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IN GETHSEMANE

author of **THE KINGDOM OF BONES**
and **THE BEDLAM DETECTIVE**

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IN GETHSEMANE

There was a thick haze in the sky, and rain on the stones out in Station Square. Borthwick the press agent was waiting for them, stepping out through the crowd with his arm raised. The crowd parted and pushed on around him, heading out into the drizzle.

"I've a taxi for the boarding house, and a boy with a handcart for Mister Goulston's boxes," he told the travelling-party of five.

"A boy, Mister Borthwick?" Goulston spoke up suspiciously from the back.

"A reliable boy, sir," the press agent assured him. "I've used him before. He'll get your trunks to the hall and he'll see them secure. His father's the doorkeeper there. Now if you'll follow me, gentlemen, I've some journalists waiting."

Two petrol-engined taxicabs awaited the party by the railway station's awning, between the row of charabancs and the stop for the new electric trams. Borthwick rode in the first with Goulston and Frederick Kelly. The others followed behind. Goulston looked back through the cab's tiny rear window, but in all of the activity out in the crowded Boulevard there was no boy or handcart to be seen. He settled uncomfortably in his seat, and tried to turn his thoughts to other matters.

He hadn't been to Blackburn in ten years. No bookings here, no reason to. He looked out and saw yet another

cotton town in the rain, glory and squalor all pushed up together. It was a market day, caps and clogs and baskets much in evidence. He was half-listening as Borthwick discussed arrangements with Frederick Kelly, but he played no part in their conversation.

Their lodgings were on one of the streets that inclined steeply toward the moors on the northern side of town. The cab laboured to make the climb, and their driver repeatedly crashed his gears. Goulston winced at the sound. When they'd finally stopped before the genteel but sturdy redbrick villa that was to be their base for the next three days, Borthwick got out first and led them into the house. Walter Ward, Kelly's secretary and keeper of the purse, stayed behind and settled the tariffs. Some bicycles leaned on the fence alongside the path to the front door; the press party had already arrived and were inside. Goulston and Kelly were greeted by the landlady, handed over their wet coats to be hung in the scullery, and then were shown through into the stifling warmth of the drawing-room where their first audience waited.

Six chairs had been set out for the journalists, and two facing them for the key performers of the troupe. They were arranged before the hearth, where a mature fire glowed with the intensity of lava. Not all of the newspapermen's seats had been filled.

"What kind of a show can we expect tonight?" was the opening question and it was fielded, as always, by Frederick Kelly. Kelly was an unlikely-looking captain, with his pale skin and broad forehead and fine moustache; he looked like a young man of delicate health who only ever ventured out of doors after a stern warning from his

mother. But his apparent frailty was misleading, Goulston knew. Tireless was not the word to describe him, for Goulston had seen him in a state of complete exhaustion on more than one occasion; but however low his energies might fall, Frederick Kelly always found the strength to rise again and go on.

He said, "Mister Goulston will begin with a demonstration of spirit effects and fake mediumship. I can tell you now that he's very impressive."

"And yourself, sir?"

"I then do what little I can in the face of the scepticism he engenders."

"Mister Kelly is being extremely modest," Borthwick the advance man put in from where he stood at the side of the room. "His appearances have caused a sensation in every town on the tour so far."

"We end the evening with comments from the audience and a debate on the spiritualist issue," Kelly added. "Mister Goulston gives me no quarter in this, I can tell you."

Two of the four journalists present made notes, and the man from the Northern Telegraph said, "Can I ask Mister Goldston why he consents to appear on a bill with a practising medium, when he's declared all clairvoyants to be frauds and charlatans?"

"That's very simple," Goulston said, with a glance at Borthwick to be sure that the error over his name would not go uncorrected. "I'm here to catch Mister Kelly out."

"Have you done that, yet?"

"Perhaps tonight."

The man from the Blackburn Times said, "What are we

going to see? Do we see physical manifestations?"

"Goulston does all of those," Kelly told him. "You want to see a table tip and fly, Goulston does it better than anyone I've ever seen. I practice a form of clairvoyance that is far less spectacular. I handle objects and I say whatever comes into my mind. Rarely do I see more than that."

"Do you raise the dead?" the Telegraph man said, and there was a tone in his voice and a look in his eye that seemed to urge Kelly to say yes, just so that the Telegraph man could go on into print and make him regret it.

"I do not raise the dead," Kelly said and then he added, with care and certain emphasis, "Sometimes I believe the dead can speak through me."

The Telegraph man switched his gaze. He looked like a bank clerk, but his manner showed the wiry energy of a whippet. "Mister Goulston?"

"Let me be diplomatic," Goulston said. "I believe that Mister Kelly is an exceptional performer of his type."

"Do you think he's a fraud?"

"I have no doubt."

"But no proof."

"Proof will come."

Three pencils scratched away in three notebooks, the exception being the cheerful-looking young man at the back of the room whom Goulston had already concluded was congenitally damaged in some way. He had a notebook like the others, but he'd so far written nothing. Coals settled in the grate, the only other sound to break the patient silence.

The man from the Blackburn Times said, "Mister

Kelly, you make much of the fact that Goulston is an independent observer. He freely asserts that he's looking to expose the means he thinks you use. So if we can assume there's no collusion between you, what exactly is the advantage to you in his presence?"

"Publicity," murmured the cheerful-looking young man from the back but Frederick Kelly, seeming not to hear him, said, "I can give you two answers to that. The first I'll state freely. Goulston is a showman. I am not. His performance and our public conflict fills more seats than I could hope to fill alone. I'm raising funds to build a spiritualist temple. Empty halls will raise not a single stone of it and the law will have me if I use my talents to raise money in any other way. If Goulston doesn't feel that he's made a deal with the devil for his ends, then neither need I."

"But you travel and lodge together," the man from the Times persisted. "Do you argue in private?"

It was Borthwick who broke in with a reply. "Constantly," he said, and with such a long-suffering air that all were prompted to smile.

The Telegraph man said, "What's the second answer?"

Kelly considered his words before he spoke. His long fingers intertwined before him, almost as if in prayer.

"I am human," he said, "and the pressures are many. But Goulston's eyes are always on me." The medium looked at the stage-conjurer then, and the conjurer returned his gaze steadily.

"Goulston is my conscience," Kelly said. "And my guarantor."

* * *

Kelly went upstairs to rest, the newspapermen fell upon the tea and cakes that Borthwick had thought ahead to arrange for them, and Goulston made his way through to the back of the house to find his overcoat and to ensure that he had, as he'd thought, left his keys in one of its pockets. His bags had been taken up to his room, but he would unpack them later. Goulston always made a point of unpacking, even for a single night's stay. The party would be here for three days, and then they would move on. They had one night's engagement in which Goulston would be performing, the remaining time being set aside for Frederick Kelly's private consultations. It was always the same. Goulston would take the stage first and thoroughly discredit every trick and technique that Kelly might use. And yet still they would line up after the public show, begging for the medium's private attentions.

His coat was damp, but he had no other. He said to the landlady, "I need to find King George's Hall. Is it far from here?"

"Five minutes to walk it, sir, no more," the landlady told him. "Shall I send you someone to show you the way?"

"Just point me in the right direction. I can ask as I go."

King George's Hall stood with its back half-turned against the middle of town, huge and solid and bursting with civic dignity. Goulston's heart sank a little when he saw it. Already he could imagine it inside, a great gilded barn of a place. The main doors were locked but he found a stage door in a yard around to the side, and he banged

on this. A handcart stood in the yard, its wheels braced with iron and its well-worn handles tilted toward the sky. Goulston looked up. The drizzle had cleared, but the sky had not. It was a yellowish-grey, the colours of soot and ochre.

"I'm Goulston," he told the doorkeeper when the door was finally opened. "Did my boxes arrive?"

"Ay, they did, sir," the doorkeeper said, moving back to let him enter.

"I want to check my properties and look at the stage. You have all-electric light here, I assume?"

"We do."

The doorkeeper moved ahead of him. His frame was that of a powerful man but it was bent as if by injury or long misuse, and he shuffled. He'd a walrus moustache, and blond stubble on the back of his neck. Goulston had noted that his blue eyes were as pale as water. His hands touched almost everything that he passed; door handles, newel posts, the angles of walls.

Goulston's boxes had been placed in a bare room under the stage. The room was undecorated and had illumination from a single, unshaded bulb. In the middle of the floor stood a wickerwork livestock basket and two big metal-bound trunks, rugged enough for a long safari. He'd bought them at a railway company sale and they now held all of his effects and properties. Firstly he counted his doves, checking their water and grain. All were alive, all seemed alert. Then, taking out his keys, he unlocked the first of the trunks and opened it up to check its contents.

It had not always been so. Goulston's properties and major illusions had once filled a railway car and required

a full-time baggage master on the payroll to get them around the major cities of Europe without loss or damage. He'd employed a staff of eleven and his own small orchestra and with them presented a full-evening show.

How the wheel could turn. Now he opened for another headline performer, and had to rely on doorkeepers' boys and push-along wagons for transport.

All was in order. He closed the boxes and relocked them.

He said, "I'll be here to set the stage at six. Can you put someone to watch my properties between then and the time of performance? It's essential that once I've laid them out they shouldn't be touched."

"I'll see they're safe," the doorman said.

They went from the room and along a narrow, black-painted passageway to reach the stage. Some carpenters could be heard working up on the balcony, and the house lights were already on. He walked out onto the stage, and looked into the auditorium.

It was more or less as Goulston had expected. An assembly hall, rather than a playhouse. Limited space in the wings, no rake to the seats in the stalls, and a distant, shallow balcony that was like the spectators' gallery in a public swimming baths. Space and civic pride, but no intimacy. Good for a big temperance meeting with a brass band and all the lights on, but not for much else.

"I'll have a list of cues for the house electrician," Goulston said dispiritedly. "I'll need to go through them with him before the performance."

He walked forward and clapped his hands once, to gauge the acoustic. Almost immediately one of the

carpenters upstairs began to hammer.

The doorkeeper waited with patience, breathing steadily and noisily through his nose.

Goulston turned to him and said, "Has anybody been asking to see a seating plan?"

"I couldn't tell thee that," the doorkeeper said. "I wouldn't know."

"Could you ask around for me? Not just about the seating. I'd like to know of anything unusual. Anything. Strangers asking questions. New wiring or mirrors fitted in odd places. Someone buying more than one ticket for tonight, but for seats in different parts of the house. I'll pay you a guinea for any information I can use."

The doorkeeper's face creased, knowingly. "I know what tha'rt after," he said. "But watch who tha asks. There's some round here, they'd take tha guinea and they'd tell thee owt."

Goulston looked out across a packed and half-illuminated house and said, "Tales of ghosts and spirits have been with us since early man cowered in his cave and sought some form of expression for his fears of the darkness outside. When daylight entered the cave and the fears departed, the ghosts departed with them. Today, when mediums claim to conjure spirits, what is the first step in what they do?"

He raised his hand and, after a second's delay, the house lights began to lower.

"Are there any spirits with us tonight?"

There came a loud bang, apparently from the very air

above the stalls, that electrified the house.

"Have you a message for anyone here?"

Two rapid bangs now, close together, and someone up on the balcony shrieked and giggled and was hushed.

Goulston pressed on, "Can you spell out a name for us?"

"*Ang on,*" came a sepulchral voice from midair, speaking with a local accent that was as thick as newly-dug peat, "*I've dropped me 'ammer.*"

There was a braying laugh of released tension from the audience, and Goulston lowered his hand and smiled. It was a simple effect using stereophonic speaking tubes and concealed horns, but it always set the mood. He'd refined and adapted his act considerably in the weeks of the tour, ever since that first night when he'd peeped out from behind the tabs and seen, to his dismay, that a good one-third of the night's audience had been in mourning. He'd played some tough houses in his career, but never before had he been obliged to walk out and begin his act before row upon row of stone-faced widows.

He'd made it through, all the same. Empathy was the key. They were wound up like springs, and in order to let it go they needed permission. Goulston let them believe that he understood their pain. They ached for the unknown, and the unknown was his business.

When their reaction began to die down, he went on, "To those who are here to be amused I say, you shall not be disappointed. To those who come in grief and hope - and I know that the Great War has made so many of you - I say this. See what I am about to show you, and be on your guard thereafter. Grief makes us vulnerable, and

death is life's greatest mystery. All that you are about to see is achieved by natural means. You will not think it so. But that, ladies and gentlemen, is the very soul of the conjurer's art. I do not show you magic. I show you wonder."

He performed the white dove production then, sending it out from his fingertips to fly up to the rafters. During the distraction that it caused, he let his hand move back to load his next effect from the *profonde* in the tail of his coat.

"I stand before you as an honest deceiver," he said. "I stand here and I say, beware of those who are not."

The act ran a little over forty-five minutes. After a few simple sleights to get them warmed-up he brought forward the spirit cabinet and, after having himself bound to a chair by audience volunteers, he ran through much of the old repertoire of the Davenport brothers; then he turned the cabinet around and did it all again with the back open and the interior exposed, with his volunteer observers at the back of the stage being duped in plain view. The house roared. He let them see what he was doing; but as to the exact details of the escapes and rope releases that let him do it, he left them wondering.

Then some billet reading and mentalism, a display of muscle-reading down on the floor of the hall and then, for the finale, a table levitation in which the table flew about the stage under the hands of a dozen volunteers. He revealed no more tricks after the first, and there he revealed little that wasn't either obvious or hackneyed in terms of technique. He had them, he knew. The grievers and the good-timers, all of them were his.

And then he handed them over to Frederick Kelly.

"Thank you," Kelly said. "May I ask you all for a moment of silence as I concentrate."

Despite the way that the medium had presented it to the pressmen, Kelly was the one they'd really come to see. Goulston might be the showman, but Kelly was the real draw. The advantages that he held over Goulston were of promise and challenge; for whereas Goulston assured them of the fakery they already suspected, Kelly purported to offer them genuine entry into the unknown. Bogus or not, the invitation was one that could not be resisted.

Goulston did not leave the hall, but took a position where he could observe both the audience and the stage. His purpose in this was to use his professional experience to watch for evidence of fraud. Occasionally he'd intervene and request some change or modification, like an opposing counsel.

Kelly's approach was a straightforward one, and Goulston had yet to fathom it. He used no apparatus, none of the usual routines. Walter Ward or one of the other young men of the party would bring from the audience an object, any kind of an object. Sometimes a laundered handkerchief, sometimes a pipe or a snuff-box, often it was a medal. The medals were of least use, most of them never having been handled by the recipient. Personal items were supposedly the best. Kelly would hold one for a while, and then speak about the life and sometimes the afterlife of its owner. Then the person who had brought the object would be invited to stand, and Kelly's story would be checked against the reality.

There would be gasps, sometimes. Often tears. Kelly's

part of the performance rarely ran for less than three hours, and then Goulston would return to the stage where he and Kelly would stand, alone and on opposing sides of the platform, to rehearse some well-worn arguments for and against a belief in the spirit world.

Tonight it went as it almost always did. Even the audience questions had grown familiar.

"Mister Goulston," said a man of about thirty-five years old, standing half-way down the hall and wearing a long overcoat. "You've asserted that the spirits only ever bring us knowledge that is already available to us by common means. Does anything you've seen tonight alter that view?"

"No sir," Goulston said, "it does not."

"Mister Kelly was extremely detailed and convincing in a large number of his perceptions."

Goulston shaded his eyes and peered at the man, and seemed to give a start. "Sir," he said, wonderingly. "What if I were to say that I see the shade of a woman standing beside you? Her hand is on your shoulder and she looks on you with love. I believe she very much resembles your mother."

"My mother is very much alive, sir," the man said, with a glance down to his side.

"I did not say she was your mother," Goulston snapped before the audience could react. "I said she *resembled* your mother."

A mature woman, seated beside the man and partly obscured by the person before her, was heard to exclaim, "Lillian!"

"Lillian is speaking," Goulston said, "but you don't

hear her. She says a name. Edward?"

"My name is Albert," said the man, extremely dark-faced.

"Then, who is Edward?"

"I do not know," the man said, seeming deliberately to ignore the woman's tugging at his sleeve.

Goulston turned to the rest of the house and said, in a passable imitation of Frederick Kelly's rising agitation, "I see Edward now. He's a young man, I see him in uniform. He looks weary. He has passed on and he is lost. Anyone. He's appealing to you. Will anyone acknowledge Edward?"

In various parts of the house, hands began to rise. Goulston nodded, and his manner abruptly changed.

"Who could deny the appeals of the dead?" he said. "Sit down, sir. And lower your hands, my friends. At least I have the grace to apologise for raising your hopes. The dead sleep on. They tell us nothing."

A man in uncomfortable-looking Sunday-best clothes stood waving his hand and, when acknowledged, said, "Are you familiar with the suggestion that spirits are actually the telepathic constructs of the living?"

"I am, sir," Goulston said. "I give it no more credence than spirit photographs or flying tambourines."

"So you're saying, then, that Mister Kelly's character is that of a cheat and a liar?"

Goulston hesitated. He did not look at Kelly who stood some yards away, content, as always, to let Goulston run the debate. Apart from having been exhausted by what he claimed was the personal toll taken by the use of his powers, he had few arguments to advance. He claimed no

great understanding of his gift. It was there, he said, and it functioned, and he could explain it no better than the next man. See what you see, he would say, and judge for yourself.

Goulston could feel the tension of the house. There had to be close to a thousand faces out there, millworkers and shopworkers and professional people, and their will to believe in Kelly was almost palpable. He did, after all, offer them a hope that they could carry away. What could Goulston offer them? A much colder certainty. But it was like prizes at the fair. Even though they might be worthless, who could want to go home without?

He said, "I have, in these past weeks, spent much time in Mister Kelly's company. As to his character, I believe him to be a sincere man." He looked across at Kelly then. The medium stood with his gaze directed down, swaying slightly. His shirt was damp with perspiration from the evening's efforts, and his fine hair stuck to his forehead.

Goulston was telling no less than the truth. He had entered into this arrangement without a trace of doubt that here was a fellow-practitioner who abused their common craft. Nothing in that belief had changed. But his personal impression of the man had been utterly at odds with that certainty, and he had yet to find a way to reconcile the two. Only one possible explanation had suggested itself.

"Which is to say," Goulston went on, "that I must number him among the ranks of the deceived."

Their landlady being used to the hours kept by theatricals, as she called them, there was a hot supper waiting even

though the hour was close to midnight. The lady's husband had been deputed to wait up and he let them in, locked the front door, showed them where to find the kitchen and then disappeared off to bed.

As ever after a show, nobody was quite ready for sleep. After they'd eaten, the two assistants went off to their shared attic room to play cards (they'd flatly refused to play with Goulston after he'd demonstrated a few simple lifts and steals and flourishes by way of a warmup on a train out of Harrogate) and Walter Ward took a table in the front parlour to check receipts and to read and sort the various messages that had been delivered to the stage door in the course of the evening. Goulston and Kelly each took a glass of port before the embers of the drawing-room fire. As always, Kelly had the wan but bright-eyed look of a man who'd just shaken off a fever and found a reason to live. After a while, Walter Ward brought in the accounts for Kelly to check, along with the letters and messages and a dampened towel on a tray.

The letters went to Goulston first. One of the conditions that he'd set was that all advance correspondence had to be held, unopened, by the theatre's management until after the performance it anticipated. He would check the seals and postmarks before passing them over. Had any been tampered with, he would know. A halfway competent medium would be able to construct an evening's revelations out of the contents of such letters alone.

The night's stage-door messages went straight to Kelly. Two or three would always contain banknotes as a sign of gratitude or support. The rest would mostly be direct

appeals or invitations from which something more might follow. Goulston glanced across and said, "More donations in prospect for you, Kelly?"

"Perhaps," Kelly said as he first took the books and looked over Walter Ward's figures. "I won't deny it. Do I prostitute my gift in your eyes, Goulston?"

"You have no gift in my eyes, as well you know. You have a skill. If you'd only be content to have it recognised and admired for what it is, you and I would have no argument."

Kelly seemed not to hear or, if he did, to take no offense. "Look at these," he said, turning from the books to the first of a number of engraved visiting-cards with messages or requests written on their backs. "Tonight we had the public show for the souls of the infantry. Now even in death, the officer classes expect some privileged consideration."

Kelly did little more than glance through the notes and cards, leaving Walter Ward to make any necessary appointments and replies. He lay back and placed the dampened towel over his forehead as Goulston opened and read through a few of the notes at random.

He looked for cues, for clues, for recurrences of handwriting or paper. Many were barely literate, some were in educated hands. Private seances and the donations that followed them were almost as profitable as ticket sales, the difference being that Goulston took no share in these. He still attended when invited, as many of the requests were from prominent families and those notables in some of the larger houses. Like any professional player or performer, he never passed up an opportunity to move

in exalted circles - even though the circles in some towns were rather less exalted than elsewhere. He'd go along and say his piece, and then withdraw.

He gave the letters back to Walter Ward, who inclined his head and returned with them to the drawing room.

"Ever-vigilant, eh, Will?" Kelly said as he took the linen compress from his brow and refolded it.

"You're good, Frederick, I'll give you that."

"Does the possibility of authenticity appear nowhere in your considerations?"

"You know it does not," Goulston said, taking out his pocket watch and checking the time. It was getting late.

"A scientist should exclude nothing."

"I'm no scientist."

"But you know what you know."

"I know what is real," Goulston said, preparing to rise, "and what is not."

"Oh!" said Kelly. "Then your faith is as blind as any other man's. May I?"

Kelly was holding out his hand for Goulston's watch. Goulston hesitated, then handed it to him and settled once more in his chair. But not so comfortably now, in the knowledge that he'd be moving again in a minute or so.

As Kelly turned the watch case over in his hands, Goulston said, "From where do you draw your confederates? I don't believe I've seen the same face twice."

"I have none," Kelly said with a smile, and without looking up from the timepiece. "Keep trying."

"Who scouts ahead for you?"

"You watch me all the time. I know you've had me

followed. I've found the secret marks you've made on my bedroom windows. When would I ever have chance to confer?"

"I'll expose you, Frederick," Goulston said calmly. "Believe that I will."

Kelly opened the watch's cover, looked at the face, and then held it to his ear as if it was a small animal for whose heartbeat he listened. He smiled when it came.

"I can tell you one thing," he said. "If you can ever work out how I do what I do, I'll be the happiest man alive. Because it's God's own truth, Will, I do not know it." He closed the cover on Goulston's watch, and held it out to him.

"Your father's work?" he said. "I know he was a watchmaker. What better training for the design and construction of a magician's stage effects?"

Goulston took it. The metal felt warm. "That won't wash, Frederick," he said, with a warning in his voice. "Don't attempt to tell me you learned all of that from the handling of a timepiece."

Kelly laid his head back on the chair again.

"No," he said. "I learned all of that from the *London Times* when you were headlining at Maskelyne's."

Leaving Kelly to finish his port and watch the embers fall, Goulston climbed the stairs to his room. There was a streetlamp outside, and it threw a watery shadow of lace curtain across the wallpaper. Headlining at Maskelyne's. That had been two years before. Eight weeks as a featured performer at the end of a European tour that had barely broken even, but no matter; the set-up costs of the show had been immense but now the sets and properties had

almost been paid for and would go on to earn him his fortune. Everything had been run-in to perfection and the show was ready, bar a few running repairs and adjustments, for an extensive North American tour. He'd moved everything to his Manchester workshop and gone ahead by liner to New York, only to learn of the fire on his arrival.

Everything had gone. Everything. The timber and canvas and size had burned with utter ferocity and made the place unapproachable. Nothing had been saved. Two people had died, along with all his animals. With every borrowed penny sunk into his show, Goulston was underinsured; he hadn't been able to envisage losing everything, all at once, and had thought instead that it would be better economy to make up any losses or damage himself as he went along.

He'd gone out to New York on a first class passage. He'd returned steerage after only two days, and had been forced to leave his hotel bill unpaid to afford even that. Now in essence he worked for Kelly, to clear his debts and to keep his name before the public until his show might be rebuilt.

Whenever that might be.

Goulston drew the curtains in his room, splashed his face at the washstand, and tried the bed. It was cold and lumpy and smelled of new laundry, with a weight of covers that would hold him down like six feet of dirt over a tomb.

Perfect. He slept better than he had in a week.

The next morning, Goulston bought all of the Northern newspaper editions that he could find and set himself up at a corner table in Booth's Cafe where he could read through them undisturbed. Frederick Kelly was still up at the boarding house. He would seldom rise before noon, claiming the need to recover from his evening's exertions. Sheer sloth, was Goulston's interpretation. Once awake, Kelly would rarely go out but would spend the afternoon writing letters or reading. He found it difficult to walk abroad without gathering a crowd, some merely curious but most wanting a part of his attention for some pressing and personal need. He couldn't begin to satisfy them all. He'd once spent an hour simply trying to cross the lobby of a large hotel. So instead he stayed in, and only ventured out to keep appointments or to make unannounced evening visits to local spiritualist circles.

A strange kind of professional, in Goulston's view. The very inverse of a showman. No mauve limousine, no monkeys, not even a visiting card. Something new in the art of misdirection, perhaps.

Kelly never even troubled to read his notices.

There was a piece in the early edition of the Northern Telegraph, something in the Standard, one in the Times. Only the Telegraph man gave a good account of Goulston's involvement. Out of interest, he then turned to the advertising and announcements to see who might be playing at the local halls. There were some names that he knew, but no-one that he cared to look up. Selbit was touring, he noted, but it was advance publicity with no firm dates. Selbit was the magician who had taken up a five hundred pound spirit challenge from the Sunday

Express and fooled a committee that had included Conan Doyle. When the truth had been revealed, the committee had clung to its belief in the clairvoyant demonstration and expressed doubt over the explanation. Selbit's tour was built around his new sawing-through-a-lady illusion.

And good luck to him, Goulston thought, and made a face which caused the waitress to look twice.

Not for the first time, his thoughts turned to his difficulties over Kelly.

Frederick Kelly was artless, and from Goulston's point of view that was the problem. He simply did what he did, with no apparent technique. One of Goulston's theories was that Kelly might be a kind of *idiot savant* of the craft, functioning in a way that even he himself didn't fully recognise. This was an explanation that had gained ground in his mind of late. It allowed for Kelly's sincerity without opening a door into realms of patent unreality. Exactly how the man worked was something that Goulston had still to determine. The method had almost certainly been staring him in the face from the beginning, and was no doubt elegant and utterly simple. Simplicity was always the hardest to spot.

And when he spotted it, what then? He'd have to sink the raft on which he stood. End of tour, end of contract, end of income. And he'd do it, as well. His pride would allow nothing less. He'd come to realise that until then he'd be like some emasculated courtier, not a true and principled opponent at all. His function here, he'd realised, was to fail; and in his continuing failure, to prove Kelly's authenticity so that the show could go on and the temple could eventually rise.

That evening, he put on a clean shirt and his formal wear and accompanied Kelly and Walter Ward to one of the large houses that overlooked the East side of the town's Corporation Park. It was the house of the Graingers, a family whose money came from three generations of rope-making in the town. The pattern was familiar to Goulston. A son had been lost in the war. Bereavement so sudden, so out of time, and at such a distance. . . it evaded the normal processes of grief and left people suspended, uncertain, unable to respond. They'd fall gratefully upon someone like Frederick Kelly, as those lost in a strange land might fall upon an English-speaking guide.

A housemaid showed them through a stained-glass vestibule into a pleasant, panelled hallway, where Mrs Grainger emerged to greet them. She was well-spoken and well-mannered, graceful but without pretensions. She introduced them to her sister Dora Isabel and her daughter Enid, and directed their attention to the wall where hung a picture of her son James in his uniform. The picture's oval frame had been draped with black crepe ribbon. James had been a smooth and good-looking boy, in the manner of all who had sat for such photographs. Smooth and good-looking boys just like him had gone to their deaths in their thousands.

They moved into the drawing-room, which had been prepared for the seance. Goulston introduced himself, and gave the short lecture-demonstration that he always gave on such occasions. He sought to inform rather than to entertain, and to encourage a healthy scepticism in Kelly's audience-to-be. He showed them how a glass could move,

how a table could be turned and tilted. He demonstrated rappings. Kelly stood there nodding, he realised. Kelly seemed entirely on his side.

"Spirit effects are fashionable tricks," he concluded. "They did not exist before they were devised. The skills used are exactly those I have shown you. If all expect the table to turn, it will turn without help."

Through all of this, Enid Grainger had been watching with great intensity and Goulston had found himself responding to her attention, to the extent that he'd had to remind himself to favour the others equally. Now she said, "Will you be staying for the seance, Mister Goulston?"

"No, Miss Grainger," he told her. "I've said all that I can say."

He walked the half-mile or so back to the boarding house. He felt like a drink, but he was overdressed for any of the public houses or hotels that he passed.

So grave. So serious.

He found himself envying Frederick Kelly for the comfort which he would be bringing to Enid Grainger and which he, Will Goulston, could not. All that Goulston could offer her was the certainty that her pain had no remedy.

And who, anywhere in this world, could find a shred of comfort in that?

Over breakfast the next morning, he managed to quiz Walter Ward on the progress of the seance. It had, from Ward's account, been one of Kelly's finer performances. Mrs Grainger had fainted and the evening had ended in

great consternation all around, with neighbours hearing the cries and summoning the police.

At ten, soberly dressed, Will Goulston presented himself at the house and was again shown inside. Mrs Grainger consented to see him, and he waited in a first-floor library that contained a number of rare-looking coins and documents and illustrated manuscripts under glass. The collection of Mr Grainger, he supposed. According to Walter Ward, Grainger had busied himself in this room after refusing to attend any seance, and had appeared amidst the uproar to insist that it ended and to forbid any repetition.

"Mrs Grainger," Goulston said respectfully as the lady appeared. She was pale and her eyes were reddened, but she held herself with dignity.

"If you are here to debate with me, Mister Goulston," she said, "I will have to decline."

"I am here to enquire after your health. I understand the evening was a harrowing one for you."

She hesitated and then inclined her head, as if in apology for her misapprehension. She said, "My son died a terrible death in a terrible place. We relived it in his presence last night. Mister Kelly tells us that we helped to bring his soul to peace by doing so."

"My warnings meant nothing to you, then."

"I wish you had stayed. You might now understand more. My health is good. My mind is calm. I have a strength I did not have before. Nothing in your parlour tricks could bring me to this."

Goulston descended the stairs to find, not only the housemaid waiting to hand him his hat and stick, but Enid

Grainger as well.

She said, "May I ask you a question, Mister Goulston?"

"Of course."

"Have you never considered that your participation in these events may validate Mister Kelly's work far more than it can debunk it?"

"I struggle with that thought, Madam," Goulston said. "Believe that I do."

She seemed in no hurry to see him go. She said, "Mister Kelly seemed drained last night. Is that common?"

"It would appear to be. He's an enthusiastic performer."

"He did none of the things you talked about. He wouldn't even have us turn out the lights."

"I'm aware of that," Goulston said.

"I feel the need of air. Would you walk with me through the park?"

Goulston declared himself at her service. She disappeared and returned a few minutes later, dressed for outdoors and carrying a spray of cut flowers from the garden which she laid along her arm.

Once outside, they crossed the street and entered the park by its East Gate. The slope of the land here had been tamed a little by terracing and landscaping, but still the park fell away to a wide and open view across the slate-and-soot vista of the roofs and chimneys of the town. Here a broad promenade passed above formal gardens, while below could be seen a bandstand and a succession of ornamental ponds.

Enid Grainger said, "My mother is utterly convinced."

"And you?"

"I have an open mind. I believe it's important to have an open mind on everything. You don't."

The assertion took Goulston aback slightly. "How so?" he said.

"You're certain he's a fraud and you've set out to prove it. That doesn't sound like an open mind to me. That's like a scientist who fixes his result and then rejects the experiment that doesn't give it."

"I'm not a scientist, ma'am," Goulston said, doing his best to hide his irritation. "I'm a common man with a common man's sense. The only thing that sets me apart from a common man is the knowledge of how these effects are achieved."

"That sounds rather like a person trying to make a virtue out of ignorance."

"Let me try to explain it." They descended a flight of stone steps that would lead them down from the garden terraces and into the landscaped field at the heart of the park. Miss Grainger seemed to know where she was going, and Goulston was happy to go where she led.

He said, "When I was a boy, I saw the great Kellar on tour. I sat through the show three times and I was convinced that his powers were genuine. I left my seat and tried to get backstage to see if it was true, but they were used to boys like me. It was two years before I was able to watch a magician work. That was at the Salford Hippodrome, in nineteen hundred and one. He was old and he drank, but he was a craftsman. And I watched the secrets unfold, one by one, and I saw. . . that they were nothing. Most of them were so simple, just a matter of

timing and misdirection. . . and preparation. Preparation was everything. I felt then that I had a vocation. To make such wonder out of dust seemed to me like one of the most subtle achievements of man. But the wonder lies in that moment of uncertainty. It's a trick. But how can it be? And what Frederick Kelly and all the other false mediums do is to betray that moment. They betray my vocation. They tell you yes, it is so, when they *know* it is not. They show you false heavens where the dead wander and spout rubbish. And my sense at that betrayal is one of outrage."

Enid Grainger said drily, "I take it you give no credence to any part of the spirit world."

"No."

"No kernel of truth, obscured by the deceits of the ill-intentioned?"

Again: "No."

Now they had crossed the open spaces, a matter of a hundred yards or so, and had picked up the carriage drive that would lead them on down to the lowest point of the park. The drive was scattered with yellow seeds and shaded by overhanging trees that threw patterns of gently-moving light across the ground.

Here Enid said, "Did you go to war, Mister Goulston?"

"I was in uniform," Goulston said.

"But did you go to the front?"

Uncomfortable now, Goulston found some cause to look at the ground and said, "The army looked at a showman and saw a recruitment officer. I toured the halls with a call to arms. I did not go to the front. But many of the boys who died there were sent to it by the likes of me."

But Enid was not seeking to embarrass him, nor to

question his courage. She'd another purpose in mind.

She said earnestly, "James wrote in his letters of a wondrous happening at the Battle of Mons. He had it direct from a man who'd been there."

Goulston nodded his head, slowly. "The Angels of Mons."

"You know of this?"

"The bowmen of Agincourt appeared in the sky and rescued British troops whose retreat had been blocked. It's a tale."

"I am telling you it is true. The bodies of Prussian soldiers were found with the wounds of arrows."

"It was a published fiction, Miss Grainger. It's there in the files of the Evening News for anyone to check."

"So how, then, were these arrow wounds caused?"

Goulston was helpless. "What would you force me to say?"

"That my brother was a liar?" she said, almost daring him to agree.

"Your brother was misled," Goulston said. "The tale was a persuasive one. There is something in us all that aches to believe. A well-chosen tale can sway millions."

They were almost at the park's ornate lower gateway now. But here, revealed to view as they followed the curve of the driveway, stood a few square yards that had been set aside to create a garden of remembrance.

In the garden was a War Memorial. Behind an oval pool fed by twin fountains stood a larger-than-life bronze on a plinth, showing a young woman draped in folds of cloth who appeared to be raising one of the dead or wounded to his feet. Already the bronze was beginning to

darken and turn green, as if the entire construction was being absorbed by the nature that surrounded it. From somewhere behind came the tumbling sound of a stream running down the hillside and through the trees. The trees were waxen-leaved evergreens.

They stood in silence, looking up at it for a while.

Then Enid said, "And how do you stand on the Resurrection, Mister Goulston? Was that another trick, or another myth distorted in the retelling?"

Such was dangerous ground, and Goulston declined to walk upon it.

"I'm no theologian, Miss Grainger," he said.

"Suddenly, no," she observed. "But don't worry. I shan't embarrass you further."

She laid the cut flowers with others that had been placed on the stones before the pool. The flowers for the boys that had no tombs, who slept in anonymous communion with their brothers. James had been brought home, as far as Goulston understood, and buried in the family grave in the town cemetery.

As they were walking back, Enid said to him, "You don't seem like a happy man to me, Mister Goulston. I wonder whether it might have been different for you if the boy had stayed in his seat."

That evening - his last in the town - Goulston sat quietly behind his whisky and soda in the bar of the White Bull Hotel until someone recognised him, after which he was drawn into performing some table magic for the other patrons. He was hardly in the mood, but he rose to the

occasion. But then they started pressing him to repeat some of the effects, which he would not do, and then someone tried to catch him out by snatching away the handkerchief during a coin exchange, after which he contained his anger and made a cool and courteous withdrawal.

Walking back through the night-lit streets, past the silent market place and across the tramlines before the old Cotton Exchange Hall, he felt as if some force were compressing his temples and weighing heavy on his heart. He felt as if the direction of his life had become a punishment for something that he was not even aware of having done. It was unfair. Kelly fed them guff, and they were happy. Goulston shone the light of truth into their darkness, and they turned from him.

He didn't choose the truth. The truth was there. And it stayed there, whether they chose to acknowledge it or not.

For once, he found, he was starting to envy them. Almost wishing not to know what he knew, almost aching to share the uncomplicated bliss of their ignorance.

To be the little boy, back in his seat, and never to have sneaked backstage at all.

Walter Ward was writing letters in the drawing-room. "Where's Kelly tonight?" Goulston asked him.

"He went with a Mr Tyrell to give a reading at a local temple. He left you the address, for if you cared to have him followed."

Goulston went upstairs and sat on his bed for a while and then, unable to settle or rest, he put on his coat and went out again.

The spiritualist meeting was in an unassuming back-

street hall with a sign over the door. The sign had been lettered with more love than skill, and was mis-spelled. The door was open to all.

Goulston went through a tiny cloakroom with a stove in it, and emerged into a place that was like a raftered, high-ceilinged schoolroom. Union flags and bunting hung across from wall to wall, leftovers of some past celebration. There were dark wooden benches on a plain board floor. The seating was about two-thirds filled. Goulston moved into the shadows beyond the pillars at the side of the room.

Kelly was up at the front, speaking. A working woman of about fifty years old stood beside him and he held her by the hand, his other on her shoulder. Goulston glanced at the rest of the crowd. They were ordinary people. Just ordinary people.

"I see green," Kelly was saying. "The colour green."

"His favourite coat was green," the woman said.

"Don't help me! This is a field. It's on the side of a hill but it's so smooth. It doesn't look real. The sky's a deep blue. Deep, like. . . like iron, when you cut it."

The place was freezing. Why was it so cold? All this stone, and only the heat of the gaslights. But no-one seemed to mind. Kelly would be working this crowd for no reward. He did this everywhere. The idly curious could pay into the cause, but to the genuinely dedicated he gave and asked nothing.

The door opened again, and Goulston glanced toward it. Everyone else kept their attention on Frederick Kelly. Two young women entered and quickly made for the nearest available seats; there was a moment's lapse in time

and then Goulston recognised them. Enid Grainger, and the maidservant from the big house.

He felt shocked. He couldn't have explained why, but he did. Enid hadn't seen him. Her eyes were on Kelly and she was pulling off her gloves, settling in.

Goulston knew that look. It was the look of the lost. The look of those who, instead of seeing the world as it really was, preferred to gaze out into the vaguest of mists where they could imagine a sunlit landscape of ghosts and unicorns.

Staying out in that part of the hall beyond the pillars, he moved to the door in order to leave. He was halfway through it when he heard Frederick Kelly calling his name.

No. This was the last thing that he wanted.

But he turned.

"You don't have to leave us, Will," Kelly said. "There may be something here for you."

"I don't believe so, Frederick," Goulston said, uncomfortably aware that every face in the hall was now turning toward him. He wouldn't look down and meet Enid Grainger's eyes, but he knew that she'd turned and was gazing on him too.

"You walked the streets to get here," Kelly called to him, "but you don't walk alone. You think you do, but you don't."

"Please," Goulston said with a pained expression, and threw open the door to the cloakroom.

Kelly's raised voice pursued him.

"I can't give you what you need," Kelly called after him. "No-one can. You create wonders for others, but

you've lost the faculty of wonder in yourself. It doesn't matter what shape your faith takes, Will. What matters is that you have some capacity for it in any form."

These last words followed him almost out onto the pavement. And then Kelly was in the doorway, in his waistcoat and shirtsleeves, and he was holding onto the sides and calling out after him.

"He cries tears for you, Will," Kelly shouted down the street. "They're not of pain or of joy. I don't understand them. But his tears run black. Does that mean anything to you, Will? His tears run black!"

Goulston made a sound that he meant to be defiant, but which came out like a growl of pain.

Goulston ran. He turned a corner, saw the lights of a public house, and slowed. He smoothed down his clothes, got a grip on himself, tried to control his breathing. He drank in moderation, but never had he felt the need for a drink as he felt it now.

He pushed open the doors and went inside. The warmth of the place stung his eyes. He pushed through to the bar and ordered himself a glass of whisky.

Of course the tears ran black. It was the black of soot and mucous.

For the coroner had told him that when his father had died it was the smoke from the burning paints and canvases, not the heat or the flames, that had first choked and then killed him.

He swallowed the whisky, let it burn its way through him. And then he looked around.

He remembered this place. Ten years before. The Theatre Royal stood next door, and this was where the

artistes came to drink. He searched for any face he might know.

Then he spied one.

And as recognition dawned, something else - akin to elation, not far from disbelief - began to rise in him and swell.

The nervous-looking man in the shabby clothes stood before a hastily-convened gathering in the offices of the Northern Telegraph and, turning his hat in his hands, said his piece.

"I have been a confederate of Mister Kelly's," he told his audience. "I would go in advance to the towns where he planned to appear. I would intercept letters that people would send to him. I would read them and then place them in new envelopes and send them through the post a second time so that they would appear not to have been tampered with. I'd get other names from newspaper files and from recent headstones and sometimes I would pass out free tickets in public houses to be sure that the right people came."

The Telegraph man said, "Why are you making this confession?"

The ill-fitted man glanced toward the figure by the door.

"Mister Goulston recognised me last night," he said. "I have done similar work in the past for mind reading acts and mentalists. I specialised in being a plant or a confederate for a number of magicians. I had the look and I could carry it off. Ours is a small world. Goulston knew

me of old. He bought me a drink and we talked. I was on my guard, but he tricked me into confessing."

"Does Kelly have any psychic powers at all, to your knowledge?"

"Ask Goulston," the man said.

Well, that was it. It was over. The man went on to respond to some detailed questions with dates and case histories, but as far as Goulston was concerned the job was at an end. He left the offices and spent an hour at King George's Hall securing his properties and exercising his doves before arranging the dispatch of everything to the station, and then he gave two interviews over lunch in the Adelphi Hotel alongside the Telegraph's offices on Station Square. By the time that he returned to the boarding house to pick up his luggage, the late editions were out and the word was all around. There was a crowd in front of the boarding house, and an ugly crowd at that. He pushed his way through and learned that Frederick Kelly had left some time before, making a hasty exit through the back yards behind the buildings to avoid attention.

When Goulston brought his bags downstairs to the hallway, he found Enid Grainger there hearing much the same story from the landlady.

She looked at Goulston as if dazed.

"I am dismayed," she said.

"I'm sorry."

Enid made an effort to gather herself. She held up an envelope, unsealed. She said, "I had this draft to give to Mister Kelly. How will I get it to him now?"

"Mister Kelly is exposed," Goulston said gently. "The

charade is over."

"Then he will need his friends more than ever," Enid said, offering the envelope and leaving him with no choice but to receive it. "Please see this safely into his hands."

Goulston began to attempt to protest, but already she was turning away. "Miss Grainger," he began, but she was walking out of the door without a backward glance.

He took a look inside the envelope. She could hardly have intended it to be a secret, or she'd have sealed the flap before handing it to him.

It was a Banker's Order, left open, for the sum of eight hundred pounds.

Goulston's mind reeled. What moved these people to the extent that, despite discredit and disgrace, they persisted in their sympathy and support? No truth, no logic could touch them. Now Enid had made him responsible for a sum that could have bought out the very house in which he was standing. His impulse was to chase her down the street and hand it back.

But he could not bring himself to do it.

He'd heard that Frederick Kelly had travelled to Preston in the hope of avoiding notice at the railway station there, but when Goulston arrived by taxi it was to find that another mob had tracked him down and, by one means or another, had managed to get onto the platforms and were gathered outside the waiting-room where Kelly and his party now hid. The police had been brought in to keep order, and their uniformed presence was considerable. They presented an intimidating wall of blue to the crowd, and refused Goulston entry until one of them

recognised him from his photograph in the newspaper. The wall parted, the crowd yelled, and Goulston squeezed through with his collar split and his hat gone missing. He stumbled as he fell in through the door, and a hand caught and helped him.

The hand was Frederick Kelly's.

"They're like dogs," he told Goulston as he raised him to his feet. "Right now they'll tear at anything that moves."

The windows of the waiting-room were of obscured glass, like those of a saloon-bar. They admitted light and a sense of the turmoil outside, but none of the details. Goulston did his best to straighten himself as Kelly stepped back and looked on. He didn't know what to say.

He said, "Do you have adequate protection?"

Kelly gave a slight shrug. "I'll change trains," he said.

Goulston made a helpless gesture, and said, "I'm sorry, Frederick. This is not as I'd expected."

"I had far to fall. Why did you come?"

Goulston glanced across the waiting-room. Walter Ward sat there, head down, lost in his own concerns. Of the two paid assistants there was no sign.

Goulston pulled out the envelope and said, "I was placed under an obligation. Miss Grainger asked me to give you this."

Kelly took it and briefly checked the contents, but beyond that he seemed to give it little attention. "I thought you might have more to say."

"It's over. Nothing to be said."

But Kelly obviously thought differently.

He said, "Why?"

He was looking at Goulston with complete intensity,

and Goulston had to look away.

Kelly said, "If you were so sure of your case, why didn't you put some trust in it? Why resort to this?"

Goulston gave him no answer. Kelly moved closer to him, and put his face only inches from Goulston's own.

"Who was he, Will? One of your old employees? One of your own confederates, or just someone you could trust to perform the lines that you gave him?"

"I had to end this farce," Goulston said, his voice almost a whisper. "Conscience demanded it. I'd have exposed you in the end. All I did was make it sooner, and cut down on the mountain of lies."

"But don't you see? You've robbed only yourself. Now you can never know for certain."

Somebody blew a whistle outside. A dark-uniformed arm came up against the glass as if out of a fog, and rapped against it hard. Kelly's train was about to depart, and it was time to get him onto it. Walter Ward was getting to his feet. He seemed slow, broken.

"Tell me, then," Goulston said with urgency. "Now that you have nothing to lose. Tell me how it was done."

Kelly drew himself up straight. In the midst of everything, he seemed almost composed. He said, "You're sincere in your way, Will. How can I blame you for doing wrong when you don't know how wrong you are?" He looked at the banker's draft, still in his hand. "There'll be no temple now," he said, and then he leaned forward and stuffed it into Goulston's handkerchief pocket.

"Tour's cancelled," Kelly said. "I can't meet your contract any more. But you can rebuild your act with this. I know it's important to you."

"Are you mocking me?" Goulston said. He'd meant it to sound indignant, but somehow he failed.

"No," Frederick Kelly said. "I'm forgiving you."

The waiting-room door slammed inward then, and a corridor of uniformed bodies showed the way across the platform to the waiting train. Beyond the corridor was a sea of snarling faces and waving fists. Kelly went out without hesitating, and the uniforms immediately closed around him and carried him forward; the mob went after and Kelly was almost lost to Goulston's sight, buffeted and borne along until he reached the carriage door. Kelly was hauled up and pushed inside, the door was slammed, and the policemen formed a line to hold the crowd back from the carriage as the train made ready to depart. Other doors could be heard slamming all the way down the platform, and then the guard's whistle sounded. Goulston could see Kelly through the window now.

The train began to move, and the angry crowd broke through and tried to keep pace with Kelly's compartment. Their rage seemed to be formless, reasonless, something abstract that opportunity had made personal. They beat on the windows. Kelly was looking down, and he didn't react.

Goulston watched him go. He didn't see Kelly raise his eyes, or look back.

Five minutes later, the platform was clear. Walter Ward had scuttled out and boarded the train somewhere further along. Only Goulston remained. Steam and coal smoke were dispersing from the empty track.

He waited around for a while, but there was nothing left to do or see. He found his trampled hat. It was almost as if he was reluctant to tear himself from the spot.

But finally he moved, walking to the end of the platform and climbing the steps toward the station exit. He did not feel as he'd expected to feel. He could not have explained how he was feeling at all.

On the far side of the ticket hall, the conjurer hesitated. It was a fair day and there was a fine breeze. There was nothing to regret. He had done no wrong. With this thought running insistently through his mind, Will Goulston walked onward and out into a world without angels.

Men and women moved by, heads down, lost in their own concerns. Goulston moved through them, unseen. It didn't take a Frederick Kelly to attune to their thoughts. They ached for some comfort, as he'd said to Enid Grainger. And how hard they found it to accept that the ache did not prove the existence of some remedy.

People could not quite bring themselves to believe in the death that surrounded them, that was the root of the problem.

But oh. . . how they longed to believe in the dead.

The Kingdom of Bones

"Vividly set in England and America during the booming industrial era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this stylish thriller conjures a perfect demon to symbolize the age and its appetites..."

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The Kingdom of Bones is a macabre mystery set in the world of the nineteenth-century theatre. With action that unfolds across fifteen years and two continents, it combines the processes of the modern psychological thriller with the pace and energy of Victorian sensational fiction.

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About the Author

[STEPHEN GALLAGHER](#) is a novelist, screenwriter, and director. He is the author of fourteen novels. They include *Nightmare, with Angel*; *The Spirit Box*; *White Bizango*; and *Red, Red Robin*.