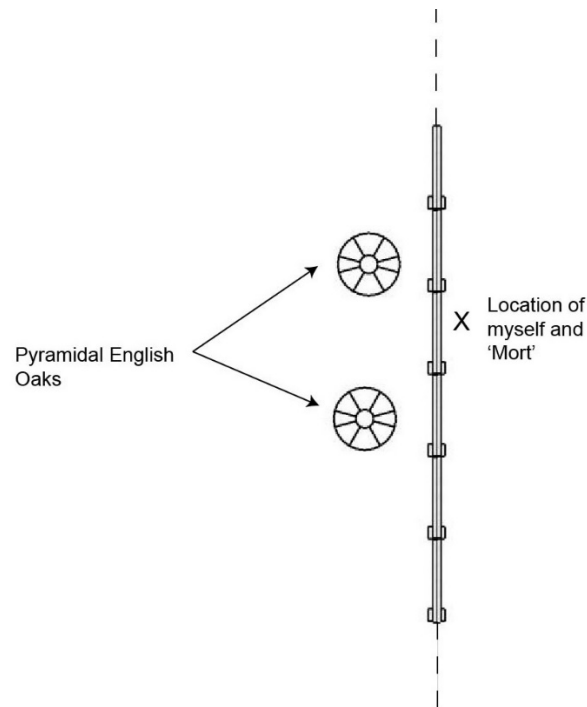


## The Courtyard

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

A few nights back, I was taking Mortimer for a walk in the thick fog just a few hours after sundown. As I walked along Philosopher's Square, with the tall fifteen foot boundary wall to my right, I heard a loud high-pitched scream accompanied by a loud thud and then some rustling of some sort of plant material. Worried that I had heard the sounds of a nightly crime taking place, I stood very still and quiet, clutching Mortimer's leash between the pilasters which anchored the wall on both its sides like the broad soles of a stone giant's feet. When the rustling had stopped, there were faint voices in the distance and the sounds of people shoveling dirt. Feeling worried again that my ears were bearing witness to a crime-in-progress, I continued to stay still while playing the role of an invisible eavesdropping witness. As I faced the boundary wall, I noticed that it stretched about one hundred meters to the East (to my right) and 50 to 60 meters to the West (on my left). When the sounds of the people on the other side eventually died down, I rushed off with Mortimer counting the number of wall buttresses from the location of my hiding spot. I also noted the presence of two tall pyramidal English Oaks marking a private courtyard on the other side of the old brick wall.



When I got back home, I took off Mortimer's leash and called Toby, a friend of mine who happened to work as a City Police Constable. Leaving 'Mort' in the house, I set off in the dark to meet my friend back in Philosopher's Square. When we got to the tall boundary wall, I began to count the buttresses from the West and to look for the two tree markers that grew some 10-15 taller than the brick barrier. When I got to the spot 57 pilasters from the beginning of the wall to the West, I said to my friend out loud:

“Toby! This is approximately where I heard the sounds. There should be a private lot on the other side that has these two trees within it.”

“Are you sure you heard a thud and digging going on after the scream?” My friend asked sternly.

“I was terrified that Mortimer would make a sound and give us away to the square’s culprits. It’s been a while since I’ve felt so scared anywhere in this town!” I replied.

“Alright, I don’t have a step ladder, but let’s go into the courtyard directly next to us and have a look at the ground. I’ve spotted the acts of local stranglers merely in the way the earth is tilled. If I can see that they were digging up the ground a certain way, I can open an investigation.” Toby said.

“How should we get in?” I asked.

“I’ll give you a boost to the buttress and then you’ll pull me up afterwards.” He answered.

“I’m a bit nervous about intruding like this but let’s give it a whirl.” I said hesitantly.

In the sheer somberness of the dead of night, I grabbed the top of the wall pilaster and tensed my arm muscles while trying to pull my torso up so that my knees would be at their top tier. At that very moment, Toby pushed upwards on the soles of my shoes with all of his might so that I could reposition my hands at grab the top of the wall to get to the wall’s very summit which was about two feet wide. Once my knees were safely resting on the top surface, I grabbed Toby’s wrists and pulled him up so he could also reach the 15 foot high lookout point. As we both set our sights on the other side of the wall, we noticed a small courtyard which was about fifty feet wide and 75 feet in length, projected out from the back façade of a small brick townhouse. Along with the two English Oaks we could faintly see an abandoned easel for oil painting and a shovel leaning on a wall buttress some 10 feet away from both Toby and I. Without a search warrant, Toby pressed on and used one of the two buttresses between the Oaks to climb down into the private yard. Once he touched down on lawn close to a small patch of English Ivy, he urged me to follow and I also used the pilaster mirrored with its outer twin to fully scale the fifteen foot brick giant. Quickly glancing into the rear window of the townhouse, the lights were dimmed and the interior appeared to be vacant.

“Why don’t we just risk it and start digging.” Toby then said, looking off in both directions into the adjacent backyards.

“You really think we should? What if someone sees us rummaging in a space that’s not even our own?” I replied in a slightly feeble tone of voice.

“If we find anything down here where the earth has been disturbed, we’ve got every reason to be in the clear.” My friend the constable asserted. Putting on a pair of gloves, Toby began to dig into the earth between the two tall Oak trees. After heaping a large mound of loose dirt just near my feet, he gave me his gloves and I proceeded to

shovel, occasionally sending quick glances into the darkened townhouse in case anyone came back into the property after the crime had taken place. After digging approximately two and a half feet down, my shovel struck a hard surface. Thinking at first that it was a rock, I proceeded to try to dig around it to eventually unearth it. I finally dislodged the object and noticed that it was a small white metal box. I immediately got down on my stomach and pulled the box out of the hole. The box felt empty when I picked it up. I handed Toby the gloves again and he lifted a small latch to open it and look inside. The box creaked on its hinges revealing a small paintbrush and a document. The document dated with today's date read:

*"To whom it may concern,  
Ryan Moore had it coming.  
P. C. P. M."*

After reading the note, Toby and I both climbed out of the courtyard using the wall pilasters and each other. We decided to keep the box and two subtle bits of evidence with us in our mission to uncover the ensuing mystery of a courtyard artist. When we both got to the other side of the wall, we headed off in our separate ways with him carrying the evidence to be checked out at the police station.

"I'll let you know if I figure anything out about the case." I said to him before heading westward.

"I'm going to check listings for 'Ryan Moore' and for the home owner of the courtyard." Toby said as he walked off in the opposite direction.

The following morning, Toby called me on my home phone line and said: "It appears that the home owner is a certain 'Mary R.'. After we left one another yesterday, I had the unit checked and due to privacy issues I couldn't get her full last name."

"Is she missing?" I asked.

"I was told she was an ex-patient at the Waverley Mental Health Centre who was recently granted absolute discharge. The case was quite controversial since it really divided the court system with judges about 50-50 on both sides with the final ruling." Toby said.

"What about the buried letter? Any connection to Mary R.'s property?" I enquired.

"I found a 'Ryan Moore' listing that goes back quite a while. Something 45 years to be exact. I looked him up in Waverley back when it was called Waverley Mental Hospital in the 1940s." He continued.

"Is he dead?" I asked curtly.

"He is listed as a discharge back then but I wasn't able to find a listing as a 'deceased' person." He said.

Suddenly, something came to me as I thought of the strange letter. "What if 'P.C.P.M.' indicates the whereabouts of Ryan Moore's tombstone?" I asked my friend.

As soon as I had said this, our call disconnected for a brief moment, then my friend gave me another ring. "Let's check out Prospect Cemetery!" He said in a loud voice.

"I can meet you there in an hour. By the black wrought-iron gate at the South end." I told him.

"Deal. If this is the same Ryan Moore, we've got us more than a good lead for sure here." He said before hanging up the phone.

After taking the tram to the North side of town, I got off at the South entrance to the cemetery. About five minutes after my arrival, Toby's car pulled up close to where I was waiting and we both entered through the wrought-iron gate. We then walked northward along a meandering walkway with reddish brick pavers in a herringbone arrangement and eventually arrived at "Plot M". After searching through a myriad of tombstones of many sizes and shapes, we came upon one hidden away in the shade of a Black Walnut tree. The grave was made up of a small Gaelic cross and a marble base which read:

*RYAN MOORE  
(1921-1968)*

*From Waverley  
To Heaven's Gate  
~In Loving Memory*

After noticing a reference to Waverley Mental Hospital, we looked around the tombstone and found a crumpled piece of paper directly behind it, resting just at the base of the Walnut tree. After smoothing out the wrinkles in the page as best I could and laying it out on the ground, I noticed that the document was in fact a government discharge paper for a Waverley Mental Health Centre patient named "Mary Reono", dated January 17<sup>th</sup> 1987. As soon as I had done so, my friend Toby called his local police precinct and said to the operator: "Send for the coroner. We may have found the remains of 'Mary R.'. She seems to be buried in the grave of another patient who was discharged the same way roughly 40 or more years ago." No sooner as Toby had said this, I took a step back at the grave site and could see that the Earth had recently been tilled, and that a second body could very well have been placed within the sacredness of the ground. Toby then turned toward me and said: "Whoever those people were in that courtyard yesterday, they must have been fervently against Mary R's discharge." I then told my friend the constable: "I did some research on the ex-patients in asylums of the past and found out that many who had passed away were never granted a proper burial but were most often sequestered to unmarked graves."

R-Y-A-N M-O-O-R-E/ M-A-R-Y R-E-O-N-O  
[The End]