

FORGOTTEN DARK

LOUISE WORTHINGTON

*When summer's end is nighing
And skies at evening cloud,
I muse on change and fortune,
And all the feats I rowed
When I was young and proud.'*

When Summer's End is Nighing, A.E. Housman.

Prologue

'Holly Cottage, a detached character property with an established back garden, is in a quiet location. It has great potential to modernize and improve.'

So said the property listing.

Holly Cottage, on Evergreen Lane, is over one hundred years old, and it has seen families come and go. It has known births and a few natural deaths. But, on a Thursday night one April in 2020, its walls groaned. Its leaded diamond windows shook with despair. Its latch doors rattled.

If only a fire had been lit in the grate; a smoke signal telling of the terrible thing in the south-facing garden, under the twinkling stars, prostate in the grass, twinkling with dew.

Field mice and sparrows paused by the thick holly hedge, curious at the stillness of a strange, sorry head cradled by daisies and dandelions, pillowed by blades of grass. Petals flapped open and glistened like a picture frame, while they lay amongst bruised flowers, still as a spade on buried bones. A discarded shoe echoed a memory of the pilgrim's last lucid journey.

Monocled by a slug, an eyeball looked up at the ceiling of an April sky, as though daydreaming about days to come. From the broken rope ladder of ribs, the bottom one protruded like a flag of surrender; snapped, crawling through a tight space. The curve of one eyebrow was all that remained of a once animated face, capturing in its final moment the suffering and surrender. A watch – a fine timepiece gifted on a landmark birthday – ticked on in robotic irony, sitting stubbornly on a snapped wrist bone like a fault line.

Word spread. Oh, the power of word of mouth.

Vehicles slowed for passengers to look at 'the place'. Some parked and trespassed into the garden; peeked into the leaded diamond windows; browsed through the letterbox, with no intention of buying or making an offer – viewing only to say that they'd been there, to the stigmatized property where someone had tried and failed to run away.

What a way to decrease the value of a character property with potential!

Bulldoze Holly Cottage to the ground!

But still its dark history remains.