

## ZELLABY-IN-THE-MOOR

'Who's done that, then?' said Eddie Muir. He was referring to the shopping trolley which lay on its side in the village pond. The ducks were swimming in and out of the trolley as if it were their shelter.

Mrs Gill came over from her shop. 'That's the third this month,' she said.

'It's not that many, is it?' I said, but I couldn't be sure.

'I don't know,' Mrs Gill replied, cross to have been contradicted, 'I've got better things to do than count shopping trolleys, I'm sure. I've got pies to make,' she added, and went back into her shop.

'She's probably right,' said Eddie. 'Sitting there all day twitching her curtains, like as not she keeps a tally. Shall I tell Sergeant Prentice?'

'About Mrs Gill?' I asked.

'About the trolley, reverend,' said Eddie, 'Someone's going to have to get it out.'

'Oh yes,' I said. 'No, it's all right, Eddie, I'll tell the Sergeant.'

He tapped his hat and went on.

I've never quite settled in to the village, I must admit. No matter how long it is I've been the vicar of Zellaby-On-The-Moor – and even I'm not sure any more – I'll always be the new vicar. Old Frearson told me, when he was verger, 'You'll be welcome in Zellaby, Reverend Vardy, but you'll never be Zellaby.' I thought I knew what he meant then, but now I really know. Zellaby born and Zellaby bred, is all that matters here, and if you're an outsider, you'd better mind your p's and q's.

The shopping trolley was definitely an outsider, and it had to go.

'Four trolleys it is, not three,' said Sergeant Prentice. 'Also two old mattresses, five bikes and a sheepdog.'

'A sheepdog?' I said.

'Poor buggler,' said the Sergeant and he sounded like he meant it. 'Weighted down with a rope and a brick it was. Inhumane. If I find out who did it, I'll break his neck. Sorry, reverend.'

'Not at all,' I said, feeling for the umpteenth time that I should have had some appropriate Biblical quote prepared for the moment. Zellaby people liked their vicars to be vicars, walking encyclopaedias of relevant lines from the Good Book. If truth be told, my memory wasn't what it was, and I found it hard to tell my Mark from my Matthew.

'It's the gypsies,' Sergeant Prentice continued. 'They come into Zellaby at night, dump their rubbish and they're out in a flash. I'd like to catch 'em at it.'

I said nothing to this because I'd heard it before, several times. To hear the Sergeant tell it, Zellaby was a major part of gypsy life, both easy touch for local crime and convenient dumping ground for mattresses, bikes and unwanted sheepdogs. I felt differently, perhaps because with Plymouth to the south and Truro to the west, there were surely more thrilling stamping grounds. Besides, I didn't share the belief that all Romany people were criminals, another factor which made me feel less than local.

'I'll get the boy to remove the trolley when he's done his rounds,' said Sergeant Prentice. 'The boy' was Constable Pengelly, a slow lad in his late 20s upon whose talents Scotland Yard had never felt bound to call. Constable Pengelly's fondness for cider and

cycling meant that he was himself a source of local danger and had ruined several front gardens and flower beds while under the influence. He could however be relied upon to drag trolleys from ponds without falling in.

'Thank you, Sergeant,' I said. 'I'll see you in church on...' The rest of the sentence went right out of my mind.

'Sunday,' supplied Prentice, looking at me oddly.

'All day,' I agreed, and left, bidding the puzzled Sergeant a cheerful farewell.

It worried me slightly that my memory wasn't what it was. I made a mental note to book an appointment with Doctor Norris for later that week.

When I reached Saint Trigan's, Mrs Aldous was just coming down the path with a large bunch of flowers. This did not surprise me in the least, as it seemed to me that whenever I saw her, Mrs Aldous was coming down some path or other with a large bunch of flowers.

'Beautiful, um,' I began. 'Flowers,' I added, on safe ground here at least.

'Chrysanthemums,' she said. 'Honestly, vicar, I'm so glad you're not in charge of the floral arrangements. We'd be knee deep in dandelions and thistles.'

She looked at me for a reaction. 'Oh yes,' I said. 'Very good, Mrs Aldous.'

Shaking her head, she walked past me, then stopped at the gate.

'They're weeds!' she shouted.

'I know,' I shouted back.

I went inside the church and immediately felt comforted. Saint Trigan's is, unusually, an almost entirely unchanged Norman church, with some 14th century amendments to create more space for the congregation. There's even a roodscreen, a rather tatty one, but as far as anyone knows it is the real thing. The attempts of my Victorian predecessor to modernise Saint Trigan's fell on deaf ears, even to the extent of the parish council refusing to allow a brass plaque to commemorate those who fell in the Boer War (although this was partly because only three men from Zellaby actually took part in the Boer War and of those three, only one was killed and as he was the local drunk, nobody was particularly upset).

No matter how cold or wet the weather was outside, Saint Trigan's felt like a refuge, a sealed capsule of reassurance. Becoming its vicar was the best thing that had ever happened to me, and I thanked God every day for this blessing. As if to concur, Trelawny the vicarage cat snaked her way past my ankles, purring (I had wanted to call her Sookie, but Mrs Aldous had given me a stern look and told me that church cats in Zellaby had always been called Trelawny, so that was that).

I sat on a pew, felt for my pipe, realised I was in church, and turned my attention instead to thinking about my sermon. I fancied this Sunday – take that Sergeant Prentice! – that I might say a few words about the loaves and fishes. I had a few rough ideas worked out, nothing too certain, but I felt inside me that this would be one of my better sermons. (My sermons were acceptable to a Zellaby congregation because while some of them went over the heads of one or two attendees, I had – I flatter myself – a reasonable speaking voice. 'I don't understand half what he says,' I once heard someone say, 'But he says it nicely, and that counts for more somehow.'

I was about to take out my fountain pen and begin making notes on the back of a hymn sheet when I heard the door creak open and heavy footsteps make their way down the nave.

'Good afternoon, constable,' I said.

'How did you – ' began Constable Pengelly, then: 'It's the boots, innit?'

Pengelly looked mournfully down at me, his helmet held in two meaty hands.

'I can never creep up on people,' he said.

'You don't need to creep up on me, I hope,' I replied. 'What can I do for you, Constable?'

'I needs you to come right away,' he said. 'Need.'

'Where's Sergeant Prentice?'

'I can't find him. You're the next best thing.'

I stood up.

'Is it another trolley?' I asked.

'I wish,' said Pengelly.

She was fully clothed and entirely still. She lay, curled up as though trying to hide, on the grass outside the pub. Behind her, low white posts with sagging white chains made a kind of half-hearted cordon around her body.

'Look at her,' said Pengelly, as if we could do anything else, 'She's soaking wet.'

He was right. Soaking wet was literally what she was. Her clothes clung to the ground like heavy drapes, and water still ran from her hair in slow cascades. Her skin was slick with water and she seemed stuck to the grass, almost as if she had come out of it.

'She wasn't here five minutes ago,' said Pengelly.

'That's impossible,' I said, then remembered. I myself had been here ten minutes ago, crossing the green from the duck pond on my way to the church. Pengelly was right. There was no way she could have been dumped here, except from a fast car, and there were no cars to be seen.

'She must have got here somehow,' I said, inanely.

A figure came running towards us. I hoped it was Sergeant Prentice but instead it was Doctor Norris. For a moment I wondered if he was coming to talk to me about my appointment. Then, when he was still halfway across the green, he called out:

'Don't move her! Don't touch her!'

Constable Pengelly made a sound in his throat, as if he were outraged at the suggestion. Doctor Norris nodded as he brushed past me, then knelt down on the grass and opened his doctor's bag. He clacked a stethoscope around his neck then felt for her pulse.

'Nothing,' he said. 'She's a goner for –'

And then the body convulsed. Doctor Norris almost fell backwards as the girl on the floor convulsed, curling herself up even more tightly than before, before vomiting at least a pint of water onto the grass.

'Dear God,' Norris said as the girl's eyes opened and she fixed us with a watery gaze. 'It's a miracle.'

He looked at me for confirmation, two professionals confronted with the central proof of our necessity.

'It certainly looks that way,' I said.

Under Doctor Norris' direction, we took the girl – I use the word 'girl' as a bachelor might, she was a woman of some twenty-five summers at least – into the snug of the Globe. Packer, the landlord, came in at once, sleeves rolled up and filthy apron indicating that he had just come up from the cellar.

'You can't sit her in here,' said Packer.

'It's a medical emergency, man,' Norris said.

'No women in the snug,' Packer said.

Norris looked at Pengelly, who took Packer by the arm and dragged him outside.

'Some people,' said Norris. 'Could you get me a glass of brandy please, reverend?'

I stepped behind the bar and as I found the brandy, I watched Norris remove his own jacket and drape it over the girl's shoulders. I remembered then that Norris had a daughter of his own, who had left home to go to London at sixteen. She would be the same age now as the girl was.

I handed Norris the brandy and he gave it to the girl. She didn't seem at first to understand what it was. He lifted it gently to her lips but instead of drinking it, she closed her eyes and sniffed it. The fumes seemed to revive her, as some colour came into her cheeks and she opened her eyes wider and looked around the room.

Her voice when she spoke was soft and to my ears kind.

'Where am I?' she said and coughed.

'The Globe Inn,' said Norris. 'How are you feeling?'

'Cold,' she said, still looking round. 'And wet.'

'I'll send for some clothes,' said Norris. 'My daughter's,' he added, and looked down for a moment.

'That's kind,' she said, then, 'I'm sorry about your daughter.'

'What makes you say that?' said Norris, not sharply.

'I don't know,' said the girl, 'I didn't mean to be rude.'

'You weren't rude,' said Norris. 'She went away,' he added. 'We get the odd letter, but we don't – she doesn't -'

'It's a long way from here, London,' I interrupted.

'Is it?' said the girl. She looked suddenly startled, and not just because Constable Pengelly had returned, his large arms laden with frocks and the like.

'Nigh on three hundred mile,' Pengelly said. He let the clothes fall onto the table with a flump.

The girl stood up. Maybe it was the brandy, but she seemed a lot steadier than she had a moment ago.

'Who are you?' she said, almost as an afterthought.

'I'm Doctor Norris,' said Norris. 'And this is the vicar. Reverend Vardy.'

'Richard Vardy,' I said. 'But Richard will do.'

'Richard,' she repeated, then 'I'm very cold. I should get dressed.'

When Julia returned in her dry clothes, she seemed a woman transformed. She'd done something to her hair – braided or plaited it, I have no idea – and she'd put on a dress that suited her youthful figure. She even managed a nervous smile as she came in, clearly nervous of the gaze of three strange men (she had some right to, I felt, as Constable Pengelly was staring at her so hard I felt his already bulbous eyes might pop in their sockets).

'You look much better,' said Doctor Norris. 'Now I think you need a bed.'

'Sergeant Prentice will want to talk to her,' said Pengelly. 'I mean Julia,' he added, flushing slightly.

‘Sergeant Prentice is currently searching for travellers to blame for the latest shopping trolley atrocity,’ said Doctor Norris. ‘Anyway, this young woman’s well-being must come first.’

‘There is a spare bedroom at the vicarage,’ I said suddenly. They all turned to look at me. ‘In fact, there are several,’ I went on. ‘If I can persuade Mrs Aldous to stay over tonight, Julia is more than welcome to sleep... to rest at the vicarage.’

‘Excellent idea!’ said Doctor Norris before Julia could speak. I looked at her questioningly and Julia nodded.

‘Is Mrs Aldous a nice lady?’ she asked.

‘In her own way,’ I replied. ‘Unless you can’t tell weeds from flowers.’

‘In that case I’ll be fine. I love plants,’ she said. ‘We only had a window box on the fourteenth floor but it was like a garden in miniature.’

She smiled at the memory. It was a beautiful smile, even if there was something sad in it.

We went out onto the green. The shopping trolley, still occupied by curious ducks, now lay on its side on the grass. Mrs Gill was lurking in her shop doorway, almost crazed with the desire to come over and see what was going on. I waved to her and she muttered something to herself about having pies to make and went back inside her shop. I shook hands with Doctor Norris as Pengelly stomped off to deal with the trolley.

‘I’ll call round in the morning,’ he said to Julia. ‘In the meantime, rest and food if you can stand it.’

I couldn’t see him as Julia and I walked up the road to the vicarage, but I knew he had not moved, and was watching to see if she was all right. Certainly she had a good stride, and for someone who less than an hour ago had been unconscious and half-drowned, she was making a marvellous recovery.

Back at the vicarage, I soon located Mrs Aldous (garden, azaleas) and apprised her of the situation.

‘I see you’re wearing Polly Norris’ frocks,’ said Mrs Aldous. ‘I must say, they suit you more than her.’

Once she had delivered herself of this opinion, she bustled Julia into her sitting room – a jungle of chintz where the only objects that did not have floral patterns printed on them were actual flowers – and settled her into a voluminous arm chair. Within minutes Julia was provided with tea and a large slice of buttered toast, both of which she consumed with alacrity.

‘Thank you,’ she said to Mrs Aldous then, turning to me: ‘I’m very sleepy now.’

‘The front spare room is made up for you,’ said Mrs Aldous. ‘And I’ll stay here tonight.’

She gave me an old-fashioned look, as if to suggest that I had better keep my perverted notions to myself. I returned it with a wan smile, the better to indicate that I was harmless, and rose from my chair.

‘I will see you all later,’ I said. ‘I’m going to write my sermon.’

As I left the room, I heard Mrs Aldous mutter the words ‘loaves and fishes’ to herself.

Sergeant Prentice came over just as Mrs Aldous was setting out the tea things.

'We're just about to have dinner,' she said, looking meaningfully at the Sergeant's helmet, which he had placed in her favourite chair.

Prentice tucked the helmet under his arm apologetically and turned to me. 'This won't take a moment,' he said.

Mrs Aldous sighed and was about to make a show of putting the tea things away again when Julia came into the room.

'Hello,' she said when she saw the Sergeant. 'Have you come to take me home?'

'And where might that be then, miss?' said Sergeant Prentice,

She frowned. 'I don't know,' she said. 'Somebody mentioned London earlier. Does that sound right?'

'That would be for you to know, miss.'

'And for you to find out, I suppose.' Julia sat down. 'I'm sorry, I'm feeling a little bit dizzy.'

'Hunger, I expect,' said Mrs Aldous, directing a look at Sergeant Prentice.

Prentice sat down with being asked and took out a large notebook and a stub of pencil.

'Can you tell me your name, miss?'

'Julia.'

'Julia what?'

Julia thought for a moment. 'I don't know that either,' she said.

'Loss of memory,' said Mrs Aldous. She sounded excited. I realised Mrs Aldous had probably decided that Julia was like a character of one of her favourite films, whose heroines were always losing their memories and marrying gallant pilots in error.

Prentice made a note. 'Do you have any idea how you came to be in the middle of the green, half drowned?'

Julia shook her head. 'I can't remember anything,' she said, sounding regretful.

'Nothing at all?' asked Prentice.

Julia shook her head again.

'And yet,' said Prentice, turning to an earlier page in his notebook, 'You told the vicar here that you had lived on the fourteenth floor of a tower block. Bit specific that,' he added, putting the notebook away.

'Now look,' I began, and stopped as Prentice raised his eyebrow. I had no idea what to say, anyway.

'Thing is, miss,' said Prentice, 'You turn up here, sopping wet, make a very fast recovery if you don't mind me saying, and now here you are in a brand new frock about to enjoy the Vicar's hospitality.'

'It's not a brand – ' said Mrs Aldous. Prentice interrupted her with a raised finger.

'We've had a lot of trouble round here lately,' he said. 'Theft, vandalism, petty crime... And now we've got you. An interloper.'

'Julia is our guest, Sergeant Prentice,' I said, raising myself to my full height, which was not inconsiderable. 'Unless you have a specific charge, or anything useful to say, it might be better if you left.'

The Sergeant put his helmet on.

'I'll be making enquiries,' he said to Julia, without looking at me, and left.

'Well!' said Mrs Aldous, and went out to finish making dinner.

'I should go,' Julia said. 'He clearly thinks I'm a criminal.'

‘He thinks you’re a gypsy,’ I said, ‘Which is not the same thing at all.’

‘A gypsy?’ said Julia. ‘I wish I were! But,’ she added, with mock regret, ‘I’m just a dull girl back from London.’

She looked surprised by her own words. ‘Another flash of memory?’ I asked, ‘Maybe it’s coming back?’

‘I don’t want it too,’ Julia said suddenly. ‘I don’t know why, only that I feel it won’t make me happy.’

Just then Mrs Aldous entered with a plate entirely occupied by an enormous trout.

‘Fish!’ she announced, so dramatically that Julia and I exchanged a look and then started laughing.

‘I’m glad someone’s happy,’ sniffed Mrs Aldous, but I could see she was smiling too.

The next few days passed, as days will in Zellaby, without incident. Mrs Gill had pies to make. An old bicycle was found in the pond. I worked on my sermon (I was thinking of taking as my subject the story of the loaves and fishes). And Julia settled in at the vicarage. Mrs Aldous, far from being annoyed by the intrusion of another human being, seemed glad to have female company. Julia’s enthusiasm for the garden and plant life in general also did no harm. In the evenings, we read, or even played silly board games. All in all, it was an idyllic week, and even Sergeant Prentice’s dark looks as we passed the police station could not spoil it.

And then a day came that I am sure I will never forget. Julia and I were sitting on the old bench by the pond, feeding the ducks with some stale bread. It was a quiet, pleasant day and there were very few people about. I remember the pond was as still as glass, and in fact Julia remarked on this, because then I said, ‘There’s an old saying, a painting may be beautiful but a mirror tells no lies.’

‘I’ve never heard that before,’ Julia said. She sounded uneasy.

‘Maybe it’s a Zellaby saying,’ I said. I stood up. ‘If we both stand here, we can see our reflection,’ I said. Julia seemed reluctant at first, but then she took my arm, and got up.

We looked at the unmoving, almost solid water. It somehow seemed deeper than it was, but the surface sheen was as clear as a looking glass. There we were. Myself, tall, and wearing a jacket that I could have sworn wasn’t as creased as it now looked, and Julia...

I had never seen a woman look as beautiful as Julia. She could have worn rags and looked gorgeous. She could have had leaves and twigs in her hair and still be alluring. She was all these things, but she also looked –

‘What is it?’ I said. Suddenly she reached down and picked up a stone and threw it into the pond. The reflection rippled and broke.

‘What did you do that for?’ I asked. But Julia had already walked away. I went after her, but her stride was quick and determined, and I didn’t want to chase her, so I sat down again. After a while, she still hadn’t returned, so I went back to the vicarage.

I didn’t see Julia that afternoon, nor that evening, nor the next morning. At last, sick with worry, I went to the police station. To my slight relief, Constable Pengelly was on duty, not Sergeant Prentice.

‘Probably gone back to her own,’ said Pengelly when I told him my fears. ‘Good job too, she’ll be happier there.’

I walked out in disgust and stomped across the green in search of Doctor Norris, who at least had the merit of sympathy. I was stopped by Mrs Gill.

'Pies tomorrow!' she said, somewhat bizarrely. I ignored this and strode on.

I had scarcely had time to knock on Norris' door when it opened.

'We've been expecting you,' he said. 'Come in.'

'We?' I asked.

Inside, Julia was sitting on a sofa. Mrs Norris had provided her with a steaming mug of tea and Doctor Norris was just putting away his stethoscope.

'She's fine,' he told me.

'She is the cat's mother,' tutted Mrs Norris. 'Men,' she said, addressing herself to Julia. 'They think we can't speak for ourselves.'

She turned to her husband. 'Come on John,' she said, and they left the room.

'I'm sorry,' said Julia.

'I was worried sick about you,' I said.

'It was the reflection,' she said. 'The water and the reflection. I – it just made me want to run away.'

'And did you? Run away, I mean.'

Julia took a sip of her tea. 'I tried,' she said. 'I walked as far as I could, out of the village and down a lane. I saw that horrid policeman and he shouted something at me, but I just ignored him and kept on. And –'

She fell silent.

'And what?' I asked.

'And then I came back,' Julia said, quietly. 'I didn't mean to, but I did.'

'Well,' I began, 'I'm very glad you did.' I put my hand on hers. She brushed it off.

'You don't understand,' she said. 'I didn't mean to come back. But I did.'

'I know,' I said, slightly hurt.

'No!' she shouted. 'You don't!'

She faced me with angry eyes.

'I didn't mean to come back!' she cried. 'But there I was!'

'I don't –'

Julia was crying now. 'There was a crossroads,' she said, 'I went towards it but – but just as I got near it... I came back.'

'Julia, you're not making sense,' I said as gently as I could.

'I know,' she said. 'I know. But one minute I was there, I was at the crossroads and the next minute, I was back.'

'Back where?' I asked.

'Back on the green,' she said. 'Back where you found me.'

'Do you mean you passed out, and when you woke up again, you were on the green?' I asked.

'No,' Julia said, and I saw she was trembling, 'I mean that I was at the crossroads and a moment later I was on the green.'

'I should call Doctor Norris,' I said, standing up.

'You don't believe me,' she said angrily.

'You've been under a lot of stress,' I replied. Even I could hear how feeble I sounded. 'You just need some rest.'

'I need to get out of here,' Julia said. 'I feel like I'm suffocating. That man – he doesn't like me.'

'I'll go and get Norris,' I said.

'Don't,' she said, and pulled me down onto the sofa beside her.

'You really do need some rest.'

She looked at me, and there was something dark and urgent in her eyes.

'I remembered something else.' She said.

'About where you're from?'

Julia shook her head.

'About this place. There was a reason why I came here. I was unhappy. I was very unhappy, so I came here.'

'Well,' I said, 'It is a lovely part of the world.'

'Not that,' she said. 'Not lovely. I mean, the reason. But I met you. That was good. Wasn't it?'

Julia sounded frightened and I felt frightened for her.

'If you really want to go,' I said, slowly.

'I have to,' she said.

'Then I'll come with you.'

We went outside. The air was thicker than ever and it was hard to see much further ahead.

Julia said, 'Do you hear that?'

I did. A kind of loud murmuring. The air cleared and ahead of us we could see a small group of people. Not a lot - Zellaby isn't the sort of place where there's a lot of anything – but enough to block our way. I saw Mrs Gill and some of the farm boys and at the front of the knot of people there was Sergeant Prentice.

'We don't want you, vicar,' said Prentice. 'Just need her.'

'She hasn't done anything,' I said.

Doctor Norris came out of his house.

'This is nothing to do with the law,' he said. 'This is mob rule.'

'Keep out of it, doctor,' said Prentice. 'I need to take her in for questioning. Make a few calls.'

'Out of the way,' I said, and took a few steps forward. One of the meatier lads stood in my way.

'We don't want any trouble,' said Prentice. The crowd took a step forward as one, like mindless flesh.

'Let them take me,' Julia said. 'I don't want you to get hurt.'

'No,' I said.

There was a crack of thunder above our heads. Prentice swore. The crowd moved back. Behind us, Mrs Aldous stood with a shotgun.

'The next one to move gets a bushel of rock salt in the face,' she announced. 'Now go home, all of you.'

'You're obstructing the law,' said Prentice.

'Arrest me then,' Mrs Aldous said. 'If you dare, Sam Prentice.'

The crowd had already dispersed. I took Julia's hand and shoved past Prentice.

As we headed down the road, I heard him call out:  
'She can remember! She can *remember!*'

Julia and I walked down the lane. The hedgerow was thick on either side and the air seemed less dense.

'There it is,' Julia said, pointing to a little triangle of unmown grass at the junction of the lane and a bigger road. In the middle of the triangle was an old signpost, slightly askew. Some old paper had blown onto the grass, its further progress blocked by the post.

'Seems fine so far,' I said, bending down out of habit to pick up the paper.

'Look,' said Julia.

It was an old Western Morning News, damp and yellowed. There was a photograph of a large lake on the front page.

VILLAGERS KILLED IN – I read, then the wind took the paper and blew it away. I was about to chase after it when Julia took my arm.

'That man was right,' she said. 'I do remember. I remember everything.'

'Don't,' I said. I don't know why but I was scared.

'I was away when it happened,' she said. 'I'd left, you see.'

'Left?' I said. 'Left what?'

'You,' she said. 'I left you.'

I stood there, looking at her. A rushing sound filled the air.

'I just needed some time to myself,' Julia said. 'I went to London to stay with my aunt. She lived in a flat but she grew flowers. We said she had her own garden in miniature. I was ready to come back and then I saw the news.'

The air was loud, and dense.

'It was an accident,' she said. 'The old reservoir above the village was breached and Zellaby –'

She gestured at the countryside around us. The lane, the hedgerow, behind us the green, the pub, the church. And I saw what she saw. The buildings, ruined, smashed. The thick green water around us. Deep water heavier than lead, thicker than stone.

I tried to speak but my mouth filled up. Julia came towards me. Her hair billowing out.

'It's all right,' she said.

'I love you,' she said.

'I'm home,' she said.

The brightness of the sun was matched only by the cloudless blue of the sky. I drank the coffee Mrs Aldous had made and went out into the garden. Julia, basket of flowers on her arm, saw me and waved.

We walked into the village together. On the green, Constable Pengelly and Eddie Muir were struggling to pull something out of the pond, a shopping trolley by the look of it. We watched them for a moment and walked on.

'How's the sermon coming on?' she asked.

'I've abandoned it,' I said.

'What?' she teased. 'Loaves and fishes? Just like that?'

'I've got a new one in mind,' I said and, closing my eyes, intoned. '*For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*'

'Deep,' said Julia. 'I like it.'

She stopped. Around us, grass grew, trees blossomed, birds sang.  
'Oh Richard,' Julia said, 'Isn't it a beautiful day?'

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