



JOHN CONNOLLY



THE
BOOK
OF
LOST
THINGS

H

HODDER &
STOUGHTON

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This book is dedicated to an adult, Jennifer Ridyard, and to Cameron and Alistair Ridyard, who will be adults all too soon, for in every adult dwells the child that was, and in every child waits the adult that will be.

Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life.

Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805)

Everything you can imagine is real.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)

I

Of All That Was Found and All That Was Lost

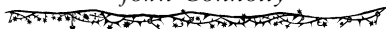


Once upon a time – for that is how all stories should begin – there was a boy who lost his mother.

He had, in truth, been losing her for a very long time. The disease that was killing her was a creeping, cowardly thing, a sickness that ate away at her from the inside, slowly consuming the light within so that her eyes grew a little less bright with each passing day, and her skin a little more pale.

And as she was stolen away from him, piece by piece, the boy became more and more afraid of finally losing her entirely. He wanted her to stay. He had no brothers and no sisters, and while he loved his father it would be true to say that he loved his mother more. He could not bear to think of a life without her.

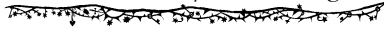
The boy, whose name was David, did everything that he could to keep his mother alive. He prayed. He tried to be good, so that she would not be punished for his mistakes. He padded around the house as quietly as he was able, and kept his voice down when he was playing war games with his toy soldiers. He created a routine, and he tried to keep to that routine as closely as possible, because he believed in part that his mother's fate was linked to the actions he performed. He would always get out of bed by putting his left foot on the floor first, then his right. He always counted up to twenty when he was brushing his teeth, and he always stopped when the count was completed.



He always touched the taps in the bathroom and the handles of the doors a certain number of times: odd numbers were bad but even numbers were fine, with two, four and eight being particularly favourable, although he didn't care for six because six was twice three and three was the second part of thirteen, and thirteen was very bad indeed.

If he bumped his head against something, he would bump it a second time to keep the numbers even, and sometimes, he would have to do it again and again because his head seemed to bounce against the wall, ruining his count, or his hair glanced against it when he didn't want it to, until his skull ached from the effort and he felt giddy and sick. For an entire year, during the worst of his mother's illness, he carried the same items from his bedroom to the kitchen first thing in the morning, and then back again last thing at night: a small copy of Grimm's selected fairy tales and a dog-eared *Magnet* comic, the book to be placed perfectly in the centre of the comic and both to be laid with their edges lined up against the corner of the rug on his bedroom floor at night or on the seat of his favourite kitchen chair in the morning. In these ways, David made his contribution to his mother's survival.

After school each day, he would sit by her bedside, sometimes talking with her if she was feeling strong enough, but at other times merely watching her sleep, counting every laboured, wheezing breath that emerged, willing her to remain with him. Often he would bring a book with him to read and, if his mother was awake and her head did not hurt too much, she would ask him to read aloud to her. She had books of her own – romances and mysteries and thick, black-garbed novels with tiny letters – but she preferred him to read much older stories to her: myths and legends and fairy tales, stories of castles and quests and dangerous, talking animals. David did not object. Although, at twelve, he was no longer quite a child, he retained an affection for these tales, and the fact that it pleased his mother to hear such stories told by him only added to his love for them.

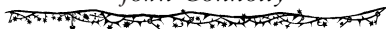


Before she became ill, David's mother would often tell him that stories were alive. They weren't alive in the way that people were alive, or even dogs or cats. People were alive whether you chose to notice them or not, while dogs tended to make you notice them if they decided that you weren't paying them enough attention. Cats, meanwhile, were very good at pretending people didn't exist at all when it suited them, but that was another matter entirely.

Stories were different, though: they came alive in the telling. Without a human voice to read them aloud, or a pair of wide eyes following them by torch light beneath a blanket, they had no real existence in our world. They were like seeds in the beak of a bird, waiting to fall to earth, or the notes of a song laid out on a sheet, yearning for an instrument to bring their music into being. They lay dormant, hoping for the chance to emerge. Once someone started to read them, they could begin to change. They could take root in the imagination and transform the reader. Stories *wanted* to be read, David's mother would whisper. They needed it. It was the reason they forced themselves from their world into ours. They wanted us to give them life.

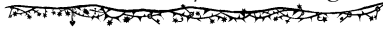
These were the things that his mother told David, before the illness took her. She would often have a book in her hand as she spoke, and she would run her fingertips lovingly across the cover, just as she would sometimes touch them to David's face, or to his father's, when he said or did something that reminded her of how much she cared for him. The sound of his mother's voice was like a song to David, one that was constantly revealing new improvisations or previously unheard subtleties. As he grew older, and music became more important to him (although never quite as important as books) he thought of his mother's voice less as a song and more as a kind of symphony, capable of infinite variations on familiar themes and melodies that changed according to her moods and whims.

As the years went by, the reading of a book became a more



solitary experience for David, until his mother's illness returned them both to his early childhood but with the roles reversed. Nevertheless, before she grew sick he would often step quietly into the room in which his mother was reading, acknowledging her with a smile (always returned) before taking a seat close by and immersing himself in his own book so that, although both were lost in their own individual worlds, they shared the same space and time. And David could tell, by looking at her face as she read, whether or not the story contained in the book was living inside her, and she in it, and he would recall again all that she had told him about stories and tales and the power that they wield over us, and that we in turn wield over them.

David would always remember the day his mother died. He was in school, learning – or not learning – how to scan a poem, his mind filled with dactyls and pentameters, the names like those of strange dinosaurs inhabiting a lost prehistoric landscape. The headmaster opened the classroom door and approached the English master, Mr Benjamin (or Big Ben, as he was known to his pupils, because of his size and his habit of withdrawing his pocket watch from the folds of his waistcoat and announcing, in deep, mournful tones, the slow passage of time to his unruly students). The headmaster whispered something to Mr Benjamin, and Mr Benjamin nodded solemnly. When he turned around to face the class, his eyes found David's, and his voice was softer than usual when he spoke. He called David's name and told him that he was excused, and that he should pack his bag and follow the headmaster. David knew then what had happened. He knew before the headmaster brought him to the school nurse's office. He knew before the nurse appeared, a cup of tea in her hand for the boy to drink. He knew before the headmaster stood over him, still stern in aspect but clearly trying to be gentle with the bereaved boy. He knew before the



cup touched his lips and the words were spoken and the tea burned his mouth, reminding him that he was still alive while his mother was now lost to him.

Even the routines, endlessly repeated, had not been enough to keep her safe. He wondered later if he had failed to do one of them properly, if he had somehow miscounted that morning, or if there was an action he could have added to the many that might possibly have changed things. It didn't matter now. She was gone. He should have stayed at home. He had always worried about her when he was in school, because if he was away from her then he had no control over her existence. The routines didn't work in school. They were harder to perform, because the school had its own rules and its own routines. David had tried to use them as a substitute, but they weren't the same. Now his mother had paid the price.

It was only then that David, ashamed at his failure, began to cry.

The days that followed were a blur of neighbours and relatives, of tall, strange men who rubbed his hair and handed him a shilling, and big women in dark dresses who held David against their chests while they wept and filled his nostrils with the smell of perfume and mothballs. He sat up late into the night, squashed into a corner of the living room while the grown-ups exchanged stories of a mother he had never known, a strange creature with a history entirely separate from his own: a child who would not cry when her older sister died because she refused to believe that someone so precious to her could disappear forever and never come back; a young girl who ran away from home for a day because her father, in a fit of impatience at some minor sin she had committed, told her that he was going to hand her over to the gypsies; a beautiful woman in a bright red dress who was stolen from under the nose of another man by David's father; a vision in white on her wedding day who pricked her thumb



on the thorn of a rose and left the spot of blood on her gown for all to see.

And when at last he fell asleep, David dreamed that he was part of these tales, a participant in every stage of his mother's life. He was no longer a child hearing stories of another time. Instead, he was a witness to them all.

David saw his mother for the last time in the undertaker's room before the coffin was closed. She looked different and yet the same. She was more like her old self, the mother who had existed before the illness came. She was wearing make-up, like she did on Sundays for church or when she and David's father were going out to dinner or to the pictures. She was laid out in her favourite blue dress, with her hands clasped across her stomach. A rosary was entwined in her fingers, but her rings had been removed. Her lips were very red. David stood over her and touched his fingers to her hand. She felt cold, and damp.

His father appeared beside him. They were the only ones left in the room. Everyone else had gone outside. A car was waiting to take David and his father to the church. It was big and black. The man who drove it wore a peaked cap and never smiled.

'You can kiss her good-bye, son,' his father said. David looked up at him. His father's eyes were moist, and rimmed with red. His father had cried that first day, when David returned home from school and he held him in his arms and promised him that everything would be all right, but he had not cried again until now. David watched as a big tear welled up and slid slowly, almost embarrassedly, down his cheek. He turned back to his mother. He leaned into the casket and kissed her face. She smelled of chemicals and something else, something David didn't want to think about. He could taste it on her lips.

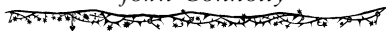
'Good-bye, Mum,' he whispered. His eyes stung. He wanted to do something, but he didn't know what.

His father placed a hand on David's shoulder, then lowered

himself down and kissed David's mother softly on the mouth. He pressed the side of his face to hers and whispered something that David could not hear. Then they left her, and when the coffin appeared again, carried by the undertaker and his assistants, it was closed and the only sign that it held David's mother was the little metal plate on the lid bearing her name and the dates of her birth and death.

They left her alone in the church that night. If he could have, David would have stayed with her. He wondered if she was lonely, if she knew where she was, if she was already in heaven or if that didn't happen until the priest said the final words and the coffin was put in the ground. He didn't like to think of her all by herself in there, sealed up by wood and brass and nails, but he couldn't talk to his father about it. His father wouldn't understand, and it wouldn't change anything anyway. He couldn't stay in the church by himself, so instead he went to his room and tried to imagine what it must be like for her. He drew the curtains on his window and closed the bedroom door so that it was as dark as he could make it inside, then climbed under his bed.

The bed was low, and the space beneath it was very narrow. It occupied one corner of the room, so David squeezed over until he felt his left hand touch the wall, then closed his eyes tightly shut and lay very still. After a while, he tried to lift his head. It bumped hard on the slats that supported his mattress. He pushed against them, but they were nailed in place. He tried to lift the bed by pressing upwards with his hands, but it was too heavy. He smelled dust and his chamber pot. He started to cough. His eyes watered. He decided to get out from under the bed, but it had been easier to shuffle into his current position than it was to pull himself out again. He sneezed and his head banged painfully against the underside of his bed. He started to panic. His bare feet scrambled for some purchase on the wooden floor. He reached up and used the slats to pull himself along until he



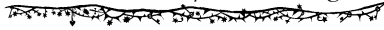
was close enough to the edge of the bed to squeeze out again. He climbed to his feet and leaned against the wall, breathing deeply.

That was what death was like: trapped in a small space with a big weight holding you down for all eternity.

His mother was buried on a January morning. The ground was hard, and all of the mourners wore gloves and overcoats. The coffin looked too short when they lowered it into the dirt. His mother had always seemed tall in life. Death had made her small.

In the weeks that followed, David tried to lose himself in books, because his memories of his mother were inextricably interwoven with books and reading. Her books, the ones deemed 'suitable', were passed on to him, and he found himself trying to read novels that he did not understand, and poems that did not quite rhyme. He would ask his father about them sometimes, but David's father seemed to have little interest in books. He had always spent his time at home with his head buried in newspapers, little plumes of pipe smoke rising above the pages like signals sent by Indians. He was obsessed with the comings and goings of the modern world, more so than ever now that Hitler's armies were moving across Europe and the threat of attacks on their own land was growing ever more real. David's mother once said that his father used to read a lot of books, but had fallen out of the habit of losing himself in stories. Now he preferred his newspapers with their long columns of print, each letter painstakingly laid out by hand to create something which would lose its relevance almost as soon as it appeared on the news stands, the news within already old and dying by the time it was read, quickly overtaken by events in the world beyond.

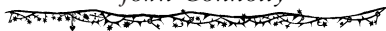
The stories in books *hate* the stories contained in newspapers, David's mother would say. Newspaper stories were like newly caught fish, worthy of attention only for as long as they remained



fresh, which was not very long at all. They were like the street urchins hawking the evening editions, all shouty and insistent, while stories – real stories, proper made-up stories – were like stern but helpful librarians in a well-stocked library. Newspaper stories were as insubstantial as smoke, as long-lived as mayflies. They did not take root but were instead like weeds that crawled along the ground, stealing the sunlight from more deserving tales. David's father's mind was always occupied by shrill, competing voices, each one silenced as soon as he gave it his attention, only for its clamour to be instantly replaced by another. That was what David's mother would whisper to him with a smile, while his father scowled and bit his pipe, aware that they were talking about him but unwilling to give them the pleasure of knowing they were irritating him.

And so it was left to David to safeguard his mother's books, and he added them to those that had been bought with him in mind. They were the tales of knights and soldiers, of dragons and sea beasts, folk tales and fairy tales, because these were the stories that David's mother had loved as a girl and that he in turn had read to her as the illness gradually took hold of her, reducing her voice to a whisper and her breaths to the rasp of old sandpaper on decaying wood, until at last the effort was too much for her and she breathed no more. After her death, he tried to avoid these old tales, for they were linked too closely to his mother to be enjoyed, but the stories would not be so easily denied and they began to call to David. They seemed to recognise something in him, or so he started to believe, something curious and fertile. He heard them talking: softly at first, then louder and more compellingly.

These stories were very old, as old as people, and they had survived because they were very powerful indeed. These were the tales that echoed in the head long after the books that contained them were cast aside. They were both an escape from reality and an alternative reality themselves. They were so old,



and so strange, that they had found a kind of existence independent of the pages they occupied. The world of the old tales existed parallel to ours, as David's mother had once told him, but sometimes the wall separating the two became so thin and brittle that the two worlds started to blend into each other.

That was when the trouble started.

That was when the bad things came.

That was when the Crooked Man began to appear to David.

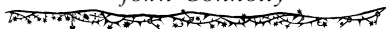
II

Of Rose and Dr Moberley, and the Importance of Details



It was a strange thing, but shortly after his mother died, David remembered experiencing a sense almost of relief. There was no other word for it and it made David feel bad about himself. His mother was gone, and she was never coming back. It didn't matter what the priest said in his sermon: that David's mother was now in a better, happier place, and her pain was at an end. It didn't help when he told David that his mother would always be with him, even if he couldn't see her. An unseen mother couldn't go for long walks with you on summer evenings, drawing the names of trees and flowers from her seemingly infinite knowledge of nature; or help you with your homework, the familiar scent of her in your nostrils as she leaned in to correct a misspelling or puzzle over the meaning of an unfamiliar poem; or read with you on cold Sunday afternoons when the fire was burning and the rain was beating down upon the windows and the roof and the room was filled with the smell of woodsmoke and crumpets.

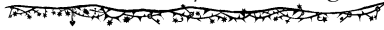
But then David recalled that, in those final months, his mother had not been able to do any of those things. The drugs that the doctors gave her made her groggy and ill. She couldn't concentrate, not even on the simplest of tasks, and she certainly couldn't go for long walks. Sometimes, towards the end, David was not even sure that she knew who he was any more. She



started to smell funny: not bad, just odd, like old clothes that hadn't been worn in a very long time. During the night she would cry out in pain, and David's father would hold her and try to comfort her. When she was very sick, the doctor would be called. Eventually she was too ill to stay in her own room, and an ambulance came and took her to a hospital that wasn't quite a hospital because nobody ever seemed to get well and nobody ever went home again. Instead, they just got quieter and quieter until at last there was only total silence and empty beds where they used to lie.

The not-quite-hospital was a long way from their house, but David's dad visited every other evening after he returned home from work and he and David had eaten their dinner together. David went with him in their old Ford Eight at least twice each week, even though the journey back and forth left him with very little time for himself once he'd completed his homework and eaten his dinner. It made his father tired too, and David wondered how he found the energy to get up each morning, make breakfast for David, see him off to school before heading to work, come home, make tea, help David with any homework that was proving difficult, visit David's mother, return home again, kiss David good night and then read the paper for an hour before taking himself off to bed.

Once, David had woken up in the night, his throat very dry, and had gone downstairs to fetch a drink of water. He heard snoring in the sitting room and looked in to find his father asleep in his armchair, the paper fallen apart around him and his head hanging unsupported over the edge of the chair. It was three o'clock in the morning. David hadn't been sure what to do, but in the end he woke his father up because he remembered how he himself had once fallen asleep awkwardly in the train on a long journey and his neck had hurt for days afterwards. His father had looked a little surprised, and just slightly angry, at being woken up, but he'd roused himself from the chair and



gone upstairs to sleep. Still, David was sure that it wasn't the first time he'd fallen asleep like that, fully clothed and nowhere near his bed.

So when David's mother died it meant that there was no more pain for her, but also no more long journeys to and from the big yellow building where people faded away to nothing, no more sleeping in chairs, no more rushed dinners. Instead, there was only the kind of silence that comes when someone takes away a clock to be repaired and after a time you become aware of its absence because its gentle, reassuring tick is gone and you miss it so.

But the feeling of relief went away after only a few days, and then David felt guilty for being glad that they no longer had to do all the things his mother's illness had required of them, and in the months that followed the feeling did not go away. Instead it got worse and worse, and David began to wish that his mother was still in the hospital. If she had been there he would have visited her every day, even if it meant getting up earlier in the mornings to finish his homework, because now he couldn't bear to think of life without her.

School became more difficult for him. He drifted away from his friends, even before summer came and its warm breezes scattered them like dandelion seeds. There was talk that all of the boys would be evacuated from London and sent to the countryside when school resumed in September, but David's father had promised him he would not be sent away like the others. After all, his father had said, it was just the two of them now, and they had to stick together.

His father employed a lady, Mrs Howard, to keep the house clean and to do a little cooking and ironing. She was usually there when David came home from school, but Mrs Howard was too busy to talk to him. She was training with the A.R.P., the Air Raid Precautions wardens, as well as taking care of her own husband and children so she didn't have time to chat with David or to ask him how his day had been.



Mrs Howard would leave just after four o'clock, and David's father would not return from work at the university until six at the earliest, and sometimes later than that. This meant that David was stuck in the empty house with only the wireless and his books for company. Sometimes, he would sit in the bedroom that his father and mother had once shared. Her clothes were still in one of the wardrobes, the dresses and skirts lined up in such neat rows that they almost looked like people themselves if you squinted hard enough. David would run his fingers along them and make them swish, remembering as he did so that they had moved in just that way when his mother walked in them. Then he would lie back on the pillow to the left, for that was the side on which his mother used to sleep, and try to rest his head against the same spot on which she had once rested her head, the place obvious from the slightly dark stain upon the pillowcase.

This new world was too painful to cope with. He had tried so hard. He had kept to his routines. He had counted so carefully. He had abided by the rules, but life had cheated. This world was not like the world of his stories. In that world, good was rewarded and evil was punished. If you kept to the path and stayed out of the forest, then you would be safe. If someone was sick, like the old king in one of the tales, then his sons could be sent out into the world to seek the remedy, the Water of Life, and if just one of them was brave enough and true enough, then the king's life could be saved. David had been brave. His mother had been braver still. In the end, bravery had not been enough. This was a world that did not reward it. The more David thought about it, the more he did not want to be part of such a world.

He still kept to his routines, although not quite as rigidly as he once did. He was content merely to touch the doorknobs and taps twice, left hand first, then right hand, just to keep the numbers even. He still tried to put his left foot down first on the floor in the mornings, or on the stairs of the house, but that

wasn't so difficult. He wasn't sure what would happen now if he didn't adhere to his rules to some degree. He supposed that it might affect his father. Perhaps, in sticking to his routines, he had saved his father's life, even if he hadn't quite managed to save his mother. Now that it was just the two of them it was important not to take too many chances.

And that was when Rose entered his life, and the attacks began.

The first time was in Trafalgar Square, when he and his father were walking down to feed the pigeons after Sunday lunch at the Popular Café in Piccadilly. His father said that the Popular was due to close soon, which made David sad as he thought it was very grand.

David's mother had been dead for five months, three weeks, and four days. A woman had joined them to eat at the Popular that day. His father had introduced her to David as Rose. Rose was very thin, with long, dark hair and bright red lips. Her clothes looked expensive, and gold and diamonds glittered at her ears and throat. She claimed to eat very little, although she finished most of her chicken that afternoon and had plenty of room for pudding afterwards. She looked familiar to David, and it emerged that she was the administrator of the not-quite-hospital in which his mother had died. His father told David that Rose had looked after his mother really, really well, although not, David thought, well enough to keep her from dying.

Rose tried to speak with David about school and his friends and what he liked to do with his evenings, but David could barely manage to respond. He didn't like the way that she looked at his father or the way that she called him by his first name. He didn't like the way that she touched his hand when he said something funny or clever. He didn't even like the fact that his father was trying to be funny and clever with her to begin with. It wasn't right.



Rose held on to his father's arm as they strolled from the restaurant. David walked a little ahead of them, and they seemed content to let him go. He wasn't sure what was happening, or that was what he told himself. Instead he silently accepted a bag of seeds from his father when they reached Trafalgar Square, and he used them to draw the pigeons to him. The pigeons bobbed obediently towards this new source of food, their feathers stained with the muck and soot of the city, their eyes vacant and stupid. His father and Rose stood nearby, talking quietly to each other. When they thought he wasn't looking, David saw them kiss briefly.

That was when it happened. One moment David's arm was outstretched, a thin line of seed spread along it and two rather heavy pigeons pecking away at his sleeve, and the next he was lying flat on the ground, his father's coat beneath his head and curious onlookers – and the odd pigeon – staring down at him, fat clouds scudding behind their heads like blank thought balloons. His father told him that he had fainted, and David supposed that he must be right, except there were now voices and whispers in his head where no voices and whispers had been before, and he had a fading memory of a wooded landscape and the howling of wolves. He heard Rose ask if she could do anything to help, and David's father told her that it was all right, that he would take him home and put him to bed. His father hailed a cab to bring them back to their car. Before he left, he told Rose he would telephone her later.

That night, as David lay in his room, the whispers in his head were joined by the sound of the books. He had to put his pillow over his ears to drown out the noise of their chatter, as the oldest of the stories roused themselves from their slumbers and began to look for places in which to grow.

Dr Moberley's office was in a terraced house on a tree-lined street in the centre of London, and it was very quiet. There were

expensive carpets on the floors and the walls were decorated with pictures of ships at sea. An elderly secretary with very white hair sat behind a desk in the waiting room, shuffling papers, typing letters and taking telephone calls. David sat on a big sofa nearby, his father beside him. A grandfather clock ticked in the corner. David and his father didn't speak. Mostly it was because the room was so quiet that anything they said would have been overheard by the lady behind the desk, but David also felt that his father was angry with him.

There had been two more attacks since Trafalgar Square, each one longer than the last and each leaving David with more strange images in his mind: a castle with banners fluttering from the walls, a forest filled with trees that bled redly from their bark, and a half-glimpsed figure, hunched and wretched, who moved through the shadows of this strange world, waiting. David's father had taken him to see their family doctor, Dr Benson, but Dr Benson had been unable to find anything wrong with David. He sent David to a specialist at a big hospital, who shone lights in David's eyes and examined his skull. He asked David some questions, then asked David's father many more, some of them concerning David's mother and her death. David had then been told to wait outside while they talked, and when David's father came out he looked angry. That was how they had ended up at Dr Moberley's office.

Dr Moberley was a psychiatrist.

A buzzer sounded beside the secretary's desk and she nodded to David and his father.

'He can go in now,' she said.

'Off you go,' said David's father.

'Aren't you coming in with me?' asked David.

David's father shook his head, and David knew that he had already spoken with Dr Moberley, perhaps over the telephone.

'He wants to see you alone. Don't worry. I'll be here when you're finished.'



David followed the secretary into another room. It was bigger and grander than the waiting room, furnished with soft chairs and couches. The walls were lined with books, although they were not books like the ones David read. David thought that he could hear the books talking amongst themselves when he arrived. He couldn't understand most of what they were saying, but they spoke v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y as if what they had to impart was very important or the person to whom they were speaking was very stupid. Some of the books appeared to be arguing among themselves in blah-blah-blah tones, the way experts sometimes talked on the wireless when they were addressing one another, surrounded by other experts whom they were trying to impress with their intelligence.

The books made David very uneasy.

A small man with grey hair and a grey beard sat behind an antique desk that looked too big for him. He wore rectangular glasses with a gold chain to keep him from losing them. A red and black bow tie was knotted tightly at his neck, and his suit was dark and baggy.

'Welcome,' he said. 'I'm Dr Moberley. You must be David.'

David nodded. Dr Moberley asked David to sit down, then flicked through the pages of a notebook on his desk, tugging on his beard while he read whatever was written on them. When he had finished, he looked up and asked David how he was. David said he was fine. Dr Moberley asked him if he was sure. David said that he was reasonably sure. Dr Moberley said David's dad was worried about him. He asked David if he missed his mum. David didn't answer. Dr Moberley told David that he was worried about David's attacks, and they were going to try to find out together what was behind them.

Dr Moberley gave David a box of pencils and asked him to draw a picture of a house. David took a lead pencil and carefully drew the walls and the chimney, then put in some windows and a door before he set to work adding little curved slates to

the roof. He was quite lost in the act of drawing slates when Dr Moberley told him that was quite enough. Dr Moberley looked at the picture, then looked at David. He asked David if he hadn't thought of using coloured pencils. David told him that the drawing wasn't finished, and that once the tiles were added to the roof he planned to colour them red. Dr Moberley asked David, in the v-e-r-y s-l-o-w way that some of his books spoke, why the slates were so important.

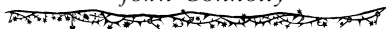
David wondered if Dr Moberley was a real doctor. Doctors were supposed to be very clever. Dr Moberley didn't seem terribly clever. V-e-r-y s-l-o-w-ly, David explained that without slates on the roof, the rain would get in. In their way, they were just as important as walls. Dr Moberley asked David if he was afraid of the rain getting in. David told him that he didn't like getting wet. It wasn't so bad outside, especially if you were dressed for it, but most people didn't dress for rain indoors.

Dr Moberley looked a bit confused.

Next, he asked David to draw a tree. Again, David took the pencil, painstakingly drew the branches, then proceeded to add little leaves to each one. He was on only the third branch when Dr Moberley asked him to stop again. This time, Dr Moberley had the kind of expression on his face that David's father sometimes had when he managed to finish the crossword in the Sunday paper. Short of standing up and shouting 'Aha!' with his finger pointing in the air, the way mad scientists did in cartoons, he couldn't have looked more pleased with himself.

Dr Moberley then asked David a lot of questions about his home, his mum, and his dad. He asked again about the black-outs, and if David could remember anything about them. How did he feel before they happened? Did he smell anything strange before he lost consciousness? Did his head hurt afterwards? Did his head hurt before? Did his head hurt now?

But he did not ask the most important question of all, in David's view, because Dr Moberley chose to believe that the



attacks caused David to black out entirely and that the boy could remember nothing of them before he regained consciousness. That wasn't true. David thought about telling Dr Moberley of the strange landscapes that he saw when the attacks came, but Dr Moberley had already begun asking about his mother again and David didn't want to talk about his mother, not any more and certainly not with a stranger. Dr Moberley asked about Rose too, and how David felt about her. David didn't know how to answer. He didn't like Rose and he didn't like his father being with her, but he didn't want to tell Dr Moberley that in case he told David's father about it.

By the end of the session, David was crying and he didn't even know why. In fact, he was crying so hard that his nose began to bleed and the sight of the blood frightened him. He began to scream and shout. He fell on the floor and a white light flashed in his head as he started to tremble. He beat his fists on the carpet and heard the books tut-tutting their disapproval as Dr Moberley called for help and David's dad came rushing in and then everything went dark for what seemed like only seconds but was in fact a very long time indeed.

And David heard a woman's voice in the darkness, and he thought it sounded like his mother. A figure approached, but it was not a woman. It was a man, a crooked man with a long face, emerging at last from the shadows of his world.

And he was smiling.