

to Cornwall, comforting myself with the conviction that this was exactly the sort of thing heroes and poets had to endure. I felt darker, and that was good.

The seasonal workers in Newquay that year included a number of Oxford undergraduates, one of whom was a slim and handsome young man called Tom, who worked as a porter at the prestigious Headland Hotel. He befriended us in pubs and cafes, and I guess we adopted him as an honorary beatnik – but one who was upper class, better educated, older and happened to prefer classical music.

One morning Tom's body was found dead on the beach at the foot of a tall cliff. Nobody had come forward to explain how he had come to be there. Some among the beatnik community were interviewed by the police, without result. On the night in question Tom had been seen drinking in a pub near the cliff edge, but no one could account for his movements thereafter.

On the night after receiving news of Tom's death, Wizz, Kevin, David, Arnold, Mick and myself were talking about the tragedy, wondering how Tom had fallen over the edge. We were all seated round the staff room at about 10pm, when we noticed that Mick had grown pale and silent. There occurred an inexplicable alteration of the atmosphere, like a drop in temperature. Whatever it was, it made us all look at Mick at the same time. His head had stooped into his hands on the table. Someone asked if he was okay, but he did not reply. He stood up and was still, staring at nothing, and we all watched him. Without

That night in the staff room, exactly the same thing happened again. We were all waiting for it. Mick's head stooped into his hands, he stood up and began to walk out the door. We stopped him and led him to the dormitory and sat him on his bunk. I asked him if it was the key again. He looked at us blankly and then started to speak to us in Tom's voice. Mick was a cockney kid whose father was a trader in Petticoat Lane, and here he was addressing us in the accent and syntax of an Oxford undergraduate. Worse than that, it was Tom's voice. We all recognised it. He said this:

“I am walking towards the railing along the cliff edge. I fall over the railing and turn over in the air twice. My head hits a stone. Under the stone is the key.”

We were terrified. Two of us immediately left the room, but I could see them standing outside, listening. I stuttered, “Is that you, Tom?”

Mick looked at me calmly, and in Tom's voice said, “I am able to communicate with you because a man is coming to this place who must be prevented from fulfilling his plans. He is a magician and he always dresses in white. A great destruction may happen if he is not stopped. You are the only people to whom this can be communicated.”

Then Mick lay down on the bunk and went to sleep.

While the normally cheerful Mick remained quiet and withdrawn over the following days, strange and frightening events began to occur in the beatnik community. Within days, everyone had heard the story

of Mick's behaviour and Tom's message, and people began to visit us at the Byron Court to report. The two waitress girls Kevin and I had stayed with on arrival came to tell us that they had finished their lunch-time shift and gone to their room to get changed for an afternoon at the beach. Three hours later, the restaurant manager banged on their door, and they found themselves sitting on their beds with no recollection of the three hours that had passed. They were so disturbed by this and by other reports that they quit their jobs and returned to London.

Sandy was a drummer who worked with a local dance band. He said that he had been walking down the high street one afternoon when an unknown man had greeted him like a friend. Sandy met lots of people in his job, and he had assumed the man to be an audience member at one of his gigs. The man had insisted that Sandy meet his friends, and had led him to a nearby bookshop. The shop was empty, and the man disappeared into the back section saying that he would bring his friends out. Sandy stood around for a few minutes, and then an elderly couple appeared from the back section and apologised that he had been kept waiting. Sandy explained about the man, but the couple had no knowledge of him. I asked Sandy to describe the man, and Sandy said that he had been short, balding and dressed all in white.

Kevin came into the staff room on the night following the 'message', and dropped a key on the table. It was an old fashioned key with a heavy brass tag, which had a saw-toothed edge. On one side of the tag was an engraved number, and on the other the logo of the Headland

Hotel where Tom had worked. Kevin explained that he had found it under a rock at the base of the cliff where Tom had been found. We decided to go to the Headland Hotel and find out which door the key opened. We did not show the key to Mick because we feared provoking another visitation from Tom. Next morning, after the breakfast service, Kevin, Wizz and myself walked out to the Headland Hotel and asked the doorman to show us which room it opened. He thought it an odd request, but led us into the staff entrance and down to the basement and along a dark corridor to a door which bore the same number as the key, and he opened the door. It was a broom closet, and it contained only brooms and cleaning equipment.

These and other less-dramatic events, together with the police investigation into the death, generated such an atmosphere of tension in the beat community that some returned to London. Somehow it was decided that as many as possible of the remainder should assemble at night, with Mick, on the beach at the spot where Tom had been found. We did this, and we stood in a silent group on that spot for a long while, waiting for something to happen. Some girls became frightened and left, and nothing else occurred. But the next day, about a week after Tom had been found dead, something did happen.

Wizz Jones returned from a trip to the town centre and reported seeing a white jeep driven slowly down the high street by a man dressed all in white. Also in the jeep was a woman in white. The white jeep was towing a white caravan, and stuck on the side of the caravan was a large