

The Huntsman Harries the Wounded Hart

Invisible, but very potent, strings stretched back over the years to prewar Trouville and through the vaginal secrets of the wives and mistresses of some very high-level British officials. Through the use of these magical threads, the former master of Illusio Senso, Dr. Clive Izard, was able to manipulate a permanent placement at that very same Lowestoft military hospital, which once temporarily housed a naked wildman. The Wild One was no more. Absconded. Dematerialized. Dissolved. Defunct. But Doctor Izard was still here, and now, instead of the Wild One being strapped to an iron cot and sedated, it was he, Dr. Dreamstone, who was held captive, a wild swan with clipped wings, not so important as the ones in the ornamental pond by the great elm on the grounds that were branded as property of the crown, but stuck here anyway to be daily bitch-slapped by one of His Majesty's least regal assigns: Chief of Staff, Major Doctor Magnus Haig-Dunnen, M.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., D.I.C.K.. Major Doctor Magnus Haig-Dunnen was proud to say, through his constantly clenched pipe-gripping tiny brown teeth, that he was a Major first and an M.D. second, the truth of which statement was amply reflected in his case results. The rest of his staff referred to him clandestinely as D.D — Doctor Death, Damnably Daft, Dumb Dick — pick one, or invent one of your own — for Magnus Haig-Dunnen was a man no thicker in character than the initials of his various titles and degrees, but was nevertheless dedicated to the strictest military efficiency and a scalpel-sharp no-nonsense approach to what he referred to as “the engineering science of medicine.” Mostly a knife and saw man whose principle duty seemed to be filling up the dispensary's dust bins with the gurry slop of amputated appendages, the Major Doctor heaped scorn and blood on Clive Izard's “soft” approach to shell-shock victims, whom Haig-Dunnen viewed as “malingerers hoping to be molly coddled and sent home whimpering to their Mums.” Major Doctor Haig-Dunnen had never been privileged to serve under fire, but with his keen military instinct, he assured himself, and any other glazed-eyed subordinate who was forced to politely listen, that he had no doubt that he would acquit himself gallantly. His staff sincerely wished that some day soon he would have the opportunity to be so acquitted. The Major Doctor imagined that the same arrogant aplomb that accompanied him into the operating theater where he dispense with shattered or not-so shattered limbs with a cavalier flourish would avail him in the challenge of the “honor's fray” — his sanitized term for the artillery manglings, meat-tearing machine gun exchanges and poison gas attacks that characterized the incessant slaughters ordered by his kinsman, the famous Sir Douglas Haig, on the B.E.F. salient of the Western Front. In his seasonal forays from his family's London townhouse, Haig-Dunnen had schooled himself as a huntsman and butcher, bagging all manner of game on his ancestral Scottish estate and from an early age was steeled to not only withstand, but to actually enjoy the enormity of carnage. Here, at the Lowestoft Military Hospital, Haig-Dunnen was in his element, slashing and drugging Tommies with a swashbuckling zeal, while lording it over his resentful, but cowering staff. He had no idea whom Izard had tapped for this assignment or why in the name of thunder the man had chosen to serve under him, but he made it his daily business to see that this mere woman's head doctor was sufficiently “bucked up” to treat the country's cannon fodder. He bucked up Izard on a daily, almost hourly basis, and when he wasn't bucking him up he was dressing him down. For Izard, who actually knew what he was doing and, moreover, actually did cure some of these savaged boys, this bucking up and dressing

down were not only personally galling but constituted a criminal act on the Major's part as the latter sacrificed lives to satiate his own twisted need for a swaggering military decorum. However, in the Major Doctor's book, one he referred to often in conversation, Dr. Izard was "a foppish civilian imposter who indulged in sloppy displays of compassion and had no business disgracing the rank of Captain or the title of Doctor." Often, as the Chief of Staff was commanding some orderly to drag another drugged patient of Izard's to the operating theater to "have a look see inside for the cause of all this mental commotion," he would make it a point, preferably in the presence of the other doctors on staff, to announce that Izard was "an affront to the modern medical profession." Adding some philosophy to the insult by caustically asserting that "Medicine, gentlemen, should restrict itself to the mechanical intervention of skilled technicians. Its job, its only job, is to restore the efficient functioning of the human organism." This was his way of saying that Dr. Izard was full of crap and that he, the Major, had rank, and therefore, the authority, nay, the duty, to finger-stab this pointed fact into the brains of all their colleagues. To Haig-Dunnen, Izard was a "hand-holder" who was "best off back sponging at beach resorts and squeezing fees from the weak-willed husbands of hysterical females who didn't have the moral muscle to handle tears with clouts."

The Chief of Staff viewed the hospital as an industrialist views his factory. Production was the key, get them in, sew them or saw them up, then get them out — either back to the front, which miraculously sometimes did happen, or in the grave, or, as a last resort, home to their wives and mothers. Any deviation from this swinging-door efficiency was deemed a waste of time, of which Haig-Dunnen always had too little, and energy, of which he always had too much. In his mind, Izard's approaches, however uncannily successful they might be in producing this or that oddity of a cure, were a dereliction of duty. Need it be said that Haig-Dunnen viewed Izard's warmth and personal concern for his patients as an impertinence and a breach of professional ethics, which, if left unchecked, would undoubtedly lead to a break down of discipline and the wholesale violation of the General Medical Council's conduct code? In the Major Doctor's mind, which was coming rather unhinged these days, for reasons that will shortly be made apparent, Izard was practicing hokum and magic, never mind the positive clinical results, and it was Major Doctor Magnus Haig-Dunnen's sacred responsibility to pepper the Registrar of the G.M.C.'s Penal Cases Committee with correspondence that would lead to this quack's official ostracizing, and maybe, God being willing and the universe just, even to his prosecution and time served at the King's pleasure in gaol.

Often mistaken, but never in doubt, Haig-Dunnen was, nevertheless, feeling — no, it was more than that, it was a full-blown sensory invasion — the infiltration of certain mental intrusions, which were pushing him well beyond the extensive scope of his habitual arseholeness. Recently, when the Major Doctor rose from sleep — each and every morning at 0-four-hundred hours on the dot — he was having these strange ellipses in his experience in which the clock told a tale that didn't jive with his short-term memory log. It would be 0-four-thirty-three or thirty-four or maybe five or six and he would just be opening his eyes and finding himself lying crosswise on the bed, vaguely aware that he had just returned from someplace where he had been subjected to some awful Wog ritual.

Embers from his still smoking pipe would be cutting little fire-ringed leprosy lacunae in his still tight sheets — he had the orderly pull them taut enough to trampoline a tuppence from them — when he would sense his mind bobbing to the surface from what seemed to be some alien underground or underwater. He would remember having lit his pipe — he always kept it loaded on the nightstand for a first bracing draught, not that he needed it, mind, that sort of addiction was for weaklings, but just to put a little jauntiness in his morning step, just to keep sharp. He would even remember taking that deep first gulp at 0-four or 0-four-02. But then time would stop. He would drop down the well, and the next thing that he was conscious of was the clock lying about the time and his bed sheets sprouting miniature tufts of smoke. The Major Doctor found this disconcerting. Plus, he was devilishly spooked by fire. Not pyrophobic, mind, but spooked. Sometimes so spooked that he actually piddled in his PJs. On his morning sit-down in the loo, often a flush of nervousness would sweep over him, as if his brain were trying to find the Rosetta Stone that would decipher these strange aphrenia, which now seemed to be drilling him every morning after that first snootfull of pipe smoke. Fallacia of little manikins glimmered intermittently through his awareness. They were wearing shakos and uniformed in scarlet, like animated toy soldiers moving in tight formations, as if the formations, or perhaps their patterns of movement, contained a message, which was important for him to hear. Or maybe more than just to hear. Maybe, in fact, they needed to be embedded, imprinted, as it were, on his very molecules. There was music, too, or singing, like a multitude of rather twee voices sounding from a bunch of pygmy poofers whining through tightly strung wires. And, yes, now he remembered, they had toad-heads, crowned with jewels. But how did this square with the shakos? It was all unaccountably strange. Altogether, he didn't feel just tip top, as he usually did, so that he imagined that he might have contracted some sort of strange jigger swamp bug, no doubt from one of those black buggers from the sub-continent — Gurkahas or Sikhs and whatnot — who got shipped, for Lord knows what bureaucratic reason, to the hospital from time to time. Haig-Dunnen's usual sit-down generally produced long appropriately tubular codfish, but now he often squirted rusty water and no astringents seemed capable of sopping the flow. Yes, he was definitely feeling a bit dicky. Most unnerving of all was that his John Thomas, when he was visiting the red light trulls for a bit of fluff, would often suffer from brewer's droop, even when he hadn't touched a drop. Whenever he tried to put the pieces of this disintegration together, it was all sixes and sevens, the diagnoses of his brain and his gut as unlike as chalk and cheese. He ached from bonce to goolies whenever he tried to think about it. It made him feel like a damnable pillock, that's what, and turned him gruff with his shirty staff and short with the patients, as well, not that these wally blighters didn't deserve a touch of the tongue-whip now and then as a goad to proper discipline. This he did know: the trouble seemed to start the day that that Nancy boy, Clive Izard, reported for permanent duty at the Hospital. He wouldn't have accepted the buffy toff himself, but strings had been pulled higher up the command chain, and duty was duty. Still, it felt like a slap in the face, after all his hard work and loyalty, not to have a say in the choosing of his own staff. A day of mixed blessings, what, with Lucky visiting as well, coming round to see the wounded boys pouring in from the Somme. Rousing success all around, but not the breakthrough hoped for. The Horse had not yet been brought to bear, but when this was done, the Huns were sure to collapse from fear of the sabre. Nothing like the taste of steel, what? This was the Supreme

Commander's first visit — his only visit, rather — and it had to be marred by the arrival of this rougey ponce. The General had given him the pipe that day, too, a gift from that American chap, Black Jack Pershing, toast of London, from Mexico, he said, curious carvings, quite a display piece. The pipe, anyway, pleased Haig-Dunnen. immensely, so much so that lit or unlit, he seldom removed it from his mouth. But kept tugging on it "like a puppy pulling on a bitch's dug," as certain of his impudent staff said when they were getting a bit squiffy and taking a general piss at the old duffer down at the pub. All this would have been rather deflating for an ordinary man, but he was a Haig, a Dunnen. And as a Major Doctor and a man of action, he was not about to take this sitting down. So, every a.m. when he rose from the loo, he determined to trip up that Izard fellow, and send him packing. No fay nob was going to throw a clod into the well-oiled gears of *his* medical machine. Knackered as the Major Doctor was from the black-outs, diarrhea and the increasingly strange flashbacks, he had a duty to perform, and he deemed that any additional personal exertions that he might be forced to bear were nothing less than a seal of trust between himself and His Majesty, a trust, as grave in its way, and as fraught with dangers, and opportunities for heroism as that given to Sir Douglas and the brave lads carrying their Nation's proud banner on the green swards of glory. The hardships were great, but Major Doctor Magnus Haig-Dunnen, M.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., C.O.S., W.A.N.K. was honored, in spite of the personal hardships, to bear the brunt. It was war. And as he was a man and as war was a man's highest calling, he stout-heartedly entered the fray.

The fray for Lowestoft's Chief of Staff consisted primarily of spying on Clive Izard while the latter was both on and off duty, and likewise maintaining a meticulous record of his kenning, which he then summarized, editorialized and excerpted for the Registrar of the Penal Cases Committee. This personal investigation continued for weeks, with the Chief of Staff making wild surmises derived from his observations of Izard curing patients, reading the portfolio and sleeping. The upshot of all this unsolicited and unauthorized espionage was that Haig-Dunnen himself was beginning to be suspiciously eyed by the General Medical Council as a bit of a clot.

The Registrar of the Penal Cases Committee prided himself as being a stickler for professional protocol. But he could not for the life of him understand how Dr. Izard was betraying his oath by healing his patients and returning them home or to duty. Neither was he impressed by reports of Dr. Izard's nefarious after-hours activities of reading and sleeping. Had the Registrar not been a man of the strictest punctiliousness, he would have round-filed Major Doctor Haig-Dunnen's scurrilous correspondence as the ravings of an over-zealous autocrat too much pressured by the general war-time madness. However, the Registrar of the Penal Cases Committee eschewed this course of action, and he did so chiefly for three reasons: one, the Registrar was in a no-lose situation — the Penal Code Committee was collecting an actionable file on either or both of the Doctors, both scrutinizer and scrutinizee, without having to do a lick of work on their own part, two, Haig-Dunnen was first cousin to the King's personal confidant, the Commander and Chief of the entire British Expeditionary Force. The Registrar reasoned that it could not be an altogether bad thing to have the kinsman of such an influential man under his ink-stained thumb. And three, well, three was personal and painful and was beginning to

more forcefully command the Registrar's attention and cause him to deviate into even wilder flights of fancy than those entertained by the raving Haig-Dunnen.

But, of course, the zealous Major Doctor Haig-Dunnen, M.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., C.O.S. P.U.D. was oblivious to the impression he was making on the G.M.C.'s Registrar. The Major Doctor was a focused man, a man on the hunt, and he was focusing his hunt now on the elusive and questionable behaviors of Dr. Izard, who, even if he, Izard, *was* a doctor, he was certainly no soldier. But in spite of the Major Doctor's diligence, he could not actually pin down this quarry's precise professional transgressions. But then, as he had discovered in so many of his hunts, if one stayed game to the scent, the stag often faltered and made a fatal error. Dr. Izard's handling of the young aviator's case was beginning to look like the Major Doctor's opportunity to hone in for the kill.

Yes, but what of those tiny tinny voices, like radio static —What? — but instead of distorting the message, being the message? More than just audio too, disturbances also of the olfactory, like the smell of the animal's fear at being pursued, like that, only more so, much more so. Haig-Dunnen was sure that the animal which he was smelling was Clive Izard, and thus the Major Doctor strutted into the wards with a lighter, surer step, but stealthy, stealthy, no sense losing the prey at the final moment due to over-eagerness. The Major Doctor was practiced in this. Focused. It made his body tingle all over, especially the small hairs at the perineum and the ring of muscles around the anal sphincter. He could relegate the cat calls of the patients to the background now, like a grainy cinema whose screen he had consigned to the periphery of his vision, hands or stumps waving at him derisively, the fast music of the house organ lightly tripping with the comic theme, but being undercut now by the big base pipes, shaking the ground, the walls, spelling out, almost below the level of conscious hearing, a new direction of the story, and vibrating the heart in its fascia envelope while shaking the blood cells in the very marrow of the bones with the coming tragedy. The entire staff had pronounced the flyer's case hopeless, and yet Izard fought on, pressing the boundaries of accepted discourse to test the Major Doctor for weaknesses, to probe the perimeter for vulnerabilities. Where exactly did vigorous argument slip over into official insubordination? Izard cared about this insignificant, nearly vegetative aviator, almost as a mother animal would care about its young, and the hunter knew that that caring would make the feral's evasiveness, the random zig and zag that could lead to escape, predictable and patterned. Izard would fly away, yes, but circle round. Always he would come back to this one thing, his care, his concern, his love. The arguments themselves were only formal arrangements. They meant nothing. Izard was pleading almost, but in that upper-crust coldly, logical way of his. "If released the patient will undoubtedly succumb to infection, and even if we might *hope* by some *miracle* . . ." Yes! Words like "hope," "miracle," let Haig-Dunnen know that the prey was wearying of the chase, was actually beginning to *long* for death. The back and forth about permanent states of psychotic paralysis, about bed-turnover, about reassignment ratios, all that was play acting — now, *miracle*, *hope*, *hopelessness*, *fairness* or *unfairness*, these words were like the foam on the nostrils, the lungs breaking the small capillaries with exhaustion, the eyes dry with terror. Izard was desperately groping Haig-Dunnen's psyche for some portal to mercy and compassion, saying in effect, "You have won. But can you forego your

victory, walk away with the satisfaction that the kill was inevitable and therefore the dénouement is only a gory afterthought and no part of the actual game of stalking.” But he must of known, keen psychologist that he was, that this ploy was futile, that for a hemothymiac like Haig-Dunnen the kill was the whole point of the game, and he would have his blood one way or another. The Chief of Staff was just as happy to get that blood by the point-blank shooting of a trapped or penned creature as by taking a hart on the run. If the exhausted animal were waiting as peacefully as a veal calf in its crate, the finish would have been, for the Major Doctor, as exhilarating — though the blood was blue and the flesh white. But then, Haig-Dunnen, perhaps distracted by the blackouts or the voices, after long weeks of honing his behaviors down to a machine-like efficiency, made a tyros’ mistake. He began to take pleasure in Izard’s squirming. That pleasure extended the moment of execution just a hair too long, and in a last gasp towards life, the game jumped sideways and the first shot went awry. The incredible, the almost impossible had occurred. The aviator began to rally, and Doctor Izard, while still voicing his objections to the lieutenant’s release, became less strident in his insistence. The pleading tone was gone. Initially this turn of events seemed a defeat, but Haig-Dunnen, instructed subtly by the gnomish internal chatter, began to brighten to the possibility that this might be the very slip-up that he had been so dogged to force.

When the staff meeting wheeled round to the case of Bernole, if the walls of the room did not exactly sweat, at least the old mildew in the buried timbers started to glisten a bit, the dust mites in the curtains mobilized. The forehead and neck veins of the assembled Doctors bulged in anticipation of another tense exchange. What they heard instead, not so much in the words, but in the undertones of threat masked as uneasy agreement, was even more disturbing. The comic music was completely overshadowed now, and the barrel notes rumbled the house seats.

Captain Doctor Izard (Resignedly): In light of Bernole’s fine rally, I am sure the Major will be obliged to accept that the case is far from hopeless and must warrant a few more days of hospital care.

Major Doctor Haig-Dunnen (Assertively): On the contrary, Captain, his rally indicates that he is on the way to whatever meager recovery awaits him. We have done our job and it’s now time for his bed to be made ready for a new arrival.

Captain Doctor Izard (Half-heartedly): Begging the Major’s indulgence, and understanding as well as anyone the pressing need to accommodate new patients, as Bernole’s lead Doctor, I would prefer that he remain at least until the end of the week.

Major Doctor Haig-Dunnen (Impatiently): Yes, yes, Captain, you have made your position quite clear on that point. But my authority takes precedence here, as I am sure the Captain is aware, and the path of duty is quite unambiguous in this matter. The staff no doubt will concur with my decision.

Captain Doctor Izard (Almost sarcastically): The Major is aware of my awareness and my protesting submission to the staff's concurrence.

Haig-Dunnen had the panting stag in the notch of his sights now and it was time to squeeze the trigger.

Major Doctor Haig-Dunnen (Almost tenderly): I am not insensible to the Captain's concerns, and I suggest that he house the patient in his own quarters for a few days before shipping him back to his family. A bit unorthodox perhaps, but the Captain seems to take a keen delight in the unorthodox, and I am sure that he will find the arrangement quite satisfactory.

Izard — unsuspecting? suspecting? — turned almost willingly into the speeding projectile.

Captain Doctor Izard: (Matter of factly) Quite satisfactory, I am sure, and the Captain thanks the Major for his concern.

The staff stood gaping. This was the most openly deceitful conversation that they had yet endured between the two adversaries and its spawn would ignite the most deadly and bizarre of consequences. When the base notes subsided and the comic music reasserted itself, no one would be deceived, in spite of the surface jocularly, about the direction that the plot was taking.

If you ordered a dozen sons-of-bitches and the S.O.B. factory only sent you Haig-Dunnen you would still feel overcompensated. Sometimes, even to his face, the staff called him "Major Doctor S," which Haig-Dunnen thought stood for the "Scot," and was a term of endearment, but it actually stood for "scrotum" because, as one wag orderly put it, "he's something between a prick and an asshole." And thus it was with keen delight and the sweet scent of the lily of future vengeance that the staff discovered the Major Doctor's machinations. It was Clops, a.k.a. Devon "Cyclops" Elmore, the libidinous orderly, who first unmasked the ruse. The former patient who had had his right eye shot out at Mons, but still had one left for the ladies, was backing a nurse into a mop closet when the uniform of the Major Doctor blindsided him in the dark. The Major Doctor, fortunately for Clops, was not in the garment at the time, but was away, in disguise, but sadly, no longer incognito. The Major Doctor was tailing Dr. Izard, whom he had discovered in a rented garage on a burned out farmstead plopped down in the soggy fields among the hopeless windmills of the East Anglian countryside. Clops lost no time in informing the staff of his discovery. And from that day forth, when the Major Doctor appeared with his silver and black handlebar greased for his daily dose of subordinate arsechewing, the arsechewee could salve his verbally inflicted wounds by imagining the Major Doctor's other persona, the countryman with the false bearbrown beard and muckless dairy boots, the one seen puffing frantically after Dr. Izard when he tore off the grounds, Lawrence of Arabia style, on his battered, but speedy Brough. It was a great delight to all to crowd the windows of the wards and see their fearsome leader peddling madly after Izard on a bent-spoked bicycle, his wig hair and shirttails tattering in the breeze. Thus Major

Doctor Haig-Dunnen, M.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., C.O.S, D.O.C. C.O.X., who had, like his kinsman on the Somme, hoped by this new offensive to break the stalemate in his ongoing conflict with Doctor Izard, was only, unbeknownst to himself, further jeopardizing his position. And although there were certainly some bizarre goings on in the garage, more bizarre than any the C.O.S had ever dared to imagine in even his most malevolent fantasies, the Major Doctor had unwittingly exposed his own flank and the enemy's forces were pouring through the gap.

In the Major Doctor's case, however, the casualties were not at first to be measured in living flesh, but in paper and postage. For now the Registrar of the Penal Cases Committee was not only receiving additional correspondence from the Major Doctor concerning Dr. Izard, but also letters from the Lowestoft staff on their bonkers Chief. Certainly the Registrar's interests had now been piqued, and the erstwhile tiresome epistles of the Major Doctor, when appended with these new commentaries by his staff, were beginning to make for far more interesting reading. A diversion, considering his degenerating personal situation, that he was in sore (no pun — wink, wink — intended) need of.

Persephone's Adjuncts in Winter

These two, when joined, encompassed half the cosmos,
The half that healed the half that had been stricken.
They came like rain in thirsty latitudes,
Like sun where too much water had been loosed,
Like comfort in the struggle against pain.
And yet, they were but half, two humble brothers,
Two naïve bachelors searching for their brides,
Not knowing that their search must end in death.
How beautiful, how novel are death's maidens,
Blanching red roses white with whiter hands.