

BINDING OVER.....

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The life of an itinerant farm labourer is, by its very nature, a varied one. Differences in geography, flora and fauna (wild and domesticated), farming methods, and practitioners, all make for a rich store of experience and memory. Sometimes there is humour, or tragedy, or cupidity, or avarice, or heroism, or just plain hard work finally bringing its reward.

There are so many stories to be gleaned from decades of following these fortuities of season or whim, sharing toil and table, yet still being, in a way, a spectator to the destinies of those more closely bound to their land and region. Moving on for them would, more likely, be due to bankruptcy or death, or retirement if there was another generation to make way for. Even those less directly bound by lease or free hold are still strongly linked by tradition, family, or economics to their hinterland.

No-one who has ever lived in a settled and stable farm or bush community, for long enough to be familiar with the close-knit society that is revealed, can forget the strength of the ties that bind for better or worse, sickness and health, richer or poorer. In reality, the society is a larger version of the families on which the prosperity and well-being of that district are founded.

Adversity strengthens these community ties, even uniting enemies against a common perceived threat from "outside" against their own kind, other judgements aside.

This story concerns such a district; close-knit, stable country-folk, possessed of strong and simple loyalties, fair and decent (in their community dealings anyway), content in the cycle of their rural lives. Elemental, productive, and interdependent; steeped in the past and nurturing the future. Yet, something happened to shock this community, as will be described that would shock even a cynical city society, with all its tribes, anomie and crises.

There was a failure of conscience and a failure of courage exposing the atavism that exists below the social and civil veneer of humankind in any cultural hearth. Not necessarily a matter of good or evil of popular culture, but rather of primordial panic reflex when self-preservation is at stake, with no time for more civilised considerations.

The final act of this Elysian drama is the stuff of myth and legend. The myth has a terrible determinist reality. The legend is salutary indeed in describing the inexorable burden of personal responsibility for those considering themselves ready to claim independence, without due heed to implication or consequence pursuant, and against the code of a community.

Beyond all these details, the summary superseding of the "rules" of everyday human life, by a larger destiny, gives pause as the story unfolds. Even the matter of how the community should pass judgement on individuals and events was superseded. My own part in all this was not one of direct involvement, but of a witness much closer to the central drama than I would have preferred at the time, and in hindsight.

So, now to the story itself:

The farm which I had arrived to work on a month before was like so many in the district, a mixture of crops, market gardens, and fattening stock. I lived, with caravan and dogs, in paddock near a bore pump which gave me both water and electricity.

Not a bad spot, and the dogs liked it too. I was mainly responsible for fixing fences, and did some trucking which familiarized me quickly with the district. In all, a good situation for an itinerant such as myself, and the late harvest season promised long hours and good pay.

On one particular weekend, the farm manager and his wife invited me to go with them to the local pub for a meal, and meet others from the district. It was, socially anyway, a busy Saturday for most ages, as there was a dance on at the local hall as well, which was a few miles from the farm, on the way to the pub in question.

Hence, the gathering at the pub, which I was invited to join, was for the older generation not given to booze and loud music to meet and talk with their peers. With them would be progeny not considered ready for the rituals of a country dance, and those young adults caught, in limbo so to speak, between the generations, and about to assume new responsibilities.

In all, a good opportunity to get to know people, catch up on local news, renew acquaintances, perhaps some hatching and matching to cement land, money and district ties. A traditional get-together, less formal than weddings and funerals, and more casual than sales or auctions.

So, we duly set off for our convivial dinner in the dusk of a clear autumn evening, the smell of fresh hay hanging in the still air. As we passed the hall the crowd of casually parked cars near the red brick front showed that the organizers and early starters were warming things up. A brief burst of music came and went as we passed in the twilight, there was a long night ahead for some.....

At the pub there was no music, but the atmosphere was friendly and the food good, with plenty of conversation. Our party shared a table with a family and their two children; the parents had a business and the children were their oldest and youngest. The eldest, in his 20's, suffered a neurological problem which kept him dependent on his parents. His two other brothers were at the local dance that evening.

The meal came and went, the talk went on, and I was given a few introductions as people circulated round the tables. By 9.30 or so it was time to make a move, as we had another work day ahead of us; seeing it was autumn, the work went on regardless of the day of the week.

We set off back to the farm again, the night clear but now very dark as the new moon was imminent. The revelry continued at the hall, the cars more numerous, and cigarettes glowed at the entrance and around the building as shadowy figures partook of the cool night air.

We continued on our way, tired and content after our own socializing, headlights cutting through the darkness, alone on the road until we reached the farm gate and home. After a cup of coffee with my hosts, I walked through the dewy paddocks until the silhouette of my van, and the greetings of my two sleepy dogs, told me I was "home" again.

The following morning was clear and sunny, and I went straight back to where I had been working the previous day, to finish a installing a gate and collect some gear. By 10 am or so I was in the farmyard again, and as my task was finished, I strolled over to the farm-house to have some tea before setting off again.

As soon as I entered the farmhouse kitchen, the manager's wife asked me if I had heard the news making the rounds of the district that morning. The hushed demeanour of my employers meant that this was not just a tit-bit of local gossip. This was borne out by the quite chilling and seemingly incredible facts that were then recounted to me after I sat down to my cup of tea in that warm kitchen.

The story was follows: on the same road as we had traversed that previous night, not far from the hall which we had passed on the way home, there had been a hit-and-run accident in the early hours of the morning. Apparently it had involved a local vehicle whose owner had attended the dance.

Not only had this car, occupants unknown, made off into the night after the deed, but the accident had been unwitnessed, and the unfortunate victim was discovered some time after, when another carload of merry-makers left the dance on their way home, at about 2 am. on the Sunday morning.

Mercifully, the dead youth suffered such terrible injuries that death would have been instantaneous. From the location of the body, it appeared that, just prior to his death, he had been walking against accepted wisdom with the flow of the traffic, and without suitably light-coloured clothing. Thus, he had been a sitting duck for some carelessly driven vehicle, whose occupants had not been paying enough attention to the road while travelling at high speed into the narrow arc of their headlights.

Alcohol could have been a factor if the car's passengers had been at the dance; what was all too obvious was the damage to the victim's body was so extensive, that the impact of car and pedestrian could not have gone unheeded at the time, and that somewhere there was secreted a very damaged and probably bloodied car.

Certainly, if the car had struck some wandering animal with such an impact, the car would have been stopped and checked for damage, and the livestock checked for purposes of liability. Wild or otherwise, animal remains would have been dragged off the road if necessary, and not left on the edge of the tarmac as was the body of the unfortunate and tragically unseen pedestrian.

The vehicle's speed must have been in excess of 100 kmh for such an impact. Presumably, it followed that the car's occupants either saw the doomed youth, perhaps seeking a lift, just before the high-speed impact, or stopped and backed up after the impact, saw what happened then panicked and drove off. If the car was local, possibly the youth was actually even recognised before being abandoned as past the need for medical attention.

Certainly, the rules of common decency and sense had been flagrantly broken by the standards of any self-respecting community. But then again, if dobbing on others is considered wrong, then why dob on yourselves..?

The conjectures were discussed in that sunny kitchen, as they would have been in so many others that morning, chilled with the awareness that such a death had occurred so close by, and to someone from a local family. No name had been released as yet, so apparently a roll call of late risers after the dance was still going on.

Some family was in for a sad and ugly bereavement; probably at that very moment phoning around for a member not yet accounted for, last seen full of high spirits and heading for a fateful rendezvous with friends at the local hall.

Where was this vehicle with extensive damage to presumably the left front side, even bloodstained? Worse, probably this was a local vehicle whose identity must one day be known. What was the psychology of hit-and-run, anyway, and this one in particular? What makes people behave in such a way, especially someone we probably know? It is a good thing the kids are too young to have been at the dance.....etc, as this unofficial post mortem took place while another pot of tea was consumed.

What was it about morning breaks that seemed to make bad tidings so much worse? I pondered as I drank my tea and listened to the conversation between the adults, as the children's presence had been duly proscribed because of the nature of the news. Appropriate explanations for them would follow "later".

...Perhaps morning news came as an intruder, as we all went about our routines; bad news most intrusive of all. More than 25 years before, I had taken a break from hoeing tobacco to have a cup of tea, and heard over a tinny transistor of the death of a US President. Earthquakes, cyclones, etc., usually were heard of at this time; perhaps the news updates of the previous evenings were just through on radio networks?

Of course time differences played a part, but morning news to me also meant telegrams (when there were such things) of the fate of family and friends, or for posted exam results. Although nowadays T.V could be made to bear the tidings of world events more conveniently in the evenings, when a clash with the day's more mundane activities was not so incongruous, a more appropriate time of day, when leisure in one's own domestic surroundings rendered the events more remote, perhaps....although not really a welcome accompaniment to an evening meal consumed along with the evening news! Such appetite-inhibiting topics do sometimes manifest as assassinations, a plane-crash in the Antarctica, or the loss of a space-shuttle.

My thoughts were interrupted as the phone rang, and the manager's wife answered. The manager mused wryly that the old party line would have saved a lot of electronic work at a time like this, so sure he was that the call was concerned with the matters we had just been discussing.

The phone conversation was brief and subdued, and concerned the identity of the hit-and-run victim. The youth came from the local village, and was the second son of the family with whom we had been dining the previous evening at the pub. Apparently, he had decided to leave the dance early and walk home the few miles to the village and leave his brother behind to make his own way home, neither of them having a car that evening.

The identity of the vehicle concerned was as yet unknown. Worst of all, the victim was the real scion of his family, because of his elder brother's affliction, and regarded as a sturdy and reliable boy. Only the good die young would be the inevitable conclusion to

the news in the community, no doubt. The pending inquest promised to be a grim affair. However, the priorities of the day reasserted themselves, and we finished our break with much left unsaid, going back to our respective tasks around the farm. Life went on, despite....

Perhaps, on a farm, we still had a larger-than-life intimation of our own mortality. For myself, I must say that some of my own narrow escapes came to mind as I went about my work for the rest of the day. How easily was that other life lost, and through negligence and carelessness which would make acceptance of the event even more difficult for family and community.

At this point, my own more direct involvement in this sad little drama begins. As a preface, I should state at this point that I have no personal interest in religion, much less tales and theories concerning any sort of afterlife. However, in common with other members of my extended family, I have had experiences of what could be called other-worldly phenomena. In other words, there is a predilection to feyness in my blood; I accept this although I do not necessarily like it, and am certainly not given to entertaining exotic or arcane explanations of this aspect of my familial heritage.

I have had these experiences ever since I was a child, in fact, in the form of dreams, premonitions, visual and aural phenomena, and unusual coincidences of various kinds. So, what I began to experience next was in a sense familiar, although still extremely unpleasant; thus, I could maintain objectivity when observing from the periphery of events, while feeling the power of emotional, and other, less tangible forces at work.

Perhaps the very writing of this story many years later could be construed as influenced by such feyness. Certainly, the events of that time have never lost their clarity in my memory. Whether I am now some sort of unwitting amanuensis in writing up this record of an event both dramatic and salutary for any community, or writing for my own reasons and satisfaction, is anyone's guess. So, anyway, to the next part of this story, and the events that presaged my involvement, sympathetically though reluctantly, with the accident victim, over the next few weeks.

The following Monday after work, I set off to the village to catch the post and to buy dog-meat and groceries. Driving after work I have always found relaxing, and this day was no exception. My dogs were happily enjoying the breeze in the back of the ute, tongues lolling and eyes slitted into the slipstream as they sat at their usual positions chained on either side of the cab. I was just enjoying the late afternoon sun and thinking about nothing in particular, going at such a speed that I did not have to worry unduly about driving or road conditions.

As I passed the hall, now closed and deserted until the next social, I had a fleeting thought for the events of the previous Saturday, then my thoughts moved onto more immediate matters. About a mile further on, the dogs became restless, yapping and pulling on the short chains that secured them in the ute. I glanced in the mirrors to see what they were up to, and saw their eyes dark and their ears laid back in reaction to whatever they sensed ahead.

At that moment, I suddenly experienced a feeling so severe and debilitating, that I became briefly disorientated, and almost drove off the road. After this initial shock, I managed to control the vehicle until the feeling passed, my breathing returned to normal, and I was able to think about what caused the attack. Perhaps it was a mysterious health problem --- heart?, stroke? --- then I remembered the dogs and their reaction, and realised that we could not all have some major health problem at the same moment.... so, what had happened?

The possibilities of earthquakes or close encounters never really presented themselves, as I suddenly realised that I had probably passed the locality on the road where the tragedy of the small hours of Sunday morning had occurred. One could only guess at what entity still remained at that blighted place, and for whatever reasons.

The extreme discomfort I had felt was courtesy of my fey family history. Thanks but no thanks was what I thought, feeling rather sick and shaky as I drove on, and the dogs obviously did not think much of the experience either, as I saw when I looked again in the mirror to see how they were. Perhaps the ute could even have left the road; at least I was not going at any great speed at the time. There was also the return journey to consider, and by then it would be dark as well, guaranteed to play even more on primitive fears....

Continuing on to the village, I conducted my minor business, tossed the dogs each a soft bone to chew on the way home, and set off in the gathering dusk for the farm, wondering if the return trip would be uneventful. There was an alternate route to take, but this would add more miles to the journey. By now I was tired, and wanted to be off my feet with a sundowner in my hand, and reading my newly purchased newspaper while my dinner cooked. Anyway, perhaps the experience was just a one-off, or not actually related to the accident at all. I had not discussed the other incident with anyone in the village on that occasion, as I had learned years before not to tell of my fey experiences to the world at large, as reactions to accounts in the past had varied considerably.

The precise location of the accident was thus unconfirmed to me in the material sense; if my experience was to be repeated, then this would occur without the benefit of suggestion from outsiders. Well, I would soon know, as my current home lay in that direction. I continued to drive the ute along the highway, the headlights reaching into the gathering darkness ahead, the dogs happily crouched in the tray of the ute, the gnawing of their brisket bones their immediate priority.

Sometimes I envied them the immediacy of their time reference, what was past was past, their present more important, their future not yet accounted for. Should they react again, I would be forewarned of anything amiss ahead of us, and again the moment would pass. At most they might feel some unease passing this way again in the future, as much as they were capable, whereas I would be far more in trepidation.....

Sure enough, after a few miles we approached the site of the original incident, and the dogs became restless again, yapping and pulling on their chains. This time I was ready to brace myself, mentally and physically, for the expected onslaught on my senses, as I had learnt to do from previous experiences. Even so, as I passed that fateful site, the feeling of sickness, dread, and weakness of limbs was as bad as the previous experience. Again I had to concentrate hard to maintain control of the ute, in spite of being more prepared for what happened.

Anyway, the moment passed, and once again I experienced a shaky aftermath. I pondered the reasons as well as the fact that, as part of my job, I used this road regularly. I was not looking forward to repeated encounters of this particular kind. How much longer would this go on for? Whatever limbo that unfortunate youth was in, as a result of his violent death, he definitely was not happy there.

Obviously, though merely a passer-by, as a receptive person I was getting the full message of his unfocused discontent. Such repeated experiences, in the past, I had found to be very enervating, so I hoped that the young man might soon become more accepting of his fate, or find some other focus for his rage. However justified the rage might be, expressing it on the edge of a highway was not at all suitable.

Finally I reached the farm, and as I drove through the yard, I stopped and spoke briefly to the manager, who was fuelling his truck at the diesel tank. We talked of farm-related matters, then without going into details, I asked casually if the whereabouts of the accident had been officially described, giving as my reason the fact that I wanted to check, out of curiosity, the visibility in the area the next time I went that way after dark.

My employer grimaced wryly and said that he and his wife had thought of doing the same thing themselves, and yes, he knew the site because the local traffic cop had been seen by his wife, inspecting the location that same morning. The location, not surprisingly, corresponded to scene of my recent experiences. I made no comment on the matter, we said our good-byes, and I drove off to my van-site, letting the dogs off for the short run while I drove on in the ute.

For the next few days, my work with the truck away from the farm kept me off that particular road, for which I was thankful. Such experiences as I described, had, in the past, a lingering effect for days after, and could interfere with my concentration levels and my physical energies as well. I was not looking for a further such encounter; my work was demanding enough...

Inevitably, though, I eventually had to make a trip on the highway past the hall and the scene of the hit-and-run. This time, I was on my own, as the dogs did not always accompany me during working hours. Thus, I would have no forewarning, beyond geographical markers, of any more encounters relating to the hit-and-run location. At least it would be a day-time encounter; I braced myself accordingly....

As I approached the accident site, I could see a team of well-dressed civilians measuring and taking notes, presumably an independent accident survey being carried out for the pending inquest. To my great surprise, I passed the fateful spot without incident, and continued on my way to the village ahead. Presumably, the presence of the investigation team was enough to offset other negative influences, or was it the fact that something was being done to investigate the sorry incident.

Some time later, I went on the same road again past the accident site, yet felt no ill affects. As I reached the outskirts of the village, my mind on the next stage of my journey, I noticed a very large crowd at the cemetery, such as could only be attending a young person's funeral, judging by the contemporaneous youth to be seen in the crowd of mourners.

Of course, it had to be the funeral of the unfortunate accident victim; no other such an occasion could have drawn such a large crowd, especially of the young, and no other funeral news was in the village telegraph. This explained the uneventful drive I had just enjoyed; a change of address, so to speak, had presumably improved matters for both parties....

Naturally, I was relieved that the inquiry was over, and that the youth was finally being laid to rest, his discontent no longer a threat to my peace of mind on the highway. Some two weeks had already passed, during which the enquiry into his death had been held, with no conclusive results. Certainly, as an outsider I had missed the immediate news of the funeral, nor would I have felt comfortable attending as an outsider to the central core of village and district. My condolences to the family would be enough when I met them socially again.

As I drove past the cemetery, with its fringe of heavy, drooping river gums shading the many cars parked along the roadside, I wished the recently-deceased a peaceful transition to whatever state or stage awaited him. Later that evening, I passed through the village with a load that I had picked up from many miles away, and was consequently late on returning to the farm, again driving into the gathering dusk as I passed through the village once more on my way home.

Suddenly, on the outskirts of the village, again without warning, I felt an assault on my thoughts, a kind of mental tugging, and sensed, rather than heard, an agonized cry in my consciousness. This time, there was not the shocking impact of previous events, and I realised immediately who or what it was, as I was driving past the cemetery where the burial of the accident victim had taken place that day.

Once again, there was just the two of us in momentarily in close proximity, the mourners of the day long departed. This time, also, I sensed more resignation than rage, but there was an imploring sense to that awful mortal cry, and still some rage remained that translated as "why me? why me?why are the those responsible not here with me?..... where is the justice in my being here alone?"

I had no answers, and the cries and the feeling of tugging growing fainter as I moved further away from the cemetery. I knew then what to expect, in spite of sympathy and regret, whenever I passed that way again, for whatever time period. But this toned-down outrage and discontent would not affect my driving so much, and would be within the bounds of sympathetic tolerance, at least... It seemed that I was destined to remain a temporal focus of past misdeed and regret. At last, the shape of my van in the dusk, and the greeting of the dogs, meant I was home again, feeling tired and enervated in a way not entirely related to my labours of that day.

For a month or so, my relations with the cemetery's latest inhabitant remained in an uneasy status quo, but I was at least able to pass that way in the course of my work. Any attempt to do otherwise would have been met with disapproval by the farm manager, and any attempt to explain such a move, even more so...

Life in the district went on as before; eventually, there was another funeral at the cemetery, more acceptable than that of the unfortunate young man, being that of an older resident. The passing of time was blurring the memory of that fateful dance within the community.

However, there was one new development which brought the events into a re-sharpened focus for a while. One of the occupants of the vehicle, burdened by the guilt of that untimely death, finally owned up to being an accessory after the fact, and was sent by his family to the police to make a statement.

The bare facts were that there were three youths, all school and/or sports contemporaries of the deceased, sitting in the front seat of the car as they drove home in high spirits from the dance. Not necessarily drunk, but more attentive to the prospective performance of the driver's first car and proudest possession as they sped away from the dance anonymously on what appeared to be a conveniently empty road.

The pedestrian whom they subsequently struck, already walking on the wrong side of the road, suddenly showed, or was seen in the headlights just before that terrible collision. The force was such that no survival was possible; the sudden shock of the event caused them all to panic, and to keep going.

Certainly, it appeared that the pedestrian had decided to hitch a ride, and stepped out to flag down the vehicle, which was going at a much greater speed than expected, while the occupants were blinded by their own high-spirited inattention, or all watching the speedo at the same time....

The incredible twist to this part of the tale, was that one of the occupants of the car was a younger brother of the victim. What this youth suffered as a result of the revelations of the morning after the accident could only be speculated on by the shocked community.

He would have recognised his brother's clothing, surely? How could he have kept silent for so long? The identity of the confessing accessory was not revealed, so I do not know if it was the victim's brother or not. With grim irony, the accessory was now the new scion...

The fact is, whatever happened, nothing was said until the day of the confession, and the car was successfully hidden in the interim, damage and all, as it was not a vehicle that would draw much attention, due to being driven so infrequently. Perhaps it had not been parked for any length of time at the hall, only briefly appearing as a pick-up vehicle.

No time of departure from the dance-hall was ever corroborated or disputed, nor had any inspection been necessary in the subsequent police investigation into traffic movements after the dance in the early hours of that morning. Perhaps the accident was seen as more likely to have involved a car from outside the community.

Curiously, the district seemed to close ranks after this latest sorry chapter in the story; even the district telegraph seemed tacitly to proscribe further discussion of the events. Perhaps there was a feeling that already there had been enough misery generated by those events, or there was shock at the serious duplicity practiced by members of the community. Enough had been said, more comment or censure would be both unreasonable and unseemly.

Whether coincidental or not, it was my perception that the incidents I experienced whenever I passed the cemetery seemed to lose intensity, as if some sort of appeasement had been achieved as a result of the confession and subsequent statement. It was as if the awful public exposure of the culprits (especially for not stopping that night after the accident), served as partial atonement for the abrupt loss of life and opportunity. However, my conjectures, such as they were, I kept to myself.

Once more the district returned to the routine of the late autumn, bathed in sun, balmy in the long twilights, redolent of harvest, suffused by the glows of a Heysen landscape. My own days continued to be long and busy, my life now in a settled rhythm, as the memories of foreign parts faded somewhat in my memory. My hours behind the wheel were also as a spectator to the changes of the season, and I made the most of my opportunities to range far and wide in the truck.

One early afternoon, I had collected a load of fencing and hardware from a neighbouring town, and was returning to the farm when I passed the local cemetery, again on the outskirts like so many are. From the crowd and the vehicles, I could see a very large funeral was in progress. As before, it was a young person's funeral, judging by those in attendance. In the glow of the late Autumn afternoon, so many young people were present, along with many others who would otherwise have been about their work on the surrounding farms.

Somehow, intuitively, I knew that this funeral was related to the death of the pedestrian a month or so before. Later still that afternoon, I passed once more the small gum-shaded cemetery shaded near our local village, and my intuition was borne out; no more unusual experiences occurred to tug at my consciousness....

Later that evening, back at the home farm, I casually asked who it was that had been buried that day. The manager's wife did not know offhand, but the following day was able to announce to us all that the funeral was for the driver of the hit-and-run vehicle, who had suddenly committed suicide that week. From that time on, I had no more experiences whenever I passed the local cemetery, which itself seemed to have receded in size, and to have assumed the more slumbrous aspect usually associated with a rural burial-ground; being rather informal, slightly weedy, and untidy gums standing sentinel on the boundary.

I have long since left that district, and probably been forgotten about myself, except as a sometime seasonal truck-driver for my previous employer, but my memory remains sharp about those events with which I was so curiously and unwillingly involved. Even though I was no more than a passer-by, the coincidences to which I was party were so striking: the events of the fateful evening, including meeting the victim's family, the experiences at the accident site, including seeing the investigation team, and at the cemetery, and being a passer-by at the two funerals. Some inexorable determinism was at work that I only could have avoided by leaving the district.

But the determinism was so much more inexorable when one considers the fate of the negligent trio; the nature of their exposure after unnatural silence, the ignominy they would have suffered, especially the brother. Finally, there was that suicide of the young driver, overwhelmed by his ultimate responsibility as the owner and driver of the hit-and-run vehicle, and by the nature of the collective connivance to remain accessories after the fact of the dreadful event.

From the experiences that I had of the rage of the deceased victim, even though I was only an outsider who was coincidentally receptive to these forces, I could have some inkling of the suffering that finally overwhelmed the young driver, and caused him to take his own life. At least I had some previous experience of such things, and no guilt to cope with, yet the first experiences along the road, and then at the cemetery, were all extremely unpleasant and enervating. How much more terrible was the toll exacted, by whatever means, on the mind of second unfortunate youth, so that a dark kind of peace could be attained by his own friend so abruptly killed by a moment of thoughtless high spirits and bad judgement at speed.

At various times in my life, before and since the events recounted here, I have reflected on the meaning and dispensing of justice. Not always have I had the feeling that justice was done, recognizably or otherwise; but here I saw justice that seemingly was not of human dispensation, coming as it appeared to do, from beyond the grave. If the two main protagonists in this drama coexist in some other realm, what then is the nature of this coexistence? I choose not to speculate too much on these things, as I have already said; this too easily could then lead to a seemingly easy answer, and that would be hubris. After all, hubris, in the form of irresponsibility, was the driving force of the original fatal act in this whole drama.

Nevertheless, one wonders if these protagonists remain locked in a sort of mythical and eternal conflict, never to find peace of any kind, condemned to the worst excesses of their own company? Or is there now a sort of satisfaction, combined with resignation, in their respective relationships; a grudging acceptance of the meaning of responsibility, and with it a lasting truce or peace, however uneasy, or endless?

Speaking for myself, I am in no great hurry to find the answers to these or related questions. As for the locals of the area, not unexpectedly, after that second funeral they again tacitly closed ranks regarding the whole unfortunate saga; even among familiars, the tale was seldom, if ever, discussed. That these events could have taken place in their district would be hard to live with for a long time to come.

The final resolution of the matter doubtless would be seen as rather ironic, but, in the end fair, even if distressingly wasteful of the two young lives so tragically foreshortened.....