

I determined now to creep up on the Police Station in Market-street. How else, I reasoned with myself, was I to find out whether I was still the fugitive that I imagined myself to be? It was, as you will perhaps concur, a reckless undertaking; there may even be some who take the view that my determination floated high upon the strong waters taken at the Caledonian Hotel. I can no longer say who might be right in this matter. Whatever the cause of my decision, I hastened along Argyle-street, with the fog streaming around me, keeping close to the houses and listening for any foot-fall or voice. There was not a soul on the street that night. Holding my lantern before me, I passed the Bank-house, house of infamy that it was, crossed the road to avoid the lights of the Argyle Hotel, and finally reached the junction with Mill-street.

Those of you who have until now been advising me against my course of action will be pleased to discover that I never reached the Police Station. My skills at avoiding detection under the very nose of the Law were not put to the test. For, having proceeded directly up Mill-street as far as the junction with Market-street, I heard the sound of a horse trotting along the road. My nerves still in turmoil after my meeting with the graveyard cat, I ran backwards with exaggerated rapidity – ‘ran’, note you, not simply ‘stepped’ – in order to conceal myself. In so doing, I fell against a rock that lay at the edge of the road and tumbled sideways to the ground.

What happened next was at the time beyond my comprehension, but I suppose it was like this: in falling, the lantern fell beside me and was dashed open upon the stony ground. The oil therein sprayed out upon me and then ignited; thus touching small fires about my person, mostly upon my back and sleeves. I noticed this conflagration straightway and sprang up in a panic, clutching the broken lantern. As I dashed forward, in my vain attempt to escape the consuming fires, I ran full tilt into the horse which was pulling a small trap with an old man asleep in its seat. To avoid an injurious collision, I leaped upwards and managed to fall quite upon the sleeping figure who gently slid away straight on to the ground (which accident, as I found out later, did him no harm at all, occasioning only a mild surprise).

As I fell upon the seat, the horse neighed in fright and began to gallop down the hill towards the sea. All aflame as I was, I managed to pull myself upright and finally lay hold of the reins; as we came to the top of the sharp incline which led precipitately into the sea, I managed to persuade the horse to cut around to the right into Argyle-street; which we did with considerable noise and (as I now understand it) a deal of senseless bellowing from myself. As luck would have it, a group of men was just then emerging from the Hotel: they watched stupefied as I drove down upon them from out of the fog, a dark figure blazing now quite fiercely, babbling in tongues. We rattled furiously down the length of the street. The shouts of the group at the Hotel attracted others as we proceeded. When we reached the cross-roads in front of the Caledonian, I could feel the heat now coming through the coat and decided that the sea was probably the better option after all. We veered once more, this time to

the left, before the eyes of all the people in the Hotel, some of whom peered from the windows, others spilling out into the street as we thundered past.

My horse and I cracked down the final hill, rattled on to the wooden pier at which Mr Macbrayne's boats tie up, and headed into the unknown. The horse and I saw the end of the quay emerge from the fog at precisely the same moment; for my part, I believe I let out a shout of horror, the horse – with good animal sense - stopped short; with the logical result that I was propelled rapidly over its head and into the lapping fog. Indeed, this moment and the next few constituted a graphic demonstration of the laws of physics – in the first place, of the Newton's Second Law; in the second place, the arc described by falling bodies with a forward motion; and in the third, of the exclusive properties of water and fire. For I was no sooner in the air than under the water where the flames were extinguished.