



PORCELAIN FOG

Jazz Adley



‘Mate, I saw ‘er,’ Alfred Smith whispered to his companions. His eyes snapped around the pub and he took a swig of ale.

‘You’re ‘avin a laugh, she ain’t real. Probably spied a fine lass and lost yer ‘ead.’ John Davies replied with a smirk. George Taylor sniggered and almost choked as he drank at the same time.

Silence fell. The three looked up to see everyone looking at them.

‘Sorry,’ George quickly mumbled as he buried his face into his pint. A few moments passed, and the hum of quiet conversation filled the room once more.

‘George, you got to be more careful. Les’ you want ‘em blues come for you,’ John whispered, with a heavy nudge to George’s side.

‘As I was saying, I was on the pull last night, and I bloody forgot to keep a track of time. Before I knew it, the clock rang and there I was plastered, starkers and on the job.’ Alfred whispered as he continued with his story. He paused to take a swig of ale.

‘Right mate, I reckon you’d be more knackered if what you’re sayin’ is true,’ sniggered John with a look of disbelief.

‘I ain’t pulling no legs here. I’ll take you to the lass if we had time. She’s a looker. Anyhow, I legged it, didn’t want the blues treating me to her majesty’s pleasure. You’d call me a jammy bastard, I got to Parliament Street and there were them blues around. I was gutted, but chance would have it they were chasing this lad. As I got to the brid...’ the sound of someone clearing their throats interrupted his tale. Silence fell once more as everyone’s attention changed.

‘Ten minutes till the clock rings,’ the bartender said. Looking at the bar he had very nearly finished clearing everything up. ‘As usual, leave your empty pints on the table, we’ll clean up on the morrow.’

The pub filled with the sound of swishing liquid as everyone quickly drank the remainder of their drinks. Alfred and his mates quickly finished theirs, grabbed their coats and moved towards the door.

‘The lad they followed him down an alley,’ Alfred whispered, quietly nudging his mates. ‘I got to the Westminster bridge and saw ‘im blocked by a locked gate. Three blues ‘ad ‘im cornered the unlucky bugger. Just before I lost sight of ‘im this mist just rolled in and she was there standing at the gate. Pale as the moon. Didn’t see ‘er face but she probably would ‘ave saved that lad if the stories are true,’ he finished quickly looking around at the people around him.

‘I still think you’re faffing around, but I ‘ave ‘eard them stories about ‘er saving people from the blues,’ John replied. George quietly nodded.

Dong... dong... dong... dong... dong... dong... dong... dong... dong...

The door slammed open as everyone quickly filed out of the pub.

Hubert Evans heard heavy footsteps behind him. He picked up his pace and clutched the bag against his chest. He glanced back as he rounded the corner onto Parliament Street. A group of three men in dark blue were walking towards him. As his sight got blocked by the Old War Office building he heard the men break into a jog. *Bloody bluebottles*. He gazed across the empty street as he continued his brisk pace. A large clock tower loomed in the distance. Every single door was shut. No place would let him in this late. *Shit. Shit. Where does he hide?*

The footsteps grew louder and came to an abrupt stop. He glanced back. The men were looking around having reached the street. They spotted him.

‘Go after him! I’ll inform the rest’ shouted the last man, and he turned to dash back down the street.

The other two drew out truncheons and started moving towards Hubert. *Shit. Shit.* He turned forward and increased his pace. The footsteps behind increased in response. He noticed an alley branching off to the side ahead of him. He could sidestep into it. He glanced back. The two men had closed the distance. Their cold eyes keeping him in sight. *Shit. Shit. They’ll see him if he tries to slip away into there.*

As he passed the alley he glanced into it. A group of bluebottles were scurrying around at the end of the street. *Bloody hell... that’s their base.* Just before his sight was cut off he saw a group disappear into to the adjacent street. *What can he do? They’re boxing me off.* He increased his pace trying to get as much distance as he could. The two following him sped up once again; still content in just following him. As he continued to scan for a place to hide, he spotted the Cenotaph, the war memorial in the centre of the road. He quickly rushed and hid behind it.

“That’s not going to help you mate,” one of the men mocked. Their footsteps closed in.

“Let us take that off you. It doesn’t belong to you,” the other man said. Clap. Clap. Clap. Hubert glanced around the memorial. One of the men was beating his truncheon against his palm. Clap. Clap. Clap.

He turned in hopes of somehow making a getaway. ‘There’s nowhere you can go, drummer.’

Three men appeared at the end of the street. *Bugger. Where can he go now?* The men fanned across the street. He noticed a signpost pointing to the left. Derby Gate. He started to walk towards it. That was the only way he could go now.

Dong... dong... dong... dong... dong...

“No! Quick after him.” He heard a scuffling sound followed by regular thudding. He glanced back and bolted. They were now running after him.

Dong... dong... dong... dong... He glanced at the large clock tower looming over the street. As the last dong of the clock faded the street exploded with activity. Doors burst open and people flooded out of the different establishments. He slowed to a brisk walk as the large volume of people filled the gap between him and the bluebottles. He quickly slipped past the crowd into Derby Gate. He hid at the archway of No.1 Derby Gate and surveyed the people going past on Parliament Street. Then two bluebottles appeared. After a quick glance down where he was hidden, they continued.

He let out a heavy sigh of relief and leant against the side of the archway. The crowd was slowly dispersing as everyone went home for the night. He took a quick glance back at Parliament Street and headed further down into Derby Gate. If he could get across the Thames river he'd be free of these bastards that were stalking him. Their territory ended at the bridge. As he approached the intersection gate at Canon Row he glimpsed the shadow of a figure behind the gate. He quickly turned right into Canon Row. He wasn't taking a risk, not when he was so close. He kept his head down and walked at a slow pace towards the end of Canon Row. He heard footsteps behind him. He turned to the edge of the alley and knelt. He fumbled with his laces and took a quick glance back. *Bloody Hell, do they never give up?* Three bluebottles were conversing. One of them looked down towards him and pointed.

Hubert got up and bolted. He was close enough to the bridge now. He heard the three men give chase. Thud. Thud. Thud. Wood against stone. He glanced back. Two of the men had truncheons out; one of them hitting the wall as he... slowed down. *What?*

Maybe the buggers were giving up? He turned around and came to face the end of his life. A bloody gate. He ran up to it. Grabbed the iron bars and shook. He pushed. Pulled. Shoved. Thud. Thud. Thud. It grew closer. He looked up. There was no way over the gate. The clock tower, Big Ben loomed over him. He saw the beginning of Westminster bridge to the right. He was so close.

“Nowhere to go now drummer,” the foremost bluebottle said as he slowly drew closer.

The two holding truncheons flanked the sides of the alley. The third one slowly approached down the middle. He drew out a growler and pointed it at him.

“Let us have it then, and nobody needs to get hurt,” he said as he stopped about a dozen or so metres away from him.

“It’s mine. You got nothing on me,” Hubert replied clutching the bag tightly.

“I ain’t asking Mr Evans. We’ve had our eyes on you for a tad now. Now stop fanning around and bung over the bag, or one of me lads will force it off ya,” the man said as he cocked his growler.

Hubert, slowly reached into the inside pocket of his coat, using the bag to hide what he was doing. His fingers clasped around the hilt of his own growler. He slowly cocked it. Thwack. One of the men hit his truncheon against the wall and started approaching.

“I think we’ve given ‘im enough time Mr Irons. Time for you to take a kip.”

Bloody hell, how’d it come to this? Hubert withdrew the growler as fast as he could. BANG. Mr Irons fired. The flash of gunpowder exploding expanded from the gun slowly. A bat screeched in the distance. The sound faded into silence. The bullet slowly sped out of the barrel towards him creating a spiral of white smoke. Ba dum. Ba

dum. Ba dum. *Why hasn't he been shot? Why is it so slow? Why can't he move? Why is it so quiet?* As he stared at his death approach painstakingly slowly; the white smoke expanded. Faster than the bullet, the smoke flooded into every space. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. His heart pounded, breaking the silence.

Hubert gazed through the fog at each of his assailants. Like him, they were frozen in this moment of his death. *Is this what they mean by time stands still just before you die?* Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. He felt something run down his right jawline; a chill ran down his spine. Something else moved along his left waist. Unable to move his head, he looked as far down as possible. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. An ashen hand was running along his waist up towards his chest; caressing him as a lover would. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. The hand circled around his waist. Another hand gently grabbed his shoulder and a woman circled around from behind to face him. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum.

Pure white. Hair so white, he couldn't tell where it ended and where the smoke started. Her skin was ashen. She wore an ivory slip that flowed in a non-existent wind. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. She was strikingly beautiful. Hubert couldn't avert his gaze even if he wanted to. Her silver iris shone brightly against her black sclera. She cradled his face in her palm. He felt as if she was gazing into him. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. She saw something more. He saw nothing. Her face was a porcelain mask. She retracted her palm and placed her index finger just under the corner of his left eye. Her finger glided down to his chin; leaving a chill where she touched. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum.

She turned around and moved towards the first assailant. His eyes bulged as she glided closer. *Could she be saving him?* As she drew closer she lifted her arm, index finger pointing at the assailant's chest. Her finger touched the centre of the man's chest and traced a cross. Going up to his jawline and a final swipe across the throat. As she

finished the stroke, the fog spiralled around her. The spiral arched towards the other truncheon wielder and dispersed. She stood there with her finger at the centre of his chest. The eyes of the bluebottles never left her. Bloodshot, bulging they stared on helplessly stuck in the fog.

Once again, she traced the cross on the body. With a gentle flick of her hand as she finishes and turns to face Hubert. Her eyes were brimming. A viscous red drop of tear fell, leaving a streak on her porcelain face. The fog spun with her at the epicentre. It seemed to spin into her silky hair.

Hubert slowly looked down as he felt something wet hit his arm. He saw red. Blood was dripping down from his face. Whoosh. He looked up to see a bat fly overhead. He looked back at the three bluebottles and the mysterious woman. The fog was quickly dissipating as it spun into her. A sudden dizziness beset him, and he stumbled down to one knee. BANG. The bullet smashed into the gate where his head had been a second ago.

“Irons! RUN FO... *gurgle*”

“It’s the Witch. The fuc... *gurgle*!”

Blood frothed out of their mouths as they turned and yelled. A dark wetness spread across their chest. Blood spurted as their throats were split open. In unison, both of them reached in a futile attempt to staunch the bleeding. They fell to their knees gazing down as their life drained out.

The fog was now violently spinning around Hubert’s would-be saviour. As the fog disappeared around Irons he turned and bolted. In response, the witch seemed to fly into the air.

“Fuck off. Leave me alone witch,” he screamed as he glanced back.

The fog spun around her, and as before arched towards the lone bluebottle. Hubert stared groggily as the fog spun into a point and pierced through the chest of the fleeing Irons. He collapsed to the ground. The fog exploded and as it dispersed the witch appeared kneeling, hand on the head of the body. She slowly stood up, hand still clasped around the head. With a gush of blood, the head separated from the rest of the body.

Blink. Her porcelain face appeared mere inches from his. Streams of blood poured down from her eyes. She raised her empty hand and cradled his bloody cheek. Her face blurred as he continued to gaze into her silver eyes.

“Hubert! Hubert!” a voice came from a distance.

He opened his eyes, his sight blurred from being shaken. A woman was kneeling on the ground in front of him. He found himself lying on the ground at the gate of Canon Row.

“What ‘appened to you? You’re a bloody mess,” the woman asked.

“The pale witch saved me from the bluebottles,” Hubert replied. “I’m glad you found me Charlotte.”

“Damn right you better be. I only came looking because you hadn’t returned,” she said, quickly glancing behind her. “You bloody well know, only bluebottles stay out this late.”

“I know, I know. I was gutted when Ben rang nine before I got to the bridge,” he unsteadily stood up, as Charlotte supported him. “But it was bloody spawny timin’ since everyone burst on to the street to get ‘ome.”

“Ain’t seem like it. You’re a bloody mess. Let’s go before them bluebottles show,” she tugged on his arm to make him move.

He took one step, and then another. Satisfied he could walk on his own, he looked around.

“Where're the bodies?”

“What bodies? You were alone when I got ‘ere.”

“I told you... the witch saved me from the blue bastards. They were looking to take me hard work,” he patted the bag still clutched tightly to his chest. “They nearly shot me, when she appeared. She got ‘em good.”

“Well, I ain’t miffed these bodies ain’t here. We don’t need any more attention.”

The pair slowly and quietly made their way away from the alley.

Constable Shaun Wilson stared at the door with the cross. He lifted his hand and motioned to knock on the door. He stopped. He wasn’t entitled to be here until the investigation had finished, but he felt as if he had to. *She deserved to know; she always treated him like a second son.* Whoosh. The sound startled him, and his raised fist knocked on the door. *Stupid Bat.* He knocked properly on the door and waited for an answer. He turned around and gazed at the neighbourhood. It looked so different in the dark. There was not a single soul to be seen, the rustling of the trees, occasionally interrupted by the passing bat.

He turned to the sound of the door opening. A woman in a nightgown, well into her forties, stood at the door rubbing her eyes.

“Ello, Mrs Irons. I’m sorry for coming so late,” he said, slowly removing his helmet and lowering it against his chest.

“I ‘aven’t seen you in ages Shaun. You two were inseparable when you were kids. Why ar...” she paused. Her eyes seemed to shimmer.

She knows.

“I know it’s late... But I wanted to tell you sooner rather than later,” he said lowering his gaze to her feet. Droplets started appearing on the ground. He looked up to see a stream of tears.

“He’s... gone?” she whispered.

Shaun just nodded. She gazed past him. The bats stopped flying around. The wind stopped as if the world was mourning with her. He shivered as a chill crept up his neck. He rubbed his arms. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. *Was that his heart beating he could hear?*

“No... Shaun. She’s here” Mrs Irons whispered. The colour drained from her face and she fell to her knees. The thudding noise of her landing and then back to silence. She continued to stare past him.

Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. Slowly, he turned around, following her gaze. The neighbourhood was covered in a dense fog. A woman with pure white hair stood behind him, staring at him. *Jesus Christ. when did she get there?* It took all he had to stop himself from jumping back. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum.

“Who are you?” he whispered.

Her face, smooth as porcelain just stared back at him.

Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. He heard Mrs Irons slowly get back on her feet.

She continued to stare at him. Her silver iris in a sea of black stared into him. His eyes started to ache from staring back at her. He didn’t want to blink. Not until she did. Her right arm slowly glided up to his chest. Ba dum. The gentlest of touch of her index finger, but a chill spread from the touch. Ba dum. He shivered. Her finger started gliding up across his chest, leaving a trail of numbness. Ba dum.

Slam. He jumped, and his eyes shut at the sudden noise. Click. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. Ba dum. He opened his eyes, his head pounding. He found himself alone in front of the door. He stared into the clear night sky. *What the hell is this witch?* Never had he been more scared of carrying his badge of office.