



Bubbling Over

Because I was following the careers of several naval officers of the Nelsonian epoch I picked a book from the library by author's title and tucked it alongside others I had selected under my arm. On looking at the first page, I released a prayer of profound gratefulness. I realised at once that I had discovered THE OPENING SENTENCE. Any book beginning like this is assured of a vast reading public and of instantaneous success and permanent place on the best seller's list - at least a fortnight at that frigid height.

The sentence? Oh, quite a simple thing, really. Like this: "As my fist took Willis hard on the point of the jaw, knocking him backwards on to a pile of silver bags, I was conscious only of the most complete satisfaction."

Doesn't your mind leap at the idea?

It was only later that the greater implications of this polished gem of a sentence came to me. Was this the first crack in the great conspiracy? The first shot in the campaign aimed at the utter wreck of the hegemony built up in the Emerald Isle? (Or parts thereof.) Were the anti-Willisites actually daring to creep from their bolt-holes into the naked blaze of cold daylight?

Such questions, of course, occurred later. In the first flush of enthusiasm the opening sentence of the book assumed something of a peppermint flavour, at once biting and refreshing.

Note the subtle inclusion of silver, always the traditional mode of traversing a gypsy's palm. Is it necessary not only to traverse the Irish Sea but also to cross someone's palm with silver in order to take a crack at Willis?

There is no reticence as to the feelings to be experienced at this cumulative point of emotion. 'The most complete satisfaction.'

Nothing, not even seeing Harris walking down the aisle having been firmly hooked by a creation in white, could have quite the same savour. Not even seeing a Vincent Clarke fanzine with inky finger marks - (I have, you know. Now perhaps you'll believe that one about the elephants and the turtle.) It would seem from this insidious propaganda that once you have

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indulged - once you have actually felt the sting of Walter's bristles against your knuckles - then you are a lost soul. It becomes a sort of drug, a frantic craving that must be satisfied, a home and career-wrecking monster.

Before this, though, we can sense an idyllic period, where Walter behaves like one of his tennis balls. Perhaps James and Bob stand quietly to one side, smiling reflectively, and taking in the silver with the refined air of a half-pay officer accepting a drink, whilst Walter picks himself doggedly off the ground ready for the next eager customer who is just rolling up his right sleeve.... And there is the hasty beat of an aeroplane as Harris comes over from Rainham for his share of the take. There is in all this something of the mystery and exaltation of a pipe dream, of the long lost mythos from over the serrated dawn of the world, from the great sagas sung by immortal ballading bards down the booming corridors of time.

The blow must be to the point of the jaw - sharp and exact, with no hesitation, and no consultation with conscience as to the results. Strike now, whilst the silver is still warm in their hands, all forty pieces. Take this opportunity of striking Willis, he will always come back for more, he's built that way. Let the subtle evil of the habit permeate your veins and brain, sending orders to your arm muscles - strike! Willis awaits, calmly.

The rather esoteric question of bags is, I venture to suggest, somewhat outside the scope of this sober discussion. We are all aware of the Willis grey flannels - you know, the pair he slept in at Los Angeles station, the pair he slept in at Manchester - oh! There is the faintest tingle of silver bells on lissom ankles of dancing girls...

After my Red Rag at Harris department in Steam 2. we were pleased to see Chuck's fanepic - more anent which later - but it does clear the way for me to use my opening line for the account of our trip which now I shall never write. I would have started in advertese style - I TALKED WITH GHOD - YES I DID, REALLY AND TRULY. And then have gone on to a short 75,000 wd treatise on the trip and the fact that Walter is more than a wee-bit leary (Suspicious, cautious chokker etc) of all this ghod business - he didn't start it, and already some sparrow-brained fen think he's swollen-headed, stuck up and anything else neurotically inferiority-complexed gazebos can think up. Enough - back to the book. Oh, yes, a fine, free, wonderful dream. The book is "Dark Hazard" by Showell Styles, pub by Selwyn and Blount at a price which my public library wot of. At one point the hero is chasing the villain's Bentley in a small Morris, his girl friend is bandaging his badly gashed arm and he is eating sandwiches for breakfast, the first food for some time. I still recommend it, it's a rattlin' good yarn.

What has this to do with Nelson's contemporaries? Well, Styles writes other stuff, too, it seems.

St. John's