

Missing

'So, that brings us almost to the end of our tour.'

'Thank-you, Ernest. It's been really interesting! Who would have thought a graveyard, a cemetery, could be so... captivating?' The young woman turned to her partner. 'Don't you think so, darling?'

'Absolutely! Loved every second, and it's been a fascinating way to kill – sorry! Freudian slip! – spend a couple of hours.'

The old gravedigger smiled wryly, puffed on his pipe, and smoothed his bushy, grey beard. Years of coastal wind and rain had gnarled his features, earning him his epithet, a homage to Hemingway and *The Old Man and the Sea*.

'Well, glad you enjoyed it.'

'But,' the young woman looked at him quizzically, 'you said "*almost* the end of our tour." Is there more to come?'

'Well, there is one more – not really a grave, more of a memorial...only if you'd like to see it...'

'Of *course*, we would. Wouldn't we darling?'

'Well, yes. Lead the way!'

Ernest led them to the top of the cemetery, a lonely promontory with uninterrupted views across the Channel; next stop, France. Stopping at a simple, unadorned, stone, he tapped out his pipe and pointed its stem at the fading inscription.

'So, who's this then, Ernest?'

'Well, nobody. Like I said, not a grave but a memorial.'

The woman leant in close and started to decipher the name.

'Gord... Gordon? Gordon *Doyle*?'

'That's the man.'

She shrugged. 'Should we know him?'

Ernest tilted his head. 'Maybe not. You're both a bit young. But you may have heard of the Mayfair Heist – back in the 90's?'

'Before my time, but my dad used to talk about it.'

'Well, Gordon was convicted. Twenty-five years, Strangeways. Two years in, he manages to escape. Witnesses said he got to the beach down there, stole a rowing boat and... well, never seen again. Stormy night. Terrible currents in the channel. Hence the "Missing – Believed Dead" bit. A few years later his missus insists we erect a stone, and who are we to turn her down?'

'What happened to the money? It was *millions*, wasn't it.'

'So, they say. Never recovered a penny.'

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Ernest pocketed their generous tip, waved the couple off, then pushed open the door of his shed. Catching his reflection in the broken window he gave himself a wink.

'Well done, Gordon, m'boy – another satisfied customer!'

What is it they say about hiding in plain sight?'

400 words
