

# MARTHA GRIMES

## SEND BY GRAVES

A Mystery in Poetry Form

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# *Send Bygraves*

MARTHA GRIMES

ILLUSTRATED BY

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SCRIBNER

*New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi*

To Katherine Harris Grimes

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*wherever you are,  
send Bygraves*

# *The Beginning*

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## AT THE MANOR HOUSE (I)

He was there again today. End of lane.  
Knee-deep in leaves, just by that stand of ash.  
The same Burberry, furled umbrella, gun  
Mirroring light. I have seen him reflected in  
Shop windows, over my shoulder—commonplace,  
Anonymous on park benches or under  
Lampposts at the ends of passageways.  
He never leaves, except for a meal or a wash.  
After forty years, I have almost ceased to wonder:  
Who is supplying the cash?

At first I thought (who wouldn't?) it was the folks  
Wanting me out of the way. I lay in bed  
Sweating it out at night with the fangs and cloaks  
They called *just shadows*. No one ever comes clean  
About murder or sex. They can leave you there for dead,  
Tied up in an attic, or down in some ravine.

“Mum, someone’s trying to kill me.” “Don’t be absurd,  
Dear,” she’d say, washing the blood from the basin.  
“If we can’t have a butler, how could we ever afford  
To hire an assassin?”

And his turning up was not mere accident  
In family snaps of hatchet-faced old hats,  
All looking ghastly gray and prison-bent;  
Nor there, in tiers of black-robed graduates,  
Does he seem out of place, funereally  
Indistinguishable from the rest.  
He joined our summer outings by the sea,  
The unidentified and unknown guest;  
Wedding days, church socials, birthdays—he  
Attended all, unasked.

I have seen him through the windows of stopped trains  
In village stations, hamlets, market towns,  
Cathedral cities, ends of country lanes  
Like this one, where the autumn’s rolling down

The hillside, and it won't be very long  
~~Before the leaves are stacked up window-level.~~  
Has something in his master plan gone wrong?  
Or is the whole idea wearing thin?  
Has death become, for both of us, less novel?  
And should I ask him in?

But, no. It has to end with the police,  
Getting the neighbors out of bed to make  
Inquiries: *Had she many enemies?*  
*Ever run foul of the law? What was she last seen wearing?*  
They will stand in the rain with torches, they will rake  
Over the gravel, measure a footprint, scrape  
Blood from the sill, file a nail paring  
In a paper cup. End up dragging the lake.  
It will be so deadly boring.

But I won't be there to see.  
Neither will he.



## AT THE C.I.D.

## I

“Send Bygraves!” barked the Chief Inspector.  
The walls went ghostlier white, the chairs  
Jumped. And from the portrait the eyes of the Queen  
Stared.

The Superintendent paled. “*Bygraves?*  
Man, are you daft? You know his reputation!  
Scares witnesses. Hides evidence. Plants clues.”

“That’s as may be. But no one else can solve  
This queer affair in Little Puddley, Surrey.  
The lady at the manor found a body—”  
“What’s queer in that? We’re always finding bodies.  
Bygraves finds bodies no one knew were missing.  
Last year: that spot of bother on Blackheath—  
Bygraves kept finding bodies where no bodies  
Had been reported!”

“Still, he got his man!  
Some lunatic, some Bedlamite escaped . . .  
I think. Well, that’s who Bygraves *said* it was.  
Damn all! I can’t keep tabs on all of London!  
But this body in Little Puddley’s different:  
No one knows who it is. It comes and goes  
Like old shells that the sea keeps tossing up  
And dragging back . . . ”

The Superintendent yelled:  
“I’m not in the mood, old boy, for metaphysics,  
Or poetry. We deal in facts, man, facts!



You're round the twist; you need your summer hols.  
A week in Bournemouth, Brighton, somewhere. Now,  
Get down to Little Puddley straightaway—"

"Not I!" The C.I. yelled. "Send Bygraves! Dolt!  
Find Bygraves!"

Sergeant Dolt, who had been sleeping  
Hard by the door, snapped to attention. "Bygraves?  
I'd get 'im sir, yes . . . only, wot's 'e look like?"

"What does he *look* like? What do you mean, you nit?"

"Now now, sir, there's no need to be abusive."  
Dolt clattered up from his chair. "I never seen 'im.  
'Ave you, then?"

"Sergeant, Bygraves has been round here  
Longer than you or me." The Chief Inspector  
Reddened, wondered too *what did he look like?*  
"Oh dash it all! Give me the phone! Bygraves!"  
He shouted down the blower. *Drat the man!*  
"Bygraves: I know you're there." No answer. "Bygraves!  
I'm ordering you straight to Little Puddley  
In Surrey." Silence. "Someone's found a body.  
Bygraves?" Click. The hum of disconnection.

## II

Looking towards Greenwich,  
Towards that great confluence of sky and river,  
Thames and Tower,

On misty mornings when Westminster rises  
In this pearl-gray hour;

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Had you been strolling on the Embankment then,  
You would not have looked up towards Scotland Yard,  
Its windows silvering in the sun,  
And thought: *Murder is abroad.*  
No, you would not have known  
The blind man coming towards you in these waves  
Of Londoners, his white stick tapping  
The ground like a divining rod, is looking  
Over his shoulder at you.

Was it Bygraves?



LODGINGS

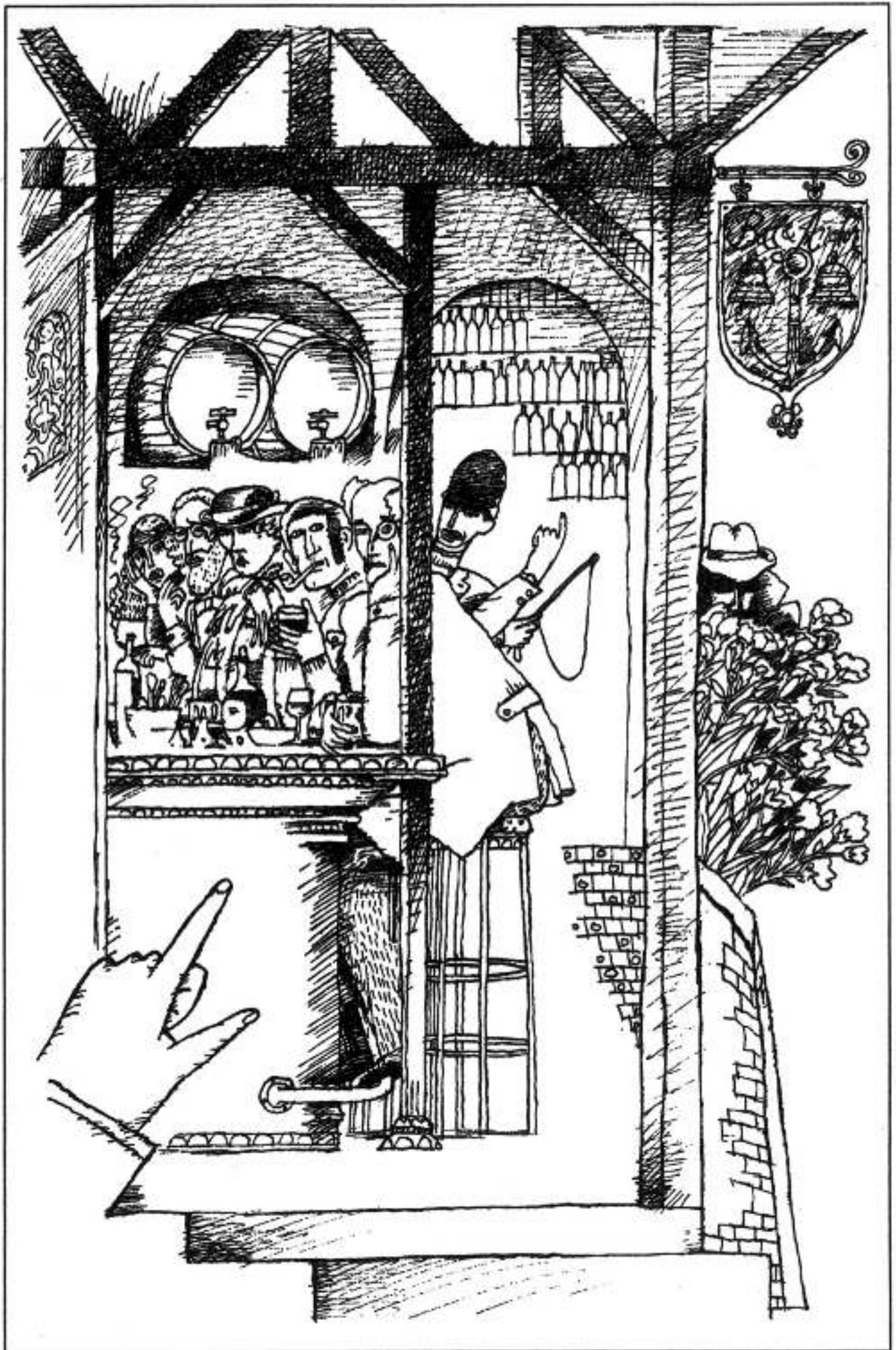
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These are Bygraves' rooms.  
Do not touch a thing.  
Stuff out of his pockets—  
Notebook, change, key ring.  
Careful. If he comes  
Back and finds us at it . . .  
Do not think about it.  
Do not touch a thing.

Notice how the floor  
Tilts. And notice there  
Where the wallpaper  
Seems to conceal a door.  
Set that table straight;  
Leave those chairs around it.  
Fool! That paperweight—  
Put it where you found it.

See your face dissolving  
In his wardrobe mirror,  
Like a face in water;  
See its surface moving.  
Do not touch the glass!  
Do not be alarmed.  
I have heard that others  
Have escaped unharmed.

Stay back from those windows!  
Wipe that knob you touched!  
Cling to walls and shadows.  
Fool! Put out that match!  
What? You thought you heard  
A key turn in the lock?  
Quiet. Not a word.  
Quick. Out the back.



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THE REGULARS AT THE *BELL AND ANCHOR*, LITTLE PUDDLEY, SURREY

We're a decent lot. We cause no trouble.  
(That spot of bother with the poisoned dogs  
At Smythe-Monterieff's? We'd nothing to do with that!)  
You standing, Sergeant? Ah, thank you, I'll have a Double  
Diamond. Jameson on the side. That fog's  
Thick as pea soup ihnit? I'll tell you flat:  
We don't much like the Yard nosing about  
In Little Puddley. Keep ourselves to ourselves,  
We do. We've nothing to hide. We're a decent lot.

We don't know—right, mates?—nothing about no murder.  
We come to the Bell for a friendly pint and a game—  
Shove-penny, a bit of darts, it's all the same.  
Only listen: there's hugger-mugger up at that manor.  
Ain't that right, Trev? Trevor was gardener  
For thirty years. But now the help won't stay.  
There's Fiona Rugg was cook there all these years;  
The one-eyed chauffeur, he quit too; and Scroggs,  
Scullery girl, they say she left in tears.

We've heard of this chap, Bygraves. There's a strange one.  
Dihn't he find them bodies on Blackheath?  
No one knew who they was nor where they came from?  
You'd think he'd spun them up out of thin air.  
You standing again? Yes, thanks; I'll have a Guinness.  
I'll tell you straight, it fair gives me the creeps  
To think of fog out there and Bygraves in it.  
Look there! Whose face was that against the window?  
Another round, Mrs. Peach! This bloody fog.

I'd not go out on a night like this, no, sir.  
Except to the Bell, of course, not with this fog;  
Not with this wind, screeching across the moor.  
Blind Willie says he hears them dogs. That's blather,  
I say. But there's strange doings in Little Pud.  
Like the things that's happened to Whipsnade's ladylove  
(All artsy-tartsy she is with her foreign ways!).  
What? You ain't heard of that? Let's have another—

Mrs. Peach! Mrs. Peach! Two pints, please, of best bitter.

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Life's a mug's game, only joy for crooks and saints.

Trying to puzzle it out—now, that's where the trouble starts.

Here at the Bell and Anchor we've no complaints.

Life's a mug's game. Stick to your pints and darts.





## AT THE LODGE

Major Snively is cleaning his guns.  
Hounds sprawl like logs  
Across the hearth. Ever since  
That wretched business of the poisoned dogs  
He's had them in. Snively listens hard:  
What noise came from the yard?  
Fog like a curtain. Snively checks the locks.  
Has he forgotten anything?  
Fingerprints wiped clean; the clocks  
Turned back; the chairs upended;  
The broken statue of Eros mended.

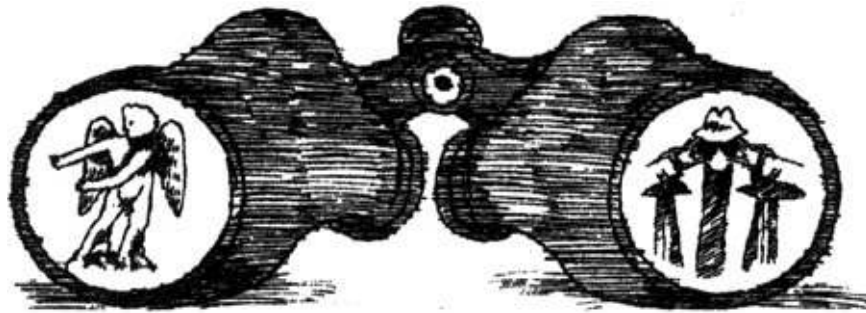
Snively remembers:  
Fear rises in him like a flight of birds.  
The shout. The sharp report.  
The hound returning with the bloodstained glove.  
Over the mantel gleam the polished swords  
Of the old regiment. His orderly  
White-turbaned and gold-toothed. Sahib. Sahib.  
Pink gin beneath the palms. The camel bells.  
Snively mops his brow; he's through.  
This is the end of him.  
His dreams are bad. Blood falls like dew.

What was that tapping on the pane?  
That scraping on the gravel?  
Snively stumbles to the window:  
The rag-and-bone man back again!  
What is he looking for?  
Snively wonders if  
The bloodstained glove is buried deep enough.  
That Scotland Yard lot's given him no peace,  
And that chap Bygraves seemed too curious.  
What noise was that? Whose footstep on the terrace?

## AT THE MANOR HOUSE (II)

Scroggs found him first by the statue of Eros,  
Impossible to mistake  
The man (the same Burberry, gun)  
Who watched me from the ends of lanes;  
And yet by morning he was gone.  
All day we searched the grounds, the woods.  
I remember the way the rooks  
Cawed in the treetops. Sinister, that.  
Rugg, the cook, took fright and packed.  
Next day we found him by the lake.

We thought it odd. The chauffeur, Quickly,  
Stumbled on him three days later  
Face down in the kitchen garden.  
Then by evening, he was gone,  
The cabbage patch completely wrecked.  
Vanished, nothing left  
Except his glove and trilby hat.  
Now Scroggs has gone, and Rugg and Quickly.  
Well, what did I expect?  
You can't keep servants after that.

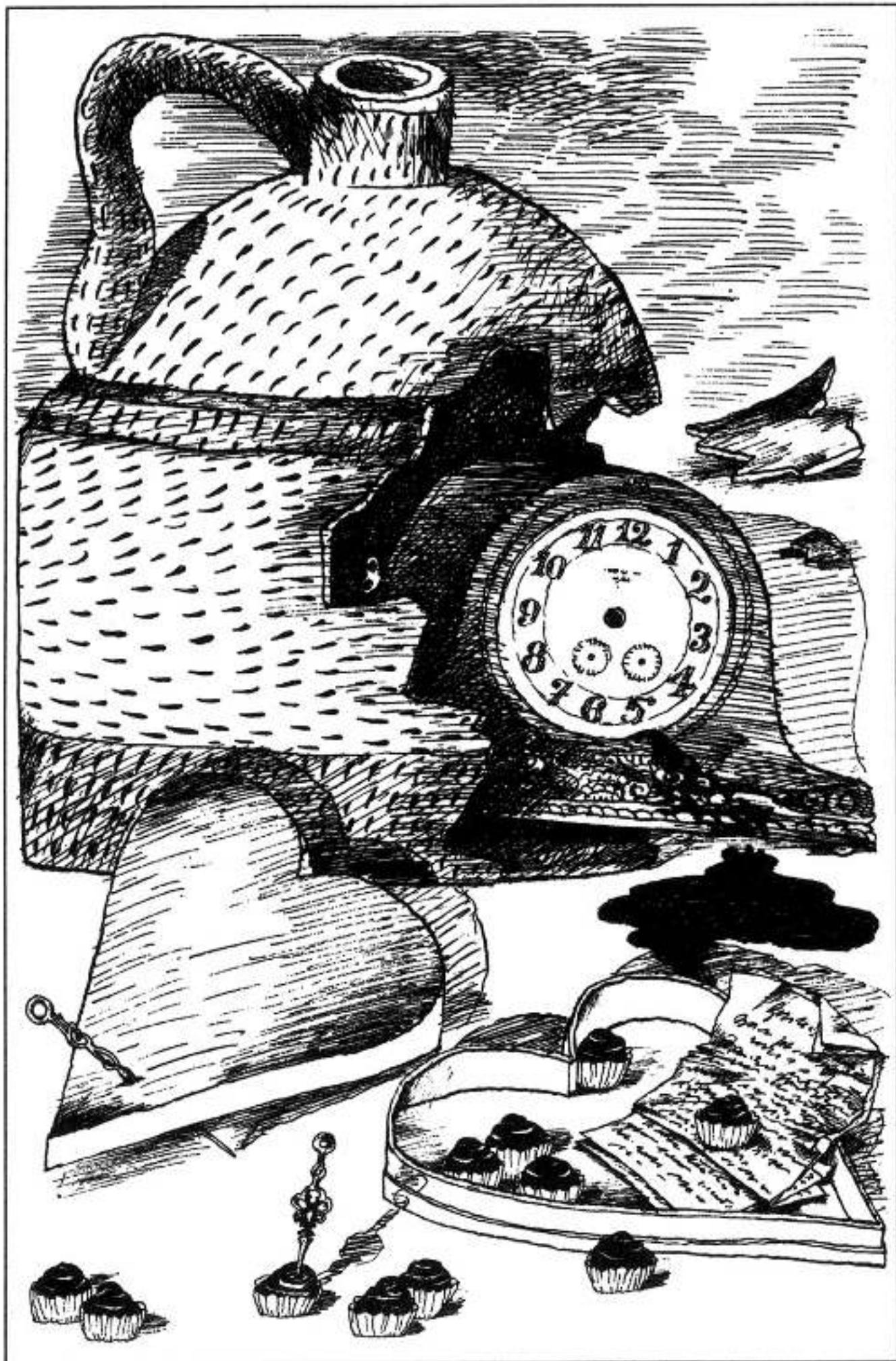


I wait alone, except for Sneed,  
Whom I distrust. All day I sweep  
Binoculars across the lawn.  
The formal garden's gone to seed.  
The locals stand about ten-deep.  
I've picked out Snively, Whipsnade, Crumb,  
Having a turn round the estate.  
What does it mean? I still can't shake  
The feeling that I'm being watched.

They've called the Yard in much too late.

The case will, in the end, be botched.

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## A NOTE FROM BYGRAVES FOUND UNDER A MALT VINEGAR JUG

The dark suspicions of a winter's night:

The missing hands of clocks.

The poisoned chocolates in the heart-shaped box.

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## ROSE COTTAGE

Miss Ivers serves the Chivers marmalade  
With trembling hands. Miss Ivers is nervous.  
Miss Ivers is in love with Dr. Whipsnade,

Engaged to Lady Madrigal du Bois,  
Pale, blonde, and vaguely foreign, whom he saved  
From being trampled underneath her horse.

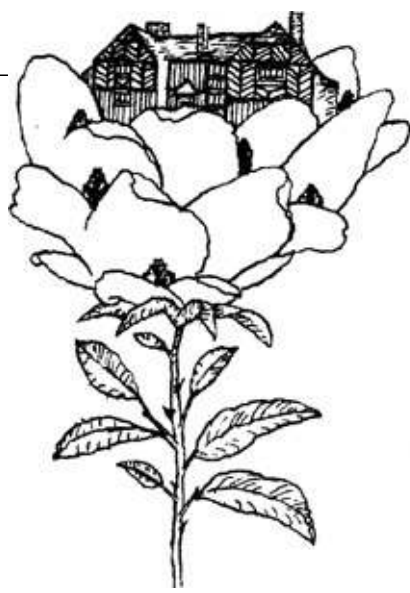
The reins were cut. But who would have believed  
The girl had enemies? There was that awful  
Episode in Creeper's Wood, that brief

Incident at Snively's with the rifle.  
A good thing Whipsnade found the arsenic  
Traces in the cocoa and the trifle.

Poor Madrigal. Thin, faded, turned to drink,  
Imagining her body lying on  
Dredcrumble Moor, or buried in a trunk.

"More marmalade, my dear? Another scone?"  
Miss Ivers asks. Her rooms are cold and poor.  
Miss Ivers has lived all her life alone

Watching the fog roll off Dredcrumble Moor,  
Thick and close and certain as old age.  
What will she do now Scotland Yard is here?



Who walked behind her from the vicarage?  
Who tampered with her lock? Who took her key?  
Who left the knifemark on the window ledge?

“More marmalade, my dear? Are you unwell?”  
“It tastes a bit bitter,” says Madrigal.



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