must say, I had no notion malt whisky could inflict such a wound, but there, I am not a photographer.

This annoyed me. Although I have no interest in the photographs particularly, I know my Father would have had one, and for his sake, I would not have desecrated them. I am not a Vandal. I feel foolishly ashamed of myself.

I began to think then about my Father and my Uncle William, of how they had lost touch with each other, and how, oddly, we had never been on a visit to this house. One assumes there had come to be a rift between the two men. There was a marked difference in age. Even so, I recall my Father speaking of my Uncle as the former neared his end. “Poor William,” he said. “What could I do?” I had not wanted to press him, his heart was giving out.

Irritated, uneasy and out of sorts, I have pushed the damaged photographs together, and come down again, to eat of Mrs Gold’s bounty.

10th September: 10:30 p.m.

Something very odd. How to put this down... Well, I had better be as scientific as I can. I had forgotten my book, and, deciding on an early bed, since I am feeling rather fatigued—the country air, no doubt—I came up to the library to collect the volume. It lay on the table, and going to pick it up, I saw again the spoiled photographs.

While I had been downstairs dining, something had gone on. The stains had changed, rather they had taken on a colour, deep swirls of raw red and sickly yellow. This was particularly unpleasant on the black and white surface of the original scenes. I examined each photograph in turn, and all four were now disfigured in this way. I had already resolved that it was no use crying over spilt milk, or whisky, to be more precise, and was about to put them down again, when something else arrested my attention.

Of course, I am aware that random arrangements or marks can take on apparently coherent forms—the “faces” that one occasionally makes out in the trunks of old trees, for example, or the famous Rorschach inkblot test. Yes, the random may form the seemingly concrete, and mean very little, save in the realms of imagination and psychiatry.

However. However—where the whisky had burned the photographs, a shape had been formed, now very definite, and filled in by rich, bilious colour. Not in fact a shape that I could recognize—yet, yet it was consistent, for in each of the four pictures, it was almost exactly the same. And it was—it is—a horrible shape. Most decidedly that. I do not like it. There is something repulsive, odious, about it. I suppose that is because it is like some sort of *creature*—and yet a creature that can hardly, I would think, exist.

Then, I am being rather silly. I had better describe what I see. What is the matter with me?

There, I have had another whisky—I shall certainly have a thick head in the morning!—and I will write this down with a steady hand.

The thing that the whisky has burnt out in the photographs is, in each one, identical, allowing for certain differences of—what I shall have to call—posture, and size. It has the head of a sort of frog, but this is horned, with two flat horns—or possibly ears—that slant out from its head sideways. The body is bulbous at the front, and it has two arms or forelegs, which end in paws, resembling those of a large cat. The body ends not in legs, but in a tail like that of a slug. This is all bad enough, but in the visage or head are always two red dots, that give the impression of eyes.

It is a beastly thing. I fear I cannot convey how vile, nor what a turn it has given me.

The varying size of the—what shall I call it?—apparition?—is another matter. I can only conclude the whisky fell in a smaller drop here, a larger there. Although that is not what I recollect quite. It seemed to me my drink had spread in roughly equal splashes on each photograph. But there.

In these two, where my Uncle William prunes the tree, the thing is quite small. But here, where he is in conversation with the vicar and the worthies, it is larger. And here, where William is standing with his sons, the thing is at its largest.

It is so curiously placed in this view, that it seems to recline at William's very feet, spacing its paws for balance. In relation to the man and boys, it is the equivalent of a medium-sized dog. I cannot escape the illusion that it has not grown bigger, but—got nearer. That way madness lies.

If there were a telephone here, I would put a call through to Saunders, or Eric Smith, even to Lucy. But there is no telephone. Perhaps, a good thing. What would I say?

I know I am behaving in an irrational and idiotic manner. I must pull myself together.

I have put the photographs back on the table and turned them face down. I shall go up and take a couple of aspirins. Obviously, in months to come, I will reread these entries and laugh at them.

11th September: 11:00 a.m.

Johnson, the agent, arrived efficiently at ten, and we perfunctorily discussed my plans. I had no hesitation in telling him that I would probably wish to put the house up for sale. I passed a restless night, mostly lying listening to the grim silence of this place. I would have been glad for the creaking of the boards I had heard on my first night, even for the boisterous owl. But both failed me. Everything seemed locked in the cupboard of the darkness, and now and then, like a child, I sighed or moved about, to make some sound.

I got a little sleep for an hour or so after dawn, and came down bleary-eyed but resolved. I had put myself into a foolish state over those confounded burns on the photographs. Perhaps this is the price for allowing myself to become a middle-aged bachelor. No matter. I am going back to London this evening. Back to traffic and fog and lights, and human company if I wish it. I must take myself in hand. I do not want to become one of those querulous neurasthenic fools one reads of. Good God, I have gone through a World War, and although luck put me out of the way of most of the action, I was ready enough to do

my part. Is some childish horror going to undo me now?

As he was leaving, Johnson recommended that I seek out the vicar. "If you want to know anything about your Uncle's tenancy here, that is."

"Oh, yes. A Reverend Dale, I believe."

"That's right. He's getting on, but pretty spry. A wise old bird."

I said that I might not have the time, but thanked Johnson all the same. What, after all, did I want to know? My Grandfather's forays in the East did not interest me, and all the rest seemed decline, disease, and death. Charming points of conversation—besides, the bubbling Mrs Gold had already rejoiced me with enough of all that.

"Incidentally, Johnson," I said, as I saw him to the door, "I suppose there is some use of photography in your business."

"There is," he agreed.

"I wonder if you've ever heard of—alcohol making a burn on a photograph?"

"Well, I never have," he said. He thought deeply. "It might, perhaps. But not anything pure, I wouldn't have thought."

"Whisky," I said.

"From a still, maybe. Not the stuff in a bottle. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, something a friend told me of."

Johnson shrugged and laughed. "A waste of a good beverage," he said.

When he was gone, I made a decision. It was because I had begun to feel angry.

Mrs Gold was not to come today until three, but she had left me another cold plate. This I tried to eat, but did not really fancy it, although I had had no breakfast.

Eventually I took the largest soup tureen I could find from the kitchen, and the whisky decanter, and went up to the library. The quickest way to be rid of my "monster" was to carry out an experiment. It was quite simple. I would place a selection of photographs in the tureen and pour over them enough whisky to cover them entirely. Either nothing would happen to them, or they would burn—burn all over into yellow and red. And that would be that. No random marks, no possible coincidences of shape. No doubt the pictures that I spoiled underwent some flaw in their reproduction, or there was some weakness in the material on which they were printed. I was confident, to the point of belligerence, that by this means I should be free of the horror I had unwittingly unleashed. As for ruining more photographs, if I did so, there comes a point where one must put oneself first.

I set the tureen down on the big table in the library. Outside, the birds were singing. There was a view of the lawn, and the big oaks, golden and crimson in the dying of the leaves. It is a sunny day.

I took three photographs from the box more or less at random, a scene of my Uncle and his son by the

little summer house, the two boys playing some game under the trees when they were small. To this selection I added one of the former casualties, the photograph of my Uncle pruning the tree. One thing I had made sure of, the three new scenes were of different dates, and had therefore been processed on other paper.

Dropping the four into the bowl, I poured in a generous measure of the whisky. A waste, as Johnson had said.

I have come away to write this, leaving a proper space of time, and now I am going back to look. There will be nothing, I believe, or complete obliteration. I am already beginning to feel I have made an idiot of myself. Perhaps I will tear out these pages.

11th September: 6:00 p.m.

The walk down to the village, just under a mile and a half, took me longer than it should have. I arrived feeling quite done up, and went into the little pub, which had some quaint name I forget, and had a brandy and soda.

Across the green was the vicarage, a picturesque building of grey stone, and behind it the Norman church, probably of interest to those with an historical concern. When I got to the vicarage door, and knocked, a homely fat woman came and let me in, all smiles, to the vicar's den. It was a nice, masculine place, redolent of pipe smoke, with a big dog lying on the hearth, who wagged his tail at me politely.

The Reverend Dale greeted me, and called for tea, which the fat nymph presently brought with a plate of her own shortbread. This tasted very good, although I am afraid I could eat no more than a bite.

The vicar let me settle myself, and we talked about ordinary things, the autumn, elements of the country round about, and of London. At last, leaning forward, the old man peered at me through his glasses.

"Are you quite well, Mr Martyce?"

"Perfectly. Just a trifle tired. I haven't slept well at the house."

He looked long at me and said, "I'm afraid people often don't."

I took a deep breath. "In what way?" I asked.

"Your family, Mr Martyce, has been inclined to insomnia there. The domestics have never complained. Indeed, I never heard a servant from there that had anything but praise for the house and the family. Mrs Allen, the former cook, retired only when she was seventy-six and could no longer manage. She was loath to go."

"But my family—there has been a deal of illness."

"Yes, I'm afraid that is so. Your Grandfather—he was before my time, of course. And his wife. Your father was long from home, and his brother, Mr William, was sent out into the world at twenty... before there was any—problem at the house. The two brothers did not at first choose to come back. And your father, I think, not at all. He lived to a good age?"

“He was nearly eighty. There was quite a gap between him and William—my Grandfather’s travels.”

“Eighty—yes, that’s splendid. But poor William did not do so well. He was, as you know, only sixty-two when he succumbed. His wife was a mere fifty, and your Aunt in her forties. But, in later life, she had never been well.”

I tried a laugh. It sounded hollow. “That house doesn’t seem very healthy for the Martyces.”

Reverend Dale looked grave. “It does not.”

“And what explanation do you have for that, sir?”

“I fear that, although I am a man of God, and might be expected to incline to esoteric conclusions, I have none.”

I said, flatly, “Do you think there is a malevolent ghost?”

“I am not supposed to believe in ghosts,” said the Reverend Dale. “However, I can’t quite rid myself of a belief in—*influences*.”

A cold tremor passed up my back. I deduce I may have gone pale, for the vicar got up and went over to his cabinet, from which he produced some brandy. A glass of this he gave me—I really must put a stop to all this profligate drinking! I confess I downed it.

“You must understand,” he said, “I’m speaking not as a man of the cloth, but simply—as a witness. I’ve seen very clearly that, in the Martyce family, those who spend much or all of their time at the house, sicken. Some are more susceptible, they fail more swiftly. Some are stronger, and hold at bay or temporarily throw off the malaise, at first. Your Grandfather lived into his nineties, yet from his sixties he had hardly a day without severe illness. Perhaps, in a man of advancing years, that is not uncommon. And yet, before this time, he was one of the fittest men on record, apparently he put the local youth, who are hardy, to shame. Again, some who aren’t strong, also linger in a pathetic, sickly state—your Aunt was one of these. She succumbed only in her adult years, but then her life was a burden for her. One wondered how she bore with it. Even she, at length...” he sighed. “Her end was a release, I am inclined to think. A satisfactory cause of death meanwhile has never been established. In your Grandfather’s case, necessarily it was put down to old age. As with his wife, since she died in her sixties. In the cases of others, death must be questionable. Or unreasonable. As with your Uncle’s two sons. They were fourteen and nineteen years.”

“I assumed some childish malady—”

“Not at all. Clemens was their doctor, then. I will reveal, he confided in me somewhat. He was baffled. The same symptoms—inertia, low pulse, some vertigo, headache, an inclination not to eat. But no fever, no malignancy, no defect. You will perhaps know, William’s health was poor enough to keep him out of the War. He was utterly refused.”

I said, briskly, “Well, I’m leaving tonight.”

“I am glad to hear that you are.”

“But, I had intended to put the house up for sale—”

“I think you need have no qualms, Mr Martyce. Remember, no one who has lived there, who is not a member of your family, has ever been ill. If anything, the reverse.”

“A family curse,” I said. I meant to sound humorous and ironic. I did not succeed.

The Reverend Dale looked down upon his serviceable desk.

“I shall tell you something, Mr Martyce. You are, evidently, a sensible man. I can’t guarantee my words, I’m afraid. The previous incumbent of the parish passed them on to me. But he was vicar in your Grandfather’s time. It seems your Grandfather, always a regular churchgoer when at home, asked for an interview. This was about three years after his final return from the East. He was getting on in years, and had recently had a debilitating bout of illness, but recovered, and no one was in any apprehension for him, at that time.” The vicar paused.

“Go on,” I said.

“Your Grandfather it seems posed a question. He had heard, he said, of a belief among primitive peoples, that when a camera is used to take a photograph, the soul is caught inside the machine.”

“I’ve heard of this,” I said. “There is a lack of education among savages.”

“Quite. But it appears your Grandfather asked my predecessor—if he thought that such a thing were truly possible.”

I sat in silence. I felt cold, and wanted another brandy, but instead I sipped my tepid tea.

“What did he say, your predecessor?”

“Naturally, that he did not credit such an idea.”

“To which my Grandfather said what?”

“It seems he wondered if, rather than catch a human soul, a camera might sometimes snare . . . something else. Something not human or corporeal. Some sort of spirit.”

Before the eye of my mind, there passed the memory of how my Grandfather had photographed so many exotic things. And of the pictures taken inside the ancient and remarkable tomb. I am not given to fancies. I do not think it *was* a fancy. Like a detective, I strove to solve this puzzle.

I stood up before I had meant to, I did not mean to be rude.

The old man also rose, and the dog. Both looked at me kindly, yes, I would swear, even the dumb animal had an expression of compassion.

“Excuse me,” I said, “I have to hurry to be sure of my train.”

“You’re not returning to the house?” said the Reverend Dale.

“No. It’s all locked up. The cleaning lady has been and gone. I promised her she’d be kept on until any new tenants take over. They must make their own arrangements.”

“I think you have been very wise,” said the vicar.

He himself showed me to the door of the stone house. “It’s a lovely afternoon,” he said. “You look rather exhausted. That cottage there, with the green door. Peter will drive you to the station. Just give him something towards the petrol.”

I shook his hand, and like some callow youth, felt near to tears.

In future I must take more exercise. It is not like me to be so flabby. Thank God, Peter was amenable.

I have written all this down in the train. It has not been easy, with the jolting, and once I leaned back and fell fast asleep. I am better for that. I want to make an end of it here, and so return into London and my life, clear of it.

No, I cannot say I know what has gone on. When I put the four photographs into the tureen and poured in the whisky, I thought myself, frankly, an imbecile.

I had left them for perhaps twenty minutes, possibly a fraction longer. I approached the table with no sense of apprehension. Rather, I felt stupid.

Looking in, I saw at once, but the brain needs sometimes an interim to catch up with the quirkiness of the eye. So I experienced a numbing, ghastly dread, but even so I took out the photographs one by one, and laid them on the newspaper I had left ready.

The original had not altered. That is, the photograph, already damaged, of my Uncle by the tree. It had not changed, nor the mark, the yellow and red mark, that had the shape of a horned creature with forelegs and the hind body of a giant slug. There it still was, quite near to him but yet not close. There it was with its blind red dots of eyes, brilliant on the black and white surface of that simple scene.

The other three images are quickly described, and I should like to be quick. The whisky had affected them all only in one place. And in that place, always a different one, exactly similarly. The demon was there. The same. Absolute.

Where the two boys are playing as children, it is some way off, among the trees. It is coiled there, as if resting, watching them, like a pet cat.

In the photograph of William and his wife and sister—my Aunt—the thing is much nearer, lying in the grass at their feet—again, again, like some awful pet.

But it is the last picture, the most recent picture of my Uncle William’s younger son, it is *that* one—They are standing by the summer house. The boy is about thirteen, and the date on the back, that the whisky has blurred, gives evidence that this is so.

They do not look so very unhappy. Only formal, straight and stone still. That is probably the very worst thing. They should be in turmoil—and the boy—the boy should be writhing, flailing, screaming—

The demon is close as can be. It has hold of the boy’s leg. *It is climbing up him*. Its tail is coiled about his knee—Oh God, its head is lying on his thigh. The head has tilted. It gazes up at him. It has wrapped him in its grip. He does not— *he does not know*.

I shall write no more now. I do not want to open this diary again. The lights of London will be coming

soon, out of the autumn dusk. Smells of smoke, cooking, and unhygienic humanity. Thank God. Thank God I have got away. Thank God. Thank God.

From a letter by Lucy Wright to her friend J.B.:

1st November 195-:

Your letter did cheer me up a bit, though I cried a bit after. Yes, I'd love to come for a visit, and it would help to get my mind off—this. Then, I feel guilty. But what can I do? I was totally in the dark. I didn't know. He never confided in me. I don't understand.

I'd always known Gordon was a bit of an old stick-in-the-mud. But he was kind and hardworking, and I did hope he'd get round to popping the question one day. No one else has made any offers. And of course, he was well-off. Not that that was my main reason. But, well, I've never been rich, and it would be nice, not to worry all the time, where the rent's coming from, or if you can afford a new pair of nylons.

The funny thing was, when he came back from that house of his uncle's in the country (and strangely he wouldn't discuss that at all), he couldn't see enough of me. We were out every night, like a couple of twenty-year-olds. The pictures, concerts, even dinners in a lovely little restaurant up West. And he made a real fuss of me. He even bought me roses. I thought, this is it. He's going to ask me now. And I thought, I can change him, get him to brighten up a bit. But then—well it was a funny thing that happened. It was really silly and—nasty. Peculiar.

It was my birthday—that was the time he gave me the roses—and one of my cousins, Bunty, well she sent me a really lovely present. It was a little camera. What do you expect—I wanted to use it. And one night when Gordon and I were in that nice restaurant, I was showing him the camera, and the manager, who knows Gordon, came up and said, "Let me take a picture of you, Mr Martyce, and your young lady." Well I was a bit giggly—we'd had some lovely wine—and I was all for it, but Gordon got really funny. No, I mean he got he really angry, sort of well—frightened, red in the face—but the manager just laughed, and he took the photograph anyway, with me very nervous and Gordon all hard and angry and scared. The manager said Gordon would have to be less camera-shy, for the wedding.

I thought, Gordon's angry because he feels he's being forced to think about that, about getting married. And he doesn't want to. And that depressed me, because things had seemed to be going so well. So it ended up a miserable evening. And he took me home. And—well. That was the last time I saw him. I mean, the last time I *saw* him. Because I don't count the funeral. How can I? They had to close the coffin. Anyway. He was dead then. I'm sorry. Look, a tear's fallen in the ink. What a silly girl. Crying over a man that didn't even want me.

Of course, I did speak to him just once more, on the telephone. He rang me up about a week after the dinner, and he said he was going to collect the films—the photographs, you see. And I was glad he'd rung me, so I said yes. I was a bit embarrassed, because the rest of the film was all of my family, dad and mum, and Alice and the babies, and it was the first time I'd taken any photographs, and I was sure they'd be bad.

But then I didn't hear again, and the next thing was, the policeman coming round in the afternoon, just as I was trying to get money in that rotten meter that's so stiff. My washing was everywhere—it was

Saturday—but he didn't look. He helped me with the meter and then he put me in a chair, and he told me. Gordon had gone out on the Northern Line and—well, you know. He'd fallen under a train. Well they said, he'd thrown himself under. People had seen him do it. But how can I believe that? I mean, Gordon. It must be a mistake. But then, where was he going? He doesn't have any relatives, and no friends out that way. Didn't have. Well.

But I was so glad to get your kind letter. You see, I went round to Gordon's flat this afternoon, they let me, because there were a few things of mine there, a couple of books I tried to get Gordon to read—I don't think he did—and some gloves I'd left, little things—oh, and a casserole dish I'd bought him. It was a nice one. I thought I'd better have it, now.

And on the table in his room, there were the photographs. The police had obviously been there, because things were a bit disturbed, not the way Gordon would have left them. But the odd thing was, these photographs were lying on a newspaper, and they'd stuck to it, so they must have got wet. And—there was a strong smell of whisky, as if he'd spilled some. Maybe he had. He'd been drinking more lately, more than I'd known him do. I remember he said something strange—something about using a spirit to show a spirit. But he was always too clever for me.

Any way, I did look at the photographs, and I wondered if I could take them home, but I wasn't sure, so I didn't, though I can't see that they'll be any help to the police or anyone. Actually, I hadn't done too badly for a beginner. The ones of the babies are really nice, though I'd made Alice look a bit fat, and she wouldn't like that. The last one was the one the manager at the restaurant took of Gordon and me, and it was really a pity. I admit, it made me cry a bit. Because, it would have been nice to have a picture of him and me together, something to remember him by. It wasn't just that we looked really daft—me all grinning and silly, and Gordon so puffed up and upset. No, there was this horrible big red and yellowish mark on the picture—I suppose something went wrong when it was taken, perhaps some light got in, or something, that can happen, can't it?

The funny thing is, I can't explain this, but there was something—something really awful about this mark. It sounds crazy and you'll think I'm a proper dope. You know what an imagination I've got. You see, it looked to me like a funny sort of animal—a sort of snake thing, with hands—and a face. And the oddest part of all, it was in just this place that it looked as if it was sitting square on Gordon's shoulders, with its tail coming down his collar, and its arm-things round his throat, and its face pressed close to his, as if it loved him and would never let go.