

1927 - MAY



"In the spring, a young squirrel's fancy lightly turns to acorns."

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## The Cruel Sea IV

He nodded miserably. He seemed sort of deflated. He wasn't the first client who gave me the impression that he'd committed a monumental error by availing of the GDA's services.

I opened my notebook to put the ten pounds in, and some photographs fell onto Mr. McCrea's desk.

His expression changed to one of complete delight and astonishment.

"You've succeeded," he panted, holding one of my photographs.

He took out another pound note and handed it to me.

"Congratulations," he said. "That other pound note will cover your train fare. Good-night."

I departed very quickly. The man was mad, and I wanted to be out of the way with the hard cash before he discovered what was obviously a serious mistake.

The Shaws, since they returned to Belfast from Canada with oodles of dollars, purchased a large house on the outskirts of Belfast.

I cycled over there on my return to Belfast from Portrush -- I'd dropped a card to tell them I was coming. I saw Bob and Sadie sitting on chairs under a chestnut tree, and feeling in a frivolous mood, I furtively slunk round the back of the rhododendron bushes, intending to creep up behind 'em and shout "boo!"

I'd tiptoed behind the trunk of a tree and was just about to announce myself when I heard Sadie say:

"I see by the newspapers that your scheme worked perfectly, Bob."

"My schemes always do, Sa-de," I heard Bob chuckle. "It's simple, really, when you know how the Goon's mind works."

"You didn't tell me exactly what you did," said Sadie, "explain it all to me."

I edged forward. I wanted to know what the wosh scheme was, and where I fitted in.

"It was all dependent on psychology," I heard Bob explain. "I could see that the Goon was destitute, so I pondered a great deal about how I could send a bit of lucrative trade his way. I started a rumour in Portrush that I'd seen a monster in the sea near the town. You know how these rumours spread-- soon the whole country was talking about it. When we returned from our holiday, I sent a note to the Portrush Council to say that I had taken a photograph which I presumed to be the monster. I also said that a reliable investigator was living in a tent in Farmer Murphy's field, who would probably accept an assignment to investigate the monster. And in the envelope I included a photograph of the Goon in his undersea kit."

"Oh, Bob, not that photograph," I heard Sadie gasp. "Not the one you took of him surfacing, with the glass visor exaggerating his bloodshot eyes, and with his hair standing on end, and his moustache sprouting out from under the visor like tusks, and that horrible 1902-type bathing costume with the long sleeves and legs and vivid red and yellow stripes, and those big frogman's flappers on his feet, and the---"

"The very one," said Bob. "You'll note in the newspaper here that it says an ace investigator -- that's the Goon, y'know-- provided photographic proof of the existence of the monster. Somehow, probably by accident, the Goon let the Council people see the photographs I gave him, and it would seem to them when they saw one of them was identical with the one I'd sent, that it proved beyond doubt it was the monster. I wonder what the Goon thought---"

I'd heard enough. I tiptoed silently away. Damn it. That meant I could never go back to Portrush again in case someone saw me swimming, and identified me as the Monster and blamed the hoax on me.

That badly fitting bathing costume had been good enough for my grandfather---

So that was why the beach cleared everytime I waded from sea to shore. . .

I had goofed yet again. . . .

---John Berry

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Sincere thanks are accorded to young Los Angeles Fan Art Under who gave me the basic idea for the story.

---John Berry, 1959

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