

Hitlergeist

Des Flynn

THE WORLD OF my childhood was a world of brightness, butterflies and sunshine. It was also a world of darkness, shadows, and shades in which the fitful moon played tricks on minds crammed with the tales of night.

Then came electricity, imagination's worst enemy, and, to me, at any rate, a mixed blessing. Gone were the days when the double-burner sent a few weak shafts of light as far as the window-sill outside. When you went beyond the window-sill you entered a world of total darkness. Inside, around the open fire, a few elderly ramblers, grinding away on crooked pipes, and whispering of ghosts seen in the dead of night. Me was ten feet tall and stomped along with a measured step, and his head bent low ... Joe boned me by the arm and he says to me - and it wasn't like Joe's voice, at all, at all, 'can you see what I see?'

Many of the stories centred around a stretch of road at Anne Quinn's. Anne was dead maybe ten years at the time and her old house, right along the road, was lying there empty. Old and twisted ash trees grew on either side of the road and in around the forlorn cabin. At night you could hear the branches squeaking and whining—garbled messages from the world of wee folk and prowling spirits. Sure that house was

only waiting to be haunted!

There were some in our house not that keen on running errands after nightfall. I loved going on messages, day or night, and never let-on that my night runs were done with a pounding heart. Nine out of ten messages took me past Anne Quinn's and, in my frantic sprint along that infamous stretch, not only did my heart pound but every organ in my body held hands and swayed in a turbulent *Paul Jones*. The stretch extended from 200 odd yards from *Micky's Stile* to *Kelly's haggard*, but the Micky's Stile end-of-it had remained consistently quiet—no sightings for years.

Directly outside Anne's house was the area of most ghostly traffic, and Kelly's bridge beside the haggard was a close second. In daylight, outside Anne's old house, there was no outward sign of any night activity but, at Kelly's bridge it was a different story. A sizeable hole or gap in the hedge on the upper side of the road was clear evidence that some 'body' had passed through. All who had made a sighting noted that the lady in white came from above the road, tiptoed across the road and went through the hedge on the lower side. And, sure enough, below the road in a hedge, which was otherwise compact and dense, an enormous gap was there to be seen. Be

Gabs, somebody had passed through there, and no doubt!

Alone on the road. My guess is that it was about nine o'clock on a November night. Giant banks of black cloud were shunting across the sky, exposing and concealing the moon in a sinister game meant to terrorise young boys. Shadows of roadside trees fell across the road - lurking places for monsters. Then, instantly all was darkness and, in the silence, the trees whispered of dread visions - not fit for the eyes of man. Blackbirds and night vermin flitted noisily through dried leaves - they never did it when the moon was out - and you waited for something, God only knows what, to dart at you from under the roadside hedge. Away in the distance a lone dog barked to keep himself company - you recognised the 'company' bark, not a rapid one-two-three-four-five-six. No, this was a one, one-two-three-stop, one one-two--three, stop. 'This earth' he was telling the moon 'is a lonesome spot for the likes of me'. I was on my way home from a neighbour's house where I had delivered some message. It was my habit to walk at a good lively pace until I came to Micky's stile.

I would then put my forefingers in my ears, put my head down and run as fast as my legs would carry me until I got past Anne's house and

Kelly's bridge. On this occasion I was approaching Micky's stile and getting ready for the sprint. Suddenly, from a silent valley below the road, the strangest squeaking, squealing, sounds. I knew all night sounds and this was not one of them. I straightaway, concluded that a warning was being given to me. This was to be my night for a close-up view of the tall, stooped man or the lady in white. I tell you the fingers went into the ears fast, and away I sprinted.

I passed Anne Quinn's. Nothing. Seconds later, I passed the bridge near the haggard. Nothing. The worst was over. I relaxed, unplugged my ears and was about to slow down when I heard the squeal warning again, and, if anything, I grew more frantic and ran faster. I could have run on as far as our own gate. I thought it was safer, however, to get off the road as fast as I could. I therefore, decided, as I ran along, 'I will escape up Kelly's lane and cross over the field to our own house?', I

veered right, at full speed, to enter the lane and, suddenly, there was an eruption of sight and sounds which has lived with me to this day. From a spot only two yards away, a reddish, brownish, whitish object with a tail and no face, exploded upwards off the ground three or four feet into the air and a sound, best described as a gawlder-yelp, shattered the silence of the November night. I stuck to the ground. My first ghost.

It took about five seconds for me to realise what had happened. Joe Kelly's over-grown and colourful mongrel, 'Hitler', had followed him to the road. Joe went ceilidhing and Hitler decided to lie down and await his master's return. He fell sound asleep and I was only feet from him and approaching fast when he woke up. I stooped and found a fistful of stones (no need to search for stones on the roads, then,) I could hear 'Hitler' scrambling through the bars of the gate, twenty yards away and I can still see the splanks (from my flying stones) lighting-up the

laneway behind him as he yelped his way to safety. I imagine he must have gernered to himself - 'What the hell is coming over (oops! That was a near one) this country, that a body can't nod off without being trampled on by stone-throwing scoundrels, running the roads when they should be at home in their beds!'

Next day, Joe was over. Never a man for drab tittle-tattle stuff, he was pleased to have something startling for my father - and about a good neighbour of our own. 'Oh God' he's an outrageous man, John, he bought a wee pig in the town yesterday, hit the 'slated row' on his way home and stayed too long 'on the high stool' and, you know, John, he had to come up through the fields last night, at all hours, with the pig in the bag - bringing in the country squealing'.

I'm thinking there's the odd ghost, surely, - if a body could come in with them!



ROLL OF HONOUR AWARD

Frank Lynch, President Irish League of Credit Unions making a presentation on behalf of Ballinamore Credit Union Ltd to P J Martin in recognition of his receiving the Roll of Honour Award from the Irish League of Credit Unions.