

The Cyclist

Peregrine Winqvist loved to cycle and his wheels were exceptional. He owned a Specialized Stumpjumper ST mountain bike which was built out of carbon fibre. He used it with great effect for trail as well as road riding and its full suspension offered him excellent comfort. Of course, the name 'Stumpjumper' was appropriate because his off-road riding was sometimes extreme and his bicycle did in fact jump many tree stumps. Peregrine was a young man in his late teens and enjoyed the springtime of his life. He was a bachelor with no family ties and an only son; his parents had died in a car crash. His inheritance gave him a decent standard of living and the freedom to indulge in his passions for travelling and cycling.

Now, Peregrine did not ride his bike everywhere; there were many occasions where it was strapped to the back of his car and he would often travel miles to various cities where he would book a hotel room for the night and unload his bicycle to explore the area. One day, he decided to go to Edinburgh, up in Scotland, but Peregrine being Peregrine chose to visit during the cold dark winter months of December. On arrival he asked the hotel manager where he could take his bike off road; somewhere nearby. He was directed across from the hotel to the Cammo Estate which was a large parkland area with derelict buildings where the public walked their dogs. The manager could not tell him if it was legal to ride a pedal cycle there but he did tell him the history of the place.

The ruins of Cammo House lie deep in a wooded area near to the river Almond in West Edinburgh. It was built in 1693 and is thought to have been the inspiration for the 'House of Shaws' in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel Kidnapped. The house had been owned by wealthy families and there had been grand balls held within its walls. It had seen horse drawn carriages arriving at its front door and well-dressed visitors disembarking to be welcomed. There had been beautiful stone stables in the woods along a gravel path and the main area around them was cobbled. There was a lake next to the house where you could row small boats and it was full of ducks and water hens with the odd visit from the resident heron who liked to fish there. In the early 1900s the house was owned by the 'Maitland Tennant' family who also enjoyed its opulence and held many social gatherings. As was the case with many estates, Cammo became too expensive to maintain and by the late 1930s the servants were let go; Mrs Maitland Tennant watched her eldest son leave home to join the Royal Air Force during World War II. He, like so many others, was killed and so she remained at Cammo with her other son, Percy. She passed away in the 1950s and was buried within the grounds near to the house and her grave was marked by a large covering of daffodils. In its last years, during the 1970s, Cammo House, its stables and its farmhouse had been neglected and allowed to fall into serious decline. After Percy passed away, the National Trust took over the ownership and the management of the estate. Soon afterwards, vandals set Cammo House on fire and it now stood in ruins. Another fire burnt the derelict farmhouse down and new apartment blocks now stood there. The manager warned him that the ghosts of Percy and his mother had often been seen walking the grounds with dogs.

Always up for an adventure, Peregrine could not wait to visit the estate and even although dusk was falling, he set off across the road. His bicycle was fitted with a clip-on front light and a red one for the rear, fitted to the saddle. He entered the estate up the main driveway to the house and made good progress in the now pitch-black condition of the night. Peregrine kept his eyes on the pathway ahead which was lit up by his

bicycle lamp and the area of coverage was good for about ten metres. Eventually the driveway reached Cammo House and in front of the building was a large and well-maintained lawn. There was a slight rustle in the trees as the wind had picked up and just at that moment, as if to add suspense to the scene, the clouds cleared away to reveal a full moon, which lit up the entire area. It lit up the ruins of the four walls which stood some 2 metres high and had mounds of grass built up around their base. The front door beams with the stonework supporting them still stood very tall with steps leading up to the entrance but the door itself was missing. Peregrine, chortled to himself, now all I need is Percy and his mother to appear with those dogs. However, inwardly, he was feeling a bit uneasy. The light intensified as the moon became clearer when suddenly to the left of the ruins, there stood the figure of a woman standing amongst the bushes. She was dressed in Victorian clothes with an all ghostly white appearance, and shrouded in a light mist. A smile crossed her face and she waved for him to come to her. Peregrine rubbed his eyes, and in that moment, she was gone.

He decided, enough was enough and right on cue, the moon disappeared behind more clouds. He set off, but in his haste, he did not return down the driveway but took the pathway towards the lake. On he went and the tree branches that were lit up by his lamp seemed like green and grey fingers stretching out towards him. They would flash by only to be replaced by more approaching him. He sped up and changed to a higher gear to gain more speed; the bike was now rocketing along and every now and then the front wheel would be thrown up of the ground as he hit an uneven part of the path. Peregrine was sweating and he could see nothing but the lit-up pathway in front, everything else was pitch black. Suddenly he felt a cold chill on his back which seemed to be travelling along with him. He felt the presence of two arms wrap themselves around his waist and a cold breath on his neck. He looked down and saw two hands gripping the front of his jacket. They were old wrinkled hands with long finger nails and they glowed white in the darkness. He tried to unseat himself and stand on the pedals but he was held back in the seat and he heard a low voice from a woman, whisper in his ear, *"faster boy, faster or we will miss the boat."*

A coldness quickly crept over his entire body. Peregrine felt her grip him even tighter and her presence seemed to blend into his back and gradually his senses began to fail him. He seemed to be slipping into an unconscious state as the intense cold penetrated his body. He managed to drop down a gear, and the bicycle started to jump and buck as he deliberately rode it over the uneven ground at the side of the pathway in an effort to dislodge his passenger. The presence was excited by it all and she shouted in his ear, *"faster boy, faster, that's it."* The pedal cycle travelled down the pathway until Peregrine finally reached the lake but instead of stopping, he carried on passed the wooden jetty at its edge and accelerated even faster on the path and through more trees. He heard her, *"foolish boy, you are a foolish boy, I don't want to go to the stables."* He suddenly braked hard and throwing the bike to the ground he ran off down the pathway and into the darkness. He glanced behind and he could see the light from the lamp as the cycle lay on its side in the gravel. The coldness was gone, she was gone and Peregrine ran on, tripping and falling as he went. His fear developed a need to keep looking back and this led him to run into tree branches as he often veered off the path. Eventually he felt cobble stones underfoot and slowed down to a walking pace. He stopped and almost bent double, he fought to regain his breath and wiped the sweat from his brow with his arm. He quickly glanced behind and in the far distance he could see his bicycle lamp still glowing in the dark on the pathway.

The moon came out and Peregrine saw the ruins of the stables at the side of the cobbled pathway. The doors were missing and the ground was uneven and overgrown with bushes and trees. The stables were impressive and were built of solid stone blocks and stood many metres high. There were stone archways, some fallen stonework and several small trees were growing out of the roof area. The moon went back in but still some light remained due to a large gap in the trees at the end of the pathway. He looked through and, in the distance, stood a huge stone tower in open fields and beyond he could see the lights of south Edinburgh. Peregrine set off along the cobbled path towards the gap in the trees to make his escape; he dared not go back for his bicycle.

Suddenly the woman stepped out from the bushes directly in front of him. He froze stock still and was unable to scream; his mouth seemed glued shut and his eyes bulged with fright. Urine escaped from him and ran down the inside of his trouser leg. She was very old and her face, her hands and her clothes were completely white. She was in a short coat and a long flowing skirt to the ground. The coat was tight at her collar over a blouse with a small bow at the front, and fitted like a tight corset with small rows of embroidered horizontal slits and buttons on both sides of her bust running down from under the bow to the waist. Around the waist of the coat were heavily embroidered matching slits and the arms of the coat were tight fitting, all the way down to heavy embroidered cuffs which had more slits and buttons. From her waist a skirt flowed very wide with a bustle at the back to give it lift and the bottom of the skirt touched the ground. On her head she was wearing a top hat with a huge broad ribbon wound around it like a band. The ribbon ends hung down over the back of the brim and over her coiffured hair which was held in bunches under the hat and on her neck. She held a short leather riding whip in her left hand and gestured for him to turn back into the woods. *"To the lake boy, the boat is waiting at the jetty."* He tried to push by her but an invisible force held him back.

Reluctantly, Peregrine turned and walked back down the path towards his bicycle and the lake. The old woman was right behind him and when he glanced at her again, he could see through her body at the stonework of the stables glinting in the moonlight. She slid up beside him and whispered in his left ear, *"you are going to be my boatman."* With the intense coldness of her mouth at the side of his head and with her right arm around his waist, he passively walked along. Once or twice he tried to break free from her grasp but to no avail; the intense cold from her presence was beginning to subdue him and he felt a strange calmness descend. Peregrine felt as if he were floating with a strange lightness afoot and gradually his mind was put at ease. He no longer feared the interaction and he began to relax in her grasp. Feeling somewhat emboldened, he raised a question, *"why is your body transparent?"* The reply was swift, *"what a load of nonsense, my body is not transparent, what gives you that idea, I'll have you know that I am a wealthy and respected person; stop messing with me and attend to your business. Employment these days is hard to find, you should be grateful for this job offer"*

They finally reached his bicycle and picking it up, he sat on the saddle. The lamp light had gone out due to a failed battery. He set off for the lake and again he felt her presence behind him with her cold arms around his waist. She whispered, *"to the lake boy and don't waste any more time."* Suddenly the pathway lit up in front of him in an eerie blue glow and he could see some forty metres ahead. Peregrine started to pedal and she prompted him to go faster by squeezing his waist. Resigned to the task, he carried on and eventually stopped at the wooden jetty. He laid down the bicycle and as she gestured, he stepped aboard a beautifully varnished brown wooden dory which was about 4 metres in length. On its stern it bore a name in bright red

paint, 'The Maitland Tennant'. He took hold of the oars, sat in the middle and proceeded to row the boat up the lake whilst she sat in the rear and smiled at him. He smiled back and became somewhat amused by the bright light from the full moon as it shone right through her body and cast no shadow on the planking of the boat. Some distance on the water was travelled, when suddenly she laughed out loud, *"do you know boy, I have taken a shine to you, I like you."* Peregrine laughed, *"it's strange, but I have taken a shine to you as well."*

The dawn came up and a young couple who were walking their dog in the woods near to the lake, came across a bicycle lying on the wooden jetty. Suddenly the woman pointed down and screamed. Under the water they could see the drowned body of Peregrine, his eyes were wide open and he was smiling.

Over the years it has often been reported by those bold enough to venture into the woods of Cammo Estate, on a cold night under a full moon; that they had seen a boat on the lake with an old woman sitting in the stern and a young man sitting in the middle facing her, and rowing the boat. He seemed to be laughing, the old woman was laughing, and the boat would disappear into a strange white mist.

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